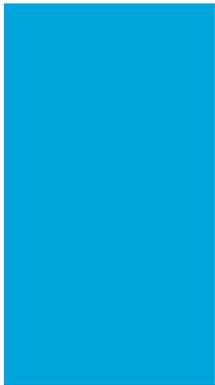


Center for Latin American Studies  
University of California, Berkeley



**After the Water War:  
Contemporary Political Culture  
in Cochabamba, Bolivia**

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## INTRODUCTION

Widespread protests against the privatization of water in 2000 brought Cochabamba, Bolivia, into the international limelight and propelled a process of further mobilizations that utterly reconfigured the country's political landscape. Popular struggles shook the country, expelled powerful multinational corporations, brought down two presidents, and led to the election of Evo Morales, the first indigenous president in the country's history. More recently, calls for "regional autonomy" by the resource-rich eastern lowlands have threatened to rend the country in two. Although a new constitution was popularly ratified in a January 2009 referendum, voting results show that both the opposition parties and Evo Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) have consolidated support in separate regions. The nation is at an important crossroads, and the city of Cochabamba is at the very center of that crossroads, geographically, racially, and politically. Located in the valleys between the high desert plateau—with its heavily indigenous population, political power, and MAS support—and the eastern lowlands, which were colonized throughout the last century by European settlers, Cochabamba represents the possibilities and challenges of Bolivian integration. These three papers, all based on recent research in Cochabamba, examine the context of popular political culture in a city that epitomizes the political change taking place in Bolivia and Latin America today.



*Los Mineros Volveremos:*  
Bolivian Ex-Miners and Politics in Cochabamba

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Between 1986 and 1992, the Bolivian government fired more than 90,000 public workers, including upwards of 30,000 miners. As most mining centers were isolated in pockets of the country's vast and desolate highlands, the majority of the miners had no choice but to leave their homes in search of employment elsewhere. The ensuing "Relocalization," as the government termed this population transfer, had profound consequences for the mineworkers and their families, as well as for the country as a whole. The influx of miners into Bolivia's cities and coca-growing regions contributed to a transformation in patterns of settlement, economic activity, labor relations, and community organization that continues to unfold today.

The migration of miners signaled a new era in Bolivia's history. The dismantling of the state-owned mining corporation and near demise of the Miners' union were consequences of a larger process of privatization of the country's state-run enterprises and erosion of labor rights ushered in by Presidential Decree 21060. In addition to ordering the closure of the publicly owned and administered mines and the dismissal of 90,000 public workers, Decree 21060 eliminated labor protections, froze the salaries of the remaining public workers, unfroze the previously fixed prices of basic food items, closed schools and public hospitals in the mining centers, and halted government investment in tools, machinery, and parts for mining. This neoliberal economic restructuring had devastating impacts on the poor and working-class sectors of Bolivian society.

This paper examines the role of Bolivian mineworkers in recent political life in the city of Cochabamba and contends that the miners' traditions of militant political and union activity have played a critical role in the city's recent social movements. To explore the miners' and their families' understandings of their role in political life in the city, I draw on personal accounts of men and women who migrated from the mines to Cochabamba whom I interviewed between December 2006 and May 2007

Even fifteen to twenty years after leaving the mines, these migrants continue to identify themselves as *mineros*. Many ex-miners have named their neighborhoods after their mining

centers of origin and have erected Stakhanov-like statues of miners in tribute to their histories and experiences. More than mere tributes to the past, these names and monuments are a testament to the ways in which migrants have consciously drawn on their experiences in the mining centers to serve them, both individually and collectively, in their lives in Cochabamba.

The popular song “Los mineros volveremos” (We Miners Will Return) expresses the miners’ feelings of loss and despair in the face of economic restructuring.<sup>1</sup> The authorship of the song is still debated, but it was widely performed by Savia Nueva, a politically radical folkloric musical group associated with the socialist politician Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz in the 1970s and 1980s. The song was written after the March for Life, when miners, their families, and supporters marched in August 1986 in an ultimately failed attempt to stop the closing of the state-owned mines. On the two occasions when ex-miners played the song for me, they cried as they listened. Their tears and the song itself reflect an enduring sense of loss and rage but also feelings of pride and relevance. Evaristo Montaña, an ex-miner from the Siglo XX mining center and a leader of a water committee<sup>2</sup> in Chilimarca, sums up both the anger and pride, the despair and hope, that “relocalized” miners feel about their experience.

I was fifteen years old when Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz came to Siglo XX with Savia Nueva, and Marcelo told us: “*Compañeros mineros*, you are the vanguard of this country. Dark days are coming, days of suffering, days of giving away our natural resources to transnational corporations. We must resist this.” This I heard when I was just fifteen years old, and they killed him. He had come with Savia Nueva, in that way I knew him. So when I put this song on the radio at full volume, I start to cry, and I remember the work I have done, what I suffered as a child. And here, all of my brothers are leftists. We are revolutionaries. We continue serving the people.

The city of Cochabamba has expanded massively in the last twenty to twenty-five years, in part due to migration from the mining centers. The population has more than tripled since

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix for song lyrics.

<sup>2</sup> Neighborhoods in Cochabamba’s peri-urban areas elect water committees to administer local potable water supply systems whose construction is usually paid for and carried out by community members themselves.

1986, from approximately 300,000 to almost one million today.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 5,000 of the 25,000 to 30,000 displaced miners came directly to the department of Cochabamba between 1986 and 1992, and many more came after spending time in other places or in later years. A large migration of *campesinos* (small farmers) from the countryside to urban areas occurred during the same period as a consequence of drought and the economic crisis. Internal migration to Cochabamba, especially from rural areas, has continued since.<sup>4</sup> This migration has resulted in a geographic expansion of the city into the peripheral areas. Once-rural areas have become densely populated, with new neighborhoods springing up every year. As Cristina Cielo's paper describes, Cochabamba's peri-urban areas have been settled largely without official sanction, and they lack basic municipal services. Migrants from the same rural area or mining center often settle together, alongside other groups.

The neighborhoods in the periphery are consequently places where a range of social groups with different economic experiences, class identities, and traditions converge. These spaces have become sites of interaction between groups competing for space and resources. However, these groups also face many of the same problems, such as the lack of water and sewage systems, transportation, and economic opportunity. Because of the long history of migration between the Cochabamba valley and the mining centers of Oruro and Potosí, the migrants in many ways share a common history. However, the recent period is unique, as agricultural and mining communities have converged in urban and semi-urban environments.

Chilimarca and the Zona Sud—a large area in the south of Cochabamba—share a similar experience, despite being on opposite sides of the city's periphery. In both areas, initial tension and conflict between existing communities of small farmers (*comunitarios*) and the newly arrived miners has given way to more cooperation over the past twenty years. Whereas, initially, collective organization and solidarity usually extended only as far as the limits of these group

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<sup>3</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística-Bolivia, <http://www.ine.gov.bo/>

<sup>4</sup> Víctor Vacaflares Pereira, *Migración Interna en Bolivia, Causas y Consecuencias* (La Paz: Plural, 2004), 101.

identities, over time, the interaction of the *mineros* and *comunitarios* within the context of a shared social condition has led to the development of a new politics that draws on the traditions of both groups. During the Water War of 2000, the population of Cochabamba rose up in opposition to a water privatization scheme and successfully expelled the consortium of private companies called *Aguas del Tunari* that had been contracted to administer the city's water. This civil uprising is unlikely to have occurred in the same way, if at all, without the experience of the previous fifteen to twenty years of community organizing to collectively build neighborhood water systems.

Miners have often played leading roles in groups such as neighborhood organizations or water committees and in organizing unions among transport workers. This is likely a consequence of miners being accustomed to public provision of services and to having to fight to maintain their continued provision in the mining centers. Zenovia Vásquez, a former leader of the housewives' committee in the mining center of Huanuni, became a leader in her neighborhood's fight to gain drinking water. She told me:

I arrived here [in 1986], and it hadn't even been a year when I was made leader of the community. Where I lived there was no drinking water. You had to get water from a well where there were frogs, and I thought that this situation was terrible, because in Huanuni, we had it much better than here. That's why I went to the meetings and become a leader and worked to get drinking water brought here.

Like Vásquez, other neighborhood water committee organizers who came from the mining centers often had previous organizing experience in the miners' union or on housewives' committees.

Many of the ex-miners and other people with whom I spoke highlighted the importance of the miners in the Water War. The miners set off dynamite and wore their helmets in the marches, which they still do in celebration of International Workers' Day (May 1). Cirilo Jiménez, the current president of the *Asociación de Rentistas Mineros de Cochabamba* (Retired Miners Association of Cochabamba) who lives in the *Zona Sud*, described the process as follows:

The Water War was really provoked by the ex-miners because we came from the mines to this city. Well, we didn't come to the city but rather to areas around the city, where there was no water, no basic services like plumbing. There was nothing. We miners knew exactly what to do; we had already learned from years of struggles.

Amadeo Ramos, a former miner and leader in the miners union and now an elected leader of his district's neighborhood organization (Organización Territorial de Base, OTB), also highlighted miners' participation in the Water War:

Lots of miners live in the Zona Sud. There were many organizations of retired miners, cooperative miners, and miners from other areas, so miners participated intimately; the Water War was very much influenced by the mineworkers. The politics of the 1985 restructuring didn't destroy the progressive outlook of the mine worker, rather, it dispersed this perspective all over the country... The experience of [our] struggles is not going to be left behind; it will always shine light on, teach, or at least be transmitted. This has not been an overnight process; it has cost us blood. We have lived through very difficult periods. For example, today the rich and powerful talk about democracy, but they don't have any moral right to talk about democracy because they have trampled on democracy. We miners, yes, we can say democracy is a practice in which we discuss our problems and draw conclusions, but in a collective fashion. This is the practice that was used in the mining sector.

Finally, Ángel Capari, a union leader and socialist from the Siglo XX mining center who recently finished serving as the president of the Retired Miners Association of Cochabamba, put it this way:

The vast majority of the miners now live here in Cochabamba, so there has been an influence. The working class is politicized, and through the way in which they participate in struggles, there is a lot of influence from the miners. Before, [Cochabamba] was a passive place [*un pueblo pasivo*], there wasn't much of anything, but now the people have woken up, and it is for this reason that struggles exist here in the city of Cochabamba.

What is striking about these accounts is that, while they differ in degree, each sees the ex-miners as having politicized the greater population of Cochabamba or having taught them how to struggle. Their common personal histories of active involvement in the miners' union and

revolutionary political organizations helps to account for a common view of the miners as the vanguard of the fight for social justice for Bolivia's popular classes.

A view of themselves as the agents of politicization and a tendency to assume leadership roles may help to explain the conflicts between miners and other sectors, like the one described by Cristina Cielo. Nevertheless, members and leaders from other sectors with whom I spoke also stressed the importance of the miners' experiences and participation to the success of the Water War and other struggles. Carmen Pareda, the president of the Federación de Regantes de Cochabamba [Cochabamba's Union of Agricultural Workers], explains ex-miners' frequent leadership of neighborhood and water committees as a consequence of their "experience in the struggle," capacity for organizing, and hardworking character. Oscar Olivera, President of the Federación de Trabajadores Fabriles de Cochabamba [Federation of Factory Workers of Cochabamba] and spokesperson for the La Coordinadora para la Defensa del Agua y Vida [Coalition in Defense of Water and Life] during the Water War, maintained that the miners' efforts were essential because, "at the most crucial moments of the Water War, it was the coming together of the elderly ex-miners that summoned the people, and it was that workers' culture that brought the people of the city together."

Cochabamba's Water War represented a convergence of the impacts of neoliberalism—massive lay-offs, the resulting internal migration and growth of peripheral urban areas, and privatization of natural resources—even as it challenged neoliberalism itself. The Relocalization was responsible for much of the emigration to Cochabamba's periphery, where water and other basic services were lacking. Miners, who were accustomed to having their basic needs met by the state and to fighting to maintain access to resources and services as well as for democratic government, played an important role in challenging and changing the precarious conditions endured by peripheral communities. The previous fifteen years of confrontation and collaboration with rural migrants and preexisting communities, whereby residents in the peripheries gained municipal services and in some cases constructed their own water systems, laid the basis for a challenge to the very conditions that had originally led to the formation of these communities.

APPENDIX

**Los mineros volveremos**

**We Miners Will Return**

En calles y en las plazas  
encontrarán nuestros pechos  
hemos venido de lejos  
a exigir nuestros derechos  
hemos venido de lejos  
a exigir nuestros derechos

In the streets and the squares  
They will find our chests  
We have come from far away  
To demand our rights  
We have come from far away  
To demand our rights

En los ojos, en las manos  
traemos dolor y esperanza  
y aquí todos nos quedamos  
desparramando la brasa  
y aquí todos nos quedamos  
desparramando la brasa

In our eyes, in our hands  
We bring suffering and hope  
And here we remain  
Scattering the embers  
And here we remain  
Scattering the embers

Ahora me voy  
y en mi pecho nace un grito  
todos juntos compañeros  
los mineros volveremos...  
todos juntos compañeros  
los mineros volveremos...

Now I go  
And in my chest a cry is born  
All together comrades  
We miners will return...  
All together comrades  
We miners will return...

No volverán a sangrar las calles  
del campamento

ni se escucharán lamentos en  
las noches de San Juan

si nos quitan el pan a fuera de dictaduras  
nuestra lucha será dura por pan  
y por libertad

### **Refrán**

La la lay....

ahora solo se oye un grito  
¡los mineros volveremos!

ahora solo se oye un grito  
¡los mineros volveremos!

They won't bloody the streets of the camp  
again

Nor will wails be heard in the nights  
of San Juan

If the dictatorships take away our bread  
Our struggle for bread and  
liberty will be strong

### **Refrain**

La la lay...

Now all you hear is a shout  
We miners will return!

Now all you hear is a shout  
We miners will return!

Cochabamba Clashes: Race, Power, and  
Not-So-Civil Disobedience in Bolivia's Heartland

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On January 11, 2007, there was a riot in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Approximately 10,000 people took to the streets with the intent of causing each other harm. They were armed with sticks and machetes, baseball bats and golf clubs. Bloodshed ensued, and Bolivia's third-largest city, with a population of over a million, was completely shut down. Few residents ventured out of their homes. The mini-civil war did not end until the army was dispatched to the city's center several hours after the melee had begun.

Such civilian-on-civilian violence is highly unusually in Bolivia and provides a rich example of Bolivia's political and social transformations in the wake of the December 2005 election of Evo Morales to the presidency. This was the first time that a president was elected with a majority of the vote in a hundred years. It was also the first time the country's top executive office was filled by someone from the country's majority indigenous population. His election was accompanied by the simultaneous emergence of the indigenous political party Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism, MAS) and its controlling representation in Bolivia's legislative bodies. In one election, the control of the central government swung from an established pattern of control by traditional political parties, led by the country's white elite that embraced neoliberal policies, to MAS, which sought to rebuild the state and emphasized autochthonous priorities in hopes of better addressing the needs of its poorest citizens. This was a radical shift. Divisions have subsequently arisen between traditional political parties that seek to maintain the status quo and Morales and the MAS party. Efforts by MAS to reinvent and expand the role of the government and embrace Aymaran cultural values are criticized by the opposition who claim that the government is moving toward Cuban-style socialism and imposing indigenous values on non-indigenous people. The January 11 protest was one manifestation of these rifts. It offers an opportunity to explore how power, race, and resistance are recurring elements in the dynamics of Bolivia's political and social evolution.

The combatants in the January 11 melee can broadly be described as white elites and middle-class mestizos from the wealthy northern neighborhoods of Cochabamba, on one side,

and on the other, primarily rural inhabitants who came to Cochabamba from nearby towns and the coca-growing region of Chapare, in addition to some residents of the cities' unincorporated neighborhoods to the south, known as the Zona Sud. The communities of these outlying areas are composed mainly of indigenous peoples, usually Quechua and Aymara. The two groups collided at the Rio Rocha, which roughly divides Cochabamba between the economically prosperous northern zone and the working-class southern zone. In the end, residents of the northern zone shot and killed two indigenous people, and indigenous protestors hanged one light-skinned youth. Hundreds of people were injured on both sides.

It was the culmination of over a week of protests in Cochabamba. Thousands of rural dwellers and coca farmers from the Chapare converged on the city with two objectives. First, they sought the resignation of the department's governor, Manfred Reyes Villa. His popularity with some residents stemmed from his funding of public works, but he was also suspected by others of using his office to increase the value of his own large landholdings in Cochabamba. Reyes Villa had presidential aspirations in the past and is a member of a traditional political party, the Nueva Fuerza Republicana (New Republican Force, NFR), which has clashed with Morales and MAS on many issues. Second, the indigenous protestors objected to Reyes Villa's call for a second vote on increased autonomy for the department of Cochabamba, a proposition that was rejected by voters from the region in the summer of 2006, with 63 percent voting against the measure.<sup>1</sup> In certain respects, the participants of the January 11 clash were merely small players in a larger dispute and instruments of national political parties.

After becoming president, Morales retained his senior leadership role in the umbrella labor organization of the coca growers' union.<sup>2</sup> While it is unclear what involvement he had, if at all, in directing the protests, the *cocaleros* came to Cochabamba to support MAS's political agenda. The residents of the northern zone were also coordinated by local civic organizations, including

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<sup>1</sup> Cusicanqui Hanssen, Patricia. "La gestion prefecture fracaso en su intento de descentralizar." *La Razon Anuario*, December 14, 2006, Pg. 66.

<sup>2</sup> "Bolivia's Morales keeps union job." BBC News. February 15, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4715498.stm> (accessed on January 24).

neighborhood associations that were allied to traditional political parties, such as Reyes Villa's NFR. Aside from such established entities, some organizations spontaneously emerged in reaction to the arrival of so many MAS supporters from the Chapare and other rural areas. One such group was the Juventud para la Democracia (Youth for Democracy), whose members appeared in one of the local newspapers with bandana-covered faces just prior to the tumult. They proclaimed a retaking of the city and called for the indigenous protestors to return to their towns or face a violent expulsion. Youth for Democracy was probably modeled on a similar group in the eastern department of Santa Cruz: Unión Juvenil (Youths Union).<sup>3</sup> At times, this group has violently attacked protestors from indigenous social movements in retribution for what their disruption of economic activity.

The department of Santa Cruz is home to the leading advocates for autonomy. It is also demographically distinct from the rest of the country, with strong Brazilian and European influences. The traditional political parties seek increased control over natural gas reserves, which are concentrated in the eastern departments of Bolivia. The country's reserves are the second largest in South America.<sup>4</sup> Santa Cruz is also home to Bolivia's largest landholders and its most productive export-oriented agricultural operations. There is obviously fear of the changes that MAS seeks for the country, and the autonomy movement is one method to undermine its authority. However, such an analysis of the conflict—that the January 11 protestors were mere puppets to higher political authorities—belittles the commitment of the participants to their respective ideologies and underestimates their individual agency in choosing to risk their lives by physically fighting the opposition. Residents of the northern neighborhood stressed in media interviews that there were no *cambas* (a slang term for non-indigenous easterners) among them, stressing their authenticity as a Cochabamba-inspired movement, unlike the *cocaleros*, who were viewed by the elites as instigated by outsiders and beyond the civilized embrace of the city.

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<sup>3</sup> The Youths Union offered its brass knuckle services to the residents of northern zones during the January 11 conflict. The press reported that just as the *cocaleros* had been dispatched from the Chapare, residents of Santa Cruz were willing to come to the city to lend aid in defense.

<sup>4</sup> *The World Fact Book*. "Rank Order - Natural Gas - Proven Reserves," The Central Intelligence Agency, March 20, 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2179rank.html> (accessed on March 22, 2008).

As we learn from the other contributions to this working paper, Cochabamba's population has recently swelled with migrants. Such an experience is not new for Cochabamba, which traditionally has been a meeting point for Bolivia's eclectic ethnicities. Indigenous migrants, usually landless, have moved to Cochabamba since colonial times, seeking economic improvement and relief from colonial obligations, such as taxation and labor in the mines.<sup>5</sup> In Andean literature and the nation's imagination, the city has always been perceived as the seat of civilized communities. Cochabamba, like other cities in Bolivia, was designed based on Spanish and European concepts of order, control, and policing. It was a bastion of modernity in a sea of rural backwardness. Under this conception, "Indians" are out of place in the city.<sup>6</sup> Rather, their place is understood to be the rural environment.

The reaction of wealthy residents in the northern neighborhoods to the events of January 11 clearly reproduced this image of the barbarian invader. It was common to hear comments in the northern neighborhoods criticizing the Indians for being so uncivilized as to protest in the city. For example, in the days leading up to the tumult, the supporters of MAS gathered in the main plaza of Cochabamba, where the regional seat of government is located, to reiterate their call for Reyes Villa to resign. Versions of what happened next vary, but MAS supporters managed to ignite the wooden façade of the government building, and several bystanders' cars were also torched. Many residents of the northern zones saw the burning as an insult to and desecration of national heritage. This act reinforced the image of the indigenous as uncouth outsiders. The timing of the subsequent melee is indicative of how offensive the act was to the supporters of the traditional parties. The Comité Cívico, the central organizing association for northern zone residents, promptly called for a citywide strike. Its members positioned themselves at major intersections in order to shut down transportation. The strike was intended to prevent the MAS supporters from protesting, but by afternoon, violence ensued. Local police forces were

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<sup>5</sup> Larson, Brooke. *Cochabamba, 1550-1900: Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation in Bolivia*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Goldstein, Daniel M. *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press (2004).

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overwhelmed early on by large numbers of people intent on causing harm, and the bloodshed continued well into the evening before military forces were finally dispatched by Morales to separate the combatants.

In the past, social movements have often used to civil disobedience to disrupt economic activity in Bolivia and to pressure traditional political parties to make concessions. Such strategies were utilized not only by indigenous-led social movements, such as the cocaleros, but also by other sectors of the economy that were organized in trade unions, such as teachers and transportation workers. The indigenous movements were the most adept at blocking roads, bridges, and key intersections in cities and on highways. At times, these tactics debilitated national commerce. The usual reaction by traditional political parties was to send in national police or military forces to quell the protest. Serious injuries were common, but there was a routine to the civil disobedience that usually prevented fatalities, which only occurred in extreme events. During such protests, a back-and-forth performance inevitably unfolded. The government forces would manage to retake the bridge or intersection, and then the protestors would rally and push back throwing rocks and stones. The government forces would return with more tear gas and so on. Eventually, after winning concessions or not, the protestors would go home.

January 11 was strikingly different. This riot saw civilians, women and men, take to the street with machetes and clubs with the intent of attacking other Bolivians. While the number of people who actually fought was a small percentage of the approximately 10,000 protestors, their ruthlessness demonstrated a willingness to escalate to a new level of violence.

The January 11 protest was also distinct from political violence prior to the election of Morales in another way. In the past, when government forces, commanded by traditional political parties, attempted to quell the protests of indigenous social movements, the result often imbued the social movements with an underdog status and sympathy in the eyes of the public. Such civil disobedience was seen as a legitimate means of resistance to a central government that was failing to meet the needs of its citizens. However, with MAS in control of the government, it

was more difficult for indigenous groups to claim the role of the underdog. While the indigenous are still economically disadvantaged compared to the supporters of traditional political parties, the use of street protests and disrupting economic activity in the days leading up to the January 11 confrontation were viewed by the elites and many middle-class mestizos as abusive and unproductive.

The ensuing violent retaliation and the not-so-civil disobedience on both sides arose from divergent cultural views and race-based judgments of each social group. There is a fear on the part of the white elites, and increasingly on the part of middle-class mestizos, as well, that Morales is intent on creating a Cuban-style communist state. However, an examination of the actual policies that MAS has managed to implement reveals this fear as unfounded, at this point.

A review of the policies that the MAS government has enacted demonstrates mostly modest reforms, and it is difficult to discern from a policy level where the motive for the backlash exists. The most dramatic change was the May 1, 2006, “nationalization” of certain petroleum-based industries, which was actually a renegotiation of contracts with private and state-run firms operating in Bolivia that provided for increased hydrocarbon tax revenue for the central government. It was a popular move among Bolivians, in part because Morales promptly increased remittances to municipalities by an average of about 80 percent, which provided additional funds for public works conceived and implemented at the city level.<sup>7</sup>

The executive decree most feared by large landholders in the eastern departments was Morales’s order to institute a renewed effort to redistribute land and break-up large landholdings that had been identified as underutilized in previous agrarian reforms. While some of the largest landowners rightly fear government appropriation of their lands and the poorest landless sectors of the society hope to gain, the timeline for implementation is seven years.<sup>8</sup> Most Bolivians will probably not be affected directly by the land reform, and its immediate impact has been negligible.

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<sup>7</sup> Bustillos, Ivan. “El desarrollo local se consolida pese a la crisis politica del pais.” *La Razon Anuario*, December 14, 2006, Pg. 68.

<sup>8</sup> “En vigencia ‘tercera reforma agraria.’” *El Diario-Anuario 2006*. December 26, 2006, Pg. 5.

Otherwise, there have been some social welfare programs instituted, such as *renta dignidad*, which provides annual payments of 2,700 bolivianos (US\$360) to all citizens sixty years and older.<sup>9</sup> This program existed prior to the Morales administration in a modified form called Bonosol. Morales also instituted a program that provides modest annual payments of 200 bolivianos (US\$27) to elementary students who consistently attend classes.<sup>10</sup> While there is debate about the efficacy of such programs, these policies and programs are hardly the giant steps towards communism that might explain the strong demands for autonomy and, in the case of Cochabamba, the violent backlash against indigenous social movements.<sup>11</sup>

The January 11 conflict was about power—specifically, the power to control the economic policies of the state—but a racial element was also clearly evident. Ethnic heritage was used in discourses surrounding the conflict to rally support, define the opposition in combative terms of foreign “other,” and make claims about the values and capabilities of each group.

During the confrontation, I was staying in the northern zone, where it was common to hear the indigenous protestors referred to as uncouth invaders that did not know their place.

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<sup>9</sup>. Gutierréz Bernal, Alfredo. “Ley de la Renta Dignidad.” Editorial. *El Diario*. January 1, 2008. [http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/nt080101/0\\_02edt.php](http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/nt080101/0_02edt.php) (accessed on January 25, 2008)

<sup>10</sup>. “Bono Juancito llegó a mas que 737 mil niños al momento.” *Los Tiempos*. December 6, 2007, [http://www.lostiempos.com/noticias/06-12-07/06\\_12\\_07\\_ultimas\\_nac20.php](http://www.lostiempos.com/noticias/06-12-07/06_12_07_ultimas_nac20.php) (accessed on February 28, 2008).

<sup>11</sup>. The remaining central policy debate revolves around the Constituent Assembly and the creation of a new national constitution. It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss the process in detail, but the stakes are obviously high for all involved. And after a year of difficult negotiations, a draft constitution was railroaded through the legislative process by MAS which controlled a majority of seats in the Assembly. In May 2008, the constitution was scheduled for a national vote, but the vote was cancelled after the National Electoral Court determined that there were problems with its implementation. Several eastern departments voted on referendums for increased autonomy from the central government in the east and those referendums passed. After complicated negotiations in the Bolivian legislature, a compromise revised Constitution was put to the voters, along with a poll on the maximum size of landholdings, on January 25, 2009. Current results indicate that the new revised constitution will pass with just under 62 percent voting in favor of the new Constitutions. (See National Electoral Court’s website: <http://www.cne.org.bo/ResultadosRNC2009/wfrmConstituyente.aspx>, accessed on January 27, 2009.) Voters also overwhelmingly approved, by just under 81 percent, limiting the size of landholdings to 5,000 hectares (approximately 12,350 acres). (See the National Electoral Court’s website: <http://www.cne.org.bo/ResultadosRNC2009/wfrmDirimidor.aspx>, accessed on January 27, 2009.) It is unclear if the new Constitution will calm the tense Bolivian political climate. While it recognizes the possibility for increased autonomy from the central government for cities, departments, and indigenous communities, the rules and the implementation are set aside for future legislative battles. The new Constitution will allow Morales to run for a second term of five years, but the opposition has indicated an unwillingness to recognize the new Constitution in eastern Departments. The fundamental conflicts over race, power, and control of natural resources remain unresolved.

It was often said that they should be taught a lesson—a violent one. It was also common to hear indigenous people described as “incompetent.” One resident stated succinctly that, “if they let indigenous people take control of the departmental government, all they would build would be chicken coops and pig farms.” Even more vulgar and racist language peppered the discourse of participants in news accounts during and after the conflict, and protestors from the affluent northern zones openly declared their intent to “kill some Indians during the January 11 conflict.”<sup>12</sup> So while class distinctions were evident, the language of the arguments focused on race. However, the indigenous movement also used a discourse that disparaged of the country’s elites as a white oligarchy of oppressors and neocolonialists.

A parallel is seen at the national level. A recent documentary captured an iconic moment around the time of the 2005 election, when Morales was traveling through the Santa Cruz airport. This footage captures someone from the opposition shouting repeatedly at Morales in front of the media covering his campaign. The insult used was “*indio de mierda*”—the English equivalent would be “piece-of-shit Indian.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, during his presidency Morales has ended a few major addresses to his cocalero indigenous base with Quechua rallying cry: “*Causachun Coca, Wañuchun Yanquis*,” which translates literally as “Grow Coca, Kill Yankees” and is reported that way in the press.<sup>14</sup> It seems likely that white elites with strong economic ties to North America fear that the statement includes them. The statement is meant to rally coca farmers, who have bore the brunt of a militarized war on the coca leaf, to resist U.S. foreign policy. Nonetheless, Morales’s rhetoric leads to a perception that his allegiance lies solely with indigenous communities, and middle-class mestizos perceive themselves as being excluded from the administration’s vision for the country.<sup>15</sup> Morales’s rhetoric also leads to the perception that his legislative agenda is totalitarian.

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<sup>12</sup> “Urresti: tras 15 meses, emergen pistas clave,” *Los Tiempos*. April 13, 2008. p. 6c.

<sup>13</sup> “Cocalero.” Dir. Alejandro Landes. With Leonilda Zurita and Evo Morales. Fall Line Films. 2007.

<sup>14</sup> “Evo advierte a Golberg que no pisará Palacio sin pedir perdon.” *Los Tiempos*. October 13, 2007, <http://www.lostiempos.com/noticias/13-10-07/nacional.php>

<sup>15</sup> Shultz, Jim. “Bolivia and Democracy.” Presentation sponsored by the Center for Latin America Studies, the Peace and Conflict Studies Program, and the Andean Project Working Group. UC Berkeley, November 8, 2006.

There is a long history of contemplating the impact and meaning of the mix of European and indigenous roots in the Andean region and the rural/urban division. The region's canon of literature and academic scholarship has grappled with, indeed, has been obsessed with these issues since the arrival of the Spanish. Latin American literature in the twentieth century was heavily influenced by an independent, yet definitively European-inspired, application of beliefs in eugenics and the inherent qualities of "racial groups." Eugenics, with its hierarchies of races and attributes, inevitably ranked whites highly and deemed darker ethnic groups inferior.<sup>16</sup> The stereotype of the Indian was and, I would argue, continues to be that of physically strong race, with an admirable affinity and knowledge of the natural world, which is nonetheless inferior in all other aspects. There is an acknowledgment of the rural environment as a terrain well suited for Indians, but the intelligence and ingenuity of indigenous peoples are particularly lacking in this analysis. Today, as members of the indigenous majority play an unprecedented role in the administration of the state, mainly through MAS, they fight engrained perceptions of incompetence. In the eyes of the dominant elite, their culture is seen as an impediment to development and stubbornly opposed to the western model of democracy.<sup>17</sup>

Despite elite perceptions of indigenous inferiority, it is interesting to note the appropriation of the indigenous rights discourse by traditional parties. Prior to 2005, the indigenous social movement adroitly utilized the discourse of democracy and human rights to their benefit. Words and phrases like "democracy," "peace," and "the right to a livelihood" were ubiquitous in their banners and speeches. Through such a discourse, the social movements skillfully courted and collaborated with international nongovernmental organizations, academics, and activists.<sup>18</sup> During the January 11 protest, the northern residents rallied with banners that also called for peace and democracy. They criticized the indigenous for disrupting economic activity with their

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<sup>16</sup> Sanjines, Javier C. *Mestizaje Upside-Down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia*. Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburg Press, (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Albro, Robert. "The Culture of Democracy and Bolivia's Indigenous Movements," *Critique of Anthropology*. (Vol. 26: Pg. 391, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Albro. Pg. 403.

protests and thereby denying people the right to earn a living. In the wake of the protest, both sides accused each other of committing human rights violations. Both sides also criticized each other for undemocratic practices and positions. The supporters of traditional political parties accused MAS of attempting to oust a freely elected representative. The supporters of MAS criticized Reyes Villa for attempting to resurrect, without legal authority, the very controversial issue of increased departmental autonomy. While the specifics of what autonomy would mean and what form it would take are elusive, prior to gaining control of the central government, autonomy was a central platform of the highlands indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup> The elites generally opposed autonomy when they controlled the central government, but having lost that power, autonomy is now deemed an excellent method to undermine MAS and its indigenous backers.

Thankfully, the first anniversary of the January 11 clash passed somberly and without violence. There has been a substantial amount of soul-searching in Bolivia about the causes and meaning of the strife and its disturbing implications for the future. Thus far, civil violence has not recurred on a similar level. While the national debate on autonomy and a new constitution continues to lumber along with few concessions, little progress, and constant hostility, Morales has recently attempted to resurrect a dialogue and has indicated some willingness to compromise on the autonomy in exchange for stability. Morales has probably noted that the same economically disruptive civil disobedience tactics that social movements used in the past to topple traditional regimes can be co-opted by the new political minority of white elites and disaffected, middle-class mestizos to impede his efforts at reform. At the same time, hopefully, the traditional political parties realize that the train has left the proverbial station with regard to the political mobilization of the indigenous majority. There will be no return to the past when the traditional elite dominated and their unquestioned embrace of neoliberal economic and social policies remained unquestioned. For now though, the deep and historically founded divisions of power and race have yet to be reconciled.

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<sup>19</sup> Ströbele-Gregor, Juliana. "Culture and Political Practice of the Aymara and Quechua in Bolivia: Autonomous Forms of Modernity in the Andes," *Latin American Perspectives*. (Vol. 23: Pg. 86, 1996).

The Parameters of Peri-urban Popular Participation  
in Cochabamba

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What are the realities and challenges of urban popular participation in Bolivia when top-down legislation seems to encourage it and grassroots mass mobilization seems to attest to it? Bolivia's 1994 Ley de Participación Popular (Law of Popular Participation, LPP) sought to increase political participation through decentralization and the devolution of resources and authority to the local levels, while mass mobilizations throughout the last decade have battled for more inclusive participation in the country's social, political, and economic life. Nevertheless—and despite the importance of the law's role in the rise of indigenous leaders (including Evo Morales, the current president), as well as the success of such mobilizations as the 2000 Water War—institutional mechanisms implemented to promote popular participation in the determination of public priorities have failed to do so (PIEB 2007).

These dynamics are particularly evident in the marginalized peri-urban neighborhoods of Cochabamba that I study, where high levels of mobilization and participation are critical to articulating collective demands for basic needs such as water, electricity, education, and health services. The neighborhoods where I have been conducting research are located in Cochabamba's Zona Sud, a vast area in the southern part of the city. The Zona Sud, which today makes up nearly a third of the city, began to be settled in 1985 when national neoliberal economic restructuring led to mass urban migration, as Sarah Hines notes in her paper on miner migration. Not without reason, the Zona Sud is also seen as an indigenous, migrant stronghold—the January 11 race wars discussed in Michael Shank's contribution were also territorial wars that pitted newcomers against established urban residents.

In this paper, I explore how the institutional and grassroots frameworks designed to encourage participation have at times had the opposite effect, given the realities of urban policy and development in the city of Cochabamba.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I am interested in how the

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informality of land tenure makes it possible for local authorities to take advantage of both institutional mechanisms and social expectations of participation to maintain their dominant positions in the neighborhoods.

These dynamics are evident in a neighborhood I'll call Lomas de los Mineros. Established in about 2001, the neighborhood was begun by a *loteador*, a derisive term in Spanish for someone who profits by subdividing apparently unclaimed land and selling lots with no legal titles at very low prices. The massive migration to urban areas of Latin America, combined with the lack of documentation of apparently uninhabited parts of urban peripheries, paved the way for the rise of the informal land settlements and loteadores throughout the region. According to a recent report for the UN Population Division on peri-urban growth in Latin America, informally or illegally settled land represents over 30 percent of the total urban population (da Gama 2008: 5) in a region that is the most highly urbanized in the developing world.<sup>2</sup> The settlers of peri-urban neighborhoods throughout Latin America turn to these areas given the dearth of other affordable housing or credit options.

In Cochabamba, the loteador of Lomas de los Mineros began to advertise free lots in an undeveloped area in the south of the city. Because there were other loteadores who also sought to profit from bringing groups to the area, however, the initial settlement of the neighborhood was a military-like encampment where rival groups could attack at any point. As one neighbor comments:

The people from over there, by Villa San Andres, wanted to take over this land, and then there were other people from Ushpa Ushpa also trying to take over. They wanted to dislodge us... It was terrible that day, fighting them off with dynamite and rocks. From nine in the morning until eleven [at night] we fought. We then rested a short while. They were exhausted, too, but then they got together again, and came after us again.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A UN Population Fund study (2007) estimates that up to 78 percent of Latin America's population are urban residents.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes from Lomas de los Mineros residents are the author's translations (from Spanish) of interviews conducted in the neighborhood.

Because of these imminent threats, Lomas settlers were required both to be present at any time the loteador called the roll, including in the middle of the night, and to patrol the area twenty-four hours a day. Another neighbor told us that “they often came at night, so... it was impossible to sleep. The roll was called at one in the morning. There was burning all around, and we patrolled all night long.” For the first year or so, most settlers lived in tents. A Lomas resident recounts:

We had our tents, and every lot had a tent where you had to sleep, because they came to check on us. At any moment they came, and if they didn't find you sleeping there, it didn't matter what you had done, how much you'd worked to clean up the area, immediately they took away your lot, with new people there the next day. Some people suffered to keep their lot; they chose to leave their work, good work in factories, because we always had to be here.

Despite the threat of expulsion, settlers looked to the loteador for leadership in the conflicts. Furthermore, given his provision of lots to an increasing number of families, the loteador initially enjoyed a grateful submission to his authority. Within a few months, however, he became an increasingly abusive and tyrannical leader. Neighbors remember that:

You couldn't say a single thing against him. When he was hitting the little old man who lived in front of me, I started to yell, “How can you hit him that way, you brute!” And my husband's cousin grabbed me and said, “Don't say anything; they'll expel you too.”

Others remember the gun that he carried, how he entered the unmarried women's houses and left them sobbing, the time that he humiliated an old woman, making her crawl and beg to him on her knees.

What is most surprising about this dramatic neighborhood history is that the authoritarian rule of the loteador lasted for over two years, with the loteador even being voted by a majority as the neighborhood's first *dirigente*, the official community leader and representative of the settlement. What processes made such extended and intensive local power possible? Urbanists decry the lack of urban policies and planning in Cochabamba that have accorded such sovereignty to locally based leaders, but I argue that it is precisely the combination of national and municipal policies currently in place that have given dirigentes such unrestrained authority.

Along with other decentralization measures enacted throughout Latin America at about the same time, Bolivia's Law of Popular Participation returned resources and functions to the municipal level. The idea of popular participation was institutionalized through the legitimization of even more local representation known as Organizaciones Territoriales de Base (Territorial Base Organizations, OTBs), covering far smaller territorial areas than municipalities. There are, for example, over 300 OTBs or neighborhood groups in the process of becoming OTBs in the municipality of Cochabamba alone. These OTBs share in the financial and legal authority of the municipality through the LPP's legislated "co-participation" funds. Analysts of the LPP generally agree that it generated opportunities for the emergence of indigenous officials and strengthened rural organization (Bazoberry et al. 2006). However, its effects, especially in peri-urban areas, have been increasingly criticized (CEDIB and CVC 2004, Ayo 2003). As Espósito and Arteaga (2007) among others note, one result has been the fragmentation of social organization by naming one institutionally legitimate local group to channel financial resources to the exclusion of other social organizations. Furthermore, because the law sought to respect local forms of organization that did not necessarily follow state-sanctioned norms, it did not distinguish between neighborhoods with legal land titling and those without. In the Cochabamba peri-urban context, these conditions created the backdrop for the corrupt, clientelistic relationships which are now endemic in those neighborhoods.

According to municipal policies, a developer's only obligation is to open access routes, with no specification regarding the quality of these routes. New urban developments therefore lack basic services, forcing local leaders to develop dependent relationships with public institutions to obtain resources for these much-needed public services and weakening their capacity for independent or critical political participation. Clientelism is further encouraged by the ambiguous legality of granting an official designation like "Organización Territorial de Base" to neighborhoods lacking legal land titles. This contradictory status makes it possible for

the neighborhoods and the public institutions to negotiate at the margins of the legal (Achi and Delgado 2007). For example, the regional electrical company requires legal land titling in the areas in which it provides services. Nonetheless, as a formally recognized collective, Lomas de Santa Bárbara was able to bargain with departmental (equivalent to state or provincial) authorities for a project to bring electricity to the community in exchange for their support in upcoming elections.

In addition, given the individualized nature of lot acquisition in informal neighborhoods established by loteadores, these areas are heterogeneously populated. Despite its name, Lomas de los Mineros residents include not only ex-miners but also migrants from both rural and other urban areas. As such, there is little initial collective agreement as to structures of local authority and organization. One neighbor commented that it was very different from the rural town that she came from, where the position of community leader was obligatory and rotated among community members. But “[w]hen the miners arrived, they took over. They’re well organized. The people from the Valle Alto [rural areas in the nearby province] didn’t say anything.” This lack of shared understanding in terms of local organization and authority, combined with the insecurities of land tenure in informal settlements, makes residents exceptionally dependent on and vulnerable to the whims of the landlords who are empowered by the Law of Popular Participation and their particular relationships with public institutions.

The confrontational history of Lomas de los Mineros and the institutional frameworks that shaped this history are the basis of the neighborhood’s present social and organizational dynamics. There is certainly a feeling of unity due to the intense shared experiences during the settlement of the neighborhood. Yet that sense of identification has been fragmented into smaller units grouped by blocks, the site at which the neighbors meet. This division into smaller block groups took place when the original loteador was still the community authority and was done quite clearly to prevent the groups from becoming too united and powerful. One neighbor relates:

In my block group, there were 150 people then, and what happened was that [the dirigente] heard that we were going to stop his car. That's why he came to divide us up into three groups, to undermine us. We held meetings. We were all organized, there were so many of us, and we didn't like what he was doing. But someone told him, and the next day he came. Now we're going to divide this area in three block groups [he told us], from here to there is one group, from here to there another. That's how he divided us up.

Block meetings now include representatives from about twenty to forty families and are intimate spaces which tend to still be the only places where neighbors vocalize their concerns. Ideally, the representative of the block group should take these concerns to the next level: the neighborhood board of directors. Yet, there continues to be an extremely hierarchical relationship between block representatives and the board of directors, in part as a legacy of the neighborhood's history. One group representative noted that, "Sometimes when we speak up we're marked. 'Why do you have to talk so much?' they ask us, 'even if what you're saying is true.'" Neighbors' concerns, therefore, rarely reach representation at a neighborhood-wide level and so remain unaddressed. Some of these concerns have had to do with the transparency and accountability of the board of directors. Other issues—mostly vocalized by women residents—include protecting their homes from break-ins and their property from seizure by the dirigentes themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This partitioning into block groups at the neighborhood level is reproduced across the Zona Sud. Although the area as a whole shares many of the same demographics, conditions, and needs, the municipal structure fragments social organization and concentrates participation in separate organizations that are related to the municipal or state government. The neighborhoods of the Zona Sud are separated from each other politically as well as economically and physically. As was the case with U.S. cities when suburbs first began to develop, the work and transportation linkages—that is, where people go to work and how they get there—exist between the periphery

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<sup>4</sup> Dirigentes in Lomas de los Mineros have used their inordinate local power to expel vulnerable residents, often in order to be able to resell their lots.

and the center with few connections among peripheral neighborhoods themselves. This separation of neighborhoods is exacerbated by the fact that many neighboring communities literally began as enemy camps.

How can these divisive patterns of organization be the background for collective mobilizations of the neighbors and of the Zona Sud as a whole? Neighbors of Lomas de los Mineros frequently march together to protest, to form blockades, and for the holidays. They meet regularly, once a week, for a mandatory block meeting and up to five or six more times a month for scheduled neighborhood-wide meetings. Evo Morales even mentioned Lomas de los Mineros in a 2008 speech, holding it up as an example of a place where neighbors mobilized to demand their rights to basic services.

In a survey I conducted with a local organization in Lomas, over 90 percent of the respondents participated regularly in meetings and mobilizations. Yet that same survey found that the majority of respondents merely attended these gatherings; they neither voiced their opinions nor joined in discussions. Less than 5 percent of the respondents felt they wielded any influence. In neighbors' discourse, the words "abandoned" and "forgotten" appear surprisingly often. How can such high levels of palpable participation and presence in collective events coexist with such low levels of neighbors' self-perceived involvement and representation in neighborhood concerns and wider municipal priorities?

To speak of participation assumes a framework within which that participation takes place. Varied definitions of that framework are expressed in theories of the constitution of civil society. As we will see in the brief overview that follows, the apparent incongruity of high popular participation and low self-perceived involvement is better explained by certain models of civil society than others. There are three basic ways that civil society and participation in civil society can be typified and understood.<sup>5</sup> One of these is the liberal approach, which understands civil

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<sup>5</sup> The academic literature clearly distinguishes liberal and republican approaches to civil society and publics (see for example Edwards 2004; Weintraub 1997). I have added the third approach, based on my readings of Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael Warner.

society as voluntary associational activity outside the scope of the state. The second of these is the republican approach, in which civil society is understood as the definitive site of political participation, and public deliberations constitute the authority that legitimizes the state. Finally, what I call the hegemonic approach understands civil society as an arena of contested meanings, by which domination is legitimized and consequently institutionalized. Below, we briefly examine each of these approaches and their ability to shed light on our case study.

The first approach—the liberal conception of civil society—is most popularly represented by the recent and influential work of Robert Putnam. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, he focuses on civic activity, particularly voluntary associational activity, which cultivates the traits that are the social requisites of a liberal representative democracy. The starting point for Putnam’s understanding of civil society is a liberal democracy in which the public is the comprehensive association of self-interested individuals separate from, but collectively represented by, the American government.

Civic activity in this sense includes economic activity, and the defense of citizens’ private interests constitutes their participation in civil society. The propertied citizenship that this liberal approach assumes, however, is challenged by the informality of the settlements examined in this paper. That is, while the liberal approach can explain informal settlers’ vigorous civil society activity as a collective defense of their individual properties, it cannot account for their lack of perceived representation by their leaders. As we have seen, the very ambiguity of these settlers’ ownership of their lots—they’ve paid for them in various ways, yet they have no legal titles—underlies their dependence on the dirigentes. This dependence, in turn, makes it impossible for them to fully exercise their rights as individual citizens.

A second conceptualization of civil society, often termed the republican approach to civil society due to the central role of the public in government,<sup>6</sup> was revived with the 1980s

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<sup>6</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines “republic” as: “A state in which the supreme power rests in the people and their elected representatives.”

emergence of the anti-statist Eastern European “civil societies” and their consequent analysis. Under this perception, civil society is seen as the definitive site of political participation, since it is the public sphere of the people that is vested with the authority to legitimize or oppose the state. The most representative theoretician for this perspective of civil society and participation is Jurgen Habermas, whose foundational work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, places critical debates within the public sphere at the very root of the legitimacy of the modern state. In this republican conception, social movements are necessary expressions of opposition in these public deliberations. Nevertheless, as we have seen in the case of Lomas, this leaves out the question of the very unequal terms by which public deliberations take place. Lomas residents may indeed be important players in the social movements and contentious publics that have challenged hierarchical social, political, and economic relations in Bolivia. There is no doubt that peri-urban movements in Latin America more generally have been critical to the reconfiguration of political and public priorities, as witnessed in Cochabamba by the part that Zona Sud residents played in the 2000 Water War and the January 11, 2007, “race war.” Yet while the republican approach can help account for the power of Lomas de los Mineros’ collective participation within civil society, it does not help us understand their concurrent self-perceived lack of representation in the public sphere.

This is because both the liberal and the republican approaches to civil society pay little attention to the inequalities and antagonisms that might complicate such constructions of collectives. As Michael Foley and Bob Edwards write, such perspectives “presuppose precisely the sort of political peace that [they] imagine civil society providing” (1996: 7). There is, however, a third approach to civil society that underscores issues of power in the constitution of civil society and thus better explains the seeming paradox of Lomas residents’ mass participation and low perceived involvement. This third approach, one I call the hegemonic perspective of civil society, is best represented by Antonio Gramsci’s definition of civil society as the arena of contested meanings in which dominant definitions justify hierarchical social orders.

That is, the power to define the parameters of legitimacy is the symbolic power that vests the dominant with authority. The dominated, in turn, internalize the social order by their consent to governing systems of values, attitudes, beliefs, etc. It is in this sense that Gramsci understands civil society—and its institutions such as schools and churches—as “non-coercive” sites of domination.

It is through this hegemonic conception of civil society that we can best understand the dynamics at play in peri-urban popular and political participation. The case of Lomas de Mineros shows us that while peri-urban residents can form powerful unities in their demand for collective rights within civil society, the very constitution of such local collectives is also founded on hierarchies of legitimacy and power. The dirigentes are the undisputed local authorities in these neighborhoods, regardless of the abuse of their authority, since they embody the alternative definitions of property and the right to land that residents seek to defend.

Sites like Lomas de los Mineros thus show us that what civic engagement means and the effective participation it can channel, shifts as the context of that engagement changes. In other words, effective popular participation that articulates the needs of marginalized citizens cannot be achieved by simple direct or representative presence in public and political spheres. The hegemonic approach to civil society reminds us that the very parameters that define participation and civic engagement imply hierarchies of legitimacy and authority. This approach helps us understand how residents of neighborhoods like Lomas de los Mineros have been able to influence national events through their participation in vigorous civil society activity, while living in oppressive situations that challenge the capacity of that participation to represent their individual interests. The contradictions that peripheral residents of Cochabamba live with daily show us that the dynamics of participation and civil society cannot be studied independently from the historically and institutionally shaped positions of its actors in the politics of power.

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