

Hobbes' Border Guards or Evo's Originary Citizens? Indigenous People and the Sovereign State in Bolivia

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Abstract

Thomas Hobbes was the first major thinker to locate an imagined pre-political State of Nature in the Americas. Even his critics such as Locke and Rousseau followed him in seeing native Americans as living in a world which they imagined existed in pre-historic Europe and, most importantly, beyond meaningful dialogue. These and other thinkers used America as a tool through which to think the status of the individual political subject and his relationship with the state. This article argues that indigenous people were much more than rhetorical tools but, rather, were necessary elements for imagining the modern nation state; they were in Shaw's words, Hobbes' 'border guards' (2008: 38). Indigeneity, however, does more than act symbolically as a 'border guard' facing the 'other' across the parapet of the boundaries of the sovereign state; indigenous *people* were and are actively challenging those boundaries, shaping its contours, and occasionally breaching the wall altogether.

In this article, I look at Bolivia as an example of how indigenous peoples have through history contributed to, challenged, and moulded the various states – from colonial to contemporary indigenous – over the past half millennium. I also explore the contemporary indigenous state and the ways in which the indigenous subject is imagined as the canonical citizen but ask if this move forecloses the possibilities of a radical critique of the sovereign state.

Keywords: Hobbes, Evo Morales, indigenous people, state

Waiting for the Barbarians

Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?
(How serious people's faces have become)
Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't
come.
And some of our men just in from the borders say
there are no barbarians any longer.
Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
These people were a kind of solution.

C. P. Cavafy

Introduction¹

When considering the position of indigenous peoples in the Americas, the most readily available lens through which to see 500 years of history is one which offers the image of myriad

peoples conquered by Europeans and then enduring centuries of struggle to maintain their identities and their very existence. By the end of the 19th century, the Mapuche had succumbed in Chile, the War of the Desert sounded the death knell of indigenous independence in Patagonia, and the nomadic peoples of the North American Plains were finally defeated. In countries such as Mexico and Peru the much larger farming populations were absorbed in the colonial and then

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republican states as subordinated ethnically differentiated peasantries. Some indigenous groups maintained their autonomies longer than others by fleeing ever further upriver or by occupying sparsely populated areas that Europeans didn't want but by the 21st century there are very few indigenous peoples who live an autonomous lifestyle beyond the nation state.

One way of understanding indigenous peoples then is as survivors of history and of enduring because they have managed to subsist, to eke out an existence, on the margins of the state. On this reading indigenous peoples have little, if any role, in the development of the state and can only be understood as existing outside modernity if not actually antithetical to it. Modern political theorists who are concerned with indigenous people often explicitly define indigeneity as a condition outside that of the modern sovereign state (e.g. Skinner 1996; Tully 1993; 1995) and the progressive political project is inclusion within the sovereign state. They thus share a position with Locke and Hobbes in seeing indigenous people as *fundamentally* outside the development of a political form that arose out of the double collapse of ecclesiastical and feudal authority in the early modern period in Europe.

I heed James Scott's (2009) caution against being blind to the complex relationship between the state and those that it somehow hasn't quite managed to control. In many cases, he argues, ethnicity is a product of a conscious effort by people to escape state control. Egalitarian political structures that are often features of people considered to be indigenous or tribal are not simply cultural forms *sui generis* but active strategies in avoiding the state. Scott quotes Ernest Gellner's work who argues that the political autonomy and tribalism of the Berber population of Morocco "is not a tribalism 'prior to government' but a political and partial rejection of a particular government" (Gellner in Scott 2009:29). In Scott's own words: "ethnicity and tribe began, by definition, where sovereignty and taxes ended" (2009:30) and this is not far from Pierre Clastre's formulation which sees

indigenous peoples as societies 'against the state' (1977). One is also reminded of Fredrik Barth's seminal (1969) work on ethnicity where he notes that the substantive difference between Pathans and Baluch in Pakistan and Afghanistan is not language (since many people speak both) or cultural traditions but essentially political: Pathans are independent and to become politically subordinate is, inevitably, to change one's ethnic affiliation.

The work of Scott and others is instructive because it shifts attention away from indigenous groups as 'survivals' to a more dynamic model of relations with a state. Indigenous people are not, however, only constituted by the rejection of the state but the state itself is constituted by the rejection of and by the indigenous or indeed by the rhetorical devices it adopts for the absorption of indigeneities. Following James Scott (2009), states need to imagine marginal indigenous people as a dramatic counterpoint to legitimate state rule. Anna Tsing (1993:26) states this rather more strongly when she writes that the "Merana construct the state locally by fleeing it." This is true of the Merana and Indonesia today; it was also true in the sixteenth century when Europeans were developing their own modern states: indigenous peoples were *necessary* to how Europeans imagined the nation state and, especially in the Americas, played a major role in its development right up to the present day, which is why Karena Shaw describes indigenous people as Hobbes' "border guards" (2008: 38) and argues that:

'savages' and the other 'others' without sovereignty are produced as 'different,' as marking the outside, the margins, of 'our' new political imaginary. It tells those of us 'inside' how to think about the world (and those 'outside'); it provides for us the limits that enables us to evade the problem of 'infinity' or 'difference'. Most remarkably it does so openly, explicitly, self-consciously. *Op. cit.*

Much has been written about the role of the Americas in the works of European philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke as they

posited a 'State of Nature' against which modern, civilized, society could be measured (Kurasawa 2002; Seth 2010) and the particular position of indigenous people within these philosophies (Skinner 1996; Tully 1993). However, in developing their ideas of modern citizens, that is, how individuals relate to the state, it is also clear that they are developing ideas of the nature of the state. Indigenous peoples' role in modern state formation is beyond simply functioning as a rhetorical tool but, rather, a dynamic, if usually invisible, force that moulds the contours of the state over time. Indigeneity, in other words, informs the nature of the State.

It does, however, do more than act symbolically – even though this symbolic act is powerful – as a 'border guard' facing the 'other' across the parapet of the boundaries of the sovereign state; indigenous *people* are actively challenging those boundaries, shaping its contours, and occasionally breaching the wall altogether. To continue with Shaw's metaphor, these border guards are not always facing the way they are supposed to.

In this article, I will focus on the case of Bolivia, which is one of these settler states which has long had to 'deal' with Indians on its margins and in its midst. Beyond this, it provides a useful hermeneutic tool for discussing indigeneity and the state, since it has recently become an 'indigenous State' (Postero 2017) and thus appear to confound a Hobbesian sovereign state constructed in contrast to indigeneity. I examine the role of Indians in the colonial state, the republican state and the post-revolutionary twentieth century state where Indians were legislated out of existence, and I argue that indigenous people were constantly probing, challenging the boundaries of the state – from its margins but also its very centre. Finally, I look at the contemporary indigenous state of Bolivia and consider the conflicting and even contradictory roles the indigenous people have, not only in how the state is imagined, but also how it is governed. I hope to demonstrate that in all periods, and in all state formations, indigenous people – symbolically and materially – played a foundational role. First,

I will look at the role of Indians in the early modern period.

Modernity and its Indians

In the beginning, all the world was *America*.

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* II: 49

The idea that European modernity developed *sui generis* has by now been widely challenged. Enrique Dussel (1995:66-7), was perhaps the first to point out that Europe developed with explicit reference to the non-European, and specifically the Americas, which was a 'New' World that acted as a foil to European endeavours; it thus played a profoundly important role in the development of Western modernity. He was accompanied by postcolonial scholars such as Aníbal Quijano (1990) and Walter Dignolo (2000) who argue that it is insufficient to see the Americas as on the periphery of modernity but, rather, at the very centre of how modernity developed and was imagined. In this way, they seek to displace Europe as the centre of modernity.

It is not, however, that European modernity is unimaginable without the Americas but, specifically, unimaginable without Americans. Scholars such as Peter Mason (1990) have noted how the European idea of the 'wild man,' a forest dwelling, hirsute, savage creature against which civilization was contrasted and transposed to the Americas where physical characteristics such as exuberant body hair and activities, most notably cannibalism, were transposed onto bodies and cultures where they did not exist. This is why, for at least a century after landfall in the Americas, Europeans were widely depicting scenes of the American natives with hirsute bodies, large pendulous breasts, and the almost *de rigueur* description of cannibalism (see Hulme 1986). Mason's key point is that Europeans arrived in the New World with a very clear view of the 'other' which they almost effortlessly transposed onto the denizens of the New World. In Vanita Seth's words, the European imagination was "mapped onto the social geography of the New World, enveloping the Indian into a repertoire of images that long preceded their discovery" (2010: 53). Shaw notes that

“savage people are explicitly present in Hobbes’ text as the ‘savages of America,’ but they are implicitly present as his neighbours, those ‘mad’ enough to kill their fellow citizens” (2008:34). Various scholars, such as Walker, have noted that, “Hobbes’ famous narrative depends on and produces an outside” but what is less widely acknowledged is that “it is an outside internal to a specific account of insides and outsides; just as what we call ‘nature’ has been produced within a specific account of culture and nature” (Walker 2010: 144-5). Hobbes’ savages were intrinsic to the very discourse which sought to exclude them from the discourse of sovereignty and politics.

It is not surprising then, as Pagden (1982:98) records, that in the sixteenth century, Indians were not only those natives of the East and West Indies, but also domestic Europeans ‘savages’ which at times might include marginalised peasants, Sicilians, or even Asturians in Iberia itself. Rousseau drew on these medieval motifs in his development of the Noble Savage (Seth 2010: 103) and Geoffrey Symcox suggests that “the wild man merely changed his name to the Noble Savage” (Symcox 1972 in Seth 2010:103).

Thomas Hobbes in particular, drew on the idea of a pre-social being and located him in the Americas. He imagined a modern, civilised nation, which for him was a monarchy to which free men relinquished their sovereignty for an enlightened and civilised existence. To do this he had equally to imagine a condition where humans existed without civilisation and king:

In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters, no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short (100).

Here, Hobbes is imagining a ‘State of Nature,’ but he does not only posit its existence in some remote European past, but in the present and that present is, above all, America:

It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition of warre as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places, where they live so now. For the savage people in many places of America...live at this day in that brutish manner. *Op Cit.*

America thus moves Hobbes’ theoretical framework from one based on supposition to one with empirical foundation.² America was the proof that there was no morality, no ethics, no peace, without a social contract, without a State based on rationality and European civilization.

Hobbes was concerned with laying the foundations of a modern state based on rights and rationality. As Carole Pateman (1988) has pointed out, these sovereign rights of man really are the rights of *men* as they are predicated on the dominance of men over women; it is equally the case that they are predicated on the rights of Europeans over racialised others (O’Connell Davidson 2001). Kurasawa (2002), in turn, notes that for Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau America provided evidence of a primitive condition against which a European developmental framework could be measured and, by extension, offering a clear justification for European conquest of America. The notion of the ‘primitive’ – the American Indian -- lies at the very heart of the development of modernity and the sovereign state.

Hobbes is quite clear that Europeans had the right to colonise the world and bring people into a civilised existence but he did not advocate genocide since he was a firm believer in the *natural* rights of man:

The multitude of poor, and yet strong people, still increasing, they are to be transplanted into Countries not sufficiently inhabited: where nev-

² Barry Hindess (2007) underlines the importance of America offering for Locke empirical evidence for the state of nature.

ertheless, they are not to exterminate those they find there; but constrain them to inhabit closer together, and not to range a great deal of ground, to snatch what they find; but to court each little Plot with art and labour, to give them their sustenance in due season. (255).

Here, Hobbes presents the *only* way the inhabitants of new worlds can possibly exist is as small scale farmers but what, exactly, is the problem of allowing indigenous people to inhabit the forests as free beings? Hobbes is quite clear: in such a state of nature people are in a constant war with each other. It is evident that Hobbes uses native Americans as a rhetorical tool (Bagby 2007:30; Seth 2010:74) but it is more than simply that: Hobbes needs Americans to be savages in order to make any sense of his political project. In Shaw's analysis, Hobbes' misrepresentation of indigenous Americans is a "necessary consequence of his production of the conditions under which we can think about or imagine politics" (2008:34). Here Shaw echoes James Tully's work on Locke when he argues the latter *intentionally* misrepresented Indians, not only because his theoretical framework required a particularly indigenous subject but also to justify their conquest (Tully 1993: 151). The project of Enlightenment *required* Indians; had they not existed in the Americas, they would surely have to be invented. Of course, other peoples around the world would have sufficed as images of alterity but the Americas were especially useful precisely because they were so new and, apparently, untouched by history. If was Hobbes who first located this essential 'other' in the Americas and, following him, "it was to the indigenous Americans that future contractarians returned in their representations of pre-political society" (Seth (2010: 77)).³

³ For political philosophers such as James Tully concerned with developing a political philosophy of the state that can accommodate the diversity of contemporary nations, this was particularly tragic (1995:116) because Hobbes' philosophy resolutely shuts down any possibility of dialogue with indigenous others: there is nothing we can learn from them and to some extent he lays at Hobbes' feet no small part of the

It is far beyond the scope of this paper to explore in depth the important differences between Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau in how they imagined and constructed a state of nature and the role of indigenous people in such a construction – this would require not simply another paper but a substantial book – but here I simply wish to underline the point that indigenous people were not only fundamental in how Europeans imagined citizenship and the state but that their *active* existence played a constant and crucial role in the development of states.⁴ This is true for states in Europe who depended on 'primitives' across the globe for their economic and political existence; it is even more true for those settler states with substantial indigenous populations within their borders.

I now move to Bolivia and explore the ways in which Indians and the indigenous have been central to state building projects since Europeans arrived and the ways in which they formed the nature of the state.

Being Indian, being Indigenous in Bolivia

In most of the colonial period, Indians, as the very diverse groups of peoples were called by the Spanish, constituted a separate 'republic' (along with the republic of Spaniards). For much of this period the term 'Indian' denoted a fiscal status (Harris 1995:354) with attendant labour obligations such as the *corvée* in the mines, much more than an ethnic one. It is unsurprising that, in the first decades after conquest, Indians and Spaniards should be so divided, but the colonies were organised around such distinctions until the end of the colonial period. Spaniards, in turn, were differentiated between those born in the New World (*criollos*) and those in Iberia (*peninsulares*) and only the latter could occupy key positions in the administration.

responsibility of cultural misunderstandings that accompanied the conquest and incorporation of peoples outside the modern sovereign state.

⁴ Precisely because they have this role they are in a privileged position to challenge the sovereign state (Shaw 2008).

When Europeans first arrived in the Americas it was very clear who was an Indian (a term which very quickly homogenised a vast population of highly differentiated people) and who was a European but this clarity didn't last very long at all. Conquistadores successfully argued for their children born of Indian women to be considered Spaniards and, as van Deusen (2015) shows in ample detail, there was considerable legal debate in 16th century Castille itself as to who was or wasn't an Indian. In the latter context, the key issue was whether one could be enslaved, particularly after the Ley de Burgos (1542) abolished slavery for Indians. Here, as elsewhere, the distinction was not simply an ethnic or racial one but, rather, what rights and obligations accrued to that status.

In the colonies, many Indians escaped the status of being Indian by moving to cities or simply elsewhere in Spanish America and presenting themselves as mixed race *mestizos* or converting wealth and marriage to change their status (McCaa 1984). *Mestizos*, as part of the Republic of Spaniards were not obliged to attend *corvée* labour in the mines, nor were they liable to tribute to the Crown (Stern 1993). The Crown, in fact, was financially dependent on Indian tribute to administer the colonies. Advantages could, however, go the other way: some leaders of indigenous communities, *curacas*, who collected tribute from Indians lived sophisticated urban lives and married into *criollo* society. Wealthy and phenotypically European, they were not liable to the same taxes as others because they were legally Indian.

During the Colonial Period, Indians were not simply subjects of the Crown on whom much of the colonial project was resting but relations with Indians was at the heart of how the colonial state was conceptually as well as practically configured. The very nature of these Indian subjects and the Crown's duty towards them was such a compelling issue that the Emperor Charles V suspended trade with the American Colonies until he had resolved the issue of the nature of the Indian subject which culminated in the famous

debate in Valladolid in 1550-51 between the clerical jurists Las Casas and Sepúlveda. As van Deusen points out the nature of the Indian soul, and particularly the morality of Indian slavery, was debated at a "key moment, when an awareness of a Castilian imperial 'self' began to emerge" (2015:102). The nature of the Indian was more than simply a philosophical problem, it lay at the very heart of the imperial state.

Independence from Spain brought formal citizenship to Indians but, in practice, Indians continued to be excluded from power and were still required to pay tribute. Olivia Harris argues that it was only in the mid nineteenth century that the distinction between those (Indians) who paid tribute to the state and people who "enjoyed access to their labour as intermediaries of the state" became increasingly an ethnic one (1995: 361). Thomas Abercrombie's (1992) historiography demonstrates the degree to which metropolitan elites depended on the existence of indigenous people with which to contrast their white, civilized, nation state and, as such, they were actively complicit in creating indigenous identities on which, after all, they depended for the legitimacy of their rule. With independence, political legitimacy could not come from the colonial state and white elites who had just overthrown the Spanish soon overcame their liberal ideas of a nation of equal citizens— except when it came to recognising collective land title— and spared little time in disenfranchising and dispossessing the majority Indian population.

The 'Indian Problem' was much debated in Bolivia (Larson 2005) and elsewhere, the 'problem' being how one could be modern with such a large number of peasants and hunter gatherers living in pre-modern social and cultural conditions. Abercrombie's (1992) point is that the agrarian and mining elite of this period absolutely depended on Indian labour, which, because it drew on peasant communities, could be paid a wage rate lower than which would normally be needed to reproduce labour (i.e. support families) (vis de Janvry 1981). In the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, Indian commu-

nities were thus not only necessary for the 'modern' economy, but they actually subsidised it.

If in the colonial period Indians were subjects to the Crown and funded the colonial state through tribute, in the nineteenth century the Republican state denied Indians full citizenship even as it was constructed on a distinction between Indians and citizens. This operated on an ideological level (providing the legitimacy to rule) as well on a practical political and economic level: the army, agriculture, and industry all depended on there being a distinction between Indians and non-Indians; the state was constructed around this difference.

Although with Independence and the foundation of a liberal republic Indians were formally citizens of the nation-state the political and judicial reality remained very far indeed from actually granting Indians full citizenship rights. As Erick Langer (2009: 539) points out, during the nineteenth century the state used categories such as *indígena*, *indígena contribuyente* o *indígena originario* (indigenous, contributory indigenous, originary indigenous) – all of them essentially fiscal categories – to designate Indians, they were never referred to as citizens (a term reserved for creoles and *mestizos* (2009: 538). Rosanna Baragán explains that the first Bolivian constitution makes a distinction between 'Bolivians' and 'citizens': "The requirement [of being a citizen] to read and write, to own property or have a minimal annual income, and of not being a servant, consequently divided the nation between Bolivians and citizens, and excluded the great majority of the population [from the latter category]" (1999:23).

Nevertheless, in many cases Indians maintained a relation with the state, insisting on paying tribute in order to continue the colonial contract (Platt 1982). When the state attempted to abrogate Indians' rights the latter appealed to maintain the colonial contract, not because they were conservative or because they were incapable of participating in a liberal state, but because the colonial documents they possessed were the only ones they could use in their defence (Baud

2009:25). Even if the state denied Indians a role in the nation, that is, refused them citizenship rights, for their part the Indians continued to fight for a relationship with the state even as the state continued to dispossess and marginalise Indians throughout the nineteenth century (Langer 2009).

Taking an historical perspective, Baud (2009) demonstrates that there is a long history of indigenous engagement with the state that makes it difficult to sustain the argument that indigenous politics is somehow radically different and antagonistic to modern statecraft. He offers a persuasive argument that the history of indigenous struggles has certainly challenged the state but has also contributed to its formation. Indigenous people have more often argued for inclusion than separation: "indigenous movements...tried to compel the state to enforce its own constitutional pledge of citizenship and to comply with its own legislation" (p.34).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were concerted efforts to dispossess the 'free' Indian communities of their lands, including the fertile areas around Lake Titicaca (Larson 2004:216-19). This was not simply an avaricious land grab but an equally avaricious attempt to acquire Indian labour. Indians, as had often been the case, resisted—such as in the uprising led by Zárate Willka in 1899 (Condarco Morales 1982) and this, in turn, led to elites questioning the role of Indians within the state (Bigenho 2006:267): the combined effects of dispossession, dislocation of markets due to the Pacific War (1879-84), and a new racism which saw Indians as biologically inferior (Demelas 1980; 1982) led to highland Indians being pauperised and increasingly marginalised from a state in which they had hitherto played an active if subordinated role (Langer 2009; Platt 1993).

It is obviously difficult to know exactly what Indians thought of these processes, but Platt (1993) suggests that they wished for a productive and dynamic relationship with the state. The uprisings of the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth have

generally been interpreted as struggles for land which rejected any role of the state in Indians' lives. Even if the appropriation of land was a clear motive for these uprisings they obscure the wish on the part of indigenous people to participate fully in the life of the nation. In the words of Marta Irurozqui, "The indigenous population did not limit itself to expressing its antagonism to the society which enveloped it, rather, through combining insurgency with other modes of public intervention such as petitions for Spanish language schooling, the right to address tribunals or participation in elections, they expressed a wish for an active, and not tutelary, role in the construction of the Bolivian nation state" (2000:367).

The Bolivian creoles imagined themselves as forming part of a modern, white, and developed nation but they were confronted, rather inconveniently, with the unpalatable fact that they formed but a small minority in the Bolivian nation-state.

The result was a rather ill defined national identity in which the construction of a homogeneous white nation became an ideal that was ever more difficult to realise given that the *mestizo* solution was equally unviable as this implied a cultural homogenisation which would necessarily include *cholos*, who would not only endanger the social hierarchy and order which currently reigned, but the international respect to which the nation aspired (Irurozqui 2000:118).

The ruling classes, thus, neatly projected upon the Indians their own incapacities and inability to create a civilized and functioning society. All this rhetoric was accompanied by 'scientific' evidence that the Indians were congenitally stupid, had smaller brains, were predisposed to indolence and treachery and so on, marshalled to 'prove' that the Indians were quite inimical to the development of a civilized society (Demelas 1981).

By the beginning of the twentieth century most Indians were tied as serfs to large estates and attempts to introduce schooling for Indians were violently repressed. In the lowland areas, the Rubber Boom Indians were rounded up and forced to work in the most violent and brutal conditions (Taussig 1987). It was in these

decades that the image of the Indian became closely associated with atavism, poverty and ignorance (Larson 2004).

The Chaco War with Paraguay (1928-35) was a watershed moment as many *mestizo* ('mixed race') officers found they did not share a language with their Indian troops. This mutual incomprehension was widely credited with contributing to large scale bloody chaos and, ultimately, defeat. This experience of the largely *mestizo* officer class in the Chaco War fed their sense of frustration against the small oligarchy as well as sharpened their sense of a divided Bolivia and ultimately led to a revolution in 1952 which overthrew the oligarchy.

The revolutionary government of 1952 eliminated the literacy requirements for voting and in one stroke quintupled the voting population (Klein 1982: 232); the army was purged of 500 officers and its role dramatically reduced to a point where civilian militias effectively replaced it; and two thirds of Bolivia's principal industry, mining, was nationalized (*ibid.* 233). By the end of the year the peasants were armed and mobilised to destroy records and seize land. Herbert Klein likens this rural violence to the movement known as the 'Great Fear' of the French Revolution (*ibid.* 234). It was Indian peasants who forced the issue on Agrarian Reform obliging the government to recognise a *de facto* land distribution at least in the areas around Lake Titicaca and the Valley of Cochabamba. The 1953 Education Reform Act followed by the end of the decade ensured there were schools in almost every village.

Once again, a new state is compelled to re-imagine Indians, but in this case they are imagined in their absence. Elites, now largely *mestizos*, also saw Indians as atavistic and overnight abolished the category of 'Indian' declaring that all would be undifferentiated citizens: in 1953 Indians were declared to be *campesinos*, or peasants, there would be Indians no longer in Bolivia.⁵ Indian identity was not to be erased in its

⁵ This, however, was widely used as a euphemism. *Mestizo* peasants then and now do not refer to them-

entirely, however, but set resolutely in the past: it was valued heritage but not an identity around which modern people could ever coalesce.⁶ In practice this meant representing Indian culture as national folklore (often performed by *mestizos*⁷) and turning Indians into cultural *mestizos*, modern and Spanish-speaking and it was to this end the rural education was primarily directed. Indian identity was thus converted from a racial/ethnic one to a class one (*campesino*) and simultaneously intermediate racial/ethnic and cultural identity (*mestizo*) notionally shared by all Bolivians.

The Indian is Dead! Long Live the Indian!

Between the 1952 Revolution and the 1990s, the ruling class fantasy that the Indian population was gradually but inexorably disappearing seemed to be confirmed. The small and largely ineffectual Indian political groups seemed utterly marginal to national politics. Successive censuses marked the decline in indigenous languages and this was seen as an indication of the progressive disappearance of the Indian in Bolivian life. This was also apparently confirmed by the fact that in the post-revolutionary period there were very few occasions when Indians mobilised across regional and ethnic lines and the predominate ideologies of justice and change were an array of leftist discourses. It was becoming increasingly clear, however, that leftist groups were in political retreat culminating in the collapse of Soviet communism. In addition, there was a growing sense of pervasive racism against people of indigenous descent that had long been ignored by class based political discourses. Until this point, Indian struggles were local and fuelled by a deep

selves as *campesinos* but *agricultores* – small scale farmers.

⁶ In this it was similar to *indigenismo* movements across Latin America, beginning with Mexico after the Revolution. *Indigenismo* was concerned much less with contemporary indigenous peoples who were encouraged to assimilate but to absolve emerging middle classes of the 'problem' of racial impurity and indigenous descent.

⁷ See, for example, Bigenho (2005).

sense of historical injustice and the struggles of the late twentieth century were very different from those even just a few decades previously, much less those of previous centuries and certainly people identified as Indians or indigenous in radically different ways. In fact, by the 1980s there were very few people in Bolivia who self-identified as either.

On one level, Indians were largely invisible in Bolivia during this period, on the other hand they were *everywhere*. Although there was no public space for Indians, 'the Indian' was at the heart of the Bolivian state since it expended so much energy in erasing it and there is no question that racism was rife during this period and euphemisms for Indians were thin and poor disguises for the disdain and contempt that was visited on people with indigenous origins. Continued political underrepresentation and poverty created the conditions for a new imagining for indigenous people.

The final decades of the century saw a growing international awareness of the plight of indigenous peoples. In preparation for the UN declared Decade of Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004) the UN appointed a Special Rapporteur on Indigenous People, Martínez Cobo (1986). The UN's recognition of indigenous issues was followed by other international bodies such as the International Labour Organization which, in 1989, passed resolution 169 recognising indigenous and tribal peoples for the first time in international law. The actions of both the UN and ILO opened up the possibilities for peoples in Africa and Asia where there was not a significant history of European settlement to identify as indigenous. This was soon followed by a series of World Bank directives that recognised the particular plight of indigenous people.⁸

It is in this globalised context that scholars noted an 'indigenous awakening' or 'resurgence' in Latin America (Albó 1991; Brysk 2000; Stavenhagen 2002; Van Cott 1994). It is no coincidence

⁸ Today, the World Bank recognises that the majority of the world's indigenous people live in Asia.

that a new globalised indigeneity emerges at the very moment that the Western nation state was facing its greatest challenge, quite possibly since the Treaty of Westphalia established the modern rules of relations between states in 1648.

The rising international profile of indigenous people and especially its the development of a parallel environmental and ethical discourse contributed greatly to the two most celebrated success stories of indigenous mobilisation in Latin America: the Zapatistas who declared war against the Mexican state in 1994 and the rise of Evo Morales in Bolivia. In both cases they were explicit critiques of the state and economic globalisation

Morales, not unlike the Zapatistas, uses inclusive language and takes indigeneity to articulate a wide range of social causes as well as the defence of natural resources for the nation. In fact, especially in the first years of his presidency, he was rather fond of quoting their slogans (Albro 2005). Manifestly influenced by the Zapatistas, he declared indigenous people to be the “moral reserve of humanity” (Goodman 2007). The association of indigenous people with social ethics, morality generally, politically progressive ideologies, and environmental consciousness is not only modern but explicitly constructed as a counterpoint to the globalised world where the local is sacrificed for the global. In the context in which many people feel the state is subordinated to a globalised economy and multinationals, indigeneity offers a powerful and explicit critique.

These Mexican and Bolivian examples underline the ways in which modern indigenous movements arise out of critiques of globalisation and in themselves form critiques of the nation state.

Contemporary indigeneity and the international order

Although contemporary indigenous identities usually draw on historical local struggles for justice, in practice, it is very often the case that people come to identify as indigenous through a

dynamic and dialectic engagement with international actors, reflecting their interaction with the discourses of global networks of international institutions and NGOs. This is most obviously true in areas of the globe such as Africa where indigenous discourses appear as very recent phenomena (Hodgson 2010).

The Bolivian 1990 *March for Territory and Dignity*, which many (e.g. Albó 1996) see as an important turning point in indigenous mobilisation, was a landmark for indigenous mobilisation for a number of reasons. The residents of the capital city were stunned to see thousands of lowland indigenous people descend on their city and this appeared to contradict the idea that lowland indigenous people were inexorably disappearing from history (Albó 1995). It was this moment that punctured the myth of Bolivia as a *mestizo* nation state with Indians resolutely consigned to the past.

This combination of mobilisation around local issues, NGO involvement and international media recognition proved to be a potent recipe for a critique of nation states that excluded subaltern peoples within it. Such successes were not only achieved in Bolivia but around the world where a variety of people challenged the idea of a homogeneous nation state and achieving recognition in court cases and even in constitutional reform. Aside from the Zapatista rebellion mentioned above, in Brazil some Afro-Brazilian groups developed new indigenous identities (French 2009); in Africa marginal and threatened groups such as San in Botswana (Nyamnjoh 2007), Maasai in East Africa (Hodgson 2010), and Ogoni in Nigeria (Watts 2004) positioned themselves as indigenous people with concomitant discourses in their struggle for land and other rights (see also Rupp 2011); and in Asia a number of subaltern people successfully argued for their rights as indigenous peoples (Karlson 2003) and, in some cases, even setting up their own individual autonomous regions (Shah 2010).

There are many examples of people recognised as indigenous in, say, Geneva or New York,

but not in their home countries.⁹ This recognition and support has enabled local groups to use international connections in similar ways to put pressure on national governments, resulting in a 'boomerang effect' (cf. Keck and Sikkink 1998; see also Hodgson 2002). Once again, these processes are both products of the weakening of the autonomy of the nation-state as well as examples of how it is accelerated.

The process by which Evo Morales embraced indigeneity as a political ideology remains obscure. Whatever the reason, even if he was a relative latecomer to the politics of indigeneity, Evo Morales embraced the concept with energy and consummate skill and immediately used the language of indigeneity to challenge the nation state as it was currently constituted. Indigeneity was used to undermine the elites' legitimacy to rule by placing indigenous people as the guardians of the national patrimony and shifting the terms of the right to rule from globalised modernity to indigenous subaltern sensibility. For example, he publically staged an unofficial inauguration among the ruins of the pre-Incaic Tiwanaku civilization. Although unofficial in the sense of not being constitutional, it had much more pomp and ceremony than the official version (Salman and de Munter 2009). It was in this context that he laid out his principles of governance and made clear that he received his mandate, not just from having handsomely won an election, but by receiving the staff of office from three *amautas*, indigenous wise men, and the indigenous population in general. Morales has returned to Tiwanaku many times to renew his mandate and underline the indigenous basis of his political legitimacy and fashion an explicitly indigenous state.

Indigeneity has also been used instrumentally by Morales in lobbying internationally against the war waged against coca producers, where he presents coca as a traditionally indigenous

product. Morales has also argued for the state control of natural resources based on the argument that indigenous people hold a privileged position in being able to defend national patrimony. Finally, Morales introduced a new constitution which reflects this; it not only recognizes indigenous rights but places indigenous values at the very core of the nation-state. Indigeneity encapsulates the values of the nation especially those of 'living well' (*vivir bien*) enshrined in the constitution which is in opposition to free market neoliberal capitalism; indigeneity also operates on the international scale as a language through which it is possible for Morales to lobby against the West in general and the US in particular. It is significant that indigeneity has been transformed from being the language of resistance to the state by people on the political margins to the language of the state in expressing its legitimacy and has also become integral to the language of governance. This is evidenced in his inauguration, when he announced national indigenous New Year celebrations (Canessa 2012) and sponsored¹⁰ a national indigenous wedding ceremony (Postero 2017: 64-88). Indigeneity, therefore is clearly being mobilized by Morales to create a new set of national and indeed nationalist values and through these to imagine a new kind of state but still very a sovereign state in the Lockean sense.

Perhaps it is not surprising then that there was a massive drop in the number of Bolivians who identified as indigenous between the censuses of 2002 and 2012 – from 66% to 41% (INE 2003; INE 2012) – as a growing rural and urban middle class (Pellegrini 2016; Shakow 2014) making claims on the state as citizens reject their hitherto common identity with marginalised people who continue to make claims against the state (Canessa 2014). In some measure, the Vice President, García Linera (2014), is right: the drop in

⁹ There are also many cases where leaders articulate a strong indigenous identity but the people they represent are uncomfortable with the label. Boulosa (2017) offers an Argentinean example.

¹⁰ His sponsorship did not only extend to initiating and presiding over the procedures but acting as a formal ritual sponsor the *padrino*, a role usually reserved for respected married members of the community. This sponsorship creates important fictive kinship ties.

the number of people identifying as indigenous is a mark of the 'success' of the indigenous state but it is also a mark of its failure: in imagining an indigenous sovereign state – perhaps even creating one – it foreclosed the possibility of a truly radical critique of the state. Recognising, or even creating, public indigenous culture will only go so far in addressing the concerns of Hobbes' 'border guards.' Some of these may very well have been assimilated into a citizenry but, as I have argued elsewhere, this only creates a new politics of exclusion (Canessa 2014) or as Nancy Postero puts it: "increasingly, performances of indigeneity serve as tools of state legitimation rather than as sites of liberation" (Postero 2017: 182). The role of 'border guards' simply gets shifted to more marginal groups.

This analysis echoes Shaw's work in Canada where she argues if indigenous demands are understood in terms of 'recognition' within the sovereign state then this implies a rejection if not a violence against other forms of being political: "if some Indigenous groups sign on to and legitimate such a project [of state recognition], and there is a commitment on the part of Canadian people to it, those who do not play along will be marginalised even further" (Shaw 2008:151). Many scholars (e.g. Burman 2014; Laing 2015; Postero 2017) have noted a watershed moment in Evo Morales' politics of indigeneity when he was in open conflict with indigenous people in the TIPNIS nature reserve as they protested the building of a road through their territory in 2011. This was not the first time the inherent contradictions of Evo's politics were laid bare (Canessa 2014) but it was certainly the most public and the most consequential. It is interesting to note that in the 2012 census the only areas which showed an increase in identification as indigenous were those, such as TIPNIS, where there was conflict with the 'indigenous' state (Schavelzon 2014).

This new indigenous state is not without its detractors, perhaps unexpectedly from the eastern areas dominated by white owned large scale agribusiness and oil and gas production (Fabri-

cant 2009). It is also challenged by a variety of indigenous groups. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these complexities in detail (see Canessa 2014) but they can perhaps most clearly be seen as competing visions of indigeneity and the state. Morales and his government see indigeneity as a language and tool of governance which seeks to absorb large sections of the population, if not quite its entirety, under the banner of indigeneity and within a decolonised state (Albro 2005; Canessa 2014). Other groups see the state as continuing to engage with them in a colonial relation and seek autonomy from the state with indigeneity as a language of contestation and protest. Nancy Postero (2017) has followed the shift of emphasis of the 'Indigenous State' towards a greater emphasis on class politics and a growing exclusion of marginal indigenous group. Postero offers an important interrogation and evaluation of the success of Morales' indigenous state but even if one adopts the most critical position there is no doubt that indigeneity is at the heart of how the contemporary state is imagined even if it has become 'a tool of policing' (Postero 2017: 182). What is clear is that at the root of these conflicts are competing visions of how indigeneity relates to the state (Burman 2014; Laing 2015; Sánchez López 2009). Whereas some groups seek to make claims on the state in the sense of co-opting the state to their own agendas, others seek to make claims against the state and keep the state from encroaching on their autonomy. Understanding indigeneity in this way – as different modes of laying claim to the state – places indigenous people at the heart of continued state development, and not simply in places such as Bolivia (Canessa 2018).

Conclusions

From Europeans' first encounter with America, its natives have been imagined and configured as counterfoils and rhetorical tools with which to explore the nature of the modern human. Thomas Hobbes was not the first major thinker to posit a primordial 'state of nature' from which humans developed, but he was the first major thinker

to associate this state so closely to some of his contemporaries: indigenous Americans. In this he was followed by his critics, such as Rousseau and Locke, whose vision of the original state of humanity was less bleak but they nevertheless joined him on seeing Americans as embodying these characteristics and in seeing indigenous people as irredeemably 'other.' Karena Shaw is surely right in not only noting (after Tully) that Hobbes' particular vision of the sovereign state excluded any kind of dialogue with the 'other' but in interrogating *why* this exclusionary model was adopted when others were available (2008: 145). Shaw argues that Hobbesian sovereign state in the context of European expansion *necessitates* the closing off of dialogue and the narrowing of the terrain of the political: even as the modern state is critiqued by scholars such as Tully, they are doing so without moving from the terrain of the political defined in terms of the sovereign state. Indigenous demands are distilled "to a singular relationship – the relationship between citizens and a sovereign authority, or constitutional state" (2008: 144).

In Bolivia, indigenous people have always engaged with the state in its various forms; there was never a time when they were simply passive subjects. Despite the state being largely deaf and blind to their concerns, perhaps born out of a constitutional inability, they nevertheless did more than occasionally rebel but actively challenged the very form of the state. Even at points when the state posited the total erasure of indigenous identities and subjectivities, they were still present in challenging the foundations of the sovereign state. The apotheosis of this struggle would appear to be the advent of the Indigenous State under Evo Morales. However, notwithstanding the heady optimism at his election after his commitments to decolonise the state, and create a constituent assembly, Morales has arguably failed in changing the fundamental institutions and structures of the sovereign state. This is not to detract from his successes in other areas such as the considerable success in improving the economic lot of many poor Bolivians.

The case of Bolivia— as it developed from a colony to republic, to a postrevolutionary *mestizo* nation and then, in this century, to an indigenous state – shows that indigenous peoples were always present and active in the formation of those states. As the state changed, so too did the ways in which its indigenous inhabitants were understood: different republics, fiscal categories, non-citizens, non-existent, and finally the canonical citizen – but not all. In assimilating the orinary indigenous subject into the sovereign state Morales has merely reproduced the state with a different symbolic language. It appears the sovereign state, even a self-styled indigenous one, continues to require its Hobbesian border guards and forecloses the possibility of an alternative politics.

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