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¿Si esto no es el pueblo, el pueblo dónde está? Discursive Disagreement in the 2019-2020 Post-electoral Conflict in Bolivia[1]

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Abstract

The 2019 electoral crisis in Bolivia was characterized by division and disagreement. In the three weeks between the country's presidential election in October 2019 and sitting president Evo Morales's resignation, both Morales's supporters and his detractors marched in the streets chanting parallel slogans in which each identified themselves as "the people" (*el pueblo*). This article examines what it means to identify collectively as "the

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people" in contemporary Bolivia and the nature of the term as a floating signifier used to justify opposing claims by protestors on both sides of defending Bolivian democracy. The use of the same self-identification by different groups represents a disagreement of the kind referred to by Jacques Rancière when two actors use the same term without recognizing the meaning given to it by the other. This disagreement is representative of competing ideas about democracy, belonging and the nation itself operating simultaneously within Bolivia.

Keywords
Bolivia, the people, democracy, pitita, masista, disagreement

Resumen

La crisis electoral de 2019 en Bolivia se caracterizó por la división y el desacuerdo. En las tres semanas transcurridas entre las elecciones presidenciales del país en octubre de 2019 y la renuncia del presidente en ejercicio Evo Morales, tanto los partidarios de Morales como sus detractores marcharon por las calles cantando consignas paralelas en las que cada uno se identificaba como "el pueblo". Este artículo examina lo que significa identificarse colectivamente como "pueblo" en la Bolivia contemporánea y la naturaleza del término como significante flotante utilizado para justificar reclamos de manifestantes que defienden la democracia boliviana desde posiciones opuestas. El uso de la misma autoidentificación por parte de grupos diferentes representa un desacuerdo como el referido por Jacques Rancière cuando dos actores utilizan el mismo término sin reconocer el significado que le da el otro. Este desacuerdo es representativo de ideas en pugna sobre democracia, pertenencia y la nación misma, que operan simultáneamente en Bolivia.

Palabras clave
Bolivia, pueblo, democracia, pitita, masista, desacuerdo

List of Abbreviations

CC	Comunidad Ciudadana
CEPR	Center for Economic and Policy Research
CIDOB	Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia)
CONAMAQ	Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyu (Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qollasuyu)

CSUTCB	Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia)
FONDIOC	Fondo de Desarrollo para los Pueblos Indígenas Originarios y Comunidades Campesinas (Development Fund for the Indigenous Originary Peoples and Peasant Communities)
MAS	Movimiento a Socialism (Movement for Socialism)
MDS	Movimiento Demócrata Social (Social Democratic Movement)
MNR	Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Movement)
MTS	Movimiento Tercer Sistema (Third System Movement)
OAS	Organisation of American States
PDC	Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party)
RJC	Resistencia Juvenil Cochala (Cochabamba Youth Resistance)
TCP	Tribunal Constitucional Plurinacional (Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal
TSE	Tribunal Supremo Electoral (Supreme Electoral Tribunal)
UJC	Unión Juvenil Cruceña (Cruceña Youth Union)
UTOP	Unidad Táctica de Operaciones Policiales (Police Operations Tactical Unit)

On October 20, 2019, Bolivia held presidential elections in which Evo Morales ran for a fourth term in office. In doing so, he ignored the result of a referendum held on February 21, 2016, in which 51 percent of Bolivia's voters had declared that he should not be allowed to override the constitution by running for president again. Following an appeal by the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) [Movement Towards Socialism] party legislators, the *Tribunal Constitucional Plurinacional* (TCP) [Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal] had in November 2017 effectively overturned the result of the referendum and ruled term limits (set out in article 168 of the constitution) unconstitutional on the grounds that not allowing Morales to stand would go against his rights as a private citizen to participate politically (Goodale 236-237). The calling of the referendum at all had been portrayed by the opposition as a threat to democracy in Bolivia, whatever the outcome (McNelly 2021), but the overturning of the result, and Morales's subsequent participation, meant that a large proportion of the voting population approached the election in October 2020 already questioning its legitimacy, before counting of the votes had even taken place (Zibechi). The protests and counterprotests that followed the election, which involved the blocking of streets and roads, were used by both sides to exert pressure, and discursively each side attempted to legitimate their

claims through slogans identifying themselves as *"el pueblo"* [the people] and as defending Bolivia's democracy.

In the context of the 2019 electoral crisis, key discursive concepts of *el pueblo* and democracy were floating signifiers (Laclau) to which different meanings could be attached by the governing party and their supporters, on the one hand, and by opposition politicians and protesters, on the other. These discursive struggles were really ontological "disagreements" of the kind described by Jacques Rancière, when he explained that disagreement as a conflict is not "between one who says white and another who says black" but "between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness" (1999, x). Though the governing party and social movements that supported them claimed to be acting as the people, they made a declaration in the name of the historically marginalized majority of the nation and defended a democracy based on their revolutionary struggle for equality with those that had excluded them. The opposition politicians and protestors, by proclaiming to be or to represent the *pueblo,* made similar claims to their own powerlessness in the face of fourteen years of government by the MAS party, not based on historical discrimination and exclusion from power but rather on a conception of democracy focused solely on the ballot box.

The "people" are usually defined as those in opposition to, and their struggle against the powerful in society (Hall 360). They are what Rancière has referred to as "the part that has no part" (1999, 30), the *demos*, whose struggle for equality forms them as a subject. Evo Morales himself played a significant role in the collective struggles of Bolivia's social movements by leading protests against the neoliberal economic model in the years prior to his election in 2005, which would shape these movements as "subjects of struggle" (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2015). Throughout Morales's time as president, he would characterize himself as "leading by obeying" the will of the people because he saw himself as a representative of these social movements. The vagueness of the notion of the people in terms of who belongs within it is what gives it its discursive power, though it is never an all-inclusive concept. Rather, according to Laclau, the notion of the people is constructed through an exclusionary us versus them. At various times, Evo Morales's government attempted to create an inclusive national vision of an "us" by opposing it to foreign, anti-Bolivian interests: for example, his government's lawsuit against Chile at the International Court of Justice to reclaim access to the Pacific Ocean. The sense

of loss of the sea, fostered through state-led remembrance, is characterized by Zavaleta Mercado (2008, 35) as having caused incalculable damage to the soul of the country, and by Boccara as leading to generational trauma, and is one of the few shared elements of national identity. However, on the whole, through the MAS government's *proceso de cambio* political program, which placed decolonization at the forefront and emphasized recognition of the rights of *indígena originario campesinos* as a collective subject, it was this Indigenous *originario campesino* majority, who made up the social movements, represented the grassroots of the party, and served as the reference point for the MAS in government.

Democratic politics, from both Rancière's perspective and that of Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta Mercado (2015), is not defined by the successful act of voting in elections, which can serve to maintain the status quo, but by the will of the *demos* themselves (identified by Zavaleta Mercado as the proletariat). For Zavaleta Mercado, writing in 1983 (245), the difficulty of implementing representative democracy was that in Bolivia, its citizens were not considered equal. It is the *forma abigarrada* [motley form] of society that impedes effective representative democracy as an expression of political will (212). By *sociedad abigarrada* [motley society] (Freeland 2019a, 2019b), Zavaleta Mercado referred to the existence of different economic forms alongside one another, such as feudalism and capitalism, and to Bolivia's regional specificity, which have both impeded the formation of a national consciousness (2015, 214). In 2019, the motley form of Bolivian society was evident after Evo Morales left power and Jeanine Áñez became president, when it became clear that what was at stake were different visions of what Bolivia was and should be as a country: the plurinational model instituted by Morales's government—which recognized the existence and rights of Indigenous nations and peoples—and another vision harking back to the republican model of the state—Áñez repeatedly referred to Bolivia as a republic rather than a plurinational state—with its nation-making ideology of *mestizaje.*

In the 2019 electoral crisis, *el pueblo* as a slogan became, at times, a stand-in for democracy. In their book *Coup,* written shortly after the 2019 electoral crisis, Farthing and Becker argue that the contentiousness of the 2019 election was based on "differing conceptions of democracy" (29) operating simultaneously in Bolivia. They echo Zavaleta Mercado in declaring that working-class Bolivia has had a tenuous relationship with representative democracy, arguing rather that "the MAS and Bolivia's social movements

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equate democracy with economic justice, while the middle and upper classes prioritize formal western democratic mechanisms such as the secret ballot and the rule of law" (29). Farthing and Becker (30) further point out that although certain institutional controls may have deteriorated, Bolivia could be said to have become more democratic under Morales as political participation by those previously excluded from politics grew. However, despite Morales's overwhelming electoral successes since first becoming Bolivia's president, from early on in his presidency there were sections of the urban upper and middle classes that had previously dominated Bolivian politics but now felt excluded, and referred to Morales as a dictator, implying (ironically, given previous governments' subservient relationship with the US) that his government was taking orders from Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez rather than acting in the national interest.

Although, as Goodale describes, the MAS government under Morales did use the law to make life difficult for some of its critics, claims of genuine dictatorship would seem to rest on citizens' ability to change their government through elections. When Morales, with the support of the Bolivian Supreme Court, ignored the result of a 2016 referendum over whether he should be allowed to stand for president for a fourth time, he justified this by claiming that "the people" wanted him to stay on. However, in doing so, he gave his opponents fuel for their claims that Morales was a threat to democracy. Although on the face of it, protests following Bolivia's 2019 election were based on claims that fraud had been committed in order to ensure that Morales would win a first-round victory, those protests had begun as a response to Morales's decision to run at all and were founded on the belief that his postulation created the basis for a fraudulent election. Opponents of the government attempted to support their own claims of defending democracy by proclaiming themselves representatives of the Bolivian "people," the powerless masses struggling against the new political elite: the MAS government. Rafael Bautista (90) has argued that this self-designation, focusing solely on the ballot box, was a perverse rendering of the concept of *pueblo* into its opposite, because it was not based on the centuries of decolonial struggle of the Indigenous and working-class sectors of Bolivia but of a displaced seigneurial elite, whose claim to defend Bolivian democracy was based on upholding the institutionality of Bolivia's electoral system and excluding the real *demos.*

I argue that the self-designation as the people by demonstrators against Evo Morales indeed attempted to appropriate the popular struggle implied in

the term, to discursively suggest their own political disenfranchisement and legitimate their protest. To do so required an othering of counter-protesters (those supporting Morales's government) and a delegitimating of their right to protest themselves. Those protesters who came in support of Morales as well as the *wiphala* as an Indigenous symbol, however, had centuries of struggle behind them. For both anti-government protesters and their counterparts, identifying as the people was an important part of legitimating their protest. The meaning attached to each side's idea of the people was expressed symbolically. Above all, the flags used in the protests came to represent different visions of the state: the tricolor harking back to the republican model, and the *wiphala,* the recognition of the state's plurinational character. The 2019 electoral crisis was, then, at least in part, a struggle fought in the streets to define symbolic belonging and its collective expression in contemporary Bolivia.

This article is divided into four parts. The first is a description of the events of the Bolivian election itself, drawing on the author's own experiences of the election at the polling station in the *ayllu*[3] of Amarete in the municipality of Charazani in the north of the department of La Paz. The second considers the protests in the immediate aftermath of the election, with reference to the author's observations of the protests against the outcome of the election, as well as rallies in support of the government, in the cities of Cochabamba and La Paz. The third examines the symbolism used by the interim government of Jeanine Áñez as well as the use of symbols such as the *wiphala* in protesting her government. The final part discusses the significance of the self-identification by protestors on both sides as *"el pueblo"* in relation to their claims to be protecting democracy.

Election Day

I spent election day in the rural *ayllu* of Amarete in the municipality of Charazani in the department of La Paz in northwest Bolivia, where I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork since 2012. Amarete is around a six-hour bus ride from the city of La Paz, Bolivia's de-facto capital and seat of government. Elections there, as elsewhere in the country, took account of local as well as nacional political divisions. For example, I have previously noted that

[3] An *ayllu* is a kin-based community with pre-Hispanic origins, in which land is held in common and positions of authority are occupied on a rotating basis by all of the married couples in the community.

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the election of the local Amarete mayor in 2015 had much more to do with the rivalries between local communities than between political parties (Alderman 252). In fact, a middle-aged man in the polling station (the local school), who had previously been a councilor, told me that in the previous election, "there had only been one party." That is, though there had been other parties, everyone had voted for Evo Morales and the MAS party without a further thought. This time it was different. Locally, the *Movimiento Tercer Sistema* (MTS) [Third System Movement] party was strong, and one group of men told me openly that they were going to vote for its leader, Felix Patzi (who was the governor of the department of La Paz), because they wanted a change. While they had previously always voted for Morales, they would not now because of perceived corruption within the party: one scandal that made an impression on people locally was the funds that went missing from the *Fondo de Desarrollo para los Pueblos Indígenas Originarios y Comunidades Campesinas* (FONDIOC) [Development Fund for the Indigenous Originary Peoples and Peasant Communities]. Over time, many people had also become fed up with the way the MAS party, which was made up of grassroots social movements (in which decisions are supposed to be made on the basis of consensus), had become increasingly authoritarian in its structure. As anthropologist Thomas Grisaffi has noted through his ethnographic research on the Chapare coca unions, although Morales proclaimed time and again that he led by obeying, members and activists among the party's grassroots increasingly felt that decisions were imposed without their voices being heard. On the bus the day before, I had overheard conversations between men from Amarete regarding the election. Several were critical of Morales and his party, but the consensus seemed to be that it would be better if he stayed in power for the sake of continuity and stability.

Though not an official election observer, I spent the day at the voting station talking to friends while observing voting and the counting of votes. There was, however, an official election observer from the Organization of American States (OAS), and the various parties were allowed their own local observer to make sure everything seemed in order. Three people from the electoral court also sat at a table facing the school building, where the voting was taking place. After everyone had voted, the votes were read aloud and then tallied for all to see. From my personal observations, Evo Morales seemed to have taken around 70 percent of the vote in Amarete, which was confirmed later in the official figures. Most of the others had voted for Felix Patzi, the leader of the MTS party and a former education minister, or Chi Hyun Chung, a

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Korean Bolivian doctor and pastor and the candidate for the *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (PDC) [Christian Democratic Party].

In the evening, I decided to accept a lift back to the city with a friend in his minibus. We followed the count as it came in throughout our journey, until it suddenly stopped after a few hours, with 83 percent of the vote counted. The rest of the journey took on an ominous air, as some in the minibus speculated that the government had stopped the count in order to fix the vote. My friend told me (jokingly, I think) that if the election went to a second-round run-off between Evo Morales and his nearest challenger, Carlos Mesa, and Mesa won, then I would have to bring my friend to England. He believed that he could lose his job as a park ranger as a result of a possible change of government, since he thought that Mesa's *Comunidad Ciudadana* (CC) [Citizens Community] party would likely put their own people in place.

The results that we had been hearing come in were those that had been put through the *Transmisión de Resultados Electorales Preliminares* (TREP) [Transmission of Preliminary Electoral Results] rapid count system, used by the *Tribunal Supremo* Electoral (TSE) [Supreme Electoral Tribunal], to make public an approximate vote count ahead of the official result. After a considerable pause, the counting of results continued, and Morales surged from being slightly behind Mesa to eventually beating his rival by more than the 10 percent threshold necessary to trigger a second-round run-off (Arigho-Stiles). Although the delay in reporting of the final results was to be expected given the physical process of transferring votes from distant voting centers to electoral courts in departmental capitals, such was the distrust of many voters regarding the electoral process that many people—including some in the minibus in which I traveled back to La Paz from Amarete—assumed the results were being manipulated. After the event, statistical analysis by Williams and Curiel at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) would find no evidence of fraud or irregularities in the vote counting, but anecdotes posted on social media shortly after voting closed describing irregularities, such as citizens' dead relatives appearing on voting registers as if they had voted, fomented suspicion among the public regarding the validity of the process (Salazar Lohman 2020, 41; Facebook posts of personal contacts in Bolivia).

For months before the election took place, Carlos Mesa and other opposition politicians had declared that the election was going to be fraudulent, thus preparing their supporters to protest its outcome. The MAS, likewise, prepared their supporters for the possibility of a coup d'état (McNelly 2021). Indeed, in early 2019, while out with one of my *compadres* (I am

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godfather to his son) in one of the other *ayllus* in the municipality of Charazani, we sat on a hillside discussing local and national events while his goats were grazing, and he speculated seriously on the possibility of an attempted coup, invoking Venezuela as a comparison. As McNelly (2021) points out, the priming of voters from both sides of the political divide is largely why declarations of a coup and fraud began to be made before there was any clear evidence for either position.

The Post-Election Protests

In the immediate aftermath of the election, protests became violent, with several electoral offices where ballots were being held burned down, and one person having to jump from the roof of the electoral offices in Potosí as a result. However, these briefly violent protests were followed by more peaceful barricades of streets, which brought whole cities to a halt for twenty-one days across the country. I had been planning to travel to the city of Cochabamba to stay with friends after the election, and I made my way there as quickly as I could in order to avoid the inevitable roadblocks that would soon stop transport from entering the city.

On arrival in Cochabamba, I found streets blocked by tires, branches, string, and occasionally even children's toys (Figs. 1 and 2). The motivation behind the street blockades was to bring the Bolivian economy to a halt and force the government to concede to the demands for a run-off between Evo Morales and Carlos Mesa. In Susan Ellison's ethnography of conflict resolution in Bolivia, *Domesticating Democracy: The Politics of Conflict Resolution in Bolivia,* a union leader explains to her that "the blockade isn't the end of negotiation. It's the beginning. It's the invitation to negotiation" (116). The street blockades, as well as vigils, *cabildos abiertos* (open public meetings), and civic strikes were attempts by ordinary citizens, though overwhelmingly (but not exclusively) middle- and upper-class urban Bolivians, to bring the govern- ment to the negotiating table in their demand for a second round of voting.

Prado Salmon argues that the failure to respect the result of the 2016 referendum radicalized and strengthened opposition against Morales beyond the sectors that had always opposed his government. This included previously unpoliticized sectors of the population that were aggrieved by the verdict of the TCP, a comparative economic downturn in the latter years of the Morales

government,[4] and the perception that the government favored rural and Indigenous sectors through infrastructure projects often derided as white elephants. He also points out that today's urban middle class includes not just ethnically white people but mestizos and ethnically Indigenous people, many originating from Indigenous communities who may not have the same aspirations as their parents, and to whom the Indigenous discourse of the MAS party does not hold such great appeal (30; see also Maclean). The protests were not exclusively urban in nature either. Notably, on November 7, the Qhara Qhara Nation (in the north of Potosí) released a manifesto accusing Morales of having lost his Indigenous identity and calling for him to stop sending Indigenous people as cannon fodder to support his own interests (Zibechi 30-31).

Figure 1: A street blockade of toys in the northern zone of Cochabamba
Photo Credit: Jonathan Alderman

[4] McNelly (2021) points out that under the Morales government, the middle class had grown larger and become increasingly well-educated, but this had not improved their employment prospects, which had ramifications during the latter years of the Morales presidency in undermining some of the support he enjoyed from popular sectors with middle-class aspirations.

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On October 24, Morales arrived in the city of Cochabamba for his victory speech, he was accompanied by tens of thousands of people who had arrived from the provinces, marching and chanting that *their* vote had to be respected,[5] and that *the people* supported Evo Morales: "*Evo, hermano, el pueblo está contigo*" [Evo, brother, the people are with you]. Both urban *cochabambinos* blocking the streets and Morales's supporters marching into the city from the provinces attempted to claim a narrative by which they were the ordinary Bolivians whose legitimate vote was under threat. Several acquaintances I spoke to around this time who lived in urban middle-class areas in the north of Cochabamba rejected the legitimacy of the counter-protesters supporting Morales by claiming that they were all being paid by the president to march in support of him. However, as Grisaffi (85) has pointed out, though it has long been argued by many white middle-class and upper-class urban Bolivians that when social movements protest, it is because they are paid or forced to do so, in reality union and *ayllu* members march and block roads because a consensus has been reached within their organizations to do so. Rather than being paid to protest, they would be fined if they did not join the protests. Less privileged working-class people that I spoke to, such as a taxi driver attempting to navigate the city despite the blockades, pointed out that the people protesting tended to be those who could afford not to work. The longer that urban street blockades went on, the more common it became for fights to break out between people trying to go about their day to earn a living and those who could afford not to do so.

During Evo Morales's speech in Cochabamba's main square, he referred to his rival for the presidency, Carlos Mesa, as a "*golpista*" and disparagingly described the blockades made by urban Bolivians across the city as using "*pitita amarrada*" [little bits of string tied together] (Amurrio Montes).[6] He also suggested that the people blocking the streets were doing so in return for money or good grades in their studies, declaring, "Les puedo dar cátedra para hacer paros y bloqueos" [I could give a seminar on how to perform strikes and

[5] The discourse from both sides was that their vote should be respected, with the anti-government protesters chanting "*Evo, carajo, mi voto se respeta*," whereas MAS supporters in their own marches into the center of Cochabamba held banners that read "*El voto del campo también cuenta*."

[6] During many of the protests against the re-election of Evo Morales, opposition groups, particularly those in middle-class residential areas, attempted to overcome a lack of people to physically block the streets by using rope or string tied from one side of the street to the other.

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blockades (Red Uno).[7] A friend of mine from Amarete had been similarly dismissive of the urban street blockades when I sent him a photo of the streets in Cochabamba. In his reply, he said, "Those *q'aras* (in a general sense, white urban Bolivians), what do they know about blockades?, the people in the countryside, we can teach them by closing all the entrances to the city. Now nothing will be able to enter the city, and ¿what are they going to eat?"[8]

Figure 2: A street blockade in the northern zone of Cochabamba using cardboard, branches, flags, and wire
Photo Credit: Jonathan Alderman

[7] Morales had risen to prominence as a leader of the Chapare coca growers' union, finally becoming president in 2006, after leading protests that included road blockades against the privatization of water in Cochabamba in 2000 and later the export of gas through Chile in 2003. When he became president, he portrayed himself as following in the footsteps of Tupak Katari, who had led an Aymara rebellion against Spanish colonial rule in 1781, and whose own blockade of La Paz led to starvation within the city. Before being quartered, Katari is said to have declared that he would return as millions (Canessa 2000, 125; see also Dangl).

[8] *Q'ara* or *k'ara* literally means "peeled" to refer to white people, though the word can also refer to people who do not engage in the same practices as rural Andean Indigenous, and therefore is also sometimes used to refer to an Indigenous person who

Although this was clearly the case, a friend in the city of Cochabamba told me that the motivation for the roadblocks was precisely to annoy peasants living outside the city, who were assumed to be Morales's supporters, into pressuring the government into organizing a second round of the vote because of their consequent desperation to get their products to market.

At the time of Morales's speech, I was staying in a hostel in Cochabamba, and the hostel's owner, Antonio, told me he thought that Morales had made things worse by mocking the urban street blockades. In referring to street blockades as *"pitita amarrada,"* Morales seemed to be not only mocking the street blockades as not being real blockades but also attempting to highlight the lack of manpower in them, and thereby minimizing the popular support for the protests. I didn't think much of this until I saw someone on Facebook posting a clip of the speech and repeating Antonio's comment that Morales should have been conciliatory.[9] Shortly after, the hashtag #pitita emerged online, and people involved in the urban street blockades began to adopt the label self-referentially.

On November 10, 2019, the electoral observers of the OAS, composed of more than twenty experts in electoral processes, released a report on the elections (OAS). They had agreed to conduct an audit after being officially requested to do so by Bolivian Foreign Minister Diego Pary Rodríguez on the proviso that the report's findings be binding (Farthing and Becker 56-57). When the report was released, it suggested serious irregularities and effectively forced Morales to call for a new electoral process to begin. However, when he did so, it was already too late. Two days earlier, on November 8, police had mutinied in Cochabamba, followed by the cities of Sucre, Santa Cruz, Oruro, Potosí, and Tarija. The next morning, I learned that the *Unidad Táctica de Operaciones Policiales* (UTOP) [Police Operations Tactical Unit] that guards the presidential palace had abandoned their posts, and as I walked past the police station near the Plaza del Estudiante in La Paz, I heard protesters urging police to *"unir al pueblo"* [unite the people]. Cahuapaza Mamani (37) describes one of the myths in the discourse of the *pititas,* explaining that when they mutinied,

has lost their cultural moorings (Van Vleet 29, Canessa 2012). In reference to the way that the electoral conflict appeared broadly to have divided along lines of ethnicity and the rural/urban, another of my friends in the municipality of Charazani, in a Whatsapp conversation on November 16, 2019, remarked that "en La Paz parece hay guerra entre *q'aras* y *t'aras*" [in La Paz it seems like a war between *q'aras* and *t'aras*), *t'ara* being a synonym for "kolla" or "indio" (Loayza Bueno 97).

[9] See also Cahuapaza Mamani 25.

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the police had reconciled with their *"pueblo,"* as if the police were supposed to stand with one sector of Bolivian society rather than the entire population. Morales's position felt untenable, and so it proved to be. After twenty-one days of street blockades in cities nationwide, he and his vice-president, Álvaro García Linera, resigned, having been strongly advised by the head of the military to leave office. The military's intervention is part of the reason many have labeled Morales's removal from office as a coup.[10] The use of the label *pitita* helped the urban street protesters to challenge this narrative by emphasizing their role in Morales's downfall and to promote the alternative narrative that he resigned as the result of a popular uprising in which the Bolivian people overthrew a dictator.

The "Coup" and Its Symbolic Consolidation and Rejection

Jeanine Áñez, a senator from Beni for the *Movimiento Demócrata Social* (MDS) [Social Democratic Movement] party, became interim president on November 12, with a mandate to do little more than organize new elections for January 21 the following year. Within days of her assuming office, roadblocks between cities were set up nationwide to pressure the government into doing just that. During this period, Morales, who had fled to Mexico ("El gobierno"), was recorded in a phone conversation urging one of the organizers of the roadblocks to starve those in the cities. Despite roadblocks being a common and accepted part of the protest against the government in Bolivia, framing the roadblocks as an attempt to starve urban Bolivians enabled the interim government to portray participants—and Morales himself—as terrorists, effectively othering them and implying that their protest was less valid than the urban street blockades. However, although generally not enunciated in such terms explicitly, roadblocks of cities always seem to imply the threat of the potential starvation of their inhabitants if the protest is prolonged. Contemporary manifestations by Indigenous movements, including roadblocks of Bolivian cities, particularly those encircling the city of La Paz, hearken back to the blockade of the city in 1781 by Tupak Katari, which did actually starve residents (Canessa 2000, 127-128; Makaran and López). The threat of such an outcome is what gives the roadblock its power.

[10] See, for example, Farthing and Becker.

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Blockades and marches could be defined as a form of "unarmed militancy," a term coined by Carwil Bjork-James, which describes "the use of forceful, combative tactics—such as barricades, property destruction, hand-on pushes and thrown projectiles—in political mobilization to serve symbolic, tactical, and strategic goals" (515). The tactics of the *pititas* allowed protesters to maintain "a fundamental moral distinction" (515) between the violence of police repression (of which there was, in fact, very little, in this case) and their own ostensibly nonviolent resistance—even though they counted on the support of the *Resistencia Juvenil Cochala* (RJC) [Cochabamba Youth Resistance] in Cochabamba and the *Unión Juvenil Cruceña* (UJC) [Cruceña Youth Union] in Santa Cruz, which behaved like paramilitary organizations (Cahuapaza Mamani 35, "Grave: Resistencia…"). *Pititas* also discursively attempted to claim a moral force as *"the people"* that had forced a fraudulent government to step down through their street blockades. Such claims, however, had to confront counterprotests in the form of road blockades. Labeling those organizing road blockades as terrorists was a way of delegitimizing their engagement in a very similar form of protest, while at the same time as implying that they were outside the category of *"the people."*

After Áñez was sworn in, protests against her government in Senkata in El Alto, the city neighboring La Paz, and Huayllani in the department of Cochabamba, were put down violently by the military, who shot over a hundred protesters, killing at least twenty-one (Farthing and Becker 149-153). Although some demonstrations were partly in protest of the way that the regime had taken power, whereas some were explicitly in support of Morales, they were more broadly in support of Indigenous symbols. In the days after Áñez became president, I noticed that the *wiphala,* the Andean flag and an explicitly decolonial and Indigenous Andean symbol, had been taken down from government buildings in La Paz, and photos and videos circulated of the *wiphala* being burned and of a policeman cutting the Andean flag from his uniform. Overwhelmingly, the protests that followed were explicitly in defense of the *wiphala* as a symbol of the inclusion of Indigenous people.

The backlash led to the *wiphala* suddenly appearing all over La Paz in places where there had previously been no flag at all, such as cafes and restaurants, either in a show of solidarity or out of fear that their business might be attacked if it did not show the flag. Meanwhile, friends in El Alto told me they too were obliged by their neighbors to fly the flag. Pablo Mamani Ramírez believes that though some people were pressured at first, bit by bit the consensus was that a grave offense had been committed against a patriotic

symbol (85). People flew the flag of their own volition and out of solidarity to show their belonging to an "us" against "them" (82). Mamani Ramírez describes El Alto as becoming *wiphalizado* [wiphala-ized] and argues that a national sentiment arose around the *wiphala* as symbol of resistance (84). On November 11, politicians and police publicly asked for forgiveness and raised the flag once again on government buildings (83).

In 1970, Bolivian philosopher Fausto Reinaga wrote that there were two Bolivias: the mestizo Bolivia with their flag, crest, and national anthem, and the republic of Indians that also has their own flag, crest, and national anthem. The truth in the symbolic differences was evident in the protests at which the two flags were at the heart. At protests against Morales, barely a *wiphala* could be seen. Instead, the Bolivian national flag was omnipresent. Meanwhile, the *wiphala* became a focal point for protests partly in support of Morales, but following the election, as a wider defense of the political gains of Indigenous people in Bolivia under the Morales government. In addition to the wiphala and the *tricolor,* as the Bolivian national flag is often known, other objects came to be significant in emphasizing indigeneity or resistance. These included the previously mentioned *pitita*, the *pollera*[11] and briefly corn on the cob, which became a symbol of resistance to the Áñez government after one was thrown at Luis Fernando Camacho, the leader of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee and a prominent opposition leader during the crisis. These "symbolic objects" are "powerful and potent signifiers of political contention" that are "at once physical objects and symbolically potent" (Gardner and Abrams 14).

During the 2019 electoral crisis, the *tricolor* briefly became contentious through its visibility in protests by those protesting Morales's reelection. Part of the contentiousness lay in the apparently genuine association by opposition politicians and protestors of the *wiphala* with the MAS party. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the centrality of the *wiphala* as a symbol of the MAS party's *proceso de cambio* [process of change]. Mamani Ramírez (84) quotes Camacho as admitting that he had failed to understand the wider significance of the *wiphala*. Despite the importance given to the *wiphala*—or perhaps because of this, given that much of the discourse of Áñez's government did not recognize the legitimacy of the plurinational state—opposition politicians associated the flag with a political party rather than seeing it as significant to the Bolivian

[11] The pleated skirt used by Indigenous women in Andean Bolivia. In the days after Evo Morales left office, videos circulated showing women in *polleras* being insulted and attacked.

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people. Following videos showing the burning of the flag, it was only when people living in El Alto came out in the flag's defense that it was reinforced as a symbol of resistance (Mamani Ramírez 89-90).

In a recent book, Vincent Nicolas recounts how the *wiphala* originated as not one flag but as a name for many different flags adhering to the crown. Chukiwanka (cited in Mamani Ramírez 77) has further shown the existence of many different precolonial *wiphalas* throughout the Andean region, on which the modern *wiphala* is based. The current meaning of the *wiphala* as an exclusively Indigenous political symbol of struggle comes from the flag's prominence in mobilizations of the Tupak Katari Indigenous federation of La Paz from the 1970s onward and the cocaleros and other federations between 1992 and 2000.

According to Nicolas, it is clear that for those who burned the *wiphala* and those who reacted against this act, the *wiphala* had become a physical representation of the government itself (152-153). As Nicolas notes, "with Evo Morales in power, the *wiphala* had become the alter ego of the *tricolor*" (156); it occupied official state spaces but lost space in the political field, as the MAS came to use national and departmental symbols that had long been favored by the opposition. Nicolas contends that in the days before Morales left office, the *wiphala* was strangely absent from demonstrations in favor of the government. Indeed, when Morales gave his speech deriding *pititas* in the Plaza 14 de Septiembre in Cochabamba (the city's main square), it was the black, white, and blue flag of the MAS party that was (probably unsurprisingly) prominent. Mamani argues that after Morales left office and images of the *wiphala* being removed from police uniforms and burned by "pititas" had been seen by people across Bolivia, it was then that the *wiphala* really became a national symbol and a political project in its own right: the reconquest of power (see also Nicolas 156). With Morales's departure, the flag came to represent Indigenous Bolivia in a way that was much less loosely aligned with the MAS party, and much more a symbol of resistance against a new government that many people saw as illegitimate. With Morales gone, the *wiphala* assumed the role of symbolic guardian and defender of Indigenous territories and nations (Huanca Coila 67). After all, if we take the position of there have been a *coup d'état,* then as María Galindo (250) argues, it was not (just) Morales and his ministers who were the victims but large numbers of people who were at the mercy of a government willing to violently kill its own citizens, as was seen in Sacaba and Senkata.

¿Si esto no es el pueblo, el pueblo dónde está?

As María Galindo (245) and others (Paley, Gutiérrez Aguilar 2020) have noted, each side in the polarized environment of late 2019 attempted to impose their own reading of the crisis: fraud or coup. Both took the position that if you are not with us, then you are against us. For Galindo (250), these two positions were mirrors mutually reflecting and reinforcing one another. In national discourse, *pititas* and *masistas,* the groups representing the two perspectives—fraud and coup—were also radically opposed in a Manichean duality during the 2019–2020 period (Rocha Gonzales 343). Their protests were dominated symbolically by the Bolivian *tricolor* (the *pititas*), on the one hand, and the *wiphala* (the *masistas*), on the other, though as already discussed, after the fall of Evo Morales the characterization of the latter group as *masistas* became more of a projection by the former, as protests became more about defending Indigenous symbols than unequivocally calling for the return of the former president. Indeed, marchers from El Alto protesting the massacre of Senkata were heard to chant, "We are not from the MAS, we are not terrorists, we are from El Alto and El Alto must be respected!" (Clandestina 38).

This dichotomy was reinforced by discourse projecting each side as the real representative of the Bolivian people and protecting democracy from the other side. This could be heard at protests, where both sides chanted, *"¿si esto no es el pueblo, el pueblo donde está?*" [if this is not the people, where are the people?] as if in defiance of anyone challenging their right to identify as such. Meanwhile, I heard *masistas* marching down Avenida Heroínas in Cochabamba (toward Plaza 14 de Septiembre) and the Prado in La Paz chant, *"Evo, hermano, el pueblo está contigo"* [Evo, brother, the people are with you] and *pititas* in their blockades and their own marches elsewhere in Cochabamba chanting, *"Evo, lloqalla, el pueblo no se calla"* [Evo, Indian boy, the people will not be silenced].[12] This discourse could also be seen illustrated in a mural (Fig. 3) that appeared on Avenida Arce near San Andrés University in late October or early November 2019. In the mural, two hands labeled "*interés propio*" [self-interest] pull apart a salteña [an iconic Bolivian snack], causing the juice to fall to the floor between them while speech bubbles from each side exclaim, "*Quiero mi Pueblo*" [I want my people].

[12] *Lloqalla*: Aymara for young boy. This was an adaptation of the common chant "*fusil, metralla, el pueblo no se calla"* [rifle, shrapnel, the people will not be silenced], which emphasizes that the power of the people does not necessarily lie with the ballot box.

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Figure 3: Mural on Avenida Arce showing the *pueblo* (in the form of a salteña) being torn apart by self-interest on both sides
Photo Credit: Jonathan Alderman

In La Paz, when the Interamerican Human Rights Commission held a meeting in the well-to-do south of the city in late November 2019 to investigate the killings of protesters in Senkata and Huayllani, I spoke with upper-class Bolivians who were protesting the fact that an investigation into the massacres was happening at all. Meanwhile, another smaller group of people from El Alto arrived to give evidence as witnesses into the massacre in Senkata. Identifying me as a foreigner, and perhaps thinking I may be a journalist, several of these white upper-class Bolivians, whom I assumed to live locally, cornered me, and insisted that the Bolivian people had never been so united as they were now. To refer to the Bolivian people as united seemed to be a denial that the group who had come to protest the actions of the interim government were included in the category of the "Bolivian people" at all. Molina (145) argues that in the political crisis of 2019, white Bolivians, having lost their social status during the government of Evo Morales, behaved as a racially discriminated ethnicity

attempting to regain their privileged public space, at the same time projecting themselves as "a *universal* identity, the only one that did not equate to an 'ethnicity' but to a 'people.'" However, though claiming an identity as "the people" has a universalizing aspect to it, it is also, as I will go on to discuss, constructed on the basis of exclusion, of "us" versus "them."

El pueblo (a much more evocative word than its English translation, "the people") is a powerful word because of its multivalence. It can of course refer to a physical place as well as a political community (Eiss), but with reference to a community of people it is also a "plastic and flexible notion that can be deployed in many different ways" (Olson 108, cf. Badiou). *El pueblo* can refer to both the totality of a society within a territory or state, regardless of its social circumstances, or in opposition to those with power (Escudero Durán 24). The latter is a definition of *el pueblo* through its radical exteriority, a category constructed historically and conceptually based on exclusion (Bosteels 2), or as Rancière (1999, 30) puts it, "[T]he part that has no part." Bosteels argues that "the people as one and indivisible simply does not exist" (4) but is "only ever the result of a process of political becoming" (5), "the people" serving as a name "for the political process that produces its own subject" (20).

Reflecting on the discourse used by the *pititas* during the protests and the beginning of what Bolivian philosopher Rafael Bautista (and Farthing and Becker, among others) refers to as the "soft dictatorship" of the government of Jeanine Áñez, Bautista argues that the term *"pueblo"* became an empty signifier used by right-wing Bolivians to mean the direct opposite of its traditional meaning. The "*pueblo" qua "pueblo"* is a subject formed around the historical memory of centuries of resistance to the colonial invader and the relationships of coloniality that have been the legacy of colonialism. It is not the whole of national society (31) but stands in opposition to the traditional elite (Huanca 64). For political theorist Ernesto Laclau it is precisely in the gap between signifier and signified that the people arise as a category that disparate groups can fill with their own meaning (Laclau 120, Linden 2). The category's lack of clarity is viewed by Laclau as useful in unifying disparate groups with their own struggles and demands (12). Laclau defines an empty signifier as "the construction of a popular identity once the presence of a stable frontier is taken for granted" (133), which he compares to the floating signifier that "tries conceptually to apprehend the logic of the displacements of that frontier" (133). That is, "[t]he boundary is constructed by the empty signifier that unites the 'us', but the meaning of the empty signifier derives from the political struggle. This means that antagonisms can change their signification

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and modify the configuration between 'us' and 'them' as the signifiers floats (sic)" (Linden 12-13). As we saw in the 2019 Bolivian electoral crisis, the term *pueblo* is ambiguous enough that it can be attached to competing political projects, particularly in a context in which both sides in a conflict view themselves as marginalized from power. As a signifier, it floats between these competing antagonistic discourses, and the meaning of the signifier must be constituted performatively (Laclau 153, Linden 2). In a similar vein, Judith Butler argues that "the people" as a subject is constituted through "performative enactments" that are a "plural form of self-designation" (54). Assembling is itself a "performative political enactment" by which those gathered together are engaged in "self-designation and the exercise of popular sovereignty, lending or withdrawing support, declaring their independence from the regimes that depend upon it for legitimacy" (54). The declaration to be *the pueblo,* made in public gatherings, and supported by national symbols, such as the *tricolor* on the one side and the *wiphala* on the other, can itself be regarded as an act of discursive resistance to a government by protesters that perceive it as out of touch.

Bautista (23) declares that without the *pueblo* there is no politics. In this, he would be in agreement with Jacques Rancière, who regards "the people" to be at the center of all truly political action. Rancière (1999, 2010) challenges any idea of the people as a unified, homogenous entity and emphasizes heterogeneity and the capacity for self-emancipation within society. He asserts that political equality can only be achieved by disrupting and challenging established orders, exposing their arbitrary nature, and redistributing power among the people. In Rancière's view, the people are not defined solely by their socioeconomic conditions or predetermined identities but emerge through political subjectification, the process by which individuals or groups assert their presence and make themselves heard in the political sphere. He emphasizes the capacity of marginalized and excluded groups to challenge their own subjugation and actively participate in shaping the political order. For Rancière, democracy relies on the constant reconfiguration of the political landscape through the disruptive actions of those who are traditionally considered outside the realm of politics. Subjectification is not simply a matter of demanding recognition of one's preexisting identity or social position but, he contends, involves a reconfiguration of the political landscape. The process of subjectification is characterized by the dissensus that emerges when those who have been marginalized or excluded contest the existing distribution of power and disrupt the dominant order.

To make a claim to be "the people," for Laclau, is to do so in contradistinction to the dominant ideology, or the institutional system. In doing so, "the people, as an oppressed part of a divided society[,] claim the right to stand in for society as a whole, deposing the parasitic minority who, they claim, illegitimately cling to power" (Beasley-Murray 364). Evo Morales and the MAS party rose to power constructing discursively an idea of the *pueblo Boliviano* based on subaltern, Indigenous, and urban popular sectors —those who have been excluded from power throughout Bolivia's history. The *pueblo* that has been the main subject of the MAS political program of government is what Gutiérrez Aguilar (2015) has referred to as a "subject of struggle" forged through the political upheavals in the early 2000s around natural resources—the *guerra del agua* and *guerra del gas*—that forced both Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa to leave office as presidents. The so-called *Agenda de Octubre* that emerged from the protests, which called for the nationalization of natural resources and a constituent assembly (Salazar Lohman 2015, 172) and was driven by the *Pacto de Unidad* [Unity Pact] between the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB) [Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia], *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia* (CIDOB) [Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia], and *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyu* (CONAMAQ) [Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qollasuyu], which was itself an act of subjectivation. Through these protests, social movements redefined "the people" to whom the country's democracy belonged (Bjork-James 64). Because struggles over national resources were also of concern to urban and middle-class Bolivians, this allowed the MAS to create a broad-based coalition of support beyond the Chapare coca growers and Indigenous and other subaltern groups. The protests of the early 2000s, argue Salman and Soruco, undermined the status of the elites in Bolivia and helped Evo Morales and the MAS party be elected to government as an anti-elite movement. As a government, they became what Salman and Soruco refer to as an "anti-elite elite" (619).

One of the challenges that the MAS faced was to turn a resistance movement into a hegemonic program of government. The particular demand of the *cocaleros* to protect coca and reject North American imperialism was easily extended at national level as a defense of national sovereignty and resources (Errejón Galván) through the ostentatious "nationalization" of Bolivia's gas on May 1, 2006. However, the particular idea of who or what was included in the notion of *el pueblo* tended to be refracted though the biography

of the president himself, an Indigenous Aymara migrant to the Quechua-speaking tropics of Cochabamba. This is very unsubtly manifest through Morales's own X (formerly Twitter) handle, @evoespueblo, and the title of the 2007 film *Evo Pueblo*, which shows Morales's difficult upbringing in the rural Bolivian highlands, his militancy amongst the Chapare coca unions and eventual rise to become president. Culturally, the MAS party reinforced its political hegemony through symbols such as the *wiphala,* which it used as a symbolic representation of Indigeneity. However, the *wiphala* could never function symbolically as a synecdoche for all Bolivians precisely because it is so explicitly an Indigenous symbol.

The *proceso de cambio* of the MAS government has been referred to as a continuation of the national-popular project of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) [Nationalist Revolutionary Movement], Bolivia's party of government following the 1952 National Revolution. However, as Prado Salmon has noted, though the MNR included the middle class—its slogan was *"obreros, campesinos, y clases medias"* (29), and indeed it could be characterized as more of a middle-class project with a paternalistic perspective on the countryside—the MAS focused on the *"pueblos indigena originario campesinos"* and, at times, confronted the middle class as *q'aras,* neoliberals, and *derechistas* (28-29). However, the nationalization of the mines and agrarian reform by the MNR government in the post-revolutionary period were explicitly directed at an elite group of families who dominated the mining industry and an oligarchy that owned feudal estates and was portrayed by the revolutionary government as representing anti-national interests: nation versus oligarchy. The rhetoric of the revolutionary government of 1952, argues Goudsmit (149), infused the anti-neoliberal discourse of the MAS. That discourse asserts a dichotomy between the nation and anti-national forces, the latter including a displaced social class previously used to governing who sought to destabilize Morales's government with external support.

Ideologically, Evo Morales was influenced by the writings of Fausto Reinaga, who had criticized the Bolivian intellectuals and political parties for imposing ideas of class and *mestizaje* on colonized Indians who were not a social class but, he contended, a people and nation in their own right (Kim 391). For Reinaga, the fundamental problem in Bolivia was that colonial domination was perpetuated by white-mestizo Bolivia over its Indian counterparts. This constituted two Bolivias, two separate nations sharing the same physical territory. The refounding of Bolivia as a plurinational state was the formal recognition of Bolivia's Indigenous nations and peoples and their right to self-

government. When Áñez became president, her government's public rejection of everything that Morales's government stood for had a counterrevolutionary aspect to it. In discourse that referred to Bolivia as a republic, and the disrespect for Indigenous symbols such as the *Pachamama* and *wiphala,* Áñez's government represented a negation of the plurinational state and the decolonizing agenda that had accompanied and created it. As McNelly (2021) has recently highlighted, drawing on Zavaleta Mercado's notion of "crisis as a window through which to study Bolivian society" (McNelly 2021, 79; see also Zavaleta Mercado 2008, 19) that shows "things appear as they truly are" (Zavaleta Mercado 2008, 19, cited in McNelly 2022, 104), during the 2019 crisis the social fissures between the constituent parts of society became evident (McNelly 2022, 104). Zavaleta Mercado viewed Bolivia as a society defined by its heterogeneity, a *sociedad abigarrada* [motley society]. The motley nature of Bolivian society came to the fore in 2019 as sectors of society with different social and political visions of Bolivia as a country—of what they wanted Bolivia to be, and how it should be governed and by whom—confronted one another.

Conclusion

Nation-making is highly symbolic. In the protests following the 2019 election, claims about democracy were made alongside the enactment of differing interpretations of what Bolivia as a nation was and who belonged to it. Symbols, particularly the *tricolor* and *wiphala,* became vital in struggles over the hegemony of the concept of the Bolivian people. Both flags were used as signifiers of the people resisting the machinations of a government that protester viewed as illegitimate. If *pititas* genuinely believed that the *wiphala* represented the MAS government, then their use of the *tricolor* takes on connotations of symbolic resistance. Meanwhile, the symbolism of the *wiphala,* present in manifestations against dictatorships beginning in the early 1980s, only deepened in the protests against its public destruction upon Áñez becoming president.

The disagreement (Rancière 1999) over the nature of the Bolivian people illustrates not only ontologically distinct perspectives on democracy and the nature of the country itself but also both sides' belief in their own disenfranchisement. Although marchers supporting Evo Morales, and later protesting the Áñez government, could draw on centuries of discrimination to inform their own subject formation, protestors against the outcome of the 2019 election, informed by genuine doubts about its legitimacy, could claim

their own disenfranchisement. Given the history of anti-democratic Latin American governments over the last fifty years in opposition to their own citizens, to self-referentially identify as "the people" is to make claims about the legitimacy of one's own cause in relation to the defense of democracy. However, particularly given the discourse and actions of the Áñez government upon taking power, the two different claims to represent *el pueblo* are also attached to different conceptions of Bolivia itself: the plurinational state represented by the *wiphala,* on the one hand, and the open rejection of plurinationalism by the Áñez government, on the other.

The 2019 electoral crisis put the motley nature of Bolivian society on open display (Zavaleta Mercado 2008; McNelly 2021). While the MAS government did not receive as much support in the streets as it had expected prior to Evo Morales's resignation, the Áñez government was the subject of massive protests by people who feared the reversal of the positive social change under Morales's government. As seen in the violent rejection of the *wiphala,* an official national symbol, by anti-government demonstrators and others after Morales's resignation, the plurinational nature of Bolivia remains contested. However, the defense of Indigenous symbols in the streets may have served to loosen the *wiphala's* association with the MAS as a political party and to strengthen it as a patriotic symbol of the plurinational state.

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