

# Cultures of Anti-Racism in Latin America and the Caribbean

edited by Peter Wade, James Scorer and Ignacio Aguiló



INSTITUTE OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

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## 9. Bolivia's anti-racism law: transforming a culture?\*

*Henry Stobart*

The catalyst for Bolivia's 2010 law 'against racism and all forms of discrimination' (law 045) is conventionally and officially identified with a large-scale incident that took place in the city of Sucre (Bolivia's constitutional capital) on 24 May 2008 – a date later declared as the national day against racism and discrimination (law 139 of 2011). In this ugly episode, some 40 *originario* ['native'] people from the provinces who had travelled to the city to welcome president Evo Morales, and take possession of ambulances gifted from Spain, were rounded up by a huge mob of townspeople, forced to strip to the waist and led to the central square. Here, they were made to kneel in humiliation beside the entrance of the Casa de la Libertad [House of Liberty]. Their *wiphala* flags – symbolising native identity – were burnt, they were subjected to verbal and physical abuse and they were forced to kiss the flag of Sucre in an act of submission.<sup>1</sup> The scale, violence and unprecedented nature of this attack, which provoked widespread national and international condemnation, was shocking and remains hard to reconcile with Sucre's usual reputation as a sleepy backwater, beloved by tourists, where 'nothing happens'.

Sucre's 'racist' incident can be interpreted in the context of the rise to power of Evo Morales in 2006, as Bolivia's first 'indigenous president', and the tensions that surrounded the Sucre-based writing of the country's new constitution.<sup>2</sup> In its final stages, in November 2007, this process erupted into violence, tragedy and a wave of destruction which undoubtedly figured

\* My thanks to the late Gregorio Mamani, his family and the many other friends in Bolivia who so generously contributed to this research. Gratitude is also due to Cassandra Torrico, who first suggested focusing my research on Gregorio. The patience, astute comments and editing of Peter Wade and James Scorer are especially appreciated, as is the understanding and support of my wife Diura. I gratefully acknowledge the support towards the research featured in this chapter that was received from the British Academy and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.

1 See also Calla et al. (2011, p. 311) and Gotkowitz (2011, pp. 35–6).

2 See, e.g., Gotkowitz (2011), Calla and Muruchi (2011), Calla et al. (2011) and Ströbele-Gregor (2011). Morales was brought up in a native community and is widely identified as 'indigenous'. However, this subject position has sometimes been questioned, and even denied by Morales himself, who often prefers to stress his labour union background. See 'Evo "nunca" se consideró un presidente indígena', *Página siete*, 25 Sept. 2011.



*Figure 9.1. Burning tyres on the streets of Sucre on 25 November 2007 on the morning after the deaths of three capitalía protesters. (Photo by Henry Stobart.)*

and, in part, motivated the actions of 24 May 2008 (see fig 9.1). At the heart of this conflict was Sucre's demand that Bolivia's seat of government be returned to the city from La Paz, where it was relocated following the Liberal War of 1899. An extended official enquiry was undertaken into the incident of 24 May, lasting many years, and in 2016 12 ex-authorities who had been involved in the incident were sentenced to jail terms, mainly of six years.<sup>3</sup> All 12 defendants then appealed, rejecting the ruling as unfair and political, and have avoided serving prison terms for the incident.<sup>4</sup> Since 2008 several of these defendants have held high-profile civic and political positions in Sucre, clearly with strong local support, which raises questions about how much attitudes and the underlying political climate have changed.

The incident of 24 May has also been understood in the context of a long history of 'silent racism of a structural and quotidian nature' (Calla and Muruchi, 2011, p. 300). Such an approach suggests that racism has a deep and persistent aspect that is embedded in multiple cultural dimensions. Indeed, scholars have long viewed culture as a key basis for racist thought and practices, although attitudes to how this intersects with biology have shifted over time. In the 21st century, according to Laura Gotkowitz (2011, p. 9), 'culture is racism's dominant figure; it lies at the center of racist rhetoric and practice'. If culture and racism are so intimately entwined, it is perhaps not surprising that of the many laws created by Evo Morales during his second term as president, none 'produced as much dissent and strife' as law 045 (Calla et al., 2011, p. 314). According to Pamela Calla and the Observatorio del Racismo research group (2011), critics expressed concerns about the law's potential effectiveness, its punitive nature, and the way it reserved the most severe penalties for public officials, rather than taking a more holistic approach. The most heated objections came from journalists, who viewed certain articles as infringing freedom of expression. For example, Article 16 states that 'Communications media that authorise and publicise racist or discriminatory ideas will be subject to economic sanctions and suspension of operating licenses.' A nationwide hunger strike by journalists was, however, unsuccessful and the law was passed with the original wording (Calla et al., 2011, p. 315).

Newspaper reports from 2014 characterised the law as 'not worth the paper it was written on', arguing that there had been no prosecutions, despite the hundreds of complaints received by the vice-ministry of decolonisation, which is responsible for enacting the law. The Afro-Bolivian congressman, Jorge Medina, who had promoted the law, countered these criticisms by stressing the need for conciliation, where an apology from an aggressor was favoured over punishment, and arguing that the spirit of the law was 'not to

3 'Los sentenciados rechazaron el fallo por considerarlo injusto y político. Anunciaron la apelación del fallo', *Página siete*, 2 March 2016.

4 See 'Caso de 24 Mayo: los 12 sentenciados siguen libres', *Cambio*, 6 April 2017.

fill the prisons with those who discriminate.<sup>5</sup> In October 2016 the law was reinforced by the launch of the smartphone app *No Racismo*, created jointly by Bolivia's ministry of communications and vice-ministry of decolonisation. This provides a phone or chat line to report acts of racism or discrimination, alongside news items, reports, statistics, photos, videos and details of the law. New technology of this kind suggests a strategic focus on students and young people among whom smartphone ownership has grown exponentially in recent years. This stress on younger people and students, who were identified as the primary perpetrators of the violence in Sucre, has also been manifested in the initiative of Student Brigades against Racism and Discrimination. The second national meeting of this organisation, held in Santa Cruz in May 2017, was attended by more than 2,000 school students from around the country and officially opened by Evo Morales. In his speech, Morales claimed that Bolivia had 'managed to recover its identity through recognising its 36 native-peasant nations in the constitution as well as through respect for their culture, clothing, music, dance and language'. He went on to observe that 'the only way to decolonise ourselves is through recovering our dress, our lifeways, and our music. The music's content that is sung is for unity, for the Mother Earth.'<sup>6</sup> Thus, in the context of a major national event dedicated to combatting racism and discrimination, it was cultural expressions that Morales highlighted, pointing in particular to the unifying nature of native music and its connection with the environment. Wilma Alanoca, Bolivia's minister for culture and tourism, also spoke at this meeting's inauguration, emphasising the progress made in the 'process of change' over the 11 years of Morales' presidency. In her view, nothing now blocked the advance of the cultural revolution. Both these key government representatives related combatting racism and discrimination to transforming culture. What, then, might such cultural transformation involve?

When Morales spoke of achieving decolonisation through recovering native-peasant dress, lifeways and music, characterising these as 'our' expressions, questions emerge about *who* this includes and what 'recovery' might mean. Is this an inclusive 'all Bolivians'? Is he suggesting that a form of unity results when cultural expressions, such as music, dance and dress, are 'recovered' from native-peasant peoples, so that all Bolivians can sing, dance and dress up in them together? Images of massive and colourful urban folklore parades spring to mind, alongside a sense of national(istic) unity (Bigenho and Stobart, 2016). Let's not forget, Morales formerly played the trumpet in Oruro-based brass bands that accompanied these large folklore parades. If this is what he was alluding to in his speech, it sounds strikingly reminiscent of Bolivia's 1952 national revolutionary project, which aimed to create a mestizo

5 Franz Chávez, 'Bolivia's anti-racism law – not worth the paper it's written on?', *Inter Press Service*, 13 Feb. 2014.

6 Ministry of culture and tourism ([minculturas.gob.bo](http://minculturas.gob.bo)) news report: 'En 11 años de gobierno Bolivia rompe barreras contra el racismo y la discriminación', 23 May 2017.



nation, represented by a national folklore derived from native-peasant sources, adapted according to European-orientated aesthetics and values to make it 'safe for the nation' (Bigenho, 2005). As elsewhere in Latin America, this 1952 vision of turning all Bolivians into mestizo citizens certainly spoke to an anti-racist agenda or post-racial imaginary. Combatting discrimination was also manifested in the policy of replacing the racist term *indio* ['Indian'] with *campesino* [peasant], thereby erasing ethnic and racial differences in favour of workers' rights and unionism. In this former revolutionary context, native culture became a rich and colourful resource to be mined in order to construct a national folklore culture.

However, from the perspective of contemporary indigenous politics, the 'recovery' of cultural expressions (or their mining for national folklore) looks like 'appropriation' or 'plagiarism'. When Morales speaks of having managed to recover Bolivia's identity through 'recognising its 36 native-peasant nations in the Constitution', he is invoking the official recognition of the country's multiple indigenous peoples in the 2009 constitution – and the re-founding of the country as the 'Plurinational State of Bolivia'.<sup>7</sup> (As a reminder, it was conflicts surrounding the creation of this document in Sucre, between August 2006 and November 2007, which prefigured the violence of 24 May). The 2009 constitution not only recognises the existence of the country's 'indigenous native peasant nations and peoples' but also officially protects their cultural expressions and safeguards their intangible rights over such expressions.<sup>8</sup> When we return to the question of what *recovery* of native-peasant traditions might mean, and who the *we* Morales invokes might – or might not – include, it quickly becomes apparent that expressions of native music, dance and dress are deeply interwoven with the politics of identity and alterity. So, should 'recovery' simply be understood as native culture-bearers making their traditions more visible and maintaining control over them? Might such visibility involve or resist commercialisation? Is adaptation to be welcomed or opposed? As we pose these questions, we quickly discover that we are in deeply contested territory, with long histories of discriminatory practices. For example, as in many other countries, Bolivia's 1992 copyright law cast native music as national property, thereby giving (non-native) citizens liberty to adapt, register and commercialise it as their own (Sanchez, 2001; Bigenho, 2002, p. 221; Brown, 2003). To what extent, then, might 'maintaining control' involve native people employing legal measures to exclude or require payment from non-natives? Can we talk of a

7 The Bolivian political constitution was ratified by national referendum in Jan. 2009.

8 According to article 100 of the 2009 constitution: (i) The world views, myths, oral history, dances, cultural practices, knowledge and traditional technologies are the heritage of the indigenous native peasant nations and peoples. This patrimony forms part of the expression and identity of the state. (ii) The state will protect this wisdom and knowledge through the registration of intellectual property which safeguards the intangible rights of indigenous native peasant nations and peoples, and of intercultural and Afrobolivian communities. In article 102, it is stated that both individual and collective property rights will be protected.

kind of ‘payback’ time? – one that employs some of the very same weapons of exclusion. Viewed from such a perspective, we might ask: do the practices and discourses surrounding native-peasant cultural expressions – such as music, dance and dress – contribute to perpetuating and even hardening the structures of racism and other forms of discrimination? Alternatively, as Morales’ speech suggested, should we look to native-peasant cultural expressions for solutions to Bolivia’s deep-seated structures of racism and discrimination? These questions form the central focus for the reflections in this chapter.

My perspective on these questions draws on my encounters with a number of Sucre-based musicians, most especially Gregorio Mamani Villacorta (1960–2011), who formed the central focus of my research over 11 months in Sucre in 2007–8. How did this *originario* (‘native’) artist and indigenous activist, from a humble rural background, negotiate the socially uneven terrains he inhabited? What were the implications of Evo Morales’ rise to power for native people like Gregorio<sup>9</sup>, and how did race, class and other forms of social difference shape his opportunities and challenges? I then turn to the impact of Morales’ presidency on urban mestizo musicians, whose perspectives we hear before a final concluding section dedicated to a tourist-focused culture show in Sucre. But first let us explore the background to the incident of 24 May.

### **Evo Morales and the Sucre *capitalía* protests**

It is perhaps unsurprising that the rise to power of Evo Morales in 2006, as Bolivia’s first ‘indigenous president’, would provoke a strong backlash from certain quarters of the population. The most extreme opposition came from the gas- and soya-rich Eastern lowland departments of the so-called *media luna* [half-moon-shaped area], especially Santa Cruz, which had already been proposing autonomy from highland Bolivia (Ballvé, 2005; Dunkerley, 2007). Under Morales, indigenous people became paradigmatic citizens who occupied a ‘privileged position vis-à-vis the state’ (Canessa, 2012, p. 204), thus overturning long-established structures of political power, and challenging naturalised understandings of social hierarchy, privilege and identity. From the perspective of Sucre’s privileged classes ‘giving power to the “*indios*” or allowing them to participate politically mean[t] to relinquish the country to the less civilized, the uneducated, the inept, the inferior’ (Ströbele-Gregor, 2011, p. 83). Despite such views, in 2005 Chuquisaca department, of which Sucre is capital, had strongly supported Morales’ election with 54 per cent of the vote. It was also one of only three departments to elect a government-supported Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) prefect, David Sánchez. However, only three years later, in 2008, following the violent so-called *capitalía* protests, demanding

9 I use Gregorio’s first name to reflect the close friendship we developed and my status as *compadre* [co-parent] to the family, as a sponsor (with my wife) of his eldest daughter’s wedding cake.

that the seat of government be returned to the city, Sucre had transformed into an important centre of government opposition. Indeed, in the 2008 recall election Morales was rejected by 67 per cent of Sucre's population (Centellas, 2010, p. 162). These conflicts also led Chuquisaca to become highly polarised between city and countryside, with opposition to Morales centred on the urban population.

In Sucre, local people often refer to their city as the 'capital'. Indeed, it is Bolivia's official constitutional and judicial capital, and hence was host to the constitutional assembly convened to write a new constitution. Losing its historical status as 'full capital', following the civil war in 1899, has long been a source of resentment in Sucre and is used to explain the city's lack of economic dynamism and other woes; complaints that I have heard on and off since first visiting the city in the 1980s. The theme of returning Sucre to 'full capital' status arose a few months after the inauguration of the constitutional assembly (6 August 2006) and was reiterated on several occasions during 2007.<sup>10</sup> In March 2007, a so-called 'citizen interest group' began to mobilise in the form of the 'interinstitutional committee' represented by civic leaders and business interests, led by the rector of the university, Jaime Barrón (Defensor, 2008, p. 79).<sup>11</sup> The strong support for the *capitalía* proposal, voiced by opposition assembly members from eastern lowland departments, was undoubtedly less aimed at benefiting Sucre than harming La Paz; its primary object was to derail the work of the constitutional assembly.

Government attempts to veto discussion of the full capital proposal by the assembly were clumsily handled, further exacerbating tensions.<sup>12</sup> By late September 2007, when I arrived in Sucre with my family to commence research, *capitalía* demonstrations and marches through the city were a daily occurrence, and bands of university students regularly gathered outside the Gran Mariscal theatre to obstruct the work of constituent assembly members. A particular target for harassment and racist insults were Aymara assembly members who wore the *pollera* (Carrasco and Albó, 2008, p. 121). Many of the students involved came from other parts of the country, a particularly thuggish element being the Union Juvenil Cruceñista, a youth wing of the Comité Cívico of Santa Cruz (Ströbele-Gregor, 2011, p. 78). This ongoing intimidation and obstruction of access to the Gran Mariscal theatre provoked organisations

10 Fabio Porcé of the opposition party Podemos, raised the topic of returning Sucre to 'full capital' status during an assembly meeting on 2 Nov. 2006 (Carrasco and Albó, 2008, p. 103; Plaza et al., 2014, p. 266). A formal proposal from Sucre's inter-institutional committee was then made in March 2007, and proposed again by a group of nine opposition assembly members, mainly from the lowland regions of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija in June 2007 (Carrasco and Albó, 2008).

11 Key civic authorities represented on this committee included the city's mayor (Aidé Nava), its civic committee president (John Cava) and its municipal council president (Fidel Herrera).

12 Large-scale mobilisations vehemently rejecting Sucre's proposal were organised in La Paz and El Alto, where huge crowds chanted the slogan *la sede no se mueve* [the seat will not move].

allied to the MAS government to bring groups of indigenous people to Sucre to hold peaceful vigils intended to enable the constituent assembly to continue its work. These vigils were often violently dislodged by the pro-*capitalia* students and – in an attempt to quickly finalise the draft constitution – on 23 November the constituent assembly was relocated to the military training school (Liceo Militar) on the outskirts of the city. On the afternoon of 24 November, and through the night, crowds of *capitalia* protesters attempted to reach the Liceo Militar, which was surrounded by a largely indigenous pro-government vigil. A police cordon, separating the groups, used tear gas and rubber bullets to hold the protesters back, but the violent skirmishes with the police resulted in three deaths among the protesters, who have become known in Sucre as the ‘martyrs of Calancha’. Gradually, through the night, the assembly members were evacuated – a draft text having been agreed for the new constitution – and the vigil dispersed. The next day the police retreated from the city, which then descended into lawlessness and mayhem (see fig. 9.1). In retribution for the deaths, *capitalia* protesters focused their anger on police property, ransacking, looting and burning the city’s police stations, and destroying police vehicles.

This eruption of violence, tragedy and destruction in November 2007, that surrounded the drafting of Bolivia’s new constitution, is a primary context for understanding the incident of 24 May 2008. The intimidation and attacks on rural people from the Chuquisaca provinces, visiting the city to receive ambulances from Evo Morales, may also be understood in terms of punishment for their support of the government’s constitutional process and failure to back Sucre’s *capitalia* cause. Looking closely at the video footage of these attacks, it is notable that the perpetrators are often difficult to distinguish phenotypically from their victims, although economic and cultural differences are evident from their dress. Those inflicting the punishment on the rural people appear to have been a racially diverse mix, including children or grandchildren of rural Chuquisaqueños. However, although this discriminatory violence may be related to culturalist distinctions (including class, politics, rural/urban residence, occupation and education), these aspects are historically intimately interwoven with ideas about racial differences and are played out discursively in racial language, despite a paradoxical tendency to deny racism (De la Cadena, 2001). Some perpetrators undoubtedly came from families whose homes employ housemaids, nannies and gardeners from the rural provinces; a deeply ingrained sense of racialised superiority is commonplace among such families (Ströbele-Gregor, 2011, p. 83). Bullying and abuse of domestic employees is well documented (Peñaranda et al., 2006), and the events of 24 May partially resemble a large-scale public version of this kind of domestic discrimination and maltreatment.

## The challenges and opportunities of turning the tables

My research project in Sucre focused on the work of the regionally celebrated *originario* musician, music entrepreneur and activist Gregorio Mamani Villacorta (see fig. 9.2). Gregorio is a good example of how Morales' rise to power put race centre stage, creating new opportunities and new challenges. Gregorio had grown up and lived, until around the age of 30, in the rural community of Tomaykuri, near Macha in northern Potosí. His long trajectory as a recording artist dated back to the late 1980s, and my project involved working with him in his low-budget home studio on the production of several music videos (Stobart, 2011). He was an outspoken campaigner for *originario* musicians and against media piracy, and often presented himself as a revolutionary, styling himself on the 19th-century indigenous insurgent hero Tomás Katari, also from the Macha region.

Gregorio was a household name among rural people and indigenous urban migrants of the region, and stalls in Sucre's Mercado Campesino [peasant market] offered many of his recordings. However, when I enquired, none of the music stall holders of Sucre's Central Market – who mainly sell national and international genres – had heard of him. This highlights the social-racial structuring of Sucre's urban space, where people perceiving themselves as belonging to 'civilised urban society' occupy the centre, with its beautiful white colonial architecture, and see the indigenous population as relegated to the periphery (Ströbele-Gregor, 2011, p. 71; Defensor, 2008, p. 28). Nonetheless, as evidenced by Sucre's diverse musical landscape, the city's socio-racial and class structures are considerably more complex than this duality might suggest.

Gregorio played an active part in Morales' election campaign and in the MAS party, releasing a music video of influential campaign songs.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the song 'Evo Evo Presidente' became ubiquitous at MAS campaign meetings around the country.<sup>14</sup> This campaign anthem was on everyone's lips, but few people knew the identity of the composer. Nonetheless, the regional branch of the MAS recognised Gregorio's contribution and in 2006 appointed him as director of the Servicio de Fortalecimiento Municipal y Comunitario [Municipal and Community Empowerment Service] for Chuquisaca Department. When I made a pilot trip to Sucre in August 2006 to consult with Gregorio about my proposed project, he had just taken up this important regional government position. During my visit to his office he could scarcely contain his amazement about this turn of events. The last time we had met had been in his humble adobe hut in rural Tomaykuri; now here he was sitting behind the director's desk of a major government office.

This high-profile post involved responsibility for Chuquisaca Department (an area about 20 per cent larger than the Netherlands) and directing a team

13 This appeared first as an audio cassette.

14 See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS4Fgz\\_gq5Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS4Fgz_gq5Y) (accessed 10 Dec. 2017).



*Figure 9.2. Gregorio Mamani Villacorta (1960–2011). Depicted playing the charango and wearing sika bota leggings and a tinku [ox-hide] fighting helmet. Image used in music video productions. (Photo by Henry Stobart.)*

of more than 20 'technicians', most of whom were university-educated urban mestizos. Gregorio, by contrast, had left rural school in Tomaykuri at the age of 11, needing to help out with agricultural and herding work following the death of his father. The attitudes of some of the staff to their new boss can easily be imagined, as can the unpopularity of some of Gregorio's seemingly practical proposals. For example, he suggested that technicians re-locate to the provincial areas for which they were responsible, rather than living far away in the city of Sucre where lack of local knowledge and interactions often limited the impact of their work. Nonetheless, a few members of the team admired and strongly supported Gregorio, and were deeply committed to the political significance of his occupancy of this position. For example, Jenny Vargas reminisced:

It was there [in the Municipal and Community Empowerment Service] that I got to know Gregorio. A very intelligent man. He memorised and learnt things very quickly. This surprised me as he had not had the opportunity to go to university. I saw how he was mistreated. [They'd say] 'this Indian' and used many other deprecating adjectives, not suitable to repeat. He was badly treated even by his own technicians. (9 January 2008)

After several months in this role, Gregorio was moved to the culture unit for Chuquisaca Department. Once again he encountered difficult working relations and in August 2007, a few months before I commenced my research in Sucre, he resigned from government employment in order to return to his career as an artist. His resignation was certainly in part due to the racist attitudes he had encountered. However, although immensely charismatic, his idiosyncratic personality – and sometimes acerbic response to opposition – may not always have served him well as a line manager. A lack of infrastructure, training and support in this challenging role was also probably part of the problem.<sup>15</sup> Following his resignation, Gregorio dedicated himself to producing music videos in his home studio in order to rekindle his career as an artist. Notably, this was the first time he had created videos entirely independently, without employing the services of a mestizo video editor. He approached the medium's creative opportunities with immense enthusiasm, despite the constant technical challenges it posed (Stobart, 2011, 2017).

### **Playing on the edge: structural racism in practice?**

While in many respects Gregorio would seem to be well qualified to represent indigenous people, like other indigenous activists his positioning as regards race, class and culture was extremely complex, as was his relationship with the indigenous people he purportedly represented (see Lloyd, 2002). In different contexts, I heard his *originario* background invoked in admiration or as a means

15 By contrast, in more recent fieldwork in the chamber of deputies in La Paz, which formed part of a collaborative project with Michelle Bigenho, we discovered considerable support for indigenous representatives from the countryside which enabled them to occupy important government positions successfully.

to exclude or belittle him. I also witnessed Gregorio himself proudly assert his indigeneity, but in other contexts distance himself from it. Many of his music videos include speeches in which he explicitly presents himself as an *originario* politician, yet when telling me about his youth in the rural community of Tomaykuri he stressed how his family were 'different' from other community members. They often ate tins of sardines, he explained, and his sisters wore *pollera* skirts, rather than the embroidered *almilla* dresses worn by other local women. Notable, in the following excerpt from our discussion about this, is the way Gregorio directly relates race-based language to class, the two often being effectively inseparable:

The [other people of Tomaykuri] never travelled and never wore *polleras*.  
 ... The people of the community gaped at us. 'They're mestizos', that's what they said about us, because my sisters wore *polleras*. It's as if [we were] half way to being a different class. (13 March 2008)

Gregorio's relations with his home community remained complex throughout his life. His career as an artist was locally celebrated and resented in almost equal measure. When he made his name in the mid 1980s, it was not by playing the indigenous music of Tomaykuri but through recording *huayño charangeada* [charango songs] identified with the *vecinos* [mestizo or *cholo* populations] of the provincial towns and villages – who would also have been seen as 'half way to being a different class'.<sup>16</sup> The sense that developing a career as a charango singer-songwriter meant transgressing his culturally and socially appropriate sphere, was communicated to me by the famous *huayño* artist Alberto Arteaga who referred to Gregorio as *indio*. As a youth, hearing recordings of Arteaga's charango *huayño* songs on the radio had originally inspired Gregorio to become an artist. However, his former idol's demeaning reference to Gregorio's rural origins suggests that Arteaga viewed him as 'jumped-up', and attempting to rise above his class and racial position. This same perception of Gregorio as jumped-up was also expressed to me by a *vecino* from the provincial town of Macha, some three hours' walk from the rural community of Tomaykuri. Bilingual Spanish- and Quechua-speaking provincial villagers from places like Macha – with their distinctive local musical traditions and where women typically wear *pollera* skirts – might well choose to identify themselves as 'indigenous' or *originario*. However, at the same time they may assert superiority over peasant people from the surrounding rural communities. This Macha *vecino* expressed particular annoyance about the way Gregorio had produced a recording of the village's carnival music:

Here in the village what we don't like is the way that [Gregorio] sings and brings out certain pieces of music, exclusively from Macha, as though they were his own. The [village] authorities say they are going to pass him a note protesting about this situation; that he must not play the village music from here. He can sing [music] from his community, of his people,

16 For discussion of the concept of *cholo* see, e.g., Canessa (1998, p. 233).



that's fine. But beyond this, what we don't like is him appropriating what is sung here in the village of Macha. (9 July 2008)

A few moments later, another elderly Macha villager waxed lyrical to me about how in his youth he had played in a group called Los de Macha [the ones from Macha]. This group of Macha villagers had worn the distinctive peasant dress of the surrounding rural communities, like Tomaykuri, and had performed the distinctive rural *zapateo* [stamping] dance to great critical acclaim at the high-profile Lauro Festival in Cochabamba (Fernández Coca, 1994), on the back of which they toured widely as performers:

We triumphed in the 4th Lauro Festival [1967] with the [3 de Mayo] *zapateo*. In those days, people didn't know about typical [Macha peasant] dress; they admired us. We toured all over the place ... even as far as Argentina ... it was a great time. (9 July 2008)

In these two examples, we see a common double standard derived from a structural racism that defines it as unacceptable for Gregorio, a peasant from Tomaykuri, to perform and record the village's carnival music, but as a matter for celebration when villagers achieve acclaim and commercial success through performing the rural traditions of peasant communities. It is not hard to see how such attitudes give rise to race- or class-based resentments.

In the late 1960s it had been unthinkable for people from rural communities in this part of Bolivia to own record players, but during the 1980s portable cassette players became more affordable, even if the high cost of batteries meant they were rarely heard (Stobart, 2006). In response to this technology, in the early 1990s Gregorio pioneered the commercial recording of music from Macha rural communities, such as Tomaykuri.<sup>17</sup> These diverse genres, which are closely linked to localised indigenous identity and agricultural practices, included distinct styles of charango songs derived from community festive practices and *pinkillu* flute music (2006). Other rural artists and community-based groups gradually followed Gregorio's example, creating a regional market among low-income, largely native consumers that expanded exponentially following the arrival of digital music video (VCD) technology in around 2003 (2010, 2016). Thus, in the lead up to Morales' rise to power in 2006, technological developments – alongside media piracy that hugely depressed prices – contributed to the spread of videos of rural music, featuring musicians and dancers wearing indigenous dress.

When in August 2006 Catalina Vargas told me how Morales' presidency had created new visibility, acceptance and opportunities for native culture she was undoubtedly correct. But this was also part of a longer story involving native entrepreneur activists, like Gregorio, and new low-budget digital audio-visual technologies. Catalina, a vendor of recordings of local music in the mining

17 Ponciano Mamani, the owner-producer of the Cochabamba-based label Borda that recorded most of Gregorio's early audio-cassettes, was also pivotal to this initiative.

town of Llallagua in northern Potosí, observed that before Morales' presidency rural native people used to hide their origins, by avoiding the use of local dress when they came to town, and would feel shame for the local musical traditions they played:

Only recently are they valuing their musics. Previously they didn't value it, they were ashamed. A person who came from the countryside was ashamed because [s/he thought] 'they are going to call me Indian', whereas now they are not frightened, they don't have this shame. Now they say 'I'm an Indian, or whatever, but I am what I am', now they value this [identity], but only recently. (August 2006)

Despite ongoing silent and sometimes explicit racism, under Morales, indigeneity and ethnicity shifted from always being viewed as obstacles to being seen as economic, social and political opportunities, and even as a qualification for certain rights, privileges or government support. This situation has also given rise to hierarchies of indigenous authenticity, which can have exclusionary and discriminatory or *culturalist* aspects. For example, in our conversations, Gregorio sometimes described himself and his organisation CEMBOL (Centre for Bolivian Music) as representing 'true' *originario* culture, which in his view was a claim that most other organisations could not make. Indeed, Gregorio's *originario* credentials and his deep knowledge of rural indigenous Macha culture were beyond question. Few community members from rural Tomaykuri had his specialist musical knowledge and ability to multi-track all the parts of a *pinkillu* flute ensemble or to tune and to play the charango and *kitarra* [local rainy season guitar] in all the local variants. Music, for them, was a relatively small part of their lives and largely confined to festive occasions (Stobart, 2006). The sense that Gregorio was the bearer of a pure and original indigenous culture was conveyed to me by Heyson Adolfo, a young and highly educated mestizo musician also living in Sucre, who had toured internationally with the group Cantosur. He expressed huge admiration for Gregorio's cultural knowledge and abilities:

What Gregorio does is very pure, it's very original, or rather it's very much *del pueblo* [of the people] and you notice this in the essence of the music, don't you? [In] its essence, its form, its variety of interpretation and this is what needs recovering. In our case ... we learnt in the town, from folklore, already a mixture. It is different and you can really see this. It's a bit difficult to explain perhaps, but you have to see this too, you have to live it. Thus, as I've said, [in the town] the culture is not left as it is. (2 January 2008)

But when Heyson asked for guidance about how to play the charango in rural style, Gregorio stated that this could only be learnt through extended immersion in the 'culture'. Heyson interpreted this very positively as an important lesson about culture as a totality, where charango technique and style could not be divorced from the cultural whole. However, there is also a sense that in

this statement Gregorio was strategically essentialising his indigeneity and protecting his cultural capital. Thus, from being a source of shame, indigenous cultural expressions have sometimes come to represent valuable assets that need to be carefully protected and controlled.

### **Advocacy or appropriation?**

Several of the urban mestizo folklore artists I got to know in Sucre perceived themselves as long-term advocates of native and national music. They were painfully aware that, like most of my children's classmates at the Sucre city centre schools they attended, urban mestizo youths tended to be far more interested in North American and European popular music than national folkloric styles, let alone native music. In this context, many of these urban folklore artists – all of whom, necessarily, combined their scant semi-professional work as musicians with other more reliable forms of income or 'day jobs' – were involved in activist projects to promote national folklore music or to support native or marginalised people of the region. For example, Los Masis, who periodically tour in Europe, run an immensely active performance group for young people, the Juch'uy Masis [little Masis], which rehearses almost every weekday evening. Young people from wealthier families pay a subscription towards the cost of running the group, but scholarships are offered to children from poorer parts of the city. This initiative, as Roberto Sahonero – the group's founder and director – explained to me, explicitly aims to break down social barriers by getting children from different social backgrounds to play music together. Los Masis, whose mission statement is 'to maintain, *reivindicar* [re-validate] and disseminate Bolivian cultural heritage', have also been running a bicultural education programme in the rural community of Mishkamayu, near Tarabuco, for many years (in part supported by international funding). The group were hugely supportive of Evo Morales' election campaign, but following his rise to power they came to feel increasingly ostracised due to their class position. From being advocates for rural people and native culture, they have found themselves being accused of appropriation – even by other urban mestizo folklore musicians. For example, according to Vicente Vargas, the director of the urban mestizo group Cantosur, which also tours internationally:

Los Masis ... imitate autochthonous expressions and present them in public performances in the cities, around the world. [They] make a copy of what still exists in the [cultural] roots. But this is a bit limiting for a musician because it's simply copying that which is played in its place of origin ... it lacks respect because this music has an owner, right? It has origins which should be respected, it should be preserved as it is in its place and this is a bit difficult and a commitment too. (19 February 2008)

In reality, there is very little in the repertoire of Los Masis – much of which consists of original compositions – that resembles the aesthetic world of

native rural music. However, some local jealousy may surround the group's relative success in attracting European funding to create a foundation and their acquisition of a centrally located rehearsal space. Their long-term dedication and advocacy cannot be questioned, even if there was sometimes a paternalistic aspect to their relationship with rural people; a general tendency – far from unique to them – not to treat rural native people as equals (Doxtator, 1988, p. 67–78, cited in Diamond et al., 1994, p. 44). Like Los Masis, Cantosur was also involved in charitable initiatives. Vicente ran a workshop in his home in which he trained adolescents from poor backgrounds to make a local guitar-type instrument that had fallen into disuse; a project that aimed both to revive this instrument and to provide skills and employment opportunities for marginalised youths.

In the context of the new government, Vicente was clearly highly conscious of potential accusations of appropriation, and was at pains to distance himself – discursively at least – from this. He explained:

[In Canto Sur] one is given the liberty to make what one really wants to without ill-treating the traditional, typical, or autochthonous. But taking elements from that with which we have always coexisted. From here rhythms; from there melodies; from there instruments. So those things which can be used advantageously and built upon to express oneself freely in a composition. (19 February 2008)

As Sucre's representative for the national music royalties association, SOBODAYCOM, Vicente was also evidently concerned that authorship, and thus copyright, was neatly packaged and beyond contestation. His rhetoric may also reflect his interactions with Gregorio a few years earlier, when Vicente had helped Gregorio record his campaign songs for the election of Evo Morales.<sup>18</sup> He was probably well aware of Gregorio's outspoken criticism of urban mestizo musicians' appropriation of native identity. Indeed, Gregorio expressed this to me on many occasions:

I don't like the way that Los Kjarkas and [other] folklorists distort [native] musics. They take them and stylise them with panpipes, quenás and bombo drums, finally making them into folkloric music. For us this is not *originario* ... When we analyse these pieces and find themes we have composed in them, [we repudiate the way] these groups feel they are artistic representatives to the world. (29 January 2008)

Many people, such as Jaime Robles (culture department, Chuquisaca Prefecture), described to me how rural music – 'as part of the expression of daily life' – was retrieved by people who are 'more knowledgeable about the artistic field', and then commercialised. Indeed, it is no surprise that educated, well-connected and cosmopolitan middle-class mestizo musicians are often better

18 However, by the time we spoke Vicente was strongly opposing the government and supporting Sucre's cause, and Gregorio – although entirely behind the 'process of change' – had become disillusioned by Morales and was looking to alternative indigenous political options.

positioned to commodify their work than their native counterparts (Brown, 2003). Nonetheless, in my experience, resentments over the appropriation of native dress – that is, the visual rather than the aural aspect – provoked the most heated objections and were directly related to perceived usurpation of indigenous identity. The contested nature of indigenous dress, and Gregorio's extreme position – which I suspect was more rhetorical than realistic – was communicated to me by Javier Ameller, a mestizo musician and restaurant owner, during my pilot trip to Sucre in August 2006:

Gregorio told me 'we're going to create a law which makes it necessary to pay to use [indigenous] clothing, too'. Let's say, to use a poncho, trousers, *aksu* [back cloth], or *unku* [small poncho]. Well, this seems a bit exaggerated to me, to my way of thinking. If I'm Bolivian I can buy a poncho and put it on; nobody's going to charge me to use the poncho. And if I want to play in this poncho I'll go and do it. For one thing I'm a Bolivian, for another it seems a bit absurd. Fine, this article [of clothing] is part of a community. They would have to register their dress with SENAPI [National Intellectual Property Service] or whoever, and then somebody would need to be the owner.

I think things are turning into a fever while we have a native president from a peasant background who is giving lots of attention to the peasants. They have the desire, I believe, to have power and do whatever they like, even [if this means] violating the rights of other people. (12 August 2006)

This example highlights how, in the face of long histories of discrimination, often buttressed by legal structures such as intellectual property law, native peoples are sometimes deploying the legal weapons previously used to exclude them; a kind of 'payback time'. There are many problematic aspects to locking up native heritage in an 'iron cage' of intellectual property protections (Brown, 2003). Besides creating a kind of essentialist cultural apartheid, which fails to recognise culture's dynamic, transformative and intercultural dimensions, practical questions surround which native 'owners' should receive benefits, what form these 'benefits' should take, and how royalty payments should be policed – especially given the Bolivian government's low-key approach to controlling the circulation of counterfeit goods and media piracy (Stobart, 2010). What is especially revealing about this example is Javier Ameller's insistence on his cultural rights as a Bolivian. Here he invokes a national culturalist discourse not dissimilar to some of those currently being expressed in Europe, where a critique of multiculturalism, alongside a belief in a post-race politics, ignores the discriminatory dimensions of what is perceived by majority populations as 'our culture' (Lentin, 2014). Nonetheless, in Bolivia's case – where, theoretically, indigenous culture has become state culture and where mainstream nationalist expressions are rooted in mid 20th-century *indigenismo* – this situation becomes very complicated and at times contradictory. Indeed, state decolonisation policy and discourse is often accompanied by nationalistic attitudes to heritage that

resemble the folklore protectionism of the 1970s (Bigenho and Stobart, 2016; Rios, 2014). In the context of national folklore expressions, there is often little sense of moving beyond the notion of the *indio permitido* [authorised Indian] – according to which, native people are acceptable as long as they perform the part allotted to them by others. According to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who coined this expression, ‘This kind of racism is among the most tenacious because it is masked behind a discourse of valuing indigenous culture’ (cited in Farthing, 2007, p. 7).

### **Concluding thoughts: an evening at Orígenes**

During our stay in Sucre, a new venue called Orígenes [origins] opened a few blocks from the central square. It offered food and a culture show and has proved popular among tourists. When we attended the show in July 2008, a few months after the incident of 24 May, we witnessed a fashion show, and the crowning of Miss Sucre and Señorita Sucre by the mayor, Aydé Nava. The programme also included a video, featuring landscapes and tourist locations of Bolivia, and a choreographed dance involving about 15 performers.

The well-rehearsed and carefully choreographed dancers in this stage show were slick, energetic and highly professional, reflecting high standards and dedication to their craft as dancers. The distinctive costumes and percussive sounds produced by the men’s wooden platform sandals, with rattling metal spurs, made this dance immediately recognisable as the *pujllay* of Yampara culture. This native group live in communities around the town of Tarabuco which is situated about 50 miles south east of Sucre. But the stylised dance moves, slick choreography and recorded soundtrack – which was much easier on foreign tourist ears than the *toqoro* flutes played by the Yamparas – incorporated little from the rural version of this genre. For many Bolivians, the *pujllay* dance represents a much-loved element of national folklore and heritage, which frequently appears in urban dance parades in Bolivia and beyond – even periodically in London and Paris. Yet, on this particular evening, the stark disconnect between what we were witnessing and my experience of the rural cultures of the region jarred. The culture of the region was being celebrated and nobody was being racist, but our proximity to the rural ‘origins’ of this dance – exacerbated by the name of the venue – and the ‘exclusionary invisibility’ of the culture bearers felt especially ironic (Ströbele-Gregor, 2011, p. 71). Maybe these sentiments were heightened by the knowledge that rural Yamparas had been among the victims on 24 May and that the mayor, as part of Sucre’s inter-institutional committee, had actively fomented the mobilisations that led to the violence.

Early on in this chapter I discussed a 2017 speech by Evo Morales in which he insisted that recovering native-peasant cultural expressions – such as music and dress – was ‘the only way to decolonise ourselves’ and, by implication,

to confront the structures of racism and discrimination. Morales' rhetoric is immensely attractive and in many ways reflects my own experiences of intercultural engagements through native Andean music. Similarly, most readers will have experienced how musical participation – as collective entrainment in melodic, rhythmic or affective sounds – can enable us to transgress social differences and achieve a sense of unity or *communitas*, as shared experience, identity and values. However, my ethnographic examples reveal how the dynamics that surround native cultural expressions – like music, dance and dress – often intensify and perpetuate the structures of discrimination or elicit resentments. It is hard to be sure how much extremist individuals like Gregorio Mamani – who expose, transgress or challenge these boundaries and structures – ultimately contribute to greater intercultural understanding or to polarising and hardening positions. Like many of the artists discussed in this chapter, his politics of indigenous emancipation was often compromised by professional interests: the need to acquire income as a performer and to protect his cultural capital. Accordingly, his vision for a 'cultural revolution' gave primacy to native expressions and artists, such as himself, but largely excluded middle-class urban mestizo artists – just as they have long marginalised native people. It was almost as if, for him at least, it was now 'payback time'. Nonetheless, I did encounter a few examples of intercultural collaboration in Sucre – such as in the context of creating music for the 2005 election campaign of Evo Morales.

Through the long presidency of Evo Morales, whose support of indigenous peoples has by no means been consistent (Postero, 2017), race-based conflict and debate have become more visible, as discriminatory practices and structures have been challenged. We might even wonder if the ugly and violent incidents of 24 May in Sucre were ultimately necessary in order to motivate anti-racist and anti-discriminatory legislation and policies. What is harder to assess is how effective this legislation and other initiatives – such as the smartphone app – are in reducing discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. In the households of Sucre that employ maids, nannies or gardeners, are native employees from the provinces now treated with greater respect and consideration than before? Or, more cynically, might apparent improvements simply mean that employers are being more careful about their behaviour as they are conscious that unfair or abusive treatment might be reported? Similarly, are domestic staff aware of their rights and do they feel empowered to assert them or to report discrimination? We might also wonder to what extent home owners and their domestic staff are sharing the same music. On this theme, Fiorella Montero-Díaz tells a striking story about the homework she set for a class of nine-year-olds while working as a music teacher in an exclusive school in an elite district of Lima, Peru. The assignment required the children to interview their maids about contemporary Andean (native) singers in Lima. Despite some initial awkwardness and resistance – 'Miss, my father will kill me if I talk to my maid' – the children undertook some interesting interviews and borrowed several CDs and videos.

Some were ‘quite moved by sharing something with their maids again: “Maria was like my mother, she raised me, I don’t know why I stopped talking to her”’ (Montero-Diaz, 2017, p. 74). This cultural expectation that elite or middle-class children will learn to discriminate against the musical tastes of their maids and stop talking to them as social equals is by no means unique to Lima; the story is no different in Sucre. Thus, might transforming culture, by keeping up the conversation and sharing music, represent a step on the road to reducing racism and discrimination? What is for sure is that this road will be very long and arduous, and even if indigenous music, dance and dress can help ease the journey in certain ways, let’s not forget that they carry heavy baggage and are no easy panacea.

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