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Latin American Readings of Gramsci and the Bolivian Indigenous Nationalist State

MICHELA COLETTA & MALAYNA RAFTOPOULOS

This article engages critically with recent theories on the eclipse of Gramsci's notion of hegemony in the face of twenty-first-century practices of grassroots activism. It demonstrates how hegemony, and other concepts reworked from Gramscian thought, have been used as the theoretical basis to assimilate indigeneity into a new form of nationalism in Bolivia. The first section examines the role of Gramsci's thought in the emergence of Latin American decolonial thinking while the second section maps out its most influential Bolivian interpretations. Finally, the third section shows how these principles have played out in the MAS movement and during Morales' presidencies (2006-2019). This article argues that the Morales administration, by weaving concepts of Gramscian provenance such as 'motley society' and the 'apparent state' into the Plurinational principle, has created a new nationalist conservatism in the form of a hegemonic indigenous state that contradicts the basic theoretical and legal premises of Plurinationality.

Keywords

Bolivia, Gramsci, hegemony, integral state, motley society, Plurinational State

Introduction

Twenty-first-century Latin American social and indigenous movements are increasingly framed within global political narratives. Until the early 2000s, scholarship tended to focus on localised identities and on the counter-hegemonic claims that emerged among diverse intranational communities with respect to state centralism (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Stavenhagen 2002). With the recognition of indigenous peoples in international law since 1989, the internationalisation of indigenous networks and identities has arguably been the greatest organisational shift in indigenous and environmental movements with the support of NGOs (Canessa 2018, 313). As it has been shown in the case of the Bolivian Plurinational state, for example, indigenous communities 'must live up to certain state-recognised or NGO-defined forms of organisation, administration and identification' (Weber 2016, 156). The political use of indigenous linguistic concepts, such as the Kichwa *suma kawsay* (living well) in Ecuador, has also given rise to new forms of interaction and negotiation between indigenous groups and state actors which are not without problems and contradictions (Radcliffe 2016).

What we are seeing is a global indigeneity with environmentalism at its core whose 'current expressions owe much more to visions of indigeneity developed in New York and Geneva than in indigenous peoples' cultural and political pasts' (Canessa 2018, 314). Such was the case in Evo Morales' Bolivia, where social and indigenous movements have been drawn under the national government's control through the creation of organisations and networks resulting in alliances that have lost or abdicated their original counter-hegemonic radicalism (Farthing 2018, 10-12). From this perspective, this paper will analyse how indigeneity was incorporated into the Bolivian state to legitimise and consolidate a new form of state hegemony that undermines the principles of its Plurinational constitution. By considering the ways in which the Bolivian Plurinational state mediated between indigenous movements' environmental stances and extractivist developmentalism, this article will engage critically with recent theories about the irrelevance of Gramscian hegemony in the face of twenty-first-century practices of grassroots activism (Day 2005) and it will show how the

principle of hegemony, and more widely Gramscian thought, was key to building the theoretical foundations of a new form of nationalist state indigeneity in Bolivia. The first section will examine the role of Gramsci's thought in the emergence of Latin American decolonial thinking while the second section maps out its most influential Bolivian interpretations. Finally, the third section shows how these principles have played out in the MAS movement and during Morales' presidencies (2006-2019). By weaving concepts of Gramscian provenance such as those of 'motley society' and the 'apparent state' into the Plurinational principle, the Morales administration has fomented a hegemonic discourse of indigeneity to create a new form of indigenous nationalist conservatism.

Gramsci and decolonial critique in Latin America

In 1963 a group of young Marxist dissidents based in the Argentine city of Córdoba, all in their early thirties, started the cultural magazine *Pasado y Presente* (1963-1973), which would soon become one of the most influential journals for the theoretical and cultural renovation of Marxism in Argentina and across Latin America (Burgos, 2004). Oscar del Barco (1928-) and Aníbal Arcondo (1940-1994) were its founders; Héctor P. Agosti (1911-1984), José Aricó (1931-1991) and Juan Carlos Portantiero (1934-2007) were soon recruited as editors and contributors. Agosti, whose intellectual standing was widely recognised both inside and outside the Argentine Communist Party (PCA), called on Aricó to join the periodical publication and produce a translation of the works of Gramsci, whose thought would form the ideological core of *Pasado y Presente* (Massholder 2011, 39). Aricó had first come across Gramsci in 1950 in the PCA's periodical publication *Orientación*, and later Agosti commissioned him translations for the PCA's *Cuadernos de Cultura* (Massholder 2011, 49). Gramsci's *Prison Letters* (1926-1934) and his *Prison Diaries* (1929-1935) were extensively translated and discussed within a hybrid intellectual context of structuralism, existentialism and psychoanalysis. The industrial setting of the city of Córdoba, with its automobile industry workers and a strongly politicised student population (the first claims for the university reform of 1918 had emerged in Córdoba) (Mignolo 2012, 209), provided a context of dissent from the party's orthodoxy: this younger generation of Marxists placed greater emphasis on historical and cultural legacies as well as on intellectual and moral reformation.

For Aricó, the relation between the intellectuals and the masses was one of the core Gramscian notions that had special relevance for Latin American societies, where the popular and working classes needed to be incorporated into the hegemonic structure in order to consolidate class consciousness for subaltern groups and give rise to a new revolutionary historical bloc (Freeland 2017, 37-40). The notion of 'hegemony', understood as the consolidation of socio-economic relations of power through the symbolic sphere, became popular in Latin America before it did anywhere else (Concheiro Bórquez 2013, 261). Hegemony accounts for the facts that ideologies and world views cannot just be explained by coercion; for these early Latin American interpreters of Gramsci there was an additional connection between their societies' structural and super-structural elements: the state was a political and cultural product of the west, of which Latin America occupied the periphery (Mignolo 2012, 206-207). This emphasis on cultural relations to both understand and transform economic and social organisation was therefore very productive to address the modern state in Latin America.

The Argentine Marxists' translation of Gramsci, as well as the forced exile of many members of *Pasado y Presente* to Mexico in the 1970s, resulted in the circulation of his thought in the region. In Mexico, the only fully unabridged edition of the diaries was published and a special sociology course called 'Gramsci-Lenin' was created at the UNAM under the direction, among others, of Ecuadorian Agustín Cueva (1937-1992) and Bolivian René Zavaleta Mercado (1935-1984) (Concheiro Bórquez 2013, 265-266). During this time in Mexico, interpretations of Gramsci's notion of hegemony merged with José Carlos Mariátegui's idea of 'Indian socialism', giving rise to new

visions and readings of Latin American societies (Burgos 2004, 284). Zavaleta Mercado's analysis of the Latin American state - which is central to MAS appropriations of indigeneity as will be shown in the next two sections - drew on Gramsci to emphasise the bidirectional relation between state and civil society, while it also stressed the heterogeneous complexity of peripheral nation-states determined by pre-capitalist organisational structures (Freeland 2014, 294-296). Argentine theorist of the philosophy of liberation Enrique Dussel (1934-) was also exiled in Mexico in the mid 1970s and his work has since been informed by both a 'humanist re-reading' of Marx (Mills 2016, 57) and the Gramscian notion of hegemonic consensus. For Latin American thinkers like Dussel, the notion of hegemony was applicable not only to the state but also much more broadly to the dominant model of modernity: 'the Other of Liberation Philosophy is not only the other of Reason but the Other of the "life community" [...]. Furthermore, this Other is not irrational but is in opposition to the dominant reason ("hegemonic" as Gramsci would say), and that establishes a liberating reason (new and future rationality)' (Dussel 1998, 15-16).

The historical significance of the modern project in Latin America has given special relevance to the idea of a hegemonic cultural model that was European and western and which needed to be challenged in its entirety in order to both understand the historical foundations of structural relations in Latin America and create anti-hegemonic models of society. For Argentine-born Néstor García Canclini (1939-), Mexico-based founder of Latin American cultural studies, the category of hegemony was more appropriate than that of domination in describing the 'political and ideological direction' of those who exercised power through 'alliances with the other classes' (García Canclini 1984, 73-74). Everyday life practices such as consumption were seen as a space of interaction through symbolic and material exchange, as well as of protest and subversion. New forms of consumption and communication meant, according to García Canclini, that the relationship between different social groups was complex and fluid in a way that was unprecedented. The notion of hegemony made room for forms of cross-fertilisation between the dominant and the subaltern. These were essential to explaining not only the coexistence in Latin America of capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of social, political and economic interaction, but also the insurgence of new interconnected forms of protest through 'multiple irruptions' (García Canclini 1984, 75) that do not fit in with the homogenising top-down logic of the nation-state.

This work has led to original and wide-ranging articulations of decolonial critiques of the state based on the notion that the nation-state is the political product of hegemonic Euro-modernity and that a counter-hegemonic project must account for the plurality of Latin America societies, for which a class-based critique is not enough. For Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (1930-2018), Euro-centric modernity is a project based on the 'coloniality of power' as a system that is founded on the epistemic colonisation of peripheral countries and regions and which requires an 'epistemic decolonisation' (Quijano 2000). The state as the Euro-centric hegemonic pivot of the socialist revolution is replaced by Quijano by a much broader Latin American project of decolonisation that disrupts the cultural foundations of modernity, which has race at its core. In articulating the concept of modernity/coloniality, Quijano developed the category of coloniality of power to explain the practices and legacies of European colonialism. As Quijano notes, 'the modern world-system that began to form with the colonisation of America, has in common three central elements that affect the quotidian life of the totality of the global population: the coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism' (2000, 545). The imposition of this hegemonic model, which involved a historical reidentification through the allocation of new geo-cultural identities, continues to be present today, marked by the ongoing pronunciation of western epistemology, the rhetoric of modernity - its most recent form being globalisation - and the capitalist economy which has spread all over the world under neoliberalism.

Latin American decolonial critique of the European modernity/rationality system has been centered around the myth of modernity and its claims of universality and cultural superiority (Dussel 1993, 65-66). The category of Eurocentrism, produced during the intellectual conceptualisation of the process of modernity, can be understood as ‘a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonising and overcoming other previous or different conceptual formations and their respective concrete knowledges, as much in Europe as in the rest of the world’ (Quijano 2000, 549-550). Within this rationality it was possible to omit every reference to any other ‘subject’ outside the European context (Quijano, 2007). Mignolo (2011) argues that this resulted in the creation of epistemic frontiers that hid geo- and body politics of knowledge, subordinating non-Eurocentric languages and cultures as well as eliminating diverse ways of producing knowledge and of knowing. As Grosfoguel comments, ‘the success of the modern/colonial world-system consists in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant position’ (2007, 213). For Escobar, territory must be considered more than a physical space: ‘[it] is both material and symbolic, biophysical and epistemic, but above anything else it is a process of socio-cultural apprehension of the nature and the ecosystems that each societal group implements from its own “cosmovision” or “ontology”’ (Escobar 2014, 91). Using Gramscian categories, Dussel defines the agency of the dismantling of the dominant bloc as the ‘social bloc of the oppressed’ (Dussel 2006), which includes marginalised sections of societies that do not fall within the traditional class boundaries, such as indigenous peoples.

Gramsci in Bolivia: internal colonialism, passive revolution and motley society

The rearticulation of indigeneity into state discourse under Bolivia’s president Evo Morales (2006-2019), this paper argues, was rendered possible by the deployment of Gramscian notions. In August 2006, the former *cocalero* leader was inaugurated as Bolivia’s first self-identifying indigenous president, placing indigeneity right at the core of the government’s decolonial strategy and drawing Bolivian intellectuals into the decolonial project. This section will show how the MAS movement’s ideological foundations, as well as its critiques from the left, have been shaped in fundamental ways by Gramscian interpretations of the Latin American state. Scholars such as Félix Patzi, Javier Hurtado and Juan Ramón Quintana quickly filled the ranks of the MAS party. Perhaps most symbolic was García Linera’s appointment as vice president in 2006, one of Bolivia’s leading Marxist sociologists whose work draws heavily on Zavaleta Mercado’s scholarship and Fausto Reinaga’s radical Indianism. García Linera’s appointment was reflective of the social influence held by the intellectual collective *La Comuna*, which he founded alongside Luis Tapia, Raúl Prada Alcoreza and Raquel Gutiérrez Aguila. This intellectual bridging created ‘the fusion of indigenous radicalism and Marxism’, leading many to believe that ‘MAS’s political project contained radical potential’ (McNelly 2017, 433). Goodale notes that *La Comuna* should be understood as ‘a hinge that formed the intellectual linkage between the diverse aspirations of Bolivia’s social movements and the government [...], a novel form of vanguardist articulation, one in which what Gramsci would have called “assimilated” traditional intellectuals occupied an intentionally equivocal space within the wider revolutionary process’ (2019, 55).

The Gramscian articulation of the state and civil society as two realms that intersect through hegemonic dynamics but never overlap is central to the ways in which Bolivian Gramscian Marxists built their critiques of the Latin American state. According to Hall, ‘the lack of assumed correspondence in the Gramscian model between economic, political and ideological dimensions’ allows to approach the relationship between race and class, especially in post-colonial societies, ‘as a process of unification (never totally achieved) founded on strategic alliances between different sectors, not on their pre-given identity’ (Hall 1986, 25). If we understand nationalism, in Gellner’s definition, as ‘the general imposition of high culture on society, whose previously low cultures had

taken up the lives of the majority' resulting in 'the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society [...] held together above all by a shared culture of this kind' (Chatterjee 1993, 5-6), the strained unifying tension of the hegemonic state is even more overt in post-colonial societies. It has been shown how the *Comuna* project, especially in the works of García Linera and Tapia, used Gramsci's notion of passive revolution to account for how the emergence of a counter-hegemonic socio-political bloc from the subaltern sectors, both urban and rural, 'produced a catastrophic equilibrium in Bolivia' (McNelly 2017, 438). From these foundations, the MAS political project unfolded as the fulfilment of Gramsci's notion of integral state; in order to break the colonial mould of Bolivia's impersonal society persisting in the 'apparent state', the MAS intelligentsia, led by García Linera, built on Bolivian Gramscian Marxist Zavaleta Mercado's understanding of Bolivian society as a type of *sociedad abigarrada* (motley society).

Zavaleta Mercado used Gramsci's theory about the shifting intersections between the state and civil society to articulate the idea that Latin American national formations, especially in countries like Bolivia, emerged as *sociedades abigarradas*, or motley societies, 'a juxtaposition of different worlds, cultures, memories, temporalities and histories' in which an 'apparent state' tried to impose itself by denying local forms of authority of, for example, indigenous communities (Fabián Cabaluz 2018, 249). Gramsci's idea that the nation-state was the outcome of a political, or formal, unity but also the relationship between political society and civil society, allowed Zavaleta Mercado to interpret the 1952 Bolivian revolution as a moment of synthesis between state and civil society, which he defined using Gramsci's notion of the 'national-popular' (Avila Rojas 2017, 449-450). His works on the nation-state, which have been reprinted since the early 2000s under the aegis of *La Comuna* members like Luis Tapia, a leading scholar of Zavaleta Mercado's thought, present a Gramscian interpretation of the Bolivian, and more generally Latin American, state. The *estado aparente* (apparent state), due to its colonial origin, was a superficial reflection of the Bolivian historical blocs who had effectively been excluded from the state by foreign oligarchies. In Mexico, Zavaleta Mercado worked closely and with sociologist Pablo González Casanova, who helped popularise the notion of internal colonialism, a condition of uneven development based on the exploitation of oppressed ethnic and social groups (1965).

MAS's Plurinational project, including its international resonance, cannot be understood without the use of these original notions produced within a Gramscian framework. In 2008, the office of the vice president of the Bolivian Republic launched an international seminar series; in the first event, 'Imperio, Multitud y Sociedad Abigarrada' (Empire, Multitude and Motley Society), internationally-renowned scholars Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Judith Revel and Giuseppe Cocco were asked to engage on these topics with Tapia and García Linera. For Hardt, Zavaleta Mercado's articulation of *abigarramiento* was fundamental to understanding a number of social spheres, including the decentralisation of the labour market and, more generally, the increasingly heterogeneous nature of labour within the capitalist system. More importantly, a historically heterogeneous country like Bolivia shows that 'it is not possible to envisage political organisation, or even capitalist production, without considering ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, plurality or *abigarramiento*' (Negri et al 2008, 42). For García Linera, indigenous identity needed to be central for building a new historical bloc that would allow Bolivia to enter a new political phase: 'an anti-colonial, anti-neoliberal and democratic revolution with a socialist-communitarian scope' (2015, 78). Freeland (2019) analyses the intellectual itinerary through which, she argues, García Linera misused categories derived from Gramsci and Zavaleta Mercado, such as that of *abigarramiento*, advancing the hypothesis that this served the purpose to protect the state from radical social transformation. However, in the pages that follow, we show how the co-option of indigenous radicalism by MAS has been geared not only towards the preservation of central governance but towards the design of a new form of hegemonic indigeneity resulting in a centralising nationalist political and economic project.

The integral state and the co-option of indigeneity in Morales' Bolivia

Brought to power with the support of social movements, Morales and his *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism, MAS) pledged to end the colonial state and neoliberal model in Bolivia. Both Morales during his 2006 inaugural speech, and Gracia Linera later in his work on creative tensions of the revolution, spoke of an 'institutionalised apartheid that segregated the indigenous majorities from the powers of the Republican State since its foundation' (García Linera 2011, 7). In comparing Bolivia to apartheid-era South Africa, Morales talked about the country's political landscape and the patterns of race and racism which had structured Bolivian society for 500 years and discriminated against the indigenous population. It was the dismantling of these racialised state mechanisms through 'the Indianisation of the State' that was at the very centre of MAS's process of change and decolonial policies. Morales' political and intellectual establishment succeeded in creating a new model of hegemonic state based on the notion of indigeneity by merging the Plurinational principle with Gramsci's integral state. As García Linera proclaimed, 'Bolivia becomes real only at the moment it becomes indianised; it can archive a full unification of society only as long as it assumes as one of its vital sources the indigenous nations that thrive within' (2014, 58).

Since the colonial period, defined categories of race, which were first introduced under the *casta* system, were used to consolidate Bolivian identity and create a hegemonic nation state. Historical social divisions structured around evolving categories of race produced distinct racialised social identities and hierarchies which looked to conceal Bolivia's vast ethnic diversity and redefine the meaning of indigeneity (Canessa, 2014). The racialisation and subsequent 'indigenisation' of Latin America's autochthonous populations created and enforced contested categories of difference within Bolivian society, excluding indigenous people from the power structures of the state and the Bolivian political economy (Postero 2013; Postero 2017; Lalander 2017). The redefinition of indigeneity in terms of class under the hegemony of revolutionary nationalism in the period following 1952 and through the construction of the social category of *campesino* (peasant), created new structures, identities and subjectivities that were based upon a distinction between highland *campesino* and lowland *indígena* populations (Burnam 2014, Postero 2017). In arguing that two divergent projects of indigeneity have emerged in the Bolivian Andes, a hegemonic one that does not question the state's sovereignty over territory and natural resources and a counter-hegemonic project which collides with the government by advocating the reorganisation of territory beyond the state, Burman (2014) shows the relevance of class in these contentious dynamics. Adopting a similar view, Postero Postero argues that MAS created the authorised decolonial subject -*descolonizado permitido*- to support the state and legitimise its political, social and economic agendas (2017). For Ravindran (2020), although the government held onto the centralisation of state power above the promotion of decentralised indigenous autonomies, it promoted indigenous ritual practices and the revival of traditional indigenous knowledge systems. However, as will become clearer in García Linera's framing of the TIPNIS project, the MAS establishment often adopted an anti-colonialist language in order to bypass class and create a national indigenous identity across the spectrum of social, economic and ethnic difference.

In the opening statement to his 2010 address as Vice-President of the Bolivian Plurinational State following Morales' re-election in 2009, García Linera, who had been 'the primary public voice of the MAS's new economic development program' since the 2005 campaign (Webber, 2015(a), 584), cited 'Bolivian thinker' Zavaleta Mercado's notion of *estado aparente* (apparent state) to explain Bolivia's political organisation until the year 2005: 'such illusory state is a state that fails to condense, that fails to achieve a synthesis, that fails to bring together the whole of society and which only represents a privileged section of society, [...] discriminating and leaving aside other social sectors, other territories, other regions and other political practices' (2010). On the other end, the

estado integral (integral state), based on Gramsci's terminology, is a synthesis of all the different social groups under a 'moral and intellectual leadership that unites all' and which is built 'from below' (García Linera 2010). The 'democratic de-concentration of power' of the integral state means that the 'monopoly of the state is gradually diluted by social movements', to which García Linera promised his 'obedience' (2010). As it has been argued, '[t]he paradox of García Linera's state theory consists in that while the state as such is devoid of agency, it is only through direct occupancy of the state apparatus that popular agency—conceived as sovereignty—can be imagined' (Freeland 2017, 119). In 2015, García Linera discussed the idea of plurality in his work on the Plurinational state and Bolivian identity, and explained that:

When we speak of the Plurinational state, we are also talking about a state with indigenous peasant hegemony, that is, as intellectual and moral leadership in the Gramscian sense of the term and with the ability to gather and attract intellectuals, academics, neighbours, business people, labourers, factory workers, transport workers. We are uniting the whole of society around this nucleus. This is both the richest part of our Constitution and the richest part of the Constituent Process for organising the state and building the state from the indigenous movement rather than just as resistance of an autonomous state (2015, 316).

For García Linera, '[the] integral State, which in Bolivia has the form of a plurinational, autonomous and community state of law, is a period of transition, a bridge in which we will work and build our community socialism' (2015, 319). The re-founding of the state through the pluralisation of state structures and political-territorial redesign was designed to recognise and enhance Indigenous nations as 'substantial components of Bolivian society', placing them at 'the organisation core of the state power system and the government regime' (García Linera 2014, 44). The nation, according to García Linera, has a 'performative' function resulting, in Gramscian terms, in a 'transcendental political common sense' promoting a 'mobilising collective identity' (2014, 24). This was reflected in the architecture of the Plurinational Constitution which was based on the three-major axis of plurinationality, autonomy and the new productive economy model, developed through seven axes: the field of rights, congressional representation, justice and legal pluralism, education, democratic institutionality, land ownership and indigenous autonomy. In a move towards 'breaking the secular exclusion of indigenous nations' from the organisation of the state and creating a new national culture based on indigenous knowledge, traditions and practices (García Linera 2014, 50), the Constitution recognised indigenous peoples as a nation and also their rights as a nation within the state structure, creating two levels of nation: the cultural nation and the state nation (García Linera 2015, 314). Assuming a Gramscian approach to the state consolidation of indigenous identities, Graciá Linera argued that:

Instead of opting for national indigenous self-determination (which would have meant the separation of Bolivian identity), the struggles opted for the option of the Indianisation of the Bolivian State, and the increasing Indianisation of Bolivian identity, as the place of unification of the diverse indigenous and non-indigenous identities, parallel to the cultural reinforcement of the indigenous identity itself. In that sense, far from renouncing the state dimension, the main indigenous identities - organised as an indigenous movement - decided to leave the latent option of national self-determination on the way, which would have opened the possibility of territorial fragmentation, opting for another form of state realisation of the indigenous national identity, which had not been foreseen

or was in any manual: the popular-indigenous state victory (Plurinational State and government of social movements), within the framework of territorial unity with the rest of the nations (Bolivian nation-state identity) and the respect and cultural reinforcement of indigenous identities (2014, 53-54).

The Constitution codified into law the granting of autonomy to departments and indigenous communities, while recognising 36 languages and indigenous nations. The incorporation of indigenous peasant autonomy (*autonomía indígena originaria y campesina*, AIOC) into the Bolivian constitution was viewed as ‘one of the mainstays for the realisation of the plurinational State; since it involved not only the recognition of cultural type of territorial autonomy but the challenge of decolonising the historical colonial and neo-colonial territorial power schemes’ (Mealla Tapia and López Flores 2016, 95). It represented an important step towards guaranteeing self-determination within the framework of state unity, and legally recognised the rights of *indígena-campesino-originario* (originary indigenous peasants) to their own culture, language, political systems, institutions and territorial entities. However, it has proved difficult for indigenous communities to strategically use these rights because of the prioritisation of public works, development and economic well-being by MAS through the rhetoric of economic liberalisation otherwise known as progressive extractivism (Postero 2017). The reluctance of Morales’ government to decentralise political decision-making was evident by their unwillingness to relinquish control and rights over non-renewable natural resources as well as key areas such as health, education, and the environment (Burnman 2014). Therefore, despite the granting of autonomy under the Constitution, MAS failed to account for other types of sovereignty other than the nation-state principles of territorial boundaries and interstate recognition and shied away from reformulating sovereignty as an epistemic and relational, as well as political and territorial, set of relationships (Coletta and Raftopoulos 2017). While 36 indigenous have started the process for accessing self-government, 21 by means of municipal conversion and 15 by territorial means under the status of Community Lands of Origins (TCOs), only three have been successful in establishing their self-government and five in achieving autonomy status (IWGIA 2020). Furthermore, in defining who was to be classified as indigenous and a means of engineering a unity in diversity, the constitution grouped together both *campesinos* and *originarios* under a single term, recognising *indígena-campesino-originario* as a new political subject and declaring: ‘[They are] the rural native indigenous people and nationality consisting of every human collective that shares a cultural identity, language, historic tradition, institutions, territory, and world view, who existence predates the Spanish colonial invasion’ (cited in Lalander 2017, 470). While the plurality within unity approach to citizenship in Plurinational Bolivia may have established a series of rights for *indígena-campesino-originario* peoples, not all indigenous groups, however, fall within the same narrative and have the same performative power in the MAS Plurinational state.

Placing interculturality at the centre of the internal decolonial struggle, the Constitution also codified into law far-reaching indigenous political, cultural and developmental rights, including broader social rights, or class defined rights, such as the right to decent living conditions and well-being as well as the right to free, prior and informed consultation but not consent (Lalander, 2017). Critically, this allowed the state to maintain its sovereignty over its natural resources while paradoxically contributing to the subordination of ethnically defined rights in favour of class-based human rights, thus endangering the possibility of an intercultural state. This paradox spilled over into socio-territorial conflicts such as the TIPNIS (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure), which saw communities struggle to defend their indigenous identity and territories against the government’s development policy of economic liberalisation based on the extraction of raw materials and the violation of recognised collective and territorial rights (Mealla Tapia and López Flores 2016). The TIPNIS conflict laid bare the contradictions of the MAS government and ‘called into question

the supposed process of building a “plurinational State” (Mealla Tapia and López Flores 2016: 86). Furthermore, to strengthen plural cultural identities and transform the relationship between development policy and social wellbeing, the indigenous notion of *vivir bien* [live well] became the guiding policy principle of national development plans and represents the state’s basic ethical and moral principles and orientation (Gudynas 2011; Coletta and Raftopoulos 2016). The principles of *vivir bien* were legally incorporated into the Bolivian Constitution through the adoption of the Law of Mother Earth (2010), later upgraded by the National Legislative Assembly as the Framework Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development to Live Well (Lalander 2017). On an international level Morales employed the language of indigeneity to construct an alternative environmentalism to western dominant environmental discourses, promoting indigenous sustainable practices and traditions to frame its alternative environmental principles (Coletta and Raftopoulos 2018). These discourses of indigeneity, decolonisation and global climate change would later be replaced by the dominate discourse of progressive extractivism (Postero 2017). This decisive policy shift was cemented when the government passed a law on hydrocarbons (Supreme Decree 2366) in June 2015, which led to the opening up 22 protected ecological reserves to hydrocarbon exploration, and later in 2018, lifted the ban on unconventional gas exploration, also known as Fracking (Coletta and Raftopoulos 2017).

Discussing the changing structure of the state and composition of the leading social bloc of state formation, García Linera observed that ‘not only are we facing a new structure of alliances between social classes, with the capacity of political, intellectual and moral leadership of the State, but for the first time in state history we have a composition of indigenous classes and nations as the leading social bloc of the State’ (2014, 49). However, while García Linera argued that the ‘process of change’ had begun to dismantle the patrimonial state, he also acknowledged that it had led to the emergence of creative tensions and contradictions which he described as a new fifth phrase in the revolution process. This fifth stage, unlike the earlier stages of the revolution which were characterised by the antagonistic tensions between the blocs of power, was marked by secondary contradictions and creative tensions within the national-popular bloc.

The first of these creative tensions identified by García Linera was between the state and social movements over decision-making. By his own admission, ‘the state is by definition the concentration of decision-making, the monopoly of coercion, public administration and the dominant ideas articulated in society. On the other hand, social movements and social organisations are by definition the democratisation of decisions, the amplification and socialisation of deliberations and decisions on common issues’ (García Linera 2011, 28). The second was between the social breadth of the revolutionary process, which increasingly began to incorporate more sectors including business into its realm, and the need to guarantee and strengthen the core of the revolution, in particular, the indigenous, peasant, and popular working class leadership. For García Linera, ‘there will always be a reluctant segment of any indigenous and popular leadership, and they will act as a transmission belt for external powers. But the continued consolidation of the plebeian leadership requires that the other social classes, while being re-educated in the collective interests as the supreme unit of the country, consider that their own personal situation is better conducted under the national command of the working classes’ (2011, 40). The third, which García Linera identified as a particular problem since 2010, was between ‘the general interest of the whole society and the particular interest of an individual segment of it, between the demands that seek to satisfy the needs of the whole people as a way of resolving one’s demand, and the mobilisations that aim only to meet the needs of a particular group, a sector or an individual’ (2011, 41). The last creative tension was based on the need and willingness to industrialise raw materials following the nationalisation of natural resources between 2006 – 2009, while preserving the notion of *vivir bien*. Industrialisation within the framework of a plural economy and with the government in control of strategic sectors would allow the state, through

the surplus generated, to ‘gradually detach itself from the capitalist logic of private appropriation as an economic norm’ and prioritise use value and needs over exchange value (2011, 66). García Linera, who concluded that the way to resolve these secondary contradictions was through the socialist integral state, also used his work on creative tensions to explain the conflict between the state and social movements over the construction of the highway crossing the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure, TIPNIS). However, as the TIPNIS conflict showed, García Linera’s vision of the Plurinational integral state gradually co-opted territorial groups aligned with the state by polarising the country’s social, political and ethnic narrative (McNelly 2017, 442) and building an increasingly conservative discourse around national hegemonic indigeneity.

Until work began on the controversial 300-kilometre highway through the TIPNIS national reserve in the Bolivian lowlands in 2011 connecting the city of San Ignacio de Moxos in the department of Beni to the town of Villa Tunari in Cochabamba, the tensions between indigenous groups in Bolivia remained largely invisible (Canessa 2018). The TIPNIS conflict, which represents one of Bolivia’s most emblematic cases of contentious politics during the Morales era, pitted lowland indigenous groups native to the TIPNIS against one of MAS’s core supporters, the *cocaleros*. Whereas highland Aymará and Quechua indigenous coca growers viewed the road as an opportunity to improve market access and bring services and economic benefits to the area, lowland indigenous communities and environmental groups opposed to the road argued that it would contribute to deforestation, ecological destruction, loss of traditional lifestyles, as well as open up the park to more extractivism and further colonisation by coca growers from the Chapare province. Furthermore, TIPNIS leaders accused the Bolivian government of failing to respect their rights as required by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Bolivian constitution following the announcement of the construction of the road in 2008.

In 2012, García Linera wrote extensively about the TIPNIS controversy and used, among others, two main lines of argument to support the project. Firstly, there was a historical demand for the road that dated back more than 300 years. Tracing its roots back to the 1700’s, García Linera argued that historical evidence showed that the route had been used for the movement of troops to defend Bolivian territory against incursions and also for trade. Furthermore, although unsuccessful for lack of finance, resources and political instability, several attempts were made to establish a connection between the two regions during the colonial period and the republican era. Secondly, the argument that the controversial road would challenge the geopolitical threat posed by foreign interests in the Amazon (2012, 53-60). Blaming the loss of Bolivian territory during the Chaco War and more recently the occupation of the Amazon by foreign governments and capitalists on the failure to unite the highlands and the Amazon, García Linera saw the road as an essential mechanism of territorialisation for the state and a means of securing its sovereignty over the region as well as dismantling the despotism that controls the semi-industrialisation of Amazonian products (2015, 60). García Linera’s approach becomes openly nationalistic when he takes on the international NGOs for trying to teach Bolivians how to protect their own environment and what he calls the ‘right-wing coalition’ for being on the side of corporate and imperialistic interests and opposing the states presence in the Amazon (2012, 65-66). For García Linera, the real threat to the Amazon does not come from the state’s nationalisation of the territory and control over its natural resources but rather from the ‘international imperial-business structure, which has made environmental management in the world the most lucrative business in the world’ for the industrialised capitalist countries of the North and multinational biotechnical companies (2015, 66). This right-wing colonial environmentalist discourse constructed on the notion of protecting the ‘lungs of the world’, García Linera contended, has led to the extension of extraterritorial control while relegating ‘indigenous peoples to the role of caretakers of the Amazon forest’ and legitimised the absence of the state in the

Amazon region (2015, 11 & 66). As Webber has observed, '[i]ndigenous self-government in Bolivia was to be defended by President Evo Morales [...] only when the claims are to territories marginal to the state's development project' while 'communities of resistance are vilified as internal enemies acting in concert with the interests, or even in the pay of, various instruments of imperialism [...] within the matrix of the new extractivism' (Webber 2015(a), 592).

Conclusion

For more than a decade, social and indigenous movements in Latin America have been the site of discourses and demands that have challenged the underlying principles and the material structures of capitalist modernity. Scholars from Latin America and the global south have recognised 'an important pattern in contemporary Latin American social mobilization, the ongoing challenge to the dominant regime of modern power/knowledge' (Aparicio and Blaser 2008, 60). The *vivir bien* principle, for example, has far-reaching political potential in that '[its] perspective is not only post-capitalist [...] but also post-socialist' (Gudynas 2011, 446). These new forms of social and epistemic mobilisation push for decolonising projects that disrupt centralist governance and advocate pluralism. The decolonial principle of plurality differs from the neo-liberal principle of multiculturalism in that the latter reproduces modern social, economic and ethnic hierarchies while the former breaks them apart. Tensions, however, have erupted when these attempts at creating 'alternatives to modernisation' are met by a state project of 'alternative modernisation' such as 'under the direction of the established Left and Morales' government' (Escobar 2010, 4). In analysing some of the critical tensions embedded in the revolutionary process as outlined by García Linera, for example, Webber has argued that '[t]he notion of a plural economy advanced by García Linera and others within the Morales administration cannot account for the tendencies of concentration and centralization within capitalist accumulation' (2015(b)).

According to García Linera, 'deep down, everybody wants to be modern' (Aparicio and Blaser 2008, 60). The contradictions between Morales' government's international stance as anti-imperialist and decolonial and its internal policies have become impossible to ignore: '[t]he [TIPNIS] conflict has shown that the executive has a growing interest in extending its control over national territory and natural resources - and social and indigenous movements located in those areas - through large-scale development projects' (Ranta 2016, 435). As this article demonstrates, the MAS establishment has substantially drawn on Gramsci's Marxist critique of the modern state in order to institutionalise indigenous radicalism and pull it into a conservative, and even nationalist, project whereby hegemonic indigeneity is transformed into a new form of indigenous nationalist conservatism based on anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist claims through which the MAS establishment succeeded in repositioning itself within the neoliberal structure of global environmental capitalism. Thanks to this carefully built Plurinational narrative, in November 2019, soon after what the ruling party and its supporters hailed as a military coup, García Linera published an article in which he described the event as an act of 'revenge against indigenous Bolivians' (2019). Using an anti-hegemonic narrative, García Linera talked about the rise of a 'racialised fascism' whereby the 'meaningful democracy' built by the Morales administration was being brought down by the 'old middle classes': '[w]e thus face a collapse of what was characteristic of colonial societies: ethnicity as capital, that is, the imagined foundation of the middle class's historical superiority over the subaltern classes. And here in Bolivia, social class is only comprehensible and visible in the form of racial hierarchies' (2019). In this article we have shown how the MAS intelligentsia, in fact, legitimised the project of extractive modernisation by co-opting indigeneity into a new form of state hegemony. The Gramscian reconceptualisations of post-colonial society, in which the historical layering of multiple racial and cultural identities helped fill in the void left by classic Marxism's focus on class divisions, are what made that possible.

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