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Anatomy of a Regional Conflict

Tarija and Resource Grievances in Morales's Bolivia

by
Denise Humphreys Bebbington and Anthony Bebbington

In 2008, the Department of Tarija became the epicenter of national political struggles over political autonomy for lowland regions at odds with the Morales administration. In September, following a series of regional referenda on autonomy and a national recall election, citizen committees in Tarija mobilized urban-based sectors and organized a general strike against the central government. It is unhelpful to understand the strike as simply an act of political sabotage orchestrated by racist regional elites. The factors driving protest and interest in autonomy are varied and deeply related to patterns of hydrocarbons extraction in the department that have allowed for the mobilization of grievances and the cultivation of resource regionalism at departmental and intradepartmental scales. Alongside class and ethnicity, identities of place and region can be equally important in processes of mobilization, and the resonance of these spatialized identities is particularly important in resource-extraction peripheries.

Keywords: *Bolivia, Tarija, Gas, Extractive industry, Social protest, Regionalism*

The struggle that during 2008 pitted the so-called Media Luna (Half-Moon) departments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni, and Pando against La Paz and the central government over the issue of autonomy—including access to and control of natural-resource rents—brought the country to the brink of generalized

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civil unrest. These conflicts have been interpreted as self-interested acts of conservatism orchestrated by civic committees and departmental political leaders in order to undermine the government of Evo Morales (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2008). Such interpretations are consistent with the argument that the demand for regional autonomy is a strategy of lowland elites who can no longer legitimately call on authoritarian interventions in the face of social processes that challenge their privilege and power (Eaton, 2007), as well as with the argument that the cultivation of Tarijeño identity and interests is an elite strategy to foster regional affiliations and so prevent conflicts from falling out along class lines (Vacaflores and Lizárraga, 2005). These interpretations do not capture all that was going on in these mobilizations. Departmental and subdepartmental conflict dynamics had their own histories and geographies, making it a mistake to interpret them only in terms of the current moment or to view them as manifestations across four departments of a single general phenomenon. Likewise, these conflicts had their own sets of motivations and grievances. While these appear to have manifested themselves as a moment of broader collective protest, they also indicate complex and at times divergent internal forces.

This paper explores the conflicts in one of the Media Luna[1] departments, Tarija. The department has been little studied in comparison to the ostensible political axis of the Media Luna, Santa Cruz, but is nonetheless the most critical to the viability of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism—MAS) government's resource-extraction-based path toward "post-neoliberal" patterns of social and infrastructural spending (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2008; Farthing, 2009; Bebbington, 2009). Much media coverage of the 2008 events portrayed the Department of Tarija as being solidly in the camp of the Media Luna, casting an image of a relatively well-off and mostly *criollo-mestizo*[2] citizenry that fiercely opposed the indigenous-populist administration of President Evo Morales (*Economist,* 2008a). This abbreviated version of departmental politics provides little insight into the intradepartmental sensitivities, identities, and power struggles within Tarija or its variant of the complex, ever-shifting landscape of social movements, actors, and political alliances in Evo's Bolivia.

"Autonomist" and protest agendas vary across the Media Luna. What was distinctive to Tarija was the dispute with central government focused on access to and continued control over hydrocarbon rents (cf. Vacaflores and Lizárraga, 2005) and the struggle to balance internal relationships within Tarija—in particular between the gas-producing province of Gran Chaco and the city of Tarija. Understanding what is going on inside Tarija therefore requires a look back into the department's history and the role of hydrocarbons in that history.

The paper is composed of four parts. The first lays out theoretical points of departure. The second explains elements of the Tarijeño context, examines the trajectory of hydrocarbons extraction, and discusses the way it has become the main axis of conflicts among different interests within Tarija as well as between them and the central government. While these interests have a class component, they have equally important geographical and ethnic dimensions. We argue that grievances had accumulated around gas for a number of years and were part of much more sedimented regionalist grievances. The

section discusses how conscious elite strategy and government decisions alike transformed these grievances into protest. The third section focuses on the protest of September 2008, emphasizing the different actors involved and the convergences and divergences among the concerns that motivated them. The final section interprets these protests as deriving their motive force from grievances that are as much specifically Tarijeño as they are part of a wider set of concerns in the Media Luna and that at the same time reflect tensions and fissures within the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism—MAS).

IDENTITY, PROTEST, AND RESOURCE ECONOMIES

One of the insights of the literature on "new social movements" is that mobilization and protest occur around identities that go beyond those of class and that it is more the norm than the exception that actors in protest have multiple identities. While the theme of a protest may privilege interests linked to one of these identities, the others remain relevant. Rather than reflecting an essence, these identities are produced through the positions of actors within networks of social relationships and discourses. Identities may also be consciously cultivated as "strategic essentialisms" (Rubin, 1998) or as part of the "invention of tradition" in order to strengthen claim making, recruit adherents, and/or obfuscate other interests. However, such strategizing and invention do not occur in a historical vacuum, and material political economies set frames within which identities can be strategized and influence which sets of identities are more and less likely to be viable in a given geographical and historical context (Escobar, 2008).

The emergence and construction of identities has been an important theme in efforts to explain the changing political landscapes of lowland Bolivia. Some writers (Eaton, 2007; Vacaflores and Lizárraga, 2005) draw attention to elite efforts to construct regional identities around regional grievances. They suggest, however, that this is a self-interested strategy. On the one hand, if regional identities dominate, then others that are based on class and ethnicity and threaten elite power will not prosper. Regional identities are viewed as being functional to elite efforts to control resources and continue to dominate regional political economy and society.

Other writers have emphasized the emergence and cultivation of indigenous identities in the lowlands and the rise of movements and organization around these identities (Albó, 2009**[AQ: 1]**; Postero, 2006; Gustafson, 2009). Such processes are as much endogenous as strategically cultivated and can also involve an association of identity and grievances rooted in regional political economy. In particular, grievances related to the adverse effects of resource extraction have been part of this emergence of identities. A variant of this process that has received far less attention in the critical social sciences of Bolivia has been the emergence of a so-called Chaqueño culture both in the broader Chaco (of Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina) and more specifically in the Chaco of Tarija. This identity has also been cultivated throughout the twentieth century as one grounded in shared productive practices (ranching), shared

culture (music, dance), and shared grievances (the suffering of the Chaco War and the marginalization of the Chaco within Tarija and Bolivia).

The emergence of such identities has several implications. First, the coexistence of distinct (strategically essentialized) and multiple identities suggests that the hegemony of any one of them is never stable. Second, identities are scaled, being simultaneously created and contested at the level of province, territory, department, and nation. Third, grievances play a central role in the construction of lowland identities, and they are always mobilized in relation to political economic history.

It is important to recognize the coexistence of these scaled, multiple, aggrieved and historical political-economy-informed identities in order to understand the protests of 2008. What at one cut might appear a political act motivated by identities of a particular nature and scale was often motivated by other identities and constituted a momentary resolution of the multiple identities underlying political action.

THE SEDIMENTATION OF GRIEVANCES AND THE RISE OF RESOURCE REGIONALISM

TARIJA

From its earliest days as an outpost of the expanding Spanish empire's efforts to forge a trade route between the Audiencia of Charcas and the Port of Buenos Aires and as supplier of livestock and agricultural products to the Potosí mines, Tarija was frontier territory. Today, bordering Argentina and Paraguay, the department is Bolivia's smallest, with a land area of 37,623 km² (cf. Bolivia's 1.1 million km²) and a population of 509,708 as of 2009 (less than 5 percent of Bolivia's approximately 10 million inhabitants). Poverty rates have been falling steadily over the past 30 years, from 87 percent in 1976 (above national rates) to 50.6 percent in 2001 (below the national rate of 58.6 percent), and departmental figures for life expectancy, literacy, and infant mortality all compare favorably with the national average (INE, 2001; 2009). This has attracted in-migration, with the result that Tarija's population is now largely urban, young (50 percent under 23 years of age), and increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse. Nearly one in four residents was born in another department (INE, 2009).

Tarija's geographical diversity, covering altiplano, valley, sub-Andean yungas, and Chaco, coupled with a very limited road network and a frontier history, has contributed to strong subdepartmental identities. In particular, residents of the Chaco (where hydrocarbons deposits are concentrated) tend to identify themselves as Chaqueños rather than as Tarijeños, a historical division that has become even more acute as debates about the distribution of gas rents have grown tenser. It has long been an ambition of Chaqueño elites to seek autonomy from Tarija and establish a tenth department of Bolivia.[3]

The Tarijeño/Chaqueño divide exists alongside other identities of ethnicity, class, and origin that form part of a more socially complex and culturally diverse department than is generally conveyed by either the identities that its elites project or the identities that the rest of Bolivia confers on it. In particular, Guaraní, Weenhayek and Tapiete[4] indigenous identities have become

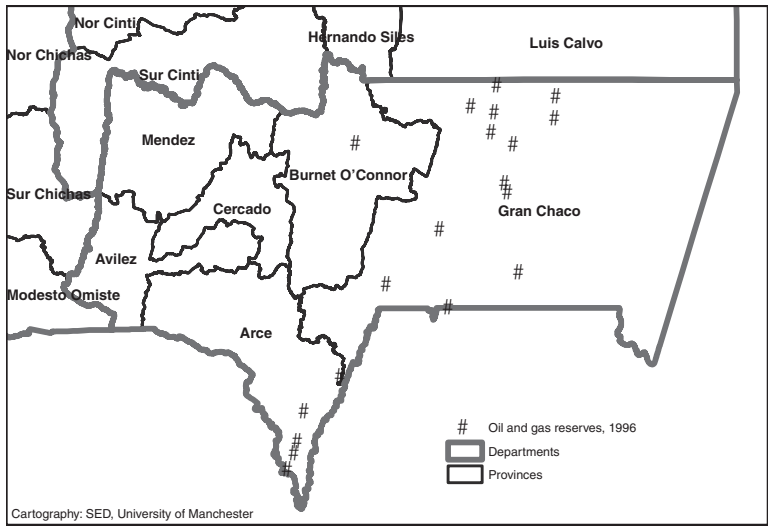

Figure 1. The Department of Tarija, Showing Locations of Oil and Gas Reserves in 1996 (U.S. Geological Survey, 1999).

increasingly visible since the 1990s as part of a process of progressive organization and liberation from various forms of subjugation including semislavery (Castro, 2004). These identities have become increasingly spatialized as each of these peoples has made territorial claims under the terms of legislation passed in the 1990s and more recently entertained the pursuit of the indigenous autonomies created by the Morales government. More recently, urban migrant and migrant landless identities have also emerged as other groups have asserted their legitimacy and made claims (UNDP, 2003). The UNDP study, led by Fernando Calderón, argues that in Tarija identities are increasingly reflective of relationships to natural resources, livelihood and occupation, and, most important, place of origin.

HYDROCARBONS IN TARIJA, GRIEVANCES IN BOLIVIA

Oil and gas have long played a role in Tarija (Fig. 1), and through them Tarija has played an important role in the national economy. The department's reserves were first exploited by Standard Oil of New Jersey in 1924 and nationalized after the Chaco War (1932–1935). Since then Bolivia's hydrocarbons have been nationalized on three occasions, the rationale each time being that Bolivia was not benefiting sufficiently from its natural resources (Miranda, 2008). Yet, whether its hydrocarbons sector was under state control or in the hands of private operators, Bolivia has a history of negotiating unfavorable deals for its oil and gas (Ribera, 2008).[5]

The most recent privatization occurred during the first administration of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993–1997) as part of a broad initiative to consolidate neoliberal economic policies (Perreault, 2008). The state withdrew from its operational role and created a series of mixed-capital corporations between the state hydrocarbons agency, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB), and private transnational firms for oil and gas exploration,

transportation, and refining. Transnational firms were to make a 50 percent capital investment, the other 50 percent of the company being owned by YPFB employees and pension funds (Kohl, 2002; 2004; Kohl and Farthing, 2006).

The tremendously favorable legal framework, low taxes, and generous investment terms for foreign capital led to a rapid increase in private investment, new discoveries, and a substantial increase in Bolivia's certified reserves. A number of major international and Latin American firms invested in Bolivia during this period.[6] Investment also poured into related infrastructural works: gas and oil pipelines and processing and storage facilities were constructed to connect new fields to new markets. Private investors keen on supplying the burgeoning energy market in Brazil were transforming the Bolivian gas and oil industry in the process (Center for Energy Economics, n.d.).

While these transformations passed largely under the political radar (Kohl, 2002), this was not the case during Sánchez de Lozada's second term (2002–2003), when continued social-movement pressure to nationalize hydrocarbons and the gas war over plans to export gas through Chile led to the president's departure. In July 2004 a national referendum was held, and voters decided overwhelmingly for greater state control over the gas industry and an increased share of gas revenues. The subsequent passage of Hydrocarbons Law 3058 (and its final implementation in 2005 during the interim Rodríguez Veltze administration) enshrined the right of all Bolivians to benefit from gas rents through the establishment of a direct hydrocarbons tax,[7] a mechanism for increasing both producing and nonproducing regional governments' share of hydrocarbons revenue. However, because the agreement to introduce and distribute the tax was crafted "in a climate of profound social and political crisis and in the midst of a series of conflicts, [the assignment of benefits] corresponded more to the pressure, struggle, and protest to capture rents than to any planning and analysis about what to do with these rents" (Fundación Jubileo, 2008: 11). Some analysts argue that the result has been a confusing system that sustains highly unequal tax-revenue transfers (ranging from US$751.3 per capita in Pando to US$27 per capita in La Paz [Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2008: 7]) and fuels increasingly intense confrontations between the central government and the regions (Hodges, 2007).

In this context, Evo Morales campaigned, among other things, on the recovery of Bolivia's natural resources with a promise to nationalize hydrocarbons, a commitment that he fulfilled by supreme decree four months into his term.[8] The national grievance over forgone and dispossessed hydrocarbons revenue had once again been recognized as law, but this time as part of a conscious policy platform that would translate hydrocarbons wealth into national social policy. Gas grievances came to be bundled with the identity of citizenship. Furthermore, that the nationalization was entitled "Heroes del Chaco" was meant as a reminder that those who had died in the Chaco War to protect Bolivia's gas had been predominantly highland Indians, not Tarijeños or Chaqueños (see also Perreault, n.d.).

HYDROCARBONS IN TARIJA, GRIEVANCES IN TARIJA

After the Chaco War, fought with neighboring Paraguay over what were believed to be significant hydrocarbon reserves, the Bolivian government

TABLE 1
Hydrocarbons Income (Bs millions), Department of Tarija, 1996–2007

Hydrocarbons-linked Income Received via Transfers

Source	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*
Hydrocarbons royalties	36	40	40	28	25	82	183	286	507	834	1,263	1,372
Direct hydrocarbons tax	18	16	20	20	36	31	30	27	27	34	25	23
IEDH **[please explain]**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	113	249	284
Total	54	56	60	48	61	113	213	313	534	981	1,537	1,679

Source: CEDLA (2009).

modified the Royalties Law to provide an 11 percent royalty[9] payment for hydrocarbons-producing departments (at that time Santa Cruz and Tarija). Since then (between 1941 and 2007), Tarija has received over US$774 million, with nearly 80 percent of those funds generated in the past decade (1996–2007) and the greatest increase in revenues coming after 2005 (Table 1). The department has, then, long received revenues from hydrocarbons and has invested those revenues in a series of productive and infrastructure projects and service enterprises. However, central government disbursements were often erratic and inaccurate, creating tension between the two parties. A former superintendent of hydrocarbons in Tarija comments, for instance, that royalties were not always transferred on a regular basis and that Tarijeños had to turn to demonstrations and protests to force their release by the central government (Luis Lema, personal communication, June 2008).

The sense of grievance has intensified over the past decade as elites in Tarija have increasingly coupled the department's future economic development with large-scale, export-oriented extractive industry activity. In the late 1990s, the increased presence of transnational firms and exploratory projects was accompanied by large infusions of capital and technology that revitalized a moribund hydrocarbons sector in the eastern provinces of Gran Chaco and O'Connor (Perreault, 2008).[10] This generated excitement about the possibility of massive infrastructure projects related to the transport and export of these gas reserves (Hindery, 2004). It is this view of development that leads political leaders in Tarija, as well as much of the population (even some who are in other respects supporters of the MAS), to view the struggle over departmental revenue from gas as fundamental to the department's ambitions for regional economic development and effective autonomy.

Since 2005, with the implementation of Hydrocarbons Law 3058, the department's revenues have soared from approximately Bs534 million in 2004 to over Bs1.67 million in 2007,[11] with hydrocarbons revenues accounting for about 89 percent of the department's income (CEDLA, 2008). This revenue bonanza, which is also in part attributable to higher prices for fossil fuels,[12] has sparked a flurry of infrastructure works promoted and paid for by the department. The regional government is especially keen to complete a network of

highways that form part of the southern Inter-Oceanic Corridor to spur Tarija's integration with national and international markets. The departmental government also uses gas revenue to fund free health care insurance, programs for small farm development, and the development of several priority commodity chains. Any central government effort to reduce transfers to Tarija challenges this model of departmental development.

TRIGGERS OF PROTEST: THE HYDROCARBONS TAX, AUTONOMY, AND THE RECALL

Resource regionalism, the hydrocarbons tax, and revenue disputes. Arguments that tie regional development to regional natural-resource endowments and to the claim that these resources and the revenue flowing from them should be controlled and used by regional actors are a key part of what we have referred to as "resource regionalism." Grievances frequently become bundled with this regionalism, with claims that after years of disadvantage and marginalization it is now time for regions to be able to take full advantage of their endowments. While such resource regionalism has a long history in Tarija, it has intensified with the gas boom and the significant increase in the resources at stake since the introduction of the direct hydrocarbons tax. Tarija produces over 60 percent of Bolivia's natural gas and receives fully 30 percent of all royalties and direct hydrocarbons tax revenue generated in Bolivia. Indeed, the direct hydrocarbons tax has further consolidated resource regionalism by providing a clear mechanism on which to peg demands for greater fiscal decentralization in the extractive sector.

In the face of a situation in which a department with 5 percent of the population receives 30 percent of gas royalties and tax revenues, the argument for a change in the distribution of gas revenues gained momentum. Commentators and leaders from disadvantaged highland departments called for a more equitable formula based on population and poverty indicators (Barragán, 2008) and for a distribution that would contribute to a diversification of the economic base (Wanderley, 2008; Gray Molina et al., 2005).[13] The MAS government argued the same and throughout 2008 tussled with the Media Luna over the assignment of tax revenues. Tensions came to a head in early 2008 when Morales promulgated a decree to pay the pensioners' stipend (*renta dignidad*) with hydrocarbons tax revenues and thus reduce the amount of those revenues going to departmental government coffers. This shift in funding was required as a result of the nationalization of YPFB, which left state pension liabilities unfunded. The Media Luna, for its part, refused to accept the government's attempts to claw back these resources for national social programs, arguing that by law the money belonged to the regions (*La Razón,* July 11, 2008) and that what was actually at stake was, according to a senior figure in Tarija's prefecture, a "government . . . seeking to consolidate absolute power and reconstitute a state that does everything . . . interrupting the process of decentralization and strangling the departmental governments" (Mauricio Lea Plaza, interview, Tarija, January 16, 2009). The irony in this claim is that leaders in the Gran Chaco Province had much the same view of the departmental government in Tarija.

The referendum on autonomy. In this context, the political leaders of the Media Luna effectively deployed the recovery of hydrocarbons tax revenues as a rallying point for the campaign for regional autonomy. In doing so they captured a popular historical demand for political-administrative decentralization (Suso, 2008) but reduced it to a simple call for "autonomy," an expression that was embraced uncritically by large parts of the population. While debates about regional autonomy date back to the nineteenth century, in this more recent guise they can be traced back to civic-movement activism for a more direct democracy, in particular to demands for greater decentralization under the Popular Participation Law during the first Sánchez de Lozada administration.

At the insistence of Media Luna leaders, the July 2006 election to select participants in the Constituent Assembly was held in conjunction with a binding referendum on autonomy. The four Media Luna departments voted overwhelmingly in favor of establishing autonomous departments, though it was clear that there was little more than a vague notion of what "autonomy" might mean in practice. The results in Tarija revealed extensive support for autonomy, with more than 60 percent in favor. But, as Bazoberry (2006) notes, the autonomy votes are likely to have disguised more than they revealed; the multiple desires and expectations encapsulated in Yes and No votes cannot be easily understood.

In December 2007, immediately following the passage of the draft constitution in the absence of opposition Assembly members, the Media Luna departments declared autonomy from the central government. In an immediate association of autonomy with hydrocarbons and in direct defiance of the proposed new constitution, the Santa Cruz declaration of autonomy established that two-thirds of the taxes from the oil and gas industry generated in the department would stay in the department.

Tensions between the executive and the departments increased as opposition leaders pushed forward with a series of departmental referenda on autonomy. The first referendum for regional autonomy was held in Santa Cruz in early May and was followed by votes in Beni, Pando, and, on June 22, Tarija (though none of these were recognized as legitimate internationally).

Prior to the Tarija vote, however, political leaders in the Province of Gran Chaco held a subregional vote to select a subprefect and departmental councilor. The election anticipated the departmental referendum and challenged Tarija's Prefect Mario Cossio to follow through with earlier promises for further intradepartmental decentralization. Cossio responded to the challenge by refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the election and calling for departmental unity not separatism, ironically doing to the province what the central government was doing to the department.

The run-up to the Tarija autonomy referendum took on a carnival-like atmosphere. Large banners swathed the balconies of departmental and municipal buildings in the main plaza while Chaqueño music blared from loudspeakers. Critics of the referendum pointed to the improvised and vague nature of Tarija's autonomous bylaws, which, they said, would only deepen structures sustaining elite power and privilege fed by Tarija's newfound gas wealth (A. Valdez, interview, May 30, 2008). The rural leader Luis Álfaro dismissed the bylaws as a document prepared by and for the right and its lodges and

TABLE 2
Participation in Referendum on Autonomy by Province, Department of Tarija, June 25, 2008

Province	*% Participation*
Arce	42.73
Cercado (the urban core)	71.48
Gran Chaco	53.77
Aviles	55.42
Mendez	57.31
O'Connor	52.62
Total department	61.76

Source: Corte Departamental Electoral, Tarija (2008). [AQ: 3]

argued that autonomy must be pursued within the framework of the new constitution. The Guaraní and Weenhayek leadership criticized the bylaws as discriminatory for failing to recognize indigenous autonomy, while regional political leaders in the Provinces of Gran Chaco and Arce expressed disagreement with the process, which they saw as marginalizing provincial calls for greater decentralization in the department. Nevertheless, of the nearly 62 percent of Tarijeños who voted, over 78 percent favored the proposed autonomy bylaws. The elite-dominated local press immediately reported this as a resounding victory for the advocates of autonomy (*Nuevo Sur,* June 23, 2008). Viewed more closely, however, the results of the referendum reveal a Tarija that was much more divided along rural-urban and ethnic lines. While in recent elections absenteeism in Tarija has typically ranged between 10 and 15 percent across all provinces, this time rates were far higher, particularly in the more rural provinces beyond the urban core (Table 2). In the Province of Arce, where the MAS has established a strong base among rural workers and urban migrants, less than half of the eligible voters participated in the referendum, and with a departmentwide rate of absenteeism of 38 percent, it was clear that many eligible voters decided to sit out the election.

The recall. The idea of holding a referendum on whether to recall the president and vice president emerged as a means of overcoming the political impasse provoked by the passage in November 2007 of the new constitution without the presence of the full Constituent Assembly. As the idea gained momentum in the Media Luna , Morales proposed a referendum in which the population would decide whether he and the nine prefects should continue in their posts or be replaced. His move deepened existing power struggles within the right among Media Luna prefects and PODEMOS, the rightist opposition party whose candidate had campaigned bitterly against Morales in the 2005 elections. While the prefects argued that autonomy was the only way to prevent the new constitution from going forward, PODEMOS thought that a *recall* was the way to derail it. To Morales's good fortune, PODEMOS senators agreed to his proposal, and the MAS quickly set the referendum date for August 10.

Jubilant over the results of the autonomy referenda and angry over this decision of the PODEMOS leadership, Media Luna departmental leaders hinted

TABLE 3
Results of Recall Referendum, Department of Tarija, August 10, 2008

Province	*To Retain Cossio (%)*	*To Retain Morales and García Linera (%)*	*% Participation*[a]
Arce	43.59	68.72	82
Cercado (the urban core)	64.43	38.35	82
Gran Chaco	54.83	57.19	74
Aviles	48.93	68.34	83
Mendez	54.64	60.55	82
O'Connor	48.03	66.15	78
Total department	58.06	49.83	80

Source: Corte Departamental Electoral, Tarija (2008).
a. Calculated on the basis of total number of valid ballots cast.

that they might boycott the recall referendum and instead push on with the immediate implementation of autonomy in their departments. However, after an initial period of triumphalism, cleavages appeared within the coalition[14] as prefects bickered over whether to participate in the recall referendum. Unable to agree on strategy, they made little coordinated or sustained effort to mount an anti-Morales campaign. There were, however, many high-profile and increasingly violent protests (e.g., the humiliation of MAS campesino supporters in Chuquisaca and the takeover of the airport in Tarija) that kept Morales from attending official public events as well as campaigning in the Media Luna.

When the recall votes had been counted, both sides claimed victory. Morales and García Linera were ratified in their positions by over 67 percent of voters and carried 99 of 112 provinces, though the mainstream media preferred to use maps showing the entire Media Luna as having supported opposition figures (*Economist,* 2008b). The three other Media Luna prefects were also ratified. In Tarija, Prefect Mario Cossio was supported by 58 percent of voters while Morales was confirmed by slightly less than 50 percent of voters (Table 3). While Morales failed to carry Tarija city, he enjoyed widespread support in Tarija's five rural provinces, where support ranged from 57 to 69 percent. Conversely, Cossio won the city of Tarija handily but was rejected in three of the rural provinces.

Once again, however, just as in the July 2006 elections and the 2008 referendum on autonomy, voting patterns are not as easy to read as might first appear. While the strong rural support for Morales seems consistent with the high rural absenteeism in the 2008 autonomy vote, the results of the referendum in Tarija also suggest that for an important segment of rural voters it was quite possible to both support Evo/MAS and favor increased regional autonomy. Even if we do not know precisely what these voters took "autonomy" to mean, at a minimum we can assume that their support for it reflected a regional/place-based identity alongside any class or ethnic identity that informed their support for Morales. In all of the rural provinces more people voted in favor of Cossio than voted against Evo by differences ranging from about 12 to 17 percent. If we can assume that support for Cossio was an indication of being in favor of autonomy, then a healthy share of voters supported autonomy at the same time as supporting Morales and his platform, which included the nationalization of natural resources. Seen this way, neither Cossio

nor Morales received a clear mandate in Tarija. Instead, the voting reaffirmed the complex and ambiguous identities and grievances that are deeply embedded in debates over autonomy and hydrocarbons governance.

Following the election, Morales adopted a more conciliatory tone. In his victory speech he called on the prefects to set aside their differences and carry on the work of recovering the country's natural resources and building a more unified Bolivia (Morales, 2008a). However, the Media Luna prefects, joined by the recently elected and pro-autonomy prefect of Chuquisaca, moved to reactivate the Consejo Nacional Democrático (National Democratic Council—CONALDE) and initiated a vigorous effort to undercut Morales's authority. Abandoning efforts to negotiate a solution to the impasse, the Media Luna leaders called on their bases to prepare a civic strike for mid-August—a precursor to the impending storm.

MOBILIZING GRIEVANCES

We have suggested that three factors—the direct hydrocarbons tax, autonomy, and the recall referendum—merged and had the effect of intensifying conflicts between the Media Luna and the central government at the same time as deepening certain ambiguities among voters. All this was the tinder for the conflict that broke out in Tarija as Cossio and other leaders moved to strike to protect revenues and demand autonomy.

The strike began in the city of Villa Montes in the Chaco. In one sense this seemed an unlikely origin, given its remoteness and its history of relatively weak social mobilization. It was, however, a symbolically significant place to start because of its role in the Chaco War as the headquarters of the Bolivian army and a key line of defense toward the end of the war. The parallel drawn by the opposition was that Chaqueños were mobilizing once again to protect the country's hydrocarbon resources.[15] Also, Reynaldo Bayard, president of Tarija's civic committee, came from Villa Montes and was there throughout the strike.

Shortly after the strike was called in Villa Montes, Yacuiba, the largest city in the Province of Gran Chaco and situated along the border with Argentina, announced that it was also joining the strike. With the border crossing closed, all transport between eastern Bolivia and Argentina shut down. The participation of Yacuiba was significant because while the MAS has a core of urban and rural migrant supporters there, on the autonomy issue Cossio and the civic committee were able to recruit significant local support for the strike.

After 10 days of fruitless protest, Chaqueño leaders acknowledged that the only ones who seemed to be suffering from the strike were the Chaqueños themselves and demanded that the urban areas of the Media Luna also strike. Local leaders then demanded that both Tarija and Santa Cruz strengthen their protest or face having their domestic gas supplies cut off. The threat was clear: "If you don't all turn out as Tarijeños, we will act against you as Chaqueños."

In Tarija, the mobilization of the middle and upper classes took place via the civic committee and other social organizations,[16] but this was not enough. While the department's public employees were also mobilized en masse, the campaign was in desperate need of warm bodies. Bringing members of the much

feared Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (a sort of youth militia based in the Department of Santa Cruz) was decided against because of the sensitivities it raised. Instead, university students in Tarija, who had participated in the campaign for autonomy, were mobilized to occupy the blockades—particularly in the Chaco — but also to participate in the takeover and occupation of public buildings and to attend political rallies (interviews, September 2008).

MOBILIZATION AND VIOLENCE IN TARIJA, 2008: AN ANATOMY OF PROTESTS

Tarija's civic committee officially declared a departmentwide strike on the afternoon of Friday, September 5. However, in a move that reflected the laid-back approach toward social protest of political elites in Tarija, the strike was not implemented until the following Monday morning, giving residents time to stock up on supplies. Warnings were sent out across town: close your business, close your office, or risk the consequences.

As the strike unfolded, pro-autonomy groups conducted a series of occupations of central government offices. One of the offices targeted was the Institute for Land Reform. Leading the confrontation were some 40 young men with sticks, rocks, slingshots, and metal shields in their hands ready to take on the 10–15 policemen assigned to guard the building. Behind the shock troop were a few young women and older adults—including parents and other relatives—who supported the young men with bottles of water, vinegar (to counteract the effects of the tear gas), and shouts of encouragement. The encounter was intense but brief and without casualties (despite the tossing of sticks of dynamite at the police). Shortly after the building was taken over, a 4×4 appeared, and out of it came a contingent of Tarija's civic committee members to claim victory. Not everyone was feeling victorious, however. Some neighborhood residents (also in favor of autonomy) expressed dismay at the disorder and violence unfolding before them. Tarija had never, they said, even in the worst of times, descended to this level of violence.

That evening the vice rector of Tarija's Juan Misrael Saracho University expressed his full support for the student occupation of government buildings, indicating that Tarija must protect its hydrocarbons tax revenues, royalties, and university: "The government needs to listen."[18] As did other public figures, he cultivated the logic of grievance, conveying an image of Tarija as the forgotten department that, having found natural gas, must now find its own development path. Not only an instrument of development, this gas was also an instrument of protest, he implied, supporting the suggestion that closing off the valves to gas lines in the Chaco might be a good way to get the (central) government's attention.

On the third full day, the general strike turned violent. Responding to rumors that members of the Federation of Peasant Communities of Tarija, supporters of Morales and the MAS, intended to march on the city's main square, the right mobilized to prevent the march. Civic leaders called upon residents to maintain a permanent vigil and to defend their city. When MAS sympathizers failed to appear, a mob of pro-autonomy supporters headed to the Mercado Campesino,

a MAS stronghold, for a showdown. An angry and violent confrontation pitted students and other urban youth against market vendors and peasants. Over 80 people were injured, including a young construction worker who lost his hand when he mishandled a stick of dynamite (*El Diario,* September 11, 2008).

In the Chaco, local residents were pressured to shut their businesses and offices or risk retaliation. The civic committee of Villa Montes controlled all activity in the city and had all major routes effectively blocked. During the height of the strike, the government reported that a section of the major pipeline transporting natural gas to Brazil and operated by Transierra S.A.[19] was damaged when protesters attempted to shut one of the valves. There was also damage reported to the CHLB liquid gas plant (a firm that had been recently nationalized) in Villa Montes.

Saul Ávalos, then minister of hydrocarbons, denounced the disruption of gas supplies as a right-wing effort to sabotage Bolivia's economy and jeopardize the delivery of gas supplies to neighboring countries.[20] According to Ávalos, the country stood to lose some US$8 million per day in lost gas sales to Brazil. For their part, representatives of Brazilian energy interests assured the Bolivian public that the affected gas fields and pipelines were under their control and that production had been only temporarily interrupted.

Tarija, with its three daily papers and its own television stations, provided a steady stream of pro-autonomy, pro-strike analysis. Throughout the strike period, Morales accused the press of an antigovernment bias and of being an instrument of oppositional forces. Indeed, as elsewhere in Latin America, the Bolivian press is controlled by elite interests, and in Tarija it played an important role in cultivating grievances and celebrating regional identity prior to and during this strike. And yet the press also, if inadvertently, contributed to a loss of motivation among some supporters of the strike. The images of racist confrontations and acts of vandalism in the city of Santa Cruz and above all the news from Pando of armed confrontation and dozens of deaths and disappearances traumatized many Tarijeños who otherwise identified with many of the grievances underlying the strike. The triumphalist rhetoric that had characterized public discourse in Tarija for so many months gave way to appeals for peace, dialogue, and mutual understanding.

Of course, these calls for peace may also have been hastened by the realization that the protest had garnered little support beyond the Media Luna. The unexpected expulsion of U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg, together with pronouncements of support and solidarity with Morales from the governments of Brazil and Argentina and international bodies such as the Organization of American States and the recently created the Union of South American Nations, made it clear that any effort to create a parallel government would fail.

As quickly as the protest began, it subsided. Tarijeños returned to their daily routines but now with a social fabric considerably more frayed and with the realization that few concessions had been gained. As one resident poignantly remarked, "The confrontation between the students and vendors in the Mercado Campesino was absolute madness: one day we go to buy our tomatoes and potatoes from the vendor, the next day we are throwing rocks at each other, and tomorrow we will go back and buy our tomatoes and potatoes again" (G. Torrez, interview, November 20, 2008).

INTERPRETING PROTEST: CONFLICTS WITHIN AND BETWEEN RESOURCE NATIONALISM AND RESOURCE REGIONALISM

In the face of generalized and generalizing interpretations of events in contemporary Bolivia and particularly of the motivations deemed to have underlain the events of 2008, the intent here has been to describe processes that appear less unitary and more embedded in longer historical geographies, than media and other renditions have suggested.

First, the conflicts in Tarija cannot be understood independently of natural gas. The history of hydrocarbons and the failure to derive either great national or significant regional benefit from their extraction inspires latent regionalist and nationalistic grievances for many actors. Meanwhile, in the contemporary context, gas has become central to the way in which the key actors think about development. As one leading figure in Tarija put it, people in Tarija began to wake up in the morning thinking about gas. Gas became the source of rents that, if accessed and controlled, could be used to sustain other projects. For the departmental government, gas rents became the essential ingredient for regional investment projects and patronage. For Tarija's civic committee, control of gas rents became the means of staking out effective autonomy from La Paz. For business, gas rents offered the possibility of new entrepreneurial opportunities through subcontracts. For the university, gas rents offered an unprecedented revenue stream. Meanwhile, for the Province of Gran Chaco, gas was a political instrument, a vehicle for determining its relationships with Tarija and the country. And for the different indigenous organizations in the Chaco, what happened with gas would determine the future of their territorial claims.

Gas became equally central to the way the national government saw its project. Morales and the MAS needed gas revenue to fund social and industrialization programs and to compensate for an otherwise very narrow tax base. At the same time, they needed gas to sustain their political project: gas and its nationalization have been symbolically central to the MAS's agenda. Thus, while the central government resisted autonomy for nationalist and constitutional reasons, it also did so for reasons of simple political strategy.[21]

Second, gas has become a resource that divides Tarija. It does so along boundaries that, rather than being simply regional/national, are defined by differences of view as to the political scale at which gas and the revenues it generates should be governed. While a MAS view (bolstered by the constitution) privileges the central management of revenue, an autonomist view (bolstered by arguments for decentralization) privileges departmental government and an ethnicist view (bolstered by international conventions such as International Labor Organization 169) privileges the authority of indigenous collectivities. As the voting patterns discussed here suggest, these views do not map simply onto different actors—a reflection of the multiple identities that have informed political positioning around gas and autonomy. Thus in practice one encounters persons and organizations who can identify with and act politically on the basis of all three views—while voting for Evo Morales they also vote for Mario Cossio, turn out in the strike in Villa Montes, and have sympathy for free, prior informed consent for indigenous peoples under whose

lands the gas lies. In interviews we often encountered Guaraní and Weenhayek persons who were electorally and ideologically committed to a MAS government but also insisted that local indigenous organizations must have more say in the control of gas and its revenues, as well as MAS activists and officials who in some contexts espoused indigenous rights while in others had told Guaraní and Weenhayek leaders not to criticize gas expansion in their territories and to defend the nationalist argument against regionalist positions. And one also encounters regionalists associated with opposition parties who identify with certain MAS positions on the constitution (Ruiz, 2009).

Motivations at the moment of protest are therefore complex, and people standing side by side in Tarija were not necessarily moved by the same grievances or the same level of commitment to nationalist or regionalist discourses (see also Perreault, 2006). Moreover, regionalism itself is scaled, and protesters in Villa Montes were as aggrieved by what they perceived as the centralizing tendencies of the city of Tarija as by those of La Paz. All of this greatly complicates the terrain on which leaders such as Morales and Cossio have to maneuver and enlist support for their political projects.

Third, resource regionalism is and will continue to be a significant factor in hydrocarbons and decentralization politics in Bolivia. This is so first because it is a motivation and identity that cannot simply be explained as a product of elite strategies to build regional identities and thus block conflict around class or ethnic cleavage. Supporters of the MAS also have regional (and ethnic territorial) identities that have every likelihood of influencing the way they will respond to government policy on hydrocarbons. This has been clear in recent conflicts between indigenous organizations and the government over oil exploration in the north of La Paz.

Resource regionalism will be important because the MAS has apparently embraced it at the same time as rejecting some of its manifestations. Morales himself has spoken of the need to correct the "desequilibrios" caused by spatial unevenness in the distribution of the hydrocarbons tax revenues. Part of the MAS's response has been to promote extraction in other departments so that they too might have revenue from royalties. In short, it appears that it is ready to foster a whole set of resource regionalisms in order "to establish an economic and political equilibrium between departments and regions of the country" (Morales, 2008b). In a recent interview, Vice President García Linera (2009) asked,

> Is it mandatory to get gas and oil from the Amazon north of La Paz? Yes. Why? Because we have to balance the economic structures of Bolivian society, because the rapid development of Tarija with 90 percent of the gas is going to generate imbalances in the long run. It is necessary, accordingly, to balance in the long term the territorialities of the state.

Furthermore, in response to its struggles with Tarija's departmental government, the MAS has also encouraged competitor resource regionalisms within Tarija. In this sense its political strategy evidently assumes that place-based identities are as important to sociopolitical mobilization as class and ethnic identities. In February 2007 Morales signed Supreme Decree 29042, assigning the Province of Gran Chaco 45 percent of all royalties earned from hydrocarbons produced in the department. Subsequently the MAS responded to

departmental authorities who argued that the province should only receive 45 percent of royalties from production generated in the province (*La Razón*, March 2, 2007) with an announcement by Morales in October 2009 that the Province of Gran Chaco would receive these royalties directly from the central government. Furthermore, dressed as a Chaqueño Morales announced that Chaqueños would be given the right to vote on regional autonomy in the December 2009 elections. When the results showed 81 percent in favor of autonomy, it was clear that the MAS had captured a provincial resource regionalism in order to disarm a departmental variant. The incongruous image of Chaco elites applauding Morales in October 2009 and celebrating in December suggests that elite blocs are nowhere near as stable as some of the readings of the elite politics underlying autonomist tendencies would imply. At the same time, however, it suggests that the MAS is willing to build alliances that might also have the effect of aggravating divides within its own bases.

The conflicts in Tarija and their fallout demonstrate that there is a range of grievances and that many of these grievances are tied to geographical identities that have some basis in historical experiences. More important, readings of these conflicts that presume more or less unitary MAS post-neoliberal positions pitted against equally unitary conservative regionalist positions are not only incorrect but do no favors for either of these political projects. The conflicts during 2008 should be viewed as an indication of how dependent the MAS has made itself on gas and how fraught that position might well become.[22] Just as the right apparently overplayed its hand on autonomy and therefore became divided internally, the risk that the MAS could overplay its hand on gas and induce protest from its own bases is real.

NOTES

1. The Media Luna is a dissident political block incorporating the eastern lowland departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija, and on occasion Chuquisaca. Promoted by political elites from Santa Cruz, the movement seeks greater financial, political, and administrative autonomy from the central government, and its strength and visibility increased in the aftermath of the election of Evo Morales and the MAS in 2005.

2. *Criollo* refers to persons of white, European descent, while *mestizo* refers to persons of mixed ethnicity.

3. The creation of a tenth department (Chaco) was proposed at the Constituent Assembly but abandoned when deemed unviable. See Bazoberry (2005) for historical debates on this issue.

4. Of the three the Guaraní are the principal indigenous group in Tarija (850 families), followed by the Weenhayek (350 families) and the Tapiete (13 families). See Castro (2004).

5. An example of the limited bargaining position of the Bolivian government over gas is the infamous *borrón y cuenta nueva* (clean-slate) agreement signed with Argentina in 1990 by the Paz Zamora government. During the 1980s, Bolivia had run up significant debts with Argentina. At the same time, Argentina's growing internal debt had led to an arrangement whereby Bolivia accepted payment in kind (equipment—often considered of questionable value—in exchange for gas) After both governments had lost track of the value of these improvised and complicated arrangements, it was agreed that each government would forgive any outstanding debts of the other and start anew (Luis Lema, interview, Tarija, June 19, 2008). Quiroga Santa Cruz (1977) provides a critical historical assessment of hydrocarbons negotiations with Brazil in the 1970s.

6. These included Amoco (U.S.A.), Repsol (Spain), ExxonMobil (U.S.A.), British Gas (UK), British Petroleum (UK), Total (France), Pluspetrol (Argentina), Petrobras (Brazil), and Perez Companc (Argentina).

7. This tax called for the transfer of 32 percent of oil and gas profits to departments, municipal governments, the national treasury, universities, and the Indigenous Fund. In 2008 the pensioners' stipend was added to this list. Initially the departments received 33.2 percent, the treasury 28.6 percent, municipal governments 26.5 percent, the universities 6.6 percent, and the Indigenous Fund 5.0 percent. Under Morales's reformulated distribution, the pensioners' stipend receives 26.1 percent, the departments 9.9 percent, the municipal governments 33.7 percent, the treasury 20.2 percent, the universities 6.6 percent, and the Indigenous Fund 3.5 percent. See Fundación Jubileo (2008) for a discussion of how these changes impact central government, departmental, and municipal budgets.

8. Critics in Comité de Defensa del Patrimonio Nacional accuse Morales of nationalizing gas rents but leaving transnational firms in charge of hydrocarbons operations as well as failing to fulfill a pledge to industrialize Bolivian hydrocarbons. See http://www.cedib.org for more on debates over the nationalization of hydrocarbons.

9. A royalty is a payment in recognition that the resource being extracted is not renewable and therefore has a finite life.

10. Bolivia is divided into municipalities, provinces, and departments. Municipal governments are governed by elected mayors and councils. Departments are governed by elected prefects (similar to governors). Provincial authorities are appointed by the prefects. In Tarija there are nine provinces, of which three are gas-producing areas: Gran Chaco, O'Connor, and, to a lesser extent, Arce.

11. Royalties are paid directly to the departmental government. The direct hydrocarbons tax, however, is distributed among the department, its 11 municipal governments, and Juan Misrael Saracho University.

12. This bonanza ended in April 2009, when Bolivia renegotiated gas prices with Brazil and Argentina and prices dropped some 33 percent from their highs in 2008.

13. See Weisbrot and Sandoval (2008) for a map and analysis of the per capita distribution of hydrocarbons tax revenues, Hodges (2007: pts. 2 and 3) for a discussion of conflicts stemming from oil and gas revenue distribution, and Fundación Jubileo (2008) for a discussion of the sums involved in the dispute over the tax revenues.

14. The presidents of Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni, Chuquisaca, and Tarija formed a coordinating group called the Consejo Nacional Democratico (National Democratic Council—CONALDE).

15. Many have argued that the Bolivia-Paraguay War of the Chaco was a war over hydrocarbons engineered by Standard Oil. In the April 2009 agreement between Bolivia and Paraguay over the definition of the border, Morales referred once again to this claim (BBC, 2009).

16. Among these the Masonic lodges appear to have played an important role. The vice president of Tarija's civic committee accused the government and MAS sympathizers of being behind the attack on a Masonic lodge in Tarija at the height of the strike (*El Diario,* September 11, 2008).

17. The violence experienced in Tarija paled in comparison with that experienced in the Departments of Santa Cruz and Pando, where the number of casualties and loss of property sparked international concern. In Santa Cruz, local news stations filmed attacks by mestizos on persons of indigenous/peasant descent. In Pando, supporters of Prefect Leopoldo Fernandez engaged in direct confrontations with peasant supporters of the MAS in which at least 11 people were killed and more than 50 wounded. For more on the Pando massacre see http://www.boliviainfoforum.org.uk/news-detail.asp?id=63.

18. In 2007 the university UAJMS received US$5.3 million in tax revenues.

19. PETROBRAS continues to hold an equity position in Transierra S.A., which operates the 432-km pipeline running from Yacuiba (Tarija) to Rio Grande (Santa Cruz). The incident took place in El Palmar, and in the months following the attack the government carried out a series of investigations to identify those who collaborated in the sabotage of the pipeline. Three individuals from Villa Montes were arrested and imprisoned in La Paz to await trial (*El Diario,* October 7, 2008).

20. Later Bayard, former President of Tarija's civic committee, publicly acknowledged the department's role in this act.

21. Arguably, it resisted the expansion of the *tierras comunitarias de origen* (originary communal lands) in areas of gas deposits for similar reasons.

22. On April 30, 2009, the executive secretary of the Confederación de Pueblos Indigenas de Bolivia (Bolivian Confederation of Indigenous Peoples—CIDOB) said that henceforth the number-one issue for his organization would be to insist that the President's Office request permission from territorial base communities prior to any hydrocarbons activity. In the light of this, he said, the CIDOB's next assembly would discuss whether it and its member organizations would continue supporting the MAS (*La Razón,* April 30, 2009).

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