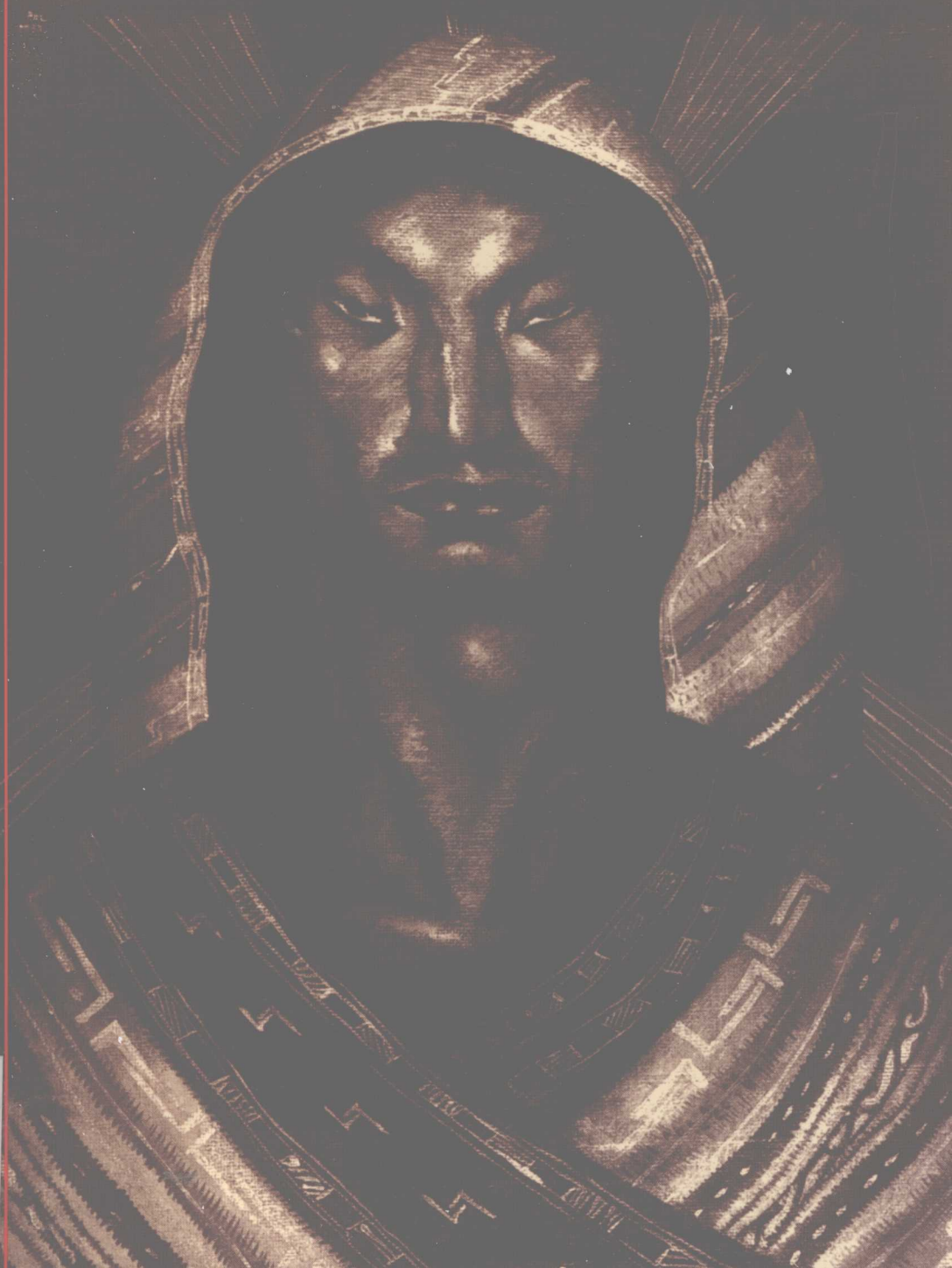


Mestizaje Upside-Down

AESTHETIC POLITICS IN MODERN BOLIVIA

Javier Sanjinés C.



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AESTHETIC

POLITICS

IN MODERN

BOLIVIA

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To my parents, Claudio Sanjinés Medina
and Elena Casanovas Otero, and to my son,
Claudio, in loving memory

To María Soledad

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Introduction

Modernity from Within and Without: Observing Power with Both Eyes

On August 6, 2002, Bolivia's National Congress met in session to inaugurate a new president and vice president, and the pictures transmitted from the congressional chamber on that day conveyed an image of the country that we Bolivians are not used to seeing. The new Congress was no longer the ethnically homogenous body of *criollos* (people of Spanish descent) and *mestizos* (those of mixed Spanish-Indian ancestry, assimilated to criollo culture) who have traditionally constituted the legislature and whose joint ethnic group—the mestizo-criollo—has been portrayed as the representation of national unity. The chamber seemed cleanly divided. On one side representatives of both sexes, sharply dressed in tailored suits and ties, fervently supported the inaugural speech of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, a neoliberal who was returning to power after a five-year interruption, during a moment of acute crisis in the reforms that he himself had set in motion between 1993 and 1997. Across the aisle an equally important sector of representatives, dressed in work jackets, ponchos, and peasant hats, listened silently, smiling in disbelief at the discourse of national unity that the incoming president propounded. This discourse must have sounded somewhat disingenuous, responding to the interests of only one part of the country: the modern Bolivia, a Bolivia alien to indigenous and peasant demands. Nonetheless, the very presence of both sectors in the chamber illustrated a profound change that is taking

place in Bolivia, a country of many ethnic groups, including speakers of Aymara, Quechua, and Guaraní, the most widely spoken indigenous languages in South America.

In the weeks leading up to this day the party of mainstream Bolivia, the modernizing Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR, Revolutionary Nationalist Movement), had cobbled together a fragile coalition. But far from symbolizing the social accord promised by the president's address, it revealed in action the deep divisions inside Bolivia today. Since the mid-twentieth century, the ideal image of the nation has been expressed through *mestizaje*—the process by which the Spanish and Indian have intermixed, creating a racial and national synthesis. But as the two halves of the chamber demonstrated, the country remains sharply divided—culturally, between *q'aras* (literally, “naked” or “shaved,” the generic Quechua and Aymara term for whites and mestizos) and Indians; economically, between rich and poor; geographically, between *cambas* (inhabitants of the tropical eastern lowlands) and *collas* (the Andeans who live in the ancient Inca province of Kollasuyo); and politically, between the governing party and the opposition.

Watching these images on television, viewers throughout the country were reminded of how different this session of Congress was from the one that had taken place nine years before. In 1993, Sánchez de Lozada first won the presidency on a platform of continuing and deepening neoliberal reforms. (The governing MNR had first embarked upon the neoliberal path in 1985, making a U-turn away from the state capitalism that the party itself had instituted in 1952 with its National Revolution.) In Sánchez de Lozada's first inauguration, the vice president had been the illustrious Aymara leader Víctor Hugo Cárdenas (see chap. 4). Cárdenas appeared sporting a tie and an elegant shawl that had been symbolically given to him by his hometown, the Aymara village of Sank'ay Jawira, on the shores of Lake Titicaca. The Aymara vice president had led a moderate indigenous movement—the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupaj Katari (MRTK, Tupaj Katari Revolutionary Movement), labeled after the legendary eighteenth-century Indian who rebelled against the Spanish—and contributed actively to the recognition of the multiethnic and multicultural character of the country. He represented the possibility of achieving a model of modernization based on Andean roots. Such a model, it was

hoped, could balance out the international market model proposed by Sánchez de Lozada, a successful mining entrepreneur from Bolivia's criollo sector. This intriguing alliance, unique in Latin America, proved short-lived, and the participation of one Indian in an otherwise entirely mestizo-criollo administration proved to be one more example of the saying that one flower does not a garden make.

I made the connection between these two events as I was finishing this book about cultural collision. This book is about mestizaje, or, more precisely, the importance of mestizaje in the construction of Bolivian modernity throughout the twentieth century.

To use mestizaje in a positive national context required not only rejecting the nineteenth-century dogmas of scientific racialism, but also liberating the word mestizaje from its negative connotations as an adulteration of the purity of a race by crossing it with others, a meaning fully compatible with racialism (de Castro 2002). Within the Latin American context of the twentieth century, mestizaje became the means through which to imagine a construction of a unified nation. Mestizaje allowed Latin American thinkers to claim for their countries the racial unity of a nation as conceived in European thought. A way to see the Latin American local histories from the "outside" of European global designs, mestizaje, or, better said, the discourse of mestizaje, thus became a way for the three numerically dominant races living in the Americas—white, Amerindian, and black—to become incorporated into the same national project constructed by the elites. They would commingle to form a new mestizo race, in which the constructive qualities of each original race would contribute to and form a new and different whole. Thus the "cult of the mestizo" as a cultural concept was born.

The cult of the mestizo, like so much revolutionary ideology, did not, of course, originate within modern Bolivian political thought. It had been hinted at during the last decades of the nineteenth century by such thinkers as the Mexican Justo Sierra, and even a century earlier by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier. Justo Sierra had defined the mestizo as the dynamic element within the Mexican population, which had risen to power with the Reforma and whose epitome was Porfirio Díaz. But it was with the Revolution of 1910 that the mestizo cult blossomed. As Alan Knight indicates in his studies on race and revolution in Mexico (Knight 1997),

it was Manuel Gamio who believed that from the struggle of virile “races of bronze and iron,” mestizaje emerged as the “national race” of Mexico, the carrier of “the national culture of the future.” In this formulation, Gamio followed Andrés Molina Enríquez, whose *Grandes problemas nacionales* (1909), like the Bolivian early twentieth-century discussions on race and ethnicity, offered a diagnosis of Mexico’s ills, based on a mixture of Comte, Spencer, Darwin, and Taine. Molina Enríquez stressed the historic rise of the mestizo, who was destined to dominate Mexico. Thereby, Mexico could achieve demographic growth without recourse to immigration, and the population could become a “nationality.” Again, just as Bolivian revolutionary elites would do later on, mestizaje and nationhood were equated in Mexican thought.

I trace the process by which mestizaje became a dominant discourse elaborated by Bolivian intellectuals in their attempt to organize the nation, whether by openly opposing indigenous peoples or co-opting their consciousnesses. In Bolivia, therefore, this process of nation building, of modernization, is and always has been inseparable from the active resistance of the indigenous Aymara and Quechua peoples. The mestizos are positioned within the ongoing conflict between modernity and coloniality that is yet to be overcome.¹ By ongoing conflict I mean that coloniality—the reverse yet hidden face of modernity, like the side of the moon that we cannot see from earth—does not pertain exclusively to the colonial period, and is not located “before” modernity and the nation-building process. From the perspective of the Americas, coloniality is constitutive of modernity and coexists with it up until today as its contradiction, as a hindrance to Latin American history. In the case of Bolivia, the nation that emerges in this postcolonial reflection is one comprising two Bolivias, which, in a way reminiscent of the recent session of the National Congress, revolve around contrasting logics. On one side, there is Western rationality, which invokes modernity with the goal of consolidating unitary nationhood; on the other, what I call *viscerality*.² Viscerality is the bodily metaphor I created from Frantz Fanon’s usage of the subject-object dialectic, and, more precisely, of its limitations. For neither the colonist nor the colonizer behaves as if subject and object might some day be reconciled. The former plunders and pillages; the latter dreams of revenge. When the dominated rise in violent insurrection they do not create a rational con-

frontation of points of view, but the untidy and grotesque affirmation of violence. Consequently, viscosity represents a combative subject-object dialectic whose central term is the violence that emerges from the hidden nature of colonialism. Viscosity, then, is a metaphor that helps explain how indigenous subalternity has resisted giving up its identity to rationalist Western discourse. In this analysis, discourses of race and nation are inseparable from discourses of time and the body, and especially of vision. I have much to say about the "single-eyed" character of modernity, its linear time and rational optic based on Cartesian perspectivism, and the alternative cyclical time, viscosity, and viscosity that new indigenous social movements have brought to bear on national discourse. By cyclical I refer to the revival of an alternative, utopian, Andean social order, with strong ideological ties to the old Inca order. Indigenous social movements relate the factors of Andean ideology and those of material exploitation and moral outrage within the context of a revived Inca time. It is an Andean time that views temporal change in terms of a series of *pachacutis*, or cataclysms, led by representatives of Wiracocha, the Andean Creator God, who are deemed to have returned to earth to reverse the existing, unjust world order (Szeminski 1984). Using this cyclical context, it is possible to link the actions of native rebels beginning with Juan Santos Atahualpa in the seventeenth century, and continuing in the eighteenth century with Tomás and Tupaj Katari, and present-day rebellious Felipe Quispe (see below), all of whom drew on the traditions and beliefs then prevalent in the Andean world. Furthermore, this concept of cyclical time suggests that the roles played by charismatic native leaders may have been important in fostering the cogeneration of Andean rebellion by reviving the concept of *recuperación*, or recovery, and allowing it to move from the periphery into the center of today's ideological discussions (Campbell 1987, 113–15).

I

The contrasting logics that clashed so memorably in the 2002 presidential inauguration lie at the heart of this book. President Sánchez de Lozada's earlier speeches had always been characterized by a caustic irony,

but his inaugural address on August 6, 2002, was markedly moderate. He spoke of the need to reestablish public confidence in the national economy. He emphasized, with atypical Biblical solemnity, the length of time it would take to set up economic policies that could overcome the crisis into which the nation had plunged. The improvised speech centered on themes that were subject to a timeline along which a series of important tasks had to be undertaken. The logic was lineal, organized from the unitary perspective of development and modernization, and he gave pride of place to the need to build a united social front, which in his estimation would have to hold together for at least one year.

Time and direction were thus the basic elements of his discourse, and its rationality was aimed at reviving public confidence. It was telling that the president, who had studied philosophy, augmented his capitalist economic model with a dialectical rhetoric. This strategy, unthinkable to anyone used to Anglo-American political discourse, was not a novelty for a Latin American politician like Sánchez de Lozada, well-tempered himself by the duplex character of populist politics and discourse (MNR's origins are tied to a populist model), and with the ability to oscillate between bourgeois economics and a dialectical analysis of social reality. In Sánchez de Lozada's speech, the thesis corresponded to the structural reforms set in motion during his first term as president, nearly a decade earlier. The antithesis—the phase of negation, conflict, collision, and difference—corresponded both to the poor administration during the five years he was out of office, and to the errors of his original plan, to which Sánchez de Lozada admitted during his electoral campaign. Finally, the synthesis—the negation of the negation—was the new “Plan Bolivia” that his office now outlined for the nation. Sánchez de Lozada's dialectics thus reinforced the temporality of his project, which came with a deadline that he himself set.

The president's recourse to dialectics was neither a superfluous embellishment nor was it a neutral description of a natural state of affairs. It was part of the temporal rhetoric that informs the discursive construction of power and the state. Through what byways did this temporal rationality reach Bolivia? How did it influence the construction of elite discourse, the most recent version of which was Sánchez de Lozada's own proposal? The history behind this rhetoric is too long to recount fully here, but

suffice it to say that it has not always taken up residence in the Andes. It derives from a way of thinking that has been passed down since the sixteenth century, the product of a double epistemic operation in which the temporal explanation of events became more important than the space where this reasoning was applied with implacable zeal.³ The first operation was the colonization of time, and through it, the invention of the Middle Ages and of Greco-Roman Antiquity as the “ancestors” of the Renaissance, and of a linear history that was (indeed, still is) considered “universal.” The second operation was the colonization of space. The latter colonization gave rise to the Americas, Africa, and Asia, with all three dependent upon the centrality of Europe.⁴ The double colonization of time and space—in which the temporal, linear explanation of history offered by Western philosophy came to dominate the colonized space—created the conditions for Europe to emerge as the global point of reference. These operations were, I repeat, fundamentally epistemic.

Transferred to an alien space, and based on Western conflation of time with history, the colonial apparatus served as the mainstay of the elite for centuries. But the Spanish cultural onslaught that assailed the distant Andes was unfortunately uninformed by the two great revolts of Western modernity: critical individualism on the one hand, and revolutionary utopianism on the other. When the elite of the colonized Andes were faced with the enormous difficulty of transforming the world around them, they unfailingly used their discourse, both religious and secular, to represent their own personal interests and the interests of those who held power. The temporal concepts of continuity and legitimacy—concepts that lie at the deepest origin of the vertical exercise of power—molded every discourse on constructing nationality. This includes both the oligarchic, conservative discourses that saw local cultures as barbaric and the reformist views that promoted and still promote *mestizaje*. The colonization of time, with its deep Western roots, is what has always made our countries see themselves as a collection of little Romes, habitually governed by little *mestizo-criollo* Caesars who can only observe the world from the *outside* point of view, from the Western view that disdains everything local and interprets it insufficiently.

Discourses of national construction, which frequently correspond to the viewpoints of those in power, are traditionally serious and sometimes

even apocalyptic in tone. Time and direction are fundamental to these discourses; they aim at removing us from the present state of chaos and transporting us to a cosmos of rational organization, which, being “naturally” good, should be openly accepted by the entire population. Given that the ordered cosmos to which elite discourse would transport us is foreseeable and rationally predictable, it has nothing in common with the heresies that break away from the linear character of this discourse. Since the conciliatory, communitarian enterprise of Moro and Campanella, of Erasmus and Vives, had little influence on the way our nation-states have been organized, scarcely a trace of ironic consciousness could be discerned in this sort of discourse. And because the serious business of order and progress came first for us, pragmatism triumphed over utopianism. Thus, the paradox we face is that we have opted for the epistemological *outside* of Western time, and have accepted the ideologies of our colonizers du jour, while always paying tribute to the time of progress, which, though we have not learned to administer it well, nevertheless molds the supposed essence of our people, so that we forget to check it against that other time, the time of our own original peoples that is marked by a profoundly different ethics of being.

The discourses of power are also tragic because they never manage to construct their desired place completely. Our modernity, too, is tragic: it is prevented from progressing by a colonial presence that it can never eliminate, precisely because that presence is the paradoxical result of the division between rich and poor that our modernity itself has created. Remember that the tragic figures in Shakespeare and Racine are invariably accompanied by comic figures who prevent them from establishing themselves entirely, and who instead anchor them in critical ambivalence. Just as Lear is inseparable from his fool, and Phaëdra cannot rid her consciousness of ambiguity, likewise Sánchez de Lozada’s modernizing discourse cannot free itself from the carnal and verbal irreverence of Felipe Quispe, the contemporary Aymara leader who represents the other Bolivia, the Bolivia of the dispossessed (see chap. 4, this volume). Sánchez de Lozada and Felipe Quispe are thus the two faces of our conflictive modernity, the two sides of the coin. The presence of the indigenous movements is therefore what teaches us that the modern Bolivia, the Bolivia that rises from the mestizo-criollo imaginary, cannot go on examining itself in a flat mirror that fails

to reflect the conflictive nature of its true being, nor can it continue isolating itself thanks to the specular “totality” that it has constructed in the realm of its hierarchical safety. There are more things in this earth than are dreamt of in the mestizo construction of the nation.

An example of the inverse logic that keeps its distance from the universals of Western time is when journalists asked Felipe Quispe what he thought of Sánchez de Lozada’s inauguration speech. He replied that, for him, the whole ceremony had been a “pain in the butt” (*dolor de nalgas*), and that he would have made better use of the day if he had spent it in the countryside in the company of his fellow Aymara villagers. Setting aside his humorous irreverence, it is interesting to observe the eccentricity of his answer, its distance from the temporal rationality of the discourse of modernity. By holding up the countryside as a space of liberation, Quispe’s reply dislocates the questioner, who undoubtedly expected to hear a series of observations on the various economic and social themes interwoven with the president’s temporal reflections. Consciously or unconsciously, Quispe’s reply ignores the aspects of the speech that were marked by the Western logic of modernizing discourse, and instead locates itself outside the dominant discourse.

Indigenous experience has a different locus of enunciation.⁵ It is an *exterior* locus, one that uses its exterior positioning to break with the rationality of the discourse of power. This locus differs from the *outside* of mestizo-criollo elite discourse, which observes the world around it by adjusting the world to supposedly undeniable and universal Western values. The latter locus, the epistemological outside that aims at normalizing the *inside* that the elite construct, is the cognitive process in which we have been educated and that we accept as normal and natural. We therefore do not notice that all our models for analyzing our reality, whether liberal, conservative, or revolutionary, come from outside and therefore deeply alter and distort that reality.

Neither inside nor outside, indigenous exteriority is named from the margins of the dominant discourse. It is the other face of that discourse: the face of coloniality. Being situated on the dark side of modernity, indigenous exteriority calls into question the dialectics and philosophies of history that the discourses of national construction lean on for support, as do the discourses of power. The most radical forms of indigenous thought