Now We Are in Power (Seminar)

The Politics of Passive Revolution in 21st Century Bolivia

Angus McNelly

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Contents

Angus McNelly (Greenwich) will talk on his recent book 'Now we are in power' on the Bolivian revolution, with Matthew Doyle (UCL) responding as discussant. They will be speaking LIVE in the Daryll Forde Seminar Room, 2nd Floor, UCL Anthropology Dept. You can join us on ZOOM (ID 384 186 2174 Passcode Wawilak)

Angus writes: "During the first decade of the century, Evo Morales and other leftists took control of governments across Latin America. In the case of Bolivia, Morales was that country's first Indigenous president and was elected following five years of popular insurrection after decades of neoliberal governance. 'Now We Are in Power' makes the argument that the so-called Pink Tide should be understood as a passive revolution, a process that has two phases: a period of subaltern struggle from average citizens strong enough to culminate in a political crisis, which is followed by a time of reconciliation and transformation. I examine this movement as it unfolded and evaluate how passive revolution plays out over a prolonged crisis, ultimately demonstrating the inherent contradictions and complications of the process."

`https://vimeo.com/917499665`

Camilla Power: Good evening, everybody. Thank you very much for joining us on Zoom and thank you very much for joining here in the room.

We have two, not we've got two for one deal tonight of experts in the Bolivian Revolution, the process of the Bolivian Revolution and its situation.

The main speaker is Angus McNally, who is international, a senior lecturer in international relations at Greenwich University and after Angus has spoken for about 45, 50 minutes, we'll be joined by Matthew Doyle, senior lecturer here in social anthropology at UCL.

So I'm going to hand straight over to Angus and yeah, if you want to.

Angus: Thank you, Camilla, for the kind introduction and for the invitation.

Thank you, Matthew, for discussing.

I have some images and some quotes from my fieldwork to show you.

So what I want to talk about today is this book.

which was published last year, which is the kind of result of about 12 years of kind of study and investigation into social movements in Molivius, right? And what I want to start by doing is just basically explaining the genesis of the book, right? So the goal of the book is to explore what happened to radical social movements.

which were kind of a broad coalition of anti-neoliberal social movements, largely indigenous, who were capable of toppling 2 governments at the beginning of the 21st century and following this period, you had the election of Bolivia's first indigenous president and a purported government of social movements, right? And I During the period following the election of Avon Bolivia, I was an undergraduate here in the UK

studying economics and maths and the thing that shaped my intellectual trajectory was the 2008 crisis.

I was studying what I thought was a science that could explain what was happening, this big event, and all of my professors in economics can't explain this.

Let's go back to our models, which I already had a problem with as a mathematician.

Don't worry about this cataclysmic event and the kind of two hours from the end of capitalism.

That's not in the purview of what we're studying, which I found quite disconcerting and then I finished my degree and I came into kind of the world of work in a period of austerity when we were told there is no alternative to politics to austerity and a period of student social movements and very, very strong movements against the introduction of student fees, which really shaped my kind of thinking and my generation's thinking about kind of politics, right? And so during this period of time, I was looking for alternatives.

Like, is there a different way to do politics than the politics of austerity that we were being presented with, right? And it was during this time that I came across the government of Abe Morales, about 2011, that was seemingly doing something different.

It was a government social movement, reportedly based on ideas of pluri-nationality, an alternative modality of development, right? And this got me excited.

right? Like many kind of scholars of my generation, I thought Matthew was the same, right? Lots of scholars came to Bolivia from Europe and the United States and other parts of Latin America, excited by the prospect of here is a genuine alternative, a living, breathing alternative and sadly, by the time I got to do my PhD fieldwork in 2016, 2017, which is going to form kind of a lot of what I talk about today.

The government of Ava Morales had been in power for 10 years and the story that I came to tell through the book was a much sadder story, right? It was a story of the contradictions of the political project of Ava Morales and why the radical potential of social movements that was so strong in the five years of social struggle between 2000 and 2005 had seemingly evaporated by the time.

that I got there.

Okay.

So I think that is kind of really, really important because it shapes, it helps kind of frame the narrative of the book.

It frames a little bit about where I came from and how I arrived to study Bolivia and it kind of also gives a sense of why I called the book Now We Are in Power.

So now we are on power comes from a very tempestuous local meeting in the city of Al Auto in Bolivia, where a Aymara activist got up and he was speaking to a government minister and he proclaimed to the room, after 500 years of colonialism, Now we are in power, the Aimara and Keturah are in power, and we will govern for eternity, right? And these are incredibly strong words which sat with me.

So I was, the goal of this book is to think about what it means to say, now we are in power, okay? And so kind of throughout the course of the book, I try and make

two arguments, right? And the framing of the book, and I'm going to speak a little bit more about the framing at the end of this talk, is through Antonio Ramsey's frame, Passive Revolution.

This is a frame that comes from obviously a European social science thinker, but is kind of the frame of the book because of the debates that were happening within Bolivian intellectual circles and within the Bolivian government during the 15 years of Morales's time in power.

Okay, so yes, it is a kind of European concept, but it's definitely not Eurocentric and it definitely helped me think about what was going on in the context and emerged from might feel that.

Okay, so I think that's really, really important and explain why at the end of the talk.

So there are two sides to my argument.

The first side explores the passive element of Gramsci's oxymoronic concept of passive revolution.

So this concerns the revolutionary drive of social movements that in a moment of crisis, at the end of the 20th century, were able to transcend the mere challenge of the status quo and establish alternative future horizons and these alternative future horizons included an alternative model of development through concepts, through the concept of Bibien, and an alternative form of the state framed around very nationalism.

However, following the zenith of the moment of catharsis, Movement leaders, along with their central demands, were incorporated into the state, thus turning movements from offensive actors pushing for change to defenders of the left in state power.

This is why Gramsci's frame of passive revolution is so useful, because the second moment of passive revolution is something that Gramsci called the transformism, which addresses the trajectory of revolutionary forces after they have unseated their initial opponents from power.

So one important contribution of the book is to trace the mechanisms and effects of social movement pacification through the course of passive revolution.

Quite often when we study social movements, we are interested in the internal dynamics of movements, we are interested in contestation, there is less literature and scholarship and what happens if social movements take power? This is because social movements very rarely take power and this is one of the really interesting things about this particular case.

The second side of the argument of the book examines the dynamics of restoration set in motion by passive revolution.

So I show how the new social and spatial configurations of power, the novel forms of power and the capitalist state that emerged in the 21st century Bolivia, established through passive revolution are contradictory, unstable and in continual need of renewal.

By placing movement incorporation and transformism in conversation with the spatial and scalar dynamics of passive revolution, I show the tension inherent in these processes.

I underscore how passive revolution are also a set of socio-spatial processes that unsettle movement incorporation and how neo-extractivism, the dominant form of value creation re-established by passive revolution in 21st century Bolivia, not only provided the material foundation for a new hegemonic state project, but also undermines the basis of this newfound hegemony, sparking new rounds of social conflict over accumulation by dispossession and the environmental and ecological maladies that leak from the pores of extractive industries and their associated infrastructures.

So these arguments at this point in the talk seem quite abstract, right? So what I want to do is really tease out the empirical contributions and focus on things that I found surprising in the course of my field work.

I was very, very lucky when I was doing my PhD.

I started to get out funding and I think it's important in academia to celebrate failures, right? But this lack of funding enabled me to do a lot of work in my first year when I was working part-time as a secondary school teacher and then when I got funding, I basically had won six months extra and my supervisor said, you have six months extra, what do you want to do with it? The answer was go on field work and so I ended up doing 18 months field work as a political science PhD, which in the UK is almost unheard of, which means that I had a long time into field sites and at the contingent cities of La Paz and El Alto in the Western Highland region of Bolivia and then kind of that, I was there for about a year and then five to six months in the lowland city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, which was the heart of the regional opposition to the Ava Morales government and I was able to live in one of the kind of popular districts there and explore some of the movements there for that period of time, right? And this kind of urban ethnography that I did enabled me to see things that others had kind of missed, right? But the book is not really an ethnography and I didn't realize this until I had the official book launch and I invited other scholars of Bolivia and they're like, this is great.

You've written political theory using ethnography from Bolivia and I hadn't quite realized that is what I had done and I think this, I wanted to stress, given that I'm speaking to an audience of anthropologists, because I don't want to overstretch my claim about what I did, but I was able to use this urban ethnographic method to really develop a sense of what was going on at different spatial scales and particularly the interplay between the micro interactions of social movement activists and the macro kind of processes, particularly political economic processes linked to extractivism and state formation that kind of really sit at the core of this book.

So I tried to develop political theory drawing on Latin American debates around Gramsci and kind of works of scholars based in the region, particularly Massimo Maldanesi, Sylvia Rivera Gutierrez, Raquel Gutierrez, Sylvia Rivera, and most importantly, Rene Zavaletto Mercado, who we will speak about more in a minute, but is the other kind of main political theorists who really, really influenced me in the writing of this book.

The guy on the left and the guy on the right is Antonio Banamchi.

Okay, great.

So initially I wanted to focus on social movements in urban areas.

Lots of the scholarship concerned with social movements in Bolivia had focused on rural areas, had been concerned with rural indigenous movements and there are very, very good reasons for this.

Bolivia is a country with long history of very, very strong indigenous movements.

Before social movements were a thing, there were strong indigenous movements going back 20 centuries and they were an important factor in the formation of Avon Morales's government, right? Avon Morales comes from the coke growers and their unions that are based in the rural area of the Chapati and so the peasant movements in Bolivia and the highland indigenous movements have been central to both the sociological composition of social movements in Bolivia, but also the formation of the central ideas that then came to underpin the government of Evan Morales.

However, 75% of the population lives in cities.

The 3 cities of El Alto and La Paz, who are kind of like conjoined, Pochabamba and Santa Cruz are not only the central economic axis of the country, but the most important kind of cultural and political spaces.

Here you have this whole generation of scholars that have gone to study this process of change, but they all go out into the countryside, right? And so I was really kind of confused by this, but why is no one studying in the cities? This had its drawbacks and I try and go back to Bolivia every year and the first time I went back after doing Gilbert in 2016, 2017 was in 2019, when there was a crisis that I'm going to speak about a little bit later and most of my contacts in social movements had been patched before the election and because I'd done an urban ethnography, because I was kind of based in movements rather than communities, What I found was that it was really, really difficult to build longitudinal relationships that lasted over decades, right? And so the relationships I have in Bolivia, yes, I'm still in touch with movement leaders.

Yes, I'm still in touch with academics, but the movement leaders who are still my friends are no longer in movement and because they're not based in communities, this means I have a different relationship to my interlocutors and the people that I really kind of form the central story of this book, which I found very, very challenging in 2019 to have this big kind of internal crisis.

But actually kind of looking back at it, it's part of the story of the book and that's something that I've only realized later.

So not only did I focus on cities, but I also went to Santa Pru de la Sierra.

Santa Cruz is interesting because it's not a city at the heart of the social movements that were so powerful between 2000 and 2005.

So Aiden Morales as a political leader came from social movements that were based around the urban areas of Cochabamba and El Alto and the rural areas in the Chapari where they grow the coca and the Highland Altiplana region where you have lots of indigenous communities between kind of the kind of lake regions around Lagotiticaca and further south to Porto Si.

Santa Cruz is not bad, right? But it is the biggest city in the country and it is the heart of the Bolivian economy and I got interested in, well, if Santa Cruz is so important, why is nobody studying Santa Cruz? And I thought that this was an oversight, and that is part of the reason that I went to Santa Cruz to study popular movements there and so what I found in the course of kind of letting my data sit, as it were, was that data analysis was like peeling off layers of an onion and many of the ethnographic insights of my chapters only appeared once I had let my field notes and interviews sit.

Okay, so for everybody on Zoom, here's the structure of the book.

So nobody's going to be able to read this.

Here's a picture of the content list.

So the way that the book progresses, right, is it starts with crisis and social movements and then goes on to explore social movement incorporation into the state, looks at the kind of spatial and scalar contradictions of this process.

It looks at Ava Morales as a political leader, somebody who I see as an indigenous apostle, the material contradictions and temporal contradictions contained in extractivism and infrastructure, and then how these different threads of transformism, social movement incorporation, and the spatial scalar dynamics.

as Caesar as an indigenous apostle and the political economy that it helps restore, how those different threats, which are kind of heuristic threads that I use analytically, in reality, they're kind of a little bit muddled up, right? How those combined to undermine the political project and the new social-spatial project that massive revolution helps establish.

Yeah, and these contradictions are explosive and lead to a political crisis in 2019.

Okay, and kind of very much the book is, yes, it comes from my PhD research, but it's also very, very interested in understanding this moment in 2019, which I'm sure Matthew remembers was a really, really tense moment, right? Where you saw activists within the country politicians, academics within the country and outside the country just split right into an incredibly polarized situation and people who you thought were really good friends ended up hating one another like that.

It was really interesting and really quite disconcerting and so what I try and do with this book is like explain what happened in that moment? How can we explain that moment, which is seen as such a polarizing moment, but also what does passive revolution allow us to see about kind of how we got there? So what I want to do for the kind of the most of this talk is think talk about the things that I found surprising, right? The thing, the things that And if I took for granted, and that over the years as I left my data set and as I returned, that were like revelations, right? So the first thing that I found kind of really surprising was that the story told about social movement and corporation along party lines was inadequate.

I missed how social movement leaders actively negotiated their incorporation, right? So the common story that you're told by people who use passive revolution as A-frame, but by kind of lots of social movement scholarship about what happens when social

movements win games and when social movement leaders enter the state, right, is that this is a top-down process where movement leaders are incorporated into the state, and they then become representatives of this new hegemonic project and this decapitates social movements and scripts them of their ability to act, right? And to a certain extent, this did happen in Bolivia, right? The first cabinet in 2006, I think 11 out of 15 ministerial appointments were from social movements.

Okay, social movement leaders did enter the state, And there have been interesting sociological studies done kind of 10 years ago now, 10 years after Immorales came to power, looking at the composition of state functionaries in Bolivia and some 40% of state functionaries in 2015 were somehow linked to social movements.

This is a massive transformation of the state in terms of the demographics of state functionaries.

But also during this time, you have a massive expansion of the state, right? The size of the state and the number of state employees as a whole.

But the story isn't a story of top-down, only top-down incorporation, right? Neither is it a story of people demanding or social movements simply demanding incorporation.

It's about trying to enact radical change through a kind of negotiation into how people are incorporated.

So one of the central kind of sites during my investigation was a school of political formation in the city of Alto organized by a Morales political party, the MACS, right? And the idea of this school of political formation was to reactivate social movements in El Alto, which was the city, which was the epicentre of social movement struggles against neoliberalism and where social movements were powerful enough to topple governments during the two gas wars in October 2003 and May, June 2005.

Right and so for about six months between June and June 2016 and January 2017, twice a week, I went along to these meetings and it was activist of the mass in and out, speaking to speakers that the mass had selected, right? Either mass ideologues and academics, ministers, vice ministers, technocrats, right? And I was expecting, right, a love-in between activists and the mass, and it was not that at all.

It was factuous.

It was full of heated discussion and tensions, and I found the questions that the local activist asked of the mass as a political party fascinating, right? I also found the opening remarks framing the school of political formation really insightful as well, right? And I just want to read you a quote from one of the organisers who was laying out why they organised this school of political formation.

So he said, and I quote, during recent times, companeros, comrades, we have been converted from the protagonists of the process of the Cambio, the process of change, which was the name that the mass gave their political project, into its benefactors.

We are waiting to see what is going to benefit us, to see which public works Evo is going to do for us and we are still waiting.

Hope Esperando has a double meaning in Spanish.

Wait and hope.

But this revolution will happen only when we mobilize ourselves to transform the country.

The state is performing its function.

But other than that, the other fundamental wheels that need to turn are the social movements and they have stopped participating.

Right.

So there is an explicit sense that social movements have been demobilized for whatever reason and that they need to be reactivated and I found this fascinating because normally the kind of the discourses you get around passive revolution are passive revolution, demobilize revolutionary forces, and that's exactly what they want to do.

But this is an active attempt by activists in the state in order to kind of undo that process, right? And so what I became really interested in is actually why did that process of demobilization happen? How did different actors affect it from kind of the state to the political party of the mass to local activists, right, and local leaders? And what were their kind of hopes and dreams, yeah, and how were they affected by this process of incorporation? And what I came to realize was, particularly from these meetings, where there was an acute awareness and agency in managing incorporation, right, albeit under a broader set of adverse structural conditions, which were shaped by Bolivia's dependence on natural gas exports to pay for government policies and the political economy of El Alto as a poor working class, highly indigenous city in one of the poorest countries in South America.

So this story forms the basis of chapter 2 of the book.

The second thing that I found really, really surprising was a sense of being forgotten.

along with the importance of public works and both of those things only really emerged well after my fieldwork, right? When I had gone back and coded all my interviews, had gone back and listened to the questions, it's only then that these discourses of being forgotten started to emerge and this is people not just in the city of Al Alto, in the city of Santa Cruz as well, people spoke about being forgotten, right? And for me, this had interesting spatial and temporal elements.

Basically, there was a tacit analysis of uneven development.

Somewhere else was benefiting at the expense of either El Alto as the center of social movement strong enough to topple governments, or of Santa Cruz, the economic kind of motor of the Bolivian economy.

For me, this pointed to the difficulties of realizing the promises of radical demands, even when they had been ostensibly met.

One of the most important demands that came out of social movements at the beginning of the 21st century was the demand for the nationalisation of gaps.

There are many reasons for this.

One is linked up to the deleterious effects of neoliberalism and the way that it led to an erosion of people's livelihoods, a massive migration from rural areas to the countryside, as the effects of El Nina, La Nina combined with opening up the country to foreign agricultural imports, and a kind of destruction of formal jobs, particularly

in mining, right? So you had a movement of very organized, very militant miners from certain regions, from mining encampments to either the growing regions in the Jabari or the City of El Alde and this is really, really important because this militancy then feeds into two of the most important social movements of this time.

One of the effects of neoliberalism was to privatize lots of the state's assets, including gas, right? Bolivia had discovered lots of gas during the 1960s, built a pipeline to export it to Argentina in the early 1970s.

But after 20 years of negotiation, had finally managed to negotiate a pipeline with Brazil, the biggest market in the region, in the early 1990s, which was completed in 1999.

Gas was privatized in 1996.

basically leaving the state without its most important fiscal asset.

This meant that it couldn't pay for important public services and there was a sense that after 500 years of colonialism, Bolivia was yet again losing out to foreign powers.

Bolivia is incredibly important in world history.

It was the place where the Spanish found a literal mountain of silver that arguably paid for the kind of nation, kind of capitalist processes worldwide.

It also helped completely transform the Chinese economy in the 16$^{\text{th}}$ century, right? It is a very, very important place in world history and yet today it is one of the poorest cities in the poorest countries in South America, right? What are you going to know? They have a sense that a Potosini or someone from Potosi is a pauper sitting on a silver throne and so when in the year 2000, there was an idea that Bolivian gas was going to be exported through Chilean seaports, through seaports that they had lost during the Pacific War.

in the late 19$^{\text{th}}$ century, people were very unhappy about this.

One of the first things that Ibn Moranes did when he was in power was to nationalize gas in a very theatrical manner, right? The military occupied one of the mega gas fields, the Margarita Field, on Labor Day, the 1$^{\text{st}}$ of May in 2006 and there was a sense that after that, Bolivia had recaptured its most important asset and was free of these foreign powers, right? This is what the two gas wars in 2003 and 2005 are about.

This was one of the major victories of social movements.

So where's the proof? Right? People wanted to see that El Alto or Santa Cruz, there were the department where some of these gas fields are based, along with Belija in the south of the country, the two departments which has the gas fields.

They want to see proof that Bolivia has recaptured these gas fields and has been transformed because of it and this led to the sense of being forgotten and not just spatially there was someone else developing, but temporally the sense that Bolivia was being left behind, right? Progress must be happening somewhere else.

because the promise of modernity contained within hydrocarbons hadn't transformed the quotidian life in urban areas.

So we have a kind of disjunction between the theology contained within hydrocarbons and the manifestation of kind of abstract time within capitalism and the con-

crete time of infrastructure projects, development models more generally, okay, and the difficulty of making resource rents manifest exist, right? And one of the fascinating interviews I had is like the mass government officials and allowed to say, we can't build sewage systems because nobody can see the pipes.

How will they know that we've built, we've invested, right? There is a spectacle of infrastructure, which I'm going to talk about in a minute that's really, really important, right? And so this narrative of forgotten citizens I found fascinating, right? And I've got two quotes, one from El Alto and one from Santa Cruz, which really demonstrates this.

I really, it would have worked so much better if you didn't set up here, but the show must go on.

Okay, so one of my, I think this is a question from the School of Political Formation in El Alto, which says, and I quote, the leaders who've been criticized for supporting the party and able, How have they been paid back? It seems as if ABO has abandoned society.

Those who supported the mass have been forgotten.

It is not the same struggle as before.

When the government fought for the poor, there were a new generation of leaders and if there were, they would fall into what is now the process of the cambio and would be shut down.

The mass does not encourage new leaders to emerge.

Only they can be leaders.

The people have started to realise this and because of this in the next elections in 2019, the mass are not going to win.

There's no point in continuing to support them.

We thought that this was going to be a government of the poor, but now that does not seem to be so.

Although they have a pro or discourse, in practice this is not the case.

So there's a real sense of, from El Alto and in movement activists, that they have been forgotten by the political project led by the mass.

Across the other side of the country, in the lowlands, you have a very different story.

A set of market guilds attempting to build a market in the poorest districts of Santa Cruz.

Santa Cruz is a right-wing city.

It's the city that led the opposition to Abe Morales.

But you do have a large migrant population that comes from either Cochabamba or the Highlands, who have been targets of racist attacks, and they are usually associated with the maths simply because they come from the Highlands, right? The way that the market girls dealt with this adverse political situation was to try and build an autonomous political formation through the construction of a market, a new marketplace.

to house all of the vendors, right? And so they're trying to build autonomy.

But their leader says, this is the same quote, unfortunately.

Their leader basically complains that he's gone to La Paz, he's travelled 24 hours on the coach and 24 hours back, right, to try and go and see Abel.

But the other thing that is really interesting during this time, the movement leaders all want to go and see Abel.

It's not about the mass, right? It's about can you build a personal relationship with Eva Morales? And so he travels four or five times to go and see the mass to try and speak to Eva to explain the problem.

If only he could explain, then things were better and he then laments the fact that Eva has forgotten them, right? And that this is part of the reason why they can't build them up.

So this sense of being forgotten frames the kind of discourses of movement activists who are trying to grapple with the fact that they have been incorporated in the state and it's been this demobilization.

The third really interesting thing that only emerges afterwards is the importance of public works.

Yeah and I didn't realise this until a lot, kind of years afterwards, but all of the conversations I had with movement activists, with state functionaries, with local people about municipal politics were all framed in the language of all those publics, right? Infrastructure projects, public works.

People wanted proof that hydrocarbons have been nationalised and what better way to do it than paving a road and so one of the major complaints that local activists in Aldo had of the mayor at the time was delays to public works and so I quote, we are already a year into the mayor's time in office and projects have been delayed A lot.

We are in the month of April, approximately halfway through the mayoral's office.

annual budget execution, and 0.88% of the projects have been completed.

After half a year, we should be 40 or 50%, right, through the execution.

People are not stupid.

People have said we have been given a chance for a year, and what has the mayor done? Okay, so kind of really strong condemnation of the mayor of El Alto, Solidar Chapeton, at the time, through the sense that she is failing because she's not doing public works.

Yeah.

Another activist says there is stagnation.

There are no public works.

So we are beginning to see a reaction from the population.

There are grave problems.

There are no works.

So the new administration of Alautu is going to have many problems.

On the other side of the country.

Sorry, everybody online.

I keep on going back and forth through slides.

On the other side of the country, this guy gets into power.

Bear with me a minute.

Yeah, he's been in power a long time.

He's an architect, okay? He's a guy called Percy Fernandez, right? And he is known in Santa Cruz for building schools, right? Designing and building schools and they, look, this is what activists had to say about him.

Percy Fernandez is very good because he has delivered public works.

He has dedicated himself to his work and it's always good to have a mayor who is an engineer who puts all of his work, soul, heat, life, whom he does or does not work with is down to his intelligence rather than any political agenda, right? This is all because he promised to build schools and he built schools, right? You could say that he planned the city.

Beyond the complaints of acts of corruption, his management is improved by us, right? So Activists are even willing to skate over the fact that he is known to be corrupt, right? He is also a, how do I put this, a horrible racist, right? Who said in 2008, what the executive branch of government wants is to keep all the power for itself and right, with all the Indian scum that we translate with, which is an incredibly horrible thing to say in Bolivia, right? This is 10 years before I'm doing floorbook and he's still very popular in the city of Santa Cruz and still very popular amongst the varied demographics of people who would have faced racism like that on a daily basis, right? But because he builds public works, he is able to maintain public support, which I found very, very surprising, right? Even amongst the people who I thought would be against against policy finance.

Right and so I just want to kind of wrap up here before I let Matthew in.

I realise I've been speaking for about 4–5 minutes.

Okay.

So what I try and do in the book, right, is start from kind of social movements and say there was this period of radical potential.

right? Between 2000 and 2005, social movements strong enough to topple governments, strong enough to have proposals that then come into government, that then shape government policy, that mean that the government nationalises gas, that you have a new constitution based on pluri nationalism, discourses of vivier bien, an alternative development model, right? So what happened? Yeah? And I look at the incorporation of social movements, these social spatial contradictions within the project.

Avian Morales's leadership, which I haven't talked about, I think is also really, really important that Matthew might pick up on and we can speak about in the Q&A and the fact that this new project was underpinned by hydrocarbons and what I try and argue in the book is all of these kind of four aspects of restoration that are put in motion by passive revolution are contradictory and they end up undermining one another, right? And what happens is following the re-election referendum in 2016, which is the first thing that happens when I'm on field work, there's this massive referendum for mass looses, yeah? And these two discourses emerge in the week before this referendum,

right? Opposition saves their kind of out until the last minute and then trucks 3 massive scandals at the government in the form of a illegitimate child that then disappears and reappears and nobody knows actually even to this day whether this child existed or not.

Evan Morales' child, the president's child.

a corruption scandal linked to the indigenous fund and a, there is a third one and a third very, very important scandal that has now completely slipped my mind.

So important that I forgot.

Yeah.

So during this time, the opposition are saying there's going to be fraud.

The mass are going to use fraud.

They're going to win this election, it's going to be Ford and they're saying there's Ford, Ford, Ford until they go and they win the referendum and all of a sudden, there's no Ford and the mass are understandably very unhappy about this and call it a coup and so what happens during this period is 2 narratives emerge, one linked with Ford, one linked with a coup, right? That enables A polarization of society in a period where these processes of restoration are exhausting themselves and the tensions between these four different aspects become increasingly explosive and this is how I argue we should understand the 2019 crisis, which saw Evan Morales having to flee the country after the military showed him a piece of paper which gave him the price, the price on his head, $50,000.

They said, we think you should leave, right? Which led to a period of a year-long kind of illegitimate right-wing government that was punctuated by social movements before the mass then got into the power in the form of the following year in 2021, right? Which marked the end of the government of Eva Morales and the end of the kind of hopes that came with this government of social movements, this opportunity to do something different, as Luca asked me, is very much a technical right? And I think that is kind of where I want to leave the story that I've told you today.

I do apologise about the slides, but I hope that this gives you a good flavour about a kind of what happened in Bolivia in the 21st century and why it was such an exciting time, but also a kind of a more melancholic story about what happened to this radical potential and some of the lessons that we can learn.

But thank you very much.

Camilla: Thanks so much for that, Angus.

Matthew, do you want to come and?

Mathew's Comments & Questions

Mathew: OK.

Thanks so much for that, Angus.

I really appreciate sort of working around the technical problems and everything.

I also appreciate the fact that you tried to kind of make it more ethnographic as well.

So you kind of added some kind of ethnographic detail.

The 2 questions, I sort of have two comments really, and a kind of series of questions linked to them and they're actually quite theoretical ones.

They're not really about the ethnography of ethnographic detail.

Having read your book, I read your book over the summer last year and the first comment kind of relates more to anthropological theory and kind of debates in social anthropology because it's an anthropology tool and the second comment and questions relate more to the sort of broader lessons that we can learn for the future of the left in Latin America and for left strategy based on this analysis that you make of combining and even development, sorry, based on, and as you make a passive revolution based on Gramscian ideas.

OK.

So the first question is about combined and uneven development.

So this is, I think, a key concept that you use in the book, right? And I think the argument that you're making is that there exists a, there exists radical potential at the peripheral spaces of global capitalism, precisely because societies like Bolivia, like Bolivia.

are not fully integrated into global hegemonic forms of capitalist life, right? So people are sort of unfamiliar with this idea of combined and uneven development.

This is sort of idea that's originally mentioned by Marx and Engels.

It's developed by Leon Trotsky and it's this idea that in places like, for example, pre-revolutionary Russia, but also places like Latin America, Bolivia, because of the kind of uneven way that the economy is integrated into global capitalism, there's this existence of different cultural practices, institutions, traditions and ways of life.

They're all combined, juxtaposed and linked together in seemingly unusual ways in one country and so anyone who's ever been to Bolivia or is kind of familiar with Bolivian society, this is very much the nature of Bolivian society.

So you have rural indigenous communities and you have all of these kind of indigenous ways of life and they exist alongside capitalism, right? And so one of the things that defines Bolivia, and has defined Bolivia historically as a post-colonial nation, is the fact that it has a weak state and it's incredibly strong and developed civil society, right? So you have where I did field work in sort of Ailu communities, this kind of pre-Spanish colonization forms of territorial and social organization, that still exist in contemporary Bolivia.

You have these peasant unions, a peasant union is a form of local government in Bolivia that exists in large parts of the countryside.

You have all of these local residents associations and Bolivia historically has had, in the 20th century, had the most militant and radical trade union movement in the world, right? So you have the existence of these autonomous cultural spaces, which kind of exist outside of capitalism are not fully integrated into capitalism, but are articulated

partially into it, right? As a result of Bolivia's peripheral position in global capitalism, it has this combined and uneven development, which creates this particular political formation, which gives the potential for radical social movements and radical change, right? I think this is the argument you make in the book and this is, I think, very similar to those of us who are anthropologists to arguments made in the sort of 1970s and 1980s by people at Michael Tausig or June Nash, who make these arguments about how, for example, the semi-proletarianized peasantry in places like Africa or South America that are partially integrated into capitalism, that their forms of life, their perspectives, their values provide a sort of moral fatigue of capitalism, right? And actually they have a perspective on capitalism, which is in a sense more informed and more perceptive than those of us that live in the kind of center of capitalism, because we are we are so accustomed to understanding the world in terms of capitalist social ideology.

Now, in anthropology, like this sort of Marxian anthropology has been criticized for romanticizing the life of peasant peoples and indigenous peoples and in the current sort of trend within social anthropology is to think about indigenous and peasant cultures or peoples in terms of this idea of ontology, this word that you use to describe different worlds, people exist in different worlds, right? I would argue that this actually overlooks the way that indigenous peoples, peasant peoples in different parts of the world are integrated into wider society.

They're integrated into wider political formations in society.

They're integrated with the wider capitalist economy and it's basically actually rather a sort of essentializing and romanticizing tendency within anthropology.

It's also, you mentioned Vibir Bien.

So Vibir Bien is this concept of alternative development, right? Or sometimes when Vibir, right? This is a sort of gloss on Aymara or Quetua words, which basically translates as to live well or a good life, right? And it's the idea of an alternative form of development, which is not anthropocentric.

It's a form of development which is based on a notion of of holism and kind of harmony between people in the community and with between humans and nature, right? And it's supposed to be based on these indigenous ontologies or indigenous worldviews, which exist in contrast to those of capitalist modernity, right? And it could be argued, and I'm arguing this in an article that's coming out in Jay Rye, that this actually reproduces quite a sort of problematic binary between a sort of indigenous worldview, indigenous ontology and capitalist modernity, which is sort of seen as the kind of bad guy, basically.

So the questions I have are, first of all, what do you have to say about the ontological term and how anthropologists represent indigenous peoples and their relationship to capitalism.

How should we understand the political agency, for example, of Baimara or Quechua people in contemporary Bolivia? What do you think about the concept of Bibir bien? What value does it have as a concept? Because it seems to, it's based on this very

essentializing idea of indigenous world or indigenous culture, right? And lastly, given that you have this analysis based on sort of combined and uneven developments of places like Bolivia being spaces of radical potential, right? Is it your view then, or maybe your hope, that this is where resistance to capitalism will emerge, right? So the sort of Trotskyist idea in the mid-20th century was that you would have revolution emerge in these places, which were peripheral spacing global capitalism in the global South, and then capitalism would be exported to the global North, and then you would, through this process of permanent revolution, overthrow capitalism.

Is this what you're sort of, is this how you see things taking place in the future? Is this kind of your hope, basically, for how capitalism will be defeated, or how there will be a kind of transition towards socialism?

So that's my first set of comments and questions.

Angus: Just small questions (laughs).

So, I think within anthropology, there's been an interesting shift away from studying kind of political economy, right? And I think that although kind of many of the critiques that were levelled against kind of Marxist anthropologists in the 1970s and 80s in terms of right sizing the pageantry were fair up and to an extent, but the thing that they were very good at were kind of analysing the relationship between basically political economy and kind of the changing situation of different groups, right? I think June Nash and her work on the Bolivian Miners is one of the best accounts of class that you can ever come across because it is so fine grained and looks at class in relationship to the world market, in relationship to the workplace, in relationship to the family and gender roles, in relationship to Carnival and the Supranational, right? It's an incredibly rich account of what it means to be a miner and I think kind of There were aspects of romanticizing indigeneity.

I do not think the ontological term has overcome this.

In fact, I think the ontological term has actually gone too far the other way, right? And I have written articles elsewhere about urban indigeneity, the way I see indigeneity.

Indigeneity is produced by the colonial encounter and therefore we have to think about the indigenous kind of subject as a extremely modern subject.

right? This means that indigenous peoples have always been part of capitalism, right? And the more that, the more work I do on the history of the Spanish colonial regime, the more I have come to understand the importance of, say, maintaining Ayus.

The reason why the Ayus were given land titles was to provide the free bonded meat, the meat, the labour to work in the mines, right? If you gave all of the land to the Haciendas and gave it up as large landed estates, you would not have indigenous labour and you could not import it from elsewhere.

They tried, but people who came from elsewhere died to put it blood in, right? And I think that there is value in taking indigenous accounts of the world seriously and I really like the fact that the ontological term takes seriously different forms of knowledge production that come from indigenous communities and different ways of looking at the world.

I also think that it's very problematic to see it as a different ontology and I think I heard Charles Howell speak 2017 and he was saying, is there a risk with the ontological term that it's just like the same problems that we have in multiculturalism in the 1990s? where all of these cultures just exist differently and they never really interact and I kind of think that he had a good point with the ontological term and there are real problems with the indigenous movement.

You can't romanticize it.

I mean, some of the things I saw on Filbert were really, really horrible things for the indigenous movement and I think that we have to be really, really careful when we're doing research in places like Bolivia is kind of I was a white Western academic going and doing research with indigenous movements who had a very different kind of power relationship than I did, right? It was a real privilege to be let in those spaces and I was definitely there to try and facilitate A dialogue.

But at the same time, there were things that I felt very uncomfortable with and I think that we have to be really, really careful not to take everything that indigenous movements say in place value, partly because of the way in which they use different notions and different ideas in order to further the course and there is a difference between indigenous movements and indigenous communities.

I think this is an important difference and I think Spivak was on to something.

Good afternoon from...

The thing that I think is important that comes from indigenous movement is a seed of doing something different, right? There's a fantastic book that came out last year called Mute Compulsion, which looks at how capitalism is reproduced in three different types of coercion, naked force, ideology.

Gramchi looks at consent and coercion in the sense.

But, sorry, Mao talks about a third compulsion, which is a mute compulsion, which is an economic compulsion.

Right? This is the double freedom with Ben Marx.

You're freed from the land, you're free to do whatever you want, but if you don't work, you don't.

Right? And being further integrated into capitalism, particularly financialized capitalism, where that plays a huge function in deciding what people can and can't do, means that increasingly within places like London, it's harder and harder and harder to organize.

I'm not saying it can't be done.

But this new compulsion is stronger in places like London than it is in, say, rural Bolivia.

Which means that there is a space to do something different, which I think is slightly not.

That's not to say I don't think that there will be a global revolution that comes from rural Bolivia, but I think there are certain ideas and practices that can be learned from that and it's all about kind of trying to build bridges between different places and

also teasing out the common experiences between places and this is the thing about capitalism, which I think the ontological term misses, right? Capitalism is a totalizing system, right? It is expansive by nature and it transforms, capital transforms itself into its own image, which means that people from different parts of the world have shared experiences.

Same with indigeneity, right? An indigenous person in the Andes and an indigenous person in Indonesia, the content of their cultures, of their societies, are going to be very, really different, but they will have a common experience of this encounter, which makes them indigent, right? And I think that those commonalities can be sources of alternatives and I think that is something that we can't miss and I think that the ontological turn, if you push this difference too much, it's very different to build those kind of impossible solidarity.

Vivier Bien, I think there's a big difference from the notion of Vivier Bien.

I think it's an invented tradition.

It comes from indigenous practices that whether it's kind of authentic or not is, I think, irrelevant.

The fact that it comes from indigenous movements and it was proposed as an alternative is important.

When it came into the spaces of the state, When it became state policy and was implemented through a liberal constitution, through a liberal state, it then became a very different thing and I think that there were concepts that were very interesting, but the proposals were never very concrete and they looked great in abstract, but there was never really any sense of what they were meaning when they were put into practice and I think that this is one of the undermining factors that meant that people have always been slightly frustrated with the Vivier Bien in practice.

Mathew: Okay, thanks, Angus.

You did an absolutely fantastic job of answering those questions.

So the second kind of comment that I had was just about your central thesis, right, which is about your argument is that the mass in Bolivia, but also the wider pink tides is an example of passive revolution, right? So This is, your argument is that this is sort of how a revolutionary moment that came from the bottom up and which threatened to overthrow capitalism or threatened to kind of overthrow the conditions under which capitalism can operate in Bolivia, is kind of arrested by this passive revolutionary regime, which is able to assume sort of hegemonic, the kind of hegemonic control which demobilizes the social movements and which allows the conditions for capitalist accumulation to continue in the absence of, in the, and to sort of create this kind of stabilizing kind of passive revolutionary regime and I think the argument that you make in the book is that although this, we should sort of see this as depressing, but because the kind of inherently unstable and contradictory nature of this passive revolutionary regime in Bolivia means that there's always the possibility of this new moment of catharsis, this is the term which you use to emerge and so you sort of express this kind of faith that in places like Bolivia and other parts of Latin America,

that the power of these social movements and this kind of autonomous civil society will allow the possibility for a kind of new moment of catharsis to emerge and a new revolutionary force to emerge and the question I was left with was, how you see this genuinely transformative revolutionary left emerging in Bolivia.

So how do you see it being different the next time round from the way that it was under the mask, right? Because one, I think, one conclusion that you could make from your argument that isn't a sort of economically peripheral country like Bolivia, which is defined by this condition of uneven and combined development, The way that revolutionary transformation can be achieved is through this sort of party, a social moving party, that attempts to embody the kind of often contradictory demands and perspectives of this autonomous civil society, which is composed of these different subaltern groups, right? Indigenous peasantry, people who work as miners, people who live in the city, there's all these kind of different social groups who are not necessarily combined within a use this Gramsian term, historical block, right? And so that's how you could actually have a transition towards socialism in Bolivia.

That's the actual revolution in Bolivia.

But that's precisely what the mass claims to be, right? So the mass claims to be a, and this is explicitly how Garcia Linero, Albert Garcia Linero, the Bolivian vice president, who himself is a kind of Marxist theorist, described the mass and described the process of change in Bolivia, right? So I'm left wondering, what is needed? Is it a kind of mass version 2.0, which is kind of going to do it properly this time? Or do you have this faith in the sort of spontaneous ability of the masses and these kind of subaltern groups and social movements to spontaneously create the organizational forms necessary to create a new alternative to capitalism in Bolivia, right? So that's what I've sort of left it unclear about in the book.

I hope that makes sense.

Yeah.

So the question I had was, how do you see the process of revolution playing at Disney next time? So what conclusions can you draw? And I guess going back to what you said at the start of your speech you said that you went to Bolivia because like many people of our generation, your life and your perspective on the world was affected by the 2008 financial crisis.

which meant you couldn't get a job, and it meant that you saw that everything, the capitalism and the system that we're living under wasn't working for you, right, or for any of us, and that you wanted to try to find alternatives.

So what lessons can we draw based on this analysis of passive revolution and what you've learned about social movements in Bolivia, for how to organise radical left politics in the UK and thinking, for example, the Corbyn movement, right, that's very recent, movement in radical left politics, which was, in contrast to Bolivia, I guess, the weird thing about the Corbyn movement was it was an attempt to create a social movement party, but in the absence of any social movements, right? Because unlike Bolivia, we don't have all these really strong social movements and an autonomous

civil society and the trade union movement and the left has been kind of hollowed out under Thatcherism and kind of like attack over the last 30 or 40 years.

So the Corbyn movement is this idea of creating an alternative, a radically reforming democratic socialist party or social democratic party that was a party of social movements, but they were also trying to create the social movements at the same time and it kind of collapsed under the difficulty of doing that.

Yeah, so those are my two questions.

You know, what are the conclusions for how revolutions play out differently in Bolivia and the rest of Latin America based on your analysis of massive revolution, and what are the broader lessons from left politics and left peaceful organising in the UK? So I hope that makes sense.

Angus: Two more small questions (laughs) and by the end of this, we'll all have a good idea about how to do revolution.

So, okay.

I think kind of I'll start with And talk about the prospects of kind of revolutionary change in Bolivia first, because I don't see that at all at the moment, which is one of the depressing things and one of the things that has happened under the mass and this process of passive revolution, yeah, it's unstable what's happened, right? And you do, and I had to look for glimmers of hope, otherwise it's so depressing.

But one of the things that people talk about in Bolivia is that the hero social.

right, this kind of like social fabric that is the strong civil society that Matthew was talking about that is very much a product of the forms of colonialism and capitalist development in Bolivia that led to kind of very, very strong civil society organizations that have started to disappear and if we look at El Alto, right, El Alto was, Shine Lazar called it at the turn of the 20th, 21st century, a rebel city.

right? A place of radical potential.

El Alto is still a place of radical potential.

It is the most capitalist city, arguably in Latin America.

It is the place where the popular economy is really exploding and you have a new generation of kind of aimaro bourgeoisie that have emerged and it's the place where you can see capitalism of the worst, most nakedly, precisely because you don't have any of the kind of bells of Muslims that probably look the same.

because the state is still quite weak there.

So there are no social programs and so it is kind of naked capitalism, right? It is still a very radical city.

It's still a very interesting city.

Every time I go back, every year, it's changed, right? It has all of a sudden become a high-rise building in Spain, a high-rise city in the space of five years.

It's famous for trillette, this amazing kind of architectural kind of phenomenon, which might you have like a building which looks like a transformer.

right? This is not a politically kind of a political project with revolutionary potential, but it is radical in the sense that it is transforming, not just Al Aalto, it has transformed

the circuits of kind of capital and particularly kind of flows of goods and services in the informal economy across the entirety of South America, right? Al Aalto is at the centre of that, it's arguably one of the most important marketplace in the region.

It is not a place of radical potential, right? The places I saw radical potential and I found interesting when I was finishing the book was in the feminist movement and the reason why I found the feminist movement really, really interesting was it had the ability to cross borders.

One of the problems that I always found with this project was its national scope.

I do not think you're going to have a revolution or a transformative change simply in one place precisely because capitalism is global, right? And yes, you do have an advantage of being a periphery.

Yes, there are spaces which are spaces where you can have potential and new kind of like doing something different, but unless you have transformation in many different places at once, it becomes really different.

The pink tide was particularly interesting because you had a block of like-minded governments that all came to power at the same time, and the US was overstretched in Afghanistan.

which is really, really important.

Oil prices were very, very high, which meant that Venezuela were basically able to fund lots of countries and Bolivia had its debt wiped off through the World Bank party and debt countries regime and then you had kind of the freeing up of lots of things at once, right? Post-COVID, countries are in a worse position.

Commodity prices are high, but Bolivia, like this week has entered into finally a fiscal crisis, they've run out of dollars.

It's not a place that anything is going to radical is going to happen soon, precisely because the role of debt and foreign debt and the need of dollars, which is going to discipline anyone who tries to do anything different, right? The same is true of Argentina, which historically has been a place where you have had radical potential and now you have a kind of fanatic libertarian in power.

The one place I do see potential, which is One of my other research projects is in the energy transition.

The transformation of the world economy from an oil economy to one based on kind of green energy sources will offer a chance to do something different.

Precisely because of the centrality of oil in everything and the way that oil is linked up to finance and has always been financialized.

There are Standard Oil and Rockefeller like the rise of Wall Street in the United States and the rise of oil have always been intimately linked, right? And the last time we had a massive shift in energy systems from coal to oil, we also saw a massive transformation of the global order and a shift from British imperialism to the United States as the imperial power.

That is the place where I see radical potential and this idea where you can do something different.

I do not think you can do it off the cuff.

You can't decide that you're going to produce social forces that are capable of something transformative.

So Gramsci also talks about conjunction being really, really important, as well as social kind of the social forces.

So you need the right historic conditions, but you also need social forces capable of taking advantage of them.

You do have the big debate that's going on in Latin America at the moment is around transitions as not just a social technical exercise of the shift from one source of energy to another, but as a transformation of whole societies and a transition through the movement beyond fossil fuels to also beyond capitalism and I think that that's the place where we need to look at if we want to kind of look for alternatives and I think that is as true in the UK as it is in Bolivia.

Audience questions

Camilla: Questions in the room.

Audiance member #1: Well, thank you, Angus, for that.

was very interesting.

I read the book as well, but it's always nice to see you presenting your ideas.

I have two questions.

The first one is, I kind of, I of course see the potential in the passive revolution kind of term, and I'm also a fan of .

But I find it problematic how some people like Petras or even Jeff Weber mobilized this notion and it seems to me that they have an understanding of the state that is a bit simplistic.

So if you read the criticism of the MAS project, it's always kind of the state is this tool or this instrument that has not been used and as a Bolivian, also kind of in my understanding of social movements, I think it's, as you were saying, this is a state is thought as something much more fluid and a place of negotiation, the site of a strategy.

So in that sense, it seems to me that Bob Jesso and the notion of the strategic relational kind of approach, might be better.

So I just wanted to see if you might agree with me on that point and the second one is, of course, we had this issue with the slides.

It was funny that when you were trying to show the picture of Percy Fernandez, this mayor of Santa Cruz, I thought it was no issue.

You should just say, just picture Boris Johnson and he was very, very similar to me.

I'm A Bolivian living in London, and that's, I think, pretty similar.

So I just wanted to provoke you and to sort of ask if you would think it's kind of fair to draw that parallel between Boris Johnson and Boris Fernandez and if so, because you seem to sort of this idea of a spectacle and public works, and I would agree that

that's kind of the case in Bolivia, but I don't think it's that different here in London as well.

If you think of the Garden Bridge or whatever, Boris Johnson was also about public work and spectacle.

So if you can think about that.

Do you want to do that?

Camilla: Who else were you going to come and talk to? So I think I know you've been drunk.

Alistair: So I'm not I'm not an academic, but I'm just interested.

I think that one of the things about when a radical movement achieves access to power, there's a sort of instant anxiety and they freeze at the prospect of actually giving local communities access to resources and this kind of freezes the whole thing at the mercy of the media and of the powerful media forces.

So that freezes.

So you don't get the cycling of resources to local people and you don't get the empowerment of local movements I guess that's a standard story in that kind of situation, it seems to me.

Just the thing about the transition of energy, this, by definition, will decentralize resources.

It's going to reduce yields.

No form of energy that we currently have has the energy density or energy leverage of hydrocarbons.

So the solution to maintaining our our social, our political economies is going to be very localised and that will make a big difference in terms of reducing centralised power structures, it seems to me.

Great.

Camilla: Yes, yeah, it's a good system because people can hear you if you do that.

Audiance member #2: Thanks.

Thanks very much.

I thought that was really interesting.

The discussion was as well.

I just really wanted to invite you to, I must admit I have not read your book yet, although I will rush, rush out, rush out the book.

But I really, as somebody who doesn't know that much about Bolivia, I'm sort of wondering, you talked about the incorporation of the social movements into the state, into the governments, if you like.

What was the programme of, what aspects of the programme of mass were not achieved as a result of this? What did they seek to achieve that they failed to achieve? Because you mentioned at the beginning a number of things which were achieved, like the nationalisation of gas, a new constitution, that kind of thing.

You also talked about neo-extractivism in your introduction, but you didn't really develop what aspects of what the mass government did that met that and how that, and how they failed to achieve their objectives as a result.

of that.

Just something on the energy transition.

Obviously, it's going to happen, it has to happen, but there's a number, it is going to have a big impact on the geopolitics of the world, because there's a number of countries now which aren't in the, aren't part of the West, if you like, which actually have power as a result of the fact that they have they have oil, like Venezuela, for instance, Saudi Arabia, and so on.

So it's going to be, it actually has the potential to empower the existing powers.

Obviously, China is taking a big lead in that energy transition, but Europe and the United States and so on are keen to challenge it.

So there is the potential there the international power relations to be reinforced as a result of that.

Audiance member #3: We've got.

Thanks.

It was a fascinating talk and Matthew for the comments.

So my main question was really about opposition to the Moss.

Sort of the story of this, if you give it to us, is largely a sort of interim Moss story, right? So Moss's rise to power and it's kind of changing relationships to social movements and so there's sort of, in the comments too, right? And so there sort of wasn't much about opposition to the Moss, especially as kind of concentrated in the lowland part of the country, Santa Cruz, the other sorts of departments called the Media Luna, the sort of half moon, where natural gas resources and agribusiness are really sort of concentrated and there was this really sort of strong process of kind of racial, political, economic retrenchment in those provinces, which I think is interesting to think about also from your kind of framework of passive revolution.

If you think about Gramsci's sort of historical reference point for it, of course, it's the sort of the process of national unification in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century, right, at the restormento as sort of territorial, political, cultural sort of unification or integration, whereas you have a sort of very strong kind of fragmentation regionally and among departments in Bolivia.

right, that really sort of challenges any sort of process of national unification that might be going on and so I was just, I was sort of curious to hear more, something about where opposition, especially in the lowlands, kind of fits in to your thinking and your scheme in particular about passive revolution and then the story you've given us about the moss.

Camilla: Is there anything on Zoom or should we have Angus? respond to those questions.

Anybody? Nobody's bringing them up.

Go for it.

Angus: Excellent.

Thank you, everybody, for the thoughtful questions.

I'm just going to go through them in the order they were asked.

So **** completely agree about some people's use of Gramshi and the state.

The state is a tool to be captured.

I don't think it's that.

The state is very much the product of the society which comes from.

right? It is characterised, it's the kind of ossification of social relations and particular ideas, right? The state isn't a thing that you can go out and touch, right? You can't find the state anywhere.

It's as much an idea as, and it kind of like ossification of social relations as a kind of like a, which has a thing like characteristic, but it isn't a thing that you can go out and touch and I do agree that kind of just gives us a good way to think about the ways in which you can use different levels and different parts of the apparatus of the state in order to do things.

I definitely, there was a big debate in the 1970s about the state, which centered on how do you kind of like define the state, how you do it, how you derive the state as a kind of like concept.

Does it come from the form, the kind of like people within the state, which was like Ralph Miliband's arguments, that kind of like the state is a product of the elites that occupy different places or the administrators.

Or is it the function that the state has within society? And I would lean myself onto the function side of it and the function of the state as a protector of private property rights, as a function of the state, as a kind of market making organisation is very, very important as well as just thinking about the state as kind of like social relations.

So I think we need to take both of those things into account and this means that if we think about the state like that, it isn't just something that can be captured, right? It isn't something that people can go and occupy and the big challenge is how do you transform the function of the state, right? Because I think for me, a state which puts kind of human well-being at the heart of what it does within society is very different from a neoliberal state whose prime function is to make markets.

I think those two states are fundamentally different, right? And I think the challenge is how do we get from one to the other? In terms of spectacle, yeah, I mean, like politics is spectacle.

I just think that it is more naked in a place like Bolivia because the state is weak and I think that the role that spectacle, I think that the Bolivian state, because of its relationship to the rest of society and the way that it kind of like, it for a long time was the ostrification of social relations between a very, very small group of elites and its function was basically to operate with them and large parts of the kind of Bolivian society were able to basically see the state once a year and give them a tribute and then be like, yeah, we don't want to see you again, right? And this kind of meant that when you had a state in the late kind of 20th century, which is supposedly trying to speak

for all of Bolivia, right? It's trying to make a nation, like the post-1952 revolution, one of the things that the state tries to do is make Bolivia into a nation.

It doesn't really kind of succeed in my opinion, right? It's still very much up for grabs.

But this spectacle, because the state is still trying to do, trying to make Bolivia into a singified polity and demonstrate itself as capable of doing something, it needs that much more spectacle, which is why you have like marches through the streets and days of the sea and like, Bolivia, like the school children are constantly out doing spectacles, right? And I was there in the past and thinking about this last summer, right? And I think it's a sign of the weakness of the state, not the strength of the state and I agree with you, this is true of all states and it's definitely true of someone like Boris Johnson and a particular type of politics.

But I think in Bolivia, the role of the function of spectacle is slightly different, right? Just because of the strength of the state.

Alistair, fantastic question.

What happens when you give local communities power and why don't kind of radical projects want to do that? That's exactly what happened in the masses case.

Like one of the things that they said they were going to do is autonomy.

don't really study autonomy, but it's been a very bureaucratized, difficult process because the kind of essence of autonomy is, that you empower, you kind of spend all of this time fighting to win the levers of state power, which is the strategy they had and as soon as you get into power, you're going to give away some of that power and this then leads on to Charles's question about the eastern lowland and you do that in a context where you have a belligerent, quite powerful opposition who are trying to divide the country and start civil war, right? And I think the kind of like just, and I try not to do this in the book, I'm not a big fan of volunteerism, just saying it's the masses fault, right? They could have been more radical.

I don't think it's particularly helpful and this is where I think passive revolution is quite helpful because it isn't just about like this old lefty who can who could be more radical and it's about egg morale is not being radical enough.

It's more focusing on the structural like context and actually what's going on, who's doing like what are the kind of structural processes that are restricting people who are in power or kind of like leading to the kind of dissemination of kind of like social movement kind of like capabilities because social movements can't just mobilize forever and I think that that's really, really important.

Charles, in the book, I do talk a lot about the opposition.

They're really, really important because they try and split the country and I think this division is part, I see it as part of the kind of like spatial dynamics of passive revolution.

This kind of like threat from one particular epicenter, which is allowed.

which becomes the embodiment of all of the fears.

It was also the place where Tupacatari laid seeds to La Paz in 1781, right? It's held a special place in the fears and nightmares of the Bolivian Ali, right? And then you had the lowland Boli who formed much, much later than that, actually only in the 20th century, post the rubber boom.

Agribusiness emerged in the, really in the 1960s, 1970s.

brought with it financial capital and Santa Cruz has been the centre of the Bolivian economy since the government of the dictatorship of Romanza in the 1970s, right? And so I think this division of the country into two Bolivias was a very, very important part of passive revolution and it is in kind of the third part of the third chapter of the book.

In terms of the social, the transformation of social movements to the state and what failed and what didn't, next question.

What's interesting to me is the mass didn't have a political program of its own, in my opinion.

It emerged as the political instrument of the Sisutsube, the peasant confederation in the 1990s, but it was fairly absent from the social movements between 2000 and 2005.

AVMR is outside the country in Lebanon in October 2003, which is like the kind of like apogee of social movement struggles during that period and many of its central kind of like political, the centres of its political project came from social movements, right? And there were arguably kind of like 4 autonomies, which I don't talk about in the book, which are very, very important.

Agrarian reform, which is linked to kind of like the redistribution of land, particularly the breaking up of large agribusiness kind of like operations in the lowlands, which were a product of the previous agrarian reform in 1953, nationalization of gas and constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution.

Right.

So the central pillars of the massive political project all came from social movements.

The interesting thing for me, and this is what I analyze in the book, is that the original design, the original demands were much, much, much more radical and transformative than actually what happened when they were implemented for all kinds of reasons and I don't just think it's good enough to say, oh, it's because the mass didn't want to be radical enough.

I think actually it's part of the challenge of what happens when you try and get radical social movement demands and implement them through a liberal state structure.

You do that in a context where people are trying to divide the country.

You have to build coalitions with groups who do not want to do any of the things that you want to do and even though you have this international context which allows you to do different things, particularly kind of like having no debt to the IMF for the first time in years and years and years in 2007, it's huge.

but you still can't go about and just appropriate everything you want to appropriate, right? The nationalization of gas, they couldn't have just gone to Repsol and Petroblats and been like all of these kind of gas fields that you bought, no, they're now ours.

Partly because the one place you export gas to is Brazil and Petroblats is a Brazilian state hydrocarbons firm.

Like you do not want to do that, right? And so the nationalization was always going to be a renegotiation of contracts and both with the private operators and with the export contracts with Argentina and Brazil were the two places that you're exporting gas from, right? And so I think that there are kind of structural constraints in what you can do and I think that part of the arguments I try and make in the book is trying to look at kind of the dynamics that led to social movement demands being implemented in a way that kind of stripped them of their radical potential, but not, I don't really want to blame the maths for that.

I just think that it's part and parcel of what happens in the context of passive revolution.

So this is why I think it's such a strong break.

In terms of energy transition, just a quick thing on energy transitions, Alistair completely agree about energy density of hydrocarbons.

For me, there are other ways that you can maintain kind of the concentration of power.

If you look at what Tesla are doing in terms of the kind of like vertical integration of supply chains, but also the role of finance in the city of London and where commodities are bought and sold, it's going to be a big part of it.

Again, Nick, I completely agree that this might reinforce geopolitical hierarchies.

We just don't know yet.

All I'm saying is a possible opening where something different could happen and that's why I think it is an interesting kind of like moment, kind of a kind of subject to study.

Camilla: Yeah, we've reached the point where we've got to let our captive audience get out.

Actually, if Margaret didn't get to the door so people can go.

But let's say thanks to both Angus and Matthew and to the questions as well that were excellent.

Angus McNelly
Now We Are in Power (Seminar)
The Politics of Passive Revolution in 21st Century Bolivia
20/02/24

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