

COMMENTARY

Evo Morales, the ‘Two Bolivias’ and the Third Bolivian Revolution

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Abstract. This essay, written in September 2006, considers the first months of the MAS government headed by Evo Morales in the light of the virtually constant political crisis in Bolivia since 2000. The first part asks why the turbulent course of public life in Bolivia has proved so difficult to explain. It seeks to show that the recent period has been depicted in rather narrow interpretations that stress institutional failings, poverty and oppression, or civic heroism, but do not try to find the linkages between these phenomena. The second section proposes an alternative approach, treating the recent experience of conflict as a revolutionary episode in which the idea of ‘Two Bolivias’ needs to be qualified by appreciation of past revolutionary experiences. The final sections suggest that the ardour and complexities of the current conflict might seem more comprehensible if the MAS and its supporters are viewed as essentially plebeian in both condition and ideological disposition. Such a classical and early modern allusion provides a fuller analytical palate for understanding the current conjuncture and the socio-political propositions being made in a ‘semi-modern’ environment.

Keywords: Bolivia, revolution, poverty, indigenous politics, plebeians, *bloqueo*, Movimiento al Socialismo, armed forces, Evo Morales, Alvaro García Linera

The ‘problem’ of Bolivia

In the world there are large and small countries, rich countries and poor countries, but we are equal in one thing, which is our right to dignity and sovereignty ... (Evo Morales, Inaugural Speech, 22 January 2006).

Lacking size in all but territory and imagination, Bolivia is indisputably a ‘small country’. At the start of the 21st century its population falls just short of nine million people and the GDP a little shy of eight billion dollars. Statistically, these figures roll out a GDP per capita of around \$900, but Bolivia is a country that is really, not just averagely, poor: 35 per cent of its

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population are completely indigent, subsisting on an income of less than a dollar a day, at least according to official figures.¹ The first strategic plan issued by the government of Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) headed by Evo Morales had as its markedly modest objective the reduction of the proportion of acutely poor to 27 per cent of all Bolivians within five years; the supposed Jacobins of the Andes hoped merely to diminish the pecuniary advantage of the richest tenth of Bolivians from 25 to 16 times the income of the bottom decile.

This is stark stuff and never to be despised, but it is surely easy enough to understand? Very poor people, after all, are widely held to conduct bleak but essentially uncomplicated lives. The regnant ideas of our day postulate elementary remedies, in which a due dose of clear thinking, political will and decent behaviour will provide at least some deliverance from economic prostration. Adam Smith, the Marquis de Condorcet and Thomas Paine had ‘an end to poverty’ firmly within their conceptual compass (as ‘common sense’) in the 1780s, and 200 years later the indefatigable Jeffrey Sachs (not yet backed by Bono) was instructing the government in La Paz to the same end.

Accordingly, considerable indulgence was initially extended by the ‘big’ chancelleries of the world to the rather bumptious Morales and his entirely inexperienced cabinet comprised of indigenous activists (of all ages), sixty-something left-wingers from the 1970s, and forty-something radical intellectuals from the 1990s. Although protocol could so readily have been overlooked, George W. Bush did make a congratulatory telephone call, despite Evo’s description of himself as ‘Washington’s worst nightmare’. Even after the new government had (re)nationalised the hydrocarbons industry, halted the mandatory eradication of coca, and hosted three visits by Hugo Chávez in six months, the United States expressed little more than tight-lipped irritation.

The nationalisation of gas – conspicuously conducted as a military operation to great media fanfare – was described by a normally sympathetic source as ‘almost infantile’.² When, nearly a hundred years earlier, Alcides Arguedas published *Pueblo Enfermo*, a bravura historical essay of racially powered pessimism, José Enrique Rodó suggested to him that a better title would be *Pueblo Niño* because Bolivia’s ills, like those of Latin America as a whole, were transitory in their nature.³ In 2005, after half a decade of civil strikes and blockades of roads (*bloqueos*) with five different presidents seeking to manage the seemingly hapless affairs of the republic, the British

¹ G. Gray (ed.), *La economía más allá del gas* (2nd edn., La Paz, 2005), p. 258.

² Council on Hemispheric Affairs, Washington, Memorandum, 6 May 2006.

³ Quoted in H. C. F. Mansilla, *El carácter conservador de la nación boliviana* (Santa Cruz, 2004), p. 14.

ambassador to a neighbouring country asked me in genuine anguish, 'Why don't they just grow up?' Perhaps we should add adolescence to smallness and poverty as an exculpatory variable? After all, nearly half of the population is under 20 years of age, and with a life expectancy of 63, relatively few Bolivians are making claims on the country's precarious pension system, a fiscal fabrication at the heart of the privatisation ('capitalisation') experiment of the 1990s.

There are, in fact, evidence-based and plausible explanations for such phenomena. These range from accounts based on geographical determinism to those of historical revisionism. Nevertheless, understanding the country today is far from easy, even if we simply wish to comprehend the apparent disavowal of modernity by many of its citizens and their failure to thrive according to Enlightenment postulates of 'progress'. As *The Economist* commented in July 2004, 'Bolivia is not for beginners'.⁴ In recent years this defiance of the *Zeitgeist* has been most energetically expressed through a kind of retentive mercantilism or telluric protectionism, with an effort to withhold the second-largest reserves of natural gas in South America from external forces deemed to be the direct heirs and successors of Iberian imperialists and Anglo neo-colonialists who, from the 1540s onwards, pillaged the mineral wealth of what was Kollasuyo, then Charcas, then Alto Perú, and from 1825 the Republic of Bolivia. What might be termed 'the Potosí syndrome' may be historically justified and economically reasonable, but it is also at the heart of the 'paranoid style' in Bolivian public life, with all 'the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and ... feeling of persecution' described by Richard Hofstadter for the United States.⁵

The indigenous features of this phenomenon are the most perplexing for those of an upbringing dominated by European rationalism. Less than half the population today regularly communicates in the languages of Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní, but in the 2001 census some 62 per cent of respondents identified themselves as 'indigenous', and in the 800,000-strong city of El Alto, situated right above La Paz, that figure rises to 75 per cent.⁶ One of the leading popular organisations of recent years is the Confederación Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ). CONAMAQ is younger than the class-based peasant union, Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB), which emerged from the radicalism of the late 1970s and the 1980s, and yet CONAMAQ congregates pre-colonial social organisations under a title that raises a question about the very existence of Bolivia. The banner of this

⁴ *The Economist*, 17 July 2004.

⁵ *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York, 1965), pp. 3 and 5.

⁶ F. Hylton and S. Thomson, 'The Chequered Rainbow', *New Left Review* 35 (2005), p. 44.

movement is the *wiphala*, a flag of 49 squares of the seven colours of the rainbow, with the reds representing the *Mallkus* (literally ‘Condors’) or indigenous authorities. In a recent internet poll 48 per cent of 10,000 respondents supported the incorporation of the *wiphala* as a formal patriotic symbol of Bolivia. Given that 80 per cent of Bolivians have no telephone, let alone an internet connection, this suggests a significant degree of syncretism and cultural hybridity. It would certainly be at odds with the views of the most prominent *Mallku* of the present, Felipe Quispe of Achacachi, for whom, on some days, Kollasuyo is a separate utopian state

where there are no traitors, nor poor or rich, and we live in the same condition, without the political revenge that always comes with racism, because we don’t want to replace white mestizo racism with that of the Indian.⁷

On other days Quispe, who was jailed for five years in the 1990s for guerrilla activity, has felt able to call upon the indigenous poor to:

rise up in arms, hunt down and judge the bosses ... burn the houses of the rich and starve out the cities that oppress and exploit us ... Only that which is native is good; the rest is rubbish.⁸

Such sentiments are assuredly at the radical end of the spectrum, and they only find resonance at times of crisis. Quispe’s Movimiento Indio Pachakuti (MIP) won barely 6 per cent of the vote in the 2002 elections and just over 2 per cent in those of 2005.

What, though, will be irreversible is a self-confident indigenous presence in the management of broad parts of public life. Indeed, this has been in evidence since 2002, when the MAS won over a fifth of the national vote, securing a presence in Congress that was, if anything, less conspicuous with regard to programme than to clothing and language – ‘*Ñoqapis munani parlayta*’ (‘I too want to speak’).⁹ Vice-President Alvaro García Linera may have been over-ambitious in talking of ‘four civilisations’ existing within the space that is today Bolivia, but civilisations do not always trade under the same sign. For Fernando Molina, a leading liberal critic of both Evo Morales and the traditional political class that he has displaced from office, the conflict of recent years has been underpinned by ‘a very active mass presence, culturally resistant to any involvement in a common project with those who do not share the same identity’.¹⁰ Molina sees such a politics of refusal as

⁷ *La Razón*, 25 Feb. 2005. In 2002 only 2.2 per cent of Bolivians used the internet, but there is ample anecdotal evidence of subsequent growth (Google has an Aymara translation facility), and the speed of general technological change was such that by 2004 there were three times more mobile phones than telephone land-lines: *La Razón*, 14 Feb. 2005.

⁸ Quoted in Julio Cotler, ‘Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru 2003–04: A Storm in the Andes’, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, Working Paper 51/2005 <www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/235.asp>.

⁹ *El Diario*, 30 Feb. 2002.

¹⁰ *Evo Morales y El Retorno de la Izquierda Nacionalista* (La Paz, 2006), p. 19.

underpinning a culture of *immobilism*, a deep and abiding obstinacy. On the other hand, a recent remarkable work of Aymara history in the early modern period by a group of European scholars reveals a far richer material and ideational culture, many cosmological and political motifs of which are still recognisable in our own day.¹¹

A key part of that culture is what might be termed 'rogatory', including a range of behaviours from formalist supplication to demanding with menaces, the practice of which may be as ethically satisfying as it is practically rewarding. Not everything is what it sounds to be in such a moral economy, which can move in and out of the Eurocentric 'rational repertoire' and which, as we shall see, is nowhere near as immutable as some fondly believe and proclaim.

Another, allied, factor complicating the analysis of Bolivia since 2000 is that after thirteen years of what García Linera has termed 'popular slumber', there was an extraordinary acceleration in the pace of mass political activity. Indeed, the country's reputation in academic analysis as well as newspaper lore is precisely of discontinuity and repeated interruption of the prescribed performative pulse of a liberal democratic regime. In the old days it was the coup d'état that was the primary form of rupture, the instances being counted so assiduously as if the calculus might, through rational ordering, tame the kind of exasperation already noted. (The *Guinness Book of Records* has tallied 157 coups between 1825 and 1982; Jean-Pierre Lavaud has worked out that of the 73 presidents over that period, 33 held office for less than a year; and nobody has laboured more industriously over the enumeration of executive misadventure than Carlos Mesa, who himself held the presidency for a statistically respectable 20 months.)¹²

Few can seriously dispute this empirical record or question its corrosive effect. However, from 2000 onwards it is the *bloqueo*, not the coup, which is the primary mechanism of 'disorder'. Notwithstanding the massacre of October 2003, it is the masses, not the armed forces, who are the principal authors. The exasperation caused abroad is, therefore, greater still. By March 2005, with social conflicts running at over 400 a year, even Carlos Toranzo,

¹¹ T. Platt, T. Bouysson-Cassagne, O. Harris, with T. Saignes, *Qaraqara-Charka. Mallku, Inka y Rey en la Provincia de Charcas (Siglos XV–XVII)* (La Paz, 2006).

¹² J.-P. Lavaud, *L'instabilité politique de L'Amérique Latine: le cas de Bolivie* (Paris, 1991), p. 19; C. Mesa Gisbert, *Presidentes de Bolivia: entre urnas y fusiles* (La Paz, 2003). It is a little disappointing to see how little has changed since I wrote over two decades ago: 'The newspapers trot out the mathematics of disorder – all of it fifth-hand and incorrect – but do not pose the question that if disorder is so prevalent, might it not be order itself? Could there not be a system in the chaos? Should it not be understood less as interruption than continuity?' See James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins. Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952–1982* (London, 1984), p. xi.

one of the calmest and wisest political commentators, was driven to write a column under the title ‘*Demandas Legítimas*’:

We demand the replacement of Aguas de Illimani by a social water company funded by the money that we demand from the World Bank and other international agencies ... We demand that the fares of buses, minibuses, provincial and departmental transport are frozen for thirty years so that the government can demonstrate that it really has a genuine strategy for the sector. We demand the expulsion of the US embassy, of the European embassies and all the international organisations, of Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Papaya Salvietti, because they are contaminated by Italians, so that we can begin a process of genuine national development.¹³

We might do well here to recall de Tocqueville’s conviction that, ‘[t]he remedy for the vices of the army is not to be found in the army itself, but in the country’.¹⁴ That might be thought to be explaining away a state institution with a bland social determinism that cannot so readily be applied to wide sectors of society as a whole. However, René Zavaleta Mercado, who opened his study of the political crisis of 1979–80 with this quotation from de Tocqueville, postulates the existence of two distinct Bolivian armies, the first of which reflects the nationalist tradition:

This is the army that must *feel* those aspects of the nation that existed before the nation or that lie behind its particularism, such as the properties of the earth and the corporatist vision of the world.

This is the army that occupied the San Alberto gas field on 1 May 2006, Col. Rodríguez’s troops attracting great popular support, even from Santa Cruz where the fact that this was territory defended against Paraguay in the Chaco War (1932–35) momentarily overrode all other disputes. The second of Zavaleta’s armies is more widely recognisable:

... the classical army, the essential reason for which is the fear of the *noche triste*. The function of this army is to resist the siege of the Indians ..., that atavism known as Tupaj Katari.¹⁵

Here we encounter the armed forces of October 2003, when some 70 civilians were shot down precisely in order to break the ‘siege’ of La Paz from (and by) El Alto through the withholding of oil supplies.

If such a dialectic can exist for the military, then why not for the rural and urban poor? They, after all, denominated the social conflict of early 2000 over Aguas de Tunari in Cochabamba as the ‘Water War’ and the *bloqueos* of October 2003 as the ‘Gas War’. Oscar Oliveira’s memoir of the former struggle is a *testimonio* in truly heroic voice. Alvaro García Linera, who may not have entirely shaken off the Central American guerrilla influences of his

¹³ *La Razón*, 12 March 2005. ¹⁴ *Democracy in America* (New York, 1990 [1835]), II, p. 269.

¹⁵ ‘Las masas en noviembre’, in R. Zavaleta Mercado (ed.), *Bolivia hoy* (Mexico City, 1983), p. 51.

youth or some nostalgia for the Ejército Guerrillero Tupaj Katari (EGTK), identifies the establishment by Quispe of an *Estado Mayor del Pueblo* in June 2003 as a vital moment in the passage of events between February, when the army and the police shot more at each other than at civilians, and October, when the soldiers attacked the citizenry directly. And in that *noche triste* García Linera is clear that it was precisely the deaths suffered that ruptured the 'docility of the masses', making a qualitative difference between a partly symbolic and a fully physical conflict.¹⁶

The overthrow of Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada and the 'neo-liberal-patrimonial state' (in García Linera's words) did not, though, take the form of direct armed attack on the institutions of that state, either in October 2003 or in December 2005. Rather, it has two symbolic moments. The first was at midnight on 16 October 2003, at the village of Patacamaya, some 109 kilometres from La Paz, when a colonel and miner embraced, and the army allowed 58 trucks of workers through to the seat of government to demand the removal of the president (who resigned immediately upon hearing this news). The second took place at the end of the 2005 election campaign, when Evo Morales, accused by his leading opponent, Jorge 'Tuto' Quiroga, of preferring the *wiphala* to the flag of the republic, kissed the Bolivian tri-colour, declaring that he had sworn allegiance to the flag every day as a conscript, while Quiroga had never submitted to any military service.¹⁷ 'Bolivia is conflict', Zavaleta once wrote, but it is not always presented to us in predictable form.

Events such as these did not appear in the foreign press, and they would scarcely promote 'the story' that newspapers must perforce tell, explain and editorialise over. The simplifications inevitably required by such a narrative do, in their own way, also complicate academic understanding of the present crisis since we are faced with a series of necessary-but-insufficient accounts often written in high register in order to win an audience and hold a line. This is just as true of veteran commentators as of eager stringers:

When foreigners take an interest in Bolivia's natural resources, fortunes are made by the few and the mass of Bolivians stay hungry. It was like that with the Spanish when tens of thousands of Quechua and Aymara died working the great silver mountain at Potosí to fund the Spanish empire. It was like that under the military dictatorships and now, they have discovered, it is like that under elected governments too.¹⁸

¹⁶ *El Juguete Rabioso*, 26 Oct. 2003; 'La crisis del estado y las sublevaciones indígena-plebeyas', in A. García Linera, R. Prada, and L. Tapia, *Memorias de Octubre* (La Paz, 2004), pp. 51 and 58; O. Oliveira, in collaboration with T. Lewis, *Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia* (Cambridge, Mass. 2004).

¹⁷ *La Razón*, 18 March 2003, and 14 Dec. 2005.

¹⁸ Isabel Hilton, *The Guardian*, 21 Oct. 2003.



Photo 1. Provisional President Hernán Siles Zuazo, protected by *miliciano*, April 1952 (From *Album de la Revolución*, La Paz 1953).

And the paradigm of untrammelled exploitation is matched by another of uncomplicated struggle:

In 2000 something remarkable happened. The Bolivian people rose up and expelled Bechtel from the country, keeping the water under democratic control. Over the past week the Bolivian people have risen again. They want to be allowed to grow coca without American interference, including – yes – for the huge global market in recreational drugs.¹⁹

Richard Gott has known Bolivia longer and understood it better than any other foreign journalist, so he adds a final, subordinate note of caution, but he still endorses the same image:

One of the most significant events in 500 years of Latin American history will take place in Bolivia on Sunday when Evo Morales, an Aymara Indian, is inducted as president ... Morales's victory is just a symptom of economic breakdown and age-old repression. It also fulfils a prophecy made by Fidel Castro, who claimed the Andes would become the Americas' Sierra Maestra – the Cuban mountains that harboured black and Indian rebels over the centuries ... False dawns are common in Latin American history, but the strength of the radical tide suggests that this time it will not be dammed, still less reversed.²⁰

Hold on. This is Bolivia. If we are listening to the left, then we should expect to find the ultras closing fast on their tail, admonitory energies and inexhaustible corrective capacity directed less at the class enemy than the doctrinally deficient. Here they come, in the not unfamiliar shape of Professor James Petras:

Once again in Bolivia we have a popular leader elected to power. Once again we have an army of uncritical left cheerleaders, ignorant of significant facts and policy changes over the last five years ... With the exception of Chávez, the presence of Indians in high places did not lead to the passage of any progressive measures in basically neo-liberal regimes ... The exuberant left and sectors of the far right (especially in the U.S. and Bolivia) evoke a scenario in which a radical leftist Indian president, responding to the great majority of poor Bolivians, will transform Bolivia from a white oligarchic-imperialist dominated country ... An alternative scenario, the one I hold, sees Morales as a moderate social liberal ... He will not nationalize petrol or gas MNCs.²¹

The decrying of delusion and treason was ever thus. Most folk abroad pleased at the election of Evo Morales will still have understood it in the terms used by Hilton, Hari and Gott, namely through a model of dichotomous relations: international neoliberals v. exploited nationals; whites v. Indians; oligarchs v. subalterns; global models v. local experiences etc.. Yet

¹⁹ Johann Hari, *The Independent*, 9 March 2005.

²⁰ *The Guardian*, 20 Jan. 2006.

²¹ 'The Bankers Can Rest Easy. Evo Morales: All Growl, No Claws?', 4 Jan. 2006, Cislac Digest, no. 433, sent via LATAM-INFO, 11 Jan. 2006 <available at www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/LATAM-INFO.html>.

when voiced so starkly, the difficulties do begin to emerge. Sinclair Thomson and Forrest Hylton, as radical in outlook as they are knowledgeable about Bolivia, register a discreet warning:

We should avoid treating the crisis simply as a local effect of a predictable transnational phenomenon. We should not take either ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘globalization’ as an autonomous agent that inevitably generates its own grave-diggers ...²²

Thomson and Hylton are here picking up on an evident weakness of the left when it indiscriminately deploys the term ‘neoliberal model’ as if that were everywhere a beast of self-evident characteristics, something that Fernando Molina has tellingly criticised as the comfortable use of a rhetorical category to evade analytical responsibility.²³ Roberto Laserna asks what, precisely, the ‘model’ is supposed to be in Bolivia: the 1985 stabilisation plan (decree 21060)? the political pacts? or maybe just the privatisations of the 1990s? He notes laconically that poverty, ethnic discrimination, violence against women and children, and environmental degradation were all integral to Bolivian life before 1985. In the same vein, Felipe Mansilla protests that it is thoroughly misguided to associate all Andean morality with collectivism and reciprocity and all European values as enshrined in possessive individualism.²⁴

It is, nonetheless, hard to arrive at a more fairly weighted and nuanced appraisal when so much of the local political discourse as well as the international depiction rotates about the idea of ‘two Bolivias’. This, as Thomson and Hylton point out, is an image that Quispe successfully projected beyond radical Aymara circles to civil society as a whole.²⁵ Nowhere has the bipolarity been seized on with more enthusiasm than in Santa Cruz and Tarija, the oil- and gas-producing departments of ‘the east’, where there has been an aggressive repudiation of the highland ‘west’s’ suspicions about the outside world and any export strategy. After the overthrow of Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada in October 2003, Roberto Ruiz, president of the Comité Cívico of Tarija, made it clear that the ‘Gas War’ was seen by some as a distinctly pyrrhic victory:

Bolivians have two options. One is to carry on thinking that we’ll always be ripped off, so it’s best not to do any deal at all in order that in 20 years’ time we can enjoy the doubtful satisfaction of saying that nobody tricked us. We’ll be in the same pitiful poverty, staring at ourselves like flies but, to be sure, unfleeced. The other

²² ‘The Chequered Rainbow’, p. 41. For a radical account that is unusually well-informed, see B. Kohl and L. Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance* (London, 2006). For a variety of stimulating academic accounts, see the special section edited by S. Lazar and J. A. McNeish, ‘The Millions Return? Democracy in Bolivia at the Start of the Twenty-First Century’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2006), pp. 157–263.

²³ *Evo Morales y el retorno*, pp. 98 ff.

²⁴ *Pulso*, no. 250, 4–10 Feb. 2004.

²⁵ ‘Chequered Rainbow’, p. 50.

option is to be proactive, establish clear rules and demand compliance to ensure that the black history is not repeated ...²⁶

What is presented in Tarija as a choice, albeit a tough one, is declaimed in Santa Cruz as an already settled state:

The two Bolivias ... that which wants a relation with the wider world, which wants to improve economically, and that which wants the 500 years, the Bolivia of failure.²⁷

Even before October 2003 nobody could plausibly claim that the gas question was a simple matter in commercial terms. Moreover, it would not have been so even if the proposition of exporting to the Pacific had been viable in 1990 (when Law 1494 introduced shared risk contracts between YPFB and private companies as well as a profits tax), or 1996 (when Law 1689 'capitalised' YPFB, radically reducing its reserved operating and regulatory powers, which were effectively thrown into the market-place), or 1997 (when two days before Sánchez de Losada left office for the first time, Decree 24604 greatly eased the contractual conditions for foreign firms). This has always been a highly complex area of commercial calculation as well as public policy. If there were some on the left who really believed that YPFB could be seamlessly transformed by edict into some kind of mega-*ayllu*, they discovered in August 2006 just how complicated it was to secure sufficient working capital to allow the company to operate with minimal efficiency (a little under \$2 billion) and buy back the shares that had been 'sold' in 1997, let alone negotiate new export prices with neighbouring markets, or conduct professional audits of the foreign companies, or negotiate new operating contracts with them. And none of this addressed the issue of the payment of state pensions, the funds for which had been derived from Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB) initial 'capitalisation'. The whole matter was, as *The Economist* rightly put it, 'a business dispute caught up in a social revolution', and few on a left disproportionately opposed to capitalist enterprise in the hydrocarbons sector (including, of course, state companies such as Petrobras) were concerned to bother themselves with the technical terms of that dispute.²⁸

Equally, not many on the right and the commercial circuit – and certainly those within what must be deemed the very clumsy local management of the TNCs – seemed to have grasped just how much their high-risk, expensive and vulnerable business had become politicised, how deeply unpopular they had become in the valleys and the *altiplano*, and how a stubbornness on the part of the highland population might eventually translate into a much

²⁶ *Pulso*, no. 224, 21–27 Nov. 2003.

²⁷ *El Nuevo Día*, 24 Dec. 2003, quoted in *Tinkazos*, no. 16 (May 2004), pp. 17–18.

²⁸ *The Economist*, 23 Apr. 2005.

more rigorous fiscal climate and competitive pricing structure. The political paradox revealed from mid-2003 onwards is that a 'Two Bolivias' strategy of the type promoted by Santa Cruz and the other departments of the '*media luna*' (ranged in an arc from Tarija in the south, through Santa Cruz, to Beni and Pando in the north) placed the TNCs at greater risk.

Here the observer of contemporary Bolivia faces a further problem. For a while there almost appeared to be 'Two Bolivias' within the very government itself, both deep in uncharted territory. One, gruffly pledged to the unadumbrated vulgate and, quick in temper, stands in scorn of any bookishness. It was obliged to learn quickly how to anticipate responses that it had never itself experienced. The other, with a formidable appetite for the deployment of critical theory in political analysis, assumed office having exhaustively narrated, interpreted and deconstructed that selfsame passage. It has since been compelled to drop all footnotes, quite a few syllables, and even some airs.

The first group is led not by Evo Morales, part of whose personal industriousness involves a concern with new ideas, even if he is an unschooled and instinctively uncurious man. Rather, it is headed by Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca, who proudly announced upon taking office that he had not read a book for sixteen years and did not seem minded to start now that he had a new job. In fact, despite initially ordaining that the language of Bolivian diplomacy would be Aymara, asking for non-diplomats to be nominated for ambassadorial posts, and suggesting that schoolchildren would be better off with coca instead of milk in the morning because it contains more calcium, Choquehuanca's militant anti-intellectualism was a mix of ludic bravado and disconcertedness at the unknown demands of office. Since this was true for almost all 16 ministers, 40 vice-ministers and 120 directors-general – the Bolivian executive is as 'small' as the country itself – some playful provocation was broadly cathartic.²⁹ Certainly, for Abel Mamani, leader of the campaign against Aguas de Illimani in El Alto, appointment to a newly-created Ministry of Water represented an immediate translation from opposition activism to responsibility for national policy, with the effect of stilling a voice of regular complaint but irregular proposal.

Another current, of older radical professionals, such as Carlos Villegas, in charge first of development strategy and then hydrocarbons, and Nila Heredia at health, had already held prominent positions in the public sector and were widely respected for their technical accomplishments. But when

²⁹ 'And why, exactly, Aymara? To discuss, in Aymara, with "Brother" Hugo Chávez? To rave against the system? To recover the sea along the lines of "¡Que se rinda tu abuela, carajo!" To compare Andean and US technologies? To have fun with the NGOs? To gas away with the Spaniards?' Pedro Shimose, 'Bibliófilos y bibliófobos', *La Razón*, 11 Apr. 2006.

in his inaugural speech Morales expressed a respect for 'middle class intellectuals', he was identifying in barely coded fashion the small but busy group around his vice-president, Alvaro García Linera, an indefatigable explainer of what he is doing, why he is right and – now he is engaged in real politics – why other people are wrong.³⁰

At one level this is a complete boon for commentators. Intellectuals who occupy public office are unusual prey to charges of hypocrisy as they scale speedily down from the heights where theory and sheer high-mindedness inevitably locate them, but apart from the tell-tale loquaciousness of the guild, they bequeath plenty of evidence of 'where they come from'. However, the present group is not so easy to 'map' because its scholarly commitments are very sophisticated and take in a range of influences from post-structuralist theory (Raúl Prada, leading the MAS contingent in the constituent assembly) to the often difficult and allusive work of René Zavaleta Mercado (Luis Tapia),³¹ and, in the case of García Linera himself, to sources as different as E. P. Thompson (to whom we shall return) and Jürgen Habermas (to whom we shall not).

García Linera is, as Pedro Shimose wryly notes, so gargantuan a reader that he readily neutralises the back-biting bibliophobia of Choquehuanca.³² This is a man who claims to have read 960 books during three of his years in jail (pretty much one a day), and who now possesses a library of 10,000 titles. Irrepressibly curious about the lacunae in Marx's published work in Spanish, he travelled to Amsterdam to consult the original manuscript texts on India and China, and you feel that he really did read *Das Kapital* in the windswept prison of Chonchocoro (1992–97) whilst on the outside Sánchez de Losada sought to 'capitalise' Bolivia. It was, in truth, not a good idea to try to blow up George Shultz when the secretary of state made a visit to La Paz, but the inertial, dogmatic currents of *altiplano* Stalinism and Trotskyism have an unenviably long record of provoking such exasperated adventurism. Like Vargas Llosa, García Linera was raised in Cochabamba and travelled abroad

³⁰ Compare these two quotations: 'In social theory, the "truths", the evidence, the legitimations are cultural caprices resulting from the historical trajectory of the structure and the operation of the intellectual field, of its processes of accumulation, verification and internal competence that have enshrined a certain mode of understanding, investigating and naming the world.' ('Qué es la democracia?', in A. García Linera, R. Gutiérrez, R. Prada, L. Tapia, *Pluriverso. Teoría política boliviana* (La Paz, 2001), p. 81), and 'No *tibilín* (little twit), no little Red Riding Hood, no Tuto, can reverse the nationalisation of hydrocarbons ... Podemos would benefit from a little reading, a little visiting of *barrios* and communities, a bath in the reality of the people's needs, that would improve their speeches a bit.' (*La Razón*, 20 June 2006) or 'We have beaten the anti-nation, the anti-history, the iniquity that is Podemos'. (*Pulso*, no. 329, 22–29 Dec. 2005).

³¹ *La producción del conocimiento local: historia y política en la obra de René Zavaleta* (La Paz, 2002); *La velocidad del pluralismo: ensayo sobre tiempo y democracia* (La Paz, 2002).

³² *La Razón*, 11 Apr. 2006.

when young: he has a Mexican degree in mathematics. His militancy in the EGTK could almost make him a figure in the Peruvian novelist's brilliant tirade against Sendero Luminoso, *La Historia de Mayta*. He certainly has set his sights on asserting an alternative voice:

There's the great challenge – to uphold the long tradition of the Latin American and Bolivian intellectual and break with that false, germ-ridden ideology of the Vargas Llosa type.³³

García Linera's writings are too theoretically infused and sinuous in style to be given here an appraisal in the depth they deserve. I will pick up just one central motif – the reconstitution between 1986 and 2000 of a self-consciously working class movement into a variegated but distinctively *plebeian* mass – as part of a more general proposition: that Evo Morales stood, in January 2006, at the head of a third Bolivian Revolution. If that revolution is indeed usefully seen as being plebeian in nature and political expression, then, as García's critics argue, it is also the product of a political economy that is *ch'enkeo* (entangled/thicket-like/messy) and so can neither disown the liberal institutionality integral to its evolution nor avoid embracing collectivist practices.

The challenges of history

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

President Morales possesses an uncertain sense of moment; even amidst his natural constituency he can often strike a wrong note through excessive extemporisation. However, at his inauguration in Congress he was at pains to make a critique of the past of Bolivia, which he compared to South Africa and explicitly described as 'colonial', without ever talking of 'revolution'. The preferred term used by MAS is 'refoundation', which might be no less comprehensive but has a much more constructive ring to it.³⁴ However, Evo requested silence to commemorate names integrally associated with local revolutionary tradition, and within weeks, at the convocation of the

³³ *Página 12* (Buenos Aires), 10 Apr. 2006.

³⁴ 'We want to refound the country, politics, democracy with our own hands: *campesinos*, workers, professionals, businessmen, different ethnic groups and indigenous peoples, all united, a country for us, for all. Political life is a right to all and not just for a few. It is not practised exclusively through the vote at elections. It is a daily practice, incarnated in the opinion, viewpoint, demands and campaigns of all and any individual and collectivity.' Comunicado del Movimiento al Socialismo, 13 Oct. 2003, in *Observatorio social de América Latina*, vol. 4, no. 12 (Buenos Aires, 2004), p. 72.

Constituent Assembly, he declared, 'This is where the democratic and cultural revolution begins'.³⁵ As we have seen, the long-suffering *Economist* reckoned the MAS victory amounted to a revolution, and it is no surprise that *The Guardian* should also employ the term.³⁶ For Carlos Toranzo, who could barely be described as sympathetic to the strategy of the *bloqueo* so constantly employed from 2000 onwards, the electoral triumph of December 2005 was,

historic ..., nothing other than a democratic revolution, conducted through the means of suffrage, according to the mechanisms of representative democracy and not by means of street violence.³⁷

Yet very few elections are widely accepted as being 'revolutionary' so soon after they occur, and even then (as in Great Britain in 1945 or Argentina in 1946) this is a relative deployment of a term that, like 'democracy', has had its cutting edge whittled down by the tyranny of popular usage. Rarely do we find 'revolution' or 'democracy' employed in fine-grained academic analysis without the interposition of adjectives. Thus, Fernando Mayorga resisted the combination to describe the removal of Sánchez de Losada in October 2003:

The idea of a revolution is the least pertinent here because the outcome of the October crisis has been expressed within a constitutional context, although it is undeniable that perceptions and prejudices about politics, culture and the economy have been substantially modified for the bulk of the population.³⁸

At that stage Alvaro García Linera declared Bolivia to have entered a 'revolutionary epoch', which he characterised as,

reiterated waves of social uprisings ..., which are separated by relative periods of stability, but which, at each step, question or force the modification of ... the general structure of political domination.³⁹

We might usefully pause here to register the characterisation of social scientists, many of whom take their bearings from Theda Skocpol:

Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation. In contrast, rebellions, even when successful, may involve the revolt of subordinate classes – but they do not eventuate in structural change.⁴⁰

³⁵ *La Razón*, 6 March 2006.

³⁶ *The Guardian*, 3 May 2006.

³⁷ *Rostros de la democracia* (La Paz, 2006), p. 15.

³⁸ *Juguete Rabioso*, 26 Oct. 2003.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 4.

One could quibble over the weighting of ‘eventuate’ – after all, Zhou Enlai was only stretching a point when he said it was ‘too soon to tell’ what the historical significance of the French Revolution might be. However, the key elements are surely speed and scope of consequence, as noted by Jeff Goodwin:

Revolutions entail not only mass mobilisation and regime change, but also more or less rapid and fundamental social, economic and/or cultural change during or soon after the struggle for power. (What counts as ‘rapid and fundamental’ change, however, is a matter of degree, and the line between it and slower and less basic change can be difficult to draw in practice.)⁴¹

That is the line we must draw here. The speed is problematic since we can only plot a regularity of popular mobilisation from January 2000, Sánchez de Losada was overthrown in October 2003, and Morales voted into power in December 2005, a process that lasted nearly six years without a single ‘defining moment’.

The scope of consequences is also problematic since Goodwin’s ‘regime change’ is generally understood in the style of Mark Kishlansky: ‘a rapid and unexpected rejection of one form of government for another’.⁴² Yet in January 2006 Morales assumed office according to all the same regulations and protocols that obtained for Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, Carlos Mesa and Eduardo Rodríguez before him. It is true that the previous day he had undergone a separate ‘indigenous’ inauguration at Tiahuanaco, but he did not there promise a parallel programme; he gave a shorter, more popular speech, but made the same rhetorical points in an essentially complementary and symbolic undertaking. The *form* of government had not changed, and although Morales and MAS firmly proposed that it should and would be altered, that process would take place through the prescribed form of a constituent assembly. This, together with the fulsome electoral victory in December 2005, enables Toranzo to identify precisely a ‘democratic revolution’ but, according to Fernando Mayorga’s logic, the very element of formal democracy diminishes the revolutionary character and on the tight definition provided by Goodwin we would need to see, at the very least, substantially more economic and social change than was witnessed through most of 2006. Certainly, we are still a very long way from the ‘*Pachakuti*’ (both a ‘revolution’ in nature and a millennial experience) desired by Félix Patzi, the Minister of Education and the most instinctively radical of Evo Morales’s first cabinet:

To speak of cyclical history is to remove oneself from modern, progressive civilisation; it is to speak of another type of society, where neither reason nor

⁴¹ *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 9.

⁴² ‘Ironed Corpses Clattering in the Wind’, *London Review of Books*, 17 Aug. 2006.

the optimal use of time are the key elements any more. On the contrary, it will be individuals who control time. It is what I call human happiness in opposition to slavery.⁴³

Is it, then, at all sensible to talk of a 'revolution' that was at least six years in the making and that had yet to deliver, in the form of materially implemented public policy, striking changes in the human condition? This may, indeed, be tantamount to a promotion of rhetoric and popular ambition over substantive and lasting change. Yet the first years of the 21st century have continually upheld the images, expectations and behavioural patterns associated with the urgency and emergency of revolution. It is plain that a revolution is widely *felt* to be under way. Many – let us say a million of the one and a half million who voted for MAS in 2005 – want it to succeed through adroit fulfilment of the definitional requirements we have just considered. Others recognise it as itself being *ch'enkeo* – a veritable mess that needs to be muddled through and sorted, but through retention of *both* democratic form and social change. Yet others – certainly not a few, maybe a million too – wish to detain, restrict and even reverse it.

The Bolivian experience shares with other recent radical episodes a *combination* of mass mobilisation and mass media. This was most vividly exemplified during the presidency of Carlos Mesa, an experienced television presenter who repeatedly made resort to the cameras and public appeals in highly charged discursive efforts to resolve the *empate catastrófico* caused by the highland *bloqueos* and the civic mobilisation for autonomy by the *media luna*. At no stage that I can recall in the last six years have television stations throughout the country been closed down other than by common-or-garden *apagones*. *Pace* Gil Scott-Heron, the revolution has been televised. Indeed, because the events of the epoch – the elections and constitutional formalities as much as the mobilisations and repression – have been piped into almost every electrified home in the country, we need to take care in assessing the impact of such imagery. For, as a result of the mass media, a process, that might by the lights of sharp academic definition not be at all comparable with 1789, 1917, or 1959, could still be construed as being precisely so by those watching it closely and constantly. Of course, a revolution thought, imagined, or willed does not a revolution make, but this daily exposure to aural and visual recordings of the recent past does serve to transform the lived sense of time (the speed of events) and to affect the demand-delivery gap

⁴³ *Pulso*, 244, 23–29 Apr. 2004. See also F. Patzi Paco, 'Rebelión indígena contra la colonialidad y la transnacionalización de la economía: triunfos y vicisitudes del movimiento indígena desde 2000 a 2003', in F. Hylton, F. Patzi, S. Serulnikov, S. Thomson, *Ya es otro tiempo el presente: cuatro momentos de insurgencia indígena* (La Paz, 2003).

(either through *novela*-induced reveries or *denuncia*-enhanced impatience) and so the scope of ‘change’.

We should take care but not worry. The social science criteria are simply unmeetable in the present or foreseeable future. Zhou Enlai is right for Bolivia too. We do, though, know that what has occurred has amounted to far more than the deployment of the ‘weapons of the weak’, as described by James Scott:

The prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents and interest from them ... forms of class struggle ... [that] require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority.⁴⁴

Equally, the very collectivist qualities of the conflicts of 2000–06, the notable absence of a vanguard political party, and the continued fragilities of MAS all suggest that, whatever has been happening, Bolivia might yet escape what Octavio Paz believed to be ‘the logic of revolutions’:

The most cursory glance at the history of modern revolutions, from the 17th century to the 20th century (England, France, Mexico, Russia, China) shows that in all of them, without exception, from the very first days of the movement, groups possessed of greater initiative and talent for organisation than the majority, and armed with a doctrine, make their appearance. These groups very soon separate themselves from the multitudes. In the beginning they listen to and follow the multitudes; later they guide them; later still they represent them, and eventually they supplant them.⁴⁵

The idea that the present experience constitutes a *third* Bolivian revolution is by no means original. Adolfo Gilly, who still has enough of the Trotskyist about him to be demanding of quantitative as well as qualitative criteria, has described it as such.⁴⁶ So have Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, who, like Gilly, identify the first in the uprisings of 1780–82 (led, amongst others, by Tupaj Katari whose movement was linked to the Cuzco-centred insurrection of José Gabriel Túpac Amaru), and the second in the ‘National Revolution’ opened by the armed rising of 9–11 April 1952 and led by the MNR until its overthrow by the military in November 1964.

I agree that the present process is quite distinguishable from that of ‘1952’, which can now almost be thought a cause of 2000–06 by virtue of its insufficiencies. However, even in a rather shallow numbers game, I have reservations about the inclusion of the Tupaj Katari rebellion within any category identified as ‘Bolivia’. That it might be is entirely understandable in

⁴⁴ *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale, 1985), p. xvi.

⁴⁵ ‘The Contaminations of Contingency’, in *One Earth, Four or Five Worlds* (London, 1985), p. 192.

⁴⁶ *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 26 Jan. 2006.

terms of popular exposition, but we need to tread cautiously in the area of longitudinal analogy, popular imagery, and the invocation of the past. However sentimentally forceful and intellectually beguiling, that concatenation glosses over the fact that Bolívar was not born until two years after the uprising, that Bolivia would not come into being for almost another 45 years, and, as Thomson himself has shown in a superlative essay, there has been very little historiographical energy expended in the cause of linking 1781 with the establishment of the republic in 1825:

Within revolutionary nationalist discourse, it was the creole independence movement that generated most historical attention. 1781, by contrast, was much more difficult to accommodate within nationalist memory and teleology ... The severed head of Tupaj Katari can find no convenient niche in the nationalist pantheon ... 1781 stands for antagonism and a parting of the ways between creole elites and the indigenous majority.⁴⁷

It may even be excessive to say that 1781 was a revolt to restore Kollasuyo that fed – eventually and with many extra elements – into the invention of Bolivia.

Moreover, in his detailed deconstruction of the late-eighteenth century movement, Thomson argues that the war around La Paz was not,

the result of atavistic impulses on the part of Indian insurgents, nor of other putatively pre-political sorts of anti-colonial nativism, peasant utopianism, or subaltern class fury. What came to be seen by elites at the time and thereafter as ‘race war’ in La Paz emerged most immediately from conjunctural political conflicts, especially the failure of the Indian-creole alliance.⁴⁸

Forty years later the creoles would act alone, albeit with the support of popular guerrilla forces until the royalists were defeated by an invading patriot army headed by a Venezuelan (Bolívar) and a Colombian (Sucre).⁴⁹ Bolívar initially resented and resisted the invention of a new republic by the local creoles led by Casimiro Olañeta, but once reconciled to it (whether by the flattering nomenclature or through recognition of a formidable localist sentiment amongst the elite), he wrote a constitution which distinguished between ‘Bolivians’ (‘All those born in the territory of the Republic’; Article 10.1) and ‘Citizens’ (amongst the requirements for which were ‘To know how to read and write’ and ‘To have some employment ... without

⁴⁷ ‘Revolutionary Memory in Bolivia: Anticolonial and National Projects from 1781 to 1952’, in M. Grindle and P. Domingo (eds.), *Proclaiming Revolution: Bolivia in Comparative Perspective* (Harvard and London, 2003), pp. 130 and 119.

⁴⁸ *We Alone Will Rule: Native Andean Politics in the Age of Insurgency* (Madison, 2002), pp. 271–2.

⁴⁹ J. L. Roca, 1809. *La revolución de la Audiencia de Charcas en Chuquisaca y en La Paz* (La Paz, 1998); G. Mendoza (ed.), *José Santos Vargas. Diario de un comandante de la independencia americana, 1814–1825* (Mexico City, 1982); R. Arze, *Participación popular en la independencia de Bolivia* (La Paz, 1979).

subjection to another person'; Articles 13.3 and 13.4).⁵⁰ This is why Evo Morales and MAS now want to 're-found' Bolivia. Their programme is for the full and enduring reversal of that foundational distinction, which was only formally abolished after the Revolution of 1952.

Yet, set aside the issue of 'Bolivianness', the parallels between 1781 and 2000–06 are striking. Of course, the 1781 siege was of a walled town some ten blocks wide and six deep, reliant for its defence on holding the bridges over the Rivers Choqueyapu and Mejahaira (watercourses that have long since been built over in the modern city centre), as well as the surrender to the rebel forces of the then outlying Church of San Francisco, now the central site of mass demonstrations. Equally, the eighteenth-century conflict was fully military in character, with no quarter spared on either side. Nicholas Robins estimates that a third of the town's population, some 10,000 people, died, mostly of starvation. A very large number of the attacking forces, which plainly served in communally organised shifts, as in recent years, was killed in frequent assaults.⁵¹ In the 1780s El Alto was not a settlement of any size but it still formed the physical and psychological skyline. Spanish accounts of the siege relate the impact of Tupaj Katari's descents from the *altiplano*, usually in a red jacket, although on one occasion the self-styled viceroy made a striking appearance adorned in gilded armour with a brooch of the sun on his chest, in the style of the Inka – not exactly the sartorial equivalent of Evo's sweater but also not without some iconographic similarity.⁵²

In 1781 the besieging forces were unable to deprive La Paz of water as effectively as those of 2000–05 could withhold supplies of petrol and fuel oil. Yet for Félix Patzi the *bloqueadores* of September and October 2000 instilled a great fear derived directly from a 'memory' of 1781:

Everybody asked to go to the city, so that the centre of the dominant bureaucracy and aristocracy could be besieged. All this revived the memory of the siege of La Paz undertaken by Tupaj Katari in 1781. Until that moment nobody had believed that the indigenous were capable of reviving a struggle that had occurred over 200 years ago, and much worse as a contemporary form of struggle, capable of overthrowing the dominant system ... The middle class employed in the state bureaucracy and private sector did not hold back; during the conflict it organised marches of white scarves demanding pacification ... They ended up reciting '*Padre nuestro*' and

⁵⁰ 'The Bolivian Constitution (1826)', in D. Bushnell (ed.), *El Libertador. Writings of Simón Bolívar* (New York, 2003), p. 65.

⁵¹ N. Robins, *Native Insurgencies and the Genocidal Impulse in the Americas* (Bloomington, 2005), p. 50.

⁵² M. E. del Valle de Siles (ed.), *Francisco Tadeo Diez de Medina. Diario del Cerco de La Paz, 1781* (La Paz, 1981), p. 120; *Testimonios del Cerco de La Paz. El Campo contra la Ciudad, 1781* (La Paz, 1980), p. 86.

'*Díos te salve María*' as at the time of the siege ... The women who joined these marches were creatures of white complexion, with skirts and high-heels, who, you could see from miles away, practised certain rules of endogamy in their marital relations because, when they passed, and the young people of dark skin flirted with them, they glared back at them; you could see in their faces a repudiation and scorn of the Indian.⁵³

If, as E. P. Thompson reminds us, the labouring poor of eighteenth-century England left very few documents, fewer still remain to provide us with clues as to the thoughts and actions of humble folk in the eighteenth-century Andes.⁵⁴ Today, though, television and radio provide constant documentary dissemination, so the way 1781 is 'remembered' is played out before our eyes, and it obviously does not exclude racist behaviour by the subaltern classes. The ribald remarks directed at the outraged creole ladies in 2000 had, by June 2005, been replaced by much more overtly aggressive activity. In the mobilisation that brought down the Mesa government there was widespread shouting of abuse between marchers and onlookers and scattered physical attacks by the protesters, according to *La Razón* particularly against men wearing ties.⁵⁵ Félix Patzi, ever the *enragé*, would have felt little sympathy for the 'pastiche' radicalism of the feminist group *Mujeres Creando*, whose marvellously provocative behaviour meant that they only escaped a prolonged beating by dint of intervention by the riot police, who in 'normal circumstances' might themselves have relished the chance to be the aggressors.⁵⁶

The most remarkable aspect of all this is how *little* violence occurred in 2000–06, given the scale of the popular mobilisation, the material and

⁵³ 'Rebelión indígena', in *Ya es otro tiempo*, pp. 215–6; 219–20. La Paz has only eight exit roads, and the three that do not pass through El Alto do not provide a route beyond surrounding valleys.

⁵⁴ 'The Patricians and the Plebs', in *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 18.

⁵⁵ *La Razón*, 3 July 2005.

⁵⁶ 'In Europe ... there have emerged *postmodern* social movements, such as the movements of women, ecologists, homosexuals, etc. ... in Bolivia the middle class and certain intellectual circles previously affiliated with the left are not analysing their own condition because of their *pastiche* behaviour ... the only option is to imitate what comes from outside.' See 'Rebelión indígena', in *Ya es otro tiempo*, p. 202. María Galindo, the driving force behind *Mujeres Creando* and author of the slogan 'Indias, putas, lesbianas juntas revueltas y hermanadas', is fully Patzi's match in the hard-fought contest to be Bolivia's lippiest iconoclast: 'Evo is beautiful, his skin is coffee like cacao, his political record is of demonstrations and yet more demonstrations, and his anti-imperialism is today by far the most important thing. That he might be an irresponsible father who pays nothing to his family and up to today has refused to recognise his daughter has had, still has, and will have no importance, none at all. What's more, it makes him all the more "authentic", especially because Evo is not Eva and has no story to tell about his body, his desires and his defects': 'No saldrá Eva de la costilla de Evo', circulated by email, 15 Feb. 2006.

ideological interests at stake, and the strength of the historical tributaries flowing into such social antagonism. If we add the approximately 70 *cocaleros* killed since the restoration of constitutional government in 1982 to the equal number shot down in what might be termed the ‘25th Vendémiaire of Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada’ during October 2003, and the 30 killed in February 2003, plus the casualties on both ‘sides’ of lesser clashes, the total certainly does not exceed 300 lives lost – around the same number of casualties as in 1952 and far fewer than in 1781. This might be explained by the ‘schizophrenic’ character of the military or by the smallness of the police force. Though, recalling de Tocqueville, it surely has more to do with the fact that society – or, for those who can see ‘Two Bolivias’, societies – did not, at some elemental level, *want* a civil war as a repetition of the 1780s. That prolonged campaign of social and political ‘nullification’ through strike and *bloqueo* which exasperated so many could very well be welcomed in retrospect as an extended and elaborate exercise in evading something far more tragic. Tupaj Katari deployed some rather inefficient siege catapults as well as the sling and lance that were the arms of his infantry and, yes, cavalry, but the rebels eschewed the regular use of firearms. Even with their fractured identities and limited ordnance, the contemporary security forces could have inflicted a hugely greater toll than any in the past.

The first Bolivian revolution rarely threatened to take such a course. I would date it from 16 July 1809, when Pedro Domingo Murillo issued a proclamation denouncing three centuries of despotism and the fact that the creole elite suffered ‘a form of exile in the bosom of our own land’. This revolution did not end with the arrival of the Patriot army under Sucre, or with Bolívar’s fleeting visit later in 1825, but with the Battle of Ingavi, in November 1841, when independence from Peru was finally guaranteed and a creole republic based on the Audiencia de Charcas was given precedence over both the old viceregal limits of Peru and the market links between La Paz, Arequipa and Tacna.

It is something of a paradox that the emblematic figure of this revolution is Andrés de Santa Cruz y Calahumana, who championed the ill-starred Peru-Bolivia Confederation (1836–39). However, Santa Cruz, a mestizo with family origins in Huarina, education in Cuzco, and strong early royalist affiliations, managed the young state with remarkable effectiveness. He upheld the alliance with the indigenous elite that Sinclair Thomson sees as having ruptured in 1781, and he displayed an assurance about the wider world that derived as much from Hispanic universalism as from a long and peripatetic military career. Registered at birth as Spanish but dismissed as ‘*el indio jetón*’ by a Peruvian oligarchy aghast at his pretensions, Santa Cruz was sufficiently respectful of indigenous culture and ‘*cholo*’ interests – he



Photo 2. Marshal Andrés de Santa Cruz y Calahumana, c. 1860 (Collection of A. Santa Cruz, La Paz).

was far more protectionist than Bolívar – to consolidate the republic's foundation. His remains, repatriated from France by the military in 1965, are ceremoniously protected beside the presidential palace, and Evo Morales is the first Bolivian head of state to be decorated with a collar in Santa Cruz's name.⁵⁷

The second revolution, that of April 1952 and led by the MNR, possesses its own mausoleum. It contains the ashes of Col. Germán Busch, the driving force behind the first nationalisation of oil in 1937. Another occupant is Gen. Juan José Torres, army commander in 1969 (when Gulf Oil was nationalised) and president in 1971 when the establishment of the radical *Asamblea Popular* provoked Hugo Banzer's coup that definitively ended the political process begun nearly twenty years earlier. Before too long the very MNR, a party which owed its origins to the Chaco War and its political schooling to the Constituent Assembly of 1938, would revert to the operational 'default' of a military alliance, now backing Banzer's dictatorship of the *noche triste*. For Fernando Molina, Evo Morales and MAS are taking Bolivia back to the 'revolutionary nationalism of the 1950s', when, in another paradox, it was the tin companies that were nationalised and the oil industry opened up to market forces.

For Morales himself, the MNR regime was a shadow exercise, a kind of mestizo manoeuvre whereby land was distributed, but not in Santa Cruz, and the masses enfranchised, but with votes as tradable items in a strictly regulated market. The MNR leadership was a tie-wearing fraternity, for a while invigilated to the left by the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB) miners' union, itself influenced by anarcho-syndicalist and Trotskyist currents. That relation, however, barely touched the countryside and was largely played out as a parochial Cold War exchange. According to Jaime Paz Zamora (long-time leader of the MIR), his party was founded in 1971 in an effort to uphold the 'authentically popular' inheritance of 1952 and to adjust it to an era in which the promotion of democratic freedoms was now paramount. It could be said that such an *entronque histórico* with the early MNR has now been taken up much more effectively by the MAS, which, in direct opposition to the late MNR, is seeking to revive not just the core features of 1952–64 – nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, agrarian reform, formal democracy – but also other elements of the longer revolutionary process of 1937–71. Amongst these we might mention the Constituent Assembly of 1938, the *Congreso Indígena* of

⁵⁷ C. Méndez, 'Incas Sí, Indios No: Notes on Peruvian Creole Nationalism and Its Contemporary Crisis', *JLAS* vol. 28, no. 1 (1996), pp. 197–225. I am most grateful to Natalia Sobrevilla, preparing a new biography of Santa Cruz, for the information on the registry of his birth.

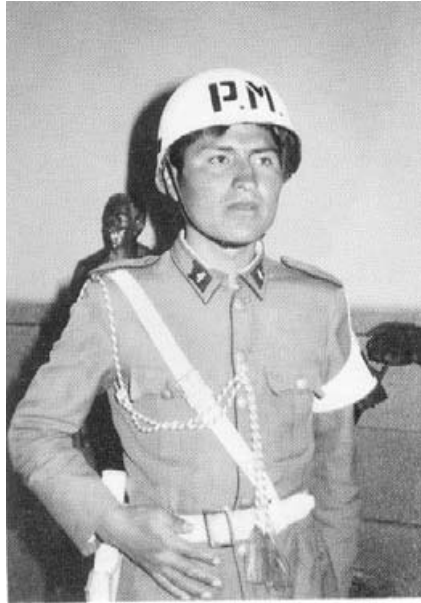


Photo 3. The conscript Evo Morales on sentry duty in the presidential palace, late 1970s (from P. Stefanoni and H. Do Alto, *Evo Morales. De la coca al Palacio*, La Paz 2006).

1945, and the experience of rural organisation and struggle in the 1940s that has only recently been retrieved by scholars.⁵⁸

That more recent historical legacy is sufficiently idiosyncratic to complicate any idea of Bolivian politics simply internalising and reflecting a regional tide of radical populism. The influences beyond the physical frontiers of the republic are indeed vitally important. It is impossible to understand the period 2000–06 without consideration of IMF pressure over the budget deficit, the international price of oil, or US pressure over coca. It is, moreover, very hard to imagine the initial months of the MAS taking the course they did without Cuban and Venezuelan support, which was far more critical than anything that Perón did for the MNR in the 1950s. At the same time, the paucity of academic attention to the regional impact of the Argentine crisis of 2001–03 badly needs redressing. Nevertheless, even for a state so small and weak that it can usefully be tutored by Venezuela, these external factors have not been determinate, nor are they likely to endure in their present

⁵⁸ R. Barragán and J. L. Roca, *Regiones y poder constituyente en Bolivia* (La Paz, 2005); L. Gotkowitz, 'Revisiting the Rural Roots of the Revolution', and B. Larson, 'Capturing Indian Bodies, Hearths and Minds', in Grindle and Domingo (eds.), *Proclaiming Revolution*; L. Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggle for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880–1952* (Durham NC, forthcoming).

form. What, on the other hand, will make or break the current political process is the government's capacity to respond to the peculiarly combustible social admixture of the ancient and the modern captured in the term *ch'enke* and reflected in frequent allusion by García Linera and others to the term 'plebeian'.

Forward with the usable past?

How is it possible that since 6 August 1825 no natural resource has been industrialised in our country? Why is it that only primary materials are exported? For how long is Bolivia going to continue as an exporter of primary materials? (Evo Morales, Inaugural Speech).

The response of Roberto Laserna (echoed by Fernando Molina) to these questions would be that Bolivia is divided not so much into two but three parts. Yet these are still negatively correlated with each other to produce an *empate catastrófico* similar to that between the 'Two Bolivias'. One quarter of the population lives in 'modern Bolivia', operates according to a mindset of instrumental rationality, and can at least formulate universalist projects. However, this sector lacks the intellectual and material resources to realise those projects. As a result, it is culturally inclined to be averse to risk and engage in rent-seeking behaviour; its average household income is \$491 per month, and a third of this sector is classified as poor. A second group, of around 35 per cent of the population, operates within an informal economy of essentially family-based activity, often migratory in character and including an urban element. Extremely vulnerable to market disruption of cash-flow and social shocks to a favours-based system of rents, this sector can rarely accumulate capital and often devotes its savings to conspicuous consumption in carnival-based activity derived from the provincial cultures to which it still belongs. It has an average monthly household income of \$299 and half of its members live in poverty. Finally, there exist some 3.5 million people, 40 per cent of the Bolivian population, within a 'natural economy' dominated by cultivation for subsistence. This is the group which most contributes to the poverty levels with which this article opened. For Fernando Molina, following Arguedas, it has to be delinked from the more dynamic sectors,

because its existence is predicated on the persistence of the past ..., a group that defines itself by racial and cultural means, by what they *are*, and not by what they have a right to be (citizens) nor what they do or propose to do.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *Evo Morales y el retorno*, p. 18.

For Laserna, the market reforms from 1985 did produce growth and change but only in the market-related circuit:

It is clear that the stagnant sectors of the economy, which are composed of the natural and familiar economies, were and remain really successful in resisting the discipline and logic of the market. There are millions of *campesinos* and informal workers who use the market and at the same time block its expansion ... This is the structural *ch'enkeo*.⁶⁰

From such a perspective – notwithstanding its almost equally negative appraisal of the political elite – it is not the neoliberal reforms but the traditional, autochthonous society of Bolivia that lies behind its backwardness. Molina, in particular, criticises Evo Morales and Alvaro García because their strategy for breaking up the *ch'enkeo* is through a strong state and ‘finishing’ the ‘incomplete’ revolution of 1952. That might produce some expansion, or ‘democratisation’, of clientelist behaviour, but it will also fortify the culture in which natural resources are viewed as a gift to be distributed:

99 per cent of the MAS programme is a project for the industrialisation of a backward economy under the control of a ‘strong state’ that will eliminate undesirable elements and the constant conflicts of interest created by the private sector.⁶¹

Yet Molina admits that MAS is quite incapable of imposing itself, either by technology or by force, on the majority. Moreover, it will not get rid of the institutions of liberal democracy because it was precisely through them that it eventually came to power, even if it succeeded by other, direct means in stopping first particular policies and then all government by forces that it opposed. Molina also sees clearly that by 2000 most Bolivians were exhausted by the loud claims and poor performance of liberalism, despite it paying tribute to local culture by denominating its privatisations as ‘capitalisations’, as if the property it was selling remained in the public sector, and by coupling it with genuinely popular and redistributive decentralisation.⁶² Here, curiously, there is some common ground with García Linera:

The MAS is in no sense seeking to form a socialist government. It is not viable because socialism is built on the basis of a strongly organised working class ... Socialism is not constructed on the basis of a family economy, which is what dominates in Bolivia, but on large industry ... What is the model for Bolivia? A strong state, and that is capitalism ... It isn't even a mixed system ... What I do as a Marxist is evaluate the actual potential for development in a society.⁶³

⁶⁰ Interview with Miguel Gómez Balboa: www.geocities.com/laserna. The term might, in this connotation, incorporate two phonetically similar Quechua verbs – *ch'in kay* (to be silent) and *ch'anqay* (to throw stones, which is the favoured means of the *bloqueo*).

⁶¹ *Evo Morales y el retorno*, p. 125.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 60 and 80.

⁶³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 126; *El Juguete Rabioso*, 18 Sep. 2006.

Table 1. *Bolivian Labour Force, 2004*

Agriculture	1,625,581
Hydrocarbons	11,772
Mining	59,686
Manufacturing	493,315
Construction	136,145
Commerce	605,590
Transport	182,539
Communications	17,987
Financial Services	31,352
Public Administration	135,923
Other services	470,407
TOTAL	3,770,299

Source: CEDLA estimates in *Pulso*, no. 245, 30 Apr.–6 May 2004.

Table 1 shows only very broad categories of work, and so on reading it one might think it makes a case against both Molina and García Linera. However, most of the manufacturing jobs are small-scale and workshop-related, just as the large number of service workers are generally linked to the domestic economy. We might also note the very few jobs in the hydrocarbons sector, from which so much is expected over the coming period, making an economic strategy ‘beyond gas’ imperative. These figures yield an open unemployment rate of 14 per cent (330,000 people) against a Latin American average of 11 per cent. 100,000 of the jobs in manufacturing were attributable to the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) treaty that suspended US import tariffs in exchange for eradication of coca crops and which was due to expire at the end of 2006; they were, then, extremely vulnerable.

A policy team working for the United Nations Development Programme has developed a diagnosis that is less pessimistic but somewhat similar to that of Fernando Molina. It extracts from three principal obstacles (‘diversificación sin especialización’; ‘solidarios, pero solitarios’; and ‘institucionalidad para algunos pocos’) a blueprint for a pluralist ‘popular Bolivian economy’, albeit with quite sober expectations as to the degree of complementarity between family- and firm-based production and the degree of institutional support for individual initiative.⁶⁴ Perhaps the fact that García Linera was accompanied on his first trip to renegotiate ATPDEA by Javier Hurtado, the radical head of the Irupana organic foods firm, signalled a more perspicacious approach to economic policy than many outside anticipated after the precipitate nationalisation of gas, but the lobby of the US Congress proved

⁶⁴ Gray, *La economía más allá del gas*. The other four models assessed by the UNDP teams are: ‘informalidad y ejército industrial de reserva; la subsumción o subordinación; microempresas; distrito industrial, clusters y aglomeraciones productivas’.

to be distinctly disappointing. In any event, García Linera's references to 'Andean and Amazonian capitalism' increased markedly over the first months of the government.

The plebeian perspective

Let me draw to a close by making a three-stage discursive manoeuvre of my own: first, by taking up the analytical revision that has attended 'class politics' over the recent period; next, by seeking to prise the *ch'enke* from an entirely deterministic association in an evocation of eighteenth-century England; and, finally, by suggesting a refreshment of an analytical palate that depicts *plebiscitarian democracy* so narrowly and with scant regard to its ancient origins.

Although he died before the present political cycle had begun, René Zavaleta identified many of its latent features in his analysis of the crisis of 1979–80. Instead of the term *ch'enke*, he used the phrase '*formación abigarrada*' (multicoloured formation) to describe Bolivia,

because you find in her economic stages (those of common taxonomic usage) placed upon each other without very much interaction at all, so whilst feudalism belongs to one culture and capitalism to another, here they are still appearing in the same space, one country being feudal and another capitalist ... Who, then, would be so bold as to say that this heterogeneous combination might end up with a uniform matrix of power? ... The only shared time for these forms is the general crisis which affects them ...⁶⁵

For Zavaleta the substantive social democracy of 1952 lay in the distribution of land, which provided some linkage between the two modes of production as well as between the collectivity and the individual: '... land is not just Pachamama. Holding a plot of land is the requirement of personal independence.'⁶⁶ This is a theme that García Linera is careful to uphold, as in his description of the *Coordinadora* that led the Cochabamba 'Water War' in 2000:

If it does from the outset possess organisational forms that might be classified as of a traditional type, because they are founded on pre- or non-mercantile logics of access to land, water or public resources ..., personal and group adherence to the movement is still voluntary and in the style of modern social movements.⁶⁷

Likewise, García Linera distinguishes between 'the mob' (*muchedumbre*), which 'combines individualities without any affiliation or dependency other than the euphoria of immediate action' and 'the multitude', which 'articulates autonomous organisational structures of the subaltern classes'. For García

⁶⁵ 'Masas en noviembre', pp. 17 and 19.

⁶⁷ *Pulso*, no. 185, 21–27 Feb. 2003.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Linaera the rioting of February 2003 was mob action, the *bloqueos* of October the work of ‘the multitude’. Although he never quite makes the claims for it as expansively as do Hardt and Negri, the vice-president of Bolivia sees ‘the multitude’ as providing a lot more than ‘the wisdom of crowds’.⁶⁸ It is a social form that can inject public creativity into the peculiar socio-economic *ch’enkeo* that is Bolivia, compensating for the historical solitude of individuals stranded in the wrong mode of production as well as for classes denied any role in development. Plainly, García Linaera’s ‘multitude’ does not limit itself to a liberal democratic *modus operandi*, but its overall tendency must be towards pluralism and democratic pacts. At the end of the 1970s Zavaleta noted that, ‘[t]he working class ... had learned in its moment of class isolation that the only way it could be itself was by means of the democratic pact’.⁶⁹ García Linaera’s article of faith a quarter of a century later is that such a transformative self-recognition applies no less to those in the ‘natural’ and ‘familiar’ economies. The electoral signs from 2002 onwards would tend to support him.

What, then, is the ‘disorder’ about? Here the lack of historical sedimentation noted by Zavaleta is complicated by at least one further important element. That is the *reversal* of ‘normal’ historical evolution in the collapse of the tin mining industry in the 1980s, deindustrialisation in an only very partially industrialised society throwing ‘modern’ wage workers back into social circuits associated with other historical epochs. Their legacy of proletarian organisation, enforced engagement in agriculture, and modern market rationality have all combined to make coca production not just a means of survival but also a symbol of ‘tradition’ and a highly politicised issue. Little wonder that MAS is fragmented or that Evo Morales so frequently shifted his position in opposition, especially when the local actors were so emphatically joined by the North Americans, for whom all this appeared to be a cut-and-dried issue of morality and legality, and who paid good money to have the police and army sort it out for them.

Although, as we have seen, Washington was initially circumspect with the Morales government, within a few months it showed signs of regression over the single most important issue for Evo Morales, an issue over which he is able (reluctantly) to negotiate but cannot be seen by his home constituency

⁶⁸ Hardt and Negri see the multitude as ‘all those who work under the rule of capital and thus potentially as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital’: *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Harmondsworth, 2005), p. 106. In his critique of this position Malcolm Bull provides a useful historical *tour d’horizon* of theories of the masses and mass action, maintaining that ‘from Cicero onwards, it was axiomatic that only when unified into a people could a multitude become a political agent’. *New Left Review* no. 35 (2005), p. 38. J. Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds. Why the Many are Smarter than the Few* (New York, 2004).

⁶⁹ ‘Masas en noviembre’, p. 49.

to resile. After his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2006, the *New York Times* finally registered, and with some sense of astonishment, a matter that had long stood as common sense in Bolivia:

He's right to complain about American imperialists criminalizing a substance that's been used for centuries in the Andes. If gringos are abusing a product made from coca leaves, that's a problem for America to deal with at home ... America makes plenty of things that are bad for foreigners' health – fatty Big Macs, sugary Cokes, deadly Marlboros – but we'd never let foreigners tell us what to make and not make. The Saudis can fight alcoholism by forbidding the sale of Jack Daniels, but we'd think they were crazy if they ordered us to eradicate fields of barley in Tennessee.⁷⁰

Here, then, the irrationality and obtuseness so conducive to conflict and violence are not Bolivian at all, but imposed on that people by foreigners who, as so often, first think they know best and then complain about the consequences.

Then there is the more straight forward anachronism in the continued existence of a plebeian culture to which we are unaccustomed because it is now virtually extinct in 'the north' where 200 years ago it prevailed quite extensively:

The brief, bawdy, violent, colourful, kaleidoscope, picaresque world of pre-industrial society, when anything from a third to a half of the population lived not only on the subsistence line but outside and sometimes against the law ... In their conception of democracy, their attitude to leadership, property, social morality, their idea of unity and correspondence, their suspicion of the 'respectable' ..., their continuous expectation of betrayal, above all in their feeling for equality and craving for recognised manhood, sans-culottes and artisans are so similar that they sometimes seem identical. The differences in tone and temper – quite radical – can be explained by the brute distinction between a situation which was revolutionary and one which was not.⁷¹

In such a world, as E. P. Thompson notes, 'some customs were of recent invention, and were in truth claims to new rights' – an eminently usable past and not one petrifying people, 'immobilising' them without rhyme or reason.⁷²

This sense of a plebeian *condition*, rather than any sharper ideological character, might best be grasped through a combination of naturalism and political behaviour. Roger Ekirch calls plebeians 'masters by night', and Thompson notes, '[i]t is exactly in a rural society, where any open, identified resistance to the ruling power may result in instant retaliation ... that one tends to find the acts of darkness.'⁷³ That might not be a world so far away

⁷⁰ John Tierney, 'Reading the Coca Leaves', *New York Times*, 23 Sep. 2006.

⁷¹ G. A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution* (London, 1968), p. 5.

⁷² *Customs in Common*, p. xiii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 66; R. Ekirch, *At Day's Close. A History of Nighttime* (London, 2005), p. 221.

from the one to which Evo Morales referred in his inaugural speech, noting that electricity had only reached his home school in 2003, or from the one of Felipe Quispe, who, for all that he is a militant ‘child of the sun’, still ensured that military activity in Achacachi was prepared under cover of night.

We might equally find a shared prominence of public festivities, dance and the carnival in poor societies dominated by the seasonal cycle and attached to spectacle:

Many weeks of heavy labour and scanty diet were compensated for by the expectation (or reminiscence) of those occasions, when food and drink were abundant, courtship and every kind of social intercourse flourished, and the hardship of life was forgotten.⁷⁴

In the same vein, the contemporary life of the city of Oruro circulates comprehensively about carnival, and the non-celebratory life of La Paz is brought to a halt by the day-long parades of *El Gran Poder* and the *Entrada Universitaria*. Even the highly cerebral Alvaro García Linera so respects the importance of pageantry that, in the midst of the preparations for the Constituent Assembly, he flew all the way from Washington to Los Angeles to attend the finals of the Miss Universe competition to boost the morale of Desirée Durán, whose considerable charms had elevated her to the final ten contestants before she experienced the inevitable defeat. The vice-president’s labours in this regard reanimated a polemic that is ardently conducted on an annual basis in Bolivia but long surpassed in Europe (less so in the United States). In 2006 Oscar Unzueta explained why such tradition retains unusual vitality:

These events are important for the countries of the Third World because they are a form of escaping invisibility, of taking the world stage without needing scientific resources or a major sporting apparatus, as in the Nobel prizes or the World Cup or the Olympics.⁷⁵

Albeit sometimes expressed with a patina of post-modernity, such phenomena surely constitute what Max Weber called ‘the authority of the “eternal yesterday” ... of the mores sanctified through the unimaginably

⁷⁴ *Customs in Common*, p. 51.

⁷⁵ *La Razón*, 30 July 2006. This is not really my specialist field, but I would say that Miss Durán’s style is very much that of Raquel Welch, also a *cruceña*, updated to the conditions of the early 21st century: Desirée is 19 and 5’10” tall but also training to be a petroleum engineer. Unkind tongues suggested that Don Alvaro might not have gone to watch Miss Durán in the style of a mathematician or even a human geographer: ‘In last year’s vice-presidential debates he was asked by the moderators – one suspects that this was not a neutral question – whether he had ever engaged in “homosexual relations.” “Not yet,” he answered nonchalantly. The nation gasped.’ A. Guillermpoprieto, ‘The New Bolivia II’, *New York Review of Books*, 21 Sep. 2006, p. 68.

ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform'.⁷⁶ The other two legitimations of domination on which Weber lays stress are the legal and the charismatic, this latter being a gift of grace held by individual warlords, prophets or 'plebiscitarian rulers':

Plebiscitary democracy – the most important type of leadership-democracy – is in its genuine sense a kind of charismatic authority which conceals itself under the *form* of a legitimacy which is derived from the will of the ruled and only sustained by them.⁷⁷

In this vein, 'plebiscitary' has become one of those familiar adjectives interposed before 'democracy', most often to denote a form of populism where the rule of law is practically but not formally subordinated to the executive power, which habitually feigns constitutionalism and displays a palimpsest of the multitude in the holding of plebiscites. Hugo Chávez and Tony Blair have been depicted in such manner.⁷⁸

Evo Morales manifestly is not Hugo Chávez, and Weber's tripartite model needs some adjustment to work for the case of Bolivia. It may be that Morales, who won his popularity not because he was outstanding but precisely because he was representative of 'normality', can still achieve charismatic status through 'charismatic acts'. He has cut his salary, abstained from alcohol, worked absurdly long hours, and shared the presidential residence with members of his cabinet. All this clearly expresses Weber's 'politics as a vocation'. But the plebiscitary character of the leadership-mass relation is distinctly bottom-up, being directed by the *cocaleros*, *juntas vecinales*, unions and sundry *coordinadoras*. That is why Evo Morales so regularly 'flip-flopped' in policy. Indeed, at his inauguration speech in Tiahuanaco he felt obliged to uphold this familiar feature of opposition politics as he moved to occupy the position of ruler:

I want to ask you, with much respect to our indigenous authorities, our organisations, our *amautas* (wise ones): control me, and, if I cannot advance, you push me on, sisters and brothers ... Correct me all the time; it is possible that I might make mistakes, I can make mistakes, we all make mistakes, but I will never betray the struggle of the Bolivian people ...⁷⁹

⁷⁶ 'Politics as a Vocation', in H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology* (London, 1948), pp. 78–9.

⁷⁷ 'Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft', quoted in D. Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1985), p. 266.

⁷⁸ For general discussions, see P. Tamás, 'Socialism, Capitalism and Modernity', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1992); D. Collier and S. Levitsky, 'Democracy "With Adjectives"'. Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research', Dept. Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, Working Paper 230, Aug. 1996; P. Mair, 'Partyless Democracy: Solving the Paradox of New Labour?', *New Left Review* no. 2 (2000), pp. 21–35.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Stefanoni and Do Alto, *Evo Morales*, pp. 157–8.

Here we have much less a demand for ratification than a request for checks and balances. That, S. E. Finer argues, was the fundamental quality of the original *plebis scitum*, won through two ‘secessions’ (little less than *bloqueos*) of 494 and 287 BC by the plebeians of the early Roman Republic. On the second occasion these led to the *Lex Hortensia*, whereby the *concilium plebis* could, irrespective of the Senate, vote a resolution into law with a ‘binding quality over the entire community ... definitively acknowledged’.⁸⁰ Those powers were also limited – the organised plebeians themselves lacked formal judicial power or the right to vote on peace and war – just as in their contemporary form, under the *de facto*, half-written ‘mixed constitution’ of 2000–06, they have similarly proved to be.

I think, then, that the recent Bolivian experience may from this perspective also be usefully understood as ‘plebeian’ in nature. The Constituent Assembly, in early session when these words were written in September 2006, has already shown strong signs of counter-testing the classical traditions of patricians and plebeians, reflecting the simple but vital point made by Trevor Smith for the United Kingdom of the 1960s: ‘consensus, whether real or imagined is ultimately prejudicial to democracy whose main foundation is organized conflict’.⁸¹ If that sounds just too rowdy and pious for the present circumstances, it might be noted that it was not until MAS came into office that any Bolivian government had a coherent policy, with real support from the office of the presidency, to save the 22,000 infants who die needlessly each year from malnutrition. Now, under *Desnutrición Cero*, a policy reliant upon the combination of clinical skills and popular organisation, this invisible tragedy is finally being confronted. Democracy may cost lives, but it saves them too.

⁸⁰ S. E. Finer, *The History of Government from the Earliest Times* (Oxford, 1997), vol. 1, p. 399. On 15 August 1805, Simón Bolívar made his vow to secure the emancipation of Spanish America at Rome’s Monte Sacro, where Sicinius had led the protest of the plebeians in 494 BC.

⁸¹ *Anti-Politics* (London, 1972), p. 20.