

New Left Experiences in Bolivia and Ecuador and the Challenge to Theories of Populism

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Abstract. This article explores a paradox at the heart of New Left populism in Bolivia and Ecuador – namely, the election of populist leaders in movement societies. Employing Laclau’s theory about the emergence of populism, it demonstrates how social movements, not charismatic leaders, first constructed the popular identities that laid the foundations for these regimes. In re-examining theories of populism in light of these cases, this article suggests that populism’s transformative and counter-hegemonic potential needs to be given renewed attention, and that the central role of charismatic leadership should be qualified in terms of the origins of populist identity formation.

Keywords: New Left, indigenous movements, social movements, populism, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, Ecuador, Bolivia

Introduction

More than any other region in Latin America, the New Left in the Central Andes has been associated with populism. Presidents Hugo Chávez (now deceased), Evo Morales and Rafael Correa have frequently been referred to in both the press and scholarly literatures as populists, albeit representing a new type of ‘radical populism’, an appellation meant to distinguish them from the neopopulists of the 1990s.¹ They are classified as populists for several

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¹ The term ‘radical populism’ has been used to refer to these cases by Carlos De la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010); and Adolfo Gilly, ‘The Emerging “Threat” of Radical Populism’, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 39: 2 (2005), pp. 37–45.

reasons: the importance of their charismatic authority; their moves to concentrate power in the executive; the utilisation of oppositional discourses that pit the virtuous ‘people’, or in Correa’s case, ‘the citizens’, against a corrupt enemy, usually traditional party elites; and the plebiscitary tendencies and apparent willingness of all three to flout the constraints of liberal democracy.

The elections that brought New Left governments to power in Bolivia and Ecuador were preceded by long waves of social movement organising and popular contestation. While protest preceded the election of New Left governments in several countries, Ecuador and Bolivia stand out not only for the length and intensity of these waves, but also for the central role played by powerful movement organisations in them.² The pairing of strong social movements and populism in the rise of the New Left is puzzling from an empirical and theoretical standpoint because populism is not generally thought to coexist easily with or emerge out of organised civil societies. Indeed, populism has often been thought to emerge in contexts characterised by weak and unorganised civil societies. Similarly, social movement organisations, which tend to value autonomy from the political sphere and horizontal participatory democracy, are often hostile to populism, which is characteristically associated with top-down types of organisation. Finally, the Latin American Left tended historically to reject populism as a political project that obfuscates rather than enlightens the masses.

This paper, then, is motivated by a series of questions. How did leftist social movements contribute to the election of radical populists in Bolivia and Ecuador? Why did two of the longest and strongest waves of social movement organising in the region culminate in the election of New Left leaders of a ‘populist’ bent? What are the similarities and differences between this new radical populism and classical and neoliberal populism? What challenges does the emergence of this new cohort of radical populists pose for theories about the origins and nature of populism?

² In Venezuela the infamous *Caracazo*, in which spontaneous protests against austerity measures in 1989 turned into rioting that was violently repressed by the government, is considered a key event that accelerated the party system crisis, thus helping to pave the way for Chávez’s election nearly a decade later in 1998. See Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* (London and New York: Verso, 2007). Néstor Kirchner was elected on the heels of massive protests following Argentina’s 2001 economic crash. Differently than in Venezuela and Argentina, where surges in popular protest tended to be episodic and spontaneous, in Ecuador and Bolivia mobilisations were organised by national movement organisations. These countries exemplify what Vanden refers to as ‘the emergence of highly politicized social movements’, which he argues represent a fundamental shift from traditional politics to new democratic participatory forms: see Harry E. Vanden, ‘Globalisation in a Time of Neoliberalism: Politicised Social Movements and the Latin American Response’, *Journal of Developing Societies*, 19: 2–3 (2003), pp. 308–33.

The paper seeks to contribute to theoretical discussions of both the New Left and populism by examining the origins of these radical populist regimes and in particular the role played by organised civil society in their ascension to power. The analysis is restricted to the years leading up to Morales' and Correa's elections in 2005 and 2006 respectively, and does not attempt to analyse the conflictive evolution of social movement–government relations after they assumed office. During the last several years Correa's and Morales' relationships with some key social and indigenous movements have grown increasingly tense, even at times antagonistic. Morales has battled politically with lowland indigenous organisations over the government's plans to build a highway through the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore (Isiboro Sécore Indigenous Territory and National Park, TIPNIS). In Ecuador, many in the indigenous movement have moved from initial qualified support for Correa to outright opposition, with much of the conflict stemming from social movement objection to the president's insistence on opening up ecologically fragile territories to large-scale mining and the grave threats this poses to the environment, water supplies and native populations. While not denying the importance of more recent developments for analysing the New Left and populism, this study focuses on these regimes' origins, arguing that they are distinct from earlier populist experiences and thus offer an opportunity to re-examine theoretical assumptions.

Utilising Laclau's theory, which emphasises the creation of an oppositional popular identity as the essence of populism, this paper argues that in Bolivia and Ecuador this crucial work of constructing new popular identities was accomplished first and foremost by indigenous and social movements, and that the charismatic leaders piggybacked on rather than instigated this process.³ This finding indicates that the overriding emphasis in theories of populism on the central role of charismatic and unmediated leadership needs to be attenuated. Contrary to assertions made by many theorists, populism is not limited to societies characterised by weak civil societies or those that lack autonomous social organisation.

There is by now a fairly clear picture in the scholarly literature of the factors and developments that explain the electoral sweep of leftist movements and parties throughout the region.⁴ These include the deleterious social impacts of

³ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

⁴ Patrick Barrett, Daniel Chavez and César Rodríguez-Garavito (eds.), *The New Latin American Left: Utopia Reborn* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Maxwell A. Cameron and Eric Hershberg (eds.), *Latin America's Left Turns: Politics, Policies, and Trajectories of Change* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2010); Matthew R. Cleary, 'Explaining the Left's Resurgence', in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner and Diego Abarte Brun (eds.), *Latin America's Struggle*

neoliberalism on poverty and inequality; party system crises; the economic crisis that hit the region from 1998 to 2001; and the rise of new social actors, in particular social movements. In Bolivia the role that waves of social protest played in preparing the way for Morales' dramatic electoral victory has been well documented.⁵ The Ecuadorean case is a bit different in that anti-neoliberal protest peaked and then dropped off in the years immediately preceding Correa's victory. Correa's election came on the heels of another type of social protest led not by the organised social movements but instead by a more spontaneous group of urban middle-class citizens. While Correa's movement is most closely associated with the *forajido* revolt that brought down President Gutiérrez, I will argue that it owes as much to the earlier anti-neoliberal protests.⁶

This study focuses on two main mechanisms by which organised social movements contributed to the rise of these New Left governments: the construction of new popular identities and the development of broad national political agendas. Many of the key ideas, proposals, platforms and even framing of the issues eventually adopted by Morales and Correa were first articulated and pushed into the public discourse by the social movements. Movement agendas were framed by an oppositional construct that many scholars consider constitutive of populism, that of 'the people' and some 'other' who threatens their interests and those of the nation. In this sense social movements can be considered the incubators of these future campaigns, and the important role played by organised civil society differentiates these projects from both neoliberal and classical populism. Secondly, the new popular identities forged by the social movements diverged in important ways from earlier national-popular identities associated with classical populism: indigenous movements in particular played a central role in fusing elements of the older

for Democracy (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 62–76; Steven Levitsky and Kenneth Roberts, 'Latin America's "Left Turn": A Framework for Analysis', in Levitsky and Roberts (eds.), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 1–28.

⁵ Luis Tapia, 'Bolivia: The Left and the Social Movements', in Barrett, Chavez and Rodríguez-Garavito (eds.), *The New Latin American Left*, pp. 215–31; Jeffery R. Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2011); Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons: Past and Present in Bolivian Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

⁶ For analyses of the *forajido* revolt see the special edition of *Íconos* (no. 23, Sep. 2005, FLACSO-Ecuador). On the connection between this revolt and the origins of Correa's Alianza PAIS (PAIS Alliance, AP), see Marta Harnecker, *Ecuador: una nueva izquierda en busca de la vida en plenitud* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2011).

national-popular agendas with new identity demands to produce new notions of nation and people.⁷

Furthermore, by focusing on Laclau's insight that the constitution of new identities is central to understanding populism and by demonstrating how this occurred and contributed to transformative (albeit contested, even by many on the left) political projects in Ecuador and Bolivia, this study supports the theoretical interpretation of populism as a transformative political project, often associated with expansions in democratic inclusion. This conceptualisation contrasts with minimalist definitions that reduce populism to a political style used by charismatic leaders primarily to win and exercise power. These definitions, I contend, overlook the transformative and counter-hegemonic dimension of populism. This article then lends support to interpretations of populism that are able to account for its potential for inclusion and transformation and which recognise variation between populist projects in terms of the role played by organised civil society.

The article begins by offering an overview of the evolution of the concept of populism, focusing on definitional modifications made in light of the rise of neopopulism in the 1990s. This is followed by a review of Laclau's model of populism. In the third section I apply Laclau's model to the Ecuadorean and Bolivian cases by examining developments during the decade or so preceding the elections that brought Morales and then Correa to power. This analysis is based on a reading of the secondary literature as well as primary research conducted in both countries beginning in 2008 (including interviews with political and social movement leaders) and archival research primarily of media sources. I explore how in response to neoliberalism, social movements combined national-popular traditions with plurinationalism to forge fundamentally new political agendas. The fourth section examines the question of leadership and argues that while social movements may have created these new popular identities and agendas, a leader with the ability to appeal broadly to sectors beyond the social movement base was needed in order to win elections.⁸ I explain why a social movement leader rose to power in Bolivia, whereas in Ecuador the social movement project was eventually incarnated in a charismatic outsider. The fifth and concluding section sums up the main arguments made and reflects on some of the differences between radical populism, neopopulism and classical populism.

⁷ On the conjuncture of the national-popular tradition and indigenous politics in Bolivia, see Pablo Stefanoni and Hervé Do Alto, *Evo Morales, de la coca al palacio: una oportunidad para la izquierda indígena* (La Paz: Imprenta Cervantes, 2006); and Pablo Stefanoni, '*Qué hacer con los indios...*' *Y otros traumas irresueltos de la colonialidad* (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2010).

⁸ This is similar to Madrid's argument that Latin American indigenous parties are only successful when they broaden their appeal beyond their ethnic base: see Raúl L. Madrid, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

*The Search for a Workable Concept: Theorising Populism
from Perón to Fujimori*

Populism has been notoriously difficult to define. The first wave of scholarly work on classical populism (1930s–1950s) produced a number of approaches. Theories emphasised the role of charismatic leadership, multi-class make-up of the populist base, particular types of statist and redistributive economic policies, and the tendency of populists to flout liberal democratic institutions and conventions. Some scholars suggested that populism was the product of a unique stage of development as countries transitioned to industrialisation.⁹ Since most of the classical examples combined these characteristics more or less consistently, the diversity of components was not terribly problematic, and scholars tended to construct multidimensional concepts combining various factors – economic, political and social – which seemed to fit together in a coherent whole.¹⁰ Exceptions, such as Velasquismo in Ecuador, were often discounted or categorised as ‘diminished sub-types’.¹¹

However, the rise of neoliberal populists in the 1990s led to a re-examination of these earlier definitions as they manifested some but not all of the characteristics associated with classical populism. Figures like Fujimori in Peru and Argentina’s Menem presented a conundrum: they were leaders who clearly employed populist strategies and discourses, but their neoliberal policies were at odds with the statist and redistributive economic projects associated with classical populism, and the social bases they relied on for support were different to those characteristic of the earlier period. Two distinct solutions were proposed: one was to jettison multidimensional definitions altogether in favour of a simpler unidimensional definition, and the other was to further refine the multidimensional definition so that it could encompass both classical and neoliberal variants.

Weyland and Knight exemplify the first option, in which the definition is pared down to focus on a single domain, namely politics. For these theorists populism is essentially a distinct political style; they reject the inclusion of

⁹ Examples of this approach include Gino Germani, Torcuato S. di Tella and Octavio Ianni, *Populismo y contradicciones de clase en Latinoamérica* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1973); and Carlos M. Vilas, ‘Latin American Populism: A Structural Approach’, *Science and Society*, 56 (1992–3).

¹⁰ I draw here on Weyland’s discussion of concept formation: see Kurt Weyland, ‘Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics’, *Comparative Politics*, 34: 1 (2001), pp. 1–22.

¹¹ Velasco Ibarra was the most important Ecuadorean politician for a good half-century. While his charisma and fiery rhetoric gave him the trappings of a populist, Quintero López argues that his policies did not advance lower-class incorporation: see Rafael Quintero López, *El mito del populismo en el Ecuador: análisis de los fundamentos del Estado ecuatoriano moderno (1895–1934)* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala and Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 1997).

economic policies, working-class make-up or association with a particular stage of development as defining characteristics.¹² Weyland argues for a definition restricted to two key characteristics: personalistic leadership and unorganised mass support. Similarly, Knight characterises populism as a political style that includes personalism, a 'proclaimed rapport with "the people"' and a 'them-and-us' mentality.¹³

Roberts' work on Fujimori exemplifies the other strategy, that of further refining the multidimensional definition so as to account for this new subtype. His definition includes five core properties: a personalistic and paternalistic leadership style; heterogeneous, multi-class political coalitions; top-down forms of mobilisation; an eclectic, oppositional ideology; and an economic project aimed at shoring up popular support either through redistributive policies or clientelism.¹⁴ Among the key differences he observes between Fujimori and the classical populists is the class make-up of the constituent base. In the case of the neopopulists, the working class is no longer that important; instead, the social base is far more heterogeneous and includes an important role for the informal sector. In order to account for this, Roberts redefines the populist support base more broadly as the subaltern sectors, as opposed to the working class. He also notes that while classical populists often organised their core constituencies, neopopulists took advantage of and further exacerbated the atomising effects of neoliberalism. Further, he observes that while the oppositional other of the classical populists was the oligarchy, for the neopopulists party elites emerge as the main enemy of the people. Likewise, the economic nexuses with the people that populist regimes build are different in each case: redistributive under classical populism, and clientelistic under neopopulism. Finally, Roberts identifies the 'absence of institutionalised forms of political mediation between the leader and his followers' as a key identifying feature of neoliberal populism.¹⁵ He argues that populism emerges in contexts of crisis when intermediary institutions, such as political parties and labour unions, are emasculated and where the organisational capacity of the popular sectors is weak.¹⁶ In this reading, then, it is the absence of organisational and institutional vehicles for representation that creates the opportunity for populism. Weyland and Knight also stress this as a key aspect. De la Torre takes issue with this characterisation of unorganised support, noting that the poor usually are organised and that populist leaders often

¹² Alan Knight, 'Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30: 2 (1998), pp. 223–48; Kenneth Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case', *World Politics*, 48: 1 (1995), pp. 82–116; Weyland, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept'.

¹³ Knight, 'Populism and Neo-populism', p. 223.

¹⁴ Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism', p. 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

utilise their networks and organisations to cement their connection to the masses through clientelistic distribution of goods and services.¹⁷ De la Torre instead suggests that populism is the product of weak citizenship regimes, in which the poor and marginalised are denied fair and equal treatment by the law, economic opportunity and security, and are thus forced to rely on powerful patrons.

To what extent are these approaches useful in understanding current radical populist variants? Certainly the New Left in the central Andes has been associated with charismatic leaders, all three of whom have employed oppositional discourses that emphasise the virtue of 'the people' against some corrupt and illegitimate elite, often the traditional political class. In fact, the anti-party rhetoric employed by Morales and Correa is strikingly similar to Fujimori's attacks on the traditional political class, or *partidocracia*. Second, many scholars have noted that these leaders have developed ambiguous, if not antagonistic, relationships with liberal democracy, with some scholars viewing them as threatening democracy and others asserting that they deepen democracy by pushing beyond the confines of liberalism.¹⁸ Whichever perspective one takes, the tendency to concentrate power in the executive and bypass constitutional barriers does bear some resemblance to the governance style of the neopopulists. The heterogeneous make-up of support is another similarity, with both Correa and Morales winning support not only from the popular classes but also from important portions of the middle class.

However, a striking difference is the assumption that populism is always associated with unorganised mass support or, especially, societies characterised by weak autonomous political organising. This is clearly not the case in either Bolivia or Ecuador, which are both characterised by strong social and indigenous movements and fairly high levels of autonomous political organising among the popular classes. Even De la Torre's point that organisation usually exists among the lower classes does not fully encompass the experience in Ecuador and Bolivia, because he is referring more to local and clientelistic types of organisation and machine politics than to autonomous national movements. When it comes to social movements he suggests that there will necessarily be tension between these more autonomous forms of organisation and populism.¹⁹ And while there has been significant

¹⁷ De la Torre, *Populist Seduction*, p. 209.

¹⁸ Critiques of radical populists based on the claim that they are undermining liberal democracy include Jorge Castañeda, 'Latin America's Left Turn', *Foreign Affairs*, 85 (2006), pp. 28–43; and Javier Corrales, 'Hugo Boss', *Foreign Policy*, 152 (2006), pp. 32–40. Cameron and Sharpe, on the other hand, offer a strong defence of constituent power as the essence of democracy: see Maxwell A. Cameron and Kenneth E. Sharpe, 'Andean Left Turns: Constituent Power and Constitution Making', in Cameron and Hershberg (eds.), *Latin America's Left Turns*, pp. 61–78.

¹⁹ De la Torre, *Populist Seduction*, p. xiv.

tension in Morales' and Correa's relationships with social movements during their years in office, this does not negate the fact that they came to power in countries with powerful, organised, autonomous social movements.

If populism, then, is not always the result of weak or unorganised civil societies, what are its origins? On this point Laclau's approach, which focuses on the process of identity construction, offers a more promising avenue. In his exploration of how the idea of *lo popular* is constructed, we see populism not so much as a political style but instead as a political project, and by focusing on the process of identity formation we get a richer understanding of the origins of New Left radical populism.

Populism as the Construction of 'the People'

In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau rejects analyses that reduce populism to charismatic leadership and emotional, even irrational, connections between leaders and citizens. Instead, he argues that the amorphous notion of 'the people' in populist rhetoric should be understood as the manifestation of a successful construction of a new political subject out of a structural situation of disunity and fragmentation.²⁰ In his analysis of how this new political subject is constructed, the leader plays an important role but the process begins previous to the leader, in the experience of political struggle.

According to Laclau, the process of constructing *lo popular* begins with a plurality of demands on the state from different classes and social sectors. Initially these demands are sectorial – that is, pertaining to the interests of particular groups; they do not have much to do with each other, and at this stage Laclau refers to them as 'democratic demands' or demands for redress of particular grievances without yet contemplating an overall critique of the state.²¹ The first step in the formation of a popular identity is the 'equivalential articulation' of these separate and isolated demands that have gone unsatisfied by the state.²² In other words, as actors make claims on the state and the state is unable or unwilling to respond effectively to them, a sense of connection and similarity may develop between them. In Laclau's words, this generates 'the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating "the people" from power'.²³ It is this series of unsatisfied demands and an emerging sense of connection between them that makes the emergence of 'the people' possible. However, according to Laclau, the process is not fully realised until political mobilisation has reached a higher level and these demands are unified into what he calls a 'stable system of signification'.²⁴ In other words, the notion of *lo popular* has to be symbolically constructed, and this is done in

²⁰ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, pp. 117–23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 72–5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the heat of political struggle. Often the charismatic leader serves to symbolically unite these demands into a coherent whole. Eventually isolated demands are united and transformed into a general demand for broad change in the status quo.

While other definitions of populism have associated its emergence with a crisis of representation, for Panizza populism goes beyond simply a change in political affiliation at a moment of crisis. It does not wean people off one political identity and attach them to another; instead, he claims that populism has to do with incorporating sectors or interests that were previously excluded from representation in the state. In this sense, populism is associated with 'the beginning of representation'.²⁵ Panizza's approach, which is in line with Laclau's, dovetails nicely with the observation often made about classical populism that it served to advance the political incorporation of the working class. The idea of incorporating actors and interests that had previously been excluded implies a challenge to the status quo. Panizza proposes understanding populism fundamentally as an 'anti-system discourse that simplifies the political space by dividing society between "the people" and its "other"'.²⁶ And again, building on Laclau, he asserts that the analytical core of populism is 'the constitution of the people as a political actor'.²⁷ In other words, identity construction is the central step in this process of challenging the status quo. Populism is not associated with a particular class or ideological agenda, but instead can be identified with a diversity of political movements that seek to mobilise and incorporate previously excluded groups into the political system through this process of creating a political discourse that produces new oppositional identities. The actual substance of what 'incorporation' entails can be fairly wide-ranging: under classical populism it involved not only expanding suffrage but also the corporatist incorporation of the working class. Roberts observes that neopopulism was much less inclusive than classical populism. Where classical populists built powerful parties and empowered trade unions, neopopulists made no attempt to organise their bases.²⁸

One problem with Laclau's approach is that it risks becoming so broad as to include any sort of anti-system or anti-status-quo movement. On what basis, for example, are we to differentiate between populism and revolutionary movements? Indeed, in discussing the development of oppositional discourse and identity formation, Laclau references examples from revolutionary Russia at the start of the twentieth century.²⁹ Certainly, revolutionary movements and populism are not the same, and we must be able to distinguish between

²⁵ Francisco Panizza, 'Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy', in Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 1–31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism', p. 115.

²⁹ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 97.

and analytically separate the two. Laclau at times seems willing to expand his conceptual framework so far that it loses specificity. For example, Arditì points to sections in *On Populist Reason* in which Laclau seems to assert that populism, defined at its core by the oppositional dynamic, is in fact 'a component of all politics'.³⁰ Panizza also challenges this tendency in Laclau, comparing his claims about politics equalling populism to other essentialist and universal claims, such as liberals' assumption that politics can be free of antagonism, or Marx's prediction of a classless society at the end of history.³¹

Despite Laclau's hubris, however, his approach is important and interesting in that it associates populism not only with an anti-system discourse, but presumably also with a process that aims at substantive political change involving the constitution and incorporation of new political actors. And if we examine the paradigmatic examples of populism from the 1930s to the 1950s, incorporation was not simply a question of rhetoric, but was realised by significant expansions of citizenship rights, including improvements in socio-economic rights, increased political power for working-class organisations and often expansions of suffrage to the lower classes.³²

However, the transformative and counter-hegemonic potential of populism has largely been ignored or downplayed since the 1990s, in part as a consequence of attempts to redefine populism so as to include neopopulism. New pared-down definitions have focused on populism as a political style and strategy adopted by charismatic leaders in pursuit of political power. Weyland's definition, which reduces populism to the two essential features of personalistic leadership and mostly unorganised mass support, exemplifies this trend. He argues that such an approach 'is most attuned to the opportunism of populist leaders and their weak commitment to substantive policies, ideas, and ideologies'.³³ In his rendering, populism is an ideologically vacuous political and rhetorical strategy designed to win power by manipulating the unorganised masses.

Ecuadorian populists José María Velasco Ibarra and Abdalá Bucaram fit Weyland's description reasonably well. In his ethnographic work on Bucaram, De la Torre reveals that many of *el loco's* supporters were not true believers but instead viewed him as the better alternative to other elite candidates and liked the way he chastised and snubbed the powerful and identified with lower-class

³⁰ Benjamin Arditì, 'Review Essay: Populism is Hegemony is Politics? On Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*', *Constellations*, 17: 3 (2010), pp. 488–97.

³¹ Panizza, 'Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy', p. 28.

³² While populism in the developed world may involve other sectors besides the poor and working class, in Latin America it has generally been associated with the popular classes. For studies of populism in the developed world, see Yves Mény and Yves Surel, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³³ Weyland, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept', p. 11.

culture.³⁴ In the end, Bucaram's political project was more about cronyism than systemic change. Similarly, Quintero López has argued that Velasco Ibarra, far from using populist discourse to challenge the existing system, served to uphold a conservative status quo, namely the power and privilege of the landowning classes.³⁵

But the fact that populist discourse has sometimes been used absent a transformative project does not mean that in its essence it is about political opportunism. This conclusion deflects attention from populism's important counter-hegemonic potential. In fact, most of the paradigmatic populist leaders, such as Perón and Vargas, did not merely 'talk the talk' but actually implemented changes that challenged the status quo and resulted in greater inclusion of the working and lower classes. Neopopulism is the great exception, because populist strategies were employed to implement neoliberalism, a fundamentally more exclusionary economic model. However, even in this case populist strategies were associated with transformative political projects, albeit ones that promoted radical restructuring of the state and economy in order to undo the very gains made by the working and popular classes during the statist period. Indeed, in order to pursue their radical right-wing agenda, neopopulists had to employ more than populist rhetoric. Roberts explains how Fujimori used targeted social programmes aimed at the poor to bolster public support for his overall programme.³⁶ Today's radical populists, by contrast, represent a swing back towards the orientation of classical populism, using populist strategies not just to attain power but to pursue far-reaching political and economic changes aimed at expanding socio-economic and citizenship rights to the popular classes.

Pappas proposes the term 'Radical Mass Movements' to describe the meteoric rise of such disparate political leaders as Papandreou in Greece, Milošević in Serbia, and Venezuela's Chávez.³⁷ He locates these 'Radical Mass Movements' between revolutionary and reformist movements based on the scope of change they seek to bring about, but he also differentiates them from social movements because they revolve around a leader and seek to gain power through institutional mechanisms. What is useful to the present discussion is his placement of these movements on a continuum between revolution and reform. Adopting this approach with regards to populism would help us to avoid Laclau's tendency to subsume all of politics within populism, as well as

³⁴ Bucaram was often referred to as *el loco*, or 'the crazy one', by both supporters and detractors for his outlandish comments and behaviour. See De la Torre, *Populist Seduction*, p. 97.

³⁵ Quintero López, *El mito del populismo*.

³⁶ Roberts, 'Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism', pp. 102–8.

³⁷ Takis S. Pappas, 'Political Leadership and the Emergence of Radical Mass Movements in Democracy', *Comparative Political Studies*, 41: 8 (2008), pp. 1117–40.

the tendency of other scholars to redefine it so narrowly as to strip it of its connection to political change.

Ever since Castañeda's polemical article that divided Latin America's New Left into 'good' and 'bad' regimes, with the 'good' ones (Brazil, Chile, Uruguay) associated with moderate social democratic policies, and the 'bad' ones (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador) characterised as populist, scholars have been working to define the differences between these regimes.³⁸ Luna provides a useful distinction. He argues that all New Left regimes seek to move their societies towards greater economic and social inclusion, but while the overall goals may be similar, the difference lies in the strategies employed to pursue them. For Luna, Castañeda's 'good' Left is more aptly described as 'ameliorationist/institutional', in that it pursues these substantive goals through institutional means and reform. By contrast, Luna rebrands Castañeda's so-called 'bad' Left as 'radical/constituent', meaning that its goals are deeper and more far-reaching, as it seeks not only to reform but in fact to reconstitute politics and to re-found the nations in which it exists.³⁹ This phenomenon is clearly captured in the constitutional rewriting process that has been so central to the Andean New Left. Thus, New Left radical populism is characterised by an agenda that aims at change in the terrain between reform and revolution. In this it differentiates itself from the non-populist New Left that seeks reformist solutions to the challenges of poverty, inequality and social inclusion. Radical populism is distinct from neoliberal populism in its rejection of neoliberalism, and particularly in emphasising substantial increases in social investment and the role of the state in the economy. It is also distinct from neopopulism in its coexistence with and, in some cases, fostering of social mobilisation. There is, however, variation among New Left populists in terms of the degree to which each embraces and encourages social organisation and mobilisation, with Morales seeking to manage – some might say co-opt – Bolivia's heterogeneous social movements, Correa ignoring or attempting to discredit them when they disagree with him, and Chávez having encouraged various types of social organisation under the umbrella of the Bolivarian Revolution. While the important role played by autonomous social movements differentiates New Left radical populism from classical populism, both variants are similar to one another and different from neopopulism in their pursuit of inclusionary political change.

This brings us back to identity formation, because attempts at more radical socio-economic change, at least in the context of democracy, cannot be

³⁸ Castañeda, 'Latin America's Left Turn'.

³⁹ Juan Pablo Luna, 'The Left Turns: Why They Happened and How They Compare', in Cameron and Hershberg (eds.), *Latin America's Left Turns*, pp. 23–39.

undertaken without a mass movement or mass support. Most studies of populism, as well as Pappas' analyses of 'Radical Mass Movements', see these as orchestrated and driven by a charismatic leader. In other words, populist movements are hierarchical and leader-driven. However, in Ecuador and even more clearly in Bolivia, this was not the case, at least in the pre-election period. The next section examines how in each country social movements initiated and advanced this critical task of building broad societal consensus around the need for radical change. This process was eventually embraced by these two leaders, each of whom contributed to its further redefinition, but it started at the grassroots, not at the leadership level.

Social Movements and the Construction of 'lo popular' in Bolivia & Ecuador

The story of the emergence of the New Left in Ecuador and Bolivia contrasts with that of Venezuela, because while social unrest and public dissatisfaction with the status quo were key factors facilitating Chávez's election in 1998, the unrest was not coordinated or organised. As a result Chávez was the one both to name the source of popular anger and to design a solution, a new political project to be pursued. He played the role attributed by Panizza to other great populist leaders, like Perón and Haya de la Torre, of being the master interpreter of some 'inchoate, previously unarticulated identity'.⁴⁰ By contrast, in Ecuador and Bolivia the role played by the leader in this critical process of constituting 'the people' was less important.

In Ecuador the 1990 indigenous uprising was a pivotal historical moment, representing the coming of age of the indigenous movement on the national political stage. In his study of the uprising, León explains that there were a variety of grievances and demands that motivated participation: land rights, credit and aid, bilingual education and so on. But ultimately all these merged into a common demand for the recognition of indigenous peoples' right to be 'different citizens', ones who possessed full citizenship rights without having to give up their own unique cultural identities.⁴¹ His characterisation of indigenous demands for citizenship bears some resemblance to James' interpretation of Perón's significance for Argentine workers.⁴² James suggests that Perón's popularity stemmed not only from his responsiveness to working-class demands, but more importantly from his embodiment of an expanded notion of citizenship. By asserting a 'social dimension of citizenship'

⁴⁰ Panizza, 'Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy', p. 10.

⁴¹ Jorge León, *De campesinos a ciudadanos diferentes* (Quito: CEDIME, 1994).

⁴² Daniel James, 'Perón and the People', in Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo (eds.), *The Argentina Reader* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 273–95.

that recognised the importance of addressing social and economic rights, Perón's discourse and actions pushed citizenship beyond liberalism's emphasis on the individual and legitimised collective representation of interests within the state. Similarly, Ecuadorean Indians challenged liberal notions of democracy by calling for a redefinition of citizenship that would recognise collective identities and embrace plurinationalism.

With the emergence of a unified indigenous identity, Indians were the first to overcome ethnic and sectorial barriers and to realise their common condition as a people separated from power, to use Laclau's terms. Over the course of the next decade the indigenous movement would be the organising fulcrum around which an even broader popular movement would develop in opposition to the neoliberalising state. During the 1990s neoliberal initiatives by the government provoked reactions from a variety of sectors of civil society. The agendas and demands of these groups were initially separate and distinct. For example, what did privatisation of the state oil company have to do with agrarian reform or bilingual education? During the first half of the 1990s, however, these groups began to recognise that they were united in their opposition to the state's neoliberal agenda. To use Laclau's term, the 'equivalential articulation' of these demands began to develop.⁴³

As indigenous mobilisational power grew, its leaders engaged in analysis which led them to realise that they shared common interests with other sectors of Ecuadorean society in opposing the government's neoliberal austerity agenda. Public sector unions and other social movements were drawn to the dynamic indigenous movement and sought to work in coalition with it and build on its strength. This unity between indigenous and other popular sectors crystallised in a 1995 campaign to block passage of a package of neoliberal reforms. Public sector unions, together with indigenous and other social movements, mounted a national campaign that succeeded in defeating a public referendum initiated by the president which would have provided public approval for constitutional changes needed to open the way for the privatisation of strategic public sector enterprises. This campaign set the stage for the birth of Pachakutik, a new political movement that would be the vehicle for social movement participation in formal politics, in 1996. In an interview that year, the founder of Pachakutik and the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador, CONAIE), Luis Macas, described the new party in these terms:

Pachakutik is a structure for working in politics that belongs to the social movements that have been working for some time now on specific actions and agreements, such as the struggle of the petroleum workers, the electrical workers, the indigenous

⁴³ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 74.

movement ... Urban popular and women's organisations, human rights activists, ecologists, and other groups are also part of the movement. Pachakutik is the political expression of all these movements and emerged because we need a space that facilitates our ability to work together in the political arena.⁴⁴

Looking back at how movement actors described what they were doing when they formed Pachakutik, it is clear that a common discourse developed that transformed separate and specific demands into broader ones having to do with rights and citizenship. Napoleón Saltos, one of the leaders of the umbrella group of non-indigenous social movements that co-founded Pachakutik, summed up the political movement's mission: 'The message was simple, we are going to defend our homeland, social security, and the strategic areas; we are going to defend our rights.'⁴⁵ Another protagonist stated Pachakutik's vision in even more utopian terms: to build 'a country in which everyone has a place'.⁴⁶ Pachakutik thus represented the articulation of different demands and sectors into a united opposition to the state, following the pattern described by Laclau. This process deepened and escalated from 1996 to 2002 and was punctuated by the unusual military-indigenous coup that ended Jamil Mahuad's presidency in 2000.

In 1999, economic crisis deepened into a financial collapse; in response, President Mahuad authorised a major bank bailout and froze depositors' accounts, followed by austerity measures. After a year of protests against these measures, including two major indigenous uprisings, on 21 January 2000 indigenous and social movement protestors were joined by rebellious military officers in the congressional building in Quito in a dramatic, high-stakes day that ended with Mahuad's resignation. A military-indigenous triumvirate held power for a few hours before the military high command withdrew its support and installed Mahuad's vice-president as the new head of state. The clarion call of the rebellion was against the corruption of the reigning political class. This unusual episode crystallised the social movement evolution from demands for reform to an agenda aimed at profound political change. Following Laclau's model, these demands were no longer about the redress of specific grievances, but instead manifested the antagonistic and oppositional dividing line that had arisen between the people and the politicians. The indigenous leaders and military officers who participated in the short-lived takeover spoke of

⁴⁴ Luis Macas, 'Un proyecto para construir un nuevo país', in Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (ALAI) (ed.), *Por el camino del arcoíris: ensayos y testimonios* (Quito: ALAI, 1996), pp. 7–8.

⁴⁵ Napoleón Saltos G., 'Una historia sencilla y sorprendente', in ALAI (ed.), *Por el camino del arcoíris*, p. 37.

⁴⁶ Osvaldo León, 'En la antesala del tercer milenio', in ALAI (ed.), *Por el camino del arcoíris*, p. 33.

representing 'the people' and preventing the pillaging of the country by corrupt politicians.⁴⁷ Antonio Vargas, at that time CONAIE president and a member of the short-lived triumvirate, addressed on that day 'all the people of Ecuador' and enthusiastically declared: 'The people are now in power and we are going to triumph!'⁴⁸ Clearly the notion of 'the people' that Laclau argues is an essential part of populism was articulated by the social movements several years before Correa ran for president.

The popular identity constructed by Ecuadorean social movements was distinct from older national-popular traditions in that it included the notion of plurinationalism. Ecuadorean social movements succeeded in fusing post-modern identity and cultural concerns with the older national-popular tradition to produce a new national-popular identity that embraced the diverse cultural and ethnic make-up of the nation and the right to differentness. In so doing, Pajuelo Teves argues, Andean indigenous movements have done nothing short of reinventing the 'imagined communities' that constitute nations.⁴⁹ Between 1995 and 2003 Ecuador's indigenous movement made great strides in having its image of the Ecuadorean nation take hold and gain broader popular acceptance. The speed with which this happened is due in large part to the leadership the indigenous movement provided to popular sector struggles and the sense that these leaders were willing to fight not just for themselves but for issues that impacted Ecuador's popular classes in general.⁵⁰ The appreciation for the indigenous movement on the part of many mestizos is reflected in this quote from a local bus owner in rural Ecuador who ran for and won elected office on the Pachakutik ticket in 2000:

I believe the indigenous movement is one of the most organised, and what is more, it is accepted by the people. The 21 January uprising is a practical and direct demonstration of how the people benefitted as a result of the sacrifice of the indigenous comrades. As a result of this uprising we have not had any increase in fuel

⁴⁷ See Jennifer N. Collins, 'A Sense of Possibility: Ecuador's Indigenous Movement Takes Center Stage', *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, 33: 5 (2000), pp. 40–6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Ramón Pajuelo Teves, *Reinventando comunidades imaginadas: movimientos indígenas, nación y procesos sociopolíticos en los países centroandinos* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos and Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2007), pp. 157–60. Pajuelo Teves builds on the concept put forward in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁵⁰ Madrid calls political movements like the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement towards Socialism, MAS) and Pachakutik 'ethnopolitist', reflecting the way they combine ethnic with broader popular demands and agendas and reach out beyond their core ethnic constituency. See Raúl L. Madrid, 'The Rise of Ethnopolitism in Latin America', *World Politics*, 60 (2008), pp. 475–508; and *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*.

and gas prices since June, and we are seeing how today the people have turned in favor of the movement.⁵¹

The recognition and acceptance of the indigenous movement's leadership reflected in this quote attests to a dramatic change in attitudes towards indigenous people and their place in Ecuador, which in turn created greater possibilities for advancing the plurinational agenda.

In Bolivia a similar process of separate demands from distinct sectors of society escalating into a broad agenda for political change occurred within a few years after the culmination of the process in Ecuador. Waves of social protest began in Bolivia in 2000 with the Water War in Cochabamba, followed later that year by two rural rebellions: one in the Aymara *altiplano*, and the other by the *cocaleros* (coca growers). All three were massive protests, but they were each confined to a specific region and organised around different grievances; there was little if any coordination between them.⁵²

The Gas War of 2003 was also not a coordinated effort, but as the protests escalated, more sectors took part and a broad shared agenda of demands for profound political change emerged. Hylton and Forrest characterise these cycles of protest as insurrectionary and argue that they took on a revolutionary character: diverse sectors of society took to the streets, at times literally engaging in combat with the state armed forces.⁵³ They describe a largely uncoordinated process, with mobilisations by one sector inspiring others to take to the streets. Protests against the state were further galvanised by public outrage over violent state repression of protestors, which eventually turned large portions of the population against the government.⁵⁴ State repression was a significant factor in leading many middle-class Bolivians to support the protestors against the state. The specific grievance that sparked the Gas War had to do with the government's plans to export Bolivia's gas, and to do so through Chile. The plan generated widespread opposition fundamentally due to the conviction that the deal would mean less and higher-priced gas for Bolivians and that it was rigged in favour of international companies rather

⁵¹ Interview with Fabian Aguilar, former provincial prefect, quoted in Jennifer N. Collins, 'Democratizing Formal Politics: Indigenous and Social Movement Political Parties in Ecuador and Bolivia, 1978–2000', unpubl. PhD diss., University of California, 2006, p. 373.

⁵² The divisions and lack of unity between the *cocaleros* and Aymara peasants were clearly seen in the way that these protests ended with the government negotiating with and acceding to some of the demands of the Aymara protestors, while marginalising the *cocaleros*. See Jennifer N. Collins, 'Gains for Campesinos, Stalemate for *Cocaleros* in Bolivia', *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, 34: 3 (2000), pp. 1–2. Hylton and Thomson attribute the lack of unity between the two groups primarily to the personal rivalry between Morales and Quispe. See Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, p. 108. ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ By the time of Sánchez de Lozada's resignation, more than 80 protestors had been killed by government forces.

than the Bolivian people. The wave of popular protests went on for more than a month until President Sánchez de Lozada was forced to resign.

The experience of 'Red October' is clearly one in which antagonistic opposition emerged between the popular sectors and the state. Again, following Laclau's pattern for the emergence of 'the people', diverse groups began to see their unity in their opposition to a state that was unwilling to meet their demands and that reacted instead with repression. Hylton and Thomson describe this process eloquently: 'massive popular mobilisations – uniting groups across class and racial-ethnic lines – ultimately confronted state power head-on, calling for structural transformations of the economy and national political life'.⁵⁵ The broad national agenda that emerged during the Gas War came to be known as the 'October Agenda' and included the following demands: President Sánchez de Lozada's resignation, nationalisation of Bolivia's gas, rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, prosecution of government officials for protestors' deaths, and convening of a constituent assembly to rewrite the Constitution. The protestors succeeded in forcing out the president, but the other demands would remain to be taken up by Morales in his 2005 bid for the presidency.

Similar to what happened in Ecuador at the start of the 1990s, in Bolivia a decade later cycles of protest began as isolated, uncoordinated efforts by different groups that escalated over time. In the process, connections were made and a sense of unity in opposition to the state and in the groups' demands for profound political change began to develop, thus embodying Laclau's key characteristics of a populist movement. The articulation of demands and the emergence of broad national and popular agendas for political change was the fruit of the work done by Bolivia and Ecuador's social movement organisations. While these organisations and leaders did not necessarily lead every protest action, they played a crucial role in forging alliances and formulating common agendas. In so doing, they moved forward the process of articulating a 'stable system of signification', by which Laclau means the unification of various demands in such a way that their unity is no longer sensed in a vague manner but is viewed as clear and comprehensible. He suggests that this process happens as popular mobilisation intensifies.⁵⁶

Evidence of the important role played by social movements in the rise of the New Left governments is also found in the incorporation of movement agendas into the candidates' campaign platforms. Both candidates promised to re-found their nations, which involved convening participatory assemblies to rewrite the constitutions, turn back neoliberal policies and facilitate more participatory democratic processes, among other things. In Bolivia, the

⁵⁵ Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 74.

demand to rewrite the country's constitution emerged first during the Water War in 2000 and then again in the heady days of Red October.⁵⁷ In Ecuador this had been a long-standing demand of the indigenous movement, stretching back at least to CONAIE's 1992 political platform. An elected assembly was convened and wrote a new Constitution in 1997, but the process at that time had remained largely under the control of traditional political parties.⁵⁸ Indigenous and social movements had only partial success in shaping the new document, and there was a sense that the process was unfinished. The idea to engage again in constitution-writing became one of the main planks in Correa's electoral campaign.

Two other major themes in both campaigns were economic nationalism and sovereignty. In Bolivia these took the form of the demand to nationalise the gas and petroleum industries. In Ecuador, Correa's agenda, which focused on promises to undo neoliberalism, bargain hard with foreign oil companies and take a strong negotiating stance on the country's foreign debt, was a clear continuation of the anti-neoliberal movement agenda of the 1990s. Thus in both countries, social movements' (re)construction of 'lo popular' served to overcome the disaggregating and fragmenting impulses of neoliberalism.

From Identity Construction to Winning Political Power: The Need for a Leader

While both Morales' and Correa's campaigns reflected the imprint of social movements' forging of new identities and agendas, only Morales emerged out of the movements themselves. The fact that Ecuadorean social movements proved unable to propel a candidate of their own to the presidency is a bit puzzling when compared with Bolivia, considering that Ecuador's social movements began the fight against neoliberalism and achieved greater coordination and unity earlier than was the case in Bolivia. The difference has to do with the unpredictable factor of leadership and movement organisations' ability to coalesce around a strong candidate with broad national appeal. While the process of identity construction and radical agenda-setting can be successfully accomplished under certain circumstances by social movements, the emergence of a leadership figure appears to remain important in terms of actually attaining political power. Winning a national election

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the emergence of this demand during the Water War, see Tapia, 'Bolivia: The Left and the Social Movements', p. 224. Hylton and Thomson talk about the importance of the demand for a constituent assembly during the protests known as Red October: see Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, pp. 138–9.

⁵⁸ For an analysis of the indigenous movement's participation in the 1997 Constituent Assembly, see Robert Andolina, 'The Sovereign and its Shadow: Constituent Assembly and Indigenous Movement in Ecuador', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 35: 4 (2003), pp. 721–50.

requires the ability to win support among a broad swath of voters, including those who remained on the sidelines during periods of social mobilisation but who nevertheless may be receptive to the message. When elections take place in a context characterised by the collapse of the party system and social movements are stridently questioning the legitimacy of the traditional political class, the scenario is ripe for the emergence of a charismatic leader who can embody and project the new popular identity and demands for profound change. This is precisely what happened in Ecuador and Bolivia, with the difference being the type of leader who emerged. In Bolivia a leader emerged from the movements themselves who had the political vision to reach out beyond his movement base just as the insurrectionary energy was peaking. In Ecuador missed opportunities and internal divisions obstructed the emergence of a viable movement candidate who could embody a unifying national message.

Only a few years after its founding, the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement towards Socialism, MAS) coalesced around and became identified with a young, charismatic leader, Evo Morales, just as the surge in protest actions began its sweep across the Bolivian landscape. The political crisis that resulted from these waves of social movement confrontations with the state opened up the possibility for new political actors to contest national power. By the time this opportunity presented itself, MAS had a leader who was nationally known and possessed solid movement credentials. While this was no guarantee of success, having a viable candidate was a necessary first step. Morales also had the vision to see that winning national power was only possible if MAS succeeded at reaching out to sectors beyond the indigenous-peasant movements. In other words, MAS was led by someone who was not tied to a narrow ethnic agenda.⁵⁹

Beginning with Morales' first run for the presidency in 2002, MAS began to expand the party by making alliances with urban popular organisations, miners and other non-rural sectors.⁶⁰ He invited intellectuals and professionals to run for office on the party ticket and later to assume posts in his administration, in part to appeal to urban and middle-class voters. Do Alto explains that the presence of these intellectuals in this campesino party helped to cultivate the idea of MAS as 'an alliance between "commitment and knowledge"'.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Madrid makes this point in 'The Rise of Ethnopolitism'.

⁶⁰ For an analysis of how MAS succeeded in transforming itself from a rural party into one that could also compete in urban areas, see Moira Zuazo, *¿Cómo nació el MAS? La ruralización de la política en Bolivia* (La Paz: Fundación Ebert, 2008).

⁶¹ Hervé Do Alto, 'El MAS-IPSP boliviano, entre la protesta callejera y la política institucional', in Karín Monasterios, Pablo Stefanoni and Hervé Do Alto (eds.), *Reinventando la nación en Bolivia: movimientos sociales, Estado y poscolonialidad* (La Paz: CLACSO and Plural Editores, 2007), p. 83.

In other words, the commitment of the party to social change was unquestionable given its peasant leadership and base, but it also welcomed the collaboration of leftist intellectuals who could offer the capabilities, modern knowledge and education needed to administer government. The selection of Álvaro García Linera, a leftist intellectual and former guerrilla, as Morales' running mate is another example of this effort to broaden the party's appeal.⁶²

In addition to bringing non-indigenous collaborators into the party, MAS eschewed rhetoric that might alienate mestizos and whites, as well as the middle class. This approach is evident in Morales' speeches and campaign propaganda, which refer repeatedly to 'the people'. The slogan from one 2005 campaign poster reads: 'We are the people, we are MAS.'⁶³ The refrain of a song written for the MAS campaign by a popular Bolivian folk group captures this broad embrace: 'All of us together, we are Bolivia ... more, more now we are MAS.'⁶⁴ The frequent reference to the idea of a united Bolivian people of course has strong populist overtones, but while Morales and MAS often referred to 'the Bolivian people', the image they projected of their idealised nation was not homogeneous or a cosmic mestizo race, but a diverse, plurinational people. In his speeches Morales invariably recognised and acknowledged the role played by social movements and sectors of organised civil society in the struggle for a more just world. Campaign spots for Morales and MAS always included images of the diversity of the Bolivian nation: indigenous people from the lowlands and the altiplano, urban people, professionals, workers and miners. These spots reflected an inclusive indigenous-peasant, multicultural agenda. This contrasted with one of Morales' rivals for peasant leadership, Felipe Quispe, who formed his own party in 2000 and maintained an Aymara nationalist discourse that most middle-class Bolivians, non-Indians and even other indigenous ethnicities found alienating. Madrid calls Morales' political platform 'ethno-populist' in that it contains an ethnic agenda but is not exclusive to that and instead attempts to appeal broadly. Significantly the party began seriously pursuing a broadening strategy in 2003, the year of the Gas War.⁶⁵ The timing was

⁶² During Morales' tenure in office, many of these leftist intellectuals have since left the government and/or party, with some becoming vocal critics.

⁶³ From photograph in Benjamin Dangl, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (Edinburgh and Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), p. 196.

⁶⁴ 'Somos MAS' by Arawi. The last line in Spanish reads: 'MAS, MAS ya somos MAS', and plays off the fact that the acronym for Morales' party means 'more' in Spanish. The song can be viewed on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITaWiQYpYqU.

⁶⁵ Zuazo, *¿Cómo nació el MAS?*, pp. 42–3. Zuazo compares the per cent increase in votes for MAS between 2002 and 2005 and finds that at the national level 64.25 per cent of the increase in 2005 came from urban areas, compared to 35.75 per cent for rural areas. Therefore the increase in MAS's urban vote was crucial to Morales' win in 2005.

crucial: MAS was unified around a charismatic figure with the strategic goal of broadening the party's appeal at a time when social movement power had reached its apex and the legitimacy of the traditional political establishment had reached its nadir. The political opportunity for a social movement candidate coincided with the presence on the national stage of such a candidate.⁶⁶

While founded in the same year and also as a coalition of movement organisations, Pachakutik was different from MAS in a couple of important ways. Its original coalition was broader than that of MAS, as it included not only the largest indigenous federation but non-indigenous organisations as well. From the beginning, Pachakutik was neither exclusively rural nor solely indigenous; it was a multi-ethnic party with a strong base in the indigenous movement but also with the ability to attract mestizo electoral support in the Highlands and the Amazon. A second important difference was that Pachakutik was never associated with a single leader, which contributed to its difficulties in competing for the presidency.⁶⁷

If the 2003 Gas War marked the height of social insurrection in Bolivia, the 2000 overthrow of Mahuad represented the apex of social movement influence and power in Ecuador. Despite the controversial, some would say undemocratic nature of this episode, the events of 21 January initially met with overwhelming public approval. According to a poll taken the day of the takeover, 64 per cent of respondents approved of the action.⁶⁸ Ecuadorean citizens were ready for radical political change. Public support for the key player – the indigenous movement – was even higher, at 71 per cent.⁶⁹ In blocking Mahuad's austerity measures, CONAIE had garnered broad public acceptance and appreciation, which translated into impressive gains for Pachakutik in local and provincial elections in May of that same year.⁷⁰ In sum, the combination of the crisis brought on by neoliberalism and the

⁶⁶ This is not to say that Morales' victory was a given. When the early elections were announced in June 2005, initial polls had Morales in third place behind right-wing candidates Jorge 'Tuto' Quiroga and Samuel Doria Medina: see Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, pp. 128–9.

⁶⁷ I have argued that the absence of a single leader reflected more internally democratic and less hierarchical practices and structures within the Ecuadorean indigenous movement as compared to Bolivian indigenous-peasant organisations. See Collins, 'Democratizing Formal Politics', pp. 413–59.

⁶⁸ Zamosc argues that their participation in the triumvirate was a stain on the Ecuadorean indigenous movement's democratic credentials: see Leon Zamosc, 'The Indian Movement and Political Democracy in Ecuador', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 49: 3 (2007), pp. 1–34.

⁶⁹ See Collins, 'A Sense of Possibility', p. 46. This figure is remarkable given that the total size of the indigenous population according to the 2010 census is only 7 per cent.

⁷⁰ In the May 2000 elections, Pachakutik won 27 mayoral races and five of the nation's 22 prefectures.

social movement response to it had given Pachakutik and the indigenous movement name recognition and popular legitimacy, thus positioning them as a potential force in the 2002 presidential race. As in Bolivia, the traditional political establishment was nearly completely discredited, which meant that space was open for new political actors.

As the elections approached, Pachakutik and the movement organisations wanted to identify one of their own to run for the presidency, but unlike MAS there was no hegemonic figure in the party. Instead, a tug-of-war between Pachakutik and CONAIE ensued. CONAIE chose a leader who, while a successful political operator within the movement, was not a viable national candidate. Pachakutik picked an indigenous mayor who would have been a strong national candidate but who did not have enough internal support within the indigenous organisations. The internal bickering left Pachakutik without a candidate, at which point the party began to consider alliances on the left and ultimately made the fateful decision to accept Lucio Gutiérrez's offer to form a coalition. Gutiérrez had been the leader of the military officers who joined forces with indigenous protestors on 21 January 2000, and along with CONAIE's president, Antonio Vargas, and a leftist judge, formed the short-lived triumvirate. This story points to tensions between movement and party dynamics as an important but often unpredictable factor in the ability to translate contestation into electoral heft.

Pachakutik's support was crucial to Gutiérrez's win, and the movement entered government as a coalition partner in 2003. Once in office, however, Gutiérrez moved to the right, abandoning his campaign promises and sidelining his coalition partners. The coalition lasted less than six months and left Pachakutik and the indigenous movement internally weakened and divided and less credible to the broader public. With internal cohesion threatened, many indigenous leaders chose to turn inward and to abandon popular alliances. The negative fallout from the alliance with Gutiérrez helped to justify the argument made by some indigenous leaders for moving away from a 'big tent' philosophy and bringing Pachakutik under more direct control by CONAIE. This led to increasing internal tensions and eventually the abandonment by 2005 of a sizeable group of mostly non-indigenous leaders out of frustration that the party's agenda was being narrowed to only indigenous concerns.⁷¹

In the end, Pachakutik fell victim to the internal crisis within the indigenous movement and was unable to survive as a truly multi-ethnic party. The shift to a narrower, ethnically based agenda further pushed the indigenous movement to the margins of the national political debate. Whereas in the

⁷¹ Interview with Virgilio Hernández, elected member of Ecuador's National Assembly, representing Correa's AP party, Quito, Ecuador, 15 July 2010.

1990s the indigenous movement transitioned rapidly from being the advocate for indigenous rights and recognition to assuming the role of vanguard movement in the fight against neoliberal policies and for a new type of politics, the trend reversed itself after the failed alliance with Gutiérrez. The indigenous movement's retreat from national leftist politics was evident in its conspicuous absence during the next major popular upheaval, the April 2005 *forajido* rebellion. While in 2000 it had been indigenous protestors who joined with rebellious military officers, in 2005 it was the urban middle class of Quito who took to the streets to demand Gutiérrez's resignation.

The decline of social movement influence, however, did not mean that the movement agenda had disappeared. In the lead-up to the 2006 elections the message was in search of a carrier, and it was Correa who ultimately emerged to fill this role. Alberto Acosta, a well-known leftist economist who was a key figure in Correa's campaign and early presidency, characterised the relationship between Correa's candidacy and the social movement agenda this way:

The social, indigenous, and labour movements were weak, they did not possess great power at the time of Correa's triumph, but Correa won the elections thanks to these movements' push. Correa is not a flash of lightning in a clear sky; he is not an outsider in the strictest sense of the word. Correa is the person who was able to synthesise at a specific historical moment all of these proposals of resistance and the construction of alternatives by broad sectors of civil society.⁷²

While Correa himself did not have connections to the indigenous and social movements, he surrounded himself with many who did. During the 2005 campaign he attempted to forge an alliance with Pachakutik, but the indigenous movement, still wary after the Gutiérrez debacle, declined. Correa ended up gaining the support of a number of the activists who had left Pachakutik, several of whom went on to form the nucleus of his campaign.⁷³ Correa's surprising come-from-behind win was due to a number of factors: his appealing personal image and charisma, a creative and sophisticated marketing and electoral campaign that succeeded in condensing and branding the demands and desires for radical political change that had percolated over more than a decade, and of course the political opportunity structure brought about by the collapse of the traditional party system.⁷⁴ Similar to how Morales had to

⁷² Interview with Alberto Acosta, founding member of AP and president of Ecuador's Constituent Assembly, Quito, Ecuador, 23 July 2010.

⁷³ Former Pachakutik leaders who joined Correa's campaign included Augusto Barrera and Virgilio Hernández; the former won election as mayor of Quito and the latter was elected first to the Constituent Assembly and then to the National Assembly.

⁷⁴ See Catherine M. Conaghan, 'Ecuador: Rafael Correa and the Citizens' Revolution', in Levitsky and Roberts (eds.), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, pp. 260–82; and Carlos De la Torre and Catherine M. Conaghan, 'The Hybrid Campaign: Tradition and

make electoral inroads in the urban areas and among mestizos, Correa was successful, where the indigenous and social movements had never been, in building support in the populous coastal region.⁷⁵

While it is clear that Correa embraced the social movement agenda, he has never acknowledged his debt to the movements. His 2007 inaugural address, for example, was devoid of any reference to them. In Correa's rendering, the struggle for a new Ecuador began with the small cohort that initiated his campaign; there is no mention of the years of popular struggle that helped pave the way for change. Correa has championed much of the movement agenda and embodied the popular discourse that the movements forged, while sidelining the movement organisations themselves. Also differently to Morales, Correa has questioned plurinationalism, often marginalising those leaders and organisations that champion this agenda, and instead claims to embrace interculturalism as an alternative to plurinationalism.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Populism is a political style, but historically and contemporaneously it has been more than that. When populism is associated with identity formation and the populist leader relies on this new social actor, 'the people', to pursue inclusive reforms and socio-economic change, populism takes the form of a transformative political project as opposed to an electoral strategy. This was the case with many of the iconic figures of classical populism, and in this way the new radical populists are linked back to them. In terms of this crucial process of identity formation, there are different models of how it may occur. In the classical view, the leader is the key actor who creates the new unifying narrative that identifies the people and their antagonist, but this is not always the case. The stories of Morales' and Correa's rise to power demonstrate that autonomous civil society in the form of social movements also possesses the

Modernity in Ecuador's 2006 Presidential Election', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14: 3 (2009), pp. 335–52.

⁷⁵ Ospina notes that one of the Ecuadorean indigenous movement's weaknesses was its inability to forge strong alliances with representative groups on the coast. See Pablo Ospina, 'Nos vino un huracán político: la crisis de la CONAIE', in Ospina (ed.), *Los Andes en movimiento: identidad y poder en el nuevo paisaje político* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 2009), pp. 123–46.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of these two approaches to the question of indigenous rights and multi-ethnic societies in the Ecuadorean context, see Mónica Chuji Gualinga, 'Diez conceptos básicos sobre plurinacionalidad e interculturalidad', *ALAI*, 2008, available at <http://alainet.org/active/23366>; and Carmen Martínez Novo, 'The "Citizens' Revolution" and the Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: Re-centering the Ecuadorian State at the Expense of Social Movements', paper presented at the 2010 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Toronto, 6–9 Oct. 2010.

ability to structure these powerful populist narratives. In Ecuador and Bolivia these radical presidencies grew out of a fertile political soil enriched by years of social movement organising and protest. Unlike Chávez's Venezuela and many of the examples of classical populism, social movements, not the charismatic leader, were the key constructors of new popular identities and oppositional discourses that facilitated and framed the political struggles for radical political change. Social movements did not always succeed at projecting these narratives sufficiently to win national elections. Charismatic leaders with the ability to embody these new national-popular agendas and appeal broadly to diverse societal groups appear to be necessary to winning national political power in contexts of political decay and disintegration.

Nevertheless, the presence of strong social movements in the construction of new popular identities and political projects would seem to have important implications. First of all, while adopting social movement discourses may be convenient for a candidate running for office, the fact that these positions are ones that civil society has invested in may make it that much harder for the politician, once elected, to ignore or sideline them, as social movements may have a greater ability to prevent the leader from renegeing on campaign promises. When Gutiérrez engaged in bait-and-switch tactics, his electoral coalition disintegrated and he was eventually toppled. Correa has implemented a good portion of the social movement agenda that he ran on, and while he has tended to marginalise the plurinational agenda in favour of interculturalism and much of the social and indigenous movement community today are highly critical of him, he is nevertheless forced to respond when movements on the left criticise him. Similarly in Bolivia, Morales' relationship with the social movements has become increasingly contentious and complex as significant differences have emerged among the country's heterogeneous movements. Even more so than in Ecuador, Morales' complex relationship with the nation's social movements is key to determining the constraints and direction of his political project.

I have argued in this paper that the rise of radical populism and the role that social movements played in this process, particularly in Ecuador and Bolivia, challenge the leader-centric optic and the idea that populism can be reduced to a particular political style of electoral politics. Instead this study supports the idea developed by Laclau and others that populism is at its core about identity construction. The process of forming new popular identities is not one that is constructed by the leader out of thin air, but instead either must capture some unarticulated but latent identity/grievance, or must respond to a new popular identity and agenda that has already been constructed by organised civil society. Populism, therefore, is not necessarily a symptom of a weak or unorganised civil society – indeed, strong social movements in Ecuador and Bolivia helped to propel radical populist leaders to power.

This difference in terms of how the populist identity and project is constructed, and by whom, would seem to be an important differentiating factor between populist regimes: where social movements are strong and play a central role in the process of identity formation that precedes the election of the populist leader, these same movements may continue to serve either as support for the radical populist president in his struggles with opposition forces to push through a more radical agenda, or by contrast as a threat or constraint on the government if the leader does not remain faithful to the political project that the social movements helped to construct. In sum, the presence of strong social movements in the construction of a populist project should help to keep the leader accountable to the agenda to some degree; it may also shape the project in significant ways that make it more likely that the populist discourse will not be simply a vehicle for the election of a charismatic leader, but will instead be the vehicle for some sort of radical challenge to the status quo that pushes beyond reform but does so within the confines of the democratic process.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo explora una paradoja en el corazón del populismo de la Nueva Izquierda en Bolivia y Ecuador, es decir la elección de líderes populistas en sociedades con fuertes movimientos sociales. Empleando la teoría de Laclau acerca de la emergencia del populismo, el material demuestra cómo los movimientos sociales, y no los líderes carismáticos, fueron los primeros en edificar las identidades populares que sentaron las bases para estos regímenes. Al reexaminar las teorías sobre el populismo a la luz de estos casos, el artículo sugiere que el potencial transformativo y contrahegemónico del populismo necesita una atención más fresca, y el papel central del liderazgo carismático debe ser reconsiderado en relación a los orígenes de la formación identitaria del populismo.

Spanish keywords: Nueva Izquierda, movimientos indígenas, movimientos sociales, populismo, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, Ecuador, Bolivia

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo explora o paradoxo existente no cerne da Nova Esquerda na Bolívia e no Equador e externado pela eleição de líderes populistas em sociedades lideradas por movimentos. Empregando a teoria da emergência do populismo de Laclau, o artigo demonstra como os movimentos sociais, ao invés dos líderes populistas, construíram primeiro as identidades populares que fundamentaram estes regimes. Ao reexaminar teorias do populismo à luz destes casos, este artigo sugere que o potencial anti-hegemônico e de transformação do populismo necessita receber uma atenção renovada e o papel central da liderança carismática deveria ser qualificado em relação às origens da formação da identidade populista.

Portuguese keywords: Nova Esquerda, movimentos indígenas, movimentos sociais, populismo, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, Equador, Bolívia