

# Introduction

## *The “Cultural Democratic Revolution” of Evo Morales*

In August 2006, Bolivia witnessed a historic event, the inauguration of the Constituent Assembly, a convention of popularly elected delegates to rewrite the constitution and “refound the nation.” For many, this was the culmination of centuries of indigenous struggles against domination by white–mestizo elites. Colonized by the Spanish in the 1500s, Bolivia’s native peoples endured centuries of oppression and exploitation and were barred from cultural and political participation in colonial administration and later national affairs. Since the founding of the Republic of Bolivia in 1825, the white–mestizo political elite had written all the following constitutions, without meaningful representation by the indigenous poor who make up the majority of Bolivia’s population. But starting in 2000, the tables have begun to turn. A series of massive popular protests against neoliberal policies staged by indigenous peoples, peasants, and the urban poor forced the resignation of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, and in 2005, Bolivia elected its first self-identifying indigenous president, Evo Morales. Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS; Movement towards Socialism) party gained the largest electoral majority since Bolivia’s return to democracy in the early 1980s, representing a sea change in the country’s political landscape. Claiming to represent Bolivia’s excluded peoples, Morales promised his government would inaugurate a “cultural democratic revolution” (Morales 2006). The next year, he convened the Constituent Assembly, a constitutional convention to rewrite the constitution, a long-held demand by indigenous organizations, to begin this revolution and codify into law the “process of change” that would lead to a decolonized Bolivia.

The Constituent Assembly began on August 6, the day on which Bolivians celebrate independence from Spain, in the beautiful colonial city of Sucre, where the

country's original constitution had been written in 1825. The city was filled with delegates, visitors, media, and large contingents from each of Bolivia's thirty-six indigenous groups, mingling in the noisy fiesta in the central plaza. My anthropologist credentials got me a press pass, so I was able to observe the ceremony with journalists from around the world. It was an amazing performance of indigenous pride and power. Right above us, from the balcony of the Palacio de Justicia, President Morales oversaw the festivities, flanked by his vice president, Álvaro García Linera, and various international luminaries, including the Nobel Peace Prize winner and Guatemalan indigenous leader Rigoberta Menchú. The president of the Assembly, Silvia Lazarte, a former domestic worker and union leader, called the Assembly to order. The most striking part of the day was the introduction of the 225 delegates, many of whom were dressed in clothing marking them as indigenous. As the roll call of clearly recognizable indigenous names rang out, it became clear that the authors of this constitution were very different from those of previous constitutions. "Mamani? Presente! Quispe? Presente!" Many of the delegates responded in their native tongues: Aymara, Quechua, Guaraní. All around me, faces were wet with tears, as we witnessed what would have seemed almost impossible ten years earlier: indigenous people making a new state. Vice President García Linera congratulated Bolivia's indigenous peoples for "reclaiming their place in society not with bullets, but with votes and words." He said Bolivia's strength is its "communitarian capacity," from which the rest of the world could learn. "The *jacha uru*, the great day, for the indigenous peoples has arrived," declared President Morales (Spinelli 2006). Then a rowdy parade began, made up of all the different social movements whose struggles had made this day possible: indigenous peoples in colorful traditional clothes, labor and peasant unions, women's organizations, students, and miners with their hard hats. With enormous pride, marchers sang and played traditional instruments, carrying signs encouraging the delegates to refund the nation and to begin the process of decolonizing Bolivia. "¡Nunca Más sin Nosotros!" declared the signs, "Never Again without Us!" The whole day, the descendants of those excluded for centuries past marched through the streets declaring that it was their turn to write the future.

Over the next two years, Bolivia's Constituent Assembly would be the site of tremendous conflict as its delegates struggled to rework the model of the state and the role of indigenous peoples within it. The resulting constitution, passed in a national referendum in 2009, declares Bolivia to be a plurinational, communitarian state, and establishes a series of rights for "indigenous originary and peasant peoples and nations," including rights to autonomy and self-government, to culture, recognition of their institutions, and the consolidation of their territories (Bolivia 2009: Article 2). More importantly, it declares the fundamental goal of the new plurinational state to be "decolonization." Article 9 of the new constitution codifies the idea into law, specifying the first goal and essential function of the



FIGURE 2. Guaraní women at the inauguration of the 2006 Constituent Assembly. Credit: Nancy Postero.

state as being to “constitute a just and harmonious society, cemented in *decolonization*, without discrimination or exploitation, with full social justice, to consolidate plurinational identities.”

This is the promise of the Morales government: to create a new form of state that will inaugurate a new kind of decolonized society. What does “decolonization” mean? How has the Morales government instituted this revolutionary idea and what have the effects been for Bolivia? Has the Morales government been able to fulfill the promises of this revolutionary idea? These are the questions this book seeks to answer. In this ethnography of indigenous state-making, I examine the discourses, policies, and practices of the Morales government to see what difference it might make for formerly oppressed groups to take state power. The Bolivian experiment inspired people across the world because it promised an alternative to both neoliberal economic policies and Western colonial legacies, especially racism. Because it drew from the repertoire of indigenous values and practices,



FIGURE 3. Celebrating the inauguration of the 2006 Constituent Assembly. Credit: Nancy Postero.

it challenged the fundamental tenets of liberalism, offering a chance to overturn them or at least modify them for the twenty-first century.

Yet my research shows that this did not happen. While the Morales government did enact policies that greatly benefited Bolivia's indigenous citizens, the "indigenous state" continues to be fundamentally liberal, and the country has not only continued but expanded its reliance on market capitalism. Indigeneity and decolonization were the rallying cries for the Morales revolution, serving as what the French political philosopher Jacques Rancière terms an emancipatory "politics" (Rancière 1999). Yet, as the MAS government consolidated its control and defeated its political adversaries on the right, its support for indigenous self-determination waned. Morales continues to invoke indigenous history and culture, but he does so in performances of a state-controlled version of indigeneity that legitimizes state power. The new constitution subsumes indigenous local autonomy rights under a liberal government in which the central state retains decision-making power over

most significant matters, especially as regards the extraction of natural resources. Moreover, the MAS government has made it clear that it will sacrifice some indigenous communities to its national development project.

The central argument in this book is that indigeneity has been transformed in Bolivia from a site of emancipation to one of liberal nation-state building. Since Morales came to power, inclusion and citizenship have increasingly been articulated in terms of class rather than of ethnicity. In recent years, Morales has argued for Bolivia's "economic liberation," blending anti-imperialism with market development. This new discourse is especially popular among the emerging indigenous middle class, who have benefited from the expanding economy. Yet it is not shared by all indigenous people. I document a number of sites where local indigenous communities are reasserting centuries-old demands for indigenous sovereignty in opposition to this conjuncture of liberalism and development.

Throughout this book, I focus on the deep disagreements these circumstances produce. In what follows in this Introduction, I introduce four central sites of contestation. First, I ask what it means to be indigenous and who counts as indigenous in Bolivia. To what extent are the tensions in contemporary Bolivia questions of race and racism? Second, I consider the multiple meanings of the idea of decolonization, and inquire into what a decolonized society would look like. Third, I look at the liberal state and ask what alternatives an "indigenous state" might produce. Finally, I consider the political struggles under way in Bolivia, introducing a key theoretical framework for the book in the form of Rancière's conception of politics. For Bolivia's indigenous peoples, Morales's administration represents a historic change, but there are deep disagreements about whether his government is producing an emancipatory politics for indigenous people or whether, like all liberal regimes, it is introducing a new form of policing. This fourth section investigates performance as a key tool of both politics and policing, showing how the struggles I describe—for control of the state, for decolonization, and for local autonomy—are enacted at the discursive and symbolic level, including spectacular political performances and rituals that invoke Bolivian history, religion, and culture.

## THE MEANINGS OF INDIGENEITY

Evo Morales is Bolivia's first "indigenous" president. I put the word indigenous in quotation marks, because defining and representing indigeneity is a subject of great debate in Bolivia, as elsewhere in the world (see, e.g., Albro 2005, 2007; Canessa 2006, 2012; Postero and Zamosc 2004; K. Webber 2012, 2013). In Morales's life and political identity, we can see the complex intersections between race and class that characterize indigeneity. He was raised in a family of Aymara-speaking highland peasants, but he spent most of his life in the Chapare region of the lowlands, where he rose to be the president of the coca-growers' union. As a *cocalero*



leader, he originally emphasized class distinctions and anti-imperialism rather than ethnic demands, but during the multicultural 1990s, Morales gradually “Indianized” his position, making indigeneity a central part of his public persona and political agenda (Albro 2005). Yet he was careful in his 2005 electoral campaign to build a platform based on both class and ethnic demands, framing it in what Raúl Madrid has called “ethno-populist” terms (Madrid 2008). Robert Albro has demonstrated that one of the strengths of Morales’s MAS party was its ability to bridge between local, collective, and culture-based indigenous communities and identities, on the one hand, and an urban pluralist recognition of indigenous heritage not tied to specific localities, on the other (Albro 2005: 449). This gave indigenous politics a “new articulatory power” and made it an “effective tool for broad based coalition building,” since it linked the common lived experiences of displaced indigenous peasants, urban workers in the informal sector, and poor mestizos, all of whom were suffering the effects of neoliberal restructuring (449–50; see also Postero 2007a).

Once in office, Morales began to portray himself and his government as representing indigenous peoples, emphasizing indigeneity over class. Beginning with his Andean inauguration at the pre-Inca religious center of Tiwanaku in January 2006, where he was blessed by Aymara spiritual practitioners and recognized as Apumallku, or the highest authority (Postero 2007b), Morales has trumpeted his own indigenous identity and made indigeneity a central icon for his administration’s radical reforms. Over the years, he gradually formulated what Andrew Canessa calls the “new language of national political identity,” a discursive representation of indigeneity as the solution to domestic and global problems (Canessa 2006). In international fora, Morales proclaims indigenous values like *suma qamaña* (living well), a model of sustainable development based on respect for Mother Earth, to articulate agendas on climate change and coca production (Postero 2012). At the domestic level, Morales has passed an important anti-racism law and established a Vice Ministry of Decolonization to put into effect a “process of change” to cleanse Bolivian society of racism and patriarchy and to recuperate indigenous identities and customs (Cárdenas 2011: 16). I concur with Canessa’s argument that in Bolivia, “political legitimacy rests on being indigenous.” He notes that Morales has positioned indigeneity as a site from which to defend and protect the nation’s national resources and to push for social justice. “In short,” he concludes, “indigeneity is the foundation of a new nationalism” (Canessa 2012: 17–18).

How has indigeneity taken on such a positive valence, and how is it defined? Who counts as “indigenous” in any society is a fundamentally political question, since such representations emerge from struggles over particular social, cultural, environmental, and economic matters at particular moments (García 2008; Friedlander 1975). It is a historically contingent formulation that changes over time. Moreover, indigeneity is relational; like all forms of identity, it emerges

from contested and co-constituting social fields of difference and sameness (see Bigenho 2007; Fuss 1995; Nelson 1999). As Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn point out, “indigenous cultural practices, institutions, and politics *become such* in articulation with what is not considered indigenous within the particular social formation in which they exist” (2007: 4). Thus, throughout this book, when I use the terms “indigenous” or “white–mestizo,” I am referring to social categories that take on specific meanings in the Bolivian context.

Race is a central line of fracture in Bolivia, where somewhere between 40 and 60 percent of people identify in national censuses as indigenous (INE 2003, 2012). There is an enormous diversity among this self-identifying group, with big differences between highland and lowland communities and between urban and rural residents. Yet the dominant class has grappled with “the Indian question” in every era—trying to determine the proper role of indigenous people in society and the economy (Postero and Zamosc 2004; Zavaleta Mercado 1986). In some eras, this question was explicitly tied to race; in others, it was described in terms of ethnicity or subsumed under class. Following Peter Wade (1997), I use the terms “race” and “racism” to describe relations between Bolivia’s native peoples and the whites and mestizos who dominated them for centuries. Needless to say, scientists now agree that there is no basis for describing human differences in terms of race, but in Bolivia, indigenous people have been and continue to be subjected to overt racism. Thus, describing these relations as “racialized” draws attention to the ways creating and enforcing categories of difference can act as a form of domination. In Bolivia, racialized difference was created historically in part through long-term extractivist patterns of development that tore native peoples from their lands, exploited their labor, and denied them full membership in the polity (Galeano 1973; Larson 2004; Platt 1982). Racism in the form of discourses about the inferiority, savagery, and childishness of Indians justified this violence, but racism was also produced in the practices and power relations that resulted. That is, in wielding power over indigenous peoples and claiming the right to exploit their territories’ resources, white–mestizo elites enacted the situated practices of domination I am referring to as racism.

In the Bolivian case, Thomas Abercrombie argues that the colonial opposition of “Indian” to “European” was always a semiotic construction based in a system of inequality (Abercrombie 2001: 97). Before contact with Europeans, of course, no such overarching category united native communities and groups. Beginning in the colonial era, Indians were forced to pay tribute taxes and to work in near-slavery conditions on colonizers’ haciendas and in silver mines, the profits of which helped fuel Europe’s industrial revolution (Galeano 1973). In the lowlands, native peoples were forced into servitude during the rubber boom. In the colonial period, difference was explicitly racialized; the *casta* system, based on “blood purity,” determined status. After the conquest, and with colonization by the Spanish, already

fragmented Andean communities underwent radical transformations—their ritual-economic-political systems were replaced by Christian practices, and their noble authorities by town councils. These changes may have eliminated the differential of Indianness and produced what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui calls a “cultural mestizaje” (1993: 64), but Abercrombie argues that the invented category persisted because it was the foundation of both Spanish landholders’ claims to labor and, ironically, for native peoples’ claims to limited autonomy (Abercrombie 2001: 104). These stereotypes were “invested with terrible power” (ibid): those categorized as Indians were forced to provide labor and tribute and restricted from living in certain places, like city centers (Platt 1982; Harris 1995). Aníbal Quijano concludes that these colonial structures of political and cultural domination established new racialized social identities based on the distribution of work, which set in place a long-term system of classification and knowledge production he calls the “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2007). In Bolivia, Rivera Cusicanqui argues, this colonial opposition was a dialectical process. Through permanent confrontation of images and self-images, three fundamental identities were forged: *indio* (Indian), *q̃ara* (white), and *cholo* (mestizo), the latter being a category filled with ambiguity and discursive insecurity (Rivera Cusicanqui 1993: 57–60).

The oppositional categories were both exacerbated and then reformulated as a result of the “age of insurrection” in the 1780s, when Andeans mounted a formidable rebellion against Spanish colonial power, and then again after the 1898 civil war, when the Aymara cacique Pablo Zárate (dubbed *el temible Willka*—“the frightful Wilka”—by the local press), who fought with the Federal army, provoked a rising in the Altiplano against the liberal government in La Paz. After a massacre of whites and mestizos by Willka’s followers, fears of “race war” caused Bolivia’s mestizo–Creole elite to rethink the position of indigenous populations vis-à-vis the state (Bigenho 2006: 267; Egan 2007). In their search for enlightened methods to control the native population, Bolivian artists, intellectuals, and writers developed a “discourse on the autochthonous,” expressing “ambivalent racial sentiments of pride, nostalgia, and fascination with the Indian” (Sanjinés 2004). Gabrielle Kuenzli documents, for instance, how intellectuals and local communities reworked the meaning of Aymara identity, seeking to cleanse it of its “barbarism” by projecting fictional links to a noble Inca past (Kuenzli 2013). Known as *indigenismo*, this new vision sought to bring Indians into the nation by disciplining, improving, or assimilating them.

After winning independence from Spain in 1825, Creole elites exploited native peoples in different ways, arguing that indigenous collective landholding was an obstacle to the creation of a modern nation-state. Legislation deprived Indians of their lands and drove them into exploitative labor relations with rich landowners. A small cadre of mestizo families controlled the mining sector, also fueled by indigenous labor (Rivera Cusicanqui 1983 [2003]; Larson 2004; Zavaleta Mercado



1986). Dissatisfaction with these patron–peon patterns contributed largely to revolution in 1952. Peasant uprisings and land takeovers pushed the new government to put an end to the system of large landowning, called *latifundio*, and to implement a wide-ranging agrarian reform to give the indigenous peasant farming class access to land. After the 1952 revolution, the category of Indian was erased and rural people were all considered simply as *campesinos*, or peasants, their differences elided in an effort to produce a mestizo nation. In this period, the category of Indian was buried in the discourse of class, but racism did not disappear. If the category of *campesino* was intended to resolve the “Indian question” by drawing attention away from race or ethnicity, in practice, indigenous peasants continued to feel the effects of racism. The reforms after the revolution were intended to reverse some of the worst of these abuses, but they made only slight inroads into the structured poverty that resulted from the colonial land grabs.

As Michelle Bigenho explains, *indigenismo* was critical to this effort as well, as staged performances of Indian culture and folklore contributed to a reformulation of indigeneity. As the elite appropriated and enacted Indian customs and culture in order to domesticate and incorporate them, the fictional and essentialized boundaries between Indians and Europeans became blurred, transforming indigeneity from a despised category into the basis of a reconceptualized mestizo nation (Bigenho 2006: 274). Meanwhile, the liberal form of citizenship instituted after 1952 relied on a “cultural package of behavioral prescriptions designed to turn the unruly but ‘passive’ Indian into an active mestizo ‘citizen’: property-owning, integrated into the capitalist market, and ‘castilianized’ (speaking Spanish)” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010b: 33). *Mestizaje* thus became the dominant paradigm for the Bolivian nation. This meant, in part that the status of mestizo became blurred with whiteness, as the educated and elite classes identified themselves as mestizos. I use the term “white–mestizo” to refer to this group, who may be seen by indigenous people as *q’aras*, or whites, but may see themselves as mestizos. But as Rivera Cusicanqui makes clear, the integrating mechanisms of school, army barracks, and union also generated new forms of violence and exclusion, simultaneously recomposing the devalued categories of *cholos* and indigenous (Rivera Cusicanqui 1993: 78). During the years of dictatorship that followed, these structures were further exacerbated, as elites expanded their cattle, logging, and agribusiness empires, taking over indigenous lands throughout the lowlands.

Andean intellectuals began rethinking this politics of race and class, and in the 1980s, the Aymara-based Katarista movement pushed a more nuanced revolutionary vision, characterizing oppression of indigenous people as the result of both their ethnicity and their class (Hurtado 1986; Reinaga 1969). They began not only to struggle for economic justice but also to push for the recognition and defense of their history, values, and language. Lamenting the paternalism of Bolivian society and the humiliating poverty in which they lived, they called for indigenous

peasants to organize as a people (*pueblo*) whose most important resource is its culture. While not explicitly referring to race, the Kataristas spoke of oppression, racism, human rights, and the liberation of the Indian peoples (Hurtado 1986).

The term “indigenous” that we hear today became dominant in the 1980s, sparked in part by an international discourse of indigenous rights (Postero and Zamosc 2004; Tsing 2007). Responding in part to marches and increasingly public demands by indigenous peoples inspired by the new discourses of identity politics and the long historical memory of resistance, in the 1990s, the Bolivian government implemented a new scheme of neoliberal multicultural citizenship, which included expanded political participation, intercultural education, and collective territorial titling. The category of “indigenous people” (*pueblos indígenas*) became the term of choice for lowland peoples, and “originary peoples” (*pueblos originarios*) for highland peoples. For neoliberal politicians, the answer to the Indian question was to transform unruly Indians into disciplined political participants and responsible managers of their own territories and communities (Postero 2007a). In this era, difference was overtly recognized and tamed: Indians were now indigenous citizens, but this citizenship was limited. Indigenous citizens could participate in local government as long as they were carefully inserted into the neoliberal system of governance (Hale 2004; Postero 2007a). Lowland groups took up the indigenous label to organize demands for territory, relying on international conceptions of indigenous rights such as the International Labour Organization’s 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169), which was adopted by Bolivia in 1991. Highland groups were less enthusiastic about this new framing, since many of them had successfully organized as peasant unions (Rivera Cusicanqui 1983 [2003]). Katinka Webber shows how even in the lowlands, some groups never self-identified as indigenous, but did adopt the category in order to make claims on the state or access legal rights such as territorial titles (K. Webber 2012). Nevertheless, 62 percent of the adult population reportedly self-identified as indigenous in the 2001 census (INE 2003). Yet despite this seeming advance in the recognition of oppressed peoples, the neoliberal period of privatization and structural adjustment did little to change their economic situation. A World Bank study indicated that 52 percent of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples still lived in extreme poverty in 2004 (World Bank 2005).

The Bolivian case demonstrates that, rather than being a static identity, indigeneity is a contested and changing “relational field of governance, subjectivities, and knowledges” (de la Cadena and Starn 2007: 3). The Morales victory in 2005 represented a historic chance to rewrite the national narrative and to provide new answers to the persistent Indian question. Thus, while the Morales administration was concerned with restructuring the economy, launching a new national development model, and rolling back two decades of neoliberalism, it was also engaged in a critical battle over the meaning of indigeneity. From the beginning of

his administration, Morales took on the role of representing indigenous people in this historic reconfiguration. Through political spectacles and speeches invoking his Andean ancestors, Morales made clear that his administration was fundamentally committed to changing the position of indigenous people in Bolivia. He has continued this role throughout his time as president, invoking indigenous history and customs as the backbone of the new Bolivia and the source of the new decolonized society.

The Morales government has brought about enormous changes for Bolivia's native peoples. First, having an indigenous president has been a source of great pride for Bolivians who identify as indigenous or of indigenous heritage. Second, the MAS government has overturned many of the neoliberal economic policies, notably by "nationalizing" the hydrocarbon industry and returning a significant portion of the profits to the country's poor in the form of infrastructure projects and cash transfers. The government's continued adherence to a development model based on extraction of natural resources has many critics, especially among those whose lands continue to be sacrificed to it. However, many see sharing the benefits of Bolivia's "patrimony" with the poor and indigenous as a sort of *pachakuti*, or radical reversal of Bolivia's history. But perhaps the most important changes have been constitutional and legal. The 2009 constitution declares Bolivia to be a plurinational, communitarian state, and establishes a series of rights for "indigenous originary and peasant peoples and nations," including rights to autonomy and self-government, to culture, recognition of their institutions, and the consolidation of their territories (Bolivia 2009: Article 2).

In practice, however, the meaning of indigeneity and the claims of indigenous people remain sites of bitter contestation. As Anna Tsing suggests, "powerful frames for indigeneity are also spaces for disagreement. Not everyone can fit into these frames" (Tsing 2007: 52). Critics argue that the emancipatory language about indigenous rights in the constitution obscures the more important results of the constitution: the overarching power of the central state in the new model (Tapia 2010; Regalsky 2010). At the Constituent Assembly, the MAS, which controlled the majority of the delegates, vetoed indigenous activists' proposals for indigenous self-determination and finally passed a much-reduced version of indigenous autonomy with limited authority and resources (Garcés 2011). Many indigenous activists, especially from the lowlands, are now opposed to the MAS, claiming that it has abandoned the revolutionary promise of plurinationalism and instead institutionalized a liberal, reformist, centralized state (Regalsky 2010). A second example of this contestation is the recent conflict over the government's proposed highway through the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure (TIPNIS; Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park), described in chapter 5. The TIPNIS case shows the stark contrast between the government's international claims to put into effect a development model based on indigenous Andean

*cosmovisiones* (worldviews), on the one hand, and state practices that harshly impact indigenous lands and livelihoods, on the other.

### DECOLONIZATION: DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

The fundamental means by which Morales and the MAS government have both claimed and reworked the meaning of indigeneity is through the use of the discourse and attendant policies of decolonization. Decolonization is not defined in the constitution, but the term is used widely in Bolivia, often to refer to efforts to overcome the legacies of colonial forms of domination to enable a new society based on social justice. For some, it means ending racism (Chivi 2011b). For others, the main goal is to overturn structures of inequality built into the political and landownership systems (Portugal 2011). Yet others point to the need to make visible the multicultural and plurilinguistic character of Bolivia (Vega Camacho 2011) and to democratize the country by creating equal opportunities for all (Patzi 2009). I consider decolonization to be a form of transitional justice, a term I borrow from the human rights literature (e.g., Arthur 2009), where it is used to refer generally to mechanisms to move post-civil war societies past the horrors of war and to create new patterns of peaceful coexistence. I see decolonization in that way, as an effort to move beyond racialized systems of servitude and structural inequalities to a new, more equitable society. These goals are, of course, horizons, and this book traces the difficult and often contested efforts of the Bolivian state and its citizens to move towards them. The discourse of decolonization is a way of representing or orienting these efforts, by drawing attention to past injustices and the forms of knowledge, power, and subjectivities that persist into the contemporary era.

In the Bolivian public sphere, several overlapping lines of thought that come together in these definitions can be identified (see Portugal 2011a and Zuñiga 2014). All of them begin with colonization, the violent system of genocide, dispossession, and exploitation imposed by the Spanish crown. The first is a very local “Indianista” perspective put forward by Bolivian indigenous intellectuals and others who consider decolonization as the necessary overturning of foreign control over native lands. Inspired by Fausto Reinaga, who declared in *La revolución india* (1969) that the only solution to the Indian problem was emancipation, these thinkers, many of them from the Katarista movement, look to the history of oppression and land dispossession as the key to decolonization. The Aymara intellectual Pedro Portugal Mollinedo personifies this trend, arguing that decolonization is “the process by which the peoples who were stripped of their self-government by the foreign invasion recuperate their self-determination” (2011: 65). For him, decolonization is a “concrete historical and political process” that “liquidates the colonial system” and returns territory to the original owners (66). This is a primarily political approach, focused on taking control of state and territory.

A second important line of thought comes from subaltern studies (see Guha 1983), focused on revolutionary decolonizing efforts in other formerly colonized countries like India and Algeria. A key influence for this perspective is Franz Fanon, who argued that decolonization was an inherently violent process through which the entire society would be transformed and new decolonized subject would be born (Fanon 1963). This focus on the “subjectivity of the colonized” calls on colonized subjects to decolonize themselves and their ways of thinking. It also calls attention to the question of internal colonialism, a topic of continuing interest to Bolivian scholars (Cárdenas 2011; Chivi 2011a; Rivera Cusicanqui 1983; Zavaleta Mercado 1986). The postcolonial studies of academics such as Walter Mignolo (2000), Aníbal Quijano (2007), and Catherine Walsh (2007) offer a third important line of thought. While there are many differences among these thinkers, their collective contribution to this debate is a focus on the relation between power, knowledge, and culture. They point out how colonial forms of domination obscured indigenous ways of thinking and knowing, privileging Western categories and epistemologies—what is termed “coloniality of knowledge” (Quijano 2007). A fundamental aspect of this critique is a recognition of the ongoing nature of this distortion in what is termed “modernity/coloniality,” thus calling for a rethinking of the binaries between nature and culture that underlie capitalism and development (see Escobar 2007, 2008, 2010; Blaser 2010; de la Cadena 2010, 2015). In this view, decolonization requires thinking and speaking from a different locus of enunciation, claiming a new epistemological relation to the state, and recuperating non-Western culture, language, cosmology, and forms of being. A Bolivian example of this perspective is the Aymara philosopher Rafael Bautista, who argues that the central feature of colonial domination is the still powerful myth of white superiority, which devalued indigenous cultures, religions, languages, and ways of life. In his view, to decolonize Bolivian society is to cleanse it of these dangerous foundations and recuperate indigenous pride, forms of knowledge, and practices (personal communication, August 22, 2012). The new society will involve a new “ethical structuration of the subject,” based on the principle of *vivir bien* (living well) and the protection of Mother Earth (Bautista 2010b). While this approach is often criticized as merely culturalist or for failing to combine these insights with the political urgency of engaged social movements (see Rivera Cusicanqui 2010: 58; Portugal 2011), it remains an important rationale in most debates in Bolivia (see, e.g., Burman 2011b; Víaña et al. 2010). The Aymara feminist Julieta Paredes concludes that while decolonization must also address the material aspects of colonial domination, a central task is “create a new imaginary, a new concept of culture.” During the neoliberal era, much of the nation’s creative work was taken over by the middle class, she told me. Decolonization now requires reconceptualizing society in ways that “decolonize both heads and bodies, but mostly heads, ways of thinking. . . . We Indians ourselves have to be creating, producing poetry” (personal communication, July 2012).



## DECOLONIZING THE STATE

The MAS government has produced several documents that provide guidelines for how decolonization should orient state action. Its 2006 Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (PND; National Development Plan) mandated that the state dismantle the colonial state apparatus and eliminate colonial forms of domination in all social spheres (Bolivia 2006: 14). This would require a transformation of the state, a recognition of the political, economic, and cultural practices of previously excluded peoples, and a focus on representations, discourses, and ideological structures of race and ethnicity. Idón Chivi, a key spokesperson for the Vice Ministry of Decolonization, suggests that decolonization must be carried out in multiple dimensions, intervening at the political level through state policies, programs, and legislation, as well as at the cultural level, remaking the Bolivian imagination (*Cambio* 2011).

The MAS insists that by exposing coloniality in all its aspects, the state can construct a just society (Mamani and Chivi 2010: 25). Taking a cue from Aníbal Quijano, Bolivia's Viceministro de Descolonización declared that "decolonization is the concentration of state energies to combat racism and patriarchy (the substrate of coloniality), and it is accomplished by critically establishing the functioning of the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being" (ibid). It promises to do this by establishing new normative models, redesigning institutions, and projecting new horizons and life goals for the new generation (24–26). In chapter 3, I focus on efforts to generate changes at the symbolic and cultural levels. Using the example of a spectacular "collective wedding of our traditions" that the Vice Ministry held in 2011, I examine how decolonization works to foment alternative positive visions of indigeneity and how the state relies on idealizations of indigeneity to justify its own agendas.

This brings us to the fundamental question of the state. The central paradox of the decolonization process in Bolivia today is the tension between the desire to overturn coloniality and all its legacies and the use of liberal state mechanisms to do so. In this book, I trace the ways the Morales government uses the tools and apparatus of the state to advance its anti-colonial agenda and, in the process, engages in state formation, constructing a powerful image of a new plurinational state and its acceptable subjects. Here, I follow Akhil Gupta, who argues that states "are not just functional bureaucratic apparatuses, but powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production" (Gupta 2012: 43). The sociologist Philip Abrams has argued that we should think about the state, not as an ontological reality, but as a powerful "idea" endowed with "coherence, singularity, and legitimacy." The state acts as a mask that "prevents our seeing political practice as it is." Consequently, we should suspend our belief in the "state idea" and instead consider how this idea and the resulting "state system" (institutional apparatus and its practices) combine to legitimize rule and domination (Abrams [1977] 1988: 82; see also Gupta and Sharma 2006: 279).

This has several implications. First, the assumed reality and coherence of the state must be questioned. Abrams's followers use this insight to draw attention to the fact that states are "imagined": they are "entities that are conceptualized and made socially effective through particular imaginative and symbolic devices" (Gupta 2012: 43; Krupa and Nugent 2015). This calls for us to study the apparatus of the state to discover how this idea is mobilized, represented, and imbricated in state institutions and practices, such as bureaucracy, state rituals, and so on (Gupta 2012: 43). Second, the understanding of the state as created calls our attention to the processes by which this occurs and the effects this has on the subjects of the state. Following Abrams, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer (1985) make clear that state formation is a "cultural revolution." "The repertoire of activities and institutions conventionally identified as the state," they argue, are "cultural forms," "statements that define, in great detail, acceptable forms and images of social activity and individual and collective identity. . . . [They] regulate much of social life" (3). We can thus understand the state as a "performative category," an idea that is performed and reiterated, creating new forms of subjectivity in the process (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 7).

In the Bolivian case I describe here, I begin by demonstrating the lack of coherence in the MAS state. Chapter 1 describes the diverse and often conflicting ideologies and agendas of those who brought the MAS to power and took places in the state apparatus. These divisions, especially between indigenous activists pushing sustainable development based on native *cosmovisiones*, and leftists pushing industrialization, have proved long-lasting. Chapters 4 and 5 return to these schisms and the bitter disputes over national development models based on resource extraction. Yet a key contribution of the book is showing how, at least in the first years of their administration, Morales and his MAS party officials engaged in state formation by mobilizing a discourse of decolonization. The Bolivian state is not coherent by any means, but its actors engage in a wide range of "decolonizing" activities, ranging from legislation and policy to public speeches and spectacular performances. I observe how these constitute a "cultural revolution," and how they seek to form certain acceptable subjects of the plurinational state. Yet, as Abrams insisted, the point here is to understand the disunity and struggle concealed by the mask of a coherent state (Abrams [1977] 1988: 79). Throughout the book, I show how the discourse of decolonization operates to enable certain practices and to silence others. This offers a challenge to those who hold out decolonization as an incontrovertible good, asking us to see what is produced by its invocation and what is obscured.

One of the greatest disagreements the Morales government has had to face has to do with what form the state should take. When Morales came to power, his "democratic cultural revolution" proposed a new kind of state. Exhausted by centuries of liberal government, which had benefited the white-mestizo class, many

indigenous activists hoped to refound the state and create a regime based upon indigenous customs and ontologies, or ways of understanding reality. In their view, the indigenous Bolivian state offered an exciting challenging to the liberal state. Liberalism is a complicated concept, with a long history, both economic and political dimensions, and multiple interpretations (see Brown 2003). Restricting ourselves here to the political dimension, we can say that liberalism's central tenet is individual liberty. As Wendy Brown puts it, "liberalism signifies an order in which the state exists to secure the freedom of individuals on a formally egalitarian basis" (ibid.). A liberal state can have a variety of differing economic policies, leaning towards Keynesian welfare policies to maximize equality or towards the maximization of free trade and competition. Regardless of which economic policies are favored, however, liberalism requires constitutional constraints on the arbitrary exercise of governmental authority. "The *sine qua non* of the liberal state in all its varieties is that governmental power and authority be limited by a system of constitutional rules and practices in which individual liberty and the equality of persons under the rule of law are respected" (Gray 2003: 71–72). Yet scholars have long noted that liberalism's embrace of individual liberty is based on systematic exclusion of those not deemed worthy of rights (Mehta 1997). As is well known, the foundations of liberalism were established in the French and American revolutionary constitutions, which summarily excluded slaves, women, and the illiterate from citizenship (Holston 2008; Dubois 2004). In Bolivia, liberal citizenship schemes since the republican era excluded the large indigenous majority (Postero 2007a). Even after universal suffrage was officially granted after the 1952 revolution, indigenous people lacked substantive citizenship rights and protections. Thus, liberalism offers little inspiration for most indigenous Bolivians.

The Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos has documented the exciting turn to refound the state across Latin America, and to imagine alternatives to liberalism, colonialism, and capitalism. He points to a central tension across the region between those who think that the liberal state is so linked to the colonial past that it cannot be redeemed, and those who believe that if reformed, the state can be part of the solution (Santos 2010: 63). In Bolivia, for instance, the Aymara intellectual Pablo Mamani has argued that trying to use the power of the liberal state to reorder society is an inherently colonial move that does nothing to alter the ontology of power. Santos argues that the central question remains whether the liberal state, long an instrument of racialized and class hegemony, can become a counterhegemonic instrument. Can social movements seeking justice find use in the tools of liberalism, like representative democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and constitutionalism? (67).

There are no simple answers to Santos's question. The Morales government has found itself caught between its critiques of previous liberal states and its own embrace of liberal democracy. The MAS came to power through peaceful elections,

and it continues to legitimize its rule as democratically elected. Yet at the 2006 Constituent Assembly, the MAS was accused of illiberal and anti-democratic power grabs. Moreover, the new liberal Bolivian state, controlled by a political party intent on consolidating its power, also posed obstacles to the demands for liberation proposed by indigenous peoples. The MAS's choice to condense power into the central state forms the basis of vehement dissent, as social movement actors lament the foreclosing of popular and communal forms of political practice in favor of state institutions. The Bolivian case analyzed here confirms that the reality of political practices is disunity, even in an indigenous-led state.

### POLITICS, DISAGREEMENT, AND PERFORMANCE

Throughout this book, I draw inspiration from the French political philosopher Jacques Rancière, who defines politics as a process of emancipation brought about by disagreement. Rancière's terms feel somewhat awkward in English translation, but I find them useful in understanding how those excluded from power can become legible political subjects. He distinguishes between two terms. "Policing" is the implicit law or order that partitions out places and forms of participation and exclusion in the world. This partition creates coordinates whereby some people have recognizable "parts" in society, while others are "the part with no part." "Politics," on the other hand, involves calling attention to the "scandal" of this distribution and to the exclusions it creates (Rancière 1999). The essence of politics thus resides in acts that challenge the seemingly natural order of bodies in the name of equality and, in the process, reconfigure the existing order (Rancière 2006 [2004]: 90). By emphasizing these disagreements, it becomes possible to interpret the ongoing forms of contestation that animate contemporary Bolivia as its people attempt to decolonize, develop, and refashion their country as a plurinational indigenous state.

Using Rancière's terms, we can think of indigenous organizing over recent decades as an emancipatory politics intended to draw attention to the "miscount" or exclusion of indigenous peoples from the nation. By making their presence visible, this "part without a part" demonstrates the "wrong" committed by the police order, or the structures of society. There is little doubt that during the "water war" in 2000 and the "gas war" in 2003, Bolivia's excluded indigenous and poor inhabitants made themselves visible, claiming their rights as citizens, and demanding to be taken into account (Postero 2007a). Yet as the colonial studies approach to decolonization makes clear, this recount does not happen only at the institutional or legal level, but also at deep cultural and even psychological levels. Rancière describes this in terms of aesthetics, explaining that a fundamental way that society is ordered is through a "distribution of the sensible." By this he refers to the ways in which certain people and certain voices are neither seen nor heard: they are

simply not perceived. It is only through disagreement, through polemically inserting their voices into what is supposed to be a common sphere, that the order can be changed and the previously excluded be perceived (Rancière 1999: 41).

But how do those seemingly invisible “parts without a part” make themselves visible? Judith Butler argues that much of what we see as political activism is in fact performative. Building on Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “space of appearance” (Arendt 1958: 198), Butler says: “when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other forms of public space . . . they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity” (Butler 2015: 11). Butler argues that through the performative act of “appearing,” what she calls “enactments”—some through language, and others through the body—even the most disenfranchised can “reclaim or resignify” existing social relations, thus exposing and, sometimes, transforming the limits of the political. In this view, we can see the efforts of the state, and especially the Vice Ministry of Decolonization, to make coloniality visible as an ongoing “politics” with a goal of reordering the distribution of the sensible. Throughout Bolivia’s history, indigenous peoples have been discursively opposed to whites and mestizos and depicted as savage obstacles to modernity and progress. The fundamental task of decolonization is to change these ideas, held at the deepest aesthetic levels. The political theorist Benjamin Arditi evokes the image of the “awkward guest” who calls on “the disruptive noise of the people,” disregarding the “table manners of democratic politics” (Arditi 2007: 78). Decolonization can act this way, too. Vice Minister of Decolonization Félix Cárdenas told me in 2011 that his job is to “dismantle and deconstruct the colonial state . . . to make everyone uncomfortable, to question everything” (personal interview, August 2011).

Following Butler and Rancière, then, we can see that a central role of decolonization is to provide a “space of appearance” for those rendered invisible by colonial legacies. Discursive battles over names and images do some of this work. As I describe in chapter 1, for instance, the government has taken great care to name new public works after indigenous heroes. The Túpac Katari communications satellite launched in 2013, named after the leader of anti-colonial insurrection in 1781, is a prime example. However, throughout the book, I also focus on the realm of performance, and especially on the highly contested sphere of political ritual. Diana Taylor argues that performances function as “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” through reiterated behaviors. “Embodied practice,” she says, “offers a way of knowing” (2003: 2–3). While there are many sorts of performances in the public sphere, she especially focuses on theatricality and spectacle, where actors draw from the ephemeral repertoire of embodied practices and knowledge such as spoken language, dance, and ritual (19).



I use this notion of performance to demonstrate how the actors on all sides of the Bolivian political spectrum use their bodies and charged symbols of indigeneity, history, and the nation in public performances. Morales is especially adept in his performance of indigeneity, gaining legitimacy for his government agenda, but, as becomes clear in my analysis of the TIPNIS controversy (chapter 5), performances and claims about indigeneity also bolster the claims of state critics, disrupting the police order.

I have suggested that we can see decolonization as a form of emancipatory politics. Returning to Rancière, I want to propose that the discourse and practices of decolonization can also act as a form of “policing.” That is, the state can utilize the ideas and rhetoric of decolonization to legitimate its own power, turning decolonization from a call for alternative epistemologies into a state-sponsored form of multicultural recognition. The state has enormous power to engage in what Corrigan and Sayer call “moral regulation” (1998: 3–4). As described in the previous section, the Morales state has engaged in an active campaign to represent indigenous peoples, in the process defining acceptable versions of indigeneity. Throughout this book, however, I explore the possibility that the decolonization discourse linked to a generic form of indigeneity acts to consolidate state power. By silencing the heterogeneity and disagreement about indigenous life and throwing the weight of the state behind a particular vision of indigeneity, the state acts as if there were a consensus about what decolonization is and who counts as the subjects of it. To the extent that this succeeds, we can characterize it as “post-political,” a term political philosophers use to describe practices of governance that operate through a prefigured consensus surrounding the seemingly politically neutral fields of intervention (Rancière 2006; Swyngedouw 2009, 2010; Žižek 1999, 2006; Postero and Elinoff, forthcoming).

However, as this book demonstrates over and again, indigeneity and decolonization are not neutral fields, but sites of overarching tension and contradiction that have been reworked and recontextualized in the Morales era. In the second half of the book, I argue that as the Morales government has continued and expanded its dependence on extractive development, these organizing frameworks have been at the center of enormous public battles over national development models and race. In chapters 4 and 5, I describe how the government tries to balance the tensions between capitalist notions of industrialization and extraction and alternative visions of development based on indigenous customs and values.

I argue that the resulting contestations are contestations over race. On the one hand, the government’s agenda sparked a strong, violent racist countermovement from elite white–mestizo agribusiness in the eastern lowlands for regional autonomy and independence from the central state. On the other, notwithstanding government rhetoric to the contrary, the country’s extractivist development model adversely affects indigenous communities. Furthermore, This tension came to a

head in the controversy over the government's plan to build a highway through the TIPNIS national park and indigenous territory, which illuminates how indigenous peoples' bodies and territories continue to be the site of political and economic violence by both the Left and the Right.

In chapter 6, I argue that in recent years, indigeneity and decolonization have undergone yet another recontextualization. I show how since 2011, decolonization and indigenous culture have been displaced by a new discourse of "economic liberation," through which the state has combined its earlier demands for economic justice with an emphasis on national sovereignty. Through a case study of three local indigenous communities, I show how in some circumstances, ethnic identities are giving way to class alliances as indigenous groups press for justice. In the final chapter 7, I describe the determined efforts of one indigenous Guaraní community, that of Charagua, to make strategic use of the discourses of decolonization and the new tools in the plurinational constitution to work towards long-held goals of indigenous autonomy.

This study of the confusing and exhilarating world of indigenous state-making in Bolivia focuses precisely on the blurry boundary between politics and policing, illuminating the tensions within liberalism, the continuing costs of capitalist development, and the promises of a decolonized Bolivia. The cover of this book—a satellite image of deforestation in the department of Santa Cruz, the product of the expansion of agriculture, ranches, and neighborhoods into the zone's tropical forests—attempts to articulate these tensions. Is it beautiful or terrifying—or both?

#### SITUATING THE AUTHOR

Before going further, I want to take a moment to situate myself and to give the reader a way to fit this book into the larger trajectory of my research. It builds on over twenty years of research in Bolivia. I first traveled to Bolivia as a radio journalist in 1990, working on a series called *Vanishing Homelands* that was aired on National Public Radio (see <http://homelands.org/projects/vanishing-homelands>). That series focused on the relation between development, indigenous peoples, and the environment, and took me all over Latin America. But it was Bolivia that captured my passion. While producing stories about indigenous peoples and missionaries in the Bolivian tropics, and the informal market in Cochabamba, I learned about the growing indigenous peoples' movement in Bolivia and their revolutionary demands to transform Bolivian society. I was determined to follow—and understand—this fascinating process. I entered graduate school in 1994, seeking theoretical tools to help me do so, and began research for my dissertation in 1995. Since 1995, I have divided my time between California and Bolivia, where I lived for extended periods between 1997 and 2000, and have subsequently returned every year or two for summer fieldwork.

In Bolivia, to understand national-level politics, I work in the nation's capital, La Paz, but my home base is in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the capital of the lowland state of Santa Cruz, where I have worked with the Guaraní indigenous organization, the Capitanía Zona Cruz, since 1995. The Guaraní's struggles for recognition are at the center of my dissertation and my first book, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Post-multicultural Bolivia* (2007a). In it, I examine the ways in which Bolivia's neoliberal multiculturalism created new forms of citizenship for Bolivia's indigenous people. Tracing the long arc of citizenship regimes across Bolivia's history, I argue that neoliberal citizenship of the 1990s created an expectation of citizenship, but did not resolve the demands for self-determination indigenous peoples had made since colonial times. I ended that book with the election of Evo Morales and the exciting promise of the post-multicultural era his presidency inaugurated.

The present book brings me full circle to evaluate those promises. It brings together much of the work I have done over the intervening years, studying the historic Constituent Assembly of 2006, the new constitution, the tensions resulting from the national development agenda, and the discourses and policies of the Morales government. Over these years, I have carried out new fieldwork in the highland communities of Tiwanaku and El Alto (chapters 3 and 6) and in Charagua, in the Chaco region (chapter 7), as well as returning regularly to the Guaraní communities of "Bella Flor" and "El Futuro," where I did my original dissertation research (chapter 6). Thus, I hope this book provides a comprehensive view of contemporary Bolivia. But, as with my first book, my primary lens onto these subjects is through the perspective of my indigenous friends from the Guaraní communities in the lowlands. I have remained in close contact with them, and their vision of the Morales state is central my analysis here. My own research and observations are augmented by the opinions of my fellow Bolivia scholars, the many brilliant Bolivian intellectuals I consult, dedicated NGO workers who are closest to the struggles on the ground, and committed government officials who have chosen to work from within the MAS state. My Guaraní contacts give me a decentered analysis—what Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) would call from the "margins"—that never ceases to impress me with its grounded, historic, patient understanding of Bolivian politics. I hope my analysis here does justice to their continued friendship and trust in me. Like them, I look towards the horizons of possibilities the Morales era has initiated. I hope my work here contributes to the process of change that has already begun to transform Bolivia.

