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Review of *El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia*, by Sian Lazar

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For all their emphasis on popular autonomy, most grassroots activists also support Chávez' promotion of national sovereignty and of Latin American unity through the ALBA project. If the Bolivarian vision is not to founder in vague utopianism, then the autonomists must surely compromise with some form of state structure. The logical solution, in Ellner's view, is internal democratisation of the new *chavista* party while maintaining a centralised leadership and discipline. The complexity and importance of this issue is such that it merits a volume to itself, but at least Ellner has made a valuable initial contribution to the discussion.

In this respect also, critics in both Venezuela and abroad (especially the USA) miss the point when they concentrate on Chávez' rhetoric and on his alleged aid to leftist groups in neighbouring countries: what is really intolerable for Washington about the Bolivarian revolution is its contagious example, the 'demonstration effect' inspiring similar (but independent) governments in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Paraguay, and popular movements elsewhere.

Ellner's concluding chapter reiterates his insistence that Venezuela must be seen in the Latin American context; its specificity (notably its oil-producing status) does not warrant its categorisation as *exceptional*. Today, as in the past, it can only be understood on the basis of foreign dependency and social and ethnic tensions which are typical of the region. This book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on Chávez and Venezuela and should be regarded as essential reading for all serious students of the Bolivarian process.

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Sian Lazar, *El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. xiii + 328, £51.00, £12.99 pb.

In October 2003 the residents of El Alto led massive mobilisations that resulted in the resignation of (then president) Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In the midst of resisting the onslaught of military forces, *Alteños/as* brought to the political surface forms of organisation that responded to the immigrants that have shaped this city. Immigrants from indigenous peasant communities and mining camps comprise the main streams of incoming population since the 1980s and constitute the social foundation for understanding both everyday practices and moments of crisis in this 'rebel city'. It is in this sense that an in-depth analysis of citizenship practices in El Alto is a much welcomed contribution to the literature about Bolivia.

Sian Lazar provides nuanced ethnographic information about the ways in which 'everyday practices and experiences of citizenship ... structure *Alteños* relationship with the state in both ordinary and extraordinary times' (p. 3). Lazar asserts that El Alto is an 'indigenous city', which is the author's building block for establishing a critique of 'western' or 'Eurocentric' notions of citizenship. Instead, Lazar argues that in El Alto citizenship is a multidimensional social network in which residents actively construct and experience a sense of 'collective self' through a series of overlapping collective practices that integrate territorial (neighborhood) and functional (trade) memberships. Through the discussion of her ethnographic material, the author highlights a 'bundle of practices that constitute encounters between the state and citizens' (p. 5). These practices encompass collective 'folkloric' expressions representative of the nation and mechanisms to engage the bureaucracy of the state.

Thus, Lazar suggests, El Alto emerges as a 'rebel city' from these forms of collective self and belonging.

The book is organised into two broad sections, presenting multiple moments of two case studies. The first one focuses on a particular neighborhood, Rosas Pampa; and the second on a particular branch of the federation of street traders, the association of fish-sellers (*pesqueras*). The moments presented in the various chapters illustrate how citizenship is collectively constructed and contested. As a preamble to these sections, the author presents a series of 'postcards' of the city. While I agree with her that it is a daunting task to 'describe an entity that is a collection of seven hundred thousand people' (p. 34), a comprehensive review of the quite respectable amount of published historical and sociological materials about El Alto could have provided a broader snapshot of this complex city. Nevertheless, Lazar's postcards highlight how residents of El Alto weave together social and commercial networks that serve as a basis for actively constructing the multiple layers of citizenship.

The chapters that comprise the first section include ethnographic descriptions of how the residents of Rosas Pampa construct a sense of collective self and individual belonging. The material and social construction of the neighborhood reflect an interaction between the state (presented as an ambiguous institutional infrastructure), layers of local institutions (such as the Federation of Neighborhood Committees – *FEJUVE*), NGOs, and 'community authorities and individual citizens'. Lazar presents two important layers for understanding the construction of these collective citizen dynamics: (1) the symbolic forms of constructing 'collective subjectivities'; (2) the more formal instances of 'local development, community leadership, and municipal elections'. These forms of belonging are highlighted in the context of participation in (urban and rural) fiestas, civic parades or demonstrations, (positively defined) clientelist relationships to political parties, and modes of membership in a variety of religious organisations.

The organisation and performance in the zone's patron saint fiesta is one of the moments in which the author describes the symbolic forms of constructing 'collective subjectivities'. During these festivities collective dancing (*entrada*) is a focal point of the neighborhood that affirms 'both a moment of intense local belonging and an expression of Bolivian identity' (p. 143). As a participant in this event, Lazar describes the preparations for the *entrada*, and the internal disputes about who participates and in what capacity. In this sense, the social construction of community, in terms of 'obligations and expected reciprocity', is an effort not only to be recognised and claim citizenship rights but also an attempt by residents to take symbolic positions that allows them to be respected members of the 'community'. Another ethnographic moment illustrates the individual and collective strategies to extract some form of benefit from the state particularly when political parties vie for votes. During these 'clientelist moments' parties (in power and opposition) shower neighborhoods and individual residents with gifts and promises. According to Lazar it is at these electoral moments when residents from marginalised neighborhoods like Rosas Pampa are recognised as citizens by state representatives and can extract some material benefit.

The richness of these chapters provides useful material for those who work in Bolivia and contributes to a body of knowledge that allow scholars to piece together patterns of citizenship in multiple social and cultural contexts. However, for those who are unfamiliar with the city of El Alto or Bolivia in general some more in-depth historical context of the political transformation during the last 25 years is needed

in order to make sense of these dynamic forms of citizenship. The latest neoliberal endeavour (1992) recognised the political shortcoming of neoliberal economic policies (introduced in 1985) and transferred the historical responsibilities of service provision from the state to local governments or *juntas vecinales*. Lumping together these transformations in the descriptions of Rosas Pampa, the author misses an opportunity to fully engage with the question of local strategies in response to particular moments of state organisation. For example, Lazar seldom mentions the *Ley de Participación Popular* (Law of Popular Participation), which has been pivotal in the latest iteration of the neoliberal project in Bolivia. A robust description of the historical transformation of the state with particular focus on how the second wave of 'neoliberal multiculturalism' influenced citizenship formations would have been of great utility in situating the ethnographic material of Rosas Pampa and the street traders.

The second section of the book addresses the implications of the dramatic expansion of the informal economy in El Alto. The virtual collapse of the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB) – as a result of the implementation of the neoliberal project and the closure of state-owned mines in 1985 – led to a convergence of impoverished population in this particular urbanising territory. By 2001, the informal economy became a de facto income generation strategy for over 75% of the economically active population of El Alto. Commercial activities (street vendors) became not only the principal economic activity in El Alto, but also a site for collective organisation and political power.

The *Federación de Gremialistas* (Federation of Street Traders) became a powerful political organisation in which Alteños also construct a sense of belonging, and engage the institutional infrastructure of the state. Lazar analyses various moments in her descriptions of 'how people attempt to assert values of collectivity in the face of the (perceived) pursuit of individual interests to the detriment of the group' (p. 179). The author describes the tensions between *Asociación de Pescaderas* (retail fish sellers) and the Federation of Street Traders for a place to sell. These tensions highlight competing strategies to augment individual welfare and individual obligations towards the collective, conflictive personal connections to state bureaucracy and pressure politics, gender confrontations between (mostly male) leaders and (overwhelmingly female) *bases*, and racial conflicts and expectations between the Prefect, the leadership of the Federation and the *Pesqueras*. Thus, 'ethnicity and commerce' form dense networks of affiliation and responsibilities, framed by precarious living conditions and the broader neoliberal political context. It is in this context of tensions and possibilities, obligations and expectations that Lazar makes an important contribution, by providing detailed descriptions of how these 'bundle of practices' operate on a daily basis and how members negotiate and manage tensions.

This book provides useful and compelling analysis of the dynamics of self and belonging that residents of Rosas Pampa and the *Asociación de Pescaderas* frame their citizenship practices. In short, to be an Alteño/a requires multiple negotiations between historical memories, cultural expressions and modes of construction of, or participation in, political and economic spaces. While the strengths of the book are in the nuanced ethnographic details, the connections to broader historical processes could have been made more explicit. For example, in what way these forms of constructing community informed the organisation of a collective front during the October 2003 events? Or more specifically, in what way these community shaping

performances (or forms of economic organisation) constitute a corner stone of a 'rebel city'?

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Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. xxv + 303, \$79.95, \$22.95 pb.

Social science accounts of indigenous movements in Ecuador typically begin with the 1990 Nationwide Uprising, which gained indigenous mobilisation in this politically volatile Andean country international attention. Historian Marc Becker shows how that significant event, and a series of social movements and political party victories that followed, are part of a long history of activism to advance a radical reform agenda addressing the dual bases of indigenous oppression: exploitation as a reviled ethnic and racial group and as a peasant class trapped in relations of capitalist agricultural domination. Framing contemporary political mobilisation within a longer historical perspective, Becker debunks much of the common wisdom concerning the origins and development of one of the most important contemporary indigenous movements in the Americas. Becker narrates the history of indigenous organising from the 1920s to the early 2000s, with emphasis on highland indigenous-peasant struggles. Particular attention is given to activity in Cayambe, a community north of Quito which was the site of important activism in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Whereas social scientists like Amalia Pallares, Melina Selverston-Scher, José Antonio Lucero, and Leon Zamosc have published detailed accounts of the emergence of Ecuador's most important contemporary indigenous organisation (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE) Becker focuses on key precursor organisations, particularly the Ecuadorian Indian Federation (FEI), formed in 1944.

Social scientists commonly criticise Ecuador's leftist organisations and parties for having historically ignored the ethnic nature of indigenous peoples' claims for rights and for subordinating them to white-mestizo organisational hierarchies. But Becker shows that rural indigenous peasants formed close ties of mutual cooperation with urban leftist intellectuals in the 1920s. Indigenous leaders participated actively in the formation of the Ecuadorian Socialist Party and the Ecuadorian Communist Party, held important positions in these organisations, and helped to define the leftist political agenda in the first half of the 20th century. In turn, leftist intellectuals and socialist analysis were profoundly important in shaping indigenous discourse and introducing new forms of protest and a number of leftist mestizos dedicated themselves to fighting on behalf of indigenous economic, social, political and cultural rights. As indigenous activists shifted in the 1960s from an agenda emphasising improved working conditions on *haciendas* toward claims for return of agricultural land to indigenous communities, indigenous-rural and leftist-urban alliances began to break down. Agrarian reform in the 1960s and 1970s reduced the political relevance of important leftist organisations like the FEI. Leftist mestizos increasingly excluded indigenous leaders from top positions in their organisations and political parties and reduced their attention to indigenous rights, inculcating the contemporary image of a classist, racist left insensitive to indigenous claims based in culture and nationality. In the 1980s, urban leftists exaggerated their role in supporting

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