THE LITHIUM ECONOMY: BOLIVIA'S "NEW" RESOURCE AND ITS ROLE IN REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

Zsofia J. Szoke

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THE LITHIUM ECONOMY:
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by

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ABSTRACT

Through an ethnographic analysis of the lithium industry this dissertation recounts the complex way lithium industrialization has interacted with Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution, officially known as the proceso de cambio, and with localized social forms and structures, which the national-level revolution seeks to reconstitute. I will argue that it is important to examine the implications of lithium industrialization’s intersection with local experiences of revolutionary politics. The dissertation’s main contention is that the industrialization of lithium in Bolivia has been conceptualized as an insurgent tool of political change and social transformation by the Morales-Linera regime and as such it has penetrated deep into local social forms, such as the very constitution of state power, personhood, time, and cosmology. In this context, the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has been embedded in both secular and nonsecular beliefs. Thus, ideologically, lithium industrialization has transcended the temporal limits of the Marxist stress on a future horizon as a time of radical change. This tendency has strongly affected how the industrialization of lithium has been experienced and contested within the lithium industry.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACI Systems Advanced Clean Innovations Company

COB Central Obrero Boliviano, Bolivian Worker’s Union

COMCIPO Comité Cívico de Potosí, Potosí Civic Committee

COMIBOL Corporación Minera de Bolivia, Bolivian Mining Corporation

COVID-19 Coronavirus disease 2019

EGTK Ejército Guerrillero Tupak Katari, Tupaj Katari Guerrilla Army

GNRE Gerencia Nacional de Recursos Evaporíticos,
   National Evaporative Resources Management Board

IMF International Monetary Fund

LITHCO Lithium Corporation of America

MAS Movimiento al Socialismo, Movement for Socialism

MNR Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, National Revolutionary Movement

NASA National Aeronautics and Space Administration

OAS Organization of American States

ORSTOM Office of Scientific and Technical Research Overseas

TIPNIS Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory

TSE Tribunal Supremo Electora, Supreme Electoral Tribunal

SEMAPA Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado,
   Municipal Drinking Water and Sewerage Service

UJC Unión Juvenil Cruceñista, The Santa Cruz Youth Union

UMSA Universidad Mayor de San Andrés

YLB Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos
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**Introduction**

**Preface**

I arrived in the remote city of Uyuni for the first time in 2017 from La Paz via one of Bolivia’s most notoriously uncomfortable bus rides on an unpaved dirt road. Uyuni is a rundown little town seven hours south of the nearest city. It feels like the end of the world. The 5:30 am arrival was not into a warm, brightly lit terminal, but to the corner of two dirt roads. As I looked around freezing, there were no open coffee shops, no open snack bars selling hot beverages and sandwiches, only hungry, raw-boned dogs roaming around piles of garbage in the deserted and dusty streets. There were no Teleferico systems or shopping centers, hospitals, or even guaranteed access to basic services.

There were piles of garbage at every corner. Looking towards the outskirts of the city, garbage often referred to as “plastic flowers” concealed miles of the desert landscape. Only one road leaving town was paved. The residents who lacked proper sanitation facilities often used garbage filled ditches as a toilet. Although the department of Potosí has seen small improvements over the years, it remained one of the poorest in Bolivia. When there were powerful winds, there was no electricity, when there were low temperatures, there was no tap water. Most communities surrounding the Salar de Uyuni were still lacking in various measures of development and suffered from high poverty rates, limited health infrastructure, and an insufficient educational system.

The communities were lacking basic services even though the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia is the planet’s largest salt flat holding the world’s principal supply of lithium, the metal that promises to transform - and has already greatly changed - the storage of electricity for transportation and other uses. Empty, haunting, and spectacular against the abyss of the
sun’s cosmic backdrop, the salt flat is like an alien planet where the laws of earthly physics bend. During the wet season when the salt is covered with a thin layer of water the Salar reflects the sky back at itself like a cosmic mirror. Then during the dry season polygonal patterns of salt rise from the ground. This deserted place is truly a dazzling, otherworldly display of nature’s awesome, and vexing magic. No wonder that it is considered one of the most extreme and remarkable vistas in all South America, if not Earth.¹

Bolivia is part of a larger region, the “lithium triangle,” along with Chile and Argentina. The Bolivian lithium reserves are higher in altitude and contain more magnesium and potassium than in neighboring Chile, making the extraction process much more complicated and costly. Bolivia has limited infrastructure compared to the other countries, thus environmental, social, and technological challenges make it extremely challenging for any company to mine lithium at a profit. Yet, the first self-declared “indigenous” president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, asserted that he was committed to ensuring that the Bolivian people fully earned the benefits of the country’s lithium. He nationalized ownership of that metal as well as other natural resources.²

Overall, reality has been at odds with the government’s promises concerning departmental development even though the Morales-Linera administration referred to the progress in lithium industrialization as a “dream-come-true” not only for the whole country but for the struggling southwest region of Potosí. The industrialization of lithium was seen as the route to paved roads, prosperity, and the end of poverty. This sentiment was echoed

¹ The Salar de Uyuni stretches for more than 4,050 square miles of the Altiplano about 12,000 feet above sea level in the southwestern Potosí region.
² Throughout this dissertation, when I use the term “indigenous”, I am referring to social subject categories that take on specific meanings in the Bolivian context. I am aware that it is a highly contested concept in Bolivia, as elsewhere which for some might have negative connotation (Postero 2017).
through government policy and action, with the impassioned declaration of “¡100 percent Estatal!” or full control by the Bolivian state of the lithium industrialization, that would occur in Salar de Uyuni. My conversations with residents illustrated how keenly aware they are that relative to other departments in Bolivia, the region struggles with various measurements of development and has numerous unmet needs. There were constant references to the poor state of the roads, electricity, communication, water, sanitation, and education. Indeed, the improvements in the region have been mostly limited to rhetoric, new billboards, soccer fields, and road signs.

Changes in Bolivia’s political economy under the Morales regime (2006-2019) created new challenges for workers, investors, social movements and for scholars who work to understand the unfolding developments. These developments continue to include the fundamental tensions between attempts to achieve social and cultural justice and an extractivist national developmental model in a nation-state which for the first time in history is controlled by Aymara actors but is constrained by old conflicts and contradictions that are being complexly reconfigured. Hence, Bolivia’s lithium industry provides an ideal lens to explore the local manifestations of revolutionary politics intertwined with local cosmologies.

At the heart of the dissertation are ethnographically driven inquiries: What can we make of the country’s self-proclaimed revolution and lithium industrialization when these are analyzed through the prism of Andean, non-Christian cosmologies? How might our understanding of revolutions and lithium industrialization be challenged, and shifted, by looking at revolutionary phenomena in a specific ethnographic setting, in relation to the state, personhood, notions of time and cosmology? Do people’s understandings of the process of change alter from one empirical situation to another and if so, does this phenomenon serve to pluralize the ways in which the notion of revolution can be conceptualized analytically? How
far can the manifestations of revolutionary politics, as it entangles with the industrialization of lithium, be understood in relation to the modern European origins of the very concept?

As an anthropologist, I am interested in instances, processes, and upheavals that local actors brand a “revolution” or as “revolutionary” for various reasons. I am primarily interested in what they might mean by that, and how they might or might not relate it to the government’s own self-proclaimed revolutionary project in the context of lithium industrialization. This includes the question of definition itself: rather than offering a definition of my own, I am interested in how the concept of “revolution” or “revolutionary” is defined by the people who are directly involved in the industrialization of lithium and so in the left-wing government’s self-proclaimed revolutionary project.

Thus, my ethnographic effort is not to foreclose a universal notion of revolution but rather to open more possibilities as to how revolutions’ claims to universality may be envisioned. In other words, I intend to use the power of anthropological analysis to break out of conventional assumptions and open new ways of debating about what a “revolution” might be in the first place, and how it operates in a specific context. The point is to conduct an ethnographically driven anthropological analysis to open the concept of “revolution” to critical ethnographic scrutiny. By experimenting with local conceptions and experiences of a revolutionary project and how it intersects with the industrialization of lithium in Bolivia, I hope to add a new perspective to the broader discussion about the nature of self-proclaimed revolutionary transformations.

I also contextualize the industrialization of lithium and how it intersects with revolutionary politics in the dynamically changing backdrop of a self-proclaimed plurinational state. In Bolivia plurinationalism has emerged as a way of reconceiving the nation state in a manner that supposedly supports indigenous autonomy and enshrines multiple identities,
conceived as both ethnicities and as indigenous nations as central to the conceptualization of Bolivian-ness and of Bolivian citizenship. The country embraced plurinationalism as a core pillar of the 2009 Constitution by which the collective rights of autonomous self-government supposed to be extended (Cameron et. al. 2014).\(^3\)

However, the promotion of plurinationalism through indigenous autonomy has been complicated by the government’s commitment to the extraction of nonrenewable natural resources; and the plurinational project in Bolivia was also constrained by the government’s pursuit of political power which included control over indigenous territories (Tockam et al. 2014; Postero 2017; Fabricant et al. 2019). Still, while in previous historical periods in Bolivia insurgency must be understood as a struggle for inclusion in the state, today it must be conceived as a historical revolutionary project that seeks to at least symbolically reorganize both legitimacy, territory, and authority through the transformation of the nation state (Gustafson 2009).

Rather than behaving like a political economist by paying attention to the distribution of resources, and other structural conditions of local economies, my intent is to take the study of revolutionary politics as it plays out on the ground in Bolivia deeper still into a distinctively anthropological terrain. A focus on quintessential anthropological themes such as the state, personhood, time, and cosmology, I propose, can help to deepen as well as refigure the study of revolutionary processes. The goal is to unpack the very concept of “revolution” and what it might mean in Bolivia in new ways.

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\(^3\) In Andean politics plurinationalism has emerged as a way of reconceiving the nation state.
I will demonstrate, that when viewed anthropologically, Bolivian revolutionary politics and the industrialization of lithium emerge as concerted attempts to radically reconstitute the world people inhabit through political and social transformation. This means that lithium industrialization and the government’s process of change have been inseparable from each other and that they both have had a deeply cosmogonic character. I understand “cosmogony” as an act that brings about the total reorganization of ontological positions (Tassi et al. 2020).

More specifically, I assert that the industrialization of lithium has been officially theorized by the regime as a revolutionary tool to consolidate state power in a context where revolutionary state transformation has been conceptualized as a struggle for hegemony. Thus, the official conceptualization of lithium industrialization mutated as the country’s self-proclaimed revolution moved forward. In this setting, the regime persisted in seeing its own “indigenous” support base as not fully capable of universalism. Therefore, the idea of a centralized and paternalistic state emerged where, supposedly, many diverse groups that comprise the Bolivian nation are represented.

At the same time, the Morales-Linera regime’s self-proclaimed revolution as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has been embedded in both secular and nonsecular beliefs. In other words, despite the regime’s Marxist, Leninist and socialist leanings, local cosmological traditions, ancestors, prophecy, and myth have been vital forces, and important domains of the country’s self-proclaimed revolution and as it has intersected with lithium industrialization. All in all, leftist ideas of revolutionary transformation have been appropriated and framed in terms of local cosmologies and traditions by both the MAS and by those who worked within the lithium industry.
Thus, the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has not unfolded entirely within the linear coordinates of chronological time. Rather, it purposely interfered with those linear coordinates. First, the regime has navigated the temporal and structural tension between the indigenous-inspired cyclical cosmovisión of *vivir bien* that was at the center of its revolutionary ideology, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, its temporally linear socialist program for economic development that depended on the exploitation, and industrialization of natural resources.

Second, the regime attempted to theoretically refigure the relationship between individual persons and the state structures that govern them. However, the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation also contained a deeper premise, namely martyrdom. Instead of the annihilation of past traditions, this theme has been deeply intertwined with mythical figures, prophecy, and the somewhat paradoxical notion of a forward-moving return to the ancestral past that the colonial regime had sought to obliterate. Third, and in a similar vein, lithium industrialization has been framed by both Marxist (linear) and Andean (cyclical) notions of radical transformation. In these temporally mixed frameworks, ancestral figures, and spiritual beings emerged as powerful actors on the political stage.

The individuals directly involved in the process of industrialization have been aware of the tensions and contradictions between the different leftist ideological and cosmological frameworks lurking at the heart of the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution. Moreover, they have been frustrated by the realities of the industrialization project and even contested the regime’s mixed rhetoric. Yet, they continued to pledge loyalty to industrialize lithium because they considered it a pioneering tool to heal and redeem the country’s painful colonial and nation-state past through radical personal transformation.
Throughout the dissertation I use the concept of “revolution” and “revolutionary politics” in different ways. These are clearly conceptual and methodological anchors. But what, precisely, is meant here by revolution and revolutionary politics? Without offering a complete answer, since the question of the Morales–Linera regime’s self-proclaimed revolution i.e., its revolutionary politics itself is taken up ethnographically in each empirical chapter, I instead want to explain how my dissertation reflects a particular approach to these questions. To do this, I draw a distinction between analytical and actor’s categories. I attend to little “r” revolution as an analytical category and as a kind of transformation of the world; the small and big acts of world making shifting the very grounds of our being.

Whereas “r”evolution indicates an actual transformation of life and ontological relations, revolutionary politics or the big “R” revolution follows the Morales-Linera’s regime rhetoric about the nature of radical political and social transformation. This means that I use the lens of “revolution” both as an analytic and as an actor’s category which brings me to what my dissertation aims to achieve ethnographically. My ethnographic goal is to attend to the little “r” revolution or the reordering of ontologies and cosmologies in practice in a particular place and time, in my case southwestern Bolivia during the Morales-Linera regime.

This little “r” revolution as my ethnography reveals operates independently and at times in opposition to the big “R” revolution posed by the MAS party which is also the ethnographic object of my analysis. Accordingly, throughout the dissertation you will encounter varied localized interpretations, critiques, and contestations of both the government’s self-proclaimed revolutionary project and the modern conception of what a revolution might be. I anticipate that you will realize that the nature of these concepts is itself an issue for those who are involved in its action.
Finally, a word about ethnography. It is the most important tool of data collection, but it is also a reflexive enterprise. It takes considerable conscious effort to do it right since different types of data produce different kinds of ethnographic descriptions. These also vary in terms of perspective. The ethnographer, like a devout practitioner should be able to go back and forth between the involved participant (emic/actor) and the observer (etic/analytical) perspectives, even if etic descriptions should always arise from conversations between the ethnographer and the informant community.

Indeed, analytical and agent categories resemble nothing so much as the two arcs of a hyperbola, which cast their beams in contrasting directions, lighting up the faces of mind and world respectively. They are back-to-back, and darkness rules between them. The goal of ethnographic reflexivity is overturning their orientation, so that they embrace each other in an all-encompassing, brightly illuminated ellipse.

The Literature Review: Capturing the Revolution

It should come as no surprise that political scientists, historians, and sociologists write volumes about political revolutions without consulting anthropological literature. Literature tends to focus on two main questions: first, how revolutions ought to be defined and, second, what their causes and consequences are. Generally, political revolutions are either understood as outcomes of class conflict (Marx 2008), or as reactions to modernization (Huntington 1968). Further, revolutions are envisioned as particular events (Koselleck 1985; Arendt 1965) or as prolonged processes (Hobsbawm 1959, 1986; Stinchcombe 1999). At times, revolutions are described in structural terms (Goldstone 2001), and envisioned in terms of interest groups, alongside individual protagonists (Kimmel 1990; Foran 1997).
Scholars also defined revolutions as a function of destabilized state structures (Skocpol 1979), or as instances of collective action evolving out of a struggle for economic means and political autonomy (Tilly 1978). Additionally, some authors considered whether distinct factors contribute to political revolutions, such as gender (Olcott et al. 2006; Malmström 2012), domestic life (Johnson 1985), or even religious devotion (Billington 1980). Finally, political scientists and political sociologists make it one of their main tasks to define revolution as an abstract category (Selbin 1999; Goldstone 2001).

This marks a fundamental point of contrast with the categorically anti-normative approach I want to develop in my dissertation. Before delving into the details of the case at hand, it is important to explicate the problem that lies at the heart of this study: to apply a distinctive anthropological approach to how a specific revolutionary project (*el proceso de cambio*) intersects with the industrialization of lithium in Bolivia to bring forth concepts and forms of subjectivity in a specific social setting in which revolutionary politics plays out. Such forms and concepts have repeatedly been excluded from both anthropological and modern revolutionary narratives (Tassi et al. 2020).

Consider, for a moment, Orin Starn’s inspiring article entitled “Missing the Revolution: Anthropologists and the War in Peru.” According to Starn (1991), hundreds of ethnographers had been conducting research in the Andes throughout the 1970s, yet the fierce revolutionary campaign of the Shining Path took them entirely by surprise. The Shining Path was a Maoist guerilla group dominating life in Peru from 1980 onwards. When the group first launched the "people's war", their goal was to overthrow the government through guerrilla warfare. The members believed that by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and inducing a cultural revolution they would eventually spark a world revolution and arrive at full communism.
Anthropologist working in the region did not only fail to realize that a major insurgency was about to explode, but in their writings little or no attention was paid to the climate of pain, anger, and unrest across the impoverished countryside (Starn 1991). They also remained oblivious to the popular upheaval that led up to the Shining Path’s campaign from 1980 onward. Starn’s critique was inspired by historian Stern’s (1987) proposing a revision of the study of Andean insurrections. His methodological revision suggested a thorough reconsideration of rebellions as short-lived sporadic eruptions of violence in an otherwise politically inert landscape. He essentially called for the explicit analysis of preexisting patterns of resistance and conflict. Rather than picturing distinct cases of insurrection as isolated cases, or as moments of violent rupture, he proposed that scholars must analyze forms of resistance and adaptation to change. To explain how preexisting patterns help shape dynamic processes of resistance and adaptation he posited the concept of what he refers to as “resistant adaptation” (Stern 1987: 10).

Generally, in the aftermath of the Second World War, scholars and social scientists throughout the Western world struggled to comprehend large-scale political changes and social transformations. Revolutionary upheavals and the Cold War-era policies also offered fertile ground for scholars to examine the roots of civil and social unrest. Existing debates at the time included the difference between “primitive rebels” (Hobsbawm 1959) unable to shape a thoroughly new political order, and modern revolutionaries (Wolf 1969). In their attempt to understand the potential causes of instability several scholars turned to agrarian bases of violence and conflict in Western and non-Western societies alike (Moore 1966; Wolf 1969).

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4 For Stern (1987) violent episodes of rebellions are defined as short-term variants of longer processes of resistance and adaptation to change authority.
Scholars like Wolf (1969) mapped out the economic bases of societies and integrated new historical actors into their analysis. Wolf (1969) for example, interpreted the great revolutions of the twentieth century in countries like Mexico, Russia, Algeria, China, Vietnam, and Cuba as peasant wars. These early studies of agrarian structures adopted the analysis of economic and social variables as openings through which potential sources of conflict could be discerned. If earlier studies considered the role of economic structures as potential causes of agrarian revolt, studies published in the late seventies and early eighties built on these economic bases, adding social and political dimensions to their analysis of peasants and agrarian conflict (Scott 1977, 1985).

Still, the theoretical assumptions that generally underlie these early works insist on the portrayal of peasants as mere pawns of external forces and view rebels in terms that diminish the role of individual agency (Stern 1987). Sure, in the seventies there were efforts to bring the “political” back into anthropology which set the stage for a historically engaged approach tackling problems of resistance, power, and transformation from the viewpoint of marginalized groups (Comaroff 1985; Scott 1985; Taussig 2010). As a result, subjects such as the “anthropology of the state” (Abrams 1988; Taussig 1992, 1997; Trouillot 2001; Fuller et.al. 2001; Gellner 2003; Sharma et. al. 2006) and the “anthropology of violence” (Balandier 1986; Brass 1997; Das 1987, 2007; Hansen 2001) emerged within the discipline. Some of the key advocates of this politically engaged anthropology were in some respect concerned with revolutionary politics (Pettigrew 2017).

However, there was also a tendency to move away from scholarly concern with radical social and political transformation. This shift was partly a result of the advancement of scholarly interest in everyday forms of political resistance and struggle (Scott 1985) and its critiques (Abu Lughod 1990; Ortner 1995). This led some anthropologist to argue that whereas
the possibility of total transformation faded theoretically, instances of social dissent that occur between the cataclysmic turmoil of revolutionary upheavals and the ordinary acts of isolated private resistance have remained completely invisible to anthropologists during those years (Fox et.al. 1997).

Additionally, as Field (1994) suggests social analysis often locked indigenous identities in a “survival vs extinction” (Field 1994:240) dualism, despite the fact that as others clearly suggested such a dualistic framework is not at all useful. Local groups exist in a historical context, and as such their existence should be seen as a possibility for transformation. In my dissertation I hope to show that radical social transformation through revolutionary action is very much a part of the twenty-first century and has clearly not disappeared with the dawn of the new millennium.

While Starn’s (1991) critique is pertinent, it would be wrong to argue that anthropologists have overlooked revolutionary upheavals in their ethnographic works entirely. There are anthropological studies written by ethnographers who have been caught up in revolutionary upheavals (Bourgois 1981, 1982; Pettigrew 2003, 2004, 2013; Hegland 2014; Armbrust 2019) or, have pursued to study their aftermath in particular ethnographic settings (Lan 1985; Donham 1999; Rodgers 2009; Wilson 2016; Holbraad 2017; Goodale 2019). Anthropologist’s accounts of radical transformation include settings as diverse as the Sierra Leone revolutionary united front (Jackson 2004; Richards 1996), the Palestinian liberation struggle (Bornstein 2001; Jean-Klein 2000; Kelly 2006), and the liberation struggles of Zimbabwe (Kriger 1992; Ranger 1985).
Further, anthropologists focused on lived revolutionary experiences amidst the Maoist revolutions of Peru (Starn 1999; Stern et al. 1998; Taylor 2006), the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua (Hale 1994; Lancaster 1992; Field 1999) and the guerilla movement in Guatemala (Falla 1994; Stoll 1993). Finally, several anthropologists delivered ethnographic accounts of Mao’s Chinese revolution (Hinton 1966; Perry 1980), as well as Maoists in Nepal (Gellner 2003), and the Maoist insurgency in India (Balagopal 2006; Shah 2006). Sure, studies of revolutionary upheavals are scattered across anthropology. However, there is neither a clear genealogy of writings on the topic, nor are there approaches to revolutionary projects that could be described as distinctively anthropological (Tassi et. al. 2020). There is no such thing as an “anthropology of revolution” as there are anthropologies of ritual, development, postcolonialism, and even anthropology of social movements and food (Tassi et. al. 2020). Overall, anthropologists have been generally “strikingly silent” (Thomassen 2012: 680) about political revolutions.

As for Bolivian resource extraction, anthropological literature has focused on dispossession, class conflicts, and indigenous resistance and rights as well as concerns around new forms of extractivism and its impact on local communities (Fabricant et al. 2011, 2019; Fabricant 2015; Revette, 2017; Gustafson 2020). Further, a relatively recent extractivism literature provides insight into several debates regarding the effects of mining. Its main themes are the role of mining in economic development, the impacts of state’s dependence on the mining industry, and the value of empirical research in illuminating the “resource curse” debate (Bebbington et. al 2010). The authors of this body of literature often draw from Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation, and the notion of accumulation by dispossession introduced by Harvey (2005).
Harvey (2005) suggests that this type of accumulation is an ongoing regulatory characteristic of capitalism. Researchers of extractive industries have found these concepts and ideas resonant in making sense of what they often refer to as new or neo-extractivism especially in regions of Latin America (Spronk et al. 2007, Bebbington et. al. 2010). Hence, following Harvey (2005) mining is often conceptualized in terms of accumulation by dispossession, which contrasts with resource extraction that has taken place in earlier historical periods, when accumulation resulted from the exploitation of a large and organized workforce. Generally, studies focusing on neo-extractivism do not attend to questions about the role of mineral industrialization in revolutionary transformations. Overall, the neo-extractivist framework does not rest on a coherent theoretical foundation that can guide vigorous ethnographic research across time, space, and local extractive sectors.

As for mining in Bolivia, it was since the 1970s that a wave of anthropological writings has emerged. Pioneered by June Nash's (1993) work among the miners of Oruro, Huanuni, and Siglo XX, the interest in mining was taken up by anthropologists such as Thomas Greaves (1985), Olivia Harris (1989), and Michael Taussig (2010). Generally, in anthropological literature natural resource and mining conflicts in Bolivia are understood both in the context of historical cycles of colonial and neocolonial projects, as well as processes of internal class formation based on ethno-racial stratification initiated by Spanish colonialism (Fabricant 2012). However, the relationship between the industrialization of lithium and the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary political transformation remains undertheorized even though in Bolivia these factors are profoundly intertwined.
In her analysis of dependency and exploitation in Bolivian tin mines, anthropologist June Nash (1993) focused upon miners whose own analysis of class, race, and gender-based oppression fueled decades of radicalization and political organizing in the mid-twentieth century. In her work, the stratified political and economic system hinged upon a class hierarchy marked by a racialized and racist social system. The author discussed the profound ambiguity with which metal extraction has been viewed in previous historical periods. According to Nash (1993), opposition to the state and exploitation generated conflicting consciousness among the mineworkers in a context where the mines and labor were both a source of income and identity as well as social, political, and economic forces that degraded the miner’s status, and health obliging them to participate in a multileveled oppressive system of dependency.

Thus, the question whether laborers working in the contemporary lithium industry perceive mining and metal extraction less ambiguously than Nash’s (1993) tin miners inevitably arises. Besides, anthropological work should also be attentive to the ways in which the agency of workers, expressed in contexts where they struggle against neoliberal markets and over control of natural resources, produces both opportunities and vulnerabilities. In Taussig’s (2010) analysis of Bolivian tin miners, he illuminated how the complex articulation of the pre-Conquest, pre-capitalist mode of production and social order, and the post-Conquest capitalist modes of production is reflected in everyday practices and signify that contemporary Andean culture is intertwined with the legacies of European colonization.
He finds that as capitalist modes of production replace precapitalist formations, social tensions arise. Miners feel displaced from their traditional values in the dark and toxic tin mines and so they create an occult mediator of tensions and a symbolic representation of evil, alienation, and exploitation: the lord of the underworld or the devil figure sculpted from minerals known as El Tío or Uncle (Taussig 2010). As the miners were proletarianized, their rituals changed: the incorporeal mother earth spirit was replaced by the devil, a virile, bloodthirsty and unpredictable figure. Unlike the Pachamama, the devil is represented in corporeal idol form and requires frequent ritual sacrifices. In short, for Taussig (2010) the devil in the Bolivian mines is both a cultural and symbolic representation of alienation.

Missing from anthropological intimations is a sustained ethnographic analysis of the complex way lithium industrialization has interacted with Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution, officially known as the proceso de cambio, and with localized social forms and structures, which the national-level revolution seeks to reconstitute. In my dissertation I seek to remedy such neglect by exploring what anthropological thinking can contribute to the study of the industrialization of lithium and its role in revolutionary transformation.

In my assessment, I treat local conceptualizations of the state as ethnographic objects of my analysis. To be sure, scholarly interest in the state is by no means new. Diverse theoretical approaches have recognized the state either as an independent and agentive institution, or as an establishment determined by the political practices of prominent groups or ruling classes within a society. For some the state is nothing but a fashionable and deceptive political concept misused to control a population by a subgroup. Theories of the state also generally have implicit in them theories of nationalism; similarly, theories of
nationalism assume some theory of the state in that nationalism is regularly seen as a state project (Anderson 1983; Sharma et. al. 2006).

Generally, socio-political traditions have approached the state in terms of what the state “is” and what it “does”. This is not very helpful when it comes to ethnographic analysis. Such analysis often suggests that the state is a universal a priori object. Further, such evaluation also rests on the assumption that distinct states are essentially similar. For example, structural and functional understandings view the state as a set of institutions that execute specific functions related to governance and security, as in Weber’s famous dictum about the state holding a monopoly over violence in each territory (Weber 1968; Sharma et. al. 2006).

Such accounts of the state tend to neglect social practices in that they view such practices as resting firmly on the society side of the state/society divide (Sharma et. al. 2006). For example, in Weber’s understanding of the state, social processes do not really make a difference where the bureaucratic rationality of modern states is concerned (Weber 1968). Consider also post World War II American political science which has taken two main approaches: the systems approach and the statist approach (Sharma et. al. 2006). Systems theorists emphasized the difficulties of defining clear boundaries of the state and argued for abandoning the analysis of states all together in favor of the notion of the political system. The statist method emerged as a response to this tendency in the turbulent political environment of the 1960s, when several theorists argued for bringing the state back into scholarly focus (Sharma et. al. 2006).
In their creative effort to counteract Marxist functionalism that recognized the state as the apparatus of capitalist class interests, post-war state-centered theorists certainly revitalized the concept of the state. However, they theoretically revived the state as a discrete social fact (Sharma et. al. 2006). One of the limitations the state-centric theories wrestle with is the notion that the state is a clearly bounded institution that is distinct from civil society and is often represented as a unitary and autonomous actor that possesses the supreme authority to control populations within its territory. No doubt, political science, and other social sciences have discursively contributed to the theoretical construction of the state as a distinct entity with particular functions (Sharma et. al. 2006).

Academics coming from very distinct theoretical traditions have critically interrogated the assumption that the state is an *a priori* conceptual or empirical object of study (Radcliffe-Brown 1940; Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Abrams 1988; Trouillot 2003). For example, the state is often claimed to be a set of processes that attempt to legitimize the exercise of power to regulate populations within its territory (Althusser 2014; Foucault 1979; Trouillot 2003; Jessop 2007). The state is also often interpreted as a quasi-dominant material and ideological force that possesses supreme authority over life, death and civil society at multiple levels and sites (Abrams 1988; Agamben 2005; Mbembe et.al. 2003).

Crucially, this project intends to further *de-theorize* the state and empty it out of its many theoretical connotations. Rendering it a pure ethnographic form I intend to treat the concept of the state as a “heuristic means” (Holbraad et. al. 2017: 211) and identify it as one of the objects of ethnographic study. An ontological perspective I contend allows me to pay careful attention to local theorizations of the state, and how the state as it intersects with lithium industrialization manifests itself in people’s lives and within the lithium industry via these conceptualizations. All in all, in this dissertation I assume the counter-intuitive notion
that although states may seem similar at distinct locations worldwide, they are also profoundly different from each other both as constitutional projects and in terms of the connotations they have for their populaces.

Outline of Chapters

The following chapter outlines the methodological choices I made for my research. The background chapter establishes the broader historical context for my analysis and gives a brief history of the origins of the lithium industry, with a particular focus on the neo-liberal era. My goal is to illustrate that the role of lithium industrialization as it has intersected with revolutionary politics under the Morales-Linera regime must be understood in the context of historical cycles of colonial and neocolonial projects. In Chapter Three, I examine the standard assumption that revolutions constitute a momentous break with the past for the sake of bringing about a different kind of future. In this section I consider whether the anthropological study of ritual enables us to contemplate nonlinear ways of conceiving of time itself, and where this might lead us in thinking about the temporality of Bolivia’s cultural revolution as it intersects with lithium industrialization.

This chapter is devoted to exploring these questions by looking at the complex and intrinsic nature of revolutionary temporality more broadly. I argue that standard definitions of revolution as a singular event cannot do justice to the diversity of concepts, temporality, experiences, and practices that different revolutionary projects depend upon across the globe. Further, linking the analysis of revolutions to the actual lived experience of the people who are intimately involved in them is important. For an anthropologist, grasping these relationships, and how they are embedded in local variables is a basic way of assessing the ways in which
self-proclaimed revolutionary transformations might differ from one context to another. I contend that the ways revolutions are formed and form in turn is nuanced and complex which leads to distinct social relations in different ethnographic settings.

In Chapter Four, I investigate what happens to the conventional notions of the state and revolution when these are seen through the logics of lithium industrialization. Additionally, I investigate what happens to the notion of industrialization when it is seen through the regime’s “process of change”. I focus upon authorized revolutionary theory, propaganda and state sanctioned conceptualizations of revolution, state, and industrialization as instrumental conceptual foundations of political transformation and in this context, I identify the hegemonic theory underpinning these concepts in the overarching framework.

I will argue that through these conceptual mechanisms the industrialization of lithium has emerged as a tangible political tool aimed at the radical changing of the political order. Yet, paradoxically the concept of vivir bien has appeared as one of the central notions in guiding the linear development policies of the MAS administration in the context of lithium industrialization. I demonstrate that lithium industrialization as an insurgent tool of the country’s self-proclaimed revolution has been embedded in both secular and non-secular beliefs, and that it has penetrated deep into the very constitutions state power.

In Chapter Five, I study local ideas of revolutionary personhood to understand how the country’s self-proclaimed revolution came to constitute persons, and how persons come to shape the country’s radical political transformation in turn. More specifically, I focus on the varying conceptions of personhood in the Morales-Linera regime’s rhetoric and how these inflect the way revolutionary subjects are constituted within the lithium industry. I find that the regime attempted to theoretically refigure the relationship between individual persons and the state structures that govern them.
I demonstrate that what has been most deeply at stake is not just the reorganization of the relationship between the state and the people, but rather the reconfiguration of ontological positions on what might count as state, revolution, and people in the first place (Tassi et. al. 2020). I will reveal that at the same time, the country’s self-proclaimed revolution officially contained the premise of martyrdom which has been profoundly intertwined with mythical and ancestral figures, prophecy, and the somewhat contradictory principle of a “forward-moving return to the past” (Tassi et. al. 2020: 35) that the colonial regime had sought to annihilate.

In Chapter Six, I study the nature of revolutionary time, and how it is experienced within the lithium industry. Are modern ways of imagining the passage of time as a chronological succession, necessarily at the heart of revolutionary action in Bolivia, and is such action conceived of as an “event” within the lithium industry? What happens when we place modern ideas of revolution in a temporal order that goes beyond the coordinates of modernity? I argue that despite its Marxist and Leninist leanings, the regime also officially theorized its self-proclaimed revolution and lithium industrialization to radically refigure the relationship between past, present, and future, often through mythical narratives.

Thus, their “cosmogenic” or all-embracing quality makes them more than simply acts of violent political rupture at the heart of revolutionary action. The individuals who participate in these transformative processes within the lithium industry perceive these developments accordingly. In other words, “there was no revolution” as an event: the proceso and industrialization are perceived as transformative processes never as events, as opposed for example to the national Revolution of 1952. Further, I will reveal that for those who have been involved in the industrializing process directly i.e., at the sub-directorial level, the industrialization of lithium mirrors the notion of Pachakuti, or “world reversal” which is an
important concept in Andean cosmology. This cosmological theme foregrounds the emergence of something that, while neglected, is already present and needs to be cultivated.

In the conclusion, I examine the relationship between the process of change, lithium industrialization and cosmology more broadly. I demonstrate that emblematic Western ideas of revolutions have been appropriated and framed in terms of local cosmologies under the Morales-Linera regime in Bolivia. These reconfigured cosmological contexts yielded specific practices of revolutionary transformation such as the industrialization of lithium. I emphasize that ideologically, lithium industrialization transcended the limits of the Marxist stress on a future horizon as a time of radical change. Instead, lithium industrialization has been marked by a temporally complex cosmological theme where subordinated individuals within the industry describe themselves not as who they are, but who they are becoming. Finally, I will demonstrate how my research about lithium industrialization contributes to a new chapter in the scholarship of Bolivia’s mining history.

**Conclusion**

To illustrate how the political ontology of the Morales–Linera regime intersected with the industrialization of lithium in the context of revolutionary politics, I do not want to begin this dissertation by presupposing neither a divided world i.e., a world split into all that is genuinely real and truly social, nor a non-divided one. In other words, the world I am methodologically presupposing is neither round nor flat. This is an important clarification, for it shifts concerns away from an a priori relational metaphysics which has become rather fashionable to adopt as an analytical/methodological lens projected upon ethnographic data and practice. Anthropological concepts and analyses are all too easily pressed into an
authoritative metaphysical framework where methodological arguments are utilized in the service of ontological ones. This predisposition fundamentally concerns me.

Mostly, I want to emphasize that this dissertation project is not about some strange kind of metaphysical model making. Instead, my goal is to understand how the country’s “R”evolution as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has been generated in multiple ways through the reordering of ontologies and cosmologies in practice. More prosaically, I am interested in the processes through which the country’s self-proclaimed revolution turns into a cosmogonic or a “world-making practice” (de la Cadena et al. 2008). In the case of Bolivia, these practices have not converged to a singular understanding of the world. Rather, they have been aimed at generating a new world that is more than one integrated whole, yet less than two-fold. In other words, as my ethnography reveals, the Morales-Linera regime’s big “R” revolution as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has been geared towards erecting a world that is “more than one world, and less than two” (de la Cadena 2015).

On the hand, lithium industrialization manifested the progressive ontological occupation of a territory. Lithium industrialization - just like extractivism -, actively created space for the expansion of this unique ontological position by exploiting the terrains it has occupied and thereby jeopardizing other worlds that make up the area. One example would be the traditional lifestyle of salt miners in the region. On the other hand, the regime has been capable of refracting the ontology of the “one-world world” and proposing, as in the Zapatista declaration, a new world of many worlds (de la Cadena et. al. 2008), or a “pluri(national)verse”.
In other words, the regime also propagated the coming together of heterogeneous socio-political and cosmo-ontological realms and tried to negotiate their complicated being together under the aegis of heterogeneity. Therefore, despite the regime Marxist and Leninist leanings, local cosmological traditions, “earth beings”, ancestors, prophecy, and myth also appeared on the political stage. In this context, the de la Cadenian tool of “ontological openings” (de la Cadena 2018:29) or the analytic instrument of the “not only” (de la Cadena 2018:28) enabling the practice of ethnography at the interfaces of what is both the same and not is somewhat useful. According to this proposal, any phenomenon might be other than what it also is as they come into being through enactments (Cadena 2018); just like the Morales-Linera regime’s self-proclaimed revolution.

Yet, it is important to clarify that instead of the de la Cadenian ethnographic “interfaces” I locate my work in a rather different and perhaps more volatile analytical domain: the frontline where the small and big acts of world makings collide in the grip of ontological encounter. Since I am mainly interested in antagonisms that I consider primarily ontological, I heavily draw upon the methodological insights of the ontological turn in anthropology. Particularly useful for this project is the work of anthropologist Martin Holbraad (2017) who suggests that the ontological turn in anthropology is above all a methodological intervention that involves three analytical practices that deepen, radicalize, and release the full potential of anthropological inquiry.

These are (1) conceptualization, (2) reflexivity, and (3) experimentation. First, the work of conceptualization is concerned with how to conceptualize things including concepts in each ethnographic moment. In this context, concepts are read as synonyms for ontological assumptions. Second, radical reflexivity in its ontological version is aimed at the generation of new concepts, and by reaching a point of reversal it emerges as a positive process of re-
construction as opposed to its postmodernist version that aims at deconstruction (Holbraad 2017). Finally, experimentation attends to what an anthropological concept might be. Ideally, experimentation allows rendering the ethnographer’s own concepts subject to study, while letting the ethnographic contingencies transform the very concepts used to analyze the ethnographic material that is emerging (Holbraad 2017).

By incorporating the ontological turn strictly as a reflexive ethnographic technology and by further radicalizing it with its own methods, this project will avoid the meta-ontological assumptions that have plagued the ontological turn thus far. These include the essentialized a priori reproduction of the arch-structuralist division between nature and culture, as well as the binary divide between the modern West vis a vis the non-modern Other (Turner 2009, Bessire 2014, Oakdale 2018). This is important since scholars working in this vein paid special attention to the critique of the nature vs. culture and nature vs. society binary distinctions. Consequently, they draw upon Viveiros de Castro’s (1998, 2004) perspectivism and conceptualize these binaries as the fundamental coordinates for distributing similarity and difference.

There are three shortcomings of the ontological turn that I would like to address. Firstly, several scholars associated with the ontological turn focus on the maintenance of homogenized ontological relations (Viveiros de Castro 2014, Holbraad et al. 2017). Such an a priori assumption renders it difficult to pay attention to the complexities of local environments where people form diverse identities (Killick 2018; Watson 2018; Oakdale 2018, 2022; Oakdale at al. 2018). Secondly, as some scholars note, indigenous realities are deeply entangled with colonial processes such that people might be traveling between ontologies disruptively (Blaser 2013; Bessire 2014; Burman 2013, 2016; Oakdale 2018).
As Oakdale (2018; 2022) explains working relations might take place in complex, interethnic, and transformative spaces where people work in collaborative projects and inhabit multiple ontologies at once. Moreover, as de la Cadena (2015) argues tensions around political matters might require the analytical, and political recognition of sentient “earth beings” (Cadena 2015: 25) in Andean local settings. Thirdly, scholars associated with the ontological turn predominantly attend to western metaphysical debates through western analytical frameworks. Moreover, as Graeber (2015) asserts the ontological turn involves adopting a tacit ontology which is quite indistinguishable from classical philosophical idealism.

The analytical literature on the ontological turn in anthropology is vital for this study because of its emphasis on taking seriously the concepts derived from ethnographic fieldwork and from local people’s matters of concern to further liberate anthropological thought from a priori metaphysical foundationalism. Overall, I hope that this intervention will allow the cosmological dimensions of specific local criticisms of revolutionary politics to re-conceptualize my own concepts and what revolution might mean in the first place.

The robust argument I will construct concerning the relationship between the industrialization of lithium and political transformation in today’s Bolivia will be situated in the milieu of a dynamically changing self-proclaimed plurinational state in that country, and with attention to government discourses that link extraction to development, indigeneity, and the struggle against imperialism and colonization, all of which are highly contested concepts and terms.
Chapter One: Negotiating Dangerous Field Sites

Phase I. Preliminary Experiences

To address my research questions, I spent a total of eighteen months in Bolivia. Between 2017 and 2018, I made two exploratory trips to the country, funded by Field Research grants from UNM’s Latin American and Iberian Institute. I conducted multi-sited ethnographic research splitting time between La Paz, Potosí, the City of Uyuni, and the Salar de Uyuni. During this exploratory research, I turned my attention to the history and current context of each area. At each location, I observed narratives of mining and resource extraction during three epochs in Bolivian history: the silver/Potosí era, the tin/Oruro era, and the lithium/Uyuni era. In Potosi I visited the mines of Cerro Rico, famous for providing vast quantities of silver for Spain during the period of the New World Spanish Empire. In the mines, I was able to ask miners about their working conditions and what they thought about the lithium industry. This inspired me in unexpected ways.

When I visited the dark and toxic mines of the Cerro Rico, I encountered the magical world of sincere and devout Catholic miners who would sever their ties with both the mother-of-God and Pachamama upon entering the mountain. Truly, the mountain is one of Bolivia’s most historically significant national symbol and monument. On the one hand, it symbolizes the mythic riches of the country, on the other hand it is the epitome of severe historical trauma, a representation of the colonial past obscured by death, loss, and merciless exploitation. As soon as they entered the mines, the miners paid homage to the horned devil known as El Tío because they believe that the devil grants protection from the dangers of the mines in exchange for offerings of coca leaves, alcohol, and cigarettes. Every year, at the
Carnaval de Oruro costumes and statues of El Tío are paraded around in a ceremony that represents his defeat at the hands of the Archangel Michael. This is the only time that images of El Tío are allowed above the surface of the mines.

When I approached the entrance of a mine for the first time, my guide told me that his father died in a dynamite explosion in the very same mine. He poured alcohol at the entrance and said it was for Pachamama to ask for our safe passage. I knew that collapsing tunnels are common in the mines, and that dynamite explosions cause fatal accidents with disturbing frequency. The very real risk of what I was doing dawned on me with full blown intensity. Even so, I took a last deep breath and entered the dark tunnel. It was incredibly narrow and dusty, so it was hard to navigate the tiny pathways. I often moved crouching. It was suffocating and I just wanted to get out.

As I tried to make my way through winding tunnels, creeped through holes, and crawled up tight passages, I heard low rumbles in the distance. It was the explosion of dynamites. Then finally we rested. As I sat with the miners keeping the devil company, we shared pure alcohol, cigarettes, and coca leaves. The Tío was sitting wrapped in streamers and confetti, with horns on his head. One of the miners uttered the following between several thunderous dynamite explosions as he looked at the devil with respect, affection, and intimacy:

“We must never stop believing in the Tío. He has horns because he is the god of the depths and the underworld. He kills the miner. He kills him and then he eats his soul. Only if the devil is generous, he will give us a good vein of silver and let us exit alive”.

There were many statues made of minerals of this devil-like spirit in strategic places in the mineshafts. The miners reiterated to me that to stay safe and return to their families, they must repay the earth the minerals taken from the mines. They also explained to me that once a year a group of yatari or witch doctors visit the mountain to perform a ritual sacrifice. Llamas are slaughtered outside the mine and their blood is smeared over the faces of miners, the entrance, gear, and the active veins of ore. The pumping heart of the llama is then removed and at times it is ritually eaten by some of the miners. Then still pumping, the heart of the llama is taken inside the mine and placed at the devil’s feet. To allow the devil some time to enjoy his meal, everyone must leave behind the mine after the bloody ceremony. Indeed, a ritual act of reciprocity in an act of "festive sociability" (Nash 1993: 239).

It was Nash (1993) and Taussig (2010) who in their pioneering books demonstrated the enunciation of mythical beliefs in the consciousness and political practices of Bolivian miners. For Nash (1993), the devil cult is anchored in the very depths of historical memory. It operates as one of the central vectors of the consciousness of the miners who were historically only marginally educated in political terms. In her analysis, the cult of the devil was a means by which the miners strengthened and sustained solidarity amongst one another to respond effectively to the perils of their industry. And for her, that profound solidarity strengthened by collective sharing in the cult of the chthonic god created the strongest platform from which to resist, and reject the demands of the so-called tin barons, and later the public bureaucrats after the nationalization of the mines in 1952.
Once I visited the mines, I realized that whether the cult of the devil serves to translate the miners' resistance to alienation and exploitation by the mine owners is not my aim to decide. The point is that both Nash (1988, 1993) and Taussig (2010) recognized the centrality of Andean traditional culture, spirituality, and cosmology as the base from which workers elaborated the mechanisms of resistance against their exploitation and alienation. Additionally, both Nash (1988, 1993) and Taussig (2010) realized that mining is not only a platform of oppression, but also holds the potential for resistance and radical social and political transformation. I decided that in my dissertation I want to go further and demonstrate that revolutionary politics as it intersects with lithium industrialization itself has a deeply cosmogonic character.

So, in La Paz, I successfully acquired permission to visit the country’s first state owned lithium production plant. Finally, at the Salar de Uyuni, the most important site of my research I explored what the nationalization of the lithium industry has meant for the workers and for the local communities. Staying in the country for three months enabled me to familiarize myself with the staff at the autonomous state company Yacimientos del Litio Bolivianos (YLB). I expected that these connections and experiences would facilitate my access to these institutions and the members of the different communities of practice that participate in the formation of the lithium industry.

**Phase II. Political Turmoil**

I arrived in La Paz in September 2019, excited, hopeful, and longing for data, having successfully written and defended a proposal in the Department of Anthropology that focused upon the role of lithium industrialization in the creation of the plurinational state in Bolivia. I organized my multi-sited fieldwork around the institutions that participate in the formation of
the Bolivian lithium industry: 1) the YLB in the capital La Paz; 2) Bolivia’s first state owned lithium production pilot plant at the Salar de Uyuni; and 3) the Pilot Plant for Cathodic Materials in Potosí, a useful node of analysis for this study, because it closes the chain in the pilot scale for the industrialization of lithium. Building on the sites and social networks I developed during preliminary fieldwork, I planned to follow how lithium circulates and changes form through Bolivia’s industrialization pilot-projects across multiple sites considering historical trauma and social transformation.

Moving through La Paz was not easy. At 11,942 feet above sea level, the city’s extreme altitude affects almost all visitors to some extent. The air is much thinner at high altitude, so the body absorbs less oxygen which leads to symptoms such as breathlessness, nausea, headaches, fatigue, a lack of appetite, and in my case anxiety and insomnia. After mitigating the effects of sorache with a lot of rest, coca tea, and raw coca leaves, I started to work with the staff members who oversee the lithium industrialization process within this institution, participating in public organizational events and lectures. I followed, and I mapped the actors, and the ideological lineages that participate in the making of the lithium industry and the histories it enables. I devoted much time to organizing, conducting, and transcribing interviews, as well as researching institutional documents.

Dealing with institutional bureaucracy required determination, and a considerable amount of effort and patience. This was a bureaucracy into which I could not easily enter. There were no simple phone calls rendering my ethnographic research intelligible to administrators, directors, and bureaucrats even though the YLB was accustomed to accommodating international students, and visitors to answering their questions about lithium extraction. When I was not interviewing other people, I spent most of my time with the public relations manager of the Electrochemistry and Battery Department.
I accompanied her as she met with locals during public events, and I watched and helped her as she organized some of the events herself. I observed her as she prepared departmental reports for review by the YLB committee overseeing lithium industrialization. I walked with her as she visited other offices, and as she monitored the information spreading out of the building about ongoing engineering projects. I sat with her as she wrote reports to her supervisors, and I shadowed her while she was attending monthly public relations meetings. At times, I noted her frustration and sadness. She was missing her daughter, and she felt that she had to work too hard as a single mother.

At night I sifted through archival and YLB propaganda materials. Overall, I felt that my research was going well. Usually, during my spare time, I practiced my Spanish vocabulary re-reading Álvaro García Linera’s book entitled *Plebeian Power* alongside a collection of essays entitled *El fantasma insomne* (the Insomniac Phantom) published in 1999 by the Grupo Comuna at one of my favorite cafeterias.5 While pondering the relevance of Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* to the contemporary conjuncture in Bolivia, I could not help but feel haunted by the eerie presence of the phantom that does not sleep. The specter was certainly not only hunting Europe.

Then something unexpected happened. After the dubiously conducted presidential elections on October 20, 2019, the self-proclaimed plurinational state apparatus suddenly crumbled. I remember people keeping their eyes glued to the television, and their ears to the radio waiting for news about the elections. I followed their lead. For several days, I did not get

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5 The authors of the Commune Group were the principal interpreters of the new movements that irrupted in the wake of the Bolivian state crisis of 2000-2005: Raúl Prada sought to use French post-structuralist anthropology to intervene critically in the contemporary Bolivian political scene; Luis Tapia, a scholar of counterculture informed by the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta Mercado; and finally, two critical Marxist intellectuals who had just been released from prison following their involvement in an Indianist guerrilla group called the EGTK, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar and Álvaro García Linera, future vice-president of Bolivia.
a wink of sleep. Tossing and turning. I could not help but wonder during those restless nights: what will happen if the MAS and Evo lose the election? What if the YLB collapses, and I cannot deliver what I proposed? As it turned out, I was getting anxious with reason.

For the first time in thirteen years, the ballot at the presidential elections was relatively polarized. On the oppositional spectrum Carlos Mesa lead the Comunidad Cuidadana (Citizen Community) coalition. Behind him, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, or Goni, and President between 2003 and 2005. Evo’s popularity had suffered since he lost a popular referendum on February 21, 2016, when 51 percent of voters said “NO” in the wake of scandals and allegations of corruption over whether the constitution should be amended to allow him to run for a fourth term in the October elections in 2019. Through a series of legally dubious maneuvers, he ignored these results and was approved to run based on the Supreme Court’s decision. According to Bolivia’s electoral system, to avoid a second round, the leading candidate must secure more than 50 percent of the vote, or more than 40 percent of the vote and a lead of 10 percent over the second-place candidate.

On the evening of October 20, the “quick-count” which is not legally binding was updated regularly on the website of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). With 83.8 percent of the quick-count votes tallied, the TSE’s website indicated that Morales was leading with 45.3 percent, with Mesa in second place with 38.2 percent. Thus, it appeared that there would be a second round. At this point, the TSE inexplicably shut down live transmission of the quick-count tabulation of ballots after the 83 percent of votes had been counted, which prompted Mesa to claim fraud. The tension peaked when twenty-two hours later, on the evening of October 21, the transmission of quick-count results was restarted, with the website now indicating 95.63 percent of votes counted.
The distance between Morales and Mesa had grown over the intervening period. The difference separating the two candidates was now said to be 10.12 percent according to the quick-count. Evo had already announced that once the rural votes were counted, he was sure there would be no need for a run-off. The vice president of the TSE, Antonio Costas resigned. Violent opposition protests led by Carlos Mesa kicked off throughout the country and included the torching of several departmental offices of the electoral tribunal. The official vote count was concluded several days later, with the results being Evo at 47.08 percent and Carlos Mesa at 36.51 percent a difference of 10.54 percent, making it a first-round victory for Morales. Despite a decline in support, the official results also indicated that the MAS secured a majority in the legislative elections, with 68 seats of 130 in the chamber of deputies, and 21 of 36 in the senate.

The Organization of American States (OAS) audit of electoral results, released on November 9, labelled the changes in the percentage of votes for Morales “improbable,” but cited no evidence of actual fraud. The radicalization of the right in the eastern lowlands, linked to agri-business and gas-petroleum extraction, as well as paramilitary youth groups, followed immediately. Fernando Camacho, hitherto little-known outside the eastern lowland department of Santa Cruz, became the right-wing leading figure of a nationwide, and predominantly urban middle-class revolt. Coming from a wealthy Santa Cruz family with interests in agribusiness and finance, he directed what many commentators refer to as a “neo-fascist” youth group called the Union Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC).  

6 The group is primarily known for leading street-violence against street vendors in the city of Santa Cruz during a failed destabilization campaign against the MAS government in 2008.
The right’s key demands quickly shifted from new elections to Morales’ resignation to the incarceration of the president, the vice president, and the entire cabinet. Violent groups burned Evo’s house down, as well as those of his sister, Esther, the ex-president of the Chamber of Deputies, Víctor Borda, and the ex-minister of mines, César Navarro. Meanwhile, Camacho managed to forge relations with disparate threads of the opposition, including forging pacts with popular sectors that had become alienated from the government during the last four or five years. These included the Ponchos Rojos, a dissident Aymara group from the western highlands, coca growing peasants from the Yungas region, sections of the state-owned mining unions, and transport unions.

On November 10, the OAS issued a preliminary report finding that irregularities were detected, ranging from very serious to indicative of something wrong in the October 20 election. Authorities detained the former president and vice president of the electoral commission known as the TSE to face investigation. Although the Morales-Linera government accepted the OAS audit as binding, questions have been raised about the organization's impartiality and accuracy. Crucially, at this point the right forged an alliance with the president of the Potosí Civic Committee (COMCIPPO), Marco Pumari, a son of a miner and the leader of the Potosí regional dispute with the national government over the distribution of future wealth that is supposed to be generated by the industrialization of lithium in that part of the country.

As the lithium industrialization project lagged, Evo became more open to foreign partnerships. However, it was not until 2018 that Bolivia found a partner. On November 3, 2019, the government rescinded the legislation that established the joint venture with ACI Systems which is a German firm planning an investment of US$1.3 billion for the industrial use of lithium. The company claimed to have new technology that could help Bolivia extract
large quantities of lithium from waste brines left over from evaporation processes. However, this joint business venture did not take the form of a true partnership.

In October 2019, residents launched a series of protests demanding that the Bolivian government grant the benefits for local communities that the massive lithium project being developed by Germany's privately owned ACI Systems is supposed to generate. Meanwhile, the committee's president started a hunger strike in the capital La Paz a week before the elections. Soon this strike escalated into a more radicalized campaign against the Morales-Linera government. Alongside Carlos Mesa and Fernando Camacho, Marco Pumari very soon became one of the main opposition actors involved in the revolt against the government.

For my research, this strongly indicated that departmental concerns around the industrialization of lithium played a direct role in the downfall of the Morales-Linera regime after the elections. I interviewed Pumari, and numerous other protesters several times during their hunger strike in the capital La Paz which started a week before the elections. During one of our sessions, on November 7, 2019, just three days before the resignation of Evo and Linera, Marco Pumari told me the same thing I heard several times from various individuals during the protest. They seemed to be all convinced that the problem was not lithium industrialization per se, but that government was power hungry, and plagued by corruption:

“We have been deceived by the government. The management of lithium industrialization is corrupted. They have been telling us for more than ten years that lithium batteries are going to be produced and that the region will develop. There is nothing. You must understand one thing. The government is corrupt. What they have been telling us is a complete lie. We are not leaving La Paz until we are being deceived, and our democracy continues to be trampled. We will not leave, and we will not eat until then. We had enough. They must go.”
Three days later I was sitting in one of my favorite restaurants chatting about the elections with local folks near Plaza San Francisco. The square is in the center of La Paz in front of the San Francisco Cathedral from which it takes its name, and it is a frequent location for political gatherings and protests. The plaza has long been a politically important space, which is why I moved into a cheap apartment nearby. It was a strategic location for my study, just as it was a tactical space during the insurrection that won the 1952 Revolution. The plaza was the central gathering place also for crowds opposing the privatization of Bolivia’s gas resources during the 2003 Gas War. Now, it was a central gathering place for Evo supporters crowded into his political stronghold.

The square was considerably peaceful and quiet that day, and I was about to enjoy a long-awaited day of rest free of protests. Suddenly, just as I finished off my usual lunch of lemon and rosemary chicken accompanied with oca and sauteed vegetables, something weird happened on the restaurant’s television. Following several resignations of cabinet ministers, the chief of command of the Bolivian Armed Forces suggested that Morales and his vice-president resign. On that quiet Sunday on November 10th, 2019, after thirteen years and nine months in power, Evo Morales and García Linera resigned. They left for exile in Mexico two days later, while denouncing what they started to refer to as a “military coup” in process, suggesting that resistance would follow.

Adriana Salvatierra, the president of the upper house of congress, and Víctor Borda, president of the lower house, also resigned. According to Bolivia’s Constitution, each would have been sequentially in the next position to replace Morales as interim president. On Tuesday, November 12, without legislative quorum, since the majority MAS party in both houses of Congress was absent, Jeanine Áñez was declared the new president of Bolivia.
country was left without a working state apparatus. Unsettling questions started racing through my mind: Am I really witnessing a “military coup”, or am I witnessing the revolt of an urban middle class against the regime? Could this be something in between, a neither nor?

Due to the escalating violent civil unrest government institutions including the YLB were impossible to access. Chaos, anxiety, shock, socio-political tension, and violence ensued. Thus, I was forced to organize interviews with my interlocutors who were scared about being persecuted outside the walls of the YLB institution. Meanwhile, massive street blockades paralyzed the city, as thousands of miners, labor unionists, coca leaf farmers and activists took to the streets and demanded the resignation of interim president Jeanine Áñez. “We are in a dictatorship, and we are on the streets because we are angry and we want a return to democracy,” an old Aymara man told me amid one of the marches while moving towards the presidential palace. Simultaneously, the crowd chanted “Ahora si guerra civil!” (Now, yes civil war!), and set off firecrackers.

During the upcoming months, whenever there was a protest, I tried to be there. The streets of La Paz were explosive terrains. As I slowly familiarized myself with the choreography of the marches, - as well as the curious sound effects that accompanied them, - I started to feel a bit more relaxed and less frightened. For example, when I heard the threatening rumbling of dynamites, I knew that the miners were coming. However, my instincts told me that getting injured was always within the bounds of possibility. Let us be real. Despite being rather performative, protesting in Bolivia can be a violent and a bloody business. In fact, it can rapidly escalate up to the point when it gets outright life threatening. Everyone sticks to their own form of violence. So, when I joined the often-furious crowd of protesters, I generally followed the well-established Geertzian (2005) principle: when in Rome the thing to do is to run and flee like everyone else.
Though, I could not quite get used to riot police firing tear gas during the clashes. Being subjected to a chemical weapon was a frightening experience. According to one scientific study exposure to tear gas may produce numerous short-term and long-term health effects, including development of respiratory illnesses, and severe eye injuries. In addition, it can cause severe eye and respiratory pain, skin irritation, bleeding, and blindness. Further, diseases such as traumatic optic neuropathy, keratitis, glaucoma, damage of cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems, and death (Svendsen et al. 2016).

Talking about “deep play” (Geertz 2005:56), one time I ended up hiding from the police in a restaurant’s kitchen with other locals during an upheaval. The tear gas shot at the building started to reach considerably high concentration in the edifice. Everything was gas and panic. People disappeared under their cloths, squeezed themselves in cupboards, and folded themselves under tables. I felt my heart racing, I could hardly breathe, and I started to tremble as my muscles tightened. My senses heightened, and I felt dizzy and lightheaded as my fingers were tingling, and my pupils dilated. I was clearly going through episodes of intense anxiety, and the sense of immediate danger was almost intolerable. Am I going to die here? - I asked myself. As I tried to ground myself, and maintain a sense of calm, the restaurant’s manager offered me clean masks, towels, and water.

Despite his attentiveness and sang-froid, my tears started rolling down my red cheeks, my eyes burnt, and I felt like suffocating. Someone heroically brought an oxygen tank, and with compassionate eagerness we started swapping it. This was a turning point so far as my relationship to Bolivian protesting was concerned. I almost fainted, but I was also quite literally “in”. This is important. I knew that I crossed, somehow, some moral shadow line. Now, while I appreciate this experience, it is important to clarify that during those frightening hours, I was very close to a full-blown panic attack because I thought that I might die.
Mercifully, I managed to keep my mind grounded, we got out, and I am still grateful for the people who helped me to get home safe and sound.

Let me mention just one more violent incident. A couple of days later, I stuck my head out of my apartment’s window to monitor a march down the street. Instead of spring, a tear gas canister almost kissed me bang in the face. If that canister hit me, I would have ended up in a local hospital with a severe head and eye injury. I certainly did not want to go down that blind alley. At that point, I was frustrated, and uncertain as to how exactly I will negotiate personal security matters, as well as ethical dilemmas unique to my perilous circumstance. I started to wonder whether my experiences of violence should be written into my dissertation, and how my fear of dying impacts my work, as well as my relationship to the field.

I suddenly realized that I must reconsider how the immediate stress of field hazard affects my observation and data analysis. In short, I had to acknowledge professionally that I am working amid political turmoil where people and social institutions are overshadowed by unrest, violence, instability, and fear. The methodological challenge was not to establish how and if I end up in jeopardy, but rather, what I can do to minimize the risk of getting injured, victimized, and perhaps even die. Further, and almost just as importantly, how should my own experiences, anxieties, and reactions to violence be integrated into the presentation of my data set.

Thus, I began studying anthropologists’ experiences with negotiating dangerous field sites. To my relief, I found that I was not alone in my reservations, and my frustrations. Several anthropologists who worked in states of political unrest contributed to new methodological perspectives demanded by the emergent subfield of the anthropology of violence and terror (Taussig 1987; Sluka 1990, 1995, 2000; Bourgois 1990; Howell 1990; Feldman 1995; Lee 1995; Behar 1996; Nordstrom et. al. 1992, 1995; Kovats 2002). Other
scholars explored people’s relationship to the state in post-violence situations (Smith 2016). This was helpful. I felt more reassured, and less alone. Indeed, most, if not all of those who do research on state terror, run the risk of suffering retaliations, even to the extent of themselves becoming targets (Sluka 2000). Yet, the potentially hazardous circumstances are virtually unanticipated by most ethnographic methods. Strategies of survival are not often discussed in graduate anthropology fieldwork courses either.

So, I had to hash out crucial matters of personal safety after I already found myself caught up in a crisis. Against the backdrop of violence, I had to abandon traditional research methods that presuppose ideal field circumstances in which the anthropologist is more in the position of control. Clearly, I needed a fundamental shift in my methodology, and develop a flexible, incorporative framework, as well as a malleable, responsible, and risk sensitive practice. At the same time, my investigative practices had to be responsive to perils at a particular research site. Further, the pressure of danger demanded the reassessment of my relationship to the field as well as my informants. The adoption of these tactics not only meant the radical transformation of my ethnographic methods, but also my anthropological ethics.

First, I gave up the idea that it is possible to obtain uncorrupted data from a social milieu tainted with violence. No doubt, it is sometimes difficult, and counterintuitive to conceive immediate violence as a reflexive reality (Feldman 1991). During my fieldwork in La Paz, I witnessed aggression, street arrests, intimidation, blood, injuries, fear, despair, mourning and even corpses, and death on the streets. Also, there was always a chance that I will be victimized. There was no point in denying it: my reaction to these occurrences started to paralyze, confuse, and distort my ethnographic analysis. I failed to see the forest of political violence. I only saw the trees of its (inter)personal consequences. The ethnographic result was what Taussig (1987) refers to as an “epistemic murk” (Taussig 1987: 121) where gossip turns
into undeniable truth, and mistrust twists into conviction. Because of the ambiguities and the immediate stresses of conflict, I was lost, and my methods were led astray.

Thus, I developed techniques that reflected a crucial methodological insight: violence was a very real dimension of my field site. Therefore, I stopped treating violence as a social ailment that needs to be methodologically avoided and averted in the field. Accordingly, I seized looking at ferocity as a “surface effect” (Feldman 1991:20). Instead of circumventing it, I acknowledged the reality of violence -as well as my reactions to it-, as data. From that point on, my data was no longer just embedded in violence: it was also “embodied by violence” (Kovats 2002:211). As I observed violence, I became a portion of it. Instead of filtering out danger and instability form my methodology, I negotiated these risks consciously often through improvisation.

Accordingly, I innovated new strategies for data collection. I instinctively facilitated an “adaptive approach to data collection” (Kovats 2002: 210), as well as informal schemes that are sensitive to what I perceived to be dangerous situations. Secondly, I adopted methodologies for research that were informed by the ever-changing social complexities unique to unstable field sites. On a practical level, these strategies involved the careful determination of how best to approach a neighborhood, or research site, and methods to minimize the likelihood that I will be shot, heavily teargassed, arrested, or injured while doing so. I mapped out safe routes across districts, and I often made sure that I got home before dark. I intuitively developed a heightened awareness of my surroundings, and a sense of wariness that a seemingly peaceful protest can quickly develop into something explosive, and potentially lethal.

Tactics of self-protection became inseparable from my methodology. For example, as a methodological precaution quite often I avoided taking video recordings and photographs in a
given social milieu or situation, and I utilized politically neutral spaces for my lengthier interviews. I constantly read the minuscule signs of other people’s body language to tell if a social encounter might be too dangerous. Rather than presupposing a safe location for an interview, I used techniques that were informed by a minute-to-minute reassessment of what was going on in a particular area, or neighborhood. If despite all the safety measures an interview environment grew to be precarious, I would abort the interview, or take a taxi and retreat with my informant to a safer place. This heightened sensibility to the dangers of my research sites became not only a normative methodological practice, but also ethnographic data to be incorporated into my methodological results.

It was through these adaptive strategies that I was able to consider the risks of my field site in an ethnographically meaningful way. Meanwhile, I conducted my research negotiating ethical dilemmas unique to my circumstances. The problems that dangerous field sites pose to ethnographic ethics have been addressed by several anthropologists (Nash 1976; Jenkins 1984; Bourgois 1990). Peritore (1990) for example discusses the problem of how to adapt field entries to the security threats present in some sensitive research areas. Still, threats to the safety of myself, and my informants as well as the ethical challenges that arose with them were unique to my field site. So, I had to work out distinctive pragmatic strategies as to how to deal with these moral issues. It was also essential to consider how the dangers of my fieldwork limit my control over my own moral decisions.

I found that my well-being was often safeguarded by my local associates. Thus, I reconceived my relationship with my informants. I accepted an even more humble and pragmatic position in my field relations. The fundamental methodological and moral insight was this: the ability to protect against harm was not a privilege of mine, but a shared power between me and my associates who were at times much better at anticipating danger than I
was. Thus, I always paid attention to their wishes and insights, considered their advice, and more often than not I followed their recommendations. In short, I applied a “localized ethic” (Kovats 2002: 2014), where my relationship with my informants was one of mutual responsibility.

Sharing the responsibility of security with my interlocutors, and a variety of techniques for low-profile data collection effectively empowered my coping with violence and instability in the field. However, as a moral agent I occasionally stepped out of the position of objective ethnographer. I helped if someone fell on the ground or was injured in my proximity. I gave them water, masks, tissues, medicine and at times, even treated their wounds. Nonetheless, I also accepted the fact that at times we were not in the position to control and negotiate danger away from each other.

After the fall of the Morales-Linera regime, most of my interlocutors were concerned about losing their jobs and being persecuted by the military and the Áñez regime. The situation at the YLB was extremely fluid and difficult to grasp even for my interlocutors. The immediacy of intimidation, instability and stress not only affected them, but it also affected me. My informants were generally edgy, moody, and nervous. Consequently, I sometimes waited weeks to approach someone because I felt that it was too pushy, early, or inappropriate to ask questions. One time, I was sitting with one of my YLB informants in a car while he was driving to our interview location. When I asked what was happening at the YLB he tensely answered:
“What do you think? – he asked. This is a dictatorship. We are still working, but we live in fear. We are worried because we do not know what will happen to us. I think the director will be removed and I will be fired. I just hope that I do not end up in jail. I have a journalist friend. He is a MAS supporter. He told me yesterday that his house was ransacked. Have you heard about the “prensa vendida” (sellout press)? They harass journalists and then they deliver them to the military!”

I was aware of the sensibility, vulnerability, and the potential harmful use of my field notes. Thus, I handled my documents accordingly. I encrypted the names of my informants, and I carried around only the current day’s notes keeping the rest locked in my apartment. Audio recordings for data inscription also became problematic. Whereas written data could be at least partially codified, a voice recording ended up being more difficult to conceal. I wondered whether it is a safe tool to use given the circumstances. In the end, I did not abandon the use of voice recordings during my interviews, but I made sure that the recordings are stored on a separate storage device. In fact, I never stored my field notes, data, photographs, or voice recordings on my phone or on my laptop. I transferred these files every night to the separate drive which I kept well protected and hidden in a secure place.

My experiences in La Paz strengthened my conviction that it is critical to examine the implications of the industrialization of lithium and how it intersects with revolutionary politics. Hence, I shifted my research questions entirely to trace how the industrialization of lithium has underpinned the Morales-Linera regime’s self-proclaimed revolution and vice versa. Further, I adjusted my theoretical frameworks to analyzing the characteristics of the “process of change” and how it has intersected with lithium industrialization. My methodology and research questions remained ontological. Hence, I continued to inquire into
the ways in which the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution itself, as a distinctive political form dictated its own terms of engagement through the work of its main theoreticians.

Parallel to my empirical research I examined governmental documents, presidential speeches, and governmental institutional archives to understand how the industrialization of lithium was taken up as a political tool and posited as a site of state building by the Morales-Linera regime in the context of revolutionary politics. As soon as the interim government seized state power, the materials I was interested in were rapidly disappearing from on-line archives, so I spent a considerable amount of time saving these documents for later analysis.

At the beginning of January 2020, I started the second phase of my fieldwork in Uyuni and the Salar area according to the planned schedule. The YLB in La Paz from which I was supposed to get permission to access Bolivia’s first state owned lithium plant was going through tremendous structural changes. Nevertheless, I managed to visit the lithium plant between January and March several times. At the plant, I visited laboratories, evaporation pools, industrialization sites and small production plants. Overall, the political climate in Uyuni was much calmer compared to La Paz. So, I participated in community meetings, and everyday conversations and practices. Despite the slow Internet connection, I continued to collect, and analyze propaganda materials, texts produced in the mainstream media, as well as governmental, and policy documents about Morales-Linera regime’s process of change and how it intersected with lithium industrialization.
Phase III. The Pandemic

Then Covid-19 happened. Overnight the borders closed down, and all the international flights got canceled. This was a different kind of terror, one that I never experienced before. This time the enemy was invisible. Because of Covid-19 which was confirmed to have spread to Bolivia by March 10, 2020, I was banned from traveling to Potosí. Thus, I stayed in Uyuni during the third phase of my fieldwork. The pandemic was distressingly disruptive for me, and not only because I was a doctoral candidate conducting a dissertation research project in a foreign country. The virus brought a layer of social reflexivity that was perhaps unprecedented at this scale, and the (inter)personal changes were drastic.

Therefore, during the first weeks of the quarantine, the pandemic wrought havoc on my mental state. I experienced moments of sheer desperation: could the pandemic spell the end of my dissertation project? Will I be able to talk to people, and conduct interviews at all? Are there ethical ways to do research under these conditions? What if I get infected, and end up suffocating in intensive care behind closed curtains – or even worse, without curtains in a local hospital? What if the coin flips and my loved ones will get seriously ill, and even die? The fact that I could not visit my family was extremely anxiety-provoking. The sense of isolation, claustrophobic paranoia, and impending doom was almost unbearable.

Although at times I suffered from extreme anxiety, I did not try to get on a plane. I just could not call it a day and pick up my research again in a year or two. Thus, I decided to self-isolate, manage my angst by working on my interview transcriptions. Though my staying in Uyuni was not just up to me. There were many accounts about foreign travelers who were driven away from small villages and even small towns across Bolivia, because the people who lived there suspected that they might carry the virus. I was able to stay in Uyuni mainly
because of three reasons: 1) I was transitioning into the public health crisis with the community, 2) many who lived there already knew me, and most importantly 3) I was always backed up and supported by my friends, and wonderful hosts who were members of a well-respected family in the community. I could not have stayed in town and finish my dissertation project without their continuous assistance.

In Uyuni according to the official news not many people got infected. In reality we simply did not know for sure what was happening. In the end, few people died of Covid. “Here we live closer to God”- I kept hearing as a possible explanation for the low mortality rate. Some people supposed that the high altitude kills the virus, others assumed that those living at high altitude are not at risk at all because they are accustomed to lower oxygen levels in their blood, one of the potentially fatal symptoms of Covid-19. Still, for about a month and a half everyone was in shock and people, including myself, were generally terrified from getting infected. Many left Uyuni for their villages to self-isolate. Those who stayed, including myself, wore a mask and walked around with various tools to disinfect our hands following the departmental bio-security restrictions.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the public health responses to it posed new and unforeseen ethical and practical challenges to my research and methodology. There lingered a profound uncertainty about both the epidemiology of the pandemic and its social, economic, and political consequences. Some uncertainties stemmed from the not-yet-understood nature of the virus: whether and to what extent the infection confers immunity, whether a second or a third wave emerges some months from now. Others stemmed from the unpredictable actions of the authorities at all levels. The situation was extremely fluid, and I did not know how, and when people including myself regain confidence in resuming activities, I took for granted
before the pandemic. It all depended on mortality rates, and the government’s departmental bio-security measures.

The turmoil and the increased vulnerability of my interlocutors who were workers at the lithium plant also meant that my research needed significant adjustments along multiple axes to resume. What if local rules and norms provide too little protection for my informants or for me? How should I ensure that I am not a vector for the virus? What if participants now fear or object to engaging with me, and what if I am fearful to connect with them? – I asked myself. Moreover, some of my interlocutors were facing serious financial hardship, many lost their jobs and became unemployed. Clearly, I needed to shift my methodology and respond to the complex ethical and logistical challenges in the context of the pandemic. I had to rethink my data collection method, and my relationship with my informants once again and react to the seismic changes by adjusting my research methods in a bid to survive.

For a month and a half social distancing and other Covid-19 measures made face-to-face data collection practically impossible. So, I started to communicate with my informants on-line, using tools such as Skype and WhatsApp. For a while my research was going slowly. At times I hardly had any Internet access. Similarly, some of my interlocutors had little or no internet access, so no remote options were available. At times, my interlocutors were in a “can’t do” mode or situation. Some were ill or just simply reluctant to talk to me, and some had firsthand caring obligations and were unable or unwilling to go online. For about a month and a half most of my informants were so preoccupied with the coronavirus crisis that they were unable to discuss, show interest, or concentrate on any other aspect of life, and I felt uncomfortable to draw attention to anything else.
Moving around town was difficult. In Uyuni, from March to April 15th, I was allowed to leave my home only once a week. The days on which I could move around the city depended on the last number of my identity card. My number was 8 so I would go out on Thursdays. From mid-April instead of accessing the plant directly I gradually and cautiously started to organize open-air and on-line meetings with individuals working at the plant in the city of Uyuni following the department’s flexible lockdown and biosecurity measures. I continued to apply a “localized ethic” (Kovats 2002: 2014), where my relationship with my informants was one on mutual responsibility.

To reduce health hazards for my interlocutors, I always wore a face mask in order to reduce the risk of spreading the virus in case I had contracted it and was asymptomatic. Further, I refrained from conducting group interviews or bringing together individuals from different households or workplaces to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection between informants. I also gave all my interlocutors the option to engage with me via phone or WhatsApp or any other virtual platform that was available to them. Finally, I always conducted interviews as much as possible outdoors, and I always practiced social distancing while wearing a medical mask.

By mid-June, things got slowly better. The license no longer mattered, and the departmental biosecurity measures were somewhat loosened. I started to participate in community meetings, markets, and everyday conversations and practices. I was able to leave the house every day until 6pm and meet with my interlocutors during the weekends. By then all stores were open and everything was almost back to normal, except that nothing was the same again. People adjusted to the new reality and were generally more active and open to engage with me. Still, I did not ask my interlocutors to travel for interviews to avoid exposing them to risk of Covid-19 infection during travel.
To ensure everyone’s health, safety, and well-being, prior to an in-person visit I continued to screen my interlocutors and myself for possible exposure to the coronavirus or symptoms of respiratory illness such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. At times I postponed meetings or interviews. If this happened, I always informed my informants of the reason and that they will be contacted again when the visit can be rescheduled. During the interviews I ensured that appropriate infection control measures are taken at the site of the face-to-face visit. For example, I guaranteed the availability of hand sanitizers, masks, and disinfectant wipes to mitigate COVID-19 spread. Despite the pandemic, the months spent in Uyuni allowed me to conduct interviews with willing participants directly involved in lithium industrialization, the government’s process of change and the recent shifts in the salt flat’s political economy.

During this time, I mostly collected interview accounts from Bolivians working at the lithium pilot plant living in the city of Uyuni. As part of the interviews, my questions focused on: (1) What is lithium and what makes it important? (2) How does the industrialization process change its value? (3) How does the role of the state manifest in the lithium industry? (4) How do laborers affiliated with the lithium industrialization experience and conceptualize their relationship with the state, the industrialization of lithium and revolutionary politics vis a vis the Morales-Linera government’s popular discourse; and how are these concepts negotiated within the industry? I returned to La Paz at the end of July and continued my fieldwork there according to the new Covid-19 security instructions until November 6th.

In this study I essentially developed two interconnected levels of analysis: 1) at the interpersonal level, how the role of lithium industrialization in political transformation is perceived by individuals within the lithium industry; 2) at the national level, how lithium industrialization has been taken up as a self-proclaimed revolutionary tool by the Morales-
Linera regime despite the recurrent historical failures of extraction-based development. To investigate my research questions, this dissertation draws on various sources of data. First, I conducted in-depth semi structured interviews with employees at Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos (YLB) in La Paz and at the Salar de Uyuni. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the interviews were partially conducted virtually.

The sampling criteria for this study was that my interlocutors had to have some degree of knowledge and be personally involved with the lithium industrialization project. Since the lithium industry was quite difficult to access, I employed snowball sampling to identify my interlocutors working for the YLB. At the state company I interviewed individuals both at the directorial and at the subdirectorial level. At the subdirectorial level I interviewed managers, bureaucratic workers, engineers, and manual workers at the lithium plant. Since all the individuals I quote in this dissertation expressed the need for anonymization, I am obliged to keep the names of my informants confidential.

Secondly, I have reviewed a large set of policy documents, including development plans, governmental programs, propaganda materials and reports about the country’s self-proclaimed revolution and how it has intersected with the lithium industrialization project. I also reviewed social and conventional media regarding the lithium sector. Overall, I placed considerable analytical weight on document analysis and governmental discourses related to the lithium industry. Finally, to engage my data in new ways, I interpreted the interviews, alongside governmental documents, propaganda materials, and presidential speeches with a qualitative data coding software called MAXQDA which supports grounded theory analysis. This inductive methodology allowed me to construct my arguments grounded in actual data that I collected during my research.
Chapter Two: Background

Introduction

Bolivian politics today is commonly cited as a prime illustration of a Latin American backlash against the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the election of Evo as Bolivia’s first “indigenous” president, a former coca-growers’ union leader and a founder of the left-wing MAS party in 2005, in the wake of popular mobilization around issues of privatization, and indigenous rights has widely been seen as a radical break from neoliberalism (Haarstadt et al. 2009). Evo’s proclamation of gas nationalization in 2006, which took place on Labor Day with the military present at the previously foreign-owned gas fields, is also often seen as part of cyclic sequences of resistance to neoliberal politics (Hylton and Thompson 2004; Haarstad et al. 2009).

Together these incidents of mobilization, from the Water War in 2000 to the election of Evo in 2005, and the subsequent nationalizations by his government have also been generally understood as part of a continentwide left-wing wave of opposition or “pink tide” against neoliberal reform and the institutions that propagate it (Spronk and Webber 2007; Dangl 2007; Haarstad et al. 2009). Historical and anthropological analyses mainly have centered around the effects of neoliberal reform upon small-scale production, on regional differences in embracing or opposing a neoliberal economy, and on the ways, neoliberalism provided fuel for explosive social unrest and struggle (Arze and Kruse 2004; Nash 1992b., 1993, 1994; Taussig 2010; Schroeder 2007).
Regarding the rigidly construed neo-liberal backlash narrative, I agree with Haarstadt and Andersson (2009) that such accounts often oversimplify the relationship between neoliberalism and popular mobilization since they tend to be centered around static conceptions of neoliberal reforms. Crucially, since the nineteenth century the Bolivian nation state’s mission to produce raw materials for the global economy profoundly shaped the country’s economic development, and political stability. In turn, the extraction of minerals has played a central role in the creation of the Bolivian nation state to a great extent. Therefore, I contextualize lithium industrialization in long histories of labor exploitation during the colonial period and uneven economic development post-independence. I also contextualize the circumstances in which out of oppression and labor exploitation the possibility for political organizing, and the potential for economic change through the transformation of the nation state have emerged.

I will show that rather than being an easy route towards economic growth and development, Bolivia’s mineral resources have generated ambiguous, and severe power struggles marked by displacement. Consider, for a moment, the Spanish conquest of the Inka Empire which brought about fundamental changes to the Andean social, political, and cultural landscape. The dismantling of Tawantinsuyu resulted in the irreversible loss of Inka self-governance and the establishment of Spanish colonial rule. Later when Bolivia became a republic, it inherited much of the hierarchical structure of the colonial regime.

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7 Tawantinsuyu is the Quechua term for the Inka Empire.
The country became a new republic in a war torn and depressed region that was to experience an economic stagnation that lasted for almost half a century (Klein 2003). Generally, the declaration of independence and the birth of the republican nation state had a rather negative influence on the economy of what became Bolivia and deepened the crisis that had begun in the colonial era. Instead of economic stability, the region’s response to the collapse of the colonial government was economic crisis. Economic depression combined with famine and epidemics created a tense atmosphere in the region. This crisis also involved the decapitalization of the mining industry.

By the time Bolivia declared independence in 1825, the most accessible and lucrative silver deposits had largely run out. By 1900, tin had completely superseded silver as Bolivia’s primary export, accounting for more than half of export earnings. The central role of the mining sector in the state formation process entrenched a stratified political, social, and economic system hinged upon a class hierarchy marked by a racialized social system. The great extent to which the mining sector played a central role in the state formation process is demonstrated through the example of the subsequent Federal Revolution also known as the Federal War which lasted from 1898 to 1899.

As the silver economy slowly collapsed, the southern and mainly Conservative elite’s power in Potosí and Sucre weakened considerably and finally diminished (Klein 2003; Waskar 2014). This elite wanted to maintain Bolivia as a unitary state with its capital in Sucre, however as the northern tin mining economy rose in importance, the mainly Liberal northern elite from Oruro and La Paz grew stronger and advocated moving the capital to La Paz under a federal system (Hudson 1991; Klein 2003; Waskar 2014). The war revolving around the polarized mining industry marked the end of the hegemony of the Conservative Party run by
the Sucre-based silver-mining oligarchy and the beginning of the predominance of tin-mining interests based in La Paz.

Therefore, just as with lithium industrialization today, the role of mineral extraction in the creation of the nation state must be understood in the context of processes of internal class formation and a political economy based on a system of ethno-racial stratification initiated by the Spanish conquest. In this chapter I will establish the broader historical context for my analysis, and I will give a brief history of the origins of the lithium industry, with a particular focus on the neo-liberal era. I will illustrate that the role of lithium industrialization as it has intersected with revolutionary politics under the Morales-Linera regime must be understood in the context of historical cycles of colonial and neocolonial projects.

**The Silver Era**

On 14 February 1615, Andes Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala wrote to King Philip III of Spain that he had just completed a “chronicle or general history" (Albó et al. 2018). The chronicle of more than a thousand pages had two key objectives. First, to give the king an account of ancient Andean history from the beginning of time through the reign of the Incas. Second, to advise the monarch about the deepening crisis in Andean society because of Spanish colonization. The thousand-folio long letter also eloquently depicted the Andean amazement at the Spanish lust for gold. The author replicated the question Atawallpa was supposed to have posed to one of Pizarro's gunners: "Is it gold that you eat?" The fabled Spanish reply was: "This gold we eat".

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8 Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (ca. 1535– after 1616) was an Inka nobleman and a descendent of the royal Inka on his mother's side and the pre-Inka Yarovalka dynasty on his father's side. His great work entitled “The First New Chronicle and Good Government” (El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno ) was written largely in Spanish with sections in Quechua. The king probably never received the document.
The Spanish conquistadors’ hunger for gold was first glimpsed in the Andean region of South America in 1524. The Spanish discovery and conquest of the Inca empire was led by Francisco Pizarro, Diego de Almagro, and Hernando de Luque. They first sailed south in 1524 along the Pacific coast from Panama to confirm the existence of a legendary land of gold called “Biru” later altered to Peru (Thomson et al. 2018). Soon after the conquest of the Inca empire in the early 16th century, much of the indigenous population of what is now Bolivia was forced to labor in mines established by the Spaniards. Moreover, the Indian allyu communities were divided into large parcels of land that were deeded to the Spanish (Bakewell 1984; Klein 2003).\(^9\)

Since the allyus were based on kin relationships with virtually no class structure existing outside the kin relations, the transformation of the allyu marked the breakup of communal agricultural structures and their conversion into private property holdings (Bakewell 1984; Hudson 1991; Klein 2003). The Spanish turned the ancient Inca institution into an elaborated system of forced labor called the mita. The mita was highly exploitative, and it was specifically set up to extract forced labor from the mines of Potosí which contained the world’s largest known deposits of silver (Bakewell 1984; Cole 1985; Hudson 1991). Along with technological advances in refining, the mita system caused mining at Potosí, the mythic colonial center of the empire, to thrive.

Potosí was founded as a small mining town in 1546, while Bolivia was still part of the Viceroyalty of Peru. By 1672 Potosí became the central location of the Spanish Colonial Mint and one of the world’s richest urban centers supporting a population of around 200,000 (Bakewell 1984; Hudson 1991; Klein 2003; Thomson et al 2018). Its fabled wealth, the grand

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\(^9\) The allyu was a form of social organization in the Andean areas that combined kinship, territorial ties, and symbolism.
dream of European colonizers, derived from concentrated capital investment in the advancement of mining infrastructure and exploitation. However, such enormous wealth came at a horrifying cost. The dazzling imperial and private fortunes accumulated in Potosí derived from the back-breaking labor of indigenous mineworkers who were forced to work at the mines.

Many perished through accidents, brutal treatment, or poisoning by the mercury used in the extraction process. Millions lost their lives to the mines of Cerro Rico towering over of Potosí, also known as “the mountain that eats men”. Moreover, an inconceivable eight million slaves were estimated to have died due to the intolerable working conditions in Bolivian mines (Cole 1985). The mining sector became the central nerve of the colonial economy (Cole 1985). Over the next 200 years, more than 40,000 tons of silver were shipped out of the town, turning the Spanish Empire into one of the richest the world had ever seen. The mines’ metal riches financed the entire Spanish New World empire (Bakewell 1984; Hudson 1991; Klein 2003).

There were the mingas, or free workers within the mines, and the mitayos, the corvée laborers who did most of the transportation and processing work (Bakewell 1984). Southern Andean ayllus, with the coordination of their cacique governors, sent the mitayos and their families to the mines, and made sure they had food, goods, and housing to survive the year-long forced service (Thomson et al. 2018). Political power was exercised by Spain and the

10 The Rich Mountain or the Cerro Rico in Potosí is generally thought to have been discovered in 1545 by Diego de Huallpa, a Quechua silver miner while he was searching the mountain for an Inca shrine or traditional burial offering. The Cerro Rico was one of the largest silver mines in Bolivia, and in the entire world. The fabled mountain and with it the whole region fell into decay by the last quarter of the 18th century because the richest and most accessible veins were exhausted. To date its mines have yielded an estimated 60,000 tons of silver.
representative of the king’s court in the colonies, who depended on the extraction of mineral riches produced by their power to control the mining industry.

The Spaniards certainly found the mineral treasure chest they had been searching for in the region. The colonial state established an elaborate system of dams and hydraulic works that powered the ore-crushing mills, and it guaranteed the supply of mercury from Huancavelica in the central highlands of Peru, which was vital for the amalgamation process used to extract silver from raw ore (Wiedner 1960; Klein 2003; North 2016). Wealthy traders provided credit to mine owners for private investment in the capital-intensive and volatile mining industry.

Since the mita system provided a continuous annual supply of cheap labor, pure silver production reached extraordinary levels between 1550s–1780s. Although, the Laws of the Indies prohibited Indian Slavery in 1542 this made little difference in the extreme forms of coercion that prevailed in the mining sector of the colonial economy (Bakewell 1984; Cole 1985; Hudson 1991; Klein 2003). Local economic activity was discouraged in favor of an economic base that was driven by the needs of the colonial political body, and the desire to accumulate precious metals and other resources for Spain. It is estimated that in the first century and a half of colonization, no less than 181 tons of gold and 16,000 tons of silver were removed from the mountains sacred to the local population (Klein 2003).

During the mid-eighteenth-century Spanish control over South America began to weaken. The threat of Spanish colonial retribution began to lose its power, first in the face of indigenous community mobilizations and then of creole-led armed revolt (Thomson et al. 2018). During the next fifty years numerous momentous political confrontations ensued. The

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11 During most of the Spanish colonial rule, Bolivia was known as Upper Peru and administered by the Royal Audiencia of Charcas.
mining industry entered a prolonged period of decline, as evidenced by the eclipsing of Potosí by La Paz. After 1800, only small amounts of bullion were shipped from Upper Peru to Spain (Klein 2003).

To reorganize the operation of its colonial empire, the government of Spain began introducing what became known as the Bourbon Reforms throughout South America (Barbier 1987; Hudson 1991; Klein 2003).12 The reforms were designed to establish tighter political and administrative control within the empire. Despite the growth of the colonial economy, after 1750 the Upper Peruvian economy proved to be highly vulnerable to short term changes in the international market conditions. Similarly, the mining sector was negatively impacted by repeated trade crises and deteriorating government support. This vulnerability became evident by the late 1790s, when the mercury supply for the Potosí mines were no longer coming from the Huancavilca mines but were shipped directly from Spain (Klein 2003). In addition to this, the beginnings of the great Napoleonic wars between 1803 and 1815 led to open warfare and the disruption of Spain’s sea routes to America which also meant a halt in mercury deliveries and the end of local smelting. The abrupt collapse of the international trade resulted in a general state of depression in the colonies, which left the miners with little capital to maintain their enterprises.

12 The House of Bourbon is a European dynasty of French origin, a branch of the Capetian dynasty, the royal House of France. By the 18th century, members of the Spanish Bourbon dynasty held thrones in Spain, Naples, Sicily, and Parma. After the Spanish Bourbon King Philip V (b. 1700–d. 1746) acceded to the throne, he and his successors, Ferdinand VI (r. 1746–1759), Charles III (r. 1759–1788), and Charles IV (r. 1788–1807), sponsored a century-long effort to reform and renovate the Spanish Empire.
The arrival of the Spanish and the era of colonial silver mining ruptured the way of life of indigenous communities by displacing families as well as forcing them into new laboring relationships. Moreover, during the colonial era a system of racial and racist discrimination operationalized by forced servitude and various taxes was imposed upon the majority of Bolivia’s indigenous population. The racial hierarchies emerging around the newly organized exploitative labor conditions became an entrenched characteristic of the colonial economic, political, and social system. Thus, what was later to become the so-called “Indian problem” was initially brought into state politics and practices by the Spanish empire (Postero 2007; Fabricant 2012; North et al. 2016). In other words, the social and political structure of Bolivia originated in the Spanish conquest to a considerable extent and in the extractive mining institutions that produced the economic base that consolidated the conquest.

The Tin Era

In 1825, the independent republic was created out of the old Audencia of Charchas which still formed an independent zone of economic power between Lima and Buenos Aires. Bolívar conceived of the new polity as a model of enlightened, liberal governance, and republican rule which represented a dramatic departure from the Spanish colonial tradition (Klein 2003; Thomson 2018). By the beginning of the 1800s there was a general crisis in the mining sector, which also implied a rapid decline in the production of silver (Klein 2003). Instead of economic stability, the background to the region’s response to the collapse of the colonial government was economic crisis.
The severe crisis in the mining sector was primarily caused by the destruction of the mines during the independence wars, the increase in transportation costs, the government monopolization over silver exports, and the end of mercury sales and royal credit by the colonial government (Klein 2003). As a result, Antonio José de Sucre begun the reorganization of the mining industry, nationalized the abandoned mines while foreign capitalists started to provide the capital needed to maintain the mines (Hudson 1991; Klein 2003; Waskar 2014). This led to intense activity, with British entrepreneurs reopening the mines. As international trade declined, the Bolivian government increasingly started to rely on the manipulation of currency, the forced monopolization of the silver, and minting exports. The collapse of the London market in 1825 led to the collapse to all these speculative ventures.

After a long period of decline, the mining sector became a leading economic sector once again at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. By 1900 tin had completely superseded silver as Bolivia’s primary export, accounting for more than half of export earnings. Moreover, the period between 1900 and 1927 saw a dramatic rise in tin prices. This time it was local elites and transnational corporations based in the United States that set the rules under which tin in Bolivia was extracted, produced, and exported (North et al. 2016). Mining and metal extraction turned into a highly capitalized and industrialized activity, with localized infrastructure that was of little use to other sectors of the economy.

Just like during the colonial period, mineral extraction was organized to meet the needs of outsiders, but this time instead of serving the interests of Spain, metal extraction served the needs of the rapidly industrializing North Atlantic region. Instead of domination by a European colonial power, the mining sector was governed by local socio-economic elites and oligarchic governments encouraging foreign investment. The general social structure and the
mining sector kept many of its colonial characteristics. Efforts to organize unions were discouraged and often repressed, even if working conditions generally improved compared to the rather extreme colonial state of affairs.

In the 1920s, the miners, often referred to as cholos, who worked in the mine called Siglo XX organized one of history’s most powerful labor movements. This labor movement and the unions that came into being because of the movement organized strikes and confronted the mining companies demanding better working and living conditions. Conflicts between the labor movement and successive conservative governments resulted in constant repression, violence, and blood-stained confrontations. By the 1940s labor movements had changed the politically charged concept of the “Indian problem” and started to refer to “indigenous” people as “campesinos” or peasants. These labor-oriented movements attempted to solve the colonial heritage of the past in terms of a purely class analysis and excluded everything that was ethnic or “indigenous”.

Concerning this, I observe that throughout the complex history of Bolivian state formation, ideas about how to solve the issue of race and ethnicity were mainly through either segregation or assimilation. While segregation, embedded in colonial legislation, was based on the idea the Indians should have separate places in society, assimilation was still a marginal idea prior to the Chaco War (1932–1935) and the Great Depression (1929-1939). Due to the collateral effects of the Chaco War and Great Depression, assimilation slowly became central to the construction of the Bolivian state apparatus during the first half of the twentieth century. The segregation of the large rural population from the benefits of economic growth, including the growth from earlier periods, resulted in local economic diversification, as well as poverty and blocked market growth.
Consequently, in the 1950s miners began to take erratic steps toward political, social and economic reform that culminated in the nationalization of the mines and the 1952 revolution. The revolution was led by MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario) a political party run mostly by the emerging middle class, instituting a one-party system and organizing state-controlled peasant unions in the rural areas. The Rosca mining oligarchy was replaced by an emerging working middle class that allied with rural people and the labor movement to nationalize the mines and institute an agrarian reform to break up unproductive haciendas.

The nationalization of Bolivia’s mineral riches represented the heart of MNR’s vision of economic liberation. Hence, in the place of the tin barons’ enterprises, the party established the powerful state mining corporation, better known as COMIBOL (Corporación Minera de Bolivia). By 1952, however, tin revenue was already in a free fall. Thus, rather than ensuring economic independence, the nationalizing decree resulted in continued economic dependence (Morales 2010). The party gradually became populist with a middle-class integrationist agenda to support their version of Bolivian nationalism. This vision differed from leftist politics emphasizing unions and socialism.

Unions remained important. However, some were explicitly intolerant of the rural majority, framing “indigenous” worldviews based on their ethnic identity as primitive, uncivilized, and non-modern. In other words, the MNR implemented economic programs in ways that reinscribed the marginalization of “indigenous” or ethnic identity. Bolivia at the time was predominantly rural, with most of the rural population only marginally integrated into the national economy. Yet, the MNR promoted a class-based political discourse to assimilate the rural and illiterate majority.
This was achieved by forming worker and peasant unions and linking middle-class citizenship to the state through a class-based revolutionary nationalist ideology (Casanovas 1985; Waskar 2014). The ideology of the ruling revolutionary party thus promoted the figure of the “peasant brother” (hermano campesino) and viewed joint citizenship as a necessary condition for ending discrimination against the rural majority. “There are no longer any Indians, there are only peasants,” as Victor Paz Estenssoro the ruling president at the time once put it. No doubt, the privileged subjects in the discourse of the national revolution were the peasants and the growing proletariat.

Twelve more tumultuous years of national reform left the MNR divided and in 1964, a military regime led by vice-president René Barrientos overthrew President Paz Estenssoro at the outset of his third term, an event that many assert brought an end to the 1952 National Revolution. This also marked the beginning of nearly twenty years of military rule. Thus, between 1964 and 1982 little changed in terms of equal opportunity for the rural or “indigenous” majority (Hudson 1991; Klein 2003, Waskar 2014, Thomson et al. 2018). In fact, blocked market growth continued to be one of the main features characterizing the neoliberal era starting in the mid-1980s onwards.

During this period, Bolivia’s mineral extraction economy occupied a peripheral position in the global system which drained the country of capital and left workers vulnerable to boom-bust cycles (Nash 1993). The nationalization of the mines resulted in alienation which in turn formed the basis of continuing exploitation. Moreover, rural peoples’ formal ties to the state were further weakened due to the privatization of land and labor which was another feature characterizing the ensuing neoliberal era. Thus, in the early 1980s Bolivia faced the most severe economic crisis of the preceding three decades. To make things worse,
in 1985 the world tin market crashed. The economy was beset by chronic balance of payments, fiscal deficits, and a foreign debt of billions.

The Lithium Era

Lithium was first discovered early on by J.A. Arfwedson in 1817, but it was not until 1975 that George Erickson of the US Geological Service conducted a study in the southern department of Potosí that established Bolivia’s lithium reserves at the Salar de Uyuni as one of the most important reserves in the world (Aguirre 2020). Lithium development began when a Bolivian geologist, Carl Brockmann, and William D. Carter, a US geologist examined the giant salt flat in Uyuni (Aguirre 2021). More studies followed, and by 1976, the existence of a very large lithium reserves was confirmed. These inspections were carried out in cooperation with different organizations and institutions, such as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Bolivian geology service, and the Mining Corporation of Bolivia (COMIBOL) (Obaya 2019).

The period between the 1980 and the 1990s was characterized by structural reforms and neoliberal policies (Obaya 2019). The purpose of the reforms was dissociating the state from economic activities by opting for foreign investments and privatization of natural resources (Obaya 2019). Therefore, vast mines located in the Bolivian countryside, as well as large reserves of petroleum were privatized (Lewis et al. 2004). During the early 1980s the investigation of lithium resumed, and the state made considerable efforts to make a business deal with the Lithium Company of America (Lithco) (Daza, 2017).

13 The lithium deposits of Salar de Uyuni were also investigated by the geology department of the Universidad Mayor de San Andres (UMSA). The French “Office de la recherche scientifique et technique outre-mer” (ORSTOM) also conducted a study of the evaporite resources in the salt flats (Nacif 2012).
This era was marked by the ongoing Cold War, which for the first time had boosted the global need for lithium. At that time, the metal was considered a strategic resource to manufacture thermonuclear weapons (Nacif 2012). Since Bolivia was still evaluating its resources, the country was not in the position to meet this demand. In 1989, Lithco was finally given the consent to explore and exploit the minerals of the Salar for the next forty years (Obaya 2019). The Bolivian state would not take part in the extraction but instead collected taxes and revenues from the exportation of the metal. This contract led to massive protests, mainly initiated by the actors that had been excluded from the negotiation process.

The most significant actor in this context was the Potosí Civic Committee (COMCIPO) which managed to create a sense of regional unity through participation and collective action (Daza, 2017). Their concern was that taxes were leveled by the central government, and not directed to benefit the department of Potosí or the communities in which the mining activities would take place (Daza, 2017). The signing of the contract with Lithco was canceled and it was not until 1992 that the subject merited renewed consideration.

Later, in 1994, Bolivian President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada passed the Law of Capitalization, which privatized telephone services, commercial airlines, and the railways. These measures heavily weakened Bolivia’s Gross Domestic Product as profits were outsourced to prosperous multinational corporations (Dangl 2007). The freshly privatized businesses became less and less responsive to the rising economic concerns including unemployment and low tax revenues. Moreover, the discovery of vast reserves of natural gas in the late 1990s provoked a heated controversy over ownership of natural resources and the extent to which Bolivia should pursue neo-liberal economic policies favorable to foreign capital investment (Klein 2003).
New social movements comprised by a variety of groups, such as the cocaleros, arose in these new circumstances, claiming to represent Bolivians who had suffered discrimination and exclusion from the country’s mainstream political and economic institutions. Common ideas among the social movements were strong anticapitalism, sympathy for socialism, and a form of nationalism expressed in anti-U.S. and anti-Chilean sentiments, combined with a profound suspicion of foreign corporations involved in Bolivian joint ventures and privatizations. Generally, the social movements distinguished themselves from political parties by promoting disruptive forms of protest, such as road blockades and occupations of government buildings.

To comply with a neoliberal citizenship regime during the 1990s, the Bolivian state redefined its national identity as a "multicultural state". Thus, assimilation was condemned as intolerant and unrealistic, while the increasing pressure of globalization rendered homogeneous visions of the nation more and more unsustainable. Neoliberal economic policies were complemented by an emphasis on recognizing and politicizing formerly marginalized groups whose exclusion was based on their ethnic identity. Generally, the neoliberal reforms stressed the cultural aspect of existing social organizations and their incorporation into the state's administrative system.

Neoliberal multiculturalism offered subject categories in which “indigenous” people were to be represented (Medeiros 2001; McNeish 2002; Andolina et al. 2005). It is not a coincidence that it was during the era of neoliberal reform that “indigenousness” replaced the class consciousness as the locus for popular mobilization (Postero 2007; Linera 2004, 2005; Lazar 2008). Consequently, there had been an increase in social movements taking part in local politics and decision-making. Popular mobilization in Bolivia became deeply intertwined...
with new political spaces opened by neoliberal reforms, while neoliberal policy discourses were often restrained by anxieties for political stability.

Despite continuing barriers to participation, social movements started demanding official recognition of their rights and slowly became a social force at the national level (Haarstadt 2009). Additionally, campesinos and workers were beginning to mobilize political power through ethnic identities and racial markers. In fact, to a significant degree it was the mobilization around ethnic demands that confronted privatization policies and gas export programs that were deemed too advantageous to foreign companies. As a result, such organizations became vehicles for political mobilization in places like El Alto, which was to become the center ground of oppositional politics. Aymara-dominated and other indigenous groups and organizations voicing their ethnic identity contested key elements of neoliberal reform policies primarily through street protests, and popular mobilization.

This is what happened in the Water War in 2000. Social movements largely comprised of Aymara protesters and other ethnic or indigenous groups were the backbone of the iconic popular mobilization. The Bolivian public had not been able to meaningfully affect politics at a national level for some time, but this changed radically in the iconic insurrection. As a direct consequence, the presidential elections in 2002 became a contest between former president Sánchez de Lozada and Evo Morales who headed the ticket of the MAS party. In the bitterly fought race, Lozada prevailed by a slight margin, but due to civil unrest in 2003 he resigned and handed over the government to Vice President Carlos Mesa Gisbert.14

Mesa’s government was brought down in June 2005 by a new wave of road blockades and large-scale demonstrations in La Paz. Due to the escalating violence, congress decided to

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14 In September 2003, violent protests erupted in response to the government’s plan to institute an income tax and to export liquefied natural gas to the United States by means of a pipeline through Chile.
appoint Eduardo Rodríguez as interim president. Sworn in Rodríguez instantly called for a special national election in December 2005. The December 2005 elections were widely anticipated as an opportunity for Bolivians to end the governance crisis. The presidential race turned out to be a two-candidate race between Evo Morales of the leftist MAS and former President Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga of the conservative Social Democratic Power (Poder Democrático y Social-Podemos) coalition.

Despite anxieties that neither candidate would win a clear-cut mandate, Morales was elected with 53.7 percent of the vote. Evo became the first Aymara president in Bolivia’s history as well as the first majority president since the 1952 National Revolution (Hudson 1991). Even though a high turnout of more than 80 percent of eligible voters lent added legitimacy to the results, Bolivia remained profoundly divided by competing ethnic, class, and regional loyalties that would thoroughly test the new administration’s capacity to forge a national agreement on basic economic and political developments.

In the shadow of colonialism and neoliberalism, when the first state-run lithium-industry was inaugurated by Evo in 2008 this created great expectations regarding Bolivia’s ability to rewrite its troubled history with natural resource extraction. In March 2008, the government issued a decree investing $5.7 million to set up a state owned “pilot extraction plant” at the edge of the Salar de Uyuni. The pilot plant was originally intended to determine the technical and economic feasibility of getting the lithium-rich brine out from under the Salar’s crust and separating it into its distinct, marketable products. Drilling started in August 2009.
According to Evo what made lithium industrialization particularly unique was that it represented nothing less than the unparalleled opportunity for the state to fully control the extraction process from its beginning. This was particularly crucial in the light of Bolivia’s long and bitter history of foreign mining and mineral exports that stretches back to the exploitation of its legendary Potosí silver mines by the Spanish during the colonial era. Evo’s administration promised nothing less than an attempt to change the past patterns of foreign colonial and neoliberal exploitation by asserting national control of the country’s natural gas reserves and its massive lithium deposits. “Lithium is like a beautiful lady, very much sought and pursued, especially in Bolivia” as Evo put it.

The anti-neoliberal program of MAS became evident already in May 2006, when Evo nationalized the oil and gas sector. This was accomplished by directing the Bolivian army to take over the natural gas installations that foreign actors controlled (Postero 2017). The government’s policy of transitioning away from the neoliberal policies of the recent past by maintaining state control of lithium development and pushing through new governmental reforms did not at all go smoothly. There were political protests and mobilizations by those groups and communities who opposed Evo’s reforms as well as by his supporters. Several of Bolivia’s social organizations, active in the Salar de Uyuni region, have demanded a fair share in the eventual bounty to be reaped from future lithium exploitation. Some of these mobilizations turned violent.

Despite the COMIBOL’s strong historical ties with MNR’s vision of Bolivian nationalism, the lithium industry was placed under the state-run mining corporation’s control in 2008 by the socialist administration. The COMIBOL soon shared control of the lithium mining operation with GNRE (the Gerencia Nacional de Recursos Evaporiticos). In the meantime, the government continued to emphasize how the nationalization of the lithium
industry would be and already was critical to the growth, development, and sovereignty of Bolivia. In 2008, the resources of the Salar de Uyuni were proclaimed a national priority.

This was the first step in the process of industrializing the lithium. The plan for the industrialization of lithium was officially launched as a state-owned project with two main objectives: to obtain lithium carbonate (Li$_2$CO$_3$) to be used in the production of cathodes for batteries, and to produce and commercialize potassium chloride (KCl) also found in the brines and used worldwide as a fertilizer. Great emphasis has been placed on the goal of 100% state ownership and the management of the initial phases of the industrialization.

The state-mining corporation, COMIBOL, established an industrialization plan that is divided into three phases: 1) the pilot phase, with a goal of 40 tons of lithium carbonate per month, 2) the industrial phase, with the goal of an annual production of 30,000 tons, and 3) the battery production phase. Together these phases represented one of the most ambitious state mining investments in Bolivian history. The launch of the pilot phase of the lithium industrialization began in 2008 with the building of the necessary infrastructure in Llipi Llipi, including evaporation pools, laboratories, and the construction of the pilot production plant. As the regime prepared to turn the country into the new “Saudi Arabia of lithium” (Schipani 2013) the government’s plan was to process and add value to lithium after extraction by manufacturing batteries, and even electric cars made in (“hecho en”) Bolivia. The lithium pilot plant was finally opened in 2013 at the Salar de Uyuni next to the red brown Rio Grande River.

Actual production began in January of 2013, and to date the plant has produced approximately ten tons of lithium carbonate. This is a far cry from the goal of 30,000 tons per year. Yet, this limited production of lithium carbonate did not diminish the conviction of Evo and his regime. A turning point in the legal and political organizational framework for lithium
development only occurred in January of 2017 when Evo, as part of the restructuring of his ministerial cabinet, resolved to create a Ministry of Energy entrusted with attending more directly to the government’s energy policies and activities, separate from oil and gas which continued under the Ministry of Hydrocarbons.

Two vice-ministries formed part of the structure of the new ministry: one for electricity and alternative energy and another for high-energy technologies, lithium, and nuclear energy. One of the areas given special attention was that of lithium industrialization. It was during the same year that the control of the lithium industry was taken away from the COMIBOL and the GNRE, in favor of the autonomous state company called Yacimientos del Litio Bolivianos (YLB) which started to oversee the management and operations of the exploitation, industrialization, and commercialization of lithium.

The YLB was founded as a decentralized state entity under the Ministry of Economy, replacing the former responsible organ, Gerencia Nacional de Recursos Evaporíticos (GNRE) by means of Law 928 of 27 April 2017. Today, it is still responsible for developing the entire production chain of the salt flats' lithium reserve as well as developing the processes for exploitation, industrialization, and commercialization of the finished products with added value. The company’s official vision is to industrialize lithium through sustainable, public, and social projects, that respond to the regional, departmental, and national development while respecting the environment.

Evo rejected several offers of foreign investment in the lithium industry even though the Bolivian lithium reserves are located at a higher altitude and contain more magnesium and potassium than in neighboring Chile, making the extraction process much more complicated and costly. Additionally, great emphasis had been placed on the complete state ownership and management of the initial phases of the industrialization. Evo required nothing less than
majority Bolivian ownership in the extraction process even though Bolivia had very limited infrastructure, thus environmental, social, and technological challenges make it extremely challenging for any company to mine lithium at a profit.\textsuperscript{15}

Due to technological challenges and lack of infrastructure and knowhow, lithium production as well as industrialization has lagged for years. To make the leap to the next stage in the industrialization of lithium the Pilot Plant of Cathodic Materials was inaugurated in 2017 at the industrial complex of La Palca in the Department of Potosí. The construction of the infrastructure was finally carried out by the French company ECM and most of the equipment was provided by a German corporation. At the same industrial facility, the Pilot Plant for Assembling Batteries was also inaugurated in 2014. Even though many years have passed since the nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry in 2006 and the inauguration of the lithium industry in 2008, Bolivia’s lithium carbonate production is still in the pilot stage. The state began building its first commercial lithium plant in 2018, but the plant remains unfinished to this day.

Bolivia’s national strategy can also be gauged through its ambitious “Strategic Plan for Lithium Industrialization” which called for a $900 million commitment to the development of a state-run industry. The plan called for Bolivia to extract and process lithium for commercial use on its own. Bolivia, the government indicated, should be prepared to finance the entire chain of production, including a battery plant. Initially, the government expected full-scale battery production to begin in 2014. Production was expected to reach fifteen thousand metric tons per year.

\textsuperscript{15} Since 2006, foreign corporations and governments have lobbied the Bolivian government for access to the lithium riches. Among the major international investors interested in Bolivia’s lithium are Brazil, Iran, China, France, Russia, Germany, South Korea and the Japanese companies Mitsubishi and Sumitomo.
tons when the promised commercial plant is operating at full capacity, but whether any of the plants will ever operate at full capacity is a burning question for many.

Yet, during his presidential tenure, Evo never failed to publicly highlight the importance of the state management of the industrialization of lithium. In fact, in 2017 Evo still insisted that the university system offer a degree in lithium development. The industrialization of lithium and the government’s process of change remained inseparable from each other in the regime’s revolutionary rhetoric. Thus, the question inevitably arises: how exactly has lithium industrialization interacted with Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution, officially known as the *proceso de cambio*, and with localized social forms and structures, which the national-level revolution has sought to reconstitute? I will investigate this question in the following chapters.

**Conclusion**

Since Independence in 1825, Bolivia has seen varying forms of military rule with nearly two hundred coups in just under two hundred years of independence. Following the National Revolution in 1952, it was not until 1985 that democracy finally returned to the country (Klein 2003; Hudson 1991). The weak history of political stability and democracy in Bolivia opened the door for neo-liberal political and economic programs. The attempts to industrialize the country’s lithium deposits cannot be seen in isolation from the effort to create the social infrastructure needed for a neoliberal investment climate.

First, it was during the neo-liberal era that Bolivia’s lithium deposits first garnered significant local and international interest. Second, during the 1990s Bolivia’s lithium reserves not only gained widespread global attention, but the country’s lithium deposits have attracted a great deal of attention from private foreign investors who openly started to compete to exploit
this strategic resource. Third, the new social movements founded on regionalism and ethnic identity emerged as a major force in Bolivian politics during the latter part of the Banzer administration which led up to Evo’s election and thus, to lithium industrialization.

Neoliberal policymaking and popular mobilization have reciprocally influenced and constrained each other since the political instability of 2003 especially. However, there are important connections and mutual constraints between popular mobilization and neoliberal policy. Similar points have been made by Postero (2007) and Linera (2004) regarding Bolivia, and Hale (2002) concerning Guatemala. The introduction of neoliberal reforms created avenues for the incorporation of social movements not only at the local level but to some extent, also at the national level.

Concerning this, several authors note that the spaces opened by the politics of multiculturalism were often narrow and fraught with limitations. The decentralization reforms encouraged the “indigenous” communities to organize only in "legitimate" and “rational” ways that reflected the logic of neoliberal policies (Hale et. al. 2004, Hale 2006; Postero 2007; McNeish 2008). Still, the opening of spaces within the state was used by social movements to try to gain a foothold in the processes of decision-making. Neoliberalism aside, the Bolivian nation state’s mission to produce raw materials for the global economy has profoundly shaped the country’s economic development, and political stability.

In fact, mineral extraction in Bolivia has played a central role in the creation of the Bolivian nation state historically. Due to the volatile and unstable nature of the mining sector the role of mineral extraction in the creation of the nation state, though it has been central, has been also highly ambiguous. While it might be true that the mining sector historically served as a platform for violence, exclusion, and oppression, it has also served as a space where political actors have organized and emerged as a socio-political force actively shaping the
state formation process. All in all, mining in Bolivia has been profoundly intertwined with power, religion, cosmology, as well as radical social and political transformation throughout the centuries. Yet, the relationship between cosmology, resource extraction, and revolutionary politics remains undertheorized even though in Bolivia these factors are profoundly intertwined.
Chapter Three: Temporal Horizons and Revolutionary Permutations

“Because that doctrine of equality was surrounded by so much horror and bloodshed this “modern idea” par excellence was given a kind of glory and fiery glow, so that the Revolution as spectacle seduced even the noblest minds” (Nietzsche 1998:73)

Introduction

The mural depicting Bolivia’s 1952 Revolution at the Comibol archive in El Alto was impossible to miss. I could not help noticing that the striking mural by local artists William Luna Tarqui and Jesús Callizaya expanded from left to right, from the armed insurrection to the nationalization of the mines, providing a progressive reading of history. The dramatic depiction of socialist ideals, revolutionary leaders and miners dying for the revolution reminded me that in just a few hours armed miners forming the radical backbone of the revolution defeated the army of the ruling class, which would take years to be re-established.

Every time I visited the archive staff members and archivists wearing white gloves were sifting through thousands of tinted pages under a display reading “Out of the trash, into the memory of the world”. History kept bursting from the shelves into the present. Among the valuable materials stored here were documents of massacres carried out at the order of the “tin barons” who controlled the nation’s economy and politics before they were tarnished by the revolution. At this special place, miners literary salvaged their own history.

One of the archivists was a former miner and labor leader from Potosí. His work as a miner was often disrupted by imprisonment, and clandestinity. One day I asked him about the mural just down the corridor and about the political role of the miners in the iconic National
Revolution. Our lengthy discussion culminated in him talking about the nature of what he thought to be a cataclysmic event changing the course of the country’s history:

“In 1952 the country witnessed a true revolution. The power in the hands of the miners and the workers was real. The early days were filled with joy and euphoria. People thought that it will be successful. Nowadays, everybody remembers it as a failed revolution. If you ask me, they completely miss the point. It was a magnificent event that brought about fundamental political changes. The miners almost single handedly humbled the bourgeois state and achieved universal suffrage. If it wasn’t for the revolution Evo would not be president today. Tell me, how can politicians designate this fact to the trash bin?”

Before I could think of a clever answer, he started to talk about the political impact of the miner’s ch’alla rituals surrounding the Tío:

“You know in Potosí almost every miner has a close ancestor or an old family member who was a revolutionary in the 1950s. Resistance is a tradition in the mines. Miners have come together for generations to perform rituals to fight for a better world. During the ritual of the ch’alla, miners offer alcohol to the Tío. You must understand that these gatherings established the foundation for famous revolutionary movements. Performing the ch’alla led to radical political actions such as strikes, union organizing and the armed National Revolution in 1952.

So, in the mines a truly revolutionary generation was born not only dreaming about but producing political change. So, it is very important to continue these ritualistic traditions because there is no occasion more profound than the ch’alla, the moment when the miners chew coca together, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and present it to the Tío. They talk about their problems; they organize and imagine a future they want to achieve. It is the ch’alla that gives them power to act on it.”
In Bolivia, as elsewhere in the world a revolution is usually defined if nothing else, as a violent upheaval, or as a climactic moment in history: as an iconic event which is often envisioned as a rupture in history bringing about radical change in the dominant political and social order, or at least intends to do so. It was in large part the French Revolution and its aftermath that continued up to 1848, which enshrined the terms and concepts that have become inevitable to revolutionary discourse (Hobsbawm 1986). The “great revolutions” de facto provided the analytical standards for the rest, their impact on historiography has been profound. These grand events worked prospectively on revolutionaries, counterrevolutionaries, and retrospectively on both practitioners and historians of revolution (Tassi et. al. 2020).

Moreover, the idea of revolutions as singular historical events has come to occupy a central place in modern perceptions of history itself as a forward-moving process (Koselleck 1985). Such a conception of history, and of time itself, is intimately bound up with changing notions of revolution in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe (Koselleck 1985). This friction between a longing for a decisive break with the past, and the past’s power to “haunt” the present and determine the future, and thus restricts the nature of revolutionary renovation endures in writings on revolution.

To discuss how Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution, officially known as the proceso de cambio, intersects with the industrialization of lithium in that country, I first examine the standard belief that revolutions constitute a violent break with the past for the sake of bringing about a distinct kind of future, a sort of kairos that separates the old era from a new one. I seek to set a claim in motion by focusing on the narrower, though central, idea that revolutions are to be envisioned, if nothing else, as a modern phenomenon, and as rupture-
like events that establish a new order of things. This chapter also looks at the complex temporal nature of revolutionary processes more broadly.

Marxist conceptions of revolution have had an enormous impact on revolutionary processes across the globe. Therefore, in this section I discuss some of the radical revolutionary theories from this tradition. I will demonstrate that while Marxists’ conception of revolution might be varied, they essentially operate with a standard rupture-like temporal horizon of revolutionary transformation. In addition, I consider whether the anthropological study of ritual enables us to contemplate nonlinear ways of conceiving of revolutionary time itself, and where this might lead us in thinking about the temporal nature of Bolivia’s self-proclaimed cultural revolution as it intersects with lithium industrialization.

Finally, based on specific anthropological examples I address how nonlinear ethnographic accounts of revolutionary processes might look like. By the end of this chapter, it should be apparent that universal notions of revolution as a particular kind of event cannot do justice to the variety of concepts, temporality, experiences, and practices that different revolutionary projects depend upon across the globe (Tassi et. al 2020). The broader anthropological lesson will be that the overall temporal horizons, and thus the basic character of revolutionary processes, are varied in any given ethnographic situation which is closely connected to the different cosmological conceptions with which they are related.
Revolution as Rupture in Time and Social Order

From the Enlightenment era onward, instead of denoting a circle, revolution began to be understood as a particular break in time, causing a rupture with the past for the sake of a future that is yet to be fulfilled. Further, the idea of revolution was elevated to a “metahistorical” level (Koselleck 1985:47). This means that revolution became a “partisan concept” (Koselleck 1985: 55) denoting, at least in part, emancipation driven by industrialization. Revolution became a regulatory doctrine of knowledge with a transcendental value, a collective singular uniting within itself the course of all individual revolutions. The totalizing concept of world revolution also emerged; the world was to be revolutionized in its entirety. Consciousness and revolutionary process started to belong together in a context where revolutionary process conditions consciousness and reciprocally affects it.

As for temporality, the modern concept of revolution started to be bound up with the notion that the course of history can, under certain circumstances, suddenly begin anew. In other words, the concept was based on a temporal perspective with a defined direction. Rather than referring to happenings within time, revolution started to refer to the structure of time itself. What fundamentally marks the modern concept of revolution is the step from the political to the social revolution. The capacity for revolutionary activism and to “make” revolutions emerged (Koselleck 1985). What was entirely new is that the objective of a political revolution should be the total transformation of social structure to achieve emancipation.
As the young Marx explained in 1844: “Every revolution dissolves the old society, and to that extent it is social. Every revolution overthrows the old power and to that extent it is political…But socialism cannot be realized without revolution. It needs this political act insofar as it needs destruction and dissolution” (Marx 1844: 2). For some thinkers this idea could only be conceived after the French Revolution (Koselleck 1985; Arendt 1965).

According to Arendt (1965) social and political revolutions were non-existent before the modern age. In contrast to a revolution, the aim of war was rarely bound up with the idea of freedom or emancipation; and while warlike uprisings against invaders were felt to be sacred, they were not recognized as the only fair wars. In this context, the element of novelty inherent in all revolutions is maintained by the conditions of a rectilinear time concept, and as such has a Christian origin (Arendt 1965). The successive wars of the Jews in Palestine against the Roman Empire might be considered to offer a case in which the idea of emancipation - specifically religious freedom - was in fact an example of a pre-modern war fought for freedom.

Marxists established an array of unique analyses on how revolutionary events should develop. Some preferred the notion of a quick, steadfast, and turbulent rupture (Marx 2008; Lenin 2014) while others conceptualized revolution as a lengthier, continuous and not necessarily punctuated process (Trotsky 2010, Gramsci 1992a). For some, revolution should entail both characteristics (Luxemburg 2006). Either way, Marxist revolutionary theory revolved around a violent break with the past to establish a brand-new social order, based upon Marx and Engel’s cosmological vision about the connections between bourgeois society, the revolutionary proletariat, and capitalism.
According to them, modern bourgeois society invented such powerful means of production and exchange, that it is like “the sorcerer who can no longer control the powers of the underworld that he has called up by his spells” (Marx et al. 2005: 15). Therefore, the members of the revolutionary proletariat must wrestle with and transform enormous and volatile forces summoned by the demonic bourgeoisie. However, they envision a revolutionary community whose foundations are laid, quite ironically by the bourgeoisie itself. In this context, the workers' communal bonds generated by the capitalist production generates militant political institutions that will overthrow the existing social relations.

Ultimately, it is the contradiction between the development of the forces of production and dynamic social relations of production that leads to radical social transformation. In this volatile context, the proletariat has a uniquely universalist role because as a social class they escape any traditional status whatsoever. Once the workers are forced to face the real circumstances of their lives they will come together, and once the ideas of communism become accessible to the masses whose members discover who they really are, communism will come into existence through revolution.

It is around egalitarian ideals and the analysis of conditions of revolutionary possibility that the main foci of revolutionary analysis cluster. However, Marxist revolutionary theory is also a viewpoint of history. theorists reach out for necessity and uniformity, rather than reckoning with odds and social probabilities. Consider the key metaphor that revolutions are “the locomotives of history” (Marx 2000: 134) representing the very core of orthodox Marxist theory. Revolution is envisioned as a historical necessity; it is the only process through which the ideal and the rational become actual. Further, revolution enables creative human intervention where “the tradition of dead generations weighs like nightmare on the brains of the living” (Marx 2008:5).
This creative interventive force generated by passion and class consciousness and spurred on by the struggle of classes results in radical, massive, rapid, and violent social change that achieves a renovated social order. In this context, revolution has two faces. One is elegant and abstract, the other is violent, concrete, and nightmarish with immense destructive power. Would the Paris Commune have lasted more than a day if it had not used the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie? – Engels (2010) asks. Probably not. Accordingly, a revolution for Engels is “the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets, and cannons, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of the terror” (Engels 2010:425).

Comparably, for Luxemburg (2004) who criticized Lenin’s revolutionary theory as Blanquist, revolution is aimed at the complete destruction of the previous order. Blanquism refers to a conception of revolution generally attributed to Louis Auguste Blanqui, who contrary to Marx did not believe in the predominant role of the working class in social revolution. He thought that socialist revolution should be carried out by a relatively small group of professional and highly organized revolutionaries, who would establish a temporary dictatorship by force. Having seized power, the revolutionaries would then use the power of the state to introduce socialism.16

In the revolution the multitudes enter the political arena, class consciousness becomes actual and active. It is an endeavor of the powerless who cannot control their own fate because of economic reasons (Luxemburg 2004). In this context, revolutionary act is defined as active self-determination. In her views the “juste milieu” cannot be sustained in a revolution:

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16 Blanquism could be considered a particular sort of "putschism" that is, political revolution should take the form of a putsch or coup d'état.
“The law of its nature demands a quick decision: either the locomotive drives forward full steam ahead to the most extreme point of the historical ascent, or it rolls back of its own weight again to the starting point at the bottom; and those who would keep it with their weak powers halfway up the hill, it drags down with it irredeemably into the abyss” (Luxemburg 2004: 289).

At the heart of revolutionary action is the “mass strike” (Luxemburg 2008: 115). It signifies the external form of the class struggle, and it is the sheer embodiment of revolutionary spontaneity. Instead of the mass strike leading to revolution, the revolution creates the condition for blending of economic and political struggle in the strike. Overall, the strike action is produced by the revolution and so it is historically determined. It is “the living pulse of the revolution and at the same time its most powerful driving wheel (Luxemburg 2008: 141)”. It is the motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle. Moreover, the mass strike opens novel new revolutionary vistas where the revolution seemed already at a dead end:

“…they are flooding the empire like a tidal wave, now splitting up into a giant web of rivulets, now welling from the subsoil like a new spring, now draining entirely into the ground. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstration strikes and combat strikes, general strikes in single industries and general strikes in single cities, quiet wage struggles and street fights on the barricades - all this runs athwart and alongside each other, crisscrossing and intertwining; it is a perpetually mobile, changing sea of phenomena” (Luxemburg 2008: 140).
In response to Luxemburg’s critique, Lenin (2014) denied any accusations of Blanquism. He also followed conventional Marxist reasoning according to which, on the one hand, socialism could only arise out of modern bourgeois capitalism, while on the other, socialism’s aim is to smash the capitalist social order. His ideas primarily emerged from the vulgar materialist Plekhanov for whom the success of the revolution was the highest law. However, for Lenin (1929) it was the party’s task to assume the role of leading the exploited proletariat into the social revolution. There can be no room for spontaneity. In order to achieve the hegemony of the proletariat, mass organizations must be separate from the trained elite.

For Lenin (1976) revolution arises out of a situation where the capacity of the revolutionary class to take mass action is strong enough to break the previous regime, which never, not even in a period of crisis collapses by itself. Furthermore, revolution is not possible without a nation-wide crisis affecting both the exploited and the exploiters. For a revolution to take place it is essential that class-conscious workers fully grasp that revolution is necessary and that they must be ready to sacrifice their lives for this process. Second, the ruling classes must also go through a crisis which makes it possible for the revolutionaries to overthrow the existing order rapidly. As Lenin (1976) remarks:

“For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for “the lower classes not to want” to live in the old way; it is also necessary that “the upper classes should be unable” to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in “peace time”, but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the “upper classes” themselves into independent historical action. Without these objective changes, which are independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties but even of
individual classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible. The totality of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation” (Lenin 1976:54).

Born to an upper middle-class family in Simbirsk, Lenin began the composition of an initial draft of his *State and Revolution* while in exile in Switzerland in 1916, under the title "Marxism on the State". He described the inherent nature of the state as a tool for class oppression i.e., the state functions as an instrument for the social and political control of the ruling class. Yet, following Marx's (1940) conclusions concerning the Paris Commune, which Lenin took as a model for a revolutionary society, he declared that the task of the revolution was to smash the state. He considered the immediate abolition of the state naïve and impossible because the proletariat would need to crush bourgeois resistance through a structural apparatus, namely the state. Thus, the immediate aim of the revolution is to overthrow bourgeois democracy.

This was the revolutionary aim of most radical Marxists; disagreement mainly centered around the means and the method to achieve this extraordinary end. Lenin (2014) argued that after a successful proletarian revolution the bourgeois state had not only begun to wither away but was already in an advanced condition of decomposition. Therefore, there was a strong emphasis on the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this context, the extension of recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the touchstone on which “the real understanding and recognition of Marxism is to be tested” (Lenin 2014: 70).

One of Lenin’s early and most powerful allies, who later became a singular opponent, was Leon Trotsky (2010), who rejected Lenin’s emphasis on the organization of a revolutionary vanguard party. Yet, Trotsky’s revolutionary theory was compatible with Marx’s in that he called for continuing the revolution to a second stage to establish an entirely
new order of things. He insisted that while a socialist revolution was needed, it would have to be brought about by the mass working class and could pass over immediately into socialist revolution in an “unbroken chain” (Trotsky 2010: 145). His theoretical framework was primarily influenced by the writings of a Russian Jew émigré Parvus (1904) who considered the Russian proletariat as the avant-garde of the social revolution. Parvus brought Trotsky’s analysis closer to the problems of the social revolution in contemporary and economically backward Russia.

Trotsky observed Russia’s curious social structure which featured a politically insignificant capitalist bourgeois and a powerful revolutionary proletariat whose economical backwardness only strengthened possibility of a revolution. Soon, he developed his socio-economic theory of uneven development, and as a counterpart he developed his ideas about the theory of uninterrupted permanent revolution which would smash absolutism to establish a brand-new political and social order (Trotsky 2010).

Though Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1992a) conceptualized revolution as a more intricate, and subtle process, he also insisted that a complete break with the past would be necessary to smash the existing and previous social order. Following Marxist principles, he agreed that revolution should start with the everyday reality of the working class. At the same time, he stressed the notion of totality and the importance of ideological struggle in the process of socialist transformation. Further, he established his own critique of traditional Marxism, and appropriating military jargon, established a distinction between “war of movement or maneuver” and “war of position” (Gramsci 1992a: 216–219). The former refers to rapid

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17 The term “permanent revolution” was bestowed by a Menshevik critic as a form of mockery, reflecting the suspicion with which much of Second International Marxism viewed Marx’s supposedly “Blanquist. Trotsky, however, was happy to accept the designation. Oddly, from the 1917 onward he concluded that the Bolshevik Party was indeed needed as the vehicle for his revolutionary aims.
revolutionary events aimed at immediately destroying old structures in order to create new ones, while the latter indicates steady, apparently uneventful developments in which revolutionary forces slowly erode old structures by deliberately changing public discourse and by creating tactical coalitions.

For now, my goal is to make a claim about the diversity of self-proclaimed revolutions. To further develop this argument, I will discuss whether the anthropological study of ritual may serve as a starting point for tackling revolutionary permutations. Indeed, many of our views about revolutions resemble what anthropologists have said about ritual action (Tassi et. al. 2020). Rituals are treated as transformative events (Gennep 2019; Turner 1967, 1969; Larsen 2014), and often, as with revolutions, ritual action entails brutality, aggression, and violence (Gluckman 1963; Bloch 1986; 1987; 1992). Can key insights from the anthropological study of ritual shed light on the comprehension of revolutionary processes? By the same token, can critical perspectives on ritual theory stimulate alternative ways of thinking about the temporal shape of revolutionary action? These are the questions I will investigate in the next section.

**From Ritual Process to Nonlinear Uprisings**

The idea that the study of ritual might provide useful tools for the analysis of non-linear revolutionary transformations is intimately bound up with developments in British social anthropology and its central concern with conflict and social order (Tassi et. al. 2020). British social anthropology has historical roots in several 19th-century disciplines, but its immediate precursor crystalized in the work of Edward B. Tylor (1958) and James G. Frazer (1981) in the late 19th century. Since that time the discipline underwent major changes in both
method and theory during the period 1890-1920 with a new emphasis on original fieldwork, and long-term holistic study of social human behavior.

What is relevant for developing my argument about revolutionary change as it overlaps with lithium industrialization is the emergence of the idea that social practice and structure together constitute and are themselves constituted by the flow of social life (Tassi et. al 2020). This became the theoretical hallmark of the so-called Manchester School of Social Anthropology established by Max Gluckman in 1947 at the University of Manchester in the UK. Anthropologists working in this vein accepted Durkheim’s (2001) fundamental idea that ritual is a crucial foundation in which society is constituted, and generally acknowledged functionalist and structural-functionalist approaches initiated by Malinowski (1922) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952).

Accordingly, they recognized ritual as a mechanism for integrating social bonds. However, they went a step further in their analyses. They wanted to demonstrate that a strictly structural functionalist approach was ill-equipped to address problems such as conflict, and transformation (Tassi et. al 2020). The best-known figures exploring the dynamics of conflict and its resolution within ritual were Gluckmann himself and his student Victor Turner. In their studies of African societies, they not only argued that the manifestation of conflict has socially integrative effects but observed that ritual events were deeply intertwined with conflict and its management. Gluckman (1963) for example argued that revolutions proper must be distinguished from what he refers to as “rituals of rebellion” (2004: 176).
He essentially understood rebellious ritual events as performances of conflict in which actual social conflicts are symbolically enacted and resolved. Consider his statement about Zulu agricultural first-fruit rites in which women transgress their conventional social roles:

“This ceremony is not a simple mass assertion of unity, but a stressing of conflict, a statement of rebellion and rivalry against the king, with periodical affirmations of unity with the king, and the drawing of power from the king. The political structure, as the source of prosperity and strength which safeguards the nation internally and externally, is made sacred in the person of the king. He is associated with his ancestors, for the political structure endures through the generations, though kings and people are born and die” (Gluckman, 2004: 199).

Gluckman (1963) analyzed a series of ritual processes that transgress everyday social roles and structures by aggravating the conflict between different members. The integrative role of ritual is accomplished not by denying social tensions but by dramatizing them and staging their resolution (Tassi et al. 2020). He followed the established thinking in the anthropological study of ritual: that such ritual acts are not able to radically transform the existing political order such as in a proper revolution. Rather, ritual actions generate minor alteration to reaffirm the legitimacy of the whole political system. Despite the apparent paradox, ritual action and revolutionary transformation eliminate each other. Ritual rebellion can be enjoyed as a social blessing, but only in a social system where revolution is not possible (Gluckman 1963).
Even so, his depiction of ritual as a channel for conflict and social tension paved the way for further scrutinizing the socially transformative dynamic within ritual processes, and, potentially, recognizing ritual not as the opposite of revolutionary transformation but as its actual embodiment (Tassi et. al 2020). For the most part, the idea that ritual is not able to radically challenge the existing social and political order remained central to most ethnographic analysis exploring the correspondences between ritual and revolutionary action. Consider Turner’s (1969) study of the relationship between ritual and social change that he developed based on his fieldwork among the Ndembu in Zambia. In his cult study, Turner (1969), who was a superb ethnographer, not only delves seep into the inner dynamics of ritual process, but also explores the symbolic characteristics of ritual action.

Turner paid careful attention to the details of rituals while also being attentive to the subversive elements lurking at the heart of ritual action. He built upon Dutch French folklorist Arnold van Gennep’s (2019) idea that rites of passage contain a liminal element in that they provisionally extract participants from their social statuses. Gennep in his best-known work entitled Les rites de passage (The Rites of Passage) originally published in 1909 explains his vision of rites of passage rituals as being divided into three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation or préliminaire “preliminary”, “luminaire” (liminality) which is a stage much studied by Turner (1969), and postliminaire “post-liminality”.

He adopted a process view of rituals, arguing that they should be considered as social institutions that enable marked transitions in social status, while he also offered interpretations of the significance of these rites as forms of social regeneration. Therefore, for Turner (1969), the mutability of liminality is essential to understanding why rituals are crucial in allowing social groups to adapt to and institutionalize social change. He was also primarily occupied with the inner dynamism of the ritual process and its socially transformative potentials (Turner
Further, his aim was to explore the dialectical relationship between the ambiguity of the liminal elements of the ritual process and the social and symbolic structures it suspends.

The term anti-structure is revealing. In this framework, ritual processes emerge in response to social and political structure and their constraints, and liminal social arenas signify a parallel reality with their own rules that are often the opposite of the existing social and political structure (Turner 1969). If liminality can undo social structures temporarily, it has a revolutionary dimension, and this powerful potential is built into the very fabric of society. Therefore, Turner (1969) goes further than Gennep (2019) and Gluckmann (1963) in that his ritual model embraces the workings of all human society. This is nicely illustrated with the emotional quote he opened his 1969 classic analysis with:

“Rituals reveal values at their deepest level. Men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies” (Turner 1969: 6).

In Turner’s ritual model, structure and liminality exclude each other, thus lasting structural social and political change is not possible due to the ritual process. Even though he resourcefully advances Gluckmann’s (1963) analysis by further developing van Gennep’s (2019) intriguing model of ritual transformation from a cross-cultural perspective, his findings are ultimately consistent with Gluckman’s basic structural-functionalist idea. In other words, the apparently revolutionary characteristics of rituals which Turner (1969) calls “anti-structural” ultimately strengthen existing social structures. Therefore, if the power of the liminal is anti-structural, it cannot achieve lasting structural transformation. Yet, the idea that
the anti-structural potentials of liminality may contain the seeds for more enduring and radical social and political transformation is not fully developed in his theories (Tassi et. al. 2020).

The best-known figure to address the problem of Turner’s model of liminality was Bloch (1992) who developed his own model of ritual transformation. One of his main theoretical aims was to explore the nature of ritual’s authority since for him ritual was all about the surrender of the individual will through confidence in the knowledge of trusted others. Crucially, Bloch’s ritual model gives vital role to violence. This problematic remained largely peripheral in Gluckman’s (1963) and Turner’s (1969) ritual models and analyses. For Bloch (1992) violence is the prime means through which the two critical transitions of the ritual sequence are enacted: a) the passage from ordinary life to the transcendent realm beyond which is Gennep’s (2019) and Turner’s (1969) “pre-liminal” phase, and b) the return from the transcendental realm back to ordinary life which is referred to as the “post-liminal” phase in the previous models.

These transitions are heavily marked by violence since they turn on the subjugation of what he refers to as “human vitality” (Bloch 1992:18). Even though Bloch maintains the same three-phase model as Turner (1969) and Gennep (2019), he argues that these phases are strictly inseparable. While Turner (1969) privileges the liminal phase, Bloch (1992) merely sees this as part of an overall process that involves people entering the transcendental only to return to and conquer the vital, using literal or symbolic violence (Bloch 1992). He argues, therefore, that ritual is a dramatic process and a violent form of ideology through which the vitality of everyday life is conquered by the transcendence of death and the eternal.
This is manifested in a process he uncovers at the core of ritual structure which he defines as “rebounding violence” (Bloch 1992:18). During the ritual process, participants who return to this world after approaching the transcendental realm return into a different state. Moreover, returning into this world is expressed as a violent conquest or as an act of rebounding violence. In the return the transcendental is not left behind but continues to be connected to those who initially made the move in its direction (Bloch 1992).

Overall, Bloch’s model gives ritual more agency to transform ordinary reality than previous structuralist models of ritual which is important (Tassi et. al 2020). Following Durkheim’s (2001) classic idea that ritual provides a prime tool for organizing permanent social and political structures, Bloch (1992) envisioned ritual transformation as geared towards establishing instead of disintegrating societal structures. The ritual process slips from individual instrumental rituals to general cosmic systems which imply general political principles. Sadly, Bloch (1992), like other structuralists before him abstains from extending the political ability of ritual to more fully fledge revolutionary transformations. He expresses this in his discussion of the way in which it is feasible to overturn the predatory consequences of rebounding violence by obstructing the progression half-way at the point when native personal vitality has been abandoned but before external personal vitality has been consumed:
“This possibility comes to the fore when political circumstances make all forms of social continuation appear hopeless. In many ways this millenarian transformation can be thought of as revolutionary in that it may lead to political upheaval, as it did in Madagascar in 1863. However, in spite of this political radicalism, there is a sense in which the millenarian option is also intellectually conservative. It does not reject the symbolism of conquest in rebounding violence; it merely seeks to abort the sequence. To find a truly radical challenge occurring on a sufficiently regular basis as to be recorded by ethnographers, it is necessary to leave the realm of organized practice for the most part and move to the freer speculation of what has been called myth” (Bloch 1992:99).

It was David Lan (1985) who offered an analysis where fully-fledged revolutionary transformation and ritual theory came together. In his ethnography he studied how the members of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army joined forces with local spirit mediums in the Zimbabwean struggle for independence from British colonial rule in the 1970s. More specifically, Lan's research area was in the isolated Dande region, where mhondoro spirit mediums strengthened the ties of Marxist guerrillas to the land. A mhondoro is a powerful and revered ancestral spirit. When a chief dies, his spirit leaves his body and goes into the bush where it enters the body of a lion. Some people believe that a few days after a chief is buried a tiny lion crawls up through a hole left for it at the side of the grave and runs off into the forest. This occurs only in the case of chiefs, for chiefs are not like other men.

The cases Lan (1985) discussed in his vivid ethnography demonstrate the transference of political authority from the chiefs to the guerrillas as it was carried out by certain mhondoro mediums of Dande. Concerning this, he explains that among the Shona of what was then

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18 ZANLA guerrillas primarily pursued the Maoist strategy of peasant mobilization and waged their guerrilla war against the regime from Mozambique.
19 The word mhondoro also means lion (Lan 1985).
known as Rhodesia and became Zimbabwe at the conclusion of the war of independence, chiefs had no ritual functions, and only the mhondoro or spirit mediums had occult power over the land (Lan 1985). Before colonialism, the major roles of the chiefs had been temporal control of land and administration of the law. However, with the loss of the right to allocate land during the colonial regime, their authority had been fatally undermined.

Two or three generations after the death of a chief, his mhondoro i.e., spirit possesses a medium and gains access to a specific spiritual realm allocated to him. Once possessed, the mediums are the most important and most respected religious experts in Dande. They provide the rain for the fields, safeguard the crops as they grow, and they are conduits of knowledge between the dead to the living. The ancestors of the royal lineage are recorded, therefore, both in time through the genealogy and in space as owners of spirit provinces (Lan 1985).

The political rise of the nationalist movements reached a climax with the entry of the guerillas into Dande. The rebels and the mediums shared a desire to regain control over the land, and since the insurgents persuaded the mediums that they were fighting to reclaim the land they were given access to the spiritual realm. From this common aim, the sharing of ritual and weapons, and the union of the mystical power of the ancestors with the military strength of the guerillas was to flow. By means of ritual succession, the guerillas became the descendants of the mhondoro. This meant that the insurgents were incorporated into the ritual and symbolic spiritual structures which had previously been occupied by the chiefs. Moreover, the symbolism of the royal lineage was expanded to refer to all the people of Dande, and that of the spirit domain to refer to the emergent state of Zimbabwe which was believed to have been taken under the protection of the ancestors. As Lan (1983) neatly highlighted:
“From the grave, from the depths of the forest, from the body of a lion or of their mediums, the mhondoro control in perpetuity the land they conquered during their lives. The guerillas offered land as fertility and land as restored tradition. They offered a Zimbabwe returned to its original and rightful owners. The support of the mhondoro mediums could not be withheld (Lan 1983: 272).

The central contribution of the mhondoro mediums to the revolutionary war was the legitimation of this succession, facilitating the acceptance of the guerillas by allowing this new actor in the experience of the peasantry to be assimilated to established symbolic categories (Lan 1983). This was attained by the imposition of certain ritual restrictions on the behavior of the guerillas. By means of these, the authority of the ancestors was tapped to provide legitimacy to armed resistance and violent insurrection. The association of the guerillas with these spirits greatly accelerated their acceptance by the local communities. (Lan 1983).

The identification of the guerillas with the mhondoro and their mediums for the purpose of resolving the national inequality forced the guerillas to validate the beliefs of the mhondoro. At the same time, the mediums were offered a chance by the guerillas to adapt their practice to the wider political order in which they found themselves to be esteemed members. Therefore, the interaction between “external and indigenous ideologies” (Lan 1983:186) as well as the process which differentiated the Maoist form of guerilla warfare from all others took place within an abstract universe controlled by the spirit mediums and projected them to the front of the political stage.
Conclusion

Marxist conceptions of revolution might be varied but they essentially operate with a standard temporal horizon of revolutionary transformation. Revolution always unfolds within the linear coordinates of chronological time. This means that they envision revolution as a violent fissure in time, and a ferocious process which is aimed at a radical break with the earlier historical period to establish a brand new political and social order. This is characteristic of the very disposition Koselleck (1985) sets as the model of modern ideas about time and directional historical progress. The notion of event that historians descriptively and Marxist theory prescriptively discover at the heart of revolutionary action is relevant in the Bolivian ethnographic settings I shall be exploring.

Lan’s (1985) study is significant for the purpose of my argument because his analysis of the role of the spirit ancestors in the Zimbabwean anticolonial struggle offers a useful illustration of what revolutionary struggles that depend on the idea of cyclical time might look like. His study also provides an innovative alternative to Bloch’s linear model of ritualistic temporality. In a cyclical revolutionary timeframe, ancestral spirits are understood as real revolutionary political actors, and the ancestors take an active part in revolutionary warfare.

In Lan’s study, Bloch’s model of ritual’s rebounding violence is transferred onto the anthropological study of a specific revolutionary process at a certain location. Due to their concerted association with the ancestors via the spirit mediums, the rebels entered a transcendent order through sexual asceticism and other ritual prohibitions which correspond to the first stage of violence in Bloch’s model. Ritual and revolution blend into a single action, each building on the power of the other, and prompting the defeat of the colonial regime and the institution of the state-socialist government. All things considered; Lan’s analysis reveals
what an engaging ethnographic account of a particular nonlinear revolutionary transformation might look like.

The point is that revolutionary transformation does not necessarily unfold within the linear coordinates of chronological time but rather in some cases, revolutionary process purposely interferes with those linear coordinates (Tassi et. al. 2020). In Shona cosmology at their deaths chiefs become mhondoro which means that they become the source of the fertility of the land they are supposed to have conquered when alive. It is through their violent aggression that the fertility of the earth is made available to their descendants. Shona chiefs are the military leaders of the present, while mhondoro were the military leaders of the past. Thus, when the Shona peasants started treating the spirit mediums as their political leaders, they were loyal to the “chiefs of the past” (Lan 1985: 140).

Imagine that the guerrillas return in new guise as the warriors of the past devoted to the mhondoro mediums. To the extent that the ZANLA rebels came to represent the order of the ancestral mhondoro, the whole anticolonial revolution could quite naturally be seen as an effort to return to a past that the colonial regime had sought to obliterate. Through ritual action the rebels manifested the ancestral past in their revolutionary future oriented present. Yet, revolutionary transformation never meant the complete restoration of the past, but its establishment as a component of the present day.

The broader anthropological lesson of Lan’s (1983; 1985) study is that temporal and cosmological coordinates of revolutionary processes are varied in every ethnographic setting and this phenomenon is closely related to the distinct cosmological understandings with which they are associated (Tassi et. al. 2020). The paradoxical idea of a “forward-moving return to the past” (Tassi et. el. 2020: 35) so prominent in the context of anticolonial struggle is
particularly relevant in the context of Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution as it intersects with lithium industrialization.

All in all, Starn (1991) condemned those who privileged ritual and missed politics, but he tended to privilege politics and missed ritual (de la Cadena 2015). Lan (1983) managed to address both domains. Ultimately, the point is to acknowledge the ontological complexity of the Bolivian situation. The confrontations I address in this dissertation are intricate and multifaceted. Moreover, they do not neatly follow standard ideological and political lines for they are primarily ontological i.e., metaphysical conflicts. In this context, cosmology is always political, and politics has a deeply cosmogonic character.
Chapter Four: Struggle for Hegemony and The Socialism of Sumak Kawsay

“The twentieth century has shown you cannot supplant society with the state. The state is, by definition, the negation of the community, insofar as it is a monopoly…So, to your question, the answer is in Lenin. What Lenin was saying is that you need to always be one step and no more than one step ahead of the people. Not two, not four. One step from what the people are feeling and thinking.” (García Linera)

"The fundamental problem of any revolution is power." (Lenin)

Introduction

I arrived in La Paz in September 2019 having successfully written and defended a research proposal for my home department. Within the first two weeks there, all my initial contacts agreed to meet for interviews, and I was feeling optimistic about my research. As I wandered the streets of the city, I observed that the boulevards were topped with billboards, calendars, and posters on which Evo was promoting public works, like the paved road that promised the government’s development ideal of vivir bien: “Obras para vivir Bien” (Construction for Living Well) or promoting his promise of “Bolivia Cambia Evo Cumple.” (Bolivia is changing, Evo Delivers). These visuals were easy to find across town.

However, I realized that Evo smiling on billboards dressed like a construction worker was just one superficial side of the story. Other visual reminders of the state’s role in development, vivir bien, and industrialization featured “Evo+ Álvaro” with catchphrases like “Juntos vamos bien para vivir bien”. These messages were also easily found across the city. I started to dig around and I learned that the cyclical notion of vivir bien was first officially introduced in the National Development Plan of 2006, and later incorporated to the
Constitution of 2009, as a moral and ethical value of the state (Ranta 2018:10). The concept nearly disappeared in the governmental program for 2010-2015, which prioritized resource extraction, industrialization and state-led developmentalism. Nonetheless, it reappeared as an important element in the national development plan for 2016-2020. Crucially, in the National Development Plan of 2015, the regime reestablished the rights of Mother Earth or Pachamama as related to vivir bien concept.

Yet, paradoxically the role of a strong state as the primary promoter of vivir bien, industrialization, and economic development has also been affirmed in the country’s national development plan. This came as no surprise. I knew that Bolivia’s “democratic and cultural revolution” was initially recognized as a revolution of social movements, with several popular organizations taking center stage in the historically exclusive Bolivian politics and society. However, the process gradually has been identified with a project primarily defined by the state and structured around the figure of President Evo Morales from 2006 to 2019. Moreover, the government presented itself as offering a new “postneoliberal” project. Yet, its development model was reminiscent of both earlier liberal and state-capitalist regimes in the country’s history, which presented extractivism as the road to modern economic development.

The fact that the self-described revolutionary government in Bolivia has relied on the extraction, and, to a great extent, the export of primary raw materials, has underscored similarities with previous regimes in the past, whether oligarchic, nationalist, military, or neoliberal. Such a model has seemed to be at odds with the government’s own national and international legislative initiatives to respect and defend Mother Earth. Tensions between the vision of harmonious development and the constraints of economic progress based on the extraction of raw materials became particularly apparent after the formation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009, when the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous
Territory (TIPNIS) became the center of a conflict over the construction of a road that would run through the park.  

The “Chaparina Massacre”, as it came to be known, attested to the dominant role of neoextractivism in the region, and for many pointed to a broader conflict between extractivism and revolutionary development strategies. The project was initiated by Evo’s administration, and it was justified by the regime on the grounds that the road would link the departments of Beni and Cochabamba and bring development to the isolated region. Although the government claimed to politically represent local minorities at the national level, the project generated friction with local communities claiming their own territorial rights (Fabricant et al. 2019).

The locals invoked the constitution to demand that the government consider their view that the road would expose them to increased encroachment by agricultural, timber, and ranching interests. Soon people from all over the country organized a march that was dispersed by state intervention. Bolivian and foreign television networks aired images of the Bolivian Armed Forces brutally dispersing the protest. The excessive use of violence, including the use of clubs and gags, the teargassing of the marchers, and their arrest was aimed at demobilizing the march after attempts at dialogue had failed. The case of TIPNIS seemed to embody growing dissatisfaction with the administration of the MAS government as well as the management of the self-proclaimed plurinational state.

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20 Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure, TIPNIS) is a protected area and Native Community Land in Bolivia situated between the north of the Cochabamba Department and the south of the Beni Department (Chapare, Moxos, and Marbán provinces). It protects part of the Bolivian Yungas ecoregion. The park was made into a National Park by Supreme Decree 7401 on November 22, 1965, and recognized as an indigenous territory or formally as Native Community Land through Supreme Decree 22610 on September 24, 1990, following pressure by local native peoples and the March for Territory and Dignity organized by the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the Bolivian East.
Concerning the state/revolution problematic, Lenin’s thought is particularly instructive. Even though he declared that the task of the revolution was to smash the bourgeois state, in Lenin’s opus, the notion of revolution was inextricably bound to the functions of the proletarian or workers’ state. Following Engels (1962), Lenin (2014) proposed two stages in the process of transformation of the bourgeois state. The first stage would be the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat” that follows the socialist revolution. This involves the seizing of state power by the proletariat and turning the means of production into state property. During this stage state-focused vanguard party would lead the way in the process of political liberation of the peasants in the overall scope of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the second stage, once all class antagonisms were abolished, the proletarian state would “wither away” since the state would become the representative of the whole society, thus rendering itself unnecessary. Therefore, in the Marxist- Leninist political analysis, the state form has always been positioned as the vantage point from which to radically transform society. Although in different ways by different political actors, conceptualizations of revolution recognize the party and the state as strategic tools in the consolidation and coordination of revolutionary transformations. The role of the state in revolutionary change has often been associated with the expression of universal and general interests versus either the chaotic revolutionary masses or the interests of the few. Thus, the subjugation and control of state power has become a central feature of revolutionary efforts across the globe. Moreover, Marxists of many different tendencies have conceived the party and the state as universal agents through which localized political formations develop a truly emancipatory political consciousness.
During my fieldwork I found that a similar dialectical relationship between state and revolution has been employed to theorize the Bolivia’s democratic and cultural revolution by Evo’s government. I refer more specifically to the theoretical work of Álvaro García Linera (2010; 2014) a former political prisoner and member of the outlawed Ejército Guerrillero Túpac Katari (Tupaj Katari Guerrilla Army, EGTK), after he joined the MAS and became Evo’s vice president in 2007. Before that, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Linera’s intellectual and ideological trajectory was explicitly autonomist and anti-statist. His early writings on revolutionary transformation were clearly inspired by Gramsci (1992) and his strategic notion of the war of position. He claimed the following:

“In more than one hundred years the State has not been capable of producing society as an organic totality, much less of revolutionizing it; the highest moments of social organization and reform as a nation… are tied, on the contrary, to large movements of mass insurgency, to the self-organization of society against the State, to the deployment of the organizational and revolutionary vitality of society facing the State; outside of this, and despite the attempts from above, the construction of the nation and social reform has been nothing but a señorial, oligarchic, and landowner fiction” (Linera 1991: 255).

As soon as Linera became vice-president and the government’s official ideologue, he asserted a linear and statist vision of revolution and social change. Ultimately, García Linera’s rhetoric identified the Morales-Linera administration and the MAS with the construction of revolutionary state itself. Consider his statist vision of revolution and social change formulated in 2007 after he had joined the MAS and become vice president to Evo:
“In the indigenous peasant world, we saw enormous vitality in terms of political transformation, achievements in equality, but also an enormous limitation and lack of possibilities for communitarian forms of management and production of wealth… The general horizon of the period is communist. But, at this moment it is clear that it is not an immediate horizon… So, where does this leave communism? What can be done from the State to support the communist horizon? A leftist State, a revolutionary State, can help deploy as much as possible the autonomous organizing capacities of society” (Linera 2014:20).

Well-crafted state sanctioned propaganda followed. Revolutionary theory became propaganda and propaganda transformed into authorized revolutionary theory. The governmental propaganda booklets, seminars and presentations asserted that the erection, consolidation, and defense of the state is the revolution. These publications, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, lectures, and brochures became my primary raw material and points of departure in my quest to understand the following question: What are the ideological underpinnings that have shaped the concept of socialism towards an emphasis upon state intervention and control?

Additionally, in this chapter I ask: What is the relationship between the Morales-Linera regime’s self-proclaimed revolution, industrialization, and the state in the government’s rhetoric and how is this framework perceived at the local level and within the lithium industry specifically? To respond to these questions, I have studied the ideas of Álvaro García Linera, the government’s foremost theoretician and propagandist, who crafted the ideological underpinnings of the revolutionary state, as well as the conceptualization of industrialization following the election of Evo.

I analyze state sanctioned conceptualizations of state, revolution, and industrialization as instrumental conceptual foundations of the regime’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation, and in this context, I identify the hegemonic theory underpinning these concepts in the overarching framework. Overall, I detect three distinct ways in which lithium
industrialization as an insurgent hegemonic tool has been formally conceptualized, as the process of change moved forward. First, industrialization was conceptualized as a revolutionary tool of hegemonic power consolidation. Second, once hegemony over the state has been supposedly achieved, the industrialization of lithium was envisioned as a creative tension internal to the country’s revolutionary process. Thirdly, in the context of communitarian socialism, vivir bien, and global capitalism, the industrialization of lithium mutated into an insurgent tool to process nature.

Through these hegemonic conceptual mechanisms, the industrialization of lithium crystalized as a tangible tool of revolutionary transformation for MAS theorists and, Linera, who aimed at the radical transformation of the political order. In general, I assert that via these conceptual mechanisms, lithium industrialization as an insurgent means saturated both the country’s self-proclaimed revolution and state power under the MAS regime and vica versa. In this context, the regime has persisted in seeing its own “indigenous” support base as not fully capable of universalism; thus, the Aymara notion of a decentralized political body dispersed across multiple territories was replaced by the idea of a centralized and paternalistic state where, supposedly, diverse groups are represented.

Yet, paradoxically the Andean cosmological concept of vivir bien has emerged as one of the central notions in directing the linear development policies of the MAS administration in the context of lithium industrialization. The cyclical notion of vivir bien has been recognized as a distinct indigenous or Andean cosmovisión that emphasizes living in harmony with nature and one another. As such, it contradicts as well as resists mainstream utilitarian, and linear development models.21 The concept gained international, political, and academic

21 The Aymara say sumaq qamaña; the Quechua, sumak kawsay; the Peruvian Amazonian groups, ametsa asaiki; the Guarani, ñandereko. The Spanish translation of sumaq qamaña or sumak kawsay is still debated, and some
attention in the late twentieth century as citizens, politicians, and academics searched for alternatives to neoliberalism.

The notion also has come to signify radical alternatives to dominant modern paradigms of linear development and progress. According to this cosmological framework, truly revolutionary change must be based on emancipation and self-determination from subaltern social and economic sectors. In Bolivia, the notion of vivir bien was included in the new constitution of 2009 as an ethical and moral principle after a massive participatory constitution-making process (Postero, 2017). It was in this setting that the regime attempted to address the tension between economic development, environmental protection, and its effort to reconcile a socialist project with the institutional structures of liberal democracy.

Part of that reconciliation probed whether the administration found a way to navigate the structural and temporal tension between the ecological and indigenous-inspired *cosmovisión* that was at the center of its revolutionary ideology, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, its socialist program for linear economic development that depended fundamentally on the exploitation, industrialization, and commodification of nonrenewable natural resources. Concerning this, I elaborate how the regime validated both extractivism and lithium industrialization by promoting a more statist version of the vivir bien concept which ultimately became identical - for Linera and others- with communitarian socialism.

Finally, I will reveal that my interlocutors within the lithium industry demonstrated an ambivalent relationship with the government’s temporally mixed rhetoric. According to them, the Morales-Linera regime incorporated the vivir bien concept into its constitutions on paper,

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suggestions include: “plentiful life,” “to know how to live,” “the good life,” “the sweet life,” “living well,” “harmonious life,” and sublime life.” In English, the term can be translated into “Good living” or “Living well”, but such translations probably do not cover the complexity of the concept.
but not in spirit. Investigating these contradictory sentiments pointed to the multifaceted factors that inform people’s experience and perception of the regime’s project to industrialize lithium and its self-proclaimed revolution.

The State in Transition and the New Economic Power Block

In 2009 the Bolivian Vice President García Linera, whom I have noted has been the Bolivian governments’ foremost theorist, propagandist, and ideologue of the state, declared that the Bolivian state must be viewed as a correlation of political forces, a mechanism for institutionalization, and a shared idea that guarantees moral consensus between those who govern and those who are governed. Linera (2010) also observed that the Bolivian state is undergoing a structural change. To stabilize its power, the new power bloc incorporated three official mechanisms to control its revolutionary project. These were the following: 1) the incorporation of the armed forces into the new power bloc, 2) the nationalization and industrialization of the country’s natural resources such as lithium, and 3) the development of a new symbolic discourse.

Regarding the nationalization and industrialization of resources, i.e. the second aspect of state power consolidation, he professed that this mechanism directly affects the economic and social structure. The goal, wrote Linera (2010), was renewed economic self-determination, redirecting the use of the economic surplus in favor of national producers to create and consolidate a new economic power bloc. In the new economic power structure, the state becomes the main investor, controller, and collector of economic surplus. This funds the vital social programs meant to reduce poverty and the launching of an extensive policy of investment that can create the industrial foundation for sustainable economic growth (Linera
In this new bloc, led by the revolutionary/producer state, the indigenous and popular elements, and an educated middle class will have greater control if not ownership of the country’s economic resources (Linera 2010).

These theoretical positionings were not simply rhetoric infused with resource nationalism embedded within and further fostered by state ritual (Revette 2017). They were the authorized state-level chronicle of revolutionary state formation where despite historical failures and recurrent conflicts associated with extraction-based development, industrialization was perceived as a legitimate means for positive development. In this context, the industrialization of natural resources officially appeared in the government’s rhetoric as a hegemonic tool for consolidating state power. So, how was this argument developed, and officially validated?

First, following Marx et. al. (2005), Linera (2017) theorized revolution as a fierce struggle over the ideological political influences that build new long-term hegemonies. This struggle over moral and ideological hegemony is the motor, he argued, of Bolivia’s new revolution, and from this struggle the new state structure would develop, capable of organizing the hitherto invisible and powerful social magma of the subaltern classes now bursting through the cracks (Linera 2017: 260). In the government’s revolutionary rhetoric, the construction of a revolutionary state is the only way to start the revolution, until the previous social contradictions melt away in a new society. Until then, one of the main functions of the revolutionary/producer state is the protection of the revolution against the counterrevolutionary power bloc comprised of the old oligarchic elites. As Linera (2017) asserted:

“The paradox of every revolution is that it exists because the workers break hierarchies, controls and take charge of their life; but they fail to do so at the national, general level. And a revolution is defended only if it can act at a national level, both
against the internal conspiracy of the old ruling classes and the external war of world powers. But that is only achieved through an organization that begins to monopolize decisions (the state), at the expense of the local democracy of the revolution itself … As long as the material conditions of production of the political bond between people are not changed, as participants in a real community who directly take charge of the common affairs for the entire society, state mediation will be necessary” (Linera 2017:274).

Second, Linera (2010) positioned the revolutionary state vis a vis the industrialization of lithium as a “force field”. Imagine the state as structural correlation of territorialized political relationships formed by past politico-material relations attached to power, domination, and political legitimacy. If the state is the revolution’s strategic framework, and if the revolution is a locomotive, then the state is the engine of development. The state is not only a synthesis of the general will, and the material and ideological struggles being waged in society, but it is the only thing that can unite society.

More precisely the state is (1) a political correlation of forces between social blocs and classes with the capacity to shape the implementation of governmental decisions and the construction of a dominant political coalition (Linera 2010); (2) a mechanism whereby these decisions are materialized in norms, rules, bureaucracy, budgets, hierarchies, that is, institutionalized; and (3) a collective idea, a shared sense that guarantees moral consensus between governors and governed. When the state is changing in form and content during revolutionary transformation, these three dimensions also undergo transformations that vary in depth and pace, and thus the state enters a transitional crisis which passes through five historical stages (Linera 2010).

First, the politically and symbolically dominant system begins to crack giving rise to a political dissident social bloc with an unstoppable capacity for mobilization and territorial expansion. Second, the insurgent movement consolidates into a national revolutionary project
that cannot be incorporated into the dominant order and discourse, which leads to a catastrophic deadlock. In other words, the revolution begins with the deterioration of an existing hegemonic order and the rise of a unified counter-hegemonic power bloc. If these two blocs are roughly equal in material and symbolic power and neither can incorporate the other into its own project, the struggle can last for an extended period in a catastrophic deadlock (Linera 2010).

For Linera (2017) following Gramsci (1992), a catastrophic equilibrium arises when there is no capacity for a complete hegemony, but rather an unresolved dispute for hegemony between two proto-hegemonies, and this creates processes of constant, low-intensity confrontation, and conflicts or a mutual erosion that prevents either of the power blocs from extending their leadership across the rest of society. The way the old ruling classes seek to maintain the concentration of power in their hands, and simultaneously, the way the working classes struggle to disempower the ruling classes ultimately defines the course of the revolution (Linera 2017).

To stabilize its power, the new power bloc must incorporate hegemonic mechanisms such as the industrialization of natural resources to control its revolutionary project. Next, the radical replacement of political elites begins, which the insurgent government requires to establish a new political coalition that converts revolutionary demands into state action. Fourth, the construction of a revolutionary political-symbolic economic power bloc commences through nationalization and industrialization, and through the actions taken by the state (Linera 2017). At this stage the new power bloc seeks to channel the ideology of the mobilized society using the material resources of the state.
Revolution

State Crisis

**Gramscian Moment: Catastrophic Equilibrium**

Struggle to achieve long-term hegemony

Incorporation of hegemonic mechanisms to consolidate state power and control: 1) armed forces, 2) nationalization and industrialization of natural resources as legitimate means for development, 3) the development of a new symbolic discourse

**Leninist Moment: Jacobin Bifurcation point**

Figure 1. Lithium industrialization as a hegemonic tool to consolidate state power.

This means that after the Gramscian phase of the revolution a starkly drawn battle of forces supposedly ensues, the Jacobin-Leninist moment, to permanently resolve the problem of state power (Linera 2017:271). Without this vital moment, the Gramscian strategy might have been, sooner rather than later, precluded from taking political power by a successful counter-revolution that despotically sweeps away all the organizational and democratizing advances achieved by the plebeian social classes:

“Hence any revolution with a Gramscian moment without a Leninist moment is a shattered, failed revolution. There is no real revolution without a Gramscian moment of political, cultural, and moral triumph prior to the seizure of state power. But there is no transfer of state power or dissolution of the old ruling classes and their project of belligerent power, without a Leninist moment” (Linera 2017: 271).

The struggle, Linera (2017) wrote, ultimately resolves itself through the point of bifurcation that either consolidates the new political system or reestablishes the old one and reconstitutes the symbolic order of state power. This means that either there is a successful counterrevolution and a return to the old state in new conditions, or a new revolutionary state
is consolidated with internal conflicts still but in the process of its stabilization. Either way the point of bifurcation is a display of force, and a moment of resolution of the stabilization of the structure of the new state. At this juncture, politics becomes the continuation of the hegemonic revolutionary war by political means. The only thing left on the battlefield is the “naked display of force” (Linera 2017:270) to settle territorial and national monopoly.

To conclude, when the Morales-Linera regime became the dominant political power, deep polarities developed across regions, classes, and ethnic identities. According to the regime’s discourse, neither power-bloc had sufficient capacity to prevail over the other. The only way to resolve this catastrophic equilibrium was by a negotiated redistribution of state-power which supposedly led to an extension of rights to the most excluded sectors and to a redistribution of economic opportunities in society (Linera 2010).

In other words, revolution and industrialization have been theorized around the struggle to achieve hegemony over the state and vice versa. This struggle over hegemony has divided society between two antagonistic political projects and visions of the future. In this volatile context, the revolutionary state emerged as a universalist, hegemonic and fragmented agent, and in this setting, before the Leninist-Jacobin moment or bifurcation point was ever reached, the industrialization of lithium was officially theorized as a revolutionary tool of hegemonic state power consolidation.
The Dialectics of Communitarian Socialism and Living Well

As I reached the 19th floor of the 24-story HANSA building in La Paz where the YLB headquarters are located, I handed over my passport at the security desk and waited for the public relations manager of the Electrochemistry and Battery Department to take me into her office. While waiting for my meeting, I was captivated by a colorful calendar placed at the reception desk. The main image depicted the government’s first state owned lithium production pilot plant at the Salar de Uyuni with several young workers dressed in red overalls staring blissfully at the horizon. On the horizon loomed the governmental slogan “Industrializamos con dignidad y soberanía para vivir bien” (We are industrializing with dignity and sovereignty in order to live well), and below the catchphrase, “No se puede vivir bien si los demás viven mal o si se daña la naturaleza’ (You cannot live well if others are living poorly, or if you damage nature).

The calendar was a striking representation of the idea that if lithium could be industrialized, the revolutionary state apparatus will be able to provide for the citizen’s immediate needs and fund the investment needed to build the future of the country. A fundamental proposition of integral development in Bolivia is thus the industrialization of natural resources as opposed to their extraction for export as raw materials. However, industrialization must be achieved while respecting the rights of Mother Earth to eliminate inequality, poverty and to achieve vivir bien, all of which together sounds well, rather contradictory. Yet, I was not surprised. I already knew that during the past decade the administration had introduced the concept of Vivir Bien, or living well, in official state strategies.
In state policy, vivir bien has been defined as an alternative civilizational and cultural horizon to capitalism and modernity. By contrast, the Western development model was presented as individualistic and based on inequality, as a threat to nature and other people which is the basis of the much-debated political discourse of vivir bien in Bolivia. The National Development Plan also elucidated that vivir bien was envisioned as a new pattern of development, supportive and part of an integral democracy, seeking to replace the raw materials export pattern of development with another productive scheme.

Rather than being centralized around the individual’s well-being, it contains a focus on the good life in a broader sense in which the subject to well-being are the individuals in the social context of their community and environment (Acosta 2013). Hence, the concept refers to a mutual relationship of humans and nature in community, with respect for cosmic cycles and spiritual understanding that should lead to a life in plenitude (Waldmueller et al. 2018). That scheme would strengthen the domestic market, generate surpluses, contribute to internal accumulation, and distribute wealth equitably. In this context, development would become a pluralistic and collective process, expressed in terms of different worldviews.
Meanwhile, my interviewer took me into her office. I spotted the very same calendar hanging from the wall near her desk. As we eased into the interview, I pointed at the calendar and asked if she could explain to me what these slogans meant to the company and to her personally. Furthermore, I asked her what she thought about the concept of vivir bien in the context of lithium industrialization. She looked at me with amusement and said:

“Well, Vivir bien is a very important concept. It means to reclaim your life and to live in complete harmony and mutual respect with the Pachamama. Vivir bien is also a way of living in balance with the universe where everything is life. You see, we are all the children of nature and the cosmos. Everything is connected, and everything moves in cycles. We are all part of nature and there is nothing that is separate from it. We are brothers and sisters with everything, the plants, the mountains, the animals, and naturally with the Salar, with all the minerals, even with lithium.”

She resumed:

“Politics in Bolivia is crazy, you know. It’s very difficult. The government is sometimes inconsistent. They denounce the abuse of Mother Earth by other countries, but they reserve the right for themselves to mistreat Pachamama until we achieve development. They just talk about vivir bien, but they do not live it in spirit. And the craziest thing is that the government justifies all this through some strange dialectics. Have you heard about communitarian socialism? Well, you will see what I am talking about once you read about it.”

I was immediately intrigued. I knew that when Evo was sworn in to a second term, he proclaimed that the state would construct communitarian socialism. At the same event Vice President Álvaro Garcia Linera proposed a “socialist horizon” for the country and declared that the route will not be easy. Consider the vice-president’s remark concerning the challenge of vivir bien, which he identified as the movement away from a plural economy dominated by capitalist logic toward a post-capitalist mode of production and consumption, and a sustainable economy:
“Our energies are geared mainly toward putting in place a new economic model that I have called, provisionally, “Andean-Amazonian capitalism.” That is, building a strong State that regulates the expansion of the industrial economy, controls the surplus and transfers it to the community level to enable forms of self-organization and of mercantile development that are uniquely Andean and Amazonian” (Linera 2006: 29).

It took me several visits to the impressive, and solemn colonial building of the Vice-presidency near Plaza Murillo to understand the occulted revolutionary dialectics behind the concepts of vivir bien and communitarian socialism that my knowledgeable interlocutor at the YLB was talking about. After weeks of researching, I finally found a small red propaganda booklet entitled “The Creative Tensions of the Revolution” (Las tensiones creativas de la revolución) amongst the vice-presidency’s numerous publications written by the vice-president himself. In this booklet, Linera (2010) further developed his theory of state transition, hegemony, and industrialization. Similarly to his theorization of the state in transition, he illustrated five stages of what he sees as the actual chronology of the Bolivian revolutionary process.

For Linera (2010), the defining feature of the revolutionary process since 2010 has been the emergence of what he calls “creative tensions” (Linera: 2010). Hegemony was achieved by 2010, and contradictions between two competing projects for society were resolved with the victory of the national-popular bloc. Still, tensions remained within the revolutionary process, which if aptly managed, could help push along the course of the revolution. As Linera (2013) stated in an interview about the revolutionary state:

“Brother, these are creative tensions in the revolutionary process. It has happened with the miners. Some ask us to intervene militarily. The conflicts, even if it takes us one month, or six months, even when there’s dynamite being exploded, have to be resolved democratically. The same with the oil industry. Similarly with the electricity industry. Revolutionary societies cannot let themselves be frightened by conflict and dissention. It is more complicated and risky, but that is how we give more life to democracy” (Linera 2013 par. 5).
He persisted:

“...The struggle is our nourishment, our peace. It does not overwhelm us. Absolute calm frightens us. Our opponents believe the struggle will wear us down. On the contrary, it nourishes us...I am not complaining. I am merely describing what is happening in a revolutionary process. We have chosen to ride these contradictions, always keeping this in mind – everything that favors the broad masses is suitable, everything that enables common action is suitable. Sometimes you stumble, and certainly over time other kinds of contradictions will emerge... [but] any revolutionary process stagnates if it does not have contradictions” (Linera in Navarro 2012 par. 5).

The first contradiction involves the relationship between state and society. The ideological response to that contradiction is that the MAS administration is a government of social movements. Once again, the state is conceptualized as a concentration of decision-making power, coercion, and bureaucratic administration that articulates society. Social movements, on the other hand, are recognized as based upon self-governing democratization of decision-making, involving wide-scale socialization of premeditated procedures. A government of social movements represents a creative tension between the two, a dialectic, in which the simultaneous concentration and decentralization of decision-making power occurs (Linera 2010).

While the second creative tension focuses on the multi-class character of the social bloc backing the revolutionary government, the third tension pivots on the notion of the general interests of all of society versus those which reflect merely the interests of individuals, sectors, or groups. With respect to the second paradox, there is, for example, tensions between laborers and capitalists. In short, the primary tensions concern the external forces, while the secondary contradictions are the creative tensions internal to the revolutionary process itself. The internal contradictory forces of the revolution are dialectical and thus, they can positively reinforce one
another and mutate into productive subjective and objective forces of the revolution (Linera 2010).

Once the catastrophic equilibrium and point of bifurcation was transcended in 2008, a new tension rose to the surface, between the further institutionalization of the universal demands of the social-revolutionary bloc, as represented in the MAS party, and several corporatist, fragmented parts of the national-popular bloc. Crucially, there was a fourth tension around the government’s commitment to industrialize natural resources, particularly natural gas and minerals such as lithium. The intrinsic tension emerged between the need to meet basic needs via industrialization under the aegis of communitarian socialism (temporally linear), and the state’s simultaneous pledge to sustain the environment and support the concept of vivir bien (temporally cyclical), at the heart of which is a harmonious relationship with Mother Earth (Linera 2010). Consider Linera’s remark on what he refers to as the dialectical tensions of the Bolivian revolution:

“… One last tension that drives the dialectic and the process of our revolution is the creative contradiction between the need and the will to industrialize raw materials, and the essential need for Living Well understood as the dialogical practice…As you can see, it is a matter of contradictions among the people, of tensions that yield to collective debate on how to carry forward revolutionary changes. And that is healthy, it is democratic, and it is the fulcrum for a life-giving renewal of action by social movements.” (Linera in Thomson et. al. 2018: 664).
As the process of change moved forward, the political discourse of vivir bien became more complex, and even more contested. One of the key actors in the debate was David Choquehuanca, the foreign minister between 2006 until 2017, who pressed for an “indigenist” understanding of the concept, in which vivir bien derives from a completely different paradigm than a Western understanding of development. It was Linera’s statist version of vivir bien that became the content of the official state sanctioned propaganda. Instead of a more traditional ongoing process and way of living, the statist version invoked the socialist project of a postcapitalist society and the need for a transitional period to reach this. Thus, his socialist and statist interpretations of vivir bien give priority to improving living conditions and have been, therefore, compatible with the extraction of raw materials. Consider Linera’s remark about extractivism:

“we cannot [...] be content with protecting the trees, while leaving our people in poverty—for there is nothing idyllic about the living conditions of indigenous peoples [...]. Some of our companions in the Altiplano live in stone houses; they have a five-hour walk to get to the nearest school; they sleep all day for lack of enough to eat. Please enlighten me: what knowledge economy can be built under these conditions? Should we emerge from “extractivism”? Yes, definitely. But not by returning to the Stone Age. The transition involves making use of our natural resources to create the conditions—cultural, political and material—which will allow the population to move on to a different economic model” (Linera 2016: par. 15).

Evo’s own discourse was situated somewhere in between Linera and Choquehuanca, depending on the setting and the listeners. Most of the time, he argued for an Andean “indigenous” viewpoint; but he also promoted the political project of communitarian socialism. Ultimately, in pushing for the temporally linear concept of communitarian socialism, the regime appropriated the cyclical concept of vivir bien to promote economic
development, state power, industrialization, and socialism as key ingredients to a successful revolution.

In the context of lithium industrialization, the notion of communitarian socialism became identical with the notion of vivir bien in the regime’s revolutionary rhetoric. This became obvious in the party’s governmental program for 2015-2020 entitled “Bolivia: Juntos vamos bien para Vivir Bien.” As opposed to capitalist death, in the government’s program vivir bien offered “the culture of life” and the recovery of the deep roots of indigenous history prior to the colonial invasion. The concept also implied the reconstitution of harmony with Mother Earth. However, vivir bien also meant the acknowledgment of the socialist struggle under the premise that another world is possible without injustice and exploitation, with an implied recognition of state power.

All in all, as the process of change moved forward, in the government’s rhetoric the conceptualization of the industrialization of lithium mutated. More specifically, during what the regime’s propaganda referred to as the Gramscian moment of “catastrophic equilibrium” industrialization emerged as a hegemonic tool for consolidating state power. Once hegemony was supposedly achieved after the Leninist/Bifurcation point, the concept of vivir bien transmuted into the revolution’s socialist civilizational horizon, and in this context the industrialization of lithium transfigured into an internal, dialectical revolutionary force that drove the revolution towards that socialist emancipatory horizon.
The Myths of Thunupa, Technology and Development

“By overcoming extractivism we are not going to overcome capitalism. If only things were so easy!” (Garcia Linera)

As I packed my gear to visit the Salar de Uyuni for the third time in 2019, I wondered how the tension between “vivir bien” and industrialization plays out at the country’s first state-owned lithium pilot plant. When the assigned YLB representative was finally driving me there with a 4X4 across the blinding white surface of the Salar, I observed the endless sheet of thick salt crust extending to the horizon. Something deep in my spine alerted me that this place is indifferent to organic life and death. Although I visited the lithium plant several times, I still had a hard time processing my perceptions of the giant salt flat.

At last, we approached the planta pilota. At the gate a somber military guard stopped us and soon several military personnel joined him. They took our passports, handed us construction hats, and after a short security briefing, they let us in. In May 2008, Evo touched down here in a helicopter for the pilot plant’s inauguration ceremony. Wearing ceremonial Aymara clothing, he gave a somewhat belligerent speech explaining the importance of the lithium project. Evo hailed the opening of the pilot plant “a historic day” for the country and the initial steps the government needs to take in order to move towards the “big industry”. In the shadow of Bolivia’s troubled history of natural resource extraction, Evo has vowed repeatedly during his tenure that Bolivia will never cede control over its precious lithium reserves.

The pilot plant consisted of three buildings: a two-story office building, a similarly sized lab, and the center of it all, the plant itself which was incredibly small with two of its three stories covered with dull red bricks. Still, this small plant, and the prospecting wells and pools
covering 27 sq km of the southeastern part of the plain represented for many the dream of the national lithium industry. The laborers, who wear red uniforms, spend two weeks at the salt flat before they return home for a seven-day rest as they attempt to industrialize lithium on top of the Andes mountains. They are drilling the salt with enormous rigs, aiming for the brine beneath. They use bulldozers to load the trucks, and they transport the brine to the nearby pools carved out of the middle of the lake. Some of these pools are more than a kilometer wide. With the help of complex chemical processes, the mineral mass is left in the sun for at least three months.

When ready, it is processed at the pilot plant. As we drove north to the edge of the Salar, where the pilot plant’s evaporation pools were located, I saw industrial machines roaring along the salt lake's southern rim. Because of the constant influx of minerals from the Rio Grande, this corner of the Salar is the richest in lithium, potassium, and boron. Shallow pools near the edge of the road glowed in a pale yellowish green color, a clue to the myriad minerals dissolved in the ponds. Every day, heavy trucks are coming and going over the salty crust, wheezing like drained beasts, some recently imported from China, and some 40 years old. Diesel fumes and noise permeate the pristine, silent, and crisp mountain air. In their wake, the trucks leave black lines in the virginal whiteness. The rape of the exceptionally delicate landscape could hardly be any more brutal.
Figure 3. Trucks at the Lithium Pilot Plant, Salar de Uyuni

Figure 4. Truck at the Lithium Pilot Plant, Salar de Uyuni
As we drove back to the offices, I saw several run-down tents with clothing hanging on ropes. This was an unfamiliar sight, nowhere to be seen in the shiny YLB brochures. Overall, the state has worked tirelessly at maintaining its image of success in the lithium industrialization project. There was a clear and positive discourse, and the government stood behind its promise of development associated with the lithium industry’s guaranteed success. In the government’s rhetoric extractivism and industrialization have been synonymous with progress. The speeches, TV and radio interviews, publications, and videos from the GNRE, the YLB, and the government all served to create an optimistic discourse around the lithium industry.

Evo and his vice-president constantly highlighted how the lithium industry is critical to the growth, and sovereignty of Bolivia. The emancipation of the extractive industries from foreign companies and capital has been an integral part of the discourse, and the objective to construct a national industry and achieve sovereignty was expressed in several speeches by government representatives. Directors at the YLB usually reiterated the regime’s views and optimism. However, as I interviewed employees at the sub directorial level, I found that although they univocally supported the idea of lithium industrialization, they also exhibited deep
ambivalence towards the government’s rhetoric and handling of the industrialization project.

One of the workers at the lithium plant said the following as he pointed towards the distant blue horizon:

“Can you see that volcano? A long time ago the volcano was a beautiful woman named Thunupa. When she became pregnant, she gave birth to a son whose father was unknown. All the suitors offered to custody the child, but Thunupa refused all of them. So, they kidnapped the child, hiding him in Colchani. Thunupa who loved her son very much, began to mourn and pour milk from her breasts and while she wept, her dry tears and breast milk spread throughout the region becoming what is today the Salar de Thunupa. The small mountains over there symbolize the missing child.

I know that lithium is important, but my heart still aches when I think about the destruction of the environment. The Salar is not just any place! Our elders kept telling us that that once it was forbidden to even walk on the salt flat. Scientists will tell you that it is the remnant of the sea. But even the oldest locals don’t remember the sea. The people here have a very spiritual connection to the Salar.”

He continued:

“You should know this. The state has promised us resources. When Evo visited us in 2104, he spoke of how his government will bring us a new hospital, and potable water. They didn’t bring anything. He and the vice-president were also talking about developing better education standards that will prepare the next generation for the employment skills needed in the region’s growing lithium industry. They even promised funding to create advanced schools with laboratories and workshops. There is still nothing. It is a circus.

When he became president, I wanted to die for Evo. I believed in him. Now I just want to kill him. The problem is not industrialization, you know. The problem is that we had a dream, but the government is corrupt. In Uyuni we have no paved roads, no water, no streetlights. We are freezing, we are hungry, and we are poor. All we have is a soccer field. The government is dishonest.”
I also met a salt miner who used to work at the plant but quit because he did not agree with the regime’s extractivist policies. He considered himself a sculptor. He lived in Colchani which is a small village on the edge of the Salar de Uyuni with a small salt factory and a busy local market. Its residents make a living by raking salt from the salar into piles, and then loading it into trucks that haul it to a processing plant on the eastern edge of town. The other line of business here is carving salt into shot glasses, candleholders, and carvings to sell to tourists. As he hacked away at a salt rock with an ax to source material for his carvings, he steadily chewed coca leaves. When I asked him why he quit his job at the plant, he told me that he wanted to maintain reverence for the Salar:

“Working at the Salar means much more for me than just labor, or even my entire income. When I worked at the plant I got depressed. I want to be on good terms with the Salar. That was not possible at the plant. Now, with my own tools, my labor is like praying. It is like a mediation. I get something out of nature, but I do it with respect. I transform the salt into something else, but I do it with gratitude and admiration.

For many of us who live around here the Salar is sacred, you know. It means more than just lithium. For me, it is my home, and the most powerful incarnation of Pachamama. It is a place I value above everything else. The concept of industrialization is good, but I regret trying to work at the plant. These days everyone works with big machines. It’s bad for the environment. The government is not respectful at all. They said that they would protect Pachamama, but they did the opposite. Instead, they abuse it.”

Overall, employees’ ambivalence towards the regime’s industrialization project concerned governmental corruption and environmental destruction mixed with a profound admiration towards the salt flat. Though they all supported the idea of industrializing lithium, they were frustrated by the fact that the regime has not really tried to implement the principles of vivir bien into its industrializing project. For them, the vivir bien concept implied that time is cyclical as opposed to linear, and that there is no dichotomy between living beings and inert
bodies. Thus, they recognized all manifestations of life including lithium as the relation between all parts of the whole, where there is no separation between human beings and nature.

Generally, they assumed that this cosmovision expressed a relational concept of becoming, where space and time were eternal and indissoluble manifestations of Mother Earth. Crucially, for them the Salar was the manifestation of Pachamama and the home of mythical beings in constant movement and a permanent state of becoming. Indeed, the deep reverence for the Salar they exhibited was in stark contrast or in tension with the government’s revolutionary narrative, where the need to develop Bolivian technology expand upon and leverages domestic technology in the quest to extract and industrialize lithium.

No doubt, the concept of vivir bien has become ubiquitous in the regime’s state discourse. However, even though Evo officially recognized the concept as an alternative vision of development relying on the idea of protecting Mother Earth, he also constantly praised the merits of a linear, progressive, and utilitarian development model in the context of lithium industrialization specifically. This involved praising the work of national scientists for their dedication and commitment to the country, and because of their extensive experience, and scientific knowledge about lithium.

Linera (2012) on the other hand validated extraction and industrialization in the light of the classic Marxist criteria concerning the forms of appropriation of nature by humanity. Consider his remark about extractivism and social justice:
“Therefore, it is naïve to think that extractivism, non-extractivism or industrialism are a vaccination against injustice, exploitation and inequality, because in themselves they are neither modes of producing nor modes of managing wealth. They are technical systems of processing nature through labour, and can be present in pre-capitalist, capitalist or communitarian societies. Economic systems with greater or lesser justice, with or without exploitation of labour, will only be possible depending on how those technical systems are used, how the wealth thereby produced is managed. The critics of extractivism confuse technical system with mode of production, and from this confusion they go on to associate extractivism with capitalism, forgetting that there are non-extractivist, non-industrial societies that are completely capitalist!” (Linera 2012: 33)

Linera, (2006; 2012) persisted that Bolivia had chosen an economic model named “Andean-Amazonian capitalism”. He upheld his view that during the revolutionary transformation it is necessary to use the resources gained from economic activity controlled by the state to generate the surpluses that can satisfy the minimal conditions of life of Bolivians and to guarantee an intercultural and scientific education that generates a critical mass of trained persons capable of assuming and leading the emerging processes of industrialization and economic development.

The concept essentially referred to “the construction of a strong state that regulates the expansion of the industrial economy, extracts its surplus and transfers it to the community level to enhance forms of self-organization and a commercial development distinctly Andean and Amazonian” (García Linera, 2006: 223). The term was constantly presented as a form of state capitalism that depends upon the revenues from natural resources to ensure economic growth and integral development.

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22 The term has often been used synonymously with the notion of “neoextractivism” in academic debates, but it holds a stronger emphasis on industrialization.
As for the possibilities of escaping the realities of global capitalism and the tyranny of the capitalist world order, the regime publicly rejected the utopia of social “islands” that would be immune from relations of capitalist domination from the 2010s onwards (Linera 2012: 33). Thus, in the context of global capitalism, vivir bien, and communitarian socialism has been conceptualized as a battlefield and the conceptualization of lithium industrialization mutated once again, this time into a technical system of processing nature through labor.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined what happens to the concept of state, revolution, and industrialization when it is seen through the process of overall social change in Bolivia. As a part of this inquiry, I debated the government’s policies, strategic orientation, and perspective on issues of development, industrialization, and the internal angst within the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution regarding what the government’s propaganda referred to as the “post-neoliberal” period. I argued that the Morales-Linera regime has persisted in seeing indigenous people as not fully capable of universalism.

In other words, I showed that official revolutionary theory and propaganda asserted that the peasant masses or “indigenous” peoples, immersed in particularistic beliefs and devoted to traditional, localized, and fragmented forms of political organization are not able to yield an original revolutionary vision and a transformative program aimed at complete and radical political liberation (Moore 1966; Wolf 1969; Gluckmann 1963; Linera 2014). These ideas and discrepancies between state and nonstate directly correspond with a notion of revolution that is traditionally interpreted as based on the overcoming of local particularities and to the development of new social units, and the centralization and hierarchization of
power to guide the old society toward a transcendent new political horizon separated from the immanence of the present.

In this framework, social formations such as tribes, kinships, ethnic groups, and in this case social movements are considered particular and localized political actors. In general, they are counterposed to universal structures of political organizations such as the state and the party (Tasssi et. al. 2020). Accordingly, the state has been conceptualized as a universalist revolutionary agent by the regime’s primary ideologue. Ironically, Linera’s (2010) definition of the state per se does not necessarily imply a politics of hegemony even though his theory of revolution does. Crucially, his theory of state transition is situated directly within the theory of hegemony and the strategy of hegemonic change.

All in all, the industrialization of lithium has been officially theorized as a revolutionary tool to consolidate state power in a context where revolutionary state transformation is conceptualized as a struggle for hegemony. In this hegemonic context, the state has been perceived as a historic-political process that is always under construction, and in a flux. Therefore, as the process of change moved forward, the conceptualization of industrialization mutated. In this setting, the regime validated both extractivism and lithium industrialization by promoting a linear and statist version of the vivir bien concept which ultimately became identical - for Linera and others- with communitarian socialism.

This caused considerable frustration and tension amongst the employees of the YLB within the lithium industry. Directors usually reiterated the regime’s official views and expressed no concern over the linear appropriation of the vivir bien concept. However, the individuals who worked at the sub directorial level often wished that the regime implemented a more “pachacentric”, holistic, and humanizing industrializing practice instead of propagating and manifesting Western developmental ideas of linear progress and permanent growth. In
other words, they wished for a version of development that is less linear and anthropocentric and more interconnected and egalitarian.

Further, they wanted to see governmental efforts to achieve an equilibrium within the industry among the various elements that make up the whole of Pacha. In short, they longed for an equilibrium between industrialization and nature, between the material and the spiritual, between scientific knowledge and wisdom. This does not mean that they have been naïve or that they have been cultivating impossible expectations. They did not look for an idyllic state of static harmony between the lithium industry and Mother Earth. They simply expected an ongoing negotiation between the whole of Pacha as a dynamic entity, governmental discourse, and the practice of industrialization.
Chapter Five: Preconquest Utopia and the Sacrifice of Túpac Katari

“People in our country know that the glorious period in which they happen to live is one of sacrifice; they are familiar with sacrifice.” (Che Guevara)

Introduction

Bolivia’s interim president Jeanine Añez had only been in office for three days when the military under her command launched fire on a demonstration near Cochabamba. It was November 15, 2019. The armed forces killed ten unarmed citizens, wounded more, and detained the rally’s leaders. Four days after the killings in Sacaba, soldiers killed at least eight protesters and injured many more in the Senkata zone of El Alto by firing into the crowd of protesters outside a gas plant. After the tragic incident, I joined thousands of grieving and furious citizens at a funeral procession lead by the victims’ relatives. Pallbearers carried the coffins. Nearby the caskets howling women were gripping flowers and held up photographs of the deceased shouting “Justice to our martyrs!”.

Soon the riot police fired teargas into the crowd to break up the funeral procession which no doubt, quickly turned into an anti-government demonstration. The coffins of the dead were dropped and left on the ground as teargas engulfed the procession and the gathering was scattered. As violence climaxed in the weeks following Evo and Linera’s ouster, MAS supporters started to bring corpses into a small church following intense clashes with the military. They brought the corpses to the redbrick church to stop the military from getting ahold of the bodies to “hide the truth” about what happened to those who had been killed. The
modest church soon transformed into an impromptu morgue where Bolivian forensic scientists conducted autopsies on the bodies next to the mourners in front of the altar.

As I entered St. Francis Church in El Alto, I saw a dead body lying in the church’s wooden bench covered with the country’s national flag. Mourners placed flowers and coca on the horizontal tricolor of red, yellow, and green with the Bolivian coat of arms in the center. I saw another five bodies in the vicinity. I noticed that the fingers of the corpses were pushing through the flags. The victim’s names and ages were printed on white sheets of paper placed on top of the carcasses: Antonio 23, Joel 22, Devi 34, Clemente 23, and Juan 23. Several plastic containers were placed on the ground beneath one of the dead figures to catch the dripping blood. It must have been a lethal head injury, I thought.

Tears filled the sore eyes of the mourners as they deliberated why struggle for political dominance condemned these young people to a premature death. A woman showed me cartridges which she collected after the clash at the gas plant, and she yelped the following:

“It is heartbreaking, señora. The military is slaughtering us. They are crushing our democracy. Everybody must know the truth. There has been a massacre. Not one, but two. Our young brothers and sisters are dying. And for what? For a lithium coup? People die because they believe in Evo and oppose the white lady president who thinks that we are the devil. These young people sacrificed themselves for Evo, but Evo is gone. We are shattered and infuriated. We demand justice for our martyrs. They are our heroes.”
Theorized as projects of total societal transformation, self-proclaimed revolutionary processes across the globe have typically set themselves the goal of producing new kinds of subjects (Tassi et.al 2020). These “new supermen” would take up the goals of revolutionary transformation to subject themselves to its collective ends (Tassi et. al. 2020). The idea that subject-formation resonates with revolutionary practices is not new amongst leftist theorists. Consider Foucault’s controversial writings on the Iranian Revolution, and particularly those he wrote in 1978 in Tehran. Foucault witnessed the revolution that brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power in 1979 while he traveled to Iran twice in 1978. His Iran-inspired writings sought above all to explore alternatives to linear conceptions of history, including the Marxist conception, which posits revolutionary transformations shaped by the past while always fixed on a future horizon (Tabrizi 2016; Tassi et. al.2020). Accordingly, he conceptualized revolution as “a moment when historical subjects refuse to subject themselves to history” (Tabrizi 2016:59).

At the same time, Foucault problematized the revolutionary subject as the person who can radically change their own subjectivity. Thus, he saw personal transformation at the core of the Shi’a rituals of martyrdom during the Iranian revolution (Tassi et. al. 2020). Foucault’s concern with the constitution of subjects as a contingent historical process has been taken up enthusiastically by anthropology. His early ideas certainly mingled with the discipline’s long-standing interest in localized ideas of personhood and the practices in which they emerge (Tassi et. al. 2020). However, Foucault’s engagement with revolutionary subjectivity marks a shift in his own thinking about how subjects are formed. While in his early works he considered the constitution of subjects as an effect of power arrangements, in his late period subjects are constituted through ethical practices of self-care which he labelled “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1988b; Tassi et. al. 2020).
Given the substantial theoretical load of the various Foucauldian frameworks, adopting one or more of them as the analytical lens through which to recognize how analogous concerns are shaped in Bolivia runs the risk of empirical distortion. Hence, this chapter is limited to the task of working out my argument about lithium industrialization as it intersects with revolutionary politics and subjecthood based on and in reference to my ethnographic materials. In this chapter I study local ideas and practices of personhood to understand how the Morales-Linera regime’s self-proclaimed revolution tried to constitute persons, and how individuals within the lithium industry came to shape the country’s transformation in turn.

In this chapter I ask: Who have been the historical subjects of revolutionary change according to the Morales-Linera government and how was this official view perceived within the lithium industry? I argue that when the government’s main propagandist, Garcia Linera (2014), formulated revolutionary subjecthood he reshaped orthodox Marxist analysis. More specifically, when articulating the legitimacy of state control over the Bolivian people he revisited the idea of class. Overall, I contend that the regime attempted to theoretically refigure the relationship between individual persons and the state structures that govern them.

While the regime maintained the importance of the centralized state, state sanctioned propaganda also applied rhetoric that retained the importance of civil society over the state as the subject of politics. This discursive move was primarily achieved through the pragmatic use of concepts originating in the work of Marx (2005; 2011), Lenin (2014), Gramsci (1992) and two iconic Bolivian thinkers Fausto Reinaga (1969) and René Zavaleta Mercado (2018). By combining these theories, the regime conveyed a continued effort to avoid the classical figure of the proletariat in favor of a more flexible representation of the revolutionary subject. I argue that by stretching the category of class, the government redefined the subject of hegemonic change.
However, the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation also contained a deeper premise, namely martyrdom. This theme has been interlinked with mythical protagonists from the country’s more recent past as well its pre-colonial history. In this cyclic time frame, ancestral figures emerged as powerful political actors and served as a productive symbolic force in the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation. This does not mean, however, that revolutionary transformation has meant or aims for the complete restoration of the pre-colonial past. Rather, political transformation aimed to establish the past as a component of the present day, through the political model of earlier radical martyrs, and through the declaration of divine will via prophecy.

The premise of self-sacrifice interwoven with the paradoxical narrative of a forward-moving return to a pre-colonial past lent revolutionary politics as it intersected with lithium industrialization a peculiar ontological foundation. On the one hand, revolutionary subjects have been publicly defined by Linera (2014) as a novel political formation which he referred to as “plebeian multitude”. On the other hand, subjects have been marked by their readiness to sacrifice themselves for the country’s self-proclaimed revolution by Evo.

Ironically, with reference to my understanding of Bolivia’s process of change as it intersects with lithium industrialization, this chapter also addresses what may be called a distinct “revolutionary” contradiction. How can so many individuals within the lithium industry continue to pledge loyalty to industrialize lithium while at the same time expressing deep frustration with the regime’s industrialization project as well as self-proclaimed revolution? To investigate this question, I explored the notion that revolutionary transformations involve deliberate attempts to correlate changes at broader political levels with changes that go deep into the most intimate aspects of people’s lives.
This idea is captured by the programmatic way in which revolutionary societies would produce “new men,” as Lenin’s and Che Guevara’s program would have it (Lenin 1929; Che 1968; Tassi et. al. 2020). In this context, the objective of revolutionary states and their institutions is to bring about a new consciousness in the individual in an open-ended project of moral development, based on revolutionary values of voluntarism (Tassi et. al. 2020). This means that a revolutionary regime’s task is not to abolish the individual, but rather to fashion the individual into a new subjectivity or consciousness that not only embodies the revolutionary ethos but enacts the very revolutionary condition that the socialist state is charged with bringing about (Tassi et. al. 2020).

Generally, my interlocutors within the lithium industry did not identify with the concept of the plebeian multitude and for the best part sacrifice did not for them mean sacrificing themselves for the government’s self-proclaimed revolution. Instead, they considered lithium industrialization “revolutionary” because they thought that the process would entail profound personal transformation. Overall, it has been this idea of personal self-sacrifice as a form of radical individual renovation that has allowed individuals within the lithium industry to sustain belief in the industrialization of lithium in the face of the many technological and political contingencies linked to the regime’s industrialization project.
Social Disjointedness and Revolutionary Subjecthood

In April of 2000, in the city of Cochabamba, mass demonstrations over the privatization of water supplies shook the very fabric of Bolivian society and politics. The Water War was triggered when SEMAPA, Cochabamba's municipal water company was sold to a transnational consortium controlled by U.S.-based Bechtel Corporation. The municipal water company was sold in exchange for debt relief for the Bolivian government and new World Bank loans were extended to develop the water system. The chief demand of the water warriors was the removal of a private, foreign-led consortium that had taken over Cochabamba’s water system. For the Bolivian government, breaking with the consortium dominated by the Bechtel Corporation was inconceivable. Thus, people took to the streets by the thousands to protest the buyout of their water system and Cochabamba’s beautiful colonial center turned into a war zone (Schultz 2009). The police, who were equipped with full riot gear, blocked the streets with tear gas cannons while protestors held their ground with rocks.

Soon, the revolt was joined by an important new ally, the coca farmers of the Chapare and their leader, Evo Morales. The cocaleros brought with them years of experience in resistance tactics against troops sent in to eradicate their crops. The cocaleros showed the protesters how to use bandanas and vinegar to fight the effects of the tear gas (Schultz 2009). Morales himself was on the streets facing the military and the police. Finally, the water warriors regained control of their water supply and defied all odds by driving out the transnational corporation that had appropriated their water in the first place. Eventually, Bechtel was forced to abrogate its contract, return SEMAPA to public control, and withdraw its legal claim against the Bolivian government (Olivera et. al. 2004). During the insurgency
Victor Hugo Daza, a seventeen-year-old boy, was killed and hundreds were wounded (Schultz 2009).

No doubt subsequent political and social transformations in Bolivia owe a great debt to the battle over water that took place in the streets of Cochabamba in 2000. The insurgency was a key incident that galvanized opposition to the existing government. This iconic struggle not only crystallized a growing demand for popular control of Bolivia’s natural resources, but it also led to the Gas Wars of 2003 and 2005. The insurrection heavily influenced the overthrow of two neoliberal presidents, and the subsequent election of Evo Morales and the MAS party, which claimed it was establishing a government of social movements (Schultz 2009).

Concerning the conflict, Linera (2004) declared that the water revolt marked the rising of an interconnected multitude with a great capacity to mobilize at a national scale and thus, to affect the state. This multitude, he proclaimed was the historical subject of emancipation and it was “profoundly traditional and radically modern” (Linera 2004: 72). As Linera (2014) explained, the rise of this plebeian multitude was rapid and it was directly connected to the tin miners’ crisis of the early 1980s, and the subsequent adoption of neoliberal policies which brought dramatic changes to the mining sector. Crucially, the closure of almost all the mines that had been nationalized in 1952 initiated the extensive discharge of mineworkers.

This occurred because the re-elected MNR-led government of Víctor Paz Estenssoro conceded to an economic restructuring plan set forward by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. According to Nash (1994) the subsequent debt crisis in Bolivia has brought about a more profound restructuring of the economy than in any other Latin American country. In 1986 civic committees in the departments of Potosí and Oruro united with unions, university students, and professors to protest the government’s plan to decentralize mining operations. When the government ignored the petitions of the population to keep the mines
open, the civic committees and workers from the mining centers organized a "March for Life." Several individuals were wounded in the demonstration when the armed forces threw tear gas bombs and fired rubber bullets as thousands of miners gathered in Oruro to begin their march (Linea 2014).

These miners were the ardent soul of the nation born in the 1952 National Revolution and it was with this consciousness that they blocked the highway to oppose the state. However, on that day the miners were betrayed by the very state apparatus they had helped to establish, and the twentieth century working-class condition collapsed after a hundred years (Linera 2014). Therefore, for Linera (2014) there has been a theoretical crisis within Marxism in dealing with the success of neoliberal capitalism and the attendant decline of Bolivia’s working classes. Seeking to arrest the often multifaceted and contradictory relations among subjecthood, class, and ethnicity, he formally brought Marxism and Indianism together.

The political ideology of Indianism (\textit{indianismo}) found its most enduring expression with the publication of Fausto Reinaga’s work entitled “The Indian Revolution”. He argued that indigenous beliefs and practices were superior to those of the decadent West and that a revolution was needed to sweep clear the vestiges of colonialism. For him Marxism was merely another imported Western ideology that only served to subordinate and recolonize the country’s indigenous majority (Reinaga 1969). Thus, “Christ and Marx must be removed from the head of the Indian” he said.

Linera (2005; 2014) has proposed that a series of opportunities for dialogue were missed between indigenous struggles for autonomy and/or full citizenship and decolonization on the one hand, and urban-centered modernizing and developmentalist projects of the Left. Leftist projects have included late 19th and early 20th century anarcho-syndicalism, a Marxist tradition that began to make considerable inroads in Bolivia in the 1940s following the Chaco
war (1932-35), and the National-popular Revolution of 1952. Their ideological differences notwithstanding, all the latter political tendencies viewed the struggle of the proletariat as the one and only path toward meaningful social transformation while indigenous groups’ backwardness was an obstacle to emancipation through modernization (Linera 2014).

As opposed to this, in the regime’s rhetoric, the “Indian” has emerged as a historical project, and the basis for a political plan. The fundamental contribution of Reinaga’s (1968) Indianism to the regime’s propaganda has been the reinvention of “Indianness” not as a stigma but as a subject of emancipation. In this framework, the subject’s revolutionary cry is not assimilation, but liberation in the context of a centuries-long war against Hispanic identity. In addition, Linera (2010; 2014) borrowed from Gramsci (1992) and conceptualized the nation as a form of durable, long-lasting hegemony, a lucid political project that(re)organizes power relations in society. Ultimately, Linera combined Zavaleta's concept of “sociedad abigarrada” or “motley society” (Zavaleta 2018: 173) and the Gramscian notion of the integral state to revise the subaltern/state dichotomy in response to the ascension of actors from social movements previously excluded from the formal political sphere to state power (Linera 2014).  

By merging these theories, Bolivia’s “indigenous” and working-class peoples would be able to assemble a new, integrated vision of the Bolivian state, one with the prospect of a proper correlation between state power and the country’s unique societal composition. Overall, the multiple references to the “plebes” in Linera’s propagandistic writings entail a continued effort to avoid the classical figure of the proletariat modeled on the factory worker, in favor of a more flexible representation of the new revolutionary subject. It has been this

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23 For Zavaleta (1968) *sociedad abigarrada*” (roughly translated "motley society"), means a society juxtaposed by asymmetric relations of differentiated cultural power and its respective modes of production.
stretching of the category of class that allowed Linera (2014) to redefine the historical subject of hegemonic change in Bolivia following the downfall of revolutionary nationalism and the onset of neoliberalism in the mid-1980s. Consider Linera’s (2014) statement about the state and the community:

“It is not that the state is not a synthesis of the community, but rather that it is an alienated synthesis, as it transfigures society’s internal conflicts under the guise of the autonomy of the state’s functions. Thus, the state can be understood as a synthesis of society, but a synthesis that is conditioned by the dominant part of that society.” (Linera 2014: 265)

In this framework, the constructions of cultural hegemony on the part of the indigenous movements followed a path more Gramscian than Leninist regarding the state’s consolidation of indigenous identities. Instead of opting for indigenous national self-determination which would have meant a separation from Bolivian identity, the struggles of revolutionary subjects flowed towards the “indianization” of the Bolivian state, and the growing “indianization” of Bolivian identity (Linera 2014). In this context, revolution is a way of nationalizing society, while the nation comprises a “primordial hegemony” (Linera 2014: 25). At stake, then, has not only been the clash between two distinct ways of instituting the relationship between the state and the people but rather two alternative ontological positions on what might count as state and people in the first place.
Patria O Muerte. Venceremos: Patriotism and the Disruption of Colonial Rule

As we have seen, the ultimate political program of the MAS’ self-proclaimed revolutionary project could be encapsulated as hegemony plus community against the backdrop of a socialist horizon to be achieved in part via industrialization. Accordingly, at his 2006 inauguration, Evo declared an ideological lineage that included Andean indigenous insurrectional struggles, Simón Bolívar's nationalism, and Che Guevara's socialism. Such a mixed lineage asserted the notion that revolutionary politics presupposes an immediate ontological identification between the revolutionary state and its subjects. More specifically, Evo stated that to “decolonize” the nation he would start nothing less than a “cultural democratic revolution”.

This revolutionary struggle would be the continuation of the struggle of Túpac Katari to restore the Inca Empire, Bolivar’s struggle to establish the patria grande, and Che Guevara’s struggle to establish a new and egalitarian world (Postero 2017). Therefore, the MAS party attempted to articulate three distinct lines of struggle, focusing on indigenous rights, economic justice, and popular democracy. They mediated these contradictions by adopting a core agenda that might be called indigenous nationalism (Postero 2017). The government’s messages were paired with strong emphasis on economic development and sovereignty, together with redistribution, social programs, presidential construction works, and national pride in plurinational nationalism. Further, there was a systematic emphasis on the ideological content of revolutionary discourse, with its repetitive evocations of “process”, “change”, “decolonization” and other discursive projections into the future.
There was also constant reference to martyrdom. In fact, it is difficult to exaggerate the symbolic significance of two of the above-mentioned historical figures who also function as the main proto martyrs of Bolivia. As for Che Guevara, who was executed by the CIA-backed Bolivian Army in 1967, the administration mostly emphasized his anti-imperialism. Consider one of Evo’s public remarks which he uttered while leading a large gathering to pay homage to Che fifty years after his execution:

“Brothers and sisters of the Big Motherland! This day is one of the most important days in our history, because we commemorate the 50th anniversary since Commander Ernesto Che Guevara passed away (...). His face, his name, his life and his ideals continue to be a banner in the struggle against all forms of oppression, of exploitation, and of exclusion—that’s what we feel when we raise our fists and we say with all the might of our voice: ‘Victory or death!’”.

The nature and the location of the event was telling. Thousands gathered that day in the small town called La Higuera in southern Bolivia where the guerrilla leader of the Cuban Revolution met his violent death. Hundreds of youths from social and popular organizations gathered from across the Global South, committing themselves to Che’s values and declaring their willingness to continue his legacy. Guevara’s slogans were chanted passionately while Evo created a floral tribute to the martyr and all his fellow fallen guerrillas.

The president himself camped in a tent with a sleeping bag and welcomed dignitaries arriving from various allied countries. Over the tumultuous weekend artists, activists, veterans of the Cuban revolution and even Guevara’s descendants commemorated their revolutionary hero in Vallegrande, where he was buried in a hidden, unmarked grave before his remains
were moved to Cuba 30 years later. The tribute ended with a celebration filled with slogans and warm embraces.

As for sacrificial colonial struggles, I discovered an old flyer in a bookstore in La Paz presenting Evo together with Túpac Katari and the slogan: “We have got back the resources. Now we have homeland!” referring to the nationalization of hydrocarbons in 2006. The suggested link between the state control of natural resources, national sovereignty, and belonging to the homeland was notable. However, the reference also suggested that for the very first time in modern history, the country belonged to the Bolivian people, and that this could be achieved only through heroism and self-sacrifice.

The name of Túpac Katari as a proto martyr was mentioned in almost all of Evo’s major speeches. The president constantly reminded his audience that although Spain ruled its Andean territory without any major insurrectionary threats until the mid-eighteenth century, anticolonial revolts began to proliferate in the highlands of Charcas from the 1750s onward. Moreover, Evo proclaimed that he embodied the prophesy of this martyr Aymara chief, who was captured, tortured, and torn by his extremities into four pieces by the Spanish at the end of the 18th-century. According to oral tradition, before he died, he shouted: “I will return and there will be millions of us.”

Consider Evo’s remark:

“Today, in 1750, was born in Ayo Ayo, Tupac Katari, who would come to fight against the abuses of colonial rule. He led a powerful Indigenous army, comprised of 40 thousand men and women. He surrounded the old Chuquiago Marka on two different occasions. Glory to our martyr!”

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24 Túpac Katari (b. c. 1750 – d. November 15, 1781) is remembered as a hero by social movements throughout Bolivia. Crucially the Bolivian Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army also bears his name. The group calls their political philosophy and ideology Katarismo. "Katari" means "serpent, large snake" in Aymara.
The first Bolivian communication satellite launched into orbit during Evo’s presidency on 20 December 2013 from the Satellite Launch Center in Xichang, China was also named after this anti-colonial hero, and the launch was presented as one of the country’s greatest national achievements. Slogans like “Bolivians, we have a star in the sky. We are millions!” appeared in official tv spots. The promotion of Bolivia’s first telecommunications satellite was undeniably linked to the regime’s narratives of the country’s heroic past but also that of sacrifice, autonomy, and a better future. The commercials, billboards, and posters with the image of Katari connected Evo to the idea of progress. One of the most common phrases associated with the satellite were: “We achieved sovereignty in telecommunications with the satellite Katari so the future is ours now”. As seen in the flyer, the government presented Evo as heir to the martyr hero Túpac Katari and the regime’s “process of change” as the realization of Katari’s rebellious aspirations of two centuries earlier:

Figure 6. Evo as heir to the martyr hero Túpac Katari (source:TeleSur)
So, who exactly was this symbolic martyr figure? Katari was the head of tens of thousands of Aymara-speaking community troops from across the altiplano and led the famous siege of La Paz during the Great Rebellion of 1780. Before becoming a rebel leader, he was a miner and then a trader of coca and cloth. His arms and legs were slightly twisted, probably from polio (Walker 1999; Serulnikov 2013). Yet, he and his wife, Bartolina Sisa, launched one of the most powerful rebellions on what was to become Bolivian territory. Their rebellion quickly spread throughout the area and turned into a prolonged siege on La Paz beginning in March of 1781. By taking El Alto and several key passes, they were able to completely block all access to the city. His army was able to hold the city under siege for over 6 months. During the siege about 20,000 people died, which included 5,000 rebels. While many died from fighting, the majority perished from disease and starvation inside the surrounded city (Serulnikov 2013).

However, there is more to the regime’s most valuable protomartyr than meets the eye. In fact, Katari is not only a fascinating figure but a complex one as well. Following the political thoughts of his rebel contemporary, Túpac Amaru II in Cuzco, Katari believed that those born in the Andes should control the wealth of territory. Yet, he presented himself as a true Christian whose aim was to wipe out corruption from the colonial system (Serulnikov 2003; 2013). Remember, one of the major slogans of the Great Andean Rebellion was "Long live the King and Death to Bad Government" (Viva el rey y muera el mal gobierno).

Túpac Amaru II (March 19, 1738 - May 18, 1781) was an upper-class cacique or prince with claims to the Inca royal lineage. He called for rebellion in the 1780s. He was an educated mestizo since he received a Jesuit education at a school established to educate the sons of the so called kurakas (Walker 1999; Serulnikov 1996; 2006; 2013). A kuraka was an Inka aristocrat serving as an official of the Inca Empire holding the role of magistrate, about four levels down from the Sapa Inca, the head of the Empire. Túpac Amaru II was executed in the main Plaza in Cuzco, the same place where his supposed ancestor Túpac Amaru I was decapitated more than 200 years earlier (Waskar 2014).
For example, while Túpac Amaru II adopted the identity of an Inca King, he was also commissioning a portrait of himself and his wife adding Inca symbols to his Spanish daily dress (Walker 1999). One of the unique characteristics of Katari’s thought was his view of a new social order in which “each thing should be in its place” (Thomson et. al. 2018: 127) even if the price one must pay is death. Let me quote from one of his letters since it affords us a rare access to the political voice and vision of this fierce anticolonial leader. It is a remarkable document insofar as it comes from the insurgent camp:

“…my intention was to finish off everything and turn everything to ash, and so do not scorn this notice of mine. If you do the opposite, you will get the gallows and the knife. And under the condition that you surrender all offensive weapons, all the entryways [to the city] will be opened, so that everything may resume. In this way we will be firm and constant friends unto death. And thus I will send all the Europeans on their way, so that they be returned to their lands, and the creoles will be pardoned forever. I also notify you that if you do not take this as the truth, I will then turn [the city] into dust and ash. Because I have some hundred thousand Indian soldiers all around the city who are well armed and determined to bring down the city. Even if it takes three or four years, I will be here in El Alto until we have our way. You can disabuse yourselves, since it is from on high that each thing should be in its place; what is God’s to God and what is Caesar’s to Caesar. So do not look down on this notice of mine, because I have ordered and signed it here in this Alto de la Batalla on 9 April 1781.”

I, the Lord Viceroy Tupac-Catari
(Katari in Thomson et. al. 2018: 128)

Crucially, as a leader, Katari assumed his name to honor two anti-colonial martyr leaders who died fighting the Spanish centuries earlier, Túpac Amaru and Tomas Katari. Túpac Amaru was the last monarch (Sapa Inca) of the Neo-Inca State, the remnants of the Inca Empire in Vilcabamba, Peru. He opposed the Spanish in the 1530s as a member of the royal family and he was executed by the Spanish following a months-long pursuit after the fall of the last stronghold of the Inka state (Walker 1999; Serulnikov 2013).
Tomás Katari on the other hand, was an Aymara cacique of northern Potosí who led a popular uprising in Upper Peru (present-day Bolivia) in the late 18th century. His battles against abusive local and regional official began in 1777 (Thomson 2002). When he was assassinated January of 1781 by the Spanish, the new leadership took a more separatist anti-Spanish stance and turned to another rebel called Túpac Amaru II as their king (Serulnikov 2013). Accordingly, in the regime’s rhetoric Katari embodied the struggles of several martyr insurrectionists of the early colonial era as well as the Great Andean Rebellion.

Although, Spain put down the revolts in 1783 and executed thousands as punishment, the regime constantly reminded its audience that the revolutionary uprisings formed under the shining symbol of the Inca sun had long term, and profound social and political consequences. Further, that the revolts not only weakened the Spanish empire but also set the stage for an even bigger revolutionary war, the War of Independence. These processes required sacrifice and death, and the government presented Evo as the heir of the history of revolt, and the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution as the continued realization of these altruistic rebellious aspirations.

My conviction about the symbolic force of martyrdom as an underling theme in the regime’s rhetoric became even stronger when I heard the slogan “Homeland or death!” at one of YLB’s public events. This occurred during one of the very memorable events when I saw Evo as president before his resignation. It was a sunny day and I accompanied one of my interlocutors working for the YLB in La Paz to the event held in Potosí. The event was also the official opening of a new lithium technology center. The technology center would teach students different courses related to lithium and its use in the hope that they will provide the workforce for Bolivia’s lithium industry. The climax of the event was Evo officially
presenting the first electric car to be manufactured in Bolivia, produced by state owned company YLB. At the end of the ceremony, Evo said:

"It is important that the technological center for lithium is installed in the city of Potosí. We hope that academics and experts can join to train medium and high-level technicians in lithium. We combine investment with education to advance in industrialization for a secure future…When we started no one believed in us! Now we present the first vehicle assembled with Bolivian lithium that will use energy from the lithium batteries of La Palca. This is a great success and it is for the people and the progress of Bolivia. Patria o Muerte Venceremos! (Homeland or death: we will win!).”

The distinctive political ontology that Evo adopted as the official motto of its armed forces was first set out by Fidel Castro himself, in an infamous speech delivered to an assembly of artists and intellectuals in 1961 in Cuba:

“The revolution [...] should act in such a way that these artists and intellectuals who are not genuine revolutionaries can find a space within the revolution where they can work and create. Even though they are not revolutionary artists and writers, they should have the opportunity and freedom to express their creative spirit within the revolution. In other words: within the revolution everything; against the revolution, nothing.

Against the revolution, nothing, because the revolution also has its rights, and the first right of the revolution is the right to exist, and no one can oppose the revolution’s right to exist. Inasmuch as the revolution embodies the interests of the people, inasmuch as the revolution symbolizes the interests of the whole nation, no one can justly claim a right to oppose it…[...] …

Counterrevolutionaries [...] have no rights against the revolution, because the revolution has one right: the right to exist, the right to develop, and the right to be
victorious. Who can cast doubt on that right, the right of a people who have said: ‘Homeland or death!’ – that is, “Revolution or Death” (Castro 2007: 213-239).

Undoubtedly, the revolutionary ontology incorporated by Evo into the regime’s own self-proclaimed revolution was founded on death as its major premise. If to be a revolutionary subject is to be prepared to die for the revolution, it follows that revolutionary subjectivity takes a confined and controlled form (Holbraad 2014). In this context, revolution is defined as an all-encompassing constituent of the world, and something that exists by right (Holbraad 2014). In other words, nothing can exist against the totality of the revolution, not even counterrevolutionaries (Holbraad 2014).

Since no part of the revolutionary subject remains beyond the revolution, the revolutionary process gives birth to a new political universe (Holbraad 2014). This notorious slogan was not only adopted by the Morales-Linera government, but it became ritualized. In fact, most of Evo’s spectacular public speaking was given the final punctuation culminating in the sweeping roar of his supporters: Patria o muerte: venceremos!. Public events within the lithium industry were no exception.

The Industrialization of Lithium and “the New Men”

Idealistic invocations of ancestral figures, death, and martyrdom as a means of popular, and national emancipation were present across the country and within the lithium industry as well. However, Fidel’s political slogan appropriated by Evo has not achieved a venerated status within the lithium industry over the years. Generally, individuals working at the YLB expressed firm belief in the idea of industrialization. Though, those who were closer to the bottom of the corporate hierarchy and/or were involved in the process of industrialization
directly also expressed deep concerns about the regime’s management of the industrialization project. When I asked one of my interlocutors who was a manual worker at the lithium plant about the slogan, he told me that he was troubled by the current state of the lithium industry which strongly affected his point of view:

“I came here to work because I believe in industrialization. But the technology is bad, and we don’t have true expertise. We have bad machinery and because of that we have a lot of accidents. This is a state project, and everything is directed from La Paz. They say that we are moving slowly because there is no other way. But that is not true. We are moving slowly because we do not have the technology and because everything you see around you is a show.”

I felt his anger as he resumed:

“I am ready to give my life to my country but not for the government’s stupidity. The government wants more power, and they do this by making people believe in all this. It’s all fake! It’ corrupt. I will quit very soon because I feel sorry for the environment, and because I know that all this is not realistic, it is all propaganda. I am also very worried that I get cancer from working under the sun all day. Industrialization is so important, but it is not managed well. We need better policies to achieve it.”

Despite their ambivalent sentiments, individuals within the lithium industry have been fully aware of the fact that the regime’s industrializing project is changing them. This did not alienate them from the process of lithium industrialization. On the contrary, most of them regarded the process revolutionary due to personal transformation via education and experimentation. For them, the point of sacrificing who they were was to change and heal the country’s exploitative colonial past. One of my interlocutors who was an engineer at the YLB in La Paz said the following:
“Look. Bolivia is rich in natural resources, but we have never had the power to industrialize. We have never had the power to do something constructive with our minerals. We just let ourselves be looted by others who were stronger than us. So, there is this sorrow all the time.

So, I am not sure about the revolution, but I know that industrializing lithium is revolutionary. It is revolutionary because we learn something new, and this changes us radically. We all want the best for this country, and therefore we are ready to change ourselves completely. This is what I call truly revolutionary.”

As for Linera’s (2014) conceptualization of the country’s revolutionary subject, my interlocutors did not identify with the category of the “plebeian multitude”. On the contrary, they expressed frustration because they felt that the regime failed to acknowledge their background and/or their education. Consider the following remark uttered by one of the lab workers at the lithium plant:

“The government mostly wants to ensure support from the peasants. It is frustrating. Here at the plant, and at the YLB we are not peasants. In the industry there are ex-miners, working class people, engineers, managers and even scientists. There are at least two generations trying to work together. There is a younger generation who is more educated than for example the miners. Some are higher up and some are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy work under perilous circumstances. Those are the real heroes, and I am not sure that the government appreciates that.”
He persisted:

“You must understand this. The regime is statist. Nationalism is another element to bear in mind. The nation is a fantasy, but it has been placed above the individual. The state was created to ensure individual rights, but with the purpose of favoring itself, even justifying human sacrifice. Political parties do the revolution in the name of the nation, not in favor of the people.”

Still, individuals working in the industry generally accepted the regime’s view that during the colonial era a discriminating pattern of forced servitude were imposed upon the majority of Bolivia’s indigenous population, and the racial hierarchies emerging around the newly organized exploitative labor conditions became an entrenched characteristic in the country’s economic, political, and social system. Further, that in the making of the modern Bolivian nation racial and ethnic discourses were reconstructed by the elite, while segregationist policies and assimilation policies continued to emerge.

According to this view, despite the grand achievements of the 1952 National Revolution racializing remained the form, and colonialism continued to be the content of Bolivia’s national identity throughout the twentieth century (Waskar 2014). Thus, during the interviews I was constantly reminded of colonial abuse and the fact that the accumulated Spanish imperial fortunes originated from the back-breaking labor of indigenous mineworkers. For example, during one of my interviews in Uyuni one elderly manual worker at the lithium plant explained to me how millions of mita workers perished through accidents, brutal treatment, or poisoning by the mercury used in the silver extraction process:
“Millions lost their lives during those times, you know. Have you been to the Cerro Rico? It is no accident that the mountain in Potosí is called the mountain that eats men. Just imagine the amount of dust, heat, lack of air, noise, and the weight of the stones extracted for silver. They were drowning people in blood because they were hungry for silver and gold. It was an atrocity. We must heal and we must do that right. So, we must learn to industrialize.”

According to government’s official discourse, the racialization of social difference was conserved by means of the state invention of the “Indian” as the “negative other” (Linera, 2014: 159). Therefore, the republican state was born vis-à-vis the category of the Indian where citizens were conceived as the non-Indians. In practical terms, individuals were defined by how they dressed, what language they spoke, their literacy or illiteracy, and their formal education or lack thereof. Individuals displaying the markers of Indians were racialized and targeted for exclusion (Waskar 2014).

Linera (2014) also publicly declared that stigmatization, and what he referred to as the modern “ecstatic holocaust of indigenous rationality” (Linera 2014: 146), came to be characterized by the eradication of collective identities in favor of a national identity, which in turn further naturalized racialized practices of political, economic, and cultural exclusion and domination (Linera 2014). In other words, according to this view the “Indian” had been historically excluded from the social and governmental system. According to state rationality pre-Evo then, everything that was deemed “indigenous” by the ruling élite was also perceived as a social ailment which must be eradicated.

My interlocutors within the lithium industry voiced analogous views. Yet, most of my interlocutors refused to identify themselves with the regime’s ideal revolutionary subjects and with the invocation of sacrificing oneself for the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution. Still, for many who participated in lithium industrialization at the sub-directorial level, it has been as
much a project of radical personal transformation as it has been a project for sociopolitical and economic transformation. Even though my interlocutors refuted the regime’s big “R” revolution as well as the regime’s handling of the industrialization project, they also univocally continued to support the idea of industrialization. Moreover, they declared their pride for it, and wished to defend the idea of it. They univocally believed that their elders preserved a sacred prophecy of a great change, or what they referred to as a Pachakuti; a cataclysmic event during which the current colonial world would be reversed and turned upside down. Therefore, harmony and order would be restored, and chaos and confusion would end.

In their view, the great cosmological change that was prophesied had already begun. In their minds, however, this prophecy was not fully connected to the MAS. Rather, it was linked to the violent death and the famous prophecy of Túpac Katari independently from Evo’s posing as the heir of this anti-colonial hero. Some of my informants thought that the cosmological reversal was directly facilitated by Katari’s torn body parts which have been “tearing holes” in the fabric of colonial time underground. Through these cracks “the doors between worlds opened again”. In their view, people have been given the chance to crawl through these openings to return to their pre-colonial state of being and to a pre-colonial world. This upside-down world should bring about the end of time as they know it, and the end of a colonial way of thinking and being.

However, one must “die” to open themselves to self-renewal, and to become a midwife of this inverted world. Clearly, my interlocutors considered themselves direct facilitators of this new cosmological era through self-transformation via industrialization. Seen in this light, for these individuals, lithium industrialization as it has intersected with revolutionary politics under the Morales-Linera regime has had a character with ontological stakes. In this context,
“two seemingly opposite existential revolutionary outcomes - becoming a new man, or dying for the revolution - come down to the same thing” (Holbraad 2014: 377): a fundamentally austere, self-transformative willingness to sacrifice what one is so that society can position itself in a new way to re-write and heal the country’s painful colonial history.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I focused on the way “revolutionary” subjects have been formally constituted by the Morales-Linera regime and how these conceptions of personhood were perceived within the lithium industry. Further, I exposed a series of official discursive moves that knit together ideas obtained from various Marxist and leftist theoreticians as a local lens to reinforce the populist logic of overcoming the ontological separation between the people and the state. The ontological fusion of state and people was pitched explicitly in contrast to Marxist scholasticism, and particularly theories of pure transition, in which communism is supposed to result from objective circumstances emanating from the class dynamics of late capitalism and, following revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

According to the regime’s vision, the immediate gauge for the revolutionary state’s legitimacy is the degree to which it promotes a collapse of the distinction between state and people, in a spirit of constant and abiding political experimentation. Under the Morales-Linera regime, despite a strong lean towards Leninist vanguardism, state-level conceptualization of revolutionary subjects has been an effort to recognize the relationship between class, ethnicity, and the state. In this context, the category of class was stretched, and the state was recognized as the synthesis of society. However, the motor of the revolution

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26 To explore this idea further see Che’ Guevara’s essay entitled “Socialism and Man in Cuba” published in 1965 which can be considered Che’s answer to Lenin’s State and Revolution.
remained constituted by a few, the monopoly of the elected who were capable to create a new world by erecting a strong state without “the illusions and impurities of the plebs” (Linera 2015: 49).

Yet, the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation has officially contained a deeper premise, namely martyrdom. The idea that acts of martyrdom are political is hardly new. Several anthropologists have sought to address related questions ethnographically (Cherstich 2014a; 2014b; Ghannam 2012; 2015; Holbraad 2014; 2017a; 2017b;). Bloch (1992) for example argued that self-sacrificial violence, whether literal or symbolic, is a key feature of the reproduction of political orders since it allows transcendent political forms to be asserted at the expense of the transitory lives of the persons at any given time.

In Bolivia, the idea of self-sacrifice has been profoundly tangled with mythical and ancestral figures, prophecy, and the somewhat contradictory principle of a “forward-moving return to the past” (Tassi et. el. 2020: 35) that the colonial regime had sought to annihilate. Thus, in this context, the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has not progressed solely within the linear coordinates of sequential time.

I also revealed that my interlocutors rejected the idea of altruism for the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution. However, the premise of self-sacrifice lent revolutionary politics as it intersected with lithium industrialization a distinctive ontological foundation. Through the self-sacrificial logic of radical transformation, individuals within the lithium industry voluntarily rendered themselves ontologically conterminous with the process of industrialization. Their aim has been to give birth to a new political and social universe via personal transformation to re-write the country’s colonial past.
Chapter Six: Renovating the Cosmos and Overturning the Upside-Down

“For the Indian of pre-America, the conception of time wasn’t a geological time and even less was it historical time. Indian time is cosmic time.”
(Fausto Reinaga)

Introduction

Once a year the dead return, also in Bolivia. At the intersection of life and death coca leaves, llama meat, and fermented corn drink called chicha awaits them. Their loved ones are eager to meet them. During my stay in La Paz, I learned that it is particularly important to satisfy the ancestors during the first three years after their death because their spirit is still strongly attached to the living. I also discovered that locals often build elaborate household altars to honor their belated loved ones. These altars are usually decorated with candles, flowers, and photographs while they commonly represent various cosmological planes including heaven, and the uma pacha or the underworld.

In Bolivia, the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) celebrations begin on the 31st of November and turn public on the 2nd when the domestic altars are moved to the burial grounds. In La Paz, streets leading to the cemetery host lively fairs. I was looking forward to this special day with great excitement. I was particularly interested in witnessing a rather unique tradition which is the adoration of human skulls called ñatitas, or “little souls.” Luckily, one of my friends and main informants at the YLB offered to accompany me and be my local guide. So, early in the morning we headed straight to the northwest area of the city where the enigmatic General Cemetery of La Paz is located.

The gates of the cemetery were already open, and the grounds were filled with music and chatter. Skull owners kept arriving carrying the ñatitas in intricately carved wooden boxes.
Soon I found out that the better their appearance, the more blessing owners will be granted in return. So, the ñatitas were set on a bed of colorful flowers and lovingly adorned with accessories such as sunglasses, extravagant hats, alcohol, jewelry, and even smoking cigarettes. People were eating meals, chewed coca, and drank alcohol alongside the ñatitas.

“Once the celebration is over, they will take the skulls home and communicate with them through dreams, asking the ñatita for favors such as prosperity, health and safety” - my informed guide told me.

After wandering around the cemetery for several hours, we decided to head back to the colonial city center by foot. Just one block from the familiar San Francisco church we suddenly found ourselves wandering through the Witches’ Market where all sorts of oddities were on display. Upon arriving at the market, I was overwhelmed by a dizzying display of color and strange aroma. Dried animals such as frogs, snakes, and turtles were hanging from the stands. Probably the most haunting objects were the dried llama fetuses. These curious objects promised to cure diseases of both the body and the soul amongst others.

Finally, we arrived at the Plaza Murillo and found an empty wooden bench facing the Presidential Palace. The public timepiece built into the impressive building that houses Bolivia’s legislative assembly was impossible to miss. Instead of right, the clock’s hands and numbers moved to the left. As we rested my companion looked at the clock and stated the following:
"Now, look at this crazy clock. It is going backwards. Because of it, and because of what you saw today at the cemetery and at the Witches’ market my country is being mocked for being primitive and going backward. It is so painful. Why do we have to fight about everything? Even about clocks and time? Really? Some people think that Evo was right and that it is a good thing to connect people to their past. But others think that tourists will think that it is an error, and that historic buildings should not be meddled with. I think that what the government tried to do is good. But the politics in this country is so difficult.

People have a very specific bond with everything. With the sun, and the moon, the dead, the past, the present and the future, just everything you can imagine. There are so many conflicts. For example, at the YLB my boss thinks that lithium is all about future, but I think that it is also about the past. Where does time exist anyway? It is both outward and inward and conflict arises when we talk about it as if it was measurable in one specific way. Politicians should respect the fact that time means a different thing for every single person. Especially in this complicated country.”

No doubt, my companion thought carefully about the nature of time. Mankind has always been fascinated by the concept of it, too. From gazing at the stars to the theory of relativity, the concept of time around the world has always been a matter of contingency. Time in Western culture has been typically defined as the continued sequence of existence and events that occurs in an apparently irreversible succession from the past, through the present, into the future. To explore unique frameworks, a considerable body of anthropological literature has addressed how different cultures and groups have established different horizons, logics, and understandings of time. Durkheim’s (2001) doctrine of the social origin of time as a category of mind inspired many distinguished ethnographic analyses (Evans-Pritchard 1939; Gell 1975; Bloch 1989; Geertz 1973) as well as theoretical work on the subject matter (Leach 2004; Levi-Strauss 1963; Gell 1992).
However, time also has a performative character. Clocks, calendars, almanacs, and schedules are full of significant meaning (Gell 1992). Consider the institutionalization of a Soviet revolutionary calendar, or, Cambodia's genocidal tyrant, Pol Pot, who famously set the calendar at "Year Zero" after his Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975 (Tassi et al. 2020). In these contexts of self-proclaimed socialist revolutions, practices of reconfiguration of time and space have rested upon on what might be called a self-contained revolutionary cosmology. In these frameworks, the idea of revolution has been utilized as one of the key concepts of political modernity and it involved a complete break with the past to annihilate traditional and oppressive social structures (Tassi et al. 2020). Accordingly, the revolutionary gaze has been constantly oriented towards a future horizon.

As we have seen, the association of revolution with attempts to discern the present from the past is somewhat recent. More specifically, theorists began to employ the concept to refer to processes of emancipation during the eighteenth century (Arendt 1965; Koselleck 1985). Crucially, in Marxist analysis, producing a truly radical social and political transformation is only possible if one refuses to be held back by the past, and this includes tradition, and religion. In other words, the conception of revolution as a sudden cut from the past is in conflict with religious forms. Marx (1970) envisioned religious conviction as a syndrome of the working class that distorts the reality of its exploitation. For him religion was nothing but a veil concealing the suffering of the oppressed and something that prevents the subaltern from rebelling against their condition.

For Marx (1970), religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, it is the soul of soulless conditions, and it is the opium of the people (Marx 1970: 175). Religious belief persists because of oppressive social conditions. Moreover, the function of religious suffering is to numb real suffering. Thus, when the exploitative condition is destroyed, religion becomes
unnecessary. Influenced by his doctrine, several Marxist–Leninist governments in the 20th century such as the Soviet Union after Lenin implemented rules leading to state atheism.

In this section, I continue to explore how despite the Morales-Linera regime’s official deployment of Marxist frameworks, a set of local spiritual and cosmological themes resurfaced at the heart of Bolivia’s self-proclaimed revolution as it intersected with lithium industrialization. To develop this argument, I study the nature of revolutionary time, and how it is experienced within the lithium industry. More specifically, in this chapter I ask: What happens when we place modern ideas of revolution in a temporal and spatial order that goes beyond the coordinates of linear modernity? I will reveal that lithium industrialization as it has intersected with the country’s self-proclaimed revolution has been framed by both Marxist and Andean notions of radical transformation.

On the one hand, the country’s self-proclaimed revolution has been conceptualized as a sudden rupture in time and a radical break with the past, tradition, and with religion by Linera (2017). The temporality of this statist agenda has entailed a linear, future oriented revolutionary gaze propagating a transcendent socialist horizon of autonomy and egalitarianism. On the other hand, the concept of Pachakuti or “space-time reversal” from both Aymara and Quechua languages has also emerged within the Morales-Linera regime’s political discourse.

For example, Evo tied the notions of reversal, return, and overturn to both the Pachakuti concept and lithium industrialization. One of the leitmotifs of Bolivian state politics became de-colonization, and the industrialization of lithium has been presented as one of the main tools to achieve that goal. This means that the industrialization of lithium has also been promoted as one of the main instruments to turn the colonial world “upside down” and re-establish indigenous hegemony. My interlocutors working at the sub-directorial level within
the lithium industry perceived these developments accordingly. In other words, “there has been no revolution” as an event: they perceived the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution as a transformative process, never as an event, as opposed for example to the National Revolution of 1952.

Moreover, conjointly with the regime they theorized the country’s self-proclaimed revolution and lithium industrialization to radically refigure the relationship between past, present, and future, often through mythical narratives. More specifically, those who participated in the industrialization of lithium at the sub-directorial level generally perceived lithium industrialization as an insurgent tool to fulfill and sustain the current long awaited Pachakuti. For them Pachakuti’s “cosmogenic” or all-embracing spiritual quality has made both lithium industrialization and the regime’s revolution more than simply an act of violent political rupture at the heart of revolutionary action.

In contrast to the directors I interviewed at the YLB in La Paz, subordinate employees typically did not recognize the linear temporality of Linera’s (2017) socialist approach. Instead, for them the industrialization of lithium has been marked by a temporally intricate and sublime cosmological theme. This cosmological theme has foregrounded the emergence of a world-shattering force that is already present and needs to be cultivated.
The Rise of the Inca Sun and the Clock

In 2006 Evo was formally inaugurated in the capital city of La Paz. However, for many his spectacular “spiritual” inauguration the day before at the archaeological site of Tiwanaku represented the true watershed moment in the country’s political life. Imagine Evo walking through the doors of Tiwanaku in ceremonial Inca clothing amidst incense and the intense prayers of Aymara priests, or yatiris burning llama fetuses in his honor. In his inaugural address, he paid his respects to ancestors ranging from the 16th century Inka emperors to the 20th century Bolivian socialist leaders, positioning himself as part of a long tradition of indigenous and anti-colonial struggle.

The pre-Inca site of Tiwanaku is an emotionally charged, powerful and evocative place for many Bolivians. Consider the Gate of the Sun, which is a monumental icon of spiritual power at the center of the sacred spiritual and political site. It features a deity accompanied by a suite of condors whose heads emit solar rays, wielding staffs of authority in both hands. The rising sun shining through the gate recount a new historical time associated with the advent of powerful political overlords, both Inka and Spanish. The sun rays symbolize the light of civilization throughout the Andean world after a time of darkness associated with a primordial society, prior to the Inka (Thomson 2018).

From the moment of Evo’s first inauguration, the MAS incorporated Tiwanaku's immense symbolic power into the regime’s self-proclaimed revolution. The aim was to give the movement a sense of ancient authenticity and to establish a direct line to the past. In fact, the government constantly tried to connect its legacy to the past which was most clearly shown through its longer-term propaganda strategies, in particular the public campaign to promote Evo as the second coming of Katari (Thomson 2002).
Katari fused with Evo not only signaled a long history of anti-colonial struggle, but also evoked the alternative reality of cosmic time, or “Indian” time. From the multi-colored *wiphala* flag as a symbol of indigeneity, to erecting statues and naming Bolivia’s first satellite after Túpac Katari, the past has constantly been present with the MAS. Connections to the past and symbols of revolt and anti-colonial “indigenous” resistance have been celebrated as part of official state policy and rhetoric under Evo (Dangl 2019).

Consequently, Evo was ceremonially inaugurated at Tiwanaku repeatedly. After being elected for a second and a third term, indigenous leaders and backpackers returned to the pre-colonial seat of power again and again. Every time there were thousands of participants in attendance. Musicians played folk music throughout the morning as priests conducted complex rituals to prepare the president for his next term. The ritualistic spectacle amongst the ancient city’s ruins has been marked by its many layers of symbolic meaning. The portraits of Túpac Katari and Bartoline made from corn husks, beans, carrots, and potatoes were on display at the ruins of Tiwanaku regularly. Remarkably, during his second inauguration in 2010 Evo, accompanied by indigenous leaders, held the staff of command at Tiwanaku’s ancient Kalasasaya Palace which is considered a sacred observatory.

The impressive ruin complex can be entered by a flight of seven steps in the center of the eastern wall. The interior contains two carved monoliths and the monumental Gate of the Sun while along the bottom of the panel there is a series of human faces. The whole ensemble has been interpreted as a calendar, and Evo officially proposed this ancient calendar for Bolivia during the Aymara New Year ceremony in 2016. On that day the sun was at its

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27 In Bolivia, the winter is on June 21st and it is also celebrated as New Year’s Day by the Aymara.
farthest from the earth, and it was the shortest day and longest night of the year. The date marked the end of the harvest and beginning of the new agricultural cycle.

On that night, people got together once again to say goodbye to the old year with coca, alcohol, and other elements of Andean rites. A vigil was kept throughout the night until the new day dawned when the sun emitted its first rays which were reflected at precise places at the sacred Tiwanakan sites. Evo declared that it was important to reclaim the country’s ancestral calendar in a bid to distance the nation from its colonial past. According to that calendar, it was the year 5524. Evo also suggested that the calendar, which consisted of 13 months with 28 days, was far neater than the Gregorian one, where the length of months vary between 28 and 31 days. He declared it a colonial imposition and suggested that the country must reclaim its ancestral calendar to reclaim its true ancient identity.

This was not the only occasion Evo and his government suggested redefining the nation’s relationship with time. The regime understood the value in viewing time as a form of symbolic capital that could be appropriated, refashioned, and redistributed. In 2014, the clock on the front of the capital’s Congress building was set to run anti-clockwise with its numbers inverted, to reflect the country’s location in the southern hemisphere as well as its quest to de-colonize its colonial heritage. The country’s Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca proudly proclaimed the unorthodox new mechanism to be “The Clock of the South”.“Who says that the clock always has to turn one way? Why do we always have to obey? Why can’t we be creative?” he asked the reporters at a news conference.
In addition, several foreign delegates attending the G77 Summit of 2014 in the eastern city of Santa Cruz obtained miniature desktop versions of the backwards clock as a gift from the regime. The clocks were designed in the shape of the Bolivian border from before the country lost its coastline to Chile in the 1879 War of the Pacific which was a profoundly nationalistic statement. The foreign minister explained that the backwards clock as paying homage to the nation’s indigenous heritage, a way for the masses to identify with their indigenous roots more closely. After all, the indigenous Aymara and Quechua peoples have a traditional belief system which dictates that the past lies ahead while the future lies behind, he said.

Just like Tiwanaku, the site of the Legislative Palace located on the Plaza Murillo has had a symbolic significance. It is the central plaza of the city of La Paz, and it has been a key site for battles for political power in Bolivia. As the center of government, it has held a unique importance within the racialization of space in Bolivia. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the rural majority was prohibited from entering the plaza. No wonder it was fought over or defended in numerous revolutionary conflicts, including during the National
Revolution in 1952. Thus, many accepted the manipulation of the Congress Clock as a gesture on the part of the regime to mark its commitment to decolonization, a literal Pachakuti or a cataclysmic overturning of space-time.

**Pachakuti and (Re)volution**

Scholars have repeatedly signaled the resonance between the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary process and the indigenous myth and notion of Pachakuti (Hylton and Thompson 2005; Gutiérrez 2014; Arbona et al. 2016). For Gutierrez (2014) for example Pachakuti refers specifically to the subversion and transformation of social relations. The author showed that the internal dynamics of insurgent collective actions and popular uprisings against neoliberal policies Bolivia was radically transformed by between 2000 and 2005.

Historically, the concept of Pachakuti referred to cataclysmic events, and as such, it resembles standard Western conceptualizations of a revolution. The phrase for example referred to the upheaval of Spanish invasion and the overturning of the Inca Empire, but it has also been used to describe instances of rebellion in the colonial and postcolonial past of the Andes (Swinehart 2019). Since the execution of the last Inca emperor by the Spanish in 1533, the hope of the Inca’s return, and a return to Indian rule, has also been described as a hope for pachakuti during several upheavals, revolutions, and uprisings (Swinehart 2019). Consider, the revolts of Túpac Amaru the first and second, the uprising of Zarate Willka, the violent upheavals through the twentieth, and at the opening of the twenty-first century, and, most recently, the country’s self-proclaimed revolution during the Morales-Linera regime.

However, as opposed to Western linear conceptualizations of revolution, the Pachakuti concept elaborates a complex temporality. Instead of the complete annihilation of the social relations of the past, and a radical break with tradition, Pachakuti describes a cosmovision of
cyclical return, and renewal. According to this framework, there is a re-turn to the ancestral past and its socio-political relations by over-turning the present relations. Pacha translates as “time” but also as “space”, space-time, world, and cosmos; and kuti, means “return” but also “to turn over,” reversal, and (re)volution. Overall, the term indicates that time is cyclical, such that Pachakuti is the process of the death and rebirth into a new cycle which also means indicating the end to one cycle time and the beginning of another.

Moreover, the temporality indicated by pacha and kuti echoes the contrast between secular time (chronos) and the messianic event (kairos), between continuity and rupture, between flowing time and the transitory moment (Swinehart 2019). The pachakuti concept possesses a distinctly multi-dimensional messianic temporality while it also signals the overturning of the world. It is a time when, “Indians alone will rule,” an antithesis, and a reversal of formerly dominant social relations (Thomson 2002; Swinehart 2019). In this context, the concept simultaneously denotes a moment or interval in time and a locus or extension in space, and does so, moreover, at any scale.

One of most well-known supporters of the Pachakuti concept during the years leading up to Evo 's election was the Aymara intellectual Felipe Quispe who had served time in prison as a member of the EGTK just like García Linera, who would become Evo’s vice president. In an interview he clarified the importance of the Pachakuti and its radical implications as follows:

“We [the Indigenous movements] have not made use of Leninism or Maoism or Trotskyism. We made use of our own ideology . . . which comes from the bottom up, which has to flow from the bottom up . . . We said that even the llamas will spit on the enemies, our animals must rebel, the dogs have to bite their masters. We are in the time of the Pachakuti. The wak'as will speak once more, the rocks will reveal unexpected things. Then the rivers will sing once again (Gutiérrez et. al. 2001: 72).
In a similar vein, examining the history of indigenous rebellions as well as conflicts with the traditional left, Bolivian theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui speculated on whether the coming Pachacuti will lead to catastrophe or renovation. She noted that, what a western linear perception of history censures as a “spinning back of the clock” should be viewed as the redemption of the future or as a past that can yet turn the tables. For her, indigenous autonomy is the starting point for building a new egalitarian, multi-ethnic nation. Thus, there should be no all-encompassing authority to represent the country’s complex, multi-ethnic nation composed of diverse societies. Consider her remark on Pachakuti:

“The contemporary experience commits us to the present—akapacha—which in turn contains within it the seeds of the future that emerge from the depths of the past [qhip nayr uñtasis sarnaqapxañani]. The present is the setting for simultaneously modernizing and archaic impulses, of strategies to preserve the status quo and of others that signify revolt and renewal of the world: Pachakuti. The upside-down world created by colonialism will return to its feet as history only if it can defeat those who are determined to preserve the past, with its burden of ill-gotten privileges.” (Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 96)

One of Bolivia’s most original thinkers also offered inspiration to the regime’s effort to reclaim the power of the Pachakuti concept. Even though Fausto Reinaga had earlier drifted toward Marxism as the primary source of ideas for theorizing and undertaking great revolutions, he came to believe that its philosophy would always remain alien to the country’s Indians, whose cosmovisión was shaped by profoundly different considerations of time, space, and social belonging. As he would later come to claim, instead of viewing the movement of history through dialectical conflict, Bolivia’s majority has understood time as cycles, turning and returning in endless succession.
Instead of thinking of land as a form of property, whether private or held in common, he suggested that Bolivia’s Indians envisioned their fields of crops forming part of a vast ontological continuity in which agriculture positioned itself next to the spirits of the mountains, rocks, and caves. Instead of living in a world in which nature was starkly contrasted with culture, the individual with society, the country’s indigenous majority organized their social lives within the nonlinear boundaries of ayllus that interwove production with ritual duties, communal celebration, and veneration of the ancestors. Thus, he proposed a radically different chronopolitics, one in which the (neo-)colonial structures of contemporary Bolivia would finally collapse under the weight of “cosmic time” (1978: 45).

The government committed significant ideological resources to the project of appropriating the cosmic time of Reinaga’s “Indian revolution,” and its associated historical and intellectual genealogies. In this setting, indigenous cosmological forces such as the Andean Mother Earth, Pachamama nurturing in her womb the limbs of Katari and traditional indigenous textiles, or even the everyday cultural practice of chewing coca leaves, have been framed as essential tools to antagonize imperial power and also as revolutionary instruments that shape and potentiate an indigenous cosmos that will counteract and possibly reverse colonial domination.

In the end, in harnessing the ideological and cultural potential of both “cosmic time” and “space-time reversal”, the government advanced its revolutionary politics in ways that would complicate its ambitions to make “the process of change” a definitive turning point in Bolivian history. The increasing political hegemony of the MAS have raised the question of whether this period of Bolivia’s history marks the “return of the Indian,” or Pachakuti. One of the main critics of the Morales – Linera government became Felipe Quispe himself. He and
his allies considered the regime as false ambassadors for social and economic change pursuing “neoliberalism with an Indian face” (Goodale 2022:798).

According to them, the administration sought to appropriate the temporality of cosmic time to claim that their policies and actions were the absolute fulfillment of the Pachakuti. Another source of conflict was the fact that the government's efforts to stay in power created tensions between the regime and the country's highland rural communities which formed an important base of electoral support. The reason for this dispute was that community members amongst highland rural communities typically exercise political and social power through a system of regular rotation known as the fiesta cargo system (Abercrombie 1998; Burman 2016).

In this system of rural governance community members pass through a series of positions of increasing importance by serving periods in office based on an agro-ritual calendar. This calendar highlights a cyclical temporality and it is built on yearly renewal (Abercrombie 1998). This rotation prevents individuals from concentrating power, since the period in each office is usually only one or two years. A community member’s the goal is to go through the rotation system and then step aside for the younger members who are still rotating through the different offices. It is only after concluding the fiesta cargo system that a man is considered a respectable adult (Abercrombie 1998). Evo’s presidency was mostly defined by its association with the temporality of cosmic time, but his initial political life was forged by the sindicatos, or unions, specifically the coca growers’ union.

The dispute over time was further complicated by the fact that the temporal order that regulates power within the unions was profoundly different from that of the fiesta cargo system. Within the unions the best political leaders can stay in office for many years, even decades. This tension between the political temporality of the fiesta cargo system and that of
the *sindicatos* was already generating conflict in the years before Evo rose to power (Lazar 2008). The tension between these different temporalities was also detectable within the lithium industry.

**The Lost Revolution and the Dark Night**

In the context of the country’s self-proclaimed revolution and the industrialization of lithium, the Pachakuti concept as it appeared in the regime’s rhetoric not only changed the rhythms and directions of time as signaled by the Congress clock running counterclockwise. The concept of renewal, overturn and return were symbolically mobilized and strategically appropriated by the administration to give the Bolivian “revolution” a de-colonial or “indigenous” character. In this context, the industrialization of lithium has been presented as one of the main tools to achieve that goal. The mobilization of Pachakuti’s cyclical cosmovisión eventually clashed with the regime’s linear catchphrases of “progress”, “revolution”, and “development” against the backdrop of a transcendent socialist horizon.

Evo’s choosing the path of “life-long-ism” not only clashed with values the cargo system, but it was combined with Linera’s statism and Leninism. While Evo talked about the Pachakuti, Linera (2017) has officially described the country’s self-proclaimed revolution as a violent rupture in time or as plebeian moment. More specifically, he conceptualized revolution as a magmatic force that explodes, breaks the Earth’s crust, erupts into the world with invincible power reshaping everything that confronts its path (Linera 2017).

In this revolutionary framework, the history of societies bears a resemblance to the movement of the continents’ tectonic layers. Internally, below them, there are powerful lava flows that put them in slow but continuous movement (Linera 2017). These forces are the struggles of the social movements that breaking centuries of silence, organize themselves
underground to rise against the existing order. He described the MAS’s revolution as a truly cataclysmic and cosmogonic event, and to some extent this description has resembled the Pachakuti concept, in that there is a radical cosmological transformation through the emergence of an indigenous world that has previously been rendered invisible.

He theorized the country’s revolution as an indestructible force that dramatically alters both the geological, ontological, and cosmological coordinates of the world (Linera 2017). Overall, he characterized revolution as the carrier of a realizable option of the world. Moreover, he presented it as a different and attainable alternative to the dominant world. (Linera 2017). Just as volcanic explosions cool and solidify, the plebeian, revolutionary moment overflows the established order, dissolving the laws and norms of the old regime with the force of the multitude in action, and then, after passing the crest of the revolutionary wave, it begins to crystallize into relations between forces that are manifested during the process, giving place to a new dominant social order and social structures (Linera 2017). However, in Linera’s (2017) Marxist account, the inauguration of a novel era occurs though a violent outbreak that destroys old worlds to give way to new ones. Moreover, revolution carries human beings along a linear route of progress and refinement instead of returning them to the ancestral past. (Linera 2017).

For most of my interlocutors working from subordinated sociopolitical positionings this view was not compatible with what they thought the concept Pachakuti was about. This created tension and a source of frustration for my informants. Generally, they framed the industrialization of lithium through their own cosmological categories of “return”, “overturn”, and “reproduction,”. All my informants univocally believed that the concept of revolution signals a violent event, a complete break with previous socio-political structures, and a radical rupture in time.
In other words, they all interiorized the concept in the Western sense of the term. Yet, instead of the conventional idea of revolution as a sudden rupture with the preexisting political order, my subordinated interlocutors resorted to the return and overturn metaphor and to their own cosmological categories. In fact, for them the term “revolution” has been inadequate to express the power, and terror, invoked by catastrophic force of Pachakuti. Moreover, they thought that there would be no next Pachakuti without the industrialization of lithium. One worker at the lithium plant said the following:

“Do you know what is Pachakuti? It is something horrific and terrifying. It is the essence and the incarnation of Túpac Katari. After they quartered him and buried his limbs it was said that his body would grow back together underground, causing another world to develop. The last major Pachakuti was when the Spanish conquered the Incas. This is when the Pachacuti runa began. The black night continues to this day. This is how the reign of the people of the overturned world came about.

In this age, an external culture suppressed us. This five-hundred-year catastrophe can only be rectified by the next Pachakuti. And there is no next Pachakuti without learning to industrialize. There is no Pachakuti without industrializing lithium. It has already begun, and it is resurfacing again. It will reestablish our rule and it will give rise to justice and healing. This wounded world will come to rectify itself. We all must turn to the past when Andean peoples lived with control over their lands. This must be our future.”

While the directors I interviewed at the YLB all supported the official views of the regime, the subordinated individuals within the lithium industry were taking about a new social and cosmological reality. This reality could be fulfilled though the process of industrialization. For them lithium industrialization has been as a strategy of both reproduction
and amplification of a marginal world now aspiring to become the hegemonic center of life. Instead of a sudden separation of the past from the present and a reorienting of expectations toward the future, they shifted the axis of the cosmos redefining a set of sociopolitical coordinates. According to this, what was submerged and marginalized has now moved toward the surface and to the center.

This means that European notions of revolutionary action have been appropriated and employed locally. Moreover, my interlocutors framed the regime’s revolution in terms of a temporally complex Andean cosmological principle. Their conception of Pachakuti could have not follow the Hegelian conception of revolution where men must progressively move forwards towards a utopia, driven exclusively by reason. Instead, this unique cosmological vision brought about an emergent space or cosmos that must be nurtured. Consider one of the employees’ remarks at the YLB in La Paz:

“This is what I think about the revolution: it is not coming from the right or from the left. Both sides abused people like me in this country. Instead of parties we must listen to the Pachamama, the apus and the ancestors. Then, and only then will the Pachakuti turn this abusive world upside down. I am old, so I grew up angry in a permanent revolt. I know what a political revolution looks like. My brother fought in the 1952 Revolution. He had to kill others to save our lives. These are different times, there is no revolution like in the old days.

I voted for Evo, but the problem is that Evo believes in Bolivar and in Bolivia. Bolivia is a European idea, and, in this sense, the MAS’ revolution is doomed to failure because we continue to live under colonialism. Remember that Katari was not fighting for a Bolivia but rather he wanted the reconstitution of Qullasuyu. Have you ever Evo talking about the Qullasuyu? Unless you do, we will live in a colonial state.”
For my subordinated informants, instead of a transcendent socialist horizon of autonomy and egalitarianism, lithium industrialization has been driven by a cosmological reconfiguration that has repositioned what have historically been the social margins of Bolivian society at the center. In other words, the concept indicated a profound cosmological transformation and the emergence of a world that has previously been rendered invisible and relegated to the social and political margins of society. For them this hidden world was re-emerging in all its intensity. Sure, for my interlocutors the concept of Pachakuti indicated cataclysmic events of certain historical epochs. However, the concept meant much more and not only that. They interpreted present events as “restatements or reversals of the past” (MacCormack 1988:968). This unique conceptualization was in many ways continuous with an overall Andean system of ordering time that probably predated the Spanish invasion.

In the colonial period a variety of myths collected by the Spanish described the Andean past and future in terms of distinct historical epochs, each of which terminated in a cataclysmic upheaval. Such sources refer to these events as Pachakuti (MacCormack 1988:968). Some colonial sources, however, also mention pachamcutin which literary means that the “world turns around” (MacCormack 1988:968). For my interlocutors, it has been the pre-colonial past that inspired the present and it has been primarily the cosmological reversal of things that lent purpose and significance to lithium industrialization. Thus, they put forth a model of history that is cyclical and past-oriented which set the linear conception of history and revolution on its head. Accordingly, for them, a sudden break with the past and the complete annihilation of previous socio-political structures simply has not occurred. All in all, in their view there was no revolution under the Morales-Linera regime in the Western sense of the term.
Conclusion

The Andean conception, and experience of temporality differs greatly from that of the linear, and progressive Western conception and so must be understood through its worldview before it is critically analyzed in its religious and political uses (de la Cadena 2015). In both Quechua and Aymara, the past is epitomized with the eye, whereby the Quechua “ñawpaq” is rooted in the word “ñawi” which is eye and the Aymara “nayra” directly translates to eye. Andeans live the world through their immediate orientation with the past, which is always what is directly in front of them and adjusts what their experience of the present is.

In contrast, Western time is expressed as temporally future-oriented, and spatially forward-oriented, whereby one can vigorously create their future in the world which is in front of oneself (de la Cadena 2015). Future-oriented temporality is secondary to the elucidation of time for Andean peoples, since it places significance on human action, inflicted on the world without realizing how that action is formed by the past and by aid from the gods. In contrast, Andean epistemology is always aware of the way the past affects the present and how this relationship is developed through a cyclical recurrence of the past. The basis of this past-oriented temporality is that time is not linear but cyclical in nature.

Accordingly, the future is a reiteration of processes that occur in the preceding cycle in new contexts (de la Cadena 2015). These cycles are often tied to the birth-death-rebirth seen throughout the cycles of the seasons and the celestial bodies. Each day is itself a rebirth of the sun in the metaphorical sense of the previous day being gone but the new day follows the same processes of the previous day as any other day would (Reinaga 1978). When these laws that form Andean cosmology are put into question or fail to occur, it is a source of extreme
anxiety as it is an indication of the world turned on its head linked to what is known in the Andes as the Pachakuti concept.

In this chapter I showed that lithium industrialization has been framed by both Marxist (linear) and Andean (cyclical/recursive) notions of radical transformation by the Morales-Liners regime. These ontological approaches turned antagonistic and eventually collided. Instead of a distant progressive horizon of autonomy and egalitarianism, those who participated in the industrialization at the subdirectoríal level generally marked industrialization by the complex Andean cosmological theme that foregrounded the development of a cataclysmic force that is already present and needs to be nurtured. All in all, for them local cosmology has provided the foundation for shaping a brand-new political order. In this context, lithium industrialization has been driven by a complex cosmological theme that has shifted what have previously been the social edges of Bolivian society at the center.
CONCLUSION

In relation to my broader effort in this dissertation to elaborate an ethnographic approach to the study of Bolivia’s cultural revolution as it intersects with lithium industrialization, I wanted to stir the anthropological attention away from the definition of revolution as a violent upheaval and a critical moment in history, into spaces that can shed light upon revolutionary processes from a different angle. The point was to ethnographically explore a self-proclaimed permutation of revolutionary transformation in a particular country, in my case Bolivia, specifically the southwestern region. Consequently, this dissertation attempted to disrupt the linear narrative of revolutions as violent rupture-like events, with a more methodological argument about where the drama of radical transformation is to be found when viewed anthropologically.

Where did the linear conception of “revolution” I anthropologically interrogated come from? Paradoxically, the root of the metaphor of revolution emerged within the field of natural science, specifically theoretical astronomy. The term revolution had an astronomical significance, and the course of the revolution was envisioned as something fundamentally predetermined. Revolution thus had a connotation of repetition and returning, and initially signified circulation. Thus, in its origins, the term revolution was a “physico-political” concept (Koselleck 1985: 46) identifying revolution with the cyclical motion of heavenly bodies, to which the cycles of political change were explicitly correlated.

In its early usage as a social concept, the concept of revolution was also employed to refer to the cyclical character of history, and in reference to and as a gesture towards the “revolutions” of the spheres in Ptolemaic astronomy. Although the astronomical meaning of revolution predominated throughout the seventeenth century, the concept came to enjoy
currency among political commentators by the middle of that century. Thomas Hobbes for example used the term "revolution" primarily in discussing geometry and natural philosophy. Yet during this time the concept was not linked to total social emancipation as a revolutionary process. This would fundamentally change during the Enlightenment.

Consider, when the duke de la Rocheffoucauld-Liancourt replied to Louis XVI’s question whether the Fall of the Bastille was a revolt. “No, Sire,” replied the duke, “it is a Revolution”. What the French duke who delivered the news of the fall of Bastille to the king wished to point out was that there were gigantic and more than human, even uncontrollable forces at work. They released an enormous amount of energy and crushed everything in their path. While men make revolts, revolutions are tied to forces of a more cosmic scale. Accordingly, revolutions were recognized as amoral facts of nature, or intense natural processes. Revolutions were like destructive avalanches. They were easy to start, but impossible to stop.

The concept of revolution started to echo this quasi-deterministic experience. It was pointless and absurd to resist this colossal force as Danton, the titan of the French Revolution put it. Or as Napoleon Bonaparte, the famous Corsican noted: “A revolution can be neither made nor stopped. The only thing that can be done is for one of several of its children to give it a direction by dint of victories”. Historical experience was embedded in natural givenness, and political beings were seen as bound up in a quasi-natural process. Yet, paradoxically it became feasible to contemplate violent political change as a motor for social transformation. This view is crucial for an understanding of the deterministic strand in Marxist revolutionary theory.

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28 The term appeared at the end of his dialogue Behemoth, which examined the course of England's turmoil from 1640 to 1660.
Accordingly, analysis of modernity (including Arendt 1965; Koselleck 1985; Hobsbawm 1962, for example) unearthed the idea of a spectacular event at the heart of revolutionary action. Some did so descriptively, and some prescriptively. These authors regard the idea of the revolution as we know it today a uniquely modern concept which emerged during the Enlightenment and more specifically due to the French Revolution. According to the German historian and theorist Koselleck (1985), if the French Revolution is deemed as the opening event of the modern era, this is because the very notion of revolution that it transmutes is itself a modern phenomenon.

Let me briefly reflect on Nietzsche’s (1998) thought that the concept revolution emerged as a spectacle, an event realized in terms of its visual impact because of the bloodshed that surrounded the principle of equality par excellence. Machiavelli’s (2019) affirmation that political innovation seems inevitably tainted by violence is particularly relevant as we reflect on the images of popular violence against which Nietzsche ingeniously directed his argument. Picture the angry and violent mob attacking the Bastille on 14 July 1789. The prison had become a symbol of the monarchy’s dictatorial rule, and the event of storming it became one of the crucial moments in the revolution that followed. Whether it is a “bloody farce” (Nietzsche 1998:73) with which Bolivia’s self-proclaimed revolutionary process plays itself out, its perpetuity has not been the central focus of this dissertation.

Once we move away from the normative expectation that revolutions ought to be understood, by definition, as events of intense and violent upheavals, but instead consider them as ethnographic objects, revolutionary processes take on a different kind of character (Abu-Lughod 2012; Ghannam 2012; Winegar 2012; Tassi et. al. 2020). Moreover, from an ethnographic point of view, lived experiences are far from being peripheral to the understanding of revolutionary processes. They are in fact integral to it. This becomes
apparent in a collection of essays in which anthropologists reflect on what the revolution in Egypt looked like from the angle of their field sites. Abu-Lughod (2012) for example offers a glimpse of what happened in one village in Upper Egypt and illustrates how the revolution was experienced in the countryside. Similarly, Winegar (2012) reflects on how the revolution was experienced by those who did not directly join in its action but remained in domestic spaces instead. For example, Ghannam (2012) discusses how the events of Tahrir Square unfold on TV screens, and how people who are primarily involved in the revolution through watching television make sense of the contrasting political claims put forth by the different groups involved in the revolts.

The author also traces the shifting feelings of her interlocutors in a low-income neighborhood in Cairo and explores the cultural meanings that informed their attempts to make sense of the shifting situation during the first days of the Egyptian revolution (Ghannam 2012). More specifically, she reflects on how existing concepts of violence have been central to the way men and women interpreted the attacks of baltagiyya (thugs) on the protesters in Tahrir Square and how these interpretations ultimately framed people’s feelings and views of the Mubarak's regime, and its supporters (Ghannam 2012).

These essays are not just about offering a more holistic, and complex account of how revolutions are experienced in diverse social domains. That is of course also important. These authors are concerned with linking the analysis of revolutions to the actual lived experience of the people who are intimately involved in them (Tassi et. al 2020). For an anthropologist, understanding these relationships, and how they are embedded in local variables is a basic way of assessing the ways in which revolutionary transformations might differ from one context to another. Indeed, the ways revolutions are formed and form in turn is often nuanced and
intricate which leads to contrasting social proportions in different ethnographic settings (Tassi et. al. 2020).

In this dissertation I illustrated how in Bolivia, the country’s self-proclaimed revolutionary transformation as it has intersected with lithium industrialization has not unfolded entirely within the linear coordinates of chronological time. Rather, revolutionary processes purposely interfered with those linear coordinates. In this context, the industrialization of lithium has been conceptualized as an insurgent tool of political change and social transformation by the government, and as such it has penetrated deeply into local social forms, such as the very constitutions of state power, personhood, time, and cosmology.

More specifically, during what governmental propaganda referred to as the catastrophic equilibrium, industrialization of lithium was declared to be a hegemonic tool for consolidating state power, as well as a means through which a radical power bloc could be consolidated both materially and symbolically. It was at this point that despite historical failures and persistent conflicts associated with extraction-based development, the industrialization of lithium emerged as a legitimated means for positive development in the Morales-Linera regime’s revolutionary discourse.

In the regime’s rhetoric, Evo’s coalition radically differed in class and ethnicity from the previous power bloc. Political crises and societal conflict have resulted. Politically, there are both rural-campesino and urban working-class currents within the indigenous movement that supported the regime at its beginning. These defined the ethno-national, regional, and class-oriented features of the MAS political pole, representing a powerful force of collective action with tremendous influence upon the revolutionary state. This bloc has proposed an economy based on the domestic market, with the campesino community and artisanal and urban microenterprise activity at its economic core, built on the foundation of a state with a
revitalized role as producer and force for industrialization of natural resources such as lithium (Linera 2010).

The other pole, that which represents the interests of old empowered oligarchs, favors foreign markets, and the subordination of the state to private business. This means that political polarity in contemporary Bolivia has had three simultaneous components: it has had an ethno-cultural base (“indigenous” support base vs. those of European descent), a class-base (workers vs. the owners of capital and resources), and a regional base (the western highlands vs. the eastern lowlands). These polarities have led to a dissociation between economic might in “the east” and the political power of the social movements in “the west”. Since the 1980s, the weight of economic power, involving foreign investment in hydrocarbons, services, and agro-industry shifted from the west to the east, but the socio-political power of mobilization has been strengthened in the west, creating uncertainty in Bolivia regarding the geographic basis of state power.

Once the hegemony of the MAS state was supposedly achieved, the industrialization of lithium was to mutate into a dialectical productive force internal to the revolutionary process itself, and, ultimately, bring the revolution forward towards its socialist horizon. This socialist horizon has been considered a battlefield, and in this context lithium industrialization has been conceptualized as a technical system of processing nature through labor. In this context, the regime persisted in seeing its own “indigenous” support base as not fully capable of universalism. The following quote illustrates this to the point:

“Only those who have lived a revolution can understand the human overflows it involves: thousands of collective actions that overlap in a creative chaos, giving rise to a torrent that, as soon as it seems to be leading to a single destination, is interrupted again to break into a thousand opposing directions; human creativity that surpasses any previous expectations; political conjunctures which are modified from one minute to another; association and social fragmentation that combine in a
way which was previously impossible. It is as if space-time becomes compressed and what previously requires decades is now condensed in a single day and place; as if the universe itself could be born in every moment and in every place of the country. Then, at the risk of being devoured by this swirling, we must establish a direction and guide these collective forces in their igneous state (Linera 2017: 251)

Despite the Morales-Linera regime’s official deployment of secular Marxist-Leninist frameworks, a set of local spiritual and cosmological themes repeatedly reemerged at the heart of the country’s self-proclaimed revolution as it has intersected with lithium industrialization. In these temporally diverse frameworks, ancestral figures, and spiritual beings emerged as potent actors on the political stage. Therefore, ideologically, lithium industrialization as it intersected with revolutionary politics transcended the limits of the Marxist stress on a future horizon as a time of radical change.

Generally, leftist ideas of revolutionary change have been appropriated and framed in terms of local cosmologies and traditions by both the MAS and by those who worked within the lithium industry. Concerning this, I showed that subordinated individuals within the lithium industry have been aware of the conflicts between the different ideological and cosmological frameworks. Moreover, they have been upset by the realities of the industrialization project and even disputed the regime’s mixed rhetoric. Yet, they pledged loyalty to industrialize lithium because they deemed it a revolutionary tool to heal the country’s painful colonial past through innovative personal transformation.

I emphasized, that instead of a vision of a transcendent horizon of freedom, salvation, and equality, lithium industrialization has been framed by both Marxist and Andean notions of radical transformation. This process is not characterized by a sudden rupture with tradition and with religion. Rather, cosmology, religion, and myth have been vital forces, and important
domains of revolutionary renovation as it has intersected with lithium industrialization. To develop these arguments, I applied a distinctive anthropological approach to how a specific revolutionary project (*el proceso de cambio*) intersects with the industrialization of lithium in Bolivia to bring forth concepts and forms of subjectivity in a specific social setting in which revolutionary politics plays out.

Such forms and concepts have repeatedly been excluded from both anthropological and modern revolutionary narratives (Tassi et. al. 2020). Thus, research about lithium industrialization as it intersects with revolutionary theory represents a new chapter in the scholarship of Bolivia’s mining history. The study of the 21st century lithium industry is also a study of struggle against neoliberalism, new forms of “resource nationalism”, the changing role of the state and the continued importance of mining in the era of intensive globalization. The special case of lithium industrialization in a self-proclaimed revolutionary context may also demonstrate the shift towards a new radical energy regime in the current century.

In the case of Bolivia, under the Morales-Linera regime (2006-2019), lithium industrialization has thus far failed to achieve the promised economic results. Bolivia’s idiosyncratic, at times quixotic approach to lithium industrialization was rooted in Evo’s commitment to maintain lithium under full state control through the YLB. By the time Evo and his vice president resigned and fled the country in 2019, the state company had failed to establish meaningful lithium production, let alone commercialize battery manufacturing. However, the regime’s positive discourse surrounding the industrialization project, alongside the official theorizing of lithium industrialization as a hegemonic tool to consolidate state power by Linera (2017) has been integral to the establishment of the hegemony of the MAS state.
Luis Arce, Evo’s former finance minister inherited this instituted power structure as the new president in 2020. Although to win the presidency, he heavily relied on the popularity of the MAS party, Arce was also elected based on his reputation as the pragmatist architect behind the country’s recent period of rapid economic growth under the previous regime. So far, unlike Evo, Arce has taken a less antagonistic attitude towards foreign investment. However, despite his ambitious promises, what lies ahead for Bolivia’s lithium industry remains unclear. In my view, the many technical obstacles only partially explain the failure to efficiently industrialize lithium. Further research could, for example investigate the many unexplored internal power struggles shaping the landscape of lithium industrialization and the question whether the new president’s apparent pragmatism will help the regime to breathe life into the country’s waning lithium sector.

There are also lingering, looming and crucial questions about the proposition that resource extraction can be deployed as the economic base around which to organize a socialist society- of any kind, the MAS-model included. Many features of Marxist theory address the alienated character of work which is supposedly the symptom and consequence of individual and collective alienation provoked by the capitalist system. Future research could directly address the issue of work and alienation, particularly if the MAS-model, and its lithium industrialization project achieves any form of success in creating socialism in Bolivia.
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