

# **Social Movements and the Bolivian State: Anarchistic Trends in Practice and Theory**

## **Abstract**

Latin America's remarkable history of contentious politics has long been theorized through liberal, Marxist and post-Marxist paradigms of state-based social change. These paradigms follow a logic of hegemony by either pursuing a strategy of demand and integration within the current hegemonic system, or by seeking state power to reverse the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors. Focusing on the Bolivian context, the paper explores how the dominance of these paradigms has had the effect of obscuring many non-hegemonic indigenous movements, tactics and practices which seek to escape the logic of hegemony – of reform/revolution – altogether. The paper then explores the affinity between major concepts of postanarchist philosophy and the way that these non-hegemonic movements, tactics and practices have been posited as the source of Bolivian collective capacity for mobilization and resistance by Bolivian politicians and activists, as well as students of Bolivia.

Keywords: Bolivia, indigenous communities, social capacity, postanarchism

Latin America has a remarkable history of contentious politics. In the past few decades, this has taken the form of an upsurge of social movements, challenging neoliberal reforms and the governments that would impose them. Examples of such movements include: the cross-border movements and mobilisations against “free-trade” agreements, the Zapatista movement in Mexico, the Landless Rural Workers’ Movement in Brazil,

Afro-Colombians resisting displacement in a region coveted by investors, the *piquetero* eruptions of workers and the urban poor in the wake of Argentina's financial crisis, and the indigenous mobilisations led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador. Many students of the region affirm that Latin America is home to some of the most powerful and successful movements in the world, that it is the source of a new radical imaginary, making the imagination of other worlds possible, and that it is leading the world in the struggle against neoliberalism.<sup>1</sup>

Within Latin America, Bolivian social movements stand out as some of the most active and successful in the region – indeed Bolivia may well be home to the most varied, effective, and egalitarian grassroots organisations in the world.<sup>2</sup> In terms of per capita

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Roger Burbach, 'Communitarian Socialism in Bolivia,' *Bolivia Rising*, April 2010, <http://boliviarising.blogspot.com/2010/04/communitarian-socialism-in-bolivia.html>; Ben Dangl, 'Common Ground: Learning from Latin American Social Movements,' *VenezuelaAnalysis.com*, July 26, 2009, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4661>; Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (Random House of Canada, 2008); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'The World Social Forum: Toward a Counter-Hegemonic Globalization,' in *WSF: Challenging Empires*, ed. Jai Sen et al., 2004, <http://www.choike.org/2009/eng/informes/1557.html>; Le Bot, 'Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine,' *Amérique Latine Histoire et Mémoire. Les Cahiers ALHIM*, no. 10, Identités : positionnements des groupes indiens en Amérique latine (December 3, 2004), <http://alhim.revues.org/index100.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See: Teo Ballvé, Edited by Teo Ballve and Vijay Prashad, and Teo Ballvé, eds., 'Boivia de pie!,' in *Dispatches From Latin America- Experimenting Against Neoliberalism* (LeftWord Books, 2006), 151-160; Dangl, 'Common Ground: Learning from Latin American Social Movements,'; Le Bot, 'Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine,'; Nancy Romer, 'Bolivia: Latin America's

income, Bolivia has the poorest population in South America.<sup>3</sup> In terms of culture, however, being home to the most indigenous population in Latin America – a population that has successfully maintained and reproduced its many indigenous cultures since the time of colonisation – it is incredibly wealthy.

The years between 2000 and 2005, in particular, saw a wave of successful protests. Between January and April 2000, rural farmers, factory workers, students, and neighbourhood groups mobilised in a prolonged series of protests, known as the Cochabamba ‘Water War’, to put an end to a water privatisation scheme.<sup>4</sup> They managed to force the cancellation of a multinational corporations’ contract, the subsidiary of California based Bechtel, Aguas del Tunari, and the return of water management to public hands.<sup>5</sup> By most accounts, the water war represents the great turning point in contemporary Bolivian mobilisation, as it “ruptured years of neoliberal hegemony and helped Bolivians make connections among a myriad of issues, including the anti-

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Experiment in Grassroots Democracy,’ *New Politics* 11, no. 4 (2008),

<http://newpolitics.mayfirst.org/fromthearchives?nid=25>; Raul Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los*

*Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales* (Biblioteca Pensadores Latinoamericanos) (Ediciones Desde Abajo, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Romer, ‘Bolivia: Latin America's Experiment in Grassroots Democracy,’ 1.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Postero, ‘Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia,’ *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2007): 5.

<sup>5</sup> Postero, ‘Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia,’ 5.

imperialist struggles against coca-eradication, peasant struggles for agrarian reform, and universal concerns about the government's economic policies.”<sup>6</sup>

After the water war, Bolivian social movements focused their energies on two issues: they mobilised around a politics of basic needs, demanding radical social reform, and called for the nationalisation of natural resources.<sup>7</sup> These demands later culminated in the ‘Gas Wars’ of October 2003 and May-June 2005. In October, 2003, massive protests erupted in El Alto and La Paz over President Sánchez de Lozada’s proposed gas pipeline plan which would have brought natural gas from eastern lowlands to Chile, where it would have been liquefied for export to the U.S. and to Mexico.<sup>8</sup> After six weeks of hunger strikes, highway blockades, mass mobilisations, and street fights with the military, the protesters successfully put a stop to the plan. The President subsequently fled the country for Miami, leaving Carlos Mesa to take over the presidency.<sup>9</sup> President Mesa’s year and a half in power was also racked by continued protests over renewed plans for a gas pipeline. By the time he was forced to resign in June 2005, he had faced

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Spronk, ‘The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia by Dangl,’ ZCommunications, June 2007, <http://www.zcommunications.org/the-price-of-fire-resource-wars-and-social-movements-in-bolivia-by-ben-dangl-by-susan-spronk>. See also: Dangl, *The price of fire* (AK Press, 2007); Jim Shultz, ‘The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath,’ in *Dignity and Defiance*, ed. Jim Shultz and Melissa Draper (University of California Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Spronk, ‘The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia by Dangl.’

<sup>8</sup> Postero, ‘Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia,’ 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

more than 800 protests and strikes, which had managed to stall the neoliberal project in Bolivia.<sup>10</sup>

These movements were resourceful in contesting the region's political and economic systems and in challenging traditional definitions of citizenship, democracy and participation. As they contested power, privilege and policy, they also challenged the dominant economic and racial groups as well as the politicians and institutions representing them. Indeed, Vice President Álvaro García Linera, writing as a political analyst in 2001, stated that the movements revealed "an organizing force capable of challenging the relevance of prevailing systems of government... and capable of erecting alternative systems for the exercise of political power and the conduct of legitimately democratic life."<sup>11</sup>

### **Explanations of Resistance in Bolivia and the Need for a Historical Perspective**

When addressing the current phase of social movement activity in the region, many scholars who write on the subject from a broad variety of perspectives and employing a variety of theoretical approaches tend to focus on the neoliberal reforms of the past few

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<sup>10</sup> Postero, 2007, 5; Raúl Zibechi, 'A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto,' Counter Punch, October 14, 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/zibechi10142005.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Shultz, 'The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath,' 29. See also, Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!,' 152; Dangl, *The Price of Fire*; Le Bot, 'Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine.'

decades.<sup>12</sup> Such arguments take many different forms. Broadly, scholars have identified the following triggers of contentious politics: the crisis of political representation, exacerbated by neoliberal promises of greater inclusiveness<sup>13</sup>; the widespread frustration

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Sonia E Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1998); Arturo Escobar and Sonia E Alvarez, eds., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, Series in political economy and economic development in Latin America (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Teo Ballve and Vijay Prashad, eds., *Dispatches From Latin America- Experimenting Against Neoliberalism* (LeftWord Books, 2006); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,' in *Dispatches From Latin America- Experimenting Against Neoliberalism*, ed. Ballvé and Vijay Pra (LeftWord Books, 2006), 173-182; Carmen Diane Deere and Frederick S. Royce, 'Rural Social Movements in Latin America: Alternative Visions for Sustainable Livelihoods,' (2007), [http://cgi.unc.edu/programs/mellon/working\\_group\\_papers/DeereUNCCConfpaper-07.pdf](http://cgi.unc.edu/programs/mellon/working_group_papers/DeereUNCCConfpaper-07.pdf); Forrest Hylton, Sinclair Thomson, and Adolfo Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons* (Verso, 2007); Hank Johnston and Paul Almeida, *Latin American social movements* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Courtney Jung, 'The Politics of Indigenous Identity: Neoliberalism, Cultural Rights, and the Mexican Zapatistas,' *Social Research* 70, no. 2 (Summer2003 2003): 433-462; Susan Spronk, 'Roots of Resistance to Urban Water Privatization in Bolivia: The New Working Class, the Crisis of Neoliberalism, and Public Services,' *International Labor and Working-Class History* 71, no. 01 (2007): 8-28; Richard Stahler-Sholk, Harry E. Vanden, and Glen David Kuecker, 'Globalizing Resistance: The New Politics of Social Movements in Latin America,' *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 5-16; Deborah J Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*, Cambridge studies in contentious politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Raúl Zibechi, 'Subterranean echos: Resistance and politics 'desde el Sótano',' *Socialism and Democracy* 19, no. 3 (2005): 13.

<sup>13</sup> Teo Ballve and Vijay Prashad, eds., *Dispatches From Latin America- Experimenting Against Neoliberalism* (LeftWord Books, 2006); Kees Biekart, 'Seven theses on Latin American social movements

over the privatisation of sectors previously open to public decision-making, such as economic policy, social service delivery, and basic service delivery as part of neoliberal reforms<sup>14</sup>; the anti-U.S. and anti-Chile feelings ignited over the gas pipeline project<sup>15</sup>; the terrible social cost suffered by the great majority of Bolivians as a result of decades of

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and political change,' *The European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 79 (October 2005): 85-95; Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,'; Paul W. Drake and Eric Hershberg, 'State-Society Relations in the Post-1980s Andes,' in *State and society in conflict*, ed. Paul W. Drake and Hershberg (Univ of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 1-40; Escobar and Alvarez, eds., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Johnston and Almeida, *Latin American social movements*; Carmen Medeiros, 'Civilizing the Popular?: The Law of Popular Participation and the Design of a New Civil Society in 1990s Bolivia,' *Critique of Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (December 1, 2001): 401-425; Philip Oxhorn, 'Neopluralism and the Challenges for Citizenship in Latin America,' in *Citizenship in Latin America*, eds. Joseph S. Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007); Postero, 'Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia.'

<sup>14</sup> Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!'; Biekart, 'Seven theses on Latin American social movements and political change,'; Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,'; Dangl, *The price of fire*; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Medeiros, 'Civilizing the Popular?: The Law of Popular Participation and the Design of a New Civil Society in 1990s Bolivia,'; Postero, 'Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia,'; Shultz, 'The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath,'; Spronk, 'The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia by Dangl,'; Spronk, 'Roots of Resistance to Urban Water Privatization in Bolivia: The New Working Class, the Crisis of Neoliberalism, and Public Services.'

<sup>15</sup> Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!'; Biekart, 'Seven theses on Latin American social movements and political change,'; Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,'; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Postero, 'Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia.'

neoliberal restructuring<sup>16</sup>; the effects of neoliberal reforms of challenging enclaves of local indigenous autonomy<sup>17</sup>; and the politicisation of indigenous identities following U.N. campaigns for the recognition of indigenous rights and the associated rise of NGOs to address the problem, along with the concurrent declining salience of class-based identities during the decades of neoliberalism.<sup>18</sup>

These arguments certainly capture various facets of the dynamics at play in the region. However, analyses that focus too narrowly on neoliberal reforms of the past few decades often fail to take into account the long history of mobilisation and resistance in the region and the comparatively high intensity and spread of mobilisation in Bolivia.<sup>19</sup> Many

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<sup>16</sup> Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!'; Biekart, 'Seven theses on Latin American social movements and political change'; Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation'; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Johnston and Almeida, *Latin American social movements*; Postero, 'Andean Utopias in Evo Morales's Bolivia'; Shultz, 'The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath.'

<sup>17</sup> Cusicanqui, 'Liberal democracy and ayllu democracy in Bolivia: The case of Northern Potosí,' *Journal of Development Studies* 26, no. 4 (1990): 97; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*.

<sup>18</sup> Jung, 'The Politics of Indigenous Identity: Neoliberalism, Cultural Rights, and the Mexican Zapatistas'; Thomas Perreault, 'Changing places: transnational networks, ethnic politics, and community development in the Ecuadorian Amazon,' *Political Geography* 22, no. 1 (January 2003): 61-88.

<sup>19</sup> Note that some of the analyses focusing on neoliberalism also take a longer historical view of mobilization in Bolivia. See, for example: Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated* (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1987); Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation'; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Zibeche, 'Subterranean echos: Resistance and politics 'desde el Sótano''; For analyses highlighting the relatively high intensity of mobilization in Latin America, see for example: Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!'; Dangl, *The price of fire*; Le Bot,

students of Bolivia emphasise that contemporary mobilisations and resistance should be understood as expressions of “a collective consciousness with deep historical roots,”<sup>20</sup> tracing the roots of contemporary mobilisations in the memories of the 1780-1781 anti-colonial uprisings led by Túpaj Katari and Bartolina Sisa.<sup>21</sup> This type of argument is certainly not unchallenged; Le Bot, for example, contends that indigenous peoples had, thus far, been submissive and passive. Moreover, he argues that when they did mobilise, their movements were grounded in archaic indigenist utopias.<sup>22</sup> He goes on to argue that contemporary indigenous movements are different from those of the past, in that they are fighting for a personal autonomy grounded in Enlightenment thought.<sup>23</sup> While most agree

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‘Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine.’

<sup>20</sup> Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’; Drake and Hershberg, ‘State-Society Relations in the Post-1980s Andes’; Donna Lee Van Cott, ‘Turning Crisis into Opportunity: Achievements of the Excluded Groups in the Andes,’ in *State and society in conflict*, ed. Paul W Drake and Hershberg Hershberg (Univ of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 1-40; Jim Shultz, ‘The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath’.

<sup>21</sup> Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*.

<sup>22</sup> Le Bot, ‘Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine,’ par. 4, par, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Le Bot, ‘Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine,’ par, 15. This contention that contemporary indigenous struggles are anchored in European Enlightenment thought, which wins them, according to Le Bot, the quality of being modern, is inconsistent (to say the least) with the many analyses that show that these actors have framed their struggles according to their own cultural heritage. See for example: Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’; Dangl, *The price of fire*; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; and Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*. Similarly, his contention that indianism and katarism only play a small role seems erroneous given the role

that the state of 1952 and the military-peasant pact of 1964 defused and contained social mobilisation through an enduring system of control and cooptation, they also show that many Bolivians found ways to subtly resist and subvert the precepts of this system, and on occasion to form oppositional movements.<sup>24</sup> The fact that General René Barrientos resorted to the military-peasant pact in the mid-60s reveals the extent of the threat posed by the union militancy of the tin mining sector.<sup>25</sup> Even in the case of those party to the military-peasant pact, however, Cusicanqui provides evidence that many indigenous peasants found ways to subvert the arrangement to protect their own ways of life.<sup>26</sup> Such works serve as an important reminder that failure to effect massive change and to be noticed does not equate submissiveness and passivity.

Moreover, the system of control and cooptation began to crumble long before the onset of neoliberal reforms. The 1974 massacre of unarmed peasants in Cochabamba, known as

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played by indigenous leaders such as Filipe Quispe in mobilizing people for the gas war. See for example: Biekart, 'Seven theses on Latin American social movements and political change'; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; E. Harry Vanden, 'Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance,' in *Latin American social movements in the twenty-first century*. eds. Stahler-Sholk, Richard, Glen David Kuecker, and Harry E. Vanden. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Cusicanqui, 'Liberal democracy and ayllu democracy in Bolivia: The case of Northern Potosí'; Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation'; Dangl, *The price of fire*; Drake and Hershberg, 'State-Society Relations in the Post-1980s Andes'; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*.

<sup>25</sup> Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation'.

<sup>26</sup> Cusicanqui, 'Liberal democracy and ayllu democracy in Bolivia: The case of Northern Potosí'.

the Massacre of Tolada, deepened the crisis of state legitimacy and was followed by the rise of oppositional indigenous movements.<sup>27</sup> Indigenous people began organising along ethnic lines in the 1960s and 1970s, and began recuperating and nurturing the development of Aymara and Quechua identities that currently foster solidarity for mobilisation.<sup>28</sup> According to Cusicanqui:

This “Katarista-Indianista” reawakening among the indigenous-campesino unions of the *altiplano* (highland plateau) and the Aymara-Quechua valleys resulted in the founding of the independent Confederation of Bolivian Campesino Workers (CSUTCB) and several indigenous political parties. This re-emergence of a popular, indigenous-based political and ideological countercurrent to the state, anticipated and informed today’s movements.<sup>29</sup>

After the 1970s, the legitimacy of the political order continued to deteriorate and was increasingly challenged.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the late 1980s, with the onset of neoliberal reforms, and the beginning of the militarised campaigns to eradicate coca, strikes, mass mobilisations, and marches became increasingly frequent and confrontational.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’.

<sup>28</sup> Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’; Van Cott, ‘Turning Crisis into Opportunity: Achievements of the Excluded Groups in the Andes.’

<sup>29</sup> Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,’ 175.

<sup>30</sup> Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

To be sure, the modalities of resistance and mobilisation have changed with the times, reflecting the constraints and opportunities provided by the system, but that does not mean that the roots of contemporary mobilisations, and even less their strength, can be explained primarily in reference to changes instigated by neoliberal reforms. As Cusicanqui argues, “structural adjustment policies and the dismantling of the country’s productive and industrial base were only the culminating factors that brought this long-developing crisis to its breaking point.”<sup>32</sup>

Overall, most students of the subject seem to focus on the crises which trigger social mobilisation and contentious politics, and on the opportunities and constraints that shape their outcomes. What may be more remarkable, however, are the long history of mobilisation in Bolivia and the ability of the movements to thrive and effect change despite unfavourable neoliberal dynamics that have been associated with a certain degree of silencing, neutralisation and cooptation.<sup>33</sup> After all, neoliberal reforms and policies

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<sup>32</sup> Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,’ 173,181. See also: Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*, 11; Johnston and Almeida, *Latin American social movements*; Zibechi, ‘Subterranean echos: Resistance and politics ‘desde el Sótano’.

<sup>33</sup> Arturo Escobar, Sonia E Alvarez, and Evelina Dagnino, ‘Introduction: The Cultural and the Political in Latin American Social Movements,’ in *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Arturo Escobar, Sonia Alvarez, and Evelina Dagnino (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1998), 22; Stahler-Sholk, Harry E. Vanden, and Glen David Kuecker, ‘Globalizing Resistance: The New Politics of Social Movements in Latin America,’ 15; Amrita Basu, ‘Globalization of the Local/Localization of the Global Mapping Transnational Women’s Movements,’ *Meridians* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 68-84; J. Brenner, ‘Transnational feminism and the struggle for global justice,’ *New Politics* 9, no. 2 (2003): 78–100; Nikki Craske, ‘Remasculinization and the Neoliberal State in Latin

have been implemented the world over, but they have not elicited the same kind of continuous widespread, and, as many argue, effective mobilisations seen in Bolivia.<sup>34</sup>

Many Bolivians and students of Bolivia are beginning to argue that in order to understand

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America,' in *Gender, politics and the state*, ed. Vicky Randall and Georgina Waylen (Routledge, 1998), 100-120; Manisha Desai, 'Transnational Solidarity: Women's Agency, Structural Adjustment and Globalization,' in *Women's activism and globalization*, ed. Nancy A. Naples and Manisha Desai (Routledge, 2002), 16-33; Elisabeth J. Friedman, 'The Effects of "Transnationalism Reversed" in Venezuela: Assessing the impact of UN - global conferences on the women's movement,' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1, no. 3 (1999): 357; Edgardo Lander and Mariana Past, 'Eurocentrism, Modern Knowledges, and the "Natural" Order of Global Capital,' *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002): 245-268; Sabine Lang, 'The NGOization of Feminism: Institutionalization and Institution Building within the German Women's Movements,' in *Transitions, environments, translations*, ed. Cora Kaplan, Joan Wallach Scott, and Debra Keates (Routledge, 1997), 101-120; Beni Mendoza, 'Transnational feminisms in question,' *Feminist Theory* 3, no. 3 (2002): 295; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without borders* (Duke University Press, 2003); R. P Petchesky and N. Unies, *Reproductive and sexual rights: charting the course of transnational women's NGOs* (UNRISD, 2000); Veronica Schild, 'New Subjects of Rights? Women's Movements and the Construction of Citizenship in the 'New Democracies',' in *Cultures of politics, politics of cultures*, ed. Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (Westview Press, 1998), 93-117; Jean-Marc Fontan and Eric Shragge, *Social economy* (Black Rose Books, 2000); Jael Miriam Silliman and Ynestra King, *Dangerous intersections* (South End Press, 1999); Cora Kaplan, Joan Wallach Scott, and Debra Keates, *Transitions, environments, translations* (Routledge, 1997); Gerardo L Munck and Vicente Palermo, 'La démocratie en Amérique latine : les acteurs sociaux, la représentation et l'État,' *Sociologie et sociétés* 30, no. 1 (n.d.): 159-172; Biekart, 'Seven theses on Latin American social movements and political change.'

<sup>34</sup> See, for example :Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!'; Dangl, *The Price of Fire*; Le Bot, 'Le renversement historique de la question indienne en Amérique Latine'; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*.

the power and effectiveness of Bolivian mobilisations and resistance, one must look beyond elite actors and events, to the everyday practices of most Bolivians.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, the overwhelming focus of the literature on change in the hegemonic system, such as the onset of neoliberalism, on the counter-hegemonic potential of social movements, such as the revolutionary potential of the Katarista movement, and on the capacity of social movements to secure reforms, such as the recognition of plurinationalism, has had the effect of obscuring the many non-hegemonic indigenous movements, tactics and practices that escape the logic of hegemony – of reform/revolution – altogether.

### **Richard Day - Anarchist Trends in Theory**

As will be illustrated in the following pages, Bolivian politicians and activists, and students of Bolivia have identified many non-hegemonic indigenous community practices that share a certain affinity with postanarchist philosophy, the latest incarnation of an intellectual tradition that has long recognised the transformative potential of the working poor, peasants and other extremely marginalised groups.<sup>36</sup> Richard Day has developed a postanarchist framework for the study of social movements. This framework is largely aimed at theorising the remarkable potential of agents that have for the most part been

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<sup>35</sup> Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation'; Dangl, *The Price of Fire*; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder*.

<sup>36</sup> Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, 'Works of Mikhail Bakunin 1872,' n.d., <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1872/karl-marx.htm>.

considered marginal, in particular that of indigenous peoples, by moving beyond the logic of hegemony. Through his unwavering critique of hegemonic logic, and his weaving together of concepts such as non-hegemony, social revolution, direct action, mutual aid and structural renewal, Day categorically posits indigenous peoples as some of the most successful resisters of totalising systems, and as some of the most promising agents of the post-modern world. His emphasis on the micro-relations and practices involved in structural renewal and social revolution provides a basis from which to identify, explore and theorise the social capacity that feeds collective action in Bolivia. Before exploring the affinity between postanarchist philosophy and indigenous community practices in Bolivia, this paper will first define the core postanarchist concepts that will be employed.

**Non-hegemony:** As articulated by Day, non-hegemony refers to the plurality of practices and alternative ways of living enacted by place-based communities, which do not have a totalising will – in other words, practices that are not aimed at allowing a particular group to remake the world in its own image, but rather at resisting totalising projects.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, as Day explains:

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<sup>37</sup> Although he does not develop the concept, Cox indicates the desirability of theorising post-hegemony. He writes: ‘Can there be distinct, thriving macro-societies, each with its own solidarity, each pursuing a distinct telos, which could coexist through a supra-intersubjectivity? This supra-intersubjectivity would have to embody principles of coexistence without necessarily reconciling differences in goals’. See: Robert W Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge studies in international relations 40 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 168. Non-hegemony offer to ways of theorizing what comes after hegemony.

Non-hegemonic strategies rest on an understanding that state and corporate forms, as structures of domination, exploitation and division, cannot produce effects of emancipation. Non-hegemonic strategies call for social rather than political revolution, thus transcending the dichotomy between revolution and reform.<sup>38</sup>

The politicians, activists and scholars discussed below describe non-hegemonic practices without naming them as such. As will be discussed below, self-managed ayllus, water committees, and neighbourhood assemblies, are examples of non-hegemonic networks, in that they do not seek totalising effects, but rather seek to meet the needs of the people who form them.

**Social Revolution:** Rather than seeking change by attacking the system in its totality through political revolution, or using a strategy of reform and a politics of demand, postanarchist philosophers argue that progressive change constantly occurs through bottom-up changes in micro-relations and practices that take power away from modernity.<sup>39</sup> These bottom-up changes, when taken as a whole, amount to social revolution. As Day argues:

Unlike revolutionary struggles, which seek totalizing effects across all aspects of the existing social order by taking state power, and unlike the politics of reform, which seeks global change on a selected axes by reforming state power, these movements/

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<sup>38</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> As Day explains, social revolution is not posited as the only source of possible change by postanarchist theorist, reform and revolution are acknowledged to be viable options for some groups and some demands. Day does argue however that social revolution should receive more attention as a mechanism for change. Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 141.

networks/tactics do not seek totalizing effects on any axis at all. Instead, they set out to block, resist, and render redundant both corporate and state power in local, national and transnational contexts. And in so doing, they challenge the notion that the only way to achieve meaningful social change is by way of totalizing effects across and entire 'national' or 'international' society.<sup>40</sup>

By defining revolution in this way, Day focuses attention on the power generated by the micro-relations and practices that make up everyday life. His definition of social revolution, however, is very narrow, as not all bottom-up social endeavours would lead to this kind of social revolution. In order to lead to non-hegemonic social revolution, bottom-up endeavours must engage in *direct action* in such a way as to produce *structural renewal*.

**Direct Action and Mutual Aid:** Direct action refers to those practices and tactics that are oriented to meet individual, group and community needs by the non-mediated action of those individual, groups and communities, rather than relying state or corporate forms.<sup>41</sup> The related practice of mutual aid involves the exchange of labour and resources for the mutual benefit of groups and individuals. Whereas the concept of direct action places emphasis on the non-mediated aspect of practices, the concept of mutual aid places emphasis on their reciprocal quality. As will be discussed below, one of the most well-known examples of direct action and mutual aid in Bolivia is the water distribution

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 44-45.

system that was built and managed by and for the poorest neighbourhoods of Cochabamba.

**Structural renewal:** As elaborated by Day, structural renewal involves a dual process of disengagement and reconstruction through direct action and mutual aid.<sup>42</sup> Day credits Landauer for being the first to realise that political revolution is not necessary to begin constructing a new world in the shell of the old.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Landauer insisted that socialism cannot be achieved through reform or revolution, but only through the creation of new institutions alongside existing modes of social organisation.<sup>44</sup> As Day explains:

[Structural renewal] aims to reduce [the] efficacy and reach [of state and corporate forms] by withdrawing energy from them and rendering them redundant. Structural renewal therefore appears simultaneously as a negative force working against the colonization of everyday life by the state and corporations, and as a positive force acting to reverse this process via mutual aid.”<sup>45</sup>

Finally, both Day and Landauer emphasise that the construction of alternatives to state and corporate forms is not preparatory work for an eventual political revolution, but rather, social revolution itself.<sup>46</sup> The term will be employed in this paper to describe what indigenous peoples have been engaged in for centuries,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 124.

either by choice or by necessity, as they have constructed and maintained alternatives to state and corporate forms in order to survive and take control of their own affairs.

### **Social capacity in Bolivia – Anarchistic Trends in Practice<sup>47</sup>**

A relatively new set of arguments is emerging among students of Bolivia. Scholars, politicians and activists are emphasising longstanding, underlying enabling elements which may explain the sources of social capacity in the country. Such arguments are present in the public discourse of politicians and activists as well as in academic works. Vice-President García Linera has been one of the most visible articulators of this line of argument. For example, noting the uniqueness of the Bolivian process, the vice president states:

Bolivia is inserted in planetary capitalism, but it is different from other societies . . . *community structures have survived* in the countryside, in the high lands, the low lands, and in some parts of the cities and the barrios that have resisted capitalist subjugation. [...] This is different from American and European capitalism, and it gives us an advantage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> As defined by Day, whereas anarchist refers to groups and tactics that are consciously identified as being grounded in philosophical anarchism, anarchistic refers to the implicit use or adoption of anarchist elements in a group or tactic without awareness of philosophical anarchism. Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Shultz, 'The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath,' 29.

Similarly, David Choquehuanca, a Bolivian politician and activist, elaborates on the communal roots that facilitate the construction of socialism in Bolivia:

We have always *governed ourselves* in our communities. This is why we maintain our customs, perform our own music, speak our own Aymaran language, in spite of a 500-year effort to erase these things – our music, our language, and our culture. In a *state of clandestinity*, we have *upheld our values, economic forms, our own types of communitarian organization*, which are all being reappraised now. This is why we are incorporating into socialism something that has survived for 500 years — *the communitarian element*. We want to build our own socialism.<sup>49</sup>

There has always been *self-government, autonomous entities*. In some places, there are even organizational forms that have been maintained for 500 years.<sup>50</sup>

Some common threads emerge from the excerpts quoted above, namely, the networked, communal, and self-organised nature of indigenous communities. Students of Bolivia have expanded on these threads, and have also emphasised the existence of a different conception of leadership that has been described as back-seat driving.<sup>51</sup> As will be discussed below, some have argued that these particularities of indigenous communities

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<sup>49</sup> Cris Gonzalez and Patricia Bravo, 'Bolivian Foreign Minister: "Communitarian Socialism will refound Bolivia",' *Bolivia Rising*, May 2009, <http://boliviarising.blogspot.com/2009/05/bolivian-foreign-minister-communitarian.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Gonzalez and Bravo, 'Bolivian Foreign Minister: "Communitarian Socialism will refound Bolivia".'

<sup>51</sup> Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*, 11; Zibeche, 'Subterranean echos: Resistance and politics 'desde el Sótano'', 30.

in Bolivia impart an advantage to indigenous communities in times of mobilisation and protest.

First, many scholars have noted Bolivia's rich networks (both historical and present) of campesino communities (known in Bolivia as *ayllus*), anarchist worker's unions, campesino unions, neighbourhood associations and many other forms of collective organisations.<sup>52</sup> These collective organisations, many argue, represent radical traditions of organising that provide unexpected reserves of strength during periods of mobilisation and protest.<sup>53</sup> Cusicanqui argues that:

Bolivia's indigenous have clung to the root of their power: the simple fact of being the occupants of a space for thousand of years, of naming it and converting it into a cultural and productive space through the force of their own fiestas, communal work, cultural resourcefulness and autochthonous technology.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ballvé, 'Boivia de pie!'; Burbach, 'Communitarian Socialism in Bolivia'; Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Cusicanqui, 'Liberal democracy and ayllu democracy in Bolivia: The case of Northern Potosí'; Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation'; Dangl, *The Price of Fire*; Dangl, 'Common Ground: Learning from Latin American Social Movements'; Cris Gonzalez and Patricia Bravo, 'Bolivian Foreign Minister: "Communitarian Socialism will refound Bolivia"'; Hylton, Thomson, and Gilly, *Revolutionary horizons*; Shultz, 'The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath'; Harry E. Vanden, 'Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance,' in *Latin American social movements in the twenty-first century*, ed. Richard Stahler-Sholk, Glen David Kuecker, and Harry E. Vanden (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Cusicanqui, 'The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation,' 180.

The culturally grounded communal political/economic/social/cultural practices enacted in ayllus represent remarkable sources of non-hegemonic direct action practices as articulated in postanarchist philosophy. To the extent that they ward off colonisation, continuously decolonise what has been colonised, and create alternatives to state and corporate forms, indigenous communities represent a powerful mechanism of structural renewal.

This characteristic, which might have been expected to decline with increasing urbanisation, is being recreated in cities throughout Bolivia. The communal action that took shape around water issues in Cochabamba, for example, may be one of the most widely reported examples of direct action in Bolivia. In the city of Cochabamba, the water distributions systems were not built to reach the poor neighbourhoods. The problem became unbearable as new migrants populated the outskirts of the city. In order to alleviate this problem, the residents of the poor neighbourhoods relied on their communal skills to solve the problem for themselves: they created water committees, associations and cooperatives and then they set to work using the scarce resources that they had to construct distribution networks, build storage tanks, and drill wells.<sup>55</sup> As discussed above, in 2000, when the government of the day attempted to privatise the water utilities, including the distribution system and wells built by the poor neighbourhoods of Cochabamba, the residents of these neighbourhoods organised a

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<sup>55</sup> Raúl Zibechi, 'Cochabamba: From Water War to Water Management' (CIP Americas Program, May 28, 2009), <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6154>.

prolonged protest and managed to have the privatisation cancelled.<sup>56</sup> Today such committees are functioning throughout Cochabamba, and supplying almost 30 percent of the population with water, through “an immense decentralised network constructed on the basis of reciprocity and mutual aid and administered in the same manner.”<sup>57</sup> According to Raúl Zibechi, the success of the water committees in building, managing and protecting their water system is in large part grounded in the communal practices that the migrants brought with them from their rural communities.<sup>58</sup> Some contend that this characteristic of Bolivian society carries a unique potential for resisting and overturning dominant economic, political and military arrangements.<sup>59</sup> Though it is generally framed this way by students of Bolivia, one could argue that the unique potential of these

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ballvé, ‘Boivia de pie!’; Burbach, ‘Communitarian Socialism in Bolivia’; Dangl, ‘Common Ground: Learning from Latin American Social Movements’; Harry E. Vanden, ‘Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance’; Zibechi, ‘A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto’; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*. Burbach emphasizes that this revolutionary potential is very different from the revolutionary socialism of the previous century, as it is not based on a top down approach aimed at the overthrow and capture of the state. In doing so, he echoes what many in the ‘changing the world without taking power’ school have been arguing, as well as the emphasis on social rather than social revolution emphasized by postanarchist theorists, such as Richard Day. See: Day, *Gramsci Is Dead*; J. K. Gibson-Graham, ‘Remarx: ‘Place-Based Globalism’: A New Imaginary of revolution,’ *Rethinking Marxism* 20, no. 4 (10, 2008): 659-664; John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002); Naomi Klein, *Fences and Windows* (Random House of Canada, 2002); Michal Osterweil, ‘Place-based Globalism: Theorizing the global justice movement,’ *Development* 48, no. 2 (6, 2005): 23-28

communal practices rests in their ability to create space for the cultivation and nourishment of social revolution.

Second, many have noted the horizontal, self-organised, non-statist character of many indigenous communities.<sup>60</sup> While some have managed to maintain a non-state form, other communities, such as those in El Alto, have acquired a non-state form, as settlers carried the seeds of their old communities to their new one.<sup>61</sup> Highlighting the power of this characteristic, Zibechi argues that one of the most remarkable aspects of contemporary mobilisation and protest is that much of it has been carried out without the existence of centralised organisational structures.<sup>62</sup> Most remarkable is that the lack of such structures does not seem to have diminished the effectiveness of the movements and protests. Indeed, their absence seems to have yielded more social energy.<sup>63</sup> “The key to this overwhelming grassroots mobilisation is,” Zibechi argues, “the basic self-organisation that fills every pore of the society.”<sup>64</sup> It is precisely because protest actions and mobilisation rely on an intensified version of skills that they already practice in their everyday life, that Bolivian indigenous people can carry them out so effectively and

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<sup>60</sup> Cusicanqui, ‘Liberal democracy and ayllu democracy in Bolivia: The case of Northern Potosí’; Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’; Dangl, *The Price of Fire*; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*.

<sup>61</sup> Zibechi, ‘A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto’; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*, 77.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Zibechi, ‘A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto.’

skilfully.<sup>65</sup> “Something like this,” he writes, “can only happen if there already exists, in daily life, the habit of self-organisation.”<sup>66</sup> It is in this second characteristic that the non-hegemonic quality of indigenous practices is most clearly illustrated.

This habit of self-organisation practiced over the centuries by many indigenous communities can be understood as a process of prefiguration. As Day argues:

[In the event of a revolution] very few people would be ready to accept the life of non-domination and non-exploitation – most would seek new masters, and a few would try to accommodate them. Avoiding the quest for masters requires some experience in alternatives to slavery; it requires prefiguration of other ways of being within and alongside existing practices.<sup>67</sup>

Defining their movements, tactics and practices as prefiguration seems to entail that they are preparing for some great moment, presumably one of political revolution. In Bolivia, however, one could argue that the revolution has been underway for quite some time. Indeed, to the extent that indigenous communities are creating and recreating communally grounded political/economic/social/cultural practices, thereby limiting their dependency on state and corporate forms, they are engaging in structural renewal and are building their new world in the shell of the old. In so doing, they are engaging in a powerful social revolution, the likes of which have likely never been equalled on the

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<sup>65</sup> Zibechei, ‘A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto’; Zibechei, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*, 77.

<sup>66</sup> Zibechei, ‘A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto.’

<sup>67</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 34.

continent. From this perspective, the election of Evo Morales is only an epiphenomenon of a much deeper and more meaningful historical process. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of their organising in resisting and warding off neoliberal hegemony may rest in the centuries of practice in fighting hegemony with non-hegemony.

Finally, some students of Bolivia have noted the different conception of leadership in Aymara and Quechua communities. Ayllus are said to have maintained mechanism for the inhibition of the concentration of power for centuries.<sup>68</sup> In reference to rural Aymara communities, Cusicanqui explains that:

They don't need this leadership that is like permanent leadership. The communities have leaders but as a rotational thing that is a service to the community. It's kind of a burden to be a leader for a community, you know? It's something you do once in a lifetime and you do because you ought to do, and that the community says it's your turn or the turn of your family. So, that creates a totally different relationship with power structures and, in a way, it decolonizes power and, to a certain extent, gives it back to the people.<sup>69</sup>

Expanding on that argument, Cusicanqui argues that there has long been cross-pollination between the rural and urban communities, because of the affinity between the rural

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<sup>68</sup> Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Andalusia Knoll, 'Bolivian Anarchism and Indigenous Resistance: Interview with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui,' *Pittsburgh Indymedia's weekly review of news from the grassroots* (Pittsburgh: Rustbelt Radio, October 14, 2007), <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/946/31/>; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*, 77.

<sup>69</sup> Knoll, 'Bolivian Anarchism and Indigenous Resistance: Interview with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.'

Aymara cosmovisión (world view) and the urban anarchist unions, which has allowed this conception of leadership to gain a foothold in urban areas.<sup>70</sup>

This vision of leadership also seems to have been transplanted and to have taken hold in El Alto. Roxana Seijas, the director of the Federation of Neighbourhood Organisations of El Alto (FERUVE), explains that the base communities refer to the leaders of FERUVE as stuffing.<sup>71</sup> Being a leader is a service to the community, it is never independent of the base communities, and it entails a lot of hard work.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, since the leaders are ‘stuffing’, they can be changed without harming the organisation or changing its direction, because, as the analogy goes, the people are driving from the back seat.<sup>73</sup> Students of social movements in Bolivia, such as Cusicanqui, Dangl and Zibechi, have argued that this characteristic constitutes a strong advantage in times of crisis, because it allows protests to take off and to be maintained without the need for leaders.<sup>74</sup>

El Alto may well represent the most striking cotemporary expression of anarchistic practices in Bolivia. El Alto is a rapidly expanding city of mostly indigenous people of Aymara and Quechua heritage. According to Zibechi:

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<sup>70</sup> Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not defeated*; Andalusia Knoll, ‘Bolivian Anarchism and Indigenous Resistance: Interview with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.’

<sup>71</sup> Zibechi, ‘A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto.’

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Cusicanqui, ‘The Roots of the Rebellion: Reclaiming the Nation’; Dangl, *The Price of Fire*; Zibechi, *Dispersar El Poder: Los Movimientos Sociales Como Poderes Antiestatales*.

The insurrection of October 2003 that overthrew President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and tripped up the neoliberal project in Bolivia revealed the existence of an alternative Aymara society that reached its highest point of development in the area surrounding Lake Titicaca and finds its clearest contemporary expression in the city of El Alto. This society has its own political and social institutions, its own economy, and a culture that is clearly distinct from the mestizo-white "official" society built on state institutions and the market economy.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, the city seems to embody the concept of structural renewal described by Day. El Alto has a long history of social struggle, due in part to its strategic location above the capital of La Paz.<sup>76</sup> It was not until neoliberal reforms lead to the massive displacement of indigenous campesinos from their rural communities to El Alto, however, that it gained the unique urban form that it has today. In 1976, the city had a population of 95,000 people; today the population has jumped to more than a million. The most arresting characteristic of the city is that it was built by and for the residents, and that it is largely self-organised by the residents.<sup>77</sup> More than 500 neighbourhood councils combine to make the Federation of Neighbourhood Councils of El Alto. Most residents of the city are part of a council, where they engage in works of collective solidarity and mutual aid to construct and improve their city.<sup>78</sup> Reflecting the rich heritage and traditional organisation of the Aymara and Quechua ayllus, the councils are organised horizontally

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<sup>75</sup> Zibechi, 'A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto'.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Dangl, *The Price of Fire*, Chapter 7.

<sup>78</sup> Zibechi, 'A World of Difference: Survival and Existence in El Alto'.

in such a way that encourages radical participatory democracy while inhibiting the concentration of power.<sup>79</sup> This appears to be a very clear example of the non-hegemonic strategy of direct action, described by Day, being put to practice. By building from the bottom-up on a myriad of micro-relations and practices, inhabitants of El Alto are building alternatives to state and corporate forms and showing the world how such alternatives can be employed to build a new world in the shell of the old.<sup>80</sup> It should be said that the situation in El Alto is precarious by any standard: most of the residents do not have access to waste collection services, most do not have access to health care, many are illiterate, and most live in abject poverty.<sup>81</sup> This does not detract, however, from all that they have succeeded to accomplish for themselves, but rather is indicative of how much work they have yet to do. Indeed, according to Zibeche, though they still have much to accomplish, the residents are aware that they have constructed and managed everything for themselves, and they are proud of what they have accomplished.<sup>82</sup>

## **Conclusion**

These three characteristics of Bolivian indigenous communities – their communal spirit, their self-organised quality, and their different conception of leadership – represent powerful underlying enabling elements of social capacity in Bolivia. The failure to notice these Bolivian dynamics, on the part of most students of the region, may rest in the fact

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

that Latin America resistance has long been theorised through liberal and Marxist paradigms of state-based social change. As postanarchist philosopher, Richard Day, has observed, the Marxist revolutionary strategies that characterised left-wing politics and scholarship for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century followed a logic of hegemony in seeking state power to reverse the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors.<sup>83</sup> Post-Marxist and liberal reformists, on the other hand, pursue a strategy of demand and integration within the current hegemonic system.<sup>84</sup> For some time, he argues, the dominance of these paradigms has had the effect of obscuring many non-hegemonic movements, tactics and practices that seek to escape the logic of hegemony – of reform/revolution – altogether.<sup>85</sup>

What is most interesting about these indigenous practices is that by operating non-hegemonically rather than counter-hegemonically, they have provided, and continue to provide, a viable alternative to the logic that forces agents and scholars alike to choose between strategies of reform which strengthen the current system, and strategies of revolution which leave off all possibility of substantive change to a distant future. Given that the current wave of mobilisation seems to be rejecting not only unsatisfactory possibilities of reform within (neo)liberalism, but also Marxist strategies of revolution, increased attention to non-hegemonic action seems particularly timely.

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<sup>83</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

To be sure, many liberals and post-Marxists are now focusing on traditionally overlooked groups.<sup>86</sup> The problem is that the emergence of these groups as important political actors is often explained in terms of changes related to neoliberal reforms. Scholars associate the declining salience of the worker, worker's unions, and the working class with the end of the Cold War and the general decline of the salience of communism as an ideology, thereby positing traditionally overlooked groups as *new* actors. While arguments that the rise of traditionally overlooked groups reflects the decline of the class-based identities certainly captures part of the dynamic, they fail to account for the broadening of who counts as relevant actors, and of what counts as significant practices of resistance. This broadening reflects more than the declining salience of class politics – it reflects the diminishing dominance of modernist thought as a whole. As totalising projects and unidirectional conceptions of time and progress lose salience, the value of peoples and practices, which had hitherto been considered outdated, unfortunate residues of a miserable past, is made visible. Accordingly, these actors may be less new, than newly visible. This distinction is crucial, because if these actors and practices are not new, they do not merely represent new potential, but a longstanding underlying strength. Indeed, the potential of the 'great disintegrated masses'<sup>87</sup> had already been recognised by anarchists at the time of the First International, when it became a major source of

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<sup>86</sup> See for example: Jung, 'The Politics of Indigenous Identity: Neoliberalism, Cultural Rights, and the Mexican Zapatistas'; J. Petras, 'Latin America: The Resurgence of the Left,' *New Left Review* 1 (1997): 223; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*.

<sup>87</sup> Antonio Gramsci, 'Communist University - 1926, Gramsci, Some aspects of the southern question,' n.d., <http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/1926,+Gramsci,+Some+aspects+of+the+southern+question>.

contention between Marx and Bakunin.<sup>88</sup> The claim of post-Marxists that these actors are new, therefore, can at best be interpreted as a symptom of the widespread ignorance of anarchist philosophy in academia, and at worst, as wilful omission.

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<sup>88</sup> Bakunin, Lehning, and Avrich, Selected writings of Michael Bakunin