

Bolivia Coup: “Hatred of the Indian”

Vice-president Álvaro García Linera reflects on the role of racial hatred in motivating the coup which forced him and President Evo Morales out of office and into exile

By [Álvaro García Linera](#)

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Almost as a nighttime fog, hatred rapidly traverses the neighborhoods of the traditional urban middle-class of Bolivia. Their eyes fill with anger. They do not yell, they spit. They do not raise demands, they impose. Their chants are not of hope of brotherhood. They are of disdain and discrimination against the Indians. They hop on their motorcycles, get into their trucks, gather in their fraternities of private universities, and they go out to hunt the rebellious Indians that dared to take power from them.

In the case of Santa Cruz, they organize motorized hordes with sticks in hand to punish the Indians, those that they call ‘*collas*’, who live in peripheral neighborhoods and in the markets. They chant “the *collas* must be killed,” and if on the way, they come across a woman wearing a *pollera* [traditional skirt worn by Indigenous and mestizo women] they hit her, threaten her and demand that she leave their territory.

In Cochabamba, they organize convoys to impose their racial supremacy in the southern zone, where the underprivileged classes live, and charge – as if it were a cavalry contingent – at thousands of defenseless peasant women that march asking for peace. They carry baseball bats, chains, gas grenades. Some carry firearms. The woman is their preferred victim. They grab a female mayor of a peasant population, humiliate her, drag her through the street. They hit her, urinate on her when she falls to the ground, cut her hair, threaten to lynch her, and when they realize that they are being filmed, they decide to throw red paint on her symbolizing what they will do with her blood.

In La Paz, they are suspicious of their employees and do not speak when they bring food to the table. Deep down, they fear them, but they also look down on them. Later, when they are on the streets shouting, they insult Evo and with him, all of these Indians that dared to build intercultural democracy with equality. When they are many, they tear down the Wiphala, the Indigenous symbol, they spit on it, they step on it, they cut it, they burn it. It is a visceral hatred that they unload on this symbol of the Indians that they wish they could extinguish from the earth along with all those that are represented by it.

Racial hatred is the political language of this traditional middle class. Academic titles, trips and faith serve for nothing because in the end, what is important is purity of ancestry. Deep down, the imagined lineage is stronger and seems to stick to the spontaneous language of the skin that hates, of the visceral gestures and of their corrupt morals.

Everything exploded on Sunday [October] 20, when Evo Morales won the election with 10% more than the runner-up, but no longer with the immense advantage of before nor with 51%

of the votes. It was the sign that the regressive, huddled forces were waiting for – the timid liberal opposition candidate, the ultra-conservative political forces, the OAS [Organization of American States], and the indescribable traditional middle class. Evo had won again but he no longer had 60% of the electorate. He was weaker and they had to go after him. The loser did not recognize his defeat. The OAS spoke of “clean elections” but of a weak victory and asked for a second round, counseling to go against the constitution that states that if a candidate wins more than 40% of the votes and has more than 10% over the runner-up, they are elected. And then the middle class launched its hunt of the Indians. On the night of Monday, October 21, they burned 5 of the 9 electoral offices, including the ballots. In Santa Cruz, a civic strike brought together the inhabitants of the central zones of the city, following which the strike branched out to the residential zones of La Paz and Cochabamba. And this unleashed terror.

Paramilitary groups began to besiege institutions, burn trade union offices, set fire to the residences of candidates and political leaders of the governing party [Movement Towards Socialism]. Even the private home of the president was looted. In other places, families, including children, were kidnapped and threatened with being whipped and burned if their parent, who was a minister or union leader, did not resign. An endless night of the long knives had been unleashed, and fascism peeked out.

The people’s forces comprising workers, miners, peasants, Indigenous people and urban dwellers resisted the civic coup and began to retake territorial control of the cities. But just as the balance of the correlation of forces was shifting in their favor, the police mutiny occurred.

The police had for weeks shown great indolence and ineptitude in protecting the common people while they were being attacked and persecuted by fascist groups. But from Friday [November 8], many of them displayed an extraordinary ability to attack, detain, torture and kill working-class protesters. When it came to dealing with the children of the middle class, they apparently did not have the capacity. But when it came to repressing rebellious Indians, the deployment, violence and the arrogance was monumental.

The same happened with the armed forces. During all of our time in government, we never allowed them to repress civil mobilizations, not even during the first civic coup d’état in 2008. And now, in the midst of the convulsion and without us having asked them anything, they told us that they did not have anti-riot capacities, that they only had 8 bullets per member and that a presidential decree was necessary for them to be on the streets in even a protective capacity. However, they had no hesitation in seeking the resignation of president Evo, in violation of the constitution. They did whatever was possible to attempt to kidnap him while he was traveling to and was in Chapare. And then, when the coup was consolidated, they went to the streets to shoot thousands of bullets, to militarize the cities and assassinate peasants. And all of this without any presidential decree. In order to protect the Indian, they needed a decree. To repress and kill Indians, it was enough to obey what the racial and classist hatred decreed. And now, in only 5 days, there are more than 18 dead and 120 injured with live bullets. Of course, nearly all of them are Indigenous.

The question we must respond to is, how did the traditional middle class incubate so much hatred and resentment towards the people, leading them to embrace racialized fascism centered on the Indian as the enemy? What did they do to irradiate their class frustrations to the police and armed forces and become the social base of this process of becoming

fascist, of this state regression and moral degeneration.

The answer is the rejection of equality, which is to say, the rejection of the fundamentals of a substantial democracy.

The last 14 years of the government of the social movements were characterized by the process of leveling of the social classes, the sharp reduction in extreme poverty (from 35% to 15%), the broadening of rights for all (universal access to healthcare, to education and to social protection), the Indianization of the State (more than 50% of functionaries in public administration must be Indigenous, new national narrative around the Indigenous sector) and the reduction of economic inequality (the difference of income between the richest and the poorest fell from 130 to 45). All this meant the systematic democratization of wealth, access to public goods, opportunities and state power. The economy has grown from 9 billion dollars to 42 billion dollars, widening the market and internal savings, which has allowed many people to have their own homes and improve their work activity.

Thus, in a decade, the percentage of people of the so-called “middle class” in terms of income, went from 35% to 60%. The largest part of them came from the working-class and Indigenous sectors. It was essentially a process of democratization of the social goods through the construction of material equality. But this inevitably has caused a rapid devaluation of the economic, educational and political capital held by the traditional middle class. In the past, a notable last name, the monopoly over ‘legitimate’ knowledge, and their family relationships allowed the traditional middle class to access posts in public administration, obtain loans and bids for projects or scholarships. Today, the number of people that fight for the same post or opportunity has not only doubled – reducing the possibilities to access these goods by half – but, additionally, the ‘up-and-coming’, the new middle class with Indigenous, working class origins, has a combination of new capital (Indigenous language, trade union links) of greater value and state recognition to fight for the available public goods.

As such, it is about a collapse of what was a characteristic of a colonial society: ethnicity as capital, basically, the imagined foundation of the historical superiority of the middle class above the subaltern classes because in Bolivia, social class is only comprehensible and is visualized under the form of racial hierarchies. That the sons of this class have been the shock force of the reactionary insurgency is the violent cry of a new generation that sees how the inheritance of the last name and skin fades in the face of the democratization of goods. Although they raise the flag of democracy that is understood as a vote, in reality, they have risen up against democracy that is understood as the leveling of social classes and distribution of wealth. This is why we see the overflowing of hatred, the outpouring of violence – because racial supremacy is something that is not rationalized. It lives as a primary impulse of the body, as a tattoo of the colonial history in the skin. As such, fascism is not only the expression of a failed radical transformation of values, but paradoxically in post-colonial societies, the success of a material democratization.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that while nearly 20 Indigenous people have been shot dead, those that murder them and order their murder narrate how they are acting to safeguard democracy. But in reality, they know what they have done is to protect the privilege of caste and last name.

Racial hatred can only destroy. It is not a horizon for the future. It is nothing more than a primitive vengeance of a class historically and morally declining that shows that a coup-

supporter is crouched behind every mediocre liberal.

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Featured image: Indigenous woman have been most targeted by the racially-driven violence during this civic-military coup d'état. Photo: Redfish

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