

## CHAPTER 3



# THE ELECTION OF MAS, ITS EGALITARIAN POTENTIAL AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

## Lessons from Bolivia

Leonidas Oikonomakis

### Introduction

Up until a few decades ago, the indigenous Bolivians who constitute the vast majority of this landlocked country were not even allowed to walk on the cities' sidewalks, not to mention vote. In 2005, however, the country elected its first indigenous President, Evo Morales Ayma. His government while having up to a certain extent empowered the previously excluded has done so in a 'controlled' manner and without disempowering the country's economic elites. At the same time, the type of social change that has been brought about in Bolivia in the past fourteen years has not been as radical as some had hoped and others had feared. While in the cycle of protest that preceded Evo's rise to state power several radical egalitarian and emancipatory proposals were articulated and practised in Bolivia, once Evo was elected the more radical proposals lost steam, while critics of the government were either suppressed or dismissed as 'traitorous'.

In this chapter, I argue that despite the fact that Evo's election was portrayed as 'the rise of the Bolivian social movements to state power', in fact his government ended up being one the *izquierda permitida* – to borrow Webber and Carr's (2013) term – and not one of *izquierda radical*. In addition, again focusing on the Bolivian experience, I also question the role

of elections during cycles of protest, and I argue that they contribute decisively towards the minimization of social mobilization and its translation into – moderate – party politics, leading to the division of movements and the weakening of radical, prefigurative, egalitarian political processes. That way, they contribute to translating protest into a more controlled political process that minimizes the threat to the survival of political and economic elites and to the ‘corporate state’ that sometimes appears during cycles of protest. In such a process, what appears as ‘egalitarianism’ may also produce (or reproduce) its own hierarchies, elites and political relations.

### **The Country to Whose Founding the Indigenous Were Never Invited**

El 22 de enero del año 2002, Evo fue expulsado del Paraíso. O sea: el diputado Morales fue echado del Parlamento. Mucho antes de la expulsión de Evo, ya los suyos, los indígenas, habían sido expulsados de la nación oficial. No eran hijos de Bolivia: eran no más que su mano de obra. Hasta hace poco más de medio siglo, los indios no podían votar ni caminar por las veredas de las ciudades. (Galeano 2006)

In the above text, Eduardo Galeano reminds us that up until half a century ago the indigenous peoples of Bolivia – the majority of its inhabitants that is – were not even allowed to walk on the cities’ sidewalks, not to mention vote in elections. In 2006, in one of those twists of history, Evo Morales, an indigenous Aymara who had been growing coca leaves, ‘the devil’s leaf’ according to Galeano, and had led the struggle of the Bolivian – and especially the Chapareño<sup>1</sup> – cocalers against the uprooting of their bushes, was being sworn President of the country: not only of the indigenous, the *cholos*, or the *blancos*, but of the whole country. His election sparked hopes and fears not only in Bolivia but in the whole region and the world. An indigenous person, one of the historically most excluded, was about to take power in that landlocked, highland country. The indigenous and the poor – who in Bolivia largely coincide – were full of hope that finally justice and equality would reign in the country. It is also a fact that the emancipatory potential of a poor, indigenous person being sworn President was more than welcome but not everywhere or by everybody though.

The Bolivian economic and political elites were nervous and unsure of what would follow. Would their centuries-long privileges be questioned now that the *indios* had taken power? And what did that mean for other economic elites and other historically excluded populations in the region? The United States, who had long controlled the country through aid and trade, were also anxious. After all, it was the US ambassador Manuel Rocha that had warned against voting for Evo Morales in 2002, more or less comparing him to Osama Bin Laden. It backfired: the Bolivians were so fed up

with North American meddling with their country's internal affairs that they rushed to vote for Evo. So much did Ambassador Rocha's intervention backfire that Evo Morales joked that he would employ Rocha 'the owner of the – Bolivian – circus' as head of his electoral campaign (Astelarra 2014).

Fourteen years have passed since Evo's rise to state power, and though he remains popular in Bolivia, he is not as popular as he used to be. In a 2016 referendum, 51 per cent voted against a Constitutional amendment that would allow Evo Morales to be re-elected for the 4<sup>th</sup> time in the 2019 elections – almost as many as had voted him for President ten years earlier. The Constitutional Tribunal, however, had a different opinion: it considers it a constitutional right for any Bolivian citizen – including Evo – to be an electoral candidate as many times as he/she wishes, thus bypassing the result of the referendum. Evo's vice president, Álvaro García Linera, saw no contradiction in this development, saying in an interview with *El País* that if we stick to the constitutional rules, Evo would have to go, but that would be political suicide, since he is 'the personification of the unification of the people . . . something that happens every 100 or 200 years' (Molina 2018). A recent poll, however, signalled that if the Bolivians were to be asked again, 63 per cent of them would back the referendum's initial result: Evo would not be allowed to run for President in 2019. At the same time, it seems that Evo's popularity is also losing ground in the four most important Bolivian cities: from 58 per cent it has dropped to 34 per cent (El Deber 2017).

While the MAS has not identified a suitable candidate that could substitute Evo Morales, they have been busy with other concerns until now, said the vice president, fourteen years after Evo was sworn President, and while he has just lost his first major political battle, it seems like a good time to look back in a critical manner and make some first evaluations of his presidency's performance. From this author's perspective, Evo's governments have been neither as radical as it was feared, nor as egalitarian as it was hoped. While Evo Morales' policies have had a redistributive character and did undeniably benefit the least privileged Bolivians, at the same time they did so without having to disempower the most privileged, thus maintaining an unequal system of power relations in the country instead of overturning it.

### **Riding on a Wave of Protests**

The MAS (Movimiento Al Socialismo), Evo's party, was conceived as the political instrument of the Bolivian indigenous-campesino movement led by the Chapareño cocalero movement, the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba. Elsewhere, I have described in detail how it was conceived and how the electoral route won the ideological battle within the cocalero

movement itself against other, more radical and certainly more violent options that were on the table such as *guerrilla warfare* (Oikonomakis, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Oikonomakis and Espinoza 2014). Why a ‘political instrument’ and not a party? Moira Zuazo (2009: 38) argues that this has to do with two factors: a) the prevalent idea within the campesino-indigenous movement that ‘political parties divide us’ and b) the delegitimization of the political party as an organizational form that has its roots in Bolivia’s ‘turbulent years’ 2000–2005. It was officially approved in the Sixth Congress of the United Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB, Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia) in 1994 and officially formed a year later in the congress on ‘Land, Territory and Political Instrument’ that took place in Santa Cruz. There, representatives of several campesino-indigenous organizations such as the CSUTCB, the Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Bolivian Peasant Women (FNMCB-BS, Federación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Bartolina Sisa), the Syndicalist Confederation of Bolivian Colonizers (CSCB) and the Indigenous Central of the Bolivian East (CIDOB) established the Asamblea de los Pueblos (ASP), which would later become the MAS-ISP and eventually what we know today as the MAS.

It is widely believed that the most influential factor behind the birth of the MAS was the introduction of the Popular Participation Law (LPP – Ley de Participación Popular) introduced in 1994. The LPP was an opening in the Bolivian political system that would allow greater popular participation at the local administrative level, since it increased the share of the national budget destined to the country’s 311 local municipalities to 20 per cent from 10 per cent (Kohl 2003: 153). Therefore, it is considered that the LPP provided a political opening for indigenous and other local grass-roots organizations to participate in local electoral politics. This political opening is viewed as the *political opportunity* that gave birth to the political instrument of the campesino-indigenous movement of Bolivia, the MAS. Even the dates point to that direction: the MAS was established in 1995, just one year after the introduction of the LPP. However, if we take a deeper look into the internal dynamics of the campesino-indigenous movement, we will realize that the creation of the political instrument was not an instinctive reaction to the introduction of the LPP by the central government but rather a carefully planned move within the movement at least since 1984. According to Durand Ochoa (2012: 161), the decision to create a political instrument was taken by the CSUTCB in 1992, long before the introduction of the Popular Participation Law. Pablo Stefanoni (2010) also emphasizes the fact that the plan to create a political instrument was being discussed by the Bolivian campesino movement ever since at least 1988. My own research also points towards that direction: Don Filemón Escóbar and other political instructors

such as Alex Contreras, Oscar Coca and David and Germán Choquehuanca organized more than 600 seminar workshops in the Chapare in favour of the creation of a political party already from 1984 onwards (Escóbar 2008: 201; Oikonomakis 2018) Don Filemón wrote respectively: ‘Our seminars were extended all over the map of Bolivia. The main work was to give seminars . . . We were converting the concentrations into seminars for thousands of compañeros. With this consequent and permanent work we forged the political instrument’<sup>2</sup> (Escóbar 2008: 191–92).

In 2009, Moira Zuazo (2009) interviewed 85 MAS deputies and senators, using a structured questionnaire in which she tried to trace back the birth of the MAS. Two of them, Wilber Flores Torres and Gustavo Torrico, who were involved in the creation of the political instrument (the rest were not) mention 1992 as the year of its conception, which is before the introduction of the LPP. What is also surprising is that not a single one of the 85 of them identifies the LPP as the instigator behind the creation of the political instrument, even though some of them identify it as ‘influential’ in their *personal* political development. Therefore, I argue that while the LPP functioned as an additional argument in order for the coccaleros of the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba to engage with the electoral route, the ideological preparation for this development had begun long ago, and it is that preparation that facilitated the electoral strategy of the coccaleros of the Chapare, which of course also took advantage of the opportunities presented by the LPP. Eventually, thanks to the coccaleros’ electoral success in the municipal and national elections of 1995 and 1997, in the Chapare mainly, Evo Morales and the coccaleros of the Chapare managed to win the internal battle for the leadership and control of the MAS-ISP, against the other two aspiring candidates: Alejo Véliz Lazo, a Quechua ex-secretary general of the CSUTCB and first leader of the ASP, and Felipe Quispe, the *mallku* (leader) of the Aymaras of the Altiplano.

From 2000 onwards, Bolivia went through its turbulent years. Starting with the Cochabamba Water War, a cycle of popular mobilizations managed to topple two Presidents (in 2003 and 2005) and eventually brought Evo Morales to the Presidency. The protagonists in these mobilizations were not political parties (not even the MAS) but social movements such as the autonomous self-organized Coordinadora por la Defensa del Agua y la Vida de Cochabamba (Coordinating Body for the Defense of Water and Life), trade unions like the Bolivian Workers Central (COB, Central Obrera Boliviana) and the CSUTCB, neighbourhood assemblies such as Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto (Federation of El Alto Neighbourhood Councils), and the coccaleros of the Chapare and Yungas La Paz. The aforementioned cycle of protest was instigated by the neoliberal austerity policies that were being introduced by successive governments, which included the privatization of

water, and natural gas, as well as the banning of coca leaf growing among other things. Fernando Mayorga (2012) writes that during this period Bolivia witnessed a double crisis: a) of representative democracy and its institutional tools such as the political parties, and b) of neoliberalism as a system of economic governance.

Two counter proposals were developed and were either demanded or experimented with on behalf of the movements: participatory democracy – direct or communitarian – as far as political organization is concerned, and state economic nationalism for economic policy. We also witnessed instances of horizontal direct-democracy forms of organization as it appeared in Cochabamba, where the Water War was coordinated by the *Coordinadora*, who assembled in the main square of the city, and where spokespersons of the different neighbourhood assemblies gathered to discuss their strategy and future plans. Processes of a similar nature were experienced in El Alto, where the water and the gas wars were planned and fought on the squares of La Ceja and the other neighbourhoods under the communitarian organizational form of the *ayllu*.

These ‘wars’ were so called because what was at stake was political sovereignty regarding the ‘ownership’ and administration of natural resources, and the two sides that fought these wars were the Bolivian corporate state (Kapferer and Gold 2017) and the egalitarian forces represented by social movements. The MAS was not the protagonist in any of these instances except for the Coca War, which took place in January–February 2002, when the government decided to ban the production, sale and transportation of the coca leaf and ordered the closure of its main markets, especially the one in Sacaba, in the periphery of Cochabamba. The Cochabamba Water War was mainly fought by the *Coordinadora*, while the Water and Gas wars of 2005 and 2003 were mostly fought in El Alto by the Aymaras of the Altiplano. However, of the three main political proposals that emerged during those years – the autonomous self-management of the *Coordinadora*, the exclusionary revolutionary *indigenismo* of Felipe Quispe and the institutional electoral route proposed by the MAS and Evo Morales – the latter managed to gain ground, *translating* (Dinerstein 2014) in a way the more radical proposals into electoral politics and channelling popular discontent towards electoral participation for social change.

Central to this process was the figure of Evo Morales, the indigenous deputy who was ousted from the Parliament in 2002 accused of instigating the Coca War and for whom the American Ambassador openly advised the Bolivians not to vote, giving him even greater popularity. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate how and why social mobilization in Bolivia was translated into electoral politics – I try to do that elsewhere (Oikonomakis 2018). My main argument is that despite the fact that during the protest cy-

cle in Bolivia there have been instances of egalitarian, directly democratic and communitarian organizational forms, they never really managed (to be fair, they may not have had the time to do so) to articulate an alternative political proposal for the country's economic and political administration. Therefore, when elections were called, the only tangible proposal was that of the MAS: the electoral path to state power. In the lines that follow, however, I will try to evaluate whether the MAS and Evo Morales translated their electoral victories into egalitarian policies within Bolivia.

### The Permitted Left and the Compensatory State

Evo Morales' 2006 rise to the Presidential seat is the Latin American equivalent of Nelson Mandela's 1994 Presidential election in South Africa. It has a lot to say about liberal identity politics and social justice in a capitalist economic system, as well as about social change and the electoral route towards achieving it. Just like Mandela, Evo represents the marginalized majority in a country administered by the elite minority: Mandela is black in South Africa and Evo indigenous in Bolivia. Both were discriminated against, yet both managed to reach the Presidential seat in their respective countries, and their success had a symbolic meaning as well: it was viewed both at home and abroad as an issue of social justice being done. However, Evo's case – just like Mandela's – offers us the opportunity to explore this extremely important question: is it enough for an indigenous person to govern an indigenous-majority country for egalitarian policies to be implemented in it? In other words, is it the identity of the *mandatario* that matters? Is *identity politics* enough when it comes to social justice? And what's the role of *social class* in all this?

According to the World Bank statistics, the percentage of the Bolivian population living below the national poverty line has dropped from 59.6 per cent in 2005 to 38.6 per cent in 2015 (accessed on 11 April 2017). That is, it has dropped by 21 per cent during Morales' administration, which is definitely not a minor feat. Official government statistics present a similar picture: poverty has fallen from 60.6 per cent in 2005 to 45 per cent in 2011, and extreme poverty from 38.2 per cent to 20.9 per cent over the same period. This is Evo Morales' achievement and should be granted to his administration. Literacy rates have also reached 99 per cent according to UNESCO, which is also impressive. Compared to past administrations, these are major improvements; we should not forget, however, that Bolivia is a country rich in natural resources and in which around 40 per cent of the population remains under the national poverty line despite having a left-wing government and an indigenous President in office for the past fourteen years. In addi-

tion, 10 per cent of the population in 2015 still earned 45.8 times as much as the lowest 10 per cent, which means that Bolivia remains a deeply unequal country.<sup>3</sup> The reason behind this is that, from this author's point of view, though Evo's administration did partly break with the country's neoliberal economic policies (the privatization of natural resources, for example) it did it without materializing an anti-capitalist economy, maintaining a liberal, capitalist, (neo)extractivist (neo)developmental logic when it comes to economic and social policy. The difference is that Evo's capitalist economy has 'a more human face' than his neoliberal predecessors' and a *more* redistributive character.

Petras and Veltmeyer define extractivism as 'economic development based on the extraction of natural resources such as fossil and biofuels, minerals and agro-food products extracted in a process of "large-scale investment in land acquisition"' (Petras and Veltmeyer 2014: 18). According to them, while the Bolivian government's share of the resource rent in the mining sector is only 6 per cent, in the hydrocarbon sector it has been increased to 50 per cent during Evo's years (18% royalty and 32% tax rate) (Petras and Veltmeyer 2014: 28). The MAS, of course, calls this process 'nationalization' and celebrated it with performative 'occupations' of foreign companies' drilling sites; however, the truth is that we are talking about a generous (compared to past administrations) increase in the government's share of the profits, and certainly not of nationalization. In the same book, Petras and Veltmeyer identify three types of extractivist states: the imperial, the neoliberal and the post-neoliberal. The imperial state refers to states that actively support local companies' national interests in their pursuit of resources to export abroad, providing them with diplomatic assistance (political pressure) when needed, in order to achieve their geopolitical targets (for example, the United States and Canada). The neoliberal state is the state that privatizes its natural resources to private companies, foreign or domestic, according to the dictates of the Washington Consensus and free market capitalism. Most of Latin America during the 1990s and early 2000s fell within this category. Because of the challenge to neoliberal policies by powerful cycles of protest that brought to power 'progressive regimes' in Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador and other Latin American countries throughout the 2000s, however, a new type of equally extractivist state emerged: the post-neoliberal state. The authors describe the post-neoliberal state as constructed on two pillars:

a new development paradigm based on a post-Washington Consensus on the need for inclusive development and poverty reduction (the 'new developmentalism') and a national development strategy ('the new extractivism') based on the



extraction of natural resources, their export in primary commodity form, and a policy of social inclusion in regard to the distribution of the resource rents collected in the development process. (Petras and Veltmeyer 2014: 7)

Eduardo Gudynas describes neoextractivism as a form of development based on the appropriation of nature in which ‘if indeed the state plays a more active role, and gives extractivism a greater legitimacy because it redistributes some of the surplus to the population, it still repeats the negative environmental and social impacts of the old extractivism’ (Gudynas 2010: 1). He prefers to use the term ‘compensatory state’ instead (Gudynas 2013). Jeffery Webber agrees because this conceptualization of ‘neodevelopmental states’ tends to exaggerate the increased role of the state and the diminished role of multinational capital while ‘the very reproduction of these political economies depends upon states prioritizing the maintenance and security of private property rights and juridical environments in which multinationals can profit’ (Webber 2017a: 46). Ben Dangl, discussing the Argentinean experience and the Kirchnerian compensatory state, put it more blatantly: ‘In other words Kirchner was handing out crumbs when what many demanded was revolution’ (Dangl 2010: 71).

In any case, whether we prefer the term neoextractivism, neodevelopmentalism, or compensatory state, Evo’s Bolivia is viewed by all theorists involved in the debate as the paradigmatic example. ‘One redistributive channel of rent to the poorest sectors’, notes Webber, ‘has been a series of targeted cash-transfer programs, which now reach roughly 33% of the population – *Bono Juancito Pinto* (funds to encourage children to attend school), *Renta Dignidad* (a small monthly payment to the elderly poor), and *Bono Juana Azurduy* (funds to improve healthcare for expectant mothers, as well as postnatal medical care)’ (Webber 2017a: 51). This type of redistributive policy, however, can hardly be described as anti-capitalist or truly egalitarian. From this author’s point of view, it is rather a very intelligent way to improve somehow the conditions of the poorest of the population, ‘securing’ in a way their future support for a regime that provided them with ‘something’ where previous administrations provided nothing, and maintaining stable economic and social conditions while following a capitalist developmental logic. This way, Evo’s administration has managed to somewhat ease the suffering of the poor without having to disempower the rich.

The answer, therefore, to whether having an indigenous president makes a difference or not, is that what matters is what a President and a government actually does, not what he/she looks like. Or, as Alejandro Almaraz ex-vice minister of lands and former national director of MAS put it in an interview with this author and Tomàs Astelarra back in 2013:

Have the landowners been displaced from power? No, very partially and secondarily. They don't have any ministers but it turns out that the *campesina* Minister of Agriculture does what they want. It is much more comfortable [this way].<sup>44</sup>

In other words, while Evo's administration has impressive achievements to show when compared to previous neoliberal governments and this should be granted to him, we should not, however, exaggerate his egalitarian effect in Bolivian society, which, when examined critically, is neither as big as was hoped for nor as radical as it is believed to be.

### **Evo and the Iron Law of Oligarchy**

Evo's first cabinet of 2006 was something else! The Minister of Justice was an indigenous Quechua *cholita*, as were the Presidents of the two *Cámaras*. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Education were Aymaras. The cabinet also included those who had been involved with the social movements that had led the cycle protest that preceded the elections and had in a way 'carried' the MAS on their backs to the government seat: activists and spokespersons of the Cochabamba Water War, cocalero leaders, representatives of unions, neighbourhood assemblies and social organizations, and especially the organizations that had formed the MAS (the Six Federations of Coca producers of the Tropic of Cochabamba, the FNMCB-BS and the CSUTCB). Three fourths of the ministerial cabinet were men and one fourth women (4/16). There were also a number of experienced technocrats (economists, lawyers, sociologists), who were not involved with the movements but had, however, identified themselves with the MAS. They were called invitees or intellectuals, and they were offered vice-ministerial positions. The first ministerial cabinet represented the rise of the popular movements, as eleven leaders from different social organizations headed 10 of the 16 ministries. Statistically, the popular movements represented 68.75 per cent of the cabinet compared to the 31.25 per cent of the 'invitees'.<sup>5</sup>

It is of no surprise, therefore, that the political and economic elites of the country felt threatened, especially after the proclamation of the Constitutional Assembly that rewrote the country's Constitution, in which many representatives of the popular sectors and the social movements participated actively. Allied with the MAS in the Constituent Assembly was the Unity Pact, a social movement alliance that consisted of representatives of lowland and highland indigenous-peasant popular organizations, including the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia, CIDOB), the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas of Qullasuyu (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu, CONAMAQ),

the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia, CSUTCB), the Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia 'Bartolina Sisa' ('Bartolina Sisa' National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Aboriginal Women of Bolivia, CNMCIQB-BS) and the Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia (Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia, CSCIB) (Webber 2017b: 335).

The country's elites felt threatened and reacted. Since institutionally they were defeated and there was no candidate to counter Evo, they focused their reactionary project in the *Media Luna* (Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz, Tarija) autonomy issue. Institutional efforts failed: the right-wing referendum to oust the government resulted in success for Evo and his vice president (67%) and also eventually led to the removal of oppositional prefects in the departments of Cochabamba and La Paz and their replacement by pro-government ones. Ahead of total failure, the opposition opted for extra-parliamentary means of action, as Webber (2017b) also emphasizes. From September 9 to September 16 2008, a number of right-wing mobilizations took the form of marches and occupations of government offices and airports in the *Media Luna* departments. In Porvenir, in the region of Pando, a number of government supporters were assassinated by the right-wing opposition. That was it: the government retook Pando militarily, while a massive mobilization of peasant and indigenous organizations surrounded Santa Cruz and started participating in street battles in defence of the government. Eventually, the autonomist opposition was defeated in the streets as well.

Until 2010, the MAS had been in constant conflict with the Right but without taking any radical measures that would undermine their economic privileges. It has governed, as Webber and Carr have put it, as an *izquierda permitida* (permitted left): 'The new model abandoned features of neoliberal orthodoxy but retained its core faith in the capitalist market as the principal engine of growth and industrialization. Government revenue spiked, but international reserves were accumulated at record levels, while social spending decreased as a proportion of GDP' (Webber and Carr 2013: 169). It maintained a capitalist economic logic, managing social protest through cooptation (redistribution of income gained from increased hydrocarbon royalties) or repression (the indigenous at TIPNIS for example were called 'counter-revolutionary' and were accused of being funded 'by the *gringos*'), and managed to control the crisis that the oppositional Right had caused in 2008 without further complications. With time, it also distanced itself from its social base. In 2007, a major cabinet replacement of the representatives of the popular movements took place: of the sixteen ministers, only seven had a social movement background (43.75 %, with 56.25 % being techno-

crats), while by 2013 only 15 per cent had a social movement background. At the same time, even in the cocalero strongholds in the Chapare people were complaining of a top-down disciplining of different opinions by the party, and the phrase *dictadura sindical* described the MAS' attitude towards the Chapareño cocaleros. In a way, the case of the MAS once again ratified Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy (Michels 1999).

By 2010, when the commodity boom that allowed Bolivia's growth (and redistributive state attitude) was over and the first signs of the financial crisis were starting to affect the country, Evo Morales' administration changed course towards the right-wing opposition as well (and vice versa). Rubén Costas, the governor of Santa Cruz who had led the 2008 anti-government protests was now on visibly better terms with Evo Morales, while agro-business organizations that had assisted the 2008 coup effort were now having regular consultations with the President, notes Jeffery Webber (Webber 2017b: 338). Starting in 2010, it seems that a pact was made: the Right would embrace Evo's statesmanship, and in return he would offer their agro-businesses (mainly coca, soy and quinoa) a considerable extension of their cultivated surface area that would triple their exports by 2025. This offer was accompanied by relevant infrastructural extensions and energy subsidies (ibid.: 343–44). With the pact, 'the government of social movements' was now entering a new phase.

## Conclusion

This chapter tried to evaluate the MAS' social and political performance after fourteen years in the *Palacio Quemado*, as the Bolivian Palace of Government is known. The MAS entered the *Palacio Quemado* for the first time in 2006, riding on a wave of popular protests that toppled two Presidents between 2000 and 2005 and articulated radical political proposals that evolved around: a) horizontal – or communitarian – democratic principles, and b) state ownership or social ownership of natural resources, which would reverse the until then neoliberal government policies. Evo Morales became the first indigenous President of Bolivia, while his first ministerial cabinet was characterized by the strong presence of political activists that had been involved with the popular protests. Fear and hope was the country's (and the world's) reaction: fear for the political and economic elites, and hope for the indigenous and the poor and marginalized. A new Constitution was negotiated, one that – theoretically at least – safeguards the rights of *Pachamama* (mother earth) and has *buén vivir* (living well) as its main principle, and an autonomist movement on behalf of the Right was successfully countered by the MAS and its social bases. The MAS did indeed negotiate new royalty

regimes with the multinationals that were exploiting the country's hydrocarbons (it called it 'nationalization'), and it did indeed redistribute the income it gained from this negotiation (and the commodity boom until 2010) to the least privileged Bolivians. As a result, Bolivia has experienced an impressive reduction in poverty rates and an increased GNI per capita over the past fourteen years. These are no minor feats.

However, the MAS' performance remains far from being egalitarian and equally far from fulfilling the expectations it raised with its elections. Democratic processes within the party have actually deteriorated; the 'process of change' has been personified in Evo Morales himself, while a pact with the Right was negotiated after 2010. In short: the MAS did ease the misfortunes of the poor without having to disempower the rich. Bolivia remains a deeply unequal society; the country's development model is based on the exploitation (not the protection) of nature, while dissident voices are treated as 'counter-revolutionary'. While it is important at a symbolic level to have an indigenous person for President, what really matters is the policies he/she makes; it is important at the discursive level to have a radical rhetoric, but what matters is its materialization. Identity politics became the flagship of MAS and brought it to the government seat, but *class politics* are still undermining political, social and economic dynamics, regardless of how *passé* they may sound.

**Leonidas Oikonomakis** currently holds a Marie Curie COFUND postdoctoral Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) at Durham University, Anthropology Department. His research and teaching focuses on Latin American politics, social movements, autonomy, revolutions and electoral politics. He is also a rapper with hip-hop formation *Social Waste* and a member of the editorial collective of ROAR Magazine. He is the author of *Political Strategies and Social Movements in Latin America: The Zapatistas and Bolivian cocaleros* (Palgrave Latin American Studies Series, 2019).

## NOTES

1. El Chapare region is the birthplace of the cocalero movement the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba, led by Evo Morales.
2. Author's translation from Spanish.
3. The Bolivian GINI coefficient was at 42 in 1990. It reached 58.5 in 2005 and dropped to 45.8 in 2015, according to the World Bank (accessed, April 2017).
4. Interview with Alejandro Almaraz, conducted by Leonidas Oikonomakis and Tomás Astelarra in Cochabamba, September 9, 2013.
5. For a detailed analysis of the first ministerial cabinet see Oikonomakis and Espinoza (2014).

## REFERENCES

- Astelarra, T. 2014. *La Bolivia de Evo Morales (Crónica Del País de Las Mamitas)*. Cuadernos. Argentina: Sudestada.
- Dangl, B. 2010. *Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America*. Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press.
- Dinerstein, A.C. 2014. *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope in the Twenty-First Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Durand-Ochoa, U. 2012. 'Coca, Contention and Identity: The Political Empowerment of the Cocaleros of Bolivia and Peru', PhD., The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Retrieved 11 October 2019 from <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/560/>.
- El Deber. 2017. 'El 58% aprueba la gestión de Evo; pero el 63% rechaza la reelección', *EL DEBER*, January 22, 2017. Retrieved 11 September 2018 from <https://www.eldeber.com.bo/septimodia/El-58-aprueba-la-gestion-de-Evo-pero-el-63-rechaza-la-reeleccion-20170121-0003.html>.
- Escóbar, F. 2008. *De La Revolución Al Pachakuti: El Aprendizaje Del Respeto Reciproco Entre Blancos e Indianos*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn. La Paz, Bolivia: Garza Azul.
- . 2013. Interview with Filemón Escóbar.
- Galeano, E. 2006. 'La Segunda Fundación de Bolivia – La Jornada', *La Jornada*, 2006. Retrieved 11 October 2018 from <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/02/09/index.php?section=opinion&article=038a1mu>.
- Gudynas, E. 2010. 'The New Extractivism of the 21st Century: Ten Urgent Theses about Extractivism in Relation to Current South American Progressivism'. Americas Policy Program.
- . 2013. 'Estado Compensador y Nuevos Extractivismos Las Ambivalencias Del Progresismo Sudamericano', *Nueva Sociedad | Democracia y Política En América Latina*, September. Retrieved 11 October 2019 from <http://nuso.org/articulo/estado-compensador-e-novos-extrativismos-as-ambivalencias-do-progressismo-sul-americano/>.
- Kapferer, B., and M. Gold. 2017. 'The Cuckoo in the Nest', *Arena* 151: 31–34.
- Kohl, B. 2003. 'Democratizing Decentralization in Bolivia: The Law of Popular Participation', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23(2): 153–64. Retrieved 11 October 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X03258639>.
- Mayorga, F. (ed.). 2012. *Estado, Ampliación de La Democracia y Disputa Política: Bolivia 2000–2010*, vol. 1., 2 vols. Cochabamba: CESU-UMSS.
- Michels, R. 1999. *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Molina, F. 2018. 'García Linera: "Perder a Evo Morales sería un suicidio político"', *El País*, January 7, 2018, sec. America. Retrieved 11 October 2019 from [https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/07/america/1515290890\\_923167.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/07/america/1515290890_923167.html).
- Oikonomakis, L. 2019a. *Political Strategies and Social Movements in Latin America: The Zapatistas and Bolivian Cocaleros*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2019b. 'From the Rainy Place to the Burnt Palace: How Social Movements Form Their Political Strategies: The Case of the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. Retrieved 12 January 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.1111/blr.12922>.

- . 2020. 'The Government of Hope, the Hope of Government, and the Role of Elections as Wave-Breakers of Radical Prefigurative Political Processes', in J. Holloway, K. Nasioka and P. Doulos (eds), *Beyond Crisis: After the Collapse of Institutional Hope in Greece, What?* Oakland, CA: PM Press (forthcoming).
- Oikonomakis, L., and F. Espinoza. 2014. 'Bolivia: MAS and the Movements That Brought it to State Power', in R. Stahler-Sholk, H.E. Vanden and M. Becker (eds), *Rethinking Latin American Social Movements: Radical Action from Below*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 285–307.
- Petras, J.F., and H. Veltmeyer. 2014. *Extractive Imperialism in the Americas: Capitalism's New Frontier*. Studies in Critical Social Sciences. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Stefanoni, P. 2010. 'Qué hacer con los indios -': y otros traumas irresueltos de la colonialidad. Plural editores.
- Webber, J.R. 2017a. *The Last Day of Oppression, and the First Day of the Same: The Politics and Economics of the New Latin American Left*. Haymarket Books.
- . 2017b. 'Evo Morales, Transformismo, and the Consolidation of Agrarian Capitalism in Bolivia', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17(2): 330–47. Retrieved 11 October 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12209>.
- Webber, J.R., and B. Carr (eds). 2013. 'From Left-Indigenous Insurrection to Reconstituted Neoliberalism in Bolivia: Political Economy, Indigenous Liberation, and Class Struggle, 2000–2011', in *The New Latin American Left: Cracks in the Empire*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Zuazo, M. 2009. *¿Cómo Nació El MAS? La Ruralización de La Política En Bolivia Entrevistas a 85 Parlamentarios Del Partido*. La Paz, Bolivia: Fundación Ebert.