

The Future of Culture and Rights for Bolivia's Indigenous Movements

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A week ago on June 6th Bolivian president Carlos Mesa resigned, for the second time, citing an inability to govern amid another round of large-scale social mobilizations that continue to paralyze the country since mid-May. On May 30, approximately 15,000 protestors filled the Plaza Murillo in Bolivia's capital city of La Paz. The next day more than 50,000 people gathered in La Paz, and clashed with police in an exchange of sticks of dynamite, burning tires, tear gas, high pressure water hoses, rubber bullets and riot gear. On June 1, Aymara peasants blockaded access to La Paz. Meanwhile in the city of Cochabamba peasants and factory workers led a massive march through the city center. By June 4, highways were blocked at more than 55 points in seven Bolivian departments. It should be noted that Mesa himself had come to power in October of 2003, after his predecessor, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, was ousted and fled the country, in the face of outrage over bloody efforts to control similar protests that convulsed Bolivia throughout that year. It is estimated that up to 500,000 thousand people converged on the city center, as Sánchez de Lozada's helicopter took off. The new president and former head of the court, Eduardo Rodríguez, is the third to take office since 2002, and has promised to hold early elections within the next six months, and to immediately address the concerns of protesters – a promise also made by his predecessor.

The Culture of "Andean Democracy"

Ongoing and exhausting direct action and mostly non-violent large scale protest movements have been particularly intense almost daily facts of life in Bolivia over the past five years. The Mesa government was beset by approximately 800 such protests during his year and a half in office. What is animating this constant social mobilization? Spearheaded by an assertive indigenous leadership, social protest movements in Bolivia have repeatedly challenged government attempts to privatize its public sector industries. Since 2003 they have specifically called for the nationalization of Bolivia's recently discovered large natural gas reserves. Protesting coalitions understand their efforts as a response to the politics of economic globalization that historically have allied global capital with government elites to facilitate the removal of material resources from the country. Since the mid-1990s, the government has single-mindedly pursued the policies of what people there call "neoliberal democracy," widely criticized for deepening the social inequities currently contributing to the worsening life conditions of the majority population. And insofar as it delivers decision-making into the hands of transnational corporations, the present neoliberal model is also interpreted as an assault upon Bolivia's political autonomy and national sovereignty.

Behind the restless and relentless protests we can identify a more fundamental transformation of society and government well underway in Bolivia. This is reflected in a profound disenchantment with what in Bolivia is called the "traditional political class," and voiced in the protest slogan, "They all must go!" Present hostilities are fundamentally a war over the representation and status of the rights of the country's majority indigenous population.

Another demand by protesters has been the call for a national constitutional referendum, in the words of the highest profile indigenous leader Evo Morales, to “refound the country, based upon an authentic participatory democracy.” Widespread popular support for a constitutional referendum articulates an indigenous aspiration to develop a “new model for the State with greater democratic participation,” which would include greater recognition of indigenous rights by granting local and regional power to “communal Indian assemblies.” From the point of view of the indigenous efforts in these multi-sector protests, then, much of what is at issue in Bolivia directly reflects an effort to reformulate from below the very terms of popular participation in the process of national political life.

However, the goal of protesting coalitions is no longer the ethnonationalist and separatist aspiration of collective indigenous rights in order to obtain greater sovereignty for indigenous groups, as was the case throughout the 1970s and 1980s. A discourse of indigenous rights now frames this multi-sector protest effort to transform governance and to change the terms of participation “to reclaim” control over the national political and economic process – but now as citizens. Bolivia’s is a case where “rights talk” is helping to frame “new domains of political struggle” (Cowan et al. 2001: 1), amid the ruinous exhaustion of the neoliberal paradigm of governance in this country. The discourse of indigenous rights here specifically informs and reformulates citizenship rights in terms of Andean cultural conceptions of traditional participation in the local body politic.

Analysts of Bolivia’s current paroxysms describe this political crisis as one of competing concepts for the democratic process locked “in fierce combat” (Hylton 2005). Bolivia’s predicament illustrates what James Holston and Teresa Caldeira (1998) have called “disjunctive democracy,” which draws attention to the uneven lived experiences of democracy in terms of the institutions, practices, and meanings of citizenship. Not only does the depth and distribution of democracy vary, but in contemporary Bolivia it is also unbalanced, irregular, and even contradictory. Bolivia’s indigenous-led movements are not in fact attacking the legitimacy of the Bolivian State, so much as how “this so-called democracy” has been run. Indigenous activist Moises Gutierrez Rojas, commenting on the week’s upheaval while at a meeting of the UN’s Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, proclaimed the need “to nationalize the state and the government itself” (Democracy Now 2005b) – to assert popular control.

Protesters understand their efforts as a “defense of democracy.” But theirs is also a critique, which sharply differentiates “procedural” from “participatory democracy” and “liberal” from “ayllu democracy” or “union democracy,” and wields opposed notions of democracy as the antipodes of colonial struggle in the present. Popular conceptions of “participatory democracy” all share a plebiscist approach to political decision-making, as one protester communiqué has put it, based upon the “assemblies of the neighborhood, the union, the ayllu, the factory.” “Ayllu” refers here to a uniquely Andean kinship based ethnic and territorial federation characterized by rotating leadership – a form of political organization derived from pre-colonial times.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, an historian as well as indigenous activist, describes an alternative democracy as one that speaks Quechua or Aymara, is communitarian and participatory (asambleista). This kind of democracy is activated by current public protests as a “set of repertoires for common action that reveal a functioning collective memory as indigenous people” (2004: 21). In the words of social movement leader Oscar Olivera, the political class has insured that “for 500 years” the “original inhabitants” of Bolivia have been utterly “excluded from participating in the democratic process of the country.” Note how the discourse of protest has removed the term – “democracy” – to the moment of the onset of the colonial encounter. I want to underscore the role of cultural practice in ongoing democratic renewal and revitalization in

Bolivia. Protest leaders emphasize the need “to reclaim” (Spanish: *reivindicar*) democracy, as a collective political birthright actively “remembered” and rhetorically relocated as an alternative tradition of political engagement that preceded the Spanish Conquest. “Democracy,” from the point of view of Bolivia’s new social movements, has become a cultural heritage of the past and a critical dimension of popular enfranchisement in the future. This social mobilization of cultural heritage is by no means unique to Bolivia’s indigenous movements. As epitomized by the work of UNESCO, heritage is also an increasingly important linchpin for global cultural rights legislation. So how might we understand the relationship of “cultural heritage” to “cultural rights” to “democracy” for the Bolivian case?

We can begin by briefly exploring the instrumental use of culture in the public protest actions of new social movements. Marches and rallies serve as potent expressive vehicles, where the “indigenous” heritage of Bolivia’s diverse popular sectors is on full display. The self-conscious political use of shared symbols characterizes all such events. These include use of the *whipala*, the banner of Andean Indian nationalism. A symbolic burden is also carried by the participation of *cholas*, or *women de pollera*, who wear the traditional gathered skirt of the Andes characteristic of urban “market women.” Such “cholas” are routinely mistakenly described in the international press as “poor highland Indians.” Important, too, is the visibility of native languages. Protesters carry placards sporting exhortations in Quechua and Aymara, “*Kawsachun coca!*” (Long live coca!) and “*Wañuchun yanquis!*” (Death to Yankees!). In rallies I have attended speeches are given in Quechua. Leader of the coca growers, Evo Morales, is himself not a fluent Aymara or Quechua speaker. But he is careful to use indigenous terms. Explaining effort to “refund the country,” Morales has put it this way, “Let us walk together to create a new country – a *pachakuti*!” The Andean cosmological idea of a “*pachakuti*” refers to the overturning of the earth, and to cyclical time, where what once was will soon be again – an indigenous future. Brought together in street protests, the cultural signs of ethnicity, language, dress, politics, and gender all become an overdetermined public frame for Andean identity. An account of this week’s protest marches by one sympathetic Bolivian journalist makes this apparent: “The proud protesters, with their many colored clothing, with ponchos, *ll’uchus* (caps), *abarcas* (tire tread sandals) and *chicotes* (a staff of traditional authority), standing out, waved their *whipalas* or liberation banners and shouted with coca leaves in their mouth” (Contreras Baspineiro 2005).

Coca, “the sacred leaf,” is without doubt the single most important symbol of Andean and Bolivian “culture” in the discourse, practice, and politics of the current protests. Leónida Zurita Vargas, the former president of the woman’s branch of the Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba as well as of the Bartolina Sisa National Peasant Women’s Movement, has traveled widely to publicize the present struggles of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples. Her testimonial accounts have circulated widely, including a New York Times editorial, “Coca Culture,” published on October 15 of 2003. Zurita’s narrative of the struggle as a conflict over culture, and with the coca leaf at the center, is designed to achieve the maximum effect among an international community increasingly receptive to images of indigenous culture:

For our people the coca leaf has been part of our culture for millennia. It has been used throughout the Andes by our ancestors since before recorded time. Our defense of the coca leaf is part of the defense of our very culture here in Bolivia. Coca is our natural medicine. Millions chew it to sustain themselves against the harsh conditions of the *altiplano*. It is used to make coca tea, chewing gums, coca wines, shampoos, and even toothpaste. There are even coca cookies and cakes. Coca is also used in our rituals. Some read the leaves to predict the future. Sharing coca leaves is a form of social bonding [Potter and Ibarrola 2003: 50].

Zurita emphasizes the pervasiveness of the coca leaf for Bolivian society, as a traditional dimension of everyday Bolivian life. If indigenous in origin, she suggests, it is now a part of “the defense of our very culture here in Bolivia.” Called the “millennial” or the “sacred leaf,” the chewing of coca leaf serves a powerful instrumental purpose in the performative spectacles of protest marches and rallies. Alongside the other “symbols” of Andean Bolivia, coca publicizes the indigenous “heritage” of protesters and creates “the people” as distinct from the traditional political class and as an active agent in the current Bolivian reality. As an integral part of the culture of the nation (and not just of rural and marginal Indians), efforts to eradicate coca fields as part of the U.S. War on Drugs have become the epitomizing example of attacks on Bolivian sovereignty, which now include efforts to privatize tin, water, and most recently, gas. The chewing of coca leaf together is also part of the social conviviality that marks group assemblies, from the family to larger kinds of political association. For present protests, the invitation to coca is a promise of reciprocity and key cultural practice that distinguishes their participatory from neoliberal democracy – a cultural practice of citizenship among Bolivia’s social movements. In this way, a “remembered” Andean political heritage is reinscribed by protesters at the center of their efforts to refound the Bolivian State. At the same time, the social mobilization of protest makes instrumental use of culture – performing an Andean identity through the street theater of protest – to press their demands. In the collective actions of protesters, these demands are formulated in the terms of what I refer to here as cultural citizenship. The protest effort, as a cultural practice, works to reconstitute the meaning of citizenship through the authority of ancestral experience.

Multicultural State Democracy and Social Movements

The Bolivian State, itself, has also recently made instrumental use of culture to attempt to reconstitute itself. In 1994 the Bolivian government instituted a controversial Popular Participation Law (PPL), offering new possibilities for inclusion in terms of the constitutional redefinition of the nation as “multiethnic and pluricultural.” This landmark legislation was a sharp break from the cultural politics of the Bolivian State, at least since the 1952 Revolution, which relegated any indigenous future to assimilation into a desired culturally and ethnically mixed middle class, called the process of *mestizaje* (see Rivera Cusicanqui 1993). Citizens’ rights here conformed to the “model of the mestizo citizen,” which Rivera Cusicanqui (2004: 21) describes as an individual “consumer and producer of merchandise, a speaker of Spanish and an aspirant to a Western ideal of civilization.” The arts and letters of *indigenismo* supported this state project in print by extolling the past greatness of the Inca and Tiwanaku civilizations as direct ancestors of the modern Bolivian State (Salmón 1997).

The PPL, however, granted full legal recognition to already existing traditional indigenous and popular forms of political organization and leadership, according to what are called a group’s “uses, customs, and statutory dispositions” (“*usos y costumbres*”), that is, “customary law.” In the process the state handed over funds and decision-making to the local municipality. With the State’s recognition of “uses and customs,” the PPL has magnified the importance of “cultural heritage” as a basis to advance political and legal claims. At the same time, and as an example of top-down and State-driven multicultural legislation, the PPL formulates “popular participation” in terms of the correspondence of “customary law” – as a unitary set of meanings and practices – to separate and discrete traditional cultural units it labels “territorial base organizations.”

Supported by related legislation, such as the 1996 update of Bolivia’s agrarian reform law recognizing the preexistent claims of “*originario*” (highland Indian) and of “*indígena*” (lowland Indian) communal landholdings, the application of customary law through the PPL establishes the legal precedent of continuity with the past. Bolivia’s multicultural legislation depends upon an

understanding of “heritage” as “patrimonio” (patrimony). The term – patrimonio – is often on the lips of Bolivian indigenous activists. Bolivia’s legal process of state decentralization grants greater local municipal “control over the exploitation of their patrimony” (patrimonio propio), while at the same time “promoting cultural development and the defense of autochthonous cultural values.” The etymology of “patrimonio” derives it from medieval Spanish legal parlance that stipulates property inherited from one’s father. Specifying rules of family estate inheritance, for modern Bolivia patrimony refers to inherited legal jurisdictional rights over land. But the very “pastness” of the heritage of indigenous identity – as a condition for recognition – also serves as a limit to direct participation by indigenous peoples in the political realities of the present by circumscribing the extent of their political relevance to what the State imagines to be the boundaries of their ancestral territories.

As such, analysts have expressed skepticism about the new PPL, noting that the “pluralism” of new multicultural states like Bolivia might provide political recognition to indigenous peoples as a means to convert and to assimilate them into the nation-state, as hierarchically subordinate “intercultural citizens” or “indigenous citizens.” Multicultural reforms, in this account, work as instruments of governmentality to serve a new round of neoliberal nation-building, articulated from above, and failing to address lingering issues of social justice, inequity, and exclusion from below. Multiculturalism is understood in this sense to be a way for governments to use new cultural rights instruments “to divide and domesticate Indian movements” (Hale 2004: 17). Recent developments in Bolivia, however, complicate this picture in a variety of ways, suggesting how both popular and indigenous movements use such new international and state-based rights instruments to transform the meanings, and very ground, of citizen participation. The terms of legal circumscription of indigenous identity, as the state’s condition of political recognition, are being appropriated to new ends by protesters.

As part of their politics of cultural citizenship, Bolivia’s indigenous movements have sought to expand the State’s limited concept of “land,” understood simply as a factor in agricultural production, to a broader conception of “territory” as a location for the social reproduction of collective cultural identity. Their claim also refigures the integrity of national Bolivian territory – now as the “patria” and including all of its underground natural resources – as a patrimony to recoup for the future. The legal conventions of “customary law,” as first formulated in Bolivia’s top-down multicultural legislation of the mid-1990s have become the constructive basis for emergent claims on the State by social movements, though not in the terms envisioned by the State itself. As aspirations for the future, these claims also recognize the instrumental legal authority of cultural heritage, but as a way designed to overcome the limiting condition of marginal indigenous “pastness” as a condition of participation in the State (see Albro 2005a). The performative agency of indigenous protesters asserts a controversial claim upon Bolivia’s political future through its own legal devices.

In the early months of 2000, the combined efforts of ‘peasant’ irrigators, urban middle class professionals, labor unions, environmentalists, students, coca growers, and the recently immigrating urban poor living in marginal barrios, won Bolivia’s so-called Water War by forcing the government to renege on its questionable behind-closed-doors deal made with the consortium Aguas de Tunari (with a controlling interest by Bechtel) to purchase the city of Cochabamba’s water works. Then coalition leader Oscar Olivera, although not himself indigenous, nevertheless publicly proclaimed water to be sacred because it was “tied to traditional beliefs for rural people since the time of the Incas.” As one poster read, “The Pachamama, Wiracocha, and Tata Dios gave it to us to live, not to do business with.” Representatives of the Cochabamba coalition later participated in the drafting of an “Indigenous Declaration of Water” in British Columbia. The rallying point for this cross-sector and largely city-based movement was a defense of the

traditional use and distribution of water both as a collective cultural heritage and right based on “usos y costumbres” (Albro 2005b; Laurie, Andolina and Radcliffe 2002), something it forced the national government to recognize with an amendment of the law.

For 2000’s water warriors the restoration of citizen rights was not envisioned for any one community or social sector, but interpreted inclusively in the pluralistic terms of a “patrimony” of the Bolivian people. The Coordinator for Water and for Life insisted upon an alternative significance for Bolivian citizenship in terms of a collective cultural heritage or property rights, and in order to arrest the “robbing of the country, the sacking of its patrimony.” The coalition of the Water War rejected a formal participation within the defined strictures of the nation-state as a sufficient condition for citizenship. If past indigenous movements have insisted upon an indigenous “nation” as distinct from a Bolivian “nation,” water warriors firmly claimed popular “citizenship” as Bolivians to reject, in the words of the Coalition for Water and for Life, the government’s “simulation of democracy, which only renders us obedient and impotent, and turns us into obliged voters and tax payers for the benefit of the rich.” An example of the practice of cultural citizenship, the social movement strategies of the Water War mobilized the State’s own legal and multicultural precedent, inserting the content of its own cultural heritage into the authority of customary law, as an instrumental cultural performance designed to change the terms of recognition between indigenous rights and the State.

During October 2003, protestors understood the Gas War as a necessary defense of Bolivian national sovereignty against the supposed detrimental impacts of economic globalization. Evo Morales – who played a prominent role in the protests of April and September of 2000, and again in February, September, and October of 2003, repeatedly locate the issues of national autonomy and economic independence in the resurgence of Bolivia’s indigenous movements. As he has explained:

The MAS [his political party] is born and draws its strength from the struggles of the indigenous peoples [pueblos indígenas], for the defense of our identity, which is the coca leaf, for the defense of our land, who is our mother, for the defense of our natural resources, which are our hope and our patrimony (Morales 2004).

Coca leaf is here not the mere livelihood of the coca growers, but a culturally important national natural resource. The cultural performance of these “struggles of the indigenous peoples” through direct action protest has become the basis for broader claims by the current coalition movements. In its “program for government,” Morales’ political party, called the Movement Toward Socialism, calls for the “recuperation of [Bolivian] national patrimony,” echoed by the call for new constitutional guarantees which promise to respect “the political, economic, and cultural autonomy of [Bolivia’s] original peoples (pueblos originarios)” (MAS, 2004). It is in this political gap between Bolivia’s social movements and its increasingly incapacitated government – between the *assertion* and the *recognition* of rights in the terms of cultural citizenship – that the current struggle is being fought.

This contentious gap is a space of cultural, political, and legal negotiation for different terms of recognition between indigenous citizens and the multicultural State. Bolivia’s indigenous movements constitute a claim to a political future by widening the state’s legal terms of recognition with the assertion of their own cultural practice. If we can point to the ways that law and the legal process, themselves, help to constitute “the facts” of cultural identities (see Cowan et al. 2001: 11), in this case the customary law of “usos y costumbres” has also become part of the performative cultural practice of street protest now directed toward a different future for Bolivia’s indigenous peoples. If Charles Taylor (1992) brought to our attention the importance of

the “politics of recognition” in multicultural states, more recently Arjun Appadurai (2004) has noted the importance of the need to pay greater attention to the negotiated “terms of recognition,” including the cultural conditions and constraints through which we negotiate the frames of our social lives. For social movements, this includes the possibility of transforming these terms of recognition, in short, an aspiration for the future.

Indigenous or Cultural Rights?

Beginning with their alliance building efforts with environmental groups in the 1980s, indigenous peoples have sought out the many corners of global policy making, pursuing the promotion of political and cultural autonomy of native peoples. Nowhere has this been more evident than in their sustained engagement with the different parts of the UN system – ironically typically part of a boomerang strategy to deal with difficult states. The end of the UN’s decade of indigenous peoples in 2004 saw the establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which will continue to work on a Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A similar process is underway at the Organization of American States. Native peoples are also actively collaborating with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in an effort to address increasingly globalized copyright laws in ways that better recognize collective sources of traditional creativity and property, as distinct from the readily recognized roles of individuals, corporations, and nation-states. We could not describe indigenous peoples, then, as disengaged participants in ongoing global rights debates.

If in recent years UNESCO has adopted a series of landmark declarations and conventions on cultural rights, cultural heritage, and cultural diversity, the ostensible subjects of such legislation – native peoples – have pursued other avenues in the UN system. Is this an expression of skepticism about explicitly “cultural rights,” alongside a preference to produce their own international statement on “indigenous rights”? In just the last four years UNESCO has drafted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). This convention’s stated goal is to provide an international framework of cooperation to promote the preservation of traditional cultural expression, including oral traditions, performing arts, festive events, traditional crafts, and knowledge (Article 2 No. 2). Intangible heritage is understood as one “mainspring of cultural diversity” and “guarantee of sustainable development.” As we have seen, the discourse and practice of cultural heritage has been central, too, to the efforts of Bolivia’s direct action protests, but not in the terms of the UNESCO convention’s vision for heritage. These differences, it seems to me, mark the limits of political possibility imposed upon cultural rights as promoted by UNESCO.

Arjun Appadurai (2004: 60), among others, has drawn attention to the ways that “culture” has been conceptualized as one or another kind of “pastness,” where marked cultural actors are people of and from the past. Indeed, the proper subjects of UNESCO’s convention are cultural identities that express their continuity with the past, and only with the recognition of continuity does the convention apply. If the convention observes that intangible cultural heritage is something “transmitted from generation to generation” and “constantly recreated by communities” (Article 2, No. 1) – this is a mimetic legacy. Legal agency exercised on behalf of cultural heritage is nevertheless still precedent-driven and backward-looking, with heritage marking the origin rather than reproduction of identity. This culture as heritage equation insists that culture revert to its place of origin. This, I think, suggests a crucial limitation to current international cultural rights legislation – an inability to envision the future. As articulated by UNESCO, cultural rights legislate a politics of the status quo. But we have seen that the ongoing protest efforts of Bolivia’s indigenous movements are directed, in part, at renegotiating their very

terms of political recognition within the State. Most importantly, their strategy of cultural citizenship is an effort to “recover the future as a cultural capacity” (Appadurai 2004: 62).

UNESCO’s convention treats the ongoing effects of “globalization” as potentially destructive of this diversity of inheritances from the past, and it charges nation-states with safeguarding their own diversity – a process of arresting the transformation of culture by the making of heritage lists – in consultation with relevant cultural “communities, groups, and individuals.” As an intergovernmental body UNESCO concentrates the management of cultural rights in the hands of the state apparatus. As international convention making, UNESCO’s cultural rights legislation complements the strategy of governance typical of neoliberal and multicultural democracy in Latin America. In the words of Charles Hale (2004: 19), UNESCO’s approach to cultural rights insures that indigenous groups “not amass enough power to call basic state prerogatives into question,” as the state works to reformulate its own project in accord with the logic of global capital. UNESCO has just concluded a final round of negotiations for a new cultural diversity convention, called the “Draft Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions,” which reconstitutes cultural heritage as “cultural goods and services.”

This, I think, helps us to understand why indigenous rights advocates have cast a skeptical, or indifferent, eye toward current cultural rights efforts. They perceive what a universal regime of cultural rights might mean for them. “Cultural rights” legislation has remained ill-defined precisely around the question of the proper subject of cultural rights. This is, of course, not an accident. But this has meant that, even as cultural performance has its instrumental uses, cultural rights, as yet, do not clearly help to define the interests of indigenous peoples. Rather, they wield a dangerous alchemical magic. Making cultural rights generically “universal” transforms cultural identity as a “freely available resource” (Brown 2003: 237), now to be appropriated and defined by others, as a shared heritage of humanity or as globally available cultural goods and services. I have pointed to some of the ways that “culture” – both as heritage and as converted into customary law – has an instrumental purpose for Bolivia’s indigenous movements, as authorizing the agency of these movements and as a basis to renegotiate their terms of recognition with the State.

An indigenous activist, himself a veteran of international cultural rights work, noted to me, “We have a problem with people coming to us and saying, ‘We have to have a definition,’ with people telling us who we are. We can define ourselves.” In a recent public forum, an indigenous activist noted, with irony, “Calling us ‘cultures’ is to limit indigenous peoples.” She then added, “I know who I am,” then offering her name and tribal membership in a language no one else in that forum in fact spoke. But indigenous peoples recognize the very real possibility that cultural rights, as presently conceived, most likely undermine the political recognition of indigenous peoples, since the cultural rights process cedes authority and agency to state-based cultural workers, and since the “universality” of cultural rights promises to erode their very distinctiveness as peoples. But as recent events in Bolivia help us to understand, for cultural rights to be relevant to native peoples in the international context, they must be reconfigured in the aspirational terms of the future rather than as a limiting condition imposed by the past. The future dimensions of cultural rights, then, need our urgent attention.

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