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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Politics of Representing the Past in Bolivia

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Edward Fabian Kennedy

Committee in charge:

Professor Nancy Grey Postero, Chair

Professor Jeffrey Haydu

Professor Steven Parish

Professor David Pedersen

Professor Leon Zamosc

2009

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother,
Maud Roberta Roehl Kennedy.

EPIGRAPH

“Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Directly, or indirectly, hundreds of people have been involved in this project. While it would be great to blame them for errors in this document, unfortunately, any mistakes are my own.

I would like to express great appreciation for the faculty at the University of California, San Diego in guiding me through this dissertation. Above all, I would like to thank Nancy Postero. She is a great person, and has been a wonderful advisor. I've had a few advisors in my short time on this earth, and she has been the best by far. She has read almost everything that I have written since 2004, sometimes twice or thrice. Without her, I would not have finished this project.

Jeff Haydu also worked closely with me throughout this project and always gave wonderful feedback. He has been an indispensable part of this work. I would also like to express my gratitude to David Pedersen, Steven Parish, and Leon Zamosc for their valuable comments during this endeavor, from start to finish.

In Bolivia, I have to thank the numerous campesinos from throughout the central highlands. Carlos Delgadillo was always especially honest and helpful. Ramon Escalera taught me how to farm and how the union works. Juan Carlos Roman kept me sane and provided someone to talk to during the moments in

fieldwork when one questions why anyone would study anthropology in the first place. I would also like to express my gratitude to the many friends and colleagues from throughout Bolivia who contributed to this project. I would especially like to thank Ronald Jaimes Cossio, Pamela Castro Orihuela, Wayra Linda Preisig, and Benjamin George Henry Strange.

On the domestic front, I need to thank numerous people for their direct and indirect help with this project. I give a big hug and “thank you” to the following wonderful members of humanity: Justin Agresti, Keith William Amoruso, Eli Elinoff, Daniel Michael Fattorini, Jamie Michelle Fine, Nicholas Robert Friedmann, Andre Paul Gonzalez, Rene Christian Gonzalez, Joanna Anna Hojdus, John Paul Jaquay, Timothy Karis, Hamlet Keshishyan Terterian, Thomas Richard Kivatinos, Jared Peter Morotti, Brian James Mudzinski, and Craig Ward Tripmacher.

I would also like to thank the continuous support of my family, especially my brother John and sister Maureen, as well as my nephews James and Joseph.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Politics of Representing the Past in Bolivia

by

Edward Fabian Kennedy

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Nancy Grey Postero, Chair

This dissertation focuses on the role of representations of the past in social differentiation in Bolivia. I examine how connotations of specific representations of the past form important catalysts for organization and mobilization by political parties and social movements throughout the country. Assertions of a direct lineage to various precolonial, colonial, and post-independent peoples have

played a vital role in contemporary ideas of difference between the highlands and lowlands of the country.

These conceptions of ancestry are used both by political parties and social movements to construct oppositional lines of descent, and perceived differences inherited from ancestors legitimize contemporary ideas about regional variation in Bolivia. This research outlines how these divides are the discursive means through which material claims are debated. Felt historical differences are directly connected to debates over revenue from oil and gas reserves, agrarian reform, and the influence of locally and regionally elected officials in national decisions. As a result, at stake is the distribution of wealth as well as the systems of land ownership and political representation in the country.

This research contributes to the anthropology of memory in three ways. First, by framing memory as a representation of the past, I demonstrate how these representations connect individuals temporally to a common ancestral heritage as well as spatially to a place. In this capacity, I argue that memory is a bridge connecting people to each other and to particular shared spaces. Second, in exploring the current role of descent in social distinctions, I show how an individual's perceived ancestry associates ancestral identification with a shared lineage, outlining a key overlap between autobiographical and collective memory. Finally, I demonstrate how power is exercised in the ability to control the connotation of important representations of the past through investigating how

these representations are catalysts for organization and mobilization by political parties and social movements. In this capacity, I show that representations of the past reflect, but are also used to construct, meaningful social distinctions and differentiation in the present.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“The people who forget their struggle and their history are a people who have no awareness of their destiny.” Bolivian president Evo Morales (British Broadcasting Corporation 2009)

On a warm afternoon in the central highland community of Ucureña, Bolivia, I was chatting and drinking *chicha*¹ with union leader Carlos Delgadillo. Over the years, we spent many lazy afternoons together outside under the setting sun, often but not always in the company of other *campesinos*², passing a *tutuma*³ of chicha back and forth while nonchalantly discussing the latest topic or daily event dominating Bolivian politics at the moment. The previous day, the community had observed *Día del Campesino*⁴, the annual commemoration on August 2nd, which celebrates the first agrarian reform in Bolivian history, signed in Ucureña in 1953.

At the base of a statue in the central plaza of the community are the graves of José Rojas and Jorge Solíz, the two figures who led the fight for the agrarian reform and are most responsible for the founding of the community of Ucureña. Their memory continues to constitute an important part of the celebrations of Día del Campesino, as exemplified by the numerous references throughout the day.

When I asked Carlos about these two figures, he stated that:

¹ Corn beer.

² “Campesino” will be translated as “farmer” instead of the usual “peasant” to avoid the derogatory connotations of the latter term in English that are not always present in the Spanish translation.

³ A gourd for drinking chicha.

⁴ All non-English words will be italicized and defined at first mention. Subsequent usage will not be italicized. Quotes and cites, however, will be translated by author into English.

“They are the two fathers of this community. I...all of us here share our ñawpa [lineage] with them. We share our blood with them. They built this community, gave us this land. We are connected to this land and to them. Our ñawpa is in our blood, and our blood is connected to this land. We campesinos are from the same blood...from the same land.”

“Ñawpa” is a powerful term indicating lineage and descent. It is a Quechua word that is commonly used to indicate a connection between people, both temporally to ancestors as well as spatially to a particular place. The use of ñawpa links individuals in the community to each other and to the central highland region. The metaphor of a common lineage represents a shared thread that weaves community members together in the central highlands.

A few days after Día del Campesino, I traveled east to visit the warm lowlands of the country, to witness the festivities commemorating Bolivian Independence celebrated on August 6th. By way of a close friend, I arranged an interview with Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee leader Mario Vargas the day after the Independence Day celebrations. Evo Morales, the first indigenous president in Bolivian history, had given a speech on Independence Day. As I read the newspapers the following morning, it was clear that his speech was not well-received in the lowlands. In commemorating the 182nd anniversary of Bolivian Independence, Morales had declared: “We are advancing toward internal and external decolonization” (Granma 2007).

When I sat down with Mario later that day, I asked him what his impression was of this particular quote from the president’s speech. His response:

“He said those words in Spanish, right? So is he against his own history? Does he reject who he is? Yes, the Spanish colonists did some bad things to the indigenous...slavery, exploitation. But, that history is a part of who he was. When Evo speaks to the nation, he speaks in Spanish. He needs to remember that he is the president of Bolivia, and not an Inca leader. He is fighting the Spanish colonists, but they are not here anymore. They have not been here for 200 years. The ghosts of colonialism are still in the highlands, but here, in Santa Cruz, we accept our history...we accept reality. In the altiplano⁵, there were many problems between the people there and the Spanish colonists...that is probably why they still talk about colonialism there...about the decolonization of Bolivia. But here, the people who were here, the Guaraní...they had a better relationship with the Spanish. This is why we are different here in the east from those in the west. We have different histories, beginning in the colonial period. Our *camba* identity began then. The way we speak, our tradition, history, culture...is *camba*. During colonialism, the Spanish and the Guaraní formed a unique identity, different from the west of the country.”

Mario’s thoughts echo the common sentiment of many people with whom I spoke in Santa Cruz and the lowlands of the country. Their perceptions of history emphasized the positive influences of Spanish colonialism rather than focusing on a legacy of exploitation associated with colonialism, which was otherwise felt and embraced by many in the western highlands of Bolivia.

These distinct interpretations of the past in Bolivia have come to the forefront during recent debates. Present-day differences are traced through separate ancestral roots. Assertions of a direct lineage to precolonial, colonial, and post-independent peoples have played a vital role in contemporary ideas of difference between the highlands and lowlands of the country.

⁵ “Altiplano” refers to the high-altitude land in the southern Andes, in the west of Bolivia.

Descent and lineage are important means by which current social distinctions are made in Bolivia. These distinctions have provided a foundation for varying regional histories and experiences resulting in variant affiliations that threaten stability. Conceptions of ancestry are used by political parties and social movements to construct oppositional lines of descent and perceived differences inherited from ancestors legitimize contemporary ideas about regional variation in the country.

This dissertation focuses on the role of representations of the past in social differentiation in Bolivia. The connotation of a specific representation of the past forms an important catalyst for organization and mobilization by political parties and social movements throughout the country. Similarly, perceptions of descent, lineage, and kinship play important roles in contemporary social distinctions. Ideas of difference, as well as national membership, are based on the interpretation and representation of the past.

This research contributes to the anthropology of memory in three ways. First, by framing memory as a representation of the past, I demonstrate how these representations connect individuals temporally to a common ancestral heritage as well as spatially to a place. In this capacity, I argue that memory is a bridge connecting people to each other and to particular shared spaces. Second, in exploring the current role of descent in social distinctions, I show how an individual's perceived ancestry associates ancestral identification with a shared

lineage, outlining a key overlap between autobiographical and collective memory. Finally, I demonstrate how power is exercised in the ability to control the connotation of important representations of the past through investigating how these representations are catalysts for organization and mobilization by political parties and social movements. In this capacity, I show that representations of the past reflect, but are also used to construct, meaningful social distinctions and differentiation in the present.



Figure 1.1 Topographic map of Bolivia.

The “Two Bolivias”

On an overcast day, I returned to the city of Cochabamba following a month of living in the rural community of Ucureña in the central highlands. I did so in order to spend some time in the city, though specifically for purposes of reacquainting myself with such luxuries as tepid showers and slightly-chilled beer. As became custom, my friend Ronald and I planned to meet at a familiar restaurant in the center of the city. There, we would drink beer and he would patiently listen to me agonize over my attempts to understand certain facets of Bolivian culture or politics and, equally patiently, help me to try to understand them. Ronald was born in the community of Colomi in the central highlands and now owns a café in the center of Cochabamba. Since meeting in 2002, we have always enjoyed lively discussions on all things Bolivian.

I took a taxi to the restaurant where I was supposed to meet Ronald that day. At a stoplight an indigenous woman ambled to the driver’s side window, hand out, asking for alms. Though not entirely hardened to such sights, this was common in the city, and I’d come to expect it. However, on this occasion, the driver called her an “indio de mierda” (“shit Indian”) and told her to go away. I had heard this term many times before, as it is a common, though derogatory, term used for indigenous people in the country, and is usually applied to highland

people by those from the lowlands. I had heard the expression many times before, but at that moment, I was struck by the casualness of the epithet.

I finally arrived and met Ronald at the restaurant. Although it was not new to me, for some reason on that day I couldn't get my mind around the racism in Bolivia, which was often implicit though at other times was overt and quite explicit. I asked Ronald about this, and while his well-reasoned response clarified the situation then, it still resonates with me today:

“Racism exists in Bolivia. There is a lot of racism here. It is difficult to understand sometimes Educito [a common nickname for me in Bolivia]. Ten or fifteen years ago it was there, but people just kept it to themselves. There weren't as many divisions as there are now. The divisions are becoming more...deep and real. You have the regional divisions, highlands and lowlands. You have the divisions of race, which are difficult to understand because most of us are mestizos really. There are the differences in language and accent. Differences in food, music, traditions...People think that there are real differences, but sometimes it is difficult to tell who is on which side. But everyone seems to be on one side or the other. You are either with Evo or against Evo. Evo thinks that he is an Inca emperor and the leaders from the lowlands think the indigenous are all backwards communists. These differences are artificial...not real...but both sides have leaders that draw borders that create these differences. They make these differences important. They both promote the idea that there are real differences, that there are two Bolivias. Bolivia is a historical accident. The borders were drawn by colonists, redrawn by war. These facts of history have led to the accident of Bolivia. Today Bolivia is not one country, there are two Bolivias.”

“Two Bolivias” is a common label for the divisiveness that plagues the country. Referring to the country as a “historical accident” exposes the extent to which regional differences are popularly embraced as genuine, as many in the country

consider Bolivia to really be two separate countries combined into one as a result of misfortune. On the other hand, Ronald cites these differences as “artificial,” accentuated and emphasized by “leaders” from “both sides.”

Historian James Dunkerley traces the history of the current divisions in Bolivia. He argues that political parties and social movements from the western highlands view the traditional elites of the eastern lowlands and other groups as continuing a long history of usurping the wealth of the country:

“[They are the] direct heirs and successors of Iberian imperialists and Anglo neo-colonialists who, from the 1540s onwards, pillaged the mineral wealth of what was Kollasuyo, then Charcas, then Alto Perú, and from 1825 the Republic of Bolivia” (Dunkerley 2007:135).

The historical roots of the recent divisions are highlighted in this quote, and the schism outlined by the notion of the “two Bolivias” was a common sentiment expressed during my fieldwork throughout the country.

The “Return of the Indian” and the Rise of Regionalism

The current regionalism in Bolivia can be traced back to the “return of the Indian” (Albó 1991) in the 1970s. Around this time other countries in Latin America—including Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru—also experienced similar revitalizations of their indigenous populations. The movement in Bolivia, known as “Katarismo,” whose name was taken from the leader of an 18th century

uprising in La Paz, Tupaj Katari, began in the 1970s in the altiplano region around La Paz.

Indigenous activists in the region, including students and intellectuals, formed “The 15th of November Movement,” named for the date Tupaj Katari was captured, drawn, and quartered by horses. Members of this movement formed two important organizations: the Center for the Advancement and Coordination of the Peasantry (MINK’A) and the Tupaj Katari Peasant Center. While these organizations began as mere cultural centers to promote indigenous education in language and history, they fostered a connection among urban and rural sectors in and around La Paz.

The first publication that outlined the political agenda of Katarismo was the “Tiwanaku Manifesto.” Produced in 1973, the document articulated a connection between contemporary movements and precolonial and colonial struggles. As I describe more fully in chapter 3, this has been a common theme among indigenous movements in the highlands of Bolivia.

The “Kataristas,” as members of Katarismo came to be known, remained outsiders with little political influence beyond the northern altiplano region. The election of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada to president of Bolivia in 1993 marked the rise of Katarista Víctor Hugo Cárdenas as his vice president. However, it was commonly felt that he was only political capital for Sánchez de Lozada to collect

the votes needed to get elected. Nevertheless, this can be seen as the first successful foray into national politics by an indigenous leader.

During the 1990s, a push towards multiculturalism and pluriculturalism by politicians and legislators opened doors to new interest groups throughout the country. While lowland movements, such as the *Confederación Indígena del Oriente Boliviano* (CIDOB), and various movements in the altiplano and central highlands had made some ground in local elections, indigenous politicians made little genuine headway into national politics until the rise of a coca grower and union leader, Evo Morales. His ascendance to the presidency of Bolivia remains a remarkable feat given the fact that no indigenous candidate had ever been elected president of a Latin American country. His election as president of Bolivia in December of 2005 marked the culmination of years of organizing, both by Evo Morales and his *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) party.

The roots of MAS extend back to the mid-1990s, when the powerful *cocaleros* (coca growers union) joined other campesinos in the Chapare region of the department of Cochabamba in forming the *Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos* (Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the People). This “political instrument” laid the foundation for the broad coalition that eventually became the MAS party, which was officially created in 1997 with Morales serving as its leader.

MAS focused not only on the rights of indigenous people but also other oppressed sectors in the country. Morales and MAS filled an important niche that built its constituency from not only indigenous groups but other factions as well who felt as though they were the victims of inequality and subordination. Morales finished second in the 2002 presidential elections and, through popular protests and roadblocks, helped bring down presidents in 2003 and 2005.

Perhaps the most incredible aspect of Morales' rise has been his election results. Since democratic elections were reinstated in Bolivia in 1982, a single candidate gaining a majority in presidential elections had been unheard of. Runoffs between the top two candidates were common, or else uneasy coalitions formed. However, Morales successfully garnered over 53% of the vote in 2005 and more than 67% in a referendum in August 2008. Unlike any previously elected president in post-1982 democratic Bolivia, Morales has been able to gain the widespread support of factions from both rural and urban areas, from both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.



Figure 1.2 Departmental map of Bolivia.

Regionalism, Difference, and the Politics of the Past

The ascension of Evo Morales and MAS led to the withdrawal of traditional political elites to regional centers of power, most importantly the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia's fastest growing metropolis and the country's financial center. However, the roots of regionalism were legislatively laid earlier, in the

early to mid-1990s, as reforms linked to the 1994 constitution attempted to decentralize power and the distribution of resources.

Decentralization was officially put into practice with the 1994 Law of Popular Participation (LPP). In essence, the LPP was a plan to decentralize the Bolivian government. It also attempted to incorporate the indigenous of the country into the decision-making process. This “state-led multiculturalism” constituted the government’s efforts to embrace and manage ethnic difference (Postero 2004:191). The purpose was to “recognize formerly marginalized groups, ensuring their individual rights as citizens, and, in some cases, granting collective rights as groups” (*Ibid.*). The LPP redefined citizenship, whereby citizens, indigenous or otherwise, were able to participate through local democratic processes, effectively decentralizing the Bolivian government. The wider implications of the 1994 LPP was in the reinforcement of a local political elite (Postero 2001). It was this local political elite that then began to challenge the influence of the national government in regional affairs.

While the LPP concretized a decentered Bolivian state, contentious regional politics in the country emerged with the rise of Evo Morales and MAS, as ethnic, linguistic, and racial fissures began to take center stage in national elections. Formerly implicit ideas of historical regional differences became explicit topics of conversation, and even themes around which national elections

were decided. The political landscape of Bolivia changed dramatically as indigenous groups cultivated a prominent place in national politics.

With the loss of their grip on the presidential palace in La Paz, the traditional political elites in Bolivia, who had previously dominated national politics, entrenched themselves in regionalism, mostly to the eastern and northern lowlands of the country (Gustafson 2006). The lowlands movement, composed of the departments of Beni, Pando, Tarija, and particularly Santa Cruz, is called the “Media-Luna” (Half-Moon) because of the crescent shape formed by the four departments running north to south along the eastern half of the country. Powerful social organizations, “civic committees,” political parties, and various social movements have led the push for decentralization under the label of *autonomía* (autonomy).

Lowland movements have coalesced around a regional identity that has superseded national membership. As the earlier quote from Mario Vargas attests, there is a sense of regional difference from the highlands felt by many in the lowlands, with its roots in colonialism. For example, a person from Santa Cruz self-identifies as a “cruceño,” but also as a “camba,” a formerly derogatory term for indigenous people in the region, but now a source of pride. The *camba* identity has arisen in the face of the “*kolla*” identity, which refers either to migrants from the highlands or people who live there (Stearman 1985). This *kolla/camba* divide

has played a decisive role in the endorsement of difference, especially in the lowlands.

The promotion of the *camba* and *cruceño* identities has been a catalyst for organization and mobilization by political parties as well as social movements. These identities are tied to salient symbols, such as the green and white flag of Santa Cruz that can be found everywhere in the lowland city. While the flag itself has a long history dating back to the 1860s, it nearly faded into extinction before it was revived in the 1980s by the Pro-Santa Cruz Committee, an organization with the innocuous title of “civic committee” but explicitly and importantly involved in politics. The Pro-Santa Cruz Committee has provided funding for days of “tradition” around the city and department of Santa Cruz, where regional music is played, food is served, and the flag of Santa Cruz is prominently displayed. Likewise, the Pro-Santa Cruz Committee has funded research on local and regional history (Camacho Áñez 2007). As a result, scholarly works dedicated to precolonial, colonial, and post-independence events and figures in the region have blossomed. As a response to “Andean-centrist” history (Muñoz Garcia 2005) that has dominated much of the scholarship on Bolivian history, there has been a concerted effort to focus research on Santa Cruz and lowland history. Importantly, these works have been incorporated into a changed educational curriculum in the region (El Deber 2007a).

Lowland movements have consciously constructed a history distinct from that of the highlands. These movements have arisen alongside, and partially as a reaction to, the rise of Evo Morales and his MAS party. Morales began as a leader of the cocaleros in the Chapare region in central Bolivia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Like many others, he originally moved to the region with his family to grow the coca leaf after the mines in and around the altiplano city of Oruro were privatized and he, along with many others, lost their livelihoods. He rose through the ranks of the MAS party, first becoming a senator, and after an unsuccessful bid for president in 2002, he enjoyed successful runs in 2005 and 2008. Morales and the MAS party focus not only on the rights of indigenous people but also those of other oppressed sectors in the country. As a result, Morales and his party have gained varying levels of support from the powerful unions scattered across sectors, including transportation, mining, and farming.

While union support has been important for Morales and MAS, their most ardent followers are inhabitants of the western highlands of the country, and especially the various indigenous groups scattered across the region. Morales has promoted a connection to indigenous leaders from the past, even taking part in two inauguration ceremonies: one official and the other a “traditional Inca ceremony” (Los Tiempos 2006a) at the cherished archaeological site of Tiwanaku.

During both his campaign and presidency, Morales has repeatedly referred to the “originarios” of the country, which can be loosely translated as “original peoples.” The use of this term has been important for Morales in solidifying his connection to indigenous groups in the country. Specifically, originario indicates a vital link to figures and groups that predate Spanish colonialism and the nation of Bolivia. Morales, his political party, and his supporters have coalesced around this originario identity, using it in their push for important material claims, including land and natural resources.

During his inaugural speech, Morales explicitly discussed his connection to his “fallen brothers”:

“In order to commemorate our forebears through your office, Señor Presidente del Congreso Nacional, I request a minute’s silence for Manko Inka, Tupaj Katari, Túpac Amaru, Bartolina Sisa, Zárate Willka, Atihuaiqui Tumpa, Andrés Ibáñez, Che Guevara, Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, Luis Espinal and many of my fallen brothers” (Evo Morales, Inaugural Speech, as quoted in Dunkerley 2007).

This excerpt from his inaugural speech is more the rule than the exception.

Constant reference to the past, during both his campaign and presidency, has been vital to the ascension of Morales and his MAS party.

At all MAS party rallies, one can always see the *wiphala*, a checkered–rainbow flag whose roots date back to precolonial Bolivia. Used in slightly modified forms both by the Inca and the Aymara Empires (Puente-Rodríguez 2008), this flag is seen at protests, roadblocks, in people’s homes, and now has a

place in the president's palace in La Paz. The wiphala is an important symbol outlining a connection to precolonial peoples. It acts as a bridge between past and present, grounding contemporary demands in indigenous struggles of the past.

As voted for in the new constitution of December 2008, the wiphala is now one of the two official flags of Bolivia, joining the original flag as a national symbol of the country. The writing of this new constitution was a major goal of Morales' administration along with the nationalization of oil and gas reserves and agrarian reform. It was with the constitution that Morales faced his biggest challenge, as the two sides of the national fission fought over the content of this new "Magna Carta," as the document is popularly labeled.

The Constitution

After an arduously long and contentious process beginning in July 2006, a new constitution was finally voted on and approved by a national referendum in December 2008. The two main forces contending for their version to be adopted was the faction led by MAS and the other bloc dominated by lowland political parties. Because the MAS party formed the majority at the constitutional assembly, they wielded the most influence in writing the document.

The new constitution is dramatically different from its predecessor. Bolivia became a secular state, much to the disappointment of the Catholic

Church, which once exerted tremendous authority in the country. Additionally, one article of the new constitution constitutes the fruition of a project Morales started long before the constitution's approval: ownership of natural resources by the state. This has had important ramifications affecting the rights to the vast oil and gas reserves in the country, as well as the mining industry. In a concession to the lowland movements, there is a provision for autonomy and further decentralization, although the practical application of this provision remains a matter of debate.

The preamble to the constitution sets the stage for the rest of the document. It is rather polemical, and quite obvious that the MAS majority in the constitutional assembly had the stronger influence in writing the document because it specifically addresses injustices from the past. The first paragraph discusses the geographic and demographic diversity of the country, and concludes:

“In this mode we configure our people, and never did we comprehend the racism until we suffered it since the terrible times of colonialism.”

“Así conformamos nuestros pueblos, y jamás comprendimos el racismo hasta que lo sufrimos desde los funestos tiempos de colonia.”

The “we” in this sentence refers to the indigenous people of the country, both contemporary groups and their ancestors. Additionally, as this example highlights, the writers of the constitution produce both an idealized version of the precolonial

past that is completely free of racism and a disparaging account of the colonial and postcolonial pasts. This is indicative of the tone of the document, which links current inequalities with past discrimination.

The new constitution explicitly addresses the contemporary connection to the past. It is “inspired by the fights from the past,” and the preamble concludes: “with the memory of our martyrs, we construct a new state” that “leave[s] the Colonial, Republican, and Neoliberal State in the past.” “Our martyrs” refers to the heroes Morales and his MAS party have spoken about since 2005. These include precolonial, colonial, and post-independence indigenous figures.

This connection between historical and contemporary peoples has been a narrative throughout the emergence of Morales and his MAS party. During both his campaign and presidency, they have pushed for “decolonizing Bolivia.” Their intended meaning for this has been to rid Bolivia of internal and external sources of oppression. The internal threats are predominantly the traditional elites that have suppressed the indigenous majority in the country, while the external threats are other countries, such as the United States, who have meddled in Bolivian domestic affairs.

The Bolivian constitution is the result of a long process of indigenous revitalization since the 1970s. It responds to many demands that were broached decades ago, but blatantly speaks to injustices from centuries ago. Additionally, the new constitution promotes specific interpretations of the past beginning in

precolonial times. The ways in which these connotations have been negotiated, constructed, and disseminated raise important questions regarding the relationship between memory, power, and representation.

Representing the Past

The new constitution highlights an important focus on the past in contemporary Bolivia. Bolivian scholars have noted how the recent identification and affiliation with past leaders and events have provided a platform for the organization and mobilization of political parties and social movements in the country. The association of certain figures from the precolonial and colonial past, particularly indigenous colonial leader Tupaj Katari, with current social movements and political parties in the country has played an important role in current Bolivian politics (Thompson 2003). Likewise, events, such as the indigenous uprising by Bartolina Sisa and Tupaj Katari in the mid-eighteenth century and Zárate Willka's rebellion of 1899 have been used by indigenous groups in the highlands of Bolivia to rally support (Dunkerley 2007).

Complicating the discussion are the unique regional histories that have produced distinct affinities and memories in the country (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984). As a result, the major divide between the highlands and lowlands has ceased to remain

simply geographic, as the lowland push for autonomy has threatened to pull the country into civil war (Los Tiempos 2007).

Debate over the interpretation and representation of the past has come to the forefront of debates in the country. Bolivia provides a wonderful platform to explore larger theoretical questions concerning both the politics of representing the past and how people view their contemporary lives through a lens of the past.

Extensive research has been done on the role of representations of the past in the present. This research, which is commonly referred to as the “politics of memory,” outlines the many ways in which the past is constructed, maintained, and bequeathed socially across generations. Studies have looked into the ways in which the past structures and is structured by the present (Tilly 1994). More recent work has traced how the past is continuously rewritten over time (Rappaport 1998). An offshoot of research that focuses on the politics of the past explores how what is ‘remembered’ is as important as what is ‘forgotten’ (Cole 2001). This genre of research connects knowledge of the past with power in the present.

Representations of the past play important roles in identity construction by contemporary social movements and political parties (Gongaware 2001; Simon 2006). Scholarship on the relationship between identity and memory explores how interpretations of the past relate to divisive claims in the present. These can involve claims to land (Adams and So 1996; Hendrix 2005; Murphy 1990; Said

2000; Shattuck 1991) and natural resources (Gordon 2003; Peluso 1995; Schmink and Wood 1992). Likewise, the process of identity construction (Melucci 1995) highlights an important facet of connecting the negotiation of representations of the past to contemporary identities around which political parties and social movements organize.

Outlining the nature of representations of the past can be traced back to Plato, who conceived of memory storage as akin to a wax tablet, whereby people “hold the wax to perceptions and thoughts, and in that receive the impression of them” (Plato as cited in Jowett 1892:255). Individuals receive the imprint of a memory and carry these representations with them in their daily lives. This line of thinking has permeated a great deal of research since individuals, as opposed to society at large, were viewed as the holders or receptacles of memory.

The common dichotomy between individual, or autobiographical, memory and collective memory is often maintained by disciplinary affiliations. While psychological and cognitive ideas on how memories are stored and recalled (Anderson and Pichert 1978; Bartlett 1932; Bower and Gilligan 1979; Bransford 1979; Eichenbaum 2002; Wynn and Logie 1998) can be juxtaposed with ideas on social or shared memory that focus on how collective practices produce and reproduce shared representations of the past (Abercrombie 1998; Auyero 1999; Bodnar 1996; Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992[1951]; Schwartz 1982), only recently has research attempted to bridge the gap between the two.

The dichotomy overlooks the notion that collective representations provide the symbolic framework by which autobiographical accounts are constructed by individuals. Collective memory helps to mold individual memory through the attachment of personal recollections to shared phenomena (Conway 1990; Nelson 1993, 2003; Rubin et. al. 2003; Thompson 1996). Individual recollections are connected to people (who), events (what), times (when), and/or places (where). This link is an important facet in promoting unity and continuity in social groups, as individuals reconcile numerous memories into a coherent personal narrative (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce 2000; Skultans 1998).

As I discuss in greater depth in chapter 7, research by Maurice Bloch (1996, 1998, 2005) outlines how certain representations of the past, especially those of perceived ancestral connections, provide individuals with a deep and meaningful link to others. His focus on lineage and descent outlines an overlap between autobiographical and collective representations of the past. This tracing of ancestral memory highlights an important area of research addressing the form and content of historical representations.

Especially when utilized by political parties and social movements, the precise connotation gleaned from specific representations of the past is vital. In particular, the main question revolves around what the actual composition of the representation is and who determines its content. In short, it broaches the issue of the nature and politics of representation.

Some representations are open to numerous connotations. These signs that have various or malleable meanings are defined as “symbolic” by American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1991). For Peirce, the connotation of some signs is more fixed than others. He divides signs into three categories: “symbolic,” in which meaning is arbitrary and derived from convention; “iconic,” which derives signification from resemblance or likeness; and “indexical,” which refers to signs that are not arbitrary and from which meaning is directly correlated to the sign. Peirce argues, however, that these three forms can overlap each other, and therefore should not be divided into exclusive types. For instance, Daniel Chandler (2002:43) discusses how:

“a map is indexical in pointing to the location of things, iconic in representing the directional relations and distances between landmarks, and symbolic in using conventional symbols the significance of which must be learned.”

Thus, Peirce’s conception of signs should be viewed as a continuum between arbitrary and fixed signification. While meaning is more predetermined and less open to manipulation or interpretation in indexical and iconic signs, the opposite holds true for symbolic signs. For example, a stop sign—which clearly signifies the discontinuation of movement—has a largely fixed meaning, whereas a category of representation—such as “homosexual”—has various connotations attached to it.

Australian linguist Paul Thibault highlights a process by which these latter forms of representation acquire their connotations. What he labels as “social

semiotic praxis” (Thibault 1991) outlines a practice by which certain representations get meanings attached to them. Essentially, significations become fixed when tied to social action. It is through action whereby certain malleable signs become fixed representations. This has important ramifications for understanding the politics of representation, as certain groups rally around particular representations that become concretized and shared among many individuals.

When these malleable representations are used by political parties and social movements, they can become extremely divisive, delineating social groups through the use of various identities and affiliations, such as class, ethnicity, race, region, religion, etc. Those with political motives can exert a great deal of power by defining the specific connotation of important symbols. They also have the potential to be dangerous because these interpretations can be representations that either reflect or construct real, felt differences between people.

Certain symbols that have a long history can be more resonant than others, making their use even more powerful. The utilization of particular symbols with rich histories provides more power for their contemporary use by providing a deep and meaningful way of connecting present conflicts and debates with historical precedents (Rappaport 1998). By separating social groups along certain lines, these divisive symbols can create a deleterious impact on the stability of a

country. Interest groups can motivate previously disparate factions into action due to claimed connections and felt associations with people from the past.

Divisions arising from felt differences in ancestry, lineage, or kinship can sink a nation into crisis, calling into question the felt bonds between those of a nation, and fracturing the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Especially in postcolonial nations, a history of injustice and inequality can quickly rise to the surface, resulting in the blame of contemporary inequalities on past ones. The issue of reparations for past injustices is a dangerous and complicated situation (Sarkin 2008). By looking at how these current divides are perceived and constructed using contemporary representations of ancestral connections, it is possible to understand the grounds on which reparations for past injustices are debated.

Bolivia offers an interesting case concerning colonial reparations. While determining who is culpable, how they are responsible, and what should be the form of reparation have been very difficult questions to answer in many countries (Henry 2007; Sarkin 2008; Torpey 2006), Bolivia has dealt with these issues directly. The constitutional assembly and resultant constitution have been the context in which reparations have been discussed. By connecting the agrarian reform and the nationalization of oil and gas reserves to reversing the inherited colonial legacy, Bolivia presents a compelling counterpoint or alternative to other accords. Instead of directly blaming contemporary descendants by forcing a large

transfer of wealth, the descendants of formerly oppressed groups have been elected democratically, and are addressing colonialism legislatively within the country, without international assistance or a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” Because of the indigenous majority in the country, whether Bolivia is an exception in Latin America or the rest of the world remains to be seen. However, the country does provide a pertinent example for addressing postcolonial reparations “in-house,” without help or pressure from international organizations.

Research Questions

The issues stated above have guided this research. However, there remain many unanswered questions regarding the politics of representing the past. This dissertation attempts to answer some of these important questions.

On a general level, this dissertation explores the connection between the past and the present. What is the nature of the connection? How are interpretations and representations of the past negotiated, constructed, disseminated, and bequeathed across generations? What makes representations of the past different from other types of representations? What factors determine the nature of the representation? How do these representations of the past effect the present?

Likewise, this dissertation attempts to answer specific questions regarding the nature of memory as a representation of the past. For example, to what extent is memory a political activity that involves the construction of competing narratives? How do these narratives catalyze organization and mobilization of both political parties and social movements? How do individuals use shared representations of the past in creating their own self-conceptions? To what extent is there an overlap between autobiographical and collective memory?

This dissertation also questions the extent to which national membership assumes the existence of a shared past (Connerton 1989). How do divergent regional histories within a nation determine national inclusion and exclusion? In postcolonial nations, do distinct perceptions of ancestry on a large-scale prohibit a sense of national belonging? What role do these distinct ancestral connections play in causing regional, ethnic, or linguistic identifications to supercede national identification?

What's at Stake?

While the previous questions address theoretical problems in the social sciences on the relationship between past and present, they also touch on subjects that are important in getting at the root of the divides that currently plague Bolivia. As the threat of civil war lingers, the future of the country remains

uncertain. Will Bolivia be able to overcome felt differences and move on as a united nation, or will instability continue to plague the country as it has since independence?

The focus on the past in Bolivia has coincided with the emergence of indigenous groups to national political power. Evo Morales became the country's first indigenous leader since the arrival of the Spanish more than 500 years ago. A major platform of his campaign has been retribution for past inequalities rooted in colonialism. As a result, debates over differences in historical experience have come to the forefront of national politics.

I contend that the regional variations in historical experience and ancestry have been constructed, essentialized, and promoted by political parties and social movements in the country. By glossing over biological and social interactions since colonialism, influential groups have constructed contemporary differences based on irreconcilable ancestral lineages in order to gain support for their causes.

This research outlines how these divides are the discursive means through which material claims are debated. Felt historical differences are directly connected to debates over revenue from oil and gas reserves, an agrarian reform, and the influence of locally and regionally elected officials in national decisions. As a result, at stake is the distribution of wealth as well as the systems of land ownership and political representation in the country.

While demands for the decentralization of wealth and political power by lowland groups were included in the new constitution, the lack of specificity on these issues does not necessarily indicate a resolution. Moreover, while revenue from oil and gas reserves has funded programs for social security, schools, and other social programs, the distribution of wealth to departments and municipalities has not changed dramatically. Likewise, challenges to Morales' agrarian reform by lowland groups have resulted in only small parcels of land being distributed in far-reaching corners of the country. The massive changes in land tenure first proposed in Morales' "agrarian revolution" have not come to fruition. Consequently, while the recent constitution alludes to changes in the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the national government, the question going forward is whether Morales can placate both lowland groups and his constituents.

Methodology

To conduct this research, I engaged in ethnographic fieldwork at various locations in Bolivia from June to October 2007 and from April to December 2008. This project can be considered multi-sited (Marcus 1998), in that I traveled around the country and acquired data in numerous locations. However, a majority of my time was spent in the central highlands, most notably in the city of

Cochabamba and the rural community of Ucureña. Large chunks of time were also spent in the cities of La Paz and Santa Cruz. Finally, trips to the cities of Oruro, Potosí, Sucre, Tarija, and Trinidad rounded out this research.

My research was conducted in two languages—Spanish and Quechua. While the greater majority of my informal conversations and formal interviews were conducted in Spanish, my knowledge of Quechua was vital not only for establishing rapport with research participants in the central highlands, but also for conversations with older monolingual Quechua speakers in the region.

Ethnographic research focused on the observation of practices, and interviews, both structured and unstructured. A large portion of my data was acquired through formal interviews that were recorded. However, as is the case in a great deal of ethnographic fieldwork, informal conversations also informed this research. Additionally, some archival research was performed in Cochabamba, La Paz, and Ucureña.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is roughly constructed as a set of interrelated sections, with each chapter as a standalone piece with its own theme contributing to the overall argument. Chapters two, three, four, and five describe the main points and

context in which the dissertation takes place, while chapters six, seven, eight, and nine investigate in depth the main arguments of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 explores the social production of space in Bolivia, with a focus on the central highlands. This region offers interesting insights into how spatial distinctions are experienced in everyday life. After a discussion of the theoretical foundations of the production of space, I will describe how the three spatial constructions in the central highlands—the city, the *barrio*, and the *campo*—have developed in relation to each other. I argue that differentiated social space has its roots in colonialism, but continues to plague Bolivia.

In chapter 3, I focus on the current regionalism in Bolivia, discussing how local affiliations have superseded national membership. The foundation of these divisions, I argue, stems from distinct interpretations of the past, referred to as the “politics of memory” (Tilly 1994; Rappaport 1998), whereby representations of the past serve simultaneously to both integrate and divide social groups. This chapter looks in depth at the role of representations of the past among highland and lowland movements forming the heart of the division threatening to push the country into civil war.

In chapter 4, I discuss the history of fluctuating alliances between national governments in La Paz and localized regional powers. My fieldwork in the central highlands demonstrates how the national government co-opts political power from the region, most often through the farmers unions. By looking at a detailed

case study of 70 years of vacillating associations between the central government and the political powers of the central highlands, I outline how the ephemeral building of ties jeopardizes national integration and promotes regionalism.

Chapter 5 discusses how corporatism is an important means by which political support is garnered both locally and nationally. By examining the function and maintenance of corporatist channels between the national government and local authorities in the central highlands, I explore the role of memory in the structuring of these relationships. The habitual use of specific channels for the procurement of goods or favors reinforces and reproduces the corporatist system, and over the course of generations, these long-held relationships become ingrained and configure current associations.

Chapter 6 explores how contemporary political parties and social movements ally themselves with historical precedents through the use of important symbols from the past. Certain symbols, namely flags and categories of representation, are adopted to serve political ends in Bolivia. I argue that power is exercised in the production of specific representations of the past via controlling the connotation of a particular sign, or what I call the “political semiotics of memory.”

In chapter 7, I investigate the ways in which representations of the past delineate a connection between people, both temporally to ancestors as well as spatially to a specific place. In this chapter I strive to overcome the dichotomy

between autobiographical and collective memory, outlining how interpretations of descent act to bridge individual and shared representations of the past. I show how memory contextualizes people, providing a sense of identity, a fuller awareness of self and community, and a bond to a specific place.

Chapter 8 explores the role that these notions of kinship and ancestry play in national debates. In Bolivia, descent and lineage are important means by which current social distinctions are made. These distinctions have laid the foundation for varying regional histories and experiences resulting in distinct affiliations that continue to threaten the stability of the country. I argue that conceptions of ancestry are used to construct oppositional lines of descent in contemporary Bolivia, and that perceived differences inherited from ancestors legitimize contemporary ideas about regional variation in the country.

In chapter 9, I explore how representations of the past are used in contemporary social movement identities by describing both the planning and implementation of a roadblock in the central highland community of Ucureña. This investigation of both phases, consensus-building and mobilization, provides insight into how social movements construct identities using representations of the past before subsequently realizing those representations as the basis for collective action. I argue that representations of the past become solidified when put into action, such as in mobilizations, protests, and roadblocks.

Chapter 10, the epilogue, ties the discussions of each of these chapters together, culminating in the central thesis of the dissertation: the role of representations of the past in the social differentiation in contemporary Bolivia. In addition, I broach the significance of the combination of two important factors in Bolivia: it is a country with an indigenous majority and formerly it was a colony. The confluence of these two factors, I contend, has been a catalyst in the apotheosizing of the past as an important issue in contemporary politics. Divisions along the interpretations of ancestry and historical experience have aided in the construction of ideas of difference in the country and threatened to push it into civil war.

My History With Bolivia

This dissertation stems from a deep history with Bolivia in both time and space. Quite literally, I have traveled all over the country. I've spent time in the freezing altiplano of the west, the barren southern region, the warm eastern lowlands, the humid, tropical jungles of the north, and the always-beautiful spring climate of the valleys of the central highlands.

My first trip to Bolivia was in 1999 when, as an undergraduate, I ventured to Cochabamba in search of adventure and instruction in Spanish. The experience was not a good one. Unequipped with the skill of surviving boredom and

loneliness in foreign countries via making friends with the locals, I was bored and lonely for most of what turned out to be the longest month of my life. I did, however, use the time well. I read about the history of the country and gained proficiency in the Spanish particular to Bolivia, locally referred to as *castellano*.

I did not return until 2002, and even then I did not know that this would be the first of seven years of consecutive trips to the country. Before my 2002 return, I began studying Quechua during the summer of 2001 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Nine months later, I received a fellowship to study Quechua with Cornell University in Cochabamba. Again, I descended upon Bolivia.

This time around I had an amazing experience. I ventured to La Paz, Santa Cruz, as well as to the central highland region around Cochabamba. Most importantly, I made numerous friends, many of whom I remain in contact with to this day. Subsequent trips around the country helped me to build relationships with Bolivians from all walks of life. While I have befriended numerous farmers in the rural areas of the central highlands, I can also count as friends fishermen from Trinidad in the far north of the country, students and social movement leaders from the eastern city of Santa Cruz and southern city of Tarija, as well as university students and professionals in La Paz. It has been the perpetuation of these friendships that has made the time spent conducting fieldwork in Bolivia a wonderful experience.

I arrived in 1999 with an interest in identity and social movements. I knew that there were deep divides in the country, but I couldn't quite grasp the source of the fissures. After having traveled around the country in 2002, 2003, and 2004, I began to appreciate the extent to which the country is still coming to grips with its past. A trip to the city of Potosí, the once-rich colonial city with the largest silver deposit in the world at *Cerro Rico*, now a mere shell of its former self, illustrated the transformation of a previously great metropolis into a depressing city of unemployed miners dependent upon tourists and the remnants of already-pillaged mines. Stories of forced labor and horrific working conditions are a staple of *Potosino* history. While the regions of Bolivia are each unique, one can find similar horror stories of colonialism from seemingly everywhere in the country.

There is an enduring issue in the country that, in my estimate, all countries in the world who have been victims of colonialism must deal with: retributions for past inequalities, exploitation, and atrocities. How to understand and deal with colonial history speaks to the effect of the past on the present. The scars of colonialism are clearly unhealed and have yet to be reconciled in Bolivia. National borders artificially constructed by colonial officials and subsequently redrawn time and time again by postcolonial wars have only further added to the inequality and injustices forced upon precolonial inhabitants and their descendants.

It is in this spirit that I hope this dissertation can contribute to the reconciliation, peace, and prosperity in the country from which I have learned, and owe, so much.

CHAPTER 2

Space and Social Distinctions in the Central Highlands

“Ven por aquí” (Come this way) said a noticeably worried Ramon as we exited the *micro*⁶ at the corner of *Avenida República* and *25 de Mayo* in the city of Cochabamba on a crisp June morning. We had traveled from Ucureña, a small rural community in the central highlands. It was only an hour away from the bustling city of Cochabamba but it felt like it was a world away. Although I had made this trip dozens of times alone over the previous seven years, this was the first time that I had traveled with someone directly from Ucureña to the city.

“Ven por aquí,” he repeated to me as we zigzagged around the claustrophobic streets in the southeast of the city. It was a Wednesday market day in Cochabamba, and as we headed for the walk to the *Cancha*, one of the largest markets in all of South America, I recognized the weary look of concern in Ramon’s face. I assumed his apprehension resulted from his understanding that it would be a wasted day; he would likely not be able to sell anything with a *gringo*⁷ attached to his side, especially one who would spend the day scribbling indecipherable notes into a book. I attempted to engage him in Quechua, but failed. Either his lack of patience with me or his hesitance to expose himself as a campesino forced him to speak to me in his familiar staccato-style Spanish.

Ramon toted a large white sack filled with potatoes over his back, and as we arrived and scouted an ideal location that seemed familiar to him, he greeted a

⁶ “Micro” refers to a common type of small public bus, or minivan, used for intracity or shorter intercity transportation.

⁷ A term used throughout Latin America for a foreigner, usually with white skin. It is often—although not always—used disparagingly.

few women who had arrived before us. Despite my difficulties in engaging Ramon in Quechua during our walk, he had no hesitancy using it in a lively conversation with the women with whom he was obviously familiar. When I joined the conversation, it was apparent that the women were skeptical of me. I was clearly the only gringo present, and their bewilderment regarding my ability to speak Quechua was obvious. Ramon recognized their confusion and after reassuring them that the gringo was merely a “harmless sociologist,” they went about their day selling the food they had brought, and bartering or purchasing food that they either could not or did not produce themselves.

As lunchtime came around, I suggested to Ramon that we go to the center of the city to get something to eat. Although I had eaten at the Cancha before, I was more comfortable eating at a place closer to the center of the city, which was a zone of familiarity for me. So, I asked Ramon if he wanted to eat at a little restaurant I often frequented that was a few minutes walk from the Cancha. Much to my surprise, he replied that he was not very hungry. I was puzzled by this response because I was fully aware that he had not eaten all day and it was almost one in the afternoon. He was either embarrassed to eat with me or didn't want to take a handout in the form of me buying him lunch. As time passed, I could feel my hunger and impatience grow; I implored Ramon to eat with me. The vendors and customers of the Cancha had vacated for lunch, and we could hear the noise

from the open-air dining areas in the distance. After what felt like an eternity, he finally agreed to eat with me at one of them.

Normally a very talkative person, Ramon was oddly quiet all through lunch. It seemed as though we were the only two people not chatting during the meal, which consisted of the lunch staple *silpancho*, a typical *cochabambino*⁸ dish of meat or chicken that has been breaded and fried, served with potatoes, rice, and a fried egg on top. I attempted to break the silence a few times with various small-talk questions, but his one-word responses signaled something was amiss. As we were finishing the meal, he broke his silence:

“Educito, we can’t go to the center...well we can go to the center, but I don’t want to...I don’t feel comfortable there. Everybody stares. Look at me. Do you see people who look like me there? Dressed like me there? How many campesinos do you see in the city center? Not many right? Maybe a few women with their kids begging for money or selling those small lemons that nobody wants. We are not welcome there. Campesinos are not welcome there. When we come to the city we have our places, and they have theirs. We eat here, they don’t. They have their markets, the supermarkets, and we have the Cancha.”

I understood exactly what he was talking about. It was an unstated fact that I had previously seen and known. Transgression of this unspoken rule did not happen. I expressed my understanding to Ramon, but my curiosity as to the specifics of what he was talking about remained piqued. I knew that the domain of campesinos was the *campo* (the rural countryside), but what about the *barrio*, the

⁸ “Cochabambino” is used to refer to an inhabitant of the city of Cochabamba.

liminal area between the campo and the city that had been growing for the previous twenty years around the city of Cochabamba? Ramon retorted:

“People live there because they have to. It is not safe, you know. Campesinos who do not want to live in the campo move to these places and try to survive. The barrio is a place of need, of necessity. I can go there if I want, but why? I don’t need to go there. I’m a campesino. I have my farm in the campo. I have the markets in Punata, Cliza, and here in the Cancha. There are doctors in Cliza and around the Cancha. I don’t need to go to the city center.”

What Ramon said made perfect sense. After spending a considerable amount of time both in the city of Cochabamba and in the countryside, it was clear they were two different worlds operating simultaneously. The liminal space, the barrio, was a place few ventured who didn’t live there.

I have come to know these three spaces very well, having lived for considerable periods in the campo and the city while also taking trips into the various barrios surrounding the city. There is a self-containment and self-sufficiency to each of these areas that set them apart. There are also associated linguistic practices, namely the categorizations used to refer to habitants of each of these spaces that confer markers of race, class, and ethnicity.

These spatial distinctions play vital roles in the lives of contemporary inhabitants of the central highlands. Ramon’s concerns echo common definitions and demarcations of space that are manifested in language and practices as well as in the restriction of movement within and between these spaces. The historical

constructions of urban, suburban, and rural areas in the region reflect relationships of power.

This chapter explores how these spaces in the central highlands are socially produced. The region offers interesting insight into how spatial distinctions are experienced in everyday life. After a discussion of the theoretical foundations of the production of space, I will describe how the three spatial constructions in the central highlands—the city, the barrio, and the campo—have developed in relation to each other. I contend that these spatial distinctions have contributed to unequal development and inequality in the region.

The Social Production of Space

The study of the social production of space explores how physical areas are constituted and lived. Distance and spatial separation can delineate social groups, integrating some and dividing others. Moreover, spatial boundaries facilitate certain interactions while limiting others. Space is a force that shapes and is shaped socially. In other words, while individuals make social spaces, to a certain extent spaces can also make individuals.

Research on social space ranges from perspectives that stress subjective and cognitive interpretations (ex. Kitchin and Blades 2001) to studies which focus on how the physical environment conditions or constrains thought and behavior

(ex. Foucault 1977). The majority of research lies somewhere between these two extremes or else attempts to unite them.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens broached the importance of space in his writings on modernity. Writing in the 1980s, he addressed dilemmas in modern social research concerning the study of time and space. For instance, he criticized the paucity of research on the subject in the social sciences:

“with the exception of the recent work by geographers...social scientists have failed to construct their thinking around the modes in which social systems are constituted across time-space”
(1985:265).

Giddens closely allies his conception of space with his theory of “structuration” (1984), in which he attempts to define the relationship between agency and structure. In brief, “structuration” involves the shared construction of individuals and society, with agency and structure mutually constituted. Applied to space, Giddens proposes a reciprocal relationship between society and space whereby space is not merely a container in which people exist, but instead are, on par with “structuration,” jointly composed.

Work by Alan Pred has criticized Giddens, citing a lack of focus on gendered space, the history of physical environments, the human body, and the deficiency of historical data. The major critique involves Giddens’ lack of a longitudinal focus on specific cases. As a result, Pred argues for a more historical work where:

“the joint time-space constitution of society and the subject is perpetually spelled out, is objectively embodied, without cessation, by the intersection of particular individual paths with particular institutional projects occurring at specific temporal and spatial locations” (1990:27).

Pred’s work deftly narrows the gap between agency and structure by focusing on the historical reciprocity of the two in the social production of space. As a result, Pred doesn’t place too much emphasis on the effect of space on human experience, conduct, and culture while allowing for change, variation, and the exploration of specific historical examples to support his ideas.

The author who laid the foundation for the contemporary discussion of social space is still perhaps the most well-known writer on the subject: French philosopher and social theorist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre explores how space both limits and constrains experience; space canalizes what people can do or say in certain places. He argues (1991:26) that:

“social space is a social product—the space produced in a certain manner serves as a tool of thought and action. It is not only a means of production but also a means of control, and hence of domination/power.”

Lefebvre’s writing focuses on the role of space in social reproduction. As a result, his Marxist perspective emphasizes the role of inequality. Generally, spatial studies in this genre concentrate on the function of space in capitalist production and exploitation. However, they also center on the ways in which these constructed spaces limit action and constrain the form and content of the thought and behavior of individuals.

Lefebvre's work has been criticized as "spatial fetishism" and "overspatialization" (Werlen 1993). In his critique, Benno Werlen concentrates on the role of action in the social production of space. Akin to the theories of Giddens and Pred, Werlen proposes an "action-oriented *social* geography" (1993:6 *italics in original*). Citing Foucault's idea (1983:219) that "power exists only when it is put into action," Werlen argues for a "social geography" that "must be able to analyze, understand, and explain appropriately...elements of the social, physical, and artifact worlds which become relevant in courses of action" (Werlen 1993:167). It is through action, for Werlen, whereby individuals and space come into contact and become mutually constituted. These interactions are at the heart of understanding the social production of space.

Werlen's work is extremely applicable to ethnography that focuses on the relationship between space and identity. Research in this field (Feld and Basso 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1992) demonstrates not only the importance of space in social and individual identity, but also in the formation and division *between* social groups, whether in a city, region, or nation. The categories and discursive practices associated with these spaces come to play prominent roles in how people identify others and themselves.

The rest of this chapter will explore these ideas with a specific focus on how geography and space have come to be defined, experienced, and lived in the central highlands of Bolivia. The relationship between space and identity has

become extremely pronounced in the country, specifically regarding local and regional identities trumping national affiliations. The social production of space and the relationship between place and identity plays a vital role in Bolivia in debates regarding the distribution of wealth, land, and political power in the country.

Wide-Open Spaces

Bolivia is a land encompassing a great variety of spaces, reaching from the chilly western altiplano across the temperate valleys of the central highlands to the long expanses of the warm eastern lowlands. Each region has its own cuisine, language/dialect, and ambience. While *salteñas*⁹ serve as breakfast in Cochabamba, Potosí, and Oruro, *cuñapes*¹⁰ are preferred in Santa Cruz. The Aymara spoken in and around La Paz is outnumbered by Quechua speakers in Oruro, Potosí, and Cochabamba. While Guaraní remains the indigenous language of choice around Santa Cruz, migrants from the west have brought the Quechua language with them to the city. The Spanish spoken in the country, named *castellano*, has the Gaucho-like accent of Argentina in Tarija and throughout the south of Bolivia while in the northern city of Trinidad, a Brazilian accent and

⁹ “Salteñas” are pastries filled with chicken or beef, range from non-spicy to very spicy, and are usually eaten early in the day.

¹⁰ “Cuñapes” are a mix of yucca starch and cheese bread and are usually eaten as an afternoon snack.

Portuguese words make it difficult for a castellano speaker from La Paz, Cochabamba, or Santa Cruz to understand.

It is not the geography itself that determines these differences, but more the definition of and association with a specific region that people deem these places to be different and identify with a particular region. The push for regional autonomy by lowland departments in the country has exacerbated these differences, resulting in regional distinctions taking precedence over national similarities.

Bolivia offers an interesting study in geographical sociology, as space and the control or occupation of specific places is often related to categories of race, ethnicity, language, and class. Socially-constructed space has been manifested in distinct spheres of power and control with long-standing historical roots.

It Goes Back a Long Way in Latin America

In 1781, a rebellion led by Tupaj Katari penetrated the city of La Paz. Born Julián Apasa, Katari led an unsuccessful indigenous uprising against the colonial regime. The siege of La Paz lasted 184 days. In the end, the rebellion was squashed, and Katari was captured, drawn, and quartered.

This rebellion frightened urban-dwellers throughout Latin America. The Spanish colonial officials had found comfort and made homes for themselves in

the cities, allowing them to be separate from the rural-dwelling indigenous. The rebellion by Tupaj Katari transgressed the rural/urban divide that was otherwise prevalent throughout Latin America.

The rural/urban divide in Latin America began in colonialism, whereby the city centers were controlled by white Spanish-speaking elites who would reign over the economic and political infrastructure of the region while the rural countryside was generally filled with indigenous farmers or miners. All of the agricultural and mineral wealth produced in the countryside filtered through the cities. For the most part, only bureaucrats or church officials from the colonial regime would freely cross between these areas. Indigenous workers farmed and mined on Spanish-owned land, and outside of economic transactions and religious proselytizing or persecution the worlds were kept separate. Likewise, indigenous languages predominated in the rural areas while Spanish was the *lingua franca* both of the empire and the cities across what came to be known as Latin America.

The Colonial Production of Space

The influence of the Italian Renaissance among the Spanish bureaucracy in the late 15th and early 16th centuries led to the incorporation of the Greek and Roman town grid plan first described by Vitruvius (Stanislowski 1946 and 1947; Smith 1955) into the design of Mexico City in 1523. Mexico City served as the

inspiration for almost every settlement, great or small, that was built in colonial Latin America. With a bit of variation, the designs were based on the same *traza*, or colonial settlement plan.

In the heart of the city is a central plaza, variously called *plaza mayor*, *plaza real*, or *plaza de armas*. Facing the plaza were the most important buildings, including the government building, called the *ayuntamiento* or *palacio municipal*, the Catholic cathedral or principal church, and two- or three-story buildings designed to house cafes, restaurants, and government and business offices on the ground floor, with the residences of the urban elite above. Radiating out from the plaza were streets laid out in a grid pattern, according to the *traza*. Rank and social standing were expressed in the relative location of the residences, with those situated closest to the plaza being the most prestigious and those farthest away the least.

Inherent in the Spanish Colonial city was the restriction of movement. As the plaza was the political center of the city, only officials were allowed to penetrate its borders. This system included a collection of neighborhoods in the outer periphery between the cities and rural areas, the “barrios.” These sections were occupied by indigenous migrants employed as household servants, manual laborers, and craftspeople. They contained mills, tanneries, brick kilns, slaughterhouses, and other city-owned industries deemed by the Spaniards to be

inappropriate inner-city land uses (Chance 1976). These peripheral areas generally lacked many of the basic services of the center of the city.

As Maria Elena Martinez argues, “the Spanish Colonial traza was simultaneously a plan, discourse, and instrument of control” (Martinez 2000:17). The Spanish Colonial city was a system of economic, political, and social organization. In short, it was a way of organizing and controlling the populations they had just colonized.

The Spanish colonists promoted nucleated settlements, called *congregaciones* or *reducciones*, for the indigenous in rural areas. There was the eventual adoption of the traza among these rural settlements, with a municipal building and church surrounding a central plaza. All of the agricultural wealth and goods produced in the rural areas were channeled through the cities via the *encomienda* and *repartimiento* systems¹¹ that, along with extracted minerals and slave labor, formed the backbone of the mercantilist system of the Spanish Empire in the Americas.

The Production of Space in Bolivia

In Bolivia, these spatial relationships continued in many places from colonialism until the early 20th century, as the presence of the feudal land system

¹¹ These were systems of resource extraction whereby wealth produced by the colonies of Latin America would end up in the hands of the Spanish crown.

penetrated many rural parts of the country, most notably in the central highlands. As a traveler went from rural to urban areas, they would cross not only geographical spaces, but social spaces as well. Understanding the social geography of Bolivia is an exercise in understanding the economic, political, and social construction of space over time.

A shining example of this is found in the central highlands of Bolivia, where the divide between the city of Cochabamba and the surrounding valleys is prominent. There are certain areas of the city, namely the south, which are dominated by markets and various services for the Quechua-speaking population. Visitors from the surrounding countryside tend to, in an overwhelming majority, stay in this area when in the city. As one progresses to the center and north of the city, the *mestizo*¹² history of the city begins to appear, up to the *Recoleta* and its surrounding neighborhoods, which are the richest, cleanest, and safest parts of the city. It is here where middle-class Cochabambinos congregate, shop, and party late into the evening on the weekends.

The liminal middle-sphere, the *barrio*, is neither very urban nor rural. Satellite communities that began as mere shantytowns have developed a local character of their own. Built by immigrants from the mining regions of Oruro and Potosí that were closed after the national privatization plan of 1985, it is in this area where development has mostly occurred over the past twenty years, as the

¹² “Mestizo” is a general term used to describe mixed ancestry.

urban periphery has become home to a new type of citizen in the region (Goldstein 2003). It is also in these areas where crime is high, coupled with low-levels of law enforcement. As a result, lynching is common.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the spatial construction of the central highlands region, from the city to the countryside. The journey between spaces highlights the importance of the relationship between space, region, and identity that are played out in local and national debates.

Traversing Spaces

Upon arriving to the city of Cochabamba by bus, one emerges from the bus station amid the normal chaos and confusion that surround most urban bus stations in Bolivia. The area immediately surrounding the bus station in Cochabamba is one of the most dangerous parts of the city, known as the *Colina de San Sebastián*, named after the hill behind the station. Among the regular ensemble of drug addicts and petty thieves are the infamous *kleferos*, glue-sniffing street gangs of children that might sound amusing if one hasn't lived in Cochabamba and been witness to their ability to provoke fear in the populace of the city with their headline-grabbing crimes. Stories of robberies and attacks by the *kleferos* fill the newspapers on a regular basis.

I had come to know the city well, fully confident in my ability not to be a victim, when I exited the station one day after arriving from La Paz and someone warned me “you should get in a taxi immediately because the kleferos will assault you.” I’m not sure of the extent to which this concerned person was certain of an attack, but I followed his advice and was whisked away to the city center. However, on most occasions, I feel safe enough to walk with my large backpack to the city center from the bus station.

Urban Cochabamba

The walk from the bus station to the city center begins with an option: one can either head east to the market of the Cancha, or north straight to the city center down a main thoroughfare named *Avenida Ayacucho*. While each path branches in distinct geographical directions, the socioeconomic spaces encountered in each direction provide a glimpse into the socio-spatial segregation of Cochabamba.

The decision to go east leads one on a path towards congestion in many forms. The Cancha market is the central point for buses, micros, *trufis*¹³, and taxis that shuttle workers, students, and vendors around the city. Garbage slowly begins to litter the streets during the morning, becoming full of trash by late evening.

¹³ “Trufis” refer to shared cars that run fixed routes around a city or between communities.

Every night, sanitation workers clean the streets and pick up the refuse from the day.

The experience of a day in the Cancha is hard to portray. The sounds and smells are very clear and sharp while the traffic, in the form of pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles add to the confusion. The heavy automobile exhaust coupled with the smell of garbage can make it difficult to breathe. The sound of screaming vendors, children playing, and vehicles assault the ears. The large stray dog population, coupled with the occasional but highly-publicized rabies outbreak, adds a dimension of fear. Moreover, the Cancha is known as a dangerous part of town, and crimes that occur here at all hours of the night are reported regularly.

The Cancha never really seems to end. You can spend a day walking in one direction and never make it to the other side of the market; its demarcated area bleeds into the surrounding streets. The market seems to thin out more than end.

Absolutely anything imaginable can be attained. A manifestation of the giant informal market in Bolivia, my purchases have ranged from pirated compact discs to all kinds of food, clothes, and toiletries. I've also been treated for chicken-pox and intestinal infections by doctors located in the market. The selection is limitless.

As Ramon's reluctance to eat with me that day showed, most campesinos that come to the city never leave the southern part. Since the main bus station and other transportation points are right next to the Cancha or a short distance away, visitors don't need to nor do they regularly stray from this familiar urban space. Quechua is as commonly heard as Spanish, if not more, and it is here where people from throughout the central highlands arrive in Cochabamba on Wednesdays and Saturdays to sell what they have grown and acquire what they either do not or cannot produce.

The few indigenous in the center of Cochabamba are usually women with a few children who can be seen selling small lemons and begging for money. I'm not sure who—if anyone—buys those lemons (I've never seen a single sale despite the many years I have spent in the city). Whatever money may be earned from the sale of the lemons, however, cannot be sufficient. Instead they rely principally on handouts of food and money from other city-dwellers.

The Clashes of January 2007

If one proceeds in the other direction from the bus station, northward along *Avenida Ayacucho*, the streets are noticeably cleaner and the predominant language is Spanish. As the city emerges, the prevalence of internet cafes,

restaurants, and clothing and department stores becomes increasingly apparent. In short, the formal economy emerges.

After progressing a few minutes north, one block east of *Avenida Ayacucho* is the central plaza of Cochabamba, *Plaza 14 de Septiembre*. The plaza is named after the date of an 1810 rebellion in Cochabamba led by Esteban Arze, a local hero and namesake on many streets in the city and throughout the country. It has the standard ensemble of a church and government buildings facing inward.

Protests by religious groups and social movements are a daily occurrence in the plaza. However, the infamous protests of January 2007 stood out among the others. A closer examination of what happened in Cochabamba in January of 2007 reveals how the social construction of space in the city correlates to social distinctions.

The socio-spatial integrity of the city was transgressed in January 2007 when rural unions and communities arrived in the center of the city to protest the policies of the governor of the department of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa. Reyes Villa had professed his support for the autonomy movement in the lowlands and his opposition to president Evo Morales.

Thousands of rural campesinos arrived in the city and clashed with urban *ciudadanos*¹⁴ in the streets of Cochabamba. The campesinos set fire to the state

¹⁴ “Ciudadano” is an important term in Bolivia that refers to both “city-dweller” and “citizen.” This label plays an important role in the urban/rural divide, as the connotation of “ciudadano” gives the impression that people who live in rural parts of Bolivia, such as campesinos, are not citizens.

capital and a car parked in front of the building at the *Plaza 14 de Septiembre*. The clashes that spread around the city left two dead, a *cocalero*¹⁵ and Christian D. Urresti Ferrel, a youth who has become a symbolic centerpiece for urbanites in their distinction from campesinos and resistance to the *avasallamiento*, or invasion by indigenous rural-dwellers.

Christian D. Urresti Ferrel has become quite popular post-mortem. The son of a prominent businessman, his biography has been published in various newspapers, and in conversations at my friend's bar in the city of Cochabamba, many people around his age claim to have known him. They speak of him as a hero, representing them.

¹⁵ "Cocalero" refers to a grower of the coca leaf and is often used for a member of the coca-growers union.

In a visit to the street corner where Christian D. Urresti Ferrel died four months before, there was a large collection of tributes:



Figure 2.1 Tribute to Christian D. Urresti Ferrel.

In the months that followed, fresh flowers remained ever-present, and new commemorations were added regularly. The most significant tribute was an official plaque that was placed there:



Figure 2.2 Plaque for Christian D. Urresti Ferrel

The plaque reads: “Great thanks to the noble neighborhood member and to the citizens of Cochabamba. In the name of Christian D. Urresti Ferrel (1989 – 2007), murdered in defense of his city.” My first glimpse focused on the dedication to him “in defense of his city.” I asked many people “Who did he defend the city against?” Many urbanites referred to the events of January as a

“civil war,” but a large portion of those who I spoke with responded that he helped defend the city against the campesinos. These respondents spoke of an invasion by uncivilized rural-dwellers. An excerpt from an interview is indicative of many responses I received to this question:

“He helped to defend us from the savages that attacked us. We handle things here in the city with debate, with democracy, with peace. They invaded our city screaming, carrying sticks, knives, guns, ready for physical attack. They are different from us. They wear sandals, they are dirty, they don’t shower...they should stay in the countryside.”

Using the third-person plural, “us” and “we,” reflects social distinctions built between the speaker and those people he describes. These differences are reflected in tangible ways, as “they wear sandals, they are dirty, they don’t shower.” As a result, for the speaker, these descriptions legitimize his description of them as “savages.”

The above quote exemplifies the differences felt between urban and rural dwellers among middle-class urbanites, especially the younger generations. Christian D. Urresti Ferrel was one of the many middle-class sons and daughters in Cochabamba that strive to wear the latest fashions, acquire the latest music, and drink and dance on weekends in the numerous bars and clubs populating the nicer areas of the city.

These youths compose the young adults who occupy the center of the city on weekends. North from *Plaza 14 de Septiembre* to *Plaza Colon* and up through the tree-lined *Prado*, across the river to the *Recoleta*, lies the heart of middle-class

Cochabamba. Numerous cafes and a few international and relatively expensive restaurants are packed with partygoers on weekends. Evenings in this area, especially along the Prado, are filled with revelers enjoying copious amounts of beer and spirits, which are consumed as play-for-pay (or play-for-beer) brass ensembles wander around this area playing loud and off-key tunes as groups of drunken single men and couples sing and dance along.

The Barrio

For many wage-laborers and informal market participants, numerous buses, micros, and trufis travel between the Cancha and the barrios to the south. Child assistants hanging out of open doors while screaming the name of various places scattered throughout the south of the city add to the chaos. The trip is often quick, depending where one is going, the time of day, and which route is taken. As one leaves the city, the scenery changes. More garbage lines the streets, poorer housing dominates, and there is the general feeling that the neighborhood is in a “developing stage”: not quite lacking the services of rural areas but definitely missing the infrastructure of the city. The main streets are often paved but dirt roads are more common and branch out to the residential areas of the neighborhood. Winds in the dry season lift the arid dirt off the ground, making the air brown and thick and breathing difficult.

Cheap housing and rent makes survival possible, although the barrio is not very safe. Exacerbated by the coverage of crime in numerous newspapers, a real fear of the barrios exists. Even the police are frightened to go to many neighborhoods. I would often ask my middle-class friends to take me to these neighborhoods, but they would routinely respond, “Do you want to get lynched?” The barrios are generally viewed as a dangerous place by urbanite Cochabambinos.

Urban peripheries have developed extensively in Bolivia since 1985. These satellite “cities” have sprouted around Santa Cruz, La Paz, and Cochabamba. The areas surrounding the city of Cochabamba have seen the majority of their migrants come from the mines that were closed around Oruro and Potosí.

When I arrived in the notoriously dangerous barrio of San Sebastián de Pagador with longtime friend Carlos, a bar owner and musician who was raised there, I have to admit I was a little nervous. I met Carlos a few years before through a mutual friend at a small concert in Cochabamba. He was very curious about my research, so when he heard that I was interested in San Sebastián de Pagador, he offered to take me there.

Ethnographer Daniel Goldstein conducted fieldwork in this particular neighborhood, and to prepare for my visit, I had read his description (2003:28) of a police report the previous evening:

“Shortly thereafter, the police arrived to disrupt the lynching. First on the scene were the three local police officers, who ran the length of the barrio from their station near the plaza, only to be showered with stones and abuse by local barrio residents. These officers retreated and called in reinforcements, who arrived in patrol cars, dressed in full riot gear. These policemen, too, were attacked by stone-throwing people in the crowd, and stones shattered the windows of three police cars parked at the bottom of the hill where the attempted lynching was taking place. At some point, a van from a local TV news station arrived, and, according to one report, this vehicle also was stoned by the crowd.”

Carlos reminded me that there was nothing to fear because he knew where to go. He subsequently showed me the gun in his glove compartment that he “uses just for protection.” We proceeded out of the city to the south and pulled up to an unnamed establishment with a hand-written sign that read “silpancho.” Carlos then advised me to be ready for the best silpancho in Cochabamba.

After he ordered two beers, Carlos commented that the neighborhood had changed quite considerably over the years. He told me that:

“People here are organizing. Officials in the city, they don’t help. They need to do everything themselves here...electricity...water. They don’t receive help from anyone. I learned here how to fight for myself. My parents had been campesinos, embarrassed to go to the city. When they arrived here from Colomi¹⁶, they were dressed like they were ready to...farm...plant seeds! So...they rarely went to the city. I learned the ways...characteristics of city-people...how to dress and speak. You have to learn how to speak Spanish...how to dress...how to be normal. Now nobody in the city knows that I am from the barrio or even that I was born in the campo. I have the tools to survive in the city...to not be judged...to succeed. Now I am a business owner.”

¹⁶ Colomi is a village in the central highlands about thirty minutes from the city of Cochabamba.

It is interesting to note how Carlos juxtaposes city-dwellers with farmers, who “plant seeds.” He found it necessary to learn the “characteristics of city-people,” highlighting his perception that there are a specific set “characteristics,” basic tenets of knowledge, that one needs in order to endure in urban areas. Only then could he have the “tools to survive in the city,” and “be normal.”

I have known Carlos since 2002, and he has always been very astute of the geographic and social journeys that he and his family have undertaken. Returning to the barrio in which he spent his childhood and adolescence must have been something of a victorious homecoming. He had become a successful businessman while many of his friends had become street vendors or taken the path of crime and/or drugs.

After a mediocre silpancho and a few more beers, we were soon surrounded by numerous friends of Carlos and his family. As night fell, the room got more crowded, the music louder, the beer continued flowing, and the spit-filled conversation characteristic of drunkenness finally got to me. I finally persuaded Carlos to say goodbye and drive me back to my apartment; I had to get up early the next morning in order to return to the *valle alto*¹⁷ to conduct interviews.

¹⁷ The “valle alto” region of the central highlands refers to the high valleys east of Cochabamba. The city of Cochabamba and the satellite city of Quillacollo encompass the “valle bajo,” or low valley.

The Valle Alto

On the journey from the city of Cochabamba to the high valleys of the region, the change from urban to rural is not precise, as some suburban areas surrounding the city have small farms that grow food for subsistence purposes or raise cows, pigs, or sheep on a very small plot of land. The road to the high valley is the old highway to Santa Cruz, which is now mostly used for transport between the city of Cochabamba and communities to the southeast.

Exiting the city, the road twists upward on the side of mountains and suburban housing, slowly giving way to squared farming hamlets surrounded by rock walls. About 20 minutes outside of the city the communities of Tarata and Angostura appear in the vicinity of the dammed Lake Angostura, the largest lake in the area. The coffee-brown lake boasts the best fish in the region, and middle-class Cochabambinos often come here on weekend afternoons to eat fish and drink beer.

The gradual entrance to the rural areas is accompanied by another slow ascent as the crowds of people thin along with the air. After another 20 minutes the heartland of the high valley appears, with mountains far in the horizon surrounding the large plateau. As the highway progresses, signs pointing to the roads leading first to Cliza then to Punata appear. These two communities, along

with Ucureña, the smaller community that is between the two along a dirt road, form the heartland of the region.

The valleys around Cochabamba are the agricultural hub of the central highlands, and have been so for a long time. In the 14th century the Incas forced large groups of people (*mitmaqkuna*) to colonize the region in order to grow corn, which is the primary ingredient of chicha, the corn beer widely used in Inca ceremonies (Larson 1988). During colonialism, the region was used to feed the mining centers in Oruro and Potosí, and this continued long after Bolivian independence. The central highlands continue to be dominated by agriculture, with most farms producing potatoes, corn, and wheat.

I've spent quite a lot of time in the high valleys since 2002, first as part of an excursion with my Quechua class, then as a volunteer on a farm, and finally as a graduate student researcher. The latest stage has seen me stay for extended periods, living with families or renting what I affectionately called my "shack" or *favela*.¹⁸ My favela was a simple four-wall adobe structure in the middle of a potato field in Ucureña, where I spent many nights writing by candlelight in my notebook on the simple wooden desk or else viewing the beautiful night sky during and after using the "bathroom" ditch in the field located a short distance from my housing.

¹⁸ "Favela" is a Portuguese word for "shantytown" that is commonly used in Brazil.



Figure 2.3 My favela.

I stayed in this shack for a total of three months over a nine-month period in 2008. My other bases in the high valley were in Cliza and Punata, but the majority of my time was spent in Ucureña living with the family of local teacher Juan Orihuela.

Juan grew up in Ucureña but attended high school in Cliza and university in Cochabamba. He teaches elementary math and science, and from all accounts is an inspiring teacher. In his spare time, he is also composing a history of Ucureña, so we had long discussions about the history of the community. On more than one

occasion he asked me about my research, especially why I wanted to spend so much time in the countryside. He was content living with his family in this rural community, but could not understand why any unmarried person would want to spend so much time in Ucureña. On a freezing evening in June, Juan declared:

“You must be crazy! You keep returning here. Have you noticed that there is nobody even close to your age here? There are children, parents, and grandparents...and you. You belong in the city. It is safe here in Ucureña. This is a place for farmers and families. We are very tolerant here. There is no racism...discrimination like there is in the city. I went to see an eye doctor in the city two months ago. I was told that he was the best. I left here early in the morning, took the trufi to Cliza and the micro to the city and a taxi to the clinic. After my appointment, I was hungry and went to get some food. I saw a *silpancheria*¹⁹ across the street and I must have not been paying attention or I was looking the other way as I accidentally hit...no not hit...gently brushed against [rozar contra] a woman as she crossed the street. She looked at me and screamed ‘stupid Indian!’ Everyone looked. Nobody did anything. I took the next taxi to get out of there as soon as possible.”

Juan was quick to point out the “racism” and “discrimination” in the city, as supported by his story. The fact that “nobody did anything” indicates a sense of isolation on his part, of something akin to a “fish out of water,” of being in an uncomfortable place. As a result, he “took the next taxi to get out of there as soon as possible.”

I’ve heard many stories that reference the general feeling of intolerance in the city center toward people from the campo. Even though Juan is a teacher, his clothes and his darker skin are indicative of someone who is not from the city.

¹⁹ A place where silpancho is sold.

Juan jokingly refers to these prejudices as “unspoken social-zoning laws” [leyes social de zonificación no hablado].

Conclusion

The “unspoken social-zoning laws” are tangible in the central highlands as one travels around the region. The targeted racism towards Juan in the city demonstrates the prevalence of the rural/urban divide. However, as this chapter has shown, the three major divisions (city, barrio, and campo) further delineate social groups geographically beyond the binary rural/urban divide. Furthermore, this chapter has also demonstrated how these labels not only reflect geographic difference, but also construct social distinctions.

Interviews regarding the transgression of spatial integrity in January of 2007 show how the adjectives used to describe the people (savages, dirty) and their actions (invasion, attack) attach spatial markers to perceived differences. Nevertheless, this only outlines the discursive ways in which spaces are divided into separate sectors. The real coercive power of spatial identities is confirmed through the ways in which these separations are maintained and the extent to which movement is inhibited. Coercion is not usually by force because social stigma, including staring and a general projection of discomfort onto transgressors, serves to maintain these divisions. Ultimately, however, this must

all be contextualized within a history of actual zoning laws and physical coercion from the colonial and national periods.

The current legacy of discursive spatialization was inherited from physical displacement and enforcement by municipal authorities in Cochabamba. In the late 19th century, *chicherías*, important centers of indigenous communal life where people drank chicha and socialized, were removed from the city's center to its urban periphery in the south due to sanitation laws (Goldstein 2004). The argument was that the city center was a place for 'modern' businesses, such as banks and department stores; it was not a place for such non-modern *chicherías*.

The displacement of *chicherías* and indigenous commerce from the city center set the stage for the current "unspoken social-zoning laws," as exemplified previously by Ramon's desire to avoid the city center. While physical coercion was initially a vital part in restricting access to certain zones, it is now enforced through social stigma and pressure rather than a threat of physical violence. This functions in much the same way described in Henri Lefebvre's work that shows how power is exerted in spaces through the controlling "thought and action" (1991:26), outlining the discursive means by which movement is restricted. However, in the central highlands, the widespread influence and success of differentiated space can partially be attributed to a history of physical coercion in the region.

This issue of differentiated social space, that has its roots far back in time, continues to plague the central highlands in a number of ways. One of the most pressing issues is in the realm of public health. The city center and the neighborhoods immediately to its north contain the wealthiest, cleanest, and most developed parts of the city. On the other hand, the southern barrios and rural central highlands continue to lag far behind in terms of development. Because spatial distinctions not only reflect, but can also produce and maintain unequal development, the southern barrios and rural central highlands continue to have poor sanitary conditions, leaving the inhabitants far more susceptible to disease outbreaks than those in the city center and the northern neighborhoods.

In addition to public health, unequal access to markets and the formal economy are also tied to these spatial distinctions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, by being restricted to the Cancha market, rural inhabitants are limited to certain areas of the city to sell their goods. This restriction of movement serves to curb economic opportunities for rural inhabitants as well as to maintain and exacerbate the inequalities between the city and rural areas. Consequently, spatial segregation, inequality, and public health are highly intertwined in the central highlands of Bolivia.

This chapter contributes to research on the social production of space by showing how spatial designations and labels restrict movement, development, and economic opportunities in the central highlands. However, this intraregional

discord also reflects larger national problems. The next chapter will take an in-depth look into similar issues on a national scale, as the growth of local and regional affiliations that have trumped national associations constitutes the most pressing contemporary issue in the country.

CHAPTER 3

Local Affiliation, Regionalism, National Divisions, and the Past

“Historically we have been marginalized, humiliated, hated, scorned, condemned to extinction. That is our history; these people never recognized us as human beings.” (Evo Morales, Inaugural Speech)

“Pachamama²⁰ doesn’t exist. It is part of the...voodoo... of the Indians. So they pray to Jesus and Pachamama? See, in the mountains...the kollas...they are ignorant, uneducated, they don’t know things. Here, we speak Spanish, we...don’t believe in voodoo. We are civilized. When the Spanish arrived, they tried to civilize the Indians here. It worked for some. However, they are savages. Here in the lowlands we are trying to develop...trying to have economic development. The kollas, what do they produce, what are they good for...potatoes? How many potatoes do you need? How many different types of potatoes do you need? We have resources, oil and natural gas and they want our money? We have agriculture, all different types, for export and they want our land? The kollas can have their land, their country. We just want ours. They can do whatever they want, but we just want what is ours. We deserve our things and...people deserve what is rightfully theirs. We don’t want what they produce so why do they want what we have?” (Juan Pedro, university student from Santa Cruz)

As these two quotes demonstrate, different historical experiences play an important role in contemporary Bolivian affairs. I’ve heard equally racist accusations from both sides of this fission that has threatened to push the country into civil war. While I am an outsider, I have still found it difficult to swallow the blatant biases that exist on an everyday basis in the country.

As one travels from west to east across Bolivia and the temperature gets warmer and the altitude decreases, there are distinct changes. While sartorial and linguistic differences are the most pronounced, the common belief that there are major regional differences is also apparent. Immigration from the highlands to the

²⁰ “Pachamama” is generally translated from Quechua as “Mother Earth.”

lowlands over the past few years has not served to blur these geo-social differences.

This chapter explores the historical roots of contemporary divisions in Bolivia. Distinct interpretations of the past are the discursive means by which local and regional affiliations have taken precedence over national identification. A key facet of the ascendancy of Evo Morales and his MAS party to national prominence has been the reversing of the exploitation of the indigenous population that began in colonialism. These assertions have served to legitimize claims to land, natural resources, political power and representation, as well as the distribution of tax revenue. Consequently, at stake is the allocation of wealth as well as the systems of land ownership and political representation in the country.

How these problems are dealt with will have important ramifications throughout Latin America. In countries such as Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, a legacy of exploitation of and resistance by indigenous populations has left contemporary disputes unsettled. Reparations for events long in the past have been a topic of debate from Tupaj Katari's uprising in La Paz in 1781 until today. At stake is the future of many countries in the region, perhaps more for Bolivia than for any other country due to its sizable indigenous population, both in real numbers and political influence.

The next sections will explore in detail the contemporary regionalism in Bolivia whereby local affiliations have superceded national membership. At the

root of these divisions are distinct interpretations of the past, referred to as the “politics of memory” (Tilly 1994), whereby representations of the past serve to simultaneously integrate and divide social groups. The main focus of this chapter is on the role of interpretations and representations of the past among highland and lowland movements that threaten to push the country into civil war. I contend that regionalism has been exacerbated by an emphasis on regional historical differences by political parties and social movements in both the highlands and lowlands of the country.

Politics of Memory

On December 18, 2005, the night of his election victory, president-elect Evo Morales declared, “Indigenous comrades, for the first time we are presidents!” (La Razón 2005). Throughout the election campaign, Morales and his MAS party projected an image of the indigenous people of the country as a force against oppression rather than the passive receivers of colonial or national policies. MAS is a coalition of various interest groups, with one important strain deriving from the indigenous revitalization that has been happening in Bolivia since the 1970s, a movement known as “Katarismo,” named after the leader of the 18th century uprising in La Paz, Tupaj Katari.

Throughout many countries in Latin America, the latter part of the 20th century witnessed a revitalization of indigenous movement activity. While the quincennial anniversary of the arrival of Columbus to the Western Hemisphere was marked by celebrations sponsored by national governments, indigenous groups did not feel like there was much to rejoice about the previous five-hundred years. Their perception of the past was markedly different than the perception of the national governments. Columbus' arrival, they argued, was not something to be celebrated.

The anniversary of Columbus' arrival continued a trend in Latin America during the 20th century that reinterpreted precolonial, colonial, and national histories. The reinterpretation of the past became a means to organize and mobilize in the present; it has informed current struggles, and heroes from the past came to be used in the present. This has important implications for how memory both structures and is structured by the present, reflecting wider issues of the politics of memory and the relationship between history and memory.

The importance of the past in understanding identities in the present is a common theme in Bolivian politics. Regional historical differences point to distinct local memories. Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has explored the role of regional memory among recent indigenous movements in the mountainous west of the country. Different historical trajectories, or collective memories, of two regions in Bolivia—the altiplano and the central highlands—

have resulted in different perceptions of the past by social movements from these two regions. In her work, *Oppressed But Not Defeated: Peasant Struggles Among the Aymara and Qhechwa in Bolivia, 1900-1980* (1987), Rivera Cusicanqui explores how the history of kinship-based communities, called *ayllus*, are distinct from the class-based history of unions in the central highlands. The key difference between the two memories concerns the history of relations with the Bolivian state, in that the *ayllus* of the altiplano have not incorporated themselves into the state as much as the indigenous communities and unions of the central highlands. Rivera Cusicanqui (1987:152) distinguishes the “long-term memory” of the altiplano from the “short-term memory” of the central highlands. Consequently, because of a distinct relationship with the Bolivian state, the historical events in which the social movements of the altiplano identify with are often associated with precolonial or pre-national Bolivia. Conversely, the social movements of the valleys call on figures of indigenous uprisings that began there in the late 1930s. Their unionization and subsequent interaction with the central government in La Paz has led to a version of history in the central highlands that is distinct from the altiplano.

Recently, the lowlands of Bolivia have begun to propagate their own regional history separate from that of the altiplano and central highlands. Lowland social movements and political parties have developed a “distinct history of mestizaje that is culturally and racially superior to Andean mestizaje or *cholaje*”

(Gustafson 2006:356). Drawing upon a divergent experience in regard to colonialism and nationalism while co-opting the Guaraní historical association with the region, these groups have constructed a hybrid “camba” identity that combines colonial Spanish and lowland indigenous traits (Lowrey 2006). Importantly, their positive perceptions of colonialism are contrary to most negative perceptions among populations in the west of the country.

These distinct histories have played out in national debates over oil and gas reserves, an agrarian reform, and in writing the new constitution. While highland groups attempt to reverse colonial legacies of racism and inequality, different historical experiences in the lowlands of the country have formed the backbone of resistance for the lowland elites. Distinct interpretations of the past have served as the basis for boundary-making in contemporary Bolivia.

Inverted Ice-Box and the Paradox of Social Cohesion

The concrete effect of a connection to a common past is the solidification of unity and integration in the present among collectivities that might otherwise be atomized. Interpretations of the past that are reflected in alliances and identities are often in opposition to other allegiances and affiliations. The way in which the past is conceived can become a nexus of contestation, as social groups negotiate and propagate alternative visions of the past. While memory fosters the

integration of collectivities, it can also serve to divide social groups.

Consequently, interpretations of the past are simultaneously integrative and divisive. This has been variously called the “inverted fridge metaphor” (Assies 2006) or the “paradox of social cohesion” (Eriksen 2005).

The “inverted fridge metaphor” expresses the idea of how social groups tend to steer warmth to the inside while projecting cold towards the outside. It is a metaphor used to describe the ways that social movements and political parties are formed and integrate around certain central themes that are in conflict with or oppositional to other movements or parties. On the surface this can seem quite counterintuitive; however, upon further inspection, it becomes clear that certain themes that integrate people can also be divisive. The paradox of social cohesion is essentially the same idea: the exploration of simultaneous social group unification and division. When both of these ideas are framed around memory, the question then becomes: How can interpretations of the past be simultaneously integrative and divisive?

The rest of this chapter will explore this question via a focus on how the growth of strong local affiliations, which are rooted in distinct histories and memories, have caused national divisions in Bolivia. This chapter outlines the national context in which the rest of the dissertation takes place.

Regionalism and National Divisions

On an October evening in Santa Cruz, I sat for an interview with José Mora, an 18 year-old university student from the lowland city. He is a member of the *juvenil cruceñista*, a pro-autonomy youth organization in Santa Cruz. I had met him through another friend who assured me that “José knows about the issues.”

As we sat down and ordered two coffees, José immediately asked me, “are you another Indian-loving gringo?” My response was: “While I would describe myself as sympathetic to the cause of the people in the western highlands of the country, I would never describe myself in quite those words.” He then broke into a monologue. Here is an excerpt:

“You...you...gringos, don’t understand the situation here in Bolivia. We are a poor country, but rich in resources. Those resources are here, in the east of the country. We know how to develop those resources, whether they are gas or agriculture. The autonomy movement is just about a more equitable share of the money from the resources. If we produce everything, why should our money go to La Paz?”

While José refers to the regional ownership of resources “in the east of the country,” he directs the conversation to the ability to develop those resources. In a sense, José is broaching the notion of a specialized regional knowledge. That is, only in the lowlands do they “know how to develop those resources.” Following

his argument, this serves as the justification for a larger share of the revenue, or a “more equitable share of the money from the resources.”

José began by speaking about a misunderstanding of Bolivia by foreigners, and then abruptly progressed into his explanation for the reality of the situation through his own eyes. He conceptualized the “autonomy movement” as something akin to a lobbying organization dedicated to attaining a “more equitable share of the money.” As is often the case, he couched his claims in the regional ownership of resources.

There was often a sense that foreigners would meddle in Bolivian affairs without knowledge of the history and the context in which the debates were taking place. I had heard this argument before. While it always seemed rather innocuous and sensible enough, it was usually followed by an emphasis on regional historical differences, and this case was no different. José continued:

“They are just different in the highlands. They don’t speak Spanish, they have...ummm...Pachamama and eat guinea pig and kill llamas and wear different clothes. Here we speak Spanish, eat normal food and dress in jeans. It started with the Spanish, with colonialism. We are from colonialism. We share our roots with the Spanish colonists. They, in the highlands, share their roots with the Incas. Their ancestors are the Incas and our ancestors are the Spanish.”

These felt regional differences have tangible manifestations, as outlined by José. Differences in language, food, and clothing are all easily noticed. Tracing it to historical variations, however, gives the impression that differences are much more numerous than are the commonalities. That is, local and regional affiliations

are much more pronounced and important than national affiliations. Also, there is the tendency to believe that these differences are legitimate, important, and real. Just as one would trace blood and kinship to identify with their own family as opposed to a stranger, tracing lines of descent and lineage to the Incas or Spanish does the same, but on a much larger scale.

José stared directly at me with his dark brown eyes during his entire monologue. He had said all of this without me asking him a question. Because of the inordinate amount of time that I spent in the central highlands, he was probably correct that I was just another gringo sympathetic with the policies of Evo Morales and his MAS party. However, his identification of my biases was followed by the disclosure of his own.

I had these types of conversations on many occasions during my trips to the lowlands. Formerly latent racism is now coming to the surface, most notably in the lowland departments. The rise of Evo Morales to the national stage, accompanied by the ascension of the lowlands of Bolivia as the economic powerhouse of the country, has formed the background around which these divides have grown.

The rest of this chapter will explore the history of movements in the western highlands and the rise of Evo Morales and his MAS party, followed by a discussion of the ascension of the lowlands as an economic and political force in the county that has developed a regional character of its own. Of special

importance to both sections will be their distinct interpretations of the past, beginning in colonialism and continuing throughout the period of Bolivian nationhood.

Highland Indigenous Movements

The roots of Morales and MAS can partially be attributed to “Katarismo,” a movement that began in the 1970s and took its name from Tupaj Katari, an Aymara originally named Julián Apaza who led an uprising in La Paz that challenged the colonial regime. During the late 1960s in the Aroma province of La Paz, a group of Aymara students formed “The 15th of November Movement,” named after the date on which Tupaj Katari was captured, drawn, and quartered by horses. The movement that came to be known as “Katarismo” bears this indigenous leader’s name, signifying an attachment to an indigenous and revolutionary past.

The 15th of November Movement culled many of their ideas from northern Potosí writer Fausto Reinaga, especially his critique of “mestizaje,” a term which was part of the revolutionary ideology of the ruling *Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario* (MNR) party. In *La Revolución India* (1969), Reinaga critiqued “mestizaje” as the dominant paradigm of the nation-building project of post-revolutionary Bolivia that justified and legitimized the domination of indigenous

people by a mestizo-criollo elite (Sanjinés 2002:39). He refused the “mestizo” identity and explicitly proclaimed: “I am an Indian. I am an Indian that thinks; that makes ideas; that creates ideas. My ambition is to create an Indian ideology; an ideology of my race” (Reinaga 1969:45). This rejection of mestizaje and proclamation of his indigenous identity was a cornerstone of his construction of the *Partido Indio de Bolivia* (PIB), or Indian Party of Bolivia. Reinaga’s *Manifiesto del Partido Indio de Bolivia* (1970) aimed to build an indigenous political party that would represent his “oppressed and silenced culture” (*Ibid.* 11). Recalling “the race of Manco Kapac, Tawantinsuyu, that was silenced under the weight of opprobrium and indignity” (*Ibid.* 7), the revitalization of a revolutionary indigenous past was at the heart of Reinaga’s creation of the PIB.

Reinaga’s pronouncements struck a chord with indigenous activists and intellectuals in La Paz, and other organizations, such as the Center for the Advancement and Coordination of the Peasantry (MINK’A) and the Tupaj Katari Peasant Center, began as little more than cultural centers that would promote indigenous education in language and history. However, these groups were eventually able to connect urban and rural sectors that were the impetus for the ascendancy of indigenous organizations that would come to compose the cultural and political movement that came to be called “Katarismo.”

The first concrete expression of the ideological platform of the *Kataristas* was the “Tiwanaku Manifiesto.” The Tiwanaku Manifiesto was a powerful

declaration that connected the “modern-day experience of racial discrimination...that served to catalyze the collective historical memory of the movement and the reaffirmation of a glorious past” (Rivera Cusicanqui 1987:136). Recalling heroes from the colonial and republican periods of Bolivia, the Tiwanaku Manifesto connected the present with the past through identifying and associating the movement with Tupaj Katari, his associate Bartolina Sisa, and Pablo Zárate Willka, the leader of an uprising during the Bolivian Federal War of 1899. The Tiwanaku Manifesto “spoke of the struggle to renovate the labor movement while pointing out the need to build an independent, political organization capable of truly representing the interests of the Indian peasants of Bolivia” (Rivera Cusicanqui 1987:135). Calling upon heroes from their past in Katari, Sisa, and Willka, the Tiwanaku Manifesto was a concrete “reaffirmation of the Indian’s past” (*Ibid.* 135).

The Tiwanaku Manifesto exposed divisions within the Katarismo movement. While declaring that “our culture is of first importance,” the decree also demanded “economic development” (Tiwanaku Manifesto 1973). In an attempt to relate the movement to a glorified Inca past, the introduction cites Inca ruler Inca Yupanqui’s declaration that “A people who oppress another people cannot be free” (*Ibid.*). With the goal of forging the “start of a powerful autonomous peasant movement,” the document identifies the authors as “We, the Quechwa and Aymara peasants and other indigenous peoples of the country”

(*Ibid.*). The identification with an indigenous identity is a cornerstone of the Tiwanaku Manifesto, and the idea of a peasant union is viewed unfavorably. The document argues that:

“Although peasant unions at grass roots levels and in many of their regional organizations authentically represent the peasants, peasant unionization at the departmental and national level has often been used to further interests which are entirely foreign to our class”
(*Ibid.*).

Self-identifying as a “class” after basing their movement in a historically-rooted indigenous identity, the authors of the Tiwanaku Manifesto exposed a tension between the class and ethnic-based organizing in the Katarismo movement that would later resurface with Evo Morales and MAS.

Pre-MAS Highland Movements Rooted in Katarismo

The period between the dawn of Katarismo and MAS exposed a lingering tension between class and ethnic-based identities amongst movements in western Bolivia. During the debate over indigenous identity and “mestizaje” in the 1970s, problems with the relationship between class and ethnicity came to the forefront. However, this tension solely reflects both sides of the same reality. It is not a question of class-based versus ethnic-based. The question comes down to the nature of the organization with regard to the composition of membership in the movement as well as the extent of alliances. While it is obvious that most

indigenous are poor and can subsequently take a class-based position with mestizos and other non-indigenous people, the more extreme sects of Katarismo that propagate an indigenous identity to organize refuse to ally with “q’aras” (Aymara term for people with white skin). Thus, a class-based identity allows broader alliances, but as history has shown, these types of alliances often fall victim to cooptation by political parties, as happened to the farmers unions of the central highlands, who began to lose power after their alliance with the MNR following the revolution of 1952 and especially after they signed the Military-Campesino Pact of 1964. Both of these past alliances by farmers unions demonstrate how coalitions with q’aras can result in cooptation and a loss of power for the movements.

The types of alliances that these movements are willing to make in Bolivia have been traced to regional and historical differences. Rivera Cusicanqui (1987) refers to this as the “two Bolivias,” in which the historical imagination in the altiplano extends farther back, with different historical experiences, in comparison to the valleys²¹. As previously discussed, the altiplano was never fully incorporated into the Bolivian state, with the ayllu-based organizing and historical

²¹ Rivera Cusicanqui’s “two Bolivias” first “became apparent in the mid-1970s with the first regional differentiation in the peasant-Indian movement” (1987:150). This is an important distinction because it highlights how the peasant unions in the Cochabamba valleys “became the focal point around which the MNR organized its Government-sponsored union apparatus,” which resulted in “the collective memory of peasant union power completely overshadowed any other memory of the Quechwa peasants in the valleys, and their collective perceptions were molded by their relationship with the State” (*Ibid.* 150-151). This is important because it demonstrates part of the reason why the ayllu-based organizing in the altiplano is more resistant to class-based union organizing.

imagination reaching back to the 18th century and the memory of Tupaj Katari. On the other hand, the movements that began in the valleys in the 1930s were part of the more recent MNR revolutionary government that took power in 1952. Together, they implemented the agrarian reform of 1953. The movements in this region were attached to the Bolivian state, and the land reform granted to the farmers unions made the members and their families small landholders, with the union as the main form of representation. Because of this absence in the altiplano, the ayllu became the more popular basis for organizing. These regional differences have more recently resulted in tensions among new movements, such as the *Corporación Agropecuaria Campesina* (CORACA) and especially the *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Marcas del Collasuyo* (CONAMAC), a movement that does not accept the union as the basis for mobilization, but instead grounds its identity in the ayllu.

One example of these tensions is the proposal by CONAMAC concerning the 1996 Agrarian Reform Law #1751 (INRA), which argues that the law does not allow ayllu-based collective land ownership. They contend that the law is “insufficient for the ayllus” because “it does not permit the right to [their] territory” (CONAMAC 2002:61). Likewise, the proposal argues that the INRA law “excludes indigenous authorities,” (*Ibid.* 62) and subsequently, CONAMAC proposes the “direct participation of indigenous organizations” (*Ibid.* 64) in the agrarian reform. Perhaps the most important facet of the proposal is the push for

collective titles to land. This speaks to the ayllu as the basis for land tenure and any type of agrarian reform. Organizing for collective ownership of land is extremely important for the ayllu-based representation proposed by CONAMAC.

A “March for Territory and Liberty” in 1990 by lowland movements, later joined by highland groups, to the altiplano city of La Paz brought about a renewed focus on multiculturalism and indigenous rights to land in Bolivia. While the march helped to facilitate the 1996 INRA legislation, the march and the legislation continued to expose the aforementioned tension between organizing around the ayllu and the union among highland movements that have their roots in Katarismo. However, more recent movements without direct connections to historically established organizations, most notably MAS, have come to play a prominent national role in Bolivian politics.

The Rise of MAS and Evo

Derived from the powerful coca growers union in the Chapare region of the department of Cochabamba, well-organized campesinos and unions created MAS in 1997 with Evo Morales serving as the leader. Central to Morales’ rise to power has been his strong stance and historical relationship with the coca leaf as a cocalero. There is much criticism, scrutiny, and worry about the actions of Morales and the MAS party, as well as of the cocaleros, regarding the role played

by the coca leaf in the production of cocaine. Morales has maintained his position as the head of the cocaleros throughout his campaign and during his presidency.

The campaign platform of MAS in 2005 focused not only on the rights of indigenous people but also other oppressed sectors in the country. This permitted MAS to gain support from the powerful unions scattered across sectors, such as transportation, mining, and farming. While these groups form the basis of Morales' support, the identity politics strategically formulated by MAS endorsed alliances across ethnic and class lines (Postero 2007a). In December of 2005, Morales became the first indigenous person to become president of Bolivia.

As head of the cocaleros, the coca growers union in the Chapare region of Bolivia, Morales built his constituency among the various labor and indigenous unions primarily from the western highlands of the country. Born in a community outside of the alitplano city of Oruro, Morales and his family became colonizers in the Chapare region of Cochabamba to grow coca during the 1980s when many of the mines were privatized and sold. The cocaleros emerged from among these miners, who had developed a strong class consciousness and had a history of militant struggle and solidarity. They eventually formed the cocaleros union to defend their interests and prevent coca leaf eradication. As the United States attempted to facilitate the eradication of the coca leaf in the name of the "war on drugs," replacement crops and proposed compensation to cocaleros in certain

regions of Bolivia were promised. Certain policies, such as the “Dignity Plan” led by the United States, are seen as direct threats to the livelihood of the cocaleros.

Morales’ elevation to the head of the cocaleros made him a national presence. He finished second in the 2002 elections and, through popular protests and roadblocks, helped bring down presidents in 2003 and 2005, culminating in his election to president. Throughout his campaign, Morales criticized the racist past in Bolivia, with a white elite governing over a country of impoverished indigenous. In various campaign speeches, Morales has critiqued the colonial legacy of Bolivia that has continued into the 21st century, and in discussing the new constitution, Evo said that he “really feel[s] that right here starts a new Bolivian history, a history where there is no discrimination” (British Broadcasting Corporation 2006). The feeling of undoing history has been a mainstay of Morales’ politics.

After a speech by Morales in the central highland community of Ucureña in August of 2007, I sat for an extensive interview with farmers union leader and MAS-supporter Ramon Escalera. Morales had announced his “agrarian revolution” in the same location exactly a year before, so the agrarian reform was a prime topic of Morales’ speech, as were the other two contentious topics that have come to be the source of great divides in the country: the new constitution and the distribution of wealth from oil and gas reserves. The support that Evo garners reflects a bitterness felt by many indigenous in the country. It reveals

anger over the difficulties that they currently face, but also the struggles that were faced by their ancestors. As the sun set on the long day, Ramon described the reasons for his support of Morales:

“For a long time we have had a majority of the people but no power...no representation in government, in La Paz. Now, we have Evo in power. We want to change things. It is hard to change things. It has been 500 years of misery and exploitation. I understand that can’t change in a few years.”

The use of “we” is an important indicator of the close connection to Morales felt by many in the central highlands. Together, as a collectivity, they can “change things.” Linking the third-person plural “we” with “500 years of misery and exploitation” has been important in linking Morales and his MAS party to the indigenous of Bolivia.

I asked Ramon directly about the constitution and the agrarian reform. His answer mirrored that of many supporters of Morales with whom I have spoken over the years. He responded:

“We want a complete change...we want a new Bolivia, so we want a new constitution. The originarios of this country are the majority, and we want the constitution and the government to...show that. This land...Bolivia, was our land. Then the Spanish came. Those in the lowlands, they are descendants of the Spanish. Bolivia is our land. We want it back and Evo will help us do it.”

There is the sense of a transformation occurring, of a “new Bolivia,” that is ultimately tied to a reversal of past trends.

When asked about debates over the distribution of wealth from oil and natural gas reserves, Ramon replied:

“We are all Bolivians, so why should they get the wealth from our resources? Does it make sense to you Educito? I’m not a mathematician, but if a country owns and produces something, the wealth generated should be spread equally among the population.”

It is interesting to note the strategic use of identities with regards to the different questions asked. Ramon deploys more divisive categories (“us” and “them”) when the constitution and agrarian reform are discussed, but uses a more inclusive category (“we”) when discussing the distribution of wealth from oil and natural gas reserves.

This was a common pattern in both the highlands and the lowlands. The malleability of categories of affiliation based upon the topic of discussion encourages the conclusion that self-interest plays a large role in the discourse surrounding current debates in Bolivia. While this may be true, historical differences, however slight, are emphasized in the promotion of distinct ethnic or regional affiliations. These associations have served as the catalyst for the failure of reconciliation over the “big three”: the constitution, agrarian reform, and distribution of wealth from oil and natural gas. This has been exemplified in both highland and lowland movements.

The Media-Luna, Civic-Committees, and Autonomy in the Lowlands

The ascension of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia occurred alongside a movement for decentralization by departments from the lowlands. The lowlands movement, composed of the departments of Beni, Pando, Tarija, and most notably Santa Cruz, has been called the “Media-Luna” (“Half-Moon”) because of the crescent shape formed by the four departments from the north to south along the eastern half of the country. Powerful social organizations, “civic committees,” political parties, and various social movements have led the push for an increased share of taxes, especially from oil and gas revenue, and greater representation and power in decision-making, both locally and nationally.

National divisions brought about by regionalism in Bolivia began during the 1990s when traditionally oppressed sectors, composed of class and ethnic-based organizations, began gaining national political power. The rise of these groups began to displace the traditional elites, who reestablished themselves in a movement for decentralization under the label of *autonomía* (autonomy). The lowland movement for autonomy is led by:

“elites [who] are constructing racialized and spatialized notions of citizen-subject rights and identity and regionalized territorial orders against the prospects of a redistributive nationalist and indigenous project” (Gustafson 2006:351).

The concurrent rise of highland indigenous and social movements to national power and the lowland movement for autonomy has set the stage for the recent divisiveness that endangers the national integrity of the country.

The lowlands of Bolivia are home to the country's vast oil and gas reserves, and also produce the majority of its agricultural exports. As a result, it contributes the majority of the tax revenue that goes to La Paz for redistribution back to the departments (Soldán 2007). A friend of mine who works at the post office in Santa Cruz told me a story about how his building needed a light bulb which had blown. For this, four signatures were required before the funds could be released from La Paz to buy a single light bulb. It took a month to replace the light bulb. This is symptomatic of the widespread idea that the tax revenue is being unnecessarily and unfairly filtered through the pockets of the western highlands.

The city of Santa Cruz, the capital of the department with the same name, has been at the forefront of the push for decentralization. Traditionally a backwater, it has risen since the 1960s to become Bolivia's second largest city and economic leader. It also differs noticeably from other regions of Bolivia, especially the highlands. While it enjoys a warm, tropical climate, there is a local character that is distinct from the western, mountainous region of the country.

This local character has been consciously developed by leaders in Santa Cruz and the lowlands of Bolivia in their construction of a regional identity. A

person from Santa Cruz, for example, is known as a *cruceño* but also as a *camba*, a formerly derogatory term for indigenous people in the region, but now a source of pride. The *camba* identity has been forged in the face of the *kolla* identity, which refers either to migrants from the highlands or people who live there. The *camba/kolla* divide has played a decisive role in the promotion of difference, both nationally and in the city. They began as spatial terms, denoting regional origin, but have evolved into important categories of identity with ethnic and racial connotations (Gill 1987; Stearman 1985).

Migration to the city of Santa Cruz from the highlands began in the mid-1980s and increased dramatically in the 1990s. Without a doubt the most common fear among inhabitants of Santa Cruz is *avasallamiento*, which projects the idea of an attack or invasion by outsiders, which in this case, are migrants from the highlands. The phobia that the migrants are trying to *aimarizar* (force people to adopt the Aymara language and traditions) and *quechuitar* (force people to adopt Quechua language and traditions) the population has led local leaders to *cruceñizar* (forge a unique *cruceño* identity) the city of Santa Cruz.

A plethora of research has arisen since the early 1990s documenting the history of Santa Cruz. These studies have emphasized the traditions, customs, and history of the precolonial, colonial, and national city. They have outlined the ways in which Santa Cruz has developed separately from the highland region. These

narratives project an identity rooted in a history distinct from the highlands, and produces a justification for current demands.

A recent work by popular journalist Ismael Muñoz Garcia (2005) illustrates the publishing being funded in Santa Cruz. His work exemplifies how the inhabitants of Santa Cruz and the lowlands region feel as though they have their own history separate from the rest of Bolivia. Based upon the premise that they have a distinct set of traditions and customs, it is claimed that the lowland departments are victims of an invasion by migrants, targets of racism, and robbed of tax money that is rightfully theirs. He speaks of “the Andean-centrist racism among the police, the violent invasion of foreign campesinos into private lands, national parks, and other protected areas” (2005:9). With regards to historical identity and difference, Muñoz Garcia (*Ibid.* 12) argues that “in almost five centuries of existence there have been numerous insurrections versus centralized power” in the lowlands while the “creation of Bolivia as a unified republic in 1825 did not begin without the persistence of a stormy relationship between the Andean part and the lowland part of the country, beginning in the colonial period” (*Ibid.* 21). Regarding the national sharing of wealth, Muñoz Garcia comments that “it is as if Bolivia had ten departments and the most onerous of them was the central bureaucracy, which does not produce anything useful” (*Ibid.* 67). He comments that “the money robbed by the State” is “robbed from the citizens” and

concludes that “Santa Cruz is the major tax contributor, but the percentage that is returned is much reduced” (*Ibid.* 68).

Muñoz Garcia touches on a few common themes that I heard throughout my time in the lowlands, including the notions of “Andean-centrism” in the country, “invasions” from the highlands into the lowlands, a history of “insurrections versus centralized power,” a “stormy relationship between the Andean part and lowland part of the country, beginning in the colonial period,” and the general sense that the lowlands are being “robbed” by the highlands. These topics are a mainstay in editorials in lowland newspapers and television news programs. They are also a fixture in speeches by politicians in the region.

However, a growing trend that I have noticed has been how even the most innocuous of comments would often have underlying racist sympathies. For example, one time at a bar in Santa Cruz, I was engaged in a conversation with a student who was complaining that the lowlands were being ripped off and robbed of tax revenue. The student quickly turned the conversation into a rant regarding the “indios de mierda” and the invasion of kollas from the highlands.

Talking with Mario

On an April evening in the main plaza of Santa Cruz, I sat down to interview a member of the powerful Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee, Mario

Vargas. Mario makes a very good living as the owner of a chain of fried chicken establishments.

The entire interview was filled with tension. When I asked him what he thought of the writing of the new constitution and the constitutional assembly, he implored:

“You know what we want. Don’t you pay attention...read the newspapers? We just want more local representation, more of a say in our own affairs. Do you know the political system of your country? Don’t states have the power to decide local affairs? Shouldn’t states have the right to decide local affairs? We have a song, the Hymn of Santa Cruz²² that was written many years ago...that demonstrates our independence...differences from other people. We have a different identity from those to the west. We are not them, they are not us. We can all be Bolivians, but you must understand that we want...more of what is rightfully ours. We have our own cultural institutions, so why not economic and political as well?”

Mario touches on an important definition of “democracy” and representation in the lowlands, specifically regarding the notion of “local representation.”

Centralized nationalized power, even stemming from free and fair elections, has been viewed as autocratic and authoritarian by leaders in the lowlands. When tied to “independence” and regional difference, the use of “democracy” has been a powerful tool for lowland movements to challenge national power.

Likewise, Mario echoed what many had previously told me, both in interviews as well as informally in cafes, on the street, and in restaurants. This sense of a distinct cultural tradition and history formed the basis for demands for

²² The “Hymn of Santa Cruz” was written in 1864 by Tristán Roca, who also created the green and white flag of Santa Cruz that can be seen everywhere in the city and department of the same name.

more political power and a greater share of the wealth produced in the region.

When asked about the agrarian reform and the distribution of wealth from oil and gas revenue, Mario said tersely:

“They are stealing our land, you know...taking it from people who own it, who bought it many years ago and now they want to redistribute it. It is unfair...unfair. How can they do that? See this pen? I own it. If someone takes it from me, it is stealing. I bought this pen last week...I own this pen. It is mine. If someone takes it, they are stealing from me, and they are breaking the law. However, when the government does it, then it is not stealing. It is the same with the gas. It is produced here. Do we get the wealth from the mines in Oruro and Potosí? No...No! None of the money comes from there to here. I understand that we are all Bolivians...in the country of Bolivia and that the gas is in this country. However, why should all the profit go to La Paz? We produce most of the wealth in this country. It is our workers, our land, and our wealth. It should be ours. We are cruceños...cambas...we have a different history...our customs, our traditions, our history. It is ours. It is not a history of Bolivia. Bolivian history...you want to know about Bolivian history? Ask someone in La Paz. You want to know about cruceño history? Ask me. This is the basis for who we are, our identity. It is the answer to all of your questions: the constitution, the land, and the gas. This is what you can write in your thesis.”

By promoting the sense of ownership and theft of land, Mario uses the discourse of legality to criticize the agrarian reform and the distribution of wealth from oil and gas revenue. His claims are based in local and regional differences, as “cruceños” and “cambas.”

Vargas’ responses are typical of many who are allied with the Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee. There is an association with a history distinct from the highlands and a concrete belief in the existence of “two Bolivias” that simultaneously exist and have come to be one country by some historical

accident. These distinct interpretations of the past have been the rallying cry around which the autonomy movement has legitimized itself.

Conclusion

The historical accident of Bolivia has long connected the center of power in La Paz with far-flung regional cities. The current decentralization movement in the lowlands demonstrates the challenges of forging a national identity in the face of divergent historical experiences. This is further complicated by, and possibly irreconcilable because of, the contemporary promotion of distinct ancestries.

The significance of connecting contemporary problems with past events and figures has come to be known as the “politics of memory” (Rappaport 1998; Tilly 1994), thus called because it is deduced that interpretations of the past carry political overtones in the present. This chapter contributes to this genre of research by showing how the use of the past links certain representations of the past to material claims. President Evo Morales has repeatedly recalled the memories of historical figures from the past in pursuit of support for his policies, including the nationalization of oil and gas reserves, the writing of a new constitution, and an agrarian reform. These interpretations carry important material and practical weight, with the distribution of wealth as well as the systems of land ownership and political representation in the country at stake.

The specific ways in which interpretations of the past are negotiated, contested, and propagated play a large part in determining one's affiliation and association, whether with a particular social movement or a political party. As we saw with the Media-Luna movement, their views on lowland history and traditions as distinct from the highlands are a basis for the arguments for autonomy. The "historical accident" of Bolivia, as it is commonly termed in the lowlands, is traced back to colonialism. Nevertheless, I contend that it has been the emphasis on these distinct regional histories that has caused the loss of a unified and coherent national identity. Differences in regional histories exist; however, powerful coalitions have accentuated and used these differences to deepen the regional rifts in the country.

Regional affiliation trumping national membership has occurred throughout the history of the country, from the lowlands across the central highlands to the altiplano. The next chapter will explore these issues by taking an in-depth look at the oscillating relationship between the national government in La Paz and local political parties and social movements in the central highlands of the country. It will highlight the existence of long-standing tensions between the national government and regional centers of power.

CHAPTER 4

Local/National Oscillation

The base of a statue in the middle of the central plaza in the rural community of Ucureña is fitted with various plaques commemorating past leaders of the farmers union and significant events throughout the history of Ucureña. The community forms the centerpiece of farmers union activity in the central highlands. While Cliza is the administrative capital of the province of Germán Jordán, Ucureña continues as the political heart of the region because of its status as a center of farmers union power.

On a lazy afternoon in July, I sat on a bench under some trees in the center of the plaza in Ucureña, and chatted with union leader Carlos Delgadillo. Carlos was impressed by my knowledge of the history of the community and region, and he would often test me regarding key names or events. On that day, he pointed to the central statue and said, “who is that?” In the center of Ucureña sits the following statue:



Figure 4.1 The statue of *El Campesino*.

With confidence I told him that it was *El Campesino*, a model campesino from the high valleys who represented the campesino movement that culminated in the agrarian reform of 1953. He responded: “Well it looks like your studies have failed you. Take a closer look. Do campesinos look like that?” I was confused. I knew that this statue was called “El Campesino.” So who or what could it represent?

“That is just a regular...Indian...Indigenous. Banzer changed the statue in the 1970s when he was president. That is not a campesino. I have never seen anyone who looks like that, but that

is what they thought...The government in La Paz changed the statue against our wishes. We don't like it very much. It is not us.”

He was right. On closer inspection, the statue definitely did not depict any campesinos that I had ever seen in the region; instead, it seemed to clearly represent a stereotypical socialist worker, with a book and axe in his hands. The statue reflects more of the politics of the Banzer dictatorship of the 1970s than anything resembling the community of Ucureña or the central highland region.

These local/national tensions have been common throughout the history of the central highlands. As I document in this chapter, my fieldwork in the region demonstrates how the national government co-opts political power from the central highlands, most often through the farmers unions. The history of the central highlands over the previous 70 years demonstrates a wide variety of junctures when the central highlands went in and out of favor with the central government. The most recent oscillation is the overwhelming support of Evo Morales and his MAS party.

In order to understand how and why national governments in La Paz and regional powers have had fluctuating alliances, I employ Stuart Hall's concept of “articulation.” It is a useful tool that analyzes the strategies involved in the making and breaking of political alliances. At the center of the concept is a description of the discourse and practices that foster collaboration. Hall (1986:53) defines articulation as:

“the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’. The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected.”

An exploration of the context in which alliances are forged makes it possible to uncover the specific interests involved and strategies employed in the ephemeral association. It is because of those common interests and pursuit of common goals, however, that differences between the various parties are erased or ignored. Over time, as differences overcome common interests, these ephemeral alliances are severed.

Based on the political context, the seat of the national government in La Paz has made and broke alliances as the political environment dictates. Through a detailed case study of 70 years of vacillating associations between the central government and the political powers in the central highlands, I demonstrate in this chapter how the pattern of “articulations” that focus more on building ties based on ephemeral interests threatens national integration and promotes regionalism in the country. As a result of the legacy of highly-centralized authority in Bolivia that dictates the level of influence of local and regional political parties and social movements, at issue is the distribution of political power in the country.

From a Land of Peons to the Region of Unions

The central highlands of Bolivia have developed into a territory with its own character. Local affiliations have been grounded in the farmers unions that have dominated the region politically, socially, and economically since their genesis in the 1930s. Collaboration with the farmers unions has been vital in acquiring support from the central highlands in national elections. Shifting alliances have also made the farmers unions in the central highlands a key part of the national political scene in Bolivia for almost a century.

When then-president Victor Paz Estenssoro signed the first agrarian reform law in Bolivian history in 1953, he chose to do so in the community of Ucureña to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of the first farmers union in the country, which began to organize in Ucureña almost two decades prior to this watershed moment in Bolivian history. With one pen stroke, Estenssoro not only legitimized the farmers union organizations, but also made them the main instrument to implement the decree. The farmers who attended the ceremony on that August morning had played a decisive role in the design of the agrarian reform, and in subsequent years continued the takeover of *hacienda* (large private landholding) lands throughout the country.

The Agrarian Reform Decree was the culmination of over seventeen years of unionization by farmers throughout the central highlands. The period immediately following the institution of this decree marked the apogee of the power of the farmers unions who, by then, composed a vast network of armed militias with tremendous political clout both locally and nationally, armed and supported by Estenssoro's MNR government. When the MNR assumed control of the country after the revolution of April 9th, 1952, the term "campesino" was officially adopted to replace "Indian" to describe the rural farmers in all government documents and programs. The espousal of "campesino" by the MNR government signaled not only a definite shift in representation, but also marked a revision in relations between the Bolivian state and the thousands of rural farmers throughout the country who were organized into "sindicatos campesinos."²³

Farmers unions began to organize around the "campesino" identity after the Chaco War with Paraguay ended in 1935. The foremost participants in the push for unionization were the ex-combatants who returned to the countryside of Bolivia after the war: the so-called "Chaco Generation." Uprisings in the central highlands against the *hacendados* (large landholders) and various local, departmental, and national governments had taken place in Bolivia since its independence in 1825. However, organized networks of unions in the valley, allied with other unions throughout the country, had not been possible before the

²³ "Sindicatos campesinos" will be translated as and used interchangeably with "farmers unions."

Chaco War. The war “revealed to the nation all its faults...political and military errors, the administrative corruption...and for the first time people had intimate contact with other classes from the nation” (Klein 1968:213). “The veterans that survived in the Chaco came to compose the new political order in Bolivia...The men came to constitute, in effect, the internal political scene for years to come” (*Ibid.* 222). The “Chaco Generation” became the new military officers, politicians, teachers, and union leaders that would guide Bolivia to the revolution of 1952 and agrarian reform of 1953. The latter signaled a victory after years of organizing the farmers unions.

Renowned Bolivian historian Herbert S. Klein (1982:234) wonderfully captures the chaos in the central highlands after the 1952 revolution:

“...in the last half of 1952 and the beginning of 1953 rural society began to collapse, despite all the efforts of the [MNR] regime to control the situation. With the army ineffectual, arms quickly reaching the countryside, and young political radicals spreading the word, a systematic peasant attack on the entire *latifundia* system had developed. In many ways similar to the peasant movement known as the ‘Great Fear’ in the French Revolution, the period from late 1952 until early 1953 saw the destruction of work records in the rural areas, the killing and/or expulsion of overseers and landowners, and the forcible seizure of land. Meanwhile the peasants, using traditional community organizations, began to organize peasant *sindicatos* with the encouragement of the COB²⁴, to receive arms, and to create formal militia organizations. Although the countryside had been relatively indifferent and little affected by the great conflicts of April 1952, it was the scene of tremendous violence and destruction by the end of that year.”

²⁴ The acronym COB stands for *corporación obrera boliviana*, a very powerful national workers union that was closely allied with the MNR.

It is strange that a historian would overlook two decades of organizing by the farmers unions, because they did *not* start to ‘organize peasant sindicatos with the encouragement of the COB’. The COB did promote the formation of agrarian unions after the revolution, but the process began far earlier. In fact, Klein (1969:242) contradicts himself in a previous work, when he looks at the “restless veterans [who] stayed on their holdings and agitated for a change in the organization of the agricultural system through self-organization and militant leftism” and “by 1936 succeeded in organizing peasant syndicates through which they rented the lands they worked from the absentee landlords.” Klein argues that the number of these unions were a “few hundred” (1969:242), so it seems that the key discrepancy for him lies in the difference between small-scale organizing for land rental and the organized post-revolutionary insurrections. Whatever the argument, it is clear that the agrarian unions did, in fact, have their roots in the period immediately after the Chaco War and the seizure of hacienda lands was only possible because of the absence of centralized power in the region.

Discontent Arises and the Genesis of the Sindicatos Campesinos in the Central Highlands

The coup on May 17th, 1936 began an “age of governments led by the younger Chaco War officers” (Klein 1982:201). These young military officers

shared experiences and sympathized with the rural peasants throughout Bolivia. Within their vague conception of “military socialism,” the encouragement for unionization was aided by the first two post-Chaco War military governments of David Toro and Germán Busch. The government of Toro, on August 19th, 1936 (Machicao 1957:34), instituted the *Decreto Ley sobre Sindicalismo Obligatorio* (Law of Obligatory Unionization). The decree outlined twelve points that formed the basis for the “founding of the new order” that would include the “social interests of the communities, cultural organizations, universities, and workers” in a “cooperative” (David Toro, 12/31/1936, as quoted in Ergueta 1982:12). Almost immediately after this decree was signed, many colonos from the haciendas throughout the central highlands openly began to organize into unions. An interview with an ex-hacendado by Dandler and Torrico (1987:339) explains how:

“The peasant, emboldened by a government that offered them promises and people who promoted indigenous schools, political lawyers, and union proselytizers, and even resentful *hacienda* administrators and majordomos, began to rouse the *colonada* [the mass of *colonos*] against the *patrones*.”

While the decree aided the formation of unions, it must also be noted that the seeds of organizing existed in the communities prior to the legislation. The governmental decree simply gave resources to the blossoming agrarian unions.

There is some disagreement regarding the ubiquity of the farmers unions in the central highlands during this time. Klein (1969:242) describes how the “movement of *sindicatos campesinos* [did not] spread outside the small Cliza

region to the rest of the valley.” This contrasts with Dandler’s ethnographic fieldwork in the region. His dissertation (1971) was based on fieldwork in Ucureña and Yayani. While Ucureña was founded in the Cliza region, Yayani is in the Ayopaya Serranía (high valley of Ayopaya), a good distance from the Cliza region. There were also other rural unions in the region that were being organized after the Chaco War, but the area around Cliza was the center for agrarian *sindicalismo* (unionization).

The three main farmers unions that formed in the Cliza region in 1936 were in Cliza, Ucureña, and Vacas. The first one, Ucureña, was founded on the land of the Monastery of Santa Clara in the high valleys of the central highlands. The name of the farmers union in Ucureña eventually became the community of the same name. During these formative years, it was the most radical and well-organized agrarian union in the country. As previously mentioned, the power of this union was demonstrated when it became the location where the Agrarian Reform was signed in 1953.

The farmers union in Ucureña began in Ana Rancho, as part of the Monastery of Santa Clara when:

“during the middle of June, 1936, Francisco Delgadillo and some *colonos* from Ana Rancho united with Andrés Dávalos (a teacher from Cliza), Antonio Revuelta (son of a *hacendado* in Toro and brother of Wálter Revuelta, future *Cliceña* leader from the MNR and prefect from Cochabamba), and Dr. Cuéllar (lawyer in Cliza), to speak about the possibilities of founding a *sindicato*” (Dandler 1969:68).

Dandler's many years of fieldwork in the central highlands in the late 1960s and early 1970s enable a ground-level perspective on the agrarian unions that began there. His piece cited above focuses on the formation of the *Sindicato de Ana Rancho* (Ana Rancho Union) and its evolution into the *Sindicato Campesino de Ucureña* (Ucureña Farmers Union), which became the first farmers union in the country. The successful formation of this union depended in large part on aid from regional and national political organizations.

Sindicato Campesino de Ucureña

Jorge Dandler's work (1969) is the most in-depth account of a single farmers union in the central highlands. He traces the Ana Rancho subdivision of the Monastery of Santa Clara that eventually became the community of Ucureña. Until the Chaco War, the "*hacienda* of the monastery was an extreme example of a *latifundio* in the Cochabamba valleys" (Dandler 1969:69). Dandler argues that it was the union, formed immediately after the Chaco War, which was able to implement alternative forms of land tenancy.

When the surviving veterans of the Chaco War returned to their homes, many found that the small plots of land they had were taken, as "some landholders usurped land in usufruct from the wives of the colonos enlisted in the army, under the pretext that the men were far away and could not complete the

work for the *hacienda*” (Dandler 1969:64). After the long and hard war fought in the desolate Chaco region, this could not have been the “thanks and welcome-home” the veterans expected. Thus, it is no surprise, that on October 12th, 1935, in a fit of rage, the colonos came together to destroy the house of a hacienda on the Monastery Santa Clara. Mobilized forces from Cochabamba suppressed the uprising, but this action signaled the ability for the colonos to mobilize collectively against the hacendados.

The veterans of the Chaco War formed two prominent veteran organizations, called the *Legión de ex-Combatientes* (Legion of ex-Combatants) and *Benméritos de la Patria* (Veterans of the Homeland). These groups would meet in various places in the high valleys and city of Cochabamba. Many of the members of these two groups came from the Monastery of Santa Clara and had spent 18 months in a concentration camp in Paraguay, where they “had learned to unite” (Dandler 1969:67). These bonds formed in the concentration camps in Paraguay carried over after the war. The soldiers had come from different backgrounds, but their shared experiences formed the basis for reunification in Bolivia after the war. They all returned to a country in turmoil, and the ties forged in the concentration camps allied campesinos with non-campesinos, and the push for mutual empowerment, based on networks of patronage, was the seed for the farmers unions. It was the *Legión de ex-Combatientes* and *Benméritos de la Patria* that laid the foundation for the Ucuireña Farmers Union.

The Monastery of Santa Clara was one of the largest land-holders in the central highlands in 1935, and the uprising against the hacendado by the ex-combatants of the Chaco War put fear in many of the hacendados in the region, who decided to form their own organization, the *Sociedad Rural* (Rural Society). These two competing factions would vie for national government support for the next two decades.

The military government headed by Toro, in addition to supporting rural peasant unions, pushed for rural education. At the end of 1936, Toro created a department of General Indigenous Education within the Ministry of Education that pressured the haciendas to construct schools in rural regions throughout Bolivia. The government implored the Monastery of Santa Clara to build a school, and eventually the school in Ucureña was founded in May 1937 and the name “Ucureña”²⁵ dates from the founding of the school.

Education played a vital role in the formation of the union. Rural education was in its infancy in the 1920s and early 1930s, but it was not until 1936—when the government created a department of indigenous education—that rural schools became important centers for syndicalism. The construction of the schools solidified communal feelings, as ties between the unions and the communities became stronger. This had important consequences for the identity

²⁵ I’ve asked numerous people regarding the etymology of the name “Ucureña,” and the overall consensus seems to be that it is the place “between,” referring to its location between the larger communities of Cliza and Punata. In the Quechua language “ukhu” or “ucu” can be translated as “inside or “between” and “reña” is the suffix that denotes location or place.

of the farmers unions, as they could not be viewed as separate from the communities they represented. The construction of the educational facilities marked an important step in this relationship, as the “campesinos contributed work and almost all the construction material” (Dandler 1969:84). As Dandler continues:

“The active collaboration of the teachers surprised the *colonos*, who were not accustomed to see *los del pueblo* (town-folk) working with their hands and especially in a work together with the *campesinos*...This active participation of the teachers did not only occur in Ucureña, but it characterizes the actions of the rural teachers of the time, in other regions” (Dandler 1969:84).

With the support of the teachers, who were often from urban areas, the farmers unions were able to build loose networks with influential groups and obtain important resources from the city of Cochabamba.

Dandler’s study of patronage between the Chaco War and the 1952 revolution focuses on the spreading of these networks. He argues that the “alternate patronage and brokerage networks represented changing political allegiances and relationships” (1971:73). The new networks were able to connect the unions with the resources and people to support the rural farmers in their push for unionization. Only later, in the 1940s, were the unions able to “rely on the support of a few lawyers in the city of Cochabamba” (Dandler and Torrico 1987:340). For Dandler, it was the schools that made this networking possible, and together, the union and the school “helped create and symbolize a changing self-image among campesinos within Ucureña and neighboring hamlets” (Dandler

1971:95). This ‘changing self-image’ identifies the process by which the colonos were able to envision themselves in a new light. The construction of the school was proof of the ability for successful collective mobilization as “campesinos,” and provided a great deal of confidence in the union to facilitate real change for its members as well as for the community.

The schools and the farmers unions worked very closely together, and the extremely close connection between them worried the hacendados because it appeared as though the schools were aiding the unions in their push for change on the haciendas. This allegiance came to a head in 1939, when hacendados began to view the teachers as agitators. Consequently, the hacendados aimed at curtailing the influence of the schools.

After president Busch committed suicide²⁶ on August 23rd, 1939, the subsequent conservative military government gave more political support to the hacendados and the aforementioned Sociedad Rural. As a result, new teachers were hired and the close relationship between the schools and the unions began to wane immediately after the death of Busch. With the schools no longer bastions of support for the unions, they could no longer rely on the teachers and Ministry of Education for assistance.

The union in Ucureña was an instrument of change through the patronage networks that formed between the unions and non-campesinos (Dandler 1969,

²⁶ Although most accounts argue that Busch committed suicide, some contend that he was murdered. For a detailed analysis of this debate, see Céspedes (1956).

1971). First with the veterans groups and later in the schools, the patron-client relations that supported the hacienda system were also the impetus for its downfall. While the patron-client system in the Monastery of Santa Clara helped to maintain the position of the colonos before the Chaco War, when the veterans returned, they were able to circumvent the hacendados and form networks that spread across the highlands, including the urban center of Cochabamba. The farmers unions were able to construct patron-client networks locally, and then spread them to other farmers unions throughout the central highlands, subsequently reaching the city of Cochabamba and extending to the national government in La Paz. The unions slowly replaced the old patronage networks with a system over which they increasingly had control.

The “campesino” identity of the farmers unions was inextricably linked to land tenure, as their goal was to change the relations of production and exchange on the haciendas. In conceptualizing the transformation from colono to campesino, the farmers unions began to define a “campesino” as a landowner, free of obligations to the hacendados. They were starting to conceive of themselves not as a division of the hacienda on the Monastery of Santa Clara, but as part of the free community of Ucureña (Dandler 1971). Although the campesinos still worked on the haciendas, they began a push for land ownership in Ucureña that could be separate from the hacienda and any influence from the hacendados. However, as their connection with the hacendados remained, the

farmers unions could only continue to network with people and resources from the city of Cochabamba and the central government in La Paz, acting as the main voice for the farmers on the haciendas. Akin to the Ucureña Farmers Union, farmers unions all over the central highlands intended to use this new type of organization as a means to change land tenure on the haciendas.

Unionization in the Central Highlands

As the years passed after the Chaco War, the number of agrarian unions in the central highlands grew, but their influence and ability to organize fluctuated depending on the government in La Paz. From a national perspective, the ‘military socialist’ governments of Toro (1936-38) and Busch (1938-39), that had supported unionization, were followed by the more conservative dictatorships of Carlos Quintanilla (1939-40) and Enrique Peñaranda (1940-43), who gave more support to the Sociedad Rural. The ability of the farmers unions to unite immediately after the Toro and Busch regimes was very limited. For the most part, they were restricted to local organizing, often secretly. During 1940 and early 1941, the leaders of the farmers union in Ucureña were arrested.

The farmers union in Yayani, which was part of a large hacienda that belonged to the Convent of Santa Teresa, also became a center of unionization after the war. The *Sindicato Campesino de Yayani* (Yayani Farmers Union), in the

Ayopaya region, formed a few years after the rise of the union in Ucureña. As in Ucureña, they faced a great deal of resistance from the hacendados. Hilarión Grájeda, the leader of the union in Yayani, and his associates, “were persecuted and forced to carry out their activities clandestinely” (Dandler 1971:104). As one of the members of the Yayani farmers union, Manuel Carrasco, explains:

“We became aware that we might improve our situation during [the government of] Busch, because the newspapers published things in favor of the campesinos. When we were once carrying the harvest by mule to the *patrón*’s house in Vinto, we found out about Busch. The *patrón* whipped us with his leather lash because we were near the railroad station talking with campesino friends from other haciendas in the Serranía and Valley, and some *vallunos* [including some non-campesinos of the valley]. It was difficult to find out about Busch or his decrees and promises because the *patrones* and administrators did not like us to mix with other people in the valley. They also prohibited newspapers at the hacienda. Besides, few *colonos* could hardly read, so we needed to find out from people in the Valley. In the [Serranía town of] Morochata the people of the pueblo treated us as *pongos* and animals so we could not talk anymore” (Dandler 1971:105).

This extended quote speaks to the difficulties in organizing during that time. The union in Yayani began their resistance during an incident in the 1930s, when a hacienda administrator “physically punished a *colono* for arriving too late to work on the fields” and “one of the *colonos* hit the administrator back and Grájeda’s brother threatened him with a pick, while others lifted some stones” (Dandler 1971:105-106). Dandler goes on to describe how the colonos were arrested and brought to the city of Cochabamba. Hilarión Grájeda and others followed the arrested colonos to the city and befriended “some lawyers and labor union leaders

in Cochabamba who were sympathetic to the Indian and were associated with Busch's government" (Dandler 1971:106). These new acquaintances helped to solidify the common bond between the central highlands and the central government in La Paz.

On the morning of December 20th, 1943, a coup by Colonel Gualberto Villarroel, in alliance with Victor Paz Estenssoro of the MNR, ushered in favorable conditions for the farmers unions. Villarroel and the MNR put forth numerous decrees for a change in the hacienda system. As part of this effort, Villarroel helped organize the National Indigenous Congress on May 15th, 1945, the first-ever meeting of indigenous groups from throughout Bolivia. Villarroel was extremely supportive of this convention, as Klein (1982:219) explains:

"At this convention Villarroel both promised a major drive toward providing educational facilities in the free communities, a drive which was in fact to have some impact, and for the first time issued a decree that abolished that hated labor service obligations of the Indians known as *pongueaje*. A truly revolutionary act and one detrimental to the foundations of the entire *latifundia* system, this decree was never put into force. Nevertheless, it provided a minimum position for the Indian radicals, and the Congress itself gave many of the traditional Indian leaders their first cross-community contacts, thus paving the way for important mobilization of peasant ideology against the *hacienda* regime."

The "mobilization of peasant ideology against the hacienda regime" did not happen immediately, as the unions of students and workers who took over La Paz on July 14th, 1946, entered the presidential palace, threw a wounded Villarroel out

a window onto the central plaza, and hung him from a lamp post (United Press 1946).

The death of Villarroel was a blow to the organizing in the countryside. The hacendados were able to exercise massive amounts of authority in the rural areas because of the absence of a centralized power, and in “each zone of the country and in every *hacienda*, an attempt was made to roll back every advance gained during the Villarroel period” (Dandler and Torrico 1987:361). The subsequent governments were more concerned with consolidating power than implementing Villarroel’s programs.

The period between the National Indigenous Congress and the revolution was marked by sporadic uprisings and suppression by hacendados in alliance with departmental and national government troops. The largest and most important revolt was a rebellion in Ayopaya, which began on February 4th, 1947, and took about a week for departmental and national army units to suppress. As Dandler’s interviews (1971:118-120) with members of the rebellion describe:

“Many of us were afraid. We have always had informers among us who would tell on us to the patrón. This time Hilarión gave orders to kill anyone who revealed our plans.”

“We first attacked Yayani. The patrón’s son was wounded and his friend was killed as they tried to escape when we dynamited the hacienda house. We took some arms and many things from the storage rooms.”

“Then for several days we went on to other haciendas and approached them from the steep hillsides, attacking, taking things,

and finding some arms. More and more Indians joined us until we were a dark mass over hillsides.”

What I want to highlight from these statements from members of the uprising was the leadership and collective organization of the rebellion. The organizing around the “campesino” identity that had been taking place for almost ten years in Yayani was the basis for the armed action by the farmers unions to fight the hacendados, a preface to the chapter of Bolivian history between the revolution and agrarian reform.

The post-Villarroel regimes of Tomás Monje Guterrez (1946-47), Enrique Hertzog (1947-49), and Mamerto Urriolagoitia (1949-51), favored the hacendados and the Sociedad Rural. As Alexander argues (1958:42), the “regimes from 1946 to 1952 are generally regarded in Bolivia as governments controlled by what is colloquially referred to as ‘the Rosca’ ...meaning the landlord aristocracy and mining companies.” Together they crushed the uprisings, jailing its members. During this period, the farmers unions met clandestinely and maintained their networks, waiting for their chance to fight the hacendados.

From Revolution to Agrarian Reform

Their chance came after the revolution of April 9th, 1952. The populist movement that stormed La Paz installed Victor Paz Estenssoro and the MNR into office. This came a year after the MNR argued that it had won the elections in

May of 1951, although a military junta assumed tenuous power. The April revolution toppled the military junta and the MNR, promising radical changes, took power.

Although the revolution was barely felt in the central highlands, the post-revolutionary government of the MNR supported the unionization of farmers. Shortly after the revolution, the MNR government signed an amnesty decree and freed all the jailed leaders of the previous uprisings. Estenssoro and the MNR sought cooperation from the agrarian unions, and several months into 1952, they created the *Ministro de Asuntos Campesinos* (Ministry of Campesino Affairs). The purpose of this ministry was to address rural education and agrarian reform as well as incorporate the farmers unions into the MNR. The ministry was composed of members of the MNR and union leaders from throughout the country (Klein 1968). When the farmers unions became associated with the ruling MNR government through the ministry the major goal was to develop a plan for an agrarian reform.

The MNR and the ministry both supported a change in land tenure, and as the push for agrarian reform began, the nature of the “campesino” identity changed. Instead of being rooted in the local politics of the central highlands, in the local communities *qua* unions versus the hacendados, the farmers became national actors associated with the national government. The previous sixteen years (1936-52) were the formative years in which the “campesino” identity was

being constructed on a grassroots regional level. The post-revolutionary period (1952-64) signals their elevation to the national stage.

Bolivian historian José M. Gordillo breaks down post-revolutionary Bolivia into three periods: 1952-53, 1954-58, and 1959-64. It is during this first period, that

“the landowners, the campesinos, and the MNR politicians debated the meaning of the words ‘indio’ and ‘campesino’ with the proposition to assign a specific character to the revolutionary transformations” (Gordillo 2000:150).

Gordillo continues by discussing how these various factions “publicly discussed the validity of their multiple interpretations of this process, trying to impose their perspectives with the goal to legitimize their points of view” (*Ibid.* 151).

The public nature of the discourse raises questions concerning the relationship between access and power in the public sphere. As Gordillo highlights, because of the “inequality in public discourse...[there were] more strident voices that spoke ‘of’ the campesinos or ‘for’ the campesinos, the voices of the campesinos themselves were less audible” (*Ibid.* 151-2). It was in this public discourse where unequal power relations were delineated. The hacendados had more access to the various media (newspapers, television, radio), which reflected inequality in the country. However, the potency of the elite was relatively weak at the time of the revolution. This was an opening for the unions to use force, and the haciendas were seized without major opposition. The campesinos were armed, well-organized, and could take land from absentee

landlords. With the absence of a centralized power in the central highlands after the revolution, the farmers unions *qua* militias were able to act independently without consequence.

The months after the April revolution in the central highlands were chaotic, as the absence of national troops allowed the heavily armed farmers unions to virtually control the countryside. The takeover of the haciendas was often by force, frequently resulting in the death of the hacendado and the burning of his house. The unions had a distinct leadership structure that would issue decrees to other regional units who would execute the orders. Everyone involved in this process collectively identified as part of the farmers unions that had become the main force in the region. The discursive use of the category “campesino” that had helped to organize the farmers unions enabled them to subsequently act collectively as campesinos. What began as a discursive force through the redefinition of their “campesino” identity became a material force in the takeover of the hacienda lands that resulted in a change in land tenure throughout the central highlands.

The massive social and economic changes in the central highlands were paralleled throughout the country, especially in the west, as the nationalization of the mining sector was unopposed. The elites were “economically weak and incapable of opposing fundamental social and economic reforms” (Klein 1982:231). Attempting to harness the chaos that ensued after the revolution, the

MNR set about trying to incorporate various political factions into the political party in order to maintain their tenuous hold on the country. The creation of the Ministry of Campesino Affairs was an effort to construct an umbrella organization to co-opt the farmers unions. The various right- and left-wing factions of the MNR struggled to sustain a coherent identity, and, along with the hacendados, “began a process of dialogue utilizing communiqués as instruments of discussion...to construct a premature victorious image of the revolution, giving the impression that the campesinos had triumphed in their demands” (Gordillo 2000:161). This only resulted in the “radicalization of the campesino movement towards the path of ‘Agrarian Revolution’” (*Ibid.* 162).

From Agrarian Reform to the Military Campesino Pact

After much negotiation among the right- and left-wing factions of the MNR, the Agrarian Reform Law was signed on August 2nd, 1953 in Ucureña, under the watch of 100,000 farmers. The principle aim of the decree was to destroy large private landholdings and end the exploitation of campesinos. Article 12 of the law unequivocally affirms this intention:

“The State does not recognize the *latifundio*, which is rural property of size varying with the geographical situation, which remains unexploited or insufficiently exploited by an extensive system, with antiquated methods and implements, which gave rise to the waste of human effort...characterized, further, in the Inter-Andean zone by the concession of parcels and other equivalent

units, in such a way that the return depends fundamentally on the surplus value which peasants produce in their condition as serfs and which is appropriated by the landlord in the form of labor service, thus establishing a regime of feudal oppression, which brings with it agricultural backwardness and a low standard of living and of cultivation for the peasant population.”

As this part of the decree explicitly states, the surplus value produced would be owned by the farmers, not the hacendados. Furthermore, as the decree continues, the main agents in the implementation of the agrarian reform would be the farmers unions:

“The *sindicato campesino* organizations are recognized as a means of defense for the rights of its members and the preservation of their social conquests. The *sindicatos campesinos* shall intervene in the execution of the Agrarian Reform. They may be independent or affiliated with central organizations” (Article 132).

The actual implementation of the agrarian reform was an arduous process. The farmers unions faced resistance at every step of the way from the hacendados, who were intent on keeping as much land as possible.

Land distribution was usually first by coercion with the armed militias taking over the haciendas, and only later asking for legal recognition. All over Bolivia, the “*hacienda* was abolished, the *hacendado* class destroyed, and a new class of communal peasant landowners established” (Klein 1982:235). Klein’s quote clearly outlines the dramatic change in productive relations. Previous to the agrarian reform, the mode of production in the central highlands parallels Eric Wolf’s conceptualization of “peasants” as “rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers” (1966:3-4), and “the term ‘peasant’

denotes no more than an asymmetrical relationships between producers of surplus and controllers” (1966:9-10).

Unequal relations of production based on the extraction of a surplus fits well with the situation before the agrarian reform of 1953. However, after an alliance with the national government, the transformation of relations of production from the feudal patron-client relationships to land ownership changed the ability of the hacendados to extract a surplus from the farmers. This can be shown in the growth of local markets after the agrarian reform. The farmers could and did take their surpluses to the markets, acting on their own behalf, instead of selling the surplus for the hacendados. Markets in the small villages (Mizque, Pocona, Tarata, to name only a few) scattered throughout the central highlands began to blossom after the agrarian reform. Farmers trading with farmers became the norm.

The transformation from colonos to landowners was the key shift in productive relations, but the realm of exchange was also vital. The transformation of relations of exchange by the farmers unions can be seen as a manifestation of changes in relations of production and a vital part in overcoming their asymmetrical economic and political relations. The extraction of a surplus by the hacendados was over, and the farmers unions—with the help of the national government—turned all the former colonos into landowners by aggressively distributing hacienda land throughout Bolivia.

The agrarian reform law, however, “fell far short of popular expectations: between 1954 and 1968 only around eight million of some 36 million hectares of cultivated land changed hands” (Dunkerley 1984:73). Frustration over the difficulty in achieving a substantial redistribution of land led to internal quarreling among the farmers unions. They were now associated with the ruling MNR party, and as Dunkerley cogently argues: “the reform succeeded in neutralizing independent peasant power” (1984:74). This cooptation by the national government lessened their ability to act independently.

The decade after the agrarian reform law was marked by the farmers unions splintering into factions, with local groups backing various local leaders. Their faculty to organize as a coherent force was greatly diminished. However, in late 1964, their future initially appeared to be improving.

The coup on November 4th, 1964, resulted in General Rene Barrientos taking leadership of the national government. He was received with optimism by the farmers unions. Barrientos was a native Quechua speaker, and openly backed the agrarian unions. This support was crystallized in April of 1964, when Barrientos signed an agreement with the farmers unions, usually referred to as the *Pacto Militar-Campesino* (Military-Campesino Pact). In fact, the full title of the agreement was the *Pacto Anti-Comunista Militar-Campesino* (Military-Campesino Anti-Communist Pact). This distinction is important, because it highlights the role that the campesinos would play in the Barrientos government.

Under the agreement, the campesino militias agreed to adopt an anti-leftist stance and to subordinate themselves to the army. Furthermore, the farmers unions had to rupture their ties to the powerful miner unions in the altiplano, and on a few occasions were actually used by the Barrientos government to suppress mobilizations by the miners.

The signing of the pact inaugurated a period of steady decline of the importance of the farmers unions. Subsequent repressive military regimes suppressed unionization, and the networks of agrarian unions were weakened. After the farmers unions officially became part of the national government in La Paz in 1952 and signed the agrarian reform in 1953, they were gradually losing influence, and by the Military-Campesino Anti-Communist Pact of 1964, they lost most of their ability to function autonomously.

The Central Highlands Turns into Evo-Land

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the national farmers union, the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB), played the role of mediator between the unions in the central highlands and the national government, thus adding another nail in the coffin of relevance for the farmers. However, with the ascension of Evo Morales and his MAS party to power in the country, the central highlands have been transformed

into “Evo-land” and the farmers unions have renewed importance because of direct connections with the national government.

As one travels around the central highlands, one notices the blue and white flags of MAS everywhere: on the sides of houses, mountains, decomposed adobe walls, and stone barriers of farming hamlets. During election season I’ve even seen dogs painted with the colors of MAS! Morales draws most of his support from indigenous movements and unions, and while his support is practically universal in the central highlands, he has also provided the farmers unions in the central highlands with a renewed level of national attention since his ascension to president.

On August 2nd, 2006, Morales announced his “agrarian revolution” in the center of Ucureña to benefit the “historically dispossessed, marginalized, and passed-over sectors from the countryside” (Cartilla del Viceministro de Tierras 2006). Both of these acts were done in the center of the main plaza of Ucureña, in the shadow of the statue *El Campesino* to commemorate the day known as *Día del Campesino* (“Farmer’s Day”).

Every year on August 2nd, campesinos from throughout the country, especially the highland valleys, arrive by bus, micro, trufi, or on foot in an amazing demonstration of campesino political power. Based on levels of support in the countryside, presidents are sometimes encouraged to speak, as in the case

of Evo Morales, or discouraged from speaking, which would be the case with most of the presidents of the country in the past 30 years.

It is quite an event. Banners and flags representing communities and unions that I've only seen on maps begin to arrive the night before and continue to fill the central plaza of the small community of Ucureña throughout the day. Participants from places with names like Ch'alla Mayu, Tarak'ucho, K'alallusta, and Tijarasqa march in a small parade into the center and some appear as though they have not left their 10 hectare farm since the previous August 2nd. Men and women with rectangular cutouts of discarded car tires as their sandals chew coca leaves and shout various slogans as they enter the main plaza of Ucureña. Banners range from exquisite to torn and rundown, with the name of the community and union plastered across the front.

The excitement of the day is unmatched throughout the central highlands. Old friends sit in scattered groups to discuss the past year, with the conversations ranging from how the harvest went to changes in the family, such as marriages or new children. Chicha and beer flow in copious amounts, and while some are drunk by the middle of the day most engage in something more akin to marathon sessions that end up in inebriation by sundown and continuing deep into the night.

The formal festivities include various speeches and presentations by political leaders, union members, and other relevant social organizations. The speech in 2007 by president Evo Morales brought representatives from radio,

television, and newspapers. The president skipped Día del Campesino in 2008, but the usual dramatic speeches by political and union leaders kept the smaller crowd interested, that is, until the music started playing, the fireworks began to fill the sky, and singing and dancing turned the festival into a party.

This day was not always called Día del Campesino. It began as *Día del Indio* (Day of The Indian) in 1935 with a decree by former president Germán Bush and became Día del Campesino only after the aforementioned event when former president Victor Paz Estenssoro authorized the first agrarian reform in Bolivian history. 53 years later president Evo Morales coined the day of August 2nd the *Día de la Revolución Agraria* (Day of Agrarian Revolution), titling the day in reference to his own agenda of agrarian reform that he announced on that day in 2006.

While August 2nd has tremendous local importance, national dignitaries have used the magnitude of this event for their own agendas. The symbolic importance of being in Ucureña on August 2nd effectively connects a president with many years of history and heroes as well as garners support from the unions throughout the central highlands, a key demographic for any political party. The deep connection with figures from the past has served the agenda of many past presidents, up to and including Evo Morales.

The use of the festivities of August 2nd as a platform for political proclamations connects the yearly practice to enormously important local figures.

In the central plaza of Ucureña, under the statue of El Campesino, are the gravesites of José Rojas and Jorge Solíz, the individuals who were pivotal to the formation of the community of Ucureña and farmers unions throughout the central highlands. The symbolism of this connection is not lost. Día del Campesino represents a tangible moment for the local negotiation of national politics and the inclusion and cooptation of local memories into national histories. As one campesino told me on that day in 2008, “Evo and I...and we campesinos, we share a common blood...a common ancestry. He fights for us and we fight for him.”

Conclusion

The 70 years discussed in this chapter have shed light onto the oscillation of alliances between the national government in La Paz and the farmers unions in the central highlands. This case study has outlined how these local/national tensions have been a mainstay in Bolivian politics, whereby connections between local powers and the national government are regularly established and severed, depending on the contemporary political context. The strategic partnerships with the governments of David Toro (1936-1938), Germán Busch (1938-1939), Gualberto Villarroel López (1943-46), the post-revolutionary MNR (1952-64), and René Barrientos (1964-1969) can be contraposed with the governments of

Carlos Quintanilla (1939-40), Enrique Peñaranda (1940-43), Tomás Monje Guterrez (1946-47), Enrique Hertzog (1947-49), and Mamerto Urriolagoitia (1949-51). While the former regimes had symbiotic relationships with the farmers unions, the latter did not. Likewise, the military governments until 1982 as well as the post-1982 democratically-elected regimes up to Evo Morales had other concerns. As a result, when not allied with the national government in La Paz, the farmers unions in the central highlands were irrelevant national actors.

The election of Morales as president of Bolivia ushered in a new era of relevance for the farmers unions. The president has visited the central highlands numerous times, giving speeches as well as providing resources for agricultural development and the building of schools. For example, Morales supplied the funds to build a school in Ucureña, and he advertised his generosity with the following sign:



Figure 4.2 Evo builds a school.

Works, such as the building of this school, that give direct credit to Evo Morales and MAS, are common in the central highlands. In turn, the central highland region has overwhelmingly supported Morales and his MAS party in all elections. Their mutually “articulated” (Hall 1986) interests have brought them together in a strategic and reciprocally beneficial partnership.

Through analyzing the articulation of interests at specific moments, it becomes possible to clearly delineate what is at stake. For example, as demonstrated by building the school in Ucureña, it is clear that Morales wants to garner votes and maintain his support in the central highlands, while the region

desires development and schools. The rural community of Ucureña, often neglected by the national government, directly received funds from La Paz. I contend that it is through transactions like this whereby alliances are built between Morales' government and various interest groups in the country.

Patronage has been the technique to facilitate this collaboration. While the central highland region uniformly backs the president and his MAS party, Morales has reciprocated with generous financial support. These networks of clientelism play important roles in both Morales' government on a national level as well as locally in the central highlands. The next chapter will focus comprehensively on the composition and persistence of these networks on a more local level.

CHAPTER 5

Patronazgo: Past and Present

On August 2nd, 2006, president Evo Morales rode a brand new tractor into the center of Ucureña as part of his “Mechanized Agrarian Revolution.” In his hand he held a decree for an agrarian reform, 2,301 land titles, and a promise to deliver 650 tractors in support of his plan (Los Tiempos 2006b). As a campesino described the situation:

“We were waiting...waiting for the big moment. Then, we heard a lot of noise, people screaming, whistling, and the crowd separated to two sides as Evo drove a giant tractor into the center of town. Everybody was celebrating like we won something big...like the World Cup! We felt like we were champions. Starting with the election of Evo, it was like we had won. We supported him from the beginning...years before he wanted to be president. He always supported us and we always supported him. We helped him and he will help us.”

Comments like this were very common in Ucureña and throughout the central highlands. I was within 10 meters of Morales when he spoke on August 2nd of the following year. While it was a slightly more subdued affair, he spoke of his connection to the campesinos. He uttered a few phrases in Quechua, but most importantly he emphasized his allegiance to them, just as they pledged allegiance to him.

The social movements from the central highlands form a key bastion of support for Morales’ MAS party. Before taking office, Morales marched with the farmers unions in the region during protests of departmental and national governments. After taking office, Morales has further nurtured these bonds. The “Agrarian Revolution” he announced in 2006 was reminiscent of the first agrarian

reform in 1953 in its emphasis on land tenure in the central highlands as well as the deep connection between the national government and the farmers unions. Estenssoro's 1953 agrarian reform allied his MNR party with farmers unions in the central highlands, even issuing a decree giving them the right to implement the takeover of land. Morales' "donation" of tractors to farmers of the central highlands region would be channeled through local political parties and the farmers unions, both of which are usually composed of the same people.

Morales' delivery of tractors helped solidify his endorsement by the unions. As the farmers unions in the central highlands of Bolivia form an important support base for the president, corporatism is still a widespread means to garner and maintain political backing in Bolivia. The remnants of corporatism, from the founding of the farmers unions in the 1930s, continue until the present, structuring the relationships that the unions have with the national government.

The maintenance of corporatist channels between the national government and local authorities has long been a way in which political power is brokered in Bolivia. Work by Javier Auyero (1999) in Buenos Aires, Argentina describes how *patronazgo*, which refers to the micro-level practices that support corporatism, that began during Peronism in the 1970s still persist today because those with continued proximity and access to the power brokers seek to maintain these relationships. In short, those with a vested interest in the system strive to preserve it. However, as Auyero argues, while its persistence is partly due to deliberate

effort on the part of the power brokers, it is also the memory of Peronism that structures current relationships. He argues that “the memories of Peronism are structured by the social environment in which actors are located and also structure present social arrangements” (1999:335).

The role of memory in structuring current social relations is an important facet of patronazgo, as the power brokers central to the system do not act solely through coercive means. Patronazgo persists because the habitual use of specific channels for the procuring of goods or favors reinforces and reproduces the system. Perceiving of patronazgo as being exclusively controlled by the power brokers is a one-sided interpretation of the phenomenon. The argument presented in this chapter demonstrates that the power brokers do not maintain the system alone. As the networks become solidified over time, those who continuously access the same power brokers propagate the systems as much as the power brokers themselves. Over the course of generations, these past relationships become ingrained and configure current associations.

This chapter explores the ways in which corporatism endures in Bolivia, structuring relationships between the national government and farmers unions as well as other elements of civil society. The first part will explore the roots of corporatism that is ubiquitous in Latin America. It will discuss how the history of corporatist networks continues to endure and impede both the formation of new

networks as well as the incorporation of alternative ways of dispersing economic and political power.

The rest of the chapter will concentrate on how this phenomenon has taken hold in Bolivia, with a special focus on the central highlands. The farmers unions of the central highlands have dominated the economic and political configuration in the region since their genesis. My fieldwork in Ucureña explores how the farmers union there has been dominated by two generations of brothers from the Delgadillo family. Beginning in 1936 with Hernán and Francisco and continuing with current leaders Carlos and Fernando, the Delgadillo family has brokered favors to farmers unions in the central highlands in exchange for support of their leadership of the union. Discourses of equality and reciprocity, rooted in authority inherited from the previous generation, have helped them to maintain and propagate their leadership.

Corporatism plays a key role in the distribution of wealth and political power in Bolivia. This chapter explores how corporatism functions in civil society both locally and nationally. During my fieldwork, the distribution of tractors by Morales and the local control of the process by the farmers unions expose the workings of this system in detail. Through a detailed account of what happened, I hope to provide insight into how corporatism persists due not only to the power brokers and the ancillary participants who reap some of the benefits, but also to the structuring characteristics of memory that are the impetus to those ancillary

participants choosing the same channels to access the power brokers time and time again. Through focusing on the role of memory in the persistence of the practices of patronazgo on a local level, this chapter demonstrates how corporatist systems for distributing economic resources and political power continue over generations.

Corporatism in Latin America

Corporatism in Latin America can partially be traced to the bureaucratic structure inherited from colonialism. Colonial Latin America was the epitome of a mercantilist system; the distribution of economic resources and political power was highly regimented and vertical, with the king at the top. Also important was the absolute rule by the king, and the traces of authoritarianism throughout the history of Latin America can be traced back to colonialism. In exploring the ancient roots of colonialism by the Iberian powers, historian Howard J. Wiarda (2004:10) traces the origins of corporatism:

“in the culture and history, the class structure, and the political sociology of ancient Greece, Roman law, medieval Christianity, the Italian-Spanish-Portuguese system of estates and medieval guilds or ‘corporations’, and the carryover of these features from feudal Spain and Portugal to Latin America.”

This hierarchical system was a factor in the reliance on privileged access to economic resources and political power in the colonies. However, the colonial

legacy can only be partially blamed for corporatism in the region. A distinct history of military, populist, and democratic governments has altered the colonial landscape of the region. Authoritarianism, however, continues, as the links between the state and civil society have replaced colonial structures (Wiarda 2004; Malloy 1977).

Definitions of corporatism usually include relationships between the state and civil society in which agreements between the two subjugate the latter to the former. Various interest groups, such as political parties and social movements, can eventually gain influence and threaten the legitimacy of the ruling regime. The argument goes that in order to satiate demands from these groups, it is to the advantage of the rulers to placate the ruled without losing power.

Corporatism involves everyday practices between those with access to power and economic resources and those without. The more hierarchical and rigid the social structure, the more favors and agreements are used to build relationships on a local level. These favors and agreements can range from acquiring seeds and tools for a farm in exchange for votes in a local election to distributing land titles for votes in national elections.

Corporatist practices have largely been, with assorted regional variations and exceptions, common throughout Latin America (ex. Malloy 1977; Vellinga 1998; Wiarda 1981, 1996, 2004). In some countries, military dictatorships have fostered agreements with civil society in order to successfully pacify interest

groups. In many others, democratically-elected governments foster and maintain political support nationally through clientelist relations with local political parties and social movements.

Bolivian Corporatism, Locally and Nationally

Bolivia has had elements of corporatism during both military and democratic regimes. Various state-civil society agreements in the latter half of the 20th century have provided the means through which political support has been offered and national power maintained. These connections link local leaders with national centers of power. The networks of corporatism play a vital role in the distribution of resources as well as in the garnering of political support in the country.

National governments have often found it necessary to broker deals with Bolivia's influential labor unions—especially the miners—in order to keep their grip on power. More recently, the “state of '52,” which describes the various governments from the 1952 revolution until the neoliberal era that began in 1985, fostered consent through agreements with social movements. This has continued into the present.

In the central highlands of Bolivia, the practices of patronazgo were established by and continue through the farmers unions. The MNR government

sanctioned the dominance of the farmers unions in the region when they armed the campesino militias in order to police the countryside and implement the 1953 agrarian reform. Originating from challenges to inequalities and land tenure, the farmers unions have effectively controlled the economic and political landscape of the central highlands since the middle of the 20th century.

Anthropologist Jorge Dandler's long-term research (1969, 1971, 1984a, 1984b) in Ucureña stresses the importance of corporatism during the genesis of the farmers unions in the 1930s through the Military-Campesino Pact of 1964. The latter agreement solidified the relationship between the unions in the central highlands and the national government. While Dandler's work covers the period up to 1964, my research shows that corporatism still remains influential in the brokering of economic and political relations in the country.

In his description of how the rural farmers transformed their relationships to the hacendados after the Chaco War, Dandler emphasizes the place of intermediaries in the network of social roles associated with corporatism. His discussion of the practices of patronazgo characterizes classic patron-client relations on haciendas throughout Bolivia: "the hierarchical system was institutionally based on relations and reciprocity of services, that linked Indians with individuals and superior social groups" (1969:13). In his analysis of the changing nature of this structured system of patron-client relations before and after the Chaco War, Dandler first describes the top-down relations of a

“relatively established elite and privileged landholding class [that] linked Indians with individuals and superior social groups” (*Ibid.* 12-13). However, after the war, there were “new relations and coalitions [that began to] destroy the old hierarchy” (*Ibid.* 14-15). The forces behind these changes were:

“the new cultural intermediary-representatives (*intermediarios-representates culturales*)...who were not content with the traditional system and many of them did not have the possibility of social or occupational mobility, and were looking for new paths of ascension” (*Ibid.* 15).

Dandler argues that these individuals formed networks across the central highlands and “establish[ed] contact with individuals and groups in diverse social, political, and economic levels” (*Ibid.* 16) to become the agents that changed the structured patron-client system in the haciendas after the Chaco War.

In his works, Dandler (1969, 1971, 1984a, 1984b) always emphasizes the role of these intermediaries in the maintenance and eventual overthrow of the patron-client relations on the haciendas in the central highlands. These intermediaries were able to bridge the cultural and economic gap between campesinos and non-campesinos.

When the farmers unions gained complete jurisdiction over the central highlands after the 1953 agrarian reform, the intermediaries began to lose their control over local affairs. While they still were able to maintain a small economic and political niche between the rural areas of the central highlands and the city of

Cochabamba (Lagos 1994), the farmers unions gained absolute jurisdiction over local politics and commerce.

Where Have the Tractors Gone?

On an abnormally cold morning in October, I sat with union member Hugo Galindo in the familiar confines of the central plaza in Ucureña. There was a rumor circulating the previous evening that a disagreement had erupted between union leader Carlos Delgadillo and union members over the allocation of the tractors given to Ucureña by president Evo Morales two years earlier. The tractors were to be shared equally among the community members. However, the tractors remained under the control of the farmers union, so access to the tractors meant that it was necessary to have access to the union leaders.

I often heard complaints about the union leadership during my fieldwork, but always in strict confidence with the promise not to tell anyone. As I began talking with Hugo, a short and stocky campesino in his fifties, I could sense his frustration. It was October, so the planting season was in full swing. Infinite varieties of potato, barley, wheat, and corn were being planted. In addition to planting, preparation for the impending rainy season was underway, necessitating intense labor to build the infrastructure necessary to capture and channel water for crops and drinking.

By this time I had known Hugo for a few years, and had developed a good rapport and feeling of trust that only comes with substantial time spent in the company of another person. He would often tell me the intimate details of how the union functioned, including the inner workings of the organization not explicit at the union meetings I regularly attended. I had found it extremely difficult to cull some information from the union leaders about what had happened to the tractors that appeared to have gone missing or else had been found for sale in various places around the central highlands. Investigative journalism in a local newspaper uncovered part of the story:

“Los Tiempos has verified the existence of irregularities in the administration of tractors that were given by president Evo Morales in the municipalities of Anzaldo, Ucureña, Tarata, Sipe Sipe, and Colcapirhua. In the first municipality, two tractors never arrived to the mayor, who is not affiliated with MAS, because the town councilors [*los concejales*] from that party [MAS] preferred to guard them in their houses. The same situation occurred in Ucureña, where two tractors that the president left on August 2nd, 2006...were stored in the house of a councilor in Cliza” (Los Tiempos 2008).

While stories exposing problems with the distributed tractors briefly caught national attention in 2008, they continued to be a substantial issue in Cochabamba and the central highlands. Inefficiency, corruption, and nepotism were common complaints directed at MAS officials and local politicians.

Hugo had been telling me since early 2007 that the tractors were being used as political capital by the Delgadillo brothers to help them maintain their power in Ucureña. The concejales, who were holding the tractors, were MAS

affiliates but also union leaders. A union leader usually held numerous positions. Apparently, conflicts of interest are neither frowned-upon nor prevented.

The news about the misuse of the 650 tractors distributed by Evo Morales increased the frustration of community members. On that cold October morning, Hugo described the confrontation between union leaders and community members that had occurred a week before:

“Last Tuesday evening a group of campesinos, maybe 7 or 8, got together and went to the house of Carlos [Delgadillo]. I was nearby at a friend’s house, so I heard a lot of what happened. I also spoke with some of them immediately after. So this is what happened. The campesinos might have been drunk, and they started yelling at Carlos about how he was corrupt. They also wanted to use one of the tractors...then! It was dark and they were drunk, and they wanted to use the tractor! After about 30 minutes of arguing, there was silence. The next day I spoke to a few of them. They told me that they had worked out a deal—a similar deal as always. They agreed to help Carlos build a canal on his farm, and they would get to use the tractor. See, the Delgadillo family does not permit anyone to use the tractors unless they get something in return. They already have the political positions here in Ucureña and in Cliza, so now they want help with the water projects. These should be shared equally. The tractors and the water projects should be communal works. We should all share in the work, but the union leaders are using the tractors as a way to get community members to work on their water projects. The water projects are supposed to benefit the whole community, and they do. However, the projects near Carlos’ farm are the first to be finished every year.”

This description of conflict resolution is interesting in the way that it depicts the complaint broached by a group only after they had been drinking. While it does imply a sense of exception, in that they would not have complained had they not

been drunk, the fact is that many campesinos drink chicha from when they finish working in the afternoon until they go to sleep.

The only formal time to express grievances is during union meetings. However, because one would want privacy in matters concerning back-door deals, more of a private setting works. The irony is that the description that was told to me was overheard because they had been drunk and loud.

The informal nature by which the settlement was reached does not discredit its importance or legitimacy. Both sides and the community as a whole respect the agreement. While the techniques of arbitration and mediation are informal, the authority of Carlos Delgadillo is respected. It is through this deference to Carlos Delgadillo whereby his agreements are followed and his clout maintained.

This was a common way in which disputes were resolved by the union leaders. It was most often a face-to-face negotiation, or argument, between the afflicted parties and the union leadership. The accusers would eventually get what they wanted, and the leaders would get access to labor for a project of theirs.

The “water projects” Hugo refers to are the area’s water collection system that provides water for crops and drinking. Producing *agua potable* (drinkable water) involves the construction of *pozos profundos* (large concrete wells) that collect and purify water from nearby rivers. These structures act as central distribution centers for a collection of houses in the community. Water for crops

entails the creation of *atajados* (large water pools) that collect water and are linked to *acequias* (canals). Cooperatives from the leadership of the farmers union control the coordination of labor in the construction of these necessary pieces of infrastructure.

The construction of these water systems occurs throughout the year, but primarily kicks into gear immediately before the rainy season, which generally begins in October. The rainy season also coincides with the planting season, putting an end to the dry and relaxing winter months. As the rains approach, there are widespread discussions as to what will be planted where, when the rains will come, whether it will be a heavy rainy season or not, and how the work will be allocated.

The story about the tractors is interwoven with the water projects and the workings of *patronazgo*. The agreement established between the disgruntled community members and union leader Carlos Delgadillo resulted in an exchange of labor for tractor use. The specifics of the agreement, as far as I understood them, were rather simple: a day of labor for a day of tractor use. In essence, the water projects are for the community's benefit, as they provide adequate water for drinking and crops. The tractors are under the jurisdiction of Carlos Delgadillo who, as head of the union, is responsible for making sure that the water projects are completed, are sufficient for the community's needs, and are well-run and maintained. Because it is often difficult to recruit the necessary labor for the

construction of the various pieces of the communal aquatic infrastructure, the exchange ensures that the community labor is completed.

The assignment of labor is a major task of the union leaders. Collective work obligations, referred to by its Quechua name *mit'a* or the Spanish *trabajo colectivo*, are designed to fairly allocate work among the families of the community. This is coordinated at meetings of cooperatives, which have specific names, such as the “Cooperative for Drinkable Water.”

Each cooperative has its own leadership, which inevitably mirrors that of the farmers union. The union maintains its grip on power by controlling all of the important positions. Likewise, the union leaders fill the local political positions of councilor, mayor, and MAS representative.

I tried, for many months, to describe the idea of “conflict of interest” to various members of the community. I approached the questioning a few different ways, but most of it revolved around labeling it as a “problem,” generally asking: “Do you think that it is problematic that the union leaders are also the local MAS representatives and hold the important political positions in the community as well?” I was usually met with a look that implied that I was crazy or had no idea what I was talking about. An answer by longtime union member Huascar Olivera exemplified this idea:

“Educito, they are politicians involved in politics. They have experience in representing us, our ideas. Who do you want to represent us...me? I don't know how to write. I can't speak Spanish very well. I'm missing teeth! Who is going to listen to

me? How would I help the community? Most of us here only know about farming. You want to know about potatoes? I can tell you everything that you need to know about potatoes: when to plant, how to plant, when to water, how to water, when to harvest, how to harvest...but I am not a leader. I am not a politician.”

The notion of a specialized knowledge of politics broached by Huascar is fascinating in how it depicts a division between himself and “politicians involved in politics” based on specific abilities and physical characteristics. He has no experience, doesn’t have the language abilities, and is “missing teeth,” so he is disallowed from entering politics. What his characteristics do enable him to do, however, is farm. This is the situation in which most of the community of Ucureña finds itself: most of them are very good and dedicated farmers. As a result, they tend to leave politics to a specialized few.

In Ucureña, there is a sense of innate political ability among the leaders, and it is these people who have a monopoly on local politics. This stems from historical precedents rooted in the founding of the community and farmers union. It is reproduced by the leaders who use their authority to foster relationships that sustain their positions.

The Delgadillo Family

As previously discussed, the Delgadillo family has brokered favors to farmers in the central highlands in exchange for support of their leadership of the

union. This also occurs between communities, as headship of the unions in the central highlands depends on the brokering of political support. The social relations of land tenancy instituted by the farmers unions after the agrarian reform laid the foundation for patronazgo and the continued leadership of the Delgadillo family in the region.

Over the three years of conducting fieldwork in the region, I built a good rapport with union leader Carlos Delgadillo. I often attempted to understand how his family maintained their dominance over local politics both by observing and questioning him. I wanted to know specifically about his family, the connection to his father, and his current political positions. Here are a few excerpts:

“My father [Francisco] founded this community. My father fought for this community in the 1940s...1950s. This community would not exist if not for my family. As the community grew, so did the union. My family was...the machine that helped the community grow. My family was like a tractor that helped to till the soil in order to plant the seeds of the community. And slowly, the community grew. My family was the union. The union was the community. All of this, the union, the community...all of this continues today because of my family.”

“I would go to meetings with my father. Union meetings, political meetings, and attend cooperatives. I marched with him, went to roadblocks. I learned by watching him, how he did things. He respected the people and they respected him. I slowly started to play a more important role in affairs. When he started to get old, I would represent him and the interests of our family at meetings. By the time he died, I had essentially been leading the union. I prepared for the meetings, settled land disputes, met with politicians. However, I was not given the position. No, I had to work for it, to earn the trust of the other community members. This is not a monarchy!”

“The people rely on me. In reality, I need them as much as they need me! Don’t tell them that! [laughing] It is my job to represent them. It is their job to tell me how they feel...and they do! They know that they can tell or ask me anything. A leader needs to listen and make decisions that are best for everyone, for the whole community. I learned from my father how to listen to people, how to respect them. The most important thing is mutual trust. I need to trust them and they need to trust me. That is how you build strong relationships with people. Members of the community have known me for my entire life. We have very long and deep relationships that go far back in time. You can’t change that.”

Carlos was always quick to point out the achievements of his father, and his father’s role in the genesis and development of the community and union. Likewise, he emphasized the apprenticeship that he had undergone, attending various meetings with his father, and his gradual increase in responsibilities inherited from his father as Carlos continued to gain experience. He then discussed the gradual replacement of his father, culminating in his father’s death, when he “had essentially been leading the union.” It was as if the role of caretaker of the community had been passed to him by his father.

The idea that the people rely on Carlos as much as he depends on them implies the sense of mutual responsibility. He depicts his relationship to the community as that of reciprocal obligation, whereby his actions and decisions are constantly being evaluated by community members. While his responses portray a sense of duty to the community, he also mentions how his position in the community stems from historical precedent and established relationships. Both

Carlos' words and his actions convey the importance of the ingrained relationships that have been built over many years.

During my fieldwork in Ucureña, I observed the closeness of the community members. The community is, like many others in the region and the country, a small rural outlet. The community members all know each other. Together they go to church, celebrate birthdays, attend funerals, protest and block roads, vote in elections, and generally organize for the community's own well-being. The bonds between the people in this community have been forged over many years, so the hierarchical system does not appear as exploitative. Most of the people I spoke to feel that they are neither being taken advantage of nor manipulated.

Discourses of Reciprocity

The mutually advantageous relationship projected by union members and leaders is reflected in the language that they use to describe the union. There was the widespread use of the reflexive first-person plural in both Quechua (adding the suffix *-naku*) and Spanish (using *nos* before the first-person plural) whenever I asked about the relationship between the union leaders and the community members. This sense of common interest, work, and responsibility is widespread throughout the community.

During interviews and more informal conversations, the language associated with the interconnectedness of the community is manifested in how the community members describe their shared responsibilities. Reciprocal work obligations, labeled *mink'a*, refer to an exchange base on a pre-arranged contract that recruits labor for a specific project. The sense of mutual responsibility that goes along with a *mink'api llank'ay*, or a collaborative work, exposes the language used to discuss common work obligations. One takes their turn, *mit'a*, to work for the collective good under the system of reciprocity, or *mink'api yanapy*. These descriptors of mutual obligation were a recurrent theme throughout conversations I had in the central highlands.

Community members think of themselves as social and economic equals with the union leaders, using the Quechua *kinkin*, or Spanish *compañeros*, to refer to each other. A common term to describe the community members in Ucureña is *uj runa jinalla*, which is literally translated as “many people as one,” generally connoting the idea of everybody united as one, giving a sense of equality. It was via the sense of mutual obligation that community members described themselves as being on equal footing with others in the community and the union. These adjectives are constantly broached at union meetings, political rallies, and during disagreements, disputes, and conflict resolutions. They are the discursive means by which reciprocity is felt.

The discourse of reciprocity is used in conflict resolution, which is an important facet of patronazgo. When complaints arise, as they often do, the alienated parties can talk directly with the relevant officials and get the problem fixed. The system functions and is maintained via these informal methods of conflict resolution. It was almost impossible for me to witness a specific negotiation. On a few occasions, I overheard arguments when they first arose, but more often I obtained second-hand accounts from those involved. These affairs were deemed private meetings between afflicted parties and the union leadership. The earlier example that discussed the community members going to the house of Carlos Delgadillo to argue for use of the tractors is a stereotypical example. If they have a problem with him, they go directly to him, and together they negotiate a settlement.

The complaints, however, are never seen as challenges to power. The union leaders, in their position of authority, are mediators that settle disputes. Their decisions are seen as fair and final. Their union leadership is seen as inevitable, matter-of-fact, and unchangeable.

The transition of power, as noted by Carlos, is a gradual one. He was an apprentice for three decades before his father became too old to be a leader. The relationships that his father established were propagated by Carlos, maintaining the clientelist networks that are essential to his leadership.

Patronazgo: Past and Present

The established practices of patronazgo are the backbone of Carlos' maintenance of power. However, it is not by authoritarian or coercive methods by which Carlos maintains this power. He resolves disputes, tries to equitably distribute resources, and listens to the demands of all of the community members. He has a tremendous responsibility as the most important authority in a rural community.

I interviewed Carlos, formally and informally, a number of times over the years. Although he was standoffish at first, I eventually earned his trust over many hours drinking chicha with him and his friends on weekday afternoons. These sessions were subtle, relaxing affairs that helped to build our rapport as well as alleviate my loneliness that would inevitably arise after a month or two in the rural areas.

It was in the chicherías where I acquired some of my best data. They discussed the gossip and news of the community, and I learned things about the community members that I would otherwise have never been privy to. The chicherías were also the place where I inevitably got sick, as my stomach was not as adept as theirs at handling large amounts of corn beer.

One day following a few hours of drinking chicha after everyone else had returned to their homes, I had a frank interview with Carlos about how the

farmers unions had consolidated power, rising to be the central authority in the central highlands. I also had the nerve (whether the result of the corn beer or the feeling of camaraderie I may never know) to inquire into how this power was maintained. Loosened by the chicha, Carlos commented that:

“We started to have more power over ourselves...more...ummm...autonomy! [Laughing]. Before the reform in 1953, nobody really paid much attention to us. We had important friends in the city, especially lawyers, who would fight for us. They would talk to the government for us. But after the revolution, and after the reform, we removed the hacendados, and this land was ours to control. We wanted complete control over our future. My father became a local politician. He divided the land and gave it to families. He was fair. The community members knew that. He had a difficult job, but community members would help each other. Everyone had their place, everyone would help each other. He liked being a leader. The community members liked him as their leader. They both supported each other. He established himself from the beginning and then made sure everyone liked and respected him.”

The sense of independence is strong in the community, exemplified by the use of “autonomy” to describe the beginnings of the union. Even though Carlos concedes that they “had important friends in the city,” the most vital part of the building of the community and union was self-reliance and reciprocity.

Carlos continued his dedication to the idea of egalitarianism in the community and the impartiality of the leadership. He described the land distribution by his father as “fair,” and concluded that “everyone had their place, everyone would help each other.” This portrays the sense of mutual obligation. It is also symptomatic of how the system of patronazgo has been cemented and

perpetuated. The system is reinforced by the everyday practices of everybody involved, and all parties involved feel as though they have their place and everyone benefits. However, the above quote also shows a shift by Carlos from a focus on him onto the history of the community and the role of his father in the genesis of the community and union. I was specifically interested in how leadership was transferred to him from his father and how his authority was maintained, but instead he transferred his answer to emphasize his role as the custodian of the community. It was through these shifts away from his individual authority to that of the community's caretaker whereby he deflected insinuations about his totalitarian but benevolent leadership role.

I had the sense that Carlos used his connection to his father, via genealogy but also through his father's actions, to legitimate his grip on power. Carlos was not only very aware of the history of the community and union; he often would broach these ideas when asked about his favored role. Likewise, he was always quick to emphasize ideas of reciprocity and mutual obligation that had its roots in the past. As a result, connecting himself to a longstanding legacy of leadership and equality aided in portraying his authority as benevolent.

Talking About Leadership

Many informal conversations with community members in Ucureña during my fieldwork emphasize descriptions of Carlos that underscore his leadership abilities. Using the Quechua possessive suffix *-yoq*, community members talk about Carlos with great admiration. As a *dirigente*, or union leader, he is endowed with intelligence (*umayoq*), rationality and judiciousness (*yuyaniyoq*), as well as an aptitude for speaking (*simiyoq*). It is through these seemingly inherent qualities of leadership that the union leader's power is legitimized. Terms of respect (*allin qhawasqa, manchana*), authority (*atiyniyoq*), and wealth (*kaqniyoq, tiyapuyniyoq*) refer to the revered status of the union leaders.

However, most important to the union leader's maintenance of power is his perceived ability to equitably distribute resources amongst community members, or at least to give the impression of fairness. It is the ability of *rak'iy*, or to distribute and divide resources, whereby the power of the union leaders are tested, challenged, and maintained. It is vital to project the feeling of equality, and union leaders are sure to project a humble standard of living on par with the rest of the community. Carlos Delgadillo still has a humble adobe and concrete house with a tin roof and a *tienda*, a small store in the front of a residential house. He makes sure that he does not have much more land than anyone else or dress better,

have better electronics, etc. And perhaps most importantly, Carlos can still be found everyday in the late afternoon drinking chicha with his compañeros.

The leaders are able to achieve these images of equality, and the community members in turn support the union without hesitation. Criticism of the union is usually kept on a low-profile, with face-to-face negotiations taking place at the house of the union leader between the parties involved. The union leaders can be seen as the manager or CEO of the community, with the inherent perks but also the tremendous responsibility to represent and take care of the rest of the community.

The history of mutual interest and trust built throughout the years laid the foundation for the contemporary leadership. Patronazgo is rooted in the past but maintained in the present. The system of patronazgo is ingrained, and everyday practices serve to cement and reproduce the system over generations.

Conclusion

The agrarian reform of 1953 instituted the organizational structure and dominance of the farmers unions in the central highlands. The unions implemented the agrarian reform, distributed resources given to them by the national government, and settled land disputes. Once established, corporatism thrived via mutual interest between community members and union leaders.

These networks have been propagated by the maintenance of ingrained practices of patronazgo.

From the genesis of the farmers unions until contemporary times with president Evo Morales, national governments have played a key role in fostering the regional dominance of the farmers unions and its leaders. By funneling resources through the unions, the leaders were in the dominant position of local resource distributors. Continuing this pattern, the community members have habitually looked to the farmers union leaders for favors in return for support. This relationship has resulted in the enduring legacy and backing of the unions by community members.

This chapter has offered a discursive and practice-based analysis of patronazgo. The discourses of reciprocity and equality are the linguistic devices by which power is legitimized. Authority is endorsed through the continued use of these representations to describe the community and the union leaders. However, the everyday practices of conflict resolution and resource distribution are the instruments by which the union leaders exert their influence. Their position as local power brokers, in which access to resources continues through the same channels, results in the reproduction of the authority of the union leaders.

While previous research discusses how memory functions in the persistence of patronazgo through the continued use of the same channels for procuring goods and services (Auyero 1999), it conceives of memory as

something akin to a magical force that coerces individuals to maintain a habit. As my research has shown, corporatist relationships endure in Ucureña not only because of the leadership's continued control over the distribution of local resources and role in conflict resolution, but also important discourses of reciprocity and equality that gloss over inequalities. Union leader Carlos Delgadillo actively promotes the use of these discourses of egalitarianism and connects his leadership to the inheritance of abilities and authority from his father. The legacy of his father set the stage for Carlos' headship, but discourses and practices sustain it.

While more formal networks of authority might ostensibly be feasible, corporatism persists because it is supported by the participants, functions well, and prevents any other system from being established. As a result, even though Carlos Delgadillo overtly has an interest in maintaining and perpetuating this system, a more formal system for distributing power and resources in the central highlands is resisted by everyone involved. This is especially true both among union affiliates as well as community members.

At issue is the distribution of economic resources and political power. Since the participants feel as though they are part of a relatively egalitarian system, their everyday practices do not endorse change but instead reinforce and reproduce the system. Dissatisfied members are quietly placated by the union leaders, and the system continues intact. However unequal and corrupt the system

might initially appear to an outsider, community members in Ucureña don't consider corporatism to be exploitative. Embedded discourses of reciprocity and equality, built upon authority channeled from the past, serve to maintain the patronage networks. As a result, the set of relationships of corporatism endures, as it has over generations.

CHAPTER 6

The Political Semiotics of Memory

One September evening in Ucureña, I was chatting with Ramon Escalera in his front yard. A stout, proud man with dignified wrinkles giving way to grey stubble protruding from his chin in the mode of many campesinos, he looked me directly in the eyes, and declared:

“I am a campesino. We, who live here, are campesinos. Look around here...look at all the land and the big sky...we are in the campo. We work the fields. We feed our families from the land. We laugh together, cry, celebrate, drink, dance together. We fight together. This is our land that our parents fought for. They fought for us. It is our responsibility to nurture it, to protect it. It is who we are. We are campesinos.”

I had only seen Ramon this serious on a few occasions, usually during union meetings. Normally our discussions were very light-hearted and centered on him interrogating me about places that I had been around Bolivia. His travel within the country was limited to the region between Cochabamba and La Paz. Tonight, however, a relatively harmless statement about campesinos sparked his seriousness.

I could see a large, rainbow flag, known as a *wiphala*, through the front window of his house. Spread across his living room wall, it was noticeably larger than the ones I had seen before, so I asked him about it:

“That wiphala? It was given to me by my father. It is really big, right? My wife thinks it is too large, as it covers the entire wall of our living room. But I like it. It is a part of who I am, of who my family is. It connects me with my father, with my family, with my ancestors. We originarios, the campesinos who have inherited this land, must take care of it. We must defend it. The wiphala connects us to the past, to our ancestors, and we are all originarios, campesinos.”

Ramon's use of "we," tied to important categories of representation such as "originarios" and "campesinos," speaks to the ways in which influential labels can denote affiliation and association. Likewise, he clearly outlines his perception of the wiphala as a marker of his own identity, and of his family's. The wiphala signifies an important connection to his father and his ancestors. He furthers the signification of the wiphala to the land that he has "inherited," forming a tight bond between his ancestors, himself, and the land that he inhabits, all coalesced around the signification of the wiphala.

The wiphala is as ubiquitous throughout the central highlands as are the blue and white flags of MAS. At all rallies, roadblocks, and festivals, the wiphala can be seen everywhere. Ramon's reference to the link between the wiphala and the "originario" identity fuses the flag to precolonial history. The deployment of both is vital to organizing contemporary social movements and political parties.

While the wiphala is the symbol of unity and power in the western highlands of the country, the green and white flags of Santa Cruz dominate the streets of the lowland city and department. In shops and restaurants, on the windows of cars, and absolutely omnipresent at rallies, the flag of Santa Cruz has come to represent the people of the region. In numerous interviews, I was told that the flag represents their history, traditions, and culture. Linked to the "cruceño" and "camba" identity, it is a powerful tool in rallies for autonomy and regional power.

The symbolic deployment of flags and categories of representation are important ways in which contemporary political parties and social movements connect themselves to historical precedents. Both the wiphala and the flag of Santa Cruz have shared a long history that has seen shifts in their meaning. Moreover, their long-standing connection to categories of representation, such as campesino, originario, cruceño, and camba, tie them to current identities.

Theoretical Positioning

This chapter explores the contemporary deployment of these symbols through the work Australian linguist Paul Thibault. For certain symbols, the relationship between a sign and its connotation is not a given. The malleability of signification has important ramifications in understanding power, as the ability to control the meaning of certain important symbols can be central themes around which political parties and social movements organize and mobilize.

Paul Thibault links the malleability of connotation and representation to social action. In his praxis-oriented approach, he outlines a “continual process of disarticulation of social meanings and practices and their rearticulation in the conceptual framework of a truly social semiotic praxis” (1991:5). The connection between malleable meaning and social action and change is explicit in his work. He concludes that “discursive practices...productively maintain and change the

social formation” (1991:181). In Thibault’s work, the process of the production and circulation of signs forms an important link between representation and social action as well as social change.

The rest of this chapter will explore how certain symbols are applied to serve political ends in Bolivia. I argue that power is exercised in the production of specific representations of the past via controlling the connotation of a given sign, or what I call the “political semiotics of memory.” The influence of particular symbols is increased when they have a long and rich history, as they can be used to connect contemporary movements with important historical precedents. The “political semiotics of memory” is an important means by which political parties and social movements in the country construct a symbolic repertoire to catalyze organization and mobilization. Understanding the process and context in which signs get their connotation provides insight into how meaning and representation are socially produced and related to power.

Flags of the Past, Flags of the Present

On January 25th, 2009, Bolivian voters approved a new constitution in a national referendum. A provision in this document states that Bolivia will have two official flags. In addition to the tricolor flag with horizontal stripes of red, yellow, and green that has been the state flag since 1851, the new constitution also

adopted the *wiphala*, a square flag with seven rainbow colors, arranged in diagonal squares. The flag has a long history, and comes in different color patterns. The flag chosen to be Bolivia's second official flag once represented *Qullasuyu*, or the eastern section of the Inca Empire, also known as *Tawantinsuyu*, or the land of four quarters. The standard pattern used at political rallies and adopted in the constitution is this:

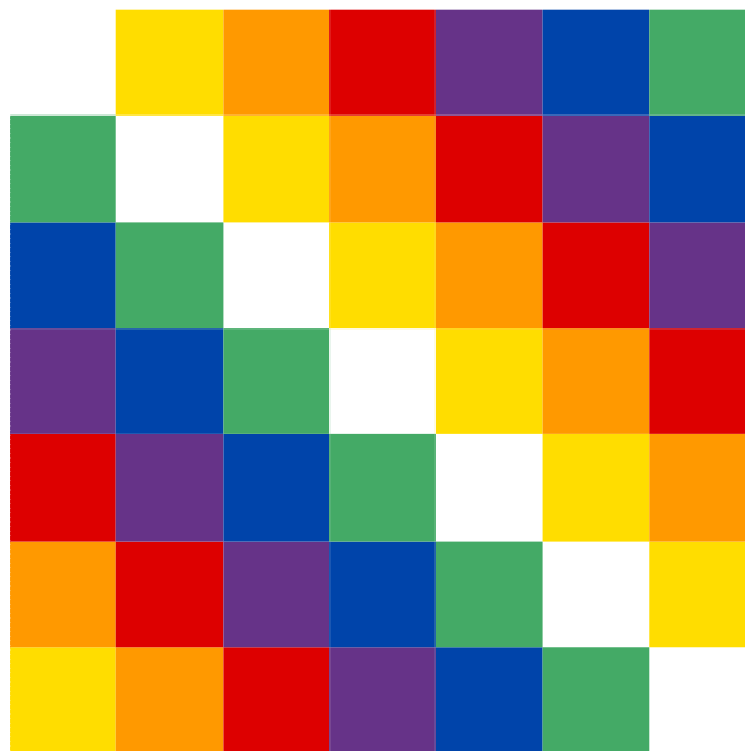


Figure 6.1 Wiphala flag.

The wiphala is ubiquitous at rallies by indigenous and labor movements, as well as Evo Morales and his MAS party. It became a national flag after much controversy. Politicians from the lowlands protested the use of the wiphala as a symbol of national identity. Clearly stated by Carlos Dabdoub, secretary of the

department of Santa Cruz: “Here, in Santa Cruz, we do not recognize the wiphala” (Diariocrítico de Bolivia 2009). Enrique Landívar, another political leader from Santa Cruz, speaking of the wiphala, agrees: “That flag represents the culture from the west of the country, but not ours. We have our own symbols” (*Ibid.*).

One of the more important symbols that Landívar is talking about is the flag of Santa Cruz, the horizontally-striped green-white-green flag that was first introduced in 1864. The flag declined almost into oblivion until 1980, when it was resurrected by the *comité pro-Santa Cruz* (Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee). The original flag is the same one that is used today:



Figure 6.2 The flag of Santa Cruz

The flag has come to represent the interests of the department of Santa Cruz, and it can be seen on cars, in businesses, adorning all public buildings, on t-shirts, wristbands, watches, tattoos, and of course at rallies where people even paint their faces and dogs with the color pattern of the flag.

The wiphala and the flag of Santa Cruz have long histories and are important symbols of distinct political movements. The exact meaning attached to these flags is not inherent. As a testament to that fact, their meaning has shifted over the many years of their existence. Because of their roots in the past, their contemporary use connects movements with profound legacies.

A large part of my fieldwork was spent trying to figure out precisely what these symbols mean to the people who use them. I would inevitably receive answers that outlined them as a part of that person's identity, with a focus on ancestry. When I pushed the questioning further, explaining what the flag represented in the past, my research participants inevitably still emphasized their lineage, connecting themselves to leaders and movements from centuries before.

In October 2008, I interviewed Ignacio Suarez, a member of the *unión juvenile cruceñista* (Santa Cruz Youth Union). My line of questioning began as something akin to a history exam, whereby I wanted to understand why the flag of Santa Cruz was resurrected and how it had anything to do with the current conflict. He responded:

“The flag represents our history. It is a symbol. Symbols represent things. You are an anthropologist, you know that. However, what you need to know is that my ancestors, my family who built this city, who built all of the eastern lowlands, the farming, the development of natural resources...they had that flag too. The flag connects me to them. So, there are words: I can tell you that I am connected to the history of Santa Cruz. However, this symbol is a powerful idea that is beyond me, beyond my words. It connects us to a past, a tradition, a way of life, and as you know my anthropologist friend, to a culture, our camba culture. This flag brings us together for a common purpose, a common purpose with roots in our past. Because of its place in history, it is powerful and strong and with it we know we cannot be defeated.”

Ignacio was quick to point out the ways in which the flag signifies an important connotation pertaining to lineage. He also makes explicit the connection that the flag has to a specific place, the city of Santa Cruz and the eastern lowlands.

Significantly, Ignacio uses the third-person possessive “our history,” differentiating lowland history from that of the highlands. He subsequently connects his “ancestors” and “family” to those who “built” Santa Cruz and “all of the eastern lowlands.” All of these connections and connotations were broached in the context of a discussion of the flag of Santa Cruz.

Ignacio was more cognizant, compared to other people I spoke with about the matter, of the notion that the flag was a symbol of unity that brought people together for a “common purpose.” He grounded his statement about the power of the flag by commenting on “its place in history.” Most of the people I interviewed about the flag took for granted their connection to it. Most people stated plainly that it was “their flag” and part of their identity, the end. Ignacio, on the other

hand, was well aware of the power of these symbols and their ability to be used as catalysts to propel contemporary movements. He was also mindful of the influence this particular symbol had because of its long history, uniting the eastern lowlands in opposition to the western highlands.

Similarly, the wiphala has a long history and has come to represent the interests of contemporary political movements. Archaeologists link the flag to both the Inca and Aymara Empires (Puente-Rodríguez 2008), and attribute the deviation of color pattern to regional differences. The standard flag adopted by indigenous movements—and now the Bolivian state—was resurrected during Katarismo, as part of the wider indigenous awakening of the 1970s.

The wiphala can be seen everywhere at political rallies and protests in the highlands. It is connected with a history of rebellion and indigenous power. As one campesino, Don Pedro, told me:

“The wiphala represents the struggle of our ancestors. We are the original inhabitants of the land, the originarios. This flag was used by our people before the Inca! It connects me, us campesinos, to the time long before colonialism. It is the same flag that Tupaj Katari used when he fought against colonialism. It is the same flag that Bartolina Sisa used to fight exploitation more than a century ago. It is now our flag. We have a responsibility to Katari, to Sisa, to fight for justice, for our people, for our land.”

Through connecting the wiphala to “our people, our land,” Don Pedro broaches a unified claim to land by indigenous movements. Likewise, the connotations also promote boundary-making and difference between indigenous groups and those who might challenge them.

Don Pedro was also clear to outline the connection of the flag to figures from the past. In a sense, the flag acts to keep the memory of past events and individuals alive. He discusses the long history of the flag, predating the Inca Empire. The idea of it being the “same flag” used by Tupaj Katari and Bartolina Sisa in their battles centuries before signifies a common thread between himself, his current situation, and powerful historical protagonists and events. He even broaches that he has a “responsibility to Katari, to Sisa.” A debt owed to these important figures from the past is channeled through the wiphala, in the current campaigns that he shares with fellow campesinos.

Flags and the Nation

The wiphala serves as a medium for contemporary associations with the past. Moreover, it shares important connections to land, rebellion, and indigenous power, so its ancestral roots make it a very powerful symbol of unity in the western highlands. Importantly, the wiphala is also attached to other important labels of identity, including “originario” and “campesino.”

Both the wiphala and the flag of Santa Cruz are more than pieces of cloth. Each is fused with a unique set of identities: the wiphala to originario and campesino, and the Santa Cruz flag to *camba* and *cruceño*. Together, they form

the symbolic repertoire of these respective movements, and are the centerpiece around which they organize and mobilize.

Furthermore, these flags are tied to larger issues pertaining to the composition of the nation. As previous research has outlined, flags are “officially endorsed symbols of nationalism” (Radcliffe 1999:48), so debates over the composition of the national flag also raise questions regarding exactly who the national flag is supposed to represent. Flags, as insignias or logos of a country (Anderson 1983; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996), are symbols of a nation, so disputes about the composition of the flag are also debates over nationhood.

Nowhere was this more apparent than during the process of writing the most recent constitution, at the constitutional assembly. Debate over whether the wiphala should become one of the official flags of Bolivia centered on questions of nationalism and plurinationalism. Since the wiphala is connected primarily with highland indigenous groups, some questioned the extent to which the wiphala can represent all Bolivians, especially those in the east of the country. Even a MAS representative at the constitutional assembly conceded that the wiphala “does not embrace all of Bolivia” (El Deber 2007b). In addition, the governors of Santa Cruz and Tarija expressly rejected the wiphala as the national flag because it is “associated with the governing party” (El Universo 2009). The article continues by confirming that “historians assure that the wiphala is

originated from ancient prehispanic culture and that the flag emerged recently at the end of the 1970s” (*Ibid.*).

In the midst of these debates, the article raises an interesting point: does the suggestion that the wiphala flag has reemerged after a long period of dormancy invalidate its contemporary use? If so, a similar conclusion could be drawn about the flag of Santa Cruz. The reemergence of the flag of Santa Cruz in the 1980s and the wiphala in the 1970s coincide with the beginnings of the regionalism that plague the country today. These flags reemerged alongside the strong regional identities, and have now come to represent divisions in the country. As such, they have formed a cornerstone of the symbolic repertoire used by political parties and social movements in the construction difference in the country.

In many cases, these two regional flags have become more ubiquitous than the tri-color national flag of Bolivia:



Figure 6.3 Bolivian flag.

Several flags have served as the national flag of Bolivia since its independence from Spain in 1825. This one has remained the national flag since it was adopted in 1851. The band of red represents the army, yellow the vast mineral resources, and green the fertility of land.

On numerous occasions I was told how the two regional flags, the wiphala and flag of Santa Cruz, are more resonant than the national flag. For instance, I asked a university student, Carlos Silva, about a news article discussing a demonstration in Santa Cruz where the national flag of Bolivia was burned. He responded:

“That flag [the national flag of Bolivia] means nothing to me. It is the flag of La Paz, of the Indians. Like the wiphala, that flag has nothing to do with us here in Santa Cruz. We have our own flag. My flag is the flag of Santa Cruz. The national flag of Bolivia does not represent me. The wiphala does not represent me. My flag is the flag of Santa Cruz.”

Carlos clearly indicates which flag corresponds to him, and which belong to “La Paz” and the “Indians.” Interestingly, while he does not hesitate to differentiate between the flags, he also doesn’t think twice about rejecting the national flag as representative of all of Bolivia.

The local importance of the flag of Santa Cruz in the eastern lowlands mirrors that of the wiphala in the west of the country. Inside numerous houses that I visited in the central highlands, I often saw a wiphala but no national flag. In marches and roadblocks, protestors brought wiphalas in far larger numbers than national flags, if the latter was even brought at all.

One campesino from the central highland community of Ucureña, Jaime Rodriguez, described the irrelevance of the national flag in terms of indifference:

“The national flag is just a piece of cloth. It is not really important to me. The wiphala...that is my flag. The national flag represents the national government in La Paz...so it means nothing to me. It does not represent me. The national flag is not my flag. The wiphala is my flag.”

Akin to the comments by Carlos above, Jaime also clearly differentiates between these different flags, asserting his connection to the wiphala and rejecting the national flag of Bolivia.

The ascension to prominence of the wiphala and flag of Santa Cruz has called into question the relevance of the national flag. This has been a relatively recent phenomenon. When I first arrived in Bolivia in 1999, the national flag was far more prominent in peoples' homes and various public settings. However, over the past few years, the wiphala and flag of Santa Cruz have replaced the national flag in most situations. The displacement of the 'logo of nationalism' by these regional flags represents the larger political rift. This national crisis symbolizes a breakdown of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) of Bolivia, as the increased importance of the regional flags since the late 1970s and early 1980s exemplifies the extent to which regional affiliations have superceded national membership.

Self-Representation and Social Differentiation: You Are a Kolla and not a Camba

While flags represent important national divisions, these symbols cannot be understood without a discussion of how they are linked to markers of self-representation. The wiphala and flag of Santa Cruz are connected to everyday markers of identity that play a vital role both in the regionalism as well as the construction and maintenance of difference in Bolivia.

Certain markers of identity with long and important histories in the country have recently emerged to prominence. “Campesino,” “originario,” “kolla,” “camba,” and “cruceño” are used in social distinctions, reflecting race, class, ethnicity, language, and place of origin. This section explores the origin, history, and contemporary deployment of these terms. A more detailed analysis of “campesino” will also be discussed as a case study exploring the evolution of a specific identity replacing older, derogatory terms.

One of the more important identities that has played a significant role in the regionalism and autonomy movement in the lowland city of Santa Cruz is “cruceño.” The following quote, from a university student, reflects a common belief among many people who I interviewed in Santa Cruz:

“As a cruceño, I live in the east. I have different habits, traditions. I have camba traditions. To the west, in the mountains, they have their kolla traditions. But here in the east, we have our camba traditions. We are fundamentally different from each other.”

The above comment suggests that “cruceño,” as a marker of identity, is linked to particular places: Santa Cruz, the lowlands, and the eastern part of Bolivia.

Likewise, these regional indicators also point to different practices and histories, or “habits” and “traditions.” It is also interesting to note how the “camba traditions” are contraposed with the “kolla traditions.” In a sense, one is defined by not being the other. They are defined in opposition, and they are “fundamentally different from each other.”

In my discussions in the bars and cafes of Santa Cruz the *camba/kolla* distinction was not hidden, and *cruceños* were not shy to discuss exactly how they differed from the *kollas*. They discussed these differences as self-evident. The regional term used to self-identify in Santa Cruz—*cruceño*—is attached to a term denoting cultural and historical roots: *camba*. The self-definition of *camba* was made in opposition to the term *kolla*, a name almost never used to self-identify by people in the highlands. Instead, it is used principally by people in the lowlands both to refer to and to distinguish themselves from highland dwellers or migrants from the highlands to the lowlands. “*Camba*” is a complicated term, which once had a negative connotation but has since come to represent empowerment by people from the eastern lowlands. Based on extensive fieldwork in the region, Allyn Stearman discusses how (1985:20):

“The inhabitants of the Santa Cruz region are known as *Cambas*, a term believed to have originated from the Guaraní word meaning ‘friend’. It was first applied to the peasant class and was synonymous with the peon who was tied to a large agricultural establishment, or *finca*, by debt. As time went by, *Camba* became an all-inclusive term for lowland society, both peasant and aristocratic. It also became a means by which lowlanders could demonstrate their cultural as well as geographical distance from highlanders, whom they referred to as *Kollas* (from the Quechua word *Kollasuyo*, the Bolivian sector of the Inca Empire). All of these uses continue to the present day.”

The use of *camba* distinguishes someone from a highlander, both regionally and historically. Migration from the highlands to the lowlands in the 1980s exacerbated these felt differences in the lowlands. Writing in the mid-1980s,

Stearman spoke of the difficulties of integration into the lowlands but offered a positive prediction on the future of *camba/kolla* relations:

“Lowlanders have not been overly enthusiastic about this recent invasion of their homeland by highland Bolivians, but they are fully aware of the positive impact it has had on the growth and development of the region. The deeply embedded prejudices held by the *Camba* no doubt will eventually be eroded by the sheer numbers of *Kollas* moving into Santa Cruz” (1985:39).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s there seemed to be the potential for successful and harmonious integration. Unfortunately, Stearman’s predictions have not come to fruition. The *camba/kolla* distinction has instead become more entrenched, racism more explicit and widespread, and the future of the country increasingly threatened by secessionists in the lowlands.

The *camba* identity has been forged by leaders from Santa Cruz bent on constructing a local character separate from any Bolivian national identity. They attach the definition of *camba* to a rich cultural tradition that refers neither to a connection to the highlands of the country nor to the nation of Bolivia. Mario Vargas, a leader of the civic committee in Santa Cruz, describes his notion of what it means to be “*camba*”:

“You have said it to me before, Educito. You have noticed the differences between the highlands and lowlands. You can see these differences in language, food, traditions...even skin color. There are differences, many differences. *Camba* describes who we are...it represents our identity...an identity different from anyone else in the world. These differences are real. The name, *camba*, in reality, is only a reflection of who we are. We are not *kollas*, we are *cambas*, and our history goes back centuries...for centuries we have had a different life, a different experience from the *kollas*.”

Mario identifies the specifics of the differences, in “language, food, traditions...even skin color.” These differences are apparent, visible, and tangible to them. However, they are also fused to variant “identities,” representing “real differences.” This characterizes more than regional variations in a country, as Mario “goes back centuries” to demarcate the difference between kollas and cambas. The “different experience” between kollas and cambas is firmly rooted in history, delineating tangible contemporary differences in Bolivia that form the basis for the regionalism in the country.

As the quote from Mario shows, the term “camba” is defined by historical difference from the highlands. Its widespread power in the lowlands is demonstrated in rallies against the national government. “Camba” is defined in opposition to “kolla” traditions, history, languages, and regional origin.

Campesinos and Originarios

“Campesino” and “originario” are two important terms that have come to be a centerpiece of highland movements, as they connote a sense of both anti-colonialism and indigenous power. Campesino was far more common before the relatively recent ascension of originario.

The use of the campesino identity has connected rural communities with Morales’ national political party. Originating as a substitute for “indigenous” and

“Indian,” the term has come to be used as a widespread label for self-identification in the highlands of Bolivia.

The “campesino” identity was a fundamental component in the long process of unionization by the farmers in the central highlands after the Chaco War. The term “campesino” has taken on various connotations marking race, class, geography, language, and even serving as a measure of farming ability (Lagos 1994). When the term was used as the basis for organizing the farmers unions, “campesino” became a rallying cry that facilitated “mobilization against their common enemy, the merchant hacendado” (Lagos 1994:60). Their definition of “campesino” created not only an “us versus them” distinction, but also altered the term to signify empowerment rather than subordination. It reflected the campesinos’ transition from *colonos* (tenant farmers) on hacienda lands producing a surplus for the hacendados to landowners who were able to own the surplus production. By mapping the various meanings of “campesino,” it becomes possible to plot the “points of contention, the ‘words’—and the whole material history of power, forces, and contradictions that the words inadequately express” (Roseberry 1994:360).

The local dominance of the farmers unions is based on their ability to maintain a coherent identity around which they organize and mobilize. By embracing the “campesino” identity in the 1930s, they effectively rejected labels that were commonly used across the country, such as “indio” and “indígena.”

Taking control of the term that defined them enabled not only a united front but also the preservation of a unified opposition. To this day, the “campesino” identity is asserted and implemented during uprisings, elections, and roadblocks.

What’s in a Name?: Campesino

Definitions of “campesino” in Bolivia usually include associations with race, class, and geography. This has resulted in somewhat flexible, though often contested, interpretations of the term. Research by two of the foremost Bolivian scholars, Xavier Albó and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, exemplify the problems associated with defining “campesino” due to the term’s varying and often contextual connotations. Their location within Bolivian academia places them in an interesting position to understand how the term is commonly used in the country.

Xavier Albó, the linguist/anthropologist/Jesuit-priest/scholar, avoids defining the term. Instead, he uses the term “indigenous campesinos” (2002) in his analysis. This is understandable because in aggregating the concepts of indigenous and campesino, Albó does not reduce them to a single definition of race, class, or geography. He instead argues that:

“in theoretical terms a clear distinction exists between the terms ‘campesino’ and ‘indigenous’. However, in Bolivia both terms are equally applicable in the countryside—the overwhelming majority of the rural population is indigenous, in terms of its identity and

ethnic and cultural origins, and at the same time campesino, because of its means of subsistence or social class” (2002:74).

The rural/urban divide, with its class-based connotations emphasized in Bolivia, reflects geographic and economic relationships, which is why “campesino” has been translated as “peasant.” However, as Albó also demonstrates, race plays a part in this rural/urban distinction, and as the often slippery indigenous/non-indigenous divide is associated with class, the term unifies race, class, and geography. Racial distinctions in Bolivia have served as a place whereby “race and class are co-constituted...by establishing meaningful categories of difference” (Postero 2005:72). These ‘categories of difference’ place various combinations and gradations of race, class, and geography into socially-constructed hierarchies.

Therefore, although “campesino” is subject to multiple interpretations, race and geography have usually come to signify both indigenous (in various definitions of another slippery term) and living in the countryside respectively. Importantly, the term has waxed and waned as a description of class. For example, Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui considers “campesino” as more of a marker of class, and uses the “term ‘campesino’ for those regions or historical periods where class demands predominated, and the boundaries of inter-ethnic friction became blurred” (2002:1). This is opposed to her use of the “term ‘Indians’, (or Aymaras, etc.) when ethnic identity is not necessarily associated with a particular occupational status or with residence in the city or countryside” (*Ibid.* 1). For Rivera Cusicanqui, therefore, the meaning of campesino is

contextual, but she utilizes the concept only when class is salient. However, within the same breath, she concedes that the “use of these terms is closely related to the way actors themselves perceive their place within the existing system of power relationships” (*Ibid.* 1). This is important because no matter how much certain terms might reflect social relations, subjective understandings also serve to construct those relations. Especially when those subjective understandings form part of practices of self-identification, such as with the farmers unions, the meaning of the term used to construct the label used in a self-representation becomes contested.

José M. Gordillo’s work, *Campesinos Revolucionarios en Bolivia*, demonstrates how the term “campesino” was a focal point in the construction of the identity of the sindicatos campesinos. Although he focuses on the post-revolutionary period in the central highlands, Gordillo argues that:

“the ‘campesino’ identity was forged in the pre-and post-revolutionary fights of the agrarian workers of the valley of Cochabamba. This identity project of the campesinos as dynamic actors in the political arena permitted them a high grade of autonomy in the space of force where they negotiated the character of the revolutionary State, between 1952 and 1964” (2000:21).

“Campesino” is perceived by Gordillo as part of an ‘identity project’. Citing Ana Alonso (1995), he describes the two dimensions of the “campesino” identity as “subjective” and “stereotype” (Gordillo 2000:24). This seems to be one of the reasons why the term is so difficult to define. When it is used as a part of a larger project of identity politics, subjective understandings are constructed in

opposition to more consensual understandings (stereotypes), resulting in shifts in the meaning of and the connotations associated with the term that then become contested and politicized.

From Campesino to Originario

The contemporary use of “campesino” is now a matter-of-fact term among inhabitants of the western highlands, especially among rural farming communities. The strategic use of “campesino” by Evo Morales and his MAS party connects the national party with social movements and unions located throughout the highlands region. While campesino still plays an important role in the central highlands among the farmers unions, the term “originario” is beginning to predominate.

As I sat in a café in La Paz one morning, speaking with a university student, I broached a question about who exactly is an originario, to which he responded:

“Originarios share the same blood. The word refers to all of the current people with roots in precolonial Bolivia. We have inherited a world of suffering, but it was worse over the previous 500 years. We share roots with those people who suffered. We are originarios. We fight for them, for our ancestors. Evo now represents us. It is our time to fight. We can do what our ancestors could not. We are no longer the victims of exploitation, of racism. No longer will we be passive victims. United as originarios, we cannot be defeated.”

The power of *originario* is reflected in this statement. It connotes the idea of an original inhabitant, predating colonialism. Conceived as such, it can readily be used to legitimize contemporary demands for land and natural resources by movements in the highlands of the country. The influence of the notion of having the “same blood” reflects a powerful connection between present and past, clearly demonstrating the link among “current people with roots in precolonial Bolivia.” The idea that contemporary peoples have “inherited a world of suffering” indicates a debt to past ancestors to change current inequalities. The use of the third-person plural “we” connotes the shared nature of the felt bonds of “originarios.” Fused with the leadership of current president Evo Morales, the demands by originarios highlights the salience of the past in present demands.

“Originario” is curiously combined with “indigenous” and “campesino” in the 2009 constitution. Articles 289, 291, and 293 refer to “los pueblos indígenas originario campesino.” This three-word adjective projects the idea of their inter-relatedness. However, it also raises the question as to the actual meaning of the words. The use of this three-word adjective problematizes their distinct connotations. As previously explained in this chapter, they have usually been used separately to portray different ideas. However, this recent aggregation may well weaken their impact. The malleability of their meanings and their widespread use by Evo Morales in rallying support for the MAS party enabled a connection to heroes and events from the past. By changing the contemporary connotations of

these important terms, both political parties and social movements run the risk of destroying their influence. To blur the distinctions between them could result in a fatal decrease in resonance with those people whom they are trying to represent.

Conclusion

The coalescence of indigenous, originario, and campesino into one term in the new constitution speaks to the malleability of each in contemporary use. Akin to “camba” and “kolla,” as well as the flag of Santa Cruz and the wiphala, all of these symbols have malleable connotations that have been manipulated by MAS and the Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee. In these cases, there is a variable relationship between meaning and object, in that some representations are more flexible than others. For example, a stop sign has more of a fixed meaning than a flag or category of representation, such as campesino. A stop sign largely broadcasts the idea of discontinuing movement. On the other hand, as this chapter has shown, the term campesino is far more malleable, and can have a wide variety of connotations.

Certain important symbols, as a result, can have specific meanings apotheosized over others. Significantly, political parties and social movements can emphasize certain connotations over others for purposes of attracting supporters, as well as drawing distinctions between themselves and other groups.

The importance of symbols in boundary-making highlights the use of malleable symbols in practices that are linked to social action. Through outlining the production and circulation of important signs (Thibault 1991), it becomes possible to chart how representations are involved in the construction of difference and in making social distinctions.

While Thibault's ideas are helpful in understanding how certain symbols become themes around which political parties and social movements mobilize, his work falls short when applied to a national framework. Even though meaning-making occurs in many social practices, connotations are often framed in opposition. Research that focuses solely on a single group not only fails to understand the larger picture but also fails to take into account the effects of competing factions on the construction of representations. Focusing on one symbol is insufficient, especially in situations when groups are competing for national power.

As my research has shown, "camba" and "kolla," as well as the flag of Santa Cruz and the wiphala, have been constructed in opposition to each other. I argue that the national crisis brought on by regionalism in Bolivia has been linked to the rise of these regional flags and markers of identity. This elevation of regional symbols over national ones has helped to foster the breakdown of national affiliations.

The modified connotations of symbols can be mapped through tracing either a change in meaning over time or a reemergence after a long period of dormancy. Symbols with long histories are very effective catalysts in organizing political parties and social movements because they connect contemporary claims with ancestral roots. Restricting the connotation of a specific representation of the past and connecting it to current debates constitutes the basis of the “political semiotics of memory.” The use of powerful symbols of the past exposes a method by which allegiances are fostered and interests articulated by contemporary social movements and political parties in Bolivia.

CHAPTER 7

Autobiographical and Collective Memory: Connecting People and Places

I spent most of Día del Campesino on August 2nd, 2007, in the company of either Juan Carlos Roman or Carlos Delgadillo. The latter constantly greeted a stream of friends and associates from throughout the central highlands. The pattern quickly became familiar: someone arrives, Carlos hands them a tutuma full of chicha, and the person raises the tutuma, and drinks to somebody or something. That day we drank to Morales, each other, the union, and the community. But mostly, Carlos would raise his gourd to José Rojas and Jorge Solíz, the two figures most responsible for the founding of the community, the genesis of the union, and the agrarian reform. I distinctly remember his repeated mention of their names, drinking in commemoration to these two important figures. When I asked him about it the following day when he was sober, he firmly stated that:

“They are the two fathers of this community. I...all of us here share our ñawpa [lineage] with them. We share our blood with them. They built this community, gave us this land. We are connected to this land and to them. Our ñawpa is in our blood, and our blood is connected to this land. We campesinos are from the same blood...from the same land.”

“Ñawpa” is a powerful term indicating lineage and descent. It is a Quechua word that is commonly used to indicate a connection between people, both temporally to ancestors in the past as well as spatially to a place. While I had heard Carlos use the term a few times before, it seemed prominent in Carlos’ mind during the festivities of Día del Campesino.

The use of “ñawpa” links individuals in the community to each other and to the central highlands. The metaphor of a common lineage represents a shared thread that weaves community members together in the central highlands. This has important ramifications for the construction and composition of one’s contemporary familial and political associations.

This chapter explores how interpretations of descent merge individual and collective representations of the past. While it seems obvious that understanding, interpreting, and representing the past is done both collectively and individually, the dearth of research that dovetails the two can partially be attributed to artificial disciplinary biases that influence research epistemology and methodology.

The study of the past and memory is, by nature, interdisciplinary, so it is important to search for connections between public representations and personal interpretations of the past. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how memory acts as a bridge, linking individuals to each other as well as connecting them to places. Memory, manifested as a representation of the past, contextualizes a person, giving them a sense of identity, a fuller awareness of self, while providing them with a bond to a specific place. Instead of distinguishing between shared and individual representations, this research attempts to categorize memory by the ways in which representations act as *bridges*, connecting individuals to each other and to specific places. At issue is the role of the past in determining kinship

affiliations as well as associations with a particular political party or social movement.

Approaches to Autobiographical and Collective Memory

The study of memory is, of course, a complex project undertaken in a broad spectrum of disciplines, from the humanities to the social, behavioral, and medical sciences. Cognitive psychologists have looked at memory processing in the hippocampus, the region of the brain where memories are first processed (Eichenbaum 2002). In contrast, more sociological understandings have attempted to conceptualize the ways in which representations of the past are created, maintained, and bequeathed socially across generations.

Memory is neither solely in the domain of the social or the individual; disciplinary biases are reflected in research. While recent work by Maurice Bloch (1996, 1998, 2005) has endeavored to get at the heart of the matter, there remains a dearth of research on the overlap between collective and autobiographical representations of the past.

This section will explore certain important works on memory linking both individual and shared representations of the past. By necessity this is a partial account, as volumes have been written on the subject of memory in various

disciplines. The overall goal is to construct an account of memory that focuses on the intersection of shared representations of the past and conceptions of the self.

Instead of grouping the research according to disciplinary affiliations, I will focus on how the contributions of each author have affected our understanding of the ways in which collective representations create a range of acceptable notions for individuals to construct their self-conceptions. At the heart of the problem is what is referred to as “distributed memory,” whereby understandings of the past are atomized and differentiated, but coalesce at specific moments. Recent research addresses how individual representations become shared in public performances and practices. These experiences reinforce both collective and autobiographical representations of the past.

I will begin by looking at early research that focuses on the role of shared notions in the construction of “schemas” (Bartlett 1932), or mental templates that effect how memories are stored and recalled. This will be followed by an extensive discussion of watershed works that focus on practices that create acceptable public representations of the past. I will then tie this research together using recent works by Maurice Bloch, whose work breaks down distinctions between public and private representations of the past.

Schemas and Distributed Memory

Schemas are a useful way to conceive of the relationship between public and private representations of the past. They form the mental templates by which memories are organized and understood. British psychologist Frederic Bartlett, writing in the 1930s, proposed the “schema theory of memory” (1932) that explored the influence of culture on perception and learning. In his research on memory, he concluded that the way memories are organized and recalled by individuals is highly influenced by past experience. Because memory retrieval is essentially a reconstruction, rather than viewing memories as files that are simply stored and retrieved, they should instead be viewed as reconstructions colored by the context in which they are learned and recalled.

Before Bartlett, common conceptions of memory revolved around representations being imprinted onto individuals. This idea goes back to Plato, who conceived of memory storage as akin to a wax tablet, whereby people “hold the wax to perceptions and thoughts, and in that receive the impression of them” (Plato as cited in Jowett 1892:255). The problem with this conception is that it relies too much on a one-sided, cause-and-effect relationship. Representations of the past are conditioned by the social situation in which they are learned as well as the context in which they are recalled.

A symptom of this is what is referred to as “distributed memory.” This describes a major problem encountered by research that focuses on either autobiographical or collective memory. The dilemma revolves around the fact that understandings of the past are not equally distributed among individuals. At times they are collectively shared, as in sometimes people share certain representations of the past. On other occasions, however, individuals whom would be expected to share memories have distinct representations of the past. How and why this happens is a matter of contention.

The problem of distributed memory is an important issue for understanding how representations of the past are impacted by individual experience as well as social situations. The storage, retrieval, recall, and reconstruction of specific representations of the past are colored by contemporary experience. Certain forms of experience, especially practices, serve to cement shared representations of the past, constructing acceptable public representations by which individuals conceive of their own past and their part in collectivities. Practices of the past serve to contextualize individuals, establishing a reference point between them and other people in both time and space. The next section will concentrate on previous research that discusses the relationship between collective practices and autobiographical memory.

Practices Connecting People

Certain practices involve public representations of the past. These public representations congeal specific constructions of the past. Collective memory provides acceptable options for individuals to understand their relationship to others who share similar interpretations.

The watershed work in collective memory is by Maurice Halbwachs, a Durkeimian sociologist, who emphasizes the social nature of understanding the past. Paul Connerton, writing many years later, builds upon Halbwachs' argument by focusing more on experience, arguing that representations of the past are influenced by contemporary practices. Recent work by Thomas Abercrombie ethnographically documents practices that carry the past into the present.

Much of Halbwachs' work on memory is concerned with a critique of psychological perspectives that locate the study of memory in individuals. In his attempt to construct a "sociological theory of memory" (1992[1951]:40), Halbwachs draws heavily on the ways in which memory is recalled—how one remembers. He first distinguished between memory on the one hand and dreams and aphasia (language deficiency associated with brain damage) on the other. Thoughts and ideas among these latter two are too unstructured, uncontrolled, and outside of conventions. Conversely, memories are part of a wider social system,

constrained by specific histories. In this perspective, “the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society” (*Ibid.* 51).

Halbwachs’ Durkheimian perspective is interesting in how it describes the societal constraints on memory. In his work, he discusses memory in the family, religion, and social classes. He argues that there are different rings or circles of overlapping memory, in that the family will share the richest and most tightly-bound collection of shared memories, down to the actual kinship term used to describe a specific person. Likewise, his discussion of social classes looks at how perceptions of memories are associated with common experiences. These common histories serve to connect people in a social class.

Most vital to Halbwachs’ work, however, is how memory is recalled and shared, bringing the past to the present. This occurs within the family and social classes, but most explicitly in religion. Halbwachs’ deliberation on religion investigates how religious practices aid in the recollection and reproduction of specific representations of the past. The clearest example is in “rites,” the “body of gestures, words, and liturgical objects established in a material form...which are constantly reproduced and assured uniformity in time and space by rituals and the priestly body” (1992[1951]:116). The enduring sequence of rites is repeated across generations, producing a connection between the practice in its past and present form. These enduring practices integrate collectivities through maintaining a shared memory.

The strength in Halbwachs' work is his description of how memories are intimately shared and reproduced collectively within religion and the family. However, he does not elaborate on sources of memory outside of the inner circles of family and religion. Likewise, he does not explain the forces at play in the maintenance and reproduction of specific representations of the past. These glaring deficiencies in Halbwachs' work are explicitly dealt with by Paul Connerton, who argues that:

“images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory. To the extent that their memories of a society's past diverge, to that extent its members can share neither experiences or assumptions” (1989:3).

Connerton moves beyond Halbwachs in his emphasis on the way memory structures contemporary relationships and how commemorative practices reproduce specific representations of the past. His work begins with a discussion of power and practices, and then proceeds to outline “two distinct areas of social activity: commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices” (1989:7). A majority of his book deals with these two facets of memory, and it is through these two typologies that Connerton constructs his argument.

Commemorative ceremonies are rituals that are performative, in that they are formal and repetitive in both form and content. Connerton argues that “images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less) ritual performances” (1989:40). Within these commemorative

ceremonies, bodily practices take form through the rhythm of actions in postures and gestures that guide individuals through ceremonies. However, practices can also serve as challenges to power and inequality. Connerton uses examples from the French Revolution to support his argument. He contends that two practices, ceremonial trial and execution, are rites that were intelligible:

“by invertedly recalling the other rites that hitherto confirmed that institution. The ritual ending of kingship was a settling of accounts with and giving an account of what it repudiated” (1989:9).

The intelligibility of these rites comes from previous incarnations and institutions, while simultaneously serving to challenge those previous institutions. The ceremonial trial and execution served to distance different perspectives on the past and solidify the unity of the collectivities and their shared past, present, and future.

It is this sharing of the past, by means of actions that serve to construct and maintain collective memory, through which bonds between people are constructed and specific memories are shared and reproduced. Collective memory provides the outline for the rituals, ceremonies, and other practices whereby the past is perceived and signified in the present.

Practices and Places

More recent work by Thomas Abercrombie in Bolivia builds off both Halbwachs and Connerton. His fieldwork in Santa Barbara de K'ulta, in the Bolivian altiplano, illustrates how memory is transmitted across generations while also reflecting contemporary experiences. He focuses on the practices that reproduce and transmit collective memory, specifically those practices that connect people to a particular time and place.

Abercrombie, like Connerton, looks at the practices and performances of memory. He is explicit in distinguishing history that a historian would compose and historical memory, or collective memory, which is constructed and maintained by people in K'ulta. He outlines a history that “we might call a history of K'ulta but not a K'ulta history” (1998:317). This distinction is important because it demonstrates the divergent nature of representations of the past that are composed by a historian, as opposed to those performed and practiced by the people of K'ulta.

Representations of the past are contingent on present circumstances, and Abercrombie argues that collective memory is constrained under the weight of experience. He argues that:

“pre-Columbian techniques of social memory, all of which construed social time and space as a sequence of places and moments along pilgrimage itineraries, were reshaped along

colonial pathways that made sense of changing contexts of social life” (1998:318).

This perspective emphasizes the performative and spatial aspects of memory.

Abercrombie conceptualizes collective memory in K’ulta as existing in spatial

paths:

“Chief among the means by which K’ultas recall, address, and manipulate the past in the present are three forms of t’aki: narrative (and also songs); libation sequences, called amt’aña t’akis, ‘paths of memory’; and p’ista t’akis, ‘fiesta paths’ or fiesta-cargo careers...K’ulta people categorize them as kinds of t’akis, ‘pathways’. T’aki may be described as a poetic category of exceptionally broad scope, encompassing all the techniques that K’ultas use to transmit social memory” (1998:321).

These performative or ritual responsibilities are all “spatial” in that they all concern a “path” of one form or another. Abercrombie translates the Aymara word “t’aki” as referring to:

“a variety of phenomena, from paths on the ground by which people travel on foot, to oral narrative, and to various kinds of individual and collective sequences of fiesta-sponsorship careers” (1998:320).

It is through the various types of t’aki that the K’ulta represent the past. For example, during the formalized and structured libation sequences (amt’aña t’akis), participants will drink to various spaces, such as a house, corral, or tomb of an ancestor, commonly referred to as a “chullpa.” The order of dedication of the libations concentrically radiates out from the house where the ceremony is taking place to the surrounding mountains and region. The performance of these libation sequences connects participants to specific places. As a:

“path of memory, this sequence of libation dedications describes a series of places across the territory, recalling the actual channels of social transmission which, like a journey, have both spatial and temporal coordinates” (1998:359).

Through connecting the histories of particular places along the journey of libation sequences, the people of K’ulta connect with and construct—through recollection and performance—their collective memory.

Overlap Between Autobiographical and Collective Memory

While Abercrombie’s research is helpful in demonstrating how practices foster collective memory, it doesn’t thoroughly explain how individuals associate shared conceptions of the past with their autobiographical memory. The tendency to neglect the connections between autobiographical and collective memory has been common in studies of memory in the social sciences.

Recent research by Maurice Bloch deliberately makes a case against the idea of a dichotomy between autobiographical and collective memory. Bloch argues that understanding memory is not about finding where individual memory ends and social memory begins, or vice versa. Instead, he focuses on how they are related and mutually constructed. Self-conceptions, for example, are seen through a learned social lens.

Building on research by Baddeley (1976), Cohen (1990), Neisser (1978), and Sperber (1985), Bloch (1998) searches for the intersection of public and

private representations. In his critique of psychological approaches to memory, he argues that:

“The problem with psychologists’ approach to memory in the real world comes, I believe, from their failure to grasp the full complexity of the engagement of the mind in culture and history and, in particular, their failure to understand that culture and history are not just something created by people but that they are, to a certain extent, that which creates persons” (1998:69).

His remedy proposes a study of memory that outlines:

“context-specific ways in which people see themselves in the real world and how their abilities are engaged in the context of their own theories, purposes, and conditions” (1998:69).

The methodological position Bloch takes is to conceptualize how “public historically created, cultural representations join private representations” (1998:83). Looking for overlap between the two is the key to Bloch’s method. The connection between public and private representations outlines the ways in which individual understandings are filtered through collective ones.

I am compelled by Bloch’s and Abercrombie’s approaches because my fieldwork both entailed practices that specifically address the past and presented opportunities to discuss the connection between autobiographical and collective memory. Taken together, the works by these authors are extremely helpful in elucidating how practices produce acceptable representations of the past from which individuals subscribe. These “practices of the past” connect people to each other and to places, as those with a shared history also share connections with a space. I contend that the temporal and spatial bridge of memory provides a

context for individuals to understand themselves, giving them a sense of identity, and a way to comprehend their place in the world.

Día Del Campesino and Representing the Past

The excitement was building for weeks. Seemingly everyone in Ucureña had a job to do in preparation for Día del Campesino. It had been celebrated here every August 2nd for more than a half-century, but in the previous year, 2006, the arrival and presentation by new president Evo Morales turned the day into a riotous festival. A very large platform had been built this year, and reporters from television stations and newspapers came from as far as La Paz to cover the event. Ucureña was on a national stage again.

Everybody was ready for the same excitement this year. I was assured by local leaders that the chaos of the previous year would be avoided. The small community did not plan and thus was not prepared for the number of people who arrived in 2006. I had heard stories of robberies, rapes, public urination and defecation, and firework-related injuries that were mere side notes to Morales' "Agrarian Revolution."

The official planning for the event began about a month beforehand, although it seemed that people started preparing months before that. There were "August 2nd Cooperatives" that handled the spatial designation of places dedicated

to sanitation, security, and food and beverage consumption. Ucureña seemed to be assuring itself that it would be ready this year.

Ucureña is a small community in the high valley of the central highlands. It has an unimpressive plaza with scattered benches and trees, surrounded by a few elementary schools and churches on the dirt-lined periphery of the concrete plaza. On August 2nd of every year, more than 100,000 people arrive from all over the country to celebrate the first agrarian reform in Bolivian history. This giant influx of visitors is a chaotic affair, but it presents the community with national attention once every year.



Figure 7.1 Central plaza of Ucureña.

The Past is Right There, I Can Show it to You

I had been living in Ucureña for a little more than two months, staying with local schoolteacher Juan Carlos Roman. About two weeks before Día del Campesino, we were in his front yard, talking about the speech that he was putting together as part of the introductory ceremony that would come before the arrival of Morales.

From the day we first met, he had shown keen interest in the history of Ucureña and the central highland region. We spent countless sunny days chatting after lunch in front of his house about the history of the community and region. I still have fond memories of relaxing in his front yard, talking with him during the lazy warm afternoons of the central highlands. He was an astute and intelligent man, naturally inquisitive. As a result, our conversations were diverse and deep, with significant range, including everything from politics to sports to religion. He was a self-described “amateur historian” as well, and together we worked on composing a definitive history of Ucureña.

On one occasion we left his yard, and he offered me a guided tour of the community. The community is rather small, so the tour consisted of a walk around the central plaza. However, the central plaza is an important place where

children play and adults meet to chat. In short, it is the center of the informal social life of the community.

The central plaza is similar to others scattered around Bolivia: it is square, in the middle of town, and has a large statue in the center. However, of note is a small sign on a light post that reads: *Respetar lo que tienes es respetar tu cultura y tu historia* (“To respect what you have is to respect your culture and history”).

I can remember the moment when I first saw the sign. I had been studying the history of the central highlands for about a year, fully aware of the importance of Ucureña in Bolivian history. This sign seemed to simultaneously crystallize both the place of the community in Bolivian history as well as the importance of the past in the present.

Juan Carlos is the author and caretaker of the sign. Long intrigued as to the purpose and meaning behind it, I asked him about it during a pause in our walk around the plaza. He responded:

“It is for the children. They do not understand the history of this community and they do not care. The history of this community, this region, is who we are today. Their grandparents, my father, were the people who fought for this land, who were able to give us everything that we have today. I teach my son and my students about these things, and the connection between the history of the community and their lives today. It starts to be absorbed as they get older, and they start to learn about what their grandparents had to do in order for us to have the lives that we have. The sign is a reminder to them, as they are playing in the central plaza, that they are part of something larger. They need to respect and defend this land as their parents and grandparents have. Only together can this be accomplished. A united people cannot be defeated.”

Juan Carlos clearly defines the purpose of the sign, and the intended consumers of its message. Connecting “the children,” their grandparents, his father, and himself with the community and the land they inhabit speaks not only to a shared ownership of the community, but also a collective responsibility to their ancestors. He feels as though he has a debt to his grandparents, and to his father, to make sure that the younger generations of Ucureña don’t forget their past. He reminds the younger generations that they have an obligation to their ancestors, a debt Juan Carlos has felt, to care for the land that their ancestors fought for. And he tries to remind them that this can only be done collectively, as a group with a shared sense of purpose and identity.

Juan Carlos always spoke seriously about the history of Ucureña. His father had been a member of the farmers union in the community, and while Juan Carlos himself did not play a prominent role in the union because he was a very dedicated schoolteacher, his farm’s survival depended on the union and community.

As we continued our walk around the plaza, I found it to be the perfect moment to broach my interest in the two graves located immediately under the main statue in the center of the plaza. Among the numerous plaques on the base of the statue dedicated to various August 2nd celebrations, the graves of José Rojas and Jorge Solíz are prominent fixtures. There are often fresh flowers on the graves, and they play an important role in the commemorations of

August 2nd.

As we approached these graves, Juan Carlos smiled and stated that “the past is right here, I can show it to you.” Pointing at the graves at the base of the statue, he said:

“This is it...here they are. Here is the history of Ucureña, the history of the central highlands, the history of Bolivia. It is all here right in front of you. These two people helped to change everything, both here in the community, in the region, and on a national level. We are grateful to them. They fought for everything that we have now. Next week when all the people are here, surrounding these statues, drinking, dancing, and celebrating, I hope they remember who made it possible.”

In pointing at the graves, Juan Carlos broached an important connection between himself, the community, the region, and the nation. The fact that “they fought for everything we have now” places Juan Carlos in the position of linking the past actions by those two figures to contemporary life in the community. Moreover, the graves of José Rojas and Jorge Solíz provided the framework for Juan Carlos to place himself within the shared history of the community, region, and nation. Through these graves that he “showed” me the history of Ucureña, and his connection to it.

After our walk around the central plaza, Juan Carlos excused himself by telling me that he had to work on his speech. I think that the walk inspired him.

The Day Arrives

There was frenetic activity the day before. People had already begun arriving. Tables and chairs were being set up all around the plaza. Signs denoting food, beverage, and bathrooms were hung all over the community. The festivities seemed to start early, as the town already had a celebratory atmosphere, with the central plaza turning into a collection of chicherías by late afternoon. I chose not to drink the day before, giving my liver an extra chance to brace itself for the next day, which was sure to involve a long day of drinking beer and chicha.

I could not sleep the night before out of anticipation for what was to come. I started hearing music and loud noise by five in the morning, not a regular occurrence in this normally sleepy, rural community. I decided to get dressed and see what was happening.

My first reaction when I emerged from my house was astonishment. The plaza was covered with people. It was five in the morning. Never had I seen such a large crowd in Ucureña. I had been warned by various community members to be ready for the festivities that were to arrive, but the sheer mass of the people and their contagious energy filled me with excitement.

I spent the morning meeting campesinos from throughout the central highlands. I made sure to always be around a familiar face, whether union leader

Carlos Delgadillo, union member Ramon Escalera, or Juan Carlos Roman. They seemed to know everyone, and through association, I seemed to meet everyone.

As the chicha began to flow in late morning, my skills in speaking Quechua hit a point of fluency which I had never felt before. Throughout the day, I was cheered as *uj runa jinalla*, loosely translated as “one like many,” referring to the felt connection between the campesinos and me.

Formal interviews were out of the question. A notebook and tape recorder would have disabled my ability to speak with most of the campesinos. Through experience I had learned that these tools of interviewing seemed to foster skepticism among the more rural inhabitants of Bolivia, the exact people I was surrounded by and speaking with.

I was, however, able to have extremely intimate conversations with many amidst the pending festivities. The celebrations created an amazing feeling of togetherness. Ucureña is the pilgrimage site for the central highlands. It is a place that gives the campesinos in the region a sense of power, strength, and identity.

There was the projection of a common people, with a common purpose and goal. These bonds were fostered throughout the year, but this day was the manifestation of these relationships. The atmosphere was of extreme happiness, togetherness, and general good spirits. While the Quechua language has two third-person plural forms, inclusive (*-nchej*) and exclusive (*-yku*), the former was almost exclusively used throughout the day.

Evo is a Legend

Music had been blaring through the speakers from the stage all morning. It is the same music heard on the radio in the houses of all the campesinos, the familiar rhythms that inspire one to *kweka*, the dance of the central highlands of Bolivia that has assisted me in making a fool of myself on more than one occasion.

The three speeches that preceded Morales' were barely noticed. I felt bad for Juan Carlos Roman, who I knew had put a lot of time and thought into his speech. He spoke of the importance of the history of the community, the place of the community in the region, and the role that the community and region could play in national debates. I paid close attention to Juan Carlos' speech, out of interest and loyalty but also because it was mid-afternoon and I needed a break from campesinos handing me gourds of chicha which could not be refused.

After the preliminary speeches, there was a noticeable lull. The conversations continued, however people kept looking over their shoulders to the dirt road that was the main access road to the community. There was a collective distraction that persisted for about an hour.

Then, all of a sudden, the voices quieted and herds of people began moving around. Five military trucks sped down the main artery into Ucureña,

came around the southern edge to the eastern wing of the plaza and quickly screeched to a halt next to the stage. The temporary chicherías scattered around the perimeter of the plaza cleared out, and the center of Ucureña became packed with campesinos as if a rock concert was about to begin.

I was able to thread my way through the crowd and walk straight to the front of the stage, where I could get a good view of Morales. As he was preparing to speak, shouts from the audience ranged from support (*Viva Morales!*) to jokes about his sneakers (*Going to a soccer match Evo?*).

Covered in rainbow confetti with large wiphala flags on each side of him, Morales gave a speech that addressed the problems of the day: agrarian reform, autonomy, nationalization of oil and gas, and the role of the central highlands in national affairs.

His speech seemed rather formal. He read from a piece of paper for about half of the time, and those in the crowd expecting great proclamations or extensive cheering were obviously disappointed. There was a general feeling of malaise, probably as a result of great expectations after what had transpired the previous year.

He delivered his speech in Spanish, and it lasted only about ten minutes in all. There were a few shouts and cheers when he mentioned the farmers unions and the community of Ucureña, and there was an obvious attempt to relate the

first agrarian reform of 1953 to his proposed plan for changes in land tenure. An excerpt from my fuzzy recording referred directly to the history of Ucureña:

“54 years ago today, we celebrated the first agrarian reform in Bolivia. This is the place where the campesinos changed history. Now, we will change history again. The voices of the campesinos will be heard! A united people cannot be defeated!”

Morales never misses an opportunity to discuss the past, especially concerning local events that have larger repercussions, such as the agrarian reform. Likewise, he often emphasizes a connection between himself and campesinos from the past and present.

The loudest cheer of the day followed these words. The bond that Morales had with the central highlands was concretized at that moment. Juan Carlos referred to him as *la leyenda*, or “the legend.” He always joked about how Morales had become something of a cult figure in the central highlands, and while Juan Carlos vehemently supported him, he judged Morales on how he helped Ucureña, not as a person who could do no wrong, as many seemingly felt in the central highlands. The almost mythical status of Morales in the central highlands is a result of the felt connection, the kinship, between the campesinos and the president.

A Drink to José Rojas! A Drink to Jorge Solíz!

A Drink to Eduardo!

After Morales' speech ended and his caravan drove away, Día del Campesino turned into a party. From around two in the afternoon until early the following morning, music blared from the stage; people danced or drunkenly swayed; there was laughing and fighting; and a tremendous amount of drinking and chatting occupied all those who attended.

The drinking was continuous and fast-paced. Drinking chicha most often involves sitting or standing in a circle, and having a full tutuma handed to you. You are then expected to drink it in one sip before dipping the tutuma into the bowl of chicha, and handing the tutuma to the person next to you, usually to your right. This is repeated incessantly, as members of the circle come and go. Around goes the tutuma: drunk, dipped, and passed.

On that day people usually raised the tutuma and drank to a place or a person. The different places usually were composed of the nation of Bolivia, the central highlands, or Ucureña, and the most common recipients of the cheer were Evo Morales, José Rojas, Jorge Solíz, or me. I met more people on that day than I had probably ever met in my entire life. It felt like I shook the hands of hundreds of campesinos. All of them enjoyed watching me drink, and they definitely had fun getting me drunk.

I had become adept at minimizing the amount of chicha consumed via stalling techniques, the most helpful of which was eating. It has two benefits: people will understand why you are not drinking when you are eating and food helps to absorb the alcohol. Most of the people did not worry about such matters, as many were plastered by midday. I managed to stay conscious until around ten at night, when the alcohol and exhaustion forced me to stumble back to my room at Juan Carlos' house to pass out.

Ñawpa, Kinship, and Place

While I was unable to take copious notes during Día del Campesino, I was able to scribble some observations into a small notebook that I always carried with me. Throughout the day, I heard constant references to “ñawpa” within the context of the celebrations. I questioned a number of campesinos about what “ñawpa” meant to them, and it is interesting to note how individuals cited themselves in relation to their family, the community, the farmers union, and the central highlands. It is from these observations that I deduced that the term overlaps autobiographical and collective memory in the region.

As previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, “ñawpa” is a Quechua term indicating lineage and descent. It does so by contextualizing the individual within a shared past. In other words, when the term is mentioned, it is

always discussed within the framework of connecting the individual to another person and/or place.

On the day after Día del Campesino, I attempted to get a clearer conception of ñawpa as it is used in the central highlands. The comments by Carlos Delgadillo earlier in the chapter address his felt connection to previous leaders José Rojas and Jorge Solíz, as well as the union, the community, and the region. However, I wanted to know whether this was solely an aberration.

Interestingly, in my interviews with other campesinos, all expressed similar connotations for ñawpa. In fact, there is not much disagreement over the meaning of the term. In a sense, it constitutes the glue that holds the central highlands together. As one campesino clearly stated to me:

“My ñawpa forms the roots for me to grow. It is the root of my family...and the community. Through ñawpa I am connected to others...my parents, brother, sister, uncles, cousins, grandparents, to union members, and to the community. My ñawpa defines who I am today. Together, we all share a history. We all have a common bond [vínculo común].”

This comment lucidly demonstrates how ñawpa links individuals to their family and all of them to their union and community, both socially and spatially.

“Ñawpa” is both a genealogical map as well as a claim to land. However, it is not a genealogical chart solely delineating bloodline, as it also fosters a connection between community and union members otherwise unrelated by blood. Consequently, I contend that “ñawpa” forms a narrative that focuses on the shared experiences of ancestors and contemporary people that inhabit the same

spaces. References to and definitions of “ñawpa” by campesinos connote a bond among the individual, family members, and ancestors in the community and farmers union of Ucureña.

Research participants from Ucureña were keen to discuss ñawpa as the centerpiece around which they conceived of their kinship relationships. While a great deal of previous research focuses on the importance of kinship in the Andes (ex. Van Vleet 2008), I feel uncomfortable in stating that there is an “Andeanness” or inherent focus on kinship by people in the highlands of Bolivia, Ecuador, or Peru. This large generalization, known as “lo andino,” is often accompanied by stereotypes that are related to conceiving of the indigenous of the Andes as people being stuck in time or a window into the past, exemplifying the way things were during the Inca Empire. This is not only untrue, but the diversity of the region makes “lo andino” an unfair generalization that borders on farcical. The focus on ñawpa that is discussed in this chapter came solely from my research participants in Ucureña, and it is through the use of the term whereby people conceptualized their associations to past and present members of the community.

Conclusion

Día del Campesino, the context which brought ñawpa to the surface, is an annual practice that solidifies individual connections to the community of Ucureña, the farmers unions, and the central highland region. The commemoration of important figures, such as José Rojas and Jorge Solíz, and events, such as the agrarian reform of 1953, serve as catalysts in strengthening communal and regional bonds.

As previous research (Abercrombie 1998) has shown, practices that represent the past connect participants to each other as well as to specific spaces. Día del Campesino is an important practice that provides public representations of the past from which individuals construct their own interpretations (Bloch 1998). While the previous research by Abercrombie (1998) and Bloch (1998) highlight important ways in which practices fuse individual and collective representations of the past, my research goes further by ethnographically documenting how collective narratives offer a template that people use to structure their autobiographical accounts. The use of ñawpa is indicative of this, as the connotation of the term unites inhabitants of the central highlands temporally (to ancestors) and spatially (to a place).

The earlier comments on ñawpa outline the framework from which individuals in the community of Ucureña construct their autobiographical

accounts. Each individual not only traces but also places substantial importance on their descent. They weave their own narratives and their own genealogies, but within the collective fabric of the community.

On many occasions during my fieldwork, self-descriptions invariably included shared concepts, such as campesino or originario. Numerous examples like this are cited throughout this dissertation. All of these instances connect individual accounts with shared conceptions. They link people to each other in both space and time.

The most common and important narrative that defines one's location in the shared past of Ucureña, however, is ñawpa. Individuals would cite their ñawpa in describing both their contemporary selves and their connection to the community. While the genealogical map of ñawpa is a collective template of familial and communal connections, individuals construct conceptions of self and autobiographical accounts based on their place in the web of the ñawpa ancestral tree. It is through the genealogical map of ñawpa that the past acts as a bridge, linking individuals to each other as well as connecting them to places. This has important consequences for determining one's contemporary familial and political associations.

CHAPTER 8

The Politics of Perceived Ancestry and Education

On the day after the celebrations commemorating Bolivian independence in August of 2007, I sat for an interview with Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee leader Mario Vargas in Santa Cruz. The entire city seemed hung over: the festivities in the streets of the city had kept me awake in my hostel and a general feeling of irritability permeated the people of this normally laid-back city. Evo Morales had given a speech on Independence Day, and as I read the newspapers that morning, it was clear that his speech was not well-received in the lowlands.

As he arrived at our designated meeting point—a café in the center of Santa Cruz—30 minutes late (or right on-time, if using “Bolivian Time”), I saw that Mario had a few newspapers folded under his arm. He did not seem very happy. After the standard greeting in Bolivia between men (a handshake, a loose hug, followed by another handshake), I realized that the timing of our meeting was fortuitous: I was interested in interpretations of colonialism in the lowlands, and the speech by Morales the previous day had touched upon that very subject, igniting debate in the lowlands on that topic.

The previous day, the 182nd anniversary of Bolivian independence, president Evo Morales declared: “We are advancing toward internal and external decolonization” (Granma 2007). I asked Mario what he thought of this quote. His response:

“He [Evo] needs to remember that he is the president of Bolivia, and not an Inca leader. He is fighting the Spanish colonists, but they are not here anymore. They have not been here for 200 years. The ghosts of colonialism are still in the highlands, but here, in

Santa Cruz, we accept our history...beginning in the colonial period. Our camba identity began then. The way we speak, our tradition, history, culture...is camba. During colonialism, the Spanish and the Guaraní formed a unique identity, different from the west of the country.”

Mario’s thoughts echo the common sentiment from many people with whom I spoke in Santa Cruz and the lowlands of the country, emphasizing the current influence of the history of Spanish colonialism instead of the legacy of exploitation associated with colonialism otherwise felt by many in the western highlands of Bolivia.

Distinct interpretations of colonialism in Bolivia have come to the forefront during recent debates in the country. Contemporary differences, rooted in distinct historical experiences, are traced through distinct ancestral roots. Attempts to decolonize Bolivia in the highlands, countered by the embrace of colonialism in the lowlands, is symptomatic of what I term “perceived ancestry.” This strategic formulation of identities by political parties and social movements in the country, aided by writers and teachers of history, center on assertions of a direct lineage to precolonial, colonial, and post-independent peoples.

This chapter is about two separate but related ideas. First, I argue that conceptions of ancestry are used to construct oppositional lines of descent in contemporary Bolivia. Second, perceived differences inherited from ancestors legitimize contemporary ideas about difference in the country. I argue that distinct historical experiences and ancestral roots have been the means by which political

parties and social movements have entrenched themselves in the regionalism that continues to plague the country.

I focus on education as the context where these deliberations are taking place. Debates over the composition of the educational curriculum, including the teaching of history and indigenous languages, have been the framework within which political parties and social movements have attempted to reinterpret and rewrite the past. The tracing of distinct ancestries in the highlands and lowlands, using regional events and figures, has been the method by which history is used to construct divergent regional lineages.

In this chapter, I will review research that investigates how the past is continuously rewritten and used in the present. This genre of research broaches the problem of the strategic use of the past in the present. It could be argued that tracing a line of descent to people from the deep past is artificial and false, constructed by political parties and social movements as part of their strategy. While this may be true, my focus is on how this is done, providing an ethnographic account of the role of notions of kinship and ancestry in national debates.

The contemporary reconstruction of the past in the present in Bolivia is rooted in “perceived ancestry.” Descent and lineage are an important means by which current social distinctions are made. This has laid the foundation for the varying regional histories and experiences that have resulted in distinct affiliations

that threaten stability in the country. As some lowland groups have proposed secession, at risk is nothing less than the future of Bolivia as a nation.

Perceived Ancestry

There is a great deal of research that focuses on the persistence of economic and political structures inherited by Latin America from the colonial period. These studies view the present through the lens of the past. Far fewer studies, on the other hand, examine how contemporary protagonists write and rewrite history. Instead of concentrating on the inheritance of traits, usually within the genre of “history,” this study places the focus squarely on the interpretation of the inheritance of those traits—memory, the contemporary representation of the past. This is an important distinction, as it clarifies the place of the past in current divides and unresolved debates.

John Sherman cogently argues that “there are many reasons to study colonial Latin American history, but doing so to get a grasp on contemporary realities is not one of them” (Sherman 2002:521). Sherman critiques the notion of “persistence” that is a common theme throughout much of the research on colonial Latin America. The problem lies in the extent to which the past influences the present. Instead of providing a longitudinal investigation of the

historical legacy of colonialism, the study of memory explores the interpretation and representation of the past: how perceptions of the past influence the present.

Ethnography is in a privileged position to conceptualize how contemporary people connect themselves to the past. As Joanne Rappaport (1998) demonstrates in her work with the Nasa of the southern highlands of Colombia, the past is often continuously rewritten when memory is utilized by existing actors. Contemporary groups propagate their own constructions of the past, connecting themselves to people and events from earlier times.

Rappaport's work uncovers three centuries of connections. These "chains of transmission" (1998:23), as she terms them, outline specific interpretations of the past that are passed across generations. Each segment or moment in the transmission exposes how the past is represented at each stage.

Rappaport analyzes key texts by Nasa intellectuals from the early eighteenth century to the present. At the heart of each historical narrative, she argues, is a clear and distinct "Nasa definition of their own identity" (*Ibid.* 20). What keeps the Nasa identity coherent, over two-hundred years, is the constant reconceptualization of their own past, distinct from colonial or national accounts. The ability to write their own history, Rappaport continues, has served to maintain the unity of the Nasa through changing economic and political environments. She labels the Nasa (*Ibid.* 202) a "textual community" that has served as the "source of the moral continuity that the Nasa have always drawn with their past [that] is

born in the interpretation of key texts.” The concrete effect of a connection to a common past is the solidification of unity and integration in the present among collectivities that might otherwise be atomized.

At the heart of Rappaport’s work is contestation over how the past is interpreted and the ramifications of the past on the present. As she makes clear:

“History is a question of power in the present, and not of detached reflection upon the past. It can serve to maintain power, or can become a vehicle for empowerment” (1998:16).

Rappaport’s research makes clear the ways in which contemporary political parties and social movements construct continuity with historical precedents, thus anchoring current debates in historical struggles.

In a more recent work, Rappaport continues her research on the rewriting of history in Colombia, but focuses more on the purposeful and persuasive ways in which contemporary people “historically ground...territorial claims” by “proving their primordial connections to the land” (2005:157-158). The construction of historical narratives is the discursive tool around which groups organize material claims. In Rappaport’s work, the explicit claims to land through the use of historical narrative further delineates a method by which motivated groups can use the writing of history as a means to make contemporary demands.

The Past in the Bolivian Present

The use of the past in the present is an important method used to garner support in Bolivia. Discourses tracing lineage, including the use of the terms *antepasado* (ancestor, relative), *ascendencia* (ancestry), and *costumbres* (traditions), have been deployed by both highland and lowland political parties and social movements. These lineages derived from precolonial, colonial, and post-independent peoples have facilitated organization and mobilization.

The rest of this chapter will explore these points from two different perspectives: that of the leaders and that of the supporters. I argue that “perceived ancestry” not only connects contemporary movements with figures and events from the past, but the notion of a direct lineage plays a vital role in the construction of difference, fueling contemporary conflicts in the country.

Tiwanaku Inauguration

President Evo Morales had two inaugurations after he was elected president in December 2005. He had the standard ceremony in La Paz on January 22nd, 2006, but the day before that, he had a “historic and symbolic indigenous ceremony at the pre-Inca ruins of Tiwanaku near La Paz” (Postero 2007b:1). A

local news article (Los Tiempos 2006a) proclaimed that Morales had been inaugurated with “Andean rituals,” and described the ceremony:

“70,000 people have waited all morning, next to the Tiwanaku ruins, tolerating the cold, the torrential rain, and the hail at 4,000 meters above sea level. All of a sudden, the sun appeared in the sky, and almost if an agreement had been made, there emerged from the interior of Akapana (the pyramid-mountain) a group of white silhouettes, among them Juan Evo Morales Aima, who today will be officially conferred the Constitutional President of the Republic and in this moment is acclaimed by the crowd as the new indigenous president of Bolivia and all the original peoples [pueblos originarios] of Latin America.”

“The pututu [conch-shell horn] sounds, the music with Andean instruments, fireworks, applause, and the sounds of the crowd. ‘Qhallalla [Long live], Evo!, ¡Qhallalla the new Pachakuti! Screams from the crowd of indigenous dressed in their multicolor outfits of original peoples [sus trajes multicolores originarios] recall the Andean god ‘Earth Shaker’ [Pachakuti] and the elder of the Incas, who gave him that name.”

“Wearing a red unku (a type of poncho) and a red and yellow sash (that the pre-Columbian priests last wore more than 500 years ago), Evo saluted father Inti [the Sun god] from the top of Akapana and asked his forces for permission to govern the country...After the 20 minute ritual giving thanks to Inti concluded, the turn arrived to do the same with Pachamama and he [Evo] descended down a hillside of the mountain in the direction of the principal door of the temple of Kalasasaya. The descent is a procession by the indigenous leader and the other seven Andean priests...As if nature had been complacent only for this act, a new rain began to fall onto Tiwanaku.”

As part of his speech, Morales stated that he “would fight for the rights of the 20 provinces of Kollasuyo,” referring to the eastern quarter of the four quarters of the Inca Empire where most of Bolivia is currently located. At the end of the

ceremony Evo was designated as “Apu Mallku,” a term denoting “Supreme” or “Ultimate Leader” in Aymara (Los Tiempos 2006a).

Morales’ inauguration summoned extraordinarily important figures from precolonial Bolivia. Comparing Morales to Pachakuti, the Inca ruler who expanded the empire so dramatically in the 15th century that he was called “Earth Shaker” or “He Who Remakes the World” (D’Altroy 2002), speaks to the drama of Morales’ ascension to the presidency. Getting permission from the Sun God (Inti) and Mother Earth (Pachamama) are important means by which this “traditional” inauguration further legitimized Morales’ connection to pre-Columbian Bolivia.

My good friend in La Paz attended the ceremony on that day. Beyond complaining about the weather and the crowds, she was impressed by the act and the number of people. As she explains:

“Everybody was very wet. I was soaked. It was crowded, cold, and nobody was very happy...until Evo arrived. It was strange. When he arrived, the sun appeared, the temperature became warmer, and everybody became excited and happy. It was difficult to hear what was going on, but I could see his clothes. It was special...special because he appeared like an Inca leader...at least the ways the Incas are shown in museums and books. You could see that he was very serious, and that the ritual was very serious. It was very official. It made the indigenous ritual appear official.”

The arrival of Morales coincided perfectly with the change in weather, and added to the drama of the event. Likewise, his choice of clothes, in the manner of an Inca as they are “shown in museums” demonstrates an intention on the part of

Morales to connect himself to the past. My friend also described the inauguration as an “indigenous ritual” that was “official.” These carefully constructed words mirrored the attempts at striving to make the event legitimate and on par with the standard inauguration.

My friend was usually very skeptical of the theater of Bolivian politics. In this case, however, she seemed to have an underlying sense of pride in the emergence of Morales as president of the country. Moreover, the Tiwanaku inauguration appeared to signal a new beginning not only for Bolivian politics but also for the Bolivian People:

“I had a sense of belonging to something larger. It was not about me, not about us there on that day. We were connected to something larger than us. Being at Tiwanaku, connecting Evo to Pachakuti and Inca times...I felt a connection to my ancestors [antepasados] like never before. The inauguration was a historical day. We made history on that day.”

Her specific delineation of “belonging to something larger” is indicative of the context and substance of the event. Tiwanaku is generally regarded as an archaeological site, but on this day, it was an auditorium for an inauguration. Likewise, the connection to the past by Morales to the Inca leader Pachakuti aided in transmitting the historical significance of the event. By discussing the “historical day” in which they “made history,” the event and its participants purposely connected past and present.

My friend was born in Potosí, in the altiplano of Bolivia, to her Bolivian mother and Swiss father. She never spoke of her ancestry over the seven years I

knew her until after the inauguration. The election of Morales and his subsequent inauguration spurred a revitalization of the consciousness of her own past, as well as that of Bolivia.

The inauguration was widely covered in newspapers and on television the next day for a national audience. While it did project the feeling of legitimacy, Morales still had to undergo the official inauguration the next day. It was the standard swearing-in ceremony, as Morales took the same oath as past Bolivian presidents.

The connection between Morales and Pachakuti during the “traditional” inauguration projects an important relationship between the current president and perhaps the most important Inca emperor. Likewise, the ritual granting of permission from Inti and Pachamama links Morales with belief systems that have their roots in precolonial Bolivia.

These acts were not haphazard. Throughout Morales’ campaign for the presidency, he often reflected on the state of precolonial Bolivia. He romanticized the precolonial period, discussing how the arrival of the Spanish, followed by the subsequent era of colonialism, dramatically changed and negatively affected the previous economic, political, and social makeup of the region.

Decolonizing the Nation

A large part of the presidency of Evo Morales has been devoted to “decolonizing” Bolivia. In many speeches during his campaign and since his election, he has spoken of eradicating colonial legacies in the country. Of course, shedding 500 years of colonialism involves change on numerous fronts. One major front of this decolonization involves education.

Félix Patzi, Morales’ former education minister, has been a strong proponent of decolonizing Bolivia through educational reforms. He argues (Los Tiempos 2006c) for the “decolonialization of the educational process,” stating that:

“The most important thing is to not deny the indigenous and original [originaria] identity that all Bolivians have...During 514 years they [past presidents and leaders] denied our civilization, the majority of the population was not taken into account and ultimately we were taken into account as folklore, as a things in a museum like art, but not as living civilization, at the least, to speak of civilization is to speak of a contemporary indigenous civilization.”

As part of this decolonization, the education ministry—with support from the president—plans to construct indigenous universities throughout the country and include the teaching of indigenous languages as a substantial part of the curriculum. Likewise, there will be more of an emphasis on precolonial Bolivia in history textbooks.

The educational reforms have been discussed and disputed throughout the country. A vocal debate has arisen especially among teachers. In a conversation with teacher Juan Carlos Roman in Ucureña, he expresses optimism but concern for this ambitious program:

“The curriculum that I have been teaching romanticizes independence heroes...Bolivar, San Martin, Sucre, so I understand the incorporation of indigenous history into the curriculum. However, we run the same risk of romanticizing Zárata Willka, Tupaj Katari, and Tupaj Amaru. We might have more problems than before! The battles, these debates over history are taking place in the educational system, which is not the best place for this to happen. The children will not be able to learn history if it changes every year! As a teacher, how can I teach history if it changes every year? I understand that the interpretations of the past can change based on new research, but try telling students this fact!”

While Juan Carlos is aware that the current education curriculum “romanticizes independence heroes,” he presents a very practical concern about teaching history. There is a problem with the disconnect between those who determine the composition of the curriculum and those who implement it. The politics of the past have come to the forefront in debates over the future direction of the educational system. While historians regularly debate the interpretation and representation of heroes and events from the past, this debate has become a concern for those who are in charge of organizing the curriculum.

The mandatory teaching of indigenous languages has been the other major topic of debate over the curriculum. Juan Carlos expressed his concern:

“I understand Patzi’s position on the instruction of indigenous languages. However, has he ever tried to teach these languages?”

Here in Ucureña, there are very few children who speak Quechua with their parents. Sometimes it is taught in school, but the children are not interested. They are even less interested the older they become and I understand their point of view. Being able to speak Quechua will not help you get a job, and even speaking Spanish with an accent that is similar to an accent that speakers of Quechua have...makes it less likely for someone to get a job in the city. You can speak Quechua in the campo, but these children do not want to stay here. They already know this when they are young. Spanish is the language of the city. These children want to leave the campo and live in the city, so the ability to speak Quechua does not help them. In reality, it can hurt them.”

Speaking as a teacher, Juan Carlos has a very practical concern about teaching indigenous languages. However, he merely touches the surface of this very complicated matter. The loss of the Quechua language signals, in a way, a loss of campesino identity. The use of Quechua is associated with rural life, the family, the campo, the farmers unions, etc. It also represents the exact way of life many children and adolescents are striving to leave behind. Juan Carlos continues:

“But I also understand how language is an important part of identity. If the Quechua language is lost, forgotten...like it might, then who we are, as campesinos, might be lost. It is the language of our ancestors [antepasados]. It is the language of our blood. It lets us know who we are and where we have come from. However, it is hard to force children to learn things that they are not interested in. I am a teacher, so I am involved in this battle everyday. It is very complicated. It is good that I am not a politician!”

It is interesting to note Juan Carlos’ understanding of the children not wanting to learn Quechua on the one hand but his sadness and remorse at the loss of the language on the other. The latter signals a loss of the campesino identity. The self-conception of campesinos is closely linked to language, so the loss of the

language would diminish their sense of being a campesino. Likewise, Juan Carlos' statement specifying the link between Quechua and his ancestors clearly connotes the link of perceived ancestry via language felt among many campesinos.

The speakers of the various indigenous languages in Bolivia, which include Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní and who constitute a majority of the population in the country, have historically been subject to "castilianization" (Luykx 1999:52), whereby students were forced to learn and speak Spanish, often accompanied with punishment for speaking an indigenous language.

An important step in educational reform that dealt with the teaching of indigenous languages was the 1994 Law of Education Reform (LER). The LER was part of a wider scheme of legislature, the Law of Popular Participation (LPP), which strived to reform public institutions and construct new pathways of interaction between rural villages and the central government. The LPP was a policy of decentralization, whereby the national government would play a smaller role in governing the country. As part of the LPP, the LER attempted to reverse a seemingly inevitable trend: the decrease in the use of indigenous languages in the face of Spanish. Between 1976 and 1992, monolingual speakers of indigenous languages in Bolivia decreased from 20.4% to 11.5% while monolingual speakers of Spanish increased from 36.3% to 41.7% (Albó 1995). Moreover, during the same period, speakers of Spanish increased from 78.8% to 87.4% while speakers

of Quechua and Aymara decreased from 39.7% to 34.3% and 28.8% to 23% respectively (*Ibid.*).

Previous research has shown how indigenous language education is tied to larger issues, such as race and class (Garcia 2005; Hornberger and López 1998; Luykx and López 2008). As Luykx (1999) cogently argues, success in the teaching of indigenous languages is subject to the social conditions in which they are enacted. She contends that:

“even after the more overtly cruel features were phased out, the hidden curriculum of schooling changed little, both in its underlying social aims and in the practices employed to achieve those aims” (1999:49).

Consequently, the failures of policy changes in education result from continuing trends toward the ubiquitous adoption of Spanish as the primary language as well as biases towards indigenous languages in Bolivia.

As the previous statement from Juan Carlos testifies, there is a discrepancy between the national project of indigenous language education and the lack of desire on the part of children to learn those languages. How can policies that promote the mandatory teaching of indigenous languages be successful if children do not want to learn those languages because they will only result in continued poverty?

In conversations during my fieldwork in Ucureña, I was told by parents that they wanted their children to know how to speak Quechua well, but not if that meant a life sentence as a poor farmer. On the other hand, these same parents

most often broached a desire for their children to learn Spanish, but not if that meant a loss of the Quechua language and campesino identity. Research by Maria Elena Garcia argues that “linguistic studies focusing on the revival or rescue of indigenous languages should also consider the often conflicting demands made by the speakers of those languages” (2005:95). The divergent requests by parents in Ucureña outline the difficulty in resolving the issue of indigenous language education in Bolivia.

The complexity of the problem is exemplified in the earlier statement by Juan Carlos that describes how the loss of the Quechua language in Ucureña would cause a similar loss of the campesino identity. Quechua is connected to his “ancestors,” and it is “the language of our blood.” However, while the Quechua language is tied to the campesino identity and ancestry, there is the practical concern of avoiding and reproducing rural poverty. Whereas competency in Spanish might alleviate rural poverty and provide opportunities for economic and social mobility, it could also signal the loss of the campesino identity and a severing of the kinship relationships and perceived ancestral connections.

In discussing the teaching of Spanish in Peru, Rodrigo Montoya (1986:251) argues that “on the one hand, [schools] contribute to the liberation of feudal oppression, and on the other, they liquidate indigenous culture.” As a result, the national project of indigenous language education in Bolivia needs to take into account local demands for a balanced education in both Quechua and

Spanish. In fact, a separate project by Morales' administration is attempting to raise the literacy rate in Bolivia to 100%—in Spanish. So, it seems as though the national government is attempting to give people the linguistic tools they need in order to escape poverty while also promoting instruction in indigenous languages. The successfulness of these programs, however, remains to be seen.

The larger project of the decolonization of education by the Morales administration touches on two important topics associated with perceived ancestry: the interpretation of the past in the writing of history and the teaching of indigenous languages. Both topics connect contemporary actors with historical precedents. While this section has focused on the highlands of the country, similar issues have arisen in the lowlands of Bolivia.

Lowland “Tradition”

In October of 2007, the lowland province of San Javier, in the department of Santa Cruz, celebrated a “Day of Tradition.” The local newspaper (El Deber 2007c) describes:

“With the traditional cultural night ‘My San Javier’, the population of San Javier revived their customs and traditions. The fifth version of the Day of Tradition and San Javier Pride, held this weekend, included dancing, poetry, and music, and over a thousand people rejoiced and gathered in the atrium of the church missionary. This event was organized by the municipal government, civic leaders, and educational institutions.”

It is important to note that the “event was organized by the municipal government, civic leaders, and educational institutions.” The collaboration by these three organizations has been an important part of the reconstruction of local “tradition” and “culture” in the lowlands.

A year later, in October of 2008, the lowland provinces of Paurito, Buenavista, and Guarayos celebrated a “Day of Tradition.” The local newspaper (El Deber 2008) describes the “cruceño traditions”:

“With the objective of rescuing cruceño traditions and transmitting them to the new generations, Paurito, Guarayos, and Buenavista realized, separately, their Day of Tradition, through an exposition of arts, tasty foods, dances, and popular games...The Guarayos go back 300 years in time, when they lived in a savage state surrounded by the heads of the White and Black Rivers. Yesterday they presented the eighth Day of Guaraya Tradition, organized by the mayor.”

The explicitly stated goal of “rescuing cruceño traditions and transmitting them to new generations” speaks to the intended purpose of constructing a local identity through the revitalization, some would say construction, of local history.

These celebrations have become widespread, as local governments and civic leaders continue their push for local and regional identities through the revitalization, or construction, of local traditions and customs. There has been a conscious effort by regional governments, both departmental and provincial, to foster a colloquial character, a sense of regional uniqueness rooted in the local history.

The promotion of local history, customs, and traditions in the lowlands of Bolivia has its roots in a movement that began in the 1980s. Local politicians and business leaders, through civic organizations, organized festivals and funded research as well as scholarly work on the region. Writers and academics from both Santa Cruz and throughout the lowlands began a flurry of publishing, writing a history of the region that would solidify a local identity separate and independent from Andean influence. The result has been a history that emphasizes the heroes and events of the lowland region.

Writing History in Santa Cruz

“September 24th” is the name of the central plaza in Santa Cruz. It refers to the day in 1810 when Santa Cruz declared its own independence from Spain, apart from other independence movements in Bolivia. An article in a local newspaper describes the regional sovereignty felt on the anniversary of this special day (El Deber 2007d):

“To talk about September 24th is to talk about Santa Cruz. This date means, in the local and national imagination, the department of Santa Cruz with...civic parades, white and green flags, flying in the houses of the city. However, this date has its own history...The September 24 events recall 1810 when a group of people dismissed the Governor...and established a Board of Governors...From September 24, 1810 to February 14, 1825 ran the War of Independence in Santa Cruz. There were 15 years of death, violence, and the loss of life of families and farms. For fifteen long years all the inhabitants of this province were involved in the war

in some way...Today, September 24th is the date that represents the department of Santa Cruz, and is the largest civic celebration of the capital city and the department as a whole.”

This article is interesting in the way it represents independence from Spain as a local event. Santa Cruz, both the city and the department, declared independence on that day. There is no mention of the nation of Bolivia, or of other wars or struggles that were occurring at the time. As an autonomous entity, Santa Cruz formed its own government, fought for its own independence, and September 24th, 1810 represents the day on which its inhabitants established themselves as separate from the Spanish crown. It is the day when formerly royal subjects became free and independent cruceños.

The events of 1810 are coupled with those of February 26th, 1561, when Ñuflo Chávez founded the city of Santa Cruz. This latter event and its associated hero has also been a cornerstone of the rewriting of history in the region. A recent article (El Deber 2009) explains a “discourse by historian Paula Peña and city council president Enrique Landívar”:

“in honor of 448 years since the founding of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, highlighted by the effort and input of the people who gave birth to the city on February 26th, 1561, as they left a conquered territory of more than one million square kilometers. The new challenge is to defend the identity and economic model of the region in the face of the current government.”

The city council president Enrique Landívar, representing the collective voice of cruceños, states that “we are determined to achieve the autonomy that was born 448 years ago, on February 26th” (*Ibid.*). The acts by Ñuflo Chavez five centuries

ago on February 26th have recently risen in prominence in the lowland region, as historians and politicians work together to give weight to his accomplishments.

The article continues with a quote by historian Paula Peña, who suggests that:

“the new educational modules that are constructed not only bear the names of the founder of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Ñuflo Chavez, but also their families and those who accompanied him on the task of ‘disenchantment of the earth’ [descantar la tierra]” (El Deber 2009).

A final quote by mayor Percy Fernandez reflects the movement for rewriting Santa Cruz history, as he argues that “there are many schools with names of unknown people and promised to make a list of them,” stating that “in this revolutionary era we must emphasize cruceño values” (*Ibid.*).

The connection between historians and politicians has played an important role in the writing of regional history. The construction of Santa Cruz history, apart from Andean influence, has been a cornerstone of this movement. New perspectives on the regional past of eastern Bolivia have been made possible by funding that has supported the publishing of local history.

This wave of publishing connecting contemporary leaders with those from the past is an important facet of representing the past in Santa Cruz. The rewriting of Santa Cruz history is also evident in a book review by Gustavo Pinto Mosquera in El Deber (2007e). The article reviews *A Subjugated Nation*, by P.

Hugo Camacho Áñez (2007). The reviewer begins by discussing his terminology to refer to the people of his region, preferring the term:

“ ‘Cruceño Camba People’ [pueblo camba cruceño] or, categorically, ‘Camba Nation’ [nación camba], because in this case the adjective ‘camba’ is more universal, and denotes, identifies, and unifies eastern Bolivia, differentiating it from other regional Bolivian macrocultures” (*Ibid.*).

The other “Bolivian macrocultures” the author is referring to are the inhabitants of the western regions of the country. The epistemology and methodology of writing about history in the lowlands largely involves juxtaposing and distinguishing lowland history from highland history. The common argument is that Bolivian historians focus too much on events and heroes from the highlands, to the neglect of those from the lowlands.

The reviewer of *A Subjugated Nation* follows this approach perfectly in his critique of the writing of Bolivian history:

“The fact that the history of Santa Cruz has been interpreted and understood through...misrepresentation by outsiders...[which] has been the grounds for the common citizen of Santa Cruz to live in a state of numbness in his conscience, which has prevented him from having a clear concept of his freedom and history...And so, with this lack of passion, respect for history (Santa Cruz), to natural rights to the authenticity of the Cruceño people, have created a negative environment for understanding and awareness of the ‘I’ of domestic Santa Cruz” (*Ibid.*).

The writing of lowland history seeks to foster a sense of individuality and uniqueness. There is the perception that the writing of Bolivian history has neglected the lowlands, leaving it with no identity, no local character of its own.

One gets the impression that the purpose of history, of historians, in Santa Cruz is just that: to create an identity through the construction of a history and local character.

However, on the other hand, it is evident that the production of local history is part of a larger project and movement for lowland autonomy. Towards the end of his review, the author argues that “Cruceños are only Cruceños, not Bolivians” (*Ibid.*). As is common with many of the authors of Santa Cruz history, his reasoning is based on a distinct regional experience: “The inclusion of Santa Cruz in the creation of Bolivia was not voluntary on the part of the Cruceño people.” (*Ibid.*)

This research might be viewed as belonging to a radical, extremist sect. However, on the contrary, it is symptomatic of a larger movement with a concerted effort to rewrite cruceño history. This is an important point, because the rewritten cruceño history is playing a vital role in the educational curriculum of the region.

History Education in the Lowlands

The director of the Department of Education in Santa Cruz—Salomón Vargas—argues for a reevaluation of the past. Quoted in El Deber (2007a), he states his position: “We want to study history and then analyze the facts.” Later in

the same article, historian Alcides Parejas argues that the previous historical work on Bolivian history “has been unable to dispose of the Andean idiosyncrasy” (*Ibid.*). The article concludes by stating that the “history of Bolivia, at least as they ‘tell’ us during our school lives, has a defeatist tint and an Andean perception of the past. This is sustained by the hegemony of the altiplano” (*Ibid.*)

These comments follow a common thread propagated by teachers and historians in the lowlands. I sat for an interview with a teacher at one of the more prestigious private high schools in Santa Cruz. While somewhat open-minded to contrasting points of view, he still offered a common response:

“It is important for my students to know about their ancestors [antepasados] so they know where they come from. We need to know about our past in order to understand our present and future. The past is full of events and people, and it is the job of the historian to interpret exactly what happened...the protagonists of those actions. It is the responsibility of the teacher to pass that knowledge on to the children, to the students, to the future leaders. Bolivian history has been written by writers from La Paz, writing about heroes from the altiplano, actions and events from the altiplano. What about the east? What about Santa Cruz? Has nothing happened here? And why are we different from the altiplano? Why do some of us speak different languages? Why do we eat different food? Listen to different music? Why are we different people? What is the cause? History is important in this respect. Our experiences, here in Santa Cruz, are different from the altiplano. We are in the same country by historical accident. We should not be part of the same country, but we are. People can change the present, but only if we understand the past. Through understanding the past we can understand and change the present. As a history teacher, this is what I can do. This is my gift to future generations.”

Within his comments, the teacher echoed a common sentiment in the lowlands that broaches the notion that Bolivia was a “historical accident.” The outcome of this has been a bias in the writing of “Bolivian history,” skewed towards figures and events “from the altiplano.” This regional bias, he argues, has resulted in the neglect of research on the history of the lowlands. Consequently, the teacher emphasizes the importance of local ancestors in the teaching of history, as he mentions the need to transmit local history to the “future generations.”

The teacher concluded his comments with the first stanza of a poem by Dario Vazquez Luis Cruz Rivero, entitled “Ode to the Flag Cruz”:

“Let us lift the sacred emblem
of the land of Ñuflo Chavez
with its clear face elevated
to the glorious height of the sun”

“Levantemos la enseña sagrada
de la tierra de Ñuflo Chavez
con la límpida frente elevada
a la altura gloriosa del Sol”

The representation of the past, in the “land of Ñuflo Chavez,” the hero from 1561, was a fitting end to our interview. This connection to the regional past, as a bridge to a local character and identity distinct from the highland region of Bolivia, got right to the heart of the matter: in the eyes of Santa Cruz historians, Santa Cruz is the land of Ñuflo Chavez and the declaration of independence on September 24th, 1810.

Conclusion

The conscious effort by historians and educators in Santa Cruz to write the history of the region counters the effort in the highlands to decolonize Bolivia. Both writing about the past and its fundamental role in education have taken a central position in the national divides. On a general level, education plays a vital function in connecting people to the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of a nation. As Luykx (1999) argues, educational institutions are a “citizenship factory.” This research speaks to how education is a catalyst in defining citizenship: both by who is included as well as who is excluded from national membership.

This chapter has followed and extended this line of thinking by demonstrating how debates over the composition of the educational curriculum are national conflicts that highlight how the ‘imagined community’ can be constructed in different ways. However, at the heart of the disputes over education in Bolivia is the contemporary role of history: coming to terms with the past is a constant struggle in the present. Fueling divides within the country, present battles are discussed and debated through a lens of the past. Only through reconciliation of these distinct representations of the past can present divides be overcome.

At the heart of these divides is the conviction that two separate “Bolivias” exist. This belief in divergent historical experiences forms the basis for claims to

distinct bloodlines and ancestry. The promulgation that Evo Morales and the indigenous inhabitants in the west of the country are descended from the Inca Empire, or the propagation that there is a “cruceño” or “camba” identity rooted in the coalescence of colonial Spanish and Guaraní identities that are distinct from the highlands, is based on the “perceived ancestry” of each region.

Politicians, historians, and educators have acted in unison to promote these ancestral differences. The decolonization promoted by Evo Morales and his MAS party, as well as the sponsorship of research and promotion of festivals by civic committees in the lowlands, have resulted in a blurring of the overlap of lineage, descent, and experience in Bolivia. Consequently, I contend that these perceived differences in ancestry have become formidable truths producing contemporary differences that are felt to be genuine. At stake is the stability of the country, and as long as these differences in ancestry are promoted, Bolivia will remain divided and volatile.

CHAPTER 9

Self-Representation and the Past in the Central Highlands

In Bolivia, it is never a good idea to be in a hurry. If you must be somewhere, you should not worry about getting there quickly, because most likely the people you are meeting will not show up on time anyway. However, the biggest obstacle to punctuality is often not a loose conception of promptness; it is the intentional blocking of roads. While roadblocks are most frequently evident during intracity trips, they are also extremely common during intercity sojourns.

Given the obstinate terrain comprising a great part of the country, only a handful of roads travel in and out of cities, making it completely possible for roadblocks to shut down an entire metropolis. Depending on who is blocking the roads, different methods are used to accomplish this goal. The powerful *taxistas*, or unions of taxi drivers, simply park their taxis in the road, blocking the path. The unions of bus drivers do the same with their buses. Other groups, such as farmers unions, basically pile items onto the road. Tires, garbage, trees and branches, though most commonly masses of people, are used to disrupt daily life so that their voices may be heard. In addition, because of the long history of mining in the country, dynamite is cheap, widely available, and ubiquitous at protests.

In the city of Cochabamba, daily protests are held on *Avenida Heroínas*, one of the major thoroughfares. These usually do not last very long, are loud but peaceful, and are trailed by extensive traffic. It has become routine: the marchers march, the police stop oncoming traffic from major intersections to let the

marchers pass, pedestrians tend not to pay attention, vendors attempt to sell goods to both pedestrians and protestors, and the protest ends.

As anyone who has traveled around Bolivia at all knows, travel plans can and do change frequently because of roadblocks. The country has a long history of resistance by subordinate groups without the resources for national media exposure. The ability for relatively small numbers of people to shut down an entire city by blocking a few roads is an unquestionable asset for otherwise marginal and powerless factions to gain national attention. Dovetailed with a strong union presence, subordinate but well-organized and motivated groups in Bolivia have an extraordinary tool in roadblocks. As a result, groups with little national political sway can make demands and exercise tremendous influence outside of a small locality.

I Need to get to Cliza!

I found myself one day in a hurry to get from Cochabamba to a meeting in Cliza, a trip that involved getting to a particular place in the city of Cochabamba in order to take a bus, micro, or trufi for the 50 minute ride to the central highland community of Cliza. I usually tried to arrive the day before a meeting, fully aware of the unpredictability of Bolivian roadblocks and transit, but was unable to this

time because of a tight schedule. I found myself instead at the mercy of Bolivian transit.

As I left my apartment, I hailed a taxi and asked the driver: “Hay paros” (“Are there roadblocks?”). He responded with an affirmative “No,” and we were off to the corner of *Avenida República* and *6 de Agosto*, on the other side of the city, from where I could catch transport to Cliza. I felt confident that I would make the meeting on time.

Traffic was moving well for about 5 minutes, but as we approached the southern part of the city, cars and buses were parked, people were waiting outside their vehicles, and I knew exactly what was happening. After some verbal jousting, I paid half the previously agreed-upon fare because we had only gotten halfway there, and left the taxi on foot ready to walk the remaining distance to the transit point. I had a very important meeting in Cliza with a union leader that had been scheduled a week before. I had to get there.

So I began on foot, hearing around me the familiar sounds of people screaming and dynamite exploding in the streets. As I approached the location where I could get transportation to Cliza, not a vehicle was in sight. There were, however, many tired-looking and slightly angry people. I asked whether anyone knew how or when I could get to Cliza. “Everything is stopped,” an elderly gentleman told me. “Maybe in the evening,” a middle-aged woman told me.

The evening was too late. Stressed, I told them that I had to leave “now.” When I stated this, the middle-aged woman smiled, let out a quick laugh, and said: “These fucking campesinos don’t care about you.” (“Estos putos campesinos no se preocupan por usted.”)

I still had hope. Sometimes the roadblocks are localized and just shut down parts of the city. At other times, the roadblocks bring the entire city to a halt. Sometimes it is difficult to tell, especially when crafty taxi and bus drivers know secret shortcuts around and out of the city. I walked some more, asked a few more people, to no avail. When the meeting time passed, I gave up. I decided instead to salvage part of the day by observing the protest.

As it turns out, campesinos from the central highlands had come to the city of Cochabamba to express their support for Evo Morales and his MAS party. They had the standard accoutrements of campesino protest: wiphala and MAS flags, large signs, and various inspiring chants. In the crowd, I recognized Carlos Delgadillo, the union leader from Ucureña. We were both surprised to see each other. I asked Carlos why he was protesting in Cochabamba, and he stated that:

“the Media-Luna wants to be in power, they want to take our land...but we, as originarios, as campesinos...must defend our land. This is the land of our ancestors, it is not theirs, it is ours.”

Carlos’ comments are interesting in how he frames his ancestral connections to contemporary identities. This is a common sentiment expressed among social movements in the central highlands, especially the farmers unions.

The contemporary use of the wiphala, and connecting the campesino and originario identities to ancestral lands, outline a central means by which the farmers unions in the central highlands construct their identity. These forms of self-representation highlight an important connection between past and present in social movement identities. This chapter explores how representations of the past are used for contemporary social movement identities. I contend that representations of the past become concretized when put into action, such as in mobilizations and protests. Consequently, the use of the past in current social movement identities produces and advocates a particular narrative of the past.

The rest of this chapter will begin with a discussion of research on the role of memory in the identity of social movements in order to explore how representations of the past become fixed and publicized when put into action. These moments are the manifestation of a collective representation of the past, connecting contemporary identities with the past. This will be followed by an investigation of recent works on the relationship between identity and social movements, so-called “new social movements.” I will tie this research to works that view collective self-representation as a process that can be broken into two phases: consensus-building in identity construction and identity implementation in mobilization.

The remainder of the chapter will build upon these previous works through the discussion of a specific case study outlining both the process of

constructing an identity and its implementation among farmers unions in the central highlands. By documenting these two stages, I demonstrate how representations of the past become concretized at specific moments in collective action by social movements. Additionally, by linking these collective identities to debates over the constitution, agrarian reform, and oil and gas reserves, I show how the farmers unions resolutely connect identities to material claims.

Coordinating the Past in the Present

The use of the past by political parties and social movements in the present is an important way in which representations of the past are constructed. Two recent works, by Scott Simon (2006) and Timothy Brooks Gongaware (2001) respectively, investigate this relationship, focusing on how the past is used to lay the basis for organization and mobilization in the present.

Simon's work explores the use of the memory of the Japanese occupation of Taiwan by political parties and social movements in Taiwan. He focuses on the strategic use of the history of Taiwanese resistance to the Japanese occupation by the Chinese Nationalist Party, Kuomintang (KMT). He argues that the party "uses social memory of anti-Japanese rebellion to reinforce its image as the carrier of Chinese nationalism" (Simon 2006:i). During the 2005 county and township elections in Taiwan, the KMT:

“headquarters in Taipei [was] adorned with an enormous image of Mona Ludaw, the aboriginal hero who had led a rebellion against the Japanese in 1930. The use of this particular image has historical precedents in KMT historical narrative of that rebellion illustrating resistance against Taiwan’s colonial overlords on behalf of the Republic of China” (2006:i).

Simon goes on to address the strategic use of history by opposing political forces in Taiwan. He concludes that representations of the past, when used by political parties and social movements, become focal points of contestation whereby the veracity of particular versions of a historical narrative become the centerpiece of a political struggle.

In his dissertation, *Finding the Memory in Identity: Native American Social Movements Challenging Educational Institutions*, Timothy Brooks Gongaware (2006) explores the relationship between identity and memory among Native American social movements in North America. Akin to Simon’s work in Taiwan, Gongaware discusses the politics of memory, but places more emphasis on the role of memory in identity formation. That is, how do perceptions of the past affect the composition of social movement identity in the present?

A key facet of Gongaware’s work lies in the conception of identity as a process, constructed over time. Social movements reinterpret their past, and identity is rewritten according to new “memories.” He argues that “collective memory processes provide the framework that organizes the past for present use, provides information for use in the collective identity process, and aides in the development of unity and continuity” (2001:i). Among the social movements

studied by Gongaware, the past is interpreted and used in the present as a catalyst for organization and mobilization.

A great deal of Gongaware's work attempts to construct a language, or method, with which to explore the role of interpretations of the past in social movements. He divides the process of constructing a representation of the past into "instrumental" and "contextual" phases. The former refers to the way the past is negotiated and understood, focusing on the methods of perceiving and forming a representation of the past. The latter focuses on the importance of the context in which this occurs, that is, the implementation of the representation. Exploring both the construction and implementation of a specific representation of the past highlights an important methodological contribution because it demonstrates how particular narratives of the past are formed and used at particular moments in the present.

Identity and Social Movements

The past two decades have seen an increase in studies of "identity politics" among social movements in Latin America. These "new" social movements have taken ethnicity, gender, and other categories of representation as a basis for their identities, replacing class-based and nationalist movements that were previously predominant. The concentration on identity for this new generation of movements

can be seen partly as a result of new political spaces emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the region, but also a renewed focus by scholars on the political nature of identity and cultural contestation in social movements (Alvarez 1997; Hale 1994, 1997; Warren and Jackson 2002).

“Identity politics” has played a key role in the surge of indigenous movements throughout Latin America. Protests led by indigenous groups of the celebrations by national governments for the quincentennial anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in 1992 provide only one example of coordinated demonstrations by indigenous groups in the region. Similar organizing by indigenous groups throughout the Western Hemisphere increased during the 1990s, especially in Bolivia (Postero 2007a), Brazil (Marés de Souza, Jr. 1994), Ecuador (Zamosc 2004), and Guatemala (Warren 1998).

Despite the fact that indigenous movements have arisen concurrently with other identity-based movements, the amount of scholarly research done on indigenous and ethnic-based movements throughout Latin America has dwarfed that of other research areas. This academic fetish with indigenous movements in the region can be viewed as a major offshoot of a renewed look at social movements in general, but also as a reaction to the changing political landscape in which social movements organize and mobilize. The insurgent place of identity in social movements has been a key to this larger wave of “new” social movements.

Delineating a break with previous social movements, these “new” social movements have played an important part in shaping the nature of political struggle in Latin America. In fact, many authors argue that there is no difference between the “new” social movements and those that preceded them, thereby agreeing with Doherty, et al. (2000:11), who note that because:

“all movements develop their own identity, common values and culture, it seems unjustified to see older social movements as materialist and new social movements concerned solely with identity.”

Not all agree with this position, however. Others argue that fundamental differences exist between these “new” movements and the other national or class-based movements.

The most fervently cited, though perhaps least understood, proponent of “new” social movements is Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci. His work during the 1980s laid a foundation for social movement scholars to understand the relationship between collective identity and collective action. Melucci criticizes a great deal of earlier scholarship that emphasizes the coherent and monolithic ideal, as opposed to the constructed consensus, of social movements.

Throughout much of his work, Melucci tends to look at the practical facets of organization that occur before the news-making protests that bring social movements their headlines. The collective negotiation of identity in social movements forms the genesis of their analysis:

“Collective action is rather the product of purposeful orientations developed within a field of opportunities and constraints. Individuals acting collectively *construct* their action by defining in cognitive terms these possibilities and limits, while at the same time interacting with others in order to ‘organize’ (i.e., to make sense of) their common behavior” (1989:25-26).

For Melucci, it is through identity formation that social movements begin to take shape. This continual process of identity formation provides a way to explore how identity is a temporal entity connected with tangible action in specific instances.

The relationship between collective identity and collective action is a vital part of Melucci’s epistemological and methodological writings on social movements. He places a great deal of importance on how identities are constantly negotiated within the movements:

“Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place” (1989:34).

Thus, instead of a static account of how movements collectively identify, Melucci’s work is a major step forward in understanding how identity is negotiated and formed temporally, contingent on specific goals defined at a specific moment in time.

However, inasmuch as Melucci discusses the place of identity in action, he does not describe the actual practices of consensus building in identity formation in a detailed way. Even in his article, “The Process of Collective Identity” (1995), Melucci unfortunately focuses on how identity is tied to action, as opposed to

describing how consensus is built in the process of constructing a collective identity. It seems quite strange that a scholar, such as Melucci, who is so focused on the place of identity in social movements, would neglect a detailed description of the discourses and practices that are involved in the construction of an agreed-upon identity. Granted, his ultimate focus is on how these identities are related to facets which are most obvious in social movements, such as protests. However, the ways in which social movements achieve consensus in an identity, albeit an agreement constantly subject to negotiation, are vital to the actual causes of mobilization.

Stuart Hall explores how various interpretations can come together in a coherent identity for action by social groups. He argues that identity is “a way of constructing meanings which influences both our actions and our conception of ourselves” (1996:613). This understanding of self-representation is similar to Melucci’s in that the way collectivities identify is a process of negotiation that coalesces at certain points in tangible actions. However, Hall focuses more on how these identities arise from discontinuity through the organization of “ways of speaking, systems of representation, and social practices” (1996:617). His focus on consensus-building is an important contribution to understanding the discourses and practices by social movements that result in an identity.

The practices of identity formation play an essential role in fostering consensus. In his work, “The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of

Recognition” (2004), Arjun Appadurai discusses the importance of consensus in collective identification and representation. His work with the Slum/Shackdwellers International (SDI) organization in Mumbai, India, explores the politics associated with aspiration and mobilization by economically, politically, and socially marginalized populations. Borrowing from Charles Taylor’s “politics of recognition” (1992) and James Fernandez’ (1965) work on consensus-building and maintenance, Appadurai discusses the ways in which groups come to represent themselves. He stresses the terms by which groups “extend a sort of moral cognizance to persons who share...worldviews [that are] deeply different” (2004:62). It is both the negotiation and communication of collective ideals whereby groups are able to come to a consensus concerning self-representation.

At the heart of Appadurai’s “capacity to aspire” is the building and expression of consensus. This forms the basis for identity and is itself a source of collective action. As Appadurai’s piece testifies, the work by Fernandez with the Fang of West Africa has provided insight for generations of anthropologists interested in how social groups build and maintain consensus. His fieldwork investigates how rituals among the Fang are open to “variable interpretation,” but can lead to “unanimous recognition” that “achieves...cohesiveness and solidarity the Fang call *nlem mvore* (one heartedness)” (1965:922). It is through ritual that individuals come to share collective and consensual understandings. An overall

sense of consensus is achieved through practices that produce shared meanings and understandings. Building upon this research, Appadurai looks at how “real groups actually produce the kinds of consensus on first principles that...may appear to [be] take[n] simply for granted” (2004:64).

The idea of consensus-building in the face of otherwise atomizing forces, inequalities, and other obstacles to unity forms the basis for Appadurai’s study of and exploration into his ultimate focus: development and culture. However, the ways in which consensual identities are constructed hinge upon the practices and performances that serve to simultaneously negotiate and reinforce collective representations. Appadurai focuses on rituals as “performances through which social effects are produced and new states of feeling and connection are created, not just reflected and commemorated” (2004:81). These practices outline how the “process of consensus production is a crucial place to identify efforts to change the terms of recognition” (*Ibid.* 83). It is important to note the creation of novel forms of self-recognition and self-representation involved in the practices described by Appadurai. By identifying the locus and process of identity construction and self-representation, consensus-building becomes a method of reflexive negotiation of self-recognition by social groups. Practices serve to construct and maintain consensus among groups that can then propagate a coherent identity.

Appadurai's work overcomes a main deficiency of the "new" social movements that focus on identity politics: external constraints. Specifically, Appadurai gives an example of the "Toilet Festivals" set up by the SDI to demonstrate to state officials and members of the World Bank that the normal "humiliation and victimization" of defecating in public is "turned into exercises in technical initiative and self-dignification" (2004:79) through the presentation of functioning toilets. The normally unsanitary conditions of slum life in Indian cities is contrasted with these elaborate and strategic presentations of hygiene, and the ways in which the SDI identifies and presents itself is constrained by the audience of World Bank and state officials, who are the intended targets of the presentation.

Consequently, while Melucci (1989) discusses external constraints on action, he does not pay much attention to either the social or material constraints and audiences that serve to limit the available range of discourses and practices of identity formation. Collective identities and consensus in social movements are constructed within economic, political, and social constraints—subjectivities are not created in a vacuum. These external forces set the stage in which actors in social movements delimit their demands.

This point is most clearly outlined in Leon Zamosc's work with indigenous movements in Ecuador. As Zamosc argues (1994:49):

"an approach based on the subjectivity of the social actors should provide at least clarification of who mobilized, how they did so,

and what goals were being pursued...[but] such an explanation would be incomplete, however, because...it is limited to the conditions and motives of the actors as perceived by the actors themselves.”

The job for the social scientist, therefore, becomes understanding “the ways in which the actors’ perception and behavior are actually fashioned by their involvement in broader sets of socio-economic and political relationships” (Zamosc 1994:49). The ways that social movements construct their identities are limited by the context in which they operate. As a result, any account of identity in social movements must draw connections between the discourses and practices associated with identity construction and the external constraints that serve to limit the possibilities, strategies, and actions of specific movements.

The rest of this chapter will build upon previous research by exploring the connection between consensus-building and mobilization among the farmers union in Ucureña. I will show how the construction of their identity and its implementation in a roadblock is constrained by the larger economic and political landscape, their allies and enemies, and their intended audience. In addition, their focus on the past in how they represent themselves outlines an important means by which the past is used for self-representation and material claims in the present.

Ucureña Plans a Roadblock

On a lazy afternoon in June of 2007 in the community of Ucureña, I was told by union leader Carlos Delgadillo that the farmers union would be meeting to discuss a roadblock scheduled to occur the following week. While union meetings usually concentrated around the planting, growing, and harvesting period of late September through late February or early March, there were sporadic meetings at other times as well. This was one such meeting.

The meetings themselves usually took place in the local elementary school, and I always had full access to the gatherings as well as the roughly forty participants from throughout the region who regularly attended. For the most part, they were rather procedural affairs lacking much in the way of entertainment. These semi-structured affairs were generally led by Carlos Delgadillo, who would give a brief introduction, list the issues to be discussed, and then proceed slowly down the list one by one while participants voiced their opinions freely.

Meetings are scheduled on the first Monday of every month, though special meetings are frequently called by the union leaders. On this occasion, the farmers union of Ucureña was preparing for participation in a roadblock with other farmers unions from across the central highlands. Every mobilization by the farmers union in Ucureña was connected to a larger movement that included the unions throughout the central highlands. This joint effort provided strength in

numbers. While separately each farmers union was insignificant in its size, together they could—and did—shut down highways and entire cities.

On the day of the meeting around 6 p.m., Carlos Delgadillo stood in front of 32 campesinos and declared:

“We will be involved in a roadblock next week. Evo needs our support. MAS needs our support. The Media-Luna is trying to control the writing of the constitution. They don’t want the agrarian reform. They want the gas. They don’t want to share anything with us. The Media-Luna is trying to govern the country. But we have the majority! We have Evo. We need to support MAS...support Evo. We need the country to know that the campesinos will fight! We need the country to know that the originarios will not be defeated! This is our land! This is our country!”

The audience nodded matter-of-factly; everyone seemed bored. Carlos continued:

“So bring your wiphalas. We need to show Evo that he has campesino support. We need to show the country that the originarios will fight. A united people cannot be defeated! We will meet in the plaza at 6 in the morning and walk together to Cliza. Any comments? Any questions?”

Nobody had any comments or questions. The speech lacked inspiration, and the reaction of the crowd mirrored it. Everyone gave the impression that it was a routine summit.

Carlos, as a mouthpiece for the union members, explicitly connects them and their campesino identity to material claims (land and gas). This is constructed in unison with Evo Morales and his MAS party, aligning them together in opposition to the Media-Luna. His use of the third-person plural “we” and third-person plural possessive “our” further projects a connotation of the campesinos as

linked to Morales and MAS, intended to communicate a unified message to their adversary, the Media-Luna.

After the meeting, with recorder in hand, I had the opportunity to interview a few campesinos whom I previously had great trouble tracking down, even in the small community of Ucureña. I was interested in a few issues, but specifically wanted to know why they were bringing wiphalas, and why they were marching under the “campesino” and “originario” identities. One campesino I interviewed, named Jorge, stated:

“We can’t permit them [the Media-Luna] to take our land. We can’t permit them to take our gas. We are campesinos, so this is our land. This is all we have. We are farmers, so our land is all we have. We feed ourselves with this land. Our ancestors had this land before the Spanish colonists came and took it from us. Now, with Evo, we are going to take it back...the land and the gas.”

Jorge links the campesino and originario identities to claims to land and natural resources. He also frames himself against the Media-Luna, contraposing his identity and interests with theirs.

I next asked Jorge about the wiphala, to which he responded that:

“The wiphala is our flag...it is our flag...the flag of the originarios...the flag of the Inca. It connects them [the Inca] to us, and now it represents us...our interests.”

By linking the wiphala to the Incas, Jorge broaches a significant association with the past, but more importantly the wiphala is used to reflect and construct differences between Jorge, together with his originario and campesino affiliates, and the Media-Luna. As a result, the wiphala forms a centerpiece joining Evo

Morales, the MAS party, and the campesino and originario identities in opposition to the Media-Luna.

Later, I interviewed another campesino, Juan Pablo, who stated:

“This is a message to the Media-Luna, to the country. The central highlands are important. The farmers unions are important. The campesinos are important. The originarios are important. They [the Media-Luna] don’t respect us. They think we are dogs. They have always thought that we are dogs. They also thought that about José Rojas and Jorge Solíz...but they were wrong. And now, we are powerful. We control the country, but they still think that we are dogs. We will show them that they are wrong.”

Juan Pablo’s reference to prior leaders José Rojas and Jorge Solíz was not unusual, as union members often discuss these previous leaders in their deliberations over mobilization. José Rojas and Jorge Solíz symbolize campesino power, both locally in the communities and regionally in the central highlands.

I had attended many meetings before, but what was interesting about this one was the focus on the Media-Luna, a group on the other side of the country. Attendees of the meeting framed their own interests and identities not only in unison with Evo Morales and his MAS party, but also opposition to the lowland movements—namely, the Media-Luna. To further their unified front, attendees also connected themselves to important symbols of the past, particularly the wiphala flag as well as the campesino and originario identities.

The meetings constitute a central part of the life of the farmers unions, both socially and politically. Importantly, they are practices whereby the formulation of specific representations of the past are connected to impending

action. The bond between current perceptions of the past and present actions is vital to understanding how memory correlates with the current identity around which they organize and mobilize.

Ucureña Implements a Roadblock

On the day the roadblock was to take place, I was definitely more excited than anyone else. I had been to numerous protests throughout Bolivia, but always as an outsider. This time, I felt like an insider.

I tried to dress inconspicuously, as I was not sure whether some would be displeased with my presence. I had no specific reason to believe this, but I did stand out in a group of campesinos. As usual, I arrived armed with my notebook. While those familiar with me and my work knew what it was for, I hoped that the campesinos whom I did not already know would assume I was a reporter, rather than a cause of suspicion.

I met Carlos at his house and together we walked to the center of Ucureña, arriving around 6:30 a.m. Although the scheduled meeting time was 6:00 a.m., we were still the first ones there. Others began arriving immediately after. People were chatting, laughing, and chewing coca leaves. The entire process seemed very routine for them.

By 7:00 a.m., we had begun the 30 minute walk to Cliza. I had made this walk perhaps a hundred times before and, while I was usually stared at along the way, I was now with a group of 40 campesinos. We attracted quite a bit of attention. After years of spending time with them, I had forged deep bonds and tremendous friendships within the community, and I did feel part of the ensemble. However, a small piece of me felt as though I was part of some miscreant gang because we were 40 people marching with a unified purpose.

Upon crossing a small bridge over the muddy Kaymi River and entering Cliza, we could hear the dull roar of many low-volume conversations. As we approached the usually tranquil community of Cliza, we could see that it was filled with campesinos, with masses that overflowed from the central plaza onto the side streets. It was still early in the morning; however, vendors of newspapers, ice cream, coffee, and tea were out in full force. In contrast to the effects on the formal economy, protests provide good business for many sectors of the informal economy.

I followed Carlos Delgadillo for most of the day; he was used to having me by his side, and he introduced me to seemingly hundreds of campesinos. Most of the conversations were insignificant. It was a reunion of sorts, for people who had not seen each other in a while. All of a sudden, Carlos saw someone who he was looking for across the plaza, and shot off in that direction; they spoke for a few minutes, and together started walking purposefully. Everyone began to follow

them. By my rough estimate, we were a force of about 250 people. I felt the adrenaline rush of purposeful marching with such a large group of people.

The goal of the protest was to block the old highway to Santa Cruz. A new highway was completed a few years before that now served as the main link between the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The old highway, however, remained the primary thoroughfare between Cochabamba and the hundreds of communities in the central highlands to the southeast of the city.

Because the roadblock was on the old highway, we had to walk about an hour to the northwest from Cliza to the access road that breaks off southeast from the highway. During the walk, we occupied one lane of a two-lane road. There were almost several accidents along the way by buses, cars, micros, trucks, and trufis trying to avoid us and each other.

We were a mass slowly moving in the same direction. About a quarter were carrying wiphalas, but almost everybody along the way broke into chants of the familiar: “¡El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!” (“A united people cannot be defeated!”). As we approached the highway intersection, the pace slowed down. After reaching the junction, we stopped.

We had arrived, and I was not sure what we would do next. I had never been involved in a roadblock, and while I had seen hundreds of protests in the cities of Cochabamba and La Paz, they generally involved people moving. Here,

the goal was the opposite: for us to remain still, and to simply prevent any vehicular movement.

We were met at the intersection by about 200 other campesinos, and the second we arrived, everyone hurriedly took tree trunks, branches, and rocks, and began piling them across the highway. For the first 15 minutes or so, the traffic drove around or through the obstacles. However, there was a certain moment when the objects in the road combined with the mass of people to prevent any movement of traffic.

Stymied by the obstacles and our roadblock, the vehicles began to turn back from where they came, in order to get to the more northern, main highway between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. However, this involved, depending on the direction, driving 30 minutes back west to the city of Cochabamba and rerouting to the main highway, or else driving back east about 45 minutes to a pitiful dirt road where, only after a left turn and an hour of bumpy driving, one could arrive at the main highway.

Some drivers became noticeably angry, yelling and cursing at the protesters, who just laughed. Most drivers, though, were used to roadblocks and simply turned around and took the aforementioned detours. We just chatted under the sun on another pleasant spring-like day in the central highlands.

The roadblock lasted all day and well into the night. On a few occasions, there were some television cameras and news reporters. For about half of the

time, people simply sat down and chatted. At other times, chanting broke out, and people stood up and joined. During these moments of liveliness, wiphalas were waving, people were screaming, and the collective energy of the people was contagious. This happened intermittently all day long.

It was a very long and exhausting day. People kept their energy levels up by chewing coca leaves and chatting. Roadblocks are a reunion of sorts, for people who see each other infrequently. Most of the discussions revolved around families and farming. I learned a great deal about planting and harvesting on that day.

I was, however, also able to have numerous brief discussions about a few other issues with an assortment of campesinos. Through these informal conversations, I was informed as to what it means to be a campesino. Everyone, across the board, highlighted the identity's important connection to land. Campesino is derived from *campo*, which is usually translated as "land," "countryside," or "field," directly connoting a bond between people and land, which my interviews repeatedly pointed out. Likewise, I was also told about how and why the originario identity was significant, as the suffering of their ancestors was important to their current lives.

The day seemed mostly like a campesino social event, with sporadic interviews by various members of the press. There were no violent eruptions, no

massive police presence, or dynamite. Compared to many of the other protests I had witnessed, this was a somewhat routine and laidback affair.

As the day began to draw down and the sun began to set, a few people started leaving around 5:00 p.m. Around 8:00 p.m., after saying goodbye, everyone else slowly began walking back to their homes. The stroll home felt long and tiring. The walk felt quite different from the roadblock because there was not much conversation at all. Everyone, including myself, was too tired to talk.

Conclusion

The roadblock provided a stage for the farmers unions to express their opinions, ideas, and identities. The ability to present themselves nationally in support of Evo Morales and MAS, unified in opposition to the Media-Luna, demonstrated the projection of a coherent and cohesive platform. Importantly, the farmers unions connected their identity to key categories of representation, such as campesino and originario, and publicized specific representations of the past on a national level.

The farmers unions were limited in their options for having their voices heard. Their only method of achieving such extreme national exposure was through media coverage of their roadblocks, as they lacked the resources for

privileged access to television, radio, or newspapers, as the Media-Luna does.

Despite the material constraints of limited resources, the roadblock enabled them to frame and publicize their identity, interests, and claims to a national audience on their own grounds, in their own words.

The main audience of the roadblock was the Media-Luna and other political parties and social movements from the lowlands. It was covered by news cameras that broadcasted it and newspapers that carried it nationally. The core message was that Evo Morales and his MAS party had strong support in the central highlands.

Previous research has shown how audience (Appadurai 2004) and material constraints (Zamosc 1994) are important factors in understanding the construction of social movement identities. These external constraints outline a key connection between the establishment of identities by social movements and the social environment in which those identities are constructed. Likewise, the link between identity construction and implementation (Melucci 1989) charts two important facets of collective action among social movements.

The meeting, a week before the implementation of the roadblock, outlines the planning and consensus-building phase. At the gathering, Carlos Delgadillo tied the “campesino” and “originario” identities not only to Evo Morales and the MAS party, but also to claims for land and natural resources. The other two

campesinos I interviewed following the meeting also broached these claims, similarly tying the identities to their ancestors.

The meeting was the practice that reinforced shared meanings, and the roadblock was the action that projected them. Fashioned in unison with the MAS party and in opposition to the Media-Luna, the farmers union solidified a specific identity and tied it to social action. Furthermore, by facilitating the use of *originario* and *campesino*, the farmers union constructed a particular representation of the past that was used for self-representation in the roadblock.

As the research by Gongaware (2001) demonstrates, the separation of the planning and implementation phases of social movements highlights both the construction and deployment of specific representations of the past. This method has the benefit of insight into consensus-building and mobilization in social movements. Nonetheless, without a discussion of the material constraints (Zamosc 1994) and audience (Appadurai 2004), the catalysts for, and form and content of, collective action may be misunderstood as simply the projection of self-representations instead of a social movement with real interests and material claims.

As is clear from this case study, the farmers unions specifically connected self-representations with material claims. This chapter has shown how the identity projected by the farmers unions on that day was both deliberately and explicitly linked to debates over the agrarian reform, ownership of natural resources, and the

constitution. Their actions were not solely the projection of an identity; they instead specifically associated themselves with Evo and MAS because they felt as though the distribution of wealth from oil and gas reserves and systems of land tenure were at stake, and they wanted to be involved and reap some of the benefits. It can be thought of as identity politics with material claims or self-representation for self-interest. As I've discussed in previous chapters, the central highlands have received funds for local development and more of a voice in national affairs since the emergence of Evo Morales and MAS.

This case study also highlights the importance of the connection between collective identity construction and collective action by showing the extent to which social movements with limited resources have control over their self-representations. As a result of their roadblock, the farmers unions in the central highlands were able to project a particular platform nationally, in unison with MAS and in opposition to the Media-Luna. In addition, as a consequence of the use of representations of the past in the construction of their identity, specific connotations for important terms, such as campesino and originario, and symbols, such as the wiphala, were concretized and publicized nationally on their own terms, in their own voices.

CHAPTER 10

Epilogue

This dissertation has explored various facets of the interpretation and representation of the past in contemporary Bolivia. Beginning with the premise that memory is a representation of the past that connects people to each other and to specific places, I have demonstrated how the connotation of specific representations of the past provides an important theme around which political parties and social movements organize and mobilize. Additionally, I have argued that ancestral lineages have been used to construct narratives of the past that promote oppositional lines of descent in contemporary Bolivia.

Research on memory is particularly germane to Bolivia now because it forms the root of the regional tensions threatening to push the country into civil war. Divisions pertaining to interpretations of ancestry and historical experience are the two main factors in the country's current regionalism; however, they are only the discursive means through which material claims are debated. Felt historical differences are directly connected to debates over revenue from oil and gas reserves, an agrarian reform, and the authority of local and regional elected officials in national decisions. Consequently, at stake is the distribution of wealth as well as the systems of land ownership and political representation in the country.

While President Evo Morales and his MAS party have partially conceded to demands by lowland groups for economic and political decentralization in the recent constitution, small tangible changes to how wealth and power are allocated

threaten the viability of both Morales' administration and the new constitution. Morales' programs that have nationalized oil and gas reserves have greatly contributed to the coffers of the Bolivian state. For example, revenue from oil and gas production increased from \$173 Million in 2002 to an estimated \$1.57 billion in 2007 (Andean Information Network 2008). As a result, Morales has been able to pay off international debt, fund a social security program (*Renta Dignidad*), and contribute to literacy and other school programs. However, the continuation of centralized administration of the wealth from oil and gas reserves has fueled the ongoing push in the lowlands for a larger share of this revenue and a further decentralization of political representation.

Additionally, Morales' "agrarian revolution" has fallen short of original goals and popular expectations. The redistribution of land has primarily been in the remote areas of the country. Various lowland groups have not only threatened but have also followed through on promises to defend highly arable land in the region. Whether Morales can match the initial proposals concerning his agrarian reform without provoking well-organized and powerful groups remains in question.

Morales' ability to foster reconciliation will be determined by agreements over the distribution of wealth and political representation as well as changes in land tenure. The important question as Bolivia moves forward will be whether

Morales can successfully pacify lowland groups while continuing his policies of economic and political centralization.

Indians, the Memory of Colonialism, and Reconciliation

While differences in historical experience exist between the highlands and lowlands of Bolivia, I contend that the emphasis on these distinct historical experiences and divergent ancestral lineages by political parties and social movements are to blame for the regionalism in the country. Representing the past is about power in the present (Rappaport 1998); however, the construction of those representations is contingent on the larger national picture, as those connotations are constructed by competing factions. This research contributes to the “politics of memory” by delineating the ways in which political parties and social movements use lineage and descent in constructing narratives of the past that are used for boundary-making and contemporary social differentiation.

The construction and connotation of specific representations of the past in Bolivia must be conceived within an understanding of the recent emergence of indigenous groups to national politics. After 500 years of discrimination, subordination, and inequality, the role of the past in the present has become a central part of Bolivian politics because of the materialization of Evo Morales and MAS to power. Claims to land and natural resources, as well as the writing of the

constitution, have been broached within the discursive framework of the past.

Morales has been clear to connect the past to material claims in the present.

The past is more relevant, or more of a problem, in contemporary Bolivia because of the legacy of colonialism and the indigenous majority in the country. Numerous studies in the social sciences focusing on the “Indians” or “Indigenous” of Bolivia, whether as social movements, political parties, communities, or isolated tribes, have been conducted. I often question whether it is the social scientist’s infatuation with the ‘other’ that has led to the infinite studies on indigenous movements and identity politics in the country. If one looks for differences in language or skin color in Bolivia, they can easily be found. However, a social scientist must exercise caution in matching his or her research agenda with the actual data. That is, does the political party or social movement in question make demands as an Indian/Indigenous, as a citizen of Bolivia, as both, or as something entirely different?

Defining who is “Indian” or “Indigenous” in Bolivia, as in many other countries, produces a problem in and of itself. Depending on one’s criteria, the factors involved have been language, skin color, region, or even whether someone is an urban or rural inhabitant. Most censuses depend on self-identification, which is problematic in itself, but seemingly the fairest way. Whatever census is cited, though, a majority of the population of Bolivia self-describes as “Indian” or “Indigenous.”

The indigenous revitalization in the 1970s, known as “Katarismo,” increased the self-awareness of what it means to be Indian and Indigenous. This increase in self-awareness triggered a reinterpretation of the history of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Bolivia. A person’s ancestors began to play a vital role in how someone thought of themselves contemporarily.

This important movement also culminated in the ascension of Evo Morales as the first indigenous president in the history of Bolivia. However, with the rise of Morales and his MAS party, fissures inherited from the past rose to the surface and entered the national political arena. As a result of the rise of indigenous politicians to power who promoted an ancestral connection to the past, wounds and injustices became a centerpiece around which political parties and social movements organized. The focus on lineage and descent has exposed regional divisions in historical experience.

These divisions threaten the integrity of the country, a problem encountered by many postcolonial nations with populations that have distinct or varying historical experiences. However, these surface differences belie important interactions, miscegenation, and commonalities among populations. While colonialism most often idealized racial, linguistic, and behavioral differences between the colonizers and the colonized, centuries of contact biologically and socially highlight important breaches of these differences, making clear-cut distinctions difficult, if not impossible.

Modern nations that have emerged from colonialism have done so under the weight of legacies of social differentiation. Indigenous populations were often subject to segregation long after the end of colonialism, at times legislatively but certainly in practice. The persistence of colonial ideas of difference has stunted the development of national reconciliation in countries with large indigenous populations in Latin America, including Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru.

This problem highlights the notion of a nation as a constructed entity, or as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). When national membership is superseded by local, regional, or other affiliations, identification with the nation is challenged and no longer a matter-of-fact.

In postcolonial nations, different historical experiences form the basis for divergent contemporary social distinctions, groupings, identifications, etc. The major issue is reconciling the past in the present. Colonial history is full of the documentation of atrocities, inequalities, and injustices. As a result, the extent to which contemporary descendants can be held responsible is a matter of contention. Likewise, the extent to which contemporary inequalities can be blamed on the past is also an important issue that former colonies need to acknowledge and address.

Overcoming the colonial legacy is vital for reconciliation in postcolonial nations. Difficulties in delineating exactly who are the culpable parties, how they are responsible, and what forms of reparation are applicable continue to be

extremely divisive and difficult issues to rectify (Henry 2007; Sarkin 2008; Torpey 2006). Bolivia presents an interesting example for countries struggling to deal with reparations from colonialism. Because the descendants of the colonial subjects have achieved national political power, the possibility of change and reconciliation in the country is much improved. By explicitly addressing these problems in the new constitution, there are clear attempts and lucid documentation of possible compromise on these issues. Circumventing the use of a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” that has been a common path in many postcolonial nations, including a much-publicized and extensive case in South Africa (Wilson 2001), Bolivia has attempted to use the constitution as a path to resolving debates over reparations and achieving reconciliation.

However, long-lasting reconciliation will only be realized if the contemporary regional divisions are overcome and all parties involved attempt to ameliorate the situation on the basis of similarity rather than difference. If both sides view each other with suspicion or as rival members of different nations, then peace and stability will invariably fail. If both sides view each other as inherently different, with separate histories and interests, then reconciliation verges on the impossible.

“The Fox and the Vulture”

On a number of occasions during fieldwork, particularly in the central highlands, references were made to, or I was told various versions of, a story entitled “The Fox and the Vulture.” Although I was told the story twice in Quechua by drunken campesinos in a chichería, for the most part the story was conveyed in Spanish, most often under similar drunken circumstances. This story seems to be a favorite in the central highlands, as it captures, in the eyes of many in the region, the contemporary situation in Bolivia.

After recording and transcribing six versions of the story, I found that the minor variations were only in word choice that did not really reflect fundamental differences in meaning. The versions I recorded in Quechua verged on being incomprehensible, but what I could translate matched the Spanish recitations. Here are the composite versions in English and Spanish:

“The Fox and the Vulture”

One day a fox and vulture found a dead donkey. The two were very hungry.

The fox wanted to eat it alone. The vulture also wanted to eat it alone. Neither one would let the other begin to eat. They then began to fight each other until they became tired. They almost killed each other.

Neither one was able to eat the dead donkey. Then came a condor, and seeing that neither could eat the dead donkey, took it whole.

And so the fox and the vulture were left without anything to eat, with the taste in their mouths, and both were very hungry.

“El Zorro y el Buitre”

Se dice que un día un zorro y un buitre encontraron un asno muerto. Los dos tenían mucha hambre.

El zorro se lo quería comer solito. El buitre también lo quería sólo para sí. Ninguno dejaba que el otro comenzara a comer. Entonces se pusieron a pelear hasta cansarse. Casi se mataron el uno al otro.

Ni el uno ni el otro podían comer el asno muerto. Entonces vino el cóndor, y al ver que ninguno de los dos podía comer el asno muerto, se lo llevó todo entero.

Y así el zorro y el buitre se quedaron sin comer nada, con el gusto en la boca, y ambos tenían mucha hambre.

I took special interest in this story for obvious reasons. First, it speaks to the divisions in the country, as the fox and the vulture represent both sides of the rift. It also mirrors how both sides are fighting over what they both could, or should, share. Finally, the moral of the story relates that without working together and sharing what they have, neither will benefit and both will lose.

The opportunistic victor of the contest, the condor, can be seen to represent the reconciliation that has so far been elusive. Since the condor was able to successfully achieve what the fox and the vulture could not, we can view this story as an allegory that describes how the competitive divisiveness might give way to a single victor—reconciliation.

The “Fox and the Vulture” was most often broached in the context of a conversation about one side demonizing the other. There tends to be an oversimplification of each side’s demands and interests, with the “us” versus “them” as “good” versus “bad” dualism serving only to accentuate the differences. Compromise and equitable distribution are the morals of the story. However, whether the story can match reality is the major question.

Hints at Compromise?

Recent events in Bolivia have shown important compromises, notably in the new constitution that was voted on in December 2008 and implemented in January 2009. Highland and lowland groups both made concessions, although the extent to which written agreements on divisive matters are applied remains a subject of debate. The three main issues at stake—autonomy, the distribution of wealth from oil and gas reserves, and agrarian reform—will be touchstones measuring whether the polemical constitution meets its implementation in the real world.

What “autonomy” actually means when carried out remains vague in the new constitution. The document has extensive sections dealing with various levels and different types of ‘autonomies’, including those for indigenous groups, as well as departmental, regional, and municipal authorities. Article 271, the “Law

of Autonomy and Decentralization,” is followed by three specific sections that attempt to define autonomy through three separate spatial designations:

1. “Departmental Autonomy” (Articles 277-279)
2. “Regional Autonomy” (Articles 280-282)
3. “Municipal Autonomy” (Articles 283-284)

For the most part, these statutes only deal with legislative regulations and processes, such as edicts regarding suffrage and requirements for candidates.

While the new constitution does mention autonomy extensively, even connecting it with decentralization, it is extremely unclear as to what it will mean in practice for important issues. Most importantly, it does not deal with changes in the departmental distribution of wealth from oil and gas reserves. In fact, no section of the new constitution addresses changes to this vitally important subject.

In the portions that pertain to natural resources, not much has been altered from what Morales has already been doing. As article 311, section 2, part 2, clearly states: “Natural resources are the property of the Bolivian people and will be administered by the State.” The highly centralized administration of oil and gas reserves initiated by Morales has continued. Not addressing or changing how the revenue is distributed to the municipalities or departments throughout the country will curb the effectiveness of the constitution in placating the powerful political parties and social movements in the lowlands. This matter has been a main source of contention, so not dealing with it in the constitution might have made the

document easier to approve, but divisions caused by conflicts over the distribution of wealth from oil and gas reserves will only continue.

In a similar vein, agrarian reform is another extremely important issue that has not been conclusively addressed. In discussing the attributes of the president, Article 172, section 27 states that only the president has the “ultimate authority to exercise the Bolivian Department of Agrarian Reform and grant executive titles in the distribution and redistribution of land.” Article 404 clearly reaffirms this right:

“The Bolivian Department of Agrarian Reform, whose maximum authority is the President of the State, is responsible for planning, implementing, and consolidating the land reform process and has jurisdiction throughout the entire territory of the country.”

Most of the land for the agrarian reform, as it is currently proposed, will be in the lowlands. As opposed to the initial excitement caused by the announcement of his “agrarian revolution” in 2006, Morales has gone about implementing the agrarian reform relatively slowly. He has mostly distributed unused land in the far-reaching corners of the country. Morales hasn’t yet attempted to redistribute prime real estate in the lowlands. Lowland groups have threatened to put up a fight, and whether the region is willing to cede parts of its highly arable territory remains to be seen.

While the constitution was voted on and passed both by the constitutional assembly and in a national referendum, either its vague contents or minimal changes on tangible issues weaken its ability foster reconciliation and peace. The extensive parts on decentralization and autonomy might have temporarily

placated lowland groups, but the concessions by Evo Morales and MAS are limited. In the places where the constitution is specific, especially regarding natural resources and agrarian reform, it clearly addresses how both of these are under the domain of the president. As a result, it seems as though authority is theoretically decentralized on paper while genuine power remains centralized in the hands of Evo Morales.

Where the constitution does show real compromise and progress is in the realm of truly addressing the diversity of the country. Numerous indigenous languages have become official languages of the state. After centuries of officially being a Catholic country, Bolivia now formally permits and endorses the practice of all religions. Numerous articles in the constitution address the universal equality of all citizens and embrace multiculturalism, and the document generally promotes a more heterogeneous and open society.

These are all significant changes and their importance should not be underestimated. However, there remains a difference between theory and practice. While the constitution is wonderfully poetic at moments, it does not address the fundamental material divides that have threatened to push the country into civil war. Zero changes to the ways in which the revenue from oil and gas reserves is distributed and complete presidential control over the agrarian reform simply continue the policies of Evo Morales and MAS. It was these policies that fueled the massive building of regional divides in the first place.

Divisive Representations of the Past

It is through concrete agreements on important issues like these that the future of Bolivia will be determined. At the heart of these controversies is the country's ability to collectively come to terms with its past. The historical record of Bolivia is filled with crises. A popular travel guide pointed out in 2007 that Bolivia had "192 governments to date" (Lonely Planet 2007). As a result, given its independence from Spain in 1825, Bolivia had 192 governments in its first 182 years as an independent nation. The country's instability made headlines when former president Carlos Mesa handed in his resignation to congress; he called Bolivia "nearly ungovernable" (New York Times 2005). Many people in the lowlands feel as though it was current president Evo Morales who helped make Bolivia "nearly ungovernable," and now it is his responsibility to lead the country.

During his ascension to national politics, Evo Morales increased his reliance on condemnation for past injustices, rooted in colonialism. Until recently, Bolivian national politics was divided among many imprecise interests and parties. However, with the rise of Morales and his MAS party, the country and its political parties have become divided in clear-cut ways. Simply, as a friend told me, one is "either with Evo or against Evo." While there are a multitude of opinions about Morales, this quote does not stray too far from the truth.

The divisive nature of Morales' rise opened centuries-old wounds in Bolivia. His reliance on the past provided a catalyst for the regionalism threatening the country. While historical differences between the highlands and lowlands are valid, the emphasis on these regional divides, which both sides of the debate have used to garner political support, has threatened to tear the country apart.

The relationship between claims about the past and present conflicts in Bolivia highlights an important debate regarding the politics of representing the past. Specifically, one should question whether these conflicts have either been perceived through the past or whether perceptions of the past have caused contemporary conflicts. In other words, are present debates simply discussed and filtered through a lens of the past, or is the past the root cause of these conflicts? Likewise, are political parties and social movements responsible for overemphasizing these differences? Or, are the present conflicts an inevitable outcome of historical differences?

While there are regional differences in historical experience, I argue that it is the emphasis and exaggeration of these divergent historical experiences by political parties and social movements that are to blame for the regional crisis in Bolivia. Divergent historical experiences, both among the indigenous majority and the regional powers have been widely documented. However, political parties and social movements from both the highlands and lowlands, in order to inspire

and garner support for their causes, have used these historical differences to construct contemporary social distinctions that are not always as clear as some would like to think. The danger lies in the construction and promotion of difference based on irreconcilable variations in ancestry.

As long as political parties from the lowlands and highlands insist on focusing their campaigns on differences inherited from the past, Bolivia will remain an unstable country. Only through a forward-looking and integrative approach will it be possible for Bolivia to overcome the divisiveness that has plagued the country for more than five-hundred years. With such a long and enduring legacy of conflict, whether the current or any other administration can do this remains to be seen.

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