

# Party-Base Linkages and Contestatory Mobilization in Bolivia's El Alto

## Subduing the *Ciudad Rebelde*

by  
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*Confrontations between Evo Morales's Movement toward Socialism (MAS)-led government and sectors of his original support base have raised concerns regarding Bolivia's "process of change." An empirical analysis of the Regional Workers' Union and the Federation of Neighborhood Associations in El Alto reveals that extensive and intensive linkages forged between the MAS and its base during confrontations with conservative forces weakened their contestatory efforts and fostered internal splits that the MAS and the right-wing Unidad Nacional (UN) parties actively promoted. The upshot was the emergence of two versions of each organization that existed side-by-side, one aligned with the MAS, the other with UN, and the capacity of the base to hold the government to popular demands was greatly diminished.*

*Los enfrentamientos entre el gobierno liderado por Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) de Evo Morales y sectores de su base de apoyo original han suscitado preocupaciones con respecto al "proceso de cambio" de Bolivia. Un análisis empírico del Sindicato Regional de Trabajadores y la Federación de Asociaciones Vecinales de El Alto revela que los amplios e intensivos vínculos forjados entre el MAS y su base durante los enfrentamientos con fuerzas conservadoras debilitaron su capacidad de impugnación y fomentaron divisiones internas que tanto el MAS como los partidos de derecha de Unidad Nacional (UN) promovieron activamente. El resultado fue el surgimiento de dos versiones de cada organización que existen lado a lado, una alineada a favor del MAS y la otra a favor de UN. La capacidad de las bases para exigir al gobierno que atendiera las demandas populares se vio muy disminuida.*

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Over the course of the processes headed by Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, in Venezuela, tensions increasingly emerged between the left parties and sectors of their original support bases. In cases where left parties were elected in Latin America to boost the quality of political and social citizenship for the popular sectors, they have faced global, regional, and national pressures from the forces of capital to adhere to pro-market norms and adopt a centrist program (Cannon and Kirby, 2012). Elected leftist leaders have been presented "with the dilemma of whether to move forward with further radicalization or

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emphasize consolidation” (Ellner, 2013: 8). Indeed, given Webber’s (2019) analysis that over the course of their time in power left-party administrators have tended “to absorb and demobilize independent social movement and trade union activity,” an up-to-date appraisal of the left-led processes via the lens of local popular actors is required. Responding to such concerns, this article offers a macrolevel analysis of state-capital relations and a microlevel analysis of state-society relations in Bolivia during Evo Morales’s time as president.

Bolivia’s left turn initially followed “a classic mode of incorporation from below via a mass mobilization party” (Silva, 2017: 93), and the government presented itself as a “government of the social movements” (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2011: 11). However, in recent times the Morales government and its party, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism—MAS), have clashed with some elements of this base (Farthing, 2019). Indeed, Fontana (2013: 31) notes that “it is clear that the typical oppositional politics of Bolivian social movements have not changed even with a more progressive administration.” Álvaro García Linera (2011) describes these as natural “creative tensions” that act as a motor toward constructing socialism. However, some theorists (Veltmeyer, 2014; Webber, 2017) question García Linera’s analysis, stating instead that popular demands have been sidelined and that outcomes to date resemble a “reconstituted neoliberalism” (Webber, 2011). Responding to such debates, this article seeks to identify why party-base confrontations emerged, how the MAS responded, and what the impacts have been on Bolivia’s process of change.

### THE LEFT-LED STATE, ORGANIZED POPULAR SECTORS, AND ECONOMIC ELITES: A RELATIONAL ANALYSIS

To explore why constituted forces enter into confrontation with their constituent bases calls for a framework accounting for the relative power of economic elites, the organized popular base, and the left government. Jessop’s (2008) strategic-relational approach is useful in this regard. Jessop (2008: 1) starts from the proposition that the state is a social relation that “reflects the changing balance of power among social forces” (Andreucci and Radhuber, 2017: 282). He continues (2008: 6): “Putting states in their place like this does not exclude (indeed, it presupposes) specifically state-engendered and state-mediated processes. It does require, however, that they be related both to their broader social context and to the strategic choices and conduct of actors in and beyond states.” State managers’ selection of strategies, projects, and policies will influence the opportunities for groups to achieve their goals, and at the same time the balance of forces in society will influence the range of policy options available to state managers. While elected leftist politicians are key exercisers of state power, they act in relation to and influence a wider balance of social forces (the organized popular sectors and capital). Therefore, to study the relation between the left-led state, the organized-popular base, and economic elites, “we must consider how state powers are exercised and aligned (or not) with specific class interests in particular societies and conjunctures, and

vice versa" (Jessop, 2016: 96). To do this we must identify both what increases the power of capital and the popular base to exert pressure on state managers and what increases state managers' capacity to influence the power of both groups.

Where the instrumental and structural powers of capital are high, the range of policy options available to state managers who challenge the interests of capital is narrowed. Building on earlier debates among theorists such as Nicos Poulantzas, Ralph Miliband, and Fred Block, among others, Culpepper (2015: 396) says that structural power "results from the fact that firms and capital holders control the investment decisions on which the economy depends for growth"; instrumental power may be understood as "those non-core functions of the firm on which business relies to attain a political edge, such as campaign donations and the use of lobbying." Furthermore, as Robinson (2012: 353–358) notes, in a globalized setting the neoliberal drive toward a "single unified field for global capitalism" has significantly boosted the instrumental and structural power of transnational capitalists, thereby limiting the autonomy of state managers who face pressures to promote an environment friendly to transnational economic elite interests.

While capital's power influences the range of policy options available to state managers, the structure of the capitalist system is one of mutual dependency between state managers and economic elites; capital depends on state managers' providing a regulatory environment conducive to generating profits (Culpepper, 2015). Therefore, state managers are not wholly constrained by the power of capital and may strategically select policies that, in certain conjunctures, favor popular-class interests over those of capital (Jessop, 1990: 248–272). Indeed, state-capital relations cannot be understood outside of a wider analysis that accounts for state–popular-base relations.

A key measure of the popular base's ability to influence state managers is its capacity to engage in what Silva (2017; 2018) labels "informal contestatory interest intermediation"—"routinized interactions where the government proposes a policy, affected popular sector organizations protest vigorously, negotiation ensues, and government abides by agreements" (Silva, 2017: 96). This intermediation involves "principles, norms, processes and routines that are not enshrined in law" (Silva, 2017: 103) but understood by base and party alike. It is influenced by the mobilizational capacity of the popular base (Silva, 2017), which in turn is dependent upon that base's organizational strength and unity and its degree of autonomy from the left party (Anria, 2016; Farthing, 2019). The greater the disruptive scale, duration, and frequency of its mobilizations, the greater the capacity of the popular base to influence the decision making of state managers (Fairfield, 2015).

Whether informal contestatory interest intermediation is regularly used depends on the relationship between base and state, which in turn is influenced by state-capital relations. A common agenda or universal enemy facing the base and the party is more conducive to an ally-type relationship, and therefore lower levels of contestatory mobilization may be expected. In ally relationships it is also more likely that there will be extensive and intensive linkages between base and party. Extensive linkages are "loose political ties based largely on an exchange of particularistic goods" including clientelist/selective side-payments

and patronage payouts (Anria and Cyr, 2017: 1256, 1268). Intensive linkages include the integration of popular organizations into the formal bureaucratic party structure (Anria and Cyr, 2017). Where intensive linkages are built, popular organizations are more likely to become deeply invested in the party and to prove dependable allies. The formation of linkages between base and party is important in that it offers an alternative to informal contestatory interest intermediation as a means of bottom-up influence on party decision making (Pearce, 2004).

Conversely, where the power of capital over state managers is strong and the party adopts capital-friendly policies, an adversarial base-party relationship is more likely and interest intermediation more frequent. State managers in turn may seek to limit the space for successful intermediation. Furthermore, as Webber (2019) highlights, extensive and intensive linkages forged during ally-type state-society relations may actively disorganize the independent capacities of the popular base. Extensive linkages may buy off movement leaders and reduce the likelihood of contestatory mobilization, even where party decisions impinge on the well-being of the social movements' grassroots base, while intensive linkages are likely to weaken movements' autonomy. Moreover, if state managers are seen by ordinary members of social movements to be favoring capital over popular demands and the leadership of the movement fails to call for contestatory mobilization because of co-optation, tensions *within* the movement are likely. These tensions may fracture the unity and organizational strength of the base, thereby ensuring a smoother governance environment in which left-state managers seek to avoid radical challenges to the interests of capital. In other words, where popular organizations split, they are less capable of offensive mobilization to hold left-state managers to popular demands.

## ADVANCES AND SETBACKS IN BOLIVIA'S PROCESS OF CHANGE

The initial support bloc of the MAS was a heterogeneous coalition of popular actors with a core base and a strategic alliance with a more autonomous bloc of movement organizations (Anria, 2013). The MAS emerged from a resistance movement of coca producers and relocated miners in the Chapare province (Anria, 2013), and actors and organizations based in this province make up its core constituency. The focus here, however, is on strategic partners, because government-base tensions have most frequently developed with these groups. The analysis centers on the experiences of the popular organizations in El Alto, the *Ciudad Rebelde* (Rebellious City) (Lazar, 2006), that were at the heart of the anti-neoliberal protests that helped bring Morales to the presidency. Primary data collection centered on groups that still supported Morales and the MAS and groups that had initially supported the president and party but whose relationship had shifted from ally to adversary. Thirty-five interviews completed in 2017 focused on the key local popular organizations, the Federación de Juntas Vecinales–El Alto (El Alto Federation of Neighborhood Associations—FEJUVE) and the Central Obrero Regional–El Alto (El Alto Regional Workers' Union—COR). To increase the generalizability of the findings, interviewees were chosen from both grassroots members and the executive committees of

pro- and anti-MAS organizations. Furthermore, I interviewed persons who had played central roles in El Alto's popular organizations during the 2003–2005 period of mass anti-neoliberal protests, who were in a unique position to offer a critique of the evolution of the relationship between the MAS and the base in El Alto. I also interviewed local politicians from the MAS and the principal opposition party in the city, Unidad Nacional (National Unity–UN). To gain a more general idea of the sentiment in the city regarding the MAS, the COR, and the FEJUVE, I also engaged in daily informal discussions with Alteños at roadside stalls, during protests, and on minibus journeys to and from La Paz. In cases where respondents revealed potentially sensitive information I have chosen not to reveal their identity.

The FEJUVE can be traced to 1957, when the first inhabitants of the then seven zones of El Alto formed a neighborhood council to protest discrimination and to demand that the state provide basic services such as water and electricity. It currently encompasses approximately 800 local neighborhood zones organized into 14 districts (Mancilla, 2016). Above the district level is the executive branch of the organization. The FEJUVE statute adopts elements of *ayllu* logic such as communitarianism and the notion that leaders selected by the base are to be replaced every two years. Furthermore, Article 1 states that the FEJUVE is an apolitical institution and must prioritize the interests of the city's residents above serving any political party. The COR was founded in 1985 to represent the demands of El Alto's workers and street traders on the principles of autonomy and independence from all political parties. Indeed, its purpose was to perform a contestatory role representing worker demands before the state.

### 2003–2005: ANTI-NEOLIBERAL MOBILIZATION AND POPULAR DEMANDS IN EL ALTO

In October 2003, residents of El Alto “mounted massive demonstrations after the neoliberal president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada unveiled plans to give concessions to transnational corporations to pipe natural gas from the eastern lowlands to Chilean ports for export to the United States” (Postero, 2010: 61). The “terms of the concession to foreign capital, framed as a giveaway, turned the issue into a symbol of the popular sector’s exclusion from market society” (Silva, 2009: 134–135). There was rising disenchantment with market-oriented policies, while across the country there was utter exhaustion with the traditional parties (Webber, 2011), whose technocratic decision making excluded popular-sector voices. As Luis Flores, a central actor in the FEJUVE leadership during the 2003–2005 period, noted, “the organization leaderships and the grassroots base were united in the idea that the COR and the FEJUVE had to reclaim control over their organizations, which had been instrumentalized by political parties in the city” (interview, El Alto, August 23, 2017). Alfredo Cahuaya, a resident of District 4 and an active participant in the protests, said that “democracy had reached its limits in 2003, whereby the people, instead of being incorporated or included in the plans for the development of the city and the country, were excluded. The COR and FEJUVE leaderships simply followed the demands of the parties” (interview, La Paz, August 18, 2017). The parties in



turn “adhered to the demands of foreign capital” (Carlos Arze of the Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario, La Paz, interview, August 25, 2017). There was a sense among *Alteños* of both political and socioeconomic exclusion—that the city had been “forgotten” by successive governments that instead pandered to the demands of powerful national and foreign economic actors (Espósito and Arteaga, 2006: 79, 86).

In this light, the COR and the FEJUVE elected new leaders who were not beholden to any party and who outlined a set of demands calling for wholesale nationalization and the reclamation of control over the extraction and industrialization of Bolivia’s natural gas. Their demands, reflecting the concerns of the popular base, centered on state provision of nonprecarious employment and basic services such as sewerage, drinking water, gas connections, and lighting (Espósito and Arteaga, 2006). Known as the “October Agenda,” this set of demands became a unifying agenda that drove further waves of mass mobilization in the city’s “gas wars” between 2003 and 2005 (Silva, 2009). These protest waves were driven not simply by demands for more control over national resources and state provision of services but by the demand that the entire political structure be cleansed of corrupt parties and actors beholden to the interests of capital. In this setting, Evo Morales was elected, with support from El Alto’s organized popular sectors, with a mandate “to restore a measure of national economic and political autonomy, to open political participation and power to heretofore marginalized leftist and other popular sector leaders, and to protect the overwhelmingly poor and indigent mestizo and indigenous popular sectors from the ravages of the market” (Silva, 2009: 143).

### 2005–2010: THE MAS IN EL ALTO AND STRATEGIC RELATIONS

In response to the October Agenda and a constituent assembly process convened during Morales’s first term as president, the Eastern lowland elites in the Sucre area began to struggle for regional autonomy in a bid to avoid the proposed changes in the status of private property rights, land reform, and redistribution of state revenue. By August 2008 there was almost an undeclared civil war in the Eastern lowlands (Errejón and Guijarro, 2016). A strategic alliance was forged among the MAS, the COR, and the FEJUVE, who were united in a common struggle to push forward with constitutional reform in the face of elite resistance. Having witnessed the mobilizational power of El Alto’s organizations, Morales wanted to be sure he could count on the support of their leaderships (Anria, 2013) not only electorally but also in defending against the conservatives’ destabilization tactics. Meanwhile, FEJUVE and COR leaders saw in the MAS an opportunity to gain access to the state and push toward achieving both the October Agenda and El Alto’s development via state provision of basic services and nonprecarious jobs (Franklin Troche, international press officer for the COR, interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). Positions in government or direct access to decision making were exchanged for loyalty (Anria, 2013), which entailed mobilizing the base for elections, engaging in defensive protests against elite destabilization efforts, and ensuring that large-scale protests against the MAS policies would not erupt (former vice president of the

FEJUVE, interview, El Alto, June 27, 2017). The COR had had “very good relations with the central government ever since the gas war of 2003. We supported the government in the Constituent Assembly; we supported them in Sucre against the autonomists. The government and the COR, we were very close. We had to defend the process” (spokesperson for the COR, interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). Furthermore, a FEJUVE leader during Morales’s first term told me, “Look, Evo was not from here, he came here as an outsider, but we had to offer him support against the elites and the right. And we could, because we were all united around reclaiming democracy, reclaiming Bolivia from the neoliberals. When we called on the base to take to the streets, they responded.”

Summarizing Morales’s first term in terms of the strategic-relational framework, we can see that he sought to fulfill popular demands for increased political and economic inclusion, thereby challenging the interests of the traditional Bolivian elites. With the lowland elites engaging in aggressive destabilization efforts, Morales was vulnerable to the mobilization or defection of popular organizations. Moreover, the elite’s efforts to remove Morales from power and block constitutional reforms that would boost the inclusion of popular sectors meant that the MAS, the COR, and the FEJUVE were united against a common enemy. Popular organizations in El Alto and across the country were at the height of their mobilizational capacity during this period and therefore capable of both defending the government from destabilization tactics and holding it to their demands (Silva, 2017). With the popular movements capable of bringing the country and government to a standstill and of surrounding and isolating autonomist forces in the East, Morales called for a referendum on whether to accept the draft constitution, which passed in 2009.

During this struggle against autonomist forces, intensive and extensive linkages were forged between the MAS and El Alto’s popular organizations whereby COR and FEJUVE leaders received funding for local projects directly from the central government while positions in government were opened to local actors. In exchange for these linkages, the COR and the FEJUVE refrained from contestatory mobilization and engaged in defensive mobilizations in support of the government against destabilizing elite forces. However, these linkages would become an issue once elite destabilization efforts had been quashed.

## **2010–2016: EMERGENT TENSIONS AND FRACTURING RELATIONSHIPS**

Before Morales’s reelection in 2009, “Bolivian politics was characterized by sharp polarization between the opposition on the right and the government and its allies on the left” (Ellner, 2013: 17). However, with the promulgation of the new constitution and the retreat of the erstwhile secessionists into institutional channels of opposition, the MAS was no longer able to rally the base against a common enemy (Fontana, 2013). In fact, after the secessionist drive was defeated tensions escalated between party and base (Silva, 2017). To explain why, it is necessary to outline the nature of government–transnational corporation relations after 2010.

To fulfill the promises to boost social citizenship in the new constitution, Morales depended on revenues from the country's natural-resource industries. However, he had inherited an extractive industry with path-dependencies that imbued transnational corporations with high levels of structural power (Kaup, 2010). Natural-gas extraction requires continued large-scale investment in exploration, but the state gas company, YPFB, and the hydrocarbon sector in general had received very little investment since the late 1990s (Kaup, 2010). Furthermore, the gas industry was dominated by Petrobras and Repsol (Kohl and Farthing, 2012), which had long-term contracts giving them access to hydrocarbon reserves that bi- and multilateral trade agreements legally guaranteed (Kaup, 2013).

In this setting, where Morales was elected promising to eliminate the worst excesses of economic exclusion, the Bolivian economy was underdeveloped and reliant on commodity exports, the state extraction company was underfunded and outdated, and transnational extractive firms were contractually and infrastructurally embedded in the economy and had the extractive capacity and capital to invest in new explorations, Morales opted for a "neoliberal nationalization" (Kaup, 2010: 135). While taxes and royalties on transnational corporations were increased, boosting state income from gas exports from US\$673 million in 2005 to more than US\$5 billion in 2013 (Solón, 2016), wholesale nationalization was not attempted. The state sought only to regain control of previously capitalized assets, and the firms holding these assets extracted a small percentage of Bolivia's gas (Kaup, 2010). Most of the hydrocarbon value chain was not nationalized, and booming gas prices meant that transnational corporation profit levels were not drastically impacted despite the new tax and royalty contracts (Andreucci, 2017).

While Morales strategically calculated how far he could push given the structural power of transnational capital, transnational corporation elites engaged in similar strategic decision making given his increased political power. Until 2009, Repsol and Petrobras had taken an aggressive stance toward Morales, supporting the lowland political elites in their pursuit of autonomy. However, following the 2009 presidential and congressional elections and the 2010 departmental elections, the MAS dominated the political sphere and the transnational corporation elites came to realize that relying solely on an alliance with right-wing political parties to protect their interests was futile (Wolff, 2016). In this scenario, in which Morales was reliant on the transnational corporations but they depended on his maintaining a healthy profit-making environment, their relations evolved from confrontation to dialogue and, ultimately, outright cooperation (Solón, 2016; Wolff, 2016). The outcome of such strategically calculated, structurally oriented action (Jessop, 2008) was a compromised neoliberal nationalization that, while appeasing capital, would bring the MAS into confrontation with sectors of its own support base.

For many *Alteños* who had taken to the streets between 2003 and 2005, this neoliberal nationalization represented a reneging on Morales's earlier promises to adhere to the October Agenda. There was increasing sentiment that Morales had sided with the economic elites, eschewing popular demands for a state-led, diversified economy with industrial job creation, state provision of essential services and poverty reduction, and a new form of politics in which popular



voices would for the first time guide political decision making from below (Dangl, 2010). As one executive committee member of the 2003 FEJUVE said, “The MAS gave a few little crumbs, a stadium and other trinkets, but this is not what we fought for in 2003” (interview, El Alto, August 8, 2017). According to the *Alteños* drinking tea at a stall in La Ceja, El Alto, “Nothing changed here. Evo forgot us once he became president. We still have no jobs, no security. We are still poor.” As another member of the FEJUVE executive committee during the 2003 protests (interview, El Alto, August 24, 2017) put it,

The October Agenda demanded complete nationalization, not a negotiation on the price TNCs [transnational corporations] pay. The government has not demanded that the TNCs leave. This is not nationalization. All the TNCs and businesses have actually been given even more help by the government. The elites, now more than ever, have grabbed hold of the government. They have it in their hands; it is simply at the service of the TNCs.

This analysis was echoed by Carlos Rojas, a central actor in El Alto’s wave of anti-neoliberal struggles and long-time activist: “Not even a pencil belonging to the multinationals has been expropriated, and, as a result, the revolutionary program of 2003 has been destroyed” (interview, El Alto, June 28, 2017). His statement drew approval from a group of men who were listening to our interview, with comments such as “Bolivia’s riches for Bolivians” and “He [Morales] calls this socialism? Ha, he doesn’t know the meaning of the word.” State-transnational-corporation relations, perceptions that the government had failed to provide sufficient jobs and essential public services, and the belief that Morales had reneged on promises to guarantee spaces for popular participation in decision making led many *Alteños* I spoke with to describe Morales as “not much better than [former presidents] Mesa, Goni, and all the other neoliberals” (conversation with minibus driver, El Alto, August 4, 2017). Indeed, echoing Zibechi’s (2010) analysis, a key factor leading to disaffection with Morales was the feeling that decision making remained hierarchical and exclusionary.

Despite such sentiment among the people I spoke with in El Alto, the central vehicles for informal contestatory interest intermediation, the COR and the FEJUVE, in general did not call for mass demonstrations against government policy (Carlos Arze, interview, La Paz, August 25, 2017). According to Arteaga (2015), from 2010 on, following the end of the stand-off between the government and the Eastern elites, top-down control of El Alto’s popular organizations intensified and participation was instrumentalized. The MAS co-opted neighborhood organization leaders by offering jobs to those who supported them and offering to complete public works in the zones of leaders who remained loyal to the party (Anria, 2013). As a MAS politician on the municipal council of El Alto admitted, the MAS “committed many errors by co-opting and controlling the COR” (anonymous interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). According to a member of the FEJUVE leadership during the gas war, COR and FEJUVE leaders offered political positions were using the popular organizations as “trampolines to become deputies, senators, city-councilors, to run for mayor” (interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017). Clear linkages between the COR, the FEJUVE, and the MAS exist today. For example, the current head of the

COR, Eliseo Suxo, had formerly been a MAS deputy for the La Paz department. The “problem with all this is that the COR has lost its capacity to hold the government to account” (Carlos Arze, interview, La Paz, August 25, 2017). However, the spokesperson for the COR said that the organization engaged in informal contestatory interest intermediation but only when it was prudent to do so: “What would happen if we were to push Evo and he were to fall? The right would return, the military governments would return. So for the moment, we cannot push too quickly” (interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). Despite such reasoning, a current member of the COR executive committee told me (anonymous interview, El Alto, August 7, 2017) that Suxo was deeply damaging the organization because “one minute he is openly supporting Evo Morales, the next he is not. The COR has been sullied and dirtied, and it must be purged. We should have kept our autonomy. Perhaps after supporting the government during the Constituent Assembly, we got too close to be critical.”

Linkages between the MAS and the FEJUVE executive have also raised issues for contestatory intermediation. For example, in 2010, at the sixteenth FEJUVE congress, Fanny Nina was elected president. The new leadership of the FEJUVE was extremely critical of the MAS’s failure to adhere to the October Agenda, stating that “the MAS simply maintains the same capitalist economic system and the neoliberal political system” (FEJUVE–El Alto, 2010: 11). Furthermore, it said that, while the MAS was elected with the support of the indigenous populations and the popular classes, these groups were increasingly being excluded from political decision making and were in fact being taken over by the MAS to “legitimize itself as a government of the social movements.” This suggested that the MAS was offering political roles and funding to local actors who “simply look after their personal and family well-being” and therefore it was vital that “the executive power of FEJUVE practice political independence from parties of both the left and right at the national, departmental, and municipal level.” The concern of portions of the FEJUVE executive and the grassroots base was that the offering of access to political positions within the MAS (intensive linkages) and promises of direct funding to loyal leaders (extensive linkages) were debilitating the organization’s capacity to critique the central government’s relations with transnational corporations (Fanny Nina, interview, El Alto, July 25, 2017).

Elected in 2010 because of her forceful calls for a FEJUVE leadership that was more open and more responsive to its base, Nina quickly encountered resistance from sectors of the FEJUVE executive (Crabtree and Chaplin, 2013: 75). She was removed from her position by a bloc of the executive committee that accused her of working for personal interests and against FEJUVE (Fanny Nina, interview, El Alto, July 25, 2017), and Rúben Paz took over as president. (Paz would later become secretary general of governability for La Paz under the MAS mayor Zacarías Maquera.) Despite rising sentiment among members of the base that they had been cheated by Morales, with Nina removed as president and “with the new FEJUVE executive closely aligned with the MAS, the organization failed to offer any coherent challenge to the central government because its leadership had been co-opted” (Javier Tarqui, El Alto councilor for the Sol.Bo party, interview, El Alto, July 27, 2017).

The balance of forces shifted in Morales's second term. No longer facing immediate internal threats from autonomists, which lessened the government's reliance on the defensive mobilizations of the popular base, and facing imposing structural constraints set by the government's reliance on transnational corporation exporters, Morales opted to moderate the reform process. While he must have been aware that such a strategy would irk the popular base, by making use of linkages forged during his first term he was capable of limiting contestatory interest intermediation. In other words, he used state powers to curb popular power and prevent mass contestatory mobilizations from erupting in response to his new capital-friendly policies and exclusionary decision-making processes (Dangl, 2010).

### **2016–2018: CRACKS IN THE BASE AND PARALLEL ORGANIZATIONS**

In a scenario in which sections of FEJUVE and COR executives had been co-opted by the MAS but popular discontent was rising with regard to the nature of both government-capital relations and top-down government-base relations, ruptures emerged within the popular organizations. In conjunction with emerging rifts, Soledad Chapetón of the right-wing UN was elected mayor. Chapetón's election was the result of public frustration surrounding the performance of the MAS mayor (and former head of the COR) Edgar Patana, "who failed to provide works . . . or projects for the base" (Daniel Ramos, regional coordinator for the MAS in El Alto, interview, El Alto, August 10, 2017) and was facing corruption allegations. With cracks emerging in the COR and the FEJUVE and with the MAS and UN now seeking to forge intensive and extensive linkages, the popular organizations split into two competing bodies.

Using existing channels, the MAS continued to offer funding and support to a "loyal" bloc of leaders while using its media influence to sideline the voices critical of the moderated nationalization process, the tightening of relations between the government and transnational corporations, and the lack of economic diversification (Arteaga, 2015; Morales and Conroy, 2017). Meanwhile the bloc that sought to reclaim autonomy from the MAS was ultimately linked to UN, which, in control of municipal funds, offered financing to the "contestatory" branches of the COR and the FEJUVE. Divisions within the FEJUVE leadership led to a scenario in 2016 in which two congresses were organized simultaneously to select a new leadership, one based in the original site of the FEJUVE on Avenida 6 de Marzo and recognized by the MAS and a second based in Villa Dolores and recognized by Mayor Chapetón. Likewise, the result of the MAS linkages to "loyal" COR leaders who did not adhere to their own statutes fostered a schism in the organization that was encouraged by UN, which supported and financed the development of a parallel COR (Daniel Gutiérrez, international press officer for the FEJUVE-6 de Marzo, interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017).

Carlos Rojas, formerly of the FEJUVE-6 de Marzo, became part of the leadership of the FEJUVE-Villa Dolores and called the FEJUVE-6 de Marzo a "puppet" of the MAS. For Rojas, the true FEJUVE, headed by Benigno Siñani, was in Villa Dolores and was "contestatory, combative, and organic" (interview, El

Alto, June 28, 2017). Siñani said, “We leave politics in the house, and we enter the FEJUVE to work with no political allegiances. Unfortunately, the central government labels us as being right-wing. Any type of organization that is not supporting the government, they always label them right-wingers” (interview, El Alto, June 26, 2017). However, Daniel Gutiérrez of the FEJUVE–6 de Marzo questioned the contestatory nature of the FEJUVE–Villa Dolores, pointing out that at the initial congress establishing the new executive committee of FEJUVE–Villa Dolores, members of Chapetón’s team were present, congratulating the new leaders and drinking beer with them (interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017): “We call it the yellow FEJUVE after the colors of UN . . . a FEJUVE created by Soledad Chapetón.”

While there were claims and counterclaims from leaders of the two FEJUVEs, it appears that there is truth to both arguments. When I discussed accusations that the FEJUVE–Villa Dolores was a “yellow FEJUVE” with a UN politician on the city council, he said,

It is true that Soledad Chapetón asked me personally to take my role as councilor for UN. While you are correct to ask about autonomy and my links to the FEJUVE leadership in Villa Dolores and the UN, you need to understand that political parties will come and go, and so they can be used to achieve the goals and demands of the base.

In a similar vein, the head of the FEJUVE–6 de Marzo, Sandro Ramírez (interview, El Alto, July 26, 2017), said,

Just because we support the government does not mean that we are the MAS but rather that the government has opened doors for the benefit of El Alto. Listen, if the mayor [Chapetón] invited me tomorrow to do something that will benefit the city and I had to work with her in return, I would do it, because it is for the benefit of the neighborhood base that we must work.

Although such sentiments may be a political reality in the city, the formation of extensive and intensive linkages with the parties means that the popular organizations cannot act as a funnel for informal contestatory interest intermediation as they did in the 2003–2005 period. Co-opted organizations “must walk a tightrope, responding to popular needs and avoiding open confrontation with their benefactor parties” (Carlos Arze, interview, La Paz, August 25, 2017). Indeed, a leading figure in the FEJUVE–6 de Marzo stated, “We may not be in full agreement with the MAS all the time, and neither is our base. But neither can we organize a big mobilization against it, because this would mean that we would no longer receive support for other projects. Unfortunately, this is how politics works. If you go against the party, the government doesn’t help you” (anonymous interview, El Alto, August 12, 2017). The “problem with the divisions and co-opting in FEJUVEs and CORs is that today in El Alto there is no popular force. What can the organizations do when they are in the service of the parties? Nothing! What are they going to demand? Nothing!” (FEJUVE executive committee member 2003, interview, El Alto, August 24, 2017). The traditional vehicles for contestatory intermediation have been depoliticized and focus simply on sectoral demands, avoiding city-wide or national issues (Revilla, 2014). Parallelism fragments the social demands “into a multiplicity of

small claims, which state institutions can deal with by offering clientelist special benefits" (Arteaga, 2015: 581). Furthermore, the splits in the organizations foster a divided and confused grassroots base. With no unified popular voice, contestatory intermediation breaks down. As Carlos Barrerra (former vice president of the FEJUVE, interview, El Alto, June 27, 2017) summed up the situation, the loss of autonomy and the divisions within the FEJUVE and the COR means that "El Alto's organizations are pawns between political parties . . . co-opted and useless, incapable of defending our radical 2003 agenda."

### **KEEPING PARTY-BASE TENSIONS CREATIVE: LESSONS FROM BOLIVIA**

Given that the MAS emerged from a movement base, won elections at the national level, and, crucially, has remained in power for nearly a decade and half, examining the evolving relations between the party and its constituent base in Bolivia is key to our theorizing about how popular movements should interact with left parties. Throughout the period of Morales's leadership, as in other pink-tide cases such as Ecuador and Venezuela, tensions between the governing left party and sectors of its constituent base emerged. To help frame the causes and consequences of such tensions, a strategic-relational approach (Jessop, 2008) that accounts for the balance of power between the left-led state, the organized popular base, and economic elite forces is useful. Indeed, the Bolivian case highlights the risks facing popular organizations and movements in dealing with left-led states in an environment where "structural path-dependent economic constraints can impede fundamental transformations over the short and medium term" (Kohl and Farthing, 2012: 234).

While the MAS and El Alto's popular organizations were united in confronting a common enemy during Morales's first term and linkages between the party and organization leaderships were forged, over time these linkages became a barrier to reform. To maintain his legitimacy and to adhere to the 2009 Constitution, which guaranteed to increase the quality of social citizenship for long-excluded sectors, Morales required a rapid boost to state finances. Given the underdeveloped nature of the Bolivian economy, he sought to increase state income from hydrocarbon exports. However, as Veltmeyer (2014) argues, the superior negotiating position of the agents of global capital ultimately led the government to revert to the neoliberal policy agenda of previous governments without incorporating popular voices into the decision-making process. Understanding the state as a social relation (Jessop, 2008) that reflects the changing balance of power among capital and society helps us grasp this scenario. While Morales was ideologically committed to an anticapitalist model, his actions post-2009 favored domestic and transnational economic elites, reflecting the power of the groups on which his development strategy depended. Indeed, expanding resource extraction as the easiest way to boost state revenue without reclaiming full state control over natural-resource value chains meant that the government's alliance with transnational corporations steadily tightened while the political agenda of the MAS became increasingly centrist, focusing on policies that encouraged capitalist growth to



fuel government redistribution (Farthing and Riofrancos, 2017). However, these strategic selectivities by left-state managers fostered tensions with sections of a popular base that had demanded wholesale nationalization and direct inclusion in the setting of national policy.

García Linera (2011: 24) argues that friction between base and party should be understood as “creative tension” within “the national-popular bloc”—“tensions between the very sectors that are leading the process of change.” Such “creative tensions” may emerge between the centralized monopoly of power by the state and the decentralized nature of decision making by social movements and between efforts to maintain both the broad cross-class alliance necessary to push forward the process of change and the hegemony of indigenous working classes within it (Fuentes, 2014). These unavoidable tensions, according to García Linera, “have the potential to help drive forward the course of the revolution itself” if they are resolved through constant struggle and conflict (Fuentes, 2014). As Fuentes (2014: 118) says, “Herein lies the real importance of struggle from below, which brings such tensions to the fore and allows for the creation of a correlation of forces that can best enable the process of change to advance.” However, the case of El Alto’s popular organizations raises serious concerns regarding such “creative tensions.”

As state–transnational-corporation relations tightened and the limits of neoliberal nationalization became more apparent to sectors of the base, the intensive and extensive linkages forged between the MAS and the COR and FEJUVE leaderships during Morales’s first term became barriers to contestatory interest intermediation. Despite popular critique of neoliberal nationalization, co-opted COR and FEJUVE leaderships in general failed to call for mass mobilization to challenge state managers. Despite García Linera’s view that tensions from below can be used to drive the process forward, the El Alto case demonstrates that participatory spaces in Bolivia were open—but only to those who did not challenge the MAS’s relations with transnational corporations. Horizontal participation for popular actors within the MAS was replaced by vertical planning and decision making, opening spaces for corruption while curbing autonomy (Oikonomakis and Espinoza, 2014). As Farthing (2019: 223) has noted, movements became a “shadow of their former selves, with leaders either working within the government or in organizations controlled by the government or demoralized.” The balance of social forces shifted dramatically. Indeed, as Farthing (225) highlights, “what has primarily permitted the favoring of business interests within the MAS government has been the diminishing role of social movements.”

Moreover, by controlling the leaderships of popular organizations, the MAS precluded the emergence of mobilization precisely in response to the nature of the co-opted party-organization relationships. Trapped within this vicious circle, popular discontent built to the point where once unified and powerful organizations split, opening opportunities for right-wing parties to take advantage. While movement leaders in El Alto who accepted funding from the right-wing UN claimed that they were simply using the party to gain funding that the MAS denied them, they were in fact legitimizing the party, adding to the confusion of the grassroots, and furthering the splits in the once unified popular organizations. Fracturing organizational unity weakened the very popular power on which Morales’s electoral victories were built and, according to

García Linera, on which the future of the process depended. “Creative tensions” became “destructive tensions.” Indeed, the disarticulation of popular discontent restored the preexisting social and power relations between state, society, and transnational corporations (Andreucci, 2017).

The tensions in the Bolivian case highlight issues regarding movement–left-party relations in general. The extrademocratic destabilization tactics of conservative forces and the pressures imposed by transnational capital to curb efforts to increase the quality of social citizenship tend to foster a centralization of power in the executive (Brown, 2018; Cannon and Brown, 2017). This issue chimes with the concerns of Zibechi (2010; 2012) and Holloway (2002) that the state not be the focus of emancipatory struggles because by its very nature it reproduces vertical power relations. These writers tend to reject parties and propose “changing the world without taking power” (Holloway, 2002). Katz (2012: 48) argues, however, that both movements and parties are essential, stating that “no emancipatory project can evolve exclusively in the social realm, nor can it do without the specific platforms—the links between demands and power strategies—that party groupings provide.” Katz therefore advocates that the state be the target of all social demands, since its transformation is the condition for any anticapitalist transition.

While Katz is correct, Holloway’s and Zibechi’s concerns regarding vertical power relations between party and base cannot be ignored. It is clear that when the power of capital over left-state managers is high, the risks of tensions’ emerging between a left party and its constituent base are increased. Indeed, the Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Venezuelan cases all suggest that tensions between base and party will be inevitable given that the state is a social relation and that the idea of breaking the power of capital in one quick step is unrealistic (Jessop, 2008). It is therefore essential that popular movements remain/become strong in their own right, since only strong movements will ensure that a left state moves in a leftist direction (see Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Poulantzas, 1978). As Dangl (2010: 162) stresses, “With a mobilized public, it matters less what president is in office, as the president will have to answer to the power of the movements.”

A mobilized public requires that popular organizations remain internally democratic. In the Bolivian context, while Morales opened formal channels of participation for popular voices during confrontations with a common enemy, over time these party-base linkages ossified, leading to blockages in the flow of demands from below. As Jaime Solares, former leader of the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers’ Center—COB) and a key figure in the 2003–2005 anti-neoliberal protests, noted, “We allowed our popular vehicles to be taken over by Morales. Our organization leaders became distanced from their base. This was an error” (interview, La Paz, June 12, 2017). There “was no rotation of our leaders, as our statute says there must be. We did not throw out our leaders when they worked with the party, again breaking our statute. We did not take to the streets as we did in 2003, when our October Agenda was ignored by Evo. This was a grave error” (former FEJUVE executive committee member, interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017). While leaders of organizations in El Alto allied with the MAS may argue that “we cannot openly confront the MAS, since we cannot risk losing funding for our projects” (FEJUVE–6 de

Marzo leader, anonymous interview, El Alto, August 12, 2017), and that openly confronting the MAS must be tempered “because we do not want Evo to fall only for him to be replaced by the right” (spokesperson for the COR, interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017), ceding the autonomy of movements and refraining from contestatory intermediation is a poor strategy in the long term. When the forces of capital pressure a left party to moderate its programs without providing a vent for popular discontent regarding the direction of the process, internal organization tensions will increase and parallel organizations may emerge. This process reduces mobilizational power by fracturing the unity and organizational capacity of the base while opening opportunities for right-wing parties to gain influence over popular organizations. Indeed, right-wing parties will actively fuel these schisms and seek to establish linkages with “contestatory” parallel organizations whose leaders require funding to legitimize themselves. While movements must walk a tightrope in challenging a left party from the left without strengthening a common enemy on the right (Becker, 2013: 58), in the long run the failure to engage in offensive mobilization when left parties veer from their mandates may ultimately be the greatest support for the forces of capital.

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