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Cultivating the State: Migrants, Citizenship and the Transformation of the Bolivian

Lowlands, 1952-2000

by

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Doctor of Philosophy

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# Cultivating the State: Migrants, Citizenship and the Transformation of the Bolivian Lowlands, 1952-2000

by

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An abstract of

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James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

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#### Abstract

## Cultivating the State: Migrants, Citizenship and the Transformation of the Bolivian Lowlands, 1952-2000. By Benjamin Nobbs-Thiessen

In the wake of a 1952 Revolution, Bolivia's new leaders began to re-imagine their small, landlocked, "Andean" nation through its vast Amazonian frontier. While Bolivia had historically depended on highland mining, the National Revolutionary Movement looked to the creation of farming communities in the tropical lowlands as an alternative form of development. This initiative, known as the "March to the East," centered on the department of Santa Cruz, the largest of Bolivia's nine territorial divisions. By sending migrants from the "overcrowded" Andes to the frontiers of Amazonia, Bolivia would move, with U.S. assistance, from an "extractive state" to a "cultivated one" achieving food security, territorial integrity, and demographic balance.

A compelling range of migrants took park in this project of internal colonization. As Bolivian officials had hoped, hundreds of thousands of indigenous Andeans left the highlands to become citizen-farmers in the tropics. They were joined by a surprisingly transnational cast of foreigners who also forged a role as agrarian citizens. This included "horse-and-buggy" Mennonites who arrived from Northern Mexico in search of a frontier where they could maintain their autonomous socio-religious systems. Several thousand Okinawan colonists, who had been displaced by the construction of U.S. military bases on their home islands after WWII, also settled in the region with U.S. support.

Settlers were not the only migrants to arrive in the Bolivian lowlands. As Santa Cruz became a laboratory for rural modernization it attracted filmmakers, missionaries, planners, sociologists and agronomists. These mobile experts brought knowledge cultivated in other locales and thereby linked lowland Bolivia to the broader context of Cold-War era development and the Green Revolution across the Global South. Foreign plants, animals, and technologies also arrived in lowland Bolivia. Improved soybean varieties, farming equipment, and agro-chemicals - to name a few of these new migrants - transformed the forested landscape of Santa Cruz. These intertwined histories of migration make Santa Cruz an exceptionally fertile terrain for understanding how the national and local consequences of a defining element of twentieth century modernization, namely, the desire to transplant people, ideas and technologies across the globe.

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#### Acknowledgements

The migrants I interviewed over the course of this research told stories in which they nimbly moved from their places of origin – Mexico, Paraguay, Okinawa and the Andes – to the region they settled. Often their movements were not a singular, linear journey through space but a series of comings and goings in which they continued to travel between, and draw support from multiple locales. As I traced their narratives over the past six years I have engaged in a migration of my own that brought me from Vancouver to Atlanta, Mexico and Bolivia and back again. So many friends, family, colleagues and interlocutors made that intellectual and physical journey possible and deserve my sincere gratitude.

My interest in pursuing graduate work in Latin American history began with an upper level undergraduate seminar and a five month field study in Mexico led by Bill French of the University of British Columbia. I continued to benefit from Bill's mentorship and enthusiasm when I returned to UBC to complete a Masters in Latin American history in 2007. I am not sure if I would have gone on to pursue a PhD had I not taken part in Bill's annual Oaxaca Summer Institute in 2008. Over the course of that five week program I met a wonderful community of fellow scholars from across North America including Derek Bentley, Nicole Pacino, Steve Allen, Brian Freeman, Stephanie Baker, Jessica Fowler and Nydia Martinez. It has been a pleasure to move through our respective graduate programs together.

In 2010, Karen and I drove across the continent, from the Pacific Northwest to the U.S. Southeast with only the possessions that we could cram into the trunk and backseat of our car. In Atlanta we found a depth of friendship with a surrogate family of sorts that has made the last six years not only manageable but truly wonderful. We were immediately taken in – housed, fed and outfitted - by Taylor and Caitlyn Mathes and their mother Andre Domnigues and re-established connections with old Vancouver friends Val and Brian Danin – and new ones – Ross and Bev Miller, Derek and Chelsea Bentley, Justin Barker, Alex and Jenny Baumann and Jim Ikemoto and many more. I cannot imagine how we would have made it through the challenges of a new city without all of them. Along the way our family grew to include our cat Nora Jean dog Skaha and finally in July of 2015 our first child, Avery.

At Emory my greatest thanks go to our "triumvirate" of Latin American historians: Jeffrey Lesser, Yanna Yannakakis and Tom Rogers. I was inspired to work with Jeff after reading his *Welcoming the Undesirables* and since reaching out to him in 2009 he has provided constant encouragement, exceptionally sound advice and an unwavering commitment to the professional development of his students. He has guided me through exams, a prospectus, every chapter of this document and countless grant applications. He also has a great sense of humor. Any mistakes, errors, or misinterpretations in this dissertation are his alone.

Throughout my time at Emory I have worked closely with Yanna Yannakakis and continue to be impressed by her analytical rigor and attention to eloquent prose. She walked me through my first major writing project and two years (and five centuries) of Latin American historiography. Two hundred years separated our periods of study but I

benefitted greatly from Yanna's nuanced understandings of power, negotiation and intermediaries and I hope that some of that insight has trickled into my own work.

I had no idea Tom Rogers would be joining the history faculty when I made my decision to come here but I could hardly conceive of my graduate education in his absence. Arriving after my first summer of fieldwork, Tom helped me piece together my earliest archival sources into a semblance of a narrative and those broad contours, I am proud to say, have carried through as this project evolved over the following four years. Our early conversations about development modernization, oral history and agro-environmental change informed my comprehensive exams, research and writing. Tom also provided encouragement and insightful editing as I worked on the first publication to emerge from this fieldwork.

Together Jeff, Yanna and Tom have been critical to my intellectual and professional development. Even more impressive from my view is that in spite of their demanding schedules, prolific publication records and focus on mentoring, each one of my advisors also continues to maintain an impressive commitment to family and personal life. This was continually apparent as they invited me into their homes and introduced me to their spouses and children. As much as their formidable academic examples, it is this model that I aspire to as Karen and I raise a family of our own.

I also want to recognize Jessica Reuther, Emma Meyer, Ashleigh Dean, Colin Reynolds, Louis Fagnon, Scott Libson and Rebekah Ramsey. This cohort entered the graduate program with me in 2010 and accompanied me on this long and strange odyssey. Their support and commiseration have been critical and I hope that I returned that favor to some extent. I have also leaned heavily on my fellow Latin American historians who have entered the program before and after me. In particular I wish to thank Chris Brown and Jennifer Schaefer for their friendship which extended from the seminar room to the soccer pitch and included some unforgettable cycling around our sprawling southern metropolis. All of us in the history department have also benefited from the encouragement and support of our graduate coordinator Katie Wilson and I want to thank her for all her hard work.

When I first visited Emory in 2010 I was introduced to our Latin American subject librarian Phil MacLeod. Since then he has tirelessly tracked down even the most obscure of materials on my behalf. He ordered a transcribed collection of a small Mennonite newspaper from a small bookstore in Asunción, Paraguay and brought in the entire catalogue of filmmaker Jorge Ruiz, whose work is the subject of the first chapter of this dissertation. Phil spent several weeks sorting through a dusty warehouse in the city of Cochabamba to amass a substantial collection on Santa Cruz. Phil has been a great friend over the past several years as he attended my panels, joined me for drinks in Emory Village and even visited me in Mexico City.

At Emory I frequently wandered beyond the history department and the library and found fantastic scholars and fellow Latin Americanists in the Departments of Anthropology and Spanish. Karen Stolley graciously allowed me to participate in her seminars on "Colonial Encounters" and "Nature in the New World," and later served on my exams committee. In Anthropology, I benefitted from the mentorship of Peter Little who has served a member of my committee and brought a global focus to my approach to development. I am also indebted to Peggy Barlett and her unforgettable "Agrarian Transformations" seminar. I have continued to develop my ideas about place and environment as a participant and coordinator in her annual Piedmont Project. Beyond Emory, I spent a term driving out to nearby Athens, Georgia to discuss Paraguayan history over coffee with the University of Georgia's Thomas Whigham. He put me in touch with another Paraguayanist, Bridget Chesterton, who was generous enough to include me in her recent edited collection on the Chaco War.

As that last lines suggests, I began my time here at Emory as a "Paraguayanist" before jumping across the Gran Chaco to Bolivia. I have Nicole Pacino to thank for this transformation. Nicole introduced me to a vibrant community of national and foreign historians, anthropologists, sociologists and journalists during my first visit to the semiannual Estudios Bolivianos Conference in Sucre in 2011. As I returned to Bolivia over the following years I worked alongside Nicole and these other individuals in the field, presented with them at conferences and benefitted from their wealth of knowledge about the country. I want to express particular appreciation to Jorge Derpic, Lesli Hoey, Chuck Sturtevant and Carmen Soliz as well as Gabriel Hetland, Justin Blanton, Matthew Gildner, Hernán Pruden and Gabi Kuenzli who helped me establish research contacts and navigate unfamiliar archives and government agencies.

Living in La Paz and Santa Cruz I also developed lasting friendships with a number of people who welcomed me into their lives and homes. I owe particular thanks to Sara Shariari (and her dog Bell) who shared her Sopocachi apartment with me for several months in 2013. In La Paz, Monica Flores, Nikki Evans and Mariela "Luna" Rodrigues made sure my time outside of the archives was full of laughter and good food. In Santa Cruz I unexpectedly found myself living with two complete strangers, Sergio Reyes and Elena Méndez. They quickly became close friends and made the months I spent there – a time in which I would often stumble into the apartment covered in mud from a long excursion in the colonies – ones I will remember fondly.

Out in the farming communities of Santa Cruz so many settlers invited me into their homes to share food and stories it would be difficult to mention them all here. Special thanks are due to the Hamm, Buhler and Enns families in Riva Palacio colony and the Fehrs, Falks, Brauns and Ungers in Canadiense colony. Harry Peacock brought me to his farm in San Julián colony and his house in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Alejandro Araus and Jaime Bravo also shared their stories. Back in Santa Cruz, I drank tereré with Willmar Harder and his family on my frequent visits to Centro Menno. My research included two months in Mexico City. There I was lucky enough to live with two wonderful friends, Derek and Chelsea Bentley, and spent time in the city's archives and restaurants with Lance and Lauren Ingerwesen.

These past six years of study, research and writing would not have been possible without the financial support of Emory's Laney Graduate School and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I also received funding from the Conference on Latin American History and the Plett Foundation. In addition to my dissertation research I have been a member of Royden Loewen's SSHRC-funded "7 Points on Earth" project - a global history of Mennonite farming. Roy's guidance and mentorship has been critical to my academic development and I look forward to our future work together. As this project drew to a close, both Nicole Pacino and Tore Olsson offered invaluable advice for the job market. I am proud to say that their guidance bore fruit. I am grateful to Arizona State University's School of Transborder Studies for the offer of a postdoctoral fellowship and I look forward to joining them in Tempe this fall.

I want to close by thanking my family. As the first person in her family to attend college my mother Linda Thiessen has been an enthusiastic supporter from my earliest academic days. She has read and commented on every word of this dissertation and has proven herself an effective, and at times ruthless, scourge of the passive voice. My inlaws Richard and Lexie Milton repeatedly visited Karen and I in Atlanta, traveled with us to Argentina and welcomed us back to Vancouver. My siblings, Andrea, Jesse and Max, their partners Larry, Lisa and Kathy-Ann and their children Savannah, Gabriela, Sebastian, Izzy and Hunter have also been a constant source of pride, inspiration and good-natured competition.

Above all I wish to thank my wife Karen. My love for history has kept us on the move over the years. She followed me on an 11 month trip through Latin America in 2006 and to Atlanta in 2010. Even as she has supported my academic pursuits she has also reminded me that there are many other fine things in life and I am very grateful for that. She has been a true friend and companion since the first day we met in September of 2001 and it comes as little surprise to me that since the birth of our daughter Avery, she has proven a wonderful and dedicated mother.

A lot can happen in six years. Over the course of researching and writing this dissertation I lost my father and became a father. Laurie Nobbs was a tremendously hard-worker who held himself and others to a high standard but he was also a charmer that had a deep empathy and curiosity for everyone he met. He was a wonderful father and set an example that I will strive to match as I raise my own daughter. Laurie, thank you for everything.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHUAGRM - Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Autónoma Gabriel René Moreno ANAPO – Asociación Nacional de Productores de Oleaginosas AGN - Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City AHD - Archivo Histórico Departamental Hermanos Vásquez Machicado, Santa Cruz AHINM - Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración Archivo La Paz – ALP ANB - Archivo Nacional de Bolivia, Sucre BMLT - Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Mexico City BNB - Biblioteca Nacional de Bolivia, Sucre. BIICA - Biblioteca del Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación para la Agricultura, Chasquipampa, Bolivia CAICO – Cooperativa Agropecuaria Integral Colonias Okinawa Ltda. CAISY- Cooperativa Agropecuaria Integral San Juan de Yapacaní Ltda. CB - Cineteca Boliviana CBF – Corporación Boliviana de Fomento CECOYA - Central de Colonizadores de Yapacaní CIU – Comité de Iglesias Unidas COB – Central Obrera Boliviana COMIBOL - Corporación Minera de Bolivia FIDES – Fundación Integral de Desarrollo, San Julián GRI – Government of the Ryukyu Islands JICA – Japanese International Cooperation Agency ICB – Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano IDA – Institute for Development Anthropology, SUNY Binghamton **IDB** – International Development Bank INC - Instituto Nacional de Colonización INRASC - Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria, Santa Cruz de la Sierra MAS - Movimiento al Socialismo MCC – Mennonite Central Committee MCCA - Mennonite Central Committee Archives, Akron PA MDRyT - Ministerio de Desarrollo Rural y Tierras, Depository, La Paz. MNR - Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario NA - US National Archives - College Park

NADEPA – Núcleos Agrícolas de Producción Asociada, San Julián

SPIC – Secretaría de Prensa, Información y Cultura

TAP – Teacher Abroad Program, Mennonite Central Committee

UAGRM – Universidad Autónoma Gabriel René Moreno, Santa Cruz de la Sierra

UCAPO - Unión de Campesinos Pobres

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USCAR - United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands

WGM - World Gospel Mission

YPFB - Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos

## **Introduction: Transnational Migrants on a Tropical Frontier**

In the early seventies William Dietrich was a U.S. diplomat based in Bolivia's booming tropical lowland city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The city is capital of Santa Cruz Department, the largest of the country's nine territorial divisions. Dietrich remembers "meeting the daily plane from La Paz at the Santa Cruz airport was an experience in diversity, although I don't think we used that word yet. On a good day you would see groups of highland Indians in their bowler hats and ponchos, Santa Cruz natives in *guayaberas* and sport shirts, Japanese with a young girl in a kimono carrying a bouquet of flowers, overhauled, poke-bonneted Mennonites and maybe even a couple of young Mormon missionaries in their white shirts and black trousers."<sup>1</sup> The curious "diversity" of Bolivia's lowlands that surprised Dietrich in the seventies is still evident today in language, people and place names. Traveling through the department's rural frontier, one is as likely to hear farmers speaking Aymara and Quechua (Andean indigenous languages), Japanese, Okinawan dialects and Low German as Spanish. Rural colonies like Yapacaní are known as *Bolivia chica* or "little Bolivia" because they include settlers from across the nation, especially from Andean departments like La Paz, Oruro and Potosí. Some official colony names betray the transnational trajectories of their inhabitants. For instance, along the Río Grande River a gravel road connects Okinawa 1, Okinawa 2 and Okinawa 3 whereas to the south of Santa Cruz one finds Mennonite colonies with names like Swift Current (a small town in Saskatchewan) and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Charles Stuart Kennedy interview with William Dietrich Director, Cultural Center, USIS Santa Cruz (1970-72). Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, VA, www.adst.org (1999) Accessed Feb. 2, 2016.

Riva Palacio (a municipality in Chihuahua) that reflect the Canadian and Mexican origins of these Anabaptist migrants.

This unique ethno-linguistic configuration in the middle of South America is a product of Bolivia's "March to the East," - in per-capita terms - one of largest tropical colonization and development initiatives in Latin America. In 1952, a heterogeneous national revolutionary coalition (MNR) composed of middle-class politicians, students, workers, farmers and miners overthrew the tin oligarchy that had dominated Bolivia for most of the twentieth century. In the wake of that revolution, Bolivia's new socialist leaders sought to achieve food security and territorial integrity by encouraging indigenous Bolivians to migrate from the "overcrowded" Andes to colonization zones along the nation's Amazonian frontier. They also hoped colonization would end the annual exodus of hundreds of thousands of unemployed and landless Bolivians travelling to neighboring Argentina to work as field laborers – or *braceros* - in the sugar harvest. According to one estimate, 63,738 Andean families – nearly a quarter of a million individuals - had migrated to Santa Cruz and other lowland regions of the country by 1980.<sup>2</sup> Over the following two decades of economic and environmental turmoil and neoliberal reform the number of highland-lowland migrants increased exponentially. For instance, approximately 175,000 migrants settled in the lowland Chapare region of Cochabamba between 1981-1986 and between the 1976 and 2001 national censuses the population of Santa Cruz department nearly tripled to just over two million.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Carmen Dunia Sandoval Arenas, *Santa Cruz, economía y poder, 1952-1993* (La Paz: Fundación PIEB, 2003), 53. The estimate for Santa Cruz up to 1980 was 28, 712 families. These figures are contested primarily because many families migrated "spontaneously" without government support and others came down as seasonal laborers before settling permanently. A much more conservative estimate suggests that 4,762 families migrate to Santa Cruz in the period up to 1986.



Figure 1. Map of Bolivia's nine territorial divisions (departments). Adapted from "Ruditaly" Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported. https:// commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bolivia\_Departmentos\_con\_nombres.png Accessed June 13, 2016.

Indigenous Andeans were not the only border-crossing migrants participating in this project of internal tropical colonization. Thousands of Mennonite farmers from Northern Mexico, Canada, Belize and neighboring Paraguay were also welcomed as colonists by the Bolivian government. While early settlements included a small group of thirty-seven families from Paraguay in the mid-fifties and 395 families (approximately 2400 individuals) from Mexico in the late sixties, the Mennonite population in Bolivia expanded dramatically over the following years to a present day population of close to 70,000.<sup>3</sup> These low-German speaking pacifists founded numerous isolated colonies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Exact population figures for the Mennonite population in Bolivia vary quite widely. Technically only baptized adults (typically over twenty) are considered to be church members. Thus while the total population is close to 70,000, church membership the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online only counts 25,000 Bolivian Mennonites. See Bender, Harold S., Martin W. Friesen, Menno Ediger, Isbrand Hiebert and Gerald Mumaw. Harold Bender et al, "Bolivia." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online Encyclopedia Online*. June 2013. http://gameo.org/. The 70,000 estimate comes from Sieghard Schartner

across the Americas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In exchange for promising to transform frontier zones into centers of food production, Mennonites requested exemption from military service, the right to conduct their own schooling and social security systems and other special privileges. Bolivia's leaders also welcomed 1600 Japanese colonists who arrived with support from their home government and a separate group of 3200 U.S. sponsored Okinawans settlers who had been displaced by the construction of U.S. military bases across the Ryukyuan archipelago in the post-war era.<sup>4</sup>

Together, these migrant streams made the March to the East a uniquely transnational affair and a compelling case study for understanding migration, citizenship and agro-environmental change. This dissertation is thus the history of a particular place - Santa Cruz Department on Bolivia's tropical lowland frontier – where the transnational, the national and the local are inextricably interwoven. Migrants brought diverse "repertoires" – from neighboring Argentina, the Chihuahua desert and from across the Pacific – that shaped the way that they engaged with the Bolivian state and situated themselves in the jungles of eastern Bolivia. I compare the ways that indigenous, Mennonite and Okinawan settlers – all "non-citizens" in the eyes of Bolivian elites – cultivated distinct forms of agrarian citizenship as frontier farmers.

In the Bolivian lowlands, ideas of foreignness and belonging were further complicated by a pronounced regionalist identity separating lowlanders ("cambas") from highlanders ("kollas"). This resulted in a striking paradox. As I argue, while Mennonites and Okinawans faced varying degrees of nativist sentiment, they were ultimately

and Sylvia Dürksen de Schartner, *Bolivien, Zufluchtsort der konservativen Mennoniten* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: S. & S. Schartner, 2009), 48-49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Daniel M Masterson and Sayaka Funada-Classen, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 193.

accepted as "our colonists" by lowland elites who simultaneously viewed their fellow Bolivians from the nation's highlands as outside invaders. In a further irony, it was Mexican Mennonites - the traditionalist low-German speaking farmers who came to Bolivia from Chihuahua seeking isolation in frontier colonies - that came to best exemplify the modern, market-oriented family farms the revolutionary government envisioned.

## Visions of Territoriality and State Sovereignty in a Truncated Nation

As the metaphor of the March to the East suggests, Bolivia's leaders conceived of their nation's problems in spatial terms. While I focus on the period after 1952, plans for the development and colonization of lowland Bolivia predate the national revolution. This is evidenced in the reflections of foreign observers, national politicians and regional elites briefly outlined below. These commentators repeatedly decried the "abandonment" of the region, claiming that they had been "neglected" or "ignored" by the state. In doing so they forged a frontier discourse that finds parallels with other regions and time periods.<sup>5</sup> In their writings, classic liberal theories of territorial integrity and state sovereignty merged with the unique geographic and political realities of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bolivia - problems that the March to the East would seek to answer. It is more than coincidence that many of these commentators were "foreigners." In Bolivia,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Dimitrina Mihaylova also identifies the strategic frontier discourse of "abandonment" in a radically different context, the post-socialist Bulgarian frontier with Greece. See "Reopened and Renegotiated Borders: Pomak Identities at the Frontier between Bulgaria and Greece" in *Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan, eds., Culture and Power at the Edges of the State: National Support and Subversion in European Border Regions* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2005).

national integration relied on a number of non-nationals who – as surveyors, planners, missionaries and public health officials – stood in as proxies for an absent state.<sup>6</sup>

"I shall never forget the impression produced on my mind by my introduction to Eastern Bolivia," observed geographer J.B. Minchin in his 1881 report to the Royal Geographical Society in London.<sup>7</sup> Looking down from the imposing heights of the Andes onto the seemingly endless forested expanse of unbroken lowlands, he experienced the allure and promise of one gazing upon the "the heart of the continent." Like explorer James Orton, who traveled through the region several decades earlier, Minchin agreed that "only the margin of the continent is developed" while the core was "as wild and prolific as ever."<sup>8</sup> Orton's assessment was particularly true of Bolivia. Major population centers were concentrated in the Andean mining regions while few lived in the nation's large lowland frontier. While demographically, politically, and economically "marginal," the eastern Andean lowlands – an area covering more than 600,000 square kilometers and extending from the Amazon basin in the north to the arid bushlands of the *Gran Chaco* in the southeast – comprised two-thirds of Bolivia's national territory.

Though the vast lowland landscape appeared a "barren zone" to Minchin, he acknowledged the incredible potential that existed in this eastern Andean frontier.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between foreign actors and state-building is particularly well developed in relation to missionaries and NGOs in Latin America. For an example of the former see, Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935-1985* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006). For the latter, see Anthony Bebbington and Graham Thiele eds., *Non-Governmental Organizations and the State in Latin America: Rethinking Roles in Sustainable Agricultural Development* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> J.B. Minchin, "Eastern Bolivia and the Gran Chaco" *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 3:7 (July1881): 401-420, 404.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The perspectives of Minchin, Orton and other observers regarding transport, territoriality and sovereignty in Bolivia are also discussed in Chapter Three of J. Valerie Fifer, *Bolivia: Land, Location, and Politics since 1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

Imagining the expanding Rio de la Plata nations across the Chaco, he speculated, "What may we not expect when her vast interior becomes opened up, and when the tide of immigration, spreading over and utilizing her boundless pampas and inexhaustible forests reaches the Andes?"<sup>9</sup> Minchin, a foreigner, worked previously as a proxy for the Bolivian state demarcating its contested boundary with Brazil. He understood the problem these "fugitive landscapes" posed for state sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> It would only be once Bolivia had "penetrated" the Chaco and transformed its idle potential into productive use that the nation's cartographic fictions would become meaningful claims and that "she" too may "take the place that is expected of her in the scale of nations."<sup>11</sup>

Nearly half a century later, a beleaguered party arrived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The group, led by Bolivian diplomat and future President Mamerto Urriolagoitia (1949-1951) included British writer Julian Duguid, cinematographer John Charles Mason, and Russian hunter Alexander Siemel. As leader, Urriolagoitia had recruited the three foreigners to assist him in making an official "commercial" inspection of the eastern lowlands on behalf of the Bolivian government. Beginning in Buenos Aires with a three thousand kilometer voyage by river steamer up the Rio de la Plata and Paraguay River, the journey took several months. At La Gaiba Lake on the Bolivian-Brazilian border the party disembarked and, on foot, completed the nearly six-hundred kilometer crossing of the densely forested eastern plains to Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Minchin, "Eastern Bolivia and the Gran Chaco," 417.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid., 417. For an explanation of the concept see Karen Lynnea Piper, *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race, and Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

"Bolivia is in a curious state of development," reflected Duguid, the British member of the team.<sup>12</sup> He noted that there were not only no modern means of transport across the eastern frontier, there was also a complete absence of permanent roads between "the forests of the east and the plateau of the west." After a few days in Santa Cruz, the party ascended a brief distance into the nearby mountains. Looking over the land that Duguid would popularize as a "green hell" in his 1931 travel memoir of the same name, Urriolagoitía reflected on their trip with disappointment. The tiny former mission settlements they had passed through appeared "dead," "dusty," and "decayed," and the great eastern forest contained, in his opinion, little more than "a few tortoises and mudholes."<sup>13</sup> Attempting to offer some words of encouragement, Duguid reminded Urriolagoitia, "Argentina was like this once." Gesturing out at the plains, Siemel agreed and suggested that, "in fifty years...this may well be populated."<sup>14</sup>

While the hopes of Minchin and Duguid would find a belated realization in the post-1952 era, the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth were defined in Bolivia by territorial loss rather than frontier development. The nation had already ceded portions of its eastern and northern frontier to Brazil when Minchin surveyed the Santa Cruz plains and would lose another territory (Acre) to Brazil during the turn of the century Amazon rubber boom. Bolivia's territorial integrity was also challenged from the west. As Minchin looked east in 1880, Bolivian forces were suffering their final defeat before Chilean forces at the battle of Tacna. The War of the Pacific (1878-1883) would cost Bolivia its nitrate and copper rich Pacific coastline. This

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Julian Duguid, *Green Hell: Adventures in the Mysterious Jungles of Eastern Bolivia* (London: Century Co., 1931). Kindle edition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Duguid, Green Hell.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ibid.

loss of their access to the Pacific encouraged Bolivia's leaders to look to the Paraguay River, running along the eastern edge of the Gran Chaco, as an alternative route to the sea. The region was also claimed by Paraguay and border disputes between the two small nations escalated throughout the twenties. Bolivia's defeat in the Chaco War (1932-35) would result in yet another territorial loss for the now truncated nation.

Bolivia's leaders undertook a few small colonization initiatives in the immediate post-war years, primarily as a way to offer land to veterans of the conflict. Few settlers responded to the initiative. The small elite class of Santa Cruz continued to argue to anyone who would listen that "the future of Bolivia was in the east." Cruceño – a term for a resident of Santa Cruz de la Sierra - topographer Constantino Montero Hoyos, completed an exhaustive tour of the lowlands in the post-war era and insisted that with "*vías y brazos*" (roads and labor), Santa Cruz would flourish.<sup>15</sup> Montero Hoyos was not a lone voice in the wilderness. Cruceños criticized politicians in La Paz for "abandoning" the region and insisted that they understood the lessons of the Chaco War to be "that the desert, the uncultivated bush, the absence of roads, railways and population" were a dire threat to the sovereignty of the nation.<sup>16</sup>

Until U.S. cultural attaché Erwin Bohan toured Bolivia in 1942, these calls went largely unanswered. His visit was a product of the U.S. wartime "Good Neighbor Policy." U.S. officials had identified Bolivia - one of the world's four largest tin

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Sixto Montero Hoyos and Constantino Montero Hoyos, *Territorios ignorados: sobre una visita a la serranía aurífera de San Simón y un estudio agropecuario de las provincias de Ñuflo de Chávez y Velasco del ingeniero Constantino Montero Hoyos* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Ed. Nicolás Ortíz, 1936).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Alcaldía Municipal de Santa Cruz de la Sierra, "Tarija y el tratado con la Argentina –Argentina y Bolivia y su vincculación ferroviaria efectiva en el oriente." Vol.23 Folletos Históricos, AHUAGRM Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 4.

producers – as a key strategic ally.<sup>17</sup> In Bohan's subsequent report on the state of Bolivian national development, he advocated for U.S. funding to build an all-weather highway linking Santa Cruz to the nation's highlands. Additionally, Bolivia independently signed agreements with both Brazil (1938) and Argentina (1945) to build railways that would connect Santa Cruz de la Sierra to their borders. In 1952, as a revolutionary coalition toppled Bolivia's mining oligarchy, all three of these projects were finally nearing completion. In the oft-cited Marxian equation, road and rail promised to "annihilate space with time" at the very moment when the revolutionary government was initiating the first concerted effort to colonize the nation's lowlands under the slogan "The March to the East."<sup>18</sup>

## **Cultivating the State: The March to the East in National Context**

Over the following half a century, Bolivia - a small, landlocked "Andean" nation at the heart of South America - embarked on a dramatic program of self-fashioning along its Amazonian frontier.<sup>19</sup> The MNR sought to re-imagine the nation that, in the words of revolutionary leader Victor Paz Estenssoro, had become little more than "a simple mining camp" under prior regimes.<sup>20</sup> I thus employ the descriptor and metaphor of "cultivating the state," to suggest the degree to which the country's state of cultivation, as seen through fears about food security, was an enduring fixation for the revolutionary Bolivian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See Seth Garfield, *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). U.S. wartime concern over strategic resources also led to a renewed development of rubber supplies in the Brazilian Amazon.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Norton, 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Edin Hajdarpasic, *Whose Bosnia?: Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015) invokes the concept of "nationalist self-fashioning" and its intellectual trajectory in a primarily ethnographic sense.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Victor Paz Estenssoro "Speech Announcing Nationalization of Mines" (Oct 31, 1952) Text available at http://college.cengage.com/history/world/keen/latin\_america/8e/assets/students/sources/pdfs/97\_paz\_bolivi a\_mine\_nationalization\_1952.pdf Accessed June 1, 2016.

state. Lowland settlement would involve a profound transformation of the region's ecology as "idle" bush and forest – its active use by lowland indigenous populations denied - were converted into productive farmland. For Bolivian elites this transformation signified the nation's future, shifting from dependency to true development. They would balance a colonial, *extractive* state, centered on the mining economy of the Andes, with the creation of a modern *cultivated* state based in the east. Yet the "cultivating" metaphor also suggests an alternative perspective on state formation. In a frontier region where its presence was absent or fleeting, Okinawan, Japanese and national colonists as well as Mennonites actively cultivated the state. While shaping the local process of state formation, they also grafted their own discrete interests onto this national project in the tropical lowlands.

In contrast to the unrealized hopes of previous decades, waves of infrastructure, directed colonization, and international financing accompanied and supported the post-1952 "March to the East." New roads, colonies and crops also arrived in the Bolivian lowlands. The results of Bolivia's reinvention were both profound and profitable. On the eve of the revolution Bolivia imported much of its food. A 1950 census reveals that the unpaved streets of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra had barely over 40,000 residents.<sup>21</sup> Today, the city has a population of more than 1.5 million – making it the largest city in the nation and the fastest growing city in South America.<sup>22</sup> It is the epicenter of an agricultural emporium of soybeans, sugarcane, corn, sunflower and rice extending

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See "Bolivia: Población por censos según departamento, area geográfica y sexo, censos de 1950-1976-1992-2001" Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas.

http://www.ine.gob.bo/indice/visualizador.aspx?ah=PC20111.HTM Accessed March 18, 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Statistics are projections for the 2006-2020 period provided by CityMayors Statistics. It is notable that of the top twenty cities only Santa Cruz and Toluca (Mexico) are outside of Asia or Africa. "The World's fastest Growing Cities and Urban Areas from 2006 to 2020." CityMayors Statistics. http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/urban \_growth1.html Accessed May 1, 2016.

through the dozens of settler colonies that dot the eastern plains integrated with national and international markets.

As migrants marched to the east, the nation has done so as well. Santa Cruz has outpaced highland centers like La Paz and Cochabamba to become the economic and financial capital of Bolivia. With the exception of Brazil (where São Paulo surpassed Rio de Janiero as the nation's largest and wealthiest city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) this shift is unprecedented in Latin America - a region in which national power and wealth have typically remained centered in colonial and early republican capitals like Mexico City, Lima and Buenos Aires. The regional-national tensions engendered by the growth of Santa Cruz have re-emerged repeatedly over the last half-century. Most recently, a wellpublicized 2008 regional "autonomy" movement challenged the authority of President Evo Morales.

The dramatic growth of Santa Cruz calls for greater historical attention. Overshadowed by studies of the nation's Andean core, Bolivian historiography – both national and foreign – typically excludes Amazonia and the Gran Chaco. The modest historiography of the Bolivian lowlands tends to focus on frontier missions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and on the Chaco War era. A few recent works provide important exceptions. For instance, Stephen Cote's forthcoming *Oil and Nation: A History of Bolivia's Petroleum Sector* documents a strong link between the growth of Santa Cruz and the development of oil and natural gas reserves in the region.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, Hernán Pruden's dissertation, "Cruceños into Cambas: Regionalism and Revolutionary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Stephen Cote *Oil and Nation: A History of Bolivia's Petroleum Sector*. (Morgantown: West Viriginia University Press, 2016).

Nationalism in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 1935-1959", offers a framework for understanding the evolution of lowland identity but ends just as large-scale colonization was getting underway.<sup>24</sup> Pruden's work is primarily an intellectual history of elite discourse surrounding regional identity as it was crafted in opposite to the nation's highlands. This project aims to extend the discussion of Santa Cruz's place in national history to the end of the twentieth century and focus on the experiences of the migrants themselves.<sup>25</sup> Ximena Soruco makes an important contribution by connecting the rubber boom of the late nineteenth century to the present-day soy boom in Santa Cruz. Yet the author's conclusion that entrenched elites have simply maintained their power, from one boom to the next, is historically thin and once again gives little voice to the experience of the tens of thousands of migrants that entered the region.

Development anthropologists, many of whom worked in the lowlands in the seventies and eighties, were quicker to recognize the emergence of the region and new forms of production and attendant tensions engendered by this shift. In this respect, Allyn Maclean Stearman and Lesley Gill have also made critical additions to the literature. Gill provides a nuanced assessment of the evolution of Andean migrant farmers in the tropics and Stearman analyzes the tensions between highlanders and lowlanders in Santa Cruz produced by large-scale migration.<sup>26</sup> Both works, written in the mid-80s, reflect the intensity of Bolivia's hyperinflation and debt crisis. By extending

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Hernán Pruden, "Cruceños into Cambas: Regionalism and Revolutionary Nationalism in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 1935-1939. (PhD diss., SUNY-Stonybrook, 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ximena Soruco, "De la goma a la soya: el proyecto histórico de la élite cruceña." in *Los barones del oriente: el poder en Santa Cruz ayer y hoy*, edited by Ximena Soruco, Wilfredo Palata and Gustavo Medeiros (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Fundación Tierra, 2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Lesley Gill, *Peasants, Entrepreneurs, and Social Change: Frontier Development in Lowland Bolivia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987). Allyn MacLean Stearman, *Camba and Kolla: Migration and Development in Santa Cruz, Bolivia* (Orlando: University of Central Florida Press, 1985).

my research to the end of the twentieth century this dissertation dialogues with the effects of that crisis and the emergence of the soybean boom in Latin America that, once again, transformed Santa Cruz. More importantly, for Stearman and Gill the presence of Mennonites and Okinawans alongside highland transplants is mentioned only in passing. In contrast, I bring the history of internal migration into dialogue with those of immigrant communities in Santa Cruz an approach that heightens our understandings of citizenship and belonging.

## Migration and Citizenship in Bolivian Historiography

It is not surprising that both Minchin and Duguid looked to immigration policies in Argentina as a model for Bolivian development. They wrote – in the 1880s and 1920s - on either end of the mass immigration of 6.6 million Europeans that transformed the pampas and cities of Bolivia's neighbor to the south. They might have also looked east to Brazil for inspiration where 4.5 million migrants would mainly settle in the temperate southern states like São Paulo - home today to over one million Brazilians of Japanese descent. A robust historiography evidences the centrality of mass migration to the modern histories of Brazil and Argentina.<sup>27</sup> By maintaining networks and practices that escape the state-centric gaze of historians, scholars of migration have explored the way that migrant and diasporic communities have "transcended" the nation. Furthermore, they demonstrate that migrant history can sharpen our understanding of presumably "national" questions.<sup>28</sup> In Brazil, for instance, the end of slavery cannot be understood

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Raanan Rein, Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Diaspora (Leiden: Brill, 2010), Mollie Lewis Nouwen, Oy, My Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).

apart from programs to recruit migrant labor and the question of race is intertwined with constructions of "desirable" migration.<sup>29</sup>

Bolivian national elites were eager to attract migrants that would develop the frontier and, in the eugenicist language of the era, "whiten" the nation, but few Europeans settled in the country in the era of mass migration.<sup>30</sup> How then, do we understand the migration history of Bolivia – or lack thereof? Jürgen Buchenau makes a compelling point regarding Mexican migration. It is equally applicable here. While Argentina and Brazil are often treated as central to the history of Latin American migration, Buchenau reminds us their experiences are not paradigmatic but in fact atypical for a region that generally did not receive massive numbers of immigrants.<sup>31</sup> In nations of relatively low immigration like Mexico and Bolivia, immigrants remain important objects of study particularly when they occupied key industries, economic niches or remote frontiers as both my Mennonite and Okinawan subjects came to do.<sup>32</sup> Extensive public debates and policies related to migration (even small-scale immigration and "immigration that never was") cast implicit understandings of race, citizenship and national identity into high relief.<sup>33</sup>

Immigration remains a peripheral subject in Bolivia. But if we broaden our framework we can recognize that, in the second half of the twentieth century, intense mobility defined the nation and many others of low immigration. Drawing rural migrants

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Fifer, *Bolivia: Land, Location and Politics*, discusses a few prominent failures.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Jürgen Buchenau "Small Numbers, Great Impact: Mexico and its Immigrants, 1821-1973" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20 (Spring 2001): 23-49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico*, 1882-1940 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Lesser, Negotiating National Identity.

into a number of new spaces and relationships, rapid urbanization, colonization, seasonal migration and emigration took place on an unprecedented scale across Latin America in the post-WWII period. While the history of "braceros" (migrant laborers) in Latin America typically focuses on Mexico, Bolivia produced a similar stream of cross-border migration. In the late sixties anywhere between 400,000 and 700,000 Bolivians (an astounding ten to twenty percent of Bolivia's total population) lived in Argentina where they worked as laborers in the harvest as well as in urban occupations.<sup>34</sup> Internal migration also re-shaped Bolivia. These processes are most evident at the extremes as they simultaneously drew migrants to the highest and lowest points of the nation, the sprawling high plains suburbs of El Alto on the valley rim overlooking La Paz, and the frontiers of the semi-tropical lowland department of Santa Cruz.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to migration, citizenship is a central theme in Bolivian historiography. The obvious explanation is the lengthy process by which the nation's indigenous majority finally achieved full citizenship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historian Brooke Larson places 19<sup>th</sup> century debates that ultimately deferred indigenous citizenship in Bolivia within the broader Andean context revealing that "*how*, *and with what social consequences*, those modernizing states tried to manage their indigenous populations would become one of the great dramas of Andean nation-making [emphasis in original]."<sup>36</sup> Like their neighbors in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia, elites in Bolivia held serious reservations about extending

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Scott Whiteford, Workers from the North: Plantations, Bolivian Labor, and the City in Northwest Argentina (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Anthropologist Sarah Lund Skar, *Lives Together-Worlds apart: Quechua Colonization in Jungle and City.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) explores similar indigenous migration patterns in Peru that were both rural-urban (to Lima) and rural-rural (to the Amazon basin).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49.

citizenship to indigenous subjects whose coerced labor they depended upon and whose political participation they feared.<sup>37</sup>

Scholars of Bolivia document both popular and elite responses to this "Indian question" in the lead-up to the 1952 Revolution. Ann Zulawski places the extension of public health to the indigenous masses after the Chaco War as a key realm of citizenship.<sup>38</sup> As Laura Gotkowitz shows, indigenous Bolivians in Cochabamba made effective use of the courts as a domain of citizenship where they petitioned the state to protect their lands in the pre-revolutionary era.<sup>39</sup> A burgeoning new scholarship on the 1952 Revolution explores citizenship through land reform, cultural policy and public health.<sup>40</sup> Citizenship is equally important for anthropologists who have confronted Bolivia's more recent experiences with neo-liberalism. Nancy Postero and Sian Lazar have examined the ways in which indigenous Bolivians have pushed the rhetoric of neoliberal multiculturalism and citizenship to its breaking points in Santa Cruz and El Alto.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> E. Gabrielle Kuenzli, Acting Inca (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia, 1900-1950* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Laura Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880-1952 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Carmen Soliz, "Fields of Revolution: Agrarian Reform and Rural State Formation in Bolivia, 1936-1971." (PhD diss., NYU, 2014) provides a detailed examination of the one of the revolution's most significant measures, the breakup of large-scale landholding patterns and the extension of land to landless peasants through the Agrarian Reform. Matthew Gildner, "Indomestizo Modernism: National Development and Indigenous Integration in Postrevolutionary Bolivia, 1952-1964." (PhD diss., UT-Austin, 2012) explores the cultural and intellectual history of the 1952 revolution. Nicole Pacino, "Prescription for a Nation: Public Health in Post-Revolutionary Bolivia, 1952-1964," (PhD diss., UC-Santa Barbara, 2013) interprets state formation and the relationship between the U.S. and Bolivia through the lens of public health.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Sian Lazar, *El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Nancy Grey Postero, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

I engage with this rich literature on citizenship by taking it in a direction that currently remains unexplored. How did notions of citizenship emerge in the process of internal migration and colonization in Bolivia? After 1952, how did indigenous Bolivians articulate their recently-acquired status as full citizens in relation to their rights to mobility and land as lowland colonists? In turn, how did the state imagine lowland settlement as a laboratory for creating new citizens out of indigenous Bolivians? Colonization created a paradox for the Bolivian government. The state sought to generate intense mobility among its population in order to settle its frontiers. At the same time it wanted to immediately sedentarize those transplanted colonists by binding them to their new lifestyle as stable, "honorable," citizen-farmers in the lowlands.

This approach draws on provocative links in the existing literature. Heidi Tinsman's study of the Chilean Agrarian Reform explores its relationship to gendered notions of citizenship, a process by which the state sought to create "new men" and in which, just as in Bolivia, family stability and masculine honor emerged as privileged dynamics.<sup>42</sup> As in Allende's Chile, Bolivians who took part in colonization schemes experienced them as a form of citizenship continually deferred by a government that withheld clear title to the land they worked.<sup>43</sup> Despite the similarities, the subjects of Tinsman's narrative are exclusively nationals. In *Partners in Conflict*, it is Chileans who will be made into "new men" through the agrarian reform. I hope to complicate that narrative in my own work by juxtaposing the struggles of recent citizens - Andean

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: the Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> To cite one of many examples, settlers in San Julián colony only received full title to their land in the early 2000s, thirty years after the colonization project began. Harry Peacock in conversation with author July, 2012. San Julián.

Bolivians - with those non-citizens - Mennonite and Japanese - that they settled alongside.

Bringing internal migration and immigration, often treated as separate phenomena, into the same frame of analysis sharpens the contradictions of deferred citizenship for Bolivia's indigenous majority. I find compelling threads for this approach in scholarship that traces the intertwined processes of migration and emancipation in Afro-Latin America. George Reid-Andrews pioneered this approach in his study of employers, European migrants and Afro-Brazilians in São Paulo.<sup>44</sup> Lara Putnam and Aviva Chomsky follow a similar strategy in their studies of evolving relationships between non-citizens and citizens in Costa Rica - in this case West Indian workers and internal migrant laborers - on another expanding frontier, the banana plantations near Limón.<sup>45</sup>

When this comparative approach is taken in the Bolivian context, surprising parallels emerge. Both in Bolivia and abroad, Andeans, Okinawans and Mennonites occupied a "non-citizen" status - albeit with different implications. Indigenous Bolivians won full legal citizenship rights through the 1952 revolution but were still seen as social and cultural "outsiders" by revolutionary leaders who felt the primary goal of the revolution was to "make a citizen out of the Indian." Suspect citizens at home, indigenous Bolivians became full-fledged non-citizens once again as they crossed the border to work as cane cutters in Argentina. Like indigenous Andeans, Okinawans had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> George Reid Andrews, *Blacks & Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Aviva Chomsky, West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

long been treated as culturally deficient citizens in the Japanese empire. They became legal non-citizens in the post-war period when the United States took sovereignty of Okinawa from Japan without extending citizenship to their new wards. Mennonites, while possessing a range of passports (Canadian, Mexican, Paraguayan, Belizean) remained non-citizens by choice by securing exemptions from state authorities that freed them from participation in many crucibles of modern citizenship from the classroom to the barracks.

Facing legal, political, cultural and religious obstacles to full citizenship, Andeans, Okinawans and Mennonites made use of overlapping strategies for expressing their sense of belonging and their claims to place. "The land belongs to those who work it," was the slogan of both colonization and agrarian reform across Latin America. Yet in the case of Bolivian colonization, the law made land available to foreigners and nationals alike providing each of these groups with a path to agrarian –rather than legal – citizenship. Andeans, Okinawans and Mennonites successfully made reference to their status as frontier farmers who, by virtue of transforming the tropics into productive land, made permanent their claims to land.

Sometimes the strategies employed by these three groups diverged. When negotiating with the state over access to land Andeans claimed the powerful emancipatory language of the National Revolution as their own. Lacking that evocative and politicized language, Mennonites and Okinawans favored a discourse of modernization and development in which they figured as "model producers" for the nation. In a work that explores memory and place-making among Jewish migrants in Bolivia Leo Spitzer provides a compelling model for thinking about how conspicuous

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outsiders negotiated their foreignness, by taking part in agricultural colonization in the tropical lowlands.<sup>46</sup> Like Jewish refugees of the 1940s, Mennonite and Japanese migrants emphasized their ability to modernize the nation when they successfully petitioned the state for the right to settle in Santa Cruz in the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast when Andeans invoked the idea of modernization it was frequently in reference to material support and infrastructure that the revolutionary government owed to them.

Faced with the unexpected presence of Low-German speaking Mennonites and Japanese settlers alongside highland migrants in Santa Cruz the reader might conclude that the former are irredeemably foreign and the latter are intrinsically Bolivian. Yet trajectory confuses origins. After a generation spent as settlers on the Paraguayan side of the Gran Chaco, some Mennonite settlers were more familiar with lowland colonization than Andean migrants. Hardly strangers to Bolivia, Japanese settlers began working in Santa Cruz and the Amazon during the rubber boom and formed a relatively large and successful community in Riberalta, a frontier city in the neighboring lowland department of Beni. It was that community of small well-established Japanese Bolivians that paved the way for the settlement of further migrants in the decades after WWII. For all the conspicuous "otherness" of Japanese or Mennonite migrants, and what this might suggest about the hypocrisy (or racial bias) of settlement policy, ideas of foreign and national regarding lowland migrants were not always clear-cut. When lowland elites complained of a "foreign invasion" it was frequently directed at the internal migrations of indigenous Bolivians from the highlands and not the existence of Mennonite or Japanese enclaves in the region. Comparative examples can be found in the racialized response to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Leo Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 105-140.

"northeastern" in São Paulo or "*cabecitas negras*" in Buenos Aires. Both cities received massive numbers of immigrants and subsequent waves of internal migrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>47</sup>

## The March to the East in Regional, Global and Transnational Context

While emphasizing the national importance of the "March to the East," this dissertation also links the transformation of Bolivia's lowland frontier to regional and global histories of migration and agricultural development in the post-WWII era and the resulting unprecedented alteration of the borderlands and frontiers of the tropical world. In South America, neighboring Amazonian states engaged in similar projects of internal colonization. In the 1930s Brazilian populist leader Getúlio Vargas championed the country's own "March to the West." In the 1950s, Juscelino Kubitschek revived this project with the construction of a new capital – Brasília – closer to the geographical center of the country. In the following decades, Amazonian expansion encompassing directed colonization and road-building became a favorite policy of Brazil's military government. This led to a booming soybean industry in the state of Matto Grosso – which since 1948 was included in the Brazilian government's defitiniton of "legal Amazonia" - across the border from Santa Cruz.

By building infrastructure and encouraging indigenous migrations to the tropical lowlands, other Andean nations also turned eastward in the second half of the twentieth century, linking ideas of citizenship with environmental change in the process. This

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 32. Emanuela Guano, "The Denial of Citizenship: 'Barbaric' Buenos Aires and the Middle-Class Imaginary," *City & Society : Journal of the Society for Urban Anthropology*, 16:1 (2004): 69-97.

approach builds on an expanding field of inquiry within environmental history.<sup>48</sup> In Peru, architect and President Terry Belaúnde imagined a transnational "Marginal Highway of the Jungle" that would integrate the entire interior of the continent and link the Peruvian and Bolivian Amazon in the south to Ecuador and Colombia in the north. The Bolivian March to the East cannot be seen separately from these simultaneous territorial imaginings across the region that led to new rounds of development, displacement and environmental change across the Amazon and the rest of the South American interior. At the same time, this history is also distinct. While oil development, ranching and other activities boomed across Amazonia after mid-century, aside from Bolivia, no other Amazonian nations managed to fundamentally alter their territorial status quo and today remain centered on coastal and highland capitals.

For MNR intellectual Walter Guevara Arze, who outlined his government's policies in the wake of the revolution, the March to the East would serve two purposes.<sup>49</sup> He promised to simultaneously transform indigenous Bolivians into productive citizensettlers and a latent Amazonian frontier landscape into an agricultural breadbasket for the nation. These intertwined environmental and cultural projects of spatial reorganization appealed to high modernizers in Bolivia and beyond. In an era of decolonization, leaders in newly independent nations looked to transform colonial subjects into modern citizens. The challenges of post-colonial republics in Africa and Southeast Asia resonated with the MNR's assessments of its indigenous population, frontier potential and enduring "colonial" legacy. In post-colonial Africa this was evident in a series of mass re-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Alex Latta and Hannah Wittman, *Environment and Citizenship in Latin America: Natures, Subjects and Struggles* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Wálter Guevara Arze, *Plan inmediato de política economica del gobierno de la revolución nacional.* (La Paz: Ed. Letras, 1955).

settlements or "villagization" projects led by independence leaders like Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana.<sup>50</sup> As Anna Tsing has shown, similar logics were at play in attempts to sedentarize the Meratus people of Indonesia.<sup>51</sup> In Malaysia, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman created the Federal Land Development Authority in the late 1950s to resettle impoverished Malaysians on small farms linked into cooperatives.

Post-colonial state-building projects were also intertwined with Green Revolution science in which U.S. technical funding promised to help nations convert "marginal" lands into breadbaskets to feed growing populations.<sup>52</sup> In the process, crops as well as communities became migrants. In Mexico, U.S. and national officials achieved early successes with varieties of high-yield corn. In Southeast Asia national leaders embraced "miracle rice." Throughout the fities and sixties, Bolivia received more per capita aid from the U.S. government than almost any other nation in the world.<sup>53</sup> Both Point Four and Alliance for Progress funding helped establish settler colonies and research stations and also brought new varieties of corn, cattle and soybeans – and their accompanying extension agents - to Santa Cruz. As they did in other contexts across the globe, these migrations (of people, knowledges, flora and fauna) transformed regional agriculture.<sup>54</sup> For U.S. officials small, socialist Bolivia appeared not only as a key battleground in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Husseina Dinani, "En-gendering the Postcolony: Women, Citizenship and Development in Tanzania, 1945-1985." (PhD diss., Emory University, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Thomas C Field, *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Gordon M. Winder and Andreas Dix, eds., *Trading Environments: Frontiers, Commercial Knowledge and Environmental Transformation*, 1750-1990 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Cold War but also as a perfect "laboratory" for international development policy based on increasing agricultural production.

The spread of these new technologies was inextricably tied to Cold War politics and the growth of an international development industry in which yet another set of migrants -a growing transnational class of practitioners - circulated through Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. As I demonstrate throughout this project, the connections between Santa Cruz and places like Guatemala, Tanzania, the Ivory Coast and Indonesia are more than parallel stories or comparative examples. Many of the "experts," missionaries, anthropologists, and film-makers I discuss physically linked those disparate locations by passing through Bolivia before translating their skills to similar projects across the Global South.

## Methodology

This dissertation draws on films, letters, pamphlets, diaries, newspapers, oral histories and the archives of migration authorities, agricultural and land ministries, among others. This rich and varied source base responds to the challenges of studying the frontier and researching migrants. Both frontier and migration history sit in tension with national narratives, and often fall in and out of national archives. Operating in another Amazonian context, Hugh Raffles has emphasized the importance of drawing from a broad source base which allowing us to see the different ways in which the frontier was imagined and re-shaped by writers, laborers, large-property owners and government officials.<sup>55</sup> Similarly I have drawn from the records and memories of settlers, film-makers, missionaries, local elites and government officials who physically

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Hugh Raffles, In Amazonia: A Natural History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

and discursively shaped Santa Cruz in different ways. Taking inspiration from Raffles, some chapters of this dissertation focus on the meaning of a particular source base - visual culture or written petitions to state authorities - while others engage in a productive interplay of divergent sources.

The incompleteness of archival records for the Bolivian lowlands is compounded by the time period under study. In an irony that is apparent to Latin American historians of the second half of the twentieth century, archival records are often scarcer and more poorly organized for this time period than for the early ones (from the republican to the colonial). Many of the collections of government ministries were never transferred to national archives or remained unprocessed. Presidential correspondence in the national archives is relatively complete for the period of MNR rule (1952-1964) and for the Barrientos and Ovando governments (1964-1968). However documentation is scarce for the following years of the Banzer regime. Faced with missing or unorganized source base I found that a surprisingly effective source for documenting lowland history in the seventies rested in the archives of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), housed in the NGO's headquarters in Akron, PA. On the one hand, MCC archives clearly indicate the role of the organization in lowland development, as one of the faith-based actors I study in Chapter Four. On the other hand, MCC officials also gathered and reported on a range of other agencies operating in the region, making the collection a critical source for Bolivian historians.

Historians of migration are faced with a number of methodological options that each constrain and enable their analysis. They can understand migration history through immigration law and popular representation. This was an early approach taken by

scholars of the Chinese in Mexico which focused on the racist sentiment and legislation that led to their expulsion from several Northern Mexican state in the 1930s.<sup>56</sup> Such an analytical framework, while revealing the racialized underpinnings of the Mexican Revolution in that case, can often misrepresent the experiences of migrants. As Jeffrey Lesser has shown, popular racism and even a concerted state attempt to limit Jewish migration in the thirties in Brazil did not reflect the numbers of Jewish refugees that were able to settle in the country.<sup>57</sup> One could make a similar mistake in Bolivia where Hugo Banzer passed a decree stripping Mennonites of their privileges in 1975. Likely stemming from competition between Mennonite migrants and Banzer's lowland supporters, the decree was never fully implemented in the decade before it was repealed by Paz Estenssoro. Similarly, it was an economic boom in Japan, rather than anti-Japanese sentiment that ultimately limited Okinawan and Japanese migration to Bolivia. Accordingly I have treated official policy and public debate around migration as compelling windows on to ideas of race, modernity and development without assuming they were always applied in practice.

Migration historians have also encouraged us to follow migrants as they cross national borders. In my research I have followed this transnational turn, which at times has required me to move across borders as well. I have explored the history of displacement that brought Okinawan migrants to Bolivia through the files of the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR) housed in U.S. National Archives. I have traced the origins of large-scale Mennonite migration to Bolivia in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) offers one example in a growing literature to move beyond the highly public anti-Chinese discourse of Mexican elites.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

archives in Mexico City. National archives in Bolivia also provided a range of information on the movements of Bolivian *braceros* to neighboring Argentina.

Much of the history I document escaped the public archive. My research thus draws extensively from personal collections and oral history, particularly in the latter two chapters. The two frequently went hand in hand. To cite one not uncommon example, during my interview with Alejandro Araus, a settler and "orientator" in San Julián colony, he paused to enter his house and came out with two old suitcases full of personal and project documents. These included National Institute of Colonization records that were not available in government archives. As Bolivian Mennonites do not participate in the military, public education or politics their archival imprint, in comparison to Andean migrants, is particularly light. Unlike Okinawan and Japanese settlers, Mennonites have also not engaged in an extensive documentation of their own history. While I was able to uncover aspects of Mennonite history in the archives of the Agrarian Reform and the Ministry of Agriculture I also conducted over thirty interviews with Mennonite settlers. In the Mennonite colony of Riva Palacio Abe Enns, Jakob Giesbrecht and Johan Boldt shared their diaries and those of relatives and friends with me. Together these unarchived histories proved critical to situating the large but relatively silent history of Mennonites within the narrative of the March to the East.

Finally, while this history is comparative in nature it is not rigidly so. Okinawan and Japanese colonization never reached the numbers forecast in the fifties and sixties. More importantly, their history has been well documented by visiting anthropologists and sociologists as well as by colony members themselves. This is not always the case for Mennonites and Andeans. I give more attention to Andean and Mennonite migrants in the latter two chapters of this dissertation that each cover periods in which the presence of those groups across the lowlands expanded exponentially while new Japanese and Okinawan migration definitively ground to a halt. Despite this imbalance, comparative approaches to Japanese and Okinawan communities in Bolivia remain important. While few in number, Japanese and Okinawan colonists remain key agro-industrial producers in Santa Cruz, much like the recent small-scale wave of Brazilian expatriate farmers who have settled in the region.<sup>58</sup> Indirectly the presence of Japanese and Okinawans in the region has also led to large scale investment from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which supports projects across the region. Lastly, Okinawan and Japanese migrants continued to be brought into conversation with Andean and Mennonite settlers in newspaper editorials, government reports and oral histories.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Each approaches the March to the East from the perspective of a distinct source-base or set of actors and moves between the transnational, the national and the local. Chronologically, Chapters One through Three focus on the revolutionary period in Bolivia beginning in 1952 and ending in the late 1960s after a military coup by René Barrientos. Chapters 4 and 5 bring the narrative of the March to the East forward in time covering the period of bureaucratic authoritarianism in the seventies and the debt crisis of the eighties and concluding with the neoliberal turn of the nineties. While recognizing the significant changes that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the way these new Brazilian immigrants have been viewed in Santa Cruz see Lee Mackey, "Legitimating Foreignization in Bolivia: Brazilian agriculture and the relations of conflict and consent in Santa Cruz, Bolivia." Paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing. University of Sussex. April 2011. http://www.iss.nl. Accessed Feb 2, 2016.

accompanied these political shifts, I also point to broad continuities in agroenvironmental and migration policy across these regimes.

**Chapter 1**, "Moving Pictures: Narratives and Aesthetics of Mobility in the March to the East" treats the March to the East as a state fixation or "national imagining." I draw on a diverse array of visual and written materials that sought to define the meanings of the unprecedented mobility of this project of internal colonization. These range from documentary and feature length films, news shorts, pamphlets produced for prospective colonists, official annual "odes to the lowlands" from the Bolivian Congress and newspaper editorials debating the merits of migration and infrastructure projects. At the heart of this impressive corpus of materials lies the work of filmmaker Jorge Ruiz who produced a number of films and pamphlets about colonization in the fifties and sixties while working for both the Bolivian Government's National Cinematographic Institute (ICB) and the U.S. Audio-Visual Center in Bolivia. Ruiz's work was shown in theaters across the country and also from the back of mobile cinema trucks.

In films like "A Little Bit of Economic Diversification," "The Spring" and "The First Ones," Ruiz offered stories juxtaposing distinct environments and people. He played with the striking visual distinction between the arid highlands of Bolivia and the tropical lowland jungle. The former often appeared as a place trapped in the past while the latter was depicted as an inviting and transformative space of nearly limitless possibility. Ruiz's camera followed the lives of a number of fictional characters including technicians, school teachers, oil-workers and ex-miners - individuals whose personal migrations overcame profound regional differences and thus unify a fractured national body. Drawing on Doris Summer's work I argue that such films sought to

resolve the tensions and dramas of eastward expansion through images of the family and became something akin to "national romances" of the early republican period.<sup>59</sup>

Those national romances glossed over profound differences separating regional and national audiences. In the second half of the chapter I look at the way the March to the East and Ruiz's films were received by residents of Santa Cruz. I focus primarily on articles in *El Deber*. The city's principal newspaper published extensive reflections on the new railway and highway projects connecting the frontier city to the highlands and to neighboring Argentina and Brazil. While the region's elite embraced the ideas of modernization and development emanating from La Paz they also harbored a deep-seated fear of the Andean indigenous bodies that would accompany these new forms of mobility. *Cruceños* often saw the March to the East as just that, an invasion by people they considered to be foreign. I focus on their experiences in the late fifties when that military metaphor briefly became a reality. This tension came to a head in the midst of struggles over distribution of Santa Cruz's growing oil royalties. Cruceños took to the streets in what they claimed was a simple "civic struggle" but which national newspapers viewed as an attempt to secede from the nation. The MNR declared a state of emergency and sent a militia to occupy the city. This experience of "invasion" (as cruceños referred to it) would remain a central element of their relationship with the national project of eastern expansion.

In the final section of this chapter I turn to the transnational context in which images of rural development and modernization circulated. I do so by exploring the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

travels of the filmmaker Ruiz, who produced documentaries in Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and elsewhere in Latin America in the fifties and sixties. At the seminal meeting of the Alliance for Progress at Punta del Este in 1961, one of his films was shown as an example of rural modernization by U.S officials. Ruiz's Bolivian films were also translated and distributed around the world by the US Point Four Program. Establishing a model that carries throughout this dissertation, chapter one moves between the national, the local, and the transnational. I understand the March to the East not only as national project (or regional response). I also situate it within a transnational context in which the aesthetics and narratives of mid-century "development" flowed. Ruiz's success at translating his aesthetic repertoire cultivated in Bolivia to dramatically different contexts demonstrates the pervasiveness of the notion of development at mid-century across a variety of regimes and national contexts.

In **Chapter 2** "Military Bases and Rubber Tires: Migrants at the Margins of Revolution, Nation and Empire," I weave together the unique environmental and geopolitical forces that brought Mennonites and Okinawans to the plains of Santa Cruz in the fifties and sixties just as the project of eastern expansion was getting underway. In the post-war era Okinawans faced displacement and unemployment as the U.S. military occupied Okinawa and began constructing military bases on much of the archipelago's arable land. At the same time Mexican Mennonites – established in large farming colonies in the state of Chihuahua since the 1920s – faced an intense and prolonged drought that eroded the basis of their rural economy. I compare the strategies of Okinawans – who contested U.S. military removal – and Mennonites – who weathered the mid-century drought by leaving Mexico to work as "braceros" on Canadian farms. I link these "survival strategies" to earlier patterns of migration engaged in by both groups. I also explore the early experience of Okinawans in Bolivia and explain how they negotiated regional hostility in explicit comparison with the first Paraguayan Mennonite colonists to settle in Santa Cruz. As in the preceding chapter, I move between the transnational, the national and the local to demonstrate how migrants employed repertoires cultivated in previous periods of migration in their negotiations with the Bolivian state and local elites in Santa Cruz.

In **Chapter 3**, "Abandonment Issues: Cultivating the State through Letters" I turn to the experience of those Andeans migrants that the MNR had courted in films and promotional materials throughout the fifties. In contrast to visions of development produced by the state - what James Scott has famously termed "seeing like a state" - I privilege ways of "speaking to a state."<sup>60</sup> In Bolivia, subaltern actors brought their own understandings to the "March to the East." To access the voices of Andean actors I work with an array of letters written by individual settlers and cooperatives about colonization. These are addressed to state officials as well as directly to the President of Bolivia. I situate these petitions as part of a broader genre of subaltern engagement with statebuilding with a long history in Bolivia and across Latin America.

The chapter is divided in two. First, I examine how Andeans actively articulated their own imaginings of the March to the East as they demanded the right to settle the lowlands in the fifties and sixties. In doing so, they painted a provocative picture bringing together desperate situations in their home communities, their transnational

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

struggles as "braceros" in neighboring Argentina, the promise of the tropical environment of the lowlands and the state's commitment to its revolutionary legacy.

Second, I illustrate how the reality of colonization – as described by letter-writers - often failed to match the harmonious human experiment depicted in state propaganda. In particular, I concentrate on the ways in which state planners and colonists negotiated those failings through conflicting interpretations of the meaning of "abandonment." Officials noted high settler abandonment rates and sought explanations. These ranged from the unsuitable cultural practices of Andeans to excessive state assistance they felt had cultivated settler "dependency." Confronting a discourse of abandonment originating from above, colonists turned that accusation back on the state. The second half of this chapter explores the litary of letters, denunciations and complaints that streamed into national offices from across the colonization zones. Petitioners joined the state in linking masculinity, settlement and honor but did so by placing the state in the role of masculine provider and then raising doubts about the nation's territorial integrity, the government's ability to feed its population and its commitment to its own revolutionary legacy. In this chapter "failure" looms large - as it does in many critiques of development modernization. Yet, I do not view failure as the definitive endpoint the language of "abandonment" suggests. Rather, for both planners and colonists, failure served as the impetus for new rounds of intervention in the colonization zones.

While the first three chapters of this dissertation cover the period of the revolution – from 1952 to the mid-sixties – the final two chapters bring the narrative of the March to the East forward in time. **Chapter 4**, "To Minister or Administer: Faith and Development in the Bolivian Lowlands," follows a different sort of "migrant."

Missionary and religious organizations played an active role in colonization programs and often served as proxies for the state. The chapter opens in early 1968 as a massive flood devastated Santa Cruz. Historians of disaster in Latin America have demonstrated that the proliferation of activity in the wake of such events brings unseen dynamics to the fore by raising challenges to, and reflecting upon, colonial order, modernization and authoritarian regimes.<sup>61</sup> The 1968 flood disproportionately affected the new colonization zones that had been established alongside the Río Grande over the previous decade and a half. I use the disaster as a framing device just as many of those I interviewed did. My interlocutors read the disaster in terms of the "failure" of national colonization projects and in its wake designed new initiatives that sought to respond to those shortcomings.

The first section of the chapter explores the pre-history of the flood, in particular the range of religious organizations that were active in the Bolivian lowlands in the fifties and sixties. As I demonstrate colonization provided several distinct opportunities for North American missionaries and volunteers to work with indigenous peoples. On the one hand, settlement resulted in displacement of semi-nomadic indigenous groups in the lowlands and the Bolivian state welcomed groups like the World Gospel Mission and New Tribes Mission who aggressively sought these "uncontacted" tribes along the margins of the new settlement zones. On the other hand, in contrast to these decidedly "evangelical" activities, the Methodist church and the relief agency the Mennonite Central Committee began working extensively with new colonists (predominantly of Aymara and Quechua origin). Ultimately the United Methodist Church and the Mennonite Central Committee made Bolivia a center of their expanding global

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Jürgen Buchenau and Lyman L. Johnson, *Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

operations. In the process they took on many of the "secular" roles we would assume to be the exclusive province of the state.

In the second half of this chapter I turn to the new roles that the Methodist Church, the MCC and several Maryknoll Sisters – a Roman Catholic religious missionary organization active across Latin America - took on in the wake of the 1968 flood. These individuals and organizations worked with victims of the disaster and gradually developed a settler "orientation program" as they helped displacees re-establish themselves on new lands. Maryknoll activities in Latin American have already been the subject of a number of studies and I thus focus primarily on Mennonite volunteers and Methodist missionaries in Bolivia whose history has primarily been limited to churchbased publications.<sup>62</sup>

From an ad-hoc response to an isolated incident, this orientation program grew into a model for new colonization projects. In 1970, Maryknolls, Methodists and Mennonites formed the "United Church Committee" (Comité de Iglesias Unidas – CIU) and contracted with the National Institute of Colonization to run a massive new national colonization program called San Julián further out on the eastern frontier. Over the following decade San Julián became Bolivia's largest settlement venture attracting a range of attention from academics and planners for its unique orientation program and its radical spatial design. Throughout the project, religious actors became key "gobetweens," able to work on the ground with colonists, gain the confidence of the Bolivian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Susan Behrens-Fitzpatrick's *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru*, 1943 – 1989: Transnational Faith and Transformation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

state and channel international funding from religious and secular sources like USAID.<sup>63</sup> The chapter closes with the beginnings of the debt crisis in the early eighties that shook the "success story" image of San Julián. As I argue, the submerged forms of popular organizing that emerged from this project continued to be viable for Andean settlers in an era of economic crisis and declining state support.

Chapter Four also straddles two distinct political periods. The first half covers religious activity during the period of MNR rule. In the second half I narrate the postflood transition alongside a political one as Bolivia moved into a prolonged period of authoritarian rule under General Hugo Banzer. While radical peasants across Santa Cruz experienced the Banzer-era as one of political repression, religious actors were adept at negotiating the turn to authoritarianism. As such, this chapter also contributes to a growing discussion of the role of religion in an era of bureaucratic-authoritarianism and state development across Latin America.

**Chapter 5**, the final chapter of this dissertation turns to the experience of the largest group of immigrant settlers in Santa Cruz. From 1967 to the end of the twentieth century, thousands of traditional "horse-and-buggy" Mennonites left homes in the Northern Mexican states of Chihuahua and Durango to settle in the eastern lowlands. While this chapter places the Mennonite experience in dialogue with that of Andeans and Okinawans and the larger project of the "March to the East," it also seeks to contribute to the history of "Mennonites at the Margins" of modern Latin America. On the one hand, this refers to the presence of Mennonite settler communities at the physical margins of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> For the role of "brokers" in the development process see David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*, 1st Edition edition (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

the region from the U.S.-Mexico border and the Peten rainforest in Belize to the Gran Chaco and Amazonia in Bolivia and Paraguay. On the other hand, it expounds on the idea that Mennonites remain at the margins of Latin American historiography.

These two forms of marginality are intertwined. Mennonites' presence at the geographic margins of the region has allowed them not only to keep the state and surrounding society at bay. It has also allowed them to escape the gaze of historians who may see this curious group as something apart from the broader contours of Latin American history. The outsider image is actively performed by many Mennonites. They claim that their faith requires them to live "apart from the world."<sup>64</sup> I assert that a rapidly expanding population of more than a quarter million Latin American Mennonites who can claim nearly a century of activity in the region and occupy roles as key producers of agricultural commodities from corn and beans to processed chicken and cheese and above all soybeans across the region calls for a change in this historical omission.

I begin this chapter by exploring the establishment of Mexican Mennonite colonies in Bolivia in the late sixties and by considering how these new arrivals were perceived by the Bolivian state, press and by members of the Mennonite Central Committee, the relief agency discussed in the preceding chapter. During their first decade in Bolivia, Mexican Mennonites converted a large area to the south of Santa Cruz de la Sierra into prosperous farming communities. Their success in negotiating with the state and transforming the land rested on a seeming paradox: the highly mobile nature of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Royden Loewen, *Horse-and-Buggy Genius: Listening to Mennonites Contest the Modern World* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 162.

Mennonite go-betweens. I follow the travels of colony leaders between Mexico and Bolivia and Santa Cruz and La Paz as well as the business trips of enterprising Mennonite merchants who brought livestock and machinery from nearby Paraguay and Argentina and from across the U.S. As I argue, it was the transnationalism of key individuals that allowed a colony that to the outsider appeared closed, agrarian and immobile to rapidly develop the frontier.

In the second half of this chapter I situate Mennonites at the center of the key agrarian narrative of late twentieth century South America: the dramatic expansion of soybean production that converted the forested heart of the continent – from Brazil and Argentina to Paraguay and Bolivia – into the world's pre-eminent soybean producing region. I demonstrate the way that soybean production emerged from a confluence of regional and global factors – from agro- industrial technology in Brazil and the collapse of fish stocks in Peru - and illustrate how Mennonite producers adapted to the new forms of production. The soybean boom emerged just as Bolivia and the rest of Latin America was entering a profound economic crisis and in this chapter I reveal the parallel experiences with debt and drought that Mennonites experienced in the debt crisis. I conclude by exploring the survival strategies that allowed Mennonite colonists to weather the debt crisis and the expansion of Mennonite settlement in the turn to neoliberalism in the 1990s that privileged the export of profitable cash crops from soybeans to sesame and peanuts.

The **Conclusion** and **Epilogue** of this dissertation extend the history of the March to the East to the present. I examine the ways that transnational and regional dynamics continue to unfold in this national state-building project. Just as ideas of "abandonment"

provided a key framing narrative for the early history of Santa Cruz, conflicting notions of "autonomy" help us understand Santa Cruz at the beginning of the twenty-first century. I compare the 2008 "autonomy" movements in Santa Cruz with other ideas of autonomy expressed and practiced by Mennonite colonists – who continue to struggle to maintain their special legal privileges – and by lowland indigenous groups - who since the nineties have struggled to regain control of lands that were usurped over the course of the March to the East. I also examine the way that Andean settlers in "rebel" colonies like Yapacaní and San Julián rejected the term "colonist" in favor of "intercultural," remember their history and continue to organize to gain access to resources and contest the state. Finally, I draw out long continuities in Bolivia's frontier policy extending through the Evo Morales administration that continues to advocate for new colonization and increased agrarian production along the frontier. I conclude by arguing that the project of environmental, economic and social transformation known as the March to the East has been, and continues to be, the most important process shaping modern Bolivian history. In this respect, I place migrant communities -Andean, Mennonite and Okinawan – at the center.

## Chapter 1 - Moving Pictures: Narrative and Aesthetic in Bolivia's March to the East

"In the highlands I was searching and searching, but I found what I was looking for in the east." – Santos, the miner-turned-colonist and protagonist of the 1955 film A Little Bit of Economic Diversification<sup>65</sup>

Jorge Ruiz's 1955 film *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification* opens with a scene that appears quintessentially Bolivian. In a highland mining town surrounded by the craggy peaks of the Andes, a whistle pierces the cold pre-dawn air. Emerging from their small shacks, workers file into the mines to begin the dangerous task of drilling, laying charges and hauling material. At the mine's office a letter awaits the group's foreman. It is from his brother-in-law Santos, a former co-worker who had left the mines to travel to the country's eastern lowland frontier. The other miners, eager for news, gather around. Reminiscing about Santos one man questions his masculinity and his decision to abandon his work. Another argues that, "no, Santos was *macho también*," affirming that the hard life in the mines was simply not for everyone. Turning to their foreman they encourage him to read the letter aloud.

The scope of this coming-of-age story is both personal and national. It begins in the back of an open truck as the letter's author passes under the zero-kilometer commemorative arch of a new highway, the first all-weather road to connect the nation's highlands with the rapidly expanding lowland frontier department of Santa Cruz. The road, as the product of "Bolivian force and Yankee money," notes Santos, is transforming the country in its path. His gaze is attracted to "macho" road construction crews as well

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Oscar Soria Gamarra, Hugo Roncal et al. *Un pocito de diversificación económica*. DVD. Directed by Jorge Ruiz. (La Paz, Bolivia: Telecine, USIS, 2010).

as the dams and irrigation projects that are rising up alongside the highway. As the truck struggles over one final, foggy, highland pass before beginning the dramatic descent into the lowlands, the tires themselves seem to say to him "go, go, never come back."

Arriving in Santa Cruz, a lowland frontier city on Bolivia's eastern plains, Santos is overwhelmed by the heat, the humidity, the chaotic muddy streets and the mountains of unfamiliar tropical fruit. A stranger in this hedonistic city, he falls in with the wrong crowd, namely, a pair of gregarious, hard-drinking *cambas* (lowlanders). Masculinity is once again at play. Though he is unaccustomed to drink, he writes of a need to "stand up for *kollas*' [highlanders] honor". Soon he is intoxicated, penniless and alone in the streets of Santa Cruz.

The city has nothing to offer the highland migrant but Santos soon discovers a booming agricultural center a short distance to the north of Santa Cruz. In the small town of Montero at the end point of the new highway, he returns to cataloguing the region's many transformations including cane fields as far as the eye can see and a "cathedral-like" modern sugar refinery. "Let all our friends come" he writes to his brother-in-law. "There is land for everyone and our government will help." In this landscape of possibility, Santos falls in love with a young camba woman named Pilar. With financing and technical support courtesy of the U.S. Agriculture Service, the two settle on their own parcel of land. In a final flashback, a mature Santos is the proud father of Bolivia's new *mestizo*. The term is not used in the colonial sense as the offspring of indigenous and European. Instead their child represents the union between a masculine race and a feminine environment, or as Santos bluntly puts it, "kolla blood and camba land."



Figure 2 Scenes from Jorge Ruiz's *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*.Santos' former coworkers (left) read of his new life and family in the tropics (right).

In the wake of the 1952 Revolution, Bolivia's National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) initiated a series of development projects which came to be known as the "March to the East." The socialist leaders of the MNR sought to radically transform the nation by shifting people and resources from an extractive mining economy based in the western highlands to the nation's neglected lowland frontiers. While Bolivia's lowlands encompassed a broad swath of land extending from tropical Amazonia to the Gran Chaco, a semi-arid region of lowland forest extending into neighboring Argentina and Paraguay, no region received more attention than Santa Cruz department (the Bolivian equivalent of a state) and its departmental capital city, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, typically referred to simply as Santa Cruz. Officials hoped Santa Cruz would become the future bread-basket of the nation.

Filmmaker Jorge Ruiz played an active role in the March to the East, creating a series of documentaries depicting road construction, colonization schemes and health and sanitation efforts for the state's *Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano* (ICB) and Bolivia's U.S. sponsors. Ruiz first recognized film-making as an effective didactic medium while training to be an agronomist in Northern Argentina. He filmed several field

demonstrations with a friend's camera before screening them for an enthusiastic class.<sup>66</sup> Returning to Bolivia in the late 1940s he received support to produce his first films from Kenneth Wasson, the US embassy's cultural attaché.<sup>67</sup> Even before the revolution, Ruiz was creating propaganda films for the government. One example is a bilingual Aymara-Spanish publicity film for the 1950 national census entitled *Bolivia Seeks the Truth*.

In films like *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*, Ruiz utilized Bolivia's divergent landscapes and the striking visual distinction between west and east in the service of his narrative. Juxtaposing the contrasting environmental aesthetics of sweeping mountain vistas and arid high plains with dense jungle and sinuous rivers, Ruiz presented the highlands as a place mired in a hopeless past while the lowlands were depicted as an inviting and transformative space of nearly limitless possibility. Melding drama and documentary, Ruiz's camera follows the movements of fictional technicians, school-teachers, oil-workers and ex-miners. These characters' personal migrations and boundary-crossing romances overcome profound regional differences and thus unify a fractured national body.

Ruiz's films are not the only sources to document lowland colonization. In this chapter I place those films in dialogue with an eclectic body of images and narratives that sought to give structure and meaning to the unprecedented mobility that characterized mid-century Bolivia. These include a diverse range of sources, from government reports and the Bolivian Congress's and Senate's annual, flowery "Homage to Santa Cruz," to editorials in Santa Cruz's largest newspaper *El Deber* and crude pamphlets produced for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> José Antonio Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad: Jorge Ruiz, memorias del cine documental boliviano* (La Paz: CONACINE, 1998), 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 22.

potential migrants. This chapter analyzes those materials to understand the visual and narrative repertoire that accompanied Bolivia's attempt to re-imagine itself in its eastern lowlands. Beginning with images that represent the March to the East as a national project, I turn to regional understandings of mobility that both mesh with and challenge this national vision before moving beyond the lowlands and Bolivia to reveal the transnational orbit in which such images also circulated.

Ruiz and others imagined happy and romantic resolutions to diverse problems ranging from technical obstacles to regional hostilities, land tenure, and cultural change. Yet these tensions were often exacerbated rather than overcome in the process of eastward expansion. The meanings of mobility, so clear in some films, were fraught and often contested by their imagined subjects in the lowlands. If the image of the east as a land of unlimited future promise seems simplistic it also remained an enduring ideal for many of the hundreds of thousands of migrants that entered Santa Cruz over the following half century. It is thus crucial to understand the formation of this frontier imaginary in the immediate post-revolutionary period.<sup>68</sup>

Ruiz presented the country's vast lowlands as a transformative space for both individual and nation. These ideas were are also at the heart of Walter Guevara Arze's *Plan Inmediato de Politica Economica del Gobierno de la Revolución Nacional* and Guevara Arze stands as the architect and author of the March to the East. As a prominent intellectual in the MNR, Guevara Arze was commissioned to write a report prescribing the revolutionary government's development policy in 1953. His economic proposal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> See similar approaches to U.S. and Brazilian frontier history in Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 2011) and Seth Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937–1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

directed at fellow party members and U.S. funders encouraged self-sufficiency and reduction of imports through the development of transport corridors and large-scale, mechanized farming. Bolivia derived nearly all of its foreign earnings from a single source: tin. It spent almost two-thirds of those earnings in importing ten basic items, primarily foodstuffs, ranging from sugar and beef to rice and cotton. Succinctly expressing the logic of import-substitution – which would emerge as economic gospel for mid-century Latin American nations – Guevara Arze argues that Bolivia's challenge was to "produce more minerals at lower cost when possible and stop importing what the country can produce itself."<sup>69</sup>

Guevara Arze combined this economic argument with a spatial sensibility unique to Bolivia, noting that,

"the majority of the population of Bolivia lives in the departments that encompass the Altiplano, the Cordillera and the valleys whose extension does not even reach 33% of [national territory]. In this space, constituted in its majority by sterile and poor land, lives something more than 72% of the population of Bolivia. The lowlands, semitropical and tropical, plains that are generally apt for agriculture and reach 67% of the total extension don't even contain 28% of the population."<sup>70</sup>

Population transfer would not only balance the nation and drive agricultural expansion it would also reduce the strain of overcrowding and unemployment in the highlands. Santos' former occupation was telling as Guevara Arze was primarily concerned with the "excess" of miners in highland camps. Overstaffing was promoted by the prerevolutionary tin oligarchy in order to keep wages low. However, this radicalized and notably Marxist population was an increasing liability for the more moderate socialism espoused by the MNR. In a move that best indicated the Revolution's desire to transform

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Walter Guevara Arze, *Plan inmediato*, 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ibid., 77.

Bolivia from an extractive to a cultivated state, Guevara Arze hoped to "fire all the excess personnel," a number he estimated at 10% of the labor force "and take them to new productive occupations such as agriculture."<sup>71</sup>

Miners were not the only group the MNR sought to re-locate. Critics of the Agrarian Reform were quick to point out that the rapid destruction of the *latifundia* system of large-scale landholding had led to an inverse problem - the creation of tiny, subsistence tenure patterns.<sup>72</sup> These small landowners, or *minifundia*, were not the market-oriented farmers the MNR sought. Instead, Guevara Arze noted they "barely produce enough for family consumption." Migration would initiate a process of socio-economic transformation by, "converting those that move to Santa Cruz into providers of essential products instead of consumers."<sup>73</sup>

While favoring abstract economic terms, it was impossible for Guevara Arze, who was in reality speaking about indigenous farmers from the Andes, to avoid acknowledging the entrenched racism that characterized Bolivian society. "There exists some prejudices," he admits, "as to the aptitude of the agriculturalists that wish to move, who some suppose are unequivocally Indians in their totality, that for centuries have been habituated to an economy of consumption without ambitions to prosper economically." Here he demonstrates the degree to which language and race were intertwined in Bolivia. Guevara Arze assures his audience. "In the department of Cochabamba alone" he states, "there are 32,000 landowners that speak almost exclusively Spanish, anxious to improve

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> For a contemporary discussion of some of the problems arising from early Agrarian Reform see, William E Carter, *Aymara Communities and the Bolivian Agrarian Reform*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Guevara Arze, *Plan Inmediato*, 83.

their economic and social condition." Fluency in Spanish implied a deracination of indigenous farmers. These "frustrated agriculturalists" were forced to migrate to the mines or to the cane fields of northern Argentina in search of work, but the revolution had "awoken in them an evident desire to overcome [their situation.]"<sup>74</sup>

## Filming a National Romance: Jorge Ruiz and the National Cinematography Institute

Guevara Arze's "essential panorama" closely follows Ruiz's film. Lines from the *Plan Inmediato*, such as "[Bolivians] are counting on their own effort along with the financial and technical support of the United States," appear nearly verbatim in *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*.<sup>75</sup> In another sense, the technocratic language of the plan differs fundamentally from the coming-of-age story in Ruiz's film. The *Plan Inmediato* was a good idea, Ruiz would remember years later, but made for a subject "somewhat rigid to produce without retouching." At heart, it "lacked a certain aesthetic seduction."<sup>76</sup> Ruiz translated Guevara Arze's statistics into sweeping vistas, his arithmetic of population transfer into the heroic movement of machines and bodies, his projections for increased production into swaying fields of cane and a "cathedral-like" refinery. Ruiz and script writer Oscar Soria provided a narrative hook for the audience by inserting the fictional story of Santos into an otherwise straightforward documentary.

This formula, which Ruiz employed in other productions, offers a 20<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "national romances" described by Doris Sommer. As Homi K. Bhaba argues in *Nation and Narration* there is "a particular ambivalence that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 70.

haunts the idea of the nation."<sup>77</sup> In the classics of Latin American literature analyzed by Sommer, authors attempt to control that ambivalence. The serious conflicts produced by export booms, regional integration and frontier development are mediated through the explorations of inter-personal, familial and generational tensions in which hopes for sexual and national union intermingled. Engaging with Benedict Anderson's influential study of nationalism, Sommer points out that patriotic literature draws strength from this ability to move from "erotic longing into another national one," in which "national projects [were] coupled with productive heterosexual desire.<sup>78</sup> In *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*, the dense logic of import-substitution industrialization is reframed in terms of a personal migration in which the reconstitution of the national body is reduced to the movement of the individual. The fecundity of Santa Cruz's land is inextricably linked to the fertility of cruceño women and the potentially conflictive eastmeets-west encounter between highlander and lowlander is reconciled in the new mestizo child of Santos and Pilar.

It is also worth noting that Sommer is referring to a literary phenomenon most identified with late nineteenth century nation-building. At the same time, understanding Ruiz's films in a similar light – as national romance and foundational fiction – is apt given that the MNR's attempt to re-found the Bolivian nation after 1952 resonated with this earlier projects. The aims of the 1952 Revolution, as several authors have pointed out, oscillated between broad margins, from the political, the cultural and the economic,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, ix.

whether considering public health, import substitution or cultural preservation.<sup>79</sup> Its leaders consistently argued that Bolivia's remained a fundamentally colonial society up to the mid-1950s which had never truly consolidated its independence. Accordingly they approached the immediate post-revolutionary years with an accompanying desire to "incorporate the mass of Bolivians into national life" – an expression that appears throughout government documents of the era - with a fervor that 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century modernizers like Sarmiento or Vasconcelos would have recognized.<sup>80</sup>

As the MNR attempted to execute a nation-building project in the mid-twentieth century, film, much more so than the nineteenth century novel, provided a unique medium to present its own national romances. As historian Monica Rankin points out, film as well as other new and old media forms such as radio, newspaper and posters were particularly useful to the Mexican government in the 1940s as its leaders attempted to consolidate its national revolution and "forge a sense of patriotism and national identity based on its own evolving version of modernity."<sup>81</sup> Along with Mexico, national film industries were already established in Brazil and Argentina by the 1950s and were emerging in other regions of Latin America. During WWII, the United States had promoted film in the region by sending Hollywood icons like Walt Disney and Orson Welles to Latin America to act as cultural ambassadors. The documentary with its authoritative narration was a particularly influential genre pioneered by film-maker John Grierson in inter-war films and war-time propaganda programs. Grierson also advocated

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Pablo Stefanoni, *Qué hacer con los indios: y otros traumas irresueltos de la colonialidad* (La Paz: Plural Editores, 2010), Matthew Gildner "Indomestizo Modernism." Both discuss the "Indian question" – as it was framed – in post-revolutionary Bolivia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Benjamin Kohl and Linda C. Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Monica A. Rankin, *¡México, La Patria! Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 2.

the creation of National Film Boards in the Americas that, like the ICB, would provide resources for cultural and nationalistic production. In 1958 Grierson visited Bolivia and toured the country with Jorge Ruiz - a formative moment of professional validation for the young filmmaker.<sup>82</sup>

The MNR was also highly attuned to the value of propaganda. It created a Ministry of Press and Propaganda in 1952 which was quickly replaced by the less sinister-sounding Secretary of Press, Information and Culture (SPIC).<sup>83</sup> Under the direction of José Fellman Velarde, the SPIC produced printed material, broadcast radio ads on Radio Illimani and published articles in the government-run newspaper *La Nación*. In 1953, SPIC's Institute for Political Capacitation produced a short pamphlet entitled, "Lessons of Propaganda, Organization and Agitation," a useful source to understand how the government imagined the production, dissemination and reception of its material as well as the Bolivian sphere it sought to address.

To best reach its imagined public, the pamphlet advised that propaganda "was to be simple and direct" in its enunciation of the central problems of the revolution, "adopting a tone that corresponds to the level of culture of the masses to whom it is directed." This would naturally "seem vulgar for educated people but has a surprising effect on multitudes and collectives."<sup>84</sup> The authors also attributed a unique "aesthetic" sensibility to their Andean subjects. Image-based propaganda was a pragmatic response

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> José. Sánchez-H, *The Art and Politics of Bolivian Cinema* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 30-31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Instituto de Capacitación Política, *Lecciones de propaganda, organización y agitación* (La Paz: SPIC, 1953), BNB, 6. 10.

to high levels of illiteracy but also had a deep resonance with Bolivia's colonial past.<sup>85</sup> As the Spanish tried to "inculcate the Indians with religion, [they] presented religious ideas by means of almost perfect graphics that were truly works of art of the age." This process of evangelization had a permanent effect on indigenous "aesthetic sensibility, that is, the love for the image." Even the Bolivian landscape, with its "environment of strong colors and the sharpness of the atmosphere," made Bolivians "aficionados of color."<sup>86</sup>

At mid-century Bolivia was a diverse nation that like many Latin American countries was characterized more by vibrant regional cultures than a single national identity. A key element of propaganda was its ability to take place and regional variety into account. It would be tailored to "the fundamental difference of a ranching or farming region, of forms of life that are more or less primitive, of climatological conditions," or even determining, "if a people have a better disposed spirit for the humorous if they are from a tropical climate than from a mountain one."<sup>87</sup>

Seemingly contradictory was the obligation of propaganda to translate that unique experience across the nation by breaking the provincialism of the receiver. The pamphlet argues that it was natural for the nationalization of the mines to be more important in a mining region and the agrarian reform in a rural one. Yet effective propaganda needed to make those changes relevant to disparate publics. The result was a stress on regional types in much of the MNR's propaganda, evident in the hard-drinking cambas encountered by Santos. As much as a stereotype employed by highlanders, the idea of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> For a discussion of the use of images in religious indoctrination in colonial Latin America see, among others, Serge Gruzinski and Heather MacLean, *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner,* 1492-2019 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Instituto de Capacitación Política, *Lecciones de propaganda*, 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Ibid., 21.

lowlanders as a people of renowned *chispa* (gaiety) was often embraced by residents of Santa Cruz.<sup>88</sup> Propaganda would offer stock regional figures that a diverse national audience could easily identify. Ruiz's films would simultaneously elevate regional distinctiveness before collapsing it in the romantic unions of its central characters.

On March 20, 1953, Bolivian president, Victor Paz Estenssoro signed Supreme Decree 3342 founding the *Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano* (ICB). The decree notes the need to amplify the "installations and the sphere of activity with the goal of having an organism that better constitutes a means of propaganda for the understanding of national reality and serves to educate the popular classes."<sup>89</sup> The decree stressed the need to equip the ICB with resources for the diffusion and mandatory display of its films in all of the movie theatres of the country.

During its first years the ICB was under the direction of Walter Cerruto. The Institute offered a space for the ritualized encounters between Bolivia's diverse peoples and landscapes as stressed in the SPIC pamphlet. While exploring many aspects of the revolution, a significant number of ICB films were set in the eastern lowlands.<sup>90</sup> Of the *noticieros* produced by Cerruto from 1953-1956, 42 of 136, nearly one third deal with themes related to lowland development. In a similar news program, the ABC (Actualidad Boliviana Cinematográfica) from 1958-59 under director Luis Alberto Alipaz – 20 of 47 shorts related directly to Santa Cruz. *Traveling through Our Land* was a recurring short segment that Cerruto produced during those years that introduced audiences to unfamiliar

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Nino Gandarilla Guardia, *Cine y televisión en Santa Cruz* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Universidad Autónoma Gabriel René Moreno, 2011), 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Victor Paz Estenssoro, Decreto Supremo 3342, March 20, 1953. Listado de Decretos. Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo/index.php/normas/lista/11. Accessed Nov. 2, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> See Nino Gandarilla Guardia, Cine y televisión en Santa Cruz, 186.

eastern locales. In their "endless pilgrimage" across the country, its producers invited Bolivians to hop aboard a riverboat on the Beni or stroll through the streets of Trinidad or Riberalta. One such episode opened with an aerial shot of a sinuous river winding through a tropical forest. Viewers were welcomed to Trinidad, "one of the most picturesque small cities in Bolivia." The "fecundity of this tropical land" was represented as a verdant plaza adorned with towering palms. The narrator balances the city's "enchanting" tradition found in a "beautiful cathedral and the cordialness of its inhabitants," with an insistence that even in this faraway place, "day by day new industries are born that contribute to the greatness of the patria."<sup>91</sup>

The dualism of lowland Bolivia, its liminal position between tradition and modernity, exotic and future-minded, comes across in other episodes of *Travelling through Our Land*. In one episode, the camera travels to a mission station in Santa Cruz "where men of good will incorporate selvícolas [hunter-gatherer communities] to civilization." The recipients of this civilizing mission were Sirionós who demonstrate their traditional hunting techniques for the camera even as the narrator assures viewers that their children are "learning to love and serve the patria."<sup>92</sup> When the program passes through the city of Santa Cruz in a subsequent episode, the narrator finds a place "typified by its exuberance," in which its streets "show the contrast between the past and the modern" between "ox-carts and modern vehicles." Men and women stroll through the plaza and fill their water jugs at a fountain while a soft guitar plays in the background. In what would become a persistent trope in representations of the lowlands, the program

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Walter Cerruto, *Viajando por nuestra tierra* (1953-1956: ICB) Reel in archive of Cineteca Boliviana, La Paz.
 <sup>92</sup> Ibid.

blends tropical fertility with alluring feminine beauty, with scarce concern for subtlety. "In its gardens, under a serene and warm sky, the most beautiful perfumed flowers, just as beautiful as its women, open their petals," the narrator intones suggestively as images of tropical flowers fade into a closing scene of a couple dancing to a song with lyrics about "the beautiful eastern land,...Santa Cruz, my love."<sup>93</sup>

While frequently emphasizing the femininity of its exquisite nature, the ICB produced images of Santa Cruz that were just as likely to fetishize modern infrastructure and goods from water towers and roads to imported Zebu cattle. In a news short on the construction of an electrical plant, the ICB reminds viewers that "Santa Cruz has been one of the regions of the country in which the government of the national revolution has put its greatest interest....this city of the future has received one of its most basic necessities."<sup>94</sup>

It is unclear how the ICB's early films were received among the Bolivian public who may have impatiently watched while waiting for the main feature to begin. Government officials however, were clearly quite impressed. The didactic, simple images and language of these first films provided a reassuring and stable representation of policy in action for the MNR itself just as much as for the film's imagined illiterate public. In September of 1956, the Bolivian Congress heard a motion to officially commend the ICB and its first director Walter Cerruto for his work over the past three years. Deputy Mendoza-López led the charge, noting that it was simply a sentiment of "logical and just gratitude," given that before the creation of the ICB, "it had not been

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Ibid.

possible to understand, in this country or abroad, the diverse activities of the *campesino* sector." In a frank admission, the deputies acknowledged that the institution had done no less than transform rural Bolivia - the majority of the nation's population - into "an element worthy of consideration where before it was not."<sup>95</sup>

Mendoza mentions that the eastern vistas of programs like "Travelling through our land" were important for another reason. "For the first time sectors of the east have seen themselves, their panoramas, their landscapes and activities exhibited for the contemplation of the nation." Mendoza's comments hint at the potential awkwardness of this new Lacanian awareness in which lowlanders were assumed to be watching ICB materials while imagining themselves as highlanders imagining lowlanders. "National contemplation," in Mendoza's view, involved the judgment of La Paz in relation to a peripheral orient.<sup>96</sup>

Bolivia's version of orientalism hinged on the display of regional types from crocodile hunters to wandering troubadours. Such representations of the east were not always flattering. Despite their land's great promise, Bolivia's lowlanders, just as much as highland transplants, were seen to suffer from their own set of limitations. This regional critique was cast in explicitly gendered terms. What the lowlands in general, and its men in particular, suffered from was principally a lack of initiative and drive. In contrast, the highlands were often spoken of as a violent place, with a troubled irreconcilable future. But out of place in the lowlands, all that nervous and volatile highland energy was not a political liability. In fact, it offered the perfect counterpart to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> H. Camara de Diputados, *Redactor: Actas Públicas* September: 2 (La Paz, 1956), 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Ibid., 73.

the oft-repeated stereotypes of lowland complacency. As Tania Li has argued in a radically different context, development discourse hinges on the construction of a "deficient subject" in need of intervention. In this case, mobility provided a harmonious, familial resolution to both of Bolivia's "deficient subjects" – highlander and lowlander.<sup>97</sup>

This perspective characterizes two Ruiz films of the late 1950s during a period in which he took over directorship of the ICB from Cerruto. In the 1958 film La Vertiente his camera travels to the lowland village of Rurrenebaque. Like A Little Bit of Economic *Diversification*, the film drew on actual events while incorporating a fictional hook for the audience. A young female schoolteacher from La Paz (or paceña) is the agent of change and conflict is once again written as an ethnic, inter-regional romance, this time between the impetuous schoolteacher and a brave, but irresponsible, crocodile hunter. While completing her obligatory year in the provinces, the schoolteacher acts as a transformative force in a sleepy, lowland environment characterized in the film by drunkenness and a lack of interest in change. She tries without success to encourage the town to build a modern water system instead of drinking water directly from the river. After a young student dies of a water-borne disease, the schoolteacher leaps into action. She enlists her own class to build a water line through the jungle before breaking her leg in a dramatic tree-falling accident. Shamed into action by the gender transgression of this martyr for development, the hunter abandons drinking to take part in the construction efforts with the support of the government and the military. The project is heroically completed and order and sanitation arrive in the village just as the safely convalescing schoolteacher's injuries are healing. The film concludes with the happy embrace of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Tania Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

hunter, masculine honor restored, and tearful schoolteacher now bound more than ever to this lowland town.<sup>98</sup>

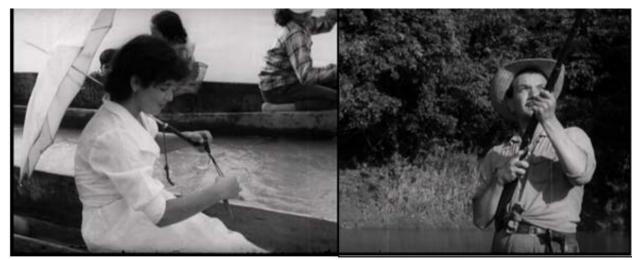


Figure 3 Scenes from Jorge Ruiz's *La Vertiente*. Regional tropes are presented in gendered form through the romance between a young schoolteacher from La Paz and a crocodile hunter from Rurrenabaque.

While lacking a highland-lowland romance, a similar relation between reconstituted gender order, family, and regional development is evident in *Los Primeros*. This 1956 film, produced by Ruiz and the ICB, centers on Camiri, an oil zone in the south of Santa Cruz. Along with food security the *Plan Inmediato* identified lowland oil production as a key site for future development. "On the eastern flank of the last ridges of the Andes," wrote Guevara Arze, "there exists in Bolivia one of the largest regions of petroleum possibility in the western hemisphere."<sup>99</sup> "Los Primeros" begins with a long sequence of an elderly woman walking through the bush. Doña Ramona knows "the scoops up a bucket of the precious liquid and scurries back through the brush. The home that Doña Ramona returns to typifies the disordered gender structure of lowland life. She

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Rosario del Rio, Raúl Vaca Pereira, et al. *La vertiente* (Guillermo Ruiz: La Paz, 2010) DVD.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Jorge Ruiz, *Los primeros* in Cine de Jorge Ruiz, ICB, 1958-1962 (Guillermo Ruiz: La Paz, 2010) DVD.

sells the oil to cover her necessities and the "vices" of her adult son. Like the crocodile hunter from *La Vertiente*, her son is a "vagabond," a guitarist frequently found in the local *cantinas* who, combining two lowland tropes, "only thinks of jokes and drinks." Heading out to the bush to play guitar with his friends he insists that, "life is more beautiful without worries."

The next scenes of dramatic state intervention offer a striking contrast to Doña Ramona's traceless gathering practices. In the process, the unrealized promise of both her unproductive well and her unproductive son are brought forth. Men from the state petroleum company cut through the bush with machetes, survey the land and set off dynamite to test wells. Soon a massive derrick rises out of the forest and Doña Ramona finds a fence blocking her access to the well. Her neighbors, benefitting from a steady supply of refined gas, no longer want her "dirty petroleum." While opportunities close for Doña Ramona, her son finds a job as a roughneck thereby fulfilling his filial obligation to mother and patria. "Living in the jungle a long way from their family, these workers have taken their responsibility towards the *gran familia boliviano*," the narrator proclaims. Like the road workers that Santos passes on the new Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway, who are just as "macho" as the traditional masculine figure of the miner, the oil worker here represents a new form of patriotic masculinity.

This dramatic change to the natural landscape surrounding Camiri results in a corresponding change to the town's interior landscapes. Doña Ramona now has a comfortable domestic space with electricity in which she can serve coffee to her laboring son. Not entirely removed from the sphere of production, she continues to sell oil, now as a special tonic, a false panacea (the narrator chuckles) for the ills of her neighbors. In

contrast, oil refining and distribution offer a true panacea for national development. At a local level oil production offers the "dignification of men [like her son] through work." But unlike Doña Ramona's tonic, this "black gold" is also integrated in a global capitalist order. The film ends with a shot of the Chilean port of Arica, where oil is loaded onto cargo ships for export, the final step in transforming Doña Ramona's "secret of the jungle" into national development.

In *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification, La Vertiente*, and *Los Primeros*, the March to the East is presented as a project that would unify the nation and the family. As Sommer points out, in the oscillation between "epic nationalism and intimate sensibility," the distinction is ultimately collapsed.<sup>100</sup> The gender order of the family appears as both effect and cause of national unity. Rather than masking the conflicts inherent in this process, Ruiz's films work to resolve them. Yet the nationalist discourse of eastern expansion was not without its critics, particularly in those promising yet sleepy regions and cities of the future that the MNR sought to transform.

## Rivers, Roads and Railways: Regional Understandings of Mobility in Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz produced its own series of popular and literary images of mobility that both meshed and conflicted with that of the central government. The following section explores this counter-veiling regionalist discourse through the Santa Cruz-based newspaper *El Deber*. The paper was founded in June of 1953 just a few months after the creation of the ICB. Currently the periodical with the largest circulation in Bolivia, at the time *El Deber* was a humble broad-sheet of four pages. However, it remains an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Sommer, 24.

invaluable source as the only major periodical in Santa Cruz in the 1950s. Under the directorship of Lucas Saucedo Sevilla, the newspaper styled itself as the authentic voice of the cruceños. *El Deber* thus served as a forum for a limited but influential public to reflect on the dramatic transformations of the decade.



Figure 4 Infrastructure Projects in Santa Cruz in the 1950s. The Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway (pink), the Santa Cruz-Corumbá railway (green) and the Santa Cruz-Yacuiba railway (grey) connected the frontier city to the nation's highlands and to the borders of Brazil and Argentina. Map adapted from UN Map of Bolivia, Wikimedia Commons. Accessed June 13, 2016.

In doing so, the paper shared much of the MNR's modernist vision of Santa Cruz as a city and region of the future. Like Ruiz's films, *El Deber* celebrated new forms of transport, industry and agriculture but its authors had an ambivalent relationship to the March to the East which framed the people of Santa Cruz as a "deficient subjects" rather than the authors of their own transformation.<sup>101</sup> The paper soon developed a characteristic regionalist critique which reached a fever pitch during a series of conflicts between Santa Cruz and the national government in the late 1950s.

Saucedo and his team of writers did not invent this discourse *ex nihilo* but rather gathered in a long tradition in which cruceño elites had reflected on their frontier region's "abandonment."<sup>102</sup> In the Peruvian context, Penelope Harvey notes that for regional frontier elites, "the state appears in another guise as an object of desire and fantasy and people's fears are as likely to focus on abandonment as on control."<sup>103</sup> Cruceños often claimed both of these rhetorical positions, clamoring for, and then questioning the results, of modern infrastructure. They reflected on the nature of mobility which on the one hand would break the historic isolation of the east and provide access to new markets but on the other, would render Santa Cruz fundamentally accessible to the mass movement of questionable individuals. Transportation's links were fundamentally ambiguous and its promises often incomplete.

Of the major changes that Santa Cruz experienced in the decade of the 1950s, few resonated more strongly with elite cruceño dreaming than the arrival of the railroad. The city had been fighting since just after WWI for rail links with Cochabamba, Brazil and Argentina. In 1942, reflecting on the promise of the latter route, the municipal government of Santa Cruz had published a pamphlet entitled "Argentina and Bolivia and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Li, *The Will to Improve*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Earlier regional movements also took place during WWI as part of the "Railway or Nothing" movement. See, Paula Peña, *La permanente construcción de lo cruceño: un estudio sobre la identidad en Santa Cruz de la Sierra* (La Paz: Fundación PIEB, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Penelope Harvey, "The Materiality of State Effects: An Ethnography of a Road in the Peruvian Andes" in *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*. Eds. Christian Krohn-Hansen and Knut G. Nustad (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 135.

their Effective Railway Connection in the East." They bitterly lamented that even after Bolivia's defeat by Paraguay in the Chaco War (1932-1935) the continued to be abandoned by the nation. Turning from lament to hope they imagined a glorious future in the arrival of trains in Santa Cruz would transform the region. We will "gather before the image of the arriving locomotive" they proclaimed, "and we will salute it with the euphonious and vibrant call of "Long live the immortal Bolivia, long live the great Bolivia of the future."<sup>104</sup>

Over a decade later, on January 5, 1955, with the Brazilian line nearly complete, that image of triumphant mobility was brought to life. *El Deber* reported on the festivities as the Brazilian president João Café Filho met Victor Paz Estenssoro in Santa Cruz. Early that morning the city was already full of the flags of both nations. A large crowd gathered at the airport to be present as the Brazilian presidential plane, along with a Bolivian escort, touched down. Café Filho disembarked to a military salute and a marching band playing the anthems of both countries. The two presidents fraternally embraced and traveled a short distance outside of town to board the train. Here the diplomatic, religious and technical merged. As they arrived in Santa Cruz, the Archbishop of the Diocese was on hand to bless the train. Brazilian and Bolivian engineers made speeches and the presidents planted a tree of friendship sent by the Rotary Club in Belo Horizonte. That afternoon the railway commission provided a special lunch along the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway, highlighting the link between international rail and inter-regional road. That evening the city's most prestigious club, the salon "24 de septiembre" hosted a banquet. The most respectable families of Santa

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Comité Pro-Defensa Intereses Cruceños, *Argentina y Bolivia y su vinculación ferroviária efectiva en el oriente* (La Paz: Artistica, 1942), 4.

Cruz danced the night away alongside foreign and national delegations as fireworks exploded over the new train station.<sup>105</sup>

*El Deber's* account reads like something from the height of the late nineteenth century railway building frenzy. For regions at the margins of Latin America's export boom (1850-1930) such spectacles had long been deferred giving their belated realization a simultaneous air of modernity and antiquarianism. In 1930, the Guatemalan city of Quetzaltenango greeted the completion of a national highland railway with "patriotic ecstasy."<sup>106</sup> The arriving train, covered in flowers, entered a station lit with new electric lighting, adorned with indigenous textiles and filled with the sound of marimbas. As in Santa Cruz, "local, foreign and national dignitaries made speeches." However, the celebration in Quetzaltenango concealed as much as it revealed. As historian Greg Grandin notes, albeit unifying, "new experiences of time could be repressive, as when trains sped troops to different parts of the country to quell dissent...They could also be horrific, as when the brakes failed on the train on its first test run into Quetzaltenango, killing three, or when a seventy-three year old blind and deaf Indian lost his life crossing the tracks because he could not hear the locomotive's whistle."<sup>107</sup>

The scene in Santa Cruz on the fifth of January seemed to offer the realization of the municipal government's vision of 1942 in which they inextricably linked modernity with mobility. It also met the goals of the MNR's March to the East. Here national, regional and transnational visions of development appeared in harmony. Yet the choreographed and minutely orchestrated display of that January day bore little

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> "Inauguración del ferrocarríl y entrevista de los Presidentes," *El Deber*, Jan. 9, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Ibid., 161.

resemblance to the subsequent experience of riding the rails. Over the following years, mounting frustration with the train, ranging from the tragic to the mundane filled the pages of *El Deber*. Editorialists, journalists and users grappled with the meaning this new rail line would have for Santa Cruz and the nation. Discussions of mobility in *El Deber* slipped easily from anger at a missed connection to reflections on national independence, food security, sovereignty and modernity itself.

Already in the first month of the train's operation, *El Deber* noted a dramatic increase in passengers heading for Brazil. The distance between the city of Santa Cruz and the Brazilian border at Corumbá, formerly weeks of mule train away, had truly been collapsed. Yet it is telling that the presidents began their ceremonial ride at a point just outside the city limits beyond which this vision of modern mobility quickly began to unravel. A short distance to the east, the Río Grande remained a broad expanse of mud and sand capable of diminishing to a narrow canal in the dry season and extending to over a kilometer with the summer rains. No bridge had been built despite the "inauguration" of the line. Travelers had to disembark from the train, unload their possessions onto small barges and – as they had done in the past - make an often precarious and costly crossing of the river before finally re-loading all of their goods onto a - hopefully - waiting train on the other side. Scarcely a month after the line'sinauguration, five passengers drowned when an overloaded *chalupa* (water-taxi) carrying twelve passengers overturned in the flood waters of the rainy season.<sup>108</sup> Reflecting on the disaster, *El Deber* demanded that further controls be placed on either side of the river

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> "El tráfico en el Río Grande." *El Deber*, Jan. 1955.

including the establishment of a Port Capitancy to remedy the "uncontrolled situation" provoked by the dramatic increase in passenger traffic.<sup>109</sup>

The river crossing illustrates one of a series of administrative and technical issues that the railway commission struggled with in its early years. On January 30, 1955 a writer gave a breakdown of a typical train trip in an article titled "the railway service is painful." The author travelled less than half the line's total distance - from the Bolivian town of San José in Chiquitos west to Santa Cruz. At the height of the rainy season, the train left on January 22 at 10am and arrived at the Pozo del Tigre station at 6:30 P.M. where it was forced to make an unscheduled stop because the track was washed out at km 522. Passengers and cargo remained in place until the following morning at 7:30am when they resumed their journey to Pailón on the eastern side of the Río Grande. They only advanced as far as KM 590 where they found the track was washed out again. Machinery sent to fix the rails was also paralyzed because of the unrelenting rains. The conductor considered returning to the previous station at Cañada Larga but found the track behind them out at KM 581. Passengers had no choice but to disembark, leave their cargo behind and walk to another locomotive on the other side of the wash-out. On the twenty-fourth the train finally arrived at the Río Grande around 4pm where the passengers disembarked and made the crossing on barges. They then waited in Puerto Pailas overnight for a train to Santa Cruz. That train only took them a short distance to KM 609 where they switched trains again around 6pm. Arriving in Cotoca at 6:15 P.M. they were stuck at the station until 8:30 due to a lack of water for the boiler. This delay was repeated only an hour later at Guaracachi station. Finally at 10 P.M., well over 72

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> "Son cinco las personas ahogadas en el Río Grande." *El Deber*, Feb. 9,1955 and "A propósito de la tragedia última en el Río Grande" *El Deber*. Feb 9, 1955.

hours after departing from San José, the exhausted passengers arrived in Santa Cruz thereby completing their journey of scarcely 270 kilometers. Their luggage, the writer reminded readers, had still not arrived.<sup>110</sup>

Time and space, far from being annihilated, had become agonizingly apparent. The anonymous author's grueling saga is worth recounting in all its excruciating detail precisely because the kilometer by kilometer and minute by minute account best expresses the painful experience - as opposed to the abstract logic – of mobility. Yet the frustrated punctuality of the rider-writer also indicates the degree to which expectations (if not realities) of mobility were in flux in Santa Cruz' belated entrance to the railway era. Cruceños flocked to the new service. In December, another rider found himself shoulder to shoulder with 5000 other would-be passengers, many of whom, he soon discovered, had tickets with the same seat number as his. In the "first-class" cabin he was forced to stand in the incredible heat with little air or light "suffering through thirst, hunger and fatigue".

The true tragedy in the writer's denunciation is not the increasingly predictable failure of the railway to deliver on its promise of efficient mobility but the degree to which the train opened Santa Cruz to others. In contrast with the fraternal embrace of Café Filho and Paz Estenssoro, on board the train the traveler was jostled by "Brazilians, who act as if they own it", and speak a "crude Spanish mixed with Portuguese." "Can the authorities really remain passive before these abuses" he asked, "is it not possible that a Bolivian could monitor this service and let the Brazilians know that we are not their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> "Noticias del F.C. Corumba-Santa Cruz – el servicio ferroviario es penoso." *El Deber*, Jan. 30, 1955.

servants (*pongos*)? Is it not possible that we could administer OUR (emphasis original) railway for our countrymen so they do not believe that we are some Brazilian colony?"<sup>111</sup>

In Ecuador, Kim Clark has explored the "uneven" effects of railway construction which consolidated particular regions of the nation faster than others.<sup>112</sup> Richard White has also pointed out that railroads did not collapse space and time uniformly.<sup>113</sup> Their layout and scheduling produced uneven effects drawing particular distant locations together while pulling other seemingly proximate ones apart. Santa Cruz's new connection with "the growing commerce of the rich eastern provinces and Brazil" meant the introduction of new products and a new outlet for exports. As early as March of 1955 an article noted the increased flow of private and commercial interests along the line. Even the plazas of the north of the country were welcoming the influx of Brazilian industrially produced goods. Bolivians were "avid in their demand for chosen and fine manufactured products." "We have connected ourselves," wrote the author "to the economic giant of Brazil, an example in development for the whole continent."<sup>114</sup> That "connection" would be read in multiple ways - as a positive example or economic opportunity but also, in the case of the above article, as a threatening foreign influence.

In an article submitted under the pseudonym "Indiano," one author celebrates those economic possibilities noting the "vast and promising foreign market" for cruceño fruit. "Thanks to the railway," he reports, "products from cruceño storehouses are being sold in cities beyond our frontiers." It was with "immense satisfaction" that the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> "Es una tragedía el servicio ferroviário Corumbá-Santa Cruz" El Deber, Dec.19, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Kim Clark, *The Redemptive Work: Railway and Nation in Ecuador, 1895-1930* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Richard White, *Railroaded*, xxix.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> P.C. "Marcada importancia economica del ferrocarríl Corumbá-Santa Cruz." El Deber, March 11, 1955.

newspaper received a card from Ponta Pora on the Paraguayan-Brazilian border informing the paper that Bolivian oranges were being eaten in their town.<sup>115</sup> Even tragic news accounts demonstrated the allure of the Brazilian market for formerly isolated Cruceños. Eager passengers soon surpassed the train's limited capacity. On the second of July *El Deber* noted the death of nine passengers in diverse operations of the train. The railway had been placing surplus passengers on "open decks" without railings to prevent falls. The frequent violent stops and failure to signal departures with whistle blows had caused these deaths.<sup>116</sup>

At times Bolivia's highland newspapers took a different approach to this international commerce. In the second year of the line's operation the La Paz newspaper *El Diario* published an article denouncing the "excessive contraband of food items to Brazil at Corumbá." Powdered milk and other articles provided to Bolivia as food-aid through the United Nations were being re-sold for profit across the border. Despite limits on export, Santa Cruz's sugar and rice were also subject to smuggling. The paper chastised unscrupulous cruceños whose "illicit commerce…makes useless the effort the government is realizing to increase production with a view to sending [Santa Cruz's] excess production to the interior of the country."<sup>117</sup>

Some cruceños had rejected the idea that their sole purpose was to act as low-cost providers of basic necessities for the interior. One editorial in *El Deber* was titled "Santa

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Indiano, "Vasto y prometedor mercado extranjero para la producción frutícola de Santa Cruz." *El Deber* March 14, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> "Punibles irregularidades en el ferrocarríl Corumba-Santa Cruz." *El Deber* July 2, 1956. Only two days later *El Deber* covered another accident, product of the "caprice and disorder" of the train authorities in which a young merchant Claudina Vaca Flor had been killed when traveling back from Puerto Suarez on the Brazilian border. "El último accidente ferroviário." *El Deber*, July 4, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> "Adquiere proporciones inusitadas el contrabando de Santa Cruz a Brasil." *El Diario* (La Paz) reprinted in *El Deber* May 1, 1956.

Cruz, epicenter of the national economy has a right to its benefits." Its author brought his audience on a virtual tour of highland markets where cruceño products sold at prices cheaper than those found at home. Meat, selling for 300 Bolivianos per kilo in Santa Cruz, sold for forty in the mining camps. Sugar also "costs more in the zone of the producers," he continued, while milk was half the price in the highlands. Inverting an Andean-centric view he argued that the "epicenter [Santa Cruz], sees its food profit diluted to the periphery without collecting any benefit whatsoever for itself."<sup>118</sup>

These *El Deber* articles written during the first two years of the train's operation demonstrate the contested reception of newfound mobility. However, the performance of national, regional and transnational unity that marked the railway's inauguration on January 5<sup>th</sup> masked this ambiguity. In the months that followed, commentators chastised the train's operators for prizing speed and volume over safety precautions. Yet those very complaints indicated the degree to which understandings of space and time were in flux. They were just as likely to denounce irregularities which caused delays, complaining of cars that "arrived late or never from Corumbá," leaving merchants dependent upon the new Brazilian market to see their products decomposing while they waited.<sup>119</sup> As the line drew cruceños into the commercial orbit of a powerful Brazil, they expressed this concern through complaints about rude and boisterous Brazilian businessmen. Nervous highland Bolivians also feared this new foreign influence. Rather than framing mobility in line with their role as recipients of the March to the East - an exclusive family romance with the highland interior – cruceños reflected on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> P.C. "Santa Cruz, epicentro de la economía nacional tiene derecho a sus beneficios." *El Deber* May 4, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> For a Brazilian perspective on the railway see Robert W Wilcox, "Ranching Modernization in Tropical Brazil: Foreign Investment and Environment in Mato Grosso, 1900-1950," *Agricultural History* 82: 3 (2008): 366–92.

possibilities and frustrations of their own march eastward, wrestling with their new position and balancing between conflicting foreign and national poles of influence.

Like the rail connections to Brazil and Argentina, cruceños eagerly awaited the completion of the highway to the interior pictured in *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*. It promised to be the first all-weather road to connect the lowland city and its undeveloped agricultural hinterland to the nation's heartland. That would mean an immense new market for Santa Cruz's growing commodities. According to Ruiz's film, it would also mean the arrival of thousands of outsiders. One writer's nationalistic reaction to Brazilian elbows on the line suggested a prizing of nationalism over unfettered trade. Yet cruceños were equally capable of treating their "brothers" from the interior as foreigners.

Both Guevara Arze and Ruiz had been careful in their portrayal of these internal migrants. The former assured readers of the *Plan Inmediato* that future colonists would be respectable, fluent Spanish-speakers and not Aymara or Quechua mono-linguists. The latter had Santos make a quick exit from the urban space of Santa Cruz after his first drunken escapade. Those narratives attempted to restrict the worrying possibilities of mobility. Once opened, the new highway might allow for migrants to break from those comforting scripts in any number of unpredictable ways. While the films of Ruiz often characterized the lowlands as deficient, *El Deber* also used stereotypes, caricatures and cartoons to reflet on the highlands.

On December 14, 1955, *El Deber* reprinted a short story entitled "By the New Highway," by Ramon Clouzet.<sup>120</sup> The Santa Cruz-Cochabamba highway had officially been inaugurated on September 24 of that year, by a delegation including the President, various ministers and representatives from its U.S. financers. The protagonist of Clouzet's story is Periquito. With a father from Santa Cruz and a mother from Cochabamba, Periquito is, in a sense, a new mestizo (like the fictional child of Pilar and Santos). Based in Cochabamba, he earns his living bridging those regional divides as a truck-driver along the old dangerous road to Santa Cruz.

Humorous regional tropes are at play in the story. Periquito, who demonstrates a clear highland propensity for saving, is driving for a large fleet owner with the expectation that he will someday own his own vehicle. After achieving that "golden dream" he hopes to marry his childhood sweetheart, a highland woman suggestively named "Robustiana," presumably the *rubenesque* opposite of the slim cruceño ideal of feminine beauty. On his frequent voyages on the old highway Periquito is accompanied by an assistant Pascualito who is (naturally) "a true artist" at the *charango* (the traditional Andean stringed instrument).

Like other Bolivians, Clouzet reminds the reader, Periquito had been "anxiously waiting" for the completion of the new road. He is "tired of the bad passes" particularly, "those places where the road bed became narrow…where he would always make a prayer, entrusting his soul to God." On inauguration day all that promised to change. Periquito and Pascualito are in Cochabamba, making preparations for their first trip to Santa Cruz on the new highway, "a land that [Periquito] had great fondness for, being

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Ramon Clouzet, "Por la nueva carretera." *El Deber* De.14, 1955.

that of his father." In their excitement the two down several glasses of *chicha kolla* (a fermented corn beverage typically consumed in the Andes). Leaving Cochabamba with a fully-loaded trailer they only make it as far as Comarapa where the protagonist makes a chance encounter with his sweetheart Robustiana and proposes to her on the spot. Robustiana accepts and the two lovers make plans to marry in the highlands as soon as Periquito returns from Santa Cruz. The assembled crowd celebrates the engagement and, as Pascualito serenades them, the pair consumes several more glasses of *chica* before departing.

Back on the new highway, driver and helper make one final stop in Samaipata, the last mountain town before reaching Santa Cruz. After more celebratory drinks they head out on the road, disregarding the warnings of their drinking companions. An intoxicated Periquito asks Pascualito to play the same song he had serenaded the new couple with in Comarapa. As "the notes cascaded, Periquito who considered himself the surest hand on the road, let go of the wheel and closed his eyes, visualizing himself back in Comarapa....the silhouette of his fiancée emerged and he started to pull her towards him with such enthusiasm that he punched the accelerator and the truck went off the road and over the precipice." The next day, Clouzet concludes, the transport commission arrives at the horrific scene of the accident to find the two cadavers at the foot of the cliff and the waters of the canyon "gentling stroking their faces and on top of a rock on the edge of the stream, the charango still intact."

"By the New Highway" offered *El Deber's* readers a cautionary tale - by turns playful and macabre. Clouzet's short story also gave an alternative narrative to Ruiz's representation of highland-lowland movement. In the latter, the protagonist's mobility results in social advancement and a stable nuclear family. Until its tragic ending, Periquito's story seems to promise the same. Along with geographical and social mobility, Clouzet suggests that mobility can also bring destruction, a result not unlike several news reports on the train service over the previous year. One explanation for such stories, fictional and non-fictional, lies in the morbid fascination produced in the audience as dreams of rapid transit become nightmare scenarios. Yet while cruceños were quick to blame the train's administration for the death of one of their own, the demise of Periquito and Pascual suggested something else. The fault lies not in the modern asphalted road but in the destructive drunkenness of highlanders, distinct from the habitual but non-threatening libatiousness of their lowland counterparts. Despite his cruceño father, Periquito, who plans to marry and return to Cochabamba, is ultimately identified with the former. As cruceños celebrated the new connection with the rest of the nation they also worried about the crude enthusiasm of their brothers from the interior who, like enterprising and boisterous Brazilians, were now free to descend on Santa Cruz whenever they wished.

In the face of increasing highland-lowland interaction in the 1950s *El Deber*, offered cruceños one venue in which to fashion a distinct regional identity. This is the obvious meaning of Clouzet's "By the New Highway" but this regional response appeared in any number of unexpected ways. The MNR resurrected an official "Day of the Indian" to celebrate the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law on August 2, 1953. Celebrating "the Indian," did not alter the degree to which the state imagined indigenous Bolivians as rural subjects in need of transformation. The latter was evident in a phrase that appears throughout MNR publications, that the goal of the Revolution was to "make of the Indian a citizen."<sup>121</sup>

Films produced by Ruiz and the ICB tended to achieve both ends. His early works such as *Vuelva Sebastiana*, *Donde Nacío un Imperio* and *Los Urus* were anthropologically-informed celebrations of Bolivia's indigenous past. In contrast, films like *Little Johnny Can Read* attempted to demonstrate that through education, indigenous Bolivians were being incorporated into the nation. The latter film follows a typical school day in the life of a young Andean boy. As Johnny demonstrates his new literacy to neighbors in his small village the narrator recites monotonously, "now you will not be a lost race in the shadow of Illampu [in the Andes], light and knowledge will make you free, through Warisata [indigenous school and teacher training center] you will enter into the grand community of men."<sup>122</sup>

While *Little Johnny Can Read* imagined the creation of "new Indians" to replace the isolated, timeless rural existence in the Andes, one prominent cruceño rejected the idea that this vision of ethnic transformation spoke to his own frontier department. On the August 2, 1956, the sociologist Hernando Sanabría Fernandez commemorated the national "Day of the Indian" with an article in *El Deber* reminding fellow cruceños that "Our Indian," was distinct from that of the highlands. As Ruiz did for the Chipaya and the Urus, Sanabría took an anthropological approach to multiple aspects of Guaraní, Mojeño and Chiriguano life. Unlike static highland indigenous traditions, lowland indigeneity was characterized by an openness to change, Sanabría argued. It had never

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> For one example see Jacobo Libermann Z., *Bolivia: 10 años de revolución* (La Paz: Dir. Nac. de Informaciones, 1962), 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Luiz Ramiro Beltrán, *Juanito sabe leer*. Directed by Jorge Ruiz in *Cine de Jorge Ruiz, ICB, 1958-1962* (Guillermo Ruiz: La Paz, 2010) DVD.

been the closed Andean village depicted in *Little Johnny Can Read*, which only now was undergoing transformation.<sup>123</sup> As a nomadic "human group," lowland indigenous communities were actually "open to all impressions of the outside world," could "easily change their lifestyle," and did not "root their existence with exclusivity in the piece of land where they were born," he continued.<sup>124</sup>

Sanabría focused on an original moment of *mestizaje* in which this essential spirit had been fused with the "criollo cruceño colonizer and civilizer" of the eastern lowlands. "From him the cruceño learned to wander in the labyrinth of vegetation, to swim and float on the rivers of adventure." Most importantly, this interaction - or *convivencia* - had taken place in the distant past. It produced the "social mass that could populate the ancient jungle solitude" - a population already established and clearly distinct from the Andean masses the MNR sought to reform. Like other elite strategic appropriations of a mythical indigenous past, Sanabría's valorization of lowland indigenous culture probably meant little in terms of cruceños' day-to-day relations with their indigenous neighbors. Yet, as part of a discourse that emphasizes Santa Cruz's unique regional identity it could easily be marshaled in opposition to the nation-building project of the MNR. This would prove particularly valuable over the following two years.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> For a critique of the "closed corporate community" model of village life see, Erick Langer, "Bringing the Economic Back in: Andean Indians and the Construction of the Nation-State in Nineteenth-Century Bolivia," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 41, 3 (2009): 527–51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Hernando Sanabría Fernández, "Nuestro indio" *El Deber* Aug. 2, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> For a further discussion of the emergence of regional identity in relation to local historical and anthropological descriptions emphasizing the uniqueness of Santa Cruz's indigenous population see Pruden, *Cruceños into Cambas*.

## Sites of Spectacle and Sedition: Movie Theaters and Popular Mobilization during Santa Cruz's Civic Struggles

From 1957 to1959 Santa Cruz engaged in a prolonged civic struggle with the MNR over the allocation of royalties from its oil development. Over the course of what became known as the "struggle for the eleven percent," residents of Santa Cruz engaged in strikes and demonstrations and the national government repeatedly sent militia and troops to occupy the city. In the process, cruceños expressed increasingly contentious understandings of regional identity, development and mobility which had emerged earlier in discussions of trains and highway.

In *Los Primeros*, Ruiz depicts the growth of the cruceño oil industry as a dynamic aspect of the revolution. The violent alteration of pristine nature unlocks its latent forces, generates wealth and re-orders a dysfunctional gender structure. In the process, Doña Ramona's delinquent son becomes a productive, and thus masculine, worker in the state oil company. The rosy picture suggests a universal sharing in the benefits of oil production from household to region to nation. Cruceños felt otherwise. In an article comparing food prices in Santa Cruz and the highlands, one author pointed out that, "Santa Cruz provides petrol but does not have water, wood but does not have public buildings, rice but does not have a hospital, sugar but does not have maternity centers, coffee but does not have a court, gas but does not have a refinery, cattle but does not have paved roads,...and so it goes."<sup>126</sup> In 1957, a regional advocacy group, the Committee Pro-Santa Cruz began vigorously petitioning Bolivian President Hernán Siles Zuazo. The Committee's president Melchor Pinto Parada asked Siles Zuazo for a guarantee that, as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> P.C. "Santa Cruz, epicentro de la economía nacional" *El Deber*.

promised in a 1937 law, eleven percent of the profits of oil production would remain in the producer department.

As the conflict over oil royalties unfolded in the second half of 1957, contradictory images and narratives of Santa Cruz began to circulate. Some mirrored the stable visions of development put forward by the ICB in their films. On September 24, Bolivia's Congress rose to honor the region on its annual celebration of independence struggles. The official holiday and obligatory homage to Santa Cruz had been signed into law by President Siles Zuazo only the previous day.<sup>127</sup> Members from Oruro noted that in Santa Cruz, "lies the future...Santa Cruz will one day constitute the power of our patria, as this concept is one of the postulates of the National Revolution." Representatives from the department of Chuquisaca, a highland sending-region for internal migrants also saluted Santa Cruz and their own "campesino workers that daily, are working and laboring in the bush for the greatness of our patria."<sup>128</sup>

Deputy Nuñez del Prado re-iterated the themes of the *Plan Inmediato*, reminding listeners of the "constant preoccupation of the government" for the incorporation of Santa Cruz into the national economy. He pointed to the conclusion of paving on the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway through which cruceños "had escaped from their tropical enclosure to provide their harvests for the consumption of the habitants of Bolivia." This was evident in the cruceño rice and sugar which filled highland markets. In implicit dialogue with an *El Deber* editorial of the previous year complaining of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Hernán Siles Zuazo, Decreto Supremo 4740. Sept. 23, 1957. Listado de Decretos. Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo/index.php/normas/lista/11. Accessed Nov. 2, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> H. Camara de Diputados, *Redactor: Actas Publicas* 31<sup>st</sup> Sesion Ordinaria (La Paz) Sept 24, 1957, 331-333.

lack of infrastructure in Santa Cruz, Nuñez noted that, in exchange for that bountiful harvest, the nation would soon "reciprocate" with "modern services…largely waited for with patience in the Oriental capital, which will soon convert it in short order in one of the most populous and modern urban areas in our Patria." Nuñez also highlighted the importance of the international railways, noting that in combination with the highway and river traffic on the Beni, these make Santa Cruz the largest railway "node" in the nation, "and this network, whose arms will open in a cross, [will extend] towards all the confines of the soil of our patria."<sup>129</sup>

While Nuñez celebrated Santa Cruz as a future "node," *El Diario*, one of La Paz's leading newspapers, took a more sinister view of those interlocking transport routes. On the same day as the official homage to Santa Cruz, *El Deber* reprinted an *El Diario* article provocatively entitled, "Santa Cruz: crucified." The author rejected empty aesthetics, narrative flourish and the "cordiality of messages and official speeches." "Two railways converge like slow arrows on the heart of our Orient," he began, "one from Brazil, the other from Argentina." "Both will open this corner of Bolivia to the routes of economic and social change. Could it be that they will also initiate a political transformation?" Their answer to this rhetorical question was that the creeping foreign influence would "balkanize" Bolivia in short order. Without a rail connection to the highlands, "Santa Cruz will remain isolated from the country by two lines of parallel steel." The only option, the author concluded was to "go to Santa Cruz, with machines,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Ibid., 331.

capital, men and a fundamentally Bolivian spirit, so that side by side with our brothers of the tropics we will make the country great."<sup>130</sup>

In his refusal to separate the economic and the social from the political, the author had broached a defining problematic of the March to the East, and a lingering question in the region's future development. The image of a balkanized Bolivia, with Santa Cruz joining the neighboring nations of Brazil and Argentina, might have seemed far-fetched to the readers of *El Diario*. Yet scarcely a month later, surprised cruceños learned from foreign news agencies and highland papers that the Bolivian government had declared an *estado de sítio* (martial law) in response to their "revolutionary separatist activity." The government of Siles Zuazo had made the declaration on October 29 noting that "the policy of tolerance and respect of the government had served to feed conspiracy proposals, that had arrived at such extremes as to provoke reactions of a regionalist character, that threaten measures of order and preservation of national sovereignty."<sup>131</sup>

In what *El Deber* described as a spontaneous and "extraordinary reaction" an estimated crowd of 20,000 people gathered on Santa Cruz's central plaza on the October 31 in flagrant violation of the decree. The crowd, the *El Deber* reported, was "tired of infamies, of intrigues and calamities" and listened to speeches by prominent cruceños including Hernando Sanabría, author of the regionalist "Our Indian" editorial the previous year. *El Deber* stressed that people from "all classes" were present, including many from provincial towns like Warnes and Saavedra. The assembled crowd decreed a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> "Santa Cruz: crucificado" *El Diario* (La Paz) reprinted in *El Deber* Sept 24, 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Hernán Siles Zuazo, *Supreme Decree* 4758. Oct. 29, 1957. Listado de Decretos. Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo/index.php/normas/lista/11. Accessed Nov. 2, 2014.

twenty-four hour strike in protest of the *estado de sítio* and the slandering of Santa Cruz's people as separatists.<sup>132</sup>

In a "Message to the Bolivian People," the Committee-Pro Santa Cruz's president Pinto Parada offered his version of events for "our brother peoples" of the interior. Far from fomenting rebellion or separatism, the Committee claimed to have sent a simple letter to President Siles Zuazo asking for the ratification of article 111 of the Petroleum code, guaranteeing 11% of profits would be returned to the department. When "all was proceeding pacifically and within juridical norms and without party sectarianism," he and other shocked cruceños learned of the *estado de sitio*. The cartoons appearing in *La Nación* indicating that Santa Cruz was requesting annexation from Brazil were baseless. An entire campaign, noted Pinto, had been put forward by newspaper and by radio claiming that internal migrants to Santa Cruz had been "massacred by the people." Ours, he wrote, "is a civic movement without concomitant political conspiracy" supported by local members of the MNR, the non-sectarian Committee Pro-Santa Cruz, "together with the same sons of this land and residents of the interior."<sup>133</sup>

Despite his hope that the conflict would soon be resolved, the "civic struggles" of cruceños intensified over the next two years. During the course of the conflict, several violent and fatal altercations as the army and militia of the MNR twice occupied the city (in May of 1958 and June of 1959), a second *estado de sítio* was decreed in 1958, and the MNR exiled Pinto Parada to Peru.<sup>134</sup> Fittingly, when the army occupied Santa Cruz in June of 1959, the minister of government who authorized the incursion was none other

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> "Reacción extraordinaria del pueblo cruceño." *El Deber* Nov.1, 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> *El Deber* printed full copies of the speeches the following day. Melchor Pinto, "Mensaje al pueblo boliviano." *El Deber*. Nov.1, 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> A large body of popular literature on the "civic struggles" has been produced by cruceño writers.

than Walter Guevara Arze, the author of the *Plan Inmediato* and intellectual architect of the March to the East.

Even as cruceños found themselves under supervision by a national occupying force and depicted as rebels, separatists and anti-highlanders in the La Paz press, they continued to receive the comforting films of the ICB in their theaters. On April 25, 1958, *La Vertiente*, that inter-regional development romance featuring a paceña school-teacher and a lowland crocodile hunter, screened in Santa Cruz. Over the preceding days, announcements had been placed all over town, outside the central post office, the university and the police station. Ads were also broadcast on Radio Centenario celebrating the first full-length Bolivian film and the first participation of a "cruceño actor" in national cinema. The showing took place in the Cine Teatro and drew a large crowd despite the fact that the entrance of three bolivianos was equivalent to a meal in a decent restaurant. The ICB made a newsreel short commemorating the screening. Over the following six months, the film showed constantly at morning, matinee, afternoon and evening slots.<sup>135</sup>

An *El Deber* correspondent, Hugo Maldonado, attended the first screening. Arriving with low expectations that *La Vertiente* would be little more than another hamfisted ICB news bulletin, Maldonado was surprised to find a dramatic, plot-driven film. There were certainly mistakes in the production but leaving the technical part behind, Maldonado found *La Vertiente* to be excellent "from the emotional point of view" which after all was a "fundamental aspect." Here the particular context of watching a nationalist film in a regional setting became apparent. Though set in Rurrenabque, a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Gandarilla, Cine y televisión en Santa Cruz, 178.

lowland Amazon town in the neighboring department of Beni, Maldonado found particular relevance for Santa Cruz, "and all people of the Oriente who confront the same problems and have the same worries, who have truly been united since time immemorial for their traditions." Moreover, the male lead, Raúl Vaca Pereira, despite representing a beniano, was actually from Santa Cruz. Thus the ethnic romance of the film was in the reviewer's mind between a "paceña" and "a countryman of ours."<sup>136</sup>

In the nationalist reading of *La Vertiente* that I offered previously, the teacher's outside intervention in the languid lowland setting fits easily within a highland narrative that viewed the lowlands as a "deficient subject" in need of improvement. Maldonaldo conceded that "a central role is portrayed by the *kolla* artist as the initiator of the project," yet insisted that "this is completely absorbed by the gallantry [the role of the crocodile hunter] that according to the plot is a secondary role."<sup>137</sup> The final lesson of *La Vertiente* is not that the east is improved by the west, but that the female is "absorbed" by the male. Vaca Pereira's wife, when reflecting on *La Vertiente* years later remembered Raul, "winning over [conquistar] the teacher that led the movement."<sup>138</sup> Other Santa Cruz viewers suggest that the cruceño public saw "Raul as gallant and bohemian, conquering the lady."<sup>139</sup> Virile, eastern masculinity trumped development originating in the west. This should suggest that cruceños were more than passive viewers of cinema, yet the ready availability of both nationalist and regionalist readings are a testament to the true effectiveness of national romances like *La Vertiente*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Hugo Maldonado, "Crítica cinematográfica" *El Deber* April 26, 1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Gandarilla, Cine y televisión en Santa Cruz, 179.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Ibid., 180.

It is worth moving from an analysis of the content of films like *La Vertiente*, to consider the setting in which they were viewed by cruceños. As one of the few "healthy diversions" in a small regional capital like Santa Cruz, cinema was still a novel form of spectacle in the 1950s. Films – from popular Mexican rancheros to Hollywood classics - could transport cruceños to modern or exotic locales, but the physical space of the city was equally transformed with the rapid construction of theaters in that decade. In 1951, the first modern cinema, Cine Santa Cruz, was inaugurated. This was quickly followed by Cine Metro, Cine San Isidro, Cine Norte.

Those attending the last would depart from a screening "with a little fear because in those days it was still pampas [empty prairie]" remembers Ruben Carvalha. Unlike Cine Norte which was located on the urban fringe where city rapidly became bush, the Cine Santa Cruz was intimately connected to ideas and experiences of modern development. It opened with a large festival. The owners had a tractor brought in to grade and gravel the street, the first of its kind in a city known for dirt roads that alternated between choking dust and deep mud. While most of Santa Cruz lacked electricity, large generators lit the streets in front of the Cine Santa Cruz, powered the projectors, and offered air-conditioning to patrons that sought an escape from the city's sweltering heat. Inside, those patrons found architecture and décor modeled after the Gran Rex theatre in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires. The cine had improved seating with capacity for 900 on the lower floor and 300 more in the mezzanine.<sup>140</sup>

Those 1200 seats, already significant in a small city with a population of approximately 50,000 people, represented only a portion of the movie-going capacity of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Ibid., 208-209.

Santa Cruz in the 1950s. In addition to the above-mentioned, there were many "rustic theaters" throughout the city and its hinterland, little more than "open sheds, with poor lighting and bad sound, with bleachers made of wood," catering to the popular classes who could not afford a three boliviano ticket. The entrepreneur Pablo Chávez also built a "mobile cinema" in 1956 and criss-crossed the department projecting films in Concepción, Roboré, San Matías and elsewhere.<sup>141</sup> In 1955, the small village of Puerto Pailas, on the western bank of the Río Grande, lacked sufficient houses for workers sent to build the provisional rail bridge. Yet that same year municipal authorities were already passing laws, much to locals chagrin governing attendance at the village's theater, which *El Deber* reminded readers was "the only distraction for the residents."<sup>142</sup>

Given their centrality to urban and village forms of sociability in the 1950s, theaters had the potential to move beyond spectacle to become sites of conflict and political mobilization. This was abundantly clear during the "civic struggles." Personal memories and stories about the role of individuals in the conflicts of the late fifties often linked place and time to the movies. A young man named Jorge Roca was killed in a shootout with the Control Político, a security force loyal to the national government, on October 31, 1957. An angry mob took the perpetrators prisoner and according to bystanders was on the point of lynching them before the Cruceño Youth, the armed branch of the Committee Pro-Santa Cruz, brought them to be detained in the Palace Theater. Orlando Mercado recounts that in 1959, when rumors arrived that a second group of highland militia was about to occupy the Santa Cruz, Carlos Valverde, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> "El cine en Puerto Pailas" *El Deber* n.d. 1955.

leader of the Cruceño Youth, led followers, numbering 10,000, to the Cine Grigota to plan their defense.<sup>143</sup>

Sometimes the theatre was simply the surest place to locate a wanted man. Leaving the Palace Cinema at 9:30 pm one evening in mid-1959, Raúl Vaca Pereira, the heroic male protagonist of *La Vertiente*, was approached by an agent of the police and instructed to appear at the Commissary to provide information. He was subsequently abducted by militia men and taken to ñanderoga, a site where several fellow cruceños were detained. While appearing as an agent of national integration in his role in *La Vertiente*, cruceños knew Vaca Pereira as a "brave civic fighter" in those years. Hernando Gracia Vespa, who was only twenty when he saw *La Vertiente* admits he is unsure of the exact moment Raul joined the struggle, but is confident, "that he also became the first national actor of cinema persecuted by a totalitarian regime." Despite initially working for the government in the Ministry of Campesino Affairs, where he first met Ruiz, Vaca and his wife both subsequently joined the Cruceño Youth and each spent part of 1959 in hiding.<sup>144</sup>

As sites of spectacle and sites of sedition, Santa Cruz's movie theaters were far more than those blank screens showing, by decree, films of the nation's revolutionary project in action. Just as much as the images of felled bush, gleaming asphalt and towering derricks that its screens displayed, the cinema was itself a contested space of development. There, as deputy Mendoza had suggested in his commendation of Cerruto, cruceños witnessed themselves, "exhibited for the contemplation of the nation." But as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Gandarilla, Cine y televisión en Santa Cruz, 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Ibid., 153.

with their responses to national road and international rail in *El Deber*, they drew their own meanings from those supposedly didactic representations of mobility, breaking from the scripted narratives of the March to the East. Occasionally they even broke from the scripted behavior of the movie theater itself as the cinema, the cruceño social milieu *par excellence* became a rallying point in the struggle for the eleven percent.

## Transposing the Tropics: Representing Rural Development in Bolivia, Ecuador and Guatemala

It could mean something far different to watch a Ruiz film at the Cine Santa Cruz than to see that same film at the Tesla Theater in the heart of La Paz. In the former one might swell with pride at the gallantry of a fellow cruceño. In the latter a viewer could just as easily snicker at the backwardness of lowlanders. In the movement from the national to the regional some understandings of development transitioned easily while others fell apart. Yet to speak of image and narrative in the March to the East as though they only drew and cast influence in a national or regional orbit is fundamentally misleading. *La Vertiente* was distributed far beyond Bolivia by the U.S. Point Four program that had helped sponsor the work. Point Four officials, who worked in development projects across Asia, Africa and Latin America, found the film an effective example of "community development promotion" and produced over 100 copies as well as dubbing the film into multiple languages.<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately we have few sources to gauge how viewers in other regions reacted to the film, or whether the dubbed copies were ever shown. Despite this, the example underscores the fact that development, a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 81.

potent concept in revolutionary Bolivia, was also a highly mobile hemispheric and global discourse in the 1950s and 1960s as Ruiz was entering the heart of his productive phase.

Historians working on topics as diverse as African healing and Chilean grapes have increasingly begun to investigate individual trajectories as a way of illuminating transnational networks in which ideas, goods and people circulated.<sup>146</sup> The first two sections of this chapter have emphasized the contested meanings of mobility in literary and visual images produced by Ruiz. In this final section I move behind the camera to examine Ruiz's own mobility. His itinerary in those years took him across Bolivia but it also brought him to neighboring Andean republics as well as further afield. The compiled skills, tricks and knowledge that he and his team of script-writers, camera-men and technicians cultivated in producing films like *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*, and *La Vertiente*, proved as useful in a transnational context as they had in a national one.

In August of 1961, leaders from across the Americas met at Punta del Este, Uruguay. They were on hand as part of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council to discuss the U.S.-led Alliance for Progress that John F. Kennedy had proposed earlier that year. U.S. officials claimed that through Alliance funding (suggested at twenty billion over the following decade) the U.S. would help make Latin America "the greatest region in the world." <sup>147</sup> The Alliance would dramatically extend the reach – and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Ernesto Guevara, Our America and Theirs: Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress : The Debate at Punto Del Este (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2006).

systematize the distribution - of development assistance previously available through the Point Four program, initiated by President Truman.

Alliance officials packaged economic development in neutral terms. Speaking on behalf of the Cuban delegation, Che Guevara challenged that assertion at Punta del Este, insisting that, "Cuba's interpretation is that this is a political conference. Cuba does not agree that economics can be separated from politics, and understands that they always go together. That is why you cannot have experts who speak of models when the destinies of a people are at stake."<sup>148</sup> Guevara's central intent was to reveal the Alliance as little more than a U.S. ploy to isolate Cuba. His speech moved from the impassioned to the humorous as he caricatured a U.S. vision of development and its "expert" practitioners. With its central focus on improving hygiene, the Alliance seemed to Guevara to mask eugenics in the neutral language of public health. "I get the impression they are thinking of making the latrine the fundamental thing, that would improve the social conditions of the poor Indian, of the poor Black," chuckled Guevara. "Planning for the gentlemen experts is the planning of latrines. As for the rest, who knows how it will be done!"<sup>149</sup>

In his lengthy sardonic address Guevara turned to two issues central to Bolivia, the Alliance's agrarian and mass media components. As Guevara would note elsewhere, the U.S. seemed to have accepted that the breakup of traditional landownership (*latifundia*) was inevitable. It hoped to moderate this shift with the "substitution of wellequipped farmers" and especially by the opening of new agricultural lands. "Agrarian reform," Guevara reminded his audience, "is carried out by eliminating the latifundia, not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Ibid., 38.

by sending people to colonize far-off places."<sup>150</sup> He also challenged the Alliance's attempt to include an inter-American federation of press, radio, television and cinema within the program. This, he was confident, "would allow the United States to direct the policy of all the organs of public opinion in Latin America." Media and print culture would be "organized, managed, paid for, and domesticated....at the service of imperialism's propaganda plans."<sup>151</sup>

Guevara's critique could easily have been directed at Bolivia, paradoxically both a key future participant in the Alliance and also one of the few countries that supported the Cuban delegation at Punta del Este. There, the U.S. audio-visual center had been crucial to financing films like *La Vertiente* and an agrarian reform existed alongside an ambitious program to send landless highlanders to colonize "far-off places" in Santa Cruz and the northern Amazon basin. Bolivia, the second largest per capita recipient of Alliance funding over the following decade dramatically extended this program and its publicity with Alliance financing.<sup>152</sup>

While he may not have seen *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*, Guevara likely had another Ruiz film in mind when he critiqued colonization at Punta del Este. The International Development Service had just premiered a Ruiz documentary called *Los Ximul* for delegates at the conference as an example of its vision for agrarian reform in Latin America. The film was set in Guatemala and documented a program known as "La Máquina," which was both familiar and ideologically repellant from the Bolivian perspective. As in Bolivia, highland migrants had been encouraged to settle frontier land

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Thomas C Field, From Development to Dictatorship.

in the humid lowlands. Ironically, the program had been established by the rightist military government of Miguel Ydígoras, one of those responsible for the overthrow of socialist Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, which seemed diametrically opposed to the ideological orientation of the MNR.

How did Ruiz end up in Guatemala filming for a military regime that seemed to stand in opposition to the socialist goals of the Bolivian revolution? Ruiz attributes this to serendipity and personal initiative, but his story also demonstrates that the U.S.influenced "cultural common market" that Guevara feared was already well established. It consisted of a series of institutions, from embassies to research stations, that intersected with ostensibly national projects in Latin America. Beginning in the 1950s and extending through the Alliance-era, media practitioners like Ruiz from across Latin America found work and training within this network.

Ruiz remembers that he first heard of La Máquina while reading a magazine in the waiting room of his orthodontist. He was convinced that the theme "a history moved by the shocks of the agrarian drama in Latin America," would lend itself to film. Immediately, Ruiz went to the US-run Audiovisual Center in La Paz and pitched the idea to his friend and collaborator Loren McIntyre. While waiting for a response, Ruiz took an advertising job in Chile. He was still in Santiago when he was contacted by the U.S. embassy with the news that the project was approved. Ruiz and his friend Augusto Roca quickly left for Guatemala.

On the way, the pair made a brief stop in Costa Rica. Ruiz sensed that the subject at hand, a roll-back of ten years of progressive land reform, was a "delicate" one that "would require the intervention of a brilliant script-writer."<sup>153</sup> At the headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Turrialba, Ruiz and Roca found their man: Luis Ramiro Beltrán. The center of research and programming for agricultural services across the hemisphere, the Turrialba office was founded in 1943 as part of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. In 1959, Beltrán, a prominent journalist who had also worked with the Inter-American Agricultural Service in Bolivia was employed with the office's center of communications.

Beltrán's trajectory, much like Ruiz's, would eventually extend across the Americas. He became a key theoretician in the Latin American school of critical research in communications after completing a PhD at Michigan State University. Latin Americans, he remembered, "began to utilize communication for development much before theories had been proposed for it and even before the term actually existed...in the first years of our professional works – the 1950s and a large part of the 1960s – we made gods of our means of mass communication as if they were capable of doing a lot of good for our people, almost to the point, of prompting the modernization of our nations in little time and practically on their own."<sup>154</sup>

Ruiz had already worked with Beltrán both in Bolivia and abroad. In 1953, Beltrán provided the narration for Ruiz's acclaimed *indigenista* film *Vuelva Sebastiana*. The following year Ruiz, Roca and Beltrán collaborated on a film in Ecuador commissioned by the US-run cooperative health service in Quito. The Bolivian team was tasked with providing a promotional film that would encourage the Ecuadorian congress

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Luis Ramiro Beltrán, "Comunicación para el desarrollo en Latino America: Una evaluación sucinta al cabo de 40 años." IV Mesa redonda sobre comunicación, IPAL, Lima Perú Feb. 23-26, 1993. http://www.infoamerica.org/teoria\_articulos/beltran1.htm. Accessed Nov. 12, 2014.

and public to continue to support anti-malaria campaigns in the countryside. They took an Oscar Soria story written about Río Abajo outside of La Paz and transposed it wholesale (with slight adaptation by Beltrán) to the valley of Huayllabamba outside of Quito. Even the title remained the same. The film was a success and the Ecuadorian government continued the public health campaign.<sup>155</sup>

Reunited once again, Ruiz, Roca and Beltrán toured Guatemala for a month in 1959 scouting locations and then spent three months filming *Los Ximul*. Beltrán's narrative followed the trajectories of three members of the Ximul family who each faced a shortage of land in their village and pursued distinct strategies. The father remains on the small parcel of land given to him by Arbenz but that fateful day arrives when, as the narrator admonishes, "the piece of land of Don Santiago, given indiscriminately, without pay, without selection or advice, and distributed in a disorganized way among the first *campesinos* to arrive for the redistribution, is today experiencing legal problems." His youngest son Ramón leaves to work as a hired hand but quickly becomes disillusioned with the grueling and insecure nature of itinerant labor. Ultimately, he opts for "the road of productive work under the law" by following his older brother Andrés who had moved to the coastal colonization zone where he receives land, housing and technical assistance.<sup>156</sup>

Ruiz's film, a dramatic endorsement of a reactionary project, drew criticism at home and abroad. Shown at Punta del Este, Beltrán's narration made clear that while documenting a single initiative in a small Central American nation, the U.S. supported la

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 131-132.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Los Ximul. Directed by Jorge Ruiz. (Bolivia: Guillermo Ruiz, 2010) DVD.

Máquina as an example of its hemispheric vision for the "ninety million campesinos in Latin America [who] are born, live and die in the misery of monocultivation, ignorance and confusion."<sup>157</sup> Ruiz remembered critics suggesting that the film "was going against the grain of many [he] had filmed in Bolivia," particularly those like *La Vertiente* and *Un Pocito de Diversification Economica*. Ruiz preferred to justify his work both pragmatically and artistically. "The colonization plan was becoming inevitable," he pointed out. More revealingly he felt that "these [negative] interpretations were contrary to my condition as an artist, and entered in a detestable political field. I already affirmed that I never enjoyed party activism, I consider it an unpunished spoiler of the aesthetic."<sup>158</sup>

Was A Little Bit of Economic Diversification radically different from Los Ximul? While the regimes that supported them were ideologically opposed, Bolivian officials were just as concerned as Guatemalan leaders about the conflictive potential of landless indigenous highland communities. Both turned with relief to the frontier space depicted in each film where strong productive families and modern farmers could flourish in a new space "over there," one supposedly detached from the political. The two films could be seen as both antithetical and identical because at heart, the medium of film and the concept of development remained as ambiguous as they were effective. Film's illusion of the real, of transparent and total representation, lent it an inescapable authenticity and immediacy that accounted for its didactic power. Development modernization's linkage to time, growth and evolution also gave it the force of inevitability, making it very

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Beltrán, Los Ximul.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Valdívia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 136.

difficult for mid-twentieth century Latin American leaders (from socialist to conservative) to conceive of - or represent - their nation's futures in any other form.

The degree to which the aesthics of modernization could trump ideology is apparent in Ruiz's travels which extended to Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Guatemala and beyond. When he decided to leave Bolivia after the military coup of René Barrientos in 1964 he found ready work in neighboring Peru where liberal-democratic President Fernando Belaúnde contracted Ruiz to make a film rehabilitating the image of the military. Like Guatemala and Bolivia, Peru was also in the midst of a dramatic infrastructure project that sought to link highland and tropical lowland. Before his overthrow, Belaúnde discussed with Ruiz the possibility of making a film about his visionary, international "Marginal Highway of the Jungle" which would connect the Amazonian lowlands of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.<sup>159</sup>

It is thus less surprising than we might expect that Ruiz's aesthetic sensibilities and modernization narratives found favor in both revolutionary Bolivia and reactionary Guatemala as well as under liberal democratic regimes in Ecuador and Peru. Even though Guevara implicitly rejected the message of *Los Ximul* in his speech, he returned to Cuba after Punta del Este lauding the support of the revolutionary Bolivian delegation whom he considered "Cuba's first cousins" and the gains of Bolivia's revolution which Ruiz had also depicted.<sup>160</sup> Guevara's focus on revolutionary progress from agrarian production to the construction of factories and per capita income growth would lend itself to representation by a booming cinema school in Cuba.<sup>161</sup> In the aesthetics of new roads,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 137-140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Guevara, Our America and Theirs, 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> John King, Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America (New York: Verso, 1990), 157.

water towers, harvested fields, Ruiz and his colleagues at the ICB emphasized that the transformation of latent landscapes into productive ones was the key to national development. This was not necessarily any different from the modernist aesthetics of the Cuban revolution. Because of this crucial slippage, film-makers like Ruiz and communicators like Beltrán were able to find plenty of work across disparate regimes and contexts in Latin America at mid-century.

Transposing narrative and aesthetic from one context to another proved both promising and compromising. For Ruiz, the temptation was often irresistible as when he saw Bolivia's Río Abajo in Ecuador's Huayllabamba valley or found in La Máquina a counterpart to what he had documented in Santa Cruz, "taken to a head at the same time and with the same sense of opening new agricultural frontiers." While he accepted that there were "specifics to both realties," in his opinion, Guatemala "suffered from a sociological conflict similar to that of Bolivia."<sup>162</sup> Narrative and aesthetic could draw together those two places where ideology and nationalism threatened to pull them apart. If Ruiz conceded that aesthetics could be politicized, this was always something that happened in a place and time, such as Punta del Este in August of 1961, *after* production.

## Documenting a "Human Transplant" in The Alliance for Progress-era

In spite of Cuba's objections, the Alliance for Progress was approved at Punta del Este and would dominate development funding over the decade of the sixties. Bolivia, just socialist enough to be alarming to U.S. officials but just liberal enough to be worth the effort, would become a star member and receive a disproportionate amount of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Valdivia, *Testigo de la realidad*, 136.

Alliance funds in the years to come.<sup>163</sup> From 1953-1964 Bolivia had received more absolute funding from the U.S. than any other Latin America nation. In 1964, Bolivia was the second largest per capita recipient of Alliance for Progress funding representing 20% of Bolivia's GDP and 40% of its public expenditures. With access to a new source of financing, the MNR dramatically expanded the March to the East in the 1960s. Moving beyond small-scale colonization programs, like those mentioned by Guevara Arze in the *Plan Inmediato*, the state, USAID and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) began financing large-scale settlement schemes across a broad swath of the Amazon basin in the north of the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

The beginning of the Alliance era coincided with the ten-year anniversary of the Bolivian revolution. Accordingly, Ruiz was tasked with producing a film to celebrate the latter's achievements. The result was the ICB's *The Mountains Never Change*. The film begins in a small Andean village but once again the eastern lowlands are the star location as Ruiz's camera swoops down mountain roads onto the plains and sugar zone of Santa Cruz.<sup>164</sup> As much as a celebration of ten years of revolution, *The Mountains Never Change* was testament to a decade of Ruiz's film-making. In romanticizing eastern expansion, the film fit within the aesthetic and narrative repertoire Ruiz perfected in earlier films both in Bolivia and abroad.

It is legitimate to question whether the ICB was actually reaching potential colonists with films like *The Mountains Never Change* or if it was simply carrying on a self-congratulatory conversation with itself. Those films were costly to make and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Thomas Field, "Ideology as Strategy: Military-Led Modernization and the Origins of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia," *Diplomatic History* 36: 1 (2012): 147–83,149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> Jorge Ruiz, Las montañas no cambian. (Bolivia: Guillermo Ruiz, 2010) DVD.

difficult to distribute in a country with few screening areas even if that number was steadily increasing. They were at times prohibitively expensive for poor Bolivians and even media practitioners worried that messages were "restricted in grand part to urban minorities of the upper strata."<sup>165</sup> Yet in the 1950s, when colonization remained tentative and small-scale, imagining the March to the East was likely as important as enacting it.

With the expansion of colonization in the early 1960s new forms of visual representation proliferated. Flimsy illustrated pamphlets posed fewer problems than films. Such pamphlets did not always possess the refined aesthetic sensibility or production quality of Ruiz's work. Printed for mass distribution, they were written in a simple language, relied on ample visual aids and had names like "What is the Ten Year Plan?" "How Will I Live and Work in My New Parcel?" or "We Will Form Our Cooperative." A simple sketch from the illustrated pamphlet, "What is the 10 Year Plan?" produced in the same year as Ruiz's film captures the demographic and geographic logic behind an ambitious new colonization program.<sup>166</sup>

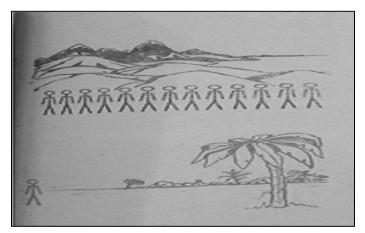


Figure 5 Image from the Pamphlet "What is the Ten Year Plan?" Oscar Soria, Jorge Sanjínes and Ricardo Rada. "Qué es el plan decenal? (La Paz: E. Burillo, 1963)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Beltrán, "Comunicación para el desarrollo."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> Oscar Soria and Jorge Sanjínes, *Qué es el plan decenal*. (La Paz: Burillo, 1962).

Directed at potential settlers, the pamphlets sought to generate mobility by managing its inherent uncertainty. The most frequently repeated motif was the descent to the tropics itself. Illustrated maps sketched the route from La Paz to new and unfamiliar settlement zones. The transition between distinct eco-systems was also rife with potential. The inevitable juxtaposition between cold, arid, open altiplano and hot, tropical, jungle can be seen below in an image from a pamphlet entitled, "What is the Ten year plan?" or "Principles of Cooperativism(to the right)."<sup>167</sup> In these images Bolivia was re-imagined as a nation no longer limited to its Andean core.

Other forms of representation sought to speak directly to migrants by capturing the anxious "drama" of colonization as a "human" endeavor. Images of Andean bodies in motion took a number of forms. Often this was done through the use of cartoon-like characters with "Andean clothing" – a hat and poncho - moving between mountains and palm trees. In an image from "How to Live and Work My New Parcel", a prospective migrant leaves a hilltop with the eastern vista and rising sun in the background.<sup>168</sup> Along with caricatures and cartoons, photos of colonists giving tearful embraces at departure points or trudging along jungle trails proliferated.

These representations of mobility, whether stirring, crude or simplistic, were followed in each case by images that moved successively towards permanence. Like the films, the pamphlets worked to resolve the tensions of migration. They depicted colonists not as forlorn "people out of place" but as well-adjusted individuals who had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Wilde Urquidi et al. "Principios de cooperativismo" (*Servicio Agrícola Interamericano*, 1958). The SAI, with its base in Montero was already producing visual materials for colonists by the late 1950s. <sup>168</sup> "Como viveré y trabajaré en mi nueva parcela." (La Paz: CBF-BID, 1962).

purchased their claim to ownership through physical labor.<sup>169</sup> At the point of departure, mobility was an essential ingredient in this state project. However, once relocated, the continued mobility of colonists was often seen as a threat. As colonization proceeded, high rates of settler "abandonment" struck a nerve with the state particularly as it reached upwards of 80% in new colonization zones. The question of how to create well-adjusted, responsible, honorable, citizen-farmers was thus a key one for the Bolivian state as it was for other Latin American nations who sought to "fix" rural subjects in place.<sup>170</sup>

The first step in this new environment was always land-clearing. In the prior images of migration the tropicality of land was frequently represented by a token palm tree, laughably distinct from the dense bush colonists would encounter. In subsequent images, the management of this "primeval forest" was a frequent object of representation. While the bulldozer became as one historian has noted, "one of the grand stars of Bolivian cinema" in those years, the hatchet was a more familiar object for most colonists.<sup>171</sup> Bush-clearing was a back-breaking task characterized by manual rather than mechanized labor. Some colonization programs asked that men arrive in advance of their families. Pre-colonization labor was frequently pictured in terms of a recovered masculine ideal not unlike that presented by Santos's ex-miner, who still remained "macho" despite abandoning the land of his birth.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Taku Suzuki, *Embodying Belonging: Racializing Okinawan Diaspora in Bolivia and Japan* (Honululu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 8. Suzuki borrows the concept of migrants as "people out of place" from Bonnie Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> See Cliff Welch, *The Seed Was Planted: The Saõ Paulo Roots of Brazil's Rural Labor Movement, 1924-*1964 (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 297.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Carlos D. Mesa G., La aventura del cine boliviano, 1952-1985 (La Paz: Editorial Gisbert, 1985), 65.



Figure 6 Images from the Pamphlet "How Will I Live and Work on my New Parcel?" (La Paz: CBF-BID, 1960s)

Physical labor was one aspect of colonization. It was exhausting yet potentially unifying for colonists. For Andeans to move from nervous, or confused departee to welladjusted settler they would have to pass through another series of crucial steps in which they were frequently imagined not as individual actors with unique skills and goals but as empty vessels to be molded at the hands of *técnicos*. How pamphlets portrayed knowledge transfer was tricky in this regard as it involved a potentially emasculating, absolute surrender of authority to project officials (often an explicit condition of the settlement contract) followed by a dramatic resumption of independence at a determined point in the future when support would be withdrawn.

Individuals would be subject to a uni-directional barrage of inputs, medical tests and vaccinations. They would receive sewing lessons and technology packets from extension agents, agronomists, rural sociologists and home-makers. In the process they would gradually be stripped of their former selves and inadequate knowledge and taught everything from planting unfamiliar crops to feeding their families and raising their children. "You wife will not feel abandoned either," read the caption next to the image of a home economics agent carefully scrutinizing the woman's use of a sewing machine.<sup>172</sup> As they passed through the stages of colonization depicted in these cartoons their habits, clothing and very bodies would be transformed. They would exchange *chicha* for volleyball and soccer, don cotton shirts and straw hats in place of ponchos and llama wool ones and transform stooped postures and thin waistlines into straightened backs and solid guts.

The results of this invasive process that extended from field to household were inevitably pictured as the reconstitution of a stable, independent nuclear family with clear title to their land. As in the films of Ruiz, individual and familial success in the colonization zone fed vertically back up into the nation. "Assure the future of the worker's family" proclaims one caption next to a group about to embark for the lowlands. "The tropics await you, a true hope for [all] your sacrifice. The tropics are your future. Your work will make Bolivia great."<sup>173</sup>

In 1965 Ruiz helped produce one of these pamphlets. "A Human Transplant" was ostensibly for distribution to prospective colonists but, curiously, was written in both English and Spanish. Potential colonists were not the only ones nervously awaiting news of their friends and relatives in the colonization zones. U.S. sponsors, it would appear, were also hoping to see stable representations of their policies and dollars in action.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> "Como viveré y trabajaré" n.p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> "La ruta del desarrollo: del altiplano al trópico" (La Paz: CBF-BID, n.d.).

Ruiz's pamphlet was replete with bodies and machines. As individuals passed through the above mentioned stages, bulldozers perched on the edge of precipices, loaded trucks raced down winding mountain roads. Colonization, the accompanying captions stated, was the "perfect combination of man and machine."<sup>174</sup> Yet, in the images that followed, colonists had more in common with tropical nature than with caterpillars. People, like the bulldozed landscapes the pamphlet displayed, were viewed as infinitely malleable. "They will soon be good friends", the narrator assured the reader below which the image of a young migrant girl offering food to a parrot stood in for future good relations between cambas and kollas in the settlement zone. While children got to know the local environment, "the few inhabitants of the chosen regions, have received with pleasure this contingent of kolla blood," the narrator assures the audience.<sup>175</sup> Other images showed happy settlers dutifully following the advice of technicians, playing volleyball and eating distributed rations before heading out to clear the land.

"Wellbeing for the mother of his children, this is the hope in the heart of every man," the pamphlet continues. Across much of Latin America, land reform and colonization were intimately linked with gendered understandings of modern citizenship, what reformers frequently described as incorporating indigenous and *mestizo* subalterns into the national, social and political concert of the nation. Ruiz's pamphlet also displayed the strong families that colonization would produce.<sup>176</sup> Masculine honor was frequently invoked by a government concerned with high rates of settler abandonment. Proclaiming that "woman is the force of man" – the pamphlet ends with an image of a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Hugo Alfonso Salmon and Jorge Ruiz "Un transplante humano: el proyecto de colonización "Alto Beni" Bolivia" (La Paz: Special Projects Office, 1964).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> For an analysis of the Chilean case see Heidi Tinsman, Partners in Conflict.

group of indigenous women and children, "by whom and for whom man labors" happily resettled in the lowlands now able to "look with confidence towards the future". Ruiz's pamphlet presented colonization as an immaculately scripted affair. Even the most candid and intimate scenes of settler life in the Alto Beni were ones in which the narrator insists that, "all details are foreseen."

## Conclusion

Much like the convenient resolutions to Ruiz's films, it can be easy to dismiss such blanket assurances. In both cases, extensive narration is used to drive home a dramatic message while obscuring alternative readings. Commentators have leveled just such a critique at Ruiz's work with the ICB. While critics champion his *Vuelva Sebastiana* as one of the first *indigenista* films in Latin America they skip over his government-supported work as crudely propagandistic as they move to the radical indigenista and anti-imperialist films that fellow Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines produced in the 1960s. In *The Art and Politics of Bolivian Cinema*, José Sánchez, simply notes that *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification* was a film that "exaggerates the American role in road construction."<sup>177</sup> In a dissertation on the Peace Corps, Molly Geidel devotes considerable attention to Sanjines' classic *Blood of the Condor* while merely stating that Ruiz had produced propaganda films in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>178</sup> Even a sympathetic viewer like Bolivian historian Carlos Mesa, who explores Ruiz's 1950s production with the ICB in *La gran aventura de la cine boliviano*, is pained by the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> Sanchez-H, Art and Politics, 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Molly. Geidel, "The Point of the Lance: Gender, Development, and the 1960's Peace Corps," (PhD Diss., Boston University, 2011).

fact that the director was constantly forced to work for government and U.S. patrons and had less time to pursue his own artistic endeavors.<sup>179</sup>

While most recognize the cinematographic skill of even Ruiz's most uninspiring work, the same consideration would not likely be extended to the crude pamphlets and news-reel shorts that also dealt with eastward expansion in the 1950s and 1960s. They may not have pleased film critics yet these images are worth studying because, to borrow from Mary Kay Vaughan, they form part of the "cultural politics" of the Bolivian revolution.<sup>180</sup> If their solutions to serious problems of colonization seem pat, then they provide an excellent point of departure for a critical exploration of the conflicts they saw so easily revolved. Ruiz's attempts to humanize eastward expansion through stories of individual migrations re-imagined economic and social policy as a family romance thereby helping us analyze and understand the ways in which constructions of Bolivian development were based on assumptions about gender, region and thus race.

For all its simplicity, this vision of eastern expansion - which sought to represent national transformation by capturing bodies in motion – proved enduring and broadly appealing, claimed by planners, international financiers and successive Bolivian governments. The latter represent a spectrum of political ideologies and formulations from revolutionary nationalism, military-led development and bureaucratic authoritarianism to neoliberal multiculturalism and pluri-ethnic socialism. It was also embraced by the hundreds of thousands of migrants who poured into the eastern lowlands over the following half century, radically re-shaping the region's social and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> Carlos D. Mesa, *La gran aventura del cine boliviano*, 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

environmental history even if the latter's migrations looked little like the romances, or meticulously planned movements pictured in films and pamphlets in which "all details are foreseen." Like the ever- resilient Turner thesis in American history, or the myth of racial democracy in Brazil, the March to the East and its narrative and aesthetic repertoire was a vision that Bolivians were forced to engage with even when (as subsequent chapters will show) they contested it, challenged its assumptions and spoke to its limits.

Like arriving colonists, resident cruceños also embraced and challenged the narrative of eastern expansion. As rail lines and asphalt drew them into greater proximity with their highland "brothers" and foreign "neighbors" they produced a series of their own images and narratives of development at times distinct from those originating in the Andes. They shared with the MNR a fondness for images of the blessings of development and their department's natural and feminine fecundity. Yet their celebrations of arriving trains, newly paved roads, beauty queens and bountiful harvests were interspersed with memories of the highland militia that had descended on the city in the late 50s civic struggles. Guevara Arze might have been the author of the March to the East but for regionalist authors he had also sent the highland "hordes" to occupy Santa Cruz and would remain a reviled figure in the region for years to come.<sup>181</sup> When they watched films like A Little Bit of Economic Diversification they saw drunken Periquito along with the humble Santos coming down the road. When they watched Los Primeros they possibly identified as much with Doña Ramona, whose ability to earn a living selling oil had been appropriated by the state as with her son who dutifully served the national oil company. Watching La Vertiente at the Cine Santa Cruz, the take-home

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> Juan Carlos and Urenda Díaz, *Autonomías departamentales: la alternativa al centralismo boliviano* (La Paz: Editorial Los Amigos del Libro, 1987) Guido J. Arze, *Chacales* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2008).

message was that the camba had "won over" the kolla not that the former had been improved by the latter.

The films of the ICB along with many of the other visual materials related to settlement could not have been produced without the support of the U.S. government which gave more money to Bolivia between 1953 and 1964, in absolute terms, than to any other Latin American nation. While the Eisenhower Technical Cooperation Administration and the Kennedy-era Alliance provided crucial support it is equally essential to recognize that Bolivians were the architects and objects of this representation. To suggest that US financing destroyed the legitimacy of this as a national vision (even though it was produced by Bolivians and embraced by state planners) reflects a narrow understanding of production and power. As Thomas Field and others have pointed out, Bolivia's new revolutionary leadership effectively made use of U.S. Cold War fears to become one of the largest recipients of development funding in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>182</sup> Individuals like Beltrán and Ruiz did the same. Along with the colonists they frequently represented, they also became migrants. In doing so they joined hundreds of Latin Americans who made use of the networks that development assistance provided as they moved between state bureaucracies and regional development projects to research centers and North American universities in the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter has explicitly acknowledged that trajectory by moving with Ruiz from the national to the regional and then to the transnational before returning to Bolivia. I do so in order to foreground the indispensable context in which image-making and viewing took place. Crucial additions, translations, borrowing and transformations took place at various stops

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Thomas C. Field, From Development to Dictatorship.

along that "endless pilgrimage" without which it is impossible to understand developments "back home" in Bolivia. Subsequent chapters dealing with colonists, missionaries and academics will emphasize the development and exercise of similar regional, national and transnational repertoires.

## Chapter 2 - Military Bases and Rubber Tires: Migrants at the Margins of Nation, Revolution and Empire, 1952-1968

In the months following Bolivia's Easter Revolution of 1952, the MNR drew its support from a heterogeneous and often tenuous coalition of miners, workers, students and peasant organizations. The movement's leaders attempted to respond to the conflicting demands for radical social and economic change as well as mollify U.S. anxiety over the perceived leftist tendencies of the revolution. Jorge Ruiz filmed the first interview with newly sworn-in President Victor Paz Estenssoro on April 16, 1952. It was broadcast on NBC and emphasized the moderate nature of the revolution to the world. Yet in October of that year, the MNR enacted one of the revolution's most radical measures by nationalizing the mining sector. The new state-run mining monopoly took control of the expropriated holdings of the country's fabulously wealthy "tin barons," Simón Patiño, José Aramayo and Mauricio Hochschild.

I turn from these standard narratives of the '52 Revolution to explore a crucial but understudied aspect of Bolivia's revolutionary history.<sup>183</sup> This chapter analyzes the ethnic construction of agrarian citizenship, demonstrating how two unexpected groups of immigrants - Mennonites and Okinawans - cultivated a relationship with the Bolivian state and negotiated local xenophobia as they took part in the MNR's March to the East. The same month of the mining nationalization, a small plane of plainly-dressed, Low German-speaking farmers arrived in La Paz. The six men were Mennonite colonists from neighboring Paraguay intent on investigating settlement opportunities in the lowlands

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> A standard account of the Revolution is James Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970).

around Santa Cruz. Since the 1920s the Paraguayan government had allowed several thousand members of this pacifist Protestant group to live independent of state interference in exchange for settling in the sparsely populated and arid, lowland forest region called the Gran Chaco. Occupying the entire western half of Paraguay, the Chaco extends into northwestern Argentina and the southeastern part of Santa Cruz in Bolivia. It covers an area approximately the size of Texas.

Without the benefit of roads connecting Paraguayan and Bolivian portions of the Chaco, the six men struggled to reach Bolivia by truck by following overgrown supply routes that had been hastily built and then abandoned after the Chaco War (1932-1935). Arriving in the south-eastern Bolivian oil town of Villamontes after a bumpy two day ride, they considered proceeding directly to the potential colonization zone near Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Ultimately, they revised their plans and chartered a plane to La Paz. There they would petition the MNR directly in the hope of establishing a system of privileges similar to those they enjoyed in Paraguay.

A member of that delegation, Peter Regier, detailed the group's findings for their Paraguayan home colony's small newspaper, *Mennoblatt*.<sup>184</sup> Addressing a readership of a few thousand settlers, many of whom had fled Mennonite colonies in Stalinist Russia during collectivization in the 1930s, Regier did not seem worried about the direction of Bolivia's socialist revolution or the MNR's policy towards foreign property-holding mine expropriations notwithstanding. He characterized the government as willing to grant the special religious, social and educational exemptions that his community of Low-German speaking, pacifist, Anabaptists required and emphasized that the MNR was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> Peter Regier, "Bolivien-Reise" Mennoblatt, Jan. 1953.

eager to promote agricultural production. For readers tired of Paraguay's extreme heat he noted that nights in Santa Cruz were, "pleasant and cool" and more "tolerable" than Asunción. Regier also outlined a range of crops that could be easily grown in the subtropical climate of the eastern lowlands and the new road and rail infrastructure nearing completion. "[In] the field of agriculture," he concluded, "sinfully little has hitherto been done, but the prospects are unexpectedly large."<sup>185</sup> For Mennonites and the MNR, Santa Cruz offered a blank, but promising slate for future expansion.

The curious image of Mennonite farmers wandering the streets of revolutionary La Paz is not as strange as it might initially appear. Mennonite settlement delegations had embarked on similar expeditions to the Ukrainian steppe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and to the Canadian prairies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the twentieth century, Mennonite delegations left Canada, traveling across the Americas from the Mississippi delta to the Río de la Plata. They established two new settlement areas, the first in the Northern Mexican frontier state of Chihuahua and the second in Regier's home colony in the Paraguayan Chaco. By emphasizing their credentials as successful agricultural pioneers, Mennonite delegations had consistently secured exemptions from a variety of regimes - monarchical, democratic and revolutionary – through their centuries of emigration.

Regier directed his article in at his neighbors in the Paraguayan Chaco. His visit also initiated a series of conversations and similar scouting missions across the Mennonite diaspora created by these successive twentieth century migrations throughout the Americas. Those discussions eventually led thousands of other Mennonite colonists to Santa Cruz. While some arrived from Paraguay, Belize and Canada, the overwhelming

185 Ibid.

majority emigrated from Chihuahua, Mexico. Their migrations form part of an overlooked transnational milieu that was intertwined with Bolivia's nationalist revolution.<sup>186</sup>

Mennonites were not the only foreigners that took part in the Bolivia's national project of internal colonization known as the March to the East. In April, 1953, the year following Regier's visit and only a few months before the passage of another radical measure, the Agrarian Reform Law, the Ministry of Agriculture approved a resolution outlining a plan of colonization put forward by an organization known as the "Uruma Society." The society was "formed by Japanese elements resident in Bolivia and some already nationalized," which possessed 50,000 hectares in Santa Cruz and proposed to bring three thousand colonists from Japan, "or more correctly Okinawan families" to Bolivia over the following decade.<sup>187</sup>

The Uruma society pre-dated the Revolution by several years. Its president, José Akamine, was a long-time resident of the city of Riberalta in Northern Bolivia. Like other Japanese Bolivians, Akamine first came to South America as a railway laborer via Peru in the early twentieth century. Facing horrendous working conditions he had crossed the border into Bolivia to work in the rubber industry and settled in the Amazonian town of Riberalta at the end of the rubber boom. Learning of the destruction and suffering in post-war Japan, members of the Uruma society advocated emigration the same option they had taken nearly half a century before. However, to open path for thousands of foreigners to settle in the Bolivian lowlands they needed to frame Japanese

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> In the edited collection, James Malloy and Richard Thorn, *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia since 1952* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 261.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> Expediente "Uruma Society" ANB, Instituto de Colonización (IC) 547.

emigration in terms that resonated with the Bolivian state. In 1950, the group established their legal entity including a constitution stating that the society's "principal object was the development of agriculture in the region [of Santa Cruz]. Writing to the Prefect of Santa Cruz – a position equivalent to state governor - their cruceño notary, Emilio Porras, asked for the protection of the state given that one of its "primordial functions" lay in the "development of colonization in the country."<sup>188</sup> At the Uruma site, Akamine planned to farm cereals, rice, corn and bananas and raise poultry and livestock. Twenty Japanese families would initially settle the land and establish a cotton mill to provide cheap textiles to Santa Cruz. In addition to promising to produce for the nation they claimed to serve as model citizens for the region's indigenous inhabitants. In the area of the settlement they guaranteed that any "savage tribes" would be "brought towards work and civilization."

By the time of the 1953 Ministerial Resolution, the Uruma colony had shown progress but had not quite met Akamine's 1950 projections. There were seventy-three hectares under cultivation on the model farm including cotton and corn. The society had built four houses and fifteen Japanese settlers lived on the property along with twentyfive Bolivians. Like Jewish refugees that had settled in the tropical Alto Beni region of La Paz in the 1940s, this colonization endeavor relied heavily on Bolivian labor for its success. It served as a public performance of model agricultural citizenship setting out to prove the desirability of future migrants even those of potentially "undesirable" background for nervous state officials that had seen some catastrophic failures in earlier colonization attempts.<sup>189</sup> While modest, the test colony succeeded in paving the way for further Okinawan immigration. In the following years the Uruma society would receive

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> Exp. "Uruma Soceity."
<sup>189</sup> Leo Spitzer, Hotel Bolivia.

the backing of the U.S. military that saw Akamine's venture as an ideal solution to the relocation of thousands of Okinawans displaced through the construction of military bases. The account of Regier, the amateur Mennonite journalist and the petition of Akamine, the Japanese-Bolivian colonization booster, demonstrate that a crucial transnational dynamic in the March to the East escaped the scripted west-meets-east national romance crafted by Ruiz and discussed in the previous chapter.

The March to the East was not a unidirectional movement from the western highlands to eastern lowlands. It extended over a far more impressive range of locales. Mennonite migrants entered the lowlands from across the border in Western Paraguay but also came from the high desert of Northern Chihuahua, while Okinawans arrived from the islands of Ryukyuan archipelago. Historian José Moya maintains that the key to understanding migration lies in the interplay between the "macrostructural and microsocial." The personal trajectories of these diverse groups of migrants and the future history of the March to the East were intertwined with regional, hemispheric and global forces from environmental change and agrarian development in Northern Mexico to U.S. military might in the Far East. As I demonstrate, migrants employed repertoires cultivated in those diverse contexts as they arrived in Bolivia and settled in Santa Cruz.

Too often, when discussing the 1952 revolution, historians reinforce the exceptional quality of modern Bolivian history by focusing on its internal dynamics. Any attempt at looking beyond the nation has typically extended no further than Bolivia's Cold War relationship with the U.S where historians have operated largely at the level of

diplomacy. <sup>190</sup> Even those historians have given slight treatment to negotiations between the U.S. government and Bolivia over displaced Okinawans. Other migrations are missing altogether.

The failure of national historiography to account for immigration is not a phenomenon unique to Bolivia. Immigrants have often existed at the cultural as well as the physical margins of the nation-state. While the immigration history of Latin America's classic nineteenth century receiving regions has been addressed over the past two decades, it has largely been left to anthropologists to provide the few accounts of immigrant life in Bolivia.<sup>191</sup> Taku Suzuki has done so for the Okinawan community in Santa Cruz.<sup>192</sup> Lorenzo Cañas Bottos conducted a methodologically similar study of Old Colony Mennonites in the region.<sup>193</sup> Both authors demonstrate an impressive transnational dexterity as they "follow the migrants." Suzuki accompanies Okinawan-Bolivians as they move from Santa Cruz to Japan as guest workers (*dekasegi*). Cañas-Bottos travels with Bolivian Mennonites back and forth between established colonies in Bolivia and new settlement ventures in Argentina. These multi-sited ethnographies are methodologically useful because they challenge the typical linear construction of sending and receiving regions as the exclusive province of their respective national historiographies. Yet, they are also paradoxically myopic, because their practitioners, while employing a transnational gaze of thousands of kilometers, scarcely glance

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> See James F. Siekmeier, *The Bolivian Revolution and the United States, 1952 to the Present* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2011). Kenneth D. Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States: A Limited Partnership* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999) and most recently Thomas Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> For a survey of migration in Argentina and Brazil see the edited collection Samuel L Baily and Eduardo José Míguez, *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2003).
 <sup>192</sup> Taku Suzuki, *Embodying Belonging*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

sideways to note their subjects' nearest neighbors who themselves may have undergone a similarly complicated voyage to arrive at their present location.

In the department of Santa Cruz in the late 1950s one could set out from the small town of Cotoca and in a short distance, pass through colonies of Mennonites and Okinawans. However, when those groups have been studied they have been dealt with in isolation, as components of their global diasporas. Mennonites in Bolivia may seem to have more in common with Mennonites in Mexico than with neighboring Okinawans, part of what Mennonite historian Royden Loewen refers to as a "village among nations."<sup>194</sup> By placing those two migrant routes that converged in Santa Cruz in the 1950s and 1960s side-by-side in this chapter I resist the diasporic studies' impulse to compartmentalize migrant experience. Even if the respective actors might have only had passing contact, reading their histories together exposes compelling similarities and instructive differences that complicate a strictly national or purely ethnic picture of migration in Santa Cruz. Distinct features of the Okinawan diaspora are also reflected in Mennonite migrations through the Americas.

Before delving into the unique transnational contexts that fed the March to the East, the categories Okinawan and Mennonite merit further pause. From the perspective of Japanese administration, the term Okinawan is an administrative category marking a Japanese prefecture that includes that island along with hundreds of others in the Ryukyuan chain, an archipelago which extend far to the south of the Japan's four principal or "home" islands. While used differently according to its heterogeneous range

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-*2006 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

of denominations, the term Mennonite describes a pacifist, Anabaptist faith that emerged during the Protestant Reformation. But these geographical, administrative and religious classifications were also racial, ethnic and national markers, categories that intensified or took on entirely novel meanings in new socio-political surroundings.

In the ministerial resolution that endorsed Akamine's colonization project, what did the strange turn of phrase "Japanese…or more correctly, Okinawan" mean? The pause and subsequent clarification betray a complicated history.<sup>195</sup> Okinawa was an independent kingdom not formally colonized by Japan until the 1870s. Over the following half-century its people were subjected to a concerted assimilation campaign by the Japanese. The results of that campaign were ambivalent. Okinawa was seen as both a "culturally inferior" colonial possession and yet as a result of assimilationist propaganda, it was also held up as the most Japanese of all places.<sup>196</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> The literature on Okinawan identity in relation to Japanese annexation and US administration is vast and often divisive. For a condensed history of Japanese assimilationist policies see Alan S. Christy, "The Making of Imperial Subjects in Okinawa," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 1(3) (1993): 607-639.
 <sup>196</sup> Kozy K. Amemiya "The Bolivan Connection: U.S. Bases and Okinawan Emigration" *WPRI Working*

Paper No. 25: (October 1996).



Figure 7 Map depicting the Ryukyu Islands. The islands form the Japanese Prefecture of Okinawa and were administerd by the U.S. military between 1950 and 1972. Map in public domain (CIA World Factbook) Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East China Sea Map.jpg Accessed June 13, 2016.

This situation was further complicated in the post-WWII period when Okinawa was occupied and administered directly by the U.S. military-run civil adminstration (USCAR), a situation lasting until 1972. Okinawans were no longer citizens of an independent Japanese nation but stateless subjects of an occupying power. The U.S. sought to distance its Okinawan wards, many of whom considered themselves to be fully Japanese, from Japan by insisting that Okinawans refer to themselves by the geographical neologism "Ryukyuan." It is also important to note that Okinawans were settled in Bolivia by the U.S. military at the same time as, and in close proximity to, a Japanese colony created by the Japanese government. Both the U.S. military and the Japanese government saw directed emigration as a way to ease post-war population pressures in a period of economic crisis. While this chapter focuses on the factors that drove emigration from Okinawa and not Japan in the post-war period, on the ground in Bolivia,

where Okinawans and Japanese were frequently conflated in the press, I discuss responses to xenophobia from both groups.

The term Mennonite encompasses a broad spectrum of religious denominations from "Old Colony" or Altkolonier Mennonites similar in practice to their fellow Anabaptists the Amish, to evangelical denominations that embrace modern technology and whose practices more closely resemble those of the Baptist church. Bolivian Mennonites were overwhelmingly members of the former, an ethnically distinct, Low-German speaking segment of the Mennonite faith that had historically pursued physical and cultural separation from surrounding society in closed, agricultural colonies whose church leaders attempted to enforce endogamy and technological restrictions through the use of shunning. Seeking religious and cultural exemptions, especially the right to conduct schooling in their Low German dialect and freedom from military service, they had migrated eastward from Holland and Prussia to the Ukrainian Steppe in the centuries after the Protestant Reformation. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Mennonites settled the Canadian prairies in the newly-created province of Manitoba. While they were initially welcomed as frontier modernizers, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Canadian government viewed Mennonites as dangerous traditionalists and, despite guarantees to the contrary, began subjecting them to national public education.<sup>197</sup>

In the 1920s, Mennonite communities sent delegations to Latin America, where they were welcomed in both Mexico and Paraguay as agricultural modernizers just as they once had been up north. In other locations Mennonite delegates also failed to secure

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Harry Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico. With an Appendix on Mennonite Colonization in British Honduras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 25-26.

privileges, notably in Argentina and Uruguay. For Latin American nations heavily influenced by eugenicist thought the "Germanness" of Mennonites might have placed them as racially desirable migrants that would "whiten" the nation.<sup>198</sup> Yet that desirability was tempered by Mennonites' express isolationistism, evident in the list of special privileges they presented to foreign governments. Thus it was in appealing to a form of agrarian rather than racialized citizenship that Mennonites had the most success.

By the 1950s there were well-established Mennonite colonies in frontier regions of Mexico, Belize, Paraguay and Brazil. Mennonites spent time in distinct national environments that tended to produce social and religious innovations and thus had profound effects on relations within this far-flung diaspora, justifying the national pre-fix before the religious denomination. For instance, "Paraguayan" and "Mexican" Mennonites both left Canada in the 1920s to move to frontier regions in their respective countries. When they "reunited" in Bolivia in the 1960s they tended to regard one another with suspicion and, much like *cambas* and *kollas*, or Okinawans and Japanese, they maintained a degree of social distance.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> On the history of eugenicist thought in Latin America see Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>199</sup> Colonists in Riva Palacios and Canadiense Mennonite colonies in discussions with author, March and July 2014.



Figure 8 Map of Mennonite migrations to Latin America.Over half a century Mennonites migrated from Russia to Canada and then to Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia and Belize. Map adapted from TUBS, Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Americas\_location\_map.svg. Accessed June 13, 2016.

Viewing Mennonite and Okinawan as divisive, contingent and relational

categories follows a turn in the field of diaspora studies. Historian Adam McKeown noted the beginnings of this shift in the late 1990s, as scholars moved away from "those narratives of essentialized, primordial identity that were so important in earlier definitions of diapora."<sup>200</sup> McKeown eschewed identity in favor of spatial conceptions of diasporic formation through mobility. He defined this as the establishment and maintenance of those "well-worn grooves" capable of linking diasporic communities across the globe and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Adam McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842 to 1949," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 2 (1999): 306-337, 309.

allowing their unworldly members a surprising "transnationalism through parochialism."<sup>201</sup> This intellectual current is particularly evident in recent scholarship on the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. Historian Frank Guridy privileges "routes" rather than "roots," and stresses the tensions and misunderstandings that occurred as African-American, Afro-Cuban and West Indian members of the African diaspora moved throughout the Greater Caribbean and attempted to build alliances in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>202</sup> Historian Lara Putnam, who began her career by writing a "national" history of immigration in Costa Rica has also followed this transnational turn. Her recent work explores the movements of the West Indian diaspora around the Caribbean basin from the Panama Canal to the gold fields of Venezuela and the theaters of Harlem.<sup>203</sup> This diaspora at the margins of emerging nationalisms, fading British colonialism and expanding U.S. Empire was defined not by a rigid internal character but by the shifting spaces of employment around the region.

In bringing together the story of the Mennonite and Okinawan diasporas that settled in Bolivia's lowlands at mid-century, I also favor an approach that privileges mobility (both its practice and meanings) over identity. I begin by mapping the transnational networks that these diasporas created over the first half of the twentieth century which took new directions in the 1950s and 1960s and eventually extended to Santa Cruz. Okinawans' long history of emigration across the Pacific Rim was given new impetus by the establishment of US military bases on the Ryukyuan islands after the Second World War. I examine the ways in which Okinawans were displaced and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 322.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept* and her recent Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves Caribbean Migrants* and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

relocated by US officials in the mid-1950s and argue that these experiences informed the ways that they re-situated themselves in Bolivia. Mennonites had been on the move for even longer before a combination of environmental, agricultural and religious factors drove a small-scale emigration from Paraguay in the fifties and a much larger emigration from Mexico in the sixties.

## Agrarian and Militarized Landscapes in Post-War Okinawa

In a 1954 report, sociologist James Tigner wrote the following about Okinawa: "[They] have been a deficit area owing to a shortage of arable land, low-grade soils, virtually no exploitable natural resources, and severe population pressure for generations. No more than a marginal, near-famine living standard."<sup>204</sup> The region presented Tigner, the "scientific observer" with "a corollary to over-population in a food deficit area [which] is the burden of continuing relief."<sup>205</sup> Curiously, it was just the sort of pitiable technocratic assessment that was often directed at the Bolivian *altiplano* in the post-Revolutionary period. Not only did Tigner's concerns about over-population and food security resonate with the language of Walter Guevara Arze's *Plan Inmediato* it was also published in the same year. Andean and Okinawan landscapes posed distinct problems for Bolivia's revolutionary government and Okinawa's U.S. occupiers, but both confronted large landless populations and Tigner, like Guevara Arze, saw colonization in Santa Cruz as the ideal solution.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> James Lawrence Tigner, "The Okinawans in Latin America: Investigations of Okinawan Communities in Latin America, with Exploration of Settlement Possibilities" (Washington, D.C.: Pacific Science Board, National Research Council, 1954), ii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Tigner, "The Okinawans in Latin America," 520.

Tigner's report was the product of his travels between Okinawa and Bolivia in the 1950s. In contrast to the private initiative shown by the handful of Okinawan-Bolivians that formed the Uruma society in 1950, Tigner benefitted from the institutional support of the United States Armed Forces. As a member of the Stanford University think-tank the Hoover Institute he was commissioned by the military to study the possibilities for Okinawan resettlement in Latin America. With the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, the U.S. military officially claimed sovereignty over the former Japanese prefecture of Okinawa including the island of Okinawa along with the rest of the Ryukyuan archipelago. Those islands faced a serious demographic crisis due to the post-war forced repatriation of 176,000 members of the Okinawan diaspora. This situation was exacerbated by the construction of extensive military bases on one-quarter of the islands' arable lands by the U.S military in the early 1950s.

The U.S. military considered this situation to be untenable and tasked Tigner with traveling through the constellation of Okinawan communities scattered across Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru to find a suitable location for a population the military deemed to be a political liability. It was during this trip that Tigner encountered members of the Bolivian Uruma Society. Reflecting on the dire situation in Okinawa in his final report, he strongly advocated for support and expansion of the society's fledgling colonization plan. Over the following decade, US military support resulted in the emigration of 500 Okinawans families to Bolivia, a total of 3,200 individuals whose individual migrations linked the U.S.'s geo-political strategy in the Pacific with Bolivian's revolutionary state-building project in the eastern lowlands.

In his final report, Tigner claimed that Okinawa's problems "were inherited by the United States."<sup>206</sup> Like Guevara Arze's discussions of overpopulation in the altiplano, this disingenuous comment naturalized a socio-political landscape characterized by military dispossession of indigenous communities.<sup>207</sup> When the United States formally detached Okinawa from Japan in 1951, it pursued a vision of global security that included permanent military bases in the Far East. Within the context of the Korean War, the islands offered a staging ground for US intervention and remained central to US conceptions of global security in the Eisenhower era and beyond. Yet in claiming Okinawan sovereignty, the U.S. also took official responsibility for over half a million Okinawans. A military-run civil administration (USCAR) would manage the Ryukyus in cooperation with "consultation" from a local government (GRI). The U.S. attempt to reconcile the conflicting obligations of hegemon and guardian in the emerging Cold War climate of East Asia, defined post-war Okinawa and Tigner's mission to Latin America.

This inherent paradox of US rule emerged mostly clearly over access to land. Tigner's 1953 report coincided with a new round of military land acquisitions. In the contest between militarized and agricultural landscapes in the 1950s, Okinawans employed a range of strategies from petitions to physical confrontations with soldiers. Displacees gave interviews to local and foreign newspapers in which they emphasized the tragic circumstances of their removal. They also held large public rallies, wrote protest songs and plastered military bases with leaflets. These tactics for actively engaging with authorities over land have been explored in the extensive historiography on Okinawan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Ibid, 520.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> Kozy K. Amemiya "The Bolivian Connection."

occupation.<sup>208</sup> Two elements of this repertoire, one ideological and the other agrarian, merit further exploration. While both were unsuccessful in their principal aim, the former pushed the U.S. to support Bolivian colonization and Okinawans would employ aspects of the latter in Santa Cruz.

Nervous USCAR officials dutifully gathered, recorded and transcribed a mass of materials related to the land issue, leaving an impressive record of Okinawan dissent in military archives. Their obsessive cataloguing of even the most mundane items makes USCAR archives housed in the U.S. National Archives in College Park an invaluable source for historians even if, and at times precisely because, they are inseparable from the paranoid ideological climate of East Asia in the 1950s. Okinawans were most effective when they framed local removal within the context of that geo-political tension. Some petitioners spoke to the anti-Communist and pro-democracy rhetoric of the United States. One newspaper article on removal that appears in USCAR archives includes a quote from an elderly woman who complains that, "the muzzles that should be directed at the Communists are directed at the islanders."<sup>209</sup> A petition posted at a U.S. military base in Naha, Okinawa's largest city, on Veteran's Day expressed outrage and disbelief that "such conducts were done by the United States of America which is leading the world with the spirit of freedom and equality and philanthropy."<sup>210</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> The contentious issue has been explored from a variety of diplomatic, social and cultural angles. For an approach that draws on Okinawan perspectives see, Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden, *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Translated news clipping, *Okinawa Shimbun*, March 12, 1955. Record Group 260: Records of the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR), Box 228, Land Issues, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (NA). The *Okinawa Shimbun* a conservative newspaper but one that frequently criticized U.S. forces during the land conflicts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Petition posted at U.S. military base, Nov.11, 1955. RG 260, Box 281, Land Issues, NA.

In addition to highlighting U.S. hypocrisy, Okinawans increasingly turned to radical politicians who vigorously protested removal. In his 1953 report, Tigner had been frank in this regard pointing out that "traditionally farming and ownership of land is one of their most cherished desires in life." Evincing a deep-seated U.S. fear, he argued, "restiveness and dissatisfaction will inevitably accompany the waning prospects" and presented the youth of Okinawa as "a potentially vulnerable element" to Communist infiltration.<sup>211</sup> For anxious U.S officials, such fears appeared to become reality in 1953 when Kamejiro Senaga, leader of the left-leaning Okinawan People's Party led two separate protests against military removal. Senaga failed to block removal but the unsuccessful protests were closely monitored by USCAR and further encouraged U.S. officials to support the emigration program.<sup>212</sup> Kozy Amemiya, a member of the Japan Policy Research Institute, discovered that a number of Okinawan emigrants to Bolivia had taken part in the islands' leftist political movements.

While often engaging with Cold War discourse directly, Okinawans' resistance to land occupation also drew on a compelling script of agrarian citizenship in which they appeared as model farmers, a genre of appeal that Okinawan and Mennonites would later employ in Bolivia. In a petition addressed to USCAR's Deputy Governor, residents of Maja district - a village on the island of Kume to the west of Okinawa Island - contrasted the agricultural and militarized landscapes of their home. They framed the tragedy of their eviction in relation to their prior history of farming highlighting their achievements as winners of the region's annual "agricultural and forestry contest" over the past four

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> Tigner, "The Okinawans in Latin America," 522.
 <sup>212</sup> Toguchi and Oroku Village Incident Reports, Sept. and Dec. 1953. RG 260, Box 104, Internal Political Activities, NA. Amemiya "The Bolivian Connection."

years.<sup>213</sup> Prior to eviction theirs had been a "peaceful and model village that had previously produced no offenders," yet, currently faced an epidemic of theft. "Crimes have been committed one after another as if to entirely change the aspect of the village," they continued juxtaposing the productive model farmer with the delinquent and dangerous evictee.<sup>214</sup> Other petitions from that year also drove home the image of productive Okinwans "engaged in farming" and thus leading a peaceful life," in direct opposition to images of displaced Okinawans at the mercy of US forces.<sup>215</sup> The contrast between agrarian and militarized landscape was driven home in a protest supported by Kamejiro Senaga of the OPP. Villagers who had been farming land slated for expropriation refused to harvest their crops prior to removal. After U.S. soldiers were called in to serve as ad-hoc field hands, the residents threw their harvested cabbage under the treads of U.S. bulldozers.<sup>216</sup>

While Okinawans succeeded in attracting enough attention to the land conflict to provoke a US congressional hearing in 1955 they were disappointed in the results. The congressional report of 1956 simply re-iterated the policy of payments for land acquisitions, at a slightly increased rate. But the land struggles of 1955 are important for two reasons. Firstly, as they would do in Bolivia, Okinawans demonstrated strategies for negotiating over land with a state that did not consider them to be citizens. Secondly, as a result of the 1955 congressional hearings, funds were made available for re-settlement

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Petition to USCAR Deputy Governor from residents of Maja District, Sept. 30, 1955. RG 260, Box 281, Land Issue, NA..

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Memo regarding Land Evacuation Issue of Yagihara-Ku, March 24, 1955. RG 260, Box 280, Land Issues, NA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Toguchi Village Incident Report, 1953.

(within the islands) and emigration (off the islands) that expanded the small-scale colonization undertaken by the Uruma society in Bolivia.

With hundreds of islands in the Ryukyuan chain, USCAR encouraged some Okinawans to settle in sparsely populated areas to "increase the scope of arable land and agricultural productivity in the Ryukyus."<sup>217</sup> The program remained active through the latter part of the decade but faced several problems. Remote islands were not always suitable for agriculture. At times USCAR attempted to improve marginal lands for settlement as the cost to reclaim infertile land often ran in excess of \$10,000 per hectare. USCAR was also adamant that the program only benefit already established farmers. However, it was inundated with requests by urban dwellers seeking to escape the island's crowded cities. It cautioned another group of forty families to be resettled on the Miyako islands (three hundred kilometers off the coast of Okinawa) that in this "model farming village" they must "make full use of their farm lands and go fishing only during periods when being away from their farm does not neglect their crops."<sup>218</sup> USCAR viewed some resettlement projects as a qualified success. Ninety-four families had been moved to the subtropical Yaeyama islands in the farthest southern extension of the Ryukyuan archipelago and according to officials, "have played a significant part in the marked developments [of the region]...through the use of lands that were never under cultivation before. Within the Ryukyuan islands, resettlement was done on a small case-by-case basis and its piecemeal aspect offered at best minor mitigation, rather than a solution, to Okinawa's population woes. In addition to resettlement on the Ryukyuan archipelago,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Memo from James Ross USCAR Director of Economic Development, March 30, 1959. RG 260, Box 257, Economic Development Files, NA. <sup>218</sup>Ibid.

USCAR considered sending Okinawans to Cambodia or Laos, along with several Pacific islands. Yet the recent memory of Japanese occupation across much of east and southeast Asia made this an unlikely alternative.

With conflict occurring over much of the Ryukyuan islands and political radicalism on the rise, the large-scale settlement projects in Latin America proposed by Tigner increasingly appealed to the United States. The U.S. interest in managing dissent by physically displacing dissident elements on to "empty lands" finds a parallel in Bolivia where a similar spatial politics was employed by the MNR which sent cooperatives of radical ex-miners to isolated regions in the lowlands with the hope that their revolutionary message find a limited audience. Emigration was equally attractive from a financial standpoint. It was significantly cheaper to send Okinawans around the globe than to refurbish land on the rocky Ryukyuan islands. Congress had allocated 5.7 million dollars for resettlement within Okinawa. Between 1955 and 1959, 2.1 million dollars was used to relocate only 650 families within the Ryukuan archipelago. In that same period over 7,500 individual Okinawans left for South America, principally to Brazil. The majority emigrated without official sponsorship as "call-in" migrants financed by existing Okinawan communities in Latin America. Even the 1,173 people funded by USCAR and the GRI to settle in Santa Cruz did so at a lower cost. The average expense per emigrant to Bolivia was \$421 while resettlement within the Ryukyuan islands – in areas not requiring expensive land reclamation - ranged from \$466 to as much as \$766 per individual. USCAR officials continually emphasized the frugality of the emigration program. "This is one of the most, if not the most austere, efficient and effective of all economic programs pertaining to the Ryukyus," noted one USAR official.

"Even though it might be considered as exterior to the Ryukyuan economy, its contribution to the fundamental economic problem of the Ryukyus is considerable."<sup>219</sup>

Long relying on emigration in the face of challenging circumstances at home, Okinawans may have been fully aware of the U.S. motives for resettlement. In oral histories conducted by sociologist Kozy K. Amemiya, Okinawan settlers in Santa Cruz remembered the U.S. plan as a "thinning policy" convinced that the emigration scheme was simply a way to dispose of an undesirable element. Yet they were quick to avail themselves of the opportunity provided by Latin American colonization. According to officials at the Department of Social Welfare in Naha, administrative center of Okinawa, in 1960, there were a staggering 42,000 families that had expressed interest in settling in South America. An agreement had been reached to settle Okinawans around Brazil's new capital, Brasília, rising up out of the tropical savannah of central-west Brazil under the government of Juscelino Kubitschek. Kubitschek's goal of shifting political power closer to the country's "undeveloped" Amazon basin stands as a classic example of twentieth century high modernism and built on a project of internal colonization known as the "March to the West," established by Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas in the thirties. The GRI's most fervent praise was reserved for Santa Cruz. Officials noted that the "settlement site in Santa Cruz is so fertile as to grow crops without fertilizing for twenty years."<sup>220</sup> Infrastructure linked the region to every place in the country and the "native population offers friendly and positive cooperation to the Okinawan immigrants."

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Report on Fiscal Year 1960 on Financial Assistance to Overseas Migration, Department of Social Welfare Naha. RG 260, Box 258, Visitors-Emigration, NA.
 <sup>220</sup> Ibid.

The department of Social Welfare felt certain that for those reasons it was "obvious that the emigrants settling into Bolivia and Brazil will be successful and prosperous."<sup>221</sup>

When Okinawans and Americans clashed over land ownership on the Ryukyuan archipelago in the mid fifties, emigration to Santa Cruz appeared to be a promising solution. However, relocating Okinawans produced its own series of problems. Here I turn to Okinawans' troubles in transit to reveal another dimension of their ambiguous status - one that remained unresolved during the period of emigration. By 1961 USCAR had already been sending Okinawa emigrants to Bolivia for six years. Yoshihide Higa chaperoned the eleventh group to travel by sea through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope and across the Atlantic to Santos.<sup>222</sup> Their ship left Naha on February 18 and included nearly two hundred Japanese migrants that, like their fellow Okinawan passengers, were bound for Bolivia and other destinations in South America. A month into the voyage, the ship made port at Lourenço Marques (the present day city of Maputo in Mozambique). If Japanese and Okinawan emigrants had felt common cause on the voyage thus far, difference was here re-inscribed. Japanese passengers, passports in hand, easily obtained entry permits to disembark and tour the city. Okinawans faced an unexpected problem. Officials in Mozambique did not recognize the curious "certificate of identity" issued by US authorities which was clearly not an official entry document. After some intervention from the American consulate Okinawans were eventually able to obtain permits.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Ibid.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Yoshihide Higa, "Investigation of the Okinawan Colonies in Bolivia." 1961. RG 260, Box 257, Economic Development Files, NA.

The awkward moment could be dismissed as a typical bureaucratic bungle, one that consular officials had successfully resolved. After all, how were officials in far-flung Mozambique to know about Okinawa's "special status?" Yet the incident highlights a central aspect of post-war Okinawan life that had still not been resolved after six years of US-supported emigration to Bolivia. Okinawans remained stateless, no longer Japanese yet certainly not American. The incident in Mozambique was not the first "humiliation" that Okinawans had experienced. USCAR officials noted that another case from May of 1958 was receiving wide circulation in Okinawa. Newspapers reported on the struggles of an Okinawan stranded in Northern Italy when attempting to enter Switzerland with a US Certificate of Identity. The hapless emigrant wandered between the US and Japanese embassies as each delegation attempted to claim he was the responsibility of the other.<sup>223</sup>

Throughout the early years of resettlement USCAR officials repeatedly confronted the issue of Ryukyuan "nationality" and overlapping Japanese sovereignty. In January of 1956, General Lemnitzer noted that some Ryukyuans took US unwillingness to grant them American citizenship as evidence that "they remain full-fledged Japanese citizens." In contrast, "most Ryukyuans" he noted, were "simply are confused and regard themselves almost as stateless persons with no official allegiance."<sup>224</sup> Deputy Governor General Moore, found the situation frustrating. While efforts had been made to create a designation "citizens of the Ryukyu Islands" the term "has not been accepted" by Ryukyuans or foreign governments." He urged the U.S. to continue to attempt to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> Article summary in internal memo. Original article entitled "Kuroshio" by Southern Area Fellow Countrymen Assistance Society. Published in *Okinawa and Ogasawara*. May 15, 1958. RG 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>224</sup> Internal Memo from General Lemnitzer, Jan. 1956. RG 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.

establish a "citizenship status for Ryukyuans." If the result, "would be to create a mess of dual nationals...it should not have any more deleterious effect than the present situation where there is doubt they have any citizenship."<sup>225</sup> In a 1958 note to USCAR's High Commissioner Donald Booth an emigration official noted that even the Bolivian government referred to Ryukyuans as "neither fish nor fowl" because some turned to the US state department for assistance while others appealed to Japanese diplomatic officials.<sup>226</sup>

In 1960, the year before Higa's voyage, USCAR had held a conference in order to "gain wider recognition" for the certificate of identity. At the outset, participants conceded the obvious, the "travel document issued by USCAR is not a passport" and that "while it may be advantageous to call it a passport, this could not be done because it does not identify the nationality of the bearer."<sup>227</sup> One participant wondered why USCAR could not "refer to Ryukyuans as Japanese nationals." Another responded, "the U.S. can only attest to the nationality of its own citizens." Ultimately, attendees agreed to push forward with a campaign to "familiarize" foreign governments with the Certificate of Identity. They also agreed to alter the format of the document specifically including the words, "issued in lieu of a passport immediately following and under the words "certificate of identity." They broached the idea of including the term "Okinawan" rather than "Ryukyuan" in the document "inasmuch as some people recall Okinawa from World

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Correspondence with General Moore, Jan 1956. RG 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> Correspondence, Donald Booth to Chief of Civil Affairs, July 28, 1958. RG 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Minutes from Conference on USCAR Certificate of Identity, Oct 17 1960. RG 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.

War II days whereas the term "Ryukyu Islands" is a lesser known geographical term."<sup>228</sup> They feared the term was too closely linked to a history of Japanese governance. With the easing of Cold War tensions a dismal prospect, US officials were inclined to continue the delicate process of detaching Okinawans from Japan that had begun with the post-war repatriations. Their absolute insistence on the neologism "Ryukyuan" instead of "Okinawan" was evidence of this.

## Settling Okinawans and Paraguayan Mennonites in Santa Cruz

As USCAR supported the emigration of several thousand Okinawans to the plains of Santa Cruz it imagined an indefinite period of US rule on the islands necessitating the continual migration of thousands more. New settlement sites across the tropical zones regions of Bolivia offered Okinawan colonists – and their US sponsors - nearly limitless possibilities for expansion. Those migrants, according to one report, would eventually fill the capacity of the first three colonies simply named Okinawa 1, 2 and 3 and, later, form new colonies 4, 5, 6, and 7 in the late 1960s and through the 1970s.<sup>229</sup> However, just as with relocation due to base construction and the difficulties of moving Okinawans lacking officially-recognized documentation, settling Okinawans in Bolivia posed a series of challenges.

Back in 1954 when US support for the Uruma initiative was first being considered, Victor Andrade, the Bolivian ambassador in Washington, told USCAR officials that his country would welcome an unrestricted number of Okinawans because

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Ryukyuan Overseas Emigration Corporation, "Proposed Plan for Use of ICA funds." July 29, 1961. RG 260, Box 257, Economic Development Files, NA. The ROEC had replaced the Uruma Society as the entity responsible for Okinawan emigration.

Bolivia "admires their courage, diligence, willingness to work, adaptability and many other fine qualities."<sup>230</sup> However, the official agreement between the Uruma society and the Bolivian government was terminated in 1955 after a disastrous early colonization attempt. Several colonists died from a mysterious disease and rumor spread within the Bolivian government and among cruceño leaders that "Uruma disease" (as it came to be known) was endemic to Okinawans and could spread to the rest of the population.<sup>231</sup> With the relocation of the colony and the abatement of the epidemic such fears faded. Bolivian officials were still willing to welcome further Okinawan migrants but they insisted on doing so on a case-by-case basis.

The resulting situation, not unlike military removal and travel documentation, was ad hoc and prone to uncertainty. As a result USCAR officials attempted to carefully assess national and local attitudes as they prepared future migrants to enter the country. In 1957 the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF), the state institution in charge of settlement, let the US embassy know that it lacked funds to assist colonization but that it held Okinawans in "high regard."<sup>232</sup> Despite the tragic epidemic at the initial site Okinawans had "maintained a high morale and have steadily pushed forward to gain a foothold on the virgin soils to which they have been assigned." Consular officials also noted that the "industrious characteristics" of the settlers, had won them a core group of government supporters.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> Memo, "Preliminary Meetings of Defense-State-ICA working group on Emigration from the Ryukyu Islands." Aug. 8, 1958. RG 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Letter from USOM Lt. Colonel Isaac Cundiff to Chief of Civil Affairs in Okinawa, Jan 14, 1957. RG
 260, Box 220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.
 <sup>232</sup> Ibid.

While the national government was pleased with Okinawan colonists USCAR was slightly more apprehensive about the local situation in Santa Cruz. As the preceding chapter suggests, it did not always mirror the confident projections of highland officials. In a report from 1959 US embassy officials attempted to assess cruceño racial dynamics after two years of civic struggles. The "lower classes…show few signs of emotional opposition to the Orientals," the embassy reported, based, rather questionably, on an interview with a bishop of the Catholic Church in Santa Cruz.<sup>233</sup> They noted that the "creole middle and upper class" controlling Santa Cruz were ambivalent about Okinawans. On the one hand, individuals questioned were, like national authorities, impressed with the work ethic of Okinawans and their economic contribution. On the other hand, they harbored a more deep-seated racism in opposition to inter-marriage they felt "would weaken the Cruceñan racial stock."<sup>234</sup> Elite cruceños unambiguously favored "European" migrants.

According to embassy officials, local elites also tended to define foreigners in regional rather than national terms. Development assistance given to "outside colonists" was frowned upon. While this obviously included Okinawans, it also extended to "Altiplano Indians or *kollas*." Instead, cruceños felt economic assistance should be "administered for the agricultural and community development of the local "camba or cruceñan-mestizo element." Embassy officials recognized that the "social" position of Okinawans would also be directly related to their spatial location. They acknowledged that it would be preferable to create new colonies along the central Santa-Cruz-Montero

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Report from US Embassy La Paz, "Staff Study on Okinawan Immigration." May 29, 1959. RG 260, Box
220, Entry and Exit Control Files, 1955-1970, NA.
<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

agricultural corridor but realized that an "excessive concentration of Orientals in the Santa Cruz "service community" ...may result in strong opposition." Therefore, embassy officials encouraged future settlement in more remote regions.<sup>235</sup>

Conversations on Okinawan settlement were not limited to confidential memos. On August 28, 1955, *The New York Times* published an article entitled, "Okinawan Group to Go to Bolivia."<sup>236</sup> The paper incorrectly reported that Okinawans would take part in an "unusual land settlement," in Santa Cruz in which an equal number of Bolivian nationals, Italians, and Okinawans would form a single inter-ethnic agricultural colony. While all three groups mentioned were in fact forming settlements in Santa Cruz – perhaps the source of the newspaper's confusion - there were no plans for a joint venture. Over the following years Bolivians, Italians and Okinawans were brought into explicit dialogue, if not actual cohabitation, in the pages of *El Deber*. Each of these migrant groups was seen in radically different ways by elite cruceños who had serious misgivings about their fellow Bolivians from the highlands along with the immigration of Asian colonists even as they enthused over a potential immigration of Italians and other Europeans.

While US authorities attempted to reinforce the political and cultural distinctions between Japanese and Okinawan, it is important to recognize that Bolivian commentators often failed to differentiate between the two groups. In early May of 1955, the newspaper *El Deber* published an article titled, "Immigration to Bolivia should be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> Special to *The New, York Times*. "Okinawan Group to Go to Bolivia." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 28, 1955. http://search.proquest.com/docview/113266050?accountid=10747. Accessed Jan. 13, 2015.

carefully selected.<sup>237</sup> The meaning of "selection" was not left to the reader's imagination. The article noted that both the MNR and the U.S. government were studying a large immigration initiative that would bring 20,000 Japanese families to Santa Cruz. "We demand refined races," the author stated, particularly those that had a common language and similar "telluric influence," listing Germans, Spanish, Portuguese and Italians as satisfying examples. He pointed to the tenth Annual Inter-American Conference held in Caracas the previous year in which members "pronounced in favor of white immigration." As an alternative to undesirable foreign migration the author pointed to the "exodus" of Bolivians who left highland frontier departments to work in the Argentine sugar fields. "Before they think of mass immigration, they should return them to the patria" instead of "abandoning them and resorting to the foreign element to intensify agriculture."

In advocating the return of Bolivian "braceros" – who like their Mexican counterparts made seasonal and permanent migrations to work as manual laborers - in favor of Japanese immigrants, the author slipped moved from a long-standing if increasingly untenable Latin American discourse of "whitening" to a more stable one of economic nationalism.<sup>238</sup> While the idea – of bringing co-nationals back home - appeared noble on the surface, some cruceños had nothing more than rhetorical interest in the fate of Bolivia's braceros, most of whom were highlanders and thus equally "foreign" in their eyes. In fact, in that very same issue *El Deber* included an article describing the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> "La inmigración a Bolivia debe ser cuidadosamente seleccionada." *El Deber*, May 6, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> While the meaning of "whitening" could differ widely in regional and national contexts. Peter Wade provides the most commonly cited account in *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). Also see Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*.

first government efforts to bring the "altiplano population to the east."<sup>239</sup> "What end does this program have?" the author asked. He criticized the haphazard "decongestion of the mining centers" with scarce attention to the climate, environment or race of receiving regions and insisting that there were plenty of empty spaces in Potosí and other highland departments where ex-miners might settle." He maintained that the people of Santa Cruz and the Beni "are special races," and surmised that they "do not need these injections of another class. Their own campesinos are white, literate, and capable." Another article joined in the nativist posturing. "Santa Cruz is living a historic moment in its production," it began. The benefits were clearly meant for its own "natives."<sup>240</sup>

Regionalism, nationalism and eurocentrism comingled in *El Deber*. Its authors gave frequent special mention to Italians, who were emigrating in large numbers to Canada and Australia in the post-war period and who had established a tiny colony in Santa Cruz. An article in 1955 denounced the mass immigration of "inferior races."<sup>241</sup> The author, waxing poetic, hoped that "in place of these 20,000 [Japanese] families, Italians will come in an exodus from Libya, that formed of its sand dunes, the productive magnitude that international justice stole from the patrimony, the German in the south of Brazil,...that created the grand industrial emporium of that country, or the Arabs of São Paulo, the strongest and most prosperous industrial power, the Spanish in Mexico...these are, without a doubt the migrations that are good for all countries, others no." In his celebration of desirable settler society, the author bizarrely suggested the Japanese had failed in Brazil despite well-established and prosperous communities across the country.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> Del altiplano al oriente: dezplazimiento de poblaciones altiplánicas al oriente" *El Deber*, May 6, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> "La produccion agraria cruceña va cumpliendo su hora histórica" *El Deber*, May 1955 (n.d).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> "Capital cruceño dentro del desarrollo agrario departamental" *El Deber*, May 15 1955.

This overt racism did not go unchallenged. In June, *El Deber* published a critique of earlier xenophobic articles by an author identified by the initials "AJF." He denounced the local press and reminded readers that "men of races of supposed racial superiority" had utterly failed in colonization schemes in eastern Santa Cruz and could currently be found in the city "dedicated to occupations in hotels and bars."<sup>242</sup> In contrast, he found the Japanese to be "admirable and easy in their complete adaptation to the new patria," citing existing Japanese communities like those of Uruma Soceity founder José Akamine in Riberalta. He challenged the "careful euphemism" of race, which "in these times is an absurd prejudice."

Despite such alternatives to outmoded racial thinking, the majority of articles in *El Deber* continued celebrating "desirable" European migrants over the following years. At the end of 1955 the paper enthusiastically greeted the arrival of Italian engineer Felipe Bonoli, who promised to build an Italian colony in Santa Cruz. Italians, *El Deber* insisted, undergo "easy assimilation in our environment, [because of] their laborosity, religious beliefs and the similarity of their customs."<sup>243</sup> The following year *El Deber* published a poem by Luis Simón García opposite the editorial page. In "My Salute to Santa Cruz", the poet expressed his sincerest wish to see Santa Cruz, "populated and more populated, not only with the beautiful Andalusian type but also with the Italian and the American who are [men] of business, energy and light."<sup>244</sup> While welcoming these migrants *El Deber* continued to reject Japanese immigration. In a September article that included a litany of complaints, among them the growing conflict over the 11% oil

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> "En torno a la inmigración japonesa" *El Deber*, June, n.d., 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>243</sup> The announcement of Bonoli's arrival appeared in an article entitled "Otra colonia italiana." In the same issue the paper elaborated on the proposed migration in the article "Colonización italiana en Bolivia" *El Deber*, Dec. 14, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> Luis Simón Garcia, "Mi saludo a Santa Cruz." *El Deber*, June 7, 1956.

revenues and the problems brought by internal migration, the paper concluded with a denunciation of "this strange invasion of the sons of the Chrysanthemum empire."<sup>245</sup>

While publishing attacks on Japanese immigrants, El Deber also became increasingly hostile to Andean migrants, the other visible outsiders who were settling in the region. In August, 1956 the paper sardonically referred to the "latest novelty: colonizers that decolonize."<sup>246</sup> This was a reference to a new colony of highland migrants established along the Ichilo River nearby the Japanese colony of San Juan. The paper claimed that the settlers were destroying the once flourishing estates and private property of prominent landowners "whose rights come from family tradition." "In this manner," lamented *El Deber*, "the force of the true farmer and progressive rancher are disappearing."<sup>247</sup> Ultimately the paper's writers constructed both Andeans and Japanese (the former brought from the highlands, the latter, "from another continent") as unassimilable outsiders in Santa Cruz by blending discourses of race, public health and environmental incompatability. *El Deber* portrayed Japanese migrants were a people "that does not improve our race and are foreign to our environment."<sup>248</sup> It considered the "state of health" of ex-miners who, like the fictional Santos, had migrated to lowland colonies to be no better. Their occupation claimed *El Deber*, made it impossible for them to carry out reproductive work in the tropics.<sup>249</sup>

In the insular but rapidly modernizing climate of Santa Cruz in the mid-fifties this discourse was far from surprising. When Yoshihide Higa arrived with a group of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>245</sup> "Santa Cruz ausente en la solución de sus propios problemas." *El Deber*, Sept 5, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> La última novedad: "colonizadores" que "descolonizar." *El Deber*, Aug 1 1956.
<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> "Santa Cruz ausente en la solución de sus propios problemas" *El Deber*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> "Marcha al oriente." *El Deber*, July 15 1957.

Okinawan colonists in 1961 he noted that the city resembled a Hollywood western town even though it had more than tripled in size in the past seven years.<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, racebaiting and more aggressive forms of discrimination characterized the Japanese and Okinawan migratory experience since the early days of the formation of their Latin American diaspora in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet race prejudice held a paradoxical relation to the spread and status of "undesirable" migrant communities. The depth of racial antagonism in the press and elsewhere was just as likely to indicate the success of a migrant community as it did for the Chinese Mexicans or Jewish Argentines.<sup>251</sup> As historian Raanan Rein points out for the latter group, "anti-Semitic discourses, even when emerging from powerful centers of political power, do not always translate into absolute oppression."252 Long accustomed to xenophobia, migrants effectively negotiated stateled discrimination along with regionally-based nativism.

There is evidence that the Japanese and Okinawan migrants in Santa Cruz also utilized these tactics. One of their most common recourses was to emphasize their agricultural contributions to region and nation just as José Akamine had done in his plans for the Uruma Soceity in the early 1950s. They could rely, in this case, on the help of powerful backers in the Japanese, US, and Bolivian governments. An official letter from the Ministry of Agriculture to the mayor of Santa Cruz preceded the arrival of a Japanese settlement commission led by Minuro Takata. The ministry requested city hall's "collaboration" and noted the tight relationship between the Japanese mission and the

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>250</sup> Yoshihide Higa "Investigation of the Okinawan Colonies in Bolivia."
 <sup>251</sup> Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> Raanan Rein, Argentine Jews Or Jewish Argentines?, 17.

revolutionary government's policy of economic diversification.<sup>253</sup> When Japanese families began arriving in Santa Cruz in 1955 the colony of San Juan had already established an agricultural cooperative. President Toshimichi Nishikawa wrote to the Mayor once again reminding him of the official agreement with Japan, and "asking and not doubting for one moment of the help and support of your distinguished person."<sup>254</sup> The Cooperative re-iterated its aims to mechanize and intensify the "agricultural potential" of Santa Cruz.

While enlisting national and local officials to ensure the ease of their migration, Japanese and Okinawan settlers were also attentive to the public perception of their colony. They occasionally confronted attacks in the press head-on. Through 1957 and 1958 *El Deber* continually repeated the tired tropes of racial fitness and nativism to attack Japanese colonists. Journalists became amateur historians of Bolivian migration by drawing on examples from other failed migrant initiatives from Northern La Paz and Cochabamba to the Chaco to drive home the point that "only the Bolivian" (by which they meant, "only the cruceño") could "resolve the problem of agrarian production."<sup>255</sup> Japanese migration was most commonly linked to Jewish migration, which, *El Deber* reminded readers, had been premised on agrarian production but resulted in a flood of "rich merchants" and absentee landowners whose Bolivian peons to work the land. The "invasion" of the false "farmers" has begun, they concluded.<sup>256</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>253</sup> Correspondence Ministry of Agriculture to Alcalde of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Feb. 15 1954. Folder, Historia, Primeros Japoneses en Santa Cruz, Provincias Santistevan Ichilo. Archivo Histórico Departamental "Hermanos Vásquez Machicado" (AHD).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> Correspondence from Toshimichi Nishikawa to Alcalde, August 25, 1955. Historia, Primeros Japoneses en Santa Cruz, AHD.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> "Sólo el boliviano puede resolver el problema de la producción agraria." *El Deber*, August, n.d., 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>256</sup> "¿Qué beneficios trae la inmigración japonesa a Santa Cruz." *El Deber*, March 26, 1958.

Shortly after that last article appeared, the *El Deber* offices received a personal visit from Yoei Arakaki, President of the Committee of Reception of Japanese Immigrants for "Okinawa" colony. Citing the inflammatory article Arakaki invited the newspaper's staff to come visit the colony and ascertain whether Okinawans were true farmers. *El Deber* accepted the challenge "after which we will emit the judgment that this development action deserves."<sup>257</sup> A few days later the paper published a brief note that, while less than a full retraction of their prior invectives, conceding that "the impression received is generally satisfactory."<sup>258</sup> The following day they published a more lengthy assessment documenting the settlement's progress. "We have confirmed," wrote the editors, "that there are works, dispensaries of good rice, people in the fields harvesting, machines opening roads and people disposed to work, happy to have arrived at a country that is hospitable and of prodigious land."<sup>259</sup> While it remains unclear whether the initiative came from the newspaper or from the colony, *El Deber* made a similar visit to the Japanese colony of San Juan in July of that year. Again, humbled reporters noted productive farms, cleared land and road construction and concluded even more favorably that, "in our opinion we believe that the Japanese Colony is fulfilling the commitment of work and we wish them success."<sup>260</sup>

The performance of good agricultural citizenship had not been successful at halting U.S. military bulldozer on Okinawa but it did quell nativist opposition in Santa Cruz. With agricultural production so closely linked to ideas of development and national sovereignty in the minds of both the MNR and the cruceños, ostensible outsiders

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>257</sup> "Sobre la inmigracion japonesa." n.d, *El Deber*, 1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> "Excursión a Okinawa" *El Deber*, n.d.1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> "Los inmigrantes japoneses de Okinawa" *El Deber*, n.d, 1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup> Untitled article, *El Deber*, July 27, 1958.

could lay claim to it to ingratiate themselves at the national and local level. For immigrants across Latin America this grudging acceptance, unlike legal citizenship, could be highly unstable. It required continual performance and negotiation and remained susceptible to economic change. While West Indians had been welcomed as laborers on Costa Rica's banana plantations in the late nineteenth century, by the 1930s, they were subjected to laws restricting their mobility to the nation's coastal zone.<sup>261</sup> Mexicans, many of whom were also American citizens, experienced a similar nativist backlash in the American Southwest during the Great Depression when several million were "repatriated" by U.S. authorities.<sup>262</sup>

Okinawans encountered this spatial politics at play in Santa Cruz as well. Through the late 1950s Okinawa colony continued broadcasting its agricultural prowess to cruceño elite. In December 1959, in the midst of continued press attacks against Japanese colonists, the mayor of Santa Cruz received a Christmas card from the head of the Okinawa colony, Sieryo Nagamine. The note included a resume of annual production and infrastructure. "The 1500 residents of the growing colony persist," wrote Nagamine, "in their mentality of making Colonia Okinawa a rural center and a model colony in Bolivia."<sup>263</sup> He concluded with the hope that the colony could continue to rely on "the cooperation of the cruceño people and its distinguished members." As a concrete manifestation of the colony's promising future and its gratitude, Nagamine included a bag of the colony's rice. He pointed to the fact that, "though small in quantity, [it was]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>261</sup> Putnam, *The Company They Kept*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> Francisco E Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> Letter from Sieryo Nagamine to Alcalde of Santa Cruz, Dec.17, 1959. Folder Japoneses en Bolivia, Palometillas Uruma y El Pailon, Colonia Okinawa. AHD.

donated sincerely as a homage to our contribution of labor for the greatness and development of the people of Bolivia."

Acceptance of these performances of agricultural citizenship was also contingent upon migrants remaining in particular places and producing in particular ways. They might have risen to national prominence for their rice production, which Yoshihde Higa proudly noted to USCAR officials in 1961, essentially set the standard and price of rice in the nation.<sup>264</sup> They were even briefly celebrated in the 1962 Ruiz film, "The Mountains never Change," perhaps best demonstrating their ability to incorporate their "ancestral race" – as the film's narrator described them - within the national vision of the March to the East.<sup>265</sup>

Production of one of the essential ten commodities outlined by Guevara Arze in the Plan Inmediato was acceptable, even commendable. But locals found it far more threatening when Okinawans moved into urban markets already monopolized by cruceños. In late 1958, *El Deber* noted with interest that Okinawans were installing carp ponds in the colony and had brought three hundred examples of the fish to market in Santa Cruz. Due to its low cost, the carp would make an excellent source of food for the "popular classes", one public notice declared.<sup>266</sup> While the response to the unfamiliar fish is not known, Okinawans experienced greater resistance when they attempted to market the surplus fish they caught in the nearby Río Grande River in Santa Cruz. Higa reported that Okinawans were bringing a truckload of fish to the city's market when they had been met by a group of the city butchers and fishmongers who complained that the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> Yoshihide Higa, "An investigation of the Okinawan Colonies in Bolivia."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> Las montañas no cambian. Dir. Jorge Ruiz.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> Public notice (no title) *El Deber* n.d. 1958.

colonists, "were supposed to work on the farmlands not to fish." Shipments were immediately halted, but the accusation that Okinawans were indeed fishermen and not farmers would be added to the arsenal of anti-migrant writers. Interestingly, USCAR official repeatedly voiced a similar concern that beneficiaries of land reclamation in the Ryukyuan archipelago not neglect their expensive newly reclaimed fields in favor of fishing. Little is known about what happened to the truckload of fish.

The above examples demonstrate the ability of Japanese and Okinawan migrants to circumvent local resistance. They could also rely on the diplomatic presence and economic opportunities that their Japanese and U.S. sponsors offered to the Bolivian government. The economic appeal of Japanese migration became particularly attractive to Bolivian officials by the end of the fifties. Under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund, President Hernán Siles Zuazo initiated a broad austerity program to combat inflation in 1956. Internal budget shortfalls were in part ameliorated by an increase in U.S. foreign aid.<sup>267</sup> Led by ambassador Victor Andrade, Bolivian embassy officials in Japan also worked to attract the interest of wealthy Japanese businessman to invest in Bolivia as a part of the plan of economic diversification. That initiative met with a ready response. In the late fifties a number of Latin American countries were courting Japanese companies and a number of Japanese businessmen were traveling through the region looking for investment opportunities.<sup>268</sup>

In 1959, a Japanese businessman, Heizo Tsukui, the head of a company named "Bolivia Industries" based in Tokyo, expressed interest in developing a sugar refinery

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Thomas Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>268</sup> Terutomo Ozawa, *Multinationalism, Japanese Style: The Political Economy of Outward Dependency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 13.

and colonization project in Caranavi (another new colonization zone in the North of La Paz department) and toured the country extensively. The head of the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF, the state agency responsible for colonization and road-building projects), Adolfo Linares, provided a series of details for the "señor inversionista" before inquiring about his status with the embassy.<sup>269</sup> Andrade informed Linares that the supposed corporation did not, in fact, exist and that Heizo Tsukui was a notorious confidence man considered *persona nongrata* by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Relations who had presented himself as the head of various "fictitious companies."<sup>270</sup>

The following year Andrade felt he had hit on something sounder. He informed Linares in April of 1960 that Japanese officials were interested in investing in a large-scale irrigation and colonization project being developed by the CBF and located to the south of Santa Cruz near the town of Villamontes.<sup>271</sup> Andrade knew that the project had stalled for lack of funds after the introduction of Siles Zuazo's austerity measures in 1958. In early 1959 a commission of Japanese technicians visited the region. Based on their positive report, the Japanese government-funded Emigration Development Company was willing to invest 3.5 million dollars into the Villamontes scheme. There was a condition. The money would only be extended if 800 Japanese families were allowed to settle in the project. Bursting with excitement, Andrade pressed Linares for more project details to provide the donors. Two months later he had not received a response from the CBF. In frustration he wrote Linares again from Tokyo on June 4,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>269</sup> Correspondence, Adolfo Linares to Victor Andrade, Nov. 4, 1959. CBF, Box 12, Varios, Folder "Japón," Archivo La Paz (ALP).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>271</sup> Victor Andrade to CBF, "Planificación económica de Villamontes- agricultura y colonización." April 7, 1960. ALP-CBF, Box 88 Proyecto de Riego Villamontes, ALP.

1960 advising him that "a greater delay would mean the failure of the initiative," with competing projects available in Paraguay, Peru and Bolivia.<sup>272</sup>

While Andrade was left to speculate, the reason for the delay emerges clearly in the CBF's internal correspondence. Officials were aware of the proposal but were nervous about proceeding. On May 4, 1960, technical supervisor, Ricardo Urquidi, had already provided Linares with his assessment of the proposed Japanese colonization near Villamontes.<sup>273</sup> He noted the substantial investment and subsequent development of the stalled project would stimulate cotton production in the southeast of Santa Cruz and allow Bolivia to cease importing a million dollars worth of cotton annually. Yet Urquidi felt the appreciable economic benefits needed to be weighed in relation to "other very serious aspects for the future of our country." He feared Japanese "penetration" in Villamontes would lead to a dramatic, and in his view undesirable, shift in the region. Urquidi assumed the 800 families would total a population of 4000 settlers which, based on 1950 census data for the population of the southeast (30,000 inhabitants) would constitute fully one-quarter of the regional population. Shoddy arithmetic aside Urquidi was convinced the "tradition of our country is clearly western" and that Japanese migration would produce the sort of "social problems" typical of "other countries of marked racial conglomerates."<sup>274</sup>

More compelling than his regurgitation of standard cruceño racial thinking was Urquidi's subsequent admission. Bolivia was far from a homogenous society threatened by social unrest brought on by the arrival of outsiders. Rather, such conflict already

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> Victor Andrade to Adolfo Linares, Correspondence. June 4, 1960, CBF, Box 12, Folder "Japón," ALP.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>273</sup> Technical Supervisor, Ricardo Urquidi to Adolfo Linares, President of CBF. May 4, 1960, "Inmigración japonesa a Villamontes," CBF, Box 85, ALP.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>274</sup> Ibid.

existed within the county "where after centuries of living together and mutual adaptation, the presence of different races signals even now great difficulties for our orderly and harmonious conduct."<sup>275</sup> "It would not be advisable," concluded Urquidi, "to consciously seek to complicate our problems that are already complicated enough." With this statement he cast indigenous Bolivians as veritable foreigners in their own country – as different and unassimilable races - like the potential Japanese colonists he felt should be rejected.

The CBF continued to discuss the Japanese proposal throughout 1960. In October, Agusto Valdivia circulated a memo that, like Urquidi's, noted the potential increase in cotton production in the zone. Valdivia made reference to cotton production in northern Argentina the source of "a continuous current of depopulation," that was drawing approximately 20,000 Bolivian "bracero" workers a year from the Villamontes region alone.<sup>276</sup> Like other authors Valdivia drew on the plight of the Bolivian bracero in Argentina to frame his opposition to Japanese settlers. He also noted the supposed inability of Japanese migrants to assimilate. He feared that such migrant communities would become "islands of races" (islas de razas) and he was sure that the presence of "foreign núcleos" along a historically contested frontier would also meet the opposition of the army.<sup>277</sup>

Ultimately the Japanese settlement in Villamontes never took place and Okinawan-Japanese colonization in Bolivia was limited to the San Juan colony to the north of Santa Cruz and Okinawa I, II and III along the Río Grande. Despite the ability

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>276</sup> Internal Report, Agusto Valdivia, October 1960, CBF, Box 85, ALP.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> Ibid.

of colonists to negotiate racism, popular pressure could place limits on the MNR's willingness to allow large-scale Japanese participation in specific aspects of the March to the East. Yet economic change as much as local nativism can explain why the Japanese presence in Santa Cruz was ultimately limited. 1960 was a key moment when, as ambassador Andrade explained, "one of the greatest pre-occupations of the government of Japan is the constant growth of its population," and intensive migration plans were still underway, particularly to Latin America.<sup>278</sup> This window closed definitively with the post-war Japanese economic miracle that was already apparent in 1960 and would soon diminish the importance of emigration as a state strategy. The mass migration of 20,000 Japanese colonists that cruceños had railed against in the 1950s simply did not take place. The once "surplus" population quickly found employment in Japan's rapidly expanding industrial sector. In the early 1960s, US-supported Okinawan migration continued at a steady but slow rate of a few hundred settlers a year. But Okinawans were also increasingly likely to migrate to Japanese industrial cities like Toyota – home to the car manufacturer of the same name - after the U.S. returned administrative control over Okinawa to Japan between 1968 and 1972. The confident projection of USCAR officials, that Okinawa colony would expand from its initial three settlements over the following decades never materialized. By 1977, when colony "Okinawa 8" should have been under construction, Okinawan emigration to Bolivia had already been stalled for more than a decade.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>278</sup> Correspondence, Linares - Andrade La Paz, June 4, 1960, CBF-ALP, Box 12 Varios, Folder "Japón" Archivo La Paz. <sup>279</sup> "Proposed Plan for Use of ICA funds" July 29, 1961. RG 260, Box 257 Economic Development Files,

NA.

The rapid growth of the Japanese economy from the sixties to the nineties may have limited Okinawan and Japanese settlement in Santa Cruz but it had other dramatic effects on the region. With ample funding the Japanese government continued to provide material support to Japanese colonists at San Juan Yapacaní and – after 1968 when U.S. funding ending – to Okinawan colonists. Benefitting from infrastructure, technical support and health services absent in many other lowland colonies, San Juan and Okinawa colonies emerged as key agro-industrial producers over the following decades, home to two powerful cooperatives CAISY and CAICO that helped establish steady and strong prices from Japanese and Okinawan colonists.<sup>280</sup>

More importantly from the perspective of cruceños, the existence of colonies of its own nationals in Bolivia provided the incentive for the Japanese government to channel funding into a range of development projects. Just as Victor Andrade had hoped in the late fifties, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) supported infrastructure and agricultural initiative across the region. The Japanese government supported the construction of Santa Cruz's first international airport "Viru Viru" which opened in 1983. JICA also provided a donation to construct the "Japanese Hospital" in Santa Cruz in 1986 along with staff to run it for the first ten years of its existence. These forms of support also stand as a critical legacy of early Japanese and Okinawan migration to the region and have helped those colonists as they moved from "undesirable" migrants to model producers in Santa Cruz over the latter part of the twentieth century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> Suzuki, Embodying Belonging, 51.

## An Inauspicious Start: The Origins of Mennonite Migration to Santa Cruz

In the late 1950s, as cruceños expressed unease and outrage over a potential largescale Japanese migration, they were oblivious to another settlement of "foreign núcleos" in their department. Initially small, this group would eventually vastly exceed the number of Japanese and Okinawan settlers in Santa Cruz. It was one that did not simply threaten to create "islands of races" in Santa Cruz but was driven by that premise and repeatedly enshrined in law by the Bolivian government. When the CBF weighed the merits of Japanese participation in the Villamontes venture they drew comparison to Mennonite cotton production across the Chaco in Paraguay. However, Mennonites were not simply growing cotton across the border. By 1960 Paraguayan Mennonite settlers were already established just a few kilometers from Okinawa Colony in Santa Cruz. Just as Japanese and Okinawan immigration waned in the late sixties, Mexican Mennonites began arriving in Santa Cruz by the thousands. This section examines the origins of the Mennonite settlement in Santa Cruz. First, I examine the small immigration of Paraguayan Mennonites in the mid-fifties, before turning to the experience of Mexican Mennonites in Chihuahua from the forties through the sixties leading to large-scale emigration to Bolivia at the end of the latter decade. The subsequent history of Mexican Mennonite settlement in Bolivia is the subject of Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

In 1954, the Santa Cruz municipal government filed a settlement agreement between the Algodonera Boliviana and the "Twenty-fourth of September Cooperative" in the public registry.<sup>281</sup> Despite the regionalist-inspired name referencing Santa Cruz's historic independence struggles, the cooperative was composed of ten foreign families

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>281</sup> Expediente, "Primera colonia menonitas, denominada, 24 de Septiembre, Adjudicación de 1200ha," 1954. AHD.

from the Mennonite colony of Fernheim in Paraguay. Their leader, David Wiens, was a member of the six-man delegation that had toured the country in 1952. On February 10, 1954, in a document notarized by the cruceño notary Emilio Porras (who had also written contracts for Italian and Okinawan migrants), Wiens was given special powers to negotiate a share-cropping agreement.<sup>282</sup> Mennonite colonists would provide the Algodonera Boliviana with a portion of their production in exchange for the rent-free use of ten lots of sixty hectares each. A minimum of twenty hectares of each lot was to be devoted to cotton but colonists were also encouraged to raise dairy cattle, hogs, tobacco, and other products. The Algodonera also promised to provide financing of five million bolivianos. The aim (similar to that of the Uruma society), was to develop "a work of beneficial colonization for the country and to intensify the agricultural production of Santa Cruz."<sup>283</sup>

Both parties agreed that the contract was conditional on approval by the national government. The following year the Mennonite settlers received official sanction for their settlement initiative. President Paz Estenssoro signed a supreme decree affirming that the "Mennonite collectives which establish themselves in any zone of the republic to dedicate themselves to agricultural labors will benefit from broad guarantees on the part of the state."<sup>284</sup> This *Privilegium* (a set of privileges and special exemptions that traced to the Roman Empire) was essentially a facsimile of the one Canadian Mennonites had negotiated with the Paraguayan and Mexican governments in the 1920s. Its central

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>284</sup> Victor Paz Estenssoro, Decreto Supremo 4192, Oct. 6, 1955. Listado de Decretos. Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo/index.php/normas/lista/11. Accessed Nov. 2, 2014.

provisions included the right to affirm in court with a simple "yes" or "no" in place of swearing an oath; the freedom from military service; the right to administer orphans' and widows' funds along with fire insurance; and most importantly, the permission to found and conduct schools and churches in the Low-German dialect.<sup>285</sup> Supreme Decree 4192 did clarify that such schools would receive lessons in Civics, Geography and History from national instructors but given the near total absence of rural education in the lowlands, this provision was essentially meaningless.

Even as Mennonites sought freedom from outside interference, in naming their cooperative "September 24" they made a small claim to place their initiative within the regional milieu in which they were settling. They also appeared to have succeeded in framing their unusual migration within the nationalist terms of the March to the East. In the text of Supreme Decree 4192, the stated rationale for Mennonite privileges lay in that "one of the propositions of the National Revolution is to populate agricultural zones susceptible to development, for which it is necessary to encourage the immigration of family groups that will dedicate themselves to exploiting this agricultural wealth."<sup>286</sup> The Mennonites, he concluded, should be extended guarantees despite their "peculiar customs and habits."

The extraordinary provisions granted to Mennonite settlers in 1955 attracted no notice from *El Deber* whose writers were otherwise preoccupied denouncing Japanese migration and pining for Italians. While there is suggestion that the issue was debated within the government no public debate appears in the records of the Chamber of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>285</sup> Paz Estenssoro, Decreto Supremo 4192.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> Ibid.

Deputies or the Senate who devoted entire sessions weighing the merits of bringing another dangerous migrant, "Indian" Cebu cattle to mix with local herds in Santa Cruz. Perhaps the migration of ten families who arrived unnoticed across the Chaco frontier rather than through the airport or train station in La Paz was simply too small to register on the radar of local pundits or national legislators. Perhaps as ostensible "Germans," even those of "peculiar" practices, Mennonites were welcome but unremarkable in a region with a small but well-established German merchant community.<sup>287</sup> Unlike Japanese or Italian migration, Mennonites also made no use of diplomatic representation to negotiate their status, preferring to work with local counsel, and this strategy that left fewer public and archival traces.

While faring better than the Okinawan Uruma colony (whose first settlement was an unmitigated disaster) the "24 de Septiembre" initiative did not succeed. Lands on the "Hitapaqui" estate near Cotoca were not ideal for cotton and Mennonites found their contract with the Algodonera difficult to fulfill. They soon moved to a new settlement site named Tres Palmas. Despite the inauspicious start, the migration gave official legal sanction to further Mennonite settlement and opened a small channel of migration that would eventually draw from communities across the hemisphere. A group of 138 fellow Paraguayan Mennonites were the next to take advantage of the opportunity provided by Decree 4192. Led by Peter Fehr and Abram Doerksen, they arrived in Bolivia in April of 1957. Both men, aged forty-nine and forty-three years old at the time of migration, had been born in Canada. Their children were Paraguayan citizens. Had the group included any elderly members – whose admittance was allowed as a special condition of the 1955

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>287</sup> Mario Gabriel Hollweg, *Alemanes en el oriente boliviano, vol. 2* (Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Ed. Sirena, 1997).

agreement - there certainly would have been a few Russians among them. Just as Okinawans traced their migration histories through Hawaii, Peru and the outposts of Japan's East Asian empire, Mennonites could recite a generational or even personal trajectory that included stops in frontier zones across the Americas and further afield.

Once again, the 1957 migrants employed local actors to insert their migration within the agricultural vision of the Bolivian state. The collection of concessionary documents preserved in state archives for "Canadiense" colony presents an impressive articulation of state interests likely as attributable to the Mennonite's Bolivian lawyer, Felix Pérez Baldivieso, and local landowners as to the colonists themselves. Given legal authority to act on behalf of the colony by Fehr and Doerksen, Pérez traveled to La Paz where he met with the President, members of Congress and officials in the Ministry of Agriculture. His letter of introduction mixed a 19<sup>th</sup> century language of settlement – reminiscent of Argentine statesman Juan Alberdi's claim that "to govern is to populate with the technological discourse of mid-twentieth century development. It assured the government that Mennonites had come to Bolivia to "populate the land and especially to develop agriculture under scientific methods."<sup>288</sup> While frustration with their own rigid cooperative system in Paraguay was a principal reason for the emigration of these colonists, they played to the MNR's interest in developing modern cooperatives in the lowlands. They would form an "agricultural cooperative, with new methods while working with specialized machinery." The accompanying documents repeated these concepts to the point of mantra, building to a thundering, breathless crescendo worth

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>288</sup> Notary Public Luis Landivar Sala, "Poder especial que confieren Peter B. Fehr Abraam Doerksen en favor del Dr. J. Felix Pérez Baldivieso" Expediente de colonia Canadiense. Instituto de Colonización, 628, 2. Archivo Nacional de Bolivia (ANB).

quoting at length. Pérez and the seller of the land, Ricardo Hurtado Medina, promised that Mennonites would improve "the methods of production with imported seeds from Canada and other places according to the climatological conditions and the quality of the terrain, with the aim of increasing in a grand manner agricultural production." Like the Uruma society, they also promised to "constitute a rural population...and establish training schools for the instruction of specialized agriculture and ranching and other skills." In short, colonists would "improve in every order the form of production and the quality of products, to advance and contribute in this most efficient and effective manner, to the economy of the country."<sup>289</sup>

The *Canadiense* settlement, as it would become known, significantly expanded on the scope of the earlier Mennonite migration. Fehr and Doerksen had negotiated with a group of land owners led by Ricardo Hurtado Medina for the purchase of a parcel of four thousand hectares. Hurtado joined Pérez in vouching for the credentials of the Mennonite farmers. He testified that the property already contained several buildings, coffee processing equipment, cattle and fruit trees. "These scientific gentlemen farmers (*señores agricultores cientificos*)," he continued, would enter the lowlands not as humble farmers but as "technicians in agriculture" working with "modern methods," substantial capital, and machinery. They would bring in imported seeds and improved livestock, eventually reaching an extension of 10,000 hectares of cultivated land and over two hundred members.<sup>290</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>289</sup> Letter from Felix Pérez, Expediente de colonia Canadiense 063643-42, Oct. 10, 1957. IC 628, 2. ANB.
 <sup>290</sup> Ricardo Hurtado and Others, Registration of Sale in "Expediente Canadiense" Dec 5, 1957. IC, 628, 2, ANB.

The reality of settlement rarely matched with the confident projections of the Algodonera Boliviana, Perez or the Uruma society nor the expectations of the Okinawan and Mennonite colonists that followed. Outsiders often incorrectly assumed that the lush vegetation and sufficient rainfall in the region was indicative of a uniform fertility. Regier and the other Mennonites that arrived in 1954 were soon forced to abandon their initial settlement because it was not suitable for farming. When North American Mennonite J. W. Fretz visited the Bolivian Mennonite colonies in 1960, he was alarmed, to find the "señores agricultores scientificos" that Pérez had successfully promoted barely scraping by, their children "so undernourished as to show outward signs of malnutrition."<sup>291</sup> Peter Fehr and David Neufeldt, listed by Pérez as eight and eighteen years of age at the time of arrival, recall the extreme poverty that drove their departure from Paraguay and characterized their early years in Bolivia.<sup>292</sup>

Fretz published the story of the struggling Bolivian Mennonite colonies in the monthly North American periodical *Mennonite Life*. While the English-language magazine had a limited readership among Low-German speaking Mennonites, news of the possibilities of settlement in Bolivia spread through other publications like the Manitoba-based *Mennonitsiche Post* as well as through personal correspondence.<sup>293</sup> Fretz's article reads as a dismal prognosis for the future of Mennonite settlement in Bolivia, but the tone is fundamentally misleading. Mennonites continued to flock to the region over the following years often explicitly seeking the sort of challenging conditions that Fretz identified. The idea, as Regier had claimed in his 1952 report in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>291</sup> J.W. Fretz "A Visit to the Mennonites in Bolivia" Mennonite Life 15:1 (Jan1960), 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>292</sup> Peter Fehr in conversation with author, Canadiense Colony, June, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>293</sup> For a discussion of letter-writing within the Low-German Mennonite diaspora and in the *Mennonitische Post* of Steinbach Manitoba, see Loewen, *Village Among Nations*.

Paraguayan Mennonite newspaper *Mennoblatt*, that "sinfully little had hitherto been done," on the plains of Santa Cruz was paradoxically appealing to many colony Mennonites from Paraguay and further afield. A rugged region of rough roads and scarce (if nascent) agricultural production, was an alluring concept for Mennonites who sought a degree of isolation at the margins of the secular nation-state.

Frontier development and Mennonite migration were entangled in a historically recurring paradox. The inherent contradiction was that the ability to obtain special exemptions and privileges from the state was dependent upon the selection of frontier zones at the margins of economic and political control Mennonites promised to develop. Their very success on the frontier quickly undermined the isolation that Mennonites sought and with it the basis for that initial colonist-state bargain. This had also been the case on the Ukrainian Steppe and the Canadian prairies and those Mennonites looking to Bolivia from Paraguay and Mexico saw similar changes underway on the Latin American frontiers they had settled in the 1920s.

In 1963, a group of twenty Mennonite families from Canada joined another group of Paraguayan Mennonites to found a third colony in Santa Cruz. Before settling, the group decided to confirm that the 1955 privileges remained in effect. In 1962, they succeeded in obtaining another decree from Paz Estenssoro who was now serving a second term as President. The decree confirmed that all the rights of the *Privilegium* would apply to any future Mennonite colonists. The only addition to the 1955 document was a provision freeing Mennonites from import duties and visa fees.<sup>294</sup> For

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>294</sup> Victor Paz Estenssoro, Decreto Supremo 06030, March 16, 1962. Listado de Decretos. Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo/index.php/normas/lista/11. Accessed Nov. 2, 2014.

impoverished Paraguayan Mennonites who entered the country with little capital in the fifties such an exemption was not particularly significant. However, over the following decades, thousands of Mennonites left Mennonite colonies from Canada to Belize and especially from Mexico bringing millions of dollars of duty-free machinery with them as they established large colonies to the south of the city of Santa Cruz.

## Mennonite Braceros: Drought and Diaspora in the High Desert of Northern Mexico

The largest immigration of Mennonites to Bolivia originated in the northern state of Chihuahua where Canadian Mennonites had established large colonies in the 1920s. When J.W. Fretz visited Mexican Mennonites two decades later, at the tail end of WWII, the Chihuahua colonies were an economic powerhouse in the region producing large amounts of dairy, oats, beans and corn. Yet a number of factors over the following two decades produced a large scale emigration of Mennonites from northern Mexico initially as seasonal laborers to Canada and then as permanent settlers to Belize in the 1950s and eventually to Bolivia. As with the history of Okinawan emigrants, this next section leaves Bolivia to explore the Mexican regional context and early transnational migrations that resulted in the first large-scale migration of Mexican Mennonites to Bolivia in 1967 and 1968. In the years before they left Northern Mexico, Mennonites also developed a range of strategies to weather environmental and economic crises. They would employ this impressive repertoire – which included transnational migration and negotiation with state authorities – once again in Bolivia in the face of similar challenges. Ostensibly different from the displaced Okinawans discussed above, Mexican Mennonites experienced similar aspects of migratory labor, landlessness and

undocumented travel. Like Okinawans, Mennonites faced population pressure, and a lack of arable farmland exacerbated not by military acquisitions but by environmental factors and the agrarian politics of revolutionary Mexico.

As with Bolivia, Mexico received a miniscule portion of the millions of migrants that crossed the Atlantic from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the great Depression. Historian Jürgen Buchenau suggests that immigration to Mexico still merits study given the large impact of the small enclaves that were established in the country.<sup>295</sup> Alan Knight and Gerardo Renique have also argued that understanding attitudes to immigration - particularly in relation to Chinese Mexicans in Northern Mexico- can help us understand the nature of the revolutionary state and the construction of a *mestizo* identity over the subsequent decades.<sup>296</sup> This is particularly relevant for the large scale immigration of Mennonites to Northern Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. It took place even as Chinese Mexicans were subject to increasing xenophobia and eventually expelled from the country. This interplay between xenofilia and xenophobia provides a more complete picture of Mexico's northern frontier and is something absent from the burgeoning scholarship on Chinese Mexicans.

As they would in revolutionary Bolivia, Mennonites managed the nationalism of the Mexican Revolution through an effective performance of agrarian citizenship in Chihuahua. In doing so they were able to mitigate the obvious paradox that expropriated hacienda land in Mexico's most violent revolutionary state was being sold off to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>295</sup> Buchenau, "Small Numbers, Great Impact."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>296</sup> Jason Chang, "Racial Alterity in the Mestizo Nation." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 331-359. Alan Knight, "Racism Revolution and Indigenismo, Mexico" in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*. Ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990). Gerardo Renique, "Race, region, and nation : Sonora's anti-Chinese racism and Mexico's postrevolutionary nationalism, 1920s-1930s" Edited by Appelbaum et al. *Race and Nation*.

conspicuous foreigners.<sup>297</sup> While Mennonites encountered local resistance to their settlement they made effective use of relationships with national leadership to mitigate hostility on the ground.<sup>298</sup> As "Ruso-Canadians," they also served, in the minds of politicians, as an effective bulwark against excessive U.S. encroachment along the Northern Frontier.

Good agricultural citizenship was predicated on the transformation of landscape. Mennonites settled in the high desert valleys of Chihuahua around the small settlement of San Antonio de los Arenales - whose very name referenced the inauspicious conditions for intensive farming. They faced severe adjustments in the forms of farming they had grown accustomed to on the Canadian prairies. They abandoned wheat for oats, corn and beans and wooden structures for adobe brick.<sup>299</sup> In under a decade, the Mennonite colonies of Chihuahua were being hailed as a veritable "agricultural emporium" in the national press. "Wastelands turned into orchards: Brilliant success of the Mennonites colonists established in Chihuahua," began one article that cited local opinion that "they will manage to convert a vast region of Chihuahua into a true granary."<sup>300</sup> When a group of Canadian Mennonites experienced difficulty entering the country later in 1931, the chamber of commerce of Ciudad Juárez launched a petition that financial restrictions be removed. "We are dealing will expert technicians in agricultural work," they began,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>297</sup> Martina E Will, "The Old Colony Mennonite Colonization of Chihuahua and the Obregón Administration's Vision for the Nation," (MA Thesis, University of California, San Diego, 1993).
<sup>298</sup> Moisés González Navarro, *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México, siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico City: SEGOB, Instituto Nacional de Migración, Centro de Estudios Migratorios, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>299</sup> Loewen, Village Among Nations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>300</sup> "Tierras ingratas que se tornan en vergeles: Brillante éxito de los colonos mennonitas establecidos en Chihuahua." *El Nacional* (Mexico City), May 9, 1931. Taken from Subject Press Clippings, "Menonitas," Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (BMLT).

noting that while the fields of Chihuahua had not been improved since the time of the conquest, the lands of the Mennonites "have been converted into true gardens."<sup>301</sup>

Even those who recognized that the premise of Mennonite migration was cultural isolation and "centuries could pass and the Mennonites would maintain themselves in their colonies," were liable to rationalize the exchange by citing the economic benefit of the colonies and their value as an "example of collective organization and frugality," for surrounding farmers.<sup>302</sup> In the 1940s *El Nacional* introduced an article about new Mennonites settlements in Coahuila by referencing their seventeen years of production in Chihuahua. This agricultural resume included 106 villages with "milk products such as butter and cheese of excellent quality," and two million pesos that circulated in the regional economy.<sup>303</sup>

In 1944, J.W. Fretz also visited Mexican Mennonite colonists on behalf of the philanthropic organization the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). His visit was provoked by the arrival of some poor Mexican Mennonites to Canada. In investigating the causes of their impoverishment Fretz discovered a situation that contrasted with the previous accolades in the Mexican press. The Mennonite colonies in Chihuahua, characterized by a high birth rate and an insistence that the individual family farmer was the only acceptable cultural option for Mennonite youth, faced a serious problem of landlessness. Mennonites had experienced similar issues in Canada and in Russia as former frontiers became crowded with new settlements. In Mexico, with a large rural population pushing for land, the issue was particularly pronounced. At present, noted

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>301</sup> "Extranjeros que deben venir al país libremente" *La Prensa* (San Antonio, Texas), Nov. 24, 1931. BMLT.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>302</sup> "Nos convienen Mennonitas y no 'Douhobors'" *El Nacional*. March 12, 1933. BMLT.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>303</sup> "Vanse los Mennonitas al estado. de Coahuila," *El Nacional*, March 6, 1944. BMLT.

Fretz, Mennonite colonists farmed their own lands and also "rented" the land on surrounding *ejidos*, a form of communal land-holding created by the agrarian reform.<sup>304</sup>

Similar to Tigner's description of Okinawa, these historical problems of overcrowding and landlessness in the Mennonite colonies of Mexico were exacerbated, by an external force. In the former case it was a geo-political one - post-war repatriation and U.S. occupation - with its attendant land expropriations - that strained the traditional safety valves of Okinawan society. In the latter it was an environmental one - an extreme drought unprecedented in the modern history of Northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. Both situations developed in 1945-46 and lasted through the 1960s. While they extended for roughly two decades, the crises on Okinawa and in Chihuahua became particularly acute in the early and mid-1950s. In Mexico, as in Okinawa, increasing local tensions and transnational emigration resulted. The USCAR archives provide a unique window on that process for Okinawa. In Mexico, the effects of drought conditions crept into the intermittent news coverage of the Mennonite colonies, it influenced their periodic negotiations with the Mexican state and also emerged in the reports of migration authorities and border officials. It led to the creation of new migrant routes in which Mennonites, like their Mexican neighbors in Chihuahua and their future neighbors in Bolivia, first became braceros, crossing borders to engage in seasonal labor, and then permanent migrants.

Without succumbing to the temptation to ascribe excessive causality to disaster, Latin American environmental historians have employed hurricanes, earthquakes and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>304</sup> J. Winfield Fretz, *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico; an Introduction*. (Akron, Pa: Mennonite Central Committee, 1945).

landslides as a vantage point to explore social, cultural and political shifts.<sup>305</sup> An environmentally-informed history of disaster is also useful because disaster can lay bear the unspoken relationships between humans and the natural world. Such moments can be generative but disaster also brings latent tensions between different actors to the forefront thus revealing rather than producing social factures. The long drought of the post-war era is particularly useful in this regard. The period of the fifties and early sixties has long been described in cultural and economic terms as "golden age" in Mexican history, one marked by prosperity and modernizaiton.<sup>306</sup> However, northern states faced series environmental challenges during this period. The Mennonites were no exception. As the drought worsened across Northern Mexico in the 1950s, cracks appeared in the agricultural emporium that Mennonites had built in Chihuahua.

In May of 1953, the leaders of the Mennonite colony of Los Jagueyes in Chihuahua came to Mexico City to meet the head of the Department of Migration. They claimed that they lacked funds to pay for the processing of their migratory documents. Without stating the reason, they asked for lenience in that regard.<sup>307</sup> In August of 1954, Daniel Salas López, a lawyer who would frequently represented Mennonites, wrote to the Department of Population. He suggested lowering or waiving fees associated with processing migration documents. Though insisting that he was not refusing in the name of his clients, he hoped the Department would take into account, that this was not "an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>305</sup> This current historiographic "flood" extends from colonial Latin America, Charles F Walker, *Shaky Colonialism: The 1746 Earthquake-Tsunami in Lima, Peru, and Its Long Aftermath* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), to the twentieth century Mark Alan Healey, *The Ruins of the New Argentina: Peronism and the Remaking of San Juan after the 1944 Earthquake* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>306</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>307</sup> Exp. 4-352-1951-133, Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración (AHINM).

isolated colonist," but "hundreds who in their grand majority have paid [processing fees] punctually." He asked on behalf of a colony "that for lack of rains has lived with positive sacrifice to the degree that it has taken out bank loans to meet basic necessities."<sup>308</sup>

Such negotiations escaped the view of most Mexicans who had little awareness of the struggles faced by Mennonite colonists. In 1957, Mennonites entered the national spotlight for a different reason, their refusal to participate in Mexico's new social security program. At the outset this issue appeared unrelated to the drought but its effects emerged here as well. In 1955, colonists had learned of the passage of a new law that made participation in Mexican Social Security obligatory. Feeling that this violated the provisions of their 1921 agreement with Obregón allowing for colony-based fire, orphan and widow's insurance, some Mexican Mennonites protested to the government while others began to investigate settlement opportunities in newly independent Belize (then known as British Honduras). They also made use of sympathetic locals to petition the government on their behalf or did so themselves.

In 1957, Gabino Aguilar, a teacher from Chavarría station on the Chihuahua-Pacific railway wrote to Ruiz Cortines. He requested that Mennonites be exempted from Social Security noting that they maintained distinct institutions "that attend to their necessities."<sup>309</sup> He emphasized the "unequaled importance" of the economic production of Mennonite farmers "with whom many in this state have lived alongside." Unlike those campesinos, "they have never asked for help... in these enormous droughts," continued Gabino incorrectly, "and none of them have asked to go as *braceros* [to the U.S.] and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>308</sup> Letter from Daniel Salas Lopez, Aug.2 1954. Exp. 4-352-1951-137, AHINM.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>309</sup> Letter from Gabino Aguilar April 9, 1957, Ruiz Cortines, Presidential Papers, "Menonitas," Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

abandon their lands."<sup>310</sup> Yet he assured the president that "the Mennonite colonies have also suffered this collapse," brought on by the drought. He would repeat this message in 1962, when he petitioned President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz complaining that a local campesino leader had been inciting unrest in the region and demanding the expropriation of Mennonite lands. He pointed out that the city of Cuauhtémoc was booming thanks to colonists and added that Mennonites were "an example of morality in their style of living and working" who unlike campesinos, "never go work as braceros)."<sup>311</sup>

Gabino concluded his 1957 petition by warning the government that Mennonites might abandon Mexico altogether if pressed to register and pay Social Security taxes. This possibility was already actively debated in the national press in 1957. The rumors that Mennonites were heading to Belize sparked a predictable series of polemics, both favorable and unfavorable, which strayed far from the particulars of Social Security. Like Gabino, the authors inevitably contrasted Mennonite life with that of other Mexicans. Elvira Vargas wrote in the national newspaper *Excélsior* that Mennonite "extraterritoriality" could not be tolerated in Mexico.<sup>312</sup> She contrasted the idea that "a young Mexican – poor of course – cannot escape from conscription but yes, young Mennonites can," and juxtaposed the "comforts" of modern Mennonite houses with the shacks of campesinos. Writing from Durango where he was familiar with colonists, a more sympathetic Manuel Schmill found it "painful but at the same time illustrative to observe….the marked contrast existing along the dividing line between a Mennonite farm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>311</sup> Letter from Gabino Aguilar, April 13, 1963, Diaz Ordaz, Presidential Files, "Menonitas." AGN.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>312</sup> Elvira Vargas, "Multicosas: se van los Menonitas." *Excélsior*, April 12, 1957. BMLT.

and an *ejidal* parcel."<sup>313</sup> On the Mennonite side, Schmill noted signs of good management from fencing to crop rotation. On the other he saw "a depressing spectacle" of depleted soil and pest infestation. He echoed Gabino, noting that Mennonite colonists remained on the land while those "poor and unfortunate" campesinos, stood "ready to abandon it at whatever moment to go and look for fortune abroad."<sup>314</sup>

Both Schmill and Gabino framed traditional horse-and-buggy Mennonites as rooted to the land in opposition to their Mexican neighbors who abandoned their country. While the juxtaposition was useful to those that wished to defend Mennonites or criticize the Bracero Program, it was also incorrect. Through the worsening drought of the 1950s Mennonites joined their campesino neighbors in migrating north to look for work. Daniel Salas López, a lawyer that frequently represented Mennonite colonists, noted as much in a 1955 letter to the president. Colony villages were a strange sight, explained Salas in which middle-aged members of the community worked long established farms with the help of only their elder daughters and youngest children. Young Mennonite men were absent. "Though all born in this country [they] have ceased contributing because they have had to emigrate."<sup>315</sup>

When scholars write about *braceros* they are typically referring to the millions of Mexicans that took part in the U.S.-Mexico Bracero Program (1942-1964) as agricultural laborers. Yet facing drought and landlessness in the middle decades of the twentieth century Mexican Mennonites also became "braceros." As the Canadian government eased border restrictions in the post-war period many Mexican Mennonites - who were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>313</sup> Manuel Schmill, "Los Menonitas." Novedades May 16, 1957. BMLT.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>314</sup> Manuel Schmill, "Los Menonitas."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>315</sup> Letter from Daniel Salas Lopez, July 7, 1955. Ruiz Cortines Presidential Papers, "Menonitas," AGN.

still technically Canadian citizens but lacked documentation - were able to temporarily or permanently return home. Arriving in southern Manitoba as early as 1947 where the sugar beet industry was booming, Mexican Mennonites were viewed as easily manageable labor that could undercut regional wages. Growers, many of whom were also Mennonites themselves, utilized this source of labor. New opportunities also emerged in a rapidly consolidating farming economy in southern Ontario. In particular, the vegetable industry and the tomato fields around the Heinz ketchup plant in Leamington attracted many Mexican Mennonites.<sup>316</sup>

Mexican Mennonites often traveled to Canada year after year throughout the midcentury drought. By the 1960s their unregulated working conditions attracted the attention of the Canadian Department of Manpower and Labor. A special task force discovered a well-established recruitment network. Migrant laborers were enlisted in the Mexican colonies, packed into caravans and shipped the two thousands kilometers from Chihuahua without rest. Authorities stopped one camper packed with twenty Mennonites -some suffering from dysentery.<sup>317</sup> Despite such hardship, the drought conditions in Chihuahua and Durango continued to push desperate colonists north. Like other Mexicans, Mennonites returned home from their annual pilgrimages where they invested their earnings in new land or struggling farms.

Given their infrequent and superficial coverage focused on the relationship between Mennonite colonization and national identity it is unsurprising that Mexican newspapers missed the highly mobile nature of Mennonite life in the drought years. To

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>316</sup> Ronald L Mize and Alicia C. S Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>317</sup> Tanya Basok, *Tortillas and Tomatoes Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada* (Ithaca: MQUP, 2002), 25.

capture this transnational dimension I turn to a different set of sources. Mexico's migration authorities faced continual challenges in documenting the border-crossing colonists. Mennonites emerge from the morass of the immigration archives through their distinctive, and frequently misspelled, surnames. In June of 1954 Heinrich Zacharias, a Mennonite from a Durango colony, applied for a visa. He informed Mexican authorities that his ultimate goal was to obtain his passport in order to "move to Canada in virtue of the fact that currently this place is experiencing a frightening economic crisis caused by the drought that has ruined this region."<sup>318</sup> Some migrants provided few motives for their movements. Records simply show that Bernard Teichrob left Ciudad Juarez for 8 months in 1954 over the harvest season. He remained in Mexico for a decade before once again traveling outside the country between July and December of 1964.<sup>319</sup>

In contrast to Teichrob's modest resume, some Mexican Mennonites followed dizzying itineraries in the fifties and sixties. By the end of the latter decade Frank Petkau had filled every available page in his original travel document. Like the frustrated cruceño train traveler from chapter one, Petkau's movements are worth repeating at length as they illustrate the impressive transnationalism of Mexican Mennonites in that era. They also suggest that migration was far from a single movement from one location to another (or even a single return) for many Mennonites who might have begun moving in the drought years but continued to do so long after. Born in Manitoba in 1943, Petkau grew up in Northern Mexico but as a teenager returned to Canada for several months at a time in 1957, 1958 and 1959 where he likely worked alongside his parents and siblings in the fields. In 1962 he spent several weeks in Mennonite colonies in Belize before

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>318</sup> Ex. 4-355-1-1930-132922, AHINM. <sup>319</sup> Ex. 4-355-1-1922-87099, AHINM.

returning to Manitoba in 1963 for four months. He also made numerous forays to El Paso, Kansas, Oklahoma and Arkansas in the mid and late 1960s (likely joining other enterprising Mennonites who purchased old farm equipment and resold it in Mexico.) He returned to Canada once again in 1968 for another three months and again in 1971 for just less than a year where he "tried to remain without favorable result," before coming back to Mexico.<sup>320</sup>

The frequent migrations of Mexican Mennonites also forced Mexican border officials to act as ethnic insiders. Some officials demonstrated an impressive and intimate familiarity with the colonies. In 1962, the border official Jorge Domínguez filed a report noting his exhaustive intervention on behalf of a Mennonite woman named Aganetta Klassen.<sup>321</sup> Accompanied by six young children, Klassen had been stopped by U.S officials while attempting to cross into El Paso and sent back to his office in Ciudad Juárez. Interviewed by Domínguez, she claimed she was heading to Ontario to join her husband but had insufficient funds to complete her trip. Domínguez not only took the entire family back to Ciudad Cuauhtémoc but, once there, he headed to a nearby Mennonite village to see Jacob Peters, a man he knew to be colony leader (*vorsteher*), hoping to convince him to intervene on Klassen's behalf. Peters was not present and Domínguez spent an hour speaking with his neighbors. Despite, "pleading with them to help their unfortunate compatriot," the colonists refused.<sup>322</sup> Undeterred, Domínguez returned to Cuauhtémoc and located David Redecop [sic] "a prominent resident of Mennonite origin." With Redekop's help he was able to locate one of Klassen's brothers

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>320</sup> Ex. 4-352-1951-138, AHINM.
 <sup>321</sup> Ex. 4-350-7-1962-3, AHINM.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>322</sup> Ibid.

in another nearby village. After further negotiation, it was decided that Klassen would leave the youngest children in his care, traveling with the others to Canada, and would send her husband back to collect them. This still left the issue of Klassen's passage to which it was suggested she appeal to the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City. Ultimately, concluded Domínguez in his exhaustive report, the affair was resolved by some generous "Mennonite elements" in Ciudad Cuauhtémoc who purchased passages to Toronto and gave Klassen forty dollars for expenses.<sup>323</sup>

Klassen was one of many Mennonites whose transnational forays caused confusion for officials in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. In 1965 a Manitoba collection agency contacted Mexican authorities with a request to help locate one Isaac Schmidt.<sup>324</sup> Mexican authorities wrote back claiming they were unsure of his present whereabouts. Reviewing his case file they discovered that he had issues on their side of the border as well. On the ninth of April he had tried to exit Mexico with his wife and seven children, ranging in age from twelve to one. The Schmidts were found to have expired visas as they had incorrectly entered Mexico as tourists. After paying the standard fine, they left Mexico the same day presumably headed back to Canada to work the coming harvest. These Mexican officials who, like Domínguez, demonstrated an impressive familiarity with the colonies and suggested to the creditors that they contact Juan Loewen who lived in a nearby village and often hired Schmidt to work his farm.

For Mennonites, migration to Canada developed as one effective response to the drought. However, over the course of the drought years, dramatic changes also took

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>324</sup> Ex. 4-010-1962-4099 AHINM.

place within the Mexican colonies, some a direct consequence of that strategy. While occasionally petitioning for tax relief, colony leaders were understandably reticent about the internal difficulties they faced over the drought years given that their relationship with the Mexican state was premised on the image of a harmonious and productive agricultural enclave. In 1963, a conflict between Mennonite colonists and recently-arrived evangelical Mennonites was suddenly brought to the Mexican state's attention. To gain a sense of the changes that produced this rupture, we need to turn to accounts from one of the third parties Mennonites employed in their dealings with state institutions.

Since the 1930s, the Mexican lawyer Daniel Salas López had worked extensively with Mennonite colonists. He was frequently called into service when Mennonites encountered problems with Mexican authorities and he helped new migrants obtain necessary paperwork a process that put him in constant contact with immigration officials. In addition to his officially contracted work with the colonies, Salas was a self-proclaimed founder and pioneer of Mennonite migration who at times claimed credit for the entire initiative. Within the desperate context of drought-ridden northern Mexico he actively petitioned the government, often without colony leaders' knowledge. In 1955, he took the liberty of writing President Ruiz Cortines asking for new lands for the struggling colonists, justified he felt, because their "attitude has been a school [example] for the inhabitants of the regions where they are located."<sup>325</sup> The previous year he also wrote to Ruiz Cortines. "My friends have not put me in charge of asking for anything," he claimed. Nevertheless, he decided to act on their behalf. Adopting a tone of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>325</sup> Letter from Daniel Salas López, July 7, 1955. Ruiz Cortines, Presidential Papers, "Menonitas," AGN.

exaggerated patriotism he insisted it was "my obligation, as a good Mexican."<sup>326</sup> He reminded Ruiz that Mennonites had always paid their taxes on time but they had "experienced a terrible drought over the last three years." Further, he proposed that the government bring geologists to locate aquifers, drill wells and establish dams in the region. While the colonies had typically depended on rainfall, "all the Mennonites are inclined now towards irrigation." Salas requested a program to create hardy and more affordable pasture that would support the colonies dairy production which "during this period has been the salvation of the colonies." The bleak portrait of the drought extended to egg production, where in better years the colonies, "would send entire trailers to market."

For Salas it was clear that by the mid-fifties the drought had already shaken the emporium of the Mennonites and altered colony attitudes towards agricultural technology. The drought had also forced colonists to depend upon small-scale milk and cheese production, rather than cash crops, a survival strategy Mennonites would bring with them to Bolivia. A decade later a state forester named Andres Ortega Estrada wrote a letter to the newspaper *El Universal* claiming that the drought had also transformed the environment of the northern states which "will not soon be rehabilitated."<sup>327</sup> He knew that Mennonites in Chihuahua were leaving the country because "their lands no longer give them sustenance." This was not simply due to the lack of rain, but also to the "irrational exploitations" of illegal logging which had deforested the hillsides surrounding their farming valleys. They faced, "an invasion of sand and silt taken brought down from the mountains that are now naked." For those that remained in

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>326</sup> Letter from Daniel Salas López, May 12, 1954. Ruiz Cortines, Presidential Papers, "Menonitas," AGN.
 <sup>327</sup> Andres Ortega Estrada, "Letter to the Editor." *Novedades* July 19, 1965. BMLT.

Chihuahua, a transition to agriculture based on pumping water from deep underground aquifers was unavoidable.

Along with environmental change, landlessness continued to plague Mennonite colonies. Returning from Canada with their harvest wages many found it hard to find land in overcrowded colonies. Increasingly Mennonites were forced to rent and buy farms beyond the limits of the colony. Managing discontinuous farms meant the need for greater mobility for Mennonites yet since the early years of their settlement in Mexico colony leadership had banned the use of automobiles and even of rubber tires on tractors ministers feared would serve as a secondary means of transport to and from town. Colonists traveled by horse-and-buggy and used steel-wheeled tractors on their farms.

Despite these sanctions some Mennonites embraced the modern transport they encountered while working up north and the question of "rubber" – as opposed to the steel wheeled tractors used by colony Mennonites - became a particularly contentious issue in this era. Once again, Mexican migration archives betray the demands for technological change that often came paired with Mennonite labor migration. Abraham Klassen had been born in Chihuahua in 1943 but spent much of his early twenties traveling to work on farms in near Aymler, Ontario.<sup>328</sup> When he returned home in 1967, border officials registered the newly purchased automobile he brought with him.

In addition to rubber tires, the drought years also opened Mennonite colonists up to the influence of a new group of U.S. Mennonites who established themselves in Northern Mexico as a "Mennonite Service Committee" in the mid-fifties. In contrast to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>328</sup> Ex. 4-355-1-1925-132920, AHINM.

colony Mennonites these young volunteers arrived with the purpose of conducting evangelical and missionary work, rather than farming colonies in the region. In his 1954 petition to Ruiz Cortines, Salas was enthusiastic about this small, youthful group "who in their education and principles differ much from those of Canada."<sup>329</sup> They had brought capital into the region and founded schools and health centers for Mexicans and Mennonites alike. In the colony of Durango, where after "five years without good harvests, there are many poor people," the American Mennonites had given money to struggling colonists to purchase fodder for their dairy cattle. Salas would become a strong advocate for this evangelical element noting elsewhere that the U.S. Mennonites "are far better than the first ones for being less recalcitrant, more knowledgeable and as their creed orders them [and they follow this to the letter] to contribute to the social well being."<sup>330</sup> Salas had celebrated the original Mennonite colonists as a positive example for their Mexican neighbors. He now envisioned the new evangelical Mennonites in a similar way. They would serve as a "trial or test" as they settled among the "villages" of traditional Canadian Mennonites. Other Mexicans would also acknowledge the agricultural contributions of Mennonite colonists, "so progressive in some aspects and retrograde in others," while hoping it might be possible to "adjust them to a general social change without hurting the interests of the inhabitants."<sup>331</sup>

Despite that hope, conflict soon emerged between evangelicals and the colony leadership. While poor Mennonites accepted the help of American Mennonites at the height of the drought in the 1950s, colony leaders became increasingly hostile to the

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>329</sup> Letter from Daniel Salas Lopez, May 12, 1954. Ruiz Cortines, Presidential Papers, "Menonitas," AGN.
 <sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>331</sup> Benjamin Medina "Los Menonitas constituyen un "estado", dentro de México." *El Heraldo de Mexico*, Aug. 23, 1967. BMLT.

influence of this modern Mennonite group in the 1960s. Whereas landlessness and rubber tires were frequently mentioned by Bolivian Mennonites as the incentive for their parents' migrations to Santa Cruz, the evangelical conflict in the colony also played a key role in setting the stage for emigration. In contesting those evangelical North American religious trends, colony leadership demonstrated once again their impressive ability to negotiate with the state to achieve their ends.<sup>332</sup> Ironically, they did so through an insistence on their "national" status in contrast to the foreignness of evangelical Mennonites and made use of their intimate familiarity with the Mexican immigration system to petition the officials, who like Dominguez, they had become acquainted with in their frequent travels to Canada. In 1963, aware that many evangelicals were entering the country on tourist visas but actively proselytizing among Mennonite colonists, colony leaders managed to convince the Mexican migration authorities to launch an investigation that resulted in several members of the evangelical-run Mennonite Service Committee being expelled from the country.

Colony leaders also challenged the purported beneficial social work of the Committee and contrasted its disruptive proselytizing with their productive agricultural labor. Colony leader Isaac Harms suggested that Committee members were "attempting to form a division and disrupt the order" of the colonies which simply wanted to "continue working the fields," without the intervention of people "foreign from ourselves."<sup>333</sup> Daniel Loewen noted that the North Americans were "invading the colonies…sowing division and discontent among all the colonist that will come to

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>332</sup> See Fred Kniss *Disquiet in the Land: Cultural Conflict in American Mennonite Communities* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997) for the growth of evangelical movements.
 <sup>333</sup> Ex. 4-351-0-1963-36254, AHINM.

prejudice the agricultural work that they do." Colony leader Aaron Redekop Dyck claimed a more insidious intent on the part of the committee. He argued that their true goal was to pull tithing members from the churches. Monetary contributions that normally went to colony maintenance would instead be sent to the coffers of American missionary organizations. Colony leaders pointed out that those contributions were routinely offered to support Mexican disaster relief, citing the recent aid they had given during a flood in the city of Tampico.<sup>334</sup> Noting the growth of missionary schools in the area, colonists who had long resisted government schools argued, without a trace of irony, that "it is the government that should tell us what to do and not a group of foreigners."<sup>335</sup>

In another letter, colony leaders reminded the government that colonists numbered 20,000 and "are respectful of the authorities, are only dedicated to work and the production of basic food articles," in contrast with evangelicals who "do not produce anything."<sup>336</sup> As proof of the missionaries' sinister intent they sent authorities a translated letter (though the original was never produced) allegedly written by Andrew Schelley [sic Shelley] head of the General Conference Board of Missions in Newton Kansas. In the letter Shelley admitted to membership that the Mission faced a severe budget shortfall and encouraged all missionaries to strenuously solicit as many donations as possible from overseas mission areas. Colony leaders also included a clipping from the local newspaper *La Voz de Cuauhtémoc* criticizing the work of the Committee in the region over the previous decade. The authors appealed for government control over the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>334</sup> Ibid. Mennonite colonists had sent victims "forty five tons of beans which represents a considerable cost."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>336</sup> Ibid.

"divisionist labor" that the Committee was undertaking in the city as well as in the surrounding Mennonite colonies and claimed little had actually been realized in regards to their stated purpose of providing health and educational services.<sup>337</sup>

Colony leaders were ultimately successful in having migration officials launch an investigation into the activities of evangelicals in Chihuahua in late 1963 and early 1964.<sup>338</sup> Several were deported or fined for operating outside the scope of their entry visas. As with Okinawan land resistance such victories were brief. Those same committee members soon re-entered the country with proper documentation and continued to work in the colonies throughout the decade. However the conflict is compelling for several reasons. First, Mennonites might have left Bolivia in the late 1960s hoping to escape evangelical influence but would continue to experience unwanted visits from missionaries in Bolivia over the following decades. Second, the issue brought the idea of agricultural citizenship and national belonging to the forefront. Their petitions continually played with the contrast between missionaries that "sowed discord" and Mennonites that sowed crops. Colony leaders asserted their rights as productive farmers and Mexicans in the face of non-producing foreigners. They would refashion this ethnic construction of agrarian citizenship in the Bolivian context of Santa Cruz over the following decades.

## Conclusion

In the fifties and sixties, the routes of Okinawans and Mennonites converged on the fertile plains of Santa Cruz. While those two groups appeared to be distinct from one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>338</sup> Ex. 4-351-0-1964-36444 and Ex. 4-351-0-1964-42834 AHINM.

another, their transnational trajectories often overlapped in form - if not in space. Throughout the 1950s a number of young Mennonite families were heading north to work harvesting sugar beets, tomatoes and cucumbers on farms across Canada. Like Andeans who referenced the harsh environmental conditions for agriculture on the altiplano and the lack of cultivable land, Mennonite braceros struggled with drought and landlessness in their home communities. Many who traveled north in the fifties would join the migration south to Bolivia in the sixties. In those same years Okinawans faced population pressure and poverty on their home islands. Some also opted for emigration when the opportunity to settle in South America arose. In doing so they employed strategies that, like Mennonite migrations, had been cultivated over generations of emigration to a range of interconnected settlement sites. Dueck told Aviles in 1968 that "we need to travel from time to time. We are accustomed to it. There are Mennonites in Canada, the United States and Mexico. We are now going to South America." Okinawan migrants could claim a similarly prodigious history of emigration with communities across the Pacific Rim and throughout Latin America.

In their respective migrations between nations and regions Mennonites and Okinawans troubled state-centric concepts of identity - a practice that caused trouble for them as well. In the 1950s Mennonites made every effort to renew or maintain their Canadian citizenship when it helped them find work in Manitoba or Ontario but vigorously defended themselves as Mexican when confronted with an onslaught of "foreign" Mennonite missionaries from Canada and the U.S. The Mexican press referred to Mennonites as "men without a country." Okinwans also faced documentation issues as they attempted to cross international borders with flimsy US identity certificates. The documents insufficiency highlighted the tenuousness of their new subject positions as "Ryukyuan" wards. In the conclusion to a critical article on Okinawa under US military rule Earle Reynolds, a visiting American anthropologist, questioned an Okinawan who wrote "Ryukyuan" on an official travel document and asserted, "there is no "Ryukyuan nationality." He noted with satisfaction when the man, after acknowledging the artificiality of the term, snapped, "I quit. I am Japanese. I will put myself down as such."<sup>339</sup>

Facing challenging contexts in the Ryukyuan Islands and the Northern Mexican desert these farming groups developed forms of negotiation that would prove useful in the new context of Santa Cruz. While Okinawans were not always successful in challenging military land acquisitions their intransigence forced the United States to actively pursue Bolivian colonization in the fifties. Okinawan colonists also effectively performed the role of model farmers in the midst of a nativist reaction they encountered in Santa Cruz. As a result it was not local opposition but external factors, in particular the dramatic economic recovery of Japan in the early 1960s, that ultimately limited Okinawan immigration to Bolivia, though Okinawan immigration to more desirable locales such as Brazil continued into the mid 1970s. Mennonites established themselves as good agricultural citizens in Mexico and while this designation did not go unchallenged it would provide them with a crucial strategy for situating themselves in Bolivia. Even as Okinawan immigration diminished, thousands of Mexican Mennonites would establish themselves on the plains of Santa Cruz, first forming the large colonies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>339</sup> Reynolds story was published in the Japanese magazine Shukan Asahi issue no.49 Sept 27, 1963. It was clipped and translated into English by US authorities who had closely monitored Reynolds' tour through Okinawa. Box 103, Local Activity Files, USCAR; NA.

of Riva Palacios, Sommerfeld and Swift Current to the south of Santa Cruz in the late 1960s and then building new colonies on the east side of the Río Grande over the following decades. The history of this dramatic expansion will be discussed in chapter five.

Foreigners often arrived in Bolivia with the external funding, personal capital or a reputation for farming marginal lands and thus passed as "technicians" in agriculture. Such a designation was more difficult for impoverished Bolivian farmers whose existing agricultural knowledge was not valued by Bolivian officials. Yet as the subsequent chapter will show, Bolivians negotiated assumptions of culture deficiency to make explicit demands on the revolutionary state. Even more forcefully than Okinawan or Mennonite settlers they were able to link agriculture and citizenship through the revolutionary legacy of the MNR. Finally, the experience of the Mennonite and Okinawan diasporas in Bolivia challenges notions of foreignness and belonging. Mennonite colonists may have faced challenges from their Mexican neighbors but clung to their "Mexicanness" when faced with an inundation of "foreign" Mennonite missionaries. Okinawans were, as Bolivian officials pointed out, "neither fish nor fowl." "Ryukyuans" in the eyes of the U.S. military, they were often grouped with other *japoneses*, in the Bolivian press. Perhaps most surprisingly, Andeans who "belonged" as nationals in Santa Cruz were often treated as "foreign races" by the cruceño elite.

## Chapter 3 - Cultivating the State through Letters: Discourses of Hope and Abandonment in the Colonization of the Bolivian Lowlands, 1952-1968

Throughout the fifties and sixties highland Bolivians wrote hundreds of letters petitioning the state about lowland colonization. Some came from would-be migrants and others from colonists already settled in new colonies. These petitions, still preserved in state archives, provide an invaluable source for exploring how "Andeans" engaged with the logic of the March to the East. Petitioners took up the language of settlement and civilization, of agricultural production and good citizenship to legitimate their claims for land and resources along the nation's frontiers. In appealing to the scientific, technical and agricultural imperatives of the revolutionary state these Andeans adopted similar strategies to Mennonite and Okinawan immigrants and, like them, were able to settle in the Bolivian lowlands in the years after the 1952 revolution.

As with "Okinawan" or "Mennonite," the term "Andean" – along with similar terms such as highlander or *kolla* that I employ in this chapter – merits scrutiny. Andean simply references a mountain range - one intimately associated with Bolivia by historians and the general public despite occupying less than half of its national territory. Not unlike the U.S. military's use of the neologism "Ryukyuan" in place of Okinawan, which then became "*japonés*" in Santa Cruz, Andeans found themselves referred to in different terms by the state and local actors. Betraying the MNR's underlying hope that colonization would transform "Indians" into "citizens," officials eschewed the former and

preferred to use the non-ethnic marker *campesino* to refer to all rural Bolivians.<sup>340</sup> The idea that a change in terminology might transform the very identity of its subjects resonates with the U.S. insistence on the term "Ryukyuan" as a way of detaching "Okinawans" from their relatively recent Japanese past. The shift from "indio" to "campesino" was common across 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin America in nations where revolutionary regimes confronted large indigenous populations.

In the lowlands that ethnic identity re-emerged with force because of a nativist reaction. A heterogeneous mixture of Andeans became kollas, defined in opposition to the lowland's equally ambiguous *camba* population. Those two terms, *kolla* and *camba* were ostensibly broad geographical references. In practice, they were racial or ethnic markers separating Bolivians into indigenous highlanders and *mestizo* lowlanders. Santa Cruz's *mestizo* elite considered themselves to have a Guaraní indigenous past rather than an Aymara or a Quechua one. They also identified an alternative historical genealogy, considering themselves to be descendents of the Spanish that had come up the Río de la Plata to settle Argentina and Paraguay, a distinction that they claimed made them "whiter" than the Bolivia's Andean population.<sup>341</sup>

The term Andean also encompasses a variety of ethnicities, places, and forms of labor. While some internal migrants were Spanish-speaking *mestizos*, the majority were Aymara or Quechua (the two most populous indigenous groups in the highlands). Andeans came from the *altiplano* – the high arid plateau running through the departments of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí as well as from the eastern valleys of the Andes located

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>340</sup> Christopher R Boyer, Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Enrique Mayer, Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). <sup>341</sup> Stearman, Camba and Kolla.

predominantly in the departments of Chuquisaca and Cochabamba. If my use of the term Andean to refer to highland migrants appears vague it is deliberately so, reflecting the diverse origins of internal migrants.

This chapter explores a series of correspondence generated by those migrants, allowing us to gain insight into the way that Andeans constructed expectations about their own mobility and actively engaged with the logic of the March to the East. The archives of the Institute of Colonization, and the presidential papers of Victor Paz Estenssoro, Hernán Siles Zuazo and René Barrientos, contain a wealth of appeals to the state from a diverse range of would-be migrants. These materials are located in Bolivia's national archives where thick tomes bind together thousands of letters as well as internal correspondence between government officials. Institute of colonization materials are divided according to region and I was able to easily find sources for Santa Cruz and other regions of settlement like the Alto Beni of La Paz and the Chapare of Cochabamba. In the case of presidential correspondence, the materials are divided by year and in relationship to the accompanying ministries. Exchanges between the President's office and the Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Ministry of Campesino Affairs contained hundreds of letters from lowland colonists.

In this chapter I divide those petitions into two distinct categories that roughly follow the division between colonization records and presidential correspondence. The former are from petitioners seeking to migrate and the latter from colonists already settled in the lowlands. This chapter begins by looking at would-be colonists and analyzes the ways in which those Andeans addressed the Bolivian state as they offered to take part in the March to the East. Some were miners, others farmers often from highland departments like Potosí, La Paz and Oruro. In those these petitions, written in the form of letters, Andeans pushed the state forward and reminded the MNR of its obligations to the rural populations it sought to "incorporate into national life."<sup>342</sup> They demanded their right to settle and farm the eastern lowlands employing the language of empty, abandoned lands, a cold, frigid *altiplano*, rational scientific production, territorial integrity, food sovereignty and the state's obligations to its own revolutionary legacy. While the Bolivian state sought to rationally manage its population through the promotion of colonization, these petitioners actively cultivated the state through letters in which they offered – and at times insisted – on their rights to settle the nation's frontiers.

Such petitions are full of hope for the prospects of colonization. As Andean migrants entered the lowlands these lofty projections encountered a daunting range of barriers including a tropical lowland environment that was radically different (but just as challenging) as the arid *altiplano* they were leaving and a state that lacked funds to fully realize the extensive promises it had made in pamphlets, radio ads and films. In the second half of the chapter I move from Andeans demands to be included in lowland colonization to the denunciations, complaints and accusations that emerged as Andeans migrants became colonists in lowland settlement zones.

## "Speaking to a State:" Imagining the Lowlands from the Highlands of Revolutionary Bolivia

By offering to cultivate the nation's lowland frontiers Andean petitioners simultaneously sought to cultivate a relationship with the revolutionary state. In viewing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>342</sup> The phrase "incorporate into national life" is repeated in numerous pamphlets produced by the MNR. One book commemorating "10 years of Revolution" suggested that Colonization and the Agrarian Reform had transformed the Bolivian campesino from "a thing" into a "full person." Libermann, *Bolivia: 10 Años de Revolución*, 143.

their petitions as a form of citizen-state engagement - of "speaking" to a state as opposed to "seeing" like one – I seek to invert a standard approach to high modernist social engineering projects. In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott provides a compelling critique of twentieth century urban and rural high modernism.<sup>343</sup> According to Scott, the vision of state planners can be understood by walking through the neat rows of a replanted German forest or flying over the quilt-like farm plots of the Great Plains. What highmodernist planners sought above all was to construct "legibility" - to reorder unruly space as a series of manageable, interchangeable and thus marketable units. In the process, an entire range of "illegible" subjects, practices and landscapes were excluded. While less prominent than other examples of high modernist engineering, Bolivia's March to the East, would easily fit within this characterization.<sup>344</sup>

Scott's critique of high-modernism offers a useful framework for understanding state-building in the twentieth century. However, his focus on a limited range of elites tells us little about the way that subaltern actors engaged with, and often embraced, high modernism. In *Seeing Like a State*, individual architects and planners like Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, along with a range of leaders from Josef Stalin to Julius Nyerere, stand in - as synecdoche - for their modernization projects. Yet those projects depended upon the active participation of thousands and even millions of individuals who followed trajectories that often escaped the intentions or vision of planners. To cite one example, in post-colonial Tanzania historian Husseina Dinani demonstrates that while forced village settlement was intended to erase "traditional" kinship structures, women in Lindi

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>343</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>344</sup> In his study of the environmental effects of development, J.R. McNeil links tropical colonization with other modernist projects. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun an Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: Norton, 2000), 43.

district made use of villagization to reinforce matrilineal ties.<sup>345</sup> In Bolivia, there was substantial overlap, as well as divergence, in the aims of state and settler. In turning to the perspective of the latter I hope to offer a more complete picture of the March to the East that outlines the interests of Andeans alongside those of the MNR.

The idea of "speaking to a state" has a long tradition in Latin America that is evident in a substantial historiography extending from the colonial period to the modern era. Colonial historians have given thorough treatment to the myriad ways in which indigenous subjects made use of the Spanish legal system, as well as extra-judicial appeals written directly to the sovereign, in their struggles over land and labor.<sup>346</sup> In their oft desperate appeals to the king, indigenous peoples extensively employed naïve monarchism (the stated belief in the benevolent nature of the sovereign) as a way to challenge "misbehaving" local officials. This tactic continued in the regional rebellions of the middle period (1750-1850) and was one which independence leaders often viewed with bewilderment or scorn.<sup>347</sup> They understood such appeals to the monarchy to represent the illogical, reactionary or conservative nature of indigenous society. Yet as several historians have shown, direct appeal to rulers offered subalterns a useful and effective way of framing their refusal to cooperate with authorities at the local level.<sup>348</sup> These tactics had a particularly strong tradition in Bolivia and across the Andes, where large autochthonous communities existed at the margins of nascent national

independence movements.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>345</sup> Dinani, "En-gendering the Postcolony."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>346</sup> Brian Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>347</sup> Cecilia Méndez, *The Plebeian Republic: The Huanta Rebellion and the Making of the Peruvian State,* 1820–1850 (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>348</sup> Saliha Belmessous, *Native Claims: Indigenous Law against Empire, 1500-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

In the modern era, rural populations continued to employ the personal petition to negotiate directly with national leaders effectively addressed emerging caudillos that depended on rural support. This tradition of direct engagement between national leaders and rural subjects was anathema to urbane liberal politicians like Argentina's Domingo Sarmiento but it re-emerged in the turn to populism in the 1930s.<sup>349</sup> Subalterns could be found petitioning populist leaders directly, most famously Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan and Eva Perón in Argentina. Their desperate voices emerge in stacks of letters often preserved in presidential archives.<sup>350</sup> Populism may have been muted in Bolivia in the first half of the twentieth century but this did not stop rural Andeans from also petitioning the state.

Historian Laura Gotkowitz analyzes petitions related to land claims from Cochabamba in the 1920s and 1940s. In doing so, she uncovered a vibrant agrarian radicalism that has been obscured by the focus on the role of mining and urban communities in the lead-up to the 1952 revolution. In those earlier decades highland indigenous communities actively engaged the state on its own terms but, "community leaders did not simply parrot the state's civilizing discourse."<sup>351</sup> Instead they brought their own paradoxical meanings to their demands for "incorporation" by the Bolivian state through campaigns for "land, justice and local power."<sup>352</sup> Gotkowitz ends her analysis in 1952 but offers a useful concluding remark. She points out, while the "violence [that] encased the countryside after April of 1952," receives the majority of

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>349</sup> Domingo F. Sarmiento, Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998).
 <sup>350</sup> Daniel James, Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Brodwyn Fischer, A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>351</sup> Laura Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights, 85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>352</sup> Gotkowitz, A Revolution for our Rights, 2.

scholarly attention, the immediate post-revolutionary period was also characterized by "a peaceful deluge of petitions." In that suggestive epilogue, Gotkowitz is primarily concerned with the degree to which Andeans revived earlier land claims through petitions "accompanied by ancient land titles that the cacique [indigenous leader] networks had unearthed in the 1920s and kept alive."<sup>353</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, the MNR's sweeping campaigns in education, public health and voting encouraged a vibrant state-citizen discourse. During the presidencies of Paz Estenssoro, Siles Zuazo and Barrientos, thousands of unsolicited letters were written by individuals and groups in rural communities and sent directly to the president or to state institutions. Emboldened and encouraged by the rhetoric of a revolutionary state, petitioners demanded medical services, land grants, schools, and technical training for their struggling communities. Most importantly for this chapter, Andeans also wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture, its Director of Colonization, or to the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF), staking their claim to land in new colonization zones. The proliferation of institutions in post-revolutionary Bolivia and their changing titles could be a source of confusion for petitioners. In the period under consideration the Director of Colonization was a part of the Ministry of Agriculture. The CBF was an independent crown corporation like the mining (COMIBOL) and gas (YPFB) companies. In 1965 a separate organization, the National Institute of Colonization (INC) was created under the dependency of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The "petitions" in the archives of the Institute of Colonization range in format from simple letters rife with spelling and grammatical errors to detailed project proposals

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 270.

with budgets, work plans and censuses of migrants' ages and former occupations. This diversity is indicative of the variety of places that petitioners wrote from but also in the range of occupations that they held. Some petitions came from elderly *beneméritos* (veterans) of the Chaco War and others from young men who had just completed their year of obligatory military service. While letter writers were often small farmers and herders from rural hamlets some of the more vociferous claimants were former miners. Along with petitions that came from individuals or families, Andeans also formed youth brigades, school groups and farming cooperatives and their appointed leaders wrote, and signed, on behalf of their members. Petitioners enlisted the help of authorities to serve as intermediaries from departmental prefects to *corregidores* – a designation dating back to the colonial period equivalent to a mayor of a small town - and the MNR's local representatives.

Andeans constructed their home communities as deficient, harsh and uninviting spaces when they wrote to the state. In articulating those desperate and often miserable circumstances they hoped to push the government to support their cause. While facing environmental challenges distinct from those encountered by Okinawans on the Ryukyuan archipelago or Mennonites in the high desert of Chihuahua, Andean petitioners also spoke of overcrowding, drought, landlessness and poor soils not suitable for farming. The most evocative petitions typically came from Potosí and Oruro - two departments that sat at the center of Bolivia's high, arid plateau. In 1954, the corregidor of Santiago de Andamarca in Oruro wrote to the Director of Colonization. Residents of the small hamlet had gathered at a public meeting to discuss joining a colonization program. "Our lands are *arenales* (sand dunes)," wrote the corregidor, "without any benefit [*beneficio*]

to human life."<sup>354</sup> He elaborated by noting that their meager harvest did not even produce sufficient fodder for their animals and that many desperate residents, who "are the sons of soldiers who fell in the Chao War," were leaving the community in search of work.<sup>355</sup> The following year a group of would-be migrants asked the government for the right to settle in the semi-tropical south Yungas, a transitional zone which descends from the eastern flank of the Andes at an elevation of over 4000m down to the tropical Amazon basin in less than one hundred kilometers.<sup>356</sup> The group described their home communities on the meager grasslands of the altiplano. There they had "led a life of suffering" the letter began, in a region "extremely unfavorable" to agriculture and where even herding was not profitable. Similar letters claimed that in the arid altiplano the labor of campesinos was entirely "in vain."<sup>357</sup>

In January of 1955 petitioners from the municipality of Llica, the tiny capital of Daniel Campos province in Potosí, wrote to the ministry asking to be sent to the lowlands. The authors of the petition, Moises Colque and Casimiro Flores explained that despite their best intentions to move forward and progress in the fields of agriculture and ranching, the people of the zone could not "prosper because of the unproductive conditions and climate of the region."<sup>358</sup> Along with struggling farmers the group included many that were unable to obtain land. At well over three thousand meters the area receives less than 200mm of rain a year and sits on the edge of Bolivia's Uyuni salt desert, characterized by small-scale farming among its majority Aymara population.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>354</sup> Letter from Corregidor of Andamarca to Ministerio de Colonización, Oct. 26, 1954. IC 628, ANB.
 <sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>356</sup> Letter from members of Cooperative "Phasa" to Min. of Colonization, Nov.29, 1955. IC 216, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>357</sup> Letter from Cooperative Ninoca de Pacollo, Oct13, 1955. IC 592, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>358</sup> Letter from Moises Colque and Casimiro Flores, Jan 26, 1955. IC 628, ANB.

Anthropologist Tristan Platt has uncovered a cyclical history of mobility in the region that dates to at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>359</sup> Small farmers would typically work their fields from December to May, bring produce to regional markets and then travel to the Pacific Coast's nitrate fields in Chile beginning in June and July.

The same year as the above petition a group from Mojinete, in southern Potosí on Bolivia's Argentine frontier, appealed to the ministry. The petitioners from the remote, rural, predominantly Quechua region linked their desire to migrate with the MNR's revolutionary project, noting that on the anniversary of the 1952 revolution, community members had gathered in a public assembly to discuss colonization. They enlisted the help of the head of the local school district to design their petition which contained a census of willing migrants including twenty-seven heads of family between the ages of forty-four and nineteen. In a letter signed by the mayor and the local representative of the agrarian reform, they explained that their current lands in the department of Potosí did not provide for even ten percent of their annual consumption. They characterized their highland environment, consisting of rocky mountains and saline lakes, as "a frigid and narrow place surrounded by suffering on all sides."<sup>360</sup>

In 1957, Toribio Tarqui, head of the "Sora" agro-industrial cooperative, wrote to the Ministry. The MNR hoped to transform highland agriculture through mechanization and other modern methods. Tarqui explained that his associates shared this goal but that their attempts to modernize agriculture in their highland department of Oruro had failed. The cooperative had had purchased tractors but despite the "efforts and sacrifices" of its

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>359</sup> Tristan Platt, "Calendars and Market Interventions" in *Ethnicity, Markets, and Migration in the Andes: At the Crossroads of History and Anthropology*, ed. Brook Larson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).
 <sup>360</sup> Letter from Mamani, Presidente Junta Rural Agraria, April 4, 1955. IC 628. ANB.

members who "worked with tenacity and pride" their efforts had been "in vain" overcome by an inhospitable climate.<sup>361</sup>

Letters like the above continued to appear in the archives of the Ministry of Agriculture throughout the 1950s. As a genre of petition they sought to marshal misery to generate intervention on the part of the state. Their authors emphasized their humble, hardworking nature in the face of insurmountable environmental conditions. Petitioners spoke with an intimate familiarity of the difficult conditions they experienced in highland communities on a daily basis. This lent an air of realism to their desperate portraits. For state officials who had little first-hand knowledge of everyday life in Llica or Mojinete it was difficult to question the veracity of such heart-wrenching depictions. Conditions in those regions were likely as trying as the petitioners made out. Even today the district of Mojinete is a remote region of few roads where nearly all residents are without electricity. Llica also remains an impoverished zone. While some petitions include a resolution, many do not. Though it is unclear if all were successful, the fact that Andeans employed these tactics, pre-supposing their purchase, indicates a dramatic shift, perhaps less in the conditions of daily life on the altiplano and more in the relationship between state and subject in revolutionary Bolivia.

In contrast to their quotidian experience of the highlands, Andeans knew little about the areas that the Bolivian state was opening for colonization. These zones included Santa Cruz but also extended well beyond that department. Settlement sites ran throughout the *medialuna* or half moon of the lowlands, beginning in the tropical Yungas to the north of La Paz and extending in a broad arc along the northern and eastern flank

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>361</sup> Letter from Toribio Tarqui Calderón of Sora Cooperative, Feb 21, 1957, IC 628, ANB.

of the Andes through the Beni, the Chapare region of Cochabamba to the forested plains of Santa Cruz. Unfamiliarity with these new lands fed rather than limited expectations. Petitioners readily constructed the lowlands as an obvious solution to the considerable problems found in their home communities. Letters typically imagined the region in economic, agricultural or territorial terms as a "rich," "fertile" and "abandoned" region. The former two designations carried evident promise for future migrants and state. While "abandoned" may seem an unlikely description for migrants to embrace it functioned in two important ways. First, abandoned lands were presumably unoccupied and thus open to potential settlers. Abandonment also invoked a question of state sovereignty - that unworked state lands, in remote frontier areas were liable to be usurped by neighboring countries. This was of particular resonance in a nation that had lost sizeable portions of its territory to Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. At times all three designations came together in a single petition. In 1955, a local representative of the Agrarian Reform wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture on behalf of a group of three hundred campesino families, asking that they be sent to the "fertile and rich lands of Caupolicán [province]" in the Northern Amazon basin.<sup>362</sup> In addition to "populating an abandoned region" he assured the ministry that this "will also be a method of securing our international border with Peru."

The nature of petitioners' requests varied in accordance with their diverse backgrounds. Individuals often wrote to the ministry asking for a single plot of a few hectares while larger organizations proposed resettlement schemes occupying thousands of hectares and promised large-scale investments in infrastructure and machinery. Much like Mennonite and Okinawan settlers, some petitioners sent advance delegations to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>362</sup> Letter from Agrarian Judge A. Goitia to Ministry of Asuntos Campesinos, March 11, 1955. IC628, ANB. Caupolicán has since been renamed Franz Tamayo.

inspect and identify suitable locations in Santa Cruz and elsewhere. For others, the lowlands (from the Amazon basin near La Paz to the plains of Santa Cruz) appeared as a homogenous whole and they hopefully asked for free transportation to open lands anywhere in the "Oriente Boliviano."

In the petitions from Mojinete and Llica, discussed above, letter writers put no prerequisite on where they ended up. The former would-be migrants were willing to go to "Santa Cruz or another zone," - though they politely asked the Ministry of Agriculture to inform them "to which department and province they would migrate and in what month" once a decision had been made. They also hoped it would "not be too far from roads or railways [and not in] zones of epidemics."<sup>363</sup> The latter group noted that they had resolved to move to eastern Bolivia because those fruitful regions offer great prospects" for those "with will and strength (voluntad y fuerza)."<sup>364</sup> Evorista Mayorga, the leader of a different group from Potosí, speculated about the fundamental differences a migrant might encounter moving from highland and lowland. He reminded state officials, "to take into account that we are from a frigid climate and that Villa Tunari [in the lowlands of Cochabamba] is tropical" and thus that medicine for malaria and other diseases should be made available to colonists.<sup>365</sup> Arriving from the treeless altiplano he also considered the need to be provided with "hatchets and machetes because perhaps there will be vegetation and trees that we need to clear."<sup>366</sup>

Petitioners drew portraits of difficult conditions in their home communities and tentatively promising ones in lowland colonization zones. As farmers, ex-miners and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>363</sup> Letter from Mamani, Presidente Junta Rural Agraria, April 4, 1955. IC 628. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>364</sup> Letter from Moises Colque and Casimiro Flores, Jan 26, 1955. IC 628, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>365</sup> Letter Evorista Mayorga, to Director of Colonization, April 14, 1958. IC 592, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>366</sup> Ibid.

seasonal laborers imagined themselves moving to Santa Cruz, the Alto Beni, or the Chapare they also framed their mobility in ways that resonated with the immediate aims of the Bolivian Revolution. While there is no direct reference to Walter Guevara Arze's *Plan Inmediato* in the following petitions, the terms and concepts employed by petitioners appear to directly paraphrase that policy document. We can imagine the many ways that economic policy may have been diffused in revolutionary Bolivia as Guevara Arze's paper was read and re-read among government officials, engineers and extension workers and picked up by local teachers, mayors, representatives of the Agrarian Reform and other intermediaries. Those intermediaries helped interprellate the individual desires of migrants into revolutionary policy.

In February of 1954, Felix Oroza wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture as a representative of a three-member agriculture and ranching society "El Yeso." He pointed out that a short distance from Santa Cruz there were lands suitable for agriculture "totally unpopulated and without close neighbors," and asked that five hundred hectares be given to the society as such an act would be "in harmony with the supreme government's plans for agro-industrial diversification."<sup>367</sup> In December of 1955, Julio Menses presented a petition through the Federation Sindical de Trabajadores Campesinos that was eventually passed on to the General Director of Colonization. Menses represented a small cooperative of seven young individuals from Oruro between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine including: a carpenter, a mechanic, a few merchants and several students. They sought land in Masicuri in the Vallegrande region of Santa Cruz in "accord with the social, political and economic reality" of the nation and "taking into account the plan of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>367</sup> Letter from Felix Oroza to Ministry of Agriculture, Feb. 5, 1954. IC 592, ANB.

economic diversification put in place by the government." The group, Menses continued, felt it was both "a right and obligation of all good Bolivians to transform the rhythm of life, [especially in] the most remote places of our patria."<sup>368</sup>

These Bolivian nationals employed similar strategies to Mennonites and Okinawans who also framed their mobility with deliberate linkages to the goals of the March to the East. Like those immigrants, the above societies and cooperatives outlined work plans and listed capital that they could bring with them to the lowlands. This was not the case for the majority of impoverished highland migrants. Yet even with scarce resources to move independently, Andeans who offered little more than their "grain of sand (*grano de arena*)" could also employ a patriotic discourse to demand inclusion in the March to the East at times in direct opposition to foreign participation. Menses, representing the least wealthy of the above petitioners, argued that highlanders had finally awoken to the reality that for too long they, "had believed ourselves inferior in all aspects in relation to foreigners, who had pursued their own interests [in Bolivia] served by our inexhaustible sources of wealth."<sup>369</sup>

Other Andean petitioners drew similar links to criticize foreign participation in the March to the East to the exclusion of Bolivians. In December of 1957, a group of five men petitioned the ministry for fifteen hectares each in the colonization zone of Caranavi in La Paz department. With no response forthcoming they wrote again the following year. Their leader, Angel Cossio, implied that the ministry's inaction was hypocritical and unpatriotic. He bitterly recounted that in early 1958 he had read a newspaper article

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>368</sup> Letter Julio Menses to Director of Colonization, Jan. 12, 1956. IC 592, ANB.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

detailing the "fabulous sum" spent on Japanese colonization in Santa Cruz. "We, the Bolivians," Cossio continued, "do not doubt that we will be received with preference," and assured the minister – with a persistence that bordered on the sinister - that he would waiting "outside the door of your office" for a resolution.<sup>370</sup> While no response to Cossio's letter is included in the archives, the internal correspondence of the CBF related to Japanese participation in the Villamontes project, discussed in the previous chapter, suggests that such petitions were effective in pushing the Bolivian government to give preference to internal migrants.

Historian Fernando Coronil identifies the bodily metaphors that infused discussions of nature and nationalism in Venezuela. In revolutionary Bolivia, personal and national interests were also articulated through the corporeal an emotive strategy largely unavailable to foreign colonists.<sup>371</sup> National bodies under threat as well as patriotic agrarian landscapes - the "Bolivian soil" – were evoked in numerous Andean petitions. Menses referred to foreign exploitation of "our beloved land." Petitioners also brought their own bodies into play to solidify their claims. A group of agriculturalists from Cochabamba provided the government with a rational, scientific explanation for their request for land. Like the Mennonites they pointed to their agricultural expertise and a "historical reality" that the state surely knew and could not afford to ignore. However, their claim was an embodied logic as much as an intellectual observation. "We

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>370</sup> Letter Angel Cossio to Minister of Agriculture, April 14, 1958. IC 592, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>371</sup> Fernando Coronil *The Magical State: Nature, Modernity and Money in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

are Bolivians" they informed the government "and we feel in our flesh the present reality."372

In the petitions to the Ministry of Agriculture in the 1950s, miners and ex-miners also appear with frequency often making explicit reference to the MNR's revolutionary legacy. That "legacy" could be interpreted to mean something similar to that articulated by Menses or Oroza, the need to diversify the economy through food production. A group of miners from the closed "La Chojilla" mine were looking for land in Caranavi, "so that we can produce for our country" in accordance with the government's plans.<sup>373</sup> But petitions for land in the wake of the national revolution oscillated between revolutionary promise and revolutionary threat. Miners were conscious of their political weight and often emphasized their radical proclivities.

In the mid 1950s, representatives from Siglo XX, the largest tin mine in Bolivia, petitioned the national government. These miners from Potosí had played a central role in the MNR's 1952 revolution and the mine (formerly owned by "tin baron" Simón Patiño) was expropriated by the state mining company in the aftermath of the revolution. The nationalization decree, which had been formally signed in a ceremony held at Siglo XX mine in 1952, resulted in a dramatic reduction of the number of miners on the state payroll. In the face of high unemployment, the miners had formed numerous agricultural, ranching and industrial cooperatives in the hope of moving former workers to new colonization zones. One group of ex-miners formed a cooperative named after mining labor leader Mario Torres and, in 1955, expressed frustration with the bureaucratic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>372</sup> Letter from Cochabamba (signatories unclear), March 12, 1955, IC 228. ANB.
<sup>373</sup> Letter from ex-miners of "la Chojilla" to Minister of Agriculture, Feb.20, 1958. IC 592. ANB.

hurdles and stalling of colonization authorities. They reminded the Ministry of Agriculture, Ranching and Colonization of their "high revolutionary spirit," and that the mine had "sacrificed the most during the oligarchy." While some made reference to historical, economic and social realities to justify their request, this group of ex-miners brought politics into play, warning the government that their "revolutionary conscience told them that they would not be defrauded in their call for [state] collaboration."<sup>374</sup> Other miners also reminded the authorities of promises to set-aside colonization land for ex-miners.<sup>375</sup>

No direct response to the above petition exists but the state accommodated subsequent petitions from the large mine. The following year Victor Hugo Zelada, another representative from Siglo XX, asked the Director of Colonization for free transport for three members of the co-op who would travel the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway in March in order to select lands that were suitable for colonization. In a rhetoric standard to the colonization petition but bearing additional weight given the political power of the Siglo XX cooperatives, Zelada concluded by stating "we do not doubt [in the fact] that we are deserving of attention."<sup>376</sup> He also requested and received an official letter from the Ministry of Agriculture certifying the group's mission and requesting cooperation from local officials - not unlike that received by visiting Japanese settlement delegation leader Minuro Takata two years earlier.

In the late 1950s, residents of Santa Cruz accused arriving Okinawans of being fishermen and not farmers with the aim of blocking their future immigration. Okinawans

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>374</sup> Letter from Eduardo Pérez, President of Coop. Mario Torres to Minister of Agriculture, Ranching and Colonization, May 19, 1955. IC 228. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>375</sup> Letter from Ángel Vargas, Dec.3, 1959. IC 216. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>376</sup> Letter from Victor Hugo Zelada to Director of Colonization, Feb 27, 1956. IC 592. ANB.

responded with a performance of good agricultural citizenship in which they invited locals to tour the colonies and presented officials with symbolic gifts of their agricultural products. Ex-miners also felt obliged to justify their credentials as suitable farmers in lowland colonization zones. Walter Guevara Arze provided a rationalization in the *Plan Inmediato*, arguing that most miners had spent childhoods laboring on small family farms and large haciendas and typically returned to these occupations during harvest months.<sup>377</sup> One group of miners made a similar claim in their petition to the state. In 1958, Segundio Gómez wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture on behalf of miners from Milluni and Viloco mines in La Paz department who had "voluntarily resigned" due to a shortage of work in the wake of Siles Zuazo's austerity measures. The miners wanted lots in Canaravi and insisted that they were "specialists" in agriculture, as they had "been born and lived in the *campo* (countryside)." They promised to bring their families and children with them so that "with our labors, in a day not too distant, we will see these [lowland] regions prosperous through the force of good Bolivian farmers."<sup>378</sup>

## Transnational Andeans: Bolivian Braceros in Northern Argentina

The miner-turned-colonist was one common script that was embraced by both the Bolivian state and Andeans. It fit easily within a national development narrative in which excess populations would be redistributed and latent landscapes re-ordered as Bolivia shifted from an extractive to a cultivated state. Beginning in the 1950s, Andeans also drew on another discourse, one with an impressively transnational dimension. In the previous chapter I focused primarily on the transnational migrations of Okinawans and Mennonites that eventually led them to Santa Cruz. This chapter ostensibly turns from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>377</sup> Guevara Arze, *Plan inmediato*, 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>378</sup> Segundio Gomez to Ministry of Agriculture, April 10, 1958. IC 592. ANB.

immigration to internal migration. That distinction may provide a useful heuristic device for organizing the history of migration to Santa Cruz just as the "push-pull" framework is a reductive but useful tool for understanding migration more broadly.<sup>379</sup> This was frequently adopted by Bolivian state officials who divided "immigrants" from "internal migrants." However, it is crucial to recognize that the ostensibly "national" migrations of Andeans were quite likely to cross international frontiers before crossing internal departmental lines. The diasporic history of Mennonites and Okinawans shaped the ways in which those immigrants established themselves in Santa Cruz. Andeans constituted a diaspora of their own as they traveled to Argentina and other neighboring republics by the hundreds of thousands in the fifties and sixties. The eventual move to Santa Cruz, where they were also treated as foreigners, was one in a series of migrations that member of the Andean diaspora engaged in.

When Latin American historians write about mid-century "braceros," they are typically speaking of the millions of Mexicans migrants that harvested fruit and vegetables and performed other labor-intensive jobs in California and other U.S. states beginning during the Second World War and lasting through the sixties.<sup>380</sup> As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Mexican Mennonites also became braceros in the mid-twentieth century. In contrast to the history of Mexican braceros, the mass migration of Bolivians to conduct similar work in the fields of Argentina is less well-known. Given that Argentine historiography is primarily focused on events in Buenos Aires this is not entirely surprising. Yet, Bolivian braceros exist at the margins of an expanding rural and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>379</sup> Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>380</sup> See Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011).

regional historiography in Argentina as well.<sup>381</sup> As with Okinawan and Mennonite migrants, full accounts of Bolivian braceros are limited to contemporary anthropologists and sociologists.<sup>382</sup>

While harvesting fields at the margins of the nation, Bolivian braceros were intimately linked to events at the center of mid-century Argentina's populist transformation. Juan Perón found supporters from among rural Argentines that migrated to the capital in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the *descamisados* and "*cabecitas negras*" – two terms infused with race and class connotations typically used to refer to Peronist supporters of rural, non-European background - fled the interior to form the popular base for Peronism they left rural work for incoming Bolivian braceros who took over an increasing portion of the harvest in Tucuman, Salta and Jujuy. Along with other laborers emboldened by Perón's progressive social legislation, Argentine field-workers began to unionize and demand better working conditions. Both of these factors further drove northern growers to look for undocumented, cheap labor from Bolivia, producing an impressive recruitment network that relied on local recruiters to canvass remote highland communities. Though they had taken part in the Argentine harvest since the turn of the century, by the late 1950s and early 1960s non-unionized Bolivian labor dominated the *zafra* in northern Argentina that expanded after the U.S. embargo on Cuban sugar. As they searched for new work at the end of the harvest, Bolivians became increasingly active in agricultural and urban environments throughout the nation. When the sugar

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>381</sup> Larry Sawers, *The Other Argentina: The Interior and National Development* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998). Oscar Chamosa *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers, and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism, 1900-1955* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2010) Bolivian migrants are also largely missing from historian Eric Carter's *Enemy in the Blood: Malaria, Environment, and Development in Argentina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012) despite the fact that Bolivian braceros were a key public health concern in Northern Argentina.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>382</sup> Whiteford, Workers from the North.

season ended they travelled further south to Mendoza to harvest grapes and to Río Negro in Patagonia to pick apples. Between harvests, an increasing number of Bolivian braceros settled in Argentine cities from Jujuy to Buenos Aires. In a 1960 there was a reported 89,600 Bolivians living in Argentina. By 1969 that number had grown to an estimated 450,000 (some suggested it was nearly double that) representing nearly one tenth of Bolivia's population.<sup>383</sup>

As the current of Bolivian braceros increased, their undocumented presence was the subject of increasing concern on both sides of the border. Bilateral agreements between Argentina and Bolivia in the early sixties did little to stem the flow. Constructing braceros as a public health concern, Argentine sociologists prepared reports on Bolivians living in slums – known as *villas miserias* – in cities like Mendoza.<sup>384</sup> While those discussions of immigration and public health were rarely far removed from ideas of race, the Argentine press rallied against Bolivian braceros in explicitly racist terms. The Buenos Aires newspaper *El Mundo* published an article in 1965 that caught the attention of Bolivian diplomats who included it among their archived press clippings periodically sent to the President's office. The article insisted that Argentina had every right to control "this massive entrance that is causing a deterioration of its social and cultural levels."<sup>385</sup> Bolivian diplomatic staff in Argentina worried about registering the substantial Bolivian bracero community to vote – they counted 14,000 Bolivians living in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>383</sup> Whiteford, Workers from the North, 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>384</sup> Juan B Farrés Cavagnaro and Yolanda E Borquez, *Estudio sociológico sobre los grupos migratorios de braceros bolivianos en Mendoza* (Mendoza: Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Escuela Superior de Estudios Políticos y Sociales, 1962).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>385</sup> Horacio de Dios *El Mundo*, 24 November, 1965 "La Frontera Invisible: Bolivianización" Clipping in Presidencia de la Republica (PR) 1140, ANB.

the city of Mendoza - and also complained about harassment of returning braceros by officials and confidence men on both sides of the border.<sup>386</sup>

In Bolivia, braceros entered public debate in the early 1950s when their status was frequently mentioned in sessions of congress and resulted in an ineffectual decree to attempt to bring them back home in 1953. As the previous chapter indicated, the bracero issue was also present in intra-governmental and public discussions of immigration with some commentators, disingenuous or otherwise, advocating a return of fellow nationals to colonize the lowlands before the entry of "undesirable" foreigners. Few evoked the bracero issue more evocatively than author Fernando Antezana who had signed bracero legislation as a member of the MNR in the 1950s. In *Braceros Bolivianos: Drama Humano y Sangria Nacional*, he mixed denunciations of a patriotic and humanitarian nature.<sup>387</sup>

While working in the Bolivian frontier city of Tupiza throughout the fifties and early sixties Antezana became accustomed to the annual inundation of migrant workers that passed through on their way to the sugar harvest. In 1966 he decided to publicize the plight of his co-nationals who "abandon their patria, their home, their people and their field of labor," to seek a profit abroad.<sup>388</sup> He claimed that a total of 784,000 Bolivians were "nomads without patria and without home." This included nearly 200,000 who made the annual pilgrimage to Jujuy and Salta. Antezana followed braceros from their homes in remote highland sending communities in Potosí and Oruro, where many walked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>386</sup> Correspondence MRE to President's Office, Sept. 20, 1956, PR879, ANB. reporting harassment of returning braceros. Correspondence Ministry of Foreign Relations and the President's Office, April 4, 1956. PR 879. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>387</sup> Fernando Antezana, *Los braceros bolivianos: drama humano y sangría nacional* (La Paz, Bolivia: Editorial Icthus, 1966).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>388</sup> Antezana, Los braceros bolivianos, 16.

to the closest rail line that would take them south across the border and into the sugar zones of Argentina. Utilizing personal testimonies and songs from the migrants, Antezana explained in detail the grueling conditions of the harvest and the difficulties they faced in bringing even a portion of their meager earning back to their home communities. Like earlier commentators, Antezana placed bracero emigration in explicit dialogue with Bolivian colonization. The tragedy of Bolivia's braceros, he concluded, was that "there exists plans of colonization and development that need labor and Bolivian initiative...there are prodigious lands in Bolivia that are waiting for the fecund labor of the sons of this prodigious land...[and] there are international organizations [the Alliance for Progress] disposed to promote the development of the community, the colonization and the exploitation of the riches of Bolivia."<sup>389</sup>

In an article published in the widely circulated La Paz newspaper *Presencia*, Walter Guevara Arze also addressed the bracero issue.<sup>390</sup> He compared the annual emigration of braceros to "the evacuation of a major European city during war."<sup>391</sup> Like Antezana he also pointed out the difficult conditions the braceros faced and the "great detriment to the future life of the country, …especially in terms of the labor that our agriculture needs." However, he was forced to admit that economic incentives would continue to drive Bolivians south where even though "illusions of wealth" were rarely realized - cane cutters could earn twice as much as they did for identical work in the expanding sugar harvest in Santa Cruz.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>389</sup> Antenaza, Los braceros bolivianos, 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>390</sup> *Presencia* was owned by the Catholic Church and unlike other conservative La Paz newspapers frequently published articles addressing the nation's social issues.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>391</sup> Undated clipping from *Presencia*, Walter Guevara Arze Collection, ANB. Likely from the mid-sixties.

Around the time of Guevara Arze's article, the Ministry of Agriculture was actively attempting to recruit settlers from among Bolivian braceros. In 1966, Roberto Lemaitre, the director of the newly-formed National Colonization Institute (INC), received a letter from Minister of Agriculture Rogelio Miranda. Citing the same statistics as Antezana, Miranda informed Lemaitre that the "question" of Bolivian braceros, "has created interest in all areas of the country and abroad."<sup>392</sup> It is likely Miranda was responding to a meeting of church leaders that had taken place in Cochabamba in March where participants had spoken about the bracero problem at length. He advised the INC to "consider with preference the possibility of settling braceros and their families in the zones of colonization," as those migrants were currently living "in subhuman material and social conditions in a foreign country."<sup>393</sup>

The above examples demonstrate that Bolivia's braceros were a policy concern for Bolivian officials through the 1950 and 1960s. Facing this outflow of productive laborers the MNR hoped to employ lowland colonization to recover its expatriates and to allay further emigration. This discourse was not the exclusive province of the revolutionary government. If we return to the petitions discussed earlier it becomes clear that the figure of the bracero was also often referenced - alongside a harsh highland environment - when Andeans wrote the government asking to take part in lowland colonization. This massive and embarrassing loss of valuable bodies to Argentina gave Andeans another key element in the repertoire of legitimating strategies expressed in their petitions.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>392</sup> Letter, Rogelio Miranda to Roberto Lemaitre, March 16, 1966, Unlabelled Folder, Depository,
 Ministerio de Desarrollo Rural y Tierras. (MDRyT).
 <sup>393</sup> Ibid.

When the above mentioned group from Mojinete in Potosí petitioned the state in 1955 it might have been enough for the head of the school district to invoke a desperate regional context in which residents were eager to "move to the east" to push state officials into action. But he also brought the Argentine issue into play, reminding the government that, by becoming colonists, potosinos could avoid making the annual migration to the sugar fields of Argentina. He claimed that this loss of labor power was an affront to national sovereignty given the shortage of *brazos* in the lowlands. While they honorably sought land to "cultivate and harvest goods in our Bolivian soil," they were instead impelled to "waste our forces in the neighboring nation of Argentina."<sup>394</sup> Their evocative petition was successful and the director of colonization assured them that though they might need to continue to sell their labor abroad, the ministry would soon provide funds to resettle them including technical assistance and medical support. In 1958, another group of Andeans writing to the state insisted they "were virtually dying of hunger" and needed to find a place "that offers us better living conditions." They had considered following the lead of their neighbors from Potosí who migrated to Chile or Argentina, "where they need brazos [labor] but for reasons of patriotism we prefer to remain within our patria."<sup>395</sup> Still they informed the state that if no help would be forthcoming they would be compelled to emigrate. Petitioners effectively framed this unfortunate abandonment as their only remaining option if they were not given land in Santa Cruz, the Alto Beni or the Chapare.

Some Andeans may have merely threatened to emigrate in order to shame the state into offering material support. However, there is also evidence from migrant

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>394</sup> Letter from Mamani, Presidente Junta Rural Agraria, April 10, 1955. IC 628. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>395</sup> Letter from Evorista Mayorga, to Director of Colonization, April 14, 1958. IC 592, ANB.

petitions and oral histories that others actually followed this transnational trajectory from Bolivia's highlands through Argentine sugar zones before settling in colonization zones in the Bolivian lowlands. The archives of the Ministry of Campesino Affairs contain a note related to settling two hundred families of campesinos "displaced from the sugar zones of Argentina," in an area on the edge of Chaco formerly managed by the state oil company.<sup>396</sup> In May of 1962, a man wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture claiming he had been living in Argentina since 1937 and working a variety of jobs in sugar mills and ranches. While he had left Bolivia to escape "the chaos of the oligarchy" he had returned home in early 1962 with the idea of taking part "in the magnificent plan of colonization" run by the CBF and the Alliance for Progress in the Alto Beni."<sup>397</sup>

Francisco Condori currently lives in Yapacaní, a colonization site about three hours to the north of Santa Cruz. He was born in 1943 in the province of Nor Chicas in Potosí - an area that produced a significant number of braceros. He remembers that he was still a young boy of fourteen when "because of poverty I had to abandon my home and go to Argentina."<sup>398</sup> Prohibited from traveling as an officially contracted *bracero* because of his age, he made most of the journey on foot with several uncles who had established a prior labor relationship with an Argentine *patron*.<sup>399</sup> Whereas Antezana wrote evocatively about the exploitative nature of the experience for many poor highlanders in those years, Condori remembers the time in Argentina as a positive and formative experience - one in which he learned about new production technologies and "gained a vision of how to work." Even as members of his home community were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>396</sup> Letter from Ministry of Asuntos Campesinos to President's Office, Jan.16, 1965. PR1143, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>397</sup> Letter from Miguel Riveros to Ministry of Agriculture, May 30, 1962. PR991, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>398</sup> Francisco Condori interview with author, Yapacaní, August, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>399</sup> Ibid.

traveling south, the Bolivian government was attempting to convince them to head east instead. He remembers members of the United Nations World Food Program (PMA, in Spanish) arriving in Potosí in 1958. In cooperation with the Bolivian government, the relief program offered free transport, credit and supplies for volunteers joining a new colonization program near the town of Cotoca on the outskirts of Santa Cruz. His uncles enlisted in the Cotoca endeavor but Condori continued working the annual harvest in Argentina until 1962 before he ventured to Santa Cruz with an older brother where he first worked as a laborer on Japanese and Okinawan farms. He eventually settled in Yapacaní (a short distance from the Japanese colony of San Juan and the Mennonite colony of Las Piedras). Condori's travels linked the home communities of the highlands to the sites of the Andean diaspora, first in Argentina and later in the Bolivian lowlands. In Yapacaní, he homesteaded alongside dozens of other Condoris as well as settlers with other typical Quechua and Aymara last names like Quispe and Mamani. In that sense Andean colonists were not unlike two other groups - Mexican Mennonites who headed north to work in Canadian harvests before joining settlement ventures in Santa Cruz and Okinawans who had migrated through Japan's empire in East Asia before joining USCAR's resettlement program in the fifties.

The previous chapter outlined the transnational routes that members of the Okinawan and Mennonites diasporas followed to reach the Bolivian lowlands. Condori's life story demonstrates that Andeans constituted a diaspora of their own both in Argentina where they were obvious foreigners and in the Bolivian lowlands where they were also seen as outsiders by local elites. One cooperative of ex-miners from Potosí appropriately named their colonization cooperative "Exodus" reflecting the idea that struggling highland communities were undergoing a form of dispersal - a central element of the diasporic experience.<sup>400</sup> A second element was the degree to which diasporic communities were shaped by experiences in new settlement areas. Whether Andeans were threatening to emigrate as braceros or actively doing so like Condori, developments in the northern Argentine sugar zone were central to the course, and discourse, of colonization in Bolivia's lowlands as were events in Chihuahua and on Okinawa. As a whole, the personal trajectories of these diverse groups of Andean, Mennonite and Okinawan migrants and the future history of the March to the East were intertwined with regional, hemispheric and global forces - from Peronist labor politics in Argentina to environmental change and agrarian development in Northern Mexico to U.S. military might in the Far East.

## Abandonment Issues: Letters from Bolivia's Settler Frontier

The preceding section has emphasized the ways in which Andeans cultivated the state by placing their own personal migrations – as small farmers, miners and seasonal laborers - in conversation with the 1952 revolution. The second half of this chapter explores the experience of Andeans as they moved into the colonization zones they had so readily petitioned for. In their earlier letters petitioners recited lines about patriotism, national progress, food production and strong families. Once established in colonies like Cotoca, Yapacaní and Caranavi those seamless narratives often jarred with the reality of life in remote rural areas. Initially presented as promising future homes, the settlements now stood as bitter lived reality. Despite the change of tone, Andeans continued to petition the state actively as colonists. A core element of their critique centered on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>400</sup> Letter from Coop. Agropecuaria "Exodo" to Min. Of Agriculture, Feb. 23, 1966. Unlabelled Folder. MDRyT.

idea of "abandonment" and this ubiquitous and versatile term emerged in nearly all materials related to colonization. Abandonment could refer to the status of land, the action of colonists or the inaction of the state. For example, when cruceños demanded infrastructure and other aid from the Bolivian state in the early twentieth century they frequently made reference to the idea that their department had been "abandoned" by the nation. Over time, that discourse shifted as they found themselves the central object of the March to the East and began to denounce abandonment's opposite, an "invasion" of highlanders that were "displacing" cruceños, the "true pioneers."<sup>401</sup> The Bolivian state also invoked abandonment imagining the lowlands as a sleeping, dormant or latent place abandoned by prior oligarchic regimes. Colonization would help Bolivia achieve true sovereignty by re-establishing the territorial integrity of a disarticulated nation. Yet, as colonization progressed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the MNR became increasingly concerned with another form of "abandonment;" high rates of settler attrition in new colonization zones often exceeded 80%. In the 1960s state officials began to obsessively track settler abandonment rates, cross-referencing the different colonization zones that the CBF (with USAID funding) had established in the lowlands of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Foreign and national "experts" held conferences and prepared studies to try to explain why new settlers so frequently "failed" to remain in the lowlands. They sought to engineer new colonization ventures (to be discussed in chapter four) in response.402

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>401</sup> Evident in newspaper articles like "Capital cruceño dentro del desarrollo agrario departamental." *El Deber*, May 15, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>402</sup> Many of these reports and proceedings are found in the library of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture in Chasquipampa, La Paz. Fausto Cappelletti, *Informe al gobierno de Bolivia sobre colonización*. (Roma: FAO, 1965). Adolfo Linares, *Problemas de colonización* (La Paz: CBF, 1964).

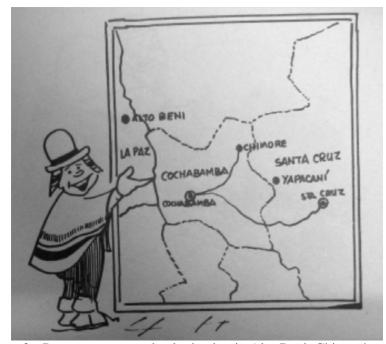


Figure 9 Alliance for Progress supported colonization in Alto Beni, Chimoré and Yapacaní.The image is from the pamphlet, "Como viveré y como trabajaré en mi nueva parcela." (La Paz: CBF; IBD, 1960s). The pamphlet introduced potential colonists to the three International Development Bank financed colonization projects in the lowlands of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.

While accused of "invading" the lowlands by hostile regionalist writers and of

"abandoning" their new colonies by the Bolivian state, Andeans also made use of the idea "abandonment," by turning that accusation back on the national government. In correspondence coming out of the colonization zones in the 1960s, colonists frequently charged the state with abandonment and cited multiple failures on the part of state institutions to provide for the basic necessities guaranteed in an array of films and pamphlets. Along with accusations directed at the state, colonists were also likely to accuse one another of abandonment particularly when such an accusation could open up a supposedly empty plot for acquisition by a newcomer.

When I spoke with Francisco Condori in August of 2014, he remembered the United Nations Andean mission touring Potosí in the late 1950s in an attempt to recruit colonists for a colonization project near Cotoca which had been founded in 1954. The colonization project was located about twenty kilometers to the east of Santa Cruz. In those same years the Bolivian military founded settlements to the north of Santa Cruz at Cuatro Ojitos, Huaytú and Aroma. Those first attempts were intended as something of a social and biological experiment to see whether highlanders could adapt to tropical life. The results were not promising. In the early years, settlers abandoned the zone in large numbers at rates of well over fifty percent. As the first generation of colonization experiments in post-revolutionary Bolivia, those sites demonstrate the range of frustrations that colonist and state experienced and also provide a good starting point for analyzing the emergence of a discourse about "abandonment" over the following decade as the Bolivian government opened new colonization zones in partnership with USAID across much of tropical Bolivia.

Why did early colonization attempts so often result in failure? Various explanations circulated among national and international actors involved in colonization. Examining the archives of the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF), the explanation of settler abandonment appears clear-cut. When deciding to leave the zone, settlers submitted signed letters to colonization authorities explicitly stating the reasons for their withdrawal and promising to pay back the costs of their transport and stay. In September of 1956, Martín Quispe signed off on a document confirming his abandonment of the colony of Huaytú. The military administered this colony where young Bolivians completing their military service worked to open roads and clear fields for future colonists and were given the option of remaining as settlers themselves when their year of obligatory service was done. Quispe attested to the fact that his departure was "voluntary" and that he simply "could not perform the [required] work because of the climate and owing to the insistence on the part of his family to return to the highlands]."<sup>403</sup> He absolved the colony administrators of any wrong-doing, noting that he had "received good treatment on the part of the military authorities," including "tools for my work, clothing, and food for himself and his families." Quispe spent only sixteen days in the colony before coming to this conclusion. In February of 1957, the colonist Eustaquio Ayaviri Villca signed a similar letter. His had been a double abandonment. First brought to Cotoca by the UN's Andean Mission, he had abandoned that colony and presented himself as a colonist before military authorities at Huaytú at the end of January. Only two weeks later he decided to leave once again, "considering myself inept for agricultural work in the geographical environment [medio geografico] of the zone."404 Like Quispe he thanked the administration and promised that in "returning to my land of birth I will not distort the truth," about anything pertaining to his departure. The cause had been the inability of his wife and children to "become accustomed to the climate."<sup>405</sup> Another abandonee, José Alba López, also referenced his inability to acclimatize to the zone and confessed that as a mason by trade he was poorly suited to hard agricultural labor.

In these signed official letters carefully absolving the military and other colonization authorities of any wrong-doing, colonists structured their abandonment within a logic of personal shortcomings and environmental incompatibility. They expressed gratitude for the role of the state and the actions of its representatives. Such letters, written in the first person but on official typewriters, tell more about the concerns

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>403</sup> Signed statement from Martín Quispe, Sept. 29, 1956. CBF. Box 88 Migraciones Internas, Folder 105, ALP.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>404</sup> Signed statement from Eustaquio Ayaviri Villca, Feb.22, 1957.. CBF. Box 88 Migraciones Internas, Folder 105, ALP.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>405</sup> Ibid.

on the part of colonization authorities to appear to have "provided every assistance" than they reveal as to the experience of their signatories. The power differential between military and settler precluded a frank discussion of any shortcomings on the part of the former.

In the lowlands, foreign technicians often acted as proxies for the Bolivian state. The UN's Andean mission brought international development workers in direct contact with transplanted migrants at the Cotoca colony. These foreigners provided an alternative perspective on the challenges of colonization and the reasons for settler abandonment. In 1955, the Haitian social worker and community development expert, Jeanne Sylvain, began working for the UN at Cotoca. From 1948-1950 she had collaborated with Alfred Métraux in a study of the Marbial valley in Haiti where UNESCO was initiating a community development project.<sup>406</sup> In Cotoca from 1955-1957 she provided periodic reports to her supervisor Jean-Baptiste Richardot and other project officials that provide alternative explanations for settler abandonment.

Sylvain traveled extensively through the highland departments of Potosí and Oruro to find migrants willing to take part in the venture. According to her, recruitment was made difficult by a mixture of political and cultural issues. In regards to the latter she noted the "fundamental distrust of the altiplano Indian to anything and anybody alien."<sup>407</sup> Having breached that cultural divide, Sylvain encountered government officials who also placed obstacles in her way. In September of 1956, after an exhausting but successful recruiting trip through highland mining camps, Sylvain found that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>406</sup> Published as Alfred Métraux, *Croyances et pratiques magiques dans la vallée de Marbial, Haïti* (Paris: Musée de l'Homme, 1953).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>407</sup> Jeanne Sylvain to Richardot, "Progress Report" September 20, 1955, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/ 0015/001563/156345EB.pdf, 2. Accessed June 1, 2015.

COMIBOL (the state-run mining organization) was prohibiting her new colonists from leaving for Cotoca. Sylvain dismissed these and similar frustrations with national agencies "confident that there could be nothing more than a slight misunderstanding between the COMIBOL and the [United Nation's] Andean Mission."<sup>408</sup> However, she would later complain "international technicians were unfairly painted with the mistrust caused by national technicians and due to political issues."

Early settlement experiences provided Sylvain with several potential culprits for abandonment from local antipathy to poor administration but she privileged sociocultural explanations of Andean society. These were evident in her accounts of the repeated instances in which she and other project officials attempted to dissuade departing colonists from leaving Cotoca. In August of 1956 new colonists had "declared themselves to be happy," but only a month later one colonist left without notice. Sylvain noted that the man was the sole colonist from Cochabamba and "probably could not feel well integrated among his companions [from Potosí]."409 The explanation offered by Sylvain suggested that cultural incompatibility might occur not simply between highlanders and lowlanders but also within the former group which included colonists from across a variegated Andean cultural geography.

In Sylvain's report this single departure appeared to have opened the flood-gates. That same evening another group of colonists (two couples and single man), announced that they would be returning to their home community of Calcha for All Saints Day and to plant crops on their highland plots. "These are Quechua-speaking people,"

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, 5. <sup>409</sup> Ibid, 3.

acknowledged Sylvain, "for whom the religious significance of All Saints Day and fear of retaliation from the neglected dead are vivid."<sup>410</sup> She suggested that the Andean Mission would "assuage possible terrors" by re-creating a version of the ceremony in the colony. By focusing on their religious motivation for leaving the colony Sylvain ignored the clear economic incentive that colonists had in maintaining highlands fields.

The following year the situation at Cotoca deteriorated further.<sup>411</sup> Whereas in November of 1956 there were just over 200 colonists at the site, by early January only 150 remained. Sylvain's assessment of this low retention rate and the poor "adaptation" of new colonists again drifted towards the cultural - particularly its gendered dimensions. According to Sylvain, single men were prone to homesickness but were ultimately more malleable than women or those with families. This was apparent to project officials who were engaged in far more than transplanting farmers. They sought to encourage a series of social transformations ranging from attempts to transform the recreation, housing, alcoholism, literacy, hygiene and sanitation of colonists. Sylvain reported significant progress in limiting the consumption of typical highland products like chicha, a fermented corn beverage, and coca leaves, a ubiquitous stimulant. Officials saw these "native" practices, along with the continued use of Quechua and Aymara, the indigenous languages spoken by a majority of migrants, as deficient cultural traditions that needed to be reformed. Sylvain lamented that "with the arrival of their wives," men that had once shown significant progress quickly began to regress.<sup>412</sup> A total of "seven women in the last contingent of settlers regularly engage in chewing coca and in two cases husbands

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>410</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>411</sup> Letter Jeanne Sylvain to Byron Hollinshead, Dir. Technical Assistance UNESCO, "Rapport Trimestriel," January to March 1957.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>412</sup> Sylvain "Rapport Trimestriel," 8.

who have abandoned this custom," have returned to it. These women made no progress with Spanish - insisting on speaking Quechua.

In addition to a lingering "Andean culture" that prevented migrants from adapting to life in the lowlands, Sylvain blamed abandonment on the "culture of colonization" being cultivated at new settlement sites. In her reports, Sylvain acknowledged that shortcomings on the part of project technicians, uncertainty over future ownership of land and the colonists' unwillingness to engage in forced cooperative labor hampered colonization. Abandonment was a response to all of these insoluble issues but, at heart, it was also "a manifestation of the simple dependence without responsibility [of the colonists] because of the satisfaction of basic needs for the families for too long."<sup>413</sup> Her terminology - linking abandonment with dependency - merits scrutiny. Dependency was an omnipresent term in mid century Latin America, often used to describe the underdevelopment of "peripheral" nations by economists and socialist theoreticians and to justify protective measures and subsidies for emerging industries. As a theory it emerged from the work of Raúl Prebisch as a member of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and was later popularized by radical socialist theorists like Andre Gunder Frank.<sup>414</sup> Here "dependency" took on a different meaning when employed as a critique of "excessive" state intervention on colonist's behalf. In fact, by suggesting that pampered colonists should be cut loose to fend for themselves, Sylvain was arguing for the exact opposite of the policy favored by most dependency theorists.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>413</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>414</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *Chile; el desarrollo del subdesarrollo.* (Santiago: Editorial Prensa Latinoamericana, 1967).

The rationale was both dubious and convenient given the frequent financial shortfalls of the Bolivian state. Yet this alternative "dependency theory" spread among the crowd of national and international development workers that took part in lowland colonization and would be cemented as the definitive "lesson" of the Cotoca project for future commentators. In subsequent colonization reports from a range of officials and observers, "Cotoca" came to be synonymous with excessive state paternalism.<sup>415</sup> Other more concrete problems from secure land title to effective marketing of agricultural production, which colonists had told officials were the "principal cause of their discouragement" would be swept aside. In practice the reaction to a crisis of colonist "dependency" emerged in a number of ways. Officials decided to decommission the cafeteria that served colonists to independently manage their own consumption.<sup>416</sup> Replacing a cafeteria with ration-cards was, after all, a simpler solution than reforming a convoluted titling process or guaranteeing reliable and fair prices for colonists' produce.

The above sources on Cotoca drawn from military authorities and foreign technicians provide a number of causes of "abandonment." These explanations range from the environmental to the cultural but always attribute failure to shortcomings on the part of Andeans. By turning from elite discourse and examining the correspondence produced by colonists this issue is recast and specifically implicates the state and its agents. Settler petitions in the first decade of state-sponsored colonization focused on three inter-related issues: titles, technical advice and transport. All had been raised, and

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>415</sup> See for example Instituto Nacional de Colonización. *Proyecto de las zonas de colonización: Puerto Villarroel, Km. 21, Chane-Piray, Ampliación de San Julián.* (La Paz: INC, 1974). Mark Epp. "Establishing New Agricultural Communities in the Tropical Lowlands : the San Julián Project in Bolivia." Action Paper. M.P.S. Cornell University, 1975, Cappelletti, Fausto. *Informe al gobierno de Bolivia.*

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>416</sup> Sylvain "Rapport Trimestriel," 7.

purportedly resolved, in state propaganda in which Andeans dutifully followed the directions of técnicos, promptly received title to their lands and immediately saw their produce efficiently whisked to regional and national market on new roads. In the letters colonists wrote from within the colonization zones that development vision appears fractured and incomplete. More importantly, we see that colonists were hardly passive recipients of state intervention – or lack thereof. Yet as several of the following examples indicate, state-shortcomings and scare resources also pitted some colonists (many of whom arrived in the lowlands "spontaneously,") against those who had come as part of directed settlement ventures. That combative settler-state and settler-settler discourse jarred with the image of a harmonious and meticulously planned human experiment in the tropics. Colonists were acutely aware of this and invoked the MNR's vision of the March to the East even as they pinpointed its shortcomings.

A plea from colonists living at Cotoca colony nearly a decade after Sylvain's tenure provides a good starting point for analyzing this settler discourse. By the midsixties, abandonment had taken its toll on Cotoca and the adjoining settlement of Campanero. The few remaining colonists petitioned President René Barrientos asking that the government help solve the problems that "hold back the social development of the colony."<sup>417</sup> They recognized their role to "populate the Orient" and in the "experiment to acclimatize the man of the altiplano on the [eastern] plains." But after ten years and with five thousand dollars invested per colonist they found the results of the Andean program to be "very sad." In that, they aligned with development authorities that considered the program to have moved from a potential model colony to a conspicuous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>417</sup> Letter from colonists at Campanero to René Barrientos, Dec. 5, 1965. PR1143, ANB.

failure. However, they differed with Sylvain on the causes of this failure - particularly on her assertion that state largesse had cultivated settler dependency and hindered their development. Instead settlers insisted that the "help they had received bears no relation," to the extravagant budget. They specifically targeted people like Sylvain, the "distinguished experts and authorities," who had devalued their knowledge claiming the "situation would have been different" had authorities listened to their views. Theirs were "opinions that came directly from experience [things] which only they [the colonists] had felt," but ultimately they had been led by the criteria of others and now "suffered the disastrous consequences."<sup>418</sup>

In addition to this attack on a dubious development "expertise," colonists made a series of specific denunciations asking that corrupt and incompetent personnel at the base be removed. They charged that the head of the center, Armando Salinas had "made a fraudulent sale" of a colony vehicle that was intended to transport the sugar cane of colonists.<sup>419</sup> A bulldozer belonging to the station was frequently rented out but the money earned was not invested in its maintenance and the machine was now broken. Four tractor tires had been placed as a guarantee for a colony business transaction in Santa Cruz but were never returned. More sinister were the frequent late night thefts. A sewing machine had been stolen at 3am. Medical service was non-existent because the very beds had been removed from the health center. The base's chief agronomist "does things unrelated to agronomy." The head accountant, Eduardo Cajías was "a degenerate

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

drunk who committed abuses against the colonizers." He frequently "demonstrates immorality and "refuses to work saying 'I will not attend to these Indians."<sup>420</sup>

No response was made to the Cotoca petition - which is filed alongside thousands of others in state archives - but the litany of complaints presented by the remaining colonizers and directed at colony personnel provide us with an alternative understanding of both abandonment and "technical" expertise. Here it is not settlers who abandon their plots because their deficient culture prohibits them from acclimatizing to a new environment. Rather, they are the ones who have been abandoned and mistreated by an absent state and its fallible representatives. This explanation had emerged in a restrained way in one of Sylvain's reports from March of 1957 which hinted at "all kinds of failures of technicians to direct the settlers" and even confided that "the fact that the superior technicians of the center were themselves abandoning the center was pretty demoralizing for the colonists which tended to confirm the fallibility of the project."<sup>421</sup> Yet for Sylvain these deficiencies were listed as "accidental" rather than "essential" causes of settler abandonment. What could be done (and what could not be done) by an international expert on short-term assignment in Bolivia limited a more expansive critique. As with the construction of abandonment in colonist-signed, military-authored abandonment letters, power differentials also precluded a frank discussion.

The letter from Cotoca's colonists makes for a compelling critique but simply cataloguing an inverted state-settler discourse - where the former is accused of abandonment by the latter - does not capture the complexity of colonization in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>421</sup> Sylvain, "Rapport Trimestriel," 4.

Bolivian lowlands. It falsely homogenizes a diverse group of "colonists" who were as likely to denounce one another as to challenge the state. A few months after the remaining colonists of Cotoca wrote their petition, Barrientos received another letter that also made specific reference to the failing endeavor. On March 1, 1966 a group of colonists from Jorochito (another new settlement along the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway to the west of Santa Cruz), led by Luis Fernández Prado and including representatives of the local cooperative and agrarian union, wrote to the President. They were aware of Cotoca the "so-called base of development" they sneered, "which for more than a decade has received all sorts of assistance unknown by other campesino communities."<sup>422</sup> Fernández felt that the base, with a scant eighty colonists, should be dismantled and transferred to their own community where its rusting machines could be put to productive use by the "thousands of campesinos that also came from distant regions of the country."<sup>423</sup> Were the colony headquarters at Cotoca simply a "display case," he wondered, or was it there to serve "the humble farming people?" Even if the former were true, Fernández insisted, "it would be better to move it somewhere more appropriate for its exhibition."<sup>424</sup> The "majority of cruceños," entirely unaware of the Cotoca center, only visited the region for the annual pilgrimage to a local shrine of the virgin. He boasted that in contrast "none denied the existence of Jorochito" which produced an impressive quantity of goods for the regional and national market.

As they concluded their letter the colonists demanded that in addition to moving the languishing agricultural center the state should send true "técnicos and not tourists" to

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>422</sup> Letter from colonists of Jorochito to René Barrientos, March 1, 1966. PR 1143. ANB.
 <sup>423</sup> Ibid.

advise the settlers of the region. What was meant by the disparaging alliteration? For their part the Cotoca colonists had denounced an "agronomist who does things unrelated to agronomy." While the Jorochito petitioners criticized their fellow colonists in Cotoca as "belligerent" because they "never permit the machinery to leave to lend help to other colonists", they shared the perspective that the frequently publicized "technical assistance" of the government had been without true substance - little more than "tourism" on the part of the visiting authorities. The response from government officials confirmed this dismal assessment. The following year, the Ministry of Campesino Affairs acknowledged that because of a shortage of funds and personnel it was impossible to move the center or extend coverage to all colonists of the region though they "hoped that one day it will be extended."<sup>425</sup>

In the highland-sending communities of Oruro and Potosí, rural Bolivians expressed similar frustration with the vaunted technical advice of authorities. They often did so in letters addressed directly to the President. For example, residents of the towns of Humacha and Saladillo wrote a petition to René Barrientos in 1966 after a survey commission had passed through. They noted that had lacked irrigation systems, "since time immemorial in this forgotten corner of the patria."<sup>426</sup> They also requested extension services and tools, "to escape from these systems that are completely antiquated." Addressing the President directly, they explained that "the indigenous race…[seeks] the level of civilization and progress that all other people aspire to." Like the petitioners from Jorochito they were wary of assuming true change would arrive with a technical

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>425</sup> Response to colonists of Jorochito from Min. Asuntos Campesinos, Nov.4, 1966. PR1143. ANB.
 <sup>426</sup> Letter to President from residents of Communidades Humacha y Saladillo, Sept, 14, 1966. PR 1143. ANB.

commission. They hoped that the resulting study by the Integrated Commission would result in "an effective and tenacious commitment, …and not be a mere visit which has occurred so many times before, cheating our aspirations."<sup>427</sup>

From across the colonization zones settlers sent complaints, ranging from absent technicians to missing tools, to state authorities. Representatives from Santa Fe colony criticized the Institute of Colonization in October of 1956 explaining that new colonists arriving from the altiplano were "very sick because we are entirely lacking in medicine." A month later they were still protesting that sanitary services were deficient.<sup>428</sup> Members of the Colonia Juan Lechín Oquendo – named after the leader of Bolivian Worker's Congress and then vice-President of Bolivia - wrote to Paz Estenssoro in late 1962, furious that they had waited for four months for the arrival of forty machetes and forty hatchets destined for the colony. The minister they claimed, "does not demonstrate a single bit of interest in helping us and... is sabotaging the labor of men of the party [MNR] who gave up all personal comfort in the city and decided to work in agriculture for the self-sufficiency of the country."<sup>429</sup> A few years later colonists settled in the lowlands to the northeast of Lake Titicaca wrote Barrientos inviting him to visit their colonies. They made similar pleas for water pumps, fencing, machetes, sprayers, shovels and affirming that while they would honorably "continue with our activities in these distant places of the country [even though] at the present we have not received help of any nature.",430

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>428</sup> Letter from Eustaquio Chuquimia to Director of Colonization, Oct.7, 1956. IC592. ANB. Letter from Max Molina to Director of Colonization, Nov.12, 1956. IC592. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>429</sup> Letter Colonia Juan Lechín to Paz Estenssoro, Dec.19, 1962. PR991. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>430</sup> Letter from Colonias Campesinas of Provincia Larecaja to Barrientos Oct.3, 1967. PR1097. ANB.

Like the state, petitioners often linked these specific demands for material support to broader ideas of patriotism and social transformation. From Roboré, on the plains to the east of Santa Cruz, the regional Director of Education wrote President Barrientos explaining that locals were demanding, "bricks, roofing materials, professors of education, agriculture, hygiene and practical skills,...so that progress can be made in all regions of the country," and "new generations will be formed with a spirit of work, discipline, civicism and honor."<sup>431</sup> In the highlands, frustrated Andeans threatened to immigrate to Argentina if state aid was not forthcoming. From San José, a city on the eastern plains, the mayor wrote that residents were fleeing to Brazil - a "pernicious exodus" in a region with "natural resources in abundance." "They see themselves as abandoned" he continued requesting that the government provide agricultural credit and extension services.<sup>432</sup>

On one of the final pages of a colonization pamphlet produced by USAID and the MNR in the early 1960s and entitled "The Route to Development," a captioned photo proclaimed "the colonist will be absolute owner of his land with titles of domain and possession after the third year of work."<sup>433</sup> In 1966, Bolivian President René Barrientos received a letter from the Colmena Cooperative in Caranavi - one of the colonization zones pictured in the pamphlet. Its members noted that they had settled in the region in 1953. They rehearsed a standard discourse about their role in national development and territorial integration. Despite complying with their end of the state-settler bargain they still lacked titles to their property. The immediate consequence of that delay was that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>431</sup> Letter from District Supervisor of Education Roboré, to Barrientos, August 24, 1966. PR 1143. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>432</sup> Letter from Mayor of San José Elio Montenegro Banegas to Barrientos, March 6, 1966. PR1097. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>433</sup> La ruta del desarrollo n.p.

they were prevented from obtaining agricultural credit from financing institutions. They extended this critique into a more reflective domain. The lack of titles, they continued, "positions us as a *transitory people* who cannot develop the fullness of our possibilities...almost as if we were *minors*, without right to manage our own affairs [emphasis added]."<sup>434</sup>

No response to this petition is preserved in the archives though the Colmen cooperative continued to petition the government over the following years. In 1968 members protested the dismantling of a community development service operating in the area, through which their cooperative "and the entire campesino sector has escaped from the ignorance in which we were subsumed." For a state worried about abandonment, the assertion that these petitioners remained "transitory" and juvenile should have been a troubling one.<sup>435</sup> Through colonization, the state hoped to first generate and then restrict mobility as migrants became firmly rooted in their new environment. The state also pictured that process as the constitution of independent rural farming families led by masculine male colonists. At times state pamphlets pictured abandonment as a failure to comply with masculine honor - conflating abandonment of land and abandonment of family in the hopes of shaming future colonists who might consider leaving the colonization zone. "Women, the force for which man labors," said one.<sup>436</sup> "Family happiness in the zones [of colonization] is a reality" stated another caption accompanied by an image of a man embracing a woman and small child.<sup>437</sup> In the Colmena petition that gendered perspective was inverted. The colonists blamed the state for their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>434</sup> Letter from Colmena Cooperative to Barrientos, June 30, 1966. PR1143, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>435</sup> Letter from Colmena Coop to INC, Oct. 22, 1968. PR 1231. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>436</sup> Salmon and Ruiz, Un transplante humano.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>437</sup> La ruta del desarrollo, n.p.

protracted instability and in describing themselves as "minors," the cooperative also sought to call out the hollowness of this gender ideal of honorable masculine migration.

To the reader, it may seem extreme that after thirteen years in the colonization zone, members of Colmena had still not received legal rights to land. Yet this was a common complaint of colonists from across the lowlands. Why did the state hold back the titling process? One could suggest that the move was a cynical one. By keeping colonists perpetually waiting on property documents the MNR sought to maintain control over transplanted, dependent subjects. Other Latin American historians have taken this perspective on colonization and resettlement.<sup>438</sup> Ascribing cynical intent to the state is not without merit, but may give too much credit to the administrative capacity of the MNR in those years. Securing land title in remote regions without a national cadastral survey was a particularly complicated and maddeningly bureaucratic process- one which passed through a range of steps from the local office of the Agrarian Reform to the desk of the President itself where at every step it might founder.

In order to establish legal title, colonists were also required to manage their new lands in particular ways. Ownership was processional, a goal that colonists aspired to through the performance of good agricultural citizenship, rather than a legal basis from which they could operate. Building houses, setting fence lines, clearing land and cultivating an increasing portion of the total plot size were all essential elements in fulfilling the social-economic function of land that made ownership a reality. As Kregg Hetherington points out for Paraguay, where a large settlement scheme was taking place

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>438</sup> Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict.* 

on the eastern frontier with Brazil in those same years, transforming precarious plots into legal property might include symbolic as well as material elements such as raising the national flag over the land or the planting of perennial rather than annual crops.<sup>439</sup>

Establishing ownership on the ground was ad hoc and relied on local officials and mobile topography teams (brigadas móviles) who would inspect the improvements (*mejoras*) that colonists had made to their land and verify their physical presence. For officials, the task of maintaining records for colonization plots that frequently changed hands without acknowledgement was a daunting one - not unlike the work of Mexican migration authorities who attempted to keep track of informal Mennonite migration between Canada and Northern Mexico in the 1950s and 1960s. In a note from late April of 1959, the Institute of Colonization admitted that 500ha of land near Caranavi had been solicited by a group of fifty campesinos but there had been no sign of them since the beginning of the year.<sup>440</sup> With thousands of colonists on the move to remote regions, simply locating mobile colonists was often a challenge for the state.

For some Bolivian officials, the struggle to control abandonment and illegal occupation was at heart an archival issue. In 1956, Max Molina, an employee of the Ministry of Agriculture, noted that in the Chapare region of Cochabamba adjudication of new lots had been paralyzed for two years because "the direction of colonization has not centralized the archive," and documentation remained with the authorities in each district. He recommended that no new lots would be given out until a topographical commission

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>439</sup> Kregg Hetherington, *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>440</sup> Internal Correspondence Institute of Colonization, April 29, 1959. IC 216, ANB.

could tour the region to inspect "agricultural labors, and carry out a survey on the number of families and available lands."<sup>441</sup>

In the absence of strong administrative capacity and reliable centralized documentation, head offices in La Paz were forced to depend on local colony leaders and officials to find land for new recruits. The obvious problem was that most of these individuals, including Max Molina, were colonists themselves. Reliance on locals also opened the door to "arbitrariness." Institute officials depended on those individuals but also asked that all materials pass through the central office so that they could register and confirm abandonments. In a letter to the President of Viluyo colony, the Institute felt the need to "once again re-iterate that it is entirely prohibited any occupation of lots that have not been confirmed by this office, any increase in the number of colonists in the colony presided over by you...would be illegal and will not be recognized." Yet through the 1960s the Institute of Colonization received frequent complaints that colony presidents were illegally selling lots.<sup>442</sup>

In the hopes of addressing issues of "arbitrariness," the Institute of Colonization continued to send out teams to survey new settlements. In the early 1960s, Pablo Gutiérrez Sánchez, head of the Department of Colonization and Lands, was tasked with sorting through the morass of abandonment denunciations in the Alto-Beni region. In 1961 and 1962 he traveled extensively in the zone, reporting to his superiors on denunciations, abandonments and overlapping solicitations and identifying lands that should revert to the states and others that could legitimately pass on to new colonists.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>441</sup> Max Molina to Director of Colonization, Nov 27, 1956. IC 592, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>442</sup> Pablo Gutiérrez to Director of Colonización, "Denuncia venta de lote agrícola," Nov. 9, 1962. IC 139. ANB.

Investigating Florida Colony along the Río Coroico, Gutierrez found that out of sixty-two lots, 42 colonists had official title, three had been investigated for improper transfer "arbitrary and without the knowledge of the administration," eleven more did not have title for failing to comply with the minimum annual improvements or for arriving "spontaneously" after the initial colonization contingent. Examples of irregularities included the case of Ernesto Choque who took out loans based on the improvements made by a previous colonist and two individuals that had "sold" land that they did not technically have title to. In Corpus Cristi colony, titling appeared to be progressing with sixty-two of sixty-four colonists holding title. Gutierrez also requested that colony leaders provide reliable documentation about abandonment, including the name of the abandonee, the season and date of the abandonment, fair price for existing improvements and whether anyone else had occupied the lot subsequently. He also dealt with cases where the entire border between two colonies had not been properly established. Despite these attempts to regulate and structure mobility, colonists frequently headed to new zones without seeking prior approval from the ministry of colonization.<sup>443</sup>

In the difficult process of establishing ownership over land colonists were as likely to denounce one another as to denounce the state. "Abandonment" was invoked not simply to shame the state into action; it was also a very specific denunciation that newcomers hoped could help them obtain rights to someone else's land. When they wrote to the state, would-be colonists often asked for lands that were presumably empty or had been abandoned by their former owners. A particularly rich vein of correspondence exists from the Alto-Beni-Caranavi settlement zone in the Amazon basin

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>443</sup> Various correspondence Gutierrez to Director of Colonization, 1961-62. IC 139, ANB.

near La Paz. Some petitioners requested the plots of "absentee" owners who they claimed lived in the city or those that, to cite one case, had supposedly "abandoned the lot in question without having worked it."<sup>444</sup> In perhaps the most ironic example, Max Molina, the same employee of the Ministry of Agriculture who would later insist on the need to properly archive the records of the Institute of Colonization in the Chapare appears as usurper rather than archival advocate. In 1957, he solicited Lot "58" in Bautista Saavedra colony in the Caranavi settlement region, noting that the original owner Manuela Chacón had not worked the lot since receiving it in 1955.<sup>445</sup> "As a single woman" Molina claimed, "she does not have the slightest capacity to complete the work demanded by our laws."<sup>446</sup> He counter-balanced this with his own masculine role as colonist-provider, explaining that he had brought his family with him to the zone to establish himself permanently. Once again the line between government official and colonist was entirely blurred.

The archives of the Ministry of Colonization are often incomplete. While they are invaluable sources to document the discursive strategies that petitioners employed but do not always speak to the effectiveness of those strategies. A typical case includes a single letter and occasionally a resolution but rarely offers a response from the opposing parties. What did these appropriations look like from the other side? Fortunately, some colonists accused of abandonment also petitioned the state. These ranged from long-time residents of colonization zones who wrote the Institute of Colonization claiming that they were being displaced by new arrivals to recently arrived colonists who traveled to the

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>444</sup> Letter from José Vino to Ministry of Agriculture July 8, 1959. IC592, ANB.
 <sup>445</sup> Letter from Max Molina, to Director of Colonization, July 31, 1957. IC592, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>446</sup> Ibid.

highlands and returned to find their new lands claimed by others.<sup>447</sup> Like the usurpers who claimed their plots, the accused presented the state with a justification for their right to the land while explaining their "abandonment."

In June 1960 Celestino Roque Chuquimia, noted that he had received lot 29 as one of an original group of colonists to settle in the Alto Beni in 1956. He had worked it for three years but the new tropical environment had affected his health and he was forced to abandon the lot and return to the altiplano for several months. After recovering he attempted to return to his plot only to discover that it had fallen into the hands of one Belberto Machaca who, he claimed, had done no work to improve it. "Return the lot to me," he asked, invoking his status as "a founder of the colony dedicated to agriculture work," adding, in a plea for compassion, that his wife and young son had both died while he was in La Paz the previous year.<sup>448</sup> In an undated letter a veteran of the Chaco war -astatus that was frequently, though not always successfully, invoked as part of a moral claim to land - complained of a frustrating experience in Caranavi in which he had been accused of abandonment before he even arrived in the colony. He had been adjudicated lands in the midst of the rainy season which he deemed ridiculous in a colony in which "one can only work in June."<sup>449</sup> Nevertheless, he avowed that he had made two short trips to Caranavi to inspect his lot but each time the head of the colony was absent and thus unable to confirm his presence. When he finally arrived in the dry season to begin clearing his plot he discovered that a woman named Luisa Valdés had been given his "abandoned" land. This was just six months after the original adjudication. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>447</sup> Arturo Cuenca to Min. of Agriculture, June 1956. IC 628. Letter from Angel Gomez to Min. of Agriculture, Dec. 17, 1958. IC 592. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>448</sup> Celestino Roqye Chuquimia to Min of Agriculture, June 28, 1960. IC216. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>449</sup> Ex-combatant in the Chaco War to Director of Colonization denouncing Luisa Valdes, n.d. IC 216. ANB.

frustrated veteran questioned the seriousness of the entire endeavor and suggested that the national government and its local representatives where "doing business" with state lands and "maliciously disrespecting the law."<sup>450</sup> He argued that the woman who had taken over his plot was a merchant and not a farmer and that his usurped plot sat next to her husband's ultimately making it "all just one plot" which the latter was working. Like attacks on Japanese immigrants in *El Deber*, the veteran's accusation that Valdés was a merchant and not true a farmer marshaled the moral authority of agrarian citizenship to reinforce a contested claim to land. His corresponding claim that her husband was in practice farming two lots invoked colonization law restricting maximum plot sizes in the settlement zones.

In the above correspondence, colonists might have denounced their neighbors and state shortcomings on the ground but in a modern reworking of "naïve monarchism" they also appealed to an imagined benevolent president to resolve those outstanding issues. As Richard Turrits writes of land reform under Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, colonization created a "novel role for its national state officials and institutions in peasants' daily lives as the mediators of land access, protectors against eviction and providers of needed resources."<sup>451</sup> Though the petitions immediate effectiveness is not always apparent, by denouncing state failings and detailing their disputes with neighbors colonists tended to reinforce the role of the state as ultimate arbiter. From the perspective of state-building and governmentality this discourse of disillusionment should be seen as generative. The anthropologist Tania Li, in an analysis of development policy in Indonesia, points out that, "failures invite new inventions to correct newly identified-or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>451</sup> Turits, Foundations of Despotism, 107.

newly created-deficiencies," creating additional room for the state.<sup>452</sup> James Scott, whose Seeing Like a State is premised on the idea of failed modernization, also acknowledges that the effect of development schemes, "lies as much in what they replace as in the degree to which they live up to their own rhetoric."<sup>453</sup> If those initiatives pull subjects into a more intimate relationship with the state, reduce the capacity for independent action or incorporate marginal territories into the nation it matters less that they fail to achieve their more altruistic aims.

Andeans sought to use denunciations of abandonment to appropriate vacant or contested land and to drive the state to provide promised support. Another key element in colonists' petitions framed abandonment in the context of transport and marketing. One news clip from the ICB's early years consisted of a steady - crudely hypnotic camera shot of the front of a bulldozer leveling virgin forest.<sup>454</sup> In another pamphlet given to colonists neatly stacked bags of grain sat by the road while, in the background, trucks carried others off to highland markets.<sup>455</sup> The message was clear. With state help, unruly landscape would be transformed to mesh with the needs of individuals and capital. Yet colonists soon discovered that getting themselves into the settlement zones was easier than getting their produce out. While the government attempted to track settlers who abandoned their plots, settlers complained bitterly of their inability to transport their crops along terrible roads, claiming they had been abandoned by the state.

In 1965, Barrientos received a letter from a group of ex-miners who described their sad fate, "suffering all kinds of injuries...and inclemencies of nature, below the sad

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>452</sup> Tania Li, *The Will to Improve*, 19.
<sup>453</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 301.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>454</sup> Unlabeled reel, Cineteca Boliviana.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>455</sup> La ruta del desarrollo.

roof of our humble huts." The group lacked sanitary posts and complained of snakebites and tropical diseases, but most bitterly of all, that a so-called all-weather road constructed by USAID was consistently impassable in the rainy season. It was blocked by "landslides and the waters of the Río La Paz...making it impossible even for animals to pass," precisely in the months when the colony began to harvest crops. In language that resonated with their former occupation, these ex-miners claimed that they "see ourselves enclosed (*encerrado*)" in the forest.<sup>456</sup> With no access to market, their crops would rot and residents would "remain in misery." El Palmar cooperative in Caranavi similarly petitioned for a bridge that would connect their fields to the highway across the river. Their leader affirmed that members were "unemployed" before becoming colonists but in light of the difficulties bringing their crops to market "they want to abandon their lands and establish themselves in the city again."<sup>457</sup>

Excessive rain and humidity and impassable rivers were not the only aspects of tropical nature that colonists struggled with. Settlers from the Agrarian Syndicate in Huaytú - a form of rural organization that became increasingly common in the midsixties - wrote to President Paz Estenssoro throughout early 1964. In earlier petitions from the region, producers had argued that government officials had encouraged them to increase rice production to satisfy national demand. Yet their success had flooded limited local and regional markets and the government had subsequently failed to guarantee prices. In the first few months of the year they wrote letters accusing the Bolivian Development Corporation of "cheating them" and making "false promises."<sup>458</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>456</sup> Letter to Barrientos from Circuata, Inquivisi Province, Jan 24, 1965. PR 1097. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>457</sup> Letter from El Palmar Cooperative to Paz Estenssoro, April 26, 1961. PR1143. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>458</sup> Letters from Colonia Huaytu to Paz Estenssoro, May 10, 1963 and May 5, 1964. PR1143. ANB.

Producers, some of whom had taken loans to increase production, were selling their production at below cost to predatory merchants. In May, Virgilio Zabalaga, elected representative of 175 families totaling nearly 900 colonists, submitted a list of demands for technical support and the establishment of credit offices. "Huaytú is a rice-producing colony," he reminded the government, and should have services including a sanitary post, bridges over small river crossings and a "properly graveled road." Finally, given that they were approaching their ten-year anniversary, Zabalaga asked that the government build a public plaza and acknowledge the community's role in the March to the East with "a monument to the Bolivian colonizer."<sup>459</sup> In a July letter, they again expressed their frustration and described a public meeting to try and devise a way to combat the giant rats that were destroying their harvested rice and that they had "wasted [their] resources fighting."<sup>460</sup> In appealing to the MNR about their struggles with these pesky rodents, the colony broached another environmental issue related to the teeming animal life of the lowlands. But the underlying issue was one of frustrated mobility - of roads rather than rodents - evident in stockpiles of rice that could not be brought to market in a timely fashion and for a fair price.

That same year, the neighboring colonies of Cuatro Ojitos and Aroma, also established in the mid-50s, wrote to Paz Estenssoro. "You called us your children/babies [*guaguas* from Quechua]" they reminded the President - invoking the deficient paternalism of the state. <sup>461</sup> Yet these colonists who were the "true campesino workers" were being cheated. The issue again was directly related to marketing - evidence of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>459</sup> Letter Virgilio Zabalaga to Paz Estenssoro, May 5, 1964. PR 987. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>460</sup> Letter from Colonia Huaytú to Min of Asuntos Campesinos. July 12, 1964. PR1143. ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>461</sup> PR 987, April 13, 1964 Letter from Cuatro Ojitos and Aroma colonies to Paz Estenssoro, April 13, 1964. PR987. ANB.

dramatic expansion of regional production. The group affirmed that its "2000 humble families had been brought from the valleys [of Cochabamba] by the revolutionary government to cultivate the land and live exclusively from our work growing sugar cane and other articles." The government run Guabirá sugar mill had drastically reduced their cane quota to 25% of their total harvest. "We are unfortunate" they stated, explaining that could not pay the excessive cost of transporting even this amount to the mill. They demanded that Paz Estenssoro, as a benevolent father figure, rectify this transport and marketing issue thereby guaranteeing them an outlet for their crops. "Anything else," they concluded, "would be to leave us as orphans."<sup>462</sup>

In a lowland context in which new colonies struggled to market their production, uncertainty functioned in the case of transport as it had in the case of land. Individual colonies frequently wrote to the government asking that deteriorating roads be refinished, or that bridges be constructed across rivers that became impassable during the rainy season. The lack of government support was as likely to lead colonists to denounce their neighbors as to denounce the government. In May of 1964, the residents of General Saavedra (another colonization site to the north of Santa Cruz) wrote to the president. They wanted the government to modify the planned road between Chané and the Guabirá sugar mill. While the current rough route passed through their town, the projected road would effectively bypass them. Such an act would be nothing less than a "death blow [golpe de gracia]" for the town, "pushing forwards its slide into decadence."<sup>463</sup> The previous year the "Victor Paz" colony in the Alto Beni wrote to their eponymous President, "with a small request that is not money." USAID was currently constructing a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>463</sup> Letter from residents of General Saavedra town, May 14, 1964 PR987. ANB.

road between La Paz and the colony of Broncini, linking a zone that encompassed approximately 7000 families. "We are located at the start of the road," along with the neighboring colony of Incahuara, they explained.<sup>464</sup> Members of both colonies had freely given their personal labor to the dangerous task of opening a 25m right-of-way in the forest. Due to a petition by members of Incahuara, engineers had decided to move the road closer to that settlement effectively stranding colony Victor Paz. They wanted the president to intervene and restore the road to its original course avoiding, 'irreparable future damage," to their town. As with cruceños who greeted the arrival of the train a decade earlier, the residents of both Victor Paz and General Saavedra understood the centrality of mobility to survival in the Bolivian lowlands. They recognized what historians of transport have also pointed out - that the effects of infrastructure are uneven. As they pull two distinct places closed together they effectively magnify the distance between other locales. In the process some sites would become future nodes while others would be abandoned. As with the commentators in *El Deber* who complained bitterly about the new train service - even as they made ample use of it - these settler petitions also reveal a fundamental shift, demonstrating the degree to which expectations about mobility and access as a fundamental right had been transformed in the course of the March to the East.

## **Conclusion: New Repertoires and Old**

As lowland settlement expanded in Bolivia throughout the 1950s and 1960s, colonists wrote letters to presidents and government officials pleading, cajoling, threatening and demanding a range of state intervention. They also described conditions

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>464</sup> Letter from Victor Paz colony to Victor Paz Estenssoro, June 29, 1963. PR987. ANB.

that challenged the representation of colonization put forward by the MNR in the 1950s. Those challenges were often environmental as when floods, storms, tropical illnesses and other issues threatened the stability of colonists. They were also legal and political as when colonists denounced illegal occupations of land and petitioned for outstanding titles to their new properties. Economic understandings of mobility also emerged in complaints about bad roads and lack of accessible markets.

Hope and failure, the respective reigning motifs of the first and second rounds of correspondence I examine in this chapter, may appear diametrically opposed. After reading correspondence from a prospective settler begging for support to travel to the "fertile" lands of the east it is difficult to read the subsequent letters of a disillusioned colonist or the damning report of a project official without accepting their explicit narrative that the "reality" of colonization had utterly failed the hopes of colonist and state. It is then easy to read that failure into a broader critique of "new lands settlement," an initiative that was taking place in developing nations across the tropical world in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>465</sup>

But failure is not modernization's opposite. Through an examination of settler denunciations, the second half of this chapter argues that a discourse of failure is not used in passive despair but rather as an authoritative lament. Cynicism and optimism are intertwined. Through its claim to "reality," a diagnosis of failure demands a new round of intervention. Assessments of colonization by development workers inevitably pointed to new forms of intervention that would salvage the initiative. The discourse of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>465</sup> Thayer Scudder, pioneer of comparative approaches to this phenomenon, trained and encouraged a variety of students to study the issue in the 70s and 80s, see Thayer Scudder, *The Development Potential of New Lands Settlement in the Tropics and Subtropics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, 1984).

abandonment appearing throughout colonization literature should be read in light of this idea. Colonists also made extensive use of the idea of failure and abandonment as they sought to push the state to provide them with promised resources. That much was already evident in pre-colonization petitions in which Andeans construct the highlands as a failed place or wrote of labor exploitation in neighboring Argentina in order to push the state to promote colonization. Ensconced in those new colonization zones, colonists sought to critique failings, not for its own sake, but to generate a new round of intervention on the part of the state. Spontaneous colonists, who arrived in the settlement zones without official sponsorship, were also likely to denounce fellow colonists who had supposedly "abandoned" the zone in the interests of securing their plots for themselves.

The diverse repertoire that petitioners employed reflects a particular historical moment. The period of MNR rule in Bolivia (1952-1964) was one of broad social and political reform and was thus highly conducive to the sort of state-citizen discourse found in the above petitions and letters. Despite the overthrow of Paz Estenssoro by René Barrientos in 1964, the following four years were still characterized by a populist, if increasingly authoritarian, approach.<sup>466</sup> This was particularly evidenced in countryside and colonization zones where Barrientos forged a rural peasant-military pact (pacto campesino-militar or PCM) to combat radicalism in cities and mining centers. With distinctive personalist flair, Barrientos encouraged a robust culture of directly petitioning government officials and the president for access to resources, land, credit, titles even as the PCM suppressed independent forms of political organizing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>466</sup> See Field, From Development to Dictatorship.

This state-citizen exchange continued in the tumultuous years after the unexpected death of Barrientos in 1968 but took on an unscripted dimension. Two leftleaning military leaders, first Alfredo Ovando and then J.J. Torres, presided over increasing radicalization of laborers, miners and rural workers leading up to a popular constituent assembly in 1971. Colonists, organizing into agrarian unions by the mid and late 1960s, were no longer content with petitioning state authorities for the delivery of promised resources. With the coup of General Hugo Banzer in 1971 and subsequent repression that populist moment definitely unraveled as it would across much of the southern cone. Petitioners had less reason to be hopeful that their pleas would be received and they could no longer claim the revolutionary legacy of 1952 to push the government into action. While individuals surely continued to write to the President and various ministries, from a methodological perspective, the disastrous state of state archives for the Banzer years also makes it increasingly difficult to read for a populist or subaltern voice in government archives related to colonization. For those historical and methodological reasons the following chapter introduces a new actor to the story of Bolivian colonization. A range of religious figures, from missionaries to faith-based development workers that had been long active in Bolivian colonization found increasing room to maneuver in the turn to authoritarianism.

## Chapter 4 - To Minister or Administer: Faith and Development in Revolutionary and Authoritarian Bolivia, 1952-1985

In February of 1968 a massive flood without precedent in the modern history of Bolivia devastated the lowlands and much of the nation. A very wet month was punctuated by several days of intense rain during which the Río Grande, the river to the east of Santa Cruz that railway engineers had struggled to bridge in the 1950s, spilled its banks and flooded nearby colonization zones from Aroma and 4 Ojitos to Okinawa. It was followed by the Río Piraí on the west side of Santa Cruz and then days later by intense floods in Cochabamba turning Bolivia's second largest city into a disaster zone. On February 13 *El Deber* reported that "eight people have perished from drowning in the turbulent waters of the Río Grande." The incident occurred near Cosoriocito where the river had risen within one meter of homes and fields.<sup>467</sup> Over the following week the rains continued and flood waters threatened the city of Santa Cruz. At the town's electrical plant firefighters struggled to place sandbags between the advancing water and high-tension power lines. Newspapers reported that the La Salle secondary school was nearly underwater as were several saw mills and the city's botanical gardens.<sup>468</sup> In addition to affecting urban spaces and new colonization zones, the disaster struck at central symbols of regional progress that had been constructed in the previous decade. The recently completed rail bridge over the Río Grande was washed away while the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway had also been closed due to dozens of landslides.<sup>469</sup> On the night of February 22, President Barrientos declared a national emergency. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>467</sup> "8 personas habrían perecido ahogadas en turbión Río Grande" *El Deber*, Feb 13, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>468</sup> "Inundaciones llevan la desolación a las zonas urbanas y rurales" *El Deber* Feb 20, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>469</sup> "Accesso terrestre a Santa Cruz se halla obstruido" *El Deber* Feb 21, 1968.

following day the situation only worsened. Another flooding river was causing the state oil company (pictured in the film *Los Primeros*) to lose 2000 barrels of oil a day.<sup>470</sup> Intense rains in the highlands brought widespread flooding to the city of Cochabamba while in Santa Cruz, Okinawa colony was faced with evacuation. Word also arrived that in Trinidad, the sleepy capital of the Beni that appeared in the ICB's serialized *Travelling through our Land* a large barn had collapsed because of heavy rains killing two and injuring fifteen.<sup>471</sup> In Rurrenabque, landslides placed the entire town in jeopardy. The mayor reported that fifty percent of the town's water system - whose heroic construction had been fictionalized in the ICB film *La Vertiente* - had already been destroyed.<sup>472</sup>

One of the most intriguing "responses" to this disaster was the work of an alliterative inter-faith coalition of Methodist missionaries, Maryknoll nuns and Mennonite relief workers. These religious actors had worked in colonization for more than a decade and they leapt into action in the wake of flood. Initially helping house the thousands of flood victims that crowded into the city of Montero, they later formed an ecumenical organization called the Comité de Iglesias Unidas (or United Church Committee – CIU) to assist in the resettlement of those who could not return to their former lands. Out of that experience the CIU developed a model of settler orientation which they eventually employed in San Julián (the largest and - according to some - most successful colonization project in Bolivian history).

This chapter explores the broader role that "faith" played in the development of colonization in lowland Bolivia. Like the other individuals, groups and organizations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>470</sup> "Emergencia nacional: se estima en un millón de dólares las pérdidas por las inundaciones" *El Diario* Feb 23, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>471</sup> "Hubo mejoría en Santa Cruz, ayer" *El Deber*, Feb 24, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>472</sup> Ibid.

discussed in this dissertation, church-based organizations cultivated a relationship with state officials by framing their work as complimentary to the goals of the March to the East. This history centers on the role of the Methodist Church and the Mennonite Central Committee – a North American relief organization – and is informed by institutional archives and the oral histories of former missionaries and volunteers involved in colonization. The role of the Maryknoll religious order in Latin America, particularly in the context of liberation theology, has been discussed much more extensively.<sup>473</sup> Unlike the petitions analyzed in the last chapter, these sources tell us much more about the perspective of religious actors than of the colonists they served. How did missionaries balance the conflicting obligations of "ministering" and "administering?" In what ways did they negotiate the transition between the national revolutionary government of the MNR and the bureaucratic authoritarianism of Banzer? More broadly, how did the experiences of Protestant development workers fit within a period characterized by both right wing political rule and an increasing leftward swing of the Catholic Church. On the ground, what did the interaction between settler and missionary look like? This perspective remains critical because in standing in as proxies for an absent state along the nation's frontiers, these faith-based development workers were often the primary "authorities" engaging with lowland colonists.

While they came together in response to the 1968 flood, Methodists, Mennonites and Maryknolls, along with a host other Christian organizations had been active in the Bolivian lowlands for some time. By late sixties however, two sea-changes in Latin American Christianity brought new intensity to their work. The first, in the years directly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>473</sup> A recent example is Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru*.

preceding the flood, was the restructuring of the Catholic faith following the Second Vatican Council. In Latin America, missionary orders like the Maryknolls, pushed forward a radical social stance described as a "preferential option for the poor" at the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín which occurred a few months after the flood in mid-1968. The second major shift was the growing influence of Protestantism across Latin America. Protestant missionaries had been active in the region beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when liberal governments welcomed them as part of their challenge to the entrenched hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Despite an active presence for half a century, it was only in the middle decades of the twentieth century that Protestant denominations gained an increasing number of converts in Latin America.

Historian Virginia Burnett provides a useful comparative example in her study of Protestant activity in Guatemala - a country that, like Bolivia, had a large indigenous population and lowland zones open for colonization in the mid-twentieth century. From the beginning, missionaries provided a "particular cultural package ([with] its emphasis on "development," as evidenced by medical clinics, schools, and translation projects) [which] endeared missionaries to the liberal government."<sup>475</sup> During the militarization of the late 1960s and early 1970s Protestantism "moved from margins of society into the mainstream" to spread "across the social landscape" and was particularly appealing for those in a process of transition or in places where communities were undergoing rapid transformation "through the erosive processes of "development" migration and war."<sup>476</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>474</sup> Lesley Gill, "Religious Mobility and the Many Words of God in La Paz, Bolivia" in *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America*. Eds. Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>475</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>476</sup> Ibid, xii

Maryknolls and Ouaker organizations were especially active in new colonization zones in the Petén forest created by Guatemala's military government.<sup>477</sup> Paralleling contemporary developments in Bolivia, Protestantism thus survived the transition from the socialist regime of Arbenz and thrived in the militarized landscape of late-twentieth century Guatemala.

Bolivia also experienced a gradual and then exponential increase in Protestant activity through the twentieth century - ultimately leading to what anthropologist Lesley Gill has described as "the invasion of the sects."<sup>478</sup> While some groups like the Seventh Day Adventists and the Methodists had been active in the country in the early twentieth century, the 1952 revolution was transformative. This was not due to a concertedly anti-Catholic sentiment on the part of the MNR but because structural changes from the end of debt peonage and the re-ordering of rural landscapes undermined the stable alliance between Catholic Church and rural oligarchy. Urbanization also played a key role. La Paz nearly tripled in size in the three decades after the revolution while the satellite city of El Alto grew from a population of 11,000 to 350,000 in the same time. Arriving from the countryside, rural-urban migrants looked for new forms of community – and here Gill takes a similar approach to Burnett – to replace the social structures they were leaving behind. The paradox of revolutionary freedom, that rural Bolivians, "lost many of the material benefits of paternalism without receiving greater social security from the state," created a distinct role for the expansion of Protestant activities.<sup>479</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>477</sup> Susan Fitzpatrick Behrens, "From Symbols of the Sacred to Symbols of Subversion to Simply Obscure: Maryknoll Women Religious in Guatemala, 1953 to 1967," The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American History 61, no. 2 (October 2004): 189-216.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>478</sup> Lesley Gill, ""Religious Mobility," 182.
<sup>479</sup> Gill, "Religious Mobility," 185.

Gill focuses on evangelical churches in highland urban environments but in the wake of the revolution, the leaders of the MNR also directly appealed to religious missions to take on greater roles in lowland colonies.<sup>480</sup> Walter Guevara Arze worked with Caritas, the Catholic Relief agency, in supporting colonization. Uruguayan Methodist Sante Uberto Barbieri remembers a conversation with a tearful Paz Estenssoro, "when the President was telling us of those regions and people, of their tremendous need and inviting us to go there to open up churches, schools and social centers. This chapter begins by comparing the activities of the staunchly evangelical World Gospel Mission with two service-based organizations, the Methodist Church and the Mennonite Central Committee. As the MNR looked to new rural and frontier regions that it wished to "incorporate" into national life, a resource-poor revolutionary government welcomed the independent initiative of Protestant churches in education, healthcare and communitybuilding. Like other transnational actors analyzed in this dissertation, faith-based development workers carried out their activities immersed in a web of interconnections linking local sites to national projects and global faith communities. That transnational dimension meant that missionaries – as intermediaries - were often required to justify their activities to an array of stakeholders including colonists, state officials and fundingconstituencies back home.

The chapter is divided into three sections. I first track the emergence and growth of faith-based rural development from the 1952 revolution to the 1968 flood. The second section narrows in on a key moment of transition beginning with an environmental crisis (the flood) in 1968 and closing with a political one (the right wing coup of Hugo Banzer)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>480</sup> Sante Uberto, "That Strange Land Called Bolivia." in Methodist Church Joint Section of Education and Cultivation, *Lands of Witness and Decision*. (New York, United Methodist Church, 1957).

in 1971. Those few short years were defined both by the development of new models for frontier colonization and an increasing radicalism in existing colonies. Mennonites and Methodists found themselves at the center of each. In the final section of this chapter I turn to the work of the United Church Committee in the San Julián project. Here I am interested in demonstrating how religious organizations negotiated the shift to authoritarian rule in Bolivia during the Banzer regime. Was the CIU's "orientation" work in San Julián fundamentally different from the radical settler organizing they had engaged in before the Banzer coup? By tracking the evolution of the CIU, I also seek to contribute to a broader conversation on the proliferation of non-governmental organizations in development modernization. That shift would become fully apparent by the end of Banzer regime as the state further stripped itself of direct responsibility for lowland development. The trajectories of many of the individuals discussed in this chapter embodied that transition as they transferred their repertoires from church organizations to NGOs and international development agencies in the lost decade of the 1980s and in the shift to neoliberalism, an economic order that proved uniquely conducive to NGO-led development.

## "Death Trails," a "Land of Decision," and the "Bolivia Mystique": Religious Actors and the Appeal of Lowland Colonization

As Bolivia opened up frontier land for colonization a legion of surveyors, engineers and other technicians arrived to supervise projects and mitigate the considerable risks posed by the unfamiliar tropical frontier environment. One such "risk" was human. When prospective colonists petitioned the state they typically claimed that the lands they were asking for were "empty" or "free from competing claims." These assertions concealed the fact that the nation's frontiers were not vacant but home to over thirty indigenous cultures, distinct from the Spanish, Aymara and Quechua speakers who were arriving as colonists. While some lowland indigenous groups, like the Guaraní and Guarayo, had a long history of interaction with Spanish culture - primarily through mission stations - many others including the Ayoreo and Yuqui lived at the margins of settled areas and had long resisted the incursion of outsiders. Conflicts between settlers and indigenous communities were exacerbated in the course of the March to the East providing missionaries with what they felt to be a "unique" opportunity.

World Gospel missionary Carroll Tamplin had been conducting missionary work in Bolivia since the early 1930s, translating the bible into Aymara in the highlands before beginning to work in lowland colonization zones. When fellow missionary Robert Geyer arrived in La Paz in 1945 he joined the Tamplin family at the small settlement of Guanay in the Amazon basin, "a base from which advances might be made to reach the Indians of the forest."<sup>481</sup> In a subsequent book recounting his missionary experience, entitled, *From Death Trails in Bolivia to Faith Triumphant* Geyer provided harrowing descriptions of the descent from the Andes to Guanay along precipice-lined mule trails. After several years and with thousands of dollars invested, the missionaries abruptly abandoned the project. "There were programs. There were plans. There were prayers. There were dreams. And then we lost it," Geyer obtusely reflected on the failed initiative. Such an explanation did not satisfy their superiors in Chicago from whom they received "hasty comments and withdrawn confidence."<sup>482</sup> Undeterred, the pair and their families turned

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>481</sup> Robert Geyer *Death Trails in Bolivia to Faith Triumphant*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1963), 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>482</sup> Geyer, *Death Trails in Bolivia*, 60.

from this failure in the northern Amazon basin to a new potential mission site near Santa Cruz.

In April of 1950, Tamplin wrote to the Ministry of Colonization with what was surely intended to be an alarming claimr. He explained that near the colony of Yapacaní, where some road-building and settlement was taking place, "this year four citizen-settlers…were killed with poison arrows."<sup>483</sup> The government had settled some veterans of the Chaco War in the area in 1938 but as funding dried up over the next decade colonists drifted out of the area, while according to Tamplin, the few families that remained faced assaults and thefts from indigenous groups re-occupying the vacated territory. He proposed that his missionary group be given exclusive license to contact and convert the perpetrators.

The timing of Tamplin's request was clearly critical for the suspect missionaries whose own organization was raising serious doubts about their capabilities. Yet Tamplin's petition also arrived at a seemingly inopportune moment for the Bolivian state. The previous year the government had definitively secularized and dispersed the last of the Franciscan-led missions in the Chaco and Guarayos. Local elites and liberal state authorities had long opposed Franciscan missions as a lingering colonial institution whose corporate privileges, large land-holdings and monopolization of indigenous labor were seen as an effective barrier to regional development.<sup>484</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>483</sup> Letter from Carroll Tamplin "Señor Ministro del Estado en el despacho de colonización," April 14, 1950. IC237, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>484</sup> For a discussion of the escalating tensions that led to secularization of the missions in 1949, see Erick Langer *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart* of South America, 1830-1949. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

The region Tamplin and Geyer wished to explore lay at the center of this former Franciscan zone. Why would the state evict one missionary organization and welcome another? The answer speaks to the unique image of Protestantism in mid-twentieth century Latin America. In contrast to the established Catholic orders, Protestant missionaries were able to present their work in a decidedly modern light that harmonized with nationalist aims of incorporating "savage" tribes. In Mexico, as historian Todd Hartch has demonstrated, Protestants became "missionaries of the state" as they mastered indigenous languages through the Summer Institute of Linguistics - an institution that some Bolivian missionaries were also members of.<sup>485</sup>

Tamplin spoke to Bolivian authorities in the language of civilization and citizenship, assuring officials that his mission among the Sirionó would be directed entirely towards, "their subsequent incorporation into the life of the nation... in strict accordance with the provisions of the Political Constitution of the Republic."<sup>486</sup> He invoked the colonial distinction between barbarous indigenous groups outside of state control and *gente de razón* to differentiate the semi-nomadic Sirionó – a tribe of "authentic barbarians"- he sought to convert from the "partially civilized" Guarayos population the state was dispersing from Franciscan missions. In search for "uncontacted tribes," Tamplin and Geyer had no interest in the latter. As historian Erick Langer points out missionaries shared with salvage anthropologists - also circulating in the Eastern Andean lowlands - a disinterest and, at times, a barely masked disdain for "corrupted" indigenous groups, living near settlements and working in extractive industries.<sup>487</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>485</sup> Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>486</sup> Letter from Tamplin, April 14, 1950.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>487</sup> Langer, *Expecting Pears*, 251.

In the tumult of the national revolution, Tamplin's petition appears to have gone unanswered. However its eventual approval in November of 1955 is evidence that the MNR continued to support evangelical-led missions. Missionary activities appeared alongside other images of lowland development in ICB sponsored news bulletins also suggesting that the Tamplins had plenty of competition in the mission field. By the end of the sixties over twenty different evangelical groups were operating in Bolivia and urgently seeking to outdo one another in frontier exploration. What an aspiring missionary needed was jurisdiction to ward off competitors. Geyer felt that he and Tamplin had a "divine commission to the Indian of the forest, savage though he was."<sup>488</sup> The MNR gave them a state-commission as well sketching out the limits of the "sector" in which he would have exclusive "religious jurisdiction."<sup>489</sup>

With state authorization the two missionaries began their search for "untouched" Indians in northern Santa Cruz. They were soon disappointed. Unable to locate more than a handful of Sirionó, their first successful convert was an ex-army sergeant they referred to as Don Ángel. With his help and the aid of a Cessna 180 they dubbed "Wings of Peace," and piloted by Tamplin's son Jonathan, they pushed further into the jungle searching for a different group – the Yuqui.<sup>490</sup> While presented to home churches as selfless acts of potential martyrdom, Milton Whitaker (a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer living) critically remembers those expeditions had all the feel of a hunting party

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>488</sup> Geyer, *Death Trails in Bolivia*, 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>489</sup> Letter from Direción General de Colonización y Tierras to Carrol Tamplin, Nov.15, 1955. IC237, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>490</sup> Geyer, *Death Trails in Bolivia*, 87.

in which well-armed missionaries were as likely to shoot at "hostile" tribes, as they were to proselytize.<sup>491</sup>

While building an airstrip in the forest in August of 1959, Don Ángel was killed by a Yuqui spear. He fell victim to the very thing that Tamplin had claimed his arrival would prevent. Yet this "failure" became a legitimating call for further action. Searching, in the words of Geyer, for a "return to the present day dynamic demonstration of the spiritual power of primitive Christianity," Tamplin had found his first martyr - a foundational moment for any struggling mission.<sup>492</sup> When another convert was gravely wounded by a Yuqui spear, the missionaries positively rejoiced.<sup>493</sup> In pursuing U.S. based support, these fatal and violent encounters furnished the missionaries with an irresistible narrative. In the millenarian language of Geyer, who travelled the U.S. sharing the story of Don Angel and collecting donations from church groups, there was a clear trajectory, "from death trails in Bolivia to faith triumphant."

Like the WGM, the United Methodist Church established operations in Bolivia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Facing hostility from the Catholic Church, Methodists operated primarily in the field of urban education. While they won few converts, the "American Institutes" in La Paz and Cochabamba became prestigious destinations for the children of the elite. By 1960, a full third of sitting members of Congress had been former attendees.<sup>494</sup> In the mid-1950s, under the leadership of director Murray Dickson, the Methodist Mission sought to dramatically expand its operations and promote Bolivia to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>491</sup> Milton Whitaker in interview with author, Santiago de Chiquitos, November, 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>492</sup> Geyer, Death Trails in Bolivia, 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>493</sup> The young man returned, "to win for Christ those who had killed Don Angel, and who now had almost taken his life!"Ibid, 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>494</sup> Jim Palmer, *Red Poncho and Big Boots: The Life of Murray Dickson* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969). 159.

its membership in the United States. Yet "mission work" meant something different for Dickson than it did for the WGM. In a 1946 letter to the Texas Methodist Student Conference in Hillsboro, Texas, Dickson admitted his prior disapproval of proselytization in terms that appeared to caricature the work of men like Geyer and Tamplin, stating that,

my concept of a missionary was of an elderly person dressed in a funny costume who put on a display in the local church to tell sob stories to raise money to save the poor heathen...Now I am a missionary. Not that kind. I have learned that missions mean agriculture, medicine, engineering, education as well as preaching...that there is a need for missionaries of all kinds.<sup>495</sup>

For Dickson, the role of the missionary was to act as service providers for lowland colonists rather than as evangelizers of lowland indigenous groups.

Bolivia was not the only field of operations for global Methodism but it became an increasingly important one. In 1956 just prior to its annual general conference, the United Methodist Board of Missions decreed that Bolivia along with three other locations – Sarawak on the Malaysian portion of the island of Borneo, Korea, and the Belgian Congo - were "lands of decision," key sites of future Methodist missionary work. While acknowledging the diversity of these locales, the board justified its selection by invoking the ideological climate of the Cold War as well as broader notions of "primitive society" and modernization. Bolivia (in the midst of a social revolution), Korea (emerging from a devastating war) and Malaysia and the Congo (where growing anti-colonial movements threatened European rule) were all "at a place in their history when they must decide which way they will go."<sup>496</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>495</sup> Jim Palmer, *Red Poncho*, 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>496</sup> Methodist Church, Lands of Witness and Decision, 7.

Dickson personally toured U.S. churches in support of the "Land of Decision" campaign giving impassioned speeches, passing out pamphlets, generating donations and recruiting young missionaries.<sup>497</sup> Reflecting on this new generation, Argentine Methodist missionary Sante Uberto Barbieri agreed "our work in a way has been limited to the "high places. It is now time to go down to the plains, to the jungles to the midst of new and throbbing communities."<sup>498</sup> The new recruits would serve in the church's rural development and colonization programs. While the World Gospel Mission, targeted "uncontacted tribes" living along the frontier, the Methodist church focused on the colonists themselves and - at the personal invitation of Paz Estenssoro - linked their work directly to the national project of eastern expansion where the state presence was weakest. As Burnett points out in the Guatemalan case, the dislocations produced by internal migration were ideal points of entry for missionary activity. "People are moving in by the thousands" wrote Dickson, "and the church is being urged to come in because these immigrants need spiritual and moral help."<sup>499</sup>

Dickson's tour took him through the Methodist heartland of South Texas where Harry Peacock, a young church member from Brownsville, was inspired by Dickson's campaign.<sup>500</sup> In 1961, Peacock headed to Bolivia to join missionaries Robert and Rosa Caulfield who had established a high school and agricultural training institute in Montero just north of Santa Cruz. The Methodist Rural Institute would serve as a regional base, an "axis of operations [from which] teams of agricultural extension, social work, education, medicine and literacy headed out to settlements of camba, kolla, Japanese and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>497</sup> "Bolivia: A Land of Decision."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>498</sup> Uberto, "That Strange Land," 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>499</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>500</sup> Harry Peacock in interview with author, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Aug, 2014.

Mennonite origin."<sup>501</sup> The small city of Montero was something of a development hotspot in those years. The US government had used Point Four funds to build a machinery pool and technical station on the south side of town and the Salesian mission also established a school in the area and eventually took over control of the Point Four operation. Montero was also a supply center for nearby national colonies including Yapacaní, Cuatro Ojitos, and Aroma and for Okinawan colonists living along the Río Grande forty kilometers to the east and the Methodists soon recruited a Japanese missionary couple to minister to the Okinawans.

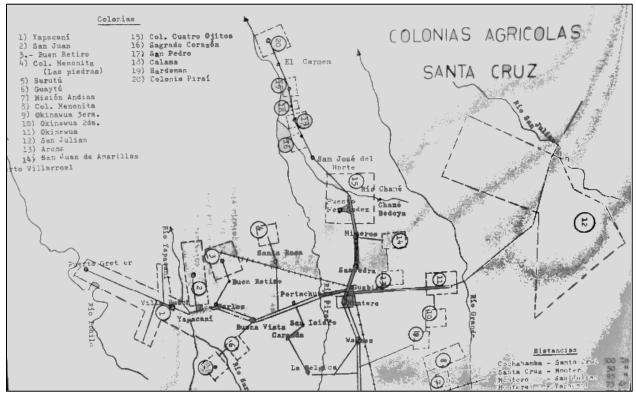


Figure 10 Map of twenty settler colonies surrounding the city of Montero, 1976.Andean, Okinawan, Japanese and Mennonite settlers colonies were all located a short distance from the booming town which became the center of Methodist operations in Santa Cruz. Hardeman and Piray – the first two colonies operated by the CIU are visible to the extreme north and San Julián is the large colony to the east. Map from Kenneth Lehman, "Vida agrícola en las colonias" (Montero: Methodist Rural Institute, 1976). IICA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>501</sup> Palmer, *Red Poncho*, 115. Also see Delfín E Quispe, *Historia de la iglesia evangélica metodista en Bolivia 1906-2006: una iglesia evangélica inculturada* (La Paz: Centro de Historia y Archivo Metodista, 2006), 203.

Peacock originally taught languages in Montero but like Dickson and many other Methodist volunteers, he came from a farming background and was drawn to the region's colonization projects.<sup>502</sup> He was soon traveling throughout the region's settler colonies. In the mid sixties he took a two year furlough in the U.S. Along with church tours, graduate studies, was a central element of Methodist furloughs one that might just as easily introduce young missionaries to rural sociology as theology. Peacock focused on social psychology a discipline he found particularly applicable to the environmental and cultural shocks experienced by new settlers in the tropics. From 1966-68 he was back in Bolivia serving as director of the rural institute but spending most of his time out in the colonies.<sup>503</sup>

Foreigners like Peacock were not the only Methodists active in lowland colonies. Membership of the nascent national church grew in the fifties and sixties and missionaries sought to recruit Quechua and Aymara speaking Bolivian Methodists from the highlands to serve indigenous settlers in rural colonization zones. Ana Fajardo is a native Quechua speaker originally from Oruro who had moved to the city of Cochabamba along with her family. As a young woman she made a chance encounter with Methodist missionaries when she was commissioned to sew a banner for the city's American Institute. Over the following years she took part in a Methodist youth group of approximately one hundred and fifty people.<sup>504</sup> The church drew volunteers from these youth and provided training before sending them off to its active colonization zones. Some went to the Alto Beni or the Chapare, others to Montero. Because of her

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>502</sup> Harry Peacock, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>504</sup> Ana Fajardo, interviewed by author in Yapacaní, July 2014.

knowledge of Quechua she was asked to go to Yapacaní, a colony 50 miles to the west of Montero, where a large contingent of fellow Orureños had settled. For a young Fajardo it was an impressive but daunting opportunity. Her father agreed to let her go because two of her cousins had already migrated to Montero and lived down the street from Methodist missionary Harry Peacock. In Yapacaní, Fajardo worked as a home economics agent (*mejadora de hogar*) and translator along with two North American Methodists. She traveled by bicycle along the colony's penetration roads that extended for miles into the jungle, stopping at houses to demonstrate hygiene techniques, food preparation and sewing. Like the MNR, the Methodist church also embraced the didactic power of film but went to greater effort to make sure instructional videos reached rural populations. Fajardo remembers traveling in a church-owned mobile cinema truck showing informational films throughout the colony.

Jaime Bravo was another highlander who migrated to the east with the church and he situates his personal journey within the larger narrative of the March to the East. "With the road that Paz Estenssoro opened in the early 1950s, a great movement of people began," he recalls, "and I was among them."<sup>505</sup> He and his family were members of the Methodist "Redentor" church in La Paz but at sixteen he moved to Montero where he enrolled in the Wesleyan seminary, a theological school attached to the Methodist Rural Institute. I "got to know a lot of Texans" he remembers, referring to Peacock, Jim Pace and Bob Caulfield who directed his study. For Bravo, "the Methodist church had the virtue of combining social action with evangelization, but the stronger side of the church was its work *envangelio intergral*, (the whole or total gospel) a salvation that had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>505</sup> Jaime Bravo, interviewed by author, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Aug 2014.

to do with hunger, poverty, justice...with doing well for the poor, the widows, the orphans and the migrant.<sup>506</sup> He "went out with this mentality" after completing his studies at the Rural Institute and was soon director of the church's new operations in the Alto Beni colonies where more than 1500 colonists and their families had settled since the early 1960s.

Describing his work to readers of the Bolivian Methodist newsletter *Highland Echoes*, Bravo wrote of these new migrants (Aymara speakers like himself) in words that mirrored his own transformation. "When altiplano Aymara Indians move into the lowlands," he explained to North American readers, "this change in geography notably affects their personalities. Their reserved nature becomes more open. Their facial expressions soften and frequent smiles denote a new happiness."<sup>507</sup> Bravo worked in agricultural extension in the region where four Methodist congregations had recently been established. Their names – New Zion, New Santa Fe, New Israel and New Jerusalem - dually expressed the sentiment of pioneering and renewed faith that the Methodist church saw in Alto Beni. He also managed a new generation of Latin American Methodist volunteers, known as "Latin America 3s."

In the Alto Beni, each North American was paired with a Bolivian Methodist as they carried out their extension work. Teams received a three month training program in cross-cultural communication and community development by a Methodist Anthropologist, John Hickman. Hickman, a Cornell University doctoral student, had just completed research in Aymara regions of neighboring Peru. The group would serve as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>507</sup> Jaime Bravo "The Alto Beni – Another Hope for Bolivia." *Highland Echoes* (February 1966), 4.

intermediaries, wrote Hickman, "to fill the vacuum of contact between the people of a given colony, and between the colonists and the church and government services available from outside the community."<sup>508</sup>

Methodist work in the Bolivian lowlands added a third party in what - from a planning perspective - might have appeared to be a development network limited to national agencies and international financers. Settlement projects funded by the U.S. government through the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s were supposedly administered by the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF) and later by the National Institute of Colonization (INC). But in practice, aside from road construction and land surveying, much of the day-to-day service provision (in public health, agricultural training and other areas) was informally farmed out to the Methodist church and led by foreigners like Hickman and Peacock as well as nationals like Fajardo and Bravo.<sup>509</sup> For the Bolivian state, missionaries and laypeople were the perfect go-betweens. They received small salaries (paid by the church), were connected to North American congregational funding and (as part of their sense of "ministering") were willing to live and work in remote regions eschewed by qualified nationals.

This skill-set was as appealing to U.S. funders as it was to the Bolivian state. The former engaged with missionaries as trustworthy fellow Americans, as it was to the Bolivian state. Methodist missionary Jim Palmer, remembers one official arguing that, "with men like Murray Dickson managing the work of the Methodist Church in Bolivia, they get twenty times as much result from a dollar as we get."<sup>510</sup> The statement is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>508</sup> John Hickman, "The Alto Beni Team and Community Development" *Highland Echoes* (Feb 1966), 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>509</sup> Ana Fajardo interview, July 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>510</sup> Palmer, *Red Poncho*, 119.

compelling not simply because it suggests missionary work was cheaper and more effective than U.S. development assistance, but for its underlying assumption, that development work and missionary work were essentially equivalent in nature.

Methodist missionaries also spoke to a state-settler discourse of "abandonment" which had emerged in the first decade of colonization. As the previous chapter argued, planners attributed the abandonment of new colonies – albeit dubiously - to settler "dependency" caused by excessive state paternalism. Writing to a friend, Dickson explicitly invoked the "infant industry" critique of state-led development claiming – in what is now a cliché of the development industry - that "I am convinced that my job, in fact the job of every missionary, is to work himself out of a job. We are not here to perpetuate the need for our being here, but to train, guide and so prepare the people that if we were to step out at any time, they could carry on, not as a handicapped infant institution, but as the instrument of good which we intend."<sup>511</sup> When Methodist anthropologist John Hickman and Jaime Bravo trained members of the Alto Beni team in the mid sixties they advised participants not to impose a model but instead to let projects emerge from close consultation with their host communities. Whether it was these linked arguments about low-cost, flexible capacity or simply that an under-funded and understaffed state had no other option, foreign and national Methodists like Peacock, Fajardo and Bravo became intimately involved in the quotidian operation of lowland colonies.

The WGM entered the Bolivian lowlands looking for "un-contacted tribes." Missionaries and lay workers of the Methodist church arrived to help in the "moral and social instruction" of Andean transplants in Santa Cruz and the Alto Beni. The

<sup>511</sup> Ibid, 108.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) initially arrived in Santa Cruz with a much different goal, namely, to help their "fellow brethren" in need. The MCC was a faithbased relief organization that had been founded by American and Canadian Mennonites during the 1920s to support Mennonite refugees that were attempting to emigrate from Russia. The organization helped re-settle Russian Mennonites in Canada and also sent another group to Paraguay in the 1930s. A handful of these Paraguayan Mennonites would also migrate to Bolivia in the 1950s. With the end of the Second World War the MCC dramatically expanded its operations to assist thousands of newly displaced Russian Mennonites. The organization also routinely sent relief workers and observers.

The MCC established operations in Bolivia within this traditional institutional framework. Mennonite sociologist J.W. Fretz had worked with Mennonites in Northern Mexico and the Paraguayan Chaco in 1940s and early 1950s on behalf of the MCC. Through his contacts in Paraguay he learned of the first small-scale migration of Mennonites to Bolivia and in 1960, he decided to visit Santa Cruz. Fretz's trip, which he wrote about for the magazine *Mennonite Life*, introduced North American Mennonites to the struggles of these new settlers and provided the impetus for the Mennonite Central Committee's Bolivia program.<sup>512</sup> For the first decade MCC-Bolivia consisted of little more than a health clinic at the edge of the Tres Palmas Mennonite colony near Cotoca.

Despite this modest aim, from the outset MCC work in Mennonite colonies was linked to the larger development nexus of Bolivian colonization. Originally designed to serve Mennonites, the small health center that the MCC constructed in the Tres Palmas colony was soon providing most of its service to neighboring Bolivians (covering an area

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>512</sup> J.W. Fretz "A Visit to the Mennonites in Bolivia."

of approximately 10,000 individuals) including those from the newly established colony of Cotoca.<sup>513</sup> When Fretz arrived in 1960 he was shown around Santa Cruz by MCC South America director Frank Wiens who had been "loaned by the MCC to the Point Four in Bolivia," where he was working with the national colonization program and with Okinawan settlers.<sup>514</sup> Having supported Mennonite colonization across the Chaco for over two decades, MCC was experienced in resettlement and connected to U.S. financing. It had obtained and administered Point Four funds to Mennonite colonists in Paraguay and, much like the Methodist church, was viewed by Point Four officials as a reliable and efficient organization.

Like Methodist missionaries who selected Bolivia along with three other "Lands of Decision," the MCC took on expanding roles in a number of nations in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia in the sixties as it transformed from a relief organization primarily serving other Mennonites to a full-fledged global NGO. It might initially appear little more than a strange coincidence that for both the Methodist Church and the MCC their largest operation outside of Bolivia was in the Belgian Congo. Yet if we understand the broader contours of "third world" development that took organizations and individuals around the globe, it is less surprising that the MCC and the Methodist Church would work alongside one another in community development projects for the post-revolutionary state in Bolivia and the post-colonial state in Zaire.

The MCC relied on volunteers that, like many Methodist missionaries, had grown up in small farming communities scattered across the Great Plains and Midwest from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>513</sup> Helen Janzen, "Bolivia Monthly Report: Tres Palmas," (June 1966) MCC Bolivia Office Files 1966. Mennonite Central Committee Archives, Akron, PA. (MCCA).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>514</sup> J.W. Fretz "A Visit to the Mennonites in Bolivia," 13.

Kansas and Iowa to Manitoba. Several factors including the increasing movement to urban centers, the growth of Mennonite colleges and a growing "outward-looking" evangelical trend in the church encouraged young Mennonites with rural backgrounds to volunteer with the MCC or with foreign missions.<sup>515</sup> Geo-politics also played a role. As members of a pacifist church, many Mennonites registered as conscientious objectors (COs) to avoid the U.S. military draft. In an unexpected twist, the same current of postwar militarization that drove the construction of military bases on Okinawa and subsequently forced Okinawan emigration to Bolivia also provided a steady stream of COs, known as "PAX men," who volunteered for expanding MCC operations abroad. Pulling in young North American Mennonites for three year stints in a country in which they had no prior experience, the MCC attracted a mixture of enthusiasm and naivety. Russ Stauffer, who would work in the San Julián project in the 1970s, remembers being an impressionable youth inspired to join the MCC through his encounter with returning volunteers "who were the example of a model citizen of the community, he could doctor sick chickens, teach a course on hog care, or build a schoolhouse and after his term give slide shows in church that the whole congregation showed up for to boot!"<sup>516</sup>

Wide-eyed enthusiasm aside, Stauffer's recollection suggests that the type of "faith-based" work that MCC volunteers undertook in Bolivia played to their experience in rural areas and small towns across America's agricultural breadbasket. This link finds an interesting parallel. In the late sixties at the height of the Green Revolution, USAID was attempting to re-create U.S. style farming in the third-world. The MCC was engaging in a similar practice writ-small, as it attempted to translate North American

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>515</sup> Fred Kniss, *Disquiet in the Land*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>516</sup> Russ Stauffer, *The Grindstone: Voice of MCC Bolivia.* (Nov.1972) MCCA.

agricultural knowledge to the tropics. While the MCC expanded its operations to cover dozens of countries in the sixties and seventies, MCC-Bolivia grew to become its largest national program.

While the Methodist church attracted missionaries in the late 50s with its argument that Bolivia was a "Land of Decision," by the end of the 1960s there was something of a "Bolivia Mystique" emerging in Mennonite circles in the U.S. and Canada.<sup>517</sup> With an ample supply of personnel (but lacking programs beyond the Tres Palmas clinic) the MCC had initially loaned out its volunteers to other agencies, especially to the Methodist agricultural school in Montero and the surrounding colonization zones before establishing some of its own programs.<sup>518</sup> The Teacher Abroad Program (TAP) placed Mennonite volunteers in rural communities without schools. By the late sixties, MCC's nascent Bolivia program was on the verge of completing a transition from a small health clinic to a fully integrated development program. In early 1968, Mennonite delegates from across Latin America met in Bogotá, Colombia. That same year, a meeting of the Latin American Episcopal council in Colombia would lay the tenets for Catholic Liberation theology and base ecclesiastical communities. The MCC – while more conservative than that radical collection of priests - was also thinking through the implications of rural community development. Writing in an MCC-Bolivia newsletter a few years later, one volunteer would claim that "Anabaptists believed, practiced and taught a Bible-based 16<sup>th</sup> century liberation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>517</sup> See Gerald Mumaw, "The Bolivia Mystique" (MCC-Bolivia, 1984), MCCA. A collection of unpublished stories from MCC workers in Bolivia during the sixties and seventies. Collected for MCC-Bolivia's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>518</sup> "Other Workers in Bolivia," *Highland Echoes* (October 1966), 7.

theology," centered on "the autonomy of the community."<sup>519</sup> In Bogota in 1968, MCC-Bolivia representative Arthur Driediger was on hand to discuss the MCC's future in Santa Cruz. He advocated, "the selection of a frontier community to develop a rounded program under MCC administration." Yet if community development could draw inspiration from Mennonite history, MCC activities were not to be linked to evangelization. According to Driediger, the objectives of the project "would be to minister to the total man without a pre-decision to build or not to build a Mennonite church."<sup>520</sup> The timing was fortuitous. As MCC delegates were gathered in Bogotá from February 12 to 18, the Río Grande was flooding its banks near the small town of Cosoriocito in Santa Cruz. The emerging disaster would provide the MCC with the opportunity they were seeking.

## From Disaster to Dictatorship: New Models of Political Radicalism and Settler Orientation, 1968-1971

The dramatic flood of 1968 displaced thousands of colonists in the agricultural areas around Montero. Refugees poured into the city. They filled the Methodist institute and the Salesian mission and still kept coming. Harry Peacock requested permission to use an abandoned road work camp to house victims, enlisting the help of students at the Methodist high school where he was principal. The MCC also lent its volunteers to the effort. For several weeks in late February and early March, MCC volunteer Elwood Schrock managed the camp alongside several Methodists, Maryknoll nuns and Peace Corps workers. Displaced communities organized themselves into firewood brigades,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>519</sup> Gerald Mumaw, "In the Spirit of the Slaughterhouse" *Grindstone*, (July 1974), n.p. MCCA. <sup>520</sup> Memo from Arthur Driedger in MCC Bolivia Field Office Files 1968, MCCA.

built brick ovens and dug latrines.<sup>521</sup> By March 20, most refugees had returned home but about 650 people whose land and possessions had been completely destroyed remained in the camp. "We are hoping" wrote Schrock, "that the churches that worked so well together during the refugee phase can continue working together on a colonization program to help the people build a community better than the ones they've had to leave."<sup>522</sup>

During March and April the task of reconstruction and the status of flood victims received continuous attention in national and regional media. Displaced people, as several historians have pointed out, were typically seen as a liability and the presence of a mass of impoverished, landless refugees who had entered the urban spaces of the Bolivian lowlands, produced predictable anxiety in Santa Cruz.<sup>523</sup> By March, as the flood waters subsided, there were rumors of a gang of thugs running rampant in Montero, with "the operation of the chicherias" to blame."<sup>524</sup> Reference to the establishments served as shorthand for malignant highlander influence. On April 6, *El Deber* carried a message noting that food for the refugees would last less than three weeks and warned of the "activities of agitators that are operating among the victims" inciting them to illegally occupy lands, "that already have owners."<sup>525</sup> In this case, the fear of flood victims or *damnificados* was also inflected by a political climate in the wake of Che Guevara's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>521</sup> Elwood Shrock, "Bolivian Flood Victims Resettling." April 10, 1968. MCC Bolivia News Releases, 1963-1975. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>523</sup> See Michel Agier, On the Margins of the World: The Refugee Experience Today (Cambridge: Polity, 2008) and Marlene Epp, Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>524</sup> "Deprevados operan en Montero alarmando a todo el vecindario." *El Deber* March 10, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>525</sup> "Hasta el 25 durarán los recursos para víctimas de las inundaciones aquí." *El Deber* April 6, 1968.

capture and execution in the nearby mountains and when President Barrientos portrayed Bolivia as threatened from all sides by Communist infiltrators.

Two weeks later, *El Deber's* editor Pedro Rivero Mercado warned of "people without scruples, politiqueros [those that engage in political maneuvering], extremists, agents of foreign governments...sowing discontent, taking advantage of the tragedy."<sup>526</sup> He suggested that while the material needs of flood victims could easily be seen to, the "spiritual and soulful rehabilitation of the [flood] victims" was essential. Barrientos also linked faith to the crisis of the flood calling for "Christian strength" to aid in rebuilding.<sup>527</sup> Faith was an apt metaphor. Over the following two years Schrock's hope became a reality as Mennonite, Methodists and Maryknolls formed the United Church Committee (CIU). After settling the remaining Hardeman refugees on a piece of land to the north of Montero, they conducted a similar trial settlement in 1970 at Piray.

In contrast to newspaper reports portraying the flood victims as spiritually and morally damaged individuals at the hands of profiteers and political agents, Peacock remembers that the *damnificados* essentially created the community-based colonization model that the CIU would employ in these settlements and later at San Julián. "There were 107 families that went in and formed the Hardeman community and in observing what they did, they planned all this out, they had lots of time in the refugee camp and they had meetings and meetings."<sup>528</sup>

With a few hundred colonists left at the Hardeman road camp in mid-1968 the United Church Committee produced a report on the proposed resettlement. In its design

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>526</sup> Pedro Rivero Mercado, "Rehabilitación de zona inundada" Editorial in *El Deber* April 18, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>527</sup> Barrientos speech printed in *El Diario*, Feb.28, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>528</sup> Interview with Harry Peacock, Aug 2014.

the colony sought to respond to the immediate needs of flood victims but also to the legacy of earlier colonization attempts in the region. From the Cotoca project in the late fifties to the Alliance for Progress supported initiatives in the Alto Beni, Yapacaní and the Chapare in the sixties, officials had blamed a crisis of settler "dependency" on state institutions for low levels of successes. While such rhetoric glossed over the perpetual budgetary shortfalls of the government, evident in settler petitions, the two causes were actively complimentary since avoiding a fictional "dependency" and fostering settler "initiative" meant further reducing levels of state support.

The idea, according to CIU members, "was to develop a self-governing community free from reliance on the emergency committee, integrated with other developments north of San Pedro in contact with government."<sup>529</sup> Having languished in a refugee camp for several months, the CIU's focus was on "getting them on the land as soon as possible," particularly as they were entering the dry season when land clearing was possible.<sup>530</sup> The organization that had emerged among refugees in the camp would guide the initial settlement process. Methodist and Mennonite volunteers from the committee would be on hand half of the time to supervise progress and two Maryknoll sisters would remain in the colony on a permanent basis to lead educational programs and foster community development. Yet decision-making would be entirely in the hands of the colonists, who planned to work cooperatively for two years having "learned that together they can beat the jungle and make good progress." Unlike the Andean colonists that Methodists had worked with in Yapacaní, the displacees from Cosoriocito were lowlanders or *cambas*. It was a revelation for Peacock and others who remembered that

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>529</sup> CIU, "Hardeman Colony Resettlement Project," July 16, 1968. MCC Bolivia Files, 1969-72. MCCA.
 <sup>530</sup> Ibid.

these were people that "knew the jungle...they got in and in one year they put themselves in a situation where highland colonists, those who survived, it would take them three years to get to that point."<sup>531</sup>

In a progress report written on July 30, approximately three weeks after the colonists had arrived at Hardeman, committee members noted evidence of physical progress with buildings, "all very orderly in neat rows."<sup>532</sup> The greater achievement however was a spiritual and psychological one, as "all visitors have commented on the completely different outlook and spirit here." The subjectivity of the former victims had been transformed, the committee claimed, affirming that "the "refugee" atmosphere is gone and in its place is vitality...even the small children manfully trotting to and fro."<sup>533</sup> A subsequent report contained a similar affirmation, noting "the most outstanding feature of the story so far has been the really remarkable spirit of community which has been generated among the people themselves." The passive phrasing in both statements (*had been* transformed, *was* generated) begs the question of who – or what - had produced that impressive shift in spirit – missionary, colonist, or the flood itself.

Both the Bolivian state and foreign donors invested the Methodists, Mennonites and Maryknolls of the CIU with a tremendous amount of transitory responsibility albeit on an unofficial level. Sometimes they acted as proxy for an absent state, at others as channels of foreign assistance and often as immediate "hands-on" participants in the affairs of the colony. However, they were hesitant to claim much responsibility – or long-term accountability – for the project. Rather than establish themselves as an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>531</sup> Interview Harry Peacock, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>532</sup> "Progress Report: Hardeman" July 30, 1968. MCC Bolivia Files, 1969-72. MCCA.

<sup>533 &</sup>quot;Progress Report: Hardeman."

institution in the colony, these faith-based relief workers, vigilant against the first signs of settler "dependency," sought to work to eliminate the need for their presence.<sup>534</sup> With settlers established on the land, the committee considered the operation a success and, wary of paternalism, looked to "phase ourselves out of the present operation....a tapering off process that must be explained to the settlers."<sup>535</sup> They insisted that their role was to remain, "in the background to advise and assist," and proudly pointed out that the committee "now has no powers of coercion or control whatsoever over the community," outnumbered by colonists five to one on the executive group.

It became evident, as the CIU withdrew from Hardeman, that members were beginning to conceive of this unique experience as far more than a simple onetime response to a national disaster. What had appeared ad-hoc or pragmatic was beginning to be redefined in CIU project reports and proposals as a deliberate and coherent vision for rural development. Mark Healey has shown a similar relation between disaster response and regional planning that emerged out of the San Juan earthquake in Argentina in 1944.<sup>536</sup> Both the personalist style that characterized Peronism and the subsequent vision of "modern" Argentine architecture emerged respectively as Juan Perón and a legion of planners confronted the victims of the earthquake and the ruins of San Juan. In the wake of the flood in Santa Cruz, these religious development workers were soon sketching the outlines of a broader model to apply across the region. Even as the committee plotted its disengagement from Hardeman it envisaged its "larger task; of integration and nation-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>534</sup> Methodists and Mennonites differed from Maryknoll missionaries on this issue. The latter, preferred to remain as permanent members of the community while the former two groups pushed for rapid disengagement.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>536</sup> Mark Healy, *The Ruins of the New Argentina*.

building over the whole local development area."<sup>537</sup> The problem, members argued, was that while a number of directed and spontaneous development initiatives were underway in Santa Cruz, "all of them are going their own sweet ways regardless of the others." What was needed was a "unifying force to build that sense of community which the whole area needs if it is going to be successful, and help build the new Bolivia."<sup>538</sup> They proposed to work with "governmental and other agencies" towards this end. Hardeman Colony, while viewed as the foundation for this model, "will be but one small but focal part," explained the CIU.

Over the following years members of the United Church Committee expanded their philosophy of settler orientation. This implied an increasingly refined understanding of the problematic of lowland settlement, a re-thinking of the challenges of Santa Cruz as a limitless and promising frontier and a response to prior constructions of "abandonment." In an MCC summary of rural development, the author reminded its own volunteers that Santa Cruz was "a terrible land as well as a land of promise," one in which infant mortality reached 95% in new settlement sites.<sup>539</sup> The MCC presented the typical highland migrant not as a hyper-masculine pioneer but as a hapless victim wielding unfamiliar tools and combating a hostile and unforgiving environment. He faced 120 acres of virgin forest, "and has never cut down a tree before [and] swarms of insects and he has never before been bitten."<sup>540</sup> In what Barrientos had referred to as "a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>537</sup> "Progress Report Hardeman."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>539</sup> "Orientation Documents for Volunteers: The United Methodist Church in Montero," 1970. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1951-1971. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>540</sup> Ibid.

titanic struggle to organize and dominate our land" the highland migrant would need help to combat the unruly forces of nature.<sup>541</sup>

In 1971, MCC worker Marty Miller, Methodist Harry Peacock and Maryknoll nuns Mary de Porres Pereyra and Maureen Keegan proposed the creation of a new "colonization orientation center."<sup>542</sup> The center was to be a condensed version of the Methodist Rural Institute which offered courses in "basic shop, horticulture, poultry, farm machinery, swine production, animal nutrition, dairy [and cooperatives] and [colonists] gained critical experience to confront their new environment.<sup>543</sup> The group planned to receive 400-500 newly arrived settlers in 1970 and double that in 1971, promoting "skills, understandings and attitudes necessary to maintain at minimal rates, colony desertion and mortality and increasing agricultural production." Critical for a state with limited funds, the committee promised to do all of this at a cost of \$18/colonist.<sup>544</sup>

Before it could take shape, the CIU abandoned the project. According to Peacock he presented the idea to several long-term residents and community organizers from older lowland colonies. Ruben Baldivieso from Yapacaní thought the project was good even if it "wouldn't work."<sup>545</sup> He explained to Peacock that "people do not come down [from the highlands] to go to school they come down because they want land," and suggested that the CIU should bring orientation directly to the point of settlement. Marcelino Limachi a colony leader from 4 Ojitos agreed. Peacock threw out the project and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>541</sup> Barrientos speech printed in *El Diario*, Feb.28, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>542</sup> Harry Peacock, Mary de Porres Pereyra et al "Orientation Center for Colonists, Santa Cruz," Aug. 20, 1971. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1971-74. MCCA.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>545</sup> Interview with Peacock, Aug. 2014.

together with the two Maryknoll nuns began to sketch out a new program of on-site orientation.

The CIU decided to implement this program in newly-founded Piray colony. To recruit potential colonists they focused their efforts on migrant workers who came into Santa Cruz by the tens of thousands to work the sugar, cotton and rice harvests. "These men come year after year hoping to earn money to buy their own land only to find that their agricultural experience in the highlands ill fits them for life in the jungle. Some fail economically, some lose their health, some simply cannot endure the isolation."<sup>546</sup> As the annual flow of harvesters arrived in Santa Cruz from highland towns in March and April the CIU was ready. Signs and radio ads reached out to new arrivals advertising the 180 spots available in the colony. MCCer Marty Miller managed on-site construction. Peacock was in charge of technical details. Two Maryknoll sisters would distribute rations. On July 5, the first forty colonists arrived. The new missionary run colony was "inaugurated with great solemnity," after colonists and staff made speeches, everyone sang the colony song, "Let's go to Piray" newly-written by one of the *orientadores*.<sup>547</sup>

Despite the large role for foreign faith-based workers in its programming, the CIU argued that the "most crucial aspect of the program fell on the six experienced colonist orientators."<sup>548</sup> These were long-time colonists or native residents of the Montero area that would facilitate the implementation of local environmental knowledge about settlement. Some of them, like Dardo Chávez, were former students at the Methodist school and had taken part in the original disaster response. Previously, national

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>546</sup> "Report of the First Phase of Orientation, Piray" 1971. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1971-74. MCCA.
 <sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>548</sup> Ibid.

authorities had been concerned to maintain physical distance between highland transplants and locals in the hopes of avoiding conflict. Government officials had also discounted cruceño agricultural experience based as it was on non-intensive production for local markets. In contrast to truck transport and modern sugar refineries like Guabirá, state authorities viewed the traditional horse-powered sugar presses and heavily-laden oxcarts of cruceños as relics of a backwards agrarian economy.

While embracing the idea of transforming Santa Cruz through highland-lowland migration and new technology, CIU members argued that local knowledge remained important. The goal, argued Methodist Jaime Bravo, "was to achieve this dialogue between two worlds, the vision of the brave, laboring man, the miner, that wanted to work...and the vision of the local, native the original farmer of the jungle that calmly achieved his life, earned [enough] to eat and was not in a hurry to destroy the jungle and shoot animals."<sup>549</sup> The modest aim of the latter, he continued, was simply "to survive...for a long time." Referencing the high infant mortality in new settlement zones, Harry Peacock also emphasized the CIU's primary goal was simply to keep settlers alive and healthy.<sup>550</sup> By reinterpreting "survival" as "success" the CIU sought to initiate a revolution of lowered expectations among highland migrants many of whom according to committee members like Bravo, sought to "farm as they had mined" - with expectations of extracting great wealth from the land and moving on.

Timing was also central to this revolution of lowered expectations. Writing about the Hardeman colony, CIU members explained that "[this] is the furthest flung of all the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>549</sup> Interview with Jaime Bravo, August, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>550</sup> Interview with Peacock, August, 2014.

colonial developments in the province and is deep in the heart of the forest."<sup>551</sup> They felt that being present at the beginning of a colonization venture would allow them to prevent many of the early mistakes – rooted in a fundamental misreading of the landscape – and subsequent disillusionment that fed the cycle of settler abandonment. Speaking of earlier colonies they explained that "many in their desperation clear, plant, harvest and then abandon the land,...leaving it useless, moving onward year after year to virgin territory."<sup>552</sup> In those first crucial days, missionaries found settlers to be paradoxically "suspicious" as they "had been exploited before" and - in the absence of established institutions - uniquely pliable and open to change.<sup>553</sup> In locating their role in "orientation," and insisting on their withdrawal from the community in short order, the CIU also defined a conscribed range of operations. They might provide instruction in marketing, securing credit, obtaining title and the formation of cooperatives but would ultimately be gone long before the success or failure of these endeavors was apparent. The CIU saw its role as something like that failed but pioneering colonist it sought to help - as the vanguard of lowland colonization "moving onward year after year to virgin territory."

In reports on Piray the CIU noted that through the work of the orientators, new colonists, "men with no experience...emerged from their discontent and suspicion and gradually acquired a quiet confidence in their own ability."<sup>554</sup> As in Hardeman colony, the orientation program ended as quickly as it had begun. By October, only the Maryknoll nuns remained to "give continuity" to the project. Departing CIU members

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>551</sup> "Progress Report: Hardeman."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>552</sup> "Report of the First Phase of Orientation, Piray."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>554</sup> Ibid.

were moving on to their next venture. While Piray was still underway, the INC had accepted a memorandum of understanding from the MCC that its volunteers along with the CIU would administer the orientation program at San Julián, a large new colonization site that the Bolivian government was opening, one of the first to be located to the east of the Río Grande.<sup>555</sup>

Even as faith-based development workers pioneered a strategy for new land settlement in small, remote locations along Santa Cruz's expanding agricultural frontier, they also continued to work in colonies that had been established at the beginning of the decade or earlier - colonies like Yapacaní, the Alto Beni, Chimoré, Huaytú and Cuatro Ojitos. The former presented the member of the CIU with two elements that planners prized above all: miniaturization and a blank slate.<sup>556</sup> In the latter, missionaries faced not the challenge of small-scale pioneering but the frustrated expectations of established colonists. Many had spent more than a decade in settlement zones and still lacked titles, agricultural credit and extension service and felt they had been abandoned by the state. Between 1968 and 1971 as the CIU's orientation program took shape in Hardeman and Piray, these colonists along with landless seasonal laborers from the highlands organized into syndicates and federations and made increasingly forceful demands on the state. While the CIU introduced a *camba*-inspired revolution of lowered expectations in Hardeman and Piray, these colonist institutions were challenging explanations about limited state resources and calls for patience. Events in Yapacaní and Chané-Bedoya in those years provide a window onto this new world of agrarian radicalism. The Methodist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>555</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between MCC and INC re. San Julián,,Sept.21, 1970. MCC-Bolivia Files 1971.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>556</sup> Scott, Speaking to a State.

church, which had stood in as a proxy for state institutions in these regions, found itself at the center of this evolving conflict.

By the mid-sixties Yapacaní contained over two thousand settlers brought in under an International Development Bank (IDB) agreement with the Bolivian government. Among them was Juan Espejo Ticoña. An ex-miner who had organized industrial workers in La Paz in the early 1960s, Espejo was forced to flee the highlands after the 1964 Barrientos coup and came to the colony clandestinely. With settlers prohibited from forming unions by the Barrientos regime, Espejo and two other colonists from Cochabamba and Oruro organized an innocuous sounding "Committee Pro-Yapacaní" instead.<sup>557</sup> One of the Committee's first objectives was to secure basic health services in the colony. The colonization institute had created medical posts but in Espejo's account "they were empty apart from a few aspirin."<sup>558</sup> Instead, it was the Methodist church that acted to provide health services to the colonists by securing a \$10,000 grant for the construction of a hospital. The program, managed by Methodist missionaries Brooks Taylor and Jaime Bravo out of Montero, included a pharmacy, an ambulance and the training of fifteen nurses along with home economics personnel like Ana Fajardo. It is telling that in Espejo's written account of those years the Methodist Church is only discussed in relation to social services and never once mentioned in a separate section on the role of churches in the colony. He is decidedly more critical of the latter. "There was no Catholic church, it did not help at all," remembers Espejo and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>557</sup> Juan Espejo Ticoña, *Historia de Yapacaní* (El Alto: Ediciones Qhanañchwai, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>558</sup> Espejo, *Historia de Yapacaní*, 39.

insists that "evangelical" churches caused division within the community when they finally did appear years later.559

Divorced from the question of faith, the Methodist presence in Yapacaní placed the church at the center of increasing radicalism in the region in those years centered on the question of marketing. The hard-fought success of colonists across northern Santa Cruz resulted in a dramatic increase in rice production. By the late sixties, Santa Cruz's new rice producers had met and then surpassed national demand. Yapacaní, remembers Espejo, had become an "empire of rice."<sup>560</sup> Over-supply led to dramatic fluctuations in prices made worse by the limited facilities for processing and storing. Colonists traveled rough roads to arrive in Santa Cruz and were often forced to accept whatever price the city's handful of buyers was offering.

With profit margins slim, the colony's struggling farmers reacted with outrage when the nearby town of Buena Vista attempted to introduce a transport tax on Yapacaní rice. A long-established provincial capital, Buena Vista was a "camba" town, strategically located along the highway to Montero and Santa Cruz and its mayor soon established a checkpoint to collect fees from passing trucks. For Espejo, the town's "ranching oligarchy" sought to live "as simple parasites" off of the hard work of new colonists in Yapacaní.<sup>561</sup> Angry colonists burned the tax checkpoint but the Buena Vista City Hall rebuilt the gate and brought soldiers from nearby Montero to police it. After unsuccessfully presenting their case to the mayor of Santa Cruz, Espejo called a colony

- <sup>559</sup> Ibid, 62. <sup>560</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>561</sup> Ibid. 101-102.

meeting. In early April of 1969 a large group of colonists traveled to Buena Vista, burned the checkpoint again and occupied the town for several hours.

The incident brought condemnation from the regional press already nervous about the increasing militancy of highland migrants. *El Deber* reported, "twenty colonists in a state of drunkenness...carried a noose through the plaza [with] the clear intention of hanging Mayor Percy Antehlo.<sup>562,</sup> The paper called for the arrest of "instigators" including not just Espejo but Methodist minister Ruben Baldivieso, as well. The latter was a close friend of fellow Methodist missionary Harry Peacock and brother-in-law to Methodist director of rural development, Jaime Bravo. In an editorial the following day, *El Deber*'s editor, Pedro Rivero insisted "the climate of effervescence…provoked by colonists needs to be definitively pacified."<sup>563</sup> He conjured an image of cruceño rural life, that "until a few years ago was peaceful and as progressive as one could hope," and was now characterized by "road blocks, the taking of hostages as in international conflicts, occupations of peaceful towns, threats of lynching, public demonstrations of the contempt for the law and legally constituted authorities."

Protests and occupations continued over the following months and mirrored a radicalization that swept the nation after the death of René Barrientos in 1968. Yapacaní's colonists formed an official union (CECOYA) linked to other emerging colonist centers in the Alto Beni and the Chimoré. With Espejo's organizing experience, CECOYA also connected its members' struggles to Santa Cruz's university population. Earlier that year, Guillermo Capobiano head of the students at Gabriel René Moreno

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>562</sup> "Colonos invaden Buena Vista domingo" *El Deber*, April 10, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>563</sup> Pedro Rivero Mercado, "Clima que hay que aquietar." *El Deber*, April 11, 1969.

University (UAGRM) in Santa Cruz, had brought a group of students to meet Espejo and other colonists near Yapacaní. The two leaders, along with a large group of colonists and students, then traveled back to Santa Cruz in a convoy of forty trucks. In the cruceño capital they blockaded all roads in and out of the city, occupied the plaza and eventually pressured the government to set fair prices for rice.<sup>564</sup> The presence of militant rural folk in an urban setting terrified and outraged cruceños who drew explicit comparisons to the "invasion" of highland militias a decade earlier during the civic struggles over the 11%.

In July of 1969, under Capobiano's leadership, students of UAGRM also petitioned President Luis Adolfo Siles directly on behalf of colonists. They had sent a commission to study the colonies of Santa Cruz and denounced the lack of titles, transport and technical support they had uncovered. They also leveled what they took to be a damning critique at the government, pointing out that while Japanese colonists received continuous support from their government, "the only manner of subsistence for the Bolivian campesino is to become a peon of the Japanese colonist."<sup>565</sup> Unlike *El Deber's* editor who divided an imagined respectful "campesino cruceño" from raucous "highland migrants," the students also reminded the President and readers of their open letter that the two were one and the same. The "campesino cruceño" wrote Capobiano is "constituted presently of elements that have migrated from La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba, and Chuquisaca."

After more than a decade of active extension work in settler colonies, members of the Methodist church were sympathetic to the demands of colonists. Methodist support

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>564</sup> Espejo, *Historia de Yapacaní*, 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>565</sup> "Open letter from UAGRM," July 25, 1969. PR 1277, ANB.

for those struggles was in part a product of personal contact and cooperation but it also meshed with a transnational theological strain in global Methodism which was experiencing its own version of liberation theology. The two were linked by the movement of individuals such as Bolivian Methodist Jaime Bravo. "We fell inside a wave of deep radicalization within the church [which] repeated what was going on in its social milieu," he recalls.<sup>566</sup> After his work in the Alto Beni colonies, Bravo went on furlough. From 1967 to 1968 he was in Buenos Aires where he completed graduate studies in theology at the Interdenominational Evangelical Faculty of Theology. For the Protestant faith in Latin America the school was an epicenter of "liberation theology." Bravo remembers being taught by José Miguez Bonino who would produce several canonical texts including, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation.<sup>567</sup> Other graduates of the seminary included Federico José Pagura, who served as a Methodist bishop in Costa Rica and Panama in the late sixties and early seventies, helped Chilean refugees escape the Pinochet regime and protested along with the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" as part of the Evangelical Argentine Methodist church in the seventies and eighties.

Bravo returned to northern Santa Cruz in 1968 still committed to colonization but his vision "had broadened in Argentina" and he was interested in deepening the social work of the church.<sup>568</sup> Over those years, Chané-Bedoya a small colony center in the north of Santa Cruz became a center of radical peasant organizing involving members of the Methodist church like Bravo and the National Bolivian Workers Congress (COB).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>566</sup> Interview Jaime Bravo, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>567</sup> José Míguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>568</sup> Interview Jaime Bravo, Aug. 2014.

When Capobiano's student commission surveyed area that year they found conditions there the most desperate in all of Santa Cruz. Two hundred and fifty people were living in a "sub-human" state having paid local elites for land that ought to have been granted for free through the Agrarian Reform.<sup>569</sup> Bravo began working with sugar cane harvesters in Chané-Bedoya that, "came from the interior, those that suffered injustices…and young people that didn't have health services."<sup>570</sup>

Like fellow Methodist Ruben Baldivieso and Yapacaní colonist Juan Espejo, Bravo helped organize unions [*sindicatos*] and orient colonists, "so that they could demand their rights" and push for land of their own. With support from the National Bolivian Workers Congress and the Methodist church colonists in Chané Bedoya formed the Union of Poor Campesinos (UCAPO) an organization that began to stage occupations of estates in the area. As anthropologist Lesley Gill points out, those "invasions occurred during a time of economic expansion [in which] new opportunities lured migrants to northern Santa Cruz, while the expansion of agro-industries undermined their hopes of becoming independent producers."<sup>571</sup>

The grassroots activities of individuals like Espejo, Bravo and Capobiano as well as organizations like CECOYA and UCAPO precipitated an increasing coordination of colonist cooperatives throughout the nation's lowlands. In February of 1971, settlers from across Bolivia gathered in La Paz for the First National Congress of Colonizers. Delegates created a national organization, the National Federation of Bolivian Colonists to address the specific needs of "the campesino colonizer who feels orphaned in their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>569</sup> "Open letter from UAGRM," July 25, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>570</sup> Interview Jaime Bravo, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>571</sup> Lesley Gill, *Peasants, Entrepreneurs and Social Change*, 97.

necessities."<sup>572</sup> The Federation held that the colonizer sat at the vanguard of any social revolution a fact they attributed to "two reasons: their origin and the act of migration [the former] because a grand part of the colonists are displaced miners, unemployed workers, etc. connected with the centers of revolutionary ideological diffusion and [the latter] because it has conditioned important cultural changes that gave them an accelerated awareness of the Bolivia drama." While they attacked the recently deceased Barrientos along with the "petit-bourgeois" revolution of the MNR, the Federation of Colonizers shared the view of these regimes - and of the Methodist church - that migration was the central dynamic element in modern Bolivia.<sup>573</sup>

A few months after the conference, the transport and marketing situation in Yapacaní once again led to conflict, this time over the status of an unfinished bridge across the Yapacaní River. An International Development Bank loan was supposed to pay for the bridge that would extend the highway from Santa Cruz directly to Yapacaní colony. The CBF and the IDB had contracted the job to a local company but the initial pilings had been destroyed by flood waters and progress appeared to be stalled. Juan Espejo and fellow colonist Marcelino Morales traveled to La Paz to petition the government to complete the work. A bridge commission arrived in the colony but "left without doing anything."<sup>574</sup> Remembering his success in fighting the transport tax issue with Buena Vista, Espejo opted for an extra-legal route once again. Relations were becoming increasingly hostile between the IBD and colonists over repayment of settlement loans and four IBD members would shortly arrive in the colony to assess the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>572</sup> "Conclusiones y resoluciones del primer congreso nacional de colonizadores realizado del 17 al 20 de febrero de 1971." CP-GLE-FOL/3619. Biblioteca Nacional de Bolivia (BNB).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>573</sup> These meetings also took place at the regional level including a National Congress of Bolivian Colonists in Montero in June of 1971.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>574</sup> Espejo, Historia de Yapacaní, 103.

situation. Drawing inspiration from the Tupamaro revolutionary movement of Uruguay (which in those same years was taking wealthy Urugayans and foreign dignitaries hostage) Espejo decided to kidnap the men and hold them until the government agreed to start the bridge.<sup>575</sup>

The operation, planned for the night of August 8, coincided with the four IDB auditors' stay at a local pension in the colony. After a brief struggle, the auditors were sequestered and taken to an undisclosed location within the colony while armed colonists set up a patrol at the entrance to the colony. Once again the Methodist Church found itself at the center of this evolving situation. In addition to foreign and national workers like Brooks Taylor, Ana Fajardo, Larry Sanders and Mary Sayers, on long-term assignment in the area, the church had twenty nine U.S. student volunteers in the colony. The students in question had come to work on Yapacaní's Methodist hospital during their summer break, a common activity for Methodist high school students from congregations across the U.S. south. After the IDB hostages had been dealt with, Espejo went to Brooks Taylor the head of the hospital commission and asked if the students would be willing to take part as hostages of "a symbolic character."<sup>576</sup> The answer came back that the volunteers stood ready to cooperate "in solidarity" with the colonists.<sup>577</sup>

At the time, Harry Peacock was working in the orientation program in Piray Colony, to the north of Montero. Returning to Montero one evening he had dinner with fellow Methodist Ruben Baldivieso who lived and worked in Yapacaní.<sup>578</sup> Unaware of the hostage situation, the two decided to make an impromptu courtesy call on the youth

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>576</sup> Espejo, *Historia de Yapacaní*, 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>577</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>578</sup> Interview Harry Peacock.

group the majority of whom were from Peacock's hometown of Brownsville, Texas. When they arrived at the Yapacaní River well after dusk the pontoon operators told them they could not cross as there were "problems" on the other side. While the ferry operators were unsure of the details, reports that there were "people with shotguns" guarding the town, convinced Ruben and Harry to proceed. On the other side they found another armed checkpoint but Ruben, as a member of the colony, was able to get them through.

They quickly located the students in the colony school where their frantic chaperone, a Methodist minister, was attempting to convince them that they could not "volunteer to be hostages to pressure the government, this or the other." Harry remembers a sixteen-year-old girl from Corpus Christi, Texas the youngest of the group, standing up and saying "I'm not sure you have the right to make that decision for us, we came down here knowing that we couldn't do anything really significant to change the lives of these people…but they have come and they have asked us to do something and I don't think I'm ready to say no."<sup>579</sup> The entire group elected to stay, with Peacock also remaining as a hostage, and promised the colonists that they would remain in the school at night and carry on with their work during the days.

Negotiations proceeded at the local and national level and on August 16 a bridge agreement was signed and all hostages, voluntarily and otherwise, were released. During the course of the conflict Yapacaní had received the strong support of a number of other colonist cooperatives from across the lowlands and especially from UCAPO in Chané-Bedoya. For a moment the unlikely union of Methodist youth from South Texas and

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

radical agrarian politics from eastern Bolivia appeared to have achieved a tangible gain. To say the moment was short-lived would be an understatement. Less than a week after the hostages were released, Colonel Andres Selechs, leader of the Montero-based rangers, launched a coup d'etat. President Juan José Torres – a leftist member of the military was removed from office and replaced by General Hugo Banzer. Banzer, a native of Santa Cruz, would orchestrate a definitive shift to the right over his seven years of rule, commonly referred to as the *Banzerato*.

## Negotiating the Transition – Faith and Authoritarianism in the Banzer Era

In colony cooperatives and Methodist circles the effects of the coup were felt immediately. The week after the bridge resolution, Espejo learned that paramilitaries were rounding up union leaders in Yapacaní. Along with a friend he fled the colony by swimming across the Yapacaní River well downstream of the ferry crossing. The two ended up wandering through the bush until they bumped into a Japanese farmer from San Juan colony and were directed to a nearby road. From there they traveled clandestinely through Santa Cruz and up to the highlands before settling in the Alto Beni colonization zone near La Paz. Returning to Yapacaní the following year he was captured, detained and tortured in Santa Cruz by agents of the government. For the next three years he was imprisoned in La Paz before finally being released because his sister had connections to the Venezuelan embassy.<sup>580</sup>

The coup also impacted the Methodist Church, albeit in uneven ways, thereby revealing points of fracture between national and foreign workers as well as between

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>580</sup> Espejo, Historia de Yapacaní, 115-120.

missionaries more and less committed to radical measures. MCC officials, who worked alongside the Methodists in a number of rural development projects but had remained more distant from radical politics, offered one perspective on this shift. In a report on the fallout from the coup, Presbyterian missionaries James and Margaret Goff explained to their mission board that "during the Ovando and Torres administrations a group of progressive priests had moved far ahead of the [church] hierarchy in advocating and promoting social change."<sup>581</sup> In particular, "the Methodist Church in Bolivia has seen itself as having a humanizing role in the revolutionary process." In a letter back to the home office in the days after the Banzer takeover, MCC-rep Dale Linsenmeyer reflected on the transition and how religious groups might continue to operate under the new regime. "In one sense this was just another coup," acknowledged Linsenmeyer, "but this one affected us more directly in Santa Cruz and a shift from left to right was a surprise. I hope the Methodists aren't too far out on their limb."<sup>582</sup>

Some were. While uninvolved in the hostage situation, Jaime Bravo was working with the settlers and fieldworkers in UCAPO organization at the time. The week after the coup, local radio broadcast a list of people that had been asked to present themselves before the authorities. Bravo's name appeared along with a number of Methodists, both national and foreign, including Harry Peacock and Brooks Taylor. Authorities arrested both Bravo and Taylor, along several other priests, Maryknolls and student leaders like Capobiano that had shown solidarity with the colonists. Foreigners, like Taylor, were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>581</sup> James and Margaret Goff, "Set Back in Bolivia," April 27, 1972. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1969-1972. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>582</sup> Dale Linsenmeyer memo to Akron office, Sept.9, 1971. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1971. MCCA.

soon released (Peacock presented himself before authorities but was not incarcerated).<sup>583</sup> Others went into hiding. In their report, the Goff's noted that forty priests were in exile while others had taken sanctuary in foreign embassies.<sup>584</sup> For Bolivians, Methodist or not, the outcome was far from certain. Bravo and his fellow detainees were led to believe they might be executed at any moment and Peacock, who visited Bravo in prison, remembers signs of violent interrogation.

"I never thought I was a communist, I was a Methodist Christian with a socialist orientation, but Communist, no" Bravo explains, but concedes that the ideological climate made those distinctions impossible. "The Cold War...took hold of us Christians, like a sandwich." Ultimately, the Methodist and Catholic churches were able to use their institutional clout to secure Bravo's release on the condition he leave Bolivia. In exile, Bravo first went to Lima where he was lodged with the Methodist church and worked alongside members of the independent new bulletin "Noticias Aliadas." While he was out of Bolivia, right-wing militia broke into his house in Montero - located next door to the Methodist rural health director Jim Alley - burning his library and yelling at his wife that Bravo was a communist.<sup>585</sup> It was not until a 1978 amnesty at the tail end of the Banzerato that both Espejo and Bravo, two of the many examples of dislocation produced by the Banzer coup, were pardoned.

The Banzer coup resulted in the imprisonment, deportation or exile of some faithbased development workers and radical organizations. For those that elected to remain in the country and work under the Banzer regime the coup also led to a deep reflection on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>583</sup> Interview Peacock, Aug.2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>584</sup> James and Margaret Goff, "Set Back in Bolivia."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>585</sup> Interview Jaime Bravo, Aug. 2014.

the radicalism of the pre-coup era and the church's place in politics. Peacock remembers that Bravo and other Methodists were very involved with UCAPO but clarified that the organization ranged from "basically socialist" to those committed to a "violent overthrow...on the same page as what was going on with the left in Uruguay and Argentina at the time."<sup>586</sup> Methodist worker Ana Fajardo was much more critical. Bravo's actions, along with other radical Methodists that "had gotten involved in politics" had fundamentally discredited the church, according to Fajardo. In her interpretation politics was something extraneous to the work of the church and of rural development. Speaking about Bravo's organizing she makes it clear that she "didn't know anything" of all this at the time but that "they were going in the trucks of the Methodists, taking their bibles but involved in another project...meeting in the church, saying that it was a church meeting, with the trucks of the church...doing all of these things against the government."<sup>587</sup> Fajardo also links active participation in politics to the nationalization - or autonomy movement – within the Bolivian Methodist church. Both factors led to a gradual decrease in support and funding on the part of North American Methodist churches throughout the seventies. Ana Fajardo's narrative of those years is decidedly declensionist, reflecting the waning of ties with North American Methodists many of whom she had worked alongside in Yapacaní. "We had a lot of fields, properties, it all fell apart because of the politics; we lost the connection with the gringos."588

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>586</sup> Interview Peacock. Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>587</sup> Ana Fajardo, interviewed by author in Yapacaní, July 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>588</sup> Ibid.

Like Fajardo MCC administrators were also critical of the Methodists' political organizing in the period prior to the coup. In the above mentioned letter, Dale Linsenmayer may have expressed concern for the Methodists who were "out on their limb." Learning that Bravo and others had been imprisoned by the Banzer government, Linsenmayer's response indicated the degree to which politics could prove divisive to the ecumenical spirit of cooperation. "We hope for the best," he wrote, but "it is without a doubt their involvement in politics earlier and especially their leaning and advocacy of the Leftist movement which was the sole reason for their severe treatment by the new government."<sup>589</sup> At the same time as he worried about his fellow co-workers in the United Church Committee he recognized that given MCC's vocally apolitical stance, the coup, "should mean that the price of [our] stock in Bolivia has risen."<sup>590</sup>

Linsenmeyer was right. The MCC experienced a dramatic increase in the scope of its operations under the new regime. That much was evident a year and a half into the dictatorship as MCC Director for Latin America Edgar Stoesz toured the country. "1972 was in many ways a good year for Bolivia," he began his report, praising the stability of the Banzer regime, and agricultural growth in Santa Cruz where "cotton is king." MCC Bolivia had expanded to thirty-six workers and unlike in the past where they had farmed out their volunteers to the Methodist church and other agencies, "all but seven are [currently] under MCC programming."<sup>591</sup> They worked in four inter-related fields each "almost entirely directed toward either new colonization areas or rural villages." These included education, medical services, colonization and agricultural extension.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>589</sup> Dale Linsenmeyer to Akron office, Aug. 23, 1971. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1971. MCCA.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>591</sup> MCC Latin America Director Edgar Stoesz, Trip Report, Jan. 30-Feb.9, 1973. MCC Bolivia-Files, 1973. MCCA.

As with the Methodist church in the fifties and the sixties, in the seventies and eighties the MCC filled in for an absent state. MCC strategically located volunteers in regions where basic services from education, medicine, colonist orientation and agricultural extension were absent. The Teacher Abroad Program (TAP), developed by MCC'er Lynn Locuks in 1962 was one of the largest MCC initiatives. TAP placed North American volunteers in rural villages without schools across the globe and was particularly active in Bolivia. Among other zones of activity, MCCers worked in the area of El Torno-Jorochito, that same region that in 1966 had petitioned for the transfer of the Cotoca center and eloquently denounced the state for failure to provide technical assistance. Stoesz insisted "the most meaningful area of interaction no doubt takes place at the village level where MCC workers seek to achieve the highest level of interaction with Bolivians...a trend that must continue if MCC Bolivia is to earn the right to continue and expand."<sup>592</sup> Loucks also celebrated "the exciting aspect of going where there are no educational services," encouraging TAP volunteers "to look outside their classroom more and begin to form a community vision."<sup>593</sup> Portraying itself in stark opposition to "La Paz-based" agencies like USAID, MCC prided itself on low overhead and direct contact with rural villagers. The policy that volunteers live "at the level" of villagers -designed to build mutual respect between rural residents and MCC'ers - was also apparent in the steady flow of volunteers hospitalized with tropical illnesses over the following years.

Whether working in education, colonization, health or agricultural extension, all MCC volunteers submitted three-month progress reports. Their candid reflections –

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>593</sup> Lynn Loucks, "Report on TAP-Bolivia," June, 1974. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1974. MCCA.

gathered in MCC archives - provide an indication of the wide variety of "volunteers" that were brought into contact with Bolivians and what direction the nebulous concept of "meaningful interaction" might take in remote rural areas. The inexperience of some MCCers comes across clearly in some reports. Working for the TAP program, Ernie Brandt was frustrated in his attempts to "teach sympathetically for comprehension" and felt an "inferiority complex" in relation to national instructors.<sup>594</sup> Fellow TAPer Karen Berkey filled a 1974 report with complaints about steady rain, leaky roofs, strong winds and cancelled classes. Her outlook only brightened when recounting a tour around the country to visit other MCCers.<sup>595</sup> Some became disillusioned with the recipients of their instruction as well as with themselves. Leland Brennan admitted that he had "real doubts about the program [of micro-credit]" because – in his opinion – "the average campesino cannot grasp the true basic ideas behind it."<sup>596</sup> While Stoesz had emphasized that initiative for projects should come from the community itself, Abe Janzen, working in San José, "got the distinct impression from one person that the well was being made for us and at our initiative hence perhaps the little dedication in completing it."<sup>597</sup>

Though some young MCCers seemed overwhelmed by their individual assignments others took part in a wide range of activities that broadened the idea of "extension." In El Torno, Wendell Amatutz was carrying out demonstrations of animal traction, drilling wells, publishing a newsletter, leading cooperative classes and doing extension work in wheat and soybean production. He had also become a "resource

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>594</sup> Brandt, "Three Month Report," April 19, 1974. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1974. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>595</sup> Berkey, "Three Month Report," July 18, 1974.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>596</sup> Brennan, "Three Month Report," 1973. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>597</sup> Janzen, "Three Month Report," Nov. 1974. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1974.

person for the town ...and surrounding area" - a role that saw him take part in youth clubs, sports programs, the credit union and the syndicate.<sup>598</sup>

The Mennonite Central Committee was a relief agency rather than a missionary organization. Yet like Methodist mission board, the MCC described itself as "faith-based" and its volunteers also faced internal and external questions about the nature of their work and whether it constituted effective ministry. Back in early 1969 Nelson Litwiller from the Mennonite mission board in Kansas visited Bolivia. He met with several church agencies. The Methodists he considered "on the far left," while the World Gospel Mission he found too theologically conservative. While generally very positive about MCC work in the country he criticized their lack of a church-building component. "The longer I am in Bolivia," Litwiller wrote, "the more I wonder how it is possible for MCC to be active here for ten years and give only the life and not give the word, or in other words establish a Mennonite church."<sup>599</sup> He also chafed at the extensive ecumenicalism of the church criticizing the degree to which the MCC relied on the Methodist church for its programming.

Not all MCC volunteers were convinced by this rejection of ecumenicalism and insistence that their role in the country should be to minister. Writing a few years later in a newsletter circulated among Mennonite volunteers, Murray Luft had decided,

not to bring my Christian theology to bear on Bolivians. I say this for two reasons: a) I do not feel personally comfortable in an evangelizing role whether here or at home in Canada, b) I have too many unanswered questions about the culturally specific implications and consequences of evangelizing in rural Bolivia. Hence, I challenge the simple assumption that if I am a Christian, my only job is to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>598</sup> Amatutz, "Three Month Report," Feb.28, 1975. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1975.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>599</sup> Nelson Litwiller, Newton and Elkhart Mission Boards "Report on Bolivia Trip," April 1969. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1969. MCCA.

communicate the gospel verbally and bring about an individual conversion experience in the heart of a Bolivian peasant.<sup>600</sup>

Instead he wished to simply "concentrate on ministering in a <u>limited</u> way to the material and social needs of Bolivians."

Other MCCers moved without reservations between development and evangelical work during their time in the field. Karen Berkey welcomed a group of 20 visitors as part of the South American Missions society in her village school. Calvin Miler, demonstrating animal traction techniques to colonists, also enjoyed "helping out the Protestant churches in the area" and found among the new migrants in El Torno, "a really beautiful and active group of Christians."<sup>601</sup> George Reimer was impressed by the dedication of neighboring evangelicals, and wrote that "we are looking forward to cooperating with the evangelical churches in the area but are also mindful of the pitfalls in too close an association with labels under suspicion and theologies slightly different."<sup>602</sup> The activity of some volunteers traversed these seemingly exclusive fields. The first MCC volunteers in 4 Ojitos colony built a relationship with settlers by digging wells and building houses. They also established a booth in the local market where they sold an impressive array of spiritual and agricultural implements from vegetable seeds and insecticides to Bibles and Christian literature.<sup>603</sup> The proceeds in turn were invested in magazine subscriptions for the church library. In combining community development and agricultural instruction they insisted "Christian witness must be the main concern." As the Methodist designation of Bolivia as a "land of witness and decision," suggests, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>600</sup> Murray Luft, "Slaughterhouse" *Grindstone Newsletter*, 1972. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1972. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>601</sup> Miller, "Three Month Report," July 30, 1974. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1974. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>602</sup> Reimer, "Three Month Report," May 1974.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>603</sup> "The Pax Program in 4 Ojitos" MCC Orientation Documents for New Volunteers. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1969-72. MCCA.

term "witness," was a potent concept in mid-century Protestant faiths - one that reappeared throughout MCC correspondence. The idea of witness suggested that faith, in development modernization (or in a Protestant God) might be imparted through a sort of "demonstration effect." This in turn lent itself to characterizations of extension work of a technical as well as a spiritual nature. The overlap is less contradictory than it may initially appear. As Nick Cullather points out, "religious terminology" was often used by development planners to describe "conversion" to new technologies and "development has been described as a "global faith," a belief often in the face of contrary evidence." As the work of the MCC and the Methodist church in the San Julián project over the following decade makes clear, religious actors moved nimbly between ministering and administering, faith-based and secular development and revolutionary socialism and bureaucratic-authoritarianism.

## Circular Logic, Secular Logic: Missionary and NGO in the San Julián Project

As the preceding examples make clear, the MCC flourished in the turn to authoritarianism under Banzer. While its members were persecuted and its radical activism suppressed, the Methodist church also survived the coup. For both organizations this was particularly true of their work in settler orientation, which emerged in the wake of the flood at Hardeman colony and Piray. In 1972, with the Piray project concluded, the CIU (with Harry Peacock as director) signed a contract to run settler orientation in a new colonization scheme to the east of the Río Grande. For those sympathetic to the type of political organizing that had proceeded Banzer and who had witnessed close friends jailed and exiled the choice to work on behalf of the new regime was likely a difficult one. When asked about his decision, Harry offered the following explanation. "When the Banzer Revolution came…we had contact with the new director of colonization, and we were invited out to San Julián and then invited to work…those of us in the CIU did some real soul-searching, Marty [and I] had the same response, that it would be the easy and clean thing for us to say we didn't want to get our hands dirty working with these people. But who pays? Who suffers? …if we're going to get on the field and play, we're going to get muddy,…we decided to get on the field."<sup>604</sup>

The final section of this chapter examines the role of religious actors in the San Julián project, Bolivia's largest colonization endeavor. The project extended through the seven years of the Banzer regime – or *Banzerato* - and into the debt crisis of the 1980s. It attracted the attention of a range of academics – from sociologists and anthropologists to political scientists - who arrived to assess the project and often labeled it one of Bolivia's – and Latin America's – few successful colonization schemes. I explore the work of orientators in San Julián and also the way such positive assessments emerged through the constellation of religious, NGO, academic and Bolivian and U.S. officials passing through the colony over those two decades.

The San Julián project appears as a natural progression from the CIU's earlier projects at Hardeman and Piray seeking to alleviate the problems – and accompanying radicalism – exhibited in earlier colonies like Yapacaní and 4 Ojitos. Yet San Julián ultimately displayed many of the same radical tendencies that characterized older colonies in Santa Cruz particularly as state funding collapsed. A prominent "success story" in the 70s, by the earlier 1980s San Julián would gain a reputation as a "rebel

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>604</sup> Harry Peacock interview, August 2014.

town" (pueblo rebelde) that continues to the present. I argue that the latter might in fact represent the very success of the former. I also reveal how the role of religious actors in San Julián's founding was gradually silenced, exchanged for a secular NGO model that emerged with the consolidation of a late twentieth century development industry around the globe.

During a week-long conference held in Santa Cruz from May 22 to May 27 of 1972 it was evident that faith-based missionaries and volunteers would continue to play active roles as proxies for the state in rural development under the new Banzer regime. The meeting brought together a range of actors, institutions and foreign agencies under the leadership of the Public Works Committee, the regional governmental organization responsible for managing Santa Cruz's oil royalties. The tone was hyperbolic. President Banzer – a native of Santa Cruz - was present to welcome participants. "We believe," he told the crowd that, "[we are living in] an age of progress, an age of development and an age of integration."<sup>605</sup> The President of the Committee Pro-Santa Cruz also spoke, claiming that Santa Cruz was "not just the place where our country comes together, but all of America."<sup>606</sup> The President of the Committee of Public Works followed recounting the "history of neglect" that had long characterized the region that now "constitutes the greatest economic potential of Bolivia."<sup>607</sup> Over the following days experts led panels on infrastructure, public utilities, petroleum development and technical assistance. A significant portion of the conference was dedicated to agriculture including: the cotton boom, "the migration of farmers from the interior," and the construction of a new

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>605</sup> "Seminario de ideas y proyectos específicos, Santa Cruz" in *Santa Cruz y el desarrollo*. (Santa Cruz: Comité de Obras Públicas, 1972), 1. The book contains the published conference proceedings including transcriptions.
 <sup>606</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>607</sup> Ibid, 3.

highway linking highlands and lowlands and connecting colonization zones in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba.

The roundtable on colonization was attended by members of the army and the INC as well as MCC-rep Dale Linsenmayer and Harry Peacock, Ken Graves and Bishop Mortimer Arias from the Methodist Church. INC director Ulrich Reyes began by outlining some of the problems faced by the 12,000 campesino families that had made the move to the lowlands since 1952. He noted the lack of tools and work animals, as well as issues with inadequate parcel size and declining fertility on cleared land. In particular he found that the "excessive geographic dispersion of the colonies," made service provision, transportation and commercialization very difficult.<sup>608</sup>

Attempting to link Bolivian colonization to global theories and practices of settlement and community formation, the conference organizers had brought in two experts from Israel. The agronomist Shai Arazi explained the evolution of the kibbutz system as well as mixed capitalist-communitarian endeavors while his colleague Y. Gazit provided members with a proposed budget for establishing a cooperative agricultural colony.<sup>609</sup> Representing the United Church Committee, Harry Peacock spoke to their planned role in the San Julián project. "Catholic, Methodist and Mennonite" he began, "through an agreement with the INC and with financing from the World Council of Churches and the Collaboration of the World Food Organization have created a capacitybuilding program (capacitación) for colonists that will settle the zone of San Julián."610 Peacock's speech drew together many of the ideas and strategies that the CIU had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>608</sup> Ibid, 423.
<sup>609</sup> Ibid, 428-433.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>610</sup> Ibid, 434.

cultivated in its earlier initiatives, above all timing, that orientators must be there "at the moment of settlement."

Peacock had recently completed a US-based furlough where he studied social psychology at the University of Texas-Houston. The training was evident in his characterization of the settler who, "at the moment of occupying his new territory, because of the need to change his methods, or for being outside of his environment and because his social relations are different is much more receptive to change."<sup>611</sup> It was a moment, according to Peacock that "is the best to implant new ideas," and lasted for four months, followed by "stages of resistance and passivity." In addition to the psychology of colonists, their health was most likely to suffer in the transition to the jungle. With its Mennonite and Methodist volunteers, the CIU intended to teach a range of practices from sanitation, land clearing, hygiene and nutrition but they felt the combined package of these "technical" elements of extension, had a broader socio-political element which would "include the idea of solidarity." In addition to project technicians drawn from the ranks of the CIU's member organizations the orientation program would rely on the "orientator" model pioneered in Piray in which "camba" orientators would impart local environmental knowledge. The proposal closed with a description of the budget, placing the total cost per colonist at \$1900, substantially lower than earlier INC initiatives.<sup>612</sup>

The kibbutz model put forward by Arazi and Gazit was not adopted in San Julián but the project's design took a radical spatial approach to address similar questions about community formation and Reyes concern with "geographic dispersion." As opposed to

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>612</sup> Ibid. This amount included rations for the entirety of the orientation period.

the "piano-key" formations of earlier colonies in which settlers were strung out along access roads, colonists in San Julián would be concentrated in "núcleos" of forty families. In a unique format, that is particularly striking when viewed from above, pie-shaped plots would radiate out from a central point. The circular logic of San Julián was that settler's homes, community centers, wells and schools would be inevitably drawn towards the center of the pinwheel, creating an inescapable feeling of solidarity and reducing the universally high abandonment rates of previous settlements. These individual núcleos would be grouped in blocks of nine with the central núcleo containing additional services including a high school, clinic and other services. A principal road would link the center núcleo of each grouping or NADEPA. Missionaries and volunteers from the United Church Committee would also offer a three-month intensive orientation program with instruction in a number of key areas including hygiene and agriculture.<sup>613</sup> At the 1972 conference, San Julián was imagined as a unified project of infrastructure, service provision, settler orientation and community-building, managed in a partnership between a religious NGO and the state.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>613</sup> Epp, "Establishing new Agricultural Communities."



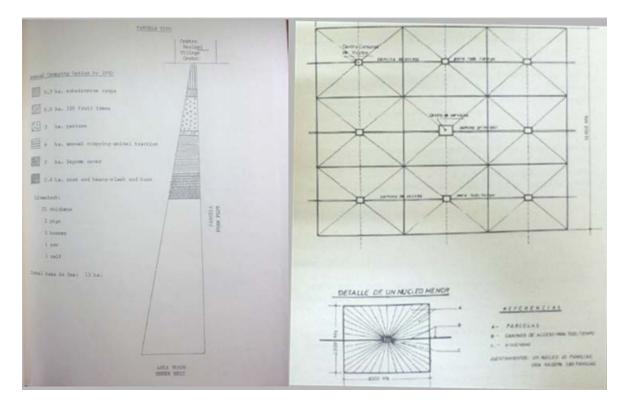


Figure 11 Spatial layout of San Julián Colony.Planning documents indicate the unique layout of a single núcleo (lower right), the grouping of núcleos in blocks of nine (upper right) and the composition of one of forty individual plots in each núcleo (left). In the latter the point of the property extended to the village center while successive fields of produce, fruit trees, cash crops and pasture extended to the rear of the property followed by a green belt. Images from Marty Miller and Harry Peacock Personal Archives.

The tight relationship between national authorities and the CIU was apparent in a 1974 INC report reviewing several earlier colonization projects in explicit comparison with the new work at San Julián. At the outset, the INC maintained its faith in the project "as the most important complement for the execution of the plan and as the most comprehensive theoretical instrument to execute whatever sort of work, construction, installation of factories or for colonizing a region."<sup>614</sup> However, for INC officials, San Julián looked very different from the colonies of the previous decade. The Institute acknowledged and justified this shift. Old settlement schemes, like the interventions described by James Scott, had sought to provide fix-alls for the nation, setting wildly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>614</sup> Instituto Nacional de Colonización. Proyecto de las zonas de colonización, 1.

inappropriate goals: incorporating the peasantry, engaging in massive population transfers, improving the balance of trade and making the nation agriculturally selfsufficient in key products. While discretely acknowledging that massive amounts of earlier funding had been misappropriated by state authorities, the INC attributed the failure of colonization to less tangible factors. "The politics like the plans, projects, services and other activities of colonization move between margins that are too broad" the report stated. Officials resolved that it was "of great urgency to delimit them with more precision and locate their execution within our reality."<sup>615</sup>

That reality, the INC acknowledged, included the misappropriation of tens of thousands of dollars of funding for earlier projects. But unwilling, or perhaps unable to address this rampant culture of corruption, the INC claimed that a culture of paternalism was the most significant threat to successful colonies. The diagnosis reflected racial concerns about the Andean migrants that comprised the majority of settlers.<sup>616</sup> The "paternalistic character" of aid the INC noted, "increases the incapacity of the colonist" to engage in basic actions from the formation of cooperatives to mutual aid.<sup>617</sup> The idea of "excessive paternalism" seems astonishing given the INC's inability to produce some of the most basic services it was responsible for in earlier colonization zones, including access roads and potable water supplies. Phantom state largesse and a corresponding and imagined state of "dependency" lurked around the corner of every present and future colony threatening the ability of colonists to develop independently. Dependency was a diagnosis with an enormous amount of symbolic capital in Latin America in the 1970s

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>615</sup> INC, Proyecto de las zonas de colonización. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>616</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>617</sup> Ibid, 39.

one that was typically invoked to justify a strong state presence in economic and social life. Yet here the INC employed dependency in an entirely inverse fashion as the pretext for a dramatic reduction in state support.

In the INC's writings this "negative attitude" of entitlement slipped easily into broader characterizations of Andean people who, they pointed out, displayed "a certain negligence and lack of initiative to learn new and more lucrative cultivation techniques."<sup>618</sup> Colonists and *campesinos* were also considered to have a "low cultural level" apparent in such presumably financial decisions as their inability to consume industrialized products to their poor, imbalanced diets. It created a dilemma for the INC in which untrustworthy colonists, as they saw it, could not be left to their own meager devices any more than they could be given excessive, paralyzing attention.

Partnering with an NGO in San Julián was one practical step in this progressive "narrowing of ends" and diversification of means. The INC was understandably excited about the project in which the CIU had taken control of many aspects previously in the domain of the state. They were particularly enthusiastic about the orientation program. The INC enthused that under the CIU, the settlers would be creating mutual aid organizations that were "the fruit of their own labor and initiative and not something imposed from outside that they have no responsibility for."<sup>619</sup> Read the other way it was the INC expressing relief at its own lack of responsibility, financial or otherwise for the new colonists.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>619</sup> Ibid, 358.

State officials were not the only ones imagining San Julián in broader terms. Mark Epp, a volunteer with the Mennonite Central Committee in Bolivia worked with the CIU in San Julián from 1972-1974 just as the orientation program was getting underway. Returning to the United States, he completed his Masters at Cornell the following year – with a thesis focusing on San Julián - before returning to Bolivia to take over the directorship of the program from Peacock. A condensed version of Epp's thesis was translated into Spanish was provided to project workers like Araus as a guide. Like the INC report, Epp conceded that the many of the structural and everyday aims of resettlement were unrealistic. But while the INC was happy to see the CIU filling in for a limited state presence in the colonization zone, Epp and the CIU preferred to think of themselves as a buffer-of-sorts, between the colonists and an insensitive, heavy-handed state bureaucracy. Along with a narrowing of ends they advocated a transformation of means that would see an increased focus on dignity and community as much as the "rational provision of services" and production outcomes. Their pedagogical role extended beyond instructing colonists. They felt an equivalent need to instruct an insensitive state by encouraging more "human considerations" on the part of national institutions.

Though carefully admonishing the state, the CIU shared many of its fears about the future capabilities of new colonists. It was at the initial moment of settlement that the "seeds of paternalism and dependence are planted," commented Epp. With a touch of the theatrical he warned that the incautious NGO is soon, "cast in the role of patron, a position it can neither fill nor painlessly retreat from. The settler, on the other hand, has begun to look to the outside for his help. The scene is set for disaster."<sup>620</sup> Like the INC, Epp felt that this "patron-seeking" behavior, sprung naturally from Andean culture. He repeated the historic perspective of Bolivian elites who claimed that "Indians have exceptional physical endurance and are able to sustain prolonged periods of exacting labor" because of an "insensitivity to hunger, cold fatigue and pain, there is no other race capable of such sustained toil on so little sustenance."<sup>621</sup> He also made the inevitable comparison between the "future-oriented" highlanders and the lowlanders who "lived for the day". By settling highlanders from similar regions together, the planners of the San Julián project sought to benefit from a strong community spirit. Yet when this community spirit expressed itself through "festive waste" in the form of "excessive drinking" the CIU suggested that perhaps, "not all traditional organization structures are relevant or applicable in the new cultural and environmental situation."<sup>622</sup>

In the decade preceding neo-liberal reform in Latin America, Epp was already advocating for decentralization as a state paradigm. Scaling back the state would carve out space for the emerging NGO but also let colonists escape from the "patron-client" matrix, moving from "follower to decision-maker".<sup>623</sup> Epp felt this variable had been "often overlooked or downgraded in favor of other more tangible strategies such as land tenure." If anything, granting campesinos secure land title in San Julián would have followed the logic of decentralization. It would effectively remove the role of the state as patron, a positional power exercised by a number of Latin American dictators, from

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>620</sup> Epp, "Establishing New Agricultural Communities," 135.
 <sup>621</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>623</sup> Ibid., 87.

Stroessner in Paraguay to Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.<sup>624</sup> Epp was aware of the desire that San Julián's colonists had repeatedly expressed for clear title as well as their suspicions that without it they were ensnared in a different form of "dependency" on state authorities.<sup>625</sup> Yet against his humanizing and decentralizing tendencies, Epp maintained a fundamental ambivalence about giving colonists title. Withholding it might cultivate a sense of insecurity, giving title too soon could allow for profiteering on the part of insincere colonists. Epp feared both that unscrupulous colonists might immediately sell their land and that the guileless among them would fall victim to voracious outside speculators.

By the end of 1974, the CIU and the INC had established the first nine núcleos in the colony. The CIU's orientation program relied on a three year OXFAM grant and project participants scrambled to identify a new funding source. As the head of the CIU, Harry Peacock was often in La Paz working with the national office of the Institute of Colonization. The rural development office of USAID was directly across the street in the same building as the Ministry of Agriculture. He remembers spending a good part of that that year traveling back and forth between the buildings courting AID funding. In 1975 the project was sent to the home office for final approval. Back in the U.S. on a church furlough at the time, Peacock traveled to Washington to support the review. The prospects were murky. After more than a decade of U.S. supported re-settlement initiatives in Latin America, such programs, Harry remembers, were "not a popular thing at this point within AID…they had figured out that colonization didn't work."<sup>626</sup> Perhaps

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>624</sup> Kregg Hetherington. *Guerrilla Auditors* and Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>625</sup> Epp, "Establishing New Agricultural Communities," 117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>626</sup> Peacock interview, Aug, 2014.

spurred by Harry's presence AID agreed to fund the project with one firm condition. They insisted that Harry would be "directly responsible to AID and not to the Methodist church or the [CIU] or Oxfam." He accepted, officially leaving the church and over thirteen years of missionary work.

Peacock's abrupt decision to exchange missionary work for a position in international development reflected an ongoing tension between the overlapping fields of ministering and administering in Bolivia. He acknowledges that working with Mennonites and Catholics in colonization he "wasn't making Methodist churches and that began to be a problem."<sup>627</sup> Even as he moved further into development, the nationalized Methodist church was focusing ever-more on evangelization. New Aymara leaders within the church were gradually assuming responsibility, recalls Jaime Bravo, "and various missionaries were thinking the time had arrived to withdraw."<sup>628</sup> Uruguayan Methodist Mortimer Arias would also resign as bishop of the Bolivian Methodist church at this time and even Bravo, himself of Aymara origin but "not too Aymara, but also not very Gringo" left the church.

Peacock's move to USAID might appear as a subtle secularization of development work in the Bolivian lowlands in which ad-hoc religious organizations and missionaries were gradually giving way to an emerging professional development industry. The reality was far more paradoxical. Even if the USAID funding agreement was conditional on Harry's departure from the Church, a shared faith also made the agreement possible. Harry confided the deal "never would have come about had it not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>627</sup> Peacock interview, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>628</sup> Bravo Interview, Aug, 2014.

been that ... Bob Moffat [director of rural development for USAID in Bolivia] was a Methodist, Bob Moffat was from South Texas. We had not known each other...but we were from the same part of the country."<sup>629</sup> Moffat visited the núcleos in that first orientation program and while they had "never discussed religion" directly, Peacock felt that the fellow Texan's rural Methodist background provided the framework for his appreciation of the CIU and their "Christian commitment" to development.

With USAID funding secured, San Julián would expand from nine núcleos to forty-seven. Another consequence of Peacock's recruitment by USAID was that San Julián, a remote colonization scheme along the Bolivian frontier was pulled into dialogue with rural development and "new lands settlement" projects across the globe. The intertwined logic of the Green revolution and the politics of decolonization were driving a range of studies in tropical agriculture, resettlement, land reform and colonization spearheaded in part by Thayer Scudder's work on human ecology, population relocation and infrastructure projects in Africa. Much of this research was clearly directed at identifying exportable models for future projects. This applied to studies within Latin America like Craig Dozier's comparative work on colonization and land development as well as those that looked further afield.<sup>630</sup> A network emerged peopled by a range of specialists and experts that traversed the globe - like members of the SUNY-Binghamton-based Institute for Development Anthropology – that were commissioned by USAID to assess the success or failure of such developments. With its unique spatial layout, orientation program and low abandonment rates, San Julián soon gained a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>629</sup> Peacock interview, Aug 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>630</sup> Craig L. Dozier, Land Development and Colonization in Latin America; Case Studies of Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico. (New York: Praeger, 1969).

reputation of success appearing to observers not just as a potential model for future settlement in Santa Cruz, but for global tropical resettlement as a whole. The project would appear in a number of studies and edited collections as visiting sociologists, anthropologists and agronomists documented its progress and passed through the small bunkhouse and headquarters that the CIU had established in the middle of those first nine núcleos.<sup>631</sup>



Figure 12 San Julián núcleos constructed with USAID funding. Photograph by author Dec 1, 2013.

With the first round of USAID funding secured by Peacock about to expire in 1978, San Julián had expanded dramatically from 9 to 47 núcleos. Yet the road beyond núcleo 11 remained unfinished. The members of the CIU, who had typically left settlement schemes in the early stages, hoped to obtain another grant to "consolidate" the program. Peacock, in particular, was inspired by Michael Nelson's 1973 book *The* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>631</sup> Valerie Fifer, "A Series of Small Successes: Frontiers of Settlement in Eastern Bolivia." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 14:2 (Nov., 1982): 407-432.

*Development of Tropical Lands: Policy Issues in Latin America.*<sup>632</sup> Nelson proposed that new settlements pass through a series of steps: pioneering, consolidation and growth.<sup>633</sup> As part of the "consolidation" proposal USAID brought a seven member interdisciplinary review team to Bolivia in 1978. The group included anthropologists Allyn Maclean Stearman and David Hess (who would publish further works on San Julián) as well as Nelson (personally chosen by Peacock).

Stearman remembers that her team was "favorably impressed with the progress of the colony and recommended that a consolidation program should be undertaken."<sup>634</sup> However, the need to obtain funding pushed forward the process of "secularization" within the CIU that had already begun with Peacock's move from the Methodist Church to AID. The CIU was disbanded and its members created FIDES (Inter-American Foundation for Development) an appropriately non-religious sounding NGO to apply for the grant.<sup>635</sup> Once again, Jaime Bravo frames the move as a response to the incompatibility of their work in rural development with an evangelical-minded Methodist church that, after nationalization in the early seventies, "didn't have the same vision." With the shift to FIDES,

we were more autonomous and independent of the church, and we were much more pluralistic, we could work with the Catholic church more openly and channel resources from foreign governments which before... working between church and USAID [was difficult], but with the NGO and [USAID] it was easy because we were a "civil organization" and not a religious organization, and not doing work of proselytization, USAID would not give us help any other way.<sup>636</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>632</sup> Peacock interview, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>633</sup> Michael Nelson, *The Development of Tropical Lands: Policy Issues in Latin America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>634</sup> Stearman describes her participation in the project in *Camba and Kolla*, 183.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>635</sup> As Stearman points out there was little change in membership as the CIU transitioned into FIDES. Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>636</sup> Bravo interview, Aug. 2014.

Despite the secularization of the CIU, faith again provided the unspoken framework for the financing. USAID's manager on the ground in Santa Cruz was Gary Alex who had previously worked in rural extension in Cambodia for seven years with the Quaker-founded International Volunteer Service. While Alex's superiors were was unsympathetic to colonization, thinking that "it was sloppy and we couldn't control it," he was impressed by the project and brought in an experienced grant writer to help FIDES frame its request in suitable terms.<sup>637</sup> The result was "the largest cooperative agreement grant ever given to a private volunteer organization in Latin America: \$1.5 million US to be disbursed over a period of three years."<sup>638</sup> On the verge of the "lost decade" in Latin America when state-sponsored development would enter a profound crisis the move signaled an emerging trend. A central shift in development financing in Latin America was underway with the nascent NGO at its center.

## Road Blocks on the Path to Development: San Julián on the verge of the "Lost Decade"

The promising period of USAID- FIDES financing began inauspiciously with a series of military coups - in which short-lived presidencies like those of García Mesa stripped state companies of resources and funding - and ended as a dramatic hyperinflation took hold of Bolivia. The combined economic and political crises produced an exile of project workers and an increasing radicalization among San Julián's settlers. Flora Gómez, a former colonist who had become a FIDES health-worker in núcleo settlement remembers the García Mesa coup "broke the colonization [program] and I withdrew" eventually opening up a pharmacy in San Julián center that she

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>637</sup> Peacock interview, Aug, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>638</sup> Stearman, 183.

maintains today.<sup>639</sup> Harry Peacock also left the project in 1983 to join a USAID initiative in Costa Rica. Annual inflation was approaching 300%. FIDES employees received a basic food allowance but salaries were worth "virtually nothing." In an assessment blending principle and pragmatism Harry confided that "[for] twelve years I had been there, I was getting to be too much of an institution and the whole idea of dependency and so on and so forth...and besides that I was broke, and they were offering me a good job."<sup>640</sup> In the year after Harry's departure the currency crashed further. By 1985 (at the height of the crisis) inflation reached over 20,000%. "We all suffered," remembers Jaime Bravo whose salary was reduced to a tenth of its value from morning to night.<sup>641</sup> He also left Bolivia in this period, returning to the U.S. to work with migrant groups in California.

In the midst of the monetary crisis the once positive assessments of San Julián took on a more somber tone. A group of anthropologists, including William Partridge and Michael Painter, visited the colony on behalf of AID and as part of the SUNY-Binghamton-based Institute for Development Anthropology which was making a global review of tropical resettlement.<sup>642</sup> The IDA was founded in 1976 by Michael Horowitz, and Thayer Scudder. Its members worked across the developing world looking at issues such as "resettlement, rural household production systems, pastoralism, gender, river basin development and community forestry." Painter and Partridge's visit to San Julián reflected the continued importance of these comparative approaches to colonization. In a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>639</sup> Flora Gomez interview with Author, June 2014, San Julián.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>640</sup> Peacock interview, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>641</sup> Bravo interview, Aug 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>642</sup> CLIR-IDA Collection website https://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/registry/hc.0370. Accessed Jun 1, 2016.

series of provocative studies and meetings through the early eighties, the IDA attempted to bring together lessons from settlement projects around the world. Participants in one 1982 meeting in Binghamton discussed "Latin America and Colonization," "Large-scale Settlement Schemes in Tropical Africa," "Transmigration Experience in South Asia" and "AID Experience with River Basin Development and New Lands Settlement." The IDA was not alone in its enthusiasm for comparative research into pioneer settlement in the tropics. In September of 1985 a group of geographers and other social scientists gathered in Kuala Lumpur for five days to discuss resettlement in the "humid tropics" of Latin America, West Africa and Southeast Asia with United Nations support before publishing an edited volume on the subject.<sup>643</sup>

Painter and William Partridge would also publish an article about San Julián in a volume of essays on the human ecology of tropical land settlement edited by the latter with an introduction by Scudder.<sup>644</sup> As with nearly every analysis of San Julián, the two began by acknowledging its considerable accomplishments. They cautioned that these did not outweigh the economic problems associated with a lack of credit or reliable access to regional markets. Their conclusion reflected the current dismal state of affairs and led Painter and Partridge to privilege structure over agency. They claimed that best practices aside, "settlement catalyzes a process of social and economic change that is beyond the control of the agencies responsible for a particular project."<sup>645</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>643</sup> Walther Manshard and William B. Morgan eds., Agricultural Expansion and Pioneer Settlements in the Humid Tropics: Selected Papers Presented at a Workshop Held in Kuala Lumpur, 17-21 September 1985 (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1988).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>644</sup> Debra A, Schumann and William L Partridge. *The Human Ecology of Tropical Land Settlement in Latin America*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>645</sup> Painter and Partridge, "Lowland Settlement in San Julián, Bolivia: Project Success and Regional Underdevelopment" in *Human Ecology*, 347.

What was one to make of the much-touted success of San Julián, reflected Painter some years later, in a period of 20,000% annual inflation?<sup>646</sup> Perhaps an accurate assessment was simply impossible at that particular juncture. That colonists could maintain even subsistence levels of production was an impressive feat given the abysmal economic situation. At the time Painter and Partridge argued that the re-creation of a subsistence economy in the lowlands was not an acceptable marker of project success. Ultimately they felt that what had successfully been transplanted to the lowlands was the same set of dependent conditions that had initially driven Andeans to migrate from the nation's highlands. Encouraged by Thayer Scudder, anthropologist Susan Hamilton also traveled to San Julián on behalf of the IDA in the early eighties to address a growing concern with the status of women in the development process. Her conclusions were not much more positive than Partridge and Painter.<sup>647</sup>

In Painter and Partridge's analysis, disembodied economic forces threaten the viability of San Julián. There is no sign of more intimate socio-economic pressure as experienced through manipulation by wealth ranchers the abuse of local infrastructure by logging companies or the increasing ethnic tensions within the department of Santa Cruz in the context of highland migration. This absence is particularly conspicuous given that a few months before the team conducted their research, San Julián's colonists had mobilized, carrying out a dramatic road block in October of 1984 that - like the Yapacaní hostage taking more than a decade earlier, catapulted the colony into the regional and national media.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>646</sup> Michael Painter, skype interview with the author, Spring 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>647</sup> Susan Hamilton, An Unsettling Experience: Women's Migration to the San Julián Colonization Project. (Binghamton, N.Y.: Institute for Development Anthropology, 1986).

A new round of state investment in San Julián was heralded in 1983 but by the following year it was clear that the funding was not forthcoming. Colonists suspected that the INC was profiting by renting out the colony's road maintenance equipment to surrounding ranches.<sup>648</sup> When Painter and his colleagues toured the colonies, they noted that the sanitary posts that formed part of the INC's 1974 plan for San Julián were unstaffed and without supplies. Due to the lack of proper wells many of the newly created núcleos housed as little as six families while others contained upwards of 150.<sup>649</sup> In the minds of disillusioned colonists, the fundamental problem they faced was not a lack of initiative but corruption and misappropriation of funds.

In a sense this was exactly what the orientation of the CIU had been preparing colonists for all along. Missionaries and volunteers sought to limit colonist "dependency" on state institutions which they knew would likely lack funds to support colonists in the future. This move, whether seen as "pragmatic" – as Peacock described it – or cynical, conditioned a degree of acceptance of adverse conditions that likely accounted for San Julián's initial low abandonment rate. Yet as the colony matured and faced a state that was in the process of disinvesting itself of even its most basic responsibilities, settlers rejected this revolution of lowered expectations.

In October of 1984, an already tense situation boiled over when the regional director of the INC Juan Terrazas requested that road equipment from San Julián be taken south to serve another project. Colonists, suspecting the machinery would not be returned, refused. An irate Terrazas arrived in the colony to demand the machinery in

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>648</sup> San Julián : bloqueos campesinos camioneros : testimonio de la lucha de un pueblo. (La Paz: Asamblea Permanente de los Derechos Humanos de Bolivia, 1984) recounts the narrative of the road block through interviews conducted with participants.
 <sup>649</sup> Ibid. 9.

person and was taken hostage by San Julián's residents. Just as Yapacaní colonists had done more than a decade before, the San Julián colonists then sent a commission to La Paz with list of demands while organizing a road-block along the highway that passed by the entrance to the settlement. The road was the only access between Santa Cruz and the neighboring department of Beni as well as the Brazilian border. Over the next few days tensions mounted as foreign contraband, agricultural goods and logging trucks began to back up. Through the "Special Federation of San Julián Colonists" settlers maintained a constant vigilance, organizing shifts and food supplies for those involved in the blockade and prominently displaying Bolivian flags on their barricades. On the day that a commission was expected to arrive from Santa Cruz, violence broke out when a group of drivers tried to break through the barriers and fired into the crowd of colonists. Despite several casualties on both sides, protesters held fast and were able to negotiate an agreement with the government. Colonists were portrayed in local media as ignorant "brutes" and "savage kollas." Several thousand people gathered in Santa Cruz for a march to "reconquer the orient" from the highland "invaders". Others demanded a rapid industrialization of agriculture that would free them from the liabilities associated with dangerous migrant labor.650

The *bloqueo* is notably absent from most outside reports on San Julián even as it forms a foundational historical moment in the present memories of colonists.<sup>651</sup> For foreign observers, perhaps the community's participation in this widely publicized road-block/kidnapping appeared an act of desperation that fits within a larger narrative of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>650</sup> Ibid, 37-42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>651</sup> See Mariano Garcia Taboada. *San Julián, la colonizacion y su fortaleza*. (La Paz: Fondo Editorial de los Diputados, 2008).

"failure" of this unique colonization endeavor. However, the phenomenon of cooperative roadblocks – so integral to the future of grassroots resistance to neoliberal politics in Bolivia – can be read in an entirely different light, as an indicator of community solidarity and organizational capacity. In fact, amidst increasingly pessimistic anthropological reports on San Julián during the debt crisis, the popular account of the protest as recorded through personal testimonios might be the best place to escape the success/failure paradigm and recognize alternative possibilities for settler resistance. As it had in Yapacaní, a decade and half earlier, blocking roads and taking hostages were strategies of engagement for colonists that had been "abandoned" by the state. If we remember the experience of the Methodist church in Yapacaní and elsewhere in the leadup to the Banzer coup it is clear that this radicalism – as much as the meticulously planned orientation of new settlers – is a legacy of the faith-based development workers operating under the aegis of CIU and FIDES.

Jaime Bravo, who returned from exile to work with FIDES and Lutheran World Relief in San Julián, makes this connection explicitly. At the 1972 conference Peacock had explained that the CIU would take part in "capacitation," a term that whether translated as training, preparation or capacity-building, seemed to imply a technical bundle for confronting the lowland environment. Certainly it passed without scrutiny at a conference attended by President Hugo Banzer who had made every attempt to crush radical political organizing after his 1971 coup. Bravo saw the term in a more explicitly political light. Over the years he also obtained funding for the "capacitacion" of lowland colonists through the NGO Lutheran World Relief. He remembers that religious aid had been key in political organizing in San Julián and elsewhere, that through "the NGOs be they Catholic or Protestant or civil like FIDES, we have helped to prepare the road," for radical politics. In the case of Lutheran world relief, its Canadian funders "did not know that money went to those that were blockading. If they had known they would have cut me off but I allocated the funds saying "we are in active capacitacion." What is active capacitiaon? Blocking roads [bloquear]!"<sup>652</sup>

The road block thus stands as one of the key if perhaps unintended legacies of settler orientation in San Julián. While questioned by outside observers who saw the community's economic struggles, an orientation program that had attempted to reduce settler dependency and abandonment rates through the development of colonist initiative was a success particularly if colonists were willing to actively confront the state, challenge regional elites and assert their rights. Clearly for some Methodists like Jaime Bravo this was precisely the meaning of "capacitacion" as it had been in the early 1970s in the north of Santa Cruz when the colonists and field hands of Yapacaní and Chané-Bedoya also blocked roads, took hostages, marched and formed peasant unions to secure their rights. A compelling aspect of faith-led development was its ability to contain both these qualities: a technical package of service provision and planning that appealed to authoritarian leaders like Banzer and a form of rural mobilization that meshed with the needs of radical campesinos.

## **Conclusion: Trajectories in Development**

The growth of NGO-led development, a system of re-allocating state responsibility to third parties, stands as a core aspect of the history of the CIU, FIDES and San Julián and a broader legacy for Latin America and the "developing world"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>652</sup> Bravo interview, Aug 2014.

[better described as the world imagined through the lens of development modernization]. In the mid-1980s, the Bolivian state was only at the beginning of a long process of divesting itself of responsibility for colonization along with many of the other revolutionary projects of the MNR. As with other debt crisis nations of Latin America, most notably Argentina, Bolivia began to privatize state institutions and sell off state property. For the Bolivian highlands, the privatizing of the state mining agency COMIBOL in 1985 was perhaps the definitive moment in neoliberal transition but the disbanding of the Corporación Boliviana de Fomento (the initial organization response for lowland colonization and infrastructure) in the same year was far more relevant for Santa Cruz. In the absence of state institutions, NGOs and evangelical organizations rushed to fill the gap, offering their services across Bolivia. It is no surprise that when anthropologist Nathan Wachtel returned to the highland community of Chipaya in 1989 for the first time in seven years he found the community awash with NGOs and evangelicals.<sup>653</sup> As the FIDES contract indicates, USAID and other international funders were also increasingly likely to rely on these organizations in lieu of state agencies.

The situation in San Julián over the following two decades provides an extreme example of the rise of the NGO in development to a position of near-redundant ubiquity. Visiting San Julián in the 1990s, political scientist Allison Ayers noted a case of extreme administrative duplication. The prominent success of the CIU, and the accompanying studies, had produced a flood of NGO interest and activity in San Julián. NGOs were just as likely to be competing with one other for institutional space as providing legitimate and needed service. While going so far as to undermine local settler organizations in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>653</sup> Nathan Wachtel, Gods & Vampires: Return to Chipaya (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

process, these organizations seemed oblivious to the total absence of support in neighboring settlements - and even some communities within San Julián - that lay outside an intense but narrow sphere of donor interest.<sup>654</sup>

For the workers and visitors that travelled the well-worn physical and intellectual routes through San Julián in the 1970s and 1980s, the colony provided a manageable, miniature space to reflect on modernization theory, dependency and cultural transformation. Those trajectories also took them to other development points across the region, hemisphere and globe, their careers linking San Julián with global development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Peter Taylor Leigh who studied the cooperative system in San Julián for his dissertation at Cornell went on to study tropical forest management in the Maya Biosphere between southern Mexico and Central America. David Hess, who also completed a dissertation on San Julián in the late seventies, went on to work for USAID, a career that took him from Bolivia to Peru, the Ivory Coast and India. He is currently is helping manage a two billion dollar USAID development loan in Tanzania and still remembers San Julián as formative moment, arguing that "there is no replacement for me, for having .... an experience I had doing my anthropology research in the jungles of Bolivia."<sup>655</sup> Mark Epp who managed orientation in San Julián in the second phase of colonization is now head of MCC Latin America which maintains an active Bolivia program. Jim Hoey who came to Bolivia as a Methodist missionary in the 1960s continued working with Heifer Project International long after leaving.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>654</sup> Alison J Ayers, Conflicts or Complementarities?: The State and Non-Government Organizations in the Colonisation Zones of San Julián and Berlin, Eastern Bolivia (London: Overseas Development Institute, 1992).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>655</sup> David Hess interviewed by Stephen Ladek on Aidpreneur "TOR064: Consulting after a USAID Career with David Hess." Podcast available at . http://aidpreneur.com/ Accessed May 5, 2016.

For some Bolivians, connection to the Methodist church or the CIU also provided opportunities for mobility or advancement. Dardo Chávez, the high school student who had volunteered in the Hardeman camp and later at Piray with the CIU runs a community health program in Montero. Flora Gómez has a successful pharmacy in San Julián. When Jaime Bravo left Bolivia during the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer the Methodist church brought him first to Peru. Mortimer Arias, Methodist Bishop in Bolivia met with Bravo in Lima and negotiated for his travel to New York, location of the Mission Board headquarters. The abrupt transition from the periphery to the heart of United Methodism's global operations still makes Bravo laugh. "After sleeping on a tiny little bed [in Montero] and being in a jail sleeping on the floor with some old newspapers in Santa Cruz, I just arrived in New York and they put me up in a Hilton Hotel [with] all the luxuries."<sup>656</sup> From New York, the exiled Bravo did what most returning missionaries on furlough would do. He traveled the network of U.S. churches to speak to congregations about the situation in Bolivia. Still blacklisted at home, the Mission Board eventually sent Bravo to Dallas to study theology at Southern Methodist University where he was finally reunited with his wife.

As a Latin American and an indigenous Bolivian, he passed dually within the radicalism of the United States in the early seventies. Bravo, who had worked with migrant field-workers in Bolivia soon found himself involved with Mexican and Chicano migrant laborers in Texas. "I started to work with Julio César Chávez, el Brown Power" he recalls. In Bolivia, Bravo had also taken part in a growing rural Aymara movement within the Methodist church that sought to challenge the control of mestizo urban

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>656</sup> Jaime Bravo interview, Aug. 2014.

Methodists. Out of place in Texas he, "was also confused with the North American *indígenas*, and various said, "hey brother" and I was "red power" as well."<sup>657</sup>

The situation in Texas was distinct but the organizing skills that Bravo had cultivated working for the church in Bolivia proved transferable. The Río Grande conference of the Methodist church offered him "a large salary, house, car" and communities to work in. Though he decided to return to Bolivia he went back to the U.S. several times to work and established connections with other faith-based development agencies like Lutheran World Relief acting as a broker between North American farming communities that supported Lutheran Relief and the Bolivian settlers that the organization funded.

Some faith-based development workers never left Bolivia. Milton Whitaker, who worked for the MCC east of Santa Cruz in Santiago de Chiquitos running an agricultural program at a local school is still living in the small town with his family nearly half a century later. Harry Peacock, one of the central actors discussed in this chapter, grew up in South Texas and came to Bolivia as part of Murray Dickson's "Land of Decision" campaign. His transition from missionary to an employee of USAID eventually brought him out of Santa Cruz to Costa Rica in the early 1980s. There he worked in another rural development project along the Nicaragua-Costa Rican border for most of the Contra war. In the early 1990s, USAID brought Peacock back to Bolivia. Along with several MCC workers – including Whitaker - he took part in alternative cropping programs in the Chapare - the counterpart to the DEA's coca eradication campaign. In this colonization zone near Santa Cruz, US funding was offered to push coca growers like future Bolivian president Evo Morales towards other crops. Disillusioned with the program, Harry eventually returned to San Julián where all project workers, himself included, had received a fifty hectare plot in the colony. Into the early 2000s he farmed the land that he had helped settle and eventually turned it over to his son Oliver Peacock who still farms it today.

The rumors in Methodist circles that Peacock had actually been a CIA agent throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties are typically told in a joking fashion yet they point all the same to the tight relationship between rural development and counterinsurgency during the Cold War. An anecdote that Harry tells about his post-San Julián work in Costa Rica illustrates a related connection - between development modernization and faith-based mission work. His superior at the time was Bastian Schouten (who Harry had previously worked for in Bolivia). One Sunday evening Bastian, Harry and several visitors were having dinner together. The guests asked Harry what sort of work he did. "Well rural development," Harry offered. "Hell, tell 'em the truth," interrupted Bastian with his typical bombast, "tell them what you really are." Harry turned to Bastian and innocently asked him what he thought he was. "Well you're a god damn missionary, that's what you are!" Bastian laughed.<sup>658</sup> This chapter has suggested that the divide between the two was not always clear cut in colonization zones in the Bolivian lowlands, where the activities of "missionaries", "relief workers" and "development workers" blurred the boundary between ministering and administering along with other divides such as that separating agrarian radicalism and bureaucratic authoritarianism. While their particular history has been subsumed by the activities of of the hundreds of NGOs that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>658</sup> Peacock interveiw, Aug 2014.

began to operate in Bolivia in the 1980s, these faith based development workers, as proxies for an absent state, were central to the course of lowland colonization in its formative years.

## Chapter 5 - "A Sort of Backwoods Guerrilla Warfare": Mexican Mennonites and the Origins of the South American Soy Boom, 1968-2000

In the densely forested region to the south of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, two independent parties of foreigners were on the move on January 18, 1967. Accompanied by Bolivian guides, both groups were scouting the area. The first, a small party of revolutionaries, led by Ernesto "Che" Guevera, had recently arrived in a transitional zone where the last mountain escarpments on the eastern edge of the Andes overlook the plains of the eastern lowlands. Slowly establishing their forest base, they were surveying the surrounding land and making occasional covert supply runs to nearby Camiri and Santa Cruz. On this particular day, Guevera's plans were cut short by heavy rain. His diary report notes, "Started out cloudy, so I did not inspect the trenches."<sup>659</sup> Two members of a scouting party, "Braulio" (a Cuban) and "Ñato (a Bolivian)," arrived in camp with the news that the rest of the group would not be returning that night because "Inti," another operative, had lost his rifle and been badly bruised after a fall in a flooding river.

The second party of foreigners out on the plains a short distance below Guevera's group was also affected by the rain. Led by Oscar Rivera Prado, a member of the Bolivian Institute of Colonization, this scouting party included three Mexican Mennonites – Peter Bergen, Peter Fehr and Abraham Peters - and their topographer Mario López. In search of vacant arable land, the five men traveled by jeep south from Santa Cruz along the old highway to Camiri. Their route paralleled the rail line from Santa Cruz to the Argentinean border. Along the way they passed the vestiges of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>659</sup> Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2006), 69.

region's oil industry - periodic exploration roads (*brechas*) that intersected the main road every few kilometers. At brecha "5.5," occasional small farms and ranches gave way to dense bush extending over an area of 60,000 hectares. This was the land the Mennonites had their eye on. However, as the party reached brecha 13, it started raining and the dirt road quickly turned to impassable mud. Slowly heading home after completing a sixty-five kilometer excursion, the group unanimously agreed that, despite the notorious lack of surface water, the land possessed excellent prospects for farming.<sup>660</sup>

Several days later, on January 23rd, while Guevera tended a feverish member of his party suspected of suffering from malaria, Rivera, accompanied by two other Mennonites – Isaac Fehr and Francisco Wall – returned to finish their aborted inspection.<sup>661</sup> This time they conducted a more detailed survey of the land, noting the quality of the forest, the presence of several species of trees suitable for construction and occasional grassy clearings in the bush. With improved weather conditions they reached the settlement of Mora, nearly ninety kilometers from Santa Cruz, before returning home.<sup>662</sup>

To the reader it might seem little more than an intriguing coincidence or a convenient literary hook to begin this chapter with the simultaneous presence of the two parties of foreigners - Mexican Mennonites and Cuban revolutionaries - in Santa Cruz in early 1967. Yet, it is worth exploring as more than happenstance. The logic that drove Guevara from Havana to the Bolivian frontier in the late sixties was – in a sense - shared by the small Mennonite exploratory commission from the state of Chihuahua in Northern

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>660</sup> Letter to Gral. Néstor Valenzuela Jefe de la Division de Colonización from Oscar Rivera Prado, Jan. 31, 1967. Expediente "Riva Palacio" 19957. Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria – Santa Cruz (INRASC).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>661</sup> Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary*, 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>662</sup> Letter to Gral, Valenzuela, Jan.31, 1967.

Mexico. Both groups were guided by an underlying environmental rationale that viewed the region's dense undeveloped bush as a fugitive landscape rife with opportunity just as they had once viewed Cuba's Sierra Maestra and the eastern valleys of Chihuahua's Sierra Madre.

Significantly, regional elites also shared this perspective. Residents of Santa Cruz petitioned the Bolivian state in 1942 for the completion of a long awaited railway to Argentina -they invoked a fragile territoriality, that "the uncultivated bush [and] the absence of roads, of railways and of population are an assault on our nationality."<sup>663</sup> Mennonites and Cubans understood state sovereignty in similar terms but invoked it to opposite ends. For Guevara, the transnational revolutionary, frontier "underdevelopment" offered a unique opportunity to establish a guerrilla force that could capitalize on the lack of surveillance and control in a region where the state was absent. Over the following decades, a range of guerrilla groups across Latin America replicated this logic. For transnational Mennonite farmers like Bergen, Fehr and Peters – whose coreligionists had already settled in frontier regions of Mexico, Paraguay and Belize over the past half century, and whose parents and grandparents had engaged in similar pioneering on the prairies of Canada and the Ukraine – frontier underdevelopment afforded a similar opportunity for autonomous action. In their case it involved extracting generous concessions for cultural, religious and social practice from the state based on their conversion of borderlands into breadbaskets. Given that the regional development engendered by Mennonite settlement often eroded the basis for those privileges and exemptions, this was a tenuous balance. In an introduction to a 1969 study of Old

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>663</sup> Comite Pro-Defensa Intereses Cruceños, Argentina y Bolivia y su vinculación ferrovíaria efectiva en el oriente (La Paz: Artistica, 1942), 4.

Colony Mennonites in Mexico, University of Chicago sociologist Evert C. Hughes referred to it as fighting, "a battle...a kind of backwoods guerrilla warfare against an ever-expanding world."<sup>664</sup>

Steeped in the assimilationist perspective on ethnicity that he and his colleagues at the Chicago School of Sociology would pioneer, Hughes harboured little hope for the long-term survival of traditional, ethnic communities like the Mennonites.<sup>665</sup> Yet it was the Mennonite's "guerrilla" vision, and not Guevara's, that ultimately prospered in Bolivia. Within the year, Guevara's party was wiped out by U.S.-trained Bolivian rangers, while over the following decades Mexican Mennonite settlement in Bolivia expanded dramatically - converting the bush land south of Santa Cruz and much of the eastern lowlands into prosperous farming colonies. As another more sympathetic commentator pointed out, in their search for the "vacant niches" of the world Mennonites were capable of "revolutionizing native economies."<sup>666</sup> Previous chapters have explored the March to the East from the perspective of state officials, regional elites and missionaries and have compared the early experiences of Okinawan, Paraguayan Mennonite and Andean migrants in the colonization zones. While maintaining a dialogue with those other actors, this final chapter situates the experience of Mexican "Old Colony" Mennonites at the center of the March to the East and traces their expansion forward in time from the late sixties to the close of the twentieth century.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>664</sup> Calvin Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites; Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969). vii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>665</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>666</sup> Menno Wiebe, "First Draft Bolivia Report," March 20, 1975. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1975. MCCA.

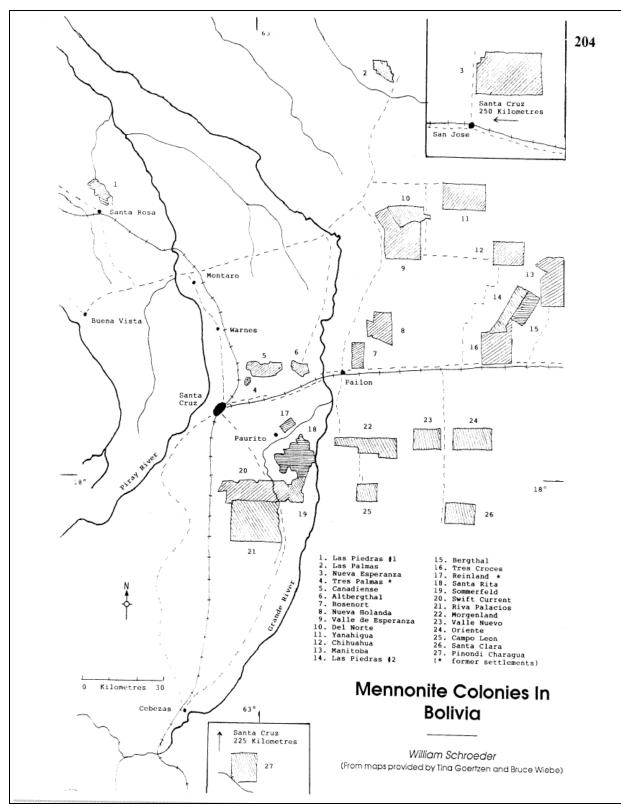


Figure 13 Map of Mennonite Colonies in Santa Cruz Department.Made available for public use by Mennonite Heritage Center, Winnipeg, Canada. http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/ archives/holdings/Schroeder\_maps/. Accessed May 12, 2016.

I begin by exploring the ways that Mexican Mennonites were perceived by the Bolivian press, government officials and their religious brethren in the Mennonite Central Committee as they established themselves on their new lands in the sixties and seventies. Throughout this period I emphasize a persistent contradiction, namely, the impressive and varied forms of "mobility" that made Mennonite "settlement" possible revealed in negotiation with state entities, local environmental transformation and transnational support networks. This chapter begins by looking at a period when Mennonites were "model farmers" still searching for a model. In previous migrations to Russia and then Canada they had established themselves as large-scale wheat farmers. Arriving in Mexico in the 1920s Mennonites turned to traditional crops like corn and beans. In Bolivia, Mennonites became pioneers in a cash crop that would transform not just that country but also much of the interior of South America in the late twentieth century. The second half of the chapter centers on the role of Mennonites in the South American "soy boom" of the eighties and nineties. I argue that the experiences of Mennonite soyproducers (or *soyeros*) in negotiating the defining events of those two decades provides a unique window on hyperinflation, the debt crisis and the turn to neoliberalism – phenomena that, while particularly extreme in the Bolivian case, were also taking place across the hemisphere.

This chapter draws on an eclectic range of sources to explain how Mennonites were able to establish and maintain their conspicuous presence on the plains of Santa Cruz. As a migrant community that settles at the margins of the state much of Mennonite history remains un-archived. Public attention to the arrival of Mennonite colonists in the form of newspaper editorials – discussed below – was intense but also fleeting. As a

group that actively negotiated with the state over non-participation in many defining state institutions - from the barracks to the classroom - the success of those initial discussions meant that Mennonites often appeared only briefly in government and military archives that other historians rely upon extensively.<sup>667</sup> Given their farming culture, it is in the archives of the Agrarian Reform where Mennonite colonists are most commonly found. Responding to these challenges, my research included a number of un-archived sources. I gathered more than two dozen oral histories with Mennonite colonists and also conducted interviews with Bolivians that interacted frequently with Mennonites. These interviewees included lawyers, government officials, members of soybean producer organizations, taxi drivers and tractor salesmen. The archives of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) - the North American faith-based relief agency that often attempted to work with Mennonite colonists - was also an invaluable, if problematic, source. Finally, I was able to collect personal diaries and account books from Mennonite farmers and colony leaders. These sources provide information about negotiation with state officials and the evolution of farming practices.

While this diverse corpus is in part the product of Mennonite's light archival imprint it aims to be more than methodologically multifarious. I place discussions with lawyers and government officials alongside official land dispute documents, import registers, production data and farmer's recollections of long voyages, bad debt and bad weather in order to emphasize that these were positions simultaneously enacted by colonists. These sources reveal a community performing an image of productive but

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>667</sup> Peter M. Beattie, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.

humble agrarian isolationism even as some of its members displayed a remarkable transnational cosmopolitanism.

## "We did not invite them in order to socialize": Understanding the arrival of Mexican Mennonites in Santa Cruz

The land that Rivera and the Mennonites surveyed in January 1967 would become the site of two of the largest Mennonite colonies in Bolivia - Riva Palacio and Swift Current. These names referenced the Mexican and Canadian migration histories of Old Colony Mennonites. Between 1967 and 1969, the first two hundred and eighty eight Mennonite families, totaling 1329 individuals - arrived in Bolivia. Whereas some arrived on chartered planes directly from Mexico City, one group of 167 had taken an exhausting route of two months over land and water. This included travelling by bus and train through Mexico and Central America, a boat from Panama to Arica, a train to La Paz and, finally, another bus to Santa Cruz.<sup>668</sup>

Unlike the small-scale migration of Paraguayan Mennonites in the previous decade, these new arrivals gained the attention of the Bolivian press who offered a public forum for debating the racial, economic and social merits of the Mennonite presence. When the beleaguered group arrived in La Paz on February 28, 1968 they were met with curiosity by reporters. In an article in *El Diario* the following day "campesinos Nemonitas [sic]" the paper reported on the curious scene, noting that there were already six hundred colonists settled in Santa Cruz and three hundred more to arrive shortly. They are a "working people" of "healthy customs" the reporter argued by explaining that Mennonites paid for state lands and brought machinery and capital. The reporter went on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>668</sup> Recounted in the Diary of Johan Wiebe, given to author by Jakob Giesbrecht, Riva Palacio Colony.

to describe the migrants' appearance. The women, he noted "cover themselves to the ankles in long dresses, preferring dark color [and] long blonde braids tied back tight against the neck," while the men, "seem like a Texas rancher."<sup>669</sup>

While *El Diario* was generally positive, this gendered distinction revealed a tension that would appear frequently in the evolving relationship between Mennonites and the Bolivian public. Were Mennonites modern farmers, as the "Texas" reference surely implied or were they a traditionalist, and perhaps disconcertingly backward people, evident in the retrograde fashions of their women? With their long dresses and tightly woven braids the latter maintained a style of dress closer to indigenous Bolivian women than *mestizo* elites. The article noted that Mennonites "consider themselves German."<sup>670</sup> Were these the "European" migrants Bolivia had been unsuccessfully courting for decades? Furthermore, this implied desirability was tempered by the news that the Mennonites were establishing a colony "where they will be contained without the need to interact with the eastern population."<sup>671</sup> In that case, the possibility of "whitening," the implication of racialized desirability, was thus unlikely to take place.

The muted questions appeared with more force and from distinct regional and national perspectives in two subsequent articles, one from *La Crónica* of Santa Cruz and the second also appearing in *El Diario*. In the *La Crónica* piece entitled, "What Benefits Does the Mennonite Immigration Bring?" that was subsequently reprinted in *Los Tiempos* of Cochabamba, the author denounced the settlement plans and claimed (incorrectly) that Mennonites were expelled from Mexico for disobeying the law and that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>669</sup> "Campesinos Nemonitas [sic]" El Diario Feb 28, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>671</sup> Ibid.

their lands turned over to Mexican nationals. "As always," the author continued, "the Department of Colonization has talked to us of 'desirability," sarcastically linking the current migration to previous plans to bring Koreans into the country.<sup>672</sup> This was followed by a series of (correct) assertions that Mennonites, "form separate nuclei within our country, refuse to speak our language, and shun us Bolivians," as well as that they "refuse military service, dress in their own way and…do not attend Bolivian schools."<sup>673</sup> The article also alleged that the land in question had previously been occupied and ended on a dire note that soon, "Bolivians will not own a single inch of our native land."

Two weeks later, Roberto Lemaitre, director of the INC, fired back in an editorial in *El Diario* also titled "What Benefits Does the Mennonite Immigration Bring?"<sup>674</sup> He also took the opportunity to defend Japanese migrants who faced similar nativist attacks. His defense of the Japanese was steeped in a deeper tradition of racial pessimism in Bolivia dating to works like Alcides Arguedas *Pueblo Enfermo*.<sup>675</sup> Noting that his country was "basically composed of Indians or mixtures in which the Indian blood is predominant," he concluded bleakly that "the argument that the Bolivian race could be made worse by mixing with other races can hardly be accepted," going even further to stress that "there is no actual Bolivian race" and hedging that assertion with the claim that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>672</sup> "What Benefits does the Mennonite Immigration Bring?" from *La Crónica* (Santa Cruz) and reprinted in *Los Tiempos* (Cochabamba), March 14, 1968. Translated into English by Elwood Shrock. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1961-68. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>673</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>674</sup> Cnl. Roberto Lemaitre, "What Benefits does the Mennonite Immigration Bring?" Printed in *El Diario*, April 5, 1968. Translated into English by Elwood Schrock. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1961-68. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>775</sup> Alcides Arguedas, *Pueblo enfermo*. (Santiago: Ediciones Ercilla, 1937). Originally published in 1909.

even if that were not the case, the small Asian immigration, "could never produce fundamental changes in the racial, mental and spiritual characteristics of our people."<sup>676</sup>

Turning to the Mennonites, ostensibly deemed "white" by the editorialist, Lemaitre acknowledged that religious and cultural rather than racial issues were the problem. As with his support for the Japanese, his defense of Mennonites moved simultaneously in a number of directions. On the hand, he assuaged fears by downplaying the extent of the migration. "At best, or at worst as some people may say," he explained, "as many as 2000 families with a total of 12,000 people may be authorized...what influence could 12,000 have on 4 million...when one considers Bolivia's potential ability to support 100,000,000 inhabitants?"<sup>677</sup> On the other hand, he simultaneously emphasized the great degree to which Mennonites could transform the nation citing their level of investment and insisting that, "this is only the beginning of an immigration which we have reasons to believe will gain momentum day by day."<sup>678</sup>

Facing the objections about military exemptions that these pacifists had received, Lemaitre directly invoked an idea of agrarian citizenship that Mennonites would put forward repeatedly over the following years. As historian Elizabeth Shesko points out, Bolivian citizenship was intimately linked to mandatory male military service.<sup>679</sup> However, Lemaitre claimed that the martial and the agrarian were intertwined. By feeding the nation and the army (thereby freeing more men to go to war), Mennonite farmers supported the military strength of the nation even if they refused to serve.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>676</sup> Lemaitre, "What Benefits?"

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>679</sup> Elizabeth Shesko, "Constructing Roads, Washing Feet, and Cutting Cane for the Patria: Building Bolivia with Military Labor, 1900–1975," *Inter. Labor Working-Class Hist. International Labor and Working-Class History* 80:1 (2011): 6–28.

Lemaitre drew on the example, a bitter one for many Bolivians, of Mennonite settlers in the Paraguayan Chaco where their position proved crucial for Paraguay's defeat of Bolivia during the Chaco War. He explained that it was this reputation as key frontier producers that led "Paraguayan civil and military authorities to encourage Mennonite colonization in the Chaco."<sup>680</sup>

As to the cultural characteristics of the migrants, Lemaitre insisted Mennonites were "by tradition, but also by religion" bound to the land and none had ever abandoned the countryside to take jobs in the city." This was an accusation that was continually evoked against potential Jewish, Japanese, Korean and Chinese immigrants in Bolivia.<sup>681</sup> "What does it matter if they use their own language (while learning ours), that they wear their own kind of clothing or even that...they do not assimilate?" he asked rhetorically. "We did not invite them [here] in order to socialize with them," he scoffed, "the important thing is that they work and make our land produce."<sup>682</sup>

The dueling articles in *La Crónica* and *El Diario* provide a range of perspectives on Mennonite settlement and ideas of race and ethnicity more broadly. On one hand, Bolivians might choose to criticize the extension of considerable privileges to foreigners. They might challenge the "modern" quality of Mennonite migrants and their racial desirability as "Europeans" by pointing to backward cultural traditions evidenced by the long dresses and head-coverings of Mennonite women. On the other hand, they could follow Lemaitre and dismiss those claims by insisting that the only "culture" that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>680</sup> Lemaitre, "What Benefits?"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>681</sup> Discussed in Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia* and Suzuki, *Embodying Belonging*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>682</sup> Lemaitre, "What Benefits?"

mattered when it came to Mennonites was a culture of agrarian production evident in a singular resume of frontier development in Russia, Canada and Mexico.

As with other nativist responses to immigration, the polemic did not necessarily reflect the process. Two years before the editorials appeared, Mennonites and the Bolivian state had quietly completed a series of land negotiations and the contentious set of privileges Supreme Decree 06030 had been signed into law back in 1962. Here I turn from the inflammatory, but ultimately fleeting, public discourse on Mennonite settlement to the behind-the-scenes negotiation that preceded it. In those private negotiations the terms of debate were not race, culture and sovereignty (useful to understanding the interlocking ways that Mennonites, Okinawans and Andeans were understood by state and the press) but hectares, investment and agricultural knowledge.

Mennonite delegates were silent on how they fit into the racial and ethnic hierarchies of Bolivia, but they excelled at framing themselves in agro-economic terms. On February 10, 1967, only one month after Rivera and the Mennonite delegation had surveyed the land, the five Mennonite delegates presented the Institute of Colonization with a "Minimum Plan of Work" for Riva Palacio.<sup>683</sup> For the establishment of Mexican Mennonite colonies to take place under Bolivian law Mennonites would not simply have to purchase the land from the government but also justify the social-economic function of their settlement. The plan was a critical part of this. It included a schedule for the immigration of 395 Mennonite families and the potential for more to come. Entries would be staggered, with the immediate arrival of twenty-five families and thirty more to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>683</sup> Abram Peters et al. "Minimum Plan of Work," Feb. 10, 1967. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

arrive every two months. "Our colony works together" they wrote, while explaining that early arrivals would clear roads and open areas for subsequent settlers.<sup>684</sup>

What followed was an impressive list of capital to be invested by the colony in houses, schools, well drilling – for which the colony had contracted the oil company Equipetrol – land clearing, wagons, furniture, tractors, tools and other goods. Each item was carefully monetized and the delegates claimed a total minimum investment of 5.7 million bolivianos or just under half a million U.S. dollars. As modern farmers, the colonists also promised to build a "center for agricultural experimentation, research and meteorological study," with the aim of providing a detailed ecological study of the soil and the prospects for farming.<sup>685</sup> They also noted their "special interest" in ranching, and promised that within three years, once pastures had been established, each family would have at least ten head of cattle. Finally, the colony contracted agronomist and topographer Mario López to provide a *croquis* or sketch of the property in question, outlining the boundaries and confirming, "[that] no campesinos were settled within the area."<sup>686</sup>

At the tail end of the "decade of development" when U.S. funding for colonization initiatives was waning, the financial weight of the Mennonite plan bears emphasizing.<sup>687</sup> The proposal was also distinct from early small-scale Mennonite migration from Paraguay in the 1950s, where colonists arrived with scarce capital for large-scale farming and land-clearing. This was apparent to some members of the INC

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>684</sup> Peters, "Minimum Plan" Exp. "Riva Palacio."

<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>687</sup> Jeffrey Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

who wrote to director Robert Lemaitre expressing their excitement that the process had passed through its first stage. "It is of vital importance," and official wrote, "to observe the investment of capital that [the Mennonites] will make in the country and the tendency to its gradual increase and development."<sup>688</sup> In turn, Lemaitre would use this capital investment as a justification in his subsequent editorial.

While all members of the INC appeared supportive of the migration, some questioned its generous terms. Two members of the Institute, General Valenzuela, head of the Division of Colonization and Epifanio Rios, head of the Department of Promotion for Spontaneous Colonies, demanded that conditions be placed on the agreement. Valenzuela supported the plan of investment and the gradual arrival of families but he felt that, particularly given the large number of children in the average Mennonite family, future migration beyond the original 395 families should be capped until it was possible to determine if the colony truly served as a "motor of development" in the region.<sup>689</sup>

More critically, he argued that 40,000 hectares was excessive for the needs of the colony. He proposed a dramatic reduction to only 17,650 hectares with individual families receiving parcels of ten, thirty and fifty hectares according to the quality of the land and the distance from the Argentine railway on the colony's western flank. Valenzuela also wanted to charge the Mennonites more for the land – up to 500 bolivianos per hectare along the railway and 150 in the interior – than the 100 bolivanos per hectare proposed by the INC. This would have brought the cost of land to over \$40/ha. While still a bargain by North American standards it was high price for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>688</sup> Letter to Cnl Roberto Lemaitre from Oscar Ribero Prada, "Ref. Expediente solicitud de Colonia Mennonite Riva Palacio," Sept.2, 1967. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>689</sup> Letter to the Director of the INC from Gral Valenzuela, March 7. 1967. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

undeveloped land in Bolivia, making the standard 50ha Mennonite plot that the colony proposed cost upwards of \$2000.

Rios brought up similar objections in his letter to Lemaitre. He indicated that a portion of the land was currently occupied by a group of campesinos, a point that one dissenting reader of the original document-perhaps the sympathetic Lemaitre or the Mennonite booster Carlos Zambrana – had highlighted and then scrawled "no" alongside of.<sup>690</sup> Rios also accused the colony and their topographer of deliberately distorting the size of the parcel, claiming that it was in fact 60,000 hectares rather than the forty thousand they claimed. In a country without a cadastral survey in which petitioners generated land documents for the state, this was a "common habit" in the request for public lands. It allowed the petitioner to pay less tax and usurp state land, later claiming the boundaries indicated on their inaccurate sketches as inviolable.<sup>691</sup> In this particular case it turned out that the reverse was true. Mennonites had actually only been given a piece of property of approximately 30,000 hectares, a fact that led to further negotiations and a reduction in the sale price the following year when they began to lay out the villages and discovered the error.

Rios went on to cite a series of advantages of the lands in question including their proximity to Santa Cruz, the railway and the old road to Camiri and the Río Grande and the fact that the entire area was intersected by exploration roads "developed" by the oil company. These all combined to make the site "one of the most advantageous in the country" far better than colonization zones in the Alto Beni.<sup>692</sup> If, Rios concluded, the

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>690</sup> Letter to the Director of the INC from Epifanio Rios, n.d. Exp. "Riva Palacio."
 <sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>692</sup> Ibid.

INC sold these lands to the Mennonites, once again, prime land, would be "in the power of a few hands [resulting in] the sad situation of being unable to give quality lands to the mass of campesino farmers that wait to be relocated." The latter, "in their condition as nationals and owners of the lands, should have the right to larger parcels than foreigners."<sup>693</sup> Like Valenzuela he advocated small parcels because, "a family cannot attend to more than twenty five hectares" and would have to bring in workers, "that would place the [Mennonite] colonist in the category of the *patron*... and as in Bolivia there are already too many *patrones* it would stand against reason to import more."

Lemaitre passed the objections on to Carlos Zambrana the INC official directly responsible for the Mennonite settlement. Zambrana might have challenged Rios and Valenzuela on the question of parcel size pointing out that the recommendation for smaller lots failed to appreciate the degree to which Mennonite settlers were not arriving as small-scale pioneers who might carve out a few hectares for subsistence but as highly-mechanized producers of cash crops. Instead he chose to simply reminded Lemaitre that the lands in question, while possessing quality soil, lacked water, and "that only businesses with significant capital can settle on them with success."<sup>694</sup> The case carried on into mid-1967 with INC official Armando Torrico recommending a new survey of the zone. Despite the suggestions for an increase in land price to 300bs, the subsequent study confirmed Zambrana's argument and the INC set the land value at 20bs per hectare. Mennonite delegates signed a final contract agreeing to pay 800,000bs.<sup>695</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>694</sup> Letter to Roberto Lemaitre from Carlos Zambrana, March 29, 1967. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>695</sup> Contract signed by Peter Fehr and Abram Peters represented by Carlos Zambrana, July 10, 1967. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

With their land purchase confirmed, the Mennonite delegates began to prepare for the mass migration of other Mennonites from Northern Mexico. In addition to contracting for well-drilling, they began to purchase construction supplies from local companies and contract drivers to travel back and forth from the colony. As word spread in Santa Cruz de la Sierra that the Mexican Mennonites had money to spend, enterprising cruceños flocked to the only identifiably Mennonite institution in the small city - the headquarters of the relief agency and NGO, the Mennonite Central Committee. Understandably, they were ignorant of the profound denominational differences between Mexican "Old Colony" Mennonite settlers and young North American Mennonite volunteers. To them, the MCC offices logically appeared as the informal "Mennonite embassy" for these new arrivals. As Arthur Driedger, head of the MCC Bolivia office, explained in a letter sent back to the head office in Akron, Pennsylvania, he had already spent considerable time, "telling the people that these immigrants, though they are called Mennonites, are come to Bolivia under their own sponsorship."<sup>696</sup>

Like the editorialist and INC representatives discussed above, MCC officials had mixed feelings about this new migration. MCC arrived in Bolivia in 1960 solely intent on helping its co-religionists in need, but it soon found itself drawn into the range of development projects underway in Santa Cruz. By 1968, MCC was involved in numerous aspects of colonization and development, including the flood relief activities described in the preceding chapter, in addition to its small health clinic in the first Paraguayan Mennonite colony. The sudden arrival of thousands of Mexican Mennonites in Santa Cruz raised the possibility of a new sphere of operation for the NGO. But these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>696</sup> Letter to Edgar Stoesz MCC-Latin America director from Arthur Driedger, Aug.22, 1967. MCC Bolivia Files, 1967. MCCA.

traditionalist colonists were rightfully suspicious of MCC initiatives given that in Mexico they had come bundled with aggressive evangelical outreach programs targeted at converting members of the Old Colony faith.

Given the potential for conflict as well as cooperation, MCC officials were slow to approach Mexican Mennonite colonists. Yet they maintained a close watch on these new arrivals thus making MCC archives a detailed, if problematic, source for Mexican Mennonite settlement. MCC'er Elwood Schrock was assisting Methodists and Maryknolls in the flood zone around Montero in 1968 but he took time to dutifully translate the editorials about Mexican Mennonites that appeared in *El Diario* and *La Crónica* into English. He then passed them on to his superiors in MCC's home office. The quiet but obsessive cataloguing of these activities resonates in striking ways with the dutiful activities of USCAR officials that also translated newspaper articles regarding Okinawan dissent and made quiet inquiries about the opinions of Bolivians regarding the new arrivals.

The awkwardness of the MCC-colonist relationship was also apparent in a clandestine visit that MCC'er Alfred Kopp made to the new colony of Riva Palacio in mid-1968. Aware that his presence might be unwelcome, Kopp did not travel as an official MCC representative. Instead, he accompanied a German agricultural extension agent who was interested in working in the region and lied to the Mexican colonists, claiming that he was a Paraguayan Mennonite from the nearby Tres Palmas Colony. Kopp and the extension agent traveled in a jeep "through deep forest" with small clearings carved out along the roadside. With Kopp translating - from Low German spoken by colonist to High-German spoken by the extension agent - the two had a

pleasant day. They found the colonists friendly and listened to their plans to begin a dairy industry and experiment with cotton that was experiencing a boom among farmers in the Santa Cruz area. Comfortable that his ruse had succeeded, Kopp decided to ask one colonist - a "Mr. Loewen" - whether the colony was interested in working with the MCC. Loewen quickly replied that "no…he didn't think that would work at all…some had [in the past] but that was another reason they had left Mexico." "He was obviously referring to the MCC and General Conference mission work that is going on in Mexico," Kopp concluded.<sup>697</sup>

While Kopp's findings confirmed his fears, that future cooperation between the NGO and the colonists was unlikely, or at least unwanted, the MCC continued to express a sense of duty to "our Mennonite brothers from Mexico" – over the following years. Rebuffed in person, the organization decided that it should become involved behind-the-scenes at the national level to intercede on "behalf" of colonists in their relationship with the state. When Latin America director Edgar Stoesz was planning his inspection of MCC Bolivia operations in late 1968 he explained to local reps that he would like to arrange a meeting with government officials, "to discuss the immigration."<sup>698</sup> Stoesz justified taking this liberty because Mexican Mennonites, "were always misunderstood [in Mexico] and…never did enjoy a good relationship with the government," he hoped it would "be possible for us to *interpret* the Mennonites [to Bolivian officials] in such a way that there would be more understanding [emphasis added]" confident that a brief

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>697</sup> Alfred Kopp, "Report to MCC Office," n.d. (likely August, 1968). MCC-Bolivia Files, 1968. MCCA.
 <sup>698</sup> Letter to Arthur Driedger from MCC-Latin America director Edgar Stoesz, Sept. 18, 1968. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1968. MCCA.

presentation of facts could serve a "preventative" function, avoiding conflict down the road.<sup>699</sup>

These efforts continued. A few years later MCC representative Menno Wiebe noted, "the tie between the individual colonies and the government of Bolivia is tenuous and haphazard."<sup>700</sup> While it could not justifiably take on the role of "official spokesman" by becoming the "Mennonite embassy" that many Bolivians assumed it to be, the MCC could still play a critical "intermediary" role. Wiebe had already been doing just that engaging in dialogue with state officials and symbolic gestures that asserted, like Lemaitre's editorial, that Mennonites were "producers" for the nation. For instance, while preparing several MCC reports on colony Mennonites, Wiebe wrote to Minister of Agriculture Alberto Natusch Busch in advance of a formal meeting between the two in late 1974. He informed Busch that he had recently completed a visit to the colonies, "and [was] impressed with their agricultural progress."<sup>701</sup> He confirmed that they are "exclusively farmers" and that they had cleared thousands of hectares of bush and were producing a variety of goods for the local market. He looked forward to a more detailed discussion of the agricultural progress of the colonies and presented Busch with a "token of gratitude...fresh cheese" from one of the Mennonite colonies.

In addition to demonstrating the importance of Mennonite production to state officials, the MCC also attempted a more ambitious program - to transfer Mexican Mennonite production technology to surrounding communities. "The colony Mennonites

<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>700</sup> Letter to MCC Executive Committee from Menno Wiebe and Edgar Stoesz, March 21, 1975. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1975. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>701</sup> Menno Wiebe to Minister of Agriculture Alberto Natusch Busch, Dec.10, 1974. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1974.

have much to contribute" wrote Menno Wiebe in 1975. "They are a local source of intermediate technology....which is useful to their Bolivian neighbors."<sup>702</sup> After all, Mexican Mennonites had arrived in Bolivia with the promise that they would become "model" farmers, for their neighbors. The "minimal plan of work" crafted by Mennonite delegates in 1967 promised an agricultural research station would be constructed in the colonies.<sup>703</sup> A follow-up survey in late 1969 by the INC – a condition of obtaining full legal title to the land - noted with satisfaction that the colony had "broadly satisfied its promise" in most areas. However, no research center had been constructed and officials requested its speedy conclusion, though they extended full title to Riva Palacio in spite of this omission.<sup>704</sup> Without it, how were Bolivian neighbors to benefit from Mennonite farming prowess? MCC'ers, who were implementing an animal traction program in national colonization projects, also hoped that Mexican Mennonites would share their expertise in animal care, handling and the manufacturing of harnesses and other equipment with Andean settlers.

The MCC attempt to speak for Mexican Mennonites was rife with contradiction. MCC'er John Friesen began one sympathetic report by acknowledging that he had previously thought of colony Mennonites, as "close-minded, conservative, obstinate and cruel [and] unresponsive to outsiders."<sup>705</sup> Yet the MCC asserted that its objective was to transform that relationship, to "relate to the Mennonites in Bolivia and Latin America in such a way that we can invite their participation...and service to those in need." Whether this was in demonstrating horse-drawn farming techniques for fellow Bolivians or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>702</sup> Letter to MCC Executive Committee from Menno Wiebe and Edgar Stoesz, March 21, 1975

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>703</sup> Peters et al. "Minimum Plan." Exp. "Riva Palacio" INRA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>704</sup> Ing. Oswaldo Quevedo, "Informe sobre el cumplimiento del Plan de Trabajo," Oct. 15, 1969. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>705</sup> Report John Friesen, May 1, 1971. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1971.

advocating for a cooperative marketing system that would tie together production among the nine Mennonite colonies in Santa Cruz, the MCC continually insisted on its right to intercede. After all, colony Mennonites were a people "whose rural, agrarian culture...makes it difficult if not impossible for them to perform this function."<sup>706</sup>

## Mennonite Mobility: Border-crossing Bishops and Transnational Traders

Through the early 1970s Mexican Mennonites made few responses to MCC overtures. One reason was that, just as colonists had explained to Alfred Kopp during his clandestine visit, MCC activities, even economic initiatives like the creation of a coop, always came bundled with evangelical ones. While MCC did not officially endorse evangelical activity a range of North American missionaries used the institution's expanding presence across the developing world as a convenient staging ground. By 1976, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church from Manitoba, Canada, was already active in Santa Cruz having purchased land near Riva Palacio colony for "young Christians" expelled from the Mexican colonies.<sup>707</sup> When they did speak with MCC officials, colony leaders clearly insisted, "disunity within the church and colony is everywhere the result of unwanted preachers from North."<sup>708</sup>

While this may have been the most contentious cause for non-participation in MCC activities, another more compelling reason was that Mennonite colonists, despite their "rural, agrarian culture," were far more adept at negotiating local and national governments than the MCC gave them credit for. Notwithstanding the image of horse-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>706</sup> Menno Wiebe, "First Draft Bolivia Report," March 20, 1975. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1975. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>707</sup> Letter to Gerald Shenk from George Hildebrandt of EMMC, April 29, 1976. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1976. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>708</sup> Menno Wiebe, "First Draft Bolivia Report," March 20, 1975. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1975. MCCA.

drawn buggies, restrictive clothing and a "simple" farming life, colonists quietly demonstrated a remarkable cosmopolitanism. This unexpected mobility was evident whether they were dealing with state officials, challenging new taxes, engaging in the cross-border cattle trade or jumping between the northern and southern hemisphere to import farming equipment. These voyages demonstrate a critical element of diaspora, what migration historian Adam McKeown has referred to as "transnationalism through parochialism" in which a select few mobile entrepreneurs engaged in migrations, negotiation and route-building that allowed the diasporic community-at-large to benefit.<sup>709</sup> Those practices, already established in Mexico where Mennonites had engaged in seasonal labor migration and equipment importing, emerged in the Bolivian case in a range of sources, from diaries kept by colonists, to government papers and oral histories.

The diary of Mennonite Bishop Johan Wiebe, a founding member of Riva Palacio colony, highlights these practices. Wiebe did not join the first survey commission to Bolivia in 1966 but he was instrumental in obtaining Bolivian visa documents for Mennonites and in investigating the possibilities for traveling to Bolivia while still in Mexico. Covering a period from 1966 – 1983 his diary account is an exhausting – and exhaustive - chronology of travel and meetings. The work began in Mexico where he and other colony leaders made the fifteen hundred kilometer bus journey from Chihuahua to Mexico City dozens of times to arrange travel and logistics. In the city they would usually check in to the Hotel Principal (a few blocks from Mexico's City's Alameda) and the following day make inquiries at the Secretary of Foreign Relations (SRE), the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>709</sup> McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas," 322.

Bolivian Consulate and shipping companies and airlines as they attempted to arrange documentation and travel for groups of several hundred individuals with both Canadian and Mexican citizenship. After only a few days they would board buses back to the colonies in Chihuahua.<sup>710</sup>

At one point in 1967, frustrated by an endless string of delays at the Bolivian consulate in Mexico City, Wiebe and several other colony leaders circumvented the bureaucratic snag by boarding a plane that flew through Colombia, Ecuador and Peru on its way to La Paz. There, with help from Carlos Zambrana, they received promises that their paperwork would be expedited directly from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Treasury. After only three days in La Paz they were back on a multiple leg flight to Mexico City where they returned to the Bolivian consulate and presented their guarantees to surprised officials before taking a bus back home to Chihuahua. Their interventions were ultimately successful and Wiebe eventually guided the group of colonists that arrived in La Paz in March of 1968 and whose exploits – by bus, boat and train - appeared in *El Diario*.

The travels of Wiebe and other Mennonite leaders on behalf of the colony did not end with their arrival in Santa Cruz. In the absence of a national cadastral survey, land transactions were rarely straightforward in Bolivia and the purchase of Riva Palacio was no different. As colonists were arriving on their new land they soon discovered that the property was barely over 30,000 ha and not the 40,000 they had purchased. With help from Zambrana they were soon back in the INC offices, adding to their growing land case file, as they petitioned the government to reduce the sale price by a quarter, in this case

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>710</sup> Diary Johan Wiebe, 1966-83, Copy obtained from Jakob Giesbrecht, Riva Palacio Colony, Bolivia.

nearly 200,000 pesos.<sup>711</sup> The confusion also meant that a fellow group of Mennonites who had planned to settle the land were instead forced to purchase a separate 10,000 hectare property to the northeast near the town of Paurito. Having surveyed the property and uncovered the error, Mennonites also balked at the INC's request to pay for an additional institute surveyor to come measure the property. Through Zambrana, they communicated that they would not object to a technician of the INC arriving to measure and would collaborate with the work, "but the colony cannot pay two times for the same work." Two years after the purchase, the Mennonites received an official agreement to recognize the lower amount. Scarcely had they succeeded when a local man arrived in the colony claiming that he held deed to over 5000 hectares of their land. Again Wiebe and others were called into action in a dispute that lasted an entire year.

Throughout the 1970s, Wiebe and others continued their negotiations of behalf of the colony and succeeded in having sympathetic officials intervene on their behalf. In Bolivia, Mennonites benefitted from a clause in their 1962 Privilegium that guaranteed exemption from import duties on agricultural equipment and personal effects. In the context of the demand for imported livestock and machinery among new colonists and the continual arrival of more migrants from Mexico this was a privilege they guarded carefully. When a 1969 decree appeared to revoke that privilege, colonists went to the INC officials for help.

As the head of the INC, Robert Lemaitre wrote to José Luis Roca, the Ministry of Agriculture in March of 1970 on behalf of Mennonite settlers. He reminded Roca of the 1962 decree guaranteeing "importation of materials and diverse equipment designed to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>711</sup> Correspondence from Nov.11, 1968 to July 21, 1969. Exp. "Riva Palacio."

help their settlement in the country." Secondly, Lemaitre informed Roca that the representatives of Riva Palacio, Sommerfeld and Swift Current, the three largest Mennonite colonies in the country, had come before him to let him know of the potential conflict with two recent 1969 decrees relating to import duties. According to Lemaitre they feared that with the annulment of the right to free imports, other conditions of Supreme Decree 06030 – such as freedom from military service - might also come under threat. He included a copy of the decree as well as a report indicating that Mennonites had fully completed the "Plan of Work" they had proposed for the region.<sup>712</sup>

The bishops of the Mennonite colonies also wrote directly to the President with a plea reminiscent of the petitions that Andeans had directed at the MNR in the fifties and sixties. They began by thanking the President "for the freedom of religion that the previous government, in total trust, has given to us."<sup>713</sup> They explained that they felt, "a deep gratitude to God and our government" and that in each religious assembly they prayed for the Bolivian government and for their continued success, "in this country where we live." They quoted Jeremiah 29:7, to emphasize their commitment to the mutual success of the colonies, Santa Cruz and the nation. The passage, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will find your welfare."<sup>714</sup> This summarized, not only the Mennonite sense of self as diasporic or "exiled" community, but also the way in which as "outsiders" they might justify their conspicuous presence through their role as regional producers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>712</sup> Letter to José Luis Roca from Roberto Lemaitre, March 25, 1970. MDRyT.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>713</sup> Letter from Bernard Peters, Abram Schmitt and Bernard Penner from Riva Palacio, Swift Current and Santa Rita colonies to Min of Agriculture, April 17, 1970. Ministerial Resolutions, 1970. MDRyT.
 <sup>714</sup> Ibid.

In their letter, the bishops nimbly turned from theological justifications to legal ones by reminding the government of the promises they had been given for free import. While they were quick to point out that, "it is not against our faith or conscience" to pay the tax, they framed the issue as critical to their continued immigration and explained that while many more Mexican Mennonites wished to come to Bolivia the cost would be prohibitive were they charged for their personal goods. Whether it was Lemaitre's intercession or the Bishops' letter, the plea was successful. In June of 1970, President Ovando signed a decree granting another year of exemption with the justification that the Mennonites had "increased the agricultural productivity" of the zone, "introduced new methods and techniques of cultivation," and that the prior guarantees should be respected to insure future immigration and maintain the good faith of the state.<sup>715</sup>

Wiebe and the other bishops also intervened in other ways on behalf of their fellow colonists. In 1971 they worked with bank officials and local authorities when a colony man was jailed for failing to pay his debts.<sup>716</sup> They made another series of trips to Cochabamba and La Paz in 1972 and again in 1975 when it appeared they would have to pay additional fees to register their children and receive identification cards. They also actively negotiated over the Mennonite "Privilegium" when the Bolivian consul in Mexico City attempted to charge fees for processing migrant visas and more critically when a 1975 supreme decree by President Hugo Banzer threatened to strip Mennonites of all their privileges under Bolivian law. While Wiebe had hoped to leave his official position as a colony representative in 1977, he continued to work into the early 1980s

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>715</sup> Alredo Ovando Candía, Decreto Supremo 09238, June 4, 1970. Listado de Decretos. Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo/index.php/normas/lista/11 Accessed April 5, 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>716</sup> Diary Johan Wiebe, 1966-83.

until the decree was officially repealed. In the meantime, from 1975-1982, he and other Mennonite leaders continuously negotiated with Bolivian authorities to make sure that most of its provisions were never implemented.

Over those years, Mennonite leaders were also investigating new land purchases for incoming colonists. In 1974 Wiebe inspected lands in nearby Camiri. In 1976 he helped a colony of Belizean Mennonites purchase land and found "Nueva Esparanza" colony in eastern Santa Cruz department. In this way Mennonites became familiar sights at El Trompillo airport in Santa Cruz as they boarded planes to La Paz, checked in to the Hotel Sucre and traveled up and down Avenida Camacho visiting the Ministries of Agriculture, Migration and the Agrarian Reform offices with their Bolivian lawyers. Though the activities described involved almost incessant negotiation with a range of officials, Wiebe's diary records them in a monotonously punctual fashion. Rarely do we find details of the justifications or defenses employed in struggles over taxation, privileges and land disputes. Rather the diary reads as a dizzying, or perhaps stupefying, succession of times and places in which all activities from the time they flagged down a cheese truck bound for Santa Cruz to the delay in boarding a flight to La Paz or the time one had breakfast at the Hotel Sucre in La Paz stand next to the precise hour the delegation arrived at the Ministry of Agriculture or the number of hours they waited for an absent official.

While it is bereft of the compelling justifications we might find in other sources, like the editorials on Mennonite migration in *La Crónica* and *El Diario*, Wiebe's travels are worth recounting in detail because they demonstrate the impressive delegation of mobility by a community for whom the majority of members rarely traveled beyond Santa Cruz in those years. For the average colonist, MCC statements, about the incompatibility of "rural agrarian culture" and high-level negotiation might have made sense. Yet the majority of Mennonite colonists did not have to board buses, trains and planes and make innumerable trips to embassies, ministries and lawyer's offices precisely because a select few individuals, like Wiebe, did so on their behalf.

Wiebe and colony representatives were not the only Mennonites who exercised a considerable degree of mobility. While their bishops were busy negotiating with state officials, other Mennonite colonists were crossing national borders and jumping between hemispheres to supply the nascent colony with the improved stock and agricultural machinery that would enable it to become a large-scale regional producer. The colony man whose release from prison Wiebe had secured in 1971 was Johan Guenther. In his diary Wiebe never explains how Guenther had accumulated such a large debt with the national bank in such a short time. The answer was likely apparent to him and other Mennonties who knew Guenther as an enterprising cattle importer. In their 1967 "Plan of Work" and in conversations with MCC officials, Mennonites had made it clear they hoped to establish a dairy industry in Santa Cruz like the one they had left in Mexico. Yet the extensive ranching techniques and *creole* cattle found in lowland Bolivia were poorly suited to the task. In the absence of local stock to purchase, the entrepreneurial Guenther stepped in.

His activities are evident in Ministry of Agriculture archives where Guenther's name appears in the accounts alongside large-scale importers who were bringing thousands of *cebu* beef cattle from neighboring Brazil and Okinawan migrants who were importing cotton seed from the Alexandria Seed Co. in Louisiana. In 1968, the Ministry

of Agriculture had authorized Guenther to import 500 heifers and twenty bulls of "holandés" or Holstein breed from Argentina subject to a sanitary inspection at the border. He received an extension to continue importing cattle in 1969.<sup>717</sup> Colonists who traveled by buggy also needed horses and the following year Guenther received permission to import up to 1000 horses. He was not alone. Two other colonists, Peter Fehr and Wilhelm Martens, were authorized to import 100 horses and 100 head of cattle (both Holsteins and Brown Swiss) each from Argentina in 1969.<sup>718</sup>

Along with ministry records, oral histories also provide evidence of this vibrant cross-border trade. Enrique Siemens was a young boy of eight when his family arrived in Bolivia in 1968 with little to their name. His strongest memory of that first year in the bush is drinking canned milk diluted with water. There were no dairy cattle in the colony. The following year his father went with a neighbor to Paraguay and helped him bring back a load of cattle, crossing the Chaco by truck on an old wartime road. "They went and returned in 40 days," Siemens remembers, and in exchange for his help his father received a cow. "After that we were happy, then we had milk [and] my father knew about the business of selling cattle...they went again and this time he got two cows out of it."<sup>719</sup> In total Siemens' father made three excursions to Paraguay. His wealthy neighbor continued to travel to Paraguay – and likely to Argentina – to purchase cattle for sale at auctions in the colony. For those transnational pioneers that engaged in it, the cattle trade could be both lucrative and risky. Guenther had to request an extension from the Ministry of Agriculture in 1969 noting that he had only been able to purchase 81

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>717</sup> Ministerial Resolution 326/68. MR 1969. MDRyT.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>718</sup> MR 253/69, July 28, 1969. RM 1969. MDRyT.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>719</sup> Enrique Siemens interview with author, May 20, 2014. Riva Palacio Colony.

heifers and 1 bull.<sup>720</sup> Two years later he was imprisoned for failure to pay debt and to negotiate his release the colony had to auction off his land and possessions.

Mennonites were not only importing livestock into Santa Cruz from Argentina and Paraguay. Next to the record of Guenther's import authorization we find permissions for colonist David Reimer who was authorized by the Ministry of Agriculture to import two 1950s Allis-Chalmer combines and two Case corn harvesters.<sup>721</sup> While not specified in the file, much of this machinery was likely brought in from as far away as the United States, building on a long-standing international importing business practiced by Mexican Mennonite farmers. Siemens remembers his father purchasing their first tractor, an old two-cylinder model, from Peter Friesen. Along with his brother Johan, Peter Friesen had been travelling between the U.S. and Mexico importing older machinery for use in the Chihuahua colonies for years. In his 1969 study of Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico and Belize, sociologist Calvin Redekop noted that such practices were a veritable "industry prevalent in all the colonies," with at least twenty individuals who made anywhere from two to ten purchasing trips a year.<sup>722</sup>

The Friesens and other border-crossing Mennonite importers benefitted from the rapid technological change and consolidation of farming in the U.S. in those years that historian John L. Shover has called the "Great Disjuncture."<sup>723</sup> As some US farms modernized and others sold out to larger operations a host of older, often derelict,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>720</sup> MR 154/69, June 13, 1969. MR 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>721</sup> Telegram from Ignacio Kinn, Regional Adminstrator in Santa Cruz to Lic. Raúl Vega, July 7, 1969. MR 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>722</sup> Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites*, 90. This vibrant cross-border trade is also evident in the AHINM, Mexico City.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>723</sup> Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015) brings Shover's concept in dialogue with the experience of North American Mennonites.

machinery awaited these entrepreneurs who scoured the rural regions of the Great Plains. They purchased and refurbished the equipment that would be considered nearing obsolescence in the U.S. but was well-suited for use on colony farms and considered modern in a Latin American frontier context where manual and animal labor were still prevalent.

The Friesen brothers brought this entrepreneurial acumen to Bolivia. Johan Friesen's son-in-law Johan Fehr remembers his father-in-law as "very smart. He spoke English, was born in Canada...it was his business in Mexico...he knew how to do that... he always brought machinery to Mexico. When he arrived here and figured out what we were lacking he would travel to the U.S., take apart the machinery, put it in wooden boxes.... and ship it down."<sup>724</sup> In a further compelling twist, Mexican Mennonties that had settled in Seminole Texas in the mid-seventies provided the Friesens with a home base to search for farm equipment as well as labor to build wooden shipping containers and pack machinery. In those first years, the machinery that the Friesens sent to Bolivia was often old and underpowered. Fehr and many other colonists recall driving two cylinder John Deere tractors. Nearly obsolete in the U.S. market, they ran on gas rather than diesel and the machinery did not do well in the humid conditions of the lowlands. Peter Wall, another Riva Palacio colonist who had lived in Canada, Mexico and Belize before coming to Bolivia marks time in the colony not in years but in a succession of those machines. "[At first] we hardly did anything with machinery...it was rough,...then I had a chance to buy a little Allis Chalmer...traded off for a Minneapolis... I could sell

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>724</sup> Johan Fehr interview with author, May 7, 2014. Riva Palacio Colony.

that...I bought a John-Deere G, then I [really] started working... and then all of the sudden I had a chance to trade for a John Deere A."<sup>725</sup>

In his personal recollection moving from one tractor to another Wall provides a technological narrative that reflects a broader theme. Through the seventies, due to the transnationalism of individuals like the Friesen brothers and Johan Guenther, the colony of Riva Palacio became increasingly mechanized and home to a variety of improved stock – a significant contrast to surrounding Bolivian farmers. A 1975 MCC report on the colonies framed the issue as one of Mennonites "revolutionizing native economies." Old Colony Mennonites and their Bolivian neighbors, "stand in contrast because of a different approach to the use of land and resources," the author wrote. While the latter were "not market driven," Mennonites "farm for profit" producing "eggs, dairy products, meat and grain...necessitating marketing means, more land and a more successful bush clearing technology."<sup>726</sup> In those same years, the struggles of national colonists in Yapacaní and across Northern Santa Cruz demonstrated that the issue was one of access to resources rather than immutable cultural differences. Yet, the consequence of that differential opportunity was increasingly apparent by the mid-seventies to both the MCC and for Bolivians who, according to the report, "are also making their observations about Mennonite colonists."

In 1978, a decade after Mexican Mennonite settlement began, agronomist Jesús Bolívar Menacho prepared an extensive report on "The Mennonite Colonies: Support and Participation in Regional Agricultural Production" which he submitted as his thesis at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>725</sup> Peter Wall interview with author, March 27, 2014. Riva Palacio Colony.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>726</sup> Menno Wiebe, "First Draft Bolivia Report," March 20, 1975. MCC-Bolivia Files, 1975. MCCA.

Santa Cruz's regional Gabriel René Moreno University. His findings revealed the consequences of impressive import networks described above as well as to the degree to which Mennonites were already established as key regional producers. "We could say that their level of mechanization is extremely high," Bolívar pointed out.<sup>727</sup> According to his survey, the Mennonites of Santa possessed 1074 tractors an average of slightly less than one per family. In contrast the entire remaining agricultural operations in Santa Cruz only made use of 429 tractors (less than half). Mennonites were using that mechanical superiority to cultivate 9% of the total land under crops in the department. Along with the significant contribution that Mennonites were making, the latter statistic indicated the degree to which most cruceño agriculture still depended on non-mechanized labor.

It was not simply in mechanized farm labor that Mennonites were making a "revolutionary" contribution. With the importation of dairy cattle by Johan Guenther and others, Mennonite dairy and egg production were also advancing. Colonists produced 40,000 liters of milk and 80,000 eggs a day.<sup>728</sup> That production flowed into a regional and national market thereby creating a constant movement between colony and city. William Dietrich served with the U.S. consulate in Bolivia in the early seventies and clearly remembers the "curious" image of "Canadian Mennonites...selling butter from horse-drawn wagons in the streets of Santa Cruz." Johan Fehr also remembers his father's weekly travels to Santa Cruz "in the first years" to sell chickens, eggs and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>727</sup> Jesús Bolívar Menacho, "Las colonias menonitas: aporte y participación en la producción agropecuaria regional." (MA Thesis, UAGRAM, 1978), 45. <sup>728</sup> Bolívar, "Las colonias menonitas," 11.

cheese.<sup>729</sup> They soon established contracts with buyers in the city, some of whom started coming out to the colony to pick up cheese directly. In Johan Wiebe's accounting of his frequent trips to La Paz to negotiate with the government in the seventies it was not uncommon for him and other Mennonite leaders to hitch a ride to the Santa Cruz airport on board one of the cheese trucks that routinely passed through the colony.

Whereas Okinawan attempts to market fish in Santa Cruz in the fifties and sixties had been met with hostility from local fishmongers, Mennonite dairy and eggs found a ready market in which production lagged far behind demand. When colonists had informed MCC worker Alfred Kopp of their plans to start a dairy industry back in 1968 he had encouraged them, noting the high cost of quality cheese in Santa Cruz.<sup>730</sup> Bolivian officials and editorialists frequently bemoaned the low consumption of dairy among poor Bolivians. Milk, in their minds, was truly a "revolutionary" object capable of physically and culturally transforming undernourished peasants. The Bolivian Development Corporation, the institution in charge of several lowland colonization and road-building projects, also ran a milk processing plant in Cochabamba. In 1967, officials wrote of their struggle both in terms of demand, "before a market that does not possess the habit of consuming dairy," and a lack of supply.<sup>731</sup> They sent commissions to Santa Cruz hoping to find opportunities to increase production there. Seeking to build a model for milk production in Bolivia, Luis Barrón, head of the Cochabamba plant, traveled as far as Europe, touring dairying regions of Holland, Germany and Switzerland and attending a dairy conference in Munich. In 1968, Jack Wuhl (an expatriate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>729</sup> Johan Fehr interview, May 7, 2014.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>730</sup> Alfred Kopp, "Report to MCC Office," n.d. (likely August, 1968). MCC-Bolivia Files, 1968. MCCA
 <sup>731</sup> Letter from Luis Barrón, Aug. 30, 1967" Box 60 CBF, ALP.

agronomist who had lived and farmed in Santa Cruz since the fifties) wrote a letter to *El Deber* proclaiming the "superiority of milk" and insisting on the need to increase its consumption among cruceños.<sup>732</sup> A decade later, Mennonites, maintained 27% of the dairy cattle in Santa Cruz and were producing 47% of the department's milk.<sup>733</sup> By lowering the cost of these once expensive goods they appeared to be realizing this decade old hope of introducing a revolution in consumption among the average Bolivian.

Bolívar's 1978 report was a testament to the fact that Mennonites, as promised, were living on the land, feeding the nation, and thus fulfilling the conditions of their 1962 Privilegium and the goals of the March to the East. On one hand, he applauded the idea that they were not simply creating national self-sufficiency in products like rice, sugar and beef that Bolivians already consumed but also introducing new food ways among the population and "developing non-traditional crops in the region such as soy, sorghum and wheat."<sup>734</sup> On the other hand, he had some misgivings. The obvious contrast for Bolívar was between a "social and cultural life almost totally isolated from the national community" and an economic relation "through the market [in which they had] distinguished themselves for the development of a highly mechanized and diversified form of agricultural production."<sup>735</sup> Mennonites might have challenged the easy distinction between social, cultural and economic and even Bolívar elsewhere acknowledged that the three were intertwined. However, the result was an enervating paradox. The very "social religious system" that produced Mennonite wealth "makes it difficult to understand their experience and systems of production, and to pass on these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>732</sup> Jack Wuhl, "Superioridad de la leche como alimento." *El Deber* Aug. 14, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>733</sup> Oscar Arze, "Producción lechera en Santa Cruz" *El Mundo*. Sept. 18, 1979.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>734</sup> Bolívar, "Las colonias menonitas," 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>735</sup> Ibid, 1.

understandings to the national producer."<sup>736</sup> To add further to this irony, the most "open," "progressive" Mennonites in Santa Cruz – those Paraguayan Mennonites that had arrived in the fifties and early sixties and used cars, electricity and placed fewer restrictions on personal behavior – were fewer in number and far poorer than their conservative Mexican Mennonite brethren who had arrived with greater capital.

If Mennonites were "model producers" for the region, it remained unclear after a decade how that model might effectively be transmitted to their neighboring Bolivian colonists. Because of this, and because of the dramatic growth in the Mennonite population, Bolívar concluded by recommending measures that had been discussed back in 1968, namely, further restricting Mennonite settlement to the frontier well beyond the "integrated sub-region" with its easy access to Santa Cruz. The policy never needed to be adopted to be effective. In 1978, Mennonites were only farming 25,000 of the 130,000 ha they owned in the integrated north.<sup>737</sup> Over the following two and a half decades, a growing Mennonite population would fill existing colonies beyond capacity and leadership would search for new, inexpensive lands further east in the Chiquitana forest and south along the edge of arid Gran Chaco. In the process, Mennonites would fully embrace soybean cultivation as the economic engine for their growth.

The first decade of Mexican Mennonite settlement in Bolivia was characterized by a compelling range of forms of mobility. Mennonites took carts of eggs and cheese into Santa Cruz to supply local demand. Others traveled further hopping on domestic flights to La Paz where they passed through the halls of government. Still others crossed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>736</sup> Ibid, 141. <sup>737</sup> Ibid, 63.

borders into neighboring Paraguay and Bolivia to import livestock or took international flights back to the U.S. to search for old machinery to be repurposed. Together these overlapping forms of mobility (local, national, regional and transnational) provided the economic, legal and technological basis for a dramatic transformation of the ecology of the Bolivian lowlands as dense forest was converted to farmlands. It was a transformation whose consequences would become particularly apparent over the following two decades and that is the subject of the second half of this chapter.

## Mennonites, the Soy Boom and the Debt Crisis in Latin America's "Lost Decade"

"Soy!: Recipes for the Whole Family" proclaimed a 1984 pamphlet produced by the National Bank of Bolivia and Radio Loyola of Sucre.<sup>738</sup> The pamphlet introduced readers to a variety of soybean-based recipes so that "families, above all those with few resources, can prepare at a low cost, whole meals of high nutritional value." For those that could not afford meat, it explained that one kilo of soy contained twice the protein of a similar quantity of meat and did not spoil without refrigeration. The versatile bean could replace milk as well as meat and could be fashioned into a number of typical Bolivian foods like *humitas*.<sup>739</sup> Furthermore, the authors wrote, "soy is grown [here] in Bolivia and can be bought in many stores and markets."<sup>740</sup>

Written in the midst of Bolivia's record setting hyper-inflation that saw price increases of 20,000% from mid 1984 to mid 1985, the authors clearly hoped to encourage soybean consumption as a low-cost option for an increasingly desperate population.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>738</sup> "Soya! Recetas para toda la familia" (La Paz: Banco Nacional de Bolivia, 1984) BNB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>739</sup> A mixture of ground corn and cheese typically wrapped in a corn husk and boiled.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>740</sup> "Soya!" n.p.

Soybeans were indeed versatile but were rarely prepared and consumed in the intimate domestic way the authors recommended. Rather, the beans passed through an industrial system in which they were crushed, separated into oil and a soymeal byproduct. While soybeans were still entering the Bolivian diet through edible oil, and thus contributing to food security, over the following years they emerged, not only as part of the "basic food basket," but as a star agricultural export crop that circulated in unprocessed form in a global economy of feedlots, bio-diesel and multinational grain conglomerates with futures set in Chicago. The passive construction "soy is grown in Bolivia" was also silent on the "who." According to annual reports published by the regional oil-seed producers' organization ANAPO, by 1984, Mennonite farmers in Santa Cruz were producing the majority of the nation's soy. They had been doing so since the late seventies when Bolívar calculated that Mennonites grew 53% of the national crop.<sup>741</sup>

The second half of this chapter examines the rise of Mennonite *soyeros* – or soybean producers – amid the major economic and political transformations of late twentieth century Bolivia. Intertwined narratives of crisis (in particular hyperinflation and debt) and expansion (the "soy boom" and the growth of Mennonite agriculture) defined Santa Cruz in the closing years of the twentieth century. The story is not limited to Bolivia. The soy boom transformed, and continues to transform a broad swath of lowland tropical forest stretching across parts of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil as well. Commentators have referred to this combined area, which now produces the majority of the world's soybeans, as the "United Republic of Soy" or "Soylandia," - terms that stress

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>741</sup> Bolívar, "Las colonias menonitas," 128.

the transnational spread of agrarian capitalism.<sup>742</sup> I begin this section by discussing the regional and global factors that encouraged the growth of soy production in Bolivia. I then analyze how this growth transformed Mennonite colonies in the context of both financial and environmental disasters of the 1980s including hyperinflation, the "debt crisis" and repeated droughts. Finally, I explore both the persistence of soy farming and new survival strategies among Mennonite colonists in the turn to neoliberalism from the mid-eighties to the end of the following decade.

Neoliberalism, was an emerging ideology that swept across Latin America in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Broadly, the entire region saw the rollback of decades of state intervention in public life most evident in the gutting of public industries, the end of price controls and tariff barriers, and reductions in social services. At the start of the neoliberal turn, Bolivia was only just emerging from a decade and a half of dictatorship. The rapid privatization of the country's large public sector – a legacy of the 1952 revolution that had been maintained by the authoritarian governments of the seventies – came with a particularly ironic twist. It was none other than the former leaders of the National Revolutionary Movement, and Victor Paz Estenssoro in particular, that oversaw the privatization of the revolution's defining institutions.

Yet neoliberalism in Bolivia also meant different things at a national and regional level. In the context of the former, it involved an abandonment of the statist legacy of the 1952 national revolution and the privatization of many of its defining institutions from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>742</sup> Syngenta Ad in *Clarín*, 2003 cited in "The United Republic of Soybeans: take two,"
https://www.grain.org /article/entries/4749-the-united-republic-of-soybeans-take-two. Accessed Sept.15,
2015. Susanna B Hecht and Charles C Mann, "How Brazil Outfarmed the Americans - After a Half-Century of Dominance, the U.S. Is Losing Its Edge in Agriculture to a Booming Latin American Powerhouse. Its Secret Weapon? Soybeans.," *Fortune*. 157: 1 (2008): 92.

the state mining company (COMIBOL) to the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF). In Santa Cruz, the neoliberal turn resulted in continuity as well as change. This was particularly apparent in the intensification of the Revolution's enduring policy: the March to the East. As the highland mining economy crumbled in the mid-eighties, the frontier once again beckoned as a space free from Bolivia's economic turmoil. Ultimately, it was Mennonite producers that were best positioned to capitalize on this disconnect between national crisis and regional boom.

The intense mechanization that accompanied the Mennonites early years in Bolivia presupposed the large-scale cultivation of a marketable cash crop. By the late seventies Mennonites marketed an important quantity of eggs and dairy. But these products of physical family labor, as important as they were for subsistence and covering daily expenses, were meant to supplement rather than replace intensive farming of a lucrative commodity. In Russia and Canada, Mennonites had been key producers of wheat. In Northern Mexico, they farmed corn, oats and beans. What would Mennonites produce in Santa Cruz? Japanese and Okinawan migrants had carved out a niche as highquality rice producers in the sixties. Many of the Andean colonies in the north of Santa Cruz – such as Aroma and Cuatro Ojitos – were dedicated to both sugarcane and rice. By the late sixties these markets had been flooded to the extent that the region's sugar mills assigned production on a limited quota system and rice, not competitive outside of Bolivia, had already exceeded national demand.

Mennonites might have become cotton planters. The first Paraguayan Mennonites arrived in Bolivia in 1954 with a contract to grow cotton for the Empresa Algodonera. They were soon disappointed. The market was limited and they quickly switched to a range of other goods, from corn to castor beans, none of which were highvalue.<sup>743</sup> When Mexican Mennonites arrived over a decade later the market conditions had changed. International cotton prices were rising and jumped further after 1973 when spiking global oil prices increased the cost of synthetic-based alternatives. The farmers of Santa Cruz, including many Japanese and Okinawan colonists, responded to the cotton boom by rapidly converting forest into new fields and abandoning sugar cane and rice on existing farms. Cultivation skyrocketed from 7000ha in 1969 to over 60,000 in 1972.<sup>744</sup> The boom generated a dramatic labor migration with over seventy thousand Andean migrants making an annual pilgrimage from the highlands to pick cotton. When it outpaced the abilities of labor recruiters in 1975, the army and even school children were recruited to pick cotton.

While they arrived at the beginning of the cotton boom and indicated to MCC worker Alfred Kopp their interest in cultivating cotton, Mexican Mennonites were still in the early phases of land clearing, road construction and well drilling in the boom years. In the early seventies they were planting corn by hand between the stumps of their newly cleared fields. By the time significant space had been opened up in the colony, the boom was over. The year 1975 signaled the zenith for cotton in Santa Cruz and for the remainder of the seventies prices declined as quickly as they had risen. Hastily cleared and poorly managed cotton fields were quickly abandoned and in the absence of ground cover, top soil blew away and many fields turned into shifting sand dunes (*arenales*).<sup>745</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>743</sup> Abram Falk and Peter Fehr interview with author, Oct.22, 2013. Canadiense Colony.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>744</sup> Felipe Ochoa Maldonado, Algodón: información agro-económica del cultivo en Bolivia. (La Paz: Banco Agrícola Bolivia, 1973), BIICA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>745</sup> J.D. Candia, "Evaluación del cultivo del algodon en Santa Cruz en la campaña 1972-73. Asociación de productores de algodón (ADEPA), BIICA.

Mennonites offer different explanations for why they embraced soy production in Bolivia. "[President] Banzer told us to," explains farmer Johan Boldt.<sup>746</sup> However, Johan Fehr remembers it differently. "We were planting corn," he says of the first few years in Santa Cruz, "and we started to sell soya. There were people here from Czechoslovakia, and they were very knowledgeable about soya."<sup>747</sup> Fehr doesn't remember who the "Czechs" were but he may be confusing them with a prominent Croatian immigrant family – the Marinkovics. A member of the pro-German Ustashe militia in war-time Yugoslavia, Silvio Marinkovic and his wife fled Europe after WWII, settling in Argentina along with many other Europeans with ties to fascist organizations. The two subsequently emigrated to Bolivia where in 1967 Silvio built an oil-seed processing plant Holding Industrias Oleaginosas (IOL). Already experimenting with castor oil in the late sixties, he turned to cotton-seed oil processing during the cotton boom of the seventies. As production declined after the middle of the decade, Marinkovic began to crush soy beans. Satisfied with the results he actively encouraged regional producers to switch to soy, including many Mennonites.<sup>748</sup> Whether Marinkovic was the person Fehr had in mind or not, the Croatian and his family soon developed a close relationship with the Mennonite colonies, supporting soy production through harvest credit and providing a ready market for the new crop.

Soy production thus emerged in Santa Cruz out of a transitional moment when the region's brief cotton boom was waning. Like cotton (tied to international prices) and the 1973 oil crisis, the soy boom was conditioned by factors far beyond the local.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>746</sup> Johan Boldt interview with author, April 5, 2014. Riva Palacio.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>747</sup> Johan Fehr interview, May 7, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>748</sup> Jaime Duranovich interview with author, May 15, 2014. Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Duranovich is a former employee of Silvo Marinkovic.

Developments in two of Bolivia's neighboring republics provided the technology that enabled the boom and the demand that carried it forward.

One of those factors was an unprecedented environmental collapse in the rich Pacific waters off the Peruvian coastline, home in the sixties to the world's largest fishery. The seabirds that had produced the 19<sup>th</sup> century Peruvian guano boom depended upon that biomass. While the guano boom was long over, Peruvian anchovies had produced a second "natural boom" in mid-twentieth century Peru. From 1962-1971 the anchovy fishery was at its peak. It reached a height of twelve million tons in 1970, well beyond the recommendations for a sustainable catch.<sup>749</sup> This persistent over-fishing proved disastrous when a severe El Niño system in 1972-73 dramatically warmed Peruvian waters typically kept cool by the Humboldt current and decimated the anchovy population. As millions of starved seabirds washed up on the coast, fisheries production plummeted reaching a nadir of less than 2 million tons by 1973. For the next two decades, Peru experienced regular strong El Nino currents and the industry remained a shadow of its former self (never again surpassing four million tons into the early nineties).<sup>750</sup>

The same El Niño conditions disrupting the Humboldt Current and depleting fishstocks in Peru brought abundant rain to the new soy-fields of Santa Cruz. The two crops – anchovy and soy – and the two bio-regions – the Pacific coastal shelf and the South American interior, were connected economically as well as environmentally. Peruvian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>749</sup> International Fishmeal and Fish Oil Organization, "The production of fishmeal and fish oil from Peruvian Anchovy," (2009), http://www.iffo.net/fishmeal-and-fish-oil-production. Accessed March 3, 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>750</sup> Edward A. Laws, *El Niño and the Peruvian Anchovy Fishery* (Sausalito: University Science Books, 1997).

anchovies were the world's largest source of fishmeal and a critical fodder for industrially produced cattle, swine and poultry. As fishmeal sources declined, soymeal – the byproduct of crushing soybeans – emerged as an effective high-protein alternative to be used in factory farming. Working in the soy industry in Santa Cruz in the 1980s, Guillermo Ribera remembers that, supported by the favorable trade terms of the Andean pact, Marinkovic and other soy processors in the department began to forge connections with Peruvian businessmen looking for alternatives to fishmeal.<sup>751</sup> Along with national demand for soy oil, increasing demand for soymeal drove forward the emerging soy industry in Santa Cruz where the highly-mechanized Mennonites were well positioned to thrive.

While linked to events to the west in Peru, the Bolivian soy boom also depended on production technologies and market connections emerging across the eastern plains in Brazil. In the sixties and seventies, ranchers in Santa Cruz had improved their herds with imported Brazilian bred *cebu* cattle that were specially selected to thrive in tropical South America. In the eighties and nineties, cruceño farmers also turned to Brazilian technology. Soy farmers in Bolivia could be found growing varieties of soybeans like DOKO and Crystaline produced by the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (Embrapa).<sup>752</sup> Since the 1960s the Brazilian soybean industry had been expanding. The construction of highway networks across the *cerrado* in the seventies and eighties opened up lands for soy agriculture and produced a wave of migration and development in large western states like Matto Grosso. Farming the new lands – long considered of marginal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>751</sup> Guillermo Ribera interview with author, April 22, 2014. Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>752</sup> *Memoria Anual*. Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Asociacíon Nacional de Productores de Oleaginosas (ANAPO), 1989-90. ANAPO. ANAPO Archive, Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

agricultural value - called for new technology. As Susanna Hecht and Charles Mann explain, that expansion was accompanied by an impressive transnational migration as aspiring Brazilian agronomists, plant scientists and geneticists traveled north to the United States for training. "In the 1960s and 1970s state schools in the Midwest and California were awash with Brazilians studying crop breeding, soil science and regional planning." It was not unlike the subsequent migrations of Chileans to California to study grape production in the Pinochet era.<sup>753</sup> But transplanting soybeans from the U.S. Midwest to tropical Brazil was different than bringing grapes from temperate California to temperate Chile. Many of those Brazilian students returned home to work in research stations administered by Embrapa where they developed the above mentioned soy bean varieties. DOKO and Crystaline grew in the poor-quality soils of the Brazilian *cerrado* and matured well in the shorter daytimes of tropical and subtropical latitudes.<sup>754</sup> Those developments created a boom in Matto Grosso which provided improved varieties that also functioned well in Santa Cruz.

The combination of external factors like demand produced by the collapse of fish stocks in Peru and technology adaptation of soybeans from a temperate climate to semitropical Matto Grosso in Brazil came together with local alliances between Mennonite producers and Silvio Marinkovic. This paved the way for a Mennonite soy boom in Santa Cruz. The increasing production is evident in a number of sources from newspapers to official reports from the newly created soybean producer organization of Santa Cruz (ANAPO). Moving beyond these official public sources I also track the beginnings of the soy boom in the personal account book of Mennonite farmer Jakob

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>753</sup> Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>754</sup> Hecht and Mann, "How Brazil Out-farmed the American Farmer," 98.

Knelsen. Knelsen arrived in Riva Palacio in 1975 as initial forest clearing had finished and Mennonite production was getting underway. His precise personal accounting for those years provides an intimate source for understanding how these regional and global factors played out on Mennonite fields in Riva Palacio.<sup>755</sup>

As Bolívar had indicated in his 1978 report, colonists like Knelsen maintained a diversified system of production. Knelsen's records show that he sold cattle, pigs, hens and ducks on the Santa Cruz market along with milk and eggs. Egg production, a key income generator from 1977-1981 declined substantially over the following four years and then disappeared entirely after 1985 as other colonies, and the Japanese colony of San Juan Yapacaní, in particular, began to flood the Santa Cruz market with egg production on an industrial scale. In those same four years we can also clearly see Knelsen's move into the soy sector. From 1978-81 he was predominantly growing corn on his recently cleared land. It was only in 1982 that he grew soybeans for the first time taking in 24 tons and the same amount again in 1983. In 1984 his production was down to 18 tons but then more than doubled in 1985 (39 tons) and again the following year (97 tons). The land under soy cultivation increased accordingly from 11ha in 1982 to a high of 53 ha by 1989.<sup>756</sup> While production of sorghum, a winter crop and important fodder for his dairy herd remained relatively consistent through the eighties, the amount of corn he produced steadily decreased in favor of soy. Knelsen's personal accounting was reflected among his neighbors in Riva Palacio and in the department of Santa Cruz at large where, according to annual reports from ANAPO, the area under cultivation jumped from barely 20,000ha at the start of the 1980s to well over 100,000ha by the end of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>755</sup> Jakob Knelsen, Account book 1966-2014. Personal Papers. Riva Palacio Colony.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>756</sup> Jakob Knelsen, Account Book, 1966-2014.

decade.<sup>757</sup> As Mennonites and the Department of Santa Cruz staked their future on soy production in the late seventies and early eighties, both colonist and region were exposed to a number of risks both economic and environmental.

Transnational connections from the anchovy crisis, the development of Brazilian soy technology and the travels of Mennonite machinery importers came together to set the stage for the Bolivian soy boom. Ironically, soy production dramatically expanded through the eighties during the very years when Bolivia, in particular, and Latin America, in general, were experiencing a dramatic economic crisis characterized by hyperinflation and extreme debt. In narrating the soy boom and Mennonites' role in it, this chapter seeks to provide a unique ethnic perspective that both re-situates and informs the broader economic and ideological crisis of the 1980s. Mennonite soy farmers both thrived and experienced their own "debt crisis" in those years, brought on by economic and environmental change. In its wake they developed a number of survival strategies that resonate with popular responses to neoliberalism among their Okinawan neighbors but also built on earlier experiences of agricultural collapse brought on by Mexico's midcentury drought.

Bolivia provides a particularly extreme case study for exploring the debt crisis even if the country's experience broadly reflected developments across Latin America, in what has become known as the "lost decade." Inflation, which began in earnest in 1982, reached levels of 24,000% annually by 1984-85. Nearly everyone I interviewed who lived through those years in Santa Cruz has a story that reflects the surreal quality of economic and daily life during that era. One Mennonite representative who was tasked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>757</sup> Memoria Anual. ANAPO, 1989-90.

with depositing colony money in a Bolivian bank arrived in Santa Cruz with an entire wagon-full of bills stuffed in sugar sacks.<sup>758</sup> He remembers being unable to carry out the transaction because the bank vault could not physically hold any more currency. Some colonists benefitted from the rapid depreciation. For a few Mennonite and Okinawan colonists whom I spoke with, the currency collapse meant that the value of large loans they had taken out to purchase tractors and harvesters could be paid at a fraction of their previous value. Other Mennonite colonies watched the value of savings brought from Mexico and converted into Bolivian pesos simply dissolve overnight.

The effects of hyperinflation were particularly traumatic in the first and largest Mexican Mennonite colony of Riva Palacio. "We lost a lot," remembers Johan Boldt, who was head of the "widow's and orphans fund" or *Waisenamt*.<sup>759</sup> A long standing Mennonite institution used to administer funds to the needy, and critically, to grant loans within the colony, the Waisenamt was of such importance to Mennonite colonists that they had its existence written into their 1962 list of privileges and guarantees. During the crisis the Bolivian government had declared that it was illegal to conduct business in U.S. dollars. Although a massive black market quickly emerged in which individuals made rapid and temporary use of Bolivian paper money as a means of exchanging stable U.S. currency, Boldt and other leaders opted to convert their dollars into pesos because "we didn't want to be against the government [thinking] they wouldn't let us live here [any more]." The colony initially exchanged their dollars to pesos at 1:1800. By the time the ban on U.S. dollars had been lifted the currency sat at 1:1,900,000. "It was a pittance,"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>758</sup> Johan Buhler interview with author, April 19, 2015. Pinondi Colony, Charagua.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>759</sup> Johan Boldt interview, April 5, 2014.

he recalls, of what remained of the *Waisenamt* after the crash.<sup>760</sup> While not everyone in the colony had converted their dollars to pesos, some like Boldt's father, who had done so, had lost all of their savings.

The financial strain produced by the debt crisis is not only evident in oral histories with Mennonite farmers. It also appears in Mennonite land records housed in the office of the Agrarian Reform. The extreme decapitalization of the early 1980s changed the tenor of the relationship between Mennonites and land authorities. Once based on a role as successful producers, negotiations between Mennonite colonists and state authorities became increasingly desperate over the course of the decade. The case file of the Mexican Mennonite colony of Del Norte provides a key example. As part of a new wave of Mexican Mennonite migration in the mid-seventies Del Norte's founders had purchased property to the east of the Río Grande near the San Julián Project. As was the case with many other farmers in the region they soon discovered that the land had been sold illegally by the former owners and overlapped several surrounding properties.

Facing difficulties legalizing their title, Del Norte's founders employed a number of strategies. Like other Mennonite colonies they asserted their rights through reference to their "social-economic function (FES)" as farmers who lived on and worked the land. Their neighbors in the San Julián Project were part of a radical new settlement design that many rural sociologists and planners, as the preceding chapter has shown, considered to be at the vanguard of Bolivian colonization. On one hand, Del Norte claimed that their own modern agricultural practices were "the envy of the Kibbutz of the Jews and of the [San Julián] cooperatives that surround us [and to whom] we lend all forms of aid and

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

cooperation."<sup>761</sup> On the other hand, they threatened to take their case before both the Supreme Court and the Human Rights Commission in Santa Cruz claiming that delays were the results of a "sick and xenophobic hatred" against Mennonites on the part of members of the Agrarian Reform office.<sup>762</sup> In and of itself, the case and their increasingly stringent denunciations of corrupt officials, abuses, and fraud offers a compelling read. But as it dragged on from the late seventies into the period of hyperinflation, sudden impoverishment offered Del Norte a new logic to be employed in their legal battle.

In 1982, Del Norte's representative Jakob Klassen filed a denunciation before the Agrarian Reform. He began by explaining the "astronomical sums" they had already invested in colony land that now stood to be taken from them. Klassen also noted that their frequent trips to La Paz to contest the case had cost them 100,000 pesos over three "agonizing years" of negotiation and counter-negotiation. "The permanent changes to the currency have decapitalized us," he explains. The collapse in the value of their U.S. dollars deposited in Bolivian savings accounts, "makes us as poor as any other Bolivian farmer, and unlike them we do not abandon [the land], but live and die on the earth, making it prosper and produce," he continued.<sup>763</sup> Mennonites had long emphasized their prodigious agricultural production as a performance of successful agrarian citizenship. Here they drew from their recent impoverishment which had transformed them from immigrant-investors to poor campesinos, invoked as a new sort of claim before the state. This resonates with earlier petitions that Mennonites, and their advocates, had sent to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>761</sup> Letter to INRA officials from Jakob Klassen, Nov. 30, 1984. Exp. "Del Norte." 458-SC. INRASC. <sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>763</sup> Letter to INRA officials from Jakob Klassen, Oct. 15, 1982. Exp. "Del Norte."

Mexican authorities during the worst years of the mid-century drought in Chihuahua contrasting colony farms with the flight of Mexican braceros. In suffering the "agony" of the debt crisis, Mennonites had "come to consider ourselves as an inseparable part of the great nation of Bolivia, thinking of ourselves as your own campesinos."<sup>764</sup> The Del Norte case, which dragged on without definitive resolution into the nineties, was not resolved any quicker because of Klassen's evocative pleas but, as a strategy of speaking to the state, the documents reveal new articulations of the "national identity" of Mexican-Bolivian Mennonites brought on by the debt crisis. In enlisting the aid of a series of lawyers and threatening to go before the Human Rights Commission (formed as a part of the democratization process in Bolivia after 1982), Del Norte employed strategies that would become critical to other Mennonite colonists in the following years of economic crisis.

Despite this bleak outlook, in 1985, sociologist Kevin Healy documented a "boom within the crisis" in a special publication of the proceedings from a conference on Coca and Cocaine at Cornell University, the same institution that had sponsored a wealth of studies on tropical resettlement under the direction of Thayer Scudder. Healy wrote that the combination of Bolivia's national economic crisis and widespread, devastating droughts in the Andes had pushed new waves of "spontaneous" colonization to the tropical lowlands in the first half of the decade.<sup>765</sup> Responding to booming cocaine demand in North America and Europe, these internal migrants were turning to coca cultivation. From the Yungas, to the Chapare and Santa Cruz, Healy explained, "the

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>765</sup> Kevin Healy "The Boom Within the Crisis: Some Recent Effects of Foreign Cocaine Markets on Bolivian Rural Society and Economy." Conference Proceeding. *The Coca Leaf and its Derivatives*. Cornell University, April 25-26, 1985. Cultural Survival, Inc: 101-144.

rapid expansion of coca leaf production and illicit coca paste and base production during the past five years has become Bolivia's boom within the economic crisis."<sup>766</sup>

Among those economic and environmental migrants was future Bolivian president Evo Morales who had left Oruro for the Cochabamba lowlands in 1978. He became a key organizer among new coca-producing settlers or *cocaleros*. Lowland development workers were also shifting their attention to coca production in the late seventies and eighties. After helping found and administer the San Julián project, both MCC volunteer Marty Miller and Methodist missionary Harry Peacock would spend time in the Chapare as part of USAID's alternative cropping program. Beginning in 1983, the initiative that sought to encourage farmers to switch from coca to other crops and was paired with an aggressive and militarized eradication campaign.

Coca was a product traditionally cultivated and consumed in Bolivia and across the Andes. In the context of the cocaine boom of the eighties it took on a new illicit meaning and economic value. Soybeans by contrast, had a relatively modest history of cultivation in Bolivia but like coca they benefitted from the economic shocks of the 1980s to become a star Bolivian export crop in the neo-liberal era. While both soybean and coca leaf production surged in the same years, the products were treated in different ways. In contrast, to the alternative cropping and coca eradication programs, the fiscal shock program - designed for Bolivia in 1985 by a young Jeffrey Sachs - actively supported soybean expansion. His recommendations led to the passing of Supreme Decree 21060 by President Victor Paz Estenssoro. The decree, an early example of the neoliberal policies that would soon be adopted across the region, removed tariffs and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>766</sup> Ibid., 101.

subsidies, privatized state institutions and opened up the market to foreign goods. While the debt crisis may have eroded Mennonite savings, the liberalization of export policies also meant that soy prices, previously regulated by the Bolivian government in cumbersome annual negotiations between the ministry of agriculture, oil factories and the soy producers organization (ANAPO), were opened to world prices for the first time.

ANAPO representative Guillermo Ribera was part of the group that oversaw the first major export of Bolivian soybeans to Argentina in 1986.<sup>767</sup> It was a moment of victory from the perspective of the industry's leading organization and for Mennonite producers who had long watched fellow Mennonites in Paraguay sell soy at higher international prices. From the perspective of state officials who had just witnessed the collapse of tin prices in the mid-eighties, Santa Cruz soybeans also stood poised to replace this traditional mineral export and allow Bolivia's new neoliberal government to improve its declining foreign exchange. With the opening, the meaning of soybeans shifted - in a way not unlike that of coca. Soy, once converted into edible oil –within the logic of food sovereignty – and consumed nationally, was now circulating as raw beans, an unprocessed commodity within a global market where soybean futures were set in Chicago.

The economic crisis fed the production of both coca and soy across the Bolivian lowlands. Both these licit and illicit production strategies helped Santa Cruz avoid some of the harsher effects of the "lost decade." Yet *cocaleros* and *soyeros* were seen in very different ways in lowland Bolivia. Coca was exclusively identified with indigenous Andean migrants like Morales, while it was Mennonites [the subject of this final section]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>767</sup> Guillermo Ribera interview, April 2014.

who came to dominate the soybean harvest. While benefitting from both soy and coca, cruceños were increasingly likely to celebrate Mennonites *soyeros*, along with other immigrant producers like the Japanese and Okinawans, and vilify Andean cocaleros in the late eighties.

In April of 1987, next to an editorial that proclaimed "Santa Cruz does not surrender in the face of the crisis," *El Deber* carried an article celebrating the agriculture of Japanese and Mennonite colonists in national territory, "or better put, cruceño territory" they clarified.<sup>768</sup> The article contrasted the beneficial presence of these immigrant settlers with that of "other supposed colonists that come down from the highlands of the country without order, without plans, without possessing physical aptitude to grapple with the rigors of the tropics." The author's criticism of Andeans and celebration of Mennonites and Japanese settlers reached a crescendo. The latter, the writer concluded, "do not come to take land from anyone, they do not come to displace, by any means including violence, the old and traditional cruceño farmer…organize unions…fight…create problems for the government…disrupt the order by blocking roads demanding this or that in peremptory or intransigent terms."

The rant, drawing on a now familiar script of indigenous highlanders as invaders, was actually tangential. The article, entitled "Protection for the Colonies," was intended to spur local government to establish a police presence in the Mennonite colonies where, according to the author, "criminals without scruples" were robbing and assaulting colonists and stealing property. Increasing thefts in Mennonite colonies in 1987 might

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>768</sup> "Protección a las colonias," *El Deber*, April 15, 1987. "Santa Cruz no se rinde" *El Deber*, April 15, 1987.

have reflected the bountiful 1986 soy harvest being, for the first time, sold at world market prices. Mennonites, many of whom did not trust banks to safeguard their earnings after the peso crash, were also much more likely to keep large amounts of cash at home. Whatever the causes, the author warned if nothing was done to catch these criminals, Mennonites, "men and women of peace and work," would surely leave the country.<sup>769</sup>

Only three years later a very different article entitled "Agricultural Project" appeared in *El Deber*.<sup>770</sup> The author explained that in Santa Cruz's Palmasola prison, a Santa Cruz Women's Club had begun a project to promote prison agriculture as a source of food and a form of "therapy." The plot included eight hectares of beans, citrus and vegetables. Those in charge were "people with agricultural knowledge who are in prison for various crimes." In the two accompanying photos, the women of the club looked approvingly as a group of prisoners - including at least three Mennonite men in their trademark overalls and cowboy hats - labored on the jail's farm. What had happened between 1987 and 1990 that at least some Mennonites had gone from being celebrated as agricultural producers and defended as passive "victims" of crime to become prisoners in Santa Cruz's most notorious jail?

While no explanation is offered in the article, these three Mennonite men were almost certainly imprisoned for failure to pay their debts. Regional elites and national officials had long celebrated Mennonites as model producers and successful farmers. For their part, Mennonite colonists and the Mennonite Central Committee had also emphasized this role when negotiating with the state. Yet colonists were not immune to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>769</sup> "Protección a las colonias."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>770</sup> "Proyecto agrícola" *El Deber*, March 16, 1990.

the effects of the financial crisis of the 1980s which combined with an increasing focus on cash-cropping of soybeans and a prolonged drought at the end of the decade. The result was a Mennonite "debt crisis" in which a number of colonists were jailed by aggressive creditors. While it played out in miniaturized form, the crisis in the colonies and the survival strategies adopted by colonists in response speaks to the broader context of Latin America's own debt crisis or "lost decade," and subsequent turn to neoliberalism.

The origins of the Mennonite debt crisis emerged out of the excellent soybean harvest on 1986. With the prospect of good international prices some Mennonite farmers looked to expand their operations. With additional income, Riva Palacio colonists might have hoped to replenish a significant portion of the savings they had lost to hyperinflation. Yet the crisis had also disrupted the internal, institutional and individual systems of lending in the colony. On the one hand, the devaluation of the widow's and orphans fund or *Waisenamt* temporarily removed a source of internal loans to support mechanization, the acquisition of new lands and annual planting costs. On the other hand, some colonists had benefitted from the crash because of outstanding debts that could be paid at a fraction of their original value and emerged from the crisis with a speculative approach to borrowing that presumed further devaluations of the peso.<sup>771</sup> These intertwined factors led many Mennonites to look to off-colony borrowing to invest in soy production.

Investigating the causes of the debt crisis, the MCC provides a picture of the lender's side. According to an MCC report, "in 1985-86 unscrupulous moneylenders

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>771</sup> Interviews in Riva Palacio, San Juan Yapacaní and Okinawa Colony.

were plotting and setting into motion an orchestrated scheme."<sup>772</sup> In early 1987 several Santa Cruz banks were actively encouraging Mennonite farmers to take out five year loans at 13% annual interest - a low rate for Bolivia. When Mennonites arrived at the banks they were told the funds were not yet available and were re-directed to external lenders where they were offered interim, short term high interest loans. Other Mennonites, according to the MCC, unwittingly signed forms acknowledging receipt of funds that had never been given out.

With a soybean harvest similar to 1986 colonists might have repayed these highinterest or "predatory" loans. Unfortunately, the following years in Santa Cruz were characterized by increasingly dry conditions and a severe drought in the 1989-90 season.<sup>773</sup> During the 1990 harvest, *El Deber* reported that small producers in the south of the department – the location of the largest Mennonite colonies – "had lost everything."<sup>774</sup> Once again Jacob Knelsen's detailed accounting is revealing. While he increased his area planted in soy every year, the yields never reached the 3.8 tons per hectare of his bumper crop of 1986. For 1987-1989 they declined from 1.8 tons to 1.4 and in the catastrophic drought of 1990 he only took in 0.3 tons per hectare.<sup>775</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>772</sup> Menno J. Ediger, "Report on the Debt Crisis," n.d. MCC-Bolivia Files, Centro Menno Debts, 1979-1999. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>773</sup> Alongside that 1990 article were several about the ongoing drought in Santa Cruz in which "small producers have lost everything" which provide some indication of the factors that might have placed Mennonites on the wrong side of the law.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>774</sup> "Santa Cruz no se rinde" *El Deber*, April 15, 1987.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>775</sup> Knelsen, Account Book, 1966-2014.

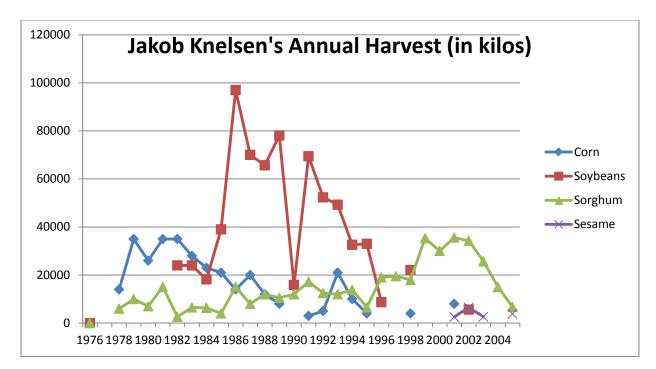


Figure 14 Harvest Data from Jakob Knelsen, 1975-2005.Compiled by author from Knelsen's personal accountbook, the graph indicates the phases of Mennonite production in Santa Cruz from corn in the seventies to soybeans in the eighties before a turn to sorghum (as fodder for dairy cattle) and new drought resistant, high-value crops like sesame in the nineties and 2000s.

The environmental disaster of the late eighties in Riva Palacio was tightly linked to Mennonite farming practices over the previous decade. When Jesus Bolívar provided his survey of the colony in 1978 he noted that only about 17% of the land had been cleared for farms. Concluding on a worrisome note, he stated, "lately the wind break curtains are being taken down to be turned to agriculture."<sup>776</sup> With the incentive provided by soy, colonists intensified the process of deforestation. For instance, colonist Johan Fehr, operating a bulldozer in the colony in those years and clearing the land of his neighbors, remembers that by 1985 the entire colony, once dense bush, had been opened up and converted into a vast, treeless plain. "The wind was very strong…and we didn't know the climate very well. We didn't know what would happen if we cut down

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>776</sup> Bolívar, "Las colonias menonitas," 141.

everything and did not leave a single tree."<sup>777</sup> Jakob Buhler also explains that in its very layout the colony had exacerbated the effects of wind-based erosion.<sup>778</sup> The plans for villages had followed the original oil company routes traversing the colony from east to west. Thus, the farmers' long, rectangular fields were generally oriented north to south parallel with the strong perennial winds that blow through Santa Cruz. As a result even the remaining windbreaks were less effective than they would have been on east-west fields.

For Abe Enns, whose family had lived in Mexico, Canada and Belize, the colony was already completely deforested when he arrived in Bolivia in 1988. One could clearly see the windmills of neighboring Mennonite villages several miles away across the open horizon. Everyone was growing soybeans. Above all he remembers the wind and counted 178 days of intense wind in his first year in the colony with 1989 even worse, "dry, very dry…and not one man got enough of a harvest to live off of."<sup>779</sup> In the depths of the drought the colony was forced to purchase sugar cane to feed the cattle and horses, "to keep them alive." Enns, whose entire crop failed in those dry years, had to plead to purchase food on credit from an owner of one of the colony's small stores.

By 1988 this environmental crisis had led to the "debt crisis" within the Mennonite colonies and the situation only worsened with another drought year in 1989. Creditors began to have Mennonites thrown in jail and to repossess machinery. Long viewed by Bolivians as an unofficial "Mennonite Embassy," the MCC conducted a series of investigations and attempts to intervene on behalf of colonists. Studying the situation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>777</sup> Johan Fehr interview with author, May 7, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>778</sup> Jakob Buhler interview with author, July 21, 2014. Riva Palacio.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>779</sup> Abe Enns interview with author, Aug. 11, 2014. Riva Palacio.

with the help of a local Mennonite businessman Jack Doerksen, the MCC discovered that some individuals owed creditors between \$20,000 and \$150,000 - most of it in debt servicing. They estimated that, in total, 250 indebted Mennonite families owed approximately five million dollars (US) on unpaid equipment and planting loans.<sup>780</sup>

Across Latin America in the 1980s and early 1990s national governments negotiated with international financers over debt relief. Bolivia had just finished negotiating a debt cancellation agreement of its own with several financers in 1987. In Santa Cruz from 1988-1993 this struggle played out in a miniaturized form as the MCC worked with Mennonite debtors to resolve the colonists own debts and recuperate their image as model producers. The narratives were remarkably similar - unscrupulous or "predatory" high interest loans – with subsequent recommendations demanding a dramatic sell-off of capital to pay principal and interest.

In late 1988, MCC representative Tim Penner was working with the soy-producer organization ANAPO to pull both the Ministry of Agriculture and Colony leadership into action in support of indebted colonists. With ANAPO's statistics on soy production to support him, Penner warned the Ministry of the impact on the region and the country resulting from a crisis of Mennonite production if predatory creditors were not held at bay.<sup>781</sup> Another MCCer noted that colony leaders were ambivalent towards their debt-ridden fellow colonists whom "they criticized for not listening to warnings" even if they acknowledged that many of the indebted "did not act recklessly or with dishonorable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>780</sup> Menno J. Ediger, "Report on the Debt Crisis," n.d. MCC-Bolivia Files, Centro Menno Debts, 1979-1999. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>781</sup> Tim Penner report to Akron, Oct. 20, 1988. MCC-Bolivia Files, Centro Menno Debts, 1979-1999. MCCA.

motives."<sup>782</sup> The result was that the MCC, which had long searched for a way to engage with Mexican Mennonite colonists, finally had an opportunity to push colony leaders.

As a result of MCC and ANAPO interventions, the Bolivian government offered affected colonists access to a \$2.5 million low-interest loan. Yet, colonists were unable to receive funds because banks processing the loans demanded property titles as collateral. While colonists did individually own their property, the title was held by the colony as a whole and considered inalienable. Ultimately pushed forward by negative coverage in the local press, colony leadership took some action to consolidate the loans of colonists though they "resisted pressure...to pay unreasonable interest rates and inflated principal claims," and instead re-negotiated several debts.<sup>783</sup> Debtors' land was auctioned off internally along with machinery but the individuals were allowed to continue living on the property and "retain several cows for food and the sale of milk." After 1990 conditions improved somewhat and colonists typically donated a hectare or two of soy beans to help their neighbors cover remaining debts.

Other debtors negotiated directly with their creditors. Jaime Duranovich was working for the oil factory IOL – Aceite Rico - in those years under the control of Silvio Marinkovic who also loaned substantial amounts to Mennonite producers. In 1992, Duranovich was put in charge of a group of clients with five million dollars in debt.<sup>784</sup> He remembers adopting a mixture of strategies to recoup debt. At times they forgave or re-negotiated amounts with Mennonite colonists. In a post-crash Bolivian economy that was increasingly turning to the informal sector, Aceite Rico and other processing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>782</sup> William Janzen, report to Akron on Jan.9-16 Bolivia trip, Jan. 20, 1988. Centro Menno Debts, 1979-1999. MCCA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>783</sup> Dick Plett, report to Akron, n.d. MCC-Bolivia Files, Centro Menno Debts, 1978-1999.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>784</sup> Jaime Duranovich interview, May 15, 2014.

companies also accepted Mennonite cattle in exchange for cash payments as well as inkind services such as land clearing or other products fashioned in the colony.

When they faced economic hardship amid the long mid-century drought in Northern Mexico, Mennonites had engaged in seasonal labor migration to Canada before coming to Bolivia. Those transnational routes remained open and intensified during the Mennonite debt crisis and subsequent years as colonists took part in this long-standing tradition of labor migration. While some Mennonite colonists sent home remittances to pay off their debts, buy new lands and purchase new machinery to replace that which had been auctioned off, others fled to Canada with no intention of returning or paying back outstanding money. Duranovich remembers receiving regular calls from colonists picking vegetables or working in factories in Ontario to cover their debts. Through this combination of transnational labor, selling off of possessions and in-kind services Duranovich reduced his clients' debt-load to one million over the following six years.<sup>785</sup>

Mennonites were not the only lowland colonists who looked to transnational migration to escape the worst of Bolivia's debt crisis. Their Okinawan and Japanese neighbors were also "returning home" in those same years and for many of the same reasons. Facing a critical labor shortage in the late eighties, the Japanese government altered its immigration law in 1990 to allow Japanese descendents (whose grandparents were born in Japan) to return as "guest workers" in unskilled factory labor. Along with a large-scale migration of Japanese Brazilians, many Japanese and Okinawan Bolivians facing debt and bleak economic prospects in Bolivia also took advantage of this program. The result was that by 1995 there was an estimated 200,000 Latin American "dekasegi"

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

or migrant workers living in Japan.<sup>786</sup> Katoshi Higa of Colony Okinawa had just finished high school in the late eighties and remembers that nearly all of his friends left to go work in Japan.<sup>787</sup>

The transnational responses of Mennonite, Okinawan and Japanese Bolivians find parallels with their Bolivian neighbors who also returned to prior migratory strategies and forged new ones in neo-liberal Bolivia. With the Argentine peso fixed in relation to the U.S. dollar in the 1990s, large numbers of Bolivians migrated to Argentina. While earlier migrations had centered on the harvest in northern provinces these new migrants often traveled to Buenos Aires to work in construction and textiles rapidly converting the former Jewish Argentina neighborhood of "Once" into a center of the new community of Bolivian porteños (residents of Buenos Aires).<sup>788</sup> Bolivians also traveled in large numbers to São Paolo and - with the Argentine collapse of 2001 – to Spain.

While transnational migration emerged as one survival strategy in the face of drought and the debt crisis, Mennonite colonists, the vast majority remaining in Bolivia, also began to shift the way they farmed. It is telling that colony officials allowed indebted Mennonites to maintain a few milk cows even when their agricultural equipment was auctioned off.<sup>789</sup> "Milk money" continued to provide colonists with a consistent source of income that stood in contrast to the risky, speculative nature of cash-cropping in soy beans. Having lost everything in the late eighties or in subsequent drought years, some colonists would turn from soy entirely and instead plant pasture and drought-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>786</sup> Rosalia Avila-Tàpies and Josefina Domínguez-Mujica, "Postcolonial Migrations and Diasporic Linkages between Latin America and Japan and Spain," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 487–511.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>787</sup> Katoshi Higa interview with author, July 3, 2014. Colonia Okinawa.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>788</sup> Emanuela Guano, "The Denial of Citizenship."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>789</sup> Dick Plett, report to Akron, n.d. MCC-Bolivia Files, Centro Menno Debts, 1978-1999.

resistant sorghum to serve as fodder for their expanding dairy herds. Once again colonist Jacob Knelsen's accounting is illustrative. Knelsen never planted more than thirty hectares of soy after the disastrous 1990 harvest while quadrupling his annual production of milk in those same years. Internal colony tax records from the 2000s indicate the scope of this shift in which income from milk and cheese often exceeds that of soy and other grains.<sup>790</sup> Other farmers would turn to drought-tolerant cash crops. Brother-in-laws Wilhelm Buhler and Juan Fehr, whose father-in-law Peter Friesen had introduced them to the transnational tractor trade in the eighties, would pioneer sesame and peanut production in Riva Palacio in the nineties.

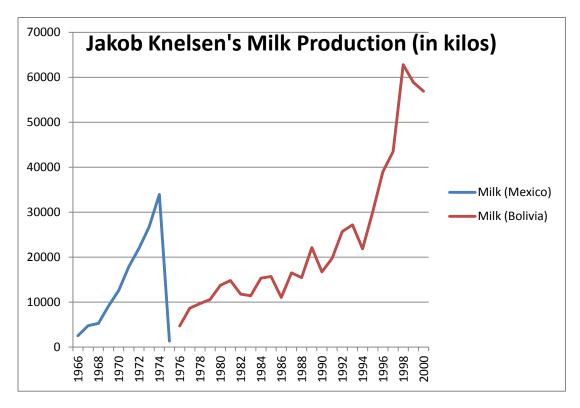


Figure 15 Milk Production, Jakob Knelsen, Bolivia and Mexico, 1966-2000.Compiled from Knelsen's personal account book suggest the continued importance of dairy for Mennonites in Mexico and Bolivia and increase in milk production after poor harvests in the late eighties.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>790</sup> Financial records Riva Palacio colony, Personal Documents of Vorsteher Abram Klassen. Viewed and discussed April 21, 2015. Riva Palacio.

In environmental terms, the crisis of the late eighties was simultaneously aberrant – (attributable to extreme weather) – and systemic (a product of the land-clearing practices of Mennonites that had created a vast treeless plain of the dense forest that the first Mennonite delegates had surveyed back in 1968). In response to the latter, Bolivia's Forestry Service became increasingly involved in regulating the usage of windbreaks in the Mennonite colonies a fact mentioned with degrees of approval and frustration by nearly all of my interviewees in Riva Palacio colony. Other agricultural practices of the colonists, having gone unnoticed in previous years, were also subject to criticism. As soybean farming turned towards "no-till" technology in the nineties, agricultural extension agents became increasingly critical of deep-plowing, claiming that it was environmentally destructive. As new Mennonite colonies to the east of the Río Grande, adopted no-till technology, the original Mexican Mennonite colonies of Riva Palacio, Santa Rita and Swift Current came to be seen, not as progressive farmers but as backwards, technological holdouts.<sup>791</sup>

## Conclusion: Survival Strategies and Mennonite Expansion in Neo-liberal Bolivia

In late 1995, a retired Bolivian general revealed that the body of Che Guevara lay buried near the small Santa Cruz town of Vallegrande. Over the following two years a joint Cuban-Argentina forensic team scoured the site without a trace of the remains. Finally in July of 1997 the investigators discovered several skeletons in a mass grave one of which was subsequently confirmed as Guevara's. A few months later, Che's bones were ceremonially repatriated to Cuba where they were interned in a mausoleum

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>791</sup> ANAPO officials in conversation with author, April-May 2014. Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

constructed for the occasion. It had been exactly three decades since the two parties – Mexican Mennonites and Cuban revolutionaries – surveyed the densely forested frontier only a few miles apart from one another on the edge of the Santa Cruz plains. From that brief moment of proximity the legacy of those two transnational delegations diverged sharply. Even as Guevara's revolutionary legacy in Latin America remained central at the close of the twentieth century – evident in a spectrum of revolutionary organizations from the FARC in Colombia to the Zapatistas in Southern Mexico – the protracted search for his remains is testament to the negligible physical transformation engendered by his presence in Santa Cruz in the sixties.

In contrast, while Mennonites continued to reside at the physical and metaphorical margins of Latin America, their environmental and agrarian impact was evident to anyone traveling through the Bolivian lowlands at the close of the century. The intertwined economic and environmental crisis that Mennonites experienced in the eighties shook the previous image of Mexican Mennonites as modern, prosperous farmers even as the eventual response – a negotiation of Mennonite debt by government officials, ANAPO, oil companies and the MCC – suggested just how critical Mennonite production had become for Santa Cruz and the nation. The practices that Mexican Mennonites had used to weather the years of poor harvests and indebtedness continued to be employed over the following decade as the Mennonite population and its impact on the Bolivian lowlands increased.

Back in 1978 when barely over 10,000 Mennonites possessed more tractors than the 300,000 rural residents of the department of Santa Cruz, the "modernity" of Mennonite agricultural practices was unquestionable. It did not matter that Mexican Mennonites drove tractors with steel wheels – though their rejection of rubber tires had been the internal conflict that had driven their emigration from Mexico. In Santa Cruz it only mattered that they farmed with tractors at all. By the 1990s, the situation had changed dramatically. Japanese and Okinawan migrants continued to modernize their operations into large agro-industrial cooperatives. A wave of Brazilian expatriate soy farmers, priced out of the Brazilian soy boom were purchasing land across Santa Cruz and farming on an industrial scale with the latest equipment. Paraguayan and Mexican Mennonites that had left the Old Colony church also began to use the latest technology. In this context, the Old Colony use of steel wheels became an issue once again. ANAPO officials and other agricultural extension agents argued that the steel wheels increased soil compaction and had aggravated the environmental crisis of the late eighties. Yet they were unsuccessful in encouraging the colony to switch to rubber over the following years. Beyond the specifics the steel wheel came to more broadly represent the Old Colony's intransigence and "backwardness" in the face of technological intervention.

Yet if Mennonite production techniques lagged behind those of new more "modern" farmers, this was made up for by the continued expansion of Mennonite settlement across the Bolivian lowlands in those same years. Reflecting on the debt crisis in 1988, the MCC had attributed one cause of Mennonite indebtedness to the high cost of buying land in Riva Palacio colony. The need to live and farm in the colony had created an extreme market juxtaposition in which un-cleared land in the colony would sell for \$100-200 per hectare while neighboring off-colony land would sell for less than one tenth that amount.<sup>792</sup> High birth rates among colony Mennonites accounted for much of this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>792</sup> Dick Plett, report to Akron, n.d. MCC-Bolivia Files, Centro Menno Debts, 1978-1999.

pressure. In the midst of the debt crisis Abe Enns remembers that there were over seven thousand people living in Riva Palacio, a colony originally designed to hold five thousand.<sup>793</sup>

In the wake of the crisis colony leadership actively responded to that pressure. Over the following years Mennonites established "daughter colonies" across the Bolivian lowlands. The term "daughter" colony is widely used among scholars working on Mennonites and other similar communal religious communities such as Hutterites.<sup>794</sup> It is likely derived from biology (cell division by mitosis) or entomology (from the colony practices of ants). Riva Palacio purchased land far to the south of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in the late eighties forming the colony of Pinondi and in the following two decades purchased new lands to form the colonies of Manitoba, El Dorado and New Mexico. Other Mexican and Paraguayan Mennonite colonies did the same. The pace of this expansion would have likely even surprised INC director Roberto Lemaitre who in 1969 had written that "this is only the beginning of an immigration which we have reasons to believe will gain momentum day by day."<sup>795</sup> The expansion of Mennonite settlement pushed the agricultural frontier in Santa Cruz eastward. While cruceño agriculture was long centered on the "integrated north" – the area to the west of the Río Grande – in the nineties and beyond Mennonites and other farmers looked to the east side of the river when purchasing new land. Extending across the plains of Chiquitos towards the Brazilian border this region was the object of a World Bank sponsored initiative from 1991-1997. Known as the "Eastern Lowlands Project," it aimed to improve infrastructure

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>793</sup> Abe Enns interview, Aug. 11, 2014. Riva Palacio.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>794</sup> For an example see, T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>795</sup> Lemaitre, "What Benefits?"

along the frontier and help secure credit for small farmers. World Bank officials identified Mennonites as key recipients of program funds. By the first years of the twenty-first century, the number of hectares under soybean cultivation in the eastern "expansion zone" was double that being farmed in the "integrated north."<sup>796</sup>

While Mennonites of Mexican descent still represented the majority of Bolivian Mennonites, those new colonies also included Mennonites with Canadian, Paraguayan and Belizean passports and an increasing majority of Bolivian-born Mennonites. Colonists ranged from horse-and-buggy Mennonites that used steel wheeled tractors, like those in Riva Palacio, to Mennonites that owned pickup trucks, used the latest no-till technology and GPS-guided tractors, lived in air-conditioned homes and had internet access. Though they faced increasing competition from Brazilian expatriate soybean farmers, Mennonites continued to produce approximately 40% of Bolivia's soybeans which in the mid-nineties accounted for half of all Bolivia's export income.<sup>797</sup>

Colony Mennonites, as the MCC had predicted in 1975, had demonstrated their paradoxical ability to both pursue physical and cultural isolation while simultaneously "revolutionizing native economies." By the end of the first decade of the 2000s there were approximately seventy Mennonite colonies in Bolivia with a combined population of 70,000 spread out across Santa Cruz and the neighboring department of the Beni. As a large and growing presence, their visibility in Santa Cruz was a testament to that transformation. The intersection of 6 de Agosto and 10 de Agosto in Santa Cruz had become an informal Mennonite market with travel agencies, lawyer's offices, pesticide

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>796</sup> Memoria Anual. ANAPO, 2002, 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>797</sup> Memoria Anual. ANAPO, 1997/98, 78.

vendors, bible salesmen and stores selling imported Mexican cowboy hats. A fleet of taxis, buses and vans traveled back and forth to the colonies on a daily basis and midweek in particular which had become known in Santa Cruz as Mennonite market day. As that presence, and its impact became ever more apparent, Mennonites continued to employ the range of transnational, legal and agrarian strategies, described in this chapter, that legitimated and supported their conspicuous and increasingly commonplace presence.

## **Conclusion: Past and Present in the Bolivian Lowlands**

As I prepared to board my flight to Bolivia in May of 2011, I waited in a queue behind several Mennonite men and women at Miami International Airport. This airport is one of the main air-hubs connecting Bolivia with North and Central America. As part of a constellation of transnational Mennonite farmers living across the frontiers of the Americas, my fellow passengers might have been returning from any number of colonies in Canada, the U.S., Mexico or Belize, constituting one of the diverse migrant streams that constitute Bolivia's March to the East. In their trademark cowboy hats and overalls, bonnets and long dresses they were as easily identifiable to me in 2011 as they had been to US diplomat William Dietrich – who had encountered them while stationed in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in the 1970s. As our plane touched down in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, after a brief stopover in La Paz, I noticed the marked contrast between the airport of Bolivia's capital city and the decidedly modern infrastructure of Santa Cruz's Viru Viru International Airport. Constructed in the 1970s with a large loan from the Japanese government, the airport reflects the impact of another of Bolivia's migrant streams. In addition to the city's new airport, Japanese and Okinawan migration led to a multiplicity of Japanese supported development projects in the lowlands. Leaving the airport and heading into the city I noticed that the influence of large-scale migration of Andeans to Santa Cruz was even more apparent. Statistically, by the year 2000, transplanted highlanders constituted a full quarter of the department's population of two million.<sup>798</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>798</sup> Bret Gustafson, "Spectacles of Autonomy and Crisis: Or, What Bulls and Beauty Queens Have to Do with Regionalism in Eastern Bolivia," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (2006): 351–79, 355.

Leaving my apartment building where Beni Street meets Santa Cruz's multi-lane "Second Ring," the three migrant streams condensed to a single intersection. Once marking the urban periphery of Santa Cruz, where city gave way to bush, the thoroughfare is now one of twelve concentric ring roads encircling the rapidly expanding city. I could cross the street for lunch at the "Japanese Social Center" which included a dormitory for students from San Juan Yapacaní and Okinawa colonies that come to study in Santa Cruz. The cross-walks and median of the intersection were peopled by the range of largely Andean informal workers (newspaper and candy vendors as well as young kids juggling and breakdancing for waiting traffic) that one finds across Bolivia's major cities. Alongside them Mennonite families from drought-stricken and impoverished Durango colony in the south of the department sold cheese, peanut butters, cookies and jam to motorists. This distinctly cruceño street scene developed every Wednesday, an unofficial Mennonite "market day" when colonists from the seventy Mennonite colonies in lowland Bolivia stream into Santa Cruz to conduct business, obtain paperwork, make longdistance phone calls and shop. Hailing a cab at that same corner, my taxi driver was very likely to originate from Potosí or Oruro, to have a house and farm out in settler zones near Basilio or El Torno, and to have purchased his vehicle after a particularly successful harvest season.



Figure 16 Abram Wiebe sells jam at a busy intersection in Santa Cruz.Wiebe, a Mennonite colonist from Durango Colony in the south of Santa Cruz department, is one of many Mennonite colonists who sell peanut butter, jam and other goods to motorists on the "Segundo Anillo" every Wednesday. Photo taken by author with Wiebe's permission. July 23, 2014.

In light of the immediacy and visibility of this history of migration, my research felt highly relevant and surprisingly challenging. Whether I was taking the old Santa-Cruz-Corumbá train out to San José de Chiquitos in 2011 or riding in a bus on the brand new, IDB-financed "Inter-oceanic Corridor" (connecting Bolivia to the soybean zones and export infrastructure of Brazil) in 2014, my personal movements seemed everywhere enabled and entangled in the past and present of this ongoing state project of eastern expansion.

The point was driven home on a visit to Canadiense II ("Canadian II"), a colony of Paraguayan Mennonites where I spoke with Peter Fehr who was seven years old when his family entered Bolivia in 1957.<sup>799</sup> His name and age are dutifully noted in the colony's case file in the National Archives in Sucre. As we sat drinking cold yerba mate (a Paraguayan tea), I explained to him, and his neighbor Abram Falk, my intention to write a history of lowland colonization from the 1952 revolution to debt crisis of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>799</sup> Expediente de Colonia Canadiense. IC 628. ANB.

1980s - roughly covering the period of state-led development in Bolivia. Fehr and Falk looked puzzled. "Why stop there?" they asked.<sup>800</sup>

I did not have an answer. For Mennonite, Okinawan and Andean colonists who continue to expand across the eastern plains it seems that such a periodization makes little sense. For example, when I last visited Bolivia in April of 2015, the Mexican Mennonite colony of Riva Palacio was in the process of purchasing yet another block of 30,000 hectares of new land to join with four "daughter colonies" opened after their arrival in 1968. In San Julián, one can visually track the expansion of the rapidly growing colony in the impromptu stores created by tractor-trailers that simply back up to the edge of the congested highway and opened their doors to business. In 2013, I visited Sagrado Corazón, a colony a short distance to the north of La Guabirá (Santa Cruz's largest sugar refinery) and attended the annual "Day of Corn." After wandering through the experimental plots and machinery demonstrations I listened as Bolivia's Vice-President Álvaro García Linera – a former guerrilla fighter - proclaimed to a large group of farmers that "without corn, there is no country (sin maíz, no hay pais)." He explained his administration's plans to triple agricultural production and frontier expansion over the next five years.<sup>801</sup>

The past was undeniably present in the preceding scenarios in Santa Cruz. Yet, paradoxically, the continuing growth of the region tends to obscure as much as highlight that history. Since the debt crisis of the 1980s migration to the lowlands has increased exponentially and the urban and rural regions of Santa Cruz have grown apace. At times,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>800</sup> Abram Falk and Peter Fehr interview with author, Oct.22, 2013. Canadiense Colony.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>801</sup> Speech by Álvaro García Linares, Aug. 30, 2013 at Dia del Maíz exhibition, Sagrado Corazón, Santa Cruz.

this growth seems poised to devour earlier histories of settlement. When Peter Fehr was colony administrator of Canadiense I in early 2000 he decided to commemorate the original colony's fiftieth anniversary with a small monument. When he joined many of his neighbors in Canadiense II – a "daughter" colony on the east side of the Río Grande - a few years later, he elected to take the monument with him because the original colony was on the verge of being swallowed by the expanding city and only a few Mennonites remained in the original site.<sup>802</sup> The monument now sits in relative obscurity (in his backyard) signifying a personal, rather than public, claim to the past. Mexican Mennonites, like those in Riva Palacio (who are approaching their own fifty-year anniversary in Santa Cruz), repeatedly explained to me they have no intention of officially commemorating their history.

Other colonies mobilize the past to a much greater extent. Yet in this process of official remembering, certain aspects of settler history fade from view. Okinawa colony contains a historical museum and frequently publishes official colony histories. In 2014 the colony celebrated its sixtieth anniversary by inviting Bolivian and Japanese officials as well as the general public to a grand multi-day public ceremony. The event was equally a performance of their integration in national society and their continued transnationalism. In this scripted spectacle, the colony carefully eluded the overt racism they experienced and actively contested in their first years in Bolivia.

In rapidly growing San Julián colony I attended the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the colony's founding where frequent references were made to the original pioneers' struggle against a hostile nature, the utter lack of support from government and the foundational

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>802</sup> Abram Falk and Peter Fehr interview, Oct.22, 2013.

1984 road block.<sup>803</sup> Missing was any reference to the history of the inter-faith coalition of Methodists, Mennonites and Maryknolls that administered the project throughout the seventies. In all likelihood this would have pleased members of the United Church Committee who frequently emphasized that, in their quest to reduce settler "dependency," they wanted to leave "no legacy." However, this absence from the colony narrative also points to the tenuousness of historical memory in a region that continued to receive massive waves of new migrants well into the twenty-first century. The majority of colonists had indeed arrived long after Harry Peacock, Marty Miller and other members of the CIU departed the colonies. In a different context, historian José Moya makes a similar point. While the majority of European migrants came to Argentina from the 1890s to the 1920s, it remains critical to understand the earlier migration of the seventies and eighties which, while small numerically, conditioned that subsequent migrant flow.<sup>804</sup>

Atlanta (the place where this dissertation was written) famously promoted itself as a "city too busy to hate," in the midst of the intense and violent civil rights struggles of the sixties. Santa Cruz de la Sierra (a city that has grown from 40,000 to 2 million in barely over half a century) currently carries the inclusive migrant-friendly motto of "we are all Santa Cruz."<sup>805</sup> It might just as easily describe itself as a city and region "too busy to remember," situated in opposition to the nation's Andean core where a much more explicit relation to the nation's history of colonialism and injustice is evident in official government policies to "decolonize" society. This conclusion and epilogue seeks to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>803</sup> Official Speeches. San Julián 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary, June 23, 2014. San Julián.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>804</sup> José Moya Cousins and Strangers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>805</sup> Gobierno Autónomo Departamental, Santa Cruz. http://www.santacruz.gob.bo/Accessed May 5, 2016.

respond to both the impermanence of the past and inescapability of the present in Santa Cruz's development. I begin by drawing together the past half century of settlement and regional development discussed in the previous five chapters and exploring the range of actors I have analyzed. Secondly, I highlight the contributions this dissertation makes to local, national and transnational history and our periodization of the second half of the twentieth century in Bolivia. In the epilogue I address Peter Fehr's question ("Why stop there?"), by returning to the ways that migration and development continue to play out in the twenty-first century in Bolivia.

A transnational history of migration (or mobility in the broadest sense), this dissertation seeks to employ the five distinct case studies discussed above to answer a common question. What happens when people, ideas and technologies are transplanted from one location to the next? More specifically, how are the meanings of that mobility interpreted, conscribed, and enacted in a frontier landscape? In this respect, Santa Cruz provides an exceptionally rich terrain for addressing and answering this question. Okinawan migrants moved from the rocky islands of the Pacific to the tropical lowlands. Andeans have not only moved from highland to lowland. They also crossed the border to work as sugar cane harvesters in northern Argentina before settling in Santa Cruz. Mennonites carried village structures, language and social institutions from Russia and Canada through Mexico, Belize and Paraguay.

Humans are not the only "migrants" in this narrative. It is a story that equally depended upon the movement of non-human actors from flora and fauna to technology. In Chapter five I explain how aging U.S. farm equipment (nearly obsolete in the North American context) was re-purposed by Mennonite famers in Santa Cruz to jump-start a "modern" agricultural revolution. I might have just as easily turned to Gir, Kankrej and Ongole cattle brought from India to Brazil in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and cross-bred to form the hardy tropical "zebu" breed of beef cattle. Taken across the border to Bolivia in the fifties and sixties, introduction of this breed initially received a hostile response from local ranchers but soon replaced *creole* stock. Today, Zebu and Nelore cattle (another indo-Brazilian transplant) dominate the cattle industry in Santa Cruz and across much of Amazonia.<sup>806</sup>

Agro-industrial innovation also brought a different sort of migrant in the form of the humble soybean. From Asia to the United States and then again to Brazil it was adapted for the semi-tropical climate of the *cerrado* in the sixties and seventies. In the process the meaning of soy changed. A food crop in Asia became a versatile agroindustrial cash crop in South America circulating in animal feedlots and also used as a food preservative and as bio-diesel. Along with its derivatives (oil, soycake), soy accounts for the largest share of Bolivia's export earnings after natural gas resulting in a profound impact on the economy and ecology of the Bolivian lowlands. Its dramatic expansion in Santa Cruz is part of a much broader transnational story. A transnational "United Soy Republic" has arisen at the heart of South America and stretches across Brazil, Bolivia Argentina and Paraguay - now producing the majority of the world's soybeans. Corn, rice and wheat have been central to the narrative and historiography of the Green Revolution. In this dissertation I have placed South American soy at the center of that narrative as well. I have done so by connecting the migrant soybean to another

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>806</sup> Robert Wilcox, "Zebu's Elbows: Cattle Breeding and the Environment in Central Brazil, 1890-1960," in Christian Brannstrom et al., eds., *Territories, Commodities and Knowledges: Latin American Environmental History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2004).

transplant - Mennonite migrants, the pioneers of soy production in Bolivia - who have been, and continue to stand, at the center of this novel agrarian transformation.

This is also a narrative of transplanted knowledge – of development, modernization, faith and ethnicity. What happens to ideas as they migrate from one context to another? Jorge Ruiz's films – shown in La Paz, Santa Cruz, at the 1961 Punta del Este conference and beyond - provide a suggestive response. Distinct audiences embraced certain elements of Ruiz's narrative and aesthetic repertoire while bringing their own meanings to his films. This was most notably the case for regional audiences watching "La Vertiente" in Santa Cruz and for Che Guevara who criticized the U.S. vision of rural development displayed in *Los Ximul*, which premiered at the inaugural conference for the Alliance for Progress. U.S. authorities even dubbed, La Vertiente, a Ruiz film about a community water project in the small town of Rurrenabaque, into multiple languages and distributed copies across the developing world. We do not know if the film was ever shown or how it might have been received across the Global South, but we do know that Ruiz transferred his aesthetic repertoire quite smoothly as he left Bolivia to film similar rural modernization projects across the Americas. U.S. support provided the physical and financial infrastructure that made Ruiz's impressive mobility possible. However, it was the broader concept of development that made his vision appealing to a variety of regimes from Guatemala and Ecuador to Peru.

We can see a similar desire to transplant ideas and practices of rural modernization in the seventies, eighties and nineties as streams of rural sociologists, anthropologists and NGOs flocked to Bolivia's largest and most "successful" colonization project, San Julián, before moving to other projects across the Americas, Africa and Southeast Asia. In tracing the religious origins of San Julián I have also shown how U.S. Methodists many hailing from Texas – like Santa Cruz a former frontier that had become the center of ranching and oil production - understood the spiritual and social challenges of Bolivia's lowland colonists in an era characterized by liberation theology and authoritarian rule. Conversely, the travels of Bolivian Methodist Jaime Bravo during the Banzer dictatorship flip that North-South perspective and suggestively demonstrate how his Aymara background and experience organizing migrant farmworkers in Bolivia carried through to the North American context. Speaking of his years of exile in Dallas, he remembered working with "Julio César Chávez, el Brown Power" but that he "was also confused with the North American *indigenas*, and various said, "hey brother" and I was "red power" as well."<sup>807</sup>

A national project of internal colonization, the March to the East involved a compelling mixture of national and foreign actors standing in as proxies for an absent state. These included internal migrants, immigrants, missionaries and filmmakers. While government officials like Walter Guevara Arze might have envisioned the "March to the East" it was those individuals and groups that gave meaning to the unprecedented mobility that defined Santa Cruz in the late twentieth century. Each chapter of this dissertation thus moves between the local, the national and the transnational while focusing a distinct actor or set of actors that participated in the March to the East.

I began by exploring the way that Jorge Ruiz and his collaborators produced a seductive narrative and aesthetic of lowland colonization. State projects, as James Scott

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>807</sup> Jaime Bravo interview, Aug. 2014.

has famously argued, need to be visualized in order to be enacted.<sup>808</sup> This was certainly the case in Bolivia. Before large-scale colonization got underway the state worked extensively to represent its outcome. Through the work of individuals like Jorge Ruiz and the National Cinematography Institute, the revolutionary government consolidated a frontier imaginary that was no less enduring for being wildly optimistic. Borrowing from Doris Sommer I argue that the family unit played a privileged role in an essentially "territorial" process of integration.<sup>809</sup> While lesser known than the classics of Latin American literature (referred to by Sommer as "foundational fictions"), the "fictionaldocumentary" style of Ruiz sought to expose the national and regional tensions of lowland settlement in a conscribed and manageable space where they could be swiftly reconciled through a gendered union that was both racial and environmental. To cite the Ruiz film entitled "A Little Bit of Economic Diversification", the resulting new mestizo of Bolivia, would be a fusion of "kolla blood and camba land."

Ruiz provided both the state, viewers, and international financers with a number of easily digestible narratives about what settlement should look like. Prospective Andean settlers faced the challenges of an unfamiliar tropical nature. "The jungle disappears and progress advances," assures a suggestively-titled pamphlet, "A Human Transplant."<sup>810</sup> "They will soon be good friends," that same pamphlet continued, in which the image of a young child and a tropical bird, stood in for good relations between new transplants and established farmers in the settlement zones. The settlers, "are now totally adjusted to their new environment and they don't get homesick for their mountains

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>808</sup> Scott, Seeing Like a State.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>809</sup> Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>810</sup> Hugo Alfonso Salmon and Jorge Ruiz "Un transplante humano." n.p.

since they can visit them any weekend," the pamphlet elaborates while remaining silent on the incredibly high rates of settler abandonment that worried officials in the colonization zones.<sup>811</sup>

Moving from this national imagining to its regional reception, I indicate the way that residents of Santa Cruz responded to such films and to the promising infrastructure and development projects they portrayed. While the happy union of "camba" (lowlander) and "kolla" (highlander) was a frequent trope for Ruiz, lowlanders – and particularly the elite of Santa Cruz – were not always receptive to the large scale migration of indigenous Bolivians. While cruceño elites had long nurtured a discourse that their region had been "abandoned" by the state, they quickly shifted this rhetoric to one of "invasion" when confronted with a wave of incoming Andean migrants.

This regionalist response intensified over the course of the March to the East and is critical to understanding the central paradox of this dissertation. While Okinawan and Mennonite migrants were highly visible foreigners in Santa Cruz and met some initial opposition, they were ultimately embraced by cruceños as modern, desirable producers. Over the following decades, they consolidated this position as model farmers. In a surprising contrast, betraying the racial underpinnings of regional identity, cruceños treated their fellow indigenous Bolivians from the nation's highlands as an undesirable, and even foreign, presence.

While I began this dissertation by understanding the March to the East as a way of "seeing like a state," the second two chapters of this dissertation turn to ways of

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

"speaking to a state" by highlighting the voices and practices of migrants – Mennonite, Okinawan, Andean - who answered the MNR's call to colonize the East. In Chapter Two I trouble the idea that eastern expansion was solely a national project by placing both Okinawans and Paraguayan Mennonites in the streets of La Paz and the fields of Santa Cruz in the radical early days of the 1952 revolution. I further extend this transnational perspective by traveling to post-war Okinawa and mid-century Mexico and linking geopolitical and environmental disasters – U.S. occupation and Northern Mexico's midcentury drought - to the transnational streams that brought Okinawans and Mexican Mennonites to Santa Cruz.

This transnational approach reflects the multi-sited nature of my research and seeks to push the boundaries of Bolivian historiography that, as if mirroring the nation's land-locked geography, has been notoriously inward-looking. The histories of repatriated Okinawans and their struggles against U.S. military base construction or the travels of Mennonite "braceros" to work harvesting sugar beets and tomatoes in Ontario are not simply transnational curiosities. The experiences of "braceros" and "evictees" structured the way that those new migrants established themselves in Santa Cruz. These transnational histories offer surprising parallels with Andean migrants who also experienced landlessness, overcrowding and undocumented "bracero" labor before settling in Santa Cruz.

For many migrants, experiences of settlement were radically different from that promised in the previously-mentioned films and pamphlets. In Chapter Three, I focus on the letters that Andeans wrote to the state - both before and after migrating to the tropics. In doing so, I flip the standard perspective of high modernism which explores how elites and planner have attempted to implement their visions of modernity. In contrast, I demonstrate how subaltern actors made their own meanings – sometimes complimentary, sometimes confrontational – of internal colonization projects. On one hand, this approach draws on a rich history of "petitioning" state and crown authorities in modern and colonial Latin America. On the other hand, this genre takes on a unique meaning within the context of mid-twentieth century development. Initially, the letters of Andean settlers containing bitter complaints of missing services and absent officials seem to resonate with the larger narrative of "failure" in the historiography of agrarian reform and colonization in Latin America.<sup>812</sup> While some commentators end their analysis with that critique I suggest that failure was not an end-point in the discussion. I argue that petitioners sought to generate further state interventions through denouncing failure and inverting a discourse of abandonment where it was the state that had abandoned them in the colonies and not the other way around.

One key response to this history of state failings and settler "abandonment" in the lowlands was the work of foreign religious organizations. Like other actors described in this dissertation, "faith-based workers" became proxies for an absent state and assumed increasingly involved roles in Bolivian colonization. As I have shown, the activities of missionaries encompassed a broad spectrum of work that moved from traditional religious activities ("ministering") to decidedly secular ones ("administering"). `1n regards to the latter, settlement resulted in the displacement of semi-nomadic lowland indigenous groups. Evangelical organizations (like the World Gospel Mission) offered to convert these groups and manage their "incorporation" into Bolivian society. In terms of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>812</sup> See for example, Enrique Mayer Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform.

the former, Methodists, Mennonites and Maryknolls worked with the settlers themselves in public health programs, education and agricultural extension that overlapped with the labor performed by USAID officials or Peace Corps workers.

By drawing in the practices of faith-based development workers I complicate the state-colonist dynamic that emerges in the petitions of the preceding chapter. Missionaries described themselves as key brokers or intermediaries between a heavy-handed state and an abandoned colonist. As foreigners with ties to the U.S. they were also successful brokers – capable of securing North American and European funding in a decade when financing for development was waning. From 1972-1978, for instance, the United Church Committee secured funding from OXFAM as well as from USAID for the San Julián project. By actively writing about their work in academic formats, faith-based workers also moved between the field and the university. For those individuals, "church-based" work was often a springboard to careers with international development agencies and non-governmental organizations.

As a form of flexible capacity that often worked in the absence of the state, these organizations expanded their role in the period of authoritarianism that characterized Bolivia and much of Latin America in the seventies. Authoritarian rule in Bolivia brought an end to many of the possibilities for radical peasant organizing emerging as a result of colonist frustrations. Yet faith-based development appealed to the Banzer regime that turned over the administration of San Julián to missionaries even as it crushed the peasant syndicates that those same missionaries had previously supported. In San Julián, under the apolitical language of "capacitatión," faith-based workers encouraged forms of settler organizing that quietly continued this tradition. With the return to democracy in 1982 and the beginnings of Bolvia's debt crisis, which saw the government slash for state programs, the radical organizing characteristics of the pre-Banzer era reemerged with force. By then, the faith-based United Church Committee had shed much of its original religious orientation and name to become the Integral Development Foundation (FIDES). Along with a wave of new NGOs, FIDES was ideally positioned to take on even greater role in rural development in an era when Bolivia's government abandoned the state-led development programs of the previous decades. Both of these trends are evident in San Julián today where a flood of NGOs operates and where settlers – known in the rest of Bolivia as "rebel people (*gente rebelde*) continue to block roads to demand services.<sup>813</sup>

The final chapter of this dissertation returns to the experience of Mexican Mennonites in Santa Cruz and offers a number of compelling and inter-related ironies that drive home the paradox of lowland development in Bolivia. A revolutionary nationstate that sought to transform "traditional" indigenous subjects into citizens welcomed foreign horse-and-buggy Mennonites and granted them special exemptions that explicitly exempted them from the central domains of modern citizenship. Seeking to develop modern, market-oriented agribusiness on its eastern frontier the MNR invited a communitarian, traditionalist agricultural community that shunned a wide-range of technological innovations. Yet, horse-and-buggy Mexican Mennonites emerged over fifty years as exactly the sort of model, mechanized and market-oriented farmers the Bolivian state hoped to create of its own citizenry. By the end of the twentieth century

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>813</sup> Iván Condori, "En San Julián sigue el bloqueo de la ruta," *La Razón* (La Paz) July 18, 2013. http://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/San-Julian-sigue-bloqueo-ruta\_0\_1871812826.html. Accessed May 30, 2016.

they were the largest producers of Bolivia's most important new cash crop – soybeans. Additionally, they dominated milk and cheese production in Santa Cruz and cultivated new food ways among the Bolivian population. This twin production cultures – soy and cheese – reflected a new logic of lowland development based on export agriculture as well as an enduring rhetoric of food security. For Mennonite farmers they also represented twin logics – of "risky" but lucrative farming and secure subsistence level dairying.

Freed from participation in the military, school and politics, Mennonites consistently defined their sense of belonging in agrarian rather than legal terms. As such they were welcomed by cruceños who favored this Mennonite brand of agrarian citizenship based on their status as model producers for, rather than participants in, the nation. Cruceños embraced Mennonite settlers over Andeans colonists. In contrast to the image of pacifist, productive Mennonites, Andeans were framed as invaders of the land, political manipulators, violent and disorderly. By the late twentieth century, this comparison emerged most clearly in relation to Bolivia's largest agricultural exports - with Andeans imagined as aggressive coca farmers (*cocaleros*) and Mennonites as model soybean farmers (*soyeros*).

This dissertation extends over several distinct political periods from the revolutionary era of the MNR (1952-1964), the transition to authoritarianism and military rule under Barrientos, Hugo Banzer and others (1964-1982), and the return to democracy with its accompanying neoliberal reforms (1982-2000). As I have shown, new political modalities carried distinct consequences for forms of political organizing. Peasant syndicates flourished under the MNR and were suppressed, often violently, by Barrientos

and Banzer only to re-emerge in neoliberal Bolivia. In terms of eastern expansion, broad similarities are also apparent. In this respect, I draw from the work of environmental historians pointing to the environmental continuities between ideologically opposed forms of governance.<sup>814</sup> While Bolivia's post-revolutionary governments may have broken with many of the progressive policies of the MNR they each maintained a consensus around the policy of continuous frontier expansion. Over half a century a series of politically divergent regimes - from the revolutionary and authoritarian to the neoliberal – insisted that the future of national development lay in the east.

In the twenty-first century as twenty years of neoliberal hegemony collapsed in the face of popular protests, Bolivia experienced yet another critical transition. In 2005, the election of Evo Morales marked a new era of "pluri-ethnic socialism" that resonated with the victories of left-leaning governments across Latin America. Along with prominent leaders like Rafael Correa, Hugo Chávez, Lula da Silva and Daniel Ortega, "Evo" – as he is typically referred to in Bolivia - was an outspoken in his criticism of U.S. involvement in the region. He also nationalized key resources and implemented a series of broad social reforms. In a sense, Morales' party Movement to Socialism (MAS) revived the state socialism of the MNR's 1952 revolution but Morales did so from an explicitly indigenous perspective. He employed concepts like "buen vivir" as a model for alternative development predicated on respect for mother earth ("Pachamama").

Whereas Morales' election marked a clear break from late 20<sup>th</sup> century politics of neoliberalism, in terms of the "March to the East" a narrative of political rupture is misplaced. Despite a strong rhetoric of environmentalism, the infrastructure programs,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>814</sup> J. R. McNeill, Something New Under the Sun.

resource development and colonization in the nation's lowlands have continued apace under the Morales government. To those familiar with Morales' biography, this is not surprising. While Morales' indigeneity and his socialism are foundational elements of his political formulation and agenda, his continued support for frontier expansion is linked to another aspect of his history. Like Okinawans, Mennonites and many of his fellow indigenous Bolivians that settled the nation's tropical lowlands, the President is a colonist.

Throughout this dissertation I explore the ways in which personal trajectories – like those of Methodists Harry Peacock and Jaime Bravo, film-maker Jorge Ruiz, sociologist James Tigner or Mennonite leader Johan Wiebe – intersected with the broader dynamics of the March to the East. In this epilogue I turn to Morales' own history. While useful for understanding his present policies, Morales' biography also provides us with another convenient device for weaving together the diverse strands of this dissertation. As a colonist his personal trajectory and political development offer a narrative of transnational and internal migration. Intertwined with the long history of the March to the East, Morales' movements parallel, or directly intersect with, many of the central subjects and actors I have discussed.

After discussing Morales' past I turn to the recent challenges he has faced from the nation's lowlands in the early years of his presidency. New discourses and practices have emerged in the twenty-first century that essentially changed the terms, if not the direction, of eastern expansion. In particular, I examine how ideas of "autonomy" have replaced conceptions of "abandonment" as a mobilizing metaphor for a surprising range of lowland actors. First, I explore the simultaneous demands for autonomy put forward by regional elites and lowland indigenous groups. I then consider how these conceptions of autonomy might be provocatively compared with the conspicuous privileges and forms of cultural and economic autonomy practiced by Bolivian Mennonites.

# **Epilogue: From Abandonment to Autonomy**

In January of 2006 an Aymara migrant became the first indigenous president of Bolivia. Juan "Evo" Morales Ayma was born in rural Orinoca canton in the highland department of Oruro in 1959.<sup>815</sup> In the immediate post-revolutionary period the region appeared frequently in desperate petitions sent in to state authorities like those analyzed in Chapter Three. Five years prior to Morales' birth, the Corregidor of Santiago de Andamarca (fifty kilometers to the north of Orinoca along the shores of Lake Poopó) wrote to the Director of Colonization requesting lands in the new settlement zones. Describing the arid landscape of Oruro as little more than "dunes…with no benefit for the life of man," he worried that many members of his rural region were leaving their communities to seek work abroad.<sup>816</sup>

In 1964, Morales and his family joined the hundreds of thousands of Bolivians that became what politician and writer Fernando Antezana would refer to as "nomads without a country."<sup>817</sup> They traveled south across the *altiplano* and into neighboring Argentina heading as far as Calilegua in the province of Jujuy to work the sugar harvest. Like many Bolivian emigrants they found conditions in Argentina scarcely better than those they had left behind. The family was soon back in Oruro. Little changed for those who eked out a living through small-scale farming and herding. In the late sixties, a group of farmers from Corque (one hundred kilometers to the north of Orinoca) wrote to the President demanding help in the form of agronomists, engineers, seeds and other

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>815</sup> Biographical notes about Evo Morales drawn from Martín Sivak, *Evo Morales: The Extraordinary Rise* of the First Indigenous President of Bolivia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>816</sup> Letter from Corregidor of Andamarca to Ministerio de Colonización, Oct. 26, 1954. IC 628, ANB.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>817</sup> Antezana, Los braceros bolivianos, 16.

assistance that had been entirely lacking. "We want to develop," wrote Maximo Luna and Felix Machaca, "so that one day our sons can be good citizens and good Bolivians."<sup>818</sup>

The Morales family remained in Oruro until the early 1980s when an environmental disaster struck the highlands. El Niño conditions – which had decimated fish stocks in Peru in 1972 and spurred the nascent Mennonite-dominated soy industry in Santa Cruz – repeatedly struck the Bolivian altiplano in the early 1980s. The accompanying severe weather conditions wiped out seventy percent of agricultural production and killed nearly half of the region's herding animals. In the face of the disaster, Morales' father once again decided to relocate the family. Their first move to the Alto Beni colonization zone near La Paz - the focus of Alliance-for-Progress-era projects two decades earlier - was unsuccessful. Ultimately, the Morales family chose the Chapare in the tropical lowlands of Cochabamba department.

While the Chapare and neighboring Chimoré river systems were one of the principal colonization zones of the MNR's March to the East, the 1980s exodus from the altiplano brought new transformations to the region. Along with the El Niño disaster, the economic crisis of that decade drove settlement. Following the neoliberal model proposed by economist Jeffrey Sachs, Victor Paz Estenssoro's government laid off the majority of the state-run mining workforce. In a real-life enactment of Jorge Ruiz's documentary *A Little Bit of Economic Diversification*, many of these ex-miners joined

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>818</sup> Letter to President's office from Maximo Luna and Felix Machaca, Dec. 15, 1968. PR1097. ANB.

rural migrants, "moved to the Chapare and reinvented themselves."<sup>819</sup> From 1981-1986, the population of the region went from 40,000 to 215,000.<sup>820</sup>

The Morales family found land in a tiny settlement of thirty houses, Villa 14 de Septiembre. Experiencing conditions much like those of the Andean migrants described in Chapter Two, they responded in similar ways. With government services almost entirely lacking, these small hamlets quickly organized into syndicates. During the sixties colonists in Yapacaní blocked roads and took hostages to protest a lack of government support. Gaining his first political experience in similar forms of community organizing, Morales eventually worked his way up the union political hierarchy to the level of Executive Secretary of the Federation of the Tropics responsible for thousands of new settlers in the expanding region.

In the Chapare the new migrants created a booming coca industry fueled by strong international demand for cocaine. Along with Mennonite soyeros, these new indigenous cocaleros thus emerged as a defining migrant response to El Niño, the debt crisis and neoliberal reform in Bolivia. In response to the expansion of coca production, the U.S. government made the Chapare a central focus for its Andean drug policy. In addition to pressuring the Bolivian government to curb coca production, USAID introduced an "alternative cropping program" in the region by encouraging small farmers, like the Morales family, to switch to other crops. USAID officials' searched for experienced administrators to run the project and, in a compelling twist, turned to some

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>819</sup> Sivak, Evo Morales, 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>820</sup> Ibid., 39.

of the faith-based development workers that had operated in San Julián colony in the seventies.

Former Methodist missionary Harry Peacock joined the program along with MCC volunteer Marty Miller. Peacock had spent the past eight years – the height of the Contra War - working with a USAID development project along the Nicaragua-Costa Rica border and was familiar with the bipolar logic of US foreign policy, which in the Bolivian case provided funding for both a militarized policy of coca "eradication" and a community development initiative to support "alternative crops." Historian Lars Schoultz identifies a similarly bifurcated logic in the El Salvadorian context where in the eighties, "the United States regularly filled two trucks, one with a Food for Peace shipment and development specialists to address the needs of hungry campesinos, and the other with U.S.-armed and trained Salvadoran soldiers to attack the Communist guerrillas, and sent both trucks down the road toward whatever region of the country happened to be unstable."<sup>821</sup> The escalating War on Drugs in South America similarly vacillated between developmentalist and militarized response.

The credibility that officials like Peacock earned from previous colonization administration in the Bolivian lowlands helped them in their interactions with coca farmers. Harry remembers that a particularly bad meeting with "some of Evo's people who were angry with us," was salvaged when one farmer spoke up to let the group of colonists know that, "before I came to the Chapare, I was in San Julián, I knew this man,…he never lied to us."<sup>822</sup> But despite abundant funding and experienced

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>821</sup> Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 358.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>822</sup> Harry Peacock interview, Aug. 2014.

administrators, the program could not overcome the logistical and economic challenges of the region. It was a near Sisyphean endeavor – an apt metaphor considering that the main logistical challenge to marketing was transporting produce up the steep, rough mountain roads separating the Chapare from the markets of Cochabamba. As Morales remembers, in the late eighties one hundred pounds of coca leaves could fetch the same as about 15,000 oranges.<sup>823</sup> Additionally coca could be harvested four times a year and transported out on a donkey rather than by truck. Marty Miller remembers an incident in which an US embassy official remarked, "surely there is some crop that can replace coca." In jest Miller responded, "Maybe opium?" Miller recalls, "My star kind of fell within the organization after that."<sup>824</sup> Peacock resigned after six years in the Chapare. USAID had spent approximately 300 million in the alternative cropping program with few gains.

As alternative cropping failed, US eradication efforts in the nineties and early 2000s escalated dramatically. The main result of U.S. drug policy in the Chapare was the political development of coca union leaders like Morales. Over those years Morales moved from a lower level representative within the union to one of the central political leaders in the region. Cocaleros led marches to La Paz, blockaded roads and engaged in direct confrontations with eradication agents. Morales was briefly imprisoned in 1995 but elected to Congress for the first time in 1997. He continued his political rise while actively supporting the "Water War" in Cochabamba in 2002 – a conflict over the privatization of the city's water system - and the protests against Gonzalo Sanchez de

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>823</sup> Sivak, Evo Morales, 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>824</sup> Marty Miller interview with author, June 20, 2013. Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Lozada plans to export gas to Chile in 2003. In 2005, the shepherd-turned-braceroturned-lowland migrant won Bolivia's presidential elections.

In the fifties the MNR had hoped that sending impoverished migrants to settle and cultivate Bolivia's "neglected" frontiers could transform the nation. On a more cynical level colonization also involved a spatialization of dissent in which poor, landless Bolivians and radicalized former miners were sent off to the frontiers of the nation. With Morales' surprising victory, one such migrant returned to the seat of national political power. In his inaugural address, Morales highlighted both his Andean origins and his new life as a tropical colonist. "I salute the place where I came from, Orinoca," he began, "...[and] the Federation of the Tropics of Cochabamba...which is my place of birth in the union fight and in the political fight....these two lands taught me about life."<sup>825</sup> Morales' words offered a dual embrace of his identity as a highlander and a lowlander in which, much like the films of Jorge Ruiz, his personal migration had produced the synthesis of Bolivia's bifurcated territorial identity. His address echoed the founding manifesto of the National Federation of Colonizers in 1971 in La Paz. Delegates had argued that colonists like themselves were critical intermediaries that had gained an advanced political awareness because of their origin and the act of migration. In regards to the latter they explained, "the act of migration has conditioned important cultural changes that have them an accelerated awareness of the Bolivian drama."<sup>826</sup> The colonist would be the vanguard of the revolution.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>825</sup> Sivak, Evo Morales, 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>826</sup> "Conclusiones y resoluciones del primer congreso nacional de colonizadores realizado del 17 al 20 de febrero de 1971." BNB.

Morales' words offered a similar narrative resolution to Bolivia's highlandlowland "drama." Yet, ironically - as President - Morales faced an immediate and intense challenge from the nation's lowland elite who – as previous chapters have made clear – did not consider the Andean transplants to represent them. From across the *medialuna* "half-moon" of the Bolivian lowlands, the departments of Pando and Beni in the northern Amazon basin to Santa Cruz and Tarija down in the Chaco met Morales' election with calls for regional autonomy. Morales also faced a very different set of demands for autonomy from lowland indigenous groups who had mobilized politically over the past two decades. Along with the cruceño elite, they often viewed highland indigenous settlers like Morales as "invaders" of their traditional lands. In this final section I place these two demands for autonomy - elite and indigenous – in dialogue with a third form of autonomy exercised by Mennonite migrants in Santa Cruz.

Morales entered the Presidency with a commitment to rewriting the nation's constitution and holding a national referendum on departmental autonomy. In mid-2006, Bolivians voted on convening a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution and on the question of departmental autonomy. The first motion passed. The second vote was divisive. The four lowland departments (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija) all voted in favor of autonomy, while the nation's five highland departments voted against it. The regional split proved contentious. Cruceños celebrated their victory. However, the national government claimed that since a majority of departments had voted against autonomy, the decision held for the entire nation. The conflicting interpretations spurred further protests and the following year additional autonomy referendums were illegally held in Santa Cruz.

Like the "civic struggles" of the late fifties, the autonomy movement in Santa Cruz was led by the Committee Pro-Santa Cruz and included demands for a greater departmental share of oil revenue. It was at its most intense in the two years the Constituent Assembly formulated a new constitution that Bolivians would vote on in 2009. In December of 2007, an estimated one million people rallied for autonomy at the large statue of Christ on the city's second ring. In 2008, autonomy conflicts often pitted "cambas" against "kollas" and other people deemed to be foreign.<sup>827</sup> These were led by organizations like "Camba Nation" founded by Sergio Antelo. The "Cruceño Youth Brigade", an armed wing of the Committee Pro-Santa Cruz, occupied government buildings and marched through Santa Cruz neighborhoods that were home to many Andean migrants. This led to confrontations in the streets. In one of the most notorious moments of the movement, an autonomy supporter attacked an indigenous Andean woman in Santa Cruz's public plaza before being pulled away by several bystanders.

At the time foreign commentators and U.S. officials were warning of a "civil war" or "race war" in Bolivia. The dire predictions proved unfounded.<sup>828</sup> The 2009 Constitution passed with a 67% majority and responded to many of the cruceño demands by guaranteeing expanded forms of autonomy for Bolivian departments. Since 2009 regional opposition to the Morales government steadily declined. While the 2007-2009 autonomy did not lead to sovereignty for Santa Cruz or transform Bolivia into a "failed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>827</sup> Linda C Farthing and Benjamin H. Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 44-50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>828</sup> Bret Gustafson, "By Means Legal and Otherwise: The Bolivian Right Regroups." *NACLA* (2008).

state," it did provide fertile ground for a range of political scientists, anthropologists and other academics to reflect on ideas of regional and national identity.<sup>829</sup>

Bret Gustafson conducted fieldwork in Santa Cruz in the mid-2000s and witnessed the ways that ideas of autonomy played out in large public spectacles in Santa Cruz. In impromptu events like the 2007 rally at the Christ statue and annual celebrations like Carnival and Santa Cruz's business and agricultural fair EXPOCRUZ, Gustafson saw a recurring theme. Elites expressed ideas of autonomy through a gendered discourse of lowland masculinity and femininity. Competitions over prize bulls and local beauty queens figured as key sites for regional self-fashioning. In holding up their cattle and their women, cruceños rehearsed their region's defining environmental and racial tropes – natural fecundity and a supposed non-Andean ethnicity.<sup>830</sup> While it may seem a surprising place to hedge regional uniqueness it is a cultural move also evident in other regional contexts in Latin America most notably in southern Brazil and Northern Mexico - ranching frontiers that also define themselves as "white" within mestizo and mulatto nations.<sup>831</sup>

For Gustafson, few men epitomized the cruceño autonomy movement better than Branko Marinkovic. President of the Committee Pro-Santa Cruz and a vocal supporter of departmental autonomy, Marinkovic is the owner of Santa Cruz's largest soybean processing company IOL, S.A.. He holds extensive ranching properties and farmlands and, naturally, is married to a Bolivian beauty queen. Recognizing that Branko is the son

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>829</sup> See articles in Nicole Fabricant and Bret Gustafson, eds., *Remapping Bolivia: Resources, Territory, and Indigeneity in a Plurinational State* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011).
 <sup>830</sup> Gustafson, "Spectacles of Autonomy and Crisis."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>831</sup> Ruben George Oliven, *Tradition Matters: Modern Gaúcho Identity in Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Rosemblatt, *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*.

of immigrants and has studied in the United States, Gustafson points out the added paradox of cruceño regional identity that "revolves around claims of deeply rooted historical particularity [but] also thrives on accommodations with transnational sources of wealth and power."<sup>832</sup>

While Marinkovic was the very public face of Santa Cruz's autonomy movement in the 2000s, the dramatic regional growth that underpinned its politics – and a good part of Marinkovic's own wealth - was the product of another "transnational source of wealth and power." Branko had courted a Santa Cruz beauty queen of German descent, but his father Silvo Marinkovic had built the family's wealth by courting low-German speaking Mennonite soy producers in the seventies and eighties. By the time of the autonomy movements there were approximately seventy thousand Mennonites living and farming independently in nearly seventy colonies on the plains of Santa Cruz and neighboring lowland departments. For understandable reasons Mennonites did not become symbols of autonomy in Santa Cruz. Yet, it is worth exploring their continuing economic and anecdotal relationship, not only to Marinkovic, but also to "bulls and beauty queens" that emerged as key symbols in this national-regional conflict. As literature professor Rebecca Janzen argues in a recent article on popular media's portrayal of the prosecution of a series of notorious rape cases in one Mennonite colony, bringing together these neighboring conceptions of autonomy in Santa Cruz can be fruitful.<sup>833</sup>

As Gustafson suggests, cruceño identity vacillates between a mythical past and a globalized present. While the distinctive white zebu and Nelore cattle are seen to

<sup>832</sup> Gustafson, "By Means Legal or Otherwsie."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>833</sup> Rebecca Janzen, "Media Portrayals of Low German Mennonite "Ghost Rapes" Challenge the Bolivian Plurinational State" *A ContraCorriente* (Spring 2016): 246-262.

symbolize a deep-seated regional identity they are in fact recently imported breeds of Indo-Brazilian stock that have displaced traditional *creole* herds. In a further irony, Mennonite ranchers have become primary producers of this "cruceño" symbol just as they continue to produce significant quantities of soybeans – another defining cruceño export that is everywhere on display in agricultural fairs.

Mennonite cattlemen might not compete in the yearly best-of-breed competitions at EXPOCRUZ, but you can find them in half a dozen cattle auction houses on the outskirts of Santa Cruz. Immature cattle are brought in from the Beni to be sold and fattened on local farms and Mennonite farmers, like Abram Hamm stroll the raised walkways above the outdoor pens inspecting the new arrivals and planning out their bids. In the face of volatile commodity prices and unpredictable weather, cattle-raising has emerged as a more stable, if less lucrative, business than cash cropping for many Mennonites. Of the distinctive white zebu (the border-crossing Indo-Brazilian cattle that have come to define Santa Cruz), Mennonite colonist Abe Enns says, "You sell the white ones once per year, you have to see if the money will reach."<sup>834</sup>

In contrast to rural cattle culture, Santa Cruz's beauty queens seem distant from the conservatively dressed Mennonite population of the department. Yet –in an admittedly anecdotal turn - varying forms of mobility and the conspicuous visibility of both Mennonites and cruceña models can bring the two together in unexpected ways. "Got off the plane today in Santa Cruz" a journalist wrote in 2014, "the line to board the next flight was composed of beauty queens and Mennonites."<sup>835</sup> As the diary of Johan

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>834</sup> Abe Enns interview, Aug. 11, 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>835</sup> Sara Shariari (Freelance Journalist), Social Media post, Oct 21, 2014.

Wiebe discussed in Chapter Five indicates, Mennonites exercise a surprising degree of mobility whether they are traveling to Sucre for medical attention, to La Paz for paperwork, or back to Canada or Mexico to work or visit family. With Santa Cruz, the center of a regional fashion industry, one also finds cruceña models flying between national and international destinations.

If the airplane represents the unexpected transnationalism of Mennonite settlers, the distinctive horse-and-buggy stands at the opposite end of this spectrum of mobility and seems to symbolize the rootedness, simplicity and deliberate traditionalism of Mennonite communities.<sup>836</sup> Yet in an ironic twist, Mennonite buggies and Santa Cruz beauty queens have also come together in strange ways. In May of 2012, the Santa Cruz newspaper *El Día* carried an article entitled "Villamontes shines with the most beautiful of Bolivia."<sup>837</sup> The author reported on the visit of aspiring contestants for "Miss Bolivia 2012" to the city a short distance to the south of Santa Cruz and on the edge of the Gran Chaco. "Miss Santa Cruz" Alexia Viruez would go on to win the competition in June. On that May day, the entire delegation of twenty-one contestants paraded through town atop horse-drawn-buggies provided by the neighboring Mennonite colony of El Palmar.

The strange image of Bolivian beauty queens circulating in Mennonite buggies is less surprising than it may initially appear. Mennonite horse-drawn carts are well-known in rural areas of Bolivia. Fashioned in colony machine shops, they contain modern suspension and travel easily across the region's dirt roads that alternate between sand dunes in the dry season and deep mud in the rainy season. As such they are prized

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>836</sup> See for example, Donald B. Kraybill and James P. Hurd, *Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites: Hoofbeats of Humility in a Postmodern World* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>837</sup> Kathryn Chávez, "Villamontes brilla con las más bellas de Bolivia," *El Dia* May 26, 2012. https://www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?cat=356&pla=3&id\_articulo=91946. Accessed Oct.15, 2015.

possessions not just for Mennonites but also for their Bolivian neighbors and sell for upwards of five or six thousand dollars. In Villamontes, the reporter from *El Día* bore witness to one literal enactment of a broader reality, the Mennonite production that undergirds Santa Cruz's regional economy and results in a prosperity that has pushed forward calls for regional autonomy.

#### *Guaraní and Mennonite Forms of Autonomy*

As regional elites were organizing protests against the central government in 2007, other ideas of autonomy, building on three decades of political organizing, were also being voiced by the indigenous communities of the lowlands. In contrast to the implicit connections between Mennonites, bulls, beauty queen and Branko Marinkovic, the links between Mennonite and indigenous autonomies are expressed in more explicit terms.

In the fifties and sixties when the MNR and regional elites referred to much of the lowlands as "vacant, empty or abandoned," they had been silent on the land's indigenous inhabitants. They are also absent in the petitions sent to the MNR by Andean settlers. Yet, groups like the Guaraní, the Guarayo and the Ayoreo were present throughout the settlement regions even if, as Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl point out, their extensive, low density land use, led the tropical lowlands "to be considered "abandoned" by the western logic of land use."<sup>838</sup> As the accounts of World Gospel missionaries Geyer and Tamplin make clear, the MNR often welcomed evangelical organizations to "incorporate" semi-nomadic indigenous communities like the Ayoreo

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>838</sup> Farthing and Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia*, 118.

and the Sirionó into the nation. In contrast, large lowland indigenous groups like the Guaraní and the Guarayo had a much longer history of contact with missionary orders (such as the Franciscans) and were considered a critical source of agriculture labor. When sugar and cotton boomed in the sixties and seventies many Guaraní, along with seasonal migrants from the Andes, were pressured by regional elites into coerced and poorly paid labor on expanding sugar and cotton plantations.<sup>839</sup>

Lowland indigenous communities are culturally, linguistically and socially distinct from the Aymara and Quechua indigenous migrants that came to the region over the course of the March to the East. Excluded from government support through colonization programs, lowland indigenous groups were displaced in some areas of colonization - particularly in the northern Amazon basin in the Chapare of Cochabamba and in the Alto Beni of La Paz. In 1982, facing this legacy of exclusion and displacement that accompanied the March to the East, the Guaraní, Chiquitano, Guarayo and Ayoreo communities organized a Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the Bolivian Oriente (CIDOB). In 1990, while Andean settlers like Evo Morales were protesting coca eradication, lowland indigenous communities also engaged in political demonstrations. That year, CIDOB held a "March for Territory and Dignity" that brought the silenced struggles of lowland indigenous communities into the national political debate. Indigenous delegates from the lowland Beni department marched to La Paz, ultimately securing the creation of four protected indigenous territories. Subsequent marches were held throughout the late nineties and early 2000s. In 2007, as delegates were meeting to rewrite the Bolivian Constitution and lowland elites were demanding regional autonomy,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>839</sup> Brigitte Simón et al., I Sold Myself, I Was Bought: A Socio-Economic Analysis Based on Interviews with Sugar-Cane Harvesters in Santa Cruz de La Sierra, Bolivia. (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1980).

indigenous lowlanders also marched on Sucre to demand their own form of autonomy focusing on land and control over local resources. These marches led to the extension of autonomous indigenous territories and the preservation of indigenous language and culture in the 2009 constitution where forms of autonomy where guaranteed for indigenous communities alongside Bolivia's departments.

In contrast to debates about regional autonomy, where they are almost entirely absent, Mennonites have slowly been drawn into discussions of indigenous autonomy. In the small town of Charagua, a few hours north of Villamontes, where Mennonite buggies transported Bolivian beauty queen in 2012, Guaraní leaders were actively pursuing the form of municipal autonomy that had been guaranteed by the 2009 constitution. While seeking autonomy as part of a national political process, in conversations with volunteers of the Mennonite Central Committee, they also actively framed their ideas of autonomy in relation to their neighbors in Charagua – Old Colony Mennonites.<sup>840</sup> As surprising as that conversation might seem it emerged from some compelling parallels.

Both the Guaraní and the Mennonites are culturally distinct minorities in Santa Cruz yet, in the rural area around Charagua, they form the two largest ethnic groups.<sup>841</sup> Furthermore, the central foci of indigenous autonomy movements are precisely those rights enjoyed by Mennonite colonists in Bolivia. As the vice-president of CIDOB, Nelly Romero explains, "our dream is to consolidate and expand collectively managed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>840</sup> Lucas Land, MCC Volunteer in Charagua, "Two Kingdoms: Low German Mennonites in Charagua, Bolivia." Wordpress. https://wwje.wordpress.com/2011/08/16/two-kingdoms-low-german-mennonites-incharagua-bolivia/ Accessed May 5, 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>841</sup> Jean-Paul Faguet, *Decentralization and Popular Democracy Governance from below in Bolivia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

indigenous territories. There we can exercise self-government.<sup>342</sup> The Guaraní maintain an alternative land-holding system to preserve the traditional lands (TCOs) that have been returned to them by the government. Mennonites also hold land in an alternative system that allows for the preservation of large, homogenous blocks of land. Within the colonies individuals own, buy and sell property, yet the titles are held collectively by the colony, a system that functioned critically in the face of the debt crisis of the late eighties, to give one example, during which creditors unsuccessfully demanded that Mennonite lands be turned over to pay off debts. In both cases the goal of the system is that land remains within the community.

Lowland indigenous groups like the Guaraní also seek to preserve their language by gaining control over local education. It was this issue that drove earlier Mennonite migrations from Canada to Mexico and Bolivia and the right to maintain separate Low German schooling is one of the central elements in the 1962 set of privileges signed by Bolivian President Victor Paz Estenssoro that also included freedom from military service and the right to maintain independent social systems such as widow's and orphans' fund. The common objection to Mennonite privileges in Mexico and Bolivia was that they constituted a "state within a state." In a further irony, Bolivia's new constitution attempted to give exactly those rights – "a distinctive space within the state" - to indigenous groups. As Linda Farthing notes, the idea of "plurinationality" as defined in the new constitution evokes, not just "cultural diversity but also an acceptance of varying values, cultural organizations, forms and worldviews. Depicting indigenous groups as separate nations within the broader state each with substantive rights to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>842</sup> Farthing and Kohl, Evo's Bolivia, 119.

consultation, autonomy and self-determination turns the idea of the nation on its head, upsetting long-standing notions of race identity and territory."<sup>843</sup>

If Mennonite "autonomy" proved appealing for some indigenous autonomy seekers, it also stood as a difficult system to imagine replicating. Back in 1978, Jesus Bolívar concluded his exhaustive study of the contributions of Mennonites to regional development with a telling paradox. The very cultural-social-and religious systems that had enabled Mennonites' rapid success in converting the forests of Santa Cruz into productive fields, also insulated them from neighboring farmers. He puzzled over how these "model farmers" might serve as actual models for other lowland communities. Despite the parallels between Guaraní and Mennonite conceptions of autonomy as seen through control over land, language and culture, it would be disingenuous to suggest the model might be simply transplanted from one community to the other while ignoring the racial privilege, economic power, transnational connections, and legal sanction that have produced "autonomous" Mennonite communities on the plains of Santa Cruz. Furthermore, the political route to autonomy opened up by the 2009 constitution is one expressly rejected by Mennonite communities who refuse to participate in national politics, even if they voice their acquiescence to whatever form of political organization emerges.<sup>844</sup> In a further irony, even as indigenous autonomy was being enacted through the new constitution, and the Guaraní were looking at Mennonites as model form of autonomy, Mennonite autonomy appeared an increasingly tenuous privilege in plurinational Bolivia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>843</sup> Farthing and Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia*, 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>844</sup> Lucas Land, MCC Volunteer in Charagua, "Two Kingdoms: Low German Mennonites in Charagua, Bolivia."

In March 2014, as I was completing research for this dissertation a draft congressional bill was revealed that planned to annul the 1962 special decree. While the Guaraní in Charagua had spoken of Mennonites as a model for autonomy, national legislators made specific references to the land rights of lowland indigenous communities in this challenge to the privileges of Bolivian Mennonites.<sup>845</sup> Though the bill was not introduced at the time, it revealed on the one hand the new challenges that Mennonites would face in plurinational Bolivia. On the other hand, it pointed to an enduring paradox in the broader history of Mennonite settlement in Russia, Canada, Mexico and Bolivia. Their very success in transforming a former frontier into an agricultural breadbasket – a condition for the extension of privileges and exemptions - had consistently eroded the basis for their initial privileges. As the frontier disappeared, long absent state authorities and institutions stepped in. Conflicts with the Russian imperial state in the 1880s, the Canadian federation in the 1920s, and the Mexican Republic in the 1950s had spurned new migrations. By the early twenty-first century, Santa Cruz had also undergone a similarly dramatic transformation - from a frontier to the center of economic power in Bolivia. It remained unclear if this growth would eventually erode Mennonite privileges in Bolivia. While Canada had forced Mennonites to take part in national schooling in the twenties, Mexican Mennonites still maintained the set of privileges granted by President Alvaro Obregón in 1921. Paraguayan Mennonites also continued to exercise the privileges they had received in exchange for settling the Chaco in 1926. For their part, Bolivian Mennonite leaders responded to the 2014 bill just as they had when a 1976 decree also threatened their privileges and special exemptions, by boarding planes to La

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>845</sup> "Menonitas son sometidos a leyes vigentes," *Cambio* March 13, 2014. The official newspaper of the Plurinational State of Bolivia published the text of the proposed decree.

Paz to negotiate directly with government officials. While they continued to brandish their credentials as "agricultural citizens" or producers for the nation, Mennonites could also claim a legal citizenship when negotiating with the state. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century nearly 80% of the 70,000 Mennonites in Bolivia were citizens.<sup>846</sup> ANAPO, the regional soy-producing organization recognized this fact in their annual reports when they stopped separating "Mennonite" soy production from "national" production as they had done throughout the eighties, nineties and early 2000s.<sup>847</sup> When some Mennonites sought new land on the frontier they invoked their rights as "campesino communities" under the Agrarian Reform rather than as Mennonite colonies defined by the 1962 set of Privileges.<sup>848</sup>

Mennonites were not the only lowland migrant groups to find both challenges and opportunities in pluri-national Bolivia. Okinawan and Japanese colonists had also made a significant impact on the region over the previous half-century and consecrated their role as producers for the nation. Yet unlike Mennonites who typically let their production speak for itself or negotiated with government ministers behind closed doors, Okinawan and Japanese settlers and their Bolivian children actively performed their integration in the nation. As mentioned above, this was apparent in carefully scripted annual celebrations which government officials and the Bolivian public were invited to attend. Colonists displayed both their transnational ties –evident in the Japanese General Hospital in Santa Cruz, cultural centers, and projects supported by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. They also branded their local production. Wandering

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>846</sup> "Población menonita en Bolivia: distribución porecentual por colonia y pais de origen," Oct.1, 2010. Dirección General de Migración. Unpublished documents provided by Adalberto Kopp.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>847</sup> ANAPO officials in conversation with author, May 2014, Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>848</sup> Attorney Waldemar Rojas interview with author, June 20, 2014, Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

in markets of Santa Cruz, one can purchase rice from unmarked bags – the product of Andean settlers – next to packaged "superior quality" rice from CAISY which proudly proclaimed its origins in "Japanese colony of San Juan Yapacaní" or "Okinawa Noodles" a product of CAICO, the Okinawan producer's cooperative. A sign at the entrance to the latter cooperative proclaims that Okinawa is also the "center of wheat" in Bolivia thus laying claim to a crop that Bolivian officials have tried to increase production of over the past decades. These two organizations, CAICO and CAISY, also hold permanent positions on ANAPO, the regional soy producers organization and actively participated in other cruceño business organizations like the Chamber of Eastern Agriculture (CAO) and the Bolivian Institute for Foreign Commerce (IBCE). When Jaime Duranovich, who renegotiated the loans of Mennonite debtors in the 1990s before opening a daily bus service to Riva Palacio, had confidently proclaimed that someday there would be a "Mennonite President" in Bolivia, we had both laughed. Despite his sincerity, the idea seemed a distant prospect. In contrast Michiaki Nagatani, the son of Japanese migrants to San Juan Yapacaní in 1955, was elected to Congress in 2005 as a member of the MNR.

Andeans migrants have also re-fashioned themselves over the last decade. Colonies like San Juan Yapacaní and San Julián were islands of support for Evo Morales in a region largely committed to autonomy. His election promised continued representation for highland migrants at the national level but in Santa Cruz, the autonomy movements of indigenous and elite lowlanders (while distinct from one another) both framed the Andean colonist as an outside "invader." In response, Andean migrants and their descendants have turned to new discursive strategies in the twenty-first century. Many settlers have rejected the title of "colonist" altogether re-defining themselves as *"interculturales,*" who, like Morales, brought together a fractured nation with their personal migrations. *"The camba* has become *kolla*, and the *kolla* has become *camba*," one man, whose father had migrated to the first government supported colony in Santa Cruz in 1955, told me.<sup>849</sup> The Methodist Jaime Bravo made a similar point.

Look I am an Indian [*indio*], of Aymara origin, from the altiplano. I came to Santa Cruz and found a woman of the east, a camba who lived in Mineros, there close to a zone of colonization. I got married to her. And she taught me her culture, and I taught her mine. And the two of us had children, and now my children are not cambas nor kollas, my children are Bolivians.<sup>850</sup>

Bravo's narrative eloquently ties together romance, inter-generationality and regional and national identity. It is a migrant narrative, like those offered by Morales and filmmaker Jorge Ruiz. Ironically Bravo told me this story as we sat at the entrance to "Plan 3000" the poor and largely Andean neighborhood of Santa Cruz de la Sierra that was the target of violent attacks pitting supporters of departmental autonomy like "Camba Nación" against "kollas" during the 2008 autonomy conflict. The Japanese Bolivian congressman Michiaki Nagatani, offered a different version of this narrative. He claimed that his decision to enter politics had been inspired by those same conflicts between cambas and kollas in Santa Cruz, noting that "I was not one or the other and I could work with rural people, as such I could serve as cushion [between the two]."<sup>851</sup> Peter Wieler from the Mexican Mennonite colony of Swift Current offers another playful attempt at resolving the transnational and the regional, in the naming of the tortilla chip company that he founded – with assistance from the Mexican embassy in Bolivia - in the same years as the autonomy movement was gaining strength. "Nachos Mexicambas" produced with corn grow on Mennonite farms and sold in stores across Bolivia offers an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>849</sup> Prudencio conversation with author Nov. 20, 2013, Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>850</sup> Jaime Bravo interview, Aug. 2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>851</sup> "De una granja a la política" *La Razón*, March 25, 2012.

easily digestible packaging of Mennonites' Mexican origins and their new lives as "camba" producers in Santa Cruz.<sup>852</sup> These three examples of narrative and naming – Andean, Japanese and Mennonite – return us to the central themes of this dissertation, demonstrating the ongoing work of migrants to lay claims to place and resolve the ongoing tensions produced in the long history of the March to the East.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>852</sup> Jakob Wieler, interview with author, April 27, 2015. Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

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