



Marcher with sign to 'Cancel Decree 4078, Call for Elections Immediately.' The decree was passed by interim president Jeanine Áñez making military impunity explicit. Photo courtesy of Chaski.

## ***Toward Freedom's* Bolivia reader:**

Voices on the political and social crisis  
Following the October 2019 elections in Bolivia

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# Introduction to TF's Bolivia Reader

By Dawn Paley

January 15, 2020

Dear Readers,

During most of the year, I am surrounded by a powerful group of Bolivian activists and scholars. Many of them, like me, arrived in Puebla (Mexico) to study with Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, a brilliant, powerful woman who is my friend and mentor. She is the author of Rhythms of the Pachakuti, an in-depth reading of struggles in Bolivia. Gutiérrez spent 17 years in the country, including years participating in the Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army, for which she was imprisoned for five years.

For the last three years I have lived with a longtime social activist from Cochabamba, who comes to Mexico twice or three times a year for extended periods. Bolivian politics, then, have been a constant in my day-to-day life for many years.

Towards the end of the summer, I started working as the editor of a small, independent website from Vermont called *Toward Freedom*. It was around the same time, in various meetings with Bolivian colleagues from Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and La Paz, we discussed the massive fires in the Chiquitano region. All were outraged by the lack of response by the Morales government.

On the heels of the fires, the upcoming elections became part of our daily conversations. Polls began to suggest that Morales' handling of the fires was damaging his popularity, and that the opposition, led by Carlos Mesa, could force a run off. There were also reports of irregularities in the organization of the elections, including an unusual increase in the electoral roll. The TSE also (Supreme Electoral Tribunal) handled polls unevenly, allowing polls showing support for Morales to be broadcast widely, while suppressing polls showing support for Mesa.

After a day of elections, at 9:25pm Bolivia time, a friend sent a link to a livestream of Morales giving a victory speech. No way, I thought. There's no way. It's too early.

In the months since then, multiple reports and audits have dissected what took place in Bolivia on October 20. The most comprehensive of these was carried out by the Organization of American States, which observed the elections and which Bolivia's Foreign Ministry requested carry out a binding audit of the elections on October 22.

It bears noting that in the lead up to the elections, Morales had a net positive relationship with Luis Almagro, the head of the OAS. After some hesitation regarding a failed referendum on Morales' fourth term, Almagro threw his weight behind Morales' run for re-election in 2019.

The Bolivian opposition was critical of Almagro's May 2019 visit to the Chapare, which they saw as a campaign stunt, and, prior to its release, rejected the OAS audit of the 2019 elections. This context is important: the OAS, far from an imperialist *imposition* upon the Morales government, was effectively mobilized by Morales and the power elite within the MAS. Until it wasn't.

I won't go into a detailed discussion of electoral fraud here. The OAS's final report, which was released on December 4; a separate report prepared by the European Union; and dozens of other articles in the Bolivian press regarding resignations of members of the TSE and other irregularities provide compelling evidence of electoral fraud, which favored Evo Morales in his run for re-election.

Already on the evening of October 20, mobilizations began in cities around the country, which Vladimir Díaz Cuellar describes in some detail in his piece "Requiem for the Process of Change."

On November 8, as the police mutiny began in Cochabamba, I ran a translation of a piece by Raquel Gutiérrez, in which she warned against increasing polarization, writing "the dispute is no longer about political power, rather it is about 'saving or destroying' Bolivia, depending on who is speaking." Over the coming days and weeks, I strove to publish voices like Gutiérrez's, which clearly positioned themselves against violence and the fascist right without shying away from legitimate, longstanding critiques of the Morales government. The next day, high ranking members of the MAS began to resign, and continued to do so over the following days.

On November 10, the OAS released its preliminary report on the elections. That same morning, Morales called for new elections. The country's main trade union (COB), once an important ally of the government, asked Morales to step down. The commander of the army, Williams Kaliman, also "suggested" Morales step down. Morales, his Vice President and others from his inner circle resigned, and traveled from El Alto to the Chapare.

By this point, polarization was the hallmark on social networks, especially in English.

"Now is not the time for nuance!" said the mansplainers (yes, most of them were men). The loudest voices in the anglo left tried to shut down criticism of the Morales administration, arguing the need to close ranks. They unequivocally labelled Añez's ascent to power a coup even as Bolivian comrades expressed concern about cause and effect. They argued that there was no trace of fraud, that the OAS had played dirty tricks. They stated without proof that Evo's departure was the result of a US-backed push for regime change. Finally, some demanded Evo's return as a solution to the crisis.

Comrades in Bolivia who pushed for a more comprehensive understanding of the crisis were disciplined, accused of being supporters of one side or another, or worse, of being fascists or doing the work of the CIA.

In other words, the push to close ranks served as a call to **ignore** Bolivians on the left who had been speaking out through this time in ways that made international leftists uncomfortable. What I did over this period as editor of *Toward Freedom* was to include voices from the independent left in Bolivia and Latin America, generally through translating and reposting articles that were already circulating in Spanish.

The dissonance was intense. On the one hand, people I know and respect (and others I don't know at all) were saying that anyone who wasn't demanding the return of Evo Morales was a fascist. On the other hand, I was communicating daily with Bolivians who were actively denouncing the violence of the interim government (including two bloody massacres at the hands of the Army in Sacaba and Senkata), while at the same time refusing to call for Evo's return. This same polarization has been deployed within Bolivia in an attempt to legitimate violence, especially following the Añez government taking power.

The choice I faced as editor of *Toward Freedom* was the following: to pretend that these well respected left voices did not exist and to ignore my trusted friends and comrades in Bolivia, or to face the ire of a good part of the Anglo left. And to be honest that choice was relatively straightforward.

Few other media outlets in English were giving these voices space: aside from *Capital, Nature, Socialism*, which posted a translation of an excellent piece by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and *Systemic Alternatives*, which published various pieces in translation by Pablo Solón questioning the coup narrative, I'm unaware of any other sites where such translations have appeared.

Over this period, *Toward Freedom* has been accused of "lacking balance," and even, unbelievably, together with other left media in the US, of "paving the way for the coup."

No one outlet is an appropriate single source for all of the news one consumes on any given issue, and I think those who wager such criticism related to balance are aware of this. The essence of the dispute is over the *kinds* of voices TF featured, which often contradicted what international leftists presume to know about Bolivia.

This brings to the fore another question that needs to be considered in these times: why is there so much pressure to silence dissident voices, and to force them into one of two positions that are in confrontation with each other? This question remains central as we continue to interpret events in Bolivia. I would suggest that there is power in opening the situation, in undoing polarization

and binaries. It has been feminists and minority Indigenous organizations in Bolivia who have been most able to position themselves in this manner. Their voices deserve to be heard.

Because as we've seen, calling for closing ranks and insisting that there is only one correct position is a polarizing mechanism. In another piece we ran in translation, Nuria Alabao states:

If anyone dares to criticize the Morales government's policies or echo the popular discontent contained in the protests against him, they can only be serving Yankee imperialism. They are accused of "legitimizing" the coup or, worse, of bearing responsibility for recent deaths.

This is the strategy of the former Bolivian vice president, Álvaro García Linera, who, in an interview with *Telesur*, pointed out the "correct" side of critical currents, suggesting that on the other side lie only fascism and dead people. Either you're with me or you're against me—a classic. He proposes that we "choose" between his increasingly authoritarian state populism and a savage neoliberalism with post-fascist characteristics. We are to "pick" the least bad option, thus erasing the movement for Morales' overthrow that came from below.

Without *Toward Freedom's* coverage of the ongoing crisis in Bolivia, critical voices from the Bolivian left and others would not have found a place in the English mediasphere. Our coverage added a series of left perspectives to the discussion, ensuring that the independent left in Bolivia was not erased from discussions in English. All of the stories we ran denounced the fascist right and state violence in the strongest terms, while at the same time expressing varied concerns about polarization and the role of Evo Morales and his entourage in creating the conditions for the crisis.

"We must support and highlight efforts that seek to overcome polarization and violent confrontation including Bolivian indigenous, native, peasant and urban organizations..." reads an [open letter by scholars of Bolivia](#), written on November 17. It is those very voices *Toward Freedom* has sought to amplify.

As editor, I encourage readers to read far and wide about Bolivia, and form their own opinion of what took place, as well as following events in coming months. We will continue to bring forward critical voices, in an effort to undermine polarization and avoid war. In the meantime, we offer this reader, which includes all of our Bolivia coverage in November and December 2019.

In the spirit of a plural left,

*Dawn Marie Paley*



October 29 street actions in La Paz against electoral fraud. Photo: Mandarina420, Wikimedia Commons

## Upheaval in Bolivia Lurches Towards Disaster

by *Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar*

November 8, 2019

*\*For Nati, for we share the same concerns.*

More than two weeks have passed since the elections in Bolivia on October 20th, and everything that has happened since has progressed extremely quickly. Understanding what is at stake is very complicated. In the streets and highways of Bolivia, what is being expressed is not only an election dispute, rather, at the very least, an enormous and heterogeneous anger against 10 years of attacks by Evo and his Macho-Leninist pseudo-plurinational method of organizing political power, the economy and public life. The social energy of contempt and contestation from a population that is no longer willing to continue allowing certain things is being claimed though a huge effort, by the most delirious and *machista* conservative, capitalist, racist and religious positions.

I am experimenting, here, with the construction of an explication: weaving facts and contrasting narratives. In these moments, we must undo the logic of polarization, clashes and war that today are tearing up the cities and regions of Bolivia. This is also an attempt to grasp at the ferocity that which is being faced.

We cannot forget that Bolivia has been trapped in a fraud for 10 years. This fraud began when the new Constitution allowed the continuity of landowner power in the East of the country was passed, ignoring what had been deliberated upon by a vast array of members of the constituent assembly, men and women of the diverse nationalities that live in Bolivia.

But we must also remember: those who became members of the constituent assembly did so through by way of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism) party, which not only maintained party representation as the only form of political activity and participation, but also created backdoor means through which not to recognize any other political organizing, and thus negating, from that moment on, the expansion of democracy. This, for many, was an early affront.

We have to remember that on February 21, 2016, there was a referendum in which Bolivian adults were asked about the re-election of Evo for the fourth time, in contradiction to and above the Constitutional text, which was adopted in 2009. And Bolivia said “No.”

No to the indefinite reelection of a political regime that encourages extractivism, though they do so with an anti-imperialist and rigidly authoritarian rhetoric, dressed up in the costume of plurinationalism. Then came the judicial and argumentative gymnastics about the “political right” to stand for elections that has come to the fore over recent years. This was another affront: Evo Morales was being set up to stay in power indefinitely.

There were elections on October 20, 2019, in which various candidates went against each other. The two candidates with the best chances were Evo Morales, with the MAS and Carlos Mesa, with Comunidad Ciudadana. The two are distinguishable in form, though in fact their economic projects are not that different: both prioritize the expansion of extractivism as the beating heart of the national economy.

Electoral law in Bolivia determines the following: if neither candidate earns 50% of the votes, there will be a run-off election if the difference between the first and the second candidate is less than 10%. The first counts that came in on that Sunday that already seems so far away pointed to a runoff.

In December, Morales would have had to have faced down Carlos Mesa—an ex-vice president during a neoliberal government that fell in 2003 because of community, Indigenous and popular mobilization, an interim ex-president during a period of rebellion, an ex-newscaster—and his



Comunidad Ciudadana, a heterogenous political coalition which has been organized over the past few years. Suddenly, at 7:40 pm, the counting stopped. Silence.

The unexplained silence during the vote count caused enormous social tension in a country where, until about 10 years ago, a crucial principle of political activity by communal, popular and union organizations was the rotation of the people in high leadership, precisely to avoid the creation of an eternal leader. This had happened decades before, with Juan Lechín at the head of the Bolivian Workers Central (COB). The *Mallkus* and *Mama T'allas* of the Qhara Qhara nation today make us remember this, speaking with great clarity about how this is about avoiding the concentration of power, and that one person hangs onto it.

After the silence during the vote count, some began to say “fraud.” Others decided to say “we won.”

Discontent grew and it was then that the Civic Committee (especially in the city of Santa Cruz) began to displace the presence and voice of Carlos Mesa and his political party, Comunidad Ciudadana. Civic Committees are long standing political institutions in Bolivia: groups of “living forces” which differ from department to department, and can include chambers of commerce, local groups and fraternities connected to organizing carnival and local celebrations, professional colleges and union organizations, and so on. These groups maintain a strict class alliance, generally under the hegemony of local businessmen, in the face of the historical political “centralism” of La Paz, and in general, with the aim of defending specific regional interests.

On October 22, 23 and 24, a period of intense deliberation opened in Bolivia. Multiple voices began to enter public space, lining up behind one of two versions of what took place on the 20th: “there’s no 10% lead, there will have to be a second round,” against “there’s more than a 10% lead and Evo’s staying.”

The Civic Committees from the departments spoke, one by one, the Committee of Santa Cruz being the most strident. The next days were marked by big town hall meetings (*grandes cabildos*): huge gatherings with tens or hundreds of thousands of people, where representatives from various party lines mix, and sharpen their positions, while attempting to dull the positions of the others.

Up until then it seemed like a zero-sum vice: one which forces a position and obliges each of us to choose sides, although neither is what we actually want. María Galindo described the initial dimensions of the political crisis as one that could be understood as a “cockfight,” calling on women to build political power to intervene so as to avert the disaster that was beginning to appear.

That call made sense to many of us and we sought to open a dialogue. The political game, at that time, appeared to take the form of a dispute between a victim and a victimizer: which was which seemed like the *quid* of the debate. So, Evo Morales is trying to get Carlos Mesa out of the game by cheating. Or, Mesa refuses to recognize Morales' victory and Morales is rebelling against that.

The Organization of American States appeared and offered to carry out an audit of the elections, given that Bolivia's electoral tribunal has zero credibility. At that time, there was still room for discussions and arguments: the thrust of the dispute remained around decimal points in the results of very badly managed elections. If Evo only wins by 9.9%, it goes to a run off, but if he gets 10.1% of the votes, he stays on as president.

### **The production of four different meanings**

The week that started October 28, which is to say, the second week of upheaval, the political—and increasingly social—conflict that was being expressed via blockades in the main cities as well as many smaller street actions, produced four different readings of the conflict, all of which are in dispute.

First, the government of Evo, stubborn, deaf and triumphalist, began moving all of the corporatist social organizations which, it must be said, were not taking any initiative of their own and were, rather, awaiting instructions. They were betting that the weekend of All Saints eve (November 1-3) would calm the people down.

Second, Carlos Mesa, Comunidad Ciudadana and allied Civic Committees appealed to the “defense of democracy” and demanded a runoff election; asking the people to meet in massive town halls “in defense of the vote.” Over these seven days, we began to see an increased participation of youth, especially students at private universities.

Third, a growing articulation of feminists and women in struggle, produced another source of meaning in discordance with the above, which tried to undo the disaster scenario that was looming, making huge efforts to meet and debate and weave meaning together in La Paz, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and other cities.

On October 30, Mujeres Creando, a key fibre of feminist articulation, organized a collective public intervention in the center of La Paz, where participants called for a “collective abortion” of ecocidal leaders (*caudillos ecocidas*). In other cities, women and feminist collectives carried out diverse actions: publicly “sweeping up” the *caudillista* garbage in Santa Cruz, opening spaces for deliberation in El Alto, and holding meetings in Cochabamba to discuss and write manifestos in a situation of intensifying violence.

Fourth, the growing centrality of Luis Fernando Camacho, the president of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, created another source of meaning. This man, in a well rehearsed maneuver of patriarchal competition, moved further and further away from his promise to support Carlos Mesa, and started presenting himself as a protagonist, authorized by none other than “God,” to carry the “anti-Evo” message into the streets.

### **From the ‘cockfight’ to the victim/victimizer/savior triad**

It is in the third week of the conflict, at the beginning of November, after the celebrations and events in honour of the dead, that the upheaval was exacerbated and became even more complicated. Between October 31 and November 4, the collective demand for an electoral run-off, linked to the lack of credibility of the 0.1% margin that would allow Evo to complete 20 years as president, became a deafening cry for his removal. “Fuera Evo,” screamed the propaganda from the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, and its leader, Macho Camacho (as he himself likes to be called) came and went between the city of Santa Cruz and the airport of El Alto with a “resignation letter” which, he said, he was going to give to Evo to sign.

Each time Camacho came and went to and from El Alto (which is located above the city of La Paz), tensions mounted between those who did not want to allow him to leave the airport and those who wanted to accompany him to the center of the city. Meanwhile, Cochabamba overflowed with street brawls that left one dead and dozens wounded. The most racist and misogynist prejudices emerged, as occurred in the town of Vinto.

Rather suddenly, the voice of Camacho became increasingly distant from that of Comunidad Ciudadana, with two immediate effects. First, Carlos Mesa and his discourse about the defense of liberal democracy was completely erased. Second, any possibility of intervention that was being built up, with great difficulty, was quashed, so that a confrontation “between men,” which is to say, between machos, could be placed at the center of the dispute. In addition, Macho Camacho proceeded to anoint himself saviour.

This is what we ended up with: An ever angrier Evo Morales, closing Plaza Murillo, the political heart of La Paz, with his allies, saying that his will is the law, in the midst of growing uprisings around the country; a Carlos Mesa increasingly out of place and without a platform from which to speak; and Macho Camacho, coming and going from Santa Cruz to El Alto, affirming that God has chosen him as the saviour of the nation. He *literally* says that in a professionally produced video that is circulating on social media.

Victim/victimizer/saviour: this patriarchal triad has been installed deep into the political confrontation in Bolivia. The appearance of Camacho-saviour challenges Evo-victimizer and silences Mesa-victim. In this situation, the power of the words of feminists and women becomes ever more urgent and, at the same time, more difficult to enunciate. It becomes more and more

difficult to speak our words, and to design actions that can air out the tragic triad that will end up eating us all. Some voices are scared and begin to bend towards one of the points of the triangle, while others among us steadfastly refuse to do so.

The situation in Bolivia is becoming more and more difficult. Bolivian society is being dragged towards the innards of the patriarchal symbolic order that sustains the logic of war, and that guarantees the expansive and colonial accumulation of capital. According to this script, the dispute is no longer about political power, rather it is about “saving or destroying” Bolivia, depending on who is speaking. Evo Morales can play this game, and in fact he can do so very comfortably. The discussion today isn’t about whether or not Evo has ignored the mandates that have emerged from the people when they’ve been consulted; rather, what is being discussed is who will save Bolivia. Evo-saviour against Camacho-victimizer or Camacho-saviour against Evo-victimizer. It bears repeating that this narrative has already led to three killings and many more people being wounded.

It is not at all clear how to get out of this situation. It is not fertile to adopt a discourse of “pacification” of the violent confrontation, which is growing worse. We must go deeper, and undo, to the fullest extent possible, the logics that animate the reiterated production of anti-community political forms, which expropriate collective voices and decisions, which discipline bodies in a profoundly misogynist manner, and which today are personified by angry men waving bibles at each other. By way of example, readers, just listen to the pathetic speech the “brilliant Marxist” (Evo’s Vice President Álvaro) García Linera gave yesterday.

One thing we know for sure is that we need to strengthen the collective and public voice that make feminist words, proposals and desires audible, raising the voices of women trapped inside a patriarchal fight for the domination and control of our lives; lifting up the decisions of communities that reject accelerated extractivism; and spreading the ideas of non-violent men. We need to exercise our power in order to unblock this situation. And we have to build this power ourselves, through permanent assembly: it isn’t the church, nor the universities, nor international organizations who will solve this.

We must, as women and as feminists, strengthen and project our own political capacity, linking it with the diverse communal, neighbourhood, union, social, and intellectual groups that are decoupling themselves from a scene of silence and ruin.

*Written on Friday, November 8th, 2019, as the question we are all asking is whether the army will be deployed today or tomorrow to kill our children and our brothers and sisters.*

*Translation by Toward Freedom. Find the original text in Spanish online at Zur.*

**Author Bio:** *Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar is an activist and the author of Rhythms of Pachakutik*



Protest in La Paz against fraud and the Morales government. Photo: Paulo Fabre, Wikimedia Commons

## New Elections are *Not* Enough

by *Huascar Salazar Lohman*

November 10, 2019

On October 20th, after a day of peaceful elections, the government of Evo Morales began one of the most grotesque and obvious frauds in the recent history of the country. This was confirmed today by the Organization of American States, but it was something the people already knew;

that's why they took to the streets. The election fraud provoked a feeling of anger, as does the discretionary use of power the MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) has exercised in past years.

Let's go back to February 21, 2016, the day of another election convened by the MAS, when the Bolivian people voted not to modify the Constitution to allow Morales to stand for another term. The government ignored the popular sovereignty expressed in the voting booths, and allowed Morales to stand for re-election using an absurd appeal to the constitution (the Constitutional Court determined that indefinite re-election is a human right).

This was present in our collective memory, along with a series of other aggressions. Aggressions towards diverse popular sectors, and especially Indigenous communities; new alliances with national and transnational economic elites; creeping authoritarianism; empty and untethered revolutionary discourse; and the cynicism with which the government repeatedly lied. All of this together meant that when it came to the October elections, the Bolivian people would not let another abuse by those in power stand.

Something that we've learned in the history of Bolivia after the military governments is that there is a desire to search for democratic solutions in the face of growing authoritarianism—and it doesn't matter if it is limited, liberal democracy. These democratic solutions then allow the people to undo the power of the government.

In the face of election fraud in Bolivia, the people went into the streets demanding democracy be respected, a demand the government wanted to usurp. The unrest that flooded Bolivia over the past weeks surpassed the dogmatic rhetoric of the progressive left, which fails to understand processes of struggle from below. This unrest was related to the desire to recuperate the basic principles of democracy (the same principles which gave the MAS the presidency to begin with). As María Galindo has pointed out, most of those who voted for Carlos Mesa didn't do so in order for him to become president, rather, they did so in order that Evo would stop being president. This was a pragmatic decision in the face of a democracy under threat, meant to open a new historical moment in which the MAS would no longer be the hegemonic party. That's what led the government, with their fraud and their refusal to accept run off elections, to raise the spectre of the extreme right and promote violence.

Fernando Camacho, with his conservative, fanatical discourse, was a nobody before the confrontations started. Prior to October 20, the conservative and reactionary currents in the country didn't have anywhere near the centrality that they do today. It was the Morales government that revived the "old right," because it needed to paint those accusing it of fraud as an antagonistic enemy. But no: we are millions, we who are not on the right and who denounce and stand against the fraud.

We know that using violence has been a strategy of the government in certain critical moments. Black January, El Porvenir, and the killing of Vice-Minister Illanes were all actions of a government that provokes violence in order to use crushing force to discipline those who go against its interests.

Isn't that what the government has been doing over these past days, provoking a bloodbath so that they could call out a *coup d'état* and displace the discussion of electoral fraud? Isn't that what they tried to do when a violent mob was blamed for the—totally unjustifiable—attack on the mayor of Vinto, which was shown on all of the television screens in the nation, while there was total silence about the killing of a 20 year old man from the opposition to the government (the Vice President even lied about his killing).

The government appears to enjoy creating martyrs with the lives of others, doesn't it? It sought to cover up fraud with blood. This violence is theirs, as it was during the most repressive and reactionary governments in Bolivia. The violence of the past weeks was a political calculation, which is totally unacceptable.

The first report of the OAS is not a victory, rather, it deepens our rage and pain, for a number of reasons: 1) it confirms what we all knew in Bolivia, and what the government knew: there was fraud; 2) because over the past days three people have been killed, and hundreds wounded, and the government defended the fraud, deepening violence; 3) because the government purposefully invoked Bolivia's demons: racism and discrimination, and the polarization of the most profound and reactionary hatreds, strengthening the rancid right wing; 4) because people who we thought were comrades in different parts of Latin America needed the OAS come and say there was fraud (even such, some refuse to believe it), in order to be able to recognize the discontent in Bolivia and stand in solidarity with Bolivians in this moment. The desire to hold up an idealized Evo delegitimizes ongoing social struggles inside Bolivia. This dogmatic, colonial and paternalistic attitude must be examined.

After the OAS report began to circulate on social media this morning, President Morales held a press conference in which he called for new elections and said that new representatives would be named to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). He didn't say anything else. It is remarkable that Morales thinks that this will be enough. Who will elect the new magistrates to the TSE? Will it be the same parliament that elected those who oversaw the fraud? Does Evo think that he should stand as candidate again, and continue to ignore the referendum of February 21, 2016? How will the fraud be investigated in Bolivia? Those are just some of the many questions we have in this moment.

But the president didn't say anything else. Does he really think he can just erase what happened and start again? Because that's not likely to happen.

In this moment, the president's arrogance isn't helping. If Evo wants to stay in office until January 21 (when his current mandate ends), he needs to recognize the discontent in Bolivian society, recognize that people are demanding change, and respond to the people. Electoral fraud, and everything it signifies, doesn't go away because of a press conference. It appears the government doesn't have the intention of addressing any of this: the leaders of the MAS are angry because we caught them cheating, and like wounded *machos* who have been outed, they want to punish us for that.

That's why it didn't surprise me that after the president's press conference this morning, the demand for Morales to resign remained. To make clear: no one is calling for a *coup d'état*. We have to go beyond the noise of the ultra-right reactionaries: the Bolivian people are wise enough to take down a government according to the Constitution.

In 2005 Carlos Mesa was removed from office through struggle, and constitutional succession brought Eduardo Rodríguez Veltzé to the presidency. Many voices are asking for that now, for constitutional succession (which would have to skip the vice president, so that either the president of the senate or the president of the congress would become interim president). This would allow for the production of some means of social control over the electoral process, which would create the conditions for a constitutional exit to the current confrontations via free and fair elections.

Of course, we are all worried about the renewal of the conservative right that the government invoked and empowered, but we will not concern ourselves with them, rather, we must deal with the MAS. What happens next will depend, to a large extent, on the government's attitude. What is worth making clear is that any further act of violence that leads to bloodshed is the responsibility of this government, which appears to want to stay in power through any means necessary.

***Author Bio: Huascar Salazar Lohman is a Bolivian economist whose research is focused on community struggles.***





Demonstrations in La Paz on October 22 against electoral fraud and the government of Evo Morales.  
Photo: Paulo Fabre, Wikimedia Commons

## The Extreme Right Takes Advantage of a Popular Uprising

*by Raul Zibechi*

November 11, 2019

What caused the fall of the government of Evo Morales in Bolivia is an uprising by the people of Bolivia and their organizations. Their movements demanded his resignation before the army and police did. The Organization of American States sustained the government until the bitter end.

The context for what is taking place in Bolivia didn't start with electoral fraud, rather it began with systematic attacks by the government of Evo Morales and Álvaro García Linera against the same popular movements that brought them to power, to the point that when they needed the movements to defend them, the movements were deactivated and demoralized.

The social mobilization and the refusal of movements to defend what in another moment they considered to be "their" government was what precipitated Morales' resignation. That is made clear by the declarations by the Workers' Central of Bolivia (COB), the teachers and authorities of the Public University of El Alto (UPEA), and dozens of other organizations, including Mujeres Creando, which has been perhaps the clearest of all. The Latin American left appears unable to accept that a considerable segment of popular movements demanded the resignation of the government, because they can't see beyond the leaders (*los caudillos*).

The declaration of the Union Federation of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB), an organization that is close to the government, provides a clear example of what is felt from many within organizations: "President Evo, you have already done a lot for Bolivia, you improved education, health, and brought dignity to many poor people. President, do not allow your country (*el pueblo*) to burn, and don't allow more deaths, president. The people will respect you for the position you have to take, your resignation is inevitable, *compañero* president. We must leave the national government in the hands of the people."

This sad outcome has precedents that go back, in a short version, to the march in defense of the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS) in 2011. After that massive action, the government began to divide the organizations that convened the march.

Morales and García Linera maintained excellent relations with the business class as they created a coup against the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ) and the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), two historic Indigenous organizations. They sent in the police, kicked out legitimate leaders, and then sent in new leaders that close to the government under police protection.

In June of 2012, the CIDOB denounced "government meddling with the aim of manipulating, dividing and affecting the organic and representative organizations of the Indigenous peoples of Bolivia." One group of dissidents, with support from the government, refused to recognize the authorities and convened an "expanded commission" to elect new authorities.

In December of 2013, a group of dissidents linked to the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) within the CONAMAQ took over their offices, and beat and removed those who were there, with help from the police. They remained there so as to impede access by the legitimate authorities who wished to recuperate their headquarters. The communiqué of the CONAMAQ said that the

coup against them was so that the organization would “approve all of the policies against the Indigenous movement and the Bolivian people without anyone saying anything.”

On February 21, the government itself convened a referendum so that the people could vote on the possibility of a fourth re-election for Morales. Regardless of the fact that the majority voted NO, the government plowed ahead with plans for re-election.

Both of these actions, disregarding popular will and the removal of the legitimate leaders of social movement organizations, were coups against the people.

But it gets worse yet. On the morning of Wednesday, November 17, 2017, days before the referendum on re-election, a demonstration by parents of students arrived to El Alto’s City Hall. A group of 100 demonstrators entered the building by force, causing a fire which killed six people. Members of the MAS had infiltrated that mobilization, hiding behind a group of parents.

This is the style of a government that cries “coup,” but that time and again repressed organized popular sectors that stood up against the government’s extractivist policies.

For the majority of people in Bolivia, the elections of October 20 were fraudulent. The first counts indicated there would be a run-off election. But the counts stopped without explanation and the results presented the next day showed that Evo had won the first round, obtaining just a 10% lead over his next rival, though without receiving over 50% of the vote.

In different regions of the country there were clashes with police. Demonstrators burned three regional offices of the electoral tribunal, in Potosí, Sucre and Cobija. Citizen organizations called for an indefinite general strike. On October 23d, Morales denounced that a “coup d’état” by the Bolivian right was underway.

On Monday, October 28th, protests intensified, blockades were erected and demonstrators clashed with police, there was also fighting between government supporters and members of the opposition. As in other moments, Morales and García Linera mobilized co-opted social organizations to confront other organizations as well as those who opposed their government.

On November 2nd there was an important development. Luis Fernando Camacho, president of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, which had an alliance with the government of Morales, called on the police and army to “stand on the side of the people” to force the resignation of the president, invoking God and the bible. On Friday November 8th, the first three police units mutinied, in Cochabamba, Sucre and Santa Cruz; in La Paz uniformed officers mingled and mixed with demonstrators. Two days later, with the country mobilized, Evo verbally resigned (though not in writing).

In this extremely polarized scenario, we must point to the notable role of the feminist movement in Bolivia, especially of the Mujeres Creando collective, which spearheaded the articulation of women's organizations in the largest cities in Bolivia.

On November 6, in the midst of violent polarization, María Galindo (of Mujeres Creando) wrote in the *Página 7* newspaper: “Fernando Camacho and Evo Morales complement each other.” She continued: “Both call themselves the sole representatives of the ‘people.’ Both hate freedoms for women and queers. Both are homophobic and racist, and both are using this conflict to try and gain the upper hand.”

Galindo not only demanded the resignation of the government and the electoral tribunal (which was complicit in the fraud), but she demanded that new elections be convened under new rules, with which society is involved, so that “nobody, ever again, needs a political party to be heard and to be represented.”

The immense majority of people who live in Bolivia refused to enter into the game of war that Morales and Garcia Linera set up when they resigned and sent party members to participate in destruction and looting (especially in La Paz and El Alto), probably so as to force military intervention and justify their claim of a “coup” which never existed. The majority of Bolivians have also stayed out of the game played by the extreme right, which acts in violent and racist ways towards popular sectors.

If there is anything left of ethics and dignity in the Latin American left, we should be reflecting on power, and the abuses committed in its exercise. As feminists and Indigenous people have taught us, power is always oppressive, colonial and patriarchal. That is why they reject leaders (*caudillos*), and why communities rotate their leaders so that they don't accumulate power. We cannot forget that in this moment there is a serious danger that the racist, colonial and patriarchal right manages to take advantage of this situation to impose rule and provoke a bloodbath. The revanchist social and political desires of the dominant classes is as present as it has been over the last 500 years, and must be stopped without any hesitation.

We will not enter into the game of war that both sides wish to impose.

*Translated by Toward Freedom with author's permission. Spanish original at Desinformemonos.*

**Author Bio:** *Raúl Zibechi* is a journalist and popular educator who accompanies grassroots processes in Latin America.



Banners in front of the Mujeres Creando space. The middle banner reads ‘They (men) care for rank and power, we (women) care for hope and dreams.’ Photo: Mujeres Creando

# Kristallnacht in Bolivia

by Maria Galindo

November 11, 2019

Burning the whiphalas—a flag that represents Indigenous people throughout the continent—of public institutions is a fascist act, but equally fascist is the categorizing of ideas, bodies and spaces under one flag or another.

Entering the Government Palace with a bible in your hand to kneel before cameras with no legitimacy from the people is a fascist act and an action coherent with a *coup d’etat*.

Burning the houses of members of Evo Morales’ government is fascism.

Burning the house of the dean of the Public University, San Andres, Waldo Albarracín, who has always been a defender of human rights, is a fascist act of social intimidation against anyone who dares to speak, or take a dissenting stance against Evo Morales, or question the electoral fraud.

These are some of the images that are flooding the screens of televisions and cell phones throughout the world.

I write in a torrential rain on a night that I have baptized as the Night of the Broken Crystals (*Kristallnacht*), because its' aim is to sow fear, to open all the wounds of a racist, misogynist and homophobic colonial society. Revanchism has taken to the streets in search of blood, in search of enemies.

Today in Bolivia it is subversive to have hopes, the most subversive things are humor and disobedience, the most subversive choice is not to choose a side, and that is what we are betting on once again.

## **What is happening?**

It is not easy to explain because the conflict is ongoing. It grew and metamorphosed over hours. The conflict emptied eyes, paralyzed three hearts and beat countless legs and heads until turning the streets of the city of La Paz into a war zone, which was only calmed down for a few hours during the police mutiny.

Evo has denounced to the international community that it is a *coup d'etat* promoted by the CIA and the fascist landowning oligarchy of Santa Cruz, and that is partly true, but it is only half of the conflict.

On October 20th we went to vote in the general election with the sweetness inherent to these lands, but both the polls and the ballots were wet and empty. Empty of real alternatives and wet with a fraud of a magnitude that has already been denounced by the Electoral Observation Commission of the Organization of American States and the Electoral Observation Commission of the European Union.

That is why this election represented the opening of a latent conflict in Bolivian society and in the region. The deep crisis of representative liberal democracy and the “party” structure as the exclusive and official way of doing politics.

It tires me to have to repeat that the Movement to Socialism (MAS) is exporting to the world the idea that what is happening in Bolivia is a popular progressive bloc against an extreme and

fundamentalist right. The government of Evo Morales was for many years responsible for dismantling of popular organizations by dividing them, corrupting them and imposing clientelist leadership, making pacts with the most conservative sectors of society including fundamentalist Christian sects to which he granted the fascist illegal candidacy of a Korean evangelical pastor, who was endorsed with the approval of the MAS.

### **False dispute between left and right**

At the same time Evo Morales was building himself up as the sole figurehead which has taken us as a country, and the MAS project itself, toward a dead end.

He has mistakenly converted himself into the sole figurehead, a symbol of the concentration of irreplaceable power. The figure bears the myth of the “Indigenous president” whose symbolic power is the color of his skin, which he carries with him, a government inhabited by a circle of corrupt of intellectuals and leaders who revere him because they need him as a mask, as Franz Fanon outlines in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Evo is the figurehead and the mask, nothing more. All the populist content is merely rhetorical and that has led to the fact that today it is at the forefront of a political project that is exhausted and empty, and whose only possibility of continuity has been the destruction of all forms of dissent, criticism, debate, cultural or economic production . His model is neo-liberal consumerist, extractivist, ecocidal and clientelist.

It is for that reason that in the face of electoral fraud, repudiation emerged rapidly, concentrated in the generation of those under 25 years old, young and urban, that have been the protagonists of this resistance of almost 20 days.

### **The fascist turn: between two delusional leaders**

In these days the word democracy has slowly been emptied of meaning and turned into a slogan of fascist and fundamentalist groups.

Evo Morales decided to exalt racist acts to position himself as a victim, using these acts in perverse ways, to the point that acts of racism committed during the general strike became part of government propaganda, amplifying this speech and making racist acts useful for the government itself. Since the movements criticizing them was and is exclusively urban, the government also exploited urban-rural contradictions, as if the conflict was between the two. The intention was to use both contradictions to disqualify criticism and gain time. They did not care about the social cost.

In the face of the delusional leadership of Evo, the Santa Cruz region produced another delusional, apparently antagonistic but at the same time complementary leader. A white man, entrepreneur, and president of a “civic” organization who uses religious fanaticism and an openly misogynist discourse that promises the men of society the recovery of their ability to control women. His right-hand man, lawyer and advisor, is the legal defender of what in Bolivia has been called “the pack,” a group of men who raped their own friend on a night out on the town.

The religious fundamentalism of Fernando Camacho has sold the idea of the recovering the family, the nation and the persecution of “evil.” He disguised his racism as a national interest and his misogyny as an interest in the family. The apparent antagonism exacerbated the spirits of people and further polarized the conflict, he took arguments regarding democracy and turned them into scenes of macho wildfire. Young people began to parade with shields and when the police mutinied, they turned them from a repressive force to armed heroes and protectors of the conflict.

Today, with many millions of dollars involved, the army’s loyalty is being guaranteed for one of the two fronts in conflict: Evo Morales or Camacho.

In both cases the outcome is conservative. The fascist turn of this process has silenced civil society and has concentrated decision making on the bloodiest heights of Morales or Camacho.

## **Women’s Parliament**

What I am telling you happened in a few hours in a confusing and intense war of fake news, which has exacerbated all fears: fear of speaking, fear of taking a position, fear of having no side.

The peoples’ ability to process what is happening has been mutilated. There are no spaces for analysis or discussion. The discussion of an exit is again far from people and very confusing. No one without a weapon seems to have the right to speak.

That is why as part of an infinite series of actions taken by Mujeres Creando over the past days we have decided to open a deliberative space for women called the “Women’s Parliament,” where we can give voice to our hopes, where we can cultivate a climate of dialogue and discussion, which is what this fascist turn in the process is taking from us.

We are doing this in the middle of a climate that has become a struggle between two *coups*, between two fascisms, represents an effort to return to the original debate on democracy. We need to think, discuss and propose concrete solutions: that is the task that the Women’s Parliament takes up in these critical conditions, the proposal born in Cyprus Greece of and proposed by Paul Preciado.



## **Against the privatization of politics: the regional crisis**

I am convinced that the conflicts in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile demonstrate, with different facets and under different contexts, the crisis of representative liberal democracy and the privatization of politics.

The entire neoliberal process has reduced the content of democracy to a bureaucratic act and election apparatus, and nothing more. This process has resulted in the elections having become legitimizing acts of the massive exclusion of the interests of society, of the interests of specific sectors, of the complex voices that make up a society in spectators legally excluded from the right to speak, think and decide.

I call that privatization of politics. Evo Morales, in his resignation, claimed to have nationalized natural resources in Bolivia, referring to the exploitation of natural gas. Although that nationalization is partial, one thing that has been done is to privatize the policy to the point that if you were not from his party you had no right to say anything, and if you were in the party you couldn't opine either, since the decisions were and are handled by a closed circle. This created a giant democratic void, which is the space that fascism used to install a delusional leader model, that put frustrations on the plane of an insurmountable polarization that is only resolved by the way of the use of terror, of lies, according to the logic of the strongest.

The crisis in Chile, Peru and Ecuador has different characteristics, but basically it expels society and social struggles outside of "politics" and takes us away from the idea that the solutions are "political," deliberative and based on agreements. A generalized fascist turn and terror is installed to convert legitimate solutions and social questions into scenarios of violent counterposition of forces. That is what I call the fascist phase of neoliberalism.

This is why Religion, in all these cases, acquires a preponderance: by denying politics the space of discourse it opens up fanaticism fuelled by "religious" visions, and the curtailing of sexual freedoms and women's freedoms is the reward that these processes promise.

## **The Unseen**

The stage is also filled with non-explicit, invisible forces that offer money and weapons, and strategically design painful scenarios and stories. Behind these are the interests of the Chinese, Russian and North American projects not just in Bolivia, but in the entire region. Also in dispute is the largest lithium deposit in the world, which is untapped and as yet unresolved in the Uyuni salt flats, in Potosí.

Control over Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua are in dispute in Bolivia, to say the least. So the protests have become the manipulated scenario of the forces that are using us.

## Outcomes instead of solutions

In the Bolivian case there seems to be no solution: people are pressured to take a side according to fanatical identitarian processes, according to stories that have nothing to do with the facts, according to messianic and delirious narratives.

That is why we are concentrating our efforts on simple discussions, not wasting energy in trying to convince any of the fascist sectors that build their respective stories, but affirming the social spaces that we have been opening for decades.

We take back the space of our own bodies. That is why the word democracy, which arouses hopes, can be summoned to preserve what we have, the place we occupy, and the freedoms that we do in fact exert without any permission.

We are not only for the activation of ideas, but for the activation of emotions, from emotions. That is why humor, ironic as it may seem, social humor, the ability to make fun of fascist stories, has emerged with great force spontaneously from all corners.

They have turned our protest into a question of: Who is the most macho, who is the strongest? We therefore request a ring, in which all the actors in conflict fight each other in a duel to the death between each other and leave the rest of us in peace.

We are not cannon fodder.

*Thank you to the anonymous translator who submitted this translation in solidarity with those in struggle in Bolivia. You can read the original in Spanish at La Vaca.*

*Author Bio: María Galindo is a Bolivian feminist and founder of Mujeres Creando.*

## Bolivia's Lesson in Triumphalism

*by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui*

November 15, 2019

I have a very serious knee problem. They say it is pride. I am proud, in fact, of being a woman, and also of somehow having kept quiet all this time, because to me, this accident has been a gift from the *Pacha* (Pachamama, mother earth). Just this past 23rd I fell while planting with my daughter in Cochabamba, and I take it as a sign that there is a need for a certain politics of silence.

I have felt an excessive discourse overload. I admire the internet from afar, but I love face-to-face communication, that's why I preferred to come here, and not do it from my seat, because I can look people in the eyes, feel the vibes, and even feel anger against me. All that helps me to be myself, to be humble, to be gentle and not arrogant. This moment in history has given us a great lesson against triumphalism.

I don't believe in the two hypotheses that are being pushed.

The triumphalism that with the fall of Evo we have recovered democracy seems to me an excess, an analysis that is out of focus.

We need a lot more to recover democracy, we need to work like ants, we need to pay attention and recognize doña Ena Taborga in Rositas (a hydroelectric dam to be built in Guarani territory), the *compañeras* from Tariquía, the *compañeras* from TIPNIS (Indigenous Territory and Isiboro-Sécure National Park), *doña* Marquesa, *doña* Cecilia and all of the fighters and the work that they are doing right now. Some of them have even been candidates, but we need to be conscious of the realities in which democracy is still a very distant goal, because these realities are still run by unions captured by misogyny, by interests of all kinds which operate with dangerous intentions.

There are also people who have put their bodies on the line, who have fought, and yet when it comes to public spaces their word is denied as has been the case with Tariquía. So, I think that this forum is very good, positive, in order to begin discussing what we understand by democracy, and by being an Indigenous person.

The second wrong hypothesis, which seems to me to be extremely dangerous, is that of the coup d'état, which simply legitimizes in a complete package, wrapped in cellophane, the entire Evo Morales government in the moment when it is most degraded. To legitimize all this degradation with the idea of a coup d'état is criminal, therefore how this degradation began must be considered.

Upon arriving here an hour ago I gave two people a photocopy of the newspaper from November 2. I want to point out that a fellow named Juan Ramón Quintana (former member of Morales' government team), on November 2, was announcing the Vietnamization of the country. This is something that he has done for years: to indoctrinate, to insert Indigenous people into the networks of military mafias, which has happened in many communities.

Hugo Moldiz, who has worked with the so-called Red Ponchos... I knew other Red Ponchos, I knew brothers and sisters who went as a family to the hills to perform a ritual before entering into battle. Those are the Red Ponchos that I knew. What Hugo Moldiz did beginning on January

22, 2006 is to bring in a uniformed and absolutely armed army dressed in ponchos, but devoid of community networks.

It's as if we were to believe that we are facing a Cuban-style revolutionary government, risking ourselves for the leftist nostalgia of a group of machos that are not only Camacho's machos, but also leftist, misogynistic machos, who treat us like cannon fodder and as bait to build their networks of perversion of the popular sectors.

I remember very well when the military had a great orgy with the COB (Central Obrera Boliviana), with women, so as to negotiate their duty posts with the military hierarchy. We have not been able to realize that this was systematic, that it has lasted for years. That is why [Quintana] and his entire military network, which includes the man who controls the cable cars. I witnessed the political use of the cable cars, cards for travel on them being handed out so that people go down and burn and cause vandalism like destroying the Pumakatari buses.

We have not been able to realize that this was systematic, that it has lasted for years. That is why [Quintana] and his entire military network, which includes the man who controls the cable cars. I witnessed the political use of the cable cars, cards for travel on them being handed out so that people go down and burn and cause vandalism like destroying the Pumakatari buses.

All this is part of a dark network that includes the director of the ANH (National Hydrocarbons Agency), a close friend of Quintana. What was ANH doing during the fires [in the Chiquitanía] giving away gas stoves? That shameful act, and their superficial defense against the fires, are uniting the struggles of women, ecological struggles, young people, old women like me who are worried about the future and the water that their granddaughters and the daughters of their granddaughters are going to consume.

I am very sad because Evo is gone, but the hope of a pluricultural Bolivia is not gone, the hope that the wiphala represents to us in its different ways has not gone, the hope of ending racism has not gone. We have to continue fighting in the trenches of anti-racism, we must continue to join forces to be able to articulate a sense of recovering our democracy on a day-to-day basis. I feel very sad for what has happened, I have no sense of triumph.

I understand that religion is not just Camacho, it is a product of the anger in the face of the generalized drunkenness that has been the work carried out Quintana and soldiers who used to go to indigenous communities with jugs of alcohol. That is what hurts me, it is the same mechanism used by the colonizers in the seventeenth century: to disarm communities by giving them jugs of alcohol. The landowners and businessmen who wanted to get rid of the agrarian reform, gave out jugs of alcohol, and had a whole estate of folkloric Indians to be able to show off in museums.

We have to understand why people are reacting in this reactionary way. They are tired of this type of misogynist trade union policy, that treats people as if they were a herd. The women of Totora Marka, who have fought for Indigenous autonomy, have been vanquished by their own husbands and their own people, who forced them into the referendum trap. It is very sad what has happened, *compañeras*, and the triumphalism that we have recovered democracy the moment Evo boarded a plane seems to me a banality and extraordinary simplistic view. But the defeatism suggesting that there was a coup d'état here and that everything has been lost is false. That would mean that we would have to think that the MAS is the only option we have for an interethnic, plural, pluricultural Bolivia.

Are we going to believe that because we have a gay minister and some women defending him from the point of view of lesbianism, that there is an intercultural, broad and anti-homophobic democracy? No, those are just symbolic acts.

I am with the wiphala and I know there are many kinds of wiphala, not just one. We have old wiphalas, they had other very different colors. That plurality is what we have to recover, sisters, and also the possibility of brotherhood with Indigenous women and men. I have cried to see the mistreatment of Indigenous Bolivian women in the name of democracy. I have cried to see very young people beaten for saying that they are Indians. The Indian woman and man that we have inside is in a lot of pain. It's up to us to free them and make them happy, able to speak several languages, to have a framework for theoretical thinking. That is for me the Indian.

I feel half defeated, but also, I feel hope. We have put a lot of blood sweat and tears into this process and to watch its deterioration at the hands of those trained at the School of the Americas has hurt. They have a lot to lose, they lost 30 Chinese barges, but they have all the iron ores of the Mutun, and the lithium deposits. That is what they want to plunder.

Please, let this parliament of women generate a space in which we form unity against those dark forces that begin with the IIRSA [Initiative for the Integration of the South American Regional Infrastructure] and also the Chinese, Russian, and Venezuelan capital, that entire mafia that is the main enemy and it is still alive and kicking and it is arming people and forming mentalities.

Let's be very careful, and also be aware that we cannot incur happiness because the Indian has finally left. That to me is very painful.

*This an English transcription of Bolivian historian **Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's** intervention at the Women's Parliament in La Paz, Bolivia, on November 12, 2019. Originally published on [desinformemonos.org](http://desinformemonos.org). Translated by Toward Freedom. This was updated by the author's daughter from an earlier translation.*



Evo Morales at press conference in Mexico City, November 13. Photo: EneasMx, Wikimedia Commons

## Evo's Fall, the Fascist Right, & the Power of Memory

by Raúl Zibechi

November 16, 2019

After nearly 14 years in power, the government of Evo Morales fell in a little less than a month, due to allegations of fraud and the desire to remain in power. Previously, Morales was a campesino leader, but this time he could not appeal, in the face of the rise of a racist and opportunist right wing, for support from Bolivian popular organizations, which have been weakened after years of cooptation and repression. Between efforts towards restoration and the advance of a coup, the Bolivian people are preparing, again, to resist.

“Mr President, from the bottom of our hearts and with great sadness we ask: Where did you get lost? Why don't you live within the ancestral beliefs that says we should respect the *muyu* (circle): that we should govern only once? Why have you sold off our *Pachamama*? Why did you have the Chiquitanía burned? Why did you so mistreat our Indigenous brothers in Chaparina and Tariquíá?” So reads the Manifesto of the Qhara Qhara nation. On November 7th, members of the Qhara Qhara nation participated with a sector of the Indigenous movement in actions against electoral fraud in Bolivia.

The Manifiesto of the Qhara Qhara is one of the most damning documents against Evo Morales, perhaps because it comes from the same forces which brought him to power. “Respect our cultures, stop spreading hate between our brothers from the country and those in the cities, stop dividing the people, you already abused their free choice. Stop sending Indigenous people as cannon fodder to back up your interests and the interests of those around you, which are no longer ours, stop sending killers to abuse our people, let us live according to our law, stop speaking in the name of Indigenous people, as you have lost your identity,” it reads.

There is a marked contrast between what is taking place today and what took place in October of 2003, during the first Gas War. Back then, the social movements fought the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, and paid a very high price: more than 60 dead, and hundreds of people were wounded and mutilated. Regardless of the repression—the army shot at demonstrators from helicopters—the population beat back the government, forcing the President to resign.

But this time, after three weeks of opposition protests and accusations of fraud during the October 20th elections in which Evo Morales proclaimed himself re-elected, there were expressions of hatred toward the government from the leaders and supporters of social organizations. By late afternoon on Sunday November 10th, many, including the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), the mining federation and Indigenous organizations, demanded the president resign. That is why the most extreme right was able to enter into the government offices without any trouble, and why no one was immediately in the streets to defend Morales when the army suggested he resign.

Over the last 14 years of rule by the official Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party, there were things the government did that social movements can't forget. Between 2002 and 2006, a Unity Pact between the main campesino and indigenous organizations created the foundations for Evo Morales' government: the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (CIDOB), the National Confederation of Indigenous and Campesina women of Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa,” and neighbourhood associations in El Alto.

By the end of 2011, the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ had decided to leave the Unity Pact, because “the executive branch has factionalized Indigenous organizations, and value those closest to the MAS above others,” which they said directly affected “our territories, cultures and our natural resources.”

In June of 2012, CIDOB denounced “the interference of the government, with the sole aim of manipulating, dividing, and affecting the organic and representative organizations of Indigenous peoples (pueblos) in Bolivia.” A group of dissidents from the Confederation, with the support of

the government, refused to recognize the authorities and convened an “expanded commission” to elect new authorities.

In December of 2013, CONAMAQ dissidents who were “close the the MAS” took over the organization’s offices, beating and ejecting those who were present with the help of police, who remained to guard the locale and ensure that the legitimate authorities could not take it back. The communiqué of the CONAMAQ that followed these events said the attack against them happened so that “all of the policies against the Indigenous movement and the Bolivian people would be approved, without anyone saying anything.”

## **Into the Void**

On Wednesday the 13th, an unprecedented series of events occurred, in a turn as important as the resignation of Morales three days earlier. Jeanine Áñez was named President in a parliament that was without quorum. The representatives of the MAS, which holds an absolute majority, as well as MAS senator Adriana Salvatierra, were unable to enter the building. Salvatierra had publicly resigned her position as president of the senate on the same day as Evo Morales and Vice President Álvaro García Linera did the same, but she did not give up her seat. When she and others from her party tried to enter parliament, they were kept out by security forces.

For her part, Áñez was vice president of the second chamber. She was able to arrive to the presidency of the republic because all of the others in the line of succession, who were from the MAS, had resigned as part of the government’s policy of denouncing a coup. Áñez is a member of the Democratic Union, an opposition alliance, and she is an unconditional ally of the racist elites from the department of Santa Cruz. This is how, three days after the resignation of Evo, a true coup was consolidated, though in reality a combination of interests led to this situation.

The chronology of these events begins with the elections on October 20, but especially with the interruption of the vote count and its re-starting, 24 hours later, with data that contradicted what was released the day before. This arose suspicions of the repetition of a very obvious fraud in a pattern long-established in Latin America, which could not be ignored. This led to protests, led by civic groups made up of middle class sectors that are well established in eastern Bolivia. These protests grew slowly until Friday, November 8th.

It appears that the Morales government underestimated the magnitude of these protests. The MAS had maintained an alliance with the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz after having defeated a separatist movement spearheaded from Santa Cruz in 2008. Initially, the circumstances appeared to continue to favor the MAS, which had a good relationship with the Organization of American States (OAS), and especially with its general secretary Luis Almagro, to the point that the opposition candidate Carlos Mesa had initially rejected the audit agreed to between the OAS and the government.



The situation changed abruptly on Friday the 8th, when a police mutiny that began in Santa Cruz and La Paz began to spread across the country. Versions claiming the police had been “bought” with money from a company with its headquarters in Santa Cruz began to circulate on social networks. What is known is that the police mutiny was an inflection point, and one that will be important to study going forward so we can better understand what took place.

The government couldn’t count on the police, nor could it send the armed forces against demonstrators, creating an unsustainable situation. Worse yet, they couldn’t count on strong popular organizations to defend them, as those had been purged and many of their leaders had been removed and condemned, some ostracized and others jailed. At this point, the President and Vice President decided to take a risk. Last Sunday, they left La Paz, which was full of barricades and protests, with the intention of returning later in better conditions.

The right continued to operate, and as is common in these cases, probably did so with the support of the US embassy. A sinister man came to the forefront in this moment: Santa Cruz businessman Luis Fernando Camacho. Employing radical and ultraconservative discourse, with a clear racist and colonial content, Camacho came up as a leader of the white middle classes of eastern Bolivia and a representative of the land owning elites in the richest part of the country. He called a town hall (*cabildo*) in which the results of the election were disqualified; his incendiary language went beyond both the “*civicos*” from Santa Cruz—who had previously co-existed perfectly well with the MAS—as well as beyond Mesa, who Camacho eclipsed as the face of the opposition within a few days. Camacho is an opportunist ultra-rightist, who should have asked for forgiveness after the burning of *wiphalas* by his supporters, in an action that demonstrates the thin line the conservatives hold in Bolivia today.

## **Women and War**

The Santa Cruz oligarchy showed its extremism through Camacho, but officialism didn’t lag far behind. As tensions built in the run-up to November 10, Juan Ramón Quintana, the Minister of the Presidency of Bolivia, told *Sputnik* “Bolivia is going to be converted into a great battlefield, a modern Vietnam.”

As one of the highest officials in the government of Evo Morales, Quintana showed how separated he is from reality when he said that “there is a political accumulation of the social movements that are ready to fight.” He proposed a strategy that consisted of “a pitched battle in the face of the virulent lies of the media,” which, in his opinion, is part of “a war that is very complex, with unknown dimensions, that is going to demand that we sharpen our thinking, our strategy of self defense.”

It was women who responded with the most clarity and transparency, working to undo the mechanisms of war. In La Paz, the *Mujeres Creando* collective convened a Women’s Parliament

(a handful of men attended), where they worked to build “collective voices” to challenge the polarization underway. Meanwhile, in the city of El Alto, thousands of youth yelled “Yes, it is time for civil war,” while flying the wiphala.

Many women manifested a double outrage: against Morales’s fraud and against the racist right. In general there was a predominance of defending the advances that took place over the last 15 years, not all of which could be attributed to the MAS, but rather to the creative potential of the movements, which the authorities were never able to ignore. I’d like to highlight the words of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, a historian and sociologist:

I don’t believe in the two hypotheses that are being pushed. The triumphalism that with the fall of Evo we have recovered democracy seems to me an excess, an analysis that is out of focus... The second wrong hypothesis, which seems to me to be extremely dangerous, is that of the coup d’etat, which simply legitimizes in a complete package, wrapped in cellophane, the entire Evo Morales government in the moment when it is most deteriorated. To legitimize all this deterioration with the idea of a coup d’etat is criminal, therefore how this deterioration began must be considered.

Along the same lines, María Galindo, the spokesperson for Mujeres Creando, wrote the following in her column in *Página Siete*: “The feeling of abandonment and orphanhood that comes with seeing Evo Morales take off towards Mexico can be felt in the streets. People are calling the radio, and they are broken, sobbing and unable to speak, their feeling of weakness and abandonment means that the memories of the violences and arbitrariness of [Morales] (el caudillo) are forgotten, the people miss him as a protective father and benefactor.”

## **An Uncertain Future**

Morales and García Linera’s plan to return as “pacifiers” failed, and gave way to a complex situation. The fascist and racist ultra right has momentum, as well as a huge amount of material resources and media support, which allowed them to assume power, though they lack the legitimacy to maintain it.

Long memory, which is one of Rivera Cusicanqui’s concepts, teaches us that the racist elites can stay in power for an extended period of time by way of blood and fire, even without social support, because they possess the means necessary to do so. However, short memory, which is complementary, points toward something different—at least since 2000—in Bolivia: the power of those from below impedes racist and patriarchal regimes from enjoying stability and longevity. Women and Indigenous people don’t let themselves get walked on, as we have learned from the people in the streets of Santiago de Chile and Quito, where new alliances are emerging on the ground and through actions, best represented by the Mapuche flag being lifted in the hands of

non-Indigenous Chileans, and by women who were able to open a fissure of hope in the heat of the conflict in Ecuador.

An exit to the tremendous situation that Bolivia is currently living could be found through general elections, which the usurper government of Áñez ought to convene immediately. As sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar notes, the choices appear to be “general elections or civil war.” If the ballot boxes speak, it is probable that the next president would be Carlos Mesa, but the MAS would retain an important number of legislators, and could even be the party that receives the most votes.

Sooner rather than later, the diverse alliance that the MAS used to represent will return to the Palacio Quemado [the official residence of the president], as it makes up the social and cultural majority in the Andean country. It would be ideal that it not be a copy of the current MAS, which has deteriorated just as the passage of time spoils standing water.

To avoid a repeat, a new political culture would need to take shape, among leaders and members of organizations and movements. A culture that is capable of nourishing itself from the waters of Andean traditions of rotating leadership and complementarity between genders, ages and world views. A culture that is permeated by the feminist rejection of the patriarchy, as they work to undo caudillo leadership and hierarchical organization.

Bolivia, like few regions in our America, offers contributions from both lineages, without which it will be impossible to communally weave an emancipatory future in which the oppressions that impact us all are overcome.

*Translated by Toward Freedom with permission of the author. Published in Spanish at Brecha on Friday, November 15, 2019.*

**Author Bio:** *Raúl Zibechi is a journalist and popular educator who accompanies grassroots processes in Latin America.*

# Professors in La Paz Call on International Academics to Prioritize Peace, Reconciliation

*by Professors at the University of San Andres*

November 18, 2019

The research professors of the Graduate Center of Development Sciences at the University of San Andres (CIDES-UMSA), manifest our outrage at the simplified versions of ongoing political events in Bolivia that are being promoted by colleagues and academic institutions outside of the country.

Following from the affirmation that in Bolivia there was a *coup d'etat*, these interpretations have reached conclusions that lead to an erasure of the diversity of subjects who have mobilized over the past weeks, whose legitimate demands are made in a context of democratic aspirations that derive from the growing uncertainty that was generated around the results of the October 20, 2019 elections.

In this context, mobilization, and especially youth mobilization, has been the result of an extended period of mistrust of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), the ruling party, which systematically took advantage of the de-institutionalization of the country through the abuse of power and the privileging of the interests of their party and group interests.

The OAS report on the national elections, which showed serious irregularities, didn't create this situation, rather it confirmed it. Today, this series of events is turning into a deep and dangerous crisis of the state.

In the context of the mobilizations for the respect of the vote, this crisis was preceded by the decision of Evo Morales to call on peasants within the MAS to cut off the cities and block the arrival supplies required for their daily existence. This was a measure designed to shut down the protests, all the while ignoring that Bolivia has an expansive, interactive, urban-rural flux.

Since then, with the exception of an important proportion of the population of El Alto and other medium sized cities which maintain a genuine sense of ethnic affinity with the ex-President, a deep-seated distancing has been produced, in particular between urban populations and the MAS government.

This rupture has been deepened in the department of Cochabamba, where the coca growing region of the Chapare is located. The Chapare is the political stronghold of the MAS, and it is from there that the most tragic events of collective sacrifice of the campesino movement in favor of the return of Evo Morales to power are being produced.

In sum, the crisis of the state that Bolivia is undergoing today is a result of the decision of Evo Morales to give up on his duty to govern all Bolivians. This was confirmed when he left Bolivia for exile, and worsened when he used the tools of the state for repression, not only while he was president, but also currently, as he has an apparatus of violence that was built up over his mandate and which, since he resigned, has been converted into an irregular structure for the systematic intimidation of popular and middle class neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods have also begun to demonstrate an inclination towards self-defense organizations, which could also end up having dramatic consequences in terms of civil confrontation in Bolivia.

The Bolivian people are currently living through a clear absence of the state, and a fragile process of the reconstruction of democratic institutionality, which will allow for the full exercise of their self-determination, the recuperation of the characteristics of diversity and complementarity, and the overcoming of the *caudillista* and clientalist forms of power which, as we have seen, favor an end to the crisis built on violence and confrontation between citizens, the most impacted of whom tend to be subaltern groups.

We call on the academic community that is accompanying political processes in Bolivia to prioritize calls for peace in the country and the total respect of fundamental, political and civil rights and constitutional guarantees, assuming our shared interest lies in overcoming the current moment of crisis, seeking reconciliation and avoiding all forms of censorship, repression and political persecution—come from where they may—in the spirit of preserving, strengthening and deepening not only our democracy, but also our existence as an organized society.

La Paz, Bolivia, November 18, 2019.

*Translated by Toward Freedom.*



Marchers showered with water as they pass by on November 21. Photo courtesy of Chaski.

## Report from the Funeral Procession from Senkata to La Paz

*by Chaski Clandestina*

November 23, 2019

The march left Senkata in the morning [of November 21] and proceeded all the way down El Alto's 6 de Marzo avenue. As the marchers walked past, many vendors hid their wares, "they're going to steal from us," they said, but the march passed peacefully, marchers asking the people of La Paz to join their call for justice. Behind the coffins and the families in mourning from El Alto walked folks who had arrived from communities in Potosí

"We are not from the MAS, we are not terrorists, we are from El Alto and El Alto must be respected!" That was one of the chants that was repeated over and again, between demands for Añez's resignation and that of Arturo Murillo, the current Interior Minister, who protesters blamed for the death of eight people by gunshot in Senkata.

As the massive funeral procession went through the Center (la Ceja) of El Alto towards La Paz, it was applauded by neighbours who gathered along the sidewalk. Together with the representation of District 4, we went down through La Portada and the Cemetery, where a small religious ceremony was held. I didn't want to take pictures, because I was also there as someone who is grieving the eight people killed. As we walked toward the center of La Paz, many passersby offered water and soft drinks to the tired marchers, who hydrated themselves with what they received.

We took Montes street into downtown La Paz. The people were angry, for the dead, because of the indifference of the authorities. An older woman with braids and *pollera* (a long skirt) told us of the looting in her area, saying she didn't want that, but she didn't want more repression either. As soon as we arrived to San Francisco plaza in La Paz, many of the marchers stopped, others began to run, shouting: "They're gassing the march down below!" "Stay calm, don't run, keep straight, don't turn around, don't run!" "They don't even respect the mourners!" yelled another woman.

The smell of tear gas made us cry, the people become even angrier as they dispersed.

Early in the morning, well before the march began to move through the streets, a driver said to me, jokingly, "They're saying that thousands of people from El Alto are coming down [to La Paz] with their coffins out in front." I ask myself what could be so funny about the arrival of a funeral march. But that's the general feeling in La Paz: belligerence, and through the cracks we breathe air that's heavy, laden with our divisions and our pain.

After the brutal police repression, various groups of people who participated in the march returned to the Cemetery. The groups of people from communities in the north of Potosí tried to go too, but local sellers and merchants tell them to leave, kicking them out because they are scared of them, because they think they could steal from stands and stores: a stigma that many unjustly carry because they are from El Alto, or from a community.

On November 10th and 11th, remember, groups—which, it is an open secret among residents, were in the service of the MAS—looted stores, houses and businesses in El Alto and La Paz, sowing a generalized panic. "But we're not looters," the mourners, carrying the coffins, insisted as they returned to El Alto via the Cemetery. They are mourning the dead, but the store owners yelled back that they don't believe that's true.

I have to ask myself what we've arrived to when we have to explain our skin color to others, explain our origins. The same thing happened when I was covering a protest outside of Plaza Murillo, before Morales resigned, which was demanding the cancellation of the elections. There, I was assumed to be from the MAS because of the way I was dressed and the color of my skin.

With tears in my eyes because of these scenes with coffins, these explanations and confrontations, which are constantly reproduced and are happening over and over again, I ask myself how we will repair these fractures, which are loaded with so much violence and indifference. Who wants to fix this? Yes, there's people from the MAS in the mobilizations; no, they're not the majority. Yes, the people of El Alto are tired, they've also gone out and taken down some blockades in their city, right now there's another march for peace in El Alto.

In this series of events, this environment of violence, some justify the deaths. On social media, even folks who are close to me write that we should “celebrate that there were only eight dead” and not more, and that “irrational people from El Alto” were going to try and blow up the Senkata gas plant, destroying half of El Alto and maybe even part of La Paz. Lots of those who participated in today's march stated the opposite: they are not people who don't think, they would never allow that. I listen, I only manage to listen, crying for the dead and rejecting the political context that produced these deaths with all the strength that I can muster.

I keep asking myself where we're going to get the strength to rebuild everything that, over 14 years, the now-collapsed regime rotted within social organizations, corroding them like acid. How do we reject the violence generated by groups of armed civilians (*grupos de choque*) and the formation of paramilitary groups, which is occurring from many sides. How do we face state repression, which will affect all of us: as we mourn our dead, others, way up above, are negotiating and making cold calculations on the blood that has been spilled.

*Author Bio: Chaski Clandestina is a Bolivian independent media collective. This article was translated by Toward Freedom with permission from the author. Read the original, and access audio testimonies from marchers, videos and photographs at [chaskiclandestina.org](http://chaskiclandestina.org).*

## The Complex Path to the Present Catastrophe

by *Huascar Salazar Lohman*

December 2, 2019

Sadness, pain, and unease have overtaken Bolivia in the past weeks. Thirty-four people have been killed, the injured number over eight hundred, and dozens have been imprisoned. Hate speech proliferates, confrontations are common and distrust is rife. There is generalized confusion, caused by a conflict in which there is no end in sight.

Bolivia has moved from having a party that appealed to fraud as a means of staying in power, to a polarized political scenario in which violence, fear, and death became mechanisms for the control of the state apparatus. That is the summary of the painful trajectory of Bolivian politics



over the last month. This is not a story of victims and saviors, but rather a fight over power, in which key actors had no qualms about trampling on the life and dignity of the Bolivian people.

The government of Evo Morales committed fraud, after violating regulations and manipulating the Constitution in their favor. This – together with an accumulation of ecocidal, extractivist, and anti-communitarian aggressions over the last 14 years – cannot be disregarded, minimized, or pushed into the background if the future of the Bolivian political process is to be understood. The electoral fraud was the crown atop an accumulation of aggressions, and it also became a trigger for the deep political crisis we are now living.

It is well established that those who stood in the way of Morales' re-election were silenced, as was Indigenous Constitutional Magistrate Gualberto Cusi, who was removed from the bench after opposing a second term in 2014. In a painful breach of privacy, the Minister of Health later revealed Cusi had HIV, for which he was publicly ridiculed. There's also the case of the criminalization of the magistrates who stood against Morales' second re-election. And the case of the judge in Santa Cruz who was persecuted and harassed for insisting on its unconstitutionality.

In 2016, the MAS lost a referendum that had been called to constitutionally allow Morales to stand for another reelection (the constitution only permits one consecutive reelection). But the Constitutional Court, which is influenced by the ruling party, did not recognize the results of the referendum. Rather, there was an "appeal for abstract unconstitutionality" that determined that *indefinite reelection* be considered a "human right." This led to the most recent October 20, 2019 elections, which were manipulated to avoid a runoff. It was one of the most grotesque frauds in the country's recent history.

The fraud was ridiculously evident. Even before the election, people who were once close to the MAS had already warned about it. The evidence for the fraud is overwhelming and goes well beyond the preliminary report of the Organization of American States (OAS). Separate reports have been prepared by academics in Bolivia (released November 6) and in the United States (released November 25). Tallies of ballots were digitized "backwards" or erroneously so that they benefited the ruling party, votes were cast by nonexistent or dead people, and there were irregularities in the transportation of electoral material.

Presidente y Vicepresidente

Candidato	Votos
CC	29
FPV	
MTS	16
UCS	0
MAS - IPSP	130
21F	
PDC	22
MNR	0
PAN-BOL	0
Votos válidos	200
Votos blancos	3
Votos nulos	9

Circunscripción Uninominal 12

Candidato	Votos
CC	33
FPV	3
MTS	17
UCS	1
MAS - IPSP	87
21F	0
PDC	0
MAID	1

Código mesa: 24442 Número de mesa en el recinto: 30  
 Departamento: La Paz  
 Provincia: Murillo  
 Municipio: El Alto  
 Recinto: Colegio 23 de Marzo

ACTA ELECTORAL DE ESCRUTINIO Y CÓMPUTO  
 ELECCIONES GENERALES 2019

CÓMPUTO DE VOTOS OBTENIDOS POR LAS CANDIDATURAS

CANDIDATURA	VOTOS	CANDIDATURA	VOTOS
C.C.	33	C.C.	29
FPV		FPV	1
MTS	17	MTS	16
UCS		UCS	
MAS - IPSP	87	MAS - IPSP	130
21F		21F	2
PDC		PDC	22
MNR	1	MNR	
PAN-BOL		PAN-BOL	

VOTOS VÁLIDOS: 142  
 VOTOS BLANCOS: 64  
 VOTOS NULOS: 6

VOTOS VÁLIDOS: 200  
 VOTOS BLANCOS: 3  
 VOTOS NULOS: 9

Los Números de carnet se escribieron de derecha a izquierda por error, en lugar de izquierda, derecha "Corre y Valle"  
 Los Diputados del Cómputo están invertidos entre Diputados de circunscripción y Presidente "Corre y Valle"

An electoral certificate that was digitized “backwards.” It shows the original vote counts for President and VP (circles on the right) were switched with votes for party candidates when digitized (left hand side) favouring Evo Morales. Image courtesy of the author.

In Bolivia, the people knew all of this and that’s why there were 20 days of blockages that paralyzed the country before the OAS confirmed the fraud and Morales resigned. All along, the government cynically denied it.

After the elections, the MAS turned to the OAS to ask for an audit of the elections, which opposition candidate Carlos Mesa finally rejected, as OAS Executive Secretary Luis Almagro had explicitly supported Evo Morales (even traveling to the Chapare to see him). It appeared that the OAS was more part of the government than a neutral judge, even so the OAS asserted that the October 20 elections could not be validated. In other words: yes there was fraud. It was not the OAS that spoke about fraud for the first time, rather the fraud was so massive that even a government appointed judge could not deny it.

Between October 21 and November 10, the slogans in the streets went from “we want a second round” to “we want new elections.” But things changed after the release of the preliminary OAS report, which the government had promised to respect.

Hours after the OAS report was issued, Morales said they would call for new elections. He did so without talking about fraud or who was responsible for it, or detailing conditions for the new elections. Would the new Supreme Electoral Tribunal be elected by those who had directed the fraud? Would Evo Morales run for election again, ignoring the Constitutional Referendum of February 21, 2016? It seemed that the government was seeking a clean slate for new elections, without ever addressing the outrage of the Bolivian people.

In a climate of tension and violence, a police mutiny began in Cochabamba, Sucre, Santa Cruz and Oruro, eventually spreading to La Paz. We don't know if the police mutinied as part of an advance strategy from the right, or whether it was part of a victimization strategy by the MAS to justify a climate of violence. There are precedents for the latter: academic Boris Nehe proposes we interpret the 2008 El Porvenir Massacre in the department of Pando in this light. Something similar took place on January 11, 2007, when social organizations were protesting against the governor of Cochabamba for his adoption of the autonomist demands of the Media Luna region, which led to a confrontation between in which four people were killed, three *campesinos* and one city resident.

The November 2019 police mutinies were followed by an armed ambush carried out by MAS affiliated sectors against miners that were traveling from Potosí to La Paz to protest the fraud.

It was in this context that various emblematic organizations from the popular sectors began to call for Morales' resignation. Among them were the Public University of El Alto (UPEA), the Federation of Mine Workers' Unions of Bolivia (FSTMB), and the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB), the largest union in the country. A day after these organizations demanded Morales resign did the CAINCO, which represents oligarchic power in eastern Bolivia, and had been an ally of the MAS in recent years, follow.

Following widespread abandonment by organizations and institutions, dozens of MAS authorities, deputies, senators, governors, mayors, and so on also resigned, some in protest and others out of fear. Although the Pro-Santa Cruz Committee – the political body of the rancid right of eastern Bolivia– had previously asked Morales to resign, it was not until November 10th that their slogan became widespread.

For this reason, in Bolivia, when the military commander Williams Kaliman, an ally of the MAS, a self identified “soldier of the process of change” and anti-colonialist “suggested” Morales resign, it almost sounded like a decision had already been made by those in power. The Army commander spoke in a climate of growing social conflict, in which several people had already been killed. The Armed Forces were the last to request Morales's resignation, which is why politically the idea of a *coup d'état* made no sense in Bolivia at that time: following rigged elections, and faced with the arrogance of fraudulent rulers, millions of Bolivians had already demanded the president's resignation.

Presidente y Vicepresidente	Votos
CC	127
FPV	1
MTS	2
UCS	0
MAS - IPSP	55
21F	0
PDC	6
MNR	0
PAN-BOL	0
Votos válidos	194
Votos blancos	0
Votos nulos	15

  

Circunscripción Uninominal 20	Votos
CC	110
FPV	0
MTS	4
UCS	0
MAS - IPSP	41
21F	10
PDC	0
MNR	3
PAN-BOL	6

Código mesa: 30931 Número de mesa en el recinto: 4  
 Departamento: Cochabamba  
 Provincia: Cercado  
 Municipio: Cochabamba  
 Recinto: Colegio Luis Quintín Vila

An electoral certificate showing the original count of 5 votes for Evo Morales (circle on the right) adjusted to 55 when digitized (left hand side). Image courtesy of the author.

Without counting the multiple aggressions by the MAS government that various sectors of Bolivian society have been enduring in recent years, especially those related to ecocidal, extractive, and anti-communitarian policies, what happened next cannot be properly named: the people were aggrieved by a government that, violating the entire constitutional order, wanted to steal the elections.

Following the October 20 elections, the way in which the Morales government decided to deal with the accusations of fraud was through polarization and social confrontation. The government unleashed a climate of violence and confrontation with the most rancid rightwing organizations in Bolivian politics.

Luis Fernando Camacho, leader of the Pro-Santa Cruz Committee, demonstrates this. Before the elections we knew that said committee existed, but in reality, its leaders' names were not widely known outside of Santa Cruz. It was following the elections that hate speech escalated, creating a polarization that was functional for both "sides."

The right does not play games, and it rapidly seized on the opportunity, capitalizing on and monopolizing a great deal of discontent towards Morales and electoral fraud. Eager for power and from a racist, conservative and fundamentalist discourse, it gained ground and directed protest demands in the first weeks of the conflict, even surpassing on several occasions rightwing "moderate" Mesa, who, being the candidate who would go to the second round, had been directly affected by the manipulation of the elections.

This conservative right is articulated around local civic committees, conservative legislators, evangelist churches, and the largest economic interests in the country, which always play on all sides. It also undoubtedly has the support of the CIA and other international organizations involved in building authority on behalf of the world's most powerful corporations. In fact, this right is very similar to the neoliberal right in Bolivia at the beginning of the century. It was they who gained momentum following the elections.

What happened between the resignation of Morales and when Jeanine Añez assumed the presidency (the country was two days without a government) is something that is not clearly intelligible at this time. High ranking politicians supported the use of terror in order to generate uncertainty in a calculation for power.

The fear experienced by residents of La Paz, El Alto, and Cochabamba on the night of Morales' resignation was unprecedented and horrific, but also clearly planned. It was violence unleashed by the outgoing government as punishment, and a mechanism of blackmail so that the people would call for the return of Morales. This violence, in turn, was connected with the repressive and violent response of the public forces when Añez assumed the presidency.

In this crisis, politics has been stripped of a legal framework. In Bolivia, we are used to producing broad agreements that enable viable realities, going beyond legislation that can become obsolete in extreme situations. Between 2000 and 2005, in the midst of major popular uprisings, this happened several times, and it was what was expected after Morales' resignation: an agreed upon constitutional succession. A broad agreement would have led to a peaceful resolution to the conflict that had been paralyzing the country for more than 20 days. But neither the MAS nor the re-articulated rancid right—the two extremes of polarization—had that intention.

While Morales played the power vacuum to generate anxiety and uncertainty, the Right bet everything on the control of the state, negotiating first with the police and the military. Thus, without a broader agreement, but with the support of the Armed Forces and under the legal figure of the abandonment of functions, which was validated by the Constitutional Court, Janine Añez assumed the presidency. She did so surrounded by nefarious people. The kinds of people who burn wiphalas, who bring the bible into the government palace, the kind who fire bullets and shoot to kill, and who promulgated Supreme Decree 4078, which exempts the military from criminal responsibility.

The Sacaba and Senkata massacres that took the lives of more than twenty people added to the deaths during those days. Many of these deaths occurred in the context of mobilizations, which occurred in part due to the pressure that MAS leadership was exerting on their supporters to show that the Bolivian people were calling for the return of Morales. None of this justifies the disproportionate use of violence or the firing of lethal weapons at protesters. There is no

international treaty or humanitarian principle that could justify the Añez government’s disproportionate use of force.

It must be clear that this disproportionate violence was also exercised against social mobilizations that explicitly are not *Masista*, but who have taken to the streets in repudiation of violence and death and in defense of life, and their own values and symbols. The Añez government, to justify the repression, labeled these and other groups “terrorists.” The repressive government of Añez sent the armed forces and the police to massacre the people. This cannot go unpunished, and it must be denounced.

If in Bolivia there has been one coup or many coups, they have been against the people. The people saw how their leaders violated the constitution, they saw how their vote was rendered worthless and they felt cheated, it was a coup against those who were repressed, against those who lost their homes or whose homes were looted, against those who were victims of violence related to a political calculation, against those who lost their lives.

Presidente y Vicepresidente

Código mesa: 28800 Número de mesa en el recinto: 1  
 Departamento: La Paz  
 Provincia: Gualberto Villarroel  
 Municipio: Papel Pampa  
 Estado: Esc. Tituza

Candidato	Votos
CC	3
FPV	1
MTS	1
UCS	1
MAS - IPSP	59
21F	0
PDC	3
MNR	0
PAN-BOL	0
Votos válidos	68
Votos blancos	3
Votos nulos	4

Circunscripción Uninominal 18

Candidato	Votos
CC	3
FPV	1
MTS	4
UCS	0
MAS - IPSP	45
21F	0
PDC	0
MNR	0

ACTA ELECTORAL DE ESCRUTINIO Y CÓMPUTO  
 ELECCIONES GENERALES 2019

La Presidencia y Vicepresidencia de mesa se otorga al original del Acta Electoral de Mesa que presenta los datos de los votos de los electores en la mesa.

Código de Mesa: 28800 MESA: 1  
 Ubicación de la Mesa: Departamento: La Paz, Provincia: Gualberto Villarroel, Municipio: Papel Pampa, Estado: Esc. Tituza

MODELO DE NUMEROS: 1234567890

CANDIDATO	VOTOS	OTROS
C.C.	059	003
FPV	001	001
MTS	001	004
UCS	001	004
MAS - IPSP	059	045
21F	003	
PDC	003	
MNR		
PAN-BOL		
VOTOS VÁLIDOS	068	053
VOTOS BLANCOS	003	020
VOTOS NULOS	004	002

OBSERVACIONES: 4 PRESIDENTE / A, C.C. 3 VOTOS

COPIAS: 1 ORIGINAL, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE VOTACIÓN, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE CUENTA, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE REVISIÓN, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE CALIFICACIÓN, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE REVISIÓN DE CUENTA, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE REVISIÓN DE CALIFICACIÓN, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE REVISIÓN DE CUENTA Y CALIFICACIÓN, 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE REVISIÓN DE CUENTA Y CALIFICACIÓN Y 1 COPIA PARA EL COMITÉ DE REVISIÓN DE CUENTA Y CALIFICACIÓN.

An electoral certificate shows original count of votes for Carlos Mesa of Comunidad Ciudadana (circle on the right) was reduced to 3 from 59 when digitized (left hand side). Image courtesy of the author.

It was not a coup against Morales or his fraudulent government, which, as Rita Segato says, “fell under its own weight.” It was the people in the streets and, as we saw, the former allies of the MAS who ended up overthrowing it. As the Yampara Nation stated: Evo Morales “has turned

out to be more *qhara* [white-European or mestizo invader] than those with blue eyes and white skin.”

It is for this reason that in Bolivia, the slogan of *coup d'état*, which was rampant internationally, generally made no sense. And that does not mean that there is no clarity on what is taking place today: in Bolivia today there is a government that has the support of congress and full constitutional legitimacy, but that is authoritarian, violent, fundamentalist, and militaristic.

However, we must consider two things. First, that the repressive Añez government does not cancel out the aggressive nature of the predecessor government. Second, that that same government led us towards this disaster. Turning a leader (*caudillo*) and his helper into victims, when it was they who attacked and harmed the people, and who are responsible in great measure for what is taking place in the country today, is a manner of encouraging the binary logic of polarization, which gives weight to those up above and contributes to the persistence of the violence against those down below.

The important thing is not to arrive upon a correct theoretical definition of what is happening in Bolivia. Rather it is crucial that whatever label we use recognizes that the repressive fascist-leaning government that has been killing people in recent weeks is intricately linked to the MAS, to the violence it exercised for years, to the political persecution of dissident Indigenous leaders, to the systematic dismantling of community lands and their organizations, to the corrupt and clientalist scaffolding of the state structure, to the unprecedented destruction of Bolivian wilderness, to transnational extractivist policies, to the systematic transgression of the constitutional order, and to electoral fraud.

What is important is to break the mechanism of repetition. Making Morales into a victim does just the opposite. It is important to get out of a *caudillista*-patriarchal episteme that idealizes the aggressor, exempts him from responsibility, and blames everything (and everyone) else for what is happening. Of course, the right also throws punches, and does so intensely, but the MAS was throwing punches first, and we cannot stop saying that. I fail to understand what is so “strategic” about being silent regarding the factors that led us to this disaster.

In the face of this repressive government, many things are happening simultaneously in Bolivia. Various social sectors are trying to reorganize their autonomous political power, but they are having a difficult time in doing so. The negligible role that organizations such as the Unified Trade Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) or the Bolivian Worker's Confederation (COB) have had in this conflict is striking. This seems to have to do with internal disputes and atomization resulting from the process of decomposition of the MAS, and the way in which the corporatism of the party permeates these organizations. It has been the neighborhood assemblies of El Alto that have had the most visibility following Morales' resignation, although schisms and fatigue are also evident.

Over the last weeks, an agreement has been reached between MAS legislators and the Añez government. The agreement accepts that Morales resigned and abandoned his duties and therefore legitimizes the new president, it accepts the declaration nullifying the elections of October 20, and establishes designation of a new Supreme Electoral Tribunal to call for new elections, in which Morales will not participate, although the MAS will.

It is an agreement that by no means resolves the deep social wounds that have been opened in recent weeks, but that nonetheless expresses that a fraction of the MAS has distanced itself from its leader and is seeking to bring peace to the country, in an attempt to preserve the strength that this party still has, even at a time of deep internal decomposition and conservative onslaught.

It must be understood that the Añez government encountered a limit: a battered but still mobilized society. The intention of this government was to restore the old neo-colonial state, with blood and the use of supreme decrees, ignoring the Plurinational Assembly. The resistance, however confusing, is what forced the Añez government to seek a negotiation in parliament.

This agreement appears to have put a stop to the use of repressive violence by state forces, but it has left the country in a state of tense calm.

What remains is a repressive government that does not intend to modify the predatory and dependent economic matrix overseen by the MAS government, beyond the fact that the beneficiaries may be different. There is a rising fundamentalist and fascist Right, and an aggrieved, battered, and fragmented society with little capacity for autonomous organization, as a result of what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has called a “long process of degradation.”

Although new elections may mark a partial exit from this disaster (as long as the Constitution is respected), political reorganization from below will be that which will really allow us to seek out other horizons of struggle, as we have learned from our long history.

*This is a translation of an article originally published by Zur, which was expanded and updated in collaboration with the author. Translated by Toward Freedom.*

*On December 2, 2019, the three electoral certificates showing erroneous vote tallies posted with this article were still available online from the official website of the October 20 elections. We accessed them by entering the five digits above the barcode on the original certificates in the “Búsqueda de mesa por código de 5 dígitos del acta” field.*

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Face Off. Image: freexero.com, used under creative commons license

## Latin America: The Importance of Speaking without Uniforms

by *Nuria Alabao*

December 10, 2019

Social media functions as a public meeting place that, beyond its tendency to sometimes enclose us in bubbles, allows us to sound out opinions on current events. Recently, for instance, we have been able to witness the demand that a certain part of the left close ranks with the government of Evo Morales regarding the political crisis following the presidential election in Bolivia.

Here, to close ranks means that any analysis of the situation that entails a certain level of complexity is rejected out of hand. If anyone dares to criticize the Morales government's policies or echo the popular discontent contained in the protests against him, they can only be serving Yankee imperialism. They are accused of "legitimizing" the coup or, worse, of bearing responsibility for recent deaths.

This is the strategy of the former Bolivian vice president, Álvaro García Linera, who, in an interview with *Telesur*, pointed out the "correct" side of critical currents, suggesting that on the

other side lie only fascism and dead people. Either you're with me or you're against me—a classic. He proposes that we “choose” between his increasingly authoritarian state populism and a savage neoliberalism with post-fascist characteristics. We are to “pick” the least bad option, thus erasing the movement for Morales' overthrow that came from below.

Political processes are not usually stories of good and evil in which only one “correct” position is possible. Nonetheless, in ongoing conflicts regarding international politics, a line has been drawn with a ruler, and we are required to join one side or the other. Any ambiguity is punished with furious attacks. In this way, imaginaries are created about certain places, such as Venezuela, Bolivia, or Nicaragua, in which ideology provides a predetermined position. There is no nuance. US imperialism or the geostrategy of world powers become the easy answer that impedes critical thought: oil explains Venezuela, lithium explains Bolivia, and thus everything is explained.

U.S. interventionism has spent these past 20 years facing processes of change in Latin America, but what we have to ask ourselves is: why are these interventions happening now and not before? What has changed? That is, why have progressive governments lost popular support, often among the same groups that initially brought them to power? Dogma is not useful in understanding this phenomenon. Politics is not a religion. This is why feminist Raquel Gutiérrez calls on us to “undo the logic of polarization, confrontation, and violent social conflict that today are tearing apart the cities and regions of Bolivia.”

### **The Coup-Supporting Latin American Right**

It is true that what were called “revolutions” in Latin America entailed, for a time, a hope for those of us who were looking for alternatives to neoliberalism. Many of us went to work there—to Venezuela, in my case—committing ourselves to those very processes that are now faltering. We bet on the promise that other paths were possible. We saw liberating prospects in the constituent assemblies of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and in their first steps, when power was redistributed. We saw people who had been excluded from representative democracy—landless peasants, favela inhabitants, Indigenous people—emerge into politics. If it was not a revolution, we at least recognized effective forms of redistribution of wealth that were carried out in those countries, and we learned a few things. We also discovered the face of a virulent, coup-plotting opposition driven by the interventionist strategy of the United States, which has supported and financed it under the pretext of “promoting democracy.”

The lack of alternatives, today as before, makes it especially difficult to take a stance publicly, but it also gives the governments in power an excuse to erase from the map any opposition from below.

Today in Bolivia, we recognize the face of that violent opposition and its new style, linked to the worldwide post-fascist turn, a face marked with racism and anti-feminism, and it seems like we

can only support “the other side.” But what is the other side? Is it our side? Are we defending the same thing? In Bolivia, workers’ organizations like the Bolivian Workers’ Center (COB) and the Union Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB)—who once contributed to Morales’ victory—and Indigenous and feminist movements—who are now fighting on the front lines against the coup—were the first to denounce both the problems of the extractivist economic model and the fact that Morales had stretched Bolivian democracy, which has helped smooth the path of the post-fascist coup that is taking place today.

The most recent example is the calling of a referendum in 2016 to increase the number of presidential terms allowed under the constitution so Morales could run again. He lost the referendum but had the result annulled. This catapulted the electoral campaign of Carlos Mesa to prominence, and Mesa became the face of the opposition, capitalizing on the discontent in Bolivia. What would our position be if something like that happened in our country? Or would it depend on who was ignoring democratic procedures? Perhaps it is possible to remain in power by subverting democracy, but that course of action generates distrust among the government’s supporters, opens a path for the opposition, and hinders the viability of the project of change.

I suppose Morales was afraid of the Ecuadorian example, where the successor of Rafael Correa, Lenín Moreno, completely dissociated himself from the “citizen’s revolution” and began dismantling the successful neo-Keynsian and redistributive policies of the previous government. But the slogan of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) is clear: “neither Moreno nor Correa.” It is clear that no one governs “for all.” But it is also clear that many of these progressive processes of change have been shedding the support of social sectors—sectors that are essential to stopping coups when they occur, but which demand, in turn, to be kept in mind.

It is precisely the closing of ranks that is becoming more imperious just now that Latin American populism, which was once a model for some European parties and movements, is in crisis. The inability to implement projects that transcend the reality of an autocratic leader is one of its greatest weaknesses. Latin American populism lacks the capacity for internal renewal to face the contradictions and problems that its governing actions have unleashed. And, above all, it has not put in place mechanisms to create space for internal criticism. This is due, first and foremost, to the fact that any dissidence among its supporters—or alternative proposals from within—have been silenced and marked as “the enemy.” This is a tragedy to which the history of the revolutions born out of the great utopias of the twentieth century has conditioned us.

These populist options, moreover, have managed to either assimilate or wipe out any supportive option from the left—just like how it has absorbed, as in the case of Bolivia, independent social movements and unions, which has progressively eroded their social and political bases. As José Lastra explains, “by implementing a model of state capitalism clearly controlled from above,

Evo helped reinforce his position within the party and the executive branch at the same time as he alienated the communities that he had theoretically come to represent.”



Guns n' kids. Image: freexero.com, used under creative commons license.

Today, the result of the quashing of criticism is that, when popular discontent increases because the limits of extractive development policies have appeared, the only available options are on the right, the revanchist right. There are no alternative political spaces for the left. Only the rebuilding of the old, dominant bloc remains, and it has the face of a coup plotter.

### **There Is No Revolution Without Democracy**

It is necessary, then, to defend the role of criticism. We are not talking here about thoughts formed in a library or in the ivory tower. We are talking about protests that are born from below and from within social processes—from those who are destined to form part of the anti-government movements when the inertia of the state departs from their interests. Without that criticism, revolution is simply not possible.

Nonetheless, in these processes, if anyone tried to denounce corruption, the increasing influence of the army in Venezuela, or the weakness of the extractive model in Bolivia and its consequences for communal forms of living, their voice was silenced with the argument that they

were “providing weapons to the enemy.” It’s a quintessential tool of state bureaucracies to quash internal criticism—or to prevent the emergence of alternative leaders.

But where is the enemy when the interests of old and new oligarchies infiltrate the new governments? Thus, the implication is that “the revolution” has to be created on a foundation of silence, obedience, and the paralysis of thought. Yes, the enemy is terrible; but without internal criticism, revolutionary processes atrophy. There is no possibility of radical transformation without it. To impede criticism allows power to be maintained from the center, but it also produces a centripetal movement that throws out supportive people and movements at a very high cost for a revolution. In this environment, revolutions die, and the worst defeat is self-inflicted by internal decomposition, which wipes out any possibility of change for many years. And then the monsters return.

## **The People of Nicaragua Provide the Dead**

The case of Nicaragua is certainly bloody. In Madrid, we have seen attempts to boycott talks by feminists from that country—in other words, we have seen people who consider themselves “leftists” trying to keep individuals who are persecuted by the state from speaking. During last April’s protests, the International Court of Human Rights documented at least 300 murders—Nicaraguan social organizations put the number at 400—and more than 1,300 injuries in the repression of the protests. Nonetheless, the Latin American left has closed ranks with its declaration of support for the “Sandinista Revolution” in the face of the “coup d’état” in its declaration from the last São Paulo forum. It is as though any popular protest can be called a “coup,” or as though the dead are not worth the same depending on who killed them, and the supposed ideological sympathy that it should garner from us. Are they not our dead?

I’d like to make a call to abandon binary logic. To people who are ideologically close, I would say that it is not necessary to agree on everything, but it is essential to have spaces where it is possible to debate, without violence or sectarianism. Because we will agree on other things, and we are going to have to continue collaborating. The enemy is dangerous, and it is urgent, both here in Europe and in Latin America, to look for situations that help resolve conflicts. A deep analysis of what is happening is a first step toward looking for an exit from the labyrinth and coming together to build radical, democratic alternatives to a present devastated by neoliberalism.

*This piece appeared in CTEXT Revista Context on December 4, 2019. Translated by Chris DeLorenzo for Toward Freedom.*

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Graphic courtesy of the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development Studies, La Paz, Bolivia

## Letter from El Alto: The Politics of Fear is the Raw Material of Polarization

*by Magali Vianca Copa Pabon*

December 11, 2019

***‘Our main enemy is fear and it is within us’***

“Up until the very last moment leading up to Evo’s resignation, the MAS used fear to remain in power.” - Domitila Barrios

The night of November 11, one day after Evo's resignation, the neighbors of several Alteño neighborhoods spontaneously left our houses (I live in District 3 of El Alto). Bonfires were lit on every corner, many of us were armed with sticks, waiting for the enemy. Although, unlike other past struggles, we didn't know who the enemy was... We went out to the streets out of a fear of external aggressions, of the "vandals" or the "military." This fear has multiplied over the past days and weeks, settling in our subjectivities.

As Domitila Barrios said, our main enemy is fear. In 1978, Domitila and four other women from the Comité de Amas de Casa of the 20th Century Mining District launched a hunger strike that led to the overthrow of the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer Suarez. She said the enemy is not an external "Other," nor is it power, rather it is constructed within and through that which we do not know how to name: fear.

However, this fear is no longer faced with bravery, since it is a type of fear that has been transformed into a political tool of division, cooptation, and polarization that is fed by a double discourse (pacification with messages of provocation; pacification with militarization). Fear of the Other ("vandal," "terrorist," "oppressor"); fear of change and building a new politics ("what will come after Evo?"); fear that justifies the violent intervention of Armed Forces; fear of acting, speaking, and thinking differently in our own contexts. Fear acts to mobilize and exacerbate the population, facilitating the handover of citizen power to "*caudillos*." Fear has opened deep rifts of pain, which widened with the deaths of thirty-five people, most at the hands of the military, in various parts of the country.

No one wants to hear voices that are not in favor of what they believe or think. We are living, as [Cornelius] Castoriadis would say, a closure of meaning through the exclusion of the Other. This implies a politics of fear that takes up what is already there, such as hierarchies and inequalities within our society (racism, classism, etc.), and mobilizes them in the service of specific moral and political ends that seek to install one group in power at the expense of another. In our own words, as Aymaras, we could say that this politics of fear has used the *t'aras* of our society (referring to poor and working-class Aymara and Quechua people) to establish new conditions of domination and control.

In his way, the politics of the internal enemy are reinstated and dichotomies (wild-civilized, center-periphery, rural-urban) which are reproduced, annulling the Other by oppressing the poor and at the same time blaming them for their own suffering. This is similar to when a male aggressor blames a woman for being attacked by him, or when a "democratic" system rebukes the voter for the hardships caused by those who have used it to declare themselves in power.

But this type of politics is not new. Rather, Evo is known to have blamed imperialism and right-wing groups for his administration's own mistakes and weaknesses. Declaring they "are from the right," the administration covered up the politics of dispossession of Indigenous territories

(TIPNIS) and the repression of Indigenous and student protests in El Alto (Achacachi and the Public University of El Alto, UPEA).

Up until the very last moment leading up to Evo's resignation, the MAS used fear to remain in power, making statements during the crisis that shifted attention away from the source of the crisis to link it to uncertainty about what would come next. Referring to the millions of dollars of economic losses from strikes and protests throughout the country in the weeks that followed the October 20 elections, for example, the Minister of Economy, Luis Arce, declared the suspension of welfare payments, adding it would "hurt the grandparents" and implicitly sending the message: "if we leave the subsidies will be lost".

Likewise, the current regime led by the Right marks and judges its enemies with similar strategies, calling them "vandals" or "terrorists" to legitimize military violence. And we might ask: Who judges this? As my lawyer colleagues noted, it's the same structure of judges and prosecutors, but this time, in favor of the other side.

Internationally, this polarization has an expansive effect. Shortly after fleeing Bolivia, former Vice-president Álvaro García Línera published an article titled "Hatred of the Indian" in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*. In it, he focuses on the racism and fascism of the Right and makes Evo into a victim to try to legitimize electoral fraud (which Garcia Linera avoids mentioning and does not recognize). Garcia Linera tries to cover his own political mistakes with Indigenous blood, creating a narrative of hatred and denial of the Indigenous Other, in the service of specific political interests.

In his partially fictitious account, the state was a paradise in favor of the Indian, when in reality a large portion of the Indigenous dead and the victims of Senkata never received the economic and social equality supposedly granted by the MAS government to lose. As Alteño sociologist Jamie Kawi Castaya noted in his recent analysis of a "disenchantment" with the MAS, most *Alteños* are people that have received mere crumbs from the government, a far cry from the privileges of power Garcia Linera has enjoyed. It was those Alteños who died like cannon fodder at the hands of the same military forces that Evo Morales government granted pay bonuses to shortly before leaving office.

We live a stage of polarization fuelled by fear, a fear that can trigger confrontation and revenge. Understanding that these expressions of hatred tend to be in the service of those who intend to enjoy the privileges of power (in the sham of the electoral circus underway) is a good start. Polarization does not contribute in any way to the re-articulation of the social base, the emergence of new leaders, or to overcoming union corporatism and corruption. It does not contribute to a serious reflection of what is happening to us.



The current government is built on the same foundations as the old one and reproduces the same strategies of integrating or replacing public officials with some Indigenous people for the appearance of inclusion, while ensuring the judicial branch operates in the service of their own interests. Indeed, perhaps the only change has been a change in the discursive facade: from the facade of an Indigenous state to the facade of a democratic one.

*This article appeared in Spanish at Colectivo Curva, and was translated and edited by Toward Freedom with the author's permission.*

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## Requiem for the ‘Process of Change’ in Bolivia

by *Vladimir Díaz-Cuellar*

December 26, 2019

How can we account for our sorrow? How can we account for the blood that has been spilled and the abrupt collapse of the government that promised a “process of change”? Understanding the events in Bolivia in October and November 2019 and learning from them can itself be a means of grieving and processing.

### Chronicle of a death foretold?

From October to October and from mutiny to mutiny. That is perhaps the superficial paradox of the period covered by the last political cycle in Bolivia. A police riot signaled the collapse of the neoliberal state in February 2003 and another police riot, alongside the Organization of American States’ (OAS) preliminary auditor’s report on the recent elections, gave the final push against the Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS) party, which ruled the country for almost 14 years. Social mobilizations also opened and closed the curtains.

Popular mobilizations in October 2003, accompanied by the loss of almost one hundred lives, had put an end to two decades rule by the mining (Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada) and agro-industrial (represented by Hugo Bánzer) elites, whose economic measures privatized publicly-owned companies, while the costs were paid at the expense of the living standards of Bolivia’s majority. These mobilizations also opened the door for the electoral avalanche with which the

MAS won elections in 2005. Fourteen years later, it was mobilizations in “defense of democracy” between October and November that led to the fall of the MAS government.



**Graphic courtesy of the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development Studies, La Paz, Bolivia**

No one, not even the most recalcitrant adversaries of the MAS, could have imagined such a dramatic and rapid collapse of the party and its government. Despite nearly a decade and a half in power, pre-election polls –conducted over about a year– gave the MAS about 35 per cent of the decided vote, with a large portion of the electorate still undecided.

Only a few weeks before the election, amid the voracious fires that were consuming the Chiquitano forest, Carlos de Mesa emerged as a presidential candidate who could potentially force a second round. From that moment on, a landslide of events dramatically unfolded.

On Sunday, October 20, the night of the election, incomprehensibly and in an unprecedented act (at least in the most recent elections), the authorities of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) paralyzed the rapid vote-count. Up until that moment, and with 83.85 per cent of the votes counted, Evo Morales had 44 per cent to Carlos de Mesa's 39 per cent, which would have forced a second round. Indeed, the 2009 Constitution establishes that there will be a second round if a candidate wins with more than 50 per cent of the votes, or with more than 40 per cent provided there is a difference of 10 points above the second-place candidate (Article 166).

That night, the results were being celebrated as a major victory by the opposition. Despite this, at 9:25 pm local time, Morales claimed victory in the first round expressing his "trust in the rural vote." The results quickly fell prey to suspicion. In cities and smaller towns, citizens mobilized to safeguard the ballots and electoral records. Then, 22 hours after the rapid count was suspended, suspicion turned to fury as the TSE resumed the rapid count, giving, at 95.63 per cent of the votes counted, the MAS a victory with 46.85 per cent. The margin was barely ten per cent over Citizen Community, Carlos Mesa's party, which received 36.74 per cent of the vote. Thus, a second round was unnecessary.

To make matters worse, over the following days, members of the TSE were unable to meaningfully justify the suspension of the rapid count (they initially spoke of avoiding releasing two results, and later of a server attack). In Potosí and Sucre, people burned offices of the Departmental Electoral Tribunals, while in Oruro they burned the offices of the MAS. On the day of October 21st and into the night, protests occurred throughout the country and, in some cases, demonstrators battled with police.

Beginning on October 22, members of the electoral body began to resign. The next day, as OAS observers recommended proceeding to a run off, Morales denounced an attempted *coup d'état* and called for the "defense of democracy." His call was answered almost immediately, with large demonstrations in support of the MAS in La Paz and then in Cochabamba. Shortly after, Morales called for a "siege on the cities."

By that time, civic strikes against the "fraud" were already strong in several cities of the country. In a short period of time, civic mobilization reached a national scale, from east to west and from north to south, which had not occurred previously in the country's history. Its epicenters were, no doubt, the administrative capital cities in departments throughout the country. At this point, the class and color lines that marked both mobilizations were clear: on the one hand, the middle classes formed much of the "defense of democracy," while those mobilized in "the defense of rural vote" were peasants and workers. In other words, the lightest skin was pitted against the darkest.

The civic protests in Santa Cruz and Potosí, however, had a broader, more popular character than their equivalents in La Paz and Cochabamba. Between October 23 and 25, the first clashes

between those protesting fraud and supporters of the MAS occurred in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and Yapacaní.

On October 25, the TSE concluded the official count and announced that the MAS was victorious with 47.07 per cent to CC's 36.51 per cent, confirming that a second round was not necessary. TSE authorities gave no further explanations and did not speak to the press over the following week, after which one of them affirmed that the results were "sacred." The week beginning October 28 was marked with civil strife in several cities and smaller towns; the numbers of people injured in clashes rose to dozens. As the peasant siege began, the opposition and the ruling party challenged each other through huge rallies in the cities.

On October 30, in Portachuelo and Montero (both in the department of Santa Cruz), two protesters among the ranks of the opposition were killed by gunshot wounds. According to the ensuing police investigations, town bureaucrats and the area's elected deputy, both MAS officials, were allegedly involved in the deaths. Allegations of fraud on the part of citizens, which had exploded without any order, many of them false, became systematic. A non-partisan computer engineer and his team explained the possible mechanisms in an interview that was widely viewed, while the company providing the electoral software sowed more doubts.

Then, at the request of the MAS government, the OAS began an audit, despite reservations on the part of members of the opposition, because of previous actions of OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro, who on repeated occasions had publicly supported Morales. Leaders of peasant organizations suspended the siege on the cities and Morales, no longer defiant, asked protestors for an "intermission." In contrast, participants in large gatherings in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre and La Paz radicalized their positions, calling for the resignation of Morales or the annulment of the elections. By this point, protests against the government had developed a more popular tinge, as compared to their inception. Self-organized neighbors outside of the middle-class neighborhoods, and some sectors with people of more humble means, particularly in Potosí and to a lesser extent in Santa Cruz, began to join.

Attacks continued on the offices of peasant organizations in the cities, as well as on the offices of the MAS. Racism marked much of the mobilizations. The last major concentration of social movements in support of the government in La Paz took place on November 5, with the participation of the Central Bolivian Workers Union (COB), miners from Huanuni and Colquiri (State-owned mines), peasants, the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Quollasuyu (CONAMAQ) and oil workers. *Ch'ulos* (traditional Andean hats) and mining helmets visually dominated the scene.

There were more clashes between popular and middle-class sectors. On November 6, near the town of Vinto (close to Cochabamba), there were brutal clashes between peasants and neighbours, culminating in the death of a young man from the opposition. Enraged, people

reacted by burning City Hall and humiliating the MAS mayor, who they accused of being a provocateur. Meanwhile in La Paz, students clashed with salaried miners using dynamite.

Finally, on November 7, there was a final rally in El Alto convened by neighborhood councils, the COB and small merchants, apparently in favor of the government. The mobilization demanded peace, rejected recent racist events, and requested an investigation into the causes of the three protest-related deaths at that time. Morales did not participate, opting to send “greetings” from his Twitter account instead. COB leader Juan Carlos Huarachi highlighted what was already becoming evident, saying: “we want to see the massive participation of El Alto, the sleeping lion...let him wake up at once, damn it!”

Demonstrations were also held in support of the government in Cochabamba and in San Julián, in the department of Santa Cruz. In La Paz, meanwhile, the civic leaders of Santa Cruz and Potosí, who a few days earlier had begun to coordinate actions, participated in a rally organized by the coca growers of the Yungas, which was also attended by students, mine workers and the wives of police officers. That night, the manager of the Panamanian company Ethical Hacking, which conducted the computer audit of the electoral process, affirmed in another widely viewed interview that the election was “impregnated with elements for its nullification” due to multiple irregularities.

At this point, the balance of forces had already turned in favor of the various social sectors commanded by the civic alliance. On Friday November 8, a police riot began in Cochabamba and spread like wildfire to other cities overnight. Over this time, Morales’s only public communication was via Twitter. The next morning, with a police riot in La Paz, the mutiny became general and national. In several cities, police officers marched together with people who had been blockading and demonstrating for more than two weeks. The commander of the Armed Forces announced that he would not repress the people. The cards were drawn. Morales, speaking from the El Alto Air Force base, called for social mobilization. Only the coca growers from Chapare (department of Cochabamba) heeded his call, marching from their region towards an unknown destination.

On November 9, a caravan of around 150 buses carrying approximately 8,000 representatives from their respective civic committees, left from Sucre and Potosí as part of their coordination with the national civic movement. These representatives included students, cooperative miners (from Cerro Rico and Porco), salaried mining workers (from Porco, San Lorenzo, San Cristóbal and several other mines) and others, who received a farewell filled with popular solidarity before heading to La Paz.

That day, the first group was intercepted and attacked by peasants, apparently instigated by a MAS mayor in the village of Vila Vila, resulting in several wounded. The next day, a second contingent was attacked with firearms on the highway near the town of Challapata, resulting in

various injuries and one death. Over these two days, upon hearing the news of the bus attacks, large infuriated crowds mobilized in Potosi, pressuring their regional authorities, all MAS representatives, to resign, and burning the residences of one of them and of a minister. In Oruro, demonstrators burned the MAS governor's house, accusing him of being responsible for the attack on the caravans. The house of Morales' sister was also burned.

In this context came the final blow for Morales. At dawn on Sunday November 10, the OAS commission that was conducting the audit of the electoral process released its preliminary report (which was meant to be delivered a couple of days later but was hastened by the convulsive social environment). It concluded that there were multiple irregularities in the electoral process and recommended new elections. That same morning, Morales, accompanied by a handful of leaders of social organizations, made a brief statement in which he called for new elections.

All of this triggered a wave of resignations of ministers, governors, mayors and assembly members, beginning with authorities from Potosi authorities, between November ninth and the eleventh. The MAS, both as state apparatus as well as political party, collapsed in a matter of days. On Sunday November 10, the Armed Forces and the COB asked, almost simultaneously, for the resignation of Morales. In the middle of Plaza Murillo, which was guarded only by the mobilized students, without police or military and without the miners of the state companies that had been there days prior, the leaders of the civic movement (Luis Fernando Camacho and Marco Pumari) entered the presidential palace, placed Bolivia's tricolor flag on the floor, kneeled and laid down the resignation letter they had written for Morales to sign together with a Bible.

By then, Morales was heading to Chimoré (Chapare) from where, along with his Vice President Álvaro García Linera and Minister Gabriela Montaña, he would resign from the presidency. They did not acknowledge that there was electoral fraud, nor did they make any reference to the dead and wounded. In fact, Morales compulsively focused on the attacks on the homes of members of his inner circle. According to them, "the coup had been consummated."

Festivities began in several cities. But as night fell, social mayhem prevailed. Vandals and the shock-groups linked to the MAS, separately and perhaps in some cases together, burned the public buses of the opposition municipal government, the houses of some opposition figures, and ransacked businesses all in La Paz. The celebration by the middle classes was replaced by their collective hysteria.

## **Coup or fraud?**

Was there a coup d'état?

That is what the MAS government assured since the conflict began. However, for the most part, the claims substantiating this were generic. Even in the most critical moments, when detailed information could have influenced the sympathies of the protesters on either side, Morales did not take the opportunity to explain how the alleged coup was being rolled-out. Why not use the occasions he had to convince the population of the coup instead of using them to poke fun at the mobilized?

The Minister of the Presidency, Juan Ramón Quintana, who attended the School of the Americas, dedicated his time to talking about a fearsome plan to turn Bolivia into a new Vietnam. It was the Minister of the Interior, Carlos Romero, who dedicated a few minutes to talking about the coup. He said that it “has three fundamental devices. The first is the violation of the constitutional guarantees of citizens, including freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Second, the activation of a racist sentiment to generate confrontation at the level of the civilian population of Bolivia and third, the violent confrontation against state institutions, particularly the Police.”

Romero’s statement, which remained quite general, was made on November 4, when the “coup” was already two weeks old. When he went into detail, he mentioned that the opposition had acquired “weapons and ammunition in the United States” for this purpose. A blog in English seems to have been the source of his assertions. Apart from this, the government’s various statements about the so-called coup at that time served mainly as fodder for comical memes. In fact, the MAS government had adopted the practice of labelling mobilizations against it a “coup d’état,” most of the time without any basis, on various occasions during the past decade. Also missing was an accusatory or a defamatory campaign against the supposed “coup plotter,” Luis Fernando Camacho, as would normally arise during these circumstances. It was evident that at that time, Camacho wasn’t even on the government’s radar.

How would it have been possible for coup plotters to create the climate that generated collective anger immediately following the elections? How would they have caused the TSE to suspend the counting of the votes? How would they have managed to do it almost at the same moment that Morales suspiciously declared himself winner? In order to achieve this, it would have been necessary for the opposition at least to have controlled one or both of the companies involved in the elections process, either the software provider or the computer auditor, and that the companies take the risk in this adventure. But even if that were the case, how could the opposition have managed to avoid the TSE and the government from detecting its maneuvers in the months of preparation of the elections? Only inconceivable errors and myopia could explain such a situation. Although it is not possible to rule this scenario out completely, it seems to be no more than a remote possibility.

Was there fraud? There are many indications that suggest this. In July 2015, the composition of the TSE was completely renewed when the MAS-controlled Legislative Assembly appointed six

new members, and President Morales appointed one. After the 2018 resignations of the so-called “institutionalist” TSE members under political pressure, the ruling party appointed members who, according to the press, had been linked in the past to the MAS (Antonio Costas remained as the only “institutionalist” TSE member). The same TSE member who declared that the results were “sacred” following October’s elections was photographed painting walls in favor of MAS during previous elections.

Costas himself said that the period after the new members were named was marked by a series of dismissals and changes in officials. In the meantime, on November 28, 2017, the Constitutional Court provided an interpretation of the Constitution, with legal maneuvers common among charlatan lawyers, that Morales and García Linera have the “human right” to run for another term, thus ignoring the result of the referendum held on February 21, 2016. In that referendum, which took place against the backdrop of an unfolding soap opera, the population voted against a constitutional modification that would otherwise have enabled their candidacy for a possible third reelection.

On December 4, 2018, this process culminated with the granting of final approval by the government-controlled TSE of the eligibility of both candidates for the 2019 elections. In addition to this, it is important to highlight the following irregularities: that there was a supposed unusual increase in the electoral roll; that notaries from Pando were found flagrantly enrolling citizens in Riberalta, which is part of another electoral district; that a single company was authorized to transmit the results from exit polls; that there were resignations of members and officials of the electoral departmental tribunals the days immediately after the election; and finally, that the silence of the TSE was deafening during weeks when it was imperative to hear the technical voice of the institution in order to clarify doubts about the electoral process.

Considering that polls in the year leading up to the election indicated that the MAS was leading but did not exceed 50 per cent of the votes or a 10 per cent difference over their second-place rivals, many in the country believed that the government had planned to manipulate the election if necessary. Both preliminary OAS reports came to confirm what mobilized citizens had presumed since the night of the election.

The MAS, as a party structure, was unable to generate leaders who could have taken the baton from the Morales-García Linera duo, or perhaps this was not attempted. When Santos Ramírez was sentenced to jail due to corruption scandals in the state oil company, the path for Morales’s natural successor was closed. Similarly, when former Foreign Affairs Minister David Choquehuanca was cast aside as a delegate to the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) in 2017, Morales remained as the sole presidential candidate.

The MAS, then, found itself in a dead end created by the very Constitution it had approved in 2009, which prohibited the re-election of the president and vice-president for more than one



continuous term (Article 168). Morales and García Linera considered themselves irreplaceable and forced the way for a possible *fourth* consecutive term. García Linera himself had said that without Morales “the sun will hide, and the moon will escape.” When the election arrived, they knew that they could not win in the first round and that if they didn’t and the election went to a run off, they would lose to Carlos de Mesa and his running mate. On October 20, they bet on suicide.

## **When hegemony vanishes**

Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta said that crises show society in all of its nakedness. The MAS government was always the government of the popular sectors of the country. It was, in truth, a macro articulation of various organizations of peasants, wage workers, cooperative workers, merchants, the self-employed and transport drivers. In the beginning, a part of the middle class was also part of this, though their support decreased progressively over time.

The business community, on the other hand, went from being radical opponents of the MAS during the first years, to converting to the government of “economic stability” following an agreement to coordinate economic policies signed on February 4, 2011. Even though the vast majority of farmers’ and workers’ organizations lined up behind the MAS when the crisis began on October 20, the events that unfolded and the information related to electoral fraud changed the balance of forces.

The initial stupor which popular sectors experienced in the face of the possibility of fraud committed by the party that represented them lasted a couple of days. When Morales summoned the “defense of the rural vote,” rejecting the accusation of fraud, farmers from the main regions of the country heeded his call, including the coca growers of the tropics and some *ayllus* from northern Potosí, the state mining workers of Huanuni and Colquiri, the gold mining cooperatives, and the neighborhood councils.

Intermingled with the sincere support for the *proceso de cambio* was clientelist mediation, installed several years before. Over this period, the quasi-state party apparatus, through its many mayors and other authorities, also worked to mobilize people, and bureaucrats were systematically used to inflate MAS rallies. Perhaps all this took its toll on the MAS when revelations of fraud were thrown into the mix. One by one, these sectors stopped responding to Morales’ call, until practically no one did. When the police in La Paz mutinied, the miners of Huanuni and Colquiri, who had been guarding Plaza Murillo for days, had disappeared from sight.

The peasantry was always the mainstay of support for the MAS government, its most intimate social sector. The renewal of Agrarian Reform kicked off a massive process of transferring land to peasant hands, an act with unprecedented historical significance since the peasantry forced the

Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) to undertake agrarian reform in 1953. But land ownership does not guarantee permanent possession, and nothing in the market prevents land from becoming concentrated, quite the contrary.

This is even more so if large-scale landholdings are not made subject to redistribution. By 2012, the agricultural census showed that agricultural units with an area of more than 500 hectares represented 66 per cent (22,818,064 hectares) of the total area used for agriculture, livestock or forestry production. If we lower the mark to 100 hectares, which is still a large area for a peasant family, the share would be 79 per cent (27,471,259 hectares).

Over the last 14 years, peasants in Bolivia have undoubtedly benefited from the distribution of land that, considering the decades of smallholdings, extreme poverty and migration, help explain their deep gratitude to the government. But this distribution failed to alter the historical process of converting the country's agricultural and livestock production into mechanized and industrial-scale enterprises, which produce soy, corn, sunflower, sorghum, beef and poultry.

Manual workers represent another important sector in Bolivia which had for the most part supported the MAS government during the past years, though their relationship to the party was oscillating and conflictive. They protested the pension law in 2008 and 2013, the *gasolinazo* (cuts to the subsidies to oil prices) in 2010, the extent of salary increases, and other specific sectoral conflicts in other years. At some point (2013) workers tried to form their own party and acquire political autonomy with respect to the MAS.

Despite this sometimes-tense relationship, when the electoral crisis began, the mine workers of the state companies responded to Morales' call and defended him with dynamite in hand, until they eventually stopped doing so.

The gold mining cooperatives, which had benefited from important deposits in the north of the department of La Paz and the Amazon region, some of which were within protected areas, also heeded the call. They too retired to their regions as the conflict advanced. Apart from these visible actors, the participation of workers was diluted, as it was mediated by other types of neighborhood or civic organizations. Although the relative size of the working-class population according to the 2012 Census had increased at the expense of the peasantry, this had not been reflected in political forms.

In the opposite camp, as the crisis progressed, segments of the popular sectors aligned themselves with the opposition and the civic movement, in some cases directly and in others due to the confluence of the forces in flux. It is not surprising that the coca growers of the Yungas region had joined the opposition, considering their conflicts with the government over the expansion of coca cultivation areas in the non-traditional region (Chapare), over which their leaders were imprisoned.

It is also not surprising that the mining cooperatives from Potosí had also joined the opposition, as the sector had lost many lives in different struggles with the government. As of yet, no one has been held responsible for their deaths, but some of their leaders were locked up. The human rights complaints of the Chojlla mine workers were not attended to by the government, despite only being a few hours away from La Paz. It is not surprising, thus, that the sectors plagued by the repressive arm or the indifference of the MAS government volunteered to join in with the political currents that besieged it.

The middle classes, meanwhile, were the backbone of the civic and opposition mobilization during a good part of the crisis, until more popular neighborhoods and regions entered the arena. The young university students and the *jailones* (rich kids) from Bolivia's largest cities were politically baptized during these times. Many of us underestimated them, but no one did so more than the government. Morales mocked their organizational capacity by saying that they would not endure and that they were only there for "a little money and some grades." They came up with the war cry that set the tone for the entire mobilization: "*¿Quién se rinde? ¡Nadie se rinde! ¿Quién se cansa? ¡Nadie se cansa! ¿Evo de nuevo? ¡Huevo, carajo!*" (Roughly: "Who surrenders? No one surrenders! Who gets tired? No one gets tired! Evo again? Hell no!").

Many of the students from public and private universities who swelled the ranks of the protestors are also the children of workers and peasants. The MAS enlarged the absolute size of the middle class during its tenure. The population employed in non-manual work, according to the 2012 Census, has almost doubled since 2001 (although its relative size increased very slightly, to almost 20 per cent in 2012).

If these serve as complementary indicators, the urbanization of the country has continued at an accelerated pace: almost 70 per cent of the population now lives in urban centers (compared to 62 per cent in 2001, or 26 per cent in 1950). In addition, a substantial improvement of living conditions (the combined outcome of wage-increase policies and cash-transfers, together with the increase in imports of cheap manufactured goods from Asia), has produced an expansion of the middle classes. According to the Ministry of Economy, 58 per cent of the population had middle-level income in 2017 (compared to 35 per cent in 2005). Somehow, the MAS itself spawned the social class that initiated the mobilization that caused its fall: the MAS fell prey to the very forces that it unleashed or accelerated.

There was no economic crisis, not even a recession, that could be said to have prompted the dissatisfaction of the mobilized middle classes. The loss of their support was slow but steady over recent years, not just because of the clumsy management of the state bureaucracy, but mainly due to the government's profound inability to recognize its mistakes, which included: the brutal repression of disabled people in 2012 and 2016; the repression of the indigenous organizations that marched from the TIPNIS territory to La Paz in 2011; ignoring the 2016 referendum and forcing the validation of their candidates in violation of norms they themselves

approved; and not recognizing, during the electoral campaign, the existence of the great forest fires in the Chiquitania region, which had been burning for some time. The anger of the middle classes had moral roots. And in democracies, there is no possible hegemony without middle class consensus.

Behind the middle classes and their good intentions, the fascist sectors that had been silent for several years reemerged. In Santa Cruz, during the first week after the elections, they went out wanting to beat up *collas* (highland people), and many did. A resurgence of religious sentiment in politics came to articulate several of these sectors through prayers in assemblies, prayers among mobilized neighbours or kneeling policemen, and the symbolism of the Bible laid on the flag in the Presidential Palace.

Civic movements are the multifaceted expression of the middle classes and others that are articulated with them. In Santa Cruz, Camacho, who was formerly the leader of the *juventudes cruceñistas* (Santa Cruz youth) is also the representative of a fraction of the business community, starting with his own family, which owns an insurance conglomerate called Grupo Nacional Vida.

The Bolivian crisis was never characterized by a block of magnates allied with the middle classes against the government and the popular classes. It is much more accurate to say that a fraction of businesspeople mobilized while others stayed on the sidelines, some of which later changed sides when the prospects for victory shone more clearly on the civic side. On October 30, the economic support of the business associations -at least what was known to the public- (the Agricultural Chamber of the East, CAO, and the Chamber of Industry, Commerce, Services and Tourism of Santa Cruz, CAINCO, in addition to the Percy Fernández foundation), began to finance the *ollas comunes* (community meals) for those mobilized: 220,000 portions were served in Santa Cruz up until November 10.

On November 8, Camacho's father complained in a letter to the Confederation of Private Businesspersons of Bolivia (CEPB), the Federation of Private Businesspersons of Santa Cruz (FEpsc) and CAINCO expressing his "disappointment because the institutions you run today do not defend the legitimate interests of the companies of the Grupo Nacional Vida," which apparently was under the authorities' microscope.

It is not possible to imagine that the livestock farmers, who provided the MAS with high-ranking leaders in particular in the department of Beni (including governor Alex Ferrier) and who had just benefited from a supreme decree authorizing clearing and controlled burning of forests and savannas, were celebrating the mobilizations against the government. After all, the leader of the ranchers' confederation, Óscar Ciro Pereyra, had, together with Morales, celebrated the beginning of the export of beef to China in the middle of the voracious fires in the Chiquitania.

The banks, which enjoyed record profits during the *proceso de cambio* (from \$44 million in 2005 to \$317 million in 2017 before taxes, according to the Ministry of Economy), seemed also to have been observing the conflict from the stands, as were other business sectors. Why would transnational mining companies support a mobilization against the government that allowed them to earn, according to my own calculations, \$1.1 billion in the past years? Businesspeople, said Minister Romero, “are supporting the candidacy of president Evo Morales, whether they say it openly or not, they are doing it” since “they are not nearsighted, they know where to aim and they know that Evo guarantees them continued expansion.”

Another government would obviously generate a more favorable environment for businesspeople overall; however, this is not enough reason for them to embark on political adventures when business is going well. CAINCO didn't join the calls for Morales's resignation until November 10.

The unexpected allies of the industrialists leading the mobilization were the civic leaders of Potosí and Chuquisaca: Marco Antonio Pumari, the young man who was once an “ice-cream salesman, fish scaler, cooperative peon” and the son of a mine worker, as well as the Trotskyist school-teacher, Rodrigo Echalar.

These two civic committees articulated students, cooperative miners, salaried mine workers and others in the protests. Potosí, the epicenter of huge and long strikes against the government for autonomy, greater government investment and the industrialization of the resources of the region with benefits for local people, in particular in the case of lithium, is without doubt the city that has been most ignored by the government in past years. In fact, Potosí was already fully mobilized a week before the general elections. This convergence is undoubtedly circumstantial, albeit catalyzed by its opposition to the government.

The police force was never Morales's favorite. Morales replaced police in the presidential guard with Armed Forces when he assumed the presidency, and police officers do not enjoy the benefits granted to the military. They do not have access to, for example, retirement with 100 per cent of their salary, as do soldiers. Morales treated the police with the resentment that was germinated when he was union leader: a few years ago, he made a policeman bend and tie his shoes in public.

Already in 2012, the police had mutinied demanding better wages and labor conditions. During the post electoral social confrontations, the police were in charge of delivering chicken dinners to the mine workers mobilized in La Paz. Their very-organized wives had mobilized early in the conflict and were surely among the instigators of their husbands' mutiny. The massive opposition rally in La Paz, on October 31st, asked for the support of the police and the Armed Forces. During a November 4 rally in Santa Cruz, Camacho promised that the new government would meet police demands. The MAS government realized the risk too late. On November first,

they made an extraordinary payment of Bs\$3,000 (\$433) to all the troops. The cops called it a “loyalty bonus” but it didn’t produce the expected effect, and may have done the opposite. “We were already tired of humiliations,” one of the mutineers would say later. The day before the riot, policemen in Cochabamba had already made their decision, and met with the city’s “youths,” a fascist group, to ask for their support.

In addition to these mobilized sectors, there were other important spectators and others who came to play that role overtime. If we exclude the mobilization of October 28, the bulk of the city of El Alto observed the events as they unfolded without mass participation. Nowhere was the post-elections stupor more obvious.

How to defend a government that most likely had committed fraud? What was lacking was the moral conviction of those who aspire to victory, which is the foundation of heroic acts in history. El Alto, the brown-skinned and working-class city, was paralyzed by the dismay caused by the findings and witnessed its government fall.

The COB leader was not wrong to ask that the lion wake up. It eventually did, when Morales was already on his way to Mexico and unashamed police cut the *wiphala* (the Andean flag) from their uniforms, while others burned the flag in various parts of the country. On November 11th, after Morales fell, not before, the fury of El Alto exploded like a hurricane destroying six police stations along its path, in a matter of hours. “The wiphala must be respected, damn it!,” people shouted.

After this, police officers in El Alto and in other cities apologized to the people, some even doing so in Aymara. “They have called us hordes, they have humiliated us, they have burned the wiphala”, the people of El Alto said. They asked for respect: to not be referred to with aggravating terms like “vandals,” and for a stop to racist acts. In Tamborada, Cochabamba, the police station also underwent the wrath of the people. The collective hysteria that preyed on the middle classes during the nights of November 10 and 11, particularly in La Paz, was the perfect excuse to treat poor people mobilized in an organized peaceful (or furious) way against racism; the MAS militants with their shock-groups and the vandals with a similar club.

Beginning November 11, Bolivia was militarized, and the repression proceeded amid a notable media silence. It was not long before the first wounded occurred. In Santa Cruz, people were given a party; in El Alto, in the popular neighborhoods of other cities, and in some minor towns (Yapacaní in particular) people bore the brutality of repression. The recovery of “democracy” took place with the army on the streets being cheered by the middle classes.

## **Champa Guerra and Democracy in Fatigues**

In the midst of the wave of resignations that included President Morales and his vice president, the presidents of the Chamber of Senators and Deputies also resigned. The disbanding of the MAS left the path open for the self-proclamation of the vice president of the Senate, Jeanine Añez, as president of the country in front of an almost empty parliament and with a gigantic Bible in her hand on November 12. MAS parliamentarians did not even manage to prevent this, nor did they try to control the transition. The Constitutional Court hurried to bless the succession the same day. The self-proclamation of Añez and the escalation of the repression provoked a series of protests that refused to recognize the new government, and in some cases called for the return of Morales. Urban protests were limited, however, to Cochabamba, El Alto and a couple of mid-size towns, while the rest of the cities were returning to normal.

On November 13, new ministers and a new military high command were appointed. Arturo Murillo, whose hotel had been burned in Chapare a few days before, became the Minister of the Interior and promised to embark on a manhunt for some of the most important figures in the MAS. With the new military command, it is quite possible that those “whose careers were truncated” in the almost 14 years of the previous government returned. In fact, the new commander of the Armed Forces, Carlos Orellana, had been the former President Jorge Quiroga’s aide-de-camp.

Thirsty for revenge, they did not waste the first opportunity. The leaders of the coca growers’ federation, probably in coordination with Morales (who never ceased to be their main leader and who continued to coordinate actions from Mexico), decided to march on Cochabamba to offer up lambs for sacrifice. As in the rest of the country, the city was full of military and police forces, in addition to a part of the middle class that brimmed with racist and classist hatred. What was the political objective of marching to the enemy’s court when the rules of politics ask that the adversary be resisted from one’s home territory in moments of weakness?

This rule was well known by the cocalero leaders who had successfully practiced the roadblock strategy since the 1990s. In the middle of the November 15 march, some middle-class looking subjects carrying long guns appeared among the cocalero marchers, as if somehow they could face hundreds of soldiers and policemen. Later it was said that some of the cocalero leaders had vanished from the march before the repression. Here, the army and the police’s naked violence, in broad daylight, converged with the perverse desire of the last fractions of leaders of the MAS to use the dead for political maneuvering. The massacre claimed the lives of nine people.

Meanwhile, residents of one of the most peripheral areas of El Alto initiated a blockade in front of the Senkata fuel plant on November 14, while a large part of the city was observing. Like the rest of the protests, it was not so much in favor of the MAS as it was against the self-proclaimed government’s repression. On November 19, in a scene that seemed copied from 2003, the new government decided to intervene and allow a caravan of tanker trucks protected by a military and police operation to cross the blockade. The brutal repression killed eight people. The

“democracy” in military uniform took no shame in producing a bloodbath. It did not even respect the relatives of the deceased who marched together in an immense march of outrage from El Alto to La Paz on November 21: images showed wooden coffins lying alone in the middle of the street behind a tear gas cloud.

In the countryside, the peasants resumed their traditional tactic of road blockades, the day of Jeanine Añez’ self-proclamation as president. As of November 21, 102 blockaded points were registered, chiefly along the main highways. And although the movement reached significant proportions, it had no prospects of being supported in the cities where demoralization, fatigue and calls for peace dominated.

With El Alto divided and only small protests against the new government remaining in other cities, these blockades represented the closing of the curtains on a month of dramatic events. Agreements between the government and the most important social organizations in the country, including the COB, the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), “intercultural” peasants, the Bartolina Sisa organization, CONAMAQ, the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), and residents of the districts of El Alto, to call for new elections, the withdrawal of the army, and the cessation of persecution deactivated most of the remaining demonstrations.

The call for elections, *without the participation of Morales and García Linera*, and the restitution of the electoral roll by means of a law passed unanimously in parliament, with the acquiescence of the MAS, was surely the final act.

It is true that Morales, for whatever reason, did not deploy the repressive forces. Rather, he bet on civil confrontation to defend irregular electoral results. Before and after his fall, the MAS mobilized its quasi-state apparatus and when it had no other means left, resorted to bribe. The crude use of money to mobilize a few people of modest means who were paid by the MAS without any qualms in the middle of the first marches since November 11, as documented in dozens of videos, and the payment to a few vandals, who have no more loyalty than to the one who makes the payment, have nothing to do with the deeds that mobilize multitudes.

The sacrifice paid by the coca growers in their morbid offering was the ultimate expression of the moral degeneration of a party that lost its horizon. In any other circumstances, the massacres of Sacaba and El Alto would have provoked a popular insurrection, but not this time. Sadly, all of this was far from the heroic days of 2003. In this debacle, the MAS displayed its most unpleasant face.

Perhaps the most lasting consequence of the recent political crisis is not the fall of the political project of the national majorities, the fall of their government, but rather the decomposition of the social organizations themselves. Not only did the MAS state and party apparatuses collapse



in this process, it is possible that the clientelist union structure will do so as well. Like wood rotting from the inside, it too is disintegrating with the impact of the crisis. This has become apparent, particularly in El Alto, which looks today more like a hydra with many heads trying to quickly reorganize, disregarding, in some cases, the MAS and opposition leaders. Reorganization requires new leadership, as only once the weeds are pulled out will crops grow. The stupor of election day produced disorganization; and the violence of “democracy,” in turn, despair.

Pride hinders judgement. The man who kneed a journalist in front of many cameras during a soccer game is the same man who believed he could commit electoral fraud without anyone noticing. The MAS leaders drank too much from the goblet of power and got drunk from it. They did not recognize their mistakes, they ignored a referendum and reacted late to the great fire in the Chiquitanía; they harshly repressed those who challenged them, including the leaders of social organizations who once supported them; it is they, in short, who created the conditions of their own defeat.

And they are the ones who gave a political opportunity to the right and to the truly conservative sectors who now venture out. After a decade of wage increases, improvement of the living standard of national majorities, extraordinary profits for industrialists, merchants and banks, as they themselves said, in a time of “economic growth and stability,” the MAS had the best prospects to continue governing the country for several more years, if they had not stubbornly forced the candidacy of the *irreplaceable* men.

After several years, the political opposition did not yet have the necessary strength, nor the program required to be a real opposition. In their obstinacy, believing themselves irreplaceable, the leaders of the MAS did not mind pitting workers and peasants against the middle classes, as if in a boxing-ring. It is they who bet on the civil confrontation to resolve the dispute. It is they who replicated and expanded the *champa guerra* (war among people of humble means), as Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui would say, just as it was incited by the MNR during its decline in the 1960s. It is they who opened the doors to the reconstitution of the conservative forces: just as in 1964, the conservative reaction arrived in *November*. Morales and García Linera are the ones who are truly responsible for this gigantic social and political disaster. History will judge them.

A political cycle has closed and its requiem must be played. Political processes rarely fit into prefabricated ideological schemes and must be considered in their complexity. We cannot look to the future without facing the mistakes of the past. When the global economic crisis, which has been in fermentation during these past years and in relation to which the economic policies of the MAS government have made the country more vulnerable, finally occurs, other songs will be played. We will have to travel new paths. For now, it is time to reorganize, to clean house. For those abroad, international solidarity must be not with he who wanted to be the supreme leader,

the *caudillo*, but with social movements during their painful process of reorganization and in defense of the social gains they've acquired over past years.

*The elements mentioned in this article can be corroborated by reviewing the Bolivian national media, among others. Newspapers: Página 7, El Deber, Cambio, La Razón, El Potosí. Television: ATB, PAT, Red UNO, UNITEL, TVB, RTP. Radio: Erbol, Panamericana, Fides, San Gabriel, Kawsachun Coca. Social media: Colectivo Curva, VosTv and others.*

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