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**MARXISM AND CONSTITUENT POWER IN LATIN AMERICA: THEORY
AND HISTORY FROM THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY THROUGH
THE PINK TIDE**

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS
with an emphasis in POLITICS

by

Robert Cavooris

December 2019

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Abstract

Marxism and Constituent Power in Latin America: Theory and History from the Mid-Twentieth Century through The Pink Tide

Robert Cavooris

Throughout the history of Marxist theory and practice in Latin America, certain questions recur. What is the relationship between political and social revolution? How can state institutions serve as tools for political change? What is the basis for mass collective political agency? And how can intellectual work contribute to broader emancipatory political movements? Through textual and historical analysis, this dissertation examines how Latin American intellectuals and political actors have reframed and answered these questions in changing historical circumstances. Four episodes in this history are examined: debates between José Carlos Mariátegui and Raúl Haya de la Torre in the late 1920s; the trajectory of the publication *Pasado y Presente* in Argentina from the 1960s to the 1980s; the uneven path from nationalism to Marxism in the work of Bolivian theorist René Zavaleta Mercado between the 1950s and 1980s; and, most recently, the theoretical efforts of activist-intellectuals in the Comuna group during the last two decades of political change in Bolivia. By examining these episodes in both their theoretical content and historical context, the dissertation argues that the modern concept of constituent power plays a central if sometimes obscure role in theorists' approaches, while the theory of hegemony, drawn from the work of Antonio Gramsci, informs their strategic perspectives. It also shows, however, how different thinkers have run up

against the limitations of these frameworks; mass political events have effects that exceed the dominant conceptual understandings of constituent power and hegemony, and reach beyond the scope of the state, demanding new explanations. The resulting tensions, revealed here by extensively analyzing the case of Comuna in Bolivia during the Pink Tide, have compelled Latin American theorists to recover elided indigenous histories, to forge materialist conceptions of culture and knowledge, to explore aleatory notions of political organization, and to reimagine the political role of intellectuals as that of weaving together, rather than leading, disparate tendencies of political innovation.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

To produce new ideas is a collective process. Whatever this dissertation has achieved in this respect owes to the many seminar meetings, reading groups, organizing discussions, and casual conversations that I've shared with others over the last several years. It would be impossible to account for all of them, or even to be aware of each of their impact. Still, I have no shortage of conscious debts.

Both at UCSC and in other settings at least as formative, I've been lucky to have many sharp colleagues and comrades willing to exchange ideas. For this, I am grateful to Isaac Blacksin, Josh Brahinsky, Stephen Engel, Jared Gampel, Michelle Glowa, Debbie Gould, Evan Grupsmith, Asad Haider, Patrick King, Janina Larenas, Ben Mabie, Sarah Mason, Julie McIntyre, Salar Mohandesi, Jeb Purucker, Delio Vásquez, and Martabel Wasserman, among many others. I'm also grateful for discussions with all of my collaborators in the *Viewpoint Magazine* editorial collective, which has been an indispensable intellectual home for me.

My time doing research in Bolivia would scarcely have been possible without the assistance of Aaron Augsburger, who generously shared his contacts and his insights from the field. During my visits, Álvaro García Linera, Raul Prada Alcoreza, and Luis Tapia Mealla were each generous enough to sit down for a conversation or two. My friend Oscar Vega Camacho went above and beyond in this respect; we shared many great exchanges, and he opened up his home, library, and personal archive so that I could better understand the formation and development of Comuna as an intellectual and political project. I was also lucky to speak to Carlos Crespo and

Juan José Alba in Cochabamba. My thanks go to the staff of the reading room at the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore in La Paz, where I spent many hours looking for old journals and a warm place to read, and to the helpful staff at the CEDIB in Cochabamba, who guided me through their extensive *hemeroteca*.

Each member of my committee made essential contributions to the development of this project. Bob Meister championed my work when it mattered most, and he always pushed me to consider the deepest implications and most difficult theoretical questions arising from my research. Guillermo Delgado-P provided a wealth of fascinating historical and anthropological insight at our morning coffee meetings over the years – I always looked forward to them, and I look forward to more in the future. Megan Thomas offered key intellectual and professional guidance at every step of my grad school journey, beginning with my very first visit to UCSC as a prospective student. Her generous, constructive comments on each dissertation draft were an important reminder that, indeed, I have something to say, but there is always room to say it better. Juan Poblete’s razor-sharp questions kept me on my toes, and his encouragement helped me strive to new levels of precision and consistency in my thinking.

Chapter 1 benefitted from the comments of two anonymous reviewers when it was originally published as “Intellectuals and Political Strategy: Hegemony, Posthegemony, and Post-Marxist Theory in Latin America,” *Contemporary Politics* 23, no. 2 (2017): pp. 231–249. The revised version is included here with permission from the publisher. Chapter 4 was likewise helped along by an anonymous reviewer

when portions of it were published as “Rethinking Knowledge and Difference in Latin America’s Insurgent Moment: On de Sousa Santos and Garcia Linera,” *Historical Materialism* 26, no. 4 (2018): pp. 227–252. Editorial comments from Leo Panitch and Greg Albo were also instructive when other portions of Chapter 4 were published as “Turning the Tide: Revolutionary Potential and the Limits of Bolivia’s ‘Process of Change,’” in *Socialist Register 2017: Rethinking Revolution*, eds. Panitch and Albo (London: Merlin Press, 2016). Both publishers have granted permission for the material reproduced in this dissertation. I’d also like to note that much of my thinking in Chapter 4 owes to discussion with my classmates in Fernando Leiva’s Epistemologies of the South Seminar in Fall 2015, as well as to Fernando’s detailed comments on an earlier draft.

Beyond the academy, I owe much gratitude to all my friends and family, especially Mom, Dad, Pete, Aida, Dana, Jake, Dan, and Kat. They’ve all done more than they know just by being there for me.

Finally, thank you to Mary, who is always ready to let me sound out an idea, who talks me through the hurdles, deals with all the dramas, shares with me each success, and who has brought joy into my life every day over the last six years. When everything else looked dim, her light made this work, and so much more, possible.

I dedicate this dissertation to everyone who is fighting to build a new world amidst the ruins of the old, especially those in Bolivia and throughout Latin America today who risk everything to do so. In the end, this project is about thinking possibilities that can only be realized through collective struggle on a global scale. If

I've managed to illuminate some of these, they belong to all of us; any shortcomings, however, are all mine.

Preface

On November 10, 2019, the Bolivian military “suggested” that President Evo Morales resign. Faced with an implicit threat of violence, Evo and his Vice President Álvaro García Linera complied. This coup – it can have no other name – marked a disgraceful end to a nearly twenty-year cycle of social rebellion and political change.

Like any other historical upheaval that plays out over such a long period and involves so many people, the Bolivian political experience in the last two decades included mass demonstrations, electoral contests, strikes, disruptions, democratic experiments, threats of reaction, friendly disagreements, vicious antagonisms, moments of unity, moments of confusion, shifting allegiances, instances of violence, unexpected encounters, and unforeseen errors. It also produced numerous written attempts to describe and theorize this shifting terrain as the process was underway.

This dissertation attempts to draw the contours of Bolivia’s recent history by reading the work of some of its participants and close observers. It also tries and grasp this political terrain in relation to the radical intellectual and political history of Latin America more generally. I wrote it, however, before the recent final blow against Evo. Much of my research and writing process preceded that event by several years. Thus, in what follows, to the extent that I reflect on conflicts and contradictions internal to Bolivia’s process of change, I do so without the hindsight that the coup might provide.

Evo Morales and Álvaro García Linera were first elected nearly fourteen years ago, following five years of near-insurgency throughout Bolivia. Once in power, their

party, the Movimiento al Socialismo, or MAS, faced significant pushback from the traditional elites in the country's Eastern provinces, from representatives of the old neoliberal parties, and from foreign interlopers who had their own stakes in Bolivia's natural resources. The new government weathered these storms owing to mass participation and popular support for political change, both at the ballot box and in the streets. Following the ratification of a new constitution in 2009, a seemingly more stable period ensued.

But as I discuss in Chapter 4, the ratification of the constitution and the period that followed also involved new conflicts, sometimes between the MAS and the very organizations whose efforts had opened the door to their political ascendancy. It also saw the growing frustration of an older middle class as a newly rising social groups, of ethnic Aymara provenance especially, had increasing access to political and economic resources that were once the strict domain of whiter, urban mestizos. Meanwhile, even as foreign capital and some older elites had managed to secure a portion of a stable and growing economic pie, the new arrangements under the MAS were never ideal for them. Nor were they for preferable for the government of the United States, which is always unhappy to see events taking place outside of its control in the Americas. Here in this country, where I reside, politicians of both parties retain the backwards imperialist assumption that the hundreds of millions of people who inhabit the Western Hemisphere are nothing but guests in the US backyard, subject to its rules and caprices.

The confluence of outright antagonism and latent resentment against the MAS among some sectors, as well as lapsed enthusiasm for their leadership among others still invested in the process of change, came to a head in 2019. Evo and García Linera lost a 2016 referendum that would have changed the constitution to overturn term limits. They later won a court case that allowed them to run anyway, but the continuing dissensus over their decision to do so became the ground for concerted efforts by sectors of the opposition to claim that the 2019 election would be a fraud, even before it had taken place. Sure enough, political opponents began protesting immediately after the October 20 election, and they received a boost from a questionable investigation by the Organization of American States which claimed, but still has not proven, that there were “irregularities” in the vote count. All of this led up to the decisive “suggestion” from the head of the armed forces, which led Evo and García Linera to resign and seek asylum in Mexico.

At the time of writing this preface, a little-known conservative opposition senator, Jeanine Añez, whose party won only 4.7% of the 2019 presidential vote, has claimed the office for herself. The police and military killed more than 30 anti-coup protesters in the following weeks, and Añez offered official impunity to the soldiers involved. Despite stating that her cabinet would only work to hold new elections, the post-coup ministers have threatened journalists with sedition charges, made pronouncements against former MAS leaders, withdrawn from two regional alliances, paid diplomatic deference to the US and Israel, bullied Cuban doctors into leaving the country, and begun an audit of the country's state healthcare system. Finally, at the

behest of the still influential members of the MAS, a plan for new elections has emerged, but it's clear that whatever happens, the emboldened Bolivian right will take every opportunity to reverse the country's immense social gains achieved under the MAS.

With all of this in mind, and recognizing that the research here precedes the most recent developments, what can we learn from the dissertation that follows? I'll leave it for readers to decide. But here is one consideration: taking a broader view of Bolivia's history and of the history of radical political thought throughout Latin America, treated in the Introduction and in Chapters 1 and 2, we see that no coup or moment of reaction can fully erase the political effects of an earlier effort for change. At the very least, each period of social upheaval and progress leaves a trace in the form of writings and practices that can be taken up once again in new moments and in new places. In this sense, and whatever its internal tensions and shortcomings, the Pink Tide era is no different. In light of the coup in Bolivia and the wave of reaction that has greeted the rest of the Pink Tide governments, as well as the movements that supported them, over the last several years, it is all the more important to examine the intellectual efforts and novel political experiments produced at the crest of the wave. I hope this dissertation will be received in that spirit.

Introduction

A country at a standstill. People and boulders crowd highways. Cities live under siege. Soldiers march. Members of parliament flee. This is Bolivia, September 2000. By the end of the month, *campesino* syndicates, indigenous organizations, neighborhood federations, and teachers' unions had blockaded major arteries in seven of the country's nine departments.¹ Typical headlines read: "*Campesinos* Take Oilfields, Blockades Worsen;" "Soldiers Respond to *Campesinos* with Shots;" "No Solution; Everything Gets Worse."² On October 6, most of the country's highways were impassible, protests had impeded an estimated \$205 million of economic activity, twenty-two were dead, and hundreds more were injured in clashes with the military.³

Already, earlier that year, in the community of Cochabamba, Bolivia's third largest metropolitan area which sits in a valley where the eastern edge of the Andes gives way to the rainforest, protesters had been engaged in a near insurrectionary campaign against the privatization of the local water supply. That struggle became known around the world as the Water War. As that was playing out between February and April, rural indigenous *campesino* unions, led by Felipe "El Mallku" Quispe, rocked the highlands near La Paz and Lake Titicaca in the north with a series of blockades to oppose a neoliberal land reform law and similar attempts to privatize

¹ "Bloqueos y militarización: Siete departamentos de Bolivia afectados," n.p. All translations from Spanish are my own unless otherwise noted. *Campesino*, generally speaking, means a person of the countryside, generally a peasant or agricultural laborer of some kind.

² Unzueta, "Campesinos toman campo petrolero, el bloqueo se agrava," n.p.; "Militares respondieron a campesinos con disparos," n.p.; "Ningun solución; todo se pone peor," n.p.

³ "El 70% de la red caminera está bloqueado," n.p.

water at the national level. Building on the momentum in the first half of the year, coca growers unions in both the Chapare, close to Cochabamba, and in the Yungas area around La Paz, protested the forced eradication of their crops that the state had been carrying out in concert with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. Each of these regional protests mobilized thousands of people, building on energy unleashed by the others and affecting the whole national territory. But it was the highland blockades by Aymara communities in the north that had intensified over the course of the year and effectively shut down the country in September following on-and-off negotiations with the government.

As an outsider and as a political organizer in my own context, reading about these events more than a decade later, it was difficult for me to imagine the kind of cascade effect that had taken place that year. I read about them plenty. But how do you capture the structure of feeling in a moment like that? What is it like to wake up each morning and get the latest on a seemingly never-ending wellspring of dissent? And how does one integrate that conjunctural experience into his or her own understanding of how power works, or where it comes from? I pondered these questions as I got to work in a newspaper archive in Cochabamba in the summer of 2016. I wanted to get a sense of the day-to-day, to understand what it would be like to process these events in real time as witness to a multitude making ceaseless demands on the state and working up new forms of political organizing in the process. Digging through old newspapers is, of course, only one way to peer into a historical moment, but I thought it would give me a sense of the slow crescendo that led to the almost

frantic state of siege in September 2000. What's more, these events were the first of a longer chain in Bolivia that would extend even farther, heating up again in 2003 and 2005 into protests deposing two presidents and creating an entirely new national political scene. I wanted to grasp how the protests that began in 2000 transformed from collection of separate grievances into the rejection of an entire representative system that people had come to see as unrepresentative, and the throwing off of a particular neoliberal model of capitalist accumulation that until that moment had seemed insurmountable.

While I was searching for sources that would help me comprehend the raw experience of the 2000 protests, I quickly realized in the archives that newspapers cannot offer that. Their relationship to events differs from that of a history book, as reports are produced each day without the benefit of hindsight or the explicit task of producing a historical narrative, but they can still only offer their own mediated version of events. Furthermore, alongside the articles reporting the facts, members of what cultural theorist Angel Rama calls the “lettered city” – the national collection of intellectuals who exercise influence with the written word – were already hard at work attempting to stitch the data into some kind of story:⁴ What does all this insurrectionary activity say about the Bolivian nation? Why is this happening? How did we get here? And above all, who is responsible? Historical narratives were being crafted in the op-eds right alongside the reports from the field.

Some members of the lettered city saw in these events the effective

⁴ See Rama, *The Lettered City*.

destruction of the state, and a descent into a Hobbesian “war of all against all, foolish and ferocious.”⁵ Others traced a clearer fault-line among parties involved, attributable to a colonial and post-colonial history of exclusion that resurrected the “two Bolivias”: “one Bolivia that blockades and is in the street throwing rocks, and another that demands a firm hand, which is present in the commentary pages; one part that has integrated into the processes of globalization facing another that wants to but cannot do so.”⁶ Most in the commentary sections were happy to condemn the protests, defending the “silent majority” against a raucous minority engaged in “subversion” and “sedition.”⁷

Against these recriminations, however, at least one voice positioned itself as an alternative interpretation. Marxist theorist and activist Álvaro García Linera suggested that these were perhaps not typical protests, nor merely destructive in character, but the beginning of something altogether new:

Facing this [situation], a political proposal emerges, for autonomy and self-government grounded in the town halls, assemblies, communal and union authorities, at the margins and separated from the system of political parties and the parliament. This is what has emerged now as an alternative, and I believe its growth, its theorization, its verbalization will go on for many months. It’s not something to resolve itself today, it is a demand and a collective postulation of the medium- and long-term that I believe will return with force in the coming months and years.⁸

Given that the year 2000 and the protests in defiance of neoliberalism opened a process of national refoundation and a proliferation of demands for autonomy, García

⁵ Velasco Romero, “La nación contra si misma,” n.p.

⁶ Lazarte, “Hablan del conflicto,” n.p.

⁷ Ciudadano, “La mayoría silenciosa,” n.p.; Berríos Caballero, “¿Concluyó la crisis anunciada?” n.p.

⁸ García Linera, quoted in “El movimiento puede volver con más fuerza: Habla el ideólogo de los aymaras,” n.p.

Linera's interpretation of events seems incisive. At the same time, the language here carries a telling ambiguity: is this a "new political proposal" for something *formally* distinct from existing forms of liberal political power, i.e., for new forms of power and new kinds of collective political relationships? Or do the protests propose new content without new form? If the authors of this proposal are "at the margins and separated from the system of political parties and parliament," will they remain there to cultivate their alterity? Or will their success be measured by their ability to overcome that separation, and to eventually introduce the ideas, formulated "in the town halls, assemblies, communal and union authorities," into the halls of state power? This ambivalence, between a proposal for new autonomous modes of political practice and one for change at the level of existing state institutions, highlights a key tension over the next two decades in Bolivian and Latin American politics. States, parties, and movements of all kinds would sit in a dynamic and unresolved relation to one another.

Furthermore, I contend that the relationship between García Linera's claim and the events it purports to describe is even more complex than it appears: as the author suggests, the theorization and verbalization of a radical political alternative did continue – most visibly by people like García Linera himself – and this often contentious theorization and verbalization actually helped to create space for the emergence of a collective political actor who would pursue political alternatives. In other words, García Linera's comments here offer not only a prediction, but a speech act that will help bring into being the effects – and the political subject – that it

predicts, even as the prediction is far from straightforward. His differences with other commentators are interpretive but also actively political; the way one represents events carries suggestions of how they can be resolved and who can participate in their resolution.

In many ways, this dissertation is about the relationships between intellectuals, their ideas, and the historical contexts that motivate them. I'm interested in the question of how ideas take shape within material contexts that influence their formation, but also how ideas play a role in changing those contexts. Why do specific theoretical and political questions become decisive within a given context? How do thinkers – who are never only thinkers but also social and political actors – build on local histories when crafting an interpretation of events?

García Linera's focus on the autonomous self-activity of a political subject outside existing representative institutions, for instance, draws on a long history of Latin American Marxist theory concerned with the issue of collective agency. It could be said, in fact, that this is the perennial question in Latin American Marxism, if not Latin American political thought more generally: Who on the subcontinent, what collective political subject, is capable of creating new social relations that will finally break with colonial and capitalist forms of domination? The history of Marxism begins, in part, from the pretense of providing an answer: the proletariat. Yet this answer has not always produced obvious political solutions, and still less in contexts that appear far removed from 19th-century industrial capitalism in Europe. Traditions of revolutionary thought grounded in modern political philosophy have their own

answer, the people-nation, whose relationship to the Marxist response is ambiguous. My argument, in terms of the history of political thought, is that the question of the political subject, situated between these two traditions, has been the central motivating force for theoretical innovation within the history of Latin American Marxism, and that its answer, in the Bolivian case, involves an effort that is not only interpretive, empirical, or theoretical, but performative, carrying material political force.

This dissertation develops my argument by looking at how several thinkers have approached the central driving question of political subjecthood from the mid-twentieth century through the Pink Tide era that began around the turn of the century. First, I examine the works of Argentine thinkers including Hector Agostí, José Aricó, and Juan Portantiero, and Ernesto Laclau who were seeking to understand and act in the context of Peronism. In the next chapter, I turn to the Bolivian theorist René Zavaleta Mercado to explore the terrain linking nationalism and Marxism in Bolivia. Then, in Chapters 3 and 4, I begin to focus on the Pink Tide context and the works of the Comuna group of political thinkers that included Álvaro García Linera, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Luis Tapia Mealla, Raúl Prada Alcoreza, and Oscar Vega Camacho.

I open this introduction with this snapshot of Bolivia in the year 2000 in order to work my way back to that moment later in the dissertation, and to then explore various interpretations that induced actions, strategies, and mobilizations in the years that followed. To understand what is at stake in García Linera's comments about an

autonomous political alternative to state institutions, we will have to read them against a larger backdrop of political problems and alternatives that had been shaping Latin American political thought for the better part of the twentieth century, and which then arose once again during the regional Pink Tide of which Bolivia's insurrectionary moment was a part. To continue the introduction, then, I want to review two influential approaches to the question of the political subject that emerged during Latin American Marxism's first decades: those of José Carlos Mariátegui and Raúl Haya de la Torre. I'll then discuss some of the recent academic interventions of the concept of constituent power, which is another way to pose the question of the relationship between a collective political subject and state. Finally, before moving onto Chapter 1, I'll offer a full roadmap of the rest of the dissertation and clarify the stakes of my argument.

Emergence of a Question: Who is the Latin American Revolutionary Subject?

The question of the revolutionary political subject emerges from the travels of theory. Marxist texts arrived in Latin America via Spanish, Italian, and German migrants to the Southern Cone in the last decades of the 19th century.⁹ From the beginning, figures like the Argentine Juan B. Justo, the original translator of *Capital* into Spanish in 1895, and the Uruguayan Emilio Frugoni, who founded the Karl Marx Study Center in Montevideo in 1904, read Marx and Engels seriously but selectively, assessing their value in light of the differences between their Latin American contexts

⁹ Löwy, Introduction, xvi; Aguilar, Introduction, 6–7.

and the European conditions in which Marxism emerged and first found influence. If Marx's work began with his contingent encounter in the 1840s with a small but increasingly combative industrial proletariat – later leading Karl Kautsky to define social-democracy as the “merger” of socialism and the workers' movement – then its elaboration in Latin America would need to reckon with a very different set of social relations. These included: (1) a weaker tendency toward industrial production; (2) a lesser consolidation of capitalist relations of production in general; (3) an unequal relationship to larger economies and national concentrations of capital on a world market; (4) the effects of a settler-colonial past that gave rise, as in North America, to distinct systems of racial stratification within and beyond the social division of labor; and (5) after 1917, the existence of a polarized world system and a distant state giving “official” political and intellectual direction to the interpretation and practice of Marxism. Without addressing each of these in detail, it will suffice to say that Marxism's entry into Latin America implied a process of translation that shaped its meaning and reception in these conditions.

This is not to say that Marxism has ever been a homogenous body of thought, static and bound to its initial European conditions of emergence. As Kevin Anderson argues, Marx in his lifetime was increasingly concerned with the margins of the emerging capitalist system : “Again and again, he [Marx] attempted to work out the specific ways in which the universalizing powers of capital and class were manifesting themselves in particular societies or social groups, whether in non-Western societies not yet fully penetrated by capital like Russia and India, or in the

specific interactions of working-class consciousness with ethnicity, race, and nationalism in the industrially more-developed countries.”¹⁰ Some thirty years prior to Anderson’s assessment, in *Marx and Latin America*, the Argentine theorist José Aricó offered a similar analysis. He notes that Latin America had been little-discussed by Marx and Engels, but he tracks in Marx’s growing interest in the “concrete possibilities of a conjunction between the fight for national emancipation and the process of class-struggle.”¹¹ Sorting out the relationship between class struggle and other categories like that of the nation would involve a process of concrete investigation, particularly where the development of capitalism in one place was shaped by the prior existence of capitalist development in Western Europe, and where the effects of colonialism and imperialism persisted.

Both Anderson and Aricó cite Marx’s 1881 letter to Vera Sassoulitch, a Russian *narodnik* and later Menshevik who had written to Marx asking whether the Russian peasant commune, called the *mir* or *obshchina*, might become a basis for socialism in a hypothetical Russian revolution. Because Russia had not undergone an extensive capitalist development, Sassoulitch and other populists reasoned, socialism’s material basis there would be distinct from that of, say, Britain, which Marx took as his empirical example in *Capital*. Marx responded:

The analysis given in *Capital* assigns no reasons for or against the vitality of the rural community, but the special research into this subject which I conducted, the materials for which I obtained from original sources, has me convinced that this community is the mainspring of Russia’s social regeneration.¹²

¹⁰ Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 244.

¹¹ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 36–37.

¹² Marx, “Letter to Vera Sassoulitch,” 624.

Marx, in other words, assesses the possibilities for social transformation through an analysis of objective historical conditions; “special research” into local historical conditions, Aricó concludes, must be a constant. This orientation would provide for the most interesting elaborations of Marxist theory in Latin America.

José Mariátegui, one of the earliest and most influential Marxian theorists in Latin American history, develops the implications of the Sassoulitch letter in *Seven Interpretive Essays of Peruvian Reality*, published in 1928. Citing Marx on the Russian *mir*, he argues that that the pre-Columbian *ayllu*, a communal socio-economic form that the Incas had spread throughout their Andean empire, was “still a living organism and that, within the hostile environment that suffocates and deforms it, it spontaneously shows unmistakable potentialities for evolution and development.”¹³ This community form contains “elements of practical socialism in indigenous agriculture and life,” in which “hardy and stubborn habits of cooperation and solidarity still survive that are the empirical expression of a Communist spirit.” The *ayllu* may therefore be a resource for “modern communism.”¹⁴

Here, the *ayllu* figures as an objective material condition for a communist program in Latin America. But the reference to it also serves another purpose: Mariátegui narrates the Incan history of the *ayllu* in order to create the *subjective* conditions for a revolutionary movement. That is, he quilts together a *myth* that would allow a collective subject to reemerge, seeing itself as fulfilling the promise of Peru’s

¹³ Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays*, n.p.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

indigenous past. “Without myth, man’s existence has no historical meaning,” Mariátegui writes. “What most clearly and obviously differentiates the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in this era is myth.”¹⁵ Thus, with Incan communism, Mariátegui finds some raw material for the difficult task of building a proletarian movement in a country where 80 percent of the population lived in the countryside, and many were engaged in forms of economic dependence other than wage labor. As Robert Paris asks: “What is the ‘proletariat’ in a country without a proletariat?”¹⁶ For Mariátegui, answering this question meant drawing on Andean communal and insurrectionary history to articulate “the interests and aspirations of the entire productive class: workers in industry and transportation, agricultural workers, miners, indigenous communities, teachers, employees.”¹⁷ A political project would need to be addressed to these broadest layers of the masses. Thus, in addition to the theoretical and literary journal *Amauta* (meaning “teacher” in Quechua), Mariátegui founded the more accessible *Labor* in 1928, and relocated his activities from the urban center Lima to the rurally connected city of Cusco.¹⁸ His argument that the party of the Third International in Peru should take the name Peruvian Socialist Party – rather than Communist Party of Peru – was likewise based on a hope of reaching this heterogeneous mix of oppressed and exploited in a language they could grasp, since the more common word “socialist” would have wider recognition. Mariátegui, in short, sought to answer the question of who could serve as a revolutionary political

¹⁵ Mariátegui, “Man and Myth,” 142–43.

¹⁶ Paris, “Mariátegui y Gramsci,” 38.

¹⁷ Quoted in Becker, 34.

¹⁸ Aricó, Introduction to *José Mariátegui*, xlix–l.

subject through a political and textual intervention. Seeing a *mélange* of potential actors rather than a pre-formed political subject, he attempted to play a role in stitching one together through crafting and disseminating myth. It is myth, according to Mariátegui, and not a mechanical law of history, that gives a proletariat its power. The ability to draw on myth gives a sense of possibility that might otherwise seem foreclosed. It highlights the contingency of the present.

To think the concept of the proletariat in these broader terms, however, opens some ambiguity about what kind of revolution is possible. This is especially true in the colonial or post-colonial context, where the demands for social revolution often exist alongside calls for national or anti-colonial revolution. Some Communists therefore denounced Mariátegui as a populist, suggesting that he had foregone class struggle in favor of a more general sense of popular struggle.¹⁹ At the same time, however, Mariátegui himself polemicized against the early twentieth-century populist par excellence, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre.

The exact terms of the disagreement are complex, and further complicated by the shifting political positions of the Third International around the time of Mariátegui's death in 1929. Most important for my discussion here is that Haya de la Torre conceptualized a revolutionary political subject in even more expansive terms than Mariátegui: his vision of an anti-imperialist, nationalist party, with branches in every Latin American country, was that of a multi-class alliance, with middle-class intellectuals at its helm, including anyone opposed to imperialism. The organization

¹⁹ Aricó, Introduction to *José Mariátegui*, xxviii–xxix.

he formed along these lines was called APRA, the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana. This political position was based on the theory that capitalism's primary conflicts took place between nations, or even regions, of the world system, Haya de la Torre thus criticized those, like the various communist parties in the region, who thought a class-based social revolution was immediately on the table:

Combatting the demagogic phantasies of the prophets of criollo Communism, who offer in each speech red paradises, APRA maintains that before the socialist revolution can bring the proletariat to power, a class only in formation in Indoamerica, our peoples must pass through previous periods of economic and political transformation and perhaps through a social, not socialist, revolution which carries out the national emancipation from the imperialist yoke and Indoamerican economic and political unification.²⁰

The specific class structure of Latin America, in other words, required an emancipation carried out by the nation itself prior to any kind of socialist transformation. To a degree, Mariátegui did not even dispute this point, and was formative in the initial creation of APRA in the mid-1920s. But where he departed from Haya de la Torre was on whether APRA should be a party, as Haya de la Torre thought, or a looser organization bringing together several distinct social groupings with otherwise divergent interests. Parties, for Mariátegui, were the conscious political vehicles for class subjects; APRA could be an alliance *between* parties, comprising multiple classes, but could not stand in for the party of the only real possible subject of communism: the proletariat.

Ironically, while Haya de la Torre sought to assiduously divide the American from the European – in thought, culture, and ultimately being – he nonetheless

²⁰ Haya de la Torre, *Fundamentals of Aprismo*, 153.

accepted the necessity of working through the form of the people as nation, modeled on the European revolutionary tradition that was crystalized with the great French Revolution, seeing it as the only collectivity capable of operating on the world stage. Mariátegui, on the other hand, argues against nationalism on the basis that the nation is “a typically liberal concept.”²¹

At the same time, and despite the different answers, Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre, both attentive readers of Marx, were focused on the same question: who can be a subject of political transformation in a Latin American context? Both agreed that, at some point, it would be the proletariat. And both agreed, furthermore, that at that moment in Peru and throughout Latin America, the industrial working class was neither large nor well-organized, and principally rural rather than urban. But short of merely waiting for political economic developments to alter the situation, what were they to do? They did not agree on the answer to that question, but both thought that intellectuals could play a decisive role in formulating a political subject, in part by emphasizing and drawing on the specificity of Latin American history. Their projects were therefore resonant, though perhaps to different degrees, with Antonio Gramsci’s consideration of national-popular culture and the strategy of hegemony, or moral and intellectual leadership.²² As I argue in Chapter 1 while examining a later moment of Latin American intellectual history, the focus on the national-popular and the struggle for hegemonic leadership emerge from the specific social position of the radical

²¹ Mariátegui, “Man and Myth,” 144.

²² We do not know to what extent this resonance of themes between Mariátegui, in particular, and Gramsci was coincidental. It’s possible that some portions of Gramsci’s work had been translated into Spanish at this time. And Mariátegui himself was present in Italy during the Turin strikes of 1920, where he may have crossed Gramsci’s path.

intellectual within capitalism. These concepts offer one way to respond to the problem of defining a revolutionary political subject.

The notions of hegemony and the national-popular also link the categories of class and of the proletariat to the tradition of revolutionary democratic politics. They help specify the relationship between class and proletariat on the one hand to people and nation on the other. Many Marxists in Latin America have stitched these categories together in different ways to articulate a revolutionary position and strategy. Thus, sometimes authors refer to a particular class as the key to national liberation. Yet at other times, notions of people and nation are, as in the case of Mariátegui, written off as bourgeois, or antithetical to the needs of class struggle. To better understand these ambiguous conceptual and strategic relationships, it will be helpful to examine another concept that has, in some recent theoretical work, served to theorize the idea of the political subject at the intersection of class and popular struggles: constituent power.

Theorizing Constituent Power

In the modern era, the break with the authority of tradition has meant that revolutionary events raise the question of a foundational authority. Certain political moments present the possibility of a rupture with the past, and thereby force participants to ask: On what basis can a new order be built? Thus, constituent power deals with two political moments and their relationship: the moment of rupture, and the moment of a new constitution.

Let's sketch a moment of rupture: In revolutionary moments, people assemble, bodies mass together to circumscribe new spaces that also mark the possibility of a new time. Such moments are forbidden, even inconceivable within the old order. They demonstrate the failure of an order's totalization, serving as a reminder that the governed cannot be so completely. The assembled multitude in such moments becomes an irruptive force emerging through the cracks in the constituted categories of the state, and of the recognized forms of political subjectivity, and thus presents the possible dissolution of the old forms of domination.

But what does the dissolution of an old order have to do with the foundation of the new? The moments of rupture with the past set off struggles for interpretation. Who was the agent of the break with the past? Is it a total break, or a partial refutation of the old order? Furthermore, who now has the power to construct something novel in its place? How can a multitude whose only experience is disruption, even destruction, take on the task of creating institutions, constitutional documents, juridical systems, forms of representation, etc.? And beyond the question of *how*, what are that grounds for the legitimacy or authority of these new institutions? What is their connection with the revolutionary break? The notion of constituent power presents a framework for answering these questions, linking the foundation of a sovereign people in the prior act of a multitude. As Filippo Del Lucchese puts it, "By constituent power, modern juridical science means the factual and political power that establishes a new legal order, assigning to it validity and efficacy."²³ If the people or

²³ Del Lucchese, "Spinoza and Constituent Power," 182.

nation is the ultimate authority in a new order, as conceived by Abbé Sieyès when he coined the term constituent power in his contemporary theorization of the French Revolution, then all the authority of the new constituted or state powers rests upon a claim to the popular or national will.²⁴ The same will that expresses a rejection of the past is the foundational will of the new order.

But as many theorists recognize, the framework of constituent power is riven with conceptual paradoxes. For instance, constituent power offers a normative basis for a new order – it explains the conditions for the legitimacy of a state – through reference to a prior legitimating act. But where does the legitimacy of the legitimating act originate? Is it possible that a revolution only an extralegal act of force which later becomes legitimate because successful? Del Lucchese writes:

The paradox, then, concerns the origin of the legal sphere and the relationship between the constituent and constituted moments. Positive law needs an extralegal and normative power for its foundation. However, this source is factual and political and has no other force than the force with which it has established itself over and against the constituted power that historically precedes it and that it has destroyed, possibly with violence.

This paradox is embraced by decisionist thinkers of constituent power like Carl Schmitt. For Schmitt, the ultimate moment of sovereign authority stands outside of positive law, and a reversion to that moment occurs in the state of emergency in which positive law and constitution are suspended.²⁵ To embrace a paradox is not to resolve it, however. To the decisionist position, for instance, we could ask: what happened to the subject of the original decision, which was not a state but a

²⁴ See Rubinelli, “How to Think Beyond Sovereignty.”

²⁵ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 7.

collectivity that was united in its rejection of a prior state, and which preceded any new sovereign leader?

What is in question, then, is the relationship between a foundation and that which springs from the foundation. Surveying contemporary discussions of constituent power, Laughlin and Walker identify four responses to this problem:

- (i) the juridical containment thesis, whereby constituent power is exhausted by and absorbed within the settled constitutional form, as for example, in much contemporary liberal theory based on contractarian assumptions (e.g. Rawls);
- (ii) the co-originality and mutual articulation thesis, whereby the legally constituted power of the polity operates in productive tension with a continuing background commitment to popular sovereignty (e.g. Habermas);
- (iii) the radical potential thesis, whereby constituent power is neither colonized by nor in symbiosis with the legal, but remains a latent revolutionary possibility which lies behind and shadows the legally constituted authority of the polity (e.g. Negri);
- (iv) the irresolution thesis, which rejects the first two norms of accommodation, but also dismisses the possibility of isolating the radical potential of constituent power from the constituted forms of sovereign power, and instead views constituent power as an irreducibly supplement which irritates and challenges rather than transcends the specific forms of constituted power (e.g. Benjamin, Agamben).²⁶

In contemporary political theory, then, most approaches to constituent power can be placed under one of these four headings.

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, placed by Laughlin and Walker under the heading of “the radical potential thesis,” have advanced the concept of constituent power most avidly among contemporary Marxist thinkers. They link the notion of a metaphysical, absolute form of democracy, conceived by Spinoza as conceptually prior to any constituted institutions, to the possibility of a fully realized society that

²⁶ Laughlin and Walker, Introduction to *The Paradox of Constitutionalism*, 6–7.

has superseded class struggle.²⁷ For Negri, constituent power is nearly synonymous with revolution; it is “an act of choice, the precise determination that opens a horizon, the radical apparatus of something that does not yet exist, and whose conditions of existence imply that the creative act does not lose its characteristics in the act of creating.”²⁸ It is a “latent revolutionary possibility,” the realization of which in any given moment depends on the historical terms of the class struggle. Del Lucchese points out that while this view appears to put the concept of constituent power on material footing, it does not solve every theoretical problem:

If one accepts the ontological priority suggested by Negri, one cannot escape the paradox implicit in the relationship between constituent power as a metaphysical entity and constituted power as a historical and legal entity. Constituted power is created by and derives from constituent power, and yet, the former necessarily obliterates the latter within the legal sphere.²⁹

Furthermore, while Negri argues that constituent power’s effects are in a sense contingent and aleatory, his historical recounting of the concept from Machiavelli through Lenin in *Insurgencies* nonetheless appears teleological; in an almost Hegelian turn, the idea seems to find an ever greater material realization with each thinker who conceptualizes it. This linear orientation later culminates, in his work with Michael Hardt, with the thesis that the constituent–constituted dichotomy has been undermined by altogether new dispositifs of power.³⁰ Contemporary capitalism has allowed for a contradictory realization in which global Empire is the obverse of global Multitude, rather than an external constituted power that dominates it. But

²⁷ Negri, *Insurgencies*, 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

²⁹ Del Lucchese, “Spinoza and Constituent Power,” 190.

³⁰ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

there is something suspicious about how this narrative neatly ends in the present, and, as many have pointed out, Hardt and Negri's theories underestimate the constituted powers of contemporary nation-states.

Other thinkers have further problematized the gap between the metaphysical and constituent power as a concept and attempts to use it as a basis for historical analysis. Examining the state of contemporary political philosophy, Bruno Bosteels argues that this field's emphasis on deconstructive, anti-foundational ontologies, on *the political* as a philosophical category, has often come at the expense of an understanding of *politics* itself in its conflictive actuality. A retreat to the questions of foundation and a partisan attachment to constituent power as a metaphysical category allow one to avoid taking positions on and within a concrete political situation. It is much easier to claim fidelity to a metaphysical force outside of history than to take a position on a divisive political question.³¹

In *Constituent Moments*, Jason Frank explores the relationship of the everyday and the historical to the notion of constituent power which seems to exceed it. He shows how, outside of the kinds of abstract theorization that Bosteels criticizes, claims on constituent power are always made in concrete, often antagonistic situations; only through particular political claims and demands can one understand the appeal to a founding constituent power as a basis for legitimacy. Thus, in its actual practice, the notion of constituent power implies not a linear transformation, via representative mechanisms, from a constituent origin to a constituted state, but

³¹ Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, ch. 1.

rather a never-ending series of performative claims in a variety of everyday scenarios and discourses. Frank writes: “Both history and democratic theory demonstrate that the people are a political claim, an act of political subjectification, not a pre-given, unified, or naturally bounded empirical entity.”³² This means that the moment of founding, and the subject supposed to have founded, only emerge as post-facto discursive constructions in the course of a revolutionary process: “The authority of vox populi derives from its continually reiterated but never fully realized reference to the sovereign people beyond representation, beyond the law, the spirit beyond the letter, the Word beyond the words, the mystical foundations of authority.”³³ Bridging the gap between the metaphysical and the historical, concrete claims to embody a people and enact its will are precisely what brings this people, as a founding subject, into existence, again and again.

In a similar vein, Bonnie Honig argues that instead of thinking of sovereignty and political decision as strictly foundational, we must recognize that the need for ongoing political decision-making, as well as continuous agonistic contention over those decisions, make the “paradox of politics” first enunciated by Rousseau – that of a foundational will that is, itself, prior to the law but also both its referent and object – into an ongoing rather than exceptional feature of political life.³⁴

Based on these accounts, I propose to understand constituent power not as a scientific explanation of how legitimacy arrives through the passage from rupture,

³² Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xvi.

revolution, and construction of a new order by the people qua subject, but as a kind of narrative, discourse, and temporality invoked *in the present* to legitimate a political act or institution. To put it another way, the theory of constituent power allows political actors to justify the construction of new states and institutions by invoking the past and claiming membership in a collective subject; this does not mean that we must accept the existence of such a subject or prior act outside of this discursive context.

This raises the question: Are there other ways of thinking processes of rupture and foundation that do not rely on the framework of constituent power? Are there political subjects who do not frame their claims with its logic, or who eschew reference to their own mystical foundations? And do all collective expressions of power result in the legitimation of state authority? In short, I would like to ask whether, in the history of revolutionary and rebellious acts, the notion of constituent power is not just one logic – a logic attached to the state and the people qua subject – among other possibilities. I want to ask whether we can understand power and revolutionary agency outside the framework of a passage from constituent to constituted power.

There are, of course, concepts of collective power and subjectivity that avoid this logic. One example, which still mobilizes the term “people” to speak of a political subject, can be found in the work of Alain Badiou. Reflecting on various events in the global cycle of political struggles that began in 2011, he cites the “the people’s people,” which he differentiates from the “official people” whom the state

recognizes and on which it founds its legitimacy. For Badiou, “the people’s people” is notable and politically positive insofar as it is linked to “the possible nonexistence of the state.”³⁵ Already, then, we are far from the logic of constitutive power. But with regard to the “people’s people,” Badiou also identifies two types, both of which he regards as politically legitimate: (1) an anti-colonial people who exists “according to the future perfect of a nonexistent state,” and whose possibility is denied by the colonial situation, and (2), a people who is supposedly represented by an existing state but is actually excluded from it.³⁶ The presence of this latter kind of people’s people “implies the disappearance of the state itself, from the moment that political decisions are in the hands of a new people assembled on the square, assembled *right here*.”³⁷ The assembled people is therefore the people in its “definitive form”: it poses not just a cyclical refoundation of the people and its state, but the condition for a rupture with the entire logic of representation that ties the “official people” to existing states.³⁸

This view poses a challenge to the conceptual pairing of constituent and constituted power. On the one hand, by identifying the power of the people in practice, in its specific instantiations, in moments of protest and change, one might say that we have identified constituent power in itself, prior to its relationship to constituted power. But if a people, by its very manifestation, can be an alternative to rather than basis for a state, or if those manifested can claim to *be* the people rather

³⁵ Badiou, “Twenty-Four Notes,” 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

than to represent it, this would disrupt the theory's entire problematic. It would mean that popular power and revolutionary transformation have a much more contingent set of possibilities than a simple linear transition between constituent and constituted powers.

Surveying Marx's works and tendencies in the histories of Marxism, Etienne Balibar poses an exegetical provocation to support the intuition that constituent power is only one among many ways of thinking revolutionary change and its subjects. Balibar asks, what if socialism, instead of the stage which precedes communism, as it is has often been conceived in the history of Marxist thought, is actually a divergent impulse within Marx's critique of political economy?³⁹ That is, what if this divergence between these terms, socialism and communism, implies two distinct conceptions of political change that are irreducible to a theory of stages?

On the one hand, according to Balibar, communism is a radical transformation of property relations, "the constituent of a nonmarket community or a 'free association of producers', transparent to itself (not mediated by the 'real abstraction' of money), that is to say... the self-organization of social life."⁴⁰ On the other hand, however, socialism would correspond to a "'collective appropriation' of the means of social production that, according to the expression of the penultimate chapter of *Capital*, recreates the 'individual property based on the [socializing] acquisitions of the capitalist era'."⁴¹ This second conception would culminate with the democratic

³⁹ Balibar, "Occasional Notes," 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

management of the socialized means of production through the form of the state. It has often been assumed, Balibar says, that the socialist step, with resources managed by a state, would lead eventually to the communist conclusion, i.e., to the totally free association of producers. But he questions this stagist reading because, though the socialist step has been carried out in social or anti-imperialist revolutions – many states have nationalized or seized collective wealth in the name of the people – it has almost never lead to the communist conclusion. This is especially clear if we consider the global appeal of socialism in the 1960s as an extension of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in the name of popular sovereignty. Insofar as these projects were socialist, they were often an extension of the democratic component of revolution – of taking sovereignty, controlling resources, etc. – rather than a qualitative change in property relations. The role of the state is central to this account. Balibar is asking: what if the socialist projects of the twentieth century were limited because their collective, democratic impulses were mediated by *the state*? What if this way of thinking political agency is a barrier, rather than a shortcut, to new forms of social and political collectivity?

This brings us back to the question of constituent power: the relationship between revolution and state authority. Balibar notes that the history of really existing states that have managed to nationalize wealth

only pushes to the extreme or reproduces under new historical conditions the antinomy that haunts the idea of popular sovereignty since the beginning of the ‘second modernity’, to which its models go back (in particular the French Revolution, but also the English Revolution): The sovereignty of the state that ‘monopolizes legitimate violence’ (Gewalt) is referred back to the sovereignty of the revolution, of which one could say that it exercises a ‘monopoly of the

power of historical transformation'.⁴²

This implies that the history of socialist politics has, through its very use of the constituent power discursive operation, tied its fate to the state, seeking to represent the people in the management of collective wealth. Balibar therefore asks about the possibility of “a category of revolutionary politics (and in particular of a revolutionary politics of the masses) that would situate itself at a distance from notions of rebellion, constituent power, the ‘transformation of social relations’, the ‘democratization of democracy’ and so on.”⁴³ He is trying to think past, in other words, the deep foundations of modern democratic revolutionary thought in order to glimpse what may be possible through different modes of political activity; he is trying to untangle the objectives of a transformative communist political project from those of a democratic one. This clarification of the ideas and dividing lines within Marxist thought and practice would perhaps open new horizons of revolutionary thought otherwise crowded out by the democratic revolutionary tradition.

Balibar concludes: “Instead of thinking of communism as ‘surpassing socialism’, we should consider the modalities of a bifurcation at the heart of revolutionary discourses that in their confrontation with the state share a reference to ‘the people’, and thus provide an alternative to populism.” Communism would not name a stage following socialism, but “a paradoxical supplement to democracy (and democratic practices) capable of altering the representation that the people has of its own historical ‘sovereignty’: this is another interior (or rather: an internal alteration)

⁴² Balibar, “Occasional Notes,” 8.

⁴³ Ibid.

of populism, or the critical alternative to the becoming-people of anti-capitalism as well as, in certain historical-geographical conditions, of anti-imperialism.”⁴⁴ The resonance with Badiou’s “people’s people” should be clear: he is talking about a political subject that views itself as such, but is not tied to the democratic tradition. When Balibar speaks of altering the representation of sovereignty, we could read this as an alteration of the performative logic of the people that, as Frank and Honig show, shape our everyday political experiences by referring to a subject and foundation that lies in part beyond them. This means that *new practices of politics* would be necessary to allow popular power, or the power of the multitude, to take a form *other than* the legitimate authority of a new state, or a rejection of this or that particular state in favor of a supposedly truer representation.

With this in mind, I propose to interrogate the concept of constituent power and draw out its multiple potentials by looking at various theoretical discourses within the history of Latin American Marxism. Since this history is always caught between the notion of the people-nation and what Balibar calls its supplemental elements from the communist tradition, I want to show how certain political practices and performative claims may introduce novel political possibilities while others reproduce the logic and temporality of constituent power. I also want to show how writing and intellectual work play a role in these processes.

⁴⁴ Balibar, “Occasional Notes,” 9.

Writing, Theory, and Constituent Textures

In this dissertation, I examine the theoretical work of writers and political agents who deal, either directly or indirectly, with the questions I have just posed under the heading of constituent power and its possible alternatives. These theorists diverge from one another, however, not only in their answers, but in their very approaches to the question. They differ in their practices of writing, their own conceptualization of their role as writing intellectuals, and in how they view their writing's performative force.

When mainstream newspaper commentators in Bolivia discuss the various assemblies, crowds, sieges, and manifestations that erupted in 2000 in terms of the imperative to restore stability, they were often invoking a particular conception of constituent power which they hoped to make into a reality through their work. To conceptualize the sieges of September 2000 as temporary and disruptive was also, in effect, to call for a one of several kinds of political response on the part of the state: either meet the demands and work on long-term means of inclusion for the mobilized but underrepresented groups into the nation, or to repress the mobilizations and ensure that they cannot wreak havoc on the "silent majority." These accounts sought to name a collective agent of the event, relate the agent to the institutions and subjects of the constituted state, and suggest a political response. It was in this context that García Linera stood out in demanding neither integration nor repression but *autonomy*, posing an altogether different interpretation of events and their root cause, and thus a different conception of power.

We might say, then, that when commentators start to invoke different conceptions of constituent power for the same event – for instance, using what Laughlin and Walker call the “radical potential thesis” to justify revolution, or the “juridical containment thesis” to defend the constituted powers of the state – they are waging a theoretical struggle to give meaning to political events. But what is the significance of such struggles? Bearing in mind Frank’s theorization of constituent power as performative, it is important to ask what these kinds of utterances, presented here in a newspaper, actually *do*. That is, I think we ought to be attentive to the way that the various theoretical positions on power have a performative force: position taking in theory can, and is sometimes intended to, create real effects in the world. In this way, the paradoxical quality that Frank sees in constituent power returns to political theory itself, because constituent power, rather than preceding its effects, may be the effect of a discourse seeking to conceptualize power in some particular fashion. And, in keeping with the insights of Balibar discussed above, other ways of conceptualizing power may also possess a performative force in ways that are irreducible to the becoming constituted of constituent power.

Of course, whether a piece of writing, literature, or theory succeeds in actualizing a political possibility depends on the material conditions in which it is produced and circulated. Furthermore, any irruptive manifestation of the people – or the alternative figure that Badiou calls the people’s people – may allow for the actuality of multiple political effects simultaneously. If this is so, the various ways of conceiving the constituent–constituted relationship, and ways of trying to move

beyond this figure of power altogether, might not be mutually exclusive, but dependent on struggles, both political and theoretical, over the meaning of an event. The “reality” of constituent power – or alternatives to it – will be a product of how an event is captured, enacted, accepted, or rejected through a variety of material practices. The performative quality of theory is therefore fundamental.

What I am bringing into question here is the relationship between thought and politics. One of the issues that Bruno Bosteels highlights in his analysis of the “retreat to the political” characterizing emancipatory political theory’s “ontological turn” is that it avoids difficult decisions by separating thought from politics. The result is what he calls “speculative Leftism,” a political position attached to a supposedly deconstructive “outside” of real political conflict. At its worst, such a tendency can serve a mere “philosophical appropriation of radical emancipatory politics, as if this radicality depended on philosophy in order to be able to subtract itself from the questions of power and the State.”⁴⁵ While such a move might be grounded in a healthy impulse to conceive politics beyond the state and struggles over state power, it can also lead to a glib rejection of political conflict in the name of an idealist force outside of history.

In lieu of a retreat to “the political” then, Bosteels suggests we focus on *actuality*, on theorizing through real historical scenarios. The vantage point of actuality would allow us to better understand the potentials of theory and writing as political practices, not only as appropriations of politics into their own cultural and

⁴⁵ Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 33.

institutional spheres (i.e., the academy, the news media, etc.). By locating activities of resistance, rebellion, and protest within historical circumstances and asking what their *actuality* says about their *potential*, this vantage point will also allow us to further interrogate different possibilities for how power is articulated, without taking for granted its contradictory investment in the legitimacy of the state.

Because this dissertation analyzes political events through the writings and discourses of intellectuals, I might be accused of conflating representations – in particular theoretical representations – with material realities. Indeed, Francisco Molina, a professor from Cochabamba, accused García Linera of this error in 2000; he disputed the latter’s suggestion that the conflict in the Altiplano illuminated a radical political alternative to the status quo, arguing that it was only a sectional agrarian dispute. “Radical activists and thinkers often confuse their desires with reality,” he writes.⁴⁶ Yet, as it would happen, those initial confrontations would marked an escalation over the course of five years into the demand for a constitutional assembly, a redefinition of national identity, and a crisis of representation that left two executives deposed. Rather than just vindicating García Linera’s initial interpretation, however, I would ask: since García Linera in this period played a consistent role as a public political interpreter and ultimately vice president of the new Bolivian state, is it possible that his own interpretations and intellectual productions played a role in the development of subsequent events? And insofar as García Linera the vice president adopted an account of revolution from

⁴⁶ Molina, “Falso balance que se hace de la crisis social del país.”

within the tradition of constituent power to defend the new state's legitimacy, might he also have played a role in channeling the moment's potentials to that end in lieu of other possibilities?

In Chapter 4, I will explore these questions by examining disagreements among intellectual-activists in the Comuna theoretical group during Bolivia's process of change. While García Linera cites the constituent power of the insurrectionary period in order to defend the sovereignty of the new Bolivian state after 2006, other thinkers, like Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, see in the same events the basis for distinctive political logics, captured by a focus on what she calls the "communal-popular," or simply "autonomy." While one could interpret this difference by saying that Gutiérrez focuses on constituent power and García Linera on constituted power, I argue that staying within the terms of the constituent power problematic – which always implies that the pairing of constituent power is constituted power – elides the novelty that Gutiérrez seeks to capture. In Chapter 3, I suggest that while the notion of the "constituent" may still be evocative for posing the problems these theorists have in mind, her object and that of others in Comuna, (including that of García Linera before becoming vice president) might be better understood through a different term, *constituent texture*.

By constituent texture, I mean a set of generative power relations and their theorization within a specific historical context. When I say that this is Comuna's object, I mean that their concern is not an abstract model of power that can be applied to all political situations, but a specific set of political and historical potentials

understood in relation to the power relations in their own historical conjuncture. While it is possible to think of constituent power as a *potential*, the notion of the constituent texture is an acknowledgement that potential disconnected from actuality is an empty abstraction. As Frederic Jameson writes, “...for Hegel, actuality already includes its own possibilities and potentialities; they are not something separate and distinct from it, lying in some other alternate world or in the future. Qua possibility this promise of the real is already here and not simply ‘possible’.”⁴⁷ This means that any political theory that wants to understand potentials must analyze what actually is. That is, there is no power in the abstract – it always has a constituent texture, an actualized composition of political, technical, social, and historical elements that make power comprehensible.

Constituent textures are, furthermore, conflictual and downright antagonistic. In this sense, I am introducing the term to highlight one facet of the theory of constituent power identified by Del Lucchese in his analysis of Spinoza:

Constituent power is not, in this sense, an absolute subject or an absolute power. It is rather a historically determined subject and a power, within the here and now of material relations of power, those it follows as much as those it is able to create: against the absolute monarchy in 1789, against fascism in 1945 and so on. Constituent power can only be seized historically, on the plain of the immanent relationship between politics and law, as well as between ontology and history.⁴⁸

I am suggesting that, in fact, with this understanding of power, we are no longer talking about the distinction between constituent and constituted power where the former tends toward the consolidation of the latter in the state. Del Lucchese retains

⁴⁷ Quoted in Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 37–38.

⁴⁸ Del Lucchese, 201.

the term constituent power; however, I think his insight here warrants a bit of differentiation from the many theories of constituent power that do not take historical specificity into account, which is why I am introducing a neologism.

Furthermore, when I use the term constituent texture, I want to emphasize the performative dimension of knowledge production. That is, I want to examine how the analysis of constituent textures could be said to do the work of texturing. A constituent texture is both an object of analysis but also a practice, *to texture*. Such analysis, as we will see in the case of Comuna in Chapter 3, is tied to historical relations not only in terms of its content, but in terms of its own circumstances of production. It is a practice of developing the novelty in those circumstances via the production of texts. The root of the word texture derives from the Latin *texere*, or to weave, which is suggestive here. In recent interventions by feminists, including Gutiérrez, involved in Argentina's #NiUnaMenos movement against femicide and for the International Women's Strike, to weave, or *tejer* in Spanish, has become a common metaphor for discussing political and intellectual work.⁴⁹ To weave in this context is to take intellectual work as a possible material link among disparate elements. In this sense, it doesn't take culture to be an already constituted field and site for hegemonic struggle; instead, it creates a network of relationships through *tejiendo*, and through *textual production* in its various material venues.

The following account therefore examines the distinct intellectual productions of various thinkers to grasp how their theoretical approaches double as political

⁴⁹ Gago, "Intellectuals, Experiences, and Militant Investigation."

practices. In Chapter 1, I use recent theories of posthegemony, which often focus on Latin American history, as an entry point into the Latin American history of hegemony theory. In the historical case of the Argentine theorists around the journal *Pasado y Presente*, with José Aricó and Juan Portantiero as central figures, intellectuals conceived of themselves as offering a subjective element to the one class – the proletariat – objectively capable of overthrowing capitalism. This project was shaped, however, by the specific circumstances in which Peronism, beginning in 1945, had caused this objectively revolutionary class appeared to deviate from its historical task. The writing and publication of *Pasado y Presente*, first in the early 1960s and again in the early 1970s, suggests constant variations on the goal of overcoming the Peronist blockage via cultural or ideological interventions. Others thinkers in this period, eschewing the cultural approach, opted for the voluntarism of armed struggle and an acceptance of Peronism. What is missing from each of these approaches, I argue, is a treatment of the question of organization. This chapter culminates by examining the populist approach of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the former having cut his teeth in the Argentine context under investigation. I argue that Laclau and Mouffe give too much weight to intellectual labor without examining the historical conditions of intellectual production itself. They ignore the question of how different social and class elements might be bound together into a collective actor through a project of organization. In terms of intellectual history, my argument also shows how these traits of Laclau and Mouffe’s self-styled post-Marxist theory were already present in certain Marxist approaches.

Following this, in Chapter 2, I delve more directly into constituent power to see whether this concept offers a better framework than those offered in Chapter 1 for understanding the questions of collective political agency. Through the work of René Zavaleta, I discuss the relationship between constituent power and class composition; i.e., the possibilities for power as shaped by the concrete circumstances of relations of production in a given historical moment. In the early 1960s, Zavaleta began his career as a functionary for the nationalist government that came to power in Bolivia in 1952; he worked as a journalist, sociologist, diplomat, and teacher over the course of his life, all the while engaging with conjunctural political questions facing Bolivia, through his exile in the 1970s and death in 1984. While Zavaleta's work can permit us to see how various capitalist dynamics play a role in how we might understand constituent power and alternative concepts, his attachment to a certain kind of nationalism, and his association of nationalism with capitalist development, ultimately make his theory ambivalent about the subject of revolutionary politics. These attachments to modernization and development, which take the nation as their collective subject and representative democracy as their telos, meant that he could not predict the demobilizing and individualizing potentials of neoliberalism.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the writings of Comuna, participants and intellectuals within the Bolivian movements of 2000–2005. Comuna's practices and interests allowed them to focus on the specific histories of the subaltern classes in their context, especially indigenous communities. At their best, Comuna analyzed the events of 2000–2005 to explain where and how conflicts arose in an emergent

“constituent” scenario. They tried to understand both new and older, reemergent practices of social reproduction. And they asked how these practices relate to the broader questions of political subjectivity. Furthermore, their early political-intellectual efforts – holding open forums for activists and intellectuals, and speed-publishing in the wake of political events – illuminate how the material side of intellectual labor might be able to bring political subjects into being. The Comuna thinkers were thus genuinely open to the idea that Bolivia’s upheaval might give way to a new collective subject, in no way under their leadership but perhaps facilitated by connections established through intellectual work. Here, the *weaving* aspect of the notion of constituent texture comes to the fore.

The stakes of this approach become clearer after 2006, as the new Bolivian state sought to ground its authority in a narrative of constituent power and popular sovereignty articulated through a kind of identitarian populism. On the one hand, the state claimed a monopoly on the insurrectionary power that had been manifest for the preceding six years. On the other, new practices of autonomy, political participation, and collective action began to emerge. The state claimed its sovereign mandate in its negotiations with the foreign businesses that had dominated Bolivia’s most valuable industries, while those who sought to pursue the implications of the constituent event outside of the framework of the state were sometimes pushed aside. The strategic consolidation of political power came into conflict with new, revolutionary social developments. I explore this contradiction in Chapter 4, where I explore divergences in the work of Comuna members in this context. In particular, I focus on the

divergences between Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar and Alvaro García Linera in their theoretical accounts of the events of 2000–2005. While García Linera, serving as vice president, invokes constituent power and seeks to a more generous conceptualization of the state, Gutiérrez stays closer to the constituent texture, doing the work of texturing within the actuality of struggle.

As Latin America's Pink Tide seems to have come to an end today, this dissertation is one attempt to understand its import in theoretical terms, and to deprovincialize the thinkers who have already done so. It also aims to show that the way political theorists conceive of politics can have implications for, and indeed be a part of, political practice. The collective work of producing ideas, I argue, can play a role in constituting political subjects. As I show in the chapters that discuss contemporary Bolivia, this work, in turn, is a way of articulating power. As in the case of García Linera, intellectual work may reproduce classical conceptions of power, like those that place the constituted power of the state at the apex of all efforts toward political change. Or it may, through both its concepts and its practice, show us how other forms of power, and politics, become possible. The textual analyses I offer are therefore complemented by interviews I conducted with some of the theorists under investigation. I draw on these interviews to try and peer beyond the letter of the text into the realm of their production and circulation. The interviews I conducted and the archives I was able to explore in Bolivia have left their mark on my work by allowing me to place theoretical works onto their material footing. This work in the field helped me to further grasp how intellectual productions are themselves a part of

history. Furthermore, in hopes that others will pick up some of this research where I've left off, I've included an appendix that details all the collective texts produced by Comuna in its twelve-year existence. By taking up these texts, analyzing them, and drawing out their theoretical implications, perhaps I will have contributed to the broader work of weaving together an even greater political subject whose scope is still unknown.

Chapter 1

Intellectuals and Political Strategy: Hegemony, Posthegemony, and Post-Marxist Theory in Latin America

In the long search for a revolutionary subject, the concept of *hegemony* has played a key role in Latin America and beyond. Since the 1980s, however, corresponding to Gramsci's own distinction between the West and the East, theorists of subaltern studies from South Asia to Latin America have followed Ranajit Guha to ask whether the concept adequately explains state and class power in post-colonial contexts. Posthegemony theory, grounded in debates Latin American Subaltern Studies during the late 1990s and early 2000s, uses the post-colonial critique as the basis for a more sweeping rejection: Jon Beasley-Murray, who has scribed the most elaborate entry into the debate on posthegemony, argues that "there is no hegemony and never has been," and that the concept of hegemony "only ever appeared" to capture social and political processes, while in fact delimiting a conservative, populist, and state-centered notion of politics.⁵⁰ The concept of hegemony, for posthegemony theorists, appears to be a fetter on political strategy and imagination.

One would hope, then, that posthegemony could offer a distinct political and strategic alternative to the theory of hegemony it hopes to displace, yet to date its status as a strategic guide is unclear. Why should this be the case? The concept of hegemony has historically existed as the keystone of an entire theoretical problematic.

⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray, "On Posthegemony," 117. The first reference points for the discussion are Larsen 1990, Yúdice 1995, Moreiras 2001, Valentine 2001, and Williams 2002. While all of these texts posed the issue of whether hegemony is a useful concept, the work of theorizing posthegemony in earnest began with Beasley-Murray 2003, conceived as a response to Moreiras 2001.

The notions of war of position/war of manoeuvre, integral state, passive revolution, etc. each found their place in relation to the hegemony concept, which served as a purported resolution to key problems in Marxist theory and practice: how to construct the revolutionary subject for a new society out of the elements of the old. Yet even as posthegemony theory poses incisive critiques to this problematic, and even as its proponents often conjure examples from Latin American political history to test the explanatory power of its concepts, it has not addressed the actual function of the theory of hegemony *within* that history. In other words, posthegemony theory has not settled accounts with the theory of hegemony as a living doctrine which has guided Latin American revolutionary actors for more than a generation.⁵¹ Such a settling of accounts may or may not actually mean going “beyond” the theory of hegemony, i.e., fundamentally displacing it as a problematic, but by relating these more recent theoretical proposals to the ideas and practices of the past, we can at least shed light on several questions: How do party politics and organizational issues relate both to the power of the state and to the everyday experiences and conditions of dominated classes? How, within this set of relationships, can a collective actor pursue a project of political change? And what role, in particular, might the production of ideas and theories play in such a project?

Ernesto Laclau, whose particular theory of hegemony, elaborated with Chantal Mouffe, is Beasley-Murray’s target, notes that his work must be situated

⁵¹ Bosteels, “Towards a Theory of the Integral State,” 55–60.

within “the troubled history of the Argentina of the 1960s.”⁵² Yet this sort of historicization has, until now, been absent from the debate on posthegemony.⁵³ In this chapter, I pursue such an investigation into the history of Argentina, in which Gramsci’s ideas were first received and propagated throughout Latin America, to achieve two goals: 1) To grasp the functions of the theory of hegemony in a context of concrete political struggle, and thereby examine whether or how the theories under the heading of posthegemony may offer new political insights. 2) To examine the *limitations* of hegemony theory in relation to these functions, and thus examine how posthegemony theory, or any new theoretical or political orientation, might avoid such limitations in its own role as a political and strategic guide. In short, the strategic political deficit in posthegemony theory *may* be resolved by exploring, first, the underlying questions and tasks, and, then, the limitations – the contradictions, gaps, and lacunae – of the theoretical problematic it purports to displace.

The Argentine history of the theory of hegemony, treated below, demonstrates that the theory has served principally for professional intellectuals to find their strategic place in the class struggle. This strategic concern traverses Argentine Marxism and, through Laclau, has a direct link to the post-Marxist theory of hegemony that has been at the center of the discussion of posthegemony. The theory of hegemony articulates the task of *organization* as a way to link intellectuals, with

⁵² Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, 1.

⁵³ Tom Chodor and R.G. Emerson have both suggested a return to some elements of Gramsci’s work as a resolution to certain problems within posthegemony theory, but the Latin American reception of Gramsci falls outside of their analysis. See Chodor, “Not Throwing Out the Baby With the Bathwater,” and Emerson, “Post-hegemony and Gramsci: A Bridge Too Far?”

subjective revolutionary potential, to the proletariat and other subaltern classes, viewed as the objective elements requiring this infusion of subjectivity. This schema relies on two other concepts: culture and knowledge. Culture, within this problematic, holds an ambiguous position as a set of immanent proletarian dispositions (toward democracy, revolution, etc.), and also as a set of representations to be guided and shaped by intellectual activity. Knowledge, on the other hand, appears within the theory in the form of intellectual productions that serve as the basis for correct political action. And yet, as a strategy, the Argentine experience demonstrates the limitations of the theory of hegemony: unless the organizational question can be resolved, intellectuals are left to either strictly cultural work, aloof from their would-be proletarian interlocutors, or else a populist and voluntarist catering to the spontaneous political and social orientations of that class.

The question in the present chapter is whether posthegemony can overcome these limitations, or at least whether it can illuminate some facets of politics that remain underexamined within the problematic of hegemony. Indeed, I am less interested here in posthegemony's own task of displacing the very concept of hegemony, which cannot easily be dismissed, than in using both sets of ideas to highlight the strategic political problem of forming a collective actor or subject, to show why this problem has been central within the history of Latin American revolutionary thought, and to examine how different historical circumstances inform thinkers' responses.

In the context of this dissertation, this chapter lays the groundwork for later discussions of constituent and constituted power insofar as the debates about the theory of hegemony are debates about the way that power works. As we shall see, differing views of power and intellectual practice that emerge in the context of the Pink Tide are already at play, in a sense, in these early attempts to use the theory of hegemony as a strategic guide in Argentina. More recently, the concept of posthegemony emerged as an early (within the history of the Pink Tide) way of asking how power ought to work for emancipatory political aims in Latin America. Because Laclau and Mouffe's theories have been influential among some leaders and thinkers in the Pink Tide, especially those who see the state as a privileged site for the consolidation of power, to place these theories back in their context will allow us to see the link between intellectual practices and the performativity of political discourses in shaping potentiality into actuality.

Political Challenges of Posthegemony

The strongest point of posthegemony theory is its critical edge, aimed principally at Laclau and Mouffe. Beasley-Murray argues that Laclau and Mouffe's focus on the mechanisms of ideology, representation, and discourse leaves it unable to account for the power of the state on the one hand, and political logics of resistance that don't quite fit within the structure of hegemonic politics on the other.⁵⁴ This focus on representation, which tends to reduce politics almost exclusively to struggles

⁵⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 60.

in ideology, has historically shaped the politics of cultural studies. Beasley-Murray argues that the concept of hegemony is tied within that intellectual formation to the strategic primacy of scholars who attach amplified importance to their own critical work, but who fail to question the prevailing ideological mechanisms of domination, instead offering a new “counter-hegemonic” version of those same mechanisms.⁵⁵ The history of hegemony theory in Argentina suggests that, even outside cultural studies, Beasley-Murray is correct to emphasize the intellectualization of politics in his critique.

But what does posthegemony theory pose as a political alternative? On the one hand, theorists of posthegemony have emphasized the momentary insurgent character of politics in contrast to the “seizing” of state apparatuses. These moments – like the mass Argentine protests of 2001, or the popular defeat of the Venezuelan anti-Chávez coup in 2002 – inform a concept of constituent power which is central to Beasley Murray’s argument.⁵⁶ Benjamin Arditi, attempting to focus less on such ephemeral moments, invokes various contemporary thinkers, as well as movements like neo-Zapatismo, to develop a theory of *exodus*, as well as a viral politics, posed as an alternative to direct confrontation with the state and capital.⁵⁷ While these suggestions are an interesting starting point for thinking about a politics that avoids operating on the state’s terrain, it is not always obvious what conditions and actors could make these ideas realizable.

⁵⁵ Beasley-Murray, “On Posthegemony,” 122–23; Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 22–39.

⁵⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 226–27.

⁵⁷ Arditi, “Post-hegemony: Politics Outside the Usual Paradigm,” 214.

The concept of the collective subject within posthegemony theory is the *multitude*, whose distinction from a *people* dates to early modern political philosophy, but which is defined within posthegemony theory with reference to contemporary readings of Spinoza by Paulo Virno, Hardt and Negri, and others. Arditì writes that the multitude is “a plurality that persists as such in the public sphere without converging into a One.”⁵⁸ As to how such a plurality comes into existence, which might be a foundational strategic question for posthegemony theory, Beasley-Murray writes that “the multitude gains power only through establishing affective relations and combining its powers with other bodies.”⁵⁹ Yet as Carlos Pessoa suggests, this claim does not give way to a broader theorization of strategy within the problematic of posthegemony.⁶⁰ And Becquer Seguíñ notes that insofar as there is a “primacy of affect” over ideology in this formulation, we are left wondering how it is possible to pursue politics on an apparently preconscious level.⁶¹ That is, given Beasley-Murray’s criticism of ideological struggle, how could one even address an amorphous multitude?

Posthegemony theory sometimes appears to avoid these problems by deferring to the spontaneity of the multitude. This is linked to Beasley-Murray’s conception of constituent power as an immanent potential of this collective actor in opposition to the constituted power of political institutions. In other words, the theory’s starting point – and possibly its end point– is the simple fact that the masses resist state power

⁵⁸ Arditì, “Post-hegemony: Politics Outside the Usual Paradigm,” 213.

⁵⁹ Beasley-Murray, “On Posthegemony,” 123.

⁶⁰ Pessoa, “On Hegemony, Post-ideology and Subalternity,” 488.

⁶¹ Seguíñ, “Posthegemony in Times of the Pink Tide,” n.p.

and oppression from time to time. As I have already noted in my introduction, however, the concept of constituent power is more often than not a way of thinking the creation of new constituted powers, generally invoked after the fact as a means of grounding their legitimacy. If this is so, then it's not clear whether Beasley-Murray's reliance on the concept of constituent power and its apparently spontaneous manifestations can help us think of politics without exclusive reference to the state. It would thus run up against the same kind of limitation that Beasley-Murray identifies in the concept of hegemony, a permanent cycle in which a state is challenged by a revolution, which leads in turn to the founding of a new state.

Beasley-Murray does offer another suggestive starting point, however, which might get us beyond the simple binary opposition of constituent and constituted powers, as well as a debilitating deference to spontaneity. He refers to *autopoiesis* – making of the self.⁶² This idea implies that what is more important than constituent power in the abstract is the ability of a multitude to work on its own composition, its specific features and internal formations. But even within the parameters of autopoiesis, we might ask: Where to begin? And what is to be *made* in the process of self-making? What are the component parts of the multitude, as a collective, in the first place?

Within the broader history of Marxist and radical thought, I would argue that these same issues have been addressed under distinct headings, namely that of *organization*. In order to more sharply pose these political-strategic questions, and to

⁶² Beasley-Murray, "On Posthegemony," 123–24.

see whether posthegemony theory offers new insights in relation to this history, it will be useful to address the object that posthegemony purports to have surpassed – the theory of hegemony – and to see how this theory has served a strategic function within really existing political movements. One could of course choose from many such movements. My focus here will be on a certain tendency of the communist movement in Argentina, as this was the site where Gramscian thought was first introduced within Latin America. Since its arrival necessarily involved a process of translation for a new context, it illuminates some of the peculiarities of the theory and strategy of hegemony. When we analyze this history, we will be able to see the deeper underlying political questions that the theory helped to address in practice, and thereby to see how and whether posthegemony theory offers new answers. If I err on the side of too much detail in what follows, it is because only through close examination of their context can we understand how these ideas were responses to practical political challenges.

Hegemony Theory in Argentine Political Practice

Cultural Approach of an Isolated Party

The theory of hegemony in Argentina was first posed as the response to a contradiction: What is a revolutionary party without revolutionary masses? This is the question that the established Argentine Left asked themselves with the worker-based electoral victory of Juan Perón in February 1946. That event, and the mass strike that had precipitated it months before, had powerful effects on Argentina's Communist

Party, Socialist Party, and the various Trotskyist organizations.⁶³ Officially, all of these parties rejected Peronism, with the Communists and Socialists declaring it a form of fascism and participating in the Union Democrática (Democratic Union) electoral platform against Perón's Partido Laborista (Labor Party). The long-term consequence of this, according to Michael Löwy, was that "a sharp divide opened between the majority of the Argentine working class, who supported Peronism, and the Communists, who were accused by Perón of collaborating with the military and the most conservative section of landed proprietors ('the oligarchy')." ⁶⁴

For others on the Left, however, the sheer success with which Peronism interpellated the proletariat gave it legitimacy as a genuine cultural expression of the working class. Writing under the pseudonym Victor Guerrero in 1946, Trotskyist organizer Jorge Abelardo Ramos argued that despite the limitations of Peronism, "the workerist and 'anti-imperialist' measures of Perón have mobilised the support of the working class, waking it from a years-long political lethargy."⁶⁵ Ramos, along with others who gravitated toward the Peronist masses, represented what would be called the *Izquierda Nacional* (National Left, IN). This divide among Peronists and the rest of the Left, as well as the divide between most workers and the non-Peronist Left, set the tone for Argentine radical politics during the following three decades.

In the Partido Comunista de la Argentina (Argentine Communist Party, PCA), the tasks resulting from these events were: 1) To explain the working class's

⁶³ Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda*, ch. 1.

⁶⁴ Löwy, "Introduction: Points of Reference for a History of Marxism in Latin America," xxxiv–xxxv.

⁶⁵ Ramos, "La cuestión argentina y el imperialismo yanqui," 3.

attraction to Peronism, and 2) To provide a strategy that could reverse this tendency and bring workers closer to the Party. For Héctor Agosti, editor of the PCA's theoretical journal *Cuadernos de Cultura* (Journal of Culture), Peronism's cynical success stemmed from its self-portrayal as an agent of the unfinished national and anti-imperial tasks of Argentina's manqué 19th-century bourgeois revolution. Thus, in 1951, Agosti analyzed that failed revolution in the book *Echeverría* and found many parallels with Risorgimento Italy as theorized by Gramsci. Based on these parallels, Agosti employs the concept of hegemony for, to my knowledge, the first time in Latin America. He argues that in the post-independence epoch of the mid 1800s, characterized by a strong division between town and country in Argentina, the new state's would-be Jacobins failed to establish a true "pedagogical" relationship of hegemony with the masses in the countryside.⁶⁶ For Agosti, the historic failure to carry out a bourgeois revolution and unite the nation through a national-popular culture gave way to demagogues like Juan Manuel de Rosas in the 19th century and Perón in the 20th. The task of establishing a national-popular culture therefore remained unfinished in 1951, except now this would occur with the hegemony of proletarian Jacobins under the direction of the PCA.⁶⁷

By the mid-1950s, this pedagogical aspect of the hegemony strategy was certainly fitting for the class composition of the PCA. Its proletarian character was more questionable: "Once they lost their ascendant position in the world of workers with the emergence of Peronism, Communism had been converted into a middle-class

⁶⁶ Agosti, *Echeverría*, 55; 148.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

party whose greatest influence was developed in the world of ideas and culture,” writes Adriana Petra.⁶⁸ Against this backdrop, Agosti prepared an address to the first national conference of Communist intellectuals in March 1956 – the conference never took place, yet Agosti’s speech, “Los problemas de la cultura argentina y la posición ideológica de los marxistas,” was published later that year in the volume *Para una política de la cultura*. There, we can detect a fundamental ambiguity in the attempt to grapple with the Party’s relationship to the estranged masses. On the one hand, the objective factors are said to be in place for the tasks of a democratic revolution in the wake of Perón’s overthrow:

The Argentine democratic reserves are of such a magnitude that to bring them into play would assure a qualitative leap in the development of the nation, a real utilization of all its powers [*potencias*], currently arrested and impeded from advancing beyond their present position because of the country’s structure.⁶⁹

Yet an obstacle remains on the level of consciousness:

The objective forces of the democratic revolution – those reserves of Argentine democracy – are there; all that is needed, now, is that the subjective factors of consciousness take hold among them to convert them into active brigades of this indispensable transformation.⁷⁰

It is the task of intellectuals, Agosti argues, to resolve this disjuncture between objective factors and subjective consciousness – but what does that entail? On the one hand, the existence of a democratic culture, “already seeded ... in the depths of the Argentine people,” means that intellectual and cultural work is simply a matter of

⁶⁸ Petra, “Pasado y Presente: Marxismo y modernización,” 110.

⁶⁹ Agosti, *Para una política de cultura*, 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

affirming the values that were located there among the masses.⁷¹ Yet on the other hand, Agosti declares that intellectuals must training them in something new: “The communist objective is the education of the popular masses for the full exercise of democracy, and this is what defines our program of cultural politics.”⁷² Communist intellectuals were thus in a curious position, charged with teaching democratic values to the very masses in whom those values are said to already exist. Notwithstanding this ambiguity, this strategy wedded the party to the task of cultural leadership, grounded in a particular understanding of the theory of hegemony. The PCA would have to produce cultural interventions to peel workers away from Peronism and imbue them with a national-popular revolutionary subjectivity.

Pasado y Presente *against PCA Dogma*

In September 1955, a military coup ousted Perón. Yet even in the subsequent period involving the proscription of Peronist parties, the PCA was unable to improve its own fortunes with the working class. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, an influx of younger, university-credentialed intellectuals entered into its ranks.⁷³ These young intellectuals shunned what they perceived as dogmatism among older Party leaders, and they criticized the theoretical inadequacy of so-called Marxist sociology. Several of these young intellectuals, including Juan Portantiero and José Aricó, became close to Agosti while working on the PCA’s *Cuadernos de Cultura*, and

⁷¹ Agosti, *Para una política de cultura*, 30; 41.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷³ Petra, “Pasado y Presente: Marxismo y modernización,” 111–12.

considered him an exception to the narrow-mindedness of the Party. By this route, Gramscian thought found its next iteration in their journal *Pasado y Presente* and ignited the inter-intellectual friction that would lead to the expulsion of these young theorists over their attachment to Gramsci.⁷⁴

For Aricó, who would become the most visible figure associated with *Pasado y Presente*, the importance of the concept of hegemony was, from the start, its relationship to the political role of intellectuals. He explains retrospectively: “The unavoidable and decisive function of culture, and thus the *political* consideration of the problem of intellectuals, in the construction of hegemony: this is what Gramsci, and no one else, contributed as an innovation in the Leninist tradition.”⁷⁵ Hegemony, in other words, conceived as a cultural process and not just as a strategy of class alliance, meant that intellectuals could have a central political position.

Aricó continues:

For the first time, culture was located there where it should have been, as an indispensable dimension of political action. The party as a ‘collective intellectual’; in its interior, we as ‘organic intellectuals.’ Here is the captivating foundational synthesis for the most varied of compositions, but also – why not recognize it? – of the most boundless of our ambitions. For better or for worse – and there was much of both – Gramsci allowed us to envisage a place in politics from which we could serve as something more than unreliable and suspicious ‘fellow travelers’ of the proletariat.⁷⁶

We have here, in continuity with Agosti’s thinking, an account of how the concept of hegemony and a focus on culture as a space for political action permitted a sense of

⁷⁴ See Burgos, *Los gramscianos argentinos*, 53–57; 75–80.

⁷⁵ Aricó, *La cola del diablo*, 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

intellectual leadership, couched in terms of the “organic intellectual.” Aricó is explicit that the theory was attractive precisely because it opened this space for self-understanding and orientation. We can see therefore begin to see how the production of ideas via the concept of hegemony in Argentina was grounded in the social position of its purveyors and the ways they imagined their position in relation to other classes.

This understanding opened up further theoretical and strategic issues, however, owing also to the historical specificities of class and organizational dynamics in Argentina. As professional intellectuals primarily situated in the university – except Aricó, who worked in publishing – the position of the *Pasado y Presente* group more closely approximated the category of what Gramsci called the traditional intellectual: those kinds of intellectuals that existed prior to capitalism, but who continue to exist within it, and who, because of their specific social functions, “put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group.”⁷⁷ According to Gramsci, the *Party* is the site for the “welding together” of traditional and organic intellectuals that can efface the distinction between the two on the level of political practice: “An intellectual who joins the political party of a particular social group is merged with the organic intellectuals of the group itself, and is tightly linked with the group.”⁷⁸ Yet the lack of a link between the Party and the working class, as in Argentina, problematizes this possibility, and will push these

⁷⁷ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 7. On the academic affiliations of *Pasado y Presente* see Petra “Pasado y Presente: Marxismo y modernización,” 113–15.

⁷⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 15–16.

thinkers to further examine, through the hegemony problematic, the political strategies available to intellectuals.

Let us take note here of some features of the hegemony problematic:

(1) A division between subjective and objective revolutionary elements, mapped onto a distinction between intellectuals on the one hand, and workers on the other. The workers, ensnared in Peronism and not having their own independent party, would need intellectual intervention of some kind in order to become a collective actor.

(2) Culture could serve as the medium of an intervention to achieve a synthesis of the objective and subjective. Culture is ambiguously formulated as something proper to the masses, a *potential* that inheres to them, and as an independent means through which intellectuals could pursue their pedagogical work.

(3) The notion of organization as the melding together of these various elements, which will allow traditional intellectuals to become a direct and organic part of the class struggle.

We can read *Pasado y Presente*'s work as an attempt to devise and enact a strategy based on these suppositions. Both the form and content of their work reveal the influence of this framework, drawn from a reading of Gramsci and filtered, by both Agostí's interpretive work and their own assessment, through the historical particularities of their situation.

The Strategic Impasse of Pasado y Presente

Setting out a justification and orientation for the journal *Pasado y Presente* in the introductory essay to the first issue, Aricó writes that the aim of intellectual production must be “a true politics of cultural unification destined to grant [*otorgar*] to the proletariat the plenitude of its historical consciousness.”⁷⁹ The word *otorgar* (to grant, bestow) is revealing here, suggesting the function of a vanguard, in a broad sense, for the intellectuals who undertake this cultural work.⁸⁰ In this formulation, then, the point is not to activate something already existent in the proletariat, but to offer it from the outside.

At the same time, however, Aricó is critical of what he sees among intellectuals as a desire to bypass forging a relationship with the working class, an unconscious “ambition to realise on their own the hegemony that their class is incapable of achieving.”⁸¹ In order to avoid this temptation, he argues, it is necessary that the working class should eventually achieve hegemony over the intellectuals, reversing the relationship by which this class was granted its consciousness:

It all depends, in the final instance, on the play of forces in struggle, on the balance of power between those classes into which society is divided. Thus it can occur – what’s more, it occurs frequently – that when the proletariat tends toward becoming historically capable of assuming the total leadership of the country, the process is inverted and the new layers of intellectuals are transformed, through a capillary and even painful development, characterised

⁷⁹ Aricó, “Pasado y Presente,” 56.

⁸⁰ I employ the term “vanguard” here in a descriptive sense, and I am specifically trying to capture its ‘cultural’ character in this context. This colloquial usage is related to but does not strictly adhere to Lenin’s understanding of a vanguard *party* insofar as here the status of the party is in question. The term here is being used in a more general way, insofar as intellectuals were trying to act as cultural leaders without clearly defining the organizational strategy which would support them in that position.

⁸¹ Aricó, “Pasado y Presente,” 49.

by successive upheavals, into intellectuals of the working class (1963/2014, p. 49).

In other words, for an external intellectual vanguard to gain an organic link with the proletariat, the working class must become a collective subject and overcome the process whereby overzealous intellectuals attempt to submit the proletariat to their will. These two alternatives, hegemony by intellectuals on the one hand, and intellectuals organically bound to the hegemonic proletariat on the other, are thus figured as contingent moments in a single process, dependent on how power is distributed within a society at large. These various possibilities are linked to what Aricó would later call “the ambiguity, or better said, the conflictuality that surrounds the problem of the encounter between intellectuals and the people.”⁸²

At this point, a third potential role for intellectuals – in addition to providing cultural leadership and organically following the proletariat – makes its appearance in the problematic: the intellectual as a bearer of scientific objectivity. The status of this scientific function vis-a-vis the other possible ways of intellectual–proletariat linkage is not immediately clear, however. For Aricó, one of the reasons to publish *Pasado y Presente* is “a true crisis of *dogmatic thought*.”⁸³ Accordingly, he criticizes a vulgar Marxism that tries to subordinate reality to a conceptual schema, arguing that in that case, “scientific objectivity, which should be at the base of all serious politics, runs the risk of being substituted by an easy subjectivism.”⁸⁴ All political action must be

⁸² Aricó, *La cola del diablo*, 188.

⁸³ Aricó, “Pasado y Presente,” 58.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

carried out on basis of “a deeply *scientific* and therefore *true* consideration of reality.”⁸⁵ For intellectuals to be effective they must accomplish some measure of “binding and homogenization,” and the unscientific idealism of the Party functionaries was an obstacle to this.⁸⁶

Once introduced, however, Aricó’s references to science only add to the uncertainty of *Pasado y Presente*’s strategy, because per Aricó, the material conditions for scientific knowledge do not always exist. “It is difficult to overcome the permanent polarity between ideology and science, historical knowledge and the scientific method, totality and empiricism (or more concretely, reform and revolution),” he writes.⁸⁷ These various disjunctures stem, he ventures, from a more fundamental social division – not between capital and labor, but rather, the very disconnect that characterized their own position, “between directorate and base, the leaders and the lead, elites and masses, intellectuals and the people.”⁸⁸ In other words, even though intellectuals were supposed to provide scientific knowledge for the workers movement, the lack of an organic relationship to the working class made such knowledge difficult, if not impossible, to produce.

If we look at all of the political functions ascribed to intellectuals within Aricó et al.’s framing of the question, the common missing element was, as the authors put it, “the creation of bridges that permit the establishment of a point of passage between

⁸⁵ Aricó, “Pasado y Presente,” 51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

the proletariat and intellectuals.”⁸⁹ Whether the role of intellectuals was thought either as granting consciousness to the working class, organically following its leadership in a historic bloc, or providing scientific knowledge for the struggle, some kind of connection – an organizational link – was presupposed. The entire theorization was suited to a situation where intellectuals and workers had some way of interacting and communicating, and yet, paradoxically, it was based on a theory of hegemony which, I’ve suggested, Agostí adopted in order to overcome this social distance in the absence of a shared party. Lacking this means by which workers and intellectuals could associate, it would seem *Pasado y Presente* published its journal in the hopes that its cultural effects would somehow create the conditions for their encounter with the masses. As Burgos puts it, “the journal appears to intervene in *politics* based on its participation in *ideological* debate and in dialogue and permanent involvement in the field of *culture*.”⁹⁰ This was something of an ad-hoc approach, however, leaving unresolved the question of how a theoretical journal, outside of any organization, would find its way into the hands or culture of the working class. In 1965, *Pasado y Presente* ended its first run without having realized their desired encounter; a year later the rise of a new military dictatorship under Juan Carlos Onganía would make revolutionary organizing even more difficult.

Class, Organization, Posthegemony

⁸⁹ Aricó, “Pasado y Presente,” 56.

⁹⁰ Burgos, *Los gramscianos argentinos*, 114.

The strategic shortcomings and theoretical ambiguity of *Pasado y Presente* at the end of its first round of journal publication owed to a non-correspondence between the assumptions of the group's theory and the actual political problem they faced. While Gramsci's strategy and his comments on intellectuals were predicated on the existence of a mass working class party, as in Italy in the early decades of the 20th century and again in the post-war period, the situation of Argentine intellectuals was different. Peronism, not Communism or Socialism, was the leading ideology and organizational basis of workers. Thus, the presupposed relation between objective revolutionary elements and those who could grant their subjective consciousness was interrupted. Such was the condition that led Agosti to turn to culture in the first place. But while his interpretation of hegemony theory suggested a solution at the level of culture, the organizational problem – the lack of an organizational space in which to make their intervention – persisted, and the Argentine Gramscians did not adequately analyze it. They accepted that the subjective and objective elements correspond to two distinct social groups – intellectuals and the working class – but they did not yet explore how the composition of and the relations between these groups in a particular historical context affected the strategic terrain.

Nonetheless, the way that these theorists discuss *culture* poses an unregistered recognition of the underlying issue. Agosti's reference to "democratic reserves," to the "*potencias*" of the proletariat, as well as Aricó's references to the intellectuals' conflictual relation with that class, suggest an affinity with the concept of *constituent power*. This power is often signified with the Latin word *potentia* in contrast with

potestas, or constituted power. While the Romance languages have different terms that correspond to this distinction, one might distinguish them in English by saying *power to* for *potentia* and *power over* for *potestas*. The fundamental point here is that Agosti and Aricó discuss culture, and define their task in activating certain cultural features of the proletariat, with reference to a kind of immanent power in the class itself. If this is so, then we might re-frame the question that concerned them as: *how can this implicit power be actualized into a unified subject with lasting political effects?* This would be a broader way to pose the task to which these theorists were trying to respond with the concept of hegemony. And this way of posing it opens up more space for considering the variable nature of *organization*, rather than taking for granted any one model for the relationship between professional intellectuals and the proletariat.

Focusing on organization does not mean ignoring class. On the contrary, it demands greater interrogation of the particularities of class relationships in any given context. The limitation of *Pasado y Presente*'s investigation was not an overemphasis on class politics, but a misunderstanding of the composition of different classes, including political or organizational composition, in their own historical circumstances. A greater grasp of the link between variable class relationships and the task of activating what they saw as the potential of the proletariat might have pushed their strategic thought toward organizational questions.

Let us return to posthegemony theory for a moment then. We can now see how, in order to move past this strategic shortcoming of hegemony theory,

posthegemony's partisans might analyze contemporary class relationships by tracking the changing shape of the relations of production under neoliberal capitalism.

Nicholas Thoburn, arguing for such an emphasis in posthegemony theory, writes:

“The frame of production, routed through an analysis of capitalist dynamics, serves not to reduce an understanding of politics and power to a circumscribed terrain of the economic, but to open it out to the complexity of the social.”⁹¹ To organize is precisely to take into account this complexity and understand it as the basis for the formation of a collective agency. In this sense, recognizing the *specific conditions* in which the theory of hegemony was elaborated to achieve this task, and asking about how one's own conditions differ, can reconnect political strategy to the core of Marxian social analysis.

Because we are discussing theory produced in particular intellectual milieus, this means not only analyzing the composition of the proletariat today, but looking at the situation of intellectual labor in contemporary capitalism. We would have to ask: what does the relationship between the production of knowledge and other sites of production look like today? Are these necessarily distinct locations within the circuits of capitalism? What would it mean to conceptualize the categories of “intellectual” and “worker” in terms of the present mode by which commodities are produced and circulated? And how could we think the relationship between these categories outside of an analogy to that of a “subject” and “object” to be merged?

⁹¹ Thoburn, “Patterns of Production,” 82.

Organization, I would argue, is still the task at hand, and likely still involves bringing together various kinds of worker, both intellectual and manual, productive and “unproductive,” public and private, waged and unwaged. But unless we know *who* or *what* is to be organized via an analysis of these ever changing class relationships, the strategic task can only be abstract.

Toward Self-Organization

At this point, we can examine two episodes that illustrate both hegemony theory’s political difficulties in Argentina and the historical link between this history and the theory’s broader, post-Marxist reception via the work of Ernesto Laclau. First, the experience of the *Pasado y Presente* group in the 1969 Cordobazo and their subsequent analysis during the second run of their journal (1973) shows how Aricó and his comrades attempted to break with the notion of intellectuals’ cultural leadership and their privileged role in knowledge production, focusing instead on workers’ self-organization. This brings them right to the brink of a theoretical breakthrough, but the subsequent collapse of the second era of Peronism in 1976 will push them toward other considerations. Second, theorists of the *Izquierda Nacional* beginning in the late 1960s will also question the role of intellectuals in producing culture and scientific knowledge, but at the cost of a complete deference to Peronism as an “organic” ideology and a tendency toward voluntarism in place of strategy.

In *La cola del diablo* (The devil’s tail), Aricó summarizes the whole experience of *Pasado y Presente* in terms of the search for an “anchor,” a “class

interlocutor” outside of the Communist Party.⁹² This awareness of the organizational lack at the center of their strategy, as well as the unevenness of the proletariat itself, had led them in the early 1960s to briefly seek out links with rural *foquismo*, the successful approach of the Cuban Revolution that militants throughout South and Central America attempted to reproduce.⁹³ Later, following the coup of 1966 in Argentina and the installation of a dictatorship under Juan Carlos Onganía, they turned instead to the autonomous combativeness of industrial workers while also showing some sympathy for urban guerrilla organizations.⁹⁴ The members of *Pasado y Presente* were particularly interested in the 1969 student and worker uprising in their industrial home city of Córdoba, known as the *Cordobazo*, and the related emergence of *clasista* and anti-bureaucracy labor tendencies.⁹⁵ In terms of their published work, this meant that the renewal of their journal in 1973 completely lacked “cultural” content and focused only on strategic and political concerns related to the movements of the conjuncture.⁹⁶

The editorial decision to prioritize political analysis and the search for subaltern perspectives and actors was informed by a radical historical revision of Peronism introduced by Portantiero and Miguel Murmis. In “El movimiento obrero en los orígenes del Peronismo,” (The workers movement in the origins of Peronism) an essay in the first of a two-volume work called *Estudios sobre los orígenes del*

⁹² Aricó, *La cola del diablo*, 75–76.

⁹³ Burgos, *Los gramscianos argentinos*, 83.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁹⁵ *Clasista* in this context refers to a specific union movement in post-1969 Córdoba that sought to establish a class line for labor, as opposed to a corporatist one either linked up with the State or Peronism.

⁹⁶ Burgos, *Los gramscianos argentinos*, 223.

Peronismo (Studies on the origins of Peronism), Portantiero and Murmis argue that the participation of workers in the Peronist movement was, contrary to existing beliefs, active, autonomous, rational, and led by Argentina's most experienced industrial workers with a base in the existing labor movement.⁹⁷ This line of thought suggests, against the prevailing view that workers had been manipulated through a populist discourse owing to their lack of autonomous class culture, that the proletariat came to Peronism through its own self-organizational capabilities. It stood to reason, then, that these capabilities might also lead them to new, more radical political ends.

The *Pasado y Presente* group grapples with these implications in the introductory essay to the first issue of the 1973 journal run, titled "La 'larga marcha' al socialismo en Argentina" (The 'long march' toward socialism in Argentina) and signed by *Pasado y Presente* as a whole. In a self-critical gesture, the writers of the group editorial question the specific role of intellectual leadership, saying that "the traditional strategies of the left that superimposed a strategy of power by a Jacobin vanguard over the spontaneous and elemental rebellion of the masses have ceased to have validity."⁹⁸ The authors do not completely abandon their self-perception as integral elements of the class struggle, but they accept that their role might be secondary to worker self-organization:

The party, or in the present conditions of Argentina, the vanguards in general, are essential for the struggles inside and outside of the factory in order to combat their corporative moment, and stimulate their political development and consciousness of the general connections. But they can only realise their

⁹⁷ Murmis and Portantiero, *Origenes del peronismo*, 73–76; 115–24. See also Popovitch, "Althusserianism and the political culture of the Argentine New Left."

⁹⁸ *Pasado y Presente*, "La larga marcha," 10.

‘orienting labor’ from within the interior of a mass movement that should be *essentially autonomous, unitary, and organized.*⁹⁹

The strategic role of intellectuals is now conceived as holding a position subordinate to the mass organization, figured here as “a network of committees and *councils*” controlled democratically by workers.¹⁰⁰ The authors criticize other New Left parties who, at the height of the *clasista* labor struggles in Córdoba’s Fiat factories, attempted to impose “a socialist political-ideological discourse” onto workers’ self-activity.¹⁰¹ They suggest an alternative: “It was necessary to outline a political and strategic perspective that would be able to make the growth of the revolutionary sectors compatible with the real validity of Peronism in the working class as an expression of the political unity of the class ensemble.”¹⁰² While they therefore accepted Peronism as a legitimate but contingent feature of working class politics, they viewed the issue of organization through the lens of the conditions and activities of the most politically active workers. Of course, to recognize the need for a new “political and strategic perspective” is not to have achieved one, but we can read their changing view here as an acknowledgement of the limits of their earlier strategic coordinates.

Izquierda Nacional: Populism and Voluntarism

If *Pasado y Presente* accepted Peronism as a condition of its relationship to what it viewed as the most revolutionary – because self-organized – section of

⁹⁹ *Pasado y Presente*, “La larga marcha,” 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 27.

workers, the *Izquierda Nacional* viewed Peronism as the essential expression of Argentina's working class politics at its particular historical stage. A young Ernesto Laclau was the editor of *Lucha Obrera*, the weekly paper of the Partido Socialista de la Izquierda Nacional (Socialist Party of the National Left, PSIN) beginning in 1964. A membership pledge in the paper explained their organizational goal in the following terms:

To link the content of current popular struggles with those unleashed by the Argentine people over the course of a century and a half of history against the enemies of yesterday and today, struggles that passed through the successive stages of the *montoneras federales*, Yrigoyenism, and Peronism, and which reach their modern synthesis in the industrial proletariat and their programmatic synthesis in the socialism of the *Izquierda Nacional*.¹⁰³

For the IN, any socialist project in Argentina had to make use of progressive elements of national history, like the popular anti-Spanish *montonera* soldiers during the war of independence, or the reformist movement of Hipolito Yrigoyen in the early 20th century. By 1964, this meant working through the working-class political culture of Peronism – this ideology was conceived as a positive historical step to be encouraged and synthesized into a national revolutionary project.

The IN's differences with their more explicitly Marxist counterparts led to a struggle over the figure of Gramsci.¹⁰⁴ In the 1971 prologue to a collection of Gramsci essays published under the title *El príncipe moderno y la voluntad nacional*, Horacio González, an IN activist, attacks any interpretation of the theory of hegemony that would lead intellectuals and politicians to complacency in their

¹⁰³ "Joven argentino," n.p.

¹⁰⁴ Burgos *Los gramscianos argentinos*, 93.

ostensibly dissident positions in civil society. He writes: “For us, Gramsci has an inscription that is decidedly the task of reconstructing knowledge in action. Not as ‘ideological struggle’ nor as a ‘cultural front,’ which is what the discussion has almost been exclusively limited to here.”¹⁰⁵ While the IN posed the imperative of building “collective-national-popular” culture in a party organization, González emphasized that this synthesis may require an armed struggle.¹⁰⁶ And, indeed, in the early 1970s, there was no shortage of IN urban guerrilla organizations who shared this analysis.

Reconstructing this history, Burgos places González’s argument in the context of a 1968–1972 ideological struggle within the sociology department of the Universidad de Buenos Aires between the Cátedras Nacionales (National Seminars), students and professors of radical Catholic and Peronist inspiration, and *Cátedras Marxistas* (Marxist Seminars), who were led by *Pasado y Presente*’s Juan Portantiero. Channeling this struggle, since he was a student in the Cátedras Nacionales, González further rejects what he perceives to be an Althusserian-inspired dedication to social science among some scholars using Gramscian categories, making implicit reference to *Pasado y Presente*.¹⁰⁷ González argues that Gramsci’s importance lies not in social scientific theory, but in his focus on the nation as the key locus of politics, as well as in his philosophy of praxis: “In the face of this obsession [of Gramscian sociologists] with explaining the revolution by means of bourgeois

¹⁰⁵ H. González, “Para nosotros, Antonio Gramsci,” 18.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 8; 11–12.

¹⁰⁷ On *Pasado y Presente*’s relationship to Althusser, see Starcenbaum, “El marxismo incómodo.”

epistemological categories, Gramsci raises his conception of the political man as a real philosopher, converted into ‘the man who modifies the ensemble of relations of which man forms part.’”¹⁰⁸ Historian Anabela Ghilini clarifies this position: “For the Cátedras Nacionales Marxism should serve exclusively for revolutionary action, and not for academic and scientific debates.”¹⁰⁹ It is striking, as well as illuminating of the limitations that the concept of hegemony imposed on the discussion, that while this criticism from González seems to be a call to action against intellectualism, it was nonetheless part of a theoretical debate in a university setting – a disagreement over the function of intellectuals in political struggle. And while *Pasado y Presente* in this period pinned its revolutionary hopes on proletarian self-organization, here, organizational questions are set aside for the armed voluntarism of intellectuals. The urban guerrilla groups that many of these students joined, however, would be expelled from the Peronist movement in 1974 during the General’s second reign, revealing Peronism as a movement whose main organizational bodies were ultimately controlled from above, rather than independent political expressions of the working class. Once again, the focus on the theory of hegemony and the function of intellectuals displaced the underlying issue of organization.

Laclau came of age in the late-1960s context in which both the National Left and Marxist groups were drawing even closer to Peronism. Indeed, when he finally broke with the PSIN and its leader Jorge Abelardo Ramos before leaving for Britain in 1969, it was because he felt that the party’s Marxist attachments would alienate it

¹⁰⁸ H. González, “Para nosotros, Antonio Gramsci,” 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ghilini, “Sociología y liberación nacional,” 9.

from the Peronist masses.¹¹⁰ This increasingly populist dedication to following the ideological and cultural line of the masses would continue over the course of Laclau's career. Rather than posing the question of organization, his theoretical pursuits would lead him to theorize hegemony at an ever greater remove from the material composition of classes. Hegemony would become, in his hands, a strategy by which discursive articulation could call political subjects into being.

Post-Marxist Hegemony

By the 1980s, the rise of military authoritarianism had radically reconfigured conditions of intellectual production throughout Latin America and crushed the revolutionary hopes that characterised the late 1960s and early 1970s. These regimes killed, disappeared, and forced into exile much of the left and liberal intelligentsia along with thousands of other political activists. The concerns of exiled intellectuals, many of whom regrouped in Mexico during this period, shifted toward new themes owing to the distinct political situation. Democracy, New Social Movements, and the failures of the traditional Left were chief concerns, each addressed under the heading of a more general post-Marxist turn.¹¹¹ Of course, this post-Marxist turn must also be linked to Laclau and Mouffe's conscious adoption of this appellation for their own work, as well as their influence among Latin American and Latin Americanist intellectuals during this period. But to what extent was post-Marxism a deviation from the older problematics among Marxists, like those in *Pasado y Presente*? In fact,

¹¹⁰ D. González, "Ernesto Laclau y la Izquierda Nacional," n.p.

¹¹¹ See Chilcote, "Post-Marxism" and Vasconi, "Democracy and Socialism in South America."

a closer examination of Laclau and Mouffe reveals not a break with, but a mutation of, the problematic of hegemony as it had already existed in Argentina during Laclau's political formation.

Like others in the 1980s, including Aricó and Portantiero, Laclau and Mouffe left behind the examination of a revolutionary class struggle in favor of a rigorous defense of democracy. In their 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe focus on the concept of hegemony to resolve what they take to be a central issue in Marxist thought: the play of necessity and contingency, and, relatedly, the relationship between the economic, the political, and the ideological. These issues stem from the classical Marxist assumption that the structural position of the working class in production makes it a universal revolutionary political subject for the overthrow of capitalism.¹¹² Arguing that history has disconfirmed this belief, Laclau and Mouffe write: "Economic fragmentation was unable to constitute class unity and referred us on to political recomposition; yet political recomposition was unable to found the *necessary* class character of social agents."¹¹³ In other words, they conclude there is no tenable way to derive the political role of a historical subject as a necessary consequence of its class position in relations of production. The concept of hegemony, however, is taken to provide a solution, insofar as it was always an attempt to suture the economic bases of anti-capitalist struggle into a political unity. Laclau and Mouffe therefore take up this concept and reformulate it on a non-

¹¹² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 17–18.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 48.

essentialist basis – the goal of political subject formation is still there, but separated from the specific consideration of class.

Laclau and Mouffe suggest a semantic version of hegemony wherein the never-resolved antagonistic struggle for meaning, which pervades all levels of the social, constantly sets the stage for the creation of new, unfixed subject positions in an ultimately democratic competition. The social itself is therefore conceived as a discursive field where articulatory practices based on the logics of equivalence and difference play out.¹¹⁴ In addition to being severed from the concept of class, then, hegemony is divorced from any question of organization. Instead, it is an ideological struggle to impose a shape upon the social through a metonymic political relation; chains of equivalence are multiplied in the course of political antagonism in order to unite a large number of disparate social elements in a historic bloc and to fix them into popular identities with relatively stable nodal points.¹¹⁵

Where Agosti and *Pasado y Presente* saw cultural politics as a means to create the conditions for a mass proletarian organization, and where the IN saw ideology as an authentic expression of the objective class struggle, Laclau and Mouffe view ideology as a contingent field and site of subject formation. If this, along with the re-conceptualization of class as one identity category among many, signals a break with the Marxist tradition, the turn to discourse nonetheless retains the

¹¹⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 130; 136.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136; 141. I have based this summary of the views of Laclau and Mouffe on their seminal and systematic elaboration of the theory in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Other pertinent texts from that time period, in which some key points are developed in more depth, are Laclau, “The Impossibility of Society” and Laclau and Mouffe, “Post-marxism Without Apologies.” See also Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* and Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

position of the intellectual as the locus of elaboration for this strategy – in this we find a continuity, if not with Marxism more generally, then with the problematic around the concept of hegemony in Argentina. This new sort of cultural politics founded on a sophisticated theory of ideology still relied on culture as a series of representations, and on a view of intellectuals as having a special role in shaping those representations.

Earlier, in 1980, Laclau was more ambiguous on the relationship between capitalism's specific structures and the discursive theory of hegemony. At a conference in Morelia, Mexico called *Hegemonía y alternativas políticas en América Latina* (Hegemony and political alternatives in Latin America), where Laclau, Mouffe, Aricó, Portantiero, and many other intellectuals in exile converged, Laclau presented his "Tesis acerca de la forma hegemónica de la política." The most notable difference between the position presented there and that in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is that while Laclau already argues political subjectivity cannot be reduced to the necessary function of an economic position, he nonetheless discusses "the specific conditions ... [and] historical limits of a politics based on hegemonic form." He delimits the concept of hegemony to the capitalist mode of production and its particular structure of separation between the economic from the political.¹¹⁶ He further suggests that a given "model of capital accumulation," which might change throughout the history of capitalism, could be a limiting factor for certain discursive

¹¹⁶ Laclau, "Tesis acerca de la forma hegemónica de la política," 21. Though these papers were delivered in 1980, they were not published until 1985.

articulations. Thus, in this early iteration of Laclau's hegemony theory, the question of locating objective conditions for revolution is linked to the analysis of the economic conditions in which ideology is articulated.

By 1985, Laclau and Mouffe offer no more discussion of the "model of capitalist accumulation." They are so invested in eschewing class reductionism that they provide an analysis of Thatcherism and neoliberalism without once mentioning its economic or class components, even as secondary factors shaping the discursive configuration they describe. The turn toward an expansive concept of discourse is complete, and even an analytical separation between economics, politics, and ideology becomes unnecessary to the authors. Notwithstanding this apparent forsaking of economic analysis, we may note here the continued importance of intellectuals:

The form in which liberty, equality, democracy and justice are defined at the level of political philosophy may have important consequences at a variety of other levels of discourse, and contribute decisively to shaping the common sense of the masses. Naturally, these irradiation effects cannot be considered as the simple adoption of a philosophical point of view at the level of 'ideas,' but should be seen as a more complex set of hegemonic operations embracing a variety of aspects, both institutional and ideological, through which certain 'themes' are transformed into nodal points of a discursive formation (i.e. of a historic bloc).¹¹⁷

Political philosophy is granted an agenda-setting role for political discourse more generally, to establish its effects through various unspecified channels. The authors emphasize that "in order for a philosophy to become an 'organic ideology,' certain analogies must exist between the type of subject which it constructs and the subject

¹¹⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 174–5.

positions which are constituted at the level of other social relations.”¹¹⁸ This corollary sits in perfect continuity with the various traditions hegemony as a strategy in Argentina, which always placed a greater or lesser emphasis on finding a social anchor by which to disseminate ideas. As in previous iterations, the concept of hegemony exists here to help intellectuals strategize from their own position, while it leaves unaddressed the problem of organization.

Moving Beyond Hegemony?

The limitations of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory are the starting point for posthegemony. In addition to criticizing the undue centrality of intellectuals in their theory – a point that I have shown here to be warranted – Beasley-Murray notes a more general, perhaps related lack of attention to materiality: “The basic flaw in hegemony theory is not its underestimation of the economy; it is that it substitutes culture for the state, ideological representations for institutions, discourse for habit.”¹¹⁹ At the same time, however, Laclau and Mouffe manage to distil an essential political task from the history of hegemony theory, which any posthegemony theory must also recognize: the strategic constitution of a unified political subject from a heterogeneous social mass. But this task, I have been arguing, has often been

¹¹⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 175.

¹¹⁹ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 60. More specifically, Beasley-Murray notes that “Laclau conflates apparatuses and discourses, presenting an expanded concept of discourse that fails to distinguish between signifying and asignifying elements.” And, indeed, Laclau and Mouffe, in contrast to Foucault, from whom they draw their concept of discourse, explicitly decline to make any distinction between “what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social process” (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 107), specifying instead that all action is only social insofar as it has *meaning* produced within a discursive field (See Laclau and Mouffe, “Post-Marxism Without Apologies,” 106–109.)

formulated without due attention to the question of organization. To Beasley-Murray's list of oppositions, we can add that within the history we have examined here hegemony theory substitutes intellectual production for organization. Posthegemony theory, if it is to offer something that the theory of hegemony has historically missed, can perhaps re-raise the question of organization via its turn away from intellectualism and toward material social relations.

If organization, outside the hegemony problematic, does not rely on the specific premise of creating organic connections between exploited classes and intellectuals, but returns to the broader underlying goal of establishing political unity, this form of unity should be proper to the concept of a *multitude*; as Arditì argues, it must preserve the productive internal variation of its subject.¹²⁰ On the one hand, determinate forms of organization must be elaborated in relation to, as Beasley-Murray suggests, state apparatuses and institutions. But, on the other, organization is a question not only of appropriateness to the structures of rule, but also to the elements to be organized. To grasp the specificity of this internal heterogeneity of the multitude, one must pose questions like: How do the specific forms of production within contemporary capitalism constitute class relationships in a given context? What about this composition might be the basis for a collective political intervention? And, indeed, what are the cultures and forms of knowledge, once presumed to exist among intellectuals, to be brought together through a posthegemonic practice of organization? As Thoburn argues, "The point is not to delineate a unified working-

¹²⁰ Arditì, "Post-hegemony," 213.

class *identity*, but to see how the dynamics of capital are constituting subjectivities, relations of exploitation, and forces of political resistance and invention.”¹²¹ In short, to overcome the limitations of the problematic of hegemony would mean not to avoid the concept of class in post-Marxist fashion, but to sharpen our mode of class analysis.

Within this framework we can also gesture toward a “break with culture as signifying practice.”¹²² In the problematic of hegemony, culture is figured through representations or discursive signifiers, or otherwise ascribed through an idealist operation that accepts a given set of representations as the *truth* of a class. Beasley-Murray’s development of the Bourdieuan concept of habit may provide the grounds for thinking of culture as a collection of sedimented practices rather than a set values or objects.¹²³ Instead of suggesting that culture in a given national formation is “really” democratic, or inherently anti-imperialist, for instance, one might seek out specific spaces in which democratic or anti-imperialist practices are habituated: in workplaces, in informal practices among neighbors or families, in social reproductive relationships, etc. The point here is that *despite* temporary political attachments to leaders or discursive signifiers, quotidian practices may lay the groundwork for anti-capitalist struggle and post-capitalist alternatives. This insight can also be found, as we will explore, in some of the work of Bolivia’s Comuna.

¹²¹ Thoburn, “Patterns of Production,” 87.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²³ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 174ff.

The critique of the problematic of hegemony also means a rupture with the view of the intellectual as a bearer of knowledge to be distributed among masses. The examination of class composition, or a focus on material cultural practices, is not simply to pose a new object for subject-intellectuals. Rather, the posthegemonic break suggests that practices in the production of knowledge need to be reformulated along unexpected lines, crossing the divide of intellectual and manual labor that pervades the multitude. Capital already grasps this, making use as it does of “extra-work cultural competencies, knowledges and networks” within the value production process.¹²⁴ The specific skill sets of intellectual laborers may still have a role, because there can be no organic collapse of difference, no saturating dissolution of intellectual laborers into the masses; but practices of knowledge production must nonetheless exceed limited academic and cultural fields to build links between distinct class fractions within a rapidly shifting productive landscape. Posthegemony thus points us in the direction of knowledge production without the presumed leadership of career knowledge-producers.

The production of strategy, ideas, and new practices becomes a collective project whose contours will depend entirely on the types of social and affective bonds that arise in the processes of contingent, which is not to say weak or transient, organization. The reformulation of the concepts of culture and knowledge can have their specific effectivity within a more experimental approach to organization and to strategy itself. Unlike in a strictly (counter-)hegemonic project, neither the purpose

¹²⁴ Thoburn, “Patterns of Production,” 86–7.

nor the shape of workers' organizations can be taken for granted. Schematically, we can say that post-hegemony as an orientation indicates a need for the *common* production of strategy in relation to particular conjunctures, not to be defined in advance by any intellectual vanguard. It is not clear that an "articulatory strategy" for organization can be defined in the abstract.¹²⁵ It was the attachment to certain preconceived but decontextualized ideas about the structure and role of political organizations that presented one limit point to the problematic of hegemony in Argentine history.

These remarks – on organization, culture, and knowledge – are mere indications, still more questions than answers. Posthegemony remains an uncertain attempt to break with the past, but its strength is to draw our attention the possibility of new forms of political action and unity that can avoid some observable historical pitfalls. On the other hand, I doubt whether it is either possible or desirable to entirely displace hegemony as a way of thinking about politics. It seems that such a mode of thinking about and practicing politics is not only deeply ingrained in the political practices of many political actors today, but that it may, in given historical circumstances, be a necessity precisely for opening up political space for unexpected and unpredictable encounters between different elements in the multitude, new kinds of material cultural practices, and unique sites and projects of knowledge production. In this sense, I think posthegemonic theory illuminates a perspective that must be held

¹²⁵ Cf. Pessoa, "On Hegemony, Post-ideology and Subalternity," 488.

alongside a continuing investigation into the limitations and possibilities at the level of the state and the attempt to construct new hegemonies.

Theoretically, it is possible to say that the theory of hegemony and that of posthegemony simply focus on different aspects of politics. Pace Beasley-Murray, this means reserving judgement on the idea that politics itself has actually become *post*-hegemonic, or that the conditions for hegemonic and ideological struggle have ceased to exist – both rather general periodizing statements. More interesting, in my view, is to look at these approaches as different ways to address the problem of political subject formation, and to further draw out the tensions in the history of Latin American political thought that have made these distinct approaches possible.

This chapter has sought to open a window into some of the key issues that come up again and again among Latin American political thinkers: culture, nationalism, organization, revolution, state power, and subject formation. It has also foregrounded the material basis of the concept of hegemony in Latin America and, via Laclau, in cultural studies more generally. While the discussions sparked by the post-hegemony thesis are relatively new and localized within the academy, we find that its underlying concerns have long been stoking debates within revolutionary theory and practice in Latin America. Thinkers have approached these concerns in different ways, more or less explicitly navigating the conceptual boundaries between the mainstream history of political philosophy and that of Marxist theory. In the next chapter, we will see how Bolivian theorist René Zavaleta Mercado also tried to theorize subject formation, and how his work both drew on the concept of constituent

power but also deconstructed it through its insights into class composition in Bolivia. And as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, hegemony will continue to be an important way for intellectuals to position their own contributions in the era of the Pink Tide. At times, the concept of hegemony would serve thinkers like Álvaro García Linera as a way to think strategically about turning constituent power into constituted power; for others, critiquing the concept of hegemony would also mean a critique of the assumption that all moments of disruption give way to stable state institutions. In this sense, the post-hegemony debates approach issues that I will continue to explore throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 2

Constituent Power and Capitalism in the Works of René Zavaleta

Mercado

Twentieth-century Bolivia, like much of Latin America, was characterized by the encounter between the remnants of its colonial past on the one hand and the most energetic hopes for a radical political novelty on the other. The old appeared, at times, in the guise of the new, and the new in the trappings of the old – ambiguities which likewise characterize more recent political developments in the country.

In a sense, Bolivia lived the ubiquitous dramas that emerged globally with the Russian Revolution of 1917, but it did so from the position that was not clear of its colonial past. Unlike in Africa and Asia, where the twentieth century marked the epoch of formal independence, most of Latin America had achieved this by the mid-1800s. Yet for many in the region, something akin to colonial conditions continued to exist in the form of dependency on foreign powers, various forms of coerced surplus extraction, and pervasive systems of racializing exclusion. The desire to explain and overcome these conditions has thus driven important strands of Latin American political and social thought. At the same time, the region was marked by movements that not only sought to break with the past but to build an unknown future: politics in the name of communism, innovations in revolutionary practice and theory (particularly after the Cuban experience culminating in 1959), and experiments in “modernization” and “development” all emerged with a fervency to bring Latin America into the global present or beyond.

One of the central intellectual figures and interpreters of this uneven set of political efforts in Bolivia was René Zavaleta Mercado (1935–1984). His oeuvre spans from the mid-1950s until the 1980s, and it traverses the experiences of an anti-imperialist revolutionary nationalism, an exiled turn toward Marxism during the authoritarian era, and a regional “democratization” that began in the early 1980s. Zavaleta’s theoretical production rode the vicissitudes of this history, and his work thus allows us to pose political questions central not only to the Bolivian political experience, but characteristic of political challenges all over the world during this period. These are the questions of power, collective action, and political change: How do the historical conditions of colonialism and capitalism, in their different forms, shape the formation of collective political actors? How are difference and unity articulated in such circumstances, and how do these affect assumptions about classical categories like “class” or “nation”? Finally, how do we understand the emergence of political *novelty* in the subjects and the political struggles those subjects pursue?

In approaching these issues, Zavaleta drew on the language of the *constitutive*, as well as the theoretical division of *potencia* and *potestas*, two distinct but connected notions of power that inform the distinction between *constituent* and *constituted*. He also, however, was an incisive analyst of class relations. His interest in nationalism, with the task of constituting a nation, became entwined with his attempt to understand class relations at both a national and global level. Thus, in this chapter, I read him as a thinker who worked within the constituent power problematic, using it to displace

simplistic notions of collective agency, while also pushing it toward its limits through conjunctural analysis. His work retains a political and theoretical interest in the problems of constituent power while also showing, for our purposes, how that conceptual problematic was limiting when it came to his own intellectual and political pursuits. In Zavaleta's texts, in other words, we can both read the discourse of constituent power as a powerful tool, and also read its theoretical limitations. Once we have done this, we will be in a better position in Chapters 3 and 4 to read how later theorists who took up Zavaleta were also able to put his work to different ends: some that sought to develop constituent power into constituted power, and others that sought novel political forms.

Zavaleta's theoretical methodology and conceptual register changed over the course of his life, and were inseparable from his varying relationship to Bolivian politics. He was a party activist, a diplomat, a parliamentary deputy, minister of an ousted government, and an exile – all before the age of thirty. He was there for Bolivia's national revolution in 1952; for the coup of 1964; for the experiment in workers' power during Bolivia's Popular Assembly in 1971 (and the additional coup that ended it); for socialism's peaceful road – and violent end – in Chile from 1971 to 1973; and for the convergence of so many exiles in Mexico during the region's dictatorial period in the late 1970s and 80s.

Zavaleta recognized that these experiences shaped him. "One knows, as is natural, according to what one is," he writes.¹²⁶ This is not to say that knowledge is

¹²⁶ Zavaleta, "Problemas de la cultura," 643.

thus always born to *a priori* limitations owing to the identity of their producer, or that it is in some sense untransmissible outside its original context. On the contrary, knowledge produced in concrete historical circumstances cannot be static because history itself is not static. Moments of great change open the possibility for new encounters between ideas and contexts, concepts and events. This is particularly true when the masses spring into action. As Luis Tapia writes:

The intensification of historical time that is produced in and with a revolution is a powerful stimulus that activates intellectual and historiographical work. Put another way, the intensification of historical time demands to be interpreted, to be reconstructed in relation to the past, to be reflected upon, and to be directed.¹²⁷

Such were the tasks that Zavaleta initially set for himself as a partisan to the Bolivian National Revolution of 1952, when the populist-nationalist party, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) ousted an unpopular authoritarian government. This was the first and most formative of his political experiences, at least insofar as it set an intellectual agenda that Zavaleta would never exhaust. His attempt to pursue the consequences of this event at the level of producing new knowledge was directly linked to his view of that revolution as a moment of constituent power.

In the works of his early period, canonically known as his nationalist phase, the formal subjective category of collective political action was the Bolivian nation. Zavaleta sought to explain the specificity of Bolivia, and to articulate a national project that could give real substance to its existence as a political community and autonomous subject at the level of global politics. Nonetheless, Zavaleta's intellectual

¹²⁷ Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, 146.

tasks grew with and beyond the conjuncture of 1952; he could not avoid the rapid political shifts that followed that moment, which would ceaselessly affect his being and thought. As conditions changed, and as the revolution of 1952 encountered limitations, Zavaleta would have to repeatedly re-pose his guiding questions in a way that could take his new observations into account.

The result was, throughout the course of Zavaleta's life, a significant shift with both epistemological and political dimensions, even as the central themes remained the same.

The impetus for epistemological innovations was that Zavaleta had to deepen his understanding not only of the category of the nation, but also of the national *lack*. Instead of examining an object, he was examining its absence. Thus, he came to investigate the conditions that would obstruct the formation of something fitting his idealist view of the Bolivian nation as a political community. A general, formalized theory of the nation would be insufficient for this analytical task, but so too would a merely empirical investigation. If Bolivia did not fit a certain theoretical concept of nationhood, does this simply mean that the concept is wrong? Or does it mean that Bolivian history must be taken on its own terms, independent from any theoretical presuppositions? This dilemma, notes Luis Antezana, is captured by Zavaleta's epigrammatic comment: "It is known that the anecdote is the eloquence of facts, but also their imprisonment."¹²⁸ Zavaleta would attempt to overcome this challenge by

¹²⁸ Antezana, *Dos conceptos en la obra de Zavaleta Mercado*; Zavaleta, "Las masas en noviembre."

using an apparently unique local history to formulate a set of broader theoretical insights.

The political dimension of Zavaleta's transformations was linked to Bolivia's local history as well. It stemmed from his observations on the limits of the 1952 state, the class contradictions inherent in a national project, and the role of capitalist dynamics in destabilizing and disaggregating the political community. He noted the importance of class conflict early on in his nationalist phase, but further analysis would lead him to theorize a series of concepts meant to explain these capitalist dynamics and their specific operation in relation to the Bolivian state and ideology. The tension he highlights between the idea of a collective class subject and that of a collective national subject would generate theoretical energy throughout Zavaleta's lifetime, and it refers us back to one key category of the present investigation, constituent power. In my view, what is first at stake in Zavaleta's works is a distinction between the two most common twentieth century categories of political subjectivity on the one hand – class and nation – and, on the other, a potentially broader concept, constituent power, that might help account for the variability of these categories and their appearance or absence in different historical circumstances. In other words, can the concept of constituent power help explain why collective actors take the form of a nation in some instances, a class in others, or, in certain cases, neither?

Zavaleta's political and epistemological engagements and his own *dérive* led him from the certainty of a historically given national subject to a consideration of

that would-be subject's diversity. By reading him, we can better understand the variable relationships between constituent power and constituted power. But we can also begin to understand the political limitations imposed by thinking in these terms. For instance, nationalism, populism, and liberal democracy, notwithstanding any differences, are all predicated on a *representational* mode of politics whereby constituted powers represent their supposed constituencies. While Zavaleta ultimately sees constituent power as a basis for any number of distinct political formations, the developmentalist or modernizing tendency in his thought leads him to see effective representation by constituted powers as a mark of political achievement, and a *sine qua non* for a self-determining or democratic society. This view shares assumptions with a number of otherwise divergent traditions, including theorists of both institutional modernization and political pluralism, and thereby reveals some of the deeply rooted connections between these views grounded, explicitly or not, in the framework of constituent power.¹²⁹ While Zavaleta's later texts therefore serve as a critique of some of the most abstract nationalist or class discourses, I also pose the question in this chapter whether he is able to fully move beyond them by using the implicit framework of constituent power.

It turns out that the constituent–constituted binary runs both directions, so to speak. The revolutionary task of rebuilding society on the basis of a collective power (constituent → constituted) can give way to that of building a constituency from the top down (constituted → constituent). For theorists of political development, for

¹²⁹ See for example Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, and Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy*. The connection to Huntington is further discussed in Chapter 4 of the present dissertation.

instance, it makes no difference which way the process operates, as long as representation is effective enough to stave off social disorder. The imaginary of national development, which left its mark on Zavaleta's thought even once he devoted his attention to the political project of class struggle, also relies on this ambiguous understanding of constituent power.¹³⁰ The twentieth-century nationalist project called for the construction of a modern society as a collection of atomized individuals, connected through abstract market relations and equal political representation. But the achievement of this combination of capitalism and constitutionality, reached to some extent in Bolivia right at the end of Zavaleta's life after Bolivia's democratization beginning in 1982, did not lend itself to building the kind of unity that he might have hoped for. Instead, Bolivian political parties adopted the rather reductionist approach where politics is simply the activity of crafting winning coalitions using demographic and quantitative analysis – a view of politics, in other words, from the vantage point of neoliberalism. The specific articulation of a set of modern institutions meant neoliberal reforms in the 1980s that intensified political and economic difficulties. I argue here that although Zavaleta came to intuitively grasp the dynamics of capitalism that created such conditions, and therefore the dynamics of constituent power, he was never quite able to consider that the project of national development actually undermined the kind of political and social unity that was always one of its hopes, as evidenced by Bolivia's experience of neoliberalism. Tracing Zavaleta's trajectory will demonstrate the boundaries of a

¹³⁰ See Wallerstein, "The Concept of National Development."

shared problematic of political thought that runs from populist nationalism to neoliberal pluralism, and also suggests, through a reformulation of the questions around constituent power, the possibility of going beyond it.

Revolutionary Nationalism

Constituent Power in 1952

The young Zavaleta was clear about his fidelity to the events of April 1952 in Bolivia, when an attempted putsch by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) was joined in the streets by a workers' uprising that successfully deposed a conservative regime that had been installed by the military the previous year. During the revolt, the unexpected support of armed workers' militias, MNR rank-and-file and low-ranking soldiers defeated the military, temporarily putting an end to that institution's activist role in politics.¹³¹ The political goals of the MNR, the party that took the reins of the state after three days of insurrection, were somewhat limited, but the revolution would take on a popular character that exceeded it. As Eric Selbin writes:

Regardless of the MNR's original vision of the process, in April 1952 the country was in the hands, not of the MNR's military coplotter, but of hastily cobbled together militias of workers, party activists, townspeople, and miners. Armed and radicalized, these people demanded more than another coup or rebellion – they wanted a revolution.¹³²

Workers, led by the militant and strategically placed tin miners, shortly afterward formed the *Central Obrero Boliviano* (COB), a highly organized union

¹³¹ Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia*, 65; Dunkerley *Rebellion in the Veins*, 38–40.

¹³² Selbin, *Modern Latin American Revolutions*, 39, quoted in John, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition*, 119.

federation with mass grassroots participation and an uncontested leadership role among the popular classes, including many peasants and rural wage laborers. Workers from the COB would form the left flank of the MNR, but the workers' organization itself had no party affiliation, and Trotskyists and Communists also had a great deal of influence there. In addition to the MNR's own armed organization, thousands participated in worker militias that answered to their local union leaders.¹³³ This, along with the seats designated for worker representatives in the MNR cabinet, allowed the COB to force the new government to comply with its promise to nationalize the country's tin mines and push out the *Rosca*, a small group of mining oligarchs who were seen as traitorous partners of foreign capital.

The large Bolivian peasantry, although it had a limited role in the April insurrection, was also brought into the revolutionary process. The MNR ended the landowning and Spanish literacy requirements for suffrage, as well as gender restrictions, thus enfranchising Bolivia's rural *campesino* majority, many of whom spoke indigenous languages. Agrarian reform followed, with peasant union organizations spurring the slow process by expropriating large estates before any law was passed.¹³⁴

Zavaleta recognized and took inspiration from the deep popular participation in and after April 1952. A decade later, he recounts the formative experience of seeing armed miners, heroes of the revolution, coming down from the hills to the city of Oruro to struggle against loyalist soldiers: "Thus we learned that every man is in a

¹³³ Lora, *A History of the Bolivian Labour Movement*, 284.

¹³⁴ Rivera, *Oprimidos pero no vencidos*, 144–47; John, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition*, 138–141.

certain measure the size of his country, and that nationalism is an element of the self, that the individual self cannot be realized but through the national self.”¹³⁵ This political and personal belief found expression in the intellectual tradition of revolutionary nationalism that preceded and in part created the ideological conditions for ‘52 revolution.

For revolutionary nationalist intellectuals like Carlos Montenegro and Augusto Céspedes, who helped to found the MNR and greatly influenced Zavaleta, Bolivia’s history was characterized by constant impediments to its authentic and organic cohesion. James Dunkerley thus characterizes their work as “a poetics of frustrated collectivity.”¹³⁶ According to Montenegro, writing his magnum opus *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* (Nationalism and colonialism) in 1944, every important event since independence “only marked another episode in the old struggle between colonialism and nationality.”¹³⁷ Beyond its anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, however, the revolutionary nationalist political problematic carried significant ambiguities, with its most visible proponents expressing affinities for Italian and German fascism in the 1930s and early 40s.¹³⁸ Thus we can read Bolivian nationalism as part of a global twentieth-century struggle over the terms of collective political action framed at the extremes by communism and fascism, two positions that in their discourses always referred to an objective body of which their politics were the

¹³⁵ Zavaleta, “La Revolución Boliviana y el doble poder,” 536.

¹³⁶ Dunkerley, “The Origins of the Bolivian Revolution in 1952,” 227.

¹³⁷ Montenegro, *Nacionalismo y coloniaje*, 98.

¹³⁸ Mansilla, *Una mirada crítica*, 115–16.

subjective expression – either class or nation.¹³⁹ This is not to suggest that class and nationalist politics were thus incompatible; as we shall see, their complex interplay had a significant role in Bolivian politics, and Zavaleta’s trajectory was always in part an attempt to navigate this. But the most extreme possibilities of class or national subjectivity nonetheless formed a powerful frame for this interplay, in Bolivia as elsewhere.

The MNR abandoned its affinity for fascism in the latter part of the 1940s, but the structure of its thought on the nation itself remained through the course of the revolution. In particular, Bolivian nationalists affirmed the always latent and *potential* status of their referent: the nation was understood as a historical possibility that must constitute itself in practice through a historical project to overcome its external impediments.

Thus, Montenegro seeks in the past “the national as an affirmative, and therefore creative and perpetuating, historical energy.”¹⁴⁰ This almost vitalist understanding of *potential* appears symptomatically throughout Montenegro’s historical analysis. It suggests a contradictory and even aporetic relation between something to come, the Bolivian nation as a normative project, and something already existing under the name of Bolivia that was supposed to tend toward that future. It serves, in other words, to suture the uneven temporality of the historical nation, providing a continuity amidst the ebb and flow of historical events that might call into question the coherence of the national ideal. This is clear, for instance, when

¹³⁹ See Badiou, *The Century*.

¹⁴⁰ Montenegro, *Nacionlismo y coloniaje*, 25.

Montenegro describes how Mariscal Andrés de Santa Cruz broke the oligarchic-colonial regime in the 1830s: “The arm of the Mariscal moved like an electric cable through the republic. The accumulated tension in the soul of that descendent of Indian royalty was transmitted vibrantly and continuously for a span of ten years, to the nation. He found it still intact in its potential for life...”¹⁴¹ Thus the nation considered as *potential* never wanes, only emerging at the level of appearance in each moment according to its circumstances. This is a key notion for the nationalist philosophy of history.

The young Zavaleta embraced this view of the vital nation, and saw its potential in the popular energies of the 1952 revolution. He writes in 1957:

Nationality is maintained not in laws nor in territorial organization and its merely secondary norms, but in the people. But the people at the same time cannot realize its historical destiny except through its independence and autonomy, that is, the realization of the nation (*a notion of potential [noción potencial]*).¹⁴²

This passage contains a sharp insight, though it expresses it in an essentially idealist form. Zavaleta recognizes the significance of the excessive, popular dimension of the revolution over and above its instantiation in law, but this excess is still defined *a priori* as national in character. He is referring to the distinction, in other words, between *constituent power* and *constituted power*, or between what Enrique Dussel calls “the originary power of the community” and “institutionalized power.”¹⁴³ The link between the recurring term “*potencial*” and the Latin distinction between

¹⁴¹ Montenegro, *Nacionalismo y coloniaje*, 92.

¹⁴² Zavaleta, “Cinco años de Revolución Nacional en Bolivia,” 532. Emphasis added.

¹⁴³ Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, 31.

potentia and *potestas*, which classically refers to this distinction between two types of power, is clear.¹⁴⁴ Constituent power is attributed to the *people* as a collective actor, and this people is always already a nation. The nation, in turn, is linked to the telos of historical destiny, a harmonious end and a realization of collective self-identity. At this point, then, constituent power is, for Zavaleta, the power of the nation.

Class Struggle inside the Nation

The notion of the *potential* nation manages one complication of the nationalist interpretation of history by transposing the problem of constituent and constituted power onto a temporal schema of realization. In moments when the nation is impeded from its full expression, it can still be thought of as the constituent power of a particular collective; when it finally realizes itself, fulfilling its potential, it appears as the constituted power of a proper nation state, the goal toward which it always tends. Thus, despite differences over time in national membership and variations in membership's cultural meaning and political expression, the nation can be viewed as having some kind of consistency throughout time. The existence of internal conflicts in the nation, however, particularly between classes – the other great referent for political struggle in the twentieth century – opens up another difficulty. Beyond the question of changes over time, it suggests that the nation may not be self-identical, a cohesive whole, in any given historical moment.

¹⁴⁴ Negri *Insurgencies*, ch. 1.

As Tapia observes, what is impossible to think within the common revolutionary nationalist formulations is that “the nation itself could engender or contain the development and organization of subjects and structures that make it ultimately impossible.”¹⁴⁵ Processes that might be thought of as part of national development on the one hand – for example, the creation of capitalist productive enterprises and the accumulation of wealth that goes along with it – may also lead to conflicts among members of the national community. And revolutionary political events understood to be the expression of the nation might likewise involve forms of collective agency that deviate from nationalist goals. This suggests that constituent power, if that is indeed what is at play in such revolutionary moments, does not necessarily tend toward a single form of cohesive collectivity called the nation.

Montenegro, for his part, recognizes that an analysis in terms of nationalism and colonialism cannot ignore class conflicts as a “propelling spring of Bolivian transformation,” and he notes the exceptional character of those moments when “all of the classes temporarily fused by their discontent” are able to fight against foreign domination.¹⁴⁶ Still, class in his discourse is always brought up in relation to the more central question of national belonging. Classes appear, for Montenegro, as organs of the national body whose cohesive identity is guaranteed by opposition to a colonial power. He considers them only in relation to the goal of national realization. Montenegro hopes to understand which classes would be capable of actualizing the national potential to form an independent state. In other words, the nation remains the

¹⁴⁵ Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, 45.

¹⁴⁶ Montenegro, *Nacionalismo y coloniaje*, 50; 75.

objective basis of collective action, and the lasting basis for political action, even as classes may act as subjects in its name.

Zavaleta retains this problematic when he writes, during the latter part of the MNR's governing years, about the party's ongoing political difficulties. In a 1962 text, he explains that the MNR in its 1952 form had been created by an "alignment of interests" between the proletariat, the peasantry, and the middle classes. This revolutionary "method" had been possible because, at the global level, there was a historical contradiction between "exploiters and exploited," and Bolivia, as an "exploited nation" thus found itself in conditions where various national classes could join together. But, "beginning in 1952, the Rosca [mining oligarchy] is virtually eliminated, and then ever new contradictions appear which can be explained by the thesis of dual power."¹⁴⁷ He invokes this Leninist concept of dual power here to refer to the internal struggle between the COB union federation on the one hand and the government on the other. The latter remained, according to Zavaleta, in the hands of the middle classes.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, by 1956, the MNR government accepted a stabilization plan written in Washington in order to overcome an ongoing economic crisis, which included measures that would drastically cut wages to counter inflation. Dunkerley describes the political crisis that ensued and the divisions between the MNR and the COB:

As a result, the MNR administrations registered all the tensions of being obliged to implement US policy whilst endeavoring to maintain their

¹⁴⁷ Zavaleta, *La Revolución Boliviana y el doble poder*, 537–38.

¹⁴⁸ The use of the term "dual power" is tenuous here, though Zavaleta would later develop its meaning in the Bolivian and Chilean contexts with a more theoretical study produced in 1973.

independence, redistributionist popularity, and ‘anti-imperialist’ trimmings. This proved an insuperable dilemma. Yet, it took the form of a general decomposition rather than an abrupt disintegration of the ruling alliance. This was principally because the party’s left, centered on the COB, had lost the initiative of the early years as well as the ideological resources and political force to overthrow the center-right but it still retained sufficient independence and strength to regain ground in a piecemeal fashion. Thus, the leadership of the COB attempted to negotiate with the right and continued to maintain a toehold within the apparatus of government although it was frequently obliged to enter into direct confrontation with the regime by a rank and file it could not control.¹⁴⁹

In this context, Zavaleta locates himself on the side of the working class representatives and of socialism, and he is elected as a left MNR parliamentary deputy while arguing that the only way out of the economic crisis is for the state to dedicate itself to the development of public industries that would allow the proletariat to grow beyond the mining sector. Any attempt to compete globally on capitalist terms, he maintains, will only end with the continued exploitation of the entire country.

What is notable about Zavaleta’s argument at this stage in his thought are the displacements between class struggle in the national sphere and that in the international sphere:

Imperialist exploitation was realized through the [pre-1952 Bolivian] Superstate and now through the domination of the mineral market. As a result, the interests of the proletariat that struggled against the mining superstate, which belonged to the essence of imperialism, were also the interests of the Nation and thus the proletariat was not only one oppressed class but also a national class. So the class struggle, which in principle appears to be a phenomenon relative to a specific determinate society, converts into an international struggle between proletarian or marginal nations and oppressor

¹⁴⁹ Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 84–85.

nations. Therefore the nationalism of the Bolivian Revolution is legitimate only when founded on class struggle.¹⁵⁰

The proletariat is conceived here as a political subject with its own structurally determined interests. At the same time, it is a subject whose objective referent continues to be the nation, conceived as also having its own interests but as having been stymied by its position on the global stage. Thus, according to Zavaleta, what legitimates Bolivian nationalism is class struggle, but class struggle by the working class *in Bolivia* is legitimate, in turn, because of the interests of the nation as determined by class antagonisms expressed on the international stage. This is a complicated, perhaps circular theoretical position, but in the end nationalism remains its principal commitment above any particular notion of class struggle. On this point, Zavaleta leaves no doubts: “We are not anti-capitalists because we are bothered by the so-called ‘American way of life,’ nor socialists because there is socialism in the Soviet Union or in China, or Cuba. We are, *compañeros*, because national existence cannot realize itself except within a Latin American socialism.”¹⁵¹ The entire problematic here turns on the idea of a nation “in itself” becoming a nation “for itself.”¹⁵²

The MNR’s political instability in the early 1960s forced Zavaleta to consider socialist means for achieving a national transformation, but the basic political goal and conception of the nation as an essential unity of historical analysis remained, just

¹⁵⁰ Zavaleta, “La revolución Boliviana y el doble poder.” 541.

¹⁵¹ Zavaleta, “Estado Nacional o pueblo de pastores.” The term *compañero* came into vogue in Bolivia with the national revolution as a way to address colleagues as equals, and was intended to explicitly avoid any affiliation with the preferred Marxist term “comrade.” (Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 51.)

¹⁵² Zavaleta, “Bolivia: El desarrollo de la conciencia nacional.”

as they had been inherited from the nationalist generation of Montenegro.

Nonetheless, in November 1964 everything changed. The long crisis suddenly gave way to a coup by General René Barrientos, and the MNR government collapsed. Like others in the party, Zavaleta ended up fleeing to exile. The failure of the MNR project would propel deep political and theoretical consideration for the rest of Zavaleta's intellectual life on both constituent power and class relations within capitalism.

Capitalist Tendencies: Rethinking the Class and Nation

Shifts in Perspective: The Nation and Constituent Power

According to the canonical division of Zavaleta's work, his early nationalist phase ended with a turn toward "orthodox" Marxism during his exile, which in turn gave way to a more heterodox and creative period at the end of the 1970s.

Nevertheless, his preoccupation with the nation as a category persisted throughout his career. His book *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia* is, as the name implies, still concerned with this theme, and it served as the culmination of his "heterodox" phase, published after the author's 1984 death.

Given these periodizing distinctions, was Zavaleta's conception of the nation in this final work distinct from that which I just analyzed from his nationalist period? According to Giller, Zavaleta's thought in the time between these two epochs shifted from a focus on the external factors for the Bolivian national lack, i.e. the colonial or imperial relation, toward investigating the country's internal dynamics instead, above

all with continuing attention on class relations and the state.¹⁵³ Looking at the same period, Antezana and Tapia note the epistemological dimension of this shift, which included not just a change of focus, but genuine conceptual innovations through what Tapia calls, in the title of his study, “the production of local knowledge.”¹⁵⁴ Through these shifts, Zavaleta will reveal a new approach to the nation, which he will now view as a *contingent* historical possibility linked to the composition of and relations between classes shaped by capitalist dynamics. These dynamics, in turn, underlie a materialist understanding of constituent power, the limitations of which I will also explore.

Although the structure of *Lo nacional-popular* runs parallel to Montenegro’s *Nacionalismo y coloniaje*, tracing various important episodes of Bolivia’s past, Zavaleta marks the distance from the earlier conception of this history by rejecting what he calls a “certain Manichaeism” of historical research which cannot explain the varying “forms of articulation” of Bolivian social relations within that history.¹⁵⁵ It is now insufficient, according to Zavaleta, to speak of a struggle between national potential and that which represses it from the outside: “What interests us, by contrast, is to notice the contradictory development of factors, that is, as if men proposed something and the facts brought them inevitably somewhere else.”¹⁵⁶ If the nation is indeed a category describing a possibility or potential, Zavaleta now believes this potential has no obvious linear path of emergence. The possibilities of national

¹⁵³ Giller, “René Zavaleta Mercado frente a la ‘Teoría de la dependencia’,” n.p.

¹⁵⁴ Antezana, *Dos conceptos en la obra de René Zavaleta*; Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*.

¹⁵⁵ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

political struggle are constrained by any number of historical circumstances which always shape its actuality. *Lo nacional-popular* is constructed around moments, which Zavaleta calls “constitutive,” when contingent historical potentials become visible through the contours of their uneven material existence.

A historical analysis that takes place through constitutive moments allows Zavaleta, at least in principle, to separate his insight regarding the importance of constituent power – the basic notion that there exists a power immanent to sociality that precedes and underlies such constituted powers as law and the state – from the teleological and idealist view that sees this power as destined to lead to the emergence of a self-identical nation. Reformulating the notion of constituent power is not so straightforward, however. There are a number of other elements, even in Zavaleta’s mature thought, that sustain the relation between constituent power and this kind of teleological assumption. To break this link would mean to think constituent power in all its contingency, and to assess the kinds of historical factors that could influence its possibilities for coalescence, in a given moment, into a force of collective action. It may mean moving away from the concept of constituent power altogether. While Zavaleta makes some progress in this direction and provides a guidepost for further development of this idea, which I will pursue in later chapters, his own thought remains uneven, containing tendencies which both reaffirm and question the teleological notion of constituent power.

In this section, then, I am attempting to draw a dividing line in Zavaleta’s work: What, if anything, can his analysis tell us about how to positively define and

address political power beyond state institutions, or beyond already given *particular* forms like that of the nation? And how, on the other hand, might a lingering nationalist idealism limit his insights on this point?

The Problem of Totalization

Zavaleta premises his investigation into constitutive moments on a broad epistemological-methodological claim about his particular object: Bolivia. For him, Bolivia can only become the object of certain kinds of knowledge, and not others, owing to its historical specificity. His analysis must focus on moments of constitution, as well as moments of crisis, or catastrophic moments, when constituted powers break apart, because “no social science is possible in any other way in a country with characteristics like Bolivia.”¹⁵⁷ What characteristics does this refer to? Zavaleta sees Bolivia as a country with disjointed and unstable internal relations. For this reason, it is not quantifiably knowable by the social scientist, nor by the politician; its formation cannot be analyzed as if it comprises a coherent whole, but only through the very breakdowns and aleatory encounters that it experiences in history.¹⁵⁸

Other societies, according to Zavaleta, may produce a more complete knowledge of themselves. Bolivia lacks the key condition for this kind of transparent, social, self-knowledge: the historical condition of *totalization*. Through an exploration of this concept, Zavaleta effectively reserves the right to speak in two

¹⁵⁷ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 81–87; Zavaleta, “Cuatro conceptos de la democracia.”

different epistemological registers, two theoretical levels whose concepts operate in distinct ways in *Lo nacional-popular* and his other mature texts. The first is the register of totalization, and the second is that of local knowledge. These two theoretical registers, in turn, correspond symptomatically to Zavaleta's recognition of two processes internal to capitalism, that of decomposition and that of composition.

The register of totalization is grounded in Marx's insight that the history of capitalism implies a compression of time and an increased density of social space. Historical transformation can occur more quickly in capitalism than ever before, and the effects of any historical event are amplified. This characteristic of capitalism, according to Zavaleta's reading, creates the possibility for a total, which is to say revolutionary, transformation.¹⁵⁹ To explain this facet of capitalism, Zavaleta proposes various concepts that can be understood in this register, *social democratization* being the key one. He cites Max Weber to define this as the process whereby individuals become unbound, juridically free, with forms of political and civil equality that make formal democracy possible. He complements this idea with reference to Marx's notion of the *state of separation* in which the rupture of pre-capitalist relations founds the condition of the doubly-free laborer and the generalization, at least potentially, of wage labor. Zavaleta notes that the process of social democratization is a condition of intersubjectivity, which he defines as "the interaction between free men who recognize themselves as such." He elaborates the connection between these various concepts:

¹⁵⁹ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 81ff.

Then, to this generalized interaction or intersubjectivity, which is the consequence of total circulation upon subjects, must be attributed the construction of the great modern totalizations, from social class (which for this reason appears distinct from social classes in any other epoch) to the multitude or mass itself, from the nation to the State.¹⁶⁰

This process of the creation of individuals as juridically recognized subjects forms the base for all possibilities of new modes of political and social unity within capitalism, permitting the construction of a continuum between “the internal market–nation State–bourgeois democracy, etc.”¹⁶¹ Totalization, then, is a way of discussing certain tendencies and transformations with the development of capitalism.

There are various ways one could interpret the importance of this group of concepts, comprised under the heading of totalization, and their relation to concrete history. Zavaleta appears at times to suggest a geographical-historical link between these concepts and the history of Europe, which would be seen as the paradigmatic case of totalization and the limited field for the knowledge yielded by such a concept. In this view, the presumed creation of juridically free individuals in Europe and perhaps North America would be the rule, permitting complete and quantifiable knowledge, and other cases would be deviations that elude this possibility, requiring distinct tools of analysis. Zavaleta certainly appears to think in these terms at times, differentiating the histories of various parts of the world based on the extent to which their development has resembled that of Europe. The question then becomes, however, what is the relevance of these concepts related to totalization – nation-state, democracy, markets – for an analysis of Latin America? It would be strange, for

¹⁶⁰ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 133.

¹⁶¹ Zavaleta, “Problemas de cultura,” 643.

example, to follow the logic of this geographical distinction all the way to an “exoticism that makes Latin America’s specificity (its culture, its history, its social structure, etc.) into an absolute and ends up judging Marxism to be an exclusively European doctrine.”¹⁶² It is clear enough from his continual engagement with Marxist theory that Zavaleta never held it to be irrelevant to Latin America.

An alternative way to interpret the significance of the idea of totalization for Zavaleta is as a predictive telos of historical development under capitalism. In whatever social formation, this process would then appear as its future. That Europe has already achieved some facets of totalization does not mean that the process itself is exogenous to Latin America. This reading would avoid the pitfall of exoticism. Yet one might then fall into the other “scourge” that Ouviaña notes has always threatened political thought in Latin America: “Europeanism, which tended to mechanically translate to this [Latin American] reality – and on this basis a unilineal conception of history – western models of economic and social development in their historical ‘evolution.’”¹⁶³ In other words, the fallacy here would be to view Latin America as merely an pre-modern, backward, or underdeveloped Europe – an image of the past.

Given these considerations, what is the utility of the concept of totalization for a region that Zavaleta suggests has *not* been totalized?

¹⁶² Ouviaña, “Traducción y nacionalización del Marxismo en América Latina,” 196.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 196–97.

Epistemological Registers

As I read it, the theoretical meaning of totalization for Zavaleta does not necessarily rely on either a geographical division that puts some regions outside of this process, nor a temporal distinction that puts some regions in the past and Europe at the fore of a linear world historical process. Rather, I propose the interpretive argument that totalization is a *register* of his thought in which his concepts and categories take on a certain meaning without being directly descriptive of any particular empirical example. On the other hand, Zavaleta certainly does at points lapse, even in his later work, into a framing of his analysis in terms of teleological notions of development and geographical divisions of the kind just mentioned. I will address the lingering impact of these views on his overall theoretical project later on.

At its most useful, Zavaleta analyzes the idea of totalization alongside other concepts that point not to a general or uniform process, but to particular conditions and historical specificity. He writes:

The danger of such an all-encompassing construction like that of the principle of totalization is that it will tend to encounter its verification inside itself, as in Hegel's metaphor of spheres inside spheres. The problem, in reality, resides in asking when we must use the criteria of deep forms or of ultimate determination [*ultimidad*] of an epoch's character, and when we must use internal histories or unique articulations, ad hoc or simply incomparable aggregations, of a social association or correlation, without one thing becoming useless for the other.¹⁶⁴

Thus, Zavaleta is paradoxically able to relativize the significance of totalization in relation to specific and varying historical cases whose explanation may best be sought

¹⁶⁴ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 85.

outside of any consideration of “ultimate” causes. These specificities, in other words, are made clearer through their contrast to the totalizing concepts.

If Zavaleta writes of Marx or Weber in this first register of totalization, it is because these two thinkers observed processes that were novel and specific to capitalism, but not homogeneous in their effects. What they noted, each in their own way, was a *tendency*: a historical orientation impelled by capitalist relations but not always present in its actuality, and thus not considered as an exhaustive description of capitalism.

The clearest example of this tendency is the existence of atomized individuals. Totalization paints a picture of modernity as characterized by certain kinds of social unity (class, nation, state, bourgeois democracy), but it recognizes, implicitly, that this is only achieved in the *decomposition* of the various older social forms and class structures that set free individuals to become the bearers of capitalist relations of production.

What then accounts for historical particularities? If certain contingencies become clearer by contrasting them to the supposed necessity of totalizing processes, they are not arbitrary. What Zavaleta’s approach reveals, though he may not put it in these terms, is that the tendency of totalization, the decomposition of old forms, exists alongside a counter-tendency: that of *composition*, which Zavaleta will also specify in various ways to be discussed later in this chapter. As a preliminary point, however, let us say that, every decomposition also implies a re-articulation of new possibilities and forms, new collectivities and social relations that arise from capitalism and its class

dynamics. If totalization is the concept of one general tendency, this tendency only ever plays out amid its opposite, constituting moments of historical specificity. These are, in other words, two simultaneous and inseparable facets of the same history; totalization does not possess a “pure” form in Europe, nor in capitalism’s projected future. It is a concept of something that is only recognizable in its local effects, and thus tied to concrete particularities.

The Register of Particularity

Zavaleta’s perspective on the relationship between totality and particularity affects how he conceives of categories like class and nation in *Lo nacional popular*. Revealing the ambiguity of this methodology, Zavaleta introduces his key discussion of the concept of the nation with a historical juxtaposition between the events of Bolivian Federal War, an internal conflict lasting from 1898 to 1899, and the processes of Italian and German national unification in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁵ It is ambiguous, I suggest, because it does appear to rely on the idea that Europe is the model by which all other historical developments must be measured. But following this national comparison, Zavaleta begins a conceptual discussion, turning from an acceptance of European nationality as an empirical referent corresponding to a concept – which then requires Bolivia to be thought as a counter-example – toward an interrogation of the category of the nation itself. He cites Stalin’s famous definition: “A nation is a historically constituted, stable

¹⁶⁵ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 136–37.

community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”¹⁶⁶ He then analyzes the various components of this definition for the case of Bolivia. After treating each one in turn, Zavaleta produces a judgement of their relative weights:

With all the importance that racial, spatial, and linguistic arguments may have, what Stalin calls problems of ‘economic life’ and of ‘psychology’ or common culture are without a doubt those that have the most conclusive value, *although they would have but a relative significance if we do not follow them to their original phase, that is, to a discussion of the constitutive moment.*¹⁶⁷

The formal concept of the nation thus refers back, for Zavaleta, to the historical convergence represented by the concept of the constitutive moment. The special determining impact of “economic life” and “psychology” date from Bolivia’s earliest social relations.

These earliest relations, however, can also be understood as an articulation between composition and decomposition. The way these two tendencies operate together in the country’s foundational moments sets the stage for later developments. Here, we begin to get the sense that the relationship between these two tendencies is mediated by something else: political struggle. Capitalism’s tendency to break down the old and its tendency to remake social relations are processes that can be affected by collective political intervention.

Zavaleta thus examines the creation of the “juridically free individual, which is a sort of economic citizenship,” – and a key feature of the totalizing process of

¹⁶⁶ Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, n.p.

¹⁶⁷ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 140. Emphasis added.

capitalism – in relation to the particular historical relationship between labor and capital within a given national formation:

This [national] ‘economic life in common’ can occur, therefore, with a greater participation of the detached individual or as a fact which overcomes him. It is quite evident that *the grade of consensus* with which formal subsumption takes place gives a distinct connotation to each constitutive pact. It is such a generalized interaction that produces the social substance or national material which can itself be called value, and which is the material base of the national in the capitalist mode of production.¹⁶⁸

The nation is thus founded on a moment of decomposition of old social relations and the foundation of new ones based on capitalist relations of production (the production of value). But the specific features of this process, in any particular example, rely on the relative political power and disposition of those who would be brought into the new order – i.e., the ability to give or deny consensus to the process of nation formation. Each national “pact,” in short, emerges with distinctive features based on the composition of its classes. The political activity of these classes may make the tendency toward totalization more or less effective.

It is important to note that this view of the centrality of political power, class composition, and constitutive contingency holds even when Zavaleta rhetorically resorts to differentiations between the “West” and the rest of the world, or between advanced capitalist countries and “backward” ones. Even European social formations have specific histories – their “primordial forms” in which classes and peoples may have distinct relationships to acts of political constitution and socio-economic

¹⁶⁸ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 141. Emphasis added.

structure.¹⁶⁹ These forms shape the history of capitalist emergence. Therefore, while Zavaleta at times alludes to European history as if it demonstrated the ideal type of national formation, he at other moments refers to any *ideal* as merely a fantasy. The dynamics of national and capitalist development yield to questions of power, revolution, and reaction:

The national is for all to recognize themselves as the same, to a certain degree and in a certain area. This would be, even so, a bucolic [*eglógica*] version of nationalization, which is generally a much more imperative or authoritarian occurrence. It would appear in fact to be a logical process that men act among themselves and produce something common to all of them, but at the same time not appearing specifically like any of them. This is what most closely approximates a democratic revolution understood as a national revolution. It is a type of fantasy with something of a dreaminess. In actual fact, passive revolution has existed, the *junker* way has occurred, and undoubtedly reactionary nationalism and forced nationalism have occurred.¹⁷⁰

The specificity of a given constitutive moment – the way it occurs in a particular instance – is always predicated on relations of power and conflict among social elements.

We can highlight two factors in this power, which confirm the centrality of conflictual class relations for Zavaleta's analysis of the nation in this period of his works. These are, in other words, two conceptual contributions to the analysis of class composition and its relationship to the nation form. Zavaleta argues first that we must pay attention to the way that individuals enter a state of *receptiveness* or *availability* (*disponibilidad*), a term that Zavaleta uses to mean open to political and ideological novelty. The manner in which this occurs has its effects on the constituent process.

¹⁶⁹ Zavaleta, "Problemas de determinación dependiente," 564.

¹⁷⁰ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 102.

He identifies both vertical forms of achieving receptiveness – like corporatism, forced displacement, enclosure of land, etc. – or horizontal forms like revolution, in which the crisis and political act by the masses creates its own set of historical possibilities.¹⁷¹ The second concept Zavaleta introduces to analyze class relationships and their primordial role in nation formation is the *accumulation in the heart of class* or *masses*, a term which refers to the popular preservation of historical memory or experience. The masses can deploy this memory in their political practices across time and in distinct scenarios.

Zavaleta summarizes his point about the political contingency of national origins in this way: “Even if intersubjectivity exists *in abstracto*, what must be seen is which path has been followed to arrive at it, because here what matters is the category plus the determination of its origin or accumulation.”¹⁷² General tendencies, captured under the heading of totalization, do not exist in isolation from specific historical experiences. Such is the insight of the two conceptual registers which always point the material particularity of any historical conjuncture while not ruling out general tendencies within capitalism.

Comparing Problematics

Let us highlight the novelty of the views just analyzed, from Zavaleta’s later works, vis-a-vis Zavaleta’s earlier, nationalist problematic. The earlier works took

¹⁷¹ Zavaleta “Problemas de la determinación dependiente,” 564.

¹⁷² Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 39. Even when Zavaleta in *Lo nacional-popular* gives England as the “paradigm” of the state of separation, he notes that it is not therefore the only example, and that even among European nations, France is a radically distinct historical counterpoint (p. 144).

constituent power as something always-already national, and saw social classes in terms of whether their interests corresponded with the goal of national organization. In the later views just analyzed, by contrast, the constituent moment involves an essential contingency based on power relations that shape the composition of classes. Classes are collective participants in formation inside a process whose finality is unknown. Although these processes make the nation possible, they could also produce various kinds of “civil agglutination” that do not fit that definition, or that result in nations of radically different types.¹⁷³

Zavaleta’s later analysis of the nation as a contingent political formation suggests a paradoxical conclusion: just as the constitutive moment might be seen as the national moment par excellence insofar as it is a moment of founding, it is also an essentially *non-national* moment. What do I mean by this? A constitutive moment, although a feature in the formation of all nations, is also the moment in which the transhistorical assumptions of nationality are lost – the very notion of forming a nation implies its onetime absence, drawing our attention to the violent struggles among distinct social groups, their compositions, and their changing relations to one another. The elements that perhaps congeal into a national form are thus revealed as something other than that form, and the impossibility of their perfect closure becomes clear through their conflictuality, their uneven and unpredictable combination.

If the notions of totalization and social democratization are in some way the abstract schemas of a tendency, then the constitutive moment, as well as the

¹⁷³ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 132.

contingencies accounted for by the concepts of primordial form, accumulation, and receptiveness [*disponibilidad*] point us to the particularities that cannot be accounted for within the conceptual register of totalization. Thus as, Elvira Bórquez Concheiro argues, Zavaleta's key intervention is a "permanent calling attention to that which does not enter into any scheme." She continues, "For this reason, his work pushes us toward the study of social paradoxes, of contradictory developments, of the unexpected conducts of social actors, and, of course, of social catastrophes."¹⁷⁴ The paradox of the nation, read through Zavaleta, is that it is *never identical to itself*: a nation with excesses. And the figure of its excess is always tied to political struggle.

Difference and Constituent Power

I have argued here that Zavaleta's work operates through two theoretical registers: that of totalization, and that of particularity, and that the distinction between these registers is linked to an implicit recognition that capitalism operates through tendencies of both decomposition and composition. Furthermore, I have been suggesting that these insights push Zavaleta toward a conception of the nation as a contingent formation whose possibility and characteristics owe to political struggles and class compositions. Where does all of this leave the question of constituent power? To answer this, I will return to a point that I previously suspended: in Zavaleta's work, alongside this entire problematic of contingency, a certain

¹⁷⁴ Concheiro Bórquez, "René Zavaleta: Una mirada comprometida," 187.

teleological orientation continues to exist. What are the stakes of “choosing,” so to speak, one tendency in Zavaleta’s thought over the other?

The basic question of constituent power is: on what collective basis do constituted political orders arise? If one reads the relation between constituent power and specific forms of constituted power (e.g., the state, the party, the hegemonic bloc) as teleological, as in the philosophy of history that appears, on occasion, even within Zavaleta’s later works, then the answer will be reached by working backwards from the qualities of existing social formations. If these are nation-states, then constituent power is essentially national. If they are representative, then constituent power must tend toward representation as its ideal. As I suggested in my introduction, this kind of reasoning is often implicit in the use of the concept of constituent power. On the other hand, if the nation, as a form of collectivity, is itself historically contingent and mutable, with radical differences between its actual variations, then a usable concept of constituent power would be able to explain extensive variation among different forms of collective political life and agency.

Teleology and Abigarramiento

Zavaleta reveals his attachment to teleology, in unresolved contrast with his turn toward contingency, in certain moments when he treats the question of totalization. At the most basic level, this means that Zavaleta sometimes develops concepts not to explain the positive social or political content of his objects of

investigation, but to explain in them a certain *failure* which can only be understood in relation to a counterfactual assumption about how things should have gone.

Even while recognizing the contingency of the nation form, Zavaleta's intellectual tasks are driven by the notion of historical obstacles that prevent this form from taking shape: "Simply put, the encounter between that group of objective facts that we call the nation and that form of political power is not something given in all cases and, to the contrary, what we are commenting on, thinking about Latin America, is precisely the way in which this fusion is not able to be achieved."¹⁷⁵ Implicitly, national unity still serves here as the theoretical reference point for alternatives to national unity. Zavaleta's overall theoretical trajectory moves toward an exit from the presumed connection between constituent power and the nation form, but his descriptions are haunted by a lack of national development.

For Zavaleta, the concept of this lack is the *sociedad abigarrada*. In *El poder dual*, Zavaleta adopts the term "economic social formation," of Leninist and Althusserian influence, to speak of concrete articulations of various modes of production, thus locating his intervention in certain global debates among Marxists in the 1970s.¹⁷⁶ Also during this time, designated as his orthodox Marxist period, and taking precedence in his third "heterodox" period, Zavaleta begins to write of *abigarramiento*, or sometimes of *formaciones* or *sociedades abigarradas*, a term meant to signal the heterogeneous and uneven processes of decomposition and

¹⁷⁵ Zavaleta, "La burguesía incompleta," 422.

¹⁷⁶ Antezana, *Dos conceptos en la obra de René Zavaleta*; Giller, "René Zavaleta Mercado frente a la 'Teoría de la dependencia'."

composition in a single social formation. *Abigarrada* is sometimes translated as “motley” or “many-colored,” however, I will continue to use the Spanish, since as a concept it is unique to Zavaleta’s theoretical production with no obvious English equivalent.¹⁷⁷

What, specifically, does this concept refer to? Zavaleta, for his part, does not offer a concise definition, but suggests that the need for the concept is derived from the fact that in Bolivia, it is “as if feudalism exists in one culture, and capitalism in another, and they nonetheless exist simultaneously in the same setting.”¹⁷⁸ Antezana (1992) argues that the concept of *abigarramiento* emphasizes the mutual qualification of components in a heterogeneous formation. Each element is definable only in relation to all the others. This anti-essentialism echoes that, for instance, of Laclau and Mouffe, who use this insight as the basis for a theory of articulation.¹⁷⁹ But Antezana further suggests that, against the notion that there might be a dominant articulatory element, *abigarramiento* describes a situation of equal contingency among parts. Thus, it is a matter of thinking various elements of distinct modes of production in relation to one another without offering a conclusive claim about which is determinate in a given instance. Tapia highlights another facet of Zavaleta’s usage of the concept, adding that the term *abigarramiento* “serves to think not only diversity, but rather the problem of its social coexistence; and also, the problem of knowledge of one part by another and of the knowledge of each one.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 109.

¹⁷⁸ Zavaleta, “Las masas en noviembre,” 105.

¹⁷⁹ See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

¹⁸⁰ Tapia, *La producción del conocimiento local*, 431.

Abigarramiento, in other words, implies a kind of difference that creates difficulties for producing knowledge.

As Zavaleta deploys this concept with regard to Bolivia, it becomes clear that *sociedad abigarrada* stands in contrast to a notion of a fully totalized, or at least an essentially capitalist (and therefore “developed”) social formation. The specificity of Bolivian history is that of a bourgeoisie that never broke with the mode of feudal land ownership – and even actively tried to model its rule on feudal relations of dominance – and thus never achieved the cultural and ideological changes that are presumed to go along with the normative totalization process: the separation of individuals from the land, the transformation of individual landholders into capitalists, and the modernization of the state.¹⁸¹ Instead, the state of Bolivia would forever be affected by the decentralized and weak administration that characterized the regional Chacras colonial administration of the Spanish Viceroyalty, as well by a strong persistence of peasant social relations during the colonial era. These conditions also lead to, in this view, a kind of siege-based class politics from 1781 onward in which conflict was articulated through autonomous indigenous blockades of major cities. Rather than modernizing all of Bolivian society, the small clique of ruling elites remained essentially isolated from the masses of the country, and exploitation outside of the mining industry took place through various feudal mechanisms articulated with anti-indigenous “scientific” racism.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Zavaleta, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, 63.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 87ff.

Abigarramiento thus comes to signify for Zavaleta this non-concordance of political, ideological, and economic elements. On the one hand, by taking note of these local particularities, Zavaleta offers a historical accounting for the encounter and non-encounter of certain elements that might otherwise lay the foundation for the successful project of the nation. On the other hand, however, that these elements are discordant gives little indication of how to theorize the Bolivian historical formation in a positive sense – if it is not a nation, then what is it? What does the concept of *abigarramiento* tell us beyond this lack of a national consistency? Furthermore, against a tragic interpretation that views this lack as a limitation, we might also ask what political potentials arise from a non-national setting. Can the concept of *constituent power* account for non-national constituted powers?

Constituent Power and Abigarramiento

In a recent commentary, Anne Freeland broaches the relationship between constituent power and *abigarramiento*, locating the latter within the “profuse and varied tradition in Latin Americanist scholarship of production, borrowing, or refashioning of concepts that address the specificities of their objects in contrast to European or Eurocentric models with a focus on problems of identity and difference.”¹⁸³ Such concepts – e.g., transculturation, hybridity, subalternity, heterogeneity – “have been distinguished from one another according to their ultimate assimilability into the prevailing logic of the nation.” In other words, each concept

¹⁸³ Freeland, “Notes on René Zavaleta,” n.p.

has been introduced in order to denote a specific degree of distance from the category of the nation. *Abigarramiento* sits on the far end of the spectrum, completely counterposed to any national assimilation.

For Freeland, the inability of the logic of the nation to assimilate all difference is itself the essential insight of the concept of constituent power. She argues that *abigarramiento*, much like subalternity, implies that there is always something in the constituent social basis that cannot be represented:

It is as the ground of the general crisis that Zavaleta's concept of *abigarramiento* works against the reification of representation, against the ossification of the constituted order and in the service of collective constitutive action. It is the persistence of an incommensurability that precludes the total closure of the constituted and therefore guarantees the possibility of de- and re-constitution.¹⁸⁴

Abigarramiento, as a concept, thus suggests that difference itself is an irreducible guarantee against perfect representation or institutionalization of constituent power.

While Freeland's analysis has the merit of posing a direct link between constituent power and *abigarramiento*, it raises a number of questions that the concept of *abigarramiento* itself does not help to answer, especially as its usage remains tied to both a vague counterposition between developed and undeveloped capitalist countries and to a philosophical project of deconstruction that eschews positive analysis. What *kinds* of difference are impossible to represent? Are we to suppose, for instance, that countries in the global North, supposedly more developed for not being *abigarrados*, provide self-transparent representation to all, while limitations on democratic representation only exist in "backward" countries? And

¹⁸⁴ Freeland, "Notes on René Zavaleta," n.p.

how can we differentiate modes of collective action that strengthen the constituted order from those that would challenge it, when either might be based on a claim to difference and representation? That is, given objective limitations to what kinds of difference can be represented, what of movements and actors that stake a claim to representation on the basis of their difference? The concept of *abigarramiento* opens these questions, but it remains tied to a rather abstract conception of difference, where the latter can only be defined as that which cannot be represented. I contend that to answer these questions would mean offering material conceptions of what kind of difference is in play in a given scenario, specifically linked to the capitalist tendencies of decomposition and recomposition. As I have been arguing, these capitalist dynamics actually are central, if not always explicit, in Zavaleta's later works, and they provide the key to a distinct conception of constituent power and *abigarramiento*.

Abigarramiento under Neoliberalism

In order to go beyond invoking abstract difference as a synonym for constituent power, it is necessary to pay attention instead to the concrete differences that Zavaleta invokes to justify the concept of *abigarramiento*: How do concrete relations between modes of production affect political possibilities? How do processes of composition and decomposition that articulate these modes of production either create or deny space for the emergence of collective political subjects? That is, how does the

concept of constituent power relate to the interaction or relationship of modes of production and their social presuppositions and effects?

Complicating these questions today, however, is that contrary to Zavaleta's inclination to counterpose the heterogeneity of post-colonial societies to an essential homogeneity in the capitalist core, events since the end of his life have further blurred any such lines of demarcation between supposed stages of development within capitalism. The simultaneity of and relationships between modes of production have entered a new phase. The global ruling consensus of neoliberalism, while not establishing global equality or homogeneity, has made it harder to map such schemas along nation-state borders. Neoliberal capitalism since the 1970s has seen instead a significant rearticulation of the tendencies of totalization and particularization; decompositions and recompositions have cut across borders and social formations. This has also meant that nationalism itself, or the postulate of national development, has likewise been rearticulated, often eschewing anti-imperialism in favor of the Washington Consensus.

Neoliberal Transformations in Bolivia

At a basic level, neoliberalism has involved an effort to generalize market relations, to privatize both the public and the commons, to place welfare in the dominion of so-called civil society, to break with forms of collectivity that are thought to weigh on efficiency, and to permit the growth of access and mobility for financial capital.

In Bolivia, as in many “developing” countries in the 1970s and 80s, this process began in earnest when the government was forced to take out loans from international institutions and to accept as the terms of these loans a “structural adjustment program” mandating macro-economic and political changes. Zavaleta’s death in 1984 more or less coincides with the start of this neoliberal project under a political regime that used its representative legitimacy in the wake of “democratization” to carry it out posthaste. In the midst of massive inflation and unpayable sovereign debt that had been accrued under the military dictatorships of Hugo Banzer (1971–78), Alberto Natusch Busch (1979) and Luis Garcia Meza (1980–81), the left-leaning civilian coalition that took power in 1982, the Popular Democratic Union (*Unión Democrática Popular*, UDP), could not control the crisis that it had inherited. Unable to bolster the economy, which experienced four straight years of GDP decline, the UDP was forced to call elections in 1985.¹⁸⁵ The winning coalition, led by none other than the Victor Paz Estenssoro and the MNR that had been in power from the 1952–64 period of the national revolution, dutifully designed and carried out its “New Economic Policy,” legislated through Supreme Decree 21060, which included the closing of state mines, a currency float, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and an end to import-substitution style protectionism. The result was a massive series of layoffs – 20,000 miners fired right away, and 35,000 manufacturing workers in the next five years.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Kohl and Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia*, 60.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

In a sense, this attempt to integrate Bolivia into global markets implies a decomposition and atomization of the working class as it had been composed. The dominant classes would thereby be able to flatten global space for the flows of financial capital and expand the reach of capitalist production relations. But contrary to what might be expected under the heading of modernization, this tendency was not the preparatory stage for the expansion or strengthening of national development. That is, modernizing the economy by making it more capitalist did not lead to the strengthening of national political institutions, nor to functional representative democracy.

One way to understand this unexpected outcome is to consider that the process of globalization, as understood in the late 20th century as a variant on modernization, created what Etienne Balibar calls “real universality”: it linked together a greater proportion of individuals through the flow of capital and commodities than ever before. Paradoxically, however, this global set of material links simultaneously upset the stability of categories of mass life that had stood for what he calls “ideal universality” in the twentieth century: nation, representative democracy, the industrial working class unions, etc.¹⁸⁷ One universalizing process, in other words, dislodged the categories that *appeared* universal in an earlier moment. This is not to say that these “ideal” categories have disappeared, but their constituencies and relations have changed. Zavaleta’s concept of totalization, however, was based on the assumption that the expansion of capitalist social relations would strengthen these institutions of

¹⁸⁷ Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 147.

ideal universality. It might be said that Zavaleta's assumptions about what developed capitalism would look like, and how it would affect political and social life, were based on a hypostatization of social institutions grounded in a certain moment of capitalism in certain European and North American countries. In reality, the process of totalization, it turned out, could actually undermine rather than strengthen what he had called the "internal-market–nation state–bourgeois democratic" continuum, while still holding onto a nationalist promise of development as an attractive ideology. The outward promise of the Washington Consensus was, after all, that the countries that fell in line would indeed emerge as more stable, developed capitalist economies without the atavistic backwardness of colonial dependency.

It turns out that modernization is neither a linear process nor one with the same meaning in every historical moment. Its significance and the implications for the nation-form are historically contingent. Thus, while neoliberalism in Bolivia reversed some effects of the 1952 revolution, it also represented a continuity with the latter's original modernizing orientation. From this vantage point, is not a mere coincidence that the MNR undid its own revolution-era policies in the wake of the 1982 "democratization": the goal underlying its project in the 1950s and 60s was that of bringing Bolivia into the global present, which in that moment permitted significant gains for workers and peasants. But one could argue that, despite a now deleterious set of effects on these groups, the basis for neoliberal ideology at the global level and in global institutions was likewise to modernize and overcome the perceived backwardness and irresponsibility with which global financiers now

charged “Third World” countries. The MNR ended up a junior partner in such efforts led by foreign capital and international institutions. Reading this through the idealist tendency in Zavaleta’s work – that is, viewing the expansion of market relations as coextensive with a unilinear and beneficial project of national modernization – one might even lay claim to his theories to justify the neoliberal MNR project, even as this would mean ignoring other important principles of his work. For instance, the situation of Bolivia in the 1980s demonstrates how a certain kind of development-oriented nationalism can also be severed from Zavaleta’s radical anti-imperialism: once the rationale for foreign economic and political domination (through the IMF and other international institutions) is couched in terms of nationalist modernizing goals, the contradiction between the post-colonial nation and the external powers, once presumed to oppress it, is discursively overcome. Now, the development of the nation is carried out in partnership with these external powers at the expense of popular classes previously thought to be the driving force of development.

In addition to this rearticulation of older terms, new technologies of value calculation and the decomposition of old social and political forms suggest that *abigarramiento* has become a global phenomenon. Denser economic flows that cross borders, the internationalization of production processes through long supply chains, vast movements of labor and capital – all of these have contributed to a situation where the articulation of different modes of production is ever more complex, where distinct local contexts of production and social reproduction are being brought into relation for the first time. This also includes the subsumption of various non-capitalist

production relationships, either in formal or real terms, often through their integration into financial markets. And the decomposition of certain ties and practices within the working class means that more workers can split their time in different sectors, including part-time subsistence farming or small-scale trade, part-time precarious waged labor, and part-time self-employment. The relationship between subsumption through financialization and the increased variability of activities among living laborers starts to emerge, for instance, with regard to small merchant proprietorships, which have flourished in Bolivia and throughout Latin America under neoliberalism, and which, nonetheless, have brought these small self-employed individuals into the market for specially-devised financial products.¹⁸⁸

These processes of subsumption, linking together a radically diverse set of activities and binding them into global processes of valorization, suggest that *abigarramiento* has become a generalized condition.

Knowledge, Difference, and Democracy

Financialization, as one aspect of neoliberalism, includes the development of sophisticated apparatuses and practices of calculation across difference. It therefore permits a potentially total subsumption of human activity, generalizing the value relation to the earth's farthest reaches. No circumstance is too particular, too contingent or arbitrary, to be included as data in an algorithm for financial calculation. No phenomenon is too remote to enter into a scheme of value

¹⁸⁸ Tassi et al., *La economía popular en Bolivia*; Gago, *La razón neoliberal*.

preservation. Difference is, if not tamable, tradeable. This raises another question: Is there a political correlate to this process? What kinds of institutions, political apparatuses, and disciplinary regimes would allow for the world's motley set of social relations also subsumed *politically*? Does *abigarramiento*, considered as a global phenomenon, hold up as a claim to the ultimate unintelligibility or irrepresentability of constituent power? Or does the neoliberalization of production relations also carry with it new political means of managing populations and activities?

Zavaleta insists on the non-applicability of quantitative social scientific knowledge in social formations *abigarradas*. But just as financial capital overcomes qualitative differences in social relations in order to subsume them, neoliberal political practices rely on regimes of knowledge production in order to know and manage what I am suggesting is a rearticulated heterogeneity of capitalist social life at a global scale. Thus, Zavaleta's comments on what he calls "democracy as a problem of the theory of knowledge" – the extent to which social life is politically knowable, and to which this knowledge can provide a basis for representative legitimacy – are all the more relevant in a world where modernization has involved various new means of calculating consent in the service of political rule. Remarking that social scientific knowledge must be specific to a given mode of production, Zavaleta suggests that knowledge of capitalism must therefore be able to keep up with the constant novelty that characterizes it.¹⁸⁹ This is the basis for linking knowledge to the practices of democracy: states and, in particular, their bureaucratic

¹⁸⁹ Zavaleta, "Cuatro conceptos," 521.

apparatuses must *hear* the “noise of the social corpus.”¹⁹⁰ They must interpret the constant growth and multiplication of elements in social life, including in those moments when capitalist expansion runs into crisis and class revolt:

Here democracy is advanced as an act of the State. It is then the conscience of the state calculating the reverberations of civil society. Civil society in this gnoseological phase is only an object of democracy; but the subject of democracy (in a manner of speaking) is the dominant class, or its personification in the rational State, which is the bureaucracy.¹⁹¹

Neoliberal politics therefore stakes its capacity for management on ever more sophisticated quantitative methods. These methods would seem to disavow any social phenomena that exceed its capacity for understanding or incorporating. The separation of state from the rest of society mirrors, for Zavaleta, the fetishistic character of the commodity: not only do social relations take a reified form in the state, but everything *known* by the state must take the form of a quantity to be valorized in its effects on the state’s policy.

The political strategy that follows from this approach to democracy is on display in the 2005 documentary *Our Brand is Crisis*.¹⁹² In a striking representation of an entire industry devoted to universalizing and applying neoliberalism’s underlying political assumptions, the film follows a firm of U.S. political consultants as they try to help Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada win Bolivia’s presidency in 2002, amid the upswell of insurrection that began in 2000. These consultants, including famed Democratic Party pollsters James Carville and Stan Greenberg, attempt, with

¹⁹⁰ Zavaleta, “Cuatro conceptos,” 521ff.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 523.

¹⁹² Boynton, *Our Brand is Crisis*.

evidently no self-awareness and only a superficial knowledge of Bolivian history, to put together a demographic electioneering strategy to deliver the presidency to “Goni,” a member of the country’s political elite who has spent so much of his life abroad that he speaks Spanish with a North American accent. The hired campaign experts’ entire strategy involves grafting together a winning coalition on the basis of what they take to be the individual preferences and concerns of the object populace, discovered through extensive polling and, in particular, focus groups. Such liberal strategies of governance presume the perfect representability of society, but have no interest in asking what *constitutes* society beyond a collection of individuals qua voters.

In the case of Bolivia in 2002, this inability to grasp social dynamics beyond the “electoral coalition” model was clear enough. One of Goni’s opponents was none other than Evo Morales and the MAS. To the shock of the American interlopers, Evo came within 2 percentage points of winning the election. The film thus shows how liberal electoralism was pit against a return to a kind of nationalist populism that instead attempted to invoke society as, once again, *the nation*. The U.S. pollsters could not fathom the limits of their strategy against the alternative of building a popular movement, a coming onto the scene of the masses as a political actor. Even during the film’s epilogue, when faced with the *fait accompli* of Goni’s forced abdication of the Bolivian presidency in the face of mass protest, Greenberg can think of nothing he would have done differently.

But if this sort of drive to quantify presents one type of knowledge, usable to the ruling class in manufacturing consent, assigning stable identities to its constituents, and building its electoral coalitions, Zavaleta also suggests a potential alternative knowledge for the subaltern classes themselves, which in turn provides insight that may help to specify the notion of constituent power. This is the knowledge that emerges according to the *perspective* of the subaltern classes in what he calls the “logic of the factory.” According to this view, individuality itself – that of the doubly free laborer in the capitalist mode of production – is productively consumed in the labor process. But this temporary loss of liberty has an immediate upshot at the level of knowledge:

The logic of the factory indisputably also creates space for the metamorphosis of the free laborer by its first circulation in the collective worker during the moment of production. This collective worker, then, is the key of the consciousness of the world considered as sociality. It is the horizon of visibility given by the collective worker that is the final cause of the existence of social science as self-consciousness of the capitalist mode of production.¹⁹³

While quantitative social knowledge based on abstract equality is proper to capitalist society considered in its own terms, Zavaleta follows Marx here in offering a critique of those categories and drawing out the political and scientific potential of the fact that social reality *exceeds* the view of civil society as a collection of individuals, posing new (and perhaps old) collectivities and social structures and relationships at the same time. This excess offers itself as the basis for an alternative knowledge.

Zavaleta himself, however, is ambiguous on how this alternative knowledge relates to ruling-class forms of social scientific knowledge. The *horizon of visibility*

¹⁹³ Zavaleta, “Cuatro conceptos de la democracia,” 515.

of the collective worker, he affirms, is linked to social scientific knowledge and the possibility for organic intellectuals, among whom he includes Marx, to see society in a new, critical way.¹⁹⁴ But, he notes, this knowledge is nonetheless concordant with that of the modern, quantifiable production of knowledge that he elsewhere links to the State's power to control society.¹⁹⁵ The difference is that one class, the working class, can take advantage of the knowledge of capitalist society *so as to change society*, whereas the other can only use it to *maintain order*. He links this to the distinction between "horizontal aspects of culture and vertical ones."¹⁹⁶ The "vertical" aspects of knowledge refers to the mechanisms by which knowledges are used to subordinate, control, compose and maintain order. The horizontal aspects present another possibility:

But horizontal culture is the spontaneous, anonymous, and general movement of the masses' creativity. ... There are moments when the initiative of the masses is determinant in an extremely powerful way, like in a revolutionary crisis. It is not a coincidence, anyhow, that the moments of creativity in the social sciences are clearly linked to historical crisis, or moments of mass initiative.¹⁹⁷

In Zavaleta's account, the logic of the factory involves an intersubjective moment of recognition between individuals as free subjects, and thus is a site for the disciplinary construction of the individual of capitalist society. But it is a simultaneous re-composition of individuals into a mass that creates the possibility of a collective insight and political call to action, shared horizontally.

¹⁹⁴ Zavaleta, "Problemas de cultura," 644.

¹⁹⁵ See Zavaleta "Problemas de determinación dependiente."

¹⁹⁶ Zavaleta, "Problemas de cultura," 651.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 651–52.

Zavaleta's conclusions about this horizontal culture and the relationship between knowledge and the masses pose another important question: how can the knowledge created only through the horizon of visibility of the producing classes be utilized by them? On the one hand, Zavaleta gestures toward the importance of the role of organic intellectuals. On the other hand, however, he points back to the concept of the accumulation in the heart of the masses: the idea that this horizon itself can only be recognized with experience, drawn out over time through struggles, and tied to the concrete reality of those workers.¹⁹⁸

All of this is to say that, returning to the concept of constituent power, Zavaleta ties positively existing social power not to a general notion of difference, as in some interpretations of the *sociedad abigarrada*, but to the structural role and historical accumulation of the masses in actually existing social formations, understood in relation to the mode of production. It is not difference which provides a key to breaking with regimes of power pioneered by the capitalist state, but historically specific sites of collective subject formation. Neoliberal regimes of power might try to decompose classes into countable individuals, to discipline these individuals in specific ways, to create a new *homo economicus*, etc. But one of the contradictory upshots of totalization is the formation of new collectivities and new sites of agency.

If, as I have argued, production itself takes place in new circumstances, with novel relationships linking producers all over the world and calling into question the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 653–54.

centrality of the nation-form, then several questions arise: 1) Where can we locate and identify *horizons of visibility* in neoliberal or post-neoliberal global economy? 2) How do the kinds of collectivity fostered in such circumstances evade detection by neoliberal mechanisms of political knowledge and mobilization, as in the case of Bolivia beginning in 2000, and illustrated in the severe limitations experienced by the political consultants in *Our Brand is Crisis*? 3) What kinds of knowledge are produced or accumulated within masses, and how might the changing shape of the various producing classes affect our understanding of the role of intellectuals in transmitting knowledge therein? 4) Finally, if difference per se is not the basis for understanding constituent power, what specific kinds of difference might be at play when we discuss this concept?

These are the questions that will play a major role for the next generation of political theorists and intellectuals in Bolivia. The following chapters will explore these questions and others in the work of the Comuna group during the insurrections and subsequent re-foundation of the Bolivian state between 1999 and 2010.

Chapter 3

Bolivian Insurgency and the Early Work of Comuna

The work of the Bolivian group of political theorists and activists known as *Comuna* provides one avenue for developing the both the insights of posthegemony theory and the work of Zavaleta with attention to the unresolved issues of constituent power and collective agency. What began as a small discussion group, principally composed of academics, in 1999, blossomed between 2000 and 2002 into a larger, more regular meeting space with representatives from a variety of social movements. As described to me by Oscar Vega and Raúl Prada, it was primarily a space of encounter, of open connection without clear expectation, that, especially after 2000, allowed participants to understand the various political forces that were in play— the Water War in Cochabamba, the massive *bloqueos* in the Aymara altiplano around La Paz and Lake Titicaca, the protests of unionized coca growers in the Chapare region. But *Comuna* was also, for a small nucleus of participants, a collaborative writing and publishing project, and when I refer to *Comuna* here, I will be referring to those who published under the imprint of the group: Álvaro García Linera, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Raúl Prada Alcoreza, Luis Tapia Mealla, and Oscar Vega Camacho. The imprint of *Comuna* was attached to a series of books from the publisher *Muela del Diablo*, and later expanded with the assistance of the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO). The series included nine collaborative volumes in which where three or more of these authors would contribute chapters, a number of other texts by individual members of the group, as well as a small group of other

publications including the work of foreign thinkers Antonio Negri and Boaventura de Sousa Santos – both of whom visited Bolivia at the invitation of the group – as well as Bolivian figures like Félix Patzi Paco. In this chapter I focus on texts published by members of the group between 1999, when their first book, *El Fantasma Insomne*, was released, until 2002, when they sought to take stock of the political situation of the period in a volume called *Democratizaciones Plebeyas*.

The *Comuna* authors are not only scholars but also activists. Prada has a long history in organizations on the left, including Trotskyist organizations of which he has subsequently become highly critical. García Linera and Gutiérrez were each imprisoned for five years for their involvement with the *Ejército Guerrillero Tupak Katari*, a tiny Indianist-inspired guerrilla group operating from 1989 until their imprisonment along with organizational leader Felipe Quispe in 1992.¹⁹⁹ García Linera would become politically involved in a different way in the first decade of the 20th century, first as a media figure interpreting movements on television news programs, and then as vice president to Evo Morales, both elected in 2005 and still serving in their roles today.

García Linera's current position provides a retrospective angle for the current chapter: What were the political challenges, as interpreted by the *Comuna* group, that might have led to this trajectory? I pose this not to personalize or psychologize his intellectual work, but rather because, in my reading, *Comuna* places great emphasis on the heterogeneity of the movements of 2000–2002, yet by the end of that cycle,

¹⁹⁹ For a history of this group, see A. Quispe, “*Los tupakataristas revolucionarios*.” See also the Chapter 4 of this dissertation for more details on Garcia Linera's biography.

this heterogeneity presented challenges consonant with the research questions I have posed for my larger project here: Namely, what is the constituent source of power by which a political order might undergo a revolutionary shift? How is the subject of that revolution to be conceived? How might certain attempts to be faithful to, or to institutionalize constituent power preclude other potentialities or interpretations? These issues are illuminated by García Linera's turn toward the state and toward a classic strategy of hegemony as a political means for building a national-popular consensus. For this reason, it is instructive to examine García Linera's earlier theorizations of difference and collective political action, and to compare them to the work of both Zavaleta and the Argentine Gramscians discussed in Chapter 1. In *Comuna*'s early stage, I argue, the driving concept of the group's work was the multitude, which draws it near to a posthegemonic problematic. The texts from this early period therefore also provide a chance to further explore the questions implied by posthegemony's theoretical contributions: 1) How can one articulate a concept of knowledge production taking place beyond the sites of professional intellectualism? 2) How do we understand the political potential of subaltern sociality in its most immanent terms, i.e. not as representation or as a set of values? 3) Finally, what would be the possibilities of political organization if we no longer understand organization in the Gramscian frame of a party that ties together intellectuals and the masses? In order to address these I will try to highlight differences between *Comuna*'s problematic on these points and that of *Pasado y Presente* and more ambiguous positions of Zavaleta that I examined in previous chapters.

García Linera on Aricó: Marxism from Below

To begin to illustrate how *Comuna* takes distance from the theory of hegemony, I will first address a direct point of theoretical contact between *Comuna* and *Pasado y Presente*: Álvaro García Linera's 1991 essay on Marx and Latin America, "América," originally from *De demonios escondidos y momentos de revolución*, in which he poses a critique of Jose Aricó's 1980 book on the same topic, *Marx y América Latina*. Even though this falls outside the time period that I propose to examine, the details of this critique provide an apt starting point for understanding *Comuna*. The differences between the positions Aricó and García Linera are subtle, yet García Linera's response is striking for its tone of vehement opposition. The reasons for this seemingly extreme critical stance are, in my view, illustrative of the underlying difference between the conception of politics in each problematic that will carry over into the first period of *Comuna*'s work. By assessing *why* García Linera reacts so strongly to Aricó's analysis, we will better understand what is at stake in their different political and theoretical approaches.

In *Marx y América Latina*, Aricó addresses Marx's relative lack of analysis on Latin America. This lack is most notable in his famous *New American Encyclopaedia* article on Simón Bolívar, where Marx makes the *Libertador* the object of much derision.²⁰⁰ For many, this article and its apparent unfairness to an anti-colonial political figure like Bolívar are examples of Marx's supposed Eurocentrism. Aricó

²⁰⁰ Marx, "Bolívar y Ponte."

argues that this explanation is insufficient, since it does not account for the differences between Marx's disposition toward Latin America and his growing interest, over the course of his life, in other parts of the colonized world and their political struggles. Aricó proposes an alternative: Marx attacks Bolívar for his apparent similarities to France's Louis Napoleon III, who had his own pretensions in the Americas at the time, and whom Marx scorned, of course, in the 1852 essay, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. In addition to this rejection of Bolívar's political style, Aricó argues that Marx objects to Bolívar's political project because it too closely resembles the Hegelian logic of "the state as a center for the production of civil society."²⁰¹ Ironically, however, in rejecting this Hegelian conception of the state, Marx implicitly reverts to another aspect of Hegelian thought that he considered himself to have overcome: the idea of "non-historic peoples" whose histories could not be rationally analyzed. Thus, says Aricó, despite the similarity between Bolívar and Louis Napoleon III, Marx did not pursue the type of fractional and class investigation that he did in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: "In these processes [in Latin America], he could only see arbitrariness, absurdity, and ultimately, authoritarian irrationality."²⁰²

At first glance, despite the sharply polemical tone of García Linera's essay on Aricó, it is not easy to see where he actually diverges from Aricó's reading or position. García Linera recounts Marx's characterization of Bolívar in the encyclopaedia article, and then, echoing Aricó's point, writes, "It is curious to note

²⁰¹ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 44.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 45.

that in this critique of Bolívar, Marx does not bother to remark on the Bolivarian effort to construct an almost continental state structure, and he only focuses on criticizing Bolívar's despotic tendencies."²⁰³ Both authors agree, then, that Marx's failure was to forego any study of the popular or subaltern classes in their relation to these processes of independence. His analysis of Bolívar as an individual stands in for a more comprehensive historical account. García Linera writes that "Marx did not study the indigenous masses, their characteristics and their movement; the weakness of Marx's evaluation of Latin America, his incomprehension, revolves around this point."²⁰⁴ Similarly, Aricó writes:

The repudiation of Bolívar implied the existence of a trap that Marx was unable to escape from, and never even fully conscious of: a certain failure to understand events in their full complexity. It is no coincidence that, letting himself get carried away by his hatred for Bolivarian authoritarianism, understood as an 'educative' dictatorship imposed by force on the masses – apparently not yet sufficiently mature for a democratic set-up – Marx stopped short of considering what his own method had driven him to seek out other social phenomena that he analysed [sic]: the real dynamic of the struggles between classes. It is surprising that [Marx] did not pay any attention to sources relating to the attitudes of the various layers of Latin-American society prior to the wars of independence, the peasant- or rural rebellions against the creole élites at the head of the revolution, the weakness of these élites' base among the mass of the population, in particular among black and indigenous people, who tended to back the Spanish cause; the abolition of forced labour and servitude; the distinct characteristics of the wars of independence in the South, where the urban élites managed to maintain control of the process and stave off the threat of an open confrontation

²⁰³ García Linera, "América," 42. There is some inconsistency here regarding which version of each text I have cited in this and the following. This owes to the scattered republication and translation record of works by García Linera in particular, and *Comuna* more generally, as well as the varying access to the texts that I had over the course of this research. All translations here are mine where they are footnoted with the original Spanish title. Other times, where available, I have used existing translations, in which case I have cited the translated title. In each instance, however, I have included the relevant version in the bibliography, so it should be clear to the reader which version of a text I am citing if he or she uses the title as the key datum when consulting it.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

between rich and poor, as compared to Mexico, where the revolution began as a generalized rebellion by the peasantry and indigenous people; and finally, the governing class's profound fear of a process reproducing the events of Túpac Amaru's indigenous uprising or the black rebellion of Haiti.²⁰⁵

Aricó and García Linera furthermore agree that such an analysis, had it been carried out, would have lead Marx to the conclusion that South America's independence movements were not essentially popular rebellions, and that they were instead a sort of authoritarian imposition by Bolívar and other creole elites, and that, as Aricó mentions in the quote above, the masses often backed the Spanish crown. "In the other Latin-American countries [besides the exception of Cuba] 'national' constructions tended to mean a long period of a purely state-driven process," writes Aricó.²⁰⁶ García Linera asks, apparently echoing this point:

And isn't it the case that the formation of Latin American nation-states was in reality the work of some 'armies without countries' and some commercial-bureaucratic, semi-monarchic elites that, rather than creating, were limited to supporting the formation of states as a simple formal extension of their powers and local necessities?²⁰⁷

He gives his own answer elsewhere in the text: "In reality this mass energy does not appear as a generalized movement (at least not in South America); it was largely absent in the years considered by Marx."²⁰⁸

If the disagreement between Aricó and García Linera is not, on its face, a disagreement about history, or about Marx's own shortcomings in understanding that history, then what is it about? It seems to relate instead to a subtle difference in how

²⁰⁵ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 63–64.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁰⁷ García Linera, "América," 48.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

nations are conceptualized, and how these conceptualizations are attributed to Marx. Aricó writes that, in its independence period, Latin America lacked “groups of men already defined as ‘nations’ ... defined by their sense of identification with a common history via a common culture, shared ethnicity, and ... a language they could recognize as their own.”²⁰⁹ In other words, for Aricó, it was a dearth of cultural elements that made the construction of Latin American nations a state-driven process, and because it was a state-driven process, Marx did not even register its importance.²¹⁰ We can see in this claim some of the same issues that were at work in *Pasado y Presente*’s diagnosis, in their early period as followers of Héctor Agosti, that Argentina was still reeling from the failure to historically consolidate its nationhood under a hegemonic class. Lacking this, the state – and intellectuals in particular, as Aricó discusses in *La cola del diablo* – directed the process of nation formation.²¹¹ “The absence of any ‘national-popular’ will – characteristic of the creole élites leading the independence- process – set down limits to its ‘visibility’ in Marx’s eyes,” he concludes.²¹² The failure of national culture, then, was the failure of society’s elites; the strategy of a corrective cultural project under the direction of a revolutionary party, first elaborated by Agostí and then carried forward by Aricó and *Pasado y Presente*, was a corollary to this analysis.

García Linera takes issue with the view that national culture could ever be produced through a state-driven project or through any political project carried out by

²⁰⁹ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 42–43.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

²¹¹ Aricó, *La cola del diablo*, 93–100.

²¹² Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 64

cultural elites, and in doing so all but accuses Aricó of being an apologist for statism. He writes that the historical lack of culture among Latin American elites “is not a sufficient argument to think that Marx, on this basis, would have discarded the real vitality of state-constructions in America (though this wouldn’t have been wrong).”²¹³ This is because, in García Linera’s reading of Marx, it is neither the culture of elites nor the actions of the state but the participation of the masses in a “general social act” that serves as the basis for the formation of a nation, and this is what was lacking the case of Latin American independence.²¹⁴ In other words, the crux of the interpretive disagreement is whether Marx apparently disregards Latin America because of the cultural and political shortcomings of its elites (Aricó’s supposed emphasis) or because of the lack of popular political participation by other classes (García Linera’s emphasis). The underlying political disagreement is whether it is even conceivable that a state or ruling class could construct a nation from above, lacking autonomous popular initiative. Therefore, according to García Linera, when Marx notes the absence of any real nation in Latin America, he was not reverting to the Hegelian notion of peoples without a history, but making a sound observation about the paucity of popular involvement in the Bolivarian project. Any real national substance would have to come *from below* as a precursor to real state power.²¹⁵

Echoing René Zavaleta’s arguments on the shortcomings of an “apparent state” – apparent because it lacked a real national-popular basis – García Linera

²¹³ García Linera, “América,” 46–47.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

attacks the idea that the state can or should be a locus for building a nation from above. He writes:

The state for more than one hundred years has not been able to produce society as an organic whole, much less to revolutionize it; the moments of the greatest national social organization and of reform in any way are linked on the contrary to the great mass insurgent movements, to the self-organization of the society against the state; outside of these moments, and very much despite the attempts from above, the construction of the national and social reform have been nothing but a señorial, oligarchic and latifundist fiction.²¹⁶

The upshot of this point is that anyone who suggests that nation-building can take place from the state is either mistaken or authoritarian.

This would be clear enough as a critique of Aricó's position, except that Aricó explicitly eschews any defense of nation-building projects from the state. One wouldn't know this from García Linera's essay, however, because he goes so far as to *cite a quotation that does not exist in Aricó's book* in order to attribute to him the view that top-down state building projects are feasible. García Linera writes: "The recourse to authoritarianism was 'the only possibility' for organizing 'a modern nation.' 'Hegel was right and not Marx regarding the state as the producer of civil society and the nation,' concludes Aricó, taking the side that opposes Marx with a different view of reality".²¹⁷ Yet the quoted passage, "Hegel was right and not Marx

²¹⁶ García Linera, "América," 49.

²¹⁷ Ibid. García Linera writes: "En su segunda tesis, surgida a partir de la primera, Aricó afirma que Marx no llegó a entender la realidad latinoamericana porque no vio (¡imagínense, no vio!) la necesidad de un fuerte poder centralizado que promoviera el progreso económico de una nación geográficamente extendida pues las masas y su participación 'eran vistas' con más capacidad destructiva que constructiva. El recurso al autoritarismo era 'la única posibilidad' de organización de 'una nación moderna'. 'Hegel tenía razón y no Marx en cuanto al Estado como productor de la sociedad civil y la nación', concluye Aricó, tomando partido por una forma de ver la realidad contraria a Marx." I have been unable to locate any instance of the phrase "Hegel tenía razón" in a recent edition of Aricó's book. The recent edition is based on the second edition, which is the one that García Linera lists as a

regarding the state as the producer of civil society and the nation” simply does not appear anywhere in *Marx y América Latina*. On the contrary, Aricó criticizes anyone on the left who would make use of Marx’s supposed Eurocentrism to justify an authoritarian path to national-popular will in Latin America. He seems to have in mind, for example, the argument that would justify the authoritarian aspects of Peronism by saying that individual political liberty is a foreign ideal or European imposition that does not apply in the post-colonial world. The result of this view, Aricó says, has been “an ever-worse fragmentation of left-wing thought, divided between accepting authoritarianism as an inevitable cost of any process of mass democratization, or else seeing elite liberalism as the only possible means of bringing about a new society, even at the cost of losing mass support.”²¹⁸ Instead, Aricó proposes an alternative conclusion that acknowledges the extent to which the formation of Latin American nations was a state-led process but also criticizes the idea that this is a desirable or politically progressive phenomenon for socialism or the workers’ movement:

Even though it is undeniable that the process of constituting Latin America’s nation-states was carried out largely on the backs of the mass of the population, against their will, to question the view held so dear by the Second International (and not only them) as to the *in nuce* progressive character of the development of the productive forces and state-formation, essentially means encountering afresh Marxism’s mass, democratic core. This is to introduce a new starting point, a new perspective ‘from below’ of historical processes, in which consideration of the masses, their movements of composition and fragmentation, the forms of their internal heterogeneity, their myths and

reference for all his quotations from Aricó, and it does not advertise any textual alterations from the original. Unfortunately, García Linera does not provide a page number for this supposed quotation, however my search for the quote leads me to believe that this is because it does not exist.

²¹⁸ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 67.

values, their degree of subordination or autonomy, must be held up as the only true Marxist criterion.²¹⁹

It strikes me as all but impossible to honestly come away from Aricó's text with the impression that he was defending a project of state-led construction of the nation or of a revolution from above. While he notes the lack of popular initiative in the formation of Latin American nation states – a point that García Linera also emphasizes – he does not endorse the state as an instrument of political change, but proposes to turn the lens back on the masses as a way to revitalize Marxism. Thus, to avoid the conclusion that García Linera was simply dishonest, I have to conclude that he was gravely mistaken in his reading. Given that copies of Aricó's *Marx y América Latina* were not easy to obtain prior to recent re-editions of the text, García Linera may have been working from memory when writing his article.²²⁰ In that case, it is possible to imagine that García Linera was working off of notes that did not clearly discern his own comments from textual quotations by Aricó, leading to the misattribution. In any event, given that the whole argument boils down at best to a slight difference in theoretical emphasis and not an obvious political disagreement, we might still ask: why the investment in polemicizing against Aricó at all?

The answer, in my view, is that notwithstanding the closeness of their theoretical positions, García Linera reads into Aricó's writings a political orientation drawn from the latter's actual practice in the eleven years between *Marx y América Latina* and García's *De demonios escondidos*. That is, García Linera wants to attack

²¹⁹ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 67–68.

²²⁰ Oscar Vega Camacho (author, member of *Comuna*), in discussion with the author, La Paz, July 2016.

what he takes to be a practical political conclusion of Aricó's theoretical position: culture-oriented political activism from a position of state power. Though Aricó explicitly rejects the notion of "élite liberalism as the only possible means of bringing about a new society," he in fact became an advisor to the liberal elites who were charged with Argentina's transition to electoral democracy in the 1980s.²²¹ What is in question, then, is the role of the intellectual as a producer of hegemony that I discussed at length in Chapter 1. For García Linera, to even suggest that it is *possible* for states to revolutionize or build a nation through a process of cultural change is to give ground to a top-down notion of politics that looks for shortcuts around the autonomous power of the masses. Theoretically, the entire prospect has to be forcefully ruled out, and for García Linera, Aricó's ambiguity in suggesting that the state had produced a nation, even as this was explicitly not a normative claim for him, was an open door for his ascension into the realm of the state.

My argument on this point is admittedly somewhat speculative. But at the most basic level, I am using the strange symptomatic characteristics of García Linera's discourse in "América" to point out that there is some fundamental aversion to Aricó, which marks the distance of their problematics. If this aversion is ironic in retrospect, given García Linera's current role as Bolivian vice president, it nonetheless speaks to the distance between their theoretical frames of reference in a formative moment of García Linera's theoretical career. Whatever happened later, García Linera's early works tended to reject the centrality of the state as well as the

²²¹ Aricó, *Marx and Latin America*, 67.

role of the intellectual as an ideological leader, and to emphasize instead the autonomous practices and knowledge productions of subaltern classes.

A Rejection of the Old Bolivian Left

One central feature of *Comuna*'s theoretical efforts is the desire to distance themselves from certain historical tendencies of Marxism. García Linera's critique of Aricó is just one example of this. They did not attempt to draw away from Marxism altogether, however, but rather to redefine it in order to forge stronger theoretical and political tools for understanding their present. This is clear from the beginning of the group's existence; their first published collaborative work in 1999 is titled *El fantasma insomne: Pensando el presente desde el manifiesto comunista* [The Unsleeping Specter: Thinking the Present from the Communist Manifesto]. That same year, García Linera also published his account of the structure of the Bolivian working class *Reproletarianización: Nueva clase obrera y desarrollo del capital industrial en Bolivia (1952–1998)* [Re-proletarianization: The New Working Class and the Development of Industrial Capital in Bolivia (1952–1998)]. Both of these texts emphasized the specificity of the authors' conjuncture while attempting to reinvigorate Marxist theory to that end. In these works, and in others, we can begin to understand the conceptual differences that *Comuna* proposes with regard to older tendencies of the Bolivian Left.

In his historical account of the Bolivian working class in *Reproletarianización*, García Linera argues against a reading of this history in terms

of what he calls a “philosophy of consciousness.” He rejects the view, put forth by the influential Trotskyist activist Guillermo Lora, that the limitations of the working class in the course and aftermath of Bolivia’s 1952 revolution were the result of a subjective shortcoming rather than the constraints of material circumstance. He writes:

The astonishment of the armed workers seeing the consequences of their collective insolence and their inability to translate it into power, into social leadership, even when there was no one else to force them into obedience, has a stronger explanatory basis in the material characteristics of labor and in workers’ symbolic representations forged since the 1930s than in the political idealism that explains real occurrences simply through ideas, or worse, through those ideas that are publicly manifest (or the lack of ideas, of ‘consciousness,’ of the ‘party’, etc.).²²²

He links this method of historical explanation links to Bolivia’s relatively robust brand of Trotskyism, which emphasizes the “public manifestation” of ideas in both its mode of historical analysis and its political practice. The high point for the Trotskyist approach was when the miners’ union, the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB), adopted a document written by Guillermo Lora and others in the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) in 1946, called the *Tesis de Pulacayo*:

[The approach of Guillermo Lora] reduces the history of the workers’ movement to the verification, established in advance by the *Theses of Pulacayo*, of the “gaining of revolutionary consciousness” by the proletariat through its public declarations. In this way, workers’ history is converted into a struggle among ideas, through proclamations and mobilizing slogans, pamphlets and political declarations. Absent from this view is the material structure of the class, the relations of power inside of workplaces as a vital

²²² García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 190–91.

point from which workers' and capitalists' identities form, with both potentials and limitations.²²³

As a method of explanation, the philosophy of consciousness clearly characterizes Lora's multi-volume *History of the Bolivian Working Class* (1977).²²⁴ And indeed, S. Sándor John's history of Bolivian Trotskyism, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition* (2009), although highly informative and useful as a historical reference, displays the same critical deficiency: the author has a constant temptation to hold history as it unfolded to how it *should have* unfolded had Bolivian workers and Trotskyists been sufficiently aware of what Trotsky himself would have done – that is, if they had simply possessed the *correct ideas*.²²⁵

For García Linera, a class is not characterized by its ideas but by the material relationships among its members and with other classes. Insofar as culture, knowledge, or ideas are in play, they have to be considered as part of the class's material structure, i.e., its organizations, its habitus, and its practices. Their importance, furthermore, is not as the verification of an ideal, but as a starting point for understanding the historically specific potentials of the class.

In his early work, García Linera opposes class consciousness to material composition time and again. And insofar as García Linera refers to consciousness, this concept does not mean the possession of correct ideas, but political patterns formed on the basis of material practices. Writing on the limitations of the working class in the 1952 revolution, this time in his 2001 book *La condición obrera*, he says:

²²³ García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 174.

²²⁴ Lora, *A History of the Bolivian Labour Movement*.

²²⁵ John, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition*.

The “movementist deception,” apparently permitted by the absence of the party, or the angry denunciation of the “lack” of socialist consciousness, does not explain why those same workers that approved a set of “socialist theses” [*Theses of Pulacayo*] later led a “national petit bourgeois” government; what it cannot explain is *what kind of knowledge and consciousness* brought these workers to feel represented, without anyone obliging them to obey, by that group of governing officials for so long, which even after several decades continued to appear as the emblem of the workers’ most deep-rooted political identity.²²⁶

Here, García Linera raises the question the of *form* that knowledge takes, rather than the content of workers’ collective consciousness, which, of course, is highly variable over time and by no means homogenous in any given moment. He asks: in the case of Bolivia, how is this form of knowledge linked to a history of representative institutions which have structured existing workers organizations? How are workers’ ideas and horizons of possibility linked to the state as a locus for workers’ political lives? And how did these historical and institutional relationships lead to the specific outcomes of worker mobilization in the wake of the 1952 revolution?

In this case, they are the material relations of power, of subordination, of dispossession, fragmentation and workplace obedience lived during decades in the shops that constitute an entire space of practical dispositions and symbolic representations among the dominated, which later will act as a material force that must reproduce, with the naturalness of common sense, the symbolic orders of permitted domination.²²⁷

That is, García Linera proposes to study class history by examining the way that classes are enmeshed in circuits of production and reproduction with specific consequences for what they are able to do, able to know, where their allegiances are, and how they practice politics. And as we see here, to the extent that representations

²²⁶ García Linera, *La condición obrera*, 20. Emphasis added.

²²⁷ García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 190.

to have explanatory value, they are grounded and circulated within an order of both power and social reproduction. Thus, it is one thing for workers to agree to a declaration in favor of socialist ideas, but it is another for them to think of the achievement of those goals through one's own agency rather than the agency of the state. While the Trotskyist tradition in Bolivia values the former, it did not, according to García Linera, have the theoretical resources to pose questions about the latter.

Here, we are broaching the issues of working class knowledge and culture. But these issues do not arise for García Linera by asking what intellectuals can do to guide the working class, as in a certain notion of hegemony. Instead, he poses the question: What practical and material resources do subaltern classes possess, and how can those resources be articulated together within this heterogeneous mass in a politically generative way? And how might intellectuals play a role in this process without presuming to lead it?

Knowledge, History, and Struggle in the Bolivian Multitude

When considering knowledge or consciousness as a set of material practices immanent to the multitude, there are two key historical traditions that *Comuna* draws upon: a class-oriented tradition, and an *indianista* tradition. These two histories have both intellectual and political valances. In this section, I will continue to focus on García Linera, since among the members of *Comuna* he provides the most sophisticated analysis of the history of class in Bolivia. However, I will shortly

supplement my explanation of his arguments with theoretical contributions of the other members of the group.

Collective Intelligence, Class Composition

A key concept for understanding García Linera's view of class and of immanent knowledge is class composition. We have already encountered this idea in Chapter 2, where I linked it to Zavaleta's reading of the tendencies of composition and decomposition within capitalism. Here, we can further specify and explore its development in the work of *Comuna*.

García Linera begins to focus on class composition in lieu of what he calls a *juridical* view of class relations, which he considers “an authentic epistemological barrier” to understanding contemporary capitalism.²²⁸ He opposes the legalistic notion of property as personal possession to his own understanding of relations of production conceived in terms of power. He describes the latter this way:

Property, in any form, is exercised as a suppression of other forms of property, as the exclusion of other potential property-holders; it is the legitimation of a power of control and a power of use on the part of some determined members of the collectivity and of the institutionalized defenselessness against these powers by other members.²²⁹

Relations of power and exclusion are therefore central to property, and these relations constitute class differences. An excessively juridical understanding can obscure this.

It can also, by reducing property relations to a flat set of legal categories, miss the

²²⁸ García Linera, “¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?,” 94.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

variety and *heterogeneity* of class relations that emerge based on different positions and exclusions vis-a-vis this power relationship.

Drawing on both Zavaleta and Antonio Negri, García Linera therefore advances the concept of class composition as a key support for his own historical analyses. The benefit of this concept is that it links the economic structure of a class to its ideological or cultural characteristics and to its political potentials.

As Salar Mohandesi explains in a recent study of the concept of class composition, the concept was first developed in the context of Italian workerism to fill a lacuna in the problematic of class consciousness – which, as I have signaled here in my above discussion of Bolivian Trotskyism, is likewise an impetus for García Linera’s work.²³⁰ The concept of class itself has an ambiguity, dating to Marx, in that it expresses both a political dimension and an economic or structural dimension. The basic issue that the concept of class composition seeks to resolve is “the relationship between forms of struggle and forms of production,” and it does this by examining the way that members of the class relate to one another both inside and outside the workplace and linking this to different political possibilities that might be produced by those relationships.²³¹ As García Linera puts it, “The material class condition functions as an infinite but delimited material condition of possibility for political, cultural, and symbolic composition.”²³² At the same time, class composition implies that these possibilities are not fixed. If they are “delimited” by specific historical

²³⁰ See Salar Mohandesi, “Class Consciousness or Class Composition?”

²³¹ Kolinko, “Paper on Class Composition,” n.p.

²³² García Linera, *La condición obrera*, ch. 4.

circumstances, they are “infinite” because a class acting as a political subject also acts reflexively. It changes its own composition. Thus, says García Linera, “the symbolic, cultural, and political class field has the ability to produce, attenuate, contain, or provoke modifications in the class condition, to the extent that it is the group of powers or weaknesses with which the class is subjectively situated in the world and acts objectively upon the world.”²³³ In short, analyzing class composition means grasping the economic or technical organization of a class – its relationship to processes of production and social reproduction – in order to draw conclusions about the its possible political organization. García Linera’s specific variation on the concept also highlights the mediating role of habits and symbolic structures comprised by a class’s material culture.

Another key concept that links technical composition to political composition for García Linera is subsumption. This involves changes in the relationship between capital and the various pools of labor power that it finds available as it expands. In particular, subsumption functions to give account of the effects of capital’s extension into new sectors, industries, or locations, shaping subaltern classes in the process.

García Linera explains it this way:

To speak of capital is to speak then of the refiguring of the world as a whole for its dominion, and of the always growing, but always incomplete, domination of trade, transportation, production, knowledge, imagination, enjoyment, and consumption by the owners of capital, be it in external formal terms, or material and real terms.²³⁴

²³³ García Linera, *La condición obrera*, ch. 4.

²³⁴ García Linera, “¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?,” 57.

It is evident here that for García Linera subsumption is not only related to the sphere of production. His mention of imagination, enjoyment, consumption, and knowledge suggest that activities taking place outside the workplace are also affected by capital's domination. Despite its capacity to affect these many spheres of social life, however, capitalist subsumption is not a linear, teleological, or frictionless process. The contingent outcomes of capital's efforts to subordinate social life to its power are "a result of the correlation of forces between labor and capital, it is a historical becoming between material mechanisms of the subordination of labor and material mechanisms of the insubordination of labor."²³⁵ In this sense, processes of subsumption are also sites of class struggle, which, in turn, compel changes in capitalist production processes and modes of discipline and exploitation :

The study of the forms of the organization of production, of technological change, of the indices of productivity, of labor disciplining mechanisms, is therefore the study of the material means by which labor is subordinated to the valorization of capital and of resistances, illusions and escapes from this subordination, that will once again bring capital looking for new forms of technology and organization to co-opt the attempts at autonomy and bring new forms of exploitation of workers, and at the same time, new forms of resistance in an endless and multiform struggle in each moment of the productive process.²³⁶

Again, we can see here how the concept of subsumption helps link the political composition of a class to its technical composition, i.e., its structure in relation to the means of labor and means of consumption. For a clearer view of how García Linera theorizes these relationships, and of how they offer a material alternative to thinking of a class in terms of its ideas, we can examine his historical account of Bolivian class

²³⁵ García Linera, "¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?," 60.

²³⁶ García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 186–187.

composition in “¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?” from *El Fantasma Insomne*, and in *Reproletarianización* and *La Condición Obrera*.

History and Technical Composition of the Bolivian Proletariat

According to Mohandesi, “Technical composition refers to the particular ways in which labor-power is divided, managed, and, ultimately, exploited.”²³⁷ For García Linera, echoing Antonio Negri – though not citing him on this point – the key idea for an analysis of technical composition of the Bolivian working class in the 20th century is the global capitalist crisis of Fordism-Taylorism and the welfare state in the early 1970s, caused by the struggles of the laboring classes. What began as a crisis of overaccumulation, writes García Linera, worsened when attempts to intensify production and to discipline workers exacerbated the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.²³⁸ García Linera does not provide an in-depth account of this worldwide tendency; however, his main point is that capital’s need to overcome these changes led to a restructuring of labor processes and the organic composition of capital – the relative proportions of its human and non-human components – resulting in the regime now known as neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, in this view, is global in scope. It is a worldwide project taken up by capitalists as a whole. But its particularities are articulated at the regional, national, and local levels. Still drawing on Italian workerism, García Linera argues

²³⁷ Mohandesi, “Class Consciousness or Class Composition?,” 85.

²³⁸ García Linera, “¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?,” 83.

that the post-World War II Bolivian working class was characterized by a hybrid between what has been called the *skilled worker*, whose personal knowledge of the production process gives them a degree of control over its flow, and the *mass worker*, who is made more easily replaceable through technological advances in industrial production that de-skill labor.²³⁹ The reason for this peculiar combination was political: the balance of class forces following the 1952 national-popular revolution was manifest as “cogobierno,” in which the state, dominated by the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR) relied on the main trade-union federation, the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), for its governing power. In this context, García Linera argues, attempts to implement an import-substitution industrialization (ISI) model in Bolivia were subject to the demands of the workers movement.²⁴⁰ The ISI model, which generally involves a considerable investment in manufacturing technology at the expense of primary exports, met opposition from the most organized and powerful workers, concentrated in extractive industries; the state, functioning at this time as a collective capitalist, had no choice but to oblige them. Thus, industrial production never really took hold as an outlet for Bolivian capital, and the skilled miners retained an outsized importance within the broader working class as a whole.

García Linera offers this historical account in opposition to those who argue that Bolivian import-substitution foundered because of the national bourgeoisie’s

²³⁹ See Federici and Montano, “Theses on the Mass Worker and Social Capital,” for a more detailed explanation of these terms.

²⁴⁰ García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 183.

“failure to complete its tasks” and its absence of class consciousness. This assumption relies on a narrow model of capitalist development and sees industrial production, and the development of the mass worker as a natural stage in the development of capitalism. Instead, the bourgeoisie were forced, according to this analysis of class composition, by the concentration of workers in extractive industries and their advanced level of political organization, to find profitability in a regime of “semi-industrialization.”²⁴¹

The historical analysis here also opens onto the question of knowledge. Real subsumption, that is, the technical re-organization of the production process in order to better meet the conditions in which capital can be valorized, has direct effects on the forms in which knowledge is embodied, since the relationship between workers and machines gets re-articulated through technical innovation. This played out in Bolivia as capitalists tried to find profits in the post-1952 context. Since they could not redirect investment to manufacturing because of resistance from miners, they tried to make mining more efficient instead, establishing large mining towns and concentrating capital there. Real subsumption took its course:

An institutionalization of the model of industrial development began that tended toward the economic growth and accumulation *based on the knowledges and rhythms of workers concentrated in machines*, on a detailed control of the pace of labor and, on strict, monotonous and clearly-differentiated functions.²⁴²

García Linera is pointing to a dual process at the levels of knowledge and discipline.

Knowledge is concentrated in material technologies on the one hand – a change in

²⁴¹ García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 183.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 184. Emphasis added.

productive forces tending toward the socialization of production – and a de-skilled workers face new forms of disciplining on the other.

García Linera discusses the process taking place at the level of knowledge in terms of the development *general social intellect*, as knowledge is materially incorporated into the organization of the labor process:

Slowly, the “general social intellect” is postulated as the most important productive force in social labor, and not simply as one more branch of the division of labor; rather, also as an organizational fact of production and in the very form of social existence of labor power in the interior of the production process.²⁴³

The implication here is that technical knowledge, rather than being situated in the worker him or herself, or even held by an intellectual worker in the technical division of labor, is manifest in the way that labor is organized. “Knowledge is converted into a direct or conditioning productive force in the production process,” writes García Linera.²⁴⁴ Knowledge, in this sense, is socialized through the practices of efficient production made possible by technological innovation. Technology is social knowledge objectified – social precisely because in its role as part of the production process it creates forms of cooperation and interaction across both time and space.

The socialization of knowledge however means that individual workers have less technical skill, and therefore less control over the labor process. They also must accustom themselves to its new rhythms and requirements, approximating mere appendages of a machine, as Marx once put it. This objective concentration of knowledge in constant capital is also an act of class struggle:

²⁴³ García Linera, “¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?,” 78.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

At the same time, [the productive forces] rise to grab workers' knowledges and deposit them in the machine, in order to subdue labor resistance, to demolish the conquests and organizational efforts of the proletariat, to increase the intensity and volume of unpaid work appropriated by capital.²⁴⁵

Generally, in other words, under real subsumption, the amount of surplus value extracted goes up as workers' individual access to technical knowledge and their ability to resist capital goes down. However, García Linera points out that this is not a uniform process, and depends, in turn on the balance of class forces. Because workers' organizations were strong in Bolivia after 1952, "it cannot be said that Fordist-Taylorist norms were applied in a generalized way, even in the large industrial shops."²⁴⁶ Technical knowledge was not completely socialized, as is the tendency in the Taylorist management of labor, and workers possessed, overall, considerable power over the process of production: "This is a worker who no longer works with artisanal techniques but industrial ones, but these are *subordinate* to the skill of the worker's body, to his movements and his personalized know-how, which has not been able to be incorporated in the machine's motions."²⁴⁷ This is important for considerations on political composition and the way that Bolivian workers were able to act as a collective subject during this period.

Political and Cultural Composition

All of these process of technical organization condition the political possibilities and forms that are available to workers. In his historical analysis, García

²⁴⁵ García Linera, "¿Es el *Manifiesto Comunista* un arcaísmo político, un recuerdo literario?," 71.

²⁴⁶ García Linera, *Reproletarianización*, 184.

²⁴⁷ García Linera, "Los ciclos históricos," 154.

Linera addresses the key political habits and organizational structures that prevailed in Bolivia from 1952 onward. This analysis will also bear on his understanding of the present, insofar as the political possibilities in the late 1990s and early 2000s were shaped by the decomposition of the political forms of the previous period.

With the extreme concentration of capital in large mining towns, workers would associate daily both within and outside the workplace. This served as the basis for a strong and unified union movement, whose power stemmed from the fact that once individual unions were federated, they could effectively shut down the country's most profitable industry with the coordination of just several workplaces.²⁴⁸ For Bolivian elites, the appeasement of workers was important in order to be able to continue to deliver goods to the world market. In this sense the technical development of large-scale mining created a new political tool for Bolivian workers.

On a political level, we see in the union structure a parallel development to the incorporation of a general social intellect on the technical level. The forms of political organization, and political demands, were structured as a sort of knowledge, or a set of habits, in the union apparatus and its forms of political action. This included, according to García Linera, the very practice of making demands on the state: the horizon of these demands was a larger share of the surplus generated in production. Strikes and mass marches were the primary repertoires for posing these demands – although lurking in the background, at least after 1952, was the possibility that organized workers could always take up arms.

²⁴⁸ García Linera, *La condición obrera*, 55.

Political composition is part of original concept of class composition, but García Linera offers an additional dimension to his own analysis: cultural composition. The idea is to link the development of class cultural characteristics with the technical composition of the class. For instance, the fact that mining in Bolivia was still skilled labor, against the global trend, made workers less expendable to their employers than they might have been in another context. This meant that they were generally hired on a fixed contract and that there was a ladder of promotions as workers gained more experience. This, in turn, created informal apprenticeship relations between older and younger workers, which in addition to being a means of transmitting technical knowledge, became a mechanism for retaining historical memory whereby political and social experiences were transmitted across generations and accumulated in the class itself over time.²⁴⁹ García Linera writes:

The so-called “accumulation in the heart of the class” [as Zavaleta called it], is not a merely discursive fact; it is above all a collective mental structure rooted as a general culture with the ability to reserve itself or amplify itself; the possibility of what we have called the *internal narrative of the class* and the presence of a physical space of *continuity and sedimentation* of collective experience were the symbolic and transcendent conditions of possibility for the collective worker, on which moments of proletarian political identity could constitute themselves among miners, as occurred in the revolution of 1952, the resistance to military dictatorships, and the reconquest of parliamentary democracy²⁵⁰

He is suggesting here that cultural features, like collective historical narratives and a political identities – even the ability to construct historical narratives and political identities – are grounded, if indirectly, in a technical structure of production. The

²⁴⁹ García Linera, “Los ciclos históricos,” 154–55.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

centrality of Bolivian miners in the narrative of Bolivian history, for instance, owes not simply to the fact that their slogans achieved the status of a floating signifier representing a larger chain of equivalence, as one might describe the process in the language of Laclau and Mouffe, but because the miners were situated at key strategic points in the system of production, had a historical repertoire of forms of protest at their disposal, and had a sense of autonomy owing to their technical competency. Nonetheless, García Linera does not suggest a mechanistic reduction of the cultural to the economic. His point is that these economic features were overdetermining conditions shaping for the development of symbolic structures and systems of habit in the class.

The importance of recounting this historical analysis for my own argument is, first, to establish the materially grounded notions of culture and knowledge in *Comuna*'s problematic more generally. This general theoretical orientation is central to their oeuvre. Additionally, however, this historical analysis shows how the decomposition of the Bolivian working class in the 1980s forms the basis for theorizing *Comuna*'s present, in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a heterogeneous and fragmented context from which the multitude arises as a new political subject. The onset of neoliberal policies in 1985 in Bolivia meant, among other changes, the breakup and privatization of large mines. Suddenly, the entire technical basis for workers' power in Bolivia fell apart: thousands of workers were laid off and "resettled," and the old political repertoires – the habits, knowledges, and practices that structured political identities and action – were not tenable anymore.

That is, at least not in the same way as before. In the theoretical problematic under examination here, the decomposition of a particular set of political and technical class characteristics is not viewed as a permanent decomposition of the working class itself. In fact, the autonomous potential for social struggle can never disappear if the history of these struggles is materially inscribed in the habits and dispositions of the members of the working class. This is not an idealization of the class, but a recognition that half a century of political experience does not evaporate even when the workplaces and forms of organization in which it was embodied are fragmented. Every change to the technical composition of production unleashes its own set of what García Linera calls *counterfinalities*, potentials of autonomous socialization and political organization that can be turned against the forces that give rise to them. In the case of Bolivia, the breaking up of old mines and the resettlement of the miners actually opened the door to a dissemination of the years of union organizing experience by those workers. This happened, among other places, in the Chapare region of Bolivia among coca growers, and the union movement among those growers was the foundation for the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), the party which brought Morales and García Linera to power. The main point here is that in the problematic of *Comuna*, political struggle is a continuous, irrepressible process grounded in material circuits of production and reproduction, however they are structured. Past configurations of the class mark future political potentials.

The Centrality of Struggle

The immanent potential for struggle that García Linera reads into the concept of class is also on display in *Comuna*'s commentaries on Marx and Engels in *El fantasma insomne* (1999). For Raquel Gutiérrez, the constant presence of antagonism within a shifting strategic field is the key insight of the *Communist Manifesto*. In making this point, she takes issue with a definition of capitalism that reduces it to a relation of class rule without considering that the rule of those at the top is always in question from below. Oppression and exploitation never remain uncontested. The impulse toward autonomous class struggle by the proletariat, rather than the secure domination of the ruling class, is the central feature of the capitalist mode of production. If, as Raul Prada argues in his contribution to *El fantasma insomne*, Marx was able to grasp the self-revolutionizing quality of capitalism, Gutiérrez emphasizes that this owes not to the revolutionary quality of the bourgeoisie, nor to an arbitrary boom in technical innovation, but to the specific kinds of antagonism that become possible within this mode of production.

Prada focuses on Marx and Engels' key epistemological insight. In his view, this is that capitalism is an object of knowledge that is constantly in motion. In articulating this, argues Prada, Marx opens up a still-contemporary episteme in which the notions of the disappearance of the subject and the disappearance of the object can be understood well before these became prominent themes in late 20th century philosophy.²⁵¹ In this sense, "the *Communist Manifesto* is the most lucid testimony of

²⁵¹ Prada, "El *Manifiesto comunista* en los confines del capitalismo tardío," 65–66.

nascent capitalism and the most intense reading in its moment of the experience of modernity.”²⁵² This constant flux, including the appearance and disappearance of subjects of politics and objects of inquiry, is a product of the intensive class struggle characterizing capitalism, according to Prada. The turbulence of modernity sits atop the fissures opened by these conflicts. “The concept of *class struggle* does not only express the contradiction, the opposition of parts, the antagonism of interests, confrontations of social strata, rather it expresses the dynamic character of this struggle, which constitutes classes themselves,” he writes.²⁵³ The counter-intuitive character of this point is worth emphasizing: In the fast-moving and uneven space of capitalism, class struggle therefore conceptually *precedes the classes that it engages*.

In her contribution to *El fantasma insomne*, Gutiérrez continues this line of thought, taking seriously Marx and Engels’ proposition that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” For her, this means that history is not linear and that it never constitutes a closed totality, but can only be grasped as “class struggle, as active generation and regeneration of the open field of possibilities, materially founded upon what exists.”²⁵⁴ Her point in emphasizing this is to undercut any kind of evolutionism or simple determinism; class struggle cannot be conceived as the successive movement of one class over another in the construction respective modes of production. In this sense, the stagism that was historically prevalent in the official Communist movement in Latin America is

²⁵² Prada, “El *Manifiesto comunista* en los confines del capitalismo tardío,” 75.

²⁵³ Ibid., 39. Emphasis in original.

²⁵⁴ Gutiérrez, “Leer el *Manifiesto* 150 años después,” 16.

displaced by what Bruno Bosteels calls the “actuality of communism,” which he reads into the work of García Linera and Gutiérrez: “The key concept in this regard is not the orthodox one of stages and transitions in a linear dialectical periodization but rather that of the different aleatory sequences of the communist hypothesis in a strictly immanent determination.”²⁵⁵ Capitalism’s revolutionary potential in this regard is not that of the bourgeoisie, but is found in the constant throwing up of conditions, of aleatory links, of unpredictably activated potentials in the movement of struggle.

In rejecting the stagist understanding of history, Gutiérrez is also rejecting the notion the capitalist class rule represents a progressive development. “We should register what the bourgeoisie does, and before qualifying it or adjectivalizing it, understand the internal logic of its actions and the means by which it undertakes in each historical period new totalizing movements of social becoming,” she writes.²⁵⁶ Capitalism should be analyzed, not judged according to a historicist schema of progress. The imperative here is strategic before all else, situated on one side of an irreducible struggle: the actions of the ruling class need to be understood if they are to be opposed. What is at stake when Gutiérrez argues against qualifying bourgeois society as progressive? She cites Ellen Meiksins Wood’s commentary on the *Manifesto* as an example of the view of capitalism that she opposes. For Wood, the key to understanding the *Manifesto* is that Marx saw the bourgeoisie as a progressive class whose rule was something to be desired, but which also carried

²⁵⁵ Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 233.

²⁵⁶ Gutiérrez, “Leer el *Manifesto* 150 años después,” 18.

contradictions.²⁵⁷ In following what she takes to be Marx's view, Wood argues that the positive historical contributions of the bourgeoisie would be undercut by their own destructive tendency toward internal competition. This results, in this reading, in an opposition between democratic political relations and oppressive economic relations. Gutiérrez sees in Wood's commentary a whiggish notion of history that cedes too much to the ruling class and ignores the role of the proletariat as the main force of antagonism within capitalism. Furthermore, Wood defends the orthodox view that the other key contradiction of capitalism, after that between abstract political freedom and economic oppression, is between the productive forces and the relations of production. This suggests that only when capitalism's technological development has reached a certain point can private property come into question. Wood concludes from this that "a socialist revolution would be most likely to succeed in the context of a more advanced capitalism," and goes so far as to suggest that the Bolsheviks ignored this lesson from Marx at their own peril.²⁵⁸ It is not difficult to see why the Bolivian theorists would reject this reading of Marx, as it would relegate them to the margins of history in the name of a teleological expectation. The implied mechanistic connection implied between politics and economics stands at odds with the imperative to consider the contingent class relationships in a given context on their own terms, which is precisely what Gutiérrez and the other *Comuna* theorists propose.

²⁵⁷ Wood, "The *Communist Manifesto* After 150 Years," n.p.

²⁵⁸ Wood, "The *Communist Manifesto* After 150 Years," n.p.

Gutiérrez also dispels the notion that the proletariat is a homogenous subject in Marx's writings, identifiable with, say, industrial factory workers. She argues that Marx's lesson is rather to find "potentialities of class struggle in the middle of that unstable and changing field" of capitalism, in whatever form they appear.²⁵⁹ She writes that when Marx suggests that "only the proletariat" is revolutionary, we need to understand the spirit of this claim as a reference to "living labor" more generally:²⁶⁰

If we have been unable to understand the "proletariat" beyond the manner in which Marx understood and described it, that is, as men and women subject to the wage relation with another individual owner of means of production, or if we have been unable to offer a comprehensive definition that grasps the proletariat, as that social group that is continually and radically dispossessed of any other possibility of securing its own reproduction besides entering into the circuits of capital's valorization; if we have not done this, it is not Marx's problem, but ours. It is very clear that Marx never needed to "add" revolutionary subjects to his groundbreaking argument in the *Manifesto*, because he was permanently scrutinizing reality with a critical eye, evidenced in his later interest in agrarian communities, in non-capitalist relations that were gradually becoming subject to the rationality of capital.²⁶¹

The main idea here is that the proletariat is defined by its struggle, rather than by a reduction to a juridical position vis-a-vis private property, or to a pre-defined positions in the production process. Radical dispossession is the basis for any number of emergent modes of subsistence within capitalism, whose articulations vary. As production processes and juridical regimes change within capitalism, struggle emerges in new locations; to understand capitalism – and to understand the revolutionary subject internal to it – is to search out these points of antagonism.

²⁵⁹ Gutiérrez, "Leer el *Manifesto* 150 años después," 24.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 25.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

Gutiérrez's reading of Marx lends itself to understanding political subjectivity in heterogeneous terms. On the one hand, this may appear to muddy the waters with regard to the specificity of capitalism. Living labor, unlike the industrial proletariat, is not a term specific to the analysis of capitalism in Marx. Similarly, by refusing to engage with the supposedly progressive political achievements of bourgeois democracy, one might charge Gutiérrez of ignoring a historical development that makes capitalism distinct from other historical modes of production. Yet what both Gutiérrez and Prada point out is that class struggle within capitalism is less characterized by specific forms than by a certain dynamism that produces new subjects and antagonisms all the time. These antagonisms and their conditions are not reducible to one or two primary contradictions that can be used to grasp the entirety of capitalism in all its forms or in every concrete instance. What is more important is to note that the terrain of these struggles is constantly changing, a historical novelty in its own right.

This search for the points of struggle, and a theorizing of capitalism from those points, will set the stage for the discussion of the multitude that *Comuna* begins following the eruption of mass movements in Bolivia in 2000. The fact that many of those movements will be rooted in indigeneity rather than a self-conscious discourse of class will therefore not deter *Comuna* from theorizing their revolutionary potential.

Material Indigenous Knowledges

After the “jornadas de abril” in which both the *Guerra del agua* and the Aymara *bloqueos* in the Altiplano emerged as the most notable protest events in two decades, *Comuna* released the second collaborative book under their own imprint. *El retorno de la Bolivia plebeya* focused on these emergent movements, as well as the histories that informed them. The dual task of assessing the novelty of these movements but also understanding their history opened the door to a re-assessment of Bolivia’s past of indigenous struggle. The resultant conceptualizations of indigenous political practices and material knowledges would add another layer to the history that García Linera had begun to theorize with regard to the working class. As the apparent possibility for a fundamental break with the neoliberal order and its regime of political representation in Bolivia grew – emerging with the demand for a constituent assembly during the Water War – these questions of history and composition would come to bear directly on the issue of constituent power. Who would be the subject capable of challenging the legitimacy of the existing order? And how would its own legitimacy or authority be subsequently established? *Comuna*’s historical and theoretical focus signaled the importance of sometimes obscure historical potentialities in any given articulation of constituent power.

In “La hermenéutica de la violencia” (2000), Prada discusses the colonial history of Bolivia, arguing that the forms of domination that were established during the Iberian conquest of the Americas formed a substrate on which capitalism and the contemporary state are situated:

The *gamonal* [colonial authority] disappears but not his shadows. It is through these specters that once again colonial domination is rearticulated; and not for this reason is it any less real. The reality of colonialism has little to do with the presence or absence of the *gamonal*, but rather with diagram of relations of domination.²⁶²

Pointing to the continuing weight of colonial history on contemporary relationships of power, Prada's understanding approximates what Anibal Quijano has called the coloniality of power. Structures like race, international economic dependence, and internal fragmentation of the nation exercise a persistent influence on social and political life.²⁶³ The continuing exercise of these forms of power, according to Prada, depends on an obfuscation of their origin. For the contemporary state, "the tracks have been erased, only the present and the future exist."²⁶⁴ Yet if one can recover this past instead, it could function as a sort of political arsenal. This does not mean taking up history in a utopian or romantic form, nor in the manner of the *Indianista* writer Fausto Reinaga, for whom Inca society is a kind of socialism to be restored. Instead, Prada argues for a recovery of indigenous history beginning with its contemporary fragments, dispersed throughout really existing indigenous communities.

Prada's efforts to understand the political potential of material indigenous forms, to which García Linera also contributes, focus on the *ayllu*, an Andean communal structure for political, social, and economic life. In another text from 2001, Prada calls these an "archaic matrix...whose fragments, dispersed by the colonial and republican wars of conquest, are articulated and united configuring once again a type

²⁶² Prada, "La hermenéutica de la violencia," 130.

²⁶³ Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina."

²⁶⁴ Prada, "La hermenéutica de la violencia," 141.

of social, economic, political, and culture totalization.”²⁶⁵ As a pre-Columbian historical structure, the *ayllu* comprised a set of kinship associations and territory-based alliances.²⁶⁶ Politically, it functioned through the “deliberative mediation of the assembly,” giving it an important democratic valence, and social conflict was sublimated into a theatrical antagonistic dance ritual called the *tinku*. But *Comuna* is less interested in anthropological or archeological knowledge of the *ayllu* than in its contemporary manifestations, which according to Prada are embodied in habits, affects, and corporeal dispositions. “The *ayllu* is a historical-cultural sphere of social relations, of customs, of agencies and political-cultural *dispositifs* based on the communitarian sense of affects and of things,” he writes in a 2002 essay that continues his exploration of this theme.²⁶⁷ The contemporary *ayllu* is not territorialized, but it is all the more powerful for the fact that it can travel “through the various movements of mobile bodies and their inherent practices.”²⁶⁸

In particular, the contemporary *ayllu* is important for *Comuna* because of its democratic and redistributive qualities. Both García Linera and Prada suggest that indigenous communal forms represent a radical alterity with regard to the state and capitalism. Prada writes: “The collective force of the *ayllu* resides in its democratic assemblyist form, that is to say, it resides in communal democracy... This democracy is culturally lived and is made possible by the disposition of the bodies and

²⁶⁵ Prada, “La fuerza del acontecimiento,” 90

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Prada, “Multitud y contrapoder,” 92.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 91.

participative agencies of the word.”²⁶⁹ And unlike the modern state, the *ayllu* can therefore mobilize a massive amount of people and resources without the use of coercion.²⁷⁰ These political features are matched in economic terms by “redistributive habits.”²⁷¹ García Linera summarizes it this way:

Setting aside sociological explanations and the abundance of local variations, it is a form of socialization of people and of nature; a form of producing wealth and conceptualizing it; a way of representing material assets and of consuming them; a productive technology and religiousness, a form of the individual confronted with the common; a way of trading what is produced, but also of subordinating it to meet personal consumption-needs; an ethic and a form of humanization, of a different kind of social reproduction, and, in a significant sense, it is antithetical to the form of socialization that comes with the régime of capital.²⁷²

This indigenous past made present is therefore a powerful political weapon in contemporary struggles. It is a field of subjectivation all its own, and it presents a real alternative, in some form, to capitalist exploitation and state domination.

The fragmented condition of the *ayllu* in habits, dispositions, symbols, and practices means that it is commingled with various forms of political organization. The constant movement of populations within Bolivia in the 20th century – in search of employment and trade above all – means that the history of the *ayllu* is also a history of class organization, and the history of indigenous peoples is a history of the proletariat, conceived broadly in the terms of Gutiérrez defined above. The 2000 *bloqueos* in the Altiplano were organized by the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), a peasant union that only emerged

²⁶⁹ Prada, “Multitud y contrapoder,” 88.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 87.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 88.

²⁷² García Linera, “The Colonial Narrative and the Communal Narrative,” 155.

in 1979, toward the end of the era of the National Revolution, but in this, Prada sees the traces of the deliberative processes that are attributable to the *ayllu*.

“Multitudinous mobilization, road blockages, siege and the taking of cities – this is the strategic outline of the apparition of the *ayllu* in the social and political Bolivian scene,” Prada writes.²⁷³ These sorts of motley, tangled convergences between histories and actors, embodied memories and organizational structures, are at the root of the concept of the *multitude*, as members of *Comuna* begin to theorize it during this period. Discussing the uprisings of 2000, Prada writes, “The protagonists were the multiplicity of grassroots organizations, in other words, the great protagonist of the mobilizations was the multitude in action.”²⁷⁴ As Gutiérrez argues, the point is not to pre-define a political subject, but to locate one by tracking concrete struggle.

I will return the *Comuna*’s attempts to theorize the multitude in the following section, but it is worth pausing to highlight that, as in the case of knowledge and culture in García Linera’s history of the working class, the notion of indigenous culture that is at play here has little to do with outward representation. Prada argues that the movements spawned in 2000 should be moving toward a “decolonized republic, a republic that rests on the cultural substrates of native peoples, taking up their originary projects as alternative social possibilities.”²⁷⁵ He continues: “The praxis of this republic, that is to say, the concurrent processes and practical inherent sensibilities, cannot but be situated on an anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist

²⁷³ Prada, “La fuerza del acontecimiento,” 99.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

pragmatics....²⁷⁶ This linking of culture to *pragmatics*, linguistic term, offers an interesting point of comparison to another theory that I explored in Chapter 1. Prada's reference to this stands in contrast to a point that Laclau and Mouffe make in explaining their concept of discourse, where they argue that there can be no distinction between pragmatics, the uses of language in contexts that give it meaning, and semantics, the literal meanings constructed through grammatical structures and rules.²⁷⁷ As I have suggested in the first chapter of this dissertation, following the posthegemonic critique, Laclau and Mouffe's decision not to distinguish between practices and meanings leads them to focus on semantics at the expense of pragmatics – to see all meaning as a kind of immaterial grammar, rather than to see how specific material structures situate and re-articulate meanings. On the one hand, they attempt to establish that all meaning is contextual, or pragmatic, but on the other, they avoid the kind of analysis that can help distinguish contexts. Prada, by contrast, is offering a material concept of culture as a kind of *potential*. He explicitly argues that the significance of the *ayllu* is not reducible to its literal representation; its meaning changes with its historical circumstances:

How can we figure the *ayllu* if it has already been submitted to the repression of representation? It is said that the *ayllu* is an entity belonging to history, conceived in its time as a story, at most as a description of the past. In this way, the *ayllu* belongs to a conquered kingdom, an originary social regimen. Or in another way, one searches for its expression in culture, that enigmatic dimension to which symbolic forms, archaic figurative forms, are attributed in an irreducible way. The *ayllu* can also be studied from the matrix of language, as oral memory. Nonetheless, the *ayllu* is and is not all of these things. It is

²⁷⁶ Prada, "La fuerza del acontecimiento," 100.

²⁷⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, "Post-marxism Without Apologies," 101–2.

present in them, but only insofar as the word cannot trap it. There is a distance between the intention of its representation and its broader scope.²⁷⁸

We can see here how Prada's attempts to place the *ayllu* beyond representation in order to lend it a potentially greater range of political possibilities. It is not simply part of a historical narrative, a set of symbols, or rhetorical invocations, but appears instead in a number of different generative forms.

García Linera also notes that the importance of indigenous movements does not lie in their ability to represent themselves. Retrieving themes from his book

Forma valor y forma comunidad, he writes in a 1998 essay:

That the majority of these [indigenous] social movements, which threatened the foundations of the *colonial and republican order of the state*, have not used written narration to validate the radicalism of their objectives implies that authentic communal and plebeian insurgencies do not necessarily need the written work in order to rise up and clearly present proposals that subvert the reigning social order. This is even more the case when it is an agenda of social renewal that, instead of coming from a virtuous minority, comes from illiterate populations that have designed other, more eloquent means of communication, such as the spoken word, the deed of rebellion, weaving, ritual, sacrifice, symbolic performance and the language of events.²⁷⁹

This argument, like Prada's, does not constitute a total rejection of representation, but it situates the strategic and political efficacy of indigeneity on a level where signifying power is only one feature among several. Even when referring to signification here, he refers to practices that call for explanation in terms of distinct articulatory practices, irreducible to a play of equivalence and floating signifiers. He further argues that the very notion of indigeneity depends on "the programmatic vehemence of the communal association, reinvented daily, and the terrible language

²⁷⁸ Prada, "La fuerza del acontecimiento," 149–50.

²⁷⁹ García Linera, "The Colonial Narrative and the Communal Narrative," 151–52.

of common action ... not on the discursive subtleties of what is said or written, but on the indomitable character of direct action, with no other mediation than the commitment and will put into play.”²⁸⁰ García Linera therefore offers a deeply political reading of indigeneity’s significance in terms of an autonomous and immanent will to rebellion, which is only a “tacit enunciation,” not a discursive explanation, of a social alternative to the present order of things.²⁸¹ The tension between indigeneity as an autonomous set of disperse practices forged through five centuries of survival amidst colonialism and indigeneity as a signifier that represents a certain constituency or group of people will be pivotal in the struggles to shape the new Bolivian state later on.

Emergence of the Multitude as a Political Subject?

In the previous section, I examined *Comuna*’s understandings of class and indigeneity, and focused on their mode of interpreting these concepts in a material, immanent way, with an emphasis on antagonism and struggle. Through this reading, it becomes clear that *Comuna* does not reduce politics to an articulatory practice of representation, and does not situate concepts within a strategic framework in relation to the position of the intellectual. In this, we see the distance from the strategic thinking tied to the problematic of hegemony. However, a key set of questions emerges: given the fragmented histories, political practices, and actors of Bolivia that *Comuna* describes, how is it possible to conceive of the unity of a political subject? In

²⁸⁰ García Linera, “The Colonial Narrative and the Communal Narrative,” 154.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

particular, how can the potentials of the various movements that came onto the scene in 2000 be brought together? Is there some articulatory mechanism that can bring these disparate pasts into relation in the present as a kind of political agency? What would be the basis for such a convergence? The answer offered by *Comuna* lies in the concept of the multitude.

At this point, one could object to the assumption that unity is indeed a desirable political goal. The term has certainly been associated with dogmatism, authoritarianism, and control. In response, it would seem logical to emphasize difference over commonality, particularism over universalism, and multiplicity over unity. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the concept of *abigarramiento*, it is not entirely clear that the multiplication of differences is, in itself, a political challenge for contemporary capitalism. And as we can see from their comments on the *Manifiesto* above, the members of *Comuna* – though they recognize historical particularity and are sensitive to those forms of difference, like indigenous forms of social organization, that do pose an obstacle to capitalism's advance – likewise view capitalism as a system that both constantly begets new subjects, objects, and points of struggle but also subsumes them in turn. Commenting on the tendency within contemporary critical theory to find new ways to affirm difference again and again, Nicholas Brown and Irme Szeman pose the issue this way: "...The primacy of 'difference' in fact outlines an identity – the unacknowledged frame of the

monoculture, global capitalism."²⁸² Bruno Bosteels concludes from this point that "difference, multiplicity, the primacy of events and becomings over subjects and objects, far from giving critical leverage, would thus define our given state of affairs under late capitalism and its attendant cultural logic."²⁸³ With attention to this problem, but without desiring a procrustean unity, the question for *Comuna* becomes: how, within such a field of difference, to pose a specific politics capable of constituting a genuine rupture with the existing Bolivian state?

Before returning to *Comuna*'s texts, it will help to give a brief review of the Bolivian social movements that began in 2000, just to emphasize the heterogeneity of the political space that *Comuna* was attempting to interpret.²⁸⁴ The famous Water War in Cochabamba, culminating in April of 2000, was a mass rejection of the city government's attempt to privatize the management of that city's troubled water distribution systems. The main formal political body involved in the protests was the Coordinadora del Agua, but this was itself composed of representatives and participants from a number of local groups and communities, as I will discuss more below. At the same time that the people of Cochabamba were staging mass protests against the city's contract with Aguas de Tunari, a subsidiary of Bechtel, and facing violent repression for it, the CSUTCB, a federation of peasant and agricultural workers' unions, began a series of road blockades intended to isolate the city of La

²⁸² Nicholas Brown and Irme Szemán, "Twenty-five Theses on Philosophy in the Age of Finance Capital, in Strathausen, ed. *A Leftist Ontology*, 35 and 49. Quoted in Bosteels, 62.

²⁸³ Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 62.

²⁸⁴ For some of the best accounts of this period, besides the works of *Comuna*, see Patzi, "Rebelión indígena contra la colonialidad"; Crabtree, *Patterns of Protest*; Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*; Jiménez Kanahuaty, *Movilización indígena por el poder*; Kaup, *Market Justice*; and Webber, *Red October*.

Paz, and they presented their own separate list of demands to the national government. These mostly Aymara rebels also faced repression, and the leader of the CSUTCB, Felipe Quispe, had to go into hiding for some during the protests (as did the spokesperson of the *Coordinadora del Agua*, Oscar Olivera). While the main demand of the Cochabambinos succeeded in April, the CSUTCB struggle resurged in the later part of the year, with another round of massive *bloqueos*, and with even greater participation in other parts of the country outside La Paz. In particular, the unionized coca growers of the Chapare region, with Evo Morales at their head, participated with force, and expanded the demands to include the end of crop eradication and militarized surveillance. Some separately organized agrarian workers in the conservative province of Santa Cruz joined as well. Simultaneously, a large, nationwide teacher's strike took place in September, with students walking out of school across the country in support. Many of these protests continued sporadically over the next five years. While this description of collective actions is not exhaustive, it speaks to the wide and unremitting quality of Bolivia's mass political energy in 2000. In this context, *Comuna* attempted to work through a concept of the multitude in order to show how history, knowledge, culture and organization as constituent components, can be activated through struggle into the basis for new kinds of collectivity.

The Multitude and Vital Necessity

Even taking just one of the struggles mentioned above, against the privatization and price-gouging of water in Cochabamba, there was a notable convergence of very distinct social groups. Hylton and Thomson write:

The diversity of groups that participated in Cochabamba in April [2000] was impressive: *regantes* (small-scale coordinators of regional water distribution); valley and highland peasants (some indigenous); coca growers from the Chapare; the regional trade union federation, led by factory workers; students and progressive intellectuals; neighborhood associations, some of them led by re-localized miners, Aymara peasant migrants from the southern part of the city; street kids; the middle classes; and civic organizations.²⁸⁵

In their first attempt to define “the multitude form” in the wake of this rebellion, Gutiérrez, García Linera, and Tapia co-authored an essay where they note that this apparently mixed composition of the protest movement matched the increasingly blurred social condition of Bolivia as a whole:

With everything, the physiognomy of these nuclei of social condensation has a characteristic stamp of the increasing complexity of the class structure in Bolivia... it can be said that the loss of organizational centrality of the labor union begins to be reversed by the emergence of new organizational forms able to include the modern hybrid workerization of the urban population and the expansion of discursive constructions strongly anchored in the self-recognition of need, of suffering, and of painstaking difficulty.²⁸⁶

What permits groups to come together in such a social landscape to replace vitiated labor union form, and what characterizes the multitude, they argue, is a struggle for *vital necessities* beyond the workplace.²⁸⁷ In this sense, the *Guerra del Agua* is a fight for the means of social reproduction. The historical forms of popular mobilization re-

²⁸⁵ Hylton and Thompson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, 104.

²⁸⁶ Gutiérrez et al., “La forma multitud de la política de las necesidades vitales,” 158.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

emerge here in a new organizational articulation around this goal. But lest this imply any economism or any conception of the multitude as *bare life*, the threat against social reproduction, say the co-authors, is also a threat against “the global social and cultural forms that give sense to life.”²⁸⁸ In other words, the fight for vital necessities is not simply a struggle in defense of one’s bare life, but also of the positive possibilities of social life itself: as a repertory of cooperative alternatives to exploitation, as well as of modes of laboring that do not unsustainably exhaust the natural world.

Comuna refers to these social forms tied to vital necessities as habits, a point which again brings them in close proximity to the problematic of posthegemony. As Beasley-Murray argues, the upsetting of existing habits can be a powerful political impetus for spurring creative political responses that go beyond defense and into the realm of novel possibilities for organizing society:

The historicity of habitus secures social reproduction, but at the same time it allows for the possibility of resistance. It is because the various practices it generates express dispositions structured by a previous state of the field that habitus enables historical structures to be reproduced in the present. But when the dispositions shaped by history interact with the field in its current state, the inevitable slippage, however slight, between the two makes for unpredictable effects and so the possibility of a new history.²⁸⁹

What he means here is that when the history of everyday forms of life is threatened by material changes like an expropriation of the commons or a destruction of social bonds, new political possibilities, what *Comuna* call “new capacities of autonomy,”

²⁸⁸ Gutiérrez et al., “La forma multitud de la política de las necesidades vitales,” 191.

²⁸⁹ Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 197.

open up in their place.²⁹⁰ In Cochabamba, this meant, among other things, alternative practices of democracy and organization: assembly-based politics displaced state power as the basis for moral legitimacy.²⁹¹ “The state is no longer an interlocutor for demands, it is a danger; it is a threat to the collectivity, to the sense of community that all are defending,” write Gutiérrez et al.²⁹² The immanent possibility of political alternatives, steeled in the interior of autonomous social life, emerges at the point when the decomposition of a social formation ignites the defense of basic necessities and gives way to new meanings of democracy. This creation of two, three, many levels of democracy means that the entire structure of political life comes into question.

For instance, when these new democratic deliberative forms were introduced into the Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado de Cochabamba (SEMAPA), the public utility that previously controlled water in Cochabamba and which was restored after the Bechtel contract was cancelled, it was a challenge to the old liberal notion of the public, argues Gutiérrez; deliberative, mass assemblies imply a socialization of property that exceeds technocratic public management.²⁹³ Furthermore, when SEMAPA was restored and brought under democratic control, knowledge had to be democratized. García Linera offers the Asociaciones de Regantes, who traditionally managed the complexities of water distribution in the Cochabamba countryside, as an example of how autonomous knowledges exist

²⁹⁰ Gutiérrez et al., “La forma multitud de la política de las necesidades vitales,” 190.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 174–75.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid., 197.

outside of official expertise, and how these knowledges play a key role in the formation of the multitude.²⁹⁴ The forms of deliberative communication and socialization are therefore related to the sharing of social knowledges.

García Linera highlights another characteristic of the multitude form in addition to its democratic practices, exchange of knowledges, and connection to social reproduction: its voluntary basis. That is, while the Coordinadora inherited some features of both union organization and the indigenous *ayllu*, it differs from both in that it is not bound within a workplace or a community. Its participants are brought together around issues of social reproduction, to be sure, but a struggle around social reproduction is not as deeply institutionalized as a workplace struggle, and its participants can join or leave the struggle at will. And unlike the COB or the CSUTCB, which can bring together and coordinate a nationwide range of movements, the Guerra del Agua presents the possibility of highly local political subject. How extensive, then, is the potential of the multitude, as theorized by *Comuna*, for overcoming social differences in order to form a political unity? This is the issue that will push their theorization of this subject to its limits.

Limits of the Multitude

By 2002, the diverse set of social movements that had, in *Comuna*'s view, generated a fundamentally new stage of social struggle and recomposition remained just that: a diverse set of separate social movements. To be sure, they were having a

²⁹⁴ García Linera, "Sindicato, multitud y comunidad," 40–41.

collective impact. The MAS, which began as a “political instrument” of the coca growers union federation, had a huge showing the national elections with almost 21% of the vote, coming in a close second place to the MNR’s 22.5%. The Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti (MIP), under the leadership of the former leader of the CSUTCB, Felipe Quispe, also had a significant 6% of the vote and gained representation in congress. While these shifts indicated a general antipathy toward Bolivia’s political elite, the two new parties did not organizationally or ideologically unify the heterogeneous social components that had been in rebellion for several years.

In the 2002 book *Democratizaciones plebeyas*, the authors in *Comuna* grapple with the implications of this continuing political fragmentation. Here, I would argue, they come up against the limits and tensions of the concept of the multitude, which is supposed to signify both social difference and collective political force. These tensions become clear in two different but illustrative ways in the essays by Prada and Tapia in that collection.

Prada sharply formulates the central strategic issue that the concept of the multitude seeks to explain. He asks whether the various movements should achieve any sort of unification:

Is it an ongoing task to construct the unity of the various contemporaneous social movements?... We are referring to a molecular unity of communitarian organizations and unions, of territorial groups and bodies of functionaries. We are speaking of a dynamic, divergent, and profoundly synergistic unity, constructed by the experiences and enthusiasms of the multitude.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Prada, “Multitud y contrapoder,” 107.

The suggestion here is that the difference itself can be a point of unity for these movements – an interesting proposition, but one that in its very formulation through polarizing terms, difference and unity, reveals a basic tension to be resolved. Prada’s overall tone speaks to the irresolution of this issue, and he returns several times to the need for unification while noting that, quite simply, this did not occur spontaneously during the period under question:

Nonetheless, the power and the horizon of possibilities of this additive irradiation may hide that the accumulation is made of disperse fragments, not sufficiently articulated. What cannot be seen is that in reality all of the organizations and mobilizations have their own particular identity; they did not mutate into shared identities in a profound dialogue of mixing that would invent new *mestizajes*. But the counterpower of the multitude is unified through mixing, and is empowered through the combining of identities in the constitutive becoming of collective subjectivities.²⁹⁶

Again, while touching on a tangible problem, and arguing that to become a powerful multitude is to combine particularities into something more, Prada does not really venture an explanation of how this mixing or unification is to be carried out. Is the multitude still something *to be formed* in the future, or does it already exist? And if it already exists, how can one speak of a collective subject or actor that nonetheless possesses a divergent, disperse, disarticulated form? These questions remain unanswered in Prada’s overview of the concept of the multitude in relation to the struggles of the prior three years. The concept remains ambiguous.

Tapia gives his own historical account, and his own theoretical solution to the problem raised by the concept of the multitude, yet a similar tension presents itself in his argument. He points out that contemporary movements have emerged from the

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 85.

“non-places of politics” – that is, places from outside both the accepted realms of political struggle, the state and civil society – and notes that it was the disarticulation of the workers’ movement in the 1980s that permitted a greater prominence for these other movements, like those based in indigenous communities, throughout the 1990s.²⁹⁷ The events of 2000 marked the convergence of these various movements into something Tapia calls a “societal movement,” a concept that denotes on the one hand, “the movement of a social totality”, and on the other “a notion that accounts for the composition of a social movement and a movement of a part of one society in the heart of another, a type of complexity which exists in motley formations like Bolivia.”²⁹⁸ That is, Bolivian society is, as a whole, in motion. Yet, once again, this apparently total process is generated through a larger set of processes taking place in particular circumstances. The whole moves, but it moves as a collection of parts rather than as something greater than their sum. He is referring here to the fact that among the social movements of 2000, the Aymara movement laid a claim to the status of a *nation* and a separate society. It was in that period that the popular discourse of “two Bolivias” emerged, an indigenous one and a mestizo one. This circumstance represents a unique complexity within the landscape of social heterogeneity: the Bolivian social formation is said to *include another social formation* within it.

Yet Tapia then resorts to a rather general explanation of the struggles that seems to downplay the complexity.

²⁹⁷ Tapia, “Movimientos sociales, movimiento societal y los no lugares de la política,” 50.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

The unfolding of these mobilizations and the structures of action they produce represents a conflict over the ends of national politics. They are an incarnation of a political-moral or ethical-political conflict... The ends of the social movements are the satisfaction of basic needs and the recuperation of control over the natural conditions of production and reproduction of social life: water, land, and labor.²⁹⁹

This statement, suggesting that the insurgencies of 2000 onward were reducible to a moral or ethical struggle over the goals of national politics, seems to disregard the very depth of political incongruence that Tapia himself had described. Sure, vital necessities had previously been defined as the basis for the multitude form, but in the essay examined in the previous section, of which Tapia was co-author, it was argued that the struggle for vital necessities also called into question the sovereign legitimacy of the state. Tapia's comment here underestimates the extent of the political challenge that he previously highlighted. And when a portion of the body politic claims the status of a nation for itself, it is not clear that one can uncritically speak about "the ends of national politics" – it is the constitution of the *national*, not just its *ends*, that have been put into play, not to mention the political form in which those ends would have to be debated.

Tapia concludes, "In short, the political renewal of the country comes from labor union politics, not for the first time, but in a new way. These are distinct unions that are responsible for this activation, but they are unions."³⁰⁰ Again, this is a highly oversimplified solution to the issue of difference that Tapia has defined. Consider the various forms of organization just within the *Guerra del Agua*: the neighborhood

²⁹⁹ Tapia, "Movimientos sociales, movimiento societal y los no lugares de la política," 63.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

organizations, the *regantes*, the groups of poor youths, the civic associations, etc. If indeed there was a rearticulation of union organizational structures there, Tapia's explanation evades their novelty.

In my view, these discordances in Tapia's argument are a result of the limitations of the multitude concept. Prada likewise encounters these limitations. Prada sutures over the key tension between difference and unity with the dubious claim that difference itself can be the basis for political unity. Tapia does not resort to that kind of theoretical closure, but instead tries to return political unity to the picture with a simplified descriptive claim about the political process as it unfolds. In both cases, what is lacking is a strategic or conceptual way to get beyond the fact of heterogeneity and move toward defining a basis for large-scale political unity. I do not say this to criticize Prada or Tapia, or *Comuna* more generally, as if they simply lack vision. Rather, it is an achievement of *Comuna*'s project during this period to bring the multitude to its conceptual edge, but their achievement also reveals both a theoretical and political obstacle to be surmounted.

Constituent Textures

It is worth asking at this point what exactly *Comuna*'s investigations of the Bolivian multitude is supposed to illuminate. If the concept of the multitude accounts for the immanent potential carried by past social forms, like the *ayllu* or the union movement, and if it is linked to an autonomous tendency toward social reproduction, perhaps it nonetheless fails to explain the conditions in which these things could be

articulated in a novel and effective way. But maybe this openness, and this lack of prescription, is the point. This feature of *Comuna*'s work, while it may appear to be a shortcoming by some, could also be viewed as a strength, as well as a challenge to the classical conception of constituent power. It would be simple enough for engaged intellectuals to advocate for the classical form of political unity as viewed from the social position of the intellectual: hegemony of a political party, with ideological leadership, fighting for state power. And indeed, this is the path that will be opened by the MAS to some degree later on, with García Linera adopting the position of a hegemonic intellectual. On the other hand, what *Comuna*'s investigations show is that there may be potentials for other *forms* of politics; their own activities early on suggest an open-ended approach to political and intellectual work that does not take for granted the sequence leading from constituent power to constituted power. For this reason, I am arguing that the real object of *Comuna*'s work, at least in their early writings, can be defined as Bolivia's *constituent texture*. Part of this idea, however, is that their work itself, rather than being a meditation on an external object, is also part of the constituent texture itself, and therefore plays a performative political role. That is, it helps to create political potentials by naming them.

In attempting to define the multitude, and in tracing the political histories and social components of political struggles in which they were participants, *Comuna*'s analysis highlights the potentials of what Del Lucchese calls "a historically determined subject and a power, within the here and now of material relations of

power.”³⁰¹ While this is a definition of constituent power offered by one theorist who seeks to locate a version of the concept in the works of Spinoza, I would suggest that this focus actually offers a distinct conception of power altogether. *Comuna*’s focus on points of conflict over abstract historical categories, and on the potentials of *these struggles* instead of an abstract schema of revolution based on a philosophy of history, are symptomatic of a form of engagement and a mode of theoretical production that illuminates and strengthens multiple political possibilities at once. This understanding of power and the kinds of political-theoretical engagement it involved are the basis for what I am calling *constituent textures*. This becomes even clearer if, departing from the content of *Comuna*’s theorizations, we examine the conditions and practices that led to them via interviews with its participants.

In one sense, *Comuna*’s re-thinking of basic theoretical concepts was driven by certain intellectual affinities and academic concerns. The academic journals *Episteme* founded by Raúl Prada and his students, as well as *Autodeterminación* founded by Luis Tapia, were key sites for the diffusion of poststructuralist thought in Bolivia in the 1980s and 90s.³⁰² Trends in traditional intellectual institutions thus played a role the development of *Comuna*’s thought. Oscar Vega explains: “Without getting into whether postmodernism is good or bad, I can say that postmodernism helped in some way to contaminate and disarm a series of beliefs, values, and theses that were very strong. History, progress, the state... these [ideas] became diluted.”³⁰³

³⁰¹ Del Lucchese, “Spinoza and Constituent Power,” 201.

³⁰² Prada, interviewed by the author, La Paz, July 2015.

³⁰³ Vega, interviewed by the author, La Paz, July 2015.

But *Comuna*'s approach, as we have seen, was not only the produce of academic concerns. The group is also making interventions into the lexicon of the political left more generally: their idiosyncratic conception of the proletariat is not reducible to industrial working class, but includes anyone dispossessed to the point of having an antagonistic relationship with a dominating class. In this, as García Linera's engagement with Trotskyism demonstrates, *Comuna* was challenging traditional conceptions of the organized left. As Raúl Prada explains it, *Comuna*'s work must therefore be read against the two major historical failures of Bolivian Marxism: in 1971, when the brief Popular Assembly failed to stave off a coup, and in 1984, when the *Unidad Democrática Popular*, a coalition including many socialist, communist, and other small left parties, failed to hold onto power during the first few years of democratization. In the face of this history and the neoliberal onslaught that followed, not to mention the fall of the Soviet Union, many on the Bolivian left subsequently questioned their commitment to Marxist ideas or political practices in the 1990s. And those that retained leftist credentials were pushed out of positions of state power. This caused others to retrench in their commitment, but in a way that Prada describes as dogmatic: "In this context of profound crisis... the left continued to study the same sacred texts. They didn't think to ask: what is happening now?"³⁰⁴

By contrast, García Linera recounts "What is happening now?" was the exact question he and Raquel Gutiérrez began asking in 1997 after four years of imprisonment. "We wanted to find out who was out there, what they were thinking,

³⁰⁴ Prada, interview.

what they were doing,” he says.³⁰⁵ In this sense we can read *Comuna*, initially, less as a coherent intellectual or political group than as a process of investigation. “Comuna wasn’t a group, wasn’t a party, but a space where everyone could think,” according to Prada.³⁰⁶ And it turned out to be a popular space: their meetings, first organized by Gutiérrez on a somewhat informal basis, soon became a go-to space for people seeking political alternatives to neoliberal hegemony and left sectarianism. Early on, many of these meetings had academic focus; the first series of discussions, resulting in a collection of essays prior to the *Comuna* imprint but including contributions by García, Gutiérrez, Prada, and several others, was on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The second, more tightly focused, was on Marx and Engels and 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, resulting in *El Fantasma Insomne*. But the academic orientation did not lessen the forum’s political relevance. So began the regular meetings, more or less fortnightly, with an open framework for discussion and investigation. Eventually, after the publication of the first several books, hundreds of people were attending and participating. In García Linera’s words, it was “an effort to bring together a critical current around a specific theme, without demanding militancy, or commitment. Simply to approach a theme from the left, or rather, from various lefts.”³⁰⁷ The investigations had a positive purpose in mind – “to put an end to the cultural desert of the 90s and the defection of leftists,” says García Linera – but the results were neither decided in advance nor intended to be a homogenizing force

³⁰⁵ García Linera, interviewed by the author, August 2016.

³⁰⁶ Prada, interview.

³⁰⁷ García Linera, interview.

for political opinion. “It never was an effort to homogenize,” García Linera continues. “We could have differences, and we’d talk about them. We might criticize one another, but we could listen to that and retain our positions anyway. And they would be published.”³⁰⁸

It was this spirit of openness that made Comuna receptive to struggles that were generally undertheorized by the Bolivian left – in particular, those of indigenous resistance. Oscar Vega points out that even before the struggles of 2000, the emergence of neo-Zapatismo in Chiapas had made this a salient topic, owing in part to the connection that so many Bolivian activists and intellectuals had with Mexico during the years of exile. The declarations of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* throughout the 1990s offered something to which there was no pre-set ideological response: “It was an interpellation, a fierce indigenous gesture, and this brought many problems... for [the concepts of] the left, of revolution, of the state.” Forcing the re-evaluation, and upsetting the linear temporalities on which so many notions of revolution relied, was that “this, which had been seen as having a manifest destiny of disappearance, was in fact the most contemporary.” Vega affirms that Marxism was still necessary, because, after all, one needed that set of tools to talk about capitalism. But Marxism needed to become plural, and it needed to grasp emergent struggles that did not fit into its most dogmatic forms. To avoid recognizing

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

the centrality of indigenous struggle would be to “fail to understand the historical densities of organization, of culture, of identity that were put into play.”³⁰⁹

The movements of 2000 intensified the interpellation of the members of the emerging Comuna space, pushing them to further critical investigation. The context of social insurrection amplified both the need for reevaluation and the potentials of the resulting ideas. García Linera and Gutiérrez went and joined in the Cochabamba Water War. Tapia continued work with the anti-neoliberal political party Movimiento Sin Miedo, and Prada kept closely in touch with his contact in the various indigenous movements. Prada explains, “What Comuna did was very particular, we became activists. We joined movements, and we learned. We didn’t teach, we learned. That’s all we did.”³¹⁰ In this sense, says Prada, the first book to emerge in 2000, *El retorno de la Bolivia plebeya* [*The Return of Plebeian Bolivia*], was more descriptive than theoretical or propagandistic. “All we did was try to understand the horizon that had been opened by these movements,” says Prada.³¹¹ The resulting book owed to the participation and observation of four distinct actors who sought to learn from movements and each other. “The important thing is that we were people, with different, distinct political experiences. We got together not to homogenize, but to strengthen [*potenciar*] each of our discourses through discussion with one another. Then we returned to our various activities,” says García Linera.³¹² His use of the term *potenciar* illuminates the extent to which intellectual processes were seen as

³⁰⁹ Vega, interview.

³¹⁰ García Linera, interview.

³¹¹ Prada, interview.

³¹² García Linera, interview.

themselves politically useful, even powerful, without trying at this point to achieve any kind of intellectual hegemony. They are, instead, to simply circulate possibilities. “If Comuna is anything,” says Prada, “it is anti-vanguardist.”³¹³

And yet, at the same time that the members and participants in Comuna were learning, at the same time they were inviting others from movements to come present at the meetings, they were also trying to bring their work out into the movements. This activity was an attempt to connect dots and to circulate information without the terms of this connection being defined in advance, and without necessarily presuming to know the significance of each event they were describing. Prada, in particular, emphasizes that what Comuna was doing when they went to present at union meetings, among peasants in the Altiplano, or in the Chapare, was not “popular education.” He says: “The left in Latin America committed barbarities, minimizing people, not respecting people, treating them like kids. They didn’t respect their own forms of knowing, of experience. We, without explicitly trying to do the opposite, we simply did things, created alliances, distinct comprehensions, complicities... we were not trying to act this or that way as intellectuals.” This speaks to is a kind of theoretical and political humility that breaks with a conscious search for hegemony that, for instance, characterized *Pasado y Presente*’s intellectual work. “What we did was reflect, describe what we were seeing. We didn’t program the impact,” says Prada.

³¹³ Prada, interview.

This is what I am describing as the *performative* dimension of Comuna's work, the work of *constituent texture*. By declaring certain antecedents and placing the movements around them in genealogical relation to one another in writing, the writings of Comuna might *bring into being* certain effects. There was no pretense of having an external objective view of political processes. The writings, and all of the intellectual work and relationships of which they were evidence, were themselves an enactment of the political process sweeping Bolivia. The task of articulating movements together might be carried out, it seemed, by bringing them together in print and in an open forum for discussion. García Linera concludes, "Comuna converted into an agglutinator of currents, small currents, from around the country. It became an articulatory nucleus." The "aleatory" character of this articulation, says García Linera citing Louis Althusser, was important. The encounters that happened in the space and in the texts were a kind of bringing together of potentials, which may or may not have lasting effects. In trying to illuminate the potentials of their moment, the members of Comuna were actualizing those very potentials with their own connections to movements, their own work in circulating a plurality of ideas that might end up being useful. Their own texts serve, therefore, as political artifacts of their moment's potentials. Texts and text making have the potential for historical effects, even when their goal is, as in Comuna's early work, to investigate and to describe rather than to define or to provide definitive answers. A *constituent texture* is therefore a process, and texts and intellectual activity can play a role in *weaving* potentials together.

In this chapter, we have seen how Comuna's intense engagement with the particulars of Bolivian history, the tendencies of global capitalism, and theoretical methods inspired by Marxism were the basis for a unique mode of intellectual engagement. The thinkers in the group dug into Bolivia's past and present to identify new potentials for politics during the insurgent period of 2000 to 2005. They participated in the struggles of this period, and they sought to describe these struggles in their writings. Their approach focused on fragments of material culture inherited from the workers movement and indigenous movements. The authors emphasized points of political antagonism as a starting point for investigation, they eschewed representation as a form of politics, and they sought to capture multiplicity without reducing it to an abstraction. Their methods also attested to the project of weaving these strands together in a way that recognized both historical specificity and the ability to think across specifics using theoretical concepts. García Linera, Gutiérrez, Prada, Tapia, and Vega all sought to understand their political conjuncture in theoretical terms without imposing a single framework or providing simplistic answers. I have argued that, in forging this path for theoretical practice, Comuna provided an alternative both to intellectual-political strategies grounded in the theory of hegemony and to the presumptive framework of constituent and constituted power.

As time wore on for Comuna, however, certain divergences emerged in their approach. The agnostic intellectual work of creating encounters and circulating ideas just to see what happens gave way to the parallel of consciously spreading alternative frames of thought, participating in a struggle for hegemony, which García Linera will

call “a cultural revolution.”³¹⁴ The different intellectual approach that emerges from this goal – that of providing answers rather than circulating questions – also implies a different political orientation. Large meetings and small pamphlets give way to a mass media presence. Participation in movements, with their many horizons of struggle, gives way to participation in parties with electoral aspirations. This diverted trajectory shaped both the next era of both Comuna’s work and highlights a tension within the broader set of participants in Bolivia’s process of change and the Pink Tide more generally.

³¹⁴ García Linera, interview.

Chapter 4

Potentials and Limitations of the Bolivian ‘Process of Change’

Abbé Sieyès first introduced the term *constituent power* in the context of the French Revolution of 1789. He later remarked that “a sound and useful idea was invented in 1789; the separation of the constituent power from constituted powers. It will go down in history as a discovery that advances science, for which the French can be thanked.”³¹⁵ This event that would shape the political conceptions of revolutionaries, theorists, and state functionaries in the West for the two centuries that followed. There have been competing interpretations of what he meant by constituent power since then, and how this idea relates to sovereignty and representation. At a minimum, however, the concept of constituent power implies a distinction between constituent and constituted, between some kind of popular power and the power of the state whose construction completes the revolutionary process.

In the 20th century, at the height of Cold War ideological conflict, theorists of political development like Samuel Huntington also raised the question of state construction and its relationship to democracy. The idea of political development was that certain political institutions are necessary for the effective management of modern society. For Huntington and his collaborators on the Trilateral Commission report of 1975 called *The Crisis of Democracy*, the implications were decidedly conservative: if states were in crisis, this was a result of certain contradictions in

³¹⁵ Quoted in Rubinelli, “How to Think Beyond Sovereignty,” 51.

democracy itself, which could only be resolved with more state institutional apparatuses and fewer immediate democratic outlets.³¹⁶ In another sense, though, Huntington could be read as ideologically agnostic; and in the era of global decolonization, when the construction of new post-colonial states was seen as a potentially radical, or socialist project, Huntington's prescriptive understandings of political development might have been usable to both socialist states and decidedly capitalist ones alike. Huntington himself writes, "History shows conclusively that communist governments are no better than free governments in alleviating famine, improving health, expanding national product, creating industry, and maximizing welfare. But one thing communist governments can do is govern; They do provide effective authority."³¹⁷ Huntington himself is not so important to my argument here, but his comments raise the question: When it comes to consolidating constituted power, to ending periods of revolution and establishing the capacities for effective statecraft, is there a difference between those functionaries that call themselves socialists, communists, or revolutionaries, and those who see themselves as nationalists, capitalists, or neutral? That is, which matters more: the outward trappings of fidelity to a certain idea, or the political forms that come to embody this fidelity?

The case of Álvaro García Linera and of the MAS deserves more attention in this light. If the notion of constituent power is capacious enough to also encompass a project of conservative statecraft like that pursued under the heading of political

³¹⁶ Crozier, Huntington, and Watakunki, *The Crisis of Democracy*.

³¹⁷ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 8.

development, then it reveals a deep kind of conceptual complicity between forms of politics that might otherwise be portrayed as ideologically opposed to one another. And if this is the case, it suggests that there is more work to do in figuring out how a process like that in Bolivia might present something other than constituent power; how its variegated texture, full of possibilities, might surpass the restoration of effective governing, and might call into question the very divergence between constituent and constituted that has been shaping political conceptions across the spectrum since 1789.

Dividing Lines

By 2009, the discourse of Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera was an index of how both conditions and possibilities had changed in Bolivia. Far from his focus on the autonomous potential of Bolivia's indigenous communities as an alternative to capitalist social relations, he now argued that conditions were ill-suited for any sort of social transformation beyond capitalism, and that the immediate goal in Bolivia was a post-neoliberal, Andean-Amazonian capitalism "focusing on the conquest of equality, the redistribution of wealth, and the expansion of rights."³¹⁸ Bolivia has indeed been able trumpet some achievements along these lines since Evo Morales and García Linera took office in 2006. Yet the continuing work of García Linera and other members of Comuna shows that this focus on the state as the site of political change is not without contradictions.

³¹⁸ García Linera, *Las vías de la emancipación*, 74–88.

García Linera is emblematic of one possible trajectory for politics and theory after the initial emergence of a political and social rupture in the 2000 to 2005 period. His role as a state functionary and his emphasis on reform and representation reveal one possible solution to the impasse of apparent popular disunity that was already visible in the middle of the insurgent period, and which shaped the theoretical interventions of Comuna that I examined in Chapter 3.

On the other hand, other work by members of Comuna shows how we might look beyond the state: to movements, margins, and social practices that continue to offer potential alternatives to capitalism in the midst of the kind of changes that García Linera now trumpets from his state position. Raquel Gutiérrez, in her work after the 2006 electoral outcome, approaches the issue from an angle opposite her former collaborator. She cites “an exclusive epistemic disjunction between State-centered politics and autonomous politics.”³¹⁹ In this view, the revolutionary potential of the constituent moment could never be encapsulated by states or populist leaders, and still less by their rhetoric. The possibilities for an alternative to capitalism would only be able to flourish if they remained independent from forms of state power. This alternative between state and autonomy, says Gutiérrez, presents itself as an irreducible political choice: on the one hand, to “‘occupy’ public posts in order to ‘consolidate’ what has been won” and “change some of the most oppressive social relations,” or on the other, “to develop and expand the range of autonomy in everyday life as to propel struggles and impose limits on the capitalist devastation of life in

³¹⁹ Gutiérrez, “Los ritmos del Pachakuti: Cómo conocemos las luchas de emancipación y su relación con la política de la autonomía,” 28.

general.”³²⁰ She places herself squarely in the latter camp. If García Linera’s turn to the state leads him to reformist conclusions, however, Gutiérrez’s formulation likewise seems to have moderated expectations, defining its goal as the mitigation of capitalism’s worst effects without necessarily connecting this goal to that of offering a political alternative. The shared moderation between two otherwise divergent trajectories casts doubt on the prospects for the more revolutionary set of changes that perhaps seemed possible at the height of Bolivia’s extensive social mobilization between 2000 and 2005.

It is possible, in this light, to look back on those earlier moments of mobilization to better understand some of the constraints that, it turns out, gave shape to the potentials harbored in those moments. If the early work of Comuna was able to find in both the indigenous and working class traditions certain resources that offered new forms of unity, then a closer look at the outcome of that period will also reveal other, perhaps less visible factors that shaped the way that power could and could not ultimately be articulated. Why was it, for instance, that the expressions of the multitude did not find a form of unity outside of the electoral party form? And how did the apparent necessity of reckoning with the state end up shaping the possibilities of a more generalized social upheaval?

³²⁰ Gutiérrez, “Los ritmos del Pachakuti: Cómo conocemos las luchas de emancipación y su relación con la política de la autonomía,” 28.

Conjunctural Constraints and Bolivia's Constituent Texture

If, on the one hand, we can analyze constituent power in terms of a given set of histories, as well as in terms of knowledge production, culture, and organizational forms, we must also situate this *potential* within the specific historical conditions of the constituted powers structuring the political field. In other words, a constituent texture is a product, in part, of the constituted political situations amongst which it is woven. One question in the case of Bolivia circa 2000 is how constituted powers, especially the state and electoral institutions, which had been restructured under neoliberalism, helped to solidify and capture of the kinds of constituent textures that were emerging onto the scene and analyzed in Comuna's earlier work.

The epoch of insurrectionary protest between 2000 and 2005 that resulted in MAS's domination of both the executive and the legislative branch in 2006 arose in response to a sweeping neoliberalization of the Bolivian economy in which all major political parties participated.³²¹ These parties had collaborated since 1985 to implement a set of austerity policies, demobilize the working class, and privatize the country's main sources of wealth: mineral mining and hydrocarbon extraction.³²² When popular protests deposed neoliberal architect Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in October 2003, the political elite suffered a devastating blow. More devastating for

³²¹ Kohl and Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*, ch. 3. These privatizations were carried out under the auspices of economic necessity in order to pay off the debts of the various military dictatorships that reigned from 1971 until the early 1980s. Political figures cycled and recycled through the various governments during this epoch, culminating at its most farcical in the election of Hugo Banzer, the military dictator who had been overthrown in 1978 and whose economic policies had been partially responsible for the massive indebtedness of the Bolivian economy in the first place.

³²² Gutiérrez and García Linera, "El ciclo estatal neoliberal y sus crisis," 12–16.

many, however, was that he had attempted to avoid this outcome with a repressive reaction to the protests in the two months before his resignation, resulting in sixty-seven deaths.³²³ Then, when even his technocratic successor, Carlos Mesa, could not quell the insurgency, it became clear that only an outsider could hold the executive, and only on condition of promise to nationalize the country's extensive gas reserves.³²⁴ This pattern echoed a rejection of neoliberalism elsewhere in the region: in each case, the crisis of neoliberalism was a *political* crisis, the resolution of which ended up involving new parties and politicians. Be it a once-jailed military officer with a nationalist reputation like Hugo Chávez, a little known governor like Argentina's Néstor Kirchner, or even a US-educated economist like Ecuador's Rafael Correa, the legitimacy of these new regimes depended on their distance from the established circles of political elites. Among this wave of outsiders, the MAS had the special credibility of having actually been created by popular movements.³²⁵

Upon Morales' taking office, certain constraints on the potential of the Bolivian situation become clear. On the international level, despite a positive outlook for regional political and economic solidarity opportunities,³²⁶ the era of privatizations had created a massive foothold for international capital in all of Bolivia's key sectors. The state-owned *Corporación Minera de Bolivia* (COMIBOL), had been all but dismantled, and the mining fraction of Bolivian capital had partnered

³²³ Webber, *Red October*, 267.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

³²⁵ Errejón and Guijarro, "Post-Neoliberalism's Difficult Hegemonic Consolidation: A Comparative Analysis of the Ecuadorean and Bolivian Processes."

³²⁶ Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 15; Fander Falconí and Julio Oleas-Montalvo, "Citizens' Revolution and International Integration Obstacles and Opportunities in World Trade," 137–38.

up with transnational firms to increase foreign investment, bolstered by new laws attacking worker protections, guaranteeing international investments, and expanding foreign access to the emerging hydrocarbons sector. Alongside these privatizations were loans from the IMF and the World Bank, bearing all of the terms that one expects as part of “structural adjustment.”³²⁷ Moreover, the international pressures were not only economic: no left-leaning government in Latin America can discount the possibility of a US-supported coup, as was attempted in Venezuela in 2002, and achieved in Honduras in 2009. Thus, as the MAS took power, the constraints from the international arena were pitted against the political will of the movements which, over the course of five years, had decisively rejected the entire neoliberal model of accumulation and were demanding a nationalization of key industries.

The MAS, in addition to being subject to the conflict between popular power and the power of capital, was constrained by liberal institutional and discursive norms. The introduction of political liberalism after Bolivia’s democratization in 1982 contrasted with the extraparliamentary pendulum of coups and street politics that prevailed from 1952 until the mid-1980s, when the defeat of the mining unions destroyed the traditional lever of working class power.³²⁸ The 1990s, in turn, saw a variety of outwardly isolated political actions, but there were two decisive trends: a decentralization of the electoral structure on the one hand, and the growth of an

³²⁷ Kaup, *Market Justice*, 61–2, 71–89; Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 33–35.

³²⁸ García Linera, “La muerte de la condición obrera del siglo XX: La marcha minera por la vida,” 23–60; For a strong account of Bolivia’s pre-democracy history in English, see Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*.

indigenous politics of recognition, heavily media- and NGO-focused, on the other.³²⁹ The institutional decentralization was part of the neoliberal strategy to devolve state welfare responsibilities to so-called civil society, and to dilute opposition to the new policies, while the state's discursive turn toward multiculturalism was an attempt to co-opt both indigenous political leaders and leftist intellectuals.³³⁰

This decentralization set the stage, however unintentionally, for an increase in popular organization. In particular, rural indigenous organizations flourished. The MAS itself was born as a “political instrument” of the coca growers’ unions in their movement against US-sponsored coca eradication, establishing local hegemony in the Chapare region before catapulting into the national political arena in 2002. Thus, from its inception, the MAS has been a mechanism for translating grassroots struggles into the electoral sphere, even as it was also linked to figures who had been trained by figures from Bolivia’s syndicalist past. The 1990s also saw the immense growth of a number of other indigenous organizations: the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB), the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), and the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ) each represented thousands of insurgent agricultural workers and small peasant producers. These organizations, along with the MAS, were central to the strength of the mobilization during 2000–2005, but they were not alone;

³²⁹ Roberta Rice, *The New Politics of Protest*.

³³⁰ Kohl and Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia*, 131, 136–37; Kaup, *Market Justice*, 86; Postero, “The Struggle to Create a Radical Democracy in Bolivia,” 61–62; Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo*, 32–34.

urban neighborhood associations, unions, students, civic organizations, and resource collectives all played a role.³³¹

The local anchoring of many of these smaller organizations, however, made a nation-wide movement difficult. We have already seen, in Chapter 3, attempts to grapple theoretically with this difficulty in Prada and Tapia's work as early as 2002: How could a mass, decentralized upheaval coalesce into something with lasting effects?³³² The MAS's decisive electoral turn, which involved a reorganization of the party in 2004, therefore resolved the key strategic issue of movement unity, but the solution carried the constraints of liberalism; it dulled the edges of indigenous struggle, which in the most radical of cases had brought capitalism itself into question, to focus on a more general claim to indigenous recognition, increasingly bound up with a kind of nationalism.³³³ The point here is less to condemn the MAS for its electoral politics than to understand that while their electoral efforts resolved the issue of movement unification, they did so in a particular way, as conditioned by the liberal political context. As a solution to the problem of unity, these politics also involved a cost at the level of radical potential. The MAS embodied the classical conception of constituent power, insofar as it was the medium by which, in the words of Balibar, describing the operations of constituent power, "the sovereignty of the state that 'monopolizes legitimate violence'... is referred back to the sovereignty of

³³¹ Kohl and Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia*, 132–33, 145; Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, 104.

³³² Prada, "Multitud y contrapoder," 107.

³³³ Harten, "Towards a 'Traditional Party'," 84–87; Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo*, 25–8.

the revolution.”³³⁴ Whatever else was bound up in the textures of quotidian political struggle – the desires, the relations, the languages, the memories – the facets that prevailed, at least outwardly, were those that could be represented in Parliament.

Tracking Transformations: A Brief Intellectual Biography of García Linera

What was lost may become more apparent through a closer look at the transformations in García Linera’s theoretical work on indigenous autonomy, contrasted with his later work focused on the state. The theoretical and ideological struggle over the nature of the constituent events are, in fact, manifest in García Linera’s oeuvre, which illustrates the extent to which the new ways of thinking and political tasks opened up by a constituent event can be reined in on the other. What is interesting about the case of García Linera is that both sides of this struggle are present in one body of work.

In his introduction to a collection of García Linera’s work titled *Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class, and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, Pablo Stefanoni writes that *Plebeian Power* can be read in part as an intellectual biography of García Linera, and in part as an account of the profound changes that Bolivia has undergone in the last several decades.³³⁵ In fact, these two things are deeply intertwined. For even given the changes that García Linera’s theoretical and political practice have undergone in the last thirty years, his deep concern with the political capacity of Bolivia’s indigenous communities has been

³³⁴ Balibar, “Occasional Notes,” 8.

³³⁵ Stefanoni, “Introduction,” 13.

contemporaneous with the growing centrality of these movements in national political life.

According to biographers, García Linera's concern with indigenous struggle originated in part with his fascination at the 1979 siege of La Paz by the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos, Bolivia's largest peasant union, when García Linera was only seventeen years old. It then continued with an interest in the indigenous politics of Guatemala's civil war while studying in Mexico in the early 1980s. Upon returning to Bolivia in 1984 with his partner and intellectual-political collaborator Raquel Gutiérrez, he began organizing alongside radical elements within CSUTCB, namely Felipe Quispe Huanca, to first organize the tendency Ofensiva Roja, and then the guerrilla group Ejército Guerrillero Tupac Katari (EGTK). During this time, he also began writing under the name Qananchiri and produced several theoretical works attempting to develop coherent Marxist positions on the question of indigeneity.³³⁶

In 1992 García Linera, Gutiérrez, and Quispe were all imprisoned for their alleged participation in the EGTK's acts of urban infrastructure sabotage.³³⁷ García Linera spent his time in prison studying sociology and continuing to write, publishing *Forma valor y forma comunidad* in 1995.³³⁸ In 1997, García Linera and Gutiérrez were released – never having actually been convicted of a crime – and both pursued deep re-evaluation of the kind of politics that were appropriate for the Bolivian

³³⁶ Gómez, "El marxista que halló su cable a tierra," n.p.; Stefanoni, "Evo, el estado, y la revolución," n.p.

³³⁷ See Quispe, *Los Tupakataristas revolucionarios*, for a detailed, if sectarian, history of that group, including García Linera's involvement and arrest.

³³⁸ García Linera, *Forma valor y forma comunidad*.

conjuncture. This was when they helped to form Comuna. Alongside his studies of the composition of the Bolivian working class as a professor of sociology, which I have examined in the previous chapter, the question of indigeneity was still present in the work of García Linera and of Comuna, having, if anything, become a more central political theme in Bolivia and elsewhere since the 1994 Zapatista uprising.

With the explosion of the famous Water War against the privatization of water in Cochabamba in April 2000 and the simultaneous Aymara highland protests and road blockades over the course of that year, rebellion – indigenous and otherwise – was back on the agenda. García Linera wasn't far from it; he says that he reconnected with Evo Morales, an old acquaintance, amidst tear gas on the streets of Cochabamba.³³⁹ In addition to continuous publication as part of Comuna, García Linera became increasingly visible as an analyst on the popular news program *El Pentágono*, in which he worked to 'translate' this ongoing set of popular struggles for a general audience. His reconnection with Morales also brought him into the role of an informal adviser to the coca-growers' union leader, who himself had a growing national profile after quite unexpectedly coming in second in the 2002 presidential elections.³⁴⁰ Following the two Gas Wars of 2003 and 2005, mass mobilizations which deposed two different presidents over the issue of nationalizing Bolivia's substantial gas reserves, Evo once again turned to the presidency, now recruiting García Linera as his running mate on the winning ticket of the MAS.

³³⁹ Gómez, "El marxista que halló su cable a tierra," n.p.

³⁴⁰ Stefanoni "Evo, el estado, y la revolución," n.p.

Divergent Tendencies in García Linera's Thought

Reading García Linera's work on indigeneity even over a limited period of his career, two key political-theoretical insights become apparent. First, his work contains a reading of the present as *an expanded field of political possibilities* linked to a *near future* of social alternatives. That is, his work conceives of indigeneity in terms of its actuality, i.e., neither as a remnant of the past or the messianic possibility of a utopian future. It reads indigeneity as part of the broader constituent texture of possibility, without lodging the hopes for its realization in a far-off, state-based alternative. This is a question, in part, of both temporality and difference. Second, and related to the first point, García Linera's theoretical reflections on knowledge and his own practice as a public intellectual speak to the question raised in Chapters 1 and 3 of how to conceptualize knowledge. Where is knowledge located within the constituent texture? Who can lay claim to it? How would it be transformed if encapsulated by the state or its functionaries?

My point that Garcia Linera's work can be read as a theoretical intervention on issues of political temporality builds on an argument by Boaventura de Sousa Santos regarding the need to reconceptualize the present and its relationship to the future. Sousa Santos is an influential thinker on and within the Latin American Pink Tide; in this he is, like Comuna, someone to look to understand the theoretical implications of the political changes that have taken place in the region over the last twenty years.

Investigating where the greatest resources for radical political thought may be located following the experiences of the twentieth century, Sousa Santos suggests that we should not be misled into looking *elsewhere* – a romantic past or utopian future – for these resources. “Why is it so difficult to think that there is nothing else beyond our concrete present if it is so easy to prove that we only live and work in the present? Why is the immanence of the present less brilliant than the transcendence of the future?” he asks.³⁴¹ The answer, for Sousa Santos, lies in the imposition of a temporality and epistemology formulated in the global North under conditions of capitalist and colonial expansion. This modern perspective has been obsessed, since its inception, with the future as telos, and with telling a story of the past that would lead it there. He describes that perspective:

Because the meaning and direction of history reside in progress and progress is unbounded, the future is infinite. Because it is projected according to an irreversible direction, however, the future is, as Benjamin clearly saw, an empty and homogenous time. This future is as abundant as it is empty, the future only exists, as Marramao says, to become past.³⁴²

Empty time, despite all its weaknesses and disappointing results in the forms of capitalist liberalism and various competing projects that adopted the same framework, has been exported all over the world.³⁴³ Indeed, as soon as it was attached to capitalism and colonialism, argues Sousa Santos, the entire paradigm on which the vision of a utopian future was based, a simultaneous realization of both *emancipation* and *regulation*, was distorted. The paradigm became even weaker because it had to

³⁴¹ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 239.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 181–82.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 169.

obscure its own limitations and consequences, to hide the brutality and exploitation that was supposed to help humanity move along the arc to its utopian conclusion.³⁴⁴

Against this reduction of the present and this unlimited expansion of a future containing one's hopes, Sousa Santos proposes, respectively, a sociology of absences and a sociology of emergences. The sociology of absences is geared toward an expansion of the present, an understanding of its multiplicity despite appearances. "This consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is in fact actively produced as nonexistent," Sousa Santos writes.³⁴⁵ Such an inquiry illuminates the space beyond the abyssal line that separates the knowable from the non-knowable. The sociology of emergences, on the other hand, links whatever exists across the abyssal line to a contracted future. Here, Sousa Santos comes close to a theory of actuality in the same sense in which Bruno Bosteels uses that concept to describe communism: human emancipation is neither ideal, nor utopia, nor a historical precedent to reject or accept, but rather an immanent possibility in political struggle and concrete sociality.³⁴⁶ And it is this, in a sense, that I am trying to get at by writing about *constituent textures* as a supplement to the idea of *constituent power*, which in my view is bound up with an emphasis on the future and the past in lieu of the present. What will be the outcome of a revolution, i.e., how will it all end? What is the past basis for the state's legitimacy? These questions seem to skip over the

³⁴⁴ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 139.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁴⁶ Bosteels, "Introduction" in *The Actuality of Communism*. Note that Bosteels focuses on the specific importance of discussing communism in lieu of any other political signifier. Nonetheless, there are clear affinities with how de Sousa Santos conceptualises the links between the present and the future and the particularity of what Bosteels refers to as 'actuality.'

issue of what kinds of political possibilities are playing out right *now*, as scarcely visible as emergences, or hidden away as absences within the prevailing frameworks of thought or investigation.

The re-evaluation of the relationship of present and future through these two sociological lenses implies a certain amount of epistemological openness. What Sousa Santos calls “learned ignorance” is the principle that there are always limits on knowledge. He makes this point not as a foundation for thinking a transcendental subject, but based simply on the empirical observation of “the inexhaustible diversity of human experience,” and “the diversity of ways of knowing human experience.”³⁴⁷ This sheer diversity, for de Sousa Santos, makes it possible to think that there are more possibilities in the present than it might appear. Summing up this point, Sousa Santos writes: “Whereas the sociology of absences amplifies the present by adding to the existing reality what was subtracted from it by metonymic reason, the sociology of emergences enlarges the present by adding to the existing reality the realistic possibilities and future expectations it contains.”³⁴⁸

It is notable that we are not dealing here with a theory that simply seeks to displace scientific knowledge through a vulgar rejection. De Sousa Santos is still talking about sociology, after all. But if scientific knowledge production holds a certain importance, he wants it relativized within an “ecology of knowledges” that does not presume such knowledge’s preeminence for all tasks in all situations, even as it clearly remains central in others. Because scientific knowledge is important, de

³⁴⁷ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 110.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

Sousa Santos argues that it is important to “transform scientific knowledge into a new common sense.”³⁴⁹ While common sense tends to be conservative, writes de Sousa Santos following Gramsci, it nonetheless holds a “utopian and liberating dimension” that can be used to generate, with an injection of scientific thought, “a new rationality – a rationality comprised of multiple rationalities.”³⁵⁰ If this formulation suggests a symptomatic tension of any politics of difference, it also presents a real task that arises out of the Bolivian constituent moment for an intellectual like García Linera: to re-articulate theoretical (scientific) knowledge with the autonomous forms of knowledge production common in proletarian and other subaltern classes.

Key to this task is also de Sousa Santos's insistence that knowledge must be “knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality” and *not* “knowledge-as-representation-of-reality.”³⁵¹ The distinction here maps onto the way that García Linera discusses the history of Bolivian Marxism (see Chapter 3): a politics based on “knowledge-as-representation-of-reality” would in effect consider political efficacy in terms of the correctness of ideas qua representations. On the contrary, if there is to be a moment of common idea-production within a movement, the idea of “knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality” suggests that it can instead be linked to shared, if only partially, practical pursuits. For this reason, autonomous knowledges, as modes of practical intervention, are more important for de Sousa Santos and for a certain tendency in García Linera’s thought than knowledges as shared representations.

³⁴⁹ Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 158.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

Indeed, only when knowledge is conceptualized as intervention can it be judged by its effects, and not by its adherence to a particular set of sectarian presuppositions.

The considerations drawn from Sousa Santos help to establish a fundamental dividing line internal to García Linera's work and show that this line maps onto various ways of conceptualizing knowledge and political temporality, with implications for how we might think about constituent power and its supplement, constituent texture. My own argument regarding these divergent tendencies in García Linera's work builds on others who have approached the question in different ways. Jeffery Webber periodizes García Linera's texts, contrasting what he calls the "managerial apologia" in García Linera's post-2006 writings as vice president to the more creative strands of his earlier work.³⁵² Bosteels reads into García Linera's work less a periodization than a duality in which, against the outwardly orthodox, stagist moments of his vice presidential discourse, the outlines of a communist actuality are still present.³⁵³ Stefanoni, in his introductory essay to *Plebeian Power*, highlights at least one deep turning point separating the phases of García Linera's discourse: "Perhaps García Linera's most significant political-ideological evolution is his shift – with few intermediate steps – from his 'autonomist' positions to an almost Hegelian defense of the state as a synthesis of the 'general will.'" ³⁵⁴ Taking these three sets of observations together, then, we can begin from the hypothesis of a creative, autonomist, communist strand in García Linera's work opposed to an orthodox, state-

³⁵² Webber, "Burdens of a State Manager," n.p. See also Webber "The Indigenous Community as 'Living Organism'."

³⁵³ Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 222–23.

³⁵⁴ Stefanoni, "Introduction," 11.

centered, bureaucratic strand. The question of periodization, as always, presents other difficulties, but let me suggest that at a general level, the first strand is more prevalent in the earlier moments of García Linera's career, and the second strand more common in the later. I argue that the first strand also represents an approach to constituent textures as emergent material practices and as knowledges-as-interventions, while the second strand presents constituent power in its more classical, liberal mold: as an increase in the recognition of “the people” by the state, where intellectuals in the state apparatus play the role of ensuring that the state remains legitimate, i.e., linked to its foundational revolutionary moment, through knowledges-as-representations. The stakes of these distinctions exceed the question of intellectual history and go straight to the heart of the Bolivian political process.

The Autonomist Tendency in García Linera

The view of an expanded present manifests itself in García Linera's work as an emphasis on subaltern autonomous practices. In “The *Communist Manifesto* and Our Present,” which I've already discussed in Chapter 3, García Linera tackles the question “Why read the *Communist Manifesto* anew today?” He argues that, far from serving as a dogma to be “applied” or a mere object of historiographical interest, the *Communist Manifesto* is *actual* in the sense that it outlines an epoch whose central dynamics still proscribe the limitations and possibilities of the present moment.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 17–18. As mentioned in a note above, constraints on textual availability have required that different versions of García Linera's texts have been cited here at different times. In the following pages, most citations are from the translated collection *Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class, and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, and are so

García Linera posits that capitalist globalization, as a productive force, suggests the abstract possibility of an immanent “counter-finality” to be realized in the form of communism.³⁵⁶ Speaking of Marx, he writes, “He does not address the productive forces in terms of what they do now – which, as Marx knows very well, is to enrich their private owners and to alienate labour – he considers them for what they potentially and abstractly contain for humanity, beyond the frustrating and miserable form in which they exist today.”³⁵⁷ But how can this abstract potential be realized? This question pushes García Linera into the realm of epistemology. As we have seen in the prior discussion of class composition (see previous Chapter), in positing the actual potential of globalization, García Linera refers to the idea of a general social intellect that develops as capitalism subsumes the various individualized knowledges necessary to the social production process.³⁵⁸ The autonomous potential of subaltern classes is the key to the intellect’s liberation, and the technical development of the general social intellect conditions the political composition of the class that can liberate it. García Linera writes:

The party of the proletariat, for Marx and for the true communists of today, is, therefore, the combination of rationalities and practical actions, of struggles, of resistances, of organizations and individual, collective, local, national, and international strategies, that the world of labour deploys in the face of the rationality of exchange-value in the terrains of economic, political, and cultural life. In this multiform historical process, which does not necessarily require external links that are not part of the common struggle, the proletariat

indicated with that title. The years and titles of the individual essays in that collection have been indicated in the body text where appropriate.

³⁵⁶ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 22–23.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

produces its own economic, political, and cultural physiognomy, and, in this sense, initiates its own *social self-determination*.³⁵⁹

Like de Sousa Santos, then, García Linera emphasizes here the importance of immanent difference, honed through antagonism, as the basis for revolutionary subjectivity, and he likewise eschews the function of a vanguard in its constitution.³⁶⁰

The proletariat's knowledge does not come from external leaders, but from its practice as both subjects of capital and as an autonomous force against capital. Subaltern knowledge, incarnate in practices of production and social reproduction, is a political force that exceeds all sectarian attempts to represent it in relation to ideological purity.

García Linera's central argument, that revolutionary possibility lies in the permanent autonomous potential of oppressed and exploited classes, formulated as practical knowledge and situated beyond all links to party, state, vanguard, or doctrine, is clear in both his treatment of working class and indigenous struggle, as discussed earlier. Over the course of the 2000 to 2005 period, however, he draws distinct and at times contradictory conclusions about the contemporary importance of these struggles, which also imply divergent ways of conceptualizing power. We can begin to delineate a distinction between this first tendency, which I have qualified as autonomous, creative, and communist, and the second more orthodox, bureaucratic, and state-oriented strand.

³⁵⁹ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 80–81. Emphasis in original.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

Against the Bolivian elite's cooptation of *indianismo* during the 1990s, like the recruitment of Aymara former vice president Hugo Cardenas, García Linera articulates a principle of indigenous politics beyond representation: a "communal-insurgent will" fueling a fiercely anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-authoritarian socialisation in Bolivia's indigenous communities.³⁶¹ This is embodied above all in the Andean communal formation of the *ayllu*, which had been a primary community organizing structure during the 2000 protests, and which, according to the author, could be the seed of an actual alternative to capitalism and the state.³⁶² This is not a romantic throwback to a pre-colonial primitive communism; the more or less fragmented potentials of the *ayllu*, writes García Linera, "are structurally different from the civilisational constitutions of dominant capitalism."³⁶³ Even as this splintered and subaltern civilizational form is indelibly marked by its subsumption to capital, it is nonetheless autonomous in its potential to overcome that subalternity. Like Gutiérrez in her reading of the *Manifiesto*, García Linera relies on a conception of struggle as a kind of catalyst for self-determining potential:

Precisely this is rebellion. It is in rebellion that Guáman Poma's and Hegel's catastrophic assertion of the 'world turned upside down' holds true. With communal rebellion, the entire past becomes actively concentrated in the present, but unlike in times of quiet, when the subaltern past is projected as the subalternised present, now it is the accumulation of the rebellious past that is concentrated in the present in order to overcome past docility.... Thus it is at these times that the communal-indigenous world covets itself as the origin and target of every power, every identity and every future incumbent upon it. Its acts are the tacit enunciation of a social order that does not recognize any

³⁶¹ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 155–57.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 244–45.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 245.

type of foreign or external authority other than its own *self-determination already under way*.³⁶⁴

In short, García Linera offers here a reading of indigenous political possibility grounded in a combination of historically accumulated insurgent force and disperse but mobile communal practices.

By 2004, we begin to see the second, state-centered strand in García Linera's thought. At this point, a cycle of even larger nationwide protests had emerged in Bolivia. The key issues were a plan that would have provided for the private export of Bolivian natural gas through Chile to be shipped to the United States, the continuing unfulfillment of Aymara demands from 2000, and the introduction of certain utility service fees in the indigenous urban center of El Alto.³⁶⁵ This round of insurgency culminated in October 2003 when protestors marching from El Alto to La Paz deposed president and neoliberal architect Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. The general level of discontent and the political class's illegitimacy following its repressive response to these protests implied a severe political crisis at the level of the state. This crisis and the vacuum of state power seem to have left a mark on García Linera's writings during this period, while he also worked to make sense of these events for a general television audience.

Thus, in the 2004 "Indigenous Autonomies and the Multinational State," in contrast to a focus on "new forms of social self-determination", he now calls for the construction of

³⁶⁴ García Linera *Plebeian Power*, 156. Emphasis in original.

³⁶⁵ Gutiérrez, *Los ritmos de pachakuti*, 223.

a new state-structure capable of integrating into the entire institutional framework, into the distribution of powers and into normative systems, these two great aspects of the Bolivian social character: ethnic-cultural diversity and the civilizational plurality of the symbolic and technico-procedural systems that are part of the organisation of the collective sphere.³⁶⁶

The reference to ethnic-cultural diversity is a call for the so-called monocultural state to recognise Bolivia's fifty or so different indigenous communities and linguistic groups by administratively constructing various forms of regional and local autonomy. By civilizational plurality, he means the acceptance of social, political, and economic practices outside of liberalism and the wage relation.³⁶⁷ What is notable here is that, first, while this discussion is still ostensibly about autonomy, García Linera has shifted the site of the issue from "rebellion" to that of a wonkish proposal wherein autonomy is granted through institutional and legal design. Second, we should observe that García Linera is now discussing indigeneity as a form of difference in two registers. Or as de Sousa Santos might say, he presents two theories of separation: 1) the ethnic-cultural register, which we can call difference in terms of identity, and 2) the civilizational register, which refers to difference in terms of economic and political practice. This latter register, I want to suggest, is also that of the constituent texture. In this essay, García Linera leaves the relation between them indeterminate, except to say that both should be valued and acknowledged at the level of the state, which serves as an implicit site of their union.

³⁶⁶ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 187.

³⁶⁷ For more on the concept of a "multicivilisational society" see Tapia, *La condición multisocietal*, 9–19.

In other essays from 2004 and 2005, however, “The Crisis of the State and Indigenous-Plebeian Uprisings in Bolivia” and “The Struggle for Power in Bolivia”, difference in terms of identity takes precedence for García Linera. Politically, Bolivia’s crisis had reached the point of no return; Sanchez de Lozada’s successor, Carlos Mesa, was unable to resolve the key issue of gas nationalization, and in 2005, he too resigned in the face of growing protests. Reviewing these five years of popular struggle against neoliberalism in Bolivia, García Linera argues that what unites the various popular movements at that point is “a common indigenous identity-framework, which challenges what has been the unchanging core of the Bolivian state over the past 178 years: its monoethnicity.”³⁶⁸ The monocivilisational character of the state – its status as a bludgeon against and subsumer of alternative social and economic forms – fades to the background here, and accordingly, ethnic-cultural identity, figured as the basis for a kind of hegemony, explains the existing state *and* the various struggles against the state. After describing several alternative modes of political decision-making and social reproduction that emerged with the crisis of the state, García Linera writes that this propensity to develop new modes of self-organization “is today undergoing processes of increasing institutional self-unification, coercive as well as symbolic, under the form of ethnic nationalisms and identities, which is producing a duality of political systems and principles of authority.”³⁶⁹ The crisis of the state, that is, opened a space for a clash between two systems qua social blocs, rooted in identity, and engaged in a struggle for

³⁶⁸ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 270.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

hegemony.³⁷⁰ The various civilisational innovations at play in this clash, which might be the basis for alternative models of social organization and political engagement, however, are reduced to symbolic modes of identification.

Having articulated the key political struggle in these terms, it is unsurprising that García Linera accepted the invitation to join the ticket of the party best poised to assume a hegemonic role, the MAS under Evo Morales. But was hegemonic struggle oriented toward the state really the only way of conceiving politics at this moment? If so, did this struggle need to be conceived in terms of identity? And what is the relationship between hegemony, the state, and identity?

For García Linera, the autonomous practices and alternative epistemologies that, in one strand of thought, appeared to provide a reserve of alternatives to capitalism, later become bound up in a framework that swings between the plural valorization of difference *tout court* and the closure of political space around a project of identity-based struggle for state power. To transition from constituent power to constituted power, i.e., to legitimize a new state, becomes the only viable political goal. Yet as Alberto Moreiras writes, “The key here is to consider the fact that local knowledges – and, *a fortiori*, their anti-colonial deployments – are not identitarian in nature, that is, that they do not primarily depend on cultural identification and may have nothing to do with it.”³⁷¹ In other words, confronted with an opportunity that might demand new social and political alternatives, it is not a given that these alternatives must be attached to an identity in order to be realized or generalized. The

³⁷⁰ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 280–81.

³⁷¹ Moreiras, “Democracy in Latin America,” 5.

danger in linking anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism to identity, as Moreiras convincingly argues, is that “identity, as necessarily particularist, as the very ideology of particularism, necessarily imposes constraints that can only be coopted but never functionalised by democratic political power.”³⁷² So once difference is politically represented in terms of identity, it may lead to either undemocratic exclusion, cynical false identification, or both. The complex and varied texture of everyday life, irreducible to any one identity category or position, is cut off from its context and circulated as a marker and guarantee of state legitimacy.

Furthermore, the entire epistemological premise of the autonomist arguments is reversed in the state-centered tendency of García Linera’s thought. In contrast to a project rooted in “the combination of rationalities and practical actions” of the masses, García Linera’s position in state power involves a top-down pedagogical approach that relocates difference itself to the level of the state, now incorporated through a narrative of Bolivian history.³⁷³ As Peter Baker argues:

García Linera offers himself ... as the intellectual figure able to prescribe modifications or 'corrections' to the State apparatus, an apparatus that would eventually be capable therefore of 'representing' the structure of that [Bolivian] plurality. ... [García Linera] reproduces a certain relationship between knowledge production and the subaltern in his writings in which it is the role of the intellectual to translate the needs of the underrepresented.³⁷⁴

Baker is arguing that the strategy of state power, as García Linera has adopted it, has brought with it a centralization of knowledge production, even as this strategy is

³⁷² Moreiras, “Democracy in Latin America,” 5.

³⁷³ García Linera, *Plebeian Power*, 80.

³⁷⁴ Baker, “Can the State Learn to Live Well?,” 292.

based on a claim to identitarian difference. That is, the Bolivian state's claim to represent a certain ethnic constituency is predicated on a figure who can narrate the relationship between that constituency and the state.

Any expanded engagement with emergent social practices as alternatives to capitalism must be something more than symbolic incorporation to legitimize state power. And any epistemological decentering of academic production in favor of knowledge integrated into people's everyday lives must exceed the handing down of nationalist historical narratives from on high. These limitations in García Linera's work have since been consolidated in his position that building Andean-Amazonian capitalism is presently more important than socialism, and his argument in favor of *closing* Bolivia's "revolutionary period," rather than a continuing openness to new energies and ideas.³⁷⁵ These theoretical claims have been paired with an increasingly lethargic political process accused – by the Left – of censorship, persecution, and the continuing dependence on an environmentally and socially destructive model of accumulation. Indeed, despite the evident importance of state power for any revolutionary process, one wonders if Latin America's Pink Tide over the last two decades has really seen its greatest achievements at that level. This question is at the heart of the later divergences in the work of Comuna's members. Against the focus on the state, Raquel Gutiérrez writes, "What is important ... is to understand the struggles and confrontations that have expanded in all of Bolivia at the beginning of

³⁷⁵ García Linera, *Plebian Power*, 277–81. The need to close this "revolutionary epoch" is discussed in García Linera, "The State in Transition: Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation." On the present impossibility of socialism see García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*.

the 21st century, and to learn what they can teach us, once again, about human emancipation.”³⁷⁶ For Gutiérrez, Prada, and to a lesser degree, Tapia and Vega, subsequent events have very much marked a closure, at the level of the state, of the constituent potential that was unleashed in 2000. It is for this reason that, at the very least, the theoretical effects of that moment continue to find vessels in the writings of these theorists, as they continue the work of weaving together existing subaltern potentials.

Bolivian Politics and Economics after 2006

Today, Bolivia’s economic model centers on the extraction and export of raw materials. With definite variation, this is the trend among most of Latin America’s left-leaning states. Some have sought to characterize this as a continuation, or reconstitution of the neoliberal economic model that these governments were elected to oppose.³⁷⁷ Yet while resource extraction has long defined Latin America’s role in the international division of labor, the specific means by which these states now secure the conditions for accumulation are distinct from those of the neoliberal period.

Whereas neoliberal models in the 1990s relied on a more diverse set of exports – in tandem with measures to keep working class wages low – Latin America in the last few years arguably faces a “reprimarization.” That is, export diversity,

³⁷⁶ Gutiérrez, *Ritmos de pachakuti*, 37.

³⁷⁷ Svampa, “Commodities Consensus,” 65; Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*; Salazar Lohman, *Se han adueñado*; Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo*.

which increased in some instances under neoliberalism, has been reduced in favor of primary commodity exports. At the same time, while there have been only limited wage increases,³⁷⁸ in certain cases exacerbated by inflation, all of the Pink Tide states in Latin America have institutionalized popular welfare programs and worker subsidies – a significant departure from the austerity underpinning the investment attraction strategies of the 1990s. The expansion of healthcare, education, and direct cash transfers speaks to this redistribution in Bolivia.³⁷⁹ In Argentina, conservative president Mauricio Macri has refrained from dismantling popular transfers introduced by his Peronist predecessor, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, even expanding some, indicating a right-wing hesitation to return entirely to the neoliberal status-quo-ante.³⁸⁰ The central feature of the neo-extractive model is that these welfare programs are directly funded by the rents on exported primary commodities, and are thus a key mechanism whereby subaltern classes are brought into the ruling coalition. In Bolivia, this has been achieved by “nationalizing” the hydrocarbon industries, which in practice meant becoming the majority shareholder in shared production partnerships with the same foreign companies that previously dominated the sector. Thus, critics correctly highlight the continued presence of transnational capital in Bolivia’s extractive industries; the state has arguably *increased* the country’s economic dependence on resource extraction in partnership with these foreign companies, but

³⁷⁸ Falconi and Oleas-Montalvo, “Citizens’ Revolution,” 127; Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 217–22.

³⁷⁹ Farthing and Kohl, *Evo’s Bolivia*, 98–113.

³⁸⁰ See “Asignación universal” and “Mauricio Macri anunció un aporte.”

has responded to its popular mandate by gaining a greater stake in the extractive surplus.³⁸¹

At the same time, neoliberal or not, the demands of an extractive economy have created new political contradictions. As a result, the state has resorted to strategies of both repression and division – and its targets have not just been the resurgent Right, but the very social movement organizations that brought the MAS to power. The famous and ongoing conflict over the TIPNIS highway illustrates both of these approaches. The highway in question would be built through the Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure (TIPNIS), which is both a protected natural reserve and a legally recognized indigenous territory. In opposition to this thoroughfare, which residents argued would be environmentally and socially disruptive, some indigenous organizations led by the CIDOB began a march in August of 2011 from the city of Trinidad to the government seat of La Paz. On September 25, the 800 marchers were intercepted in the town of San Lorenzo de Chaparina by 500 police officers, attacked with tear gas and batons, and leaders of the march were detained. Planes from the Bolivian Air Force attempted to land in Chaparina to remove the arrested. The detained were saved by the solidarity of locals who blocked the runway and prevented the planes from touching down, then freed the marchers from the buses where they were held. When the marchers finally arrived in

³⁸¹ Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 82; Kaup, *Market Justice*, 28, 129–134.

La Paz, the increased attention had consolidated their numbers, making them 500,000 strong.³⁸²

This first attempt to stop the highway illustrated that while the extractive model created a contradiction between the state's developmental plans and the autonomy of indigenous peasants and workers, the latter could still depend on solidarities established during years of insurrection, a network of constituent connections not captured by the MAS project in the state. Thus, when repression didn't work, the state developed a new strategy: division. Within the TIPNIS, there are both lowland indigenous groups with long histories in the area, as well as Aymara coca producers who have more recently settled it. The former often have mixed economies of subsistence agriculture, communal farming, and some market-oriented activities, while the latter are principally dependent on the coca leaf market.³⁸³ After the government appeared to concede to the mostly lowland highway protesters in October 2011, a similar march organized by the Consejo Indígena del Sur (CONISUR), the main coca growers association in the TIPNIS, arrived in La Paz in order to demand, conversely, that the government build the road. On this basis, the state organized a "consultation" of the residents of the TIPNIS, where they claimed to have found that 80 percent of the communities consulted were in favor of the

³⁸² Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo*, 33, 44–45, 48; Salazar Lohmann, *Se han adueñado*, 283; Farthing and Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia*, 53; Carlos Gonçalves, *Encrucijada latinoamericana en Bolivia*, 83.

³⁸³ Gonçalves, *Encrucijada latinoamericana en Bolivia*, 52–65. In Bolivian social discourse, Andean Aymara and Quechua rural producers who have moved to different parts of the country are often called, not necessarily pejoratively, *colonizadores*. The other 34 indigenous groups recognized by the constitution are primarily smaller, lowland communities. It is worth noting, in this sense, that these social divisions did not originate with the Morales government, but rather have been underlying, in some form, the political process in Bolivia for a long time. The recent migrations of Aymara and Quechua peasants, however, and their integration into the coca economy, has been an effect of the economic reorganization caused by neoliberal policies since the 1980s.

construction. In fact, according to some independent monitoring groups who sought to corroborate this claim, many communities that the government claimed to have consulted were never contacted, and of those who were, only 17 percent came out in favor of the highway.³⁸⁴ But the announcement of these “results” was enough to sow the seeds of division among the various communities in the TIPNIS. One group of anti-highway protesters defined the MAS strategy in these terms: “The interference of the government in the organic structures of indigenous peoples [serves] to divide us, using extortion, intimidation and criminalization of leaders and representative indigenous organizations.”³⁸⁵

As it stands, the highway is set to be built, but its commencement is delayed. Whether it is ultimately constructed will be an index of the political and organizational capacity of those who oppose it. As Huascár Salazar Lohman writes: “The consultation proposed by the government was simply a state attempt at disarticulation and disruption of regional communitarian structures and of their historic struggle, and although in this sense this was achieved by the state, the fact that until now ... the highway has not been built demonstrates that there exists a popular force that has been able to delay its construction.”³⁸⁶

The extraparliamentary organizations that drove the period of insurrection, however, face increasing challenges. The Bolivian state continues to demobilize the groups that helped bring the MAS to power. The Pacto de Unidad, in which all the

³⁸⁴ Salazar Lohmann, *Se han adueñado*, 288.

³⁸⁵ “Manifiesto Público de la IX Marcha Indígena Originaria,” 366.

³⁸⁶ Salazar Lohmann, *Se han adueñado*, 289.

major indigenous organizations pooled their power during the 2006 Constituent Assembly, fell apart in response to the TIPNIS conflict, and MASistas in both the CIDOB and CONAMAQ have managed to split the organizations into *oficialista* factions, who support the government and receive resources from it, and *orgánica* factions who oppose the MAS's interference.³⁸⁷ These splits have undermined the political potential built by these organizations during 2000–2005; rather than serving as a force to advance the struggle, they have had to continually defend their autonomy against the initiatives of the state and private enterprise, designed to attract more extractive capital. It is this political decomposition, owing in part to state strategies to rout popular opposition, that is the most demoralizing feature of the current conjuncture.

Opportunities Lost

Comparing the MAS to the Movimiento Revolucionario Nacional (MNR), which came to power in the Bolivian national revolution of 1952, we find a paradox. As Jeffrey Webber suggests, the MNR went quite a bit further with its promised reforms than the MAS, yet the rhetoric of the MAS is much more radical, steeped in the language of social movements, indigenous rebellion, and popular power.³⁸⁸ While the MNR had a left flank, its main line spoke mainly the language of moderate nationalism, even as it sought US cooperation. So how does a party with less apparent

³⁸⁷ Layme, "CIDOB dividida por el Gobierno de Morales," n.p. Vacaflor, "Dirigentes denuncian que el MAS busca injerencia en el Conamaq," n.p.

³⁸⁸ Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 101.

revolutionary will become the more revolutionary party? It is a question, perhaps, of the social relations of power: the MNR depended upon armed, self-organized workers to defeat reactionary elements of the military when it took power, and until it supplanted those popular militias by resurrecting the discredited armed forces, it could ignore workers at its own peril. The military, that repressive arm of the capitalist state, was on the verge of permanent ruin – though once the MNR revived them, the armed forces quickly destroyed their reanimator. By contrast, while the insurrectionary power of 2000–2005 was organized and effective, the state power achieved through the MAS, even with the extraparliamentary backing, was only a small foothold by which to contend with the robust class power of entrenched national and international capitalist interests.

Taking the rhetorical radicalism of the MAS at face value, this presents us with another problem: what might the MAS have done, once in power, to invigorate the political process, to radicalize its base, to open up an alternative path forward, outside the confines of an extraction-based welfare state? In other words, even granting all of the factors, all of the history weighing on the Bolivian situation as of 2006, and all of the international and national constraints of capital and the state, what were the possibilities beyond a straightforward reconsolidation of the state that relied on a claim to ethnic representation? What might have been the alternative to the constituent/constituted model of power?

Looking back, we see a watershed involving a choice between two distinct approaches, two possible relationships between the state and the society, two

understandings of the very meaning on constituent power: the Constituent Assembly of 2006. The MAS could either have created opportunities for mass political intervention to push the process into uncharted waters, or it could have – and did – ensure its own position by seeking out new allies and building a merely ideological set of mechanisms to activate its base.

Possibilities of the Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly of 2006 was a defining moment for the question of what kind of relationship the state would have with society in the post-insurrectionary period. The demand for the Assembly went back to the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, was revived during the Water War of 2000, and with the second Gas War and the abdication of Carlos Mesa in 2005, its realization was a condition for the MAS's rule. Owing perhaps to a recognition of its own insecurity with regard to the overall social relations of power, as well as to legislative opposition from other parties, the MAS accepted an assembly framework with limited opportunities for popular political participation. Even as the social movements, and in particular the indigenous social movements who formed the *Pacto de Unidad*, pledged to critically support the process, they were not actually permitted into the assembly as such – they had to stand as individuals and affiliate with a political party. And the proportional voting system, which the social movements decried, allowed an outsize minority representation for the discredited elites. Once the Assembly was in session, the

movements in the *Pacto de Unidad* proposed their own set of amendments on key issues, but were effectively rebuffed by the MAS leadership.³⁸⁹

What was missed in the Constituent Assembly was a chance to open the Bolivian state to new democratic political practices, to displace the domination of liberal politics that the MAS inherited, and to activate the unique constituent texture of the insurgent period to create new formulas of constituted and constituent power. Indigenous communities, for instance, hoped to use their own methods of selection in order to choose their representative delegations to the legislature – that is, to participate in alternative forms of community deliberation, beyond a simple vote. They proposed a series of democratic mechanisms that may have allowed popular participation to counterbalance the weight of reaction, including immediate recall of legislators, communal assemblies, and citizen legislative initiatives. They sought to create a fourth branch of government, the “Social Plurinational Power,” which would be composed of representatives of indigenous nations and community organizations.³⁹⁰ At stake in these proposals was a step toward a proletarian state. Just as Marx drew his own vision of such a state based on the practical developments of the Paris Commune, here was a set of new, if uneven, mechanisms whereby the laboring classes could secure for themselves a weapon against their enemies.

³⁸⁹ Sader, *The New Mole*, 139–40; Salvador Schavelzon, *El nacimiento del estado plurinacional de Bolivia: etnografía de una Asamblea Constituyente*, 143–47; Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 86; Salazar Lohman, *Se han adueñado*, 191–206.

³⁹⁰ Lucía Linsalata, *Cuando manda la asamblea*, 260; Asamblea nacional de organizaciones indígenas, originarias, campesinas, y de colonizadores de Bolivia, “Propuesta para la nueva constitución política del estado,” 176, 179.

Yet these ideas were largely excised from the final constitutional proposal. Alternative forms of delegation, though recognized in the abstract by Article 11 of the constitution, were not instituted as a means for any actual elections. The idea of special Legislative Assembly representatives for indigenous territories was deferred for future parliamentary debate, and worker, peasant, and community organizations failed to achieve institutionalized representation. The masses had offered an imaginative set of democratic possibilities that would have reshaped the entire social arena. An alliance of rural and urban indigenous groups was one pole of a social antagonism manifest at the level of the state and shaping the possibilities for the MAS as it faced increasing pressure from the Right in its first term; only by marshalling that popular support could the conditions have been created for a further rupture with the old order. But the MAS chose a different route.

Strategic Populism and the Ideology of Division

In describing the Pink Tide, one is tempted to use the term *populism*, understood, following Ernesto Laclau, as the suturing together of various demands into a single identity, “the people,” that produces a concomitant reduction of the social field into two opposing camps.³⁹¹ Yet to leave things there would permit simple excuses for the democratic shortcomings of Latin America’s left-leaning states; if the social field were so simplified, we might concede that the battle for hegemony against

³⁹¹ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

the Right is more important than the political content of the Left.³⁹² But the real communal and popular struggles against the state belie the suggestion of both a dualistic contest, and of a subject, the “people,” capacious enough to encompass internal dissent. Indeed, by creating the appearance of such a populist reduction, of a simplification of politics into a Manichean clash, the Pink Tide governments have strategically displaced political antagonisms arising from the neo-extractive model. Veronica Gago explains the relationship between economics, politics, and ideology that underlies the populist garb:

Furthermore, the relationship that the *progresista* governments of the region have with their populations and with natural resources is politically complex: the equation is that the primary *commodities* are the source of financing social subsidies. The exploitation by ... transnationals is thus legitimized owing to a discursive state mediation that emphasizes the function of social integration achieved on the basis of the capture of these extraordinary rents. Faced with this, the attempts from below to politicize resistance against these businesses are repeatedly infantilized, or treated as irrelevant for those outside of them who hope to disqualify their critical force. ... Indeed, what is blocked in this state refusal of legitimacy for the demands arising from the mode of accumulation is exactly the dynamic of recognition that would characterize a democracy mapping its constituent practices onto the points of antagonism.³⁹³

In other words, the contradictions generated by the model of extractivism, wherein specific groups of workers and indigenous communities bear its negative effects, are subsumed by another apparent conflict between the state and various right wing enemies. The state can ignore one set of political antagonisms by emphasizing another, even as it seeks out “partnerships” with the latter set of supposed antagonists,

³⁹² See for example Harnecker, *A World to Build*.

³⁹³ Verónica Gago, *La razón neoliberal*, 245.

including transnational companies and politicians from the old neoliberal parties.³⁹⁴ Thus, Morales and García Linera denounce all critics, left or right, as anti-Bolivian, or as imperialists, because they oppose the supposedly national-popular consensus of resource extraction and surplus redistribution – but the object of the critics is precisely the influence of the national and international right in the “process of change.”³⁹⁵ A populist political logic is certainly in play here, but it is a shock absorber for a more complex set of political conflicts. Real social antagonisms run up against rhetorical oppositions.

To ground this strategic populism, the MAS skillfully wields liberal mechanisms and plays on their limitations in order to reduce political choices and transfer them to terrain where they can win. Nancy Postero highlights a tension between liberalism and what she calls a “post-liberal” emphasis on constituent power in the governing style of the MAS. According to her, the MAS’s strategy is “the latest attempt to make liberalism overcome its limitations, by deepening the promise of democratic participation.”³⁹⁶ But today this generous interpretation cannot be sustained.

In fact, the approach of the MAS is as much about *constraining* power, making it fit the classical model of constituent power that culminates in the power of the state, as about invoking it. The entire strategy is reflected in the tactic of the popular referendum. In 2008 Morales proposed a recall referendum when the MAS

³⁹⁴ Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*, 82; Harten, “Towards a ‘Traditional Party’,” 78–79.

³⁹⁵ Molina, “El gobierno boliviano amenaza con expulsar a cuatro ONG críticas.” See also, for example, Álvaro García Linera, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*.

³⁹⁶ Postero, “The Struggle to Create,” 75.

was feuding with the right-wing landholding class over the finalization of the new constitution. Morales handily won his recall, and several of the opposition's governors were ousted. Salazar points out that the effect of this was to give Morales the support necessary for completing passing the new constitution without bringing the masses into the street again, except in order to vote, since the indigenous organizations would likely have mobilized to demand their own constitutional proposals if they had been called to defend the Assembly.³⁹⁷ Through the referendum, the choice was reframed: either the MAS-supported constitution, or the intransigence of the Right. Such tactics bolster liberal democratic legitimacy while also alluding to constituent power in the most abstract terms; but indeed it is only an allusion, providing no space for autonomous popular activity. The real constituent texture, which might not have neatly fit into the space of the Constituent Assembly, did not enter into the equation. The continuous electoral consolidation of the MAS – though it has more recently suffered its first defeat in a vote on abolishing presidential term limits – is therefore neither an unproblematic reflection of the general will, nor, conversely, a case of some supposed false consciousness. The “people” have not been duped, as an elitist trope would have it, but we must recall that the “people” is always the reductive representation of a heterogeneous multitude, brandished in this case against those on the left as well as those on the right.

Another feature of the MAS strategy of consolidation is nationalism. This theme did not originate with the MAS, of course. Even in the original insurrections of

³⁹⁷ Salazar Lohman, *Se han adueñado*, 209.

the early 2000s, nationalism played a central role. The Gas Wars were stoked by the idea that Bolivian gas would be going through Chile, an old rival according to some popular narratives of Bolivian history, and going to the US, the object of nationalist ire throughout Latin America for obvious reasons. For the MAS, this nationalist element of the insurrection has not been a problem so much as a solution – a solution for those whose task, as soon as the executive was taken, was to make Bolivia governable again. The MAS, in order to survive, needed to overcome the challenges I have already mentioned: a fragmented elite with bastions of power in regional governments, economic dependence on foreign-dominated extractive industries, a set of neoliberal cultural policies, and, of course, an organized popular insurrection from whence the MAS came. In such a context, nationalism has provided a specific way of configuring state power to overcome concrete issues presented by continuing class conflict. As Étienne Balibar argues, the nation form itself is always an ongoing “process of reproduction, of permanent *re-establishment* of the nation”:

In order completely to identify the reasons for the relative stability of the national formation, it is not sufficient, then, merely to refer to the initial threshold of its emergence. We must also ask how the problems of unequal development of town and countryside, colonization and decolonization, wars and the revolutions which they have sometimes sparked off, the constitution of supranational blocs and so on have in practice been surmounted, since these are all events and processes which involved at least a risk of class conflicts drifting beyond the limits within which they had more or less easily confined by the ‘consensus’ of the nation state.

The state effort toward building the nation, through policy and discourse, is ever renewed to address instability in processes of capital accumulation. The irony in this case is that the MAS is itself a manifestation of class struggle from below that

challenged the white-mestizo conception of the Bolivian nation, posing itself as an alternative “dominated nationalism”, but now calling on nationalism to confine class struggle through a new consensus.³⁹⁸

As Kohl and Farthing argue, the articulation of nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments with demands around natural resources in Bolivia has been a powerful basis for social mobilization since 1952.³⁹⁹ The specific innovation of the MAS has been to employ what Silvia Rivera calls “strategic ethnicity” claims to refigure Bolivian nationalism in accordance with resurgent indigenous politics. The MAS’s claim to what she calls an “authoritarian and idealist conception of the Nation ... that would be in the process of consolidating itself as a primordial identity” stands in contrast to ambiguous language of “plurinationalism” which is enshrined in the constitution, yet the MAS has been able to invoke both ideas. Rivera argues that this is possible because of the prominence of 1990s neoliberal identitarian politics: “The state has made use of that strategic ethnicity precisely because the latter was constructed in the cultural sphere of neoliberal reforms.” For instance, Morales’s electoral slogan “*Soberanía y dignidad*”, combines a classic watchword of the nationalist movement, sovereignty, with one of the 1990s indigenous movement, dignity. With an appeal to indigeneity as identity, or as a set of values, instead of as a concrete set of political and social circumstances, the government can recognize the many indigenous communities as part of the Bolivian nation, disregarding the real

³⁹⁸ Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 60–65; Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” 93.

³⁹⁹ Kohl and Farthing, “Material Constraints to Popular Imaginaries,” 225.

conflicts that some of these communities have with state-supported national development projects. The underlying strategy here, which manifests itself likewise at the grassroots level of political discourse, is that of “marking indigeneity as national and the Bolivian nation as indigenous.”⁴⁰⁰

Naturally, invocations of the indigenized Bolivian nation were important for fending off the secessionist challenge from the right-wing Santa Cruz landowners in 2008. But they have likewise been used against those who protest the TIPNIS highway, against independent research organizations, against social media, against MAS dissidents, and against anyone else who opposes the plans of the state from the Left.

State, Revolution, Transformation: García Linera and Nicos Poulantzas

If the forces of the Right appear resurgent today throughout Latin America, this is in part because of the ambivalent positions of the state-centered Left. Moderate leftism in the global periphery, balancing between popular pressure and acquiescence to international capital, tends to wear itself out; capital has little use for an ambivalent ally, and revolutionary energies wane in the face of halting political contradiction.⁴⁰¹ While this conflict has not yet reached its denouement in Bolivia, things have largely come to a head elsewhere: Venezuela is in the midst of a full economic and political

⁴⁰⁰ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Mito y desarrollo*, 25, 40–41, 54; Perreault and Green, “Reworking the Spaces of Indigeneity,” 51. The reference to “dignity” evokes the ‘March for Territory and Dignity’, which set the agenda for the lowland indigenous movements throughout the 1990s.

⁴⁰¹ Katz, “Is South America’s ‘Progressive Cycle’ at an End?,” n.p. The contradictions of this position have many precedents in Latin America, owing primarily to the constant presence of foreign capital and imperialist political pressure. In Bolivia, for example, both the MNR after 1952 and the brief period of ‘military socialism’ from 1969–71 collapsed on the basis of similar contradictions.

crisis, and Brazil recently elected an openly racist and sexist president with nostalgia for military dictatorship. Notwithstanding important differences, the popular support that has carried these governments through difficult times in the past has made only a tepid appearance. And with Brazil's Bolsonaro and Argentina's Macri in office, the regional solidarity that has bolstered the center-left in times of crisis is also in question. Bolivia too is facing a growing set of corruption-related scandals, leading the MAS to lose its bid for a constitutional amendment permitting Morales and García Linera to compete for a fourth term.⁴⁰²

But what is the path forward that would retain the possibility of a revolutionary transformation? Indeed, what can we learn from the Pink Tide about revolution and state power more generally? There is perhaps a temptation to lump the Pink Tide in with the entire history of social democratic failures and limitations that litter history, to see in it a process of constituent power that has already exhausted any possibilities for further change via a transformation into constituted power. On the other hand, if Latin America represented an early regional rejection of neoliberalism in the name of certain claims to democracy and popular sovereignty, articulated perhaps in a populist form, then we can now see this possibility elsewhere. In the US and UK through the rhetoric and appeal of Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, and in Greece and Spain through the new parties of PODEMOS and SYRIZA. If this sort of

⁴⁰² McNelly, "The Latest Turn of Bolivia's Political Merry-Go-Round," n.p. Since the time of writing this, however, events in Bolivia have moved quickly. Evo and García Linera did run for a fourth term in 2019, after winning a court case that overturned the referendum. Subsequently, after Evo claimed victory in October/November of 2019, middle-class protests against Evo and the MAS led to a coup in which the commander-in-chief of the military, Gen. Williams Kaliman, "suggested" that Evo resign. See the Foreword for more on these events.

electoral politics is becoming the medium for new political possibilities in various parts of the world, the Latin American experience may be instructive.

Among other contributions on this point, we might look to the work of Nicos Poulantzas, which points the double necessity of both seizing positions of state power, but also changing the class balance of forces at a social level, maintaining independent political organizations outside the state, and working toward a transformation of the state's institutional materiality. The key insight of Poulantzas is that the state is not a monolith; class conflict is rather "inscribed into the institutional structure of the state" because of its own internal horizontal divisions – between branches, departments, offices, military commands, etc. – as well as its vertical ones – between officers and rank-and-file soldiers, for example, or university administrators and staff.⁴⁰³ These divisions allow, in some moments, echoes of popular will to find their way into the state apparatus, intentionally or otherwise, as "the establishment of the State's policy must be seen as the result of class contradictions inscribed in the very structure of the State."⁴⁰⁴ Through the interaction of the various departments and branches affected in different ways by class relationships, the state takes on a number of potentially conflictive projects, whose resolution constitutes its autonomy as it resolves them to reshape the means by which capital accumulation is made possible.

This conception of the state suggests possibilities for its capture as part of a revolutionary strategy that surpasses social democracy. The state is not figured here as a site for the gradual transition to socialism, and even a piecemeal acquisition of

⁴⁰³ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 125.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 131.

the state apparatus cannot achieve this end. As Poulantzas says in a 1976 interview conducted by Henri Weber, “I do not believe that the masses can hold positions of autonomous power – even subordinate ones – within the capitalist state.” Instead, “they act as a means of resistance, elements of corrosion, accentuating the internal contradictions of the state.”⁴⁰⁵

The other side of a revolutionary strategy involving positions of state power, then, must be to shift the balance of class forces outside the state. What the Bolivian case further illustrates on this point is the need for a certain directionality, a constant movement by which the state is forced into a sharper articulation of class struggle on a social level. What may have been missed in the case of Bolivia “is the necessity of radical transformation” in the *institutional materiality* of the states – in the means and circuits through which relations of power are crystallized in a determinate social formation, and by which the state is linked to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production.⁴⁰⁶ The transformations themselves would not constitute a transition to socialism, but by creating the mass basis for a political intervention, they could permit an accelerating process tending toward an actual rupture with capitalism, “a *stage of real breaks*, the climax of which – and there has to be one – is reached when the relationship of forces on the strategic terrain of the State swings over to the side of the popular masses.”⁴⁰⁷ Such was the wager of Poulantzas in any case, though in his own conjuncture, Communist Parties carrying out the Eurocommunist strategy in the

⁴⁰⁵ Poulantzas, “The State and the Transition to Socialism,” 337.

⁴⁰⁶ Poulantzas, “Interview with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt,” *Marxism Today*, 196.

⁴⁰⁷ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 44.

1970s proved both too rigid and too opportunistic to serve as an organizational basis for these changes. Still, the observation that new political logics that break the classical mode of constituent power could only be founded on a transformation in the relations between state and society itself – a process which must be differentiated from even major welfare-oriented policy shifts in response to popular demands – presents a resonant critique *avant la lettre* of the Pink Tide’s current trajectory. This is especially so in that García Linera himself has appealed to Poulantzas to explain his own strategic view of the state’s centrality.

García Linera on Poulantzas

In “El Estado y la vía democrática al socialismo,” a talk delivered at a colloquium on the work of Poulantzas in 2015, García Linera takes up Poulantzas’ work in order to discuss the centrality of the state to any revolutionary project. His central argument is that because the state is a *relation* of forces, and power is not a *possession* to be held, any revolutionary action has to traverse and alter these relations. Indeed, as Poulantzas writes, the state is “a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions.”⁴⁰⁸

Contrary to Poulantzas’ cautioning about the importance of a rupture with the state and the limited and essentially disruptive capabilities of occupying state power, García Linera validates the importance of the state while also symptomatically

⁴⁰⁸ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 128.

glossing over problems raised in the state–movement relationship. His own understanding of the state as a social relation is much more sweeping and totalizing than Poulantzas’: according to García Linera, any movement that is able to object to the state, to put it in question, and to pose something new, is bound to find its principal effects *within the state itself*. Here, he reaffirms the closed view of constituent power which always culminates in a kind of cyclical relationship between emancipatory movements and the state. The kinds of quotidian power to generate new publics, new ideas, new common sense, and materialize themselves in “agreements, laws, presuppositions, inversions, and rules,” become for García Linera “the material of the state.”⁴⁰⁹ The State, in this almost Hegelian understanding, is simply the collective totality of all that is: any opposition finds its effects there through a kind of dialectic. This Hegelian position is further affirmed in García Linera’s view – and this he considers his own “addition” to Poulantzas’ theory – that the state is “more idea and symbol than material, and the only place in the world where the idea antecedes the material.”⁴¹⁰

The upshot of this for García Linera, is that theories positing a kind of autonomy or subalternity as a point of resistance to the state are ignorant to the fact that these spaces or moments *are always already* the state. Because everything is subsumed in the state, there can be no such thing as autonomy, no outside, or no margin.⁴¹¹ And yet, at the same time, because these innovations that are absorbed by

⁴⁰⁹ García Linera, “El Estado y la vía democrática al socialismo,” n.p.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

the state must come from *somewhere*, and because García Linera wants to argue that the state is not bound merely to repeat and reinforce the relationships of which it is a “material condensation,” to use Poulantzas’ term, he affirms a “principle of historical incompleteness” according to which there is always a kind of outside to the state relation. García Linera’s opposition to autonomist arguments – he criticizes John Holloway’s notion of “changing the world without taking power,” which may be a proxy for Raquel Gutiérrez, a student of Holloway – leads him to affirm an overly-expansive notion of the state, but his apparent commitment to validating the Bolivian political process leads him to suggest that the state itself is the product, in its relative autonomy, of autonomous movements.

If the state for Poulantzas is a relation, his focus on the “institutional materiality” of the state precisely makes it, pace García Linera, *irreducible* to a kind of symbolic idea. The latter view has more in common with Bourdieu than with Poulantzas. And, indeed, against the totalizing view of the state that García Linera puts forth, we can consider a point made by Ernesto Laclau in “The Specificity of the Political”: to theorize the state, one needs to specify its limits; otherwise, we are in the absurd situation where everything that exists is part state, part non-state – even an individual consciousness.⁴¹² In other words, without a materialist definition of the state, the state is just a quality partially encompassing all social phenomena.

Populism, State, and Commons

⁴¹² Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, ch. 2.

The other point that Garcia Linera takes up from Poulantzas is the idea of the “democratic road to socialism” elaborated by the latter in the final essay of *State, Power, Socialism*. Pace a view of revolution that envisions a dual power scenario wherein the existing state is entirely replaced by another, Poulantzas argues that one cannot conceive of a socialist transition unless one considers the simultaneous need of both transformations within the state apparatus as well as outside it. Whether one agrees with this view or not, it is coherent with Poulantzas’ view of the state as an apparatus, not as a totalizing set of symbols. What García Linera adds to this is the observation that the state is an attempt to *monopolize* the commons. For García Linera, just as money is a necessary if fetishistic social medium for coordinating production within capitalism, the state is the necessary if fetishistic means of maintaining the universal, or the common. It is therefore indeed necessary to struggle within the state apparatus, but also, following Poulantzas, to exceed it:

Certainly, the popular is constructed as a political subject in elections and in political liberties, but it is also clear that the popular overflows the merely representative; the democratic irradiation of society creates or inherits spaces of direct participation, of communitarian democracy, of union or territorial assembly experience, which also form part of the democratic pluralism of society. This representative democratic and participative-direct-communitarian duality is key for the understanding of the democratic way to socialism.⁴¹³

And yet, insofar as the capitalist state, according to García Linera, has a monopolizing function, it would seem that the “democratic pluralism of society” will always come into conflict with it. This kind of conflict has come up in Bolivia, and as I’ve suggested, has been dealt with through various strategies of division and strategic

⁴¹³ García Linera, “El Estado y la vía democrática al socialismo,” n.p.

populist invocations; this most pressing problem, however, is left untreated by García Linera, even as it is implicit in his own understanding of the state.

García Linera's position on the necessity of the state for managing the commons is consistent with the approach to neoliberalism implicit in Bolivia and in much of the Pink Tide. It is also the basis for a kind of populism, insofar as the collective political subject is always mediated through an elected state figure. As Veronica Gago points out, if neoliberalism is thought abstractly as the dominance of the market over the state, then the presumed solution would be the wielding of state power to restore a balance. But if neoliberalism consisted, in its ascent, not of a weakening of the state, but of "the creation of a political world (regimen of governmentality) that arises as a 'projection' of the rules and requirements of the competitive market," then the challenge is not merely the instrumental use of state power, but an intervention in the relationship between state and society, and the multiple ways in which power is articulated across and within the divisions implied by this relationship.⁴¹⁴

Here, we must also emphasize that the capitalist state is, among other things, an instance of the broader social division of labor within capitalism that separates the manual from the intellectual.⁴¹⁵ As the specific set of institutions charged with social organization, the fullest expression of the capitalist state's intellectual function is the power of the technocracy, deepened under neoliberalism in accordance with creditor demands and at the expense of democracy. The social democratic approach to the

⁴¹⁴ Gago, *La razón neoliberal*, 219.

⁴¹⁵ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 55–56.

state does not challenge this arrangement. Even when working to redistribute wealth, to regulate capital, or to bolster its organizational role in certain industries by nationalizing them, the center-left elements in state power have tended toward technical solutions. In contrast, a truly novel perspective on this point would have to refigure this divide: if the science of governance is an intellectual project of capital, then the science of revolution must be an intellectual project of the masses, embodied in a given constituent texture. As Decio Machado puts it, “Without political and social vanguards who have the credibility to pose an alternative social project, who lack even the capacity to elaborate such an alternative, it will fall to the mobilized sectors of society... to reflect on whether we must be subject to definitions of reality elaborated from the spaces whose political power and control over the existing social order are currently in dispute.”⁴¹⁶

As we have seen, García Linera’s role has been, both as vice president and as a media personality before that, precisely to elaborate such “definitions of reality.” It is perhaps the case that, often, and especially in earlier moments of the Bolivian project, these definitions have been counter-hegemonic. Nevertheless, one wonders what is being lost in the reduction of politics that has characterized the Pink Tide, and whether there is an outside to the state, and to the centralized narration of politics by people like García Linera, that might offer a post-hegemonic, and perhaps post-national forms of social relation that are already embodied in the day-to-day existences of those the state claims to represent.

⁴¹⁶ Machado, “Ecuador y el ocasio de los dioses,” n.p.

Toward the Communitarian Popular

Throughout Latin America, the governments that had originally claimed to be able to represent the multitudinal manifestations of constituent power have lost their positions in the state, or at least seem to be considerably weakened.. And at the level of organization, extraparliamentary movements, most powerful in the case of Bolivia, have proven susceptible to cooptation. Leaders who left organic organizations to become bureaucrats will find it hard to return to the grassroots, and movements depending on state resources will find themselves starved if the Right continues its electoral gains.⁴¹⁷ Important autonomies, developed in the heat of struggle, have been lost.

Yet if we examine what Raquel Gutiérrez calls the “internal horizon” of recent struggles throughout the region, we find continuing possibilities grounded in autonomous and communal practices, concrete knowledges, whose exclusion has been the tragic – or perhaps farcical – flaw of the recent cycle.⁴¹⁸ The potential power of a collective challenge to capital remains rooted there, in what Veronica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra call “an extremely heterogeneous, dense, and rich web of everyday social practices, in which thousands of men and women carry out the material reproduction of their lives.”⁴¹⁹ That is, there remains the possibility of emergent subjectivities organized on the basis of “communal-popular” economic, social, and

⁴¹⁷ Linsalata, *Cuando manda la asamblea*, 261.

⁴¹⁸ Gutiérrez, *Horizonte*, 22.

⁴¹⁹ Gago and Mezzadra, “Actualidad de la revuelta plebeya: Por una nueva política de autonomía,” n.p.

political practices. Desires for autonomy, and communal practices like the Andean *ayni*, an informal system of reciprocal expectation, and *pasanaku*, a mode of sharing common resources on a rotating basis, continue to flourish, transform, and travel throughout the Latin American subcontinent.⁴²⁰ Such tendencies toward “the production of the common in an everyday form” hold open the possibility for political alternatives.⁴²¹

Yet on their own, disperse subjectivities and practices, with often localist limitations in their practical reach, cannot substitute for a positive political project. An organized push from below, not merely in defense stagnating governments, but in the spirit that exploded the dour consensus that “There is no alternative” over the last two decades, is the only way to reset political coordinates, to unite the various strands of the anti-extractivist movement, and to displace the populist myth that there is only *one* alternative, centered on welfare distribution and the exclusion of popular power. This means that movements must make positive demands for political space: more power to the communes in Venezuela,⁴²² more land for the landless movements in Brazil, more space for the self-management of unions and *ayllus* in Bolivia, and for the “taken” factories in Argentina. All of these fragments of autonomous potential can, if organized in yet-to-be discovered ways, present a true alternative to both the present and the state-centered narratives that have claimed to bring closure to the constituent disruptions that began the cycle of the Pink Tide. For now, the forces of

⁴²⁰ Gago, *La razón neoliberal*, 298–9.

⁴²¹ Gutiérrez, *Horizonte*, 119.

⁴²² See Cicariello-Maher, “Building the Commune: Insurgent Government, Communal State.”

reaction are taking the initiative. The hopes for something new in Latin America – the unrealized potentials that have only been provisionally drawn out on the small scale of everyday practice and theoretical intervention – will need to rely on a conception of politics that breaks with the domineering frame of constituent and constituted power, with all its populist consequences.

Conclusions

This dissertation argues that mass political events have multiple, sometimes conflicting historical potentials. Certain ways of thinking about these potentials, through the concepts of hegemony and constituent power, predominate. In the history of Latin American Marxist theory, however, and in the application of these ideas in Bolivia during Latin America's Pink Tide, we can also see the limitations of these concepts, both political and epistemological.

Hegemony theory often gives an overstated role to intellectuals in creating political change, and on very specific terms: their ability to shape ideas is supposed to be the ground for a kind of leadership. In its most idealist moments, the conception of power and of intellectuals' political roles in the theory of hegemony is disconnected from other considerations like organization, culture, and subaltern knowledges.

The theory of constituent power suggests that political openings, moments of rupture within an older order of things, cyclically congeal into a new order of state and constitution. Constituted power, the institutions of the state, is the obverse of constituent power, but also its culmination. It is possible to think, from this vantage point, that all openings lead to closures centered on the state, or that the natural political endpoint of every insurgent moment is a new set of institutions. Any kind of power that exists outside of the state, therefore, is only ever a path toward a new state. To question this presumption is not necessarily to suggest a utopian anti-statism, but it is to ask whether there are emergent forms of power that do not follow along this trajectory from constituent to constituted. It is also to ask how, if such alternative

political forms do exist, intellectual work might play a role other than that of crafting hegemonic ideas.

The first two chapters of this dissertation lay out the above theoretical arguments by examining them within particular intellectual and historical contexts. Chapter 1 focuses on the intellectual group *Pasado y Presente*'s complicated relationship with Peronism, and showed how the theory of hegemony allowed these intellectuals to see themselves as part of a political process, even as their self-conception gave them a one-sided view of culture, knowledge, and organization. Chapter 2 examines the trajectory of Bolivian political activist and thinker René Zavaleta Mercado. There, Zavaleta's theoretical vicissitudes help us see how the general problematic of constituent power comes up against the particularities of post-colonial politics as well as the shifting composition of classes amid the turbulence of global capitalism. To conclude that chapter, I argue that political neoliberalism relies on a notion of constituent/constituted power that it, surprisingly, shares with forms of national-popular politics that it might outwardly oppose.

To explore alternatives to the political forms of hegemony and constituent/constituted power, I then turn to the Pink Tide in Bolivia and the intellectual project of Comuna. The members of Comuna sought to match the expansive possibilities of Bolivia's insurgent moment from 2000 to 2005 with a spirit of intellectual experimentation. Álvaro García Linera, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Luis Tapia Mealla, Raúl Prada Alcoreza, and Oscar Vega Camacho draw on the history of Marxist theory as well as Bolivia's indigenous history to identify novel articulations

of political practice. They focus on shifting class compositions in neoliberal capitalism, moments of insurgency and antagonistic struggle emerging therein, unique practices in political and economic life, and unexpected moments that brought all of these together in the midst of a vast political struggle.

As I clarify through a series of interviews with four of these five thinkers, they pursued their intellectual tasks from a position of inquiry rather than leadership, a preference for material difference over abstract unity, and a search for aleatory encounters rather than teleological outcomes. I refer to their approach as that of weaving a *constituent texture*. By this I mean that they examine unique features of their social and political landscape that might be otherwise abstractly subsumed within the theory of constituent power, and they ask how these features might be brought together, through intellectual and political practice, into something other than a new set of constituted powers. *Texture*, in my usage, is both a noun and a verb, and what it constitutes remains an open question. While this approach may not have resulted in satisfactory answers, even by Comuna's own standards, it nonetheless presents a strategy of intellectual engagement that we can contrast with that emerging from the theory of hegemony. And during this period, it allows Comuna to explore political forms that did not necessarily cohere with a linear transformation from constituent into constituted powers.

Nonetheless, as I argue in Chapter 4, not all members of Comuna retain this approach after 2005. The ascendancy of Evo Morales and the MAS in Bolivia during the 2000–2005 period brought a certain kind of unity to the many forms of rebellion

that Comuna had been studying. García Linera joined the MAS as Evo's running mate in 2005, and subsequently served as vice president for nearly three terms. The MAS's centrality in Bolivia's process of change offered significant advantages for resolving the problems of disunity that Comuna itself had identified, but it also involved putting aside some of the other political potentials that had emerged during the most creative period of political upheaval. Thus, while some members of Comuna seek to continue to explore and defend those potentials after 2005, García Linera shifts his intellectual and political focus increasingly to the role of the state, grounded broadly in concepts of hegemony and constituent power. What produced tension, both within Comuna's thinking and within Bolivian society in subsequent years, was the relationship between movements and the state, or between insurgent politics and political transformation more broadly.

This tension would turn out to be central to Bolivia's future. As I discuss in the preface to this dissertation, the foregoing work was almost entirely complete prior to the coup d'état in Bolivia in November 2019. While some Bolivian movements and organizations came out to oppose this coup, the MAS's ambivalent relationship with them, through the incorporation of some and antagonism toward others, seems to have created the conditions for a disjointed and difficult popular response.

In Chapter 4, I suggest that even though the state had monopolized the effects of the Pink Tide's popular rebellions, other potentials were still present – perhaps they were less visible, and sometimes in conflict with the goals of the state itself, but new modes of thought and action subsisted in oblique relation to the paradigms of

hegemony and constituent power. The unresolved character of that moment meant that I could preserve some optimism for new possibilities. In Bolivia today, however, something much darker is afoot. An unelected, self-proclaimed president and her cabinet are doing all they can to rein in the possibilities for political change unleashed over the last twenty years, and they are willing to use violence in the process. The ascendancy of the MAS certainly created its own challenges. But following the coup, the prospects for new forms of living, for unexpected political possibilities, and for a world beyond capitalism and imperialism became a little bit dimmer. We can still take comfort, however, in one of the more subtle lessons that this dissertation offers: even in the darkest moments, emancipatory practices and ideas, once unleashed, always have a way of finding new encounters.

Appendix: List of Major Works by Comuna (1999–2011)

The following 35 titles comprise the major works of the various publishing members of the Comuna group for its duration. The list is not intended to replace the bibliography, which follows. I have provided it specifically for the scholar who wishes to undertake a study of Comuna, since as far as I know, no such comprehensive list of their works exists and comprehensive information about the books – never mind the books themselves – can be difficult to find. Thus, this list is arranged chronologically and the authors of each text are given in the exact order in which they appear in publication. By contrast, in the bibliography, texts by the same group of authors but different orders of billing on the cover are combined for the sake of clarity, and the entire list is alphabetical for easy reference from the notes.

It is worth recalling that the group, especially in its early years, was more an open space for discussion with varied participants from social movements, political organizations, and academic circles than a clearly defined set of writers. Still, the name has come to be associated with a specific nucleus of thinkers, and the Comuna publishing project was directed by them.

I have included all book-length works published by the five main authors in the group, as well as other books released under the Comuna imprint with publisher *Muela del Diablo*. I have also included several collections of essays that included other authors, and were released by other publishers, but had central essays by one or more member of the group. Other publications (mainly journal articles and other edited volumes) have been excluded. I have also included two books by Raquel

Gutiérrez that appeared after she stopped publicly associating with the group, because I believe they represent a key node of the tension between an autonomous orientation and a state orientation that characterizes the overall trajectory of the group. For the same reason, while omitting most of the short publications released by the Bolivian Vice-presidency under García Linera, I have included his 2011 essay *Tensiones creativas de la revolución* as the culmination of the state-oriented view. Finally, where I personally have relied on later editions of the text, I have listed these in brackets after the original bibliographic entry, and where possible I have provided information on English translations.

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