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A Tale of Three Habas Pejtos, Or, How to Make a 'Plurinational' Cuisine

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Dear Reader,

As I write this essay, I am sitting at my desk in Cochabamba, Bolivia. My window looks over a sunny park, frequented by families with young children on the weekends. A few miles away, the mountains that surround the valley rise up sharply, climbing to some 4000 meters above sea level from the approximately 2700 meter elevation where I sit. A handful of books are lined up in front of me, leaning against the wall across the back of my desk. Among the titles are histories of Bolivia, a few ethnographies, ethnobotanical references, and Quechua-language texts. My theory books are back home, in boxes, or pushed to the backs of dusty bookshelves. Apart from my personal e-archive of coursework notes, the only grand theorist who managed to accompany me in extended version is Marx – and even he is filtered through the reading, literal and figurative, of David Harvey on a CUNY podcast.

I say this by way of introduction, and perhaps as a bit of a disclaimer. Here in Cochabamba, I have just passed the halfway point of my dissertation fieldwork. All going well, my stay here should result in a multi-disciplinary thesis: part ethnobotany, part food-security/nutrition, and part ethnography. The premise is to explore the relationships linking agrobiodiversity - or native and traditional Andean crops - to food security and food culture, in this city and the nearby rural area of Colomi. Although the components of my project seemed quite clear and discrete prior to fieldwork, from where now I sit, they look more like a jumbled-up pile of notebooks and grey literature, scribbled phone numbers, and sketched-out timelines.

Drawing from ethnographic data gathered over the last year, the paper you're about to read is an incipient attempt to trace a few of these threads through to an end-point, or at least a good point to pause. As is perhaps appropriate to this stage in the dissertation process, I'm currently wrangling with whether and how the theory that permeated the first years of my PhD is useful for understanding the complexities of life *in situ*. For better or worse, I'm also pondering some existential questions about ethnicity, inclusion, and the "strange bedfellows" of movement-building. What's written here will likely form the basis of a dissertation chapter, but this seems quite far off into a hazy, post-fieldwork future. Right now, it is more description than citation; more ethnography than theory; more "raw" than "cooked."

I hope that these first reflections will nonetheless make some useful contributions to our dialogue in New Haven. My thanks to you for reading.

Best Regards,

Alder

1. Lessons from the field, lessons from the kitchen

The first time I made *habas pejto*, I learned three new things.

First, shelling fresh, green *habas* - or fava beans, in English - is a finicky process. In addition to a thick, pithy outer pod, the tender, green beans are protected by two inner layers of skin. The first of these, a leathery husk, comes off relatively easily; but the thinner, innermost layer is more delicate. Easily perforated, it sticks close to the bean, making it easy to inadvertently gouge the flesh while trying to pull it away. In short, this is a task for which manual labor - in the literal sense - is optimal. Hands, and thumbnails particularly, seem the ultimate tool for shelling favas. It's difficult to imagine a way in which a tool, or a machine, could do the same work and produce the desired result: a pot of clean, mostly whole, peeled beans.

Second, in Colomi, my fieldsite, even during the season when favas are in abundance, few people save the flawless, fuzzy green pods for home consumption. Instead, they first eat the *descartes* - "throw-away" pods which are misshapen due to incomplete grain-filling, or which have been pecked by birds, stained by fungus, and may be starting to rot. These are the beans which will go bad first, if left too long, and which can't be bundled up for sale at market. The rot might contaminate a bag of whole, unsullied favas (reducing their shelf-life), or their appearance might simply lead urban consumers to decline to purchase them.

That afternoon, when we decided to make *habas pejto*, my host, Doña Deisy¹, disappeared behind the house and brought back a brightly colored plastic tub fully of not-fit-for-market fava pods, presumably set aside for precisely this use. Alicia - Deisy's *comadre*, and my research assistant - reached for a pod from the somewhat mucky pile and began shucking it. I followed suit. We sat on eight-inch tall benches in front of the house, enjoying the sun peeking through late-rainy-season clouds, and chatting while watching Doña Deisy's sons, a couple of dogs, and a pig or two run around the yard. Despite my initial skepticism, as I successively peeled away the three shells of one pod after another, I learned that even the most rotten-looking pods contained perfectly edible beans.

And by the end of the afternoon, I learned a third thing, which stayed with me for several days following: peeling favas is hard on the hands. By the time we worked our way through two large plastic tubs of *descartes*, my thumb was irritated and raw. Shucking one, two, or ten pods was one thing; but a few hundred pods later, it felt as if someone had stuck sticks under my fingernail. The muck from the *descartes* didn't help either. A layer of black goo had built up

¹ Following ethnographic convention, the names of individuals and organizations have been replaced with pseudonyms.

between cracking layers of my nail, and under my other nails as well. It burned a little, and was surprisingly uncomfortable.

I kept my complaints to myself. Normally, I think of my hands as strong and agile, the result of years of keyboard use and, when younger, stringed-instrument practice. But now, in comparison to the deft, robust fingers of my companions, who had grown up hand-processing food straight from the field, my own hands looked delicate, and not particularly useful. I refrained from grumbling, not wanting to call attention to this relative weakness, or the larger differences between us that it exposed.

If I'm honest, Doña Deisy was someone whose good opinion I wanted to cultivate. I had met her for the first time a few months earlier, at an event hosted by Alicia's in-laws. A young mother of three, there was something bright about her. She had freckles and a wide smile and, attentive to everything going on around her, she chattered and joked in chirpy Quechua. She was dressed in a *pollera* - the pleated skirt that symbolizes the embracing of a rural or indigenous identity in Bolivia² - but she carried herself in a way that left me wondering whether she wasn't college-educated, or if she didn't work for a local NGO. Unlike most women I'd met in Colomi, she seemed neither cowed by the presence of a foreigner, nor suspicious, nor overly curious. In this environment, it was a relief to meet someone who felt familiar and, perhaps more importantly, who seemed to consider me relatively unremarkable.

I later learned that my initial speculation was wrong, but Doña Deisy's demeanor seemed no less noteworthy for it. She was primarily a stay-at-home-mom in a young farming family. She lived in a three-room brick house with her husband and her children - two school-aged boys and an infant girl - on the outskirts of the Colomi's semi-urban municipal seat. I often ran into her on the streets of town, walking back and forth between her home and the local school, where I gathered she was closely engaged in her sons' education. Their family was neither rich enough to own a car or build a fancy house, nor poor enough to exude struggle.

That afternoon, after reducing the two large tubs of fava pods to a single bucket of shucked beans, we moved on to a tub of potatoes. We skimmed off their skin with small paring knives, subsequently plopping them into a bucket of water. My instinct, having grown up with smooth, oblong, russet potatoes, was to peel first, trying to lose as little of the flesh as possible, and then gently pare out any remaining eyes with the tip of my knife. But this method was slow, and soon Alicia reached over and corrected me. With these small, oblong-to-round tubers, somewhere between the size of a golf ball and tennis ball, the preferred technique was to first

² See Weismantel (2001) for a discussion of the politics of *pollera*-wearing in the Andes. While Weismantel's observations focus on market women urban Ecuador, in contemporary Bolivia, *polleras* are worn in both urban and rural areas. This "modern" indigenous dress has mostly replaced the hand-woven and embroidered clothes considered "traditional" markers of indigeneity.

slice off two opposing ends, leaving the potato with a flat top and bottom. Then, one should peel the skin in a spiral, before finally removing any remaining eyes. Alicia and Doña Deisy could remove the peel deftly, often in a single long strip, but seemed more concerned about relative speed than the loss of an extra bit of the starchy flesh.

Recently harvested, the potatoes were still caked with earth, and both my hands and the water got muddier and muddier as we peeled. In the end, it didn't matter. Like the favas, after one round of rinsing, the potatoes were deposited into another pot of water and boiled -- long enough to cook the whole mixture, and also, by my calculations, to kill any lingering bacteria.

By this time it was late in the afternoon. Dona Deisy's sons were hungry, and Eloina's husband and toddler had arrived to share the meal. I sat in the kitchen, a long, narrow room along the side of the house, while Deisy cooked. Not knowing the process, I wasn't sure what to do to help, so instead I held her daughter (now awake after an afternoon nap) while she worked. The six-month-old girl was just learning to use her legs. Propped upright, with support, she made a game of pushing against my thighs, leapfrogging into a joyful upwards-and-backwards arch, and more than once nearly knocking me in the teeth. It soon struck me that keeping a wiggly toddler-in-waiting out of trouble in a kitchen where the stove, knives, and other tools were quite low to the ground was perhaps not a superfluous task at all.

As she prepared the meal, Deisy chatted with me, switching from Quechua, in which I was still struggling to communicate, to Spanish. She wasn't entirely happy with the setup of the kitchen, she told me; it had recently been moved from an inner room of the house, to make space for her in-laws following their return from Argentina. The gas stove worked well, but there was no surface for preparing food, nor running water, which she brought by the bucket from another source behind the house.

When the potatoes and favas had finished boiling, she drained the water and set the pot down on the dirt floor of the kitchen, using a wooden spoon to smash the mixture together. She broke the whole potatoes into smaller chunks, adding oil and salt as she stirred. Then she turned to preparing *llajua*, the quintessential Bolivian sauce, served as an accompaniment to almost any dish. Starting with a base of sauce left over from a previous meal, she mixed in another hot green pepper (*locoto*), a tomato, an Andean herb called *kilkiña* (with a flavor somewhere between mint and eucalyptus), and an onion. She diced these using only her hand and a knife, first cross-hatching the fruits down to nearly the level of her palm, and then cutting them horizontally, letting the small cubes fall into the dish below. I had seen women use this technique often, and watching her squatting low over dishes set on the floor, it again struck me how practical it was in the absence of a cutting board, or other clean, flat chopping surface.

Finally, Doña Deisy ground some fresh farm cheese (*quesillo*) into the mixture, turning the *llajua* into a spicy, cheese-and-vegetable salad.

She served the meal with homemade lemonade. Bringing the low benches from where we had been working outside, the adults took seats around a table in one of the other rooms, which did multiple-duty as a bedroom, a storage room, a work-room, and a sitting room. Doña Deisy served the *habas pejto* from a larger pot into generous, flower-stamped tin bowls. She distributed spoons to each one of us but, in the end, everyone but me ate with their fingers. The kids ran in and out from the yard, reaching into the communal pot to grab potatoes, or *llajua*-coated cheese. Doña Deisy scolded them good-naturedly, reminding them that their hands were dirty and needed to be washed before eating.

The *habas pejto* was a little over-salted, and the men gently teased Deisy about this for a while. In the end, though, the dish was good, and we were hungry; the saltiness didn't keep any of us from eating a second serving.

2. The many faces of *habas pejto*

Habas pejto - literally, "mixed-in favas" in Quechua - is a common dish in the inter-Andean valleys of Bolivia. Although favas have their origin in the Old World, and are not a "native" food in the sense of being endemic, the crop has been planted in the Andes for centuries, and is ubiquitous at certain times of year in Colomi. Located on the banks of a reservoir, right where the clouds start to drop their moisture as they rise upslope from the Amazon basin, Colomi sports a moist, cool climate, in which favas grow exceedingly well. Much of the harvest is eaten green, or sold at market. The remainder can be toasted, to be kept over the course of the year, and served as a nutty, protein-filled snack.

Within Colomi, there is a range of variation in how *habas pejto* is served. Sometimes it's dished out in large tin bowls and eaten at a table, as on the afternoon discussed above. Sometimes, it's cooked early in the morning and taken, in a plastic bag like a lunch-sack, out to the field to be eaten as *sama* - a heavier meal taken at midday, whose name is derived from the quechua word for "breathe." Still other times, it's an accompaniment to a meat dish, such as fried *pejerrey* or *trucha*, both caught from the local reservoir. In Colomi, this dish is almost always quite simple. It is made from one of the many floury varieties of Andean potato which, peeled, hold their shape even after boiling. These are subsequently mashed together with green fava beans, salt, and some oil, and served with *llajua* alongside. It's a minimalist dish, but satisfying, and from a nutritional perspective, reasonably healthy.

The nutritional quality of this dish is no small advantage in a country with major problems of undernourishment. While few Bolivians suffer from acute malnutrition - the severe, life-

threatening lack of food colloquially described as starvation - an estimated 23% of the total population is undernourished, the highest rate in South America (FAO 2010). In 2010, the World Food Program estimated that some 37% of rural children under age 5 suffered from stunting, or low height for their age as a result of chronic undernutrition (WFP 2010).

Characterized by poor dietary quality, even in the context of adequate caloric intake, chronic undernutrition has important long-term health effects, particularly when suffered by children. Stunting is correlated with poor brain development. This may subsequently influence underperformance in school, which can be compounded if hunger is ongoing, or if other poverty-related factors reduce the child's access to education, or ability to take advantage of it. Children who have suffered this kind of malnourishment in early childhood never recover the lost opportunity for physical and mental growth, and some research (Hoddinott et al. 2008) has demonstrated that the impacts extend to later-life earning potential. While not, in most cases, a death sentence, all other things being equal, researchers broadly agree that chronic malnutrition in childhood puts an individual at lifelong disadvantage.

At the dietary level, there is no shortage of culprits to blame for Bolivia's malnutrition problems. Some point to the rising popularity of fast-food. Fried chicken and french-fried potatoes, popular in urban areas, are often accompanied by rice and a few tablespoons of watered-down *llajua*, but seldom by salad or any other vegetable. Other observers point to rural diets which, particularly in low yield-potential areas, and in the season after planting and before the harvest, may consist predominantly of potatoes. Either way, considering the inclusion of a fibrous green legume, a starch, some vegetable oil and salt, and a robust, veggie-based *llajua* on the side, one could do worse than a simple *habas peyto* for a cheap, nutritious, home-produced meal.

It isn't just among rural farmers that that *habas peyto* is popular, however. The last several years have seen a rising fusion cuisine movement in Bolivia. Referred to as *Cocina Novo-Boliviana*, this is a local version of the *novo-Andino* (nouveau-Andean) cuisine movement associated primarily with neighboring Peru. In Bolivia, this movement encompasses both the high-brow and the popular. In La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, professionally trained chefs are endeavoring to build a community - and a market - around the creative use of the wide variety of ingredients unique to Bolivia. At a local level, community food fairs, focusing on the promotion and sale of regionally recognized dishes, offer a source of both pride and income for household producers, who set up stands and booths to sell their version of the dish in question to hungry, curious tourists. Near harvest season in Cochabamba, posters advertising these fairs appear a week or two in advance, and on any given Sunday in peak season, a fair-goer will have two or three different options to visit around the valley.

Around Cochabamba, *habas pejto* makes appearances in all of these forums. The first time I ate this dish was early in my fieldwork, at the *Feria de la Ñawpa Manka Mikhuna* – a long-running fair showcasing food cooked in *ollas de barro* (earthen pots). This *habas pejto* was bright red, slow-cooked with thick *ají* (hot chile sauce), and mixed together with strips of *charque de llama* (llama jerky). Later, I would find similar iterations of the dish turning up in urban restaurants, not to mention the households of people I visited in Colomi.

There is something slightly – and often intentionally - rebellious about the wide reach of *habas pejto*. Within living memory, many of the ingredients, not to mention the preparation processes, were thought of *comida de indio* (indian food) – an ugly, racially loaded term connoting lack of hygiene, backwardness, and underdevelopment. By placing a dish historically cooked in an earthen pot from native potato varieties and llama meat at the center of a much-advertised yearly food fair, or on the table of urban restaurants, the preparers are make a subtle, and often fully conscientious, effort to bring material elements of Bolivian indigeneity into the cultural mainstream.

The catch, however, is that this translation does not take place seamlessly. The three *habas pejtos* I discuss in this paper offer a window onto the transformations the dish undergoes when served in an urban restaurant, as opposed to a rural household, exhibiting traces of friction between places, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes. Comparing these iterations of *habas pejto* raises somewhat queasy issues about the evolving nouveau-Bolivian cuisine movement, particularly with respect to gender, labor exploitation, and cultural appropriation.

However, to my mind, this is only part of the story. Taking into account the motivations and personal histories of the food preparers in question, these cases also shed light on limitations in the reach of contemporary social theory. In particular, they highlight that our theory often helps us to identify or explain historical social divisions, but falls short when it comes to thinking about the generative forces of society – the things that make a “we” from multiple “I’s,” or which potentiate positive social change. On this, more below.

3. Planting the seeds of El Huerto

I first became aware of the project of *El Huerto* at a “gastronomic fair” held in a conference center in downtown Cochabamba. With a decidedly gourmet flair, the fair was designed to attract middle-class urban restaurant-goers and the owners of budding food businesses. It showcased such products as *locoto*-based jam, cookies made with flour derived from *chuño* (freeze-dried-potato), and organic vegetables. Several booths were populated by restaurants and catering businesses offering samples of their wares, hoping to reach a new clientele.

El Huerto's booth was small, and by the time I arrived, their food samples were finished. What struck me was that the people running the booth were all young – mostly women in their early 20's – and very enthusiastic. Their newly opened restaurant, they told me, aimed to collapse the chain between producer and consumer. They were making an effort to source their products directly from small-scale sustainable or organic producers, and to grow some of them on-site. They talked about wanting to build a business that would offer a cultural and educational space, making traditional dishes accessible to the middle-class urban public in a comfortable, friendly environment.

I called up and visited the restaurant about a week later. The charismatic girl who had originally given me her number wouldn't be on-site that day, but instead, she recommended I interview the cook, Rogelio, who was there preparing lunch.

After a few wrong turns, I found my way to the restaurant, which was located in an old house, tucked on a side-street of residential neighborhood. It was far away from the heavily trafficked nightlife hot-spots, where Cochabamba restaurants tend to cluster. It was a slow day, and when I arrived, Rogelio was alone; I was the only customer.

Luckily for me, this gave him time to show me around. The restaurant had a bare but well-thought-out interior. The tables were made from bright, unvarnished wood, and covered with colorful, woven placemats. There was educational material on the walls, and a big pass-through window that left the kitchen open and visible at the back of the main room. Rogelio walked me around and showed me the corner where they were starting a still-modest lettuce garden, using recycled soda bottles to support the raised-dirt beds. He also indicated a space where they were thinking of installing an open-air grill, in order to be able to host barbecues and *c'oas* – an Andean ritual celebration that brings groups of people together to toast for the blessings of the *pachamama*.³ Rogelio was clearly excited about these ideas, and I could see why. The space was still unfinished, but the idea of what it might become already had me envisioning my next visit.

Lunch was served in a style typical to urban Cochabamba – first, a soup, and then a heavier second course, accompanied by bread, *llajua*, and a lightly sweet fruit-based drink. In this case,

³ As popularly understood, *c'oas* historically were religious rituals, led by a shaman (*yatiri*) or community leader and involving whole communities. They are also preformed at the household level, for example, at Carnival, as way of seeking good fortune for the coming year, or at the beginning of a new venture, such as the inauguration of a business or before a journey. In recent years, in Cochabamba, *c'oas* have become a popular way to mark the first Friday of every month, particularly held in workplaces with co-workers at the end of the day. Most *c'oas* involve burning *carbón* (charcoal) and incense in a small, purpose-built stove, and performing a *ch'alla*, a toast in which the first sip of a person's beverage is spilled on the floor or the ground as a way of giving back to the *pachamama*. Some *c'oas* also involve making a *ch'alla* and an offering to a figurine of the *equeko*, a small, elf-like figure, whose intervention can bring prosperity to a home or venture.

Rogelio had prepared a substantial quinoa soup as a first course, and *habas peyto* as a second dish. His *habas peyto* included a tangy, spicy ají, and strips of nicely cooked, tender *charque*. The green *habas* stood out in contrast to the orange-red sauce, and the chunks of slow-cooked potatoes were small, adding a thick texture to the dish, and blending in a way that let the flavor of the other ingredients take center-stage. It was delicious, and although I couldn't finish all of it after having eaten the soup, I wrapped it to take home for later.

As I ate, we talked about the project of the restaurant; about the day-to-day work, and the philosophy behind it. Although Rogelio covered many themes - the producer-consumer connection, healthy food, sustainable production – the topic that seemed a center of gravity for him, and to which his attention returned to more than once, was the notion of re-creating a space to bring families to the table together.

“It used to be that we got together, you know?” he began, as a way of framing the restaurant's larger aims, “... to have breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but these days, given how much technology has grown, and lots of other things have changed, we no longer have this central moment, where the family comes together... you know? Often parents leave very early to work, the kids to school... they come, they go, and there isn't any dialogue between parents and children, you know? And in this space, it isn't that way anymore... [we're] recuperating the traditions⁴.”

I asked more about his personal history. Rogelio had learned to cook while growing up. He was originally from a rural area, and both of his parents had migrated seasonally, looking for work in the harvest in Santa Cruz. Left at home, he looked after his four sisters.

“I learned to cook watching my mother,” he explained. “She said to me, ‘do this, do this,’ and I already liked it, just from watching her. At the beginning yes, I burned things, I put in too much salt, sometimes I didn't put enough salt... but, bit by bit [I learned]⁵.”

When Rogelio reached the end of high school – now living in Cochabamba – he wanted to study economics, but he didn't have the money. Instead, he learned about a professional degree program sponsored by an NGO, which offered the option of studying gastronomy. It gave him formal lessons in cooking, as well as designing, planning, and opening a restaurant. He was

⁴ Author's translation. The original quote in Spanish: “En sí, ya que antes nos reuníamos, ¿No? Para desayunar, almorzar y cenar, pero hoy en día, ya que la tecnología ha crecido y muchas cosas también han cambiado, entonces ya no hay ese momento central donde la familia se une, ¿No? En muchos salen muy temprano los papas a trabajar, los hijos al colegio, llegan ahí, salen, y ya no hay un dialogo entre padre, hijo, ¿no? En este espacio, ya no es... ¿no? [estamos] recuperando las tradiciones, ¿No?”

⁵ Author's translation. The original in Spanish: “Aprendí a cocinar viendo a mi mamá. Me decía: ‘¡Hace esto, hace esto!’ Entonces yo viendo ya me gustaba. Al principio, si le hacía quemar, o sea le colocaba mucha sal, a veces no le ponía sal sino... poco a poco, ¿no?”

equivocal about how he'd ended up at *El Huerto* - was he a *socio* (partner), or an employee? Was this a project funded by a private investment, or a donation of supporting organizations? I didn't press too far on these questions, worrying it might cause more discomfort than the information was worth.

Rogelio spoke in a soft voice, sometimes hesitating, his words eloquent, though his accent and phrasing were more colloquial than polished. He thought he would have help in the kitchen of *El Huerto*, he told me, but it turned out he was alone, responsible for preparing food for all of the opening hours. When the recorder was off, he spoke candidly about missing his family and feeling alone, counting the plates he had sold each day, and worrying that the business wouldn't make it. He was living on the second floor of the restaurant and taking care of the place full time. He didn't get out much, but sometimes his sister, who lived in a nearby town on the outskirts of the city, would come visit him.

It was only when he spoke about these aspects of his work, looking down at the table, the muscles in his face pulling a bit, that it struck me how young he was. He would be in his early 20's, I guessed – possibly as young as 19, and not more than 25. His words and demeanor projected what seemed to me a genuine sense of hope and perseverance – but also a great deal of weight resting on a pair of slender young shoulders.

4. Of radical alterity and ambiguity

In the last several decades, Bolivia has undergone monumental social changes. After the repression of the mining unions in the 1970's and 80's, the country saw huge pressure for greater equality leading, among others, to the passage of the *Ley de Participacion Popular* (Popular Participation Law) in 1994. Although met with skepticism by some,⁶ contemporary Bolivian NGO workers mark this as a key turn toward legitimizing the participation of poor, rural, indigenous Bolivians in the organizations (governmental and otherwise) affecting their day-to-day-lives.

The 1990's also saw the flowering of movements led by national indigenous coalitions (cf. Postero, 2007), which brought to power Evo Morales, the nation's first indigenous president. Under Morales, the country adopted a new constitution which, in recognition of the country's many indigenous groups, declares Bolivia a "pluri-national" state. The constitution has also been widely remarked for its enshrining of the rights of nature, or *la pachamama*, in accordance with Andean indigenous cosmologies.

⁶ For example, Gill (2000) points out that this law effectively served as a veiled justification for the neoliberal state to abdicate its responsibilities to its citizenry, instead transferring many essential public services to the NGO sector.

The scope of this change is challenging to summarize, but the titles of two books on the indigenous struggle are perhaps indicative. The 1977 *testimonio* (testimony) of Domitila Barrios de Chungara, an Aymara leader and activist from mining region of the *altiplano*, was entitled *Si me permiten hablar* -- "if you will allow me to speak" (Viezzler, 1977). In contrast, Nancy Postero's ethnography chronicling the struggle of lowland indigenous groups – published in 2007, the year after Morales' first election - takes its title from the triumphant declaration, "Now We Are Citizens."

Under Morales and his party, the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, or Movement Towards Socialism), significant steps have been taken to realize this new, full citizenship for Bolivians who have historically not enjoyed it. Indigenous language training has been mandated for all public officials. Significant investments have been made in rural infrastructure, including schools, community centers, and market places. A pension plan option has been opened for self-employed farmers. And the government has placed renewed emphasis on improving childhood nutrition, sponsoring extensive school breakfast programs. In contrast to many other political contexts, in which "food security" and "food sovereignty" are placed in ideological opposition to each other, contemporary Bolivian politics make an effort not to reinforce this dichotomy. Food security and sovereignty are almost always mentioned in the same breath, both in official policy, and in the platforms of community organizations.

While these changes may be significant, they are neither complete, nor uncontested -- nor have the country's deep ethnic, cultural, and economic divides disappeared. Following his nationalization of oil and gas reserves, the early years of Morales' presidency saw an active separatist movement the oil- and agriculture-rich lowland Amazonian regions. This came to a head in a proposal for more autonomous government, put to an unsuccessful vote (BIF, n.d.).

More recently, in 2011, major discontent with Morales' government emerged from within his party base. Lowland indigenous groups marched on the capital in protest of the government's insistence on the construction of a road uniting Bolivia and Brazil, which would pass directly through the Isiboro Securé Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS). The cultural, economic, and environmental consequences, they warned, would be grave. Although the conflict was resolved through negotiation and the promise of improved efforts for prior informed consent, the road-building plan has not been abandoned, and members of both the indigenous and environmental advocacy communities express simmering frustration.

In these conflicts, the issues themselves are highly contentious. The participants put forth highly divergent visions of development – of who should bear the costs, who should reap the benefits, and, fundamentally, of what "development" should really look like. However, as much as critics lambaste specific policies of the MAS, a prominent current of criticism focuses on

Morales' person rather than his politics, belying the ways in which ethnicity still matters for political power in Bolivia.

An example is the book, *Evadas: El libro sin fin* (Rodríguez Peña, 2012). Compiled by a journalist from Santa Cruz, the book chronicles Morales' curious statements, similar to the collections of "Bushisms" popular during George W. Bush's eight years as US president. Indeed, the book sheds harsh light on moments in which Morales' phrasing sounds unpolished, poorly thought-out, grammatically confused, or politically incorrect. Where the text is understated, the illustrations finish the job, caricaturing the president as a large-nosed, poorly dressed figure with shaggy hair, pictured in a variety of unflattering poses. Many of the illustrations suggest that he has thuggish tendencies, and in more than one, he is pictured as being participant in, or tacit to, the imminent or recent sexual violation of the female figure of "blind justice."

While the illustrations do more than hint at the violent, dangerous "otherness" of the MAS president, the author's choice of quotes to include is more subtle, and perhaps more revelatory. Of the statements re-printed in the book, many include forms of storytelling that parallel the grammatical turns and uses of metaphor common in Quechua and Aymara.⁷ Although Morales' proficiency in either of these languages is often called into question by his detractors, this choice effectively makes fun of patterns of Spanish-language use that are frequent among non-wealthy Bolivians, particularly those with recent indigenous heritage. Common parlance in urban areas of Cochabamba, even among those who are primarily Spanish speakers, takes similar loans of words, grammar, and metaphor from Quechua, just as urban Quechua borrows from Spanish. "Correct" Spanish is generally the province of those who have had extensive opportunities for formal study, or have grown up surrounded largely by monolingual Spanish-speakers.⁸

⁷ For example, in some instances, Morales is quoted as speaking in incomplete or incomprehensible sentences: *La llajua, comes la llajua cuando te pica quieres más llajua, debe ser así la cocaína, el exceso de llajua te hace daño pero (aunque) está picando (se quiere) más llajua, más llajua; me imagino así* (2012: 48). The short phrases, repetition, and use of incomplete connecting phrases make for expressions which, in Spanish, are nearly gibberish without the addition of clarifying phrases by the author. However, in back-translation into Quechua, the phrasing is much more fluid, the meaning much clearer (*Llajuata, llajuata mikhunki, khashkijtin aswan munanki; jinallatachá cocaínaqa kanman; achka llajuata mana wallejchu, chaywanpis khashkijtin aswanlla munanki; jinallata, yuyani*). In other selected quotes, Morales refers to the Colombian President, César Uribe, as a *chapulín* (grasshopper; 68); describes himself as Bin Laden and his followers as the Andean Taliban (69); and suggests, presumably exaggerating for effect, that since transgenic crops cause baldness, in 50 years, all barbers will be unemployed (110). While these statements sound frivolous and highly politically incorrect within a medium where cultured, diplomatic Spanish is the norm, the equivalent metaphor and whimsy in Quechua would be much more run-of-the-mill, and might be admired for its creativity.

⁸ In Cochabamba, much Spanish usage takes takes grammatical cues directly from Quechua, and does so in ways which are not "technically correct" in Spanish. For example, to express the idea of "there" or "in that place," many Spanish speakers will use the term "*en allí*," which is grammatically incorrect in Spanish, but a direct translation of "*kaypi*" in Quechua. Further, verb tenses in Quechua do not have a one-for-one correspondence with verb-tenses

What Rodríguez Peña implicitly pokes fun at in *Evadas*, then, is not just Morales' eloquence or lack thereof, but rather an alternate way of seeing, interpreting, and representing the world through language, made visible by the transposition of indigenous grammar into Spanish speech. This visibilization of "radical alterity"⁹ is incomprehensible to the point of ridiculous when viewed through the lens of an urbane, cosmopolitan Spanish-speaking elite.

While these forms of opposition demonstrate the subtle continuity of a long and pervasive history of racism, the Left's response to has not been unimpeachable. When faced with detractors, Morales and his party often respond by delegitimizing the opposition, suggesting that they have been brainwashed by the long hangover of Spanish colonialism. In May 2013, during a series of protests against his government, carried out by the major national labor union and its allies, Morales accused the protestors of trying to provoke a coup, proclaiming, "...eso no es una reivindicación sino una acción política. Convoco a defender primero la democracia y, si somos parte de este proceso, defender el cambio." (*.. this is not justice, but rather a political action. I convoke [you] to defend first, democracy, and, if we are part of this process, to defend change*; Chipana, 2013)

By invoking the "process of change" Morales referred to the long history of indigenous and civil rights protest, denominated the *proceso de cambio*, which had brought him to power. This was coupled with a call to his base - the rural farmers - to march on the cities in a show of numbers and physical strength, and implicitly to goad the unions into proving whose side they were on. Within a few hours of Morales' call, violence broke out at one rural union roadblock, and for several days, there was a palpable threat of physical confrontation between these two groups, which had been united in their support for him in past presidential elections. After dramatic

in Spanish, and Spanish tenses are often deployed in ways that are not entirely grammatically correct, but make perfect sense in back-translation into Quechua. For example, in Quechua, a single conjugation (*ñoqa ruwani*) may represent near past, present, and future, depending on the context. An additional conjugation (*ñoqa ruwarqani*) translates approximately to the preterite in Spanish (*yo hice/I did*), but implies a finality and boundedness to the action which limits its use far more than the use of the preterite in Spanish. An additional tense – formed from the same root as the past participle – is frequently translated as the simple past perfect (*ñoqa ruasqani/yo había hecho/I had done*), and is often used to describe an action which, in the course of the story the speaker is telling, led into a subsequent action in the same story. Finally, another tense approximately corresponds to the Spanish imperfect (*ñoqa ruwaj kani/yo hacía/I did or used to do*), which describes an ongoing action providing context or background to the story the speaker is telling. Where the non-correspondence between these tenses and Spanish grammar becomes apparent is in back-translation; even my Quechua teachers, experts in both languages, and the textbooks they work from, have differences as to when *ñoqa ruasqani* should be translated as "*yo había hecho/I had done*," "*yo hacía/I used to do/did*," and "*yo hice/I did*." This indeterminacy also extends into Bolivian popular parlance. In Cochabamba, it is exceedingly common to hear individuals describe an action they did in the past in Spanish using the past perfect (*yo había ido/I had gone*), even in contexts where, in strict grammatical terms, the preterite (*yo fui/I went*) would be formally correct.

⁹ Drawing from Lacan, in her discussion of the Australian settler response to Aboriginal ritual sexual practices, Povinelli short-hands radical alterity as that which, in the encounter, emerges as "repugnant and repulsive" (2002: 64).

and much-reported negotiations, political compromise was eventually reached, and major violence was averted.

For a Bolivian who is neither a member of the party faithful, nor of the opposition, it can be hard to know what to make of these political twists and turns. I was presented with a particularly poignant example of this one Friday night while chatting with a taxi driver. When the subject of the MAS government came up, the man first expressed approval, saying that the government had done many good things, and that he was in favor of the notion that more power and resources should be brought to those who had, for so long, been deprived of their benefits.

But a few phrases later, he also expressed a sense of ambivalence. It was good, he suggested, that there were new efforts to honor historical traditions -- *ch'allando* to the *pachamama*, for example, or recognizing the Andean New Year celebration, which falls on the June solstice. But past a certain point, these expressions didn't quite sit right with him.

"Por decir, querían re-nombrarle a ésta 'La Avenida de la Pachamama,'" (*For example, they might have wanted to re-name this "Pachamama Avenue"*), he explained, gesturing outside the taxi toward the wide, tree-lined avenue which at the heart of Cochabamba, which we were driving down. The street is known as El Prado, but formally named Avenida Ballvian, after a Bolivian-born leader of the 19th-century revolution, who subsequently became one of the country's first presidents. As the avenue down which major parades are routed, connecting directly to the square where the offices of the municipal government sit, the street is also the symbolic heart of the city.

The driver punctuated the observation with something incredulous - *can you imagine?* – underscoring that he found the suggestion objectionable, but leaving unspecified precisely what it was that bothered him. Then, we reached my destination. I paid the fare and walked away, imagining some of the vexing questions that might have filled his silence. How many ceremonial re-namings does it take to reverse the effects of 500 years of inequality? At what point does recognizing one set of oppressed histories effectively do violence to another set? To legitimate a forgotten past and a disadvantaged people, is it necessary to discredit anyone falling outside of this group?

5. *Cocina Novo-Boliviana: Cultivating a pluri-national palate*

The president and co-founder of the *Club de Cocina Boliviana* has piercing blue eyes, and pays keen attention to the politics of personal interaction. I learned early-on that when we made an appointment, I should expect it would take place at the day and time we had planned, and I should show up on time, or early. If I faltered around these things - not outside of the realm of

common behavior in Bolivia - he did not hesitate to point it out, reminding me that he was accustomed to respect and follow-through. At first I was irritated by this, but my skepticism subsided when I saw that he made an effort to extend the same courtesies to me and others.

I had read about the monthly meetings of the *Club* in the local newspaper, in a social-events section called *Sociales VIP*. After my first or second meeting with Chef Jaime, the president, he invited me to an event that he was putting on with another chef, a dinner at one of Cochabamba's fancy downtown hotels. This formed a part of the ongoing *Mes de la Cocina Boliviana* (Month of Bolivian Cuisine), a national-level celebration designed to raise awareness of the nouveau-Bolivian cuisine movement. The theme of the dinner was *Un paseo por el valle* – a reference which could suggest a tour either through the valley of Cochabamba, or the neighboring Valle Alto, a region of diverse, small-scale agricultural production, and thriving Quechua language and culture. Intrigued, I found a girlfriend to join me, and reserved two tickets.

The dinner was held in the ground floor restaurant of a fancy hotel downtown. (The *Club*, the chef had assured me, usually held its events in four- or five-star hotels.) The lobby was brightly lit, with floor-to-ceiling windows, and leather couches. There was something about the way the reception staff looked at me when I walked in – alone, having arrived before my friend - that made me wonder if I was a little under-dressed.

The restaurant itself was tastefully designed – as if the owners had taken a page from a lifestyle magazine. The décor was earth-tone-themed, with sage-green walls and gently contrasting tablecloths, cloth napkins, and centerpieces. Live music was provided by saxophonist, who was playing jazz and Brazilian samba. Unfortunately, the attempt at create a chic ambiance was hindered by the balance on the speakers, which was off, and compounded by the fact that the saxophonist squeaked every few phrases.

When I arrived, only one other table was occupied. A producer of artisanal beers, who I recognized from previous food fairs, was accompanied by a small group of family or friends. By the time the restaurant filled up, I estimated 20-30 guests, mostly aged 30 and above, consisting of well-dressed families, and older couples. My friend and I were the only obvious foreigners in the group. The chit-chatting around us was entirely in Spanish; I heard no Quechua spoken.

Dinner, when it started, was served in multiple courses, designed to provide a sampling of the different dishes produced in and around Cochabamba. A small *licor de fresa* (strawberry liquor)

was served as an aperitivo. The appetizer was a *pesto de huacataya*¹⁰ – a dish made from boiled wheat kernels mixed with a green sauce, molded elegantly on a white plate. This was accompanied by thin, shaved slices of *cordero ahumado* (cured sheep), which had a smoky flavor halfway between beef and pork.

Next, as a palate cleanser, they served a *chicha dulce*, a sweet version of the fermented maize drink commonly drunk in rural areas of the Andes. Typically, chicha is served in a *tutuma* – the halved shell of a coconut – which is dipped into a communal jug, and then passed around from person to person. In this case, the *chicha* was served in a white wine glass. The taste was reminiscent of cider, but with a yeasty odor.

Then came the main course: a selection of local dishes, arranged artfully on a large white plate. There was an *aji de lentejas* (a spicy lentil and beef stew), another *ají* made with pulled chicken, a molded yellow concoction, some boiled purple potatoes, and finally, a *habas pejto*. This version, like Rogelio’s preparation at *El Huerto*, included reconstituted charque in a red sauce. Like the other, it was tasty, perhaps my favorite of the dishes on the plate. For dessert, they served a water-based *helado de canela* (cinnamon sorbet).

The dinner was an impressive display, but small details seemed conspicuous in their absence. Some of the main dishes were flawlessly delicious, but others were curiously lacking in flavor, a function, perhaps, of the challenges of having few hands in the kitchen to prepare such a wide variety of plates. My friend also pointed out the lack of *llajua* or bread. These were key elements characterizing meals in the rural area where she had lived, and the idea of a “typical” Bolivian meal being served without them seemed strange.

The service was also a little incongruous. The waiters seemed distracted and somewhat stressed, sometimes serving one item to our two-person table, and then making the rounds to several more tables before remembering to bring us the second. When we asked them to tell us about the dishes they were serving, they stumbled, either not knowing the names of the items on the plate, or mistaking the ingredients. For example, one told me that the *pesto de huacataya* had been made with basil, rather than the Andean herb. While they were clearly professionally trained wait-staff – either hired for the event or on-salary at the hotel – this event’s purpose of showcasing local cuisines seemed to fall outside of their comfort zone.

The root of some of the dissonances in this *Paseo por el Valle* became a little clearer later, when I had the chance to interview Chef Jaime’s co-chef, Enrique. Having worked as a chef for some 18 years, he had first-hand knowledge of the Bolivian food scene, and particularly of the

¹⁰ *Huacataya* is the Peruvian name for an Andean herb frequently used in *llajuas* and sauces. Like *kilkiña*, it has a minty, earthy flavor. In the Quechua spoken in and around Cochabamba, it is more commonly known as *suico*.

evolving *Cocina Novo-Boliviana* movement. He spoke animatedly about movement's the potential; about the wide variety of ingredients available from the country's diverse array of eco-regions; about the delightful variation in recipes for any single dish; and about the aspiration that Bolivia might gain international recognition as a culinary powerhouse, like neighboring Peru.

But Cochabamba was a hard market for this project, he admitted. Despite having been declared the *Capital Gastronómica de Bolivia* (the gastronomic capital of Bolivia), *cochabambinos'* appetite for gourmet food was limited; urban Cochabamba residents often judged a meal first by the quantity served, and only second by the quality of the ingredients. A well prepared dish which failed to meet the standard of price-to-quantity ratio would not be well received.

Integrating indigenous or local dishes into the up-market restaurant scene was also a challenge. Cochabambinos would rather eat a *habas pejto* shaped in a mold and served on a square white plate than on a traditional *plato de barro* (red clay plate), he asserted. For these foods to be accepted in a gourmet market, there must be some differentiating factor – a stone plate, a white plate – something to mark the difference between these dishes and those sold at roadside stands, or community food fairs.

By this time I knew I was interested in learning more about *habas pejto* specifically, and had learned from Chef Jaime that at the *Club's* event, this dish had been Chef Enrique's preparation. Why, I asked, had he chosen that particular dish to prepare that night?

He responded in a round-about fashion, telling me a story about how, when he had been president of a prominent local chefs' association, an initiative had arisen within the local government to sponsor a contest to choose the single dish most representative of Cochabamba. He had fought against it, he told me, because it ran counter to the reasons why the region had been selected as the "gastronomic capital" in the first place. This distinction hadn't just been bestowed upon the city, but upon the entire department, which spans ecoregions ranging from the sub-tropics to the high-altitude *puna*. This diversity of environments, ingredients, and local delicacies were what made Cochabamba stand out – and in the same spirit in which he had argued against narrowing Cochabamba's gastronomic fame to any single dish, at the *Club's* dinner, he had wanted to use the opportunity to underscore the wide array of tastes and preparations that this unique environment made possible.

Both of the two chefs at the head of the *Club de Cocina Boliviana* are members of a privileged class of *cochabambinos*. Both speak perfect Spanish, and at least one speaks Quechua; when I asked how he had learned to cook, he responded that his mother had largely left his upbringing to their household employees. He had "been raised in the kitchen" – and learned not only how to prepare local dishes from local ingredients, but also how to speak Quechua.

As is almost uniformly the case among chefs I've interviewed, the path to professional food preparation for these men was neither direct, nor easy. Both chefs had turned to the kitchen after trying other professional careers, and in the end, finding them unfulfilling. Despite their relative success and prestige, underscored by their participation in a "gourmet" sphere, both chefs were struggling with a project larger than – even if linked to – their own financial success. How can national food be made into a source of national pride? How can these local resources be used not only to gain validation from abroad, but also to create a sense of what is uniquely, and collectively "ours"? These questions ran through not only their descriptions of their own aspirations, but also the ways in which they learned about, sourced, and prepared their food.

6. Two theoretical roads diverged in a forest of habas...

The first challenge, when it comes to placing these data in an academic framework, is not a dearth of theoretical options, but rather an abundance.

For example, one possibility would be to explore the power and limitations of discourse on "valuing indigeneity" or "valuing the local." A keen observation by Paulson (2006) offers an entry point. Paulson notes renewed national interest in Bolivian indigenous festivals in recent years, a process occurring in conjunction with an ascendancy of indigeneity on the national stage. However, while urban celebrations are largely focused on appearance and pageantry, rural celebrations are much less visually oriented, emphasizing the bodily practices of food preparation and ingestion. Paulson relates this difference to the long heritage of discrimination against Bolivian indigenous peoples, which portrays their bodies and practices as "dirty and racially inferior" (2006: 650). She expands, "Because ritual meals, like people who become strong and united by eating them, are inseparably meaningful and material, they challenge the type of multiculturalism that privileges symbols and products of indigenous identity while disregarding the extreme material inequalities engraved on Bolivia's bodies and landscapes" (ibid, 662).

The three *habas pejtos* discussed here offer a fertile jumping-off point for building on Paulson's observations. While easily coded as the most "authentic" version of a dish conceived as having rural origins, the material differences between Doña Deisy's simple *habas pejto* and the more complex preparations served by professional chefs are not incidental. Absent in her preparation were both meat and heavier spices, which would likely have had to be sourced outside of her household's modest production, requiring hard-won cash. Further, the inclusion of these ingredients would have implied slow-cooking over a fire or gas burner, increasing costs in time and fuel use. Even ingredients and preparation practices, then, signal the broader, ongoing material inequalities between an indigenous, rural household and the public to which urban Cochabamba restaurants cater.

Further, at the level of cultural politics, restaurant food preparers' tendency toward more complex preparations of the dish risks undermining the authenticity of the knowledge and practices of Doña Deisy, and women like her. Lamentations are often voiced about the "castellanización" (castillianization) of contemporary Quechua language, reflecting concern that the purity of the language been degraded by the incorporation of loan words and grammar from Spanish. The comparison between Deisy's simple dish and the complex preparations being "revived" as the traditional object hints at a similar possibility: that the country version of *habas peyto* may be discounted as having lost the complexity of "true" indigeneity. Such a derision might, indeed, reflect material differences in preparation; but might well also ignore the extent to which a fundamental principle structuring home-made *habas peyto* is the judicious use of limited available resources. When placed on a "gourmet" playing field, which emphasizes the material complexities of a given dish, the complexity of the careful decision-making engendered by conditions of poverty and struggle seems unlikely to survive as a characteristic conferring "authenticity."

It would be a small step from here to consider the extent to which the process of transforming a rural dish into a restaurant-worthy plate recurs to Foucaultian practices of governmentality. Other scholars (e.g. Li, 2007; Lazar 2008) have noted that the interventions of government, international organizations, and NGO's in the lives and livelihoods of poor people seek to create not just certain kinds of economic outcomes, but also certain kinds of citizens. Similar observations might be made about the focus on hygiene characterizing the urban restaurant scene. Hygienic preparation is frequently raised as a key differentiating factor between reputable Cochabamba restaurants and rural or low-income alternatives, just as the unhygienic nature of indigenous foods has historically been considered a factor limiting their urban consumption (Sammels, 1998). In a context where "indian" and "dirty" have long been mutually defined, the extent to which cleanliness is emphasized as a key factor differentiating the "new" Bolivian cuisine is indicative of more subtle pressures that privilege and shape certain kinds of indigenous subjects, while devaluing others.

Another avenue for understanding these three *habas peytos* would be to consider the relationships linking gender to labor, power, and resource use, as played out in the formalization of "traditional" foodways. Doña Deisy's un-remunerated, household "reproductive" kitchen labor contrasts sharply with Rogelio's paid culinary work. But while Doña Deisy may prepare food in the company of friends, and receives the positive feedback of direct involvement in nourishing her growing family, Rogelio is most consistently accompanied by his worries about the economic survival of the restaurant. His culinary knowledge is derived primarily from experience serving food to people he loves, but at *El Huerto*, his dishes are served to paying customers, with whom his connections are likely to be fleeting, even if genuine. Nonetheless, the self-exploitation that comes from turning his labor into a commodity

is acceptable to him, at least for now, as he tries to provide for himself and his family options which go beyond those available to a rural family, like Doña Deisy's.

Meanwhile, professional chefs and upscale fusion restaurants make efforts to inscribe themselves at the top of a cultural and economic hierarchy. While the chefs themselves may be deeply committed liberal social ideals, their target audience includes those who can afford to pay 70-100 bolivianos (\$10-14) per meal, a sum out of reach for most poor or middle class Bolivians. These chefs may not be getting rich – indeed, they may struggle economically – but in a context where money begets money, the success of both their culinary and cultural projects requires that these be tailored to the aspirations and expectations of upper-class urban *cochabambinos*. Just as in the context of other patterns of resource use (cf. West, 2006), the transformation of “traditional” foodways from household preparation to a market framework has deep implications for the social relationships linking producer, preparer, and consumer.

7. The trouble with binaries

These theoretical avenues, not to mention others, merit exploration. Even at the halfway point of my research, I don't doubt it would be possible to write internally consistent, and morally defensible essays using these frameworks.

What worries me is not what data I might include. Rather, in considering how to construct these arguments, what worry me are the observations I would have to leave out.

A first conundrum is how to deal with the fact that the individuals I've come into contact with consider themselves to be addressing “real” concerns -- social, economic, and environmental issues which have material impacts on human lives and livelihoods. One of these (which I share) is concern for the fate of Bolivia's considerable and unique agrobiodiversity. On one hand, a high-brow food culture derived primarily from European tastes and aspirations offers little room for ingredients derived from the local geographic context, or from indigenous traditions. On the other, a popular food culture structured primarily by the exigencies of poverty – coupled with the fact that pasta, rice, and other processed starches are frequently cheaper than Andean grains or native potatoes – seems a poor omen for the future of popular demand for native and traditional foods. The loss of native and traditional crops is, in many ways, driven by the same patterns of inequality that a critical social-theoretical reading would aim to decry.

In this context, actors from across the socio-economic spectrum perceive the opening of new markets for local crops as a positive development – one which has the potential to promote the maintenance and use of agrobiodiversity, to bring more money into food insecure households (allowing them, if not better food security, at least a wider range of choices), and to contribute to a slow but worthy process of cultural change. Bolivia is a country fraught with racism and

inequality – but are the actors I describe at fault for being embedded in this hierarchy? By interpreting their activities as bare self-interest in the struggle for economic and discursive power, I risk ascribing them with a false-consciousness that delegitimizes any individual agency, any will for positive social change.

I feel a similar ambivalence about the critique of hygiene. True, one need not scratch too deep beneath the surface of the discourse on the cleanliness of food and food preparers to find racist and discriminatory tropes. But on the other hand, the impacts of parasites, bacteria, and other microscopic disease agents are hard to ignore. My own recurrent gastrointestinal battles during fieldwork are evidence enough for me that these illnesses have real and palpable impacts on human capacity. How, then, I wonder, do we weigh our advocacy? Measuring the need to combat the oppressive potential in campaigns for hygiene, on one hand, against the urgency of addressing the structural inequalities that disproportionately expose young children from poor families to the effects of chronic undernourishment, on the other, seems a mean and distasteful task.

My hesitation to interpret these patterns of social interaction exclusively through the harsh lenses of power and hierarchy is perhaps heightened by the possibility that agrobiodiversity might contribute to a shared sense of Bolivian “plurinationality.” In Andean Latin America, previous attempts at creating a shared sense of national identity have turned around the fraught notion of *mestizaje*, a term describing an ethnic category that is the product of racial mixing between Europeans and indigenous groups. As Weismantel (2001) points out, although in theory a racially inclusive vision of the world, when operationalized, the notion of *mestizaje* relies on defining the relationship between any two individuals in binary terms, turning on the question of which is “whiter.” So much is this the case that *mestizaje* has been described as “an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion” (Stutzman, 1981).

But unlike *mestizaje*, at its best, the movement to revalue Bolivian ingredients and dishes is far too intricate for the application of easy binaries. The material nature of native and traditional foods, or “fusion” cuisine, resists an easy categorization of the “native” and the “foreign.” Rather, these material objects offer the opportunity to talk about differing ecoregions, and the trade relationships among them. They provide examples of dishes that deftly combine five, eight, or fifteen ingredients, or multiple cultural influences. Even within a single named dish, there is room for plurality – for multiple recipes, multiple preparers, and multiple “secret ingredients,” making each version of the dish unique. Although Chef Enrique’s debate with the municipal government demonstrates that, on one hand, the Cochabamba food scene is not immune to the impulse to hierarchically categorize, it also demonstrates that food may offer unique avenues to resist this tendency.

8. Considering Kitchen Spaces

It may be that my inquietude about the adequacy of available theoretical frameworks is, quite simply, a function of my stage of fieldwork. Perhaps, when I've packed up my things and returned to my books in New Haven, one or the other of these avenues will appear more clearly to me as the correct way forward for analysis.

But I would like to think that my doubts reflect a deeper theoretical conundrum. At least as operationalized, analyses of the relationship between the social and the material usually focus on the ways in which resource use is governed by – or alternatively, at the root of – social divisions. While we have ample tools at our disposal to understand the origins, history, and persistence of such divisions, we have far fewer avenues for seriously considering the *generative* power of the material world. Our interactions with goods, things, places, and the people attached to them may lead to new ways of thinking, acting, and identifying ourselves – but a theory that would encompass these interactions without wandering into the realm of metaphysics is elusive.

Put another way, one of the reasons why the avenues of analysis discussed above ring hollow to me is that I see little place in them for understanding the very basic things I learned while preparing *habas peyto* in the sunshine with Alicia and Doña Deisy. How do I describe, in a more than merely anecdotal way, the finesse, and hard work involved in shelling favas? Or the know-how and persistence necessary to turn something inedible or even poisonous into something delicious? Or the fact that these are tasks which transform not just the food items, but the physical body of the food preparer? It is easy to see the *metis* in these everyday tasks (à la Scott, 1998). But in the absence of an authoritarian state, or indeed, significant interest by anyone other than an anthropologist in what rural women do in the kitchen, this line of argument presents few obvious next steps.

And what of realization that "doing something useful in the kitchen" may be as simple as holding the cook's baby for a while, freeing her hands to do something else? While seemingly trivial, this issue hints at a broader commonality among many of the food preparers I've interviewed. Almost without exception, when asked how they learned how to cook, my interviewees have ended up telling me about their families. A grandmother in Colomi learned to cook at a young age, when her mother died and she was tasked with caring for herself and her siblings. Another successful chef found his first interest in cooking after running away from an abusive household. Living on the streets and working for a living, he eventually discovered that he could earn a free meal by cooking alongside urban market women, and his skills and career grew gradually from there. Others, like the elite chef in Cochabamba, hinted that the kitchen was the place in their household where they had the most access to warmth and love

when they were young, and from which they could share these affections as they grew. Time and again, individuals expressed satisfaction when they remembered preparing, for the first time, a dish that pleased a sibling, a parent, or a spouse.

Here, at the risk of overreaching, I'll venture an assertion. My discomfort with the available theoretical avenues may stem from the fact that kitchen spaces are a particular and special kind of site for the study of the generative nature of social interaction. Kitchen spaces - or put more broadly, the social and physical spaces in which food is prepared, served, and eaten – offer a unique position from which to take seriously these small details of affect, these anecdotal but nonetheless real ways in which material goods build, change, and reflect human relationships. While food preparation and consumption certainly have potent capacities to symbolize and reflect social difference, these sites also provide unique environments for collapsing, redefining, and restructuring difference, creating surprising new senses of similarity and unity across existing divides.

9. Back at the fork in the road...

This is all well and good, but the problem of placing it in a theoretical framework remains. On some level, to assert that the behaviors and interactions observable in kitchen spaces has been neglected by mainstream theory is nothing new. The feminist critique of Marx has soundly brought home the point that, by writing off the "reproductive" sphere, he suggests that an entire domain of human activity falls outside of the realm worthy of analysis. Attempts to bring this domain back into the picture by assigning it economic value aren't of much help either; assigning an hourly wage to women's work may quite literally bring it into the equation, but does little to help us understand the ways in which the social aspects of human economic behavior may act as catalysts for other forms of sociality. Observers of this phenomenon – in gendered spheres of activity and beyond – have discussed such catalyzing behaviors under the umbrellas of mutuality (Gudeman, 2008), reciprocity (Mayer, 2002), or moral economy (Scott, 1976), to name a few.

But what worries me, when considering these frameworks, is how to find a place for the material, understood not just as power and resources, broadly defined, but rather as specific objects. Is there a way in which the flavors, textures, and culinary potential of specific native and traditional crops might figure into these analyses as something other than a footnote?

I find inspiration - though not necessarily an answer - in literature exploring how objects, technologies, and actors interact to create new meanings and phenomena. Among these, Mitchell on the mosquito (2002); Callon's "dissident scallops," (1986); and of course, Latour's Actor Network Theory merit mention. But particularly when thinking about the gritty nature of harvested-from-the-farm ingredients, Keane's observations about the mutually constitutive

relationship between materiality and meaning resonate with me. “Even the most conventional signs are instantiated in material forms,” Keane writes. “They are, at least to that extent, subject to material causality. Conversation requires a shared language and a medium of communication; yam prestation requires a garden; the phone call requires electricity and a telephone – something so obvious as to be commonly overlooked” (2005: 200).

In wrestling with my data, I am looking for a way to take seriously Bolivia's historical inequalities without discounting the difference between a slow-cooked *ají* and a spicy *locoto*, or the potential for the enjoyment of these two ingredients to transcend lines of race and class. What would it take to expand on Keane, and ask how the material nature of objects is related not just to the meanings assigned to the words we use to name them, but also to broader patterns of *meaning-making* in which they are embedded? How do we arrive at a framework which allows us to understand not just the deep material divisions of society, but also the ways in which material objects can generate new meanings, alliances, and potentials?

10. On sovereignty and selfhood

As a final note - perhaps an epilogue, particularly for the current audience - I have lately been thinking a great deal about the political stakes of choosing one theoretical framework or another.

In the medium in which I work in Bolivia, criticisms of the current government are voiced with care and conservatism. Bolivian practitioners in environment and rural development often see themselves as part of a broader national project, which reached a zenith when Morales came to power. Among this group, critiques of specific policies - like the government's approach to TIPNIS, or its willingness to mine in the Uyuni salt flats, despite the rhetoric about the rights of Mother Earth - are common.

But most Bolivians in this sphere shy away from wholesale attacks on Morales' person, remembering the history that preceded his success, and the long road that they all walked to make his election possible. While Morales' politics may not be perfect, it is difficult to deny that the MAS government, by its very existence, has overturned a long, discriminatory historical trend. By the same token, there is also a pervasive, and perhaps well-founded sense that something far worse remains lurking in the political shadows.

But every now and then - in a quiet, private moment - I hear a deeper concern. What should we make of a movement that came to power riding the wave of inclusion for the long-excluded, and now seems to be adopting the same exclusionary tactics as its predecessors? Where do we draw the line between justice and revenge?

In *Evadas*, the first words with which Morales is introduced to the reader are the following: “No estamos de visita, no estamos de paso, no estamos de inquilinos. Hemos llegado al palacio para quedarnos para toda la vida” (*We are not visiting, we’re not just passing through, we’re not renting. We’ve arrived at the palace [the seat of government] to stay for all our lives*; Rodríguez Peña, 2012: 10). These words, spoken after his first election, are used to locate Morales within a group of Bolivian presidents whose megalomaniac tendencies propelled them toward failed dictatorships, doing more damage than good to the nation. The implication is that the reader should be on guard; that, despite the appearance of triumphant democracy, Morales is just another *caudillo*, this time in indigenous clothing.

One response might assert that the author’s interpretation of Morales’ statement is underpinned by a fundamental misunderstanding of the Andean notion of self; that there is no “self” without family or community; and that the “we” in this statement is not a “royal we” (meaning “I”) but rather a collective “we”, meaning “we, the indigenous people, the descendants of the original owners of this continent.” In this sense Morales’ “we” may be interpreted not as a veiled pretension to *caudillismo*, but rather an expression of a collective wish not to be ruled over by a foreign-descended elite. And what could be more democratic than this?

But what is telling, I think, is to consider an alternate critique-from-within. A friend - an older Bolivian, who by any measure has earned full stripes as an advocate for democracy and equality -- understands the current national project in the context of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s. “In that time,” he tells me, “we made a point of reminding ourselves, reminding each other, that none of us - not you, not me, not anyone - none of us was indispensable to the movement. If one of us was lost, there would be another to take his place.”

To pause for a moment, it seems worth pondering the implications of this alternative formulation of the role of the non-Western self in emancipatory politics. This is a vision certainly - and directly - influenced by the left-wing revolutionary philosophies of the 20th century. But it is also distinctly marked by an Andean sense of the self, defined by the family, community, and the environment. Academic discussions underscore the “de-centering” of the self, an expansion of the “I” so that its edges overlap with the “they” or the “we.” But the formulation my friend posits is one in which the “we” persists, even after a gradual peeling away of the I’s. His quiet critique of the current leadership posits a self which is part of a whole, but *only* one part; nothing more.

For the purposes of our conversation in this forum, this is the point at which, for me, Bolivia takes a back seat, and the idea of food sovereignty as a movement becomes a central concern.

What, we might ask, are the stakes of aligning sovereignty with the politics of a political party or a particular ethnic group? What if the party deviates from its ideals? What if the ethnic group turns out not to fit the iconic image of the "noble savage," and instead to consist simply of individuals, each with as much potential as any other for triumph and failings in the face of life's complexities? To the extent that food sovereignty is a movement with universalist pretensions, founded on the notion that all individuals deserve both adequacy and autonomy in their food choices, these possibilities are concerning.

But perhaps these questions are more provocative – and less helpful for movement-building – than would be my ultimate intent. Rather, perhaps I should pose the question this way: Can we imagine a sovereignty that consists not only of power and control, but also of small daily sacrifices, of the blending of self with other? Can we see sovereignty in a mother's choice to put slightly more food on her child's or her husband's plate, even knowing that she will eat a little less? Can we recognize both the tragedy and the triumph in a child's choice to wake up early and prepare food for his or her siblings, filling a role otherwise left unfilled? Can we define sovereignty in a way that not only advocates for people to have enough resources, but honors creativity in the face of dearth? Can we imagine food "sovereignty," in other words, without depending on the notion of the sovereign individual?

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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A CRITICAL DIALOGUE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES

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A fundamentally contested concept, food sovereignty has — as a political project and campaign, an alternative, a social movement, and an analytical framework — barged into global agrarian discourse over the last two decades. Since then, it has inspired and mobilized diverse publics: workers, scholars and public intellectuals, farmers and peasant movements, NGOs and human rights activists in the North and global South. The term has become a challenging subject for social science research, and has been interpreted and reinterpreted in a variety of ways by various groups and individuals. Indeed, it is a concept that is broadly defined as the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system, and to produce sufficient and healthy food in culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable ways in and near their territory. As such it spans issues such as food politics, agroecology, land reform, biofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), urban gardening, the patenting of life forms, labor migration, the feeding of volatile cities, ecological sustainability, and subsistence rights.

Sponsored by the [Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University](#) and the [Journal of Peasant Studies](#), and co-organized by [Food First](#), [Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies \(ICAS\)](#) and the [International Institute of Social Studies \(ISS\)](#) in The Hague, as well as the Amsterdam-based [Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#), the conference “Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue” will be held at Yale University on September 14–15, 2013. The event will bring together leading scholars and political activists who are advocates of and sympathetic to the idea of food sovereignty, as well as those who are skeptical to the concept of food sovereignty to foster a critical and productive dialogue on the issue. The purpose of the meeting is to examine what food sovereignty might mean, how it might be variously construed, and what policies (e.g. of land use, commodity policy, and food subsidies) it implies. Moreover, such a dialogue aims at exploring whether the subject of food sovereignty has an “intellectual future” in critical agrarian studies and, if so, on what terms.

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