The Constructions and Reconstructions of an Identity

An Examination of the Regional Autonomy Movement in Santa Cruz, Bolivia

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Abstract

In Bolivia, the well-known indigenous mobilizations of the last decade have given rise to the mobilization of a regional opposition, particularly in the south-eastern department of Santa Cruz. The regionalist autonomy movement not only opposes the nationalization of the country’s natural resources – of which the largest share is located in the south-east – but also indigenous autonomy for fear of a *de facto* discrimination of non-indigenous Bolivians. In its discourse, the movement draws on the construction of regional identities that are increasingly contrasted with indigeneity and implicitly, or even explicitly, racist. This paper examines this lesser-known movement and its construction and reconstruction of the Cruceño identity category in Santa Cruz over time. Following a short overview of the economic, political, and demographic situation in Santa Cruz, this paper covers the construction of identity categories from Santa Cruz’ colonization in the sixteenth century until the end of the twentieth century. It then presents and analyzes the events and discourses of the protest cycle between 2000 and 2005 from the perspective of Santa Cruz and examines the departmental elites’ struggle against the new constitution and the discourses and actions filed in support. The conclusion discusses the developments, focusing particularly on the contestation of identity categories and their relation to the Bolivian nation as a whole.
ISSN: 2048-075X

Ethnopolitics Papers is an initiative of the Exeter Centre for Ethnopolitical Studies and published jointly with the Specialist Group Ethnopolitics of the Political Studies Association of the UK.

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Ethnopolitics Papers are available online at
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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the South American country of Bolivia has seen drastic developments in both the political and social spheres. But while the indigenous mobilizations leading to the election of Evo Morales and the rewriting of the constitution has been explored extensively, much less attention has been paid to the mobilization of regional identity categories, particularly in the south-eastern department of Santa Cruz. Here, a regionalist autonomy movement has emerged which not only opposes the nationalization of the country’s natural resources – of which the largest share is located in the south-east – but also indigenous autonomy for fear of a de facto discrimination of non-indigenous Bolivians. In its discourse, the movement draws on the construction of regional identities that are increasingly contrasted with indigeneity and implicitly, or even explicitly, racist.

This paper examines the construction and reconstruction of the Cruceño identity category in Santa Cruz over time. Following a short overview of the economic, political, and demographic situation in Santa Cruz in Section 2, Section 3 covers the construction of identity categories from Santa Cruz’ colonization in the sixteenth century until the end of the twentieth century. Section 4 then presents and analyzes the events and discourses of the protest cycle between 2000 and 2005 from the perspective of Santa Cruz, while Section 5 examines the departmental elites’ struggle against the new constitution and the discourses and actions filed in support. The final Section 6 discusses the developments, focusing particularly on the contestation of identity categories and their relation to the Bolivian nation as a whole.

I argue that the construction and reconstruction of the Cruceño identity category and thus the attributes the category is based on depend in large part on the department’s position vis-à-vis the state and with it on the nationally hegemonic identity discourse. The Cruceño elites sought to distinguish themselves from the Bolivian state and nation; more often than not, the Cruceño was defined by that which it was not, than by an own clear set of attributes. First the Cruceño was defined as the only population in Bolivia which has never spoken anything but Spanish and the only one of pure Spanish race, in contrast to those in the rest of the country, which they called the Co-la. From the 1950s onwards, it developed into its own mestizaje of Spanish and lowland indige-
nous heritage, distinguished from the ‘bad’ mestizaje of the Colla.¹ And finally, when the national identity discourse emphasized indigeneity, the Cruceño identity discourse increasingly focused on the indigenous, Andean Colla. Hence, while in theory the Cruceño category is clearly delineated by the department’s territorial borders, in practice it is at least as contested as the indigenous category.

For each of these dichotomies, the discourse first focused on the positive depiction of the in-group but soon, particularly in times of crises, shifted to a focus on the negative out-group. But in the past decade, this focus on the out-group backfired. Large parts of the department’s population did support the elite’s political agenda through protest marches, petitions, successful referenda, or in elections – a support which may have been strengthened through the positive Cruceño identity discourse – but it did not tolerate direct action against the out-group in the form of violent crack-downs on mainly indigenous pro-government protesters. The political elite lost its support and the regional opposition has hence not recovered. This suggests a clear distinction between in- and out-group processes: in-group support does not equate to out-group antagonism.

Another distinction becomes prevalent when examining the discourse with regard to the relation between the Cruceño and Bolivia as a whole: that between a social and a political community, both in discourse and practice. Although the discourse was marked by regional chauvinism, it was articulated as an alternative vision for the country and, while this was portrayed differently in the international press, secession was never seriously considered nor supported by the vast majority of Santa Cruceños. Thus, whereas the social community of Bolivians was doubted, the political community was not.

2. Santa Cruz

Bolivia is rich in natural resources, in particular large swaths of arable land, timber, as well as oil and gas deposits. However, these are unevenly distributed, with most resources found in the lowlands. For example, of Bolivia’s nine departments, the south-eastern departments of Tarija and Santa Cruz together produce 82.3 percent of the country’s gas output and 41 percent of its GDP.

¹ In Latin America, the term mestizaje denotes a mixture of heritage.
With 28.2 percent, Santa Cruz is thereby the single largest contributor to Bolivia’s GDP (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008; Centellas and Buitrago 2009).

Its situation as Bolivia’s economic powerhouse has bestowed upon the department a steady stream of immigration. Santa Cruz is, after La Paz, the country’s most populous department. Of its around two million inhabitants, 1.1 million live in the departmental capital Santa Cruz de la Sierra alone, making it the largest city of the country. According to the census of 2001, about 25 percent of the department’s population were born elsewhere in Bolivia, and some rural areas of the department as well as the periphery of the capital are mainly inhabited by immigrants from the Andean highlands (INE 2001; Kirshner 2010).

Just as in Bolivia as a whole, in Santa Cruz, too, the distribution of wealth is uneven. The profits of the agricultural industry are produced by only a few large landholdings, and those generated in the hydrocarbon industries concentrated in the urban middle and upper classes of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The rural as well as the peripheral areas of the city, on the other hand, are marked by rapid population growth in precarious circumstances (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008; Kirshner 2010). The economic elites are at the same the political elites. Organized in the Comité Pro Santa Cruz (CPSC, Santa Cruz Civic Committee), they have long been an influential force in the defence of the department’s interests. It was principally from this organization that the demand for greater autonomy from the centralized state originated.


The geographic and political marginalization of the department of Santa Cruz until the 1950s led to the emergence and persistence of a traditional system of power in which the economic and social elite was at the same time the political elite. These regional elites often stood in opposition to the central state and used their power to construct an identity which would unify the regional population against it; the result was the construction of the regional Camba identity, opposed by the political enemy in the form of the state, run by Collas. However, this discourse was, and still is, not entirely based on spatial differences but also has acquired a biological dimension, based on differences seen in Camba and Colla mestizaje. Over time, the Colla was increasingly equated with the highland indigenous. These developments are discussed in turn.
3.1 ‘The enemies of the soul are threefold: the Camba, the Colla, and the Portuguese’\(^2\): A divided and isolated society in Bolivia’s lowlands

Although long isolated from the rest of Bolivia, the colonial population of the lowland, southeastern territory known today as the department of Santa Cruz was marked by a similar social structure, with overlapping and mutually reinforcing ethnic and class boundaries. The departmental elites tended to emphasize their Spanish heritage and thus their ‘inherent rights to […] resources as the direct heirs of the conquistadores’ (Fabricant 2009: 771; see also Peña Hasbún et al. 2011). These white Cruceños distinguished themselves from the Camba, a pejorative designation of the indigenous lowland populations (Peña Hasbún et al. 2011; Plata Quispe 2008). The distinction manifested itself openly in a feudal social order up until the middle of the twentieth century (Waldmann 2008).

Another distinction was made to the Colla population of the Bolivian highlands, those in control of the centralist but distant and indifferent state. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Bolivia’s political as well as economic power was situated in the Andean cities of La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí, the centres of commerce, agriculture, and mining, respectively. Santa Cruz, on the other hand, was an isolated region without visible resources, long seen mainly as buffer zone to the Portuguese colony of Brazil (Klein 2003; Peña Claros and Boschetti 2008). By that time, Santa Cruz’ landholders had taken to arms twice against the central state, in 1876 and 1891, but both rebellions failed, fomenting feelings of contempt for the Collas among the local elites (Sivak 2007). These feelings may have become even stronger when, during the Chaco War against Paraguay in the 1930s, mainly fought on Santa Cruceño soil, the government entrusted all important military positions to men from the highlands, for fear of desertions if not an alliance between Santa Cruceños and Paraguayans (Waldmann 2008). Meanwhile, local campaigns for a connection of the region to the main markets of the country were ignored (Peña Claros and Boschetti 2008).

It was only after the national revolution of 1952 that the central government, in the form of the newly empowered Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR, Nationalist Revolutionary Movement), took a sustained interest in the region, following the discovery of hydrocarbon re-

\(^2\) Historian and writer Gabriel René Moreno in 1885, as cited in Jordán Bazan (2011: 42). Santa Cruz borders Brazil, at the time colonized by the Portuguese.
sources. But the party’s national, anti-feudal, and anti-colonial political programme was perceived as overpowering and authoritarian, against the economic and political interests of the department. By then, the local landholders had long mobilized politically in interest groups. In 1950, they founded the interest group CPSC, which would later become the most influential civic institution of the region (Klein 1992; Assies 2006). Over the years, the CPSC established its standing through a string of successful interest representations: it averted the implementation of the MNR’s agrarian reform in Santa Cruz, which would have redistributed land from large landholdings to indigenous workers’ unions and communities (Klein 1992), and attained higher shares of hydrocarbon royalties for the department later in the 1950s. It took the CPSC more than two years of conflict with the central government to secure these shares, not always by peaceful means (Roca 2008). The ‘Massacre of Terebinto’, which ensued when the government dispatched the army to quell the unrest, is today an important cornerstone of the regionalist discourse in Santa Cruz (for example, CPSC 19.05.2009).

The events of the first half of the twentieth century thus constituted not only the central, Colla government as the opponent of the region but also the CPSC as the legitimate defender of its rights, turning it into the ‘moral government’ of the citizens of Santa Cruz. The CPSC retains this position until today, further bolstered by a general distrust in traditional political parties and state institutions (Peña Claros and Boschetti 2008).

3.2 ‘Camba is a mixture of the warrior blood of the Chiriguanos, refined with the blood of the Spanish’: The development of a social and political collective identity in Santa Cruz

Part of the CPSC’s legitimization process was also its capability, at least discursively, to reach out to the non-elite population. From the 1950s, the CPSC recuperated the previously pejorative term Camba to denominate the outcome of mestizaje between the white Cruceños and the lowland indigenous inhabitants. With the introduction of universal suffrage, the regional elite’s claim to supremacy based on its Hispanic racial purity had lost its appeal; what was needed was an inclusive discourse capable of creating a collective identity beyond class differences and against the

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3 For more on the national revolution and the MNR, see for example Klein (2003) and Harten (2011).
MNR government (Jordán Bazán 2011). Indeed, the discourse did not only remove the stigma associated with being indigenous but actively included the indigenous roots of the population into the founding myth of Santa Cruz: the brave and fearsome lowland warriors of the Chiriguanos had defended the region from the intruding Incas from the highlands (Waldmann 2008). The CPSC thus both expanded the boundary and redefined the content of the term Camba to construct a common biological heritage; Camba became a positive collective identity that could not only be assigned but also asserted.

Although the discourse took on an assimilating stance, it also maintained or even emphasized boundaries. The Camba mestizaje was distinguished from that of Colla mestizaje: whereas the Colla contained the ‘inferior’ characteristics of Hispanics and indigenous, the Camba was a mixture of only the best of both groups (Lowrey 2006; Plata Quispe 2008). The discourse thus further ethnicized the difference between Cambas and Collas. And it did little to overcome racism among the Camba: the difference in Camba and Colla mestizaje was attributed to the ‘whitening’ (blanqueamiento) of the population in the lowlands (Waldmann 2008; Peña Hasbún et al. 2011). This assimilationist discourse did not break down completely the distinction to those lowland indigenous who remained ‘unwilling’ to be assimilated. As at the national level in Bolivia and indeed in other parts of Latin America, this ‘undeserving, dysfunctional’ ‘other Indian’ remained condemned to ‘racialized spaces of poverty and exclusion’ (Hale 2004; see also Assies 2006). The regional Camba discourse thus reconstituted ethnic discrimination against Collas and lowland indigenous.

This regional, lowland biological and cultural commonality was complemented through the articulation of a political commonality, that is, a shared past and a shared fate, among the citizens (and not just elites) of Santa Cruz. But following the 1950s, the political other in the form of the central state was only evoked when local elites where unable to attain their interests directly. For example, they supported the 1964 military coup by General René Barrientos Ortuño against the MNR government as well as the 1971 coup by Santa Cruz-born Colonel Hugo Banzer Suárez against the leftist government of Juan José Torres González. Santa Cruz benefitted from Banzer’s dictatorship not only politically but also economically. Members of the CPSC held influential positions and the region’s agricultural industry and budding drug business profited from subsidies (Assies 2006). The introduction of neoliberalist economic policies in the 1980s benefitted the department further
and, together with the collapse of the mining industry in the western departments, made Santa Cruz the economic powerhouse of Bolivia (Sivak 2007).

3.3 ‘The Cruceños never belonged to Upper Peru’\(^5\): From integration towards decentralization in the 1980s

It was in the 1980s that the CPSC took a renewed interest in the regional identity. With Bolivia’s return to democracy in 1982, the regional elite’s national political influence became less certain. They responded with a change in course, exchanging the demand for increased integration for that of departmental decentralization, which would give them more autonomy in decisions concerning the department’s fiscal and resource policies (Sivak 2007). The calls for decentralization were supported by a process of reflection on Cruceño identity in order to accentuate a social and political commonality (Peña Hasbún et al. 2011).

A number of tactics used in the reconstruction of the Cruceño identity category can be distinguished. The discourse of a common biological background was supported through a process of historic reconstruction. Peña Claros and Boschetti (2008) argue that regionalist historians rediscovered and reinterpreted regional history, choosing myths and stories that make the past seem meaningful and glorious and the regionalist claims of the present seem authentic and natural. This history confirms the isolation, abandonment, and marginalization the region suffered on part of the central government and attests to ‘Colla attacks’ in the form of state suppression of regional revolts. At the same time, it glorifies Cruceño heroes who have fought for the defence of regional interests. Another more recent example is the emphasis on the CPSC’s efforts in the 1970s to provide Santa Cruz de la Sierra with public services, such as a canalization system, without the assistance of the central state (Sivak 2007).\(^6\)

Additionally, cultural elements such as traditions and language were constructed or emphasized. While the creation of the departmental flag dates back to the nineteenth century, it was not until


\(^6\) However, this historic reconstruction still did not overcome racist conceptions of the Cruceño. Espósito Guevara (2008: 6) finds that a ‘whitening’ of regional history took place, resulting in ‘an almost mythological history, full of Homeric feats starring “white” heroes and where the indigenous are barely mentioned other than as subjects or murderers of white, “civilizing” missionaries’. 

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1980 that it was recovered from its state of oblivion for the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the CPSC. Today, the green and white colours of the flag are omnipresent in the department, decorating taxis, buses, or business logos. In 1989, the CPSC invented the *Día de la Tradición* (Day of Tradition) to celebrate an apparently long-forgotten cultural identity, often accompanied by opinion-forming slogans alluding to issues of local or national reality (Peña Claros and Boschetti 2008; Peña Hasbún et al. 2011).

The CPSC’s efforts were supported by an ever more salient distinction to the Collas. The department’s increasing integration had not only meant its economic development but also the beginning of a partly state-sponsored, influx of migrants from the highlands to the lowlands. The migrants were mainly impoverished peasant with indigenous background and, although Santa Cruz’ businesses benefitted from this influx of cheap labour, quickly perceived as endangering the relative prosperity of the department. This ‘March to the Orient’ strengthened perceptions of a subjugating state and its local representatives, with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, underlined the commonalities among lowland Camba and their difference to the Colla other, soon virtually synonymous with highland indigenous Bolivians (Sivak 2007; Peña Claros and Boschetti 2008; Peña Claros 2011).

By the turn of the century, then, ‘being Cruceño’ had emerged as a regional, political collective identity in opposition to the central state. But this regional identity was ethnicized as it was linked to a biological and cultural difference between the lowland Camba, to which the Cruceños belonged, and the highland Colla, who governed the central state and were perceived as subjugating the Cruceños. Due to the presence of highland indigenous immigrants in Santa Cruz and their discursive connection to the central state, the maximum expression of the Colla became the Aymara or Quechua. At the same time, while the lowland indigenous populations were discursively included into the Camba and Cruceño categories, the racial hierarchy persisted.

The CPSC’s identity politics were largely successful and able to mobilize the department’s population for pro-decentralization protests in the early 1990s (Sivak 2007; Peña Hasbún et al. 2011).

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7 The colours green and white stand for natural abundance as in the region’s rural resources as well as for purity and nobility, respectively, the latter being a ‘rather transparent invocation of racial distinction inherited from Spanish colonialism’. Other often recurring symbols such as the cross potent (for Christianity) or the crown (for royalty) depicted on the department’s coat of arms also invoke nobility and conquest (Gustafson, 2006: 356).
When from 1994 onwards several decentralization measures were passed, however, they threatened rather than secured the position of Santa Cruz’ elites. The Law of Popular Participation of 1994 redistributed power away from the departments towards 311 newly created municipal governments. The Law of Administrative Decentralization of 1995, in turn, strengthened the administrative competences of departments, but it also removed from the constitution the possibility of direct elections for departmental government. An additional cause for concern for regional elites was that the municipalization introduced new political actors, bringing about indigenous-based political movements and parties which differed strongly in their ideological basis from that of the traditional parties. The return of Banzer to the office of president in 1997, this time as the result of elections, promised alleviation, constraining municipal powers (Klein 2003; Eaton 2007). Yet as the ensuing ‘protest cycle’ will show, the Banzer administration was incapable of containing nationwide popular protest against the neoliberal regime, leaving the regional elite alarmed and ready to once again resort to its regional identity discourse to support political claims.

4. 2000–2005: From a positive in-group to a negative out-group perspective

The years 2000 to 2005 marked the so-called protest cycle in Bolivia. But while it began in the valleys and spread in the highlands in 2000, it only reached the department of Santa Cruz in 2003. Here, the resignation of President Sánchez de Lozada in response to the protests turned initial ambivalence into stern opposition to the growing protest movement and the departmental elite into advocates of autonomy. In support of an agenda which sees Santa Cruz as a model for the whole of Bolivia, the autonomy discourse reconstructed the Cruceño as a pan-ethnic, regional identity based on a common ideology which could be acquired by choice by any of the department’s inhabitants. However, this civic depiction of the in-group was increasingly contradicted by an ethnic depiction of the out-group by emphasizing the biological and cultural attributes of the Colla. In the following, the events of the protest cycle as seen from Santa Cruz are outlined before the discourse is analyzed in more detail.

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8 For more on the protest cycle in the Bolivian highlands, see for example Albro (2005b), Perreault (2006), and Webber (2009).
4.1 ‘The time has come to govern ourselves!’\textsuperscript{9}: The autonomy movement in Santa Cruz

The events of the protest cycle in Cochabamba or La Paz affected the majority of Santa Cruceños mainly to the extent to which they were covered on radio or television. The mostly conservative and government-affiliated media highly simplified the situation, often portraying the protesters as anarchist or irrational. The protests were thus widely perceived as temporary outbreaks rather than as the consequences of profound contradictions between state and nation (Peña Claros 2011). For others, the events in the highlands fuelled perceptions that the creation of an Aymara Nation was imminent (for example, Antelo Gutierrez 2003; Zegarra Siles 2011).

\textbf{Figure 1: Map of the Camba Nation as proposed by the MNC-L}

It was in this context that, in 2001, the \textit{Movimiento Nación Camba de Liberación} (MNC-L, Camba Nation Liberation Movement) was founded. Emphasizing the difference of the lowland Cambas

\textsuperscript{9} Rubén Costas, then president of the CPSC, during an assembly in June 2004 (as cited in Plata Quispe, 2008: 152).
from the Andean Bolivian population, the movement proposed (and still does) the breakaway of the departments Beni, Pando, and Santa Cruz to form the Camba Nation (see Figure 1; MNC-L 2001c). The Andean population, in turn, ‘underdeveloped and miserable’, which ‘practices an execrable colonial centralism [...] and imposes its culture of underdevelopment’ (MNC-L 2001a: para. 2), may form the Aymara–Quechua Nation.\(^{10}\) The cultural nation of the Cambas, they say, ‘is the result of a common history, language and the legacy of our heroes and ancestors [...] which declares its right to difference but reaffirms its commitment to integration, to its ethnic democracy, and cultural pluralism as part of its national essence’ (MNC-L 2001b). While the movement thus emphasized a discourse of unity in diversity among the lowland population – the main unifying factors being a common history as well as a common enemy – it drew a clear boundary between the lowland and highland population on explicitly racist grounds. What is more, the movement declared its unwillingness to remain within the same political community.

Although the pro-secession stance of the MNC-L is not supported by many (see for example, Peña Hasbún 24.10.2011), its political discourse presented the intellectual underpinnings of a wider political current, which soon demanded departmental autonomy (Jordán Bazán 21.10.2011). The protest cycle had also alarmed the CPSC. The protests caused concerns over the loss of international investors and of revenues from gas exports. President Sánchez de Lozada’s fall and Mesa’s assumption of the post meant that, for the first time since re-democratization, the presidency was not in the hands of any of Bolivia’s traditional parties, which had done well in representing the region’s elites’ interests. What is more, Mesa took a more accommodating stance vis-à-vis the social movements and promised to fulfil their October Agenda, including the nationalization of hydrocarbon resources (Eaton 2007; see also Assies 2006). The protest cycle, and in particular the events leading up to the Gas War in 2003, led the CPSC, which had mainly operated in the background before, to now take on an explicit role as government opposition (Zapata Rioja 20.10.2011).

In February 2003, the CPSC met with its counterparts of the departments Beni, Chuquisaca, Pando, and Tarija – the departments of the south and east of Bolivia forming the media luna (half moon) – to debate their stance on gas exports to Mexico and the USA. Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca, and Tarija

\(^{10}\) Note that the map suggests that the Aymara–Quechua Nation, or Alto Peru, includes parts of Peru, while the department of Tarija is connected to the Argentinean province Salta.
alone account for 88.2 percent of the country’s gas production (the remaining 11.8 percent are extracted in Cochabamba); the stakes in the Gas War were thus particularly high for them. While Beni and Pando would not have gained as much from a gas export deal, the increasing influence of indigenous-based social movements and emerging nationalization tendencies also threatened the departments’ large landholders who, together with those in Santa Cruz, own the vast majority of arable land in Bolivia (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008). The meeting of the civic committees concluded with the declaration that, should the national government not consult with the departments on the issue, they would declare regional autonomy (Assies 2006).

The events of October 2003 radicalized the civic committees of the media luna departments, and that of Santa Cruz in particular. On 14 October, the CPSC and affiliated associations declared their support for the rule of law and announced that it ‘would not permit any blockades or subjugations’; three days later, members of CPSC, MNC-L, and of the youth organization Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC, Cruceño Youth League) intercepted anti-government protesters on their way to the main square in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, leaving seven injured and four detained. The shock troops celebrated their victory hoisting the department’s flag and singing its anthem (Peña Claros and Jordán Bazán 2006).

At a cabildo (public, deliberative assembly) in June 2004, CPSC president Rubén Costas directly attacked the October Agenda as one of ‘blockade, imposition, violence, repression, and centralism’, going on to proclaim an alternative, the June Agenda: the agenda ‘of all peoples. The agenda for a new Bolivia. The agenda of autonomy. [...] Our own agenda!’ (as cited in Assies 2006: 90). In December, the CPSC, in response to the government’s reduction in petrol subsidies, organized hunger strikes, boycotts, and at times violent occupations of state institutions through the UJC, resulting in what Gustafson (2006: 354) has called ‘essentially a regional coup’. At a second cabildo on 28 January 2005, the CPSC expanded the June Agenda to the January Agenda, arguing that ‘Santa Cruz was “not being taken into consideration in the decisions being made over the country’s future”’ and that it stood ‘in complete opposition to the radically distinct vision that dominates the western part of the country’. Some even expressed separatist considerations should the hydrocarbon law demanded in the October Agenda be passed and property rights and investments be threatened (Webber 2010: 59-60; see also Assies 2006; Eaton 2007).
The main source of contention was thus the difference in ideological visions held by the social movements, expressed in the October Agenda in 2003, on the one hand, and the traditional business elites, expressed in the January Agenda in 2005, on the other hand, rather than an ethnopoltical conflict as such. Proponents of the former can also be found in Santa Cruz, proponents of the latter also in the highlands (for example, Gustafson 2008). And in contrast to the MNC-L’s secessionist stance, the CPSC presented its autonomy agenda as a national agenda for a new Bolivia and only threatened with secession as a last resort. However, the issue is not (only) about competing visions of the state but also of the nation – and is marked by a high degree of regional chauvinism (ICG 2004; Tilley 07.09.2011). Indeed, in its actions and discourse, the CPSC and affiliate associations took after the MNC-L and territorialized the ideological division, pitting the west against the east.11

4.2 ‘Now we can orientalize the occidentals’12: A regional in-group, an ethnic out-group

In support and legitimation of its political discourse, easily interpreted as a strategic step to defend elite economic interests, the CPSC and other organizations again reached out to the non-elite population by re-emphasizing the Cruceño regional identity and unity as well as its distinction to the western, highland population of Bolivia. The official discourse thereby focused on the territory and ideology shared by the inhabitants of Santa Cruz. For example, in their analysis of discourses during the Gas War in Santa Cruz, Peña Claros and Jordán Bazán (2006) find that pro-autonomy actors repeatedly referred to positive characteristics ascribed to Santa Cruz and its inhabitants, in particular the department’s productivity. They also discursively united its population by emphasizing that statements are made in the name of all Cruceños. And the latter the CPSC now defined as everyone living, rather than being born in, Santa Cruz, including the department’s immigrant population (Eaton 2007). In this way, the autonomy movement changed the definition of the Cruceño from one of territorial or even biological roots to one of choice and thus de-ethnicized the category as well as considerably broadened the boundary, making it possible for more inhabitants to assert the identity.

11 The MNC-L’s radical discourse allows the CPSC to present its calls for autonomy as moderate demands (Gustafson 2006). Yet the distinction between the two organizations is not always clear-cut: both discourse as well as membership at times overlap. Assies (2006: 103) therefore refers to the MNC-L as the ‘radical wing’ of the CPSC.
12 CPSC President Costas in October 2003 (as cited in Peña Claros and Jordán Bazán, 2006: 63).
This collective identity, seen to be necessary for the articulation of a collective demand (Schilling-Vacaflor 20.09.2011; Jordán Bazán 21.10.2011), was strategically politicized: political demands were directly linked to expressions of identity. Public festivities in the department, for example, turned into celebrations of autonomy demands (Gustafson 2006). But while the Cruceño festivities were inclusive in that they showcased ‘their’ ethnics and traditions, the represented versions of Guaraní and Guarayos – taken to stand for the entire lowland indigenous population (Lowrey 2006) – as well as their music and dances were stylized and folkloristic. Autonomy demands, on the other hand, were directly linked to the presentation of white beauty queens and of manly, mainly white defenders of the productive and prosperous department (Gustafson 2006). Thus, while the autonomy movement’s discourse broadened the boundary, its actions suggested the appropriate content of this boundary.

In this way, the movement’s discourse and behaviour also led to an increasingly clear definition of the other. Peña Claros and Jordán Bazán (2006: 83) argue that in October 2003, ‘the other’ to Santa Cruz is not yet clearly articulated; instead, the texts refer to the ‘chaos and convulsion’ taking place in present Bolivia, which should be kept out of the department. In effect, they argue, the other is all that which is not Santa Cruz. The positive in-group identity seems to be more important than the negative out-group identity. By the end of 2005, however, both discourse and action re-emphasize two out-groups in particular. The first other is the ‘unruly’ lowland indigenous. Gustafson (2006) describes how the movement’s shock troops were sent to break up a Guaraní blockade in the department’s poorer, southern periphery, set up in demands of higher shares of gas royalties. The discursive inclusion and folkloric use of lowland indigenous customs, on the one hand, and their active discrimination, on the other hand, may not even seem to be contradictory to the movement’s agents: the latter may simply be perceived as unwilling to be assimilated.

The second other are the highland immigrants, who, according to newspaper representations, threaten the department’s prosperity, which is defended with violence if deemed necessary. Since 1999, and more markedly since 2003, assaults by elite-led, armed thugs such as the UJC on peasant and indigenous activists as well as on sympathetic NGO lawyers increased. The thugs thereby claimed to ‘defend their city’ against ‘invaders’ (Peña Claros and Jordán Bazán 2006: 67, 146; see also Gustafson 2006; Schilling-Vacaflor 2009). Again, the violent actions may be reconciled with the inclusive discourse by arguing that the immigrants in questions harbour ideological, rather
than ethnic, differences. This reading is supported by the actions of Santa Cruz’ sectorial business association which, in 2004, withdrew from their nation-wide counterparts (Eaton 2007) and thus, arguably, underlined their opposition against all Collas, regardless their biological or cultural background.\(^{13}\) However, both the actions by the UJC and the business associations did little to disperse racist conceptions of the highland population.

This was shown, for example, in May 2004 when, in this now infamous quote, the Bolivian Miss Universe-contender from Santa Cruz said about her country:

> unfortunately, people that don’t know Bolivia very much think that we are all just Indian people [...] poor people and very short people and Indian people ... I’m from the other side of the country, [...] we are tall and we are white people and we know English [...] (Oviedo, as cited in ICG, 2004: 14).

Similar if less explicitly racist sentiments were expressed by representatives of the autonomy movement themselves. Santa Cruz and its January Agenda were repeatedly presented as a role model for the whole of Bolivia, superior to the model presented by the primitive, indigenous Bolivia (ICG 2004; see also Schilling-Vacaflor 2009). Being Cruceño was based on the antagonism between a failed and chaotic Bolivia, represented by the west, and a successful Bolivia represented by Santa Cruz, and the January Agenda was seen as a chance to ‘orientalize the occidentals’ (Costas, as cited in Peña Claros and Jordán Bazán 2006: 63).

In summary, the autonomy movement’s agenda, in contrast to that of the MNC-L, was not separatist but national in scope. Its identity discourse established a non-ethnic, regional conception of the in-group, a discourse which enabled the elites to evade explicitly racist, pro-white and anti-indigenous, rhetoric (Lowrey 2006; Eaton 2007) and which allowed for an expansion of the boundary to include the whole of Bolivia. However, just as the MNC-L, the discourse continued to construct the out-group in ethnic terms by emphasizing the biological and cultural attributes of the boundary, showing that racist conceptions of social relations prevailed.

The autonomy movement seemed to be successful. High turn-out for pro-autonomy protests shows that the elite’s demands were supported by Santa Cruz’ population: at the second cabildo

\(^{13}\) Eaton (2007), however, links the break to the rise of a new economic elite of Aymaras.
in January 2005, the CPSC presented a list of more than 450,000 signatures for a petition for departmental autonomy (Assies 2006; Centellas 2010b). The scope and force of the autonomy demonstrations weakened Mesa’s determination to take steps toward gas nationalization and, instead, led him to agree to a referendum on departmental autonomy. In addition, Mesa pronounced a decree for the popular election of departmental prefects. Held together with the presidential and legislative elections in December 2005, Santa Cruz saw the election of former CPSC president Costas as prefect. And with presidential candidate Quiroga from the conservative, pro-business party PODEMOS, regional elite interest promised to be represented at the national level soon again (ICG 2005). The relatively weak performance of Quiroga and the election of indigenous-movement backed Morales to the presidency, however, once more changed the balance of power, entrenching political opposition in the regions and on the streets.

5. 2006–2010: The polarization and depolarization of discourse and action

The December 2005 elections had turned Bolivia’s political sphere upside down. An indigenous–peasant based social movement was now in government and the traditional national political parties were severely weakened. In response to both developments, an oppositional regional power bloc began to consolidate in the media luna departments and particularly in Santa Cruz. From 2006 to 2008, political relations between the government and opposition would become increasingly polarized, culminating in violence. The period also saw an increasing politicization of regional identity and a move from the construction of an in-group around a positive identity to the construction of an out-group around a negative identity, with both discourse and action turning from implicit to explicit racism. The polarization of in- and out-group as well as the perception of the state as the out-group also led to the territorialization of politics, not only with regards to government and opposition, but also with regards to political allegiance: that is, a Cruceño cannot be left-wing. The following first sets out the events during the period of highest polarization, 2006 to 2008, and then analyzes the discourse.

14 The petition showed almost 500,000 signatures but the number was reduced in a verification process by the National Electoral Court (Centellas 2010b). Some suspect that not all signatures were collected without the threat of violence (for example Waldmann 2008).
5.1 ‘What this nation should do is to work. We won’t live from the CA, we’ll live from our work’: Diverging views on Bolivian re-foundation

With the election of Morales and his party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS, Movement toward Socialism) in 2006, the previous power parity of both the indigenous-based and the regional movements in opposition to the government was broken. The polarization continued instead within the institutional framework (see also Yaffar de la Fuente 2011), and in particular in the constitutional assembly (CA) set up as one of the first actions of the new government. Both traditional political parties and civic leaders of the lowland departments opposed the government’s project for a new constitution; apart from departmental autonomy, they were mostly content with the existing institutional framework and certainly preferred it over that proposed by the MAS and affiliated social movements. The constitution writing process began with a consolidation of these two poles, the opposition on the one hand and re-founders on the other, both within and external to the CA.

Congressional opposition to the MAS’ bill for the formation of a CA led to drastic changes to the bill, including the holding of a referendum on departmental autonomy together with the elections for the CA as well as departmental representation within the CA itself. The resulting bill stipulated an autonomous CA, free from influence from state institutions; it was to convene in (the nominal capital) Sucre for at least six to a maximum of twelve months; candidates could be proposed by parties, civic groups, as well as indigenous peoples; forty-five of the 255 delegates were elected in the nine regional departments. The text of the new constitution had to be approved by two-thirds of the delegates present and ratified by an absolute majority of the population in a referendum. Finally, departmental autonomy was to be enacted after the promulgation of the new constitution in those departments where the autonomy referendum received an absolute majority (ICG 2006). This bill would be the first and last instance of cooperation between the regional opposition and the MAS government until the end of the decade (Prado Salmón 2009).

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15 Dabdoub, as representative of the MNC-L, in a television interview shortly before the election for the CA, as cited in Schilling-Vacaflor (2009: 114).
16 The MAS had to concede these points in order to pass the bill. Civic leaders from the departments Beni, Pando, and Tarija had threatened to boycott the CA if no changes were made to the MAS proposal while civic leaders from Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, and Santa Cruz had demanded the inclusion of departmental representation (ICG 2006).
The inclusion of departmental representation strengthened the participation of opposition parties. The CA elections resulted in 53.7 percent of seats for MAS candidates and 33.7 percent for candidates of the main opposition parties and thus, as neither bloc sported a two-third majority, impeded swift decision making (ICG 2007b). The split between re-founders and opposition mirrored the country’s political regional division: while the MAS was mainly elected in the highlands and Cochabamba, the main opposition party PODEMOS was mainly elected in Beni, Pando, and Santa Cruz (Schilling-Vacaflor 2009). These results show that the PODEMOS’ political agenda was not only supported by the departments’ elites but also by vast parts of the lowland population. The referendum similarly reflected the regional division as it decided in favour of departmental autonomy in Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija, whereas in Chuquisaca, Cochabamba, La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí more than 60 percent of the population voted against autonomy. On the basis of the overall ‘no’ on the national level (57.6 percent), the CA decided to discuss the question of departmental autonomy as part of its deliberations on the new constitution; a decision which would lead to polarization both within and outside the CA (ICG 2007a; Schilling-Vacaflor 2009).

The convention of the CA brought further polarization. The first issue concerned the interpretation of the decision rule set out in the CA bill: the MAS proposed that a two-third majority rule should apply only to sensitive matters and the approval of the whole constitution, whereas the opposition demanded the two-third majority for every article. But also outside the CA polarization increased: lowland prefects and civic committees opposed the proposal of the government to extend land reforms to media luna departments, where implementation had been obstructed earlier, as this would imply restrictions on the use of land or even its redistribution (ICG 2007a; Prado Salmón 2009).

On 8 September 2006, the CPSC organized a general strike in support of the opposition’s demands. However, for the first time, not everyone in Santa Cruz was supportive; especially around the markets, in the suburb Plan 3000, as well as in the towns San Julián and Yapacaní, all areas mainly inhabited by highland immigrants, people resisted and clashes occurred between the latter and UJC troops trying to enforce the strike. Throughout November and December, the prefects and middle classes of the media luna departments and Cochabamba as well as in the cities La Paz and Sucre called for hunger strikes and protest marches against what they perceived as an illegal takeover by the MAS. In mid-December, cabildos held in all four media luna departments (excluding Chuquisa-
ca) demanded the two-third majority rule as well as careful consideration of departmental autonomy and threatened with secession should the demands not be met. The increasing polarization discharged in several clashes between government-supporters and -opponents on the streets which, in Cochabamba in January 2007, left two dead and dozens severely injured. It was only after this incident that CA delegates could agree on a compromise, which provided that a referendum would have to decide on those articles which did not achieve a two-third majority in the CA itself. Land reform, on the other hand, was pushed through (ICG 2007a; 2007b; Prado Salmón 2009).

With the debate on the decision rule solved and the land reform decided, the regional opposition resorted to another issue of contention to, arguably, further obstruct CA negotiations and win over the department of Chuquisaca to rejoin them: departmental delegates in the CA as well as social movements in the department had demanded to transfer the seat of government to the country’s de jure capital Sucre and thus to reconstitute its full capital status, and this demand was now taken up by the media luna civic committees and CA delegates (ICG 2007a; 2008; Prado Salmón 2009). When the issue was nonetheless deferred by the CA for fear of further divisions within the population, it was taken to the streets. Large-scale capitalía protests prevented CA meetings until November 2007 and led to re-elections in Chuquisaca, which then actively supported the media luna departments in its opposition to the central government (Centellas 2010a).

Departmental autonomy, however, remained the main issue of contention. The CA’s decision to discuss it as part of its deliberations on the new constitution was protested in the media luna departments, especially as it was seen that no progress was being made. By May 2008, Santa Cruz’s departmental council had taken matters into its own hands and devised an autonomy statute and convoked a referendum – unsanctioned but not actively prevented by the Bolivian government – in which it was soon followed by the other media luna departments. The referendum in Santa Cruz showed high levels of support for autonomy (85.6 percent), but also exhibited a relatively high rate of abstentions (37.9 percent), both with regard to non-voters and invalid votes. In mid-May, Santa Cruz took the first step in the implementation of its autonomy statute with the convention of a new departmental legislative assembly (ICG 2008).
5.2 ‘Shitty kolla’\textsuperscript{17}: The depiction of an inferior and hostile out-group

The CA elections as well as the autonomy referendum in 2006 considerably contributed to political polarization: election campaigns were not led with the dissemination of information but with emotional messages towards either ‘re-founding’ or ‘destroying’ Bolivia. This was compounded as the MAS, which had agreed to departmental autonomy in the beginning, changed course shortly before the referendum and campaigned against it. In the campaign, as well as within social movement organizations, autonomy proponents were often described as ‘oligarchs, egoists, secessionists, racists, exploiters, colonizers, foreigners’ and the like (Schilling-Vacaflor 2009: 116, 136). The MAS called on the population to vote ‘no’ in order to avoid fragmentation of the country which, Morales argued, was promoted by ‘small conservative and fascists groups’ (ICG 2008: 10).

‘True Bolivians’ rejected departmental autonomy (de Reinke Buitrago and Buitrago 2008: 167). Nationhood discourses of re-founders and opposition were thus basically reversed in the disputes over indigenous and departmental autonomy: while re-founders had argued in favour of pluralism and indigenous autonomy with the argument that it would strengthen, rather than fragment, Bolivia, they now warned of fragmentation or even secession in the wake of departmental autonomies. In contrast, advocates of autonomy argued that departmental autonomy would not destroy Bolivia but, on the contrary, guarantee its unity (see de Reinke Buitrago and Buitrago 2008: 166).

But just as the central government spoke of ‘true Bolivians’, the Santa Cruz departmental government spoke of ‘true Cruceños’. In mid-2007, the secretary for departmental autonomy of the prefecture, Carlos Dabdoub Arrien, publicly talked of the ‘civil death’ of ‘enemies of the autonomy’, which triggered the circulation of black lists with names of ‘ex-Cruceños’ seen to have betrayed their people and who now should be punished (Schilling-Vacaflor 2009: 291; see also Gustafson 2008).\textsuperscript{18} The autonomy statutes prepared for the referenda continued this radical discourse. Schilling-Vacaflor (2009) notes the disproportionate emphasis on identity, culture, and history in all departmental drafts compared to the national draft for the constitution. The indigenous peoples

\textsuperscript{17} Insults levelled at pro-government protesters during the Massacre of Pando in September 2008 (as cited in Gustafson 2009: 3).

\textsuperscript{18} It should be noted that not everyone in the department supports the position of the CPSC, the prefect, or other more radical organizations. In July 2007, a group of Santa Cruceño intellectuals and members of the middle class published a press manifesto criticizing the way in which the department’s institutions had been taken over by ‘people with hidden interests and intolerant attitudes’ (BIF 2007: 8).
mentioned in the statutes are those native to the region. The presence or rights of the highland indigenous immigrants, although a relatively large group, are not recognized in either statute. The autonomy statute of Santa Cruz, however, seems particularly radical to her.\(^{19}\)

While the cultural content of the Cruceño was further emphasized, with attention being paid to the use of the Cruceño speaking style in advertising or the permanent hoisting of the departmental flag (Peña Claros 2010), the discourse now focused more on the out-group and became increasingly hostile. Besides such threats against enemies of autonomy, disseminated together with misinformation and provocations through conservative print, radio, and television media (Gustafson 2008; Howard 2010), the autonomy movement’s repertoire of performative politics was ever more extended to violence, such as the burning of effigies and armed assaults. Fabricant (2009), for example, describes how carnival celebrations portrayed the Colla, and especially Morales as a stereotypical representative of the Colla, as the enemy by joking about or conducting mock lynchings of Morales. In the wake of the illegal autonomy referenda in September 2008, several buildings were occupied and robbed, with the proclaimed goal to bring state institutions under departmental control. The offices of indigenous organizations as well as those of several NGOs were attacked and destroyed and in the poorer, mostly migrant quarters of the capital Santa Cruz de la Sierra, numerous people were victims of violence. In the aftermath, the attacks were justified as having been ‘provoked by the government’ (Schilling-Vacaflor 2009: 291).

While the two-thirds, the land reform, as well as the capitalia issue were certainly used by the regional opposition to rally against the MAS, the latter played no small part in the polarization. In the run-up to the December 2006 cabildos, Morales’ call to the military to defend national unity was perceived in the lowlands as threat of armed repression. Similarly, the military’s decision to hold its annual parade in August 2007 in Santa Cruz and to invite groups like the Aymara militants Ponchos Rojos (Red Ponchos) to participate was seen as provocation, especially as the same group had previously attacked the Supreme Court in Sucre. The situation was further exacerbated by the militant stance of hard-core MAS supporters who repeatedly announced that they would march on Santa Cruz if national unity was threatened. In summer 2007, a videotape apparently showing ci-

\(^{19}\) Prado Salmón (2009), on the other hand, argues that the statute is only as radical as it is thought of as bargaining chip when negotiating the constitution.
vilians in the highlands drilling with assault rifles further fed rumours of an indigenist takeover (ICG 2006; ICG 2007a; ICG 2007b).

It may thus come as little surprise that the political polarization would lead to further clashes in the streets. The already mentioned deadly clashes in Cochabamba were an attempt of ‘citizens of Cochabamba’ to ‘free their city’ from indigenous and rural pro-government protesters (Schilling-Vacaflor 2009: 295; see also ICG 2007a). Capitalia protests in Sucre in summer 2007 and again in 2008 quickly became overtly racist as well when CA delegates from and supporters of the MAS as well as Bolivians in traditional dresses were insulted and attacked (Calla and Muruchi 2008; Nuñez Reguerin 2008), with the perpetrators demanding apologies for actions ‘against the capital’ (Schilling-Vacaflor 2009: 293-4). The most violent days, however, happened in the department of Pando when at least eighteen unarmed pro-government protesters were killed in a departmental-government incensed act of violence against ‘shitty kolla’ (as cited in Gustafson 2009: 3; see also Prado Salmón 2009).

From 2006 onwards, then, both the political discourse as well as civic relations became ever more polarized and while issues such as the land reform or status of the capital city certainly played a role, they were current catalysts of long-term processes. The discourses and, in particular, the violent clashes all may be interpreted varyingly as based on regional, class, or ideological divides, but racist components cannot be dismissed. Victims of violence were overwhelmingly of different skin colour or dress, which shows that the Camba–Colla distinction was again ethnicized or racialized: there were no victims among white or mestizo Collas.

This Massacre of Pando acted as a wake-up call as it shocked the country and led many to reject the confrontational discourse of the right. The government declared a state of emergency in the department and oppositional prefects and civic committees accepted Morales’ invitation for a dialogue for peace, thereby suspending all protest measures. The CA draft was renegotiated between the re-founders and the national, traditional parties and, although more than one hundred articles were changed, approved in both congress and referendum (Prado Salmón 2009; Bebbington and Bebbington 2010).

Taking advantage of its new-found strength, the MAS government initiated a counter-offensive against the regional opposition, including the strategic suing of politicians who were seen to have
had fuelled the violence (Prado Salmón 2009; Schilling-Vacaflor 20.09.2011). The regional opposition was, however, already weakened. The violence in September 2008 led moderate politicians and business leaders to withdraw support. The opposition was further weakened with the great majority of pro-constitution votes in the January 2009 referendum. A final blow was dealt by terrorism charges against regional elites after the army had killed three foreign mercenaries in April 2009, who had allegedly attempted to assassinate Morales. Various local politicians and businessmen implicated in this affair fled into auto-exile. Although the exact course of events remains unclear, they represented the final moment of bifurcation of the opposition. Businesses opted to work with the government, leaving a radical political sector in the form of, for example, the MNC-L behind (Jordán Bazán 2011; see also Zegada Claure 04.10.2011; Peña Hasbún 24.10.2011).

The decline of the regional opposition went hand in hand with a change in the identity discourse on the Cruceño. While the CPSC and MNC-L mainly maintain their version of both self and other (including the Colla state) – the constitution is argued to be discriminatory, the wiphala flag is not raised, and the so-called Massacre of Terebinto against Cruceños in the 1950s repeatedly recalled (for example, CPSC 19.05.2009) – the debate is now more open (Zapata Rioja 20.10.2011; Prado Salmón 21.10.2011; Jordán Bazán 21.10.2011). Illustrative here is not only the hosting of an essay competition entitled ‘Unravelling the Cruceño Identity’, but also that one of the winning essays asked whether there is one Cruceño identity to begin with (see Olivares 28.03.2011). Whether this new debate leads to a re-definition of the Cruceño identity or, more importantly, of regional politics, is another question.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The Cruceño, or Camba, identity discourse has seen at least four changes since its conception: in its boundary location, in the categories emphasized, and in the attributes of both the in-group as well as the out-group. First, it has seen changes in its boundary location. It was first defined on the basis of Hispanic attributes, then on the basis of territorial boundaries, and after 2003 on the basis of ideology. With these changes in attributes, the category also changed from being based on biology and perceived as primordial to being based on and perceived of as choice. Second, the dis-
course changed with regard to which of the two categories was emphasized: first it was the Cruceño (versus the Camba as indigenous), then the Camba as the whole lowland population, and then both in different contexts, with the Cruceño being seen as the inclusive, moderate category.

As hopefully became clear in this paper, Camba thereby includes all the lowland population, including that of Beni and Pando, while the Cruceño includes the population of Santa Cruz (and, depending on which attributes either category is based, they overlap in part or in whole). However, this distinction does not become clear immediately as both terms are often used synonymously in texts, expert interviews, and within the population. Both terms are also somewhat disputed. For example, Zapata Rioja (20.10.2011) maintains that Cruceño is anyone born in Santa Cruz and that it is thus a regional identity while Camba is a cultural or even ethnic identity. Similarly, Peña Hasbún (24.10.2011) says that everyone in the department is a Cruceño, but that Camba is a more rooted identity. And Moreno Morales (03.10.2012) maintains that the Cruceño is an open identity; open for immigrants, both from the Bolivian highlands and from as far away as Croatia. On the other hand, Waldmann (2008: 39-41) recounts a definition of Camba as ‘someone whose great-grandparents are Cruceño and who has social, cultural, and religious roots in Santa Cruz’, or hears that ‘the term Camba refers to all inhabitants of this region’. And a 2001 survey in the department showed that ‘all Cruceños feel Camba but not all Camba feel Cruceño’ (Peña Hasbún et al. 2011: 140).

Neither do interviewees agree on the characteristics of the Camba identity: is it an ethnic and cultural (Zapata Rioja 20.10.2011), regional (Prado Salmón 21.10.2011), or indeed a national identity (Peña Hasbún 24.10.2011)? While this can in part be said to be based on different definitions of ethnicity as such, some disagreement goes beyond this. There is also disagreement about whether the Cruceño is an ethnic identity. Some maintain that the Cruceño is not an ethnic but a regional identity (for example, Zapata Rioja 20.10.2011; Prado Salmón 21.10.2011). Others argue that there is indeed an ethnic component to it (for example, Estremadoiro Rioja 04.10.2011; Jordán Bazán 21.10.2011). Hence, contestation about the categories Cruceño and Camba is at least as high as

21 Branco Marinkovic Jovicic, president of the CPSC from 2007 to 2009, is the son of a Croatian father and Montenegrin mother. Dabdoub has Lebanese roots.
for the indigenous category, particularly so as their constructed nature is often acknowledged and their meaning thus discounted.

Third, the regional identity discourse changed over time in its focus on the in- or the out-group: in times of crisis, the positive identity discourse focused on the attributes of the in-group changed towards a focus on the out-group, mainly the Collas, and thus from a discourse of in-group preference to out-group hostility. Fourth, and related to the former, was the change in the attributes of the out-group. Until 2003 and, if pressed for a clear definition even today, the Colla is defined by most as being everyone from the highlands, no matter their skin colour or other ethnic attributes (Moreno Morales 03.10.2011; Loayza Bueno 12.10.2011; Zapata Rioja 20.10.2011; Prado Salmón 21.10.2011). It is equated with Andean or Western culture and with centralism. That is, the Colla identity is seen both as a regional–territorial identity and as a property of the state (Estremadoiro Rioja 04.10.2011).

However, there is a clear distinction in the meaning of being a Colla, depending both on social-economic status and skin colour. On the one hand, a distinction is made between ‘good Colla’ and ‘indian Colla’ (Zapata Rioja 20.10.2011); whereby the latter are also denoted as ‘kolla shits’ (Achtenberg 19.09.2011: 3; see also Gustafson 2009: 3). White Collas are accepted in Santa Cruz (Loayza Bueno 12.10.2011). Thus, although the distinction Colla–Camba is portrayed as regional, it is (also) racial, taking up once more the distinction between indigenous and white. On the other hand, there is a distinction according to socio-economic class: ‘collas con plata’ (Collas with silver, that is, money), no matter the skin colour, are recognized as partners in business negotiations or marriage (Prado Salmón 21.10.2011; see also Waldmann 2008: 53-5). This distinction, however, is in sociological reality again linked to skin colour. While the Camba–Colla distinction was always charged with racial chauvinism, it was since 2003 and particularly since the beginning of Morales’ presidency in 2006 that Colla was increasingly explicitly equated with highland indigenous.

The regional identity discourse hence highly depends on the hegemonic national identity discourse: it was not capable to establish the Camba or the Cruceño identity as something beyond the classic white–indigenous distinction. And although the discourse gave rise to violent conflict, the violence did not lead to a spiralling out of control but stopped the conflict, and the discourse, in its tracks; the distinction between the Cruceño as better and the other as worse was not an-
chored strongly enough in society. Neither was this ethnic distinction important enough for the political elites. Once the Morales administration appropriated the discourse on departmental autonomy there was nothing to fight for anymore.

The regional identity discourse was directed against the state as agent of ‘internal colonization’ and it ethnicized the state as Colla/highland elite. This definition allowed the regional discourse to continue even after the election of Morales, who is now the ‘maximum expression of the Colla’ (Estremadoiro Rioja 04.10.2011). But despite all this, the Santa Cruz discourse was nationalist. It was initially not pitched against the nation but put forward as a redefinition. The Cruceño way of life was seen as a model for the whole of Bolivia and it may have been exactly for this reason that, from 2003 onwards, the Cruceño identity was equated with a certain ideological stance and thus to an identity of choice: in this way, the identity was open for Bolivians from other regions and backgrounds. This only changed when, in the elections of 2005 and the constituent assembly, the regional opposition noticed that its vision for the country received little support and it entrenched itself in the media luna.
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