
An extraordinary series of revolutionary events unfolded in the first half decade of the 21st century in South America’s most-poverty stricken land. From the Water War in Cochabamba, 2000, through the vast mobilizations of the Aymara in the Bolivian altiplano in 2000, 2001, and 2002, the actions of the coca growers (los cocaleros) in Chapare between 2000 and 2003, the First Gas War of 2003 with the powerful protests of Aymara en El Alto, and finally to the Second Gas War of 2005, Bolivia experienced a series of mobilizations, popular protests, strikes, highway blockades, confrontations with army and state. Again and again came eruptions of creative human power resisting the governing powers of capital and state: a projection of a different manner of life and labor through a uniting of emancipatory action and thought by urban masses, peasant growers of coca, Aymara and Quechua Indigenous—hundreds of thousands of Bolivian women, men, youth.

Bolivia, 2000–2005, was a period verging on full social uprooting. In October 2003, President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was forced to flee after unleashing state forces, who massacred 67 demonstrators protesting his rule as hundreds of thousands marched from El Alto into La Paz. Developing a radical agenda, a Left Indigenous and popular insurrectionary movement extended from October 2003 through the Second Gas War of May–June 2005, leading to the forced resignation of Carlos Mesa, Sánchez de Lozada’s replacement. As Jeffery Webber expressed it: “... Bolivian society was intensely divided along the lines of class, race, and region. Out of this context two social blocs emerged: a left indigenous bloc, constituted by worker and peasant organizations based in La Paz, Cochabamba, Oruro, Potosí and Chuquisaca, and an eastern-bourgeois bloc in the Departments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Pando and Bendi.” (Webber, 2010).

Rather than outright civil war and/or the taking of power by the left-indigenous insurrectionary force that had forcible dismissed two presidents and developed a radical agenda, the movement found itself presented with an electoral

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* As integral to this Chapter the reader should consult “The Statist Marxism of Garcia Linera,” Section II of Chapter 14, “Horizontal-ism, State-ism, Marxism and the Indigenous Dimension: Álvaro García Linera, Raul Zibechi, Hugo Blanco,” as well as “The Tipnis March: New Horizons for Popular Education” by Benito Fernandez in Part III.
pathway—a December 2005 presidential election. The result was the unprecedented election of an Indigenous president, Evo Morales, breaking the old colonialist framework that had characterized Bolivia’s history for centuries, and thus taking important steps toward Indigenous liberation.

However, at the same time, the electoral road fundamentally changed the trajectory of this profoundly revolutionary half decade 2000–2005. In this sense, we can divide the transformative process in two: the first period of 2000 to 2005, a revolutionary transformative process; and a second period of 2006 to the present, a process of what happens after?, after the election of Morales, a period marked by the pull of state-capitalism within the framework of what Webber terms “reconstituted neoliberalism.” But as well, a period marked by Indigenous resistance to the imposition of state-ism. We wish to briefly examine and contrast key moments in these two periods.

1 The Revolutionary Social Process, 2000–2005

In Los ritmos del Pachakuti, Raquel Gutiérrez’s presentation and analysis center on three threads of the rebellion, at times acting independently with their own demands, views and actions, and at times intertwined with a strength and power that proven determinate in confronting the Bolivian state: (1) The Coordination for the Defense of Water and of Life (La Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida), which carried on the “Water War” in Cochabamba; (2) The blockades launched by the Aymara communities around La Paz, particularly under the leadership of Maliku Felipe Quispe; (3) The struggles in Chapare carried out by the coca growers under the direction of their union, headed by Evo Morales. This does not exhaust the vast, multi-dimensional participation of the Bolivian masses in this period of revolutionary transformation. It is only to single out these three most prominent currents, which, at different moments, would unite diverse segments of the population with their demands and actions.

A concurrent, complementary way of thinking about the struggle which Gutiérrez discussed, and which Hylton and Thomson put emphasis upon, is the intellectual division between the national-popular struggle, with its components of the national, the proletariat, and the state form, and that of Indian

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1 This Chapter is indebted to a number of important studies on Bolivia which have detailed these social processes in a far more extensive manner then could be taken up in the present study. See in particular Gutiérrez Aguilar (2008). As well, see Hylton and Thomson (2008); Olivera (2004); Webber (2011); and, Zibechi (2012a).