

# **Bolivia: The Democratic Revolution**

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## **Prologue to the English Edition**

When this book was finished at the end of 2006, the Bolivian political and social panorama had some different characteristics than it currently does. After the downfall of neoliberalism in 2003, with the expulsion of ex-president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and his getaway in helicopter, and Evo Morales' victory in 2005, with 54% of the vote, a new phase in Bolivia's republican life began, characterised by the project of a "Cultural and Democratic Revolution"

The challenge was not only to confront neoliberalism – as various neighbouring countries had done – to have a non-corrupt administration, to cease the brutal and irresponsible use of state violence, to propose token reforms to alleviate the particular problems of the country. Essentially, the consideration was not to simply offer a transparent government, close to the people and sensitive to socio-economic problems. The task was instead to decolonise state structures, to construct a new form of nationhood, a new modern state, made up of multiple nations, autonomous, economically dynamic, egalitarian and interactive in the global arena.

At least three historic debts had to begin to be settled. The first had to do with the gap between culture and the state. It is well-known that both the legal framework and the multiple national symbols have never represented the Bolivian population. The best laws, the most lucid initiatives, were not able to reflect the cultural complexity of the country. The second challenge was to reverse the perverse relationship with natural resources – that has characterised the nation since its conception – which consists of the combination of enormous wealth that is poorly taken advantage of by the elites. The Bolivian bourgeoisie, mediocre and limited, has not been capable of creating wealth – not to mention distributing it, which should have been its primary function from the beginning. Finally, the most obvious, is the socio-economic inequality. The country has been characterised by the scandalous social and economic distances, which drove it to have brutally differentiated groups at its heart.

The government agenda to achieve these objectives was based around, on the one hand, the nationalisation of hydrocarbons (May, 2006), and on the other, the creation of a Constituent Assembly (August of the same year) whose basic task was to equip the country with a new Magna Carta.

The first edition of this book was finished when the government was in its first push, and was left with the questions of where the country would be directed to, and how the fallen oligarchy would react. Today, two years later, we can see that, on the one hand the initiatives of the



democratic revolution has had important implications in looking to resolve historic debts, and, on the other, a violent new right has been born, racist and separatist, which is what operates in the political landscape.

In this framework, the Constituent Assembly put in place in August of 2006, was transformed into the most conflictive battlefield. For several months, the government looked to reach an agreement to fulfil its promise but the right used a variety of tactics to delay the work and impede the birth of a new constitution. The Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, in the eastern region, even promoted irregular and very violent groups which beat constituents from grassroots organisations and committed a series of abuses and outrages unacceptable in a democratic nation.

After numerous months of these groups' illegal actions, the Assembly had to take place in a military compound, with cordons of citizens from all over the country and police protection to fulfil its mandate. Despite the adversity, in December 2007 in Oruro, the constituents were able to approve a constitution that reflects the multicultural and multiethnic characteristics of the country, including the demands for departmental and indigenous autonomies. Currently the first article of the new constitution says that "Bolivia is constituted of a unitary social state of multinational communitarian law, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, intercultural, decentralised, and with autonomies. Bolivia is founded on political, economic, judicial, cultural and linguistic plurality and pluralism within the integrating process of the country.

Two years into the government of Evo Morales, we have seen how the oligarchy has been reorganised and has shown its strength particularly in the East of the country from where they launch their attacks against the project of the people. They have pledged not to recognise the new constitution in a political tactic to destabilise the government and promote autonomous statutes that are completely outside the judicial order. In the same vein, they have undertaken illegal and secessionist actions, putting national integrity at risk. We are facing the birth of a highly aggressive and racist new right that has a regional range and that exploits identity as an effective form of mobilisation. It would not be rash to say that we have a new type of Latin American neo-fascism at work.

Behind the autonomous discourse of this group, there is a landholding oligarchy that plays with life and its future. This political project that is promoted by the Prefects and Civic Committees of some departments has at least two components. The first is autonomy, understood as the maintenance of the colonial structures of public administration within the department, structures in which they are, of course, the most benefitted. As such, it does not consider the recognition of micro-regions and much less of indigenous peoples that have rights in other autonomous territories.

A second element is the economic factor. The oligarchy of Santa Cruz had reached a ceiling, and its fortune – fed overall through state investment and illegal favours during times of dictatorship – could extend no farther. In this context, the possibility of exporting gas arose due to the discovery of hydrocarbon resources. The administration of these goods would have meant an effective integration into international markets and the consolidation of its power in the local, national and global arenas for these elite.

The violent confrontation of the past two years is a result of the struggle between two ideas of the country: one tied to the colonial structures of the past centuries that promotes a group of landholders with control over natural resources in the economic international sphere; and the other from the people that looks to construct a new modern republic involved in the global economy but with equality and with recognition of the cultural and ethnic diversity within it.

Despite the difficulties and the right opposition to the popular initiative, the Democratic Revolution has taken brought about fundamental steps and is en route to constructing a country made up of many different nations, that administers diversity, unity and equity in the project of a modern nation. Bolivia is moving forward and can no longer be held back.

H.J.S.

Mexico City, spring of 2008

## **Introduction**

Long ago are the years when Bolivia appeared in the “news shorts” section of some important newspaper. When it was mentioned, its place in the poverty ranking (beaten only by Haiti in Latin America), the role of narco-trafficking, the topic of coca, or some tourism peculiarity was typically brought up. Today a week hardly passes without the country appearing in the headlines of newspapers, news programs and radio broadcasts. Several front pages have been dedicated to it, multiple pundits have reflected on it (in favour or against), in the most disseminated and prestigious media in the world. It is clear that something is going on in Bolivia that is of interest.

In effect, since the year 2000, Bolivia has experienced a series of large social protests that have modified the social stage. In the political sphere these have resulted in the decisive victory of the indigenous leader Evo Morales in the elections of December, 2005, a fact that has placed the country as an international reference. The Water War, that took place in Cochabamba in April, 2000, with the participation of more than 80,000 people; the indigenous blockade in La Paz of the same year organised by 500,000 Aymara, and its repetition in June of 2001; the uprising of 30,000 coca-growing families at various moments during the past years; the struggle of 100,000 neighbours in the city of El Alto (in the metropolitan area of the city of La Paz) during the Gas War (October, 2003) to defend natural resources and expel the president of the time, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada<sup>1</sup>; the permanent mobilisation of indigenous people from the East in marches towards the capital cities; the hundreds of dead and injured in distinct protests. Overall, the mobilisation of the country and the resistance from the masses, opened a new phase in the national history, and showed that the political, economic and social structures that had been imposed by neoliberalism since the middle of the 80s were running out. Sensibly, a group of intellectuals affirmed that the “return of the plebeian Bolivia” (García Linera, 2000) was being seen at beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bolivia is a country of masses, of unions, of indigenous communities, of marches and protests, of road-blocks, of demands; it is a country where the dispute over the direction of history has been taken up in the street and into which the people have put their sweat, their bodies, and their blood.

This simple written and visual essay attempts to situate the general process which Bolivia went through from 2000 to 2006. It looks to paint the background in which various actors played their parts. The idea that runs throughout this book (although it is not specifically developed) is that from its birth, there has been a rift in the country between its national project and the culture. This has arisen in various sectors of social life: economics, education, religion, administration,

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers taken from Garcia Linera, 2004: 18.

politics, etc. As such, the *jilakata* (indigenous leader) had to coexist with the deputy; the *yatiri* (healer/holy-man) with the priest and the doctor, community justice with the licensed judge. They have been dragged through decades of short-term or long-term tensions. Rural/urban, modernity/tradition, party/union, East/West, were and remain unresolved couplings in even the most ambitious and visionary social projects. The project of modernisation, whether in its independence-oriented, republican, revolutionary, democratic or neoliberal form, has not satisfied the needs of the masses and has not been able to construct the necessary bridge between culture and nation. Today, the presence of Evo Morales as president, and multiple successive events have begun to paint a new cultural project of Bolivian identity. These are the issues currently at play; as such, one can see the importance of the moment which the country is experiencing<sup>2</sup>.

This book is composed of texts and images which, in dialogue with one another, paint the rise of social actors and the decline of neoliberalism, which resulted in a new story and a new role for the country in the international arena. Moreover, it consists of contributions to be debated that are not the fruit of systematic research and that are directed to a public who, from a distance, look with interest at what is going on in the heart of Latin America and tries to go beyond what is presented in the media. As a result, various passages could appear obvious or unnecessary for a reader who is specialised in the area or for one who has lived through the transformations taking place within the country.

This book is composed of some articles that have appeared in journals<sup>3</sup>, essays published in another format<sup>4</sup>, and periodical reflections. Each chapter was written at different moments. Some pages respond to direct observations in the city of La Paz after having participated in some march, hearing shots in Murillo Square, and feeling the tear gas. Other words were thought faraway – written from Mexico – and have memory as their source, experience lived years before, some letter from relatives and the Internet. The photographs, these, yes, taken in Bolivia over the past few years, offer a parallel and complementary reading to what is written. They are not news reports, in reality they would leave numerous gaps if their function were to inform. They are a living record, a notebook that seeks independence in its recounting, while contributing to an explanation of things that are seen but not written. In this book the visual burden is different, autonomous; it encourages reflection with its own language. Photos do not illustrate, they discuss; they do not accompany, they complement.

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<sup>2</sup> Evidently to argue this idea in great detail would require a much more profound examination than the scope of this document; instead some paths which can serve for further reflection are identified.

<sup>3</sup> Parts of chapters 1 and 4 were published in the journal *Memoria*, 198 (August, 2005) and 191 (January, 2005), respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 3 was published in Bolivia in a small text titled “*Una Semana fundamental. 10-18 Octubre 2003*”, Muela del Diablo, La Paz, 2003.

For some time sociology has taught us that the camera is much more than an apparatus of visual technology; a photo when it is constructed sociologically, is a world of information of remarkable analytical value. Bourdieu, in his posthumously published book *Images d'Algerie* (2003), shows the coherence between his vision and his reflection in the text *Sociologie d'Algerie* (1957). In Mexico we have also seen great works of this nature, such as *México: modernidad sin rumbo* of Luis Mendez and Miguel Angel Romero (2004), or the research of Luis Ramirez, *Villa Jiménez en la lente de Martiniano Mendoza* (2002). These distinct approaches, and among them the contribution of the present work, attempt to reconstruct the dialogue between images and texts, in the consideration that the two are narrative contributions with distinct forms but that can be combined together in a single analytical intention.

This book is divided into five sections. The first, "Pains and labour: the nation and its birth" is composed of a reflection on the keys to interpreting the transformations of the past years, and a visual essay on the Bolivian state and its presences and absences.

The second, "From above", recounts the stupidity of a decadent oligarchy from the electoral victory of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in June, 2002 and until 2003. The photos reflect the way of life of an elite that lived in a sealed and frivolous bubble with their back turned on the people. Next the "Ten days in October" which made the nation shake are presented. The report recounts the distinct moments that resulted in the expulsion-flight of the president in a helicopter on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003. A series of images, taken in those days and a few weeks before, closes the scene.

"From below", the fourth section, is composed of a reflection on the birth of a new left. The photos capture different forms of protest: marches by students, peasants, human rights defenders, left parties, etc. They are the different faces that contributed, each in its own way, to the construction of a politically progressive culture.

Finally, "History against the grain" broaches the challenge of the government of Evo Morales and its principal political and economic measures (nationalisation of hydrocarbons and the Constituent Assembly). It concludes with an essay composed of images that attempts to outline this era where "a heart is being born", as Silvio Rodríguez would say.

The text takes the year 2000 as its starting point and concludes in 2006, but these years are no more than a breath in the history of this country where time flies by, and events pile one on top of one another, making it difficult to discern which is most important. Without a doubt, new tales to tell will soon arise, and this book will be destined to memory, but it is inevitable that a nation is driven by collective action, not by the inertia of time. Evidently there are topics left out and moments discussed in too much detail. Only a few images of a much more complex reality are presented here. This is an attempt to fill the dark landscape with lights of distinct origins and

colours, like fireworks, that allow the observer, the reader, to construct their own work. If the text contributes to having greater clarity with regards to the Bolivian experience, and that each time that the country comes out in the press there are greater elements to understand what is happening, it will have fulfilled its objective. Likewise, I do not conceal the political intention of this work that, in its way, attempts to support the determination of the Bolivian people to write their own history. It is in homage to all those fighters who kept the hope alive and did not faint in the battle for Bolivia to have another path.

Lastly, I must offer thanks for the reading and the criticisms on the first draft from, Massimo Modonesi, Luis Ramirez, Sergio Zendejas and Willem Assies, which allowed me to improve the text. As well, as always, to my family: Cathia, Canela y Joaquin, accomplices in every letter I write.

Hugo Jose Suarez  
Zamora, January, 2007

## **Chapter I**

### **Pains and Labour: The Nation and its Birth**

Keys to interpreting the transformations in Bolivia

“We believe that we are a country but we are only a landscape.”

Graffiti in La Paz

In the past few years Bolivia has experienced a series of important changes. In this section we will consider some of the elements that are central to understanding the current socio-political atmosphere in Bolivia and we will situate this particular juncture in a long-term and multi-faceted global process.

#### *The crisis of the state<sup>5</sup>*

Bolivia's founding, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August of 1825 in Sucre, was accompanied by a schism between the territory and the capacity for state management. Let us remember that the country was born with an area larger than two million square kilometres (double what it is today), and with very little bureaucratic structure to allow it to minimally attend to the basic requirements of a republic<sup>6</sup>. This mark of a nascent country will accompany it throughout its history, at points becoming its greatest problem.

There are many examples that we could evoke to show how the Bolivian state was incapable of responding to the requirements of the national order. To consider one of the clearest examples, we can look to the War of Acre that took place with Brazil in the northern Amazon at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This event, which took place in one of the most neglected and isolated regions of the country, the Bolivian army, bastion of nationality and the defender of sovereignty, were not aware of the need to defend the homeland. It was local businessmen, headed by Nicholas Suarez, who invested their own resources – protecting their economic interests – to put together the so-called “Columna Porvenir”, which held off the Brazilian offensive for a time until diplomacy arose and gave up for lost more than 191,000 km<sup>2</sup> in 1904.

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<sup>5</sup> As several authors have already stated, the very notion of “crisis” has an ideological weight, since it implies a break with some sector that, when considered from another perspective, could be considered a victory. Here we use the term in its simplest sense, as a redefining of the fundamental notions that allow for the operation, for good or bad, of some social institution, that is to say as an imbalance that opens new horizons for analysis and action.

<sup>6</sup> See Annex 4, Map of lost Bolivian territory

This historic example simply demonstrates a fundamental fact: faced with the absence and the incapacity of the state to fulfil its fundamental role in the entire national territory, parallel forms of para-statal institutionalism came forth – and continue to come forth – with grades of autonomy and coordination that filled the gap. In this manner, the state was not been efficient in justice, politics, economics, culture, etc. which has resulted in a country with distinct state levels and parallel forms of functioning.

On the other hand, both the idea of the state and its specific organisation were under the care of an elite that conceived, planned and executed it without considering the indigenous populations, denying them possibilities for integration and, furthermore, submitting them to a western dynamic in the various arenas of social life, as we shall see further on.

### *Crisis of the cultural project of nationhood*

The weak state was not capable of constructing a cultural project of nationhood. We know theoretically that a state should have territorial control, a monopoly of physical and symbolic violence, a symbolic system of belonging and identity. Well, in the case of Bolivia, it was not possible to successfully structure a national identity what would allow the members to feel integrated into a collective.

Bolivia does not have a national dish or a traditional dress with which all identify. The patriotic symbols, although they are spread throughout the republic, are not of a primordial nature; they come second to ethnic or regional identities. For example, in the case of independence, each department has its own leader to whom they offer homage; in La Paz to Pedro Domingo Murillo, in Cochabamba to the Heroines of the *Coronilla*, in Sucre to Juana Azurduy and Manuel Asencio Padilla. The symbols are more local than national. Who is the great national patriot? Perhaps Simon Bolivar, but not even he is viewed as a true father of the homeland. Let us remember, as an anecdote, that there is no lack of children who confuse Bolivar the Liberator with the soccer team that carries the same name.

Evidently, when faced with the survey question (that was already posed in one poll) “do you feel proud to be Bolivian?” 97% responded positively, but the content of this Bolivian identity, has never been clear. The state was never capable of constructing civic symbols that bring everyone together. Although there have been efforts and certainly some icons have stuck, they do not have the same strength as in other countries.

Moreover, the heritage of symbols that were fragily constructed, have been unable to incorporate the indigenous cultures into the territory. They never participated: they were part of the landscape or, more recently, forms of folklore. In Bolivia, it is easier to come across a statue



of Christopher Columbus or a square called Washington than a reference to Tupac Katari or an indigenous culture.

Furthermore, Bolivia is a highly racist country – especially its elite – that never accepted that the indigenous people could occupy some place of leadership. In fact, a survey undertaken by the UNDP in 2004 indicated that 70% of the population of upper and middle socio-economic class would not consider it beneficial for the country to have an indigenous president in 2025.

If some institution tried to maintain and feed the sentiment of the nation it was the army. Nonetheless, it was incapable of expanding this feeling to the country as a whole, as had been the case of the Chilean Armed Forces which are the centre of the construction of identity of this neighbouring country.

To clarify this hypothesis, it must be said that in some moments of historical intensity, forms of nationalism come forth that make sense in particular contexts. For example, to be Bolivian faced with Chileans, or faced with the rich and the powerful, or Americans. Nonetheless, the content is very malleable and depends predominantly on the particular moment in time. No one knows definitively, scientifically, what it means to be Bolivian.

In the past few years, this topic has been complexly fed with new identities that cross the ethnic or the regional, that reconfigure – and put into check – the fragile national identity.

#### *Crisis of the neoliberal illusion in Bolivia*

In Bolivia – perhaps like in Chile or in some other “model” countries – the neoliberal paradigm was put in place with brutal force. Let us remember that neoliberalism was a political programming response to a situation of economic crisis and hyperinflation. In effect, in 1985, after the government of Hernán Siles Zuazo (1982-1985), Víctor Paz took office with a classic speech affirming that, “Bolivia is dying on us”. The fatal diagnosis opened the doors to radical policies: the mines were closed, expelling thousands of miners into the streets, inflation was controlled and a process of reforms was undertaken. The unfinished project had a second mandate starting in 1993 when the “second generation reforms” were concluded that affected territorial administration, education, the economy, and the privatisation of strategic enterprises.

The second period was led by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. The profile of this character could not be more appropriate for the project that he sought to undertake: mining entrepreneur, personal friend of the Rockefeller family, studies overseas, millionaire, deficient Spanish. His international contacts and his connection with the American elite, made Bolivia rapidly adopt an international neoliberal discourse. Close relations with the Consensus of Washington were maintained, the economist Jeffrey Sachs the country several times and advised with regards to the reforms, Mark Malloch Brown (who was later director of the UNDP) had a direct

relationship with the president, etc. Perhaps the neoliberal period was one of the moments in which Bolivia was able to better connect itself with a global project, for good, and especially, for bad.

The seductive capacity in the country was fundamental. A part of the left (the Free Bolivia Movement – MLB) assumed the direction of the chancellery with enthusiasm, a group of intellectuals critical of Santa Cruz built and directed the Secretariat of Popular Participation, one of the Katarist factions assumed the Vice-presidency, and many sectors accommodated the promising project (the elections of 1993 were won by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement [MNR] with more than 30% of the vote). Journalists, artists, politicians, economists, and even priests formed part of the neoliberal ideological platform. It is not erroneous to affirm that the project was able to construct a very powerful and absolute hegemony during several years. Sanchez de Lozada, with his typical arrogance used to cite St. Thomas: “If it is not this, what is it?”

Neoliberalism touched various spheres. University training schools for businessmen and administrators were opened, the managerial hierarchies within state and private organisations were reorganised, and a capitalist meritocracy was implemented in the society as a whole. This project promised much more than it would be able to give: growth, participation, justice. But perhaps it is worthwhile to identify two aspects that are of fundamental importance, as will be seen later. In the political sphere, the ideology of liberal democracy was promoted (“one person one vote”) for any type of decision and, likewise, the parties as the only legitimate channels of participation. Everything outside of these political institutions could not play a role in democracy. The National Electoral Court was created and reforms were promoted to ensure that people only had a voice through legitimately established parties.

On the other hand, in the area of technology, a powerful and well-paid technocracy was created, which possessed knowledge, and as such, was called upon make decisions for the rest of society. Only those who belonged to it had the right to say their piece with regard to the future of the country, and they were the ones responsible for making most important decisions. The characteristic of neoliberal policy basically consisted of an enlightened elite that knew the issues and made decisions without consulting anyone. This perverse marriage between parties and technocrats gave fatal results, as it evidently rejected union and communitarian traditions as well as the multiple forms of political participation in Bolivia.

But the neoliberal illusion did not last long. Certainly, in a country with an indigenous and community base, with a revolution behind it, a working class and unions, a left tradition, a history of direct political participation etc. there was no delay in questioning the fanciful project. The neoliberal construction was cracking little by little and social movements slowly ascended, destroying each one of the bases that previously had been unquestionable.

*Santa Cruz: the emergence of the eastern elite*

In 1950 Santa Cruz de la Sierra had only 40,000 inhabitants. The department represented around 10% of the total population of the country. As state policy, fruit of the Revolution of '52, large sums of money were invested in Santa Cruz with the intention of creating another pole of development that, together with La Paz and Cochabamba, would form the central axis of the country. In some way, the idea was to consolidate a presence throughout the territory to initiate a type of decentralisation.

During the epoch of the Banzer dictatorship (1971-1978) thousands of hectares of land were donated to the elite of Santa Cruz who, taking advantage of the economic and material resources of the state, consolidated a solid business class and local elite capable of competing with La Paz. Today, Santa Cruz is one of the main economies, competing with and improving on the productive output of La Paz. By the year 2001, the city was already the second largest urban centre after the metropolitan area composed of La Paz and El Alto; while the West has simultaneously seen a systematic decrease in its population, the East has experienced a notorious increase.

The elite of Santa Cruz have traditionally been right-wing. They supported the coup d'état led by Hugo Banzer in 1971, and today their streets and public squares are named after the ex-dictator. Their participation in the management of the country has been increasing; there have even been moments in which a large part of the cabinets in government have been held by people from Santa Cruz. Every newspaper has affirmed: "Bolivia is directed by Santa Cruz".

Within the Department the elite have constructed important networks of power, supported by clubs of belonging, favouritism and money. Evidently, those who do not participate in them are excluded. At the same time, the *camba* (eastern) identity came about in response and in contrast to the *kolla* identity (referring to the western inhabitants of the country). Racism was another central aspect that made up part of this identity. The political hegemony, both economic and symbolic, achieved by the ruling elite of this department, is undeniable, and can be seen in different manifestations.

At the beginning of 2005, the elite of Santa Cruz pledged to show the nation their power and their homogeneity – and control – in the department. The different manifestations of the demand for autonomy showed that Santa Cruz has the possibility to define part of the history of the country and the ambition of becoming an economically dominant sector and connecting with international capital. Without a doubt, the discovery of Bolivian hydrocarbon potential – that is concentrated in Tarija, near Santa Cruz – is speeding up this process and putting a great deal of money into play, thereby exacerbating the situation.

As such, the demand for autonomy and the movement of the *camba nation* respond to economic ambitions, political presence and dynamics of the reconfiguration of territorial forces on the national level. This is the fourth element that must be taken into account to analyse the Bolivian crisis.

### *Social Movements: strength and fragmentation*

The emergence of new social movements since the year 2000 has been restructuring the popular powers and gives them a new role in the political, social and symbolic spheres, turning them into central actors with the capacity to dispute – and define – history. Much has been written with respect to this subject and it is not relevant to enter into all of it at this time, as we will broach the subject later on<sup>7</sup>, it is sufficient to identify a few key moments and some of the most conflictive aspects of these movements.

The first event of great importance was the so-called Water War in Cochabamba (April, 2000). On that occasion, the motive of the uprising was the struggle against the process of privatisation of water and the entrance of transnational corporations. The mobilisation was based in the federation of water-workers and the manufacturing unions, under the direction of Oscar Olivera. The growth and effect of this mobilisation resulted in the Coordinator of Water, which began a new form of political participation integrating councils, assemblies, movements and the union structure into the decision making process. As well, the Coordinator became a model for coordination between different actors, whether social or political, that looked for greater and more active political participation. Years later the *Estado Mayor del Pueblo* was born which looked to integrate movements on the national level.

A second significant movement were the road blocks of September 2000, lead primarily by sectors of Aymara peasantry, with notable efficacy, leaving the city of La Paz without provisions an evoking the legendary blockade of Tupac Katari in the 18th century . The Aymara leader that came into the limelight was Felipe Quispe, who had taken the reins of the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB) in 1998 after participating actively in distinct peasant organisations. His presence marked a new dynamic in this Confederation: with recurring road blocks as forms of struggle. At the same time, strongly cultural aspects were incorporated into the demands of the confederation, which can be synthesised in the idea of *the two Bolivias* and the vindication of the Aymara nation.

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<sup>7</sup> On social and political movements in Bolivia in recent years, see the books published by the group *Comuna*: García Linera, et al. (2000, 2001, 2002, 2004).

The third moment of the social movement was the Gas War of October, 2003 which resulted in the ousting of the president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, as we will later analyse in greater detail.

But, despite the impressive acts, on a general level, fragmentation and unity appear to be a pairing that accompanies the dynamic of new social movements in recent years. Each social sector possesses a particular demand for which they struggle and undertake their own mobilisation. Miners, peasants from the West, peasants from the East, etc. undertake a series of protests, from blockades to isolated and temporary land occupations. Each one looks to solve its own problem, with very little coordination: worse still, there is no lack of quarrels and attacks between groups, using language to delegitimize one another. At the same time, the complex accusation of traitor is thrown about in the case of reaching an agreement or solution with the government of the time.

What draws particular attention is that, in this daily climate of fragmentation and tension between social actors, there are moments in which it is possible to create an overriding theme that is capable of uniting distinct groups, putting differences aside; consensus can be achieved on a particular motto or banner under which forces can be united. When this happens, social movements act as if they were coordinating on the national level. It is in these moments that the capacity for social action is fundamental, being able to impact and modify history. In the uprisings of October 2003, the demand “*Goni* out!” became a reality when the president had to flee by helicopter. In the first weeks of June 2005 a new consensus was reached, this time centred on the demand for the nationalisation of hydrocarbons, and preventing the naming of the president of the Senate, Hormando Vaca Diez, as president of the republic after the resignation of Carlos Mesa.

Nonetheless, the structure of political action is fragmented, sometimes anarchic, showing its fragility after the heroic victory. Once a particular demand is met, the collective identity of the protest quickly disappears and returns to individual demands until a new point of consensus and encompassing overriding theme arise. The new moments of emergence in the sense of convergence have been related to the elections that brought about victory of Evo Morales in December, 2005, the nationalisation of hydrocarbons in May 2006 and the Constituent Assembly.

In this fashion, today’s social actors move between fragmentation and unity.

#### *The population’s perception of politicians*

In 2001 I had the opportunity to tour several regions of the country, interviewing people with three commonalities: they did not belong to a party or a union; they were of the popular classes; and they sold products in a local market. All of them, men and women – 200 people in total –

were asked what they thought of the political situation, politicians, the economic crisis, gas, and the future of the country. It was the times of Hugo Banzer and Jorge *Tuto* Quiroga; with Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada waiting in the wings. There were multiple answers but it is helpful to focus on two themes: the perception of politics and natural resources (given the recent announcement of the discovery of hydrocarbon potential in the south of the country).

#### The perception of politics:

Up to now the president hasn't been elected by the people, but by an agreement between politicians. That's why the majority of us are upset when the two ally.

To me, it sometimes seems better not to vote, because politicians don't do anything. It's better to say "I don't count on politicians", better to think that one has to get out of their problems by themselves.

All politicians are the same, politics is a sham. They can't be believed; they are all promises and never follow through when they're in the hot seat. There is no hope in the country because they aren't there when we need them most.

Politics is the art of robbing without being discovered, nothing more.

Politics is worthless. During their campaigns, politicians shout, call us, give us hats, drinks and get us drunk, nothing more. And once they're in office, they forget us, they don't listen to us; they even get angry. Politicians aren't even capable of thanking us. What they are doing really hurts me...

When politicians are running for office, they promise to distribute favours but when they're at the table, they no longer look to us, they mock us.

We like politics, we don't like politicians.

There are four guys governing, they are the same family, some go up, some go down. They are like capitalists, and like capitalists what do the rest of us matter to them? Among themselves they chat: "okay, you climb in government and I'll go down but you've got to give me something, some spot..."

When a politician is on the campaign trail, everything is good, everything seems marvellous. It's like wintertime: when winter starts, the rain falls, and when summer starts, things start drying out. That's politics. The whole year should be campaign time.

Politicians don't live what we live. Politics is for the benefit of the big guys.

I believe that politicians will always be lying. I believe that we, the indigenous, can run, that one of our relatives will be a president, this is how I believe we can really change our situation, this way our candidate, our president, can work with us.

For me, everyone having work is politics.

#### Natural resources and economic expectations

I see that it's very difficult for Bolivia to escape poverty. Each government that we have, instead of moving forward, goes backwards. I believe that Bolivia will never move

forward because all those that go into government only work to line their pockets and leave Bolivia poor.

I believe that those who go into politics won't change anything. The poor will continue to be poorer and the rich richer. So, I don't know.... I wonder: what solution can we speak of if those that go into government will never solve the problems of the country? In vain people say, alleviate poverty, helping the poorest. All that is political propaganda, because instead there's greater unemployment, there aren't sources of work.

Bolivia doesn't have the ability to interact with foreigners, they just take everything.

Some wealth is discovered and the only thing that enters the government's head is to negotiate. What I mean is, we almost aren't comforted by finding new wealth because we know it's all going to leave our hands, the business will go to foreign countries. That's why I say that with the gas it'll be the same as always.

There's no country for us like there is for other countries. They don't think of how to benefit the people, just of the profits they'll receive.

Speaking of politics, for example gas, the gas is ours, but it's expensive here; if gas is something that is Bolivia produces, how can it be expensive? We are sending gas to Brazil, we have more than enough, but here in Llallagua [a mining centre] we always have to run around to get gas. Nonetheless, we're selling our gas.

It is not necessary to consider numerous reflections. The general climate between popular sectors is of malaise and hopelessness with respect to politics. Social suffering is seen in each one of the words that are chanted in unions to the same melody of distrust and discontent towards the world of the rich and the politicians.

These six characteristics are, roughly, those that give us thorough look at the structural transformations in which Bolivia found itself before the arrival of the movement headed by Evo Morales (and which, along with other things, explain his triumph). It was the hope that change had to be of greater scope, each time that the problems demanded much more than small adjustments in the logic of neoliberal continuity. Only the proposal of a new project could channel the frustrations in other directions. And that is what happened.

## The State: Presences and Absences



Guayamerin, Beni. The border with Brazil. 2002



The electoral court. San Antonio, Santa Cruz. 2001



The Yungas, La Paz. 2002





Cobija, Pando. 2000



El Alto. 2002



Sale en Riberalta, Beni. 2000



Boy peeing across from the Government Palace. La Paz. 2000



General Accounting Office in Cobija. Pando. 2002



La Paz, 2003.



Vendors from the public market with patriotic symbols. Potosi. 2001



Advertisement for Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano, a state enterprise. Cobija. Pando. 2002



Peri-urban electrification in La Paz. 2002



Television channel in Chiquitania, Santa Cruz. 2000



District director of education. La Paz. 2000

Technical University of Beni. Riberalta. 2003





Police post in Riberalta, Beni. 2003

Flag in the Government Palace. La Paz, 2004.



Police in Llallagua. Potosí. 2000



Soldiers at the border with Chile. Potosi, 2001.

## **Chapter II**

### **From Above**

The fumbling of the governing oligarchy and the decadence of “Gonism”: 2002-2003

They considered themselves the owners of the country but at the same time they depreciated it. At no point in time did they consider that the money and power they possessed were due to the people who had passively accepted, unconsciously, without resignation or rebellion, because they were the fruits of broken feudal system.

Sergio Almaraz

On June 30<sup>th</sup> 2002, general elections took place and Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada won with 22.4% of the vote. He beat Evo Morales by a few scant points, a revelation that hadn't been previously shown by polls. The fifteen months of Goni's second term were marked by clumsy actions that showed the decadence of neoliberalism. One must remember that Evo, although he was a deputy, was thrown out of parliament – after a process of doubtful legitimacy – in January of the same year because of promoting protests against the policies of coca crop eradication. In what follows, we shall see some memorable episodes in the short-sightedness of an oligarchy in decline.

#### *The new parliament*

August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002 the Bolivian parliament demonstrated (or at least tried to), that it represented a multicultural country. The deputies were no longer the tie-wearing usual crowd that were on television: traditional skirts and hats were getting a voice. The parliament was beginning to no longer be an ethnically and ideologically homogenous block, only serving to approve laws dictated by the president and agreed upon in elegant restaurants. New faces, shapes, and smells populated the stage; the colours of the popular party, also appeared in the seats, ties were replaced with *lluchus* (traditional indigenous caps), jackets for ponchos. The end of uniformity was coming to an end. The debate was beginning.

In this new parliament, the men in power, used to dealing only with their “equals”, would have to get used to coping with others who did not look like them; they would have to learn to regulate the difference. What a problem for those who during centuries had attempted to ignore the Indian presence in the nation, those who went to great lengths to believe that Bolivia wasn't a country of *cholos*.

The first day of the debate was spectacular: 27 straight hours of speakers. Everyone took the floor, from indigenous leaders to ladies of the Santa Cruz aristocracy. The parliament became a place for discussion, and in it the conflicts of the street were reflected, the demands of social

movements. The hypocritical diplomacy was left aside and the problems of the country could be seen; glasses of water were thrown between the participants and truths were screamed in people's faces. The parliamentary bubble had burst, now it actually represented the society and its conflicts.

*The new repartition of the state between militants*

After the euphoria of the transfer of power, of the new faces in state administration, of those called to the unity of the nation that Goni made reference to in his inaugural speech, came the moment of truth. What to do with the state? Who was going where? What for whom?

Without a doubt, the task was difficult. Especially considering that the bureaucratic structure had been reduced in recent years, but not the thirst to participate in it, nor the commitments to the loyal militants who in campaigns had raised banners thinking of their future work opportunities. The moment had come; the debt of time invested (and in many cases, money) was starting to be collected.

A good part of the payrolls of the public sector went from the hands of the principal political leaders who, based on their own criteria, and in relation to their correlation of party forces, followed the corresponding distribution.

Although the phenomenon was nothing new, it had at least appeared to be controlled through processes of reforms that had taken place in the previous years. It was naively thought that some political sectors were starting to think like men of the state and not as party leaders; that they had understood that politics must respond to society and not to the militant bases.

How to stop the political malaise if the very parties obstruct society's entrance to public responsibility and distribute payrolls behind closed doors? Evidently, the question was not on the agenda of those in office. Those in power had not understood the electoral message of June 30<sup>th</sup>. Months later, they would see their error more clearly.

*Events of February 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of 2003 and military justice*

February 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> were days of incredible intensity in Bolivia. After the release of a presidential decree (a tax increase) that was poorly received by the population, and the entrance of students from Ayacucho High School into Murillo Square to throw rocks at the Government Palace, the security forces went into battle mode (military against the police) in the political centre of the country. The deterioration of the state structure could be hidden no longer; the state was fighting against itself in the city's central square.

The president escaped and left a power gap while the shots between the national security forces followed their course. In the afternoon, faced with total chaos, Goni released an improvised two



minute television message in which he asked for unity and compromise, defending his policy of “public works with jobs”. He finished by saying: “God save Bolivia”. Hours later he appeared next to military and police commanders and affirmed that he governed with them and that the country was moving towards calm. “I hope that it can be this way” was how he concluded on this occasion.

During the afternoon, between shootings in the downtown, scatterings of multiple origins began: social actors protesting against the government, upset citizens taking to the streets, gangs looting stores, burnings of buildings of political parties and ministries. The opposition was strongly criticising the government and asking for the president’s resignation. Slowly the state disappeared from the scene; there were no police in the streets, no ministers on the news. Authority was without a face. As the afternoon fell, only three media networks broadcast news – along with one radio station. At night, after the only channel showed how public buildings were burning and how police and military had been killing one another throughout the day, the television announced the end of its broadcasting. Emptiness and silence took root in the homes whose inhabitants could do nothing more than put a lock on their doors.

The timid appearances of the state would come the following day, with declarations of ministers and deputies. The army took control of urban “security”; in one protest in the San Francisco Square a uniformed sniper shot a nurse, causing her death. The event, filmed by a cameraman was made public. Despite numerous social pressures, the military was tried in a military tribunal and absolved.

Uncertainty about what really happened in these intense hours continues to our days; along with the necessity of bringing to justice those responsible for so much death.

#### *More deaths*

His name is Luis Zelaya Marquez, number 60 on the list of the dead from the first 11 months of Goni’s government. According to the Assembly of Human Rights, there was a victim every five days. Luis died at 32 years of age, in a conflict in Santa Rosa del Sara, in the department of Santa Cruz on July 21, 2003.

The population had blocked the road, boking for attention from the government for particular demands, to finish paving and to push out invaders from the nature reserve. As a form of pressure, along with the road black, the valves of a gas duct of the transnational company Transredes were closed.

The response of the government was to militarise the area by sending 500 troops. What a situation: the population was looking for assistance from the state to satisfy basic necessities (pavement and forestry control), and the state only appeared when the interests of transnational

corporations were threatened. Absence of the state? No, better yet, interested, strategic and abusive presences, when foreign interests are affected. Why does the government only appear through uniformed forces in the most remote regions? Shouldn't the troops be used to protect forestry reserves rather than liquidating those who demand protection?

A few months after the death of Luis Zelaya in Santa Cruz, the violence hit La Paz. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, a group of Aymara community members took Sorata (a historic town that saw the uprising of Bartolina Sisa and Tupac Amaru in 1781) as a form of protest against the possibility of gas exportation, with cultural demands. Some foreign travellers were trapped, which gave rise to government military intervention in the area, under the expressed suggestion of the American Ambassador. The Minister of Defence, Carlos Sanchez Berzain, who now lives in Miami after his violent flight from the country in October 2003 with Sanchez de Lozada, ordered and coordinated one of the most spectacular interventions of recent years. In what was called a "humanitarian operation" to rescue foreigners, a caravan made up of the air force and land troops was formed. The general supervision was undertaken by Sanchez Berzain from a helicopter. The German Ambassador, given that there were citizens of that nation as tourists in the area, classified it as a "grave error" that the government had not militarily protected Sorata. The result was six dead indigenous people, including men, women and children. With the matter under control, the government called for dialogue.

#### *The racist technocracy*

At the beginning of the year, the universities in Bolivia go out to hunt for students. They must convince the youth that the option they offer is the best. Although local universities are generally very mediocre, each one puts themselves on the market, showing off their most attractive aspects, and affirming that they are the best, that they have the most experience, that their quality is comparable with any other foreign university.

Many parents, and several students, fall into the trap. They enter enthusiastically into the classrooms, believing that the money they pay each month, will ensure they get a respectable job that allows them to "live well", that they'll be recognised socially, and will "be someone" in life. Naively, they seem to ignore that the problem of unemployment goes beyond having a university degree, or dedicating oneself for five years to a profession that is recognised and ensures that "you won't starve to death".

In the supply of dreams, a private university launched in 2002 an ad campaign that sought to convince parents that, by enrolling their children in the school, they would have no further problems in life, and, they would especially not have to resign themselves to working as mere workers. The photo in their ad showed a working cleaning windows in a building and the following text: "What side of the window do you want your children to work on? An excellent education means greater and better opportunities."

What ingenuity of these gentlemen (who know more about business than academia) to put forth that education will offer children a secure job. The ambition to order others about, the desire to form part of the economically powerful groups, is very legitimate for a mediocre local elite; this would not be surprising if it came from a group of businessmen, but to see such publicity from an academy, was simply scandalous.

It is evident that the Bolivian elite doesn't listen to Juan Carlos Baglietto when he sings: "my children will be trumpeters or nothing, certainly not stockbrokers". But worse than this case was the pair of technocrats, economics professors in the postgraduate program of the Universidad Católica Boliviana (financed by the American embassy, which receives support from Harvard), that published a newspaper article entitled "An Economics Class for Evo". The columnists highlighted the great advantages of market economy, and the number of jobs generated by foreign investors, of the new vision that would bring about the creation of a new "first world business culture", of the importance of the arrival of McDonald's to Bolivia, and the certainty that "with these businesses we are making a better country". These market evangelists advised Evo to "deepen democracy", and to start to "act as a representative of a greater number of Bolivians". Very generously, they claimed to "help our novel Bolivian politician".

I'll ignore the whereabouts of these economics professors, they are probably advising Goni in the United States, or helping him prepare his conferences on democracy in Latin America, as he has done on various occasions. Nonetheless, their clumsy words at that moment illustrated the technocratic mentality that feels called to (and prepared for) the implementation of the public world and the direction of the nation. It is they who believe to possess the truth and the monopoly on political knowledge; people must listen attentively to them and follow their instructions. Especially indigenous people. Luckily history has given them a slap with a white glove.

In a similar vein, in a visit to the country, Elena Martinez, then regional director of Latin America and the Caribbean for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), faced with mobilisations led by the MAS asked in anguish: "What does Evo want?", and suggested the leader "take dose of realism" and join the government (of Goni!) to promote democracy. "We don't have people without training in power" the international functionary concluded.

#### *The image of the elite woman*

Monica Bellucci used to say that beauty is like having a Rolls Royce: you have to know how to use it. Miss Bolivia 2003, Gabriela Ovideo, of Santa Cruz origin and who represented the nation in the Miss Universe Contest, when faced with the question, "what is the greatest misconception about your country?" responded:

Well, unfortunately people who don't know Bolivia very well think that we're all indigenous, from the West side of the country, La Paz. The image that is reflected is of poor, short, indigenous people. I am from the other side of the country, a place that isn't cold, that is very warm, we're tall, white, we know English; in this way all those misconceptions make people think that Bolivia is just an Andean country. Bolivia has a lot to offer and that's my job, I'm an ambassador for my country.

Evidently the unfortunate declarations generated a wave of reactions. What is clear is that the beauty never asked herself about the physical and social conditions of those who served her food, who cleaned her room, who drove her to the beauty parlour. An indigenous Guarani, a Chiquitano or a Colla had apparently never crossed her path; her eyes didn't see anything more than what her surroundings and television offered.

But perhaps the most worrisome was that, beyond her beauty and her origin, this racist narrowness, was not the monopoly of the Miss Santa Cruz's but instead expanded to other sectors of Bolivian society: intellectuals, politicians, social groups, whom the presence of the Indian made uncomfortable.

On the other generational and territorial extreme of the country, caricatures of the idea of the indigenous can also be seen. Beatriz Canedo Patiño, a successful woman in international fashion, who returned to Bolivia after years of living in the United States, incorporated alpaca weavings with indigenous motifs in her clothes for her Fall/Winter Collection of 2003. In this way, on the runway – seen by a series of politicians and members of high society at the Hotel Radisson – one could see elegant models dressed as Incan queens. The colours, smells, and textures of the Indian with the necessary distance, occupied the place of greater social and visual legitimacy.

In the press release the event was announced as follows:

The Fall/Winter 2003 collection is based on a return to the social sensitivity that existed in the decade of the 70s during social, economic and political conflicts, like those we are living today throughout the world. For this reason, the designer Beatriz Canedo Patiño wants to express in this collection a return to individuality and freedom of expression, placing emphasis on the return to our Incan cultural identity.

These images of politicians, businessmen, technocrats and ladies, are an attempt to demonstrate how the Bolivian elite constructed a world in which only they existed, their reasons and their arguments, their pastimes, their world-vision, incapable of perceiving what was taking place beyond their gates, and the underground disillusionment that sooner or later would modify the entire national stage. Particularly with the events of October 2003.

## Nobility and Distinctions



La Paz, 2004.

Propaganda for Hugo Banzer. La Paz, 1997.



Sign in a municipality in the Amazon. Pando, 2000.



Party in a private home in La Paz, 2000.

Guillermo Justiniano, senator for the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement for Santa Cruz. Minister of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, Cochabamba, 2002.



Promotional models for Axe deodorant. La Paz, 2003.



A family in front of McDonald'. La Paz, 2000.



A boutique in the city of La Pa, 2004.



Shoe shiners in front of a video store. La Paz, 2003.



Perfume store in Cobija, Pando, 2002.



Ad for the five star hotel Los Tajibos, in the Santa Cruz countryside, 2002.



Rules of the subprefecture Nuflo Chavez: "Entry with shorts and t-shirt prohibited".



Santa Cruz, 2004.



Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and Jaime Paz. An event to commemorate the National Revolution of 1952. Cochabamba, 2002.

Sale of wood in Santa Cruz, 2003.





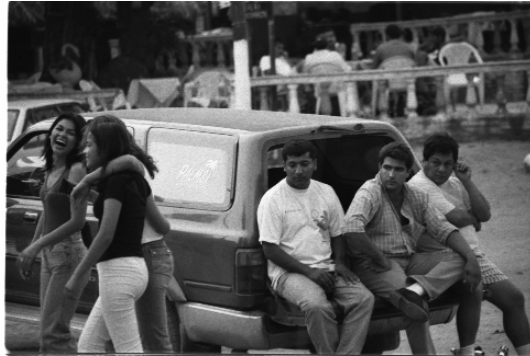
Exploitation of timber in Cobija, Pando, 2000.



Right-wing senator Leopoldo Fernandez.  
Pando, 2003.



Buildings of La Paz, 2004.



Santa Cruz, 2001.



La Paz, 2004.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Ten Days in October**

October, 2003: Chronicle of the expulsion of a president

October of 2003 rests in Bolivian history as one of the moments when the direction of the nation changed. It is the moment of the transformation of a long neoliberal period and the opening of unknown horizons.

Without a doubt, the mobilisations of the week of the 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of October that brought about the fall of the president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada are the result of a long process of initiatives of social action and socio-political transformations; probably the genesis is in the movements of the year 2000 with their respective repercussions in the political changes of 2002 and 2005. In any case, it is clear that we have been present for the exhaustion of one form of politics and economics, which was clearly expressed with the events of October.

The first question that arises in looking back at this epoch centres on the triumph of this social movement. What happened? Why did the people mobilise themselves with such strength until they brought down the president? What new aspects did these uprisings have to achieve the objective size? Why was it simply not one of the protests to which we are so well accustomed? What makes this particular juncture such an exceptional moment?

Beginning from the idea that the capacity to expand social demands was based on, among other things, symbolic dispositions of the population, which were activated by determined catalysts in specific circumstances. In this case, what permitted the awakening of people's rage, that ended up in supporting the demand for the resignation of the president were:

- The place of gas in the nation's history
- The extraordinary figure of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada as a character capable of evoking distinct negative images at once (being a mining businessman millionaire, the powerful politician, the sell-out responsible for the policy of privatisation of state enterprises, and finally, the killer).
- Death, which evokes a feeling of unity, solidarity, and identification with the abuse of power.

These elements, along with others, changed people's feelings, causing them to rise-up in protests, building in a given moment, a collective identity of "the people". In this fashion, a new sense of identity was developed that was defined in opposition to the powerful (Goni) and in relation to the victim ("us"). In this new identity, although it was clearly transitory and unstable (it disappeared once the conflict had passed), neighbourhood organisations, workers, students,

civil society groups, middle classes, and various citizens came together. Only when this citizen identity of protest was sufficiently made up of different social sectors, “the people” had the power to work as a whole. In a given moment, strangely without previous instructions or central coordination, social action flowed as if everything had been coldly calculated and directed by an orchestra conductor.

In this conflict there was a difference with respect to what happened on the 12 and 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2003, when police officers and military were involved in an armed confrontation in Murillo Square, the centre of national politics. At that moment, the centre of the problem was the struggle of the state against the state. The people had passively watched the fact that the “Bolivian brothers” were killing one another, and were not significantly affected (especially during the first day). In February, the phrase that encompassed the sentiment was “we are killing one another”, creating a rupture in the Bolivian identity. In October, the consolidated sentiment was that “they are killing us like lambs to the slaughter”, evoking a collective identity of the people vs. the powerful and their military allies. The deaths on this occasion were not state functionaries but instead normal people.

The “identity of the people” began to be defined as of the end of Saturday 11, but reached its heights on Monday 13 or Tuesday 14. From Tuesday 14 until Friday 17 we see how it operated; and it’s this identity that achieved the downfall of the president. Hours later it disappeared and transformed.

Through this growth of consensus we will understand precisely the process of making up this identity, whose elements allow for feeling part of a connected collective. If we follow the emergence of the demands, we can see that the first call was sectoral (coca, and Aymara) and later the topic of the gas became more pressing. But it is far from the moment that death would appear as a way of fundamental interpellation at the heart of society, that began to construct the “consensus” summed up by the motto “Goni out!”.

Chronologically, Friday 10<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> of October the demand “Goni out” was seen as excessive and only coming from certain sectors. But as of the night of Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> it began to be understood as a greater demand, and Monday 13<sup>th</sup> or Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> it became a consensus in the mouth of the people. At that moment the demand was so strong that only a tremendous level of repression could have detained it.

The simple analytical guide driving this chronicle consists of paying attention to the behaviour of the principal actors in the conflict (government and social movements), analysing the escalation of social demands and the capacity for the expansion of consensus of distinct groups and, finally, analysing the process of incorporation and involvement of new social sectors (the media, the

Catholic church, the middle classes, regions, etc). All in all, investigating the formation of what we could hypothetically call the “identity of the people”.

In the pages that follow an attempt is made to contribute to explaining this process through a chronicle (arbitrary like all chronicles) of the events that took place during the week of 10-18 October.

### *Chronicle of an intense week*

To explain what happened in those intense days we could go back a few years prior, which would take time and space. But, perhaps, for a first approach, attention would have to be paid to September 19<sup>th</sup>, when San Francisco Square was filled with protestors in defence of the gas. On that occasion, the placards and the war cries centred on that demand, showing that a pertinent phrase, which appeals to the right sentiments, is capable of unifying struggles, forgetting differences and allowing people to rise up together under a single banner.

Let us recall some of the words tossed in the air at the same time by hundreds of protestors in that uprising:

- “The gas belongs to us by rights, reclaiming it and industrialising it is our duty”
- “No to the sale of gas, industrialising it until we succeed.”
- “The gas is not for sale! The UPEA will not give up, full autonomy”.
- “Social communication here in the struggle, long live autonomy”
- “Drums of war in defence of our gas”
- “Enough robbery, stop the corruption.”

The principal image that was evoked in the majority of the cries that Friday afternoon were related to the gas, although the other demands continued to be present, from the common macro spaces (corruption, politicians, traitors, etc.) to the more specific and sectoral (university autonomy, retirees, coca, etc).

Perhaps the most audacious slogan was that of “The gas belongs to us by rights, reclaiming it and industrialising it is our duty”, which slightly modified the martial cry that states, “the sea belongs to us by rights, reclaiming it is our duty”. It must be remembered that this expression was disseminated as official state policy in all the educational institutions of the country throughout decades. The objective of the message was to remember the war of the Pacific with Chile (1879), when Bolivia lost access to the sea. Each civic school hour and each 23<sup>rd</sup> of March (the day of the sea) the heroism of those fallen in that confrontation is celebrated and the sentiment of an unresolved, latent, conflict is revived.

The pertinence of the appropriation of the phrase in the new context is owed to the fact that it evokes, in few words, distinct images. First, the substitution of the word “sea” for “gas” in that classic refrain awakens a profound sentiment anchored in the Bolivian imagination around the

issue of the sea. This is almost common ground for all: right, left, white, Indians, rich and poor. Few people could oppose, at least publicly, the idea that is written in high school notebooks and the minds of Bolivians. The consequences of the War of the Pacific are revived whenever they speak of this topic.

Secondly, the word “gas” itself brings with it the memory of the War of the Chaco with Paraguay (1932-1935), and the stories of the grandparents that marched and gave their lives in that conflict. Finally, the word “reclaim” (with both the gas and the sea) evokes at least two ideas: on the one hand, the role that Sanchez de Lozada has, the “traitor” and responsible for privatising state enterprises that should be “reclaimed” to benefit the nation; and on the other, “reclaiming the coast line and the wide sea”<sup>8</sup>, as the widely heard military anthem says.

As a backdrop, on other placards, the word “war”. The national identity is constructed from the traumatic relationship with wars; Bolivians are the lost wars, as a tense relationship of something taken, stolen and as a continually unresolved topic. War, for a Bolivian, represents an outstanding debt, an open wound, a stage not overcome by history, but something that constitutes at its depths, their being.

As such, the marriage between the discourse of the sea and the gas has an unmeasured potential, which will take a greater shape in October, as we will see in the following passages. Even the day after the massive march of the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, the government undertook a clumsy operative in Sorata to rescue the tourists that we mentioned in the previous chapter. Three weeks later, the great uprising that would result in the resignation of the president, would begin. Let’s consider the daily chronicle.

#### *Friday October 10, 2003*

The indefinite civic strike in the city of El Alto, called two days previously by the Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations (FEJUVE) and supported by the Regional Workers Central (COR) and the Federation of Workers, saw a great response from the population of El Alto. Conflicts and confrontations were lived. Businesses were closed, little transport was available, there were shots, gasses, wounded, and two deaths. The centre of the demands was focussed on the defence of the gas, and the rejection of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas). The government insisted that a minority was attempting to divide Bolivia, and stressed that the solution was to be found in the framework of the document of “reconciliation”, an initiative that some party officials signed a few weeks later.

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<sup>8</sup> The anthem says: “Let’s reclaim our sea, let’s reclaim our coast. Even if it costs us our life, we’ll reclaim the captive sea. The youth is present, Bolivia on its feet, claim the sea. Through this century of injustice, reclaim it, reclaim it, it is our cry and our will. Reclaim it, reclaim it, the coast and the wide sea”

Few alternative solutions to the conflict were in sight, but the situation was nothing new. Government behaviour had been out of touch with social demands for years. Gasses and roadblocks made up the daily landscape.

In the city of La Paz, at mid-morning the information ran, from mouth to mouth, that gasoline had run out. The lines of cars grew for blocks and a certain feeling of fear began to arise, but it was still limited to an individual problem of fuel. The minister Sanchez Berzain assured that the issue would be resolved the following day. Up until this point, no one had imagined that the country would be completely different one week later.

*Saturday October 11, 2003*

Gas in La Paz

The spirits of El Alto were heating up more and more each day. Marches began to identify a person responsible, which was expressed in placards that said: "Goni, asshole, up against the wall". His resignation slowly began to enter into the debate, but it was nothing more than an isolated voice. The success of the strike was greater and greater each day. The mobilisations were tremendous.

The principal battleground was concentrated on the intention of the government to transport tankers of gasoline to the city of La Paz, and in the intention of people to block this movement. The fuel distribution plant situated in Senkata (30km from La Paz) is the epicentre of national politics. Sanchez Berzain designed a plan to fulfil his word of meeting gasoline needs. To do so, he called upon tanks and military vehicles. The most guarded gasoline of history attempted to move towards the city but on the road it was met by hundreds of people who had constructed barricades. The confrontations were constant, bullets crossed the city, the dead and injured increased.

At night the radio informed people about the popular struggle. In the neighbourhood of Alto Ballivian of the city of El Alto, the 5<sup>th</sup> police regiment was surrounded by neighbours; the army and the police began to shoot without qualms at the homes.

La Paz was paralysed, only those who had filled up on gas the day before could move about. Public transportation was practically inexistent. Commerce and markets were operating irregularly.

At night, as mentioned previously, El Alto had become a no-man's land, with significant confrontations. Near midnight, the spokesman of the presidency, Mauricio Antezana, announced on television that there was a plan of destabilisation conceived of and financed by foreign forces. The "attacks" on the plant of Senkata were with firearms, provoking the accusation that Evo Morales was instigating a coup d'état to destabilise democracy. The government again brought



up the document of “reconciliation” and concluded by affirming that the topics of exporting gas and the FTAA were undetermined. With growing rage and some deaths, the day concluded.

*Sunday October 12, 2003*

The massacre of El Alto

El Alto becomes a military zone. The troops occupy practically the entire city with tanks, military vehicles and soldiers. The resistance and the confrontations extended to the area of Rio Seco (the extreme South of La Paz) and some other faraway areas.

The soldiers had shoot, but this does not prevent them from having conflicts of conscience. One captain from the Amazon recounted that during his training, when they had to fire a bullet, they would recite “to kill a Peruvian”, “to kill a Chilean” while reloading. Anguished, the captain said, “How could we shoot Bolivians with a bullet destined for a foreigner”. But the conflict of conscience of some military personnel did not prevent the massacre from continuing. In the afternoon, the radio Erbol announced 26 dead.

The operative *gasoline to La Paz* met some of its objectives. The cost was very high. A woman on the radio summoned the people not to buy gasoline with the blood of El Alto.

The powers that be had demonstrated that they were ready for anything and that they were not scared to pull the trigger. The number of deaths was growing. All the fears of previous days transformed into rage, powerlessness faced with so much death, so much abuse of authority.

*Monday October 13*

The cards are dealt

In the morning, Evo Morales declared that he rejected the offers that the government was making. After the deaths of El Alto, he affirmed that the only remaining solution was the resignation of the president. The call became a general consensus. Moreover, Sanchez de Lozada became a tremendous symbol of everything negative. Asking for his resignation became a point of convergence between different sectors that would not have been able to come to an agreement in other circumstances. A new collective identity developed based on the cry of “Goni out”.

This was a day of great social uprising. Hundreds of people from El Alto descended upon the city of La Paz, all demanding that Goni go. There were more deaths. In the south of the city, the areas of Ovejuyo and Chasquipampa went into action, contributing with more deaths. Everything was directed by neighbourhood organisations who, with their banners, invaded San Francisco square, in the heart of downtown La Paz, in one of the most attended marches in the last decades. The people were in the streets, radios transmitting each of the steps of this massive encounter. A helicopter was constantly watching every movement of the population. Final tally: 28 dead

during the day. A poster in the street asked, “What is the path? You decide for Bolivia, sectarianism, selfishness, or bringing down the oligarchy. Out Goni! Constitutional succession!”

The powers suffer their first break. At 11:00 am, Vice-president Carlos Mesa broke with the government without leaving his post, saying that his conscience did not permit him to support the government. Some voices of the coalition declared themselves in a similar line. A Cochabamban leader of the MNR denounced that *Gonism* had taken the party and removed it from the people. The ex-Defender of the People, Ana Maria Romero (who is well-known for her reputation in the struggle for human rights and democracy) harshly criticised the violence of the government and asked for the president’s resignation.

The march, the people, politics, the deaths, all point to the president releasing a message of resigning his post. At midday there seems to be a certainty that the government will resign. The question is pressing.

At the start of the afternoon, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada appeared on television affirming that he would not resign. With strength and in tremendous contrast to the weakness shown the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of February, the president maintained that those who wished his resignation were seditious, wanting grief and violence, enemies of democracy. “Bolivia will endure and we will protect democracy” he concluded.

At that moment, the cards were dealt and the situation in the coming days would be wrestled over by the different forces in the conflict. The government already had a clear position: it would not resign and would seek any measure to maintain its position, repression and international support. At the same time, it was clear that the very political power already had its own dissidents, that its homogeneity had been broken. For its part, the social movement had reached an important consensus, “Goni Out”. There was nothing that could replace this demand. The two sides had drawn all their cards, now it was simply a matter of seeing who had more strength, who made better moves, who would fold first.

#### *Tuesday, October 14*

##### *The day of mourning*

The country was in mourning. There were few mobilisations in the streets. Many complaints could be heard on the radio, but all of them centred on the demand for resignation. Some personalities, like the mayor of La Paz, Juan del Granado, were taking up the demand. There was now total consensus, nothing less than Goni’s head would be accepted.

Death hurts, everyone was burying their dead.

It would seem that only one question was in the hearts of the mourners: “what more can we do to get Goni to go?”. New initiatives were silently arising that would come to light the following day.

*Wednesday, October 15*

The awakening of the middle class

The middle class went into action. A manifesto signed by various neighbours and intellectuals of the city affirmed:

We cannot be indifferent towards the deaths, more than 60 as of today, Wednesday October 15. We express our solidarity with the city of El Alto and with the families that have been murdered, both in this city and in La Paz.

We repudiate the government of Sanchez de Lozada, the MNR, their ministers and all the parties of the coalition. We denounce the guilt of the political class, party leaders and members of official Parliament that only hours ago meted out power.

The president and his followers have made the mistake of associating the social unrest only with the working class and the unions. Indignation is present in a large percentage of the population, in all the social classes, in diverse professional frameworks.

We demand that Sanchez de Lozada and his government make way for a transitional government in which true democracy and human rights can be protected without concessions. To not do so implies promoting still greater violence and a deeper division in Bolivian society. We also call for a process of peace with justice and unity with full diversity.

Perhaps one of the most important events would be the hunger strike called by Ana Maria Romero. The picketing of the Carmelitas church in Sopocachi, one of the most traditional neighbourhoods of La Paz, could not be more symbolic. Ricardo Calla (anthropologist), Ricardo Cevallos (Jesuit priest), Jenny Cardenas (singer), Jose Antonio Quiroga (editor), Javier Hurtado (small businessman), Sacha Llorenti (human rights activists) were present. Each one represented a distinct sector. The call of Ana Maria was taken up by hundreds of people; dozens of pickets of strikers in distinct places of the city, and later the country, emerged.

As the afternoon closed, vigils were established both in Abaroa Square and the church of San Miguel, two middle class neighbourhoods. Everyone had to bring candles. A march was directed towards the picket of the Carmelitas church. The strikers came to the door and each one of them gave an impromptu speech by megaphone. Many names came up: Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz (leader of the Socialist Party 1, assassinated in 1980), Luis Espinal (Jesuit priest assassinated in

1980), Domitila Chungara (a mining leader). Peace was called for, and the event concluded with a special act, giving the candles to the surprised and highly-armed police who were guarding the house next door, of the General Command of Police.

The march, now that night had fallen, was following its course towards the other picket of strikers. On the way, they passed by the headquarters of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and it was marked with graffiti saying, “accomplices in death” due to the support that they offered to Sanchez de Lozada. The cries that accompany this march were:

“Goni make yourself gas, incompetent government”

“Goni you ass, go to a Washington”

“Here are the seditious”

“Goni and Zorro, both to Chonchocoro”<sup>9</sup>

“We are the seditious ones of Sopocachi”

In the street some young activists were distributing flyers demanding:

Out Goni! Murderer of Bolivians! The exit is constitutional! Urgent tasks: Approval of unconstitutional laws; A New Hydrocarbon Law in line with the constitution; Industrialisation of Gas for Bolivians; Exportation with added value and employment generation; Constituent Assembly. Unity against the massacre.

The government is pronounced. Its offerings are a consultative departmental referendum on the issue of gas, revising the Law of Hydrocarbons and incorporating the Constituent Assembly of the Constitution. The answers arrive late.

*Thursday, October 16*

Snake-like marches

From Patacamaya, a small town on the highway an hour and a half drive from La Paz, a confrontation between miners and military was broadcast on the radio. The looting is by the uniformed. They decommissioned greenhouses, blankets, even cell phones from the marchers. As well, they took two miners’ lives, lengthening the list of the dead. The news went resounding throughout the city.

In La Paz, the people took the streets independently. For each street there was a march without a strict path, screaming the same slogan. Some marchers were neighbours, others were miners, and others were students. The form of the mobilisation now took on a heterogeneous social face. Each person marched from where they feel most called. The form “neighbour” already had

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<sup>9</sup> *Zorro* is the nickname for the minister Sanchez Berzain. *Chonchocoro* is the maximum security prison located on the outskirts of La Paz.

developed a personality. Neighbour is now a new social and political identity, but it comes together primarily on the base of a politicised territoriality.

The anarchy of the occupation of spaces in La Paz was also evident. Although the classic points of concentration continued to be where everyone found themselves (San Francisco Square, Mariscal Santa Cruz Avenue), each march took its own path, breaking the traditional routine of protest. They went up one street and down the next. They were streamers of colours tossed throughout the city, not united by social class, economic position, or even ideology. What moved them was the consensus “Goni Out” and the solidarity brought on by the deaths.

A miner was handing out a leaflet during the march that gave five arguments for the motto “Resign, murderer Sanchez de Lozada”:

1. Resignation is the only guarantee of recovering the gas and the oil for Bolivians from transnational corporations.
2. The defence of democracy is the resignation of the murderer Sanchez de Lozada, because democracy is not murder. Not one more death!
3. The resignation of Sanchez de Lozada is the only way that there can be a definitive peace in Bolivia.
4. The greatest homage to our murdered martyrs is the resignation of Sanchez de Lozada.
5. If Goni does not resign, the general strike will not stop, the roadblocks will not stop, the protests will not stop.

For its part the hunger strike continued to grow. In just a few hours there were more than 700 strikers. The pickets opened in different places, expanding to the interior of the country. There was practically not a single department that did not have strikers. The movement was definitively national.

The radios did not stop broadcasting what the people were saying. And the people said many things, but it all centred on the resignation of the president. Carlos Mesa spoke again with the central point of his argument being, “I do not have the courage to kill”. He reaffirmed his distance from Sanchez de Lozada.

The powers that be still seemed to be very stable. At 4:50 in the afternoon, the Minister Sanchez Berzain appeared for the first time. He stressed that it did not make sense to be against the government as it was a losing battle, “you have no possibility of winning” he said.

At night Goni offered an interview to CNN. He reaffirmed that he would not resign, and was convinced that he had the support of two-thirds of the population, saying that a survey by Radio Fides gave him that result.

Some walls now sported a new slogan, “Carlos Mesa traitor”, accusing him of betraying the regime. The black paint was the same that before said, “Evo murderer, no more conflicts”. Without a doubt, the government also wanted to battle on the walls of the city.

During the night, there were new military incursions in El Alto, this time in the neighbourhood of Rio Seco. Neighbours called, complaining that the soldiers had entered their homes without care and were taking things and causing fear. The fear and rage continued to grow. At this point there was still a tie of sorts; it was not known which way the scale would tip.

#### *Friday October 17*

In the morning there was still a balance of powers. Little by little the balance would turn towards the side for resignation. The first voice was that of the priest Eduardo Perez, director of the Jesuit system of communication. Very early he announced that the figures that Goni had mentioned the previous night during his interview with CNN were false. It was not hidden that the webpage of Radio Fides was hacked and that just minutes before that happened, the figure had said that more than 75% of voters wanted the president to go, exactly the opposite of what had been presented hours previously.

The marches in the streets did not stop. A leaflet was handed out that captured some of the spontaneous slogans of the people:

- “They kill us like lambs”
- “The police come and the helicopter is shooting”
- “They treat us worse than dogs”
- “They are killing us, why isn’t anything done?”
- “Because we demand our rights, they’re killing us”

When faced with the question, “What to do?” The pamphlet suggests:

1. Close your business or work.
  2. Hang a black cloth of mourning on your door.
  3. Don’t let what they tell you sway you from :
    - a. The resignation of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada
    - b. Natural resources for us all
    - c. The struggle for a more just society for all
- If you want peace, think and work for social justice.

The fracture in political power was growing more and more evident. The newspaper *La Prensa* announced that Mauricio Antezana, the unconditional speaker, must have resigned, but the news was still not very clear. It would still take some hours to confirm that, for “personal reasons”, Antezana had left the official microphones.

At almost midday Manfred Reyes Villa, the leader of the New Republican Force (NFR), allied with the government, publically announced that the president must listen to the people. His distancing was imminent. The Armed Forces confirmed that they will follow legal order and constitutional mandate.

At 1:45 in the afternoon, the ERBOL Network (Radio Education of Bolivia) announced that the president was preparing his resignation. It was almost considered gossip that would become an open secret hours later. Speculation began, the calls, the reports. What time would he go? How? When?

On the radio a step forward was taken to consider the possible. Now the issue of the conditions of succession; the question, now very realistic, is what would come after Goni.

All afternoon rumours fly: saying that he was going to Lima, that he was going to Miami, that he would give a speech, that he had recorded his message, that he had only left a letter. In the streets the social movements began their celebrations. The miners in the popular San Francisco square set off dynamite, showing their presence. Some gasses were still used by the police but their efficacy was limited. Victory was knocking at the door.

Everything follows its course. The still president left for Santa Cruz en route to Miami. He left nothing more than a letter directed, not to the people, but to the parliamentarians, putting his position at their disposal. In parliament, between shouts and arguments, the naming of Carlos Mesa was taken up. At nightfall a group of youth that had been on hunger strike, march through the city with the white banners of the Permanent Assembly on Human Rights, shouting "Ole, ole, ole, ole, he's gone, he's gone".

Who would have said that this date, no more, no less, would result in the resignation of Goni? When the 34 years of the nationalisation of Gulf are remembered, the principal neoliberal privatiser left the government fleeing in a helicopter. A coincidence of history.

#### *Saturday October 18*

##### *El Alto celebrates*

What doubt remains, the die had been cast. The president Carlos Mesa was well received in El Alto, but that was not the most important. The vestiges of the great battle persisted on the great highway. The entrance to the highway that connects La Paz and El Alto still had the most important evidence of victory: railway cars anarchically thrown from a bridge. What force could have moved these tonnes of steel? What anger must there have been present among the people of El Alto to unite their arms and move such artifacts? Only 80 deaths explain it.

On the railway there are some signs that say, “Asshole Chileans, used to robbing us and closing our way”. Up higher, the highest point, a Bolivian flag with a black cloth of mourning. Above the car, numerous people from El Alto were looking on with pride at their work; this was their symbol of victory.

Through the transitory anarchy, a conglomeration of people organised the debris so that it only took up one lane. One citizen spontaneously signalled when some or other should take the narrow piece of avenue that had not been covered by the railway cars. Many looked around, a lady was holding up a sign that said: “honk your horn”, a sign of celebration, and he who did not do so was likely to be hit with rocks along with hisses.

Ahead, on the road that is near the gas plant of Senkata, there remain deep ditches carved by the population of the place, some burned cars and many rocks around. The oxidised rail is used as an instrument to block the road. It was grabbed with the force of the earth and is put before the road. Standing and defiant it fulfils its new social function: it supports heavy demands and moves mobilisations.

On the little space of the road that remains, at the end of the afternoon, it is possible to see some trucks filled with miners that are leaving the city. They are decorated with Bolivian flags and black cloth of mourning; placards of victory and excitement in people’s faces.

They say that places keep emotions alive. There, between rocks, blocks of cements, and remains of burned tires, one can still hear the cries against the soldiers that accompanied the convoys of gasoline en route to La Paz, the shots still echo in the ears, and the weeping of the families as they pick up the fallen.

The epic of bringing down a president has finished.



### **Daring to disagree**



La Paz, September, 2003. March against the export of gas in San Francisco Square.



La Paz, October, 2003. Walls of San Francisco Square after the events of October.



La Paz, September, 2003. Representatives of the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA)



El Alto, October, 2003.

La Paz, February, 2003. Burned car in the confrontations in February near Murillo Square.



Burned cars in El Alto. October, 2003.



El Alto, October, 2003. Derailed railway car.



Windshield of a police car broken by military projectiles. Conflict of February, 2003.



Painting on the Prado. La Paz, October, 2003.



Railes that served as barricades in El Alto to block the gasoline tankers. October, 2003.



La Paz, October, 2003. Postal Office.



San Francisco Square. La Paz, October, 2003.



Murillo Square. La Paz, February, 2003. Day of confrontation between military and police with a total of 30 deaths.



Police patrols. La Paz, October, 2003.



La Paz, September, 2003.



La Paz, October, 2003.



San Francisco Square. La Paz, September, 2003. Manuel Morales speaking, social fighter and MAS deputy.

## **Chapter IV**

### **From Below**

#### The birth of a new left in Bolivia

As seen in the previous chapters, Bolivia has experienced a process of transformation of political life since the year 2000. The changes have touched upon different spheres, from electoral results to social movements. One of the most visible results of this mobilisation was the resignation of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in October 2003. But, the most important change is that the monopoly on legitimate power, which had been imposed for the previous 15 years, ran out. It had been supported predominantly by the neoliberal paradigm brought on by the Supreme Decree 21060 that, in 1985, introduced a new era and became an icon of the nascent economic and cultural proposal.<sup>10</sup>

In this process of change, the behaviour of the left was of tremendous importance.<sup>11</sup> The left itself had suffered mutations that situated it in a different place than it had occupied even a few years prior. Suffice to say, in the general elections of 2002 the Movement towards Socialism (MAS), got 20.94% of the vote, becoming the second greatest political force in the country; and in December 2005 its striking victory was with more than 54% of the vote.

The present chapter attempts to analyse the process of the creation and the characteristics of the new left in Bolivia. But, to do so, it is first necessary to run through the history of the politically progressive culture to later explain the scenery that has allowed for the development of other political expressions.

#### *Cycles of the making up of the left*

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the country was living a particular economic peak and some industries began, unions began to grow with a socialist or anarchist leaning (influenced, clearly, by the global political happenings). The first socialist organisation was created in 1914, and the Workers Revolutionary Party (of a Trotskyist tendency) was founded in 1934. The party groupings have their counterpart in the workers unions and federations that, little by little, were

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<sup>10</sup> Garcia Linera rightly states that “for more than a decade and a half, the “slides of truth” that articulated expectations, certainties, and practical adherences to important sectors of the population, were the supply of the free market, privatization, governability and liberal representative democracy... upper classes, middle classes, and urban lower classes... believed that in this offering of modernization they would a new path of stability and social ascent, as such giving way to new appetites, greatness and individual competition considered as legitimate” (2004:40).

<sup>11</sup> The term “left” is ambiguous, broad, polemic. Much has been written about the left as a search for equity, equality, justice, etc. I will keep conceptual reflections for another moment. Here the concept is used in a descriptive and general fashion, with all the risks that that implies.

being constructed in this period. According to the reading of Luis Tapia, the two foundational documents that reflect part of the debate are *La justicia del inca* by Tristan Marof (1934), and the *Tesis de Pulacayo* (1946), resulting from the reflection of the Union Federation of Mining Workers (founded in 1938). If Tristan Marof accentuates reflection on socialism, the national question and the pre-Hispanic world, the *Tesis de Pulacayo* reflects on workers movements, socialism and anti-imperialism.<sup>12</sup> In some way, these topics will outline the future horizon for the Bolivian left, accentuating some aspects more than others, according to the junctures in time, as we will see further on.

A second cycle comes after the triumph of the Revolution of 1952. As is known, the Chaco War, between Bolivia and Paraguay from 1932 to 1935, resulted in a strong nationalist sentiment and the emergence of a new generational elite, critical of the political system of the country. This factor, together with an existing union organisation, triggered the revolution of April 9 of 1952, with the key participation of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) and Victor Paz Estenssoro. A few days after the revolutionary victory, the National Labour Federation of Bolivia (*Central Obrera Boliviana* - COB) was created, headed by the historic union leader Juan Lechin Oquendo. In this way, the COB would become the most powerful organisation in the history of unionism in Bolivia and in Latin America. Considering the importance of mining in the national economy, this was the social sector that marked politics. From its assemblies, it would define the luck of the entire nation. The theoretical paradigm around revolutionary nationalism and the political proposal was solidified in “dual power”<sup>13</sup>, which implied the direct participation of the workers in the direction of government. Politics is made from the union and the party.

The third moment took place during the dictatorial period. From 1964 to 1982 Bolivia lived through dictatorships with brief democratic interruptions. The miners' movements were important, as were the authoritarian responses to these movements and the respective slaughters. The students entered the fray and looked for forms of action and organisation. The influence of Che, and his death in 1967 in Nancahuazu, caused a group made up predominantly of university leaders to enter into the National Liberation Army (ELN) and opt for the guerrilla movement, starting actions in the jungle of Teoponte (in the Department of La Paz) in July 1970. Their efficacy would be limited, and in three months they would see more than 50 deaths, all guerrillas. At the same time, youth of Christian democracy, along with other political organisations, would join distinct political proposals. One of them, and perhaps the most significant of the time, is the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), founded in 1971. The centres of the social movements would be, on the one hand the heavily repressed mining sector and on the other, urban university students. At the same time, some fundamental leaders would

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<sup>12</sup> See Tapia, 2004. In part we follow some of his reflections.

<sup>13</sup> See Zavaleta, 1987.



give a voice to these proposals, as is the case of Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, who years later would found the Socialist Party 1. The centre of the discussion was around socialism, anti-imperialism, popular and national government. One of the characteristics of this movement is the weak connection between urban proposals and union movements. It is evident that the emergence of these political parties (and that is their weakness and the reasons for their development) will be linked, primarily, to the urban middle class, with little worker and popular participation.

The fourth period we could consider as the rise and fall of the left. In 1978 the dictator Hugo Banzer was obliged to call elections due to a hunger strike initiated by four women miners.<sup>14</sup> The left was united under one single demand: democracy. The elections of 1978, 1979 and 1980 were won by the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP) with more than 30% of the vote (see table 1). The UDP brought together distinct parties from the MIR to the left of the MNR, and even the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB). At the same time, Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz ran in the elections with the Socialist Party 1 (PS-1) and got 4.17% and 7.65% in 1979 and 1980 respectively. In 1982 after the struggles in the streets and the ballot boxes, democracy returned and the UDP assumed the leadership of the country. Although forms of worker participation were initially sought, in an attempt to redefine the “co-government”, after a few months the COB would be one of the primary instances of government critique, and yet would be incapable of modifying the structures of the form of political and economic participation of the country. This moment is known for its hyper-inflation and for the decline of economic indicators; between 1980 and 1985 the real GDP was -1.2 and the average inflation was 2692.4.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1. Left vote at the end of 1970s

Political Party	Year		
	1978	1979	1980
UDP	n/a	31.22%	34.05%
PS-1	n/a	4.17%	7.65%

Source: Data taken from Tapia, 2004

At the same time, in 1979 the National Federation of Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) was founded, that would give rise to Katari-ism (with distinct tendencies within the movement), evoking the indigenous leader Tupac Katari. Katari-ism would grow and become, as we will see further on, one of the centres of the current new left.

<sup>14</sup> See Chungara, 1978 and Lavaud, 1999

<sup>15</sup> Figures from the UNDP, 2002:80

In 1985 the UDP left government and the MNR was inaugurated beginning the cycle of neoliberalism. The elements that characterise this period are: the economic policy of the free market, the paradigm of governability and “democracy by pact”. On the one hand, neoliberalism would be responsible for dismantling the workers’ movement through the process of “relocation”, which implied closing several mines and sending thousands of workers to the street, and, on the other, co-opting (in distinct phases) the party-oriented left. In this fashion, the MIR took a strong turn to the right, which allowed them to continue having a certain electoral presence. A fraction of this party, the Free Bolivia Movement (MBL), battled in a few elections with meagre results and ended up incorporating themselves into the political proposal of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in 1993 (in the elections of 2002 the MNR and the MBL participated in the same way), while other sectors stayed in neighbourhood politics or abandoned this route. It is clear that the traditional left, especially in terms of its political party structure, had died.

After this definitive defeat, in the unions, in the parties, and ideologically, of the Bolivian left, years later, starting in the year 2000 a new form was born, with other characteristics that we will examine. Nonetheless, before doing so, one must reflect on the social conditions that allowed for this emergence.

*Setting of structural tendencies for the birth of the new left*

The forcefulness and the high degree of social consensus with which the neoliberal model was put in place in Bolivia, were redefined throughout the years due to multiple factors.

The first element is the low returns of this model. As one can see in the two following graphs, the behaviour of the GDP in the past years was ambiguous, and although the index of human development had sustained growth from 1975 to 1999, it was thanks to health and education indicators. The social impact of the economy was not very significant, even in the best moments of the model, when GDP growth was 4.7% (between 1994 and 1997), the tendency to reduce poverty was only from 52 to 51 points, that is to say economic dynamism had no relation to the social sphere. To date, public investment relies on international cooperation for almost 50% of its resources.<sup>16</sup> The economic promises of neoliberalism have not been fulfilled.

A second aspect to highlight is the exhaustion of the logic of governability through a “policy of pacts”. Between 1986 and 2003 seven pacts between the governing elites were undertaken, with distinct goals, which became known as “democracy by pact”.<sup>17</sup> Always with ostentatious names, these were agreements signed by the leaders of the political parties without any participation from social movements or unions (see table 2). In this fashion, a division was created between political parties, who concluded and defined the political destiny of the nation, and the

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<sup>16</sup> Figures taken from UNDP, 2000: 63 and 83

<sup>17</sup> See Calderon and Gamarra, 2004.

population, who from the street, the federation or the community did not participate in the decisions.

Table 2: Pacts between political parties from 1985-2001

Years of the pact	Name	Participants
1985-1989	Pact for Democracy	MNR-AND
1989-1993	Patriotic Accord	MIR and ADN-PDC
June, 1991	Electoral system reform	Political parties with parliamentary representation
July, 1992	Accord for the modernisation of the state and the strengthening of democracy	Political parties with parliamentary representation
1993-1997	Governability Pact	MNR-MRTK, MBL and UCS
1997-2002	Commitment for Bolivia	ADN-NFR, MIR, UCS, PDC and CONDEPA
June, 2001	Act of Understanding	Some political parties

This dynamic, sustained throughout the years, generated a third element: the distance between the political world and the social world. It resulted in a process of the professionalization of politics, and with that a specialised sector that, little by little, lost contact with the people. As well, in the “political man” all the negativity was concentrated, accusing him of being responsible for the crisis, corruption, poverty etc. The dynamic of being “inside” or “outside” the party created a dangerous rift that the political world was later unable to resolve. Belonging to a party became a form of social ascent, losing all its mystique. Politics became an instrument and parties ceased to be spaces to really do politics.

A fourth element is the end of populism as a form of political expression. The parties of Homeland’s Conscience (CONDEPA) and Civil Solidarity Union (UCS), both characterised by a solid populist leadership, died together with the tragic disappearance of their leaders. Carlos Palenque, of CONDEPA, died after a heart attack and the same happened with Max Fernandez of UCS who died in a plane crash. These two groups, whose greatest moment was during the 1990s, achieved remarkable popular support that they later rapidly lost. In the elections of 1997 CONDEPA got 17.1% of the vote, and UCS 16.1% by the year 2002, the results were 0.3% and 5.5% respectively.

These elements created a favourable framework for the emergence of new options that could satisfy the demands of the population both in material economic terms and in forms of symbolic integration into the political dynamic. The form of economics and politics, where the neoliberal paradigm had prevailed, had run out. Together with multiple other factors (such as the tradition of union struggles, the historic indigenous uprisings, the constant mobilisation of coca-growers, etc) these aspects helped to bring about the rebirth of the left that was waiting in the wings.

*The new left: the emergence of the MAS.*

Since around the year 2000, a new cycle in the Bolivian left has begun, which includes elements of continuity and of change with respect to what preceded it. But it remains clear that the traditional left no longer plays a role, opening up room for new expressions. The new left is connected directly to social movements and popular organisations.

After the success of the social mobilisations, Felipe Quispe, *El Mallku*, decided to found a party, the Indian Pachakuti Movement (MIP) that participated in the elections of 2002, getting 6.09% of the vote, which represents an unheard of fact for indigenous movements (although the MIP did not have the same luck in the elections of 2005).

But the most important grouping in this direction is the MAS. Evo Morales had been a union leader since the 1980s. Starting in 1994 he led the five coca-grower federations of the tropic of Cochabamaba (affiliated with the CSUTCB), and his discourse on coca had given him a national presence during the previous few years. In 1995, it was decided to create a political instrument based on the union structure, and the Assembly for the Sovereignty of the People, that later became the MAS, was born. The MAS expanded its range and got into the electoral logic, thus controlling the principal municipalities of the region of the Chapare (Cochabamaba, see map annex 4). In the elections of 2002 this party surprisingly came in second place; and in 2005 Evo Morales became the first indigenous president (see table 3).

The MAS knew how to channel the protest of social movements (accumulated throughout the years), the demands of the indigenous, the urban middle class, students and intellectuals into a single proposal, incorporating the remains of the surviving traditional left, the generalised popular disenchantment to make up a massive hope. The words of Morales and Garcia Linera reached the most isolated corners of the republic, and even upper class groups had ears to hear them. The nationalisation of the hydrocarbons, the Constituent Assembly, and the distinct offerings of the campaign were by far more seductive than what was being offered by the right that was entrenched in two candidates: Jorge *Tuto* Quiroga and Samuel Doria Medina (who, together, obtained around 36 percent).

When, on Sunday January 22, 2006, Evo Morales was inaugurated as president, a page in the history of Bolivia was turned. An indigenous person would govern the country, a coca leader, a social fighter, a builder of the renewed left. Beyond the successes or errors, the lights and shadows, there is no doubt that that day a period was closed, and the doors to new horizons were opened.

Political Party	Electoral Year				
	1989	1993	1997	2002	2005
MAS	-	-	-	20.94	53.7
MIP	-	-	-	6.09	2.1
Eje Pachakuti	With IU	1	0.8	-	-
MBL	With IU	5.1	3.08	With MNR	
PS-1	2.5	n/a	1.38	0.6	-
United (IU)	Left 7.21	0.9	3.7	Did not run	-

Source: National Electoral Court and Tapia, 2004.

## Struggles and Resistance



March in La Paz, June 2004.

Sit-in of the Association of Family members of the Detained, Disappeared, and Martyrs for National Liberation. Murillo Square, La Paz Cathedral, 1996.



The University Mayor de San Andres (UMSA). La Paz, 2004.

Graffiti in La Paz before the elections, 1996.



Square in the Mining Centre Llallagua, Potosi, 2000.

March in La Paz, 2005.





Indigenous Aymara, La Paz, 1998.



Image of Christ *Siringuero*, Cobija, Pando. 2002.



La Paz, 1996. Student in the UMSA with a mural of Che.





Chiquitania, Santa Cruz, 2000.

Painting of a youth group  
Building through  
Remembering (CREARE). La  
Paz, 1996.



Community radio in the head office of  
the Indigenous Peoples of Beni, 2001.



Political Campaign of Cecilia Barja for the municipal elections, Movement without Fear, La Paz, 2000.



Discussion of analysis of the political juncture in the Feminist Café Carcajada, 2005.



Tombstone of Maruicio Lefebvre, founding priest of the major in sociology, murdered by the Banzer dictatorship. La Paz, 1999.



Sociology students in protest. La Paz, 2005.

Homage to Carlos Trujillo, disappeared by the Banzer dictatorship in 1972. La Paz, 2005.



Mural based on the idea of Walter Solon in the Square of the Disappeared. La Paz, 2005.



Fidel's visit to Bolivia. La Paz, 1993.

## **Chapter V**

### **History against the grain**

Decolonising the State: the challenge of the government of Evo Morales

Upon assuming the vice-presidency in January 2006, Alvaro García Linera sensibly said that the government faced the challenge of dismantling the traditional forms of domination of the oligarchic state, the inheritances from the colony. As such, it is no surprise that the arrival of Evo Morales implies a more complex task, because it is about, in the words of W. Benjamin, “brushing history against the grain” (quoted in Löwy, 2002:81).

The proposal of MAS in the electoral campaign of 2005 was centred on 10 points that consider three spheres: economic, social, and political<sup>18</sup>. In the economic sphere, traditional forms of land use by landholders are criticised; the neoliberal policy of privatisation that, from the 1980s introduced transnational corporations as economic actors with technical and political power, and the imposition of the United States of substituting coca cultivation. The social challenge includes education and native languages. In the political arena, people’s participation is sought in the different spheres of the state to control the synergies of corruption.

Now, in the practise of government, both the use of symbolic indigenous references in the most sacred places of the country, and concrete policies point in the same direction: decolonising the state. The task, doubtlessly complex and will take much more than a few years of governmental administration, alludes to communitarian forms of the implementation of democracy, justice, economics, the uses of territory, etc. In this way, as part of the process, the first cabinet of Evo integrated sectors that before had previously only been decoration within public management: a woman was minister of government, an indigenous person was head of international relations, an Aymara sociologist was responsible for education, a leftist economist responded to economic needs. Concretely, with new faces, clothes and symbols, simply with the presence of Evo and his cabinet a page of history has been turned.

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<sup>18</sup> Land and territory (property of the peasants according to the principle of “land belongs to he who works it” and support to small producers); Recovery of resources (nationalization of natural resources, particularly gas, forests and water); A productive country (promoting renewable natural resources, industrialisation of the coca leaf); State with social control (transforming the Legislative, Executive and Judicial powers to be at the service of the people and respect popular control); Weapons for the people (redefinition of the role of the Armed Forces and the National Police to the service of the people); Educating for freedom (free primary school, education in native languages and controlled by aboriginal people); Integral and total health (establishing programs of popular health); Each person is essential (favouring marginalised sectors like those of children, youth, women and seniors); Global integration (promote Latin American integration and see that the rights of the country are respected on an international level); People’s Constituent Assembly (the construction of an instrument with representatives of social organizations to develop a constitution) (<http://www.masbolivia.org/mas/mas.html#>).

With regard to the initiatives of public management, the first year of government began to fulfil the campaign programming agenda on various levels. One of the actions of particular importance was the approval of the Community Redirection of Agrarian Reform Act in November 2006 which, fundamentally, allowed the state to reclaim plots of land held by large landholders, particularly in the departments of Santa Cruz and Beni. The situation of land distribution in the country has been very unequal, reaching the extreme – according to the Special Commission of Indigenous and Aboriginal Issues – that 91% of agricultural lands were in the hands of 5% of landholders; only 3% of these lands belonged to small producers that represent 80% of the population. Along with this outlook, one must add that the landholders did not use the lands productively and that these lands had been obtained as direct benefits of the dictatorial regimes. As well, the core landholders – around fifteen families – currently have significant ties with the right-wing parties and have been deputies or senators during distinct periods.

But it is worthwhile to stop for a moment to consider the two most important government initiatives, during the year 2006: the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and the Constituent Assembly.

#### *The nationalisation of hydrocarbons*

As mentioned, Bolivia has constructed its fragile identity based on the wars it has lost, it does not possess a victorious narrative but instead is characterised by defeat. One of the principal moments in the history of the nation is Chaco War with Paraguay (1932-1935) in which the ownership of petroleum was under dispute. From this armed conflict there remains, among many other things, the presence of gas in the national imagination.

In the same vein, one must not forget that “nationalisation” is a term that evokes the leftist tradition and its fight for control over natural resources. The action of the socialist leader Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz is historic; when he was Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons, he nationalised the international Gulf Oil Company on the 17 of October 1969. It is also important to mention that Bolivian history has been shaped by a perverse equation: a great deal of wealth in natural resources, little distribution of their profits to the people. Silver, tin, rubber, and now gas, have been exploited by a miniscule faction of the elite that have taken advantage of them for personal benefit without leaving a trace in the country. The most obvious case is that of Simon I. Patiño, a mining entrepreneur who was among the richest men of the world but did not contribute the development of the nation.

This history of the relationship between natural resources, the elite and the people, contributes to a generalised distrust with respect to possibilities for gas exploitation-exportation.

The new nationalisation of hydrocarbon natural resources made up part of the electoral platform of the MAS. It must be mentioned that, as seen previously, the demand got going with particular

passion in the past few years, first after transnational corporations discovered that Bolivia was a hydrocarbon power on the international level (the second largest reserve in Latin America after Venezuela) and then the suggestion that the gas that could potentially be exported, would leave the country via a Chilean port. As such, nationalising the gas was much more than a proposal of the MAS, it was a national demand. The measure was implemented on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 in the gas field of San Alberto (discovered by YPFB and later transferred to Petrobras) with the Supreme Decree 28701. Multiple factors stand out in that document and event.

There were symbolic aspects: the decree was issued on May Day; the president started his speech by evoking the memories of Tupac Katari, Tupaj Amaru, Bartolina Sisa, the and the fighters of the Chaco War; in the decree itself calls that during the “historic days of struggle the people have conquered, at the cost of their blood, the right for our hydrocarbon wealth to return to the hands of the nation”; the socialist leader Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz was mentioned. It was affirmed that: this is a “popular government, an aboriginal government, a government that stems from so many indigenous and aboriginal struggles of more than 500 years”.

The indigenous struggle, national identity, and movements of the last decade and the leftist class tradition were linked through this speech. The language block therefore constructed a new identity (that has driven the government from various agencies), clear and powerful that involves the primary actors.

There were also political and social aspects. The nationalisation of the hydrocarbons is a step that is based politically on: formal processes like the Binding Referendum of July 18 2004;<sup>19</sup> the multiple uprisings that in the past years have raised the banner of “nationalising until death”; and the electoral backing and support of public opinion towards the charismatic figure of the president.

The idea of sovereignty is present throughout the YPFB, with an active role at two particular moments in time: first, in the possession of natural resources and second, in the right to marketing the resources. In this sense, the YPFB should have information on the financial

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<sup>19</sup> It must be remembered that July 18 2004 the then president Carlos Mesa held a Binding Referendum on the future of gas. There were five questions on the ballot: “1. Do you agree with the approval of the Hydrocarbon Law No. 1689 passed by Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada? 2. Do you agree with recovery of the property of all the hydrocarbons EN BOCA DE POZO for the Bolivian state? 3. Do you agree with re-founding of *Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos*, recovering the state property and the stocks of Bolivians in the capitalized companies, in such a way that they can participate in the hydrocarbon productive chain? 4. Do you agree with the policy of President Carlos Mesa to use the gas as a strategic resource to achieve a useful and sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean? 5. Are you in agreement with Bolivia exporting gas in the framework of a national policy that: covers domestic consumption; foments the industrialization of gas in the national territory; covers taxes and/or royalties to oil companies with 50 percent of the value of the gas and oil production destined in favour of the country; directs resources from the exportation and industrialization of gas principally towards education, health, roads and jobs?” the second question that more directly touched on the possible nationalisation, received 72% support.

situation of transnational companies and have them undergo an audit. And it is framework that businesses had been offered facilitated entrance into Bolivia with minimised the participation of state actors, letting them act practically autonomously and without monitoring. It was said that an attitude of control would have frightened off investors and markets. Now, like other state enterprises in Canada, Norway and other countries, a means to negotiate between the state and companies, instead of between businessmen as happened with the neoliberal model, is being sought.

Technical and economic aspects: the Supreme Decree states in its first article that “the state reclaims the property, the possession, and total and absolute control of these resources”. As such, transnational companies had to hand over all hydrocarbon production to YPFB, and it is this state actor that has assumed their marketing and negotiations with regard to the internal and external markets. The distribution of profits will be 82% for the state and 18% for businesses. The Ministry of Hydrocarbons and Energy will undertake audits of businesses and negotiate the terms new contracts with each of them. The state has recovered “full participation in the entire productive chain of the hydrocarbon sector”; YPFB must control a minimum of 50% plus one of the businesses.

Economically, the impact of this measure is significant. According to Andres Solis Rada, then minister of Hydrocarbons, Bolivian income from this sector would increase from 400 to 700 million dollars annually.<sup>20</sup> It is clear that, from the perspective of economic development, the measure strives to create greater dynamism in the economy in its entirety by industrialising the sector and creating spin-offs in parallel industries.

### *The Constituent Assembly*

The demand to modify the Political Constitution of the State through a Constituent Assembly that goes beyond token reforms arises from the indigenous movements of the East of the 1990s. In that year the March for the Right to Land and Life took place from the city of Trinidad (Beni) to La Paz, with the participation of 800 people of 12 ethnicities and lasted 34 days. A second moment was the March for Territory, Land, Political Rights and Development, in 1996, in which both indigenous people from the East and West participated. Although both occasions had different objectives in terms of struggle, primarily linked with the conditions of exploitation of the land and the forests by the lumber businessmen and cultural aspects, the indigenous actors could already see that the only real solution was through modifying the legal structure of the nation: changing the constitution.

In the uprisings of the following years, the demand became a banner for different social agents. From the year 2000 – in the Water War and other instances – there was no placard from which

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<sup>20</sup> Andres Solis Rada, “Cash” en *Página 12*, May 14, 2006; Buenos Aires, Argentina.



the demand was absent, and in the days of October 2003 it was, along with the nationalisation of hydrocarbons, one of the principal demands.

The governing elite never took the necessity of transforming the operating bases of the country seriously, and accepted particular reforms although there was greater social pressure. Distinct adjustments of greater or lesser importance were made, such as the Reform of 1994 in which the first article of the constitution was written in the following fashion: “Bolivia, free, independent, sovereign, multiethnic, and multicultural”. Article 171 said that the constitution “recognised the social economic and cultural rights of the indigenous people that live in the national territory and especially the relatives of their lands of community origin, guaranteeing their use and sustainable use of their natural resources, their identity, values, languages, customs and institutions. Nonetheless, the distinct touch-ups to the fundamental document did not change the heart of the popular demands. In fact, those in power considered the demand for a Constituent Assembly to be exaggerated and infantile. At one point, Jorge Tuto Quiroga, former president of the republic in 2002, said publicly “when I want an adventure, I go to climb Illimani, but I don’t take the Political Constitution of the State with me” with respect to the demand.

But it was evident that beyond the clumsiness of the elite with regards to the issue, one could no longer move backwards. The Assembly became the electoral platform of the MAS, and was therefore on the public agenda after their victory. After intense debates, on March 6 2006, the Special Law of Convoking decreed that the Constituent Assembly was to be made up of 255 people. A national election would be undertaken to elect constituents through popular vote on July 2 of the same year; the only end goal of the Assembly would be “the full reform of the Political Constitution of the State” (Art. 3). Likewise, the call for the referendum on departmental autonomies was approved, to ask the people whether the Constituent Assembly had to consider the topic in its deliberations.<sup>21</sup>

On July 2 the election took place, and once again the MAS consolidated its popular support on the national level with 51% (135 of the 255 constituents), followed by PODEMOS with 15% (62 constituents). With respect to the referendum on departmental autonomies, the “no” vote won, promoted by the MAS, with 57% and, “yes” lost with 42%. Five of the nine departments

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<sup>21</sup> The question on the referendum, certainly complex for a national consult, was: “Do you agree with the framework of national unity, in giving the Constituent Assembly the governing mandate to establish an autonomous departmental regime, applicable immediately after the approval of the new Political Constitution of the State, in those departments where this referendum has a majority, in such a manner that their authorities are elected directly by the citizens and receive executive authority, normative and administrative attributions and the economic-financial resources from the National State that the new Political Constitution of the State and laws assigns them?” (<http://www.cne.org.bo/sirenacomp06/wfrmnacionalref.aspx>). The issue is delicate because it touches on a fundamental issue of departmental autonomies, which is where the interests of the elites are at play. In effect, the intention of the oligarchic groups is to deepen a form of autonomy and decentralization that maintains the structures of domination on the departmental level, while the option of the MAS consists in promoting new forms of organization that break with the traditional dynamics of control.

favoured the first option and four the second, with clearly differentiated percentages in the interior. Further on, history will still be written with obvious difficulties and uncertainties (to undertake a substantive modification of the Constitution two thirds of the vote are needed; the MAS does not have that level of support and will have to undertake multiple alliances) and the aspiration to “refound the nation” through the Assembly is still distant objective, but important steps have been taken.

Beyond the debates, tensions, achievements, or frustrations of the Constituent Assembly, there is no doubt that having it convened and materialised was a fundamental achievement of the social movements and the result of hundreds of collective actions. The Assembly and the nationalisation of hydrocarbons were put on the public agenda from below, with the strength and the courage shown in each protest, each strike, each cry. In the case of Bolivia, changing the basic operating norms did not happen after an agreement with the elites (as happened in other countries); in fact all the pacts and agreements which political parties reached in the last 15 years were incapable of putting forth substantial changes and responding to the demands of the population. The people demanded political and social participation and sovereignty over natural resources – which was the object of mockery and trickery of the oligarchy – , and it is what was achieved. Until what point will these initiatives be pushed forward, their reaches and limits remain to be seen; it will be necessary to wait some years to evaluate. But the lesson is that the limits of what is possible and impossible are always debatable, and for that there is politics which, as has already been said, is not “the art of the possible”, but instead “the art of making the impossible possible”.

**Scenes for a new national synthesis**



Tiahuanaku, La Paz, 2000, Welcoming the sun



Potosi, 2000



Lake Titicaca. La Paz, 2000.



The Altiplano in the vicinity of Lake Titicaca.  
La Paz, 1999.



Chquitanía. Santa Cruz. 2001



La Paz, 2002



Sanctuary of the virgin of Copacabana. Lake Titicaca, La Paz, 2004.



Dancer in the festival of Gran Poder, La Paz, 2003.



The Yungas, La Paz, 2003.



2002. Musician and dancer in the University Entrance Festival La Paz,



Lake Titicaca. La Paz, 2004.



Trumpeter. Urban festival in La Paz, 2003.



Playing in Lake Titicaca. La Paz, 2004.



Kite in La Paz, 2000.



San Francisco Square. La Paz, 2002.



Religious procession in the outskirts of La Paz,  
2004.



La Paz, 2002.



La Paz, 2004.

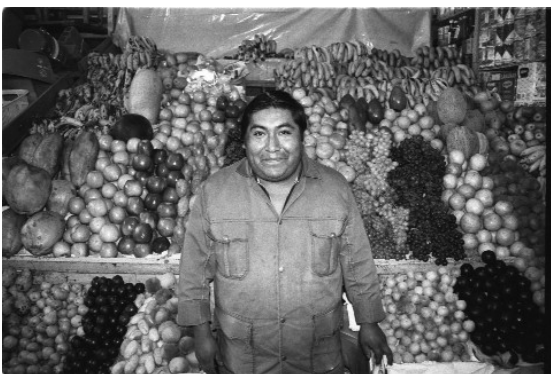




Vendor in Riberalta. Beni, 2002.



Young worker, La Paz, 2004.



Fruit seller. La Paz, 2002.



A day in the country in Potosi, 2000.



Lake Titicaca, La Paz, 2000.



Wiphala (indigenous flag) and national flag in the outskirts of La Paz, 2004.

## Conclusion

Never has it been so inopportune to conclude a book (editorial formality) as when what is being analysed continues with its own life.

The intention of this text was to offer a series of glimpses and reflections on the social process lived in Bolivia during the past few years. The construction of different landscapes where the country finds itself was sought through multiple methods, putting special emphasis on social struggles. The motive of this political-intellectual option is that, although in the present day it seems a “natural” possibility to think of a distinct country, only a few years back doing so was considered absurd. The memory of the difficulty of criticising neoliberalism is still held in the minds of the people from when it had practically a complete hegemony; its defenders would not even allow it to be called as such, they created other terms, like “structural reforms”, “economic and social adjustments”, “democratic governability”, etc. to verbalise it.

This collection of courtesan intellectuals defended tooth and nail that the only path possible was that put forth by the neoliberals, they repeated time and time again that the old dictators were now democrats, that there had to be respect for the rules of the game, that “pacts and accords” were necessary between political leaders, that killing was tolerable – and necessary – if with it democracy was sustained. In that time N. Elias would say of another context “no one could imagine that some time the world would be different” (1995: 22). As such, colloquiums, reports, books, workshops, were undertaken – squandering millions of dollars – that did nothing more than reinforce the neoliberal paradigm.

I remember the various speakers that discredited any critical argument by saying that we had to look towards the future, that a new vision of the future had to be build, that there was no use to always be looking behind us, that the 1970s had passed and that around the corner a market was waiting for us with open arms, the information society and a modern Bolivia, and possible. Luckily, today we can speak differently.

Perhaps the most motivational of what happened is the break with the monopoly on decisions and knowledge of technocrats and political parties, which in the neoliberal project were the principal actors responsible for thinking and deciding for the entire country. Among so many things, “the exchange between ‘thinkers’ hungry for power and powerful hungry for thought” (Boudieu, 1999: 162). Today everyone speaks, thinks and decides about the gas, about autonomy, development and the economy. Politics has been democratised and it is not a requirement to be registered in a party or have a masters in business administration to have a

voice. This, in itself, is already a victory. Today the people in the streets, the squares, and the mineshafts have shown that they have an opinion that must be listened to and that they want to lay out their own path and future.

Where will this country be led? Will it be able to sustain the new cultural project in the long run? How will the oligarchy react? Will the lost land be recovered? Will the people demonstrate that they can advance with autonomy and lay out their own path? Will the contradictions of social movements end in destroying the global project? How is one to know? Only time will offer us answers to these worries that have been awoken thorough this process. But however it is, beyond the destiny that is chosen, Bolivia has given an important lesson in dignity and courage; and has again demonstrated that above all, it is action and mobilisation that define history.

“It is the time of the people, of the aboriginals, of the excluded” (Dussel, 2006:8)

## **Afterword**

### **2008: The year of definitions**

The year 2008 has been of crucial importance in the history of Bolivia. Since the arrival of Evo Morales to government in January of 2006, the political stage has been reconfigured: on the one hand, the collapse of the parties of the traditional right, and the birth of a new left (explained in certain chapters of this book) is evident; but, on the other hand, a process of reorganization of the elite sectors in new political forms has begun, whether through parties or new civic groupings.

The year 2007 was marked by the confrontation of political forces, especially in the Constituent Assembly in Sucre. The “political standoff” caused both the government and right-wing groups to declare themselves victorious in the territories they controlled, ignoring what the other side was doing. In this manner, in December, when the Assembly concluded, there were two celebrations: in La Paz the birth of the New Political Constitution of the State was celebrated; while in Santa Cruz they celebrated what was termed the triumph of autonomy.

Faced with the obvious confrontation that disrupted the implementation of Evo Morales’ program, given the “political veto” and the blockade that the right of Santa Cruz had during this entire period, and through the “catastrophic deadlock” – as it was called by the Vice-president Alvaro García Linera – in December 2007, the president decided to resort to a structure recently incorporated into the Bolivian Constitution and never before used, the “recall referendum”. This consultation consists of submitting the mandate of the president, vice-president and departmental prefects to a popular vote. The initiative to be approved had to pass through distinct levels such as the Chamber of Deputies, the Chamber of Senators and the National Electoral Court.

At the same time, the civic committees of the dissident departments (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija) during the first half of the year organised the so-called “autonomous referendums” that consisted of a consultation to approve or reject the autonomous statutes of each region. It must be stressed that the process was completely corrupt: it was not called by the National Congress, it was condemned by the National Electoral Court and it only received the support of the Departmental Courts – that are not equipped for such an action and have the same interests as the local elites which does not permit them even the slightest impartiality – the elaboration of the contents of the Civic Statutes, was influenced by completely antidemocratic actors such as the Civic Committees, the electoral rolls were not trustworthy, there was no debate nor political campaigning of the actors, during the event itself there was no participation of national or foreign observers, etc. But the most delicate was that the referendum, instead of having the legitimate status of a popular consultation, was determined by local authorities to having binding effects. As such, after their “victories” (of more than 80% in each case, without counting the absenteeism

that in some places reached 50%), they began to implement the results completely outside the law and the Political Constitution of the country. In this fashion a clear violation of the precepts of democracy took place.

The differences between the two referendums jump out, while the national one is included within legal norms and represents a genuine democratic exercise of popular consultation, the regional ones were instead maliciously directed to have political favourable results.

Knowing full well that according to the polls the president was very likely to win the recall referendum of August 10th, distinct opposition groups tried to stop the process, using all the methods within their reach: they sought legal loopholes; they went on hunger strike; they took airports; they extorted the National Electoral Court to change the percentages that had been predefined by congress; campaign offices of the President's party were attacked, etc. etc. The authoritarian forms of the dictatorships of the 70s were dusted off by the new right, which were rightly denounced as actions of a civil dictatorship. Bolivia was on the verge of going back three decades in history, and it had to fight to defend the right to vote, and for the results of the ballot boxes to be respected. But despite so many hindrances, the Bolivian democratic tradition came out ahead and the consultation took place.

The results of the referendum were strongly in favour of Evo Morales, 67% of the population voted in favour of him staying in his position, while only 33% was against<sup>22</sup>. His support grew by 13 points with respect to the backing that he had in the elections of 2005 (53.7%). Evo gained wide sympathy even in the regions dominated by the right. In Santa Cruz, bastion of the opposition, he had 41%. In the department of Pando, that also has an opposition prefect, 53% voted for the president; in Tarija, with a similar setup, he got 50%. It is also important to mention that precisely the airports of Pando, Tarija and Santa Cruz were taken by local civic committees to impede Morales' scheduled visit (and in the case of Tarija, even the arrival of Argentine president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez was blocked), but the results in terms of votes show that these actions were not undertaken by the majority but instead by ultra-radical groups.

In the departments with the greatest government backing, like La Paz, Oruro, and Potosi, 8 of every ten people voted for the president; in Cochabamba it was 71%, and in Chuquisaca, where recently there have been multiple tensions and the departmental leaders impeded the president from going to the national festivities for the 6<sup>th</sup> of August saying that "he was n't welcome" there, the result in favour was 54%.

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<sup>22</sup> The referendum question for the president and vice-president was: "Do you agree with continuing the process of change led by President Evo Morales Ayma and Vice-president Alvaro Garcia Linera?". The question for prefects was: "Do you agree with continuing the policies, actions and the management of the Prefect of the Department?"

At the same time, both the right-wing and the MAS prefects were ratified in their positions with different percentages. In some cases, as in Santa Cruz (the most important department of opposition) the backing of the prefect Ruben Costas was 66%; in other regions, like in Potosí, the support of the prefect Mario Verreira (a MAS militant) was 79%, representing the highest percentage of support at the national level. The prefects of La Paz, Jose Luis Paredes, and of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa, were recalled. Both were representatives of the traditional parties of the Bolivian right, accused of illicit dealings and corruption throughout their political careers.

Based on the results of the referendum, it can be affirmed that there is no region in the country that does not have an ample human base that is in favour of the president and his project of change, although the percentage varies according to the regions (as happens anywhere in the world). In the history of Bolivia, there has never been a social project that has achieved such a level of consensus. No political program, no leader, has achieved what Evo Morales has. Today it is clear that the will of the Bolivian people is to follow the path of democratic revolution that is being led by the president, and that that will must be respected.

Mexico City; Summer, 2008.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1 Basic Chronology

1781	Indigenous uprising led by Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa and siege of the city of La Paz.
1809	July 16. First Cry of Freedom with the emission of the Proclamation of the <i>Junta Tuitiva</i> demanding independence. Pedro Domingo Murillo is the principal leader, costing him his life.
1825	Founding of the Republic of Bolivia
1879	War of the Pacific against Chile. Access to the sea is lost.
1899	Indigenous rebellion led by Zarate Willca.
1900	Federal War, struggle between Sucre and La Paz. The seat of government is moved to La Paz.
1904	War of Acre against Brazil.
1932 – 1935	Chaco War against Paraguay.
1952	National Revolution
1964 – 1982	Period of military dictatorships
1982	Recovery of Democracy. Presidency of Hernan Siles Zuazo with the UDP.
1985	Presidency of Víctor Paz Estenssoro with the MNR. The Supreme Decree 21060 inaugurates the neoliberal era.
1989	Presidency of Jaime Paz Zamora with the MIR.
1993	First presidency of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada with the MNR. The period of “second generation reforms” begins giving continuity to neoliberalism.
1997	Presidency of Hugo Banzer Suarez with the ADN.
2000	April: Water War in Cochabamba September: Blockade of the city of La Paz by Aymara sectors
2001	Death of Hugo Banzer Suarez. Succeeded by Jorge Tuto Quiroga.
2002	Presidential elections: Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada of the MNR and Evo Morales of the MAS are the principal. August: Second presidential term of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.
2003	February: Confrontation between police and military in Murillo Square, 30 deaths. October: Gas war. Expulsion of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada from the presidency, 60 deaths. Presidency de Carlos Mesa.
2004	July: Binding Referendum on the future of hydrocarbon resources.
2005	June: Social mobilizations and the resignation of Carlos Mesa. December: General elections, victory of Evo Morales and the MAS.
2006	January: Presidency of Evo Morales May: Nationalization of hydrocarbon resources.

- July: Election of members of the Constituent Assembly.
- August: Beginning of the sessions of the Constituent Assembly.
- October: Confrontation between unionized miners and cooperative miners in Huanuni (Oruro). 16 dead and 80 injured.
- November: Passing of the Community Redirection of Agrarian Reform Act.
- 2007 December: Approval of the New Political Constitution of the State by the Constituent Assembly. Divided festivities both in Santa Cruz and La Paz.
- 2008 May: Autonomous Referendum in Santa Cruz.
- June: Autonomous Referendums in Beni, Pando and Tarija
- August: Recall Referendum with the victory of Evo Morales.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Glossary and References of characters cited**

**Camba:**

A manner of referring to the inhabitants of the east of the country from the departments of Beni, Pando and Santa Cruz.

**Carlos Mesa**

Journalist, director of Associated Television Journalists (PAT). He was the vice presidential candidate of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in 2002, and assumed the presidency from 2003-2005 after his resignation.

**Cholo:**

A descriptive category of a popular urban social group, with distinct cultural characteristics that connect urban and rural dynamics.

**Cocalero:**

Name for the peasants who grow coca.

**Colla:**

Descriptive term used by residents of the east of the country to refer to residents of the west, the departments of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí.

**Domitila Chungara:**

Mining leader who started a hunger strike against Banzer in 1978. She was recognised internationally and published the book *Let me speak!*

**Evo Morales:**

Coca union leader and leader of the MAS. Presidential Candidate in the elections of 2002. President as of 2006.

**Felipe Quispe “El Mallku”**

Aymara leader. First member of the Guerrilla Army Tupac Katari, and later secretary general of the CSTUCB.

**Goni:**

Nickname for Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.

**Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada:**

Mining businessman and leader of the MNR. President of Bolivia from 1993 – 1997 and 2002 – 2003.

**Hernan Siles Zuazo:**

Leader of the National Revolution of 1952. President during two periods: 1956 – 1960; 1982 – 1985.

Heroínas de la Coronilla:

On May 27th, 1812 the city of Cochabamba was left without independence fighters and was attacked by the royal army. On the hill of the Coronilla, the city was defended by women; the historic event is remembered as the victory of “The heroines of the Coronilla”. In their honour, Mother’s Day in Bolivia is celebrated on May 27<sup>th</sup>.

Hugo Bánzer Suárez

Responsible for the coup d’état of 1971. *De facto* President from 1971 to 1978 and 1997 to 2001.

Jilakata:

Indigenous leader, part of community structures of power.

Jorge Tuto Quiroga

Leader of the ADN and Vicepresident to Hugo Banzer Suarez from 1997 to 2001, when assumed the presidency (2001-2002) after Banzer’s death. Current leader of PODEMOS, a new political party.

Juana Azurduy:

Independence warrior in Sucre. Wife of Manuel Asencio Padilla. Was named lieutenant colonel and was in uniform. Represented a milestone of the women’s struggle in the War of Independence.

Katarismo:

A political current within Bolivian indigenous movements that ascribes to the ideology of Tupac Katari.

Lluchu:

Traditional indigenous cap.

Oscar Olivera

Leader of manufacturing unions. Played an important role in the Water War of Cochabamba in 2000.

Pedro Domingo Murillo:

Is attributed with the first cry of freedom in Latin America after declaring the proclamation of the *Junta Tuitiva* on July 16, 1809. He was hanged in the central square of La Paz that today is named after him. His legendary phrase before dying, in reference to the independence struggle, was: “I die but the torch I leave burning can never be put out. Long live freedom!”.

Plaza Murillo

The main square of La Paz, in which the Government Palace, the Parliament, the Ministry of External Relations, and the Central Cathedral are located.

Plaza San Francisco

Popular square in the city of La Paz where the main social demonstrations take place.

Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz

Found and leader of the Socialist Party 1. Responsible for the nationalization of the Gulf Oil Company in 1969, assassinated in July, 1980.

Manuel Asencio Padilla:

Independence fighter in Sucre. Husband of Juana Azurduy. Executed in 1816.

Sorata:

Small town on the outskirts of Lake Titicaca, 170 kilometres from the city of La Paz.

Tesis de Pulacayo:

Ideological document approved by the Union Federation of Mining Workers of Bolivia in 1946 in Pulacayo; it was a point of reference during various decades in the discussions of the Bolivian left.

Tupac Katari:

Indigenous leader who led the indigenous uprising of 1781 and the siege of La Paz. He was publically drawn and quartered in the same year of his defeat.

Víctor Paz Estenssoro:

Leader of the National Revolution of 52 and historic leader of the MNR. President during various periods: 1952 – 1956; 1960 – 1964; 1985 – 1989.

Wiphala:

Aymara flag made up of seven little squares of equal sizes and seven colours. It is currently an icon of popular struggles.

Yatiri:

Healer, shaman, and indigenous priest responsible for conducting religious, spiritual and healing ceremonies.

### **Appendix 3** **Acronyms**

**ADN**

*Acción Democrática Nacionalista*. Nationalist Democratic Action. Right-wing party founded by Hugo Banzer.

**ASOFAMD**

*Asociación de Familiares Detenidos, Desaparecidos y Mártires por la Liberación Nacional*. Association of Relatives of Detained, Disappeared and Martyred for National Liberation.

**CIDOB**

*Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia*. Federation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia.

**CPIB**

*Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Beni*. Federation of Indigenous Peoples of Beni.

**COB**

*Central Obrera Boliviana*. National Labour Federation of Bolivia.

**CONDEPA**

*Conciencia de Patria*. Homeland's Conscience. Political party founded by Carlos Palenque

**COR**

*Central Obrera Regional*. Regional Labour Federation.

**CSUTCB**

*Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*. National Federation of Peasants of Bolivia, founded in 1979.

**ELN**

*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*. National Liberation Army.

**ERBOL**

*Educación Radiofónica de Bolivia*. Radio Education of Bolivia.

**FEJUVE**

*Federación de Juntas Vecinales*. Federation of Neighbourhood Groups.

**FTAA**

Free Trade Area of the Americas.

**MAS**

*Movimiento al Socialismo*. Movement Towards Socialism. Party of coca-grower origin, founded and directed by Evo Morales.



**MBL**

*Movimiento Bolivia Libre*. Free Bolivia Movement. Political party that emerged from a break with the MIR in 1985.

**MIR**

*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*. Revolutionary Left Movement. Political grouping founded in 1971.

**MIP**

*Movimiento Indio Pachakuti*. Pachakuti Indian Movement. Political party founded by Felipe Quispe “El Mallku”.

**MNR**

*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*. Nationalist Revolutionary Movement. Right-wing party that was central to the Revolution of 1952.

**NFR**

*Nueva Fuerza Republicana*. New Republican Force. Political party led by Manfred Reyes Villa.

**OAS**

Organization of American States.

**PDC**

*Partido Demócrata Cristiano*. Democratic Christian Party.

**PCB**

*Partido Comunista Boliviano*. Bolivian Communist Party.

**PETROBRAS**

*Petróleo Brasileiro S.A.* Brazilian Petroleum Corp.

**PODEMOS**

*Poder Democrático Social* Social Democratic Power. Right-wing political grouping founded by Jorge Quiroga after the defeat of the ADN.

**PS-1**

*Partido Socialista 1*. Socialist Party 1. Founded by Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz.

**UCS**

*Unión Cívica Solidaridad*. Civic Solidarity Union. Political party founded by Max Fernandez.

**UDP**

*Unión Democrática y Popular*. Democratic and Popular Union. Grouping made up of various parties, which was responsible for Hernan Siles Zuazo’s election in 1982.

**UMSA**

*Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (La Paz).* University of San Andrés (La Paz).

**UNDP**

United Nations Development Program. Every two years the UNDP puts together a Human Development Report, which offers information and statistics on the country.

**UPEA**

*Universidad Pública de El Alto.* Public University of El Alto.

**YPFB**

*Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos.* Bolivian Petroleum Holdings.

## General Map of Bolivia



**Map of Territories Lost in Armed Conflicts**

