

## **Nightmares of the Present: Turbulence and the Politics of Place in Bolivia**

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The year 2003, important for many reasons, marked the downfall of neoliberal policies in Bolivia. It also initiated the rise to power of social movements that had been increasingly restless even before the impressive insurrection in Cochabamba in April 2000 known as the “Water War,” which forced Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada’s rightwing government to reverse the privatization of potable water. Like several Latin American countries that are governed today by presidents who seek to deepen democracy by rejecting neoliberalism and proclaiming ideals commonly associated with socialist principles, Evo Morales’s “turn to the Left” was overwhelmingly

supported by the Bolivian people in the general elections of 2005. Yet, at the end of December 2010, the first uprising in the region against a government of the Left took place in Bolivia. It was caused by an excessive increase in the price of fuels. The event demonstrated not only the difficulties of entering into a *capitalismo andino*, into a truly alternative mode of development, but it also revealed the limits of Evo's Leftist government's stated effort to reestablish and de-colonize the state. The event also demonstrated how today's Leftist governments have constituted an event of indisputable importance announcing the installation of a new time marked by a boundless present. It has put into question the status of our received forms of temporization by upsetting the relationship between history and the tripartite division of past, present, and future.

Confused by the appearance of movements fueled by a potent mixture of modernity and archaisms, we Bolivians seem to live the removal of the conception of the future that had once been summoned—mainly through the “perspective” established by the nationalist Revolution of 1952—to shape the experience of the present and the expectations of development toward which it ceaselessly moved. In sharp contrast, none of the many analysts observing what happened this December 2010 was able to foresee that a government that was reelected barely a year ago by 64% of Bolivians, could come to face such a critical social protest. Moreover, the regions where the

president won more than 80% of the vote were the most mobilized against the government's decision to raise gas prices. The Aymara Altiplano and the coca-growing zones of Chapare spawned collective actions, including the attack and burning of state institutions, expressing the anger of the population against the same people that they elected.

Uruguayan journalist Raúl Zibechi gives an interesting account of what happened in those five days of last December (2011, p. 1). He provides some guide to this turbulent, expansive present we live today. Zibechi indicates that in mid-December the media began to disseminate official announcements about the big difference between Bolivian fuel prices and those of the rest of the region. As was explained through the media, the difference was said to encourage contraband and the draining of the country's currency. On December 26, while Evo was on a trip to Venezuela, Vice-President García Linera, the architect of *capitalismo andino*, made public Supreme Decree 748 that raised the price of gasoline 72% and revealed the fragility of the MAS government.

On December 27, drivers began a 24-hour work stoppage. A day later, the miners of Huanuni also decided to stage a 24-hour stoppage. Civic organizations, neighborhood councils, unions, *campesinos* and indigenous organizations rejected in massive demonstrations Decree 748. Coca growers of Chapare, who formed Evo's grassroots base of support, and El Alto, the bastion of Evismo

where Morales won 81% of the vote, blocked the highways and burned tollbooths on the El Alto-La Paz toll road. In a message to the nation two hours before the end of the year, Evo Morales, who had just returned from Venezuela, revoked Decree 748. He said that the increase was inevitable, but that he had the obligation to *mandar obedeciendo* (“rule by obeying the people”) and that was the reason for his turn-about.

This summary of Evo’s ill-fated decree explains how the hope of bringing about fundamental change through an economic decision was displaced by the debilitating sense of the state’s incapacity to use the already given political system. Fernando Coronil wrote recently that in today’s leftist turns “the present—the experience of the here and now—seems to be pulled by conflicting forces. On the one hand, it is animated by numerous struggles for a better society. On the other, it is trapped by formidable barriers that block these struggles” (2011, p. 234-5). He added: “The Left pursues a just future, but its particular content eludes it. It has a sense of direction but no clear destination” (2011, p. 235). Indeed, we seem to be living a turbulent, expansive present, a “now” that hinders the future for entering the public stage Reinhart Koselleck described as “horizon of expectations” (2004), as potentiality, offering a hopeful sense of possibility. With the future in decline, Evo’s turn to the Left seems to be drifting into a political crisis.

## **1. TOWARDS A POLITICAL CRISIS**

After the turbulent period between 2000 and 2005, when Evo became president, stability came at a price of increasing state expenses through the subsidies and a broad range of social policies focused on diminishing poverty. The cycle of rising prices in commodities allowed the government to cover the increased expenditure with a degree of ease. However, the cycle now appears to have been broken and the generalized rise in prices is beginning to have a boomerang effect. While Evo started his government dancing happily with Miss Bonanza, he now seems to be stuck with ugly Miss Turbulence.

But there's more to be said about the perils of this expanded present. The Aymara sociologists Pablo Mamani and Pedro Portugal, both exponents of the new Indian intellectualism, point to four problems: the failure of the nationalization of hydrocarbons, which in reality was a modification of contracts to improve the terms for the state; the failure of de-colonization and reestablishment of the state; the fallacy that with the present government the country's huge structural problems will be solved; and the reemergence of social conflict that weakens the government's grassroots base of support (Mamani, 2008; Portugal, 2011).

All four problems indicated are important, but the last one could lead the country into a grave political crisis since active popular support has come to be the principal argument the government uses to manage delicate

situations. Pedro Portugal's description to what happened in El Alto (assault and burning of government and social movement's buildings) leads one to conclude that grassroots leadership allied with the government has been overtaken by its own rank-and-file, who are acting even against the organizations they belong to (2011, p. 2).

The situation in Bolivia seems to confirm Coronil's perception that we are living a "crisis *of* the present and *about* the future" (2011) "Crisis of the present," because the present unfolds as a "dense field of nervous agitation, constantly entangled in (...) a conglomeration of contradictory tendencies and actions leading to no clear destination" (Coronil, 2011, p. 247), and "about the future," because the future appears as if it were a specter, "a space inhabited by ghosts from the past" (p. 247). Consequently, despite the significant achievements of Evo's government, a "nightmarish sensation of being trapped by the very social movement that gave Morales power saturates the present, as if it were jammed or moved without advancing or in the wrong direction" (p. 247).

Under this modality of historicity, the expansive present prolongs itself within lasting constraints. In the face of a history of partial achievements and constant deferrals, the ghosts of the Indian rebellions of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, of the defunct Revolution of 1952, and of the never ending nation-building process, continue to haunt the present, filling with ambiguities its modernizing project. In fact, we seem to be stuck in a never ending battle

between the short and the long terms. Coronil notes that “whereas the long term has historically been the horizon of the Left, the overwhelming dominance of capitalism has now restricted the domain of the Latin American Left to the short term” (2011, p. 250). Without clear alternative images of the future, these constraints have produced some paradoxical results that turn the debate over development more confusing than ever. Let us see why.

Vice-President García Linera’s much heralded *capitalismo andino* is being enunciated largely from the state position. For García Linera, the goal of the MAS government is to achieve a high degree of control over the production of wealth and the distribution of the surplus. This control of the economy would be the basis for a pluralistic process of articulation of three modernizations: the modernization of the industrial sector; the urban micro-entrepreneurial modernization; and the modernization of the rural communal sector. García Linera recognizes that there is indeed a logic that is proper to the indigenous worlds, and that this logic is neither separate nor antagonistic in relation to the Western one. As Arturo Escobar reflects on García Linera’s proposal (2010, p. 27), it is clear that *capitalismo andino* is a novel view for the Left; however, the vice-president considers that positions started on the basis of indigenous difference essentialize the indigenous and incapacitate them from becoming modern. Hence his emphasis on equality as opposed to difference, which is best expressed in

his conceptualization of this “Andean-Amazonian capitalism.” The novel form is capable of articulating capitalist and non-capitalist forms and, through corrective state action, also capable of generating the surplus needed to support a transition to a postcapitalist order. García Linera’s proposal thus becomes “a form of capitalism which we believe contains a set of forces and social structures which, in time, could become poscapitalist” (2007, p. 158-9), and this might be arrived at in a “new period of universal ascension of society, following the dialectic between movements and the state” (2007, p. 154).

This state-centered, dialectical and teleological view of social transformation remains within the confines of Eurocentric and modernizing Left perspectives. It is also a clear indication that a “neoliberal logic” continues operating in the government in spite of loud anti-colonialist declarations. *Capitalismo andino* is a case of those constraints that produce a rather peculiar articulation between practices and ideals in the short and long terms. As Coronil affirms in his essay, while leftist governments in Latin America proclaim socialist ideals for their long term, they promote capitalism in the short term. And while these leftist states may be moving towards socialism, their reliance on the pursuit of capitalism and of modernization suggest that “capitalism has a present without a future, and socialism has a future without a present” (Coronil, 2011, p. 250). And when these paradoxes prevail, they make a turbulent reality out of the present.



Attempting to explain the paradoxical nature of our present time, I think that de-colonization proposes a new “theory of locality,” a new politics of place. I share this view with José Rabasa’s recent research on the existence of a “people ‘without’ history” (2010). I am particularly close to his belief that modernity (that is, capital, the nation-state, history) is just one temporality, even when it aspires to absorb all life. The contemporaneity of the modern and the non-modern, what Ernst Bloch defined as the “non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous” ([1918] 1990), questions the assumption that the narratives of civilization, national formation, development exhaust all possible forms of existence. Rabasa observes that “whether under the rule of capital, the state, or history, the prevailing story is that there is no outside to these structures” (2010, p. 3). He then goes on to argue that “capital, the state, and history can be observed, worked on, manipulated, and avoided from perspectives that cannot be simply translated into Western discourses (...)” (2010, p. 3). Following this rationale, there would be a “without history” that bears a corresponding “without state”. Consequently, we could thus turn the absence into a productive “exteriority,” into a “beyond” that I intend to explore as a way to keep modernity and its nationalist modes of domination prudently at bay.

## **2. TOWARDS A “THEORY OF LOCALITY”**

There are three “beyond” I wish to discuss as ways to envision an ethos that attends to the voices, the daily practices, the forms of memory, and the strategies of

mobilization that societies in movement have devised to counteract domination. There is a necessity to reflect on reality beyond, among others, three well-entrenched liberal concepts of modernity: an “imagined community”; a homogeneous citizenship based on individual rights, and the existence of the nation-state itself.

Let me start with the concept of the nation, nowadays too easily interpreted as an “imagined community.”

Rereading the classics in the social sciences, one begins to notice that even authors who analyze social reality from the perspective of class struggle tend to interpret societies as organic “wholes,” subject to rules of analysis that reinforce the criteria of unity and homogeneity through which human events are usually evaluated. The same is true when, as often occurs in the study of postcolonial societies, a historical analysis ignores the deep ethnic and social divisions that mark political life in nations like Bolivia. Similarly, concepts as important to the study of social organizations as “national culture” are based on a straightforward assumption of a supposed national cohesiveness that simply does not correspond to reality. This is a debatable Hegelian-style European model proclaiming the lineal, enlightened construction of modernity, which after overcoming all the obstacles that present-day reality has strewn in its path, will necessarily lead to the future social utopia, be it capitalist or socialist. Like García Linera’s *capitalismo andino*, this inalterable course of historical events, this rectilinear path to seizing

control of the state, is based on a profound conviction that the various historical and economic cycles will follow, one after another, without ever casting doubt on the lineal and progressive character of History.

As I reflect upon the discourse surrounding the Andean nation—which, because it deals with the collective organization of the people, is the most important discourse in the enlightened construction of modernity—I notice that, when critics talk about imagining the nation, they rarely take the complex relationship between nation and ethnicity into account as they should. In other words, it is important to ask oneself whether an explanation of the nation also calls for an ethnic component, or whether the nation itself, unmoored from any situation predating its own organization, is the sole source of nationalism. To my way of understanding, the nation, approached from the local, can only be theorized in strict relationship with the theme of ethnicity, which is linked to profound cultural conflicts that influential thinkers on modernity have ignored. For Benedict Anderson (1983), the origin of the nation lies in a “print-capitalist” nationalism that emerged from the sphere of the educated elite. This nationalism swallows up ethnic differences with a Eurocentric vision that overlooks or minimizes local conflicts.

The “persistence of ‘then’ within ‘now,’” Ernst Bloch’s happy definition of the simultaneous and conflictive presence of the non-modern into the historical

time of modernity (Bloch, [1918] 1990, p. 129), can be seen in the stubborn present of “ethnic identities on the move” (Zibechi, 2009). These identities, uncomfortably grafted into the project of Latin American nation-building, are left unexplored in Anderson’s construction of his “imagined communities.”

Forged from the point of view of the lettered elites, this imaginary community comes under harshly criticism in a brief review by subalternist historian Ranajit Guha (1985). The validity of the Andean thesis is based, as I have indicated, on a foundation of print capitalism, which from Guha’s point of view carries a problematic colonialist touch. If we were to overlook the fact that the spread of Western liberal ideas organized the political nationalism of the colonized peoples, Guha argues that we could fall into the error of ignoring the stubborn nationalism of the masses.

According to Guha, in preindustrial societies (Bolivia fits perfectly in Guha’s scheme), where the peasantry is a major social force and with unmistakable politics, traditional values that clash with liberal culture prone ideas and with the political aspirations of the bourgeoisie are often set aside and given no importance. Omitting this working-class experience of nationalism makes it impossible for Anderson to set out a more balanced explanation of the “origins” of the nation. Guha declares that reducing the language to an expression of print-capitalism is problematic for two reasons: first, because it ignores of

everyday spoken language; second, because it uncritically accepts the discourse about modernity and the historical time that establishes it.

Guha's argument against basing the discourse of the nation exclusively on linear time is convincing. In Bolivia, if we take into account the multiple times the indigenous rebellions have haunted the construction of the nation, there are moments in national history when the community's self-image ceases to line up with the horizon of expectations in modernity. These are moments when the community returns to itself and follows a cyclical time, quite unlike the time of the flow of history. Historical time has its setbacks, its lapses, which participate in aspects of millenarianism, of utopianism, and which function as "resources of the present" that call the triumphal march of history into question.

A second "beyond" has to do with my long-standing concern with how Latin American social science promoted institutional "engineering" in the recent past. For social science concentrated in exploring modern "governability," social movement were anomalous destabilizing forces, alien to democratic institutionalization and incapable of adjusting to the new formal representative political arena. The "Water War" and the "War on Gas" revealed later on what Bolivian political technocrats were missing all along: a solid understanding of how ethnic identities on the move had been contributing to the relations between culture and politics within the struggle for democracy.

Societies on the move such as the ones operating in El Alto or in El Chapare have advanced a conception of democracy that transcends the limits both of political institutions and of “actually existing democracy.” Indeed, the distinctive feature of this conception, which points toward the extension and deepening of democracy, is the fact that it has as a basic reference not the democratization of the political regime but of society as a whole, including therefore the cultural practices embodied in social relations of exclusion and inequality. Evelina Dagnino points out regarding the politics of culture in Latin America, particularly in Brazil, that what urban popular movements had to struggle for was not only their social rights, but their very right to have rights (2008, p. 305). Dagnino goes on to indicate that

(...) the right to have rights exposes what had to be a political struggle against a pervasive culture of social authoritarianism (...) establishing a common ground for articulation with other social movements that are more obviously cultural, such as ethnic, women’s, ecological, and human rights movements. (Dagnino, 2008, p. 306.)

This meant that the term “citizenship” had to be re-appropriated, enlarged, conceived beyond the view of citizenship as an alluring individual integration to the market.

Dagnino’s main argument is that the redefinition of the notion of citizenship, as formulated by societies in movement, expresses not only a political strategy but also a renewed cultural politics. This implies the need to

distinguish the new citizenship of the last decade from the liberal tradition, which ended up misconceiving the concept. Indeed, the new conception of citizenship is not limited to the “constituted” legal provisions or the effective implementation of abstract, formal rights. It involves the creation of new rights, new “constitutive” situations which emerge from specific struggles and their concrete practices. This redefinition, this shifting from constituted into new constitutive rights, comes to include not only the right to equality but also difference. Broadening and deepening the right to equality involves the gradual political incorporation of excluded sectors, beyond the strategy of the dominant classes and the state. Consequently, the new citizenship transcends the liberal claim to access, inclusion, membership, and belonging to the constitutional political system.

Let me now explore the third and last “beyond” I wish to discuss throughout the last part of this essay. The redefinition of citizenship, which is no longer confined within the limits of the relationship with the state, but must be established within civil society itself, must move beyond the conceptualization of the nation-state. Pushed to the extreme, “beyond the nation-state” means “the total transformation of liberal society” (Patzi Paco, 2004), the end to the hegemony of liberal modernity, based on the notion of formal rights and representative democracy, and the activation of communal forms of organization based on indigenous practices. But only a society in

movement, where autonomous social actors get to play, like in Bolivia, an important cultural and political role, might they be able to push the social formation towards the elusive goal of postliberalism. In this respect, Arturo Escobar argues cogently that “beyond the nation-state” also means moving beyond the “Right-Left” political spectrum. It means entertaining the idea of a space where de-colonial politics and postliberalism emerge “as two aspects of the process by which some groups in Bolivia are imagining, and perhaps constructing “worlds and knowledges otherwise” (Escobar, 2010, p. 24)

As Walter Mignolo has theorized in his studies on “local histories” (Mignolo, 2000), and Pablo Mamani reflected in his studies on indigenous autonomies (2008), “worlds and knowledges otherwise” implies a great political, cultural, ideological, and territorial organization between the indigenous and the popular. For Mamani, the new scheme would mean that “the indigenous appears as the orienting matrix of the project, whereas the popular constitutes the ideological matrix of the new political articulation” (2008, p. 23). From the Aymara intellectual perspective, the indigenous-popular world in movement sets in motion a steady process of social reconstruction from the local and the communal to the regional and the national. While the MAS project, particularly García Linera’s developmental economics, aims at reconstructing the social order from the heights of the state, the indigenous-popular project goes “beyond the



nation-state” to focus on the people mobilized as a turbulent multiplicity—the metaphor expressing this turbulence, this rush of people, is “avalanche”—and on the actions of a communal social machine which disperses the forms of power of the state machine (Escobar, 2010, p. 29; Zibechi, 2006, p. 161).

### **3. THE “COMMUNAL SYSTEM”: AYMARA POLITICS OF PLACE**

The distinction between the “communal forms” and the “state forms” allows Aymara intellectuals to envision forms of self-regulation beyond the modern state and its temporal organization of society. Indeed, understanding communal life means not reducing it to the temporal structures of power, which remain teleological and linear. If history is characterized as the study of the temporal other existing in the past, the communal reminds that if the past is the only temporality we can experience, we do it under the paradoxical “now.” This takes me back to my early assertion regarding the removal, or at least the indefinite deferral of the future. Since the future seems to have been emptied of its promise of progress, its evacuation from the experience of the present has led to contemporary appeals to a new temporal regime pronouncing the advent of the expanded present. This new temporal regime is the communal.

One of the more careful conjugations performed by modern industrialized societies has been to conceal

the awareness within their own precincts and often discordant temporalities. Yet we know that capitalism has always been “contaminated” with prior modes of production and that what Marx described as formal subsumption—the partial subordination of labor to capital—would continue to coexist with the process of real subsumption until the last instance, until the final achievement of the commodity form. It is the specter of the past in the present that has come back in the figure of what Harry Harootunian describes as the “non-contemporaneous contemporaneity” (2007). Instead of Benedict Anderson’s articulation of both capital and the nation form, Aymara intellectuals propose a “theory of locality” which articulates the ambiguous mixtures of modern and archaic, the past and the present recalling for us a historical *déjà vu* and welding together different modes of existence aimed at overcoming the unevenness of lives endlessly reproduced.

The Aymara calls for communalism do not share, as José Rabasa has noted, an alternative socialist state but a “politics of place,” a theory of locality that is not bound by the Western logic of capitalism and socialism as an alternative administration of capital. In so doing, communal thinkers recuperate memories of earlier Indian insurgencies in order to break up with and move beyond the dominant forms of the nation-state. Without any predetermined political system to follow, Aymara intellectuals build on strong subjectivities that are connected to the

recuperation of memories exterior to the logic of either capitalism or socialism. Rabasa points out that societies in movement should be seen “as cultural forms where the modern and the non-modern are compatible” (2010, p. 57). Furthermore, indigenous social movements, as well as their multiple subject positions are deeply “eschatological” though not “teleological.” Rabasa recalls here Walter Benjamin’s distinction between “progress” and *Jetztzeit*, the “time of the now.” Like Benjamin, communal thinkers would confront “progress,” “what keeps the Angel of History from redeeming the past,” with a “revolutionary violence” exterior to the logic of socialism and capitalism.

In his “Critique of Violence” (1999), Benjamin develops the concept of “pure violence,” of “revolutionary violence”: that be neither making nor preserving the law, but by deposing it, this act “inaugurates a new historical epoch.” In this sense, “revolutionary violence,” “pure violence” expresses the turbulence that haunts power structures. In the Bolivian case, recent huge demonstrations against Evo’s government, both in urban and in mining areas where government support is traditionally high, are indicative of the presence of multitudes that, in Rabasa’s view, always carry in their constitution the force of multiple singularities that cannot be reduced to a formal state. Rabasa indicates, and rightly so, that “it hardly makes a difference if the state in question is conceived as including a plurality of nations, if one ends up

with a plurality of forms of preserving the regime of law and system of property.” He adds:

if the state is an inevitable reality one faces today, revolutionary violence would seek to dismantle the state—not to reform the state—to construct a new world in which the state would disappear. (Rabasa, 2010, p. 257.)

Going back to communalism and the politics of place not bounded by the Western logic of capitalism, it is clear that communal thinkers emerge from the historically fixed materiality of the social groups involved in such politics. Their point of departure are the local non-state and non-liberal forms of politics and social life. These forms, which constitute the “communal system,” anchor their power in collectivity, in indigenous societies. Ay-mara sociologist Félix Patzi Paco indicates that

in contradistinction to modern societies, indigenous societies have not reproduced the patterns of differentiation nor the separation among domains (political, economic, cultural, etc.). They thus function as a single system that relates to both internal and external environments (...). (Patzi Paco, 2004, p. 171-2.)

In Patzi’s proposal of a “communal system” beyond the nation-state, this system can appropriate the liberal environment without this implying the transformation of the system. As a clear indication of his reliance on the temporal structure of the “non-contemporaneous contemporaneity,” Patzi’s system is not predicated on excluding any group. The communal system can utilize the “know-how” and the technological advances of liberal society, but subordinates them to the communal logic.

The communal also benefits from technology and becomes more competitive. Arturo Escobar describes Patzi's proposal as not being

a call for a new hegemony, but for an end for the hegemony of any system, to take leave of the universal modernity and move into the pluriverse of interculturality, and as a way to build more symmetrical relations among cultures. (Escobar, 2010, p. 32.)

As an Aymara theory of locality, Patzi's communalism is neither romantic nor essentializing. Incorporating the past into the expanded present implies neither purity nor timeless cultures. Patzi historicizes the liberal present and places the communal and the liberal systems as part of the same social space. Consequently, his envisioning of the Andean "non-contemporaneous contemporaneity" implies that Patzi does not conceive the communal and the liberal existing separate from each other. In this sense, it is important to avoid implying that the indigenous in "non-modern" because in many ways it is more than that. It does not imply the rejection of modernity. Even foundational modern notions such as growth and technology have place within a perspective of indigenous modernity and non-modernity. It simply means that indigenous communities in movement apply another rationality to their life-world, different from the purely economic one.

Finally, we may ask ourselves if it is possible to move from the communal into the postliberal alternative to modernity. The term communal implies an epistemic rupture with Western discourses of the sort we scholars

with different degrees of conviction produce in association with the nation-state. In relation to the possible construction of a postliberal, postcapitalist society, Evo's government constitutes a paradigmatic case of a turbulent relationship between a self-declared revolutionary state and the growing dissatisfaction of indigenous-popular mobilizations. This indicates that we must stop being complacent about the so-called "return to the Left" in Latin America. As both Rabasa and Coronil reflect on the new political status quo of the Left, the state remains a repressive power that steps on human rights, and a protector of capital without future. Rabasa indicates that it makes little sense to talk of a plurinational state, "if one ends up with a plurality of forms of preserving the regime of law and system of property" (2010, p. 257). If the plurinational state that was born out of the *Asamblea Constituyente*—the "constituent power" that marked for Bolivia the transition in 2007 to a new constitution and its corresponding "constituted power"—is a reality today, will it be ample enough to recognize and protect the non-Western, indigenous communal systems? Will the relation between them be so light that the two players will be relying always on the force of law or pure means? Will "state terror" be frequently invoked in order to preserve the law?

Evo Morales's government also constitutes an attempt at relocating a plurality of people within the familiarizing narrative of the nation. In relation with the rebellions

of the past, Evo's government is closer to amnesia than remembering, having the intended effect of smothering the uncanny nature of collective memory. Clearly developmental in its aims, it abides by historical time. The plurinational state seems to forget that history differs from memory in its presumption of a singular, universal time rather than coexisting multiple times that correspond to the memories of different temporalities proper to indigenous societies in movement. As Harry Harootunian indicates, "the artificiality of the historical contrasts sharply with a transtemporal memory, which mixes the past experiences with those of the immediate now being lived." And reflecting on Maurice Halbwach's "collective memory," Harootunian adds: "If History is concerned with changes, with breaks that actually shorten time, memory cultivates resemblances to insure the continuous passage of past into present" (2007, p. 492).

Imbued by memory and preoccupied with the historical present, societies in movement have managed to balance the cyclical time of their collective memory with a political project of liberation inscribed in a Marxian narrative of modernity. It is a narrative free of the nation-state as well as of progressive mythologies. At the same time, societies in movement inhabit the perennial present of the contemporary world and the global dominant they are combating. What these perspectives offer is a model of a historical present in which the temporality of non-contemporaneous contemporaneity must live

in permanent tension, in “revolutionary violence” with the expansion of capital and its continuous reproduction in new registers. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to affirm the postliberal, postdevelopmental alternative to modernity. What we might still attempt to do in this current conjuncture to displace a single modernity, to suspend it at the epistemic and ontological levels, is to begin the difficult labor of creating a discourse on modernity

centered principally in understanding the history of our present as the unity of uneven times differentiating global geopolitical space, rather than merely affirming or cheering on a globalizing project that sees the world only as a true space of the commodity relation. (Harootunian, 2007, p. 493.)

And the appeal to past icons may also help express the ongoing struggles towards a better world. I use the notion “embers of the past” (2009) to evoke memory’s capacity to energize and illuminate present struggles, and, above all, to ignite new conflagrations. Likewise, José Rabasa invokes Artur Rimbaud’s *orgie* as the aesthetic of insurgency in line with the concept of “pure violence,” and Fernando Coronil recalls Marx’s “poetry of the future” as the emancipating imagining capable of freeing the present from the burden of the past. The three notions are sensible to the durational present and to the role played by mixed times in political struggles rather than merely the primacy of a single historical configuration. They express the idea that the turbulent “now” cannot be interpreted as a constituting part of a lineal, teleological succession.



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