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A path cut by water: the making of the Cochabamba water war through internationalization, postcolonialism and decoloniality

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A Path Cut By Water

The Making of the Cochabamba Water War Through Internationalization, Postcolonialism and Decoloniality

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Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography

Adviser, Professor Joseph Nevins

ABSTRACT

In early 2000, protests erupted across the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia, in response to the privatization of the city's water source by a multinational consortium, in accordance with a World Bank initiative. In what became known as the Water War, the people of Cochabamba joined together to fend off international power in favor of local autonomy. This project examines how and why the internationalization of Bolivia's nature and space came into conflict with decolonial modes of thinking to bring about the Water War in the late 1990s, and what this illuminates about power and geographic scale. Through a deep historical analysis of Bolivia's indigenous groups and their interactions with colonial powers, the Bolivian state, and international development actors, this thesis looks at how Bolivia became internationalized so as to invite neoliberalism in the 1990s. Then, through first-hand narratives and decolonial theory, this thesis looks at the creation of a successful resistance movement. It argues, through the lens of postcolonialism, that institutions, ideologies, and models of development created out of historic colonial relations, like the World Bank and neoliberalism, perpetuate and exacerbate global inequalities in the name of aid and development. This postcolonial lens illustrates how decisions surrounding water allocations and water system management in the age of climate change are nested in complex, multi-scalar processes founded on accumulation and dispossession. In an age where water distribution is increasingly contested, the Water War offers alternative conceptions of nature, power, and control that move beyond exploitative neocolonial relationships and work to fight for a decolonized existence.

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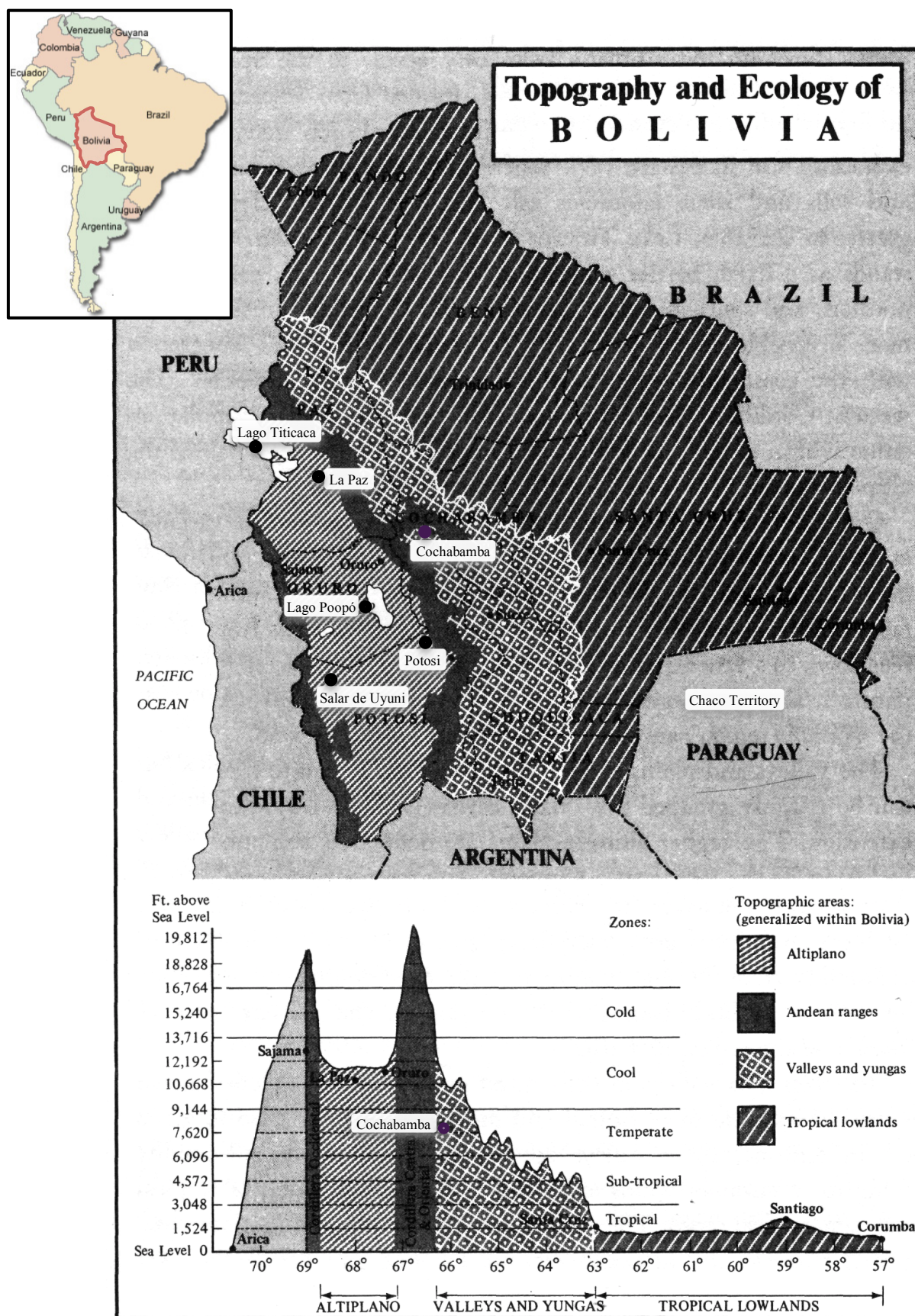


Figure 1 - Map and Cross-Section of Bolivia (Source: Klein 1992, 5; Inset: Bosnall; Annotations: Tobin)

Chapter One

Introduction

Quiet small-talk and the noise of minibuses on the streets five floors below us surrounded me as our group of 31 students waited eagerly for our guest speaker to arrive. We were sitting in a classroom in the middle of Cochabamba, Bolivia, on a cloudy afternoon in May 2016, and we were exhausted from a full day of classes, and from almost four months of travel.

When he entered the room, we sat up and quieted down. He was smaller than I expected, and as he started to speak, his voice was low. He was fidgety. He seemed nervous. He stood at the front of the bare classroom, next to an English translator, and began to tell his story.

He was Oscar Olivera, a key leader of the Cochabamba Water War of 2000. As he told us stories from his life leading up to his organizing efforts in the movement, his voice gained strength. Soon we could feel the fight and passion within him. By the end of the two hours, after scribbling furiously to capture his words, I was captivated.

He told the story of a series of protests that erupted in the streets of Cochabamba against the privatization of the city's water system. He told us how he, along with four other leaders, synthesized large amounts of information about the privatization and its expected effects into five main points that were comprehensible to everyone. He told us how the people literally occupied, cooked and slept in the streets, and began to talk. As neighbors got to know each other, they realized how much they had in common, and they began to see more clearly what they were fighting for.

With the power of their own voices and actions, Olivera and the people overcame the tyranny of a powerful multinational corporation attempting to privatize and profit off their water source. The privatization had come from a World Bank initiative as a condition to continue receiving loans, and the city's water system was taken over by the San Francisco, California-based company, Bechtel.

The people of Bolivia were tired of the state aligning with outside international actors to make decisions for them. As Olivera said, the water “belongs to everyone, not to the state. And above all, it's a heritage of nature” (Olivera 2016). The people of Cochabamba wanted autonomy over their water, particularly in an era where privatization of water and utilities had become the newest wave of profit-making.

Their effort to overthrow Bechtel was successful.

As I left the classroom that day, questions swirled through my mind. Why were the people of Bolivia successful in overthrowing a multinational corporation when many people elsewhere were not? We had been to Vietnam and Morocco as part of the study abroad program that brought us to Bolivia¹, and we had heard from communities in both countries about emotional and violent cases of water grabbing. This process of water grabbing, or “a situation where powerful actors are able to take control of, or reallocate to their own benefits, water resources already used by local communities” (Mehta et. al. 2012, 197), happens in all corners of the world, taking on many forms of oppression, violence, racism, and disregard for indigenous or local people. Why is this a global trend? Why was the Bolivian case different? Could a deeper look at the Cochabamba Water War help to illuminate other similar processes and wars over water relations in a world where

¹ The program was SIT International Honors Program: Comparative Climate Change and the Politics of Food, Water, and Energy, Spring 2016.

water scarcity is increasing? These questions remained in my head throughout the rest of my time in Bolivia, and, over time, led me to the central question of my thesis: how and why did the internationalization of Bolivia's nature and space come into conflict with decolonial modes of thinking to bring about the Water War in Cochabamba in the late 1990s, and what does this illuminate about power, geographic scale, and resistance?

Existing Literature

Though much has been written about the Water War, a deeply historical and geographic story that looks at Bolivia within a global and transnational context is missing. Key literature on the Water War itself includes *Cochabamba!* by Oscar Olivera (2004). Olivera's first-hand account, accompanied by other perspectives before, during, and after the Water War, is crucial to understanding what it was like on the frontlines of a water rebellion. Not only does this book help to paint a more clear and personal account of what happened leading up to and during the Water War, it also provides an analysis of neoliberalism, a real account of an effective counter movement, and helpful strategies for organizing against power.

Many other articles have been written about the Water War, both academic and news articles. Notable pieces include Assies (2003), Lobina (2000), and many news articles from the time. To varying degrees, these pieces detail the privatization, the conflict, and the resolution. They help to create an understanding of the recent context from which the Water War emerged. While my thesis includes many of these details as well, it expands beyond in both space and time.

Arguably one of the best-known pieces on water wars more broadly is the book

Water Wars by Indian scholar and activist Vandana Shiva (2002). Her discussion illuminates that while each water war plays out differently due to its political, social, economic, and geographic contexts, there are many key similarities as well. A deeper analysis of the power underlying these water wars helps to illuminate the international processes that produced these conflicts

The power in the Bolivian case came in large part from the World Bank. In his book *Imperial Nature*, Michael Goldman (2005) uncovers the trajectory of World Bank development projects, with a significant section dedicated to neoliberalism and water in the 1980s and 1990s. This book offers insight into the Water War by making sense of water privatization and World Bank development more broadly, helping to illuminate the broader global context of international economic aid.

Where my thesis comes in is in developing a deeply historical and geographic account of the making of Bolivia as a place where the World Bank could introduce a neoliberal project. The opening up of Bolivia to international actors due to a long history of colonization and neocolonization helps to illuminate why the privatization occurred in the first place. Further, looking at the divergence of understandings surrounding nature and autonomy helps to illuminate alternative ways of thinking and living that challenge dominant rhetoric. What happened in Cochabamba was a crucial sign to those in power that the power of the people is strong when they join together to fight for a cause they care deeply about.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the Water War, we must think much more broadly and

deeply about scale and power, and consider questions of conflicting views on nature, space, and autonomy.

A key theme in the conflict over the water was the differing views surrounding water and therefore nature. In contemporary Euro-dominated economic thought, nature exists separately from humans. As people began to see themselves as separate from nature, dominant over nature, and free to use and exploit nature to meet their own needs—seeing nature as “natural resources” for human use—humans placed themselves in a hierarchical category above nature that “justifies” domination over nature.

However, not all relationships to nature are based on domination. In Bolivia, many people relate to nature through beliefs surrounding *Pachamama*, or Earth Mother, and *Buen Vivir*, or living well. The discourse and practice of *Buen Vivir* “emerges out of idealized Andean constructs of gender complementarity: harmony and equilibrium between men and women, egalitarian ayllu communities [to be described in chapter 2], and protection of natural environment” (Fabricant 2013, 164), and has been mobilized recently in Bolivia beyond indigenous communities to encompass a mode of living that includes living in harmony with *Pachamama*. While these concepts are idealized and stereotyped, they come out of a movement by the indigenous majority to incorporate these ideas into the new constitution under the Evo Morales government. Though they come from indigenous roots, many non-indigenous or *mestizo* (a person of mixed indigenous and European ancestry) *campesinos* (peasant farmers), have been incorporated into these models as well, and have helped Bolivia become a frontrunner in indigenous, *campesino*, and Earth rights worldwide. However, the incorporation of these beliefs into the political system did not solve all problems; Bolivia is still intimately tied to the

extraction economy, and these indigenous worldviews sometimes exclude urban or non-indigenous populations within Bolivia. Still, they represent a departure from the hegemonic beliefs surrounding nature.

Because there is a diminishing amount of space untouched by humans (what Lefebvre calls “First Nature”), we must reconceptualize what is understood as nature. Erik Swyngedouw (1999) argues that nature is inherently social and political; nature and society mutually shape each other, and we cannot speak of “nature” or of “humans” without some discussion of their historical, social, environmental, and political contexts. Swyngedouw notes that as we continue to shape nature beyond recognition in the push for development, modernization, and profit, the distinction between nature and society is breaking down. This leads us to *socionature*, a notion that rejects the false separation of society and nature, and a recognition that nature and society are constantly mutually constructing and reconstructing one other. When I discuss nature or different ideologies surrounding nature, what that really means is different ideas about how we relate to natural resources and our larger environment.

In thinking about how *we* relate to our larger environment, it is important to look at how the products and resources we *use* are related to the larger environment, and thus represent socionatural networks. For example, Swyngedouw quotes Latour saying, “if I were to capture some water in a cup and excavate the networks that brought it there, ‘I would pass with continuity from the local to the global, from the human to the nonhuman’” (Latour 1993:121 in Swyngedouw 1999, 445). As Swyngedouw argues,

These flows would narrate many interrelated tales, or stories, of social groups and classes and the powerful socioecological processes that produce social spaces of privilege and exclusion, of participation and marginality; chemical, physical, and biological reactions and

transformations, the global hydrological cycle, and global warming; capital, machinations, and the strategies and knowledges of dam builders, urban land developers, and engineers; the passage from river to urban reservoir, and the geopolitical struggles between regions and nations. In sum, water embodies multiple tales of socionature as hybrid.

In describing water in this way, Swyngedouw elucidates the incredible importance and complexity of water as a vital resource in virtually every space, shaping social conflicts and socionatural landscapes. In order to deeply understand water's social and material interactions, we must situate our analyses in the dynamic and historical processes of accumulation and dispossession. These processes can be illuminated in conversation with theory surrounding space, scale, place, and power.

Space, place, and scale are embedded in every interaction and yet are rarely theorized outside the field of geography. Doreen Massey (2005) argues that space is often *unthought*, in contrast to time, which consciously mediates our every interaction. By overlooking the relationship between space and time, Massey argues that governments like the United States have been able to paint globalization as inevitable, and the relationships of globalization as relationships of time. Doing so disables us from understanding developing countries “as having their own trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own, perhaps different, futures. [In our time-centric understandings,] they are merely at an earlier stage in the one and only narrative it is possible to tell” (Massey, 5). In discounting that other groups of people may understand and desire “development” in a different way than the United States or Western Europe, development rhetoric ignores the possibility of multiplicity and heterogeneity across space. Recognizing the interactions between space and time and the existence of multiple trajectories can help to explain resistance to development.

In thinking about resistance, Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto (2008) argue that scale, place, and positionality help illuminate contentious politics, which can be described as “concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries” (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto 2008, 157). This definition is deepened when in conversation with spatial ways of viewing and understanding the world. Across the commonly defined scales—global, international, national, regional, local, and individual—it is important “to examine the ways in which various scales articulate with one another,” because “scale is conceptualised as a relational, power-laden and contested construction that actors strategically engage with, in order to legitimise or challenge existing power relations” (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto 2008, 159). Thus, multi-scalar analyses help to illuminate the shaping of place.

Place signifies the locations of daily life, and the interactions between materiality and social relations. Objects of exclusion—such as fences or walls—help define to whom the place belongs, and thus the importance of positionality in navigating space and place. Positionality is the recognition of relational and subjective ontologies and epistemologies and the dominant or subordinate constructed nature of those relations. Both social and spatial relationships define these positionalities. Sometimes within one space an identity might be marginalized, while in another space it would be privileged. Recognizing intersectionality—the interaction between power-laden identities or positionalities—is crucial in building solidarity in counter movements to hegemonic power (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto 2008).

The definition of power is indistinct, and the word can be utilized to meet vastly

different motives or situations. From powerful dictators to powerful movies, from “knowledge is power” to “people power,” from power plants to power tools, it truly is everywhere. But what is power? Michael Mann (2012) argues that, “*societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power*” (Mann 2012, 1). He goes on to define four sources of social power relationships—ideological, economic, military, and political—that are based on organization, control, logistics, and communication (Mann 2012, 2). *Ideological power* rests on the ability to monopolize claims to normative social organization of knowledge, meaning, and practices (Mann 2012, 22). *Economic power* utilizes the ability to realize “subsistence needs through the social organization of the extraction, transformation, distribution, and consumption of the objects of nature,” where a dominant class monopolizes control of the economic means (Mann 2012, 24). *Military power* uses authoritative organization that is “concentrated, coercive, and highly mobilized” (Mann 2012, 8) within the troops, in order to control force across large geographic and social spaces (Mann 2012, 26). Finally, *political power*, or state power, is centralized, institutionalized, and territorial, and heightens boundaries, as opposed to the other forms of power that transcend or expand boundaries (Mann 2012, 26-27).

Throughout my thesis, another kind of power emerges—the power of communities in the Third World. This can be understood in Chandra Mohanty (2003)’s framework. She defines “Third World,” as “geographical location and sociohistorical conjunctures [which...] incorporates so-called minority peoples or peoples of color in the United States” (Mohanty 2003, 44) and other places. In reclaiming the phrase “Third World”, Mohanty argues it is not just the commonly understood place of oppression and

poverty, “but it is also a world with powerful histories of resistance and revolution in daily life and as organized liberation movements” (Mohanty 2003, 44). She recognizes the power that can be accrued and asserted in forms of resistance. By reclaiming the phrase, Mohanty highlights that people at the bottom of our constructed hierarchies have agency, and they have power. Just because this power is ignored by those who write histories does not mean it does not exist.

Combining power and scale, we can begin to analyze the multi-scalar interactions of power at work in political decision-making processes. Nation-states shape each other as they interact, because these interactions occur across scale and power differentials, though the amount that each nation-state is shaped by outside forces varies. Nevins (2005) argues that we must look at actors and groups within nation-states whose interests may more closely align with groups in other nation-states. As he argues, “rather than seeing countries as unified rational actors carrying out foreign policies for reasons of national interest, those employing a political-economy approach focus on how elite groups shape national agendas to a degree disproportionate to their numbers and project national power onto the world stage—in part by working through international and transnational mechanisms, military, political, and economic elites, and institutions abroad” (Nevins 2005, 18-19). This helps to illuminate the power that elite groups have to ignore the interests of the majority by aligning themselves with more powerful international actors.

In Bolivia, we see evidence of the governmental elites making decisions more in line with international actors than in favor of their own people. Part of this comes from a long history with colonization and neocolonization. This history helps to describe how

Bolivia has been constructed as an *internationalized space*. An internationalized space is one that, despite being nominally sovereign, is, to some degree, dependent on, accountable to, accessible by, and/or controlled by, the interests of outside, international actors. Internationalized spaces have points of access for international access due to the complex history of power relations. These points of access are defined both by the state and by the international actors, through complicated, power-ridden, dialectical relations in which the actors have varying degrees of choice and autonomy.

In this thesis, I argue that Bolivia's space has been internationalized through processes of colonialism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, and while the international actors have changed throughout the years, the effect, in the eyes of the people of Bolivia, is essentially the same. Thus, Bolivia as an internationalized space has been shaped, conquered, and exploited. But as the end of this thesis suggests, counter-movements can be successful against the global consolidation of power.

Methodology and Methods

This thesis analyzes the world through a postcolonial lens, with an emphasis on the colonality of power, a specific category theorized by Quijano to analyze various forms of colonialism and postcolonialism in the American colonies (Castro-Gómez 2008, 280-291). Postcolonialism broadly refers to the academic discipline that recognizes and analyzes the lasting effects of colonialism, and the colonial legacies that continue to take on different forms but continue to shape life in former colonies.

In talking about postcolonialism in Latin America, various scholars have argued for an understanding of postcolonialism that is specific to the Americas, in order to more

appropriately address the unique form that colonialism and neocolonialism have taken on the continent, as compared to Africa and Asia. Thus, Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano developed the conception of “coloniality of power” as a world-system that pushes beyond postcolonialism and the simplification of dynamics between Europe and its former colonies. Mignolo and Quijano argue that there has also been a “production of hierarchies and differences among the colonized” (Castro-Klaren 2008, 133-134); for example, Peter Hulme (2008) argues that the United States and Argentina after independence are arguably postcolonial nations, and yet they became “immediately themselves colonizing powers with respect to the native populations of the continent whose lands and resources they covet” (Hulme 2008, 392). So coloniality of power recognizes the multi-scalar postcolonialisms, and multi-scalar dimensions of power and domination that are present within postcolonialism in Latin America. It is through this lens that I analyze the Water War. I argue that, through understandings of postcolonialism and coloniality of power, we can make sense of the hierarchies of power present in Bolivia throughout its history.

In order to look deeply at these historic and geographic hierarchies of power, this thesis relies heavily on many sources, including literature that is both theoretical and empirical, academic articles, investigative journal reports, and news stories. I pull from sources from before, during, and after the Water War, paying close attention to the historical context at the time of the publication. I also incorporate narratives from a few people involved in the Water War, some of which is from the six weeks I spent in Cochabamba in May and June of 2016, to further develop my analysis. Using these many sources, I weave simultaneous histories of Bolivia and neocolonial structures of power world-wide that help to understand the Water War in a historically deeper and

geographically broader sense.

Chapter Narrative

In chapter 2, I discuss the Spanish colonization of Bolivia, and ask the question of how the production of Bolivia as an internationalized space through colonialism began. This chapter traces the history of colonization and European influence, starting in the 1500s, through Bolivian independence in 1825. This history forms the basis for the next chapters in introducing how, through Spanish colonization, Bolivia's space and nature were internationalized. I argue that Bolivia's indigenous groups have maintained much of their own unique worldviews and social practices, despite the region's resources being produced by, accessible to, and dependent on outside public and private actors. These processes had a profound and lasting impact when the region became a recognized independent state.

In chapter 3, using the framework established in chapter 2, I demonstrate how Spanish colonial presence and economic ties to the outside world impacted Bolivia long after its independence. In the first years of independence, Bolivia as a state was weak and poor, and due to many factors including increasing globalization and increasing desire for precious natural resources, it quickly became economically dependent on other actors. These actors included private U.S. banks in the early 1900s and oil companies later in the 1920s and 1930s. Emerging from WWII, global economic aid began with the creation of the World Bank and the IMF. This chapter traces the simultaneous histories of the World Bank and Bolivia, and their increasing interaction. Through the lens of postcolonialism, I argue that dependency relationships formed during the 1900s created a new colonialism,

maintaining the same hierarchical structures under different actors and rhetoric.

In chapter 4, I continue to trace postcolonial threads of international aid and international influence into the 1980s and 1990s, when neoliberalism and green neoliberalism became dominant development rhetoric. I explore how complex histories of economic aid, close ties between private corporations and dominant governments, and the lack of representation of the majority within the Bolivian government help to make sense of the decision in 1999 in Cochabamba to privatize the water system.

In chapter 5, I address the specifics of the Water War in response to the 1999 decision. Employing a lens of decoloniality, I explore how the Water War set a precedent in Bolivia of decolonization and of (re)establishing ways of living that are outside the colonial mindset and power relations. I introduce alternative voices and conceptions of nature and space outside of the mainstream World Bank narrative, including theory on decoloniality and decolonization of social organization, solidarity networks, and epistemologies. I complicate ideas surrounding Bolivia's nature and space by bringing in stories from Oscar Olivera and other people who fought in the Water War. By joining together in solidarity, multiple interest groups within Cochabamba created alliances despite difference that demonstrated the power of the people in fighting against the elites in a decolonial fight.

To conclude, I move into the years after the Water War, discussing new conceptions of resources and resistance, both within Bolivia, and on a global scale. I explore how decolonial mindsets during the Water War translated into the election of Evo Morales and his *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS- Movement towards Socialism) political party. Since Morales's election, Bolivia has nationalized many industries, and has created

a new constitution that recognizes the rights of *Pachamama* (Earth Mother). Despite the strides toward decoloniality in Bolivia, the country still struggles with relative poverty and extreme drought. Water remains a contested resource, and as the glaciers recede further and the lakes dry, it will remain a crucial issue. This chapter concludes with some broader themes and questions that expand beyond the Bolivian context, addressing problems of resource shortage, neoliberalism, and postcolonial institutions, as well as movements of resistance, solidarity, and decoloniality.

Chapter 2

Colonialism: The Roots of Internationalization

The internationalization of Bolivian space and nature began much before Bolivia itself existed, starting with Spanish arrival in the greater Andean region in 1532. Understanding the early history of the Andean region, both outside of and in relation to colonialism, helps to make sense of Bolivia at the moment of independence, and in the years following. The physical geography and social fabric of Andean indigenous cultures help to explain the uniqueness of the region and of the shape colonialism took. Because the Andes were not as accessible as many other places in South America, there was limited influx of European masses, resulting in the indigenous groups remaining the majority class. While the colonial elites still implemented many “westernizing” and “civilizing” projects, and changed the region dramatically and often violently, the indigenous people were able to maintain much of their culture and uniqueness. This chapter looks at the physical landscape that has been essential in shaping culture and social relations, the development of indigenous groups over time, and the colonization of the region by the Spanish. This history sets the scene for understanding postcolonial relations and the making of the current Bolivian nation-state.

Physical Landscape

The physical landscapes of the Andes and the Amazon have uniquely shaped rich indigenous cultures and histories in the region. Because the many indigenous groups developed before the making of the current Bolivian nation-state, the current-day national borders of Bolivia are somewhat arbitrary, and contain a variety of physical landscapes.

Bolivia is a land-locked country in the middle of South America that exists both in the Andes mountain range and the Amazon rainforest. Because of its diversity in topography, there are distinct climate zones. In the Andes, the altiplano, or high plateau, is a relatively flat plateau at about 13,000 feet between the two high Andean ranges (figure 1- pg. 5). The western range creates a harsh, mostly uninhabitable barrier between Bolivia and the Pacific Ocean (Northern Chile). In contrast, the eastern range contains many river valleys and fertile plains, and because it is less steep, it enables easier access to the lowlands. Cochabamba is located in the higher altitude plains of the eastern range.

This unique physical geography of the enclosed altiplano basin creates a distinct water system in which the water arrives from snow and ice melt, and leaves through evaporation. *Flying rivers*, or “rivers” of water vapor, enter through a gap in the eastern mountains from the Amazon, and bring precipitation that accumulates in glaciers in the upper Andes (Forsberg 2016). Water evaporates in the southern altiplano, leaving mineral deposits (known as *Salar de Uyuni*, the world’s largest salt flat) (Forsberg 2016). With climate change, the glaciers—which historically did not fluctuate much seasonally due to a rainy warm season and a dry cold season—are receding rapidly, and lakes are drying up. The second largest lake in Bolivia, Lago Poopó, finally evaporated completely in December 2015. Thus, water, which has always been central to Andean cultures and existence, is becoming a more contested resource, which helped shape the scene for the Water War.

Pre-Spanish Contact

Most human development in Bolivia occurred in the altiplano and cordillera

regions until recently. The region first became inhabited around 21,000 BCE, and small communities developed and settled the area. Domestication of plants and animals developed and by 2500 BCE, there were agriculture, governments, urban centers, and religious centers. In 100 CE, the Tiwanaku cultural empire emerged, based between Lake Titicaca and present-day La Paz, and by 600 CE, its influence had spread through agriculture and religion to encompass parts of Bolivia, Peru, and Chile (Shanks 2016). The Tiwanaku fell in the eleventh century due to a 70-year drought, making room for a new empire (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 37) and highlighting the importance of water in the area from the beginning.

Soon, more war-like and aggressive Aymara kingdoms came to dominate the area, replacing Tiwanaku centers with fortified towns on hilltops. Within each of seven Aymara-speaking groups, there existed ayllus, or kin groupings (Klein 1992). These ayllus have been called ‘vertical archipelagos’ due to their non-contiguous territory, and this vertical, island-like control “implied the existence of a communal tradition and ideology that bound people together in a web of mutual rights and responsibilities” (Larson 1988, 21), rather than by a common territory. Because ayllu groups controlled non-contiguous territory, this form of organizing created “a multiplicity of societies speaking numerous languages [that] were grouped together into a vast non-market exchange system which involved a continuous transfer of products among starkly different ecological systems” (Klein 1992, 25). These ayllus persisted through Incan conquest, Spanish occupation, and the many governments after independence, often adapting shape and organization style but maintaining key elements. They remain the basis for social organization in much of rural Bolivia today.

In the late fifteenth century, a new group began to emerge in Cusco, and came to be known as the Incas. The Incas, one of several Quechua-speaking groups, were able to dominate in the 1460s due to the inability of the Aymara kingdoms to unite in resistance. Much of Quechua culture today in Bolivia has its roots in the Incan empire, and Quechua is currently the second most widespread language in Bolivia (after Spanish, right before Aymara). This was partially due to the Quechuanization processes—converting languages including Aymara to Quechua by placing Quechua colonists in formerly Aymara territories (Klein 1992, 23). Many Inca and other Quechua nations’ traditions make up significant parts of Bolivia culture today.

Despite the strength of the Incas and the cultures of the many nations in the Andes regions, the arrival of the Spanish initiated a dramatic reshaping of Bolivia. That the indigenous peoples were able to maintain some of their culture and social structures (ayllu structure largely persisted in the highlands) throughout colonialism lay the basis for the ability not only to craft a successful Water War, but also to create a new way to organize contemporary society in the 2000s in the mold of indigenous tradition but with recognition and incorporation of elements of the more globalized world of today.

Spanish Contact

The Spanish first arrived in the Peruvian Andes in 1532, and the Bolivian altiplano in 1538. At this time, the entire region was considered Peru. Spain was emerging as a dominant force within Europe, as Europe was becoming a dominant force in the world. Due to Spain’s presence (along with Portugal) in the Americas, their new access to many natural resources “finally tipped the balance of world economic power to

Europe and helped prepare the way for its ultimate industrial domination as well” (Klein 1992, 26). The first wave of Spanish conquest in the 1530s in the greater Andean region was characterized by small European armies with superior military technology conquering larger indigenous armies as European diseases swept through the region. The rhetoric of temporary occupation for gold and silver resources obscured the greater project of the Spanish—to establish more permanent colonies and trading posts (Klein 1992, 32). Further, the Spanish benefitted from the recent Inca conquering pattern, because many non-Quechua groups joined the Spanish as allies, in reliance on false promises of “recognition of traditional Indian nobilities” (Klein 1992, 31).

The Spaniards who made the voyage to the Americas were those who could afford it but who were not of sufficiently high social status to be satisfied in Spain. The influx of only these low groups of the upper nobility class created a “total absence of the Spanish peasant class, which was replaced in the New World by the American Indian peasants” (Klein 1992, 29). This enabled a small permanent Spanish or *criollo* class to rule over the majority of indigenous peoples. Under Spanish rule, one in every ten native men were forced to work in the mines, and as these policies combined with waves of European diseases, seventy-five percent of the indigenous population was wiped out in forty years (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 38). The remaining indigenous peoples were introduced to wage labor, money, taxation, and private property.

Resources and Restructurings

The Bolivian Altiplano region did not strike the Spaniards’ interest like Cusco had until the discovery of silver in Potosí, in 1545. The resulting silver rush led to the

establishment of the city of La Paz as a crucial trade hub. Silver production boomed during the period between the 1570s and 1650s, making the Upper Peru region one of the wealthiest parts of the Spanish-colonized Americas, though the wealth went to the Spanish and *criollo* elites. The extraction of silver initiated what would be a long period of exploitation of the region's natural resources, for purposes benefitting solely those in charge.

As silver boomed, the area became increasingly structured by the Spanish. The Toledo Reforms of 1572-1576 under Francisco de Toledo, the first viceroy appointed by the Spanish Crown, served to restructure and standardize governments, laws, customs, and overall organization of the empire in ways that benefitted the Spanish occupiers. The consolidation of sprawling and noncontiguous indigenous settlements was designed to create larger cities, and despite strong indigenous fights to continue their ecologically differentiated archipelago system, the Toledo structure eventually became the dominant form of social organization, relegating ayllu structure primarily to the highlands (Klein 1992, 39). Toledo also created the city of Cochabamba in 1571 during a new wave of Spanish settlements extending into the lower Cordillera Real regions. The Cochabamba region became intimately tied economically to Potosí, engaging in trade of wheat and maize for silver.

Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, the lower altiplano area, including Cochabamba and Potosí, experienced several booms in silver production, with more mines opening up in the greater region. Under the Bourbon reforms instituted by Spain in the 1770s, the greater Peru area was split, with the lower half, including Cochabamba, Potosí, and parts of northern Argentina, going to Buenos Aires control. This meant the separation of these

productive and economically vibrant regions from Lima and Cusco. This top-down structure, like most, further oppressed the indigenous populations, and despite the temporarily successful, multi-group Tupac Amaru Rebellion from 1780-1782 that destabilized the Spanish, they ultimately retained control.

During this time, Spain's relations in Europe were tenuous, particularly due to invasions by the English (1796) and French (1808). Trade routes to the Americas slowed as Spain had to devote resources to its own survival, and "the sudden collapse of the international trade routes created a temporary but quite severe depression in commercial markets" (Klein 1992, 85), particularly for Southern Andean natural resources. Because the Andean region had become embedded in the world economy, the region's economic standing was at least partially dependent on the state of Europe's economies, signifying the beginning of economic dependency.

Seeds of Independence

In the decades before and during this period of Andean depression, independence movements around the world began to inspire those who had been oppressed by white, often distant, elites, and began to generate fear of social revolutions in those elites who would resist such change. In 1808, local elites in La Paz became the first to declare independence from Spain, and this declaration instigated the period of American Wars of Independence from 1808 to 1825. While La Paz didn't gain independence at this time, the wars inspired many fights throughout South America (Klein 1992).

By 1816, Simón Bolívar was advocating for independence in Venezuela, and Argentina was declaring independence as well. Bolívar hoped to unify the continent under one grand republic that could challenge the power of Europe, but with the growing

conflict between Upper Peru and his Colombian state, both of which he had helped to create, he had to rethink. He was “beginning to fear the growth of too powerful a Peruvian Republic which in turn could threaten the existence and importance of his own base in Gran Colombia” and due to hostility in Argentina, “all his plans made the idea of a buffer state between Peru and Argentina a reasonable proposition” (Klein 1992, 98). Finally, in 1824 the last royalist army was defeated in Lower Peru. In 1825, Upper Peru was liberated from Spain, and Bolivian Independence was declared on August 6th, 1825, with the country named after Bolívar.

Conclusion

When the Spanish first arrived in the Andes, they immediately colonized the natural resources as well as the space. As with all colonizers, Europeans in the Andes believed themselves to be superior to the indigenous populations. They justified their exploitative processes of silver extraction and settlement by arguing that the local populations’ failure to take advantage of the riches entitled them to do so. This created an expectation of Bolivia’s resources as inherently exploitable and exportable for profit. This was the beginning of the process of the internationalization of Bolivia’s nature and space, and of the long history of struggle with international actors. These processes would continue into independence, and because *criollo* elites came to power immediately, Bolivia’s indigenous populations were never consulted, as the *criollos* and their series of international allies dominated the decision-making. Thus, for the majority indigenous populations, the next period of “independence” effectively mirrored the period under the Spanish crown.

Chapter 3

Postcolonialism: The World Bank, The Bolivian Government, and The Making of the Modern World to 1980

At the time of Bolivian independence in 1825, the *criollo* elites dominated decision-making, influenced by economic ties to the globalizing economy and the political desires of powerful countries. Barbara Stallings (1992) explores this pattern of local elites' connections to powerful countries in the global context, describing a "historical-structural" approach to dependency analysis that emerged from Latin American social scientists. This approach "focused not on direct links between center and periphery but on intermediaries, specifically groups in Latin America who shared interests with the international actors and thus joined forces with them to promote mutual gain often at the expense of other national groups" (Stallings 1992, 45). This historical-structural dependency theory also acknowledges diversity in the nature of relationships between countries in Latin America and the international economy, due to different stages of growth and different socioeconomic and political contexts (Stallings 1992, 45). Using this theory helps to illuminate the role the Bolivian government had as an intermediary, while also recognizing that the relationship between the Bolivian state and the international actors was constantly in flux due to raw resource supply and demand, international economic growth and depression, the actors themselves, and myriad other influences.

Bolivia's increasing dependence on outside actors mirrored global development patterns in which first world countries became dependent on third world raw resources, forcing third world countries to become economically dependent on the international

market. These patterns developed along colonial lines, so while colonialism had “ended,” its reach took different forms. While this is overly simplified, the general patterns of global development help to illuminate the making of countries of the third world into internationalized spaces. Much of this development in the later 1900s was driven by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and large multinational corporations, all of which were influenced by the United States and other powerful governments.

This chapter explores Bolivia’s complex and significant relationship with the dominant colonial and neocolonial powers of Western Europe and the United States in the structuring of the Bolivian country. The disparity between the Bolivian state leaders and the majority populations highlights the actors within Bolivia who worked with international elites, often to the benefit of those international groups. This chapter also looks at how, in postcolonial times, the larger global picture of international aid, and in particular, the development of the World Bank and the IMF also played a pivotal role in structuring the global economy. The emergence of the World Bank and the IMF as prominent economic actors in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Bank’s production of much of the literature surrounding development aid, form the foundation for the global context that led to the Water War. Through this lens of postcolonialism, the continued existence of colonial-like relations in Bolivia under different actors continues.

Bolivian Independence and Economic Struggle

At the time of independence, “to the rest of the world, Bolivia was still a mythical region of hordes of Indian peasants and incredibly wealthy mines that represented a

treasure house of riches,” but for Bolivians, it “was a war-weary and economically depressed region which was to experience, in the first years of its life, an economic stagnation which lasted for close to half a century” (Klein 1992, 101). Historians often argue that independence for Bolivia was economically detrimental to the country, and that they simply were not ready for it (Klein 1992, 101). The sixteen-year war against Spain was not fought cohesively or with one vision of independence in mind, and the region of new Bolivia was not bound together by anything more than arbitrary borders configured by Bolívar and the elites, who saw opportunity for personal gain in the creation of the state. These *criollos* “had little grasp of the geopolitical problems that forming a highly dispersed, weakly consolidated state would engender” (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 40), and Bolivians have struggled ever since to create a shared national identity and a strong state across starkly different ethnic, geographic, and sociopolitical divisions.

With struggling national elites and dispersed indigenous populations, the new country became increasingly vulnerable to international influence. The newly independent state remained under traditional elite control, but economic hardship in its early years caused many Spanish-speaking populations in the cities and in haciendas to move to other developing countries. The exodus of urban elites and those of Spanish descent, combined with the decline of the mines, left the country dominated by rural, subsistence settlements. This “decline of the export sector reduced the level of Spanish exploitation and raised the income of the Indian peasants” (Klein 1992, 105), as internal trade picked up and the government became increasingly dependent on the indigenous populations for production and revenue through taxation. Though Bolivia’s government

remained dominated by *criollos*, the vast majority of the population was indigenous, unlike in some other Latin American countries, most notably Chile and Argentina, where there existed a stronger middle class of *criollos* or *mestizos*.

Throughout its first 100 years, Bolivia worked to establish itself as an independent country, nationalizing the Roman Catholic Church, continuing to attempt to increase silver production, and fighting in several wars that shrunk and solidified its borders. These included severance of political involvement with Peru and coastal defeat to Chile during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), as well as loss of the Acre territory to Brazil (1903). During this time, various Spanish-descent or *mestizo* political figures, groups, and projects competed for dominance. Many of the rulers had lived abroad in Europe at some point in their lives, and brought relatively European viewpoints to state governance. Foreign trade increased with the discovery of guano, more silver, nitrates, and tin in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and Bolivia became increasingly economically dependent on exports of these raw materials.

By the early 1900s, during a global movement to increase infrastructure and introduce transportation technologies, Bolivia received a United States private bank loan to help complete international rail connections that helped facilitate trade. Under Bautista Saavedra who took over in 1921, banking controversies emerged involving large U.S. loans for infrastructure in return for U.S. control over Bolivia's taxation. The desire to further integrate Bolivia into the world economy through infrastructure development increased even more with the beginning of oil extraction in the Chaco territory (in what is today Paraguay- see figure 1). In 1921, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey purchased concessions for Bolivia's oil reserves, a move that "marked the onset of US-led

neocolonialism, based on privatization and extraction of Bolivia's hydrocarbon resources" (Hindery 2013, 22). Already wary of international presence dictating resource extraction and trade, opposition quickly surfaced.

A Shift Toward the Left

In 1930, in response to increasing U.S. control over Bolivia's infrastructure, trade, and resources at a time of global depression, radical leftism began to arise, as Marxist radicals attempted to lead a worker-peasant uprising in "the first genuinely successful expression of more radical political activity on the national political front" (Klein 1992, 177). Soon after, in 1932, the Chaco War started over the oil-rich territory. After their defeat, Bolivia created the state oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB) in 1936, and nationalized the industry the next year (Hindery 2013, 22). This provoked negative U.S. reaction, and the United States sanctioned mineral imports and threatened to discourage investment in Bolivia if the government did not pay Standard Oil back for the expulsion (Hindery 2013, 23). These U.S. sanctions catalyzed a long struggle over control of Bolivia's oil reserves between the Bolivian state and foreign private oil companies (backed significantly by the United States or other governments), reintroducing questions of sovereignty of the Bolivian state versus international actors, and influence of the Bolivian majority versus the state.

Defeat in the war over Chaco territory oil reserves between Bolivia and Paraguay also led to the collapse of the civilian government and the rise of the "Chaco generation" (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 45). These university students—children of government elites—wanted to break from hegemonic politics, and brought to the forefront issues of

“the Indian question, the labor question, the land question, and the economic dependency on private miners” (Klein 1992, 186). This leftist Marxism had its roots in European thought, and tended to focus more on labor issues than indigenous issues. The Chaco War left Bolivia in the same economic state, but politically, “it changed from being one of the least mobilized societies in Latin America, in terms of radical ideology and union organization, to one of the most advanced” (Klein 1992, 187). This shift, along with the rise of the Chaco generation—and the creation of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) Party in 1942—led to the revolution of 1952. With the arming of many of the supporters of the MNR, including rural indigenous masses, the National Revolution of 1952 culminated in the MNR coming into power.

The MNR wanted to transform Bolivia into a modern and centralized state, with all natural resource ownership nationalized. With pressure from indigenous and working-class peoples, the MNR gave everyone citizenship and the right to vote, and attempted to establish national education and healthcare systems, though the state lacked the resources to effectively administer those (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 47). Despite social progress, during the next 12 years Bolivia faced a “bankrupt economy, an inability of the regime even to feed its people, and a lack of capital to undertake all the ambitious welfare and reform programs proposed” (Klein 1992, 238), and soon hyperinflation began. The government began to seek assistance from the United States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IMF and the World Bank

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were founded at the

Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 at the end of World War II. The IMF was created as a financial and exchange rate stabilizer, while the World Bank was created as a development bank “to promote economic and social progress in developing countries by helping to raise productivity so that their people may live a better and fuller life” (Driscoll 1996). Both institutions are headquartered in Washington DC, and although their work differs, they work together to stabilize, develop, and aid national economies worldwide. Despite seemingly apolitical and benevolent motives, the two institutions have faced significant opposition throughout their existence, and in many cases, their work has actually created new problems. Because they act as globalizers, working to incorporate more countries into the world economy—using economic theory that is often not directly applicable or relevant—the countries that receive aid become more dependent on the global economy. Furthermore, the United States and other major countries have significant political influence over the two institutions, since they created them and largely run them. The two institutions have largely shaped the world economy based on economic and political principles dictated by the United States and other Northern governments, implementing top-down policies and structural adjustment programs (Woods 2006). Both the IMF and the World Bank began to play significant roles in the structuring of Bolivia throughout the country’s next period.

Economic Aid in Bolivia

By 1956, Bolivia under the MNR was in need of outside help to control hyperinflation and to address widespread famine. Through a much-needed bailout and monetary stabilization program by the IMF, Bolivia was faced with conditions for

restructuring that brought “the most conservative, pro-business sectors in the MNR to the fore, sharpening the divide between the government and the labour movement” (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 49). The restructuring efforts included pressure for a free-market economy, privatization and stabilization of the government, and more, with threatened discontinuation of aid if Bolivia did not comply (Zunes 2001).

IMF economic aid was joined by 5 million dollars of necessary food aid from the United States, under the condition that Bolivia would ramp up its military. In 1956, Bolivia passed a new law at the imperative of the U.S. government that “enabled foreign investments in hydrocarbon and forbade state companies from extracting Bolivian oil” (Hindery 2013, 24), despite widespread protests. While the oil investment law was for U.S. economic reasons, the U.S. food aid was for entirely ideological reasons, as the United States wanted to quell any possibility of a communist revolution in Bolivia. As Zunes describes it, the United States was willing to work with the Bolivian revolution due to the “realization that it might be able to moderate [it] because of Bolivia's extreme economic dependency and take the opportunity to manipulate the balance of forces within the factionalized MNR to its own advantage” (Zunes 2001, 34). This established a precedent of ideological control through economic means.

By the end of the 1950s, Bolivia became the first Latin American country and the largest single recipient of U.S. foreign aid, and worldwide, it became the highest per-capita recipient of foreign aid. Because of Bolivian dependence on the United States, and because of the U.S. control of the IMF, these aid programs essentially “gave the U.S. government unprecedented power to control the course of the Bolivian revolution” (Zunes 2001, 45). The Bolivian government had minimal agency in the decision-making

process following the revolution because of the dire situation within the country, and because “the MNR’s pragmatic wing recognized that no Bolivian revolution could afford to alienate the United States, not just because of the threat of direct intervention but also because of the possibility of economic retaliation, not unimportant given Bolivia’s dependence on the United States to absorb its tin and provide needed imports” (Zunes 2001, 35). This demonstrates the power of economic aid; while Bolivia initially needed food to feed its people, food aid became a vehicle for the United States to secure political and economic control over a country (and its resources) that, had its course of history gone differently, could have become another radical enemy of the United States.

Political Turbulence

The United States continued to have considerable influence in Bolivia until 1970, when the military instituted General Juan José Torres as president. Torres, a radical leftist, began to accept financial aid from Russia and Eastern Europe, thus rendering U.S. aid uncritical. Over the next few decades, Bolivia’s leadership overturned many times. Conservative Hugo Banzer, president-dictator from 1971-1978, restructured Bolivia and made many economic gains while also working to depoliticize and re-educate the masses (Klein 1992, 256). He abolished all political parties and instituted a military rule in 1974, in the model of the Pinochet regime in Chile (Klein 1992, 258). During this period of conservative military rule, literacy rose from 31% to 67% (from 1950 to 1976); Spanish was becoming the majority language for the first time in Bolivian history, now spoken by 72% of the population (Klein 1992, 265).

By the late 1970s, Bolivia began to transition away from military rule while

diversifying economically and politically. Bolivia's trade partners diversified to include Latin American countries and Asia, a significant departure from the 1960s when the United States and Western Europe took 90-95% of the exports (Klein 1992, 260). This diversification insured that one country was not controlling Bolivia economically or ideologically. Within Bolivia, many different political parties began to re-emerge, creating a diversity of political opinion and ideology, as democratic elections were reinstated. Despite the nominal democracy, eight separate governments ruled between 1978 and 1982, during a period of extreme political and civil upheaval (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 54).

By the 1980s, coca leaves for cocaine were becoming a significant export. Bolivia was still dependent on and in debt from loans, particularly those for modernizing agriculture, and as cocaine boomed internationally, coca leaves from the lowlands grew in demand. Coca growing in the Chapare region dates to pre-colonial times, because the coca leaves are used spiritually and help with altitude in the altiplano, but the exports increased significantly with the production of cocaine. Despite growing exports and profits from cocaine, other industry did not grow. Bolivia remained one of the poorest countries in Latin America throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and today is the single poorest country in South America by GDP per capita (aneki.com). Agriculture is still a predominant sector, with only 51% of people living in cities by 1988.

The World Bank and IMF in the 1980s

During the Bolivian political instability from the 1960s to the 1980s, the country began receiving more World Bank loans for development projects. These included many

urban development and infrastructure projects, water supply projects, mining and gas projects, financial management projects, and more. To see a full list of World Bank projects in Bolivia through 1989, see appendix table 1. See appendix table 2 for World Bank projects in Bolivia from 1990 to 2000.

These World Bank development projects were not occurring uniquely in Bolivia, but rather were part of a wave of globalization driven by the World Bank and the IMF and their leaders. As president of the Bank, former U.S. secretary of defense Robert McNamara argued fervently that “rich countries had the *responsibility* to redistribute their wealth to the poorer countries, for moral and ethical reasons, as well as the more pragmatic reason of stemming the tide of revolution” (Goldman 2005, 73) that was growing worldwide in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Sparking new academic studies on development economics, poverty, and the Green Revolution, the World Bank in this era became more than just a development bank; it became a new driver of organizing and constructing transnational relations, from education to infrastructure to agriculture to the perpetuation of economic dependency in the name of ‘development’.

Despite the development and poverty-reduction motives of the Bank throughout the global South in the 1970s, “the twin effects of massive borrowing for rural industrialization and the linking of Southern food and agricultural sectors to the consumption of Northern-based capital goods and farm inputs, contributed heavily to the net flow of capital out of the South and into the North” (Goldman 2005, 88). Between 1976 and 1980, the South’s debt had grown by 20% annually due to the Bank’s loans. Entering the 1980s, the global South was generally struggling again with inflation, debt, and economic dependency. The international response, based on economic theory and

market-oriented reforms, was a combination of debt service, stabilization, and structural adjustment (Stallings 1992, 44).

These three policy clusters dominated development rhetoric over the next decade, and set the stage for the dominance of neoliberalism in the 1990s. Debt service is mediated through relations with private banks, bilateral creditors, and multilateral agencies; stabilization involves policies to address inflation and balance of payments; structural adjustment includes many policies of institution building, specifically liberalization and privatization (Stallings 1992, 44).

Stallings highlights the mechanisms through which these programs operate. The first is the integration of countries into *international markets* that determine terms of trade by international demand. The second is economic, political, and ideological *linkage* between domestic groups and international actors. The third is through *leverage* that uses the power relations between international actors and 3rd world governments (Stallings 1992, 48-49). These mechanisms are not new to the 1980s; they have been developing along postcolonial lines, in both Bolivia and globally, since independence. Using these mechanisms, the World Bank and the IMF implemented new projects with conditions and requirements that resulted in many countries having to reduce their spending on national social welfare (food subsidies, health, education, etc.) in order to meet the demands of the World Bank and the IMF. By 1986, third world debt was at \$1 trillion, much of which was to pay interest on old loans, further increasing dependency on loans from the Bank and the IMF. These shifts led to the neoliberal wave in the 1990s.

Conclusion

Through the mechanisms of international markets, linkage, and leverage, international actors have increased accessibility and exploitability of Bolivia's resources, and therefore its nature and space. Because Bolivia had to depend on these international actors, primarily the IMF and the United States, to stabilize inflation and receive food aid, and because the United States and other large economies desired Bolivia's natural resources, Bolivia was forced deeper into neocolonial relationships. These relationships were supported by the Bolivian state to varying degrees, but the majority of working-class people, young people, and indigenous peoples were growing increasingly angry about international actors controlling and dictating Bolivia's economy, politics, and life. These tensions would only increase in the 1990s, as privatization efforts increased and international actors descended on Bolivia's internationalized space.

Chapter 4

Neoliberalism: Setting the Stage for the Water War

Cycles of privatization and nationalization of various industries in Bolivia occurred throughout the 1900s. Oil, as a key example, oscillated between state control and international private control many times following its discovery in the early 1900s. Other industries like gas and tin have also been through cycles of privatization and state control. In the 1970s and 1980s, with the advent of neoliberalism, privatization became the worldwide trend. Private corporations based in the United States and other major countries were gaining unprecedented access to natural resources in Latin America. This tide of neoliberalism was driven by the World Bank and the IMF, with influence from the United States and other governments, which, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, were becoming increasingly influenced by private corporations. Though institutional links between private corporations and Latin American privatization may be indirect, the murky role of these corporations in the U.S. government, and of the U.S. government in the World Bank suggest that the corporations played a role in increasing privatization.

The neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s was next in a long series of neocolonial relationships that continue to put outside actors in control of Bolivia's natural resources. While the internationalization of Bolivia's space continues to take new forms, and the actors continue to change, the people of Bolivia are still faced with the violence, frustration, and exploitation of having powerful outside groups control their resources. These outside groups do not understand the local context, and often care more about making money or achieving political and economic motives than about truly restructuring society to better achieve justice. But even the ones trying to achieve justice or "alleviate

poverty,” such as the World Bank, do so insufficiently, paternalistically, and generically.

This chapter looks at the rise of neoliberalism through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the shift to a more “green” version of neoliberalism, and the role of the different actors in the privatization decision of 1999. Many people in Bolivia protested privatization every step of the way, but, as is the case in many internationalized spaces, the international actors have too much leverage, their linkage with state elites is too strong, and the states are too embedded in international markets for the protests to permanently dispel privatization. So the privatization spread from industry to industry, reaching the water in Cochabamba in 1999. When it reached the water, so crucial to daily survival, the people had had enough.

Rise of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, and the implementation of its ideals, arose in the 1970s and 1980s, and is often considered to be tied to the rise of Reaganomics during the Reagan years. David Harvey (2007) argues that the first implementation of a neoliberal state as we understand it today was in Chile in 1973, after Pinochet’s coup. The coup, supported by the United States—with intelligence help from the corporation Bechtel, the same corporation that privatized Cochabamba’s water in 1999—was enacted to repress social movements of socialism, to reduce market restrictions, and to revive the economy. The subsequent government restructuring, formulated by the “Chicago boys” (Pinochet economists trained at the University of Chicago), was funded by loans from the IMF. With help from the IMF, the economists “reversed the nationalizations and privatized public assets, opened up natural resources to private and unregulated exploitation (in

many cases riding roughshod over the claims of indigenous inhabitants), privatized social security, and facilitated foreign direct investments and freer trade” (Harvey 2007, 8). This first case study—in the global periphery rather than the core, as Harvey notes—became the model for neoliberal agendas of privatization, deregulation, “trickle-down” economics, reduced trade barriers, free trade, and reduced government spending. Neoliberal models proliferated throughout the world, mirroring the policies of Reagan and Britain’s Margaret Thatcher.

Neoliberalism and structural adjustment were introduced in Bolivia in 1985 under President Victor Pas Estenssoro, with the edict known as DS 21060 or the NEP (New Economic Policy), designed to control hyperinflation. While it was successful in achieving that goal, it also destroyed unions, lowered living standards, and started processes of privatization. Mining unions prior to 1985 were strong and influential for the Bolivian economy and politics, but the collapse of tin prices, combined with DS 21060 in 1985, threatened the unions. A protest march from Cochabamba to La Paz in 1986 was stopped by the military, and resulted in the privatization of the mines and the effective end of the unions. Through corporate globalization, resources became even more exploited, pay rates stagnated, and prices increased for services such as health care, education, and electricity. Feeling the effects of exploitation, repression of protest, and more expensive services, the people were increasingly dissatisfied, both with neoliberal policies generally and with the institutions that were initiating them. Protests began again—and not just in Bolivia.

Shift from Neoliberalism to Green Neoliberalism

In the late 1980s, protests against neoliberalism proliferated in the third world; “the image in the North of the happy recipients of Bank aid—the ‘objects of development’—was sabotaged as rural peasants and urban laborers began a series of bread riots and project protests, including mass marches and fasts to dramatize their discontent with the World Bank and its policies” (Goldman 2005, 94). Social and environmental concerns were raised worldwide, and many of the Bank’s policies and projects came under scrutiny. Protestors challenged development as both socially and environmentally destructive, and many people lost faith in the World Bank.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 came worldwide unrest, as “‘ethnic, religious, and territorial conflicts, long subdued by the Cold War, erupted one after another. The world was remade, tossed, and liberated—and reopened for international business’” (Steve Coll in Denton, 2009). The World Bank responded (after a brief period of denial) with massive reorganization, arguing that “there could be no sustained economic growth without a sustainable environment and just treatment of the ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples living on fragile ecosystems” (Goldman 96-97). They implemented environmental policies and ordered reports and research, requiring all projects from 1995 on to have environmental and social impact reports. This response represented a rapid departure from previous development protocol, and came along with the rising tide of a new kind of neoliberalism—green neoliberalism.

Green neoliberalism, the Bank’s response to integrate more environmentally and socially “conscious” goals, “fundamentally altered the defining features of the Bank’s neoliberal agenda by adding as a goal the restructuring and capitalization of nature-

society relations that exist as uncommodified or underutilized by capital markets” (Goldman 2005, 7). Essentially, under this new form of neoliberalism, the World Bank marketed the idea that natural resources like water and forests were being improperly and inefficiently managed by Third World governments, and that, in order to work toward environmental sustainability, these markets must be privatized and commodified. As Goldman argues, this current of neoliberalism was “built upon the power relations embedded and embodied in former colonial capitalist relations,” and works to completely “remake nature in the South” to prioritize commercial logging, cash-cropping, preservation, and elite eco-tourism (Goldman 2005, 8-9). While much of this new neoliberalism was driven by the World Bank, it began to pervade global development discourse, as Northern environmentalists came together with neoliberal economists, and national elites as well as international actors implemented these new policies under the guise of protecting natural resources from the incapable poor countries of the South.

In Bolivia during this massive shift toward “environmentally-friendly” privatization between 1985 and 1999, the country’s debt rose by about 3 billion dollars (Olivera 2004, 15). In 1997, the former dictator Hugo Banzer returned to power after 14 years, and job loss increased drastically, leading to a huge surplus of unemployed workers working under inhumane conditions out of desperation, with no promise of job security. More transnational companies moved into Bolivia to take over newly privatized industries, and corruption in government increased. Olivera noted that “this impunity—so characteristic of neoliberalism itself—clearly demonstrated that the ideological basis, as well as the roots, of corruption existed within the system” (Olivera 2004, 17).

Under Banzer, the government “felt incapable of peacefully imposing

neoliberalism. They had no other recourse to silence the hungry, protect the political and economic elite, or to control the population” (Olivera 2004, 18). Labor organization and social protest became increasingly criminalized, and the police gained power. Democracy became simply a name for holding corrupt elections, and while political candidates often ran on platforms of creating jobs and reducing poverty; “at the end of the day, however, their strategy for eliminating poverty is to eliminate the poor” (Olivera 2004, 21). Thus, the poor became increasingly oppressed, silenced, and dispossessed of their jobs, welfare, and resources, while the political elite gained power. All of this began to set the stage for the water privatization law of 1999.

Water System Management and Law 2029

While neoliberalism ravaged indigenous and poor populations across the Global South, growing populations and the rhetoric of climate change refocused the conversation on diminishing water resources and ineptitude of local states to effectively distribute potable water to their populations. Goldman argues that, “since the mid-1990s, a new transnational policy network has arisen with the ambition of generating a global policy agenda on water” (Goldman 2005, 224). This new agenda had many goals, including improving access to water for the poor and finding the right price of water to enable access while restricting overuse. Through the process of normalizing and depoliticizing water privatization narratives, “the World Bank successfully transformed a ‘potentially explosive political question about rights, entitlements, how one should live, and who should decide into *technical questions* of efficiency and sustainability’” (Li 2002, 1 in Goldman 2005, 224). This ideology of privatization became justified and explained

academically by the World Bank Institute (WBI) (previously Economic Development Institute prior to the late 1990s), a worldwide training program sponsored by the World Bank that trains professionals and produces studies and knowledge that will benefit the World Bank.

The World Bank began to require a privatized water system as a precondition to receiving Bank loans, resulting in “industry analysts predict[ing] that private water will soon be a capitalized market as precious, and as war-provoking, as oil” (Goldman 2005, 232). This rapid shift from nationalized industries often beneficial to the countries to privatization occurred as structural adjustment impositions and transnational policy networks spread, with help from the creation of the World Water Council in 1996. The transnational water policy network included many multinational corporations, and various reports depicted water privatization as both lucrative for the company and beneficial in reducing the number of people without access to potable water.

Goldman argues that “there is good reason to critically question the ‘global water scarcity’ and the ‘crisis’ discourses of the transnational water policy network and to examine the very real political-economic interests that lie behind it” (Goldman 2005, 252), because these narratives emerged out of particular powerful agents embedded in the global water industry. While many people lack access to potable water, it is not necessarily due to a global water shortage or the exploitation of water resources by small-scale communities. Rather, these shortages result from two decades of structural adjustment policies driven by the World Bank that emphasized decreasing spending on public utilities, infrastructure, and services (Goldman 2005, 251), and from decades of postcolonial domination and decision-making that have historically prioritized elites and

money-making schemes over the majority populations.

Despite the constructed historical, socio-political and geographic dimensions of water shortages, the effects are very real, and in Cochabamba in the late 1990s, the water situation was dire. Water shortages are not new in Cochabamba, and Olivera notes that Bolivia's "water shortages have been historically used by politicians and businesspeople to manipulate the population in pursuit of corporate interests and corporate power" (Olivera 2004, 8). The case in 1999 was no different.

In June of 1999, the World Bank released a report on Bolivia that specifically focused on the Cochabamba water situation. In keeping with recent policy to enforce privatization by threatening to discontinue loans until public utilities were privatized, the World Bank strongly recommended the privatization of the Cochabamba water system. In October 1999, in response to the World Bank report, the Bolivian Government introduced Water Law 2029 to govern water. The law set national standards for drinking water, and in doing so, discontinued the guarantee of water distribution to rural areas, prohibited traditional water practices and distribution systems (without compensation for systems that had been built by individuals and communities), "dollarized" all water payments (meaning the prices now depended on exchange rates and how strong the *boliviano* was to the US dollar), and even prohibited the collection of rainwater without explicit permission (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 162-163; Olivera 2004, 9).

Before Law 2029 passed, a contract was signed between the Bolivian government and *Aguas de Tunari*, a new consortium that would own and operate the water system in Cochabamba for the next forty years. *Aguas de Tunari* was mostly held by the San-Francisco-based multinational engineering corporation, Bechtel, as well as by Abengoa

of Spain and four Bolivian companies, including one led by the owner of Bolivia's Burger Kings, and one led by the *Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR or Movement of the Revolutionary Left), which, ironically, is neither left nor revolutionary (Olivera 2004, 10). The consortium was the only bidder of the privatization effort, so despite being improperly qualified and poorly motivated, the government had no other options. So they turned to the multinational corporation Bechtel, and their partners.

Who is Bechtel?

Bechtel is a large, private construction and engineering corporation based in San Francisco, California. Bechtel is responsible for 25,000 projects across all seven continents and 160 countries spanning over a century of hard work (Bechtel.com). What started as an honest, hardworking, all-American company became a multinational corporation tied deeply to oil, politics, foreign policy, big money, power, and corruption, aiming to build the world in a way that favored Bechtel and its friends.

Bechtel began with construction and infrastructure projects on the West coast of the United States, including many roads, railroads, bridges, and dams, the largest being the Hoover Dam. Over the years, Bechtel's projects expanded to include pipelines, refineries, ships for WWII, nuclear power plants, international airports, entire cities, resource extraction sites, and privatization projects.

More significantly, and more controversially, the company developed close relations to the U.S. government. Bechtel played a large part in intelligence-gathering for the CIA from the 1950s onward, particularly in the Middle East. Through close connections with the U.S. government, including two Bechtel senior executives serving

as Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State under Reagan, and many private lobbyists in Washington, Bechtel and the U.S. Government epitomize the “revolving door” between private corporations and the government. This relationship has won Bechtel many business deals, helped dictate which countries become allies of the U.S. (driven largely by oil or other resources), and even helped drive several U.S.-backed coups d’état and other foreign policy decisions (McCartney 1989; Denton 2016).

However, as a New York Times article pointed out in 1988, “despite the grandeur and high visibility of many of its projects, [...] Bechtel has sought to keep a low profile” (Labaton 1988), choosing to be known by its key customers rather than by the public. While Bechtel has been cited as the company that “built the American West” and “engineered the world,” it is not a commonly known household name, and not by accident. Bechtel often takes on projects as part of consortiums or through other local companies (often companies it has created), so as to avoid having its name on the project. They dodge responsibility on controversial projects by saying they are “just the engineers” of projects, not the designers or masterminds behind them, but they enjoy the immense power they have as one of the largest, longest-standing, and most global private corporations over the last 120 years. So why did such a well-established, far-reaching, massive corporation come to Cochabamba?

Bechtel is always looking for new industries, and water privatization at this time was the next big thing. As CEO Stephen Bechtel said, “we’re more about making money than making things” (Dangl 2007, 61). While the company did not have a history of water system management, they saw an opportunity to make some money off the 40-year contract. This is how they went about many of their projects—jumping into new

industries and utilizing their impressive engineering skills to make it work. But because of their disregard for the local people, and their misunderstanding of the local context, they quickly faced significant opposition.

Aguas de Tunari, with the help of Bechtel, set the rates for the water, and also controlled the water bills, which fraudulently included increases in water consumption amounts. Some water bills increased by as much as 300%, which many Cochabambinos simply could no longer pay. More importantly, these policies went against all of their beliefs, including water as a right, water as a public service rather than a business, water distribution as taking into account the needs of the people, and water system innovation as within the purview of neighborhood cooperatives and rural communities. As Olivera notes, the privatization decision had to do with “the nature of government decision-making. Would decisions be made by taking into consideration the interests of the population, or simply by conforming to what foreign financial entities prescribed?” (Olivera 2004, 11). It was this thinking that jumpstarted the resistance.

Conclusions

Neoliberalism and green neoliberalism arose from the search for new solutions to global poverty and resource overuse, but were also embedded deeply in the colonial relations that have developed over centuries. Despite stated motives of reducing poverty and increasing development, or sustainable resource management and welfare distribution, projects driven by colonial histories and instituted without the input of those whose lives they will affect will be violent and damaging to the people they are ostensibly designed to serve. The Water War in Bolivia is a prime example. The World

Bank, the Bolivian Government and Bechtel collaborated to address the water shortage in Cochabamba without the direct input of Cochabambinos.

Though different in scope, action and effect, Bechtel and the World Bank have actually changed the world in very similar ways—they facilitated close U.S. government relations with international development aid, foreign governments, and Northern corporations, and they helped to construct economic dependency cycles and a globalized economy that relies on the raw materials from countries in the Middle East and the Global South while relying on the technical expertise and manufactured goods of the Global North, particularly the United States. The distinction between the World Bank, the U.S. government, and multinational corporations like Bechtel has become murkier, as governments have increasingly advocated for and enforced privatization policies. Because of the internationalization of Bolivia and the linking of the Bolivian state to foreign actors, the Bolivian state does not sufficiently stand as an intermediary between the people of Bolivia and the complex web of international influences.

As Woods argues, “the greatest success of the IMF and the World Bank has been as globalizers. [...] Politics and their own rules and habits explain much of why they have presented globalization as a solution to challenges they have faced in the world economy” (Woods 2006, 2-3). By making these claims, Woods is not arguing that the World Bank and the IMF act as solitary actors, but instead that they have become deeply entrenched in the world economic system with the help of the powerful governments and economists who created the institutions. However, as people began to uncover and expose the downfalls and false promises of neoliberal development—particularly when its effects reached the water system in Cochabamba, the spell was broken, and revolts began.

Chapter 5

Decoloniality: The Water War

Looking at Bolivia in its period after independence through a postcolonial lens illuminates the continuing multi-scalar power dynamics present in the country. While the actors have changed—and the economic and development mechanisms have shifted—the results have been relatively the same throughout its history. Bolivia as an internationalized space has been opened up to outside actors who then profit off of Bolivia's nature, while the majority of people living in Bolivia have limited autonomy over their resources and living conditions. When the cycle of exploitation reached Cochabamba's water system, however, the people initiated a social movement laden with decolonial modes of thinking and decolonial assertions for living in order to take back their water system management and their resources.

The Backdrop

Since the time of initial European contact, many indigenous groups in Bolivia resisted and maintained their own heterogeneous structures of organizing and living, despite oppressive and often violent pressure from the colonizers and, later, state actors. Because these structures remained in the fabric of the Andes, efforts to build a movement that utilized this historical multiplicity centered on solidarity between indigenous peoples and other *campesinos*. Because of the wide range of people who were both affected by and indignant at foreign corporate control of the city's water system, “the Cochabamba Water War was the most heated example of the Bolivian people's broad-based opposition to the neoliberal model, and was considered the first victory after a decade and a half of

defeats” (Assies 2010, 57). The collective action against neoliberalism was so strong because it mobilized against Bechtel, a common enemy, and around water, a common necessity.

Andean Water Systems and Cultural Identities

The cultural identities of indigenous groups and *campesino* groups in the Andes have been tied to water and irrigation systems throughout colonial and postcolonial times. Because water is often scarce due to the physical geography described earlier and the unpredictable cycles of wet years and dry years, Andean communities have developed complex irrigation and water systems based on communal management and small-scale farming practices that are locally relevant to the physical geography and climatology, as well as consistent with cultural practices and beliefs. While these systems and cultural practices differ based on the community, in general, “water provides a strong material and spiritual basis for Andean life-ways and cultural orientations, one that has a firm foundation in ancient infrastructure and in well-developed understandings that join sacred landscapes to production, community, the commons, and cultural identity” (Gelles 2010, 137). Water system management has historically taken place on a community level, but its importance transcends the community scale, as evidenced by the larger claim of the right to manage water (distinctly different from a claim of the right to own the water).

Water rights for many indigenous and *campesino* peoples of the Andes typically include “claims that encompass both the right to access and withdraw water and the right to determine rules for managing water use systems” (Boelens et. al 2010, 5), so water rights conversations include autonomy over water systems. When the Bolivian

Government passed Water Law 2029, the many indigenous and *campesino* water systems were disallowed and everyone was forced to pay for their water, even those who were not connected to the central water system, causing whole communities to lose their legal water access. When *Aguas de Tunari* privatized the water, the people lost their ability to determine water management rules. These threatened everything about the people's relationship to the water.

In order to create a successful movement, “the Water Wars mobilized a discourse centering on the defense of indigenous ‘traditional use and distribution of water’ as collective cultural right. Many of the protestors were urban *mestizos* (not self-identified indigenous); yet *usos y costumbres* [uses and customs] became a powerful discourse which cut across race, class, and social sectors in order to negotiate for ‘collective’ water rights” (Albro (2005) and Olivera and Lewis (2004) in Fabricant 2013, 161). Extending the usage of indigenous assertions of water as a collective cultural right beyond indigenous peoples and to all peoples of Cochabamba demonstrated the solidarity embedded in the Water War, and offered a distinct and specific statement to fight for.

The Initial Organizing

According to Oscar Olivera, the creation of the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (Coalition in Defense of Water and Life) was “an effort to reconstruct a social network, or the social fabric of solidarity, that had been destroyed by neoliberalism” (Olivera 2004, 25). The coalition also was created to protect the rights of mother earth and the “idea that water belongs to the community and no one has the right to own the water” (Olivera 2004, 8). The *Coordinadora* became instrumental in leading

the movement and gaining support from groups outside its own members.

In the creation of the *Coordinadora*, Olivera, as a union leader, had deep connections to the workers represented by the large and small unions in Cochabamba, but he recognized the existence of a large portion of workers outside of organized labor, namely women and children, who made up about 80% of the workforce (Olivera 2004, 25). Through media exposure, these sectors of “invisible work” became better understood, and Olivera began to recognize the importance of cross-sector solidarity. He began promoting this so much so that “everybody came around seeking solutions to their problems” (Olivera 2004, 26).

It was during this time that he became aware of the water privatization issue through irrigation farmers, who had organized a protest against the new water law in 1999. Olivera says he did not understand the water law until the irrigation farmers “explained the water law in detail and how our systems in the workers’ neighborhoods would be affected, especially by rate hikes and confiscations” (Olivera 2004, 28). These explanations—ways of making tangible to common people what the State, the World Bank, and Aguas de Tunari were doing, and the real effects it would have—became critical in mobilizing the masses. Rallying behind a convoluted and seemingly abstract law is difficult; when people understand how it will directly impact their family and life, it is much easier to mobilize. Olivera and the leaders recognized this, and created a summary of five bullet points stating how Law 2029 would affect the common people (Olivera 2016). This five-point plan helped facilitate the understanding of “the importance of joint actions and believing that no individual sector alone could marshal sufficient strength to block the privatization of water. There could be no individual

salvation. Social well-being would be achieved for everyone, or for no one at all” (Olivera 2004, 28). This assertion challenged capitalistic and neoliberal ideals of competitive individualism, and suggested the need for a mode of organization that emphasized societal liberation and solidarity outside of neoliberal and neocolonial modes of organizing.

Introduction to Decoloniality

Decoloniality is a mode of thinking that de-links from and works to create narratives outside of colonial thought. While it was not expressly used in the creation of a successful movement in Bolivia, it can be applied to help understand the real tactics used that differentiated the Water War from other protest movements. Mignolo, together with Quijano and Escobar, helped theorize *decoloniality* in the 1990s. Epistemological delinking from colonialism—thinking outside of colonial modes of organization, and offering political, social, and economic on-the-ground alternative thoughts and actions outside of eurocentrism—forms the basis of decoloniality. Decoloniality arose within and centered around Latin America (as opposed to postcolonialism, which arose largely out of Asia and Africa), created by Latin American scholars and understandings of colonialism and coloniality of power (see introduction).

The broader goals of decoloniality include helping us see modernity, Western civilization, development, and capitalism as only one option of many, and this one option was defined by those who benefit from it, which shows “how it became hegemonic: economic, political, epistemic and institutional beliefs coalesced to suggest there is only one option” (Mignolo 2012). Decoloniality acknowledges that there are alternatives to

capitalism and westernization, and that existing outside these hegemonic systems of organization involves delinking from them. If modes of thinking don't de-link from colonial or Western thought, or if "coloniality is disrupted but still maintained, the legacy of coloniality prevents the construction of an economically just world, of equitable and ethical future social organizations" (Mignolo 2012).

Mignolo acknowledges two common modes of delinking, dewesternization and decoloniality. Dewesternization challenges "Occidentalism, racism, a totalitarian and unilateral globality and an imperialist epistemology" but "only questions who controls capitalism—the West or 'emerging' economies" (Mignolo 2008), rather than questioning capitalism altogether. Dewesternization is a step in the direction of decoloniality.

Decoloniality, however, fundamentally interrogates the roots of the legacy of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Thus, in a decolonial project, we must work to release the control knowledge from the powerful within the current hegemony, and reimagine the economic and political world structure (Mignolo 2012). Decoloniality centers the communal, which has already existed before and alongside capitalism, but has been systematically discounted by the capitalist mentality. Oftentimes, these modes of organization are "non-Western categories of thought through Western-categories of thought" (Mignolo 2012), meaning that even though they are outside capitalism, they are still being conceptualized through capitalist thought. Decoloniality strives to conceptualize these modes of organizing outside of capitalist thought. To achieve this kind of thinking outside and beyond colonialism and capitalism, Olivera and the other leaders of the Water War drew on indigenous groups' modes of organizing.

The War

The *Coordinadora* became an organizing body that contested ideas within hegemonic organizing powers, becoming “the ‘conscience of the people’—a living, breathing force that monitored and challenged the actions of government and big business alike. It became the organ that could interpret and decipher the basic demands of the population” (Olivera 2004, 29), while also recognizing a multiplicity of needs, desires, ontologies and epistemologies. In these ways, the organization epitomized decoloniality without explicitly using the academic theory behind it.

To draw solidarity across varying needs and desires, the five-point plan focused on issues that would affect more than one population. Olivera and the *Coordinadora* reached out to many seemingly disjointed groups for a planned mobilization on December 1, 1999. To Olivera’s surprise, ten thousand people showed up (Olivera 2004). The resistance offered a well-articulated option for the government to end the contract with Aguas de Tunari, with the threat of shutting down the city otherwise.

When the government didn’t respond, the *Coordinadora* and the Civic Committee (local elites who wanted to create a political space for themselves, but who had initially voted for the privatization) joined together with a massive strike and blockades. What turned into a multi-day blockade (though the Civic Committee was only in it for the first day) became violent at the hands of police, when they brought out tear gas and gassed the peaceful negotiators. This infuriated the people, who brought their water bills to the city center and burned them in an act of symbolic resistance. When the government still didn’t respond constructively to the protest, the people planned a peaceful movement called “*la toma de Cochabamba*” (takeover of Cochabamba) for February 4th.

The name of the takeover movement terrified the local authorities, even though the *Coordinadora* insisted that it was peaceful and symbolic. Ignoring the statements by the *Coordinadora*, the government employed local security guards as well as the *dálmatas* (Dalmatians), a police force from La Paz. When Feb. 4th came, the police were ready with their tear gas and clubs. The people pushed on, and many downtown residents who had initially been watching from their windows joined the crowds in the streets as more and more people became infuriated by the police and the rising water rates. As one college student, Luis Gonzales, said, “‘all of Cochabamba was up in arms.... People from all different political and social groups came together in the street barricades to confront the police’” (Gonzales in Dangl 2007, 59).

The next day, on February 5th, the whole city had been blockaded, and with the media reporting on how many people were occupying the streets, more and more people joined in disbelief and protest. On this day, the people took matters into their own hands, choosing to fight for their rights. Kids built barricades, elderly people banged on pots in the streets, and, most notably of all, as Olivera described, “as we left the shelter of our houses and our communities, we started to talk among ourselves, to know one another, and to regain our trust in ourselves and each other” (Olivera 2004, 36). The people began to support each other and the community as a whole, and this strengthened community fabric and started to build the foundation of solidarity among irrigators, *cocaleros* (coca farmers), miners, students, and more.

The fight wasn't over. The government failed to change the contract with Aguas de Tunari as promised, so the movement escalated its demands, now calling for a complete expulsion of the multi-national consortium. By April, with still no concessions

from the government, the “final battle” took place—eight days of intense protests, blockades, and strikes. The “barricades were made with objects of daily life in houses, like tables, chairs, stoves, disabled people left wheelchairs, kids left toys, and it was also symbolic by saying the privatization affects daily life of the people” (Olivera 2016). The occupation of the streets inspired more and more protestors to join.

The people held meetings, committees, and town hall meetings, some attended by 50,000 to 70,000 people. One of these led to the decision by the people to take over the Aguas de Tunari building, “symbolically occupying the company’s offices, ripping down its big sign, and everything” (Olivera 2004, 39), but still the police did not show up. The protestors continued to push Olivera to talk to the government, which was having private meetings with various other groups but refusing to speak with the *Cordindadora*. Olivera attempted to enter the Aguas de Tunari building, and almost immediately the police came with tear gas and arrested him. The people were infuriated; 40,000 protestors showed up in the main plaza to occupy the center of town until the government acted.

The next day there were orders for Olivera’s assassination, as well as conflicting news on whether the government was going to lift the contract or not. People continued to protest, and the army grew more violent. One army member shot and killed 17-year-old Víctor Hugo Daza on April 8th, who wasn’t even protesting (Dangl 2007, 66). In a standoff, the protestors continued to occupy the city and the government continued to adhere to the contract and enact violence on the streets. After significant governmental mismanagement, on April 10th, the Prefect of Cochabamba said in a phone call to President Banzer, ““this is not some radical group, it is all of Cochabamba”” (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 166), and finally, the government cancelled the contract. In the end, the

government and the protesters decided to create a transitional board of directors that included representatives from the *Coordinadora* as well as the mayor's office and unionized workers to figure out a new way to manage the water.

Afterthoughts on the War

Olivera later commented, “these were the most anguished days of my life. I was not at all afraid of the government, of their bullets. I was afraid that the people would not agree with the decisions we might take. That was my fear” (Olivera 2004, 44). Olivera's comment highlights the difficulty of having a representative for a movement that represents many diverse groups and interests in the search for plurinational coexistence—the recognition of the existence of more than one national group within a state. But in the end, the people believed in him as a spokesperson because he considered multiple viewpoints and because he was fighting for liberation for all.

The departure from Western individualistic modes of thinking can be seen within the Andean indigenous communities, as Mignolo explains. He argues that the communal in the Andes is a form of social and economic organizing that survived alongside European colonization, and is now “being re-inscribed, but the re-inscription is grounded in the revamping and expansion of Aymara and Quechua categories of thought” (Mignolo 2012). Conceptualizations of these ideas of the communal outside western economic conceptions of common-pool resources and the commons rely on three related concepts to decoloniality—epistemic disobedience, border thinking, and delinking.

Epistemic disobedience is “thinking in exteriority, in the spaces and time that the self-narrative of modernity invented as its outside to legitimize its own logic of

coloniality” (Mignolo 2011). Similarly, border thinking encapsulates epistemologies outside of the rhetoric of “modernity,” capitalism and eurocentrism, and represents a break from hegemony in the search for alternatives outside the system, rather than alternatives within the system. Border thinking also highlights “the ability to speak from more than one system of knowledge” as “an act of pluralizing epistemologies” (Mignolo 2008). The Water War occupies a space of decoloniality, a moment of challenging hegemonic development models and globalization that is embedded in a larger history of resistance and existence outside of the so-called Western world, because the people of Cochabamba came together and began to reimagine an existence without neoliberal implementation of IMF and World Bank projects, and without neocolonial decisions over their water system.

The Water War was just the beginning of an entire movement toward decoloniality based on indigenous and *campesino* modes of organizing that challenge dominant hegemonic economics, politics, and international relations. Within decoloniality, people “become epistemically disobedient, and think and do decolonially, dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs” (Mignolo 2011). This is exactly what the people of Cochabamba did—they confronted global designs by prioritizing alternative ways of understanding relations between each other and with natural resources.

Olivera, in reflecting back on the months of protest, negotiations, town halls, coalitions, and coordination, saw the larger significance of the Water War. Yes, they won the water system back from a multinational corporation, but more than that, the people realized that they were fighting to improve their lives beyond just the water; they began

to see a fight for the right to true democracy, where the people would have a voice in state decisions. Olivera said that, “we also had to ‘unprivatize’ the very fabric of society. We discovered how difficult it was to reconstruct solidarity in a society that had been fragmented and atomized by neoliberalism” (Olivera 2004, 47). In recognizing the difficulty of building strong solidarity under Western organization, the Cochabambinos uncovered the importance of restructuring the way society is organized, in order to give voice to the people.

Olivera commented that through the Water War, the people learned three things: one, “it is ordinary working people who achieved justice,” two, “all of our individualism, isolation, and fear evaporated into a spirit of solidarity” and three, “we want a government that takes our views into account—not the interests of the international financial institutions and their neoliberal politicians” (Olivera 2004, 49). These three realizations would form the basis for reordering of Bolivian society over the next fifteen years, and represent decoloniality and alternative epistemologies that enabled alliance building, trust, understanding, and community.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Right after the successful halting of the water privatization, a woman stopped Oscar Olivera and said to him:

Compañero, now the water is still going to be ours, what have we really gained? [...] My husband will still have to look for work. As a mother and a wife, I will still have to go out into the street to sell things, and my children will have to drop out of school because there's just not enough money. Even if they give us the water for free, our situation still won't have gotten any better. We want Banzer to leave, his ministers to go with him and all the corrupt politicians to leave. We want social justice. We want our lives to change. (Olivera 2004, 48)

This hard-hitting assertion highlights how one successful protest movement cannot solve all the problems. The changes have to come from deeper down, from beyond the system, from decolonial epistemologies and reimagined ways of organizing and living. After returning the water system to the public, it did not instantly become an effective system. People still suffered from lack of water and of means to address this beyond constructing their own water systems. What this social movement did achieve was the empowerment of the Cochabambinos. The Water War catalyzed a decade of rejection of neoliberalism and utilization of decolonial epistemologies that led to nationalization of many industries and assertion of indigenous and Plurinational sovereignty in Bolivia.

The Water War made clear the power of community organization and solidarity, and as Olivera explained to us in the classroom of 31 students in Cochabamba, “the most important thing was that people left their houses and began to talk, like brothers, equals, and they became reacquainted, cooked in a common pot for the whole street, slept and ate

in the street, and got back their trust in one another. They lost their most powerful enemy; they lost their fear. The people weren't afraid of anything" (Olivera 2016).

In the years since the Water War, Bolivia has made huge strides forward in decolonizing and re-defining Bolivia, and expelling neoliberalism. In February 2003, the IMF pressured the Bolivian government to increase taxes to address the economic deficit. The government needed the loan to pay public employees, so they proposed a tax increase on the poorest people. In response, the police force—typically the ones to repress protest and enforce state policies—went on strike. The people, led by presidential runner-up from the 2002 election, *cocalero* Evo Morales, joined the police, as mayhem broke out across the country. The military attempted to fight and stop the strikers and protestors, using tear gas and snipers and killing 31 people. Finally, the president announced, “our budget will not be the budget of the International Monetary Fund,” (Dangl 2007, 87), and as the social fabric of solidarity continue to grow, the people of Bolivia said no to another international power.

In 2005, riding momentum from the social movements of the previous few years, Evo Morales became the first indigenous president in Latin America, as a member of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS or Movement towards Socialism) party. Under Morales, the country has undergone major changes, including the passage of a new constitution in 2008. This new constitution established Bolivia as a Plurinational state, recognizing the many indigenous nations. Bolivia also passed a law in 2010 recognizing the rights of *Pachamama* (Earth Mother) as the rights of a person. Establishing in the national constitution that Earth deserves rights is a step toward decolonizing the view of nature as natural resources, and the Plurinational state uses decolonial rhetoric (though is not fully

decolonial in practice, due to its continued existence within the capitalistic world economy) to emphasize a shift toward dewesternization and recognition of models beyond single nation-states (Mignolo 2014, 31).

While the state's shift toward decoloniality, solidarity, and a reimagining of relations between each other and with nature are in many ways inspiring, Bolivia continues to struggle. Cochabambinos fought for something they deeply believed in, and they were victorious in overturning the privatization, but in the years since the Water War, Cochabamba has grappled consistently with drought and potable water distribution. They are still amidst a 25-year drought, and since 2016—sixteen years after the fight for water sovereignty—many communities have had to truck in water and then carry it to their houses. As glaciers continue to melt, and as the population continues to grow, conflicts over water between rural peasants, city dwellers, miners, farmers, and other people will continue to dominate life in Bolivia.

Clearly privatization, in the way it was introduced and managed, is not the answer, but if the public system isn't working effectively, what is the next step? Who plays a role in defining the process? Is there a mode of regulating water in times of drought, water shortage, or water conflict that is within decolonial modes of thinking that would prioritize the indigenous and *campesino* populations but also take into account the urban *mestizo*, rather than the Bolivian State, the World Bank, or multinational corporations like Bechtel?

Decoloniality offers an introduction into modes of delinking from the oppressive structures of colonialism and capitalism. Introducing decoloniality into questions of states like Bolivia allows for the possibility of a plurinational state that prioritizes and elevates

heterogeneity, communal organizing, and societal organization on smaller and more manageable scales. Decoloniality departs from traditional nation-state rhetoric and incorporates all scales from the ultra-local to the global, understanding that no relations can happen in an isolated bubble, but that smaller-scale relations that occur outside of hegemonic capitalist globalized orderings are legitimate, appropriate, and often effective, and deserve to be recognized.

Decolonial thought that extends from and relates to indigenous epistemologies of Andean cultures adds nuance to our understanding of nature, allowing us to see that humans are not separate from, but part of nature, and play a role in constructing and utilizing non-human nature. Decolonizing nature involves the reinstating of humans to the natural ecosystems, understanding that society functions as an ecosystem, or a system of ecosystems, that is intimately tied to other forms of nature and ecosystems. *Pachamama*, or Earth Mother, does not provide resources for exploitation, but rather for a symbiotic relationship.

Beyond Bolivia

Through the success of the Water War, the power of community organizing became evident, not only to the people within the community, but to the whole world. Moving beyond Bolivia, this case study is important because as water demand increases worldwide, conflicts over water will only increase in intensity. Many fights to overturn water privatization occurred during the same decade that Bolivia fought (see appendix table 3). These struggles are not just about access to water. As Guevara-Gil, Boelens and Getches argue, “the water justice struggle involves contests at four interlinked levels or

echelons. These disputes are typically over resource distribution, over the contents of rights and rules, over affirmation of the authority to generate and enforce these rules, and over the discourses representing them” (Guevara-Gil, Boelens and Getches 2010, 337). Not only does the Cochabamba Water War raise questions about water as a resource, it introduces questions about sovereignty, control, ownership and justice in water wars across the world.

Decolonial power grows with the recognition of the oppressive practices of organizations like the World Bank or Bechtel. As Goldman argues, “in spite of widespread food riots and marches by the unemployed in major third world cities throughout the 1980s, the opportunity to build cross-sectional movements was lacking largely because it was difficult to understand precisely the source of these oppressive changes” (Goldman 2005, 273). As powerful international actors become more exposed globally, and as more people and communities across the world recognize that people power can truly counteract hegemonic power, the closer we will be to creating a worldwide movement toward decoloniality, solidarity, and coexistence.

Ironically, with increasing grassroots movements toward social and environmental justice and against hegemonic institutions such as the World Bank, these same hegemonic institutions are creating new programs surrounding indigenous and other marginalized groups’ rights, as new forms of development (Goldman 2005, 289). What does it mean that the World Bank is now jumping on this next new “opportunity”? What does it mean for NGOs and other transnational social or environmental groups to get involved in these movements? Goldman argues that the World Bank’s desires to create development based on romantic notions of these movements can quickly lead to co-

optation and a shift in focus from small communal radical fights to institutionalized NGO projects. Not only does this risk poor implementation of non-culturally relevant practices, but it involves powerful groups once again taking ownership of what is not theirs—not land, natural resources, or money, but ideology.

While this Bolivian case study offers many important take-aways, it also introduces more questions. Where does this leave us? How can we implement larger fights for social and environmental justice across multiple scales? How can we decolonize our relationships with each other, with nature, and with knowledge, if we do not have long histories of indigenous or *campesino* organizing outside of capitalism and colonialism? The possibility of a transnational solidarity network of anti-neoliberal and decolonial projects could be the “world-historic shift in oppositional politics” (Goldman 2005, 290) that is necessary to truly challenge hegemonic, capitalistic, and multinational power. But is this possible to create without further marginalizing those so deeply embedded in the system that they rely on loans or food aid to survive? Is it possible to do so without co-opting movements and appropriating customs and forms of organization deeply embedded within specific geographies?

Final Thoughts

The Cochabamba Water War illuminates tensions between understandings of nature, international space, and power, colonial and decolonial epistemologies and ontologies, and forms of social organizing and organization. In Bolivia during the postcolonial period we see a new nature—socionature—emerge, as societies and natural resources become deeply entrenched in one another to the point that separation of the two

becomes impossible. The disputed nature of water in Cochabamba offers a deep look into a nature “that is both imaginary and material: the product of labor and history, the bedrock for all life, and, yet, at the same time, the elusive and deeply contested subject of intense political debates” (Kosek 2006, 286). The materiality of water and its importance to daily life locates these struggles concretely, yet autonomy over water and water systems is also important to cultural consciousness in the Andes. Water represents a form of socionature that articulates on multiple scales, from the local to the international. The international in the case of the Water War is not just within the World Bank, the United States, or other international actors, but also permeates throughout Bolivia, crossing space and time and taking on many forms. The internationalization of Bolivia’s space and nature have helped to structure socionature along lines of power and exploitation, and the introduction of decolonial ideals have contested the power embedded in that socionature. How we relate to nature introduces questions of how we relate to other people. Do we interact with respect? Do we leave space for non-dominating, decolonial relationships?

We must work with each other, and with our non-human surroundings, to reimagine decolonial relationships of solidarity and counter-hegemonic power. To truly address the inequalities and injustices in the world, we must create and build multi-scalar, culturally relevant, contextualized, and anti-normative solutions based in mutual respect of each other and our environments, needs, and histories.

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Appendix: Tables

Project ID	Year Approved	Project Title	Country	Commitment Amount (\$US Million)
P006110	1964	ENDE Power Project	Bolivia	10.0
P006111	1964	BPC Power Project	Bolivia	5.0
P006112	1967	Beni Livestock Development Project	Bolivia	2.0
P006114	1969	Interim Beni Livestock Project (03)	Bolivia	1.4
P006115	1969	Gas Pipeline Project	Bolivia	23.3
P006113	1969	ENDE Power Project (02)	Bolivia	7.4
P006116	1971	Livestock Development Project (03)	Bolivia	6.8
P006117	1972	Railway Project	Bolivia	8.0
P006119	1973	ENDE Power Project (03)	Bolivia	6.0
P006118	1974	Mining Credit Project	Bolivia	6.2
P006120	1975	Agricultural Credit Project	Bolivia	7.5
P006121	1975	Railway Project (02)	Bolivia	32.0
P006125	1976	Small Scale Mining Development Project	Bolivia	12.0
P006129	1976	Water Supply and Sewerage Project	Bolivia	11.5
P006123	1976	Banco Industrial Mining Project	Bolivia	10.0
P006124	1976	Power Project (04)	Bolivia	25.0
P006122	1976	Ingari Rural Development Project	Bolivia	9.5
P006132	1977	Urban Development Project	Bolivia	17.0
P006127	1977	Aviation Development Project	Bolivia	25.0
P006128	1977	Railway Project (03)	Bolivia	35.0
P006126	1977	Education and Vocational Training Project	Bolivia	15.0
P006131	1978	Highway Maintenance Project	Bolivia	25.0
P006130	1978	Ulla Ulla Rural Development Project	Bolivia	18.0
P006137	1979	Santa Cruz Water Supply Project	Bolivia	9.0
P006134	1979	National Mineral Exploration Fund Project	Bolivia	7.5
P006133	1979	Omasuyos - Los Andes Rural Development Project	Bolivia	3.0
P006136	1980	Structural Adjustment Loan Project	Bolivia	50.0
P006135	1980	Gas and Oil Engineering Project	Bolivia	16.0
P006154	1986	Gas Recycling Project - Vuelta Grande	Bolivia	15.0
P006164	1986	Reconstruction Import Credit Project	Bolivia	55.0
P006165	1987	La Paz Municipal Development Project	Bolivia	15.0
P006168	1987	Reconstruction Import Credit II Project	Bolivia	47.1
P006176	1987	Emergency Social Fund Project (01)	Bolivia	10.0
P006163	1987	Power Rehabilitation Project	Bolivia	6.8
P006160	1987	Public Financial Management Project	Bolivia	11.5
P006170	1988	Economic Management Strengthening Operation	Bolivia	9.7
P006159	1988	Financial Sector Adjustment Credit Project	Bolivia	70.0
P006175	1988	Emergency Social Fund Project (02)	Bolivia	27.0
P006187	1989	FIN SCTR	Bolivia	9.1
P006161	1989	Mining Sector Rehabilitation Project	Bolivia	35.0
P006167	1989	Export Corridors Project	Bolivia	37.0
P006183	1989	FINAN SCTR	Bolivia	11.3

Table 1- World Bank Projects in Bolivia, 1964-1989. Source: *The World Bank*

Project ID	Year Approved	Project Title	Country	Commitment Amount (\$US Million)
P006172	1990	Major Cities Water Supply and Sewerage Rehabilitation Project	Bolivia	35
P006192	1990	FIN SEC ADJ SUPLM III	Bolivia	14.5
P006179	1990	Private Enterprise Development Project	Bolivia	16.1
P006182	1990	Social Investment Fund Project - SIF	Bolivia	20
P006153	1991	Agro Export Development Program	Bolivia	22.5
P006195	1991	SAC (IDA REFLOW)	Bolivia	10.4
P006184	1991	Structural Adjustment Credit Project	Bolivia	40
P006189	1991	Public Financial Management (02) Project	Bolivia	11.3
P006188	1991	Agricultural Technology Development Project	Bolivia	21
P006201	1992	SAC (IDA REF2)	Bolivia	11.1
P006194	1992	Environmental Technical Assistance Project	Bolivia	4.8
P006180	1992	Road Maintenance Project (02)	Bolivia	80
P006196	1993	Integrated Child Development Project	Bolivia	50.7
P006200	1993	Social Investment Fund Project (02)	Bolivia	40
P039862	1994	SAC SUPLM4(IDA REFLO	Bolivia	8.6
P006181	1994	Education Reform Project	Bolivia	40
P037005	1994	Regulatory Reform and Capitalization Technical Assistance Project	Bolivia	14.7
P006190	1994	Municipal Sector Development Project	Bolivia	42
P035710	1994	SAC SUPLM III (IDA REFLOW)	Bolivia	9.4
P006186	1995	Environment, Industry & Mining Project	Bolivia	11
P044266	1995	CAPTLZTN PRG/IDA REF	Bolivia	8
P006191	1995	Power Sector Reform Technical Assistance Project	Bolivia	5.1
P034606	1995	Financial Markets and Pension Reform Technical Assistance Project	Bolivia	9
P006202	1995	Rural Communities Development Project	Bolivia	15
P006173	1995	Capitalization Program Adjustment Credit	Bolivia	50
P006178	1995	Hydrocarbon Sector Reform and Capitalization Technical Assistance Project	Bolivia	10.6
P006197	1995	National Land Administration Project	Bolivia	20.4
P006205	1995	Judicial Reform Project	Bolivia	11
P049307	1996	CAPITALZTN2-IDA REFL	Bolivia	5.4
P006206	1996	Rural Water and Sanitation Project	Bolivia	20
P056342	1997	CAPITZN PROG/IDA REF	Bolivia	2.9
P040110	1997	FINANCIAL DECENTRALIZATION & ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT	Bolivia	15
P057030	1998	Regulatory Reform Sector Adjustment Credit Project	Bolivia	40
P064228	1998	REG REF ADJ (IDA REF	Bolivia	1.78
P057396	1998	REGULATORY REFORM & PRIVATIZATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	Bolivia	20
P006204	1998	Education Quality and Equity Strengthening Project	Bolivia	75
P040085	1998	Participatory Rural Investment Project	Bolivia	62.8
P055974	1998	El Nino Emergency Assistance Project	Bolivia	25
P060392	1999	Health Sector Reform Project	Bolivia	25
P062790	1999	Institutional Reform Project	Bolivia	32
P055230	1999	ABAPO-CAMIRI HIGHWAY	Bolivia	88
P065902	2000	Environmental Management Capacity Building Pilot Project of the Hydrocarbon Sector	Bolivia	4.8

Table 2- World Bank Projects in Bolivia, 1990-2000. Source: *The World Bank*

Table 6.4 Campaigns against Water Privatization

Country	City	Year	Type
Poland	Lodz	1994	privatization prevented
Honduras	Honduras	1995	privatization prevented
Hungary	Debrecen	1995	privatization prevented
Sweden	Malmo	1995	privatization prevented
Argentina	Tucuman	1996	termination and reversion to public
Germany	Munich	1998	privatization prevented
Brazil	Rio	1999	privatization prevented
Canada	Montreal	1999	privatization prevented
Panama		1999	privatization prevented
Trinidad		1999	termination and reversion to public
Bolivia	Cochabamba	2000	termination and reversion to public
Brazil	Limeira	2000	incomplete termination
Germany	Potsdam	2000	termination and reversion to public
Hungary	Szeged	2000	incomplete termination
Mauritius		2000	privatization prevented
Thailand		2000	termination and reversion to public
United States	Birmingham	2000	termination and reversion to public
Argentina	BA Province	2001	termination and reversion to public
France	Grenoble	2001	termination and reversion to public
Brazil		current	continuing campaign
Ghana		current	continuing campaign
Indonesia	Jakarta	current	continuing campaign
South Africa		current	continuing campaign
Uruguay		current	continuing campaign

Source: Gathered from <http://www.psir.org/reports/2002-06-W-Africa.doc>.

Table 3- Campaigns against Water Privatization. Source: Goldman 2005, 259