

## Review Essays/Ensayos de Reseña

### Reinventing Democracy in Bolivia and Latin America

*Ton Salman*

- *Citizenship in Latin America*, by Joseph S. Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg (eds). Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner, 2006.
- *Participación política, democracia y movimientos indígenas en los Andes*, by Jorge León, et al. La Paz, Lima: PIEB / IFEA / Embajada de Francia en Bolivia, 2005.
- *El estado del Estado en Bolivia – Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano 2007*, coordinación general George Gray Molina. UNDP / PNUD, Bolivia, 2007.
- *El Estado de la opinión: los bolivianos, la Constitución y la Constituyente – Encuestas para el Desarrollo Humano*, coordinadores George Gray Molina, Alfonso Ferrufino and Antonio Aranibar. UNDP / PNUD, Bolivia, 2007.
- *Democracia de alta tensión – Conflictividad y cambio social en la Bolivia del siglo XXI*, by César Rojas Ríos. La Paz: Plural Editores, 2007.

The fervour with which the debates on democracy in some countries rage suggests that the incumbent models and systems of democracy are fiercely contested. In Bolivia and Ecuador, for instance, debates (we are writing in early 2008) are highly combustible. Ongoing experiments with alternative forms of democracy and the efforts to forge democracies that bolster civil, social, cultural, and participation rights make Latin America a fascinating laboratory for ‘reinventing democracy’ today.

Evo Morales, a leftist and indigenous candidate, was elected president in Bolivia in late 2005. His election was preceded by a long series of massive protests in Bolivia, in which he actively participated. These protests were diverse in nature and in what triggered them. But amidst the diversity, some common denominators are discernable. Many were carried out by indigenous sectors of the population, and all protests were motivated by the perceived lack of real democratic influence, the rejection of corruption and ‘treacherous’ conduct by politicians, and by the failure of policies to improve the livelihoods of the poor. Taken together, the protests were against ‘indecent’ politics. To a certain degree, cultural backgrounds in which the qualities of authorities ought to have included honesty, respect, and preparedness for ‘serving leadership’ also motivated and shaped the protests. Protests were thus at least in part motivated and given shape not only by ‘standard’ democratic values and competences, but also by cultural notions of indigenous origins.

In indigenous communal life, and in what emanates from it in Bolivian society as a whole, the relation between the communities and their authorities is perceived in a specific way. Normally leadership responsibilities rotate and contribute to the

authority's prestige – especially if he or she proves to be a generously redistributing leader. Also, the moments of accountability are more frequent and of a different nature. Often regular assembly-like meetings take place, characterized by broad communal participation. The mode of decision-taking is deliberative, lengthy and consensus-seeking, rather than limited to pre-empted, vote-legitimizing statements. In such communal gatherings, the 'state' (e.g. the incumbent authorities) almost permanently seeks to find consent for proposed standpoints and measures. Instead of referring to their status as a 'representative', authorities consider themselves 'delegates' in constant need to *relate* to their constituency, and to reconfirm their position and legitimacy. It seems probable that elements of this more 'organic' link between leaders and followers gave form to the protests. The question now to be asked is whether and how such considerations influence current debates on the renewal of democracy, a process that is finding its point of gravity in the country's effort to write a new constitution. That process, however, is complicated by specific features of Bolivia's political situation: one of the 'hottest' issues in Bolivia is the exploitation of the country's natural resources, in particular gas. Additionally, there are regional tensions between the 'east' (largely *blanco-mestizo* in the – erroneously conceptualized – national imagery) and the 'west' of the country (largely indigenous in the – again erroneously conceptualized – imagery). Finally, there are the tensions between more centralistic and more de-centralistic government models.

When Evo Morales was elected in 2005, something truly revolutionary occurred. Not only had the power balance shifted at long last, and the indigenous majority come to rule; not only had the mounting protest against neoliberal policies culminated in the election of a president opposing that neoliberal economic model. The current situation is *also* a laboratory for rethinking and remaking democracy and (differentiated?) citizenship. Evo Morales' victory not only meant a victory of the 'subaltern' indigenous over the *blanco-mestizos*, or of the working classes and the poor over the 'capitalists', it also signified an indictment of the traditional, liberal-representative democratic practices which in the eyes of many had become corrupted and exclusionary, and had lost much legitimacy. The debate today is about whether these problems were only the result of a distortion of an, in principle, adequate and 'good' model, or whether, alongside changes in socio-economic policies and stronger state intervention in economic affairs, substantial changes in the democratic system are also needed. Indicators suggest that the latter is the case. One of the prime sources for providing inspiration for such a rethinking of democracy and an alternative role and exercise of citizenship is the indigenous tradition that so clearly influenced the protests. This makes Bolivia a fascinating case for studying the 'reinvention of democracy'.

All the books under review directly or indirectly address this issue. A good starter might be the compilation edited by Joseph S. Tulchin and Meg Ruthenburg, *Citizenship in Latin America*. The volume 'seeks to bring the analysis of citizenship in Latin American democracies to the forefront of democratic theory...' (p. 2). Citizenship, although fostered by the return of democracy, is still 'curtailed by a weak rule of law' (p. 3). That is why the volume attempts to broaden and deepen the analysis of citizenship by connecting, in such analyses, the practices of citizenship with specific, and often problematic, 'real democracies'. In other words: 'how the flaws in the democratic process limit the exercise of citizenship in Latin

American democracies' (p. 5). One of the most outstanding contributions to the volume is 'Latin American Citizenship and Democratic Theory' by Frances Hagopian. Her critical analysis of the studies of Latin American politics leads her to the conclusion that the intimate relation between citizenship and democracy has often not been addressed adequately. In some contributions in the literature on the topic, for instance, 'citizens were not so much seen [...] as agents of democratization, but rather as part of the diagnosis of shaky democracies' (p. 19). According to her, specific practices of democracy create specific modes of exercising citizenship, and end up leading to specific models of democracy. For example, a 'rights'-focus 'underlies a version of citizenship that is "passive" and "thin", [...] and] where citizens are denied the opportunity to exercise civic responsibility, a "low intensity" citizenship results' (p. 28). With a minimalist definition of democracy, as advocated by Schumpeter, Dahl and others, we end up not only conceiving of democracy as a 'formalistic ritual' (p. 32), but also forsaking the opportunity to bring 'citizens back into our everyday understanding of it' (p. 32). We must, Hagopian asserts, go beyond 'the study of only the political and formal component of citizenship' (p. 33). The remainder of her contribution is a sophisticated attempt to diagnose the flaws of our understanding of the constitution of citizenship and democracy in Latin America. The failure of the rule of law and the denial of civil rights contributed to the loss of democracy's legitimacy and 'the "underperformance" of civil society and the oversupply of "passive citizens"' (p. 38), which is associated with the lack of a 'moral relation' with democracy.

Currently, two new issues have entered the debate on democracy: neoliberalism and the emergence of ethnic movements. The first has engendered a fierce debate on whether neoliberalism fostered 'liberal democratic opportunities' or, to the contrary, worsened inequality, atomized civil society and turned citizens into 'social monads' (p. 44). The second challenges the inherited idea of national unity going 'far beyond the remediation for cultural discrimination and exclusion [...] opening up] the possibilities that citizenship will not be identical for all, that the units that hold rights will not necessarily be the individual, and that there is not a fixed basket of rights that only the state will define and concede' (p. 47). What such developments point at is that 'the struggle for citizenship does not have a fixed endpoint; it is a permanent revolution, and in this process it extends and renews democracy itself' (p. 48). One of Hagopian's conclusions, therefore, is that democracy itself needs to be an 'open' and not independent variable in our studies. In her own words,

If we truly leave open the possibility of democracy's distortions, transformations, and even inventions, if we [...] think about how different experiments in citizen engagement, different ways of institutionalizing forms of citizen participation, different recognition of cultural rights and differences – different citizenship regimes – shape democracy, we may open the underside onto why rulers get away with corruption, why party systems collapse, and why citizens do or do not bother to vote (p. 50).

Although largely theoretical and programmatic, I believe this to be a major contribution. It stimulates the study of democracy as a process of the ways citizens perceive and practice it, including the ways (either organized or not) citizens support,

question, or reject democracy. It looks at how identities, beyond the national one, co-constitute democratic mores.

Deborah J. Yashar, in her contribution, supports these ideas, concluding that the Latin American state should correct the deficient 'equal access' to rights and the different experiences 'vis-à-vis citizenship regimes, other citizens and the state' (p. 72). James Holston makes a similar point, emphasizing the frequent 'disjunction' between different rights, leading to a variation in democratic experiences, which need to be studied to discover the actual 'array of attributes, resources, and processes citizenship entails and the manner in which they are available to people' (p. 88). Ariel C. Armony also highlights the fact that (the denial of) rights are often unequally distributed, and will not develop in an evolutionary mode, and that therefore 'whole nation approaches' (p. 109) will often not work. Joseph H. Carens, in reviewing the preceding contributions, completes the first part of the book 'Conceptions of Citizenship' with his contribution, 'Democracy and Citizenship in Latin America', which focuses on the need for a normative stand.

The next part of the book, 'Challenges for Citizenship', consists of four contributions. Philip Oxhorn identifies what he calls 'neopluralism' as the core problematic characteristic of current day democracy in Latin America. It is the 'market-centered pattern of political incorporation [... in which a]n individual's personal economic resources largely determine the extent and nature of her or his political and social inclusion. These economic resources also directly affect the quality of education and healthcare, and even the legal protection a person enjoys' (p. 125). Roderick Ai Camp and Keith Yanner address the gender consequences of currently prevailing democracy and civil inclusion patterns by comparing the situations of Mexican citizens, Mexican-American citizens, and other citizens of the USA. They conclude that the differences in assessments of tasks, characteristics and qualities of democracy are especially noteworthy between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and that, moreover, women more than men tend to appreciate the 'ends' (progress, lawfulness) above 'means' (procedures and transparency). Focusing on Brazil, Luis Bitencourt addresses crime and violence as threats to democracy. He concludes that 'rampant crime affects [citizen's] freedom and undermines their confidence in the state and in the democratic system' (p. 181). In reviewing the contributions to this part of the book by Oxhorn, Camp and Yanner, and Bitencourt, Christopher Sabatini in 'Democracy Assistance in Creating Citizenship' mildly criticises their emphasis on the state's responsibility. He suggests that they should have emphasized more that 'democratic citizenship [also] embodies some degree of obligation to the state and to fellow citizens', even if he admits that Latin Americans 'have good reason not to feel particularly indebted or obligated to public authority' (p. 194).

The last part of the book, 'Promoting Active Citizenship', is concerned with efforts to foster citizenship and enable people to exercise their rights. Carmen Beatriz Ruiz describes the experiences of the Bolivian's human rights ombudsman institution (set up in the 1990s) to protect these rights, as they are 'the backbone of any system that claims to be democratic' (p. 201), and to empower people to demand and proactively exercise these rights. Carlos March takes us to Argentina to describe the activities of the NGO *Poder Ciudadano*. One of the focus points of *Poder Ciudadano* has been to obtain access to public information. Thanks to their

ability to create a 'force field' (p. 222) by obtaining critical mass, social anchoring and diffusion of power, *Poder Ciudadano* has managed to contribute to civil society's ability 'to become an effective space for controlling public administration and public policies' (p. 234). César Montúfar describes how an 'antipolitics' vocabulary in Ecuador is even used by the vested parties and politicians. Yet he objects to the idea that we can conclude from this that 'traditional' representation has become obsolete there (p. 237). Participation, he asserts, should strengthen and legitimize representation, and not replace it. He develops this idea by distinguishing between 'constituted' and 'constituting' power, and by illustrating how in the field of 'demands for the expansion of rights', the field of 'social control, oversight and accountability', the field of 'collaborating with authority and strengthening institutions', and the field of 'political innovation', Ecuador has arguably made some headway in strengthening 'representative democracy [which] depends on the articulation of constitutive and constituent political logics' (p. 248).

In conclusion, Henri Boyte first makes a plea for acknowledging 'public work' as a terrain for analysing the quality of democracy. 'Citizenship as Public Work' focuses on the shift 'from citizens as volunteers, clients, consumers, and protesters to citizens as problem solvers and cocreators of a democratic way of life' (p. 254). Combating the privatizations of all spheres of life is one aim; another is the attempt to liberate the citizen from the confines of 'civil society' and launch him and her in their 'efforts that cross boundaries of state, society and economic life. People doing public work solve public problems, create public wealth, and in the broadest terms, become makers of a democratic culture' (p. 267). The editors, finally, stress that, although 'all is not well with democracy in Latin America', there are signs that we are not at a deadlock: citizen's protests have indicted and sometimes toppled presidents and parliaments that were considered corrupt, have contributed to legal and constitutional reform, and have participated in participatory planning and budgeting. At the same time, democracy needs institutions and cannot depend solely on 'civic acts', and therefore questioning actual democracy cannot be an excuse for condoning the results and methods of any particular citizens' rally, or for believing they are a substitute for representative democracy.

The book is an inspiring and cogent contribution to the understanding of the intricacies of current debates and struggles over democracy in Latin America. Many contributions are valuable both in terms of presenting concrete cases and national developments as well as in terms of suggesting promising theoretical distinctions and concepts. Nevertheless, the editors have not fully succeeded in synthesising the different contributions. If the challenge had been taken up to connect and analyse the theoretical suggestions made by Holston ('disjunctive democracies'), Oxhorn ('neopluralism'), Camp and Yanner ('procedural versus non-procedural interpretations of democracy') and situate them in an encompassing idea about the state of affairs, they would have gained in significance and contributed to our further understanding of Latin American democracy.

Surprisingly, contributions to the debate by indigenous voices about what a 'genuine' democracy should look like are largely absent from the book. It is, in my view, an omission that the ideas formulated by Hagopian have not been more explicitly taken up by other authors. An important lesson from the book, however, is noteworthy: to analyse democracy, we need to take into account the practices, per-

ceptions and experiences of citizens; we need to seriously look into citizen's experiences of discrimination and exclusion, their frustrations, and their suggestions.

As stated above, one of the most conspicuous protagonists of this type of intervention in the democracy debate is that of the Latin American indigenous peoples and movements. *Participación política, democracia y movimientos indígenas en los Andes*, authored by experts from various countries in the region, attempts to take stock of the indigenous political participation in the Andean countries during the last decades and to provide a comparative analysis of its characteristics, their impact, and the political perspectives of the indigenous mobilizations. The book was published before the ouster in April 2005 of president Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador, who had been supported by the indigenous party *Pachakutik*, and in Bolivia before indigenous leader Evo Morales was elected president in December. This makes the book, in a way, *history*, but the analyses it offers are still worthwhile.

Jorge León gives a very valuable reconstruction and interpretation of the developments regarding the indigenous 'inclusion' in Ecuador. León emphasizes that mobilizations already underway in the 1990s were affording the indigenous organizations a certain status by becoming an interlocutor of the state. They articulated demands combining 'equality', yet at the same time recognized 'differences' (p. 13). These demands, in the course of time, became more 'political' due to the circumstances calling for resistance against neoliberalism, poverty, and the solution of the country's banking crisis in 1999, and led to the formation of the indigenous political party *Pachakutik*, which beleaguered the state with both socio-economic and ethnic demands. This party allied itself with Gutiérrez's *Partido Sociedad Patriótica* (PSP) in 2002, and the alliance won the elections. The effects on the indigenous organization were considerable. In spite of a prolongation of the discourse on participation, the policies that were implemented hardly echoed the opinions of the 'rank and file' indigenous people, and began to resemble instead the recommendations of the IMF (pp. 20-21). The party's weakness in terms of translating its original complaints and demands in designing, implementing and administering policies also became obvious. *Pachakutik* found itself in the awkward position of having to discourage people from protesting, and in the end its politics turned out to be not so very different from 'traditional politics'. After *Pachakutik* and PSP split up, some *Pachakutik* ministers remained at their posts, holding on to their positions of power and access to state rewards at the expense of indigenous unity.

León also illustrates how the special characteristics of the Ecuadorian political system were crucial for *Pachakutik*'s rise in the first place. Only in a national political constellation in which party fragmentation combined with notorious distrust in vested political entities and politicians could *Pachakutik* have obtained governmental responsibility. And only because of the – albeit tacit – support of the military for the indigenous cause, as well as the demise of the traditional left and the trade unions, could they have reached the organizational strength to assume the task to begin with (p. 26-27). Nevertheless, León's goal is not to deny all significance or 'progress'. He points out how the events resulted in a further institutionalization of the indigenous movements and in ideas about participating in, as well as changing, the country's institutionality. Notwithstanding the fiasco sketched above, ideas revolving around institutionalizing pluralism and improving participa-

tion and genuine deliberation are very much alive. They are being weighed against the apparent impossibility of transplanting community practices into national practices, and against tendencies to see power only as a cruel Jacobean game using the government's instruments to obtain group benefits. What definitely has changed is the rising status of the indigenous movements as fully fledged political actors, even if this has come at the price of 'classical' tension between (educated) political cadres and the rank and file indigenous population (pp. 32-33). Finally, the impact of Pachakutik's adventure in government has been (and locally often still is) the acceptance of the possibility of *shared* governance by (ethnically) *different* parties. One is tempted to derive from León's analysis that, first of all, indigenous entries in politics tend to take place only when indigenous demands and discourses merge with other, broader socio-economic or political grievances, and that, secondly, the indigenous ambition to intervene in the debate on the state's political and democratic system is often not yet supported by elaborated ideas.

León's contribution is followed by a somewhat disappointing text written by Félix Patzi on the course of events in Bolivia. His reconstruction of indigenous protests is soaked too much in political rhetoric and lacks analytical value. The subsequent chapter by René Orrellana, also on Bolivia, directs the attention to an issue that became paramount in the country's recent events: the demand for a constitutional assembly. Orrellana's goal is to demonstrate that the social sectors pressing for such an assembly cannot be considered as solely ignorant or anti-democratic, but rather as organizations interested not only in a more participatory and more transparent democratic modus, but also as respectful of the judicial and legal prerequisites for such a process. His emphasis, however, on a series of subsequent, 'bottom-up' proposals for creating such an assembly tells us little about the ideas on the contents of an alternative constitution, as he himself admits (p. 72). Moreover, his elaboration of the factors that triggered the call for such an assembly tends to highlight the most contested aspects in recent confrontations (policies with regard to the exploitation of natural gas, privatizations, regional and ethnic autonomies, land distribution, and the like), and downplays the factors that are related to just as fundamental but less episodic questions of political access, democracy, participation and sovereignty (p. 54).

Subsequent contributions to the book offer only limited help in clarifying the issues of indigenous participation and their impact on democracy models. Ricardo Peñaranda's analysis of the situation in Colombia focuses on the factors of the increasing openness of the state (especially after the 1991 constitutional renewal) and the diminishing 'insurrectionism' of the indigenous elites, but also points at some elements such as their increasing involvement in armed struggles that might threaten the future of their political protagonism. Marcial Fabricano writes about the gains and limitations of Bolivia's lowland indigenous peoples in politics. Ramón Pajuelo, in an overly detailed historical overview of Peru, describes how the efforts of president Toledo (and his wife!) to include the indigenous people in politics and improve their levels of well-being ended in factionalism and internal disputes, and hampered a genuine, articulated and assertive promotion of indigenous interests.

The article by Isabelle Combès is a lucidly written and most interesting account of how, in eastern Bolivia, a people called the *Iziceños* tried to defend their histori-

cal and present rights, and in the process attempted to construe genuine and 'authentic' democracy. The outcome is a bit disappointing because the often interrupted and contested process of appointing 'acknowledged', legitimate leaders called *capitanías* often resulted in quite authoritarian and exclusionary leadership and representation (p. 141-144), in spite of the fact that this process was often characterized by explicit and assertive references to traditional features of a system of 'multilevel authorities' and cultural characteristics such as a preference for *iyambae* (living without a leader) or, in other words, a type of rejection of *politics*.

On the whole, the compilation suffers from an imbalance between the various chapters, ranging from conceptual and theoretical to descriptive and activist. Also, it is of course a pity that the book was published just before more recent developments could have been addressed. However, what we can learn from these accounts is that the strengthening of indigenous organizations and of indigenous participation in politics is not a process that is detached from the broader (political, cultural, historical) conditions in which it takes place, but instead is often fostered by mergers with *other* than ethnic discourses or organization-parameters. In addition, the historical exclusion from politics is often an explicit motive behind protests, organizations and, in some cases, electoral success. Nevertheless, concrete suggestions about how democratic systems and procedures could be improved (or even replaced) by practices stemming from indigenous social fabrics, cosmologies or authority-structures are at best incipient.

In the remainder of this review essay we will look at publications explicitly focused on Bolivia, where, as elsewhere, the issues with regard to democracy are intrinsically related to debates about citizenship. In 2007, the United Nations Development Program ('PNUD', according to the Spanish acronym) launched two publications about Bolivia in the framework of its series on Human Development. Both publications were coordinated by George Gray Molina and assisted by sub-coordinators and researchers. The first publication, *El estado del Estado en Bolivia*, extensively examines a whole range of aspects of Bolivian democracy – citizenship, state features and practices, and popular opinions – and situates these in many recent, often turbulent, developments. The book is, in my view, a landmark accomplishment. The work was guided by an innovative and solid research agenda that, with a vocabulary originating in the country itself, reconstructs the images Bolivians hold with regard to their state, its structure, its actions and obligations, and reflects upon both the divisive and uniting features of these images. This agenda, at the same time, was 'open' enough to allow some of Bolivia's finest researchers to give their best in a series of excellent chapters on the distinctive features of the Bolivian state – and on its democracy and citizens. Chapter 2, 'Historia del Estado: El armazón estatal y sus imaginarios' written by Rossana Barragán and José Peres, exposes how the Bolivian state came into being and how it designed, across time, its relationship with the various (often racially distinguished) sectors of society. Chapter 3, 'Radiografía del Estado: Capacidades fiscales y burocráticas (1985-2005)', focuses on the fiscal and bureaucratic attributes of the state and delves into features such as the (largely failed) attempts to exert centralist control, the state as employer, and the state's budgeting. Chapter 4, 'Etnografía del Estado: Más allá de la tecnocracia' by Pamela Calla, provides an 'ethnography' of the state, looking 'from the inside'. She tracks the actions and decisions by ministers,



directors and subdirectors in the ministries, the compliance (or not) with these rulings by schoolteachers, the police, departmental functionaries and the like, and finally the ‘landing’ of these decrees and bills among social organizations, neighbourhood councils, other associations and the ‘ordinary citizens’ (*los ciudadanos de a pie*). This ‘chain’, she contends, constitutes the link between ‘*estatalidad y sociedad, son los “lugares de la política pública”*’ (p. 277). Although the title of Chapter 5 suggests it is a ‘sociology’ of the state, ‘Sociología del Estado: Ejercer ciudadanía en Bolivia’ by Fernanda Wanderley, is at least as ethnographic in nature. These are excellent pieces of work in their own right, and combined they provide a rich and multilayered picture of the Bolivian state and democracy. Wanderley gives a meticulous description of how the Bolivian citizen exercises her or his citizenship, the most remarkable feature of which is the sharp distinction between individual and collective citizenship. Exercising individual citizenship, especially for the poor, was often very hard. Wanderley uses the example of the acquisition of an identity certificate, the *carnet de identidad*, to make her point. In this interaction, the citizen faces the state *completely* on her or his own. Paradoxically, obtaining the carnet, being the symbol of equality *vis-à-vis* the state *par excellence*, confronts the citizen with the state’s tendency to ‘in-equalize’. The very act of applying for or renewing the – obligatory – carnet makes the citizen face a state that arbitrarily discriminates against, or even insults, this citizen, all according to the status, attire, and (in)articulateness of the applicant. The process is accompanied by demeaning gestures, insolent remarks and authoritarian tones – all contributing to the (self) perception of rural, indigenous, illiterate, poor or non-Spanish speaking citizens that they are inferior to others (pp. 407-415).

The story becomes quite different when collective citizenship comes in. Wanderley implicitly alludes to (often but not exclusively indigenous) inspiration present in current struggles over ‘upgrading’ democracy in Bolivia: those referring to ‘communitarian’ or otherwise collective ways to ensure rights, obtain benefits, and have a real say in politics and decisions affecting (groups of) citizens. Wanderley points out that a strong tradition of collectively defending one’s right and dignity is present in Bolivia. She argues that the state has historically often conceded to collective demands for rights and benefits. That is why, in this case, the classic tension between individual and collective rights (often addressed in the literature) works out differently. Having individual rights and identities often come into being exclusively through collective performance (p. 389). Thus, obtaining legal recognition (*la personería jurídica*) for the group, organization, indigenous community or council is what the *carnet* is for the individual. But it is accompanied by completely different features:

Whereas in the acquisition of the *carnet de identidad*, as we have seen, the central strategy is to implore, and the discourse of rights is absent in the ways to approach the public functionary in the effort to obtain the *personería jurídica*, the imploring and the ‘favour’ make way for a strategy of empowerment [...] accompanied by a discourse of rights’ (p. 424).

Contrary to the experience of vulnerability and inferiority in obtaining the *carnet*, in the process of obtaining and acting upon the conquest of formal recognition as a collective, people feel empowered and ‘capacitated’, and feel they are a match for

the state and its dependencies. Wanderley stresses that the process is twofold: people 'learn' to perceive themselves as individually disempowered and collectively empowered *because* the state, time and again, confirms the adequacy of this image. By conceding to collective pressures and by *respecting* citizens more often whenever they operate as a group, the state corroborates that collective citizenship is a 'real' feature in and of Bolivian society.

These and many other constructive analyses of the nature of the Bolivian state and the way it shaped democracy and its citizens come together in the 'Synopsis' at the beginning of the book. In it, these findings can be projected onto the 'crisis' in Bolivia that led later in 2005 to the election of the first indigenous president in the country's history, Evo Morales, and, maybe even more pertinent, to the election of an *Asamblea Constituyente* in 2006. In this Assembly, the deficiencies but also the particularities of the Bolivian configuration of state, democracy and citizenship are at stake. Expectations with regard to the pluri-ethnic make-up of society, to the strategies concerning the exploitation and redistribution of the benefits of natural resources, and to regional autonomies converge in the Assembly and need to be addressed. In this sense, the issues that are discussed in the diagnosis the book offers, in a compressed way, are present in the challenges the Assembly faces.

To recapitulate the most conspicuous of these issues, in the imagery of the Bolivians, the state is the *Estado Padre*, that is, it should protect and provide; an *Instrumento de Poder*, that is, a state in the hands of those in charge, most often the rich elite; and the *Estado Cotidiano*, the state the citizens encounter in their daily dealings, when it is most often faulty in its responses. All three images correspond with certain expectations and demands, and co-constitute the state Bolivians experienced in the past. The result, the authors insist, is not a 'failed' or 'inconclusive', nor a strong or homogeneous state: it is a state under construction and as such reflects the complex and plural make-up of Bolivian society.

The second book published by PNUD in 2007 is titled *El estado de la opinión: los bolivianos, la Constitución y la Constituyente*. It is, in a way, an addition to the earlier work in that it focuses on what the Bolivians feel about the current turbulent developments in their country. It aims to make an inventory of the opinions and expectations among the population with regard to the changes in the country, and to delineate the elements present in the nation's political culture that might be of guidance in facing the changes demanded with regard to democracy. The results of the studies underlying the book point out that there are indeed divergent views. On the negotiations in the Assembly, for instance, lower percentages of the inhabitants of the eastern regions assented to the idea that the minorities should, in the end, give in and accept the majority's decisions (p. 182). On the issue of the regional autonomies, the question about whether these autonomies would endanger the national unity is answered affirmatively by a higher percentage of the interviewees in the western part of the country (p. 266). Nevertheless, the authors insist that there are many things that a large majority in Bolivia agree on. An overwhelming majority, both in the east and west, believes that political changes in the country are necessary, and support the *Asamblea Constituyente* (p. 172). They support the idea that the assembly's work should strengthen democracy and result in the outcomes being *observed*; and they are very much in favour of legislation *that is respected by all* – even if they admit this was more often not the case in Bolivia in the past.

People are also demanding that the new constitution should establish the modes through which the disagreements of today and the future can and should be solved. People endorse the idea of autonomies, although they differ on contents and on who should be the bearers of such autonomies – the indigenous, the municipalities, or the regions. Thus, an overwhelming majority of Bolivians agree on ‘unity in diversity’, the necessity of promoting democracy and obeying the law, and prefer negotiations above clashes. This made the authors optimistic. However, since the period of research underlying this book was done in 2007, the formulation of the new constitution has been a bumpy process and filled with discord. And now at the time of writing this review essay in early 2008, many think that an escalation is inevitable, especially with regard to the regional autonomies. We cannot know whether the authors today would still give as much credit to the ‘majority’s’ shared opinions’ as they then believed was the solid underpinning that supported the Assembly and the constitutional process.

The significance of all this is well captured in the title of the book by César Rojas Ríos, *Democracia de alta tensión*, which also highlights the two main causes for the country’s crisis: the enormous inequalities in the country, which partially overlap with the marginalization and discrimination of the indigenous peoples, and the regional conflict. This conflict is partly a conflict about centralism versus decentralism, and partly about a conflict ‘substituting’ for the socio-economic scuffle, whereby the elites in the east of the country are attempting to hold on to their positions. Rojas Ríos points out that the huge victory of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) in 2005 needs to be explained in part by the collapse of the ‘neoliberal model’ applied by the traditional parties *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR), *Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR), *Acción Democrática Nacionalista* (AND), and some other smaller parties. This means that even though the sectors defending this model (and the concomitant privileges for some) are in an unfavourable position today, MAS’s support might be for the short-term rather than structural. It drew in many frustrations rather than providing an articulated alternative. The challenge to the MAS is double: it needs to respond to the demand for substantial socio-economic and political transformations, yet it needs to do this while upholding its ambition to respectfully endorse and deepen democracy. The strategy of the opposition is to make these issues the government’s Achilles’ heel: it denounces every attempt of MAS to *impose* on the basis of its majority, and it takes initiatives and sets up institutions that defy the given democratic and institutional order, to ‘seduce’ the government to impose its mandate by force. Here, Rojas Ríos poses the question he believes to be central in a process of ‘a democratic revolution’, which is, will we have opposition or counterrevolution? His answer: ‘It will depend on whether the MAS revolution will operate abiding by or flouting democracy, and on whether the opposition will not radicalize the MAS revolution by resorting to systematic obstruction and disloyalty [to the given institutional order]’ (p. 196). As in the books by PNUD, he takes the position that strengthening democracy is the only way out of the escalation scenario (p. 274): ‘Democracy allows, and does not repress, people’s wish to express their discontent, [...] it should adapt to and institutionalize a new socio-political configuration’ (pp. 278-279). In this sense, his plea also is for a ‘reinvention’ of democracy that should go beyond the given electoral order. Democracy, by definition, should be a

process, an activity of ‘making, unmaking and remaking’ (p. 279). Democracy should not only be a static mechanism to reach outcomes supported by various majorities; it should, *as procedure*, be part of the continuous effort to institutionalize the ways a people aspire to be represented and to participate.

How can, under the current conditions in Bolivia, new ideas about democracy provided by this research be translated in suggestions for the new constitution? It is clear that ‘the liberal-representative conception of democracy is today questioned in the Bolivian debate’ (PNUD 2007, p. 51). Additionally, there is a heightened claim to belong to a ‘distinct’ people, while at the same time being Bolivian (p. 54). This calls for a simultaneous recognition of *distinct* public spheres, over which bridges can be construed ‘between liberal-representative democracy and the communitarian-participative democratic practices present in Bolivian society’ (p. 73). These should be directed at ‘a guarantee for a representation of multiple identities, that is, ensuring that democracy-at-the-state-level and at the same time, the state-in-society, includes “the difference” at all levels of governance and representation [...] via mechanisms through which the complementarity between representation, deliberation and participation could be advanced’ (p. 74).

Beyond doubt, the most important targets looking at the largely consensual opinions among Bolivians leave many moot points when it comes to the institutional questions. First of all, the issue of the differentiated prerogatives between state, regions, municipalities and ‘communities’ is a difficult one. They allegedly include autonomy with regard to territory, but also with regard to the natural resources these hold. It would be difficult to state in the regional-autonomy-debate that Bolivia’s riches should benefit all Bolivians, and in the indigenous-territories-debate that the *originarios* could have a veto on exploitation. Moreover, due to migration processes over the centuries, which have intensified in recent decades, no demographically ‘uncontaminated’ regions or territories exist in Bolivia today.

Secondly, it will be very hard to actually integrate different modalities when it comes to the election of authorities at the community, intermediate and the state level. Rotational leadership mechanisms, extensive deliberation and generalized participation are wonderful mechanisms at the community level, but hard to imagine in a national political structure. Some would argue that the contribution of such ideas to a ‘reinvention of democracy’ therefore needs to remain confined to ‘moral’ incentives and, possibly, mechanisms like referenda, or to clearly demarcated communal mandates regarding local issues and justice, and an obligation for politicians ‘to negotiate their differences until the ultimate consequences’ – as the indigenous tradition but also the Bolivian majority would have it. Nevertheless, at the level of national representation, many questions persist concerning accountability and checks and balances.

Making democracy more participative by taking into account cultural features to make democracy fit better with local characteristics and values is a precious ambition in Bolivia as well as elsewhere, especially in view of the disenchantment people have experienced with actual, flawed democratic practices. How this ambition can be accomplished, which alternative ideas can add something worthwhile to the established and tested ideas about the ‘solid equilibrium’ of liberal-representative institutionality, and how these aspirations for having a more meaningful and participative access to democratic decision-making can together be

translated into a more differentiated, more compound but still workable set of complementary institutions can probably only be answered in the making.

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