

Territories and citizenship: the revolution of the Chiquitanos

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On 3 July 2007, after 12 years of frustration and persistent struggle, President Evo Morales handed over the legal titles to the indigenous million-hectare territory of Monte Verde to the Chiquitano people (numbering an estimated 120,000). Morales also gave land titles to the Chiquitanos of Lomerío (259.188 hectares) and Bajo Paragua (200 hectares).

The event was attended not only by Evo Morales, the first indigenous president of Bolivia, but also by several ministers, three elected mayors (of San Javier, Concepción, and San Miguel), ten local councillors, a senator, a congressman, and two members of the constituent assembly, all of them Chiquitanos.

1980

All this sounds impressive. But the depth and speed of change can only be understood by taking account of the situation a few years ago. José Bailaba, who is one of the leaders of Chiquitano movements and was elected senator in 2002, remembers that until the 1980s:

...everyone used to have to work for free for three days on road maintenance service, paying for our food and everything. We were forced to do the work that they, the authorities and the Catholic Church, used to assign us...¹

Younger than Bailaba, Justo Seoane (a leader and elected major of Concepción) recalled that:

...the Monsignor had to call the townspeople of Concepción by ringing the bells. 'Neither paicos nor cunumis² can own land,' they said...they thought we were only fit to obey orders from the authorities.³

Colonial condition

Inhabitants of Bolivian lowlands, the Chiquitanos originally occupied the semi-humid forest of El Chaco. They grew food around their hamlets, and went fishing and hunting in the forest. This semi-sedentary pattern was altered during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of the Spanish conquest. Due to a kind of 'missional pact'⁴ with Jesuits, however, the Chiquitanos avoided the worst consequences of colonial rule. Accepting the evangelisation and their confinement to *reducciones*,⁵ they maintained some traditional institutions and authorities and gained access to education and training in many arts. As stated by an eyewitness in the eighteenth century:

At the end, you found everywhere carpenters blacksmiths, weavers, tailors, shoemakers, lathe operators, clockmakers. In the holidays you heard excellent music from voices and instruments: pipe organs, harps, violins, flutes and clarinets.⁶

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and liberties, especially when the Bolivian state decided to 'colonise' the east, an area populated by dispersed *chunchos* or *salvajes* (savages). During the boom of rubber exploitation (1890–1920), thousands of Chiquitanos, Ayoreos, Guaranies, and other indigenous peoples of the lowlands were captured and confined in the *barracas* (large estates) where they worked as slaves.⁷ As the communities weakened, the estates continued to grow, including the people as one of the assets of the owners. Until the last decades of the twentieth century, the estates were bought and sold with the purchase of the indigenous families working there included in the contracts.

Backwardness and exclusion

Bolivia was usually referred to as an example of a weak state in permanent crisis. It lost large portions of its territory in wars with Chile in the late nineteenth century and with Brazil and Paraguay in the twentieth century. Rich in natural resources, Bolivia lacks a 'nation building' project capable of transforming these resources into prosperity for the many. As in the case of rubber, economic and political elites – many living in Europe⁸ – have exploited natural resources without any 'trickle down' to the rest of the population.

Inspired by nationalism and syndicalism,⁹ a revolution took place in 1952. As a result, the mining and oil activities were nationalised and an agrarian reform was initiated. But in the lowlands the situation did not change for the better. One of the key ideas of nationalistic governments – and of their opponents, including military governments – was the March to the East, promoting migration from the highlands and the 'distribution' of lands to political clients and landowners,¹⁰ affecting the indigenous territories.

The long march

The lowland indigenous people had to wait until the 1980s to initiate their own revolution. Eastern Bolivia's indigenous populations met in 1982 and created the Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia Confederation (CIDOB). The Chiquitanos took an active part in the process due to their local organisations' efforts in previous years (beginning around 1977), as recorded by José Bailaba.¹¹ A Chiquitano often filled the position of president of CIDOB, until they broke with it in 2002 to concentrate on a departmental organisation, the Coordinating Committee of Ethnic Peoples of Chiquitania (CPESC, created in 1995). Inside CPESC the Chiquitanos formed the Organización Indígena Chiquitana (OICH – the Chiquitano Indigenous People's Organisation).¹²

Why then and not before? One of the probable reasons was the erosion of the 'nation building' project whose last government ended abruptly in the middle of a deep economic and political crisis (1985), opening the way to a neo-liberal cycle in Bolivian politics. This also opened the way to new ideas, new actors, and new identities in the popular camp.

As analysed by García Linera,¹³ during the 1980s and 1990s the term 'indigenous' began to replace the term 'peasant'. 'Indigenous' denotes a more autonomous condition, based on identity and traditions. An old woman remembers the years of servitude and links the change in attitude with a change in self-identification from *campesinos* to *indígenas*:

*Few years ago, we begun to call ourselves Chiquitanos indigenous ... Chiquitanos women are similar, all of us have been "empatronadas", the "patrones" gave us our tasks, we work for them, and they call us "cambas" or "peasants" until now.*¹⁴

According to the national census of 2001, around 300,000 people in Bolivia identify themselves as lowland indigenous people. This change had consequences for the perception of their demands. Until the fifth congress (1986), the main demand of CIDOB was *tierra* (land). In the sixth congress (1988), the demand changed to *territorio* (territory). And this was one of the slogans of the first march in 1990.

Another reason for this dynamic of organisation and mobilisation in the 1980s is related to the unexpected consequences of the neo-liberal project.

The era of neo-liberalism in Bolivia

In the middle of a debt crisis, the election of Victor Paz Estensoro as president (July 1985) initiated the era of neo-liberal governments in Bolivia. This was capped with the approval of Law 21060 (1985), which dramatically changed the course of the previous three decades of nationalism, state intervention, and social rights.

The 21060 Law included:

1. Reduction of state expenditures and increase of revenues through the increase of public prices (mainly oil and gas).
2. Free flotation of the peso against the dollar.
3. Massive lay-off ('re-localisation') of public workers (including 23,000 miners).
4. Liberalisation of markets.
5. Promotion of export sector.
6. Tax system reform.

As in other countries in the region, the main political forces accepted the recipe of the Washington Consensus,¹⁵ and the main parties brokered a pact to implement the economic reforms needed to implement it, and to come out better off (this pact was the national democratic agreement or *democracia pactada*, which included all the traditional parties). In successive elections, the electorate – with high expectations or a lukewarm resignation – supported the successive governments, up until the 2000 change process.

The first and second march: initial gains

This pro-market and pro-business shift increased the pressure over indigenous territories, so indigenous people decided to mobilise. Following previous experiences of other social movements (the miners were famous for their marches, the last taking place in August 1986: *la marcha por la vida y por la paz*), lowland indigenous people organised a march to La Paz, the capital of Bolivia: *la marcha por el territorio y la dignidad* (August 1990). Some legal measures were weakly implemented in the following years. The main result was a sense of recognition, as stated by Egberto Tavo: 'la marcha sirvió para mostrar que los indígenas del oriente existimos' (the march demonstrated that we exist).¹⁶

The 1990s were not only the years of economic reforms, but also of the 'modernisation' of the state. For complex reasons (including the needs of the parties to have some form of legitimisation), the political reforms included some 'progressive' or unorthodox components of reform. The constitution was reformed to include a definition of the state as pluri-ethnic and multi-cultural (1994), and the same year a law was passed that promoted popular participation in local governments (*Ley de Participación Popular*). Two years later an institute was created to accelerate the agrarian reform (*Ley del Instituto de Reforma Agraria*). All this created a special momentum for indigenous movements.¹⁷

In this context, two key events took place: January 1995 was the date of the first legal demand for the titles of Monteverde TCO ('Territorio Comunitario de Origen'), (which was later completed in November 1996). August 1996 was the month of the second indigenous march that obtained the INRA law, including the explicit reference to TCOs being legalised in ten months. Despite its official name, *marcha nacional por la tierra y territorio, derechos políticos y dignidad*, it was better identified as the 'March for Life', as stated by Marisol Solano, a woman leader of Chiquitanos:

*In mid-96 we had the 'March for Life', where we were fighting for land and territory...and the other demand had to do with political participation, so that our indigenous representatives could participate in municipal governments.*¹⁸

The following years were years of tedious legal procedures, small gains, reversals, claims to international institutions (such as the International Labour Organisation), pressure and violence from landowners, self-defence initiatives, and new marches.¹⁹ The changing course of the legal demand can only be understood in the context of the acceleration of political processes in Bolivia at the beginning of the new century. It was not a fortuitous coincidence that the third Indigenous March took place in June–July 2000, the previous months of the Cochabamba uprising against the privatisation of water services.

Crisis and change: from doubtful expectations to rejection

Despite the increase in foreign direct investment (\$4.8bn between 1996 and 2001), the growth of gross national product (GNP) oscillated around a 2.8 per cent annual rate. Employment increased by only 2.1 per cent during the same period, and unemployment doubled up to 13 per cent (2004). The quality of employment also deteriorated due to deregulation of labour markets.

The implementation of different strategies for poverty reduction had no impact on poor people: despite the improvement of some social indicators, income poverty worsened (extreme poverty grew from 38 per cent in 1997 to 41 per cent in 2002).

April 2000 was a turning point due to the uprising in Cochabamba against the privatisation of the water service. Privatisation had led to a dramatic increase of tariffs, immediately rejected by the population, which organised around a 'Water Co-ordination', a social platform involving a coalition of multifarious organisations: urban, rural, cultural, civic, and so on. They developed an array of strategies including a referendum on the issue. In the end, they reversed the privatisation process.²⁰ This victory triggered a wave of protest against liberalisation policies.

After this, the popular unrest grew month after month. It included not only unionised workers and peasants, but also the police, claiming better salaries. The kinds of structures supporting these actions were similar to the Cochabamba Water Coordination. The best expression of this was the loose but effective Gas Coordination that led the 'gas war' in October 2003.²¹

In this context, the third march acquired a more political shape. To the claim for recognition of the TCOs, the indigenous people added the claim for a constituent assembly. And they were the first voice to be heard in the growing chorus demanding the 'refoundation of the republic' in the following years.

As the national political crisis developed, the tension increased in the Chiquitanía. The year 2001 was a turning point with regard to the use of force by landowners. As they began to lose in the courts and official institutions (such as INRA), they resorted to 'private armies'.²² The weakening of the national state contributed to this. Fortunately, the partial resolution of the crisis after October 2003, and the conformation of a transitional government that included indigenous leaders in key posts (Justo Seoane became Minister of Indigenous Affairs), stopped the violence from growing.

Just before the October crisis, a new march confirmed indigenous peoples' lead role in the national arena. Not only did they include national demands (for a constituent assembly, nationalisation of hydrocarbons, and the reform of INRA law), but they also established national alliances. To put this big leap forward into context, we must remember the differences between the lowland indigenous people and those in the highlands. Ignacio Paticu, a Chiquitano leader, explains it in terms of different political attitudes:

I really don't think we can form a single indigenous organization for the whole country, because indigenous people in the lowlands are quite different to those in the highlands. Whenever there's any conflict, the highland people always want to break the dialogue with the government, while we Chiquitanos are always willing to talk.²³

The change is clear if we hear the testimony of Carlos Cuasase:²⁴

Firstly, we marched like the indigenous peoples of the lowlands. I remember it very well. We marched for 37 days – not only because of the hydrocarbons issue, but we were also demanding a new constitution and a new constitutional assembly. When we were fighting we realised that there was nothing we could do alone and, of course, from the traditional Bolivian parties' view it was good for us to continue divided. They said, why unite forces with people in the highlands. And then we realised as leaders the big interests they had. Therefore, I remember it well, we met with one of the leaders of the highlands and we said: "Look brother, you have the same problems that we do, the same needs". So it resulted in this agreement we made not only for the hydrocarbons law but also to defend the rights of both the 'indigenas' of the highlands and lowlands, the most discriminated. We not only defended the sovereignty of our state, of our natural resources, but also we realised we needed a change within the framework of the political constitution...and that's when we demanded the constitutional assembly. We made this agreement, we had this press conference and we joined forces, the highlands and the lowlands.

Similar processes happened all around. Oscar Olivera, a spokesperson for *La Coordinadora por la Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (the Coalition in Defense of Water and Life) from Cochabamba, explains the involvement of people as follows:

I think the water war was basically caused because the people felt ignored by policies which were affecting them directly in their daily lives. If airplanes were privatised, gas, oil, it didn't have a direct impact on people. But if water is privatised, if the rates are increased, if water goes from costing half a dollar for 200 litres and then the next day it costs three dollars...well, this has a direct impact on people's daily lives. The trigger was that privatisation occurred to such an extent that it had an impact on people's daily life. The people who were the force behind the struggle against privatisation were the farmers because they lost their traditional ways of managing water. They lost their sources that had been used for centuries for irrigation and as drinking water. That had an economic impact.

Finally, the experience led to the widening of the agenda:

At the end of the water war we realised that people were not only fighting for water. At the end of the water war there was a woman who continued blocking the road with her family, her husband, and her children. I told her 'the conflict is over, we have stopped the blockade'. And she says, 'what have we got with the water war, we still have no water. How will my life be tomorrow? Even if they give us water for free, my husband has no job, I have to work on the streets, my children can't go to school because they have to help me. We want the president out, we want social justice'.

This was a turning point. We understand that the struggle was political, that people were fed up with the quality of life imposed on them. We wanted a new type of relationship in society, not based on exclusion or racism, but on reciprocity, equality, unearthing our ancestral values.

Crisis and the big change: from resistance to government

After the overthrow of former President Goni Sánchez de Lozada in October 2003 – during the 'gas war' – the country entered into a deep political debate around natural gas, its ownership, exploitation, and use. Bolivia is probably the only country in the world where these issues were resolved by a referendum. More than 70 per cent of the population answered positively the five questions put to them, giving the steer to the nationalisation of gas resources and the revision of the exploitative contracts with transnational companies (TNCs).

Simultaneously, indigenous people obtained better conditions for political participation, including facilities to obtain identity documents and the possibility to run candidates for election outside of traditional political parties. This led to big gains in the 2005 municipal elections.

This participatory citizenship was constructed from the bottom up. Grassroots organisations played a key role and local processes were seminal to change. As was stated by a Chiquitano leader:

The process of change in the pueblo Chiquitano, especially in Concepción, has moved forward progressively. Nothing is the same compared to what it was like before. We don't see people punished anymore. We don't see people jailed in the police station. The street-cleaning is now paid for by the municipality. Now the sub-prefect must listen to our demands. It wasn't like that before...

This has been a long-term effort together with the communities, speaking about our duties and rights. It has been an effort to make the authorities understand and know about the reality of our lives and to meet our needs. We decided we had to participate and run for general elections. As a result, we got a mayor elected. He was the President of the Central Indígena, representing the communities of Concepción.

Finally, after more than six years of social and political turmoil, including the 'water war' in 2000 and the 'gas war' in 2003,²⁵ and three short-lived presidencies, the first indigenous president of Bolivian history was elected with more than 50 per cent of the vote in a one-round election, in December 2005. People who had never dreamed of serving in high-level public posts began to assume posts as Ministers,²⁶ were sworn in as members of Parliament, and a few months later were assuming the responsibility of redrafting the constitution as members of a constitutional assembly. As was said by the Minister of Water, Abel Mamani:

What I demanded, what we demand today, I have to resolve. It's the irony of fate, this invitation of Evo Morales to be the Minister of Water. I accepted it precisely because we, the common people, demand our rights but we also have to – when the moment comes – take responsibility. And that's why I felt motivated, and there is no other reason.

How and why did this happen?

Frustrations and disenchantment with liberal policies are not infrequent. Social unrest has occurred in many regions of the world without producing deep changes. Is there any difference in the Bolivian experience?

There are many differences, but two especially stand out:

1. The generalised perception that the country was on the threshold of a historical opportunity for egalitarian development, due to the amount of gas reserves.²⁷ New and recycled ideas had fertile conditions to unite social institutions around common aspirations.
2. The strong historical *memory* of long-term processes, which evoked bad and good experiences, and remained part of popular imagination and beliefs. This includes:
 - previous eras of exploitation of natural resources: silver in the days of the colony when Potosi City was one of the three biggest cities in the world – due to the presence of the famous mine of the same name; tin during the twentieth century, when Bolivia was the world's primary producer of this metal (it is now down to less than 15 per cent of the revenues of the best years);
 - anti-colonial indigenous revolts: in the eighteenth century (Tupac Catari), at the end of the nineteenth century (Willka Zarate), and in the 1920s and 1950s;
 - and, of course, the decades of the national and revolutionary state that came out of the revolution of 1952.

As was stated by the current vice-president, Alvaro García Linera: 'memory is the creative force of the Nation'.²⁸ Memory also acts as a strong antidote against factionalism, a very frequent feature of popular movements in Bolivia and other countries of the region. One of the reasons for the failure of a previous leftist government (led by Hernán Siles Suazo between 1982 and 1985) was the insane dispute between the parties and movements that initially supported it. The discovery of common

interests was a crucial point in the previous process, as testified by Carlos Cuasase, Oscar Olivera, and others.

Institutions and catalysers

Repeated frustrations relating to empty promises of progress opened the space to question the model. The failure of the system led to 'a profound shift' in people's beliefs. But this shift was made possible by 'institutions' and 'catalysers'. These included:

- traditional organisations: rural and indigenous communities, and unions (weaker but still active during the neo-liberal period);²⁹
- new organisations: for example, the unions of coca growers (whose growth was a by-product of the 're-localisation' of miners following Law 21060, and which were the 'school' of Evo Morales and other leaders of the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo, Movement towards Socialism) and the current government);³⁰
- the spaces that opened up with the the Popular Participation Law (1994) prepared under the supervision of the World Bank, which aimed to decentralise the state (this Law was initially criticised by traditional popular organisations). The law created 311 new municipalities, mainly in the countryside; transferred 20 per cent of the national budget to municipalities;³¹ and recognised around 14,000 organisations (named Organizaciones Territoriales de Base) as formal channels for participation;
- urban organisations, currently named FEJUVE (Federación de Juntas Vecinales) in each city. These were a kind of laboratory in which peasants recast themselves as urban citizens, redefining their cultural, social, and economic practices. The main example of this is El Alto, an Aymara city of nearly one million inhabitants, strategically next door to – and 'looking down on' – La Paz, the capital).³²

Social institutions played a key role in achieving change (around 40 per cent of Bolivians participate in some form of social organisation), but individuals and minority groups also played pivotal roles, proposing new ideas and beliefs (and recycling or adapting old ones). Bolivia has a long tradition of nationalism, different forms of socialism, and indigenism. Despite the shift in the 1980s, this alternative thinking survives. These ideas and values 'catalysed' people's unrest and rage.

The weak 'modernisation'³³ of Bolivian society – including the years of neo-liberalism – enabled the survival of traditional forms of identity and communication. The communal and union forms of communication, basically through assemblies, were able to process the current experiences of neo-liberal promises and failures. But some modern artefacts were also useful. A key vehicle of popular communication was and is the radio, which is used in many cases by indigenous language speakers.

The crisis and the loss of credibility of traditional parties created a vacuum that would be filled by new actors such as: social leaders, progressive academics, good mass communicators (one of the transitional presidents and the current vice-president were both communicators with a strong academic background), NGOs that did not position themselves as sub-contractors of the World Bank, religious groups (the Jubilee Campaign was strong in Bolivia), and so on.

Change and democracy

Despite the massive protests (including clashes with security forces and, unfortunately, deaths), the main strategy of the change forces was the recourse to democratic means. Bolivia has a previous history of military coups followed by strong repression. The leaders of latter social movements know about this and try to avoid it. But underneath there is also a strong tradition of negotiation and recourse to legal mechanisms. The big marches of indigenous people for dignity and territories were inspired by the idea that 'we must go to the capital to be heard by the authorities'.

This attitude is particularly strong among the lowland indigenous people. Probably as a result of their differences with local and regional elites, they did not see the national state and its institutions as 'enemies'. Their main strategy was to put pressure on national government to fulfil its role as rights provider. All this led to the lowland indigenous movement being described as 'locally strong and committed to national dialogue'.³⁴ This was the main reason for insisting on legal procedures relating to their territorial demand, despite the tricks of adversaries and delays of judges.

The course of the national crisis followed a similar 'legalistic' pattern. After Goni's departure, his vice-president assumed the post; when he was forced to resign the social movements blocked the move of the president of the senate (a loose ally of Goni), who was entitled to succeed the vice-president, and forced the president of the Supreme Court to take over. During that period of mobilisation one of the main demands of the population was the formation of an elected constitutional assembly, elected by popular vote, to redefine the state.

The main idea coming from the popular movements was not the global replacement of formal (liberal) democratic institutions by an indigenous-style state or a new form of 'popular democracy', but a hybrid of different democratic traditions.

The depth of change

During the twentieth century, and especially in Latin America, one of the big questions for pro-change movements was: *reform or revolution?*

In Bolivia the current answer is: 'it depends'.

Socially speaking, the Bolivian process is a deep social, political, and economic revolution. The current ruling class of the Bolivian state is probably the most popular in terms of social roots of in Latin American history. In this sense the change process is more radical than the 1952 revolution (led by middle class 'revolutionaries').

In terms of the socio-economic programme, it is more of a radical reform than a revolution. Some leftist critics of Evo's nationalisation of natural gas say that it is a renegotiation, weaker than the nationalisation that occurred during the 1952 revolution. And the agrarian reform is only a redistribution of lands not in productive use. More than an old-style central national state, it seems that the aim of the process is to promote a new business and middle class of indigenous roots and to establish a new relationship with foreign investment.³⁵

One of the more controversial fields of change is the one of gender relations. After two decades of gender-sensitive policies, there is a widespread sense of disenchantment with them. This sense is fuelled by some conservative forces, including some indigenists with popular roots. The question has arisen as a result of the increased visibility of women as leaders of pro-change movements. In the course of the mobilisations two ways of understanding the role of women emerged. For men, women's role was to protect against repression: *If the women march in front, it should not be violence; it will be difficult for them to beat us; when women are in march we feel safe.* But the women thought another way: *If we are useful in the march going in front of it, we want to be in the front of everything*³⁶

Politically, it is not clear yet what will be the new order, the new state, the new arrangement of social, political, and economic forces inside it. Could be this process of change an ephemeral experiment?

Taking account of endemic political instability and the current increasing tension, it is difficult to give a definitive answer. But a deep analysis reveals some structural, and probably irreversible, changes. The most important is to do with the level of decentralisation of the state. A recent publication describes the Bolivian state as a 'three handed State': national government, departmental government, and municipalities. And the big share of the new resources will go the last two. The department of

Pando will receive 160 per cent more resources next year, Potosí 90 per cent more, and Cochabamba 27 per cent more. All the municipalities will receive, in transfers from central state, between \$300m (2005) to \$450m (2006). Obviously, the results of this increment will depend on popular participation and accountability.

Tradition or modernisation?

Another concern is related to the weight of 'indigenist' discourse inside the process. Undoubtedly it is a strong source of identity. It provides a repertoire of powerful ideas and symbols. For example, during the 'water war', the discourse about rights was intertwined with the recognition of the water as the 'Pachamama blood'.³⁷ But it is hard to imagine that it will inspire a global political model.

When indigenous people had their first traumatic encounter with western societies, the resistance strategies included a lot of negotiation. One of the results of those negotiations was new cultural forms, for example the wonderful Baroque Chiquitanian settlements, religious music played with European instruments with lyrics in Guaraní and other native languages, composed by Spaniards and Guaranies. Today, in El Alto, thousands of kids sing their rages and hopes to contemporary global urban music, the hip-hop and reggae of their time. But they sing in Aymara and play electronic instruments alongside Andean ones.

Probably this is the kind of synthesis that the majority of Bolivians are looking for in the field of economics and politics.

Results and opportunities

As stated by Justo Seoane, Chiquitano leader, former Minister of Indigenous Issues and Native Peoples during the transitional government of Carlos Mesa, the new government is a big hope:

Our indigenous brother in government, a fighter from the marginal and discriminated poor class, is not everyone's cup of tea. Everybody is expecting Evo to solve all problems and for me an important thing to do is to deal with corruption. We are also hoping to see the strengthening of productive development...that our indigenous brothers could at least have a higher education, a better education. You see, my mum can't read or sign her name, many brothers are illiterate. We want all indigenous brothers to have an education as any other Bolivian. On health the government is going to play a major role even if we don't have enough resources. We don't want to take revenge. We want to stop having third and fourth class citizens. Our needs are great, greater than the resources we have.

Despite increasing social and political tensions in the last months,³⁸ the results of the first year of Evo Morales government are impressive:

- The election of the constitutional assembly to formulate a new constitution (aimed at the 're-foundation of Bolivia'), with a clear majority of members coming from social organisations. This assembly is chaired by a woman of indigenous descent.
- The renegotiation of all the previous contracts with TNCs for the exploitation of natural gas, that increased the revenues collected by the state from the original share of 15 per cent (previous to the 'gas war' in 2003) to 80 per cent of its export value.
- The renewal of the process of land redistribution, and the recognition of permanent territorial rights to indigenous peoples, including the 'Casa Grande' of Monteverde.³⁹
- The reduction of external debt from \$4,940bn (end 2005) to \$3,227bn (prior to the decision of the Inter-American Development Bank on its share of Bolivian external debt).⁴⁰
- A fiscal surplus of around six per cent after years of endemic deficits: 6.9 per cent in 2001, nine per cent in 2002, 8.8 per cent in 2003, and 5.5 per cent in 2004.
- A record budget for 2007 of around \$10bn, 29 per cent more than the previous year.
- A new role for Bolivia in the international arena, especially in relation to regional integration, trade and investment, indigenous rights, and policies to deal with TNCs (which enjoy an extraordinary favourable moment including with Chile, their 'historical' enemy in the region).

For Chiquitanos this is the best opportunity in centuries to become autonomous and prosperous; in a word: citizens.

The challenges now are how to consolidate this process at different levels:

- At a national level in the emergence of a new intercultural hegemony and in ensuring legislative implementation of indigenous rights and new public policies framed in the new constitution.
- At a regional level in terms of ensuring the sustainable management of the indigenous territory.
- At a municipal level in terms of consolidating effective public administration and expanding influence in more municipalities.
- At all these levels ensuring a new generation of men and women leaders able to take on leadership roles.

It is not clear yet how the different political, social, and ethnic components of Bolivia will be included in the new state. There is a growing tension between the west Andean and impoverished regions, mostly of indigenous descent, and the eastern, richer provinces where most of the large-scale agribusiness and the natural gas and oil fields are located. Despite massive support from indigenous populations, and poor people, the government has begun to lose support from the middle class due to a weak public administration. But, undoubtedly, some of the changes that occurred in these few months will not be reversible. They are the result not only of an extraordinary timing, but also of long-term processes: nationalism, exclusion, powerlessness, and new *critical thinking* that is feeding this wave of change.

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Notes

¹ OGB Bolivia, *Life Stories*, La Paz, 2003, p. 96.

² Common name of indigenous groups.

³ OGB Bolivia, *Life Stories*, p. 140.

⁴ Zulema Lehm Ardaya *Milenarismo y Movimientos Sociales en la Amazonía Boliviana. La búsqueda de la Loma Santa y la Marcha Indígena por el Territorio y la Dignidad*. CIDDB-Oxfam America, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 1999, p. 35.

⁵ Settlements founded by the Spanish colonisers of the New World with the purpose of assimilating indigenous populations into European culture and religion.

⁶ José de Mesa, Teresa Gisbert, Carlos D. Mesa Gisbert: *Historia de Bolivia*. Ed. Gisbert, La Paz, 2003, p 259.

⁷ Salvatierra, Hugo, *Artículo Primero*, VII, 14, CEJIS, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, p. 117

⁸ This is the case of the barons of tin (Patiño, Roschild, and Aramayo). Simón Patiño was, until his death in Buenos Aires (1946), one of the richest men in the world.

⁹ A revolutionary doctrine by which workers seize control of the economy and the government by direct means (as a general strike).

¹⁰ Described by José Sandoval in "Reforma Agraria 50 años, TCO y tierras campesinas", *Artículo Primero*, VII, 14, CEJIS, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, pp. 85–99.

¹¹ OGB Bolivia, *Life Stories*, pp. 94 and ff.

¹² OICH (the Chiquitano Indigenous People's Organisation) includes 12 'centrales': CICOL, CICC, CIP-SJ, TURUBO, CCISM, CIRPAS, CIBAPA, CICHAR, CICCH-T, ACISARV, ACISIV, and CICH-GB, extended through five provinces of Santa Cruz department: Ñuflo de Chávez, Velasco, Chiquitos, Germán Busch, and Ángel Sandoval. OICH represents more than 450 communities.

¹³ *Sociología de los movimientos sociales en Bolivia*. Oxfam-Diakonia. La Paz, 2004, pp. 242 and ff.

¹⁴ Pamela Calla et al, *Género, etnicidad y participación política*. Diakonia, La Paz, 2006, p. 58. "Patrón" is the common name for landowner, "empatronada" is the person who has a "patrón".

¹⁵ According to a Structural Reform Index elaborated by the Inter-American Development Bank, Bolivia was clearly over the median in Latin America with an index of 0.7 in 1996 (against a regional media of 0.5).

¹⁶ Alvaro García Linera, *Sociología de los movimientos sociales en Bolivia*. Diakonia, OXFAM GB, Plural, La Paz, 2004, p. 233.

¹⁷ See the testimony of Justo Seoane in: *Life Stories*, p. 142.

¹⁸ *Life Stories*, p. 112

¹⁹ For a short and complete chronology of the process until 2001, see: *Artículo Primero*, año V, n. 19, CEJIS, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 2001, pp. 37–41.

²⁰ Initially the trans-national company Bechtel, one of the owners of the privatised 'Aguas del Tunami', filed a legal demand against the Bolivian state appealing to a bilateral treaty of inversions. After a strong national and international campaign, in January 2006, Bechtel dropped its demand. As stated by Fundación Solón (one of the key actors in the campaign) Bechtel 'surrendered to the Bolivian people'.

²¹ The immediate cause of the 'gas war' was the intention of Sanchez de Lozada's government to sell gas to the USA under unfavourable conditions for Bolivia, using Chilean facilities to transform and export the gas. The regime of exploitation of gas and other natural resources, due to laws passed during the years of neo-liberalism (1985–2000), in general had generated discontent.

²² For more recent history of the TCO demand, see Tamburini and Betancur: 'Monte Verde: símbolo de la lucha indígena por su territorio', en: *Artículo Primero*, n. 14. CEJIS, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 2003.

²³ *Life Stories*, p. 124

²⁴ Carlos Cuasase is a Chiquitano leader, formerly president of OICH (the Chiquitano Indigenous People's Organisation). He was responsible for confronting and dealing with oil and gas companies building a pipeline through indigenous territory. Carlos is now a senator in the Bolivian Parliament in La Paz, representing all the indigenous people of the lowlands.

²⁵ The 'water war' was a massive public uprising of indigenous people in Cochabamba, Bolivia's third largest city, opposing the privatisation of water and wastewater services. The triggers of the protests were the 'privatisation' of private, community-owned water systems, and the water sources. The 'gas war' was a national uprising of indigenous people, miners, and coca-leaf producers, opposing the economic policies of the government, which included generous contracts to TNCs to exploit Bolivian natural gas. This war led to the forced resignation of the president.

²⁶ Some examples: the Foreign Affairs Minister is an indigenous leader without higher education, the Justice Minister was previously a leader of the union of 'home workers', and the Water Minister was the leader of the urban organisations in El Alto and worked as a carpenter. Other Ministers came from unions and NGOs (Dalence, Salvatierra, Villegas).

²⁷ During the years previous to the change, the provision of gas reserves increased from 5.91 trillion cubic feet (1991) to 52.3 trillion (2002).

²⁸ Alvaro García Linera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 199.

²⁹ The special characteristics of these organisations are related to their involvement in Bolivian politics during the period of national revolution (1952) until the years of neo-liberalism. The COB (Bolivian Workers Confederation) was on several occasions part of the government; half of the Ministers in the first MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, Nationalistic Revolutionary Movement) government (1952–1956) were from COB.

³⁰ Evo Morales was a 'disciple' of one of the historic leaders of the Miners' Union: Filemón Escobar, elected to the senate during the previous period (2002–2004). According to many analysts this influence was key for Morales to transcend a union agenda as a coca growers' leader.

³¹ As examples: the municipality of Achacani, which received \$4,000 in 1993, received more than \$1m in 1996; Villa Tunari, which received no money previous to the law, received more than \$1m in 1996.

³² Nancy Aruquipa, a young environmentalist born in El Alto, describes as follows the social values of El Alto: 'One of El Alto's potentials is that there is this persistence, this culture of helping each other. If I've got a problem people don't leave me alone, we all go and stay together. So all of us together can solve this problem...'

³³ Understood as the erosion of traditional structures and the development of market forces and individualism.

³⁴ García Linera, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

³⁵ 'What must be clear is that this government is extremely respectful of investment, of foreign interests. The foreigner, who wants to come here to Bolivia to invest, can do so and has all guarantees, but he has to respect the law and Bolivian norms and he also has to respect Bolivian interests. We understand they come to do business but it doesn't mean to come and abuse or to deceive people. And that is what unfortunately has happened with this and other issues, as a consequence of capitalisation' (Abel Mamani, Minister of Water and former leader of FEJUVE from El Alto).

³⁶ Pamela Calla et al: *Género, etnicidad y participación política*, Diakonía, La Paz, 2005, pp. 63–4.

³⁷ 'For the people, water is not a commodity, for the people water is no one's property, not even of the community. For people, water, and this is what I've learned from the ancestral values we have rescued, is that water is a gift from nature, is a gift from Mamapacha. We are the beneficiaries from mother earth, thus we cannot take away this gift. So, in people's view, no one can keep it for themselves, not even a community, least of all a foreign investor. So according to this understanding and to the community values, water is Pachamama's blood, therefore it's impossible to trade it off. This is something the powerful can't understand. This is what brings people together...the threat of life becoming merchandise. As people said, water and air is our only legacy, therefore it can't be made merchandise.' (Oscar Olivera, leader of the Cochabamba 'water war').

³⁸ These are the result of many factors, including the resistance of forces opposed to change, the exacerbation of some disputes between the government and regional movements, the fears of middle classes, and managerial weaknesses of the new authorities. However, Morales maintains a rate of approval over 55 per cent in the main cities of the country (and if this included the countryside, this rate would be higher).

³⁹ During the previous decade, national governments spent \$90m to legalise 9m Has. During his period (18 months) Evo Morales has handed over more than 5m Has.

⁴⁰ The debt relief from from the Inter-American Development Bank ranges from between \$253m and \$768m.