

‘We Want a Democracy for *Us!*’ Representation and Democracy: Current Debates in and on Bolivia

Ton Salman

- *Unresolved Tensions – Bolivia Past and Present*, edited by John Crabtree & Laurence Whitehead. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008;
- *El Alto, Rebel City – Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia*, by Sian Lazar. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2008;
- *Struggles of Voices – The Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes*, by José Antonio Lucero. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008;
- *Bolivia, 25 años construyendo la democracia – Visiones sobre el proceso democrático en Bolivia 1982-2007*, by Luis Tapia et al. La Paz: Vicepresidencia de la República, CIDES/UMSA, fBDM, FES-ILDIS, PADEP/GTZ, Idea Internacional, PNUD-Bolivia, 2008;
- *Ciudadanía, clase y etnicidad – Un estudio sociológico sobre la acción colectiva en Bolivia a comienzos del siglo XXI*, by Álvaro Zapata. La Paz: Ediciones Yachaywasi, 2006.

The books under revision here are distinct enough to justify reading and enjoying them all, and similar enough to group them together in one essay. They all address questions of improving and deepening democracy in Bolivia (and Ecuador), in conjunction with the emergence of indigenous movements and demands in the Andes. Bolivia may have a major role in these developments, but comparisons with Ecuador (Lucero 2008, see below) prove most insightful. The central issue in the books reviewed here is the fact that democracy has disenchanted many people in many Latin American countries, including Bolivia. Electoral democracy has proven unable to deliver on economic growth and employment, the reduction of poverty and inequality, the recognition of ethnic difference, or rising expectations with regard to state protection and services. People increasingly perceive such formal democracies, and the party systems sustaining them, as elitist, exclusionary and corrupt. In Bolivia and Ecuador, this has triggered the emergence of new ethnic movements and parties that are denouncing both the incumbent political policies and the defective democratic structures and practices. In both countries, the current administrations in power have promised to make democracy more ‘genuine’.

In the meantime, the debates on democracy are moving beyond questions of extending a few channels for participation, advocating a little more probity in party organizations or electoral courts, granting some autonomy in specific enclaves, or even promoting decentralization. Various interventions today touch upon the very epistemological or conceptual groundwork of the liberal democratic institutions and procedures that have been handed down. Today many question the veneration of and assumption about representation as the fundament of democracy, and about the detached sphere of the polity and independence of the three powers (legislative,

judicial, and executive). Many people are inspired by an alternative cosmology-based way of reasoning with regard to society, participation and decision-taking. Should not, for instance, the cultural make-up of a country be honoured in the way its constitution and democratic structure are designed? Should not the natural environment (*Pachamama*) also have a say in development visions and projects? Should not *everybody* (instead of only some professionals and charismatic individuals) assume his or her responsibility, in a rotating system, to direct and lead the community? Should not different *collectivities* be as much a titleholder of rights as the individual? Should not a community's resolutions on a specific matter result from a *general, plenary deliberation*, instead of from a majority vote in a specialist body of representatives?

Nevertheless, counter-arguments abound that declare that these principles and practices, no matter how well they may work at the small-scale community level, will simply not do for nation-states. For states, it is argued, the direct participation mechanisms of *democracia comunitaria* are unworkable. For states, the established mechanisms and institutional edifices of liberal democracy have proven their worth and self-regulating capacity.

This is the difference in perspective that rages in Bolivia, the country that installed, in 2006, the first indigenous president in the history of the country, who won a landslide victory in the first electoral round with a campaign stressing the need for the ethnic, the ideological, and the economic 'revolution'. Since then, Evo Morales – or simply 'Evo' – has pushed through a series of reforms. However, there is growing criticism of his allegedly anti-free-market policies, his centralist and 'meddling' state-view, his show of favouritism towards the indigenous citizen, and of the new constitution he pushed through, in particular because it would weaken 'institutional' democracy and undermine the equality guaranteed in the 'rule of law'. It is the diversified, cultural citizenship and amended democracy that mainly concerns us here.

Bolivia's tensions: an overview

To be able to present an indication of the different aspects of Bolivia's current turbulent developments and controversies, let us start with a compilation that precisely pretends to do that: *Unresolved Tensions: Bolivia Past and Present*, edited by John Crabtree and Laurence Whitehead. The book has a short introduction by the editors, and is divided in six parts on: ethnicities, regionalism, state-society relations, constitutionalism, strategies of economic development, and Bolivia and globalization. It ends with Laurence Whitehead's conclusion. Most of the authors are Bolivian and were invited to a conference to Oxford in 2006. The book does a very adequate job in offering a survey of issues currently debated in Bolivia, and in revealing different positions on various issues.

The first part on ethnicities might be one of the most relevant for our present concern: the 'ethnicization' of the debate on democracy. The first article, by Xavier Albó, is a crystal-clear overview of the historical episodes of repression, invisibilization, and recurring re-emergence of the indigenous ethnic differences in the country, which ends in the current episode of indigenous hegemony. Albó, as always, is a magnificent 'reconstructor' and analyst of the various factors and con-

junctions that both historically and today may help account not only for the fact *that* but also the ways *how* the indigenous strength and assertiveness has come about. In his view, Evo's project is mainly about 'the search for greater complementarity between individual citizen rights – which point toward national unity – and collective rights' (p. 30). This characterization may be a bit too rosy: up to now the inherent tension between these two types of rights, instead of leading to a genuine 'search', more often resulted in political hard-headedness in both government and opposition discourses. The issue is also full of twists and turns because the title-holders of collective rights are no longer exclusively the traditional rural communities, or ethnically clearly demarcated peoples populating a specific and well delimited territory. Instead, migration and *mestizaje* have resulted in an indissoluble mix of 'everything'. But current political dichotomies, in spite of the loss of unequivocal ethnic, linguistic or cultural boundaries, induce identification with either indigenous or non-indigenous identities. Although, in Albó's words, 'the strength of migratory flows shifts the rural-versus-urban contradiction to one of rural plus impoverished and ethnically defined urban peripheries versus wealthier, more central, and *criollo* urban areas' (p. 33).

The nature of the indigenous 'difference', which often functions as a support in the demand for specific ethnic rights, becomes more complicated in the contribution (Chapter 2) by Carlos Toranzo – with the remarkable title 'Let the Mestizos Stand Up and Be Counted'. Clearly goading Albó, Toranzo disputes the idea that Bolivia is indigenous in its majority: he believes that the 'process of *mestizaje* that has taken place over the centuries [makes] ... [m]any Bolivians – perhaps the majority – feel themselves to be part of this ethnic and cultural mix' (p. 38). His arguments revolve around several elements: ethnic homogeneity is illusory; the outcome of surveys and censuses are contradictory; massive migration to the city and losing the ability to speak an indigenous language does not necessarily mean that someone will drop his or her identity. But the very least, people's 'everyday lives are changed, enriched, and rendered more complex' (p. 46). He insists that many Bolivians are 'many different things at the same time, at once *originarios* but also Bolivians and mestizos' (*idem*). And his political point is that '[e]ven if in the past indigenous peoples faced discrimination, this cannot be a pretext for removing today's mestizos from the scene' (p. 47). Toranzo's point is largely reiterated in Chapter 3 by Diego Zavaleta, who discusses the *categories* of the indigenous and mestizo. He asserts that 'every human being is made up of a multiplicity of relevant identities' (p. 55) and stresses the importance of – shifting – social contexts for the importance of such identities. He concludes that, although many people *believe* them to be true, '[t]he use of dichotomies such as white versus indigenous, modern versus traditional, or market versus reciprocity are examples of common simplifications that cloud the analysis of ethnicity in Bolivia' (p. 59).

The chief issue resulting from these contributions is that claims to specific rights are often discursively backed by references to vital ethnic and cultural differences, to linguistic 'other-ness', to millenarian traditions, to distinct cosmologies, to communitarian *usos y costumbres*, to internal cohesion – as if these things were all intact. According to the above-mentioned authors, they are not. The question then arises what happens to these claims when the 'applicant' no longer lives up to the parameters that invoke and sustain his claims in the first place. What to

make of 'communitarian administration of justice' once the community has partially migrated, 'outsiders' have moved in, and land titles are a mix of traditional collective use, individual or family titles obtained after the 1952 revolution that ousted the hacienda system, and plots sold to urban residents who built a weekend house on it? What to make of the celebration of traditional indigenous harmony with nature, if we acknowledge that indigenous communities also pollute and have adopted a whole series of 'alien' techniques and crops that today threaten this 'millenarian' equilibrium? What to do about the fact that many indigenous claims allude to *rural* traditions and values, when the majority of the indigenous live in the city? In other words, who exactly is the beneficiary or 'subject' of measures distinguishing between indigenous and non-indigenous Bolivians, once that subject became hybrid? Which 'differentiated' democracy would be able to be 'just and fair' if the differences have faded and now overlap? Notwithstanding such questions, it would be too easy to discard the indigenous interventions as anachronistic, because what is at stake is not a recovery of an ancient past, but an equal role and voice in public and political debates on the 'design' of the nation-state, a design that would, for the first time in history, grant genuine equality to the different ethnic groups in the country. Bolivia's challenge is to forge a democracy and a citizenship regime that would reflect the, albeit intricate, still very lively, very visible, very real plurality of its societal make-up, and that would undo the neo-colonial imposition that formerly governed.

In the section on state-society relations, two authors have addressed certain fundamental themes related to the debate on democracy. George Gray Molina (Chapter 6) elaborates on the concept of Bolivia as a 'state with holes' (p. 110). Rather than characterizing the state as 'weak', he prefers to understand it as an uneven, disjointed state, capable of keeping national unity and peace precisely because it shares its authority with many civil organizations 'by means of multiple institutional mechanisms' (p. 112). In this view, the proliferation of parallel institutions is not a short-run dysfunction of Bolivian state building but rather 'a structural feature of political accommodation under weak elites' (p. 112). It is this particular feature of Bolivian state building that Gray Molina holds responsible for both flaws and inequalities as well as continuity and effectiveness of this 'institutional pluralism' (*idem*). Most importantly, however, he sees it as a both a possible and a necessary starting point for current efforts to diversify and enrich, 'multiculturally', democratic participation channels. He admits this will not be easy: '[r]ecent discussions of a fourth power of social control that would provide popular checks and balances over the executive, legislative, and judicial powers would seem to test the limits of multicultural institutional design' (p. 123). In spite of these problems, the idiosyncrasies of Bolivia might, in Gray Molina's view, provide exactly the accurate starting point for the effort to invent something new (pp. 123-4).

Franz Barrios, in Chapter 7, is more cautious. The 'fourth power' mentioned by Gray Molina is, in contrast, a reason of great concern for him. The thread of his argument is that every democracy needs the distinction between democratic participation on the one hand, and the rule of law and more 'a-political' state-spheres on the other: a 'clear separation between the checks and balances aspect of the liberal state and the democratic component' (pp. 127-8). The current administration, in his view, neglects this distinction, 'In contemporary Bolivia the democratic im-

pulse is tending to engulf the rule of law' (p. 128). The aforementioned 'fourth power' is a case in point: Evo's government is very much in favour of giving final and absolute power to the social movements and/or the citizenry (the vague distinction between the two in government discourse being one reason for worries). 'The fourth power would exercise political and administrative control over the executive, legislative and judicial powers and [...] would stand above the classic powers since it was conceived as a power of the people' (p. 136). Although the idea was eventually watered down in the final version of the new constitution, the issue remains: when does a radical, highly participative, de-centred, communal and 'direct' form of democracy begin to threaten institutional equilibrium, and even the idea of *equality* in terms of opportunities for access to decision-making, and in terms of citizen guarantees? Democracy might become the 'way in which the excluded and disadvantaged of society, and especially its indigenous people' (p. 138) obtain exclusive benefits, resulting in 'the social movements dismantling a regime of state office-holding' (pp. 138-9). One flaw of Barrios' argument is that he forgets history, because the meritocratic appointment of state officials, an apolitical judiciary, apolitical central bank, an unbiased constitutional court and public auditing, etc has never existed in Bolivia. Another flaw is that, in his line of reasoning, this 'ideal' state becomes an incontestable entity: even multicultural societies should succumb to its superior wisdom (although it should also be added that Barrios does see current developments as very necessary processes of democratization and inclusion). Nevertheless, Barrios is very right in being concerned about the 'equilibrium of democracy': democracy is just as much about guarantees for each and every individual citizen to associate and have access to the polity, irrespective of his or her (ethnic) status or of belonging to the opposition, as it is about the current effort to repair century-old exclusions as citizens and as ethnicities/cultures. Bolivia's quest for finding a balance between the two has thus far not produced convincing solutions.

A similar friction emerges from Chapters 8 and 9 in part IV on constitutionalism. Here, the opposition expresses itself in terms of the *nature* of such an entity as a constitution. Eduardo Rodríguez, the interim president in 2005, and before that president of the Supreme Court, argues that a constitution is something 'beyond politics and societal particularities'. A constitution should mainly 'vouchsafe [...] guarantees of freedom and individual rights, including the separation of powers (with all its controls and counterbalances) and an independent judiciary that is both accessible and efficient in dispensing justice' (p. 159). Luis Tapia, on the other hand, argues that, '[m]any constitutions – or parts of them – [...] serve to provide a juridical discourse and to justify or erect a political image of a country that has little to do with the ways in which power is actually wielded through economic, social and political structures' (p. 163). Tapia's denial of the alleged neutral nature of any constitution opens the way for allowing or even fostering the idea of constitutions that do justice to specific cultural and socio-political compositions of countries. Nevertheless, it also remains a 'task' of a constitution to guarantee equality across diversity.

The subsequent chapters of this book concern strategies of economic development, and on Bolivia and globalization. Since they have less direct relevance for the theme of democracy and ethnicity, I will abstain from reviewing them here.

Ethnographies of democracy

Any debate on democracy, justice and citizenship begins to touch ground only when it is complemented by insights in how things work in rank and file perceptions and practices. Therefore, we now turn to ethnography. Sian Lazar's book *El Alto, Rebel City – Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia* is a magnificent ethnographic study of a specific neighbourhood in the city of El Alto, Bolivia, in the years before Evo Morales became president. She asserts that her findings substantiate that citizenship in the *Rosas Pampa* neighbourhood in El Alto where she worked is more than 'a legal status consisting of the individual ownership of a set of rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis the state', and that instead 'collectivist traditions, which draw on indigenous communal practices, Trotskyite trade unionism, anarchosyndicalism, and other threads' (p. 3) should be taken into consideration when analysing a city and a country that have not been privileged to enjoy a state which fully honours the rights of classic citizenship, nor had the adequate cultural make-up for it.

The first Chapter deserves a compliment for its lively and appealing portrayal of a very colourful and unique city. El Alto is the only 'indigenous city' of its size in the world (approximately 700,000 to 900,000 in population). It sits at an elevation of over 4000 meters and looks down into the bowl-shaped valley in which La Paz lies. Although it is poor and lacks many urban services, the young city of El Alto is also pulsating, inventive, pioneering and resilient, and crammed with ambulant street vendors, open-air 'restaurants', workshops of sorts, all amidst a startling hullabaloo. Many *alteños*, however, work in the city of La Paz, resulting in a colossal transport flow 'downwards' in the morning, and back up in the late afternoon and evening. In Bolivia's political setting, El Alto is a prominent city. Its location as gatekeeper (and some would say, as a hostage taker) of La Paz, its orientation to the countryside because most inhabitants maintain close ties to their communities of origin, and its willingness and ability to mobilize people turn it into a key player with unique politico-cultural features in Bolivia's political setting.

Chapters 1 to 5 focus on identities and citizenship practices as related to belonging to a place or neighbourhood, and chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on identities and citizenship practices connected with belonging to a specific occupational group such as, in this case, street traders. Both dimensions of citizen identity are characterized by the specific mechanisms of exercising it, in which strong collectivism combines with specific ways of defending individual interests.

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 take us to the neighbourhood of *Rosas Pampa* in El Alto. Lazar discusses themes such as belonging to a neighbourhood (being a *vecino*) and the ways to express being 'blended in'. She also elaborates on local clientelism, on local organizations and how they work, such as the neighbourhood council and the council of school-parents, and lastly, on the characteristics of the yearly fiesta. In doing so, a very vivid image emerges of how citizenship is practiced in this El Alto area. Elements of this citizenship are, among many others, the majority votes for politicians making the most credible promises in a constellation of 'collective clientelism' (pp. 113-17), and the parade-like dances during the yearly fiesta when, '[m]oving through space [...] constitutes the relationship of person to locality; in this sense, the dancing of the *Entrada* reflects the highly spatial nature of the local

terminology of citizenship, namely *zone*, *vecino*, and *pueblo*' (p. 129). A few pages further, Lazar adds that, '[i]f dance is a citizenship practice, then the citizenship here is not an abstract status or category of belonging, but concrete, physical, and embodied [...]' (p. 143). These and other observations reveal that understanding citizenship in El Alto (and in all likelihood elsewhere in Bolivia) is much more than just an awareness of belonging and/or rights; it is practiced in concrete acts, in unwritten codes operative in informal encounters and formal meetings, in mechanisms like gossip to 'warn' local leaders not to exaggerate their corruption, in sharing drinks and food, and the like. Such features resemble both practices that people recall from community life in the countryside, from syndicalist traditions they have learned as miners or in other trades, and from urban learning processes comprised in people's experiences with the state and its representatives. Lazar repeatedly warns, however, against assuming a sort of 'communalism' or 'collectivism' in which there is no place for individualism or even individual dissidence.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 make up the second part in which citizenship as exercised in trade union-like organizations takes central stage. Again, this is syncretic, in which 'trade unionism, populism and indigenous democratic values' (p. 174) combine. The focus is on street traders and how they, in spite of being competitors in their daily business, create a collective to pursue their interest vis-à-vis an arbitrary or negligent state. The latter element complicates this exercise of citizenship even more, as the unions not only mediate with the state, but to a certain degree also take its place. The organization here not only defends its members' interests, but also has to (inter)mediate and regulate. Fulfilling these tasks, the organization demonstrates how, in complying with certain values, it embodies citizenship in different ways. For instance, general assemblies, eloquence, consensus (pp. 241-7), and subservience of the leaders are particularly important. But Lazar steers away from romanticizing any relationships, as '[...] bases tend to be inherently suspicious of their leaders [...]' (p. 237).

The book is a goldmine for scholars caught between their attachment to the – indisputable – values of classic liberal democracy and the awareness that reality is different. It can teach us something about other possible ways of actually *doing* democracy – without an inclination to make these practices more attractive than they really are. Like very few others do, this book actually takes us to the work floor of democracy where it is put into practice. Any desire to understand democracy or democratic mores in Bolivia (or elsewhere) should begin by reading it.

Bolivia's 25 years of democracy

In early 2008, the Vice-Presidency of Bolivia, accompanied by a host of university and research-institutions, NGOs and international aid-agencies, organized a symposium and a series of working-groups in the different departments of the country, to evaluate 25 years of democracy. The compilation *Bolivia, 25 años construyendo la democracia – Visiones sobre el proceso democrático en Bolivia 1982-2007* is the outcome of that initiative, containing six articles by prominent Bolivian scholars as well as reports on the debates in the working groups. In this book we meet Albó and Tapia again, two of the contributors to the Crabtree and Whitehead compilation. It provides an excellent overview of different analyses of the gains and

constraints of Bolivia's silver democratic jubilee. I will briefly address some of the most salient articles and workshop reports. The first article, *Las olas de expansión y contracción de la democracia en Bolivia*, by Luis Tapia, at the outset emphasizes that to understand Bolivian democracy, one needs to recall that full democracy, or universal suffrage, was installed in Bolivia only in 1952. He adds that syndicalism and organized collective action was more important in the restoration of democracy in 1982 than individual citizenship articulated in political parties, and that this has resulted in a political culture that mixes various types of political agents (such as collective ones) and spaces, instead of a homogeneous public culture or practice of citizenship (12-14). He proceeds to explain that the recent changes in political power balances and subsequent institutional changes were conceived in spaces *outside* the state; because the state, embodied by a logic of a (distorted) political party competition, did not 'match' with the *different* political cultures in the country. It produced an 'unconventional' demand to democratize, not only politically but also socio-economically and culturally – a wish for democratization surpassing even the existing state and party parameters.

Xavier Albó, in his contribution '25 años de democracia, participación campesino indígena y cambios reales en la sociedad', reconstructs how indigenous peoples and their organizations have historically both obtained access to the polity, and in the process questioned the established democratic mechanisms restored in 1982. He traces the characteristics of the various forms and phases of conquering political presence of the indigenous population in Bolivia, among others distinguishing between the more syndicalist and the more ethnic structures of organization, and demonstrates how both forms took shape *before* democracy returned in 1982, and contributed actively to this return. Conspicuously, it was this very same democracy that in subsequent years was increasingly criticized for not only being accompanied by neoliberal reforms, but also for its insensitivity to cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences (p. 48, 51). Combined with criticisms regarding corruption and ineptness, it led to a series of massive protests, two presidents being toppled, and in the end to the victory of Evo Morales – although his election was also facilitated by the 1994 decentralization law (LPP) that catapulted Evo and the MAS into prominence (p. 52).

An intriguing contribution is Roberto Laserna's 'Entre el ch'enko y el rentismo: democracia y desarrollo en Bolivia'. He begins by reminding the reader of the inadequate progress Bolivia has made: in terms of buying power, the income per capita today is practically the same as in the 1950s. Living conditions have only improved due to technological advances and not to real growth. Laserna's hypothesis is that two long-term features are responsible for this economic stalemate: *ch'enko* and *rentismo*. *Ch'enko* refers to the mixture and interdependency of various cultural-economic rationalities that, apart from being complementary, also produce blockades. This heterogeneity in economic logics surfaces in a variety of values and attitudes concerning economic behaviour. Being in charge of one's own time, friendships and loyalties, celebrations and 'belonging' are just as much responsible for decisions concerning employment, investments and planning, as are 'economic calculations'. As a consequence, 'nature-based', 'family-based' and 'market-based' economic spheres coexist in Bolivia (p. 94) and feed back upon each other, prompting both the inability of the labour market to absorb the avail-

able labour force and a resistance against the labour discipline the market demands. Many prefer the low yields of informal jobs and chores above the (often also very low) salaries that would come with the strict demands in terms of timing and ‘reliability’ of formal jobs. And people can afford to stick to these strategies because these informal activities, thanks to the relationships with the market economy, provide just enough to survive more or less satisfactorily. The price the country pays as a whole is low productivity, and low growth.

The phenomenon of *ch'enko* is complemented by *rentismo*. This is behaviour – most often in a corporatist setting – that seeks to acquire income through the exercise of political or administrative power over existing wealth, thus obtaining advantages, benefits or revenues. The state is crucial here in that it is politically weak but economically wealthy (mainly due to income from natural resources) and yet it is continuously being ‘assaulted’ by power groups or strong civil society organizations that want to get a share of the ‘bounty’. The more income the state generates (for example, as the sole owner of a natural resource that commands rising or high world-market prices), the fiercer the battle over its income becomes – and this is often mistaken as the ‘politization’ of Bolivian society, according to Laserna (p. 97). The two mechanisms combined, he asserts, account for the strong focus on the state in Bolivia, for the corporatist tradition, the weak adherence to the law, the feeble impulse to dedicate one’s efforts to *production*, and a citizenship whose attitude towards the state is one of expectancy combined with low levels of a consciousness of obligations (pp. 98-100). It is this fragile yet opportunistic citizenship that Laserna holds responsible for Bolivia’s weak democracy.

These three analyses have three different focuses (political, socio-ethnic, and economic), and all point at the weaknesses of Bolivian democracy. But here the consensus ends. Laserna largely ignores the cultural features that play a role behind the multiple economic rationalities. People may not *want* to enter into the logic of accumulation without it automatically turning them into state spongers. And their unwillingness to be ‘rational economic actors’ is to be understood against the backdrop of a political-economic framework that never honoured the idea of ‘fruits according to one’s labour’, due to extreme socio-economic inequalities. It also needs to be analysed against the backdrop of cultural values such as ‘a good life’ instead of wealth or accumulation. Albó evades making any recommendation, but Tapia clearly suggests that the challenge lies in creating a state that would be able to deal with and respond to the pluricultural make-up of the country. A final interesting point to notice at this stage is the idea shared by Albó, Laserna and Lazar that political mores in Bolivia are not predominantly shaped by the institutions, channels and ‘disciplining’ that the state provides. Alongside these mechanisms, and both struggling and collaborating with them, exist a series of codes, strategies, and practices that apparently do not take much notice of the ‘official scripts’ of intervening in politics or exercising citizenship – and the state’s ability to ‘co-exist’ peacefully with these codes is exactly what seems to make Bolivian politics both explosive and out-of-the-ordinary, as well as relatively peaceful and, in a way, ‘efficient’.

A remarkable second part of the book consists of the minutes of a series of *mesas de reflexión*. Here, the ‘rank and file’ evaluate the past 25 years of Bolivian democracy. Inevitably, many remarks are pious and politically correct praises of

democracy paying tribute to *libertad*, *votación*, and *pluralismo*. However, there are also a series of remarks that do not sit easily with the elaborated ideas of the academic contributors. Many remarks reveal that people expect of democracy not only elections and liberties, but also socio-economic results: people want an end to the ‘looting of the country’ (p. 158), they demand ‘equality and social justice’ (p. 147), and ‘employment’ (p. 160). And some go even further and state that democracy has been a fake because ‘being indigenous affects our rights’ (p. 126), and because it ‘has been a camouflage for domination’ (p. 208). Many people, apparently, do not really feel part of democracy as it functioned in Bolivia; the democratic system was unable to integrate and include them into something of which they could feel being a valued part or agent. It makes one of the participants say resentfully: ‘We want a democracy for *us*’ (p. 127).

This is a key issue that is very often overlooked in the analyses of democracy in the region: people have learned to distrust democracy; they feel excluded from its so often praised benefits; they (albeit ambivalently) do not recognize a real significance for their lives in their democratic system. The causes of this profound mismatch between the ideal and people’s perception of it may lay in both the impotence people feel because of the huge societal inequalities they perceive as invincible and left intact by ‘democracy’, and in feelings of exclusion caused by the inability of ‘democracy’ to end ethnic discrimination and its incapacity to hear and respond to ethnic and culturally distinct voices.

Bringing in comparison

That idea brings us to the book by José Antonio Lucero: *Struggles of Voice – The Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes*. He delves into the intricacies of indigenous representation, both empirically and with great conceptual sophistication, by making a comparison between the developments in Ecuador and Bolivia. His aim is to understand how indigenous movements, or ‘struggles to obtain a voice’, came into being, not only in terms of accomplishing enough strength to challenge the power holders (the ‘vertical voice’, p. 3), but also in terms of the ‘horizontal voice’, of ‘harmonizing horizontal identities and interest’ (idem), a process the author believes is never completely successful. His approach is ‘pragmatic constructivist’ (pp. 21-3), pointing at the need to focus on the fact that ideas ‘are best understood by the consequences they have in the experience of actually existing people’ (pp. 177-8), and at the need to merge analytic strategies of rationalist, structuralist and culturalist natures. Only in this manner can we hope to understand the combination of the processes of construction of political subjects, and the subsequent and simultaneous selection of specific constructions to build political representation, avoiding pre-set notions of what representation should look like. Lucero addresses representation as ‘a set of cultural and social processes through which certain ideas, identities, and relationships are constructed and institutionalized in ways that link certain (individual or collective) subjects with larger political communities’ (p. 29). The traditional separation of cultural, social and political spheres of representation may thus be questioned (p. 47), which is the very same idea brought forward by Laserna, Lazar, Gray Molina and Albó. Lucero proceeds with more empirical analysis in the Chapters 3-6. The structure of these Chapters is

roughly chronological, but mixed with thematic organization. The reconstruction of how indigenous movements and struggles for representation in both countries came into being is rich, detailed and enlightening because of the comparative strategy, the wealth of data and convincing analyses. The other side of the coin is that there is some repetition and jumping back and forth through time. Nevertheless, the analytical strategy is effective in explaining the reasons why a relatively early success in Ecuador to unite lowland and highland indigenous associations came apart after the calamitous alliance with president Gutierrez, and why the long-standing division between regional as well as class-versus-ethnic associations in Bolivia was finally overcome in the indigenous-popular strategy of Evo Morales' MAS. These explanations cover demographic and regional differences, discourses on identities and strategies, and historical vehicles of 'ethnic administration'. They discuss concepts to denominate one's 'nature' among being 'indígenas', 'originarios', 'naciones' or others, and they also cover political opportunities and contingencies, and grades of radicalism or moderation. Combining the contributions of different focuses in the analysis of the construction of indigenous movements, Lucero is able to provide an encompassing portrait of the vicissitudes of these movements in both Bolivia and Ecuador. Additionally, this broad analysis helps to understand how and why specific claims 'to represent' (both by individual leaders and by collective stories and discourses) are successful, and others are not. The issue at stake is not to 'truthfully' denote the interests of one or the other group or *pueblo*, or to be 'authentic' as if that were a static characteristic, but to manage the discursive and material resources available in such a way that practices emerge 'that enable some subjects to situate themselves as more culturally authentic and more politically consequential than others' (p. 155). This context-dependency, both at the local, regional, national and transnational levels, makes 'some organizational models, political tactics, and cultural discourses become representative largely by fitting within the structures of key cultural and political conjunctures' (p. 174).

Lucero's analysis highlights some of the same issues reflected upon by Lazar. They both conclude that there is no such thing as an either/or relation between class and ethnic frames of unification and mobilization, and they both agree on the fact that one should not only look at struggles for voice and visibility in terms of the given politico-institutional structures (often leading to sterile debates on whether this results in inclusion or co-optation), but at the ways in which the quests for citizenship and democratic participation unsettle the very parameters of the classical democratic edifices and different spheres of representation.

In a way Álvaro Zapata's book *Ciudadanía, Clase y Etnicidad* resembles the thrust of Lucero's analysis. The organization and set-up of the book, however, makes it quite a bit harder to digest. The style is complex, the sentences are long, and the headings sometimes enigmatic. It builds mainly on Touraine's theory in order to portray and categorize the nature of Bolivia's twenty-first century social movements. A long theoretical chapter and a host of distinctions and enumerations (in Touraine's style) do not always convince as analytic tools. Also, the literature consulted for this ambitious analysis does not cover much important work recently published on the turbulent vicissitudes of the country. In spite of these critical remarks, the book certainly has its merits. It skilfully unpacks the orientations that guided the protests movements between 2000 and 2003 (class/ethnic/citizenship) in

the context of Bolivia's history and links these with the specific character of the post 1985-reforms. Like Lucero, it attempts to understand the emergence of the movements in connection with socioeconomic and cultural conditions and developments, as well as in connection with political models, discourses and opportunities available both historically and contemporaneously, emphasizing that establishments and resistance need to share specific hegemonic cultural orientations. It is based on Touraine's scheme of three dimensions to make out the social-movement-status of collective action (the axis of identity, the axis of the definition of the adversary, and the axis of 'historicity'; or the ambition to direct the cultural/developmental orientations of a society, page 40 onwards). This proves helpful in describing and categorizing different phases and forms of collective action. Zapata, however, reaches arguable conclusions (although in evaluating these conclusions we need to take into account that Zapata's analysis does not cover the 2005 and post-2005 developments). His conclusion is that the orientations of the 2000-2003 protests were both class-based (with rural *campesinos* demanding 'modernization') and citizenship-based (with urban dwellers such as the *Alteños* demanding 'inclusion'). The ethnic orientation, on the contrary, he asserts, was weak (p. 188, 190), or at best symbolic or instrumental. In the case of El Alto, the demands of urban life, whenever they clashed with traditions, resulted in 'dismissing the traditional customs, or, in other words, to raise the matter of their validity as expressions of legitimate identity' (pp. 190-1). For these reasons, the ethnic motive remains weak. Moreover, Zapata claims that in case the protests *would* have relapsed into '(ethnic) identity movements', they would have lost their potential to live up to the third condition of Touraine for constituting a genuine social movement: that of 'historicity' (idem). In the light of more recent developments, it would of course be interesting to hear Zapata's re-evaluation of these assertions.

Taken together, these books address, in one way or another, the question of how the indigenous voice can become a genuine, equal contributor and interlocutor in quests for a democracy that no longer stubbornly clings to the Western liberal canon at a time when this indigenous voice is itself in a process of change and transformation. Given the history of repression, lack of respect and discrimination, the demanding assertiveness for respect and an equal (or even bigger) share in the decisions on national identity and the country's future is very understandable and in a way justified. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to acknowledge that not the indigenous people's past, but the indigenous people's present is the rightful counterpart in the deliberations on what an 'assorted', national democracy should encompass.

* * *

Ton Salman is Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA). <aj.salman@fsw.vu.nl>