CHAPTER III

THE GHOSTS OF 1952

This chapter seeks to describe Bolivia as an *imagined political community*, using Benedict Anderson's (1991) conceptual framework for modern nationalisms.[1] My approach is based on a reading of twentieth century Bolivian history that differs slightly from conventional wisdom. While most commonly accepted historical accounts—particularly English-language accounts—give a narrative of the 1952 Revolution followed by military-authoritarian reaction after 1964, I looked to key Bolivian accounts that give a slightly different narrative of their national revolution. My method is historical, presenting an overview of twentieth century Bolivian history, drawn from different historical narratives, and with an emphasis on the continuity across much of Bolivia's twentieth century political history. The purpose in this chapter is not to challenge accepted social scientific accounts of Bolivian political history (accounts I also use in the following pages), but to illuminate how the idea of a National Revolution was perceived in the collective imagination of Bolivia's political elites—in short, how they imagined their modern Bolivian nation.

I start from Fernando Mayorga's (1993) sociological analysis of a "revolutionary nationalist discourse" that emerged during the Chaco War and was hegemonic until the 1980s. I also closely follow Christopher Mitchell (1977), whose study of 1930s-1970s Bolivian politics, describes the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) as the

[1] Anderson describes modern nations as "imagined political communities" because their individual members, who might never meet each other, nevertheless imagine themselves members of a common community, a community that is limited, sovereign, and horizontally egalitarian (see Anderson, 1991, p. 5-7). The act of "imagining" does not imply "falsity", but rather an ongoing process of "creation". A discussion of this concept and its relationship to a democratic political community is found in Chapter 2.

product of two-decades-long consolidation of a "populist coalition" that was subsequently retained as the "social framework" of later military regimes. A joint reading of the two suggests significant continuity throughout twentieth century Bolivian political history. While Fernando Mayorga provides a sociological analysis of emerging political discourse, Mitchell provides an organizational analysis of how the MNR (as a party) came to dominate political discourse shortly after its founding in 1941, and how the party's loose organizational structure and ideological flexibility allowed it to better exploit and shape the emerging national revolutionary discourse. Paralleling most Bolivian accounts, Mitchell provides a convincing argument for political "continuism" well after military regimes overthrew the MNR civilian government in 1964. Although a common nationalist discourse soon became hegemonic in Bolivian politics after the 1930s, the 1952 revolt was carried out by an MNR that was not ideologically cohesive; different wings and tendencies within the party would continue to vie for control of the revolution's direction long after 1952.

The national revolutionary discourse is important not just for understanding the attitudes and behavior of political elites. The hegemony of this discourse carried into the post-democratization period two important historical legacies. The first was a tendency for political parties to organize themselves as populist coalitions of interest groups and local notables, rather than as formally institutionalized and ideologically cohesive party organizations. In fact, political parties in the post-democratization period were marked by a remarkable tendency to avoid specific ideological doctrines, preferring instead the kind of ideological flexibility that allowed them to appeal to wider cross-sections of the electorate. A second legacy of the national revolutionary period was the consolidation of a corporatist-

developmentalist state model that played a significant role in the national economy.[2] The new liberal-pluralist discourse, dominant among member of the political elite after the transition to democracy, called into question this "national revolutionary" state model. In large measure, post-democratization politics oversaw a systematic rejection and dismantling of the previous state by political elites determined to craft a new liberal-pluralist state. Opposition to the new liberal-pluralist discourse—and particularly the neoliberal economic policies it generated—would eventually produce new populist political movements that defended the values of the traditional corporatist-national state.

An emphasis on understanding Bolivia's pre-democratic experience is consistent with the historical institutionalism framework used throughout this study. Bolivia's democracy did not emerge from a vacuum; preceding historical-institutional legacies played a powerful role in shaping the democratic polity. Understanding the nationalist discourse that dominated twentieth century Bolivian politics and juxtaposing it to the liberal-pluralist discourse that overtook it in the 1990s gives us a better understanding of Bolivia's current political crisis. As this chapter illustrates, Bolivia's twentieth century revolutionary nationalism was not only a deliberately constructed discourse, it also played a key role in legitimating the Bolivian state. The shift in elite political discourse reopened Bolivia's demos question and issues of state legitimization. The political crisis facing Bolivia today is as much a question of what kind of national political community it should be, as any other issue.[3]

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[2] While Bolivia's corporatist state was never fully consolidated, the ideal model was. That is, Bolivian political elites failed to consolidate a sufficiently autonomous state apparatus, even though the model of what a legitimate national state should look like was consolidated in the popular imagination. For a description of this state model, see Garcia Argañaras 1993.

[3] Many of the current salient issues in Bolivian politics can be understood this way. Some examples: calls by COB union leaders to nationalize oil and gas resources to renew state-led development evoke the corporatist-nationalist discourse; calls for regional autonomy by lowland leaders who also support the neoliberal economic model borrow from the liberal-pluralist discourse; calls by indigenous leaders for regional autonomy and greater acceptance of indigenous traditions apply a distinct *katarista* discourse.

Bolivia Before and After 1952: A Brief History

The 1952 Bolivian Revolution is often considered to be one of the major social revolutions of twentieth century Latin America.[4] The April 1952 uprising, though relatively quick (the *ancien régime* was swept away in only three days of fighting), was itself the product of nearly two decades of evolving revolutionary nationalist political discourse. Though most political histories trace the revolution's origins to early twentieth century Bolivian history—frequently citing the role of the Chaco War with Paraguay (1932-1935) as a catalyst—these tend to focus on the April 1952 uprising, relegating preceding events to the role of precursors. A recent volume edited by Merilee Grindle and Pilar Domingo (2003) includes chapters from a number of prominent political historians who study Bolivia; all the authors take this approach in their reflections of the 50th anniversary of the 1952 Revolution. Eric Selbin's (1999) comparative study of Latin American social revolutions synthesizes the conventional view of the 1952 Revolution as the starting point of what would later become an "uncompleted" social revolution.[5] Bolivian accounts, however, tend to understand 1952 quite differently—viewing the events of April 1952 as the victorious moment of a revolutionary nationalist process, a process that continued long beyond 1952.[6] A close look

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[4] At one time, the Bolivian revolution ranked with the Mexican revolution; both substantially reshaped their respective social and political structure. The revolution, though considered a "failure" compared to Mexico's "success" was broadly discussed. See Huntington 1969 (p. 275), Skocpol 1979 (p. 287), Hobsbawm 1986 (p. 23), and Knight 1990 (p. 182). Seminal English-language accounts of the 1952 Revolution and its aftermath include Alexander 1958, Klein 1968, Malloy 1970, Dunkerley 1984, and Malloy and Gamarra 1988.

[5] Selbin writes: "There is unquestionably a consensus that a revolutionary process *began to unfold in Bolivia in 1952* [italics added]…" (1999, p. 34).

[6] F. Mayorga writes: "The revolution of 52 was, without a doubt, the establishing moment of the Bolivian nation and the nationalist ideology occupied the 'hegemonic center' of the *process that culminated in the April insurrection* [italics added], that is, civil society was shaped and defined … through the revolutionary nationalist discourse" (1993, p. 23, my translation). Examples of this view of 1952 and the "national revolution" in Bolivian accounts include Ayala 1956, Céspedes 1956, Bedregal 1958, Smith Ariñez 1960, and Antezana 1969. Such authors are marked by tendency for a teleological view of history. Accounts of continuism after

at the post-1964 military regimes also demonstrates a sense of continuism: each of the military regimes (at least until 1978-1982) not only explicitly declared themselves as "restoring" the revolution, they were actively supported by competing factions of the 1952-1964 MNR coalition.

A brief comparison to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1928) is instructive. First, Bolivian political intellectuals clearly looked to Mexico as a model for their own national revolution.[7] Second, despite their different origins and trajectories, state-building and nation-building processes accompanied both revolutions. Both revolutions were successful in fundamentally (and in large measure irreversibly) transforming their respective social, political, and economic structures. Both revolutionary experiences also included long periods of turbulent violence that saw opposing (even counter-revolutionary) forces vie for control.[8] Where the Bolivian revolution "failed" was in the inability of the MNR to consolidate its monopoly on power and establish the same kind of long-lasting, institutionalized hegemonic single-party system as Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).[9]

Internal splits within the MNR coalition became increasingly problematic after 1956; by 1964 a military coup swept the party's civilian revolutionary leadership aside. Yet the military regimes that governed from 1964 through 1982 not only did not reverse most MNR policies or change the state model, they were often backed by alternating factions of the

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1964 include Garcia Argañaras (1993). Some English-language accounts also note a continuation after 1964. See especially Mitchell 1977 and Malloy and Gamarra 1988.

7 Another important model was Peru's Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) a populist-nationalist party founded in 1929. APRA was particularly influential among the middle-class intellectuals who would go on to form the MNR.

8 Though the violence of the 1952 revolution was brief, the similarity with the Mexican case rests with the back-and-forth nature of the political struggle, with revolutionary and reactionary regimes briefly winning ascendancy between 1936 through 1952.

9 My interpretation differs from the one presented by Selbin (1999, pp. 33-39), who argues that Bolivia's revolution was institutionalized (establishing a government) but not consolidated (convincing people to "embrace the social revolutionary project", p. 13). I argue that the key features of the revolutionary project were already accepted by a critical mass of the population before 1952, suggesting that the revolutionary project was consolidated, even if the party that came to power (the MNR) was not.

MNR leadership and staked their legitimacy on claims of continuing the national revolution.[10] It is possible, of course, that such claims were mere populist rhetoric, though the military regimes (especially the lengthy Barrientos and Banzer dictatorships) did have substantial ties to the national revolutionary project. What is significant, however, is that by 1952 the revolutionary nationalist discourse was hegemonic—no successful political movement (from the right or the left) tried to identify itself with or appeal to a different discourse, and no regime attempted to use a different political vocabulary. Moreover, the struggles between the Bolivian right and left from 1964 through 1982 mirrored the same internal divisions that had plagued both the broader revolutionary nationalist movement leadership and the MNR before 1952; none of the post-1952 political movements advocated a return to the pre-revolutionary status quo.

Considered as a national revolution, the Bolivian revolution seems to have been firmly consolidated and certainly not a failure.[11] The 1952 Revolution was in many ways the culmination of a broad revolutionary project aimed at consolidating a new national identity based on integrationist *mestizo* nationalism.[12] The nationalist project proclaimed a community where class, ethnic, and regional distinctions were subsumed under a common, corporatist national identity. Among the key reforms of the 1952 Revolution were agrarian reform and

[10] Scholars have long accepted a narrative of the Mexican Revolution that encompasses nearly two decades of political violence and upheaval, including back and forth struggle between various national political factions and leaders. I see no reason why a similar interpretation of struggles between Bolivia's nationalist factions is not also possible. I briefly outline a case for a Bolivian revolutionary continuism after 1964 later in this chapter.

[11] It is important to clearly differentiate between the nation-building and state-building elements of the Bolivian revolution. Where the MNR failed was in building a sufficiently autonomous state.

[12] The revolutionary nationalist project was "integrationist" because, like other nation-building projects (e.g. France, Russia, Mexico), it aimed to assimilate various social groups—regardless of regional, ethnic, or class differences—into a single homogenous community. They pursued this goal by promoting a Spanish-language *mestizo* (mixed race/ethnic) identity. The revolutionary nationalist project was also "integrationist" in another sense. Throughout much of Bolivian history, political life focused almost exclusively in the urban centers, especially the capital city. The nationalist integrationist program pursued by the MNR also emphasized a need to incorporate the frontier provinces more closely into national political, economic, and social life.

the abolition of the semi-feudal *hacienda* system, state control over much of the country's economic activity, and universal adult suffrage. Prior to 1952, voting was heavily restricted to only white adult males; the vast majority of the indigenous population was excluded from the electoral process. By introducing universal suffrage—and the recognition of indigenous *campesinos* as citizen members of "the nation"—the leaders of the national revolution turned to creating a new sense of national unity. And while the 1930s saw a burst of regionalist movements (particularly in Santa Cruz), these all but disappeared by the late 1950s, in large measure as a product of deliberate state policies meant to more closely integrate—both politically and economically—previously marginalized regions of the country.

One key program of the revolution was educational reform, by which Spanish literacy was imposed on the nation's *campesinos* ("Indians" became "peasants") in what Aurolyn Luykx (1999) describes as "citizen factories."[13] This corporatist-statist national discourse was reinforced by a political mythology that wove post-Chaco Bolivian history into a single narrative, reflected in a teleological tendency in Bolivian historical accounts. Later movements and regimes (whether civilian or military) made significant efforts to establish their legitimacy by explicitly connecting themselves to the events and heroes of this revolutionary national narrative. Other discourses, such as those concerning identity politics—principally revolving around ethnic and regional differences—would not gain salience in Bolivian politics until after the democratic transition.

[13] Luykx's work focuses on recent Bolivian history, and looks at how students resist the kind of cultural assimilation imposed on them by public schools (what she calls "citizen factories"). I have merely used her catch-phrase, since it describes the kind of educational reformism adopted by the nationalist revolutionary movement, reforms meant to create new "Bolivian" citizens.

The Chaco War and the Crisis of the *Ancien Régime*

Bolivia began the twentieth century with civilian government and a competitive political party system. Nevertheless, political life was restricted to a small (mostly white) Spanish-speaking elite—known collectively as *la rosca*—dominated by the powerful *hacendados* (the traditional landed elite) and the "tin barons" (Aramayo, Hochschild, and Patiño). Suffrage was closely restricted: women, Indians, the poor, and the illiterate were barred from voting through legal provisions and poll taxes.[14] Meanwhile, the majority of the indigenous rural population lived in poverty and servitude. Since the 1880s, the "liberal republic" attacked indigenous communal land rights and oversaw the expansion of the *hacienda* system of landlord-peasant relations. By the 1920s, political competition revolved around the Liberal and Republican parties, though minor parties represented the nascent labor movement and other challenges to the liberal republic's status quo.

A collapse of tin prices during the Great Depression exposed underlying socioeconomic problems associated with monocultural dependence on tin exports and the country's racial caste system. It was in this context that Bolivia entered the Chaco War. The war grew out of escalating conflicts over the long-disputed territory. Despite initial hopes, gross political mismanagement and a stubborn Paraguayan counter-offensive soon left the Bolivian army reeling; by 1934, Paraguayan forces threatened the Andean foothills.[15] That November, the military high command overthrew the civilian government of Daniel Salamanca. It was only in 1935 that Bolivian forces—under the command of a young field commander, Major Germán Busch—managed to halt the Paraguayan advance. Finally,

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[14] Ironically, while most native-born Bolivian adults were excluded from voting, non-citizen foreigners who met length-of-residency requirements were allowed to vote.

[15] At the start of the war, most observers expected the larger, better-equipped and German-trained Bolivian army to easily defeat Paraguay. For extensive historical analysis of the war, see Zook 1960 and Farcau 1996.

exhausted after three years of bitter fighting, the two sides signed a peace treaty that formally recognized Paraguay's claim to almost the entire disputed territory.[16]

The military defeat shattered middle-class confidence in the social, political, and economic status quo. The Chaco War was Bolivia's first "modern" war; nationwide mobilization was extensive, affecting almost an entire generation of Bolivian men. In many ways, the war was comparable to the First World War, both in the type and scope of the fighting and the social upheaval that followed.[17] More than 56,000 (about one in five of all Bolivian combatants) died in the war—a figure that amounts to two percent of the total population. Most affected were the lower middle-class (primarily *mestizo*) junior and noncommissioned officers who served in the front lines, sharing common hardships with their Indian subordinates—most of whom could not even speak Spanish.[18] Here, often for the first time, they confronted the harsh realities of their society's racial caste system. The new "Chaco generation" of young intellectuals that emerged from this experience was highly radicalized, critical of the status quo, and included individuals who would later play a key role in national revolutionary movements.

The 1934 military coup dealt a crippling blow to the *ancien régime* and signaled an acceptance by military officers towards direct participation in Bolivian politics, a role they had not played since 1880. And while the traditional, established parties—now joined in a broad coalition—could no longer count on the support of the middle classes, the latter were

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[16] To give a sense of the scope of Paraguay's victory in the war: The size of the disputed territory awarded to Paraguay was nearly double the country's pre-war size.

[17] Both post-war Russia and post-war Germany are cases that resemble post-war Bolivia. In both cases, military defeat shattered confidence in the status quo and led to social revolutions that swept away the *ancien régime*. The origins of the Bolivian social revolution thus fit the pattern in Skocpol 1979.

[18] There is historical consensus that Indian ex-combatants were more easily reabsorbed back into the *ancien régime* social system. Most active post-war social movements were predominantly middle class in orientation, leadership, and membership. For an overview of emerging rural social movements during this period, see Antezana and Romeo 1968, Dandler 1969, Klein 1969, and Dandler 1971.

not yet organized into a unified revolutionary movement. The result would be a back-and-forth struggle between different nationalist elements and the remnants of the traditional oligarchy that lasted from 1936 through 1952.

The National Revolution: A Historicist View

The two decades immediately following the war saw the emergence of three phenomena: the consolidation of a new national revolutionary discourse, the rise of the MNR as the dominant political organization, and the construction of a new national state. All three would have significant consequences for the post democratization period. A historicist view of Bolivia's national revolution places April 1952 within a broader historical process. Most Bolivian accounts, as previously noted, have tended to consider the two decades following the Chaco War as a continuous process in which April 1952 is only the apex. Without endorsing (or rejecting) this perspective—one must remember that this is a constructed national narrative—I wish to sketch out a history of Bolivia from 1936 to 1952 within this historicist framework. The implications of this historical narrative—the consolidation of a post-Chaco national imaginary and the enduring legacy of populism—are discussed later in this chapter.

Bolivian accounts trace the origin of the national revolution to the Germán Busch regime (1936-1939).[19] Barely a year after the end of the Chaco War, the colonels' coup initiated a process of radical economic and political changes under a banner of "military socialism" supported by members of the Chaco generation. The project closely modeled the contemporary Mexican example, seeking to establish a corporatist-developmentalist state. The regime's reforms included: a new 1938 Constitution that gave the state a powerful role

[19] Though two colonels, David Toro and Germán Busch, jointly initiated the 17 May 1936 coup, the latter was the main protagonist. Busch formally deposed Toro on 13 July 1937 and assumed full control of the regime.

in economic life;[20] the country's first labor code, known as the Código Busch (1939), which would become a centerpiece of future labor policy for most subsequent regimes; and the formation of the country's state-owned oil company, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales de Bolivia (YPFB). The regime's main shortcoming was its high degree of personalism, which left the popular young war hero increasingly isolated from institutionalized bases of support. On 23 August 1939, a frustrated Busch committed suicide.[21]

The Busch regime was followed by a brief restoration as the Liberal and Republican parties formed an alliance known as the Concordancia to win the 1940 presidential election. Nevertheless, Marxist and national revolutionary candidates won a majority of the legislative seats. In the first post-Chaco election, the traditional parties had trouble winning votes from a highly restricted electorate. The opposition was split into three blocs: Soviet-line Marxists, who formed the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (PIR); the Trotskyite Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR); and a group of middle-class nationalists who had supported the Busch regime and would go on to form the MNR within a year. All three blocs agreed on some basic principles: nationalization of key industries, support for a growing labor movement, and anti-imperialism. While PIR and POR addressed the peasant question, the MNR remained silent on the issue.

The Second World War, however, produced a significant realignment. Hitler's 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union led the PIR (and many POR deputies) to adopt a pro-Allied position and made them allies of the Concordancia regime. The move left the MNR as the only significant opposition party. When a series of mineworkers' strikes in 1942 that ended

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[20] The 1938 Constitution was modeled on the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which was a model of the "social constitutionalism" trend throughout Latin America. Under the constitution, property was no longer an inalienable right, but rather depended on "social utility."

[21] While Busch's suicide is generally accepted, some have claimed that he was actually murdered by political opponents. See Paredes Candia 1997.

in repression, it was the MNR's Paz Estenssoro who denounced the "Catavi massacre" from the legislature. Following on the heels of a 1942 election that saw the MNR expand its support—at the cost of both Concordancia and Marxist parties—the Catavi massacre was a devastating blow to the liberal republican government.

Only two years after its founding, the MNR participated in its first coup.[22] The 1943 civil-military putsch was principally organized by members of Razón de Patria (RADEPA), a secret military *logia* (lodge) founded by eighteen Bolivian junior officers held in Paraguayan prisoner-of-war camps. RADEPA members had been key supporters of the Busch regime and represented an ultra-nationalist position.[23] The Gualberto Villarroel regime (1943-1946) marked a radical phase of the national revolutionary movement. Both *ancien régime* and Marxist political opponents were heavily persecuted.[24] It was the regime's pro-Allied policies, however, that led the MNR to distance itself from the regime by early 1944. Thus, the MNR was partly insulated when the regime fell. On 14 July 1946, in a burst of popular mob violence, Villarroel was dragged out of the Presidential Palace and hanged from a lamppost.

The subsequent governments, known as the *sexenio* (1946-1952), saw an awkward alliance between liberal and Marxists politicians. Despite PIR control over several key ministries—including the Ministry of Labor—the *sexenio* governments were unfriendly to labor. By 1944, PIR had lost its influence with labor as independent labor leaders, led by

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[22] The 1943 coup was also supported by the fascist Falange Socialista Boliviano (FSB).

[23] For a history of RADEPA written by former members, see Murillo and Larrea 1988. The authors present the Villarroel regime as part of the larger national revolutionary movement, when they write that it laid the "base of the explosion [sic] of 1952 and laid the foundation for reform that today are irreversible" [my translation]" (p. 18).

[24] The Villarroel regime was one of the most brutal in Bolivia's twentieth century. Unhappy with popular support for PIR in the 1944 election, the regime merely executed *pirista* leaders, closed their newspapers, and jailed their supporters. After a brief 1945 uprising by liberals in the city of Oruro, Villarroel ordered mass executions of liberal politicians.

Juan Lechín, brought the MNR and the mineworkers' closer together.[25] A key moment was the Thesis of Pulacayo. Announced only months after Villarroel's death, the mineworkers federation firmly rejected the *sexenio* regime, called for the immediate formation of workers' militias, and declared a "permanent revolution." After another series of mineworkers strikes at the Catavi mines in 1947 ended in repression, PIR was effectively destroyed as a party organization. Meanwhile, the MNR consolidated its position as the political vanguard of the national revolutionary movement and moved itself closer to the labor movement.

In 1949, the MNR attempted its first independent putsch, organized by Siles Zuazo. Only three years after Villarroel's death, the September 1949 uprising clearly demonstrated the MNR's ability to mobilize a credible armed threat. Like the later successful April 1952 uprising, the 1949 revolt was highly coordinated. MNR civilian militias simultaneously and successfully seized control of all the country's major cities, with the notable exception of La Paz. Having established a provision headquarters in Santa Cruz, the MNR militias fought the army for two months before finally capitulating. Only months later, in May 1950, a spontaneous factory workers' strike in La Paz swiftly escalated into yet another MNR-led insurrection.

After the 1951 presidential election—which by all accounts the MNR won—was annulled by a conservative military coup, the MNR fully committed itself to total civil war and the complete destruction of the army as an institution. Unlike in the 1949 uprising, when its leaders refused to open captured armories to the broader public, restricting the fighting to its organized party *comandos*, the MNR would now encourage broader popular participation. On 9 April 1952, the final MNR revolt began, this time with the participation of the FSTMB mineworkers' militias. After three days of intense fighting, especially in the city of La Paz,

[25] In June 1944, a mineworkers' congress at Huanuni established the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB), which soon became the labor movement's radical-militant vanguard.

the army was effectively destroyed as an institution and the last elements of the *ancien régime* were swept away. The victorious MNR would go on to rule Bolivia for the next twelve years.

The Fragile MNR Hegemony, 1952-1964

The MNR that seized power in 1952 was not an ideologically cohesive political party, but rather a multi-class populist alliance of diverse popular sectors.[26] This populist strategy of multi-sectoral alliances and pacts would define the future evolution of Bolivia's political party system. Since 1946, the MNR leadership had pursued a strategy of building networks and alliances with key leaders of different social movements, especially labor. While the MNR's middle-class origins would dictate the central leaderships' ultimate interests, the party platform offered vague, reformist promises that could appeal to a broad popular cross-section. But between 1952 and 1956, the central leadership attempted to reign in popular movements and establish a centralized, institutional party organization similar to Mexico's PRI. After 1956, these efforts broke down as different personal factions within the MNR vied for control. These factional conflicts would shape the next three decades of political conflict. But such conflicts—even those between the middle classes, labor, and *campesinos*—took place within a common, underlying national discourse. The nineteenth century liberalism of the *ancien régime* was swept away and discredited, as was the PIR's orthodox Marxism, replaced by the integrationist, revolutionary nationalism promoted by the MNR. The political conflict of the next three decades was principally a struggle over the ownership and direction of the national revolution.

The sudden and absolute collapse of the *ancien régime* in 1952 left a situation of political chaos and uncertainty. Party leaders struggled to regain control of the broader

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[26] See Mitchell 1977, who compares the MNR with three other multi-class populist parties: Peru's APRA, Venezuela's COPEI, and Mexico's PRI.

revolutionary process they had unleashed. Especially problematic were the mineworkers, who were aligned with the Trotskyite POR, and whose demands conflicted with the MNR's middle-class interests.[27] The early period of MNR government was marked by attempts to reconcile *movimientista* and *porista* policy agendas. The result was a corporatist system of *cogobierno* in which different sectors were allowed to govern their own affairs with little interference from the central leadership. In an effort to co-opt the labor movement, MNR leaders supported the creation of the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), a national labor federation, under the leadership of Juan Lechín. The COB kept its independence from the MNR and became a key element of the *cogobierno* system. Between 1952 through 1956, a careful balance was maintained between the middle-class MNR and the COB.

In the chaos that immediately followed April 1952, a radical peasant movement began to sweep the countryside. Without no central army or state authority to restrain them, and encouraged by the labor movement, peasants began organizing into rural *sindicatos* and forming their own militias to attack the *hacienda* system. By August 1953, the Paz Estenssoro government recognized what was by now essentially a fait accompli and issued an agrarian reform decree that abolished the hacienda land-tenure system and issued land titles to peasants. Soon after becoming a class of landowners, however, the *campesinos* became an increasingly conservative force, often hostile to the urban labor movement. In time, MNR leaders would learn to mobilize rural voters in their internal struggles with labor.

By 1956, there were growing divisions between the MNR and COB.[28] In an effort to retain governmental stability, Siles Zuazo (who succeeded Paz Estenssoro) abandoned the

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[27] While the MNR had established workers' *células* within the mines themselves, the real power within the mineworkers' movement were the local FSTMB *sindicatos*. These were typically controlled by POR labor organizers.

[28] Many refer to 1956 as the Bolivian revolution's "Thermidor" since, during the Siles Zuazo presidency, the MNR began distancing itself from labor and aligning itself more closely with the middle classes.

previous populist coalition strategy and instead encouraged personal factionalism within the leadership. Though temporarily successful, the strategy had long-term consequences. First, of course, the move deinstitutionalized the party and transformed it into a constellation of personalist factions. Many factional conflicts became increasingly bitter personal feuds, which in turn would weaken both the MNR (and, to a lesser degree, the COB) as well as the state (which increasingly became a resource for political patronage). Another long-term consequence was that many of these factions would go on to form key elements of the later post-democratization party system.

While losing the support of the militant labor movement (and its workers' militias), the Siles Zuazo government had to develop new strategies for maintain state authority. One approach was to mobilize the rural *campesinos*, frequently used as a blunt coercive instrument against labor and other regime opponents.[29] Such a strategy was dangerous, however, since rural *caudillos* often fought each other—such as the 1959-1962 civil war between Ucureña and Cliza forces in the Cochabamba valley—and revived middle class fears of armed Indian uprisings. The other strategy was to rebuild the Bolivian military. Beginning in 1957, the military was reorganized as officers dismissed during the *sexenio* (for Busch-Villarroel sympathies) were returned to active duty. The new post-1952 military was predominantly middle class and generally committed to the national revolutionary position. The new military was also deeply involved in rural developmentalist projects (e.g. road building, school construction, literacy projects), which would in time help establish a military-*campesino* political alliance.

By 1960, Siles Zuazo's personalistic leadership had eroded both the party's legitimacy as a social-representative institution and the central state's authority. Increasing support for

[29] In March 1959, a *campesino* force from Ucureña was mobilized to break up an FSTMB strike in the city of Oruro. A similar force briefly occupied the city of Santa Cruz in 1958 following an abortive FSB revolt.

the FSB demonstrated middle class frustration. Meanwhile, several key party leaders abandoned the party to found their own political movements.[30] As the 1960 election neared, Paz Estenssoro brokered a deal with Lechín to back the former president against Siles Zuazo's chosen successor, Walter Guevara Arze. Once elected, Paz Estenssoro continued the policy of fomenting factional divisions, as he concentrated political control in the hands of the young MNR technocrats, most of whom were personally loyal to the party *jefe*. In 1964, Paz Estenssoro again secured his presidential nomination, though this time he named a military officer, René Barrientos, as his running mate. Only months after the election, Barrientos, supported by different MNR factions, overthrew Paz Estenssoro in a bloodless coup.

The 1964-1978 Military Regimes

A common feature of the military regimes that governed Bolivia from 1964 to 1978 was their close ties to the MNR. They "did not constitute any change in the class allegiance or basic policies" (Mitchell 1977, p. 97). In part, the MNR's attempts to coordinate activities with sympathetic military officers in the 1940s helped politicize the military. Similarly, the post-1952 purge of *ancien régime* officers and reinstatement of Busch-Villarroel supporters, along with policies that encouraged middle class entrance into the officer corps, produced a new military committed to the national revolutionary project and with close ties to middle class interests. Meanwhile, the middle classes had slowly moved to the right as they sought to defend their post-revolutionary social and economic gains. By 1964, continued factional infighting and increasing violence in the countryside prompted the military high command to

[30] These included: Izquierda Nacional del MNR (Siles Zuazo); MNR Auténtico (Walter Guevara Arze); Sector Izquierda del MNR (Lechín); Sector Socialista del MNR (Aníbal Aguilar, Edil Sandoval Moron); Frente de Unidad Nacionalista (José Fellman); and the Sector Pazestenssorista (Paz Estenssoro).

take an active political role. Nevertheless, these military regimes deviated little from the central, middle-class policies of the MNR.

The 1964 Barrientos coup was backed by a broad anti-*pazestenssorista* coalition that included leftists and labor leaders.[31] Barrientos had participated in the 1952 April uprising, and after the MNR's victory, had flown Paz Estenssoro back from exile. Once in power, however, Barrientos' regime became highly personalist, conservative, and rabidly anti-Communist.[32] The regime aggressively attacked organized labor, slashing wages and militarizing the mines. Between 1965 and 1967, a series of labor strikes ended in violent clashes with the military. By the end of the Barrientos regime, with most COB, FSTMB, and other labor leaders jailed or exiled, organized labor was effectively dismantled. The result was reluctance by labor and the left to support any future regimes.

The regime relied on a military-*campesino* pact, formally signed between Barrientos and key rural leaders in 1966. The alliance, however, was one-sided. The military dictator dominated the rural social movements by establishing patron-client networks. With overwhelming *campesino* support, Barrientos easily won the 1966 election—a plebiscite on the new regime. A 1966 constituent assembly drafted the 1967 Constitution, though not immediately enacted, later served as the foundation of the post-transition democratic system.[33] Without little support from middle class political leaders, the personalistic regime was fragile; it did not survive Barrientos' sudden death in April 1969.[34]

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[31] The 5 November 1964 coup was supported by the Lechín, Guevara Arze, and Siles Zuazo wings of the MNR, as well as by FSB, PIR, and PSD. Officially led by General Alfredo Ovando (Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces), but it was soon clear that Barrientos (Chief of the Air Force) was in charge.

[32] The regime is internationally best remembered for its role in apprehending and killing Ernesto "Che" Guevara in 1967.

[33] For a detailed discussion of the 1966 constituent assembly, see Barragán 2005, p. 374-378.

[34] Barrientos had named Luís Adolfo Siles Salinas as his vice president in 1966. Siles Salinas was a member of the Partido Social Demócrata (PSD), a small liberal middle-class party founded in 1947. Only months after assuming the presidency, Siles Salinas was overthrown in a military coup led by Ovando.

General Alfredo Ovando's September 1969 military coup announced a return to "national revolutionary" principles. The program, designed to appeal to the middle classes while also loosening restrictions on labor, was modeled on Peru's military "revolutionary government."[35] To court middle class support, Ovando invited into his cabinet members of the MNR, FSB, and the new Christian Democracy movement. Efforts to improve relations with labor, however, failed. The COB remained skeptical after the Barrientos experience and refused to participate in or support the regime. With no institutional mechanism to channel or manage popular participation, Ovando's loosening of restrictions merely increased anti-regime activity. Renewed violence between rival *campesino* groups in the Cochabamba valley frightened the middle class and the officer corps, the two groups Ovando's regime relied upon. In 4 October 1970, army chief General Rogelio Miranda launched a coup. Because of growing splits within the military, Ovando was able to rally support. The result was a military deadlocked that forced the military to hold a military congress, which voted on 7 October to replace Ovando with General Juan José Torres.[36]

The brief Torres regime was marked by left-populist policies and significant reliance on leftist middle-class intellectuals and labor leaders.[37] A disunited military also gave the regime freedom of action. But continued factional splits within the labor movement and throughout the political left made governing extremely difficult. The most powerful labor organization, the COB, refused to give the regime more than conditional support. Hoping to

[35] A group of Peruvian national revolutionary military officers, led by Juan Velasco, overthrew the country's APRA government in 1968. The regime, which lasted until 1975, had similar goals: nationalization of key industries, a developmentalist state, and agrarian reform.

[36] During the military's *cuartel general*, workers loyal to the Lechín COB faction, students from the public Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), and the Siles Zuazo MNR faction declared their support for Torres, who had been forced to resign as army chief by Barrientos, and threatened armed insurrection.

[37] The most active civilian support for the regime came from the new ideological Marxist groups dominant in the universities. Among these were established groups like the POR, as well as a revitalized communist movement (though split into numerous Moscow, Beijing, and internationalist factions). One of the few groups that retained a decidedly left-nationalist orientation was the newly founded MIR.

establish an institutional base of popular support for his government, Torres convened a Popular Assembly in June 1970. Delegates to the assembly were not elected, but rather selected—almost exclusively by labor syndicates and Marxist political parties. The assembly's radical discourse solidified middle class opposition to the regime. In August, a civil-military putsch led by Colonel Hugo Banzer overthrew Torres.[38]

The Banzer regime (1971-1978) was primarily supported by large sectors of the middle classes, particularly the new Santa Cruz agriculture and entrepreneurial elite. Banzer's civilian political support came from the Falange and the *pazestenssorista* wing of theMNR, which provided several cabinet ministers. Though the MNR would later be officially dismissed in 1974, when Banzer transformed the regime into an all-military dictatorship, the party rank-and-file and the regime retained close ideological ties. The regime continued the same state-capitalist model initiated in 1952, though it made a stronger effort to control labor. Banzer removed labor (and *campesino*) leaders, replacing them with government-loyal "labor coordinators." The regime also employed significant levels of repression against political opponents.[39]

In 1974, Banzer announced an *autogolpe* (self-coup) and initiated an all-military dictatorship. Like similar bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, the Banzer regime sought to develop a modern, national capitalist economy, while preventing the "social chaos" of democratic party politics, through a depoliticized,

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[38] Banzer had already attempted a coup in January 1971 and was exiled after its failure. Plotting with the Paz Estenssoro wing of the MNR and members of FSB, Banzer returned to Bolivia in August, entering through the city of Santa Cruz. From 20-23 August, Banzer advanced towards the capital as military units defected to his position. Only a few workers' militias and university students decided to make a stand in La Paz and Oruro; the result was the bloodiest coup since 1952.

[39] Two incidents in 1974 stand out. To break up a university student protest, air force units strafed the UMSA campus, before a military ground assault. A *campesino* uprising that blockaded the rounds around the city of Cochabamba was similarly attacked by air force and army units, leaving at least 100 dead. By the end of the regime, at least 35,000 Bolivians had been jailed or exiled, and at least 500 were killed or disappeared.

technocratic state. One of the goals of the regime was to and accelerate the post-1952 policies of "national integration" by increasing investment in non-mining sectors of the economy—principally the Santa Cruz agricultural and business sectors. The post-1974 regime brought increased opposition from the middle classes, however, particularly those members of the "political class."[40] By 1977, growing social unrest against the regime forced Banzer to promise elections ahead of schedule, in 1978.[41]

The Transition to Democracy

The 1978 election marked the beginning of Bolivia's difficult transition to democracy. In 1978, Banzer named General Juan Pereda Asbún as the regime's official presidential candidate. The election was annulled, however, and Pereda Asbún launched a military coup in July once it was clear that he would not win the election. Splits within the military between institutionalists (those who did not want to continue military political involvement) and hard-liners became clear when a military junta overthrew Pereda Asbún in November and called new elections. Between 1979 and 1982, Bolivia would experience two more elections, two interim civilian presidents, and five military regimes.[42] Finally, in October 1982, the parliament election in the 1980 election was reconvened; it chose Siles Zuazo, the candidate for the Unión Democrática y Popular (UDP).

[40] The Bolivian "political class" is a particular subsector of the middle classes. It includes not only politicians, but others who live from politics (such as bureaucrats) and, therefore, have a vested interest in maintaining civilian involvement in political life.

[41] Banzer had originally declared that his regime would last until 1980.

[42] Elections were held in 1979 and 1980. Both elections led to a political stalemate, after no candidate won a simple majority and parliament was unable to decide on a winner. Parliament chose Wálter Guevara Arze (PRA) and Lidia Gueiler Tejada (PRIN) as interim presidents in 1979 and 1980, respectively. The longest of the military regimes, led by Luis Garcia Mesa, lasted from July 1980 to August 1981.

Political Discourse and the National Imaginary

A common thread tying Bolivian political life from the 1930s through the 1970s is the consolidation and hegemony of a new post-Chaco national imaginary marked by a strong historicist tendency. The discourse consolidated after 1952 provided the lens through which modern Bolivian national history is understood. In it, the April 1952 National Revolution represents a "historical axis" in which the nation's different ethnic or regional groups, social classes, and other corporate sectors converged—and were integrated—into a single national community. Though this understanding of the 1952 revolt endures, the discourse that produced it was displaced—among members of the political class—during the 1980s. In many ways, the initial success of the democratization process produced a fractured collective consciousness. Principally, members of the political elite developed a new, liberal political discourse, even as large sections of the population continued to understand Bolivian politics through a post-Chaco discourse.

In sharp contrast to preceding period, the contemporary period is marked by thre rival (and in many ways contradictory) political discourses:

1. A new liberal-pluralist discourse that emerged from the democratization process.

2. An older corporatist-statist discourse that has survived from the post-Chaco national revolutionary period.

3. A new, indigenous *katarista* discourse that developed since the late 1970s.

The liberal-pluralist discourse combines belief in neoliberal market economics with a pluralist conception of the political community. Proponents of this discourse emphasize the "pluricultural, multinational" nature of Bolivian society, as well as put an emphasis on individual political and economic rights. The corporatist-statist discourse articulates a belief in more activist state intervention in the economy—particularly in state ownership of key

natural resources. Proponents of this discourse also emphasize the corporate nature of the political community, preferring to emphasize corporate (that is, group or sectoral) political and economic rights, rather than individual ones. At its heart, the corporatist-statist discourse is also a traditional nationalist discourse. Finally, the new *katarista* discourse (named after eighteenth century indigenous guerrilla leader, Tupac Katari) is essentially an indigenous millenarian political discourse. It is important to note that not all indigenous movements or leaders are part of this *katarista* discourse, many are better understood as part of the liberal-pluralist (e.g. Víctor Hugo Cardenas) or the corporatist-statist (e.g. Evo Morales) discourses.

The corporatist-statist national discourse emerged from the Chaco War.[43] The war had a profound effect on the national psyche and brought the national question directly into public political discourse. This evolving discourse fit the revolutionary nationalist form outlined by Anderson (1991): print capitalism fostered the development of a decidedly "nationalist" literary genre and a dramatic growth in newspapers, pamphleteering, and other means of printed text that anchored a shared (national) communal experience among the literate middle class. One clear example was the new "Chaco novel," which began appearing during the war.[44] Rooted in an earlier realist style, these novels were marked by proletarian point-of-view and thematic attacks against the racial caste system—often portraying high-ranking military officers as incompetent, cowardly, and treacherous. The tone and subject matter of the Chaco novel reflected the new nationalist discourse common among members of the Chaco generation; these openly criticized the liberal republic as "anti-national" or

[43] There was an earlier nationalist literary tradition that emerged around the turn of the century. The most notable figure of this movement was Franz Tamayo, a Bolivian intellectual and politician. His essay *Creación de la pedagogía nacional* (1910)—a discourse on the need for a nationalist, integrationist educational system—is still highly influential.

[44] See MacLeod 1962, Stock 1969, and Salinas 1969.

"colonialist." Similar attacks were also made in the new anti-establishment newspapers and presses throughout the 1930s and 1940s. One of these was *La Calle*, a popular nationalist agitation newspaper edited by future MNR founders.[45] By the late 1930s, the harshest indictment against any political figure was that of being a *rosquero* (a supporter of the oligarchy, or *la rosca*) or an *entreguista* (a traitor, one who delivers the nation to foreign interests).

The Chaco War became a central moment in the new national imaginary. The war was (and still is) seen as a collective, national tragedy. The bitterness of the conflict, the harsh conditions of the battlefield, and the poor organizational capacity of the liberal republic's elite—all vividly expressed in the popular Chaco novels—became an important reference point for future political leaders and movements. In the new national imaginary, the Chaco battlefields were the place where the Bolivian people "discovered themselves" as a national community. In the historical national narrative, the war also became part of a longer tradition of collective national suffering at the hands of foreign interests and "anti-national" elites. Another such collective national tragedy is the War of the Pacific (1879-1884), in which Bolivia lost its Litoral to Chile. Interestingly, unlike that conflict, which still extends animosity outward (toward Chile), the post-Chaco nationalism directed animosity inwards (toward local elites).[46] Annual commemorative ceremonies, however, frequently tie both events together; the 23 March Día del Mar parades invariably include a contingent of

[45] These included: Carlos Montenegro, Augusto Céspedes, Armando Arce, and José Cuadros Quiroga. These men would later comprise the MNR's right wing.

[46] The Litoral conflict still resonates in the Bolivian national consciousness. Various Bolivian political leaders (both civilian and military) have taken advantage of existing anti-Chilean sentiments to seek popular support. The tenuous Carlos Mesa regime was, in many ways, sustained by his consistent appeals to seek Bolivian sovereign access to the Pacific.

aging Chaco War veterans and war widows.[47] Through official (and unofficial) history, the Chaco War mythos and its role in the national consciousness were carefully maintained.

As a foundational narrative, the Chaco War mythos can be expressed as an archetypal journey through the wilderness. The arid lowland plains of the Chaco in which a fifth of all Bolivian combatants died (most from hunger and disease) became the crucible through which the nation passed and was forged into *a people*. But a historicist understanding of the Chaco War also temporally expands the journey into the distant past. By tying the Chaco War experience to other moments of past collective tragedy (e.g. the War of the Pacific, the difficult struggle for independence, the eighteenth century Tupac Katari revolt), the Chaco national narrative extended the national community further into the distant past, thus granting it greater legitimacy. Such a narrative also contributed to the formation of a "collective tragedy" genre, which has frequently dominated popular political discourse. In this discourse, the Chaco War serves as a powerful metaphor for political life: woefully misled by corrupt, irresponsible elites more interested in serving international interests than national ones, the Bolivian people are sentenced to repeatedly struggle in defense of "the national"—in short, the nation suffers a collective martyrdom.

Like other types of narratives, national historical narratives contain both heroes and villains. The Bolivian post-Chaco imaginary includes a pantheon of heroes and martyrs to the national cause.[48] The first great hero-martyr is Germán Busch. The charismatic young dictator, who became the model for future reformist projects and (more importantly) populist leaders, is almost universally viewed in a positive light—as a figure who struggled, in

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[47] In many ways, Chaco War veterans, and members of the Chaco generation more generally, are afforded special status within Bolivian society, sharing a similar status to members of the "Greatest Generation" (who experienced both the Great Depression and the Second World War) in the United States.

[48] The post-1952 period included a series of national monument and museum projects that make the national imaginary "physically present" in everyday life. These include a host of statues, *plazuelas*, and streets named after figures from both post- and pre-Chaco national history.

the end in vain, in an attempt to wrest control of the state away from the anti-national elites in the name of the nation. Busch enjoys the status of popular legitimacy not only because he initiated the construction of a national (rather than a "liberal") state, but also because he personally went through the crucible of the Chaco War. As the war's most well-known and legitimate war hero, he perhaps best represented the middle class elements of the Chaco generation. The second great martyr, ironically, is Gualberto Villarroel. Despite his regime's brutal repression and ignominious end, only a few years after his death Villarroel's reputation was reconstructed by emerging nationalist middle class leaders who had supported him. Rehabilitated, Villarroel represented a nationalist leader betrayed by anti-national elites (both *rosqueros* and *piristas*) who was brutally and publicly killed by a misguided mob—in short, he became a nationalist Christ figure.

Bolivia's prevalent historicist tradition frequently joins such heroes into an organic, evolutionary succession that represents one consistent narrative strand. And because one can add other figures into this narrative sequence, political leaders have actively included themselves in this national historical sequence. The MNR, and its leaders, not only frequently legitimized themselves by appealing to the Busch and Villarroel regimes, but also successfully included Víctor Paz Estenssoro into this pantheon.[49] The lasting appeal of such myths is noticeable: The most recent official history of the MNR (Bedregal 2002) sports a color photo of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, flanked on each side by bronze busts of Villarroel and Paz Estenssoro. Likewise, Hugo Banzer's biographers never fail to mention

[49] The Plaza de Heroes in La Paz is marked by two massive and imposing stone sculptures: the first is a stylized *monolito* (a sort of Andean stone "totem pole"); the other is the head of Paz Estenssoro, carved in similar style. The Plaza de Heroes, is in many ways, the heart of "the Bolivian street" since it serves as the meeting place for protest gatherings (sometimes self-described as "popular" or "national" assemblies) and the starting point for marches to the capitol buildings.

the young Banzer's fateful meeting with Busch.[50] Almost invariably, apologists for different regimes (whether civilian or military) have tied their project to one or more of the key national heroes and called the regime a continuation or restoration of the nationalist project—a project such authors claim was "interrupted" by an intervening (anti-national) regime.[51]

The new nationalist discourse was consciously both anti-liberal and anti-capitalist.[52] Sharply critical of the liberal republic's emphasis on individual rights (limited, of course, to a minority of the population), the post-Chaco discourse was, like many nationalist discourses, strongly communitarian and corporatist. Not surprisingly, the so-called "1952 State" was built on a corporatist social order and gave precedence to collective, rather than individual rights. Similarly, the new constitutional order introduced the concept of "social utility" as a key function of property—the social use of land trumped property considerations. It was in this context that the nationalization of key industries (particularly mining and hydrocarbons) was undertaken. After the 1980s, the transition to liberal democracy and the neoliberal economic restructuring that came with it, not surprisingly, dramatically altered the political status quo. While the post-Chaco nationalist discourse had been anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, and corporatist, the new democratic regimes strived to be liberal, pluralist, and capitalist.

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[50] According to the story, Busch (while traveling through "the provinces") met a then-adolescent Banzer and declared the boy "destined to do great things" for the *patria*, which led Banzer (with Busch's sponsorship) to enroll in the military academy. Another telling incident involves Banzer's attendance at Paz Estenssoro's 2001 funeral, which was nationally televised. On approaching the casket, Banzer laid a small ADN party flag over Paz Estenssoro. The controversial move was denounced by many *movimientistas*, though Banzer himself declared himself a loyal "son of the revolution" and life-long friend to Paz Estenssoro. Nevertheless, the move was clearly meant to symbolically tie Paz Estenssoro to Banzer in hopes of positioning Banzer and ADN as heirs of the 1952 National Revolution (a status that the MNR has consistently worked hard to confer only upon itself).

[51] Most recently, in various public statements, Evo Morales has tied his own regime's political reforms—particularly his May 2006 nationalization of the hydrocarbons industry—to the 1952 revolutionary project.

[52] Interestingly, the term "liberal" was (like *rosquero*) given a negative connotation by nationalists, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. The language used to denounce the liberal republican regimes and their political elites by nationalists was, in many ways, similar to the kind used by anti-neoliberal dissidents (e.g. Evo Morales).

By the later phase of the democratization process (after 1985), members of the political class had adopted a new, liberal-pluralist political discourse that fundamentally re-imagined the role of the Bolivian state, its relationship to its citizens, and the nature of Bolivian citizenship, as they sought to consolidate a "new collective imaginary" (F. Mayorga 1993, p. 168). This new discourse became the prevailing language of politics among the political parties that dominated formal, electoral politics through the 1980s and 1990s.[53] The democratization process itself prompted a new reimagining of the Bolivian nation by opening the demos question. Just as nations are imagined political communities, so too are democracies. Like nations, individuals also construct democracies (in part) through a collective agreement that they are indeed members of a single, sovereign community (and not two or more such communities). Unlike other types of political communities, democracies are more open (and vulnerable) to ongoing deconstruction of their demos question.[54] By 2002, tensions between sharply different and competing national imaginaries and political institutions little able to manage them produce a political crisis.

The Legacy of Populism

Another common thread that ties Bolivian politics from the 1930s through the 1970s is the dominance of populism as a political strategy. In large measure, this was a product of the post-Chaco national revolutionary discourse. But it was also, as Mitchell (1977) argues, the product of a series of decisions made by elite leaders as they sought strategies to seize

[53] After 1985, both ADN and MNR adopted a "neoliberal" economic discourse; by 1989 MIR also accepted the basic neoliberal economic model. All three parties also embraced pluralist positions, which reached their zenith with the 1993-1997 reforms.

[54] The relationship between democracy and the nation is expanded in Chapter 2.

and retain power.[55] Though populism and *caudillismo* are, of course, region-wide phenomena, the development of modern Bolivian populism coincided with an unprecedented expansion of political participation. Radicalized by the Chaco War experience, and hoping to transform the Bolivian state, the middle-class members of the Chaco generation sought allies in their struggle against the *ancien régime* elite. The kind of alliance structures developed between the middle classes and other classes (particularly labor and the *campesinos*) had significant consequences for Bolivia's later political development.[56]

Members of the Chaco generation developed their collective political power slowly. Participants in the new nationalist movement commonly began by participating in the numerous independent veterans' associations. By the 1940s, several of these evolved into the MNR, which soon became the country's most significant political movement. Unlike other political parties of the post-Chaco period, the MNR was deliberately vague and flexible in its ideological positions—it pursued revolutionary nationalism with little concern for ideological orthodoxy. In contrast, the Marxist left was frequently beset with ideological and doctrinaire splintering, while its emphasis on issues of class limited its acceptance to the middle class. The left's ideological commitment to the international Marxist-socialist movement also left it vulnerable to attacks from nationalists that the left was "anti-national"—accusations that plagued PIR, particularly after its government participation during the *sexenio*.

The origin of modern Bolivian populism is found in the Busch regime. The regime fit the style of a "revolution from above"—though engaged in a radical reformist program, it gave no importance to mass politics or popular mobilization. Despite its banner of "military

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[55] It is important to note that Mitchell recognizes that these choices were, in part, constrained by structural or historical factors, such as the global economy and Bolivia's position regarding the world's great powers.

[56] The importance and implications of different inter-class alliances and relationships for future political development is well established. See Lipset 1963; Moore 1966; and Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992.

socialism," the regime had no sophisticated ideology beyond promoting some new, vaguely defined sense of social justice. Though short-lived, the energetic Busch regime became a model for later radical or reformist regimes, especially those led by military figures. In large measure, it was Busch's personal charisma that made him an appealing icon—much like his better-known contemporaries, Juan Perón in Argentina and Getúlio Vargas in Brazil.[57] Yet differences with the Argentine and Brazilian cases are significant. Unlike the former, the Busch regime came on the heels of defeat in a military war, and one in which Germán Busch was a well-known, popular hero. Unlike Perón or Vargas, Busch insulated himself from civil society and did not engage in mass politics. Thus, Busch offered an ambiguous model (he could be invoked both by the left and the right) of a "revolutionary" regime centered on the personal virtue of a heroic, anti-political leader.[58]

Despite its attempted insularity from civilian politics, the Busch regime also served as an incubator for the revolutionary nationalist movement. Several of those who would go on to play key roles in the MNR began their political careers during this time, many as delegates to the 1938 constitutional convention or civilian bureaucrats. Among these was an obscure lawyer and war veteran from Tarija, Víctor Paz Estenssoro.[59] The swift ascendance of the MNR shortly after its founding is in large measure explained by its early leaders' connection to the Busch legacy. As anti-establishment parties continued to gain ground after the 1940 election, the MNR provided a movement that both clearly articulated the aims of the Chaco

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[57] The Busch regime coincides with the Vargas regime (1930-1945) and predates the Perón regime (1946-1955). There are important differences with these regimes. Unlike Busch, Vargas came from an aristocratic family and entered political life before his 1930 revolution. Busch in many ways better resembled Perón, who was also from a recent-immigrant background and uninvolved in politics before 1943 (when he participated in an officers' coup). Unlike Perón, however, Busch did not come to power on the back of popular mass support—but rather by directly seizing power.

[58] For discussions of the Busch regime and its impact, see Céspedes 1956, Antezana 1965, Durán 1996.

[59] Other notable future MNR members included Augusto Céspedes, Carlos Montenegro, and Hernán Siles Zuazo.

generation and rejected an ideological Marxist position. In following years, the ability of the young nationalist leaders to capitalize on the Busch mythos helped them to expand their support among the middle classes, largely by retaining vague ideological commitments and a flexible populist orientation.

The emerging national revolutionary movement, like the Busch regime itself, had a decidedly corporatist-fascist tendency. This reflected the contemporary popularity of Mussolini's regime throughout Latin America.[60] Internationally, both Busch and the MNR supported the Axis powers. But this was in part a reaction to the close ties between the tin industry magnates and the "imperial" interests of the United States and Great Britain. At first, the Marxist PIR and POR joined the MNR in condemning the Concordancia governments' efforts to increase tin production in support of the Allied war effort. Only after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 did the PIR and POR support the Allied cause.[61] The move led to a decline in support for Marxist alternatives, which were now accused of anti-national, *entreguista* behavior. The result was that the nationalist MNR—not the Marxist parties—became the standard-bearer for opposition to the *ancien régime* and the liberal republic.

The Villarroel regime marked a new civil-military partnership aimed at continuing the Busch legacy. RADEPA represented one of the most ardently nationalist of the numerous semi-secret *logias* that emerged from the Chaco War. What bound *logia* members together was their shared war experience—a bond also shared by the young MNR founders. Thus,

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[60] The Italian fascist movement similarly articulated the demands of that country's veterans and represented a similar "generational" movement. The relationship between the MNR and international fascism is, of course, complex. I would note that, like many similar movements in 1930s and 1940s Latin America (e.g. Brazil's Estado Novo), such tendencies more closely resembled Italian fascism than German Nazism. Italian fascism closely resembled Latin American corporatist-populism. See Weber 1985, Dos Santos 1972, Mann 2004, and Griffin 1991.

[61] Some POR factions continued to oppose low tin export prices and moved closer into alignment with the MNR.

unlike the Busch regime, the Villarroel regime was more closely tied to civilian political support, principally, the MNR. At this stage, the party served principally as a social network, joining various smaller, independent groups. The 1943 putsch, however, demonstrated that the national revolutionary movement was not yet prepared to use mass mobilization. The regime thus resembled the Busch regime (and other contemporary authoritarian regimes) even though it relied more on an organizational structure than on mere personalism. The key lesson from the 1943 RADEPA-MNR putsch, however, was that less than three years after its founding, the MNR was able to help organize and execute a government's overthrow.

The regime's ignominious end did not signal the end of the MNR. Within a short time, the party regained its status as the vanguard of the national revolutionary movement. In part, this was due to careful rehabilitation of Villarroel's legacy. But continued missteps by the Marxist left were certainly significant. PIR leaders not only helped organize Villarroel's overthrow, they also participated in the subsequent *sexenio* governments. Because these were clearly hostile to labor, *pirista* participation effectively severed the party's ties to the organized labor unions—especially after the Thesis of Pulacayo.[62] In short time, the MNR was able to build ties with labor leaders and establish party cells within the mineworkers' syndicates. Only the pro-Lechín factions of POR actively opposed to the *sexenio*. But by dismissing electoral politics as "bourgeois democracy" and refusing to compete in elections, the POR ceded its political terrain to the MNR.

During the *sexenio*, the MNR leadership further developed its concept of a broad, multi-class popular alliance, describing itself as a *movimiento nacional policlasista*. As the military purged officers with *movimientista* sympathies, the MNR had to rely on popular mobilization.

[62] Following this period, and into the 1970s, the term *pirista* joined *rosquero* and *entreguista* as negative political terms. Specifically, *pirista* has two possible meanings: the first implies a blind political naiveté that unwittingly hands power to "anti-nationalist" or "imperialist" forces; the second implies a deliberate deception by self-serving political figures.

But because its leadership was still committed to armed insurrection as a possible avenue for a national revolution, the MNR was organized less as a political party and more as a clandestine insurrectionist movement: the party adopted a Leninist organizational model, organizing into semi-autonomous *células* and *comandos regionales*. The September 1949 and May 1950 uprisings demonstrated the ability to mobilize popular forces against the government. In particular, the 1950 La Paz factory workers' revolt revealed the MNR's dominant position within the labor movement. By 1950, the MNR was the only political organization that could count on widespread popular support. Nevertheless, its ideological position remained vague as the party broadened its support by appealing to a variety of sectors, including the middle classes and organized labor.

Once in power, however, the MNR leadership sought to demobilize—or at least neutralize—the popular bases. The factionalism encouraged by Siles Zuazo and Paz Estenssoro weakened the regime's ties to civil society through a process of political deinstitutionalization. Though power was concentrated in the party's central leadership, the failure to consolidate a political apparatus meant that Bolivian political authority was highly personalized. In contrast, an equally divided Mexican revolutionary leadership successfully consolidated political authority into an apparatus—the PRI—that transformed Mexico into a one-party corporatist state.[63] The MNR retained the loose structure of a populist alliance of different, independent social sectors (the middle classes, labor, *campesinos*, etc.) but did not successfully forge a single political structure. Meanwhile, the central leadership continued to pursue middle class interests while retaining the loose—and often contradictory—populist rhetoric of the 1940s. Internal struggles within the MNR leadership demonstrated that even

[63] See Selbin 1999.

key members of the party held sharp ideological disagreements. In time, the various MNR factions sought to mobilize key popular sectors against each other.

By the mid-1950s, the *campesinos* constituted the country's most powerful social bloc. Though only marginally involved in pre-1952 politics, their spontaneous mobilization on behalf of land reform made them a potential threat to the new MNR regime. Recognizing land reform as a fait accompli, the leadership incorporated land reform and other demands into their populist program and rhetoric, deliberately co-opting the movement. As a voting bloc, their support for official MNR candidates ensured landslide victories. In the rural *campesinos*, several MNR leaders also found a useful blunt instrument to wield against the COB and organized labor. But the regime's increased reliance on repression also increased the role of the new military. By the 1960s, close ties had developed between several military officers and rural *campesino* leaders. Absent a consolidated, institutionalized state authority, any political leader who could control (or neutralize) the *campesinos* could control the state.

The military regimes that governed Bolivia from 1964 to 1978 continued using a populist strategy. Beyond appealing directly to the rhetoric of the national revolution, none of these sought to institutionalize their regime. Like Busch and Villarroel before, they were willing to use civilian politicians as allies, but in the end pursued personalist strategies. While in power, none seriously attempted to establish an independent political party. Beginning with Barrientos, these regimes also encouraged a new anti-Chilean xenophobia and ultra-nationalism. Such appeals fit easily into the post-revolutionary national imaginary and could easily stir popular sentiment. In short, despite their different policy orientation, each of these regimes mobilized popular sentiment, but not popular participation.

Despite their differences, the Barrientos, Ovando, and Torres regimes adopted similar populist strategies. Neither was pure military regime.[64] Instead, they relied co-opting support from popular sectors with active participation by MNR factional leaders. Rather than a break from the previous mode of politics, the three regimes marked the search for a new populist coalition. The Barrientos regime was the most personalist of the regimes, relying extensively on the dictator's frequent visits to the countryside to rally his *campesino* supporters. Nevertheless, *campesino* organizations remained weak, factionalized, and dependent on their loyalty to the regime's leader. And despite the formation of electoralist vehicles, there was little binding the regime together, which disintegrated upon his death. Ovando and Torres pursued similar strategies. Though Ovando was more in line with the Estenssoro *movimientista* wing and Torres was more in line with the Siles Zuazo and Lechín wings, neither sought to institutionalize their regime—either by handing power back to civilian control or giving the military full political control. Instead, all three regimes followed a policy of co-opting different political figures—whether from MNR factions or other political organizations—under a populist, multi-sectoral coalition.

The Banzer regime also began as military-civilian, populist alliance—though focusing on the more conservative, middle-class elements within the post-1952 MNR. The *campesinos* and labor were kept fragmented. In many ways, the first three years of the Banzer regime closely resembled the kind of middle-class, populist government of the first Paz Estenssoro government. Only in 1974 did Banzer break the tradition of military-civilian governments to install an all-military dictatorship. Though after 1974 Banzer's regime closely resembled the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes common throughout the region, the *banzerato* (as it was

[64] According to Malloy, Bolivia's armed forces had not developed "an institutional doctrine regarding national reality and the role of the military within it" nor "a minimal notion of corporate identity" (1977, p. 478).

called) was profoundly personalistic.[65] Banzer's political style in many ways modeled that of Busch—another German-immigrant colonel. Over all, the seven-year Banzer dictatorship was a combination of nationalism and middle-class populism.

Instead of creating a new political party, Banzer's regime only kept the existing parties and factions at bay. By 1978, popular demands for a democratic opening were channeled principally through the same political elites that had dominated post-Chaco politics—all of whom claimed to represent the true spirit and values of the national revolution. The lack of the Banzer regime's institutionalization was evident when, after Banzer stepped down in 1978, factional divisions within the military contributed to a turbulent four years. Only in 1979, a year after leaving office, did Banzer found a political party—Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN). The center-right party, however, was highly centralized around the person of Banzer, the party's perennial presidential candidate.

The legacy of post-Chaco populism significantly affected Bolivia's democratization process. After the military returned to its barracks, the civilian political elite that managed post-1982 politics represented the previous national revolutionary factions. Between 1978 and 1985 various MNR factions split away from the "historic" Paz Estenssoro wing—including faction led by key members of the party's central leadership. But all three of the major political forces during the democratic transition, while appealing to the symbols and rhetoric of the national revolution, focused on the personality of their leaders. The MNR appealed to the memory of Paz Estenssoro, its presidential candidate in 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1985. Siles Zuazo, the orchestrator of the 1949 and 1952 uprisings, led the UDP. Banzer's new Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN), likewise, focused exclusively on the

[65] In sharp contrast, the Argentine bureaucratic-authoritarian regime was never clearly identified with any one specific military figure, but rather by a series of military juntas. Perhaps the Pinochet regime in Chile (1973-1990) most closely resembled the Banzer regime.

former dictator's personal charisma. There were several consequences—particularly for the new democracy's party system: First, none of the post-democratization parties developed an institutionalized party apparatus independent of the party *jefe*. Second, each of the parties continued to pursue top-down mobilization strategies, limiting popular participation to elections, often with co-option strategies meant to secure the support of local *caudillos* that could deliver votes. Consequently, party's lacked strong roots in civil society. Finally, the populist model was so dominant, that even opposition movements expressed themselves through populist strategies.