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BOLIVIA AT THE CROSSROADS

Politics, Economy, and Environment in a Time of Crisis

Edited by
Soledad Valdivia Rivera

ROUTLEDGE Focus

Bolivia at the Crossroads

As Bolivia reels from the collapse of the government in November 2019, a wave of social protests, and now the impact of Covid-19, this book asks: where next for Bolivia?

After almost 14 years in power, the government of Bolivia's first indigenous president collapsed in 2019 amidst widescale protest and allegations of electoral fraud. The contested transitional government that emerged was quickly struck by the impacts of the Covid-19 public health crisis. This book reflects on this critical moment in Bolivia's development from the perspectives of politics, the economy, the judiciary and the environment. It asks what key issues emerged during Evo Morales's administration and what are the main challenges awaiting the next government in order to steer the country through a new and uncertain road ahead.

As the world considers what the ultimate legacy of Morales's left-wing social experiment will be, this book will be of great interest to researchers across the fields of Latin American studies, development, politics, and economics, as well as to professionals active in the promotion of development in the country and the region.

Soledad Valdivia Rivera is Assistant Professor, Institute of History, Leiden University, the Netherlands.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Valdivia Rivera, Soledad, editor.
Title: Bolivia at the crossroads : politics, economy, and environment in a time of crisis / edited by Soledad Valdivia Rivera.
Other titles: Politics, economy, and environment in a time of crisis
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021. | Series: Routledge studies in Latin American development | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020052834 (print) | LCCN 2020052835 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Bolivia—Politics and government—21st century. | Bolivia—Economic policy. | Morales Ayma, Evo, 1959–
Classification: LCC F3327 .B637 2021 (print) | LCC F3327 (ebook) | DDC 984.05/4—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020052834
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020052835

ISBN: 978-0-367-70772-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-14792-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by codeMantra

Contents

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2 Protest State and street politics

Bolivian social movements in the 2019–2020 crisis

Soledad Valdivia Rivera

Introduction

It is remarkable that the term of the first indigenous president of Bolivia would be both preceded and succeeded by a political crisis and a transitional government. Social movements ousted two presidents in 2003 and 2005, and their support was key in bringing Evo Morales to the presidential seat in 2005 as the leader of the Movement towards Socialism (MAS): at the time foremost 'the political instrument' of popular social movements. It was also amidst continued street protests demanding his resignation that Morales too was forcefully removed from power in November 2019. Large differences separate these historical events but they are evidential to the significant consequence of social movements in Bolivian politics. Indeed, the MAS government oversaw radical State transformations and social change directly linked to the demands by social movements, changes felt by vast sectors of society particularly in terms of wealth distribution and socio-political inclusion. This explains the high level of electoral support for the MAS party, having won the 2009 and 2014 national elections with over 60% votes. But even the overwhelming power at the institutional level, derived by its control of both the legislative assembly and the senate by two thirds from 2009, did not prevent social movements from pushing back against controversial governmental plans, destabilizing the administration and at times forcing it to step back. This chapter maintains that social movements have been and continue to be the most decisive actor in the Bolivian political process. For that reason, the State-social movements' relation is crucial to our understanding of the underlying developments that led up to the 2019–2020 crisis, as well as making sense of the baffling events of October/November 2019. This chapter traces the relation, paying particular attention to the rise of 'right wing' social

movements in opposition to MAS, arguing that social movements have become a sine qua non, rendering any political force unable to govern without 'contentious power'.

The chapter's first part lays the theoretical ground for the analysis, discussing the role of social movements in a democratic political process and introducing the concept of 'protest State' for its explanatory power in the case of Bolivia. The following sections trace the development of the State-social movements' relation under the Morales administration. First, I discuss how the combination of the MAS' electoral success and the development of the social movement into the most legitimate vehicle of citizen representation and participation shaped the relation in a way that although effective in containing oppositional forces would gradually erode the bond between the MAS and its popular base of support. I then turn to the rise of oppositional social movements around old and new demands that grew stronger and more conflated towards the end of Morales' third term. In the last section I explain how these two developments set the stage for the fall of Morales, creating a window of opportunity of the failed election for oppositional forces to forcefully take over power with a certain level of legitimacy. In this part, I also discuss how the MAS and anti-MAS flanks evolved under the Áñez presidency, paving the way for the return of the MAS. The concluding section reflects on the importance of social movements for the political future of the country.

Democracy, social movements and 'protest State'

The question of democracy has been central to the public political debate, crystallized in the question of whether the fall of Morales in November 2019 was the result of a 'citizen revolution' or a 'coup'. Understood as a kind of relation between the State and society, one in which the first one acts mainly in response and conformity to the latter (Tilly 2007), there are roughly two positions concerning the role and effect of social movements for democratization: negative and positive. The State-social movements' relation is conceived as part of the interaction between citizens, social movements, the political party system and the State (Craig Jenkins and Klandermans 1995). On the one hand, the political party system ideally organizes and regulates access to State power by different groups in society (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). In consequence, strong social movements could not only be perceived as indications of a deficiency in the functioning of democratic institutions but they are also seen to undermine the political party system to the detriment of the consolidation of formal representative

democracy. On the other hand, from a 'cultural politics' perspective, social movements have an important role in democratization as they question the 'political culture' that excludes and oppresses certain groups of society. This is expressed in the struggle to democratize the whole of society and not only the political regime, including the cultural practices that embody the social relations of exclusion and inequality (Calderón et al. 1992; Alvarez et al. 1998). Social movements would play an important role in pressuring and stimulating the political system to be more responsive to the needs of (segments of) the citizenry, not only democratizing the political system but the society at large.

Both stances position social movements in opposition to the State as the realm of institutional politics, which basically limits the types of State-social movement relation to two: repression or manipulation. This is the base preoccupation in the often-used analytical categories of 'autonomy' and 'co-optation' in the characterization of the relation. Social movements' autonomy is seen as necessary to counterbalance the alienation and authoritarianism from a presupposed elitist and repressive State (Steyn 2012). However, a more nuanced view sees a level of rapprochement as indispensable. Coy and Hadeen state that it is practically impossible to discern between cooperation and co-optation in situations of imbalance of power, but that social movements should aim to maintain a fluctuating position relating to State power (2005). In the same vein, Earle has suggested that social movements need to find a 'delicate balance' in order to maximize the benefits of collaboration while avoiding falling into co-optation (2013).

Particularly in the case of Bolivia, the characterization in terms of 'autonomy' and 'co-optation' seems too reductionist, obscuring its complexity. According to Goldstone (2013), the range of State-social movements' relations is much wider, especially if the heterogeneity within State institutions is acknowledged, rendering the frontier between 'institutionalized' and 'non-institutionalized' politics vague and permeable. This line of thought has found resonance in several studies that have looked at the elusive barriers separating social movements from political parties (Schönwälder 1997, Roberts 1998, Desai 2003, Glenn 2003, Deonandan and Close 2007, Van Cott 2005, 2008, Kitschelt 2006, Dufour 2008, Anria 2013). The various and varying relationships social movements maintain with political parties and the State could even ask for a different conceptualization of the phenomenon. As de Bakker, den Hond and Laarmanen (2017) show, more recently social movements have found new ways to organize, connect and enact collective action, particularly as a result of technological

and communicational innovation, leading to more volatile forms of organizing. Although 'social movement' and 'social movement organization' retain elucidating value for the analysis, acknowledging the fluidity and continuity depending on the level of *organizing* as a process allows us to appreciate how that organizing process flows over the (analytical) borders that separate social movements (organizations), the State and political parties as distinctive entities.

Last, given the relatively high levels of social protest in the Latin American region, in a recent publication Moseley (2018) has proposed an innovative theoretical approach around the concept of 'protest State' that attains high explanatory power for the case of Bolivia. According to the author, the high levels of protest result from the dual process of political dysfunction and economic prosperity. Political dysfunction refers to the poor levels of performance of the State institutions that result in low levels of confidence. In parallel, the economic development has increased citizen awareness and organizational resources, producing a stronger and more engaged civil society. Moseley identifies four elements explaining the high levels of social protest: grievances, representation, repression and mobilizing structure. Grievances are necessary but not sufficient to trigger collective action. Too high levels of repression will inhibit social protest and so a minimum level of openness (democracy) is necessary. Moseley sees 'grievances' and 'repression' as fairly constant in Latin America, ascribing 'representation' and 'mobilizing structure' as the highest explanatory power. 'Representation' refers to the *promise* of viable vehicles of representation and its *failure* to deliver, whereas the mobilizing structure refers to the availability of organizational resources to citizens to engage in social protest. Where the political systems have become devoid of effective representative institutions, social protest becomes a conventional form of political participation for citizens, including the elite. As institutions remain weak, protest becomes a very likely option to a diversity of sectors in society. Interestingly, this is not limited to protest against the government, but also includes social mobilization in support of it. According to this author, in 'protest States' clientelist parties invest in building 'contentious power' by linking to organizations of civil society to enable and maintain street-based activism. In such scenarios, levels of protest remain high, regardless of the level of grievances.

On the basis of these theoretical considerations, in the remainder of the chapter, I trace the evolution of the State-social movement relation in recent years as key to the political process in Bolivia in general, and to the political crisis that started in October 2019, in particular. For

the sake of clarity in the analysis, I will often refer to social movements (organizations) as 'actors', but I am building on its conceptualization as 'organizing processes' around specific issues. Also, the term *social movement* encompasses both popular (indigenous) social movements as well as the middle class, 'elite', 'right wing' or 'civic' social movements. This clarification is necessary as in the Bolivian public debate (and sometimes in the academic debate) the term social movement is almost 'exclusive' to the (indigenous) movements that form the base of support of the MAS.

The government of social movements

The end of military rule at the beginning of the 80s brought a period of increased tension between new social movements and the democratic State. In the 'lost decade' scenario of austerity and structural reforms, and in the face of rising levels of poverty and inequality, new social movements emerged in resistance to neoliberal policies. By the beginning of the 90s, it became evident that the double transition to democratic rule and a neoliberal model failed to deliver its promises of social and political inclusion, development and well-being to large sections of the population. The deficient functioning of political parties (Van Cott 2000, Mayorga 2004) rendered them unable to represent the growing discontent among popular sectors, pushing the articulation of social movements forward. The discontent derived into a double crisis of legitimacy of the political system and the neoliberal model marked by an intense period of social protest and mobilization between 2000 and 2005, with the Water War (2000) and the Gas War (2003) as the high points. Despite growing citizen disapproval, the governments of former dictator Hugo Bánzer Suarez and technocrat Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada continued the implementation of a neoliberal agenda, including the privatization of natural resources enterprises. In this scenario, the people turned to the streets and social mobilization, leading to fatal clashes with the State and the reversal of governmental policies. The at-the-time president Sánchez de Lozada was even forced to resign and flee the country amidst the Gas War, and it would take little over a year before social protest would once again oust Carlos Mesa, his former vice-president, from the presidential seat.

The implications of the social outbursts were significant and manifold. First, it proved the efficiency of social movements as political actors and vehicles of citizen participation and representation. Second, it showed that it was possible to impose street politics, or 'contentious power', on the formal and institutionalized. Third, as a moment of

deep political crisis, it made clear that profound reforms were necessary and imminent. And last, in the context of a legitimacy crisis of the political party system and the triumphant mood, social movements emerged as the legitimate actors to conduct the change. In a somewhat contradictory turn, the social movements opted to further unite electorally behind the charismatic leadership of Evo Morales and the MAS to participate in the December 2005 national elections. They defined the slogans of the political campaign, and after Morales was installed as president in January 2006, played an active role in the implementation of the political agenda they had set.

The 2005 electoral victory of Morales and MAS, with over 50% votes, constituted a turning point for the social movements. From then on, under the MAS government, social movements entered into a complex and fluctuating position by attempting to synergize institutional politics with 'contentious power', quite literally a 'government of social movements'. As if this was not challenging enough, the objective was nothing short of a revolution, the 're-foundation' of the Bolivian State to achieve radical social transformations, an objective that could count on the resistance from the politically displaced but still powerful economic elite.

The first years of the Morales government were marked by the confrontations around the Constituent Process. An original demand of the indigenous movement was that a new constitution was to be drafted by a Constituent Assembly. At first, the oppositional forces almost successfully sabotaged the assembly around procedural technicalities at the institutional level. The indigenous social movement organizations, coordinated under the umbrella entity Pacto de Unidad (Pact of Unity), organized vigils and social protests in response that were, in turn, met by mobilizations by the urban elite of the city of Sucre, where the Constituent Assembly was seated. While maintaining a firm foot on the streets, the indigenous movement drafted a complete proposal for the new Constitution pushing the process within the Assembly forward.[1] At that point, the resistance by the economic and displaced elites concentrated in the eastern region, where politicians sought to reinforce power at the local and regional political levels, mobilizing large segments of the urban population around the claim for regional autonomy, particularly in the region and city of Santa Cruz. The strong divide and confrontation even bordered on civil war, but the dual action of the social movements linked to MAS, both at the institutional space of the Assembly and the streets, defended the process and enabled its completion. The popular and indigenous pressure from the streets rescued the Assembly

from complete stagnation, while the 'civic autonomous' movement was strong enough to force a few but very important concessions.[2] As I have argued before (Valdivia 2019), the discussions, confrontations and negotiations that took place in the realm of social movements were essential to the troubled constituent process and to shaping its result, demonstrating again the weight of non-institutional politics over the formal spaces of the State.

The promulgation of the 2009 Constitution was, to an extent, perceived as the defeat of the political opposition by the 'government of social movements'. The 2009 Constitution was approved by a referendum with 61% votes, and the elections held later that year yielded a 64% win for the party of Morales. The hegemonic position of the MAS appeased the conflicts with the political opposition that, from that moment, entered a period of fragmentation and loss of legitimacy, unable to articulate a plausible political discourse and project. At the same time, sustained economic growth and stability became markers of the Morales administration. The nationalization of the hydrocarbon sector in 2006 and the rising prices in the world market meant a considerable increase of the treasury while large parts started being redirected towards social policy. Until the end of the Morales administration, GDP averaged around 5% per year, GDP per capita doubled and poverty and inequality fell by half (Knaack 2020). The Bolivian 'economic wonder' was a source of legitimacy reinforcing MAS's hegemonic power. This is the stage of 'economic prosperity' that Moseley sees as the precondition for the rising levels of social protest that characterize the 'protest State'.

The two-thirds MAS majority in the legislative was crucial in shaping the relation of the State-social movements in the following years. Pro-indigenous policies and wealth redistribution amounted to unprecedented high levels of representation of many of the common and historical grievances, creating the space for contradictions and differences within MAS' plural coalition to surface. Social movement organizations moved back to sectorial demands amidst rising expectations generated by MAS hegemonic position and economic bonanza, leading to fragmentation and confrontation. The *Gasolinazo* conflict in 2010 and the TIPNIS-conflict in 2012 are most illustrative, where the MAS' absolute majority government was kept in check against these particular issues by quite 'autonomous' indigenous social protest (see also Valdivia 2019). However, when the political opposition and elite interests needed to be confronted, the popular support would again align sufficiently behind Morales, as illustrated by the electoral moments. Even the considerably destabilizing and delegitimizing

TIPNIS-conflict of 2012 did not prevent Morales from winning the 2014 national election, again with over 60% votes.

As I will explain below, the absolute MAS majority in the legislative practically neutralized the opposition at the institutional level, pushing it towards the domain of non-institutionalized politics where it adopted a strategy of destabilization and discrediting of the MAS government. This struggle took place to a large extent in the arena of the (social) media and the NGO-sector, explaining the hostilities under the Morales administration, but also through social protest. To confront this, most notably in the context of weak institutions, the MAS government turned to the social movements as a source of legitimacy and 'contentious power'. In a personal interview in January 2020 with the National Director of NINA, a decade-long program working on the construction of indigenous leadership (previously headed by the current vice-president David Choquehuanca), Walter Limache explained that instead of being the instrument of social movements, the social movements had become instrumental to MAS. The two-thirds majority rendered consultation unnecessary. Instead of social movements' demands and proposals flowing through MAS to the legislative, the decisions would be made at the high levels of the executive branch, reducing the social movements to an endorsing function (Limache, personal communication, La Paz January 2020; see also Farthing 2019 and Zuazo 2010). Clientelist and favouritism practices served to oil this gear wheel but did not prevent fissures and divisions as the effect of postponed demands. This modus operandus, although effective in containing oppositional forces, gradually eroded the relation between the MAS and its social base. Undermined support later would help create the window of opportunity to remove the MAS from power.

This erosion occurred in two dimensions: in State-social movement relation and within the social movement as an organizing process. The relative weight and equivocal position of the social movements conferred them a singular role in Bolivian politics that escapes the analytical dichotomy 'autonomy vs. co-optation'. Accusations of manipulative and co-opting practices addressed to the MAS government have been recurrent, both in the public and academic debates (Regalsky 2010, Anria 2013, McKay et al. 2014, Hollender 2016, Farthing 2019). The endorsing function arguably led to a gradual deterioration of the capacity of social movements for proposal to and interpellation of the MAS leadership (Limache, personal communication, La Paz January 2020). Within the social movements' organizations, the leadership changed. Decades of struggle against the State had produced committed and experienced leaderships that went

quickly to occupy all sorts of political posts as MAS arrived to power. In the following years, MAS presence grew within the political institutions as the public sector expanded. The leadership of social movements' organizations was soon perceived as a bridge towards jobs in the public sector. According to Limache, the younger leaders had less experience and were no longer formed in the struggle against the political power but in collaboration with it, resulting in a lower 'historical consciousness' and lower commitment (personal communication, La Paz January 2020). As the State absorbed them, the leadership of the social movements' organizations became weaker and prone to internal fragmentations. This explains in part the emergence of parallel leadership structures, some promoted by the MAS government, in alignment and opposition to the MAS government (see for example Achtenberg, 2015), signalling the fragmentation and weakening of the social movements' *organizations*.

Notwithstanding, social movements may be more adequately conceptualized as organizing *processes*. From this perspective, the putative 'co-optation' could also be seen as the cooperative organizing process that flows over the (analytical) borders separating the social movement from other actors. In other words, the organizing processes around specific issues underlying the social movements' relation to the State show varying levels of oscillation between support and cooperation, and rejection and confrontation. In a situation in which the more profound shared grievances of the popular sectors had attained its historically highest level of representation at the institutional domain but were still under continuous siege by oppositional forces, the perceived urgency and risk of sectorial demands varied, resulting in divergent organizing processes around those demands. The 'co-optation' by the MAS government focuses on the social movements' *organizations, structure and leadership*, producing a characterization as weak, divided and subjugated. In doing so, it does not recognize the agency of their constituencies (as if they were sheep), and overlooks the fact that the dynamic and strategic calculations vary widely from when the social movement is outside the State and in open conflict with it, to when it enacts a much more complex and contradictory fluidity (as a process) transiting between institutional politics and street politics. From this perspective, the academic signalling of 'co-optation' and 'autonomy' appears too reductionist, while those in the public debate denote a mere political position.

In addition, structural institutional frailty and corruption gradually damaged the image of the MAS 'social movements' government. It must be noted that institutional weakness was not always detrimental to the Morales government as it, for better or for worse, allowed

for a greater space of manoeuvre to the MAS charismatic leadership (see Van Cott 2008) and also for the social movements. According to Balderacchi (2017), the informal incorporation of social movements, resulting from weak institutions in Bolivia, permitted them to wield greater influence on the political process in comparison to the experiences of Ecuador and Venezuela. And this applied to social movements both in support and in opposition to the government.

Notwithstanding the multiple and changing forms that the social movement relation with the State can and did take, it remained the icon of legitimate political representation and participation. Amidst a dysfunctional political party system, the social movements emerged as the authentic and effective actors defining the political process in the period 2000–2005. Building and depending on this contentious power, the MAS discourse reinforced the narrative that social movements were politically virtuous, expressing the will of the people and as the true channels of citizen participation. With this narrative, MAS, first as the 'instrument' and later as the 'government' of social movements, was relatively successful in monopolizing its political capital. But it was precisely this discourse that made the MAS government very vulnerable to social movements that opposed it.

The rise of anti-MAS social movements

In an article of 2011, Salman pointed to the necessity to consider the development of 'opposition movements' in Bolivia, as 'social movement' seemed always to involve support for the government. The constituent process had seen the rise of opposition social movements around elite regionalist demands. In the years to come, the political opposition stood weak, unarticulated and prevented from any meaningful influence at the institutional level before the two-thirds MAS majority, and turned to 'street politics' as means of political participation. In that process, it would expand to include new faces and grievances. In his study of 'the process of change', Goodale dedicates a full, comprehensive and elucidating chapter to an ethnography of the opposition (2020). He shows that although 'conservative', 'economic' and 'regional' are salient characteristics, the opposition constitutes 'a nonlinear process deeply embedded in and shaped by Bolivia's distinct regional mytho-histories' incorporating 'multiple, competing, and alternative' national projects (p. 97). The contribution of Angus McNelly to this volume also offers an insightful account of the development of the regional autonomy movement as political-economic 'socio-historic bloc' that builds on transient processes of class alliances.

This multidimensional resistance to the MAS found an influential expression in social protest. In line with the conceptualization of social movements as an organizing process, these movements encompass a plurality of grievances, demands and actors, with the vague common denominator of being 'anti-MAS'. Although they condensed in the slogan 'Morales' resignation and democracy' amidst the alleged electoral fraud, the reasons behind the widespread social protests in November 2019 were more complex. I differentiate between a set of grievances of more legitimate nature around issues of democracy and the less legitimate vested interests.

Building on the theoretical tenets of 'protest State', the rise of these social movements in the first category answers to the combination of insufficient representation and increasing resource mobilization. The 'democratic' demands reflect the promises and high expectations that were generated by the 'government of social movements' and the 'indigenous State' (Postero 2017) in relation to its relative (and realistic) capacity to fulfil them. The economic bonanza under the Morales administration played a double role in this regard. It inflated the otherwise accurate perception that the State went through a period of unprecedented growth and institutional strength, and it increased the citizen's access to resources to become aware and mobilize around demands. A significant example of this is the launch of Bolivia's own telecommunication satellite Tupac Katari in 2013, that extended communication and internet services to remote populations while making it widely accessible by reducing consumer costs.

A first set of 'democratic' grievances reflect the local resistance to the implementation of large infrastructural and neo-extractivist projects that were perceived as the betrayal of the State discourse of defence of indigenous rights and the rights of Mother Earth. The TIPNIS-conflict is emblematic. The governmental plan to build a highway through a protected area and indigenous territory mobilized the local indigenous population, under the leadership of Fernando Vargas, around 'essentialised meanings of indigenous identity … to attain legitimacy for historical claims to territorial and political rights' (Perreault and Green 2013).[3] It was soon joined by the leader of the Confederación de los Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano, Confederation of the Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (CIDOB), a painful dissension at the social movement base of support of MAS. The movement achieved nationwide attention and support thanks to extensive although politicized media coverage,[4] expanding social protest under a plurality of actors, such as urban youngsters, ecologists, feminists, Indianists and cultural activists (Rivera Cusicanqui 2015).

This reflects the increased resources of the citizenry to become aware and mobilize around demands. In addition, cognizant of the destabilizing and delegitimizing effect of the conflict, the political opposition moved quickly to support the movement, illustrated by the unlikely alliance between Adolfo Chávez with Santa Cruz opposition leader Ruben Costas, who in 2008 had supported an illegal autonomy referendum with an extremely racist content. In the 2014 elections, the fraction of CIDOB headed by Chávez supported Costas' *Movimiento Demócrata Social* (MDS) (Social Democrat Movement), the parallel fraction headed by Melva Hurtado supported MAS, Fernando Vargas was the presidential ticket of opposition alliance Green Party, and indigenous CONAMAQ leading representative Rafael Quispe, having broken with MAS over this conflict, allied with the Frente de Unidad Nacional (National Unity Front) pertaining to businessman Samuel Doria Medina. Aside from the 'autonomy vs. co-optation' discussion, the social movement as an organizing process was successful in its aim to stop the construction of the highway.

Another example is the mobilizations headed by the *Comité Cívico Potosinista* (COMCIPO) (Civic Committee of Potosí) in 2010, 2015 and 2019. One of the poorest provinces of Bolivia, and in line with its colonial past, the economic activity of Potosí heavily depends on external actors: the demand for minerals and international tourism. During the first years of the Morales administration, the mining sector experienced an upturn due to the swelling global demand, leading to increased exploitation by transnationals in the mines of San Cristóbal and San Bartolomé, and posing a serious threat to the local communities' access to water. As the development of the province lagged behind, the sense of undelivered promises turned into political dissatisfaction erupting into weeks-long strikes in 2010 and 2015. The demands were chiefly material in nature, including unfulfilled promises of constructing hospitals, an airport and land reform, next to an increase of the benefits of the exports of resources for the region. On a deeper level, they reflected the perceived failure of the MAS government to radically transform the country's economy, maintaining its dependence on the export of raw natural resources and foreign capital investment, a sentiment shared by the local youth that otherwise supported the MAS (Colectivo Lucha de Clases 2017). In both stances, the slogan of regional autonomy resurfaced. By July 2019, in the run-up to the national election, under the leadership of Marco Antonio Pumari, COMCIPO joined other regional civic committees demanding that Morales decline his candidature. Pumari's national profile increased when he led another COMCIPO strike weeks before the election, demanding

the annulment of the joint venture between the government and the German firm ACI for the exploitation and industrialization of lithium. The mobilization claimed that the conditions were detrimental to the Potosí province and its population. These soon conflated with the ones alleging electoral fraud and demanding Morales' resignation following the October 2019 election, catapulting Pumari to the national stage as one of the leaders of the general upsurge. Morales eventually dissolved the joint venture in early November, probably in the hope to appease the COMCIPO movement against him, proving once again the effectiveness of the social movement in Bolivia.

A second set of 'democratic' grievances revolved around the state of democracy in Bolivia, pointing more specifically to the poor performance of State institutions and its deterioration into an authoritarian regime. Corruption was a recurring theme as many cases were brought to light and were widely disseminated by media outlets. The Indigenous Fund case, involving funds aimed for the development of indigenous peoples and implicating social movement organizations' leadership and State authorities, was particularly painful. Although admitted by the government, the slow progress of the judicial process resulting in low convictions, discredited the MAS administration as another sign of arbitrary use of the judiciary. The government's attempts to reform and 'democratise' the traditionally weak judiciary system with elected judges were perceived as a move towards undermining its independence from the executive power.

'Democratic' grievances also developed around Morales' fourth candidature. Interviews held shortly after the election in October 2019 and in January 2020 with a variety of actors, including MAS members and supporters, former public authorities and members of the anti-MAS *Pititas* movement, coincided that the 21 February 2016 referendum constituted an inflexion point. At Morales' first defeat at the ballots since 2002, a thin majority of Bolivians voted against a constitutional reform that would allow him to run for president for the fourth consecutive time. During the period leading up to the referendum, the political opposition successfully pitched the NO campaign in the media as a 'citizen mobilization', finding resonance far beyond the traditional opposition of the urban upper classes. It appealed to new segments of the middle class, particularly the so-called 'Evo generation' youngsters who had come of age during a period of economic stability and growth as well as of significant reduction of poverty and inequality, and that would cast a vote for the first time in 2016 and 2019. As Achtenberg pointed out (2016), the MAS discourse of transformation and revolution gradually changed into one of pragmatism

and stability that could not fully appeal to the youth's aspirations. To many of them, the elongated presidency of Evo Morales, the only one they could remember, appeared indeed as a sign of deterioration of democracy. The political fatigue of the relation with its social base after more than a decade in government was also reflected in the NO campaign support by dissidents of MAS. Detracting union and social leaders articulated severe criticism against Morales, accusing him of bringing the country further down the road of authoritarianism. These sentiments were confirmed to some and further spread to others when a ruling by the Constitutional Court allowed the fourth candidature of Morales in November 2017.

The successful attempt by the MAS administration to bypass the results of the '21F' incited a new social movement in defence of democracy around the slogans *Bolivia dijo NO* (Bolivia said NO) and *Mi voto se respeta* (My vote must be respected). In the months previous to the Constitutional Court ruling, the movement mobilized thousands of people in different cities of the country. By this time, it had become clear that the working class and indigenous face of social protest had found a new subject in the (new) middle class, wealthy and 'white'. Although at the level of formal politics the issue was settled within the margins of the law, the consecutive mobilizations both against and in favour of the Morales candidature demonstrated that the issue still needed to be settled at the level of street politics, with the important detail that it concerned an issue capable of unifying the opposition. As the 2019 elections moved closer, rallies continued. Despite the fact that most polls previous to the election showed Morales as the favoured choice, or perhaps because of it, eventually the discourse around the alleged authoritarianism and lack of legitimacy of his candidature started to be transferred to the electoral process, questioning the independence of the electoral court, and warning against an upcoming electoral fraud. Here too was the movement successful as this suspicion was amplified by (social) media to become a widespread belief: by September 2019 68% of the population believed electoral fraud would occur (Página Siete 2019).

A third strand of resistance emanates from the vested interests of an economic elite displaced from political power, accounting for the more elitist, racist and classist face of the opposition that sees the MAS 'process of change' as the loss of privilege and position in Bolivian society (see Goodale 2020). These grievances heartened mobilizations around the slogan of autonomy during the constituent period, with severe expressions of racist violence leading eventually to its decline (Gustafson 2009, Farthing 2019, Valdivia 2019). Its most recent articulation

is found in the ultra-right-wing *Comité Cívico Pro-Santa Cruz* (Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee). It represents the Santa Cruz elite that consolidated first as approximately 40 families during the rubber boom to later include large landowners as the region became the largest agricultural exporter (Farthing, 2019), also connected to foreign, predominantly Brazilian, capital (Mckay 2020). After 2009, a series of agreements between the MAS government and the agro-business served to appease resistance, creating a 'State-capital alliance' that favoured the agro-business interests while reassuring MAS of its political power (Mckay 2020). They turned out to be but a truce in a struggle to maintain and regain political power tainted by regional, racists and classist sentiments. The Comité engrossed the '21F' and 'Bolivia dijo NO' movements and catapulted the leadership of Luis Fernando Camacho to the national stage. Days before the election in a multitude *cabildo* (rally), Camacho claimed that electoral fraud would occur and called for civilian disobedience in the event of a MAS victory while flagging federalism (Correo del Sur 2019). He led the mobilizations in the eastern region after the 2019 election, staging a dramatic delivery of Morales' letter of resignation and return of the bible to the governmental palace (Infobae 2019), as well as playing a dubious role in the events leading to the ascension of Jeanine Áñez to the presidency (Pando 2020). Later, he bragged about his father's role in convincing the police and military to turn against Morales (Erbol 2019).

The fall of Morales and the Añez government

The so-called '*Pititas*' (Little Ropes)[5] movement denotes the continuation of the social protest that preceded the 2019 election, in which the above-sketched demands conflated around the claim of electoral fraud and Morales' resignation. The movement constitutes the result of chiefly mid-term accumulation of grievances that found increased expression in the form of social movements. By means of social protest, it advanced and sustained the narrative of abuse of power and electoral fraud, genuinely believing it was enacting the recuperation of democracy. The roles of Carlos Mesa, Luis Fernando Camacho, the police, the military and the preliminary report of the OAS audit were more decisive to the fall of Morales. However, the 'Pititas', by the validity and authenticity inferred to the social movement format, was key in legitimizing the events that advanced and consolidated Áñez in power amidst the weakened 'contentious power' of the MAS.

Thus, after its decline in 2009, the opposition experienced a recovery and re-composition around old and new grievances. It evolved into

a political network (Kenis and Schneider 1991, Börzel 1997, Bogason and Musso 2006) that brought together a variety of actors behind a common goal, mirroring the political network conformed by MAS behind the political project of 'the process of change' (Valdivia 2019). Both show the gearing of actors and processes across the domains of institutional politics and street politics. As an example, in the run-up to the 2019 elections, the political alliance *Bolivia dice NO* (Bolivia says NO) was created in a very literal attempt to connect the *Bolivia dijo NO* movement to political parties. In the same vein, Carlos Mesa's Comunidad Ciudadana also coordinated political parties and other civil society movements called *plataformas ciudadanas* (citizen platforms) into an electoral option. The internal differences prevented the creation of a single anti-MAS electoral front. But the very specific aim to topple Morales (not even MAS) intensified the mobilization of resources and actors as it became clear that this would not be achieved by electoral means, successfully unifying in social protest behind that common objective.[6] Thus, the October and November 2019 events display the clash between these two large political networks, transiting between institutionalized and street politics and overflowing borders, where the one lead by the oppositional forces obviously got the upper hand. The social protest was crucial in installing and reinforcing the narrative of the electoral fraud, while inferring legitimacy and investing a veil of 'lawfulness' to political processes and moves which, certainly in retrospect, can be rightly characterized as coup d'état.

If the October and November 2019 events leading to Jeanine Áñez's presidency remain confusing or controversial to some – in regard to whether or not a coup took place – the blatant undemocratic performance of her administration has left little room for discussion. From the beginning it was made clear that the Áñez government, far from its formal role as caretaker, set out to reverse the political course of the previous government (Wolf 2020), overtly exceeding its mandate by means of an authoritarian crackdown on racist violence (Farthing 2020). The human rights violations and political persecutions have been widely denounced and reported, including reports by the International Human Rights Clinic (2020), Human Rights Watch (2020), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (2020). The 'pacification' in November 2019 came at the cost of at least 22 deaths of protesters who were massacred by the military in the locations of Sacaba and Senkata. After that, in the words of Stefanoni (2020) 'revanchism won out over institutionalism, repression over inclusion, and the chaotic and deficient new administration was quickly overwhelmed by

the crisis generated by Covid-19…' In addition, flagrant corruption scandals accompanied with impunity have marked the Áñez administration (Página Siete 2020), featuring the governmental acquisition of 170 highly overprized ventilators to attend COVID-19 patients that proved useless upon arrival (Miranda 2020). This has led outspoken critics Morales as Pablo Solón (2020) and María Galindo (2020), to characterize the Áñez administration as 'the worst government ever' after the bloody dictatorship of Luis García Meza.

The Áñez government presented an effort to recover the political power by a displaced oligarchic economic elite (Stefanoni 2020), with a clear expression in the (agro-) business elite of the Santa Cruz region (see also the contribution of Bret Gustafson to this volume) that, as soon as it took over, revealed the same vices it had denoted during the 90s, this time as right-wing populism (Molina 2020). It can be argued that the legitimate social movements that revolved around issues of democracy were co-opted or instrumentalized by the radical right-wing linked to vested interests, although in consequence with my own analysis, this is more a political opinion or too simplistic an academic inference. However, it is a fact that once the common objective of removing Morales from power was achieved, the political network started to disintegrate. This is reflected in the fragmentations within the institutional domain of the government and in the distancing of those sectors of society that gradually saw the betrayal of the democratic grievances for which they had mobilized. The high expectation of the restoration of democracy, efficiency and reconciliation were met with quite the opposite, leading to many frustrated citizens to opt for the MAS in the 2020 elections (Peñaranda 2020).

In 2020, the alliances between different sectors and actors of society as two opposed political networks reflected in the competing narratives 'fraud vs. coup', went through inverse processes. As the right-wing political network deteriorated and fragmented, the MAS political network with a core of social movements recuperated and unified amidst political repression and siege. This happened at the level of institutional politics in the MAS majority Assembly under the leadership of Eva Copa, but perhaps, more importantly, at the level of the streets. The salient image being the ten days nationwide blockade at the end of July 2020, staged by the base of support of MAS that imposed the immovable election date of 18 October and terminated the uncertainty of the electoral moment. The dissimilar developments reflect a qualitative difference between the two political networks. The organizational structures supporting the popular movements – -e.g. the indigenous social movement organizations conforming to Pacto de

Unidad, the *Central Obrera Bolivia* (COB) (Bolivian Workers Center), the Coca growers confederations, etc. – are the historical result of decades-long struggles, with a more 'organic', 'grass root' and consolidated nature. These have forged the longer perspective project of 'the process of change' that forms a common base of political articulation providing a stronger and notably more resilient substance to MAS. In comparison, the right-wing coalitions have proved more circumstantial and brittle. To see this, one needs but to take a quick look at the less than one year in power of the right-wing where the State was (legally and illegally) put in service of vested interests, leaving many of the demands around democracy (literally) postponed. The fractures in the right-wing government have been much deeper as expressed in the many episodes of conflict, contradiction and crisis within the executive power (Opinión 2020). Its weak substance is further demonstrated by the fact that even the electoral moment and the imminent MAS victory did not produce an alliance behind one candidature, let alone a unifying political proposal for the 2020 elections.[7] Its political project added to nothing more than the fall of Morales and the MAS, and even when it became clear these were not one and the same, it remained unable to articulate anything more than a rejection of MAS.

Conclusion

The results of the 2020 elections presuppose a continuation of the MAS political project: 'the process of change'. However, the MAS returns to the government under very different leadership and before a very different and complicated scenario. For the first time it will have to govern in austerity, while trying to emerge from a multidimensional crisis marked still by much uncertainty. Polarization may lose some of its instrumental value in the post-election scenario, but it is clear that long and mid-term social incisions have been deepened in an already fragmented society. Even before Luis Arce was installed, protests had already taken place. Some of these were staged before the barracks supplicating for a military government, indicating the extremism of some positions.

A powerful economic elite resents having been once again displaced from power and has demonstrated to be willing to use any means available to regain it. The (upper) middle-class democratic grievances are likely to continue under the new MAS leadership. They both have incorporated street politics. In addition, the Covid-19 crisis is bringing and will continue to bring increasing economic and social pressure, particularly to the constituencies of the MAS that, after the transition,

demand restitution and compliance of 'their' government. Luis Arce has expressed the aim to lead a unifying and conciliatory government, but it remains to be seen how these centrifugal forces will be integrated, or at least contained.

The deteriorating economic situation may reduce organizational resources to some, but will aggravate grievances to most. In the context of weak representative institutions, social protest will continue as an effective form of citizen participation while the 2019–2020 crisis shows that this can come at a high cost, turning the political process belligerent and polarized. The new government will need to find ways to deal with it. The Morales government received wide criticism for weakening popular social movements by means of authoritarian, populist and co-optative practices. Even if the weaker structuration and articulation could be linked to higher levels of representativeness in State institutions (Moseley 2018), the surfacing of old and new grievances is to be expected in Bolivia's 'protest State'. Although social movements are not on their own sufficient or all-determining, institutional politics are vulnerable to social protest, and so it seems that no political force will be able to govern without sufficient 'contentious power'. So much have we learned from the Morales government. Since there is no register for incorporating social movements in the political process, we are bound to the experiment, improvisation and mistake. The question is if both State institutions and political actors, including the social movements, can learn and improve.

It must also be noted that deficient institutions are not the whole story. The plurality and diversity, and the historical schisms that characterize Bolivian society make you wonder of the possibility of a system able to capture it all. Hence the 'transits' and 'overflows' between State and society, for which social movements appear to be key. Attaining a certain balance between institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics seems to be necessary. This remains a challenge ahead.

Notes

1 The social movements organizations organized a series of consultation and deliberative events throughout the country. With the aid of national NGO's, they collected grass roots proposals and integrated them into one complete draft proposal (see also Garcés et al. 2010).
2 The concessions related to land reform were perceived as a betrayal by many MAS constituents, and remained a recurrent point of critique of MAS failure to address structural sources of exclusion and subjugation.
3 See also Lucero (2008), Fabricant (2012), McNeish (2013), Burman (2014), Canessa (2014), Laing (2015), Postero (2017), Fabricant and Postero (2015), Valdivia (2019).

4 The growing influence of the media in politics and its use as a political instrument is a widespread phenomenon (see for example Kitzberger 2010, 2012) also in Bolivia (Exeni 2010, ONADEM 2011). In the Latin American region, the media traditionally maintains close links to political elites (Fox, 1988). In the case of Bolivia, an outdated media law – the Print Law of 1925 – serves as a carte blanche for a media sector dominated by private-commercial actors and in the absence of public media (Exeni 2010). Attempts to reform the Print Law by the Morales administration have been met with resistance by the sector amidst accusations of censorship (see also Lupien 2013 and Valdivia 2019).
5 The name resulted from Morales' disdainful reference to the little ropes the mobilized middle- and upper-class citizens had to span over the streets of their neighbourhoods, as they were unable to man all blockades.
6 This characterization appears to correspond with the result of the 2020 election. Indigenous and democratic demands, after Áñez, seem better guarded by MAS in the eyes of in 2019 dissident indigenous and (lower middle class), illustrated by its increase from 47% to 55%. The democratic upper middle class and elite demands are represented by 30% of Comunidad Ciudadana. The 14% of Luis Fernando Camacho's Creemos, represents the radical populist right-wing minority of above all (agro-business) elite economic interests that build on historical regional sentiments.
7 It has been difficult for the opposition to compete with MAS policy in terms of content, particularly due to the MAS government's economic success. That explains why the political campaign has concentrated in character attacks, particularly on the address of Morales.

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