

CLAIMING SPACE, REDEFINING POLITICS:
URBAN PROTEST AND GRASSROOTS POWER IN BOLIVIA

by

CARWIL BJORK-JAMES

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Marc Edelman

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Gerald Creed

Date

Executive Officer

Michael Blim

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

Sinclair Thomson
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Marc Edelman

This dissertation analyzes the role of space-claiming protests by primarily left grassroots social movements in Bolivia's current political transformation. *Space claiming* includes mass protests that physically control or symbolically claim urban space through occupations of plazas and roads, sit-ins, blockades, and other measures. As a theoretical construct, space claiming brings together tactics of collective action and meanings of public spaces, and looks at the consequences of their interaction. This dissertation is based on ethnographic engagement and oral interviews with protest participants and their state interlocutors during twelve months of fieldwork and archival research. By using detailed ethnographic evidence—of social life as experienced through the human body, the meanings attached to places, and social movement practices—it explains how grassroots movements exerted leverage upon the state through pivotal protest events.

This study shows that the political import of these protests arises from their interruption of commercially important flows and appropriation of meaning-laden spaces in cities like Cochabamba and Sucre. Social movements used spatial meanings, protest symbols and rhetoric to build an imagined community of interest and sovereignty, which claims the right to direct the political course of the state. The presence of indigenous bodies, symbols, and politics in these spaces challenged and inverted their longstanding exclusion from power.

The largest mobilizations exercised control over aspects of daily life that would otherwise be organized by the state. These interruptions of commerce and circulation, and the collective gatherings that directed them posed an alternate possibility of sovereignty. This put the existing order into question, forcing shifts in political life to resolve the temporary crises. At the same time, the practices of disruption were added to the routines of political practice, making future officeholders even less able to maneuver independently of the grassroots base. This dissertation explains why and how space-claiming protests work as political tools, and the ways that practices of cooperation, coordination, and decisionmaking within protest have become models for Bolivia's political culture. In doing so, it contributes to the study of social protest in Latin America, the theory of social movement practice, and the geographic study of political protest.

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Acronyms

APDH	Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos Permanent Assembly for Human Rights
CAOI	Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas Andean Coordination of Indigenous Organizations
CIDOB	Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia
CNTCB-TK	<i>Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia “Tupaj Katari”</i> National Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia—“Túpaj Katari”
Comibol	Corporación Minera de Bolivia Mining Corporation of Bolivia
COB	Central Obrera Boliviana Bolivian Workers Central
COICA	Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin
CONALCAM	Coordinadora Nacional por el Cambio National Coordination for Change
CONAMAQ	Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu
CSCIB	Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia Union Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia
CSTB	<i>Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia</i> Bolivian Confederation of Labor Unions
CSUTCB	Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia Unified Union Confederation of Bolivian Peasant Workers
FEDECOR	<i>Federación Departamental Cochabambina de Regantes</i> Cochabamba Departmental Federation of Irrigation Users (“the Regantes”)
FEJUVE	Federación de Juntas Vecinales Federation of Neighborhood Councils
FSTMB	<i>Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia</i> Union Federation of Mining Workers of Bolivia

FOCOMADE	Foro Boliviano Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Cochabamba Forum on the Environment and Development
FOT	Federación Obrera del Trabajo Workers' Federation of Labor (founded in 1912 as the International Workers' Federation, with socialist and syndicalist influences; reorganized as FOT, 1918)
FOL	Federación Obrera Local Local Workers' Federation (libertarian syndicalist; founded, 1926)
IIRSA	Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (IIRSA) Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America
MAS–IPSP	Movimiento al Socialismo–Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos Movement Towards Socialism–Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples
MNR	Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario Revolutionary Nationalist Movement
OTB	<i>Organización Territorial de Base</i> Grassroots Territorial Organization
Semapa	<i>Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado de Cochabamba,</i> Municipal Potable Water and Sewage Service of Cochabamba
UDP	Unión Democrática y Popular Democratic and Popular Union (political party; 1977–84)
Unasur	Unión de Naciones Suramericanas Union of South American Nations

Introduction

I first encountered Bolivia's remarkable social movements in the United States. When an uprising in Cochabamba threw out a foreign corporation that had privatized the city's water in April 2000, the event sent two kinds of ripples into the San Francisco Bay Area, where I worked for small environmental NGO. On one hand, the Andean city's water system had been added to, and then suddenly removed from, the portfolio of the private construction firm Bechtel, based in downtown San Francisco. On the other, the privatization was a perfect symbol of the corporate globalization against which multiple movements were converging through the global justice movement. The story of Cochabamba's victory was shared among attendees of the glittering awards ceremony of the Goldman Environmental Prize,¹ held in San Francisco's imposing War Memorial Opera House, and beneath hand-crafted cardboard puppets at the anti-World Bank A16 protest on Market Street. I attended both, slipping out of the reception at the opera house to join the drumming and marching three blocks away. By the next year, Cochabamba was more than a rumor in both milieus: the Goldman Prize committee chose movement spokesperson Oscar Olivera for one of the 2001 prizes, making him the first trade unionist to receive the \$150,000 award. Global justice campaigners would spend many hours outside the Bechtel headquarters at Beale and Mission Streets using street theater, sit-ins, and oratory to persuade the corporation to drop its demand against the Bolivian government for damages from the contract lost to Cochabamba's grassroots outrage. Both scenes admired the organization Olivera represented, the Coordinadora for the Defense of Water and Life (*Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y la Vida*) for its priorities, structure, and agenda.

¹ The Goldman Environmental Prize is one of the most prestigious international environmental awards. Endowed by Richard and Rhoda Goldman, it honors six recipients each year for grassroots environmental accomplishments.

In late 2003, the Bolivian movement had escalated to nationwide campaigns of pressure and tens of thousands of US anti-globalization activists converged on Miami outside of summit proposing a continent-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas. Some of us followed the dramatic news from Bolivia in September and October as we prepared for Miami, largely through the Independent Media Center (an electronic network that was itself a product of the global justice movement).² Bolivian protests mounted in scale even as military repression claimed scores of lives, mostly in El Alto and the rural highlands. Then, with 200,000 in the streets, the U.S.-educated President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada resigned from office and boarded a plane to Miami. When he was a Senator in 1985, “Goni” had headed the task force designing the package of neoliberal policies that globalized the Bolivian economy; now, his ouster was the surest sign that opposition to those policies finally had political force.

Presumably the American-educated ex-president had fund a comfortable new residence by the time Miami police unleashed tear gas, smoke grenades, and rubber bullets on the summit protesters downtown. Miami was the last of a series of anti-globalization protests to achieve critical mass in the United States. In its wake, attention turned to the “Miami Model” of aggressive policing to explain why it had failed.³ Yet the waning of U.S.-based protests on these issues coincided with the rise of South American governments that were just as critical of neoliberal globalization as the street protesters. Those of us who followed events on both continents were left with different questions: What was this very poor country that had just dealt a blow to neoliberalism? What allowed their protests to cohere, endure, and reshape the political landscape in the face of much greater repression?

² The edition of Indymedia Bolivia that operated from 2002 to 2007 is archived at <http://archivos.bolivia.indymedia.org/>.

³ On the Miami model see Gibson (2008); FTAA Miami Independent Media Center Video (2004); Vitale (2007).

BOLIVIA'S CLASS FORMATION AND POLITICAL ORGANIZING IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT

The forces of neoliberalism, urbanization, and indigenous organizing came together to reshape Bolivia over the past three decades. These factors drove the shifts in class formation and geography that twenty-first-century protests built upon. In 1985, the new Bolivian government of Víctor Paz Estenssoro undertook a package of emergency economic policies designed under the direction of World Bank economist Jeffrey Sachs. The deep hyperinflation crisis of the previous years, the country's dependence on the International Monetary Fund, and multiparty backing for extreme measures opened the way for drastic action. Together their Washington-based advisors, a generation of Bolivian politicians embraced an experiment in undiluted neoliberal economic policies. After months of build up, the opening wave of these policies were imposed as a single package through Supreme Decree 21060 on August 29, 1985. Behind the scenes in La Paz, President Paz Estenssoro⁴ urged multiple policies be implemented right away, quoting Machiavelli when he spoke to the task force drafting the decree: "Do bad things all at once, and do good things little by little" (Conaghan and Malloy 1994:129). In Jeffrey Sachs' Harvard office, this approach would be termed "shock therapy," and offered as medicine to state-centered economies for the next quarter century.

The "New Economic Policy" had a dramatic effect on Bolivian workers. A "free contracting" regime enabled layoffs, including firings that targeted union officers and activists; trade protections for domestic industries were eliminated; state businesses lost their subsidies and became subject to closure (Torricono 2008:58–62). Bolivia's publicly owned mining conglomerate Comibol, the strongest bastion of its labor movement, threw tens of thousands of its employees out of work. The government used the initial pushback by labor—a general strike immediately following the decree,

⁴ My use of double or single Spanish last names attempts to follow the local precedents, which vary widely among public figures.

and the miners' March for Life in 1986—as an occasion to publicly break the back of resistance to its policies (Conaghan and Malloy 1994; García Linera 2000). Neoliberal privatization in Bolivia meant the sale of strategic state-sector enterprises (energy, minerals, communications, transportation, and finance) to foreign investors. The new owners lacked the state's political interest in maintaining a large workforce and aggressively laid off their workers, freed by the new laws from restrictions on doing so. Thousands of employees were also transferred to subcontractors, increasing wage insecurity and employment security. The workers in this economy were “no longer predominantly peasants or industrial laborers but rather informal workers, permanently unemployed and underemployed, living in chronic insecurity in slums like El Alto” (Straub 2004:15). The leverage of traditional mass unionism through workplace-centered strikes was no longer works for them.

Just as a new generation of popular classes was shunted into in the informal economy, it became concentrated geographically. Bolivia's urbanization rate shifted dramatically from 41% in 1976 to 58% in 1992, and on to 65% in 2007 (Reed 1998; UNFPA 2007). Much of this growth has occurred in the eastern city of Santa Cruz, in Cochabamba, and in El Alto, on the plateau immediately above La Paz. El Alto only became a separate municipality from La Paz in 1985, but has grown rapidly into a city of 700,000 people (Lazar 2006:30-31). Bolivia's larger cities all swelled with new migrants and sprawled over the surrounding countryside. In the absence of state provision, many of these new residents were left to organize their own settlements and to either campaign for basic services or construct their own.

In Bolivia, these changes did not only lead to political atomization, but eventually to a recomposition of popular forces.⁵ Despite the paucity of formal work, and the declining size of workplaces, union-style organizing maintained a highly dense network of union and community

⁵ For a parallel argument across periurban South America, see Raúl Zibechi's *Territorios en Resistencia* (2008).

organizations. Trade unions (*sindicatos*) cover a far greater range of economic positions than in modern industrial societies. There are unions for street vendors and miners, teachers and minibus drivers. *Sindicatos* manage far more of economic life as well, organizing vendors into markets and drivers into bus systems, in addition to negotiating with larger actors (Lazar 2004:188-9). As the Coordinadora's April 2000 victory demonstrated, these organizations became politically active, bringing neoliberal policies into question.

BROADER TRENDS AT WORK IN BOLIVIA

Bolivia's political transformation in the first decade of the twenty-first century reflects broader shifts in Latin America: the rejection of neoliberal policies, the rise of a "pink tide" or "new left" into governmental power, and an increasing recognition of indigenous rights. The Washington Consensus of neoliberal policies⁶ defined the economic policy orientation of a generation of the region's governments, but its reign was thrown into question by the social movements that converged through the World Social Forum process and by financial crises such as Argentina's in 1999 to 2002. Civil unrest brought down governments in Ecuador in 2000 and Argentina in 2001 before the Bolivian presidents who fell in 2003 and 2005. Electoral shifts soon followed: Fernando Coronil enumerates eleven presidents in ten countries who were voted in on the promise of rolling back neoliberalism between 2002 and 2010. For him, this regional turn represents a renewal of efforts "to define an original path toward a postcapitalist future" (Coronil 2011:240–41, 250).

Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia pursued a more radical course within this overall trend. All three states held constituent assemblies to rewrite their constitutions; implemented partial nationalizations that increased government ownership of hydrocarbon and mineral resources; and devolved new powers to their indigenous and/or Afro-descendant communities. In all three,

⁶ A classic summary of these policies appears in Williamson (1993).

participants saw “the takeover by [social] movements of previously narrow and top-down spaces” (Reyes 2012:10). Bolivia stands out within this overall process, however. If revolution is understood as the intervention of mass participation into politics to alter the established order, nowhere in South America has that intervention been more direct, turbulent, or sustained than Bolivia. Further, it is the only country in South America with an identifiable indigenous majority,⁷ the poorest country on the continent, a country with a long prior history of revolutionary takeovers of the national government. Bolivia stands as an extreme case within the backlash that produced a regionwide wave of “post-neoliberal governments.”

Simultaneous with this reversal on economic policy came a rethinking of the meaning of left politics that extended the meaning of liberation beyond the economy and class. Multiple identity-focused movements in Latin America led scholars of social movements to rethink their paradigms of social change in the 1980s in order to accommodate the “rich mosaic of identities” whose “movements [are] bringing about a fundamental transformation in the nature of political practice” (Escobar and Alvarez 1992:2,3).⁸ In the early twenty-first-century, these movements began to take on the political arena more directly through the novel spaces of the global justice movement and actions that directly challenged the direction of politics at the national level. Their activity pushed the rethinking of leftist politics in a pluralist direction: “Alliances are now sought among subjects affected by multiple forms of domination, not just economic exploitation but also cultural and

⁷ See the introductory note on Race in Bolivia (beginning on page 32) for the nuances of this characterization.

⁸ While identity-driven movements led social movement scholars such as Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez to adopt the model of “new social movements” from European and North American researchers, these movements growing role in politics goes beyond the framework of this approach. The new social movements model, “based on a radical, and untenable opposition between [social movements] and politics, civil society and the state,” loses much of its explanatory power as movements coordinate their activities, engage in simultaneous mass actions, cooperate around economic issues, and collectively challenge state power (Canel 1997:203).

political subordination and discrimination” (Coronil 2011:255). Some Bolivian movements took part in a hemispheric wave of indigenous organizing. This transnational movement’s vision included an indigenous identity aligned with ecological responsibility, cultural preservation, and spirituality, and a political agenda of “resistance to states, markets, and modernity” through “core demands: self-determination, land rights, and cultural survival” (Brysk 2000:59). Even prior to 2000, but continuing in the decade afterwards, this agenda informed the rewriting of numerous constitutions.⁹ In Ecuador and Bolivia, in particular, indigenous peoples led long-term campaigns to redefine the nature of their societies as plurinational (Yashar 2005).

Finally, as the growth of cities created a global urban majority for the first time, certain forms of urban protest have risen to renewed prominence. The world is in the midst of an unprecedented expansion of cities, most of which comes in the poorer peripheries of Global South metropolises. Outside of industrializing East Asia, this growth is not associated with an expanding urban proletariat: the Inter-American Development Bank estimates 57% of Latin American workers are in the informal sector (Straub 2004).¹⁰ Periurban residents participate in an informal labor force and self-organized neighborhoods. Locally, so-called slums function as “places in which residents use their ingenuity to create a world of adaptations, connections, and strategies with which to inhabit modern metropolises on better terms” (Holston 2009:249).

Meanwhile, certain forms of urban protest, blockading roadways and occupying prominent plazas, have surged in their global use. Road blockades have been important features of Chinese

⁹ Donna Lee Van Cott observed, “In fact, with the exception of Uruguay ... all Latin American states revising constitutions in the 1990s have incorporated parts of what I suggest is an emerging regional model of ‘multicultural constitutionalism.’” Her survey included 13 other countries pursuing constitutional reform or re-writing.

¹⁰ Mike Davis charts how global forces have pushed Third World urbanization. In particular, “Agricultural deregulation and financial discipline enforced by the IMF and World Bank continued to generate an exodus of surplus rural labor to urban slums even when cities ceased to be job machines” (Davis 2006:14-15).

labor protests, Thai political conflicts, urban and rural conflicts in the Andean region, the Canadian indigenous movement, North American environmental and antiwar movements, and European opposition to austerity measures. Plaza occupations, long a key feature of national political action, played a role in the anti-neoliberal turbulence in Latin America, but acquired unprecedented centrality in 2011. Mass occupations of Tahrir Square and the Pearl River Roundabout in the Arab Spring, of Zuccotti Park in the Occupy Wall Street movement, and of Syntagma Square and Puerta de Sol in European anti-austerity protests have all demonstrated the pivotal role that takeovers of public space can play in national and transnational politics.

DISCOVERING A POLITICAL AND RACIAL REVOLUTION

I finally came to Bolivia in June 2008 as an anthropologist studying the workings of social movements. The country had become a center for global interest among critics of neoliberalism, indigenous rights supporters, opponents of privatization, leftists, and environmentalists. Bolivia's visibility skyrocketed with the election of coca grower Evo Morales to the presidency (after a second president was forced out of office by mass protest). Yet despite the change of government, the transition from protest to politics was still far from complete. Sucre, the constitutional capital had seen violent clashes as a new plurinational constitution was written. Just a month before I arrived, indigenous peasants who sided with the government had been kidnapped, beaten, and publicly humiliated in Sucre's central square by right-wing crowds. On a march to repudiate the violence, I realized how polarized the country had become. The things I witnessed and heard about recalled the reprisal attacks that resisted the African-American Civil Rights Movement: Molotov cocktails tossed into campaign offices, racialized humiliation, and campaign organizers meeting in unmarked offices for fear of violence. The political situation in Bolivia quickly showed itself to have the multilayered complexity locals referred to as *abigarrada* (literally, mottled and multicolored), an adjective that

seems custom-fitted for Bolivians to describe their society.¹¹ The events of 2008 showed me three things: that the society remained in motion even when it seemed the revolution of 1999-2005 had come to completion; that Bolivian politics was still dependent on events in the streets; and that any analysis of its changes must take seriously the racial dimension of power. While curious about Bolivia's global significance, I learned quickly to see with two eyes: the global agenda and the local struggles, the revolution against neoliberalism and the parallel one against centuries-old social exclusion.¹²

The 1999–2005 upsurge has been cast as a third Bolivian revolution by Adolfo Gilly (2004, 2007), Sinclair Thomson and Forest Hylton (2007), and James Dunkerley (2007). For Gilly, the first revolution was the 1780–82 cluster of indigenous revolts led by Túpaj Katari, Bartolina Sisa, Tomás Katari and others, which was part of the Age of Andean Insurrection (1987). Dunkerley views the more successful war for independence from Spain (1809–25) as Bolivia's first revolution. All these authors view see a second revolution in the 1952 revolt led by the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*; MNR) in alliance with workers' militias. The two facets of the twenty-first-century third revolution, ending neoliberalism and the plurinational remaking of a state that has long represented a colonial elite, correspond to longstanding standing axes of power in Bolivia: race and class.

Thomson and Hylton anchor their three-century history of Bolivia around the repeated alliance and falling out between indigenous rebellion and subaltern political projects within urban

¹¹ The phrase *sociedad abigarrada* was taken up by the highly influential Bolivian social scientist René Zavaleta Mercado. His use of the term is explored by Antezana (1991) and Mignolo (2005). Quechua and Aymara each have similar terms for multicolored objects: *cheqchi* and *ch'ixi*, respectively. For a political theory of Bolivian society around the Aymara term, see Rivera Cusicanqui (2010, 2012).

¹² I adopt the term “see with two eyes” from Katarista political discourse, in which it refers to seeing race and class simultaneously.

and creole society. Indigenous movements' political thought—their critique of power and inequality, innovation of forms of self-organization, and demands for local autonomy—has been critical to the national upsurge, including in Bolivian cities. Indigenous cultural knowledge has shaped these mobilizations and served as one of their greatest weapons. The indigenous and leftist revolutionary traditions have long and intertwined histories, which culminated in the current period of intense collaboration with one another. (I include a stand-alone primer on the complexities of “Race in Bolivia” after this Introduction.)

CURRENTS IN REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT IN BOLIVIA

The politics of the Bolivian grassroots left is grounded in dense, sectoral organizations. The union structure is widely replicated, federating school and neighborhood councils and rural community unions into city and nationwide networks. Like other trade unions, all these forces can be mobilized into labor actions, principally including strikes — the suspension of work — but also concerted labor directed towards social conflict, paralyzing urban space, or supplying basic needs. Their disruptive actions all serve to create a break from normal arrangements of economic life that can only be resolved when the state, employers, or other powerful entities agree to concessions. Conventional understandings allow unions to sanction their members for nonparticipation and exempt actions during collective conflict from normal criminal laws. That is, sindicatos are treated as part of the political mechanism of collective representation. While they organize conflict, union and civil associations are also “the means by which the state channels resources down to the local level, and individuals channel demands up to the municipal and national levels” (Lazar 2004:188-9).

Grassroots leftists build upon see this comprehensive organization as the basis for transformative politics. How do they envision union organizations altering the direction of the state? Broadly, we can identify four visions that connect collective action to political power: (1) A tradition

of rural, Indian uprisings has run through the long history of Bolivia since colonization; (2) Syndicalism saw general strikes as the means to exercise power directly from the workplace; (3) The “Bolshevik model” of revolution¹³ empowered a political party, workers, and peasants to form militias and contest state power through arms; and (4) The coordinated application of strikes and blockades in both rural and urban spaces came to be a critical tool for exercising power from below.

Rural indigenous visions of rebellion comprise the oldest tradition of legitimate revolt in Bolivia. Through the crucible of conflict, *campesinos*¹⁴ developed ethical positions grounded on both native peoples’ original sovereignty and state legality. In the long history of rural revolt in Bolivia, the pursuit of legal claims has been tightly coupled to armed uprisings as a recurrent form of struggle. In his study of eighteenth-century revolt, Sergio Serulnikov (2003:154) observes, “Peasants’ continual reference to colonial legality and institutions did not inhibit but instead unleashed and legitimated mass violence.”¹⁵ Efforts at recognition within the Bolivian legal system were linked to a deeper historical memory of colonialism and traditions of violent revolt on the part of a legitimately distinct community. On occasion, these revolts dared to herald the restoration of an indigenous political order, but even when they did not go so far, they authorized autonomous violence on the part of Indian communities against the state and local elites.¹⁶ The symbolic language of rural uprisings is grounded in this historical and cultural legacy.

¹³ Douglas McAdams and William Sewell (2001:114–16) situate the Bolshevik model in the context of evolving strategies for revolution.

¹⁴ Throughout this text, I use the politically constructed *campesino* in place of the English term peasant. *Campesino* and other terms that designate “rural worker” cross boundaries between landless workers and small tenants and have developed an active political meaning that differs from the English term.

¹⁵ Much recent scholarship presumes a natural opposition between legal entanglement and armed rebellion. Very little in the nearly five centuries of Bolivian history bears out this argument.

¹⁶ A major point of disagreement in the literature is whether, through incomprehension or political choice, the indigenous political horizon rejected the legitimacy of Bolivian national politics, or

The Bolivian labor movement, a product of rigorous organizing in the first half of the twentieth century, joined with the MNR in the 1952 Revolution. Labor's participation was led by the highly active and politically radical Union Federation of Mining Workers of Bolivia (*Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia*; FSTMB), which adopted a Trotskyist vision of the need for the working class to carry out a "bourgeois democratic" revolution in its 1946 Thesis of Pulacayo.¹⁷ The miners saw themselves as providers of political orientation to the working class as a whole. Mining leader Juan Lechín headed the new overarching labor confederation, the Bolivian Worker's Central (*Central Obrera Boliviana*; COB), after the 1952 Revolution, and the first chair in its leadership has been reserved for a miner ever since.

Just six years after the Revolution, the miners found themselves disillusioned by the MNR's many rightward shifts. Adopting the text proposed by another Trotskyist, Guillermo Lora, the FSTMB adopted an independent political position under which "unions ought not to make themselves the agents of any party, even if that party is in power and calls itself revolutionary." Inside the unions, "the most diverse tendencies" could coexist "with the sole condition that they are inspired by revolutionary principles" (Tesis de Colquiri, quoted in Zavaleta Mercado 2011:763–64). These ideals, called "classist" (*clasista*), kept the COB firmly committed to independent action, even under sympathetic governments in 1969–71 and 1982–85, and continue to guide the Central's position in the present.

Left and campesino movements came together practically and theoretically in the first decades of the twentieth-century, driving a strong left opposition to the servitude of indigenous

whether, on the contrary, indigenous movements "expressed their will to take part actively, rather than under supervision, in the national construction of Bolivia" (Irurozqui 2000:87).

¹⁷ Michael Löwy (1981) describes at length the theory of permanent revolution, under which the working class takes on the modernizing and democratizing tasks accomplished by bourgeois revolutions in countries like France and the United States.

peasants and the recasting of rural revolts through the language of syndicalism. In the late 1960s a new generation—primarily the urban-educated children of Aymara campesinos—formulated the position of Katarismo. Katarismo placed rural organizers in a tradition of anticolonial resistance that reached back beyond the colonial era to an Inca social order, understood as free and autonomous. A prophecy of this return of history was seen in the dying words of rebel Túpaj Katari, “I die, but I will come back as millions.” Kataristas proposed syndicalist and communal self-organization organization of rural indigenous peoples, independent of the existing political parties and based on their own political traditions (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990:163-64). In the 1973 Manifesto of Tiwanaku, Kataristas declared independence from the MNR, which it blamed for co-opting the struggle of indigenous peoples. Like workers’ classism, Katarismo emphasized autonomy, although with an accent on indigenous culture: “It would be best for us campesinos if governments and political parties were to leave us to elect our own leaders freely and democratically so that we could formulate our own socioeconomic policy inspired by our own cultural roots.” In parallel to the workers’ movement, Kataristas saw the indigenous campesinos as a focal point for the coming together of many social groups: “Miners, factory workers, building workers, transport workers, the impoverished middle classes, all are our brothers, victims in different ways of the same exploitation” (*Tiwanaku Manifesto* 1973). In their rhetoric and outlook, they envisioned a pluralistic grassroots left conscious of both race and class (Albó 1987).

So, by the 1970s important currents of worker and campesino radicalism saw themselves as strongest when operating independently of, or at a distance from, political parties.¹⁸ This skeptical position was only reinforced by the party politics of the post-1982 democratic era. Major parties identified by name as “left” and “revolutionary” collaborated with neoliberal shock therapy and

¹⁸ This skepticism of the state was widespread despite the fact that the once-vibrant Bolivian anarchist movement had been suppressed in the 1940s and 1950s.

joined the frontal assault on the labor movement. Since no single party won an electoral or parliamentary majority during this period, inter-party dealmaking was crucial to governance, cementing the idea of parliament as a space of corruption alien to political principles. Grassroots organizers often regarded those who engaged with this system as betrayers, *buscapegas* (seekers of positions) and *llunk'us* (Quechua for flunkies) who sought only personal advantage (Albro 2010).

These positions dovetailed with a rise in autonomist Marxism and, later, popular anarchism across Latin America. Propelled by pessimistic reflections on the Soviet Union and Sendero Luminoso and optimistic inspiration from the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Movimento Sem Terra in Brazil, many leftists in Bolivia engaged in a general rethinking of the primacy of state power, the centrality of formal wage labor to the working class, and the interaction of class and racial oppression.¹⁹ Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar—who lamented the Soviet experience as “a work of ordering [society] apparently distinct [from capitalism] but at the same time, in reality, scandalously similar”—is representative of this rethinking. A Mexican national inspired by the insurgencies of Central America, Gutiérrez threw herself into Bolivian struggles, eventually taking part in the Altiplano-based Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army alongside Álvaro García Linera, who became Morales’ vice president.²⁰ Gutiérrez’s militancy evolved through a sentence in a Bolivian jail, participation in the Cochabamba Water War, and writing a chronicle of recent Bolivian history. She interprets Marx’s call for the destruction of the state “as its real abolition [*anulación*], its non-utilization, which is only possible through the energy deployed by communities exercising self-determination” (2006:139). Filemón Escobar, once a communist activist in the mines, re-centered his perspective from class to

¹⁹ María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2003) discusses a longer trajectory of this rethinking in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

²⁰ Gutiérrez describes her experiences and the lessons she drew from them in *¡A desordenar!* (2006). A third-party account of the insurgency appears in Quispe Quispe (2005)

colonial suppression of Andean lifeways.²¹ The Comuna group of intellectuals in La Paz brought together public intellectuals including Raúl Prada Alcoreza, Luis Tapia, García Linera, and Gutiérrez, all of whom sought to understand the independent power of grassroots forces. They all made themselves researchers of the self-determination that Gutiérrez spoke of, although viewing the path of its realization in different ways. Across Latin America, social movement practices of assemblies and the rejection of formal hierarchies within grassroots movements have become a hallmark of anti-neoliberal organizing. The Coordinadora structure pioneered in Cochabamba's Water War reflects these "horizontal" relations and its activists took part in continental conversations that made this way of organizing a model.

Running somewhat counter to these state-skeptical lines of thought was the articulation of a "political instrument" for social movements to intervene in politics. Rural and campesino grassroots confederations used this term to mark the organization they were building different as from a political party, while capable of assuming a representative role in state institutions. The instrument was founded in 1995, and the fraction led by Evo Morales became the Movement Towards Socialism—Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (*Movimiento al Socialismo—Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos*; MAS-IPSP) in January 1999. Alongside the remnant Assembly for the Sovereignty of the Peoples and Felipe Quispe's Pachakuti Indigenous Movement, the MAS-IPSP represented an extraordinary indigenous intervention in conventional politics. Since its 2005 electoral victory, it has worked to gain electoral dominance by rapidly expanding into every Bolivian municipality. This makes for a patchwork organization inside of which the ideal of the party's subordination to social movements, local political celebrity, and loyalty to the national

²¹ Escobar co-founded the Movement Towards Socialism—Political Instrument of the Sovereignty of the Peoples, the party of Evo Morales. He recounts his political trajectory in a memoir, *De la revolución al Pachakuti* (From the Revolution to Pachakuti; 2008).

leadership compete as organizing principles. García Linera took the office of Vice President with a promise of keeping the national party accountable to grassroots movements, but has left autonomism behind to become an advocate of a strong “Jacobin” or Leninist national leadership and the formation of party cadre.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOLIVIAN UPSURGE THROUGH THE SPATIALIZED EVENTS

This study is broadly concerned with how a series of protest events dramatically reshaped the political life of Bolivia. Peoples and movements who had long taken a back seat in Bolivian politics moved into a driving role through these events. Likewise, a generation of neoliberal policies were thrown into question or swept aside. Respectively, these two sentences describe the indigenous and leftist revolutions of twenty-first century Bolivia, and they have been justifiably explored in great depth through reporting, political theorizing, narrative history and social science. What this investigation addresses, however, is not the change in who engages in politics, nor in the overall political direction of Bolivian society, but a shift in *how politics is carried out*. It especially looks at how Bolivian streets, public buildings, downtowns, and practical and symbolic centers of power were reclaimed, contested, and fought over in the course of the country’s unprecedented twenty-first century upheaval. Recent changes in political practices—particularly the much greater importance for space-claiming, mass mobilization, and collective decision making within social movement structures—are part of a region-wide pattern. Domestically, they are at least as fundamental to understanding Bolivia’s new political configuration as are the plurinational ideal, “twenty-first century socialism,” *Buen Vivir*/Living Well, and the workings of the Movement towards Socialism—Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples.

Given the variety of historical experiences, it is perhaps obvious that any one revolutionary transformation stands apart uniquely from all other such experiences. What is more meaningful to say is that the twenty-first-century Bolivian experience stands apart from our inherited models in ways that allow us to deepen our analysis and broaden our sense of historical possibility. The electoral framework alone cannot account for country's political change, but just as certainly, military frameworks of force are inappropriate. Tactical victories did not come from bullets, while electoral victories did not begin at the ballot box. No single ideology, constitutional principle, or political party monopolized political power in the wake of the past decade's turmoil. Rather, to understand Bolivia's present and future, we must examine the turbulent forms of political contestation, new principles of democratic legitimacy, and new forms of representation of grassroots actors in public life that make up a new way of doing politics.

The central question of this inquiry is how mass participation in space-claiming protest has enabled and structured new modes of thinking about and doing politics. To address how this experience of protest changes its participants, their political visions and the political arena, I focused my research around two specific questions:

1. How do space-claiming protests interact with the political and racial geography of the city? To what extent does the power of these protests depend upon this interaction?
2. How do space-claiming events enable the production of a common political subject among participants from multiple social and class positions?

Centering a research project on transformative events and upon these questions posed some immediate problems: By the time that Bolivia was identified as an ideal case for following these dynamics, was it too late for an ethnographic study? Would there be suitable new events to study

during the time of my fieldwork? How can the numerous subject positions involved in mass movements be acknowledged? Fortunately, Bolivia's remarkable political trajectory accommodated these concerns. While the central events that are the subject of my project—large-scale space-claiming protests that address issues of national significance—are not constantly occurring, there has been no recent period of more than a few months without such protests. In fact, the two calendar years of my fieldwork, 2010 and 2011, had the highest numbers of protest events recorded since the 1970s.²²

Even with new conflicts arising in the streets, though, I needed to understand some of the central events in the first years of the upheaval, before I arrived to Bolivia. To do so, I used a variety of forms of enduring evidence from these events: documents and media recording the events as they happened; the patterns and spatial locations of smaller-scale protests, which often reflect the patterns and locations set by high intensity periods (Sewell 2001:64–66); the memories, identities, and oral history narratives of protest participants and observers; the continuing use of past moments of protest in present political discourse (e.g., “the October [2003] Agenda,” the Coordinadora form in Cochabamba); and monuments and other physical markers erected in recognition of protest events. The public nature of these protests, the wide variety of media that documented them, the willingness of people to share their experiences (and the pride, sincerity, and clarity with which they did so), and the active efforts of memoirists, biographers, archivists and social scientists in Bolivia all made this task easier.

Finally, the direction in which that this project developed—its orientation around public spaces and mass political actions in them—allowed me to look across different movements as they

²² Researchers in the Conflict Observatory at the Cochabamba-based research group CERES counted 811 “conflictive events” in 2010 and 884 in 2011, the highest levels of any year in their 1970–2012 dataset (Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social 2012, 2013).

came into that same space. I don't pretend that this perspective provides a comprehensive view of the interior of each of those movements. Instead, it illuminates the common spaces and practices they created through joint action. Several generations of studies of revolution—globally and in Bolivia—have sought out a single revolutionary subject, around whom others should coalesce. This study on the other hand asks about *how* revolution is carried out and *what its acts mean*, rather than asking which actors are best suited to initiate revolution. I hope in doing so, it conveys some of the multivocal character of the events that changed Bolivia's recent history.

THE MULTIRACIAL, POLITICALLY PIVOTAL CITIES OF COCHABAMBA AND SUCRE

Sucre and Cochabamba, the two most important cities in central Bolivia, are both situated in the fertile and temperate middle altitude region of Bolivia, known as the Valleys.²³ There are intimate, but distinct relations between race and space in each, amid high levels of political mobilization. Each city is a capital of one of Bolivia's nine departments, with somewhat mixed (indigenous-nonindigenous) population. From the first half of the twentieth century onward, mestizo elites shared both cities with merchants of indigenous origin, particularly women, and an expanding mestizo and indigenous laboring class (often racialized as *cholos* and *chololas*). They constituted marketplaces and working-class neighborhoods as their own, sometimes maintaining sharp differences from the status of Indian, and other times serving as a bridge between labor and rural political organizing.²⁴

²³ Somewhat confusingly, the Valleys are located at higher altitudes than either the Yungas (including the Chapare) or the tropical lowlands.

²⁴ Laura Gotkowitz's review (2007:164–91) of chola market women's politics emphasizes the distinction, while Forrest Hylton's (2003) exploration of left-indigenous alliances in the 1920s and 1930s emphasizes the bridge role played by urban laborers of indigenous origin.

Cochabamba distinguished itself as a site for mobilization in the 1999–2000 Water War and continued to bring out large concentrations of protesters year after year over a wide variety of issues. Sucre’s role was more subdued until it suddenly became the arena of national mobilization in the June 2005 succession crisis, and went on to host the 2006–07 Constituent Assembly. The departments of Cochabamba and Chuquisaca (of which Sucre is the capital) lie between a secure base for the MAS-IPSP in the western highlands and the eastern departments that are the electoral base of the right-wing opposition. In the years of regional polarization, stretching from 2004 to 2009 (the “catastrophic stalemate,” see below), Cochabamba and Sucre became vital to the national balance of power. Like the national government, departmental and municipal power in both places was in the hands of neoliberal politicians in 2000, but this control faced serious challenges in the years considered in this study.

Sucre, the “city of four names” was founded as La Plata and oversaw the enormous silver wealth extracted from nearby Potosí. As the capital of the Spanish colonial Audiencia de Charcas, it became both an administrative and academic center as the site of the second university to be established in the Americas, Universidad Mayor Real y Pontificia de San Francisco Xavier de Chuquisaca. The university was one of many regional centers for independence agitation and residents claim its 1809 call for independence (*Grito Libertario*) marked the start of the continent’s separation from Spain. It became the first capital of independent Bolivia and took the name of war hero and president José Antonio de Sucre in 1839. However, the seat of government moved to La Paz following the 1899 civil war, and the modern Bolivian bureaucracy along with parliament are centered in La Paz.

In an illustration of the dependence of cities on administrative and commercial networks, Sucre stagnated with the loss of the government apparatus. While La Paz and Cochabamba nearly

quadrupled their populations from 1900 to 1950, reaching 267,000 and 80,795 respectively, Sucre saw more modest growth reaching just 40,128 inhabitants at mid-century (Malloy and Thorn 1971:41). Despite its status as constitutional and judicial capital, Sucre feels much more like a provincial capital. The city lacks the high-rise buildings that dominate central La Paz and dot central and north Cochabamba. Instead, Sucre has the historic feel of an old Spanish colonial town. Sucre's upper class preserved racial stratification almost as it preserved its colonial architecture and street grid, as markers of its status to be cherished even if outsiders might regard them as anachronistic.²⁵ Nonetheless, it expanded with the post-1985 relocalization of miners and urban migration of peasants, reaching 215,778 residents in 2001 (*Correo del Sur*, August 16, 2012). This wave of new arrivals faces all the challenges of periurban expansion as well as an estrangement from the city's elite institutions, which aggressively aligned themselves against the MAS-IPSP majority in the Constituent Assembly. Convinced that a return to full capital status could restore the city's greatness, the elite formed the Inter-Institutional Committee of the Interests of Chuquisaca to lobby for this position. When the MAS-IPSP balked at the request, an escalating series of local protests targeted predominantly indigenous assembly members as "traitors to Chuquisaca" and dirty Indians unfit to enter and govern from the "cultured" city. In part because of this racialized and turbulent conflict, local power has changed hands frequently between the elite and the MAS-IPSP in the last decade.

Despite being the city where the upheaval of 1999 to 2005 originated, Cochabamba does not anchor accounts of the recent Bolivian upheaval.²⁶ The Cochabamba region has long been an

²⁵ In Sucre, the landholding elites generally conserved their creole racial purity until the 1953 Agrarian Reform, after which many took their remaining wealth outside the city. In the decades that followed, they were replaced by mestizo families who were deeply attached to the Lettered City heritage represented by their city (Sánchez C 2008:41–44). This cultural identification transformed into a visceral hostility to their campesino neighbors during the catastrophic stalemate period.

²⁶ On this, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar's *Los ritmos del Pachakuti* is a partial exception. Her account carefully balances the political force of the upheaval among three blocks: Cochabamba's

agricultural heartland for the wider region. It played a key role in Bolivia's early- and mid-twentieth century peasant and worker movements (Gotkowitz 2007; Lagos 1994; Olivera 2004). The infrastructural corridor between La Paz and El Alto, Cochabamba, and the lowland agricultural center in Santa Cruz became the economic heart of Bolivia in the second half of the century. This corridor (the so-called *eje troncal*, or trunk axis) dominates the national economy, uniting the four largest cities, which make up nearly half the population and an even larger share of the economy. During this time, Cochabamba experienced explosive growth through migration (Guardia B and Mercado B 1995; Ledo García 2002). The city has industrial zones stretching west to Quillacollo, northeast to Sacaba, and southeast towards the High Valley. Recent urban growth sprawls over hillsides and recently subdivided agricultural lands in self-constructed neighborhoods. The city has an internal geographical split within the city between a poorer, recent migrant and indigenous periphery and a "whiter," middle-class north-center. The south side, or Zona Sur, has become the iconic way to refer to the peripheral population but does not include all of it. In the 2001 Census, the Zona Sur alone had 235,355 residents, comprising nearly 44% of the municipality (Butrón Oporto and Veizaga Rosales 2010:59).

The city lies at the center of the department of the same name, and both describe themselves as "the heart of Bolivia" (the department's borders are reminiscent of a heart shape). The city is the sole urban center of the larger department and regional movements of peasants, indigenous peoples, and even the Chapare cocaleros maintain headquarters within the city limits. Key left grassroots movement actors there include the factory workers' labor union, neighborhood organizations, water supply committees, student organizations, the MAS-IPSP party, the Coordinadora that emerged

Coordinadora, the Aymara movement of the Altiplano and La Paz–El Alto, and the cocalero–MAS-IPSP movement (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008b:315–18). Gutiérrez's theorization of the Cochabamba movement from the Water War onwards is detailed, thoughtful, and visionary.

from the Water War, and these peasant organizations from the rest of the department. The department was the first electoral foothold for the Assembly for the Sovereignty of the Peoples, a faction of which became the MAS-IPSP. Conversely, four-time Mayor and twice-elected Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa was a prototypical politician of the neoliberal era. Despite not having any claim to capital status, the city has hosted a wide variety of nationwide summits and international fora with massive attendance by social movements. These events, and the slowly progressing establishment of a parliament for the Union of South American Nations (*Unión de Naciones Suramericanas*; Unasur)²⁷ outside the city make it into a kind of unofficial social movement capital for the country.

I focused on Cochabamba and Sucre in part because other accounts had already provided detailed information on El Alto and La Paz, but also because shifting the geographic focus allowed me to probe some of explanations that emerged from other studies. Research focused on these cities (Zibechi 2006; Mamani Ramírez 2005; Patzi 2003) foregrounds the commonalities between the two main mobilizing forces in La Paz Department, the Aymara Altiplano and the urban neighborhoods of El Alto. What sets this department apart is the tight cultural continuity among rural migrants with the combative Aymara Altiplano, and an overwhelming demographic balance to back up that community's weight. By contrast, Cochabamba and Sucre were less densely organized and less ethnically homogenous, and yet had their own important involvement in the decade of revolt. Studying them allows for comparative consideration of the relative importance of Altiplano cultural patterns of organization, and the role for mestizo, middle-class, or life-long urban dwellers in these revolts. It also allows consideration of the backlash to upheaval, and the disputed ownership of the city that were not so obvious in overwhelmingly indigenous La Paz. Finally, in demographic and

²⁷ Like the 2006 summit that first promised it, the planned parliament will have massive spaces for meetings of the continent's social movements alongside government leaders, under the model of "diplomacy of the peoples." See pages 250 to 252 in chapter 6 for further discussion of this concept.

cultural terms, the mixed populations of Cochabamba and Sucre are more typical of multiracial Latin American cities, providing greater opportunity for comparison beyond the Bolivian case.²⁸

A NOTE ON METHODS AND SOURCES

My research combines documentary sources, oral histories, ethnographic participant observation, and interviews to examine the pivotal, but infrequently studied, role of Cochabamba and Sucre in the last decade's political upheaval. This data was amassed during twelve months of fieldwork (March–April 2010; July 2010–April 2011), as well as six weeks of visits in 2008 and 2009. My sources of information include: *participant observation* alongside organizers and citizens in space-claiming protest, social movement summits, and grassroots organizations; *semi-structured interviews* and *medium-length interviews* with approximately thirty movement leaders, organizers, and participants in space-claiming protests; and *extended life histories* from three participants in recent mobilizations and those of a generation ago. Documentary sources include newspaper and other press accounts; documentary films and other media recording the events as they happened; and photos, notes, audio recordings, leaflets, posters and other ephemera solicited from informants.

Observation of public events included attending at least fifty-two protest or state-organized events, most of them engaged in the claiming and use of public spaces; fifteen public forums or conferences; and four international events illustrating the indigenization of Bolivian diplomacy. Extended engagement with movement participants included three movement campaigns: the urban opposition to a new highway proposed through a national park, a labor movement seeking to organize sub-contracted workers, and a strike wave across Bolivian organized labor. Documentary

²⁸ Most multiracial settings do not have overwhelming majorities of the subordinated group (as in La Paz, or apartheid South Africa), but rather a more stratified mix.

sources, primarily newspapers and movement publications, were collected, copied, or photographed in archives in La Paz, Sucre, and Cochabamba, amounting to over 2,500 photographed items.

I also collected information on the spaces these movements contested—from informants and regular ethnographic observation of the main sites—including the presence and spatial form of significant cultural and political events that occur in these spaces and the racialized geography of these two cities. I mapped the routes taken by protest events and the spatial components of prominent public spaces. During fieldwork, I recorded examples of racial exclusion and hostility in everyday life; perceptions of “ownership” of the city; how people relate physically and emotionally to various sites; and how they encounter people of different statuses in the space of the city.

The pre-2009 events I studied occurred before the eyes of the media and happened in public spaces. All of them are extensively documented as they occurred and widely discussed afterwards. Repression of participants in their aftermath was limited, and such repression ended almost entirely after the MAS-IPSP came to power.²⁹ As such, they are highly accessible to documentary and oral historical research. The problems concerning this research are not related to access, but rather questions of media representation, personal bias, self-presentation, contamination or loss of memories, and other issues that trouble any historical research project. To provide greater perspective, I also consider four campaigns that occurred while I was in the field: the July-August 2010 Potosí regional strike, the December 2010 *gasolinazo*, the strike waves of January to April 2011, and the 2011 TIPNIS campaign. These are good proxies for the earlier campaigns in some ways: they share some of the same participants, use similar methods, and followed similar trajectories as

²⁹ Those who authorized repression in September and October 2003 have been the subject of judicial investigations and prosecution. Grassroots protesters who participated in exceptional events outside of these three events, particularly those involving deadly violence, have on rare occasions been prosecuted for violence and for property destruction. I do not believe that these prosecutions discouraged informants from discussing the events in this ethnography.

they escalated towards a crisis. However, their common antagonist—the Morales government, rather than its neoliberal predecessors—was quite different, as was the degree of repressive violence they faced. They could appeal to common political principles in arguments with the state, were not forced to endure as much lethal violence, and faced a more complicated challenge of countermobilization by other grass-roots sectors allied with the government. I will address some of these issues separately in the section on countermobilization (in the conclusion). The early mobilizations may have had a greater sense of acting in uncharted territory, uncertainty of government response, and inexperience in this type of action, which may not have continued in the mobilizations I observed more directly. Finally, the past victories provided a pattern of successful overthrow that was clearly invoked symbolically in the more recent mobilizations; this was simply unavailable to activists in the earlier mobilizations. Despite all these qualifications, contemporary events provide real ethnographic insight into the tactics and processes of mobilization in the key events of 1999 to 2005.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

This study is theoretically anchored by the events in which movements take over, control, or claim public spaces. In chapter 1, I connect these events to revolutionary change and articulate my approach to understanding space-claiming through its component parts: protest actions and meaning-laden spaces. The events I bring into focus in this study were transformative, but they were neither unprecedented nor unique. The ability of ordinary people, through various means of pressure, to alter Bolivian politics is a central element of the country's history, not a deviation from it. In a series of episodes dating back at least three-quarters of a century, new Bolivian governments have linked themselves to popular upheavals, proclaiming their rule as the enactment of ideologies of revolution: socialism, nationalist renewal, and indigenous resurgence. In chapter 2, I use a variety

of historical sources to show how the modern idea of revolution has become a Bolivian political tradition. At the heart of at least four major political transitions, I find that mass popular upheaval connected to new governing projects through dramatic handoffs of power from one government to the next, and transfers of legitimacy from the streets to the state.

Moving on from this historical approach, I look at four kinds of space-claiming in the central part of my text, chapters 3 through 6. Before these chapters, I include a prelude that describes the 2000 Water War in Cochabamba in detail. Chapters 3 and 4 are primarily concerned with actions that claim spaces as a political act or an extension of a general strike. In the former, I trace the role of the individual road blockade and show the various ways it can be scaled up to a paralyzing metropolis-wide civic strike. In the latter, I show how several tactics contribute to creating a feeling of broad political unity in the streets, and the ways that central plazas are taken over to give this unified political subject a sovereign voice. Chapters 5 and 6 concern the racial geography of the city. I show how Bolivian cities were constructed as spaces of indigenous exclusion and subordination, and the powerful impact of protests that break those rules in chapter 5. In chapter 6, I turn to the post-2005 Bolivian state's use, defense, and re-design of state spaces that were traditionally marked by creole dominance, showing how these changes altered the connection between race and governance.

The organization of the text is thematic, rather than chronological, but the events I describe through oral history and ethnography stretch from 1999 to 2012. This was an extremely complex and turbulent period in Bolivia's history. For simplicity, I adopt the following periodization, which I use throughout the text.

The **grassroots upsurge** extended from late 1999 to 2005. Beginning with the Cochabamba Water War, numerous large but regional mobilizations broke the presumed inevitability of neoliberal

economic policies. The movements involved had strong mutual affinities from the beginning despite some major differences in long-term strategic vision. Simultaneous mass mobilizations were pivotal moments for movements to articulate their goals and visions together. Through the September–October 2003 Gas War, they found a way to coordinate their actions into a national strike wave. Their ability to oust two presidents, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa Gisbert, fit the classic structure of a political revolution, but constitutionality and electoral democracy were never abandoned.

These years had a decisive historical impact that continues to be felt in Bolivian politics. By expelling a transnational privatizer, the participants in the Water War shattered the inevitability of neoliberal economic policies and set a precedent for the later nationalization of numerous privatized enterprises. The restoration of the municipal water company Semapa began experiment in public management of water resources (one largely seen as unsuccessful by the time of my fieldwork) and set a precedent for the recovery of El Alto’s water company in January 2005. The October 2003 Gas War left behind a concrete package of popular demands. This “October agenda” literally consists of the aggregated proposals put forward by the movements, but essentially boils down to three points: public control over common resources through nationalization; a Constituent Assembly to redefine the state; and decolonization of state’s relationship with indigenous peoples. Finally, the May–June 2005 mobilizations repudiated both the half-measures of Carlos Mesa on gas privatization and the possibility of further government repression against disruptive grassroots movements. In the end, an electoral solution was put forward, allowing the Movement toward Socialism to become the vehicle of state transformation in the country. These events laid a lasting foundation for the Bolivian political agenda. On a typical day in 2010 or 2011, any one of these three legacies—anti-neoliberalism,

the October agenda, and the construction of the plurinational state—might be used to orient a policy debate, explain a government decision, or justify a new protest.

The MAS-IPSP came to state power through an unprecedentedly large victory in the December 2005 election. The party's affinity with the movements that carried out the grassroots upsurge and its promise to function as a "government of social movements" suggested a simple transformation from protest to politics. The process of redefining the country was carried forward through a Constituent Assembly from August 2006 to December 2007, in which the MAS-IPSP held a simple majority. However, the first four years of MAS-IPSP government were complicated by intransigent right-wing opposition and became known as the **catastrophic stalemate** (*empate catastrófico*).

After 2005, neoliberal and right-wing politicians still retained considerable institutional resources: control of the Senate; a significant minority within the Constituent Assembly; the leadership of departmental governments in Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija, and Cochabamba; and civic movements in these departments and Chuquisaca.³⁰ They organized these forces into a backlash that counterposed regional autonomy to the proposed plurinational order. Right-wing forces turned to massive public gatherings, including "departmental cabildos" and referendums to articulate this stance, mirroring some of the space-claiming in the grassroots upsurge. At the same time, so-called *grupos de choque* within these movements directly attacked indigenous movement participants, including Constituent Assembly members, for the "crime" of "invading" urban spaces.

³⁰ The term "civic movements" reflects self-identification and the institutional role of Civic Committees in most of these departments in these mobilizations. The movements also identified with regional identities like *cruceñidad* (Santa Cruz-ness). In Chuquisaca, the Inter-Institutional Committee, made up of the heads of various public and private mainstream institutions, took the lead role in organizing.

The government weathered this challenge for years, but finally turned the tide against it during the August–October 2008 political crisis. Its strategy involved enduring outrages rather than cracking down on them, and mobilizing social movement support in massive numbers to continue along the path to a plurinational constitution. Compared with the previous five years, national power was upended but politics continued to depend on protest, and the grassroots left and right-wing civic movement used overlapping repertoires of tactics. Conflicts were also settled through contests at the ballot, including the final approval of the Constitution by a 61% vote in January 2009.

Recent years have been a period of **mobilization and countermobilization within the Plurinational State**. Bolivia was formally declared a plurinational state on January 22, 2010, with the Evo Morales' second inauguration. In national (December 2009) and regional (April 2010) elections, the MAS-IPSP secured its place as the premier political force in the country, but it was joined by a growing ecosystem of grassroots, left, and indigenous forces holding municipal and departmental offices. In accordance with the new constitution, indigenous delegates assumed legislative seats without party affiliation for the first time.

It is now clear that the first years of the plurinational state are ones of conflict within the grassroots left coalition. Sectors that stood with the Morales government during the catastrophic stalemate now voice their demands by applying the same methods of mobilization that defined the first years of the twenty-first century. In response, the government has denounced these actions by its erstwhile allies as a continuation of the right-wing campaign to destabilize the national government. Countermobilization—the strategy used to defeat the right—has been turned against those grassroots movements that put their “particular interests” first rather than accepting the direction chosen by the government. While some of the events described in chapters 3 to 6 were

part of this pattern of mobilization and countermobilization, it is only in the conclusion than I discuss this dynamic directly.

In that conclusion, I bring the multiple forms of space claiming discussed in the study together. Looking carefully at the turbulent year of 2011, I show that each of them continues to be an active part of Bolivian politics. Rather than merely a means to obtain desired political changes, space claiming has become part of a new, more dynamic political culture.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: RACE IN BOLIVIA

Since racial power in Bolivia is a key focus of this text, it's helpful to set out the range of racial positions and identities. Race in Bolivia is a product of colonial rule, built around the privileging of people of European origins in political, economic, and social life. In the colonial period, the highest status was accorded to *peninsular* (born in the Iberian peninsula) and *criollo* ("creoles," born in the Americas, but of entirely European origins) individuals. Since the Republican era, this higher status has been substantially shared with *mestizo* elites.

After independence, racial stratification remained an enduring feature of Bolivian society, but the strata shifted to include mestizos (rather than only creoles of European origin) at the top of the social ladder. Nineteenth-century liberals softened this upper boundary, but sought to liquidate indigenous collective institutions altogether. Property ownership, higher education, or professional training remained the keys to entering political life. Throughout the nineteenth century, Indians violently rebuffed attempts to dismantle their separate status and subdivide communally controlled land (Larson 2004; Platt 1987). While the 1871 *Ley de Exvinculación* (Disentailment Law) formally abolished Indian communities as juridical entities, a system of *caciques apoderados* (empowered caciques) grew to represent their collective claims before the law over the 1870s to 1920s (Gotkowitz 2007:21-68), even as their land tenure was being substantially reduced by encroaching estates and haciendas.

The exclusion of indigenous people from the professions and public service was reproduced through continuing legal prohibitions and government disinterest in education for Indians.³¹

³¹ For a brief history of the unequal and racially stratified division of the Bolivian education system, see Gustafson (2009:40–58).

Suffrage extended only to property holders and literate professionals until 1938,³² when it was expanded to male, literate adults; most Indians³³ gained the vote only with the introduction of universal, gender-neutral suffrage in 1952. Well into the twentieth century, elite administration and leisure in the cities occurred alongside, and were made possible by, unpaid indigenous hereditary labor. The forced labor regimes of rural haciendas extended into urban service, while racial hierarchy entailed public moments of microaggression and humiliation.

The country's racial composition differs from that of other Latin American nations in three highly significant ways. First, while European, American, and African origins are all present, the number of self-acknowledged Afro-descendant peoples is very small. A geographically concentrated population of no more than 30,000 Afro-Bolivians lives mostly in the Yungas region of La Paz. Like their indigenous neighbors, Afro-Bolivians have undergone a cultural revival and increasingly migrated to the cities, particularly La Paz and Cochabamba. Afro-Bolivian identity and collective rights are recognized in the 2009 Constitution alongside those of indigenous communities, but they remain peripheral to national political alliances. The few Afro-Bolivians I encountered in urban Cochabamba's labor movement were vocal about their identity, but it did not feature in the space-claiming events I documented.³⁴

Second, a large labor force³⁵ of indigenous origin, primarily in the highlands, maintained that racial identity through the centuries.³⁶ These people, primarily speakers of Quechua and Aymara,

³² The Constituent Assembly of 1938 wrote a new constitution that expanded suffrage; national elections with an expanded franchise occurred in 1940 and 1951.

³³ Indian literacy was registered at just 15.9% of adults in the 1950 Census (Presidencia de la República 1962:79).

³⁴ Sara Busdiecker's dissertation on Afro-Bolivians found that "migrant blacks [i.e., those outside the Yungas] do not occupy a racialized occupational space nor can they be found concentrated in any one neighborhood" (Busdiecker 2006:286n201).

³⁵ The question of class stratification within the indigenous population, through an existent and expanding indigenous middle class, is increasingly relevant to Bolivian social life. However, its

experienced class subordination in the mines, large agrarian estates, and cities that coincided with their racial positioning. In rural areas, they were racialized as *indios*, while in cities they were termed *cholos* and *cholas*, a term for “acculturated” Indians. The Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, which carried out the 1952 Revolution, envisioned a homogenous mestizo nation, but its designation of peasants as *campesinos*, not *indios*, only made the former into a quasi-racial category. Later, the influence of highland radicals like Fausto Reinaga and the Katarista movement reclaimed *campesinos*’ indigenous identity as central to their politics.

Third, there is a distinction between these indigenous peasants and primarily lowland indigenous peoples. The latter’s relations with the settler society were varied: some were missionized as early as the sixteenth century, many were incorporated into agricultural plantations as unpaid servants in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and others remained self-sufficient and outside the dominant society’s orbit. At the time of European arrival, their social orders spanned the range from foragers to advanced agriculturalists, from small bands to polities of a hundred thousand members. However, the settler society termed them savages and they continued to occupy the *indio* slot after 1952.

Specific terminology for these indigenous groups is complicated. Lowland communities organized inside of the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB) use *indígena*; in this text, I call them “lowland indigenous.” Highland communities that seek to reconstitute their ayllu structures as a basis for territorial governance, are organized through National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (*Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu*; CONAMAQ) and use the term *indígena originario*. Peasant communities, including members of the Unified Union Confederation of

political role is limited. Major indigenous-identified political projects continue to affiliate themselves with working-class, peasant, or self-sufficient rural class positions.

³⁶ This parallels the experience of Guatemala, but differs from many other societies where peasant and indigenous identities gradually separated.

Bolivian Peasant Workers (*Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*; CSUTCB), use *indígena*, *originario*, and *campesino*. The Union Confederation of Colonists of Bolivia, made up primarily Aymara and Quechua migrants, renamed itself the Union Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (*Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia*; CSCIB) and its members self-identify as *interculturales*. Theoretically a part of this federation, the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba identify primarily as *cocaleros*, or coca growers.³⁷ Chapare coca growers have staked a claim to indigeneity detached from their traditional landbase, but connected to the coca leaf (Grisaffi 2010). I use these terms, but where relevant I refer to the last two groups as “agricultural colonists” or as “indigenous migrants” as well. Collectively, these groups have articulated the term *indígena originaria campesino*, which covers all of these identities. Felix Ticona Quispe, then a senior official in the CSUTCB, described the differences in terms as “only in organizational matters ... the name is from the mode of representation that we have” while “in the end, we are the same, we eat the same things, we feel the same things.”³⁸ I use “indigenous” in place of this overarching identity, and to identify members of any of its subgroupings in their relations with groups outside this broad category.

While race is lived viscerally through material inequalities, obligations of deference, social exclusions, its embodiment is subtle and even surprising for outsiders accustomed to skin color as a reliable racial marker. Racial identities are inscribed onto bodies through the lived experiences of malnutrition and stunting and hard physical labor. Some social beliefs about race also involve physical qualities such as height, perceptions of dirt and disease, and notions of blood descent. Generally, however, racial divisions are performative: “In the Andes, ... the absence of reliable

³⁷ Other *cocaleros* live in the Yungas region of northern La Paz Department and the Yungas of Vandiola in Cochabamba Department.

³⁸ Interview, March 20, 2010.

phenotypical markers places special emphasis upon clothing, hairstyles, speech and body language to determine who is an Indian and who is not” (Weismantel and Eisenman 1998:130; Nelson 1999). Mid-century Argentine visitor Alicia Ortiz (1953:18), who “at first could not distinguish the *india* from the *chola*” during her 1952–53 trip, was surprised to have a Bolivian man inform her that the difference was “their dress.” Her informant proceeded to briefly list distinguishing garments for Indian and cholo men and women.³⁹

In twenty-first century Bolivia, dress and place of residence both continue to be crucial markers of racial identity. Rubber sandals (*ojotas*), for instance, mark a man as indigenous. Racial differentiation by dress applies more strongly to women, however. Dressing *de pollera*, with a pleated skirt and characteristic hat (black bowler hats in the Altiplano, straw hats in Valley), marks a woman as a chola. Conversely, wearing a “modern” dress—dressing *de vestido*—defines the same woman as mestiza. This distinction is so attached to identity that it can be used as a demographic category, notably in accounts of the first women de pollera to serve in various national offices.

Self-identification is both complex and shifting in Bolivia. When confronted with a series of racial categories (white, mestizo, black, indigenous, and other), “mestizo” was the preferred choice of three out of four Bolivians (76%) in 2012 (LAPOP 2012:242).⁴⁰ The mixed category has grown at the expense of “white” and (to a lesser extent) “indigenous” self-identification. At the same time, 72% declared they belong to a specific indigenous people, including two-thirds of the mestizos

³⁹ Ortiz, while a liberal advocate of freeing the Indian from servitude, remained an insistent believer of biological difference in crude terms. She insists that, “The cholo carries white blood in his veins and this fact can do no less than be reflected in his psychology. He is no longer the submissive and oppressed being, now speaks Spanish and acts with the mentality of a free man for better and for worse.” (Ortiz 1953:18).

⁴⁰ The racial question was eliminated in the 2012 census, making LAPOP’s stratified-sample survey the best available source of data on this question. There was considerable public debate about including “mestizo” among the list of peoples in 2012, but this option was ultimately rejected by the National Statistical Institute.

(241). This category, too, continues to grow.⁴¹ Social scientists and many political advocates use the latter categorization, included in the 2001 and 2012 Census, to term Bolivia a majority-indigenous country (Molina Barrios 2005; Albó and Romero 2009).⁴²

⁴¹ Both relative demographic factors (indigenous birth rates are higher) and increased social acceptability of indigeneity may be driving this shift.

⁴² In the definitive study by Ramiro Molina Barrios, the total indigenous population was 65.8% of Bolivians over 15 years old in 2001 (younger Bolivians were not asked the relevant questions in the Census). In fact, this figure includes those (3.7%) who grew up speaking and continue to speak an indigenous language but do not self-identify with that group in this indigenous “ethno-linguistic” category. Albó and Romero (2009:20) explain this group as those “who are ashamed of their indigenous identity,” a group they believe has shrunk dramatically as indigenous acceptance has increased.

Chapter 1

Urban Space-Claiming and Revolutionary Events

This is a study of how people participate in disruptive politics and why their disruptive actions have transformative political effects. I trace these actions in particular locations and through their practical and symbolic effects. Their actions interrupted the economy, interrupted political life, and interrupted long-maintained social exclusions on who may be afforded a voice in deciding the direction of either. They made demands, and sometimes refused to end their interruptions until those demands were met. When their adversaries in government could not accept either their demands or their interruptions, they attempted to clear out the spaces that had been taken. Sometimes, unable to win this contest, their adversaries conceded their demands; on rare occasions, they conceded their offices as well.

I look at these actions in a context of revolutionary change, in a country with a history of organizing for revolution, and I argue that this context helps provide meaning to these actions. However, this study does not begin from the idea that certain people will necessarily be revolutionary subjects. (In fact, the idea that the people at the forefront of the Bolivian upsurge could and should lead a revolution had to be theorized as their struggle progressed.) Instead it offers a bottom-up view of revolutionary change. Certain actions, taken by growing numbers of people, in certain spaces laden with meaning, produced changes in society. Others, including those in government, tried to stop those changes and failed. This text attempts to explain how this happened. It begins with brief events in which people take over public space.

REVOLUTION AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF EVENTS

Social scientists and historians using the frame of contentious politics have examined how mass participation in brief but momentous events can have a dramatic political impact, initiating

temporary political openings or lasting transformations (Tarrow 1995; McAdam and Sewell 2001). As in the 1980 strike wave that initiated Poland's Solidarity trade union, the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, or the 1789 storming of the Bastille, such events can herald the arrival of new political actors, new principles of legitimacy, and new practices of participation. These eruptions of public political action may emerge from the long-term cultural work of building these identities, values, and practices in movements like Katarismo in the rural Altiplano or the neighborhood councils of periurban Cochabamba. When they step out into the streets, social movements that question "dominant cultural interpretations of politics, or challenge prevailing political practices" work to introduce their distinctive values and practices into the political arena (Alvarez et al. 1998:5-6).

This work on transformative events intersects with the longer tradition of historical anthropology and its limited forays into exploring political revolutions. The historical approach within anthropology has a long lineage, but is necessarily in tension with much of cultural anthropology's focus on enduring cultural patterns, roles, rituals, and traditions. Historically informed ethnography draws in these longer-term cultural features to understand the significance of historical events. In the 1930s and 1940s, anthropologists of the Manchester School turned to event-focused analysis to investigate changes in social structures, previously treated as static. At a time when other anthropologists were putting the societies they studied into a timeless "ethnographic present" in which traditional societies continued without change, Max Gluckman described a multi-racial "social situation" of single day of events in South Africa in his classic "Bridge Paper" (Gluckman [1940] 1958). The text uses interactions among Zulus, and between Zulus and white South Africans to portray changing power dynamics in the common society to which they

belonged.⁴³ The extended case method Gluckman pioneered (Van Velsen 1967; Garbett 1970) provides insight by “compiling situational knowledge into an account of social process” and observing how “a social order reveal itself in the way it responds to pressure” (Burawoy 1998:18, 17).

While events can reveal structures, a more difficult challenge—but one essential to studying revolutionary events—is to understand how they transform these structures. Marshall Sahlins considers this topic at length, producing a theory in which surprising events (surprise being defined according to the idea that “the world is under no obligation to conform to the logic by which some people conceive of it”) force alterations in the meaning of cultural categories. Even so, he maintains a structuralist insistence that the overall cultural schema endures, that “the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction” (Sahlins 1985:138).⁴⁴ Historian William Sewell (2005a, 2005b) takes up and adapts this framework to describe the genuine ideological and material transformations which constitute revolutionary change. He uses the example of the French Revolution to articulate a model of how brief events relate to large-scale political transformations. I draw upon this model to interpret revolutionary events in Bolivia over recent decades.

Anthropologists have long been interested in revolutions, but much of the anthropological writing on them has been retrospective and with limited connections to fieldwork or on-the-ground ethnographic data. Emile Durkheim devoted considerable attention to “that general effervescence ... which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs,” which he explains in analogy to

⁴³ Gluckman’s work also represented a methodological innovation in its inclusion of members of dominant society as well as the conflicting position of Zulus themselves, both of which would have been excluded in classical structural-functionalist accounts (Cocks 2001).

⁴⁴ Sahlins (1999) emphasizes the fundamental continuity of each culture and its structures across major historical changes. However, this continuity is belied in the Andean case by the structurally transformative effects of Christianity and colonialism (Silverblatt 1987; Abercrombie 1998), capitalist wage labor (Taussig 1980), international left movements (Becker 2008; Grandin 2004), and the transnationally circulated concept of indigeneity (Brysk 2000; Albro 2005; Lucero 2006).

religious experiences (Durkheim 1915:210–11). Political scientist Aristide Zolberg urged his colleagues to pay more serious attention to revolutionary upheavals. He argues that a different logic governs these events than the “‘normal’ political events” that occupy the discipline’s attention, but that these events have “lasting political accomplishments that are perhaps made possible only by the suspension of disbelief in the impossible which is characteristic of [these] moments of madness” (Zolberg 1972:183, 206). Victor Turner’s exploration of *communitas* and liminality—during historical social change as well as in socially prescribed rituals—argues that these states constitute “anti-structures” that are dangerous to existing social orders and that have the potential to facilitate their transformation (Turner 1969, 1974; Alexander 1991:27-43). Edith Turner (2012:84–141) reviews the history of emotionally intense experiences in violent revolution and nonviolent protest in her elaboration of the concept of *communitas*. Interestingly, these analyses of the interior of revolutionary events can appear in the works of social scientists—particularly Durkheim—writing from within structural-functionalism, which was dedicated to explaining the stability, rather than the transformation of the existing social structure. For Durkheim, collective effervescence served as a generator of the collective consciousness needed for social coherence. It thereby served the function of reaffirming the social order, rather than altering or rejecting it. Victor Turner was trained in structural-functionalism, but studied process anthropology under Max Gluckman. His approach saw both marginal communities (like mendicant religious orders) and disruptive events (like May 1968 in France) as anti-structural situations in which social values and structures can be remade. Victor Turner veers between describing this process as merely renewing⁴⁵ or genuinely transformational, capable at times of “originating and sustaining processes involving temporal [i.e., *worldly*] changes in

⁴⁵ In *The Ritual Process*, Turner writes: “men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by *communitas*. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic” (Turner 1969:129).

social relations” (Turner 1974:55). Edith Turner squares the circle by proposing an “increment” of structural change left behind by ecstatic moments of revolution, while proposing that experiences of *communitas* offer genuine revelation of our oneness with the world (Turner 2012:85–141, 110).

Despite these theoretical explorations by canonical scholars, Bjørn Thomassen (2012:681–2) observes, “Anthropologists have, with a very few exceptions ... generally refrained from studying actual political revolutionary events as ethnographic cases, and consequently they have also left comparison of the processes involved to political scientists.” The exploration of emotion, ritual, and the religious overtones of revolutionary change within the functionalist tradition is mirrored by a corresponding silence on these issues by many writers who regard the prospect of revolution more sympathetically. To some extent, this silence was a strategic response to hegemonic accounts—such as Gustave Le Bon’s *The Crowd* (1897)—that dismissed social movements as the irrational acts of mobs, rather than legitimate political actors. In the United States, scholars of social movements inspired by the African American Civil Rights Movement were particularly devoted to recognizing the political legitimacy of movement claims. As a result, a generation of pioneering work on collective action sought to highlight the rational, individual motivations for movement participation. Only near the end of the twentieth century would scholars re-focus attention on this “repressed” aspect of the life of social movements.

An event-focused approach offers an anthropological entryway into the study of revolution. Durkheim and the Turners are united by an approach that sees affect as central to the transformation of social structures in revolution.⁴⁶ Scholars of social movements and contentious

⁴⁶ The importance of feelings to revolutions and to social movements has received only limited recognition by political scientists and sociologists studying these phenomena, but this attention is increasing. See Aminzade and McAdam (2001); Goodwin et al. (2001); Reed (2004). This analysis converges with a so-called fourth wave of studies of revolution in arguing that a widely accepted

politics have offered emotion-centered accounts of the Solidarity strikes in communist Poland (Barker 2001) and the El Salvadoran insurgency (Wood 2003). In the tangible events that make these revolutions possible, many other human-scale, experiential and cultural features beyond emotion are extremely consequential. As Thomassen (2012:684) argues, “Anthropologists might have quite a lot to say about exactly those ‘big events,’ those extraordinary moments or situations where existing power configurations crumble and collapse in brief and drastic events.” In this investigation, as I study space-claiming protest events, I devote close attention to “anthropological” elements of life: embodied experience, the significance of place, everyday urban stratification, and practices used by social movements.

SPACE CLAIMING AS A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

The idea of space claiming brings together two parts—tactics of collective action and meanings of public spaces—and looks at the consequences of their interaction. Space-claiming protests physically control or symbolically claim the space of the city through: occupations of plazas and roads; mass marches; sit-ins; takeovers of offices; blockades of roads; and the construction of physical barriers. They have led to, and sometimes coincide with the legally authorized use, re-appropriation, and redesigning of spaces belonging to the state.⁴⁷ By taking over the streets of urban centers, blockading inter-provincial roadways, and occupying symbolically important spaces, indigenous and grassroots protesters have disrupted economic flows, seized the political stage, and transgressed the racial norms that informally regulate urban space. Simultaneously, hundreds of

interpretive and ideological stance is an essential part of fundamental political transformation (Foran 1993; Goldstone 2001:152-156; Foran 2005).

⁴⁷ In a conceptual article on the role of space in contentious politics, Charles Tilly proposes “spatial claim making” and “control of places as stakes of contentious politics” as two important aspects of understanding transgressive acts of contention. My concept of space claiming overlaps these conceptions, while specifically focusing on the meaning of the spaces being claimed.

thousands of Bolivians engaged in collective experiences of organization, disruptive action, demand making, talking politics, and meeting their daily needs while sharing physical space. Their space-claiming actions communicate meaning and exercise practical control.

These protests use their control over space to assert several claims (Auyero 2003; Pile and Keith 1997). First, they can transgress the racial, class, and gender-based order of urban space and its uses (Ruddick 1996; Mamani Ramírez 2005) thereby posing a challenge to these forms of power. Second, they assert a claim to ownership of the city and common resources. Third, the experience of holding space against determined adversaries can illustrate popular unity, collective power, or capacity for sacrifice. Juris (2008:126) argues that affective and bodily experience links individual and collective sentiment: “mass mobilizations, and actions in particular, largely operate through affect, amplifying an initial emotion, such as a sense of injustice, and transforming it into collective solidarity.” Fourth, by governing the spaces they control through open collective decisions, they can also demonstrate the possibility of an alternative political order.

Space-claiming protests are political tools with real consequences. Consider these examples:

- A crowd in Cochabamba marches uphill from downtown to the filtration plant and headquarters of the privatized municipal water company. They pulled down the fence and replace the sign in front of the office with the spray-painted text *Water of the People*. Within a week, the privatization is reversed.
- Thousands of people, organized as peasants, teachers, miners, and other workers isolate the city of Sucre with barricades of the four entrances by land and a strike at the airport’s control tower. Others ring the central plaza downtown, threatening the contingent of police protecting a parliamentary meeting. A presidential successor concedes his right to the office and accepts new elections.

- At the end of an eight-day march, another crowd surrounds the Bolivian parliament on the night of October 20, 2008, dancing through the night. Months of political deadlock finally conclude the next day with the convening of a referendum on a new constitution.⁴⁸

None of these space claiming events were the sole basis for the political consequences that followed, but they were all necessary parts of achieving those consequences. How are we to understand these events and their remarkable efficacy? These acts of space claiming are at once communicative, symbolic, and tactical. They put forward a claim to sovereign power while physically taking over spaces associated with governing (but not the apparatus of government). Their participants struggled to control spaces rather than physical objects. Their means, while often combative, cannot be reduced to the mere seizure and retention of desired spaces; rather, they claim space to express meaning. Their use of force is tangible, but relies on political legitimacy rather than superiority in violence. As such, these space claiming protests are conceptually adjacent to protest spectacles and street theater, armed insurrection, and long-term occupations that take over facilities or occupy land for use. I describe these areas as adjacent, rather than contrasting to emphasize that my project is not about creating categorical divisions from these other actions. Indeed, recent extensions of these concepts—insurrections “of a new type,” direct action protest—offer reasonable ways to think about the same events. However, I advance the concept of space claiming because only by looking at the relation between protest tactics and meaning-laden spaces can we understand the extraordinary political impact of recent Bolivian protest.

Space claiming can transform society because the social order is enacted through the spaces of public life, and it must be continually reenacted in order to remain the same. Power and authority

⁴⁸ The first event is discussed in the Interlude before chapter 3. The second is described in chapter 2 beginning of page 88. For an official recording of the 2008 march, see Giavarini Blanco (2009).

over a given domain—such as the government’s power over the economy—imply the ability to maintain its normal operations. When Bolivians began to make practical decisions on the streets about whether cities would be allowed to function, they shifted the place where decision-making happens. When mobilized strikes brought tens of thousands of working, indigenous, and poor people into central urban spaces to talk about their future, they broke patterns of exclusion. Through many such actions, they began to redefine “the people” to which the country’s democracy belongs. Officials in the Morales government altered the symbols in state spaces, recasting the foundations of the state in a history of indigenous resistance and revolt. They also opened the doors of once exclusive domains—diplomacy, parliament, jurisprudence—to indigenous bodies, ideas, and languages.

To understand these events, I consider how the geography of Bolivian cities, and the spaces which movements claim, are expressive of political and racialized power, which has been constructed historically. That history began with an idealized opposition between “the urban” and “the indigenous,” despite the reality of an indigenous urban presence. The geography of Bolivian cities continues to develop under the influence of numerous factors, of which governance, political stratification, labor, and commercial life are the most relevant for understanding contemporary space claiming.

ACTS THAT TAKE SPACE: ELEMENTS OF A CONTENTIOUS REPERTOIRE, TACTICS

My analysis of tactics is articulated within the framework of contentious politics, which seeks to understand social movements and other collective actions that make political demands in a society (Tilly 1998; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). While this field offers many concepts that can structure extensive quantitative analysis of mobilizations, waves and cycles of protest, and shifts in scale (see

Tarrow 1989), I draw from its vocabulary to describe major qualitative changes in political actions and their meanings. Contentious politics scholars draw attention to the fact that the practices used to advance political claims are always a very narrow subset of all possible actions. As Charles Tilly observed (in long-term studies of England and France; 2008:xiii), “although ordinary people found vigorously vital ways of making their voices heard in the midst of repressive regimes, they clung to the same few forms of collective expression and modified those forms only slowly.” These various forms of action comprise a society’s *repertoire of contention*—the “fairly limited and well-established set of means for action on shared interests”—elements of which can endure for decades or centuries (Tilly 1978:232). While certain forms of action can appear (and even feel to their participants) as highly spontaneous, participants are often choosing among long-established forms of political action as the means for putting forward their demands.

Throughout this study, I introduce a series of forms of contention, and describe them both in terms of their tactical activities and their social established meanings. Sidney Tarrow argues that during periods of heightened political mobilization, the contentious repertoire expands dramatically to include new forms of action, new symbols, and new “ideologies that justify and dignify collective action” (Tarrow 1995:94). Similarly, Tilly (2000:138) defines certain forms of contention as transgressive because they involve “newly self-identified political actors, and/or ... employ innovative means of collective action.” Transgressive contention, he continues, “disrupts existing spatial routines,” frequently through the “deliberate occupation, reorganization, or dramatization of public space.”

SPACES THAT ARE MEANINGFUL: POWER, RACE, COMMERCE

In this study, I consider spaces as full of meaning and analyze how social movements use those meanings in efforts to remake their society. Looking at space is important because both

political life and everyday inequalities are organized and enacted through particular spaces, the uses that are made of them, and the expectations that are imposed upon the people who enter them. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey insists on the socially constructed nature of space, describing it a repository of cultural meaning rather than a passive arena for frictionless movement. “Space,” she writes, “is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation” (Massey 1994:265).⁴⁹ Equally, Massey calls for exploring and documenting the “spatial construction of society,” the ways in which interactions in space define social roles and positions. Social movements that act spatially can use the power and symbolism that has accumulated in certain spaces or they can interrupt the reproduction of social inequalities by enacting different social relations in space. This study looks for such meanings and interruptions in space in three domains of life: governance, race, and commerce.

Governance takes place in particular spaces. Those used most frequently, that are most connected to other sites become “central nodes in [a] social practice of wide extent” — the state (Sewell 2005c). Bruno Latour’s work (2005) reminds us that every space, even a president’s office or the New York Stock Exchange, is local. Yet as “central nodes” some spaces are layered with multiple connections that allow actions in these politically significant localities to have real and profound consequences in many other localities. Certain spaces “can become at once local *and* national spaces for the construction, mediation, and regulation of social identities” (Ruddick 1996:140). In normal times, a state draws up its own rules for participation in political life—from voting eligibility to parliamentary rules of order—and designs spaces around these routines. In that context, the physical spaces of government can seem like passive arenas in which the political system

⁴⁹ Tilly (2000:139), like Massey, draws attention to the fluid flow of meaning between political acts and the spaces in which they occur, observing that “routine political life ... endows different places and spatial meanings ... with symbolic significance.”

just happens to take place. However, when a parliament building is surrounded until a bill is passed or when a vote for the expulsion of a corporation takes place on a public square, the relations among political participation, social decision making, and tangible spaces are thrown off their usual path.⁵⁰ To understand these unauthorized interventions into politics, we have to rethink how politically important spaces can be claimed and used by means that go beyond the established channels.

Public spaces accommodate the circulation and presence of people crossing all lines of identity in society. Theorists of the public sphere have portrayed public spaces as arenas of civic equality, grounding this idea in the presence of diverse individuals and presumed freedom of movement. However, just as liberal accounts of universal citizenship have been called into question for their various exclusions, numerous studies of public spaces show how interactions within them are raced, gendered, and classed. For geographer Susan Ruddick, these “interactions in and *through* public space are crucial to the formation and maintenance of social identities” (Ruddick 1996:135). In Bolivia, in particular, ownership of urban space has long been attached to creole and mestizo identity while indigenous peoples have been associated with rural areas. In urban public spaces, the rules of labor service, obligations of employees, and conventions of decorum conspired to require deference from racial subordinates. Further, spaces of governance also had these racial restrictions: the methods of political speech coincided with creole and mestizo elite status. Governing spaces allowed indigenous people to enter as builders, servants, and attendants but excluded them from self-representation, much less defining the rules of the political game.

⁵⁰ As Charles Tilly (2000:139) narrates this interaction, “Governments always organize at least some of their power around places and spatial routines. Hence contentious politics often challenges or disrupts governmental activity, and thereby incites governmental intervention.”

A final aspect of public space explored in this study is the role of streets, highways, bus terminals, airports, and (occasionally) other infrastructural corridors as spaces of commercially vital flows. Alongside its political role as part of the public sphere, the street is fundamentally an arena for movement. Work depends on the arrival of workers while commerce depends on circulation of goods. In Bolivia, the mechanics of the general strike has shifted from the mass withdrawal of organized labor to the interruption of these flows. When this happens, the tactical actions of “strikers”—who are actually marchers, blockaders, parkers of buses, and, yes, striking teachers, transit drivers, and factory workers—encounter the physical spaces of the roadways and other spaces of flows. Through these interruptions, the vital importance of the street for the commerce of city, the economic health of the nation, and the course of politics suddenly comes into focus. The continuation of normal economic life, of complete school years and nightly dinners, is shown to depend on making these flows—particularly of fuel, food, and laborers—resume. Commercial trade, which so often seems to be connected to space in the abstract, requires control and operation of very specific spaces and technologies. At those sites, the seemingly larger scales of regional economies, national governance (or ungovernability), and international trade and investment are made and unmade.⁵¹

THEORIZING REVOLUTION

Revolutions are, in the words of Leon Trotsky (1980:17), “the direct intervention of the masses in historical events. ... those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable ... [and] they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside

⁵¹ Neil Smith questions the separateness of a “space of flows,” noting that “the fluidity of space is fundamentally premised on some quite traditional spatial fixities. The networks that make up the space of flows—banks and telecommunications systems, government agencies and orbital satellites, information corporations and telephone lines—all have nodes located in strategic places.” (Smith 1996:70)

their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new régime.” Despite intense polemics over the desirability of revolution this definition finds acceptance among scholars across the political spectrum.⁵²

Other approaches to the subject, however, believe a revolution occurs only when the breakthrough participation of the public results in a fundamental reshaping of political and social structures. At least since Prince Klemens von Metternich, observers have distinguished between *political revolutions* and *social revolutions*. The former, which are more frequent, displace a regime from power and replace it with a new one, while altering the basis for participating in politics. To carry out a social revolution, however, requires altering economic relations—ownership of land and resources, the organization of workplaces, and the distribution of wealth—so as to change the relationship among classes or other major social divisions. Since parties carrying out political revolutions often do so while identifying with a subordinated group, they do so with a promise (implicit or explicit) of also delivering a social revolution.

John Foran’s comparative study of third-world revolutions concludes that this promise is frequently not kept: changes may be purely political, or social revolutions may be turned back and reversed. He finds that all of the successful social revolutions in the global South followed a narrow path: “a multi-class, cross-racial, and all-gendered coalition of aggrieved social forces ... emerge[s] and coalesce[s into] a revolutionary project” (Foran 2005:23).⁵³ The study isolates five necessary factors for social revolution: all the successful cases occurred in a context of dependent economic development, against an “exclusionary state,” at the time of decline in the economy, and in the

⁵² Foran (2005:6-7) reviews similar definitions by other scholars, conservative Samuel Huntington and liberal Theda Skocpol.

⁵³ Foran’s empirical description of “broad, heterogeneous coalitions” (23) clashes with Marxist theories of a revolutionary class as the lone protagonist of revolution, but not with those same theories’ strategic discussions of leadership, hegemony, or permanent revolution.

absence of hostile geopolitical conditions that could prevent or reverse it. The fifth condition is ideological: “widely embraced political cultures of resistance,” under whose influence the revolution is carried out. This parallels another frequent element in definitions of revolution, ideology. Arno Mayer (1971:47–48), for example, characterizes revolutions as “initiated and implemented by militant political actors sworn to a nurtured and internally coherent doctrine” that “guides the formulation of concrete programs, [and] restricts the scope for compromise and opportunism.” Taken together, we have a definition of revolution that combines grassroots action, ideological vision, and changes in the social order. At the heart of revolution stand events: people act in ways that are outside normal channels, and the organization of society changes. Both are surprising: rules of action are broken, and so too are the expectations of how society functions.

And yet, this is not so surprising as it once was. The word revolution names this pattern of change, makes it an element of our political vocabulary, and gives us familiarity with the unexpected. Douglas McAdam and William Sewell (2001:103) argue that beginning in the late eighteenth century, the concept of revolution has served as a “master template” for social transformations. In conceptual terms, revolution was a novel “and potent category ... for political action ... that governments all over the world have had to worry about ever since, and a new category of political actors — ‘revolutionists’ or ‘revolutionaries’ — who dedicated their lives to revolution.” The revolution as template has a viral existence, spreading because one revolution demonstrates another is possible; spreading through imitation; and changing forms through multiple mutations.⁵⁴ The

⁵⁴ In Bolivia, for example, the template of revolution has taken both its “constitutional revolution” form in which the uprising authorizes an elected constituent assembly and its “Bolshevik form” in which a ruling party claims the right to speak for a historically crucial class. Since 1979, a series of upheavals meet the definition of a “people power revolution” that detaches revolution from an armed uprising, while retaining its other features (McAdam and Sewell 2001:113–16). However, McAdam and Sewell’s (2001:115) description of the dynamics of such revolutions—“The condition of the success of such ‘people power’ revolutions is that the regimes in power be unwilling to use

template of revolution is a collective understanding that elevates certain conflictive events to lasting historical significance and through which particular collective actions stand in for the sovereign populace. To understand revolutionary transformations we must look at these actions both in tactical and experiential terms (*How do they displace the state from exercising control?*) and in terms of their social significance (*How do they come to represent the popular will?*).

William Sewell considers these elements at length in his study of the storming of the Bastille. He argues that “remarkable collective creativity” deployed in “a time when political structures were massively dislocated” allowed a relatively small set of actions to politically redefine national life (2005b:251, 245). Four elements of this analysis are relevant to the long series of Bolivian upheavals since 1936 that I chart in chapter 2. First, cultural transformation (“a reconstruction of the very categories of ... political culture and political action”) is interwoven with the changing practical possibilities enabled by conflictive actions (245).⁵⁵ The introduction of new elements of the contentious repertoire is one form of this transformation. Another is the breakthrough ability of social actors to evade controls on their political action or to exert new control over space. In either case, the pre-existing street-level routine is interrupted in a way that suggests an altered dynamic between power and defiance. In contemporary Bolivia, the central tactical breakthrough is the ability of rural and periurban residents, and of metropolitan coalitions to paralyze economic life through civic strikes, which I describe in chapter 3.

their superior military force in putting the demonstrators down”—must be refined to understand these events in Bolivia.

⁵⁵ As Sewell argues, “Indeed, had these actions not led to the withdrawal of troops from the Paris region and a victory of the National Assembly over the king, the collective euphoria experienced at the taking of the Bastille would not have resulted in the birth of the concept of revolution—even had those who assaulted the Bastille self-consciously regarded themselves as embodying the will of the nation”(246).

Second, the capacity of protests to be transformative political events requires a widely accepted correspondence between local, short-term, embodied events and the political life of the society. As the taking of the Bastille began to have its historic impact, protagonists of the French Revolution “cod[ed] ... an episode of urban popular violence as an act of the sovereign will, and hence a legitimate basis for a new form of government” (McAdam and Sewell 2001:103). This kind of identification violates the distinction between the “disorder” of subordinate masses and the “politics” of established actors. Yet the more that revolutions happen, the easier it becomes for movements, their state adversaries, and the public to interpret disruptive actions as legitimate. The idea of revolution becomes a semiotic conduit for this kind of identification. chapter 4 considers the way this connection is made through interpretation and collective experience.

Third, mass participation in these events is laden with significance, involves innovation and flux, and elicits heightened emotion. The sense of remaking history comes at the intersection of uncertainty in the structures of power and powerful feelings of creativity, *communitas*, risk, and overcoming boundaries that I will explore in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. Fourth, there is a surprising presence of ritual, in spite of the unconventional nature of these events. Creative, even “spontaneous” events “used preexisting ritual gestures to establish the sovereignty of the people/nation” (Sewell 2005c:253). In particular, movements hand off the legitimacy they have acquired to representatives in the state in elaborate, if often improvised, gestures. Further, the rituals of state are altered to incorporate in some way the shifted basis for legitimacy. I sketch out the long sequence of such gestures and alterations in Bolivia’s recent history in chapter 2 and consider the role of remaking state spaces in chapter 6.

Chapter 2
**Regimes Grounded in Revolt:
Mass Disruption's Legitimizing Role, 1936–2005**

Revolution has become a Bolivian tradition. The 1930s and 40s saw the “rapid emergence of ... of new political parties, almost all of them flaunting an ‘R’ for ‘Revolutionary’ in their names” (Albó 1999:796).⁵⁶ In the seven decades that followed, popular upheaval and political turnover in the Bolivian government have frequently coincided. Many observers have treated Bolivia’s infamous political instability as a failing of the country. This chapter takes a different view. I show here how grassroots movements used an ability to precipitate and intervene in political crises to advance their political agendas. Over decades of these interventions, the grassroots role has grown more direct: the politics of the palace and the barracks have given way to the politics of the street.

This illustrates a recurrent historical pattern: newly successful disruptive protest has both prompted and justified no fewer than four regimes in Bolivia: military socialism (in 1936), Nationalist Revolution (in 1952), restored parliamentary democracy (in 1979 and 1982); and the plurinational state (in 2003-06).⁵⁷ In turn, these regimes have acknowledged and legally solidified the mechanisms of mass organization and revolt. The history of Bolivian politics for the last 75 years is the history of the dynamic relationship between grassroots movements and new political regimes.

This evolving relationship is played out through a shifting repertoire of contention on the part of the grassroots forces, and changing efforts by the state to repress and/or incorporate them. Mass grassroots politics in Bolivia has found highly contentious forms of action that were

⁵⁶ This phenomenon recurred in the 1970s.

⁵⁷ It would be inaccurate to describe the coexistence between General Juan José Torres’ military-led nationalism and the Popular Assembly in 1971 as a regime, despite the aspirations of both sides.

nonetheless distinct from a conventional military conflict.⁵⁸ Indigenous communities, unions of workers and campesinos, and city dwellers have engaged in a wide spectrum of political actions that are neither parliamentary politics nor an armed challenge to state power. This chapter shows how collaborative actions among these sectors have become an element of political life, to the point where grassroots disruption becomes an ongoing way to participate in politics.

The following pages chronicle a series of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Bolivian uprisings. In those moments where disruption authorized political regimes, a common sequence took place: (1) a new, or newly identified, political actor found a way to act collectively; (2) disruptive action achieved a tactical victory through new tactics or increased numbers; (3) the identification of the mobilized political force with a legitimate collectivity within Bolivia was widely recognized; and (4) power was ceremonially delegated from the mobilized group to the state.⁵⁹ Thus, a chain of moments of national disruption in Bolivia share a common relation with the regimes they legitimized or brought to power.

The first part of this considers the important political role of popular upheaval in Bolivia and outlines the mutually supportive relationship between the moments and methods of mass resistance and the country's (at least nominally) revolutionary regimes. I illustrate a long-term pattern of upheavals providing legitimacy to regimes through a sequence of disruptive action against the old regime and ceremonial acknowledgement of the new regime. The second part of this considers the founding place of mass organization of workers and peasants in Bolivian politics, as represented by

⁵⁸ There are several notable exceptions in the period considered here: three involved relatively small armed forces—Che Guevara's National Liberation Army (1966–67), the student-led Teoponte guerrilla (1970), and the Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army (1988–1992). The unsuccessful MNR-led rebellion in the 1949 civil war was the most politically consequential, and led to the successful 1952 Revolution, discussed in Part II of this .

⁵⁹ The elements of this pattern across post-1936 historical cases are summarized in Table 2 on page 96.

military socialist and Revolutionary Nationalist Movement governments that came to power from 1936 to 1952. I argue that these regimes legally recognized and reinforced a political culture of mass grassroots action that would eventually make road blockades and other direct action strikes into vital, legitimate political tools. In the third and final part, I trace the development of new large-scale actions, organized around coordinated road blockades. These methods developed and spread from the Cochabamba Valley campesino mobilizations of the early 1970s, through the democratization struggles of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and on to their central role in the twenty-first-century indigenous-led upheaval. Over that time, activists have built a culture of resistance of which revitalized traditions of indigenous self-governance, union organization, and direct action are mutually supportive components.

POPULAR INTERVENTIONS IN BOLIVIAN POLITICS

Bolivia is a country in which a variety of political leaders have been willing and even eager to claim the title of revolutionary, which reflects the regular intervention of mass politics in the country's political life during the past century. Strikingly, popular upheaval accompanied: the 1936 rise of military socialism; the 1952 revolution led by the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement; the 1978-82 restoration of parliamentary democracy; and the 2005 arrival of the Movement towards Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo; MAS) to power; as well as the rapidly reversed 1969-71 political opening. In at least three other cases (1971, 1974, 1985), mass disruptive mobilizations were unsuccessful in changing the state, and instead repressive regimes came to power opposing these attempted revolutions.

Strikes, blockades, and rural unrest helped to shape national politics from the 1930s to the 1980s. In fact, at least seventeen changes of government followed these forms of popular pressure between 1936 and the present, whether yielding to that pressure or escalating repression against it

(see Table 1). Until the early 1980s, however, grassroots pressure could only succeed in tandem with military coup d'états, political party intrigue, and in the exceptional case of 1952, through armed insurrection. Bolivian politics depended intensely on intra-military power struggles. James Dunkerley (1984:175) recounts that, "The staging of a coup is, therefore, a veritable art, the iconology of which is familiar to the people of Bolivia in much the same way as the population of Europe is conversant with the devices of parliamentary elections." Most of the time between 1936 and 1985, an unelected member of the military installed by a coup d'état headed Bolivia's government.⁶⁰ Even in military coups, popular mobilizations and strikes were an influential factor from below. Popular resistance interrupted coup attempts by Gen. Rogelio Miranda (October 1970), Cols. Hugo Banzer Suárez and Edmundo Valencia (January 1971) and reversed Col. Alberto Natusch Busch's coup in November 1979. These interruptions then authorized the surviving government to consider the grassroots movement that carried them out as a major political player.

Finally, in a small but significant number of instances, new governments have come to power with an explicit aim of repressing popular mobilization. These include those governments indicated in green in Table 1 as well as the 1974 shift within the Banzer administration and the 1980–81 dictatorship of Luis García Meza (which sought to preempt an elected government rather than a popular mobilization). The prospect of a new government with a repressive mandate persisted into the twenty-first century, most recently in the form of Hernando Vaca Díaz's bid to succeed to the presidency in mid-2005. Some of these repression-oriented governments, like Enrique Hertzog and Banzer from 1971 to 1974, attempted to maintain a revolutionary identity. Others, like Banzer after 1974 and García Meza, broke with traditional political ties to popular

⁶⁰ My conservative survey of Bolivian heads of state reveals 57% of days between the 1936 inauguration of David Toro and the 1985 end of Hernán Siles' term had an unelected military leader in charge of Bolivia. See the pre-1980 presidents listed in Table 1.

forces and embraced an agenda that was explicitly counterrevolutionary.⁶¹ Alongside the neighboring Southern Cone dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s (with whom the Bolivian governmental collaborated in Operation Condor), these governments termed radical labor organizers “terrorists” and publicly embraced violence against them.⁶²

A SHIFTING REPERTOIRE OF CONTENTION

Bolivia’s recent decades of revolution have utilized a multi-faceted repertoire of contention: strikes, rural uprisings, political party militias, blockades, and the emergent civic strike. These diverse forms of disruptive action have risen and fallen over time, but collective action by dense, sectorally defined organizations has been the organizing backbone of all of them. We will see in the second third of this chapter how syndicalism became the common framework for mass organization in the country, with the backing of a generation of governments from the 1930s to the 1950s.

A longitudinal look at the Bolivian contentious repertoire reveals several trends. The strike, which conceptually belongs to employed workers, has become a general tool adapted to multiple class positions: rural and urban; formal and informal work; factory, mine, and community. The strike

⁶¹ Within the context of Cold War Latin America, I term *counterrevolution* the deployment of violent counter-insurgency techniques in politics following Grandin (2004:169–98). Grandin takes up the “analytical framework” offered by Arno Mayer (1971:65), who describes these components of counterrevolutionary politics: “The counterrevolutionary clarion call is for order, hierarchy, authority, discipline, obedience, tradition, loyalty, courage, sacrifice, and nationalism. ... But there is one ingredient that is essential and peculiar to the counterrevolutionary formula: combining the glorification of traditional attitudes and behavior patterns with the charge that these are being corrupted, subverted, and defiled by conspiratorial agents and influences. Moreover, this charge, which reactionaries rather than conservatives are inclined to endorse, also includes a clarion call for ritualistic purification.”

⁶² Due to the complex role of revolution in Bolivia, even these figures often distinguished between good “nationalist revolution” and nefarious “foreign subversion” and “revolutionary terrorism.” However, they were open in their aim to liquidate the latter. René Zavaleta Mercado quotes, for instance, an unnamed military chief in the Barrientos government pledging “In defense of the Fatherland, we [would] kill ten thousand more,” in the wake of the 1965 Catavi massacre (Zavaleta Mercado [1965] 2011:565).

has proved a flexible term, which can be attached to diverse forms of rural action (debuting as the “sit-down strike” or *huelga a brazos caídos*⁶³), combined with collective action by workers (in a *paro movilizado*), or enacted by a neighborhood or city. Rural uprisings, which have been an unceasingly recurring feature of the country’s post-conquest history, have transformed from localized, violent uprisings to non-lethal, combative, regional and national mobilizations.

Mid-century political movements strategized to take control of the state through force of arms, although this goal was realized only once. The MNR led an ultimately unsuccessful insurrection in August-September 1947. The COB, the MNR’s right wing, and the right-wing Falange all attempted uprisings in the first decade of MNR rule. The classic dream of revolutionary change by “the people in arms” was raised and then dashed during the rule of two generals sympathetic to the grassroots left, Alfredo Ovando and Juan José Torres. In rapid succession, they presided over a renewed flowering of direct action protest. Wary of cooption, unions, leftist parties, and a small faction of campesinos organized a independent Popular Assembly and spoke of dual power between themselves and the state (Zavaleta Mercado 1977).⁶⁴ Torres offered the National Congress as a meeting hall for the Assembly, but the Assembly’s pleas for arms to “defend the revolution” went unmet. The failure of striking workers and poorly armed popular militias to prevent Hugo Banzer’s August 1971 coup was the first nail in the coffin of the dream of revolution in collaboration with the military.

Over the longer term, conditions conducive to a left-grassroots armed insurrection never came together: miners and workers were counterposed to peasants by astute politicians; state crackdowns from 1965 to 1969 defeated and disarmed the miners; and, after 1952, arms were never

⁶³ The *huelgas a brazos caídos* took a name then circulating in the international labor movement; strikers took actions ranging from refusing to work to physically attacking hacienda landlords.

⁶⁴ Members of the grassroots left saw echoes of Russia in 1917—when armed workers formed a dual power to the state—and a chance to apply the lessons learned from the 1952 Bolivian revolution.

again supplied by the state to popular militias. Separate efforts by Che Guevara and urban students to establish rural guerrilla forces on the model of the Cuban revolution failed to take root. Ultimately, the vision of a revolution through arms was not so much rejected, as symbolically incorporated by disruptive actions that contested state control through other less lethal means, particularly since 1979.

In the 1970s, the blockade took the place of the rising in arms. Road blockades have evolved both urban and rural forms in the service of autonomous unions and indigenous peasant communities. Through tactical, organizational and strategic refinements, they have emerged as central tools in the grassroots capacity to pressure governments and construct spaces outside state control. Finally, the combined use of blockades, mobilized strikes, and mass gatherings in urban areas has created a composite form of action often known as a civic strike (*paro cívico*). I consider this protest form in depth in chapter 3.

We can verify this overall shift in Bolivia's repertoire of contention by turning to the data produced by social scientists who monitor the country's protest actions.⁶⁵ Since 1970, the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social (CERES) has maintained a database of Bolivian social conflicts, drawing on press reports.⁶⁶ While press censorship may have caused an undercount during the pre-1982 era of military dictatorship, the database reveals the clearly increasing prevalence of both urban and rural blockades as methods of political action (see Figure 1). In their review of thirty-eight years of data, CERES analysts note several other trends that coincide with this increased

⁶⁵ Several research groups have kept quantitative records of Bolivian protests, including UNIR Bolivia's project on Governability, the Defensoría del Pueblo, and private academics, but CERES offers the longest-running dataset.

⁶⁶ A brief explanation of their methods for creating entries is offered by Laserna and Villarroel (2008:11–12). For a discussion of a comparable global database, and an argument that data from press sources can reliably chart quantitative surges in labor protest, even though they are not comprehensive, see Silver (2003:35–38).

role of blockades. First, as shown in Figure 3, protests that require the “active adhesion” of participants, who join in a particular activity, rather than merely being present or abstaining from a routine activity, have steadily risen since the 1970s to become the vast majority (over 80%) of recent protests (Laserna and Villarroel 2008:23). Second, “urban popular sectors” have risen from relative obscurity to form a consistent major portion of the protagonists of protest (18). Finally, during recent administrations, including that of Evo Morales, rural and urban blockades, as well as “takeovers and riots” have followed “demonstrations and marches” among the leading forms of that social conflict, displacing tactics such as hunger strikes and limited duration strikes (55-68).

REGIMES GROUNDED IN REVOLT, 1936-53

Over 1936 to 1953, the right of popular movements—especially those organized in a union structure—to intervene in politics became an established tradition in Bolivian political life. Structures such as near-universal or compulsory unionization, strong protections for union officials (through the *fuero sindical*), and union participation in the self-proclaimed “revolutionary” government solidified this tradition. Military socialist generals and MNR leaders claimed legitimacy for their political orders based on mass popular action. Moreover, unions of urban workers and of campesinos became the means for incorporating these constituencies into state decision-making.

Eventually, such rural peasant unions and urban social movements, organized according to a trade union structure, would become the most frequent users of road blockades in Bolivia. Yet, this shared tactic has differing roots in rural and urban communities, whose repertoires of contention differed markedly. In rural communities, regularly recurring armed revolts gave way or transformed into sieges of hacienda houses, and later to coordinated blockades that isolated urban centers from their food supply. In cities, the labor movement’s general strikes guided strategies first of urban militias, and later of mobilized strikes, both of which involved interrupting transport. Still, during

this formative period up to the 1960s, mass urban demonstrations were not yet committed to direct action assertions of control; rural uprisings and local sieges had not yet been translated to the national political stage; and armed action to take over the state apparatus (whether from outside or within) remained the key political horizon.

1936: MILITARY SOCIALISM AND THE INFLUENCE OF STRIKES

From June 1932 to June 1935, conscripted indigenous peasants and imprisoned radical labor organizers died together on the front lines of the Chaco War. The war with Paraguay materially devastated the Bolivian working and peasant classes, but brought these two grassroots forces into closer contact with one another and gave them a symbolic claim on the state.⁶⁷ In its wake, the organized labor movement underwent a resurgence driven by three factors: the women-led labor force of the war years, the return of syndicalism that had been suppressed during the conflict, and the arrival of numerous ex-combatants to the urban labor force. In 1936, the Workers Federation (*Federación Obrera del Trabajo*; FOT) presented an ambitious petition to the weakened government of Liberal President José Luis Tejada Sorzano. The Federation demanded: “a 50% reduction in the price of basic necessities and a 100% wage increase ... the suppression of monopolies; the banning of night work for women or children; the suspension of the state of siege; freedom of assembly ... work for war veterans and protection for people disabled or orphaned by the war” and other new social legislation (Lora 1977:175). Within weeks, a “multitudinous avalanche” of unionized workers and the public joined in a May Day demonstration. The outpouring revealed that “syndicalism was one of the decisive forces on the political scene” (Lora 1980:48-49). On May 10, the Printers’ Union

⁶⁷ The Chaco War was the first military effort in Bolivian that conscripted indigenous soldiers, giving a generation of indigenous men access to military training. Their new practical and symbolic relation to the state paralleled that of African American soldiers in both world wars and soldiers from the European-controlled colonies who fought in World War II.

(*Sindicato Gráfico*) struck for a doubling in wages, and was soon joined by the FOT and the anarchist Local Worker's Federation (*Federación Obrera Local*; sometimes, *Federación Obrera Libertaria*; FOL) in a general strike. Col. Germán Busch Becerra, whose plans for a coup were well advanced by May, mediated an Army pledge to stay out of the strike. Tejada Sorzano was left adrift as the unions mobilized heavily on the streets of La Paz. A political conspiracy headed by Busch ushered him out of power on May 17, inaugurating a three-year experiment in "military socialism."

The Socialist (*Partido Socialista Boliviana*, led by Enrique Baldivieso and José Tamayo) and Republican (*Partido Republicano Socialista*, led by Bautista Saavedra) parties, which had been plotting for at least three months to take power, were quick to claim the new government led by David Toro as their own accomplishment. By agreement, they did in fact take lead roles within it, from ministerial portfolios on down. The general strike was resolved on terms favorable to the workers on May 18,⁶⁸ and labor leaders declared, "The Junta Mixta has assumed command of the Nation as a consequence of the general strike" (Lora 1980:52-53). Four days later, Toro appointed Waldo Álvarez, a Printers' Union member and General Secretary of the FOT, to head the new Ministry of Labor. Álvarez's office became a gathering point for labor leaders and a key source of new legislation. Obligatory unionization was instituted by decree on August 19, 1936, requiring all workers to join unions and all employers to form federations (Lora 1980:57-60). The decree converted the union card (*carnet sindical*) into "an essential requisite for the extension of" formal citizenship, part of Toro's vision for a fully corporatist *Estado Sindical Boliviano* (decree quoted in Lora 1980:58; Lanning 1965:43-44).

⁶⁸ On May 18, the Junta ordered all private firms to raise wages of workers, and pledged to raise public workers salaries to compensate for inflation. Unions urged employees to return to work (*ABC* [Madrid], May 19, 1936).

However, labor's influence on the military socialist government was far from steady, and proved vulnerable to dramatic reversals. When the FOL and FOT organized a National Workers Congress⁶⁹ in December 1936, Álvarez could only welcome them as the *ex*-Minister of Labor. Alongside forming the Bolivian Confederation of Labor Unions (*Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia*; CSTB), the meeting spent hours in agitated debate to nominate a successor to Álvarez. However, by 1937 Toro had shifted rightward and appointed Javier Paz Campero, a staunch friend of the oligarchy and lawyer for the Hochschild mining interests as the new Minister of Labor. At a meeting between Toro and the CSTB that followed a deadly police crackdown on mining workers at Villa Imperial in Potosí,

Paz Campero ... said angrily ... that the germs of subversion were suffocated with very few victims and that he was disposed, if it were necessary, to sacrifice a greater number of miners to save the *Patria* and return tranquility to the country. (Lora 1980:182-83)

Organized labor's recommendation for an alternative to Paz Campero's nomination, and its subsequent protests concerning his conduct went unheard.

Germán Busch, the organizer behind Toro's ascension to power, carried out a second coup and became president on July 13, 1937, this time doing without any political party allies. Busch led the government leftward, presiding over a 1938 constitutional convention and enacting the Labor Code written in Alvarez's Ministry. The Socialist Front (*Frente Unico Socialista*), which included the CSTB and the Legion of Ex-Combatants, won substantial representation at the convention, as did a series of other groups with workers' involvement, as well as one rural peasant (Klein 1966:263). Many participants emphasized how important it was that working-class delegates were involved in drafting a constitution for the first time (Gotkowitz 2007:114–27; Barragán 2005:359–71). Convention participant Augusto Céspedes called it “a popular insurgency in its eagerness to abolish

⁶⁹ Earlier congresses were organized in 1921, 1925, 1927, and 1930.

concrete forms of the exploitation of the country by the *Rosca*” (quoted and translated in Lanning 1965:46–47).⁷⁰ These acts secured the reputation of military socialism for enacting such principles as the right to freely organize, to strike, and to the eight-hour workday. However, the path by which they became law reveals the tenuousness of labor’s influence on the state during the military socialist era.

AN EXPANSIVE RIGHT TO STRIKE

Whatever the actual strength of the grassroots under military socialism, the generals acknowledged the rights of workers and peasants to engage in union-based self-organization and rights claiming. Leaders in the military and the MNR embraced a corporatist model that saw unions as a way of affiliating workers with the state while imposing an obligation of loyalty to its policies. Meanwhile, labor organizers saw unions as either ideally autonomous from the state (the anarcho-syndicalist position) or the vanguard that would use the state to reorganize the country (the Marxist position). State recognition of the unions took place in the contested overlap among these various agendas. This process advanced in both the Toro-Busch era and under the radical military-MNR government of Gualberto Villarroel López (December 1943-July 1946). Germán Busch’s Labor Code (*Código del Trabajo*; enacted May 24, 1939, and sometimes known as the *Código Busch*) legitimized the right to strike, forbidding employers from dismissing their workers for participating in work stoppages.

A more expansive view of the right to strike coalesced in the concept of the *fuero sindical*, which also achieved recognition in Colombia, Chile, and Panama. The concept of *fueros* dates to medieval Spanish jurisprudence, under which certain professional or corporate groups, notably

⁷⁰ *La Rosca* was a popular term for the mining power elite, primarily composed of the families who owned the three largest private mining companies.

clergy and the military, could not be punished in conventional courts, but had their offenses considered by their own court systems.⁷¹ Applied to labor disputes, the system recognized collective and direct action in the course of strikes and union organizing as distinct from everyday actions. A union engaged in a strike or collective-bargaining cannot be considered a cartel of workers; a picket line is not a mob forcibly controlling entry into a workplace; a sit-down strike is not the theft of a workplace; instead, all are considered modes of representing workers collectively, accountable to their own set of norms. The *fuero sindical* specifically forbade employers from firing union officials and the government from prosecuting them for acts carried out in their official capacity.

The *fuero sindical*, protecting those “elected to carry out the directive roles of a union,” first found legal recognition in February 1944 under Villaruel (Gotkowitz 2007:175; Lora 1980:415). Following the 1952 Revolution, it was reinstated by the MNR government, together with the concept of workers’ control (*control obrero*) over major nationalized enterprises and co-government through the Central Obrera Boliviana’s (Central Labor Confederation; COB) appointment of several government ministers (Alexander 2005:89-93). Afterwards, the COB was established as *the* compulsory national labor confederation.⁷² Malloy and Gamarra (1987:94) argue, “By accepting the ... claim to a *fuero sindical*, the MNR in effect granted the COB semisovereign status over the workers of Bolivia.”⁷³ Rural leaders invoked the *fuero sindical* against the MNR government as well, as in a January 1953 demonstration in Cochabamba demanding the freedom of peasant leaders charged with subversion (Dunkerley 2003:103).

⁷¹ *Fuero* derives from the Latin *forum*. The term was used to designate privileges conceded to regions, cities, and feudal tenants in medieval Spain. On the Spanish colonial *fuero militar*, see Loveman (1999:14–15).

⁷² The exclusive recognition of the COB contrasted with previous political pluralism in Bolivian unionism.

⁷³ See also Malloy (1971:121–24). According to Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing (2006:75), “From 1952 to 1985, the COB [labor federation] ... wielded greater influence than had any other independent trade union movement in Latin America, and perhaps the world.”

State recognition of labor unions' legitimacy has become a durable feature of Bolivian political culture, reflecting the deep connections established between governmental legitimacy and the formal recognition of labor rights. This connection was maintained even in the absence of elections and during periods of repression of unionists. While neighboring right-wing dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil openly sought to liquidate union organizations, Bolivian rulers tried to maintain a nominal connection to them. Even the Constitution of 1967, formulated under the anti-labor government of René Barrientos,⁷⁴ included and reaffirmed the *fuero sindical*.⁷⁵ It would take three years and a dramatic confrontation with labor mobilization in 1974 for the military regime of Hugo Banzer to criminalize political parties and eliminate labor union independence. Even then, it did so not by disbanding the unions, but by appointing their leaders, keeping the syndical form intact. Although the neoliberal Decree 21060 of 1985 led to massive firings of trade union leaders, and the jailing of strikers, the *fuero* remained in the constitution to be taken up by rural unions.

As we shall see below, independent unions—both rural and urban—engaged in waves of mass actions that combined strikes with blockades and struggles for control of urban centers. For both, the form of the union and the practice of union mobilization became central to justifying political action. As broader and more radical actions came to be authorized by collectives organized as unions, their leaders “proclaimed the right to strike is sacred” and included these actions in an enlarged definition of strikes (Gómez Balboa 2004). In mid-2003, the Federation of Small Traders (*Federación de Gremialistas*; literally, “guild members”) applied the *fuero* in defending its Executive Secretary from charges of inciting the burning of El Alto's town hall (Lazar 2006:189). Despite

⁷⁴ Rossana Barragán (2005:374) describes the 1967 Constituent Assembly as the effort of “an illegitimate military coup that sought its legitimacy.”

⁷⁵ The *fuero sindical* is contained in Article 159 of the 1967 Constitution, which was in effect until 2009 (Constitución Política de la República de Bolivia 1967).

extreme conflict between the state and unions, seven attempts to begin prosecution against strikers for impeding public transit were refused by Bolivian prosecutors between 2000 and 2003, in recognition of the right to strike (Gómez Balboa 2004). In effect, if not necessarily intent, the *fuero* incorporates a variety of methods within the arena of legitimate struggle.

Following his election, MAS-IPSP leader Evo Morales confirmed Villaroel's decree on the *fuero sindical* in the first new law of his presidency (Agencia Boliviana de Información, February 21, 2006). This right was incorporated in the 2009 Constitution. The labor movement targeted the limits imposed by the neoliberal decrees in its 2011 strikes, winning the government's promise to reverse them. In December 2012, the final laws criminalizing strike activity were removed from the Penal Code (*Los Tiempos*, December 11, 2012). However, labor laws only apply to formal employment not including short-term contracts. Widespread subcontracting and informalization have shrunk the reach of official labor protections to just 18 to 20% of the national workforce (*La Razón*, April 28, 2013).

RURAL INDIAN REVOLT: AUTONOMY AND SELF-DETERMINATION

As noted in the introduction, indigenous revolt is the oldest opposition tradition in Bolivia, indigenous rebels have sought alliances and shared ideas with each generation of urban (and creole or mestizo) revolutionaries in the country. In a study of early-twentieth-century revolts, Forrest Hylton draws attention to indigenous movements' adoption of "republican ideals such as citizenship, rights, and equality before the law" and "revolutionary ideals like direct democracy, alliances among oppressed classes, and action against the state" as a product of their collaboration with urban activists.⁷⁶ From 1938 onward, peasants (particularly in Cochabamba and Oruro) engaged

⁷⁶ These exchanges were part of a sustained engagement of leftists with Indian issues across Latin America in the first decades of the twentieth century. This interaction is explored in Ecuador by

in strikes that incorporated direct actions and claims of legal rights that often exceeded those authorized by national legislation (Gotkowitz 2007:154-57). These peasant rebellions centered on the locally applied siege of haciendas and centers of power.

An external siege on the borders of the haciendas ... that makes the *hacendados* [landlords] flee, is later extended to the interior of the haciendas, where the colonos collect or destroy the landlords' harvest and resist the fulfillment of their turns of work. Violent clashes are produced when the hacendado tries to break the siege by bringing in the local forces of repression. (Rivera Cusicanqui 1986:70)

The siege was a tactic of isolation, a tool in the local production of a liberatory social order, a means of territorializing the revolt (Mamani Ramírez 2004:161-82). Those who engaged in rural revolt related to the state and legality in a two-sided maneuver. On the one hand, peasants claimed a legal mandate for a variety of change, citing the abolition of *pongueaje* and other sympathetic actions on the part of the national government.⁷⁷ On the other, they took physical steps to cut off direct application of state control by the military (Gotkowitz 2007:153-59). These sieges demonstrated that landlords' power was local and physically vulnerable, and used the spatial limitations of their adversary to disrupt that power.

In parallel with their labor politics, Bolivia's mid-century revolutionary regimes sought to acknowledge and incorporate indigenous discontent while their modernizing impulses sought to erase indigenous ethnic identity. Following the pro-indigenous position advanced by the labor left in

Marc Becker (2008), in Guatemala by Greg Grandin (2000), and in El Salvador by Jeffrey Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago (2008).

⁷⁷ Unpaid service owed by indigenous *comunarios* to an estate was not in fact abolished until 1953, but both official government actions and labor activist strategies propagated the rumor that it had been abolished in the 1940s (Gotkowitz 2007:158-59). Confusingly, Decreto Supremo 319 abolished *pongueaje* and *mitanaje*, while Decreto Supremo 318 (both issued May 15, 1945) explicitly allowed agriculture-related service. Supreme Decree 318 outlawed both violent punishment of agrarian colonos and the false claims of the abolition of labor service altogether (*La revolución boliviana* 2007).

the 1920s and 1930s, military socialist generals and leaders in the post-1949 MNR sought to incorporate peasants into their political projects. This included recognition of Indian communities in the 1938 Constitution, and explicit recognition of Indians' rights (but not full citizenship) in the 1945 Indigenous Congress. The MNR finally offered universal citizenship and suffrage in 1952, but based these on subsuming Indian identity within a de-ethnicized (but normatively mestizo) campesino identity. The 1952–53 peasant unionization wave, authorized by the MNR but accomplished by rural organizers, created an organizational basis for rural collective action. These rural unions stand as inheritors of both the syndicalists' right to strike and the tradition of indigenous revolt.

BLOCKING TRANSPORT AND RURAL REVOLT IN THE 1952 REVOLUTION

When the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement seized power in the April 1952 insurrection, there was a dramatic break in Bolivian politics. The MNR had sunk roots in the labor movement of the cities and the mines, and forged ties with other dissidents in the jails of conservative leaders since 1945. Critically for its 1952 rise to power, the MNR had recruited support in the military. With a popular mandate from the unfulfilled 1951 election victory of Víctor Paz Estenssoro, the MNR prepared for “a civil-military ‘coup.’” Then, on April 9, 1952, their plans “turned into a popular civilian insurrection when the military didn’t answer the call.” The MNR was aided by militias it had formed among factory workers, miners and the urban middle class (Foran 2005:158).

While brief in duration, the three-day uprising was in its nature and outcome a confrontation of arms and of armed social sectors. These allied sectors acted through an armed insurrection, but their military skills were accompanied by civil persuasion: “the insults, pleading and even angry blows of the *cholas*, working women whose familiar authority frequently overcame the residual fear [conscripts had] of the officer class” (Dunkerley 1984:39). On the third and final day of the

insurrection (April 9, 1952 and Good Friday), the capacity of rebel miners in Milluni to seize control of the railway line to Oruro played a key role, as did a rebel victory in Oruro itself.⁷⁸ The actions of the unarmed grassroots were vital, but largely because they affected the balance of forces for military confrontation. In this context, blockades and the interruption of lines of transportation could only be secondary tactics rather than the central mode of struggle.

The first two years of the Revolution were marked by what UN envoy and professor Carter Goodrich (1971:21) called “exercise[s] in MNR showmanship” that united governmental initiatives with mass public support. As the insurrection drew towards victory, armed civilians and military police “streamed up the Prado ... on the way to the Plaza Murillo” (Goodrich 1971:4). Three labor leaders soon joined the cabinet as the Ministers of Mines and Petroleum, Labor, and Peasant Affairs. Some sixty thousand backers greeted MNR leader Víctor Paz Estenssoro in El Alto Airport on his return from exile on April 16 (Kohl 1978:245). The carefully crafted nationalization of the mines was decreed not in La Paz, but in the Siglo XX mining complex at Catavi, followed by a Sunday miners’ mass atop Potosí’s Cerro Rico; miners offered a twenty-one-blast dynamite salute and labor leader Juan Lechín joined President Paz Estenssoro in signing the document (Goodrich 1971:17; Malloy 1971:121–22).

The MNR’s revolution came in a context of repeated, intense rural revolt from 1947 to 1953.⁷⁹ These rebellions included besieging or taking over hacienda houses and demanding greater freedom for peasants. Prisoners from the 1947 peasant uprisings and the MNR’s failed 1949 civil war reportedly collaborated in joint cells in preparing for revolution (Gotkowitz 2007:274). The role

⁷⁸ René Zavaleta Mercado (1983b:90) notes this latter success proved “fundamental in impeding the march of the southern regiments on La Paz.”

⁷⁹ Rural rebellion is significant enough for Gotkowitz (2003) to suggest that historians should reframe the time period of the Revolution to include earlier events.

of campesino direct action during the April 1952 revolution remains insufficiently studied,⁸⁰ and the decisive events in transferring power occurred in the major cities. However, the urban MNR victory led to further rural unrest,⁸¹ predominantly over the issue of local land tenure. Renewed uprisings and land seizures, notably in the *Valle Alto* (high valley) of Cochabamba and the Altiplano⁸² pressured the MNR to systematically authorize land reform in 1953 (Gotkowitz 2007; Albó 1987:405). On the Altiplano, tactics deployed by hacienda-based sindicatos included: “attack[ing] landlords and administrators, seiz[ing] buildings, animals, vehicles, seed stocks, and machinery and threaten[ing] to attack towns, murder their mestizo and white inhabitants, and confiscate anything they desired” (Carter 1971:242). With their longstanding fears being spoken directly, many rural elites took flight to the cities. In Cochabamba, these threats were realized, along with frequent “wholesale attacks by hundreds of insurgent peasants” and seizures of land by March and April 1953. Simultaneous attacks on the towns of Tarata, Cliza, Punata, and Arani came in July, together with a road and rail blockade affecting the city of Cochabamba. Armed peasants did enter the larger cities, but in peaceful displays of mass power: a thousand campesinos in arms arriving in Cochabamba from Ucareña in January 1953 seeking to free imprisoned leaders (Dunkerley 2003:103); parades of campesino militia regiments on the Revolution’s anniversary in April 1953;⁸³

⁸⁰ For a review of the historiography, see Gotkowitz (2007:268–87). For more on the history of this cycle of revolt, see Gotkowitz (2003); Rivera Cusicanqui (1986, 1987).

⁸¹ There are several connections, including the arming of peasant militias, the restoration of the 1945 Villarroel decrees, the government’s formulation of a land reform agenda, the release of imprisoned rural agitators, and MNR organizing in the countryside (Kohl 1978).

⁸² James Kohl (1978:242–44) argued that early histories of this period were flawed because they produced “national generalization[s] based on data obtained from regional investigation[s]” in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and the Yungas. His work attempts to remedy this. Carter (1971) also discusses the ferment in an unnamed Altiplano town.

⁸³ “On the first anniversary of the revolution, two regiments of armed *campesinos* consisting of 13000 men from Los Andes province and 18000 from Omasuyos were reviewed by President Paz Estenssoro” (Heath et al. 1969:143).

“tens of thousands” in La Paz on May Day 1953, and “even larger numbers” on August 2 (Carter 1971).

The signature handover came in highly mobilized Ucureña,⁸⁴ where a crowd of 60,000 to 100,000 campesinos gathered as the Agrarian Reform was signed into law. The President, cabinet, military and civilian officials, and foreign dignitaries all arrived in the town, whose rural education center had educated a generation of campesino organizers (Arce Loureiro and Montoya Medinaceli 1971).⁸⁵ Peasant militiamen were given pistols and Military Police uniforms (Ortiz 2006). The assembled campesinos remained “silent and passive when the decree was first read in Spanish but sent up a might roar when it was read in Quechua,” according to a U.S. official who was present.⁸⁶ Minister of Foreign Affairs Wálter Guevara also addressed the crowd in Quechua (Goodrich 1971:21).

In practice, simultaneous campesino mobilizations had won a major policy change in the agrarian reform. In exchange, the MNR asked for loyalty⁸⁷ and de-ethnicization, making *indios* into *campesinos*. Unlike the worker’s COB, the National Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (*Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, CNTCB) had leaders appointed by the government, from Santa Cruz oligarch Ñuflo Chávez Ortiz in 1953 through General Hugo Banzer Suárez in the 1970s. Later, the military continued to rely on the peasantry for tacit or explicit support as it engaged in a variety of anti-worker policies and crackdowns, a triangulation that became known

⁸⁴ Ucureña is located in the center of Cochabamba’s Valle Alto.

⁸⁵ Emilio, a veteran of Ucureña unionizing during this period claims that the ceremony, originally slated for Sipesipe, was moved to the Valle Alto in recognition of the importance of the July battle for winning the reforms (Ortiz 2006).

⁸⁶ The official, Edward J. Sparks, was later Ambassador to Bolivia. His account came in a 1974 letter to Jerry Knudson (2010:42–43).

⁸⁷ Loyalty included active defense against frequent uprisings by the MNR’s right wing and by the Falange. Flores (1954:116) reports six such uprisings by November 1953, when Cochabamba peasants mobilized in arms to retake the city of Cochabamba (see Butrón Mendoza 1992:70).

as the military-peasant pact.⁸⁸ Where agrarian reform coincided with armed rebellion, the pre-existing power structure was expelled entirely, with landlords fleeing to the cities. They left behind a potentially autonomous rural landscape structured around campesino unions.⁸⁹ However, this practical independence did not immediately drive campesinos to bring the same kind of pressure to bear on national politics. It would take decades of collaborative effort among urban and rural, left and indigenous movements for campesino ideals of self-government and decolonization to become central to national politics.

RURAL-URBAN CONVERGENCES, 1974-2005

Beginning in 1974, three decades of left grassroots activism turned to action independent of the state. This followed dramatic and violent rebuffs by the military against the worker-led Popular Assembly and the campesino-led 1974 protests. In reaction, both major grassroots constituencies focused on direct action strategies. This required them to innovate new ways of revolt that did not require sympathetic officers or clandestine arms caches. November 1979 saw a breakthrough in the form of joint rural and urban mobilizations that reversed the military's seizure of state power. These events, and the three years of mass mobilization that followed the return of democracy in 1982, foreshadowed the national blockades of the twenty-first century.⁹⁰ Success required creating means of urban-rural coordination and overcoming the labor movement's paternalistic attitude towards

⁸⁸ Under the so-called pact, the peasantry provided tacit or explicit support to the military government as it engaged in a variety of anti-worker policies and crackdowns. Differing interpretations emphasize the role of land titling as either (where completed) a precedent for peasant loyalty to the military, or (where still pending) a way of holding them obligated to cooperate with it.

⁸⁹ After 1953, the union structure largely incorporated pre-existing ayllu structures on the Altiplano (Carter 1964) and became the de facto instrument of governance in the post-hacienda areas of the Valleys. According to Xavier Albó (1999:799), "the term *sindicato* became a new provisional name for the old communal organization, not only on the ex-haciendas but also in many of the free-standing traditional native communities." For a view more critical of the sindicatos' respect for native traditions, see Rivera Cusicanqui (1990).

⁹⁰ They also refute the idea that post-1999 protests were tactically unique.

indigenous campesinos. Both practical cooperation and migration facilitated the redeployment of campesinos' signature tactic, the blockade, upon the urban landscape.

However, important changes in Bolivian society and grassroots politics set the post-1999 upsurge apart. If 1979 to 1985 represented the final great push from a movement centered on, and led by, the Bolivian proletariat, the grassroots coalition of the twenty-first century would have a new center of gravity. Between the two, informalization of labor, cutbacks in mining employment, mass migration to the cities, and the emergence of new forms of organization on the urban peripheries would redraw the map of grassroots politics. Meanwhile, peasant unionism took on an increasingly traditional and communal form in the Altiplano, and rallied in defense of the coca leaf in the Chapare and Yungas. Lowland indigenous peoples led national marches for territory and local sovereignty, frequently collaborating with highland peasants and increasingly indigenous-identified urbanites. While this coalition faced severe economic challenges, it would share a common identification with indigeneity and could draw on both rural traditions of Indian revolt, and urban capacities for ever more disruptive social strikes.

1974: A PORTENT OF THINGS TO COME

In January 1974, both campesinos and urban workers responded to the Banzer government's new economic austerity measures with street protests. The package, contained in decrees issued on January 20, included the doubling of prices for staples including sugar, rice, and flour. The following day, market women protested in central La Paz, including the Plaza Murillo, from which they were dispersed only to "regroup in various parts of the city" (APDH Bolivia 1975:7). La Paz workers and miners across the country went on 48- or 24-hour strikes and held demonstrations. Cochabamba department, however, became the epicenter of the protests. On January 22, factory workers in Quillacollo—from the Manaco shoe factory, Quimbol, Fino oil, and the Pil milk factory—went on

strike and blocked the highway (though many were dispersed by tear- and vomit-inducing gasses). During a turbulent January 23, the Guardia de Seguridad sought to reestablish transport while a new blockade was put up at Waykuli. One young protester, Secundino Paco, 18, was fatally wounded by a teargas canister that struck his face.

From Thursday, January 24 onwards, the center of protest moved to the countryside, principally a string of blockades on the Cochabamba–Santa Cruz Highway⁹¹ (in the Valle Alto) and the road to the Chapare (and to Sacaba) beginning Saturday afternoon (APDH Bolivia 1975:17, 21). Further blockades were placed on the Cochabamba-Oruro highway, the La Paz-Oruro highway, and the Sucre-Cochabamba highway (APDH Bolivia 1975:37-38). The evening of January 28, President Banzer declared a state of siege and termed the protests “this new adventure in treason [*anti-Patria*], which in the final instance favors the plans of international subversion” (quoted in APDH Bolivia 1975:25). General Pérez Tapia met with campesinos on January 29, hearing their grievances and promising that Banzer would come to the blockades. It would have been an exemplary instance of the military-campesino pact. Infamously however, a second military convoy opened fire upon the blockaders within two hours of Pérez Tapia’s departure. A one-sided massacre followed with scores of people killed or disappeared. One soldier told the Permanent Assembly on Human Rights in Bolivia, “We have seen mountains of cadavers of campesinos piled up like firewood” (APDH Bolivia 1975:29). Estimates of the death toll in rural Cochabamba range from 70 to 200 (Sivak 2002:152).

Military rule from the January 1974 repression through the 1982 restoration of democracy (interrupted briefly by elections and constitutional governments) took a counterrevolutionary stance.

⁹¹ The approximately 500-km Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway was built in 1954. It leaves from Cochabamba at 2500m elevation. “From there it winds up through the mountains, clings perilously to the cliff walls overhanging a rock riverbed, and finally reaches the 3,000 meter high cloud forest known popularly as ‘Siberia,’ before descending again towards the lowlands (Stearman 1985:17).

In mid-1974, the military dictatorship escalated its clampdown on subversion, and indeed on “politics” in general, jettisoning its political party partners—the MNR and the Falange Socialista Boliviana—and claiming the right to appoint trade union leaders. Independent union leaders of both campesino and workers’ movements would be forced to concentrate their efforts on the very right to organize openly. The military would maintain control of physical space during worker mobilizations such as the 1975 and 1976 miners’ strikes (Zapata 1980).

ROADBLOCKS AND DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE

In the late 1970s, roadblocks returned to the national political stage as the primary tactic used by peasants during civil resistance to a series of military governments. Campesino unions collaborated actively with urban laborers to paralyze the country through general strikes, mobilizations, and roadblocks. These joint efforts marked the triumph of the Katarista vision for a peasant unionism: ethnically conscious, linked to urban workers, and autonomous of the state and dominant political parties. These national episodes of resistance repeatedly proved decisive in succession struggles within the government, and eventually assured the return of electoral democracy to Bolivia, but did not achieve the insertion of a political force responsive directly to their interests. Even worse, this period was marked by extraordinarily intense repressive violence on the part of the national government, killing hundreds of unionists and campesinos.

Once Banzer promised elections for July 1978, the wives of four exiled miners began a hunger strike on December 28, 1977, to demand that political prisoners be released and civil liberties be restored. Their strike crystallized a mass effort in which over a thousand people gave up food to demand these freedoms (Lagos and Escobar 2006:126ff). Following an embarrassing attempt at repression, Banzer granted a general amnesty for imprisoned activists and the legalization of union and party activities on January 20 and 24, respectively (Dunkerley 1984:238-42). On December 14,

1977, Jenaro Flores and other Katarista union leaders reorganized the National Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia—"Túpaj Katari" (*Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia "Túpaj Katari"*; CNTCB-TK), reclaiming their national role in peasant union organizing, which had been swept away by Banzer's 1971 coup. They were readmitted to the COB as it moved towards autonomy from the MNR and the state. With the COB's backing, independent peasant unions merged to form the CSUTCB, which was led by the revolutionary Katarista current (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990:107).⁹²

Banzer's handpicked successor, Juan Pereda Asbún, contested the July 9, 1978 election, but had to resort to fraud to "defeat" the center-left Democratic and Popular Union (*Unión Democrática y Popular*, UDP) led by MNR dissenter Hernán Siles Zuazo. After requesting the annulment of the election he himself had stolen, Pereda seized power in a July 20 military coup. The parties' unanimous call for new elections, joined by the US government, and the UDP's plan for mass mobilization on November 24 generated another coup. Army commander General David Padilla Arancibia offered and held fresh elections in July 1979. These too proved indecisive, as no party could obtain a parliamentary majority and yet another government, that of Senate President Walter Guevara Arze, came to power primarily promising new elections (Dunkerley 1984:243-61).

In the early hours of November 1, 1979, Colonel Alberto Natusch Busch mobilized tanks to claim presidential power. The resistance to the coup, led from the beginning by revitalized COB and the newly formed CSUTCB, was in the view of René Zavaleta Mercado, "the transformation of representative democratic logic into a principle of the masses" in their process of insurrection (Zavaleta Mercado 1983a). Within hours of the takeover, the COB called the first general strike since October 1970, renewing it every 24 hours. The CSUTCB supported it with strikes and blockades in

⁹² This branch of the Katarista movement would lead the CSUTCB from its consolidation in 1979 until 1988.

the countryside (Dunkerley 1984: 267). The strike extended to factories, mines, universities, and schools, and was accompanied by mass demonstrations and street clashes. René Zavaleta Mercado records that, “The campesinos use their own methods which, without doubt, are not those of workers: the siege, paralyzing the roads, encircling the settlements, virtual occupation of all non-urban space” (Zavaleta Mercado 1983b:85). The highway blockade, which had been added to the campesino repertoire of struggle through its use in the valleys of Cochabamba in the early 1970s, returned at a larger scale. The Altiplano of La Paz (the base of Katarista leader Jenaro Flores) played the central role in the rural blockades and sent marchers towards La Paz.

From the beginning of the coup, demonstrators attacked with cobblestones and threw up barricades in La Paz and El Alto, and dug antitank trenches in the avenues of La Paz. These resistance-oriented mobilizations sought to impede military deployments and contested the major streets of the capital, and in particular the central Plaza San Francisco (García Linera et al. 2004:64-65). The military government, after several days of seeking civilian backing, assigned Colonel Arturo Doría Medina to organize a crackdown on November 5 and 6. He blew up much of the COB headquarters, raided the civilian president’s home, deployed armored vehicles and helicopters, and machine-gunned people in the streets. More than 200 people were killed, and 125 “disappeared”—a toll perhaps as great as during Banzer’s entire regime (Dunkerley 1984).

Zavaleta Mercado (1983b:40-41) marks November 1979 as a face-off “between the disarmed triumph of the people and the armed defeat of the Army.” After protracted three-party negotiations among the COB, Congress, and coup leaders, the military returned to their barracks on November 16. At Lidia Gueiler’s inauguration, thousands gathered in the Plaza Murillo and hundreds entered the Palace of Government. In the Congressional session elevating her to President, one other order of business was a speech honoring Túpaj Katari on the 198th anniversary of his death (*Presencia*,

November 18, 1979). The military-campesino pact was relegated to the past, and a Katarista peasant leader, Jenaro Flores, became second in command of the labor federation (Zavaleta Mercado 1983b:85). Despite the heavy toll in lives lost, an unprecedented level of coordination across the racial and urban–rural divide had been demonstrated.

FURTHER MOBILIZATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC GOALS

Just two weeks after Gueiler’s inauguration, peasant unions began a new mobilization against the government’s new economic package. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, the government devalued its currency by 25% and cut off fuel subsidies, causing gasoline, oil and kerosene prices to more than double (Dunkerley 1984:273). The CSUTCB mobilization blocked the country’s main roads, isolated towns, and restricted food supplies except for in mines and factories by arrangement with the COB. This was the first fully national blockade (the earlier blockades were more geographically limited), including the Chapare, Alto Beni, the *Altiplano* of La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí, the Santa Cruz plains, and the Cochabamba valleys (Rivera Cusicanqui 1986:157). Marcial Canaviri relates that Jenaro Flores’ announcement of the blockades to the COB executive committee was met by laughter and disbelief in the CSUTCB’s organizing capacity,⁹³ but merging of rural unions with their community base proved remarkably effective (Rivera Cusicanqui 1986:157-58).

The campesino union’s solidarity the previous month was not repaid in kind: the COB only held a one-day mass march on December 4 and a one-day strike on December 10. The urban union federation’s leadership opted for cooperation with electoral parties rather than mass mobilization on economic issues. James Dunkerley laments that the COB’s strategic decisions seemed to “abet the downturn in working-class militancy” and “effectively den[y] the realization of the much-vaunted worker-peasant alliance” just when the *campesinado* needed it most (Dunkerley 1984:275). On the

⁹³ Flores briefly recounted the reaction to *La Razón* in 2011 (Bustillos Zamorano 2011).

other hand, Xavier Albó reads the solidarity strike as a significant act against the workers' own economic interests (the peasants were opposing a price freeze on foodstuffs), inaugurating "an alliance ... in which workers and peasants treated and respected each other as equals" (Albó 1987:404).

When another military coup d'état took place on July 17, 1980, the labor, campesino, and left leadership were preemptively attacked as they discussed plans for a general strike. Under orders from General García Meza, paramilitaries invaded the COB headquarters, murdering three leaders and capturing Juan Lechín. Jenaro Flores, who luckily was spreading the call for a general strike from a nearby payphone, soon became the first peasant to assume leadership of the labor federation. While the initial attempts at a general strike failed, the COB and CSUTCB remained a critical nucleus of resistance to the military through the reopening of democracy in October 1982, organizing major strikes in January, May, and July 1981 (Rivera Cusicanqui 1986:154; Alexander 2005). A final general strike on September 17, 1982, pushed the interim junta then in power to hand over power to the victors of the prior election rather than hold new ones.⁹⁴ Once the UDP government of Hernán Siles Zuazo was in power (October 1982–August 1985), popular mobilization exploded further. Along with other forms of mobilization, blockades occurred at an unprecedented pace. Siles, like Torres in 1970-71, vowed not to repress the movement, but instead presided over record-setting hyperinflation.⁹⁵

The business community and right regrouped around Víctor Paz Estenssoro in preparation for the 1985 elections. In consultation with the IMF, Paz implemented economic "shock therapy"

⁹⁴ The shifting position of private capitalists on the most desirable government also played a crucial role, as detailed by Conaghan and Malloy (1994:95–97).

⁹⁵ Siles refrained from repression out of principle, declaring, "I don't care if I'm judged as indecisive or a bad administrator. What's important to me is having my hands clean of repression and that history recognizes the extent of my commitment that Bolivia continue to be a land of free men" (quoted in Conaghan and Malloy 1994:123–24).

through the Supreme Decree 21060 of August 29, 1985, and girded the state against popular resistance. After the COB called a general strike in the week after the decree, Paz declared a state of siege, arrested over 200 labor leaders and managed to stifle the movement. The shock therapy package undercut labor's stronghold by targeting the state-run mining company COMIBOL for massive cutbacks (Conaghan and Malloy 1994:149-51). The miners' March for Life in September 1986, which dispersed after a 200-km journey when confronted by the military, was the last stand for mass proletarian resistance to neoliberalism (Olivera 2004:13-14). Over the next decade and a half, privatizations, mass layoffs, and other economic dislocations would reconfigure the Bolivian working-class and redraw the demographic map of the country.

2000: CSUTCB RURAL ROAD BLOCKADES

A new and extended cycle of rebellion in Bolivia began in 2000. The Coordinadora for the Defense of Water and Life led an urban uprising in Cochabamba against the privatization of water provision in the city. In its April 2000 climax, marches, a civic strike, the symbolic taking of key locations, and street barricades won the expulsion of Aguas de Tunari from Bolivia altogether (The Water War is narrated at length in the interlude before chapter 3). Simultaneously, the CSUTCB mobilized against coca eradication in the Yungas, as well as the commodification of both land and water through recent national laws. From April 5, road blockades were put up in protest, closing highways across the country (Patzl 2003:207). Aymaras of various occupations reinforced the peasant blockades in Omasuyus. The mechanisms of rotating participation, organized provision of food, and civil guards were incorporated for the first time on a large scale (208). Mass meetings and direct cooperation united worker and campesino organizations. The government and its supporters attacked the blockades as "irrational" and mobilized repression: a state of siege and the imprisonment of the movement's leadership. Following the emergency declaration, the riot police

themselves went on strike, demonstrating before the National Palace on April 8 (209-10). Confrontations flared in Achacachi, during which two demonstrators were killed and the military was forced to call for reinforcements. Enraged by the deaths, crowds looted state offices, opened the jail, and attacked officials and officers while urging indigenous soldiers to desert. On April 9, the government invaded the Achacachi region with some two thousand soldiers (Mamani Ramírez 2004:44). Arriving soldiers exacted revenge through leveling homes and torturing locals (Patzí 2003:210-12). Still, the state apparatus would remain destroyed or barely operative in Achacachi,⁹⁶ and the region became the center of calls for an indigenous military force as the nucleus of a distinct indigenous nation. What began to appear through these mobilizations was a broader agenda to reverse neoliberalism and expand indigenous self-determination, a goal that encompassed and went beyond specific demands (Patzí 2003:215; Mamani Ramírez 2004:163-67).

In September 2000, the diverse streams of grass-roots mobilization brought a new round of conflicts to a head in synchronous actions across the country, generating an unprecedented disruptive effect. The teachers' union strike included a march from Oruro to La Paz, while the CSUTCB mobilized nationwide roadblocks and the Six Federations demanded the government break its commitment to coca eradication and the construction of three new US-funded bases in the Chapare (Kohl and Farthing 2006:168). The blockades lasted from September 11 to October 7. Interviewed in January 2001, Felipe Quispe described this month as a new level of mobilization in excess of "the traditional or classic blockade ... in which only the leaders participated":

I have been impressed by the force and massiveness of the uprising, and it was because the *mita* and the *ayni*⁹⁷ functioned, the communitarian form of struggle and organization functioned. For

⁹⁶ In person, anthropologist Allison Spedding offered me a dissenting view.

⁹⁷ The Quechua term *mita* (sometimes *mit'a*), which dates to the Inca era, designates rotating labor responsibilities. In that period, it covered "labor for communal tasks, for the fields of the local lords

example, thousands of community members came out of the valleys; I couldn't do anything else but cry ... those who had come out from there inside gave me their hands... the thin people, malnourished, but all of them in the road with their ponchos. (Quispe Huanca 2001:171)

As the mobilization extended, there was a shift from mere blockades to mass gatherings eager to advance on La Paz, fifty thousand in Achacachi alone.

In the capital, food began to grow scarce in both working-class and elite neighborhoods. This had a great impact both politically and psychologically. As Felix Patzi emphasizes, “for the first time since [Túpaj] Katari and [Zarate] Willka,⁹⁸ the dominant class was affected by the campesinos in a direct manner; its own reproduction as a class was in play” (Patzi 2003:218). The government moved to airlift supplies, only to face blockades outside the airport led by El Alto housewives. In the end, the state was obliged to concede certain demands, including the cancellation of the military installations. However, these successes were followed by three years of uncoordinated regional mobilizations while division among sectors, and especially their caudillo leaders, complicated a united front.

2003: THE GAS WAR

The 2003 Gas War came about as a cascade of actions by various unions and associations. Some 500 to 1000 Alteños and peasants joined Felipe Quispe in a hunger strike at Radio San Gabriel

and for the lands of the idols, and as support for local kuraka” and the Inca state. Colonial governments adapted the state labor obligation to funnel workers into the mines (Rostworowski and Morris 1999:822). When used, as here, within communities, it refers to a horizontal, obligatory system of labor for collective ends. Ayni refers to “a symmetrical exchange of delayed reciprocity between equals, usually manifest in labor exchanges,” and is often translated as mutual aid (Allen 1981:165).

⁹⁸ Pablo Zárate Willka led the Aymara forces who allied with the La Paz-centered Liberal Party in the 1899 Federal War. As with many other indigenous military ventures, Willka's effort combined local rebellion with taking sides in an internal conflict in dominant society. After the war, Willka and thirty-one other Indian military leaders were executed for the Mohoza massacre, itself an Indian reprisal for Liberal attacks on Indian communities.

in El Alto beginning on September 10. As the gas Coordinadora⁹⁹ called a nationwide strike on September 19, CSUTCB-affiliated peasants in Warisata engaged in a blockade for regional agrarian demands. When the national government sent antiterrorist troops to break the blockade, bloody confrontations left between five and eight people dead (Kohl and Farthing 2006:173-5). By bringing death to Warisata, the military centered attention on a community with impeccable credentials in campesino organizing that had also sent numerous indigenous volunteers into the Chaco War. That previous generation's sacrifice to defend the gas-producing region of Tarija, alongside the current generation's sacrifice for the rural indigenous cause, made the town a symbol of the overlapping struggle of Altiplano campesinos and opponents of gas privatization (García Linera 2004:48-50).

Campesinos in the CSUTCB organized road blockades around El Alto and La Paz from early September. The regional labor federation Central Obrera Regional-El Alto and the Federation of Neighborhood Councils (FEJUVE El Alto) organized a series of marches, roadblocks, and civic strikes: paralyzing public transit, blockading arterial roads, and closing access to outside regions beginning on September, and escalating to an indefinite civic strike from October 8. The various groups put forward a platform that refused the export of natural gas, the new tax code, and joining the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Organizations agreed not to make separate agreements with the state, and to support one another's demands. And following the deaths of CSUTCB activists at Warisata, all forces called for the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (Lazar 2004:184). Miners from Oruro, armed with dynamite and Chaco War-era weapons converged with other demonstrators (Postero 2007:208).

⁹⁹ The Coordinadora for the Defense and Recovery of Gas was formed in June 2002, headed by Evo Morales, and including a wide range of organizations from across the country. It aimed to roll back the 1997 privatization of oil and gas.

In El Alto, protesters blocked gasoline tankers bound for La Paz. They were attacked by the soldiers who escorted the tankers; the military escorts killed at least thirty-eight people (Lazar 2004:184). The violence shocked the public, but failed to intimidate protests. It also generated middle-class outrage, expressed through a second hunger strike wave led by Ana María Romero de Campero¹⁰⁰ and the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights (Rivero 2006:74–75). A massive gathering in La Paz on October 16, two hundred thousand strong, was the final gesture before Sánchez de Lozada's resignation on October 17, and his immediate departure to exile in Miami (Postero 2007:208).

Carlos Mesa followed his assumption of the presidency with direct appeals to the mobilized crowds and sectors that had brought down his predecessor. In his inaugural address the night of October 17, Mesa began by leading the Congress in a moment of silence “to render [the] most profoundly felt and admired homage to the women and men of Bolivia who in these days offered up their lives for the homeland, for democracy, for the future, and for life” (Mesa Gisbert 2003). On October 18, President Mesa joined a gathering of some eight thousand people in El Alto in memory of the fallen from the Gas War. Alteños replaced much of the president's traditional escort from the tollbooth, a commonly understood social boundary of the city. Mesa's speech promised “neither forgetting nor vengeance, but justice” through a full investigation of the deaths, and compensation and perhaps jobs for their families. Before that, however, he read the names of each of those killed, with his voice joining “in a duet with one of the family members,” stirring the emotions of those gathered. Mesa recognized El Alto as “a sentinel of Bolivia” and pledged to promote its role as “the

¹⁰⁰ Romero de Campero served as the country's first Human Rights Ombudsman (*Defensor del Pueblo*); Sánchez de Lozada had recently blocked her renomination to the post. She describes the hunger strike as “a reaction of total indignation before what was the massacre of compatriots” and as “a space of genuine solidarity [from Paceños] with El Alto” (quoted in Rivero 2006:260–61)

guarantee of the unity and the defense of the interests of Bolivia” during his inaugural tour of the country (*El Diario* 2003).

On October 20, Mesa visited the Plaza San Francisco to address campesinos of the CSUTCB.¹⁰¹ This visit coincided with a debate on further mobilizations in a public meeting that also had ceremonial characteristics (including an opening offering to Pachamama). Following a speech from Rafael Quispe filled with demands, Mesa offered a conciliatory approach, declaring that “one of the great errors” of past governments was “not knowing who the Aymara were.” On the central issue of gas, Mesa pledged to hold a referendum to decide the fate of the gas resources democratically. The crowd welcomed him and assembled campesinos offered Mesa a ninety-day “truce” in their mobilizations (*La Prensa* 2003; Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008b:239–41).

2005: INTERVENING IN SUCCESSION

The national crisis in May and June 2005 reprised the 2003 Gas War, but the entire process was accelerated. Again blockades isolated and paralyzed La Paz; again marchers from across the country converged on the capital. Indeed, many of the same forces were involved in the protests, although their direct action extended across more of the country. And again a sitting president, this time Carlos Mesa, offered his resignation. But in 2005, a change of faces in the Palacio Quemado was not even on the agenda of the protesters: instead, the nationalization of gas and the convening of a Constituent Assembly to redefine the governing model of the country were at the top of the list of grassroots demands.

An indefinite general strike in El Alto went into force on May 22, and continued with one respite (May 27 to 30) to constrict supplies and transport in and out of La Paz until the end of the

¹⁰¹ Given the rest of his initial itinerary, it would be shocking if Mesa’s presence at the 455th anniversary ceremony for the city of La Paz in the San Francisco Church were merely coincidental.

crisis on June 10. Numerous sectors joined the *Alteños* in their demands, first with a tight focus on the province of La Paz, and later across the country. New elements in the 2005 protest included a wide variety of infrastructure takeovers, which were concentrated in the oil and gas sector at the center of the dispute.

Seven gas fields — property of Repsol YPF (Chaco) and British Petroleum (Andino) — were taken over by the Assembly of the Guaraní People and indigenous frontier settlers, while highland peasants shut off the valves at stations in Sayari (Cochabamba) and Sica Sica (La Paz). [Within the state-owned oil and gas company] YPFB, takeovers at Los Penocos, Sirari, Víbora and Yapacaní on June 6–7 reduced the provision of petroleum by more than 3,000 barrels per day. (Hylton 2005)

Other active strikes occurred in the heavy transport sector, and in the nationalized cement and beer industries. Peasant road blockades multiplied in number in the final days of the conflict, “reaching a high point at 119 on June 9” (Hylton 2005; Hylton and Thomson 2007:125). Marches on the Plaza Murillo, the central La Paz plaza at which both the President and Parliament sit, became continual and threatening to the state. President Carlos Mesa recounts: “Thousands of demonstrators made a ring of iron around the Plaza de Armas,¹⁰² marching for hours with strong dynamite explosions and the intent to defeat police control so as to take over the Parliament” (Mesa Gisbert 2008:290). On June 2, the Parliament was unable to meet because its building was surrounded and MAS-IPSP delegates opposed the session. These actions all expanded the tactical repertoire of popular protest, and they moved the protests closer to direct implementation of their demands.

President Mesa directed police to hold back protesters from key locations (essentially the Plaza Murillo and its counterpart in Sucre, the Plaza of May 25), but did not authorize bloodshed. Second in line to the presidency was the right-wing President of the Senate, Hormando Vaca Díez,

¹⁰² A *plaza de armas* is a central square of governmental importance in national and regional capitals of Spain, its colonies, and their successor states.

who publicly and privately vowed to confront protesters. Mesa (2008:297) reports that Vaca Díez secured a parliamentary coalition for a new government and promised U.S. Ambassador Greenlee “immediately upon taking power, he would bring order, he calculated that in three days the country would be under control. Greenlee believed him.”¹⁰³ In negotiations sponsored by the Catholic Church, Vaca Díez refused to cede his right to the presidency, leaving Mesa with no guarantees when he resigned on June 6 (Mesa Gisbert 2008:294-96).

With La Paz under protesters’ control, Vaca Díez announced that Parliament would move its sessions to Sucre. The official capital stood on effectively neutral ground between the left-indigenous-grassroots mobilizations of the past five years and the autonomy push from the parliamentarian’s native Santa Cruz. Vaca Díez needed parliament to formally convene and accept Mesa’s resignation so that power would pass to him. MAS-IPSP and Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (*Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti*; MIP) legislators demanded that both Vaca Díez and Cossio renounce their right of succession—in favor of neutral Supreme Court President Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé—before any session could start (Mesa Gisbert 2008:301; *La Razón* 2005c).

The grassroots quickly shifted its focus of mobilization to Sucre, coordinating a convergence of campesinos, teachers, and students from across Chuquisaca; cooperative miners and CONAMAQ-organized ayllus from Oruro and Potosí, and urban protesters from Sucre itself. Protesters replicated their strategy in La Paz around the central May 25 Plaza. The outnumbered police confined themselves to defending the blocks around the square from encroachment by protesters. Within the plaza on June 9, parliamentarians met in cafes and restaurants and counted votes. Some of them urged Mesa’s representative, Jorge Cortés, to open the cordon “to permit the

¹⁰³ Vaca Díez had stoked popular fears of repression by telling the press, “If one faction from the many social sectors chooses to set aside these principles (of national unity) and pushes toward confrontation and a bloodbath, it will end in authoritarian government” (Giordano 2005).

people to enter the plaza and pressure the Congress” (Cortés’ account, published in Mesa Gisbert 2008:301-306). Sucre’s Mayor Aydée Nava was herself at the forefront of gathering middle-class hunger strikes urging Rodríguez’s succession as president.

By the night of June 9, there were 94 hunger strike pickets across the country, amid a climate of escalating direct action (*La Razón* 2005b). Campesinos blockaded the city’s four main land exits, towards Potosí, Santa Cruz, Oruro, and Cochabamba. The killing of Juan Carlos Coro Mayta, a leader among the cooperative miners of Potosí, by military troops outside Sucre escalated tensions (Mesa Gisbert 2008:301; Hylton 2005). Security officials informed members of Congress that the police were on the verge of being overrun (*La Razón* 2005a). Grassroots protest disabled (via an air traffic controllers’ strike) and isolated Sucre’s airport while the military high command tried to dissuade the Senate President from his claim. Finding himself politically stranded, Vaca Díez conceded the presidency between 9:00 and 9:30PM. Just after midnight, Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé took the presidential oath with an extraordinarily narrow mandate: conduct elections in December 2005. While Rodríguez’s succession brought a quick end to protests in Sucre and across the country, the new president was obliged to meet personally with movement leaders in El Alto two days later to end blockades there.

2005–: EVO MORALES’ CEREMONIAL TRANSFERS OF POWER

Evo Morales was not front and center in the agitation that brought down Mesa, though he led parliamentary opposition to a Vaca Díez presidency.¹⁰⁴ However, Morales would spend the succeeding months and years grounding his administration in the waves of unrest that characterized

¹⁰⁴ Mesa (2008:187–90) perceived Morales as the hidden coordinator of the entire effort, but Raquel Gutiérrez (2008b:290–95) argues persuasively that Morales was committed to an electoral succession path and hung back from the Second Gas War. Martin Sivak quotes David Choquehuanca’s description of Morales in May 2005: “Evo has decided to be president” (Sivak 2010:145).

2000 to 2005. Evo Morales kicked off his formal campaign in the Plaza San Francisco on October 12, his body surrounded by movement symbols: “a YPFB mining helmet, a staff, and a whip given to him by indigenous authorities” (Sivak 2010:154). Morales took the recuperation of Bolivia’s gas resources, the expansion of indigenous and campesino land rights, and the convening of a Constituent Assembly (demanded by the lowland indigenous movement since the 1990s, and embraced across the left grassroots by 2003) as his primary mandates.

In terms of symbolic acts, the most dramatic acknowledgment Morales made of social movements’ sovereignty was his effectively triple inauguration as president. In an unconventional investiture ceremony at the Tiwanaku archaeological site, Morales was acknowledged as *mallku* by traditional Quechua and Aymara leaders: he “donned the replica of a 1,000-year-old tunic similar to those once used by Tiwanaku’s wise men, was purified in an ancient ritual and accepted the symbolic leadership of the myriad indigenous groups of the Andes” (Forero and Rohter 2006). While the Tiwanaku ceremony received widespread comment, Koen De Munter and Ton Salman draws attention to a third ceremony of possession for the new president, which immediately followed the state ceremony at the National Congress: a social movement inauguration in the Plaza San Francisco. This gathering was a new instantiation of the popular grassroots crowds that had used the plaza in moments of pressure, joined by “representatives of like-minded governments and of indigenous and popular movements drawn from all over the continent” (De Munter and Salman 2009:434).

At this ceremonial occasion, Vice President Álvaro García Linera “solemnly vowed to return to the square within five years to account for what the new authorities had done” (De Munter and Salman 2009:434). This statement is illustrative of a new sovereign relation between movements and a revolutionary regime: Morales and the MAS-IPSP would never stop returning to mass collective

action and assembled crowds of social movements to defend and legitimize their rule. Whether in the formation of the Constituent Assembly, large-scale marches to advance the “agrarian revolution” and the constitutional referendum through a resistant Congress, or the agenda-setting Plurinational Encounter to Deepen the Change (of December 2011–12), symbolic handovers from movements to leaders have become the essential currency of legitimacy for the era of MAS-IPSP rule.

TRANSFORMATION OVER TIME

For seven decades, mass popular mobilization has legitimated a series of political projects in Bolivia. Newly defined actors and new regimes have emerged over the those decades in a dynamic process of transformation, rather than a cyclical pattern of demolition and rebirth. The revolutionary upheavals associated with each new regime announced the arrival of new, or newly defined, actors on the political stage: a unionized proletariat, a national-popular alliance, an ethnically conscious *campesinado*, and an indigenous-identified urban-rural alliance. In turn, these regimes created new representative institutions from which these actors redefined state policy and instituted new legal principles that acknowledged their right to collective action.

Large-scale symbolic moments were organized in each case to transfer legitimacy from the mobilized groups to presumptively revolutionary regimes. (See Appendix 1 on page 284 for a summary of these events). These projects—namely, military socialism, nationalist revolution, the Popular Assembly, parliamentary democracy, and MAS-IPSP plurinationalism—have in turn extended legal recognition to worker’s unions, the expulsion of landlords, campesino organizations, and an expansive repertoire of collective actions (many of which would be regarded as criminal in other national contexts). Popular organizations’ representatives have been admitted to legislatures, ministerial offices, constitutional assemblies, and an array of unconventional political arenas blessed with government recognition: indigenous congresses, “co-government,” the Popular Assembly,

“pacts,” and all manner of summits. Road blockades and control of urban centers have risen to political centrality in this context, bringing with them the connotations of indigenous revolt symbolized by Túpaj Katari and of syndicalist self-rule embodied in the tradition of the general strike.

The longitudinal look at Bolivian regime transitions in this chapter illustrates both continuity and change. Across this period, state actors have offered formal and tacit authorization for social sectors to use disruptive protest to advance their interests. This authorization has developed and deepened over time in Bolivian political and legal culture. A less constant, but still predominant, theme is the revolutionary identification of most (though certainly not all) governing political forces since 1936. Another continuity is the return, generation after generation, of revolutionary disruption as a well-understood template for doing politics in Bolivia. Bolivia is a prime case of “the revolution as master template” shaping political contention.

Further, the relations among grass-roots collectivities, political parties, and the military/state apparatus have dramatically shifted. Where changes in government were frequently centered on militarized conflict prior to the 1970s, they have increasingly relied on unarmed tactical confrontations in the decades since. In parallel, there has been a shift in commonly held political ethics around violent repression. The populace at large, the politically important middle-class, and state leaders themselves have become less comfortable with violent repression as a response to popular upheaval. As geographically distributed disruptive action has displaced the maneuvering of coup plotters and party-controlled militias, the relationship between the grassroots and political parties has changed as well. There has been a move from *disruption as authorization* of political regimes to *disruption as a form of participation* in politics. The increasing sophistication of grassroots social forces places them in a different relationship with the regimes they empowered.

Yet despite the increased latitude for social movement action, the degree of influence and control that movements will exercise in society remains a central point of uncertainty following the latest upheaval. Like the military socialists, the MNR, and post-1985 parliamentary parties, the MAS-IPSP political project differs from the agenda of its social movement base, whose positions are themselves diverse. The Morales government has connected the movements' vision of social transformation to a developmentalist policy, while attempting to build a political party and organize the loyalty of large movement organizations to its vision. Both these state projects—economic and political—echo the efforts of previous Bolivian governments brought to power by revolutionary upheavals. Like them, the current government has experienced turbulent relations with left grassroots organizations. However, I leave that question in suspense for now as I focus on the mechanism of grassroots action (which have been used similarly against both neoliberal and post-neoliberal governments) in Chapters 3 through 5. State-movement tensions will return to the narrative in Chapters 6 and 7.

May 20, 1936	July 13, 1937	▲ David Toro	Military	419	
December 20, 1943	July 21, 1946	▲ Gualberto Villarroel López	Military/Fatherland's Cause-Nationalist	944	
July 21, 1946	August 15, 1946	Néstor Guillén	Non-party	25	
March 10, 1947	October 22, 1949	▼ Enrique Hertzog (e)	Socialist Republican Union Party	957	
October 22, 1949	May 16, 1951	▼ Mamerto Urriolagoitia	Socialist Republican Union Party	571	
April 16, 1952	August 6, 1956	▲ Victor Paz Estenssoro	Nationalist Revolutionary Movement	1573	
November 5, 1964	May 26, 1965	▼ René Barrientos	Military	202	
October 7, 1970	August 21, 1971	▲ Juan José Torres	Military	318	
August 22, 1971	July 21, 1978	▼ Hugo Banzer	Military	2525	
July 21, 1978	November 24, 1978	Juan Pereda	Military	126	
November 1, 1979	November 16, 1979	▼ Alberto Natusch	Military	15	
November 17, 1979	July 18, 1980	Lydia Gueiler Tejada	Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left	244	
October 10, 1982	August 6, 1985	▲ Hernán Siles Zuazo (e)	Democratic and Popular Union	1031	
August 6, 1985	August 6, 1989	▼ Victor Paz Estenssoro (e)	Nationalist Revolutionary Movement	1461	
October 17, 2003	June 9, 2005	Carlos Mesa	Non-party	601	
June 9, 2005	January 22, 2006	Eduardo Rodríguez	Non-party	227	
January 22, 2006		▲ Evo Morales (e)	Movement Towards Socialism	2687	

Table 1: Presidencies begun in the wake of popular upheaval

Bolivian heads of state since 1936 who came to power in the wake of popular upheaval. ▲ Red indicates leaders who came to power to carry forward the agenda of protesters. ▼ Green indicates those who came to power to step up repression against the movement. Black indicates government caretakers charged with carrying out elections. Regardless of agenda, (e) indicates they were elected to the role of head of state. A summary of these events appears in Appendix 1.

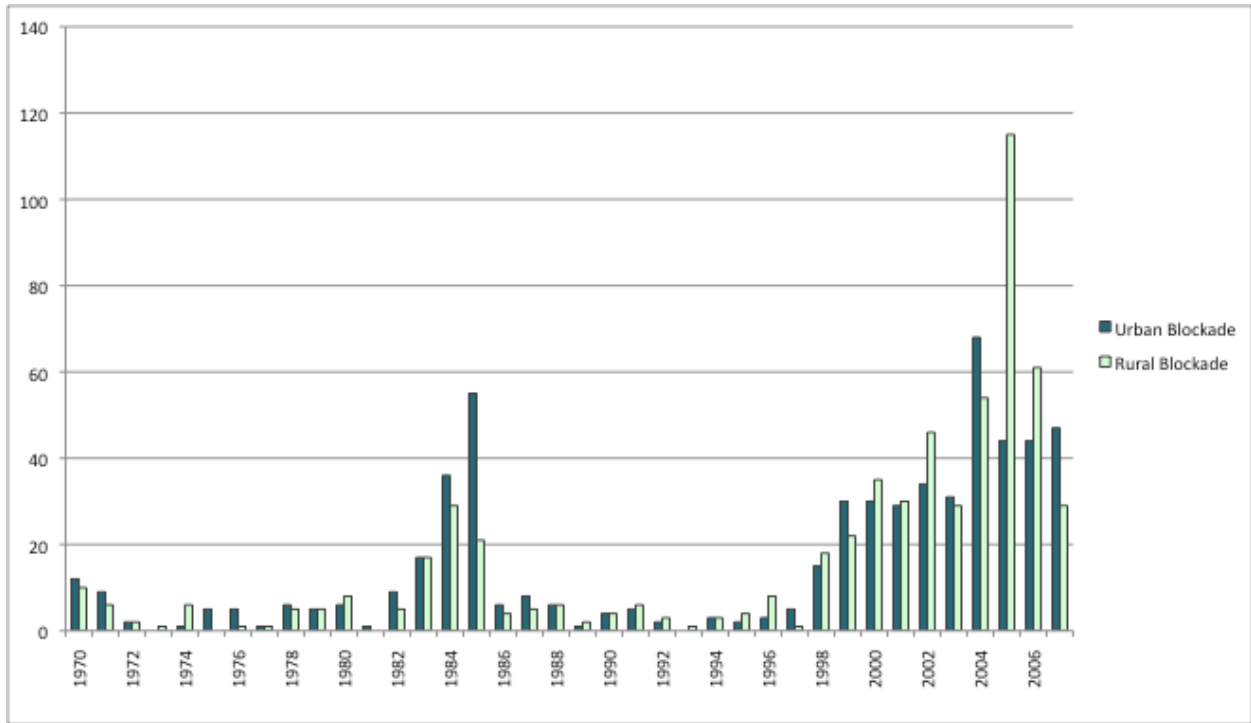


Figure 1: Urban and rural blockades per year, 1970-2007.

Source: CERES database (Laserna and Villarroel 2008:23).

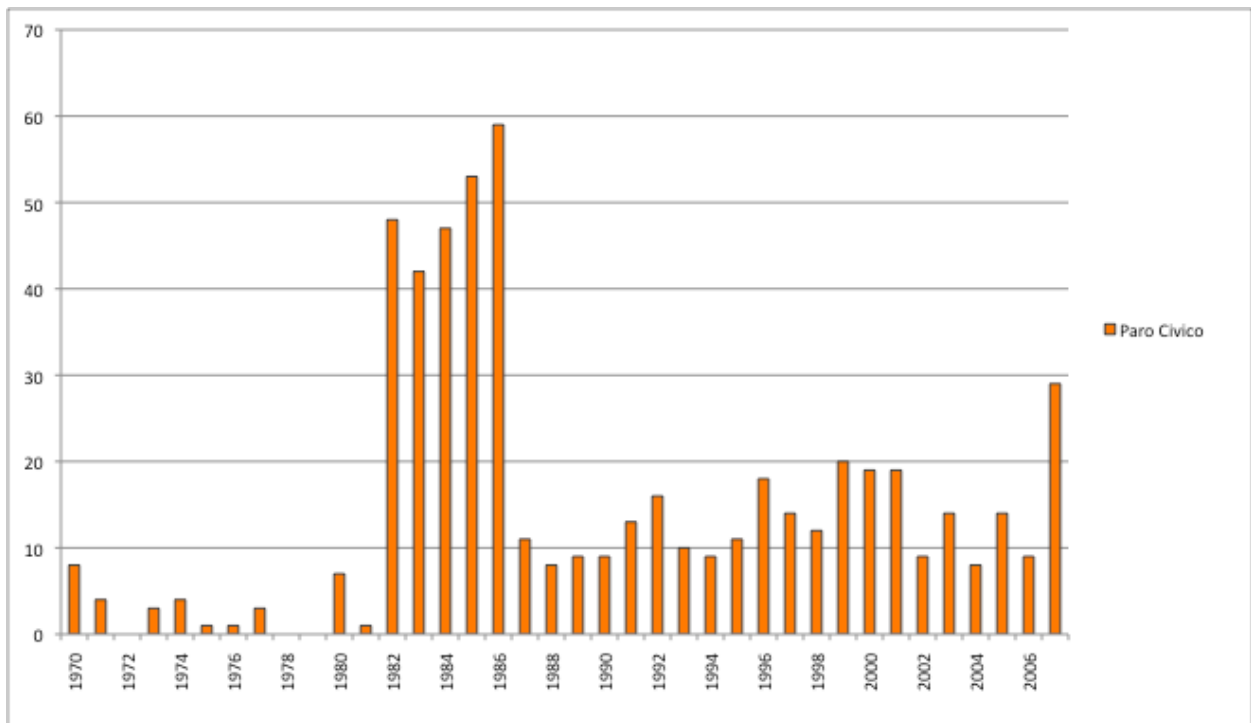


Figure 2: Civic strikes per year, 1970-2007

Source: CERES database (Laserna and Villarroel 2008:23).

Figure 3: The move to active protest

Share of conflictive events by protest type, based on data in Laserna and Villarroel (2008:88–89).

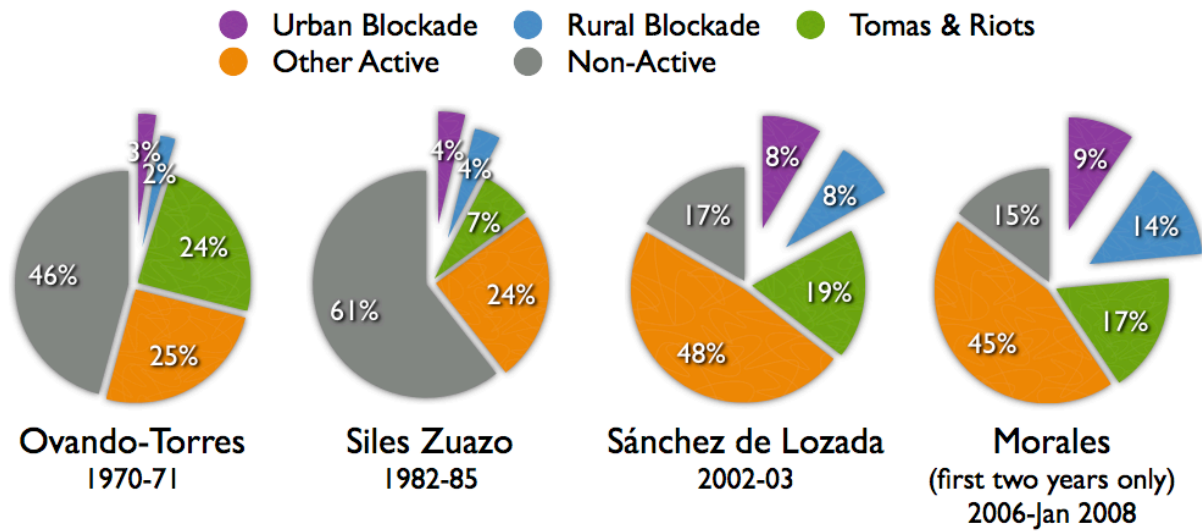


Table 2: Regime transitions and their relation to social movement disruptions

<i>Regime</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Change in Leader/ State</i>	<i>Disruptive Justifying Action</i>	<i>Represented Constituency</i>	<i>Symbolic Handover</i>
Military Socialism	1936	David Toro presidency through Germán Busch coup	April-May strike wave	Organized labor	1938 National Convention
	1945	Villarroel decrees of May 1945 abolishing rural servitude	Late 1930s, early 1940s strikes and rural unrest	Indian campesinos	National Indigenous Congress in La Paz, May 10–15, 1945
National Revolution	1952	MNR assumes power	1947-52 “Cycle of rebellion”; April 1952 popular insurrection	Organized labor, campesinos	Worker and party militias parade through La Paz
	1952	Tin mining nationalized	Miners’ assistance in April insurrection	Organized labor	Decree-signing ceremony in Catavi Siglo XX complex August 2, 1953
	1953	Agrarian Reform	Wave of land takeovers; armed presence of campesinos in Cochabamba	Campesinos	signing in Ucareña, Cochabamba.
Popular Assembly	1970	Proposed co-government by labor and left parties	October 7 general strike in defense of military populism	Organized labor, left parties	(left accepted on conditions, offer was rescinded)
	1971	Popular Assembly	October 1970 and January 1971 defense against right-wing coup	Organized labor, left parties, independent campesinos	Assembly held in National Congress building, June–July 1970
Democratic Transition	1978	Political prisoner release & elections	Hunger strike campaign supported by rural blockades	Miners’ wives, miners, campesinos	—
	1979	Reversal of Natusch Busch coup; Lidia Guieller becomes constitutional president	General strike; urban and rural road blockades	Organized labor, campesinos, urban middle class	Guieller’s inauguration in Presidential Palace
	1982	Restoration of democratic rule; UDP takes office	Accelerated by COB, peasant strikes	Organized labor, peasants	Post-inaugural address in Plaza San Francisco
Plurinational State	2003	VP Carlos Mesa assumes presidency	Gas War: general strikes, urban and rural road blockades, hunger strike wave	Organized labor, indigenous campesinos, urban popular masses	Mesa attends El Alto memorial and campesino gathering in Plaza San Francisco
	2005	Supreme Court head Eduardo Rodríguez becomes interim president	May-June crisis: general strikes urban and rural road blockades.	Organized labor, indigenous campesinos, urban popular masses	—
	2006	Evo Morales becomes President	Previous disruptions plus December 2005 electoral mandate	Organized labor, indigenous campesinos, urban popular masses, electoral majority	Triple inauguration: Tiwanaku, Congress, Plaza San Francisco,
	2008–09	Plurinational State affirmed through new constitution	September 2008 crisis; March on National Congress	Indigenous movements, campesinos, urban popular masses	Surrounding Congress; Plaza Murillo proclamation

The Water War as Precedent and Prototype Prelude to Chapters 3 and 4

Cochabamba's Water War was the first major event in Bolivia's grassroots upsurge, and the way it happened set a number of precedents for future mobilizations: the vulnerability of neoliberal policies to grassroots opposition, the power of urban-rural alliances, and a new collective *we* in its signature slogan: "The Water is Ours." It involved a balance of different types of space claiming, as did many of the mobilizations that followed. As such, I use it as a prototype for describing the distinct role of space claiming as a tool of economic disruption and as a demonstration of popular legitimacy. In order to offer a complete analysis, however, it's useful to present the mobilization as a whole before proceeding to reconsider these issues separately in Chapters 3 and 4.

The Water War was a six-month series of events that extended from the first rural protest blockades in late October 1999 until April 2000, when a mass outpouring forced the government to concede both major demands of the movement.¹⁰⁵ Overlapping with mobilizations in Seattle against the World Trade Organization, and in Washington, DC, against the World Bank, it was one of the most direct and successful confrontations in an emerging worldwide challenge to the power of transnational corporations.¹⁰⁶ Protesters demanded both the cancellation of Aguas del Tunari's forty-year (1999–2039) contract to take over and operate Cochabamba's municipal water system (*Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado de Cochabamba*, Semapa) and the repeal of Law 2029, the Potable Water and Sewage Service Law promulgated on 29 October 1999, which was designed to

¹⁰⁵ Demarcating the beginning of the Water War is somewhat difficult, but the October blockades mark the clearest shift from the "background music" of protest (as Thomas Kruse (2005:146) quotes Hugo Banzer describing those decrying the water concession contract on September 3, 1999) and the upheaval to come.

¹⁰⁶ For a chronology of this period that leans towards the global North, see Juris (2008:48–51). For one focused on the global South, see the World Development Movement's *States of Unrest* reports (Woodroffe and Ellis-Jones 2000; Ellis-Jones and Hardstaff 2003)

facilitate privatization. Aguas del Tunari was a custom-crafted corporate entity, majority-owned (55%) by International Water Ltd., a subsidiary of the privately-owned U.S. construction firm Bechtel,¹⁰⁷ with the remainder divided among the Spanish corporation Abengoa and politically well-connected Bolivian investors. Under the terms of the privatization, Aguas del Tunari was guaranteed a sizable return on its investment (Spronk 2007:13), and obliged to invest in long-sought-after improvements to the city's water infrastructure, including the signature Misicuni dam project.

The privatization aroused opposition from several quarters. Traditional rural users of irrigation water—organized in the Cochabamba Departmental Federation of Irrigation Users (*Federación Departamental Cochabambina de Regantes*; FEDECOR; hereafter, the Regantes)—feared losing their informally recognized rights or paying fees that might drive them into bankruptcy. Engineers, lawyers, and economists raised concerns about rising water prices through the Defense Committee of Water and the Family Economy (*Comité para la Defensa del Agua y la Economía Popular*).¹⁰⁸ The text of Law 2029 stipulated that any well in the concession area could be privatized and metered, putting years of work by both the neighborhood water committees of the urban outskirts and the Regantes at risk. Finally, Aguas del Tunari attempted to raise investment capital for improvements directly from the ratepayers, setting off price increases that quickly became known as

¹⁰⁷ The privately held, San Francisco-based Bechtel Holdings Inc. was the sole shareholder in International Water (Aguas del Tunari) Limited, a Cayman Islands-based corporation, that was the lead (55%) investor in Aguas de Tunari when the contract was signed on September 3, 1999 (International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes 2005:471). Italian energy corporation Edison S.p.A. bought a 50% stake in International Water in November 1999 (Bechtel Corporation 1999).

¹⁰⁸ The Defense Committee sometimes designated itself the Defense Committee of Water and the *Popular Economy* as well.

the *tarifazo*.¹⁰⁹ This rate hike generated broad-based opposition in the urban core and even the wealthier districts of the north side of the city.

Over the six months from November to April, the metropolitan-scale mass blockade re-emerged and a new organizing form—the Coordinadora—stepped forward as the embodiment of popular rejection of the two privatization policies. This organization was founded at a November 12 assembly, initially convened by the Regantes, the Fabriles, and the Defense Committee of Water and the Family Economy. The Coordinadora joined together pre-existing organizations, some of whom had long histories of combative organizing, and others that threw their collective weight into public political conflict for the first time. Together these organized forces were the skeleton of a larger mass mobilization involving thousands who participated as outraged individuals or who made connections and took on regular roles only once they were in the streets. In these streets, their most powerful weapon was a civic strike: simultaneous rural and urban blockades, as well as battles for control of the city center that brought daily life to a halt and put forward a claim to speak on behalf of the city.

The Coordinadora faced two primary challenges: proving its democratic legitimacy and convincing the government to reverse its policy of privatizing the city's water. Its success required wielding mass pressure, establishing legitimacy, and offering itself as the vehicle for communal ownership of resources. The moment of mass pressure involved blockades and other disruptive actions to win the annulling of the contract. Through these measures, they squared off against the efforts of the state to maintain order and regular economic life in the city. The moment of legitimacy consisted in convening assemblies, *cabildos* and an unofficial referendum or *consulta popular* to register

¹⁰⁹ The center-right daily *Los Tiempos* covered the conflict in progress under the heading *tarifazo*, a term that highlights central and northern Cochabamba residents' concerns about higher rates over the other concerns of the rural irrigators and Zona Sur water committees.

public opposition to water policies. Over the course of the conflict, the Coordinadora sought to carve out a place as the legitimate negotiating body for the Cochabamban public. (Figure 4 on page 117 provides a chronology of the major events of the Water War analyzed according to these two moments.) While legitimacy and pressure represent two distinct moments of the mobilization, it is important to understand that the ability to mobilize mass pressure against Aguas del Tunari was a vital to demonstrating popular legitimacy.

CONCERTED PRESSURE THROUGH BLOCKADES

The Water War featured three major “battles,” episodes of concentrated action designed to interrupt daily life in the city and win the movement’s demands. Like more conventional strikes, these civic strikes deployed economic pressure to initiate and win negotiations. The mobilizations of January 11–13, 2000, ended with a commitment to multiparty negotiations on each clause of Aguas del Tunari contract and Law 2029 as well as on the fee schedule, with the Civic Committee and the Coordinadora at the bargaining table. The government also conceded that Water Committees and the Regantes would maintain control of their water facilities and the water apportioned them by *usos y costumbres* (traditional habits and customs), respectively.

The February 4–5 mobilization was promoted well in advance by the Coordinadora as the “takeover of Cochabamba.” The organization’s spokesmen were at pains to describe their plans as peaceful,¹¹⁰ reading the very name as a metaphor for democratic power. Recounting their rhetoric in writing, Oscar Olivera recalled:

We said we were coming to take what is ours—the main plaza—to take it over physically and in a peaceful way. We were coming to take each other by the hand—workers in the city and in the

¹¹⁰ Oscar Olivera, Gonzalo Maldonado, and Gabriel Herbas had their position reported in *Los Tiempos* (*Los Tiempos*, January 31, 2000b).

countryside—and we were coming to take our own decisions. That is why we called it *la toma* (the takeover). (Olivera 2004:32; emphasis and translation original)¹¹¹

However, even such a symbolic takeover, “in the sense that the campesinos, workers, and inhabitants of those neighborhoods that have been disadvantaged [by the privatization] ... will enter the city and will say that they love the land and will make their voice heard” (in *Los Tiempos*’ paraphrase) aroused fears of racial insubordination and rebellion. Olivera highlights these fears: “All the talk about taking over Cochabamba frightened many people—businessmen, state officials, city council members—and they said things like ‘the Indians are coming to seize the city’” (Olivera 2004:32).¹¹²

On Friday, February 4, 2000, the government acted to block this convergence, deploying hundreds of Cochabamba-based police and the anti-riot Special Security Group from La Paz (*Grupo Especial de Seguridad*, popularly known as the *dálmatas*, dalmatians, for their camouflage). Campesinos had mobilized in large numbers and directly confronted police barricades.

In the West, the demonstrators slowly passed over the troops on the Viaduct. Once they had achieved this, they had built up enough spirit to nullify the police barricades on the Quillacollo bridge and in the Plazuela of the Corazonistas. Finally, they arrived at Heroínas and Ayacucho, just three blocks from the Plaza 14 de Septiembre and established barricades [*se parapetaron*] there. In the East, another group of approximately five thousand campesinos who had arrived from Sacaba, having evaded a green wall [of police] in the Muyurina [Interchange], took over Ramón Ribero Avenue, and Oquendo streets, arriving finally at Heroínas and Antezana. At the Muyurina bridge in the Eastern sector, around seven thousand cocaleros entered the city peacefully, passing through the police perimeter. Nevertheless, the coca producers also faced repression in the vicinity of the Plaza. In the South, ten thousand campesinos of the High Valley were held back near the bus terminal. The police were surrounded. Hundreds of their troops guarded the four

¹¹¹ In the original Spanish text, each of these “takes” is the verb *tomar*.

¹¹² I’ll return to such fears around rural mobilizations to Bolivian city centers in chapter 5.

corners of the central plaza while tens of them fought in the nearby streets. (Los Tiempos, 5 February 2000, quoted in Orellana Aillón 2004)

Meanwhile, urban groups clashed across downtown with police forces using tear gas and rubber bullets. Barricades were erected on numerous street corners and a few protesters paused to spray paint: *No more gassing. Blood flows. 4 February 2000 (No más gasificación. Sangre corre. 4-II-00)*. (A variety of these spray-painted memoranda of defiance remained visible in downtown Cochabamba a decade later.) The daylong street battles lasted through Friday and Saturday; but the police defense gave out at 11:30pm on the second day (Kruse 2005:147). Following a substantial expenditure on riot munitions, and facing dissent on tactics from within the police, the government yielded a stop-gap agreement: the rate hike would be suspended pending negotiations between itself, the Civic Committee, and the Coordinadora on both the privatization contract and Law 2029.

In mid-March, acting alone, the Civic Committee reached a preliminary deal with the government on the temporary halt of the tarifazo, which would instead be phased in gradually beginning in December. Coordinadora activists refused to accept this framework, and organized a novel response to show the public was on their side. They prepared a grassroots referendum (*consulta popular*) through which Cochabambans could vote on their principal demands.¹¹³ Coordinadora activists set up some 150 voting precincts on Sunday, March 26 and collected the votes of 48,276 people (the results are shown in Table 3 on page 119). This “represented 10% of the population of Cochabamba and was equivalent to 31% of the votes in the December 1999 municipal election” (Assies 2001:15). While the overwhelming majorities were unsurprising—dissenters were more likely to avoid the unofficial poll than register a negative ballot—the large numbers involved demonstrated

¹¹³ The exercise echoed similar efforts undertaken by Mexico’s Zapatistas.

broad sympathy. Just as importantly, the vote cultivated public legitimacy and a new wave of potential participants.

On March 30, 2000, the Coordinadora for the Defense of Water and Life issued Communiqué No. 20, a resolution passed by its general assembly. Its includes these points:

1. To decree an INDEFINITE GENERAL BLOCKADE of the department and of the city, beginning 6:00am on Tuesday, April 4, 2000.
2. This gigantic mobilization of Cochabambans (men and women)¹¹⁴ will be named THE FINAL BATTLE BECAUSE WATER AND LIFE CONTINUE TO BE OURS.
3. This blockade will be realized in the provinces with road blockades and in the city with the blockading of streets, avenues, and bridges, in each neighborhood and in each house.

(capitalization original; reproduced in Olivera et al. 2008:178–79)

Activists in the Coordinadora saw the “final battle,” which would achieve the two main demands of the movement, as one gigantic blockade. But they also understood the larger blockade—what I call a civic strike—as including numerous small blockades, each with a particular target location. The terrain that thousands of Cochabambans contested—streets, avenues, bridges, and neighborhoods—is dispersed and made up of channels for flows: flows of vehicles, travelers, workers, commodities, and basic necessities.

The April mobilization started out with fewer than five thousand attendees, but gradually built up adherents and density throughout the city. Blockades became ubiquitous, while physical actions attempted to directly assist negotiations. In a counterproductive move, the government arrested the Coordinadora’s negotiating team late in the day on April 6 and declared a state of

¹¹⁴ Following the translation practice of *Vía Campesina*, I include “(men and women)” or “(male and female)” to mark the duplication of gender-specific nouns, in this case “Cochabambinos y Cochabambinas.”

emergency (*estado de sitio*) on April 7.¹¹⁵ A ban on demonstrations was ignored and armed soldiers and police faced ever greater numbers of protesters and blockaders in central Cochabamba. Street battles raged even after the police added live ammunition to their mix of weapons. Dozens of protesters suffered bullet wounds, but only Víctor Hugo Daza, a 17-year-old student shot in the face on his way home from work, was killed. On April 9, one day after Daza's body was carried to the central square, the Bolivian government revoked the contract with Aguas del Tunari. The crowds gathered in a *cabildo* in the square were not easily convinced of this concession and waited until April 10 to lift citywide blockades. In the end, the Coordinadora was not only able to press for its overarching demands but also a role in redesigning Semapa's directorate in ways it hoped would be more responsive to community representation.

DEMONSTRATIONS OF LEGITIMACY

Despite the framing of the March 30 Communiqué, the tactical form of “the Grand Battle” was not only a strategy of blockades, but also a concerted effort to converge upon, take over, and inhabit the central Plaza 14 de Septiembre by grassroots participants in the Coordinadora. The seat of civic life, Cochabamba's central plaza took on a key role in the Water War. The Plaza was the destination of nearly all marches; the objective of the most intense efforts to seize, hold, and maintain a particular space; and the site where the right of the Coordinadora to speak for the city and the region was asserted and confirmed. The Plaza was almost the exclusive site for holding *cabildos*, the mass gatherings whose decisions were treated as sovereign within the Coordinadora. In it, the Coordinadora could function as a *de facto* sovereign, actively in charge of its blockades and potentially in charge of the region's water.

¹¹⁵ The state of emergency was not publically announced until the next day.

From the beginning of the Water War, activists sought to use the Plaza as a new space for public discussion. The Defense Committee organized weekly meetings in the Plaza on Tuesday mornings beginning in July 1999 (Crespo 2000:24); these gatherings used informational panels to propagandize against the privatization, beginning a tradition that continues in the plaza to the present. The continuous work of the Coordinadora also helped to establish that Plaza as a space for grassroots political activity. Ratepayers concerned about their increased bills could simply come to the Fabriles office to connect with the Coordinadora. The office became “a privileged space for meeting and taking decisions” and “a space where the people could go to converse with people from other sectors and, above all, where everyone did so in a totally informal manner during moments of intense social confrontation” (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008b:75). The crowds that clustered around the corner of España and Bolívar Streets, outside the office, became a regular image of the movement in the press. The mass meetings, or *cabildos abiertos*, held in the plaza were both the movement’s highest decision-making body and the gauge of its popular support.

PROPERTY DESTRUCTION AND SYMBOLIC ATTACKS

On many days of the Water War, physical confrontation was nearly everywhere: thousands of stones, fireworks, and other objects were thrown towards the police in street battles. Thousands more stones, boulders, sections of rebar, tree limbs, and tires (sometimes set alight with newspaper) were brought into the streets to make them impassible or to serve as protective barricades for protests. Frequently, protesters directed their stones against the facades of hated institutions. However, taking over the same buildings—as began to occur on April 5—represented an escalation. On that day, enthusiastic militants led the charge and assaulted the doors of the Civic Committee on the Plaza Colón as well as the entryway and sign at Aguas del Tunari headquarters and purification

plant in the El Temporal neighborhood. However, at both locations, Coordinadora leaders intervened to prevent more serious damage to these offices.

In a strange way, the physical actions at Aguas del Tunari's headquarters—a half dozen protesters hanging on and ripping down the sign, scores pulling open the gate and hundreds rushing in, and one masked protester repainting a wooden “Aguas del Tunari” sign with “Aguas del Pueblo” became some of the most resonant images of the conflict. Yet these space-claiming actions were also primarily symbolic: neither attempts at general destruction, nor efforts at an ongoing occupation. Oscar Olivera stood at the gate of the enterprise urging calm rather than escalation. Their symbolic value was the power of the movement to seize these spaces, but this power was deployed in spaces emptied of police protection. Leaders like Olivera feared that stronger actions by the crowd would be used to discredit the movement.¹¹⁶

THE STRUGGLE TO SPEAK FOR COCHABAMBA

Interwoven with these moments of mobilization was the Coordinadora's campaign to be recognized as the voice of Cochabambans in the water dispute. In this, it faced competition from the Civic Committee of Cochabamba and Mayor Manfred Reyes Villa. The Coordinadora had three weapons in this contest over representation: its power to convene mass resistance from sectors alienated from conventional politics, the appeal of its radical demands to resolve the many problems caused by the difficult-to-alter water concession contract, and the exposure of its rivals' involvement in approving that contract.

¹¹⁶ A more severe act of property destruction occurred on April 8, amid serious police use of gunfire elsewhere in the city. Protesters attacked and burned parts of the Corporación de Desarrollo de Cochabamba, which included environmental and historical offices of the Prefectura.

The Civic Committee, composed of prominent figures from commercial interests and civic organizations, is an organization with analogues in each of the major cities of Bolivia.¹¹⁷ Edgar Montaña, president of the Civic Committee until the late-1999 municipal elections, followed a conventional path from heading the organization to serving as Councilman, and later as mayor of Cochabamba. Manfred Reyes Villa, founder of the New Republican Force (*Nueva Fuerza Republicana*) party was elected to his third term as Cochabamba's mayor and had built an impressive political machine. Some of the Neighborhood Councils were among the local organizations involved in patron-client politics with the Mayor's party. Fond of grandiose public works—from the “distributors” that systematize road traffic into central Cochabamba to the 33-meter statue of Jesus that overlooks the city—Reyes Villa embraced the construction of a water- and electric power-supplying dam on the Misicuni River as a priority. The dam project, and the unmet water needs it promised to fulfill became the *raison d'être* for water privatization in Cochabamba.

From its formation in November, the Coordinadora disputed the authority of the Civic Committee to represent Cochabambans. On January 13, for example, the Coordinadora called for a *cabildo* that would declare both Reyes Villa and Montaña “enemies of Cochabamba” and “derecognize [*desconocer*] the Civic Committee as a representative body.”¹¹⁸ This challenge pushed the Civic Committee towards stronger actions, more radical demands, and insistence that it was the voice of Cochabambans. Popular revulsion for the *tarifazo* repeatedly drew the Civic Committee

¹¹⁷ The civic committees are broadly representative of regional elites. The Santa Cruz Civic Committee, an institution of the local oligarchy, is the oldest of these organizations. Other civic committees were formed in the 1960s and 1970s, with Cochabamba's and Potosí's being the most politically progressive. The committees backed democratization under the repression of the 1970s (from which they were largely spared), but have taken divergent stances since 2000, embracing the separatist right in the *media luna* and Chuquisaca, while incorporating unions and grassroots organizations in Potosí. See Kohl and Farthing (2006:49–53).

¹¹⁸ The term *desconocer* is the one used by grassroots base organizations that withdraw their consent from confederations or leaders to negotiate on their behalf.

into co-sponsoring Coordinadora-initiated mobilizations even as it sought to distance itself from the grassroots grouping. In November and December, the Civic Committee shifted to a public stance opposing the severe rate hikes for water imposed by Aguas del Tunari, and sought to work out a softer or slower adjustment. On January 11, the Committee and Reyes Villa put themselves of the front of the parade and embraced a 24-hour strike. The 48 hours following midnight on January 12 became a test of the Coordinadora's relative mobilizing capacity. The Regantes and Water Committees made the difference in passing this test. Transportation unions, whose loyalties were divided, brought Coordinadora and Civic Committee representatives together and brought about an accord in which the dueling "representatives of Cochabamba" agreed not to negotiate without one another.

From the mid-January mobilizations onward the accumulating weight of mobilization brought an exceptionally broad coalition behind the Coordinadora's negotiating position. On January 23, the center-right mainstream daily *Los Tiempos* reported that Reyes Villa and Montaña were among the authorities who signed the Aguas del Tunari contract, which specifically authorized a rate hike (*Los Tiempos*, January 23, 2000c). In rapid succession, condominium owners announced the formation of an association and their refusal "to pay even one cent" of the increase (*Los Tiempos*, January 20, 2000); the Chamber of Industry declared itself on alert (*Los Tiempos*, January 23, 2000a); and Archbishop Tito Solari attacked the tarifazo as an "anti-popular" measure. The archbishop urged government authorities to put their

eyes, ears, and hearts on the side of the people. It is not enough to have power or law on one's side... one must see if this law and this power are a law and a power that gives life and hope to the people, and if not, law and power don't serve for anything. (*Los Tiempos*, January 31, 2000a)

These uncharacteristically bold actions by establishment actors were another side of the snowballing tendency to identify Cochabamba, the water conflict, and to some extent the Coordinadora as a

single cause. Twelve years later, *Los Tiempos* remembers ruefully¹¹⁹ how “all of ‘cochabambinidad,’ with very few exceptions ... gave itself over to a sort of collective delirium that culminated in the expulsion of Aguas del Tunari” (*Los Tiempos*, April 8, 2012). Without this broadly held sense of the situation, the grassroots victory in the conflict would surely have been impossible.

LASTING MEMORIES OF THE WATER WAR

The Water War assumed an international profile when it was still in motion, and the spotlight it brought upon Cochabamba still connects the town with many people far beyond Bolivia’s borders. The privatization contract seemed to connect all the concerns of neoliberalism’s critics: corporate control, the commercialization of an essential common resource, and disadvantaging the poor. Coming just months after the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization and days before similar protests against the World Bank in Washington, DC, the Cochabamba victory over privatization became an overnight cause célèbre of the global justice movement.

Cochabamba soon became an entry point for the international activists to make contact with Bolivian movements. A December 2000 gathering of activists against water privatization from five countries produced a “Cochabamba Declaration” opposing the privatization or commodification of water. In April 2001, Oscar Olivera became the first trade unionist to win the Goldman Environmental Prize for his work in the Cochabamba movement. Accepting the prize in San Francisco in 2002, he took part in one of many protests at Bechtel’s headquarters opposing the company’s efforts to win compensation for its expulsion from Cochabamba. In September 2001,

¹¹⁹ The editors bemoaned the failure to find adequate alternative sources of capital to invest in water projects, including the still-behind-schedule Misicuni Dam, a project the paper has promoted since the 1950s.

Peoples' Global Action¹²⁰ held its Third Global Conference in the city, hosted by the Cocaleros and the National Federation of Domestic Workers (*Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar*). This global visibility has continued, as reflected in the mounting of a major Spanish motion picture depicting the Water War—*También la Lluvia*—and the choice of Cochabamba to host the World Peoples' Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in April 2010.

The experience of the Water War generated a variety of collectives and spurred many of its participants to lasting participation in grassroots politics. The activists who maintained a bulletin board in the plaza became Red Tinku, a cultural-political collective that hosts regular activist events and still forms a nucleus for public political conversations around its panels in the Plaza. The anarcha-feminist collective Las Imillas gained much of its membership from Water War veterans. The Coordinadora continued to meet in spaces offered by the Fabriles and its structure was emulated in national efforts. It spun off the Fundación Abril (the April Foundation), dedicated to stopping and rolling back water privatization around the world.

Protagonists of the Water War held two separate gatherings to commemorate its tenth anniversary. On a Sunday afternoon—April 11, 2010, ten years to the day from the government's capitulation to grassroots demands—President Evo Morales presided over a lengthy ceremony at the Federation of Campesinos of Cochabamba. In his speech, Morales argued that the events of 1999 and 2000 were just the beginning of a “permanent uprising” to “do away with a pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist state” (*Cambio*, April 12, 2010). It is not only on anniversaries that MAS-IPSP luminaries celebrate the Water War; it has a prominent place in the party's narrative of recent history. Vice President Álvaro García Linera (2011:12–14) terms it the beginning of “the first phase

¹²⁰ Peoples' Global Action is a transnational network of grassroots opponents of globalization that is distinguished by uniting large European movements with even larger militant grassroots organization across the global South, as well as by its anti-bureaucratic and direct action approach to political praxis.

of the revolutionary epoch.” The Morales administration fashions itself as the torchbearer within the state of the grassroots movement for common resources and against privatization, by way of nationalizations, constitutional recognition, and public works projects.

Four days later, another commemoration took place on the streets of Cochabamba. It began at the Plaza 14 de Septiembre, the bit of territory most sharply contested in January, February, and April 2000. Thousands of Cochabambans and a couple hundred international visitors marched out from downtown to the sporting complex that belongs to the Cochabamba Factory Worker’s Federation. Most of them marched behind the banners of dozens of water committees and associations that provide water service to about one fifth of Cochabambans,¹²¹ organized on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. They were joined by the Bolivian Forum on Environment and Development (*Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo*; FOBOMADE), a Factory Workers’ delegation, and organizers for public water ownership and environmental causes from across the Americas. After several celebratory speeches, came the inauguration of the Third International Water Fair, an alternately practical and political convention on how to operate a local water system and how to organize communities and cities against privatization and environmental threats. For Water Fair organizers like Oscar Olivera, self-reliant community organizations are the only real alternative to privatization, and the democratic promise of the multitudes in Cochabamba’s streets a decade ago cannot be realized through political parties like the MAS–IPSP.

También la Lluvia, a feature film set during the Water War, premiered in Bolivian theatres in mid-March 2011,¹²² a late but glittering entry to the parade of tenth anniversary remembrances. In a

¹²¹ The coverage of water service by local organizations was estimated at 20% of the population, compared with 49% coverage by SEMAPA, in figures presented by Roberto Prada at the Foro Metropolitano de Agua y Saneamiento on March 22, 2011.

¹²² *También la Lluvia* depicts the filming of an adaptation of the story of Columbus’ landing, portrayed with Bolivian indigenous people (residents of the Zona Sur of Cochabamba and Yuracaré people to

cab from the theatre to my apartment in central Cochabamba, I chatted with my cab driver about the film and the Water War that had inspired it. In 1999, he had been a shop vendor on the plaza that had been thronged with protesters and clouded with tear gas. “It was a lovely beginning,” he said of the upheaval, “but now it is having the worst conclusion.” At the time he spoke, the Morales government was at the nadir of its popularity in the wake of the December 2010 *gasolinazo* and the brief but costly inflationary spiral that followed.

His was not the only melancholy memory of the Water War. Don Angel Hurtado, a community leader in the May 1 Neighborhood (Barrio Primero de Mayo) within the southern District 9, speaks of disillusionment and frustration when his community’s sacrifice is remembered: “These days we see with much disappointment that we have not achieved anything. We don’t have water. Neither the national government, nor the departmental government, much less the mayor’s office can solve our problem; no one.”¹²³ The public utility, on whose board Don Angel briefly served as a public representative, has been plagued by mismanagement, failure to invest in major expansion, and internal corruption.¹²⁴ Instead of the renewed public investment they hoped for, Don Angel’s neighborhood has had to manage an increasingly scarce resource, cutting back from continuous water provision in their local pipes to a few hours each week for residents to fill their household tanks. Still, this seasoned activist and one-time radical unionist in the mines sees the

the northeast) due to the relatively lower costs of production in the Andes compared to the Caribbean. The film’s sharp insights on the political economy of global media production did not prevent certain inequalities in the global media landscape from recurring in its release. The film only made it to Cochabamba six months after its United States release. Even more emblematically, a replica of Columbus’ ship, created for the film and given by the filmmakers to the city as a token of appreciation, was lost by city officials between the film’s production and debut. Media sources discovered its mast lying in a public park swallowed by vegetation, and metaphorically by official incompetence.

¹²³ Interview, March 28, 2011.

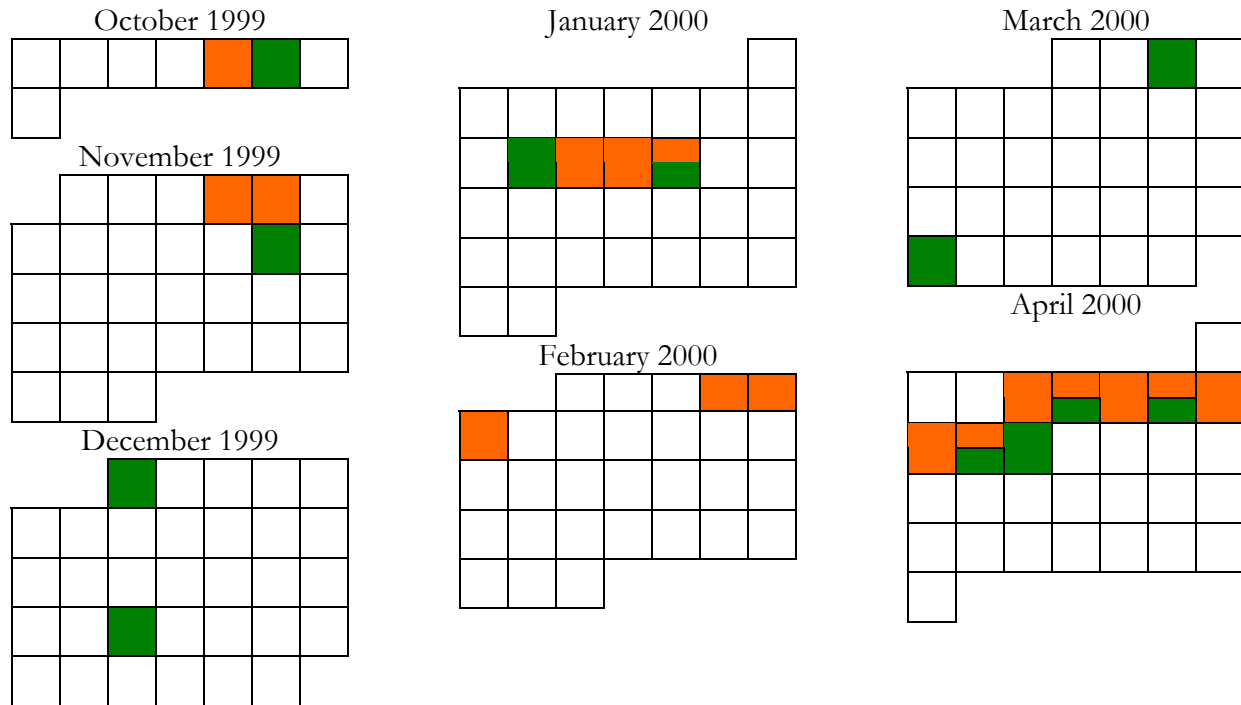
¹²⁴ All three were attested to by an array of community activists, Semapa managers and engineers, and academics at a public panel I attended on April 15, 2010, at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón.

Water War as the beginning of a transformative political struggle for “an indigenous government that we have put in power.” This new political order and the continuing tangible reality remain poles apart, he says: “The fighting has served to change the political system, but there are still no concrete solutions to the matter of water.”¹²⁵

The Water War is a paradigmatic example of the power of civic strikes to shut down regular urban life and thereby win grassroots demands. At the same time, its mass assemblies and popular referendum raised the possibility of an alternative, grassroots sovereignty over resources and government decisions. In the years that followed, the tactical challenge for participants in major upheavals was to replicate and extend the success of the Water War, but their political challenge was to transform conflicts like the one over water privatization into a fundamental rethinking of democracy in Bolivia. In this, the Water War offered a seed for the future, but not a blueprint for success. In chapter 3, I take up functioning of the central tools of the Water War, the tactic of blockading road and its extension to an urban scale through the civic strike. This chapter examines how blockades are organized and why their interruption of flows, commerce, and daily normality proves so persuasive to adversaries in government. In chapter 4, I will consider the process by which disruptive grassroots mobilization interacts with the spatiality of the city to constitute a collective subject capable and worthy of demanding new ways of being represented politically.

¹²⁵ Interview, March 28, 2011.

Figure 4: Chronology of events in the Water War



The major events of the conflict can largely be broken down into moments of *concerted public pressure*, exercised through blockades, and moments of *demonstrating the broad backing* behind the movement, through mass meetings, cabildos, assemblies, and an unofficial referendum. In the following brief chronology of the Water War, orange and green highlight these two moments: orange for exerting pressure and green for demonstrating a mandate.

October 28: Rural blockades led by the Regantes the along Cochabamba–Oruro highway

October 29: Multisectoral assembly calls for revoking Law 2029 and annulling the Aguas del Tunari contract.

November 4–5: Rural blockades led by the Regantes and periurban Water Committees along Cochabamba–Oruro, Sacaba, and Valle Alto highways.

November 12: Assembly of Representatives of Provincial and Cercado Organizations meets, de-recognizes the Civic Committee, and founds the Coordinadora for the Defense of Water and Life.

December 1: Protest of first rate hikes in Plaza 14 de Septiembre

December 22: Coordinadora protest, joined by transport and education workers and FEJUVE.

January 10: The Coordinadora organizes assembly in Plaza 14 de Septiembre

January 11–13: Grand Blockade for Civil Dignity, the first civic strike, is organized by the Coordinadora and, on January 11 alone, by the Civic Committee.

January 13: Cabildo in Plaza 14 de Septiembre The Cabildo ratifies the rejection of the Aguas del Tunari contract and Law 2029, and declares Manfred Reyes Villa, Edgar

Montaño (former president of the Civic Committee) and other officials “traitors to the region” for their role in the contract. Marchers stone the Civic Committee offices, along with stores that did not observe the strike, the Municipal Casa de Cultura, and other public offices. Negotiations involve the Coordinadora, but it does not sign without public backing.

February 4–6: The Coordinadora calls for a blockade-free gathering in the central square, under the banner “peaceful takeover of Cochabamba.” However, the government deploys police around the city center to frustrate the gathering. On the streets of downtown, riot police and protesters face off in an open battle for downtown. The government concedes that the rate hike will be annulled.

March 3: Coordinadora organizes protest march.

March 26: Coordinadora organizes consulta popular, an unofficial referendum on water issues that draws the participation of over 50,000 people.

April 4–10: Coordinadora organizes a third civic strike, the “Great Battle”

April 4: Blockades in rural and periurban areas.

April 5: Converging marches into a cabildo in Plaza 14 de Septiembre, which decides on the “peaceful takeover” of the Civic Committee

offices and Semapa headquarters. Limited property destruction at both sites.

April 6: Public occupation of the Plaza. Late evening negotiations are interrupted by police intervention evicting protesters from the plaza and arresting Coordinadora delegates for several hours.

April 7: Mass march in support of the Coordinadora. Coordinadora leaders are arrested. Cabildo decides on indefinite civil strike.

April 8: Banzer’s government announces a state of siege in the country at 10:30 am. Thousands mobilize in defiance of a curfew and ban of meetings. Government troops open fire as widespread downtown confrontations rage. Victor Hugo Daza, a 17-year-old not participating in the protests, is shot dead; his body is carried to Plaza 14 de Septiembre.

April 10: A new mass march reinforces protester control over the central Plaza. The government and Coordinadora sign an agreement agree to the reversion of Semapa to public control and the modifications to Law 2029 demanded by the Coordinadora.

April 11: Law 2066 modifies 36 articles of Law 2029, recognizing the role of neighborhood councils, water committees, cooperatives, and traditional rights (*usos y costumbres*) in water management.

Table 3: Results of the March 26, 2000, consulta

	Question	Result
1	Do you accept the rate increase?	99% No
2	Should the contract with Aguas del Tunari be annulled?	96% Yes
3	Do you agree with the private character of water in Law 2029?	97% No

Source: Assies 2001:15

Chapter 3
The Power of Interruption: From Blockades to Civic Strikes

April 2000 brought simultaneous victories to the Cochabamba Coordinadora and a national peasant strike led by the CSUTCB. Since neoliberal shock therapy was imposed in 1985, no victory had been as hard-fought or as unequivocal as these. “The people were excited,” recalled Water War participant Marcelo “Banderas” Rojas. “To take out a transnational company, to overturn capitalism, to break [the hold of] imperialism” was something unthinkable, and suddenly accomplished.¹²⁶ By taking on a privatization contract and particularly a corporation linked to the United States, the Cochabamba mobilization had challenged the centerpiece of fifteen years of national economic policy and the principal foreign backer of that policy, and won. The younger generation of activists, of which Rojas was a part, had never seen that accomplished.

“I personally had said: This, this is how we have to all fight together,” Christian Mamani remembered. “*This* is the way we must forge links, must defend our interests as a society.”¹²⁷ Mamani was not alone in these thoughts; in the wake of the April 2000 victories, many Bolivian activists talked about a new model for struggle. Water War spokesman Oscar Olivera, Raquel Gutiérrez, and Álvaro García Linares synthesized the experience of the Water War into a political thesis for future organizing. Their approach was deeply syndicalist: it defined popular outpourings like the Water War as a new form of general strike, and grounded them in new ways of unionizing society. “The future,” they proposed, “is communal self-government through assemblies and cabildos where everyone ... decides what to do, and where we all charge one another with carry out those decisions. *That is the government of the workers* [emphasis original]” (Olivera et al. 2008:103).

¹²⁶ Interview, February 4, 2011.

¹²⁷ Interview, April 4, 2010.

The Water War did become a model for collective action in a series of mobilizations in the years that followed. Like conventional union organizers, participants in these events follow a sequence of collective organization, striking, escalation, negotiation, and concessions. However, these strikes are carried out on the scale of a city, metropolis, region, or nation to address issues occurring at those scales. These *civic strikes* combine road blockades, marches, open confrontation with security forces, organizational endorsements of demands, hunger strikes, grassroots-organized referenda (*consultas*), open public meetings (*cabildos*), and numerous symbolic actions carried out upon property, persons, and space. Multiple movements have found ways to coordinate a series of space-claiming actions, sometimes escalating into a total shutdown of commercial and civic life through coordinated marches, road blockades, enforced closures of businesses, and a general strike. Despite this heterogeneity of actions, Bolivians speak of civic strikes as unified forces. They describe them either in terms of their most visible form of leverage, blockades, or in terms of their organization, as mobilized or general strikes. As they prepared to act, activists called them “blockades,” “peaceful takeovers,” “the great battle,” “strikes,” or simply mobilization. After the dust settled from the conflicts, they would be remembered as the Water War; the Gas War (or Black October¹²⁸); the fall of Carlos Mesa;¹²⁹ the Potosí strike; and the *gasolinazo*. Coordinating these actions and agreeing on a process for collective representation poses a series of challenges. Successful mobilization involves both generating effective pressure through these actions (the subject of this chapter) and creating a new collective subject worthy of representation and capable of negotiating (the subject of the next chapter).

¹²⁸ While the other names of events listed here affirm the power of the grassroots, the term Black October (*Octubre Negro*) describes the deadly repression applied to the 2003 protests. I will consider the role of collective sacrifice in defining protest events in future work.

¹²⁹ Not one of my informants called the 2005 events “the Second Gas War,” as many secondary sources do.

At their heart, civic strikes operate through simple actions: sitting down in public space, carrying debris onto a road, tossing stones at police in riot gear. In the rural context, protesters use physical obstructions—rocks, tree limbs, tires, piles of stones, or constructed barricades—to reinforce a road blockade or to keep a road closed even when no one else is around. During the April 2000 Water War in Cochabamba, and a series of El Alto mobilizations from 2000 to 2003, these techniques were brought to the cities and deployed in such a way that state control was impossible and power was put into question. How can seemingly modest, local acts acquire such potent political and economic significance? As I discuss in the section “Scaling Up,” the answer lies in the articulation of multiplying local protests into a larger body that wields great force and compels a state response. Such shifts of scale are studied within the contentious politics framework by Douglas McAdam, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow (2001:331–4; Tarrow 1998:193); and as “scale-jumping” by critical geographers like Neil Smith (2000), Sallie Marston (2000), and Lynn Staehel (1994). For contentious politics, the issue is primarily one of understanding the emulation and diffusion of actions during waves of contention. For critical geographers, the more important question is how relative power can shift in a contest between opposed social forces when a conflict moves to a different scale. They are particularly concerned with the ability of capital to move swiftly between different places, and the corresponding question of how labor organizes to maintain pressure across all of those spaces.

Civic strikes use these various means to put leverage behind their political claims. Their economic impact comes in several ways: the interruption of daily business by employee strikes; closure of a larger number of businesses through the lack of transport for employees, popular adherence to the strike, or direct action by militant marches; the interruption of supplies to cities; and the interaction of interdepartmental commerce and travel. In “Strategic Impacts of Blockades,”

I show how extended blockades impact the economy and the state, forcing negotiations and concessions. These economic consequences are sufficient to compel a government response, but the political meaning of widespread strikes is equally important. The cooperation of multiple social sectors in a joint mobilization can pose a major political challenge, which will be explored in the next chapter. Before moving on, this chapter returns to the vision of a new general strike raised by the Water War. If we acknowledge the collective power wielded by these mobilizations, does that mean the entire city is a union capable of projecting its own interests into politics? Despite the efficacy of civic strikes, I suggest there is reason to doubt this analogy.

Box 1: The Potosí Regional Strike

(A chronology of the Potosí conflict appears in Figure 5.)

In July and August 2010, Potosí residents carried out a strike wave that would close virtually all regular business in the department. Their common agenda, articulated by the Civic Committee of Potosí (Comcipo), was a six-point platform presented to the national government, demanding employment through industrialization and infrastructure investment as well as a favorable resolution in a border dispute with neighboring Oruro. In Potosí, letters to Ministers gave way to sectoral strikes, a two-day general strike, and a massive march that far exceeded organizers' expectations.¹³⁰ The strike coalesced into an overwhelming mobilization fueled by pervasive poverty, historical grievances, a sense of neglect from the Movement toward Socialism government they had supported in national elections, and by indignation over MAS-IPSP allegations that the strike was merely a politically motivated attack.

¹³⁰ Personally confirmed by Celestino Condori in interview, November 27, 2010.

Local government officials and representatives in the national parliament offered to begin a hunger strike—which according to Bolivian tradition is held in places opened to the public called “pickets.” A general assembly endorsed this tactic, which spread among Potosino migrants across the country, to pickets on blockaded streets, to an organization of sex workers, and to the region’s prisons. Negotiations were held in Sucre after unsuccessful calls for Evo Morales to personally fly to Potosí. An effort by Comcipo leaders to walk out of talks was turned back by pro-government peasant blockades in Chuquisaca. Following a nineteen-day economic standstill, the government accepted the five demands for “reactivation of the productive apparatus,” but not the one concerning the border issue, and the department’s negotiating team had a triumphal return to Potosí.

Box 2: 2011 Labor Protest Wave

In 2011, the more combative unions—principally the teachers, health workers, factory workers, and miners—within the Central Obrera Boliviana led a three-stage effort to win national wage increases. Coordinated national protests occurred on February 18, March 20–21, and April 6–18. Workers began with mobilized strikes, staying away from work and marching through the streets, in attempts to broaden the work stoppage from their base to other sectors. Both the February and April mobilizations saw widespread use of road blockades, and the final strike wave attempted to isolate major cities by road, including Cochabamba, Sucre, and Potosí.

The April round of mobilization saw widespread active participation within these sectors, forcing the national government to bargain seriously with workers. After twelve days of strike activity and 53 hours of negotiations, workers accepted an overall agreement on April 18. The agreement met numerous policy demands, but only nudged salary increases up from 10% to 11 or

12%, depending on the sector involved. (Due to the post-gasolinazo price increases, the appropriate level of inflation to measure these increases against was disputed: January to December 2010 inflation was 7.18%, while March 2010–March 2011 inflation was 11.1%.) These limits reflected both the government's successful countermobilization of peasants and other allies in Cochabamba, and the failure of the strike effort to catch fire in the broader population. Amid this series of strike waves, mass transit drivers also mobilized to increase fares, citing the rising cost of living and higher prices for fuel. This effort, vigorously opposed by labor unions and the regional Federations of Neighborhood Councils, included paralyzing transit strikes in February and March.

OVERVIEW AND HISTORY OF ROAD BLOCKADES

As an economic weapon in the hands of miners, urban workers, and peasants, road blockades¹³¹ can paralyze commerce in a way very similar to (and often take place in tandem with) a conventional general strike. They can cut off cities, including the capital, from vital supplies of food or fuel. By interrupting the movement of troops, they can alter the outcome of state repression. And by blockading key leaders or isolating legislative bodies, blockades have intervened in the details of the political process, and even decisively affected who sits in the presidential chair. Blockades are thus both an economic and a political weapon.

In rural areas, road blockades have a very simple recipe: an isolated, strategically significant roadway near an organized population willing to cut it off with their bodies or their obstruction-generating labor. Still, this formula seems to have not become routine until the rural agitation of

¹³¹ I am speaking of the tactic of blockades as a tool that leverages mass participation (on the blockaders side) effectively against armed capacity for repression, rather than blockades as form of siege warfare, which dates back at least to Túpaj Katari. Some armed highway blockades have already been mentioned in the context of the 1952 Revolution.

1946 to 1953 had defeated and broken up the system of hacienda landlords and peasant servitude.¹³²

Up to and during this time, rural protest had a locally available target, the landlord, and control of the roadways was only a means to the end of attacking the hacienda houses directly. With the defeat of the latter, the roads suddenly became the spaces in rural Bolivia of greatest value to elites and the state, and thereby the center of protest. James Malloy (1971:155–56) describes a sequence of post-Revolution rural blockades: an Achacachi peasant road blockade in August 1953, and Altiplano peasant blockades of La Paz in November 1961 and January 1962.

As we saw in chapter 2, Bolivian grassroots movements—the so-called national-popular bloc that united urban unions, miners, and peasants—truly began to speak with the language of blockades in the 1970s. Urban workers took up blockades as a tactic and rural unions began to coordinate their blockades into region-wide mobilizations. Workers and peasants experimented with coordinated blockades at a large scale in January 1974, an effort that foreshadowed several key elements of later, larger scale waves of obstructive protest. They demonstrated urban-rural solidarity and paralyzed Bolivia's sparse inter-city road network by concentrating protests on main roads, thereby causing shortages of food. Participation was massive, involving the factory workforce and rural communities in far greater numbers than needed to staff a blockade. Blockaders used their numbers to generate redundant blockades, forming a string of roadblocks on both the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz road, at twelve sites, and at ten sites on the Chapare road (APDH Bolivia 1975:18-21). Protesters transferred elements of everyday communal life to the roads, notably several large-scale masses held at Cliza and Epizana. The economic activity of participating communities was redirected to sustain the blockade through systematic donations of food to blockaders. While these

¹³² Caroline Conzelman found a report of unmanned blockades of piles of stones used to obstruct Spanish military movements in the Yungas of La Paz in the wake of the 1781 revolts, but was unable to find documentation of similar techniques during Inca rule or Spanish conquest.

anti-austerity protests were squelched in the city and repressed through outright massacre in the Cochabamba High Valley, the memory they left behind would become a template for future protests.

In the November 1979 mobilization against the coup by Gen. Germán Natusch Busch, the labor movement's urban blockades in La Paz played the lead role. Workers continued to hold the streets despite suffering over 200 deaths. Campesino blockades isolated La Paz from without, and rural union members advanced towards La Paz, although they had not entered en masse by the time the General surrendered power to a civilian government. With the events of November 1979, a template was set for joint urban and rural mobilization to paralyze economic life at the metropolitan scale. Bolivian movements deployed this successful formula most frequently from 1979 to 1985 and again since 1999. (For a chart of the frequency of rural and urban blockades, see Figure 1 on page 97.) In the first period, the COB and CSUTCB coordinated national general strikes calling for the return of democratic government (until 1982) and for economic demands. Nine general strikes shook the three-year administration of Hernán Siles from December 1983 to March 1985 (Conaghan and Malloy 1994:122–24). However, the labor movement was unable to weather the increased repression inflicted upon it after the neoliberal Supreme Decree 21060. A strike to resist the New Economic Policy began on September 4, 1985, but was eventually overcome by a national state of siege¹³³ and the mass detention of labor leaders, who were held until they called off nationwide blockades.

The second rise of the road blockade—since 1999—also owes much to the enlarged presence of a radicalized and substantially indigenous informal workforce closer to the cities, sympathetic to rural movements but physically closer to good targets for effective blockades. The

¹³³ A common term for emergency rule in Latin America.

most dramatic and successful uses of civic strikes have come when this sector made possible alliances between central city dwellers, rural peasants, and themselves. Where the first wave of massive blockades was centered on the urban and mining workers' unions of the COB, the post-1999 efforts are built around the rural and indigenous politics of the community, collective labor, and control over territory.

THE AYLLU IN ACTION

Writing about the campesino mobilizations of 1978-1980, René Zavaleta Mercado (1983b:24) speaks enthusiastically of how “Katarismo took up the weight of millennial forms of organizing: it was like the ayllu in action.” As noted above, longstanding indigenous means of struggle (roadblocks, encircling population centers, etc.) were scaled up from the local to the national context in this period, although the degree of tactical innovation should not be understated. However, the concept of “the ayllu in action” may be even more suggestive now that three decades of struggle have passed. Over that time, indigenous activists have deepened the interweaving among revitalized traditions of community self-governance, union organization, and contentious direct action.

Peasant organizers redirected traditions of rotating turns (*mitas*) and collective work to organize collective participation in blockades and hunger strikes. These systems divide up the labor needed to create the blockades, maintain a flow of supplies to activists within them, and regularly relieve participants in protests with fresh groups of people. “For every hundred people mobilized on one of the hundreds of blockades, there is a circle of another one or two thousand people who await their turn to replace them” (García Linera 2001). Physically, the blockades are deliberately obstructive works of collective labor: numerous rocks covering a stretch of highway, or trenches or entire hills built into the road. Alvaro García Linera describes, “along the length of the roads,

powerful human productive machines are put in motion, selling rocks and earth over every meter of asphalt ... this powerful force of agricultural production, which permits the rapid plowing or harvesting of the soil, now serves to carpet the highway with infinite obstacles” (García Linera 2001).

SMALL-SCALE ROAD BLOCKADES

The basic component of larger civic strikes is a blockade of an individual road, an element of protest that can be set up on its own and press claims from a single physical point.

June 17, 2008: Several dozen members of an Altiplano peasant community have come to La Paz. A man in a ragged jacket and trousers and a woman with a black coat and multicolored skirt stand on opposite curbs holding a sign that says no more than “Sindicato Agrario Ex Fundo / Achumani 2da sección Provincia Murillo / Tierra y Territorio.” The plain white sheet, which they evidently painted using stencils, is the sole protest prop used by the group. Clustered together, all facing down the steep street that leads past the Ministry, most wearing bowler hats (a standard element of *de pollera* dress for formally attired women of indigenous ancestry) or leather men’s caps, they present themselves as an unmoving block. This impression is reaffirmed by the fact that many women among them have gathered their skirts and sat down at the back of the group. Their backs face the normal direction of oncoming traffic, and do so safely because no motorist could even imagine continuing through this section of the roadway. Their faces and banner address the Prosecutor’s Office instead. As I arrived, a police officer casually walked past them downhill, on his way to somewhere else.

This peasant gathering in downtown La Paz was the first road blockade I encountered in Bolivia, and its unassuming simplicity and far-from-aggressive posture reflect how commonplace and accepted blockades can be in the country. In the United States, I had become accustomed to

police barking orders to clear the streets for automobile traffic and the willingness of inconvenienced motorists to threaten the lives of Critical Mass cyclists for blocking traffic. So, I was struck by the routine nature of this interaction, and the treatment of this event as legitimate protest rather than exceptional confrontation.

A week later, on June 23, another protest posed a far greater inconvenience to the city of La Paz but elicited a similarly low-key response on the ground. Residents of District 13 on the northeast side of the city, organized through forty-six neighborhood councils, advanced an eight-point platform of demands concerning crime, public works, and water provision (*La Prensa*, June 24, 2008). They plugged the main arteries through their neighborhood with stones and their collective presence. Simultaneously, they set up mini-blockades or checkpoints on the smaller streets that led through the area. Since the main road from La Paz to the Yungas passes through this district, normal minibus service to Coroico and points northeast was interrupted. Rather than run the blockades, the bus operators—who routinely circumvent fallen boulders and washed-out segments of cliffside roadways on the so-called Highway of Death—suspended service for the day. Taxis did still operate the route, but only approached one side or another of the main blockade to discharge their passengers. Large stones littered the road and protesters gathered in the middle. The protest area was a sort of no-man's-land for transport workers, across which no vehicles passed; but the blockade of vehicles was not a blockade of people. Dozens of men and women walked with their goods stacked on their heads, bundled in fabric on their backs, or dragged along in suitcases through the vehicle-free zone, and then waited to pile into the vehicles just emptied of passengers traveling in the opposite direction.

While my traveling companion and I were thinking about joining the crowds crossing through the stone-filled neutral zone, we were approached by a taxi driver who said he knew the way

through the blockades. We found ourselves on a winding series of neighborhood roads going up and down tens of meters as we snaked between houses perched on the city's hilly terrain. The road we were on, a mere capillary in the city's road system, also had a blockade from the neighborhood committee: two men waited on one side while a woman held a rope taut across the road. A couple of small orange construction cones gave a quasi-official seal to the physically underwhelming effort. This place was just as much a part of the overall blockade as the main thoroughfare, but an exchange of words between our driver and the three locals showed the blockade was intended to disrupt major traffic, not hermetically seal off passage. A driver who was local to the neighborhood, like ours, could get through so long as the inconvenience was still felt and the existence of a pathway was not made too obvious or overt.

I encountered another isolated blockade in late March 2010 on a highway between Potosí and Sucre. This time, workers at a waste disposal yard on the road aired their grievances by blocking the region's main thoroughfare. Those stopped were a cross section of Bolivian inter-departmental travelers: passengers on large buses, in small minivans, and standees on the flatbeds of trucks; and truck drivers carrying goods large and small beneath plastic tarps on their trucks. Unable to pass the workers' human and physical barrier, our bus driver simply pulled to a stop and silenced the motor, first explaining that there was a blockade ahead and allowing time for the situation to shift. About ten minutes into this indefinite pause, our driver suggested that walking past the blockade was an option, if you wanted, because surely there were buses on the other side. After another fifteen minutes of gathering belongings, negotiating our suitcases out of the cargo compartment, and walking up past the dozens of parked vehicles, the situation did shift. A detachment of national police in olive green uniforms, holding clear plastic shields, had intervened to insist the blockaders open the road. Hundreds filed back to their original buses and went on their way. There is nothing

to suggest any of the blockaders were detained. Nor was it clear whether any of their demands had been met.

THE SCALABLE WORKINGS OF ROAD BLOCKADES

These commonplace blockades are not the stuff of epochal political conflict. As in a demonstration, those affected by an issue act publicly to make it visible and, as in a demonstration, participation is limited, and the effects are not immediately visible. The bystanders in these events did not have their lives seriously interrupted, and the police force may have debated at leisure whether or not, and how, to intervene. Yet the ways these actions were organized, the familiarity of the interrupted roadway in Bolivians' minds, and the widely distributed knowledge of how to arrange a roadblock underlie history-making events of the last decade like the Water War, the Gas Wars, and the Potosí regional strike.

The simplest mechanism for strengthening a blockade is a rotation system for who is physically at the blockade site. Such systems are the purview of formal organizations and rural communities, where *mita*, collective work, or union-established attendance requirements are simply transferred from other activities to protest. How does a demonstration or peaceful day blockading end? While in many countries, the answer is a rallying cry from the stage and gradual dispersal into knots of friends seeking each other out, a different pattern often prevails in Bolivia. A crowd that stood shoulder to shoulder in a plaza or marched in orderly columns through the streets will organize into small clusters. Peasant union federations visiting Cochabamba use hand-lettered signs that designate these clusters as delegations from the local and subcentral unions of the Chapare or the High Valley. But most days, these clusters have no signage and recognize one another by sight: they are teachers from the same primary school, workers in the same division or worksite, neighbors from the same committee. Their organization may have brought a diamond-shaped sign or banner

to represent itself, but now the time for representation has passed and everyone knows where to go. And everyone knows this will be the moment when his or her attendance will be registered.

The mechanics of attendance are the workings of a syndical culture of obligatory participation. There are several mechanisms: a responsible official or volunteer may have an attendance list, she may distribute pre-printed stickers for participants to bring to their next organizational meeting, or may hold a notepad for each attendee to write in their name. In the stationery shops of old town La Paz, such pads are sold and printed alongside retail invoices and school attendance charts. Attendance may be universal or by a rotation system. Participation in collective actions is understood as one of the obligations of union membership, and this knowledge guides the decisions of assemblies and steering committees alike. Unions maintain the authority to impose fines for non-participation, which is seen as a breach of solidarity. In neighborhood water committees and associations, the purchase of collective goods and payment of dues are likewise regular obligations of all members.

One way grassroots organizations can create a citywide blockade is to assemble a mesh of quiet, solitary blockades. The rural community members, La Paz neighborhood associations, and junkyard workers described above all have small formal organizations that can decide to apply this simple method of pressure, and coordinate their actions with those of others. Most groups like these are part of federations organized on a sector-by-sector basis: neighborhood federations, departmental and national campesino organizations, and labor unions.

The flow of power of power and initiative within these federated organizations is complex. Local leaders stand in an intermediate position, compelled by their base to advance their demands and concerns in the larger organization and expected by the overall leadership to inform and adequately mobilized their base. The leverage that can be wielded by the sector—and represented by

its leadership—overall depends on the actions of thousands of individual members, whose actions can be coordinated by union officials but not fully controlled. Each strike action is a test of the “power to convene” that varies with the demand, the leadership, and the momentum of the mobilization in progress.

In practice, this makes the multiple-waves-of-mobilization pattern that occurred in the Water War fairly common. Over months of labor mobilization from October 2010 to April 2011, there were many calls to citywide action put forward in Cochabamba, some endorsed by only the more militant unions and others emitted by the Departmental Workers’ Central as well. All of them were meticulously regulated efforts, with the same mechanisms used as in organizing marches. However, attendance and enthusiasm varied. In an October march, participants largely ignored the union leaders making speeches in the plaza, checked in with those taking attendance, and headed home. After two rounds of national labor protests in February and March, however, disruptive efforts by the more militant unions created a sense of forward momentum and mobilization. During the April 2011 strike wave, the unions moved to channel that momentum into a “blockade of a thousand corners” in departmental capitals. In Cochabamba, teachers, public health workers, municipal construction workers, and factory workers followed up days of marching through the city center by agreeing to escalate to blockades on April 14.

Meetings at the Federation of Urban Teachers of Cochabamba, for example, involved hundreds of teachers congregating in the first-floor auditorium of the Federation’s building on Junín Street, a short walk northwest of the central plaza. Featuring a large stage before row upon row of wooden benches, the room typically serves as a briefing room for the details of the latest cause for mobilization. The union’s negotiating team, experts, and Secretary of Conflicts make presentations using a projection screen. The pre-mobilization talks are practical, lengthy, and filled with technical

details on government proposals and movement demands. Details and demands predominate over exhortations and tactics because while the demands and offers change, union members know and accept the strategy of steady escalation up the ladder of means of pressure.¹³⁴ As primary school teacher Lubia Vargas Padilla explained while staffing a barricade, “The only way that we are heard is this, because when have no other way to speak. ... We go along dialoguing and dialoguing and we are not heard. So, if we don’t use a coercive method, we achieve nothing.”¹³⁵

After the briefing, teachers gather in the street by school and shift, the first time they sign in as present. On April 14, this was the point at which the teachers first learned exactly where and for how long they would be blocking a road as part of the multi-sectoral plan to paralyze Cochabamba, even as other blockades were already well underway. Teachers at each school took on a particular intersection or stretch of roadway, and sealed off traffic—using their bodies, chairs, tree limbs, and little else—for their duration of their regular shift. Attendance according to shift was mandatory. The blockades closest to my house, every block or so on Urquidi Avenue, were actually rather tranquil, little more than lines of teachers, sticks, chairs, and debris crossing the street every so often. Their ubiquity dissuaded most traffic, save an occasional motorcyclist who found a gap where no one was paying attention for a moment. Sitting on the curb or folding chairs, participants swapped stories of the more dangerous confrontations in La Paz.¹³⁶ More serious assemblages of workers standing shoulder to shoulder blocked thoroughfares and bridges in and out of downtown, and by early afternoon these sites were the scenes of debates and insults as motorists edged their vehicles

¹³⁴ Conversely, in the absence of grassroots enthusiasm, leaders know to resist escalation or call an “intermediate truce” until a later date.

¹³⁵ Interview, 14 April 2011.

¹³⁶ The Cochabamba delegation to these national protests included a man who suffered a traumatic eye injury.

towards the lines, expecting (correctly, for that day) that the blockades would not continue into an afternoon shift.

The force of popular pressure grows when more people join in, when they erect blockades across more city blocks or rural towns, when multiple sectors collaborate, and when economic interruption extends wider, or for a longer duration of time. It is not so simple, however for unionized workers or some other sectoral organization to carry out a long-term blockade in a major city. That requires more people than are affiliated with a single organization, and the capacity to mobilize day after day comes in part through giving some members a break. During my fieldwork, the transport workers were the sector to mount a paralyzing mobilization alone. They, however, use several other techniques to swell their numbers and impact, as we will see below. Even the April 2011 multi-sector blockades did not completely stop movement, acting instead as an early-morning-to-early-afternoon interruption rather than a comprehensive shutdown. Excepting organizations whose workplace is other people's circulation network, scaling up is usually a matter of bringing more people in, through multisectoral alliances and (at the best of times) a wave of mass participation that goes beyond that.

The Water War's evolution illustrates various mechanisms that make scaling up possible. Its central organization, the Coordinadora was an organizational hybrid, shaped by the needs of this scaling up. One face was a coalition that united established sector-by-sector organizations into an alliance for joint mobilization. On the other side, unaffiliated activists could join in the continuous and open processes of the Coordinadora participate in its assemblies and mass gatherings, and work to generalize participation across the city. Raquel Gutiérrez describes its workings this way:

In organizational terms, the internal life of the Coordinadora oscillates among the occasional meeting of tens of thousands to take important decisions, the assemblies that are frequently

called (but not at regular intervals), and the more or less permanent meeting of some representatives to take charge of maintaining all the presence of this expression of popular capacity and unity which has already been achieved. (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008a:64)

At its formation, a steering committee of the most influential sectors was chosen: Oscar Olivera, executive of the Fabriles, as President; Omar Fernández, the leader of FEDECOR, as Vice President; and Gabriel Herbas, as General Secretary (Assies 2001:12). These titles quickly became somewhat honorary, and Olivera came to represent himself more as a spokesperson than a leader. The Coordinadora initially comprised some twenty associations, but grew to include around forty-five by December 18, including unions of peasants and of urban workers, the Chapare coca growers, provincial civic committees, water committees, and irrigation associations (Orellana Aillón 2004:515).

The hybrid functioning of the Coordinadora came about because this organization's leadership was both willing to be directed by more open processes of decisions—like assemblies and cabildos—and because mass participation far exceeded the directing grasp of the Coordinadora itself and its adherent organizations. In scenarios like the February “Takeover of Cochabamba” or the April “Grand Battle,” thousands who had never attended, nor been represented in its meetings, took part in its efforts. At the same time, Fernández, Herbas, and especially Olivera could take on personalistic and transactional roles for the Coordinadora that paralleled clientelistic politics. For example, Don Angel Hurtado of the Barrio Primero de Mayo recalls his local water committee's first interactions with the Coordinadora:

The necessity arrived for us [the Water Committee] to speak with them [the Coordinadora] through our president. And Oscar was in need of support from other organizations to mobilize the people. Since we ourselves neither got water then, nor get water now from Semapa, we had no need to participate in the Water War. For we are totally independent. But we found ourselves

obligated to participate because of the [Aguas del Tunari] concession. This was the moment in which our president spoke with Oscar, and said we need economic support [for our water system] and Oscar said, “We will be those who provide support, and when we win we are going to give you something,” and that was the relationship.¹³⁷ In this way, we got involved in the Water War.¹³⁸

Sometimes grassroots groups get involved in a citywide blockade despite not originally being organized around political action. The Juntas Vecinales in El Alto, the Comités de Agua and irrigators’ organizations in Cochabamba are all examples of once relatively apolitical organizations that became organizing hubs for citywide blockades. Raúl Zibeche (2006), Luis Gómez (2004), Sían Lazar (2008), and Pablo Mamani Ramírez (2005) have all documented the role of El Alto’s neighborhood committees in revolts from 2000 to 2005, which meant mobilizing practical organizations for new political ends. The process of occupying new land on the urban periphery, or defending lands acquired through the grey market in property titles, often prompted tight neighborhood organizations. Sometimes these neighborhood groups engaged in political advocacy but more often they served as the vehicle for organizing, building, and managing local infrastructure: streets, water systems, sewage, and (in El Alto, at least) schools and public space. Zibeche and Lazar both argue that the twenty-first century mobilizations were “successful because people drew on their more day-to-day experiences of collective organisation in Juntas Vecinales and sindicatos” (Lazar 2006:194).

In both Cochabamba and El Alto, syndicalist models of organization and working-class political affinity shaped the politics of these neighborhood organizations even before they got involved in street mobilization. Christian Mamani, president of the OTB Santa Vera Cruz, grew up

¹³⁷ This transaction places the Coordinadora’s *we* inside a hypothetically reclaimed public water utility.

¹³⁸ Interview, March 28, 2011.

in a rural area that was brought into periurban Cochabamba's District 8 by the settlement wave in the 1980s and 1990s. Rural peasant union traditions shaped his community's self-organization, while the Popular Participation Law of the 1990s required its formalization into a Grassroots Territorial Organization (*Organización Territorial de Base*; OTB) in order to manage government funds. His OTB and a neighboring one organized their water system jointly through the organization Agua Cruz with a membership made up of everyone who has a faucet and a meter, each of whom have "the right to speak and to vote, and the right to take on leadership positions."¹³⁹ Water Committee officers were responsible for attending Zona Sur-wide meetings, and for informing and mobilizing the community:

That was their labor, their responsibility. They had to be informed, and in turn they had to inform the rest of the population. ... Each president of an OTB had to go and convene his or her base, had to go and convene the rest of the citizenry to mobilize and add to the mobilization.¹⁴⁰

In the May 1 Neighborhood, the local Neighborhood Council oversaw the water infrastructure. However, corruption by local leaders twice led to a restructuring of the system of local management, first into an association and finally into a cooperative. These restructurings were decided by general assemblies of neighborhood residents. Don Angel, a "relocalized" miner who moved to the community in 1985 recounts that the cooperative's establishment on November 7, 1999, came amidst the metropolitan conflict: "We were born directly into the Water War. So, as babies we began to fight."

Some water committees of the urban outskirts joined in the November 4–5 blockades led by the Regantes; their blockades served as a continuation of the efforts outside the city (Orellana Aillón

¹³⁹ Interview, April 4, 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, April 4, 2010.

2004:505–07). Much larger participation by the committees and neighborhoods, however, was the result of explicit organization by the Coordinadora. At a Zona Sur cabildo abierto, “Oscar and the other leaders of the Coordinadora came to explain,” Don Angel recounts. Among the issues at hand, the effect on Semapa, rising water rates, and Law 2029, the most persuasive was the concession’s effect on local water systems:

The thing was that they [Semapa and Aguas del Tunari] hadn’t invested a single cent to have [our water distribution] system, right? And this made us react. It had been sold to them under the Law. So, how could they take possession if they hadn’t put forward a single boliviano [the national currency]. Consequently, there in the *ampliado*, we said, “Now, are we going to allow Aguas del Tunari to take ownership of our system? And all the neighbors said, “No!” “And therefore, what shall we do?” “To the march! To fight it out!”

During and between the rounds of mass action, participants strategized about how to increase their impact, generalizing the lesson of the previous mobilization. The November 4–5 actions were rural blockades carried out by FEDECOR, which had a long history of blocking roads in its previous conflicts over control of rural well sites. The new rural-urban alliance in the Coordinadora sought to combine these rural blockades with targeted urban blockades during the three-day civic strike in January. Six bridges over the River Rocha were named as blockading sites and assigned to different unions for those days. From January onwards, rural blockades were comprehensive and rural tactics of placing tires, tree branches, and other objects on the roadway were used in the cities (*Los Tiempos*, January 16, 2000).

Reflecting on the January deployment, the Coordinadora found that the blockade points claimed by the unions had been weak; other accounts were more scathing, with Raquel Gutiérrez, Alvaro García Linera, and Luis Tapia declaring the support from the rank-and-file promised by urban union leaders “fictitious.” “No one, absolutely no one in the traditional union structure,” they

write, “had the organized strength to take up the work assigned to them by the popular mobilization” (2000:148).¹⁴¹ However, as the Coordinadora noted, the popular outpouring in the Zona Sur had been “overwhelming,” if scattered (Olivera et al. 2008:161). The Water Committees barricaded off their communities and interrupted the major arteries of the city from near where they lived. The Coordinadora moved to register these Juntas Vecinales and Water Committees as a formal part of the organization (Olivera et al. 2008:161) and soon announced the creation of [new] committees in 14 neighborhoods to organize for the February mobilization; the committees were designed to bypass the “double-talking” Juntas Vecinales integrated into the clientelistic networks of political parties aligned with the mayor (*Los Tiempos*, January 23, 2000b). As the April strike approached, the Coordinadora envisioned the generalization of blockades, “with the blockading of streets, avenues, and bridges, in each neighborhood and in each house” (Communiqué No. 20, reproduced in Olivera et al. 2008:178–79). The needs of street mobilization became the driving basis for organization, under the charge of “blockade committees,” which were to take on multiple responsibilities.

Over the course of the water conflict, a widening base for action developed. The grassroots mobilization began as a sector-by-sector effort, dividing the work of blockading by organization. In the process of mobilization, however, new organizations joined in and those already on the streets developed novel working relationships. By the time of the April “grand battle,” the multisector coalition had blended into a functional self-organized multitude capable of contesting the streets of downtown and keeping the major thoroughfares blocked. Its internal structures had shifted from pre-constituted groups to diverse working relationships. Simultaneously, the mobilization had broadened, with the addition of newly politicized organizations (especially the water committees),

¹⁴¹ Assises (2001) concurs.

the tacit endorsement of numerous civic organizations outraged by the tarifazo, and the unmediated assent of tens of thousands through the cabildos in the consulta popular. Finally, the activity of the street confrontations themselves gave a territorial character to the alliance: Zona Sur blockaders, young “water warriors” from across the metropolis, and the central zone supporters who gave them food, aid, and comfort began to perceive themselves and one another as representing their communities. And in their collaboration, numbers, and acts of unity, they took on the mantle of representing a regional subject, a *Cochabambinidad* in which the region spoke as one.

STRATEGIC IMPACTS OF BLOCKADES

Space-claiming protests make an impact by seizing spaces where goods and people flow and changing them into spaces of protest and blockage. Why does interrupting these flows matter? Why does it provide leverage for negotiating concessions from the government? The movements themselves have a clear response to these questions. Through unions and other groups that share their style of organizing, systematically planning and preparing for collective action has become a kitchen-table conversation topic in Bolivia. The Cochabamba Fabriles’ worker education effort—the Escuela del Pueblo “Primero de Mayo” (May 1st People’s School)—imparted such concepts on a regular basis. The thirty-two pages of their tiny handbook *Métodos de Lucha* (Methods of Struggle; Escuela Primero de Mayo 2002) form a palm-sized compendium of the Bolivian repertoire of contention. The various measures described form a toolbox of measures of pressure, each of which amplify the first and most basic, the strike. At its simplest level, the manual’s point is that “strikes, work-stoppages, meetings, marches, blockades, voluntary fasts and other forms of pressure put the government in check and allow the working sector to secure economic and political victories that would not be reached with mere dialogue” (7). Yet it is also filled with cautionary phrases about the mis-application of pressure. Mostly though, the booklet is stocked with historical examples showing

that when pressure succeeds, “Bolivian history is written on the basis of these measures, some of them heroic” (7).

In *Métodos de Lucha*, blockades—of the urban scale—are described as “more radical and effective, as well as better suited to the current social circumstances in the country” than workplace-based strikes. The force of blockades, the manual advises its rank-and-file readers, comes “through [their] implications for the overall unfolding of economic and productive activities” (23). The blockade is a tool for winning concessions from the state: “when the productive routes are left disconnected, the government will find itself obliged to attend to the demands of the blockaders” (23).

The leverage of these methods of struggle comes when they affect the economy and public life as seen from the perspective of the state, through economic quantities and measures of social stability. Basic measures of economic activity (like GDP, exports, or industrial production) have a component that is invisible when they are functioning normally: duration in time. A workplace strike or a blockade that disconnects workers from their jobs reveals economic output is the product of workers’ time and productivity. Missed work means less economic activity, a quantifiable loss from the perspective of economists. Paul Virilio argues,

Interruption is a change of speed. The strike, for example — I mean the general strike — was a formidable invention, much more so than the barricades of the peasant revolt, because it spread to a whole duration. It was a less of interruption of space (as with the barricade) than of duration.

The strike was a barricade in time. (Virilio and Lotringer 1983:35)

In a three-year study, José Luis Evia, Roberto Laserna, and Stergios Skaperdas attempted to estimate the economic impact from all Bolivian protests over a thirty-five-year period from 1970 to 2005. At the heart of their methodology is calculating lost days of work, which they applied across sectors with different levels of productivity to produce an estimated annual average of “slightly more than

\$60 million” (2004 dollars) in “direct losses” from lost production by the protesters themselves (Evia et al. 2008:36–37). This amount, however, was only a fraction of the total losses since many protests affect the working time of people not directly involved in them. To deal with this, the researchers introduced a “multiplier effect” for each type of protest, accounting for additional days lost by others affected. By far the strongest protests are urban blockades (estimated at 12.5) and rural blockades (estimated at 10). The paralysis of a city through a civic strike was estimated to not only include the entire population among the number affected, but to have a multiplier effect of 2 as neighboring regions are affected (49). Accounting for these indirect effects, Bolivian protest imposed around \$200 million in annual economic costs, about 3% of GDP, the study finds; this impact rose to nearly 10% of GDP at times of peak protest, such as 1982–85 and 2000–2005 (37).¹⁴² The civic strike is a barrier in time, but also the simultaneous organization of a barrier in space; when not dispersed by violence, its force is greatly multiplied.¹⁴³

Second, blockades interrupt commercial trade. Goods sit in trucks on motionless highways, or pile up or rot for lack of transport. Beyond the monetary losses this disconnection entails, it is also a reversal of a main government achievement: connection and annihilation of distance within the national territory. One of the central achievements of states worldwide has been their fostering of transport networks and the rendering of the national territory accessible and unified. In a country like Bolivia, where this achievement is recent and fragile, it is frequently invoked and proudly boasted of. Commerce and regular travel is an indicator of state sovereignty, successful

¹⁴² The study does not extend past 2005, so it is not possible to see whether this economic impact peaked during the 2000–2005 relative to the years of the Evo Morales presidency.

¹⁴³ Despite his favorable contrast to peasant blockades, Virilio is preoccupied by the limits of “barricades in time”: “The strike was the beginning of an answer to this: ‘We can’t set up barricades, we’ll interrupt elsewhere than in space. Space is all yours; we’ll defend ourselves in time, by shutdowns, interruptions, wildcat strikes, refusal to pay taxes.’ But it’s not enough. Right now the situation of popular resistance is very grim” (Virilio and Lotringer 1983:110).

modernization, and national unity. Blockades show these achievements to be tenuous and subject to local consent rather than a projection of the central government's power.

Regular functioning of the economy and undisrupted commerce and infrastructure also affect the perception of the government's standing in a globalized world. The *Métodos de Lucha* handbook observes:

The worker, contrary to what the government proclaims, never loses with the strike or blockade: it is rather the government that ends up discredited before the instructing angels from the North [who must assent] for it to receive the qualifications, co-signatures, and credit to keep open for business [*lit.*, for usufruct] the economic emporium into which the Bolivian state has converted itself. (Escuela Primero de Mayo 2002:5)

This passage, along with its anticolonialist swipe at foreign “instructing angels” and Bolivian economic dependency, addresses the real significance that international perceptions of conflict hold for Bolivian state decision makers. The ability to avoid or control protest disruptions, and to ensure contracts like the Aguas del Tunari concession, is operationalized as “maintaining a favorable investment climate” and “ensuring the rule of law,” or in murkier conceptions like government capacity and economic stability.

Consider as an example the speech in which Carlos Mesa offered to resign as President on March 6, 2003 (a gambit that won him enough popular backing for three more months of rule). In an extensive address, he directed his remarks to Abel Mamani of FEJUVE El Alto, then organizing blockades to eject Aguas de Illimani from his city in a reprise of the Cochabamba Water War. In Mesa's speech, “the carnival of crazy men” was crowned by Mamani's threat to blockade the La Paz-El Alto airport:

And, what is it that you are proposing Sir Abel Mamani? Let's take over the El Alto International Airport. Three days ago, a group of lawless people sought to break one of the wire fences that

control the El Alto International Airport, and go onto the tarmac and interrupt the flights. You, whom I suppose, Sir Abel Mamani, would want a modern El Alto, whom I suppose would want a city of El Alto which grows and produces, but at the same time who wants to take over the International Airport.

You know what would happen when a group of lawless persons takes over an International Airport? The international rating of that airport falls, and we will not see again a flight from American Airlines, or Varig, or LAN Chile, or any international line whatsoever, covering the city of El Alto and the city of La Paz.

And so, what we have built over years, and years, and years, we throw into the garbage in a second, and what does it matter to you? Of course not, for later the government will come and say that President will mend everything. (Mesa Gisbert 2005)

This quote offers a window into what keeps a Bolivian president awake at night. It illustrates at once the power of international technocratic standards to set state priorities, and the truly compelling leverage available from interrupting those elements of the economy that are most prioritized by foreign investors.¹⁴⁴

In the midst of confrontations like the Water War, state forces—the police and military, principally—withdraw from contested blocks or regions in an effort to concentrate their forces. With the roads made impassable to soldiers and trucks, wrote Álvaro García Linera, the state appears “as an inept intruder to whom geography and time become alien and uncontrollable forces.” When the state turns to repression, it arouses still greater adversity. The logic of the roadblock pushes the community toward the deepening construction of political autonomy (García Linera 2001). Daily life routines are interrupted, and participants’ time and location are subjected to their own initiative and collective decisions made in movement fora like unions and cabildos.

¹⁴⁴ The objective consequences of shutting down or intruding upon international airports, as occurred in the 2005 crisis and the 2010 Potosí strike, have been less severe than Mesa feared.

So, the leverage that blockades bring to bear is exerted upon economic activity, connectivity, and the capacity for state control. These are priority areas for the state on its own rhetoric, and in major theoretical interpretations of the modern state. Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality envisions the state as taking a new responsibility for the management of the economy, including overseeing its growth, and for regulating and facilitating both the provision of basic needs and the mechanisms of "the circulation of goods" (Foucault 2007:105–8, 325). Both the "material network that allows the circulation of goods and possibly men" and "the facilities and encouragements that will allow the circulation of men and things" come under this new state's purview (325). Paul Virilio (2006) identifies a military-centered logistical state, where weapons, militaries, work, commerce, and transport are all facets of a single process. The state organizes labor and circulation into a war economy, perpetually subordinating civilian life to military needs. James Scott centers his understanding of the state on a worldwide "massive enclosure movement" concerned with "transforming [territory] into a fully governed, fiscally fertile zone." This process is "made possible only by distance-demolishing technologies (all-weather roads, bridges, railroads, airplanes, modern weapons, telegraphy, telephone, and now modern information technologies including global positioning systems)" (Scott 2009:10–11). Whether we understand the state as a manager of the economy, a logistical manager of civilian life or an instrument of territorial rule, a mass blockade undoes—at least temporarily—the primary work of the state.

The effectiveness of both rural and metropolitan blockades is enhanced by the topography and relatively limited infrastructural development of Bolivia. Both mountainous terrain in the highlands and the combination of soft soils and heavy rainfall in the lowlands have made infrastructure construction difficult and costly. Bolivia has an exceptionally sparse network of railroads, and "the lowest road density ... of any South American country" (Gallup et al. 2003:85).

These limitations render the country's centers of power in constant need of agricultural supplies, and consequently vulnerable to being cut off. Bolivia's limitations in roads, rail, and flight all serve to amplify the impact of what might otherwise be local blockades.

Given this, the ability of a La Paz's District 9 to cut off the city by land from the Yungas (and thereby much of northern lowlands in La Paz, and Beni and Pando Departments) is far from exceptional. Inter-departmental highways in Bolivia are few and, until the completion of the La Paz–Oruro *doble vía* in 2014, are all just two lanes wide. Upon their entrance into the cities, they integrate into the regular street grid. Cochabamba's westward highway connecting to La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí becomes the wide Avenue Blanco Galindo as one arrives in Quillacollo. Since the road network lacks redundancy, there is no alternate route for large truck and bus traffic when a key connection is shut down. Dedicated blockaders in Quillacollo or Colcapirhua, and much smaller efforts in the towns like Vinto and Sipe Sipe can isolate the metropolis from the western third of the country. Similarly, only the Avenida Petrolera makes possible travel to the Valle Alto and on to Sucre (or on the old, lengthy road to Santa Cruz); and the highway through Sacaba is the sole gateway to the Chapare and fast access to Santa Cruz. Likewise, El Alto is strategically positioned to cut off La Paz from the Altiplano, Cochabamba, and Peru. (Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8 illustrate the limited number of blockade points required to isolate El Alto-La Paz, Sucre, and Cochabamba, and the fact that this isolation is a fact of political life in Bolivia.) As a result, local conflicts on these routes are expensive and frequently have regional repercussions.

AMPLIFIERS OF ECONOMIC IMPACT: MOBILIZED STRIKES AND LOOTING

Like blockaders, participants in a strike march attempt to multiply their impact by reducing the ability of others to work. It is more difficult to quantify the impact of a march of strikers than that of a blockade, but the fact that Bolivian strikers don't merely avoid work but instead march

through city centers amplifies their impact. A mobilized strike (*paro movilizado*, literally a “mobilized stoppage”)—as workers term these traveling protests—may combine marches with public sabotage, looting of goods, and symbolic or effective destruction of the property of political opponents. During my fieldwork, the latter acts were relatively unusual, but surely amplified the indirect impact of any march.

A single day of a mobilized striking, the fourth day of the Cochabamba transit drivers’ strike to increase their fares (February 22, 2011) shows how the use and threat of these tactics amplifies the interrupting power of a strike. Government officials have declared it a “day of tolerance” for tardiness and absenteeism in official workplaces and schools. Throughout downtown, the absence of large vehicles and the march of hundreds of drivers along the main thoroughfares means that traffic is very sparse. At around 10 a.m., I am walking alongside the march up Ayacucho. Up ahead, union officials present a well-crafted image to the press covering the march. They lead collective chants and talk the economics of fares and fuel with interviewers from radio and television stations. Alongside the march, however, dozens of younger drivers run excitedly onto the streets that intersect the route. Their interest is drawn to the small numbers of automobiles that brave the central city, almost all of them taxis offering individuals rides around town. These young men are working to enforce the mass transit strike upon private drivers whom they see as breaking it. The first words they exchange with the drivers are generally “Hay paro,” — there is a strike. The drivers’ first reaction is generally to shift gears into reverse. On the one-way, one-lane streets of downtown Cochabamba, however, some don’t have time to back up. The young transit drivers on foot flash various metal tools and puncture these unlucky taxi drivers’ tires, just one at times, and sometimes all four. They leave behind frustrated conversations between drivers and their suddenly stranded riders.

Two hours later, the same march is traveling south along the eastern edge of the *cancha*, Cochabamba's working-class central market. Sellers of tires, bicycles, and produce line the west side of the street in metal and wooden stalls. The site contains deeper stores on the ground floor of three- to five-story buildings: paint stores that will mix your desired color, providers of building material, sellers of large panes of glass. These are vendors who use the crumbling sidewalks as an extension of their showrooms. Now that the marchers have arrived, however, they are packing up their complex displays and dragging them inside, even as they pull down the metal gates that seal their businesses shut at night.

It's not that any looting is actively taking place. The most active young men in the crowd are still concentrating on pursuing renegade drivers on the roads that cross the march route. Nor has there been a public call for general strike or shop closure from the drivers' union. But talk, and fear, of looting circulates in the crowd and among the shopkeepers. Marchers yell towards the sidewalks, "Close your doors!" An older protesting driver, dressed in a blue button-down shirt and trousers yells to enliven the crowd, "Hay que saquear"—we ought to loot. He attracts enthusiasm but not action.

The transaction of looting is present in the scene in a way that entangles threat with action, enthusiasm with illegality, and fear with solidarity. The social understanding behind this mix is as follows: the drivers have created an incidental general strike by keeping people away from work. Clearly, the shopkeepers are not among those kept away from their jobs, but they ought to have been from a certain point of view. In the case of a real general strike that coalesced into a mobilized strike event like this march, members of the crowd would be "reminding" everyone of the need to close their businesses in solidarity. Shopkeepers in Bolivia understand that a militant crowd may enforce such a demand with damage or looting to businesses that "break the strike." In the case of

our encounter, the unity of purpose between the two sides is loose at best, and entirely feigned at worst. No one acts from the crowd in my line of sight to actually punish noncompliance, but neither do any of the shopkeepers confront the crowd about its imposition. Once the march moves on, they roll their shutters back up and resume business. The practical result, of course, is that it's a bad day to buy things on the march route and the multiplier effect for the strike is a bit higher than it might have been otherwise. Symbolically, it turns each small strike into a little bit of a general strike.

A few weeks later, Cochabamba's drivers carried out a further escalation. On the morning of February 24, they drove their minibuses and passenger vans into the central zone and turned Cochabamba's main roadways into a giant gridiron of immobility. Drivers woke early in the morning to fill all the lanes of streets with the simplest but heaviest blockading objects of all: their vehicles. The intersection of Ayacucho and Heroínas looks like a still photograph of midday traffic as motionless, driverless buses paused in the middle of left turns they would never complete. Circulation was far more paralyzed than during the drivers' marches; private taxis simply didn't have enough connected roadway to run their affairs around the blockades; and downtown streets were depopulated by comparison to typical workdays. On the deserted central plaza, only pedestrians could be seen. Elsewhere, a vacant calm prevailed: few businesses opened and the streets were silent without the roar of motors and the bustle of commerce. At Heroínas and Aroma, near the market and the bus station, drivers played an impromptu soccer game in the street.

The transportistas' vehicle blockades are a somewhat exceptional tactic. In most circumstances, very few sectors have access to this kind of blockading material. In this case, the transport sector itself was the heaviest user of the blockaded routes, and thereby the most inconvenienced. But the tactic of using vehicles to block roads is not unique to transit strikes. At the

height of the 2003 Gas War, barricades and stones were joined by far larger materials to seal off circulation. As Raquel Gutiérrez (2008b:224) summarizes:

[El Alto residents] made pedestrian bridges fall upon some avenues, dragged old railway cars to reinforce certain blockading points, dug trenches in the principal avenues, [and] constructed walls in the entryways of the neighborhoods.

These acts peaked in frequency during three days of open confrontation with militarized gasoline convoys on October 11 to 13. While fighting directly to hold space was a crucial tactic, in which dozens gave their lives, these material blockades offered a way (perhaps unavailable in less heated circumstances) for the mobilization to pit its labor capacity against the government's military capacity.

BLOCKADES AND THE FOOD SUPPLY

Major blockades don't just hit the pocketbooks of the city and the accounts of businessmen but, more urgently, they hit the population through their stomachs. Christian Mamani recalls of the Water War:

To begin with, all of the tubers that arrive into the city of Cochabamba do so through the Zona Sur. We're talking about potatoes, ocas,¹⁴⁵ all kinds of tubers, and even some ... even corn and choclo. What was determined in the Zona Sur was to blockade absolutely all of the roadways providing access to the city. And nothing circulated for almost two weeks, nothing had circulated. And I remember that even we ourselves felt this means of pressure. Not even we ourselves could reach the center of the city, nor could those in the center reach us. And some neighbors needed to buy some vegetables, and so we loaned vegetables from one of us to the next, and we went to find the [rural] unions and see if someone might be able to sell us an onion, a tomato. And this is how we kept up this means of pressure, which was quite harsh. The families, the mothers, the

¹⁴⁵ Oca is a sweet yellow tuber crisscrossed by magenta grooves.

housewives had to seek out—as I say—the food which they will cook today. And there was just one meal for the rest of the day.

These effects were expected consequences of the carpet of blockades across the metropolitan landscape, and the Coordinadora's March 30 Communiqué urged preparation for the supply shortages that would accompany mobilization: "It is communicated to the entire population to supply yourselves with food, water, medicine, lanterns, radios, and everything which may be necessary in accordance with the experience of past struggles" (Olivera et al. 2008:178).

Coordinated blockades have repeatedly resulted in urban food shortages, which are at once a dramatizing element of the sense of crisis they generate and a challenge in terms of planning logistics and sustaining commitment. Felix Patzi argues, "The blockade¹⁴⁶ revealed before national society and the international community the role of small-scale rural reproduction in the national economy and the dependence of the cities on the rural economy" (Patzi 2003:218). In his attempt to dissuade a national blockade wave in March 2005, President Mesa suggested the burden of blockades falls hardest on recent urban migrants "who live from day to day, who eat from day to day, and who go down from El Alto to La Paz ... to assemble each day the food for their children" (Mesa Gisbert 2005). Ironically, however, the urban indigenous informal proletariat has often been more able to weather the economic disruptions of the blockades and general strikes, in part because it relies on a different set of commodities for its daily life. The tubers Christian Mamani spoke of, as well as *chuño* (a freeze-dried potato that is a staple in the Altiplano) and quinoa are goods traded in large quantities and stored for slow and steady use. In the September–October 2003 blockade, writes Patzi, these practices reinforced "the idea of the savings-oriented indigenous and the white squanderer" (an inversion of dominant racial stereotypes):

¹⁴⁶ He is writing of the September 2000 rural strike wave that sealed off La Paz.

The indigenous had accumulated impressive *quintales* (hundredweight sacks) of *chuño* and quinoa, through which they were unaffected by the blockade. The whites, accustomed to buying only for the day's consumption, were severely affected by the measure. (Patzí 2003:263–64)

Perseverance, preparation, and thrift, however, are not the only strategies for outlasting hunger during a blockade. During the Potosí Civic Strike of July and August 2010, the Potosí Civic Committee modulated its call for total blockades during most days with two-hour or half-day interruptions during which commerce could occur and supplies could be bought. Similarly, the strategy of repeated 24- or 48-hour general strikes allows for limiting the survival impacts of a mobilization, while maintaining much of its economic force.

A CITIZENS' UNION?

The civic strike transposes the formula for union action—demands, means of pressure, escalation, negotiation, and resolution—onto the scale of the metropolis. The Water War showed that a new metropolitan strike was possible. But what was the nature of this power? If this was a strike, was the Coordinadora its strike committee, its union, or a political subject like the working class itself? Oscar Olivera, coming from a long history of formal unionism, termed the Coordinadora “a kind of citizen union which brings together different social sectors, from the city as well as the countryside,” and “like a traditional union ... but broadened to the whole society” (quoted in Ceceña 2004:84).

The open structure of the Coordinadora has been embraced by many as a model. It was certainly one answer to serious questions raised by the Bolivian grassroots left. In the late twentieth century, traditional working-class politics had been shaken by an array of factors: the flexibilization

of work in large workplaces and increasingly informal labor relations;¹⁴⁷ the challenge of representing the dispersed, but massive urban periphery; the historical power struggle between industrial workers and indigenous peasants; post-Soviet rethinking of hierarchical union and party models; and the general distrust of political parties as anything other than vehicles for personal advancement.

During and after the Water War, it was tempting for participants to understand the mobilization as embodying the city itself. After all, backed by tens of thousands of demonstrators, the Coordinadora had been negotiating on behalf of the metropolis as a whole. During the mobilization, “The Coordinadora was the power and the authority in Cochabamba,” as spokesman Gabriel Herbas would describe it soon after (Herbas 2002:108). So, it was certainly plausible when Olivera, García Linera, and Raquel Gutiérrez claimed the mobilization

had replaced for weeks the government, political parties, prefects, and the state with A NEW TYPE OF POPULAR GOVERNMENT of assemblies and cabildos at the regional and departmental level.

For a week, the state had been demolished and substituted by another manner of self-government of the poor based on their own organizational structures at the regional and local level, which took charge of the department. (Olivera et al. 2008:101)

And yet, this enthusiastic perspective was not a clear-eyed analysis. The Coordinadora’s central demands were a simple negation of the laws enabling water privatization. Opposing these united the disparate demands of different sectors around rate hikes, the lack of universal provision, property ownership in collectively built infrastructure, and continued access to water for rural irrigation. Once the contract was broken, the disparate forces—each with their own particular element in this set of

¹⁴⁷ Contrary to the popular impression, however, manufacturing was a rapidly growing source of employment during the neoliberal era. The number of workers employed in manufacturing in capital cities expanded from 83,000 in 1986 to 390,000 in 1997. Fully 49% of these workers continued to be in shops of at least 30 employees. Raquel Gutiérrez summarizes the change as follows, “the neoliberal reforms have changed the labor world, but have not made it smaller. Rather, they have fragmented and transformed it” (2008c:78, 79).

demands—no longer necessarily gelled into a political alliance. The still dismal state of water provision in periurban Cochabamba has not generated a large-scale mobilization to improve it. The failures of Semapa's water provision, the need for resources to improve water committees' infrastructure, and environmental threats to Cochabamba's water supplies are all topics of regular public discussion and small-scale activism, but none have generated an outpouring across lines of class throughout the city like the Water War did.

While inspirational, the self-organization of the days of the Water War and the substitution of its power for governmental control did not last beyond the agreement that made its principal demands into law. In the years that followed the April 2000 victory, the Coordinadora remained a key space for mobilizing Cochabambans. The organization activated in the 2002 regional battle over Sacaba's coca market, in the national campaign against the sale and privatization of gas, and in the 2005 political crisis. In all of these episodes, the power of blockades was re-articulated to press new claims. But like the original Water War, these mobilizations took shape in an uncertain, incremental process, and involved shifting coalitions.

Finally, as a negotiating force, the Coordinadora demonstrated its usefulness by putting forward demands that were stronger than its rivals, the Civic Committee and the Mayor. The failure of these alternate representatives meant that moderate social forces could embrace (or at least mobilize behind) the Coordinadora temporarily, without sharing in either the class politics or radical democratic vision of its central organizers. In short, the exceptional force of conjunctural factors made the Coordinadora stronger and more broad-based than it would have been otherwise.

It may be wise, then, to understand the Coordinadora as more of the strike committee than a union or substitute government. Its open structure reflects the needs of mobilization more than the needs of representation. The Coordinadora succeeded by mobilizing many more people than were

represented in its core organizations into the joint efforts of the Water War. While the moment of the strike may be illuminating as to pre-existing capacities for organization, it is also a moment of choosing sides that may or may not indicate moderates' level of commitment to transformative politics. The remarkable capacity of a city or nation to act as a whole, to dissolve internal differences to end a generally detested situation, to proclaim a collective "no" is not the result of a certain type of organization. It has elements that come about through the process of mobilization itself, and which persist only as long as the political impasse of which they are a part. I now turn to those elements of collectively expressed unity and look in detail at how they are constructed in the streets.

date	conflict	locations
Nov 1999– Apr 2000	Water War	C
Sep 2000	Campesino strike	EA, Altiplano
Feb 2002	Coca conflict	C, Sacaba, Chapare
Sep-Oct 2003	first Gas War	LP, EA, C, S, O, P
May-Jun 2005	second Gas War/ fall of Carlos Mesa	LP, EA, C, S, O, P, elsewhere
Jul-Aug 2010	Potosí regional strike	P, Potosí dept
Dec 2010	<i>Gasolinazo</i> protests	LP, EA, C, S, O, P, SC, elsewhere
Jan–May 2011	Strike wave	LP, EA, C, S, O, P, SC

Table 4: Major recent successful civic strikes

In the location column, departmental capital cities and El Alto are identified by initials.

Figure 5: Chronology of the 2010 Potosí Regional Strike

July 17	18	19 One day strike	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29 Two day strike	30 Assembly
31 Extended to indefinite strike	Aug 1	2	3	4	5	6
half-day to resupply			Mass March	General Assembly		March: holiday observed as "mourning"
7	8	9	10	11	12 Negotiations open	13 Potosi delegation obliged to return to Sucre by blockade
14	15	16 Day of Potosino Unity	17 half-day to resupply	18	19	20

April–June 2010: The Civic Committee of Potosí (Comcipo) sends its demands to the national government and seeks a direct meeting with President Evo Morales.

July 19: A twenty-four hour civic strike is held in support of the six demands advanced by Comcipo.

July 29: A forty-eight hour civic strike is held. Vice President Álvaro García Linera and the Minister of Government say they will not negotiate so long as methods of pressure are being actively applied.

July 30: On the second day of the strike, a “consultative council” meets and decides make the stoppage continue indefinitely, but to suspend it for a half day on July 31.

July 31: Half-day strike and resupply periods are observed in the city of Potosí. Campesino organizations issue letter insisting that Coroma representatives attend negotiations in Cochabamba, but this request is denied.

August 2: Miners march in support of the strike.

August 3: Massive march in Potosí backs the strike.

In La Paz, three deputies and one senator who represent Potosí install a hunger strike picket at the Plurinational Legislative Assembly in La Paz.

August 4: A “General Assembly of the Potosí People” authorizes escalated pressure through a wave of hunger strikes and the replacement of the August 6 national holiday with a “day of mourning.” Negotiations are delayed due to

differences over venue: the national government proposes Sucre, while the Potosí movement insists on Potosí.

August 5: The “consultative committee” coordinating the strike issues a middle-of-the-night decree temporarily lifting the blockades for several hours to allow stranded travellers to reach their homes.

August 6: In place of the traditional celebration of a national holiday, protesters declare a day of mourning and fly flags at half mast. Comcipo holds a mass march in support of the regional demands, estimated by *El Potosí* to include over 150,000 participants. Governor Félix Gonzales joins the hunger strike, which includes pickets in union halls, state offices, and business associations.

August 7: *El Potosí* reports that 500 people are on hunger strikes at 60 pickets.

August 11: Governor Gonzales enters intensive care because his gastritis was aggravated by participating in the hunger strike. Residents of Yura, Potosí, takeover a hydroelectric dam, prompting the massive San Cristóbal mine to cease its production, valued at \$2 million per day.

August 12: Negotiations briefly open in Sucre, but the Potosino delegation continues to insist on the presence of President Evo Morales. Their leaders threaten possible escalation by taking over

the San Cristóbal Mine, marching on La Paz, or cutting electrical service.

August 13: The Potosino delegation attempts to return to their home department, but they are met by a peasant road blockade in the community of Pampasoico, Chuquisaca, and obliged to return to negotiations in Sucre. Four journalists travelling with the delegation are wounded by stick-wielding blockaders and two technical staff from the Potosi government’s negotiating team are briefly taken hostage.

August 14: Twelve hours of continuous dialogue produce the first agreement, concerning the upgrading of Potosí’s airport to international service. Hunger strikers now number 1,780 at 130 pickets.

August 15: Representatives of Potosí and the national government sign a five-point accord and the government pledges to resolve the boundary dispute, bringing the conflict to a close. Meanwhile in San Antonio, Potosí, blockaders and people attempting to break the blockade come to blows, injuring at least seven.

August 16: The Potosí negotiating team makes a triumphal return to their departmental capital, making several stops at blockading locations on their approach and participating in a civic festival inside the city. The governor declares it the “Day of Potosino Unity.”

Figure 6: How blockades can isolate La Paz



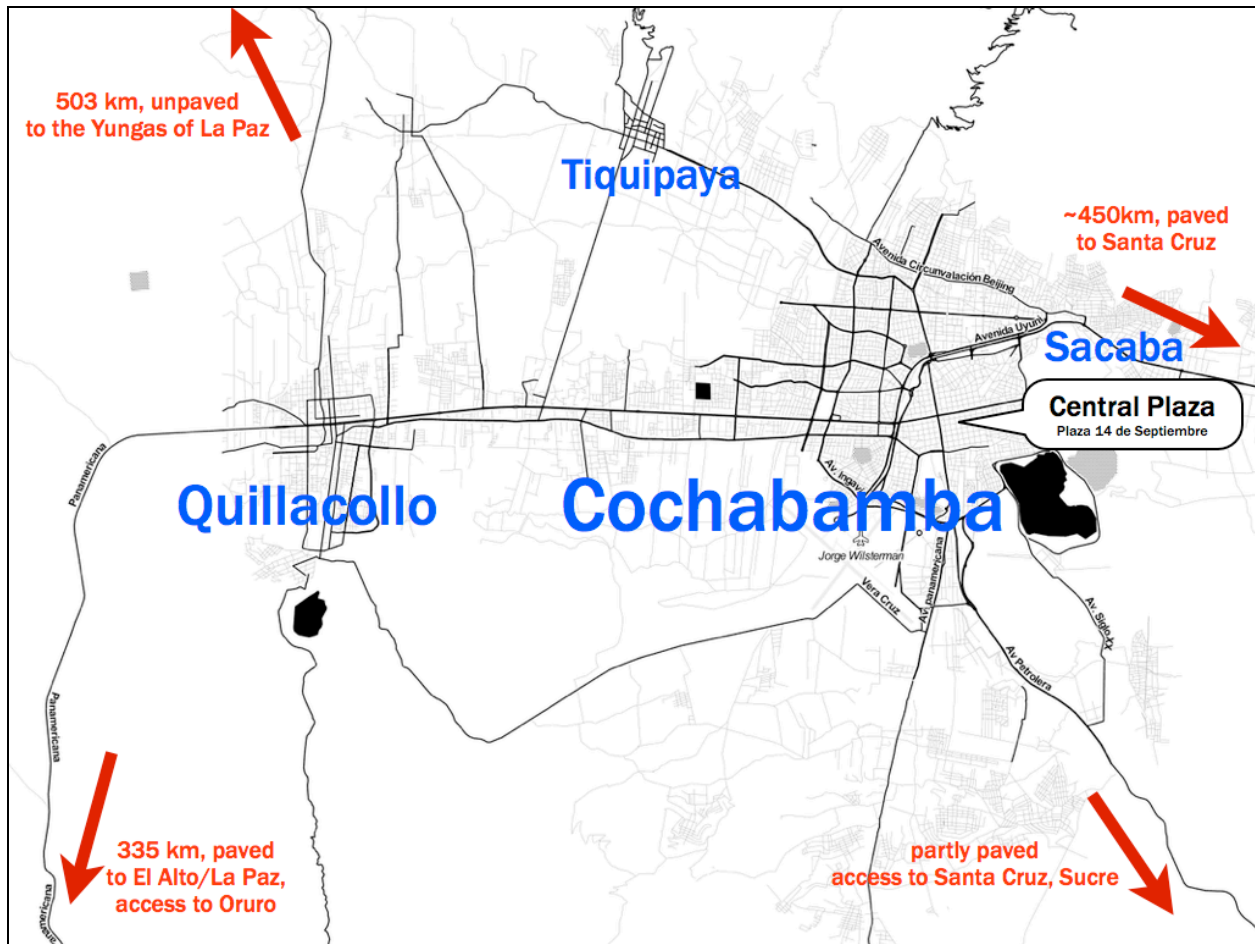
The City of El Alto includes all routes from La Paz to six departments. Just eight exits surround the two cities, allowing it to be isolated by a small number of blockades. Map published in *La Razón*.

Figure 7: How blockades can isolate Sucre



The main illustration shows the presence of protesters surrounding the central plaza. In the upper right, the four exits of the city are shown as blockaded. Infographic published by *La Razón*, June 2005.

Figure 8: Cochabamba's limited road connections



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Chapter 4
The Voice of the People: A Unified Political Subject in the Streets

While I was interviewing Christian Mamani, the OTB leader from Santa Vera Cruz who participated in the Water War, he suddenly shifted emphasis from the experience of protest to its political significance:

We confronted the Army, and we had some tragic losses of some of the youths. But the fight was really about: How can a state, how can a government, as the representative of the people, of a nation not have to be accountable to the nation? That was the dispute. If the people want for the decree to be annulled, than it must be annulled. Because *the voice of the people is the voice of God*. ... I believe that it is we the people who forge our own destiny—it is not economic interests, or the personal interests of those who govern, so that then we must submit ourselves to their will, and be deprived of our principal resource [water]. That was what the fight was about and I think that we were all conscious of that.

A decade after the events, Christian centers his memory of the Water War on an intensely political question, the right of “the people” to “forge our political destiny,” to have the government be responsive to them, to understand that their will is sovereign. He describes that will as sacred, precisely in the sense described by Émile Durkheim (1915:213): “In addition to men, society also consecrates things, especially ideas. If a belief is unanimously shared by a people, then ... it is forbidden to touch it, that is to say, to deny it or to contest it.” This chapter explores how people come to see the tangible acts of Bolivians in mass mobilization as embodying “voice of the people,” and thereby as a sovereign mandate for the country’s political future.

As the Water War progressed, and later as the Coordinadora and Cochabamban activists joined in national mobilizations, this claim to sovereignty became more and more developed. The mobilization’s signature slogan—“The Water Is Ours!”—put the idea of public ownership of resources at the center of the dispute. Activists appropriated the idea the idea of “national

patrimony” and contrasted their stance with politicians they labeled as *vendepatriás*, or sellers of the country. These moves were part of a shift from particular demands about resources and policies to general demands about economic and political direction. Don Angel recalls:

We began simply with the matter of water, to lower the rate and throw out Aguas del Tunari. But it grew; the position of the organizations grew. And it was no longer simply the water, but instead it was the Constituent Assembly, that Goni must go, or first that Banzer must go and so must Aguas del Tunari. And from there we put forward political questions, right? And it was not only the water. It was something much more, it matured then. It was not only Cochabamba in the fight, but also it was the Chapare; it was the Altiplano. All of Cochabamba committed itself, [set up] blockades. It had gone like that, growing quite well.

Don Angel’s slip from President Hugo Banzer Suarez (in office at the time of the Water War) to his successor Gonzalo “Goni” Sánchez de Lozada is revealing. His oral narrative of the Water War integrates the later demand to oust Goni, made during the Gas War in 2003, as part of a single continuing process. These demands, while gestated over many years among movements, and their participants, strategists, and intellectual contributors, surfaced into a popular mandate during the brief periods that make up the key events of my analysis. Even a visiting member of Banzer’s cabinet could not deny that mandate. Oscar Olivera (2004:45) recalls the comments of José Orías, Vice-Minister of Police and Internal Government, to journalists:

The press asked Orías asked why the government was negotiating with the Coordinadora since the day before the Ministry of Information had claimed the movements was financed by narcotraffickers, and he replied that, first, what a government official perceived behind a desk in La Paz was one thing, and reality another. He personally confirmed [from being in Cochabamba] that the Coordinadora was not five vandals, but rather one hundred thousand people who were in streets and ready to do anything. Second, he could be sure that it was not a movement of drug

dealers because, when he left his house, two of his neighbors, elderly ladies, were helping to block the street. There was no way they could be involved in the drug trade.

This identification of the whole city with the protest solidified into journalistic fact by the end of the confrontation. A *Los Tiempos* headline (April 14, 2000) simply read, “Cochabamba bent the arm of the government.” How do people come to see protests as carried out by “everyone” rather than a select group? In the first part of this chapter, I look at how anthropologists have theorized this sense of joint collective activity as a quasi-religious experience, an emotional experience of affective solidarity and *communitas*, and as an interpretation applied to the actions of the few on behalf of the many.

In the second part of this chapter, I examine the experience of unprecedented unity in the Cochabamba Water War and the July–August 2010 Potosí regional strike. I show how similar emotions and experiences made these mobilizations into defining events for their respective regions. Using recent and classic scholarship on the role of affect in social movements and the importance of narrative in revolutionary political transformation, I consider how these feelings of unity contributed to the formation of the political subjectivity that both demands and justifies the new Bolivia.

The third part considers how specific forms of space-claiming protest—converging marches, hunger strike pickets, coordinated strike waves, and *cabildos*—at once represent and construct alliances, unity, and a popular mandate. In these forms, the protests’ interaction with urban geography is crucial to their meaning. I use examples from the Cochabamba Water War, the September–October 2003 Gas War, and the May–June 2005 succession crisis, and the Potosí mobilization. The February–April 2011 strike wave, described in the previous chapter, stands as an unsuccessful case, one whose sectoral support never generalized in into a transcendent or unified representative of the public at large. However, this strike wave allowed me direct access to a series of

cabildos and insight into what makes a mobilization generalize into the voice of the people. I show how movements locate their protests to show their ties to particular places, how they distribute protests across space to create the feeling of ubiquitous participation, and why they converge upon governing spaces. In the fourth and final part, I look at the meanings of central plazas and the historic cabildos that happened in them. Their importance as political spaces makes them worth literally fighting for, and amplifies the importance of decisions made from within them. I show how movements have used central plazas' significance as spaces of sovereignty to assert that sovereignty from below.

EXPERIENCE AND AFFECT; NARRATIVE AND POLITICAL INTERPRETATION

“The voice of the people is the voice of God”—*Vox populi, vox dei*. Pragmatists, democrats, and revolutionaries all advise state actors to listen to the popular voice. In both disorder and revolution, disruptive acts outside the established institutional order acquire political significance. But how is disorder legitimated? Better put, how does it rise from being disorder to something worthy of respect, something more elevated? How does *the people*, that quintessential subject of an era that believes in both democracy and revolution become the author of these events? Clearly, these concepts of democracy and revolution have a vital role in making this equivalence commonplace. We saw in chapter 2 how a political tradition has emerged over the long term in Bolivia that grounds political legitimacy in popular disorder. However, to explain these meanings we must delve into the events themselves. I begin this search for an explanation in emotionally potent experiences on one hand, and narrative interpretations on the other.

Assembling in large groups, feeding off of one another's energy, and feeling heightened significance from the gathering is an essential part of this story. In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*,

Durkheim examines the role of intense collective experiences in the remaking of social life. This text is punctuated with invocations of social “energy,” a felt force that strengthens individual action:

The sentiments which society has for him raise the sentiments which he has for himself. Because he is in moral harmony with his comrades, he has more confidence, courage and boldness in action (Durkheim 1915:211).

For Durkheim (1915:427), these feelings must be felt and affirmed in common, and cannot be renewed “except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments.” With still greater intensity of gatherings comes a qualitative shift (“Changes are not merely of shades and degrees; men become different. The passions moving them are of such an intensity that they cannot be satisfied except by violent and unrestrained actions, actions of superhuman heroism or of bloody barbarism.”) into a “general effervescence ... which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs” (Durkheim 1915:210–11).

Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process* was one of several anthropological accounts that argue that the uncertainty and shared feelings which resonate among participants during revolutionary events are the same phenomena experienced by individuals in the rituals of traditional societies. In the context of ritual rites of passage with a pre-ordained format,¹⁴⁸ liminality appears as a middle phase in which all social status and societal structures are stripped away. But in revolutionary transformations, the experience of structurelessness and communal feeling are combined with uncertainty about the future, since the previous social order itself is called radically into question. Victor Turner argued that *communitas* and liminality, when experienced in social movements, constitute “anti-structures” that are dangerous to existing social orders and which have the potential to facilitate their transformation (Turner 1969, 1974; Alexander 1991:27-43). By *communitas*, Victor

¹⁴⁸ Turner’s work leans heavily in this segment on A. van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* (1960).

and Edith Turner designate collective experiences of “togetherness itself,” in which status and structure are put aside, and a group’s “life together takes on full meaning” (Turner 2012:4, 1). At the “hinge point” of social change, Edith Turner identifies intense passions, festivity, inversions of hierarchies, and emotional presence. These experiences can be parallel the “collective effervescence” studied by Emile Durkheim (1915:210–19),¹⁴⁹ the “moments of madness” characterized by Aristide Zolberg (1972),¹⁵⁰ and the “orgasms of history” narrated by Yves Fremion (2002).¹⁵¹

Jeffrey Juris, in an ethnography of large antiglobalization protests, argues that affective and bodily experience links individual and collective sentiment: “mass mobilizations, and [direct] actions in particular, largely operate through affect, amplifying an initial emotion, such as a sense of injustice, and transforming it into collective solidarity. The awareness of bodily copresence induces particularly strong sensations” (Juris 2008:126). The result, Juris finds is *affective solidarity*: shared emotion experiences that drive mutual identification as allies experience danger, uncertainty, relief,

¹⁴⁹ Parallels between *communitas* and collective effervescence are explored by Olaveson (2001) and Roseneil (2001).

¹⁵⁰ Zolberg’s summary of the emotional content and creativity of the “moments” he studied has striking resonances with the Turners’ definition of *communitas*: “Whatever the attitudes of the writers at the time of writing, whatever role they played in the events, whatever their mode of writing, they record intense moments of festive joy, when an immense outpouring of speech, sometimes verging on violence, coexists with an extraordinarily peaceful disposition. Minds and bodies are liberated; human beings feel that they are in direct touch with one another as well as with their inner selves. The streets of the city, its objects, and even the weather take on harmonious qualities. Falsehood, ugliness, and evil give way to beauty, goodness, and truth. Factions and parties appear unreal while personal networks appear strong as steel. The private merges into the public; government becomes a family matter, a familial affair. Simultaneously, there is a disposition to encounter the *déjà vu*; through the medium of collective memories recorded in sophisticated or demotic culture, in historical works or in folklore, human beings connect the moment with others. Liberated from the constraints of time, place, and circumstance, from history, men choose their parts from the available repertory or forge new ones in an act of creation. Dreams become possibilities” (1972:196).

¹⁵¹ Sidney Tarrow (1995), a scholar of contentious politics, takes up Zolberg’s moments of madness as generative moments in the otherwise gradual evolution of the repertoire of contention. His argument that these moments both circulate already developed tactical forms across the landscape and produce a burst of innovation in new ones (only a few of which become routinized) is broadly consistent with the examples discussed later in this chapter.

play, and joy in tandem. This affective dimension is amplified by the requirements of cooperation and of space-claiming itself. As I illustrate in this and the previous chapter, space-claiming protest is particularly productive of this affective solidarity. Through the experience of holding space against determined adversaries, participants illustrate to one another (and to themselves) popular unity, collective power, and capacity for sacrifice.

NARRATIVE AND POLITICAL INTERPRETATION

One approach within the anthropology of revolution examines how people come to see a correspondence between popular political will and collective physical action by a necessarily smaller group. William Sewell (2005b:263) argues that “what makes the struggles we call revolutions *revolutionary* is that they fundamentally change the nature of the ideological and institutional alternatives available,” and that to understand this shift we must look at the emotional and semiotic dimensions of these events. The semiotic element is a widely accepted identification between collective actions and idealized political protagonists, just as participants in the French Revolution “cod[ed] ... an episode of urban popular violence as an act of the sovereign will, and hence a legitimate basis for a new form of government” (McAdam and Sewell 2001:103).

Social movements’ imaginaries link the embodied collective experience of protest to the political foundations of a social order. For example, the Water War represented for many the action of the entire people of Cochabamba, as well as a coming together of campesinos and poor and middle-class urban residents. The stories Bolivians tell about these transformative events reveal the interpretive connections they have made between mass mobilizations and such political subjects. Indeed these connections are what make the emergence possible. While figures whose authority is formally established can make declarations based on the offices they hold, a gathering in a square or a network of blockaders can only speak on behalf of a city when they are widely interpreted as

representing it. These interpretations were revealed in the narratives that I found in press and movement documents and I recorded in ethnographic participation and interviews.

When I refer to interpretive work in this chapter, I don't mean merely a symbolic connection or even an alliance, but rather a genuine identification of these acts as embodying the social forces of which they were a part. Government of repression of these protests *is* "attacking the people", and pressure exerted by the grassroots *is* "the people bending the government to its will." Correspondingly, certain collective actions or spaces of decision and discourse become "the people's voice" in this process.

That political voice is so powerful because the mobilizations' participants could credibly claim to speak for the people as a whole. At the height of mobilization, the vision of popular sovereignty went beyond even these political mandates into efforts to proclaim *the mobilizations themselves* as the representative and/or governing institution of the public. This intense identification, between tangible actions carried out by some and a sovereign political subject representative of all, is both the result of intensely lived sequences of events and a credible political interpretation of the social forces involved in them. People live these events as embodied experiences, in which physical sensations, emotions, and copresence contribute to their meaning. Meanwhile the political challenge to the constituted power structure and the frequent inability of that power to control what happens opens up the possibility of structural change. Political collectivities step into the streets as particular bodies, and through their struggles for practical control, political claims are asserted and won. People understand their actions as making history or, in the terms of Sahlins and Sewell, they are living through an event that transforms the structures of society. This turbulent situation produces an uncertainty of power relations that Victor Turner called anti-structure, and the unanticipated collaborations and felt unity with it is recognizable as *communitas*.

These revolutionary events take place in “moments of madness” and in times of uncertainty in the balance of power. New levels of mobilization exceed the traditional upper limits on popular power, while mechanisms of repression and control seem newly ineffective. Suddenly it seems obvious that physical actions, the very things being planned and decided upon in gatherings on the street, can affect the political future. Simultaneously, the very things that make these moments so extraordinary to live through—*communitas*, liminality, shared danger, and unprecedented affective solidarity—allow the emotional flexibility to re-interpret the political order. The collectivities that are the protagonists in the country’s revolutionary tradition can suddenly become constituent parties within the new political order.

THE EXPERIENCE OF UNITY

One product of mass public participation in large-scale protests is a sense of unity that is simultaneously affective and analytical. In examining the practice, experience, and memory of large-scale Bolivian protests, I have found recurrent understandings of the city, region, or society in common mobilization. This sense is marked by the transcendence of boundaries of class or ethnicity in the course of mobilization. Strategically, participants perceive that long-time adversaries have formed a winning coalition, while they feel affective solidarity with these unexpected allies. This section analyzes the experiential and practical bases for these feelings: the collaboration of multiple social sectors in successful protest, the physical necessity for cooperation and empathy in the process of confrontation, and utopian desires for common political action.

I believe four elements give participants (and often the media and even state adversaries) the shared impression that “everyone” is involved in a mobilization: the involvement of multiple organizations in a mobilization; the physical presence of unusually large numbers of people in the streets; geographically extensive protests (rather than those focused in one area or at a single target);

and the overcoming of longstanding social or political boundaries among protesters. In the following pages, I examine these elements separately.

1. The involvement of organizations from diverse backgrounds. Unity begins as the coming together of different forces with their own identities. The grassroots Coordinadora and the Cochabamba Civic Committee (a centrist establishment organization) were joined at least in their opposition to Aguas del Tunari. The Chamber of Industry, the condominium owners' association, and the Archbishop of Cochabamba all joined in the widespread outrage between the first round of blockades in mid-January and the Coordinadora's call for a "peaceful takeover" of the city on February 4. On that day, Regantes from the northwest, Cocaleros from the east, periurban neighbors from the south, and factory workers from the west showed by their separate actions that the Water War was the battle of a diverse multitude against the few.

By contrast with Cochabamba's, Potosí's Civic Committee was more of a grassroots coalition: 31 of its fifty-one member organizations are unions and it participated actively in the 2003 and 2005 national uprisings. Comcipo (whose base is inside the city limits of Potosí) joined with the cooperative miners' union, rural peasant organizations, the governor, politicians, and a wide variety of local groups, eventually including the organizations of the blind, prisoners, and sex workers in the strike. Through these identities, and often through separate action, each of these groups added to the climate of general mobilization.¹⁵² Politicians across party lines joined the mobilization, including those from the MAS, Potosí Mayor René Joaquino's Social Alliance, and the smaller Uqarikuna party.

One particular crosscutting alliance stands out: the protests unified urban and rural interests at the center of their narratives. In Cochabamba, this began with the claims of small-scale irrigators

¹⁵² Similarly, in the 2003 and 2005 strike waves (see chapter 2), hundreds of groups found their own place in the net of blockades and hunger strikes, and their own voice in the cabildos.

(*Los Regantes*) whose loss of traditional rights to water stood side by side with urban dwellers' loss of their investment in private or community-owned wells. Among the urban dwellers, collective owners of wells in poor, periurban neighborhoods and central city businesses and residents with private facilities came together. All of people saw their hard work handed over to Aguas de Tunari as part of a comprehensive privatization of both the water resource and the water infrastructure.

In Potosí, protesters found an unlikely rallying point in the boundary dispute of the municipality of Coroma with its Oruro department neighbor over the Pahua and Incamisa hills, rich in limestone and reputedly uranium. During the 2009 and 2010 political campaigns, President Evo Morales (a native of Oruro) promised that a cement factory for Oruro would be built using the hills' limestone. The decades-long border dispute over the hills and the prospect of being bypassed for state-sponsored development crystallized Potosinos' grievances over being left behind economically. As Saúl Juarez, a hunger striker in Cochabamba's first picket, explained it,

[The protest] can be summed up in one single thing: in misery. ... We are fighting for a hill that as of yet is not a factory, just a hill; it's raw material. For the dream that some time we, that the families that live there, might have something. They are places forgotten by the hand of God: they don't have water. They are using up the water in the wells. There is no electricity. It is misery.

Conversely, urban dwellers' backing for the border dispute energized many rural Potosinos. Marta Quiroz, a striker in Cochabamba who was born in Coroma enthused about the sudden backing her community was receiving:

I am very, very, very happy, it could be said, because now we *do* count on the support, all 38 communities [in Coroma] including my community—the support of the entire Potosí [department] even—look!—the [urban] residents who would never even receive us. For this reason, I declared myself on strike, to make the government genuinely recognize the borders with which the department of Potosí was born.

2. Large numbers: One key element of these protests is the mobilization of overwhelming numbers in a single event. Regardless of the causes, large numbers have political consequences. A protest can become so large that it implies a common popular sentiment, even to political adversaries. When engaged in a protest in opposition to a political institution (or even one of its major decisions), numbers alone calls the institution's representativeness into question. Affirmatively, they create a constituent moment insofar as they foreshadow a different social order that would express their collective demands and will. At some level, they can claim to embody the whole of society. Alongside their practical demands looms the call to be represented, a call that has led to a restructuring of the country's politics beginning in 2006.

The Coordinadora generated massive turnout both in on-the-street marches in January and February and through its day-to-day organizing efforts. The March 26 referendum generated over 48,000 votes, nearly a third of the official election turnout. During the climactic April events, a series of cabildos attracted crowds ranging from 5,000 and 100,000 participants.¹⁵³ Even more dramatically, Comcipo's call for a mass march on August 3 (and by some reports a second mobilization on August 6) turned out an unprecedented quantity of people on Potosí's streets, estimated by journalists at over 100,000 people (the city's population is just 164 thousand and the entire department has around seven hundred thousand residents).

Neither the Coordinadora nor Comcipo was content to leave this message of popular sovereignty implicit. The Coordinadora replicated or innovated democratic structures in the central plaza and across the city. It held some rallies in the form of cabildos abiertos—open assemblies with the capacity to make demands and approve courses of action. One day after the massive August 3

¹⁵³ The urban population of Cercado in the 2001 Census was (516,683); including Sacaba Municipality (92,581) and Quillacollo Province (164,007), the metropolitan urban population was 773,271. Cochabamba Department's population was 1,455,711 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística n.d.).

march, a “general assembly of the Potosí people” was held. Governor Félix Gonzales attended, apologizing for his previous absence and put himself at the disposal of the public. The assembly voted to ratchet up pressure through a hunger strike campaign, which began with the Governor.

3. A parallel feeling of totality is created through geographic extension. This effect can be achieved with a wide variety of tactics, as historical precedent has shown: Road blockades extended over space paralyze of motorized transportation. Since at least the January 1974 strike wave, rural protesters have erected multiple blockades on the same highway as a form of solidarity.¹⁵⁴ On November 4–5, 1999, the first rumbles of the Water War took the form of serial blockades: “more than a score of blockades comprised of tree trunks, branches, tires, stones, and vehicles were set out from km 6.5 of Blanco Galindo Avenue to Parotani [at Km 37] ... A similar situation held on the road to Sacaba and the old highway to Santa Cruz” (Orellana Aillón 2004:506). We have seen how both the Coordinadora and urban trade unions have devised a standard tactical plan to isolate and paralyze central Cochabamba by blockades on the bridges across the Rocha River. Another urban innovation is the so-called “blockade of a thousand corners [*bloqueo de mil esquinas*],” deployed by workers in Potosí during the May–June 2005 conflict. The Departmental Workers’ Central (COD-Potosí) organized the plan for numerous blockades—of entry tollbooths, plazas, and streets—as part of a 72-hour strike backing the mobilization for peasant demands and gas nationalization (*Los Tiempos*, May 25, 2005).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ At that time, campesinos erected multiple blockades at points stretching along scores of kilometers of the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz Highway (in the Valle Alto), the road from Cochabamba to the Chapare via Sacaba, the Cochabamba-Oruro highway, the La Paz-Oruro highway, and the Sucre-Cochabamba highway (Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos de Bolivia 1975:17; 21; 37-38).

¹⁵⁵ It has since been adopted as a moniker for coordinated strikes by La Paz teacher’s unions, neighborhood associations, and other departmental labor confederations (*La Razón*, April 14, 2008; *La Patria*, June 28, 2010; *Opinión*, April 15, 2011).

In the 2010 Potosí strike, the adhesion of province after province to the strike, and then the opening of hunger strike pickets at ever greater distances were key signs of “universal” participation. When I talked to him, Comcipo president Celestino Condori described the rural backing for the strike this way:

So, from the fifth day of the indefinite strike, many of the provinces—of the sixteen, I want to say fifteen—had already joined in the strike, with the blockading of highways and the suspension of activities. ... So there, we have seen that there was a certain relation, there was a certain connection, and there was an identification with the demands of the various sectors. We had set out that these were our demands, and everyone had added themselves [to the effort].

Similarly, the hunger strike pickets in support of the strike multiplied into a network of more than two thousand fasters, who crossed boundaries of rank and geography. Potosinos dragged in mattresses and hung red and white flags at pickets in Sucre, Tarija, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and La Paz (including one with the department’s parliamentarians), and even in migrant neighborhoods in Argentina and Spain.

During a civic strike, the many points of blockades are connected by spaces of immobility that become part of the territory of the strike. The generalized cessation of economic activity creates the sense that everyone is participating. Christian Mamani recalls that during the April phase of the Water War,

No vehicles circulated on the highways. From eight, eight-thirty in the morning, nothing circulated at all. We were all in the struggle, we were all in protest. ... Because in all of Cochabamba, absolutely all of the center of the city was filled with tear gas. And not even to eat, not even the restaurants could open, there was nothing.

With broad enough participation extending over wide enough space, the blockade ceases to be something done *by* a mobilized few *to* the rest of the region, and “the entire city,” “department,” or “country” becomes part of the strike.

4. **Finally**, and most emotionally significant in my view, is the sense of **an emerging common effort that transcends prior social divisions**. Edith Turner (2012:3) observes “In *communitas* there is a loss of ego. ... In the group, all are in unity, seamless unity.” Speaking at the August 3 march in Potosí, Comcipo President Celestino Condori read the turnout in terms of overcoming division: “We’d like to demonstrate to the government that in Potosí, there is unity, among Moors and Christians; everyone is changing their shirts to put on the red and white which are the colors of the Potosino flag” (Ballivián 2010). In Potosí, the division most talked about was political: the civic strike began in the middle of a tense partisan struggle over the Mayor’s office, and Morales administration officials at first accused the mobilization of being a diversion in defense of Social Alliance Mayor René Joaquino. But, alleging “politicization” of the strike only increased its support. Thus, Condori spoke of unity in terms of taking off the colored T-shirts of political campaigns in favor of the common colors of the department. Journalists reported on the August 3 as crossing the region’s (ever-racialized) class divisions: “Middle-class people were confused with workers and peasants in that multicolored human worm that slowly made its way down the streets,” ran one account (*Los Tiempos*, August 4, 2010).

As we saw above, Coordinadora director Gabriel Herbas (2002:102) also spoke of “Moors and Christians”: “the popular sectors” and “moneyed people,” who were both affected and met one another in *cabildos* in the Plaza. In Cochabamba, divisions of class and race (mestizo vs. indigenous) predominate and are mapped onto the split between a middle-class center-north of the city and the larger, poorer, more indigenous Zona Sur. The Water War stood out for both sides as a moment of coming together. Former Water Warrior Marcelo Rojas recalls:

Unity of the neighborhoods, of the neighborhood territorial organizations, of the water committee organizations, and the neighborhood councils. Well in that place, there was no color,

race, creed, or political color; whether you were white, whether you were rich, poor, *jailón* [from “high,” this term is somewhere between yuppie and upscale hipster], there was no difference. Which is to say, what was to be seen was unity. For once, a quite large unity in Bolivia.

Similarly, Christian Mamani, a neighborhood water committee leader recounts: “In those days, yes. The whole city was very united.” For him, this unity was expressed through collaboration in the practicalities of on-the-street struggle: “Those of us from the Zona Sur would come in caravans to join the fight, and those in the central zone, those who lived downtown were charged with giving us water, vinegar to combat the [tear]gas. They threw old mattresses and sheets of paper so we could burn tires. The thing to do was to cooperate.”

Don Angel saw both his neighborhood and his city united in the days of street fighting during the Water War. As the February and April battles went on, more and more people descended from Barrio Primero de Mayo to confront the police downtown (although, he admits, fatigue and food shortages produced some reluctance). In the city, they sent little “commissions”—handfuls of neighborhood youth, to keep track of people and make sure the injured were attended to, even as neighbors dispersed among various points of confrontation. Don Angel describes the small-scale aid from downtown neighbors as “the growing consciousness of the people” who “had just recently gotten involved.” Remembering an unknown man who fell just ahead of him from rubber bullets, he is moved to speak of unity:

He fell, and what are we to do? We can't just go over him. We had to lift and carry him away quickly. That is, it was of no concern who ... that there was a strength, a solidarity that was unique in that place. There, there were no left, right, or center parties, no tall or ugly, no Indian or gringo, nothing at all. All of us were one. That is what we learned as well.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Interview, March 28, 2011.

“All of us were one”: Unity comes as a revelation. Rather than an achievement, it feels like an insight into our true selves. As Edith Turner (2012:1–2) characterized *communitas*, “the people ... see their fellows as they are.” The tangible experiences that provoke this realization (and the things my informants described to evoke my understanding) had several different genres. What was tangibly happening at these moments of unity could be shared suffering, like the sting of tear gas; or shared risk, like not knowing if you would be shot; or acts of material aid from one person to the next (even quite minimal ones like sharing a newspaper or an onion). Yet all are taken as signs of deep bonds and the lack of separation between people. The commonality among these experiences, I argue is embodied equality of condition and/or embodied mutual aid: in the *melee*, unlike in the meeting, each body shares the same vulnerability, has the same needs, and must engage with others on a one-to-one basis. Such experience is “undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, spontaneous, concrete, and unmediated,” precisely the nature of the bonds created through liminality (Turner 2012:4). This real description of lived experience becomes a possible interpretation of political relations among those on the streets together.

THE EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL COLLECTIVE SUBJECTS

At heightened points in mobilization, collective political subjects emerge into commonplace narratives. As we saw in chapter 3, the Coordinadora, Cochabamba, and the upheaval became mutually identified as “all of ‘cochabambinidad,’ with very few exceptions ... gave itself over” to a unified political demand (*Los Tiempos*, April 8, 2012). On June 9, the final day of the 2005 upheaval, “Cochabamba cabildo-ed” according to a headline in the daily *Gente*. This Cochabamba was embodied in a “multitude” and made up of “tens of social, neighborhood, labor, and shopkeeper institutions, among others,” who “determined to begin acts of civil resistance” if Hormando Vaca

Díez came to power. In an unusual journalistic move, the article attributed quotes to the speakers as a collective sequence rather than to individuals, naming six with their sectoral affiliations.

Bolivian cities are particularly susceptible to taking on this role of collective subject. Ambiguities in everyday language reinforce some of these identifications. *El pueblo* literally means both “the people” and “the town,” and *el pueblo* may appear as combative actor (*el pueblo* took over the plaza; meaning certain protesters), as public opinion (*el pueblo* rejects the rate hike for water; meaning the population of the city), as the owner of common resources (the gas belongs to *el pueblo*; meaning Bolivians as a whole); and as a mix of all of these (Goni has fallen; *el pueblo* has won).¹⁵⁷ Since five departmental capitals share the names of the larger departments, “Cochabamba” or “La Paz,” for example, can name a region united among peasants and urban citizens. The Altiplano and El Alto came into their own as political subjects through high-profile uprisings.

This was just as clear in the 2010 Potosí regional strike. From the mass march on August 3 onwards, the slogan “Potosí Federal”—suggesting a new regional relationship with the national government—was an unofficial part of the mobilization. The August 4 assembly termed itself the “General Assembly of the Potosí People.” Less officially, the net of hunger strike pickets and solidarity marches redefine what it meant to be Potosino, reincorporating migrants from the department into a common political identity. The conclusion of the 19-day mobilization was the August 16 return of the Comcipo-led negotiating team from Sucre, a long, drawn-out process of greeting that stretched across numerous communities on the road to the departmental capital, became an urban procession within the city, and culminated in rally in the central square. Governor Félix Gonzalez formally declared it the Day of Potosino Unity. The effect of these unifying experiences is a consolidated political subject, capable of making demands in the future.

¹⁵⁷ My linguistic analysis here expands on Sewell’s comments (2005c:246–47) on *le peuple* in the context of the French Revolution.

THE “VOICE OF THE PEOPLE” AND SPACE-CLAIMING

The popular political voice can take shape in several ways, through already established organizations standing together, the creation of new ones, the mechanism of mass gatherings, and in the electoral style offered by a consulta. Certain space-claiming practices generate these feelings through their interaction with urban space. In the previous section, we saw how unity is experienced through diverse groups acting in alliance, the copresence of large numbers, extension across space, and dramatically overcoming social divides. This section looks at how particular social movement tactics, in the way they use urban space, generate these experiences. Like the blockades discussed in chapter 3, converging marches, distributed hunger strikes, and cabildos can all contribute to sense that the city is acting as one.

Claiming certain urban spaces also enables other feelings. I illustrate below the electric connection between one’s community and decisionmaking spaces experienced in marches. In the final section of the chapter, I consider the special role that central plazas play in Bolivian cities as spaces of state pageantry and historical symbolism, and show how claiming the plaza strengthens movement claims to popular sovereignty.

MARCHES, PLAZAS, AND SPACE-CLAIMING

Of the dozens of marches I observed in Bolivia, most had two focal points of activity. Typically, the originating point represented a space of power or organization for the group mobilizing, while the destination was symbolic of state power. (Just twice did a march begin at a central governmental plaza and end up somewhere else, and then only to lead into an actual meeting.) Figure 9 illustrates the principal origin sites of marches during fieldwork from July 2010 to May 2011, marked by plum-colored arrows. The originating spaces were sometimes actual places for organizing, like the Teachers’ Union Federation building or the Six Federations headquarters on

Plazuela Busch in Cochabamba. Often, however, they were places that evoke popular mobilization and everyday activity: the Ceja in El Alto, Plaza San Francisco in La Paz, or the outskirts of the Cancha in Cochabamba. Many of these *spaces of popular power* are organizational headquarters. Cochabamba's urban teacher's federation, campesino federation, worker's central, and cocalero union headquarters all have large first floor auditoriums designed to hold pre-march briefings of their membership. The Plazuela Busch (outside the cocalero headquarters), Kilometer Zero on the south side, and various other plazas sometimes used as gathering points allow for even larger crowds to amass in preparation for marches, mobilized strikes, and blockades.

No space is as emblematic of the Bolivian political upsurge as La Paz's Plaza San Francisco. The San Francisco Cathedral was first built as the main church for the indigenous-majority town across the river from colonial La Paz. It has long had a major plaza before it. Unlike the Plaza Murillo, the edges of this plaza lack a representative face of state or commercial power. Working-class market women fill the streets with their tables, booths and blankets in an open-air market that extends uphill from the plaza. When the River Choqueyapu was culverted below a central roadway in downtown La Paz, this plaza expanded. Across this space from the Cathedral stands the office high-rise belonging to the Factory Workers Union Federation of La Paz Department, built in the early 1970s.¹⁵⁸ Between the indigenous-popular Cathedral and the proletarian-syndicalist Union, four decades of Bolivian popular movements have gathered their forces in the capital.

The march from places of popular gathering to places of official governance is an electric connection between two disparate forms of power: a move from "our territory" to theirs. If the political order were well respected by the grassroots, such marchers could primarily carry needs and demands to accountable representatives, acting as petitioners before an accountable leaders.

¹⁵⁸ The Fabriles built the eight-story building in the basis of regular contributions from all their members (Cerruto 1972:131).

However, the relationship with government is rarely so straightforward in Bolivia. Popular mobilizations can refuse to recognize the government's primacy or hand off their legitimacy; at times, they openly challenge its legitimacy or seek to shake the rulers from their space. Even when the connection between popular plaza and governing plaza is a peaceful walk, the different feels of the two spaces are united by the action, energizing participants with the first experience of gathering in a place that is their own.

The *destination* of marches in central Cochabamba was extremely uniform. A typical march in 2010–11 ended in the Plaza Murillo, the city's central plaza. At times, there were as many as three demonstrations using the plaza at once.¹⁵⁹ Sometimes marchers came to the plaza to directly address—or more often, to demand to address—officials in the Departmental Palace or City Hall. Very few marches sought out decision makers elsewhere in the city.¹⁶⁰ At other times—the majority of cases I observed—they used the Plaza Murillo as a public platform to make demands. The symbolic publicness of the Plaza Murillo was sufficient for national issues, despite the fact that no office of the national government stands on the plaza. Physically, this meant making a full circle around the plaza and perhaps setting up a speaking location: either the sidewalk in front of the two government buildings, the northern quadrant of the plaza itself, or the crossroads in front of the Fabriles headquarters.

In February 2000, the *toma* of Cochabamba was planned as a convergence of marches upon the Plaza, where a *cabildo* would be held in the streets. The marches were organized to reflect the

¹⁵⁹ For example, on October 15, 2010, the Southern Cochabamba Federation of Persons with Disabilities marched (and wheeled) for a disability pension, the Association of Retired Miners demanded a pension increase, and numerous campesino federations marched in support of the Law for a Productive Decade, an investment law being drafted by a national summit then meeting in the city.

¹⁶⁰ One rare exception was a November 12, 2010, march by urban teachers challenging a meeting of the national labor confederation over its stance on a proposed pension law.

diverse place of strength and consisted respectively of: Valle Alto campesinos and neighborhood and shopkeeper organizations; Cocaleros and peasants and Sacaba town residents; and Regantes and campesinos. Movements continue to use this multi-march model in Cochabamba to show the breadth and diversity of public support for a cause. This message makes intuitive sense since most marches in central Cochabamba in fact connect a gathering point associated with their constituency (or on the same side of town as their constituency) and the central plaza. Multiple marches superimpose several copies of this narrative using several origin points to demonstrate cross-sectoral unity. The many groups in these marches either “fold in” (*plegar*) to long processions, with each group behind their own banners, or arrive separately to the Plaza and bring their banners to the front of the crowd. With a handful of people behind each banner they make up a representation in miniature of a united front among organizations, standing shoulder to shoulder. Rather than demands, most banners are designed to identify who has showed up and committed to the struggle (*Cochabamba Federation of Health Workers, Presente!*, or simply, *Tarata District*). “We are gathered here, students, workers of the Caja de Salud, teachers, retirees, factory workers, neighborhood councils, to ratify in a unified form...” declares a speaker at the February 18, 2011 labor *cabildo* in La Paz. His language is commonplace: multiple grassroots sectors coming together as a united but separately organized block. And it emerges directly from the way groups organize their marches to come together in union in urban public space.

CABILDOS ABIERTOS

The *cabildo abierto* is a large-scale mass meeting that combines the tasks of demonstrating the mass support for a movement and making decisions about its direction. What sets these meetings apart from others is the open call for participation and attendance. Pivotal *cabildos* in the run-up to the Water War were held in the Zona Sur, bringing together neighbors who committed to joint

mobilization. These gatherings brought Water Committee representatives and other neighbors together in sporting fields to hear calls from the Coordinadora to mobilize.¹⁶¹ However, the largest Water War cabildos were organized in the Plaza 14 de Septiembre with open calls for participation. “We convened [the public] through the radio, through media that were totally accessible,” recalled Coordinadora director Gabriel Herbas (2002:102) in a interview. These open calls brought in thousands of wealthier citizens with few or no connections to the organic grassroots organizations that coordinated periurban participation. With “Moors and Christians both affected,” “things heated up and we had an enormous support, and soon the Plaza ... would end up completely full” (2002:102).

Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, who was a member of the Coordinadora’s technical team, described it as a hybrid organization:

The internal life of the Coordinadora oscillates among the occasional meeting of tens of thousands when important decisions need to be taken, smaller assemblies that are called frequently but not on a regular schedule, and the more or less permanent meeting of several representatives who are in charge of carrying on daily activities and maintaining the Coordinadora’s function of facilitating popular unity and mobilization. (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2004:57)

Marcela Olivera, at the time a volunteer in the Coordinadora and the sister of spokesman Oscar Olivera, remembers this fluidity as essential to the movement’s success:

There were meetings in the neighborhoods for example, and later there was what was known as the Coordinadora’s Assembly, where representatives would come. There were various levels of organization, but it was a mix of all of them. And at times the Coordinadora was—like in April, you see—a hundred thousand people in the plaza, and at times it was Oscar Olivera sending faxes from his office, right? So that was how it was. And I believe that this breadth, and this

¹⁶¹ Don Angel appears in the re-creation of this cabildo in the film *También la lluvia*.

flexibility of the organization was also what made it so what could be done was done, and what was achieved came to pass.

The linchpin of this system was the leadership's commitment to¹⁶² the will of the assembled people. Spokesperson Gabriel Herbas (2002:110) described this as "horizontalism" and saw it functioning is follows:

Effort was always made to ensure that the important decisions were collective ones. We were especially careful that, for example, entering into some mobilization, or taking some definitive measure, or that type of things, had to be a decision assumed by the assemblies. The assemblies were themselves absolutely horizontal, and the initiatives could come from anywhere.

While the cabildos are at the peak of this assembly-based, directly democratic tradition, in practice they offer far less horizontal participation than smaller gatherings or the assemblies of unions and neighborhood committees.¹⁶³ The Water War cabildos were essentially rallies with decision-making power, and the speakers stood two stories above the crowd on the balcony of the Fabriles' office.

The Coordinadora's leadership, guided by assemblies of grassroots organizations, attempted in turn to guide the movement from the balcony. Marcela Olivera described these efforts:

At times ... the Coordinadora also tried to lay out a kind of [political] line. For example, when there were cabildos in the Plaza, the structure, the assembly of the Coordinadora would meet beforehand, and they would say, "What are we going to do?" "What are we going to say?" or "What is the strategy?" right? And then they would go out on the balcony and offer a little bit of this direction, right, and would say, "Okay, were going to do this." And then the people would sort of decide by means of applause or by booing.

¹⁶² One could also say "subordination to" and "dependence upon."

¹⁶³ Aside from practical issues, at least Oscar Olivera speaks of a political reason that the assembly decisions might have been prioritized over the largest crowds in the square: a new relationship between class and power. One of the things Olivera celebrates about the Water War is this: "There were the rich from the northern part of the city ... but this time something was different. This time they marched behind the slogans of the poor, instead of the other way around—the way it usually happens—with the poor marching behind the slogans of the rich" (Olivera 2004:47).

Herbas recalls that the crowds at Cabildos radicalized the Coordinadora's agenda by pushing for breaking the contract with chants from the street level.

So, the cabildo was demanding greater things, that Aguas del Tunari must go, but even still, the people of the Coordinadora who were in the negotiations maintained with a certain serenity that their requests were not so great, and also we maintained not an intransigent stance, but rather an openness to negotiation to see the possibilities of this having a result that would be damaging to no one. (Herbas 2002:103)

The results of the cabildos were relatively consistent: the crowds pushed the Coordinadora's leadership to take a stronger stance. Generally, the Cochabambans assembled in the Plaza to ratify a maximalist agenda for negotiations (e.g., annulling rather than modifying the privatization contract), and to advance the overall strategy of blockade-based pressure and mass public ratification of the Coordinadora's legitimacy. That hours of clashes in the streets were sometimes required even to meet in the plaza could only have hardened the crowd's stance.

During the April mobilization, the spokesmen's subordination to the assembled crowd was maintained and strengthened by tactical choices. On April 6, as government and Civic Committee representatives gathered in the Prefectura, a team of Coordinadora negotiators found their way inside too. The institutional forces refused to give them a seat at the table, while hundreds of protesters in the Plaza refused to let them out the front door. The demand for negotiations was spatialized. When they were called into negotiations three turbulent days later, the Coordinadora's leadership held fast to the idea that the cabildo have the final say on any agreement, refusing to guarantee themselves that blockades would be lifted once a draft was agreed upon. An outraged Education Minister, Tito Hoz de Vila, responded with a telling exclamation: "They are savage Indians" (quoted in Gutiérrez Aguilar et al. 2000:184).

18 FEBRUARY 2011: HOW A CABILDO SPEAKS

On February 18, 2011, several public sector unions—urban and rural teachers, and health workers for the public health service and the Casegural pension system—and some factory workers and retirees participated in joint march that was part of a nationwide strike wave demanding increased compensation. The Trotskyist-aligned teachers in La Paz marched in with signs demanding radical economic measures (*Expel the transnational corporations!*), revolutionary political steps (*Workers and peasants to power!*) and wage increases (*Salary increases in accordance with the family budget!*). Like many marches, this one culminated in a joint rally, filling the plaza atop the newly reconstructed Mercado Camacho, which overlooks the central park in downtown La Paz. Thousands of workers gathered in that square and speakers from each of the unions present made fiery speeches from a platform that jugged out into the crowd. Journalists thrust cameras, tape recorders, and digital devices into the air to capture their words, while two speakers on tripods made their shouted arguments audible to the entire crowd. This was the *cabildo abierto* of the Inter-Union Strike Committee (*Comité Intersindical*), an alliance of unions pressuring the Central Obrera Boliviana from the left. The decision-making aspect wasn't particularly prominent, however. It was at the end of the Casegural health worker union leader's speech that he added, "Now, this *cabildo* has got to put forward some important resolutions on all that has been spoken about by the *compañeros*. Given this situation, help me by shouting." Crowd shouts of *¡Que viva!* (Long Live!) and *Abajo* (Down with!) were just the acclamation needed to approve this sentence of resolutions: "Long live the unity of all the workers! *¡Que viva!* Down with hunger and misery! *¡Abajo!* Down with the country-selling government of Evo Morales. *¡Abajo!* Down with the traitorous [union] bureaucracy. *¡Abajo!*"¹⁶⁴ The Inter-Union Strike Committee was able to elaborate this approval into a 12-point

¹⁶⁴ Transcribed from field recording, 18 February 2011.

resolution.¹⁶⁵ Despite the abbreviated approval, and the lack of debate, there was nothing in the longer document that hadn't been said from the podium: the speakers had in fact explained that by the "unity of the workers" they mean an inter-union alliance to hold strikes, and to put "hunger and misery" behind us, the transnationals would have to be expropriated without compensation. Nor could one easily discount the enthusiasm of the crowd and their frustration with both the national government and the COB's leadership. While this was by far the most compressed process I observed, it reflects the relative absence of participation and deliberation in many large cabildos, and the fact that cabildos depend on continued mobilizing power and circumstance, rather than their approved language, to have real effects. This gathering reflected not so much the feelings of the crowd as the organization of a pact among unions to press forward mobilization. In the end, despite the words from the podium and in the resolution, this cabildo will be remembered as one step forward in a strike wave that crested not with the fall of Morales, but a modest wage rise two months later.

CLAIMING THE PLAZA, EMBODYING SOVEREIGNTY

In casual Bolivian conversation, there are plazas and then there is "the Plaza." All plazas (even some tiny triangular ones) have formal names, but one plaza is also the central plaza, the principal plaza, and the Plaza de Armas. The central plazas have their days structured by state rituals and regimented ceremonies, even as these fade into the background among flows of tourists, demonstrators, or shopkeepers under the bright sun. While government offices extend across the Bolivian downtowns, central plazas continue to be spaces for the public projection of the state and

¹⁶⁵ The full text of the resolution was published in the Partido Obrero Revolucionario's newsletter *Masas*. (*Masas*, March 18, 2011)

for the performance of regional or national unity and self-government.¹⁶⁶ Presidents are inaugurated in them; massive displays of state ceremony take place in them; and row upon row of soldiers parade and salute in them, as do the school children whose motions mimic those soldiers. Honorary sessions of the legislature are held in buildings that front these plazas. The state's repeated use of these plazas as symbolic resources makes them into "central nodes" in state governance. So, central plazas have become significant spaces for protest, and arenas for placing street politics and mass protest in the most political and public of venues.

Bolivia's departmental capitals share a common urban structure that was underlain by the Spanish colonial vision of an ordered grid with a central plaza at its heart.¹⁶⁷ The institutions of the plaza were the physical manifestation of the lettered city: cathedrals and state institutions were just the highest ranking of many sites for the literate to work.¹⁶⁸ Members of the lettered city were trained in universities, schools and monasteries; performed their organizing labor in courts and archives; and displayed their wealth in ostentatious public and private constructions in the space that surrounded the plaza. In Sucre, the colonial capital of Upper Peru and site of the Universidad Mayor, Real y Pontificia de San Francisco Xavier de Chuquisaca,¹⁶⁹ these multiple institutions define

¹⁶⁶ As discussed in the next section, the *cabildo abierto* is a particular form of public self-rule. Its performance in spaces that commemorate the *cabildos* of the independence era can only heighten its significance.

¹⁶⁷ On the idealistic and disciplinary aspects of Spanish colonial urban planning in general, and the grid structure in particular, see chapter one of Angel Rama's *The Lettered City* (1996). Setha Low (1995) compellingly argues that the Zócalo-centered grid of Mesoamerican cities, beginning in the 1520s, is also a legacy of pre-Columbian urban planning.

¹⁶⁸ On each of the central plazas of La Paz (Plaza Murillo), Sucre (Plaza 25 de Mayo), Cochabamba (Plaza 14 de Septiembre), Oruro (Plaza 10 de Febrero), Potosí (Plaza 6 de Agosto), and Santa Cruz (Plaza 24 de Septiembre), stand these cities' principal government buildings and a cathedral.

¹⁶⁹ The university's extensive title—literally translating to Higher, Royal, and Pontifical University of Saint Francis Xavier of Chuquisaca—neatly encapsulates the union of intellectual, governmental, and ecclesiastical power in the lettered city.

the city as “the cultured Charcas.”¹⁷⁰ National, departmental, and municipal, and religious buildings make up two sides of the plaza: the Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe; the Chuquisaca Departmental Government (housed in the nineteenth-century national Palace of Government); the Casa de la Libertad where Bolivia’s independence war was declared and its independence proclaimed; and Sucre’s City Hall. Today, the UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site of central Sucre serves as a sort of monument to the lettered city, and is known as “the white city,” officially for the whitewashed walls of these well-preserved institutions.

Facing Cochabamba’s Plaza 14 de Septiembre are the Governmental Palace of Cochabamba Department, the Town Hall of Cercado municipality, and the Cathedral. At its center is a column commemorating the city’s founding and department’s independence: a thousand rebel soldiers seized the plaza and government buildings on it on September 14, 1810. The (Departmental Factory Workers’ Federation (*Federación Departamental de Fabriles*) has its headquarters on the northeast corner of the plaza, taking up the third floor of the building it shares with the Cochabamba FEJUVE (*Federación de Juntas Vecinales*; Federation of Neighborhood Councils), the Cochabamba Forum on the Environment and Development (*Foro Cochabambino sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo*; FOCOMADE), an assortment of smaller offices. The Fabriles have a strategically unique space: their building is the only grassroots organization located on the Plaza. Within it, only their Salón Azul is a room large enough for major coalition meetings. This room opens onto a third-floor balcony that overlooks the square. Two loudspeakers and a microphone are sufficient to turn the entire Fabriles building into a stage for rallies and a speaking platform for meetings of thousands, even tens of thousands in the Plaza. No other grassroots institution has this kind of direct access to the Plaza, and none of the

¹⁷⁰ The name Charcas, designating the lower-ranked moiety in the pre-existing “multiethnic collectivity” in the region, became the name of the Audiencia ruled from the city, and sometimes the name of the city itself, (Thierry Saignes, in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, Volume 1, 67-69;

governmental or church buildings on the square are designed to be in regular relationship with mass crowds. During the Water War, activists hung a giant red banner on the Fabriles building, declaring *¡El Agua es Nuestro, Carajo!* (The Water is Ours, Damn It!) across the front of the building.

Bolivian central plazas, the products of sixteenth century urban planning, are relatively small. Despite the history of *cabildos*, they are designed primarily as spaces of leisure not to hold assemblies in their centers. People remember truly massive mobilizations by the fact that they flooded the space around the plaza, as in the largest *cabildos* of the Water War, or that they lasted hours just passing through a central space, as reports of the August 3, 2010 gathering in Potosí emphasize. While such numbers deepen the challenge of democratic participation in *cabildos*, they only add to their symbolic power as the embodiment of unity and representative of the public at large.

Access to Bolivia's central plazas is sometimes open and sometimes controlled. Their central spaces are managed as gardens or monuments, designed to be seen and walked through at any time, day or night. Governmental headquarters, like Cochabamba's municipal and regional government buildings have single, massive wooden ports of entry, which are frequently guarded but designed to admit people with business involving the wide variety of offices within. Official parades, whether of soldiers, schoolchildren, or folkloric dancers, frequently used the outer roadways as their route. In the other hand, rebellious action in the Plaza is recognized as symbolically potent, and governments and their police forces actively strategized to prevent certain marchers and mass movements from gaining control of the space.

THE HISTORIC RESONANCE OF CABILDO ABIERTOS IN CENTRAL PLAZAS

When movements like the Coordinadora make a call for *cabildos abiertos* in the plaza, they invoke a long history. The town halls in Spanish colonial towns usually shared the name *cabildo* with

the council of officials at the heart of municipal governance. The *cabildo* as council was the most horizontally organized of the institutions of colonial government, but it was composed of local elites throughout the period of Spanish rule. These exclusive cabildos nonetheless convened larger gatherings for a wide variety of decisions. These larger assemblies, *cabildos abiertos*, continued an Iberian tradition that provided for public election of municipal officials and decisions on major issues (Tapia 1969:59; Barnadas 2002).¹⁷¹ Members of the public gathered in the city hall (i.e., the *cabildo* as building), the principal Cathedral, or upon the central plaza itself on a Sunday, the day residents of the outlying countryside were most likely to visit the city (Tapia 1969:62, 63).

At the time of the Independence revolts, the *cabildo abierto* assumed a renewed importance as an organizing site for creoles seeking independence from the Spanish Crown. Every Bolivian schoolchild learns of the *cabildos abiertos* called in cities across the continent during this period. The common-sense meaning of a *cabildo abierto* is a mass gathering that puts the will of the government in question. The term has been invoked at times of revolutionary crisis in twentieth century Bolivia, including by the MNR in February 1952. In the wake of the June 24, 1967 massacre of miners under the government of René Barrientos Ortuño (the “Massacre of San Juan”), students at the Universidad Mayor San Andrés in La Paz declared their campus a “free territory” and convened a *cabildo abierto* challenging the government, a step which was echoed at Cochabamba’s San Simón University (Lora 1997). Within Bolivian unions and in rural communities, *cabildos abiertos* also carried the meaning of an unusual open meeting calling on the entire membership of the community or profession to be involved in a decision. These precedents underlie the calling of citywide, and eventually “national” *cabildos abiertos* in the twenty-first century.

¹⁷¹ Francisco Tapia’s review (1969:61) of historical materials demonstrated that these gatherings addressed numerous matters, among them “the fight against epidemics, the founding and moving of cities, defense of those cities against the Indians, fulfillment of religious obligations, payment of tithes, and the suppression or addition of festivals to the calendar.”

The tradition of *cabildos abiertos* is one of the meanings bound up in Bolivia's central plazas.¹⁷² The names of central plazas memorialize moments of departmental or national independence struggles, when *cabildos abiertos* proclaimed independence from the plaza.¹⁷³ La Paz's Plaza Murillo was itself disputed terrain in numerous revolutionary conflicts, including in 1809, 1811, 1814, 1862, 1865, 1871, 1898, 1946, 1952, and 2002 (Gerl and Chávez 2012:6 [unnumbered]). Overthrown President Gualberto Villarroel was hung from a lamppost in the plaza in 1946, while six years later the MNR and militias proclaimed the victory of the April revolution from there. This past is not forgotten, but remembered and invoked. As water warrior Marcelo Rojas put it, "We had to take the plaza because doing so is very symbolic. Always in all the revolutions, the first thing that happened was taking the plaza."¹⁷⁴ Today, Bolivia's central plazas carry with them the legacy of this history of revolt, and the founding place of *cabildos abiertos* in the life of the nation.

BATTLING FOR THE PLAZA

Governments do not always allow mass protest free entry to their doorstep. Sometimes, they mobilize police to defend the governing plaza from the popular masses. This effort became a flashpoint in the 2000 Cochabamba Water War, the central focus of days of militant activity being to take the plaza. Christian Mamani recalls that protesters used many plazas in central Cochabamba as

¹⁷² In the manner described by Doreen Massey and Charles Tilly, see chapter 1.

¹⁷³ Pedro Murillo was the lead conspirator in La Paz's July 16, 1809, uprising. Creoles gathered in the Universidad San Francisco Xavier to proclaim independence in Sucre on May 25, 1809, widely described in Bolivia as the "primer grito libertario [first cry for liberation]" in South America. Creole Sebastián Pagador of Oruro issued an anti-Spanish call to arms against peninsular Spaniards on 10 February 1781. Both Simón Bolívar's pivotal victory at Junin and Bolivia's formal independence came on August 6, 1824 and 1825. Francisco del Rivero, Esteban Arze, and Melchor Villa Guzmán led a force of a thousand men to seize the plaza's institutions on September 14, 1810. *Cabildo abiertos* in the plaza named del Rivero governor on September 19 and pledged loyalty to the continental uprising on September 23. Santa Cruz rebels fomented an uprising whose first battle began on September 24, 1810.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, December 7, 2010.

spaces to articulate and coordinate their protest, but the Plaza 14 de Septiembre held a special symbolic importance:

The plazas were the gathering places, the meeting places, and in some way the space from which the marches began towards the main plaza. The objective was to conquer the main plaza and there to declare [pause] victory. But the main plaza was guarded by police who they brought from other departments, they got the army out, and it was very difficult to get into the plaza. And so, it was there that the confrontations developed.¹⁷⁵

Prefect Hugo Galindo announced that the planned February 4 “taking” of the plaza was illegal and ordered a massive policing effort to stop it. After two days of street confrontations led to government concessions, crowd surged into the plaza. There, the scene was both festive and ritualistic. *La Razón* reported, “The multitude ... demonstrated their joy. ... Later, they took off their hats and intoned the notes of the national anthem at the top of their lungs” (quoted in García Orellana et al. 2003:101). The Coordinadora’s February 6 communiqué, written in the joy of that takeover, expresses what the space meant for them:

We entered into the Plaza after two days of battle, just as we said we would, jubilantly, to say that Cochabamba does not yield, that our Water is not for sale, to take back the right to speak [*recuperar la palabra*] and democracy; and finally, to show that when it comes to water, it is we who will decide ... That is what the Cochabamban population of the city and the country has done, forcefully and decidedly, accompanied by us.

Again in April, the Plaza, access to it, and the ability to hold a sovereign cabildo within it, was the central object of dispute as clashes took place across downtown. This was not, I believe, just a matter of defying the concerted efforts of the police to exclude the public from the central square during the confrontation. Rather, it was the culmination of the Coordinadora’s campaign to claim

¹⁷⁵ Interview, April 4, 2010

the right to speak as the voice of Cochabambans, and to offer a new form of participation as a means for controlling the city's public goods, in this case its water resources.

Since 2000, Cochabamba governors and police have largely conceded access to the Plaza 14 de Septiembre. A member of Red Tinku, the group that has maintained activist information panels and a table in the plaza over the dozen years since, explained to me that the old city center around the plaza had once been treated as an elite space, but now the boundary had shifted. The street battles in and around it cemented it as a space of the "popular classes." Right-leaning protesters in 2003, and the divisive days of December 2006–January 2007 observed this boundary by centering their protests to the north, around the Plaza de las Banderas and the Plaza Quintanilla.¹⁷⁶ Popular protest won the Plaza 14 de Septiembre as an open space, and even right-wing Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa generally gave up the fight to exclude protesters from it. On September 19, 2003, an estimated 60,000 people streamed from six locations into the Plaza "in defense of the gas," where representatives of the COB, fabriles, cocaleros, peasants, professionals, and veterans of the Chaco War spoke from the balcony (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008b:211). And in the December 2006–January 2007 effort to force Manfred Reyes Villa to resign as prefect of Cochabamba, a series of grassroots cabildos filled the plaza, coordinating pressure efforts and in one dramatic gathering (on January 16) proclaiming a former political prisoner "interim prefect."

In La Paz, however, access to the Plaza Murillo continues to be tightly regulated (at least for large groups of demonstrators). This Plaza Mayor of the nation is not made available for demonstrators challenging the government, but it is the place where the masses are permitted to gather in support of the government and a Plurinational Bolivia. These include festive state

¹⁷⁶ A study of youth and urban space by Rodríguez Ostría et al. (2010:111–12) concurs with my informants: "Phenomena like the taking of Plaza 14 de Septiembre by popular sectors, beginning with the Water War in 2000 ... have stimulated the mutation of the geographical references, establishing a new boundary between north and south."

occasions when multi-movement gatherings celebrate the new constitution or MAS–IPSP electoral victories. But it also includes mass public pressure, such as the November 2006 encampment of indigenous and landless peasant protesters demanding a new Agrarian Reform Law.¹⁷⁷ In October 2008, a national march demanding a referendum on the new constitution ended in the Plaza, surrounding the National Congress until their demand was granted. A night of festive dancing accompanied the material and political pressure brought by tens of thousands of participants.

When the national government orders police to seal it off, however, the ritual combat to enter the plaza continues. When major marches cross downtown La Paz, police position metal barriers one block from the Plaza Murillo in all directions and wait to seal off access. On these occasions, stealth, surprise, physical altercations, or overwhelming numbers are required to take the plaza. In April 2010, weaving marches of striking workers clashed again and again with the police in attempt to claim the space for the COB's strike.

In October 2011, the Eighth National Indigenous March and its numerous urban supporters contested the square vigorously in a series of incidents. The space was already on the mind of CONAMAQ leader Rafael Quispe earlier in the day, when he explained to Dario Kenner,

The square is not the hacienda of Interior Minister¹⁷⁸ Wilfredo Chávez. He does not own the square; we the people are the owners. We are going to speak from government to government.

(Kenner's translation; Kenner 2011)

The massive arrival march passed through the Plaza Murillo on its way to a gathering in the Plaza San Francisco. Later in the day, scores of marchers returned to the Plaza Murillo and set up a vigil in support of their negotiators (Colonel Wenceslao Zea O'Phelan was relieved of his command over

¹⁷⁷ Nicole Fabricant (2012:155), who observed this event first-hand, describes the importance of taking the plaza: "The senators could not ignore the sheer number of people camping in the Plaza Murillo, and so the new agrarian reform bill passed through the Senate that very night."

¹⁷⁸ The "Interior Minister" or "Minister of Government" oversees all domestic policing.

police in La Paz department for allowing this to happen (Bolpress, November 20, 2011.) The vigil was isolated when a ring of police surrounded the Plaza. They were unwilling to attack the vigil, but unleashed teargas upon supporters who arrived with food, tents, and warm clothing. Four days later, the Morales government conceded the marchers' demands. Whether permitted or resisted by the state, the symbolic power of the plaza has real consequences for amplifying the voice of the protests and connecting it to both democratic legitimacy and the tradition of revolutionary change.

FRIDAY, 15 APRIL 2011: A CABILDO AND ITS LIMITS

Two months after the Inter-Union Strike Committee's cabildo in La Paz (see page 190), the labor strike wave had gathered force. Two rounds of labor mobilizations by the Central Obrera Boliviana had alternated with university mobilizations for additional resources and a series of strikes at private employers. Unlike its forerunners, the April round was pulling in increasing numbers of supporters and employing the tools of a civic strike. A general strike beginning on April 4 brought out rural and urban teachers, health workers, and retirees again, but also began attracting municipal, construction, and factory workers into a widening effort. Miners joined a convergence of labor marches in La Paz that fought for access to the Plaza Murillo. Isolating highway blockades had begun around La Paz on Tuesday and Sucre on Thursday. The "blockade of a thousand corners" paralyzed central La Paz, while Cochabamba's downtown had been cut off for much of Thursday by coordinated bridge blockades.

On the twelfth day of labor protests demanding a wage increase and a comprehensive package of demands on labor rights, pensions, and benefit guarantees, Cochabamba's labor movement came to the Plaza 14 de Septiembre for a cabildo. The cabildo was preceded by a convergence of marches to the plaza, and the diversity of those present demonstrated that sympathy

for the strike was spreading across organized labor, beyond the combative sectors that had been mobilizing for months.

On the ground, the crowd in the plaza was a rolling cacophony of sounds: chants, songs, claps, and the rattle of noisemakers made of pebble-filled soda bottles. All of the bullhorns and group cohesion in voice and message that had accompanied each of the little groups on their separate marches persisted, bringing a patchwork of messages into the square. People sang threats—*It seems like he's going to fall, it seems like he's going to fall, Evo and his ministers*—pledges of commitment and fearlessness—*Rifles, machine guns, the teachers won't be silenced!*—and debating points about the availability of government funds—*They are buying airplanes (in the next verse: satellites) with the money of the people.*

These various groups had marched in behind separate banners, but a few from the largest delegations detached themselves and carried these banners to the front of the crowd, on the street in front of the Fabriles Headquarters. The health and education workers, who had been pushing the effort along for two months, were joined by construction workers, the employees of the water utility Semapa, departmental and municipal employees, university students and workers, postal workers, bus terminal vendors, and factory workers, organized behind dozens of banners but melding into a single crowd. They positioned themselves in all the spaces where the speakers on the balcony could be seen, covering the roadways, sidewalks, and walks within the plaza, while remaining standing and focused on the rally.

Above, the third-floor balcony was a hive of activity. Labor leaders spoke one-by-one to the crowd, each surrounded for the duration of his speech by a couple dozen microphones and videographers. The speakers shared words and handshakes with one another and few passed declarations out to the press. From the front of the balcony, their speeches rallied the crowd with

news of new allies in the struggle (airport workers were joining the strike, for instance) and angry insistence on the importance of higher wages.

However, the outlook from the balcony was complicated by three social forces in motion: the government was steadfastly resistant to major wage increases; the campesino federations of Cochabamba were preparing a march challenging the strike “in defense of the process of change”; and the grassroots in Cochabamba distrusted national labor leaders to fully press their interests. (As Gustavo Sánchez, Secretary General of the Magisterio Urbano, described it in his speech, “The leaders of the Central Obrera Boliviana have one foot in the mobilization and one foot in the government.”) As Oscar Olivera joined other labor leaders looking out over the crowd, the scene looked a lot like moments from the Water War, but the sense of unity only went so far. Key social boundaries separating the rich from the working class, campesinos from the city, and unions from unorganized workers had not been breached. Moors and Christians remained separate. Four days later, the government would back a massive countermarch in the same plaza. Without a broadening base, the labor *cabildo* could only aspire to sovereignty. They would have to accept an agreement with the government offering very limited wage concessions.

HOW CABILDOS USE THE PLAZA TO CLAIM SOVEREIGNTY

In April 2000, a new public movement mobilized in the streets of Cochabamba and coordinated through *cabildos* in the Plaza 14 de Septiembre impressed its demands upon the national government of Bolivia. In October 2003 and June 2005, larger efforts brought about the fall of two Bolivian presidents. Three presidents who assumed power after these episodes returned to crowds in the plaza to present their plans and promise their accountability. These mobilizations became reference points for politics and the crowds at their center became sites of sovereignty.

What distinguishes these events? What elements are required for a crowd to claim sovereignty? Bringing together the conclusions of chapters 3 and 4, there is a unified story that intertwines the civic strike and the cabildo, collective decisions and the symbolic weight of the spaces where these decisions take place. Only a few mass mobilizations achieved this level of transformative political importance, because for only a few does the entire story ring true.

Practical sovereignty: First, the civic strike and other means of pressure have their tangible effects on urban life, the economy, and daily rhythms. The cabildo is the place where these methods are chosen and these effects are governed, not by usual institutions but by a public forum. As Lorgio Orellana Aillón argues about the Water War, “The authority of the Coordinadora was born of the direct action of the masses, and that was the way in which the decisions assumed in assemblies and cabildos was ‘made effective’” (2004:530). The government’s tangible loss of control over urban space and/or flows of vital necessities (like food, fuel, or water) is a powerful challenge. From the side of the demonstrators, the ability to control these spaces according to the decisions of the cabildo represents a practical sovereignty.

A unified political subject: A select few mobilizations exceed the organizing power of the movements that endorsed them and become generalized gatherings of the public. These truly overwhelming protest efforts have the qualities of being numerous, boundary-crossing, composed of novel alliances, and made up of committed people across a large geographic reach.

Irrepressibility: If these multitudes are combined with the kind of disruptive civic strikes described in chapter 3, they are imposing enough of an economic cost that they cannot be ignored.

However, they also demonstrate themselves¹⁷⁹ to be difficult to repress without further broadening the base of mobilization through public outrage.

Dueling sovereignties: When all the steps along this path have been travelled, but the government is unwilling to yield to the movement's demands, we have a situation of fundamental uncertainty about who is in charge, about who is the truly sovereign voice. Gabriel Herbas' description is illustrative: "The Coordinadora was the power and the authority in Cochabamba, which even gave permission to the functionaries of the prefectura to enter and leave their building" (Herbas 2002:108). The seemingly abstract theory of sovereign power is suddenly reduced to the most practical matters.

It is at this point—in Sewell's (2005a:228) terms, "a cascading series of ... ruptures that ... result in ... social transformation"—that cabildos and other voices can rise to speak on behalf of a political subject in a way that is an alternate to the established state. This is also the point at which some remarkable and daring claims are voiced, according to political visions of various actors who make it to the balcony. These have included declaration of a "popular assembly" that could assume power, designation of an "alternate prefect" in Cochabamba, ultimatums to Presidents, and naming El Alto "the general command of the people." And, this is where, a government concession or a "constitutional exit" allows the crowd to translate a "popular mandate" into a policy or agenda for the state.

By locating their mass assemblies in the central space of governance, protest participants have modeled a realignment of the political system that places social movements, community organizations, and politically and racially excluded groups, at the center of civic and political life. When speaking as the coordinating center of a massive strike wave, at the confluence of social forces

¹⁷⁹ This demonstration may come by the mobilization actually surviving repression, or by dissension on the part of elites unwilling to allow them to be repressed.

uniting unexpectedly, or before an unexpectedly large outpouring of the public, cabildo participants can dare to claim a broader voice with democratic legitimacy. That voice, as a moment of popular sovereignty, has left Bolivia with lasting political mandates—de-privatization of water, nationalization of gas, and a Constituent Assembly—with a force that continues.

Figure 9: Major points of origin and routes of marches in central Cochabamba



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Chapter 5
Transgressing the Lettered City's Racial Geography

On October 18, 2003, in the Plaza San Francisco, the COB organized a massive cross-sector gathering to celebrate President Sánchez de Lozada's fall. According to one newspaper account, Roberto de la Cruz, Executive Secretary of COR–El Alto, ended his speech and “asked the workers to make the sign of the cross and solemnly swear to not betray the Bolivian social movement and to fight tirelessly until the poor accede to power.” The gathering also featured embraces between members of different sectors that had collaborated in the protest. A march by Huanuni miners, Oruro university students, Qacachaca indigenous people, and Altiplano campesinos (among others) was used to symbolically begin their journey home. This march featured “the sounding of pututus,¹⁸⁰ the flying of wiphalas, and explosions of dynamite” (*El Diario*, October 19, 2003) as symbols of identity, fighting spirit, and victory.

As this closing ceremony for the Gas War suggests, indigenous movements, indigenous symbols, and indigenous bodies have been vital to the power of space-claiming protest in Bolivia. In the two previous chapters, I have shown how the sovereign crowds of the 1999–2005 grassroots upheaval put forward a challenge to the political authority of the government, particularly when the crowds' message of grassroots sovereignty was amplified by the political geography of the spaces they claimed. However, many of the same mobilizations also spoke from a subordinated racial position: indigeneity. As indigenous collective subjects, these crowds claimed the right to redefine Bolivia, putting aside whatever parts of the state they rejected and reconfiguring politics to accommodate indigenous self-rule, an end to the impoverishment of the indigenous majority, and equal social status for indigenous individuals and cultures. They proposed a plurinational Bolivia that

¹⁸⁰ A pututu is an Andean wind instrument made from a large seashell or horn.

would mirror their plural mobilizations. In this chapter and the next, I look specifically at indigenous space claiming within urban and official government spaces that have long been racialized.

Conceptually, I distinguish between the *political geography* of the city and the *racial geography* of the city. I do this not to suggest that race lacks a power dimension, but rather to tease out the complex interactions that occur between racialized subordinates and governmentally privileged spaces. The racially exclusive tradition of governance in the lettered city suggests an identity between power geography and racial geography. Such an identity can be found in colonial cityscape as envisioned by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “a world divided in two” and characterized by “mutual exclusion,” “a world compartmentalized, Manichaeic, and petrified,” where *colonist* and *powerful*, and *native* and *powerless* appear as synonyms (Fanon 2004:3, 4, 15).¹⁸¹ Yet when we treat state power, class, and race as interchangeable, we lose the ability to perceive transformations in their relationship, even as we gain insight about the emotional impact of a world so divided. Even where geographies of power and race are identical, separating them conceptually can aid our understanding. It explains, for example, how participation in governance requires miming or performing the dominant racial identity, a world in which indigenous entrants wear white masks. The conceptual split also allows us to reconsider how spaces of governance are racialized and how the meanings of spaces shift as people act to claim them.

In terms of the spatial construction of society, I argue that colonial and republican Bolivian society was constructed through a racial geography of the city. Nirmal Puwar (2004:8) writes:

There is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time. Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked as trespassers, who are ... circumscribed as being “out of place.”

¹⁸¹ On parallels between Fanon’s anticolonialism and that of Bolivian indigenous movements see Lucero (2008).

In Bolivian cities, this racial geography has been historically constructed around the management and governance of an indigenous majority, presumed to “belong” in rural areas or only engaged in labor service in urban spaces. At the center of cities and in the halls of government, privileged spaces were marked by the occasional exclusion, and near-constant subordination, of indigenous people. I follow Puwar in drawing attention to the bodily dimensions of appearing in these different spaces. She argues that high-status practices like governing come to be associated with the bodily characteristics of those who are exclusively allowed to perform them. When governing is a race- and gender-exclusive task, the governing body is presumed to be racially privileged and male, a standard she calls the “somatic norm.” This association, made silently so long as there are no exceptions to exclusion, becomes visible when insubordinate people enter the exclusive space, or take on the forbidden role. That transgression of boundaries arouses powerful emotions, which can include fear, anxiety, disorientation, and revulsion. The number and presence of the out-of-place bodies are amplified in importance and seem to threaten the structure of division altogether (Puwar 2004:33, 48-52).

In this chapter, I begin by describing the emotional power of Bolivian cities’ racial geography. I show how a single practice—the requirement that indigenous people yield the sidewalks to their whiter compatriots—reflects a web of associated meanings: servitude, ownership of space, restrictions on comportment, and absence of political voice. Next, I trace the historical construction of this racial geography starting with the Spanish colonial period. I show how the geographical divisions between governing cities and governed rural areas, and between elite spaces of literate colonial officials and the surrounding spaces that were governed by their written words, formed a racial order. Despite the transformations brought by independence, liberalism, and the 1952 nationalist revolution, this hierarchical order remained intact.

In the scenarios of collective space claiming through protest and plurinational state building that I chart in the second half of this chapter, more complex interactions take place between these two types of geographies. In earlier chapters, we saw how urban and rural mass protests unsettled the established geography of power in Bolivia. First, I begin by looking at the drama created when indigenous people appear unbowed, representing themselves politically, in the public spaces at the heart of the lettered city. They violate their racial exclusion from space to speak from the centers of power, but against the state as constituted. In the next section, I examine how mass indigenous presence was used as a protest tool in and around in the 1952 Revolution. Turning to contemporary events, I find that a half-century after that revolution, indigenous people holding central urban spaces in Bolivia was still felt as revolutionary. I use a 2011 Cochabamba protest to illustrate how collectively “being indigenous in public space” can be a richly political act. Finally, I show how this dynamic has strengthened the voice of national indigenous marches, a protest tradition that has been crucial in the call for a Constituent Assembly and a plurinational Bolivia.

THE EMOTIONAL POWER OF RACIAL GEOGRAPHY

“Forty or fifty years ago, our ancestors didn’t have the right to walk on the sidewalks,” President Evo Morales remarked in his first inaugural address. Morales remembered:

Early this morning, I saw some of my brothers and sisters singing in the historic Plaza Murillo, the same Plaza Murillo where, just like the Plaza San Francisco, forty or fifty years ago, we didn’t have the right to enter... That is our history. (Morales Ayma 2006)

Portraying the speech, biographer Martín Sivak wrote, “In gestures and words [Morales] embodied the campesino who had come to the most important post in the city” (2010:161). Beginning when

he served as a Deputy in the National Congress,¹⁸² Morales was a living transgression of the pre-existing Bolivian order, made manifest through his presence in space previously unauthorized to indigenous peasants like him. This made him “a permanent official target ... the perfect and long-wished-for enemy,” subject to public accusations and private humiliations.¹⁸³ His presence proved so troubling that the mainstream parties eventually suspended and then expelled him from parliament. Now as president, he used his first turn at the podium to make the troubling historical memories of exclusion into a public matter as he stepped into power.

The limits placed on Bolivia’s indigenous majority—exclusion from prominent public spaces and the obligation to step into the gutter to allow “whiter” residents to pass on the sidewalk—had many parallels across Latin America and beyond.¹⁸⁴ Understanding Morales’ remarks requires considering what such rules mean, and why they are historically important. What does the obligation to yield the sidewalk do as a racial marker? What relation is inscribed between the creole woman, man, or child who remains on the sidewalk and the indigenous woman, man, or child who is socially

¹⁸² Morales was elected to the uninominal seat representing the Chapare with 70% of the vote in the 1997 general election, the highest vote percentage of any candidate nationwide. (Uninominal seats have districts; plurinominal seats are chosen by proportional representation in each department.) (Komadina and Geffroy 2007:32).

¹⁸³ Sivak (2010:81–82) details these experiences in a lengthy list including the following: “They accused him of ... being the dictator of El Chapare, being the king of El Chapare ... They made fun of him publicly, saying he didn’t know how to add. They mocked the way he spoke and what he said when he did speak. They gave him—through the president of private businesses—a Bible and a constitution to civilize him.”

¹⁸⁴ Rules of sidewalk deference were applied in Tlacotalpan, Toluca (Staples 1994:121), and Chiapas, Mexico (Kovic 2005:123); and, to Africans and African Americans, in apartheid South Africa (Nightingale 2012:269), the American South (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht 2009:87–89; Coker 2007:169–71), and Albany, New York (Holsaert 2010:102). They seem to have originated part of a broader set of forms of deference (removing hats, bowing heads, averting the gaze, etc.) that subordinates of many kinds had to follow. These rituals conflicted directly with the idea of equal participation in a public sphere. As these examples illustrate, the rituals of deference became sore reminders of exclusion from that sphere and/or flashpoints for groups contesting that exclusion.

obligated to descend to the gutter? How does it define and demarcate the spaces where mestizos and creoles are thus respected and yielded to?

To take these questions in turn: (1) Yielding the sidewalk meant obliging the indigenous passerby to expose her- or himself to greater amounts of dirt and discomfort in the often earthen roadway, providing a margin of protection, safety, and deference to the anonymous, but personally privileged creole or mestizo she or he passed. It resonated with the rural and urban assignment of indigenous servants to the role of *pongo*, the personal servant who slept outside the doorway (hence the Quechua term from *punku*, door), giving up his or her comfort and cleanliness to provide immediately accessible service to the master. The obligatory gesture is thus a racialized generalization of the relatively common condition of indigenous servitude.

(2) Both parties to such public interpersonal interactions necessarily internalized the racial roles and characteristics involved in these repeated interactions. Susan Ruddick (1996:136) reviews how a wide variety of Black feminist, anticolonial, and Black studies researchers have considered “the ways in which roles of visible minorities have been scripted in and through public space.” The obligation invoked by Morales is clearly an evocative and directly enforced example of such a script. As a historical account recalls, “When the campesinos went upon the sidewalk, the ‘gentlemen’ would push them aside with their walking sticks” (Antezana Ergueta 1984:715). Ruddick argues that micropolitical encounters scripted in this way instruct those who experience them, whether through the emotional tone of the script or the implied or realized threat of enforcement of the obligation. She writes that “such encounters deeply scar the psyche, inscribing in the very bodies of people their understanding of themselves and their place in a racialized hierarchy” (Ruddick 1996:136). Morales described his own childhood traumas, associated with urban space as a whole, to a British reporter: “When I first went to school in the city, the other children would laugh at me and call me ugly

because I was Aymara. If I spoke my language, they would laugh and know I was Indian, and at that time I didn't speak Spanish, so to avoid being laughed at, for a long time I didn't speak at all" (Boggan 2006).

(3) While not immediately obvious, these kinds of obligations have an intense spatial dimension. They were applied above all in spaces understood to belong to creoles and mestizos, in the city and its center, not the marketplace or the rural village. Through such interactions, the deferring indigenous person is compelled to yield not just the sidewalk, but ownership of public space to the dominant creole. The indigenous child who watches his parents give way to a passing young creole would rapidly learn this part of the city did not belong to his family.

We must always remember, however, that "ownership" is not equivalent to a right to exclusive use: the subordinated presence of the oppressed may be a more powerful sign of the power of the dominant than their complete absence. This sense of ownership helps explain Morales' other remark on the plaza that could not be entered. In 1925, President Bautista Saavedra declared that indigenous men could not enter the Plaza Murillo in traditional dress.¹⁸⁵ Fears of self-possessed indigenous bodies were acknowledged and regulated with other restrictions on transit ridership, occupations, and eligibility for civic life.

This pattern of scripted or regulated encounters, microaggressions, and internalized power differences is replicated in other urban interactions, which can be most striking to foreign observers. Unlike the sidewalk rule, most are played out around class. Indeed class, comportment, and geography largely constitute the race difference between *cholos* (urbanized Indians, imputed to have European blood) and *indios* (rural "full-blooded" Indians). Visiting American Carter Goodrich offers

¹⁸⁵ This claim is sourced to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui ("Bircholas", 2001: 100) by Forrest Hylton (2003:176). She argues that this pushed women to be the primary presenters of Indian tradition in La Paz.

a brief panorama of Indian (as opposed to cholo) occupations: “Whenever Indians appeared in La Paz before the revolution, they kept mainly to the back streets, dressed in an extremely ragged clothing, or drove llama trains loaded with llama dung to serve as fuel in their masters’ town houses. Some of them served as bearers of burdens” (1971:19). (Even his sympathetic language reflects a geographical displacement: cholo laborers and chola shopkeepers are “town dwellers” and feel “at home” in the city, while Indian domestic servants and porters “appear” in the city without residing in it.) Porters’ lives were also circumscribed by rules of comportment. Goodrich continues,

One of these [bearers of burdens] appeared at our office in the hotel staggering under a wooden box of supplies which, according to the stenciled label, weighed well over 200 pounds. This he had carried upstairs on his back since Indians were not allowed to use the elevator. (1971:19)

Ortiz had her own encounter with a porter at her hotel: A hotel employee points him out on the street (“aquel bicho [that critter]”) and advises her of a maximum fee (“It’s enough. These are abusers.”). She observes him in detail, “ragged and with indescribably tattered clothing,” “his gait faltering under the weight of the suitcases ... the lack of energy from his malnourished nature.” Still, she hands him the prescribed fee. His haggling consists of three words “It’s not much, mama,” spoken with “a plaintive voice, that voice of the submissive servant that the Indian directs to the white person.” She does not yield, and he emits a “discordant wail, a kind of prolonged and deep sob” and “leaves suddenly without another word” (1953:7–8).¹⁸⁶

Both Goodrich and Ortiz deploy these accounts to sum up in a moment, as Morales would do again in 2006, the contours and impact of racial power on the bodies and selves of indigenous peoples. While experienced immediately in these embodied interactions, this power has been constructed and embedded in the cityscape through centuries of history.

¹⁸⁶ Ortiz and her daughter then share tears of their own. She tries but fails to follow, and later to locate the man she had taken advantage of, but her guilt is a different side of this story.

THE SPATIALITY OF RACIAL POWER IN BOLIVIAN CITIES

“Let’s not fall into illusions. The cities have always been enemies of the Indian,” declares Julio Butrón, a high valley peasant organizer, in his memoir of the 1952 Revolution. In his account, the urban area appears as a space totally hostile to the indigenous countryside:

It was in [the cities] that we carried out the services of *pongueaje* and *mitanaje*; it was also in the populated centers where we were most devalued and where we suffered humiliations of all kinds like the ridicule of our dress, our skin color, our gross attitude, and our ignorance. In the cities there was not a single friend of the Indian. Only enemies. Only exploiters. Only landlords (even those who never owned even a square meter in property nor a single *colono*). (Butrón Mendoza 1992:70)

Across Latin America, and particularly in the Andes, the racial stratification of power has long taken a spatial form, which excluded the indigenous from spaces of power in the governing cities (Appelbaum et al. 2003; Rama 1996; Chambers 2003; Weismantel and Eisenman 1998; Cadena 2000). Spanish colonial governance rested on the foundation of new cities that ruled over the surrounding countryside. In late colonial Latin America, around 1789, 78 percent of Indians lived in rural areas, while a bare majority (52%) of whites lived in “urban” places, according to a continental survey by C. Esteva Fabregat.¹⁸⁷ Indigeneity was historically defined by membership in rural collective communities, in contrast to the mestizo-creole-identified cities (Larson 2004). Spanish authorities permitted indigenous communities to maintain many internal institutions and ways of living, but also subjected them to various obligations to provide labor and cash tribute to the colonial state. A variety of state-imposed regimes also made unpaid Indian labor available to Spanish

¹⁸⁷ Fabregat’s statistics are based on Alcedo’s 1789 *Diccionario de América*, and tabulate “594 ciudades, villas, and mining centers” as places with “significant ‘urban’ functions.” His percentages thus include rural residents near “urban” places, and are specified to an additional decimal place in the original: 78.0% and 51.8%; such numbers have precision exceeding their accuracy. Quotes from Morse (1984:89).

and Creole elites. In Bolivia, as elsewhere in Spanish colonial America, the racially imposed obligation of Indian tribute together with the possibility of anonymity in the city fostered the disappearance of urbanized Indians from pure racial categories. Instead of *indios*, many registered themselves as *mestizos* and *cholos* (originally meaning of three-quarters Indian blood) regardless of their parentage.¹⁸⁸

Spanish colonial cities were not in fact mestizo/creole islands in an indigenous sea. In Fabregat's late eighteenth century data, whites and mestizos formed just half of residents of urban areas across Latin America.¹⁸⁹ Instead, colonial cities were miniature reproductions of the urban–rural hierarchies of identity, power, and labor, crisscrossed by streets on which creole elites, mestizos, and indigenous all walked. As Sergio Serulnikov (2009:444) describes the pattern in the region: “Urban society was imagined as split between the “decent people” (people of Hispanic origin, both Iberian-born and creole, eligible to occupy the principal offices of the council) and the plebeians (individuals identified as mestizos, mulattoes, cholos, and other ‘castas’ who carried out manual labor and the retail trades).” The urban creole–rural indigenous polarity was an *internal feature* of towns and cities. Patterns of residential and public space segregation were a part of Bolivian cities from their colonial era forward, although marketplaces, neighborhoods, and marital beds (as well as extramarital couplings) all accommodated racial mixture.

In spaces that faced out upon or surrounded central plazas, a stratum of literate intellectuals constituted what Angel Rama termed the Lettered City (1996:18): “a myriad of administrators,

¹⁸⁸ On cross-registration in official records Arequipa, Peru, see Sarah Chambers (2003). On the original meaning of “cholo,” see Rodrigo Montoya Rojas (2011) and Magnus Mörner (1969:64). On the rapid conversion of cholo from a biological to cultural mixture, see Huascar Rodríguez García (2010:274–81).

¹⁸⁹ Again according to Fabregat, 35.6% of “urban” residents were whites and 14.1 % were Mestizos. The urban Indian population of 1.73 million made up 36.8% of the total urban population, with the remainder made up of Afrodescendant groups: Mulattos (8.9%) and Negroes (4.6%) (Morse 1984:89).

educators, professionals, notaries, religious personnel, and other wielders of pen and paper” whose work ordered the lives of vastly more people, and who stood among the “consumers of the colonies’ economic surplus”. Indians sometimes entered these creole spaces, but were constrained to serve within them and not represent themselves politically. Membership in the colonial-era convent, monastery, and priesthood were denied to Indians, but these institutions brought Indians within their walls as laborers.

In summary, the lettered city was constructed principally as a creole/mestizo city.¹⁹⁰ It operated in a European language and manifested itself in downtowns filled with walled enclosures inside which creoles and mestizos governed but the indigenous served. Further, cities were also places for the concentration and enjoyment of the wealth obtained from Indian labor in the fields and the mines. The geographical boundaries of the creole/mestizo city were not of course the outer limits of towns, but lines between zones of restricted behavior, bodily comportment, and role. In this physical manifestation and in those minds conditioned by the racialized interactions, the geography of power and the geography of race were analogous: governing spaces were coded as white spaces, within which indigenous politics were an aberration and indigenous servitude was routine.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRANSFORMATIONS AND CONTINUITIES IN BOLIVIA’S RACIAL GEOGRAPHY

As I observed in earlier chapters, the twenty-first century Bolivian city is defined not just by long-term structures, but also by the recent impact of rapid urbanization, neoliberal economic policies, and ethnically conscious political movements. Over the period from the 1980s to the 2000s,

¹⁹⁰ Notwithstanding Dueñas’ argument that exceptional Indian and mestizo men participated in the lettered city’s flow of ideas, principally through learned appeals of their status, the same men were unable to redefine the city they participated in to end its various professional and geographical exclusions of the indigenous.

these factors made the overlap of indigenous and urban grow to an unprecedented scale, qualitatively changing the racial cast of the Bolivian metropolis. The ballooning of Bolivian cities with huge peripheral settlements created a new majority within the cities. Poor periurban dwellers came to outnumber the prior population of their cities and most self-identified indigenous Bolivians now live in rapidly growing urban areas (Canessa 2006). The migration from the countryside and the sharply downsized mines, and the collective struggles to establish these settlements, generated a structure of community self-organization and a political consciousness in periurban neighborhoods (Zibechi 2008; Achi Chiritèle and Delgado 2007). And the waxing of Katarismo and indigenous rights movements led these periurban collectives to increasingly think of themselves in indigenous terms. As Sian Lazar found in El Alto, many periurban residents are invested in an “indigenous identity ... based upon the mixing of the rural and the urban” and grounded in their neighborhood, their union, and their rural community of origin (Lazar 2006:186–92).

Many of the long-term activists I interviewed considered themselves urban *and* indigenous, living out the strands of identity identified by Sian Lazar. María Eugenia (“Mauge”), a young Cochabamba urban activist who has cultivated alliances with rural organizations, is aware of the traditional opposition between urban residence and indigeneity, but defines herself as Aymara. In this fragment of her narrative, she explains this through familial and community connections to rural communities:

I grew up in the city, but my identity is Aymara because my parents are Aymaras. My family is Aymara; they live in the countryside. And, well, identity is not only acquired by where one lives, right? Rather, one acquires identity through the values one acquires. Beyond language, beyond whether you live in a certain place, you are from there and you are indigenous, and [to say that] if you live in the city, you totally relinquish your culture is a lie, isn't it? So, I came to the city [*here Mauge speaks metaphorically; she was born in Cochabamba—CBJ*] but I have... I was raised under the

values of the Aymara culture. My mother has nourished me, has given me the values of the community, shall we say. So, therefore I identify myself as Aymara. Of course, before I did not [so identify] because of this discrimination.

We can see here how the rural countryside structures Aymara identity, defining “the community” as a font of values that can be preserved and transmitted in the city. However, people like Mauge take up a full identification as indigenous while remaining urban, overcoming what they read as a discriminatory impulse to give up this part of their biographies.

Don Angel, the former miner who was “relocated” to Cochabamba’s Zona Sur during the height of privatization of the mines, found the defining structures of Quechua-Aymara communal life at work in establishing his neighborhood, Barrio Primero de Mayo. Once a devout Marxist-Leninist, he now speaks of restoring indigenous values as the primary political act: “recovering,” “recuperating,” and “returning to practice” the values that constitute a way of life. Remembering his father’s stories of nineteenth-century indigenous resistance, he said, “I came to recall that, that solidarity, for example, is called *aymi* here, right? It’s called *ayni* in our culture and in the Aymara culture as well.” The collective work that built his communities’ roads, water system, and political organizations embodied for him a cultural logic, more powerful than his previous political orientation because “everyday we practice it in our lives, we Quechuas and Aymaras.” “We have discovered this,” he said, “in everyday struggles, in living, in the assemblies.”

These transformations in urban identity were not matched by changes in the composition of the state prior to 2005. The lettered city lived on within the national administration, carried out in spaces marked as creole. Bret Gustafson’s account (2009:171–74) of the 1994 cabinet meeting that authorized bilingual education describes how the decision unsettled the room in which it was made:

Introducing indigenous languages into public schooling was akin to having a servant join the master at the table, much like the Aymara vice-president [V́ctor Hugo Cárdenas] speaking cholo Spanish amid this lighter-skinned inner circle of power.¹⁹¹

Particularly at the national level, the language of government, systems of governance and justice, rituals of prestige, and symbols of national rule remained decidedly creole/mestizo. Up until the dramatic 2006 inauguration, the polar opposition remained between elite administration and indigenous spaces, even as the latter came to include vast new urban peripheries.

PRECEDENTS: PEASANT CROWDS IN THE 1952 REVOLUTION

The overlap of racial and government power and their accompanying exclusions and embodied subordination have long created a field of tension in Bolivian cities. In turn, the reversal of these rules, the transgression of the racial and political order has left behind an electrifying sense of that order's fragility. The sudden presence of large numbers of indigenous people in ruling spaces makes manifest their exclusion from the power organized from these places. Further, fearful elites may question, *If indigenous bodies cannot be controlled in this most central and precious of spaces, will systems for controlling them function at all?* Thus their presence raises the prospect of a shifting social order. Observers and participants share the sense that everything can change in terms of *power* because the usual rules have been broken *on the streets*. We can see this happen in the current Bolivian transformation and its mid-century predecessor.

¹⁹¹ Gustafson's vignette is a rather striking instance of the disorientation Nirmal Puwar describes (2004:42) at times when a privileged gaze encounters bodies out of place: "Their very presence, as 'equal' members rather than service staff ... who take up a different rhythm in the occupation of space, challenges the ways in which racial bodies have been categorised and fixed. Significantly, both the way in which the 'other' has been fixed and the construction of self in relation to this image are troubled; there is a disturbance of a certain order. ... [T]he occupation of what has been dressed up as a 'universal' position of authority, even though we know it is crafted for particular bodies, or, rather precisely because it is a black body, represents a dissonance; a jarring of framings that confuses and disorients. It is a menacing presence that disturbs and interrupts a certain white, usually male, sense of public institutional place."

During and after the 1952 Revolution, indigenous presence in city centers reached massive proportions. Indian peasants marched (sometimes bearing arms) in state parades, demonstrated over grievances, queued up to meet bureaucrats, and simply inhabited the public plazas where they had previously been shunned. Their appearance was a joint effort by rural indigenous organizers and the ruling MNR party itself, and their presence alone was a dramatic statement. In his memoir *Eran solo unos indios: Pasajes de la cara india de una revolución* (*They Were Just Some Indians: Passages of the Indian Face of a Revolution*), peasant union organizer Julio Butrón Mendoza recalls:

From April 1952 to August of the following year, we brought to the cities thousands of campesinos from all the provinces and all the rural corners of the country, sometimes with music of panpipes and other instruments, other times with rifle and machine gun blasts concentrating ourselves in their plazas, streets, and sports fields. In Cochabamba, at the stadium, the Cuellar lagoon, the *cancha* of Caracota, San Antonio Plaza in the south, and the exits towards the routes to the Valle Alto, Sacaba, and Quillacollo. We entered the city those times we thought necessary, boldly displaying [*ostentando*] our number and our weapons in its avenues and most travelled streets, firing our weapons towards the sky, at some known houses of feudal lords, or at public buildings. We crossed the city from one extreme to the other, expounding our human force and our decision to assume the defense of our rights against all who opposed the resurgence of the Indian. (1992:69)

United Nations technical support mission leader Carter Goodrich was among those impressed with the peasants' "human force," which he saw (from the vantage point of La Paz) as tightly connected with the MNR government:

More spectacular were the processions of tens of thousands of campesinos from all over the country that were brought in to La Paz by truckloads to celebrate various official holidays such as the Revolution on April 9. Each group carried banners bearing the slogans of the revolution and, in some cases, of the attack on *analfabetismo* ('illiteracy'), and it was usually preceded by its own band playing panpipes or native drums or other instruments. Some of the men, and even a few

women, carried guns. In each unit the first rank or two of the marchers typically included the village leaders with their staffs of office and others in the native costume of their region. The procession, which formed an ethnologist's or at least a photographer's review of the indigenous population of the country, moved for hours through the main streets of the city and ended in either the Plaza Murillo or the Stadium where the president rendered an account of his stewardship. (Goodrich 1971:19–20)

The MNR proudly highlighted the indigenous symbols used in these rallies, and at the 1953 signing of the Agrarian Reform Law in Ucureña. A government publication celebrating *Bolivia: 10 Años de Revolución (Bolivia: Ten Years of Revolution)* highlighted the flying of the wiphala and captioned a photo, “The ‘pututu’ of campesino liberation is allowed to be heard.” At the same time, the MNR sought to supersede “Indian” identity. “A high human reason dictated” Agrarian reform, claimed the same publication, “TO MAKE THE INDIAN A CITIZEN” (Presidencia de la República 1962:55, 59, capitalization original).

Amid the general presence of mobilized Indians in the city, their takeover of central governing spaces stood out. Argentine literary scholar Alicia Ortíz (1953:27), who travelled to Bolivia to document the revolution, observed:

The multitude flows constantly towards the Plaza Murillo, as if this were the center of gravity of the city. Indians, who previously did not have access to the plaza, for it was prohibited for them to cross certain boundaries, as if this were the holy city of the czars, now fill it to the brim [*la colman*] with picturesque coloring. They sit down on its benches, crowd themselves on its steps, or remain standing before the Palacio Quemado, watching as if the solution to their destinies, incarnated in a certain person, might surge from its interior from one moment to the next. They arrive from the northern zones of the Altiplano, from the shores of Titicaca, with their multicolored woolen *gorros* with earflaps, and their tremendous ponchos of vibrant colors; they arrive from the valleys of Sucre and Cochabamba, with their wide felt hats like steel helmets, their

pants cut at the knee and their long hair on their shoulders; they arrive from Potosí with their hats like black plates and their ponchos like dark tunics with crisscrossed stripes.

By many accounts, so many mobilized indigenous bodies attracted not just photography and ethnological curiosity but fear. Goodrich detected a “traditional vague fear of Indian revolt” among both liberal and conservative elites. Indeed, the *unarmed* gathering of Indian leaders in the 1945 Indigenous Congress prompted newspaper accounts of the La Paz upper class burying its silver and preparing weapons for defense (Tórrez Rubín de Celis et al. 2010:134–36; Mendieta 2008:223ff). Indian peasants’ principal demand was the redistribution of the lands on which they worked. This and their armed participation in politics posed analogous challenges to the racial order. American observer James Malloy characterized the political dynamic as follows:

[T]he issue of agrarian reform awakened fears that ran deep in Spanish-speaking Bolivia. The relationship between the Spanish-speaking culture and the suppressed Indian culture was pervaded with mutual hate, distrust, and fear. To many, the city was the repository of civilization and the hacienda its outpost. With the hacienda destroyed, what was to stop the hate-filled Indian horde from sweeping over the cities in a paroxysm of revenge? (Malloy 1971:125)

While no horde was materializing in the cities, Indian organizers did make calculated use of these subterranean fears. Their discipline in urban demonstrations showed a capacity for restraint that defied stereotypes of their “violent nature.” Yet at the same time, they were aware of the visceral reactions they provoked. High valley peasant organizer Julio Butrón recalls:

[W]e made a daily presence of Indians in the city, although the people protested the nerve-racking frequency of the gatherings, the presence of weapons, and even our odor. In reality, this was the point. That they should have us present even in their dreams and their nightmares and would not forget about us at any moment, whether sympathetic or otherwise; better, that they should be fearful of our number, our objectives, and our activity. (1992:69)

One thing that is striking about these accounts by travelers, local politicians, protest leaders, and protest participants is that all of them recognize the political significance of indigenous presence in these spaces. Not only their political presence (as demonstrators, militia, or petitioners) and their self-presentation as claimants, but their collective enjoyment of these urban spaces (wearing indigenous dress, staring at walls, and just being there) is read by all as a political act.

THE ELECTRIFYING IMPACT OF INDIGENOUS PRESENCE

A half century later, the sheer presence of indigenous people in urban spaces in large numbers, bringing their ways of being along with them, remains a potent political tool. As in 1952 and 1953, it can be deployed by the government or against it. In January 2011, the Morales government was conducting a diplomatic effort to revise international drug laws that treat coca leaf chewing—a widespread practice throughout the Andes with practical, medicinal, and cultural importance—as an illegitimate vestige of the past that must be eliminated. The campaign was a joint effort with the coca growers unions that are a core constituency of the MAS-IPSP. In an effort to bolster the campaign's impact, the unions and the government organized a massive public chewing of coca leaves in defense of the tradition and demanding the end of the formal international ban on the practice.

January 25, 2011: I spend the day in Cochabamba's central plaza, where one of the largest events was held (the other was in La Paz, outside the United States Embassy). The presence and different habitus of so many coca-growing campesinos transforms the plaza. The main spaces have been filling up since my first 9am arrival. Coca growers are seating themselves in the various pathways, spreading out square cloths covered with leaves, breastfeeding babies, sitting on the paved walkways, lounging on the ground, crossing into the normally rigidly-preserved green space boundaries and turning the grass into a place to relax. There they are joined by city youth now that

it's clear that these boundaries will not be enforced today. Walking through the plaza there is foremost a feeling of human density, of having to walk slowly, bumping into others, continuous interaction.

The cocaleros are sorted by sindicato and each claims its space with a hand-markered sign. They are from all over the Chapare and the various Federations seem well represented. Performers, politicians, poets, and members of the crowd moved to make a speech do so from a microphone in the part of the plaza opposite the City Hall. Their stage is on the ground, while the stage that was brought in, topped an inflatable arch used by Morales' election campaign in Tiquipaya acts as place for people to cluster as part of the audience while watching the performance. In fact, most people are not watching the performance, and the loudspeakers are not overwhelming, barely even noticeable on the opposite street. If the voices from the main stage had a variety of messages, and the booths of the vendors emphasized the benefits of coca (as did individuals I encountered), the message of the masses in the square was simpler: "We grow coca. We chew coca. And we are many."

In this informal takeover of the Cochabamba's central plaza, indigenous farmers interrupt the routines of urban space. The usually ordered plaza, accustomed to demonstrations, is made into a market, a gift-giving space, a place of quotidian living and leisure for primarily rural indigenous people. The crowd of observers on the stage reverses the normal order of a traditional political rally. Something of a heterotopic space appears for a day in the center of Cochabamba.

It is not always easy to perceive the political meaning of a protest through these the simplest of elements of protest: number; density; inhabiting a formal space in a way that one's own rules of bodily comportment are active, rather than the usual official ones; letting coca growing, distributing, and chewing speak for themselves. But in situations like the coca chewing protest, they rise to the

surface. Rather than concentrated attention on speakers who provide the meaning of the demonstration, overt political language is projected alongside the much larger enactment of a politicized lifeway. The point of the protest, after all, was that coca chewing is embedded in a living culture that will not give it up. The lived implacability of a day spent being indigenous in public view illustrated immovability. The public location reminded everyone that this implacable culture now inhabits the spaces of representation that once excluded them.

BEING INDIGENOUS IN PUBLIC SPACE

The 2011 coca chew-in and the 1952–53 campesino protests recounted above share the common element of *being indigenous in public space*. By this I mean not just a coincidence of ethnicity and location, but a self-aware performance that is carried out strategically. Protesters deploy their own indigeneity out of its usual place, relative to the geographies of state and of race, to challenge the political and racial orders of society.

My interpretation of these acts as deliberate arises from the ways that participants choose to perform their indigeneity. People present themselves as indigenous in Bolivia by a variety of markers: dark skin color, short stature, limbs and torsos shaped or dirtied by physical labor, use of indigenous languages, ethnically marked dress, and formal symbols of belonging to indigenous communities. Along this spectrum, the more physical elements are the most difficult to change at the moment of presentation. They are also radically insufficient to necessarily convey indigenous self-identification and social status, particularly in central Bolivia where a mestizo-identified elite often appears phenotypically indigenous in body.

In 1952 and 1953, however, the indigenous bodies that circulated in the city centers of Bolivia suddenly became noticeable, and thereby noticeable as indigenous. They did so by breaking with rituals of deference and the routines of labor to appear in mass demonstrations and congregate

outside governmental offices. When they “remain[ed] standing before the Palacio Quemado, watching,” they ceased to be the politically voiceless porters of the hotels and became political subjects making a claim. Similarly, the addition of more chosen elements of indigenous identification—traditional costume, musical instruments, the wiphala and pututu—makes “being indigenous in public space” into an explicit act. Indigenous political actors can use these overt symbols explicitly direct the attention of their viewers to their indigeneity, in a way that would be impossible with bodily features alone.

Indigenous imagery is often incorporated into the structures of social movement organizations, particularly campesino unions and indigenous organizations. By wearing indigenous dress in an official capacity, these actors insist that others recognize them as indigenous. They are refusing to act in a way that accepts traditions of creole/mestizo presentation as necessary to interact with the state. When they do so in traditionally elite spaces, they are taking steps to redefine who may be considered capable of government and political self-representation. It is certainly no coincidence that symbols of indigenous self-rule—staffs of office, the wiphala, and the pututu—are brought into this performance.

Many of the space claiming protests described in Chapters 3 and 4 made being indigenous part of their self-presentation in public space. The Cochabamba Water War, which as we have seen was carried out by a very broad urban–periurban–rural coalition, foregrounded indigeneity in its chosen symbols. The Regantes’ mass mobilizing capacity in its indigenous-identified base and its reliance on *usos y costumbres* as the moral basis for its water claims facilitated an indigenization of the Water War. Mestizos and indigenous-identified urbanites also deployed indigenous symbols in the Water War, to illustrate the primordial importance of their claims and their unity with the Regantes, campesinos, and cocaleros. By invoking indigeneity, Cochabambans were able to move the

discussion to issues of the human relation to the environment and commodification per se rather than advancing only class-based claims. As Robert Albro (2006:403) argues, “Cultural heritage is an effective means to form and revitalize the moral community of a popular, collective politics” and a “coalition-building device across historically indigenous and popular political projects.”

The January–February 2002 pro-coca mobilization began as an effort by cocaleros from the Chapare to take over and reopen the coca leaf market in Sacaba, an outlying town east of Cochabamba. Allied with the urban activists of the Coordinadora for Defense of Water and Life and the national campesino federation CSUTCB, they carried out a range of combative protests, culminating in road blockades across five departments, completely isolating the city of Cochabamba. The urban activists of the Coordinadora and the Regantes joined in blockades following the detention of the cocalero leadership on January 19. Water warriors and university students demanding their release fought with police, and the scenario escalated through the raising of barricades across the central city’s streets. On January 30, a cocalero march installed itself in Plaza 14 de Septiembre, paralyzing traffic in the city center and attempting to realize a mass public act of coca chewing, similar to the one I observed in 2011. (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008b:176–85)

THE TRADITION OF NATIONAL INDIGENOUS MARCHES

For the last quarter-century, lowland and highland indigenous movements have deployed the tactic of mass indigenous arrival to urban spaces with transformative consequences. Since 1990, a series of national indigenous marches have brought thousands of indigenous people together in processions towards the cities. On other occasions, movements describe similar actions as “takeovers” of the city. Marching on the capital has become the signature tool of the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia, a confederation of lowland indigenous peoples. They hail from

seven of the country's nine departments, from the arid plain of the Chaco, from the vast Pantanal wetland, from the tropical valleys of Cochabamba and La Paz, and from the Bolivian Amazon.

As a spatial tactic, these national marches have three functional parts. First, a cross-country convergence brings multiple organizations into a single mobile community in which solidarity and shared politics are worked out day by day. Second, the route brings marching activists into contact with scores of local communities and rural workplaces along the way, including the towns that host them nightly as they set up camp. Third, if and when they enter the capital, the marchers come together with urban allies and hold joint protests, sometimes in the form of a Plaza encampment that remains until their demands are met. Marches are long, slow events which attention-gathering rather than disruptive. They can't paralyze economic life, but do seize symbolically important spaces. By comparison with road blockades, then, the march is better suited to numerically smaller sectors with high moral authority. For CIDOB, this moral authority comes from the prior claim indigenous peoples have on national territory and the history of racial violence against them.

The 1990 March for Territory and Dignity was a defining event in the Bolivian indigenous movement. CIDOB was then the newly formed Confederation of Indigenous Peoples in the Bolivian East. The march advocated the recognition of indigenous territories governed by local residents and secured government approval for four such indigenous territories, including what was then the Isiboro Sécure National Park. Thousands of highlanders accompanied the six hundred lowland marchers into La Paz, and backed their successful demand for the country to sign the International Labor Organization Convention 169, on the rights of indigenous peoples.

In 1992, indigenous and campesino organizations mounted symbolic resistance to the Columbus Quincentennial. They prepared separate events in La Paz, Sucre, Potosí, Cochabamba, Oruro, Trinidad, Santa Cruz, Tarija, and Llallagua (Potosí) prepared to "take" these cities. The

campesinos of Chuquisaca prepared a five-hour “encirclement” accomplished by marches upon each of the four access roads to Sucre. Frantic newspaper account inflated the specter of violent attacks (“The Rebellion of the Quechua People has Begun,” *Hoy*, September 29, 1992) only to be calmed again by assurances from the movements involved that their mobilizations would be peaceful (Torres 1992). An impressive crowd of 20,000 converged upon Sucre where “at the sounding of pututus, they began the acullico or chewing of coca in honor of the Pachamama” (*Hoy*, October 12, 1992). Twenty thousand Cochabambans staged converging marches upon the main plaza from Sacaba (cocaleros), Plaza San Sebastián (workers), and Quillacollo (campesinos), while also taking over the Plaza Colón (Columbus Plaza) as a meeting space. The La Paz convergence ended in the convening of an Assembly of Native Nationalities (*Asamblea de Naciones Originarias*) but this organization failed to cohere or even complete its deliberations (Ovando-Sanz 1993:211–23).

National indigenous marches have a rhythm of actions and meanings on their days of forward advance, as I observed in the 2010 march. By day, there are the marchers and the road. Hundreds of indigenous people who have gathered from across Bolivia walk on one of a string of highways that will take them across this country of forests and farms, vast plains and sharp mountains. They march behind a series of banners, one for each of the regional federations that make up the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), and one smaller banner at the front announcing that this is not the first time, but the Seventh Grand March. Hundreds of people, young and old, some carrying babies with them, are marching day after day across Bolivia. In my single day’s experience,¹⁹² marching itself is the best way to keep warm, more effective than huddling around a fire, or camping together in the tents, schoolhouses, and churches that provide

¹⁹² I also interviewed march participants on site, attended a march supporters’ meeting, observed negotiations with the government in Santa Cruz, and interviewed Rosa Chao of the Cochabamba indigenous confederation shortly afterwards.

one-day homes to the marchers. When the rain comes, the marchers pull out white tarps or lift their plastic banners above their heads. When it gets worse, small virtual tents are made on the side of the road. And when it stops they go back to marching. By late afternoon, there is a welcome—cups filled with hot coffee and a brief speech from a member of one of the many communities that have offered hospitality for a night or two to the hundreds of marchers. Most of the marchers walk past this speech to begin a new round of setting up camp. On the day I joined them, the new host was the village of La Senda, whose church, school, and a half-dozen other buildings provided cover for the marchers' tents, and the concrete floors of a school house for those without tents.

Nicole Fabricant's description of the Sixth Indigenous March in 2006—in which the Landless Peasant Movement participated—emphasizes the ties that are built among different communities through these physical acts. She focuses on the “communities of pain” that emerge out of their shared suffering (Fabricant 2010:128; 2012:212n1) and the various forms of self-organization that emerge to make the operation function—ensuring that participants present an ordered image to the public, and that everyone is fed—and to allow for collective decisions on demands and negotiations. The far-flung ethnic groups represented inside of CIDOB, and the indigenous–peasant–landless movement as a whole, have built ties of solidarity in part through these acts of common effort, sacrifice, and autonomous organization.

This lowland–highland collaboration had lasting impacts, both advancing an indigenous agenda through the Bolivian political system in the 1990s (despite neoliberalism) and reorienting Bolivian highland peasant politics around the language of decolonization, autonomy, and indigenous rights. After the cooperation in 1990, CIDOB would be joined by highland peasant organizations—CSUTCB and CSCB—in further mobilizations and in alliance with a widening agenda. Later CIDOB marches introduced the demand for a national Constituent Assembly to redefine the nation

and write a new Constitution. When such an Assembly gathered in 2006, CIDOB joined five other indigenous and campesino federations in a Pact of Unity, making common demands upon the Assembly to incorporate extensive indigenous rights into the new constitution.

At their strongest, these marches combine several elements to provide meaning and force to their space claiming. Their suffering on the road functions through the logic of nonviolence. It reveals their commitment to the cause and willingness to put their bodies at risk. When they convince the public that their suffering is unjustified, it also becomes a visible representation of the historical violence against them. In the city, they bring their bodies to where they are most out of place, and simultaneously to where the state's voice takes its most concrete form.¹⁹³ Finally, the ballooning of their marches with periurban and urban supporters demonstrates that even this minority movement has numerous and diverse supporters. In these moments, indigeneity unites small lowland peoples with the vast populations of the highlands. The exchange offers the lowlanders more political weight and the highlanders greater moral legitimacy, even as it illustrates how both have been left out by the political system.

INDIGENOUS PRESENCE FROM THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION TO THE PLURINATIONAL STATE

Between the visiting campesino crowds of 1952–53 and the mobilizations of the twenty-first century lay a series of historical transformations. The longstanding opposition of indigenous and urban has been supplanted by the irruption of indigenous identity inside the cities. Migration, the revival of indigenous self-identification, and demonstrated solidarity between rural and urban

¹⁹³ Fabricant describes this aspect of the 2006 march, on its arrival to Cochabamba's central square: "Sometimes, these dramas can become big and bold. As MST and other indigenous groups seized the Plaza 14 de Septiembre, they also infused the main square with dynamic highland Andean cultural forms and practices. Such cultural practices, which had been pushed to the margins, now occupied center stage as indigenous people claimed citizenship rights" (Fabricant 2010:138–39).

popular sectors have redrawn the map of indigeneity. The indigenous city dweller and campesino recognize their shared roots and have built up experience collaborating in takeovers of downtown streets. In the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, the 2000 Water War, and the 2011 Coca Chew-In, to name just a few examples, urban and rural residents have joined in common actions. Together, they have made La Paz's San Francisco Plaza and Cochabamba's Plaza 14 de Septiembre their own.

The MNR and its military successors stood apart from the indigenous people it claimed to represent, a relationship expressed through assembled crowds, paternalistic rhetoric, and the language of a "pact" between peasants and the government. In the twenty-first century, in contrast, space claiming by indigenous people was part of a drive towards self-representation and (frequently) recognition of their right to autonomy. The concepts of the "plurinational state" and "decolonization" involved simultaneously removing colonial dynamics of power from the interior of the state apparatus and devolving power to indigenous collectivities. Also, unlike the MNR of the 1940s, the MAS-IPSP was founded as a campesino party. By the nature of its membership, the MAS-IPSP government placed indigenous-bodied people into spaces of power and transgressed a history of excluding indigenous peoples. In the next chapter, I will show how the Morales government worked to transform certain state spaces in its effort to define them as representing plurinational self-rule.

Chapter 6
Indigenous Presence in Spaces of Power

The central plaza of Sucre, surrounded on all sides by blockaders in June 2005—workers, teachers, miners, and campesinos—welcomed those same sectors back in August 2006, this time as part of a body to rewrite Bolivia’s constitution.¹⁹⁴ Most of the 255 members of the Constituent Assembly who gathered in Sucre identified themselves with an indigenous people; half of them spoke an indigenous language; and one in five was a grassroots leader (Albó 2008:60). This remarkable assembly’s sessions were inaugurated before twenty thousand observers: an “enormous quantity of indigenous people and campesinos who suddenly dominated the urban center with their presence, breaking the especially tranquil rhythm of life in the capital city” (de la Fuente Jeria 2008:93–94). Their presence at the center of national life was a dramatic reconfiguration of race, place, and politics.

The Assembly’s opening ceremony on August 6, 2006,¹⁹⁵ was accompanied by the formal protocol¹⁹⁶ and official ordering of space that marks Bolivian state functions: police guards, neatly lined-up white chairs, lines of soldiers in ceremonial dress. Carla Valcarce (2008:42) recounts,

Suddenly there appeared a hundred indígenas and campesinos dressed in their best finery who took possession of this VIP area. The red ponchos, the knotted cords, the tricolored (Bolivian) and *wiphala* (indigenous) flags glowed against the white backs of the seats. Truly I felt that change had begun.

¹⁹⁴ As discussed in chapter 2, miners and campesinos focused their blockades at a greater distance, from the plaza, but together with other protesters, they blocked the city’s four exits and its airport.

¹⁹⁵ General Simón Bolívar won the decisive battle of Junín on August 6, 1824. The Deliberating Assembly of Upper Peru (soon to be named Bolivia) passed its Act of Independence on August 6, 1825.

¹⁹⁶ For a more extensive discussion of “protocol” as an element of continuity in the plurinational state, see my discussion of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s 2010 visit below, beginning on page 252.

In the last chapter, we saw the dramatic role that indigenous people entering public plazas played in both Bolivia's "second revolution" in 1952 and the twenty-first century upsurge. The mass presence of indigenous peoples in state spaces during the Evo Morales presidency echoes the crowds summoned by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement when it arrived to power, but with a vital difference. Where the 1952 Revolution presumed a creole/mestizo culture would continue to set the standard for state practice, the MAS-IPSP government proposed a redefinition of state institutions as plurinational spaces.

Under the MNR, state offices would continue to be staffed by Spanish-speaking urban dwellers. The Ministry of Peasant Affairs, outside of which indigenous petitioners camped as they waited for assistance, pledged "The Indian has served us for four centuries. / Let us devote the next 50 years to serving him." Its practice, however, maintained the line between the creole/mestizo state (*us*) and (silently Indian) campesinos (*them*). Just four Indian peasants attended the 1953 National Convention of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, and journalist Alicia Ortiz observed three to be silent and inhibited in the meeting. While there, they may have witnessed Ñuflo Chávez Ortiz, a Santa Cruz lawyer who headed of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, argue that the commission on Indian issues be composed of creole/mestizo intellectuals rather than Indians themselves, whose "backwardness" would have made them ineffective (Ortiz 1953:107).

The opening day of the Constituent Assembly reveals the very different approach taken in the creation of the plurinational state. Its opening day was part of the series of moments in which grassroots movements lent legitimacy to the new MAS-IPSP government. Yet it was also a day for the same movements to directly appropriate the spaces and symbols of state, and to enter into them as participants and decision makers. Movements claimed state spaces with official authorization, and did so in a way that extended their prior space-claiming protests. They flooded the city with crowds,

took prior decisions in movement summits, and found ways to be ostentatiously indigenous inside official spaces. Beginning with Morales' inauguration, the MAS-IPSP has frequently used, re-appropriated, and redesigned of spaces belonging to the state. These acts remade both formal and informal governing spaces in an effort to realize a structural and symbolic *re-foundation* of the country.

However, like the “exercise[s] in MNR showmanship” after the 1952 Revolution, these acts provide a veneer of unified purpose to the highly contentious relationships between the government and grassroots movements. By asserting that spaces and practices that were traditionally the prerogative of the state now belong to “the peoples,” Morales opened the door for contests over the direction of the government to be expressed in official gatherings. Already present in the Constituent Assembly, multiple and, at times, conflicting agendas have been pursued in a variety of spaces. I show these tensions in series of spaces of “popular diplomacy”: a bilateral Argentine-Bolivian ceremony honoring Juana Azurduy de Padilla, a hemispheric Indigenous Caucus, and two state-sponsored movement summits. I illustrate how symbols of indigenization sometimes coincide with substantive changes, and sometimes become contested between the government and left grassroots movements.

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AS INDIGENOUS SPACE

The convening of a Constituent Assembly had been a central demand of the 1999–2005 grassroots upsurge, and was one of the demands accepted by Carlos Mesa when he addressed the crowd in the Plaza San Francisco at the end of the 2003 Gas War. Advocates of the Constituent Assembly imagined a body outside of Congress and the political party system that could undertake a comprehensive re-envisioning of Bolivian politics. At climactic points in mass organizing, when presidents fell before popular disruption, movements imagined such a gathering emerging from the

mobilizations themselves, rather than an election from the ballot box.¹⁹⁷ At a minimum, the 2004 reforms of the local elections set a precedent for organizations with juridical personhood to advance candidates. However, the MAS-IPSP used its negotiations with the National Congress to make itself the vehicle for representing the grassroots left in the Assembly. These negotiations resulted in elections for the Assembly based on political parties. The MAS-IPSP then integrated social movement organizers and leaders into its electoral slate.

The Pact of Unity,¹⁹⁸ a multi-movement alliance that began to coalesce in 2002, articulated the vision for movement-based, nonpartisan Constituents in its proposals for the Convocation Law for the Constituent Assembly. The Pact created and put forward its demands for a Constituent Assembly through mass gatherings of hundreds of activists and a larger set of organizations, as well as through participating in cross-country marches and the countrywide mobilizations of September–October 2003 and May–June 2005. When these proposals were bypassed, the Pact organized this structure on its own and, to the best of its ability, sought to impose the more open process's results on the Assembly.¹⁹⁹ It convened a series of meetings among member groups and allies to create a comprehensive draft constitution, which was finalized in the National Assembly of Peasant and

¹⁹⁷ Multiple parties involved in mobilizations for a Constituent Assembly saw the body as an alternative to political parties (CIDOB: Zacu Mborobainchi and Ontiveros 2006) and an extension of local assemblies and cabildos (the Cochabamba Coordinadora: Herbas 2002:113). Raquel Gutiérrez (2008b:225) also describes “a thorny debate” during the October 2003 mobilization as to whether “the State ought to convene it, or whether the mobilized population and their organizations could convene a Constituent Assembly on their own.”

¹⁹⁸ The Pact's exact membership has varied, but its core has been five national organizations: the Union Confederation of Rural Laborers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), National Confederation of Peasant and Indigenous Women of Bolivia–Bartolina Sisa, Union Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (CSCIB), Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), and the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qollasuyu (CONAMAQ).

¹⁹⁹ Oskar Vega argues that the Pact of Unity faced the choice in early 2006 of renouncing the partisan Constituent Assembly structure or imposing a constituent structure upon it, and took the latter option (intervention in “Coyuntura y Modelos de Desarrollo en Bolivia,” session organized by Bolivia Section of Latin American Studies Association, May 27, 2012).

Indigenous Organizations held in Sucre on the three days prior to the official Constituent Assembly's inauguration. The more than four hundred delegates who attended the crafted a crucial mandate: "The organizations and some constituents had it very clear that this Constituent [Assembly] was that of the organizations, and that the organizations must be there, supporting and participating," in the words of public intellectual and Constituent Raúl Prada (Programa NINA and Garcés 2010:50). Many Constituents were themselves members of Pact organizations and were termed "organic" assembly members from the movements' perspective.²⁰⁰ Other sympathetic members, even MAS-IPSP affiliates, were considered "allies," a second tier in the Pact's strategizing (Programa NINA and Garcés 2010:84; Schavelzon 2012:80–83).

On August 5, the final day of the movement assembly, both "organic" and "allied" Constituents were invited to sign an "Act of Commitment" pledging to consider and defend the Pact's draft in their work. In return, the assembled organizations pledged to "maintain a vigil over the action of the constituents to guarantee the re-founding of Bolivia in the framework of a Plurinational State" (Programa NINA and Garcés 2010:136 [Anexo 6]). This act at a movement summit helps clarify the meaning of the state ceremony the next day. When indigenous men and men in traditional dress took their place on the VIP stage as Constituents they carried these political commitments with them. One could even say that the political agenda of the movements became embodied in their ethnic and class presentation and their racially marked bodies as they stepped into a space that had long been defined against the poor, peasant, and indigenous.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ For more on the organic Constituents' role and political position see Prada Alcoreza (2010b).

²⁰¹ Despite the pledges, this relationship was difficult to maintain. Over time, inter-party negotiations outside the Assembly between the MAS-IPSP and its right-wing opponents became a more influential force in directing the Assembly, and later in revising the text before it was put to a national vote.

Indigenous people signaled by their actions on August 6, 2006, that they were not just ethnically marked bodies but political claimants with a tradition of collective mobilization. Before dawn, reports José de la Fuente Jeria (a staff member at the campesino support NGO CIPCA), the first march to influence the Constituent Assembly had already begun. A women's rights coalition carried placards and chanted as they marched into the Plaza 25 de Mayo. In the plaza, the delegation from Evo Morales' hometown of Orinoca, "impeccably uniformed and musically equipped" waited to be the lead element of the day. De la Fuente describes them as "a kind of receiving commission for 'their' president, a type of community guard, and above all a way of making their dominion felt musically over the political process and the Constituent Assembly" (2008:93). The procession of indigenous and campesino marches before the assembled dignitaries on white chairs lasted into the night. De la Fuente (2008:93) was left with this impression, "The indigenous—those for whom we (who work in support institutions for indigenous and campesino rights) have become accustomed to speaking as we demand their rights in the abstract—were *there*, more secure and implanted than anyone else [*emphasis added*]."

The formal sessions of the Constituent Assembly were held in Sucre's Grand Marshall Theatre. The building, which is under the auspices of the San Francisco Xavier University, was built in halting stages from the late 1800s through the 1950s. Across these decades of redesigns, its builders kept their focus on emulating precedents from European high culture, a preference that also shaped its programming, which includes a chamber orchestra dedicated to early modern music. Yet, within weeks of the opening, the organic constituents were treating the Constituent Assembly as a space of their own at the heart of the state. Khantuta Muruchi and Andres Calla (2008:41) observe that "the changes [in Bolivia] mean the possibility of coming into and taking possession of the spaces of political power which had been denied them until now." Inside the walls, this took the

form of introducing indigenous symbols (like traditional dress and symbols of office), indigenous languages, and grassroots movement practices into the activities of the assembly. In their interviews with Constituents, Muruchi and Calla found memories of overt racism in the early days of the body's meetings: times of "strong confrontation, of insults, provocation, and fighting," in the words of one of their informants (44). Isabel Dominguez, the president of the committee on the Structure of the State, rose to address the body in Quechua, only to face insults from a right-wing Constituent who shouted, "Quiet, Indian, so long as you don't speak Spanish get out of here" (41). Indigenous Constituents were outside the somatic norm for occupants of power, called the traditional qualifications for governance into question, and upset the alignment of government service with class privilege (Puwar 2004). Their charged appearance in these spaces unsettled the identification between state and racial power, eliciting direct resistance.

This inversion of state space from *hostility* to indigenous presence to *embodiment* of it led to an inversion of the spatial orientation of left grassroots protests outside. Movements mobilized not to surround and cut off the legislature (as they had in June 2005), but to hold defensive vigils around it. Chuquisaca campesinos and indigenous peoples held one such vigil in November 2006; an Indigenous March that embarked for Sucre in July 2007; and some two hundred supporters formed a ring of defense against right-wing protesters from November 19 to 21, 2007. Such outward-directed vigilance was a key form of collaboration between left grassroots movements and the Morales government.

SYMBOLICALLY EMBODYING INDIGENOUS SELF-RULE

From the beginning, the Morales administration fashioned the symbolism of the executive branch to echo long-standing calls for indigenous self-rule. Morales' first inauguration, held at the site of the ancient city of Tiwanaku "revitalized, and partly reinvented, inauguration protocols,

symbols, and wordings” to define him as the authorized leader of the country’s indigenous peoples (De Munter and Salman 2009:433–34). The choice of site, Morales’ dress, his anointment by an indigenous priest or *amauta*, the ceremony, and his staff of office were the elements of this new indigenous inauguration. Koen De Munter and Ton Salman (2009) describe the ceremony as the first of many “pluricultural civil practices” that correspond to a newly plural approach to political participation.

The Morales government moved to outfit state offices, officials, and institutions with the symbols of indigenous self-rule. The Vice Presidency flew the square, checkered rainbow flag called the wiphala alongside the Bolivian tricolor outside its front door. The constitution crafted by the Constituent Assembly made this flag of indigenous origins into a state symbol. During 2009 and 2010, its inclusion as a co-equal flag at state offices, ceremonies, and military processions, and on police and military uniforms was phased in, making it the clearest visual sign of the replacement of the “Republic of Bolivia” by the “Plurinational State of Bolivia.” Each of these moves was accompanied by critical comments from the mainstream, mestizo-identified press. The national and departmental opposition governments showed their loyalties by raising, or not raising, the wiphala at official functions in central squares. New symbols for the military—double-flagged patches and an expansion of the text of the formal salute—attracted particular debate, but were accomplished without incident. A final indigenization of the military body came in the form of new larger-than-life sculptures at the Military High Command (Estado Mayor). This monumental display of heroes placed indigenous fighters (including Túpaj Katari, Bartolina Sisa, Pedro Ignacio Muiba, and Bruno Racua) alongside independence leaders and patriotic strongmen as models of military valor (Hannover 2010).

Prominent indigenous activists catapulted into leadership without disclaiming their identity, while a systematic effort prepared indigenous activists to staff the administrative apparatus of the state.²⁰² Morales' first cabinet included Quechua domestic worker and union leader Casimira Rodríguez as Minister of Justice; Abel Mamani, the Aymara president of FEJUVE–El Alto as Minister of Water; and Aymara campesino organizer David Choquehuanca as Foreign Minister. When the team of sixteen assumed their offices, Choquehuanca declared in Aymara, “Uka jacha uru jutasjiway”: *the great day has arrived* (Agence France Presse, January 23, 2006). At ground level, more quotidian changes opened the doors of the state to the public. Cochabamba organizer Don Angel described even simple access to state spaces as a major step forward:

Before, they didn't even allow the ladies de pollera to be in a [government] office, one couldn't even enter with a sombrero into an office. You had to be dressed in a [Western] men's suit to enter, right? It was prohibited to wear sandals.

The MAS-IPSP government proposed that Spanish, like a suit, no longer be a requirement to access state services. Evo Morales urged all state functionaries to learn an indigenous language, a constitutional requirement imposed first on those who register births, marriages, and deaths. In Cochabamba, the government demoted the heads of all thirty-four of its Civil Registry Service offices to “interim” status, contingent on demonstrating command of Quechua (Revollo 2011). The

²⁰² Government insiders describe how this process was undertaken with caution. Raúl Prada (2010a:104, 105), for instance, recalled in an interview, “I had the impression—others shared this impression—that, in a way, the decision had been made to go forward haltingly, not to replace the public functionaries radically; I believe there was a fear that we would be overcome and would put ourselves on the path to chaos, since when we came to government power, we had neither the tradition nor the custom of handling the public apparatus. The experience was lacking. And so, they replaced the ministers and the vice ministers first, and then the directors, and later the unit chiefs.” (His description focuses on the Ministry of Economy and Finance.) Yet this caution came within “a structural transformation of the Ministry and of the state” in accordance with the new constitutional text. Likewise Esteban Ticona (2010:199–211), an anthropologist of Aymara background and radical public intellectual, describes his work in the Diplomatic Academy which has moved to offer master's degrees in international relations to an unprecedentedly diverse corps of future diplomats.

lowering of barriers to indigenous voices and bodies figured as Don Angel's first example of "a government that is doing some measure of justice."

"DIPLOMACY OF THE PEOPLES"

David Choquehuanca, a bedrock force within the Morales cabinet,²⁰³ took over Bolivia's Ministry of Foreign Relations, located on the corner of La Paz's Plaza Murillo. Choquehuanca was the first indigenous person to occupy his office, following an illustrious sequence of generally upper-class creole diplomats²⁰⁴ (Agence France Presse, January 23, 2006). Previously an Aymara campesino movement leader and co-founder of a leadership development program, he has presided over a very active period in Bolivia's international diplomacy.

Like the union organizers in the 1936 Labor Ministry, indigenous and grassroots movements have brought their own agendas into the Foreign Ministry. They coordinated with the Bolivian Foreign Ministry to place the Bolivian state at the forefront of long-running international campaigns on indigenous rights, climate, and water. The novel, but quite visible, role of social movements in Bolivian (and regional) diplomacy came to be known as "diplomacy of the peoples [*diplomacia de los pueblos*]," a phrase that suggests that people-to-people relations are as important as state-to-state ones, while quietly incorporating ambiguity about diverse peoples within one state. The concept of "diplomacy of the peoples," advanced through the World Social Forum, the Bolivarian Alternative

²⁰³ Only Choquehuanca, Finance Minister Luis Arce, and Vice President García Linera have lasted six years in their present offices.

²⁰⁴ Walter Queiser Morales (2003:241) described the selection as follows, "The President appoints the foreign minister, from the political, economic, and academic elite of the country, to serve as an officer of the executive branch." The identity between creole elite presentation and government power was such that in early 1959, English-speaking, but not white-appearing Bolivian Foreign Minister Victor Andrade caught the U.S. ambassador in La Paz yelling that "a savage," Andrade himself, was at his door (Lehman 1999:130).

for the Americas (ALBA) and other “hemispheric integration” initiatives, argued that social movements should join government in the process of diplomacy.

Led by Choquehuanca, and with frequent prominent appearances by Evo Morales, Bolivian diplomacy backed a visionary agenda at the United Nations. It helped secure the 2007 passage of the UN Declaration, which had moved through drafting and debate at a glacial pace. A series of initiatives introduced the Andean concept of Pachamama, the planet as a living being, into international diplomacy (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2010:3, 17).²⁰⁵ Bolivian Ambassador to the UN Pablo Solón shepherded UN recognition of the right to water and sanitation through the General Assembly, culminating in a 2010 resolution.²⁰⁶ Finally, the Bolivian government took a principled stand on climate change at the Copenhagen summit in 2009, demanding steeper reductions in global North emissions and opposing carbon trading schemes. In all these moments, movement positions (that had long held outsider status) were suddenly represented by a nation state (however marginal) and its diplomatic apparatus.

COCHABAMBA 2006: FOUNDING THE SOUTH AMERICAN UNION

One sign of the complex new balance of initiative between movement and state in Bolivia’s international affairs came in December 2006. It was Bolivia’s turn to host the summit of the South American Community of Nations (later to become UNASUR, the Union of South American

²⁰⁵ In so doing, Bolivia’s representatives broke a taboo on religious declarations, one deeply rooted in the United Nations’ secular modernizing origins.

²⁰⁶ The resolution (A/64/292) passed 122–0 with 41 abstentions. While it represents a milestone in a political recognition of the right to water, that recognition remains contested by countries like the United States and the United Kingdom (Worsnip 2010). In legal terms, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ General Comment 15 (2002), which declares the right to water to be a legal consequence of the binding International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, has greater force.

Nations), a nascent regional body incorporating all the independent republics²⁰⁷ of South America. Due to the intervention of Bolivian and national movements, non-state actors made up a large and visible segment of the summit. The domestic activist coalition known as Bolivian Movement for the Sovereignty and Solidarity-based Integration of the Peoples Against the Free-Trade Agreements and the Free Trade Area of the Americans (*Movimiento Boliviano por la Soberanía y la Integración Solidaria de los Pueblos contra el TLC y el ALCA*) and the Latin America-wide anti-neoliberal Hemispheric Social Alliance (*Alianza Social Continental*) co-hosted a 5,000-person social movement summit simultaneous with the inter-state gathering. In her official reflection, summit organizer Elizabeth Peredo Beltrán²⁰⁸ (2007:9) defined the Summit as a “simultaneous civil society event” committed to contributing to the debate, rather than an oppositional one.

This cooperative relationship between movements and the nascent UNASUR reflects regional political trends. The trajectory of the anti-neoliberal movement of movements made visible in the World Social Forums intersected very differently with Latin American regional integration than it did with regional summits elsewhere, such as the European Union and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summits, which faced hostile protests. Latin American forums, like Community of Andean Nations (CAN) and Mercosur, were increasingly inhabited by the vocally anti-neoliberal parties coming to power in the “pink tide” across Latin America. These governments recast regional solidarity and integration as an ethical priority, speaking in the grassroots language of internationalism and cultural recovery.²⁰⁹ Latin American critics have long explained the historical

²⁰⁷ The body thereby includes all of South America except for French Guiana (under French sovereignty) and the British-controlled Falkland Islands.

²⁰⁸ Peredo is a social psychologist, researcher, and Director of the Fundación Solón, a major Bolivian NGO.

²⁰⁹ Cross-border visions also include Bolivarian dreams of a *Patria Grande* uniting South American republics, transnational indigeneity, and Quechua and Aymara aspirations to revive unity throughout all or parts of the former Inka Empire.

dominance of the United States as (in part) a consequence of the relative weakness of any one Latin American state in relation to it. The “deformation” of Latin American economies critiqued by the region’s left (a critique vividly expressed through Eduardo Galeano’s widely circulated *Open Veins of Latin America*²¹⁰) is their orientation towards individual export of raw materials to the North. Thus, many grassroots movements see regional integration as a political and economic counterstrategy to capitalist empire.²¹¹ As UNASUR arose, then, grassroots movements sought to shape its direction and incorporate their values and concerns into its agenda rather than protest or disrupt its coordinating meetings. A reconfigured form of diplomacy embraced by the Bolivian government, which de-centers the state as the sole actor in international relations, offered them the opportunity to do so under an official aegis.

As the Cochabamba summit approached, Evo Morales connected this diplomacy from below with infrastructural planning from above in his invitation to fellow heads of state. Writing under the title “Let’s construct with our peoples a genuine South American Community of Nations for ‘Living Well,’”²¹² Morales called for “deepening [South American] integration from above and from below. With our peoples, with our social movements, with our productive businessmen, with our ministers, technocrats, and representatives” (reprinted in Peredo 2007:76). Like the MAS-IPSP in Bolivia, “post-neoliberal” governments across this region sought to fulfill promises to increase

²¹⁰ Thus the potent symbolism of Hugo Chávez handing a copy of the book to Barack Obama at the United Nations on April 18, 2009. This briefly raised it to number two on the Amazon.com bestsellers list, even though it was published decades before (Pickert 2009)

²¹¹ For example, the Memorial compiled from the Social Summit for the Integration of the Peoples notes “The social organizations of the continent view [*vimos* first-person plural] the creation of ... UNASUR with great hope” (Peredo 2007:3).

²¹² *Vivir Bien*, literally meaning living well, is an articulation of an alternative vision of a successful society, which contrasts with ideals of “unlimited progress and development at the cost of the other and of nature.” Articulating this ideal, Morales argued, “We have to complement one another and not compete. We must share and not take advantage of our neighbor. ‘To live well’ is to think not only in terms of per capita income, but rather in terms of cultural identity, community, and harmony among our selves and with our mother Earth” (reprinted in Peredo 2007:77).

economic equity. They did so by funding aggressive social redistribution with revenues from continued expansion of extractive industries, a pattern that has been dubbed “neo-extractivism” (Reyes 2012:10–11). Within the South American integration process, they continued previous plans for a variety of commercial, infrastructural, and extractive industry projects under the new banner of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA).

Bolivian activists, numbering over 4,000, predominated among the attendees of the “Social Summit for the Integration of the Peoples,” supplemented by at least 900 movement representatives from across South America.²¹³ Following the model of the World Social Forum and other twenty-first-century social movement summits, members of worker, campesino, indigenous, anti-privatization, and urban popular movements, and their allies in NGOs, churches, and environmental organizations gathered in spaces across Cochabamba. Thirteen thematic sessions created an agenda of demands that a mass meeting of all participants in an enclosed stadium publicly ratified. Interactions with the governments went beyond these events to “achieve, in an almost unprecedented manner, spaces of interchange with the official delegations” of the attending governments (Peredo 2007:10).

Traditional diplomacy met this popular diplomacy in Cochabamba across a heterogeneous collection of spaces. The Bolivian government was publicly anxious to make its role as host conform to the norms of diplomatic prestige, norms that have evolved around elite governance rather than popular democratic involvement. The Morales government pledged to make Cochabamba a “luxury host” for the official summit. Vice President Álvaro García Linera called for the city to “show its generosity, quality, infrastructure, and capacity for receiving large continental and global gatherings” (*Los Tiempos*, December 1, 2006). The city government spent B/ 6.1 million (\$760,000 dollars) to

²¹³ The summary table of the participants’ registry lists 4,153 Bolivian nationals and 1,002 foreigners, including 80 from Europe, North America, and Asia (Peredo 2007:127).

employ 400 workers paving, lighting, and upgrading green spaces surrounding the summit (*Los Tiempos*, December 1, 2006). The notoriously polluted slopes of the Rocha River and the city's roundabouts were planted with greenery for the occasion (*Los Tiempos*, November 24, 2006). Symbolically, the delegations “from above” were to be received with markings of high class, state power, and indigenous iconography: at the airport, for example, a red carpet, a military demonstration of arms by special forces troops, and a walk through a traditional Andean arch hung with native fabrics. The former estate of tin baron Simón Patiño²¹⁴—the quintessential member of the Cochabamban elite—hosted discussions among the heads of state.

Between the plebian indoor stadiums and public university classrooms of the Social Summit and the elite halls of the official summit, lies the space where the summit concluded: the Felix Capriles Stadium. On December 9, a crowd of over thirty thousand packed the stadium in the capstone event to the summits from above and from below. The signature soccer stadium of Cochabamba, Felix Capriles sits in the well-off Cala Cala neighborhood on the north side of the Rio Rocha (one unofficial dividing line between downtown and the elite-identified North), but its public events draw spectators from across the economic and political spectrum. Despite being held on middle ground, the feel of such a massive event belongs to a particular kind of state: those ruled by leftist populist parties on the Cuban and Nicaraguan model.

This kind of gathering represents a particular state–movement relationship in which the state leader and party see themselves as linked to, even embodying, movement power, but also value a certain degree of self-organized effervescence in the movements that are their allies. This resonates with the impression of Evo Morales' biographer, Martín Sivak (2010:14): “Morales conceives of politics as a show of strength in the form of rallies. They convey the extent of the leader's

²¹⁴ The Simón Patiño estate on the north side of Cochabamba was made into an upscale cultural center shortly after the 1952 revolution.

authority.” The format echoes, for example, the communist-led World Festival of Youth and Students or a Venezuelan political rally. The stadium set-up allows for mass presence, for visibility by different attending groups. But the quantity of attendees, the shape of the space, and the means for broadcasting voices allow only a tiny number of speakers to address a much larger crowd. The dynamic fits the leadership style of Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez or Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega—the only heads of state to attend the Capriles event—but not the multivocal collective voice characteristic of smaller Bolivian gatherings nor the centerless open space model that has come to define the World Social Forum. On a visit to Cuba shortly before the Cochabamba Summit, Morales modeled plans for the rally on precedents there, with indigeneity added to the mix: “Evo liked the martial form of the civic military procession. He believes in organization and mobilization, and he aspires to see it done with ponchos, suits, and olive green uniforms all together in Bolivia.”²¹⁵ The event was entitled *Taypi Jenecherú*, a bilingual Aymara-Guaraní construction purportedly meaning “Gathering of Departure,” which framed the public launching of South American unity in terms of an ancestral inheritance.²¹⁶ The crowd at the closing event had a decidedly (rural and urban) indigenous cast, however, supplemented by international color.

²¹⁵ Argentine journalist and scholar Martín Sivak devotes considerable attention to this rally in his insider biography of Evo Morales, *Jefazo: Retrato íntimo de Evo Morales* (2008), republished in English as *Evo Morales: The extraordinary rise of the first indigenous president of Bolivia* (2010). The rally came on the heels of an intercontinental tour, including a visit to Cuba where he sat in the official box of the civic military procession honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the landing of the Granma and the founding of the revolutionary army (also Fidel Castro’s 80th birthday). Sivak paraphrases Evo on the phone with his Minister of Government that evening: “Evo said he’d just seen a million people pass before him ... In addition to his political and ideological affinities for Castro and Chávez, he feels a respect for them that he only reserves for those capable of moving hundreds of thousands of people. ‘That’s it, boss—the people mobilized.’ ¶ He moved on to the rule of proportions. If there were a million people in Havana, there should be 800,000 in Cochabamba. Nobody mobilizes that number in Bolivia. He bet that he could gather 60,000 people in the Cochabamba stadium, where he would conclude his presidential summit” (2010:72).

²¹⁶ *Taypi* means *center* (with connotations of gathering) or *beginning* in Aymara, while *Jenecherú* means *eternal flame* in Guaraní (press reports and official organizers seem to have confused the translation).

The South American summit in Cochabamba came at a time when tensions between left and right were rising around the Constituent Assembly, then in a second month of deadlock over voting procedures. Right-wing civic movements and governors in five departments—Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni, Pando, and Cochabamba—suggested they would not comply with a Constitution unless a two-thirds majority was required to approve all matters, while the MAS-IPSP and its allies held little more than 60% of the Assembly. The closing in the stadium became an opportunity to showcase the government's alternative international vision and to demonstrate its popular support through a large crowd drawing on rural and urban popular movements. Effectively participants in a political rally, their being-indigenous-in-public-space was not just about the summit, but an affirmation of support for a government that was domestically embattled.

LA PAZ 2010: THE INDIGENOUS AGENDA AT WORK IN BOLIVIAN DIPLOMACY

Global indigenous diplomacy and Bolivian activism in the UN system came together in 2010 around indigenous rights and climate change. In March, Bolivia became the first Latin American country to host preparatory meetings for the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The government and the Pact of Unity organizations jointly welcomed Permanent Forum officials and indigenous representatives from throughout Latin America to an Indigenous Caucus, held first in the small town of Huarina on the Lake Titicaca coast and then in central La Paz. Indigenous campaigners worldwide have developed a tradition of meeting among themselves in an all-indigenous caucus within a wide variety of settings, while UN bodies structure their work with interstate preparatory meetings. Something of a hybrid construction itself, plurinational Bolivia found itself hosting both types of meetings at once. The closed gathering in Huarina was a space for lateral

The choice of these two languages was astute given their transnational presence across South America and across the east–west polarization of Bolivia.

discussions among indigenous leaders, while the events in La Paz were used to showcase indigenous issues to diplomats and the press. The two days in La Paz, much of which I attended, illustrated the substantive and symbolic centrality being built for indigenous people and social movements in state spaces.

What in the past would so often have been a gathering of outsiders took place in the Hall of Honor of the Foreign Ministry. The Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Relations is based in an imposing building on the northern corner of La Paz's Plaza Murillo. While not exactly luxurious, the building is designed for grandeur, much of its second floor dedicated to meeting halls designed to host foreign dignitaries. Meanwhile, as an example of "diplomacy of the peoples," five Bolivian social movement confederations acted as co-hosts to the gatherings, each rising alongside the government to offer welcomes to foreign visitors.

The Foreign Minister used the occasion to get the diplomatic corps—all the various ambassadors to Bolivia—to attend a virtual teach-in given by indigenous leaders and international experts. Choquehuanca's opening speech defined the efforts of both his government and the forum as part of a *pachakuti*, which he gave the gloss of "a return to equilibrium" among peoples and between humans and nature. Technical experts within the Permanent Forum's secretariat spoke expansively about the necessity for indigenous voices to intercede in global debates about ecological preservation and the direction of economic life. Transnational indigenous alliances, chiefly the Andean and Amazonian confederations CAOI and COICA,²¹⁷ put forward a frontal critique of IIRSA and extractive industrialization. These organizations, veterans of scores of resource conflicts, concentrated on the right to free, prior and informed consent over projects on their territories, while

²¹⁷ The Andean Coordination of Indigenous Organizations (*Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas*; CAOI) and the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (*Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica*; COICA) are transnational confederations of Andean highland and Amazonian lowland indigenous peoples' organizations.

articulating a sweeping critique of both extraction and capitalism. As these positions came together, and as the hosts spoke of a “new paradigm” articulated around *vivir bien*—living well, rather than living better—there was a sense of turning from defensive fights to being a voice in global debates on the direction of humanity. At the closing dinner of the gathering, held incongruously in a La Paz luxury hotel, one Bolivian movement representative noted, “before we were always the folklore” in international gatherings. Now, she said, we are making the agenda.

HISTORY, INDIGENEITY, DIPLOMACY: COMMEMORATING JUANA DE AZURDUY

On March 26, 2010, Argentine President Christina Fernández de Kirchner made an official visit to the city of Sucre. Her visit was a multilayered event that included all of the major aspects of Bolivian plurinational and Argentine populist statecraft in just a few hours of diplomatic interchange. The central figure of the day was neither the first elected female president of Argentina, nor the first elected indigenous president of Bolivia, but rather the mestiza patriot Juana Azurduy de Padilla (1780/81–1862). The fallen soldier and foremother was once again called to service, this time offering her life story in the service of integrating these breakthrough presidents’ political projects into their respective countries’ national histories. The ceremony and the day’s events reflected the repurposing of military and nationalist symbols for indigenous and feminist ends, the reshaping of national heroic pantheons, the evolving role of mass indigenous organizations in Bolivian diplomacy, and the ways that all these kinds of iconography are projected onto neo-extractivist economic projects.

Fernández de Kirchner touched down at midday at Sucre's Juana de Azurduy airport, one of many illustrations that venerating Azurduy is a local tradition.²¹⁸ Azurduy was a very active participant in the war for independence. She is credited with taking part in 33 battles, fighting along with her creole husband Manuel Ascencio Padilla until his death in 1816, and with various feats of heroism. Azurduy surrounded herself with a personal detachment of female soldiers, while she and her husband jointly commanded a force of as many as six thousand indigenous fighters. Following her husband's death she was elevated to Lieutenant Colonel (Lavrin 2008). Four of her sons died in the war, and she reputedly took leave to give birth to her fifth child, Luisa, only to return to combat at Pintadora. Despite her glories, she spent the final years of the war wandering through the Chaco. Simón Bolívar offered her after-the-fact elevation in rank, to Colonel in 1825, when he discovered she was living in poverty (*Correo del Sur*, August 7, 2011). Now, in the twenty-first century, politicians once again moved to bestow a higher rank upon this symbolically rich figure.

When Presidents Fernández de Kirchner and Morales and Vice President García Linera arrived in the May 25 Plaza, they were met by an honor guard of Bolivian soldiers extending along the northwest face of the square from the corner to the Casa de la Libertad. That building, where elite conspirators met within the walls of the royal university in 1809 to proclaim their independence from Spain, and the first seat of the Bolivian legislature retains enormous symbolic significance, akin to Philadelphia's Independence Hall in the United States. Crowded into the seventeenth-century structure's main chamber was the first class of Plurinational Legislative Assembly members, elected

²¹⁸ The airport was given her name during its construction, on the 150th anniversary of the 1825 consummation of independence. As for local veneration, it includes an annual commemoration on her birthday, July 12. Conveniently, this is also the day on which the city of Chuquisaca was renamed Sucre by an 1839 Bolivian government decree, which also proclaimed the city as Bolivia's capital. Amid the twenty-first century controversy over the title of national capital, Sucre's left and right found different ways to celebrate this Día de Chuquisaqueñidad (*Correo del Sur*, July 9, 2010).

in November 2009 and holding their first honorary session.²¹⁹ Often in their regular sessions, but especially in honorary sessions like this one, the Senators and Deputies dress according to their sectoral background: miners wear hardhats stickered with name of their union confederation; highland Indian men wear ponchos or pointy Andean hats with earflaps; and indigenous women and mestizas dress *de pollera*, topped with wide-brimmed or bowler hats according to their region of origin.

While Juana Azurduy de Padilla's elevation was the central act of the honorary session, the event's real function was to re-narrate Bolivian independence. García Linera was the first speaker, and he began not with Azurduy or even the Cry of Freedom issued from the Casa de la Libertad in 1809. Instead, he spoke of a long revolutionary era stretching from the 1780–82 indigenous uprisings through to independence in 1825. The vice president's speech left no doubt that the plurinational state's vision of independence is an anticolonial and antiracist one. In his re-narration, the war in which Azurduy fought was essentially an incomplete effort: The Age of Liberation we celebrate as the birth of our nation, he argued, will only be fulfilled when Native peoples have self-governance, the poor majority has won social justice, and Afro-Bolivians have ceased to suffer racism against them.

President Fernández de Kirchner offered a less comprehensive revision to the South American independence narrative, but still used the occasion to right the wrongs of both the past and the present. She spoke of her honor in bestowing the title of General upon an underappreciated *woman* of the founding era, and directly connected this story to overcoming sexism in the present. There was also an unvoiced, but present resonance between the living President and dead

²¹⁹ Honorary sessions like this one are held across the country as symbol of geographic inclusion.

Commander, both female leaders who took leadership beside husbands whose role and title they held as widows.²²⁰

Nationalists and pro-indigenous activists alike embrace Azurduy, as an Argentine and a Bolivian, as a woman and as a soldier, a speaker of Quechua and Aymara and a bride of an elite gentleman. In their rhetoric, she neatly stands for the integration of the indigenous, mestizos, and women in a project of nationalism. She was a fighter for her nation as a military commander, but also contributed as a war widow, the mother of soldiers, and mother of the new mestizo nation. Like Bartolina Sisa, she rose to military leadership beside her husband before leading combat alone. Yet Juana de Azurduy does not live so consistently within the pairing of husband and wife;²²¹ her husband is much less celebrated and she continued to fight for years after his death. For all that, her domesticity and service to the nation through birthing warriors make her less threatening to the gender order of the state. Through her fecundity, Juana de Azurduy is taken to embody yet another aspect of the nationalist project: pro-natalism as national loyalty. It is that aspect which is commemorated through the MAS-IPSP social policy that bears her name: the Juana de Azurduy Bonus. The bonus program, initiated on May 26, 2009, rewards uninsured women who receive prenatal and postnatal care and give birth in a hospital with a cash stipend of around \$15 every two months. The benefits of healthcare and nutritional supplements go along with state registration of the birthmother and child (and the sidelining of traditional midwives). The program, which benefited more than 131,000 women and children in its first two years, is one of several efforts to put cash in the hands of Bolivia's poor, both to alleviate poverty and stimulate economic growth. Inverting the stigma that societies often attached to lower-class (and particularly indigenous)

²²⁰ Fernández de Kirchner and her late husband Néstor Kirchner were separately but sequentially elected Presidents of Argentina: he in 2003, she in 2007.

²²¹ Arguably, Sisa and her husband Túpaj Katari have become the paradigmatic example of *chachawarmi*, the heterosexual Aymara man-woman dyad.

women's fertility, the Juana de Azurduy bonus honors poor mothers for rendering a service to the nation.

Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's visit had a second event: a reception in Sucre's indoor stadium. Before a tableau of enormous hands in the colors of national flags, officials from both countries sat at a white-tablecloth-covered table. The Bolivian tricolor, wiphala, Argentine and Chuquisaqueña flags stood behind the formal podium. In this ceremony, the state-centered order was marked with the traditional protocol that attends a diplomatic gathering. In its current Bolivian incarnation, this includes a formal, Western-defined setting, oversize computer-rendered posters (*gigantografías*) representing the type of meeting, and garlands and flower petals upon the guests of honor. A further element is having indigenous performers dance for the assembled dignitaries, as a cultural welcome to the foreigners. Dancers from Tarabuco performed *Pujllay* dances, while those from Oruro enacted the *Diablada*, as they have for creole elites, dignitaries, and tourists for decades, if not centuries. In plurinational Bolivia, indigenous peoples have joined the agenda, but they continue to also be the folklore.

Fernández de Kirchner's afternoon visit included the designation of Azurduy's birthday as a day of mutual brotherhood between Argentina and Bolivia. However, there were more substantial elements of the bilateral agenda as well. Fernández de Kirchner's visit sealed the pledge to construct the Juana de Azurduy Gas Pipeline of Integration from the Margarita gas field to Campo Durán, where it feeds into Argentina's Northeast Gas Pipeline. The \$88 million project makes possible a 15-year supply relationship between Bolivia and Argentina. While activists in the 2003 and 2005 Gas Wars assailed gas export plans for squandering the opportunity to "industrialize the gas" domestically, Morales now portrays gas export as a money-making opportunity for Bolivia and an emblem of idealistic regional brotherhood. "We sign agreements," he said when the gas started to

flow in July 2011, “so that two brother and neighboring peoples can share their natural resources and not compete. To complement one another, together, in the service of our peoples” (Cambio, July 1, 2011). Morales’s words neatly combine the rhetoric of the shared birth of South American republics (*brother*), with terms that evoke Andean values as an alternative to capitalism (*complement, not compete*; complementarity being a key term for highland indigenous societies), while applying them to a capitalist extractive enterprise.

Is there a coherence that unites the rethought foundation of plurinational Bolivia in García Linera’s speech with the Juana de Azurduy Gas Pipeline of Integration? There is at least a monetary connection, which runs through the coffers of YPFB into the cash stipends for new Bolivian mothers. Argentine gas consumption is one economic input for the MAS-IPSP’s policies of redistribution. However, this economic strategy ties new domestic economic policies to the old international division of labor: Bolivia’s role remains a supplier of primary materials, which are merely extracted, only to gain added value elsewhere. This reproduction of economic dependency leaves popular demands for economic decolonization unanswered.

A second, environmental critique of the MAS-IPSP’s economic model took shape during the World Peoples’ Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (*Cumbre Mundial de los Pueblos sobre Cambio Climático*; CMPCC). Book-ended by massive rallies on the model of the 2006 summit, the five-day gathering was made up of 184 independent events and seventeen multi-day sessions outlining a global grassroots climate agenda.²²² As the summit approached, the government got into a very public dispute with CONAMAQ and CIDOB over who would set the agenda. These organizations proposed Mesa 18, an eighteenth official session on domestic environmental problems

²²² After being isolated in a minority of three at the Copenhagen global climate summit, the Bolivian government hoped to galvanize a broader coalition before the 2010 gathering in Cancún, Mexico. This effort was unsuccessful.

in Bolivia. While the Pact of Unity, including these organizations, was named the co-host of the gathering and met to finalize the structure of the meeting, Evo Morales and the Foreign Ministry vetoed discussion of “internal matters” in an official track. The preparations for Mesa 18 became a debate over who exactly is conducting the diplomacy of the peoples.

In the end, Mesa 18 was held two blocks outside the gates of the Universidad de la Valle, which hosted the official and self-organized sessions. CONAMAQ, four smaller indigenous organizations, one campesino federation, and the Landless Workers’ Movement joined environmentalists and academics to organize two days of sessions before an audience of hundreds of people. Dozens of community groups presented their experiences and concerns about the impacts of “the extractivist development model based on the export of hydrocarbons, hydroelectricity, mining, agrobusiness, and lumber” (in the words of a Mesa 18 promotional flyer). Unlike the official sessions up the road, these conversations took place in a room with simple concrete floors and their results were not included in the Tiquipaya Accord that concluded the week. Still, coming in the middle of a convergence of nearly 25,000 Bolivians (along with over 9,000 foreigners), it offered an opportunity for national visibility around the country’s growing series of socio-environmental conflicts.

Called the “rebel” session by the press, Mesa 18 drew a spotlight on the “double talk” of the government, as critiqued by leaders like CONAMAQ’s Rafael Quispe: “This government speaks of respect for Mother Earth, but it simultaneously pollutes the land, and there are the cases of Corocoro, Mutún, the San Cristóbal [mining] company, and projects like Cachuela Esperanza [a planned hydroelectric dam], which also damage the Earth.” While organizing Mesa 18, indigenous and environmental critics worked inside the seventeen official discussion sessions as well. Quispe proposed that the summits’ conclusions “should, at minimum, be binding on the countries from

which they were generated” (*La Prensa*, April 16, 2010). Quispe used the blurred boundaries between outside and inside, movement summit and official diplomacy to press their critique and urge a rethinking of the economic development model that parallels the plurinational-izing of Bolivia.

The extremely visible indigenization of Bolivian state spaces is at once a shocking disruption of pre-existing relations and a gloss added superficially to neo-extractivist policies. The visual, rhetorical, and ethical language of indigenous autonomy and decolonization are now the language that both the state and social movements speak, to the world and to one another. It is a language spoken through mass physical occupation of public spaces, both in the symbols used, and the bodies gathered together. And it carries the electrifying power of transgression whether used by movements or the plurinational state. In the conclusion, the TIPNIS conflict illustrates the limits to how much indigenizing practices have redefined the state, and how indigeneity and the capacity for mobilization have become the new currency for Bolivian politics.

Table 5: Forms of space claiming described in this study

	<i>Form of space-claiming</i>	<i>Tactic</i>	<i>Element(s) of geography</i>
Ch. 3	Civic strike	Road blockade “Mobilized strike”: abstaining from work and marching	Spaces of flows: Rural highways, bridges, arterial roads Central urban roadways
	Strike wave	<i>Same tactics in multiple simultaneous locations</i>	
Ch. 4	Sovereign crowd	Large public gathering	Symbolically important central plazas
	Cabildo abierto	Large public gathering with open decisionmaking between stage and crowd	Symbolically important central plazas; other locations
Ch. 5	Indigenous march	Extended, multiday march	From rural or indigenous spaces, through daily stops in supportive locations, into central cities
	“Being indigenous in public space”	Overt performance of indigenous identity, use of indigenous symbols of rule	Spaces marked by a history of racial exclusion
Ch. 6	Indigenizing state spaces	use of indigenous symbols of rule, indigenous religious ceremony	Spaces owned by the government, public plazas, sites of official events

Conclusion **A New Way of Doing Politics**

The mobilizations analyzed in this study did not just authorize a new (pro-indigenous and post-neoliberal) political stance by the government, but made space-claiming a continuing part of a new political culture. These episodes of mass space-claiming I have examined became so significant by fighting and not being defeated, by exercising control (for small periods of time) over areas that would otherwise be organized and controlled by the state which they challenged: small areas of space with remarkable political and symbolic weight, or spaces vital for commercial flows and economic life. These partial interruptions, and the collective self-organization that decided upon them, posed an alternate possibility of sovereignty, and put the existing order into crisis. Despite not being able to replace the state (or the political/economic order) as a whole, they articulated a challenge that could not be ignored. At particular moments the tactical configuration of these mobilizations and the political constraints upon repression made these same mobilizations incapable of being silenced and repressed by the conventional tools available to the state. The constraints of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and just as importantly the apparent legitimacy claimed by these mobilizations, and the presumed right to collective action through syndicalist and revolutionary means, meant that a sizable number of intermediary and elite actors could not stomach or passively accept their repression. The combined physical, political, and moral aspects of these mobilizations posed an insoluble problem for elites, forcing the recomposition of political life to resolve the temporary crises. At the same time, the practices of disruption were added to the routines of daily life, and became part of a repertoire of contention that made future officeholders even less able to maneuver independently of the grassroots base. This extraparliamentary expression of grassroots sovereignty through disruptive space claiming is what I am calling the new mode of politics in Bolivia.

This study has shown how space-claiming protests were at the heart of a major political shift in Bolivia. Through a wide-ranging set of examples, I have characterized the ways movement actions interact with meaningful spaces to produce political consequences. Specifically these are paralyzing strike waves (chapter 3), sovereign crowds in central plazas (chapter 4), the reversal of indigenous exclusion from central urban spaces (chapter 5), and the introduction of symbols of indigenous self-rule into the state (chapter 6). Each of the interactions explored through this text had its own role in winning an altered political order that can (and would want to) call itself a plurinational and post-neoliberal Bolivia. (See Table 5 for a summary.)

In chapter 2, a historical review of revolt and regime shifts in Bolivia, I proposed that grassroots movements have become adept at intervening in politics, producing a move from *disruption as authorization* of political regimes to *disruption as a form of participation* in politics. Now that I have used ethnographic and historical examples to articulate a series of meaningful political acts built around space-claiming, I will use this conclusion to show how the disruptive pattern of political action in 1999 to 2005 did not give way to a new calm, but rather became the template for raising and (sometimes) resolving political conflicts. In the political culture of plurinational Bolivia, disruptive space claiming continues to be recognized as the voice of the people. This conclusion focuses on the contentious relations between the left grassroots movements and the MAS-IPSP government, from November 2010 to January 2012. As I noted in the Introduction, Evo Morales' second term is a time of grassroots mobilization and government-backed countermobilization on many issues. I look at the underlying sources of this tension and recount some dissident perspectives on this conflict. Turning to specific events, I consider the December 2010 gasolinazo, and the conflict over the Isiboro-Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). The TIPNIS campaign and the February to April labor protests (described in Chapters 3 and 4) dominated the

headlines during 2011 and provided a large chunk of the record number of protests in that year.²²³

During them, the power of space-claiming protest, as charted through this study, continued to be capable of reversing government decisions. When the government resisted these campaigns, it too had to turn to the same sources of power through countermobilization and other efforts.

POLITICAL INSTRUMENT, PROCESS OF CHANGE, PARTY-BUILDING

The hyphenated name of Bolivia's governing party, *Movement Towards Socialism—Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples*, evokes the tension between international leftist statecraft and plural Bolivian movements' distrust of party politics at the turn of the twenty-first century. The practice of *moving* an economically peripheral country *towards socialism* through state-led industrial investment and comprehensive redistribution programs is a well-established and theorized tradition. Well before his 2005 election, Evo Morales found mentors and allies in this process among Latin American heads of state from Cuba's Fidel Castro to Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. On the other hand, movements endorsed the creation of the MAS-IPSP as a *political instrument* that would return power and sovereignty to them. At the local level, in places like the Villa Tunari (the municipality at the center of the Chapare), MAS-IPSP officials were expected to subordinate their decisions to grassroots organizations. Indigenous movements envisioned the return of sovereignty in terms of decentralized and local self-government.

Jorge Komadina and Céline Geffroy (2007) argues that the MAS-IPSP innovated a form of a political action that put the tactics of social movement action behind the electoral advance of a party. Mass mobilizations challenging neoliberal politicians alternated with the Political Instrument's

²²³ Researchers in the Conflict Observatory at the Cochabamba-based research group CERES counted 884 “conflictive events” in 2011, the highest level of any year in their dataset (1970–2012). The 101 protest events recorded in September 2011 was the second highest monthly figure (Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social 2012, 2013).

electoral takeover of local governments. This was particularly true in its original base of the Chapare, but also set precedents for Morales and the party leadership to see a presidential election victory as an exit to the national crisis in 2005. Raquel Gutiérrez identifies the state-focused strategy of the MAS-IPSP as just one of three grassroots visions in competition during the 1999–2005 upsurge, alongside an Altiplano campesino campaign for indigenous self-rule and the metropolitan movements that are the focus of my study. For Gutiérrez, autonomy, communal control over common resources, and democracy through collective deliberation are the hallmarks of recent grassroots movements, but are only dimly reflected in the alternative state project led by the MAS-IPSP. Both of their studies carefully chronicle how the MAS-IPSP sought to articulate movement demands, while channeling popular energy to the ballot box rather than constructing alternate forms of politics.

In their drive to take office, Morales and García Linera spoke of a “government of social movements.” However, this did not take the form of a cabinet or legislature of social movements, despite the presence of some organizational leaders.²²⁴ The Constituent Assembly (as shown in chapter 6) had a more organic relationship to grassroots organizations.²²⁵ Neither the ministers in the executive nor the MAS-IPSP majority in the legislature brought the multivocal turbulence of Bolivian grassroots politics to official debates about the direction of the country. Since the election, a distinction has been maintained between president and party on one hand, and the “process of change” on the other. When Morales accepted a recall referendum in mid-2008, the ballot referred

²²⁴ They “were incorporated on a personal basis, and not as representing social movements within the governmental structure,” according to the authors of a study on the relationship (Zegada et al. 2008:55).

²²⁵ Its product, the New Political Constitution of the State—often referred to by that full name—is a common point of reference in grassroots protests. Holston (2009:259) makes a parallel point about Brazilians referring to their 1987–88 Constituent Assembly: “they often refer to the text of the national charter by the agency—their insurgent agency—in making it.”

not directly to him but to “the process of change led by ... Morales.” This distinction allows grassroots actors to offer critical support of the government, and particularly for joint mobilizations alongside it, without conceding ownership over the broader process of transformation.

Morales’ December 2005 election campaign assembled 53% of the electorate—a figure unprecedented since the 1982 restoration of multiparty democracy—but the party continued to face enormous challenges in the years that followed. In response, it embarked upon a major party-building effort. As it expanded rapidly to compete in four elections from 2008 to 2010, many of its new candidates and local efforts lacked the kind of organic connections to local organizations that once defined it. The party recruited local politicians, activists, and celebrities in its effort to secure a parliamentary majority and a local presence nationwide. Meanwhile, a substantial number of long-time high profile leaders and intellectuals were pushed out of, or broke with, the party to become critics of the government. Nonetheless, the campaigning and expansion efforts were enormously successful, bringing a sense of confidence and possibility to the party’s leadership.

After the 2009 elections, Morales and García Linera began to publicly advocate the reorientation of the MAS-IPSP towards a model of a traditional left party. Lamenting the lack of a “cadre structure,” the Vice President observed, “Evo and I have reflected that we must reassume leadership of the MAS and bet heavily on a new wave of cadre from within the unions.” The new cadre would have “a Bolshevik and Spartan vision,” ideologically committed and resistant to corrupt influences (EFE, December 2, 2009; *Los Tiempos*, August 6, 2010). Meanwhile, they also began to speak of outside “infiltrators” in the membership of the party and its allied organizations as they pressed for loyalty from them. CONALCAM, a civil society coalition founded in 2007 to defend the Constituent Assembly, was re-organized as an increasingly partisan organization in September 2010. In September 2010 documents (*Declaración de Principios* and *Reglamento*), CONALCAM redefined itself

as “the strategic alliance of the Plurinational State” including the executive and legislative branches of government, the MAS-IPSP, and social movement organizations. The coalition declared that it “recognizes and backs the leadership of brother Evo Morales Ayma,” and that takes as one of its purposes to “impede, denounce, and sanction the infiltration of counter-revolutionary enemies within CONALCAM.”²²⁶ Despite its origins as a political instrument, the MAS-IPSP began to be driven by the imperatives of party building and its leaders’ desire to integrate unions into a corporatist relationship with the state. (The COB trade union confederation remained outside this formation according to the “classist” position that workers’ unions must remain independent of the state.) The top-down reworking of CONALCAM became one of the most visible expressions of this tendency.

MOBILIZATION AND COUNTERMOBILIZATION

Countermobilization began as an extension of the joint mobilization that knitted together various grassroots mobilizations during the upsurge of 2000 to 2005. Once the MAS-IPSP came to power in 2006, the neoliberal parties and elites in the country’s eastern departments mounted a determined resistance from the places where they continued to hold office. Lacking a majority in the National Congress and a lacking a supermajority in the Constituent Assembly, the MAS-IPSP needed pressure from the streets to defend the its agenda and the re-writing of the constitution. When the civic movement in Sucre held a *cabildo* demanding full capital status, movements in La Paz and El Alto staged their own much larger event declaring, “the seat of government will not be

²²⁶ Under Article 14 of the regulations, organizations within CONALCAM are obliged to “defend and make respected the leadership of the President” and to respect CONALCAM decisions.

moved.” When the National Congress stalled an agrarian reform law in 2006, or a constitutional referendum in 2008, crowds marched across the country to its doorstep.²²⁷

The MAS-IPSP and its social movement allies navigated the “catastrophic stalemate” with the right-wing opposition through judicious use of countermobilization. By mobilizing its allies instead of the police, the MAS-IPSP government was able to avoid more direct confrontations between state forces and right-wing opponents. This strategy reframed the political polarization of these years into a competition between competing efforts to bring supporters into the streets. By placing activists on the front lines instead of police and soldiers, it undercut the opposition narrative of MAS-IPSP authoritarianism, and eventually led to a series of events where the right-wing’s own violence and racism were put in the spotlight. This “nonviolent statecraft” made coordinated government and social movement action a major feature of politics. It also facilitated a shift towards the capacity to mobilize pressure in the streets as a measure (in some ways, *the* measure) of relative political legitimacy in Bolivia.

Since 2010, however, waves of grassroots protest have increasingly put forward demands that are unauthorized by the Morales government. During my fieldwork, I observed how the government responded by continuing to encourage its supporters to countermobilize. No longer was the primary target of mobilizations right-leaning officials in the legislature or departmental governments. Instead it was other left grassroots movements which the government alleged were “endangering the process of change” with their demands. These tensions, controversies, and confrontations came just as the Bolivian state was being re-baptized as plurinational and new legislatures began to craft the first legislation within the framework of the new constitution. With the aforementioned shifts in the party in mind, we can identify a number of roles and motivations for

²²⁷ For a comprehensive account of the agrarian reform march, see Fabricant (2012:133–57). For an official recording of the 2008 march, see Giavarini Blanco (2009).

the government that detached it from the left grassroots base. As administrator of the Bolivian state, the government faced practical constraints on reconfiguration of the Bolivian economy. It navigated the nationalization of gas in ways that kept existing foreign investors on as “operators” of its facilities. Fears about the confidence of international lenders and the memory of hyperinflation encouraged the government to make cautious budgetary choices, putting off large wage increases and investment in favor of income-redistributing cash-transfer programs. The structure of municipal governance made decentralization to indigenous-majority rural municipalities straightforward, but similar devolution of powers to periurban neighborhoods difficult. As a result, MAS-IPSP efforts have reshaped the former, but not the latter, around community norms of politics.

State policy is affected by the need to constantly maintain both sources of revenue and relationships with economically powerful actors like the large agro-exporters and private businesses. Grassroots demands for local control over resource extraction and redistribution of large productive estates have been rebuffed as a consequence. The party’s political composition has affected its policies as well. Its core political constituencies have seen their interests prioritized over other grassroots sectors. This has included prioritizing coca growers and agricultural colonists over lowland indigenous peoples. The question of land redistribution is a case in point for these shifts. While the campesino movement’s push for land reform was once seen as a direct threat to eastern agribusiness, the MAS-IPSP has begun to cultivate a working relationship with this former adversary. In turn, it has attempted to re-direct the grassroots appetite for new lands towards titled indigenous territories. From the government’s perspective, such choices are its fundamental responsibility, as it ensures that the general interests of the public against the “particular interests” of mobilized groups. Whether the government’s position is read as responsibility or betrayal,

divergences between the government and movements have moved to the center of the political stage.

In May 2010, for example, a MAS-IPSP-affiliated parents group was organized against a teacher's strike, demanding that teaching be declared a "free profession," whose workers would not have to be part of a union. Then, in July and August 2010, the executive branch—from Evo Morales down—attacked CIDOB's 2010 Seventh National Indigenous March, arguing it was a foreign-funded plot to divide the indigenous movement. Ministers alleged that environmental organization FOBOMADE and northern La Paz indigenous federation CPILAP were "infiltrated" organizations backed by foreign money, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID); and alleged the Center for Juridical Studies and Social Investigation (CEJIS) was an "outside influence" misleading the indigenous movement. (*La Jornada*, June 10, 2010). (CEJIS had advised the MAS-IPSP since the 1990s, and no fewer than five former CEJIS staffers served as Ministers during Morales' first term.) Combining these two allegations with a dash of old-fashioned racism, the state-funded daily *Cambio* ran an editorial cartoon depicting a stereotypical jungle savage (labeled CIDOB) controlled by a conniving Uncle Sam (USAID) using a remote control (CEJIS). Vice President Álvaro García Linera convened a meeting of the other members of the Pact of Unity, in which five national leaders urged CIDOB to stop the march. Finally, cocaleros in the Chapare threatened that the march would not be allowed to pass through their region on the way to La Paz. The cocaleros' proposed counter-actions carried forward longstanding activist traditions: declaring certain figures "persona non grata" or unwelcome in a movement's home territory, using the tactic of road blockades as a means of pressure, and attacking "certain leaders" as "traitors" to the broader cause.

Finally, the government organized through the National Coordination for Change (CONALCAM) to repudiate the April 2011 strike by the Bolivian labor movement (key events of

this strike appear in chapter 4). On April 19, the Cochabamba departmental affiliate of CONALCAM organized three converging marches of campesinos, coccaleros, and urban supporters “in defense of the process of change” and against the strike. The protest was held despite the signing of an agreement to resolve the strike one day earlier. In the Plaza 14 de Septiembre, marchers filed past a reviewing stand where the Vice President, Governor, and social movement leaders sat side-by-side. In the rally’s final address, Vice President García Linera amplified earlier accusations of coup plotting, disruption, and selfishness by the strikers and their leaders. He warned the assembled crowd of thousands (the coccalero march alone stretched for ten city blocks) that destabilizing the Morales government could bring the right wing back into power. This official discourse paralleled CONALCAM’s scathing April 13 public pronouncement, attacking “these individuals and caudillos [in the Central Obrera Boliviana] who are promoting marches and blockades against the government; we see in them the principal enemies of the DEMOCRATIC and CULTURAL REVOLUTION [*uppercase original*].”

THE CRITICS’ POSITION: RETAKING LEADERSHIP OF THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

While the government and its defenders pushed towards blaming “counter-revolutionary” leaders within grassroots movements for conflict within the country, those critical of the government developed a different perspective. If those in pro-government countermobilizations described themselves as “defending the process of change,” grassroots left critics asserted that the process had run off the rails and must be restored. They articulated their demands and theories of the political situation around a failure of the government to carry forward the process in the desired direction, and a need for movements to retake the initiative over its direction.

The discussion at the Fourth National Forum of Social Organizations offers a window into the critics' perspective. On November 27, 2010, I sat in a very crowded room in the center of Cochabamba's Martadero, a former slaughterhouse remade into a community space for arts and culture. There was more than a casual resemblance between the space and the scores of convergence spaces in which I had sat in meetings of the North American global justice movement from the 1999 disruption of the Seattle WTO meetings through the 2004 Republican National Convention protests. The setting was so familiar—white drywall and brick, butcher paper recording the views of participants, bodies tightly packed together filling a room with a low murmur of chatter and the scent of sweaty, unshowered bodies—that the differences stood out even more clearly. The men and women in the room were older, most of visibly indigenous ancestry, and poor. More of them clutched plastic bags of coca leaves than held cell phones, although a laptop and projector were set up to record the plenary's demands.

This Forum was a weekend-long showcase of the discontent within Bolivian popular movements just a year after President Evo Morales was elected to his second term. Leaders and rank-and-file participants in grassroots movements took part in a joint process: first, thematic workshops to discuss the current situation and then gatherings organized by region of the country to compile lists of their proposals. I attended the most general workshop, on “participatory democracy.” A particular attentiveness was given to delegates from Potosí Department, a region that gave more than 80% of its votes to the Movement Towards Socialism, but had recently held a 19-day general strike that won concessions from the government.²²⁸ A catchphrase emerged from the

²²⁸ In July and August 2010, see page 124.

room: “It’s up to the social movements to retake the leadership of the process of change” back from the government.²²⁹

“We, the social movements, are the central actors,” said one participant, articulating a widely held view in the Forum. An organizer from Potosí defined the regional strikers as “in the process of change” and its demands as advancing “the October agenda” from the overthrow of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003. Carlos Macha of the Neighborhood Councils of La Paz observed, “We made the Constitution ... if we want to keep moving forward, we will do so.” “We believe that change is what the organizations, persons, and the public in general do. It is not accomplished by a minister or a vice president,” insisted Celestino Condori, the leader of the Potosí Civic Committee. A member of the neighborhood federation in Plan Tres Mil (a poor section of urban Santa Cruz) said, “The government needs to come down and consult with the grassroots,” before defining an uncritical allegiance to the state as a new form of colonialism. “We need to de-colonize ourselves and demand this from them.” His metaphor—removing the colonial “chip,” sort of a political version of mobile phone SIM cards—bounced around the conversation among enthusiastic speakers eager to validate their frustrations.

The participants in this National Forum wanted a new gathering to be organized to carry forward these conversations, but I could see from the faces of the logistics team—from Project NINA,²³⁰ a La Paz-based NGO—that they wouldn’t get it. Instead, divisive strike waves captured the national headlines in Bolivia over the succeeding months.

²²⁹ This phrasing is from activist intellectual Raúl Prada, who served in the Constituent Assembly of 2006–2007 and spoke at the summit. However, the phrase *reconducir el proceso de cambio* was used repeatedly in the conference and among grassroots activists over 2010 and 2011.

²³⁰ Project NINA (from the Aymara word for fire) focuses on movement capacity-building and leadership development, and was formerly headed by David Choquehuanca, who serves as Foreign Minister.

THE GASOLINAZO

The turbulent year of 2011 began a week early. On the day after Christmas, 2010, Vice President Álvaro García Linera announced that the Bolivian government would remove all subsidies on fuel, primarily gasoline and diesel, and let the prices float to international levels. For the state, these subsidies represent a fiscal drain and have the troubling side effect of subsidizing profiteers who illegally export the inexpensive fuel. The MAS–IPSP government joined a long line of administrations that have attempted to suddenly end price supports.²³¹ Fuel prices went up 70-80% overnight.

Within hours, transit drivers mobilized to raise their fares, which are a basic element of family budgets.²³² Nearly every other seller of basic goods argued that higher fuel costs would lead to higher prices for their products. Shocked by the consequences for their pocketbooks and outraged to be paying more for products considered to be a collective asset after the 2003 and 2005 Gas Wars, the Bolivian public hit the streets. Many of the social movements that brought the MAS-IPSP to power, including Evo Morales' coca grower base, did not hesitate to mobilize against the gasolinazo. Despite some pressure from the government on their leadership, the Neighborhood Councils, Factory Workers, labor confederation, and others mobilized mass protests.

In El Alto, the Neighborhood Council Federation orchestrated protests on December 29 and 30. The December 29 protest was organized as a public gathering to decide on protest actions, but it immediately shifted into action by calling a general strike and destroying property on the highway down the hill to La Paz. Their message was direct, confrontational, and personal: calling for

²³¹ This was despite the MAS-IPSP having opposed the move when previous governments proposed it. For a historical review of previous price hikes and attempted price hikes see Gandarillas G. (2011).

²³² Transit fares are set by agreement between drivers and the government, and may not be unilaterally raised.

Evo Morales to resign, publicly pummeling effigies of Morales and García Linera, and burning images of both leaders in the streets. On December 30, the leadership declared itself on a “war footing,” and parts of the crowd destroyed property belonging to local organizations that had failed to mobilize (notably COR–El Alto), the MAS–IPSP-controlled municipality, and the national government (the Bolivian Roads tollbooth and the EMAPA food supply agency). Thousands marched to downtown La Paz, joining Paceño protesters who pressed towards the Plaza Murillo on all sides. Meanwhile, thousands more gathered in Oruro, Potosí, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Cobija, Trinidad, Sucre, and Tarija—all nine of the departmental capitals. The scene in El Alto, and the gathering wave of mobilizations nationwide, brought back collective memories of the mobilizations that toppled presidents in 2003 and 2005, even though the numbers were not yet as great.

For several days, the government clung to the belief that other new policies could soften popular revulsion, or that the benefits of the policy could be explained, but the streets were too big of a threat. Just hours before midnight on December 31, the government reversed course and returned fuel prices to their former levels. By the next day, Morales claimed that this second decision reflected his dynamic relationship with the Bolivian people: “The people listened to me and taught me, and they salute the decision that I took in defense of the poorest families” (Arias 2011). However, the government proposed that a renewed hike could come soon, provided that the social movements were consulted.²³³ This suggestion and four days of price hikes set off a wave of inflation. The government was unable prevent some loss of its credibility as an opponent of free-market policies. In response, the government launched a nationwide advertising campaign promising to “govern by obeying the people.”

²³³ Vague references to an economic summit eventually materialized as the Plurinational Encounter to Deepen the Change mentioned below.

TIPNIS: FACE-OFF OVER A HIGHWAY

In 2011, the national indigenous movement, represented by both CIDOB and the National Council of Ayllus and Marcas of Qollasuyu (CONAMAQ), recognized the proposed highway through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory²³⁴ as a bellwether case for local control over indigenous territories; the right to free, prior, and informed consent; and the preservation of protected areas. Despite some rhetorical acknowledgment, the MAS-IPSP government has avoided creating a legal mechanism for indigenous peoples to exercise these rights.²³⁵ On the TIPNIS highway Morales explicitly denied local indigenous communities the right to choose, saying the road would be built “whether they want it or not.”²³⁶ Both sides recognized the dispute, then, as a key precedent for the right of indigenous people’s to freely consent to or reject megaprojects on their lands. As a consequence, a local issue—the TIPNIS highway—became the centerpiece of a national indigenous march, unlike the seven previous marches that were driven by broad legislative goals.

The government began construction of the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway in June 2011. The 306-km road would pass through Isiboro Sécure along the 177-km Segment II from

²³⁴ Isiboro-Sécure was established as a National Park on November 22, 1965. It spans 1,372,180 hectares (5,298 square miles; about the size of Connecticut) and straddles the undelimited border between Cochabamba and Beni Departments in Bolivia. As of the 2001 Census, there were 12,388 indigenous inhabitants, members of the Tsimané, Yuracaré, and Mojeño-Trinitario peoples. Since the 1970s, agricultural settlers, primarily coca farmers, have colonized the southern portion of the park.

²³⁵ Article 352 of the Constitution recognizes “a process of free, prior, and informed consultation” over the “exploitation of natural resources” in a territory. More expansive rights to free, prior, and informed consent are contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A joint CIDOB-CONAMAQ effort to include these rights in the Law on the Rights of Mother Earth was sidelined in late 2010. Further legislation recognizing indigenous consultation rights remain stalled in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

²³⁶ In Morales’ words, “Whether they want it or not, we are going to build this road and we are going to deliver under [my] current administration the Cochabamba-Beni/Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos road” (*Página Siete*, June 30, 2011).

Isinuta to Monte Grande, effectively dividing the park in half. A study by the Bolivian Institute for Strategic Research (PIEB) found the road would accelerate deforestation by increasing access to the territory for illegal loggers as well as agricultural colonizers.²³⁷ The Subcentral TIPNIS, holders of collective land title to the territory, have stated and restated their opposition to the building of the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway through their land at least forty times²³⁸ since 2003. Contrary to international norms,²³⁹ they were not consulted prior to a series of government actions to make the highway a reality.

CIDOB and CONAMAQ began their cross-country march on August 15 from Trinidad, Beni. Countermobilizing northern Bolivian residents against the Eighth March proved to be a challenge for the government. A brief blockade was held by workers and residents in San Ignacio de Moxos, but an attempted mobilization against the march in San Borja, Beni, was outflanked by more massive efforts by march supporters. Finally, members of the agricultural colonists' federation organized a road blockade on the Beni–La Paz border in Yucumo. The national government sent police troops to guard the space between the march and the blockade “to prevent violence,” effectively blocking the march for ten days. As reports of food shortages and limited access to water among the marchers circulated in the press, a delegation of activists travelled to join the march in solidarity.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ It projected deforestation of 64% of the park by 2030 if the road was built, a major increase from the already worrisome projection of 43% loss without the road (PIEB 2011).

²³⁸ According to Leonardo Tamburini of the Center for Juridical Studies and Social Investigation (CEJIS) (Tamburini 2011).

²³⁹ ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples require such consultation, and the latter norm requires “free, prior, and informed consent.” The declaration was incorporated into Bolivian law on 7 November 2007, by means of Law No. 3760, but its provisions are not effective. The government contends guarantees for consultation in the 2009 Constitution are restricted to hydrocarbon extraction.

²⁴⁰ The delegation included Alejandro Almaraz (former Vice-Minister of Lands), Oscar Olivera, Gustavo Guzmán (former Bolivian ambassador to the United States), Lino Villca (former MAS-

The standoff at Yucumo came to a head on September 25. The police mounted an afternoon attack on the camp of indigenous marchers, beating and teargassing them, seeking out and arresting prominent leaders, and leaving behind a chaotic scene of injury, flight, and fear. Marchers, including prominent leaders, were grabbed, tackled, and handcuffed in front of network television cameras. Between 72 and 280 protesters were injured.²⁴¹ Police arrested hundreds of marchers and evacuated them in buses and vans, attempting to send them back to Trinidad, Beni, where the march began. In Rurrenabaque, they faced another local popular mobilization in support of the marchers. Hundreds of protesters arrived at the airport, confronted police, and erected obstacles to planes landing. With control of the airport slipping away, the police commander ordered the release of the captured protesters (Defensoría del Pueblo 2011).

Up until the September 25 raid, the Morales government maintained a clear opposition to local indigenous consultation on the highway. However, it was forced to shift this position. Three kinds of events moved the government on the TIPNIS issue: the failure of repression, demonstrations of broadening support for the movement, and the symbolic impact of the indigenous marcher reaching the capital, its downtown, and the Plaza Murillo. Evo Morales made a televised statement on the day after the raid, announcing the suspension of Segment II of the highway and asking the families of those attacked for forgiveness. However, Morales soon reiterated that projects like the Cochabamba–Beni Highway are “questions of state” not subject to a local veto.

IPSP senator), Omar Fernández (former irrigators’ union leader in Cochabamba), Moisés Torres and Vladimir Machicado (Movimiento Sin Tierra or landless movement), feminists, university students, and El Alto community leaders (*Página Siete*, September 21, 2011).

²⁴¹ A Prosecutor’s Office report in September referred to 74 wounded (*Página Siete*, October 6, 2011); a legal complaint presented by the marchers asserts 280 were injured (Erbol Digital, October 15, 2011). The most severe cases include: Celso Padilla, leader of the Assembly of the Guaraní People, who was hospitalized with multiple hematomas from his beating, but rejoined the march; and Wilson Melgar, a grandfather and Sirionó indigenous marcher, who suffered an embolism and who could remain paraplegic from the incident (*Página Siete*, October 6, 2011).

The arrival of the marchers to La Paz and their mass backing by Paceños propelled the second shift. On Wednesday, October 19, the march of at least 1,200 people—long-term marchers and recent supporters—was greeted by thousands upon thousands of spectators on the streets of La Paz. That evening, several hundred indigenous protesters set up camp in the Plaza Murillo—the square that is faced by the president’s palace and the legislative assembly building. If the importance of preventing this vigil was already clear from the September raid, it was reinforced by the demotion of the police official who failed to keep them out. The government abandoned its refusal to allow the TIPNIS indigenous community to have any say over a highway through their lands, and began detailed negotiations on the remaining demands of the march. Fifteen separate agreements were signed within a week. Law 180, authored by CIDOB and made law on October 25, 2011, declared TIPNIS an “intangible zone” and prohibited any highway from crossing the park.

In late 2011, as soon as the indigenous marchers had gone home, the government sought to regain its footing and reverse the TIPNIS protection law. The Chapare cocalero movement, of which Evo Morales remains the head, and Conisur, a confederation of indigenous communities in the colonized southern portion of TIPNIS (themselves affiliated with the cocaleros), took the lead in advocating renewal of the road project. The 2012 events of the TIPNIS conflict have added many layers of complexity to the story, but the essential government stance is simple. Where once it said the highway would be built “whether the indigenous like it or not,” since November 2011, the message is that the highway will be built precisely because the indigenous like it. More generally, the Morales government disputes what the voice of social movements is saying, and which leaders have the right to speak for them, but shares in the idea that the movement voice is foundational to Bolivian politics.

THE ROLE OF SPACE-CLAIMING IN A TURBULENT YEAR

The events of December 2010 through January 2012 illustrate that politics on the street has a continuing force in Bolivia, one that is capable of overruling the determined efforts of the national government. The Morales government had secure control of the executive and legislature, but these tools could not legitimately overrule the people in the streets. Movements used a variety of means to make this happen, but strike waves, converging marches, cabildos, and indigenous vigils in urban centers—the forms of space claiming studied here—were the central tools. These challenges, when articulated with numbers and commitment and when they used symbolically important spaces in historically resonant ways—Alteños swarming downhill to La Paz, indigenous peoples retaking the Plaza Murillo—continued to represent “the people” whom the government must obey.

When challenged, the Morales government turned to its own mobilizations as a defense strategy, embraced symbols of indigenous and grassroots sovereignty, and pushed its proposals through social movement fora. While Morales and García Linera claimed a fuel price increase was essential, they repeatedly promised it would only occur with social movement consultation and approval. During the 2011 labor mobilization, the government also strove to connect its policies to social movement demands, both through the countermarch in Cochabamba and by positioning the government as defending an agenda of transfer payments to the poor and long-term productive investments, rather than short-term pay increases. While helping the government to navigate through difficult moments, countermobilization has deepened divisions among social movements.²⁴²

In December 2011 and January 2012, the government organized a new and broader national social summit, the Plurinational Encounter to Deepen the Change, a three-part “consultation with civil society” on the part of the Bolivian executive branch. The summit format replicated the one I

²⁴² In November 2011, for example, CIDOB and CONAMAQ left the Pact of Unity.

attended a year earlier, which lacked state sponsorship. Its purpose was to provide the national government with the legislative agenda for 2012. In plurinational Bolivia, the road to legitimate lawmaking no longer begins and ends with a legislative majority, but rather with strike waves and movement summits.

THE ROLE OF LASTING POLITICAL DYNAMISM IN EVALUATING REVOLUTIONS

For Bolivians, the journey towards a new society is ongoing. The profound shifts in values proposed in the Constituent Assembly do not orient the society yet. The material demands of the movements that animated the grassroots upsurge have not been achieved. While vast shifts in priorities have been accomplished, neither water, nor gas, nor land are managed to benefit all. Many in the country's urban peripheries, in particular, still lack access to the basic necessities for which they organized locally and rebelled collectively. And on many fronts—water service in Cochabamba being a paradigmatic case—progress is neither evident nor even on the horizon. The reconceptualization of the democratic process around indigenous sovereignty and mass participation, and of the economy around the collective control of resources and respect for Mother Earth, remains to be clearly articulated, much less carried out.

Seven years into Evo Morales' presidency, the promise of a "government of social movements" remains deeply fraught with contradictions. Governmental priorities around resource extraction, developmentalism, and limited wage growth are not readily altered by the grassroots base. But these are matters for Bolivians to work through as they define, through struggle and vision, what plurinational Bolivia will become. What this study can do is to examine the means by which these matters are worked out on the ground, through movement. Social movement summits and waves of grassroots mobilization (when they are successful at achieving broad adherence) remain the

touchstones of democratic legitimacy. The media and everyday people recognize such events as legitimate expressions of popular will, much like voting. Despite its wishes and its institutional advantages, the government cannot afford to ignore either of these forms of popular democracy.

The events described in this study confirm that space-claiming protest has become part of Bolivian political culture, in ways that seem destined to endure. Mass mobilization now stands as a source of political legitimacy comparable to armed force in past revolutions and electoral victories in liberal democracies. Movements continue to *participate in politics by disrupting everyday life*. It is through mass mobilization that protesters, politicians, and the media now claim that the people have spoken. As shown in chapters 3 through 6, the voice of these mobilizations acquires its significance, and dares to aspire to sovereignty, when it controls and claims urban spaces. Potosinos and the protesters against the gasolinazo in 2010, and the defenders of TIPNIS in 2011 retraced this pathway and confirmed its significance. Plurinational Bolivia was created and continues to be defined through acts that use and reconfigure the relation between these spaces, the bodies within them, and political and racial power.

Additionally, the Bolivian experience should alter the ways we think about and evaluate revolutionary change. The presumption of many theories of revolution is that a revolutionary period constitutes a brief interregnum between stable orders. The new order is charged with vital mandates from the interrupting forces, and it can be judged according to its fidelity to these mandates. This approach judges the new regime's leaders as either faithful torchbearers or deceitful betrayers of the revolution.

The disruption-as-participation approach advocated in this study sees the timeline of revolutions differently. It takes the fierce independence of Bolivian movements, expressed through the idea that the "process of change is not a person, not a political party," but something more

which belongs to everyone as a source of theoretical insight. It shifts the focus from the successor government after the upheaval to the relations among movement(s), society, and state. It turns to a focus on political culture, of which the contentious repertoire and shared beliefs about the nature of revolution are crucial parts. By keeping my eyes on the streets, I have written a study of the creation and persistence of new forms of participation through grassroots upheaval. While I intend this to account to stand on its own, I also offer it as a complement to policy-focused readings of revolutionary upheaval. With this shift in focus, we can look beyond the state, its policies and structures, statements and inconsistencies, for evidence of the effectiveness of revolutionary upheavals.

While changes in material situation, in symbolic esteem, and in structures of participation in national decisions are crucial goals of revolutionary movements,²⁴³ they achieve these goals by throwing the stability and legitimacy of the existing order into question. A government that emerges through a revolutionary situation can and should be judged by how well it achieves these goals. However, so long as it remains dependent upon mobilization to achieve its goals (as in the catastrophic stalemate) or vulnerable to renewed mobilization (as in the current period), the element of dynamism that shook the old order remains. Failures of a new government to achieve the ambitious visions that animated the upheaval that brought it to power, or to reconcile the contradictions among these visions, can and should be challenged, corrected, and guided from below.

Revolutionary events produce not only a new regime, but also a new familiarity among its participants with the practice of making politics and possibility of being the source of sovereignty. These capacities provide a new context in which those elevated to governmental office make their

²⁴³ This list briefly rephrases Nancy Fraser's (1997, 2005) theory of redistribution, recognition, and representation as distinct forms of justice.

decisions as well as a new flexibility in imagining how society can be remade. As they define what their country will become, through struggle, Bolivians have an expanded set of tools and models. The future of their struggle relies on the continued ability of people to come together around, articulate, and defend common visions. While not fulfilled, and not embodied in a single organization, the transformative possibilities of this process remain open and in motion.

Appendix

Chronology of Leadership Changes in Response to Popular Upheaval

May 1936: Massive May Day demonstration, followed by general strike weakens Tejada Sorzano government. Germán Busch guarantees army non-interference in the strike; a crisis point comes with La Paz left unpoliced on May 19. Germán Busch and David Toro execute military coup on May 20, in collaboration with Socialist and Republican parties. Labor leaders included in “military socialist” government.

1943: Razón de la Patria and MNR collaborate in Villarroel coup, in part out of disgust for the Peñaranda government’s repression of labor. A notable precursor is the January 1943 massacre of miners at Catavi. Villarroel stages “improvised victory party” (Gotkowitz, p. 164) on January 20, 1944.

July 1946: A La Paz teacher’s strike expands to students at the Universidad Mayor San Andres. As many as 35,000 take over Plaza Murillo on July 19. Villarroel concedes the expulsion of the MNR from government in negotiations, but events overtake him and a crowd captures police headquarters and the national penitentiary. Despite resigning, the President is captured and hung in the Plaza. The MNR’s later alliance with workers and peasants, and eventual victory, as well as the conservative turn made by post-1946 governments has generally overshadowed any grassroots motivations behind opposition to Villarroel. Néstor Guillén is the first of two Supreme Court heads to assume the presidency to conduct elections.

April 1952: MNR and labor unions collaborate in three-day armed insurrection, which takes power despite the absence of military co-conspirators. Worker and peasant militias have a notable presence in the immediate aftermath, as well as May Day 1953 and at the signing of the Agrarian Reform Decree in Ucureña on August 2, 1953.

1964: Miners, teachers, university students engage in a series of strikes. President Víctor Paz Estenssoro appeals to the military and the peasantry to restore order, but René Barrientos retreats to Cochabamba and declares himself in

rebellion, while radical peasants in Cochabamba and the Altiplano demur from supporting Paz. The coup is finally carried out on November 3, and a November 4 crowd in the Plaza Murillo demands a Barrientos presidency, displacing “co-president” and Army chief of staff Alfredo Ovando Candía. Despite these origins, Barrientos rapidly turned away from the labor movement and exiled former ally Juan Lechín.

October 1970: Mass mobilization by workers holds back an attempted right-wing coup. General Juan José Torres assumes power with a great debt to the labor movement. The Central Obrera Boliviana organizes the Popular Assembly on the model of revolutionary dual power.

August 1971: General Banzer comes to power in an anti-communist military-civilian uprising centered in Santa Cruz. Banzer’s governing rhetoric seeks to divide mass organizations from “foreign” and “anti-national” purveyors of “subversion.”

1977–78: Labor strikes and foreign pressure convince Hugo Banzer Suarez to call elections for 1978. Restrictions on political participation are lifted and political prisoners released following major hunger strikes begun in December 1977.

October–November 1979: Alberto Natusch Busch leads coup as part of ongoing polarization between military and COB. An early October military rising in Trinidad proved to be a dress rehearsal and was opposed by the COB. On October 27, the COB accurately accused Natusch Busch of planning an upcoming coup.

November 1–16, 1979: Rapid reaction to the coup led by Alberto Natusch Busch by both urban crowds and peasant unions rapidly paralyzes the country. The mobilization continues despite lethal repression and within a week Natusch begins to seek an end to his rule. In the end, a representative of the parliament, Lydia Gueiler succeeds to the presidency and is greeted by a massive crowd as she is sworn in.

September 1982: A nationwide strike, begun on September 17, hastens the end of military rule.

General Guido Vildoso Calderón resigns and turns power over to Congress, who return to the 1980 election winner, Hernando Siles Zuazo of the UDP. Siles Zuazo commits to a no-repression policy that allows three turbulent years of popular protest.

1985: Disruptive mobilizations by the COB workers' confederation combine with a hyperinflation crisis to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and peril. Opposition parties advance the elections and run campaigns promising stability. A new alliance of the MNR and ADN comes to power and negotiates a comprehensive economic restructuring with the International Monetary Fund, which is promoted for weeks and then suddenly implemented in late August 1985. Relation with the resistant labor movement is largely decided by deploying the military to stop the miners' 1986 March for Life before they can reach La Paz.

October 2003: Massive participation in September-October "Gas War" protests, which the government unsuccessfully attempts to repress. The scores of killed protesters outrage the urban middle class, and generalize calls for Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada to resign. Vice President Carlos Mesa assumes power and movements offer a six-month truce.

June 2005/January 2006: Popular pressure during the "Second Gas War" of May-June 2005 forces Carlos Mesa to resign, and prevents accession of Senate President Vaca Díaz. Eduardo Rodríguez, the President of the Supreme Court, assumes the presidency as a caretaker. Evo Morales, whose party had been active on the issue of gas, builds a coalition with mobilized social movements and wins an unprecedented electoral majority in December 2005 elections. Social movement leaders in government and some agree to Pact of Unity with MAS government.

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