

Gramsci in Latin America: Reconstitutions of the State

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation traces the reception of Antonio Gramsci's works over a series of critical moments in the development of the Latin American left, including the transitions to democracy in Argentina and Brazil, Latin American subaltern studies in the academic sphere, and the rhetoric of "pink tide" governments of the twenty-first century, with a focus on Bolivia. My central argument is that Gramsci has appealed to Latin American intellectuals as a theorist of the state—notwithstanding his more frequent characterization as primarily a theorist of civil society—and that the different appropriations and deployments of Gramscian concepts such as the war of position and the integral state have been oriented, in one way or another, toward a defense of constituted as opposed to constituent power, and more generally toward the closure of constituted political subjectivities. The project is intended at once as a study of the historico-political conditions of intellectual production in Latin America, and more specifically as a contribution to the scholarship on the long history of the centrality of the state in Latin American politics, as well as an examination, focused on a particular theoretical field, of modes of appropriation and resignification of political concepts in the construction and contestation of power.

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## INTRODUCTION

Citing Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Williams' uses of Lukács's concept of reification, Edward Said calls attention in "Traveling Theory" (1982) to the tendency of theories that are transported across time and space and re-inscribed in historical and institutional contexts other than those to which they respond at their inception to lose some of their vitality or fossilize as cultural dogma. In a later essay, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered" (1994), he recognizes in the earlier text an ideological notion of originality and derivation in which every iteration is necessarily a pale shadow of its true form; in their displacement, theories can also gain critical force, breaking through limitations that constrained their initial formulation. This project is conceived as a study of the development of Latin American Gramscian theory from the 1960s to the present with both senses of Said's "travelling theory" in mind. I read a set of genealogically interconnected texts in order to trace the iterations of a constellation of pivotal concepts drawn from the work of Antonio Gramsci in the intellectual production of the Latin American left that shift between critical and affirmative modes of politically interested theorization.

The discipline of cultural studies emerged in the late 1960s claiming Gramsci as one of its key sources, and Gramsci's influence continued with the expanding orbit of the field in the 80s and 90s, including the development of postcolonial studies. Gramsci's reception as predominantly a theorist of the superstructure made him an essential author for a study of culture largely led by intellectuals with Marxist roots, or for a Marxism concerned with literary and other cultural products. Raymond Williams writes in 1977 of the Gramscian concept of

hegemony, “whatever the implications of the concept for Marxist political theory . . . the effects on cultural theory are immediate. For ‘hegemony’ is a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts: that of ‘culture’ as a ‘whole social process,’ . . . and that of ideology, in any of its Marxist senses” (108). Said opens *Orientalism* (1978) by framing both his conception of his object of inquiry—Orientalism as hegemony<sup>1</sup>—and his own subject position in writing such a work (as a response to the imperative to attempt to compile an inventory of the “infinity of traces” that constitute the subject, as a precondition for critical reflection) in Gramscian terms. Stuart Hall, a central figure in the establishment of cultural studies in his role as director of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, makes the familiar claim about the preponderance of a hegemonic mode of power—rule through consent rather than coercion—in the West in late twentieth century, but also argues for Gramsci’s relevance in the 1980s as a theorist for times of defeat, of a crisis of the left:

The truth about the 1920s is that the ‘proletarian moment’ very nearly came off. Just before and after the First World War, it really was touch and go as to whether, under the leadership of such a class, the world might not have been transformed—as Russia was in 1917 by the Soviet revolution. This was the moment of the proletarian perspective on history. What I have called Gramsci’s question in the Notebooks emerges in the aftermath of that moment, with the recognition that

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<sup>1</sup> “[T]he form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West. It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives *Orientalism* the durability and strength that I have been speaking about so far” (7); “we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting. It is this idea that Gramsci, certainly, and Foucault and Raymond Williams in their very different ways have been trying to illustrate” (14).



history was not going to go that way, especially in the advanced industrial capitalist societies of Western Europe. Gramsci had to confront the turning back, the failure, of that moment: the fact that such a moment, having passed, would never return in its old form . . . This looks like a moment of total crisis for the Left, when all the reference points, the predictions, have been shot to bits. The political universe, as you have come to inhabit it, collapses. (162)

Hall defines Gramsci's historical moment here within an argument for the relevance of his thought in the era of Thatcherism in the U.K., but the comparison could just as well be extended to the Latin American context of the corpus that I analyze in my first chapter.<sup>2</sup>

Gramsci has also been a central reference for Latin American and Latin Americanist political thought, in part because of the flexibility of his theoretical legacy, as a communist who has been appropriated by a liberal to social democratic left, as well as from a radical democratic post-Marxist position. I discuss the most salient figures of the former schools in my first chapter; a major exponent of the latter, Ernesto Laclau, is conspicuously absent in this study, and so his important intervention in contemporary political theory merits some mention here. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (who has in her own right made a direct contribution to Gramscian scholarship through her own writing as well as with her edited collection, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* [1979]) appropriate and self-consciously rework

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<sup>2</sup> The "cultural studies" Gramsci has elicited criticism from a number of Gramscian scholars and others who align themselves with a more general opposition to the "turn to theory"; see, for example, Brennan's *Wars of Position* (2006), and others discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Perry Anderson, whose 1976 essay "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," perhaps the foundational study of English-language Gramscian scholarship, is similarly critical of this "culturalism," but attributes the fault to Gramsci himself, noting that Croce along with Lenin is a fundamental source of Gramsci's concept of Hegemony (48).

Gramscian concepts in the service of a radical democratic socialist politics that insists on “deepening” rather than renouncing liberal-democratic ideology (176). “[I]t is clear,” they write, “how we may recover the basic concepts of Gramscian analysis, although it will be necessary to radicalize them in a direction that leads beyond Gramsci” (136). As much as the concept of “hegemony” itself, Laclau and Mouffe draw on the concept of the “historical bloc” as a coalition or “hegemonic articulation” of social groups, as the basis of a political logic not confined to the determination of class.

A particular reading of this Gramscianism “beyond Gramsci” as a version of social contract theory has recently been spotlighted within Latin Americanist academic discourse with the notion of “posthegemony,” coined by Alberto Moreiras and developed at length by Jon Beasley-Murray in *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*. This ambitious proposal situates itself as post-Gramscian (although Gramsci is not cited directly, but always through Laclau’s reading),<sup>3</sup> claiming that “the concept of civil society (for Gramsci, intimately linked to the notion of hegemony) no longer holds” (xi), to then advance an argument for a theory of posthegemony centered on the concepts of affect, habit, and multitude (citing Antonio Negri). What is most credible in Beasley Murray’s book, however, the claim that ideology and therefore hegemony does not work through “consent” understood as rational contract but through “affect,” “habit,” etc., is in fact consistent with any minimally responsible reading of Gramsci.

The critique of rational consent is familiar enough not to warrant further discussion here; the

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<sup>3</sup> Beasley-Murray writes of the *Requerimiento*—the document read to the peoples that the Spanish conquistadores intended to conquer, establishing their legal right to do so derived from the king, the pope, and ultimately God himself—that it “appears to encapsulate Gramscian theory in a nutshell” (2) (as a petition for consent backed up by force), a statement that, rather presumptuously, seems to demonstrate an almost total lack of acquaintance with or interest in “Gramscian theory.”

more pertinent polemical stance is against a logic of populism, for which Laclau is taken as representative. Laclau, the most productive theorist in a broader effort to reconcile the politics of Peronism with a more radical left (I discuss an apology for Peronism that shares something with Laclau's in the work of Juan Carlos Portantiero in my first chapter), has argued from this theory in defense of *chavismo* and by extension the politics of the "pink tide" more broadly; it is in his opposition to this kind of populism, in its crudest form a strategic espousal of a notion of a unified people-nation (Laclau's theory of politics as hegemonic articulation into a popular subject is more sophisticated, but ultimately is mobilized to the same purpose) that this "post-hegemonic" strain of Latin Americanist theory is relevant to my project.

Two further general features of Gramsci's thought that have contributed to its appeal and utility for Latin American intellectuals should be pointed out: his position as a theorist of the semiperiphery (of Italy, and specifically the South), and his concern with the state (or more broadly with the superstructural moment *as extension of the state*), which has been connected to the historical centrality of the state in Latin American politics.

The former aspect is central to the subject of my second chapter, and in particular to the category of subalternity. While Gramsci's concern with the effectivity of superstructural elements complicates the linear progression of the orthodox theory of historical materialism (Laclau and Mouffe, for example, write, "War of position presupposes the concept of hegemony which, as we shall see, is incompatible with the idea of a linear, predetermined development" [23]),<sup>4</sup> the subaltern is, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's terms, a supplement that introduces the

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<sup>4</sup> Marx himself explicitly refutes the reading of *Capital* that posits as universal such a "linear, predetermined development"; following four unsent and unpublished drafts of a reply to Vera Zasulich attempting to answer her question as to whether the Russian rural commune was necessarily fated to be destroyed and superseded by capitalist relations of production before a

incalculable. In Latin America, it is José Carlos Mariátegui, Gramsci's contemporary, who first takes up this task of reworking Marxist theory to account for the (potentially revolutionary) historical action of collective subjects other than the bourgeoisie and then the proletariat, in this case the Indians (for Gramsci, and the South Asian subaltern studies scholars, the peasantry). Latin American intellectuals understood the social reality that constituted their object of reflection, then, to share this difference from the Western European context from which orthodox Marxist theory emerged in the trajectory of its historical development and the persisting plurality of "historical stages," "modes of production," or social groups (the various theoretical conceptions of which are discussed in Chapter 3), while at the same time sharing structures of modern political and civil society with Western Europe, if sometimes as second-hand imports.

The claim that Gramsci has appealed to Latin American intellectuals as a theorist of the state, and therefore as particularly relevant to a region with a historical tendency toward statism, must take into account that Gramsci's "integral" concept of the state does not correspond to that normally assumed by the notion of "statism," and has led him to be characterized at least as often as primarily a theorist of "civil society." In the familiar Althusserian terms, the state in this "integral" sense (discussed at length in my third chapter) refers to one in which the "private"

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communist society could emerge (in which, Spivak has observed, we see Marx grappling with the limits of his own thought), he finally answers tersely in the negative and directs her to an almost equally brief article in which he writes: "[My critic] feels himself obliged to metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into an historico-philosophic theory of the *marche generale* imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circumstances in which it finds itself, in order that it may ultimately arrive at the form of economy which will ensure, together with the greatest expansion of the productive powers of social labour, the most complete development of man. But I beg his pardon. (He is both honouring and shaming me too much.)"

apparatuses of hegemony within civil society serve a function continuous with that of the state proper, ultimately backed up by the repressive apparatus. Althusser's translation of Gramsci's theory into an idiom of 1960s structuralism is correct but necessarily incomplete; while the conception of social totality and therefore of the fundamental unity of elements separated for analytical purposes into the categories of "structure" (or "base") and "superstructure" is conveyed,<sup>5</sup> Althusser's dismissal of Gramsci's "absolute historicism" or "humanism" (2009: 141) reintroduces a determinism that is untenable for Gramsci, and for the Latin American theorists who claim his legacy. The state—together with its organs within civil society—is conceived in this tradition as a historically productive entity, even an ethico-political *subject* (a tendency suggested by Gramsci's personification of the state, or of the party as proto-state, following Machiavelli, in the "modern prince"), in a way that introduces a element of contingency, of politics as truly productive, and not merely *reproductive*. This is the tendency in Gramsci that enables the hypostasizing readings that I identify here, and that, I argue, can also be countered from a Gramscian position.

My subtitle, "Reconstitutions of the State," places the state in relation to the conceptual dyad of constituent and constituted power, which enters contemporary theoretical debates primarily through Antonio Negri's 1992 *Il potere costituente*. My allusion to the concept here does not engage the problem of defining a subject of constituent power, or with the historical development of such a subject, theorized as the "multitude" in Negri and in his subsequent work co-authored with Michael Hardt (something further emphasized in the English translation of Negri's title as *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* [1999], relegating the

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<sup>5</sup> Although the base remains always determinant "in the last instance."

concept of constituent power to the subtitle; “insurgencies” suggests a more concrete revolutionary subject, or at least a more concrete historical process, than the more abstract concept of constituent power as an intrinsic element of all power). My use of the concept remains, instead, in a more negative mode, in reference to forms of intellectual practice rather than discrete political subjects.

Negri conceives of constituent power in opposition to *sovereign* power (despite the tradition in democratic thought of ascribing sovereignty to the “people”), a distinction that is implicit in my critique of Álvaro García Linera’s political discourse in Chapter 3 (Negri 22). Andreas Kalyvas, while maintaining the notion of popular *sovereignty*,<sup>6</sup> offers a useful discussion of constituent power as irreducible to any discrete entity or collective subject such as the term “people” connotes. The constituted power is unified, singular, and invites personification (Kalyvas 2013: 10).<sup>7</sup> Constituted power commands, “emanating from the top” (Kalyvas 2013: 11), while “the notion of the constituent sovereign redirects attention to the underlying sources of the instituted reality located at the bottom” (Kalyvas 2013: 10); constituted power is power *over*; constituent power is power *to* (Martin Loughlin, cited in Kalyvas 2013: 11). The constituent power, finally, is not reducible to or an attribute of any prior collective subject: “The subject of the constituent power is not prior or external to the act of constituting. Rather, it constitutes itself as it constitutes for itself. By framing the political forms of its collective existence, it also produces its own public identity” (Kalyvas 2013: 12). The movement between the constituent and

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<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, Kalyvas’s defense of the concept of sovereignty as the constituent power of the people rather than constituted power in “Popular Sovereignty, Democracy, and the Constituent Power” (2005).

<sup>7</sup> And yet, in an earlier article (2000), Kalyvas equates Gramsci’s “prince” with Schmitt’s notion of sovereignty, as expressions of the concept of constituent power.

the constituted as conceived in this dissertation is, in keeping with this notion of irreducibility to a prior subject, not between the multitude, or the people, or any other analogous term, and the state, or the sovereign, etcetera, but between a concept of the constituent as continual self-fashioning, and a thinking that takes for granted any form of constituted political subjectivity.

My first chapter focuses on the Gramscian concept of the war of position in relation to the texts of politically engaged intellectuals of the transitions to democracy in the Southern Cone—Carlos Nelson Coutinho in Brazil, José María Aricó and Juan Carlos Portantiero in Argentina—and concludes with a discussion of the Bolivian Marxist theorist René Zavaleta Mercado, whose work I discuss at greater length in my final chapter. Paolo Capuzzo and Sandro Mezzadra suggest that Gramsci’s reception in Latin America helped to rehabilitate him back in Italy, where he had been appropriated, largely through Palmiro Togliatti’s efforts, as the intellectual voice of the Italian Communist Party and accordingly rejected by the more radical left as a moderate “culturalist.”<sup>8</sup> But the Latin American Gramsci—despite prompt translations into Spanish and Portuguese of the notebooks in their complete and unaltered form following Valentino Gerratana’s 1975 edition (the first three volumes of which have just recently been translated into English by Joseph A. Buttigieg [Columbia, 2007])—is not unmarked by Togliatti’s reading, and this tendency was reinforced by the new alliances of liberal democratic and socialist interests imposed by the right-wing military dictatorships. Drawing on the work of several of the most influential intellectuals in Brazil and Argentina in the dissemination and interpretation of Gramsci’s thought in Latin America of this period, I focus in this chapter on the changing

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<sup>8</sup> “Provincializing the Italian Reading of Gramsci” (2012).

conceptions of the relation between state and society that claim Gramsci as a legitimating source in the articulation of a new strategy.

Against both the voluntarism of the model of the guerrilla *foco* expounded and later repudiated by Régis Debray and the (anti-politician) structuralism of Althusser,<sup>9</sup> the generation of the failed revolutionary programs of the 1960s turned to Gramsci to take stock of their defeat and regroup. *Foquismo* conceived the military conquest of state power as its tactical end, and as the strategic means through which revolutionary consciousness is forged. Gramsci was invoked to authorize a shift of focus from state power to civil society, from military force to hegemonic leadership through other forms of institutional organization. The war of position, as opposed to the war of maneuver, was the master metaphor of this new orientation. I read in this corpus an underlying affirmation, by way of a Gramscian reading and despite a supposed turn away from the state, of a pre-constituted popular democratic subject whose political *expression* is achieved through a proper articulation with the state.

Chapter 2 traces the trajectories of the concepts of the subaltern and the national-popular from Gramsci through the work of Latin Americanist scholars affiliated with subaltern studies, with a focus on the interconnections with discursive production from the position of the state. I look at the work of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group but also Latin American intellectuals not connected to the North American academics, including Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who edited a translation of the work of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group with

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<sup>9</sup> Althusser warns in a letter to Debray (published in *La critique des armes*, 1974) criticizing his influential essay on the strategic urgency and tactical challenges of exporting the Cuban revolution to other Latin American countries (*Revolution in the Revolution?*, 1967) that “Above all, you must at all costs avoid the ideological disease of the Latin American political tradition, the mistake of seeing everything as purely and simply a matter of politics—the ‘infantile disorder’ which Latin America is far from having outgrown, which is that of politicism” (265).



Rosana Barragán. My discussion of this body of work is focused on its engagement with three moments in the relation between the subaltern/people and the nation/state in Bolivia: (1) Indigenous insurgency against the creole-oligarchic state; (2) new forms of subalternity within the National Revolutionary state of 1952, as one instance of the broader regional phenomenon of nationalist/populist regimes in the mid twentieth century; and (3) a return to the national-populist mode of interpellation within the “pink tide,” specifically in Evo Morales’s Bolivia. I conclude this chapter by arguing that while in the second of these moments the subaltern is the remnant or excess that is invisibilized by a *mestizo* “fictive ethnicity,” in the third, the subaltern is re-visibility in a way that instrumentalizes indigenous identity, now as the subject of the state, with effects that are ultimately continuous with previous modes of social containment. At the center of this chapter is a shift from a political and intellectual culture of the eighties and nineties that privileged non-state actors on both the right and the left—a discourse to which the concept of subalternity, conceived as the absolute outside of the state, seemed particularly well suited—to a paradoxical recycling of the concept from the position of the state.

In Chapter 3 I look exclusively at this new statism of the pink tide, extending my analysis of the Bolivian case. One of the discursive tasks of Evo Morales’s MAS government has been to knit together, around a core trope of indigeneity, elements of a Marxist discourse that provide some continuity both with the non-indigenous national left and a broader regionally and globally articulated rhetoric of anti-capitalism. García Linera has been the primary agent charged with this task, as the non-indigenous, academic counterweight to Morales’ performative persona, and the principal figures through which García Linera establishes a linkage of political memory and a current interpellative state program, of elite and popular sectors, intellectual prestige and prevailing interests, are, on the national and international levels, respectively, Zavaleta and

Gramsci. This chapter will trace the steps through which certain concepts drawn from the work of both theorists—Zavaleta's *sociedad abigarrada* or “motley society,” and the Gramscian integral state—come together in the service of the ideologeme of the Plurinational State. I conclude by situating the study within the current political conjuncture, in which the moment of the rise of the pink tide that was my point of departure is superseded by a new regional and global right.

I read the texts that make up my corpus, produced from different disciplinary, institutional, national, and historical positions (by public intellectuals with varying levels of ties to political parties and social movements, both Latin American and North American academics, and finally, directly from the propagandistic organs of the state apparatus) as primary texts. I do not conceive my argument as belonging to political theory, but rather as a study of modes of reading as a political act. While I return to the Gramscian source of the concepts under discussion in each chapter in plotting their itineraries, this dissertation is not conceived as a study of Gramsci's thought in dialogue with Latin American and Latin Americanist readings and applications. While my analysis takes into account the relation between discourses in Latin America and their local historico-political conditions as well as shifts in a globalized academic culture, the object is not Latin America in its social or political reality as locus of production of these texts, but rather forms of discourse as productive of political effects.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Postdictatorship and the War of Position**

The reconstitution of the left in Latin America at the level of the state since the close of the twentieth century demands—and has indeed provoked—a return to the discursive legacy of the preceding decades of struggle and defeat. The present chapter is intended as a contribution to this genealogical work of rereading. I focus here on a symptomatic component of that legacy, on the work of a number of influential intellectuals at the vanguard of what has been called the Gramscian turn, the defining mark of which is an effort to reconcile a socialist project with the institutional structures of liberal democracy. I read these texts from a position of cautious solidarity: I share their conviction of the need to retrieve a concept of democracy from the logic of liberalism, but am wary of the impulse to do this by locating a hypostatized subject of democracy within the existing order of social relations.

The problematization of emerging forms of democratic organization is no doubt a task of global dimensions, but it carries a particular weight—and entails particular difficulties—in the context of Latin American societies marked by decades of military dictatorship, where a strategic alliance between the socialist left and liberal-democratic center-left was arguably indispensable. It is within this field of shifting conceptual and practical alliances—which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and still conditions a contemporary discourse that nonetheless contends with a different set of tasks—that I examine here a series of inscriptions of Gramsci's thought. I start with a critique of Carlos Nelson Coutinho, who translated Gramsci into Portuguese in the 1960s and has played an important part in the dissemination and critical discussion of Gramsci's texts in

Brazil; I turn then to Juan Carlos Portantiero, who wrote the first and probably still the most significant major book-length study of Gramsci's thought and its utility for Latin America (*Los usos de Gramsci*, 1971), and to José Aricó, who collaborated in the first Spanish translations of the prison notebooks and published the journal *Pasado y Presente* and eponymous book series, both with a strong Gramscian orientation. I conclude with an analysis of Bolivian sociologist and philosopher René Zavaleta Mercado's critical reading of Gramscian categories in relation to his thinking of democracy in his later work.

I argue that in Coutinho, and in a more subtle way in Portantiero and Aricó, there is a tendency to deploy conceptual tools drawn from Gramsci's texts to posit in different ways an existing collective popular democratic subject with emancipatory potential, rather than articulating the necessity of constructing new forms of subjecthood. In his reterritorialization of Gramscian categories, Coutinho substantially alters the concepts of society and the state and, as a result, that of revolutionary practice and objectives, which become synonymous with democratic pluralism; Aricó and Portantiero stress the superstructural determination of the base as the specific difference of Latin American social processes, and starting from this premise Portantiero ultimately seeks to redeem the political agency of the monolithic demos of populism. Zavaleta's use of Gramsci is diagnostic rather than validating: he derives from Gramsci's expansion of the state a concept of democracy as a powerful instrument of bourgeois dictatorship.

The background of dictatorship and transition to democracy must be understood within a longer history that has conditioned both the immediate political context and the intellectual inheritance of the texts in question. The first generation of Latin American Gramscians (most notably those associated with *Pasado y Presente*) came of age during the Cuban Revolution and the period of polarization in its aftermath that Régis Debray sums up with his observation that

“revolution revolutionizes the counter-revolution” (1967a: 21).<sup>10</sup> This mechanism through which socialist revolutionary struggle strengthens the military and ideological backlash from the right supported by the United States necessitated a new political strategy, but also a new theoretical discourse, and the Gramscian “war of position” became a recurring trope in the intellectual production of the left; the succession of military coups beginning in the 1960s was diagnosed as the expression of a *crisis of hegemony*.<sup>11</sup> A vocabulary and conceptual matrix derived from or associated with Gramsci’s texts became commonplace not only in the academy but in the public

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<sup>10</sup> The foremost theorist and advocate of armed struggle modeled on the Cuban guerrilla experience, even as he upholds Cuba’s status as the “vanguard detachment of the Latin American Revolution” (1967a: 13), Debray recognizes that it is a paradoxical vanguard: “From the Rio Grande to the Falkland Islands, the Cuban Revolution has, to a large extent, *transformed the conditions of transformation* of Latin America. . . . Cuba condemned to failure any mechanical attempt to repeat the experience of the Sierra Maestra, with an equally rapid tempo of action, with the same alliances and the same tactics” (1967a: 21).

<sup>11</sup> José Nun, writing at the same time as Debray, advances this argument in “América Latina: la crisis hegemónica y el golpe militar” (1966), arguing that while there is a common-sense assumption of *golpismo* as an indicator of economic underdevelopment, it is correlated instead with an underdeveloped state-society relation. Norbert Lechner, taking as his premise this correlation between militarism and hegemonic crisis, extends the argument from successful coups to revolutionary armed struggle focused on the seizure of the state. This mode of struggle reflects that of the existing state, he argues, and a new regime established through armed struggle can only reproduce the same hierarchical power structures: “La experiencia del Estado como una fuerza de ocupación encuentra su simple inversión instrumental en la organización del partido como ejército de liberación. . . . La ruptura se reduce a un cambio de mando” [the experience of the state as an occupying force finds its simple instrumental inversion in the organization of the party as a liberation army. . . . The break is reduced to a change of command] (418). Debray diagnoses this *putschist* or *blanquist* reflex of the right and the left as the bane of the region, and defines “Fidelism” as its negation: “In semi-colonial countries, even more than in developed capitalist countries, the State poses the decisive political problem. . . . The usual way of resolving the problem in South America is the coup d’état, by means of which almost all transfers or overthrows of established power take place, even when they are carried out in the name of the popular classes and against the oligarchy. Fidelism defines itself first of all by its refusal of the coup d’état” (1965: 19).

discourse more broadly.<sup>12</sup>

Within this wide range of interpretations and instrumentalizations, the dominant strain of reception in Latin America echoes Togliatti's presentation of Gramsci's writings and the PCI's shift toward social democracy. Most of the texts considered here bear a relation to this trend. Each responds to and participates in a shift in the discourse of Latin American Marxist intellectuals—conditioned by an international crisis of the left and, at the national level, by the eclipsing of the traditional class antagonist by the fiercer, or at least more immediate, opponent of authoritarianism—toward a theoretical marriage of socialism and democracy that simultaneously borrows from and competes with the cultural and formal principles of liberalism, a signifier that has historically served both its exponents and critics to identify democracy with capitalism. Each of their authors, with the exception of Zavaleta, left or was expelled from the communist party of their respective countries: Coutinho, along with other leading intellectuals of the Brazilian left, joined the Workers' Party (PT), which has held the presidency since 2003; Aricó and Portantiero founded the Club de Cultura Socialista, and were denounced by the orthodox communist left as “renegades, deserters, or traitors to their roots” for supporting social democrat Raúl Alfonsín as the first elected, civilian president following the years of military dictatorship (Burgos 2004: 385). Speaking from a position of defeat, they seek to found a new discourse that renegotiates old allegiances without renouncing them. The strategy of armed insurrection had failed, and was held to have led to the years of military repression by the reconstituted democratic opposition as well as by the military regimes themselves. A new strategy

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<sup>12</sup> Raúl Burgos (2002) provides an overview of the disparate uses of a Gramscian vocabulary in the discourse of political actors in Latin America, from Sandinista guerrilla leaders to the Communist Party of Argentina, to the PT in Brazil.

was in order, and Gramsci's theoretical arsenal seemed apposite to the task.

## I. Gramsci's military metaphors

### *Arditismo and foquismo: From tactics to strategy*

Gramsci first theorizes political struggle in terms of the military metaphor of the war of position in § 133 of notebook 1, titled "Military art and political art,"<sup>13</sup> in a discussion of the *arditi*, storm troops of the Italian army in the First World War. Here the *arditi* are understood as a kind of tactical supplement to the regular forces that indicates a weakness:

1) . . . gli arditi sono semplici formazioni tattiche . . .

2) . . . non bisogna considerare l'arditismo come un segno della combattività generale della massa militare, ma viceversa, come un segno della sua passività e della sua relativa demoralizzazione.

[1) . . . the *arditi* are simple tactical formations . . .

2) . . . one must not regard *arditismo* as a sign of the general fighting spirit of the mass of soldiers but conversely, as a sign of their passivity and relative demoralization.]<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> With the following disclaimer: "Ciò sia detto mantenendo implicito il criterio generale che i paragoni tra l'arte militare e la politica sono sempre da stabilire cum grano salis, cioè solo come stimoli al pensiero e come termini semplificativi ad absurdum" [One says this while silently adhering to the general principle that comparisons between military art and politics should always be made with a grain of salt, that is, as terms simplified *ad absurdum*].

<sup>14</sup> For all passages from Notebooks 1–8, I use Buttigieg's translation. Since the Buttigieg translation includes only the first eight notebooks, translations of passages from subsequent notebooks, where no earlier version is indicated, are mine alone; where an earlier version of the note is identified, I have modified Buttigieg's translation of the original version of the note in

*Arditismo*, by extension, refers to a spontaneous, self-organized militancy that can act with greater flexibility than a national army, perhaps analogous to guerrilla tactics, and later in the same note is connected to the war of position: “Il vero arditismo, cioè l’arditismo moderno, è proprio della guerra di posizione, così come si è rivelata nel 14–18.” [True *arditismo*, that is, modern *arditismo*, is peculiar to the war of position, as became apparent in 1914–18]. In Notebook 1 § 134, however, Gramsci takes care to distinguish *arditismo* from “forms of partisan war,” citing as examples the Balkan Komitadji and the Irish guerrillas:

I comitagi, gli irlandesi, e le altre forme di guerra da partigiani devono essere staccate dalla quistione dell’arditismo, sebbene paiano avere con esso punti di contatto. Queste forme di lotta sono proprie di minoranze deboli ma esasperate contro maggioranze bene organizzate: mentre l’arditismo moderno presuppone una grande riserva, immobilizzata per varie ragioni, ma potenzialmente efficiente, che lo sostiene e lo alimenta con apporti individuali.

[The *comitadjis*, the Irish, and the other forms of partisan war must be separated from the question of *arditismo*, even though they seem to be related in some respects. These forms belong specifically to weak but exasperated minorities opposing well-organized majorities, whereas modern *arditismo* presupposes a large reserve force, immobilized for various reasons but potentially effective, which supports and sustains it with individual contributions.]

*Arditismo* is now defined as a form of struggle proper not to a minority but to a latent majority.

There is a dialectic of “voluntarism” and spontaneity, of a mass movement spurred on by

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accordance with Gramsci’s revisions in the later notebook. All unattributed translations of other authors are mine.



organized cells, that resonates with the theory of *foquismo* that emerged out of the Cuban revolution, prior to Debray's reassessment following the failed efforts of "exportation"<sup>15</sup>; Guevara writes,

Es importante destacar que la lucha guerrillera es una lucha de masas, es una lucha de pueblo: la guerrilla, como núcleo armado, es la vanguardia combatiente del mismo, su gran fuerza radica en la masa de la población. . . . Por esto es preciso acudir a la guerra de guerra de guerrillas cuando se tiene junto a sí un núcleo mayoritario y para defenderse de la opresión un número infinitamente menor de armas. (14)

[It is important to emphasize that guerrilla warfare is a war of the masses, a war of the people. The guerrilla band is an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people. It draws its great force from the mass of the people themselves. . . . Guerilla warfare is used by the side which is supported by a majority but which possesses a much smaller number of arms for use in defense against oppression.] (52)

Here priority is given to the "spontaneous" will of the masses, and the "voluntarist" force of an armed vanguard serves as a mere tactical stimulus. Debray articulates this position in his defense of *foquismo* or "Fidelism," contrary to the claims of its critics who would argue, based on the failed attempts to "export" the Cuban revolution, that *foquismo* is a tragically voluntarist strategy (but here specifically in the context of a discussion of the failed Brazilian Communist coup led by Luís Carlos Prestes in 1935):

The most serious mistake would be to see in the *foco* a revival of Blanquism.

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<sup>15</sup> See Fonseca (pp. 76–77) for a discussion of *arditismo* in connection with Leninist hegemony as vanguardism as well as Latin American *foquismo* (qualified as Trotskyist).

Although it starts as a tiny group—from 10 to 30 individuals, professional revolutionaries entirely dedicated to the cause and aiming to win power—the *foco* does not by any means attempt to seize power on its own, by one audacious stroke. Nor even does it aim to conquer power by means of war or through a military defeat of the enemy: it only aspires to enable the masses themselves to overthrow the established power. It is a minority, certainly, but one which, unlike the Blanquist minority of activists, aims to win over the masses before and not after the seizure of power, and which makes this the essential condition of the final conquest of power. (1965: 27)

Like Gramsci's *arditi*, the guerrilla *foco* of the 1950s and 1960s represents an incipient or latent hegemonic (mass) force, but one that still must operate in a context of repression in which revolutionary struggle cannot be waged unarmed.

The name *arditi* was later adopted by fascist paramilitary units, but also by antifascist militias called the *Arditi del Popolo*. In 1921, Gramsci opposes Socialist member of parliament and political leader of the *Arditi del Popolo* Giuseppe Mingrino's position that its members should carry out only defensive actions in an article in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, contending that such a limitation would neutralize the power of the movement, confining it to trade union (that is, corporative) goals. Mingrino's position, Gramsci argues, is premised on a naïve understanding of the fascist opponent. He writes,

bisogna invece vedere il fascismo nella sua realtà obbiettiva . . . come uno spontaneo pullulare di energie reazionarie che si aggregano, si disgregano, si riassociano, seguendo i capi ufficiali solo quando le loro parole d'ordine corrispondono all'intima natura del movimento, che è quella che è, nonostante i

discorsi di Mussolini, i comunicati di Pasella, gli alalà di tutti gli idealisti di questo mondo?

Iniziare un movimento di riscossa popolare, aderire a un movimento di riscossa popolare ponendo preventivamente un limite alla sua espansione, è il più grave errore di tattica che si possa commettere in questo momento.

[Fascism must rather be understood in its objective reality . . . as a spontaneous swarm of reactionary energies that coalesce, dissolve and then reassemble, following the official leaders only when their orders correspond to the inner nature of the movement. This is what it is, regardless of the speeches of Mussolini, the statements of Pasella, and the war cries of all the idealists in the world.

To launch, or join, a movement of popular resistance – while setting in advance limits to its expansion—is the gravest tactical error one could commit in this moment.] (Trans. Ben W., with my modifications)

The people should be armed, Gramsci maintains, but also allowed autonomous political organization and action. The disciplined subsumption of the Arditi under more rigid political leadership would, moreover, he points out, instrumentalize its militants and put them at risk of being massacred if they are deployed from above as a mere armed vanguard. Although the *L'Ordine Nuovo* article predates the note in which *arditismo* is defined as merely tactical, there is here already an implied privileging of the diffuse, *political* (rather than merely corporative) nature of the Arditi del Popolo as a broader strategic conception of the struggle against fascism.

In § 18 of Notebook 14, “Machiavelli. Voluntarism and Garibaldism” (a revised version of § 244 of Notebook 8, “Machiavelli. Against ‘voluntarism’ or Garibaldism”), in which Gramsci criticizes an individualistic rhetoric of heroism, he uses the term *arditi* as a synonym for

*vanguard*, itself a military metaphor so central to discourses pertaining to culture that it has become catachrestic (in the sense of a metaphor without substitution elaborated by Derrida, following Pierre Fontanier<sup>16</sup>), its metaphoricity forgotten.<sup>17</sup> Like vanguardism, hegemony, and indeed the very category of the intellectual as cultural and political function, *arditismo* has a necessarily double sense, as organic popular leadership or as an agent of domination and of the perpetuation of elite privilege.

Le “avanguardie” senza esercito di rincalzo, gli “arditi” senza fanteria e artiglieria, sono anch’esse trasposizioni del linguaggio dell’eroismo retorico; non così le avanguardie e gli arditi come funzioni specializzate di organismi complessi e regolari. Così è della concezione delle élites di intellettuali senza massa, ma non degli intellettuali che si sentono legati organicamente a una massa nazionale-popolare. In realtà si lotta contro queste degenerazioni di falsi eroismi e di pseudo-aristocrazie stimolando la formazione di blocchi sociali omogenei e compatti che esprimono un gruppo di intellettuali, di arditi, un’avanguardia loro propria che reagiscono nel loro blocco per svilupparlo e non solo per perpetuare il loro dominio zingaresco.

[“Vanguards” without an army behind them, commandos (*arditi*) without infantry and artillery, are transpositions of the rhetorical language of heroism; not

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<sup>16</sup> Derrida 1982: 255–257.

<sup>17</sup> Buttigeig translates *arditi* as *commandos* in Q 8 § 244, a choice that I maintain in my translation of the revised note here. It should nonetheless be noted that the term is not used in this general sense in Italian (the same word of Latin origin, *commando*, is used in Italian). *Arditi* as a military term retains its historical specificity originating in the First World War (as a common adjective it simply means *daring*, *courageous*, etc.).

so vanguards and commandos as specialized functions of complex and regular organisms. Such is the elite conception of intellectuals removed from the masses, but not of intellectuals that feel themselves to be organically linked to a national-popular mass. In reality the struggle is against these false notions of heroism and pseudo-aristocracy and for the formation of homogeneous social blocs and alliances that produce a group of intellectuals, of commandos (*arditi*), a vanguard of their own that acts within their bloc to develop it and not only to perpetuate their Gypsy-like domination.]

As the concept moves from the sphere of military to political and cultural activity (a rhetorical move with which Gramsci was never entirely satisfied, as noted in the passage cited in footnote 4, above, despite his continual return to various forms of these military metaphors), *arditismo* as a more improvised, clandestine, and prolonged form of militancy comes to signify the core of political struggle rather than its mere supplement, and the war of position becomes a figure for the shift to the terrain of hegemony, ideology, and culture.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marco Fonseca frames *arditismo* as a strategy within the war of position in Negrian terms (something perhaps suggested by Gramsci's use of the word *pullulare* [translated here as "swarm"] in the *L'Ordine Nuovo* article): "In Gramsci's sense, then, popular organizations committed to counter-hegemony are radically autonomous, rhizomatic, multiple, heterogeneous, and even prefigurative or utopian expressions of what can be called self-constitutive, self-authorizing and self-legitimizing practices of modern militant activism that, if we look at them in the context of today's neoliberal capitalism, can also operate as a form of neo-arditismo, a kind of cultural guerilla warfare subversive of the process of hegemony and the passive revolution that operate invisibly at the heart of modern types of civil society. Counter-hegemonic popular organizations are, thus, radically collective and oppositional forces in the war of position, and Gramsci by no means suggests that civil society should be fought with civil society, or hegemony with hegemony, or the state with the state. In this regard, Gramsci transcends Lenin's basic notion of hegemony as leadership and Lenin's basic formula for a shift in the balance of forces towards the leadership of the proletariat and its party within an existing capitalist hegemonic regime or historical bloc. Gramsci here is decidedly post-Leninist" (Fonseca 119).

*From military to political struggle: The war of position*

The recurring trope of the “war of position,” defined in opposition to the war of movement, is connected to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony first as the predominant military strategy of Western industrialized states—that is, states in which hegemony predominates over sheer force—while the war of movement is relegated to a *tactical* role<sup>19</sup> (“La guerra di posizione domanda enormi sacrifici a masse sterminate di popolazione; perciò è necessaria una concentrazione inaudita dell’egemonia” [The war of position calls on enormous masses of people to make huge sacrifices; that is why an unprecedented concentration of hegemony is required] [Q 6 § 138]); it then comes to signify not only the form of warfare that accompanies, or follows, the construction of hegemony, but the conquest of hegemony itself as the political correlate of this form of military struggle (a transposition made, for example, in Notebook 8 § 52: “la guerra di posizione, in politica, è il concetto di egemonia, che può nascere solo dopo l’avvento di certe premesse e cioè: le grandi organizzazioni popolari di tipo moderno, che rappresentano come le “trincee” e le fortificazioni permanenti della guerra di posizione.” [in politics, the war of position is the concept of hegemony that can only come into existence after certain things are already in place, namely, the large popular organizations of the modern type that represent, as it were, the trenches and the permanent fortifications of the war of position]).

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<sup>19</sup> In Q 7 § 10, quoted at length below, Gramsci writes, “Con ciò non si vuol dire che la tattica d’assalto e di sfondamento e la guerra manovrata debbano essere considerate come ormai sparite dallo studio dell’arte militare: sarebbe un grosso errore. Ma esse, nelle guerre tra gli Stati più avanzati industrialmente e civilmente, devono considerarsi ridotte più a funzione tattica che a funzione strategica, così come era la guerra d’assedio nel periodo precedente della storia militare” [This does not mean that the tactics of assault and incursion and the war of maneuver should now be considered to be utterly erased from the study of military science; that would be a serious error. But in wars among the most industrially and socially advanced states, these methods of war must be seen to have a reduced tactical function rather than a strategic function; their place in military history is analogous to that of siege warfare in the previous period].

Gramsci develops this metaphoric—but, again, not only metaphoric—relation between the military and political strategies of the war of position at length in note 10 of Notebook 7, titled “Structure and superstructure,” identifying the Russian Revolution of 1917 as the pivotal moment after which the war of movement became anachronistic.<sup>20</sup> If 1917 represented a “revolution against *Capital*” because it proved that the bourgeois revolution and the entire historical stage it was to inaugurate could be skipped, that the proletariat could lead a socialist revolution without the period of training that subsumption under capital would provide,<sup>21</sup> it also represented a victory that was irreproducible in industrialized Europe.

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<sup>20</sup> The note opens with Gramsci’s criticism of Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Mass Strike*, which he reads as overly economistic: “Ricordare il libretto della Rosa . . . erano trascurati gli elementi volontari e organizzativi . . . per pregiudizio “economistico,” li trascurava inconsciamente; questo libretto mi pare il più significativo della teoria della guerra manovrata applicata alla scienza storica e all’arte politica. L’elemento economico immediato (crisi ecc.) è considerato come l’artiglieria campale nella guerra . . . di creare fulmineamente la concentrazione dell’ideologia e dei fini da raggiungere. Era una forma di ferreo determinismo economistico, con l’aggravante che gli effetti ne erano concepiti come rapidissimi nel tempo e nello spazio” [Take note of Rosa’s little book . . . The “voluntary” and organizational elements are ignored . . . because of her “economistic” prejudice, she unconsciously ignored them. This little book, in my view, constitutes the most significant theory of the war of maneuver applied to the study of history and to the art of politics. The immediate economic factor (crises, etc.) is seen as the field artillery employed in war to open a breach in the enemy’s defenses . . . to produce, in a flash, a concentration of ideology and of the ends to be achieved. It was a rigid form of economic determinism, made worse by the notion that effects of the immediate economic factor would unfold at lightning speed in time and space] (cf. Q 13 § 24). Luxemburg, it should be noted, stresses the unity of political and economic struggle in the mass strike, and unequivocally denies such a notion of a victory at “lightning speed”: “It is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades” (141).

<sup>21</sup> “In Russia, Marx’s *Capital* was more a book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat. It was a critical demonstration of the necessity that events must take a certain course in Russia: a bourgeoisie had to develop, the capitalistic era had to get under way and civilization on the Western model be introduced, before the proletariat could even start thinking about its own revolt, its own demands, its own revolution. But events have overtaken ideology” (“The Revolution Against *Capital*” 39).

In this note Gramsci initially writes “trench warfare,” but then changes “trenches” to “positions,” a choice maintained in his transcription of the note in Notebook 13 § 24: “La guerra di ~~trincee~~ posizione non è infatti solo costituita dalle trincee vere e proprie, ma da tutto il sistema organizzativo e industriale del territorio che è alle spalle dell’esercito schierato” [A war of (~~trenches~~) position in fact does not consist solely of a set of actual trenches; it comprises the entire organizational and industrial structure of the territory that lies behind the arrayed forces]. This revision contributes to the flexibility of the concept to move with greater ease from a strictly military sense into the sphere of political struggle. Because the superstructural “trenches” of modern civil society offer greater resistance to the “immediate economic factor,” the notion of revolution as a heroic event is superseded by one of prolonged political struggle that requires an in-depth study of the elements of civil society, and their progressive occupation and transformation. In this way the war of position not only articulates a conceptual relation between two parallel spheres through analogy, but can designate a shift *from* military to cultural struggle.

Finally, the war of position is connected in a number of passages in the notebooks to the notion of passive revolution (elsewhere called “revolution without revolution” [Q 1 § 44; Q 19 § 24] or “revolution-restoration” [passim]), and situated within a broader periodization scheme according to which the war of movement gives way to the war of position as the general mode of historical development after the French Revolution. The first victorious “war of position,” according to this scheme, is that of liberalism in the nineteenth century, followed, in the twentieth century, by fascism. In Notebook 8, for example:

Non sarebbe il fascismo precisamente la forma di “rivoluzione passiva” propria del secolo XX come il liberalismo lo è stato del secolo XIX? . . . Questa concezione potrebbe essere avvicinata a quella che in politica si può chiamare “guerra di



posizione” in opposizione alla guerra di movimento. Così nel ciclo storico precedente la Rivoluzione francese sarebbe stata “guerra di movimento” e l’epoca liberale del secolo XIX una lunga guerra di posizione.

[If liberalism was the form of “passive revolution specific to the nineteenth century, wouldn’t fascism be, precisely, the form of “passive revolution” specific to the twentieth century? . . . This idea can be compared<sup>22</sup> to the concept of what, in political terms, one might call “war of position,” as opposed to war of movement. Thus one might say that, in the previous historical cycle, the French Revolution was a “war of movement,” whereas the liberal epoch of the nineteenth century was a long war of position.] (Q 8 § 236)

In Notebook 10 § 9, passive revolution is defined as the political equivalent of the war of position understood as proper to the economic sphere, and in Q 15 § 11, on the Risorgimento, Gramsci asks whether there is an “absolute identity” between the two concepts, or at least a coincidence of the two during a certain historical period. The war of position as political or broadly superstructural rather than armed struggle cannot therefore be equated with a given *superstructural* content; for example, of either liberal or radical socialist democracy, either of which might claim such an identity through their respective understandings of “civil society” as the field of politics.

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<sup>22</sup> I have changed only this word from Buttigieg’s translation; he translates *avvicinata* as “juxtaposed,” suggesting that the two concepts are contrasted rather than likened to one another, perhaps indicating a resistance to reading the war of position as potentially reactionary. *Avvicinarsi*, while closer to “juxtapose” in the most literal sense in that both refer to a spatial relation of contiguity, denotes similarity rather than contrast.

## II. Civil society against the state

In 1979, midway between the beginning of the “opening” of the military regime in Brazil and de-escalation of repressive measures initiated in 1974 and the formal transition to civilian government in 1985, Coutinho published his most influential essay, “A democracia como valor universal.” Marco Aurélio Nogueira describes the impact of this text on the Brazilian left:

O ensaio de Coutinho funcionou como um verdadeiro divisor de águas no marxismo brasileiro. Gerou polêmicas até então inimagináveis, polarizou a esquerda, fez com que viessem á superfície o doutrinaramismo e a resistência à mudança dos militantes comunistas, impulsionou realinhamentos teóricos fundamentais e, sobretudo, ajudou a consolidar, entre muitos revolucionários, uma cultura política democrática e uma visão moderna do socialismo. Isso sem falar dos efeitos renovadores que teve sobre o próprio liberalismo brasileiro.

[Coutinho’s essay marked a before and after in Brazilian Marxism. It generated polemics that had previously been unimaginable, polarized the left, brought the doctrinarism and resistance to change of the militant communists to light, prompted basic theoretical realignments, and, above all, helped to consolidate, among many revolutionaries, a democratic political culture and a modern conception of socialism. Not to mention its role in renewing Brazilian liberalism.]

(137)

While Nogueira frames this intervention in terms of a “polarization” of Brazilian Marxism, he also (and more pertinently) emphasizes its unifying function, the “consolidation . . . of a democratic political culture and a modern vision of socialism,” and signals, in its resonance not

only among socialist intellectuals but also within Brazilian liberalism, a recognition of common interests and values that unite the socialist left and the liberal-democratic center-left in their opposition to authoritarianism. Those who held fast to a militant position, a “golpismo de esquerda” [literally, *coup-ism* of the left] (37) that had already failed in practice, were now exposed as theoretically obsolete, unmodern. With “A democracia como valor universal,” Coutinho upholds a concept of democracy that is substantive rather than functionalist and is equated with socialism as an end in itself rather than subordinated to it as a strategic medium. He introduces in this text a deployment of Gramsci’s conceptual toolkit that he will take up in many of the texts that I examine in what follows, explicitly situating his reading within a lineage that comes through Togliatti (60).

Note 16 of notebook 7, on the war of maneuver and the war of position, is cited with astounding frequency in Latin Americanist scholarship on Gramsci, and Coutinho centers his argument for Gramsci’s utility for Brazilian socialist theory and practice around this fragment (as will Zavaleta, and Portantiero also cites it).<sup>23</sup> The original passage reads:

In Oriente lo Stato era tutto, la società civile era primordiale e gelatinosa; nell’Occidente tra Stato e società civile c’era un giusto rapporto e nel tremolio dello Stato si scorgeva subito una robusta struttura della società civile. Lo Stato era solo una trincea avanzata, dietro cui stava una robusta catena di fortezze e di casematte; più o meno, da Stato a Stato, si capisce, ma questo appunto domandava un’accurata ricognizione di carattere nazionale.

[In the East the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous;

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the frequent misuse and decontextualized readings of this passage, see Joseph A. Buttigieg’s “Gramsci on Civil Society” (*Boundary 2*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 1–32).

in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the state tottered, a sturdy structure of civil society was immediately revealed. The State was just a forward trench; behind it stood a succession of sturdy fortresses and emplacements.]

Coutinho offers different translations of this passage in different texts. In “As categorias de Gramsci e a realidade brasileira,” he renders “un giusto rapporto” literally as “uma justa relação”; on at least two other occasions, however, the same phrase is translated “uma relação equilibrada entre Estado e sociedade civil” (1985: 66; 2000: 88, 172), implying a balance, or, potentially, a tension, between two opposing forces, rather than an organic articulation.

In discussing Gramsci’s expansion of the concept of the state, Coutinho posits a dual nature of this “integral state,” and the relative autonomy of civil society within this binary structure. He outlines this theory taking as his point of departure Norberto Bobbio’s identification of Gramsci’s designation of civil society as superstructural (against Marx, for whom it constitutes the structural social relations of the economy) (1985: 60; 1989: 73), but distinguishes his reading from Bobbio’s by arguing that from this transformation or repositioning of the concept of civil society it does not follow, as Bobbio claims, that the superstructure becomes a determining element and no longer a mere expression of the structural base. This claim requires a complex edifice of argumentation, of equivalences and oppositions that can be summarized as follows: (1) the superstructure is of a binary nature and is identical to the integral state, that is, political society (or the state in the narrow sense, or dictatorship, or coercion) plus civil society (the field of hegemony, or *consenso*<sup>24</sup>); (2) The relative autonomy of

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<sup>24</sup> Consensus or consent. In Coutinho—as is conventional in Spanish and Portuguese translations of Gramsci’s concept—the Italian term is shifted toward the sense of consensus (Pt. *consenso*),

these two spheres is determined in two ways: first, through a rigorous distinction between coercion and hegemony,<sup>25</sup> and second, through the existence of separate material structures corresponding to each sphere which come to occupy the position of the material base, namely, the institutions of government, the police, and the military, and those of civil society (roughly corresponding to Althusser's repressive state apparatuses and ideological state apparatuses, though conceptualized differently). Coutinho privileges this "ontological," "material independence" of the institutions of civil society in his explication of Gramsci's theory of the state—"é essa independência material . . . que funda ontologicamente a sociedade civil como uma esfera própria, dotada de legalidade própria" [it is this material independence . . . that founds civil society ontologically as a separate sphere, with its own laws] (1989: 77). This perhaps allows Coutinho to claim fidelity to a certain materialist orthodoxy, but in doing so he rewrites the notions of base and superstructure, reducing this relation to a mere distinction between the material and immaterial in a quite literal sense. Base and superstructure are no longer categories of any theoretical value, since the real relation (or opposition) here is between civil society and the state, first claimed to jointly constitute the superstructure but then found to each contain its own base. The result is a concept of civil society that is neither determinant of the state (as in Marx) nor closely articulated with it (as in Gramsci), but has a dual structure—internally divided into material base and ideological superstructure—parallel to that of the state.

This idea of parallel structures emerges once more in an essay that traces the concept of

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implying a more active form of agreement than mere consent. This is perhaps the most obvious translation, but it is worth noting that a word closer to the English *consent*—*consentimento*—is also available in Portuguese, while both concepts are covered by the Italian *consenso*.

<sup>25</sup> For a critique of this distinction, see Pereyra (5–19).

dual power from Marx, through Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, and concludes by suggesting that this genealogy constitutes the historical roots of Gramsci's concept of the war of position, refined by his Eurocommunist successors: Togliatti, Poulantzas, Vacca. Coutinho argues that the seeds of the transcendence of Marx's "explosive revolution" are already present in Engels, in his introduction to the 1895 edition of *The Class Struggles in France*. Here Engels offers a revision of Marx's definition of the state as the executive committee of the ruling class, proposing a new concept of a contractual state that includes a plurality of interests. The subsequent Leninist and Trotskyist theories of dual power as a transitional phase that must end in the destruction of one by the other are rejected, and a version of Engels' theory of the "contractual" state reemerges in Gramsci and his heirs. Through this linear genealogical construction, Coutinho rejects the original content of the concept of dual power, and yet borrows the name to give new meaning to the Gramscian concept of the integral state (49). Both concepts are transformed in the process: dual power becomes a balance of forces rather than a parallel operation of two opposing powers, and the integral state assumes a binary (or pluralistic) structure in terms of interests or ideological content and not merely in terms of means (coercion and hegemony). The "integral" state, here and elsewhere in Coutinho, through a series of semantic associations, comes to connote the inclusion of a multiplicity of political subjects, rather than merely the integration of state and non-state organs, grafting Gramsci's text onto a contemporary discourse of democratic pluralism and social inclusion.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to Coutinho's application of these concepts to Brazil, and to the passage on Western versus Eastern states and the war of position as opposed to the war of maneuver:

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<sup>26</sup> I discuss a similar use of the concept in Álvaro García Linera in Chapter 3.

Coutinho argues in “As categorias de Gramsci e a realidade brasileira” (1989) that the Brazilian state, founded on the exploitation of slave labor, has historically been of the Eastern type, basing this argument on an evaluation of the relative strength or weakness of society vis-à-vis the state: “o que torna possível afirmar a predominância de pontos de semelhança com o modelo ‘oriental’ é o fato de que não só a sociedade civil era até pouco tempo ‘primitiva e gelatinosa,’ mas também de que o Estado—ao contrário das mencionadas sociedades liberais—foi sempre bastante forte” [what makes it possible to affirm the predominance of points of resemblance with the “Eastern” model is the fact that not only was civil society “primitive and gelatinous” until recently, but the state—unlike in the liberal societies he refers to—was always comparatively strong] (212). During the latter half of the twentieth century, however, Coutinho claims that Brazilian society embarked upon a process of Westernization through which civil society gained a certain degree of “autonomy”;<sup>27</sup> Westernization here is equated with organized, grassroots struggle against the ruling class rather than the hegemonic integration of civil society into the social order defended and represented by the state.

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<sup>27</sup> This progression is placed in a relation of antagonism with respect to the military regime established with the coup of 1964, which is constructed above all as a reactionary attack on this growing autonomy, albeit one that ultimately fails:

a tendência à “ocidentalização” da sociedade brasileira continuou a predominar, reforçando-se ainda mais no período 1955–1964. Essa tendência foi obviamente freada pelo golpe de Estado de 1964 que . . . buscou por todos os meios quebrar os organismos autônomos da sociedade civil. . . . Todavia, apesar de tudo, a sociedade civil—embora por vezes duramente reprimida—sempre conservou uma margem de autonomia real.

[the tendency toward the “Westernization” of Brazilian society continued to predominate, becoming even more pronounced in the period between 1955 and 1964. This tendency was obviously halted by the coup of 1964 that . . . sought by all means possible to break the autonomous organisms of civil society. . . . Still, in spite of everything, civil society—if sometimes brutally repressed—always preserved some degree of real autonomy.] (123)

There is in this reading a conflation of Gramsci's East/West dichotomy and a state/society opposition that resonates with a global trend of anti-statism in processes of democratization,<sup>28</sup> but which has also been a central theme of Brazilian social thought at least since Gilberto Freyre's notorious defense of "social democracy," used interchangeably with "racial democracy," as obviating the need for a "merely political democracy" (Freyre 18) at the level of the state. Gramsci's (far from unequivocal) phrase "primordiale e gelatinosa," an attribute that Coutinho applies to Brazilian society until the second half of the twentieth century, refers not to an absence and not even primarily to a weakness or deficiency (though certainly these are implied to some extent), but to a lack of structural organization, and of articulation with the institutions of the state. More to the point, in the first sentence of the passage he cites from the notebooks, Coutinho reads "Lo stato era tutto" as affirming a degree of presence, of strength, of power. Certainly the *immediacy* of state power often appears as heightened presence, and the association of Gramsci's characterization of Tsarist Russia with colonial and early republican Brazil, in which a landed oligarchy ruled over a population of slaves and poor laborers with little mediation of bourgeois institutions of civil society, is not entirely unfounded. But a more precise interpretation of the first clause in this opposition—"lo Stato era tutto, la società civile era primordiale e gelatinosa"—would be not that the state is everything in that it is strong, expansive, omnipresent, occupying the space left empty by an unformed civil society, but that it is everything in the sense of being *all there is*: in that it cannot enlist the support of civil society and therefore does *not* occupy this space; it lacks the necessary connection to the organs of civil society to reinforce its power.

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<sup>28</sup> Outlined, for example, in Cohen and Arato, and in Lincoln Secco in reference to Brazil specifically.



This reversal with regard to Gramsci's use of these categories serves to shift the terms of the discourse toward pluralism and grassroots democratic mobilization, rehabilitating a Marxist tradition (at least nominally) that had in recent decades been charged with obsolescence by integrating it into a broader discourse of the Latin American left, and specifically of the Brazilian PT, which, Coutinho notes, constitutes a coalition of appreciable ideological heterogeneity. This gesture is necessarily bidirectional: a Marxist identity is preserved in the inhospitable climate of globalized capitalism following the collapse of "real socialism," and a discourse and practice compatible with (and perhaps indistinguishable from) that of the liberal democratic left is given radical overtones.

According to Coutinho's reading, in the Eastern model the state permeates the social fabric, foreclosing the possibility of organized opposition, while in the Western model civil society enjoys a degree of autonomy that enables it to contest the dominant ideology of the state, limiting the reach of its institutions. What for Gramsci is merely the terrain on which the war of position is waged, for Coutinho is something like conquered territory from the outset. "Civil society" is equated here with "the masses" and with political agency "from below," and thus is conceived as necessarily bearing a democratic content. A concept of civil society as a *space*, or *structure*, slips continually into the form of a *subject*,<sup>29</sup> and the war of position—a war waged

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<sup>29</sup> Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato propose a revision or development of Gramsci's theory in a vein very similar to Coutinho's reading, though without attributing their innovations to Gramsci himself, whom they consider to have been confined by a "functionalist reduction of civil society" (152). The idea of civil society, and more specifically that of liberal democratic political culture, as a good in itself, they note, emerged in the discourse of anti-authoritarian social and political actors in the transitions to democracy in Latin America and Eastern Europe, and is a defining trait of post-Marxism, and possibly post-Gramscianism (71). Coutinho seems to exemplify what Cohen and Arato identify as a desirable transformation of Gramsci's concepts, and yet he almost always chooses to present himself as a faithful apostle, arguing the case for Gramsci's timeliness and appositeness to Brazilian social conditions, and seeks to distance himself from declared

*within* the structures of civil society for the radical transformation of the state conceived in its expanded form—is simplified into a war *between* society and the state.

### III. From civil society to *pueblo*

If Coutinho implicitly abandons the logic of base and superstructure while still claiming adherence to a materialist position, Aricó and Portantiero both take as their explicit point of departure in writing Gramsci into Latin American socialist theory the transcendence of this logic. Each stresses in different ways the effectivity of the superstructural moment, no longer a mere expression or reflection of the socio-economic structure; the productivity of the state as inseparable, in short, from the productivity of culture, of the intellectuals, of the ethico-political moment.

In Aricó's *Marx y América Latina*, this anti-economistic perspective informs an argument against the conventional wisdom that attributes Marx's inattention to Latin America simply to the Eurocentrism of the times. This view follows from an orthodox construction of the Marxist canon in which certain texts—those that question the universality of a historical process in which the development of capitalism is a necessary precondition for socialist revolution, and even propose an inversion of the model in which revolutionary mobilization spreads from the center to the periphery—are excluded as apocryphal, designated as “circumstantial” and devoid of

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advocates of liberalism; Cohen and Arato, on the other hand, while uncommonly rigorous in their analysis, read Gramsci from a position that seeks to deliberately distinguish itself from Marxism and rehabilitate for the left substantive and formal elements of bourgeois liberal political culture.

theoretical significance (58; 76). If we cannot accept this reductive explanation, Aricó suggests, we must take a closer look at Marx's marginalization of Latin America in order to deduce its cause. Aricó does this by examining a rare text in which Marx does indeed discuss Latin American politics, but does so in a way entirely inconsistent with his own theory and method (120). In a text on Simón Bolívar, Aricó claims, Marx fails to offer any materialist or structural basis or, for that matter, any theoretical basis at all, for his criticism of the figure that embodies the emergence of the independent Latin American nation states, and thus writes off the continent as untheorizable. Aricó concludes that this theoretical blind spot is the result of Marx's overzealous reaction to Hegel's philosophy of the state as subject of history, which prevents him from recognizing the capacity of the state to act upon or "produce" civil society, inverting the logic of social base and political superstructure (128).

The relative strength of this capacity constitutes for Aricó the singularity of Latin American societies, and leads him, by bringing to the fore Marx's failure to address such cases, to propose a revision of classical Marxist theory that resonates with Gramsci's thought. It is therefore not so much Gramsci who facilitates a reading of Latin America, but the other way around: Latin America demands a Gramscian rewriting of Marx. In *La cola del diablo*, Aricó describes the affinity of Gramsci's historical context with his own in terms of

el implícito reconocimiento por parte de Gramsci de dos rasgos que caracterizaron el proceso de constitución de nuestros estados nacionales: una autonomía considerable de la esfera ideológica y una evidente incapacidad de autoconstitución de la sociedad. Colocados en este plano de análisis, los grandes temas de la revolución pasiva, del bonapartismo y de la relación intelectuales-masa, que constituyen lo propio de la indagación gramsciana, tienen para

nosotros una concreta resonancia empírica.

[Gramsci's implicit recognition of features that characterize the process of the constitution of our national states: a considerable degree of autonomy in the ideological sphere and an evident incapacity for the self-constitution of society. On this level of analysis, the major themes of passive revolution, Bonapartism, and the relation between the intellectuals and the masses, which constitute the core of Gramsci's research project, have a concrete empirical resonance for us.]  
(1988: 96)

Gramsci's empirical situation, in this reading, allowed him to arrive at an understanding of the historical productivity of superstructural elements lacking in Marx, which in turn serves as a model of theoretical production from and on the basis of Latin American societies.

The Gramscian turn in Argentina, with a strong regionalist overtone, entailed a reconstruction of the origins of Latin American Marxism in its own image. Aricó characterizes one of the canonical founders of the Latin American Marxist tradition, José Carlos Mariátegui, as Gramscian not by influence (he was just three years younger than Gramsci and cannot have been familiar with much of his work, although he studied in Italy) but as a result of the commonalities in the social problems they confronted—those of a “peripheral” formation largely constituted by non-proletarian (peasant) masses. The concrete problems that Aricó identifies in the conflict that arose between Mariátegui and the European Marxist institutional authorities of the period—the early years of the Third International—also carried a strong resonance in the Southern Cone at the time. In his introduction to the anthology, *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano*, Aricó writes,

La condena del populismo encubría en realidad la negación de toda posibilidad

subversiva y revolucionaria de movimientos ideológicos y políticos de las masas populares que no fueran dirigidos directamente por los comunistas. . . . Al establecer una relación de discontinuidad entre el movimiento comunista y los movimientos sociales que precedieron la constitución de aquella formación política, contribuyeron a romper los lazos ideológicos, políticos y culturales que los vinculaban con las realidades nacionales y que les podían permitir convertirse en una expresión originaria de ellas, antes que ser la expresión de una doctrina “externa” y por tanto “impuesta” a las formaciones nacionales siempre históricamente concretas.

[The denunciation of populism really concealed a denial of any subversive or revolutionary capacity of the ideological and political movements of the popular masses that were not directly led by the communists. . . . In establishing a relation of discontinuity between the communist movement and the social movements that preceded the constitution of that political formation, they helped to break the ideological, political, and cultural links that connected them to the national realities and that allowed them to become their original expression, rather than the expression of a doctrine “external” to and therefore “imposed” upon the always historically concrete national formations.] (xxxviii)

Mariátegui comes to represent a precedent for the articulation of socialism and populism, understood as the predominant mode of mobilization of the Argentine masses, and at the same time serves as a justificatory example of a certain heterodoxy, a process of autonomization from the European tradition. This departure is validated by an alternative source within the same European tradition: a thought that is at once inside and outside the metropolitan origin and

center, and thus confers a certain legitimacy even as it authorizes a divergence from the institutions that claim the legacy of this origin. Gramsci here serves to lend a certain prestige to the figure of Mariátegui and by extension an entire Latin American tradition, and this equivalence in turn justifies Gramsci's appropriation for the development of a new theoretical practice from Latin America after the bankruptcy of the traditional models. Aricó writes of the Comintern's censure of Mariátegui, "En primer lugar, condujeron a excluir por principio toda búsqueda original basada en el estado social del país y no a partir de doctrinas sectarias" [In the first place, they led the exclusion in principle of any original inquiry based on the social condition of the country rather than on sectarian doctrines] (xxxix), and he emphasizes in Mariátegui "la acuciante necesidad de hacer emerger el socialismo de la propia realidad, de convertir al marxismo en la expresión propia y originaria de la acción teórica y práctica de las clases subalternas por conquistar su autonomía histórica" [the urgent need to make socialism emerge from reality itself, to turn Marxism into the the proper and originary expression of the the theoretical and practical action of the subaltern classes in their conquest of historical autonomy] (lii). The new guiding theoretical principle would be the subordination of theory to the local empirical reality, clearly a proposition of sufficient generality to allow its development in a number of directions.

Portantiero's reading of Gramsci resonates strongly with Aricó's account in the passage cited above from *La cola del diablo*, and he emphasizes in particular Gramsci's interest in "Bonapartist," or populist configurations. The Argentine left has, since the boom in academic Marxism in the 1960s, found itself in a double bind in relation to the most formative experience of the working class: that of Peronism. In 1970 Portantiero and Miguel Murmis published *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*, a volume that brings together two essays on the

conditions and early gestation of the Peronist hegemonic configuration, arguing against both those who attribute to the subaltern classes an absolute ingenuity and heteronomy (the majority within the academy) and those who uncritically extol the radical potential of the popular masses as emerging political subject. The previous literature on the subject, according to Murmis' and Portantiero's overview, is invariably premised on the claim that the Argentine working class at the time of the emergence of populism as a political option was internally divided into "old" and "new" sectors: the old workers, mostly with immigrant backgrounds, resemble the classic European model of a proletariat with a history of organization and consciousness of their structural position; the new workers, which in this reading represent the dominant element quantitatively and qualitatively in the populist movement, exhibit a state of ideological vacancy. For Peronism's critics, this vacancy translates into a docility and manipulability, a predisposition to a purely emotive mode of interpellation by the state; for its apologists, it represents a kind of natural purity and potential for revolutionary innovation. Murmis and Portantiero argue that this premise is both theoretically and empirically flawed. They present evidence for a high degree of autonomous syndicalist organization on the European ("old") model in the early stages of Peronism, and argue that the new hegemonic configuration is constituted through an alliance of classes rather than simply through the subordination and manipulation of the workers. This alliance may have been the best strategic option at the time, and resulted in an objective amelioration of the conditions of existence of the working class. And yet, it failed in the long term to transform the social relations of production.

This double critique constitutes a response to what I have called the double bind of the Peronist legacy: the challenge of articulating a constructive analysis of the dominant mode of popular political subjectification that neither posits a pre-given, self-cognizant mass subject nor

forecloses the possibility of autonomy. Portantiero takes up this task again in his work on Gramsci, proposing that his theorization of the construction of hegemony is particularly pertinent not, as Coutinho would have it, in the West proper, but in the peripheral West where one form or another of “populism” has been the dominant mode of articulation of the national and the popular, and of the people with the state. This subcategory of peripheral capitalist Western states, in which Gramsci classes Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Poland, seems apposite to his object of study, and allows him to think a mode of relation between the *masses* and the state outside of the model of an organized civil society, deemed proper to advanced or central Western states, and a mode of collective agency of subaltern classes that do not constitute an industrial proletariat (124).

The structures of mediation between society and the state that Portantiero identifies as proper to peripheral countries exemplified in the populist movements that emerged in the 1930s continued to organize the primary force of resistance against and constitutive enemy of the Argentine dictatorship. In *Los usos de Gramsci*, his main interlocutors are once again the critics of populism who adhere to the standard claim that in Peronism and analogous movements throughout the continent (*varguismo*, *cardenismo*) the “people” are passive and infantilized, deceived and manipulated by cunning elites.<sup>30</sup> But in the texts written with Murmis, the refutation of this claim maintains one of its central premises—that only a class with a history of syndicalist organization can possess any degree of autonomy, that consciousness must be preceded by proletarianization on the classic, European model; they demonstrate that the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Q 13 § 18: “Alcuni aspetti teorici e pratici dell’ ‘economismo.’” Portantiero’s argument largely anticipates Ernesto Laclau’s. Portantiero, unlike Laclau, however, does not posit populism as constitutive of the political as such, but maintains its specificity to “peripheral” societies.



Peronist workers did in fact draw on such a history and that the unions maintained a high level of autonomous participation in the early stages of the regime. For Portantiero and Murmis, this syndicalism is what distinguishes Peronism from other instances of “populism,” and leads the authors to question the suitability of this designation. In *Los usos de Gramsci*, this emphasis on syndicalism is absent, and Portantiero’s reexamination of the category of “populism,” which he now unhesitatingly applies to the Argentine experience, is articulated as a critique of the assumption that political subjecthood is produced necessarily and exclusively by economic conditions, which in practice refers to those conditions that accompanied the development of class struggle in Europe, precluding the development of popular consciousness beyond the dominant capitalist countries.<sup>31</sup>

Portantiero maintains the Marxian schema of civil society as base and state as superstructure as the basis of his critique of a deterministic “socio-centrism” rather than the Gramscian model in which civil society is subsumed under the superstructure,<sup>32</sup> so that the

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<sup>31</sup> “La historia de la emergencia de las clases populares no puede ser asimilada con el desarrollo de grupos económicos que gradualmente se van constituyendo socialmente hasta lograr coronar esa presencia en el campo de la política como fuerzas autónomas. Su constitución como sujeto social está moldeada por la ideología y por la política desde un comienzo: cuando aparecen en la escena lo hacen de la mano de grandes movimientos populares y su emergencia coincide con desequilibrios profundos en toda la sociedad, con crisis del estado.” [The history of the emergence of the popular classes cannot be likened to the development of economic groups that gradually constitute themselves socially until they achieve a presence as autonomous forces in the political sphere. Their constitution as social subjects is molded by ideology and politics from the outset: when they appear on the scene they do so together with great popular movements and their emergence coincides with profound social disequilibriums, with crises of the state] (128).

<sup>32</sup> “En realidad—y esto lo planteó claramente Gramsci—, la distinción entre sociedad civil y sociedad política (o entre ‘base’ como *dato* y ‘superestructura’ como *reflejo*) jamás fue orgánica, sino meramente analítica: la ideología y la práctica burguesas tendían a imaginar esa disociación, pero la penetración de lo político-estatal en lo económico-social siempre había existido, aunque en el estado liberal restringido ello resultaba menos visible empíricamente.” [In fact—and Gramsci clearly stated this—, the distinction between civil society and political society (between

critique of the base-superstructure model corresponds to a critique of the state/society opposition:

Si la propuesta gramsciana puede significar un avance, lo es—sobre todo y en principio—por las *impasses* que el sustancialismo dualista de las esferas “separadas” y “preexistentes” plantea para el desarrollo de una teoría de la política, tal como el caso del marxismo estructuralista francés lo ha demostrado patéticamente, algo más de una década atrás.

[If the Gramscian project represents a step forward, it is—above all and in principle—because of the *impasses* that the dualistic essentialism of “separate” and “preexisting” spheres creates for the development of a theory of politics, as the case of the Marxism of French structuralism forcefully demonstrated over a decade ago.] (1988: 108)

In this way a more familiar polemical discourse, against the canonical Marx but also, and more immediately, against a certain reading of an Althusserian determinism, and one which Portantiero shares, for example, with Coutinho, is mobilized against a new dichotomy, and one which is ultimately reified in Coutinho.

Portantiero coincides with Aricó in locating Gramsci’s utility for the Latin American left in the notion of the historical productivity of superstructural elements, but while for Aricó the capacity for self-constitution of such a subject is limited in Latin America, Portantiero stresses the emergence of a popular collective political subject despite the predominance of the state in

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“base” as a *fact* and “superstructure” as *reflection*) was never organic, but merely analytical: bourgeois ideology and practice tended to imagine this dissociation, but the penetration of the political and of the state in the socio-economic has always existed, although in the restricted liberal state it is less empirically visible.] (1988: 108)

the formulation of hegemonic national projects. Coutinho seeks to redeem through Gramsci a plurality of extra-state social actors loosely articulated in terms of interests or ideological orientation but unified through a concept of civil society that posits an intrinsic value in such a mobilization; the identification of socialism and democracy is thus achieved through the positing of a pluralistic popular subject with the power to resist and, to an extent, determine the operation of the state. In Aricó and Portantiero, the popular subject of democracy is constituted not against but *through* the superstructural moment of the state (or the vanguard organization as emergent state). What I am interested in highlighting here as a symptomatic commonality despite the important differences in the texts that make up this necessarily limited but representative corpus is the impulse to locate a stable democratic subject in the particular historical modes of organization proper to the region. It is a criticism meant to dismiss neither the value nor the singularity of its textual objects, but to signal a broader discursive tendency that perhaps obstructs the work of continuous reconstitution that democratic thinking requires.

#### **IV. The masses as epistemic object of democracy**

Zavaleta credits Gramsci with a central concept in his later work, what he refers to as the “social optimum”—the degree of coordination between the state and civil society, “the relational quality of a society” (*Lo nacional-popular* 104)—which he derives from Gramsci’s military metaphor in which the state is but a “forward trench” of a superstructural field constituted by the institutions of civil society. My discussion of this concept in Zavaleta—that of the “optimum”—follows two related considerations that recur in several of Zavaleta’s texts: the first is his critique or qualification of the dichotomy of Eastern and Western states that frames Gramsci’s

presentation of the state-society relation in notebook 7 §16; the second is what Zavaleta calls the epistemological (*gnoseológico*) function of this relation, which is the operation of liberal democracy.

In “El Estado en América Latina,” Zavaleta argues, against both instrumentalist and structuralist theories of the state, that the state must be understood as an autonomous, volitional subject: autonomous by definition, according to a usage of the term which properly designates a modern form, its precapitalist counterpart merely a fraction of “civil society” (which he does not restrict to any historical period, but here seems to use to designate the social in a broad sense) that has not yet constructed itself as a general class, separate from any particular social group; volitional in that as a *synthesis* (as Lenin claimed) of civil society, the state is not a mere product or reflection, but a selective and deliberate construction out of the elements of the larger superstructure, which is then projected back onto society as its true self. The superstructural social text (which is not ontologically separable from the economic structure, but merely distinguished from it as a methodological necessity for social-scientific analysis), on the other hand, necessarily lacks this unified or unifying volitional center, and gathers heterogeneous and conflicting elements, contingent products of a particular history. This imbrication of inherited and emerging forms approximates Raymond Williams’ model, but diverges from it in that a temporal heterogeneity is not organized into a predetermined, progressive sequence; elements extraneous to the capitalist order are not mere residues on their way out but integral and active components that combine with new historical forms to produce unforeseeable results. The articulation of the state and civil society—neither mechanistically determined nor directly governed by a seamless dominant superstructural organization—is therefore a complex and crucial factor in the analysis of a given social order and the elaboration of a strategy for its

transformation, and it is here that Zavaleta turns to Gramsci. In reference to the passage in notebook 7 § 16, he underscores the value of Gramsci's theoretical construction of this relation, but questions the explicit spatial distribution and implicit temporal ordering of the types of state determined by it.

That the terms *oriente* and *occidente* are inadequate labels for a generalizable taxonomy of state forms by the 1980s should go without saying, and here Zavaleta skips the deliberation as to where to place which Latin American states according to this schema that is almost ubiquitous in Latin Americanist discussions of Gramsci.<sup>33</sup> Rather than problematizing the category of *oriente*, Zavaleta focusses on the descriptor *gelatinosa*, specifically in its connection to that of the *primordial* or the *primitive* (*primordiale*; *primitiva*, rather than *primordial*, in the Spanish translation that Zavaleta cites, as in Coutinho's Portuguese), proposing, in addition to Gramsci's sense of *gelatinous* in reference to a civil society that lacks the institutional organization applicable to precapitalist societies (and, therefore, prenatal and prestatist societies, in the strictest sense in Zavaleta's—and Gramsci's—conception of the state), one that applies exclusively and necessarily to capitalist countries.<sup>34</sup> The gelatinous, in this latter sense, is opposed

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<sup>33</sup> In *Lo nacional-popular*, he writes, “Se ha dicho que acá Gramsci utiliza el término Oriente en un sentido metafórico, lo cual, en todo caso, sería una metáfora con nombre y apellido. En realidad es un exceso culturalista suponer que el capitalismo ocurre en Europa porque es occidental” [It has been said that here Gramsci uses the term East in a metaphorical sense, although in any case it is a metaphor with a proper name. It is a culturalist exaggeration to suppose that capitalism exists in Europe because it is Western] (51).

<sup>34</sup> “[H]ay formas de lo gelatinoso. Gelatinosa, por ejemplo, es una sociedad incapaz de producir opinión pública, y lo es sin duda aquella en que no se dan las condiciones para producir formas racional-comprobables del poder. El capitalismo organizado produce sin excepción formas modernas de sociedad gelatinosa. En el caso de ciertos países como Perú y Bolivia, el verdadero problema no está en la gelatinosidad de lo social, sino en su osificación: la sociedad sigue sometida a la profundidad de su momento constitutivo.” [There are different forms of the gelatinous. A society incapable of producing public opinion, for example, is gelatinous, and

not to the articulated, structured organs of “Western” civil society, but to the ossified effects of the constitutive moment of traditional societies that are territorially coterminous with peripheral, dependent capitalist states.

This is not a simple inversion of terms (nor would it constitute, even if it were, any kind of challenge to an Orientalist discourse, in which the representation of traditional societies as fixed, ossified, is perhaps even more familiar than that of a primordial or “primitive” disorder). Zavaleta’s qualification constitutes rather an extrication of Gramsci’s conceptual innovation from a linear world-historical teleology that happens to be Eurocentric. This move is consistent with the spirit of Gramsci’s own rigorous historicism and antidogmatism, a methodological principle that is inevitably applied imperfectly (an inevitability to which Zavaleta is no more immune). There is no more a necessary historical progression from fixity to fluidity and mobility than, as Gramsci’s language (that is, that which he has inherited and reproduces) implies, from primordial chaos to order, but rather a contingent incidence of historical conditions that may give rise to an intersubjectivity capable of self-organization. From the critique of the ordering of the categories that define this “optimum” a modification of the concept of the optimum itself necessarily follows, which can no longer be thought as something attained once and for all, or even progressively approximated, as the ultimate expression or destiny of capitalist development: “Es verdad que ésta, la del óptimo, es una metáfora, que la realidad no produce más que aproximaciones hacia ella. En cualquier forma, incluso si existe, no existe para siempre y es algo

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surely so is one that lacks the necessary conditions for the production of rational-verifiable forms of power. Organized capitalism produces only modern forms of gelatinous society. In the case of certain countries like Peru and Bolivia, the real problem is not in the gelatinousness of the social, but in its ossification: society continues to be subject to the depth of its constitutive moment.] (“El Estado en América Latina” 348).

que se obtiene y se pierde” [What we are calling the optimum is of course a metaphor, and in reality it can only be approximated. In any case, even if it exists, it does not exist once and for all but is something that is gained and lost] (*Lo nacional-popular* 52).

In *Lo nacional-popular*, Zavaleta argues that precapitalist or “backward” (*atrasada*) societies should be considered more rather than less complex than capitalist ones.<sup>35</sup> As with the category of the “gelatinous,” this move implies a redefinition of what is meant by complexity (namely, heterogeneity, even *disarticulation* rather than an articulation that produces a certain totalization and homogenization), but it also indicates that an opposition based on the notion of the complex organizational structure of capitalist societies tends to erroneously presuppose an undifferentiated, homogeneous social mass as the mere negation of organizational complexity that precedes the capitalist nation-state.

This qualification leads Zavaleta to theorize the bidirectional mechanism through which this relation (between the volitional unity of the state and the heterogeneity or mobility of the social base) is established in terms of *legibility*:

Es claro con todo que, por lo mismo que el Estado debe adaptarse en el capitalismo a una base perpetuamente móvil, debe también actuar por medio de

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<sup>35</sup> “Se puede sin duda considerar como algo inmediatamente falso el que se piense en una sociedad capitalista como algo más complejo, de hecho, que una sociedad precapitalista. Es cierto que el capitalismo multiplica el tiempo social, pero no lo es menos que torna homogénea (estandarizada) a la sociedad. Al fin y al cabo, las clases nacionales, la propia nación, las grandes unidades sociales relativamente uniformes son propias del capitalismo y, en este sentido, cualquier sociedad atrasada es más abigarrada y compleja que una sociedad capitalista.” [We consider the premise that capitalist societies are more complex than precapitalist societies to be patently false. It’s true that capitalism multiplies social time, but it is no less true that it homogenizes, standardizes society. Ultimately, national classes, the nation itself, vast, relatively uniform social units, are proper to capitalism and, in this sense, any backward society is more heterogeneous and complex than a capitalist society.] (2009: 50)

métodos de lectura de la sociedad o métodos de conocimiento social como la democracia política considerada en esta acepción. El *sistema de trincheras* no es así sino el conjunto de mediaciones, estructuras y soportes mediante los cuales existe la sociedad civil ante el Estado y el Estado político ante la sociedad civil, o sea aquella fase intermedia sin la cual la voluntad consciente de la política o irresistibilidad (el Estado) y la sociedad (o sea el espacio de ofrecimiento de las circunstancias a la voluntad política o el de recibimiento de ella) no se pueden conocer una a la otra.

[Of course, just as in capitalism the state must adapt to a perpetually moving base, it must also act through methods of reading or methods of social knowledge such as political democracy in this sense. The *trench system* is thus nothing but the set of mediations, structures, and supports through which civil society exists before the state and the political state before civil society, that is, the intermediate phase without which the conscious will of politics or power (the state) and society (the space of production of the conditions of a political will or of its reception) cannot know one another.] (Lo *nacional-popular* 49–50)

Societies are legible insofar as they have been simplified by industrialization; this legibility in turn facilitates the hegemonic organization of civil society by the state. The instrument through which this mechanism operates is called representative democracy. Democracy in this sense is neither a concession obtained through passive revolution, as Coutinho would claim (1987: 106–107), nor a collective subjectivity constructed through the dialectical mutual constitution of the people and the state as construed in the populist tradition, but a barometer, a “method of reading” used to maintain an “optimum” state-society relation that maximizes the effectiveness of the state in the



broad sense. Zavaleta develops this epistemological concept of democracy in “Cuatro conceptos de la democracia,” where he argues that representative democracy performs the same function as the “quantitative techniques” of the social sciences, but with a far greater efficacy:

Las técnicas cuantitativas pueden revelar las modificaciones del modo de producción, pero sólo en el rango de la prognosis, como verosimilitudes medias o, en todo caso, como certeza ex post. La política, en cambio, o sea la democracia, que aquí tiene un significado idéntico en absoluto, retiene de inmediato las palpitaciones de los sitios de la sociedad; los mediadores convierten esas contracciones en materia estatal. Para decirlo de otra manera, la democracia oye el ruido del corpus social.

Está claro a dónde llegamos en este tercer sentido o índole de lo democrático o, al menos, a dónde queríamos llegar. Aquí la democracia se insinúa como un acto del Estado. Entonces la conciencia del Estado civil, en esta fase gnoseológica, es sólo el objeto de la democracia, pero el sujeto democrático (es un decir) es la clase dominante, o sea su personificación en el Estado racional, que es el burócrata. La democracia funciona por consiguiente como una astucia de la dictadura; es el momento no democrático de la democracia.

[Quantitative techniques can reveal modifications in the mode of production, but only at the level of prognosis, as approximations or, in any case, as ex post certainties. Politics, on the other hand, that is, democracy, which here means exactly the same thing, immediately registers the palpitations of society's different sites; the mediators convert these contractions into state substance. In other words, democracy hears the noise of the social body.

It's clear where this third sense or quality of the democratic leads us or, at least, where we want to arrive. Here democracy appears as an act of the state. The consciousness of the civil state, then, in this gnoseological phase, is only the object of democracy, but the democratic subject (so to speak) is the dominant class, that is, its embodiment in the rational state, which is the bureaucratic state. Democracy therefore functions as a ruse of dictatorship; this is the non-democratic moment of democracy.] (2009: 132)

The concept of democracy opposed to this "gnoseological" function in the service of bourgeois dictatorship is, in the simplest terms, the self-determination of the masses; the problem that remains is what is meant by this and how it is to be achieved. It's obvious that we cannot dispense with representative democracy, and Zavaleta says so explicitly ("Cuatro conceptos" 127). Our task is to combat the self-perfecting mechanisms of the capitalist state from within a liberal democratic society; I conclude this chapter by offering two different moments in Zavaleta's thinking in which he grapples with this question.

The opening paragraph of "Cuatro conceptos" is repeated in the beginning of the second chapter of *Lo nacional-popular*, but its sense is altered by what follows. ("Cuatro conceptos" was probably written first, as *Lo nacional-popular* was unfinished at the time of Zavaleta's death, but we can't be sure of this.) Here are the two passages:

En el desconcierto absoluto o malestar cósmico que produce la multiplicación de los objetos del mundo, los hombres están solos en medio de las cosas que se amplían sin cesar. ¿No es verdad acaso que esto es ya la soledad de la época, la falacia general de su identidad y, en fin, lo que podemos llamar la segunda pérdida del yo?

El conjunto de estos acontecimientos ontológicos desemboca en la cuestión de la democracia, que es la medida de la presencia del hombre, como una entidad activa frente a la vida, en una época cuya señal de esencia es su totalización.

[In the absolute confusion or cosmic unease produced by the multiplication of objects in the world, men are alone in the midst of things, which are increasing endlessly. Is this not now the solitude of the age, the general fallacy of its identity and, in short, what we might call the second loss of the self?

These ontological events lead to the question of democracy, which is the measure of the presence of man, as an active entity in the face of life, in an era whose essential mark is its totalization.] (“Cuatro conceptos” 121)

En el desconcierto absoluto o malestar que produce la multiplicación de los objetos del mundo, los hombres están solos en medio de las cosas que se amplían sin cesar. ¿No es verdad acaso que esto es ya la soledad de la época, la falacia general de su identidad y, en fin, lo que podemos llamar la segunda pérdida del yo?

La época es cuantiosa y es como si huyera de nosotros, como si significara siempre algo distinto de sí misma, perdida en el número enorme de sus acontecimientos invisibles. No obstante, a pesar de estar abrumando a los hombres de continuo, tiene una suerte de flanco de fracaso en medio de esta suerte de asedio infinito y consiste en que puede ser conocida.

[In the absolute confusion or unease produced by the multiplication of objects in the world, men are alone in the midst of things, which are increasing endlessly. Is

this not now the solitude of the age, the general fallacy of its identity and, in short, what we might call the second loss of the self?

The era is multitudinous and it is as if it were fleeing from us, as if it always signified something other than itself, lost in the enormous number of its invisible events. Nonetheless, despite continually overwhelming us, it has a weak flank amidst this sort of infinite siege and this consists in that it can be known.] (*Lo nacional-popular* 75)

In “Cuatro conceptos,” there is a direct opposition between the existing order and the subject of democracy that asserts itself as an “active entity” before the ontological fact of totalization. Throughout the essay this opposition is maintained: democratic practice entails a challenge to the mode of knowledge that measures, quantifies, and affirms the real. The possibility of rupture lies in the ineradicable heterogeneity of the social ground and the contingency of historical events. In *Lo nacional-popular*, this mode of knowledge—and the corresponding order of existence that produces it—is a pharmakon: at once the condition of our subjection and of our subjectification. In this case, the intellectual labor of the “social sciences,” and of philosophical thought, which in Zavaleta’s own texts cannot be rigorously separated, is both complicit with the logic of totalization and necessary for its critique. The question as to whether another mode of knowledge is possible is left open to us.

My interest in this chapter has been in tracing the construction of the collective political subject—as democratic subject, in keeping with the equivalence that Zavaleta establishes here—in the period of redemocratization following the collapse of the military dictatorships of the 1960s to the 1980s. The general impulse that I have taken as the focus of my analysis is one

toward a closure of a constituted social subject thought in terms of “civil society”; the Gramscian “war of position” provides a conceptual frame through which a unified consciousness and agency of such a subject is posited. This critical reading of the invocation of an unquestioned democratic subject called civil society as antidote to a statist authoritarianism of the right, but also of the left, should be borne in mind in the following chapters, where I turn to the increasingly state-centered politics of the leftist regimes of the twenty-first century in Latin America, over more or less the decade and a half following the period under discussion here.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Subalternity and the National-Popular**

The rise and decline of an electoral left in Latin America over the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century has provided an evolving frame for ongoing theoretical debates concerning the state, the subject, and, in the particular thread that I take up in this chapter, the categories of hegemony, subalternity, and the national-popular. My interest here is in the relation—most often one of opposition—that is constructed in Latin Americanist scholarship between these last two concepts, originally borrowed from Antonio Gramsci: that of the national-popular as modernist, developmentalist, homogenizing, and hegemonic, and that of subalternity, as heterogeneous, a-telic, and, finally a- or post- (rather than pre-) hegemonic. This opposition comes to structure much of the discourse of Latin American(ist) cultural studies in the late twentieth century, and has been reworked since the emergence of the so-called “pink tide” regimes of the twenty-first century that repeat—with a difference, of course—nationalist and populist modes of interpellation of an earlier era, now in a register that is, in varying degrees, explicitly anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist. Through a critical reading of the evolving forms of a debate around these concepts, in this chapter I am less interested in advancing an argument in favor of one side over the other than in drawing attention to the historical and political determinants of the various iterations of the propositions at play, from a non-determinist position, that is, with the understanding that this determination is never total.

The “Founding Statement” of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, formed in 1993 and inspired by the work of the South Asian collective that emerged a decade earlier, opens

by citing three historical conditions to which the group seeks to respond: “the end of communism and the consequent displacement of revolutionary projects, the processes of redemocratization, and the new dynamics created by the effects of the mass media and transnational economic arrangements” (110). Although expressed as simultaneous aspects of the text’s present, these three interconnected conditions refer to different—sequentially organized, although overlapping—moments in the history of the region in the second half of the twentieth century: the period of armed struggle that began with the Cuban Revolution and its reverberations, the series of military dictatorships authorized by U.S. counterinsurgency policy, and the neoliberal horizon of the societies that emerged from their collapse.

“Redemocratization”—and this, the authors claim, is the most important aspect<sup>36</sup>—implies a return, but this is not a circular history, and the transitions to democracy, within the parameters of the Washington Consensus, in fact sealed the eclipse of the national-popular (or nationalist and populist) democratic paradigm that prevailed prior to the decades of authoritarian rule.

The relation to this moment of the project of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group—and Latin Americanist left intellectuals in general, within the broader context of the contested political significance of postmodernist or even poststructuralist thought—is fraught with the tension between an opposition to neoliberal globalization and an affiliation with a pluralistic democratic politics that rejects the model of the nationalist/populist state; an anti-statism of the left oscillates between a self-conception as a necessary adaptation to the political conditions imposed by the market anti-statism of the right and a general, theoretically grounded resistance to constituted forms of power. This left anti-statism is expressed in an attention to

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<sup>36</sup> “It is above all the emerging consensus on the need for a democratic world order that sets the stage for our work” (117).

objects and actors whose marginalization in relation to the state and the hegemonic national culture is not conceived as a lack, and which are not placed within a narrative of active or potential (that is, desired) incorporation or emergence into the national scene. In a mode resonant with the original South Asian Subaltern Studies group's focus on peasant insurgency, this work proceeds through the selection of social movements like that of the Zapatistas—as an insurgent collectivity that does not aspire to state power—as favored objects of study and sites of political solidarity;<sup>37</sup> in the sphere of cultural production, there is a privileging of practices below the sanctioned cultural circuits and outside of the formal economy. Subalternity is sought as the locus of a disarticulation of the national and the popular and, ultimately, of the unified or unifying notion of the people itself.

The political and cultural discourses that best—or at least first—exemplify the “national-popular” as developmentalism for these authors emerge throughout Latin America in a series of analogous populist movements since the 1930s, including Cardenism in Mexico, *Aprismo* in Peru, Peronism in Argentina, Vargasism in Brazil, and the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement in Bolivia. These regimes establish a broadly inclusive notion of the “people” as subject of the nation in a way unprecedented in the region, through a route other than the traditional bourgeois production of liberal citizenship, but firmly within a teleology of capitalist modernization and industrialization. In their mode of popular interpellation, the revolutionary (or state-capitalist) regimes in Cuba and Nicaragua are largely consubstantial with the classical populist movements. The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group identified an affinity between

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<sup>37</sup> José Rabasa's *Without History* (2010) offers a strong and representative performance of such a reading of the Zapatista movement against state-centric political theory, and specifically against what he identifies as a thoroughly vanguardist and developmentalist Gramscian conception of subaltern studies (46, 124, and *passim*).



this teleological articulation of the people-as-nation in the political sphere and, in the cultural sphere, the literature of the Latin American “Boom”—whose writers often aligned themselves with the revolutionary projects—and a series of ideologemes produced simultaneously or subsequently in the fields of literary and cultural criticism: mestizaje, transculturation, hybridity.<sup>38</sup> Like the national-popular political formations, these forms of cultural and ideological production, the subalternist scholars argue, erase difference in its very incorporation.

The first part of this chapter traces the trajectories of the concepts of subalternity and the national-popular from Gramsci through Latin American subaltern studies and its critical reformulations since the dissolution of the group. To examine the historical coordinates of this shifting theoretical terrain, as well as alternative articulations of the subaltern–national-popular relation before and after the twentieth century, I focus my discussion in the second part of the chapter on a selection of symptomatic readings of the history of the Andean region, from colonial Peru to contemporary Bolivia, via the Bolivian Nationalist Revolution of 1952. In looking at the intellectual response to the pink tide, I turn to the provocative intervention of John Beverley—a founding member of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group who subsequently proposed a partial abandonment of the category of subalternity, proposing in its place a “postsubalternism” when he adopted a more statist position,<sup>39</sup> diverging sharply from the

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<sup>38</sup> The concept of transculturation is developed by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his *Contrapunteo cubano del tabáco y el azúcar* (1940) and taken up again by the iconic Latin American literary critic Ángel Rama in *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982). The most widely disseminated theoretical articulation of the concept of hybridity in Latin America is that of Néstor García Canclini (*Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Beverley’s position was in fact never post- or anti-statist; he initially expresses some affinity with the leftist version of the neoliberal assumption of the inadequacy of the nation-state, but distinguishes himself from other members of the group for whom this takes the form of an

“posthegemonic” turn led by a group of scholars including Alberto Moreiras and Jon Beasley-Murray—as the best academic exponent of a symptomatic discursive shift that takes place within the conjuncture of the first decade of the twenty-first century. I read Beverley alongside an author that he takes as a source, from a sphere outside the university and within the immediate ideological organs of the state, to offer a critical exposition of the conception of the subaltern *as* national-popular in a text by Bolivian vice president Álvaro García Linera. The work of Bolivian sociologist and historian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui from the 1980s to the present in particular guides my reading of the interaction between the histories of the theoretical concepts at work here and the historical narratives that constitute their object.

### **I. A brief genealogy of the concepts**

In this section I offer a partial sketch of the Gramscian origin of the concepts of the subaltern and the national-popular from the point of view of a particular endpoint in their trajectories. My intention here is not only to advance new readings of the formulation of the concepts in Gramsci, but to intervene in the growing body of scholarship on their subsequent appropriation by proposing a conception of this legacy that is less focused on finding error, or even productive misreadings, and instead highlights tensions in the Gramscian sources that anticipate future reorientations and even reversals in Gramsci’s theoretical architecture.

#### *Subalternity*

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absolute and definitive obsolescence. I elaborate on this divergence below.

In tracing the history of the category of the subaltern, it should first be noted that the development of a specialized concept of subalternity probably owes much to the decision of Gramsci's translators to use the English cognate for almost every occurrence of the term *subalterno* and its variants, which often might have been more naturally (which is not to say better) translated with another word—subordinate, oppressed, inferior, etc., depending on the context—since the term is in common colloquial use in Italian in a way that it is not in English.<sup>40</sup> In a passage like that in Notebook 4, § 1—“si suppone una scarsa capacità teoretica in Engels (per lo meno una sua posizione subalterna in confronto a Marx)” [Engels is supposed to have been lacking in theoretical skills (or at least occupies a subaltern position in relation to Marx)] – it means simply *inferior*, and the cognate does not convey anything that “inferior” would not. (I'm quoting from Joseph Buttigieg, but Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith also use the English “subaltern.”) In most other cases, however, for example where *classi subalterne* might

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<sup>40</sup> The Treccani dictionary, for example, gives the following definitions for *subalterno*: “Che è subordinato, in sottordine e in diretta dipendenza, rispetto ad altri di grado maggiore, o anche, riferito a istituzioni e sfere di attività, rispetto ad altre di livello superiore . . . sostantivato, con valore generico, chi è in un grado gerarchico inferiore o alle dipendenze di altri...” [That which is subordinated, inferior and in direct dependence with respect to others of a higher rank, or, in reference to institutions and spheres of activity, with respect to others of a higher level . . . as a generic noun, that which exists at a lower level hierarchical level or in the service of others]. Vico is cited as an example of term's use in “the arts and sciences”: “la Metafisica è la scienza sublime, che ripartisce i certi loro subbietti a tutte le scienze che si dicono ‘subalterne’” [Metaphysics is the sublime science which distributes to all the so-called subaltern sciences their determinate subject matters], followed by the more quotidian and only recently outdated sense of an employee or assistant, and, in a usage that carried over into English in the seventeenth century, designating a lower rank in a public or military post. Finally, in “ethnology, sociology, and culture,” the Gramscian sense that has developed in the twentieth century is given: “la cultura di un popolo che è rimasto a lungo in posizione di dipendenza da una cultura dominante” [the culture of a people that has long remained in a position of dependence in relation to a dominant culture]. The Oxford English Dictionary, by contrast, gives only specialized or “rare” usages, among them that derived from Gramsci's incorporation, in English translation, into the disciplinary lexicon of cultural studies: “Now chiefly in critical and cultural theory, esp. post-colonial theory: of or relating to those who are marginalized or oppressed.”

have read “lower classes,” or “oppressed classes,” or the position of the Catholic church could have been described as “subordinate” instead of subaltern, the production of a specific concept through this iteration may well be warranted.

In its narrowest sense, the subaltern is one of inferior rank and therefore takes commands from a superior. This seems to me to be an apt concept-metaphor for the expanded sense, in which subalternity designates instrumentality, a lack of historical personhood and political autonomy, a greater degree of subjection to the laws of historical necessity (Notebook 25, § 4). This is continuous with some of the intermediate, narrower figurative uses of the military term, such as Gramsci’s description of the intellectuals as carrying out subaltern functions of the dominant class.<sup>41</sup>

If there is a relatively unified concept of subalternity in Gramsci, it is elaborated in Notebook 25, in which prior notes, some of which do not yet contain the term, are compiled and revised under the title “On the Margins of History (The History of Subaltern Social Groups).” Much has been written on the subject, and so I will limit my remarks to some summary comments on two areas of debate that come up in this literature and that are pertinent to the subsequent uses of the concept in subaltern studies:

1. *Supplementing class*. There is a tendency in Gramscian scholarship to point out a broadening and indeed an increasing vagueness in the concept as it travels through subaltern studies into a more general field of postcolonial theory and cultural studies. While this is obviously and inevitably the case if we are looking for a definition that fits all instances over an ever-proliferating corpus across not only different authors but different disciplines and

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<sup>41</sup> Buttigieg sees no significant relationship between these usages (2013: 35), and yet chose—again, I think rightly—to maintain the cognate in these instances in his excellent translation.

theoretical orientations, given the flexibility of the concept in Gramsci noted above, I think that the tendency with each of its iterations within the smaller, more easily delimited corpora that constitute the major moments of this development (such as that of the early volumes of the *Subaltern Studies* series edited by Ranajit Guha, that of the Latin Americanist group, and an evolving definition in Spivak's work) is rather toward a greater specificity or precision, which does not necessarily entail a narrowness of scope.<sup>42</sup> Guido Liguori's contention that the concept of subalternity enters cultural studies in a "mistaken . . . attempt to substitute a vision of society founded on class divisions with that of a society based solely on differences of culture" (130), for example, implies an understanding of "culture," in its construction as the object of inquiry of the field of cultural studies, as that which does not lend itself to more rigorous analytical categories. Subalternity in the corpus referenced here is in fact more often conceived as a supplement, rather than a mere substitute, for class, or more precisely, a category in which class is necessarily supplemented and traversed by other social conditions.<sup>43</sup> This supplementation of class is already present in Gramsci, if only implicitly theorized.

A recurring theme of this debate in reference to Gramsci's own texts has been the philological question of the significance of Gramsci's original terminology in relation to the conventional Marxist analogs, alternately claimed as code words to elude the prison censors and

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<sup>42</sup> Buttigieg maintains that "it is futile to search for or attempt to formulate a precise definition of 'subaltern' or 'subaltern social groups/classes' as conceived by Gramsci" (2013: 36), but he seems to be in the minority.

<sup>43</sup> Liguori's position is representative of the critique of "culturalism" in relation to subaltern studies that has recently been relaunched as a topic of debate by Vivek Chibber's controversial *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013). For a generous yet critical assessment of this position, see Timothy Brennan's review of Chibber's book in the *New Left Review* ("Subaltern Stakes," 2014).

as substantial theoretical innovations. Perhaps the most prominent of these is “philosophy of praxis,” in relation to Marxism; the most pertinent here is “subaltern” in relation to “proletariat,” and then subaltern “groups” in relation to “classes.” In a discussion of Gramsci’s revisions of § 90 of Notebook 3, Marcus Green writes that “When Gramsci rewrote the note in Notebook 25 [§ 5], the special notebook on subaltern groups, he uses the terms ‘subaltern classes’ and ‘subaltern groups’ interchangeably. Therefore, although the terms are different, they do not represent a difference in meaning for Gramsci” (2002: 9). Peter Thomas, Buttigieg, and Green are among those who have argued against the assertion that “subaltern” is a mere code word for “proletariat.”<sup>44</sup> Yet Buttigieg, having dismissed this claim, finds the censorship argument more persuasive as an explanation for the shift away from a strict adherence to the category of class (2013: 36).<sup>45</sup> This hypothesis seems unfounded to me, as the lexical change is consistent with the implicit theorization of the category within the notebook. In revising prior notes in Notebook 25, Gramsci almost always changes “classes” to “groups,” and while “classes” is sometimes maintained, “groups” is never changed to “classes.” The two words are, therefore, not used interchangeably; in gathering his developing ideas into a more cohesive text organized around the theme of subalternity, it was clear to Gramsci that in most cases subalternity was not reducible to class.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This position is attributed to Spivak; it should be noted, however, that when Spivak writes this, she follows it with the claim that “the word soon cleared a space, as words will, and took on the task of analysing what ‘proletarian,’ produced by capital logic, could not cover” (2000: 324; she has made the same qualification elsewhere).

<sup>45</sup> See also, for example, Christine Buci-Glucksmann (75).

<sup>46</sup> Green himself argues precisely this point—but without reference to the change in wording between Notebook 25 and prior notes—in “Race, Class, and Religion: Gramsci’s Conception of Subalternity” (2013).

This incommensurability with a differential social position defined strictly by class relations already implicit in Gramsci is thematized in subaltern studies both in terms of methodology (Marxism needs to be supplemented) and in terms of the social subject itself or object of study (subjects other than the proletariat come into view). In the unfinished essay that Gramsci was writing at the time of his incarceration in 1926, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question,” he begins to theorize the place of the peasantry of southern Italy in the communist movement. Although this text does not discuss the “subaltern” by name, it is perhaps the best expression of Gramsci’s early thinking about subaltern social groups in relation to a process of incorporation into a hegemonic bloc. His emphasis, because he was writing within a discourse that viewed the peasants as reactionary or underdeveloped in relation to the proletariat as an actually or potentially revolutionary class, is on the imperative of including the peasantry within a broader revolutionary alliance; he does not, however, question the necessary leadership of the proletariat in forging and directing this coalition. While the unification of the peasantry and the development of its political consciousness are crucial steps in the revolutionary project, they are not to be achieved autonomously. In the early work of the South Asian collective, closely following Gramsci’s own lines of inquiry, it is the peasantry, a subject outside of capital logic in a particular sense because it is the immediate *precapitalist* antecedent of the proletariat according to the stagist teleology, that occupies this position; it does so, however, in a way that puts this teleology into question.

Already in the work of the South Asian collective, but more explicitly with the Latin Americanist group, this category is further complicated—articulated in its difference not only from the proletariat as the subject of class struggle but from the logic of struggle as the engine of a historical dialectic defined by class positionality—through the category of indigeneity. Guha’s

famous definition of the subaltern in the work of the group as “a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” in his preface to *Selected Subaltern Studies* (35), while maintaining the breadth of the original concept (rather than reserving it for an elusive radical alterity or exteriority per the common allegation of critics of subaltern studies), coincides with the transition of the project into the disciplinary and discursive spheres of cultural studies and deconstruction, for which the compilation, co-edited with and introduced by Spivak and with a foreword by Edward Said, at the same time as providing a certain form of canonization of essays from the early volumes of the series, marks a kind of threshold. From this opening to subsume other forms of subordination, the concept does indeed, in certain contexts within this later corpus, including the work of some of the Latin Americanists, come not to substitute culture for class as a structuring principle but to mark a rejection of any kind of structural analysis that assumes a linear historical progression or social totality, stagist or not.

2. *The question of autonomy.* A second (and related) major theme of the disputed appropriation of the concept of the subaltern within cultural theory is that of its relation to hegemony and the capacity for autonomous action from a position of subordination. In Gramsci, the extent to which subaltern groups can act autonomously is equivalent to the extent of their progress in overcoming their condition of subalternity, or “becoming state,” outlined in his famous (but tentative) six-point program of study laid out in Notebook 25, § 5 (the first draft of which appears in Notebook 3, § 90).<sup>47</sup> The phases that Gramsci identifies are:

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<sup>47</sup> In a prior note of the same notebook (Q3 § 18; cf. Q 24 § 4), however, Gramsci refers to an autonomy of the current subaltern classes that precedes the development of the modern state, which, it is suggested in this note, reaches its most perfect form with the rise of fascism: “Lo Stato moderno abolisce molte autonomie delle classi subalterne, abolisce lo Stato federazione di classi,



(1) il formarsi obbiettivo dei gruppi sociali subalterni, per lo sviluppo e i rivolgimenti che si verificano nel mondo della produzione economica, la loro diffusione quantitativa e la loro origine da gruppi sociali preesistenti, di cui conservano per un certo tempo la mentalità, l'ideologia e i fini; (2) il loro aderire attivamente o passivamente alle formazioni politiche dominanti, i tentativi di influire sui programmi di questi formazioni per imporre rivendicazioni proprie e le conseguenze che tali tentativi hanno nel determinare processi di decomposizione e di rinnovamento o di neoformazione; 3) la nascita di partiti nuovi dei gruppi dominanti per mantenere il consenso e il controllo dei gruppi subalterni; (4) le formazioni proprie dei gruppi subalterni per rivendicazioni di carattere ristretto e parziale; (5) le nuove formazioni che affermano l'autonomia dei gruppi subalterni ma nei vecchi quadri; (6) le formazioni che affermano l'autonomia integrale ecc.

[(1) the objective formation of the subaltern groups through the developments and changes that took place in the economic sphere; the extent of their diffusion; and their descent from other classes that preceded them, the mentality, ideology, and objectives of which they retain for a period of time; (2) their passive or active

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ma certe forme di vita interna delle classi subalterne rinascono come partito, sindacato, associazione di cultura. La dittatura moderna abolisce anche queste forme di autonomia di classe e si sforza di incorporarle nell'attività statale: cioè l'accentramento di tutta la vita nazionale nelle mani della classe dominante diventa frenetico e assorbente” [The modern state abolishes many autonomies of the subaltern classes — it abolishes the state as a federation of classes—but certain forms of the internal life of the subaltern classes are reborn as parties, trade unions, cultural associations. The modern dictatorship abolishes these forms of class autonomy as well, and it tries hard to incorporate them into the activity of the state: in other words, the centralization of the whole life of the nation in the hands of the ruling class becomes frenetic and all-consuming].

adherence to the dominant political formations; that is, their efforts to influence the programs of these formations with demands of their own and the consequences of these efforts in determining processes of decomposition and renewal or new formations; (3) the birth of new parties of the ruling class to maintain control of the subaltern classes; (4) the formations of the subaltern groups themselves that make demands of a limited and partial nature; (5) the formations that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes, but within the old framework; (6) the formations that assert complete autonomy, etc.]

Here, in addition to the substitution of “classes” in the original version from Notebook 3 in every instance where Gramsci writes “groups,” significant changes include the addition of the final clause of point 1, “di cui conservano per un certo tempo la mentalità, l’ideologia e i fini,” and, at the end of point 2, “e le conseguenze che tali tentativi hanno nel determinare processi di decomposizione e di rinnovamento o di neoformazione.” The first addition indicates the persistence of ideological structures, and indeed of an ethico-political regime (“objectives” or “ends”) across different historical moments in the development of the productive forces constitutive of the class/group, that is, across different modes of production. This is consistent with the departure from the category of class, as it suggests components of an evolving political subjectivity that exceed determination within the class structure. The expansion of point 2 emphasizes the force of subaltern demands in shaping emergent formations; the progression that Gramsci is interested in tracking here is not merely a change in relative position, but a substantive alteration of the social formation from below. In both cases the element of continuity in the development of a collective social subject is reinforced in Gramsci’s more sustained elaboration of the theme.

In their work on peasant and worker mobilization, the South Asian Subaltern Studies group stressed the relative autonomy of these groups in their objectives and modes of struggle, sometimes falling into the developmentalist language that assumes a passage from political infancy into mature consciousness, but also modifying the notion of autonomy in the direction that Gramsci himself, as I have argued, suggests in his revisions in Notebook 25, emphasizing not just a quantitative measure of initiative but also a qualitative difference with regard to the desires, ethical principles, and episteme that inform subaltern political action in relation to those of the leadership of the nationalist movement. The principal divergence from Gramsci's envisioned methodology lies in that while for Gramsci the study of subaltern groups is framed as fundamentally a study of the process of desubalternization, taking into account its substantive, ethico-political dimension, in the South Asian Subaltern Studies group's revision of colonial and nationalist historiography the primary focus is on the elements that distinguish these processes from the narrative of political modernization assumed by both bourgeois historiography and classical Marxism.

Guha's claim that in India there was (or is) an autonomous politics of the subaltern groups—a position shared by other members of the collective—has sometimes been misconstrued as a conception of subalternity as a non-relational condition. Guha takes care to preempt such a reading:

We recognize of course that subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms of the binary relationship of which the other is dominance [not hegemony, which will take the place of “dominance” as subalternity's opposite pole in some of the later subaltern studies work], for “subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise

up.”<sup>48</sup> (35)

The conception of autonomy in the work that Guha is introducing here retains an affinity with the Gramscian idea of a graduated process of autonomization, as well as with the methodological injunction that every trace of autonomous action should be studied by the “integral historian” (Notebook 25, § 2; Notebook 3, § 14), while marking a shift toward a privileging of action from below as a potential interruption of the logic of historical progression through capitalist modernity, a theoretical bearing that later scholars of subalternity, including the Latin Americanists, will take up and amplify.

Massimo Modonesi—whose work is perhaps of particular interest here because his point of departure, the circumstance that he posits as the impetus for his study of the concept of subalternity, is the emergence of the pink tide and specifically the processes of desubalternization that brought Evo Morales to power in Bolivia and of resubalternization within the new regime (23)—articulates a position representative of the charge of an undue attribution of autonomy against both the South Asian and Latin Americanist subaltern studies scholars. Modonesi identifies in Guha (as representative of subaltern studies in general) “una esencialización contradictoria: el subalterno es, por definición, autónomo” [“a contradictory essentialization: the subaltern is, by definition, autonomous”] (46). This contradiction, for Modonesi, results from Guha’s positing of subaltern autonomy without the mediation of Gramsci’s six-phase process (45). The autonomy that Guha claims is indeed prior to and not the transcendence of domination or hegemonic control; his assumption of such an autonomous politics or “consciousness” does not amount to a Gramscian scheme in which the intermediate steps are

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<sup>48</sup> The unattributed (and often cited) sentence is from Notebook 3, § 14, transcribed in Notebook 25, § 2.

simply skipped, but to a modified conception of the political “consciousness” or “unity” of subaltern groups. Modonesi recognizes this in his criticism of the “possible excesses . . . of postcolonialism,” citing Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Rossana Barragán’s introduction to an anthology of essays from the *Subaltern Studies* series in Spanish translation, where a drift toward identity politics that will become a major axis of debate about and within subaltern studies begins to take place.

Along with the notion that subaltern studies exaggerates the capacity for autonomy on the part of subaltern groups there is, and for related reasons, although in reference to its later period, a more common, opposite contention that subaltern studies goes too far in denying subaltern agency. The link between the two tendencies lies in the separation of subalternity from the hegemonic order, first as a positive alterity, and then as an absolute exteriority silenced by its discursive incommensurability and therefore conceivable only in negative terms, the ubiquitous representative for this position being Spivak’s alleged claim that the subaltern cannot speak. Peter Thomas advances a case for a reading of subalternity as inseparable from Gramsci’s theory of the integral state, and therefore as a position that is by definition within modernity and within hegemony.<sup>49</sup> His argument provides a counterpoint to some of the readings of subalternity under discussion here in a way that is less straightforward than one might assume at first glance, and that therefore merits some comment. In the first place, being cut off from access to the state (Spivak’s phrase is slightly different—“removed from all lines of social mobility” [2012: 430, and elsewhere]), or the hegemonic discursive field, is indeed a relation to the state, and a constitutive one, if the state must constitute itself through what it excludes; in the second place, that

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<sup>49</sup> “Cosa rimane dei subalterni alla luce dello ‘Stato integrale?’” (2015).

externality is not necessarily equivalent to absolute oppression, but can mean precisely the opposite, that is, a degree of autonomy, even if this autonomy does not translate into any kind of recognizable political agency within the hegemonic sphere of the state. Finally, Spivak insists that no one can claim to be subaltern, because subalternity precludes the ability to make claims intelligible within the dominant discourse; Thomas's assertion that "we" are the subalterns (92) assumes a different conception of the term, and it is not the same statement that Spivak declares impossible, since here there is no trace of *identity* in the position claimed. In fact, in enlarging the scope of subalternity, Thomas is perhaps making a move that has something in common with Spivak's rejection of any vindictory appropriation of the concept from the site of a particular positive identity by means of its restriction. Likewise, Spivak uses the term in a sense entirely consistent with Thomas's when she talks about the dismantling of the welfare state as a process of resubalternization.

Subalternity in Gramsci is always, at least potentially, a moment of a historical process of collective subject formation that has a hegemonic articulation as its telos. In most of its subsequent iterations it remains a differential position and not a site of radical or absolute difference—as Spivak reminds us, a structural position without identity. But in Gramsci it is not yet, as it will become for the Latin American subaltern studies scholars, taking up and modifying Spivak's frequently cited definition of the subaltern as "the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic" (1988: 16), a negativity that can be read as a positive force in its political and epistemological resistance to any hegemonic articulation. For a certain strain of subaltern studies it becomes the position from which to deconstruct the teleology of which in Gramsci it constitutes an initial moment, whatever its content, as itself produced by the hegemony of modernity, or modernity as hegemony, as totalization.

The “Founding Statement” of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group contains the different stages of this conceptual development: the history of Latin America is constructed as one of (only partially successful) processes of desubalternization, starting with the Mexican and then finally the Cuban and Sandinista revolutions, but in the subsequent moments of this history of struggle—with the emergence of *testimonio* in the cultural sphere, for example—the meaning and function of the category shifts to one of a vindication of subalternity as a position from which to deconstruct the collective—national-popular—projects of liberation. The “Statement” ends with a citation of the final lines from Rigoberta Menchú’s testimony edited by Elizabeth Burgos: “I’m still keeping secret what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets” (121); the space of subalternity guards some positive content that loses its fetishistic power the moment it is exposed. Not only is the subaltern removed from the teleology of modernity whose embodiment is the state, but this immutable and constitutive removal becomes its positive content, and one with political, cultural, and commercial value.

### *The national-popular*

Gramsci’s most substantial notes on the national-popular deal with the cultural sphere, and specifically with the absence of a national-popular literature in Italy. This is connected to the socio-historical development of the country, and of particular interest for Gramsci is its relation to the question of the lack of popular mobilization in the Risorgimento. In this section I discuss the significance of the term as articulated in relation to these two interconnected themes, followed by a consideration of other uses of the concept in the notebooks which, taken together, highlight the ambiguities already implicit in the cultural and historical notes: in reference to a

national-popular *collective will* as the essence of the modern prince and to the national-popular as integration into the capitalist market.

Notebook 21, titled *Problemi della cultura nazionale italiana: I. Letteratura popolare*, collects revised versions of Gramsci's key notes on the national-popular. Note 5, "Concetto di 'nazionale-popolare,'"<sup>50</sup> thematizes the concept as one of theoretical import, formulating the problem of the disjunction between the national and the popular in Italy. The note takes as its point of departure an article in the periodical *Critica Fascista* decrying the serial publication in Italian newspapers of nineteenth-century French novels and calling for a more rigorous examination of the underlying social causes of the greater marketability of foreign literature, which, he insists, are not to be found in the judgment of the press, as the *Critica* piece suggests, or in the tastes of its readership, but in the absence of a national intellectual class capable of producing a popular literature:

perché i giornali italiani del 1930, se vogliono diffondersi (o mantenersi) devono pubblicare i romanzi d'appendice di un secolo fa (o quelli moderni dello stesso tipo)? E perché non esiste in Italia una letteratura "nazionale" dello stesso genere, nonostante che essa debba essere redditizia? È da osservare il fatto che in molte lingue, "nazionale" e "popolare" sono sinonimi o quasi . . . In Italia il termine "nazionale" ha un significato molto ristretto ideologicamente e in ogni caso non coincide con "popolare," perché in Italia gli intellettuali sono lontani dal popolo, cioè dalla "nazione" e sono invece legati a una tradizione di casta . . . Il termine corrente "nazionale" è in Italia legato a questa tradizione intellettuale e libresca . . .

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<sup>50</sup> See also Notebook 3, § 63, "I nipoti di padre Bresciani."



La letteratura “nazionale” così detta “artistica,” non è popolare in Italia.

[Why must the Italian newspapers of 1930 publish serial novels from a century ago (or modern novels of a similar kind) if they want to increase (or maintain) their circulation? And why is there no “national” literature of this type in Italy, if there is a market for it? Note the fact that in many languages “national” and “popular” are almost synonymous . . . In Italy the term “national” has a very narrow ideological sense and in any case it does not coincide with “popular,” because in Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, that is, from the “nation,” and they are bound instead to a caste tradition . . . the term “national” in common usage is connected to that bookish and intellectual tradition . . . So-called “artistic” national literature is not popular in Italy.]

Here Gramsci identifies a double sense of the term *national* analogous to that of *culture* often referenced since the emergence of the disciplinary field of cultural studies, asserting that the “nation” in Italy was understood as proper to an elite segment of the country, the *cultured* stratum (since in its adjectival form *cultured* can only designate a distance or distinction from the popular or vulgar rather than a natural property of it).

When Gramsci reiterates the question in the same note, he formulates his answer in terms of hegemony:

Cosa significa il fatto che il popolo italiano legge di preferenza gli scrittori stranieri? Significa che esso subisce l’egemonia intellettuale e morale degli intellettuali stranieri, che esso si sente legato più agli intellettuali stranieri che a quelli “paesani,” cioè che non esiste nel paese un blocco nazionale intellettuale e morale, né gerarchico e tanto meno egualitario.

[What is the significance of the fact that Italians prefer to read foreign authors? It means that they undergo the intellectual and moral hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more closely linked to foreign intellectuals than to national ones, that Italy does not have a moral and intellectual national bloc, whether hierarchical or, much less, egalitarian.]

The national-popular bloc is constituted through a hegemonic relation, which can be more or less egalitarian, that is, more or less hierarchical. This relation, in its ideal form, is one of identification and education, which alternate in a dialectical process: “i sentimenti popolari non sono vissuti come propri dagli scrittori, né gli scrittori hanno una funzione ‘educatrice nazionale,’ cioè non si sono posti e non si pongono il problema di elaborare i sentimenti popolari dopo averli rivissuti e fatti propri” [popular sentiments are not experienced as those of the authors, nor do the authors have a “national educational” function, that is, they have not taken up and do not take up the task of developing popular sentiments after reliving them and making them their own]. Gramsci’s opposition between an elite and a popular conception of the nation does not imply a positive valorization of subaltern “sentiments,” culture, or knowledge as they exist, but rather of the will and capacity to develop these, in a sense, from within, into superior forms.

In a note on Vincenzo Gioberti, an intellectual and political leader of the Risorgimento,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Notebook 17, § 9, “*Argomenti di cultura: Gioberti e il giacobinismo.*” Gramsci cites a passage from Gioberti on the national-popular that resonates strongly with his own formulation, cited above, from Notebook 21: “Una letteratura non può essere nazionale se non è popolare; perché, se bene sia di pochi il crearla, universale dee esserne l’uso e il godimento. Oltre che, dovendo ella esprimere le idee e gli affetti comuni e trarre in luce quei sensi che giacciono occulti e confusi nel cuore delle moltitudini, i suoi cultori debbono non solo mirare al bene del popolo ma ritrarre del suo spirito; tanto che questo viene ad essere non solo il fine ma in un certo modo eziandio il principio delle lettere civili” [A literature cannot be national if it is not popular; because, if it is

the concept of the national-popular, understood as a hegemonic relation, is qualified as “Jacobin”: “Il Gioberti, sia pure vagamente, ha il concetto del ‘popolare-nazionale’ giacobino, dell’egemonia politica, cioè dell’alleanza tra borghesi-intellettuali e il popolo” [Gioberti, albeit vaguely, has a Jacobin concept of the “popular-national,” of political hegemony, that is, of the alliance between the bourgeoisie-intellectuals and the people].<sup>52</sup> The national-popular (or “popular-national”) relation is again not an equivalence but an alliance, and an asymmetrical one. Note 21 of Notebook 8, on the projected work that Gramsci proposed to call *The Modern Prince* following his reading of Machiavelli as a theorist of hegemony, indicates that the book should have a chapter on Jacobinism. Here he diagnoses the “successive failures of the attempts to create a national-popular creative will” throughout the history of Italy as the result of the feudal and fragmented distribution of political power, “an internal situation that can be called ‘economic-corporative,’” that is, without the ethico-political articulation that constitutes a collective historical subject capable of acting outside of a logic of simple self-interest or instrumentality. Gramsci writes,

mancò sempre una forza “giacobina” efficiente, la forza appunto che crea la volontà collettiva nazionale popolare, fondamento di tutti gli Stati moderni. ...

Realmente il moderno Principe dovrebbe limitarsi a questi due punti

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the vocation of few to create it, its use and enjoyment ought to be universal. Moreover, since it should express common ideas and sentiments and bring to light those feelings that lie latent and confused in the heart of the multitudes, its cultivators must not only look to the benefit of the people but portray its spirit; indeed this is not only the end but also the beginning of a civil literature].

<sup>52</sup> He then qualifies this: “giacobino teorico, s’intende, perché in pratica egli non ebbe modo di applicare le sue dottrine” [Jacobin in theory, that is, because in practice he was unable to apply his doctrines].

fondamentali: formazione di una volontà collettiva nazionale popolare di cui il moderno Principe è appunto espressione attiva e operante, e riforma intellettuale e morale.

[there never was an effective “Jacobin” force—precisely the force that creates the national-popular collective will, the foundation of all modern states . . . *The Modern Prince* should focus entirely on these two basic points: the formation of a national-popular collective will, of which the modern Prince is the active and operative expression, and intellectual and moral reform.]

When Gramsci criticizes the regional writers for their “touristic” and “paternalistic” gaze, he goes on to say that a more militant nationalism is preferable to this kind of sentimental and essentializing portrayal;<sup>53</sup> in his discussion of the Risorgimento in the same note, he argues that one of the causes of the weakness of the national-popular element in the movement was precisely the myth of an Italian nation that has always existed since ancient Rome. The obstructive, conservative force of such a myth for the critical and creative work of national formation outweighs whatever strategic value it might have in the process of unification.

What each of these points shows is that the distance between the “national” intellectuals

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<sup>53</sup> “la letteratura regionale è stata essenzialmente folcloristica e pittoresca: il popolo “regionale” era visto “paternalisticamente,” dall’estero, con spirito disincantato, cosmopolitico, da turisti in cerca di sensazioni forti e originali per la loro crudezza . . . Da questo punto di vista sono stati più simpatici Enrico Corrandini e il Pascoli, col loro nazionalismo confessato e militante, in quanto cercarono risolvere il dualismo letterario tradizionale tra popolo e nazione, sebbene siano caduti in altre forme di retorica e di oratoria” [regional literature has been essentially folkloric and picturesque: the “regional” population has been seen “paternalistically,” from the outside, with a disenchanting, cosmopolitan, touristic spirit in search of strong feelings, authentic in their rawness. From this point of view Enrico Corrandini and Pascoli, with their overt and militant nationalism, are preferable insofar as they seek to resolve the traditional literary dualism between the people and the nation, even if they have fallen into other forms of rhetoric and oratory] (Notebook 21, § 1).

and the “people” is not a question of authenticity but of alliance, of ethico-political self-positioning. Gramsci emphasizes this in his revision of Notebook 3, § 63 in Notebook 21, § 5; the clauses in italics below are added in the later note:

Gli intellettuali non escono dal popolo, *anche se accidentalmente qualcuno di essi è d’origine popolana*, . . . sono qualcosa di staccato, di campato in aria, una casta, cioè, *e non un’articolazione, con funzioni organiche, del popolo stesso*.

[The intellectuals do not come from the people, *even if by chance one among them happens be of popular origins* . . . They are something detached, cut off from reality—a caste, that is, *and not an articulation, with organic functions, of the people itself*.]

Spivak has pointed out — and the passage above confirms—that the organicity of the “organic” intellectual has to do with organization rather than essence or identity; an organic intellectual—whether of the dominant class or of the popular, or subaltern, strata—is connected to its class or group not by nature or origin but by function. The national-popular collective will is not pre-given but must be produced.

I’ll conclude my discussion of the concept of the national-popular developed in Gramsci’s notebooks by citing a passage that offers something of a counterpoint to the “Jacobin concept.” In a note on Fordism, a national-popular—as opposed to merely nationalist—economic policy is one that views the masses as national *market* rather than as mere “cattle”:

in certi paesi di capitalismo arretrato e di composizione economica in cui si equilibrano la grande industria moderna, l’artigianato, la piccola e media cultura agricola e il latifondismo, le masse operaie e contadine non sono considerate come un “mercato.” Il mercato per l’industria è pensato all’estero, e in paesi arretrati

dell'estero, dove sia piú possibile la penetrazione politica per la creazione di colonie e di zone d'influenza. . . . Paesi dove esiste nazionalismo, ma non una situazione "nazionale-popolare," dove cioè le grandi masse popolari sono considerate come il bestiame. (Notebook 6, § 135)

[in certain countries where capitalism is still backward and the economic structure consists of a mixture of modern big industry, artisan production, midsize and small-scale agriculture, and large land holdings, the masses of workers and peasants are not considered to be a "market." Industry looks abroad for a market, it seeks to export its goods to backward countries where it is easier to penetrate politically through the establishment of colonies and spheres of influence. . . . There are countries that have nationalism but no national-popular situation—in other words, countries in which the great popular masses are treated like cattle.]

In this passage a "national-popular situation" is, as in other contexts, connected to the idea of historical subjectification, perhaps of citizenship, figured as humanization through its opposition to *bestiame*. But the opposition is also, and more explicitly, between a population regarded by the state as cattle and one that is regarded as a *market*. The incorporation of the people as an active element of the social or national body is coextensive with the consolidation of an advanced capitalist economy. While the "Jacobin" concept is derived from a bourgeois historical process, the form of articulation, expressed in political rather than economic terms, is assumed to be transferable to a new—socialist—content or ethico-political horizon, and it is this possibility that Gramsci wants to highlight in his elaboration of the concept. The note on Fordism, without negating this transferability, makes clear that a "national-popular situation" is not necessarily a

good thing in itself, and reminds us that its empirically knowable historical form is that of the bourgeois nation-state.

We have seen that the category of the national-popular in Gramsci already contains the vanguardist and integrationist structure that will prompt the criticism of the Latin Americanist subaltern studies scholars from within an intellectual culture wary of these aspects, but it always represents a sphere of inclusion rather than exclusion of the subaltern. For Gramsci, the production of a national-popular collective will correspond to a process of desubalternization of the popular masses, and even within “advanced” capitalism, a national-popular state is one in which the masses are no longer “treated like cattle.” In the appropriation of the terms by the Latin Americanists, following the South Asian group’s critique of Indian nationalism, the national-popular comes to name a mode of political organization that further subalternizes those who constitute the necessary outside of any totalizing hegemonic articulation, of which the nation is the paradigmatic form. Subalternity, then, can come to designate not a condition to be transcended but a position that in fact represents a certain epistemological privilege, while the national-popular, embodied in the historical nationalist and populist movements of the region, is the erasure of difference, for example, the erasure of indigeneity through the ideologeme of *mestizaje*.

The development of the concept of the national-popular as something that masks and deepens rather than eradicating the condition of subalternity can perhaps be traced to the disjunction between the peasantry and the nation highlighted by the South Asianist scholars.<sup>54</sup> But while the absence or failure of hegemony in colonial India, as posited in Guha’s *Dominance*

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<sup>54</sup> Although in Notebook 6, § 135, cited above, Gramsci explicitly distinguishes between the national-popular and nationalism plain and simple.

*without Hegemony* (1997), was a central tenet of the original Subaltern Studies group, the hegemonic projects of Latin American internal colonialism—the various populist and nationalist movements in early to mid twentieth-century Latin America—if necessarily incomplete, had at their core the expansion of the nation to formally and symbolically include the majority of the people through the construction of mestizo national identities within the cultural and intellectual spheres. The exclusions that operated within these discourses and regimes could no longer be attributed to a lack of national-popular orientation of the dominant classes, but were inherent in the institutionalization of a unified nation-people itself.

The reversal in the valorization of the concepts of the national-popular and the subaltern outlined here (or, more broadly, between hegemony – a term more often counterposed to subalternity with the same implications – and the subaltern) tends to reduce the Gramscian terms to stable and unequivocal positions within a normative politics: the national-popular names the hegemonic regime that is distinguished from pure domination in means only and not in substance, while the subaltern marks the incompleteness of this regime, the fracture from which its undoing can be precipitated, or at least imagined. We can cull from Gramsci's notebooks an equally normative political project onto which subalternity and the national-popular can be mapped as a starting point prior to the emergence into historical subjecthood and a step on the path to a popular hegemonic project respectively; this framework, however, as I hope my discussion here bears out, does not exhaust Gramsci's theoretical formulation of the concepts. Subaltern groups, always and by definition occupying a position of subordination to be overcome, are not reducible to this position or incapable of an autonomous politics, but actively contribute through their own ideological formation to the construction of a new society; a national-popular articulation, as the incorporation of subaltern groups into the nation, on the



other hand, can represent an emergence from subalternity into hegemony, into the nation, through a bourgeois mode of citizenry-as-market that only fortifies the existing regime. Our reading of both concepts and the larger theoretical constellation in which they are embedded must take into account this equivocality, through which they might serve as figures for any element of a discourse that might be mobilized in the service of a disembodied or transhistorical politics.

## **II. Histories of (de)subalternization**

The trajectory of the Gramscian concept of the subaltern as one of analytical value for the study of historical processes and structures of power, through the “history from below” or “grassroots history” spearheaded by Eric Hobsbawm, anticolonial scholarship, and finally the turn to poststructuralism and cultural studies, has been conditioned not only by these disciplinary factors but also by the discourses proper to the societies and histories taken as their objects of inquiry and sites of enunciation. My discussion of the subaltern in this chapter situates the concept in relation to that of the national-popular as its most pertinent counterpoint in the Latin Americanist discourses that make up the object of this study. These discourses, in turn, are generated in response to the nationalist and populist political projects that have predominated in the history of the region in the twentieth century, but such discourses also take on a life of their own, persisting in their structuring function beyond the historical effectivity of the events to which they respond in their initial formulation. In this section I construct a necessarily somewhat arbitrary itinerary of both concepts in academic and political Latin Americanist discourses in connection to (yet often articulated at a significant temporal and geographic distance from) a

series of points in a local (Bolivian) historical narrative that has broader regional resonance; my interest is in the production and *uses* of these discourses, rather than in their correspondence to historical situations or historical causation.

*The creole state and its outside*

From the moment of its creation following the final victory of the War of Independence in 1825 until the early twentieth century, the Bolivian nation-state was organized around what have been loosely called feudal or precapitalist social relations that corresponded to the racialized colonial hierarchy; the most conspicuous mode of participation of the indigenous majority in the political sphere was that of direct militant action, that is, as challenge to the creole nation from without. This position of externality in relation to the state is eloquently expressed in the campaign of the Aymara military leader Pablo Zárate Willka and its aftermath.<sup>55</sup> In 1899, a civil war broke out between the colonial capital of Chuquisaca and the rising elite of La Paz connected to the tin mining boom, represented by the Conservative and Liberal parties, respectively. José Manuel Pando, the leader of the Liberal faction, enjoyed the support of the Aymara communities of the La Paz department, and Zárate Willka mobilized an indigenous army that would have given the Liberals a decisive advantage in the war. The Aymara forces, however, had their own, autonomous line of command based on traditional structures of authority and developed their own substantive program as well. They formulated their own demands and waged battles in white towns to achieve their ends without regard for the Liberal/Conservative divide. In the end, the two creole parties decided they had no choice but to unite against the indigenous forces.

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<sup>55</sup> The classic account of the uprising is Ramiro Condarco Morales's *Zárate, el "temible" Willka: Historia de la rebelión indígena de 1899* (1965).

Zárate Willka was executed and the war ended in a kind of stalemate, with the question of the capital still unresolved today (Sucre—what was then Chuquisaca—remains the judicial capital, while the seat of the executive is in La Paz). René Zavaleta recounts this history in *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia* to argue that the oligarchic Bolivian nation-state is constituted through the unification of its elite factions *against* the Indians; the historical function of the indigenous peasantry in the process of national consolidation is that of an existential threat. For the indigenous insurgents, on the other hand, a relationship to the state that appeared to be one of simple subordination (or subalternity) is revealed as an alliance that is forged and broken at will. There is a failure of incorporation not only within a national-popular framework, but also as an instrumental faction, leaving open a certain disarticulated autonomy in potentia.

If we go back another century in Andean history, to the rebellion of Tupac Amaru II in 1780 in Peru, we see another failed approach between the Indians and the state, this time ending in a new state project or proto-state, that is, what for Gramsci would constitute a process of desubalternization, and what for Zavaleta constitutes the only true national-popular program of the region (216). José Gabriel Condorcanqui sought recognition from the colonial authorities of his title of Inca nobility, and only after this was denied does he take the name of the last Inca, Tupac Amaru, and lead his own independence campaign against the Spaniards—one that sought to found an independent state organized around an indigenous hegemonic articulation—thirty years prior to the outbreak of the creole-led wars that were ultimately successful.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Alexander von Humboldt cites the incident in his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811) within an Enlightened liberal argument for the social development of the Indians through education and economic and political assimilation, that is, through juridical equality and incorporation into capitalist production: the Indians constituted a “status in statu” (69) and urgently had to be included as citizens, lest they wage their own, very different, barbaric war of independence. Although as a guest of the viceroy of New Spain Humboldt would have been

What these movements express is not quite a conflict involving a subaltern group understood—in a somewhat modified usage of Gramsci’s term within the various streams of subaltern studies—as one cut off from the channels of the state, since Condorcanqui was able to solicit his title and Zárate was able to enter into an alliance with Pando. Nor is it a conflict between dominant and subordinated groups, in a sense closer to Gramsci’s, that vie for hegemonic control of a single formation. Instead, there is a struggle on behalf of the state to externalize or suppress a more or less internal element that challenges its subordinate status, and an even more vigorous response to the threat posed by the emergence, from that externalized position, of an organized will to constitute a counter-state. Here Ranajit Guha’s thesis of the (always relative) autonomy of subaltern groups seems pertinent. Despite this relative externality, the defeated militant subaltern counter-state, as in Gramsci’s six-phase process but, of course, without a necessary progression toward increasing autonomy, provokes a reactionary adaptation of the dominant groups, unifying and strengthening the creole state.

In a central text of the Latin American Subaltern Studies project, *Subalternity and Representation* (1999), Beverley cites two documents of the Tupac Amaru rebellion—Condorcanqui’s *Genealogía*, written to prove his royal descent, and his brother Juan Bautista’s *Memorias*—as examples of texts that could be incorporated into the canon of Peruvian literature in a certain subalternist/multiculturalist revision of the curriculum. But this kind of inclusion, Beverley argues, would in fact run contrary to the task of subaltern studies:

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unlikely to voice explicitly separatist views, his writings echoed and stimulated bourgeois Creole revolutionary discourse (Simón Bolívar called Humboldt the second discoverer of America). The Tupac Amaru revolt therefore serves a similar cautionary function to that of the Haitian Revolution across the Americas, both in prompting the most reactionary (in the Haitian case, pro-slavery) responses and in urging liberal reforms from above to preempt subaltern insurgency.

To seek to canonize texts like the *Genealogía* or the *Memorias* . . . as pertaining to a now wider sense of “Peruvian” or Latin American literature not only obscures the fact of the cultural production of a national-popular imaginary by an indigenous peasantry and its organic intellectuals—a production which, while it may have involved elements of European literary, political, and scientific culture, did so in a way subordinate to its own struggle for meaning and hegemony; it also amounts to an act of appropriation that excludes that population as a subject conscious of its own history, incorporating it only as a contingent element of another history (of the modern nation-state, of the Enlightenment, of Peruvian literature), whose subject is also an other (creole or mestizo, Spanish-speaking, *letrado*, male, propertied). (55–56)

Like Zavaleta, Beverley recognizes in the Túpac Amaru rebellion a national-popular, hegemonic articulation, albeit one that failed in an embryonic state, and here the interest in the subaltern, as in the early volumes of *Subaltern Studies* (and in Gramsci), is in tracking “every trace of autonomous initiative” (Notebook 25, § 2; Notebook 3, § 14).

But within the larger argument of *Subalternity and Representation*, this failure seems to be more than an incidental element of the narrative. Beverley is writing from the position of the literary critic (although it remained an interdisciplinary enterprise, the Latin Americanist project coincides with the “linguistic” or “literary turn” of subaltern studies) and he is less interested in the historical subject of the rebellion than in the way in which the event is narrativized within the academy; he is more interested in the performative than the constative function. I am thinking

here of Spivak's framing of the task of subaltern studies in terms of this distinction<sup>57</sup>—for Spivak, the constative mode is sometimes useful but insufficient; for Beverley (although he does not use the terms), the constative scholarship within Latin American subaltern studies is in fact performative in a counterproductive way in that it reifies the subaltern as representable object and as constitutive element of a national history that is necessarily given a closed and teleological form in its narrativization.<sup>58</sup> The category of the national-popular/hegemonic in the Tupac Amaru rebellion retains a disruptive function because of its incompleteness; when the category refers to a successful passage from subalternity to hegemony, for example, in the case of the victorious Sandinista revolution, it enters the phase of closure in which the heterogeneous multiplicity of subjects that have been articulated into the popular is flattened and sealed, producing new and more insidious forms of exclusion. The other mode in which the national-popular emerges in *Subalternity and Representation* as a productive ideogeme for the politics of subaltern studies—besides that of an unrealized would-have-been—is that of futurity, of what might be read as the Derridean *à venir* (although, again, Beverley does not use the phrase). In contrast to the subalternist strain represented by, among others, Alberto Moreiras, who had already launched his appeal for a posthegemonist subaltern studies,<sup>59</sup> Beverley does not entirely

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<sup>57</sup> “Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular,” in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2014).

<sup>58</sup> This is his argument against Florencia Mallon's *Peasant and Nation* (1995).

<sup>59</sup> Beverley cites a conference paper given by Moreiras at the annual conference of the Latin American Studies Association in 1997: “We need a concept of hegemony, but only in order to then go ahead and affirm that our work as translational subalternists is necessarily posthegemonic” (Beverley, 1999: 97); Moreiras elaborates this position in *The Exhaustion of Difference*, which would be published two years after *Subalternity and Representation*, in 2001. He lists among the “features constitutive of subalternist thinking” “the need to understand the operation of thinking beyond any attempt at reconstituting it as a form of philosophical

renounce the categories of hegemony, nation, state, or people, but calls for their radical reimagining, against all empirically discoverable models.

*The national-popular as resubalternization*

The Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, MNR), which came to power in Bolivia in 1952 with the election of Víctor Paz Estenssoro, sought to construct a mestizo national identity in opposition to the creole nation of the early republic, and therefore relied on a dichotomy between an oligarchy which, unlike the elite in the core capitalist countries, was allied with foreign rather than national interest, and the people-nation that was just beginning to emerge into the sphere of electoral politics. This dichotomy between the nation and (internal and external) “anti-nation” (in the words of Bolivian journalist and leading intellectual of the nationalist movement Carlos Montenegro<sup>60</sup>) constitutes the basic structure of the populist mode of articulation of which the Latin American state formations of the twentieth century have so often been taken as representative. In the most emblematic case, that of Peronism, the consolidation of the collective national subject is conceived in terms of class, as a transcendence of class antagonism through an affective identification with a national project; in the case of the Andean countries where the Indian provided the (negative) basis of a unified creole oligarchic national identity, the antagonism to be resolved is imagined primarily in terms of ethnicity.

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reconceptualization at the service of hegemonic articulations” and “the production of a new philosophical subject, even as subjectless subject, whose ‘general intellect’ can sustain the enterprise of operational thinking, as posthegemonic thinking, in times of postmodernism” (Moreiras 2001: 113).

<sup>60</sup> *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* (1943).

Gareth Williams takes up Etienne Balibar's concept of "fictive ethnicity"<sup>61</sup> to think the various forms of national-popular articulations that emerge in this period, from the literary and political *indigenismo* of Peruvian Marxist theorist and activist José Carlos Mariátegui (48–51) and novelist José María Arguedas (39) to the "transcultural fusion" of Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, founder of the Peruvian nationalist/populist party Alianza Popular Revolucionario Americana (APRA), and the Bolivian MNR. While the *indigenistas* seek to found a national identity that privileges the Indian as the core of the nation (and in Mariátegui, the revolutionary subject as universal class in the Marxist sense), the discourses that Williams calls transculturalist seek instead to construct a unified national subject through a notion of mestizaje in which the indigenous and Hispanic identities are fused. In the ideology of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, and the analogous nationalist projects of the mid-twentieth century elsewhere in the region, the subaltern is symbolically incorporated into a universal national identity, producing a new set of exclusions (of that which cannot be effectively interpellated by the call to such an identification), new forms of subalternity, which lend themselves more readily to the theoretical

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<sup>61</sup> "I apply the term 'fictive ethnicity' to the community instituted by the nation-state. This is an intentionally complex expression in which the term fiction . . . should not be taken in the sense of a pure and simple illusion without historical effects, but must, on the contrary, be understood by analogy with the persona ficta of the Juridical tradition in the sense of an institutional effect, a 'fabrication.' No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social 'formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized—that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions. . . . It is fictive ethnicity which makes it possible for the expression of a preexisting unity to be seen in the state, and continually to measure the state against its 'historic mission' in the service of the nation and, as a consequence, to idealize politics. By constituting the people as a fictively ethnic unity against the background of a universalistic representation which attributes to each individual one—and only one—ethnic identity and which thus divides up the whole of humanity between different ethnic groups corresponding potentially to so many nations, national ideology does much more than justify the strategies employed by the state to control populations" (Balibar 96).



elaborations of the concept since the mid 1980s.

Silvia Rivera traces the continuities between the colonial and oligarchic-republican forms of domination and this operation of the subsumption of the indigenous into the categories of the mestizo and the peasant. In her seminal *Oprimidos pero no vencidos (Oppressed but not Defeated)*, published in 1984—that is, contemporarily with the first volumes of the *Subaltern Studies* series edited by Guha, although their work had not yet made its way to Latin America—Rivera frames indigenous Andean history in terms of Fernand Braudel’s *longue durée* to posit a persistence of indigenous consciousness from late-colonial times to the present, not as a positive identity, not constituted through the survival of pre-colonial “conceptions of the world” or forms of social organization, but through struggle, through an unbroken history of oppression and resistance. The constitutive antagonist of this indigenous collectivity—the colonial Spanish elite, then the (internally colonial) republican creole caste, and finally a non-indigenous national elite that includes the mestizo (the identification of this continuity should recall the South Asian collective’s insistence on a continuity rather than an opposition between the colonial and indigenous nationalist elite)—possesses a remarkable capacity for adaptation and cooptation, and promptly took over the National Revolution of 1952 that in fact owed its victory to factions heterogeneous to this elite (although organized as “workers” rather than “Indians”<sup>62</sup>). This adaptation represents a passage from what Guha identified as dominance without hegemony into a hegemonic project of partial success that subalternizes at once through the renaming of the social subjects that it seeks to internalize and the invisibilization of those who cannot be designated by the new name.

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<sup>62</sup> It is important to keep in mind the overlap in the empirical content of these distinct analytical categories in a context like the Bolivian.

The National Revolutionary state presupposes and (to varying extents) produces a homogeneous mestizo people-nation, organized in its discourse into three groups that recognize traditional notions of class but not the category of indigeneity (despite the very real structural functionality of that category at the juridical and economic levels since the time of conquest): the petty bourgeoisie, the workers, and the peasants (*campesinos*). Through their inclusion as *campesinos*, the nationalist state once again excludes the indigenous as such. At the level of political discourse, the collective popular subjects that are integrated into the larger national-popular subject are individuated and formally reinserted into the collectivity via a process of equivalence through *citizenship*; economically, this process corresponds to the continued assault on communal landholding. In practice, the liberal model of citizenship is not operative in the electoral sphere, and the coup continues to be the normal method of transfer of power, while legitimacy is established through charismatic leadership. At this juncture, then, the old (residual?) forms of subalternity overlap with emerging forms to produce a double erasure that reconfigures and neutralizes the identities of the subjects that it incorporates in the symbolic sphere.

More than a decade after the publication of *Oprimidos* and four years after the founding of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (but independently of this project), in 1997, Rivera co-edited an anthology of work by the South Asian collective in Spanish translation with Rossana Barragán. Their introduction to the volume emphasizes the value of South-South dialogue bypassing the mediation by the North represented by the group based in the U.S. academy and responding largely to metropolitan theoretical debates, calls attention to a certain affinity with historiographical and sociological work on and from Latin America that is underacknowledged by the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (they name Zavaleta, and

Rivera's own work would be an obvious example), and welcomes the methodological and theoretical contributions of the South Asian scholars as a potential source of enrichment for Latin American scholarship as well as an influence (via Spivak and the deconstructive turn, although this is unacknowledged) that has prompted them to revise some of their own conceptualizations. Their presentation of the concept of subalternity that they hope to introduce to a Latin American readership indeed differs from the one implicit in *Oprimidos*, in which a subaltern political identity is constructed through antagonism. In her study of Aymara and Quechua responses to colonial oppression in *Oprimidos*, Rivera proposes that the Katarist movement, in its invocation of a "long memory" of the colonial and precolonial past, activated by the protean mechanisms of exclusion operated by the state from the time of conquest to the present, works to produce an autonomous ethnic and political identity. In their introduction to the *Subaltern Studies* anthology, Rivera and Barragán write,

La hegemonía colonial en la construcción institucional e imaginaria de la India es . . . cuestionada desde el punto de vista de una sociedad civil abigarrada—la sociedad subalterna—que siempre permanece heterogénea y elusiva a la política de los de "arriba." La propia noción de subalternidad resulta forjada como algo distinto, ajeno y preexistente al mundo occidental—Razón como Historia –, aunque sin desconocer que es este mismo mundo el que le ha legado este concepto desde la vertiente gramsciana.

[Colonial hegemony in the institutional and imaginary construction of India is . . . questioned from the point of view of a motley civil society—subaltern society—that remains always heterogeneous and elusive to the politics of the elite. The very notion of subalternity is forged as something distinct, alien and prior to the

Western world—Reason as History—although keeping in mind that it is from this very world that it has received the concept, via Gramsci.] (11)

The subaltern here is no longer the collective militant subject constituted through a history of struggle, but what exceeds or, in Alberto Moreiras's terms, *subceeds* (2006) struggle and history. Yet while Moreiras understands this excess as precisely the negation of the subject, what is posited as alien to "Reason as History" here refers neither to another mode of existence (that is, as I understand Moreiras's argument, as one which would have to apply to all lives prior to, underneath, or beyond the constitution of subjectivity) nor to a new theoretical perspective from which to study the power relations of subalternity (as in Spivak's presentation of the *Subaltern Studies* project), but to the subaltern as subject, as identity, in that it refers to particular groups of people defined as heterogeneous to the Western world. The concept, and perhaps theory itself, is necessarily derived from the West, in this case via Gramsci, but can be instrumentalized to access a knowledge of the inhabitants of its outside. The subaltern-as-subject, which I take to be the necessary basis of the subaltern-as-state in the national-populist sense of the pink tide that I discuss in the following section—of which Rivera is now among the most forceful and astute critics—emerges precisely in the attempt to effect a detachment from a Western regime of subjectivity.

### *The new national-popular state and postsubalternism*

Within the conjuncture of the pink tide—a moment now in crisis—the postmodern, postnational critique of the national-popular that developed within the context of the neoliberal "redemocratizing" state has had to contend with a new era of state-centered politics in Latin America. Beverley revises the subaltern/state dichotomy in response to the ascension of actors

from social movements previously excluded from the formal political sphere to state power—a new moment of desubalternization—citing the Gramscian notion of “becoming state” received via Ernesto Laclau; if his reading of the Amaru uprising as an indigenous proto-state collectivity served, in its mode of unrealized potentiality, as an apt example of subaltern agency, this successful conquest of the state by electoral means requires a theoretical reformulation. Beverley combines the terms of the subaltern/national-popular opposition to propose a substitution of the category of the subaltern by that of the “subaltern-popular,” constructing his argument by counterposing statements by Spivak and Bolivian vice president Álvaro García Linera. Spivak reaffirms the externality of the subaltern to all forms of political struggle:

There is much talk these days of the emergence of subaltern counter-collectivity. I think that is bogus. If you nominate collectivities that are questioning the power of the United States or the power of the West or whatever as immediately a subaltern counter-collectivity, I don't think you really know what it is like where this conflict *can mean nothing*. (qtd. in Beverley 2011: 122)

García Linera, on the other hand, in an article published in the *New Left Review* and written during Evo Morales's presidential campaign,<sup>63</sup> stresses that in Bolivia the subject of political struggle oriented toward the transformation of the state, in contrast to the revolutionary periods of the early twentieth century, is itself indigenous and not only claiming to speak for the indigenous. Beverley concludes that, as Evo Morales and the movement he represents have proven, and basing his position in the quite justified judgment that the notion of the subaltern as radically other than the citizen or indeed the state is flawed, the subaltern not only can speak, but

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<sup>63</sup> “State Crisis and Popular Power” (2006).

can also govern. He calls for a combination of “skeptical realism” and hope, noting the populist aspects of pink tide governments like that of Chávez, for example, and points out the growing distance between García Linera himself and “intellectuals and activists more closely bound up with the demands of the indigenous movements” (123). But his argument in favor of a cautious support for the pink tide governments, and against the concept of subalternity embraced by the Subaltern Studies group in the previous decade, ultimately rests on an idea of the subaltern as subject rather than position, and in the Bolivian case that he proposes as exemplary, authorizes a repetition of the familiar populist claims to a totally transparent state-people relation.

García Linera articulates these two moments—the first and second “national-revolutionary” regimes in Bolivia, in a short article entitled “El evismo: lo nacional-popular en acción.” Written in 2006 from a position of victory, the text considers the relation between the National Revolution of 1952 that (with all the qualifications made above) put a close to the creole oligarchic phase of Bolivian history and marked the entrance of organized workers and peasants into the political sphere and the 2005 election of Evo Morales as the first indigenous president of the continent. The first obvious indication here of a populist mode of interpellation (and, incidentally, one that was absent in the MNR regime) is of course the proper name turned into an *ism* (*evismo*). The person of the leader is a signifier amorphous enough to contain, and reconcile, contradictory ideological positions and in this text García Linera affirms that while the core economic sector is small production, large foreign companies are also included; that while the core is indigenous, the white middle classes are also represented; that *evismo* contains multiple temporalities, multiple modes of production, and so forth.<sup>64</sup> But what characterizes

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<sup>64</sup> This passage in García Linera’s text could have been from one of Perón’s speeches, in which he continually insisted upon the inclusion and harmonious alignment of the different elements of

*evismo* as national-*popular* for García Linera is that, unlike with the state of 1952, and unlike in Gramsci's "Jacobin concept," there is a hegemonic interpellation *from the position of the subaltern*. He writes, "el MAS representa el despertar de los sujetos subalternos hacia un nuevo nacionalismo revolucionario, pero eso no quiere decir que el movimiento de Evo Morales pretenda resucitar la vieja ideología del nacionalismo revolucionario. El evismo transita más bien la vertiente de lo nacional popular, cuyo filo es todavía más revolucionario" [MAS represents the awakening of subaltern subjects to a new revolutionary nationalism, but this does not mean that Evo Morales's movement intends to revive the old ideology of revolutionary nationalism. Evismo proceeds, rather, by a national-popular route, which is even more revolutionary] (28). Since the subject of the revolution is indigenous, the subaltern social base is not represented but represents itself in an unmediated way:

Anteriormente, las estrategias de los subalternos estaban construidas a la manera de una vanguardia política cohesionada que lograba construir movimientos que eran su base social. Ese fue el caso de muchos países de Centroamérica, de Chile y, en parte, de Brasil. . . . El evismo modifica este debate al plantearse la posibilidad de que el acceso a niveles de decisión del Estado lo puedan hacer los propios movimientos sociales.

El evismo ya no hace una lectura de la representación de lo político a través de la delegación de poderes. Es una proyección que busca de manera casi absoluta la auto-representación de los propios movimientos sociales.

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capitalist production, united through a shared telos and affect for the good of the nation (in 1944, for example, "Queremos que el capital y el trabajo, en estrecho abrazo, labren la grandeza de la patria" [We want capital and labor, united in a cordial embrace, to work towards the greatness of the patria] [246]).

[Previously, subaltern strategies were constructed through a unified political vanguard that was able to construct movements that in turn served as its social base. This was the case in Central America, Chile, and, in part, Brazil. . . . Evismo modifies this debate in opening up the possibility of access to the level of state decision making on the part of the social movements themselves.

Evismo does not conceive of political representation through the delegation or power; it is a project that seeks almost absolute self-representation of the social movements.] (26)

Here the subaltern has become a subject that maintains its identity as subaltern even when it comes to occupy the position of the state. The real institutional reforms that have expanded the political representation of subaltern groups within state apparatus—such as the increased inclusion of women and indigenous leaders in the Constituent Assembly of 2006, the constitutional recognition of indigenous-*campesino* and Afro-Bolivian autonomies, and the Derecho de Consulta Previa (“Right to Prior Consultation” of populations that would be affected by natural resource extraction or development projects)—are accompanied, and eroded, by a discourse that masks the constitutive gap of representation. If the theoretical elaboration of the concept of subalternity in Latin America has largely been constructed against the national-popular as identitarian, hegemonizing, and homogenizing, here there is a paradoxical affirmation of difference and heterogeneity—the institutionalization of the concept of the Plurinational—together with a total collapse of the people, or the subaltern, and the state through the person of the leader as well as an assumption of a similar transparency at regional levels. The claim of unmediated representation is authorized through the claim to a subaltern identity that persists independently of its position in the power structure or dominant discursive regime.



### III. From fictive to strategic ethnicity

The history of subaltern studies, a discourse that has indeed shown a particular inclination toward its own historicization in the context of the development of the political and intellectual landscape of the late twentieth century, is typically divided into two phases (alluded to above) with a “deconstructive turn” and a convergence with cultural studies and postcolonial theory marking a shift from the early work of the South Asian collective that sought primarily to challenge the premises of the existing historiography of colonial India.<sup>65</sup> The Latin Americanist branch of this discourse emerges during the second of these phases, and articulates its own establishment as a response to the same scene of globalization that requires a reformulation of the original critique of nationalist ideology (although much of the work done under the banner of Latin American subaltern studies is influenced by the early essays on Indian peasant insurgency). The Latin Americanist group formally dissolved in 2001 following a theoretical divergence precisely on this question of deconstruction and historical subjectivity, the organizing antinomies of which have structured much of this chapter.<sup>66</sup> My intervention here has sought to bring this debate into conversation, on the one hand, with the original Gramscian formulation of its theoretical terms, and on the other, with a particular historical sequence—one that is connected (although not reducible) to developments on a regional and global scale—and the ideological and theoretical production that responds to it.

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s “A Small History of Subaltern Studies” (2002).

<sup>66</sup> Moreiras offers a thorough and highly personal discussion of this split in “The Fatality of (My) Subalternism: A Response to John Beverley” (2012).

Returning to Gramsci does not simply provide a starting point for a theoretical genealogy or descriptive history of the discourse under discussion; the insistent return of the questions of vanguardism, autonomy, and historical subjectivity have shown that Gramsci remains relevant as an interlocutor at all stages of its development, and one whose position is complex and ambivalent. The historical narrative focused on Bolivia—but, again, in each of its moments representative to some extent of a broader Latin American situation—that I have plotted here can be summed up as follows:

(1) In what has been called the creole-oligarchic state of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the colonial period leading up to its foundation, the subaltern indigenous majority is constituted through antagonism as a collective subject with relative autonomy, and demonstrates a capacity to launch a proto-state project, even if it is ultimately defeated. This first moment comes into view in the historiography of an anti-colonial scholarly discourse that emerges in the mid to late twentieth century through a lens that shares the general theoretical horizon of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, although not yet directly in dialogue with that corpus. With the Latin Americanist group, this historical moment is revisited, and the fact of defeat is what enables the narratives of indigenous insurgency of the period to perform their role as enactments of subaltern agency.

(2) With the National Revolutionary state founded in 1952, the national-popular ideological regime of *mestizaje* conceals subaltern difference, prompting another kind of retrieval than that of direct militancy and revisionist, vindictory, or solidary historiography at multiple levels of political, cultural, and intellectual discourse and practice in the following decades. This

kind of erasure through a discourse of inclusion and universalization or totalization,<sup>67</sup> through a resignifying and renaming, comes to characterize the object of Latin American subaltern studies, the remnant or excess of the fictive ethnicity of the national-populist state, in the subsequent historical period that has been called postnational.

(3) The return of what has been called a national-popular state ideology with the pink tide regimes, with the passage of actors from the social movements, that is, non-state formations from the neoliberal or postnational phase, to state power, coincides with a sense of the political exhaustion of the deconstructive moment of the disciplinary development of cultural theory and a return to the subject, a tendency that in this corpus is best exemplified by Beverley's postsubalternism. This turn occurs simultaneously and in dialogue with an opposing theoretical project, an extension of the subalternist position centered around the concepts of posthegemony and infrapolitics, designating a radical questioning not only of prior conceptions of collectivity and social articulation but of the political subject as such, which seems to have achieved a greater contemporaneity with the current crisis of the left at the level of the state.<sup>68</sup>

Silvia Rivera, whose participation in each of the first two moments outlined above has been central to my discussion, offers a different position from which to criticize the discursive and political practice of the (pluri)national-populism of the MAS regime: she calls the appropriation of a subaltern subject-identity from the position of the state a mobilization of "strategic ethnicity," a term that I find useful here because of its resonance, in a critical mode,

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<sup>67</sup> This is comparable to the postracial ideology of the U.S. that has finally come into crisis within the mainstream public discourse, within a very different (liberal rather than national-populist) model of integration.

<sup>68</sup> I discuss this at greater length in my conclusion.

with both Spivak's continually invoked attribution to the South Asian collective of a "strategic use of essentialism" (which she has long since retracted, insisting that the formula is unhelpful and in any case the group needed no such apology)<sup>69</sup> and with the "fictive ethnicity" of Gareth Williams via Balibar as the mechanism of subalternization within a regime of national-popular inclusion. Rivera's "strategic ethnicity" is connected to what she has called the "permitted" Indian or the "World Bank Indian"<sup>70</sup>—the minoritized Indian as symbol of a folkloric national

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<sup>69</sup> Spivak writes in "Deconstructing Historiography," her introduction to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, "Although the group does not wittingly engage with the post-structuralist understanding of 'consciousness,' our own reading of them is enhanced if we see them as strategically adhering to the essentialist notion of consciousness, that would fall prey to an anti-humanist critique, within a historiographic practice that draws many of its strengths from that very critique" (1988: 15); in "The New Subaltern," she writes, "In 'Deconstructing Historiography' I had suggested that the Subaltern Studies collective assumed a subaltern consciousness, however 'negative,' but a 'strategic use of essentialism.' Subaltern Studies had no need of such apologetics. But the theoretically inclined metropolitan identitarians did. In the name of their own groups, they argued identity, claimed strategy, and sometimes gave me credit. No one particularly noticed what I have already mentioned, that Subaltern Studies never presupposed a consciousness for 'their own group,' but rather for their object of investigation, and for the sake of the investigation. . . . 'Consciousness' here does not engage subject-theory, deconstructive, psychoanalytic, or otherwise. . . . We are here on the level of social agency—institutionally validated action." (2000: 332–333; another version of this text appears in *Subaltern Studies* vol. 11)

<sup>70</sup> "La idea del 'indio del Banco Mundial' (como la llamé entonces) surgió de una página de una revista de viajes que encontré en un avión, donde había un dibujo a color de un indio de los Andes, con Uuch'u y poncho, atendiendo un negocio 'moderno' de agua embotellada de los glaciares de la Cordillera . . . la ilustración no era sino una propaganda de la empresa Hewlett-Packard, que mostraba su programa de donaciones de computadoras a iniciativas empresariales como la del indio descrito en el dibujo. Las reformas multiculturales de los años noventa, emprendidas bajo el impulso del Banco Mundial, se ven metaforizadas en este aviso publicitario. Se buscaba 'incorporar' a los indígenas al mercado como comercializadores de su propio patrimonio cultural, incluso de sus propias deidades tutelares. Esto se tradujo en un fomento de la actividad turística, en un modelo eco-etnoturístico que convertía en mercancía a los paisajes sagrados de las comunidades, a sus prácticas rituales y a las propias personas de la comunidad, que debían exhibir su alteridad conforme a las expectativas y estereotipos del turista, con su búsqueda del 'buen salvaje,' exótico y protector de la naturaleza." [The idea of the "World Bank Indian" (as I called it then) arose from a page in a travel magazine that I found on a plane, where there was a drawing of an Andean Indian, with his *lluch'u* and poncho, tending a "modern"

identity rather than a subject of rights—of the neoliberal/multicultural period prior to the rise of the pink tide and MAS, and designates the performance of an indigenous identity on the part of the state to mask “the (neo)colonial continuities with the past under the label of the ‘process of change’” as well as “more prosaic facts, like the covert alliances between the cocalero project and mafia capitalism” (87). What Rivera has identified is a persistence of Gramsci’s “touristic” conception of the subaltern/popular that has nothing to do with inauthenticity, since the subjects in question are in fact indigenous (recall that Gramsci notes in his revisions in Notebook 21 that the detached, “caste” intellectual may well be of popular origin), and one that authorizes itself through a discourse of subaltern-becoming-state (as we see in García Linera’s language) at least in part bequeathed from Gramsci.

Among the primary, or at least the original, contributions of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group was their analysis of the existing historiography as the organic intellectual production of the colonial-bourgeois-nationalist elite, that is, of the state in the integral sense, highlighting the colonial-nationalist continuity in this formation. The resonance between the discourse produced from the position of the state and in the successive Bolivian and Latin American political cycles delineated here and that of an intellectual and academic left reveals at once a translatability of the elements of any counter-hegemonic project to a function of

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business that produced bottled water from the glaciers of the Cordillera . . . The image was an advertisement for Hewlett-Packard, publicizing a program that donated computers to entrepreneurial initiatives like that of the Indian in the drawing. The multicultural reforms of the nineties, undertaken under the auspices of the World Bank, are symbolized in this ad. The idea was to ‘incorporate’ indigenous people into the market as merchants of their own cultural heritage, even of their own tutelary deities. This translated into a promotion of tourism, into an eco-ethno-tourism model that presented the sacred landscapes of the communities, their ritual practices, and the people themselves, who had to display their otherness in accordance with the expectations and stereotypes of the tourist, with their pursuit of the “noble savage,” as exotic and in harmony with nature] (Rivera 2014).

containment and control and a capacity of the state for a continual adaptation to and neutralization of not only certain demands of recognition, but the ideological forms of their articulation, first through the national-popular as unifying identity and then through the affirmation of a heterogeneous subaltern subject of power.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Plurinationalism and the Integral State

In his review of Peter Thomas's 2009 book on Gramsci's political philosophy and its most influential misreadings (*The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*) Bruno Bosteels questions the value of philological reconstruction and correction as a mode of engagement with the texts for which we claim theoretical and practical efficacy in the present. He cites first Gramsci's legacy in Latin America in general as not only one of particular robustness but also one that happens to focus precisely on what Bosteels reads as the key concept in (Thomas's) Gramsci for a correct, non-dichotomizing reading of the familiar binaries of civil society / state, domination/hegemony, etc., namely the integral state, and then specifically Bolivian vice president Álvaro García Linera's appropriation of this concept in his inaugural address following Evo Morales's reelection in 2009, as productive misreadings that demonstrate the insufficiency of a scholarly ethos of fidelity. Forewarned of this risk of overallegiance to the texts with which I have been most closely engaged (in my case René Zavaleta, whom I have recently translated, as much as Gramsci), I want to advance here an argument that I hope will not be charged with the same merely corrective intent: while I explain García Linera's concept of the integral/plurinational state as a misappropriation of Gramsci and Zavaleta, I am, like Bosteels, more interested in its performative function than in the legitimacy of its purported filiation. Unlike Bosteels (who makes a case for the radicality of García Linera's project in *The Actuality of Communism* [2011]), I read this function as one that is profoundly conservative in that it seeks to

immunize the constituted power of the state from destabilization or transformation by the constitutive power of its social base.

The steps of the process of resignification that interests me here can be summed up as follows: Zavaleta's concept of *abigarramiento* or *sociedad abigarrada* (usually translated as *motley society*) has a history of misappropriation in which García Linera participates by articulating it with the related concept of the *estado aparente* to claim that the merely "apparent" state which does not effectively represent the heterogeneous social reality of a country like Bolivia is abolished with the official establishment of the Plurinational State in 2006. This ideologue of the Plurinational State as one that faithfully represents Bolivia's *abigarramiento* is equated with the Gramscian *stato integrale*, which in Gramsci refers to the state proper plus civil society in cases where these are thoroughly integrated to function as an organic whole (the "Western" or modern capitalist nation-state). Beyond merely misusing the borrowed terms of this discursive operation (most patently in the case of the integral state, which comes to mean transparent representation more than organic articulation, but in a more subtle way also the apparent state and motley society), García Linera gives a prescriptive value to concepts developed for an analytical purpose in what effectively constitutes an absolute and uncritical validation of the existing regime.

This claim seems to conflict directly with García Linera's own explicit position, which he has been expounding since the 1980s and defending as the authentic Marxian one, on the primacy of "civil society" as opposed to the superstructural moment of the state, against a Hegelian statism that he ascribes, for example, to the Argentine Gramscian José Aricó. The first part of this chapter, then, will consider García Linera's intellectual trajectory with a focus on his theoretical treatment of the state/society binary, followed by a discussion of the elaboration of



this relation in Gramsci. I say my claim regarding García Linera's ultimate defense of constituted power *seems* to contradict the arguments developed in his writings because the performative fortification of the state that I read in his use of Zavaleta and Gramsci is not exactly a reversal of the "societarian" position; García Linera will continue to affirm that the state merely reflects society and cannot produce revolutionary social effects, but he will ultimately imply that the perfect operation of this reflection, achieved with Morales's Plurinational State, cancels the distance between state and society, and he holds this correspondence to be an end in itself, from which it could be concluded that the current regime effectively represents the completion of all political struggle. I turn then in the second part of the chapter to Zavaleta's elaboration of the concepts of the apparent state and motley society, the history of the reception of the latter, and finally the plurinationalist project with which it has been articulated. I conclude with a brief discussion of García Linera's official discourse as a representative of the state as the most direct expression of this appropriative gesture.

## **I. Theories of the state in García Linera and Gramsci**

### *Un hombre que sabe*

The strategic electoral use of García Linera's public persona as the learned, non-indigenous counterweight to Evo Morales, a powerful symbol of the occupation of the state by those it had most strictly excluded, is well known. García Linera comes from an urban, middle class family and, like most of Bolivia's political class, was educated abroad. Formally trained as a mathematician at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM), he is routinely accorded the title of self-taught sociologist. His credentials in leftist and Inidanist militancy are

equally solid: he wrote what he regards as his most polished theoretical work (*Forma valor y forma comunidad*) while imprisoned for his militancy in the Ejército Guerrillero Túpac Katari (EGTK), and signed all his texts from his guerrilla period with the Aymara pen name Qhananchiri, “the one who clarifies things.” His 2005 campaign posters are inscribed with a version of this epithet designed to relieve any lingering anxieties on the part of the more progressive sectors of the urban middle-class electorate about the competency of a government led by an Indian peasant with little formal education: *Un hombre que sabe*.<sup>71</sup>

In the introduction to his anthology of selections of García Linera’s texts, Pablo Stefanoni describes his role as that of a translator mediating between the traditional and emergent political classes,<sup>72</sup> a function that has been expanded to include a kind of ambassadorship in relation to the international academic left, and such prominent intellectuals as Antonio Negri and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have accepted his invitations to speak in La Paz. While the text to which

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<sup>71</sup> “A man who knows”; the gendered character of the phrase is of course not insignificant, although it comes across more strongly in English translation.

<sup>72</sup> Stefanoni writes, “En un contexto de nuevas formas de lucha, pero sobre todo, de nuevos actores (sobre todo campesinos e indígenas) poco comprendidos en las ciudades, se va consolidando el papel de García Linera como sociólogo-intérprete, lo que se refleja en su presencia creciente en los medios de comunicación bajo la figura de moda del ‘analista’ . . . sus formas y posiciones políticas aparecían moderadas por sofisticados análisis, capaces de ‘traducir’ a las clases medias urbanas la “racionalidad” (cosmovisión, dirían los indianistas) de la Bolivia profunda y tradicionalmente despreciada, completamente opaca para los intelectuales hegemónicos” [In a context of new forms of struggle, but especially of new actors (above all peasant and indigenous groups) not well understood in the cities, García Linera’s role has been established as that of the sociologist-interpreter, which is reflected in his growing presence in the media under the title of “analyst” . . . his political concepts and positions appear to be moderated by sophisticated analyses, capable of “translating” for the urban middle classes the “rationality” (worldview, the Indianists would say) of rural Bolivia, traditionally scorned and totally opaque for the hegemonic intellectuals] (16). The collection has been translated into English by Historical Materialism’s book series (*Plebeian Power: Collective Action and Indigenous, Working-Class and Popular Identities in Bolivia*, 2014), reinforcing its presentation of the figure of García Linera as the dominant one internationally.

Bosteels refers in his review of Thomas's *The Gramscian Moment* and which belongs unequivocally to a genre of explicit state propaganda, circulated by a state publishing organ<sup>73</sup> after its delivery as an official speech, García Linera also uses Gramscian terms to analyze the Bolivian situation leading up to the 2005 electoral victory in a more academic register in a text translated into English for the *New Left Review* ("State Crisis and Popular Power" [2006], discussed in Chapter 2). The attribution of the concepts deployed in his political speeches and academic essays to figures such as Gramsci and Zavaleta, then, is not immaterial to their performative content: while Gramsci conveys an international prestige with a broad, amorphous ideological range, Zavaleta (whom García Linera has been citing more than any other Bolivian author since well before his affiliation with a party aspiring to state power, perhaps on par with Bourdieu and Marx himself) is widely considered the most important Bolivian social theorist, and his work has been situated at the threshold between nationalist, Marxist, and Indianist discourses in a way that resembles García Linera's own mediating position.

#### *From abolition to conquest of the state*

I will consider García Linera's theoretical treatment of the state from two different angles, which could be designated (for the sake of convenience, without implying a hard distinction here) as prescriptive and descriptive, or political and philosophical. First, the concept of the state constructed from the perspective of a political program: García Linera's professed position conforms to the communist notion of the ultimate (but presently deferred) abolition of the state

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<sup>73</sup> Which, incidentally, has recently published a collection of Bosteels' texts in Spanish translation, including the chapter on García Linera from *The Actuality of Communism (El marxismo en América Latina: Nuevos caminos al comunismo* [Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional, 2013]).

(and one that Bosteels [2011] rightly distinguishes from the traditional stagism of the Latin American communist parties that sought the full development of the capitalist state and corresponding institutions of bourgeois civil society in the medium term, although with the same utopian telos). The introduction to *Forma valor y forma comunidad*, co-authored with Raquel Gutiérrez, privileges the antisystemic, autonomist organization of society toward a “semi-state configuration” and finally “against the state in any form”;<sup>74</sup> this text also contains an explicit warning against the “vulgar” conquest of state power as a revolutionary objective: “Hay que abandonar . . . de una buena vez, la idea vulgarizada de la ‘conquista del poder’ que se ha traducido en la ocupación del poder ajeno” [We must abandon once and for all the vulgar idea of the ‘conquest of power’ that has been translated into the occupation of a power that is not one’s own] (17).<sup>75</sup> This passage offers perhaps the most convenient ironic foil for critics who claim that the MAS government has achieved just this, as evidence of García Linera’s hypocrisy or

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<sup>74</sup> “No puede haber una nueva naturaleza del poder político sin una nueva correlación de fuerzas sociales en los ámbitos múltiples de las relaciones de poder, esto es, si no se ha construido desde todos los territorios de despliegue de la vida social, en todos los vasos capilares del cuerpo del poder social-nacional, un flujo de energía de pasiones, de imaginación, de autonomía, de capacidad transformativa, de resistencia y emancipación individual-colectiva frente al poder del valor mercantil, lo suficientemente denso como para traducirse en una configuración semiestatal (porque es la sociedad misma en proceso de autodeterminación, lo que inevitablemente también supone a la larga el camino a la emancipación contra el Estado en cualquiera de sus formas) de nuevo contenido que las sintetice y luego las refuerce y expanda” [There can be no new nature of political power without a new correlation of social forces in the multiple spheres of power relations, that is, if a flow of energy, of affect, of imagination, of autonomy, of transformative capacity, of resistance and individual and collective emancipation from the power of market-value, dense enough to be translated into a semistate configuration (because it is society itself in a process of self-determination, which necessarily also ultimately presupposes a path towards emancipation from the state in any form) of new content that synthesizes and then reinforces and expands them, has not been constructed from all the sites of unfolding of social life, all the capillaries of the social-national body] (27).

<sup>75</sup> See Bosteels 2011, p. 267.

*transformism* (a position that I take up in my conclusion). This narrative of betrayal, however, is too simplistic. (It should be noted that Gutiérrez, García Linera's then partner and fellow EGTK member with whom he was imprisoned at the time, has remained critical of the cooptation of Indigenous and other social movements by the state and of the centralist and verticalist tendencies that have accompanied the assumption of state power by actors originating in such movements in Bolivia and elsewhere in the region.) In other texts from this period prior to MAS's electoral victory, there is already a tension in García Linera's conception of popular insurgency in relation to the state that anticipates those of his discourse from the position of the vice presidency, which consists in a failure to conceive of the state—or the collective subaltern subject constructed as its outside or antagonist (*plebe*, etc.)—beyond the logic of the sovereign subject.

García Linera proposes a schematic periodization of different forms of inclusion within the state in an essay titled “Ciudadanía y democracia” (1999), structured as a history of the changing modes of citizenship since the beginning of the Bolivian republic (a scheme that largely overlaps with the one introduced in the previous chapter). The first period spans from the constitution of 1825 to the National Revolution of 1952. During this phase the operative concept of citizenship is identified as one of *caste*, that is, a hereditary system in which political and civil rights come with property and literacy requirements, and the Indian is the constitutive other of the citizen (“los indios son la nada del Estado, su externalidad más fundamental” [the Indians are the nothing of the state, its most fundamental outside] [136]). The second period, inaugurated with the Revolution of 52, formally extends citizenship to all (although the caste system continues to operate to a considerable extent, its boundaries policed by custom rather than law,

through racial, cultural, and linguistic hierarchies), but after the initial irruption of democratic political subjectivity that overthrew the oligarchic state, a new order of mediations is quickly consolidated, co-opting the emergent political actors, and the mode of inclusion of the formerly excluded is *corporative*. The emergence of autonomous political agency gives way to a contractual relation through which organized labor is entitled to certain negotiated concessions. By 1985, the state mode of 1952 has been fully replaced by a neoliberal state that no longer recognized collective political demands; García Linera calls this new form of individual citizenship reduced to the election of representatives *ciudadanía irresponsable*.

On this phase, he writes,

La delegación de la voluntad política presupone . . . un tipo específico de sujeto, el sujeto *delegante* que *no es responsable* de sus actos porque es impotente frente a sus circunstancias, y queda compelido a desprenderse del manejo de sus intereses . . . requiere pues, de la construcción disuasiva o forzada de una cierta “moralidad de esclavos” que permite arrebatar a los sujetos libres su impulso genérico y esencial de seguir siendo libres.

[The delegation of political will presupposes . . . a specific kind of subject, a *delegating* subject that is *not responsible* for his actions because he is impotent before the circumstances that confront him and is compelled to relinquish control of his own interests . . . there is therefore a deterrent or forced construction of a certain “slave morality” that deprives free subjects of their general and essential impulse to persist in their freedom.] (147)

This critique of representative democracy within the neoliberal context in which the citizen is

presented as a “slave” in fact resonates with his critique in a later text of the merely corporative citizenship of the National Revolutionary state, where the popular political subject, rather than delegating all power, is reduced to a supplicant. The Bolivian proletariat of this period, he argues, while famously combative and organized, has failed again and again over the course of its history (prior to the mobilizations that culminated in MAS’s electoral victory in 2005) to constitute itself as a sovereign subject rather than a subordinate endowed with certain rights, where the *sovereign* is imagined as the occupant of the position of the state. In *El retorno de la Bolivia plebeya* (2000), García Linera writes of the *marcha por la vida* (1986), as the swan song of the proletariat that emerged in 1952,

Ciertamente, es una apetencia política muy intensa la que se pone en marcha, y de hecho no es exagerado afirmar que los obreros, y en particular los mineros en toda esta época que va de 1952 a 1990, han interiorizado como componente indisoluble de su identidad de clase la cercanía al Estado, la ambición de integración en el Estado.

Pero a la vez, no se trata de una presencia en el Estado como objetivación de un yo colectivo de clase; es decir, el minero no se ambiciona en el Estado como titularidad gubernativa. Al contrario, se ambiciona poderosamente en el Estado como súbdito, como seguidor, arrogante y belicoso, pero tributario de adhesión y consentimiento negociados. El obrero no se ha visto jamás, a no ser en momentos extremos y evanescentes, como soberano; pues el soberano no pide sino ejerce, no reclama sino sentencia.

[Certainly, an intense political desire is produced, and it is indeed no exaggeration

to say that the workers, and in particular the miners, over the course of this period from 1952 to 1990, have internalized as an indissoluble component of their class identity a close relation to the state, a desire for integration within the state.

But at the same time, it is not a matter of a presence of the state as the objectification of a collective class identity; that is, the miner does not aspire to a government post. On the contrary, he has a powerful aspiration to be a subject of the state, as follower, arrogant and bellicose, but offering his negotiated support and consent. The worker has never seen himself, except in extreme and ephemeral moments, as sovereign; for the sovereign does not ask but executes, does not appeal but decrees.] (2008: 174)

This notion, in which a structural relation is expressed through psychologizing personifications, first applied specifically to the proletariat incorporated through union structures (and echoing his assessment of neoliberal citizenship in “Ciudadanía y democracia”) is later generalized, referring broadly to “un hábito mendigo de las clases populares” [a habit of supplication of the popular classes] (175).

García Linera’s assessment of the relation of the Bolivian subaltern classes to the state, despite his attempt to organize his text around a series of more precise historical configurations, is structured in all its phases by an absolute opposition between the aspiration to state power and all other forms of political intervention. A supplicant or slave subjectivity is constructed as the inverse of seigniorial rule, the sovereignty of the colonial lord, governed by the same principle; the only alternative to the position of the slave within this logic is that of the master. The concept of popular power that corresponds to this binary construction of supplicant and sovereign does



not seem to admit any form of non-servile political subjectivity beyond the occupation of the state apparatus. García Linera articulates a discourse that is predominantly, at least on the surface, conceived from a radical antistatist, autonomist perspective, yet in fact cannot imagine a politics beyond the state.

*The apparent state: from reflection to illusion*

The second aspect of García Linera's discourse on the state that I want to consider is the ontological or causal relation between society and the state. Since his writings on Marx and the agrarian community, García Linera has maintained that the state is produced by, and cannot produce, society. In *De demonios escondidos*, he affirms that the state can produce revolutionary effects only when the first cause is society itself, which expresses its will through the medium of the state:

No hay pues revolucionarización social posible y la consiguiente construcción nacional desde el viejo Estado. Esta tarea solo puede venir como movimiento de la sociedad para auto-organizarse, como impulso creativo y vital de la sociedad civil para organizarse como nación. Esto no quita el papel que en esta tarea pueda desempeñar el Estado, como lo señala Marx en el caso de la monarquía absoluta en Europa, o las mismas elites criollas de México, pero siempre como condensadoras de los impulsos de la sociedad.

[No social revolutionization and consequent national construction is possible from the old state. This task can only come as a movement of the new society to organize itself, as a creative and vital impulse of civil society to organize itself as a

nation. This does not negate the role that the state can play in the execution of this task, as Marx points out in the case of absolute monarchy in Europe, or even as with the creole elite in Mexico, but always as a synthesis of the impulses of society.] (50)

The state for this early García Linera is not altogether impotent, but is ultimately productive only to the extent that it operates as an organic appendage of the social body.

In *De demonios escondidos*, García Linera rejects Aricó's argument in *Marx y América Latina* (discussed in my first chapter) that Marx is unable to engage productively with the figure of Simón Bolívar and by extension Latin America because, blinded by a too vehement, reactive anti-Hegelianism (and at the same time by a residual, unwitting Hegelianism in the implicit, Eurocentric positing of peoples without history), he denies the state any historical agency; García Linera attributes Marx's inattention to Latin America rather to a relative absence of popular insurgency during the period and an even greater absence of sources on what mobilization from below there was.<sup>76</sup> In his defense of Marx's dismissal of Bolívar, who is for him (in keeping with Aricó's reading) a symbol of Latin American nationalization from above, García Linera speaks already of *apparent* states, using the same term that he will later claim as a citation of Zavaleta (although he does not cite him here):

En otras palabras, la concepción de Marx sobre los estados latinoamericanos como formaciones aparentes, formales, sustentadas más por el arbitrio autoritario centralizado que por la condensación de iniciativa social general y por tanto, el carácter inacabado o mejor a realizarse, de la construcción nacional estatal como

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<sup>76</sup> For Bosteels on this, see *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, pp. 6–9.

tarea del futuro, no es un desliz hegelizante de un momento (que no quita la incorporación de razonamientos de Hegel), sino un conjunto de valoraciones orgánicas al cuerpo teórico del marxismo que dan cuenta de la realidad nacional.

[In other words, Marx's conception of the Latin American states as apparent formations, merely formal, sustained more through a centralized authoritarian will than by the condensation of a general social initiative and therefore of the unfinished, or rather, still-to-be-realized nature of the construction of the nation-state, as a task for the future, is not a momentary Hegelian slip (which is not to deny the incorporation of Hegel's thought), but a set of judgments that are organically connected to the theoretical body of Marxism and that account for the national reality.] (254)

The equivalence here between top-down nationalization from the moment of the state and the merely apparent or formal draws on the conception of the superstructural in general as mere reflection or expression; but in referring specifically to the Latin American republics as artificial national formations, García Linera introduces an implicit distinction between these as false representations and the Western European capitalist nation-states in which the state is a true expression of a process of nationalization from below. The concept of appearance here therefore functions on two different levels, one that applies to the state in general and serves to establish a causal primacy of the social base, and one that serves to distinguish the original Western nation-states in which this relation of (here not merely economic but "civilizational") social structure and political superstructure is effectively produced and those in which the state projects a false or *fictive* image of the nation: "muy a pesar de los intentos desde arriba, la construcción de la nación y la reforma social no ha sido más que una ficción señorial, oligárquica y terrateniente" [In spite

of efforts from above, the construction of the nation and social reform have been no more than a seigniorial, oligarchic, landholder fiction] (255). In this passage from the general category of the state as phenomenon to the deviant case of non-correspondence, the “apparent” nature of all states is eclipsed and a new category of the “real” state, still unnamed, is implied.

Bosteels cites the following passage from an interview with Stefanoni on the state’s limited power to produce a communist society—it can only empower or *potentialize* (*potenciar*)<sup>77</sup> structures that emerge from below—to preface an apology for García Linera’s “well-nigh complete turnaround in the interpretation of the relation between communism and the State” (presumably against critics of his proposition of “Andean capitalism” as the only realistic option for the present):

Cuando entro al gobierno lo que hago es validar y comenzar a operar estatalmente en función de esa lectura del momento actual. Entonces, ¿dónde queda el comunismo? ¿Qué puede hacerse desde el Estado en función de ese horizonte comunista? Apoyar lo más que se pueda el despliegue de las capacidades organizativas autónomas de la sociedad. Hasta ahí llega la posibilidad de lo que puede hacer un Estado de izquierda, un Estado revolucionario. Ampliar la base obrera, y la autonomía del mundo obrero, potenciar formas de economía comunitaria allá donde haya redes, articulaciones y proyectos más comunitaristas.

[When I enter the government what I do is validate and begin to operate at the level of the state in accordance with that reading of the present moment. So where does that leave communism? What can the state do in relation to that communist

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<sup>77</sup> Bosteels offers these two possible translations.

horizon? Support the development of the autonomous organizational capacities of society as much as possible. That is the extent of what a leftist state, a revolutionary state, can do. Expand the working-class base, the autonomy of the workers, empower communitarian economic forms where communitarianist networks, articulations, and projects exist.] (*Actuality of Communism* 247; *Las vías de la emancipación* 75)

But this passage, far from representing any kind of turnaround, is in fact entirely consistent with García Linera's earlier writings on the state (for example, with the passage from *De demonios escondidos* cited above). The impotence of the old state that does not represent the impulse of society has been exchanged for a potentially revolutionary state that cannot fulfill its function without correspondingly revolutionary forms of social organization, but can only stimulate these forms where it finds them as they emerge.

The paradox of García Linera's state theory consists in that while the state as such is devoid of agency, it is only through direct occupancy of the state apparatus that popular agency—conceived as *sovereignty*—can be imagined. The state then becomes the unmediated expression of a popular subjectivity when occupied by members of formerly excluded groups, so that Evo Morales as an Aymara *cocalero* organizer comes to embody the country's social movements and indigenous population as a whole. Precisely because the state has no autonomous existence, where it is not an impotent shadow it becomes the embodiment of a stable, preconstituted social subject.

### *Gramsci's general concept of the state*

The concept of the integral state in Gramsci and in its subsequent iterations can operate in an empirical, analytical, or normative mode: it designates a historically determinate kind of state, a theory of the state as such, and a stage of development en route from subalternity to the full realization of political autonomy in a stateless, “regulated” society. This latter mode is of course the one that seems least adequate or thorniest today, and the first chapter of this dissertation is largely a refutation of such a normative reading of Gramsci, emphasizing the empirical or descriptive sense—the integral state as the terrain rather than the end of political struggle in advanced capitalism—as the one most pertinent to the context under discussion and the passages from the notebooks cited in the literature of Latin American Gramscianism of the seventies and eighties. Here I want to focus on the analytical function, the concept as a contribution to state theory (the claim that “in reality, the distinction [between the state proper and civil society] is purely methodological and not organic; in concrete historical life, political society and civil society are a single entity” [Q 4, § 38]), while taking stock of its *ethical* content—a term that must be distinguished from the *normative*—however untenable the concept of “regulated society” and the progressivist conception of history that it entails.

Thomas, who likewise cautions against a normative interpretation, points out that the notion of the integral state attributed to Gramsci owes much to Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s presentation of the concept as one of an “expanded state,” a phrase that does not appear in Gramsci’s writings (Thomas 2009: 139). More pertinently perhaps (and Thomas does not note this), the phrase “integral state” does not appear either, with the exception of one instance with quotation marks around “state,” in Notebook 6, § 10, in reference to the emergence of the modern state with the French Revolution:

. . . il raggruppamento sociale che dopo il Mille fu la forza motrice economica dell'Europa, poté presentarsi come "Stato" integrale, con tutte le forze intellettuali e morali necessarie e sufficienti per organizzare una società completa e perfetta. [. . . the social grouping that had become the economic driving force in Europe after the year 1000 was able to present itself as an integral "state" with all the intellectual and moral forces that were necessary and adequate to the task of organizing a complete and perfect society.]

Gramsci suggests here, by placing it in quotation marks, that he is using the term "state" in a figurative sense, to mean something other than the state proper, and it is this figurative "expansion" or metaphorical displacement of the *concept* of "state" that comes to structure Gramsci's political theory; the state becomes a *pharmakological* figure for the political, as ethico-political transcendence of corporativist self-interest and as subjectification within a totalized bourgeois society.

In two subsequent notes in Notebook 6 Gramsci refers to the "general notion of the state" and "the state in the integral sense" (translated as "full sense" by Buttigieg) (that is, again, the distinction has to do with the concept and not its object), followed by variations of the famous formula *state = political society + civil society*: in § 155, on the analogy of political and military struggle (the war of position and the war of maneuver), "Nella politica l'errore avviene per una inesatta comprensione di ciò che è lo Stato (nel significato integrale: dittatura + egemonia)" [In politics, the error stems from an inaccurate understanding of the nature of the state (in the full sense: dictatorship + hegemony)], and in § 88, on the "gendarme or night-watchman state,"

Siamo sempre nel terreno della identificazione di Stato e Governo, identificazione che appunto è un ripresentarsi della forma corporativa-economica, cioè della

confusione tra società civile e società politica, poiché è da notare che nella nozione generale di Stato entrano elementi che sono da riportare alla nozione di società civile (nel senso, si potrebbe dire, che Stato = società politica + società civile, cioè egemonia corazzata di coercizione)

[We are still on the terrain of the identification of state and government, an identification that is precisely a representation of the economic-corporative form—in other words, of the confusion between civil society and political society, for it should be noted that certain elements that fall under the general notion of the state must be restored to the notion of civil society (in the sense, one might say, that state = political society + civil society, that is, hegemony protected by the armor of coercion).]

Here the “general” notion of the state, as opposed to “government,” synecdochized by the *police* in the narrow sense (and perhaps also in Rancière’s general sense of this concept, which I take up below) subsumes elements of civil society, no longer to be conceived as its dialectical other. The state understood in this general and not merely “technical” sense, as more than a mere instrument, does indeed have an ethical dimension, in that it designates an ethico-political articulation, the collective participation in the construction of a new “conception of the world.” In Notebook 17, § 51, on Machiavelli, Gramsci describes the process of becoming state in the integral sense (via the “party,” another term that Gramsci uses beyond its narrow or literal sense):

Nel mondo moderno, un partito è tale, integralmente e non, come avviene, frazione di un partito piú grande, quando esso è concepito, organizzato e diretto in modi e forme tali da svilupparsi integralmente in uno Stato (integrale, e non in un governo tecnicamente inteso) e in una concezione del mondo. Lo sviluppo del



partito in Stato reagisce sul partito e ne domanda una continua riorganizzazione e sviluppo, così come lo sviluppo del partito e dello Stato in concezione del mondo, cioè in trasformazione totale e molecolare (individuale) dei modi di pensare e operare, reagisce sullo Stato e sul partito, costringendoli a riorganizzarsi continuamente e ponendo loro dei problemi nuovi e originali da risolvere.

[In the modern world, a party is such, integrally and not, as it happens, a fraction of a larger party, when it is conceived, organized, and directed in such a way as to develop integrally into a state (integral, and not into a government in the technical sense) and into a conception of the world. The development of the party into a state in turn acts upon the party and demands its continuous reorganization and development, just as the development of the party and of the state into a conception of the world, that is, the total and molecular (individual) transformation of the ways of thinking and acting, acts upon the state and the party, requiring them to continually reorganize themselves and posing new and original problems for them to solve.]

The modern state is the concrete historical realization of the concept of the state in its integral or full sense, as an organically articulated ethico-political collectivity; the integral state in Gramsci is, as highlighted in my first chapter, the terrain of political struggle in advanced capitalism, and, as I discuss in my second chapter, the condition of collective political and social agency. In this sense it is at once a condition of autonomy and a set of constraints, as a common ideological horizon.

This double aspect, as condition and limitation of social action and thought, might take us into the field opened up by Althusser's reading of Gramsci, in which the element of constraint,

the internalization of the “night-watchman” or police within the subject, is emphasized.

Although my argument necessarily gestures in this direction, I will stay closer to Gramsci’s own terms here in insisting that the ethical unity of the state is not the end of political struggle.<sup>78</sup> The ethical is not necessarily the good, although it is a precondition for a just society; it is also a precondition for all forms of totalitarianism, as well as for capitalist individualism. The autonomy, or sovereignty, of a collective social subject that succeeds in constituting itself as state can be as oppressive, both internally and externally, as any despotic regime. Gramsci is entirely aware of this non-normative value of the ethical *integrity* of the state, but he does not, as later theorists will, theorize heterogeneity, difference, or disagreement, as a productive democratic supplement to the collective political subject so constituted. In the next part of this chapter, via Zavaleta, I take up a particular strain of this thinking of social difference.

## II. The motley and the multi

### *Zavaleta as local theory*

Zavaleta has been claimed within and beyond Bolivia as a *local* thinker. Or, more precisely, his thought has been read as the enactment of an incomplete passage from the metropolitan toward the local; in Walter Mignolo’s terms, of a process of epistemic decolonization. This intermediate position perhaps lends this localist/proto-decolonial Zavaleta even more symbolic force than if he were read as thoroughly decolonized from the outset because it can be recited in the form of a narrative, and this is indeed what has occurred. Here is

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the ethical state as police state, see Williams 2011, pp. 91–92.

Mignolo's account (taking Fanon and Rivera Cusicanqui as representative of fully decolonial thinking):

Zavaleta died young, in the early 1980s, and he was also formed as a Marxist.

Both, dying in the early 1980s and being Marxist of the 1960s, prevented him from pushing further into the colonial wound and the profound historical experience of the *damnés* that shaped the 'mass accumulation' of meaning. This aspect was developed with force and insight by perhaps the most brilliant follower of his work, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. In the work of Silvia Rivera, the colonial wound, the consciousness and the accumulation of the *damnés* (although she doesn't use this word), is loud and clear. ("On Subalterns and Other Agencies" 403)

Here—in a text published the year of Morales's election—Zavaleta is at once a foundational and a transitional thinker of the "colonial matrix of power."

Another passage in Mignolo that tells this story emphasizes the *empiricism* of local theory (seeing what is "before [one's] very eyes"), and places Gramsci, whom Zavaleta himself uses as a model of *historicist* attention to the local (see *Lo nacional-popular* 228, for example, on the *blocco storico* as a supplement to mode of production as analytical category), which is not the same thing, on the side of detached, abstract, metropolitan theory:

Although the colonial matrix of power was introduced after Zavaleta Mercado died (and of course, Zavaleta's contribution fueled that conceptualisation) its origins are helpful to know. Knowing them enables one to understand the tensions juggled in a conceptual apparatus inherited from Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, but growing out of Bolivian society—a society quite different from the three industrial countries of Western Europe (England, Germany and

France) that the German and Italian intellectuals were trying to understand. Zavaleta's heritage in those frames of mind created out of the Indian and African experience in South America and the Caribbean is clear. But so too is his Marxism and it is this that then prevented him from taking Fanon's conceptualisation of the *damnés* seriously, despite the fact that daily, in Bolivia, Zavaleta could see the *damnés* before his very eyes (397).

Already in 1991, Antezana writes that Zavaleta's concepts are left suspended between the general and the concrete, a universalist Marxist ideal and a heterogeneous social reality. The task of the new generation, he proposes, is to continue the unfinished work of the formulation of alternative concepts applicable to the local Andean reality. In his monograph on Zavaleta, *La producción del conocimiento local*, originally written as his doctoral thesis in 1997 and published in book form in 2002, Luis Tapia likewise proposes supplementing Zavaleta's Marxist analysis with Rivera Cusicanqui's historiography and the project of the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA), which he describes as a counterpoint to Zavaleta's more "systematic" analysis by supplying a "consciousness of subaltern diversity" (421).<sup>79</sup>

The theoretical contribution most commonly associated with Zavaleta and cited to situate him within this narrative of a progressive approximation of the local is that of *abigarramiento*. Recalling a tradition of exoticizing commodification of Latin American culture, in *La producción*

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<sup>79</sup> Mignolo does not cite Zavaleta directly but relies on explications of his terminology in the works of Luis Tapia and Luis H. Antezana (and indeed the term "local theory," which Mignolo attributes to Zavaleta, is used by Tapia and Antezana, but not by Zavaleta himself); this narrative, with Rivera representing the terminus that Zavaleta gestures toward but does not reach, is already present in his secondary sources (see below, on Tapia). Rivera points out that Zavaleta in fact draws on her work in his consideration of indigenous struggle, complicating the linearity of this sequence in which she is his "follower" (2014).

*del conocimiento local* Tapia connects *abigarramiento* with Alejo Carpentier's concept of the baroque (which is of course in turn connected to Carpentier's "real maravilloso," the original formulation of magical realism): "el barroco es un tipo de producción cultural que se hace sobre las condiciones del abigarramiento social. Mi intención es utilizar estas ideas sobre lo barroco para caracterizar el tipo de trabajo y de pensamiento elaborado por Zavaleta, que también es un tipo de producción cultural" (320). There is an affinity here with a certain strain of subalternist discourse that would coalesce into the "decolonial" turn led by Mignolo upon the dissolution of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, articulated in strikingly similar terms, as a vindication of alterity that is continuous with a broader Orientalizing tendency but rarely so plainly expressed, in the Bolivianist critic Javier Sanjinés (who takes Mignolo as his principal theoretical source):

Indeed, in Latin America's project of development and modernization, cultural and economic forms of different temporal origins coexist, forming layers rather than stages. This simultaneity of time and cultural forms, best captured by artists and writers through the mythic mode of magical realism, indicates that Latin America is unique and quite different from the instrumental rationality of the West. (154)

There is clearly an appropriation here of a prior notion of economic disarticulation, uneven development, etcetera, which is incorporated into a certain form of Latin Americanist cultural studies that works through the continuous production of the specificity of its object of study; Tapia likewise appropriates, from the position of the social scientist and specialist in Bolivian political theory, claims originating in the discipline of literary criticism to advance an argument for the value of non-metropolitan thought.

Tapia's reduction of Zavaleta's "cultural production" to the function of re-presenting its object of inquiry, which is also its origin, or locus of enunciation, is precisely what occurs perhaps in a more subtle way in localist readings like Mignolo's, and is complicit in the identitarianism that authorizes the populist, (pluri)nationalist state. He continues,

Considero que Zavaleta es el barroco en la ciencia social en Bolivia, o sea, la descripción, que aquí es un decir, adecuada o correspondiente al mundo que piensa y pretende explicar. En general, el pensamiento social en Bolivia ha sido siempre más simple que el tipo de realidad que se pensaba. En el plano de la teoría y la ciencia social, esto muestra un grado de mayor retraso o no correspondencia en relación a las otras expresiones culturales, como las artes.

[I consider Zavaleta to be the baroque author of Bolivian social science, that is, the description, so to speak, that is adequate to or corresponds to the world that he thinks and wants to explain. In general, social thought in Bolivia has always been simpler than the reality that it thinks. In the sphere of theory and social science, this represents a greater degree of underdevelopment or non-correspondence with respect to other cultural expressions, such as the arts.] (322)

Here Tapia's conception of the question of representation within the sphere of intellectual production, whether cultural or social-scientific, is analogous to García Linera's discourse on political representation as faithful rendering or reflection of society in the state.

#### *From motley society to Plurinational State*

The concept of *abigarramiento* in Zavaleta first designates a synchronous superimposition of historical stages, that is, of modes of production, within a territory.

Comparable to other conceptual formulations of Latin American heterogeneity in the work of his contemporaries—and indeed to the identification of a persistence of precapitalist relations elsewhere in the postcolonial world, for example, in the work of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group—it is thus initially inscribed within an at least implicitly stagist analytical frame; rather than challenging the logic of the modes-of-production sequence it attempts to account for aberrant cases within the terms of that logic, and marks the specific difference of non-European societies. When Zavaleta emphasizes the insufficiency of a purely economistic social taxonomy and turns to the Gramscian conception of the historical bloc, the motley is not so much redefined as reoriented toward ways of imagining the social beyond the totalized, rational subject of bourgeois liberal democracy.

In all its iterations it refers to “peripheral” societies not (or not yet) leveled by the process of homogenization that comes with the capitalist mode of intersubjectivity produced by the abstraction of labor, but always as a *condition* (of possibility or impossibility) whose theoretical value is bound to its political consequences, and never as an identity—or even a form of organization of a plurality of identities—to be defended. The motley is thus conceived primarily as a negative category, as an obstacle to the epistemological and political operation of the superstructures of capitalism, which are by no means wholly or unequivocally undesirable: motley societies are “unknowable” through the quantitative or empirical methods of the social sciences, necessitating a historicist method of inquiry, and the motley quality of a society obstructs the legitimacy of representative democracy.<sup>80</sup>

Rivera Cusicanqui’s *Oprimidos pero no vencidos* offers an example contemporary with

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<sup>80</sup> See p. 57 of this dissertation.

Zavaleta's late work (published before the posthumous and unfinished *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia* [1986], the source most often cited by Tapia and García Linera) of a more vindicatory use of the term *abigarramiento*. In the context of a critique of the homogenizing ideology of mestizaje that governed the interpellative discourse of the Revolutionary Nationalist state, she calls for

un nuevo pensamiento político y . . . un nuevo discurso histórico capaz de reconocer en el abigarramiento del país no ya una verdad angustiante sino la manifestación positiva y enriquecedora de un milenarismo proceso humano de domesticación del espacio, jalonado por múltiples y complejos procesos de ruptura, resistencia y creatividad colectiva.

[a new political thought and . . . a new historical discourse capable of seeing in the motley composition of the country no longer a disconcerting truth but the positive and enriching manifestation of a millenarian process of the human domestication of space, marked by multiple and complex processes of rupture, resistance, and collective creativity.] (217)

*Lo abigarrado* here occupies a position analogous to that of subalternity, and the two terms are in fact equated in Rivera's and Barragán's introduction to their collection of *Subaltern Studies* texts in Spanish translation (in a passage cited in the previous chapter): "La hegemonía colonial en la construcción institucional e imaginaria de la India es . . . cuestionada desde el punto de vista de una sociedad civil abigarrada—la sociedad subalterna—que siempre permanece heterogénea y elusiva a la política de los de 'arriba'" [Colonial hegemony in the institutional and imaginary construction of India is . . . questioned from the point of view of a motley civil society—subaltern



society—that remains always heterogeneous and elusive to the politics of the elite] (Rivera and Barragán 11). Like subalternity in its presentation here, *lo abigarrado* is read in *Oprimidos* as a “positive and enriching manifestation” of alterity, as that which *eludes* domination, or politics from above.

This alterity as a positive outside of the hegemonic order, as a force of resistance or repository of alternative possibilities, is always at risk of appropriation by a conception of alterity as multiculturalism, as the neutralization of difference through a discourse of inclusion and equation. The 1994 constitution—produced in the neoliberal phase whose crisis brought the current regime to power—already declared Bolivia a “multicultural state”; one of the major ideological tasks of the “Plurinational State,” declared in the 2009 constitution, then, is to distinguish itself from this earlier discourse. One such attempt is made in a text by Tapia frequently cited by García Linera, *La condición multisocietal* (2002), in which *abigarramiento*—which I have argued is inherently neither good nor bad in Zavaleta, but can be understood to have both politically advantageous or obstructive effects—is defined as a condition of colonial domination:<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Bosteels questions the Zavaletian origin of the concept in Álvaro García Linera:

The multiple references to the “plebes” (*la plebe armada, la plebe facciosa, las plebes insurrectas*, and so on) in García Linera’s recent collection of writings [Stefanoni’s *La potencia plebeya*], on the one hand, entail a sustained attempt to bypass the classical figure of the proletariat modeled on the large factory worker, in favor of a wider and much more flexible composition of the revolutionary subject. García Linera calls this composition “motley,” or *abigarrada* in Spanish, supposedly borrowing a term from the famous Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta Mercado. In actual fact, though, this concept and its name already appear in the Spanish translation of Lenin’s well-known pamphlet on left-wing communism: “. . . motley intermediate types between the proletarian and the semi-proletarian . . . between the semi-proletarian and the small peasant . . .” This is how García Linera . . . describes the new class composition of that motley social formation of the

La idea de lo multisocietal viene de la idea de lo abigarrado que elaboró René Zavaleta . . . El abigarramiento social es una condición de sobreposición de diversos tipos de sociedad que coexisten de manera desarticulada, estableciendo relaciones de dominación y distorsión de una sobre otras. El abigarramiento en general es producto del colonialismo. Se podría decir que mientras persiste en algún margen de abigarramiento la condición colonial no ha desaparecido de ese ámbito de relaciones sociales y políticas. . . . Lo abigarrado es la heterogeneidad mal compuesta por la dominación.

[The idea of the multisocietal comes from the idea of the motley elaborated by René Zavaleta . . . The motley quality of society is a condition of superimposition of different kinds of society that coexist in a disjointed way, establishing relations of domination and distortion of some in relation to others. The motley is generally a product of colonialism. It could be said that as long as this motley quality persists to some degree . . . the colonial condition has not been eradicated

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“plebs” in which the socio-economical and cultural-symbolic aspects must be constantly thought together.

More general speaking, the plebeian reference is consistent with a leftist and populist appeal to various names for the formless or as yet unformed masses: from Hegel’s “rabble” to Deleuze’s “hordes” and “packs” to Laclau’s retrieval of Marx’s “lumpen.” (2011, 232–233)

Lenin is certainly a source for Zavaleta and there is no reason to believe García Linera is not also drawing directly on the same texts, but the citation of Zavaleta is not meaningless. As discussed below, there is a sense of superimposed and disarticulated formations in Zavaleta’s concept of *abigarramiento* as used in García Linera that exceeds the one offered in Lenin. Still, I don’t want to fetishize the term as constructed in Zavaleta and to which his work has so often been unjustly reduced (as also occurs with a set of terms in Gramsci). My interest here is much less in the concept itself or its original source than in the mechanisms and effects of its appropriation.

from this sphere of political and social relations. . . . The motley is heterogeneity disfigured by domination.] (10)

While the term is taken here to denote a condition of domination (no specific source for this claim is provided; the concept is normally used in reference to contexts where it is an effect of colonial domination, but this is not necessarily inherent to its structure, and it might just as well be understood as the effect of the failure of colonial domination, or, in Ranajit Guha's terms, of domination without hegemony), a positively valued heterogeneity actually precedes this condition of *abigarramiento* as disjointedness, which is its "disfigured," corrupt, or falsified appearance. In addition to positing this prior condition of heterogeneity as authentic and originary, Tapia's reading of *abigarramiento* leads him to formulate his own concept—*lo multisocietal*— as an anticipated, future condition that resembles the identitarian reading of the term that I have been disputing. Tapia continues,

La idea de lo multisocietal deviene de la idea de lo abigarrado, la he imaginado desde esa fuente para pensar algo más general, por un lado, y así, varias posibilidades histórico-políticas de reconstrucción del país, por el otro lado complementario. Lo multisocietal contiene el primer rasgo de lo abigarrado: la coexistencia y sobreposición de diferentes sociedades o matrices de relaciones sociales de diversa cualidad y tiempos históricos, pero no necesariamente lo segundo y definitorio de lo abigarrado, que es el carácter desarticulado y de dominación más o menos colonial de la sobreposición.

[The idea of the multisocietal comes from the idea of the motley, I have derived it from this source to think something more general, on the one hand, and thus, on the other hand, multiple possibilities of historical-political reconstruction of the

country. The multisocietal contains the first feature of the motley: the coexistence and superimposition of different societies or matrixes of social relations of different qualities and historical temporalities, but not necessarily the second and defining feature of the motley, which is the disjointed quality and the more or less colonial form of domination in this superimposition.] (10)

This is a somewhat different operation from the one in which the concept is “expanded” from a discourse governed by the logic of mode of production to one of ethnicity, and takes as its point of departure a different reading of the term, but the resulting argument and its philosophical and political premises are similar: there is a recuperative impulse that claims a hidden truth and destiny. While Tapia is careful to explicitly endorse an anti-essentialist concept of ethnicity, in attempting to differentiate his position from a (neo)liberal multiculturalism he relies on a culture/civilization distinction (17) in which the Enlightenment hierarchy that privileges culture<sup>82</sup> is flipped, and “civilization” means something deeper than the cosmetic diversity of multicultural liberal democracy.

García Linera makes a similar argument in 2004 (*La descentralización que se viene*), referring to a *sociedad multicivilizatoria* (230), composed of different “civilizational regimes” (*regimenes civilizatorios*) in which “civilization” is likewise a culturalist expansion of mode of production: “Un régimen civilizatorio es mucho más que un modo de producción, pues integra la matriz cognitiva y los procedimientos de autoridad que regulan la vida colectiva . . . En Bolivia, se puede afirmar que existen cuatro grandes regimenes civilizatorios” [A civilizational regime is

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<sup>82</sup> Kant writes, for example, in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” “While the idea of morality is indeed present in culture, an application of this idea which only extends to the semblances of morality, as in love of honor and outward propriety, amounts merely to civilization” (1991: 49).

much more than a mode of production, for it integrates the cognitive matrix and the procedures of authority that regulate collective life] (231).<sup>83</sup> These are: (1) capitalist modernity, (2) the small-holder and artisan sectors with a “corporative rationality” (233), (3) the Amazonian, and finally, (4) the communal, which includes Quechua and Aymara communities. The latter is “no solo . . . la más antigua en el territorio boliviano, sino que, por sobre todo, . . . la que más sistemáticamente ha creado una arquitectura de creencias, de discursos políticos centrados en el autogobierno, de proyectos y de fuerza de movilización en torno a esas demandas” [not only . . . the most ancient in the Bolivian territory, but above all, that which has most systematically created an architecture of beliefs, of political discourses centered around self-government, of projects and mobilizing force around these demands] (228). There can be no doubt that here an essentialist notion of civilization—despite García Linera’s attempts to safeguard himself from such a charge by citing sources like Benedict Anderson on the constructedness of collective identities—serves to propose the centrality and ascendancy of a particular ethnic group—held to be at once the most ancient and the most advanced—as the basis of the nation. Both Tapia and

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<sup>83</sup> García Linera connects this to *abigarramiento*, and presents the slippage from mode of production or historical stage to “civilization” in terms of *operationalizability*: “El otro eje de desarticulación social sustancial es lo que Zavaleta llamó ‘lo abigarrado,’ que puede ser resumido como la coexistencia sobrepuesta de varios modos de producción, de varios tiempos históricos y sistemas políticos. En términos más operacionalizables, se puede decir que Bolivia es un país donde coexisten desarticuladamente varias civilizaciones, pero donde la estructura estatal recoge la lógica organizativa de una sola de estas civilizaciones, la moderna mercantil capitalista” [The other axis of substantial social disjointedness is what Zavaleta called “*lo abigarrado*,” which can be summed up as the superimposed coexistence of several modes of production, of various historical temporalities and political systems. In more workable terms, we could say that Bolivia is a country where multiple civilizations exist disjointedly, but where the state structure reflects the organizational logic of only one of these civilizations, that of modern market capitalism] (230).

García Linera, in their conception of the social reality of Bolivia and in their prescriptive political theses, assume an irreducible “civilization” that corresponds to a particular form of political organization; there is no room in this reasoning for politics as the collective transformation of the real, but only as its faithful or authentic expression.

The notion that *abigarramiento* necessarily entails a form of colonial domination elaborated in Tapia’s *La condición multisocietal*, which García Linera also suggests in the passage cited above, a presumed equivalence between disarticulation or discord and domination, is predicated upon an understanding of democratic politics as consensus or *totalization*.

*Abigarramiento*, Tapia writes, involves “formas cambiantes e inestables” [changing and unstable forms], and “implica la coexistencia conflictiva de varios principios de organización social que no pueden componer orgánicamente la totalidad social . . . el *abigarramiento* es la multiculturalidad conflictiva sin solución compuesta” [implies the conflictive coexistence of various principles of social organization that cannot organically constitute a social totality . . . *abigarramiento* is a conflictive multiculturalism without resolution] (58). This reading of conflict as domination and “social totality” as the political good to be sought anticipates García Linera’s presentation of Gramsci’s *stato integrale* as the resolution of centuries of struggle.

In the passage from mestizo nationalism to plurinationalism understood in the sense of Tapia’s *multisocietal* or García Linera’s *multicivilizational* as either a translation or transcendence of Zavaleta’s *abigarramiento*, and despite or even partially as a result of the express intent to differentiate this project from liberal multiculturalism as just another form of equalization or totalization, the positing of stable identities as the basis of political

organization is retained.<sup>84</sup> If we read Zavaleta's pharmacological use of the motley (as medicine and poison) as (de)constituent obstruction to the total, transparent representation of the social in the state, it does not so much constitute a positive alternative to nationalist thinking as an antidote to any ideological apparatus that might be erected in its place in the service of the closure of politics as struggle.

### *The apparent and the real*

In the first part of this chapter I highlight a slippage between notions of superstructure as

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<sup>84</sup> A notable point of contrast: In a more recent text (*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*, 2010), Silvia Rivera modifies her earlier usage of the concept to claim Zavaleta as precisely a thinker of agonistic plurality rather than totalization:

La noción de “hibridez” propuesta por García Canclini es una metáfora genética, que connota esterilidad. La mula es una especie híbrida y no puede reproducirse. La hibridez asume la posibilidad de que de la mezcla de dos diferentes, pueda salir un tercero completamente nuevo, una tercera raza o grupo social capaz de fusionar los rasgos de sus ancestros en una mezcla armónica y ante todo inédita. La noción de *ch'ixi*, por el contrario, equivale a la de “sociedad abigarrada” de Zavaleta, y plantea la coexistencia en paralelo de múltiples diferencias culturales que no se funden, sino que antagonizan o se complementan. Cada una se reproduce a sí misma desde la profundidad del pasado y se relaciona con las otras de forma contenciosa.

[The notion of “hybridity” that García Canclini proposes is a genetic metaphor that connotes sterility. The mule is a kind of hybrid and cannot reproduce. Hybridity assumes the possibility that the mixture of two different elements can produce a third, totally new entity, a third race or social group capable of fusing the traits of its ancestors in a harmonious and above all unprecedented combination. The notion of *ch'ixi*, on the other hand, is equivalent to Zavaleta's “motley society,” and posits the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that are not fused, but complement and antagonize one another. Each reproduces itself from the depth of the past and relates to the other in a contentious manner.] (70)

While there is surely still an element of recuperative identitarianism here (although the connection drawn between Zavaleta and the Aymara concept of *ch'ixi* is one of affinity rather than filiation), this reading is exceptional in its recognition of antagonism without seeking resolution.

expression and as reflection, illusion, or fiction as it operates in García Linera's texts (although the problem of course does not originate with García Linera). Here I expand on this in relation to the appropriation of Zavaleta's concept of the apparent state, which will in turn serve as the constitutive opposite of the integral state as the *real*. Zavaleta's reflection on the question of phenomenon or appearance in social theory begins with Marx and passes through Gramsci. In "Las formaciones aparentes en Marx" (1978), Zavaleta uses the term in the sense closest to that of illusion or falsity, that of "mystification," the fundamental substitution of which is that of surplus value by profit (106–107). In "Problemas de la determinación dependiente y la forma primordial" (1982), peripheral capitalist development serves to illuminate the fallacy of an economicist conception of the correspondence between base and superstructure, between the constitution of an internal market and nationalization; he cites the Argentine case as one of "false" or "apparent nationalization" because the "national" market remains disconnected from the state (346).

The "apparent state" in Zavaleta, conversely, refers to those which emerged on the periphery of the capitalist world and failed to import the political and ideological structures proper to the liberal-democratic state. Without these mediating structures, the state is disconnected from the nation, effectively absent in much of the territory that it claims to govern. In *Lo nacional-popular*, the apparent state is introduced in order to relativize Gramsci's characterization of the modern Western state as an integrated system in which the state proper is only a "forward trench" backed by a "succession of sturdy fortresses and emplacements" of civil society—the integral state—as opposed to the Eastern state that lacks this trench system, where society is an (untheorized) "primordial and gelatinous" mass (Gramsci Notebook 7 § 16): "En esta metáfora maestra acerca del Estado moderno se da, sin embargo, más de un aspecto controvertible. Habría que distinguir, por ejemplo, entre los Estados de larga duración y las



situaciones de fluidez estatal, como las que son propias del Estado aparente” [In this master metaphor of the modern state there is, however, more than one arguable point. We would have to distinguish, for example, between states of long duration and situations of state fluidity, such as those proper to the apparent state] (*Lo nacional-popular* 50). The apparent state escapes Gramsci’s conception of the integral (or “Western”) state in which there is a “proper relation” between civil society and political society, without quite conforming to its “Eastern” counterpart. The apparent state is distinguished from the Gramscian integral state within Zavaleta’s conceptual framework not necessarily as its opposite (it is not equivalent to the “Eastern” despotic state, which for Gramsci assumes a homogeneous and passive social base), but as an exception; a state in which a strong repressive apparatus predominates over the system of ideological apparatuses, in Althusserian terms, does not necessarily constitute an apparent state since its authority is nonetheless effective, if precarious. Heterogeneity, or *abigarramiento*, is a condition of the apparent state just as totalization through the abstraction of labor is a condition of the integral state.

García Linera’s rewriting of these concepts in his 2009 inaugural speech offers a different interpretation of Zavaleta’s apparent state, and holds it to designate quite simply the one prior to Evo Morales’s 2005 election.

Para Zavaleta, un Estado aparente es aquel que no logra incorporar los hábitos, la cultura y las formas de organización política de la sociedad, articula sólo a ciertos hábitos políticos y deja al margen a otros sectores sociales, regiones, territorios y prácticas políticas. Un Estado aparente, en el sentido zavaletiano, es lo que fue Bolivia hasta 2005.

[For Zavaleta, an apparent state is one that does not incorporate the habits, the

culture, and the forms of political organization of the society, but articulates only certain political habits and excludes other social sectors, regions, territories, and political practices. The Bolivian state up until 2005 had been an apparent state in the Zavaletian sense.] (7)

There is a reversal here through which a state that (as conceived in Zavaleta) fails to enforce its authority or establish its legitimacy in its official territory—fails to occupy society—becomes one that has not been occupied by society or has failed to incorporate local political structures. In Zavaleta the disconnection of the oligarchic state from society is not a form of active exclusion or domination but a *weakness* on the part of the dominant bloc, which, limited to its repressive apparatus and a small and socially isolated political class, is vulnerable to sudden and total displacement.

The integral state, then, (in the Gramscian sense of the terrain of the war of position as the appropriate revolutionary strategy for “the West” as opposed to the war of maneuver that was effective in “the East”—the ethico-political struggle within civil society rather than the military struggle to take over the state) is conceived as the opposite of the apparent state as defined in the passage cited above, that is, as one in which society is incorporated from the bottom up:

¿Qué Estado queremos construir? . . . Decía Gramsci que el *Estado integral* es aquel en el que hay una correspondencia entre la sociedad civil, los ciudadanos, las regiones, los trabajadores, las clases sociales y su representación política estatal. Es aquel aparato político gubernamental que une y sintetiza externamente a todos los sectores y clases sociales, a los grupos nacionales, a las regiones y a las colectividades. *Estado integral* o pleno es aquel en el que hay un liderazgo social, político, moral e intelectualmente activo, que permite crear el sentido de

pertenencia y representación de todos en la estructura administrativa del Estado.

El *Estado integral* gramsciano es todo lo contrario del *Estado aparente* que tuvimos durante 180 años y es, precisamente, la construcción de un Estado articulador de la diversidad nacionalitaria, geográfica, cultural y clasista, lo que los bolivianos nos hemos planteado edificar desde abajo, en base a los pilares del gobierno de los movimientos sociales, la plurinacionalidad, la autonomía democrática y la soberanía económica.

[What kind of state do we want to build? Gramsci said that the integral state is that in which there is a correspondence between civil society, citizens, the different regions, the workers, the social classes, and their political representation in the state. It is the political apparatus of a government that externally unifies and synthesizes all the sectors and social classes, all the national groups, all the regions and collectivities. The *integral* or full state is one in which there is a socially, politically, morally, and intellectually active leadership, which creates a sense of belonging and representation of all in the administrative structure of the state. The Gramscian *integral state* is the complete opposite of the apparent state that we had for 180 years and is, precisely, the construction of a state that articulates national, geographic, cultural, and class diversity, what Bolivians have been trying to build from the bottom up, from the pillars of a government that emerged from the social movements, plurinationality, democratic autonomy, and economic sovereignty.] (11)

What is at stake in this redefinition and insertion within a conceptual field whose main coordinates are the apparent state in its inverted form (as exclusion by the state rather than a

failure of the state to exercise hegemonic control) and the plurinational as identitarian reconceptualization of the motley? In the first place the Gramscian integral or expanded concept of the state is read as a normative model. While in Zavaleta Gramsci's bourgeois, integral state is also contrasted with the Bolivian "apparent" state, this opposition is set up for the purpose of determining appropriate methods of knowing and acting. The apparent state and corresponding heterogeneous society constitute the conditions of political and theoretical practice in Bolivia, which therefore cannot borrow the methods proper to the totalized capitalist nation-state. The other semantic shift consists in that the idea of integration, which in Gramsci means an integration of the state in the narrow sense and the organs of civil society, coercion and consent, comes to mean here horizontal integration or inclusion of the heterogeneous or motley elements of the social body, directly reflected in the state apparatus. The state in the narrow sense is now imagined to include or re-present the whole of the nation.

In a 2010 televised interview (like the 2009 speech, subsequently printed by the vice-presidential office), García Linera counterposes another term to the apparent state, perhaps more telling in its simplicity—the *real* state:

El Estado aparente, que es una categoría de René Zavaleta Mercado, un sociólogo boliviano importante, es una estructura de gobierno y de poder que no representa a todos, sino sólo a un segmento reducido de la sociedad. . . . [E]n Bolivia, hasta el año 2005, no tuvimos un Estado orgánico, real, sino, para darle un nombre, un Estado de camarilla, de fracción, que sólo representaba a un diminuto sector de la sociedad, donde unos pocos sectores dominantes construyeron el poder político y no les importó representar al resto, dejando al margen a indígenas, jóvenes,

trabajadores y mujeres. Era un Estado ilusorio porque no hizo el esfuerzo de unificar a todos ...

Lo que se viene haciendo, desde 2005 y con mucha más fuerza a partir de la promulgación de la nueva Constitución en 2009, es construir un Estado real que totalice, unifique y represente a la sociedad, como de alguna manera ha sido nuestra Asamblea Constituyente y, ahora, nuestra Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, donde estamos incluidos todos . . .

[The apparent state, a concept developed by René Zavaleta Mercado, an important Bolivian sociologist, is a governmental and power structure that does not represent everyone, but only a limited sector of society. . . . [I]n Bolivia, up until the year 2005, we did not have an organic state, a real state, but what we could call a factional state that represented only a minute fraction of society, where a few dominant sectors exercised political power and had no interest in representing the rest, excluding the indigenous peoples, young people, workers, and women. It was an illusory state because it made no effort to unify everyone . . .

What we have been doing, since 2005, and much more forcefully since the enactment of the new Constitution in 2009, is building a real state that totalizes, unifies, and represents society, something that has been realized in a way in our Constituent Assembly, and now, in our Plurinational Legislative Assembly, where we are all included . . . ] (8)

The “real” state, to my knowledge, does not appear in Zavaleta. The source of the real/apparent binary in which the motley is effectively representable by the (real) state seems to have its roots less in Zavaleta’s sources (Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci, all of whom he qualifies in substantial

ways) than in Hegel's real/existent opposition. In all of its iterations in Zavaleta, *lo abigarrado* remains in a negative mode, even when it is a productive negativity.

### III. Passive revolution and police regime

Again, I do not propose to correct García Linera's (mis)readings, since I read his as primary texts.<sup>85</sup> I have tried rather to uncover the performative function of a series of discursive moves that knit together ideas received from Gramsci, and Zavaleta, as a local lens and supplement, to reinforce what is really the familiar populist logic of total identification between the people and the state, in which the distinction between representation as proxy and as portrait (Spivak) is dissolved. This is achieved *through* rather than against a language of pluralism, multinationality, and even *abigarramiento*, and with a rhetoric that maintains the primacy of civil society over the state as the subject of politics.

The identification of centralist populism in the pink tide regimes whose explicit ideology is pluralistic and even radically participatory, and particularly Evo Morales's Bolivia, has been framed in terms of another set of Gramscian concepts in the work of Tapia and Jeffery Webber: those of *transformism* and passive revolution. Gramsci defines *transformismo* as "l'assorbimento graduale, ma continuo e ottenuto con metodi diversi nella loro efficacia, degli elementi attivi sorti dai gruppi alleati e anche da quelli avversari e che parevano irreconciliabilmente nemici" [The gradual but continuous absorption, through means of varying efficacy, of active elements of

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<sup>85</sup> I am thinking of Spivak's critique of Vivek Chibber for "correcting" Ranajit Guha (and, more broadly, the project of the Subaltern Studies group), "merrily mistaking a primary text for a secondary text" (2014: 180).

allied groups and even of opposing groups that seemed to be irreconcilable enemies] (Q 19 § 24; cf. Q 1 § 44). Tapia writes in *El Estado de derecho como tiranía*,

el núcleo dirigente del MAS y del actual gobierno ha entrado en una fase de transformismo cada vez más acentuada. De ser intelectuales orgánicos de sectores campesinos, indígenas y populares se han convertido en los intelectuales orgánicos de un proyecto de reconstitución del estado-nación en Bolivia en torno a un núcleo capitalista, que está reacoplando las estructuras de poder y dominación patrimonialistas con una nueva dirigencia de origen popular, que a su vez está organizando un régimen de tiranía sobre el mismo pueblo del cual ha salido.

[MAS's and the current government's core leadership has entered an increasingly pronounced phase of transformism. Once organic intellectuals of the peasant, indigenous, and popular sectors, they have become the organic intellectuals of a project of reconstitution of the nation-state in Bolivia around a capitalist nucleus, which is rearticulating the patrimonialist structures of power and domination with a new leadership of popular origin, which is in turn organizing a regime of tyranny over the very people from which it emerged.] (125)

Tapia goes on to note that it is not a matter of a cooptation of the current leadership by the old elite, but rather that they have formed a new ruling class, connected to a new capitalist project, incorporating the old dominant bloc now in a subordinate position. This analysis is a valuable supplement to that of Rivera, discussed in Chapter 2, on the continuing coloniality of the Bolivian state, which in turn resonates with Zavaleta's reading of the continual reconstitution of the dominant bloc in response to subaltern demands and insurrection over the course of the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and particularly with the National Revolutionary state of 1952.<sup>86</sup> What I find questionable in Tapia's presentation of this assessment—a detail that is perhaps incidental but prominent enough to merit consideration as one of symptomatic value—is the accentuation of the notion of *tyranny* (in the title of the book, *El Estado de derecho como tiranía*, as well as in the passage quoted above), which implies an aberrant abuse of power, in contrast with the Gramscian argument that he in fact advances of a historically conditioned political process.

Jeffery Webber builds on Tapia's argument, as well as that developed by Massimo Modonesi, which he finds to be mostly correct but qualifies as “overly ‘politicist’” (1862) (something perhaps indicated in the use of the concept of *tyranny* in Tapia), and proposes to offer a more class-based analysis, through the lens of the concept of passive revolution. Webber focuses on García Linera's use of phrases like “creative tensions” and “plural economy,” which form part of the same conceptual constellation that I have highlighted here privileging the “plurinational” as its pivot, to argue that these terms obscure the operation of a process in which

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<sup>86</sup> Tapia in fact makes a similar argument to Rivera's, discussed in Chapter 2, summed up in her notion of “strategic ethnicity,” in which subaltern groups are resubalternized precisely through the symbolic, instrumental, and identitarian form of their inclusion: “La noción [that of transformism] sirve para pensar cómo una parte de la lucha política consiste en la transformación de intelectuales orgánicos de un bloque obrero popular en intelectuales orgánicos del bloque dominante. Esta transformación debilita a los subalternos que difícilmente producen sus intelectuales orgánicos, capacidades de organización y dirección, y potencia al bloque dominante en tanto no sólo resta a los subalternos sino que les suma capacidades; ya que a veces operan también como una representación simbólica de la inclusión de los subalternos” [The notion (of transformism) enables us to think how part of the political struggle consists in the transformation of organic intellectuals from a popular workers' bloc into organic intellectuals of the dominant bloc. This transformation weakens the subalterns, who only with difficulty can produce their own organic intellectuals, organizational and leadership capabilities, and reinforces the power of the dominant bloc insofar as it does not only subtract from but also adds to the subalterns' functions, since they sometimes operate as a symbolic representation of the inclusion of the subalterns] (119).



“the accent of the preservation/ transformation dialectic of passive revolution is clearly on preservation” (1857). He defines the model that has been widely criticized in recent years as one of “neoextractivism” as “extractive distribution,” in which the economy remains dependent on primary products and there is no structural change in property relations, and which is successful in reducing poverty while growing the economy during periods like that of the commodity supercycle of the 2000s but is not sustainable over the long term. The positive charge with which such notions of “tension” and “plurality” are imbued is reinforced by their association with the “plurinational” or “multicultural,” while in fact referring, in the economic sphere, to the persistence of the capitalist mode of accumulation despite the emergence of new political and economic subjects. Webber alludes to the “often sizable chasm between this government’s rhetorical flourish and its routine politics” citing praise for the regime in publications like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* (1871), while stressing the structural adaptation of capitalist accumulation to new political conditions, new demands, and new actors, in an ideological climate in which racism is no longer a viable structuring principles and an emergent indigenous bourgeoisie has been integrated into the international circuits, something that, as Rivera and Tapia have argued, has a political use: “If the logic of big capital persists, it is legitimated in and through petty indigenous capitalists” (1857). Webber’s analysis through the lens of passive revolution, while explicitly seeking to shift the discussion from a “politicist” or ideological plane to a more structural one, in fact reveals the link between these levels, the rhetorical operations through which a transformation, or preservation in new terms, is expressed.

Gareth Williams (citing an earlier draft of this chapter in his discussion of García Linera as a reader of Zavaleta) characterizes the shift toward a state practice of containment and “decisionism” in terms borrowed from Rancière, as a *police order*, in which the problem of state

form is reduced to a technical one (10):<sup>87</sup>

hegemony *over* disjointedness seems to take precedence over the hegemony *of* disjointedness. The bourgeois ‘good order’ (or police) deemed to be necessary for the extension of extractivist developmentalism (and of renewed dependence on external markets, of course, despite all anti-materialist rhetoric) is prioritised over the transformation of state-form. Finally, in García Linera’s intellectual and political trajectory, it remains to be seen whether Hobbesian decisionism has indeed displaced the legacy first opened up in the Bolivian Marxist thought by René Zavaleta Mercado. (2015: 15)

My argument has been that the end of this transition from hegemony *of* to hegemony *over* is in fact already present at its origin, something that I think is already suggested by Williams’ choice of the term *disjointedness* to translate *abigarramiento*,<sup>88</sup> as well as in the allusion to Rancière’s concept of the police, which involves more than a mere sequential passage from transformation to conservation or constituent to constituted as discrete steps in a linear process. The order of the police, as the opposite or other side of politics, is already that of any hegemony *of abigarramiento*—whether understood as diversity or as disjointedness—which must instead remain as a supplement to and interruption of hegemony as reification of the social as an ontologically fixed content representable by the state.

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<sup>87</sup> “*The Geopolitics of the Amazon* [García Linera, 2012] is a police book. By this I mean that it is a book conceived and written from within the state, the main idea of which is to suture a certain form of state reason to a fully integrated geography of power in which sovereignty can exercise its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force” (2).

<sup>88</sup> This effectively conveys its difference from mere “diversity” (although Williams also uses this as a synonym: “state hegemony over diversity seems to be taking precedence over the hegemony of diversity” [2015: 12]).

What I hope to contribute here is a reading in which the paradoxes of such regimes cannot be reduced to mere hypocrisy, to decisionism, or to a simple betrayal. Nor can the debate be neatly organized into opposing factions. What has been identified as a “turnaround” in García Linera’s discourse is really a reiteration of a similar reasoning from a different subject position, within a different political conjuncture, and, of course, in a more coarsely propagandistic register, of certain premises—the motley as a plurality of positive identities, integration and social totality as desirable political ends—that can also be found in the texts of the government’s critics on the left. A critique of this regime of representation cannot merely target the failure of effective correspondence, but must remain vigilant against any pretension of total closure of the crisis that resulted in the establishment of the Plurinational State.

## CONCLUSION

I wrote the first draft of the text that developed into the first chapter of this dissertation in 2012, before the beginning of the decline of the progressive cycle in the region that is now (in 2017) well underway (in the past year and a half, Mauricio Macri has been elected in Argentina, ending twelve years of Kirchnerism; Evo Morales has lost a referendum seeking to change the constitution to allow him to run for a fourth term in Bolivia, and Dilma Rousseff has been impeached in Brazil, returning the right to power for the first time since Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected in 2003 and setting an alarming precedent for the democratic process). That text, which focused on a corpus from the 1980s, already thematized the relation of the intellectual production of the left to the position of relative strength or weakness of its project within the historical conjuncture from which it emerges. Gramsci, I suggested, had been appropriated by the progressive intellectuals of the transitions to democracy in a moment of tempered expectations following the military dictatorships as a theorist whose most mature (although still entirely provisional and unfinished) writings emerged from a context in which, as Stuart Hall stresses, the once plausible prospect of an immanent proletarian revolution in Europe had been brutally defeated, and compounded by the more immediate circumstances of his incarceration. My argument in this chapter, however, was already one that urged a sustained critical stance; my second and third chapters dealt directly with the success of a new left whose origins in grassroots social movements and leadership by subjects not belonging to the traditional political caste has served a strategic rhetorical function in distancing it from prior regimes while reproducing a familiar state-centered populist mode of political interpellation.

García Linera has shifted his discourse from one focused on the direct occupancy of the state to the task of building hegemony when the revolutionary energy that brought the regime to power has waned; critics of the pink tide governments and their allied intellectuals in the U.S. academy, including Jon Beasley-Murray and Alberto Moreiras, proclaim the crumbling of Latin America's electoral left of the twenty-first century as proof of the untenability of any hegemonic project. There is a sense that the constituted power in its very emergence as such has betrayed its constituent base, and is now reaping its due reward. I will not attempt a diagnosis or prescription of a strategy for the current conjuncture. It has not been my intention to condemn the state, or the constituted power as such in this way, and the identification of a succession of moments of defeat and of victory, or insurgent social movements and ruling party, does not imply a sequential ordering of the constituent and the constituted, which are simultaneous aspects of any socio-political formation. In the current crisis it is imperative that we eschew this kind of dualism and that the project for the future, mindful of the gains achieved, nonetheless not seek to repeat or repair a failed past.

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