Journal of
Agrarian Change

Journal of Agrarian Change, Vol. 14 No. 3, July 2014, pp. 435–465.

Evo Morales and the MST in Bolivia: Continuities and Discontinuities in Agrarian Reform

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There is a widespread understanding in critical scholarly literature that the government of Evo Morales is fundamentally challenging the neoliberal order in Bolivia. The empirical record of Morales' first five years in office, however, illustrates significant neoliberal continuities in the country's political economy. At the same time, the most important social movements that resisted neoliberalism prior to Morales' election have been considerably demobilized in its wake. This gives rise to the critique that the Morales government has merely implemented a more politically stable version of the model of accumulation it inherited. This paper draws on recent field research in Bolivia to make a contribution to this broader research agenda on reconstituted neoliberalism. Our focus is twofold. On the one hand, the paper examines the continuities of agrarian class relations from the INRA law at the height of neoliberalism in 1996 to the various agrarian reform initiatives introduced since Morales assumed office in 2006. On the other hand, the paper traces the mobilization of the Bolivian Landless Peasants' Movement (MST) in response to the failure of the 1996 neoliberal agrarian reform, followed by the movement's demobilization after Morales' 2006 agrarian reform initiative. The paper explores this demobilization in the context of agrarian relations that have remained largely unchanged in the same period. Finally, the paper draws on recent reflections by MST members who, to varying degrees, seem to be growing critical of Morales' failure to fundamentally alter rural class relations, and the difficulties of remobilizing their movement at the present time.

Keywords: agrarian reform, MST, Evo Morales, Bolivia, reconstituted neoliberalism

INTRODUCTION

Critical forces in international civil society and academia have found renewed hope in the mass mobilizations against neoliberalism in Bolivia from 2000 to 2005 and, particularly, in the subsequent formation of an indigenous-populist government under Evo Morales (Crabtree 2008, 2009; Kohl 2010). It would be difficult to exaggerate the symbolic resonance of electing the country's first indigenous president, and the relative democratization of race relations that this represents in a country that has been characterized by vicious internally colonial racism since its formal independence in 1825. There is an expanding literature on the empirical

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The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

 doi: 10.1111/joac.12037

record of Morales' first five and a half years in office, however, which illustrates that the anticipated rupture with neoliberalism has not been forthcoming (Webber 2011). Rather, significant continuities with neoliberal policy and strategies of class rule remain, while the vociferous resistance to it that arose in the 2000–5 period has diminished considerably. This paper uses the example of agrarian change, which was a fundamental pillar of Morales' mandate, to engage the critique that the Morales government has implemented a *reconstituted* version of neoliberalism. The paper draws on recent field research in Bolivia to examine the continuities of agrarian class relations from 1996 to 2011 and the tactical discontinuities in the struggle of the Bolivian Landless Peasants' Movement (MST) against these class relations in the same period. While not the most strategically important social movement within the cycle of Left-indigenous revolt between 2000 and 2005 (Webber 2012a), the MST was nonetheless a significant player in the sectoral struggle around land and has thus been attracting increasing scholarly attention (Fabricant 2012a).[1]

Alongside analysis of the Venezuelan and Ecuadoran governments of Hugo Chávez and Rafael Correa, much critical scholarship on the contemporary Latin American Left suggests that the emergence of the Morales government has 'facilitated a democratic approach to far-reaching change . . . an emphasis on social participation and incorporation over considerations of economic productivity . . . diversification of economic relations, preference for radical democracy over liberal democracy, and the celebration of national symbols' (Ellner 2012, 97). In this analysis, a 'refounding' of the state, society and economy is often said to be taking place under the Morales administration, one that 'is intended to make the entire political and economic system more just, inclusive, participatory and aligned with the indigenous cultures'. Indeed, this change is seen as 'promising a radical inclusion of all those disenfranchised in the past' (Harten 2011, 202–3). Morales, it is argued, shares with Bolivian Vice-President Álvaro García Linera a vision of ceding 'permanent control over the state to the indigenous and popular sectors' (Postero 2010, 29).

While the leftist rhetorical positioning of the Morales government certainly represents a radical rupture with previous governments, the actual extent of the break with neoliberalism under Morales has been convincingly called into question by a growing number of scholars. This can be seen at the levels of macroeconomic policy, social policy and the dynamics of the urban labour market (Webber 2011). For example, Levitsky and Roberts (2011, 21–2) situate Bolivia's economic policies alongside those of Argentina and Ecuador in a 'heterodox' camp between the 'orthodox' free-market policies of Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Peru and the 'statist' policies of Venezuela. Raúl Madrid (2011, 240) goes further, pointing out that, while the Bolivian government frequently engages in 'radical, even incendiary, rhetoric', its 'economic and social policies . . . have not represented a dramatic break with the past'. Government discourse rails against capitalism, Madrid recognizes, but in practice 'the government has not sought to carry out a transition to socialism or change the existing pattern of development'. This argument is substantiated by the fact that the economy remains 'focused largely on the export of natural resources', that it is still under the control of foreign capital and that 'the government has largely respected private property and has sought to encourage private

[1] Another pivotal conflict around land and indigenous territory that emerged at the time fieldwork for this paper was being conducted is the ongoing dispute over highway development plans seeking to connect Villa Tunari (in the department of Cochabamba) north to San Ignacio de Moxos (in the department of Beni), through the indigenous territory and national park known as TIPNIS (*Territorio Indígena del Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure*). While an analysis of this conflict is beyond the scope of this paper, we feel that its dynamics nonetheless reinforce the validity of the overarching arguments presented here. On the TIPNIS situation, see Webber (2012b) and Laing (2012).

investment' (Madrid 2011, 248). The government has 'eschewed radicalism in social policy as well, focusing instead on deepening or broadening policies that were enacted by previous governments'. In the area of agrarian reform, the government's 'initiative, which it enacted in 2006 after protracted struggle in the Senate, is largely in keeping with the land reform principles laid down in the Sánchez de Lozada administration's 1996 land reform measure' (Madrid 2011, 249–50).

Thus, even while uncritical support for the Morales government persists amongst observers in some quarters, there is a growing literature on the empirical record of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Toward Socialism, MAS) government to date that illustrates significant neoliberal continuities in the country's political economy. At the same time, however, the most important social movements that resisted neoliberalism prior to Morales' election have been considerably demobilized. Many of those who had been active in the 2000–5 mobilizations considered Morales' election to represent a clear break with neoliberalism. Following his election, social movement activists were given positions in government and participated in the drafting of a new constitution through the Constitutional Assembly, and there was a prevalent feeling that this was a government of social movements. As the movements turned their attention to state politics, however, they focused less on independent political activity. Despite increasing evidence of continuities in Morales' policy with the neoliberal governments that came before him, discussion and dissent from the Left has been limited. This combination of reconstituted neoliberalism and a relative downturn in mobilization against it gives rise to the critique that the Morales government has implemented a more politically stable version of the model of accumulation it inherited from its orthodox neoliberal predecessors.

For the purposes of this paper, *neoliberalism* is understood on a world scale not as 'a core set of ahistorical neoclassical economic policies, often cited as the "Washington Consensus" ' but, rather, as 'a historical, class-based ideology that proposes all social, political, and ecological problems can be resolved through more direct free-market exposure, which has become an increasingly structural aspect of capitalism' (Marois 2005, 102–3). The purist theory of free-market economic fundamentals that provides the bedrock for neoliberal ideology should be understood as a flexible toolkit for justifying the project for restoring capitalist class power, rather than as a guide to the actual policy practice of states during this period (Harvey 2005).

In the South American context, neoliberalism entered into ideological crisis during the regional recession of 1998–2002. When 'the basis of a new and harmonious society did not emerge spontaneously from neoliberal structural adjustment', the flexibility of this toolkit enabled the neoliberal project to respond to the destabilizing internal contradictions and social conflicts that ensued by expanding the scope of its institutional restructuring without abandoning its 'essential emphasis on the rationality of the market as the foremost organizing principle of social life' (Taylor 2009, 23).

Likewise, we understand *reconstituted neoliberalism* in the Bolivian context as a tactical attempt by the Bolivian ruling classes to adjust to the social contradictions generated by the implementation of neoliberalism in the country while preserving the class project underlying neoliberalism and the successes it has enjoyed. The flexible toolkit of neoliberalism has introduced changes at the margins of social and economic policy in Bolivia, while the underlying structure of the political economy has not been transformed. The discursive innovations of reconstituted neoliberalism in the country, such as a plural economy and mixed forms of property, are ultimately able to operate *within* the broad parameters of actually existing neoliberalism (Webber 2011, 177–229). What have been in fact modest changes in policy, such as the much discussed increase in royalties and taxes in the natural gas sector, have often had a surface appearance of radical reorientation because they have had important

consequences for increasing state revenues. This has much less to do with the radicality of their character than the fact that the new policies coincided with a world commodities boom beginning in 2003. In other words, a relatively minor increase in royalties and taxes in the natural gas sector has seemed much more dramatic than it otherwise would have because it has mapped on to a period of incredibly high international prices of the commodity in question, generating important rent captured by the state (Webber 2009a). For some observers concerned in the main with surface appearances rather than the undetected essence of Bolivia's political economy lying beneath (García Linera 2011), such modification at the margins signifies a post-neoliberal turn. According to Kennemore and Weeks (2011, 278), however, the Morales government (like that of Correa in Ecuador) has not designed a dramatic shift towards a new model of development 'but rather a pragmatic way for centre-left governments to better capture capitalist surplus in the exploitation of natural resources'. Understanding this transition in such a manner, at the level of ideas, surface appearances and underlying essence, we are better able to appreciate the extent to which deep continuities in the overarching structures of neoliberal political economy in Bolivia persist, as well as the true weight of the challenges still facing those socio-political forces seeking transformative change.

With this conceptual apparatus as a backdrop, the paper focuses on the question of agrarian change, as comparative investigation into the processes of agrarian reform and agrarian resistance in the orthodox neoliberal and Morales periods has not featured significantly in the above-mentioned literature. The architecture of the paper is comprised of five sections. First, the paper outlines the late twentieth century agrarian class structure in Bolivia, which was characterized by extreme inequality, and the 1996 neoliberal agrarian reform that consolidated this structure. Second, the paper traces the mobilization of the MST in response to the failure of the 1996 reform to address unequal social–property relations in the countryside, and it outlines the movement's unusual and temporarily successful technique of land occupation. The third section of the paper charts the subsequent demobilization of the MST following Morales' 2006 agrarian reform initiatives. While the MST has remained more autonomous from the Morales government than many social movements, the paper examines how the MST has crucially altered its strategy nonetheless, most notably by agreeing to end its distinctive and effective land occupations in return for the agrarian change promised by Morales. The fourth section of the paper traces change and continuity between the 1996 neoliberal agrarian reform and the various agrarian initiatives introduced under the Morales administration since it first came to office in 2006. It identifies and examines specific neoliberal continuities in the context of the configuration of agrarian class relations in Bolivia, which have remained largely unchanged. Finally, the fifth section of the paper draws on reflections from interviewees, which show how MST members, to varying degrees, seem to be growing sceptical of Morales' promises of agrarian reform in the face of the government's failure thus far to deliver, and it reflects on the implications of this for future MST mobilization. The paper ultimately contends, however, that Morales has introduced a reconstituted agrarian neoliberalism while containing the rural resistance of the MST.

LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY AGRARIAN CLASS STRUCTURE AND THE 1996 NEOLIBERAL AGRARIAN REFORM

Agrarian Class Structure in Bolivia at the End of the Twentieth Century

At the outset of the twenty-first century, the rural class structure in Bolivia is characterized by a dramatic concentration of land in the hands of a few, on the one hand, and a sea of

poor – often landless – peasants on the other. Haciendas (large landholdings) dominate 90 per cent of Bolivia's productive land, leaving only 10 per cent divided between mostly indigenous peasant communities and smallholding peasants (Chávez and García Linera 2005, 65).[2] Roughly 400 individuals own 70 per cent of productive land, while there are 2.5 million landless peasants in a country with a total population of 9 million (Enzinna 2007, 217). Most of the peasants are indigenous, with 77 per cent of rural inhabitants self-identifying as such in the 2001 census (Romero Bonifaz 2005, 40).

Bolivia's rural structure prior to the 1952 National Revolution was dominated by large landholdings in which 'neo-feudal' social relations predominated, 'based on established modes of colonial extraction and exploitation in the countryside'. Pre-revolutionary Bolivia had the highest inequality of land concentration in all of Latin America, with 82 per cent of land in the possession of 4 per cent of landowners (Eckstein 1983, 108). As the nationalist–populist revolutionary process of 1952 unfolded, mass direct-action tactics and independent land occupations orchestrated by radicalized peasants in Cochabamba, La Paz and Oruro, and to a lesser extent in northern Potosí and Chuquisaca, challenged this rural class structure profoundly (Dunkerley 1984, 67). The new revolutionary government of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR) was forced to enact the Agrarian Reform Law of 1953 in response to the pressure from below. Forced labour was made illegal, while haciendas in the highlands, or *altiplano* (La Paz, Oruro, Potosí), and the valleys (Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Tarija) were divided and the land redistributed, creating a new smallholding peasantry in large sections of these departments.

The MNR, though, was never a socialist party. Its interests coincided with the radical peasants only in so far as the MNR saw the break-up of semi-feudal agrarian modes of production as a prerequisite for establishing and developing a dynamic capitalist agricultural sector with ample state support. Beginning shortly after the revolution, the geographical fulcrum for capitalist agriculture in Bolivia became the eastern department of Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz had a lower population density at the time and was largely unaffected by the agrarian reform. Over the next several decades, it became the most dynamic centre of capitalist agriculture in the country, producing cotton, coffee, sugar and timber for export. The department also spearheaded a reconcentration of land in the hands of a few that eventually spread again throughout much of the rest of the country, reversing, through complex legal and market mechanisms, many of the reforms achieved in the National Revolution.

The agro-industrial dominance of Santa Cruz was solidified with the onset of neoliberalism in the mid-1980s.[3] Bolivian neoliberalism emphasized the orientation of agriculture towards exports for external markets. Transnational corporations and large domestic agricultural enterprises based in Santa Cruz led this intensified insertion into the global economy. The traditional peasant economy was increasingly displaced in various parts of the country as large agro-industrial enterprises solidified control and focused increasingly on a few select commodities, soy in particular. In 1986, 77 per cent of the total land area under cultivation was devoted to the production of cereals, fruit, vegetables and tubers, in which small-scale peasant production predominated. By 2004, this area had been reduced to 48.2 per cent. By one estimate, in 1963 peasant production represented 82.2 per cent of the total value of agricultural production in the country, whereas by 2002 peasant production accounted for only 39.7 per cent of total production, and agro-industrial capitalist production accounted for

[2] By productive here, we mean arable.
[3] For further analysis of the agrarian political economy of Santa Cruz since the 1980s, see Gill (1987), Stearman (1985), Soruco (2011) and Soruco et al. (2008).

60.3 per cent of the total (Ormachea Saavedra 2007, 29–32). Of the approximately 446,000 peasant production units remaining in the country today, 225,000 are located in the *altiplano* departments of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí; 164,000 in the valley departments of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca and Tarija; and only 57,000 in the eastern lowland departments of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando. Capitalist relations of production now predominate in the eastern lowlands and are increasingly displacing small-scale peasant production in the valleys and *altiplano*, although the latter continues to be the most important form of production in the *altiplano* (Ormachea Saavedra 2007, 33).

Of the 2,118,988 hectares of land cultivated in Bolivia in 2004, 59 per cent were in the eastern lowland departments. These departments were home to 96 per cent of industrial crop production (cotton, sugar-cane, sunflowers, peanuts and soy), 42 per cent of production of vegetables (beans and tomatoes), and 27 per cent of fruit production (mainly bananas and oranges). These eastern departments furthermore accounted for 73.3 per cent of national cattle ranching, 36.3 per cent of pig farming and 37.8 per cent of poultry production. Finally, 60.1 per cent of the timber extracted from Bolivian forests came from Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando (Ormachea Saavedra 2007, 33–4). Large agro-industrial capitalists dominate in this part of the country.

In the valley departments, small and medium capitalist enterprises account for most of the agricultural sector. These departments play a significant role in ranching. They account for 60.3 per cent of poultry production, 48 per cent of pig farming and 18.5 per cent of Bolivian cattle ranching. The rural *altiplano*, on the other hand, is still dominated by small peasant producers and indigenous communities. This region accounts for only 19 per cent of total cultivated land in Bolivia, and its contribution to national ranching is circumscribed to the sheep and llama sectors (Ormachea Saavedra 2007, 34). The rural population is diminishing throughout the country as processes of semi-proletarianization and proletarianization accelerate, with the gradual extension of capitalist relations of production into all corners of the country. Beginning in the early 1970s, migrant semi-proletarians provided the workforce for sugar-cane and cotton harvests, while for the rest of the year they maintained small plots of their own land in the departments from which they primarily travelled: Cochabamba, Potosí and Chuquisaca. Between 1976 and 1996, the rural population as a proportion of the total population fell from 59 per cent to 39 per cent (Pacheco Balanza and Ormachea Saavedra 2000, 9). This exodus has to do with two interrelated developments in the agricultural sector. On the one side, peasant production has been living through a prolonged crisis. Peasant families are increasingly unable to reproduce themselves and must supplement their farming income by selling their labour power, whether in the countryside or in the cities. In the *altiplano*, small-scale peasant producers and indigenous communities are experiencing diminishing productive capacities of their soil, the division of land into smaller and smaller plots (*minifundios*) as families grow in size from generation to generation, the migration of young people to cities and an acute absence of new technologies, making competition with foreign suppliers to the domestic Bolivian markets impossible (Pacheco Balanza and Ormachea Saavedra 2000, 19). Meanwhile, in the dynamic centre of agro-capitalism in the eastern lowlands, technical innovation and modernization have led to more capital-intensive forms of agricultural production and, consequently, a paucity of employment opportunities even as industries expand (Pacheco Balanza and Ormachea Saavedra 2000, 31–2).

As capitalist social relations increase their reach, the differentiation of the peasantry into rich, medium and poor peasants also intensifies. Survey data from 1988 suggested that 76 per cent of the peasantry were poor peasants, meaning that they did not have the means to

reproduce their family labour power on the basis of the income generated from their land and were obligated to sell their labour elsewhere on a temporary basis. Medium peasants constituted 11 per cent of the peasantry when defined as peasant family units fundamentally based on family labour, with the ability to reproduce that labour without selling their labour power elsewhere. Rich peasants – those who regularly made a profit after reproducing their family and their means of production, purchased the labour of poorer peasants and utilized modern technology – constituted 13 per cent of the peasantry (Ormachea Saavedra 2007, 27–8). This process of differentiation within the peasantry has only accelerated since that time, with the transformation of some rich peasants into commercial farmers in specific regions of the *altiplano* and valley departments (Ormachea Saavedra 2007, 28).

Neoliberal Agrarian Reform: The 1996 Law of the National Agrarian Reform Institute

An important influence on these trends in agrarian class relations as the twentieth century drew to a close was the law of the National Agrarian Reform Institute (INRA), Bolivia's neoliberal agrarian reform. In the elections of 6 June 1993, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada of the MNR won the presidency with 35 per cent of the popular vote. His Aymara-indigenous running mate Víctor Hugo Cárdenas became the first indigenous Vice-President of Bolivia. The new government (1993–7) deepened the neoliberal economic and political ruling-class project first initiated in 1985, even while it embraced a sophistry of social solidarity with the poor and a multicultural sensibility towards the indigenous majority. At the centre of the MNR electoral campaign platform was *El Plan de Todos* (Plan for Everyone). To distinguish it from the fiercest phase of neoliberal restructuring in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the *Plan de Todos* was pitched as a social-market solution to the development problems facing Bolivia. Enduring troubles of unemployment, low wages and corruption were to be resolved through the privatization of inefficient state-owned enterprises. Education, health and other basic social services were to be improved. Local communities, especially indigenous ones in poor rural areas, were to have greater participation in development planning and decision-making at the local level (Grindle 2000, 113).

The MNR adopted an opportunistic approach to ethnicity in order to attract indigenous voters, which was a common practice of most political parties in the country by the early 1990s (Medeiros 2001). The MNR promised a New Bolivia in which the culturally integrationist nationalism of the post-1952 revolutionary period was rejected and, instead, a politics of constitutional recognition of the pluricultural and ethnically heterogeneous nature of Bolivia was introduced (Healy and Paulson 2000, 2–5). This multiculturalism, however, was attached to a fundamental commitment on the part of the MNR to deepen and spread the neoliberal economic restructuring initiated in 1985 – an ideological paring that anthropologist Charles Hale has called 'neoliberal multiculturalism' in other contexts (Hale 2002; Hale 2004). Neoliberal multiculturalism in Bolivia was institutionalized under Sánchez de Lozada through a series of carefully constructed laws and reforms. Most significantly, in 1994, the new administration amended the constitution such that its first article defined Bolivia as multiethnic and pluricultural (Healy and Paulson 2000, 11). Article 171 recognized the right to limited self-government for indigenous communities, although the state's commitment was vaguely worded (Kohl 2003, 341). In the MNR's *Plan de Todos*, indigenous cultural issues were integral components of the justification and legitimization of educational reform, land reform and decentralized popular participation. All of these reforms were built on the contradictory foundation of culturally 'liberating' the indigenous working-class and peasant population through recognition of certain linguistic and traditional rights by the state, while

simultaneously reinforcing the neoliberal mechanisms responsible for the dramatic increases in their exploitation and suffering over the previous decade (Arellano-López and Petras 1994; Albó 1995; Gill 2000, 135–54; Gustafson 2002, 276–82; McNeish 2002).

This dynamic is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the INRA law, the key initiative in land reform over the orthodox period of neoliberalism in Bolivia, which 'symbolically gives rights to indigenous communities but materially fails to follow through on its promises' (Fabricant 2010, 92). Initially, in 1994, the government proposed new agrarian legislation – the Law of the National Institute of Lands (INTI) – that had been drafted with the support of the World Bank. Its purpose was to fully roll out and extend market rationality into the land tenure process, something partially precluded by agrarian policy since the 1952 National Revolution. The boldness of the marketization within INTI, however, led to peasant resistance in the form of a coordinated lowland and highland indigenous 'March for Land and Territory, Political Rights, and Development' in August 1996, which ultimately defeated the initiative (Assies 2006, 591). INRA, however, was ostensibly a law with a novel social-market hybridity compared to INTI and, although highland indigenous organizations continued to oppose it, the INRA law was successfully pushed through Congress on 18 October 1996.

On its surface, INRA seemed to offer protection to vulnerable rural sectors by asserting that abandoned private plots be reverted to public ownership; exempting subsistence peasants and indigenous communities from taxation; offering titles to eight indigenous territories; and ensuring exclusive access to any further redistribution of public land to subsistence peasants, landless peasants seeking land and indigenous communities (Kohl 2003, 342). Part of the apparent protection of the law was embedded in the distinction between properties that must comply with a 'social function' versus those that need to conform to a 'socio-economic' function. Under the former category fell *solar campesinos*, which comprised residential plots of subsistence peasants, communal peasant properties collectively titled to a corporate unit of subsistence peasants, and *tierras comunitarias de origen* (Original Community Lands, TCOs), in which the original inhabitants of the territory are recognized to be collectivities of indigenous peoples living according to their own specific forms of economic, social and cultural life. So long as these three categories continued to perform the 'social function' of the reproduction of these individual subsistent peasant families, or collective indigenous communities, they were not to be subject to taxation and could not be subdivided or mortgaged, although they could be sold under certain circumstances (Assies 2006, 591). Meanwhile, agro-industrial enterprises and medium-sized commercial properties were to be subject to land taxation and were allowed to be sold, subdivided and mortgaged. These lands were classified under the rubric of 'socio-economic function' and thus were to be devoted to productive agricultural activities, forestry, ecotourism or varieties of biodiversity protection, or else they could be reverted to public ownership (Assies 2006, 592).

With time, however, the INRA's process of *saneamiento* (clarification), through which all types of lands and territories were to be assessed, revealed itself to be weighted decisively towards land-titling and individual property rights as a response to pressures from both the World Bank and large-landholding lobbyists (Crabtree 2005, 79; Webber 2011, 169). Initially, 60–65 million hectares of Bolivia's land was to be investigated and 'clarified' so as to determine which lands could be expropriated by the state for the purposes of redistribution. The area under investigation was extended to 107 million hectares in 2002. The process, including plans for quite a large-scale distribution of land, was supposed to last ten years, terminating in 2006. However, incredible levels of corruption, bureaucratic incompetence and above all fear of confronting the landholding class meant that, as of 2005, just months before the scheduled closure of the INRA process, only 9 per cent of the land scheduled for clarification had been

clarified, and only 6.5 million hectares of this 9 per cent had been recognized as TCO, or indigenous community land (Lora 2006). Part of the problem had to do with the fact that the law, in spite of its apparent social-market hybridity, provided large landowners with a basic protection of their properties so long as they did not 'abandon' them. This was true because, whereas in previous iterations of agrarian reform in Bolivia the state classified idle land as *de facto* abandoned, under INRA guidelines the state only considered land abandoned when the owner failed to pay taxes on that property at a self-assessed market value. In effect, 'absentee landowners [were able] to protect their holdings by paying annual taxes of 1 per cent of the value that they themselves establish[ed]' (Kohl 2003, 342). Furthermore, the process of titling peasant, indigenous and communal lands under INRA was distorted by the fact that many such communities lacked the requisite material resources or community leadership to engage in the process, while other communal lands were simply sold without the consent of the resident community members. In these latter cases, the mere fact of titling that came with INRA was what facilitated the possibility of commodification (Kohl 2003, 342). It was out of this political economy of agrarian relations that the MST emerged.

MOBILIZATION OF THE MST, 2000–5

The Bolivian MST, inspired by its Brazilian counterpart of the same name, was formed in the Gran Chaco region in the department of Tarija in 2000, at the height of neoliberalism in Bolivia. The immediate demand for land joined traditional groups of landless agricultural workers with workers from other sectors and organizing traditions who had been dislocated through neoliberal reforms (Mendoza et al. 2003, 71; Chávez 2008, 552, 568, 572; Fabricant 2009, 85, 87; Chávez interview 2010; Luna Poma interview 2011; Torres interview 2011). Together, they formed a movement with a heterogeneous membership and a strategy uncharacteristic of traditional Bolivian social movements. The MST's initial central strategy involved engaging in illegal occupations of unused land on large estates in order to pressure the government to enforce land laws that state that unused land must be redistributed. This approach is unusual in its combination of concrete gains in the short term with long-term goals; illegal militancy with an appeal to law enforcement; and targeted pressure on both the landowning elite and the state. An outline of each of these elements sketches a picture of the MST's approach prior to Morales' election in 2005 that will enable comparison to the current period.

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals: Immediate Gains and Future Mobilization

In the short term, an MST occupation offered immediate concrete gains. By occupying and farming land, members gained a necessary means of survival and the ability to work with dignity. During the occupation, the MST actively pressured the government for an assessment of, and permanent title to, the land being occupied (Mendoza et al. 2003, 99; Enzinna 2007, 224; Saisari in Chávez 2008, 568; Chávez interview 2010; Callapa Ticona interview 2011; Luna Poma interview 2011; Torres interview 2011). Importantly, however, the MST's goals extend beyond any individual occupation as a survival mechanism within the existing agricultural system (which is the common aim of the agrarian syndicalist tradition). Rather, the movement strives to ensure the collective rights to land of all Bolivian peasants and to build a larger campaign for wide-scale agrarian reform 'from below', as well as a reorganization of agriculture in its entirety towards independent, small-scale and environmentally sustainable production. The MST has not been as successful as its Brazilian counterpart at investing in the

ideological formation and capacitation of its members, and as such the degree to which rank-and-file members espouse this radical ideology remains uneven.[4] However, the MST's *tactics* reflect an understanding that land inequality in Bolivia is embedded in the political–economic context of global capitalism, which must be altered if an equal distribution of land is to be attained (Fabricant 2009, 114–5, 120–1; see also Durán in Chávez 2008, 570; Arce interview 2011).

Legality and Illegality: The Centrality of Occupation

The MST has been described both as one of the most militant movements in Bolivia and the most legalistic. It compensated for its relatively small membership and limited organizational capacity through forceful and resonant actions that included a particular use of law (Chávez 2008, 562, 580; Fabricant 2009, 119; Costas interview 2010). Land occupations were pivotal to this strategy and distinguished the MST from other movements at the time (Chávez 2008, 561; Fabricant 2009, 116). Road-blocks had been the classic tactic of peasant and indigenous movements in the highlands, but the MST felt that occupation of *latifundios* was a more direct, compelling and effective method of pressuring governments. This type of action carried more risks for members and for leaders, but also required fewer people and attacked the oligarchy more directly (Chávez 2008, 560–2; Durán in Chávez 2008, 560; Mamani in Chávez 2008, 560). As one MST member in Tarija put it, 'When you have marches, meetings with the government, . . . strikes, and road-blocks, nothing happens' (Cruz interview 2011).

While the MST's strategy centred on the occupation of land, this type of land occupation engaged the law in a very specific way. The MST drew on an important legal principle enshrined in Article 166 of the Constitution, which states that land that is not being cultivated can be appropriated by the state. This stipulation formed the basis of the socio-economic function found in the INRA law and created an important legal restriction on property ownership, although it was rarely enforced in practice (Hylton and Thomson 2007, 138). To start an occupation, the MST began farming land on a large estate that was known to be uncultivated by its official owner and thus in violation of the socio-economic function. This act of occupying land that is not theirs could be considered a violation of the private property rights of the owner of that land. Yet, the MST used the principle of the socio-economic function to question whether the owner was legally entitled to own this land in the first place, because the land was not being cultivated. The occupation thus forced the government to investigate whether the owner's title was legitimate (Vargas interview 2011), which, after much struggle, usually led to the government appropriating the land and redistributing it to the occupation community.

The tactic was effective because it painted the government and judicial system into a corner, forcing them to choose between accepting the movement's interpretation of the INRA law and timeline for enforcing it, or on the other hand admitting that the law was not intended to be upheld. The appeal to law also garnered the movement legitimacy in the public eye, while the attempt to hold the government to account using its own law had a broad public resonance. Moreover, the land selected for the occupation was sometimes owned by a prominent enemy of the Left, such as in the case of the Collana hacienda, which belonged to the sister-in-law of neoliberal Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, President of Bolivia at the time this land was occupied, or the Yuquises occupation of an estate owned by Rafael Paz Hurtado, who was an outspoken wealthy agro-business owner (Chávez 2008, 549; Fabricant

[4] The authors would like to thank a blind reviewer for raising this issue.

2009, 122, 140; Machicado interview 2010; Fabricant 2012b). No matter who owned the land being occupied, however, the spectacle created by the MST's creative use of law and direct action quickly earned the movement broad public support and helped to build broader momentum for full-scale agrarian reform. As the MST found, however, both breaking the law and appealing to the law were necessary for the strategy to function, as alone either could be easily dismissed (as in the case of a movement advocating for a law to be enforced without the pressure of an occupation) or dismantled (as in the case of a movement staging an occupation without being able to exploit the legitimacy of the law).

Landowners and the State: The Dual Threat of Repression and Co-optation

The MST's strategy also combined targeted pressure on both the state and the landowning elite, which created a dual threat for the movement of violent repression and co-optation. The MST was unusual in that it engaged in collective action that was aimed directly at another sector of civil society and only secondarily challenged the state through pressure to enforce land redistribution laws. By extension, the movement has faced systematic, often racialized, violent repression since its inception, which has come from civil society in the first instance, but has had the active or passive support of the state (for example, police passively observing the 2001 massacre of seven MST members at the Pananti occupation by a militia that was reportedly armed by local police and military) (Enzinna 2007; Chávez 2008, 570; Chávez interview 2010).

In addition to the immediate threat of violence, however, a longer-term fear of co-optation by the state is a heightened concern for the MST that is reflected in both the movement's tactics and its internal structure. From its inception in 2000, the MST attempted to maintain a distant relationship from the state, engaging with state structures selectively and only when tactically useful for achieving their broader goals. The movement considered the state to be part of the power networks of businesses and large landowners that they were struggling against. Yet, the MST did not see the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the state to be impenetrable. Rather, the movement felt it was necessary to win reforms that would shift the orientation of the state towards conditions favourable to the MST's aims when opportunities arose. Holding public office was not considered viable, however, because there would be little room to manoeuvre in the state apparatus. Moreover, those holding public office would be co-opted, shifting their priorities from the interests of their movement to their own personal interests. Instead, pressure from outside the state was considered the best mechanism for influencing government officials (Chávez 2008, 570, 577; Salvatierra interview 2011).

Likewise, MST members also have been cautious about making alliances with political parties, and the MST does not participate officially in any party (Mendoza et al. 2003, 80; Chávez 2008; Arce interview 2011). The movement was strongly divided about the extent to which it should support the MAS in the 2005 election, and many local and regional MST leaders did declare their support for the MAS,[5] but the movement consciously retained a degree of independence from the party in a context where other movements were less restrained (Enzinna 2007, 225; Chávez 2008, 552, 583; Chávez interview 2010; Torres interview 2011).

In addition to the movement's tactics, the structure of the MST is also designed in part to avoid co-optation and repression from landowners and the state. The MST is structured horizontally and not in the vertical hierarchy typical of some other peasant syndicalist orga-

[5] The authors would like to thank a blind reviewer for raising this point.

nizations. There are four levels of elected representatives, but the National Congress, and not the national leaders themselves, is the ultimate authority. Similarly, the membership of each level is the ultimate authority of that level, and its leader merely executes the membership's decisions. Leaders are elected, leadership posts can only be held for a set amount of time, and leaders are meant to share the same opportunities, knowledge and responsibilities as other members (Mendoza et al. 2003, 99; Chávez 2008, 553, 555; Saisari in Chávez 2008, 556). Members describe this structure as more democratic and distinct from other movement organizations that are less orientated towards building the capacities of their rank-and-file base. But this structure is also designed to reduce the potential for the movement to dissintegrate easily if leaders are killed, as they were in the 2001 Pananti massacre, and to reduce the potential for leaders to be subjected to political pressure and co-optation (Chávez 2008, 554; Arce interview 2011; Salvatierra interview 2011; Torres interview 2011).

It is important to emphasize the heterogeneity of the movement with regard to its composition, ideological development and views on strategy, as the conflict over support for the MAS illustrates. The geographical spread of the movement's members and their varied political histories and needs, as well as the MST's horizontal structure, all contribute to a movement that was not built around, and never attained, a thorough internal unity. What did unite the MST's members, however, was the tactic described above, through which members combined direct action in the form of land occupations with an appeal to the law, and through which they sought to create a spectacle that would build public support and political pressure such that the land claims of occupation communities would be decided in the movement's favour.

Using this multifaceted tactic, the movement grew rapidly to 50,000 members, setting off waves of mobilization in different parts of the country, including several hundred land occupations between 2000 and 2004. The MST has been active in the departments of Tarija, Santa Cruz, Potosí, La Paz, Cochabamba and Beni. The MST's occupations, mobilizations and pressure on the judicial apparatus have resulted in the government grant of titles to numerous MST settlements (Enzinna 2007, 224–5; Chávez 2008, 552, 554–5, 571–3; Fabricant 2010, 91). While the MST was never as large or visible as other major movements in Bolivia in the 2000–5 period of mobilization, those who have reflected on its significance understand it to have performed an important role in the struggle for land redistribution nonetheless. They credit the MST with highlighting the class and ethnic contradictions in the distribution of land that had been absent from public discourse (Chávez interview 2010), as well as accelerating the work of the INRA by calling into question its failed implementation (Costas interview 2010).

DEMOBILIZATION OF THE MST, 2006–11

Following the 2000–5 period of mass mobilization in Bolivia, the election of indigenous activist Evo Morales in 2005 was considered by many to signify a decisive break with neoliberalism. Social movement activists were welcomed into government posts, and there was a feeling amongst many on the Left in Bolivia that social movements were now running the country (Chávez interview 2010; Prada interview 2011). The corollary to this new focus of the movements on state politics, however, has been a decrease in their autonomous political activity. Moreover, noticeable attempts have been made by the MAS government to actively demobilize or channel independent political action (Olivera in Dangl 2010, 25; Webber 2011, 130, 144). Whereas these movements had been strong enough to oust two presidents between 2000 and 2005, amongst other achievements, Raúl Prada observed in 2011 that, currently in

Bolivia, 'there are no movements except to defend the process' of change implemented by the government (Prada interview 2011).

Choosing a 'Strategic Convergence' over 'Unity': Official Independence from the Government

The MST, however, has attempted to retain a measure of independence from the Morales government in keeping with its wariness of electoral participation. Javier Aramayo is a lawyer with the *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* (Centre for Legal Studies and Social Research, CEJIS) and is considered to be an architect of the MST's legal strategy. Aramayo explains that the MST has envisaged itself in a 'strategic convergence' with the Morales government that is different from 'unity, is not a fusion nor an alliance with the government, as other organizations have done, and which in many cases has led to a blind defense' of the government and often co-optation of these movements. Instead, he says, this way is designed to allow the MST to retain points of divergence from the government (Aramayo interview 2011).

A key element of this 'strategic convergence' approach is that, unlike many other movements, the MST's leaders have refused all government posts offered to them (Aramayo interview 2011; Salvatierra interview 2011). Instead, the MST has participated in the initiatives of the MAS government but strictly from outside the state apparatus, including making proposals directly to the Legislative Chamber and the Constitutional Assembly (Arce interview 2011).

MST leaders and rank-and-file members are proud of their independence from party politics and argue that this method of struggle is more effective, particularly as regards resiting co-optation (Arce interview 2011; Cruz Fernández interview 2011; Manuel Yucra interview 2011). MST leaders deride the leaders of other movements who have taken government posts for betraying their members (Arce interview 2011; Salvatierra interview 2011). 'Sometimes here [in the MST] we as leaders don't eat for three or four days, [whereas] in contrast the leadership of the other organizations that have political arms is supported [materially],' explains Edwin Arce, a national MST leader in Santa Cruz (Arce interview 2011; see also Machicado interview 2010). Yet, at the same time, '[t]here are people dying in the countryside who don't have land – they don't have roads, health care, education – while their leaders are selling them out. [The leaders] only see their own personal interests, and they've forgotten the demands of their sector and the people who elected them,' adds Vladimir Machicado, an MST leader in La Paz (Machicado interview 2010). Moreover, MST activists feel that the conflict of interest that arises when movement leaders take government posts neutralizes the movement organizations run by these leaders: 'It's awful. It distorts the organization, and the organization is destroyed, and in the end it's subordinated to the government. We are not subordinate to the government. We can *not* do what the President says. We can say, "No sir, stop. This is our position" ' (Arce interview 2011; see also Serrado interview 2011). To what extent the MST actually has retained the capacity to make such a refusal is less certain, however.

Eliminating Occupations: An MST Compromise

Despite this formal independence from the government, the MST has undergone a fundamental shift in tactics since the election of the MAS. Since 2005, they have largely abandoned the occupations that had been the backbone of their approach (Vadillo 2007; Costas in Dangl 2010, 37). They have left the redistribution of land to the government's agrarian reform

initiatives and instead subjectively claim to have turned their focus to what had initially been secondary (though related) goals: obtaining titles and developing infrastructure for the land they have already occupied successfully, and developing autonomous and environmentally sustainable agrarian practices (Chávez interview 2010; Arce interview 2011; Julián interview 2011).

These goals are not divorced from the MST's strategic project of revolutionary agrarian change, but they have reorientated the tactical focus of the movement towards the needs of communities that have already occupied land. Indeed, many MST communities that have obtained land lack basic infrastructure on this land, such as electricity and potable water (*Erbol*, 2011a,b; Serrado interview 2011; Vargas interview 2011). Moreover, the MST believes that 'genuine and complete agrarian reform involves food sovereignty and food security', as well as environmental sustainability (Arce interview 2011). Yet, the main ingredient of this 'agrarian revolution' remains the redistribution of land, and the MST's shifted focus embodies a clear dependence on the government to conduct this redistribution. While awaiting access to new land, the MST's new focus has been remarkably limiting, as it involves essentially reorganizing the limited resources already available to them.

It is important to note that this shift in tactics does not represent a unified or sharp demobilization that occurred overnight, and that began only once Morales was elected; nor was it a change forced upon the movement by the government. Rather, it has been the product of complex and nuanced processes, some examples of which elucidate why this tactical shift occurred. First, there is what Fabricant (2011) has identified as a 'complex new identification with the state' amongst Bolivians on the Left since the Morales government was elected, which is intertwined with a 'campaign of hope for reform' (282–3). As an indigenous social movement activist, Morales is often regarded as 'a direct representative of the historically excluded and oppressed indigenous majority' (Webber 2011, 145). This image, combined with the presence of social movement leaders in government and in the Constituent Assembly, has conveyed a fluidity between the government and movements that is unprecedented in Bolivia, in which Morales is considered one of the people and his government as comprising the people. This image has been further enhanced through government discourse (Chávez interview 2010; Dangl 2010, 21; Fabricant 2012b). As a result of this sentiment, despite MST activists' belief in the futility of advocating for change primarily through electoral politics, MST activists – like many Bolivians – have been trusting of Morales. In Torres' words, 'We had a lot of hope for the indigenous government, a peasant government, an Aymara government, and this is why we did not fight for land, trusting in him' (Torres interview 2011).

This discourse of identification with the state and of investment of hope in the state is further fuelled by a fear that the Right might wrest this historic moment away. The right wing in the eastern part of Bolivia has mobilized against the Morales administration, particularly in the early years of the government. In response, the government called for unity on the Left in its defense, and most Left mobilization during this period was channelled into support for the government against this perceived threat from the Right (Mokrani interview 2010; Dangl 2010, 23; Zibechi in Dangl 2010, 25–6; Fabricant 2011, 280). Marxa Chávez, a Bolivian activist and researcher of social movements, explains the embrace of unity on the Left:

> The MAS entered with the very potent discourse unprecedented in Bolivia that this was an historic change, that now the movement organizations are in government. This was an incredibly strong discourse in 2006 . . . The *compañeros* in the grassroots were not leaders [who got positions in government]; they were nothing. But they believed it, and

> they said that we must take care of this process of change, we must take care of our president because he is our president, an indigenous president, the president who came from us (Chávez interview 2010).

Second, in addition to this emotionally powerful discourse, many MST leaders and observers claim that the change in MST tactics following the election of Morales is not a demobilization imposed by the government but, rather, a calculated response by the MST to the changing political context and to the new opportunities available to their movement with a left-wing government. 'You have to use what you've got,' explains Vargas, a lawyer with CEJIS. 'The setting has changed. Before, you were facing an enemy. When you had a discussion with the director of INRA, it was someone from the right who was defending other interests [from yours]. Now it's different . . . [T]he government, with all of its imperfections, is an ally, so you have to frame the mobilization in this context. There is a different logic' (Vargas interview 2011). Probably the most important opportunity the MST sought to take advantage of by letting the government redistribute land was the possibility of reducing the serious and sometimes fatal violence faced by MST activists in the course of every occupation. Arce says he has been threatened, injured, beaten and arrested for his involvement with the MST and is currently unable to work. Arce believes the reality of this high level of violence influenced the change in MST strategy: 'Here, you take land and you die. It seems that this is poor logic for us. We don't want to do this if we can get territory [another way]' (Arce interview 2011).

A third – and perhaps most controversial – reason for the change in MST tactics, however, is found in accounts of the government explicitly instructing the MST to stop occupying land. In some cases, the MST was told this was so they could avoid further violence, and in some cases they were told simply that the government would expropriate the land instead of the MST (Chávez interview 2010; Torres interview 2011). Patricia Costas, an activist and researcher of social movements in Bolivia, recounts that '[t]he government, in its discourse, said that "there is no reason to have land occupations anymore because we will implement an agrarian revolution" . . . This was a big blow to the MST. You could say it's positive because they will have land, but this hasn't actually happened yet' (Costas interview 2010). Costas' remarks identify the clear risk of agreeing to allow the government to redistribute land: that the government simply might not follow through. The MAS government claims successes from its 2006 agrarian reform project, but a close examination illustrates that the gains achieved have been limited thus far and their value for landless peasants circumscribed. It is this explicit government promise remaining unfulfilled that has begun to create tension around the MST's new focus away from occupations. We turn now to an analysis of agrarian change and continuity under Morales.

NEOLIBERAL CONTINUITIES IN AGRARIAN CLASS RELATIONS UNDER MORALES

Morales' Land Reform Initiatives

With the election of the MAS in December 2005, land reform was placed squarely back on the political agenda. The debate around agrarian reform and what form it would take was amongst the most heated components of political life in the first few months of Morales' first administration. Rumours and threats proliferated, with various right-wing large landowners' organizations rooted in the lowland departments of Santa Cruz, Pando and Beni even

threatening to take up arms against the state in response to any state initiative that might encroach upon their property rights (*La Prensa* 2006a–d; *La Razón* 2006a–c). Official discourse was two sided from the outset. Morales, attending the Alternative Forum in Vienna alongside Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and then Cuban Vice-President Carlos Lage, announced that he was not merely preparing an agrarian reform for Bolivian peasants but, indeed, 'an agrarian revolution' (*La Prensa* 2006e). Government officials still at home were more sober and reassuring to large landowners. Vice-President Álvaro García Linera noted that, 'We are looking for a process of dialogue and negotiation . . . We're going to talk with business people and with agro-industrialists. We are going to talk with loggers, peasants, indigenous peoples, with every social sector involved in the question of land' (*La Prensa* 2006f).

The general discursive orientation of the government towards agrarian reform began to solidify quite early into the first administration, prior to any new legislation. According to the MAS government, there were three legitimate agrarian sectors that deserved state support: (i) large-scale, agro-industrial exporters; (ii) small-scale family peasant production, partially for the market and partially for subsistence; and (iii) communal indigenous landholdings. The government's contention was that a certain harmonious balance, or virtuous circle of mutual benefit, could be maintained across these different sectors, rather than there being an inherently conflict-ridden class antagonism structured into their competing interests (*La Prensa* 2006g). This position has been essentially maintained throughout both administrations of the Morales regime to date. But whatever equivocations permeated the speeches of government representatives, it was clear that from its inception the new government, still riding the crest of five years of Left-indigenous extra-parliamentary tumult, had to face up to the fact that many Bolivians felt 'an agrarian revolution' to be precisely the antidote required to overturn long-standing rural injustice. When Morales assumed office, large and medium landholders possessed 90 per cent of usable land in the country, whereas community and small-scale producers (90 per cent of the population engaged in agricultural activities) possessed the remaining 10 per cent. Land was most concentrated in the department of Santa Cruz, but distribution was also starkly uneven in Beni and Pando. Five families alone owned over 505,000 hectares of land, for example, set against a backdrop of growing numbers of landless peasants, some of whom organized themselves into the MST, as we have seen (Lora 2006).

Conflict around land found one of its principal expressions inside the corridors of the Constituent Assembly, established in 2006. Indeed, the intensity of racialized class rivalries surrounding the future trajectory of agrarian reform frequently spilled over the institutional boundaries of the formal assembly into street conflicts and other expressions of contentious politics (Regalsky 2009; Webber 2009b, 253–7). The Constituent Assembly finally agreed on a constitutional text in December 2007. However, given ongoing instability in the country, a modified and moderated version of the text was only ratified by the Bolivian Congress in late October 2008, after negotiations brokered by the *Unión Sudamericana de Naciones* (Union of South American Nations, UNASUR) resulted in a settlement between the government and the right-wing *Consejo Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia* (National Council in Defense of Democracy, CONALDE). The text was then ratified by two-thirds of the Bolivian electorate through a popular referendum in January 2009.

The new constitution is best described as a 'patchwork of overlapping and often conflicting claims involving indigenous peoples and nonindigenous propertied citizens', rather than 'a unified set of rules for governing the national territory' (Regalsky 2010, 36). It promises protection for indigenous rights to self-determination and autonomy (Article 2), while simultaneously reinforcing private property rights originally enshrined in the previous constitution

(Article 315) (Regalsky 2010, 36). It declares Bolivia to be a 'plurinational state', while synchronously legalizing *latifundia* and subordinating claims of indigenous territorial autonomy to existing departmental boundaries (Regalsky 2010, 37; Regalsky 2011). 'The constitution,' Assies correctly points out, 'guarantees the right to private property (in rural areas on the condition that it complies with a socio-economic function) alongside communal and state property' (2011, 115).

For the MAS government, the construction of a new model of agrarian development signifies a commitment to a 'plural and diverse' agricultural economy, with state, communitarian, cooperative and capitalist forms of social–property relations coexisting alongside one another. However, the plural economy, from the government's perspective, can only act as the basis for a sustainable and integrated model of rural development if it prioritizes the strengthening of the economic, technical and institutional capacities of those social groups historically subject to social and economic exclusion: indigenous communities, peasants and the landless (MDRAyMA 2007, 19). By 2010, the Ministry of Rural Development and Land claimed that the distribution of rural properties undertaken to that point had already achieved a 'communitarian renewal of agrarian reform' and in a short while would achieve 'an equitable and inclusive structure for all economic actors', which would result in 'practically two thirds of the national territory being in the hands of the country's majority, with the state having control of a half of the remaining third part of the national territory, and the sector of individual property owners linked to agroindustrial activity having access to the other half of the last third' (quoted in Control Ciudadano 2012, 12). The notion of a conflict-free, plural agrarian economy appears in the new constitution, as we have seen, as well as in the two major pieces of legislation introduced by the government to address agrarian reform: the *Ley de Reconducción Comunitaria de la Reforma Agraria* (Law for the Communitarian Renewal of Agrarian Reform, LRCRA or Law 3545) passed in late 2006, and the *Ley de la Revolución Productiva Comunitaria Agropecuaria* (Law of Productive Communitarian Agricultural Revolution, LRPCA) passed in 2011. In what follows, we provide an empirical and analytical counter to Bottazzi and Rist's (2012) recent contribution to this journal. Their (2012, 529) 'sociopolitical' approach, which focuses on the 'political, multi-level governance, spatial and ethnic dimensions' of land reform flowing out of the 2006 legislation, reaches an analytical conclusion that is categorically distinct from ours. For Bottazzi and Rist (2012, 546), as in the claims of the official representatives of the Morales government, the 'land reform of the Morales government led to a clear power shift from lowland oligarchic interest groups to peasant and indigenous people'. An historical materialist analysis, we argue, rooted in a rigorous mapping of change and continuity across agrarian class relations in the Morales epoch, provides a robust case against such claims of a power shift.

Change and Continuity in Agrarian Class Relations

If this is the transformative discursive apparatus of the government's agrarian policy framework, in practice the continuities with neoliberalism in the implementation of such legislation have been rather sharper than any ruptures. Indeed, a pattern of reconstituted neoliberalism has been quite decisively demonstrated in the most detailed report on the political economy of the Bolivian countryside under Morales available to date, Control Ciudadano's *Reconducción comunitaria de la reforma agraria y producción agrícola*, published in March 2012. Evidence of these continuities can be observed in six areas.

To drive home the distinctiveness of the empirical assessment that follows, it is worthwhile stressing that our interpretation of the data across all six of these domains also calls deeply

into question the basic interpretative conclusions of the two-volume report released by INRA in 2010 (INRA 2010a,b), as well as a smaller summary report in 2011 (INRA 2011), which together constitute arguably the most influential official summations of the process of land redistribution under Morales. These constitute the pre-eminent bases for most positive scholarly celebrations of the ostensible profundity of agrarian restructuring under Morales. According to INRA (2010b, 39), there has been ample state intervention in an area of more than 10 million hectares across all nine departments in the country, with the redistribution of close to 4 million hectares of land to indigenous and peasant communities. This has meant, it is argued, redistributive land gains for 2,000 families in need, benefitting over 56,000 individuals, the vast majority of whom reside in indigenous or peasant communities (INRA 2010b, 39). Let us move, then, through each of the six patterns of continuity in turn and demonstrate the limitations of the official perspective.

First, empirical trends in crop production demonstrate that the neoliberal export-orientated model of agrarian capitalism – initiated in earnest in the late 1980s, rooted in large-scale agro-industrial enterprises and geographically situated in Santa Cruz – has been consolidated rather than overturned under the MAS administration. Small-scale peasant production has continued to lose relevance. The LRCRA amounted to little more than the introduction of a select number of modest reforms to the INRA law of 1996, and it was designed to better operationalize its predecessor rather than to undo its underlying logic (INRA 2010a, 59–73; INRA 2010b, 15–20). Crop patterns are one indication of continuity. Since the mid-1990s, the aggregate trend in agricultural production in Bolivia has been slow and moderate expansion. The slow but relatively steady uptick in agricultural production can be explained essentially through the growth of four specific industrial crops: sugar-cane, soy, corn and sorghum. If these four crops are removed from the equation, agricultural production has been in a transparent process of stagnation (Control Ciudadano 2012, 2–3). During the government of the MAS, crops that are usually catalogued as industrial – because they undergo some level of manufacturing or industrial processing in preparation for human or animal consumption and are produced, by and large, under capitalist relations of production – account for the bulk of agricultural production in the country (79.1 per cent in the 2005–6 agricultural season and 80.4 per cent in 2010–11). Moreover, two export-driven crops alone – soy (40 per cent) and sugar-cane (36 per cent) – account for 76 per cent of the total growth in volume of production between 2005 and 2011 (Control Ciudadano 2012, 5). On the other hand, the portion of overall agricultural production of those crops in which peasant production continues to be important (fruit, vegetables, tubers and fodder) has trended towards irrelevance (Control Ciudadano 2012, 3).

Second, the geographical concentration of agricultural production during the Morales period is another useful, if indirect, indicator of the growing importance of medium and large capitalist agricultural enterprises in spite of an official discourse backing small-scale peasant and indigenous communitarian agrarian economies. While in 2005–6 the department of Santa Cruz – where medium and large capitalist enterprises predominate – accounted for 71.9 per cent of total agricultural production in the country, by 2010–11 this figure had risen to 74 per cent (Control Ciudadano 2012, 3). At the same time, the relative weight of agricultural production in the valleys and *altiplano* – where the better part of peasant production is concentrated – as a proportion of total national production tended to decline over the same period. During the MAS period in office (2005–6 to 2010–11), there has been a total increase of 246,731 hectares of agricultural land under cultivation, 85 per cent of which is concentrated in Santa Cruz. Similarly, if we look at growth in agricultural production over the same period as measured in weight, of the 1,582,899 metric ton increase, 88 per cent

took place in Santa Cruz. Growth of agricultural production in the valleys and *altiplano*, measured in area of cultivated land or volume of production, was totally marginal (Control Ciudadano 2012, 3–4).

Third, the types and delimitations of *latifundio* designated for expropriation by the MAS government through the LRCRA and official policy documents are not those that predominate in the structure of the Bolivian agrarian economy; therefore, the large capitalist landowners who obtain rent from the land, along with the agrarian capitalist enterprises that obtain their profits through the exploitation of their salaried workforce, have not and will not be affected by the 'agrarian revolution'. The MAS administration designates three types of *latifundio* for expropriation: (a) those that do not comply with the socio-economic function of the land due to unproductive tenancy; (b) those *latifundio* that utilize bonded labour, semi-slavery or slavery in the exploitation of land; and (c) those that surpass the maximum area of landholding – 5,000 hectares – codified in law and the constitution (although non-retroactively). The main point of contention raised by the *Reconducción comunitaria* document has to do with the fact that none of these foci predominates in the agrarian social relations of *latifundio*. As a consequence of the National Revolution of 1952, and the subsequent Law of Agrarian Reform of 1953, bonded labour, semi-slavery and slavery are not predominant forms of labour anywhere in the Bolivian countryside. There is also no empirical information demonstrating the unproductive character of *latifundio* in the eastern lowlands. Finally, fixing a limit on the area of agrarian property eludes the fact that modern *latifundio* are not configured on the basis of territorial continuity but, rather, they tend to be centrally managed groups of estates that are not geographically contiguous and are therefore largely untouched by the new constitution and the laws seeking to enact it (Control Ciudadano 2012, 6).

Information on the Marincovic family, made public by INRA, serves as a useful example to demonstrate this point. The Marincovic family unit has managed to accumulate 59,748 hectares distributed over 11 separate estates situated in different provinces of the department of Santa Cruz. Two of the 11 estates – Yasminka and Laguna Corazón – were demonstrated by the INRA clarification process to have been acquired illegally and are therefore scheduled for expropriation. This will signify a loss of 26,951 hectares, meaning that the family unit will consolidate in their hands nine estates with a total area of 32,797 hectares. Importantly, even if the new constitution had encoded the 5,000 hectare limit retroactively, only one of the family's estates, which has an area over 5,000 hectares, would have been partially expropriated, leaving the family with a total of 19,364 hectares (Control Ciudadano 2012, 8–9).

Fourth, most of the limited redistribution of land that has taken place through the granting of title to TCOs between 1996 and 2010 has not been a consequence of expropriation of *latifundio*. According to an INRA report of January 2010, as a result of the process of clarification (*saneamiento*) for the titling of TCOs, over this period there was a redistribution of approximately 3.9 million hectares of land. This figure, however, includes 499,000 hectares in Oruro and 492,000 hectares in Potosí that were mere changes in title from *proindiviso* (community land that is collectively titled and not formally divided into individual plots) to TCOs – that is, a juridical distinction between two community forms of title to land (Control Ciudadano 2012, 6–7). These land transfers refer to a simple change of juridical status, then, of communities that since the Agrarian Reform of 1953 have had collective titles, or *títulos proindiviso*, and then requested collective property recognition as TCOs. The TCOs in question are concentrated in the departments of Oruro and Potosí in zones that overlap with mining activities. TCO status better equips these communities to potentially collect rents derived from mining activities (Control Ciudadano 2012, 10). Excluding these figures, then, the redistribution of land through the process of clarification of TCOs by 2010 amounted to

2.9 million hectares. Of this total, the overwhelming bulk of these redistributed lands (72.8 per cent) were transfers from various forms of state-owned lands (*tierras fiscales*) to TCOs. Approximately 15.3 per cent were lands that were being used by owners of rubber estates who never in fact enjoyed property rights over them; another 35.2 per cent were drawn from forestry concessions; 14.6 per cent came from public land that had been designated for colonization by landless peasants but which had never been distributed; and 8.0 per cent were the result of *expedientes anulados* (annulled records), which is to say lands over which the supposed title holders never actually held recognized property rights to the land. Only 27.2 per cent of lands distributed to TCOs between 1996 and 2010 were a result of expropriation or partial expropriation of medium and large agrarian properties due to non-compliance with the socio-economic function. On this point, it is also useful to point out that a large part of the process of clarification for the titling of TCOs was carried out by neoliberal governments that predated the MAS, illustrating that the identification of state lands and the identification of those few medium and large properties for redistribution through this mechanism has not been an exclusive practice of the Morales administration (INRA 2011, 3; Control Ciudadano 2012, 7). Of the 16.2 million hectares titled to TCOs between 1996 and 2010, 10.5 million (65 per cent) were titled during the MAS era, while 5.7 million (35 per cent) were carried out under the auspices of the preceding neoliberal regimes (Control Ciudadano 2012, 10).

According to the INRA report cited above from March 2011 (INRA 2011), the area expropriated from medium and large property owners for failing to comply with the socio-economic function of their properties due to the presence of bonded labour, semi-slavery, slavery or other illegal labour practices totalled 54,734 hectares. If we add this area to the total and partial seizures carried out during the process of clarification of TCOs, it amounts to a total of 855,823 hectares of land expropriated from medium and large property owners, which constitutes 1.5 per cent of the total of the land clarified and titled through redistributive processes between 1996 and December 2010. If we account for the fact that the clarified and titled area constitutes 51 per cent of the total area identified for clarification (106,751,722 hectares), it would seem difficult to draw any conclusion other than that the process has not discovered – nor was it designed to uncover – the unproductive *latifundio* that the government supposed predominated in the agrarian structure of the country (Control Ciudadano 2012, 8).

Fifth, the quality of land redistributed is important to consider because a close examination undermines the government's claim that peasant and indigenous community agricultural production will play an increasingly important role in generating the food supply of the country. During the MAS era, 10.5 million hectares have been allotted to TCOs, of which 6.8 million are in the lowlands and 3.7 million in the highlands.[6] It is interesting to note here that, of the 11.9 million hectares of land allotted to TCOs in the lowlands between 1996 and 2010, 5.0 million (43 per cent) were granted title by neoliberal regimes, whereas 6.8 million (57 per cent) were granted under Morales (Control Ciudadano 2012, 10). The distribution of this land to indigenous peoples in the lowlands has not resulted in an increase in agricultural production because, as is well known, these mainly state-owned territories are largely unfit for agriculture, many of them suited only for forestry and, to a lesser extent, rubber extraction (Control Ciudadano 2012, 11–12). Meanwhile, in the highlands, much of the agricultural land has suffered intense subdivision and environmental degradation.

Thus, to return for a moment to the passage from the Ministry of Rural Development and Land quoted above, it may be close to true that soon roughly two-thirds of the national

[6] We have already noted the character of some of this distribution in the highlands.

territory will be formally in the hands of the indigenous peasantry of the country. However, this tells us nothing of the quality of the land that they will control. Nor does it tell us anything relevant about the one-third of the territory that will remain in the hands of the medium and large agro-industrial firms. This third, in reality, constitutes the best lands for agricultural production and ranching in the country. Because, as we have seen, the MAS government has not touched their monopolization of this territory and has no plans to do so, the alleged 'equality' of distribution in the plural economy will not translate into 'equality' of quality lands (Control Ciudadano 2012, 13).

Sixth, and finally, the different components of the latest major agrarian legislation passed by the Morales government, the LRPCA in 2011, suggest major continuities with trends already documented thus far. The new law, first of all, outlines a plan for the use of lands and territory devoted to agricultural production that obligates autonomous territorial entities to define 'their' territorial management in line with national objectives highlighted in the plan, to use and take advantage of communal territories along the lines of a national plan for agricultural production (Control Ciudadano 2012, 15). To begin, the state will continue to distribute available state-owned lands – fundamentally suitable for forestry – and convert them into areas of agricultural production and ranching. The state will also legally incorporate existing settlements of migrant, landless peasant colonizers into existing TCOs and national parks, and promote more settlement in these types of territories, subsidizing the necessary highway infrastructure to make this possible. The state will 'identify' lands ostensibly suitable for agriculture and ranching within the territories of national parks for their subsequent distribution. Finally, the state will continue to protect the sanctity of medium and large properties devoted to export-orientated capitalist agriculture (Control Ciudadano 2012, 15).[7] Through the constitution and all subsequent legislation, the MAS regime has consecrated the property of the better part of the quality agricultural land held by medium- and large-scale agrarian capitalists. The same social class that ruled over agricultural production in 2005 continues to rule today in 2012.

CURRENT RETHINKING AMONGST THE MST

Continued Faith and Growing Frustration

Such agrarian continuities under the MAS government present a difficult dilemma for the MST. Members have begun to grow frustrated that they have not received the support they anticipated from Morales, and the movement has been unable to pressure the government for this support effectively without engaging in occupations, yet the political climate under Morales is such that a return to occupation would not be a simple decision.

While MST leaders and rank-and-file activists are well aware that the government's promises to redistribute land have not yet been fulfilled, their informal moratorium on occupations continues, and general support for Morales and for the agrarian reform process remains widespread throughout the movement. Those who continue to support Morales explain his general failure thus far to redistribute land in three ways. First, there is broad understanding that the agrarian reform process is a long transition that requires patience (Mokrani interview

[7] It might be argued that export-orientation may not be an adequate indicator for determining the continuity of capitalist land policy under Morales. While we recognize that export-orientation in the way we discuss it is not, on its own, a fully adequate measure of capitalist continuity in land policy/land use, it is nonetheless the best avaialable proxy for measuring this phenomenon.

2010). Second, some activists excuse the lack of change by pointing out that Morales may be prioritizing the creation of new laws, such as agrarian reform legislation, and not their enforcement in an effort to create a legal mandate in case he is not re-elected. Third, in some cases, Morales himself is not seen as responsible for the failure to redistribute land to MST communities. Instead, blame is placed on bureaucratic difficulties ranging from suspicion of the MST amongst civil servants belonging to other peasant organizations to the lack of resources and incentives given to civil servants to enforce the law. On the basis of these explanations for the lack of substantial agrarian reform to date, many MST activists remain hopeful that the MAS government will still follow through with its promised agrarian reform in future. Moreover, in addition to their continued faith in Morales, many members recall that the MST participated in the conception and design of Morales' agrarian reform, and continue to believe in the process because they feel they have a stake in its success (Aramayo interview 2011; Arce interview 2011; Vargas interview 2011).

While MST activists have thus been somewhat forgiving of their continued lack of land under Morales, they have been less able to excuse the general lack of support, outside the provision of land, that the MST has received from the government since it came to office. It is the lack of sufficient land combined with this lack of other support that has left MST activists increasingly frustrated. This additional lack of support has been perceived in the following areas: provision of infrastructure to MST communities, protection of MST members from violence and respect for MST contributions to public debate. It is worth elaborating the character of MST grievances of this kind with several examples.

Infrastructure. First, the MST does not feel it has received the infrastructural assistance from the government that it has required for its existing settlement communities. The movement claims that the majority of MST communities live in very poor conditions, regularly resulting in malnutrition and illnesses from contaminated water (*Erbol* 2011a; see also *Erbol* 2011b). Some MST projects have received loans, machinery and supplies such as seeds, but those supporting the MST believe that the government should also provide assistance to foster the sustainability and independence of these communities (Vargas interview 2011).

Violence. Second, while the violent, racialized abuse faced by MST activists at the hands of landowners and the organized right wing has decreased since the MST stopped occupying land, conflicts and violence have persisted, and MST activists have not felt the support in these situations that they anticipated from the government when they decided to stop the occupations. The most well-known example of this violence is the massacre at Pando in 2008, which occurred when months of government-tolerated racialized intimidation and violence by right-wing vigilantes against MST members and allies, indigenous peasants and government agencies culminated in a machine-gun massacre of indigenous peasants (Webber 2011, 35–9).[8] Chávez describes a trip to Santa Cruz at the time:

> MST members told me that there were beatings, daily abuse, you could be beaten up in the street if you looked indigenous . . . This culminated in the massacre in Pando, which was a direct assault on the *compañeros* identified with the MST. [The aggressors felt that] they were enemies who had to be eliminated, Indian land invaders who would commandeer their land, 'the hordes' they called them there. So 2008 ended with a massacre.

[8] We do not intend to imply here that the government knowingly connived in the massacre in Pando.

> Eleven peasants were dead; MST members were persecuted, beaten up, threatened with death. (Chávez interview 2010)

In a further example of this persistent violence, on 20 April 2010, in the Velasco province in Santa Cruz, 300 families were driven from the MST's Trillizas settlements in a violent assault led by local landowners and supported by local elites. Under continuous threat from the landowners, they were not able to return to their land, to which they held legal title, and as a result they lost their animals and crops (*Erbol* 2011c). It was only after the MST initiated a hunger strike and a national march from Santa Cruz to La Paz that the government intervened with an agreement to support the ousted communities and to fulfill the MST's general demands for land, infrastructural support and food sovereignty (*Erbol* 2010a–c; MST-B 2010). The MST was frustrated that it had official title to this land but still 'had to fight large landowners' without the assistance of the state (Arce interview 2011).

Public discussions. A third example of the MST's frustration at their lack of government support can be seen in the feeling amongst MST activists that their input has been ignored in several crucial public discussions on agrarian reform. This includes some of the advice that the MST offered during the design of the *Reconducción Comunitaria*, as well as the government's unilateral decision to alter a key provision agreed upon by the Constitutional Assembly. The provision, Article 399, stipulated a maximum landholding size of 5,000 hectares, but it was amended by the government to apply only to future land purchases, as noted above. This move was heavily critiqued by the MST, not only for reducing the amount of land available for expropriation and redistribution, but also for ignoring a prior collective decision, which stifled subsequent public debate around agrarian issues (Colque interview 2010; Machicado interview 2010). MST members felt alienated by this move because the MST values public discussion and deliberation, and because being seen as a viable participant in such debate had been seen as one advantage to stopping its occupations (Vargas interview 2011).

These three examples – provision of infrastructure, protection from violence and respect for contributions to public debate – illustrate areas outside of land redistribution in which MST members feel they have not received the support that they anticipated from the Morales government. This perceived lack of support has combined with the lack of land redistribution outlined above to create a growing frustration with the government amongst many MST activists, despite their continued support for the government. While the degree of frustration with the government varies within the MST, it is interesting that the most unapologetic frustration is articulated by those MST activists who had been the most vocal advocates for the MST's support for the MAS in the lead-up to Morales' election (e.g. Machicado interview 2010; Torres interview 2011). MST leaders who had believed strongly that a Morales government would be positive for the MST, as the movement would benefit from the government support that it would receive, are now expressing anger that this support did not materialize, and they suggest that Morales' election has instead been detrimental for the movement (Salvatierra interview 2011; Torres interview 2011).

A Potential Return to Occupations?

The frustration expressed above on the part of the MST at the inadequate land redistribution and other support suggests that the MST's current approach has been less effective than they

anticipated at extracting material gains and building momentum for broader change to agrarian relations under Morales. The MST's original tactic of occupation was effective specifically because it gave the movement leverage by presenting a legal claim that could not be refuted combined with a direct action that could not be ignored. By removing occupations from their arsenal, the MST unsurprisingly eliminated any impetus for expediency in fulfilling their legal claim to land. So far, the MST has been unable to replicate this leverage without the use of occupations.

MST leaders, rank-and-file members and allies who are frustrated with the government's lack of support as outlined above make it clear that the MST continues to mobilize and to pressure the government without resorting to land occupations (Aramayo interview 2011; Arce interview 2011; Vargas Arancivia interview 2011), but this mobilization remains circumscribed (Arce interview 2011). For example, the MST's national assembly on strategy in March 2011 produced a call for the government to fulfill its obligations to provide basic services to MST communities (*Erbol*, 2011b), and in April of that year the MST issued a statement accusing the government of failing to implement a genuine agrarian reform (*Erbol* 2011a). These steps raise crucial demands for infrastructure, but they are less focused on the acquisition of new land and still are not action driven. In a further example, in September 2011, an MST blockade in San Ignacio and San Raphael in Santa Cruz was credited with winning land for 1,600 families (Banegas 2011), but such examples are few and far between, and they fall short of the MST's original strategy of coordinated direct occupations. These instances suggest that the MST simply has not been as strong and effective a political force without occupations.

The MST thus finds itself in a situation in which it has chosen to forgo an essential element of its tactic. Whether the movement will eventually choose to reinstate occupations is undetermined, but is not a simple decision. MST observers and allies on the Bolivian Left feel that the MST's stay of occupations is potentially temporary – a trial phase to determine whether the MST will be granted the land it requires by the government (Chávez interview 2010; Vargas interview 2011). Should the MST determine that this 'trial' has failed, however, there are several potential obstacles to a return to occupations at the current conjuncture that the movement must consider. These obstacles pertain mainly to certain shifts in public discourse that have occurred since Morales took office. These discursive barriers include what can loosely be called a discourse of the obsolescence of the MST, a discourse of hope surrounding the MAS government and a discourse of shame surrounding Left opposition to the government. A brief outline of each will illustrate some of the barriers facing a return to occupations.

Discourse of the MST's obsolescence. The first discursive barrier is the widespread sentiment that the MST should cease to exist because MST members already have land (e.g. de Dios Fernández interview 2011). The MST response to this critique is that those members who have already won land have remained in the organization in order to struggle for land for others, so that the movement is sustainable, yet the discourse persists (Arce interview 2011; see also Serrado interview 2011; Vargas Arancivia interview 2011).

Discourse of hope. Another barrier is a discourse of hope for Morales and the accompanying sentiment that the MST, like other movements, should trust Morales and, rather than pressure the government through occupations, they should let the government do its job. This discourse affects both whether MST members would consider a return to occupations to be appropriate and whether the broader public would as well.

First, regarding its effect on MST members, Fabricant (2011) explains that, following Morales' election, '[m]any activists might find themselves trapped inside this complex new entanglement of hope, identification with the state, and the daily frictions of their ever-more impoverished and difficult lives' (282). MST activists appreciate that their demands have not been met, but the hope they continue to invest in Morales means they are not prepared to bring down his government, she says. Instead, they are 'resigned to a politics of waiting for a reform, which may never take place' (282).

Second, in addition to influencing whether MST members themselves would consider occupations to be appropriate in the current context, this discourse of hope also affects whether the broader public would consider a return to occupations to be legitimate. Public opinion is important to MST strategy. An essential part of the initial tactic of the movement was that it allowed the movement to play to the broader public. The occupation and the ensuing claim by the occupiers that this act of taking over someone else's land was actually legal – if not helpful to a government that claimed to be redistributing unused land to peasants – created a spectacle for the public audience. Through this spectacle, each occupation, although geographically isolated, contained an opportunity to build support for the larger movement. The movement won this support not only through the legitimacy it held by invoking the socio-economic function, but also through its clever manipulation of an unpopular government into doing something that it fundamentally did not want to do: redistribute land.

However, in the current context of a government that does, in fact, claim to desire a redistribution of land and that has captured the hope and support of the indigenous peasants, poor and working classes to whom the MST would hope to appeal, this type of spectacle might meet a different, and counterproductive, reception. And, in the context of strong rhetoric around the ostensible accomplishments of the MAS's agrarian reform, the need for unity in support of the government, and explicitly the need for the MST not to occupy land, as discussed above, any pursuit of subversive tactics such as occupations risks falling flat. Vargas posits that 'the process through which the MST became the avenger of the peasant or the indigenous person is over because that process was [only] legitimate when you had a state that didn't meet the needs of the [movement] organizations' (Vargas interview 2011). After the election of a government that claims to support social movements, the public considers it more appropriate for the MST to use less disruptive channels that are more respectful of the government and the established political process: now 'the MST can't brazenly disobey the law because this is a context that allows them to use these [legal] instruments' (Vargas interview 2011). In these ways, the discourse of hope presents a potential barrier to the perceived legitimacy of a return to occupations in the eyes of both MST members and the broader public.

Discourse of shame. A final discursive barrier to resuming occupations is related to the second. If we understand the above sentiments to be linked to a discourse of hope, it is clear from interviews with MST activists and observers that this discourse is accompanied by a discourse of shame through which MST activists believe their organization – and themselves personally – have been marginalized and targeted for attempting to debate or critique the government.

First, regarding the MST as a whole, some of its leaders recount that they feel the MST is 'marginalized' and 'humiliated' by movement organizations that are closer to Morales. Asunta Salvatierra (interview 2011), an MST leader in Cochabamba, believes that this is because the MST's commitment to growing the MST rather than forgoing it in favour of less critical support for the government is seen as a threat to the organizations involved in the govern-

ment (Salvatierra interview 2011; see also Arce interview 2011; Torres interview 2011).[9] These feelings of marginalization have been compounded when MST leaders have heard false rumours about their movement. For example, Torres (interview 2011) recounts how an MST delegation abroad that was seeking international funding was met with suspicion because Morales had previously claimed that there were no longer any landless people in Bolivia. As a further example, Torres has heard unofficially that Morales has described the MST as 'a thorn in the government's side' and has instructed other organizations to ignore the MST because it is harming the MAS. These rumours have contributed to the MST's perception that it is being marginalized and targeted for attempting to debate or critique the government.

Second, in addition to feeling targeted collectively, individual MST members who have critiqued the government claim that they have faced persecution. For example, several MST leaders say that they have been labelled right-wing neoliberals, corrupt and liars by the government when they have attempted to mobilize, and they believe the government may be attempting to divide and eliminate the movement (Machicado interview 2010; Arce interview 2011; Torres interview 2011). Observers of the government have noted that this type of response to critique of the government is not limited to the MST, and is on the minds of activists in other organizations who feel the need to watch what they say. Threats to dissenters range from having their taxes audited to public accusations by the government that opposition groups are neoliberals, or that they are being manipulated and funded by external groups such as USAID (Fundación Tierra 2009; Almaraz 2010; Colque interview 2010; Olivera in Dangl 2010, 25). This is seen by critics of the government from the Left as symptomatic of a general trend of the MAS government away from open discussions and dialogue in an effort to secure their political power for the next elections (Colque interview 2010; Dangl 2010, 22; Mokrani interview 2010; Prada interview 2011).

In these ways, a discourse of shaming those who critique the government has left MST members feeling marginalized and targeted both collectively and individually. Like the discourse of hope, this discourse represents a political climate in which direct action that critiques the government would probably detract from support for the MST rather than build the public support necessary to force the government to act in the MST's favour. In this context, the MST is unsure of how best to proceed. Faced with a reconstituted neoliberal agrarian reform and these prominent public discourses of obsolescence, hope and shame, MST activists and observers feel that in many ways the MST has more difficulty mobilizing now than they had under the neoliberal governments that preceded Morales (Colque interview 2010; Arce interview 2011; Torres interview 2011). Arce explains this sentiment:

> The problem with this government is that . . . they criticize the oligarchy and they criticize the neoliberals, but on the other hand they want the same thing only with a more peasant face . . . And this could be worse than neoliberalism because, under neoliberalism, the social movements were in agreement and we mobilized [against the neoliberal government]. Now, we're not in agreement, and the government controls the social movements . . . and we can't mobilize. (Interview 2011)

[9] Salvatierra is referring to the *Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia* (Syndicalist Confederation of Colonizers of Bolivia, now the Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia) and the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia 'Bartolina Sisa'* (Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Native Women of Bolivia), which are among the major social movement organizations that were active in the 2000–5 period of mobilization in Bolivia and have since been aligned with the MAS government.

Thus the dilemma faced by the MST is clear. It is increasingly apparent that occupations were crucial to the MST's strategy, as the movement has been unable to develop an effective way to exact sufficient support from the government without them, whether this be support in terms of land redistribution or in other areas such as provision of infrastructure, protection against violence and respect in public discourse. Yet important obstacles would complicate an MST return to occupations in the current political environment, including public discourses of the MST's obsolescence, of hope for the government's reforms and of shaming those who oppose the government. In this climate, subversive tactics such as occupations would probably detract from, rather than raise, the public support and political pressure that was essential for the movement's occupations to succeed in the movement's initial phase.

Faced with this dilemma, for the moment, MST leaders invest hope in the grass roots, anticipating that ordinary peasants will continue to be drawn to the concrete gains that the MST has achieved, initially by acquiring land and now by improving residents' quality of life on that land (Arce interview 2011; Salvatierra interview 2011; Torres interview 2011). This includes the peasants who form the base membership of the other movement organizations, as these peasants grow increasingly frustrated with the lack of results that their organizations achieve through their uncritical support for the government (Arce interview 2011). Moreover, uncritical support on the Left for the MAS government has been tested on several occasions since late 2010. These include the '*gasolinazo*', Morales' short-lived elimination of a gasoline subsidy in December 2010, which sparked immediate and massive protest amongst traditional MAS supporters, and the march against a highway development through the indigenous territory and national park known as TIPNIS (*Territorio Indígena del Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure*) in mid-2011. It remains to be seen whether these hints of a potential change in public opinion and of an increase in independent social movement mobilization will afford the MST sufficient space to regroup and redesign a set of tactics that builds on their early, and relatively effective, combination of legal argument, direct action and public appeal in such a way that can force the hand of the current government to fulfill its agrarian reform promises. For the moment, however, it seems that the MST – which gained prominence from its unusual ability to navigate policy and shape debate – has been out-manoeuvred by a government that has managed to pursue a reconstituted neoliberal agrarian agenda while containing the MST's dissent.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have charted change and continuity in agrarian class relations and in the MST's resistance to them from 1996 to 2011. We have demonstrated that, despite Morales' promises of an equitable and inclusive agrarian economy with a prominent role for peasant and indigenous communitarian agricultural production, after five years in office, the continuities in agrarian class relations with the orthodox neoliberal period outweigh any ruptures. The trends towards an export-orientated model of agrarian capitalism, the displacement of small-scale peasant production, and the growing importance of medium and large capitalist enterprises that characterized the orthodox neoliberal period have continued. The land that has been redistributed to peasant and indigenous producers is less than that promised, and it is often of poor quality or the result of changes in the juridical status of existing landholdings rather than access to new productive land. Moreover, the design of Morales' agrarian initiatives does not target large capitalist landholdings for redistribution, and it is thus unlikely that a fundamental shift in agrarian class relations via these reforms is forthcoming. Instead, the latest major agrarian legislation in 2011 only confirms this trajectory towards reinforcing

rather than dismantling the concentration of quality productive land amongst medium- and large-scale agrarian capitalists.

In spite of these clear continuities in agrarian class relations with the neoliberal period, however, the paper has simultaneously documented discontinuities in the mobilization against these class relations across the same period. The MST was formed in direct opposition to neoliberal agrarian policy, and initially it utilized a unique and effective combination of illegal direct action with a demand to enforce the Bolivian legal principle that unused land must be redistributed. Following Morales' election, the MST attempted to retain a degree of independence from the state to avoid the demobilization that befell many movements that were incorporated into the Morales government. Despite the MST's relative autonomy, however, the movement has largely eliminated land occupations – which formed the backbone of its original strategy – trusting that a redistribution of land would be achieved through Morales' agrarian initiatives instead. The movement has since received neither the land nor the state support it anticipated, and MST members have begun to grow critical of their current, less forceful approach. The changed political environment under Morales, however, and particularly various manifestations of the strong discursive support for the government, presents important barriers to a return to land occupations.

Through this examination of the divergent trends towards continuity and discontinuity in these parallel lines of enquiry, we have contended that the Morales government has pursued a reconstituted agrarian neoliberalism while containing the MST's resistance to it, thereby contributing not to the rupture with agrarian class relations that was anticipated when the Morales government was elected but, instead, to a more politically stable version of the model of accumulation that it inherited.

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