

# Fluid modern ethnic spaces: contesting the spatial ordering of the State in Bolivia

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*Relationships between the Bolivian State and the emerging indigenous and peasant social movements have become increasingly fluid since the end of the 1970s. Although this process could be traced back to the 1953 Agrarian Reform, it was not until the world crisis of the 1970s and the surge in globalisation that it led to radical changes in the relationship between State and indigenous peoples. Seen from the point of view of the State, our case study of a group of Quechua communities seems to illustrate a process of fragmentation leading to ungovernability and disorder. This understanding has to do with a lack of 'legibility'. However here I replace that 'image' of disorder with another 'feeling' of cultural ordering, one that emerges from indigenous people's livelihoods, strategies and governance from below. I argue for understanding the apparent lack of governance as the expression of an autonomous reorganising process that leads to the regrouping and expansion of indigenous localities linked into new forms of regionalisation.*

**Key words:** Bolivia, space, ethnographic, State, ethnicity, hegemony

## Reconfiguring State and social spaces in Bolivia

Relationships evolved in such a way during the last quarter of the twentieth century that a reconfiguration of social and political space took place at regional and local levels jeopardising State governance. As a corollary to that re-composition of socio-political forces and geographical spaces, a crisis became evident at the nation-state level in 2003.<sup>1</sup> In this article I examine some of these transformations through the case study of Raqaypampa, now an Indigenous District in the Cochabamba inter-valleys region, in order to understand the social actors, power relations and changing correlations of force that lay behind fluidity in space and place. To understand how new spaces – and not only new meanings – emerged in the socio-political landscape, we look first at the way the communities were active in the reconfiguration of political boundaries and in erecting ethnic barriers, and how these processes

are connected with their own strategies of social reproduction and the building of vital spaces.

The political process under way in Bolivia is interpreted by some as part of processes of negotiating identities. I would combine that element into Foucault's emphasis on the

usefulness of the 'schema of war' as an alternate mode of conceptualization which attempts to fix power-relations in terms of a model of perpetual conflict, which looks 'for the principle of intelligibility of politics in the general form of war'. (Foucault 2003, iv, cited in Hook 2003)

A new set of paradoxes and contradictory processes is taking shape in and between the fields of the social and the political. The thread that links both fields is made up by social control mechanisms (Migdal 1988). Social controls initially articulated and put into motion from the State downwards now acquire different meanings, even pointing to a political clash with the State from insubordinate

social networks mobilising upwards. Locality and place have changed their meanings in different ways through an ethnicisation process that is taking place at the community grassroots level, but is not limited to this scale. The fluidity of the relationships between State and social indigenous movements as seen in the case of Bolivia implies that these relationships are unstable and non-crystallised.

Any social process involves contradictions between the different actors bringing up change and uncertainty. Nevertheless the dramatic turnabout of the 1990s with whole political systems – even empires – collapsing and multiplying sites of struggle, ‘scattering of antagonisms, indeed by a fragmentation of the political itself’ while ‘experiencing the disintegration of modernity’ (Watts 1991, 9) took a toll in academic pride. This made it even more difficult to understand ‘the real’ and prompted some academics to take refuge in solipsistic ‘creationist’ discourses. In the following section I try to capture this movement of disintegration and reordering of the political space at the level of locality in Bolivia.

### When the turmoil began

The Bolivian countryside in 1953 was quite conflictual. Armed valley peasantry militias occupied many *haciendas* and attacked rural towns where the *hacendados* and their administrators (*gamonales*) had residences, not only in the department of Cochabamba but also in some regions of La Paz. Throughout the implementation of the 1953 Agrarian Reform, jurisdictional rights over rural political space began to slowly move away from being under the authority of the expelled landowners and into the hands of the new peasant ‘*sindicatos*’ indigenous authorities. The struggle for an autonomous communal space combined with the uneven expansion of peasant organisation. This trend was obscured and later neutralised by the clientelist policies implemented by a State some authors characterise as ‘corporatist’ (Lavaud 1998; Yashar 1999). Based on a model of corporatism that derives from well-defined archetypes like the Spanish State between 1939 and into the 1950s I challenge this characterisation of the Bolivian State as ‘corporatist’ during that stage. I accept that what we faced in that period are corporatist *policies*, but nevertheless the Bolivian State did not transform itself into a corporatist one because of the nature of power relations between the social sectors and the State. In the first place, the Bolivian State did not attain a monopoly over

legitimate violence at this stage, and the balance of relations of force was not stabilised. The Agrarian Reform which served as the basis for implementation of State clientelism through allocation of land titles was a direct result of the armed mobilisation of the peasantry. Notwithstanding the instrumental nature of corporatist policies, the expansion achieved by the *sindicato* organisations and the peasant militias in the Andean rural areas of western Bolivia did not mean the State attained social control. Rather, a growing number of these organisations began to exert a *de-facto* localised territorial authority with influence within the geographic boundaries of the ex *haciendas*. In this way, the communities were setting the basis for a dispute with the State over the monopoly of control over its territory. Behind its re-emerging ethnic identity, since the mid-1980s the rural *sindicato* as a local territorial authority has represented the main challenge to governability.

The disappearance of the *hacendado* authority in much of the Bolivian highlands with the 1953 Agrarian Reform led to the establishment of a territorial *indirect* local government with many of the former landlords’ attributions transferred to a different social location. Not only did the rural *sindicato* reconstitute a substantial right to control access to land as part of its *informal* jurisdictional space, but some indigenous local traditional justice authorities also began to administrate functions parallel to the legally established State authorities. In many highland places the traditional *ayllu*<sup>2</sup> has reconstituted itself, but under a different name. Up until then, under the new form of the agrarian *sindicato*, the Andean indigenous communities were apparently vanishing into modernity and integrated into an individualised propertied citizenship. Since 1953 a gradual reassertion of its collective existence and jurisdictional ability has taken place in many areas where the *hacienda*’s territory has now been transformed into the community’s. However, as the Bolivian State maintained a disciplined control of the peasant leadership through the Military Peasant Pact between 1965 and 1979, the territorial powers of the *sindicatos* developed at first in a veiled and limited manner.

### ‘Corporate’ state and ethnic space

The post Agrarian Reform situation is still under debate. Yashar asserts that in Latin America

a corporatist form of citizenship regime . . . created and/or promoted labour and peasant associations that

structured and often monopolized official representation . . . to cast aside ethnic categories . . . and to reconstitute Indians as national peasants . . . In this context, State efforts to build and register peasant communities had unintended consequences. Via land reforms and credit programs, Indians secured the spaces in which they could institutionalize indigenous community practices at local level. (Yashar 1999, 84)

According to Yashar, the very fact that the State implemented corporatist policies to capitalise on peasant support influenced or facilitated the emergence of this new stage, while

as part of this corporatist project Latin American states incorporated Indians . . . through peasant associations (thereby organizing them along corporatist lines) . . . Corporatism, therefore, created a dynamic dualism, with identities shifting according to the locale: for the State, Indians assumed identities as peasants; within the community, peasants assumed their identities as Indians. (Yashar 1999, 84)

By contrast, Gledhill (1994) argues against typologies and analyses restricted to formal political institutions. He favours modelling political process in terms of power transactions involving a diversity of other actors. While State policies are decisive elements for explaining changes in the political regime, they are only one side of a more complicated formula. Gramsci's concept of relations of force leads us to understand changes in the relationship between State and Andean peasantry as part of a changing class landscape (Gramsci 1971). Here I am arguing that the emergence of community's autonomous jurisdiction is not the result of State policies but of their failure in the face of molecular resilience in the part of the communities. Changes in the development of indigenous ethnic conscience have much to do with the political economy of the Andean communities.

Ethnicity is a complex political process defined by Barth (1998) as the social organisation of cultural difference where self identification is only part of that process. It implies the construction of social boundaries and identifying differentiating cultural markers within interaction structures even if boundaries do not necessarily mean the occupation of exclusive territories. Indigeneity is not a category of antiquity, but must be understood in terms of interaction with the modern world (Niezen 2000). Indigenous struggles such as those described here are not limited to Bolivia and should be located as part of global indigenous movements, as is argued by Niezen

(2000) and Hall and Fenelon (2004). Furthermore, it signals a planetary declining civilisatory hegemonic process characterised by the 'general inflation of cultural politics and ethnic conflict in the world, together with substantial increases in class stratification, economic polarization and major shifts in capital accumulation' (Friedman 1999, 391; 1998).

A definition of identity on the other hand is not a simple derivative of locality in so far as the dynamic proper to that locality is defined in the frame of specific ebbs and flows of social and political forces in tension. Moreover, the definition of territorial jurisdiction seems to be a key to the development of ethnic identity. This category articulates the constitution and recognition of authority as a derivative of power relations within a certain cultural and juridical definition of space and locality. This approach can undermine objections such as those underscored by Castree 'any definition of the term [indigenous] will be guilty of . . . "essentialising tendencies"' (2004, 154). Instead, I am arguing that jurisdiction can be seen as a more solid, processual and objective category of analysis than the subjective and individualising criteria of self-adscription for understanding indigeneity. In this way locality can be visualised as a tension in and part of a process involving focalised forces constituted as a portion, element or link within a wider process on different levels. The case of Raqaypampa will exemplify how these tensions at different levels are articulated.

### **Landscape, productive patterns and ethnicity**

Today Raqaypampa is a rural, Quechua-speaking region with a dispersed population of more than 11 000 people. Their space management resembles, on a smaller scale, Andean vertical ecologies. This politico-ecological system emerged in response to the particularities of the Andean environment and keeps evolving under the seemingly unchallenged traditional nets of reciprocity. The productive patterns are a combination of dry-farming agriculture, cattle-raising and agroforestry practices (Golte 1980; Murra 1987). Practices are adapted in order to balance and combine Andean climatic risks. A politico-ecological configuration of space at the micro level creates a landscape that is constituted historically, but whose dynamics will answer on one side to market opportunities, while on the other is organised along the family's food security needs (Morlon 1991; Calvo *et al.* 1994).

The collaborative indigenous network of labour exchange arrangements known as '*ayni*'<sup>3</sup> is carefully managed and ritually legitimised and consolidated through a number of opportunities and festivities: it appears as a differentiated indigenous cultural structure working through distinct socio-political layers. When the rituals and the ritual managers (*aysiris*)<sup>4</sup> fail to secure the orderly relationship between the households, and between men, women and land, it will be managed through the political leaders of the agrarian union, that is, the territorial authorities elected and recognised by the indigenous community. In a third instance, the community assembly, the heads of all households solve any disputes. The shared agro-cultural environment is reinforced by the feeling that they share a common history and a common past, and a great deal of attention is given to the rituals that pay tribute to their ancestors who are the keepers of the land's heritage.

The leaders of the locality of Raqaypampa explain that following the 1953 Agrarian Reform each *sindicato* was directly linked to the '*Central Campesina*' located in the provincial capital of Mizque. Some years later, during the Military Peasant Pact (MPP), 'peasant subcentres' were organised in correspondence with the *cantonal* towns where the politico-military nuclei (*celulas*) of the MNR<sup>5</sup> were now set up as part of the MPP. This way, highland communities were incorporated into the various different peasant subcentres as part of a hierarchical structure of control. The valley peasants with access to irrigation, those who took the opportunity to set up commercial farming, occupied most of the positions within this hierarchy.<sup>6</sup> This form of organisation amounted to a relationship of political, union and economic dependence of the highlanders with reference to the valley peasant sector, ethnically and economically differentiated.

In Figure 1 we see that in the 1970s, the local community of Raqaypampa and its surroundings were part of the Molinero *Subcentral*, a small nearby valley only an hour's walk away. The boundaries were fixed through the cantonal State politico-administrative configuration.

### The spatial reconfiguration of communities

The first phase of the Agrarian Reform implementation lasted well into the Barrientos military government (1964–69) after the overthrow of the 'Nationalist Revolutionary Movement' Party in power after the 1952 revolution. In this period a violent

power game occurred between the old provincial elites and the emergent local peasant leaders over the control of the agrarian unions (*sindicatos*).

The second moment is the consolidation of corporatist policies supported by the Military–Peasant pact between 1964 and 1974, when a coalition of provincial elites, old and new, and military officers took command of the peasant union organisations. A network of middlemen secured the nexus between the high levels of State bureaucracy and the subordinated peasant institutions.

A third period during which the conflict of jurisdictional sovereignty took a visible shape started at the end of the 1970s, when the peasant unions recovered their autonomy vis-à-vis the regional elites. Even though they emerged through micro-level processes of identity reassertion, these local dynamics were catalysed by a change in the relation of forces at national level. Notably, the Bolivian Confederation of Peasant Organizations (CSUTCB) emerged when a young Aymara leadership staged a very successful national blockade in 1979. This episode is key to understanding how the paradoxical transition took place. The agrarian reform process of 'liberating' the labour force of *haciendas* was meant to promote a land tenure regime of individual propertied farmers in the 1950s–1960s. Instead it led to the creation of political autonomous collective forms of jurisdictional control of space by peasant Andean communities reconstituting it in molecular fashion in the 1990s.

After the events of 1979, the control of *sindicato* authorities by the military began to collapse. This political space reconfiguration was most evident in its impact on indigenous social networks. The strength of the community's jurisdictional system is built upon the social cooperative network between households organising the everyday productive activities as a non-irrigated and very diversified agropastoral system (Calvo *et al.* 1994). The travails of that network for the exchange of human energy and food production are under the surveillance and protection of a strong communal authority.

Control mechanisms are collectively exercised over the right to access the land in their territory.<sup>7</sup> No one is allowed to have direct access to land in the community's territory without being part of the *sindicato*, while the *sindicato* – as the assembly of all households' heads – is in charge of policing the enforcement of that rule. After more than 400 years of submission to the *hacienda* regime, the Andean communities' jurisdictional system at the local level in Raqaypampa began to re-emerge in customary

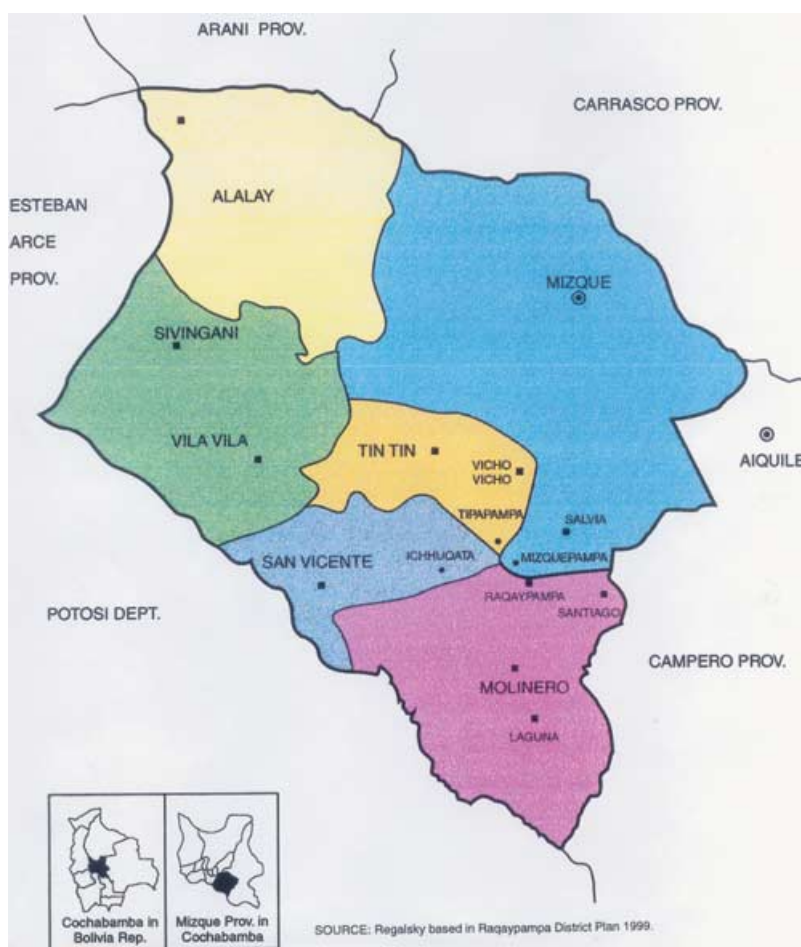


Figure 1 Cantonal division of the Mizque province 1976

oral normative form, as in other highland places (Albó 1988). The boundaries and social rules of this agro-culture are expressed and reinforced through ritual and myth metaphors. At this particular geographical level, 'oral institutions', like traditional customs and rituals have a dominant function. As Yashar has written, 'Location plays an important role in the definition of ethnic identity' (1999, 83). However, below I explain how the molecular aggregation gives place to new levels of political conscience questioning State authority and combining into regional and national class actions.

Referring again to Raqaypampa, parallel to the local-level unfolding of such a system of customary oral institutions through day to day interactions

between families, there is a differentiated process of reconstruction of the jurisdictional space for the entire group of peasant communities at an ethnic regional level as a whole. At that level the shared common identity as *alteños* (highlanders)<sup>8</sup> is constructed through a conscious and explicit political process where Andean ritual plays a small role compared to that of the elaboration of a written text of assembly minutes, resembling State bureaucratic rituals. The assertion of a regional distinctive ethnic space required the politicisation of their own cultural differentiation as *alteños* marking a difference with State institutions, with the regional elites at the provincial towns, and with the commercially oriented peasant communities in the Mizque valley.

The process of identification is subordinate to the task of constructing an ethnic territorialised space for community (re)production. The process of identification is part of the construction of a collective subject. The building process went through the collective construction of an explicit regional strategy. It took a much more difficult and twisted path than the mere self assertion at communal level, as this development was closely linked with the political and strategic formation of a peasant class social movement at national level.

Ethnicity is not just an imaginary construction and expression of the indigenous authority that asserts order into the inter-household network. It is a process of collective identification at the same time that it is an exercise of legitimate violence by a non-State authority. It is a political process very much interconnected to the productive dynamics of the community's forms of appropriation (and exchange) of resources, especially land and family labour.<sup>9</sup>

In 1985 the two *Subcentrales Campesinas* of the ethnic region united in a first attempt to create the Regional *Central Campesina* of Raqaypampa. The Peasant *Central* was challenging the centrality and authority of the town of Mizque, which is the seat of Provincial authority.

If we compare the political configuration of Figure 2 with Figure 1, it is possible to note two features: the first is that now the political jurisdiction has de-centred the Molinero cantonal organisation and three peasant subcentres have taken the place of the now fragmented canton State administrative structure. Even though Molinero formally continues to be a cantonal capital, it has lost its political centrality and the subcentres of Raqaypampa and Laguna are now established as political centres of their own. As peasant class territorial organisations, Raqaypampa and Laguna are thus no longer subordinated to the State bureaucratic administration without dispute. The second is that the ethnic region has expanded and now it includes more territory and communities that used to be part of other political cantons such as Vicho Vicho and Tin Tin, as these also decided to participate in the peasant subcentres. By this stage at least one big community which was dependent directly on the provincial town of Mizque had become integrated into the Raqaypampa subcentre.

This move represented a quiet political revolution. The administrative order was subverted. State bureaucracy and the town elites associated with it began to lose their political abilities to rule the peasant communities. At this point these abilities had been

consciously taken by the peasant *sindicato* organisations exercising a new kind of 'inter-legality' (Orellana 2003).

### Land tax and class resistance

Successful resistance of national peasant organisations against the government's attempt in 1986 to impose taxes on peasant smallholdings opened a period of renewed resistance to the State with continuous discursive reference to communal control over access to land (Regalsky 2003).

Two main strands of Andean peasant mobilisation unfolded from 1978. On the one hand, there are national and departmental union structures which make basic demands as part of the working class. Although the CSUTCB claims their ethnic and historical rights as 'Originarios' (First Nations) in its discourse, this is however not expressed in specific demands or proposals. With no apparent contradiction, on the other hand, the peasant communities at the very grass roots of those union structures (as in the case of the Federation of Peasant Workers of Cochabamba FSUTCC), set up 'authentic community governments' (Rivera 1984) via the *sindicatos* as we saw in the Raqaypampa case.

As a result, the highland indigenous peasants will mobilise together with all other rural and indigenous communities at national level as when they rejected the rural tax. The Raqaypampeños took part in the national blockades declared by the COB<sup>10</sup> (Central Obrera Boliviana) with the support of the CSUTCB. Claiming a common class identity as an organic part of those organisations, they used ethnic differentiation to gain leverage and negotiate their own power space. Not only did they fight for their political space within those national and regional social organisations, they were also engaged in tense negotiations for access to territorial resources and to extend their jurisdictional reach at a regional level.

Here we find no linear patterns for the historic development of locality and ethnicity, as there is no basic incompatibility between class ascription and ethnic identity. Rather we see an uneven and complex combination of social forces unfolding within a process of growing social mobilisation against the background of a weakening State with little control over 'its' territory.

The same year the peasant organisations rejected the governmental tax law, another issue drew communities' interest. The rural education system throughout the Andean communities became nearly

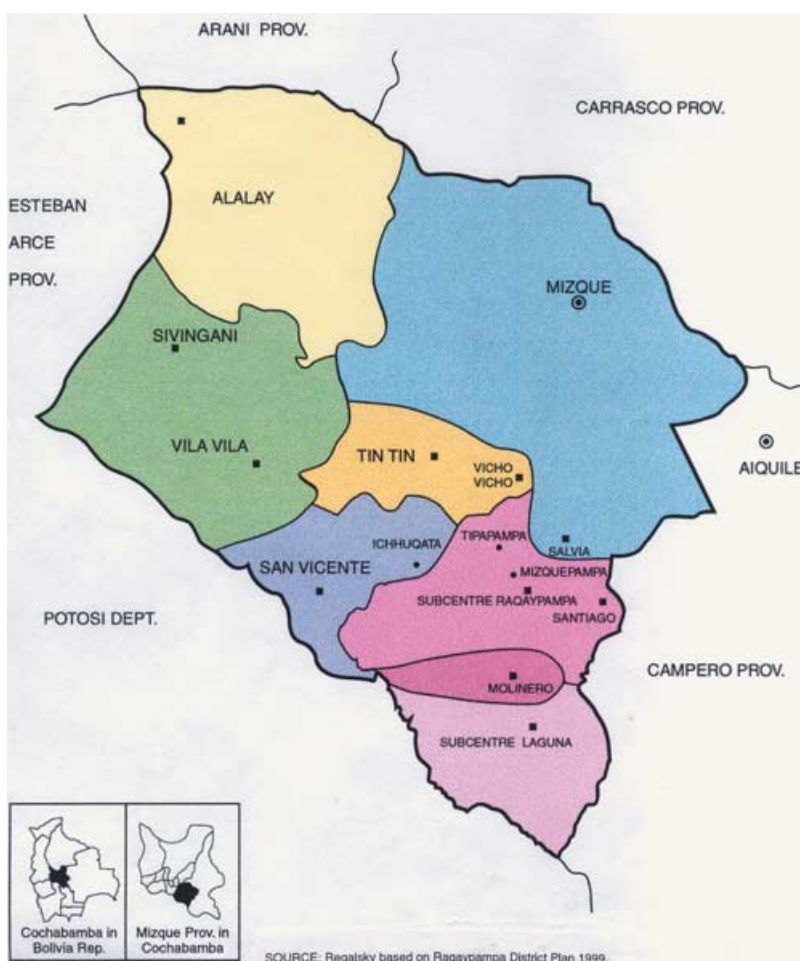


Figure 2 Mizque cantonal division and highland subcentres 1986

paralysed because of the structural reforms adopted in 1985 to alleviate the governmental fiscal deficit. These two matters, land rights and rural schools, became increasingly connected as the indigenous movement in Raqaypampa fought for jurisdiction over land and territory (Regalsky 2003). Scott (1998, 33) stresses the role of taxation and education as part of centralising State policies that seek to 'impos[e] a novel and (from the centre) legible property system' in order to make the State itself viable.

As was before the case of Cantonal authorities, now the educational authorities became challenged and overruled by the '*Consejos Comunes de Educaci3n*' (Community's Educational Councils). Just as the regional markets acted in the recent past as a

network for the subordination of the peasant communities to the Aiquile and Mizque town elites, the localisation of the schools now became pivotal in the opposite direction facilitating the articulation of the autonomous ethnic space in Raqaypampa.

Ethnic differentiation took a political path. In contrast to the more implicit and non-discursive micro-ethnic process at the household level, this process was politically explicit. To that end it required a conscious definition of ethnic and class categories of belonging. Thus this regional process parallels and is closely articulated with the development of the peasant national class organisations of the CSUTCB, the national confederation of peasant organisations, and its discourses.

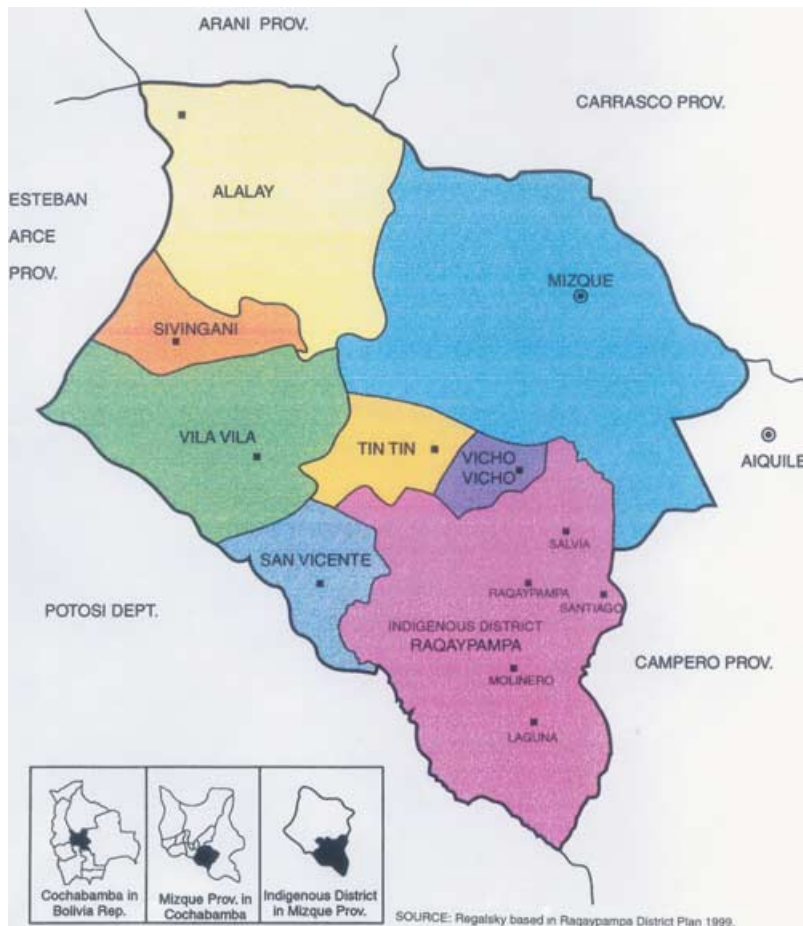


Figure 3 Raqaypampa indigenous district 1997

### A new map of Raqaypampa

It is possible to see in Figure 3 that in 1986 the highlanders' communities began to reach a certain degree of autonomy with respect to the Creole authorities of the neighbouring valley towns. To that end, they organised their own new peasant *Subcentrales*, each one built upon the legitimacy lent by the new State school's spatial structure. The jurisdictional conflict with the rural school authorities revolved around the organisation of time the peasant children dedicated to attend school, which hampered their active participation in their domestic role as part of the community workforce. This conflict pointed to the political definition of which authority would establish a timetable for children and schools. At stake here was which authority

rules children's socialisation. A different rationale would rule the social organisation of time, once the *Consejos Comunes* enforced the acceptance of the agrarian calendar in the school timetable. The organisation of agrarian activities would define the timing of school classes (Regalsky and Laurie 2007).

Raqaypampa turned itself into the politico-unionised centre of an enlarged ethnic region. A number of valley communities decided to take part in the CSUCIR highland's indigenous *Central*, breaking away from the Mizque valley's political centre. It seemed that situation during the 1970s was now completely on its head. A new task emerged, and a new apparent paradox appeared.

Raqaypampa now looked for recognition as a politico-administrative state district negotiating and accommodating into the new State re-ordering



established through the Popular Participation Law (Ministerio de Desarrollo Humano 1994). The new law enforces the municipalisation of rural space, provides formal legal status to the indigenous communities as Territorial Base Organisations (OTBs) and decentralises funds for infrastructure. This law can be interpreted as a State attempt to reorder and recolonise what was recognised as an ungovernable space of indigeneity (Van Cott 2000; Regalsky 2005). The CSUCIR mobilised the peasant communities of Raqaypampa and obtained the Municipal Council of Mizque's approval for their recognition as an indigenous district in 1999. The indigenous communities wanted to take advantage of the decentralised financial resources. Figure 3 illustrates the reconfiguration of the ethnic and political space of the *Raqaypampeños*, indicating how this ethnic region reconstituted itself as an indigenous district in 1997. We can see that all highland communities are now integrated as a politico-administrative unit within the boundaries of the CSUCIR (Regional Indigenous Peasant Centre of Raqaypampa). At this point Raqaypampa entered into a fourth moment of reconfiguration of space, from a localisation process to the active transformation of the nation-state.

### Politics of difference and class

How can we think about forms of political action which are able to understand these processes of identification rooted in difference rather than try to transcend it? And it seems to me that this project requires not a flight from class but a crying need to retheorize where class has gone to, and to rethink it – and to reintegrate it – in non essentialist terms. (Watts 1991, 14)

Identification processes rooted in difference result from the politicisation of cultural difference. What is the origin of this politicisation? What can we add to Barth's assertion of ethnicity being the social organisation of cultural difference? In the case we have discussed above, cultural differences were subsumed in national politics and identities as long as the nation-state had the capacity to promote a homogeneous identity. Cultural difference has not only become subsumed because of State institutions like the school and the army actively exercising symbolic violence against indigenous people. The hegemony of the ruling classes, synthesised in the ideology, forms and functions of the nation-state, is legitimised insofar as they can represent the common interests of the population in all its differences. It is

not political will to suppress difference alone that maintains an established order. The effective opportunities and spaces the ruling classes offer to the ruled people so they are able to reproduce themselves within the state political and moral framework is the key factor to the maintenance of the status quo.

Nation-states have come to represent the main obstacle to peoples being able to preserve a vital space in order to develop their livelihood strategies. Vital spaces are endangered by nation-state biopolitics and commoditisation of virtually every 'economic' space.

People's survival strategies, and the peasant and indigenous strategies in particular, that help to keep their reproductive capabilities translate into a growing informal non-State sector. Informal non-State justice systems are currently flourishing. As indigenous and peasant strategies require the establishment of boundaries in order to safeguard their vital space, these processes have become the key source of growing ethnicisation. Class politics therefore is only feasible as long as it blends with the politicisation of difference.

Defensive localisation processes in Bolivia are entering into a local–global interaction that at times questions the class divide. It is not just about the erection of strong boundaries around places, but rather to define new ways of organising a democratic society. These actions are part of a consensual strategy staged by the whole of the indigenous and peasant organisations in Bolivia (Pacto de Unidad 2006), which are demanding their proposal to be considered at the Constitutional Assembly<sup>11</sup> in order to reorganise the State territorial configuration through recognition of 'indigenous territorial autonomies' and 'collective rights'. Their aim is to negotiate a new social consensus with all national social movements for new conditions of co-existence within capitalism. The extraordinary social mobilisation shook an extremely debilitated and delegitimated political establishment, leading in December 2005 to the election of Evo Morales, an Aymara leader of the coca growers, as President of Bolivia. His government is already trying to neutralise the more radical indigenous demands in the search for consensus-building with the ruling classes (Natanson 2007). The incorporation of a stratum of indigenous representatives to the highest levels of administration of the State is a paradoxical development in Latin America, as already shown in the case of Ecuador during Gutierrez's presidency (2002–2005) (Tiban 2004). Nevertheless,

as Niezen (2000) recognises, this may be part of a new global political entity coming of age, while the changing international relation of forces, indigenous autonomies and the challenge of the emerging collective identities represent a test to declining civilisational hegemony of the West.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Nina Laurie, the Editor and the two anonymous referees for their very useful suggestions.

### Notes

- 1 The indigenous peoples demand for a Constituent Assembly was to be met after the dismissal of two presidents between 2003 and 2005: it was convened and began sessions in August 2006. Discussions revolve around two differing concepts: the one disseminated by the press is for the establishment of a new social pact and rules for governability under the existing social order, but the other, supported by the indigenous peoples, is to reinvent the State to facilitate the building of a new social order.
- 2 *Ayllu* is the traditional Andean civilisation basic territorial political unit, usually based upon kinship.
- 3 *Ayni* (quechua) is a form of reciprocal exchange of energy (human or animal).
- 4 *Aysiri* (aymara/quechua) is an indigenous healer that can deliver a call to a 'lost soul' to return to the body. The body losing its soul results in a major illness.
- 5 MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario) Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, the party that was at the head of the State and conducted the Agrarian Reform in the period between the April 1952 nationalist revolution and the period of military regimes since 1964.
- 6 At this time the co-opted peasant leaders were able to deliver the paperwork for agrarian individual land titles thanks to their relations to the State bureaucracy.
- 7 One good description of the Andean community as a mini-state is Albó (1988).
- 8 Highlander (*alteño*) becomes a marker for ethnic differentiation from the more market-oriented valley peasantry (*valluno*).
- 9 Here we draw attention to the definition of culture we examined elsewhere (Regalsky 2003) as a control system that transforms human biological impulses and intercourse into social energy programmes for social work purposes.
- 10 National Trade Unions Confederation.
- 11 The Constituent Assembly was installed in Sucre on 6 August 2006.

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