



Claudia Heins works for the Indigenous Political Participation Programme of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in La Paz, Bolivia.

INDIGENOUS INTERNAL MIGRATION IN BOLIVIA

CAUSES AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Claudia Heins

Since the introduction of democracy in 1982, Bolivia has been ruled by political elites for whom integration of the indigenous population into political and economic processes was not a priority. To a much greater extent than the rest of the population, indigenous people are migrating within the country in search of work and social advancement. Internal migration of indigenous people has changed the country and has given rise to many political challenges. Historically and currently, internal migration often results in poverty – although the migrants set out precisely in search of prosperity. A 2002 study by the Advisory Office for Population Development (Consejo de Población para el Desarrollo, CODEPO)¹ in Bolivia shows that the immigrants are primarily settling in the suburbs of the major cities where there is a lack of basic necessities (living space, schools, hospitals, water, electricity); unemployment is rampant and social problems arise due to poverty (crime, alcoholism, etc.). According to the most recent estimates by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for Latin America and the Caribbean², the tendency toward increased poverty rates in Latin American cities is attributable to internal migration from rural areas to the cities. In Bolivia, poverty rates are increasing especially in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba, precisely those departments with the greatest number of immigrants. Departments such as Potosí and Chuquisaca are home to the poorest segment of the population and these are also the departments experiencing the most emigration.

1 | Cf. CODEPO, *Migración interna – Estudios de los Movimientos Poblacionales en Bolivia*, (La Paz: CODEPO, 2002), 39 et seq.

2 | Cf. *ibid.*

Fig. 1

Bolivian Departments**HISTORICAL ASPECTS**

The indigenous population in Bolivia has always been characterised by high levels of internal migration, even before colonisation by the Spanish.³ Even 4,000 years ago, the country is thought to have been populated by numerous cultures that have now been forgotten. There is evidence of three great civilisations: Tiwanaku (the Aymara culture), the Incan Empire (the Quechua culture) and the Mojo Empire. These civilisations were settled by internal migrants.

During Spanish colonisation, indigenous people tried to escape from the exploitation through the Spanish. The colonisers used indigenous labour in particular for mining (*mita*) and agriculture (*encomienda*). Under both systems, many indigenous peoples were partially enslaved. At this time, indigenous people mainly migrated to the cities with smaller Spanish populations and where there was high demand for tradespersons and domestic staff. This

3 | Cf. throughout Carlos Balderrama et al., *Rural migration in Bolivia: the impact of climate change, economic crisis and state policy*, (London: International Institute of Environment and Development, 2011), 6-10 und CODEPO, *Migración interna*, n. 1, 35-38.

structure left an impression on the social classes that lasted until late into the 20th century: the Spanish and their descendents took the top positions in society, followed by Mestizos and finally by the indigenous people and by those who worked in the mines and who were at the bottom of the social pyramid.

The institution of an independent republic in 1825 gave the country political independence; however it retained the social structures inherited from the colonial period. Nevertheless, there were some changes. For example, compulsory labour in the mines was abolished and a wage system based on the capitalist model was introduced.

The mining industry attracted many migrants and was the most important economic sector during this period. Being a miner or working in the city meant social advancement.

On the other hand, the feudal *encomienda* agricultural system was expanded and many indigenous people were driven off their property. The mining industry underwent a tremendous boom at the end of the 19th century; in particular, the new mines in the Potosí department attracted many migrants who worked as miners and merchants. Mining was the most important economic sector during this period. Being a miner or even working in the city meant belonging to the worker class, which was equivalent to social advancement in society – especially for the indigenous population.

The most significant changes in Bolivia happened in 1952 as part of the so-called National Revolution, initiated by the political party Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario) and which started a comprehensive process of democratisation. The most important key features of this revolution were the introduction of universal suffrage, the initiation of agricultural reforms, which primarily had the effect of returning indigenous peoples to their properties, the nationalisation of the tin mines, which had been exploited by three “tin barons” for years and finally universal and free access to public schools. The agricultural reforms were especially conflictual. Although they permanently displaced the *hacienda* system (which had followed the *encomienda* system) in order to promote the agricultural industry and independent small farmers, the reforms conflicted with indigenous traditions of cultivation and did not have the desired effect.

Another objective of the agricultural reforms was to initiate settlement processes. With a surface area of 2.4 million km² populated by only two million inhabitants, the Bolivian state proclaimed a politically motivated initiative called "March to the East" (*Marcha hacia el Oriente*). The main objective was to promote the agricultural and oil sectors, as well as to secure the borders with Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. The Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway was expanded to aid these efforts.

Although at first there was little success, attempts were made from 1969 to 1992 to introduce political measures aimed at making the lowlands in the north of La Paz, Beni, Cochabamba, Tarija and Santa Cruz attractive places to work and live. State-sponsored programmes motivated the population in the Andean region and the departments of Potosí, Chuquisaca, La Paz, and Oruro to migrate, such as by supplying plots of land and food. However, these measures only lasted until 1992, and they were not very satisfactory in achieving the state's objectives.

Further effects of the National Revolution included migratory movement into the cities, since people continued to believe that they would find work there and advance to higher social classes. But rural areas were also a destination for internal migrants, especially for the indigenous population who now replaced the former land owners and began working as small entrepreneurs and distributors in the agricultural sector.

Rural areas were also a destination for internal migrants, especially for the indigenous population.

The National Revolution also pursued the objective of industrialising the country. In this regard, it was necessary to promote migration in order to supply workers for production processes. Although the migratory movements were initiated by the aforementioned political measures, primarily by those in the eastern regions, migration continued to develop independently, with the main destinations being the three major cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The result was an informal business sector, caused in particular by the poverty and unemployment among indigenous migrants.

Some other important historical events that significantly influenced internal migration occurred in the period from 1981 to 1990. The extreme drought from 1983 to 1985 drove the rural population away from the valleys and highlands. The economic crisis from 1985 to 1990 sent the country into a deep depression. Miners who had lost their jobs were relocated, chiefly to Chapare (Cochabamba), which is today the main region in which coca leaves are cultivated, and to El Alto (La Paz), where the growth of the indigenous population is especially evident.

To counter these trends, the Popular Participation Law (Ley de Participación Popular) was passed in 1994 in order to bring about administrative decentralisation and municipalisation in Bolivia. The intention was not merely to combat poverty but also to stop internal migratory movements from rural areas to the cities, since this was obviously leading to ever increasing poverty.

To combat poverty and to stop internal migratory movements a law provided for transferring 61 per cent of the state's total budget to the municipalities. But implementation was not satisfactory.

The Law provided for transferring 61 per cent of the state's total budget to the municipalities instead of eight per cent, as previously. Implementation was not satisfactory, however, since the municipal administration staff was not sufficiently educated and often allocated the funds to improve the city's image instead of providing the most essential basic services.

It may be said that basically three recent historical events have marked internal migration in general and internal indigenous migration in Bolivia: the National Revolution of 1952, the economic crisis of the 1980s and the Popular Participation Law of 1994. Meanwhile the first and the second event have stimulated internal migration, the third contained it. History has brought significant shifts as for the economic centre in Bolivia: the highly populated western part of Bolivia, which used to represent the commercial hub due to mining, was being replaced by the western former providers of agricultural products, the eastern part of Bolivia, namely Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. The economic crisis harmed the mining industry significantly, which led to internal migration towards the east. This fact explains the demographic data regarding immigration and emigration elaborated below: because the Aymara and the Quechua people are the most numerous ethnicities and the

western part of the country is the most populated one, it becomes clear that, what indigenous internal migration is concerned, this indigenous groups are the ones that migrate predominantly. It becomes also clear why the eastern part of Bolivia is the target of migration, also for the indigenous population.

REASONS FOR INTERNAL MIGRATION

A study⁴ conducted by the Kiel Institute for World Economics, the Institute for Socio-Economic Research at the Catholic University of Bolivia (IISEC) and the Bolivian International Institution for Economics and Business (IIDEE) has explained the reasons behind the internal migration in more detail, based on a MECOVI⁵ study conducted in Bolivia in 1999. According to the study, the main reasons for internal migrations include the family, the search for employment and education. More secondary reasons include transfer of jobs from one place to another, health and civil safety.

The Human Settlement Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)⁶ discovered that the reasons for internal migration are age-specific. Adults indicated that they emigrate mainly because they own too little land and therefore cannot produce enough. Environmental problems are also cited, which damage agriculture ever more catastrophically, such as frost, drought, hail or flooding. Other reasons cited included lack of livelihood, malnutrition and the desire to live a more "Western" life. The younger population cited almost identical reasons, however in a different order. For them, low income and the desire to have a better livelihood are the primary reasons. Many young people possess no land, while their parents do. The whole family must often work hard, and incomes are low. Migration is seen as one

For the younger population, low income and the desire to have a better livelihood are the primary reasons for migration. Many young people possess no land, while their parents do.

4 | Cf. Lykke E. Andersen, *Rural-Urban Migration in Bolivia: Advantages and Disadvantages* (La Paz: IISEC, 2002), 8-11.

5 | Since 1996, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and CEPAL have implemented the "Program for the Improvement of Surveys and Measurement of Living Conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean" (Programa al Mejoramiento de Encuestas y Mediciones de Condiciones de Vida, MECOVI).

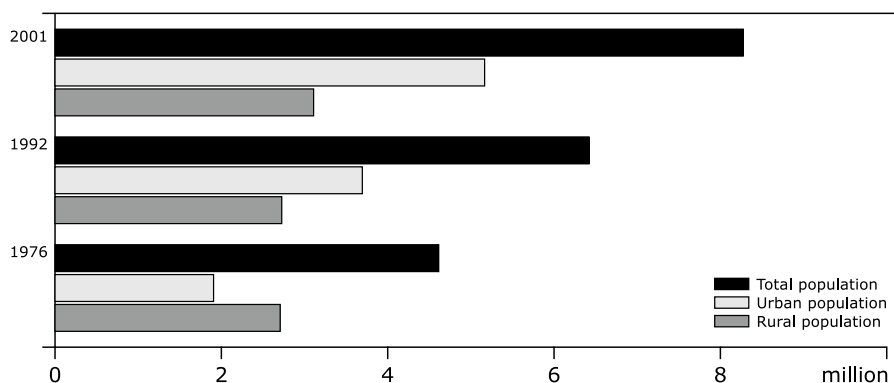
6 | Cf. Balderrama et al., *Rural migration in Bolivia*, n. 3, 24-25.

way to achieve independence. Other reasons include the precarious health situation in some regions, the rustic living conditions in rural areas and the lack of basic services.⁷

BOLIVIA'S POPULATION

From 1976 to 2001, Bolivia's population increased from 4,613,419 to 8,274,325. This means that the Bolivian population grew by more than 100 per cent in the second half of the 20th century. Current estimates put the number at approximately ten million. While in 1976, the majority of the population still lived in rural areas, 60 per cent of the total population lived in cities in 2001.

Fig. 2
Urban and rural populations compared to the total population



Source: Own presentation of data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), cited in: José Luis Medrano, *Características sociodemográficas de la población en Bolivia*, Víctor Mazza (ed.) (La Paz: INE, 2003), 32.

Three censuses dating from 1976, 1991 and 2001 have confirmed the rural exodus that Bolivia has experienced over the last four decades. In 1976, more than 60 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, but the situation was reversed in 1991; by then, 58 per cent of Bolivians lived in cities. In 2001, less than 40 per cent of the Bolivian population lived in rural areas. These statistics show that the

7 | Cf. Carmen Ledo, *Estudio sobre los patrones de migración interna e internacional en Bolivia*, Documento de Trabajo (La Paz. PNUD, 2010), 69-78.

urbanisation process is mainly attributable to the influence of internal migration.⁸

In general, it is evident from the three censuses that increasingly more women lived in cities, while more men lived in rural areas (in 1976 more women lived in rural areas). It was also observed that the older population generally lived in rural areas rather than in cities. The 15-64 year-old population predominated both in the cities and in the rural areas. A majority of children and youths younger than 14 lived in rural areas.⁹

INTERNAL MIGRATION IN BOLIVIA

The general demographic data give some insight into the structure of internal migratory movements in Bolivia. On the one hand, it is clear that the population is growing in almost the entire eastern part of the country, i.e. Santa Cruz and Pando (except Beni). Other migration destinations include Tarija and Cochabamba. On the other hand, the population is shrinking in the departments of Potosí, Oruro, Chuquisaca und La Paz.

In Bolivia, two types of migratory movements can be distinguished: historical (*de toda la vida*) and current (*reciente*) migrations. Historical internal migration relates to those parts of the population who left their place of birth long ago. The destinations for this type of migration are mainly Santa Cruz, Tarija, Cochabamba and Pando. Of the 8,149,783 inhabitants in 2001, 1,241,772 individuals were registered (about 15 per cent of the total population) who do not live in the same department in which they were born. In 1976 they accounted for only nine per cent, while by 1991 their number had risen to 14 per cent. Of the registered historical migrants living in Santa Cruz in 2001, 494,148 had emigrated to this lowland department from Cochabamba and Chuquisaca. Santa Cruz is thus the most favoured destination for historical internal migration. With regard to age and sex, the historical migrants were overwhelmingly women between the ages of 15 and 64.

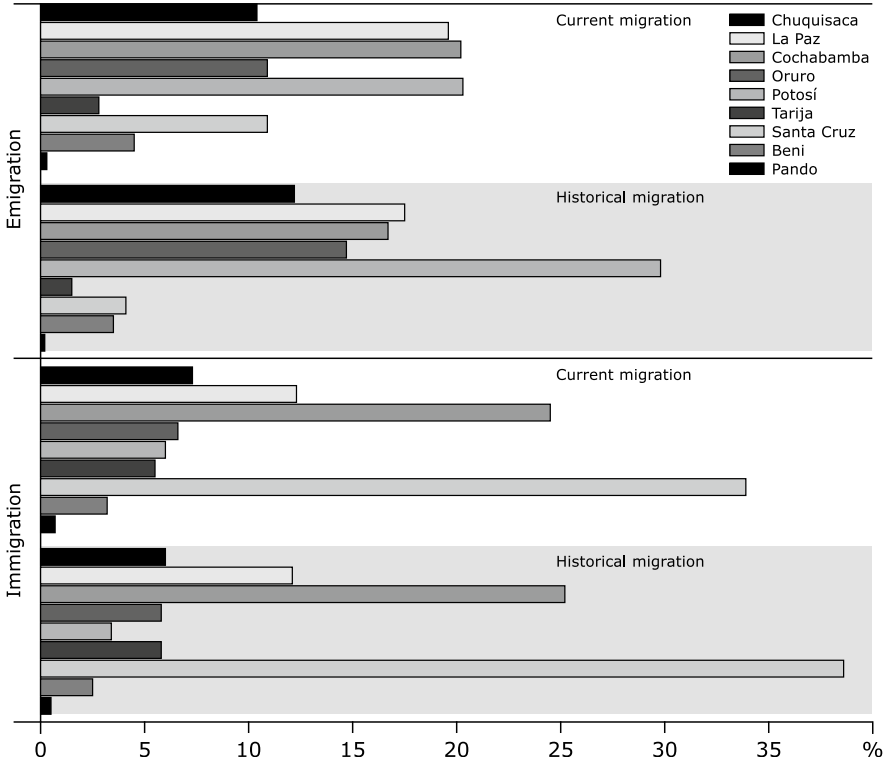
8 | José Luis Medrano, *Características sociodemográficas de la población en Bolivia*, Víctor Mazza (ed.) (La Paz: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE, 2003), 31-32.

9 | *Ibid.*, 34-36.

Men also leave their place of birth primarily while in this age range.¹⁰

Fig. 3

Internal Migration by Department



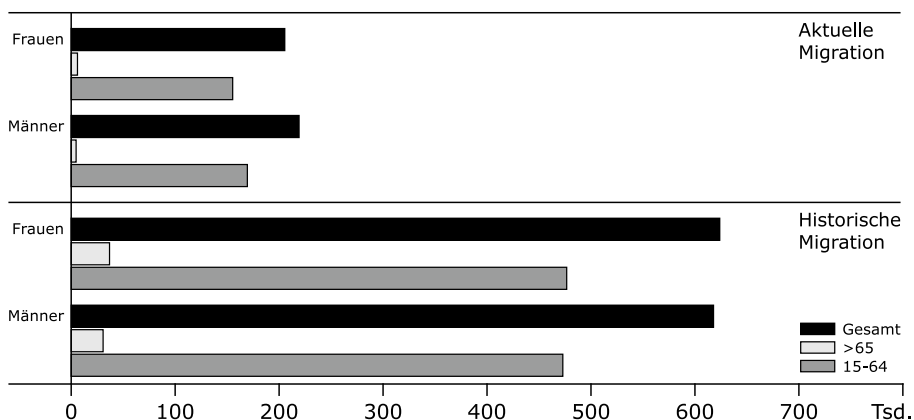
Source: Own presentation of data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), cited in: CEPAL, *Los pueblos indígenas de Bolivia: diagnóstico sociodemográfico a partir del censo del 2001*, (Santiago de Chile: United Nations, 2005), 56.

In contrast to historical internal migration, current internal migration refers to migratory movements in which the migrants had left their place of residence less than five years before the last census in 2001. In 2001, their number was 424,671, which represents about six per cent of the total population. In the 1976 census, however, only four per cent reported that they had migrated within the last five years. The most favoured migration destinations continued to be Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Tarija and Pando, with Santa Cruz taking the top position with 91,271 migrants.¹¹

10 | Ibid., 75-77.

11 | Ibid., 78-80.

Fig. 4
Internal Migration by Sex and Age



Source: Own presentation of data from the INE, cited in: Medrano, *Características sociodemográficas*, n. 8, 78.

Of the 15 per cent of the total population that migrated internally in 2001, 9.8 per cent were indigenous, and 5.3 per cent were non-indigenous.¹² Indigenous people thus even relatively migrate more than non-indigenous people. In the 2001 census, respondents were asked what ethnicity they felt they belonged to; 5,064,992 inhabitants identified themselves as indigenous, which is equivalent to around 60 per cent of the population. Of these 60 per cent, 31 per cent identified themselves as Quechua and 25 per cent as Aymara.¹³

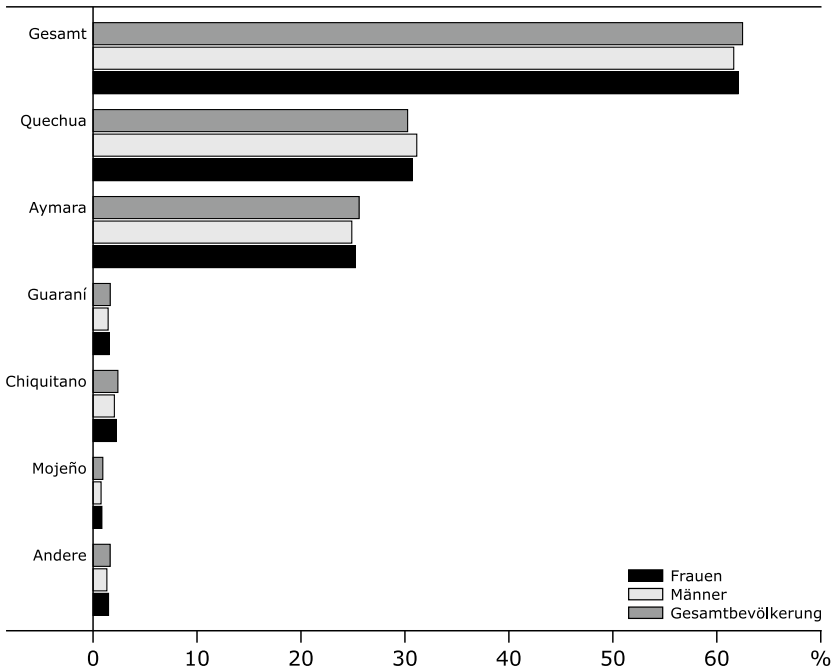
In Potosí, Cochabamba and Chuquisaca more than 60 per cent of the population identified with the Quechuas, while in La Paz 68 per cent identified with the Aymaras. In Santa Cruz five per cent identified with the Guaranís und nine per cent with the Chiquitanos, while in Beni 13 per cent

12 | CEPAL, *Los pueblos indígenas de Bolivia: diagnóstico socio-demográfico a partir del censo del 2001* (Santiago de Chile: United Nations, 2005), 56.

13 | In Section 5 Paragraph 1 of the Bolivian constitution, 36 languages are enumerated: Aymara, Araona, Baure, Bésiro, Canichana, Cavineño, Cayubaba, Chácobo, Chimán, Ese Ejja, Guaraní, Guarasu'we, Guarayu, Itonama, Leco, Machajuyai-Kallawaya, Machineri, Maropa, Mojeño-Trinitario, Mojeño-Ignaciano, Moré, Masetén, Movima, Pacawara, Puquina, Quechua, Sirionó, Tacana, Tapiete, Toromona, Uru-Chipaya, Weenhayek, Yaminawa, Yuki, Yuracaré, Zamuco. According to this paragraph, there are 36 indigenous ethnicities in Bolivia.

identified themselves as Mojeños und 12 per cent with other ethnicities such as Chimán, Maropa or Trinitario. Most of the male population in general feels as part of an indigenous group, while the female population strongly identifies with the Quechuas.¹⁴

Fig. 5
Auto-identification with an Ethnicity



Source: Own presentation of data from the INE, cited in: Medrano, *Características sociodemográficas*, n. 8, 161.

The main age group that identified themselves as indigenous were 15- to 19-year-olds (approx. 485,000). In all age groups more than 55 per cent of the population felt they belonged to an indigenous group. Among those above 25 years of age, the figure was over 60 per cent, while it increased to around 65 per cent among those above 45 years of age.¹⁵

Summing up it can be said that more indigenous people migrated than non-indigenous groups. The most targeted destinations for migration were Santa Cruz, Cochabamba

14 | Medrano, *Características sociodemográficas*, n. 8, 157-162.

15 | *Ibid.*, 158.

and La Paz, both for the non-indigenous population as well as the indigenous groups. La Paz, Potosí, Beni and Chuquisaca were the destinations from where the population emigrated. The age of the indigenous migrants coincided with the age of the non-indigenous migrants: migration took place from the age of 15 to 64. As for women or men, more women migrated in the category of historical migration, while more men migrated in the category of current internal migration. Regarding the indigenous population, only data concerning the current migration was found, which gives evidence that more indigenous women than men migrate.

POLITICAL EFFECTS

The internal migrations have led to a range of consequences. One effect has been increasing crime in the cities, but also in areas where coca plants are cultivated. Increased crime can also be observed in suburban areas, however not to such an alarming extent as in Guatemala, for example. Other effects include environmental pollution and overburdening of transport infrastructure. Beyond these effects, there may also be a cultural shift encompassing more issues than just the loss of traditions.¹⁶ New cultures arise when migrants combine their own culture with that of their new home. This occurs in particular among indigenous people; oppressed in earlier times, they have learned to come together in the cities to create a community in which they emphasise their ethnic identity in order to distinguish themselves from the white majority. Since the population now primarily lives in cities, this evolution naturally has specific political effects.

Historically the indigenous people in particular have suffered discrimination. They were excluded from political processes for a long time. It was not only the Spanish who disregarded the needs of indigenous people, but also the non-indigenous political elites who ruled the country until President Morales was elected in 2005 (and particularly the military dictatorships in the 1970s and 80s). Even the introduction of the Popular Participation Law in the 1990s was not able to comply with the demand for inclusion that was being increasingly articulated.

16 | Cf. Andersen, *Rural-Urban Migration in Bolivia*, n. 4, 5-9.

The statistics above convey that indigenous people are the population group which is most actively involved in internal migration. It can be concluded from the chapter on the reasons behind the internal migrations that in many cases, the main reason for indigenous people to migrate is poverty. This is consistent with the general data on poverty in Bolivia: almost 90 per cent of indigenous people are poor (58.6 per cent of Bolivians live below the poverty line, and 62 per cent identify themselves as part of an indigenous ethnicity).¹⁷ Since poverty is the reason for emigrating and the indigenous population is the group most affected by poverty most often involved in internal migration, it becomes clear why this population group elected a president with whom they can identify. Especially in the departments where a majority of the population is indigenous, in particular Quecha and Aymara, Evo Morales's party Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) won landslide victories in the 2005 presidential elections (67 per cent in La Paz, 58 per cent in Potosí, 65 per cent in Cochabamba, 54 per cent in Chuquisaca and almost 100 per cent in Oruro).¹⁸ In the departments with low indig-

The difference in political tendencies between the east and west of the country resulted in people referring to the eastern part of the country as the "half moon" region.

enous self-identification such as Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando, the opposition party PODEMOS (Poder Democrático Social) took the lead (with 45 per cent in Tarija, 42 per cent in Santa Cruz, 46 per cent in Beni and 45 per cent in Pando).¹⁹ The difference in political tendencies between the east and west of the country resulted in people referring to the eastern part of the country as the "half moon" region (*media luna*) to emphasise the political divide.

The election of President Morales can also be explained by the fact that the indigenous population now feels like a new elite that has finally achieved representation after many years of oppression. In this connection, the Bolivian sociologist Rafael Loayza²⁰ posits a social structure in which the Spanish were the first oppressors, followed by

17 | Rafael Loayza, *El eje del MAS*, n.loc., n.d. (manuscript yet to be published), 3.

18 | Corte Nacional Electoral, "Resultados Departamentales 2005," <http://www.cne.org.bo/sirenacomp/index.aspx> (accessed July 5, 2011).

19 | Ibid.

20 | Cf. Loayza, *El eje del MAS*, n. 16, 3-52.

the descendants of the Spanish; the latter drove the indigenous population further into poverty with Western political practices and would have allowed them to be forgotten.

In fact, the situation indeed came to a head in 2003 when social movements drove then-president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada out of the country because his government was planning to export gas to California via Chile.

The goal of these movements was to prevent external forces from once again becoming involved in Bolivia's internal affairs. With Evo Morales, power relations shifted. The new regime attempted to respond to the previous economy, which they termed "neoliberal", and to society, which they regarded as "individualistic", by nationalising core industries and major service providers, as well as establishing a "plurinational" state. The Morales government does not tolerate those with different opinions. The prosecution of numerous opposition politicians and the restriction of the freedom of the press speak for themselves.

With Evo Morales, power relations shifted. The government does not tolerate those with different opinions. The prosecution of numerous opposition politicians is self-explanatory.

The leaders in La Paz don't merely want to see the new indigenous political elite become stronger; they also want it to remain in power over the long-term thanks to state settlement programmes. New presidential elections were held in December 2009. According to surveys conducted in advance of the election, MAS lacked the votes necessary to win the senator positions in the Pando department and would therefore fall short of obtaining a two-thirds majority in parliament. In August of that year, the government therefore decided to use government resources to resettle 700 families from the western regions of the country in Pando in order to cultivate land that was lying fallow – according to the official version. The opposition accused MAS of doing so in an attempt to dislodge Pando from the opposition block – criticism which MAS dismissed. According to the government, the migrants would return to their previous places of residence to vote. The effects were first felt in the municipal elections in April 2010: the number of registered voters in Pando had risen 5.9 per cent²¹, more than in any other department. In the 2009

21 | "El padrón electoral creció 5,9% en Pando," *La Razón*, <http://www.la-razon.com/version.php?ArticleId=116045> (accessed July 6, 2011).

elections²², 40,912 citizens voted, while in April 2010, the figure was 43,351. In 2009, MAS in fact won in Pando with 44.51 per cent of votes and in 2010 obtained 49.7 per cent. The elected governor thus belonged to the governing party. Today, both regions in Pando that were settled, namely Bernardino Racua and Morales Ayma (the latter is named after the president), have been virtually forgotten despite the government's promises to improve infrastructure and build houses.

CONCLUSION

The political effects of internal migration should be taken seriously. The search for better living conditions within the country has always been characterised by oppositions: country-city, west-east and indigenous-mestizo. These differences have doubtlessly strengthened indigenous identity, and the result has been that this majority of the population now believes that it holds the reins of Bolivian politics – through a president who conceives himself as an advocate for what are putatively the interests of indigenous people.

However, current political practice shows that democracy, as currently implemented, has in no way achieved the indigenous desire for actual inclusion, either. Too many individual interests of the numerous labour unions and indigenous organisations are contradictory, at least to some extent, and cannot be promoted by the government. Countless people feel excluded from the political decision-making process – primarily among the indigenous population. This can be explained in several ways. As most of the indigenous people are Aymaras or Quechuas, indigenous groups in the eastern part of Bolivia remain a minority and feel excluded. Additionally, indigenous people are *de facto* hardly represented on the national level (there are only a few indigenous ministers); on the other hand, the government merely pays lip service to the interests of indigenous people. A good example of this is the equality between indigenous law and state law

Countless people feel excluded from the political decision-making process – primarily among the indigenous population. They are *de facto* hardly represented on the national level.

22 | "El voto del MAS cayó en 8 de 9 regiones," La Razón, <http://www.la-razon.com/version.php?ArticleId=1164> (accessed July 6, 2011).

established in the Bolivian constitution. The “delimitation law” (Ley de Deslinde Jurisdiccional) passed at the end of December 2010 was supposed to clarify the jurisdictions of each legal system, yet in practice, it continues to give state law precedence. Furthermore, the antidemocratic aspects of the Morales government, such as the conformity among the branches of government and persecution of opposition leaders and the press, certainly do not foster trust in the current government and its style.