

**Between Pachakuti and Passive Revolution:  
The Search for Post-Colonial Sovereignty in Bolivia**

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**Abstract**

From the period 2000-2005, Bolivia experienced a profound political convulsion as social movements rose-up to contest the neoliberal model of development. This was most markedly inspired by contestation over the control of natural resources, namely water and gas. The period of mobilisation brought down two successive governments and propelled the MAS, led by Evo Morales, to power in 2006. This period also helped to revalorise indigenous culture and held out hope for a reimagining of power, politics and political economy. The transformation that would result from this uprising, effectively re-founded Bolivia as a 'pluri-national state', recognising 36 separate national groups with their own languages and cultures. This was, furthermore, a process based on the convergence of national-popular and indigenous struggles. However, following his disputed election for a fourth successive term in office, Evo Morales and other key leaders of the MAS have gone into exile, while right-wing, revanchist social forces are seemingly in the ascendency. How do we begin to make sense of this turn of events, which include the swirling combinations of reactionary capitalist interests but also left-indigenous critiques of development from marginalised sectors? In this article, I argue that we need to situate indigenous social movements in the struggle between Pachakuti (an Andean term referring to the desire to turn the world upside down and forge a new time and space) and passive revolution (a state-led process of modernisation that seeks to expand capitalist social relations whilst incorporating limited demands from below, ultimately diffusing their radical potential).

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## Introduction

From the period 2000-2005, Bolivia experienced a profound political convulsion as social movements rose-up to contest the neoliberal model of dispossession. This was most markedly inspired by contestation over the control of natural resources, namely water and gas (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008, Webber 2012). This period of mobilisation brought down two successive governments and propelled the *Movimiento Al Socialismo* (MAS – Movement Towards Socialism), led by Evo Morales, to power in 2006. Moreover, this period served to revalorise indigenous culture (Ravindran 2019). The transformation that would result from this uprising, effectively re-founded Bolivia as a ‘pluri-national state’, recognising thirty-six separate national groups with their own languages and cultures within the new constitution. This was, furthermore, a process based on the convergence of national-popular and indigenous struggles (Hylton and Thompson 2007: xxii). From the outset then, the mandate of the MAS and Morales was based in the demands of largely indigenous social movements. As a prime exemplar of this, the five most prominent indigenous groups had come together in 2004 to form the Pact of Unity. Working together to overcome their historical differences, these groups had put forward proposals for a new constitution to transform the country. Meanwhile, the public rhetoric of Evo Morales focused on notions such as decolonising the state, protecting Mother Earth, communitarian socialism and living well (*vivir bien*). This notion of living well - anchored in indigenous forms of knowledge - was incorporated into the new Bolivian constitution in 2009 and sought to question traditional developmentalism and westernised forms of modernity (Gudynas and Acosta 2011). However, the struggle to build an ‘indigenous state’ retained numerous contradictions (Postero 2019). Many also highlighted the co-optation of social movements and the decline of their independent agenda during the time of the MAS (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008; Hesketh and Morton 2014; Modonesi 2013; Tapia 2011; Webber 2011). One of the principal challenges the MAS faced was the reconciling of their economic strategy of development – largely based in expanding natural resource extraction to pay for redistributive social programs – and the professed commitment to respect the autonomy and territorial control of diverse indigenous peoples. The latter was integral to the concept of plurinationality (Tapia 2015a). Whilst Álvaro García Linera<sup>1</sup> (2011) referred to this challenge as part of the ‘creative tensions’ involved in the ‘process of change’, others saw it as an outright contradiction (Arze and Gómez 2013; Gudynas and Accosta 2011: 82; Fabricant and Gustafson 2011: 2). Neither side in this debate, disagree however, that the promise of indigenous emancipation was, prior to the fall of the MAS government, still an unfinished business. How do we begin to make sense of this turn of events, which include the swirling combinations of reactionary capitalist interests but also left-indigenous critiques of development from marginalised sectors?

The central argument I make in this article is that Bolivia remains caught between two major sociological dynamics that have long resonance within the country’s history. These are, the search for an overturning of the colonial order on the one hand (Pachakuti); and the preservation of class rule tied to the expansion of capitalism (passive revolution), on the other. My argument proceeds as follows. First, I situate the history of indigenous exclusion within Bolivian state formation and introduce the key terms of Pachakuti and passive revolution. I then explore how these dynamics intertwine via three constitutive moments in Bolivian history. The first moment is grounded in the subterranean nature of indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently the vice president of Bolivia and principle ideologue of the MAS.

struggles following the suppressed anti-colonial uprisings of 1781. The excavation of this historical period is essential to highlight the role of collective memory in driving forward the search for the Pachakuti. The second constitutive moment is the National Revolution of 1952. Here I introduce the term passive revolution to explore a new dynamic, whereby the state captures and neutralises insurgent demands in order to facilitate capitalist modernisation. The period of the MAS in power is then analysed through these opposing logics of Pachakuti and passive revolution. Finally, I conclude that, if the period 2000-2005 can be thought of as a third great constitutive moment in Bolivian history (Hylton and Thompson 2007: 7), then this recent period, looked back upon with critical reflection, can provide the basis for a new horizon of collective memory with which to renew the rhythms of the Pachakuti (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008).

### **Bolivia and the ‘Indian Question’**

An important place to begin this inquiry is by recalling the predominantly indigenous social forces that brought the MAS to power and the deep-seated issues in Bolivia they sought to address. The most fundamental of these was the issue of exclusion, or what we can term Bolivia’s ‘Indian question’. This question has occupied the dominant class in every era (Postero 2019: 7). Conversely, from the perspective of indigenous groups, they have grappled with the ‘colonial question’ and how their liberation is to be achieved in conflict with this mode of power. If all nations are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991), then I would contend they are not imagined equally. I mean this in three interrelated senses. First, the dominant stories of nationalism are often narrated by elites, even if this imaginary is contested by subaltern voices (Bonfil Batalla 1994; Mallon 1995). Second, not all nations possess an equally powerful hold on the collective imagination of people within its claimed territory. Finally, not all nation-states have adopted equally inclusive discourses that have attempted to embrace all peoples. In the Latin American context, this lack of inclusivity functions as part of the broader ‘coloniality of power’ that has been imprinted on the continent, marked by racial inequality, marginalising a significant part of the population from citizenship and democracy (Quijano (2005). This has been especially evident in Bolivia (one of Latin America’s most demographically indigenous countries). As Lucero (2008: 6) notes, Bolivia was, for a long time, effectively a republic without citizens. This fact has led to an elusive search to construct a ‘national-popular project’ in what Zavaleta (2018) famously characterised as Bolivia’s *sociedad abigarrada* or ‘motley society’. Does this indicate that the search is a doomed one given the heterogeneous nature of Bolivian society? Is it an impossible myth, perhaps Bolivia’s own El Dorado? Or does it require a rethinking of what the very category national means? This issue goes to the heart of post-colonial nation-state formation, and was an issue that the very concept of the plurinational state sought to address.

In a much-misunderstood text, entitled ‘On the Jewish Question’, Marx (1843) sought to distinguish between political emancipation and human emancipation, arguing ‘It is by no means sufficient to ask: who should emancipate and who should be emancipated? Criticism has to be concerned with a third question. It must ask: *What kind of emancipation is involved* and what are its underlying conditions.’ What then does emancipation mean, for the diverse indigenous groups that comprise Bolivia? Here a tension has been noted between those groups that seek a revival of indigenous traditions, political institutions and spaces and those that seek expanded access to constituted national state institutions and resources (Ravindran 2019; 2020). Although the discourse of the MAS sought to appeal to both elements, these tensions sat uneasily in the construction of a hegemonic project (Burman 2014). These would be exacerbated further after 2009 which saw a move to accommodating major capitalist class

interests in the name of development (Webber 2017). Reflecting on this, we can begin to outline the core concerns of this article which is the dynamic - or better - the dialectical struggle between the demands for emancipation by indigenous subjectivities and the co-optation of such struggles to preserve continued power structures. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012: 96) captures this dynamic when she writes,

The present is the setting for simultaneously modernizing and archaic impulses, of strategies to preserve the status quo and of others that signify revolt and renewal of the world: Pachakuti. The upside-down world created by colonialism will return to its feet as history only if it can defeat those who are determined to preserve the past, with its burden of ill-gotten privileges.'

It is this struggle between indigenous revolt on the one hand, and the preservation of the status quo of privilege on the other, that I refer to as the struggle between Pachakuti and passive revolution. I will contend that these concepts are dialectically intertwined as the major historical-sociological dynamics within contemporary Bolivia. Let us briefly unpack these key terms.

Pachakuti is an Andean concept that refers to a turning of the world upside down and a re-ordering of space and time that seeks to fundamentally re-orient social relations (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008; Hylton and Thompson 2007: 15, 28-29; Lucero 2008: 187). It is an attempt to escape the colonial nature of Bolivian society. As Hylton and Thompson (2007: 30) state, 'The ancestral language of Pachakuti...implies a returning to a new beginning. It is in this sense, and not as a sheer regression, that the past can be seen as a future.' Passive revolution, meanwhile, is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the contradictory outcomes of incipient challenges to the established social order. Originally invoked to describe the Italian *Risorgimento*, the concept of passive revolution became further developed by Gramsci to refer to a contradictory processes of modernisation within conditions of uneven development (see also Morton 2007). According to Gramsci (1971: 59, 106–114), a passive revolution involves a state-led process of re-organizing social relations so as to maintain or restore class dominance while diffusing subaltern class pressure. Integral to a passive revolution is the institutionalisation, or expansion of capitalist social relations of production. A passive revolution, or a 'revolution' without a "revolution" (Gramsci 1971: 59), occurs when social relations are fundamentally reorganised (revolution) but ultimately, popular initiatives are neutralised so as to continue class domination (restoration) (Jessop 1990: 213). It therefore involves a combination of change and conservatism. 'The problem', argues Gramsci (1971: 219) 'is to see whether in this dialectic 'revolution/restoration whether it is revolution or restoration that predominates. Passive revolution is the dialectical counter-point to Gramsci's (1971: 57) well known concept of hegemony, the intellectual and moral leadership that a class is able to exercise within (and across) society. In contrast to hegemony, passive revolution refers less to the strength of a dominant class and more to the weakness of its adversaries in being able to protagonise an alternative (Sassoon 1980: 204).

Two interrelated objections could arise to the premises of the article. The first of these refers to the issue of concept stretching, namely taking a concept out of the context that it was originally developed, thereby, robbing it of its meaning (see Callinicos 2010). The second refers to the importing of a concept of European origins into Bolivian reality. In response to the first issue, Gramsci (1971: 108-9) himself noted that, 'since similar situations almost always arise in every historical development, one should see if it is not possible to draw from this some general principle of political science and art.' It was he, therefore who sought to

extend the concept in the first instance.<sup>2</sup> Turing to the issue of importing European concepts, I would first note that Gramsci has already become a major touchstone of debate between ‘intellectuals of statecraft’ in Bolivia and dissident intellectuals (Hesketh 2019: 1475; McNelly 2017). Secondly, Gramsci’s concepts only gain meaning through their historical and geographical specificity of lived reality (Hesketh 2017; Kipfer 2013; Morton 2013). Consonant with Zavaleta (2018: 142), concepts ‘have no analytical utility if they are not subsumed in historical analysis.’ It is this analysis that the article aims to provide.

Whilst the notion of passive revolution has been usefully deployed to understand contemporary Bolivia (Andreucci 2017; Hesketh and Morton 2014; Tapia 2011; Webber 2017), these explanations are largely grounded explaining state strategies of incorporation. What I add to this debate is both a more nuanced historical-sociological examination and a greater focus on the subaltern agents involved in this process. This is important, as the danger with some scholarship on passive revolution is that it renders the subaltern classes *literally* passive in the face of tactics to absorb their struggles. Elite actors are thus imbued with agency, whereas subaltern strategies are silenced. This idea of passivity is in no way integral to the concept developed by Gramsci, who recognised that ‘the conception remains a dialectical one—in other words, presupposes, indeed postulates as necessary, a vigorous antithesis which can present intransigently all its potentialities for development’ (Gramsci 1971:108, 114). I highlight such agency by drawing upon a range of interviews conducted with individuals that represent key subaltern social forces in contemporary Bolivia. I aim to show the open-ended process of contestation by social movements struggling in and against the state that has characterised contemporary Bolivian state formation, as well as highlighting divergent viewpoints about the meaning of indigenous liberation (see Ravindran 2020).

For my own interpretation, I utilise three key thinkers to understand indigenous mobilisation. Drawing from Florencia Mallon (1995), I note that radical discourses can remain alive even if seemingly submerged. These discourses have the power to help re-animate activism in the contemporary conjuncture, in tandem with specific material conditions. It is for this reason we must study certain movements over the *longue durée* to understand both the source of their inspiration and the crucial material moments conducive to collective struggle. Building on this theme, I take inspiration from Rivera Cusicanqui’s (1984) emphasis on the role of collective memory for indigenous peasant movements in the context of Bolivia, defined in terms of both a long-term horizon linked to indigenous anticolonial revolts of 1780-1, and a short-term horizon linked to the experience of the 1952 Revolution. Finally, I utilise the notion of ‘political class formation’ developed by Otero (1999, Otero and Jugenitz 2003) that proposes a synthesis of class and identity-based politics, mediated by issues of regional culture, forms of state intervention and leadership types. Struggles for land, territory, resources and indeed recognition are thus simultaneously both class and ethnic demands, even if one of the elements happens to be privileged in a movement discourse (Otero 2007). All of the above factors help to demonstrate the important role of a culturally ‘specific quality of class formation’ (Hall 1986: 24). In this case an insurrectionary political culture that continues to inform left-indigenous struggle in Bolivia in the search for the Pachakuti (Hylton and Thompson 2007: 24; Webber 2012: 12-13).

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<sup>2</sup> See Hesketh (2017: 398 n66) for a timeline of how the concept developed in Gramsci’s thought.

## Indigenous Struggles and The Power of Collective Memory

Marx (1852: 847) famously opined that, ‘The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the living.’ However, for indigenous movements in Bolivia, rather than ‘weighing like a nightmare’ the traditions of dead generations are often invoked as a source of inspiration. Specifically, since the 1970s, aided by the political movement of Katarismo, and groups such as the *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* (THOA, Andean Oral History Workshop), the notion of Pachakuti has been revived. This section seeks to uncover the roots of collective memory that inspire indigenous struggles for emancipation.

Bolivian history is marked by colonisation that involved both economic exploitation and ethnic domination. This legacy persists in the present (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 99). Anti-colonial struggles are thus not an object of history, but a continuing lived reality of the present. Rivera Cusicanqui (1984) therefore identifies the importance of a long-term horizon of collective memory for contemporary political struggle, most notably for indigenous Aymara peasants from the Altiplano. This leads to memories of anti-colonial struggle being invoked to fight against present forms of discrimination. The major referent point of collective memory for indigenous peoples dates back most famously to 1781, when the armies of Tupac Katari and Tupac Amaru led wars of independence against the Spanish Empire. These rebellions were crushed by the colonial powers and the possibility of an indigenous hegemonic project curtailed. Drawing from Zavaleta (2018: 74-5), this can be referred to as a failed ‘constitutive moment’ in Bolivian history. In its place came a much more conservative independence movement led by white elites that sought to incorporate indigenous peoples only as subordinate social subjects (Lucero 2008: 1). However, the importance of this period as a reference point for future struggles is that it was not only a rejection of domination and colonial territorial forms, but it was also the most expansive project for reclaiming indigenous political sovereignty (Hylton and Thompson 2007: 35).

Although Bolivia gained formal independence in 1825 the country lacked the conditions associated with modern centralised state formation. Not only did regionalism persist but the indigenous majority of the country continued to occupy a marginal place within the life of the state. However, owing to the weakness of national and local state formation, indigenous communal structures (known as *ayllus* and *markas*), that pre-dated Spanish colonialism, continued to exist as a social and political form (Lucero 2008: 40, Zavaleta 2018: 13). Over the next century there would be a continued process of dispossession of communal lands and indigenous resistance to this process. This culminated in the Federal War that took place between 1898 and 1899. The war, essentially fought by different factions of the Bolivian oligarchy over the rate of taxation paid by different regions, was a conflict between conservative forces on the one hand, and so-called liberal forces on the other. It was the latter to whom indigenous armies allied themselves in a bid to recover collective control over their land and resources (Hylton and Thompson 2007: 55). This moment contained hegemonic potential in the sense of including the masses in the life of the nation-state, but this potential went unfulfilled (Zavaleta 2018: 219, 230). Instead, fearing their demands for autonomy, indigenous populations were betrayed. Indigenous support for liberal forces was returned by their massacre once the war had ended, and a racialized logic reimposed on the country (Gotkowitz 2007: 38).

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century what solidified in Bolivia was the so-called ‘seigneurial paradox’. This refers to the failure of the dominant classes to transform themselves into a modern bourgeoisie and was based on their continued attachment to a pre-

capitalist order and racialized views of hierarchy. In concrete terms this meant that the dominant classes had no conception of ‘national space’, instead viewing territory in parcelised and patrimonial terms. The state perspective was thus defined in terms of gamonalism<sup>3</sup> (Zavaleta 2018: 139). Not only did feudalism remain a major feature of the Bolivian countryside until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, but furthermore in all areas of life, the indigenous population was severely discriminated against, including being forbidden from entering certain public spaces (Dunkerley 1984: 22-23). Zavaleta (2018) has famously argued that two distinct spatial projects existed in Bolivia from the time of colonialism onwards. These were ‘seigniorial space’ (dominated by hacienda owners with localist views of territory that were to be held for private gain) and, conversely, ‘Andean space’ (dominated by indigenous conceptions of collectively held land, in which community, production and the sacred co-existed). What was not present was a fully developed project of ‘national space’. However, this did begin to be altered by the experience of the Chaco War (1932–1935, fought against Paraguay) which provided a collective experience of discontent against elite rule. At this time Bolivia was dominated by a mining oligarchy (known as *La Rosca*), in which just three families controlled 80% of national exports (Dunkerley 1984:6–7). A combination of the nationalism engendered by the Chaco War, and falling tin prices on the world market served to undermine the basis of oligarchic power and helped to precipitate the Revolution in Bolivia that broke out in 1952.

It has been suggested that 1952 represents a ‘frustrated opening’ (Gotkowitz 2007: 287), an ‘uncomplete revolution’ (Malloy 1970), or a ‘bourgeois revolution’ (Knight 2003: 78). However, I argue that the term passive revolution is the most felicitous concept to characterise what took place. This allows us to recognise that while progressive developments may have taken place, they ultimately did so in a manner that sought to deepen class rule and thus frustrate the possibilities of autonomous alternatives, namely the search for the Pachakuti. The 1952 Revolution therefore became the means of restructuring social relations, but to further the expansion of capitalism in Bolivia.

### **1952: Modernisation as passive revolution in Bolivia**

The 1952 Revolution has come to be seen as a constitutive moment of modernisation in Bolivia. However, Zavaleta (2018: 128) describes the idea of a national revolution as a ‘chimerical idea’ and contends that, ‘In reality, nationalization has occurred through passive revolution.’ This suggestive argument was never developed further however. How then can we unpack it in more concrete terms? Prior to the Revolution, Bolivia was the poorest country in the hemisphere (aside from Haiti), literacy stood at around one third of the population, three families controlled eighty percent of national exports and 615 estates dominated around half of the country’s farmland, despite only accounting for thirteen percent of production (Dunkerley 1984: 57, 19). Six percent of landowners controlled ninety-two percent of cultivable land and in rural areas landowners still made use of highly exploitative personal service obligations (*ponguaje*) (Klein 2003: 232). The Bolivian Revolution was therefore primarily one that sought to overthrow a feudal order (Knight 2003: 59). I contend however that what occurred was a classic example of a passive revolution. Not only were capitalist social relations expanded (beyond the enclave mining sector), but, at the same time, demands from below - owing to the weakness of their rival hegemonic project - ultimately

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<sup>3</sup> Gammonal is a derogatory Andean term referring to landlords or local party bosses of European descent and their exploitation of indigenous peoples.

were absorbed and contained. Let us recount the salient facts in question in order to make this case clear.

Despite the main events of the Bolivian Revolution lasting only three days, Gotkowitz (2003) has urged us to move beyond this perception to recall the Revolution's rural roots, and in particular, the cycle of rebellion that was formed against landlord power from 1947 onwards. A major event leading up to this was the state-sponsored indigenous congress of 1945. This period sums up of a number of themes this article seeks to address. On the one hand this was an event the government helped to sponsor and therefore control the proceedings of. However, the agenda was also seized by indigenous leaders who sought to move issues onto their terrain including demands for land and secure work. After 1947, there were rebellions across Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, La Paz, Oruro and Tarija. These involved work-stoppages and demands for land reform and education. This era also demonstrated resistance to state authority which was challenged by indigenous forms of representation. The era leading up to the Revolution, therefore, was thus dominated by powerful subaltern demands for land, community and autonomy (Gotkowitz 2007: 265). Demands in the countryside conjoined with student calls for democracy as well as radical workers led by the miners, all of whom were instrumental protagonists of the Revolution. However, lacking a collective and autonomous hegemonic project of their own, they were instead led by the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR - National Revolutionary Movement), who channelled the Revolution in a nationalist direction that sought to play down the contradictory class elements that made up the antagonistic alliance.

One of the most significant achievements of the Revolution was the effective enfranchisement of the indigenous population and the peasantry more broadly (Dunkerley 1984: 50). Major processes of nationalisation also took place, most notably in the tin industry. The three big mines of Pati o, Hochschild and Aramayo were taken over by the newly formed state company *Corporación Minera de Bolivia* (COMIBOL - Bolivian Mining Corporation), meaning two-thirds of the mining industry was under state control (Klein 2003b: 213). In the countryside, processes of revolutionary pacification took place linked to both land reform and the formation of rural militias (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984: 76). Land reform began to take place a year after the Revolution began. However, it is here we can begin to illustrate why this constituted a process of passive revolution. Whilst land reform did begin the break-up of haciendas and the redistribution of land, there were some important caveats. First, land reform was partial. Only a quarter of farmland was redistributed between 1954-1968 (Dunkerley 1984: 72). This process of agrarian reform was class and race biased in that it favoured private over communal property (neglecting indigenous territorial demands). It was also gender biased as land grants were made to male heads of households (Gotkowitz 2007: 279-80). Secondly, agrarian reform exempted haciendas that were deemed capital-intensive. Overall, therefore, land reform in Bolivia was shaped through the slow transformation of large landholdings (haciendas) into capitalist enterprises, (with the important exception of the Cochabamba region), with landowning elites retaining control of the state (Zavaleta 2008: 43, 126). In terms of political class formation two important geographical divergences resulted from this process. First, one of the key regions where expropriation did not occur on a large scale was the department of Santa Cruz, which would become a vital site for investment, commercial expansion and capital accumulation (Klein 2003b: 217). This would facilitate the consolidation of a powerful agrarian bourgeoisie who have been the leading force of reaction (Eaton 2007). The highlands, conversely, saw a process of mini-fundisation (Gotkowitz 2007: 279). As has been pointed out, mini-fundismo allows for the super-exploitation of labour by pushing wages below subsistence-levels as



elements of workers' reproduction takes place within the sphere of the community (Otero 1999: 23).

Following the Revolution of 1952, the Bolivian state adopted a cultural policy of *mestizaje* (celebrating the mixing of European and indigenous peoples). However, as critics have pointed out, this policy celebrates indigenous culture while effectively confining indigenous subjects to the region's past (Lucero 2008: 44). In the Bolivian context, this meant indigenous groups were re-designated as *campesinos*, and the territorial geography framed by the state was not one that recognised indigenous spatial practices. In the construction of its modern form of citizenship the state therefore contained, a 'structural inability to recognise the political practices of Bolivia's indigenous majority' (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 99). Instead there was an effort to tie indigenous peasants to the state's tutelage via the creation of the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CNTCB: Bolivian National Peasant Confederation). As Gotkowitz (2007: 289) argues, 'up to a point, the revolution was a reaction against indigenous mobilisation and thus a production of the liberal oligarchic project.' This encapsulates precisely the revolution/restoration dynamic integral to passive revolution. Nonetheless, just because the aim of the state was to negate indigenous identity and radical demands, this does not mean that it was successful over the long term. As Rivera Cusicanqui (1990: 104) points out, 'peasant incorporation was incomplete and imperfect... creating the conditions for the resurgence of ethnic grievances in the 1970s'.

To understand why this was the case, we need to recognise the weakness of the Bolivian state and the continued role of contestation. Regarding the weakness of Bolivian state formation, this led to continued regionalisation and the lack of a firm national hegemonic project, internalised within civil society (Domingo 2003; Tapia 2015b). As Zavaleta (2018: 208) clarifies, 'When a ruling class produces ideas that cannot be metabolised as its own by civil society, the state necessarily exists in a relation of non-belonging to its very object or end which is, precisely, society.' In relation to issues of struggle and contestation, Zavaleta (2008: 8) invites us to look at this as part of the 'class accumulation' of the peasantry by examining their changing experiences and conditions which led to the waning attachment to the established order. I contend that this is the very struggle of Pachakuti against passive revolution. In other words, the subterranean discourse of anticolonial struggle and the search for autonomy may have been submerged, but it was dormant as opposed to extinct (Mallon 1995). Let us explore briefly how this radicalised discourse was reignited.

The period 1956-64 saw the initial radical impulses of the Revolution beginning to be reversed, most notably with workers' co-government ending (Dunkerley 1984: 84). After 1964, what was witnessed was revolutionary collapse (Knight 2003: 65).<sup>4</sup> Following a military coup that year, the peasantry was subsequently used as a counter-weight against the more independent power of workers, with the establishment of the Peasant-Military Pact. This effectively ended the national-popular components of the Revolution. I would argue that, simultaneously, it solidified the Bolivian Revolution as a passive revolution. It is worth noting that the military regime of René Barrientos (1964-67) even referred to his project as a 'restorative revolution' (*revolución restaurada*) (Morales 2010:171; Webber 2012: 77). However, the relationship between the peasantry and the military became increasingly one defined by coercion rather than consent. The previously mentioned *muni-fundisation* of the highlands created a problem when these lands began to be further sub-divided among family members owing to demographic change (Webber 2017: 334). This created discontent among

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<sup>4</sup> The military would continue to rule Bolivia until 1978, in both authoritarian and populist forms.

highland indigenous peasants, but also antagonisms with lowland indigenous groups when the government sponsored projects of internal colonisation to relieve highland demands for land reform. Tensions were further exacerbated when the government followed IMF recommendations to devalue the currency and cut subsidies, measures which hit the countryside hardest of all (Hylton and Thompson 2007: 86). As radical demands built up, the government responded with aggression, exemplified in the 1974 Massacre of the Valle in Cochabamba when hundreds of peasants, who sought to join striking workers in solidarity were killed, effectively ending the Peasant-Military Pact (Webber 2012: 101). As the indigenous peasantry became disarticulated from their political compact with the state, a new generation of more radicalised leaders sought to recover subaltern history including the search for the Pachakuti. Inspired by the work of Fausto Reinaga, who stressed the role of indigenous nationalism and rejected the policy of *mestizaje*, the Tiwanaku Manifesto published in 1973, focused on the grievances of indigenous peoples. These grievances were subsequently led by the political movement of Katarismo (taking their name from Tupaj Katari). The Kataristas were important in bringing together class and ethnic concerns in their opposition to the previous peasant-military pact. They sought to fundamentally challenge the ideological basis of the post-Revolutionary state (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 107). This was aided by international organisations such as Oxfam, but most importantly, by national organisations such as the THOA, whose mission was to promote the resurgence of indigenous territorial forms (Lucero 2008: 166). This activity helped to promote the slow growth of an ‘indigenous-peasant proletarian alliance’ (Webber 2012: 102).

To understand the predominant role of indigenous subjectivities in recent Bolivian politics it is important to see the changing composition of social forces that resulted from the neoliberal period in Bolivia from the 1980s to the early 2000s. During this time, some former dominant groups were either demobilised or reconstituted. Contested forms of neoliberal subjectivity also allowed for the creation of new powerful actors. The four most salient features of the era were the following: First, the huge layoff of miners and their relocation to places such as Cochabamba and El Alto. This provided the basis for a fusing of traditional, class-consciousness unionisation with indigenous communitarian traditions. Second, the opening of the countryside to marketization undercut subsistence activities and provided an existential threat to the reproduction of indigenous peasant life (Nash 1994). Thirdly, the changing political contours of the time, including the collapse of communism, led to class-based organisations being denigrated while indigenous organisations gained greater legitimacy. Finally, forms of subjectivity were reconfigured by the experience of neoliberalism. The most important example in this regard can be seen through the Law of Popular Participation (LLP) (discussed further below). These factors helped to widen the locus of resistance from workplace-based forms of struggle against exploitation to broader, often territorially rooted struggles, that asserted a basic right to live (Nash 2003: 20-21, Zibechi 2012). In order to understand some of the present conflicts, it needs to be re-emphasised that, especially in the countryside where state presence tended to be weak, indigenous peasants still exercised a high degree of territorial jurisdiction that included communal control over natural resources that pertained to daily life, such as water (Regalsky 2010: 40). However, under the IMF-mandated policies, the countryside began to be opened to increased capital accumulation. This severely undermined the subsistence base of the peasantry. To deal with the resulting unrest, new modernising techniques of statecraft were devised. Thus, under the Presidency of Sanchez de Lozada, a new political strategy was adopted. As Morales (2003: 219) notes, this sought to ‘combine a cultural and political revolution with the structural and economic one.’ The two key policies integral to this strategy were the Law of Capitalization and the Law of Popular Participation (LLP). Taken

together, these laws sought to simultaneously expand capitalist social relations via the privatisation of natural resources (largely to transnational corporations), whilst also decentralising some decision making to the municipal level (Perreault 2006: 156). This devolution of decision-making powers should be seen as an effort to re-scale political activism to the local level and contain national-popular efforts at wholesale change. The LLP provided limited recognition of indigenous demands (such as language and cultural rights) and thus made possible their recuperation into state-based projects whilst also seeking to limit their demand to spatially restricted areas (Tockman 2016: 155). It can therefore be analysed as a policy practice that conforms to what Hale (2004) has described as the '*indio permitido*' (authorized Indian). This signifies the way neoliberalism both enables and limits indigenous subjects. The neoliberal state in places such as Bolivia has been content to provide recognition of limited rights, provided they do not contradict the wider economic model of neoliberalism or threaten the wider power structure at large (Hale 2005: 18).

However, the politics of the LLP, while seeking to recognise indigenous politics within discursive limits, did begin the process of politically unravelling the idea of Bolivia as a homogenous, mestizo nation (Domingo 2003: 376). Furthermore, we must not forget the way in which state discourses are appropriated and reworked by social movements as part of the terrain of hegemonic contestation (Roseberry 1994). When exploring this period, some scholars tend to separate ethnic and class demands. I believe this represents a poverty of theoretical approach. Revived 'ethnic' demands, do not arise from an ascribed characteristics but rather have resulted from deep-seated and changing structural issues that certain groups have encountered that attacked the basis for their social reproduction (Nash 2003: 20; Otero 2007). One such attack was the World Bank mandated privatization of water in Cochabamba in 2000. This, followed by the so-called Gas War in 2003 were to begin a new insurrectionary cycle throughout the country that would bring down two presidents and end with the MAS in power (Webber 2011: 48). At the heart of this mobilisation, led by indigenous groups allied with peasant and worker unions, was the question of who gets to participate in decision making surrounding resources and development (Postero 2019: 32).

### **The MAS in power: passive revolution in indigenous clothes?**

Following the momentous period of social mobilisation from 2000-2005, culminating in the election of Morales, there was hope that finally the colonial basis of the Bolivian state could be overturned and the world of the indigenous peoples, could be turned back onto its feet. It is important to note that the election of the MAS as a 'political instrument' of social movements, was thus seen as an attempt to overturn this order and begin a new process of change. As mentioned in the introduction, the struggle for Pachakuti seemed possible in the early years of this upheaval. An important precursor was the formation of the Pact of Unity. This created the possibility for a pluralised, indigenous hegemonic project, bringing together a diverse range of social movements in what Garcés (2011: 48) calls an 'institutionalised moment of articulation'. The shared rejection of the old order, a dialogue to overcome differences and a focus on common proposals thus sowed the seeds of a new hegemonic project. Invoking Antonio Gramsci (via Zavaleta), Álvaro García Linera (2010a: 8) proclaimed that Bolivia was moving from an apparent state – representing only a minority of Bolivians - to a modern state (or 'an integral state') that was capable of representing all sectors of Bolivian society. This was the task of the plurinational state; to be the form of transition towards communitarian socialism. Moreover, he proposed that civil society was to take back the functions of government (2010b). At the heart of this project lay a rethinking of democracy, nationhood and their spatial articulation (Tapia 2015a: 69). As Garcés (2011: 52)

notes, ‘the idea of a plurinational state implies thinking about an asymmetric territorial organisation.’ The recognition of a state made up of multiple nations thus challenges traditional western conceptions of sovereignty, and implies the possibility of thinking about indigenous forms of modernity based in territories that pre-date the formation of the modern state (Tapia 2007). The aim of this section is to synthesise the two key dynamics of historical change that have been discussed hitherto. First, by showing how, at the beginning of the century there was a renewed search for Pachakuti. Secondly, how subsequently, owing to the weakness of an independent and united hegemonic project from below, this search was once again co-opted into a passive revolution on behalf of the MAS. I now turn to analysing the MAS’s time in power from 2006. For the sake of brevity, I will break down my analysis into the following three interrelated areas: the struggle for dignity and recognition, the contradictions of the economic model of development, and finally, conflicts over indigenous autonomy and territorial rights. The purpose of this section is not to deny that any progressive change has taken place in Bolivia. Rather, it is to highlight the contradictory nature of that process of change that has served to limit the horizons of the possible, most notably in terms of the radical impulses that began the insurrectionary cycle. This also highlights the tensions within indigenous movements and their understanding of emancipation (Burman 2014; Ravindran 2019, 2020), and the ultimate failure to solidify a subaltern hegemonic project that maintained unity within these divisions.

### *Dignity and Recognition*

An important element of the process of change in Bolivia has been a shift in how the country was imagined as a nation. As was documented earlier, the indigenous population, from the time of colonialism, were either forcibly excluded from the state or had their identity negated via policies of *mestizaje*. Johnson Jimenez Cobo (personal interview 2019), President of the *Central de Pueblos Indígenas de La Paz* (CPILAP - Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of La Paz), recounted that, ‘before they took us - the neoliberal government - took us into account as savages, as nomads, so they did not take us into account in the decisions of the state.’. Similarly, Felix Ajpia from the *Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia* (CSCIB - Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia) told me,

we were totally out of the state. The indigenous world or the native world were not on their list. Although after the year ‘52 they had given us the right to revolution, we had no infrastructure to pick us up. If we had been told that we have the right to health, there were no hospitals. If we had the right to transport we had no roads, that is, we had virtually nothing...these were life or death necessities to have infrastructure, schools, roads, bridges.

An undeniable and important element of change that took place with the passing of the new constitution and re-founding Bolivia as a plurinational state, has been the reimagining of the nation as one grounded in indigenous culture (Canessa 2014: 158). Isabel Ramírez from the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia - Bartolina Sisa* (National Confederation of Indigenous, Native and Peasant Women - Bartolina Sisa), recounted to me how indigenous women felt empowered under the MAS, ‘we did not have rights before, there was no plurinational state... now we have the right for everything, to participate in meetings politically, also organically.’ As evidence of this empowerment, Bolivia has the highest number of female legislators anywhere in the world after Rwanda (Farthing 2019: 213). This achievement was explicitly linked to the role of Evo

Morales, whom the women from the Bartolina Sisas identified as empowering them, and helping to key right-wing forces at bay:

today they (*the right-wing forces*) want to return. It has cost us a lot, the indigenous people. So much struggle that we have made so that we can govern ourselves...we cannot go back to what we had before, but we have to have a further vision, going forward with our president and us as indigenous *originarios* at the national level, men and women. We will continue to support our president.

Such sentiments were echoed by other peasant representatives. Hugo López Paxi (personal interview 2019) from the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB, The Unified Syndical Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia) stated that,

here in the Plaza Murillo, there are ladies with *polleras*. I remember since the seventies, more or less, those ladies with the loaded *aguayo*, with a hat, with broaches, did not enter the Plaza Murillo. Since Evo Morales came to power, the parliaments, the deputies, the senators are *compañeras* with *aguayo*, with ponchos, with everything...It has changed. If before the *q'aras* dominated us, *now we are in power*'.

This change should not be taken lightly. As Felix Ajpia emotionally told me, 'we feel worthy' (personal interview 2019). For those indigenous movements that prioritised access to 'national space' and inclusion, the MAS project was seen as highly successful (Ravindran 2019). However, whilst Evo Morales was indeed associated with progress by a number of these organisations, it is worth reflecting that not all in Bolivia accorded with this state-centred analysis of change. Pamela Cartagena (personal interview 2019) from the *Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado* (CIPCA - Centre for Research and Promotion of the Peasantry) points out,

The process of change does not begin with Evo. The process of change began in the 1990s when lowland organisations placed on the political agenda and the country's agenda the need to be recognised as organizations and their right to land, territory and dignity... all that came from the set of indigenous marches that for 20 years questioned the economic, productive model, the political model, and put that on the agenda.

Referring to the new constitution of 2009 that re-founded Bolivia as a plurinational state, she continues, 'it is the indigenous peoples who have put it on the agenda and evidently the MAS has had the ability to capitalise on that demand and to raise it as a government program.' This issue of the MAS effectively capturing subaltern demands is an important point to return to when reflecting on passive revolution. Edgar Paredes (personal interview 2019) from the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB, Bolivian Workers Centre), reflected on the ambiguous nature of the MAS era, stating 'we still don't have land and territory. The peasants, perhaps, have been absorbed by the state, the national structure...but it has also made considerable progress in social inclusion.' This, he told me, was the most important element of the process of change.

Although recognising the many advantages that the constitutional moment had for recognising indigenous people, Pamela Cartagena (personal interview 2019) notes the issues of demobilisation that resulted from it. Referring to indigenous movements she argues,

today indigenous peasants and their organisations have set aside their strategic agenda and are handling the political agenda – partisan of the MAS. The issues of their own agenda have been left aside for attending a political party agenda. This was necessary in the time when we made the new constitution. Only with that strength has a constitution been achieved...but it is time to leave this and return to the strategic agenda of political, social and economic issues of the peasant movement.

This issue of demobilisation and a lack of independence, was echoed by Hernán Avila (personal interview, 2019), an advisor to the constituent assembly process and former director of the *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* (CEJIS – Centre for Legal Studies and Social Research). He told me, ‘there was a common denominator that has to do with the lack of independence and autonomy of organisations and the loss of their strategic objective. Their national agenda was conditioned and the patriotic agenda of the government party was prioritised.’

To explore how this issue of dignity and recognition can therefore be complicated, it is important to move on to explore the model of economic development that has been pursued under the MAS. This reveals how elements of dignity and recognition are not always felt evenly across the geography of the country. Rather, the very discourses of indigeneity have become rhetorical tools of statecraft (Canessa 2014: 156). This has been most marked in relation to extractive forms of development that have threatened indigenous territories in the name of development. Thus, concurrent with Postero (2019: 138), ‘indigeneity, once considered the site of ontological alternatives to capitalism is now rearticulated to global capitalism under the rubric of economic liberation.’ This is embodiment of passive revolutionary processes.

### *The Deepening of Economic Extractivism*

A key demand of social movements prior to the election of Evo Morales was the nationalisation of gas. This did not happen, but instead a larger share of royalties were claimed by the state (Webber 2011: 82). This conforms to the broader developmentalist goal of ‘resource nationalism’ subsequently pursued by the MAS. During their time in power there was an explicit discourse of anti-capitalism and an accompanying aim to move to a new form of political economy as part of a transition to socialism. This model was defined as a ‘plural economy’ made up of four key sectors: the state, the private sector, the co-operative sector and the communitarian sector. Discursively, this notion of the plural economy seeks to recognise Bolivia’s famous *sociedad abrigarrada* (Zavaleta 2018). The main goal of the plural economy was to move Bolivia away from its historic reliance on the exportation of primary commodities, by building up industrial capacity. The state was therefore to play a key strategic role in integrating these various sectors, most notably in redistributing resources from ‘strategic sectors’ (that include hydrocarbons and the mining sector) to ‘employment and income generating sectors’ (which include industrial, farming commercial, and service sectors), as well as redistributing profits to fund key social programmes (Arce, 2011). This essentially places the state as a ‘centre of accumulation’ in terms of planning and control of the social surplus (Ruccio 2011: 75, 85-86). However, there remains a question whether communal class processes can be sustained whilst still reliant upon a wider capitalist

economy. As Veltmeyer (2014: 91-92) has noted, the discourse of a plural economy ‘ignores the dominant role of private ownership and the pressure it can exert on other forms of property.’ Capitalist enterprise remains dominant within the Bolivian economy accounting for 55% of GDP in 2005, whilst 22% was held by the state, 14% by the communitarian sector and 2% by the social/co-operative sector. The social co-operative sector, far from growing, however, had contracted by 2010 (Arze and Gómez 2013: 100). Farthing (2019) argues that, despite the portrayals of Morales as a radical in the international press, in reality most economic and social policies have been fairly moderate and not led to major changes to the economic structure of the country.<sup>5</sup>

In relation to its economic model, Bolivia has broadly conformed to the regional approach of neo-structuralism. This gives emphasis to extractivist modes of development, in which the state co-operates with transnational corporations but assumes a social role in redistributing rents (Veltmeyer 2012). On these terms, it should be acknowledged that in many respects the MAS’s economic policies were quite successful. They maintained impressive economic growth whilst reducing the incidence of both poverty and extreme poverty (McNelly 2019: 425). However, a major contradiction that lies at the heart of their economic model was that of extractivism and the social conflicts it created. Even among the supporters of the MAS there was a recognition that environmental problems existed and that this represented a permanent struggle between peasants and those involved in natural resource exploitation (Paredes, personal interview 2019). However, whilst it was agreed that extractivism could not continue indefinitely there was nevertheless a continued reliance upon it. As Felix Ajpia (personal interview 2019) from the *Interculturales* stated, ‘we have to stop being extractive, but we will not be able to dispense with it definitely very soon.’ However, if anything, extractivism actually deepened under the MAS. The prohibitions on hydrocarbon exploitation were lifted in 7 out of 22 national parks (Torres Wong 2019: 137). Hydrocarbon operations for example have expanded in the northern Amazon basin, exacerbating tensions with indigenous groups (Bebbington 2009: 14). Whilst in 2006, 90% of Bolivia’s exports were in the hydrocarbons sector, by 2011 (the middle of Morales’s second term) this figure was 96%, making Bolivia the most natural resource dependent country in the region (Veltmeyer 2014: 84). This model of development has class effects. First it is a model of accumulation often based on dispossession or invasion of communal territory. In addition, as McNelly (2019: 428) has demonstrated, extractive industries employ less than 1% of the labour force and this has displayed limited growth. Despite the rhetoric of the state acting a major redistributive agent, the majority of investments under the MAS remained in capital intensive sectors linked to hydrocarbons and mining. In a wide-ranging analysis of the economic programme of the MAS, Arze and Gómez (2013: 55) highlight how the dynamism of the economy continues to rely on external demand and that industrial manufacturing as a percentage of GDP has not altered its level for three decades, while further, it retains a basic character. Meanwhile, despite the importance of conditional cash transfer programmes such as *Jauncito Pinto* (for school age children), *Juana Azurduy* (for pregnant women) and *Renta Dignidad* (for the elderly), these collectively account for around 1.6% of GDP. As a result, they are fairly minor flows of capital and do not alter the role of household consumption. Remittances from countries such as Spain play a far more significant role in that regard (Arze and Gómez 2013: 114-16).

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<sup>5</sup> The most profound example of this can be seen in relation to land. Despite a law being passed that limited landholding to 5000 hectares, this could not be retroactively applied. This effectively nullified its reforming utility (Gárce 2011: 62).

The framework that dominated the agenda of the MAS was one of ‘resource nationalism’. Whilst nominally a progressive move to take back state control over royalties surrounding strategic resources, the scalar imagination of the traditional sovereign state often came into conflict with the demands of (some) indigenous groups to control the resources of their territory (Laing 2020). The latter has been a long-held demand, and indeed, during the formation of the Pact of Unity, this was among the key proposals pushed by certain actors (Marston and Kennemore 2019: 142). Regarding this conflict, Canessa (2014: 160) argues, that beyond the highland/lowland dichotomy that is often said to characterise indigenous tensions in Bolivia, the real tension involves a division between groups that remained territorialised (and thus prioritise autonomy), and those that are deterritorialized, and, prioritise a much more nationalised identity that, as a result, seeks to exploit national resources for broader purposes such as governmental social programmes. Furthering, this analysis, Ravindran (2019) differentiates between what he calls expansionist (nationally-oriented) and revivalist (community-based) indigenous demands. Whilst expansionist demands are concerned with spatial mobility, for example, furthering the presence of indigenous people within historically inaccessible spaces, revivalist demands seek protection of ancestral territories.

Such a distinction was reinforced with different actors I spoke with. Thus, for example Hugo López Paxi from the CSUTCB spoke about the continuing need to fight for industry and factories. In particular, his role within the CSUTCB was to fight for the industrialisation of the coca leaf. Such broad sentiments were echoed by Edgar Paredes (personal interview 2019) from the COB, who spoke of the need for safe, decent work and housing, but wanted the solution to come from the application of modern, advanced technology in order to better exploit resources such as quinoa. In contrast, Johnson Jiménez Cobo (personal interview 2019), from CPILAP, gave a very different account not only rooted in territory, but, as he saw it, a different cosmovision:

We as indigenous peoples have lived with nature, with that ecosystem, with biodiversity, with the potential that our territory has in natural resources. We don't have that ideology of getting in, grabbing a chainsaw, or machete or axe, no. ... Sometimes the government does not understand, or understands but does not want to listen, because its ideology is mechanization. Of course, we want development, but always within the framework of the rights of indigenous people.

There is a broad recognition therefore that the model of development based on natural resource extraction sits ill at ease with the professed respect for indigenous territories and their right to refuse exploitation or engage with extractivism on their own terms (Anthias 2018; Canessa 2014: 161; Fabricant and Gustafson 2011; Laing 2020). The reliance on rent seeking sectors and the expansion of the resource frontier also reproduced, vertical, clientelistic relations that included the use of bribes and threats (Andreucci 2017: 174). To give one illustration of this, a major infrastructure initiative was simply named *Evo Cumple* reinforcing personalistic power, or what Anthias (2018: 137) has called ‘gas-funded state patronage’. The narrative of progress also sought to silence critics who are opposed to resource extraction (Marston and Kennemore 2019: 146). Pamela Cartagena (personal interview, 2019) from CIPCA, outlines the stark result of this,

Today we no longer talk about the right to consultations. The government says we will do exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons in this area and I count on the endorsement of the organization. In reality, it does have the endorsement but of the



leaders, not the social base the ones who suffer the effects of the model. The fires in the Chiquitania and the Amazon are the effect of an agro-export model that extends the frontier...The effects that are there in the south of the country, in the Chaco, on the areas that have been (involved) with the exploration and the exploitation of resources, especially hydrocarbons, are not for the leaders, nor is it for the government. They are for the social bases that live on the land that today has its water polluted, which have been displaced from their productive zones.

If the neoliberal period was indeed summed up by the notion of the *indio-permitido*, that is, authorised indigeneity, that was not allowed to challenge the prevailing economic model (Hale 2004), can we really say that the MAS has acted so differently? It would appear that, in the desire to construct an ‘indigenous state’, certain discourses of indigeneity are embraced whilst others are effectively silenced. A singular vision of an indigenous state thus displaces a heterogeneous notion of plurinationality, especially in its links to extractive development (Anthias 2018; Postero 2019: 19). To give more substance to this assertion, let us finally explore the issue of indigenous autonomy. I argue that the process of autonomy highlights the unwillingness by the MAS to fully embrace decolonization and instead remain within the cartography of traditional sovereignty.

#### *Autonomy within state power*

The possibility of constructing autonomy, defined in terms of self-governance, has been a historic demand of indigenous people in Bolivia and was at the heart of the process to re-found the nation as a plurinational state (Augburger and Haber 2018, Garcés 2011; Tockman 2016: 154). However, from the outset, ‘The process and outcome illustrate the ways through which indigenous demands were negotiated – and sacrificed – to favour a more conservative defence of existing state forms (Garcés 2011: 47). While democracy in Bolivia became, in many respects more inclusive than in the past, it remained the case that communitarian, participatory democratic processes have been limited by the broader commitment to representative democracy (Tockman 2017). The process of autonomy has therefore been limited by the broader nationalist spatial strategy pursued by the MAS. This has led to the demobilisation of social movements on the one hand, and a re-legitimation of state power on the other (Regalsky 2010: 36-38). Hernán Avila (personal interview 2019), more forcefully argued that, after 2009, we can see the ‘restoration of power, of colonial power...only with an indigenous face.’ This would be the hallmark of passive revolution, where restoration predominates over revolution.

Indigenous autonomy was supposed to represent a major expression of decolonised sovereignty, precisely the search for Pachakuti. The means for achieving this were *Autonomía Indígena Originaria Campesina* – AIOC, Indigenous Originary Peasant Autonomy). The very term AIOC reflects the heterogeneous understanding of identity in Bolivia. The 2009 constitution provides 3 paths for AOICS to be constructed: 1) the conversion of an existing municipality, 2) the conversion of a region (both by popular referendum) or 3) the consolidation of a *Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino* (TIOC - Indigenous Originary Peasant Territory) via the appropriate norms and customs of that community (Mathes 2019: 73; Tockman 2016: 156). However, despite the rhetoric of decolonising the state, what the autonomy process has done is create a passive revolutionary means of statecraft that has absorbed subaltern demands to a limited degree (those seeking greater access to national state and cultural recognition) while continuing to expand the realm of capitalist social relations (in terms of the economic model discussed above). Thus, in

conformation with the broader outlines of passive revolution, the proposed remapping of sovereignty, ‘is transformed into a state reform that *deepens the mechanisms of indigenous participation in the state but does so through their subordination*, without changing the structures of the state itself’ (Gárces 2011: 64, emphasis added). Indigenous organizations were thereby ‘domesticated’ (Zuazo 2010: 134).

Despite the discourse of decolonising Bolivia, and its initial support for the process of autonomy, which included creating a new vice ministry, the role of the MAS has become increasingly ambiguous, with little resources provided to support the process and sometimes outright opposition to it when autonomy interferes with their electoral priorities (Augsburger and Haber 2018: 58; Postero 2019: 59; Tockman 2016: 160). Numerous scholars have demonstrated how the process of autonomy instigated by the MAS is further limited in scope in a number of ways. First, the process of autonomy, despite seemingly creating new spaces for governance, does so in a manner that privileges existing cartographies as opposed to ancestral indigenous claims (Garcés 2011: 53; Tockman 2016: 154, 162). Secondly, AIOCs still have to conform to the broader development plans set by the national state, including burdensome bureaucratic engagements with the central state (Mathes 2019: 75). Finally, as was discussed above, the economic model of extractivism clearly sets limitations on the practice of autonomy, most notably when the state assumes the rights to non-renewable resources (Laing 2020). As Jimenez Cobo (personal interview 2019,) told me, the government sometimes fails to make prior and informed consent, and as a result, ‘do not enter through the door to the territory, the very authorities enter through the window, and that is why we are struggling and we begin to meet, to take resolutions. We take out mandates of the assembly.’

The issue arises when certain indigenous ways of life or demands conflict with the developmental plans of the government. Jimenez Cobo (personal interview 2019) ruefully stated that ‘consensus does not exist much with the government. So that’s why they tell us: ‘Ah, these indigenous people are neoliberal, these indigenous people are against the Process’, but we are posing ourselves according to the experience of our territory.’ The process of autonomy therefore has failed to decolonize state structures. Rather, in many respects, coloniality has been reconstituted, as autonomy is subsumed beneath state power’s desire for natural resources (Postero 2019: 5). As Cartegena (personal interview, 2019) outlines,

There is a kind of colonization especially in the lowlands of the Andean region, which is not only going to exploit the land but to impose development models, to impose customs etc, Majorities are being imposed, The plurinational state is still on paper and political speeches, ...in reality there are no policies that encourage this dialogue, respect for minorities etc... And of course there are conflicts over the visions of development.

Nancy Postero (2019: 181) frames the issue starkly: ‘because the state has continued to tie its economic policies to a capitalist model of natural resources, it continues to sacrifice those indigenous people whose lands and livelihoods are “obstacles” to national development.’

The clearest example of this would be the imbroglio over the construction of a highway through the *Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure* (TIPNIS, Isiboro Secure National park and Indigenous Territory). This episode has become synonymous with the expansion of the resource frontier at the expense of indigenous communities (Veltmeyer 2014: 100; Webber 2012b). Álvaro García Linera’s forcefully defended the construction of

the proposed highway as ‘a mechanism for achieving territorial control of the geography by the state and the establishment of sovereignty’, against what he termed ‘hacendado-patrimonial power’ (García Linera, 2012). However, it is worth noting in García Linera’s discourse there is a battle between the state (and its territorial sovereignty) and transnational capitalist interests. The complexity of indigenous interests and their struggle for developing on their own terms was therefore elided (see McNeish 2013). The resulting conflict with social movements that took place over TIPNIS led to the effective breaking up of two of the most important indigenous organizations CONAMAQ and CIBOB in 2012 and 2013, following their public disagreement with the MAS. The leadership of these organizations were violently dislodged and parallel organisations loyal to the government put in their place (Andreucci 2017: 174). This demobilisation of social movements also facilitated rapprochement with economic elites in the countryside (Webber 2017: 331). However, given the obvious desire of these elites to roll back the limited project of redistribution, this must be seen as an ‘opportunity squandered’ to fundamentally transform the country when these right-wing forces were at their weakest after 2009 (Farthing 2019: 225).

Rather than autonomy transforming the nature of state power, in reality it has been ‘a political strategy to maintain control... Today all laws, policies it is said that, in quote “they are made with the participation of organizations, have the backing of leaders etc” but in reality they have the participation and endorsement of people who are aligned with the ruling party. No dissenting voices are heard’ (Cartagena, personal interview 2019). Arze and Gómez (2013: 159) argue that the MA relied upon ‘organisational summits’ as a mode of ratifying the agenda of the government, thereby displacing the traditional indigenous spaces of dialogue and debate. However, recalling the independent power of marches and autonomous activity that had initiated the rise of the MAS, Johnson Jimenez Cobo stated emphatically, ‘we as indigenous peoples, are always going to enforce against our own government or even if it is another government, we will also enforce our rights as indigenous peoples.’ Looking to the future, Alex Villca (person interview 2020), spokesperson from the *Coordinadora Nacional de Defensa de los Territorios Indígenas Originarios Campesinos y Áreas Protegidas* (CONTIOCAP, National Coordinator in Defence of Indigenous, Originary and Peasant Territory and Protected Areas) declared forcefully, ‘the hope is not in who holds power today or tomorrow or in the future. The hope is within ourselves, to collectively wake up. We have to take over collective spaces, where we make decisions and become the people of change.’

## Conclusion

Standing in the centre of Plaza Murillo (La Paz) in the middle of September of 2019, I faced towards the National Congress of Bolivia. In front of the building, alongside the traditional Bolivian tricolour of red, yellow and green, flew the wiphala, the multi-coloured, chequered flag that represents the indigenous peoples of the Andes. Since 2009, when the new Bolivian constitution was ratified, the wiphala has been recognised as a joint symbol of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Turning ninety degrees to the right, I observed the new *Casa Grande del Pueblo*, at 29 stories high, rising above the old Presidential Palace (Palacio Quemado) and Cathedral of La Paz. As I stood, surveying my historic surrounding, a gust of wind blew. Catching the breeze, the tricolour unfurled to full length, obscuring for a time the wiphala. This snapshot, caught in my mind as a moment in time, seemed to encapsulate the contradictions involved in the *proceso de cambio* (process of change) in contemporary Bolivia. The new, chic, \$42million building festooned with indigenous symbols, towers above the surrounding area as a symbol of Bolivia’s contested modernity. Meanwhile, the progress represented by indigenous inclusion remained overshadowed by older, traditional

modes of representation. Two different imaginations of Bolivia were on display, but sat uneasily side by side, not quite synthesised, and still open to change, depending on the prevailing (political) winds. This article has sought to address this contradictory dynamic of social change, exploring both the historically rooted dynamic to overturn the colonial order, versus the desire to expand capitalist forms of modernity.

Prior to the current crisis in Bolivia, there was a growing consensus among critical left voices, that the reinvigoration of the process of change, if it came, would have to be from subaltern indigenous social movements (Gárces 2011: 56). As Arze and Gómez (2013: 161) argue, despite the setbacks for indigenous movements, revolutionary aspirations 'will persist and could reappear under explosive and destabilising conditions.' The current situation is clearly dangerous and highly volatile for many indigenous communities. However, while not being completely sanguine about such danger, it is worth recalling the words of José Carlos Mariátegui (1971: 58) who long ago opined that, 'When expropriation and redistribution seem about to liquidate the "community," indigenous socialism always finds a way to reject, resist, or evade this incursion.' In the present conjuncture, we must hope that he is right. Hope, however, should not be dismissed as an empty cliché. Rather, the struggle for Pachakuti remains intrinsically a utopian one, in that sense that it is the search for the good place that is still no place. Whilst profound mobilisations may have indeed opened a new horizon of desire, the struggle to realise an indigenous sovereignty that fundamentally breaks with colonial cartography has remained a vanishing point on that horizon. However, this is no elusive search for el dorado, but rather there exists a powerful set of collective memories of alternative praxis, not only in a long-term horizon, but also in more recent forms of struggle that included the proliferation of communal assemblies, rotating representatives and a re-grounding of power in the community. If collective memories can indeed inspire processes of change, then likewise critical reflection on recent periods of history, examining how the weakness of autonomous initiatives led to their capture by constituted power and subsequent demobilisation can also serve as a powerful lesson for the past. Taken together these antagonistic memories of collective experience can provide the basis for a renewal, once again, of the rhythms of the Pachakuti.

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