

Conclusion

Between Politics and Policing

In February 2016, Bolivia held a referendum to approve a proposal to amend the 2009 Constitution to allow Evo Morales to run for a fourth term in 2019. His current term expires in 2020. Surprising many observers, the proposal was defeated by a slim margin: 51.27 percent voted No (Casey 2016). Most observers assumed that the positive economic situation I have described in this book and the overarching political support Morales enjoyed from his base would carry him through this referendum as it has every other election. Recall that he was elected in 2005 with the largest majority of any president since the return to democracy, 54 percent; ushered in the new constitution by public referendum in 2009; and then handily won the 2014 election with 60 percent of the vote. But this election had a different outcome, and the results are significant: 2019 might mark the end of the “indigenous state” headed by Morales.

The months leading up to the 2016 referendum had telegraphed possible concerns. There had been a number of scandals involving Morales, including one in which he appeared to have abandoned a child resulting from a love affair. Most important, the country had been appalled by a scandal of the FONDIOC, the Indigenous Development Fund. Millions of dollars had gone missing from phantom development projects, and many of the country’s most important indigenous leaders had been sent to jail. Critics accused the MAS government both of gross mismanagement and of setting up the corruption to gain further state power (see Saavedra 2015). Then, to top it all off, the week before the election, a protest march in El Alto against the opposition mayor Soledad Chapetón turned tragic when the municipal building was set on fire, resulting in the deaths of six. Two MAS militants were arrested, tainting Morales and the MAS in this incident (Casey and Machicao 2016).

In his thoughtful postmortem on the defeat, Bret Gustafson (2016) pointed out that the *No* votes came from the classic opposition headed by the eternal presidential candidate Samuel Doria Medina and former president Tuto Quiroga and the lowland opposition led by the Demócratas party and Governor Rubén Costas. However, even among MAS supporters, Gustafson noted, there was some ambivalence. Although Morales had produced a booming economy, led efforts to help the poor, and pushed back against U.S. imperialism, for many people this was no longer enough. Gustafson notes

as more than one colleague said, “the people are exhausted.” *Desgaste*, exhaustion, was the word I heard most frequently: Evo’s party suffered from political exhaustion (*desgaste político*). Too many deals with too many interests had created machination, manipulation, and corruption within the government. The exodus of committed pro-MAS militants meant that the party’s vision of democratic and cultural revolution had been penetrated by the “*neoMASistas*” or the “new MAS-istas”—that is, politically interested actors of various stripes with little ideological conviction. (Gustafson 2016)

Gustafson cites as prescient the many intellectuals on the Left, like Raúl Prada and Silvia Rivera Cusicanquí, who have long lamented the unfulfilled promises of the democratic cultural revolution. In the weeks before the referendum, several intellectuals issued thoughtful evaluations of the decade of MAS government (see Arze 2016; Solón 2016). But Gustafson reminds us that nearly half of the country voted for the referendum. He concludes that these *Sí* votes were not all markers of blind approval for the MAS. They may have been votes for economic stability. Most important, many voted “Yes” because they were concerned that the end of Evo would bring a return of the past, an unraveling of all the many gains of the process of change. “A ‘Yes’ for Evo was a yes for the longer history of struggle and hope for its future” (*ibid.*).

The contested referendum is an appropriate way to conclude, as it acts to draw attention to the disagreements that I have analyzed throughout this book about the meanings of the Morales revolution. As this phase of the indigenous state under Morales comes to an end, Bolivians continue to debate and contest the topics I have analyzed here: the meanings of indigeneity and decolonization; the form of the state; and the national development model. While the long-term legacy of the Morales state cannot be known for some time, we can summarize the effects so far.

INDIGENEITY AND DECOLONIZATION

Throughout this book, I have explored the meanings of both indigeneity and decolonization, arguing that they formed the basis of what Jacques Rancière calls emancipatory politics—a revolutionary agenda that brought the MAS to power

and propelled its “process of change.” As I have shown, following the rise of the indigenous movement in the 1980s and 1990s, and then the insurrections of the early 2000s, indigenous identity became the platform from which many poor Bolivians began to organize for justice. Whereas class had previously been the most salient category from which to make claims for inclusion, in recent decades, ethnic identity has taken precedence. Morales and the MAS party were able to gather these demands after the gas and water wars at the beginning of the twenty-first century, articulating an agenda that sought to return the profits of Bolivia’s patrimony to *el pueblo boliviano*, the Bolivian people. In his 2005 election campaign, Morales merged an anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberal platform with a populist framing that appealed broadly to the poor, indigenous, and popular sectors. As I showed in chapter 1, from its beginnings, the MAS party and state apparatus was forced to balance the tensions between very different agendas: the indigenous, the leftist, and the populist. Yet Morales and the MAS state made important use of the discourse of indigeneity to legitimate their political, social, and economic agendas. Through his public speeches and performances, Morales claimed to represent the indigenous population, embodying Túpac Katari and thereby linking his agenda to the anti-colonial indigenous insurrections of the past. This was also true in the international venue, where he claimed indigenous values like *vivir bien* could solve climate change. His powerful performances of indigeneity were supplemented by those of the state, as we saw in the collective weddings analyzed in chapter 3. Central to this enactment of indigeneity was the theory and practice of decolonization, which sought to reverse the influence of Western colonial legacies and to empower indigenous values. As described in the Introduction and the first half of this book, the MAS state promised to decolonize not only the state but also the wider society.

It is difficult to overstate the tremendous positive effects this revaluing of indigenous identity has had in Bolivia. When I first began working in Bolivia in 1990, the indigenous people I worked with suffered from structural racism that excluded them from the national imaginary and participation in the political realm. It made them feel ashamed of their cultural practices. I remember how my Guaraní friends would talk about the *vergüenza* (shame) they felt when talking to upper-class white–mestizo people. Their lack of education and perceived inability to behave according to mestizo norms made them fearful of discrimination. While racism is far from being erased, the past decade has radically changed the ways indigenous and indigenous-descended peoples experience their identities. Having a president who proudly declared his indigenous identity and filled government offices with people wearing indigenous clothes and speaking indigenous languages has literally changed their world. As the residents of El Alto we met in chapter 6 explained: “Evo has opened the doors for us.” Now many people who felt fearful to enter state buildings or banks or universities, proudly claim their rights as citizens and residents. They believe the government is the result of their collective

activism, and as a result, is responsive to their interests. This opening of doors has also had tremendous class effects, in essence altering the class structure of the country. Indigenous people now work in commerce, law, and healthcare across the country, have attended universities, and make up the burgeoning indigenous middle class. As described in chapter 4, the government's policies have reduced poverty, massively grown local infrastructure, and distributed national resources to local and state governments. Indigenous people are involved in the country's most fundamental political questions, serving in the Parliament and in the government's ministries. The anti-racism law means racist talk is no longer acceptable and is penalized. These are huge and positive accomplishments of the Morales administration, a sort of sea change similar to the civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States.

Yet, like the civil rights movement in the United States, which posited inclusion and justice for African Americans, the Bolivian *proceso de cambio* has not resolved the structures of racism it promised to overcome. In the United States, many saw Barack Obama's election as the first African American president as evidence that liberalism is perfectible, and that, with time, democracy can embrace those previously excluded from its benefits. Yet the wave of violence and police brutality that came to light in the 2010s revealed the ongoing exclusions of American liberalism. As the Black Lives Matter movement has made clear, many poor urban blacks are still sacrificed every day to racist state violence. In Bolivia, the cultural democratic revolution promised a similar redemption: putting the evils of colonialism in the past. But because the state has continued to tie its economic policies to a capitalist model of natural resource extraction, it continues to sacrifice those indigenous people whose lands and livelihoods are "obstacles" to national development. As we saw in chapter 5, the MAS state systematically privileges extractivist development over the desires of lowlands indigenous communities. The TIPNIS case was a watershed for the MAS administration, and rendered visible the fact that capitalist development trumped protection of rural indigenous communities. In the era of "economic liberation," national policies focusing on expanding the agricultural frontier, supporting agribusiness, and expanding energy production make clear that these policies will continue, recontextualizing long-standing patterns of racialized development. And despite its discourse of decolonization, the MAS state has utilized co-optation, police violence, and legal mechanisms to silence its opponents, including indigenous groups. Thus, the accomplishments of the Bolivian process of change must also be measured in relation to these ongoing exclusions.

I conclude that, in part because of these tensions, indigeneity and decolonization have faded from their initial privileged discursive positions. If Morales and the MAS initially relied on their ability to enact decolonization for Bolivia's formerly oppressed poor and indigenous peoples, using this discourse as the basis of their emancipatory politics, in the post-TIPNIS period, indigeneity no longer

serves that purpose. Morales's potent indigenous figurations and the state's grand spectacles of anti-Western cultural rituals are increasingly perceived by many—like the residents of Tiwanaku whom we met in chapter 3—as “shows” used by the government to cement its power. Again, I want to emphasize how important such shows can be to ethnic pride. However, as time passed, this symbolic dimension appears to have lost its power to convene constituents. Increasingly, performances of indigeneity serve as tools of state legitimation rather than as sites of liberation. Thus, to return to Rancière, we can say that indigeneity has become a tool of policing.

The 2012 census may be one indication of this development. In 2001, at the height of the neoliberal multicultural era, the census reported 62 percent of the adult population as indigenous (INE 2003), or 66 percent of the entire population with children included. In 2012, however, the number of people identifying as indigenous dropped to 41 percent, with 2.8 million people identifying as members of the thirty-six indigenous groups, out of a total of 6.9 million people over fifteen years of age. The numbers dropped to about 34 percent in the highlands, among Aymara and Quechua peoples, and to about the same amount in the lowlands, among the three largest groups—Guaraní, Chiquitano, and Mojeño. Only where the local peoples were involved in serious disputes with the MAS government—like TIPNIS—did the census show an increase in indigenous peoples (Schavelzon 2014).

The census results were interpreted by many as a blow to the MAS project, which has based its legitimacy in great part on representing the indigenous “majority” (see, e.g., Mesa 2013; Tabra 2013). Vice President García Linera quickly wrote a response to critics (2014), interpreting the census results as a demonstration of the administration's great success. He insisted that indigenous people were a majority of the population and that the new plurinational state represented a new Bolivian nation, which is itself indigenous. He argued that during the first stages of the “process of change,” indigenous people needed to organize as indigenous to defeat the white-mestizo oligarchy that had ruled Bolivia for centuries. Not only has this been accomplished, but the new plurinational state has itself been “indigenized,” leaving indigenous peoples free to identify themselves as Bolivians. Thus, he argued, the census represents a victory for the indigenous majority.

Others had different conclusions. Pablo Stefanoni (2013) pointed out that the census question asked if people identified as “indigenous originary peasant” peoples or nations. This category, which appears in the new constitution, mixes national identity with class identity, in essence “ruralizing” indigeneity (6; see also Tamburini 2013). Many urban people do not feel part of this ruralized vision of indigeneity. Salvador Schavelzon (2014) makes a slightly different argument: he says the generic or “ecumenical” state-led version of indigeneity is not particularly salient for many highland and urban people, because it does not take into account

the lived or territorially shaped identities of local people, but rather is expressed discursively at the national level. Thus, for most of Morales's constituents in the highlands, this sort of indigeneity indexes a political membership rather than a personal or collective identity (2014). But for those in heated struggles over the control of their territory, like those fighting over the TIPNIS highway, indigeneity means something quite different, quite personal and embodied. For these respondents, their identity as indigenous was indicative of their membership in their local communities and struggles.

The case studies in this book support these more nuanced understandings of the evolving political relevance of indigenous identity and show how state versions of indigeneity have lost ground. The participants in the collective wedding described in chapter 3, for instance, held strongly to their identities as Aymara and were happy to support their president in his political project. Yet they were clear that the image of the decolonized indigenous subject they were asked to enact—the *decolonizado permitido*—was a performance that did not represent their daily reality. The urban residents in El Alto presented in chapter 6 also eschewed the label “indigenous.” “The indigenous are those who work the land,” community leader Gonzalo León told me. They did not understand decolonization as having to do with indigeneity, but rather as a form of anti-imperialism allowing the state to reclaim and redistribute the profits from national resource exploitation. Many urban indigenous people appear to be focusing on getting ahead economically and their support or critique of the government tends to be framed in those terms. As we saw in chapters 6 and 7, however, for many lowland indigenous communities, indigeneity continues to be a critical site of contested politics. After the TIPNIS case, many lowland indigenous peoples felt deeply betrayed by Morales and the MAS state. They perceive the MAS state's representations of indigeneity as cynical performances enabling new colonial domination of lowland territories. As the case of the Guaranís of Charagua showed, this context required leaders to partake of the state discourses of development in order to push forward their long-standing struggles for local autonomy, in essence performing their own version of the permitted decolonized Indians.

The findings of this book demonstrate once again the malleability of the category of indigeneity. I explained in the Introduction that who counts as “indigenous” is a fundamentally political question, emerging from struggles over particular social, cultural, environmental, and economic matters during particular moments (García 2008; Friedlander 1975). I do not mean to imply by this that it is a simple construction without real meaning. The cases in this book show quite the opposite: for all the self-identifying indigenous people I describe here, their ethnic identity as Aymara or Guaraní is fundamental to their place in nation, their relations with neighbors, and their location within the political economy. It defines their sense of membership in the plurinational state and in large part structures their hopes

for the future. It is deeply meaningful. Nevertheless, the category of indigeneity is a slippery one that can be claimed and performed by many actors with distinct interests. I conclude that indigeneity is what Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) would call an “ethical substance,” a shared but contestable notion around which actors can frame their disagreements about development, environmentalism, and sovereignty. The many versions of virtuous indigeneity that circulated around the TIPNIS controversy analyzed in chapter 5 are prime examples of this. Thus, indigeneity acts as the site of both politics and policing, providing the cultural material for the blurry boundary between the two.

LIBERALISM, SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE INDIGENOUS STATE

If Morales promised to alter the position of indigenous people, his cultural democratic revolution also promised to decolonize the state. As I explained in chapter 2, perhaps the most revolutionary promise of the MAS state was the possibility of enacting indigenous alternatives to the liberal state. Indigenous intellectuals posed substantial challenges to the classic notions of sovereignty of the nation-state in the Constituent Assembly, arguing for a form of shared decision-making, especially about natural resources. As I have shown, however, the MAS diffused these alternatives, using much of the language of indigenous rights and plurinationalism, but in essence retaining the classic state structure of Western liberal democracies. The new constitution contains some inspiring language about indigenous self-determination and instituted some decentralization, allowing both indigenous municipalities and regions to form autonomous governments. But, as I have shown, the central state still has jurisdiction over all nonrenewable natural resource decisions and channels funding to these entities subsumed to its power. Thus, the nation-state retained full sovereignty, despite language to the contrary.

This surprising result becomes less surprising when we return to the makeup of the MAS, described in chapter 1. While indigenista activists formed an important part of the MAS state, and were especially salient in the face Bolivia presented to the rest of the world, another large part of the MAS inner circle were leftists and union leaders. Their goal was always state capture: gaining control of the state and using its power to accomplish their agendas (see Beaulieu 2008). As I have shown, Vice President García Linera has consistently argued that the MAS state is the best mechanism by which to accomplish revolutionary justice. In his view, the first goal was to overcome the white–mestizo political class that previously controlled the state, and then use state power to intervene in the economy and redistribute benefits to the people. He invoked national sovereignty to justify the ongoing extractivist development project and its most controversial aspect, the TIPNIS highway. In recent years, this form of national sovereignty is the basis of the new discourse

we saw in chapter 6, that of “economic liberation”—the results of a strong nation negotiating in the global market.

Throughout the book, I show the tensions this form of sovereignty produced. Even if one accepts the notion that a strong state might be a tool in the search for economic justice, it is clear that such power also holds danger. Chapter 2 shows the delicate balance at the Constituent Assembly between the actions of MAS militants who wanted to reconstitute the state and those who saw their actions as violating the rule of law. Most important, the indigenous proposals for power sharing were silenced in favor of a powerful central state. In the TIPNIS case, the MAS state exerted violent force to put down challenges to its development agenda.

These developments lead us to a difficult question: at what point does the use of state sovereignty go beyond liberal state sovereignty to illiberal or authoritarian power? As I suggest in chapter 2, these may be “undecidable” questions at the boundary between politics and policing. What appears as overreaching authoritarianism to some may appear to be long overdue popular justice to others. Yet it is clear that, until the 2016 referendum, the MAS successfully countered all challenges, continuously consolidating its power. Thanks to its “nationalization” of hydrocarbon resources, and then to its maneuvering at the Constituent Assembly to foreclose regional or local decision-making on natural resource matters, the MAS state assured it would reap the massive rents from the hydrocarbon sector. This allowed it to distribute funds and infrastructure to its followers, cementing its popularity. This strategy was successful for ten years: in the 2014 election, the MAS even won a majority in Santa Cruz, the center of opposition in the first years. As indigenous leaders explained, it made no sense not to “get on the train,” the government gravy train that was guaranteed to provide jobs and benefits. As the Guaraní activists Justa and Gregorio make clear in chapter 6, it became a matter of common sense to go along with the MAS, even if you opposed it ideologically. “Why should others reap the benefits of the revolution we fought for?” they asked.

By 2016, however, this concentration of power suffered fractures, as allegations of corruption emerged. At the national level, many MAS-supporting indigenous leaders were accused of pocketing money intended for community development from the Fondo Indígena (FONDIOC). Leaders were jailed and the central government was accused of either negligent oversight, or worse, setting up these leaders as a way of silencing them. Either way, this ugliness at the center of indigenous politics hurt the MAS. Morales’s personal scandals multiplied and painted him with a tawdry brush. Across the country, while now legally strictly sanctioned, local corruption appeared to be rampant. In every field site in which I have conducted research in recent years, people have told me about how the MAS funneled money to its militants by giving them government jobs and, more important, contracts for the big infrastructure development projects. New companies blossomed, as the families and friends of MAS civil servants reaped these benefits. I have not

been able to confirm these accusations, but this is common knowledge among ordinary people I have spoken to in La Paz, El Alto, and Santa Cruz. True or not, the sense of widespread clientelism helped undermine the high moral ground on which the MAS indigenous state had begun. Instead of a government beholden to social movements, as it declared itself to be, in recent years, it appears that social movements were in fact beholden supplicants of the rentier state. This sense may help to explain the results of the 2016 referendum. Ten years of power almost inevitably results in these sorts of clientelist structures; they are a feature of all incumbency and one reason why term limits are healthy.

We must also consider the Bolivian case in the wider regional context, where across the continent, moves to the left, the so-called Pink Tide, have been reversed. Once-powerful leftist leaders in Brazil and Argentina have fallen to corruption charges, Venezuela's government is under attack, and even center-left Michelle Bachelet of Chile has lost popularity. Observers agree that conservatives are on the rise, in part because of a widespread disillusionment with the Left (Romero 2016). Bolivian Vice President García Linera ruefully acknowledged this turn: "We are facing a historical turning point in the region; some are talking about a throwback. . . . We must relearn what we learned in the 80s and 90s, when everyone was against us" (ibid).

So, how then do we evaluate the indigenous state? First, I conclude that despite the strength of its discourse about indigeneity, this state did not fulfill many indigenous demands. The MAS chose to use the liberal nation-state model instead of any of the more radical alternatives proposed, and used it to consolidate party power. Second, it played up national sovereignty as a way to legitimize its development agenda, silencing local people's objections. I return to this in the next section. Third, as we saw in chapters 2 and 7, efforts to institute alternatives based on collective governance, like indigenous autonomy, received little support from the MAS state. It put up bureaucratic obstacles to these efforts, creating a legal structure that subsumed these municipalities into the central state. In the few cases where local indigenous communities persisted, like Charagua, they were forced to present their forms of self-governance within the dominant state discourse of economic liberation, rather than any challenge to Western liberal national sovereignty. I conclude that if there is such a thing as an indigenous state, we are only seeing the first glimmerings of it in local projects like Charagua's new autonomy statute.

DECOLONIZATION AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Finally, there is the question of development. As I suggested at the start of chapter 6, many people on the Left hold Morales and Bolivia up as examples of alternatives to the evils of global capitalism. The activists who came to the Encuentro Social in Santa Cruz in 2015 are like many on the Left I have encountered in the United

States as I talk about my research. They assume that the popular discourse about *vivir bien*, or *buen vivir*, as it is called in other Andean countries, is a reality in Bolivia. Given the fears many of us have about the effects of global climate change, people want to hear that indigenous wisdom can help stave off the looming disaster our Western forms of development and consumption have created. When I describe the forms of resource extraction going on in Bolivia, and the plans for continued expansion of the agricultural frontier, hydroelectric energy production, and lithium mining, laid out in chapter 4, or the struggles over the TIPNIS highway recounted in chapter 5, people are often dismayed. They have a hard time reconciling their image of Morales with the economic policies and practices I describe. At one talk, one member of the audience asked me if I wasn't being too hard on Morales. Hadn't things really improved a lot for people?

As I hope I have made clear throughout the book, things have improved for many Bolivians, on many levels. Yet I think it is important to look beyond the discourses of decolonization and *vivir bien* to see what has been produced. In her wonderful book on development in Ecuador (2015), Sarah Radcliffe documents the disappointment that indigenous women express over the form of *sumak kawsay* (*vivir bien*) the government implemented. Yet they wonder what a version that engaged in the complex social heterogeneity they inhabit might look like—a real intercultural state that respected difference (Radcliffe 2015: 433). Many Bolivians express this same sort of disappointment. At the end of ten years of MAS government, Bolivia is no closer to adopting a decolonized form of economy and has made little progress towards any sustainable development, whether based on indigenous values or otherwise. The data show instead a country moving forward at full gallop towards natural resource extraction, agribusiness, and continuing its dependency on global commodity markets. If the MAS has enabled a shift in the class structure of the country, “opening the doors” to indigenous peoples, it has not made any substantial change in the basic forms of production. Transnational corporations and large-scale agricultural consortiums still produce the majority of the goods and make the majority of the profits, with the state raking profit off the top. When I was discussing this conjuncture with a colleague in Bolivia in 2015, I asked if perhaps Morales had accomplished something unusual, getting capitalist forces to support his progressive agenda. My friend shook his head, disagreeing. No, he said, “I think it is the other way around. I think the owners of the world have won again.”

I do not know if that is the case, but the Bolivian case does show the continuing creativity of capitalism, its ability to adapt to a variety of political and cultural conjunctures. In my analysis of the racialized effects of Bolivia's development project in chapter 5, I cite Allen Pred and Michael Watts's influential work on capitalism (Pred and Watts 1992), which describes the complex ways in which both spatial meanings and cultural identities are produced as capitalism is reworked in

particular moments and places (17–18). Pred and Watts argue that “nonlocal processes driving capital mobility are always experienced, constituted, and mediated locally” (xiii). “Tradition” and “custom” often provide the symbolic raw material with which actors rework and refashion the meanings of such capitalist transformations (15). Yet, they insist, transitions occur “from within, but within limits, set by the logic of capital itself” (8; see also Pred 1992). In contemporary Bolivia, I argue, decolonization has served as a new logic and justification for capitalist production. By translating continued reliance on the global market as a form of “economic liberation” or a form of decolonization, reversing the racist world order, Morales and the MAS have enabled capitalist forces in a new era. Without a doubt, as Eduardo Gudynas (2010) has forcefully argued, this “progressive extractivist” project shares the benefits of production beyond the classic elite class. That is why it is so popular. Yet it is important to acknowledge that wrapping capitalism in revolutionary talk—or indigenous textiles—does not alter the underlying political economy. Given that the state benefits directly from this development path, and given the fact that it has veto power over all projects, it is not surprising that the state has continued to sacrifice those who stand in the way. Thus, decolonization has served as a form of policing to silence those who expected it to be the basis of their emancipation.