

Performative politics:

The Camba countermovement in eastern Bolivia

ABSTRACT

Evo Morales, the indigenous, leftist president of Bolivia, has faced serious challenges to his social-democratic project. His new constitution and proposals for redistributive legislation have sparked much resistance from white elites in the country's eastern region. In this article, I explore the component elements of right-wing movement building in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, which include festive and celebratory performances of regional pride and paramilitaristic carnivals of violence. I suggest that these kinds of spectacles—one of invented cultural tradition, the other of aggression and brutality—represent the desperate attempt of a minority white, mestizo population to restore political and economic order through extralegal means. [*right wing, cultural performance, violence, political economy*]

The 2005 election of President Evo Morales, the indigenous, leftist leader of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement toward Socialism; MAS), marked a critical transformation in Bolivian history. In a radical challenge to the neoliberal model, Morales and his movement have worked to refound the nation-state—nationalizing the country's oil and gas industries, accelerating redistributive land reform, and rewriting the constitution to incorporate the indigenous majority. These moves have sparked explosive reactions from conservative elites, who have responded with racially charged demands for regional autonomy and with paramilitary violence to oppose the popular indigenous challenge (Fabricant and Gustafson in press).

Ethnographic research with violent right-wing fringe groups is notoriously difficult and dangerous, but because I was already studying the Landless Peasant Movement (MST) in the department of Santa Cruz (Fabricant 2009),¹ I became an inadvertent witness to the growth and widespread appeal of this countermovement, which relied on festive performances of regional pride and spectacular forms of violence. As time passed, I became increasingly fascinated—and alarmed—by the success with which Santa Cruz elites managed to build a 500,000-person movement to contest the larger indigenous-campesino mobilizations and inculcate their conservative ideology—a process largely unexamined by academics, most of whom, I among them, have more sympathy for progressive causes and have shied away from close engagement with conservative movements (Edelman 2001). Yet, to sufficiently analyze new leftist movements of the 21st century, we must also turn our attention toward the obstacles they face: the growing economic power and military influence of rightist organizations in Latin America.

Much insightful scholarly work on new social movements is situated in the symbolic realm of politics and focuses on cultural struggles over identity, lifestyles, and postmaterial values (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Laclau 1985; Melucci 1989, 1996; Tourraine 1988, 2000). Here I recontextualize

these themes and examine them vis-à-vis the political economy of the region and the state (di Leonardo 1998; Lancaster 1992; Roseberry 1989; Wolf 1982). William Roseberry best articulates this theoretical positioning as culture and political economy or an “attempt to understand the emergence of particular peoples at the conjunction of local and global histories, to place local populations in the larger currents of world history . . . to see the constant interplay between experience and meaning, in a context in which both are shaped by differential access to wealth and power” (1989:49–50). I start with the long *durée* of rightist politics in the region to illustrate that separatist sentiment did not begin in the Morales era but, rather, that performances of resistance to the national government are part and parcel of a long history of uneven geographic development and natural resource extraction. Although a turn toward identity might be seductive, I assert that new forms of symbolic and cultural politics in Bolivia have everything to do with historical elite investment in extractive industries, such as petroleum, gas, and, more recently, soy. Linguistic distinctions between highlander and lowlander, Indian and mestizo, only bolster territorial claims to land and natural resources by shifting the focus away from economics and onto race and ethnicity. Initially, for instance, *Cruceño* was a term used to describe a person of pure Spanish blood, and *Camba*, a Guaraní word, described a dark-skinned indigenous peasant, a peon tied to the finca, or plantation, by debt (Stearman 1985). More recently, however, elites have appropriated the term *Camba* for themselves: de-Indianizing it, whitening it, and making it an acceptable designation for elites despite their identity as Europeans (Pruden 2003). In post-social revolution eastern Bolivia, *Camba* has become a regional rather than a racial term, referring to anyone born in that lowland zone. Lowlanders demonstrate their cultural as well as geographical superiority over their highland counterparts, whom they refer to as “Collas” (from the Quechua word *Kollasuyo*, the Bolivian sector of the Inca Empire). Such symbolic or linguistic categories have also been critical in determining regional citizenship, rights to the city, and territorial claims to peripheral land.

It is no coincidence that Santa Cruz has recently surfaced as the epicenter of a growing anti-Morales movement; after all, it is the agroindustrial capital of Bolivia, accounting for 42 percent of the nation’s agricultural output. The economic model underlying regional development is one of large-scale agrarian production, speculative landholding, and natural resource extraction (Gustafson 2006). Tarija, a neighboring lowland department, accounts for 80 percent of the natural gas. With only five percent of Bolivia’s population, Tarija’s share of royalties and taxes from gas production could disproportionately influence the distribution of future economic investment throughout the country. Elite groups that stand to benefit from such economic prosperity have joined forces to promote political decentralization in the *media luna* (a reference to the crescent-moon shape of



Figure 1. Rightist vision of the media luna (area labeled República Oriental de Bolivia). Courtesy Nación Camba.

Bolivia’s eastern lowland area). At the same time, the rightist power block illustrated in Figure 1 indicates that such political independence could provide the executive power necessary for elites to consolidate their claims to natural resources in the lowlands.

By staging a series of spectacular events, such as those that took place during the week of December 7, 2006, right-wing Comité Pro Santa Cruz, or Santa Cruz Civic Committee, leaders built an urban base of support and ultimately created a powerful social movement with credibility in the eyes of outside observers, such as U.S. journalists and officials. I analyze the component elements of right-wing movement building: the appropriation by whites of selective aspects of lowland Bolivian indigenous culture, that of the Guaraní, and spectacular performances of symbolic and real violence in critical urban spaces to inculcate working-class youth into movement politics and implement extralegal forms of governance in the region. I focus on theatrics of shared cultural identity and violence because these performative shows encapsulate and transmit plotlines of historical privilege and territorial power, racial hierarchies, and spatial hegemonies (Taylor 1997:76).

Much anthropological work has centered on spectacle, or cultural performance as ritual, drama, and carnival, as offering a critique of the existing social system by presenting alternative forms of living and social ordering (Goldstein 2004; Guss 2000; Mendoza 2000). Daniel Goldstein (2004) argues that spectacles, like other public events, are systems for the creation and transformation of society. They

are “locations of communication that convey participants into versions of social order in relatively coherent ways” (Goldstein 2004:16). Further, he suggests that such theatrics have the capacity to serve as both models for and mirrors of cultural reality, which gives them powerful resonance as instruments for maintaining the status quo.

Beyond spectacles as reflecting social and cultural realities, I am interested in what spectacle makes possible through the bold, intensely visual display of regional power and pride. Although elite-backed public spectacle is an attempt to make certain things dramatically visible, it is also, by extension, an attempt to render things invisible (Goldstein 2004). As early as 1867, Karl Marx (1977) described the key role of mystification in the creation of commodities, whose allure does not reveal but, rather, veils the true nature of social relations under capitalism. Identity-based performances, the public celebration of the region’s most beautiful women, and the ritualized burning of effigies of the president hide or mask the true intentions of destructive economic and social policies of accumulation by dispossession or the commoditization and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations by militant youth groups. To expose the workings of the capitalist system, one must move beyond the surface level of appearances and festivity to the underlying and structuring mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production: exploitation and control through violence. It is also important to note that “the state [or regional power bloc], with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes” (Harvey 2003:145).

It is within this context that elite-backed paramilitary youth groups such as the Union Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC) impose an imagined order on both regional and national space by intimidating, threatening, and publicly assaulting Andean migrants.² Their unrestrained violence on indigenous bodies and peripheral communities exposes the structural inequalities underneath the celebratory public face of spectacle. Violence reveals the instability of elite power, exposing the limits of spectacle as a projection and mirror of a particular social order (Gustafson 2006:371). Whereas public festivals might hide the true political and economic ambitions of elite Cambas, spectacular violence pulls back the curtain on a severely weakened right wing and has only served to embolden Morales’s social-democratic project.

Tracing the historical, political, and economic base of regionalism

Three historical periods—the early national period, the Chaco War, and the 1952 Social Revolution—illustrate how discourses of regionalism in Bolivia are connected to efforts by particular groups to control material assets. In the early national period, Cruceños developed a powerful dis-

course of geographic isolation to push for a transportation system that would aid economic modernization. Because the overwhelming proportion of Bolivia’s population and wealth was located in the western departments, Santa Cruz, situated in the east, was not at the center of the new nation’s political life (Klein 2003; Palmer 1979). From the beginning, Santa Cruz registered its resistance to policies of the central government. The first organized revolution occurred in 1924, an event that came to be known as the “railway revolt.” This Cruceño resistance movement expressed white residents’ concern that the growth of their local economy—primarily, the development of agriculture in northern Santa Cruz—was constrained by the isolation of the department and the lack of markets. Delegates from the city of Santa Cruz traveled to La Paz to demand a direct connection to the highlands and foreign markets through the construction of a railway. The lack of support from other parts of the nation, the weakness of the regional economy, and the power of highland mining interests all contributed to the rebellion’s short duration, and the national government remained firm in its commitment to building railroads on the altiplano while effectively ignoring the lowlands (Gill 1987:27–28).

Although they were not successful, elites in Santa Cruz manipulated a language of isolation and political independence from the republic to promote capitalist expansion. Thus, much of the historical lowland resentment toward the central government extended beyond issues of geography and access to roads to broader political and economic questions regarding the development of potential trade routes leading to Europe and the United States. However, lowland ambitions for transportation systems and broad-based economic development would not be met until after the Chaco War.

The Chaco War (1932–35),³ fought between Bolivia and Paraguay over control of the arid Chaco Boreal region, marked the beginning of important changes that reshaped Santa Cruz in subsequent decades (Gill 1987:30). Bolivia’s devastating defeat and the loss of a major portion of the Chaco territory to Paraguay brought drastic shifts in the nation’s political and economic systems. The need to mobilize troops and supplies had motivated the government to upgrade the route connecting Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. A brief upsurge in agricultural production was generated by the need to feed soldiers fighting on the front. The territorial loss to Paraguay, however, caused further discontent over the department’s isolation and refueled a debate over the need for a railroad. In the aftermath of the Chaco disaster, elite Cruceños promoted a form of economic development that was not based solely on mining but also included intensive capitalist agriculture (Kohl and Farthing 2006).

These events finally put an end to lowland isolation from other nations by leading to more strategic relations with Brazil and Argentina, as these nations were interested in Bolivia’s gas and petroleum reserves. During

the brief government of German Busch (1937–39), Brazil and Argentina agreed to build railroads from Santa Cruz to Corumba and Yacuiba in exchange for gas and oil sales. The railroads established an important base for future development. A 1938 law that recognized departmental participation in hydrocarbon production allowed Santa Cruz to collect an 11 percent tax on all petroleum and natural gas extracted within its boundaries (Kirshner 2008). These earnings grew substantially when production intensified in later years, and the law represented a significant victory for the dominant classes (Gill 1987:44).

Regionalist sentiment also came to a head in the days before the 1952 revolution, when local elites opposed the potentially “redistributive” proposals of left-wing reformers (Kohl and Farthing 2006). During this period, a group of businessmen created the Civic Committee to protect and preserve their private economic interests (Klein 1992:215). In 1957, the allocation of oil revenues provided them, once again, with a convenient issue to contest the central government’s rule and the power of Sandoval Moron, then the president of Bolivia. The committee members demanded that a larger portion of the oil revenues generated in the department be earmarked for local expenditure, and in light of the historical neglect displayed by past national governments, they managed to rally considerable support for their cause. To further promote their campaign, they emphasized their Spanish, non-Indian heritage to claim inherent rights to such resources as the direct heirs of the conquistadores. The Civic Committee of Santa Cruz won its battle for a larger share of oil revenues and dedicated this income to a series of expensive regional development projects, which favored large-scale agricultural and urban-based industry. These episodes of resistance to the central government formed the historical backbone of the powerful contemporary right-wing Camba movement. The themes that had infused them—geography and historical marginalization, ethnic–racial differences, economic expansion, and strong opposition to redistributive proposals—set the stage for the present conflict.

Recently, there has been a marked resurgence of Bolivian regionalism, fomented by elites as they began to lose their grip on political and economic power (Gustafson 2006; Peña 2003; Sandoval 2003). Simultaneously, the dominant classes have faced rising indigenous–popular movements calling for a democratic socialist agenda: the redistribution of land, the nationalization of state resources such as oil and gas, and the formation of a constituent assembly that would rewrite the constitution to encourage more inclusive politics. The most powerful stimulus for the recent incarnation of the elite movement was the significant cutbacks in diesel subsidies that occurred in December 2004. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) insisted on this policy change to reduce the government deficit.⁴ IMF demands for reducing diesel subsidies provoked a powerful social re-



Figure 2. Map of Bolivia.

sponse: 250,000 people rallied in central Santa Cruz (Kohl and Farthing 2006).⁵ Initial requests for continued diesel subsidies soon translated into calls for departmental autonomy to ensure that cotton, sugar, and soy producers would have access to cheap fuel, pointing toward the connection between autonomy and agribusiness interests in the region. The unrest spread to the southern department of Tarija, where people blocked roads to the Argentinean border, demanding that the proposed refinanced state hydrocarbons company be headquartered in their department, near the gas fields (see Figure 2).

Although the cutbacks in diesel sparked the initial mass mobilization, eastern elites had experienced a steady loss of power over the previous six years. Since 1985, Santa Cruz business interests had controlled more than their fair share of government ministries and traditional ruling-party leadership positions. When Carlos Mesa entered office in 2003, many of those privileges disappeared. The new president sought to bolster his authority by constructing an extra-congressional alliance with MAS and by engaging in direct negotiations with Morales (Eaton 2007). According to Vladimir Ameller, “Negotiations between Mesa and Morales at the national level were much more troubling to Santa Cruz elites than efforts by Sánchez de Lozada in the 1990s to draw in indigenous groups at the municipal level” (Eaton 2007:83). Mesa’s dialogue with Morales was particularly threatening because no one from Santa Cruz’s powerful agricultural sector was invited into the presidential cabinet. Unable to dominate the 2005 elections, Santa Cruz elites shifted their focus to regional concerns and calls for departmental autonomy, over which they thought they could exert greater control (Kohl and Farthing 2006).⁶

As illustrated by the following cases, regionalist and separatist discourses emerged in distinct historical periods as tools for elites to claim control over regional surpluses. The performativity of right-wing movement building, however, has proven characteristic of the contemporary

moment. The unraveling of 30 years of neoliberal reforms, loss of political and economic power, worsening indexes of inequality, and the rise of the indigenous populist movement have raised the stakes, heightened the sense of risk for elites, and set the stage for new creative and theatrical outlets of conservative politicking.

Appropriation of lowland Bolivian indigenous culture

Although right-wing politicians historically vilified traditional indigenous communities as savage and antimodern, Civic Committee leaders, along with the UJC, now make use of Guaraní culture in their civic festivals and parades to forge a shared ethnic identity. In part, this use has much to do with Morales's highly successful manipulation of highland indigenous culture in his rise to the presidency. But, whereas Morales appropriated the symbolism of Aymara identity to decolonize the nation-state, Cambas have sought to use the same strategy to launch their conservative autonomy campaign. As Bolivians of European origin, they are obviously unable to show a genuinely indigenous face, so they have constructed a hybrid identity paradigm mixing Cruceño and Guaraní Indian,⁷ using an adroitly manufactured shared past and contemporary narrative of resistance out of what is actually a history of white supremacy and exploitation. One of the most astute aspects of this ideology is its appeal to urban working- and middle-class youth, who feel threatened by the highlanders moving into their neighborhoods and competing for limited resources. The city of Santa Cruz has grown rapidly from a town of 43,000 inhabitants in the 1950s to a major metropolitan center of 1.4 million in 2005. Initially, the state promoted highland to lowland migration as part of its "March to the East" program, which sought to colonize the eastern lowlands and provide much-needed agricultural laborers for expanding sugar industries. In the wake of the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, however, migration flows intensified and shifted from rural to urban settlement patterns, and working-class youth were forced to compete with Andean migrants for the same limited pool of jobs. Now, in a striking departure from previous racial myths, these youth draw inspiration from political tales of the Guaraní as Amazonian "warriors" who protected their economic and territorial interests by standing up to attempts by the highland Inca Empire to expand into the lowlands.

Cambas have seized on mythic tales and appropriated the Guaraní warrior as a central character in their performances of autonomy. Such folkloric accounts, initially recorded by Swedish ethnologist Erland Nordenskiöld in 1917, chronicle the encounter of lowland Guaraní warriors with the Inca Empire in the foothills of the Andes during the early 16th century (Pruden 2003). According to these accounts, the Inca could not overcome the force of the

Guaraní militia and "no pudo bajar" [literally, could not come down, i.e., could not continue their advance into the lowlands]. Both Hernán Pruden (2003) and Kathleen Lowrey (2006), however, clarify the actual history behind this tale. In contrast to the contemporary elite version, with its imagery of resistance to imperialism, the ethnohistoric documents do not clearly indicate whether Inca imperial ambitions encompassed a desire to expand into Guaraní land or whether the battle was initiated by the Guaraní during an ambitious incursion into the far margins of Inca-held territory in search of access to mines. Nevertheless, Cruceño scholars of the contemporary period have shaped their account to present the Guaraní warrior as a powerful and unstoppable force against the Inca Empire. Pruden (2003) persuasively argues that this new version of the historical incident allows the later lowland encounter of white Spaniards and noble Guaranís to be framed as a "kind of clash of the titans" rather than a casual colonial foray by a powerful empire into an unimportant hinterland. In the 20th and 21st centuries, groups that feel newly threatened by highland Indians find such fragmented narratives appealing as myths of successful ancestral resistance to their Colla counterparts.

Guaraní as sign and symbol of rightist politics

I left my house one afternoon at approximately 3 p.m. to share a cup of coffee with a friend in the center of the city. As we walked through the plaza, we were swept up into a massive demonstration of youth carrying signs reading "Autonomía, ya" and "Basta El Centralismo de MAS" [Enough of the centralism of MAS]. The crowd, primarily young men, paraded down the main streets from the Civic Committee office (in the second ring of the city) through the Casco Viejo (old city), leaving green and white confetti in its wake, and eventually marched into the central plaza. Some of the men screamed, "Evo Evo Cabrón, Evo Evo Cabrón, Evo Evo Cabrón—La puta que te parió!" [Evo, Evo, you bastard, and God damn the prostitute of a mother who gave birth to you!]. A metal platform, set up in a far corner of the plaza, featured two large amplifiers. The intense beat of a live lowland band filled the air; the drums vibrated behind a deep, rhythmic melody, and the trombones blared. The music then shifted to a recorded song, "Viva Santa Cruz, bella tierra de mi corazón" (Long live Santa Cruz, the beautiful land of my heart). Camba youth grabbed partners and started dancing in small circles. Fireworks blasted in my ear like construction drills hammering away at concrete. Blues, reds, and greens rained down on the skyscraper-cluttered skyline of Santa Cruz.

The green and white flags formed a kind of parachute billowing in the wind. Some of the flags shouted "Autonomía Sí o Sí," and others demanded "Democracia." The colors green and white represent the region of Santa Cruz



Figure 3. Elite Cambas at an autonomy parade. Photo by N. Fabricant.

and have come to symbolize autonomy; the green is said to represent natural beauty and abundance, the riches of the frontier, and the white symbolizes the pure Spanish lineage and nobility inherited from the colonial period. Youths had painted green and white flags on their bald heads and naked chests, giving new dimensions to what Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) called “bodies of meaning.” Through the use of green and white paint and highly charged political messages regarding the two-thirds majority needed to pass legislation,⁸ Cruceño youth turned their bodies into billboards, colorfully displaying their political perspective on bare heads and chests (see Figure 3).

Interspersed among the green and white flags of Santa Cruz were green and black flags. The green again stands for the limitless possibilities of the Amazonian region, but the black represents petroleum as a principal mineral resource of the Nación Camba (the Camba Nation Movement; NC).⁹ The demonstrators also waved giant flags bearing the image of an eagle, emblematic of movement politics. This historically fascist symbol, revived through rightist groups such as Nación Camba, symbolizes worldwide opposition to class struggles against capitalism.

Physically, the demonstrators looked like typical Civic Committee members, but rather than their usual apparel of khaki slacks and white button-down shirts, on that day, these white men were dressed as Guaraní peasants, sporting flowing white collared shirts and matching cotton pants, large straw hats, and traditional *barco* sandals. Instead of cell phones and wallets, their costumes were completed by slingshots and water gourds slung over their right shoulders. Like Peruvian elites of the 19th century, as described by Marisol de la Cadena in *Indigenous Mestizos* (2000), these Cruceños used folk performances to claim national and regional identities. In the Camba case, these performances

use the image of the lowland Indian to assert a claim to regional autonomy.

The crowd suddenly broke into shouts of, “Iyambae, Iyambae, Iyambae,” a Guaraní phrase that Cruceños gloss as “Somos un pueblo sin dueño” [We are a town without a leader, i.e., We reject the authority of Evo Morales]. Adopting not just the clothing but also the language of the Guaraní, elites claimed this ethnic group as *lo nuestro* (our own), just as they asserted rights to the natural resources on and below their soil.

Through performances of a shared Guaraní culture and Cruceño identity in the central plaza, Civic Committee members rewrite their history and the larger material or political-economic intentions of such spectacular movement-building events. Their celebrations of lowland identity, which thrive on the power of dance, parades, and festivals, give their cause credibility as an issue of cultural pride and identity, a powerful political claim in the 21st century, rather than frame it as a nakedly economic issue of complete control over all gas and oil deposits and the attendant displacement of indigenous communities, especially Guaraní communities in the Chaco region. It is important to note, then, that whereas expeditions and conquests in the late 1800s depended on assertions of pure Spanish blood to acquire material assets, in this new racial politics of the Andes, it is suddenly necessary for Europeans to claim a shared identity with the very people they previously attempted to eradicate.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger’s (1983) well-known concept of “invented tradition” is useful for thinking about the creation of a shared Cruceño–Guaraní past. Hobsbawm and Ranger argue that invented tradition is a set of ritual or symbolic practices governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules that seek to inculcate certain behavioral values and norms through repetition, which, in turn, implies continuity with the past. In Santa Cruz, this newly minted “common history” serves as the backbone of the Camba youth movements and provides an initial stimulus for disenfranchised young men to join in, as it offers meaning through shared identity. Performances create an opportunity for these youth to build solidarity across race, class, and ethnic identity. Whether youth identify as urban Indians or working-class mestizos, elites convince them that they are linked in a political struggle, as their social and economic problems are principally the fault of Bolivia’s centralist state (Kohl and Farthing 2006). By claiming this fused cultural–racial identity, then, youth can gain the power to materially alter their lives for the better through political action and violence.

Gender is a powerful tool in forging this message. If one side of cultural performances brings to life a highly masculinist Camba who cloaks himself in the costume of the Guaraní peasant to defend his patrimonial rights to territory (Gustafson 2006), then the female counterpart is a

highly sexualized Guaraní peasant who mixes “traditional culture” with urban cosmopolitanism and encourages people to participate in the new global economy—the fruits of Cruceño labor.

Performing cosmopolitan kuñatai and neoliberal status quo

One moment, a large crowd of young men in the plaza was screaming “Iyambae, Iyambae!” [Autonomy, Autonomy!]. The next, the men had split into two groups for the grand finale of the civic event, a showcasing of Las Magníficas (Magnificents), the region’s most beautiful women. Las Magníficas de Pablo Manzonei, the largest and most successful modeling agency in Bolivia, is based in Santa Cruz. There is no structural counterpart to the UJC for young women, but through their participation in the beauty industry, they are able to engage in and contribute to right-wing forms of civic engagement. Further, like the young men who join the UJC in search of purpose, many women come to modeling from working-class backgrounds and conceptualize civic engagement as an entrée into a world of elite connections. In the words of one Magnífica, “My mother struggled to raise my brother and me. It was very difficult. There were days when she didn’t know where or what we were going to eat. I decided to become a model to help out my family. But through this, I have been able to meet people and make important connections.”¹⁰

Agribusiness elites call on these attractive young women to play a role in civic parades, festivals, and gatherings. The most explicit example of elite networking opportunities occurs during Expocruz, a business fair to display new commodities and technologies. Agroindustrial elites compete for sought-after models, from the top-drawer Magníficas to the more modest Glorias, to serve as hostesses for their particular booths. This regional fair of economic power takes up a 40-block space of pavilions, stands, booths, and restaurants. The fair is a bourgeois social event as well as a site for deal making, networking, and advertising (Gustafson 2006).

When women participate in Camba events in the central plaza, their performances take on a mixture of traditional Indian and hip urban culture. Under the light of fireworks, long-legged women strut down platforms wearing *tipois*, a costume typical of lowland or Guaraní women. Like the Camba men in the Guaraní band, these women dress as *kuñatai* (Guaraní, young woman) to appropriate the authenticity of the indigenous maiden (Gustafson 2006). But to enhance the sexual allure and add a dash of more contemporary Latin style to these “traditional” performances, some Cambas hike up the side of the dress, showing off their beautifully sculpted legs. Their legs are a result of many hours of hard work in El Premier Gimnasio, the premier fitness center in Santa Cruz. This gymnasium, established a few years ago by Bolivian Americans who now reside in

South Beach, Florida, provides yet another opportunity for upward mobility. Young models make connections there with older Feminine Civic Committee (Comité Cívico Femenino) members,¹¹ who partake in aerobics classes, weight lifting, and spinning to maintain their aging bodies. The *autonomista* models also take pride in their olive-toned skin, the result of weeks of frying in tanning beds and booths. The day I saw them perform, their hair had been frizzed, tossed, and flipped to display the latest trends from the Gloria Salon. Their emphasis on urban style expresses Camba women’s aspiration to participate in an idealized, global, middle-class consumerist society—an aspiration to be achieved through the regional independence symbolized by the faux-Guaraní aspects of their costume.

On the surface, the Camba movement forges a shared ethnic-regional identity, but underlying the symbolic reclamation of the lowland Indian is a well-developed but carefully underemphasized platform of regional economic desires, consumerism, and shared aspirations. Civic businessmen rarely speak publicly about their perception that the western highlands and the national government defend an antiquated redistributive model, whereas the eastern lowlands support a neoliberal model (an oligarchic model mixed with a particular form of political autonomy). They let their Magnífica women, the marionettes of their movement, do most of the talking. When asked, Susana, a Magnífica dressed as a Guaraní maiden, stated, “I come from San José de Chiquitos [a small town known for its Jesuit church], and I want to say that Santa Cruz and our lowland Indians should celebrate because we are a progressive and modern city.” Her friend Silvia commented, “We are free, and now, more than ever, we want the central government to let us fly and develop economically.”¹²

Young female Cambas, through the medium of the beauty pageant, become the spokeswomen for regional autonomy. This is not unusual in Latin America, especially in Bolivia, where an enormous cultural and social weight is placed on beauty pageants as sites for the construction of regional, racial, and national identities (see Ballerino Cohen et al. 1996; Hanchard 2008; Rahier 1998; Rogers 1999; Ruiz 2002). In this particular case, improvisational pageants become a space for the production of regional Camba identity as connected to larger transnational interests. One of the most well-known—if not most notorious—statements of the movement’s underlying ideology came from Miss Bolivia during the 2004 Miss Universe pageant in Quito; when asked about the misconceptions of her country, the contestant, a Camba, adamantly declared,

Unfortunately, people who don’t know Bolivia very much think that we are all just Indians from the west side of the country, that is, La Paz—all the images that we see are coming from that side of the country—poor people and very short people and Indian people. I’m

from the other side of the country, the east side, and it's not cold, it's very hot and we are tall and we are white people and we know English, so all that misconception that Bolivia is only an Andean country, it's wrong, Bolivia has a lot to offer, and that's my job as an ambassador of my country to let people know much diversity we have. [Wall 2004]

Public spectacles of Camba beauty mark the women who participate and represent the lowland region as white and modern, unlike their Andean counterparts, who are darker-skinned, shorter, and "backward." Miss Bolivia's comments ignited a firestorm of international media coverage about the Santa Cruz separatist movement, and such stories placed this beauty queen at the center of foreign speculation about the rise of white rightist groups in the eastern lowlands. Although she drew scorn from across the globe for her naive racism, she was embraced by Civic Committee members, who made her the queen of that year's carnival festivities (Gustafson 2006).

Performances of invented Camba–Guaraní past and regional pride occur only in particular parts of the city, primarily the most central locations. In the production of myths and invented traditions, space is a critical dimension for constructing the component parts of right-wing movement building. Many scholars have focused on how the conceptual and material dimensions of space influence the production of social life (Bourdieu 1977; de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991), and social-movement theorists have looked at how movements operate not only in but also, more importantly, on, with, and in relation to space (Castells 1983; Guidry 2003; Miller 2000; Staeheli 1994). Yet little scholarly work has centered on the importance of old colonial spaces or municipal centers as primary staging grounds for the construction of rightist ideologies. Like pageants, which construct gendered, racialized, and class-based identities through the dramatization of Cruceña beauty and productive power, spectacular performances in urban areas transmit messages about regional citizenship and rights to the city.

Charting geographies of rightist resistance

The geography of the Bolivian nation-state—the poor Aymara highlands, spatially and demographically dominant, versus small but economically powerful Santa Cruz—is replicated in miniature within the structure of the municipal plan of radiocentric ring roads, or *anillos*. The social geography of the city today emanates outward from the colonial center, or Casco Viejo, a hub of commercial life that rings the central plaza. If the plaza itself is the core of religious and governmental power, then the Casco Viejo that encircles it is the center of Cruceño economic power, often associated with traditional white European families.

This centralized geographic area flaunts the possibilities of transnational capital through extravagant houses, designer stores such as Salomé (an Argentinean clothing franchise advertising high-end casual clothing), fancy restaurants, and European cafés. Whereas the city's old-guard white families reside in the inner rings, typified by opulent Miami-style wealth, newly arrived Andean migrants settle in the peripheral areas, which are characterized by a lack of basic necessities such as sewage, drainage systems, paved roads, and health and educational services (Kirshner 2008).

It is no coincidence, then, that right-wing organizations stage spectacular events in and around centralized locations, within the first two concentric circles of the city, thus marking particular geographic sites as anti-indigenous and anti-MAS. Unlike the marches of popular and indigenous movements that have historically begun on the peripheries and then moved through urban space to stage a dramatic siege of the centers of power, these rallies begin in, and remain very close to, the old colonial core (Gustafson 2008), a nucleus that continues to serve as a poignantly racialized boundary separating Indian from mestizo. At the same time, the central plaza and old city also represent a new borderland of consumption, distinguishing between those with resources (mainly the European Cambas) and those left out of this new global economy (the indigenous poor). Right-wing organizing efforts must erase some of these contradictions while choreographing elaborate spectacles to make claims to municipal spaces.

The freshly constructed Cruceño–Guaraní identity is performed and reinforced in public spaces such as the Plaza 24 de Septiembre, which is now the most visible example of racialized and class-defined geography, marking who belongs to and who violates particular norms and city standards. Gustafson (2006) describes the plaza in Santa Cruz in familiar Latin American terms, as an arrangement of religious and secular power around a main square. It is also important to mention that the plaza, once a space for informal work and labor for highlanders, has now become a semiprivate place. In 1990, the Civic Committee launched a new municipal project, La Refundación de La Plaza 24 de Septiembre (Refounding of the Plaza 24 de Septiembre), to reconstruct the plaza as a site of cultural consumption for elite urbanites and visitors. This new urban development model represented both a regional and a global shift toward neoliberalism, relying on trickle-down strategies of privatization, marketization, and consumerism to promote urban economic revitalization (Ruben 2001:435). Shoeshine boys, indigenous vendors, and other marginalized groups who once found employment in these centralized locations were no longer allowed to use this new tourist-friendly space. City officials redefined informal labor as formal, and laborers had to obtain and display a municipal pass to work inside the plaza. Reinforced by police and armed guards who secure the core from possible trespassers, the plaza is now

protected from potential “invaders.” Such efforts, then, represent an attempt by local and municipal governments to penalize Andean migrants for not acculturating to the formal market, and to ultimately erase their bodies from the urban landscape (see also Low 1995, 1996; Rosenthal 2000).

Through the enactment of “invented traditions” linking lowland Indians and elite Cruceños, rightist groups stake their claims to the old city, a preserved symbol of colonial power and authority. At the same time, poor highlanders and MST labor organizers are absent from downtown spaces of international capital and investment. This absence is not accidental—the whiteness of the city center is maintained through force when necessary. In fact, MST organizers have been beaten and whipped in these central locations. “I won’t even walk through the main plaza,” commented regional MST leader Silvestre Saisari. “I usually take an alternative route. After those UJC members pulled my hair, beat me, and attempted to lynch me, I refuse to set foot in that ring of power.”¹³ The cleansing of the central plaza of highland indigenous vendors and labor organizers through police surveillance and new forms of extralegal violence preserves the Casco Viejo and Plaza 24 de Septiembre as critical sites of right-wing movement building.

(Re)structuring order through spectacles of violence

Whereas ethnic celebrations and discourses of productivity mark the core of the city as belonging to the Camba movement for economic and political autonomy, mock lynchings of Evo Morales infuse the plaza with a sharper understanding of the harsh rightist ideology of such a political endeavor. Chris Krupa (2009) looks at the meaning and signification of popular representations of a “spectacular” lynching event in highland Ecuador as symbolizing widespread mestizo resistance to the broad-based indigenous rights movement. He states, “In Ecuador, lynchings have become a trope for producing public understandings of Indians . . . and serve to contain Indians in time and space, as relics or residuals” (Krupa 2009:32). Instead of focusing on representations of violence, I am interested, rather, in how these spectacular events function pedagogically to inculcate conservative ideology. The Camba countermovement blends the legacies of colonialism (and its associated racism), 19th-century liberalism, and U.S. imperialism into a contemporary style of neofascism: brute violence used to advance a particular form of salvage capitalism, specifically privatization, extraction, and exportation of natural resources. Through performative rituals in the city center, Cambas politicize the urban masses and municipal space by imposing “order” on the resistant indigenous body.

On December 10, 2006, a few days after a series of civic parades and autonomy celebrations, a caravan emerged in

the plaza, trailing behind a four-wheel drive sport utility vehicle bearing a live Camba woman hanging from a cross. The crucified Camba serves as a popular trope in countermovement politics: Jesus is resurrected in the body and soul of the marginalized Camba to defend and protect land, society, and economic resources from the Indian. Such a public and performative crucifixion represents the possibility of Christian values and mores defeating the indigenous masses, revolutionaries, and anarchists. Evocations of organized religion as moral code pit the civilized Camba (the European) against the uncivilized, indigenous Savage, the nonbeliever. Christianity will tame the Indians and transform them from wild animals into civilized beings. In South Africa, colonial evangelists spread a religion imbued with Western values to colonize the consciousness of Tswana peoples (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). Such efforts serve a similar purpose in contemporary Santa Cruz: to induct Collas (western Indians) into the colonists’ order of activities and their free-market economic ideology, and ultimately to tame or subordinate them.

This colonialist vision relies on gendered inequality as a powerful trope in contemporary autonomista politics and theatrics. Whereas the Magnífica model serves as a “beautiful” representation of the regional autonomy platform, implicitly “white” and highly sexualized in relation to Andean Bolivia, the crucified Camba represents the Catholic mother who will sacrifice her life for the good of the *patria* or, in this case, the region. One version of this gendering is the hip, urban white cosmopolitan, and the other is the selfless, traditional, moral mother. Yet in both cases, the hypermasculine Camba must emasculate, feminize, and ultimately marginalize the Other to impose spatial, social, and racial order on the region.

A group of UJC youth with shaved heads and wearing sunglasses and army fatigues followed the crucified Camba. The vehicle circled the plaza several times while the crowd screamed, “Autonomía, Autonomía, Autonomía!” Eventually, the “sacrificed” woman jumped off the cross and disappeared into the crowd, and the youth displayed a life-sized doll of Evo Morales. In red magic marker, they wrote, “Evo, Cocalero, Drogo” on one of its pockets, and on the other, “Racismo, Dictador,” making visible their political platform: that Evo Morales is governing for the Indians in the west, not mestizos in Santa Cruz. In this bizarre moment of Bolivian history, this effigy equated *cocalero* (an impoverished coca farmer) with drug dealer and addict; conflated communism, populism, and the indigenous–campesino movement; and left in its wake deep polarization between Left and Right, west and east, Indian and mestizo (see Figure 4).¹⁴

Urban spectacle reduces right-wing politics to colors and slogans, celebrations and carnivals, literally erasing all historical political-economic contextualization. The spectacle, then, is as much about obscuring what performers



Figure 4. UJC members beat Evo Morales effigy with sticks and belts. Photo by N. Fabricant.

wish to conceal as it is about putting on display: controlling what is to be seen, when, and by whom (Goldstein 2004). In this particular case, the Camba youth who wrote “Evo Cocalero” and “Drogo” failed to mention the destructive consequences of the U.S. war on drugs, which sought to eliminate coca production but actually systematically criminalized poor farmers and militarized the Chaparé region.¹⁵ Elites literally wrote Evo Morales outside the law through such highly charged political language, which reduced an elected president to an indigenous body and equated coca farmers with *narcoguerillas*. These popular cultural representations emerged directly from the larger legal context: Law 1009, enacted in 1998 under heavy pressure from the United States government, blurred the distinction between peasant growers (of coca) and drug traffickers (in cocaine). This law not only criminalized hundreds of coca growers but also restricted the individual rights of people accused of drug trafficking, who in most cases were low-level drug-industry workers caught smuggling small quantities of paste. The decree limited their right to defense and denied them provisional liberty (Gill 2004). The result has been the forced eradication of coca cultivation. Those peasants who refuse to destroy their coca crops are deemed criminals and alleged to be in cahoots with drug traffickers

(Gill 2001), and they are therefore subject to arrest and torture. Through such ritualistic ceremony, elites established a common frame through which Cambas could view their struggle over power (Snow et al. 1986; Zald 1996). By literally writing the indigenous–campesino body outside the law, elites invented a rather simplistic story of good versus evil and selected a target group, the political or resistant highland Indian, on which to unleash their aggression.

I saw this logic in the performance I witnessed that day in December 2006, as UJC members beat the stuffed mannequin with whips and chains, violently imposing a particular order on the Evo Morales doll. Such imagined order must be understood in the context of increasing social decomposition and the uncontrollable “disorder” that elites experience under new forms of indigenous populist power, especially the new state policies that now threaten to claim their land and natural resource wealth and to redistribute them to the poor.

As I watched the teenagers beat and eventually burn the effigy, I thought about an earlier event in which youths from the same civic group had imposed violent order on real indigenous bodies, the MST leaders who they left lying in the street, bruised and beaten in El Torno one day in 2005. On that day, landless organizers and rank-and-file MST members had attempted to march to the central plaza with bright red banners reading “Nacionalizar los Hidrocarburos” [Nationalize the Hydrocarbons] and “Gas para Bolivia, No para los Extranjeros” [Gas for the Bolivians, not Foreigners] to put pressure on Carlos Mesa, the interim president, to immediately nationalize hydrocarbons and call for a constituent assembly. As vice president, Mesa had initiated a referendum vote in July 2004 to decide the future direction of Bolivia’s hydrocarbon sector and end low taxation and high royalty rates for transnational corporations. Mesa, however, could not meet these populist demands quickly enough. By May 2005, protestors took to the streets in every major Bolivian city (Kohl and Farthing 2006; Perrault 2006). The UJC intercepted the Santa Cruz demonstration with whips and chains.¹⁶ The youth beat indigenous protestors and later pounced on their wounded bodies. Video footage of the event illustrated how these same UJC members marched to the plaza with bloody bats, singing, “Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz—para los Cambas Carajo. Estos ‘collas’ tienen que respetar a Santa Cruz” [Santa Cruz, for the Cambas goddammit, these highland, outsider Indians need to learn to respect Santa Cruz] (see Balcázar 2006a, 2006b; see Figure 5). The literal scarring of MST bodies, and the red marks and open wounds on their backs, bore a frightening resemblance to the Evo Morales effigy as its white paper stuffing turned to black and brown ashes. The fire glowed a deep red and left a mist of smoke.

A mix of urban middle- and working-class bystanders watched as the effigy burned. Some were on their lunch break, merely hanging out in the plaza, and others were



Figure 5. Man from El Torno beaten by UJC. Photo by Video Urgente.

part of the larger Camba countermovement. The violence inflicted on the “body” of Evo Morales provided a fuel that fed the intensity and rage of the crowd. Their shouts of “Autonomía, Autonomía, Autonomía!” grew louder and louder as the doll turned to ashes. Through such elaborately staged events, the youth became emotionally charged and more deeply connected to struggles against an indigenous, social-democratic form of governance. Many watched the events unfold, listened to the fiery speeches, and eventually decided to join the movement because, as they asserted, “It is *our* duty to defend Santa Cruz.” This language of defense referred both to the larger autonomy project that asserts the right of the city and region to operate independently from national government and democratic control and to the urban-centered neoliberal project of economic development and progress defined in opposition to MAS’s social-democratic philosophy and policies. It was within this context that UJC members patrolled peripheral settlements, protecting the borders of the city of Santa Cruz from the migrant barrio that surrounds it. Their motto was, appropriately, “Violence for the sake of reclamation and redemption,” words that turned into deeds after every civic parade and festival, when Camba youth traveled with sticks and bats to migrant neighborhoods to beat highland indigenous organizers into submission before they could attempt to make their alternative position visible.

Such carnivals of violence not only imposed order on the resistant indigenous body but also reinforced the elites’ reign over the urban spaces of Santa Cruz. Those who claimed genealogical ties to the conquistadors or the nobility of Spain attempted to don the airs of seigniorial life. Bolivian writer Gabriel Rene Moreno said, “[We are as] magnificent as the sun,” and Cambas continue to stand by this assertion. The ashes of the mock lynching left a colonial and neocolonial print on the plaza, forged collective anti-Evo



Figure 6. UJC circling city in swastika-painted jeep. Photo by Video Urgente.

Morales, anti-indigenous sentiment, and justified what was to become paramilitary training and systematic violence to reclaim peripheral land and regional space.

There is a direct genealogical relationship between Nazi Germany and paramilitary groups like the UJC in Bolivia. The appearance of the swastika in Santa Cruz is not a post-Evo Morales phenomenon (see Figure 6). German Nazism has deep roots in Santa Cruz, dating from the migration of German Nazis to South America after the end of World War II.¹⁷ Carlos Valverde Barbery, the Cruceño who founded the UJC in 1957 as an ideological wing of the Civic Committee, had close ties to Klaus Barbie, the notorious “Butcher of Lyon,” an ex-Nazi who escaped to Bolivia with a U.S. passport during the immediate postwar period (1945–55). Protected and employed by U.S. intelligence agents because of his police skills and anticommunist zeal, Barbie worked as an interrogator and torturer for dictators Hugo Banzer and García Meza. Ironically, given his past, Barbie had frequent dealings with Israel concerning the supply of arms to Latin American countries and oversaw various underground paramilitary organizations. UJC tactics included using both arms for training and literature from Nazi youth brigades to inculcate members into the group, tactics that have survived to the present day.

The UJC now functions as both a political wing of the Civic Committee and an underground paramilitary organization. Publicly, this civic organization consists of a board of directors, a president, a vice president, and a secretary, who make practical and policy decisions. Privately, UJC members train as foot soldiers, or what the organization calls “el grupo de rescate” (rescue unit). Hiding behind this code language, the UJC describes this military wing as the social and practical action division of the organization, whose doings range from protecting the environment to engaging in civil defense in the mountains when necessary. Importantly,

this unit learns systematized basic weaponry and assault methods, invasion tactics, and even torture techniques that are passed on to it through officers trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas.¹⁸

Civic leaders like Rafael Paz, who feared losing potentially productive land (primarily for production of soy for export) in the periphery, used paramilitary youth to reclaim their rights to private property. The UJC attacked the MST community of Pueblos Unidos in September 2005, took several leaders hostage, and practiced old dictatorial methods of torture and abuse to obtain critical information regarding the movement's organizational tactics. As one of the UJC members who led the raid exclaimed, "MST is just a camouflaged arm of the larger MAS movement; they enter into other people's land [which is being worked] and they disrespect us. How would they like it if we went to La Paz and invaded their land? They defy constitutional rights to property ownership and therefore must be pacified through violence."¹⁹ Within days of the MST incident, rightist groups launched attacks against NGO lawyers and peasant- and indigenous-rights activists in the city. Regional elites also raided landless-peasant offices and the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA; the state land reform agency), stealing documents, files, and even computers.

Violence seems to be the most effective means of suppressing resistant voices. Right-wing civic leaders have also relied on extralegal forms of abuse and intimidation tactics to pursue their broader agenda of territorial reordering, that is, the remapping of sovereignty, securing of resources and rights, and construction of a new nation-state. It is no coincidence, then, that nation-state building is historically connected to "Indian clearance." Catherine Lutz (2002) argues that the early U.S. military was defined as a kind of constabulary whose purpose was nation-building through "Indian clearance," rather than defense of national borders. The U.S. Army also built roads and forts to facilitate colonial settlement, an aim so intrinsic to the military that "any difference between soldiering and pioneering escaped the naked eye" (Lutz 2002:726). A similar convergence of soldiering and pioneering remains hidden from the public eye in contemporary Santa Cruz. Elites often claim that they are developing new frontiers for regional production through the expansion of cattle ranching or the soy industry. Privately, however, they displace, kidnap, and torture resistant agricultural leaders to maintain complete political hegemony over the rural provinces.

Such spectacular violence has also occurred in paramilitary Colombia, as trade unionists from the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos (SINALTRAINAL; the national food and beverage workers union that organizes Coca-Cola workers) defend the labor rights of its constituents. Lesley Gill (2004) details the ways in which paramilitary graffiti marked and framed plant walls to terrorize wage laborers. Such forms of symbolic

violence rapidly turn into all-out attacks on unionist bodies, homes, and communities. Gill (2007) outlines how paramilitaries use rightist tactics—similar to those of Camba youth—of intimidation, kidnapping, and torture to systematically dismantle any form of organized resistance. On the morning of December 5, 1996, two paramilitaries shot Isidro Gil, the local union president, who stood in the doorway of a Coca-Cola bottling plant. Another member of the union's directorate, Luis Adolfo Cardona, barely evaded an attempt on his life the same day, when paramilitaries tried to kidnap him. The paramilitaries proceeded to loot files at the bottling plant, set fire to the premises, and demonstrated outside the offices. Although many scholars have focused attention on internationalization of leftist movements (Desmarais 2003, 2007; Edelman 1998), more work needs to be done on the transnationalization of rightist resistance—through images and symbols that travel across time and space through YouTube videos and social networking groups such as My Space or Facebook. Although the "pink tide" may be spreading across Latin America—initiating new economic, political, and institutional shifts—it might be productive to explore other kinds of pendulum swings provoked by, for example, radical rightist groups organizing in opposition to Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, Cruceño youth groups opposing Morales's administration, and Colombian paramilitaries undermining labor organizers at a Coca-Cola plant.

Performative politics in Bolivia, then, must be understood as a spectrum, with torture, kidnapping, and killing at one end and the burning of effigies and parading at the other. Elites make use of performances in the city centers and paramilitary violence in the regions to draw attention to what they claim to be a "heroic cause": the (re)conquering of space, place, and region to preserve an economic model of agroindustrial expansion, commerce, and free-trade agreements.

Carnivals of violence

Evo Morales directly confronted the right wing by calling for a national recall referendum on August 19, 2008, in which the electorate was asked to ratify the process of change under his leadership. Morales achieved an impressive victory, winning more than 67 percent of the vote, far exceeding the absolute majority of 54 percent he garnered in the 2005 presidential elections. The opposition wasted little time in reacting to this recall referendum; they organized what some have referred to as a civic coup by taking over central government buildings in the lowlands, including the tax office, the agricultural reform offices, and the national telecommunications company. The UJC set fire to the offices of NGOs that promote indigenous rights and provide legal assistance to leftist movements like MST. They also

seized the local airport and set up roadblocks to cut off the critical highways linking Santa Cruz to the rest of the country.

U.S. ambassador to Bolivia Philip Goldberg had been fomenting such tensions by supporting regionalist occupations, and the Morales administration had no choice but to eject him for “conspiring against democracy” (Hylton 2008). Goldberg’s expulsion sparked the most dramatic and theatrical episode of violence to date. On September 11, 2008, the 35th anniversary of the overthrow of democratically elected Chilean President Salvador Allende, indigenous peasants in Pando (from the community El Porvenir [Future]) planned to hold *un ampliado* (a meeting) to discuss recent rightist events. However, local authorities sent road crews to block the highway, and verbal confrontation escalated into a massacre as the autonomists opened fire on the peasants, killing 20. Desperate farmers fleeing the violence threw themselves into the nearby river, despite its crocodiles and venomous snakes. Wounded peasants were dragged by regionalists to the main plaza of Cobija, where they were whipped and lashed with barbed wire (Gustafson 2009).

Ximena Soruco (2008) argues that the Masacre de Pando (Massacre of Pando) was the last stand of a severely weakened right wing, desperate to maintain territorial control over regional space, including indigenous zones, peripheral barrios, and resistant municipalities. She asserts further that the massacre “encarna la lógica moderna del individualismo” [incarnates the logic of a modern form of individualism]. The violence, Soruco states, stripped indigenous organizers of both humanity and equality. As one victim declared, “They massacred the *campesinos*. They hunted them like wild pigs.” Another witness claimed that the assassins screamed, “Autonomía Carajo, Viva Autonomía!” [Autonomy, Goddamn It, and Long Live Autonomy!] and then shouted, “They should all die . . . all these *campesinos* should die . . . their lives are worthless!” (Soruco 2008:5).

Although it was the Right’s intention to perform marginality on a much larger stage and ultimately reclaim power, the strategy backfired. The unintended consequences of the reactionary rampage were, remarkably, the provision of international support for the passing of the new constitution,²⁰ which, among other measures, called for greater state control over Bolivia’s rich natural resources.

Performative politics revisited

Indigenous Andean people have historically suffered under a variety of oppressive colonial systems ruled by the minority white mestizo elites. The possibility of an indigenous head of state, even in the 21st century, seemed like a distant and unattainable reality. However, the devastating effects of neoliberal reforms created the conditions for

the rise of new forms of political organizations, neighborhood alliances, and coalitional efforts, which proved critical to remapping power in the region. At the same time, performances of indigenous identity through public theatrical political events, music, costume, and language also contributed to the success of Evo Morales and MAS in the recent elections. Morales’s administration mobilized discourses and performances of Andean culture to reorder or cleanse Bolivian society of the colonial legacy of racism and the more contemporary evils of capitalism and neoliberalism (Postero 2007).

Yet foundational to the growth and development of right-wing politics in Santa Cruz has been right-wing reappropriation of such performative strategies of the Left. Agroindustrial elites have built a powerful countermovement in the eastern region of Bolivia, which poses a real threat to indigenous populist movements such as MST and the larger MAS project. I have traced the logic of a series of performances, spectacles of both shared cultural-ethnic identity and paramilitary violence, to illustrate how *Cambas* build a base of support and inculcate right-wing ideology, which stands in opposition to the leftist highland Indian. Urban space proves critical to movement building, as civic leaders choreograph their carnivals of both regional pride and violence in and near the colonial center. By mapping rightist demands onto both the indigenous body and municipal space, they transport a particular ideology of free-market economic principles: the right to private property, free markets and free trade, and Santa Cruz’s complete control of resources extracted within the department. Because elites cannot fully recover their executive power and territorial rights, given the Morales administration’s complete disregard for their version of autonomy, they must (re)imagine and eventually erect an alternative national-regional apparatus and seize control of the city and region. Through such performative politics, the Right has captured the imagination of Bolivian citizens, as well as that of the U.S. government and international press. Unfortunately, the curtain has not closed, as a desperately weakened right wing continues to invent new and creative forms of resistance.

Notes

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1. My dissertation research focuses on left-wing politics, analyzing how social movements like the MST use historical narratives of

neo-Incan revolutionaries, discourses of utopian indigenous community, and highland music and dance to build solidarity at the local and regional levels and push for national policies regarding redistribution.

2. The UJC is a militant, neofascist group based in Santa Cruz. Founded in 1957 as an arm of the Civic Committee, the UJC has recently become the subject of controversy and accusation concerning its activities in support of the Santa Cruz autonomy movement and opposing the government of Morales and his MAS political party. Claiming a membership of more than 2,000, the UJC has violently enforced general civic strikes called for by the Civic Committee, intimidated and assaulted leftist political opponents, and recently served as a "private" security force patrolling and protecting the city of Santa Cruz.

3. Many argue that the Chaco War was a proxy war between Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell for oil and gas reserves. Historians generally agree that it reflected an attempt by President Daniel Salamanca to divert attention from Bolivia's internal political and economic crises (Klein 1992:183–200).

4. In 2005, the subsidy for diesel was projected to exceed \$80 million. The primary beneficiaries were the agro industrial producers of Santa Cruz and the transportation industry (Kohl and Farthing 2006).

5. This response is quite interesting, considering that most World Bank and IMF proposals have adversely affected the working classes and poor. In this context, however, elites rallied around the issue of IMF cutbacks in diesel, which directly affected their agricultural production. This serves as another intriguing paradox of the period.

6. There have been several efforts at decentralization. The Law of Popular Participation (LPP) of 1994, for instance, committed 20 percent of national tax revenues to municipal governments, to be used for the maintenance and construction of schools, health clinics, roads, and so on. Santa Cruz elites, however, considered such proposals an inadequate response to their demands for greater autonomy. They argued that the LPP was simply another effort to keep them tied to the central government (Kohl and Farthing 2006).

7. This phenomenon indexes a critical paradox. Camba youth cloak themselves in the costumes of lowland indigenous groups such as the Guaraní, but they simultaneously ransack indigenous communities in search of valuable gas caches. Ximena Soruco, Wilfredo Plata, and Gustavo Medeiros (2008) detail the historical abuses committed against lowland indigenous communities by elites in quest of precious natural resources, from the rubber boom of the 1890s to contemporary wars over land, especially territory in the Chaco with gas deposits.

8. MAS delegates are the majority power in the assembly, but they do not have the two-thirds majority necessary to approve new articles of the constitution, which has always been the rule. In September 2006, shortly after the inauguration of the constituent assembly, MAS voted by simple majority to change the rules; in Article 70, they declared the assembly to be original and plenipotentiary rather than derived from the previous constitution, and they authorized an absolute majority to approve all decisions except the final text (Postero 2007).

9. The Camba Nation is a group of intellectuals led by a septuagenarian fascist, a historian, a doctor, and an architect, who are editorialists, former Civic Committee leaders, and right-wing political figures.

10. Interview, June 30, 2007.

11. The Feminine Civic Committee reflects the explicitly male character of the Civic Committee. It is a parallel entity for women

that often politicizes motherhood through public acts of charity to orphaned children and engages in protests that denounce inflation in defense of the "family basket" (i.e., family welfare).

12. Undated quotes are from field notes.

13. Interview, April 15, 2007.

14. Gustafson (2008) warns against drawing an east–west divide between highland Andean Collas and the eastern Bolivian Cambas because it ignores the strong right-wing presence in the Andes and equally significant MAS presence across eastern Bolivia. Although this more complex perspective more closely reflects political "reality," it does not adequately capture the ways in which elites organize spectacular performances, by and large, along geographic or racial–ethnic lines.

15. Many peasants felt that pressure to eradicate coca was just the first step in a concerted effort by the Bolivian government and the United States to dislodge them from their lands and remove them from the Chaparé. They believed the United States coveted the region for development as an ecotourist mecca, and they did not have to look far to understand that the Chaparé was being transformed in ways that disregarded their presence (see Gill 2004).

16. Such acts reflected the division and antagonism that existed between the petition for departmental autonomy (for Santa Cruz) and the October Agenda (which demanded the constituent assembly). Jorge Hollweg, president of the UJC, pledged that his organization would make sure the campesinos did not reach the principal plaza.

17. Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson (2007) note that there were intimate ties between corrupt military governments and Civic Committee members (linked to drug trafficking in the lowlands). The landed narcoparamilitary Right in Santa Cruz backed General Luis García Meza's cocaine coup on July 17, 1980. García Meza enjoyed the external support of the Brazilian and Argentinean military governments and a host of fascist figures like Klaus Barbie; Albert Van Ingelgom, chief functionary of Auschwitz; and Joachim Fiebelkorn.

18. The United States had trained Latin Americans at a variety of bases in the Panama Canal Zone since 1939 but centralized its training activities in 1946 with the creation of the Latin American Ground School. Caught up in a rising wave of Cold War fear that Soviet communism was spreading in Latin America, the U.S. government increased military expenditures for technical assistance to Bolivia's armed forces during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1980s, with the end of the Cold War, it invested militaristic might into fighting a war on drugs. Training programs shifted to so-called operations other than war, such as counternarcotics and counterterrorism activities, although the base techniques of warfare at the local level remained much the same. Much more recently, in the post-9/11 period, the Bush administration offered funding and training to any nation willing to join the United States in a global crusade against terrorism, and the Bolivian administration shifted the definition of conflict in the Andes from a drug war to a war on terror (Gill 2004).

19. Video interview, April 20, 2005.

20. The 100-page document rejects the dominance of private capital and reasserts the role of the state in the economy. All of Bolivia's natural resources, such as gas and oil, are declared the patrimony of the state, with the state given the unique right to administer strategic resources and to run basic services such as electricity and water. The new constitution also declares Bolivia a plurinational state by recognizing the 36 indigenous nations and languages that compose it and the right of indigenous communities in their territories to run their own judicial, health, educational, and communication systems.

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