



Introduction

Politics in a *Ch'ajchu* City

Early-twenty-first-century Bolivia is a nation energetically confronting stubborn legacies of second-class citizenship, as part of a historic process of political transformation. Indigenous and social movement activism beginning in early 2000 and followed by years of large-scale and direct-action protests culminated in the historic election to the presidency in late 2005 of the Aymara-descended coca grower and opposition leader Evo Morales. The years of civil unrest were a spectacular expression of grassroots disenchantment and a sharp rebuke to the politics of Bolivia's neoliberal democratization, first applied with the sweeping structural adjustment measures of 1985. They also articulated a thoroughgoing indigenous, popular, and even middle-class rejection of the elitism, inequity, corruption, and occasional downright ineptitude exhibited by Bolivia's traditional "political class," which dominated national party politics since the democratic opening of the late 1970s and which had maintained a political stranglehold on the country's politics since its creation. The adoption of a new national constitution in January 2009 defining the country as "plurinational and communitarian" was an unquestionable high-water mark for indigenous enfranchisement in this majority indigenous country.

Set in the largely urban provincial capital of Quillacollo, this book is an ethnographic examination of municipal politics in the context of renewed elections of local-level officials beginning in 1987 after a hiatus of almost forty years.¹ And in the words of one counterpart in Quillacollo, "This was

the moment when people of humble descent began to enter” into local politics. Understanding who these people are, how they think of themselves, and how they relate with each other politically tells us a great deal about the everyday neopopular political ground that preceded and has since been embraced by the Morales presidency, which has steadily been moving Bolivian national politics toward a greater rapprochement with its indigenous heritage. But the recent story of the undeniably historic political empowerment of Bolivia’s indigenous peoples is not just the story of the Morales administration’s successful constitutional referendum. It is more importantly a story about the changing significance of what it means to be indigenous in contemporary Bolivia. This story is apparent in the examination of local political relationships along the urban margin in towns such as Quillacollo, where “indigenous” has become a more capacious category of inclusion in recent decades. And this, in fact, represents a key part of the formidable grassroots support for Morales and the MAS (Movement toward Socialism).

The high profile currently enjoyed by Evo Morales, as perhaps the hemisphere’s most influential indigenous figure, is often explained in the context of the increased public exposure, transnational coordination, and political effectiveness of the hemisphere’s indigenous movements, from at least the successes of Mexico’s Zapatistas to the present.² But this assessment tends to ignore more prosaic and less corporate forms of politics. Throughout this ethnography I develop the case that the present high profile of an indigenous political project in Bolivia is significantly owed to longer-developing if more under-the-radar neopopular working relationships among people often categorized as nonindigenous, diverse urban indigenous, and popular sectors, whose political activities are largely entangled with everyday and informal kinds of economic activities in the effort to make ends meet in neoliberal Bolivia.

This lower-profile process has accompanied the opening up and development of local municipal and provincial politics throughout the democratic period. The thoroughgoing interrelationship of neopopular political alternatives with indigenous projects in local politics through the 1980s to the present, particularly along the growing urban periphery, has gone largely unexamined even as it is notably transforming and expanding the terms of indigenous belonging in Bolivia. This interrelationship is apparent in the steps taken by a diverse array of urban-dwelling people with backgrounds as laborers, factory workers, agriculturalists, miners, entrepreneurs, students, shop owners, and lawyers, among others, to build and maintain political relationships in terms largely recognized by them as characteristically Andean forms of cultural practice. In the Morales era such local

neopopular political experience in provincial and urban settings, as a personally relevant heritage, directly informs popular support for indigenous rights. This promises to be a continuing trend.

This book is an account of the cultural politics informing the recent neopopulist turn away from Bolivia's democratic "politics as usual"—a process that is still ongoing. Enthusiastically dubbed the "politics of the multitude" or the "democracy of the plebe" by close-up observers, academics, and social movement participants,³ the present turn has included a surge of grassroots participation from among this nation's historically marginalized popular and indigenous sectors. In media as well as scholarly accounts, the events of the past nine years in Bolivia are often interpreted as part of the often bumpy trajectory of democratization, with the country's indigenous movements achieving greater recognition through the fits and starts of institutional reforms that have culminated with the new Constitution (Van Cott 2007; Yashar 2005), if only after a series of false beginnings, repressive state actions, and factional infighting since at least the mid-1940s. But my account takes a different starting point.

This ethnography is a product of long hours spent in the company of the several hundred or so most politically engaged men and women in Quillacollo,⁴ as well as close attention to the discourses, practices, and cultural and political strategies characteristic of these most local state representatives, the mayors and town councilmen and leaders of local base organizations, who together compose the political authorities of this provincial capital.⁵ None of these people are what we could call professional politicians, if many have had long careers and if politics is their abiding passion. One Bolivian political analyst has aptly called such people "politicians of circumstance more than of vocation" (Lazarte 1998:78). And circumstances require that they make a living in other ways.

During the mid- to late 1990s, "neopopulism" in Quillacollo corresponded to the UCS (Unidad Cívica Solidaridad, or Civic Solidarity Union) party, born in 1988 almost full blown from the head of its founder, beer baron Max Fernandez, who was himself born in Quillacollo.⁶ For more than a decade the UCS party thoroughly dominated the town's politics. Since 2002 the UCS has been displaced by the MAS in Quillacollo. But the type of local municipal politics talked about here and the mostly urban indigenous and popular constituency to which the parties correspond are not simply a phenomenon of the UCS of the 1990s or the MAS of the 2000s. They are part of a more encompassing set of developments that emerged in close relationship with everyday struggles during neoliberal democratization, an increased informalization of the local economy, uneven provincial urbanization, the inconclusive provincial legacies of an earlier project of national

identity based on *mestizaje* (cultural mixing), the effects of more recent multicultural state reforms, new incentives to embrace at least the rhetoric of indigenous politics, and greater autonomy and concentration of resources in local municipalities. Taken together, these factors have shaped local political strategies and priorities in Quillacollo.

This book, then, is about the political lives and careers of a growing urban-dwelling popular and indigenous constituency that operates primarily within the many corners of the hidden or informal economy in and around Quillacollo, a population that has experienced significant expansion throughout the neoliberal period just as Bolivia's public sector has shrunk.⁷ The cultural politics informing the political and economic rivalries and relationships maintained by these people are not, I suggest, unique to Quillacollo, if they are well illustrated here precisely because of the location of Quillacollo as a social and cultural crossroads of sorts on the margin of the nearby city of Cochabamba.

The majority of people who self-identified as indigenous on Bolivia's most recent census in 2001 also happened to be urbanites.⁸ This is perhaps a counterintuitive fact, given that the recognition of indigenous identity in Bolivia and in Latin America frequently has been linked to such diacritics as place (assumed to be rural), language, collective integrity, or precolonial descent. But recent events in Bolivia have invested the question "What does it mean to be indigenous?" with new relevance, since these events have highlighted the variable and situational characteristics of indigenous claims. Most notably, the high profile of Evo Morales and the MAS owes significantly to having successfully articulated a more inclusionary big tent to better frame key national issues, rights, forms of heritage, and agency in indigenous terms than previously (see Albro 2005a, 2006a; Canessa 2006).

However, once in government the MAS has also at times adopted a "with us or against us" approach. This is perhaps most apparent in the new Constitution,⁹ which formally recognizes thirty-six indigenous "nations" and which defines them as collectively sharing in common a cultural identity, language, historical tradition, institutions, and cosmovision while asserting the rights of indigenous peoples to autonomy, self-governance, and territory.¹⁰ The Constitution is a historically significant step forward for the enfranchisement of Bolivia's indigenous population. But it also begs the questions of misrecognition and of the legibility of indigenous experience vis-à-vis even a well-meaning state (see Postero 2007b), particularly for people living in marginal urban environments such as Quillacollo or El Alto, and for whom indigenous identity is at once personally relevant, a politically relevant heritage, but not necessarily recognizable in territorial or even collective terms (see Albro 2008).

Bolivia's new Constitution has not come to terms with the more variegated expressions of indigenous agency, which ironically were significantly responsible for the MAS's original rise to power. These include the more urban, overlapping, and mutually engaged interests and identities of indigenous and popular associational networks, as well as the changing boundaries of indigenous and mestizo (racially and culturally mixed) inclusion characteristic of these alliances and politics. As Andrew Canessa (2007b:208) has recently and rightly noted, the numbers of Bolivians who do not belong to a recognized indigenous community, who do not speak an indigenous language, but who nevertheless identify as indigenous in some circumstances are considerable, but "there is still virtually no research on this important segment of the Bolivian population." The present work is an effort to begin to address this.

Quillacollo's Identity Problem

Quillacollo and environs could be said to be in the grip of a protracted identity crisis, perceived in the terms of growing urban squalor, felt social anomie, and even moral decay. This is not a new problem. Quillacollo's is not a history based on tracing out successive collective locations of Andean identity, still detectable after more than five hundred years (compare to Rivera 1984). Rather it is a history told as if premised upon a cultural *absence*, upon which are enacted successive social displacements. In fact the encompassing region of Cochabamba, as a social space, has always been somewhat at odds with the sorts of explicitly Andean cultural contexts more typically made the basis of ethnographic accounts. As Xavier Albó (1987b:45–46) put it some years ago, the Cochabamba region is an "open geographic space, a point of encounter, whose identity consisted in its very *lack of an identity*" (emphasis mine).¹¹ The lower valley of Cochabamba is originally thought to have been populated by groups of Aymara colonists "whose nuclei were in other parts," supplanted in quick succession first by the Quechua-speaking Inca and then by the soon-to-arrive Spanish (Larson 1998:14–31; Wachtel 1982).

Founded in the late sixteenth century and first named as a Spanish parish (see Peredo Antezana 1963), Quillacollo was not a typically sleepy provincial town. Unlike all of the other towns in Cochabamba's lower valley, Quillacollo was not created as a *reducción*, or new Indian town, under the program of then-Viceroy Toledo. Its population was primarily a collection of "rootless Indians" (in colonial terms, *forasteros*), alongside a mixed-race (mestizo) artisanal class, and land owning creole townsmen (*gente decente*). The town is described by one historian of the region even then as

“notoriously mestizo” (Sánchez-Albornóz 1978:156–184). By the eighteenth century we are told that the pre-Hispanic “pattern of ethnic identification” (Larson 1998:101) had been severely undermined, and it was reported that “five hundred *cholos* [gloss: “upwardly mobile Indians”] and mestizos” (1998:179) were already hard at work in the town’s incipient textile industry. A large laboring class has continued to characterize the unique demographics of the province right up to the present, most importantly in the form of the Manaco shoe factory and other smaller industrial ventures in and around the province, especially along the highway corridor on the way to the city of Cochabamba.

The emergence of a large population of petty agriculturalists, called *piqueros*, in the early twentieth century accelerated after the 1952 Revolution, feeding the growth of a thriving regional market network. This growing investment in the market on the part of rural provincials (*vallunos*) increased the traffic between rural and urban, including intimate and daily connections with the nearby city of Cochabamba. As a result of these many factors, historians of the region have consistently emphasized the social *mobility*—internal migration, displacements and superimpositions of populations, fluid shifts in ethnic identity, diversified household subsistence strategies, socioeconomic shifts—particularly characteristic of this region (see Dandler 1987a; Goldstein 2004; Lagos 1994; Peredo Antezana 1963; Rivera 1984; Rocha 1990; Rodríguez and Solares 1990; Salamanca 1931).

The academic consensus about Cochabamba’s *vallunos* has described them as a long de-Indianized peasantry that over time has successfully manipulated vertical ties as clients to urban elites and state politicians, to solidify their own access to land, material, and capital (Dandler 1983; Lagos 1994; Larson 1998). As a regional case study, Cochabamba has thus reflected a trend within the study of peasant communities in Latin American anthropology, where “class differences and differentiation remain the basic theoretical issue” (Kearney 1996:173). This regional combination, then, of social displacement, the lack of complex indigenous cultural forms (or extended kinship ties), no long-term historical memory (or corporate organization), competitions of class, and a concomitant fluidity of ethnic categorization have all participated in producing a set of circumstances within which cultural identities are understood to be weakly defined and where questions of identity are anything but clear-cut. Take this characterization of the region by the respected historian Brooke Larson:

However shrewd and flexible peasant families might be in their livelihood strategies, and however much they tried to balance their subsistence requirements against reciprocal obligations to kinsmen or

neighbors, they lived and worked outside the cultural and material context of Andean village society. They may have practical reciprocities, but those practices were embedded in a class context. In their daily pursuit of a livelihood or their struggle against the enduring injustices and humiliations of being Indian in colonial society, or living in the shadow of a patrón, most valley peasants faced the world alone. They did not have recourse to the material and ideological traditions of Andean communities to defend themselves against the incursion of outside claimants, the arbitrary demands of a landlord, or the ravages of a natural disaster. There was no communal tradition of group self-sufficiency, reciprocity, and distribution to buffer the peasant household against subsistence threats or to contain class forces. Valley peasants had no means of calling upon the moral economy of their ancestral kin and ethnic groups to collectively confront the outside world whenever it turned hostile. In short, the absence of a strong ethnic heritage in the valleys left most peasants without economic autonomy or symbolic integrity. [1998:303–304]

For the purposes of this discussion, it should be apparent that the complexly interrelated social facts only touched on here have routinely been used to indicate the absence of sharply defined collective cultural identities for the region as a whole. The different ways that this absence has been explained and temporarily filled over time are, in a sense, imagined to *constitute* the unique characteristics of regional history. One repercussion has been for researchers to look elsewhere for elaborated corporate or collective ethnic identities. Another repercussion has been a reduction of scale of cultural analysis, within a region characterized by a “diffuse peasantry.” Hence, those who have conducted research in Cochabamba have tended to subsume questions of cultural identity to a seemingly more characteristic class analysis at the level of the household (see Lagos 1994).¹² And yet, as recently as 2000, campesino irrigators in Cochabamba’s lower valley—where Quillacollo is found—mobilized collectively to defend their established “uses and customs” (that is, traditional *cultural* practices) from an attempted government sell-off of the city’s waterworks (Albro 2005b).

Among the many appraisals of the current moment of Evo Morales, and the successful installation of a national indigenous project within the apparatus of the state beginning in 2005 (see Albro 2006a; Canessa 2006; Postero 2007a), the majority have been concerned primarily with the mobilization of Aymara-based social movement activism during the period 2000 to 2005, with attention focused mostly upon the city of El Alto as representative of indigenous kinds of mobilization in contemporary Bolivia

(Arbona 2007; Lazar 2008). But, beginning with the Water War of 2000, Cochabamba's lower valley has also been an important if distinct space of popular mobilization, in which Quillacollo has played a prominent role. Quillacollo, therefore, offers a fruitful comparison with the political organizing along the outskirts of other major cities like El Alto, particularly in terms of the different varieties of urban indigenous expression characterizing these places.

Brooke Larson's (1998) excellent history of Cochabamba has detailed the regionally characteristic close relationship of the rise of independent small landholders, traders, and markets at the turn of the nineteenth century alongside the emergent politics of *mestizaje*. The Bolivian nation-state, Bolivian organic intellectuals, as well as social scientists have all viewed Cochabamba through the twinned lenses of racial and cultural *mestizaje* facilitated by an "alliance of classes" (Rivera 1984; Albó 1987b, 1994). And as Florencia Mallon (1996:170) and many others have observed, being a "mestizo/a is, by definition, betwixt and between, neither Indian nor Spanish." Particularly after the 1952 Revolution, the MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario, or National Revolutionary Movement) undertook to finish the incomplete project of creating a unified citizenry with the goal of constructing a socially integrated and culturally homogeneous mestizo nation.

As a discourse of nation building, the new MNR government of 1952 understood *mestizaje* as the assimilation of Andean "others" through the erasure of disruptive internal differences to create a single national subject. The Bolivian critic Guillermo Mariaca Iturri (1998:190) has glibly summarized the revolutionary project of folding culture into class as a recipe for the creation of citizenship with the maxim, "Mestizo equals homogenization equals nation of equals."¹³ Borrowing the words of Nestor García Canclini (2001:137), such projects represented a historical moment of the "epic affirmation of popular identity" in Bolivia. For the past quarter century, in fact, Quillacollo has taken on a starring role in advertising the supposed cultural mixture productive of Bolivian nationhood, as the site of the yearly fiesta of Urkupiña, the town's saint's day festival. Urkupiña has become a colossal yearly event of national significance, where "traditional" and "modern" Bolivia are feted as they publicly, amicably interpenetrate and coexist. In 1986 Urkupiña was officially dubbed the "fiesta of national integration."

Larson (1998:343), however, has questioned the skepticism with which researchers of Andean culture and community initially snubbed this scene, dismissively written off, in her words, as composed of "Quechua-mestizo peasantries" and "corrupt clients or penny capitalists." Quillacollo, in particular, has been understood to exemplify these trends. The province has been described as having a "weak communal tradition" (Albó 1987b:412)

or, as a now-dated study by Bolivia's Ministry of Urbanism and Welfare explained, "poor social cohesion" (Rojas Rosales and Galarza Garamendi 1975:29), in large part due to its 13-kilometer proximity to the nearby city. In the late 1990s politically engaged cultural activists with whom I worked in Quillacollo regularly repeated such conclusions when complaining about challenges they faced as informal cultural workers: "Quillacollo lacks its own identity" or "Quillacollo has little in the way of tradition." Or, as one friend put it, Quillacollo is "as variable as the wind."

Dismissively described by both residents and nonlocals as a town with an expanding population of *cholos*, upwardly mobile people of indigenous descent who often also reject their own origins, the social space of Quillacollo invites comparisons with June Nash's (1979:311) path breaking description of the "cholo culture" of the miners of Siglo XX, never sharply in focus and discussed as a "culture of transition."¹⁴ Thomas Abercrombie (1996:63) makes this point as well, noting that *cholos* are "defined by others as much for the identities they have not achieved as for those they have failed to leave behind." The conviction that *cholos* represent an ill-defined, temporary, unstable, or transitory identity—as at best a problematic weigh station—early on characterized the scant writing about the process of *cholaje* (indigenous upward mobility) among social scientists. "The cholo," as Jacob Fried (1961:25) characteristically explained while writing about mid-twentieth-century Peru, "is not really a class or a cultural entity, but a transitional, contingent, elastic category."¹⁵

But this book addresses how such instability of identity can be surprisingly culturally productive for the construction of political relationships in Quillacollo. As I examine throughout the chapters to follow, part of this productivity is derived from the exploitation and interplay of ongoing internal connections between the expectations of *mestizaje* and the undercurrents of *cholaje*, which such expectations potentially continue to include in the activities of provincial politics.¹⁶ If personal association with the term *cholo* historically has been pejorative, in contemporary politics it nevertheless represents commitments to forms of cultural practice associated with popular and indigenous sources of identity that, too, enable the effective construction of political networks. Despite the assumption of the disappearance of indigenous identity, particularly as part of urbanization, in and around Quillacollo a regular discourse of alienation—which includes facts of insult and stigma and of the potential loss of identity—in fact serves to reassert shared claims to indigenous heritage among people for whom such claims help to develop informal working relationships. The figure of the *cholo*, now as potentially positive, has in recent decades become the surprising subject of political and cultural attention.

Contemporary Quillacollo: New Urban Periphery

As a cultural and economic crossroads, Quillacollo is a good illustration of Olivia Harris's (1995:110) apt comment about the growing complexities of Bolivian cultural identity: "Everything is mixed, but not everything is mestizo." In the words of one long time resident, Quillacollo is neither "city-city" nor "country-country," and cultural identities are not smoothly, evenly, or equitably mixed. The town is comparable to other unevenly developed, unregulated, and informal boomtowns or satellite cities that have grown up alongside Bolivia's established urbs, like El Alto next to the de facto national capital La Paz and Montero near the lowland business center of Santa Cruz. As a recent in-migrant expressed it to me, Quillacollo has "a little of everything." It is a peculiar peri-urban social space, part migrant destination, part "dormitory town" a commuter's distance from the nearby departmental capital city of Cochabamba, part provincial capital, a more urban extension of the post-peasant yet still rural goings-on of Cochabamba's lower valley, and part rustic heartland of *qhochala* (valley) cultural sensibilities, conveniently available for consumption by nearby and otherwise modern city dwellers. These characteristics are at once confounded and conjoined at this crossroads.

Though there is no precise record of Quillacollo's founding, commerce is usually offered as the primary reason. One demographic study cites Quillacollo's

location as a key point of intersection within a vast market system where it connected, on one side, the agricultural production of the central valley with the markets of the city of Cochabamba and of the region of the altiplano; and on the other side, it forms a central part of the commercial circuit of important goods from Peru, Chile and Argentina. [Polo Nájera 1991:13]

An assessment produced for Quillacollo's municipal government in the mid-1990s concurred, emphasizing the continued regional importance of the town's weekly agricultural market:

Fundamental factors linked to commerce and to the circulation of products in the zone of the central valley, as well as the mountainous regions of the provinces of Ayopaya, Morochata and Tapacarí, converge in the historical process of the creation of Quillacollo's urban nucleus. A consequence of its strategic placement assigns it the role of a center of interchange, commerce, as a crossroads for agricultural production, toward the centers of consumption in the interior of the

country and the city of Cochabamba, giving place to an incipient commercialization consisting of grain warehouses, deposits, and squares for regional peasant markets. [Canedo 1994:45]

Its location has given Quillacollo a strategic importance for people looking for new opportunities and coming from points distant to settle in Cochabamba.

The son of a long-established Quillacolleño family observed to me, “Until 1960 Quillacollo was a pueblo, that is, rural, with its cows, its burros, and its horses.” Since then, “it has totally changed.” By 1976 the population of the provincial capital of Quillacollo had begun to skyrocket, at 19,433 doubling the previous census figure (Calzavarini, Laserna, and Valdivieso 1979:14). With the next count in 1992, Quillacollo’s population had more than doubled again, climbing to 42,278 (INE 1994:3). With the most recent census in 2001, the town continued its rapid growth rate to 78,324 persons. In-migration has substantially increased with the “anarchy of the relocated miners,” to quote a local civic activist, to the point that already by 1991, 47 percent of Quillacollo’s population were ex-migrants (Polo Nájera 1991:63), that is, people not born in the province. Part of a rapidly emerging urban periphery, recent estimates identify Quillacollo as the most populous provincial capital in Bolivia, with, at last measurement, an unofficial annual growth rate of 6.5 percent (Contreras Baspineiro 2001).¹⁷

Largely unregulated street vending has come to be synonymous with the squalor of too rapid urbanization, and in recent years it has become a major headache for the town. One economic analyst has asserted that seven of every ten new jobs created in Bolivia since the application of structural adjustment measures in 1985 have been in the “informal” sector, which now comprises up to 40 percent of the total workforce (Kruse 2001, 2003). Commenting on the local effects of the nation’s persistent economic crisis, a panicked editorialist noted, “Quillacollo has been converted into a gigantic center of informal commerce, bringing together more than ten thousand vendors from Cochabamba, La Paz, Oruro, and other cities” (*Los Tiempos* 2002). Today on Quillacollo’s streets the signs of commerce of all sorts are everywhere, from vendor kiosks, or blaring music, to video parlors, construction shops, or cybercafes (in the past few years). A host of ambulant vendors as well as *cholas*—women with their distinctive braids *pelo al pecho* and wearing the signature gathered skirts—hawk their wares, including ingredients for a ritual table, coca leaf for chewing, and *anticucho* (grilled beef strips served with potatoes and a peanut sauce). Market women give a *yapita* (a little something extra), hoping to turn customers into *caseros* (loyal customers), who are one-half of a stable buyer-seller relationship.



Figure 1.1. Sunday market day: A Quillacollo side street crowded with the stalls of informal market vendors.

On Friday evenings in particular, vendors laying out the trappings for weekly ritual observances take over the streets. At that moment the dirt or cobblestone streets are warm, lively, and sociable. Food stalls send their smells up into the night air, if they also mingle with the occasional reek of putrefaction and garbage. But by the following Sunday, the weekly market day, the scene is much more disorderly (Figure 1.1).

The street, Héroes del Chaco, running off the main plaza, is the town's commercial district. It runs down to the Plaza 15 de Agosto. Over the years, this street has become increasingly overrun by informal small merchants [comerciantes minoristas], and during the weekly market fair it is not passable except on foot.... A central preoccupation of the local authorities is to bring some sort of order to this growing confusion. Their stalls are everywhere. Ambulant vendors set up shop anywhere, selling anything from Hanes underwear, to tutumas [bowls for drinking chicha], to potatoes, to firewood. The stalls spill randomly down the streets.... Young chulu-wearing kh'epiris [strappers] traverse the

market with wheelbarrows of bananas.... Piercing squeals of panicked pigs go up, as they are loaded or unloaded from trucks, or in one case shoved terrified into the trunk of a taxi. [Author's field note, August 11, 1994]

Quillacollo's changing human landscape has generated a great deal of angst and criticism from the town's civic minded and from visitors, which is apparent in the following excerpt from a scathing open letter to the mayor's office lamenting the disorganization of the town's yearly fiesta of Urkupña.

How profound was our disappointment, upon encountering in the streets: chaos, anarchy, disorder, drunkenness, and filth, a filth which particularly dismays the tourists who come to our borders, asking themselves the same question: Does Quillacollo not have any authorities? Having hardly disembarked from the vehicle that transports us from the city...we are instantly blocked [by merchants] from our objective, the temple.... We have no interest in the doodads they hawk.... The street that leads to the sanctuary...seems a madhouse. Everyone shouts, pushes, leaves no room to walk, since the street is full of merchants.... More importance has been granted to the merchants than to the pilgrims!... Is it that Quillacollo has no place to put its merchants, or is it that the criteria and mentality of its communal government is to prioritize commerce over religious faith?

This market vendor epidemic is an acute political problem for Quillacollo's authorities, and the effort to relocate this exploding vendor population has been the source of periodic friction and even violence, in the forms of protests, riots, and vandalism. As a legacy of neoliberal reform, this widespread informalization of economic life has also been extended to many other arenas of Bolivian society (see Toranzo Roca 1989), including politics.

Both a highway and a railway pass through the town. To the west, the train tracks leaving town begin to travel through fields of corn or alfalfa, with milk farmers grazing their stock on empty plots or in unoccupied neighborhood blocks (Figure 1.2). To the east, the town blurs indiscriminately into the irregular urbanscape of the outskirts of Cochabamba, connected by a road, Avenida Blanco Galindo, nicknamed the "highway of death" because of the high frequency of accidents. It composes a corridor of mostly unregulated small industry (see Dandler 1987a; Gordillo et al. 1995). This growth has added greatly to a sense of local disarray. The town's expansion has long since spilled beyond its colonial-era plan, and haphazard construction now characterizes its expanding margins.



Figure 1.2. The town's uneven urban development: A young shepherd pasturing his sheep in a barrio of Quillacollo.

Over the years, as Quillacollo's demographics have changed dramatically, Quillacolleños' perceptions of their town have changed with them. A sketch of the town circa 1950 by one of its prominent citizens described it this way: "The population of the province of Quillacollo is constituted by whites and by mestizos, with very few indigenous people, who are barely seen on market days and in some religious festivals. And these have already changed their clothing and speak Spanish" (Rejas 1950:10). And some twenty years later elite descriptions of Quillacollo continued to express a confident optimism about the town's inevitably "modern" future: "[Quillacollo's] ten kilometers of paved road, now a city avenue, are alive with feverish activity. And the lively work of the industrial establishments bordering it are notable: factories, warehouses, gas and lubricant stores, clinics, ultramodern grandiose hospitals, and multiple places for recreation. The flow of vehicles is incessant, for which the traveler arriving from Oruro or La Paz is thankful" (Cevallos Tovar 1971:12).

However accurate these glowing accounts, people of indigenous descent are much less scarce in Quillacollo now than they were in the early 1970s. And amid the town's subsequent exponential, unregulated growth, and in the aftermath of national structural adjustment—with a new generation of laid-off workers and a stiffer cost of living—this confident image of an

industrious, hardworking future has given way to expressions of dismay over chaotic change for the worst, leading to “underdevelopment” and breeding disenchantment. And as with the close-by city of Cochabamba, the “purportedly deficient physical and moral hygiene” (Goldstein 2004:64) of the growing presence of indigenous ex-peasants has been understood to pose a threat to the integrity of Quillacollo, at least from the perspective of its besieged upper and middle classes.

Consider this indictment by one of Quillacollo’s schoolteachers and longtime participants in its civic committee, which appeared in a local pamphlet:

A town like Quillacollo, with such national and international honor and renown, does not merit the state of backwardness and semidevelopment to which it has been reduced: Its streets and squares abandoned and anarchic, with dirt and mud everywhere. Its public buildings: schools, offices, markets, beyond insufficient, are also ruinous, inadequate, barely camouflaged with paint and filler. Its civic, political religious, union and educational organizations barely keeping up appearances and with a desire to “shine” regardless of how. Its people: chastened and defeated, as well as indifferent, grumbling about its frustrations. Once in a while they lift up a shout of protest, or better said, of censure or rejection, of those who do not know how to defend [them]. Its culture, reduced to a minimal expression, to a slender patrimony, preserved at great cost. But it is not promoted nor permitted to grow creatively and autonomously. Its routine social life, full of prejudices, interests, and neighborly antagonisms, evokes a primitive and pharisaic form of life.

Quillacollo’s promise of urban development carried along its modern avenue in 1971 had by the late 1990s become “streets full of filth and converted into public bathrooms.” And this problem has not improved, with “great volumes of organic and inorganic trash strewn about the streets and piled up nearby” (*Los Tiempos* 2001b). The lack of planning and the lack of any means to regulate development are recurrent themes in Quillacolleños’ own stories about their changing town (see Figure 1.3). The promise of urban planning has been replaced by “shantytowns and secret land speculation, which appear overnight without authorization.” This has turned Quillacollo— “a land years ago characterized by the loveliest landscapes and places of recreation”—into a “totally disorganized expansion” (Carpio San Miguel 2001b), with unemployment, violence, lack of basic services, poverty, and suspect political authorities.¹⁸



Figure 1.3. An election-era mural: “Llajtamasi: Let’s make Quillacollo a dignified, clean, and attractive city.”

Nevertheless, people still seek out sociability in one of the town’s many colorfully named *chicherías* (traditional watering holes)—the Electric Cat, Maria the Teacher, the Guerrilla, Chernobyl, the Miraculous Chola, the Hovel, and others. For many, *chicherías* correspond to a social environment reminiscent of the more pastoral years in the provinces prior to the 1952 Revolution, where people can drink, socialize, play the dice game *catcho*, cheat on their spouses, and work out political deals. Recently, though, people have also had to learn the names of new youth gangs (*pandillas*), such as the Black Bulls, the Black Sheep, the Black Panthers, Los Rodriguez, and the Vultures. One report identified at least thirty such gangs in Quillacollo dedicated to “alcoholism, drug addiction, robbery, rape, theft, and violence,” the products of a “social fragmentation” increasingly associated with places like Quillacollo (*Los Tiempos* 2004).

Blamed for an alarming recent rise in crime statistics, these gangbangers are mostly “of humble origin” and come from the “sectors most punished by the crisis.” In many cases, they are “orphaned of father and mother” and “display an inclination to delinquency from having been totally abandoned” (*Los Tiempos* 1992). People in Quillacollo, now considered one of the most dangerous zones in the department, recognize that their tranquil small town is now a thing of the past. Given the increasing presence of gangs and drugged-up youths—who also spend a lot of time in *chicherías*—people now express concern about walking the streets at night (see García 2005). Whether this is more perception than reality—I have often walked the streets at night—Quillacolleños understand themselves to be living at once

amid a growing crisis and in a *ch'ajchu* (Quechua: “a little of everything”) environment. This has become a crisis of citizen security that has provoked vigilante responses in the form of repeated attempted lynchings in different neighborhoods.¹⁹ Though intimately familiar with Quillacollo, upon a return visit one of the first things a close friend felt the need to tell me was to warn me not to ride in taxis. Likely as not, he gravely explained, I might be driven out of town to the periphery, to be “robbed, shot, and left for dead.” In fact the social careers described for the participants in these new gangs are surprisingly comparable to the lives of the political authorities with whom I worked.

Quillacollo’s turn-of-the-century neopopulist politics, then, should be understood in the context of a local perception of chaotic urban disarray, including an expanding informal economy, and characterized by a decline of good fortune under neoliberalism, in-migration, and lack of urban planning, alongside the perception of delinquency and danger. But it also needs to be understood in the context of the town’s agrarian history and the province’s particular cultural traditions, which, taken altogether, have encouraged varieties of re-Indianization. The social base of relatively new popular and indigenous alternatives in national politics draws precisely from urban peripheries like Quillacollo, with their historically largely neglected but growing constituencies of people struggling in the post-peasant, urban and indigenous informal sector: artisans, market vendors, migrants, disenfranchised workers, and many others. Local political authorities of “humble origin,” specifically, are in a very significant sense the partially estranged inheritors of these peri-urban circumstances. And chapters 5 and 6 in particular are concerned with the problematic public consequences of genealogy and inheritance as a cultural patrimony.

Politics and Problem-Solving Networks

An astonishingly common and readily recalled experience among the vast majority of politically active people with whom I worked in Quillacollo is that of a childhood shaped by sharp traumas and variously combining hard and even exploitative labor, acute poverty, physical abuse, father abandonment, cultural and geographic dislocation, and a hard-knocks street socialization. These are men who grew up in a wide variety of challenging circumstances, including life in isolated mining camps or as street urchins, accompanying their mothers on the itinerant trading circuit, working in the fields, or as child-aged street peddlers. Most attended school only irregularly, which was fodder for political rivals who ridiculed them with complaints that they were at best “semiliterate.”

As regularly serving public functionaries, many of these men were sheepish about their lack of education, which was often little more than the equivalent of elementary or middle school. A large proportion went back to school as adults as this became possible, sometimes even up through the local public University of San Simón in the city of Cochabamba. Some of them did so to become lawyers, a profession with significant political value in Quillacollo. Others, however, were clear that they had little formal schooling but indicated that they grew up in the school of political or union life (*la escuela sindical*), where they became conversant with the ideologies and politics of the workers' movement and the agrarian or mining union. By their own descriptions, though, typically these are people who have overcome long—even tragic—odds, including malnourishment, illness, and violence, to enjoy relatively successful adult careers as local authorities and public political figures in Quillacollo. Economic hardship is a basic social fact of Quillacollo's provincial politics at present as in the past, and when local authorities describe themselves as of "humble origins"—as they often do—they are pointedly orienting these experiences of hardship and their ongoing careers to a personal trajectory, a family history, the public recognition of relevant cultural heritage, and a style of local politics, compatible with nationally emergent popular and indigenous commitments. How such family and personal careers become a basis for the negotiation of cultural inheritance as shared patrimony in the context of political expedience is the subject of chapter 6.

Over the past two decades the state's neoliberal measures have led to the proportional decline of the contract worker—locally represented by Manaco and smaller-scale industry—and an increase in an insecure and unregulated or informal economy of unemployment, temporary employment, self-employment, and small-scale commercial activities.²⁰ When last measured, Quillacollo's average annual income was approximately \$1,448 (Bustamante, Buttorworth, and Faysse 2004:5), and it remains a relatively poor province where the use of money is not pervasive and the reciprocal or direct exchange of goods and services remains a basic economic strategy (Delgado, San Martín, and Torrico 1998:29). In the absence of more stable options, people have been moved to invest a great deal of energy in developing their own household-based diversified economic strategies. These usually include wives, children, and extended family members in different capacities, as well as involvement in trade unions and both local and regional political contacts. These diversified strategies are not at all new and in fact are well documented for the provincial context of Cochabamba.²¹ But the neoliberal era has made such informal and diversified economic activities even more crucial as tactics of survival.

In addition to the resources he received directly from politics, for example, one veteran political operator—described to me by his rivals as an “urban peasant”—worked as a schoolteacher, maintained a lawyer’s office on the side, and owned a taxi, as well as a hectare of land on which he cultivated corn. Economic activities prominent among the politically active men I knew well variously combined such diverse pursuits as agriculturalist, transporter, land speculator, pig or milk farmer, the illicit coca leaf industry, small business, legal work, one or another cottage industry, factory worker, chichería owner, market trader or seller, street vendor, petty functionary, local official, or staff member of a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), among other possibilities. And these are not stand-alone activities but also directly if informally connect to other political and economic benefits. Such a distribution of economic activities takes considerable energy and is a necessary compensatory strategy in a context of the scarcity and vulnerability of secure long-term contract employment.

As Carlos Toranzo Roca (1989) described early on, one of the basic experiences of neoliberalism has been an increased informalization of Bolivian society, a principle we can understand as extending beyond the expansion of the informal economy to also include the face-to-face, personalistic, familial, and network-based mobilization of political activity. The great majority of people I knew living and working in the small city of Quillacollo moved through the informal economy in various ways. This included “eating from politics,” as it is said. Participation in politics was definitely a calculated part of many diversified household economies, particularly the hope that with a change of local administration one might benefit by receiving a *pega* (a political job). But no one who is politically active in Quillacollo lives by politics alone, if by that is meant making a sufficient salary as a public or party official—minuscule or nonexistent in any case. Make no mistake: people do extract resources from politics, though in more informal ways (and not excluding graft), through organized political networks that circulate economic resources, sometimes as money, basic food staples, family connections, reciprocal relations, or key information.

If the views they air are any gauge, disillusioned Quillacolleños hold their political authorities in extremely low regard. A thirty-five-household survey of political perceptions in Quillacollo administered early on in my fieldwork painted a bleak picture. The following are typical samples of people’s views about Bolivia’s political class: “Bolivia is ruined by those shameless men”; “They are an embarrassment for humanity”; “I don’t know where corruption isn’t found”; “They’re corrupt. All of them look out for their personal interests”; “After they take office, they forget everyone”; “They have no interest in working for the province, but instead pocket what they can”;

“There is no honorable politician”; “They are fraudulent”; “They dissimulate”; politics is “a deception”; a *político* is “he who shouts loudest”; “For every one word I say, they say ten or fifteen.” And the most often heard complaint is that local *políticos* “make promises they don’t keep.” Not coincidentally, politically active people in Quillacollo typically energetically deny the perceived accusation that, indeed, they are “politicians.”

There was no shortage of criticism of local officials while I worked in Quillacollo, however. They were constantly publicly accused of influence peddling, accepting bribes, or the pursuit of their own material interests. The most frequent charge was that of *prebendalismo*, the exchanging of material goods for votes. This charge was particularly leveled at the UCS party throughout the 1990s, the dominant political party in Quillacollo over that period. But what is condemned as corruption in national newspaper editorials is, from another angle, a staple of the informal economy, where resources change hands to bolster ongoing and potentially productive working relationships among clients.²² Successful political operators in Quillacollo occupy indispensable positions brokering what Javier Auyero (2000:83–84) has aptly called “problem-solving networks.” Auyero (2000:85) describes the problem-solving network for urban Argentines during this country’s economic crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s as “an overlapping of informal networks of survival and political networks,” a strategy utilized by working-class people in mostly marginal urban neighborhoods. We can understand Quillacollo’s politics during the crisis of neoliberalism in comparable terms.

For local functionaries—as people with indispensable skills and access to the municipal administrative process—making a living includes the exchange of favors in the form of influence, information, or the facilitation of paperwork up the chain of administration, in return for payment in agricultural goods, other perishables, or even livestock, rather than cash. Clients will often describe these as part of an informal economy of ongoing and traditional reciprocal relationships typical of Quillacollo’s primarily informal economy. This interpenetration of economic, political, and cultural priorities, through organized, personalistic, and diffuse networks that circulate both material and symbolic benefits as part of a local informal economy that includes a local politics of the purse strings, lies at the heart of the political relationships I describe for Quillacollo in these pages.

As the site of an important popular market, Quillacollo has for centuries been an axis of convergence for intensive and daily cultural interactions between smallholding peasants, itinerant traders, as well as urban-dwelling artisans, laborers, mestizo merchants, and pilgrims. As such, Brooke Larson (1998:365) has emphasized the close cultural proximity and tensions

between country and city, peasant and worker, Indian and cholo, productive of a complex “interclass, interethnic mingling” of the province, which is not simply reducible to the assimilationist and nationalist account of *mestizaje*, and which has proved critically important in recent years in a populist expansion of the possibilities for urban indigenous political participation. Instead, the people at the center of this book are best understood as specialized political intermediaries who, often for self-interested reasons of the household economy, actively manage resources to build informal political and mercantile alliances. In the present context of the national ascendancy of an indigenous project in Bolivia, the political goings-on in Quillacollo help us to fill out an account of the evolution of the characteristically urban indigenous-popular political experience that has provided critical mass support for the current project of Evo Morales and of the MAS.

Political Careers

The people featured in this book, if mostly men, confront the challenges of representation in at least two ways. They seek to be and often are elected political representatives, if to a union post or as a member of a local party ticket. They are supposed to stand in for, and to serve, a public constituency during their term of office. At the same time, throughout their political careers they are also subject to a very public and often factional cultural politics of representation, as the subjects of arguments among allies, rivals, and the noninvested, which are most often made in the terms of ethnicity, culture, family, class, and the extent to which a person's career is or is not legible in terms of the experiences and expectations of Quillacollo's fairly diverse popular, including indigenous, sectors. This is a town, recall, itself in something like a semipermanent identity crisis: as part of the regional market circuit, a historical point of transit, popular destination of in-migration, and peri-urban zone. And these two problems of representation often coincide.

Stigma is regularly attached to the reputation of local authorities, as a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963), not only through a distrust of those involved in politics but also with the frequent perception that they are often cholos. As such, they are considered inappropriately mobile in a variety of ways both geographic and social, transgressing perceived unitary categories of ethnic identity while confounding civilizational models of urban progress.²³ And travel, as transgression of both place and status, is a central experience of almost all the *políticos* of this ethnography. The problem of the cholo and of perceived cholo sensibilities in Quillacollo's politics, as stigmatized and as historically “unintelligible” from the point of view of the nation (Soruco Sologuren 2006), is a unifying theme throughout this book.

Specifically, if in different ways, it is a central subject of chapters 4, 5, and 6. But rather than simply record the facts of infamy, disgrace, or reproach composing stigma, this book explores how stigma is also an expression of estrangement from particular kinds of indigenous and popular cultural experience, but which is often confirmed in regular references to its absence. Estrangement, then, has its political uses as a way to introduce indigenous experience and identity into Quillacollo's urban politics, if often as the factional face of local politics.

More than two-thirds of the people I knew in Quillacollo who were active in politics were born elsewhere. Some, brought up in the "historic Left," described to me their experiences in Cuba (sometimes to attend university), China, or the former Communist Eastern Europe. Others spent time as political exiles cutting sugarcane in the Bolivian lowlands or in Chile. One well-known local authority worked for many years as a salesman for Cochabamba's milk company, making regular trips to Mexico. Many other men emigrated to work illegally in such countries as Argentina, Israel, or the United States for significant periods of time. A further, and important, group of local political types has worked as long-range transporters of mostly agricultural goods, traveling throughout the nearby highlands of Ayopaya and elsewhere in Bolivia, as well as Chile, Argentina, or Peru.

María Lagos (1994:102–129) has provided a detailed account of the emergence of a regional trucker elite in Cochabamba's upper valley in and around the town of Tiraque. As she noted, however, the wealthiest trucking monopoly—reputed to have a pact with the devil—was based not in Tiraque but in Quillacollo. Mobility is as often social as geographic. For one politically active individual, this was a progression from an early life pasturing cows, to thievery, to working as a butcher's assistant, to carpentry, to small-scale transport, and, finally, to becoming a lawyer, supplemented by a municipal salary, modest land speculation, and his wife's job as a pharmacist. In another case, an individual's youth spent helping his father harvest the family plot was eventually exchanged for working on a hacienda as an assistant foreman, working for years at Manaco, a brief interlude learning to be a barber, and a later life as a successful transporter.

These checkered careers are not the exceptions. But if the men in this book are "popular leaders" (*dirigentes populares*, as they are sometimes called) and if Quillacollo's is in some sense a popular culture, I try to avoid uncritically invoking the popular here, since the term *popular identity* often conceals more than it reveals about political careers and the politics of self-presentation, particularly when encouraging a too easy connection to cultural studies approaches and to the well-worn grooves of the analysis of mass consumption and class (see Williams 2002), on the one hand, and of

the charismatic leadership of Latin American populism (see Albro 2004; Conniff 1999), on the other. In Quillacollo, the popular includes the indigenous, which has been given short shrift in cultural studies approaches to popular identity in Latin America (see García Canclini 2001; Yúdice 2003).

The political scientist Harold Lasswell (1930:1) memorably remarked, "Political science without biography is a form of taxidermy." Focusing upon the most politically active subset of the town's population as its subject, this book is concerned with the process of publicity in Quillacollo's local politics, as it has been instrumental for the changing boundaries of popular and indigenous belonging. Concerned with some of the ways that self-expression and representation become contentious, methodologically this problem has been distilled to considerations of the intersection of collective politics with biography or life history (see Auyero 2003; Behar 1993; Friedrich 1977, 1986; Ginzburg 1980), which I discuss here in terms of "careers." I explore the public implications of political careers most thoroughly in chapter 3. Particularly given suspicions about politics, the careers of local political authorities are subject to substantial public scrutiny and competing interpretations. And the ways that careers publicly circulate, as a cultural process, is a central preoccupation of this book. This is, too, a calculated means of bringing into focus the relevance of a kind of urban indigenous experience not simply expressible as collective ethnic or territorial claims.

The career of Pancho Sánchez, a key maker and recurrent figure in this book, is illustrative.²⁴ He can be found every day manning his small street stall, where he makes keys. This is also his political base of operations. The disorderly modesty of the kiosk can be deceiving. The street stall offers easy public accessibility, of which Pancho takes the fullest advantage. Though a "mere key maker" (as critics point out), Pancho is a market union leader, has served several times as town councilman, has been interim mayor, and for years has been an active insider of the local UCS party. As an intermittently important member of the provincial machine of this dominant party, he is among the same group of people who took turns running things from 1985 at least up to 2002. Pancho's street stall, strategically positioned just off a major town square and along a trufi route to the nearby city, places him at the hub of the town's political commerce.²⁵ His stall allows him to be available and to keep current as a place where other political allies gather to discuss things, joke, plot, eat, or read the newspaper.

On any given day, Pancho can be seen industriously carrying out his main business. Though he makes a lot of keys, it is not making keys. His wife sells meat as a market vendor. Though himself not a member, Pancho represents the interests of the rank and file of her union. He spends most of his time advocating for and helping to solve problems for members of his

wife's union, who stop by daily. A compadre might bring him a particular problem, which Pancho will take care of for free, abruptly jumping on his bike and disappearing for several hours. Friends can easily find him at the kiosk and cajole him to a nearby drinking establishment for a private conversation. The benefits derived from Pancho's efforts are mostly indirect. Pancho is often contemptuously identified by rivals as one or another sort of semiliterate cholo. Pancho's critics, in short, derisively insinuate his indigenous descent. And if he is often vocal in combating his critics, in other contexts the myriad often unstated connections between Pancho's critics' and his own accounts of his difficult upbringing are also potential indigenous and popular cultural capital.²⁶ This book explores the problematic public careers of so-called cholos of humble origins in Quillacollo, like Pancho Sánchez, as doubly representative of the new kinds of possibilities for urban indigenous politics in contemporary Bolivia.

Like most of the people in this book, Pancho Sánchez is hard to classify. After coming with his mother from Oruro to Cochabamba, Pancho spent the first ten years of his life accompanying her, a corn trader (*rescatista*), on trips along the rural back roads of the regional market circuit. He has a good command of Quechua, has known the extremes of poverty, and lived as a child "like a campesino" and "on the streets." But he would be the last person to pin himself down with any particular identity. In fact careers like his encourage us to consider limitations to the now-conventional analysis of indigenous "identity politics" (see Clifford 1988; Gilroy 1991; Hale 1994, 1997; Jackson 1991, 1995), and even the inadequacy of beginning with identity as a prevailing analytic category at all in coming to terms with politics in Quillacollo. Identity trouble is a persistent theme of this book. As I have stressed, the town's history has been told in terms of a crossroads lacking its own identity and as an increasingly unregulated urban periphery. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman (1999:22), Quillacollo provides the conditions of "identity chased but never caught."

As Charles Taylor (1994:75) noted in his widely referenced discussion, "Identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others." This ethnography dwells on the regular interplay of recognition with misrecognition, which most often exploits the perceived continuities and discontinuities between mestizaje and cholaje, as a dynamic source of cultural capital. I refer to this as the work of estrangement, and it is an important means for the movement in and out of indigenous and nonindigenous terms of local experience. If in the politics of Quillacollo identity is constantly publicly negotiated, as an ongoing and often contentious performance, this is comparable to the ways that participation in recent indigenous mobilizations has been described elsewhere in

Bolivia. Sian Lazar (2008:4) describes the tensions between collective and individual interests within the politics of El Alto's base organizations as identities built through "ritualized and embodied practices, gossip and suspicion, and the development of notions of reciprocity, authority, hierarchy, and obligation." This also effectively describes Quillacollo. And yet, if local associations figure importantly in the province, at least in recent decades Quillacollo's has not, by and large, been a primarily collective politics. It therefore offers an alternative account of the various forms that popular and indigenous political subjecthood is taking in contemporary Bolivia.

Politically active people in Quillacollo often expressed concerns to me in the terms of estrangement: stories about the displacement of cultural heritage and abandonment of the terms of community, expressed via the specter of the cholo as a public sign of the loss of cultural belonging. And if this process never precisely settles into identity, it is a constituent part of an ongoing process of identification. In Quillacollo recognition is as often as not the key to an identity politics but also its undoing. In fact, with García Canclini (2001:77–86), this book explores the impossibility of constructing contemporary collective narratives of "the popular" in Latin America. It does so in large part by tracking the political effects of estrangement—including the social, cultural, and economic incoherence of the application of a collective identitarian project—in the experience and careers of men like Pancho Sánchez.

Taylor (1994:81) has distinguished two registers of the work of recognition, those of the intimate and of the public sphere. But in Quillacollo these are problematically conjoined, where public recognition is projected through what Michael Herzfeld (1997) calls "cultural intimacy." In the following chapters this is explored as more than simply intimate knowledge of the flaws and imperfections of state institutions, as Herzfeld has emphasized. More importantly, cultural intimacy involves regular effort among political authorities to define and to claim access to interior spaces of culture in Quillacollo as claims of authenticity and as the public expression of a political career. Particularly in chapter 4, I explore the connections between intimacy and politics in Quillacollo through a discussion of publicity as the management, by local authorities, of exchanges with prototypically popular women. Men, in short, advertise relations of descent and maintain public relationships of exchange with women of indigenous descent because of the ways these women are understood to control access to the market, to the home, to agricultural practice, to *chicherías*, to saints, and to fiestas, all as spaces or experiences of cultural intimacy. This is one publicly important way that *políticos* seek to continuously reactivate the sources of authenticity of their own humble cultural backgrounds.

The work of cultural intimacy is often also connected to the activities of the informal economy under neoliberalism, which are very much a part of local political practice. Careers rather than collectivities are the form taken by the province's popular and indigenous politics, if these careers are at the same time locations and trajectories for arguments about family, community, experience, and authenticity. As Carlos de la Torre (2000:11) has suggested about the populist mystique, this requires a leader who promotes "an atmosphere of intimacy with his followers." Such political intimacy depends upon the interrelation between politics and daily life—politics as a particular way of being in the world—characterized by the overlap of the personal with the social and with the public: "This lack of differentiation between the public and the private—where not only the public is privately appropriated but also political relations are perceived as extensions of private relations—normalizes favoritism, personalism, clientelism, and paternalism, as regular political practices" (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998:9). Public political careers are transit points in discussions of what composes cultural intimacy. Careers act as a kind of "alchemical crucible," to use Bauman's (1999:11) lyrical term, where "private concerns and public issues meet" and where politics and personhood are mutually and locally constructed in neoliberal and democratic Bolivia.

But what Debora Battaglia (1995:10) has called "self-prospecting" is complicated by its very publicness. I dwell throughout on political performances of cultural intimacy, as these successfully and unsuccessfully seek to bridge the gaps between public and private, past and present, or social origin and mobility, as a series of ongoing recognition dramas. But, as Herzfeld (1997:3) insists, even as recognition might promote "common sociality," it can also be a "source of external embarrassment." And it can fail, as chapter 6's analysis of the factionalism associated with one public political performance makes apparent. In this case, a series of choreographed ritual libations by the mayor designed to demonstrate his effectiveness while in office backfired, with detractors using these cultural spectacles as opportunities effectively to question and to undermine his identity as a popular leader. Quillacollo's neopopulist politics of cultural intimacy, then, rarely settles into the consensus of identity talk as it grapples with the problems of recognition and the implications of misrecognition or the essential hazards of self-representation (see Keane 1997). And this, in turn, encourages a more provisional approach to the role of indigenous heritage.

Política Criolla or Humble Politics?

The informal politics of patronage usually have been described as a matter

of the ways leaders see to the loyalty of their followers by taking care of them, typically with material benefits (see Auyero 2000; Bailey 1988). But during my two years of original fieldwork in Quillacollo, people were particularly disparaging of “vertical politics,” which they imagined as widely practiced varieties of patronage and clientage, virtually synonymous for many people with a personalistic, informal, self-interested, and often corrupt politics, dismissed with a flourish by at least one disgusted former mayor as “drinking, handouts, and cronies” (“*chupas, pegas, y compadres*”). During the campaign for local elections in 1993 and 1995, for which I was present, Quillacollo was regularly derided by its own candidates for office as a “nest of the corrupt.” But, as F. G. Bailey (1988:5) reminds us, “leaders are often villains.” One kind of villainy in Quillacollo is the practice of *política criolla*, literally “mixed politics,” synonymous with the kind of self-interested conduct thought to lack an ideological or higher purpose of the public good. If most local commentators are to be believed, this would include just about everyone involved in the province’s politics.

Local critics in Quillacollo in fact coincide with many social scientists, who have also pointed to problematic aspects of the practices of patronage and clientelism as at once intrinsic features of what is often described as populism—a transient and transitional kind of realpolitik—and as subject to considerable criticism (see Auyero 2000; De Vries 2002; Friedrich 1986; Gay 1998; Mayorga 2002). Indeed, patronage is often synonymous with the unequal exercise of power, with an illegitimate politics conducted in between official channels, and with a kind of face-to-face interpersonal politics understood to be an undesirable cultural remainder or holdover from traditional society. So far as it goes, such a description is true of Quillacollo’s *política criolla* as well. But this is not yet a sufficient description.

People in Quillacollo complained often to me about the contraction of the state after neoliberalism, including the decrease in state services or patronage, at the same time that they indicted politicians for their mendacity—often treated as an unwanted expression of Bolivia’s adopted neoliberal values. In Quillacollo patron-client relationships, then, also present cultural solutions to one version of the ongoing crisis of political representation and estrangement in the province and nationally, often articulated as a sign of the perceived failures, most recently, of neoliberalism. In ways comparable to De Vries’s (2002:903) description of the Mexican cacique as “pervasive, corrupt, and violent but inevitable,” *política criolla* in Bolivia is a legacy at once to be escaped but which people find they cannot easily do without.

The milieu of *política criolla* included the majority of people active in politics, whom I came to know well in Quillacollo. As participants in this milieu, all of the people figuring in this book were routinely described to me

at different points as “patrons” or as “clients” of other people in this book or of people beyond present considerations. In Quillacollo there is a concomitantly rich and figurative political vocabulary of patronage and clientage. It at once describes potentially self-interested political behavior but also an exercise of building social networks that provide different avenues of connection with, and inroads to, urban indigenous worlds, as a cultural identity project and as overlapping with the local informal economy.

Sustained examination of the ways that patronage and clientage in Quillacollo are culturally productive kinds of political relationships and how these, in turn, point to an alternative kind of urban indigenous subject in Bolivia is a major unifying theme of this book. In this way, each of the chapters speaks to the others, as, collectively, they lay out the ways that patronage is an organizing cultural expectation negotiated through beliefs and practices of gender, kinship, exchange, concepts of authority, reciprocity, and other aspects of Quillacollo’s moral economy. This begins with a discussion in chapter 2 of the close public relationship between patronage and stigma, as epitomized by ideas about notoriously “bad clients” and as contrasted with the normative and gendered goals of self-construction, as these organize expectations across the patron-client relationship. Chapter 3 further develops the interpretation of patronage, as articulated by the political roles of the institution of ritual or spiritual godparenthood in Quillacollo, which at once registers moral kinds of debts and obligations, changing notions of respect, and public roles of sponsorship, in contrasts drawn between the feudal *patrón* of the past, market behavior, and the apparently self-interested investments of the present. Chapter 4 dwells on the kinds of cultural analogies people draw between municipal and individual political authorities, on the one hand, and the town’s patron saint, on the other, as these govern exchanges of “articles of first necessity” between politically engaged men and indigenous women, and as part of the work of political self-prospecting.

Chapter 6 complements the previous chapters, as it also considers the cultural trappings and political implications of the role of the ritual sponsor, or *padrino*, particularly ideas about intercession, as these help to determine the kinds of brokerage roles local *políticos* inhabit, if not always successfully. Finally, perhaps the central chapter of this ethnography is chapter 5, which develops an account of varieties of meaningful connection between public expectations for fatherhood and patronage (as an extension of fatherhood), as related to family histories, and conceived as a kind of cultural inheritance or patrimony. This chapter makes the case most forcefully for the different ways that patronage and clientage organize cultural practice as a kind of public knowledge that is generated through the interplay between estrangement and intimacy and that people can then claim.

Across all these chapters, arguments over expectations of patronage, and related political relationships and identities, produce what we might call an indigenous remainder, which people at once acknowledge, critique, and embrace, if in different ways. Throughout this book, then, I point to the sorts of cultural work people seek to accomplish as part of patronage relationships and as part of a local political process. The case of Quillacollo raises important questions about characterizations of Bolivia's current national indigenous project, as at least rhetorically based upon a sharp repudiation of crony capitalism and of patronage politics as legacies of the elite politics of the recent past. However, it is apparent that Quillacollo's urban popular and indigenous politics and identity are also significantly produced through the legacies and expectations of a local politics of patronage.

Complicating the political careers of most of the people in these pages is the accusation that they are, to a man, *cholos* (gloss: "citized Indian"), a historically pejorative racial slur and insult that is expressed in the terms of *política criolla*. In this environment claims to "humble" status have become a prevailing mode of self-presentation—at once a means to deflect criticism and stigma and a cultural strategy of intimacy vis-à-vis Quillacollo's popular public. In Quillacollo being "humble" is a social and cultural set of circumstances directing attention to a history and ancestry as someone "of humble origin" (*de origen humilde*). This book examines Quillacollo's humble politics—the everyday sorts of neopopulist and urban indigenous political practices typical of provincial municipalities and urban peripheries in Bolivia—as one solution to the problem of stigma. At the same time, it also describes the circumstances of an emergent "humble political public," a new kind of third space associated with Bolivia's urban periphery, which is not elite or simply indigenous, the implications of which I discuss in the concluding chapter. But more problematically, nor is it just mixed. And this is changing the boundaries and significance of indigenous (and nonindigenous) political projects in Bolivia.