EVO MORALES AT THE CROSSROADS: PROBLEMATIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS IN BOLIVIA

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I. INTRODUCTION

Oromomo, Natural Park Isiboro Sécure, Cochabamba province. In this remote community of central Bolivia, on 29 July 2012, a process of consultation began to discuss the intangibility of this territory and the measures to protect it from external interferences. This initiative has been put in place by the government of Evo Morales to find a solution to a conflict with Amazonian indigenous organizations that has been ongoing for more than two years now. The node of contention is a road building project between the two towns of Villa Tunari and San Ignacio de Moxos that would facilitate the communications and connect this area to the trans-American commercial corridors, thus promoting a new wave of development and economic growth. These, at least, are the arguments of the government and of its local allies, mainly peasant and coca growers' communities. On the opposite side, other inhabitants of the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure*, TIPNIS)[1] are strongly resisting a project that would cut across the natural park in which they live, altering its environmental and social equilibria. Moreover, they criticize the fact that no previous consultation took place with local communities, as established by the new Constitution approved in 2009.

The conflict suddenly reached national and international public opinion on August 15, 2011, when more than 2000 people left the town of Trinidad and started the Eighth Indigenous March[2] for the Defence of TIPNIS, which ended in the administrative capital La Paz two month later. Through this period, various initiatives of dialogue between the government and the indigenous authorities took place. On September 25, an episode of repression against the marchers by the Bolivian police raised the indignation of national and international public opinion. The indigenous protesters did not only demand the suspension of any infrastructural project within TIPNIS, but they also added 15 other points to the agenda for

negotiation, most of them oriented to preserve the integrity of their territory. A few days after the marchers reached La Paz, and under a rising public pressure, on October 24, the government promulgated a law (*ley corta*) guaranteeing that the road would not pass through the TIPNIS. However, a few weeks later, some Ministers and the President himself initiated a campaign in favour of the road construction and for the cancellation of the law. As a result, the conflict persisted and in July 2012, a process of consultation with the local communities eventually began. However, several communities declared themselves against the consultation and were unwilling to welcome the entrance in their territory of the brigades of the National Census of Population and Households in charge of carrying out the consultations. Moreover, they started an international campaign, denouncing rights violations to international organizations, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the International Labour Organization. In this context, the representative of the Coordinating Committee of Andean Indigenous Organizations (*Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas*, CAOI), Rafael Quispe, declared: "If it is demonstrated that the rights of indigenous peoples have been violated, there will be repercussions for Morales. From the indigenous President he was supposed to be, he has become a violator of the rights of the natives", adding that the "TIPNIS is just the tip of the iceberg".

These statements reflect the tense situation prevalent in Bolivia between indigenous sectors and the government of Evo Morales. We are evidently very far from the time when the new president was invested in a ceremony in the Tiwanaku archaeological site, where Aymara *jatiris* (religious authorities) gave him the traditional stick of command on behalf of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia. How is it possible that in just a few years, and after compelling electoral results that reconfirmed Morales as Bolivian president in December 2009, the relationship with the indigenous movements suffered such a radical deterioration? And is this change irreversible? What are its causes, the broader context and the other actors that contributed to this conflictive scenario?

This paper will provide some insights that help understanding these new configurations. It will present an analysis of the most important institutional and normative reforms, which contributed to a process of ethnicization of the country's social and political life and the effects on the social movements' articulation, with an emphasis on the ambivalent relationship between the indigenous and the peasant movements. Both the set of reforms as well as the new social and political dynamics contributed to shaping a contemporary scenario of fragmentation and conflict, which

finds one of its main and most symbolic expressions in conflicts over land and resources such as the dispute around the TIPNIS.[3]

II. FROM THE 'SOCIAL WARS' TO THE 'PROCESO DE CAMBIO'

In Bolivia, the new millennium marked the beginning of a drastic renovation of political and social dynamics. Some scholars have labelled this phase the new 'rebel cycle' (Esperandín López and Iglesias Turrión 2007:189). Likewise, picking up the expression used by the anthropologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui to name the Quechua and Aymara rebellions during the first half of the 20th century, the Bolivian Vice President and sociologist Álvaro García Linera (2010:382) defined this period as the new 'indigenous insurgency', emphasizing the ethnic character of the social mobilization. The popular and journalistic narrative eventually opted for the more drastic and dramatic, although improper term of 'wars', namely the Water War and the Gas War (Dangl 2007). Beyond the differences in terminology and definitions, from 2000 to 2005 Bolivia underwent a tough political crisis that, in some occasions, reached high peaks of violence.

The main protagonists of the mobilizations during this five-year period were rural peasant, indigenous and urban neighbourhood organizations. They were the expression of problems of poverty and social exclusion that concern a high percentage of the Bolivian population. Moreover, in this phase, they were also able to strengthen their potentialities in terms of political action. This accumulation of political and social capitals was crucial for the construction of the counter-hegemonic project that challenged the dominant elites, and, through an extraordinary grassroots mobilization, eventually reached power through elections in 2005.

This crisis can also be interpreted as the result of the decline and failure of the socio-political and economic neoliberal model of the previous two decades. On the one side, it contributed to highlight the limits of the projects of modernization and economic growth postulated by the neoliberal governments under the so-called Washington Consensus. The protests reflected a negative or a modestly positive trend of economic indexes that failed to adhere to the expectations generated during the first phase of structural adjustments' implementation. On the other side, the crisis accounted for the increase of socio-economic gaps and the precarious results of the neoliberal multiculturalist model[4] and the so-called 'democracia pactada' to address problems of political representation, social exclusion, ethnic and regional fragmentation (Mayorga 2007).

Ethnic identities, symbols and narratives were crucial factors of social cohesion during the conformation of the 'counter-hegemonic hub' (Esperandín López and Iglesias Turrión 2007:53). "The *indio* was converted in a popular cohesive identity for the social sectors that were confronting the effects of the free market policies" (Stefanoni 2010:20). In particular, an ethnic-based narrative was generated, which was able to catalyze both the indigenous native movements[5] as well as the peasant unions[6], redirecting the trend of disarticulation and social fragmentation that they had experienced since the 1980s (Fontana2012c). As Andrew Canessa noted:

> Not only have indigenous people gone from the margins to the centre of Bolivian politics; but, rather more interestingly, it appears that central political issues, national issues that affect everyone, are represented as indigenous issues – after all, there is nothing intrinsically indigenous about a gas pipeline. Indigeneity is becoming the language of protests over resources and the defence of the patria against the forces of globalization; it is breaking out of its specific concerns and offering a language of political engagement for a much broader public (2006:254).

The electoral victory of Evo Morales in 2005 and of its Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al socialismo*, MAS) marked the end of the socio-political crisis of the previous five years and gave birth to a new political era. It opened a delicate moment of transition of an ideology and political project from a counter-hegemonic condition (i.e. against the dominant neoliberal block) to the hegemonic occupation of power (Postero 2010). This complex dynamic, which includes the reconfiguration of political dynamics and agenda, has been called the Process of Change (*Proceso de Cambio*). One of the key efforts was to pass from a strictly representative model of democracy to another one, based on the trinitarian formula of a "participative, representative and communitarian democracy"[7].

The country has entered a new political era, whose main innovations are the leading role of the indigenous popular sectors as the dominant partner in the ruling coalition (García Linera 2010:38), and the paradox of an unprecedented peasant political hegemony within a predominantly urban country (Do Alto 2011). Indeed strong and repeated references to the Andean culture and the indigenous roots of Bolivian people were important narrative and semiotic resources used by the government to help carry out its ambitious social and political agendas. Through this new form of strategic essentialism, the culturalist discourse of the Morales government contributes to a general feeling of pride and sense of community mainly among rural social movements (Postero 2007). At the same time, the

heterogeneity of the coalition in power raised many problems in terms of the management of diversity and potential tensions among social sectors, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

The Bolivian sociologist Fernando Calderón (2008:66) named the new Bolivian political project 'neodevelopmentalist indigenism'. Its main characteristics are the central role of social movements, especially indigenous ones; a search for inclusion and egalitarian order, based on a rather standardized development proposal that relies upon commodities incomes (what has been called neo-extractivism, Gudynas 2010). This is paired with a complicated negotiation with transnational enterprises led by a state that purports to be strong and stable, but that still harbours chronic weaknesses. Another characteristic is a national and anti-imperialistic rhetoric that dominates international relations and is used as a political instrument when it is time to consolidate internal consensus. This definition seems to be excellent for describing the first phase of the process, while recently it is probably more appropriate to invert the order of the pairing. Indeed the latest political experience is rather characterized by the strengthening of a less innovative development path, mainly backed by state capitalism, commodities exploitation and basic measures of redistribution and poverty reduction[8]. At the same time, the ethno-cultural issue has receded to the background, practically abandoning even its discursive centrality. This is why 'indigenist developmentalism' is perhaps a more appropriate definition.

This shift is an important indicator for interpreting the complex relationship that links Evo Morales and his political movement with the 'indigenous issue'. Contrary to what one could expect, the ethnic issue has not been a driving force due to the election of Morales. Nonetheless, it has gained a key position on the political agenda as a result of a long process of change, strongly influenced by the international debate on multiculturalism, which developed during the neoliberal epoch (1980s and 1990s). As Hervé Do Alto (2012) notes in seeking to clarify the relationship between the electoral ascension of Morales and the politicization of the indigenous issue, if these two dynamics fed each other during the 1990s and 2000s, this was possible only through a precarious political configuration. In other words, "Morales and his team were not proponents of an 'indianist' agenda; rather they saw to the imposition of certain relevant claims under that very agenda – from which however they paradoxically received some political benefits within a process of legitimization of the 'indigenous issue' and the ethnicization of Bolivian society" (Do Alto 2012:41-42). Consequently, it was a political reason more than an ideological inspiration

that places the indigenous issue on the agenda of Morales. This was the case timidly before the electoral victory, and more prominently afterwards.

A strong indigenous rhetoric and symbolism became dominant within Morales' discourse, and in the new iconography of power, characterized by a president who prefers local traditional dress and coca-leaf necklaces over conventional suits and ties. These semiotic and discursive features are, however, in strong tension with the government's political agenda and praxes, where a reformist and 'descolonizing' horizon cohabits with old corporatist models of power management. Those tensions acquire an ideological dimension through the hybrid formula of the 'democratic revolution' or the 'revolution within democracy' (Morales Ayma 2006). This appears as one of the cornerstones of the new political discourse and a concept coming from the very epistemology that the coalition in power uses to describe itself. In this sense, the Masista discourse is shaped as a teleological argument of modernity based on development through commodities exploitation. At the same time, the Masista teleology, and its utopian component in particular, introduces elements that are commonly considered anti-modern, namely concerning its ties with the past, tradition, the communitarian social system as promoters of change. Within this discourse, time heterogeneity entails deep antinomies in the coexistence of opposite dimensions: tradition and revolution; progress and conservatism; decolonization proposals and neo-extractivism.

This mix generates raises various epistemological problems embedded in the Masista narratives, rooted on one hand, on the crisis in which the historical project of modernity is mired and, on the other hand, on the difficulties entailed in the effort to conciliate the "radical heterogeneity" of the subaltern with the "homogenizing reason of the state" (Sanjinés 2009:97). All of these contradictions emerged at crucial stages throughout the process of institutional reforms and, particularly, during the negotiation for the drafting of a new Constitution. Indeed the Constitutional process was highly contentious and even involved episodes of violence. MAS didn't manage to win the two-thirds necessary to carry any decision within the constitutional assembly, being therefore forced to confront a harsh opposition by the right and the eastern elite leaders (Postero 2007). The latter catalyzed their consensus and opposition strategy around the demand for regional autonomy rooted in racist fears and long-term popular regional resentments against La Paz (Gustafson 2006). Civic leaders used a racist counter-discourse to mobilize its social bases, triggering episodes of violence and provoking the paralysis of the assembly's work during seven months. Even after an agreement was reached, tensions persisted especially

around contentious topics such as land reform, autonomy, and indigenous rights and the constitution was eventually voted in a climate of emergency and open conflict (Postero 2010).

Beyond the constitutional process, other issues remained highly polarized and in certain cases led to unclear and contradictory stands by state authorities. A key opposition, for example, separated the discourse on the defence of the *Pachamama* (the Mother Earth) proposed within important international arenas (such as the World People's Conference on Climate Change in Cochabamba in 2009 or the Cancun Conference on Climate of 2010), and an agenda for national development based on the intense exploitation of non-renewable and renewable natural resources as well as the strengthening the country's infrastructural network which would affect protected natural areas.

III. INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS: TOWARDS A PLURINATIONAL MODEL OF STATE

In post-colonial countries, especially in Latin America, criticisms and disappointments with respect to the multicultural policies of the 1980s and 1990s[9] gave birth to new normative proposals that are now experiencing their first empirical and political tests. In Ecuador and Bolivia, the intercultural and plurinational paradigms became part of the agenda of the new leftist governments. In this framework, interculturality is meant to be an ethic and political principle that should orient the construction and maintenance of difference within heterogeneous societies. At the discursive level, this is presented as an effort to overcome the multicultural paradigm, since, while multiculturalism is focused on the improvement of social competition through tolerance, interculturalism would look for an articulation, a cohabitation that overcomes cultural coexistence and emphasizes the interaction among diversities. This implies a political project to mobilize traditionally marginalized sectors of post-colonial societies, in particular peasant and indigenous groups (Giarracca 2005).

Bolivia is certainly one of the most interesting cases to monitor the impact of new intercultural and plurinational paradigms on political and social life. Indeed the implementation of a plurinational citizenship is probably more advanced than elsewhere. Bolivia is reinterpreting the concept of citizenship through cultural lenses, implementing a radical process of institutional and normative engineering. Also, a theoretical-normative debate on the need to rethink the very foundations of modern representative democracy has taken place. The new Constitution is the most important example of the renovation of the new legal and institutional

paradigm. Among the main points, it ratifies the recognition of thirty-six groups of native indigenous peoples[10]; it permits only one presidential re-election and incorporates revocatory referendum for the President, governors and mayors' mandates. It also establishes that the judges of the Supreme and Constitutional Courts will be elected through universal suffrage, from among a list of candidates previously approved by the Plurinational Legislative Assembly (the Congress). Moreover, the geopolitical paradigm of the unitarian republican state was substituted by a new *plurinational state* that institutes indigenous, municipal, departmental and regional autonomies. In this new framework, elections of local authorities are permitted on the basis of customary norms, and a communitarian justice within the 'native indigenous peasant' juridical framework is being introduced.

In practice, not all these political and normative changes correspond to new initiatives pushed by MAS and the popular coalition in power. Some of them rather represent a deepening of the neoliberal agenda of reforms implemented in the previous decades and a process of strengthening of the indigenous movement since the 1980s. During the 1990s, some important institutional changes were promoted, among them: the formal recognition of the multicultural nature of the Bolivian state; the administrative decentralization through the institution of mayors' popular elections and the municipalities' financial autonomy (Popular Participation Law); and the creation of the Native Communitarian Lands (*Tierras Comunitarias de Origen*, TCOs), i.e. large extensions of land titled in favour of indigenous peoples to guarantee access to and control of their ancestral territory. Indigenous and peasant leaders took advantage of these opportunities, firstly occupying local political charges and, afterwards, delegations within the National Congress (Stefanoni 2012:7). This eventually paved the way for the raise of a rural-based movement such as the MAS (Zuazo 2009; Do Alto 2011).

From a broader perspective, normative instruments were introduced that strengthened a process of citizenship's ethnicization (Lacroix 2007a and b; Gros 1999), promoted by the Bolivian state as well as by other important actors such as social movements and international cooperation. The political and cultural problems that this strategy tries to confront are related to an endemic lack of citizenship, which, after the failure of the national revolution's corporatist project and the neoliberal program, new ethno-cultural kind of policies try to fill. The issue at stake is an old one. In the words of Chantal Mouffe (1992:5) the question is: "how to make our belonging to different communities of values, language, culture and others

compatible with our common belonging to a political community whose role we have to accept".

The new political transition Bolivia is living through could be read as the latest attempt, from a culturalist viewpoint, to resolve the structural problem arising from the gaps in the process of creation and consolidation of the modern nation-state and of its basic pillars (territorial control, equality of citizens in front of the law, separation of powers, and the creation of a national 'imagined community'), that are themselves rooted in the colonial past. This can be considered as a new manifestation of a long-lasting crisis. Bolivia is adopting a new recipe to confront a condition of nationality, statehood and endemically weak citizenship, affirming a project that is no longer based on the political or the economic, but on the cultural and, more precisely, on the pluricultural realm. The answer to the defeat of the construction of an efficient nation-state in post-colonial contexts presents an innovation inasmuch as it does not attempt to re-conduct the process and find solutions within the dominant model and its institutional instruments, but looks for alternative models in which autochthonous reality would 'more comfortably fit'. The response in this sense has potential for innovation (Fontana 2013). But in practice it also presents relevant problems: its most important fragility, in functional terms, is perhaps the incompatibility between *developmentalism* and *indigenism;* and, in terms of state ethics, its anchorage into culture and ethnicity as criteria of resource allocation and of rights entitlement, i.e. the potential incompatibility between the ethnic (or pluri-ethnic) state and the principle of equal citizenship.

The definition of '*indigenist neo-developmentalism*' embodies these tensions, i.e. the problematic contradiction implicit in the nexus between ethnic identities and resource allocation; a trend towards pluralism and promotion of indigeneity opposed to the need to keep walking a path towards development and economic growth. These contradictions were partially resolved in discourse, at least in the first period of the Morales' government. However on the legal and practical level, tensions still persist.

The effort to harmonize, at least in the first place, developmentalist goals with the relativist indigenist perspective implied an important change: weakening the persistent racist and colonialist visions on the 'indigenous', it paved the way for an historical renovation. At the same time, this formula is the gravitational point of some the most important tensions embedded in this political project. If developmentalism is defined as a teleology[11] that has accumulation and productivity as ineluctable goals, it stands in an incompatible position with respect to a supposed 'indigenous epistemology'. Some analysts foresee the eventual prevalence of the former

over the latter for the main reason that development has a more generalized consensus among the population and within the government, than indigenism (Molina 2010). This would justify the growing subordination of indigenous peoples' interests to broader state interests, a state that is however led by an 'indigenous-popular and peasant movement (Canessa 2012). Other scholars argue, on the contrary, that industrialization and indigenism are not necessarily incompatible and could even be complementary. This would require the implementation of measures, which exclusively favour the indigenous sector (Ayo, quoted in Molina 2010). The latter point raises the important issue of who is taking advantage from the economic policies implemented by the MAS government and of the complex relationship between neoliberal and post-neoliberal economic strategies. Nancy Postero expresses a quite optimistic view, pointing out how Morales and his administration "not only are trying to move beyond neoliberalism but also may be working toward vernacularizing liberalism to make it more democratic and more relevant to Bolivia's indigenous populations" (Postero 2010:62). On the other side, according to Jeffery Webber (2011), Morales administration did not do much more than merely 'reconstitute' the neoliberal model, instead of destroying it.

Other factors further complicate the situation, such as the fact that no perfect equation can be identified between social groups and their ideological and political positioning. This is clear for instance looking at the mismatching between self-identification with an indigenous group and the adoption of an indigenist ideology. Indeed, recent conflict between indigenous people and a self-styled indigenous state has brought to the fore some of the paradoxes and contradictions within the concept of indigeneity itself (Canessa 2012, McNeish 2013). The fact that indigenous identities can be complex and slippery categories was also confirm by the last census (2012), whose results highlighted the 'disappearance' of 20 per cent of the population self-identifying as indigenous over a decade (from 62 to 42 per cent). Moreover, social groups that might be considered indigenous (including the rising Aymara urban middle and upper classes and the Aymara and Quechua *cocaleros*) are very much in favour of Morales' economic policies, including the neo-extractivist turn, and they are benefitting from them in different ways (McNeish 2013; Fabricant 2013). On the other hand, a growing part of the white and mestizo urban middle class is sensitive to environmental problems and indigenous rights. This might reflect the changing dynamic of identity politics in the country. New questions about political economy alongside cultural rights are emerging, in particular concerning how extraction as a means of addressing social concerns can create exclusions for those who live and articulate cultural

demands on territories rich in natural resources, in opposition to those who are migrants that may also make cultural claims to indigeneity in certain contexts but have a fundamentally different vision of development. At the same time, the link between ethnic-identitarian origins and systems of resources, rights and power allocation also presents important problems, concerning for example the operationalization of ethnic categories and the high risk of instrumentalization (Fontana and Sparti 2012; Fontana 2012a).

IV. INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL ETHNICIZATION

The recent institutional changes promoted by the Morales' administration have been both the framework as well as one of the main consequences of the identitarian and organizational changes that the country has been living through over the last decades. Indeed, the new state engineering, and the process of constitutional negotiation were confronted, both at the national and local level, with the historical structural plurality of Bolivian social movements and collective identities (classist, ethnic, regional…).[12]

Latin America has traditionally been a fertile land for the study of social movements, especially by scholars, who have often been activists at the same time, influenced by the New Social Movements paradigm (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Escobar, Alvarez and Dagnino 1998; Calderón 1986; Calderón and Dos Santos 1987). At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, Latin American social movements are still a fascinating issue for researchers, who tend to put a particular emphasis on their 'globalizing resistance', i.e. their role as bulwarks against capitalism and globalization (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden and Kuecker 2007 and 2008; Stahler-Sholk and Vanden 2011; Pleyers 2010).

From the 1980s and especially after the Zapatista rise on the global scene, the attention of Latin Americanist sociologists was concentrated on and fascinated with what Yvon Le Bot (2009) calls *'la grand révolte indienne'* ('the great indigenous revolt'), i.e. the ensemble of ethnically-based social movements that started to revitalize and gain importance all over the region, from Mexico to Argentina. At the same time, the issue of identity, and in particular of ethnic identity, was introduced to the political and social realms by new indigenous movements that were able to position themselves as enacting a concrete project of change. These are movements that respond to new logics that could not be analysed only through classic social sciences categories and, even less, through classist-based models that do not consider the centrality of identity claims. They generally avoid violence, have ambivalent relationships – sometimes of rupture rather than

continuity – with the previous historical struggles, and move within a complex spatio-temporal dimension, which includes local, national and global spheres. However, although their identity is a central issue, it is also important to note that their claims are often predominantly social and economic. These claims are usually related to special rights and territorial control (which is why a purely identity-based explanation is not completely satisfactory). Territorial claims became central articulators of the fight of Latin American indigenous movements since the 1980s (Lacroix 2012a). In the following decade, these movements arose in the political scene of various countries, in particular Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala. In the first two cases, political forces tied to social coalitions managed to win the elections and are now in power.

In the Bolivian case, MAS came to power supported by a strong rural social coalition. The Unity Pact (*Pacto de Unidad*) – an umbrella organization that constitutes the main popular basis of Morales' government – is formed by three peasant and two indigenous organizations. All these organizations are characterized by a sort of communitarian meta-identity.[13] Especially in the rural world, a communitarian view of social life prevails, which is ruled by rigid corporative and associative mechanisms. These mechanisms generate strong collective identities of a normative type that precede many forms of individual manifestation and are used to wield social control, formulate claims, name representatives, and shape a civic morale and a core of ethical norms. Since the 'principle of community' works as a powerful form of social cohesion, these mechanisms are often very efficient for collective action coordination. Indeed, the refusal to assume more or less implicit normative prescriptions that form part of the communitarian meta-identity means the risk of expulsion from the collectivity and the deprivation of protection and of the mutual aid at the basis of these societies. In other words, there are strong contextual disincentives against the exit from a communitarian framework, pursuing a strategy that gives the primacy to the individual over the collectivity (Hirschman 1970; Leonardi, Nanetti and Putnam 1993; Bauman 2001).

In the presence of a geopolitical map where there is not a dominant communitarian meta-identity (such as the nation), but multiple communitarian meta-identities each one with its territory, its narrative and cultural traits, the probability of being involved in conflict increases. First, this is due to the structural characteristics of identities themselves (they are always defined in opposition; sometimes they get strengthened by the ties to a territory, resources and spaces of power). Secondly, the trend towards fragmentation also increases the probability that one identity group will seek to dominate the others. Finally, as I will show, a fragmented

environment characterized by strong ethno-cultural identities is a relatively delicate field in which to introduce positive discrimination norms that can eventually trigger performative effects, favouring one identity over another.

In the Bolivian context, all of these elements contributed to making the political tasks of MAS and its role as a catalyzer of rural and popular organizations particularly complicated. Although, since Morales' elections, there has been an effort of articulation of the two main identitarian and corporatist forms of the rural world – peasant and indigenous – the discursive as well as the inter-organizational system of alliances are evidently fragile and in tension with the forces of fragmentation that have been manifest over the last two decades and that are still active.

This situation is linked with the collateral risks coming from political attitudes and institutional frameworks, which tend towards the ethnicization of politics and citizenship. From a theoretical view point, identities are characterized by a certain degree of fluidity, dynamism and *fitness*, in the sense that they tend to adapt to the context and to be reshaped according to endogenous and exogenous factors (Barth 1996; Fontana and Sparti 2012). These processes of identity reshaping are often driven by instrumental tactics of social groups to increase their degree of fitness in specific particular circumstances and thus facilitate their access to resources and power. This characteristic of collective identities represents a key, although often neglected, issue in the moment of elaboration of a political strategy and designing of an institutional framework to manage ethno-cultural heterogeneity. In a context characterized by weak institutions and extensive socio-economic gaps, the introduction of incentives for ethnic self-identification (in the framework of institutional reforms that could be considered a sort of 'supply side multiculturalism'[14]) is likely to trigger a process of social fragmentation and encourage new conflicts between the state and social movements and among social movements themselves.[15]

V. FRAGMENTATION AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

The radical change of government and political power distribution that brought about the first electoral victory of Evo Morales at the end of 2005, opened the possibility for a deep transformation of the state-civil society relationship. Optimistic expectations were wagering in favour of a redefinition of the conflict fields in the light of a new institutional framework. This would also include a new role for civil society in politics, which could possibly hold the potentiality of promoting a process of change in the nature of social conflicts themselves. Although conflict will not disappear, the change of paradigm in favour of inclusion and

democracy was expected to bring a shift and a decrease in the high level of conflicts in Bolivia.

However, an in-depth analysis of social conflicts in the country over the last seven years recalibrates those expectations. Looking at the quantitative data on Bolivian social conflicts, the major evidence against predictions is that the number of disputes has escalated in the last few years, reaching significantly high peaks. If compared with thirteen other political conjunctures from 1970, the last one occupies the third place with regards to number of conflicts per year after the governments of Hernán Siles (1982-1985) and Carlos Mesa (2003-2005) (Laserna and Villarroel 2008).

Fig. 1: Number of conflict per year in Bolivia between 1970 and 2007
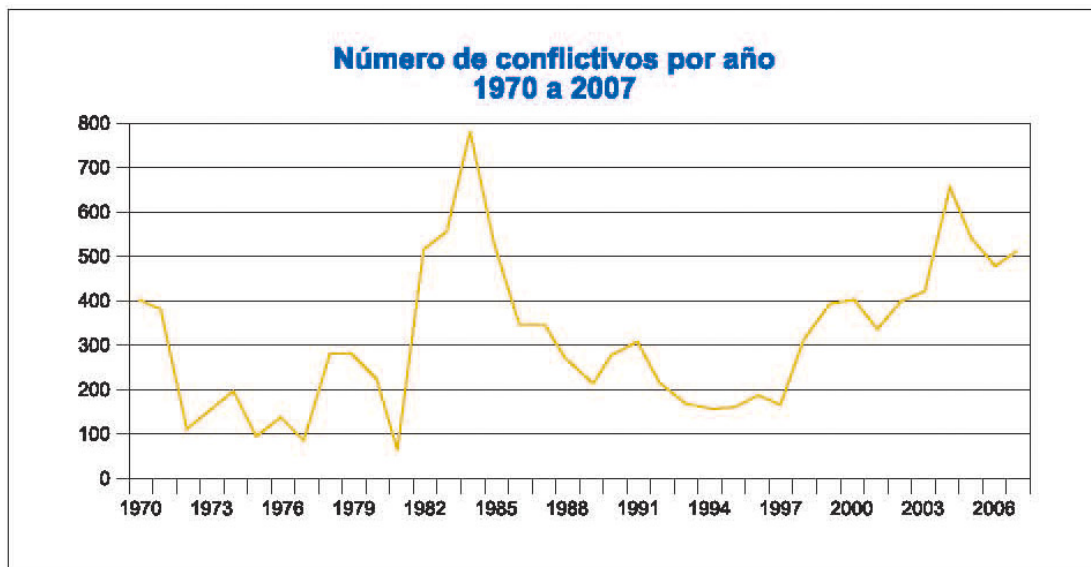
Source: Laserna and Villarroel, 2008.

When looking at the conflict dynamics from a qualitative point of view, there seems to be a double track that conflates longstanding causes and patterns of social tensions with new ones, which are strictly dependent on the current political conjuncture. Structural conflicts, which depend on the long-term characteristics of Bolivian social and economic structure – in particular, endemic inequalities and deep unresolved polarizations – coexist with functional conflicts, which arise from the endogenous contradictions of the transition process, and that are mainly politically rooted (Fontana 2013).

Some of these conflicts are disputes around land and resources and confront some of the most important Bolivian political actors: MAS government, indigenous movements and peasant unions. As in many other countries in Latin America, in Bolivia the agrarian issue has been at the core of unsolved tensions and cyclical struggles since the formation of the

modern state 200 years ago. Social movements have historically been the articulator of these fights. In particular, the land issue has been at the core of the claims of the two main traditions that have articulated Bolivian political struggle: indianism and national-populism (Thomson and Hylton 2007:7).

Different factors contribute to trigger conflicts over land and resources in Bolivia, including population growth, internal migrations, inheritance management that parcels up the properties (*minifundio*), and the foreign ownership of fertile lowlands (especially Brazilian soy plantations). This is coupled with a highly unequal system of land distribution among families and social groups[16], which is the most important evidence of the failure of the agrarian reform started in 1953. The latter also contributed to the increasing of corruption and bureaucratization in land management (Urioste and Kay 2005). This complex situation contributes to explaining why land governance is a delicate matter in a highly unstable social and environmental context.

Over the latest fifteen years, the conflict between indigenous and peasants has been further complicated, in part as a consequence of the recent Bolivian agrarian policies. In 1996, the INRA Law was approved, under the pressure of lowlands indigenous organizations. The latter were satisfied with the new norm – mainly because the law eventually recognized the Native Communitarian Lands (*Tierras Comunitarias de Origen*, TCO) as a form of property. In contract, the peasant movement remained at the margins of the debate. The *Confederación Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* – the main national peasant union – instructed its bases to avoid any contact with the INRA's officers that would have visited the communities.[17] As a result, the land clearing process in these areas had been halted for many years. This was one of the reasons, together with the availability of funds from international cooperation for the TCOs' titling (and not for peasant land titling), and the relative procedural ease and political convenience[18], which meant that the clearing process started in the lowlands and was postponed in the highlands. In other words, considering the 'short history' of the agrarian reform, indigenous organizations for various reasons received more benefits: the titling process started earlier, it was better funded and satisfied the calls of many indigenous groups for collective titles, prioritizing their demands with respect to the clearing of the peasant communitarian or individual lands.[19]

This advantage came mainly from the process of institutionalization of a link between identity and ethnic belonging, and systems of resource allocation through the reforms of the agrarian law that took place over the

last two decades. As a consequence, the new normative framework introduced some incentives for ethnic identification, which, in some contexts, ended up favouring an instrumental use of indigenous identities. Different social groups started to build new identitarian boundaries, fuelled by ethnic-based narratives, mythologies and symbols, to distinguish themselves from competitor groups. In certain cases, this generated fractures within originally homogeneous communities.[20] Identities and resource access became the most important factors that contributed to the radicalization of land and territorial conflicts at the local level between indigenous and peasant organizations (Fontana 2012b).

At the same time, these intra-societal conflicts are one of the clearest and most explicit manifestations of the structural problem of MAS in its role of catalyzer and coordinator of different social forces. Over more than a decade, MAS has been the articulator of multiple subjects, organizations and social movements whereby none was the actual holder of ontological privileges in the construction of new collective political identities. These identities are therefore the result of contingent hegemonic fights. Within the social universe close to MAS, a new wave of identitarian and organizational construction, deconstruction and hybridization has generated conflicts for the control of corporatist power, and political and physical spaces. As a consequence of the identitarian and strategic crisis that the government is facing as cohesive political actor, fragmentation among social sectors has increased and a new system of alliances (and conflicts) was shaped, characterized by a higher degree of social tensions especially at the local level. In this sense, the problem of land tenure and management constitutes a key disputed issue among MAS's rural allies, which reflects divergent visions of development, territorial organizations and systems of control and power management (Fontana 2012b).

Critically the most important episode of conflict during 2010 was related to the land issue and, in particular, to the unclear definition of interdepartmental borders and natural resource exploitation (limestone and, possibly, uranium deposits). As a result, a long-lasting dispute between communities in the departments of Potosí and Oruro re-emerged and degenerated into a protracted conflict. At the end of July 2010, the clash radicalized, when the Potosí Civic Committee decided to take advantage of the existing tensions, mobilizing the population and asking for greater political autonomy. The accesses to the city were blocked and various pickets and hunger strikes were organized. After some attempts at dialogue and more than 20 days of mobilization, negotiations with the government were successful and a new agenda for Potosí was arranged. However, the local conflicts on interdepartmental borders continued for several months

before reaching a provisional agreement between the numerous communities involved (Los Tiempos 3.9.2010; La Revista Minera 20.4.2010).

One year later, another conflict linked to land challenged the Morales' government. On August 15, 2011, indigenous groups started a march (the eighth) to protest against the construction of a road that would cut across the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). The indigenous organizations accused the government of ignoring the constitutional obligations that establishes a prior consultation process with the indigenous peoples on initiatives that would affect their territories. Moreover, in alliance with national and international environmentalist movements, they considered that the road would open the way to smuggling and to a colonization flow of coca-leaf growers (*cocaleros*), with whom a situation of conflict and tensions already existed. On the other side, the government stated that the new infrastructure – that would have been constructed by Brazilian companies – would contribute to connect the country to the great trans-American commercial corridors (in the framework of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America, *Iniciativa de Integración de la Infraestructura Regional en América Latina*, IIRSA). Hence, this project would promote a new wave of development and economic growth. The government also accused indigenous groups of being manipulated by the American cooperation agency – the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – that would have allegedly funded and provided political support to the march (Perrier Bruslé 2012).

After one month on the march, indigenous peoples reached La Paz where a big demonstration took place to welcome them. On 24 October, under a raising public pressure, Morales' government enacted a new law that prohibited the construction of the highway through the indigenous territory. Meanwhile, counter-demonstrations of sectors closer to the MAS (mainly peasant and *cocalero*) took place to support the construction of the road. Since the beginning of the mobilizations in Trinidad, the peasant and *cocalero* organizations maintained their loyalty to the government, accusing the indigenous peoples of betrayal of the *Proceso de Cambio* and of connivance with imperialist powers. This sounds peculiar for those who remember the first indigenous march in 1990. In that occasion, '*Jallallas*'[21] and *pututus*[22] of Aymara and Quechua peasants received in a high pass called La Cumbre, a few kilometres from La Paz, the '*hermanos*' coming from the lowlands to ask to president Paz Zamora the respect of their 'territory and dignity'. On that occasion, the peasant leaders welcomed the indigenous delegations and officially demanded that the government pay

attention to their claims. The former secretary of the peasant union, Mario Flores, said in his welcome speech that the event should be considered as a "re-encounter of 500 years of exploitation", and the signal of an evident crisis of the elites that usurped social movements' common "interests and territories" (Flores, quoted in Peralta 2011).

The TIPNIS infrastructural project has been widely criticised from an environmental perspective for its effect on the protected area, and the variety of arguments put forward by the different parties has been deeply scrutinized, mainly focusing on the tense relationship between the government and lowland indigenous movements (Webber 2011, Wanderley 2011, Brysk and Bennet 2012). In this context, I will rather concentrate on the tensions between social organizations. How is it possible that social sectors that seemed to be tied by feelings of 'brotherhood' and to share the same 'destiny' – whether suffering discrimination or triggering an emancipatory process (as during the cycle of social protests between 2000 and 2005) – are now involved in a rather confrontational and tense relationship? I argue that recent events, and in particular the TIPNIS conflict, reflect a tendency towards the primacy of corporatist interests over potentially trans-cultural and trans-ethnic social fights. The boundaries between the indigenous and peasant worlds reveal once more their flexibility and capacity to adapt to the political contingency. After a period of alliances and mutual support to face the threats from external enemies – in particular, neoliberalism and oligarchic powers – social organizations are now undergoing a moment of fragmentation and contention over access to the same physical, symbolic and power spaces.

Each sector puts in place its particularistic strategies, and identitarian issues become key instruments in social fights. On the one hand, the indigenous groups developed an environmentalist discourse in which they are the '*Pachamama* paladins', glancing to global environmentalist movements,[23] weaving a new alliance with the Bolivian urban middle class, and confronting a government which is no longer that of the first indigenous President, but a 'neodevelopmentalist bureaucracy at the service of transnational companies'. On the other hand, the *cocaleros* and peasant unions revitalized their alliance with MAS through a pro-development and classist discourse. This allowed them to occupy a rhetorical space that had remained relatively empty since the Bolivian Workers Union (*Central Obrera Boliviana*, COB) and the left parties entered into a deep crisis at the beginning of the 1990s.

The TIPNIS case also accounts for the arbitrariness of the empirical-identitarian correspondence as well as the symbolic-discursive radicalization of some key identitarian categories. The persons who

marched to safeguard the TIPNIS were indigenous. However, were not those Aymara *cocaleros* who marched in support of the government also indigenous? The peasant was the one who blocked the march, but was not he/she also the marcher on the other side of the barricade? Drawing on the examples above, it is evident the lack of clarity that 'indigenous' as an analytical category is esperiencing. There is an overlapping of levels whereby, depending on the social aggregate under consideration, certain actors find it worthwhile to use or to refuse ethnic-based categories. For example, many Aymaras and Quechuas perform 'outward indigeneity' in order to participate in the transnational global community, when they consider that the relevant aggregate is the world and they need to gain collective strength and alliances to be recognized as relevant actors. However, the same groups 'inwardly' refuse the indigenous category and prefer to call themselves 'native' or 'peasant', in contrast with the lowland self-defined indigenous. Therefore, they position themselves as different and, often, as rival actors within a political arena characterized by a fragmentation of the potential enemies and a fight for the same resources and spaces.

Nonetheless, there are also many key elements in common between the two groups, which are often undermined by the dominant discourse. Both indigenous and peasant sectors are often confronted with unsustainable poverty conditions, both need land to subsist, both put in place strategies to guarantee their precarious social reproduction. Moreover, both these strategies are based on the construction and strengthening of oppositional identities, on the effort to occupy of symbolical and discursive spaces and on the weaving of alliances and supportive nets. Eventually, both groups are fighting for the same limited resources. As Canessa (2012:9) noted, what is surprising in the TIPNIS case is that "this occurred in a state which is led by an indigenous president who has placed indigeneity at the very center of how he expresses the legitimacy of his rule and has explicitly created a series of very public rituals to match his rhetoric of having created an indigenous state". In this turbulent framework, a pertinent question to pose is whether the leading role of the indigenous-popular sectors as dominant coalition – as it was called by García Linera (2010) – is still in place.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of contemporary conflict in Bolivia, and in particular, of its articulation around cultural, narrative and identitarian axes, more general reflections can be made on the historical moment that the

country is living through, and especially on the complexity and heterogeneity of the *Proceso de Cambio.* The crisis of the alliance between MAS and the indigenous sectors has reached a critical point, and tensions have been growing also between rural social movements themselves. This will probably open up the way to new configurations and re-articulation of political and social equilibria.

As I have argued in this article, the TIPNIS conflict, despite its exceptionalities in terms of magnitude and media attention, is not an isolated episode. Yet it forms part of a broader political and historical framework in which the relationship between the government and social forces, as well as the balance of power between rural movements themselves have been changing, following the rhythm of new political alliances, institutional reforms and international transformations.

In their fluidity and interactional dynamics, identity-building processes have actively contributed to these changes. Ethnic identities, in particular, were crucial factors of social cohesion during the 'social fights cycle', becoming soon after factors of disarticulation and tension among rural movements. This is mainly due to a major change in political dynamics (started in the moment in which Morales was elected and MAS got in control of state power) as well as to a deepening of the process of normative and institutional reforms. The latter actively contributed to strengthening the link between ethno-cultural identities and resources and power allocation, especially concerning land management and control over natural resources.

The tensions implicit in the new normative framework are reflected in the conflictive landscape since Morales' re-election in 2009. Over the last eight years, new social tensions have gained importance as well as a national (in some cases even international) dimension. A key space of dispute in the recent political phase is constituted by conflicts over land, territory and resources. While they were traditionally portrayed as struggles between rural communities and big landowners, over the last years the focus of land disputes has been shifting towards inter-organizational confrontations (mainly between peasant, *cocalero* and indigenous organizations). The TIPNIS case represents the most notorious and internationalized among these conflicts. Critically, they embody crucial problems that the coalition in power should confront: on the one side, the crisis of MAS as effective catalyzer of popular forces; and, on the other side, the corporatist logics that still govern Bolivian social movements' actions and fights.

NOTES

[1] The TIPNIS is an area of 1,2 million hectareas between the departments of Beni and Cochabamba. It was declared a national park in 1965 and in 2009 the indigenous groups Yuracaré, Mojeños-Ignaciano and Chimán that occupy this land received a collective title for their territory.

[2] Over the last two decades, Bolivian indigenous movements organized various marches (nine in total) across the country, to protest against the governments and claiming for rights (mainly concerning the control over their lands and territories) and political visibility.

[3] This paper is part of a broader research on Bolivian social conflicts, identity and narrative building processes in the framework of my PhD dissertation in Political Science. The empirical data were collected during two years of fieldwork (between 2009 and 2011) and are constituted mainly by almost 80 interviews with political, social and international actors, various participant observations and eight research workshops with social movements leaders and grassroots in rural areas.

[4] I refer here to the political doctrine and normative reforms that become dominant in Bolivia from the mid-80s which results from the interconnection of neoliberal values (and mainly the free market) and multiculturalism as a body of thought of contemporary political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity through the recognition of 'group-differentiated rights' (Kymlicka 1995). See among others, Postero 2004; Lacroix 2007; Gros 1999; Gros and Dumoulin Kervran 2012; Marinissen 1998.

[5] Here I refer to Bolivian ethno-cultural movements at large, including, on the one side, the lowlands indigenous movements which gathered around the Confederation of Indigenous People of Bolivia (*Central de los Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia*, CIDOB) and the highlands native movements represented by the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qullasuyu (*Consejo Nacional of Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu*, CONAMAQ).

[6] The peasant union movement gained strength in Bolivia since the national revolution of 1952, when the corporate structure was used as a mechanism to foster political participation and citizenship. This was couple with a process of *mestizaje*, which gave precedence to classist over ethnic identity as collective self-identification structures. The national peasant syndicate Unique Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (*Confederación Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, CSUTCB), however, is not a homogeneous movement, since it includes various streams in tension with each other, in particular a wing closer to Katarist indianism, a Marxist stream and an important delegation of coca growers and colonizers (the peasants of Quechua or Ayamara origin moving from the highlands to more favourable environmental conditions in the valleys and plains of the East).

[7] "Democracy is implemented in the following ways that would be developed by law: 1. Direct and participative, through referendum, citizens' legislative initiative, recall elections, assembly, *cabildo* and previous consultation, among others. (...) 2. Representative, through representatives' elections through universal, direct and secret

vote, according to the law. 3. "Communitarian, through election, designation and normative regulation of authorities and representatives through norms and procedures, typical of the native indigenous peasant peoples and nations, among others, according to the law" (Art. 11 of the Political Constitution).

[8] Welfare programs include a popular retirement account for senior citizens, a national subsidy to schoolchildren and their families, a national literacy program, and a zero-malnutrition program to eliminate childhood malnutrition (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2007, quoted in Postero 2007).

[9] In Bolivia, the multicultural political project and narrative were key during the first half of the 1990s, in correspondence with the so-called 'neoliberal social reformism' (Saleman 2010:118). They worked as a strategy of contention in front of the increasing social tensions from the raise of new discourse and indigenous peoples' organizations, under the influence of intellectual and political transnational currents. Through a circular and dialectic dynamic, the official multiculturalist discourse and the high number of ethno-development politics sponsored by the international cooperation agencies contributed to strengthen and multiply ethnicization processes.

[10] Every native language is official in its influence area and they are compulsory for public employers.

[11]Teleology is to be intended here in his broader meaning: a process or action which is for the sake of an end, a final cause. What I intend to emphasis here is the fact that, in certain contexts and in almost all modern societies, development is understood as a process which, through a series of consecutive steps (including for example economic growth and industrialization), would lead to well-being and to a condition of general improvement with respect to the present. This is a dominant paradigm often taken as given in modern political economy which however has clear historical origins (as brilliantly described by Albert Hirschman in his book *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments For Capitalism Before Its Triumph*, 1970. On development as a historically produced discourse see Arturo Escobar 2010).

[12] Some key identities in this sense are peasant, indigenous, native, but also Camba and Kolla, i.e. cultural-based popular words to identify people from the highlands (West) and from the lowlands (East).

[13] I define the communitarian identity as a meta-identity, highlighting its structural dimension which describe the form, not the substance, of the identity, i.e. the fact that an identity is defined by a supra-communitarian dimension. Community in this framework is used to define a group of individuals which share the same environment and strong common ties and feelings of belonging. In its structural meaning, this definition applies both to indigenous and peasant groups.

[14]Christian Gros uses the expression 'public neoindigenism' to express a similar concept, i.e. the ensemble of state-driven multicultural strategies (2000).

[15] Given the alliance of paradigms and visions of Latin American states and the international community, the Subcontinent constitutes the most important setting where these kinds of processes took place. However similar dynamics were reported in other regions of the world, triggered mainly by the changed in the international legal framework. In particular, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples and the International Labour Organization 169 Convention provided incentive for minority groups to self-identify as indigenous peoples. An example is constituted by the Arab-speaking minority of the Ahwaz region of Iran (Kymlicka 2007:284).

[16] According to INRA data (2006), in Bolivia the 91 per cent of the land would be in the hands of big landowners, while the 71 per cent of the population would count only on the nine per cent of the land.

[17] Interview with a CSUTCB technical advisor, July 2010.

[18] The issuing of only one title for big territorial extensions of thousands of hectares require a reduced technical effort and guarantee an increase in the numbers concerning titled land, being thus politically convenient. However, as the organizations involved in *saneamiento* can confirm, TCO land titling generally constitute a complex and often highly conflictive process, and the INRA doesn't hold legitimacy and technical efficiency to deal with land disputes in many local spaces.

[19] With this statement I do not imply that the clearing and titling process of TCO/TIOCs has occurred without problems. In this respect, data and critical points are pointed out in the report of the Fundación Tierra, *Territorios Indígenas Originarios Campesinos en Bolivia*, 2010.

[20] My PhD thesis *Social Conflicts, Collective Narratives and Identity-building: Lessons from Bolivia*, 2012, studies the generation of new ethnogenesis processes and the link with institutional reforms and land conflicts. In particular, two chapters are dedicated to the analysis and comparison between two case studies of land conflicts, one in the Apolo region (Franz Tamayo Province) and the other in Quila Quila (Oropeza Province).

[21] Aymara expression of hope, satisfaction and gratitude that is used in greetings or in religious rituals.

[22] A sound device typical of the Andean region. 'Blowing horn' in English.

[23] The TIPNIS conflict attracted attention and solidarity by many environmentalist and ecologist movements. Among others *Juventud Ecologista* and the Spanish network *Ecologistas en acción*. However, the protection of the natural environment was not a key point from the beginning of the protest. It was rather used to reinforce other priorities such as the defence of territory and autonomy (McNeish 2013).

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