

CULTURAL RESILIENCE, IDENTITY AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF POLITICAL POWER IN BOLIVIA

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Abstract

On January 22, 2006, history was made in Bolivia when Evo Morales was sworn in as Bolivia's first indigenous president, becoming the first leader of a rural-based social movement to govern a Latin American nation. Against the historical backdrop of a brutal colonial regime, elitist statehood, revolution and, most recently, neoliberal structural adjustment, the resilience of Bolivia's original peoples is striking. This paper explores key events and actors in a decades-long struggle through which Bolivia's marginalized indigenous population succeeded in gaining the most powerful voice in the national political arena – a voice that had been silenced for over 500 years. With the political maturation of peasant and indigenous organizations, Bolivia's condition as a multilingual, plurinational state, with individual, community and territorially-based rights to land and natural resources is increasingly important to its continued existence as a nation-state. The concept of ethno-ecological identity – a social identity shaped by the unique human-environment relationships of highland and lowland peoples – is key to understanding the dominant political alliances in Bolivia today, and visions for the future. The extent to which strength and unity in diversity makes for a viable and durable political alternative to Western-imposed notions of development remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that it marks a fundamental and irreversible shift in the Bolivian political landscape. Based in part on in-depth interviews with campesino and indigenous leaders, intellectuals and political activists in Bolivia during the period leading up to the 2005 election, this paper identifies critical elements in the evolution from Andean cultural resilience to indigenous political capital, with the goal of informing similar processes underway in other parts of the world.

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1. Introduction

In just over two decades, Bolivia has undergone socio-political changes so profound that the year 2006 may be remembered as a defining moment in Bolivia's history, on the scale of the 1952 National Revolution. On January 22, Evo Morales Ayma was sworn in as President of the Republic, the first indigenous leader of a rural social movement to be elected to a Latin American presidency, and the first Bolivian president to win an absolute majority since electoral democracy was reinstated in 1982¹.

Bolivia's *campesino*², indigenous and original peoples (*pueblos originarios*) make up 60 percent of the country's 8.8 million population. The earlier 2002 presidential election saw the peasant – indigenous coalition known as the MAS-IPSP³ propelled to national importance as the second most voted-for party in the country. The slim majority won by Washington-raised Bolivian mining heir Gonzalo (“Goni”) Sánchez de Lozada, bolstered by a sophisticated North American-style election campaign managed by a team of high profile U.S. consultants⁴, could not last long in the face of unpopular economic policies, mounting urban unemployment, acute rural problems and a generalized crisis of legitimacy of the traditional political parties. Sánchez de Lozada managed to sustain his tenuous hold on the presidency a mere fourteen months. On October 17, 2003, he was forced to resign and left the country amidst nation-wide opposition to the government's plan to export gas to the United States via Chile, a decision which sparked mass popular mobilizations followed by the violent repression of protesters, elevating the number of deaths through state – civil society confrontation during his brief term in office to 135.

When vice-president Carlos Mesa Gisbert subsequently assumed the presidency, it was uncertain whether the government would complete its five-year mandate to 2007. This was not to be. Mesa found himself in an untenable position as the clamour for constitutional reform and nationalization of the strategic hydrocarbon (oil and natural gas) sector peaked anew, while rural demands went unattended. Mesa resigned the presidency on June 5, 2005. A caretaker government set the date for early general elections on December 18, 2005. The election took place as planned with one of the highest voter turnout rates in recent history (85 percent of registered voters voted), and the predictable yet still stunning victory of the predominantly rural-indigenous MAS-IPSN (Movement to Socialism – Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the People) with a full 53 percent of the popular vote (see Crabtree 2006).

It is important to note that it is the “political instrument” (IPSN) born of Bolivia's peasant (*campesino*) organizations that is the relevant subject of analysis. The re-constituted *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS), which is the simpler acronym and reflects a political ideology not incongruent with dominant currents within the peasant-indigenous movement, in fact subsumed

¹ Between 1964 and 1982, Bolivia's political scene was dominated by a succession of military governments.

² *Campesinos* are smallhold peasant farmers.

³ The Spanish acronym for *Movimiento al Socialismo – Instrumento Político por la Soberanía del Pueblo*.

⁴ The acclaimed documentary film by Rachel Boynton titled *Our Brand is Crisis* (2005) reveals in startling detail the “democracy for hire”, purely technocratic approach to winning a political leadership race that was employed by Bolivia's neoliberalist MNR party during the 2002 presidential election campaign.

an existing, legally registered political party in order to participate in the 1999 municipal elections.⁵ The MAS proposes the “re-founding” of a multiethnic and pluricultural sovereign state, with far-reaching Constitutional reform providing the framework for an ambitious, community-based national development project.

What are some of the key factors that explain the emergence and consolidation of the MAS as Bolivia’s principal political force? One explanation is found in the opening up of political space at the local municipal level through decentralization reforms, which provided fertile if unforeseen ground for cultivating indigenous political leadership. A second set of factors relates to Bolivia’s history of working class militancy, strengthened by and leveraged through a single, national labour confederation (the COB) that incorporates a wide range of otherwise politically powerless sectors, from domestic workers to university students, campesinos, miners and schoolteachers, to name a few. Additionally, the profusion of rural livelihood issues – eroded and fragmented plots of land in the highlands, land trafficking and incursion into traditional indigenous territories in the lowlands, and military-police intervention in coca⁶ producing zones – reached a peak following Bolivia’s dramatic turn to neoliberalism in 1985, and combined to form the set of “acute peasant grievances” that have sparked rural uprisings around the world and throughout history (see Wolf, 1969). In Bolivia, however, a strategy of resistance more suited to the present conjuncture was already in preparation – the construction of an autonomous political “instrument”, born of the campesino organizations but open to alliances with others who shared the same fundamental goal: sovereignty for Bolivia, and democratic rights for Bolivia’s multiethnic majority.

In this paper I suggest that, in addition to the above, the concept of ethno-ecological identity – a social identity shaped by the unique human-environment relationships of highland and lowland peoples – is key to understanding the dominant political alliances in Bolivia today, and visions for the future. The articulation of diverse indigenous identities linked by a common history of exploitation, marginalization and – perhaps most importantly – resistance, led to the unification and mobilization of resources that might otherwise have remained divided. As a central factor in the restructuring of national political power, the cultural resilience of Bolivia’s original peoples created ideal conditions for unleashing processes of identity formation and the development of critical alliances between highland campesino and lowland indigenous peoples, and their non-indigenous allies.⁷

⁵ The political instrument initially called the “Assembly for the Sovereignty of the People” (ASP) and later the IPSN was denied political party status (“legal personage”) by Bolivia’s National Electoral Court, obliging the campesino organizations to participate in a coalition of the United Left (IU) in the municipal elections of 1995 and the national elections of 1997, before gaining official party status as the MAS in 1999 (see Burgoa 2006).

⁶ Coca is an ancient traditional plant, the leaf of which is used for medicinal and ritual purposes, as well as for alleviating hunger (see Weatherford, 1988:199-200). Chemical processing of the coca leaf produces the illicit drug cocaine, making coca-growing a key element of Bolivia’s underground economy, an important livelihood option for peasant farmers, and the object of increased U.S.-backed eradication efforts.

⁷ It is useful here to point out that the use of the terms *campesino* and *indígena* to describe Bolivia’s native peoples reflects historically ascribed roles and organizational affiliation more than anything else. After the 1952 revolution, *campesino* provided an acceptable substitute for the pejorative *indio* (Indian) for the highland peoples, while *indígena* served the strategic need of forging a collective identity for lowland peoples (Healey 2005, 166). *Pueblos originarios* (original peoples) has emerged more recently to describe people in highland communities outside of the agrarian syndicate structure.

2. The Roots of Ethno-Ecological Identity

To the dismay, or horror, of many Bolivians who were born in or otherwise identify with the lowland tropical and sub-tropical two-thirds of the country, Bolivia is typically perceived as a mountainous Andean nation. Thinly cloaked as “regionalism”, deep-seated discrimination along easily blurred lines of race, ethnicity and class is just one sign of the grim history that marks Bolivia, Latin America and indeed most parts of the world where indigenous peoples were subjugated by superior firepower during Europe’s Age of Discovery. Transformation from a culture of exclusion to one of inclusion, even when prescribed by legal decree⁸, is unlikely to occur as long as systemic inequality and the lack of political commitment to change remain pervasive. With the political maturation of peasant and indigenous organizations, Bolivia’s constitutionally enshrined condition as a multilingual, plurinational state, with individual, community, and territorially-based rights to land and natural resources, is of critical importance to its future as a nation-state. Therefore, any inquiry into rural social movements and political restructuring in Bolivia must be grounded in a basic understanding of the diverse ecology – the interrelations between humans and the natural environment – within which the processes of identity formation and struggles for political power are unfolding.

Defining Identity

The term identity connotes a sense of belonging that derives from shared origins or characteristics. Shared origins include having the same parents or being born in the same geographical area. Shared characteristics include a common language or livelihood, elements that are frequently (though not always) a function of origin. According to this understanding, someone that identifies or is identified as belonging to a group must share origins, characteristics or elements of both with other members of the group. Because there are so many possible combinations of origin and characteristics on the basis of which identity can be constructed, we focus here on identity that serves as a foundation for organized collective action aimed at challenging the status quo; namely, ethno-ecological identity and its role in Bolivia’s peasant-indigenous movement.

Max Weber’s (1997 [1978],18-19) understanding of ethnic group identity is similarly focused on political agency. While ethnicity is fundamentally a social category “rooted in socially perceived differences in national origin, language and/or religion” (Bates and Fratkin 1999, 457), in Weber’s view,

...ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity.

With a view to enhancing our understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and identity in Bolivia, the concept of ethno-ecological identity is advanced to explain a social identity shaped

⁸ Article 1 of Bolivia’s *Constitución Política del Estado* states: “Bolivia, free, independent, sovereign, multiethnic and pluricultural, ...based in the union and solidarity of all Bolivians”.

by the unique human-environment relationships of specific ethnic groups. Ethno-ecological identity is a concept of particular relevance because it reflects, more accurately than ethnic identity alone, the dominant political alliances, and divisions, in Bolivia today. Moreover, as an analytical construct, ethno-ecological identity is critical to understanding the challenges to and possibilities for a model of development for Bolivia constructed not 'from above and the outside', but rather 'from below and within'.

The Geo-Physical Environment

Bolivia is a landlocked tropical nation comprised of nine districts or *departamentos* (the largest sub-national political unit) and three main geographic regions, distinguished in the first instance by their extreme variation in altitude and running like three vertical strips from west to east across the country.⁹ The three regions are the Andean highlands, comprised of two mountain ranges and the high plateau that lies between them (28 percent of Bolivia's land surface), the high valley or sub-Andean region on the eastern slopes of the Andes (13 percent of the land surface), and the northern and eastern lowlands (59 percent). The first two zones share more physical and cultural linkages and are often jointly referred to as the highlands, although both are punctuated by swathes of humid, low-lying river valleys.

Within these three broad regions lies an immense array of ecosystems. The Andean highlands alone consist of several hundred ecological micro-zones in varying combinations of precipitation, topography, vegetation, and human influence, compared to only a few dozen in the Alps mountains and fewer than ten in the mountain regions of the far north (Dollfus 1986 [1978], 11; see also Luteyn and Churchill 2000). It is the region with the greatest plant diversity per unit area in the tropics and possibly the world (Luteyn and Churchill, 2000, 281). The Andes Mountains are also the site of the *altiplano*, the highest, largest and most level plateau in South America. Bordering the altiplano on the east, the Royal Cordillera is the gateway between the highlands and the remainder of Bolivia's territory. As the site of important silver and tin deposits, the zone where the altiplano meets the Cordillera formed the economic axis of colonial and republican Bolivia. By the early seventeenth century, the city of Potosí had become the chief mining centre of Latin America, so renowned in Spain for the silver extracted from its *cerro rico* that Cervantes (in *Don Quixote*) popularized the saying that any person or thing of value was 'worth a Potosí' (Galeano 1973, 31-33). La Paz, the seat of the Bolivian government¹⁰, and Oruro are the two other important urban centres that lie along this axis.

The second principal ecological zone, the high (or mesothermic) valleys is situated on the descending eastern slopes of the Royal Cordillera. With numerous fertile plains and river valleys, this area supplied maize to the highland populations in pre-Columbian times, and wheat to the mining industry after the Spanish conquest, in return for key staples grown on the altiplano including quinoa grain, potatoes and other root crops (Klein 2003, 5-7). Following Bolivia's National Revolution, most land reform was carried out in this region, and it remains the principal

⁹ Although all of Bolivia lies within the Tropic of Capricorn, significant variations in altitude produce a range of climatic conditions.

¹⁰ While the Bolivian Parliament and government ministries are located in La Paz, Sucre remains the official capital of Bolivia and the site of the Supreme Court of Justice.

area of intensive small-scale agriculture. The urban centres of Cochabamba, Sucre and Tarija are situated in large valleys with temperate climates and forested hills at the lower altitudes.

The high valleys give way to rolling foothills until finally reaching the lowland eastern and north-eastern flatlands of the *Oriente*, the most extensive but least populated region of Bolivia. The *Oriente* in turn is comprised of three distinct ecological zones characterized by an even greater number of microclimates. In the northern and central part of the *Oriente* bordering Brazil, four large rivers together with numerous smaller tributaries form part of the Amazon River system. Directly south of the Bolivia's Amazon rainforest lies the Llanos de Moxos (or Mojos), an extensive floodplain with the third largest complex of grasslands (savanna) in South America, together with humid forest and associated wetlands (Daly and Mitchell 2000). Towards the south-west, the *Oriente* landscape becomes a mix of flatlands and scattered ranges of low hills with vegetation ranging from savanna to scrub cover and tropical dry forest. The vast dry plain of the *Gran Chaco*¹¹ is the third distinct ecological zone of the eastern lowlands. The Chaco extends across Bolivia's southern border with Paraguay and Argentina, and is one of the few forested (rather than desert) transition areas between a tropical and temperate zone found anywhere (Daly and Mitchell 2000).

Highland Ethno-Ecology

The late pre-Hispanic (15th and early 16th centuries) era on the Bolivian highlands was dominated by two indigenous peoples, the Aymaras and the Quechua-speaking Incas (or Inkas), and included a number of other less populous linguistic groups. Society was structured around rural communities or *markas* (Erickson 2000, 326). Within the community, the basic landholding units were the *allyus*, corporate kin groupings made up of a few to hundreds of households, subdivided into noble and commoner classes (moieties) with regulated access to communally held land (Erickson 2000, 326; D'Altroy 2000, 359, 365). Militarily inferior but organizationally stronger than the divided Aymara nations, Inca control of the highlands was achieved under Pachakuti¹² (1438–1471) and further consolidated under Tupac Yupanqui (1471–1493) (Delgado 2002, 89; Klein 2003, 17). The language, religion and institutions of the Incas spread throughout the Lake Titicaca basin of *Qullasuyu* (or *Kollasuyo*) in what is now Bolivia, by then the western-most of the four provinces that made up the Incan realm of *Tawantinsuyu* (Land of the Four Parts). Nevertheless, Aymara society was not significantly disrupted, and its resilience is reflected in the survival today of the Aymara language and community structures, and the 25 percent of the population that are identified as ethnically Aymaran. Andean scholars also attribute this to the willingness, or necessity, of an expanding Inca state to incorporate rather than completely subjugate conquered (and at times fiercely resistant) societies (Delgado 2002, 91-96; Klein 2003; Murra and Wachtel (1986 [1978])).

¹¹ 'Chaco' is derived from the Quechua word *chaku* meaning "hunting land" (Prado cited in Daly and Mitchell 2000, 428).

¹² *Pachakuti* (or *pachacuti*) is a term of considerable significance in the Andean worldview and indigenous politics. One meaning is provided by Campbell (1987, 115, citing Szeminski 1984 and Gow 1982; see also Medina n.d., 132): "...Andean time...views temporal change in terms of a series of *pachacutis*, or cataclysms, led by representatives of Wiracocha, the Andean Creator God, who are deemed to have returned to earth to reverse the existing, unjust world order". Similarly, Choquehuanca (interview 2004) defines *pachakuti* as "the return to equilibrium".

Essential to the functioning of the Aymara, Inca and other complex societies in a difficult environment were the sociopolitical and economic relationships maintained with farmer-colonists (*mitmaq* or *mitimaes*) settled on the lower eastern slopes and valleys of the Andes, frequently in close proximity to other ethnic communities. This way of organizing space has come to be known as “vertical integration”, uniting ecologically distinct zones at widely varying altitudes into an economy and society built on the principle of complementarity (Murra cited in D’Altroy 2000, 363; Delgado 2002, 88; Murra and Wachtel 1986 [1978], 4). This allowed for production and access to a variety of crops, animal products and handicrafts through elaborate, non-market systems of exchange based on social relations, barter, labour obligations and shared access to resources. Researchers concur that such an arrangement was essential to the sustainability of human populations in the harsh Andean environment.¹³

Exchange between zones occurred through relationships based on reciprocity and redistribution. Mayer (2002, 105) defines Andean reciprocity as

...the continuous, normative exchange of services and goods between known persons, in which some time must elapse between an initial prestation and its return.¹⁴ The negotiating process between the parties, instead of being an open discussion, is covered up by ceremonial forms of behaviour. It is a social relationship that ties an individual to other individuals, an individual to social groups, producers to producers, and producers to consumers.

Thus, human insecurity in the Andes was minimized through reciprocity and vertically integrated production-consumption systems that allowed societies to be collectively self-sufficient and not reliant on external trade for their basic needs (D’Altroy 2000, 364; Murra 1986 [1978], 49).

The arrival of the Spanish in 1532 to present-day Peru, some forty years after Columbus’s 1492 landing in the Caribbean islands, was not resisted by all highland indigenous peoples. Led by Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish allied with some ethnic groups against the ruling Incas, and also played a role in a civil war already underway between separate Inca factions, betraying and executing the victor Atahualpa in the end. Only in the latter part of the decade, with the “increasingly odious extraction of surplus resources from the Indian elite and peasantry”, did a period of sustained, loosely united but ultimately unsuccessful resistance to the colonial regime ensue (Klein 2003, 29-30).

It was the discovery of Potosí’s rich silver veins in 1545 that generated serious interest in what is now Bolivia. Three years later, the establishment of the city of La Paz in Aymara territory secured the important transportation route connecting Potosí with Cuzco in Lower Peru, facilitating the flow of precious metals to Lima and on to Spain (Klein 2003, 31-33).

¹³ D’Altroy (2000, 383) notes that verticality as a productive regime is not unique to the Andes, but it also a traditional practice in some parts of Japan, Hawaii, north-western North America, Nepal, California and Switzerland, though distances between zones were much greater in the Andes.

¹⁴ The time lapse between reciprocal prestations underscores a fundamental principle of Andean reciprocity: that it is one party’s *need*, not the other party’s availability to *provide*, that determines the timing of the exchange (Medina n.d., 140).

In an effort to replicate the Inca system of indirect rule, the Spanish sought to preserve the ayllu structure of social relationships, political leadership, and access to land (Collier et al. 1985, 182; Klein 2003a, 34). So-called free peasant communities were obliged to render goods and services as tribute directly to the Spanish crown. Other communities were organized into districts. Groups of people – and in practice, their lands as well – were sub-divided into *encomiendas*, the control over which was granted to prominent colonists (*encomenderos*). The *encomendero* was supposed to bring Christianity and Spanish customs to the indigenous peoples, and he in turn was entitled to peasant labour and production, on the land or in the mines. Under Spanish Viceroy Toledo (1572-1576), rural households were relocated or “reduced” into a smaller number of larger communities so that they could be managed and taxed more efficiently (Klein 2003, 35-37). Though the process took over one hundred years to consolidate, the reforms impacted directly on the ayllu form of social organization and settlement. The *reducciones* were permanent settlements that had the effect of grouping people from various ayllus into one indigenous community, at the same time separating them from their *mitmaq* (colonists) in other regions. Settlement sizes increased from an average of 142 people per community to about 2,900 each. Even though the ayllu structure was not completely destroyed, and lowland and valley communities remained linked to the highland core ayllus, the nucleated “indigenous community” structure eventually came to dominate in the Andes.

Toledo also completely overhauled a mining system that relied on increasingly labour intensive methods of mineral extraction as more accessible surface deposits were depleted. In order to maintain high levels of output, a more onerous form of the pre-Columbian *m’ita* system of labour tribute was instituted. Some 13,500 indigenous men (or their wives and children) were forced to work each year on a rotating basis in the mines of Potosí in the peak production period from the 1570s to the 1650s. While the atrocities suffered by colonized peoples around the world and throughout history are already widely documented, the over-exploitation and abuse of highland indigenous peoples in the mining areas of Bolivia and Peru was particularly severe, “obliged as they were to produce without surcease” in extremely harsh conditions in order to generate the permanent surplus required to sustain the colonial regime and enrich the Spanish Crown (Sweet 1995, 17; see also Collier et al. 1985, 192; Galeano 1973). The colonial regime was therefore entirely dependent on the super-exploitation of indigenous labour for its mining enterprise, and the agricultural production needed to support it.

Lowland Ethno-Ecology

The pre-Conquest ecology of lowland Bolivia was very different from that of the highlands, and is key to understanding subsequent differences in the Colonial and post-Colonial history of the two regions. The Incas were unable to penetrate and subdue areas not dependent primarily on peasant agriculture, the surplus of which supported the non-food-producing sectors of the population that were essential to the functioning of the Inca state. Thus it was a “complex combination of hunters and gatherers, village agriculturalists, and even multivillage states” (Klein 2003a, 20-22), comprised of a large but indeterminate number of ethnic groups possibly numbering in the hundreds, that formed a virtual barrier to the eastward expansion of the *Pax Incaica*. These sedentary, semi-sedentary and nomadic groups are represented today by, among others, the Guaraní, Chiquitano, Ayoreo and Guarayo peoples in the southern and central eastern

lowlands, and the Mojenos and Sirionó in Bolivia's north eastern Amazon region. Echazu (2003, citing various authors) estimates that there are 24 distinct groups (or nations) remaining in the Amazonian and Chaco regions, with a population of approximately 250,000, or about 5.3 percent of Bolivia's indigenous population.

With regard to indigenous politico-economic structures in the lowlands, Temple (2003) argues that relationships based on reciprocity were not limited to Andean peoples but rather were the foundation of political authority in all New World indigenous societies, without exception.¹⁵ In Temple's view, understanding reciprocity, which was and remains *the* central feature of indigenous social systems, is essential not only to developing a sound interpretation of the past, but also to constructing a viable political alternative for the future – one that recognizes and incorporates age-old communal systems of reciprocity.

In the eastern lowlands, contact between indigenous peoples and Spanish explorers seeking gold and a northwest route to Peru dates from as early as 1516 (Temple 2002, 27). Basing her analysis on first-person historical accounts, Temple (2002, 28-35) describes the typical pattern of these early encounters. After first being warmly received, fêted and fed by their New World hosts, the navigators eventually wore out their welcome and, at times on the brink of starvation, overcame indigenous resistance and took by force what had once been freely given. Entire communities were exterminated or enslaved. Continued efforts by the Spanish to discover mineral resources in the east proved fruitless, although indigenous peoples were captured and transported west to work in the mines.

Over time, the eastern lowlands were transformed from hinterland into new frontier as silver production in the core areas entered a period of decline beginning in the mid-1600s (Klein 2003, 58). Increased European contact in the eastern lowlands occurred during the period of the Missions (1682-1767). Jesuit priests from Spain began the process of Catholic evangelizing by grouping together people of different ethnicities, based on the model of the *reducción*. In the missions, people were obliged to adopt the language of whatever ethnic group was numerically predominant, or some variation of it (Parapaino 2002, 38; Sweet 1995, 23). The cultural ramifications of *reducción* are considered to have been particularly significant for the many less sedentary ethnic groups in the eastern lowlands. In contrast to the highlands, most lowland peoples were not accustomed to concentrated permanent settlement, nor was the hot, humid climate conducive to it, with accumulating wastes and infectious diseases contributing to the death of millions of indigenous peoples (Sweet 1995, 13). The Jesuits had less success in establishing missions among the Guaraní of southern Bolivia and Paraguay (Temple 2002, 41), considered to be among those native peoples who most fiercely resisted colonization (Albó 2002, 10). Even by the end of the colonial period, the Spanish were unable to exercise direct control over the lowland plains of the Gran Chaco (Klein 2003, 33).

Writing from the perspective of the “new mission history”, which is primarily concerned with rectifying the missionary-centred, sanitized or idealized accounts of Catholic evangelizing in the Americas, Sweet (1995) provides a richly detailed overview of the impact of the colonial era missions on Latin America's lowland indigenous peoples. While allowing that mission life

¹⁵ Like other leading anthropologists and economic historians studying indigenous reciprocity, Temple draws on the seminal contributions of Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942).

presented both constraints and opportunities for native peoples, the evidence is overwhelming that for most of them, the experience was “a bitter disappointment, a dead end, and an early grave” (Sweet 1995, 45). In Sweet’s view, the most devastating consequences for indigenous peoples stemmed from seven elements introduced or aggravated by the mission regime: disease, malnutrition, regimentation, discipline and punishment, deculturation, infantilization, and alienation from nature. The combination of these factors led to a huge decline in the lowland indigenous population to the extent that “in demographic terms none of these [missionized] peoples anywhere in the Americas have subsequently recovered” (Sweet 1995, 12).

The mission regime was a standard bearer for Western beliefs of the time that saw women (as well as indigenous men) and nature as wild, brute things (see Merchant, 1989 [1980]). Because native peoples did not differentiate between goods of greater or lesser economic value when engaging in reciprocal exchange, they were considered irrational, inferior beings who, quite possibly, were not human at all (Temple 2003, 32-33). They needed to be tamed or dominated before they could be exploited in the interest of accumulation, expansion and trade. The once multiple and authority-imbued role of women in community activities and agricultural production was reduced to reproductive, domestic and artisanal functions. Indigenous social *morés* were, then, completely at odds with the interests of the colonizers, whose primary intent was “the accumulation of the value of exchange” (Temple 2003, 24); that is, the generation of profit. Under the missionaries, nature – once a powerful spiritual force that was revered, tended and feared – was recast as a commodity to be systematically exploited as efficiently as possible. In Sweet’s (1995, 31) words, the mission Indians

...lost their sense of membership in nature and became small-time, generally not very successful exploiters of nature. They learned to hunt and fish and harvest more than they needed to feed their families, to waste that which they could neither use nor sell. They learned to plant in rows, to chop down all the trees when clearing a field rather than planting around the stumps of a few. In time...they came to threaten the species that had once fed them, to destroy the forests, to provoke the erosion and hardening of the soil itself by altering landscapes to conform to ill-conceived human designs.

The most significant impact of the missions on lowland indigenous peoples may have been their conversion “from a spirituality of participation to a monotheism of powerlessness and exploitation” (Sweet 1995, 31). This was exacerbated by a process referred to as “infantilization”. By subjecting people to a completely foreign and rigid belief system that physically punished the merest transgression while rewarding compliance and passivity, adults were deprived of their dignity, and children were molded to remain childlike as adults (Sweet 1995, 27-28). It may also be inferred that a significant expansion of humankind’s ecological footprint in Bolivia’s eastern lowlands can be traced to this time. Thus, deculturation combined with the enormous loss of life and commercial exploitation of natural resources significantly altered the ecology of parts of Bolivia’s eastern lowlands.

When Bolivia – named for Venezuelan-born “Liberator” Simón Bolívar – gained independence from Spain in 1825, nearly three-quarters of the estimated 1.1 million population were

indigenous¹⁶ (Collier et al. 1985, 239). Historians concur that the economic exploitation of native peoples during the Republican era was even more extreme than in colonial times (Collier et al. 1985, 192, 211). The relative political autonomy of free communities was incompatible with the republican vision of national development through the more intensive exploitation of rural land and labour. Even when genuine attempts were made to abolish the oppression of peasants and servants by their mixed race (*mestizo*) or white *patrones*, the elites usually managed to close off livelihood alternatives for their serfs and dependents, in effect resigning them to personal bondage for the rest of their lives (Mayer 2002, 117).

In the south-east, indigenous communities came under increasing attack as the new state “promoted private property rights in the llanos, deprived the nomadic plainsmen of their traditional common usages, and reduced them to the status of rural labourers” (Collier et al. 1985, 211). In the Bolivian Chaco, hunter-gatherer peoples including the Tobas, Maticos and Choretas were especially hard hit by republican policies that sought economic and social progress for the region through integration into the national economy. Within a century, the warlike Tobas had been relegated to the annals of Bolivian folklore, with students donning tall headdresses and dancing as “Tobas” in pre-Lenten Carnival parades around the country.

3. Andean Cosmo-Vision and Indigenous Resistance

That the subject of ethnic identity has resonance in Bolivia or anywhere else in Latin America today says much about social-cultural resilience in the face of wave upon wave of ethnocidal onslaught.¹⁷ In highland Bolivia, difficult physical conditions combined with colonial policies that allowed free communities to be organized along traditional lines impeded the penetration of more remote areas and sustained indigenous political structures. The decline in silver mining in the late 17th century, the subsequent reduction in demand for indigenous labour, and the later forging of independent statehood, promoted two processes of significance here. One was the slowing and eventual reversal of the decline in numbers of the highland indigenous population. The second was that, from the point of view of the ruling elites and the emerging commercial class, the economic value of rural indigenous populations was converted from permanent asset to sometime liability, as competition for land and resources in different places and at different times trumped the demand for an abundant supply of cheap labour. Lowland cultures in particular were less able to withstand the consequences of forced assimilation, the loss of vast territories over which to range, and a system where survival became synonymous with dependency. Many distinct cultures, probably more than a hundred, ceased to exist. At the same time, as traditional Andean-based food supply and exchange systems were increasingly incorporated into the market economy, the Bolivian peasants’ role in producing food to sustain the urban and non-agricultural rural population was no doubt an important element in securing their ethno-cultural survival.

¹⁶ By way of comparison, Peru is estimated to have had a similar-sized population to Bolivia at the time of independence, but a smaller proportion (just over half) that were indigenous.

¹⁷ In Sweet’s (1995, 43) and others’ views, what took place in Latin America is best understood not as genocide but as ethnocide. The Spanish never intended to annihilate entire peoples upon whose labour (or souls) the colonial regime depended; rather, the goal was to break their cultural systems. That their cultures proved more resilient than the people themselves (whose numbers declined dramatically), and the ways in which that ‘cultural patrimony’ might inform present and future generations, is of central interest to social movements today.

These factors help to shed light on the cultural resilience¹⁸ of Bolivia's original peoples over generations. Nevertheless it is the strength of their determination to re-assert the primacy of indigenous lands and ways, and their resistance to external forces of oppression and exploitation, which are arguably the most important elements of ethno-ecological identity construction and rural political mobilization in Bolivia today. Andean cosmology or *cosmovisión*, never completely lost and still a vital part of life in highland communities throughout Bolivia, is being "rediscovered" by indigenous political leaders (interview with Choquehuanca, 2004) as they seek to balance the material needs of impoverished people with the recognition that Western-imposed notions of capitalist development are neither spiritually nor ecologically congruent with the 'life-world' they seek to construct.

Augstburger (1990, 21) describes Andean *cosmovisión* as an overarching, holistic view of the world that directly impacts the daily lives of campesinos. It is expressed in a system of social controls exercised through family and communal organizational structures, which also serve to reinforce the belief that virtually all things that touch the life of a campesino are inter-connected. Grillo (1990, 57) paints a vivid picture of the essence of Andean cosmology:

Andean culture considers nature as if it were an animal¹⁹ (Kusch, 1962), ascribing to it the attributes of being alive and highly sensitive, able to respond positively when treated well, and therefore to be domesticated, but also capable of responding ferociously to aggression...The relation between Andean men and women and flora, fauna, soil, and water, occurs with the understanding that they are integral parts of a greater whole in which they themselves and their children are included. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. We are part of the earth...

Reciprocity, wholeness, inclusiveness and change are central to the Andean worldview (Grillo 1990, 58; Rocha 1990, 68): the fluid, continual transformation or domestication of the environment is not antithetical to these beliefs, so long as it is for the reciprocal benefit of nature and society. The dual non-market exchange mechanisms of reciprocity and redistribution are portrayed as vital elements of contemporary Andean culture, as a means of regulating relationships among people in society, and between society and nature (Grillo 1990, 60). While Andean reciprocity has been described as the act of giving and receiving, and of guaranteeing equity in economic relationships at the communal, inter-communal and continental level (Rocha 1990, 69), there is considerable evidence that the meanings and practices of reciprocity and redistribution are varied, nuanced and complex (D'Altroy, 2000; Temple, 2003). Nevertheless, of primary interest is the importance that these concepts hold as examples of enduring, more equitable, less accumulative and potentially more sustainable forms of production and consumption.

¹⁸ Cultural resilience is defined here as the capacity of a distinct cultural system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to retain key elements of structure and identity that preserve its distinctness (after Kofinas 2005, 5).

¹⁹ The view of nature as animal has both spiritual and physical dimensions, recognizing for example the influence of the phases of the moon on fertility (Grillo 1990, 58).

Andean cosmology is also an agrocentric one (Augstburger 1990, 21). Virtually all components of Andean culture, from modes of social organization through the sciences, arts, philosophy, religion, value systems, language and technologies, are constructed in relation to agricultural activity (Grillo 1990, 58). For example, the interest in astronomy is not only spiritual, but also a function of its relevance to the agricultural production cycle (Grillo 1990, 58; D'Altroy, 2000).

Ordered, controlled equilibrium is another current that runs through most treatments of the subject of Andean cosmology. Rocha (1990, 67-68) suggests that this is achieved through the dialectic or “dynamic game” between, on the one hand, austerity and, on the other, the sacred and profane religious festival (*festividad sacro-profano*). Austerity is an economic concept based on the hierarchical ordering of goods according to their human and social use value, for the purpose of optimizing their use and avoiding excess and waste. The sacred and profane festival is characterized as a function that tempers the rigour of austerity and transcends the physical-biological realm in order to satisfy human psychological and spiritual needs. Among other things, it also serves to redistribute surplus production, reducing the possibility of unnecessary material accumulation, concentrated power and domination. Together, these two functions serve not only to articulate a hierarchy of priorities, but also to optimize and justify the use of resources, and reduce the natural and man-made risks associated with agricultural activity in the Andean region.

Another defining characteristic of the Andean worldview is the understanding that ‘the future is in the past’. It is completely abstract and irrational to do something that is unknown to the *campesino* and, by extension, to his/her ancestors (Augstburger 1990, 21). An option is only valid if history has proven it so (San Martín 1990, 87). Consequently, Andean cosmology infuses the process of knowledge creation and dissemination, resulting in a concept of learning that is very different from Western epistemologies based on discipline-based scientific inquiry. Blanco (1990, 77-78) is candid in his criticism of orthodox, Western-styled learning focused on compartmentalized knowledge, and its incongruity with the Andean worldview of integration and regard for the whole.

[T]here is the agronomist engineer, the zootechnical engineer, the agricultural economist ...the forestry engineer...[A]griculture is totally fragmented. This does not respond to the needs of the family agricultural enterprise that we have in the Andes because here, the family enterprise, with a couple of hectares or less of land, has agriculture, livestock, sometimes a little agroindustry, and sometimes handicrafts...

By now it is apparent that in addition to representing a belief system and a process for regulating behaviour in the family, in the community, and on the land, the concept of Andean cosmology represents nothing less than survival in, and of, an age-old way of life, one which may hold important clues to the forging of a more sustainable future.

Nevertheless, as Karl Polanyi (1944, 8) once noted, “[i]nterests, ... like intents, necessarily remain platonic unless they are translated into politics by the means of some social instrumentality”. The history of peasant-indigenous resistance in Bolivia has served a fundamental purpose in this regard, and the stories of its heroes and heroines serve as potent

symbols of the sacrifices of the past, and the possibilities for the future. Any discussion of the ecological and historical antecedents of identity construction in rural Bolivia would not be complete without considering the more important figures in the history of indigenous resistance. But how far back is it necessary to go? Albó (cited in Stern 1987a, 12) suggests that “politically engaged Aymara peoples and their opponents think in terms of memories spanning two centuries’ time”. The period 1780-1782 is known as the Great Rebellion, the events of which posed a genuine threat to the colonial regime and figure prominently in the campesino-indigenous political consciousness of Bolivia today.²⁰ Based on his exploration of the underlying and multiple causes of the insurrection, Stern (ibid., 73) offers the following insight:

It is the moral memory – or myth – of an alternative, Andean-based social order, a cultural memory nurtured and sustained by Andean peoples...that in part explains why economic pillage led not merely to local revolt...but rather to dreams of a great transformation under nativist or neo-Inca auspices.

Campbell (1987, 116-17, 121) concurs, suggesting that the rebellion was part of a “larger effort of cultural recovery” fuelled by a cosmological belief that linked “God, the Spanish King, and the Inca” in a uniquely Andean view of the past, and the future. Moreover, Campbell argues that the work of numerous Andean scholars clearly demonstrates that “the concept of Inca recovery through the reappearance of a *messiah* was flourishing by the mid-eighteenth century” (Campbell 1987, 117, emphasis added). According to this interpretation, then, indigenous ‘heroes’ of the past were not merely rebel leaders, but rather persons imbued with divine authority to carry out the prophesized Inca *recuperación* (recovery).

Two key indigenous leaders from Bolivia emerged during the age of insurrection: Tomás Katari; and Julian Apasa (or Apaza), better known by his adopted name, Tupac (or Tupaj) Katari²¹. A 1777 rebellion led by Tomás Katari and based in Macha, Chayanta (on the Bolivian altiplano in the department of Potosí) actually pre-dates the Great Rebellion by a few years. Tomás Katari was a charismatic Aymara leader who attempted to defend his people against the worst abuses under colonialism, visiting the Viceroy in Buenos Aires to plead his case for reducing tribute levels (Campbell 1987, 113-14). Able to mobilize “up to 30,000 Indians”, Tomás Katari was ultimately betrayed and executed in 1781, but “the people refused to accept that their messiah was dead” (Lewin cited in Campbell 1987, 119). Shortly before his death, the Great Rebellion had already begun in the area of Cuzco, Peru, spearheaded by Quechua leader and Inca descendent José Gabriel Condorcanqui, known as Tupac Amaru (Campbell 1987, 112; Stern 1987b, 35).

The second part of the Bolivian story unfolds following the defeat of the Cuzco rebellion and Tupac Amaru’s subsequent betrayal and execution in May, 1781. At this point the history of the

²⁰ After Campbell (1987, 110), political consciousness is understood here as “the self-identifications, cultural meaning systems, interpretations of contemporary society, and aspirations for the future which [shape] political behaviour”.

²¹ The memory of Bartolina Sisa, the wife of Tupac Katari as well as Gregoria Apaza, his sister, lives on through the names of popular organizations, the most important being the National Federation of Campesina Women of Bolivia ‘Bartolina Sisa’ (FNMCB-BS).

indigenous rebellion moves out of the “tupamarista phase” and into the “katarista phase”²² (Campbell 1987). In the final months of Tupac Amaru’s life, another charismatic leader, a commoner named Julián Apasa had appeared and quickly filled the leadership void created by the death of Tomás Katari. Apasa was renamed Tupac Katari in a reincarnation ceremony, and he redirected a 40,000 rebel force toward La Paz, which remained under siege for six months from March until October of 1781 (Campbell 1987, 129; Echazu 2003, 183; Klein 2003, 76). Leveraging his adopted names, Tupac Katari positioned himself as leader of both the Quechua and Aymara-led factions (Campbell 1987, 127-29). The fall of La Paz to royalist troops, together with a negotiated settlement with tupamaristas who had resisted (and may have betrayed) Tupac Katari, brought the rebellion to a close and Tupac Katari to trial and execution, but “Katarismo” evolved into, and remains, an important political current in Bolivia today. Later indigenous uprisings produced other historical figures, notably Pablo Zárate “*El Temible*” (the feared) Wilka, another legendary Aymara leader, and the Guaraní rebel leader “*El Tumpa*” Apiaguaiqui (see for example Echazu 2003, 183-84, 281). Their stories help to sustain a powerful sentiment within the campesino-indigenous movement that they are a people “oppressed but not defeated”

4. Campesino Organization and the Process of Identity Construction

Following the National Revolution of 1952, in which the campesinos played a supportive but not decisive role (see Malloy 1970), Bolivia’s Agrarian Reform was initiated (1953), and campesinos were organized at the community level into agrarian syndicates. These are frequently a hybrid of trade union models and traditional indigenous organizations.²³ Local unions are in turn grouped together at increasingly centralized levels of decision-making – the Sub-central, Central, and Federation, generally following the country’s geo-political divisions (canton, province, etc.), culminating in a national Confederation of Campesino syndicates (the CSUTCB). These are formally structured organizations. The rights and responsibilities of each agrarian union and its members are clearly defined. Members are elected to fulfill specific roles or secretariats as *dirigentes*, and sanctions are meted out – fines, for example – if obligations and responsibilities are not met.

While the Agrarian Reform did not significantly alter the extreme poverty and marginalization of indigenous peoples, it did emancipate the majority of them from feudal-type labour obligations. The first appearance of an emerging ethnic consciousness in Bolivia occurred during the 1960s, when a group of Aymara students studying in La Paz formed a group called the “Cultural Centre ‘November 15th’” – the date of Tupac Katari’s death (Ticona 1996, 11-14). Influenced by the teachings of indianist Fausto Reinaga, who had founded the *Partido Indio* in 1962, the group undertook an alternative reading of Bolivian history from an indigenous-indianist perspective, focusing on two principal aspects: the need to resist the continued colonialist oppression of Indian peoples, and the notion of the campesino syndicate as “a privileged instrument of

²² The “katarista phase” refers to the period of activity of Tupac Katari. Nevertheless, the linear sequence of the two periods was conceivably much less salient to the protagonists of the time (and their descendants today), as meaning was more likely construed within the context of the cyclical *pachacutis*, or cataclysms, that characterize the Andean concept of time (see Campbell 1987, 115-16).

²³ In much of highland Bolivia, agrarian *sindicatos* coexist with *ayllus* but fulfill different functions (Kohl 2003, 157), while in other parts of the country traditional organizations were melded into *sindicatos*. In the eastern lowlands, the community-based *Central Indígena* is typical, while the Guaranís have continued a long-existing organizational form known as *Capitanías*.

resistance”, albeit one that also served to perpetuate domination by a non-indigenous state. Their analysis revealed the fundamental challenge of melding the “long”, pre-hispanic, anti-colonial memory with the “short”, revolutionary memory into a collective indigenous identity and political vision. In Ticona’s view, the frustrated expectations born of the 1952 revolution wakened the long memory of centuries-old indigenous resistance to the state, giving rise to a new ethnic consciousness and a more enlightened understanding of the challenges that lie ahead.

In the late 1960s, the peasant syndicates of the Aymara province of Aroma, department of La Paz, close to where Tupac Katari was executed, took on the mantle of “katarista-indianism” (Albó 1987; Ticona 1996). After first gaining control of the campesino syndicates at the local, provincial and departmental levels, Katarista leader Jenaro Flores was elected to the maximum post (Executive Secretary) of the then-named National Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia (CNTCB) at the national congress of 1971. Only a few days later, the military coup of Hugo Banzer Suárez took place, driving the newly elected campesino leadership underground. It was during this time that the first political platform explicitly linking “class and [ethno-cultural] nation” was formulated. The “Tiwanaku Manifesto” was signed in 1973 by four political organizations, including Flores’s MRTK (*Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Katari*) – “at the foot of the great pre-Inca ruins of Tiwanaku [or Tiahuanaku]” – and clandestinely distributed in Spanish, Quechua and Aymara (Ticona 1996; see also Dunkerley 1984, 213-15). The return of electoral politics in 1978 led to the re-emergence of opposition political currents and the return of the Kataristas to the leadership of the Campesino Confederation, which not insignificantly bore the added descriptor “Tupac Katari” (CNTCB-TK).

Under the Kataristas, the campesinos won official membership to Bolivia’s powerful national labour confederation, the COB (*Central Obrera Boliviana*). In spite of differences in political currents within the campesino sector, a congress of “campesino unity” convened by the COB and held on June 25 and 26, 1979, marked the birth of the *Sole Union Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia* (*Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, or CSUTCB), which for the first time grouped the majority of highland indigenous and campesino peoples of Bolivia into a single national confederation. Thus, Katarismo played a fundamental role not only in the consolidation of Bolivia’s first autonomous highland indigenous-campesino organization, but also in the forging of an enduring (though often problematic) alliance with organized labour through membership in the COB. In time, the campesinos increased their power and influence within the COB (Ticona 1996, 30). By 1992, the CSUTCB had won a position on the Executive Committee of the COB, gaining one of two General Secretariats, the second position in importance after the Executive Secretariat (a role reserved by statute for the Miners’ Federation) in addition to four other Secretariats (Ticona 1996, 32).

The year 1992 also marked the five-hundredth year anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in the New World. This was supposed to have been a commemorative celebration of the “Discovery of the Americas”. Instead, for people from the indigenous, black and popular segments of society, it became an opportunity to rebuild grassroots movements from the bottom up, and throughout the hemisphere.

5. Strategic Alliances: The “500 Years of Resistance” Campaign

Through a series of massively-attended continental meetings starting in Bogotá and concluding in Managua, the “500 Years of Resistance” campaign marked the beginning of a process that brought indigenous movements from different nations of the Americas together for the first time (León et al. 2001; Infodesarrollo 2001). The campaign counted with the early participation of the National Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Colombia (ONIC), the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE), and the U.S.-based South and Meso American Indian Information Center (SAIIC). Its goals were to develop a coordinated plan of action that would project the theme of ‘five hundred years of indigenous resistance and struggle against colonialism’ onto the world stage, as well as to re-establish inter-cultural relations and reaffirm the unity of indigenous peoples of the Americas (Native Web 1990, 1991). The campaign marked an important juncture in the process of what Alison Brysk (1996) calls the “internationalization of Indian rights”. To be sure, the evolution of a transnational indigenous social movement network, which quickened its pace during the 1970s with the support of key international allies²⁴, has played an important role in catalyzing social movements of Latin American indigenous peoples who are “rich in identity but poor in everything else” (Brysk 1996, 39-40). One result was the resounding success of the 500 Years Campaign in “neutraliz[ing] the festive character that the Spanish government and the elites of the region had wanted to give the 500th anniversary” (León et al. 2001). Most importantly, “the processes of coming together for collective interaction” unleashed by the Campaign “were so intense that they continued over time”, resulting in an associated group of region-wide autonomous organizations able to coordinate their activities and mobilize around issues of shared concern and strategic importance.

The 500 Years Campaign was a turning point for Bolivia’s campesino-indigenous movement (interviews with De la Cruz Villca 2004; Choquehuanca 2004). Bolivia’s highland peasant organizations were already well positioned to actively participate in a hemispheric indigenous rights campaign. A confederation representing Bolivia’s lowland indigenous peoples (CIDOB) had been organized more recently, in 1982, with the support of some of the same international organizations behind the 500 Years campaign. While the coming together of indigenous peoples from across the Americas served to legitimize the cultural recuperation and quest for territory that were central to lowland indigenous demands, the impact on campesinos was arguably even more significant. It appears to have opened the door to nothing less than the beginning of a complete reorientation of the campesino movement in Bolivia that, though historically dominated by political parties and the labour confederation, was about to discover the possibility of greater autonomy by pursuing the path of identity politics. David Choquehuanca, a key leader of the MAS-IPSN and currently Bolivia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, notes that

“through the Campaign we realized that in Bolivia the Aymaras and Quechuas were the majority population...that we are the real owners of these lands and territories... We began to want to participate politically... we said, from now on,

²⁴ Brysk (1996) lists a number of organizations and people that have played key roles in the social movement network supporting indigenous rights in Latin America, including the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs, Cultural Survival, the World Council of Churches, OXFAM America, the Inter-American Foundation, and the South and Meso-American Indian Information Centre, among others.

let's begin to construct our own proposals, according to our own way of thinking, our feeling, our own ideology" (interview 2004).

As evidenced by the rise of the MAS-IPSN in Bolivia, Brysk (1996, 45) is quite right in asserting that the transnational indigenous social movement was "not merely an interesting sociological phenomenon but a politically consequential force for social change" in Latin America.

In addition to benefiting from a solid organizational structure to support active participation in a hemispheric initiative, non-indigenous allies of Bolivia's campesino-indigenous organizations have played a critical role in strengthening the movement. Men and women in Bolivia who have remained firm in their commitment to social justice, including long-time political activists of the left, civil rights lawyers, trade unionists, and other social agents, have rejected careerism and opted instead to work for the social and political transformation of their country. Reflecting Brazilian Paulo Freire's concept and methods of popular education and consciousness-raising, the formation of leaders to guide Bolivia's campesino-indigenous movement has been a steady and deliberate process, one that has had to overcome numerous limitations and obstacles, not the least of which is the ever-present risk of leadership co-optation by powerful third parties. In some cases, new organizations have emerged where existing ones were unwilling or unable to defend the interests of those they were supposed to represent, or where critical organizational alliances floundered because of political or personal differences too vast to overcome.

This is the case, for instance, with the emergence in 1992 of the Coordinator of Ethnic Peoples of Santa Cruz (CPESC), in eastern Bolivia. Although originally an affiliate of the national indigenous confederation CIDOB, the CPESC practically usurped the role of protagonist in this part of Bolivia. This is largely the result of different political agendas and the loss of confidence in the national leadership, a state of affairs related in no small way to the dispersal of large sums of money for the 'indigenous cause' by some international organizations, not always with well-planned or transparent intentions. In spite of these kinds of difficulties, alliance-building with key supporters, and among grassroots organizations themselves, at the local, national and international level has been essential to the strengthening of Bolivia's campesino-indigenous movement.

6. Conclusions

The period beginning with the arrival of Europeans in Latin America and continuing to the present brought about social and environmental change at a scale and intensity "far greater than at any comparable span of time in prehistory".²⁵ At the same time, particularly in the Andean highlands, some pre-Columbian forms of community organization and exchange, as well as technologies, landscapes, and an array of other knowledge and customs have proven to be remarkably resilient.

For some forty years now, a process of converting Andean cultural resilience into indigenous political capital has been underway, and is being replicated in the Amazon and eastern lowlands. Leaders of the MAS, the first politically consolidated expression of Bolivia's peasant-indigenous

²⁵ Erickson (2000, 349) is referring specifically to environmental change in the Andes, a conclusion that has been extended here to socio-cultural change in all of Bolivia.

movement, are moving forward towards a new vision of autonomous development by reaching back to elements of their long history – a history in which resilience, reciprocity, and resistance to a worldview not of their making figure prominently.

The extent to which strength and unity in diversity makes for a viable and durable political alternative to Western-imposed capitalist notions of development remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that it marks a fundamental and irreversible shift in the Bolivian political landscape.

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