

Political Exclusion and Ethnic Identification: The Case of Bolivian Social Movements¹

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The recent political and social crises that have taken place in South America have manifested the important role played by social movements; for instance, in the 1990s groups of unemployed people in Argentina and indigenous people in Ecuador protested against the government and challenged local democracies. Bolivia is not the exception. Why did contemporary Bolivian social movements emerge and become dynamic in the last decade? What is their current situation? The purpose of this article is to analyze the case of Bolivian indigenous movements and their emergence from the perspective of social movements' theories. These are mainly resources mobilization theory, political opportunity theory, and political representation theory. According to the resources mobilization theory, a movement emerges when it is able to start mobilizing people, the most important resource. The political opportunity theory affirms that social movements rise when the conditions to mobilize are politically extended. The political representation theory reviews concepts such as lack of representation, self-identification, and collective identity. The methodology applied in this paper is based on scholarly resources, journalistic reports, and published sources.

In January 2006, Bolivia received international attention when Evo Morales, an Aymara descendent and coca growers' leader, became the first indigenous head of state in the history of the nation. Bolivia has an estimated population of nine million of which 62 percent is indigenous. For that reason, Bolivia has three official languages: Spanish, Aymara, and Quechua. The large Bolivian indigenous population is not just a simple fact; it has also originated powerful contemporary social movements that have contributed to different government crises and changed the nature of Bolivian politics. Yashar (2005) affirms that the Bolivian indigenous movements did not have a united organization, but still regional organizations capable to act nationally emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. These organizations played a leading role in the country's recent political life. The indigenous movements had a very influential role in what was called the 2003 Gas War: they forced to former president Sanchez de Lozada to resign in 2003 and celebrated when Evo Morales took office in 2006. During the first two years of Morales' presidency they have massively supported his policies.

What caused the emergence of the contemporary Bolivian indigenous social movements? The purpose of this article is to apply the frameworks of social movements' theories – mainly political opportunity theory, resource mobilization theory, and a theoretical synthesis formulated by Baldez (2002) during her research on women's movements in Chile – to the analysis of Bolivian social movements. In previous work, I applied these social movements' theories to the

emergence of the Piqueteros, an Argentinean social movement (D'Anna Gorriti, 2008). Yashar (2005) explains and compares the emergence of indigenous political identities of the Indian populations in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia – she briefly mentions Guatemala and Mexico as well – and remarks that these groups integrated social movements as peasants, but not as indigenous people. This article argues that the dynamic has changed during recent years as indigenous people have identified themselves as indigenous and built a broader movement on this basis.

The dependent variable in this study is the emergence and dynamic of the Bolivian indigenous social movements in the last five years. These movements become active when social and economic effects are directly prejudicial to them as occurred in October 2003 during the Gas War when Bolivia agreed to export gas to the United States at a high cost to the Bolivian population – and again when the current administration, led by President Evo Morales, implemented policies which provide the integration of the segregated 62 percent of the population and seeks its political opinion. The political opportunities created by the debilitated neoliberal government of Sanchez de Lozada in 2003, the indigenous identification with each other, and their political representatives and leaders (Baldez, 2002) will be the possible independent variables.

PAST RESEARCH APPLIED TO CONTEMPORARY BOLIVIAN EVENTS

Tarrow (1998; 4) defines social movements as, “collective challenges by people with common

purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities." Yet, rational choice theory emphasizes the difficulty of achieving collective action. Jenkins (1983; 536) cites Olson's theory of collective action (1968) to explain the cause of mobilization. According to Olson, rational individuals will mobilize only if they can be assured of what he calls "selective incentives." These "selective incentives" are not offered to everyone, just to those who become members of "privileged" groups (Olson, 1968). Olson (1968) says that if the group is small, the benefits to individuals are greater. Jenkins (1983) considers Olson's theory to be important although it does not offer an "adequate solution." Vasi and Macy (2003) refer to the conflict between personal and collective interest, which underlies rational choice theory. They affirm that the conflict has two origins: the *free-rider problem* and the *efficacy problem* (2003; 980). The *free-rider problem* emerges when an individual receives the benefits of someone else's efforts (Vasi & Macy, 2003). The *efficacy problem* explains that, from all the actions of an individual member of a group, just a small portion of benefits obtained goes to him (Vasi & Macy, 2003). According to these scholars, *the logic of collective action* makes every group member think that even though he makes a small effort or no effort at all, he "will enjoy the benefits of other's efforts even if [he] fails to contribute" (2003; 980).

Political Opportunity Theory: The political opportunities for potential social movements are not equal; in other words, sometimes opportunities can affect one group more than the other, or they can be better in a specific area than the others (Tarrow, 1998). Despite these differences, political opportunity theory focuses on when the conditions for mobilizing are politically extended. Political opportunities are not clearly obvious to all people at the same time: mobilization will generally be more easily spread among people facing oppression and needs than among those more satisfied and with fewer complaints (Tarrow; 1998). In Tarrow's theory, *political opportunities* are understood as "a set of clues for when contentious politics will emerge, setting in motion a chain of causation that may ultimately lead to sustained interaction with authorities and then to social movements" (1998; 20). Thus, political opportunity does not always generate social movements, but it creates the situation in which social conflict can potentially be translated into social movements.

In his elaboration of political opportunity theory, Tarrow identifies the key political conditions for social movements to emerge: "when institutional access opens, rifts appear within elites, allies become available, and state capacity for repression declines, challengers find opportunities to advance their claims" (1998; 71). These conditions are external to social movements which can use them to start their

organization and mobilization. If *institutional access* is open, it is easier for people to face their oppressors (Tarrow, 1998). Challengers must see a sign of weakness in the powerful classes to start making demands. Shifting alignments are related to political instability. In countries with more than two political parties, the coalitions created among the opposition to confront the government, or the one created between the government and another political group, creates the appropriate environment for the emergence of new groups or social movements (Tarrow, 1998).

A *divided elite* is another factor mentioned by Tarrow, which might cause the rise of a group of demanders (1998). It is associated with political instability. Divisions within elites give opposition groups the incentives to act collectively. Having *influential allies* is also very important. Tarrow affirms that "challengers are encouraged to take collective actions when they have allies who can act as friends in court, as guarantors against repression, or as acceptable negotiators on their behalf" (1998; 79). Without influential allies it would be harder for movements to reach their goals.

According to Tarrow (1998), the *decline of state capacity for repression* also facilitates the rise of social movements. Tarrow uses Tilly's definition for repression: "any action by another group which raises the contender's cost of collective action" (1998; 80). In his analysis of the decline of state repression, Tarrow uses the comparison of Poland and Czechoslovakia. A weakening state in Poland enabled the emergence of Solidarity, a very critical and powerful social movement, while in Czechoslovakia, a stronger state, any potential social movement was repressed, and the country "was one of the last to rebel" (1998; 81). Strong authoritarian states are less likely to permit the growth of social movements while in weaker or states with reduced capacity of repression, social movements might find the appropriate moment to emerge.

Gas War and Beyond - A Political Momentum: To apply political opportunity theory to the Bolivian case, Bolivia faced an insurrection known as the Gas War in October 2003. The events began at the end of September 2003. The former Bolivian president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who had two periods as head of the Bolivian state, 1993-1997 and 2002-2003, implemented a decree he had signed in 1997 during his second term. That decree allowed multinational corporations to own natural gas at the wellhead.

The Bolivian constitution expresses that all natural resources belong to the Bolivian state (see Bolivian National Constitution, Chapter *Bienes Nacionales*). Consequently, the decree signed by Sanchez de Lozada considered the underground gas as Bolivian, but it became foreign when pumped out. The decree had a secret clause included by which the Bolivian state would receive 18 percent from the exploitation of new

wells, while the multinational corporations received 82 percent. Based on this clause, technicians of the corporations designated regular facilities as new wells (Petras, 2004). Since Bolivia does not have access to the sea, the gas exportation to the US would take place through a Chilean port. It was at this port where, according to the decree, the Bolivian state percentage would be calculated rather than it being based on a proportion of the American price (Petras, 2004). Critics argued that Bolivia would lose money from this formula and that it would have a higher cost to the country's population because Bolivia received just 18 percent of every \$0.70 per thousand cubic feet (See Petras, 2004).

The political opposition, represented by Evo Morales, denounced this arrangement, and strikes all around the country began demanding the nationalization of the gas industry and "painted a vision in which Bolivia's natural resources are channeled into health care, education and social security for the million who lived from hand to mouth" (Hooper, 2003, 26; See also Vasquez 2004). These events generated a popular insurrection, which resulted in over 50 people being killed as a consequence of the repression (Rhoter, 2003; Hayden, 2004; Petras, 2004; Arze & Kruse, 2004; Vasquez, 2004). Analyzing the Bolivian government repression, Arze and Kruse state that the second administration of former president Sanchez de Lozada "killed more people in 14 months than did General Hugo Banzer's seven-year military dictatorship" (2004; 23).

Despite the support of the American ambassador (Petras, 2004), Sanchez de Lozada was isolated – he had lost power and support; thus, he resigned and relocated to Miami (Vasquez, 2004; Hooper, 2004; Loperena, 2004; Arze & Kruse, 2004; Hayden, 2004).

The Bolivian uprising, united by a spontaneous mobilization of workers, political and indigenous movements, reached its main objective for the government plan to export gas to California through Chile, but it added new political demands to the successor of Sanchez de Lozada, the then-vice president Carlos Mesa. Most significantly, the movement demanded a referendum on the nationalization of Bolivia's petroleum and reserves of gas and infrastructure (Vasquez, 2004).

The decree that Sanchez de Lozada signed in 1997 and expected to implement in 2003, was not an isolated example of neoliberal policies. Bolivia, like most of Latin American countries, did not escape neoliberalism which began in many countries during the 1980s, but became stronger in the 1990s. Arze and Kruse affirm that, "neoliberal reform has hit Bolivia harder and deeper than other countries" (2004; 23). Considering that Bolivia is the poorest country in South American, that affirmation is quite understandable. The country's economy mostly relies on mining and agriculture.

Neoliberalism was promoted during the 1980s and firmly implemented in the 1990s as a plan originated by U.S. Agency for International Development. It provided economic and technical resources to governments with good political relations with the United States. According to Vilas, neoliberalism based its significance on three "ingredients" – stabilization, structural adjustment and export-led growth (2000; 213). The first ingredient, stabilization, requires a reduction in the money supply through the devaluation of the currency, freezing wages, tight credits and cuts in government spending. Structural adjustment, the second ingredient, aimed at adapting the domestic economy to the world market: "reduction of government involvement in entrepreneurial activities" (Vilas, 2000).

Privatization was the key in this process. Latin American governments used to be part of most public services and health care providers to the population; this means those who provided services were totally or partially owned by the government. Finally, governments were demanded to promote foreign trade through reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers (Vilas, 2000). Neoliberalism brought the destruction of agricultural production to Bolivia and a bigger gap in the social class divisions. There was an existing inequality which was increased by the neoliberal policies. Privatization contributed to a big wave of unemployment because "new privatized" existing public enterprises produced unemployed people from the energy, transport, hydrocarbon and telecommunication areas, among others (Arze & Kruse, 2004; Petras, 2004; Vasquez, 2004).

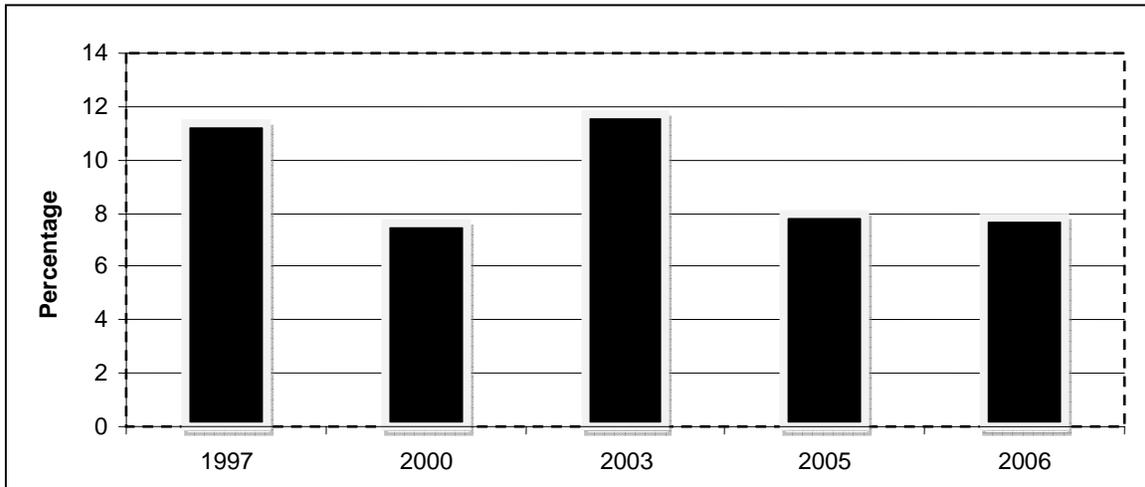
Some critics affirm that the events of October 2003 in Bolivia are consequence of the economic plan implemented during the 1980s. Arze and Kruse point out that, "the prevailing economic conditions in Bolivia, largely the product of economic and government reforms begun in the 1980s, provided much fuel for the social explosions of 2003 (2004; 23). The New Economic Plan, as it was called, aimed at deep changes in the Bolivian economic system: "state-oriented economic policies were reversed, industries and services were privatized, government spending was cut, hyperinflation was stopped, the unions and labor laws were weakened and the financial sector was deregulated" (Ballve, 2005; 41). The economic plan led the closure of major tin mines, the firing of thousands of miners, and the creation of the militant coca farmers' movement because many fired miners invested in land growing coca (Petras, 2004).

Figure 1 illustrates the variation in unemployment rates from 1997 to 2006. During this time frame, unemployment rates ranged from a low of 7.7 percent to a high of 12 percent. It also emphasizes the higher percentage of 11.7 percent in 2003, when the popular insurrection occurred in October.

The results of decreasing poverty might be a consequence of the informal sector which among the

FIGURE 1. Bolivian Unemployment Rate, 1997-2006

Source. *CIA World Factbook*



private and government sectors was the only one that grew based on rural-to-urban migration and general urban employment trends (Arze & Kruse, 2004). Another reason that the informal sector might have helped is, as Arze and Kruse state, “in the cities, families have to mobilize more of their members from an earlier age to work harder in unprotected circumstances for relatively lower pay” (2004; 27). Among the factors that contributed to high unemployment is the pressure from the United States government to eliminate the growth of coca causing loss of jobs, not just of the agricultural sector, but also of every related activity (Petras, 2004; Arze and Kruse, 2004).

In their analysis of how the privatization process impacted on the Bolivian economy, Arze and Kruse (2004; 24) add, “loss of income owing to the closure or privatization of public enterprises and the high financing costs associated with their reforms left the government in a state of permanent insolvency.” By 2004, “Bolivia’s foreign debt was \$5 billion, and its internal debt was more than \$2 billion” (Hayden, 2004; 20). Facing that situation, the country was not able to find a way out. The elimination of the barriers protecting the national industry produced stagnation. This inactivity mainly affected the agricultural sector because the price of products made the farmers stop the production. “From 1985 to 2001, cheaper imports lowered the price of products from the eastern lowlands of the country by 60 percent and those from the western highlands by 30 percent” (Arze & Kruse, 2004; 26). The national industry was non-competitive, and the agricultural activity was not an exception.

Mayorga (2005; 176) summarizes opposition to neoliberal governmental policies, “...resourceful social movements and popular organizations fiercely opposed liberal economic reforms, plans to export natural gas,

the integration of Bolivia’s economy into global free trade, and coca eradication.”

Resource Mobilization Theory: By the 1980s resource mobilization theory had become very dominant among social movement scholars. This theory’s emergence and importance in the 1970s and 1980s was a result of the wave of protests by the civil rights movements in the United States.

The theory studies the support from society and the limitations of social movements, and analyzes the diversity of resources that must be mobilized, the relationships among groups, their external support, and how authorities’ strategies for movements affect the relative success of movements (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; 1213). Groups of people look for several ways to organize. These ways are called “mobilizing structures” and they imply “collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, et al., 1996; 3). McCarthy (1996) adds that seeking the mobilizing structures, organizing people varies from informal ways, such as neighborhoods and friendship networks to formal ways, such as churches, unions, and professional associations.

In their analysis of resource mobilization theory, Marx and McAdam assert that this approach “was conceived as a response to those who saw social movements as resulting from strain or discontent in society” (1994; 81). There is always enough dissatisfaction in society to motivate the rise of collective action. “What varies is not the motivation to organize but the organizational resources required to do so” (Marx & McAdam, 1994; 81). Following from McCarty and Zald (1973), they state that social movements emerge during good economic times. Economic growth and prosperity induce social movements in two ways. First, during good times people are more likely to support social causes.

“Prosperity creates a potential market for social and political causes, which formal movement organizations seek to stimulate through aggressive marketing and fundraising techniques” (Marx & McAdam, 1994; 82). Second, economic growth stimulates collective action through bigger amounts of resources to people with their basic needs unsatisfied. The authors mentioned the emergence of social movements in the 1960s, when the unemployment rates were low and there were several social programs (Marx & McAdam, 1994).

McCarthy and Zald (1977) emphasize some crucial points to better understand this resource mobilization approach: the accumulation of resources – for instance, “money and labor” – is necessary for the analysis of the activity of a group; the movement must be organized to obtain the resources; the level of people’s participation is significant for the success or failure of a movement; and finally, “cost and rewards are centrally affected by the structure of society and the activities of authorities” (1216).

According to these authors, social movements are not always originated in the grievances or ideals of their members; they clarify that sometimes “those who provide money, facilities and even labor may have no commitment to the values that underlie specific movements” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; 1216). In this theory, the strategies employed by social movements are essentially the mobilization of their members-supporters and the change of elites into allies. Social movements take from society “communication media, levels of affluence, degree of access to institutional centers, preexisting networks, and occupational structure and growth” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; 1217). It is here, where the authors introduce the term “conscience constituent” to refer to those who provide resources to support collective action in interest of others (McCarthy & Zald, 1973).

In this theory, social movements clearly aim at social change. What mainly characterizes the resource mobilization approach is the importance of the access to resources and the ability to use them well.

The Mobilization of Bolivian Organizations: The October 2003 insurrection started with a strike called by the trade-union confederation – *Confederación de Obreros Bolivianos* (COB). They protested against neoliberal policies, specifically the sale of gas to the United States. At the beginning, just the mining unions joined the strike, but later the rest of the unions, students, peasants, and the population in general were occupying the streets and highways with their demonstrations – even women as representatives of neighborhood associations were ahead of the protests (Petras, 2004; Hayden, 2004; Vasquez, 2004; Ballve, 2005; Dangl, 2007).

Then President Sanchez de Lozada accused Evo Morales, a member of Parliament and leader of Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al*

Socialismo; MAS), the main opposition party, of trying to exploit the strike for political and personal gain. Later, however, the government announced there would not be gas exportation (Hoover, 2003). The president wanted to remain in power, but the decision was a victory of the spontaneous manifestation of different groups organized against the government.

The disappointed groups found a way to be organized and channeled their grievances through social movements, such as the *cocaleros* and neighborhood associations more than in political parties, which were seen as elitist and corrupt (“Pressure builds,” 2005). The social movements were more structurally coordinated and provided blocked roads as a method of protesting.

Yashar (2005) asserts that these protests were the result of the democratization process which allowed indigenous communities to mobilize with the support of church, unions, and NGOs. *Campesino* communities, workers’ unions, *campesino* unions, neighborhood associations were all around the country resisting the government policies. Women played a significant role in the social mobilizations that destabilized the neoliberal order (Monasterios, 2007). The women organized through NGOs, indigenous and peasant movements, and neighborhood councils. Bolivian indigenous movements have also been successful at local administrative levels and not just by protesting against the implemented policies by the government. Roper (2003) explores their influence in local legislative reforms by the mid-1990s. The Bolivian revolt was not just the result of popular and massive anger with government, politicians and political parties, but with longtime established “patterns of political behaviour where corporate groupings have become used to direct negotiations with the government” (Lazar, 2006; 185). According to Lazar (2006; 185), these negotiations developed a cyclic way of “protest, negotiation, agreements, government renegeing on its promises, renewed protest” until the Bolivians forced the president to resign.

El Alto, a suburb of La Paz located on the high plateau highlands, is a very organized city (Dangl, 2007). Most of the protests and revolts have started in El Alto. Lazar (2006) focuses her research on El Alto’s organization, mainly *vecindad*, trade union membership, and quasi-peasant identity. The *vecindad*, or residence, develops popular participation and organization through neighborhood and schools councils, which act as links between people and the government. They demand that the government provides what citizens need at the neighborhood and at the school (Lazar, 2006).

The trade unions work in a similar way as neighborhood and school councils. The unions are organized between men’s and women’s activities, and they represent their members’ needs at the local and national levels (Lazar, 2006). Concerning the peasant

identity, El Alto is a place with a high number of migrants from rural areas. This migration created an identity among the population, which many joined when the protests began (Lazar, 2006). Despite the differences among these collective organizations explained by Lazar, it is important to emphasize how they maintain El Alto as one – or the only one – of the most organized cities of Bolivia.

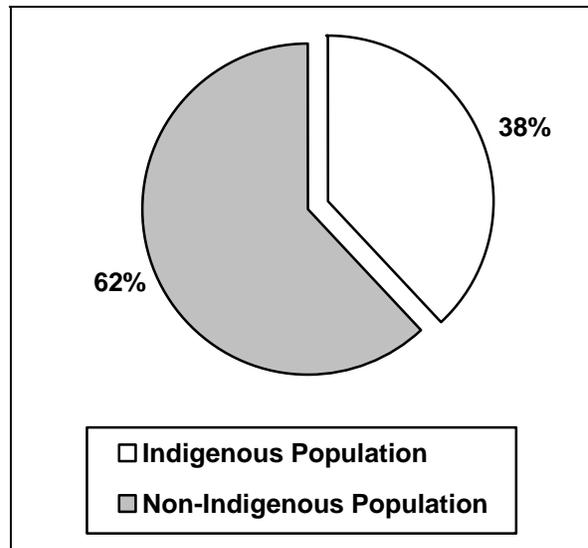
Baldez's Synthesis: Baldez (2002) analyzes women's movements in Chile using three theoretical concepts: tipping, timing, and framing. The concept of *tipping*, her dependent variable, refers to the women's movement in terms of gender identification. Baldez adds that an individual participates in a protest depending on how many people will also participate. Baldez (2006; 6) affirms, "... your decision to participate in an act of protest hinges on your beliefs about what others likely to do." When explaining the emergence of women's movements, Baldez cites the political opportunity approach: she understands that movements rise and fall as a reaction to political changes. Her independent variable *timing* focuses on the moment that political opportunities become available. In this specific case, it was the political party realignment that the Chilean elite was facing. Divisions among political elites resulted in the weakness of the political system (Baldez, 2002; 8). What Baldez calls *framing*, the third theoretical concept of her research, is the way in which movements members are perceived and perceive themselves. Chilean women needed to identify themselves in order to achieve their goals. The group's self-identification is very important because it helps to distinguish the group's needs. As Baldez (2002; 10-11) cites, "Appeals to gender identity bridge women's different and sometimes contradictory interests: exclusion from political power." As part of their self-identification, Baldez mentions that, in her research, "gender functions as a source of collective identity" (2002; 11). Thus, Baldez's synthesis combines elements of political opportunity theory, rational choice theory, and political framing theory.

National Identification: Is It All About Indigeness?
The Bolivian presidential elections in December 2005, received international attention: Evo Morales, the leader of Movement Toward Socialism and *cocalero* movement, won the elections obtaining more than 50 percent of the electoral votes (Dangl, 2007). Carlos Mesa, the vice president and successor of Sanchez de Lozada, had resigned after failing to fulfill promises to the population during the insurrection of October, 2003. Consequently, Carlos Rodriguez, the president of the Supreme Court, took office and called for elections by the end of 2005.

The victory of Evo Morales is very significant because he is considered the first fully indigenous head of the state. In Mayorga's critical words, "Morales's ethnic-populist fundamentalism and tendencies toward

FIGURE 2. Bolivian Indigenous Population

Source. *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, (2001)*



corporatist and ethnic-based representation have become stronger, engendering a bleak scenario for democracy's viability" (2005; 178).

As it is shown by Figure 2 and according to the most recent census of 2001, Bolivia's indigenous population is around 62 percent. Having an indigenous president influences and emphasizes the national ethnic identification. Evo Morales' cabinet represents Bolivia. "Many of his ministers are university-educated radicals, and leaders of the country's indigenous, labor, peasant, and social movements, not professional politicians. Several are women, and others are Indian" (Morales, 2006; 32). This integration means the participation of many groups, movements, etc. in the government – groups that were previously excluded from political participation (Albro, 2005).

During recent years, Bolivia has experienced an increasing participation of indigenous representatives in the government – mostly in legislative and municipal level positions. It is a new development in Latin America, and Bolivia is not the only case (See Van Cott, 2003, 2004, 2006; Rice & Van Cott, 2006; Birnir & Van Cott, 2007). In 1993, the *Law of Popular Participation* was passed; it aimed to promote democratic state building and citizen participation. It also tried to "reconcile and integrate the rich ethnic-cultural diversities of Bolivian society into a democratic system, asserting the rights of individuals and peoples that do not belong to a homogenous culture and nation" (Mayorga, 2005; 168). The *Law of Popular Participation's* outcomes were not sufficient, but slowly indigenous people were having representation at the local level.

In terms of political participation or activism, the role of indigenous movement was preponderant during the events of October 2003 protesting against

neoliberalism. Considering the high percentage of Bolivia's indigenous population, it is important to focus on its two main economic activities, agriculture – being that the Chapare area is the most important center of coca leaf production (Arze & Kruse, 2004) – and mining. Both of these areas were affected by neoliberal policies: mines were privatized and coca growers witnessed the repression from the U.S. in order to eradicate the coca production. The miners protested without impact, but within the *cocaleros* germinated a strong anti-imperial ideological orientation (Webber, 2005).

The Chapare area, situated in the Cochabamba department where 68 percent of the population is indigenous (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, n.d.), is the most important center of coca leaf production; consequently, it manifests the close relation between ethnicity and coca production.

Even though there is an indigenous majority in the country, Bolivia has marked divisions, as “the oil-and industry-rich lowlands region, centered in Santa Cruz, has embraced market-oriented reforms, while the indigenous majority concentrated in the highlands has rejected neoliberalism in favor of state-led development” (Shifter, 2004; 133-134). These are the challenges President Evo Morales faces in his administration. The wealthy eastern area of Bolivia – the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija – does not just differentiate from the rest of the country, but it is also clamoring for its autonomy. In order to achieve their autonomy from the rest of the country, these departments have called for referendums, which have been declared illegal by the national government (Romero, 2008).

The political engagement of indigenous people that Evo Morales has intensified during his campaign and administration is an important development. His policies aim at what the majority of the electorate – the indigenous population – expects: the end of neoliberalism and the beginning of a new process. During the first two years of his administration, Morales nationalized oil and gas reserves (Prada, 2006) and the telecommunications company (Gobierno Explica Nacionalizaciones, 2008). These political decisions are manifestly in opposite direction to the policies applied by the neoliberal Sanchez de Lozada administration.

INTERPRETATION OF THE THEORIES

Olson's theory of *collective action* and Tilly's *mobilization model* associate individual interest with collective organizations. Unlike the Argentinean *piqueteros*, who mobilized to demand subsidies and jobs becoming a powerful group, the Bolivian social movements did not start mobilizing for individual interests. Their position was against neoliberal policies

and their economic and social consequences. Webber (2005; 39) states:

Aymara peasants from the *altiplano* with a series of demands linked to indigenous autonomy and vindication of their presence and dignity within the racist Bolivian state; miners from Huanuni; urban protesters from El Alto with strong connections to the struggles of the indigenous Aymara peasants and the relocated former miners, the poorer sectors of La Paz; and middle-class *paceños* disgusted with the violence of the state under Goñi [former president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada].

Different sectors, different social classes – mostly indigenous peasants – and general interests protested against the plan established by the government.

Reaffirming this statement, Arze and Kruse (2004, 23) add:

Government restructuring, associated changes in tax policy, trade liberalization, modifications to the country's productive and industrial base and the abandonment of the internal market have combined to drastically undermine the material well-being of most Bolivians.

The origin of the conflict between individual and collective interest lies in the *free rider problem* and the *efficacy problem*, which had a weak presence in the Bolivian movements. Since there were no single individuals involved, but rather groups representing different sectors of the society, the *free rider* and *efficacy* problems were reflected at the beginning of the events of October, 2003. There was a call for general strike, first, just the mining unions of Oruro and Potosí stopped their activities. Then, the teachers and students joined, and later the peasants were all merging into the streets (Petras, 2004). “The country erupted in protest, especially La Paz, where already – striking policemen joined the demonstrations and eventually had a daylong shootout with military forces...” (Ballve, 2005; 42). Considering that every department was involved in these protests, it took less than a week to get every group on strike.

Rational choice theories are not enough to explain the dynamics of Bolivian social movements. Bolivians took the street after several months of tolerating severe policies from the government:

Two consequences of reform have been especially harmful to the majority of Bolivians: the devastation wrought by commercial openness on small-scale campesino and indigenous agricultural production, and the increasing precariousness of the world of work in which growing social divisions are systematically reflected and produced (Arze & Kruse, 2004; 23).

Consequently, October 2003 was the appropriate moment at which the movement could become powerful and force the president to resign. As Tarrow (1998) assures, the political opportunities are more manifest to people with oppression and needs. The country has one of the highest rates of poverty in South America, and the indigenous people, the majority of the population, were excluded from politics.

The events of the Gas War showed President Sanchez de Lozada's incapacity to govern through consent and the weakness of the neoliberal state. That weakness was also evidenced later, when Vice President Mesa took office promising economics policies which he could not fulfill.

Meanwhile, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), the political opposition led by Evo Morales, became an ally of the protesting groups. MAS had lost the 2002 presidential elections by less than two percent of the electoral votes, so it had an important participation in Congress and at the local political level. One of the MAS actions was to build an "anti-neoliberal coalition" (Ballve, 2005; 44) based on support of the social movements, a political strategy used by Morales to gain more adhesion in the following elections.

Tarrow (1998) emphasizes that the political opportunities affect some groups more than others, or one specific area more than others. Baldez (2002) underlines Tarrow's statement when she analyzes the Chilean women uprising during the Allende and Pinochet administrations. She affirms that movements rise and fall as a reaction of political changes (Baldez, 2002). Given the existing difference within Bolivia between the eastern area and the rest of the country, the wealthy population of Santa Cruz was less affected by neoliberal policies. As it was analyzed before, *cruceños* supported neoliberalism.

Finally, according to Tarrow (1998) movements also arise if the state declines its capacity for repression. Bolivian government repressed the popular mobilizations by violent means, but that action contributed to intensified confrontations and mobilizations spreading to different groups and geographic areas. As a result of the repression, several civilians were killed in a short period of time. Tarrow's statement cannot be applied because, in despite of the state repression, movements continued protesting and became more powerful.

The resource mobilization theory focused on people and how those people are organized. Unlike the Argentinean *piqueteros*, Bolivian social movements were founded on grassroots organizations which were very active operating in their own activities: trade unions, neighborhood associations, peasants which in the majority were coca growers farmers – even women were organized previously to the main protests in October 2003. Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), the political party of the opposition, supported the

movements but it did not play a significant role during the manifestations.

The structural organization developed at the local level, as it was shown in El Alto, where popular participation was directly linked to the government. Despite of this organization, which can be considered fundamental for the social movements in Bolivia, the country was not experiencing prosperity and economic growth, as is proposed by Marx and McAdam (1994) to explain the dynamic of social movements. People were disappointed with the lack of answers and unsatisfied promises from the government.

In her synthesis, Baldez (2002) combines rational choice theory, political opportunity theory and political framing theory. The concept of *framing* helps to understand how the Bolivian social movements perceived themselves and were perceived by the outsiders. If 62 percent of the population is indigenous, and the majority of them are mining workers and coca growers farmers, it is understandable they frame themselves as indigenous – Quechua and mainly Aymara.

When Evo Morales won the presidential elections in 2005, Bolivian indigenous social movements saw him as one of them. Morales was not just the first fully indigenous head of state, but also an active coca growers leader. During his administration, and even before serving as a member of the Congress, Morales has aimed at a total integration and participation of indigenous people into politics:

Look at 2002 elections – white people began to respect people with [common Aymaran] names... We have senators who are Aymara. We are teaching our children to occupy the space that is ours, to create our own government... (Hayden, 2004; 21-22)

Morales focuses his policies on recovering from the neoliberal practices of the former President. This is what the majority of Bolivians wants and was expecting from Morales.

FINDINGS

The Bolivian social movements emerged as strong and influential in 2003 as a consequence of social and economic effects of neoliberal policies applied by former president Sanchez de Lozada. Most of the members of the movements were indigenous people who protested against the privatization of natural gas and demanded the nationalization of natural resources.

Following the political opportunity theory, Bolivian social movements visualized the appropriate moment to act. The country is one of the poorest in South America; the implementation of neoliberalism was causing stagnation in the national production. Consequently, the government was losing support. Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) was a strong opposition force in

Congress and Evo Morales, its leader, was becoming a prominent political figure. Morales lost the 2002 presidential elections by less than two percent of the electoral votes (Petras, 2004). Politically, the opportunities to protest were not equal because the wealthy eastern area of Bolivia supported neoliberalism. Repression from a weakening state did not stop the movements, which demonstrated how powerful they were forcing the president to resign and leave the country.

Resource mobilization theory suggests that Bolivian social movements were well organized and based on structural grassroots organizations. These grassroots organizations provided to the movements the necessary strategy and elements to protest. Unlike the Argentinean *piqueteros*, this theory also helps to explain the actions of Bolivian social movements.

Baldez's *framing* (2002) helps to understand the connection between ethnicity and lack of political representation. Even though 62 percent of Bolivia is indigenous, they were not previously represented, nor was their political ideology. It was in 2005, when Evo Morales won the elections and incorporated indigenous people to his administration, policies opposing neoliberalism were implemented. The indigenous social movements identify with Evo Morales, who shares the same Aymaran heritage. This is why the movements highly support him.

Conclusion: The Bolivian social movements became very dynamic in 2003 as a consequence of neoliberal policies implemented by the Sanchez de Lozada administration, and the need for the political participation of indigenous people, who represent the majority of the Bolivian population. Since 2006, the social movements strongly support the current president Evo Morales. These movements identify themselves with President Morales, the ideology he represents, and the policies he supports.

NOTES

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