

Chapter 9

Party-Base Linkages, Contestatory Mobilization and ‘Creative Tensions’ in Bolivia

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In the course of left-led processes in Latin America in the past two decades, relations between ruling left parties and constituent movements followed complex paths.¹ At times, popular organizations mobilized in defense of the party—electorally and on the streets—while at other moments there was friction. In the case of Bolivia, the 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.” However, tensions emerged between sectors of the movement base and the ruling party, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism—MAS). Fontana (2013: 31) argues that “it is clear that the typical oppositional politics of Bolivian social movements have not changed even with a more progressive administration.” The vice president during Morales’s presidencies, Álvaro García Linera, described these as natural “creative tensions” that act as a motor for constructing socialism. Others (Veltmeyer, 2014; Webber, 2017) question García Linera’s analysis, stating instead that popular demands for a more rapid transformation had been sidelined.

To understand the evolution of party-movement relations and to account for both convergence and divergence it is necessary to understand that the MAS-led process, and popular organization support for it, was underpinned by rejection of neoliberalism. Tensions emerged where the MAS diverged from an anti-neoliberal course. This raises several questions. Why did the MAS moderate the process? Did this moderation trigger party-base tensions? And if so, what form did they take, and how can we explain this?

To engage with these questions, it is necessary to locate analysis of party-base relations in a wider framework that accounts for the evolving power relations between the left-led government and a pro-neoliberal opposition bloc. To understand whether a left party governs from the left and retains popular movement support, we must understand the nature of opposition power. Moreover, movements and party may converge when confronting a universal enemy, allowing the forging of new party-base linkages, but we must address whether such linkages act as conduits for movements to shape the reform process from below or whether they are used by party officials to curb the contestatory mobilization capacity of movements. Responding to the above concerns, this chapter offers a framework for evaluating party-movement relations in conjunction with party-opposition relations before turning to an analysis of the Bolivian case via the lens of popular organizations in the city of El Alto.

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 between social forces. 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 structural power of capital is robust, 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 "capital holders control the investment decisions on which the economy depends for growth." 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 structural power of transnational capitalists, thereby limiting the autonomy of state managers, who face pressure to promote an environment friendly to transnational economic elite interests. However, 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) 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, which in turn is dependent upon that base's organizational strength and unity and its degree of autonomy from the left party (Anria, 2016). 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.

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 a base-party 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 extreme intensive linkages are built, popular organizations are more likely to become deeply invested in the party and to prove dependable allies.

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 contestatory intermediation more frequent. State managers in turn may seek to limit the space for successful intermediation. Furthermore, extensive and intensive linkages forged during ally-type relations may actively undermine 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 as 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.

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 strategic alliance with a more autonomous bloc of movement organizations. The MAS emerged from a resistance movement of coca producers and relocated miners in the Chapare province, 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 most frequently developed with these groups. The analysis centers on the experiences of the popular organizations in El Alto that were at the heart of the anti-neoliberal protests that helped bring Morales to the presidency. Primary data collection centered on groups that continuously supported Morales and the MAS and groups that had initially supported the president but whose

relationship 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.

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, 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, interview, La Paz, 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 context, 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. As Carlos Barrerra, vice-president of the FEJUVE in 2003 told me, “Our ultimate objective was to advance a revolutionary political program, to advance profound structural changes in the country. The neoliberal system had to end” (interview, El Alto, June 27, 2017). The COR and FEJUVE demands, reflecting the concerns of the popular base, also centered on state provision of non-precarious employment as well as basic services such as sewerage, drinking water, gas connections, and lighting. Known as the “October Agenda,” this set of demands became a unifying program that drove further waves of mass mobilization in the city’s “gas wars” between 2003 and 2005. 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 December 2005, 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, the Eastern lowland elites 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 a virtual undeclared civil war in the Eastern lowlands. A strategic alliance was forged between 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 ensure the support of their leaderships not only electorally but also in defending against the conservatives' destabilization tactics (Anria, 2013). 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 non-precarious 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 MAS policies would not erupt (former vice president of the FEJUVE, interview, El Alto, June 27, 2017). The COR had "very good relations with the central government ever since. We supported the government in the Constituent Assembly; we supported them 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). As Franklin Troche told me, "We are workers, we are leftists. We had to be beside Evo Morales and the government because it is a party of the left" (interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). The FEJUVE also shared an ideological affinity with the anti-neoliberal stance of the MAS. The "FEJUVE supported the process led by the MAS because it shared the same principles. This doesn't mean the FEJUVE was part of the MAS. But there was a shared philosophy" (Daniel Gutiérrez, international press officer for the FEJUVE, interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017).

Summarizing Morales's first term via 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 the popular sectors meant that the MAS, the COR, and the FEJUVE were united against a common pro-neoliberal 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 such as street repairs and water and gas installations directly from the central government while positions in government were opened to local actors. 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. 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. Furthermore, the gas industry was dominated by Petrobras and Repsol, which had long-term contracts giving them access to hydrocarbon reserves that bi- and multilateral trade agreements legally guaranteed (Kaup, 2013).

In this setting, while 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, and he could not push for wholesale nationalization (Kaup, 2010: 135). As Bolivia's former minister for mining, César Navarro, told me, "productive models do not change just because of good intentions or decrees. They are the material outcome of decades. Extractivism characterized colonialism, liberalism, state

capitalism, and neoliberalism” (electronic interview, September 2017). Nevertheless, 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. YPFB increased its role, both operationally and as an auditor, while it had a greater voice in determining the destination of investments. Moreover, service contracts of joint ventures between YPFB and transnational extractive firms allowed the state company “to participate in operations and develop its productive and technological capacities” (Paz and Ramírez-Cendero, 2021: 138, 144). Despite these advances, 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). Hence, most of the hydrocarbon value chain was not nationalized. The state’s increased share of hydrocarbon revenues, and the plans to direct these funds to social spending programs, did, however, represent a significant policy shift from the previous neoliberal governments.

While Morales strategically calculated how far he could push given the embedded, structural power of transnational capital, transnational corporation elites also engaged in strategic decision making. Until 2009, transnational extractive firms had taken an aggressive stance toward Morales, supporting the lowland political elites in their pursuit of autonomy. However, after the 2009 presidential and congressional elections and the 2010 departmental elections, the MAS dominated the political sphere, and 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 transnationals but they depended on his maintaining a healthy profit-making environment, their relations evolved from confrontation to dialogue and, ultimately, cooperation (Wolff, 2016). The outcome of such strategically calculated, structurally oriented action was a compromised nationalization that, while appeasing capital, brought the MAS into confrontation with sectors of its own support base.

For some Alteños who had taken to the streets between 2003 and 2005, the moderated nationalization represented a reneging on Morales’s earlier promises to adhere to the October Agenda. 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.

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). 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.

While there were tensions between the MAS and some sectors of the base regarding the scope of reforms and how decisions were made, it is important to stress that there was also convergence between the party and popular organization leaders who supported the project, even if they critiqued the speed of reforms. Franklin Troche of the COR captured this sentiment: "The government has to adhere to the October Agenda, this is the mandate from the city of El Alto. Some leftist organizations are reducing their support for Don Evo Morales because the industrialization of our natural resources has not yet been completed" (interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). He went on to say that, that despite the divergence between popular expectations and the realities delivered by the MAS government, "we must remain by the government's side. The workers of El Alto cannot align with parties of the right. We can have different lines of thinking toward the government, but our institution must always be of the left . . . and the MAS is leftist."

While some organization leaders accepted that the structural constraints on the MAS government limited its capacity to engage in more rapid nationalization, industrialization, and subsequent creation of nonprecarious employment as well as increased social spending, the fact remains that for many grassroots members of popular organizations in El Alto the process was moving too slowly. However, the central vehicles for 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). Arteaga (2015) states that from 2010 on, following the end of the standoff between the government and the Eastern elites, there were increasing efforts by the MAS to accommodate El Alto's popular organizations. According to a member of the FEJUVE leadership during the gas war, COR and FEJUVE leaders were offered political positions within the MAS, thereby using the popular organizations as "trampolines to become deputies, senators, city council members, to run for mayor" (interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017). However, Daniel Gutiérrez (interview, El Alto, August 9, 2017) of the FEJUVE told me that the organization

supports the social programs of the government, and we participate in the public announcements that the MAS organizes, and this has led to confusion regarding our relationship. We are not simply an allied entity. The FEJUVE will always be on the side of

defending our neighborhoods. For this reason, the FEJUVE has had an affinity with the MAS, but we are not part of the political party.

Although it is understandable that a popular organization with a socialist ideology would support the MAS, the nature of the linkages between some organization leaders and the party did cause frictions. Indeed, a MAS politician on the municipal council of El Alto admitted to me that the MAS “committed many errors by co-opting and controlling the COR” (anonymous interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017). 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). Despite such critiques, the spokesperson for the COR said that the organization did engage in 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 we cannot push too quickly” (interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017).

These nuanced viewpoints from local actors who all reject neoliberalism highlight the difficult balancing act facing popular organization leaders when a leftist party is elected to office. The incorporation of popular organization leaders into state structures, sometimes as MAS candidates, and the provision of much-needed funding by the MAS government to local organizations represents a significant deepening of the quality of democratic participation for long-excluded sectors. These intensive and extensive linkages, however, are double-edged, since they can also dampen the willingness of popular organization leaders to engage in contestatory mobilization. For example, a member of the COR executive committee told me (anonymous interview, El Alto, August 7, 2017) that Eliseo Suxo, head of the COR, 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 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 strictly 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.” It was therefore vital that “the executive power of FEJUVE practice political independence from parties of both the left and the 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. She was removed from her position by a bloc of the executive committee that accused her of working for personal interests and against the FEJUVE (Fanny Nina, interview, El Alto, July 25, 2017), and Rúbén Paz took over as president (Paz would later become secretary general of governability for La Paz under the MAS mayor Zacarías Maquera). According to Javier Tarqui, El Alto council member for the Sol.Bo party, the new FEJUVE executive was "closely aligned with the MAS" and "the organization failed to offer any coherent challenge to the central government" (interview, El Alto, July 27, 2017). Sandro Ramírez, executive of the FEJUVE, however, rejected such assessments, repeating a phrase I often heard during interviewing that "just because we are with the government does not mean that we are the MAS" (interview, El Alto, July 26, 2017). Ramírez noted that the FEJUVE supports the MAS because the government responds to the needs of the city (El Alto). The problem, however, was that while close linkages between the MAS and some local organization leaders had indeed brought benefits to the city, the scope of these benefits and the speed at which changes occurred were facing popular scrutiny. Disappointment with the depth of change with regard to hydrocarbon nationalization and the perceived lack of funding for El Alto's development raised questions about the relationship between the MAS and popular organization leaders.

The popular organizations in Alto that coordinated anti-neoliberal mobilization before Morales's election had raised popular expectations regarding a radical anti-neoliberal transformation. However, the balance of forces shifted in Morales's second term. No longer facing immediate internal threats from autonomists, thereby lessening 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 exporters, Morales opted to moderate the reform process. This strategy irked sectors of the popular base, but booming gas prices facilitated increased social spending, as Morales retained the steadfast backing of the core popular organizations who played a foundational role in establishing the MAS and whose voices were incorporated into the policy-making process. Moreover, by making use of linkages forged during his first term he was able to limit contestatory interest intermediation from strategically allied popular organizations, thereby ensuring a relatively smooth governing environment and continued electoral success. The problem with this strategy, however, was that limiting the scope for strategically aligned organizations to engage in contestatory mobilization caused discontent with the reform process to build up inside the organizations themselves.

2016–2018: Cracks in the Base and Parallel Organizations

In a scenario in which sections of the FEJUVE and COR executives had forged tight linkages with 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 Unidad Nacional (National Unity), with ties to business interests, 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 employment . . . 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 Unidad Nacional 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). Meanwhile the bloc that sought to reclaim autonomy from the MAS because of its alleged renegeing on the anti-neoliberal agenda was ultimately linked to the right-wing Unidad Nacional, which, once 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 the rightist-backed mayor, Chapetón. Likewise, the result of the MAS linkages to "loyal" COR leaders fostered a schism in the organization that was encouraged by Unidad Nacional, which supported and financed the development of a parallel COR (Daniel Gutiérrez, 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 Unidad Nacional. . . a FEJUVE created by Soledad Chapetón."

There were claims and counterclaims from leaders of the two FEJUVEs. When I discussed accusations that the FEJUVE–Villa Dolores was a "yellow FEJUVE" with a Unidad Nacional politician on the city council (interview, El Alto, July 20, 2017) they said,

It is true that Soledad Chapetón asked me personally to take my role as council member for Unidad Nacional. While you are correct to ask about autonomy and my links to the FEJUVE leadership in Villa Dolores and the Unidad Nacional, 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.

Meanwhile, the head of the FEJUVE–6 de Marzo, Sandro Ramírez (interview, El Alto, July 26, 2017), told me,

We support the [MAS] government because it has opened doors to El Alto's benefit. Listen, if the mayor [Chapetón] invited me tomorrow to do something that would 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 (whether of the left or the right) meant that the popular organizations did not act as a funnel for contestatory mobilization as they did in the 2003–2005 period. According to Carlos Arze, organizations “must walk a tightrope, responding to popular needs and avoiding open confrontation with their benefactor parties” (interview, La Paz, August 25, 2017). One social movement activist stated: “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). As Carlos Barrerra (former vice president of the FEJUVE, interview, El Alto, June 27, 2017) summed up, 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.”

2019–2021: Convergence against a Common Enemy But Divergence with the MAS

In 2019 Morales won elections with the support of many popular organizations. Previously, he had lost a 2016 referendum in which he sought a change to the constitution to allow him to run for reelection. The Supreme Court ruled, however, that the constitution allowed for reelection without term limits, a move that unified the divided political opposition while delegitimizing Morales in the eyes of some critical former strategic allies. The 2019 election results were immediately disputed by the Organization of American States (OAS), whose “deep concern” about a “change in trend” in voting patterns created the impression that fraud had taken place. A report later released by researchers at MIT's Election Data and Science Lab would prove that the OAS analysis was deeply flawed, discrediting it and its secretary general, Luis Almagro (Williams and Curiel, 2019).

With the Electoral Court's announcement of the results in favor of Morales, and with the OAS casting doubts over their legitimacy, large-scale protests erupted in urban areas. While the initial protesters were middle-class voters angered by perceived fraud, they were subsequently joined by formerly strategically allied popular organizations that resented the failure to comply with the results of the 2016 referendum. The protests, however, were eventually co-opted by far-right elements embodied in Luis Camacho, head of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz. Camacho bound together sectors of the opposition bloc that had remained somewhat muted post-2008 because of Morales's political power and popular support. Camacho and allied racist figures incited violent protests across the country and called on the police to "stand on the side of the people." With police mutinies in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and Sucre and police mingling with protesters in La Paz, General Williams Kaliman "suggested" that Morales step aside, and he did. While there is no doubt Morales was ousted, the issues of top-down interference in popular organizations and parallelism dealt him a double blow. On the one hand, a once powerful and unified base was fractured and made less capable of mass-defensive mobilization. On the other, precisely in response to efforts to curb popular organization autonomy, some popular organizations engaged in offensive mobilization against Morales.

With the ouster of Morales, Jeanine Añez was declared caretaker president. Añez, from the Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity) party headed by the ultraconservative Rubén Costas, governor of Santa Cruz, immediately installed a new cabinet with deep ties to Bolivia's right-wing sectors. The Añez government persecuted MAS leaders, arbitrarily detained critics of the coup government, shut down critical media outlets, called members of the MAS "animals," and deployed the armed forces to repress anticoup protesters at Sacaba and Senkata in El Alto, killing at least 23 and injuring hundreds (Achtenberg, 2020; International Human Rights Clinic and University Network for Human Rights, 2020).

The reemergence of the racist right provided a common enemy that witnessed a re-convergence between divided wings of El Alto's popular organizations. In the course of 2018–20, the FEJUVE had fractured into three blocs; the "contestatory" bloc aligned with Unidad Nacional, which had lost relevance, and two blocs that contested control over the FEJUVE–6 de Marzo. One wing, headed by Fernando Condori, sought to reclaim organizational autonomy from the MAS, while the other, headed by Basilio Villasante, retained tight linkages with the MAS. These struggles were pushed aside temporarily as the leaders of both factions called for mass demonstrations demanding immediate presidential elections. The elections were finally held in October 2020, with the MAS ticket of Luis Arce and David Choquehuanca winning more than 55 percent of the vote.

In El Alto, Morales had lost some legitimacy because of his decision to run for reelection in 2019, while the perceived renegeing on the October Agenda and the formation of extreme intensive and extensive linkages with some popular organization leaders had led to tensions between the government and sectors of the popular base. The convergence of the MAS and El Alto's popular organizations had from the outset been based on resistance to neoliberalism, and divergences between party and base emerged when the party was perceived to be moving away

from its anti-neoliberal path. However, while the tensions, and MAS's response to them had damaged the legitimacy of the party and its leadership in the eyes of some former supporters, the MAS remained the only viable national party capable of acting as a bulwark against the neoliberal right's reclaiming state power. In the face of a universal common enemy, both wings of the FEJUVE-6 de Marzo backed the MAS ticket in the October 2020 elections. Moreover, El Alto voters dramatically increased their electoral support for the MAS candidates in comparison with the 2019 election, in which large sectors of the electorate had rejected Morales. This unification of El Alto's citizens and organizations to confront a common enemy is crucial to understanding the city and its capacity to influence national politics. As Franklin Troche of the COR told me (interview, El Alto, July 13, 2017),

While we may have our own tensions in El Alto, when confronted with danger we offer our hands to each other and the people unite. This has happened many times. When the autonomists were dividing our country (in 2008), we were divided here in the city too. However, in the face of danger, we forget our divisions and come out together; we know who the enemy is, those with a different political tendency.

Unification to confront a common enemy, however, does not mean that tensions between popular organizations and the MAS disappear once the critical confrontational moment with the neoliberal right has passed.

Following Arce's election, the two blocs of the FEJUVE-6 de Marzo called for the organization's unification. Condori stated, "I am not part of the MAS, but I am part of the process of change, and because of this, we have decided with Villasante to unify this emblematic institution." Meanwhile, Villasante, echoing earlier statements by FEJUVE leaders aligned with the MAS, highlighted that the only party willing to work with the FEJUVE for El Alto's development was the MAS and that the two organizations would work together. This achievement of unity, however, proved short-lived. The old issue of linkages and autonomy between the FEJUVE and the MAS reemerged, with Condori accusing Villasante of using the organization to gain political positions with the party (ElAltoDigital, 2020; ExitoNoticias, 2020). During the mayoral elections in March 2021. Eva Copa, a former MAS senator from El Alto, with the backing of the Condori-led wing of the FEJUVE, split from her party to run for El Alto's mayorship on the new Jallalla La Paz ticket. She claimed to be responding to demands from the grassroots of local popular organizations to reclaim organizational autonomy from the MAS. Morales verbally attacked Copa and predicted that the MAS's candidate, Zacarías Maquera, would easily win, but Copa triumphed with 68.7 percent of the vote.

Keeping Party-Base Tensions Creative: Lessons from Bolivia

Throughout the period of Morales's leadership, as in other PinkTide countries, 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 the economic elite 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, over time the linkages forged between the party and organization leaderships became a barrier to contestatory mobilization. To maintain his legitimacy and to conform to the 2009 Constitution, which sought to enhance the quality of social citizenship for excluded sectors, Morales required a rapid increase in state finances. In the context of an underdeveloped economy, he increased state income from hydrocarbon exports. Veltmeyer (2014) argues, however, that the superior negotiating position of the agents of global capital ultimately limited the capacity of the MAS government to respond to popular demands for a fundamental restructuring of the hydrocarbon sector. Understanding the state as a social relation that reflects the changing balance of power between capital and society helps us grasp this scenario. While Morales was ideologically committed to an anticapitalist model, his actions post-2009 appeared in many ways to have favored domestic and transnational economic elites, reflecting the power of the groups on which his development strategy depended. These strategic selectivities fostered tensions with sections of a popular base that had demanded (perhaps unrealistically, given the structural power of capital) wholesale nationalization and direct inclusion in the development 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 (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 key issues regarding the implications of García Linera’s concept that tensions from below can be used to drive the process forward.

As MAS-transnational relations tightened and the limits of moderated 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 the extent of reforms, the strategically allied COR and FEJUVE leaderships in general failed to call for mass mobilization to challenge the government. The El Alto case demonstrates that participatory spaces in Bolivia were open—but principally to those who did not challenge the MAS’s relations

with the transnationals. Popular discontent built up to the point where, once the unified and powerful organizations split, opportunities opened for right-wing parties to take advantage. While movement leaders in El Alto who accepted funding from the right-wing Unidad Nacional claimed that they were simply using the party to gain funding that the MAS denied them, they were in fact contributing to the legitimization of that 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, as García Linera points out, the future of the process depended.

While the reemergence of the far right in 2019–2020 led to a reconvergence to confront the common enemy between the divided popular organizations and the MAS, once the critical confrontational moment had passed the issues of organizational autonomy and the depth of the anti-neoliberal project under the MAS came to the fore again. Indeed, while the MAS emerged as a political vehicle for social movement demands to move beyond neoliberalism and remains the dominant party at the national level, MAS-base tensions opened space at the local and regional levels for new parties representing popular demands. Looking ahead, the direction of Bolivia's process of change will depend on how the MAS leadership responds to criticism from below and from its left, both in the electoral arena and on the streets. Failure to reopen spaces for critical internal debate may mean a further fracturing of the popular bloc, thereby reducing the possibilities of challenging pro-neoliberal opposition forces.

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). In contrast, Katz (2012: 48) argues that both movements and parties are essential; “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.” He 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 most pronounced, the risks of tensions' emerging between a left party and its constituent base are increased. It is therefore essential that popular movements be strong in their own right, since only strong movements will ensure that a left-led state moves in a leftist direction (see Ciccariello-Maher, 2013; Poulantzas, 1978). 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, told me, “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). As the El Alto case demonstrates, when the forces of capital pressure a left party to moderate its programs, without a vent for popular discontent regarding the direction of the process, internal organization tensions will increase and parallel organizations controlled by the right may emerge. This process reduces mobilizational power by fracturing the unity and organizational capacity of the base. Although this occurred at the national level as well, Morales hardly abandoned his anti-neoliberal commitments, thus explaining why social movement activists who were critical of his government rallied behind his party's return to power in 2019–2020. While movements must walk a tightrope in challenging a left party from the left without strengthening a common enemy on the right and while “unity, unity, unity” is necessary at national election time, the use of excessive party-base linkages to curb contestatory mobilization may ultimately act as the greatest support for the forces of capital in the long-run.

Note

1. This chapter is a revised version of an article that appeared in *Latin American Perspectives* 47 (5): 40–57 (2020).

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