

11 CITIZENS DESPITE THE STATE: EVERYDAY CORRUPTION AND LOCAL POLITICS IN EL ALTO, BOLIVIA

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In this chapter,¹ I explore some of the continuities and differences in perceptions of corruption at varying levels of Bolivian politics, from community organisations to local and national governments. At all levels, corruption and its necessary counterpart, public works (*obras*), are crucial discursive elements in the ways in which citizens assert their expectations of their leaders, and here I examine the extent to which they are successful. In the exercise of formal and informal mechanisms of control, which turn decisively on the interaction between perceptions of corruption and the delivery of *obras*, people imagine themselves as a collective entity, as residents of a particular neighbourhood, or 'the Bolivian people'. Through rumour and gossip, they attempt to hold their leaders to account pre-emptively. In so doing they establish a sense of the public good, and, hopefully, an obligation on the part of their leaders to serve that good.

Corruption is a problematic category for analysis because of its slipperiness: actual corruption is both everywhere and nowhere, because it is never made explicit. Telling a story about corruption often serves more to highlight the moral integrity of the teller than anything else. Corruption is always somewhere else, perpetrated by someone else. It is, furthermore, relative – the same act can be perceived by one person as corruption and by another person as legitimate recompense for services rendered. Nonetheless, corruption is impossible to ignore, because of both its discursive power and material effects. Here, I focus on the former, following Akhil Gupta's argument that 'the discourse of corruption [is] a key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organisations and aggregations come to be imagined' (Gupta 1995: 376).

Corruption is a useful analytical category for anthropologists principally because people mobilize it in various ways to constitute their understanding of the proper use of political power. Disentangling

local understandings of corruption enables us to say something about local understandings of politics and the state, specifically the relationship between public and private spheres. Nye's definition of corruption is now normative: 'behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of a private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gain; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence' (Nye 1967: 419, cited in Olivier de Sardan 1999: 27). If we accept that private and public are differently constituted in different cultures and histories (Sneath 2002), the stories told about corruption can illuminate that construction.

J.P. Olivier de Sardan writes usefully about a 'corruption complex', that is a spectrum of illicit practices beyond the strictly legal definition of corruption, and including 'nepotism, abuse of power, embezzlement and various forms of misappropriation, influence-peddling, prevarication, insider trading and abuse of the public purse' (1999: 27) as well as bribery. Others have distinguished between the market-based corruption of the bribe and the patrimonial corruption of the importance of personal networks in subverting the smooth and rational operation of a bureaucracy (e.g. Sampson 1983; Wade 1985). There has been much anthropological work on bureaucracy and the bribery of civil servants, particularly from those studying India.² However, I want to use Olivier de Sardan's wider notion of the 'corruption complex', because in Bolivia, the corruption that worried ordinary people the most was not the need to bribe petty bureaucrats to do their work more quickly (although that certainly happens), but the perceived propensity of those in power to steal public resources for their personal benefit. As I argue towards the end of this chapter, this is linked to the operations of personal clientelistic networks in particular ways. But, just as complaints about corrupt bureaucrats reveal the strength of acceptance of bureaucratic rationality within a society, because they do not measure up to the ideal of the disinterested public servant (Parry 2000; Taussig 1997), complaints about the rapacity of politicians reveal the importance of the idea of the proper functioning of the state in the interests of its people. The complaints are part of the way in which people assert their collective identity as citizens betrayed by venal politicians who steal public resources.

When people talked about community leaders or politicians being corrupt, they usually meant that they were seeking to use public money to serve their own interests rather than those of the neighbourhood, city or country. Other ways of describing the same thing was calling people *personalistas* or *interesados* (self-serving, or self-interested). As people accused others of corruption, they were asserting their expectations of their leaders, in two senses. First, they

tended to expect that leaders would be corrupt, but second, against this they tried to assert a hope that leaders would, even if contrary to their natural inclinations, serve the public good. Articulating the expectation that leaders will serve the common good makes a distinction between public and private inherent to both local and normative understandings of corruption. Corruption talk is therefore one of the ways in which Bolivians construct a moral public sphere, and make claims to the appropriate distribution of resources, and to increased accountability.

The question is how effective is corruption talk as a way for citizens to encourage their leaders to work for the public good? Corruption is both the means by which people stake their claim to public works, called *obras*, and the context which makes such concrete evidence of activity essential. The demand for *obras* is in turn a means of reducing the damage done by corruption, because, at the very least, some money has been invested in the community. As with community-based politics, in local and national politics, corruption and *obras* together are tropes through which citizens attempt to hold their leaders to account: so that the threat of accusation of the former leads politicians (hopefully) to build the latter. The difference between the levels of political activity lies in the relative ability to succeed in asserting those expectations. Aihwa Ong, following Charles Taylor (1995) has called this kind of ability 'citizenship capacity', meaning 'the ways citizens in different democratic countries seek to realize particular interests, including resources and citizen dignity, and the kind of political accountability they expect from their government' (Ong 1999: 54). Corruption and *obras* together are the key discursive constituents of citizenship capacity in Bolivia, at all levels of politics, and in this chapter I examine the proposition that citizenship capacity progressively diminishes as the distance between citizen and leader increases. The problem is that the generalized perception of the inevitability of corruption on the part of leaders may in fact unofficially sanction corruption, as people complain but do not expect politicians to behave otherwise. The public sphere is thereby constituted as a struggle between citizens' assertions of morality and public good and the risk of the conversion of the 'corruption complex' into a 'corruption syndrome' resulting in a spiral of low expectations of leaders.³

THE JUNTAS: AT THE INTERFACE BETWEEN STATE AND 'CIVIL SOCIETY'

Rosas Pampa is a neighbourhood of about 800 households in the southern part of the highland city of El Alto in Bolivia. Most of its residents are first- or second-generation migrants from rural areas,

predominantly the Aymara-speaking regions of the Andean plateau. Adults are represented by the neighbourhood council, called the *Junta Vecinal*, and if they have children at the local school, as most of them do, by the *Junta Escolar*, or parent's association. The *Junta Vecinal* is led by an elected committee who meet roughly every two weeks, and every two to three months they hold a General Assembly for all the residents of Rosas Pampa.⁴ The *Junta Vecinal's* primary responsibility throughout the year is to obtain *obras* for the neighbourhood. *Obras* can refer to public works such as the health centre or community centre, as well as infrastructure such as street-lighting, the sewage and water system, and electricity. The *Junta Escolar* consisted of three leaders (a president, vice-president and treasurer) who called a meeting of all the parents of children at the school two or three times a year, to discuss questions of, among other things, school activities and discipline, and improvement to school buildings, also called *obras*.

The day-to-day administration of El Alto relies upon the *Juntas* taking the role of brokers, nodal points for the coordination of service providers to their neighbourhoods. Legislative reforms instigated in the 1990s have meant that the community leaders stand at an interface between the state and civil society. The most important of these reforms are the Popular Participation Law and the Educational Reform Law, both of 1994. As a result of the Popular Participation Law, 20 percent of national tax income is devolved to local government, who spend it according to participatory planning processes that, in urban areas, involve the *Juntas* as community representatives. Local governments also became responsible for expenditure on local infrastructure, including education, and the Educational Reform Law provided for an expanded role for the *Juntas Escolares* in supervising the administration of schools, even, in theory, evaluating teachers.⁵ Thus, the *Juntas* are part of the process through which the Bolivian government channels development money to Rosas Pampa. International NGOs also channel money through them, and are often better patrons than the local or national government. One Dutch NGO in particular has funded the building of a health centre, community centre, and toilets and classrooms in the school.⁶

The *Junta Vecinal* and the *Junta Escolar* are both state and civil society, evidence of the reach of the state throughout everyday life.⁷ They existed as means of organizing residents to gain development for their neighbourhood prior to the latest attempts of the state to co-opt them, and are partially influenced by structures of leadership common in highland rural areas. However, their interactions with the state have also influenced their development: for example, some *Juntas Vecinales* are becoming increasingly party-politicized as their influence over resource allocation grows. They mediate between state

and people but are not always uncontested representatives for the community, and do not always serve the interests of the collectivity, which must frequently attempt to counteract the apparent self-interest of its leaders. The *Juntas* also substitute for the state on occasions, for example when they police the neighbourhood informally, and when they implement state decisions at the local level. In many ways, they are seen as *both* continuous with politicians at the national or local governmental level *and* separate from them. The reforms of the 1990s have had important implications for corruption in Bolivia as, with greater resources going to local government, opportunities for corruption have multiplied. At least, this is what many believe, and the community organizations are increasingly coming to the heart of this debate. The legislation assumes that increased community participation through bodies such as the *Juntas* will act as a brake on institutional corruption, seemingly because they can stand in for the 'grassroots'. They are 'civil society' and therefore somehow purer than corrupt state bureaucracies.⁸

RUMOUR, 'PRE-EMPTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY' AND PROPER LEADERSHIP

In fact, in Rosas Pampa, corruption is one of the principal languages for conducting community politics. Corruption is used via rumour to articulate political allegiances or struggles, and to manoeuvre for positions of power; as well as to resist such manoeuvres. Accusations of corruption serve both to highlight the moral integrity of the accuser, as well as to throw some mud (not always undeserved) at the accused. While I was there, there were constant rumours about corruption among the community leaders. For example, it was commonly known (or thought, at any rate) that most of the leaders of the *Junta Vecinal*, in common with previous committees, had houses or land in other neighbourhoods. The belief was that successive committee members have used their positions to accumulate enough money (or building materials) to buy a plot there and build a bigger house than their property in Rosas Pampa. Even in taped interviews, women made comments about the *Junta Vecinal's* tendency to 'extract money', as in the following quote:

The Junta, well there are times when they say 'give us a bit of time [to show how they have spent the money]', but frankly they can't say that any more; people say that they help themselves anyway. People have given quotas, but they've just redirected it to their houses. They even buy houses for themselves, and with the money make everything nice, that's what people say ... they really just take advantage of their position ... The authorities change, but they all do the same. A new one comes in, and away he goes with the money.⁹

Rumours alleged diversion of the money raised from the quotas collected by the *Junta Vecinal* for the installation of almost all of the public services. The sewage system was particularly notorious. A previous president had apparently charged quotas around twice the price of the actual cost, and people had serious doubts about the destination of the extra funds. Don Rolando,¹⁰ the president in 1999, had charged quotas of 10 Bs (US \$1.70) per house for work paving the three main streets of the zone. But he said that someone had stolen the money. One of my informants thought that Don Rolando was particularly *personalista*. She told me that when the *Junta Escolar* had obtained funds for the school toilets, he had demanded to be the builder in charge of their construction, since he was also the president of the zone at the time. However, later on the parents had discovered that stones and cement had gone missing.

Quite apart from the constant rumours and speculation, on occasion serious scandals would flare up, as the incident which put an end to Don Rolando's presidency shows.

By March 2000, the residents of the zone had had enough of him, and at a General Assembly, he and his vice-president were forced to resign, and were replaced by other members of the leadership committee. It was a case of embezzlement: Don Rolando had 'misspent'¹¹ US \$2,000 from the money set aside for the Community Centre. Some rumours put the figure at US \$25,000, and no one knew what he had spent the money on: some said he had bought a piece of land in another neighbourhood with the proceeds and taken building materials from the Community Centre in order to build a house there. Others said that he had spent the money on a mistress. Earlier in the year, he had been so stressed at creditors and builders coming and asking him for money he no longer had, that he poisoned himself, and was taken to hospital. At the time of the meeting, he was still living in Rosas Pampa, but had gone to ground. People thought that he should show his face, to say whether he had stolen the money or not, saying that he was a coward and not a real man. My neighbour, Doña Antonia, said that she thought that leaders 'shouldn't do these things' and while perhaps a woman would poison herself, a man shouldn't.

Doña Antonia was fairly resigned to his actions, saying 'we can't say anything, they won't listen to us. It's the same in [the countryside villages], they defraud just the same, it's their job.'¹² I asked, why do they do it? and she replied 'I ask myself the same thing. Perhaps because there's no money around.'¹³ The sports secretary of the *Junta Vecinal*, elected after Don Rolando's resignation, was also sympathetic:

It's really bad, isn't it? I mean, I think he was in a really critical moment – I think that you only do that sort of thing when you are desperate. When there's no way out, and to do that, to get to that extreme, he must have been really

desperate, to sell his reputation. Because a lot of people thought he was very able, they believed in him, but since he's done this, no, they think he must have been really desperate, he must have had debts, to get to the point where he sold his prestige, really just threw away his good name.¹⁴

Reactions to the embezzlement were mixed, varying from disapproval to disgust, sympathy and resignation. People were fairly unsurprised, considering it the way things are, but Don Rolando had clearly lost his status, even masculinity, in the eyes of residents of Rosas Pampa, as the comments about his weakness attest. He never recovered his reputation in the neighbourhood, and three years later was living somewhere else. The loss of reputation is no small thing for someone who has taken the trouble to become a leader. Holding a defined series of leadership positions in rural Andean communities is part of the progressive achievement of full adulthood (Abercrombie 1998; Carter and Mamani P 1989), and such perceptions hold weight in urban migrant communities such as Rosas Pampa. The sense of resignation expressed by many was, I suspect, because by the time the story got out, the processes of accountability had failed, and everyone knew that the money had been spent and was unrecoverable. Ideally, accountability in Rosas Pampa works preventively, with the sanction of rumour, so that the gossip and scandals about one set of leaders act as examples and serve to keep other leaders in check. As the sports secretary put it, one does not want to lose one's status. Here the micropolitics of reputation are informed by the struggle in the public sphere between the expectation of corrupt behaviour and the attempt to assert a different, more moral, kind of politics.

The stories above show a tension between a strong conception of communality and the perception that personal material gains are the most important motivation for leaders. On the one hand, there are direct and personal material incentives for becoming a leader, as gaining control over the distribution of state resources enables individuals and their families to benefit personally. On the other, leaders are supposed to work for the benefit of the community rather than for personal interest. People have a clear sense of what public service is, and construct that sense in part by telling stories about corruption. As argued by Johnathan Parry (2000), a notion of what corruption is requires a notion of what it is not, and indeed perceived 'crises of corruption' perhaps indicate less the prevalence of corruption and more the prevalence of a commitment to properly functioning bureaucratic rationality (see also Taussig 1997). In Rosas Pampa, there was a general consensus that *Junta Vecinal* and *Junta Escolar* leaders had stood for election because they wanted to work for the 'good of the neighbourhood', a frequent theme in conversations, meetings and interviews. Far from corruption indicating a lack of a sense of the public and public service, as argued by Olivier de

Sardan (1999) for the case of Africa, in Rosas Pampa, the notion of the public is actually constructed in part by the rumours and realities of corruption. Corruption scandals express and impose the residents' expectations of their leaders, holding future leaders to account pre-emptively with the threat that they will be removed from their position and discussed in the same demeaning way as Don Rolando was if they succumb to the temptation to divert the zone's money for their personal interests. Future leaders know that in order to be successful they should hold to their commitment to be active in favour of the zone.

This is not always easy. Andean ethnographies tend to view community leadership in rural areas as an obligation that is usually very expensive, and where prestige and duty prevail over material interest (Abercrombie 1998; Carter and Mamani P 1989; Klemola 1997). The committee members of Rosas Pampa themselves were often vocal about the fact that they were spending their own money on all the work they did. However, in practice, people in Rosas Pampa are understanding up to a point, accepting that nobody works for nothing. Leadership of a community is hard work, an obligation but also a job, and people cannot be expected to work entirely for free, particularly in the context of a serious economic recession. People are prepared to recognize that leaders of the *Junta Escolar* or *Junta Vecinal* should be recompensed, at least for their transport and lunches, when they have to go to the municipal government to ask for things on behalf of the neighbourhood. Rather pointedly, one woman said to me 'They don't get paid anything either. Who's going to work for free? They get hungry.'¹⁵ Nonetheless, leaders tread a fine line between being fairly recompensed for their work and the expenses that they incur, and spending the neighbourhood's money on themselves. What to one person is corruption is another person's way of being paid for the work they do.

Comments from two aspiring politicians illustrate the operation of such logics in other political spheres. Rubén was weighing up the possibility of standing for future election in his natal village, and Jose Luis 'Tren' Martínez was an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of El Alto in December 1999. Both spoke of corruption in politics as a result of the investment required to be elected. When asked in 2000 for his assessment of the new government, Martínez said:

I at least think that they have made a big investment in order to enter local government, and the symptoms you can see straight away are the returns on that investment.¹⁶

He was referring to the considerable expense incurred over the preceding years by the new mayor in building up a network of grateful clients who then voted for him in the elections.¹⁷ Rubén

thought that in Bolivia there is 'too much corruption', as politicians go into positions of power purely to 'extract benefits'. But as far as he was concerned, he wanted 'to work more for people, get something out of it, but not much'.¹⁸ Notable here is his view that there can be 'too much' corruption, implying that there are degrees of corruption, some of which are appropriate. He was probably being realistic about politics: as Martínez indicated, being a candidate for any position is an investment, and one usually expects returns on investments. Rubén estimated that he had spent US \$700–800 on taking a dance group to his natal village, an act partly designed to increase his profile there, as he said:

My aim is to get myself known by the people there; because they look at your character, they have respect for what you do. You have to help people, and then they vote for the person that helped them. If you give them support, invest a little bit for them, they'll vote for you.¹⁹

He knew that if he decided to continue in politics, he would have to find the money for something more concrete, and more expensive. For him, it was therefore only reasonable to expect some return. It is the *level* of return that is contestable, along with the amount of work you do to benefit your 'people' (usually clients) or your village. This is reflected in the common assessment of one of the most successful mayors in Bolivia, Manfred Reyes Villa. He was mayor of Cochabamba for three successive terms in the 1990s, and people often said of him that 'He steals, but at least he does something.' Managing the balance between the investment of personal and state resources in favour of clients/the public, and the accusations of self-interest and corruption makes political leadership a complex proposition. It may indeed be the case that serving the public good will only induce most people to become leaders if it is combined with the prospect of personal reward.

OBRAS

People will probably always assume their leaders are corrupt, even if they are as clean as a whistle (cf. Parry 2000). As a community leader, the only way to avoid excessive criticism and overt accusations of corruption was through working 'for the good of the neighbourhood', which is proved by success in obtaining *obras*. From the residents' point of view, the achievement of *obras* was both a necessity and evidence that the leaders were making an effort and achieving results. There are good reasons for this: Rosas Pampa, which was founded in 1975, had to struggle for a considerable time to gain electricity in the late 1980s, a sewage and water system in 1994, and in 1999 the streets were not paved, causing frequent complaints about the

dirt and inconvenience. Both *Juntas* had to produce *obras*, but the *Junta Escolar* had had more success than the 1999 *Junta Vecinal*: when asked their opinion about the *Junta Escolar*, many of the women I interviewed made comments about how the school had progressed, how ugly and small it was before, when children had to have classes outside in the playground, and how pretty it had become since the latest set of leaders had been in charge. Overall, the assessment of the *Junta Escolar* was favourable, because they had quite clearly improved the school. You could see where they were spending the money they charged in quotas and fines.²⁰ The problem was that with the *Junta Vecinal* the results were not so obvious, so the women made comments such as the following:

[The leaders] have forgotten about the zone. They've totally forgotten. Now, recently, there seems to me to be a little bit of interest in the zone [because of the contract for paving the central street] ... But they've never had any interest in the zone.²¹

When I asked what good things the Junta had done, this particular woman replied 'No, they haven't done anything, there aren't any *obras*.'²²

Obras constitute the acknowledged legitimate expectations of the residents of Rosas Pampa. One result of this was a series of highly ritualized inauguration ceremonies for the *obras* that had been completed during the year I lived there. The *Junta Vecinal* ceremoniously poured alcoholic libations for the new Community Centre, with the relevant NGO people in attendance. The same people came to the ceremonial opening of the four new school classrooms which they had part-funded. Both ceremonies consisted of long speeches, and poetry readings and dances from school children, followed by an official *ch'alla* (libation)²³ and toast of 'champagne' (cider) and biscuits, followed by food and, if those present were lucky, beer. Such rituals of accountability marked the triumphs of the authorities in a far more powerful and important way than rendering well-kept financial accounts could ever do.

The combination of corruption and *obras* as discursive constituents of citizenship capacity at different levels of political activity in Bolivia is also demonstrated by an examination of the 1999 local elections. By 1999, the El Alto municipality had been run by the same political party for the previous decade: *Conciencia de Patria*, or Condepa. The Condepa administrations had been notoriously corrupt and inefficient, and the party had fragmented since the death of its founder in 1997 and its subsequent electoral success and entry into national government as a coalition partner. In 1999, the situation looked ripe for an upset in its final stronghold, El Alto. Sure enough, the *Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionario* (Leftist

Revolutionary Movement, or MIR) put an end to Condepa's reign. Their candidate, Jose Luis Paredes, gained around 45 percent of the overall vote, and the MIR won an unprecedented 7 of the 11 council places on offer. Paredes' success was down to a number of factors, principally the collapse of Condepa and his long-term work in developing an effective clientelistic network throughout El Alto. But central to the campaign was the stress that the MIR placed on the fact that they were the only party with a real plan of government for El Alto, emphasizing their fit with a technocratic politics characteristic of many Bolivian regimes, including the less democratic ones.²⁴

This document, entitled the *Plan Progreso*, is extremely detailed, replete with targets and pledges which seem impossible to achieve. However, it meant that the MIR were able to present themselves as modernizers who would fund *obras* for El Alto, more through proclaiming the existence of the government plan than actually distributing it effectively. Local party offices, especially in outlying neighbourhoods like Rosas Pampa, did not hold copies of the *Plan Progreso* for interested people to look at: they were distributed only among active party members. The *Plan Progreso* helped the MIR to put clear blue water between themselves and Condepa, stressing that they would be more efficient and less corrupt than the previous administration. The MIR media campaigns also focused on this theme: Jose Luis Paredes frequently appeared on TV with his 'whip against corruption' in his hand.²⁵ In the electoral campaigns, corruption was indelibly linked with the ability to produce *obras*.

Although many people talked so often and so negatively about politicians being corrupt, I suspect that residents of El Alto who almost longingly described the mayor of Cochabamba as someone 'who steals but at least does something' would rather have a corrupt mayor who provided *obras* than a completely honest one who did nothing visible. The focus on *obras* is unsurprising given the needs that actually exist in residential zones of El Alto, and anyway, at high levels of power, complete honesty is often thought impossible (cf. Parry 2000). Since most people felt all politicians to be equally corrupt, the issue of corruption did not enable electors to choose between the political parties. Ultimately, they assessed the value of a politician despite and beyond their presumed corruption. One informant's comment about the MIR reflects this: 'They're corrupt, but at least they keep their promises.'²⁶ By early 2003, the *obras* in El Alto were certainly visible, as the MIR had asphalted some roads, built a stadium and finished pedestrian bridges that Condepa had left uncompleted. This increased activity was in part because the MIR wished to improve its election prospects in El Alto for the national elections of 2002. Accusations of corruption at campaign time are part of politicians' weaponry, and a component of the cyclical nature

of politics, as one party gives way to another, but they also constitute a pressure to perform, at least to some extent. At the neighbourhood level, the president who took over from Don Rolando has also proved to be more visibly effective than his predecessor, and in a meeting in May 2003 was re-elected for another year's term of office. Of course, these are not simple stories of effective citizenship capacity. There is still considerable suspicion of the MIR administration, particularly with regard to the durability of their *obras*, given a perceived tendency to divert money through the purchase of lower-quality materials than those in the budget. The *obras* have also been concentrated in the neighbourhoods which are known to support the MIR. Community and municipal politics are linked, as Don Rolando was a well-known Condepista, and therefore unlikely to achieve very much from a MIR administration. However, the *Junta Escolar* of 1999 also remains in place, largely because they are known to be effective and thus have been able to withstand the accusations of corruption levelled at them. They have also been careful to keep good records, because, as the treasurer told me, 'people talk'.

CORRUPTION TALK, POWER AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Corruption talk enables people to make evaluations of those in power, according to how *personalista* or *interesado* they are. What is at issue is the *extent* to which public money is diverted for personal gain, or, more importantly, redistributed to the people, either through *obras* or through jobs. These are linked to the clientelistic structures that pervade politics, as the party 'militants' are the ones who can hope to get the jobs planning, supervising or building the *obras* once their candidate has won. This is an indication of what Bayart (1993) calls a 'politics of the belly' (see also Olivier de Sardan 1999). Bayart argues that, in Cameroon, politics is about the accumulation of wealth and its subsequent redistribution, in order to satisfy and increase a politician's clientele. Politicians are entitled, and expected, to accumulate wealth personally, and use it to benefit their social networks, including above all their family. How acceptable this is in Bolivia varies according to the context, but what is similar is that Bolivian patrons are expected to redistribute their wealth, and the wealth of the state, through the provision of jobs to their clients (Gamarra and Malloy 1995). Each time a new political party takes over the administration of a municipality, ministry, etc., the previous set of civil servants is fired and the new party's activists take their place. Despite the rhetorical emphasis on *obras*, the largest part of a municipality's budget goes on wages for its functionaries (Blanco Cazas and Sandoval 1993). While Condepa was in power in El Alto, half of the budget went on wages, a third on debt servicing, and less

than a fifth on new *obras*.²⁷ It is here that local administrations are caught between two imperatives: the need to give wages to their militants and the need to fund *obras*. They are lucky if they are able to combine the two.

Of course, the evaluations that people make of politicians do slip, and vary according to context and person, but their mobilization illuminates the kinds of expectations people have. And in the Bolivian case, corruption, and political life in general, cannot be understood apart from the expectations and needs people have for tangible evidence of political activity. Hence the frequent repetition of increasingly unrealistic promises of *obras* for El Alto during election campaigns. *Obras* are concrete (often literally) evidence that politicians have been working in the people's interests, however much money they might have siphoned off for their own benefit. Condepa held the allegiance of many of people because they 'helped poor people' through clientelistic party mechanisms, that is giving jobs and wages, even if they did not pay back the zones with many actual *obras*. However, that tolerance was only extended up to a point, because given the presence of a promising alternative, enough residents of El Alto were fed up of having an inactive municipal administration to vote Condepa out.

The 1999 elections *may* be an example of a successful assertion of citizens' expectations at the municipal level, although its extent should by no means be overstated, and it was at any rate exceptional. On the whole, citizenship capacity is perhaps rather more effective at the community level than with regard to local or national politics. The actions of the present leaders of the *Junta Vecinal* and *Junta Escolar* show the extent to which pre-emptive accountability can work at community level. At municipal and national levels, a pervasive disillusionment with politics expresses itself in narratives of politicians' corruption, which articulate the powerlessness people feel with regard to political (and economic) elites, expressed well by the following comment I overheard: 'We queue up in order to pay taxes, they queue up in order to steal.'²⁸ As the effectiveness of citizenship capacity reduces, citizens progressively feel distanced from their leaders, and corruption talk becomes a way to express feelings of powerlessness and explain the failure of politics to respond to the needs of ordinary people. The lack of felt representativity in the political system is thus made apparent.²⁹ Through narratives of politicians' corruption, Bolivians assert their expectations of the state and attempt to hold politicians to account. In doing so, they represent the nature of the state and the reality of their citizenship back to themselves, not in a favourable light. I often heard from friends, of all classes, that although Bolivia has everything in terms of natural riches, the politicians steal everything, so Bolivia has not

been able to 'advance'. Here, the subalterns blame the elites: Bolivia is not underdeveloped because of its citizens being backward, or because of an inauspicious environment, or because of its place in the global economy. Rather, a country that could be wealthy is betrayed by elite leaders, who are *personalistas* and *interesados* – the 'people of Bolivia' are citizens betrayed by venal politicians. Thus self-esteem and pride in the country, land, environment and the masses of the people, can be maintained. The people telling these stories are collectively imagining themselves as 'citizens despite the state' rather than citizens who are constituted through a positive relationship with the state.

Discourses of corruption reveal some of the values underlying political life, as well as perhaps discursively constituting political life in Bolivia. This is true for all of the levels at which the state operates, from community to national politics. Political leaders, including community leaders, do not always serve the interests of the collectivity. However, their failure to do so does enable the construction of a notion of what those interests might be. Occasionally, the collectivity defines itself against, or despite, the actions of its leaders, through accusations of corruption which in turn reinforce a notion of a common or public good that can be violated through corrupt practices. Here, rumour and gossip are means of constructing public opinion, conducting local politics and articulating values about the use of political power. These rumours, and the occasional real successes in getting rid of leaders perceived as especially corrupt, are a way of asserting the morality of the public sphere. That morality is under threat from corruption, but also put into stark relief by corruption. Thus ordinary citizens assert their own collective morality in the face of their expectations of the immorality of their leaders.

NOTES

1. My thanks to Olivia Harris and Cris Shore for comments on earlier versions of this chapter.
2. For example Wade (1982, 1985), Gupta (1995, and this volume), Visvanathan and Sethi (1998) and Parry (2000); but also see Shore (2000) and Sampson (1983) for the European Union and Romania respectively.
3. I am grateful to Cris Shore for this observation.
4. General Assemblies are usually attended by about 100–150 people, who represent their households, or their streets, and feed back information to those who are unable to attend. In a survey I conducted, a remarkable 77 percent of respondents said that they regularly attended some form of civic activity, and most of them went to the General Assemblies. When discussing the *Junta Vecinal* committee, people often called them 'the authorities/leaders of the neighbourhood', rather than its representatives. The most active member of the committee is the president.

5. For more detailed comment on popular participation, see McNeish (2002), Booth et al. (1997), Gray Molina (2003); on the education reforms, see Hornberger (2000) and Comboni Salinas and Juárez Nunez (2000).
6. The *Juntas* are also increasingly finding themselves representing the community to private enterprises, such as the electricity or waste disposal companies.
7. Much of the work on corruption in India has similarly argued for an interpenetration of the state in ordinary life, but has tended to focus principally on the reach of a bureaucratic system controlled more or less from the top down (Gupta 1995, and this volume; Visvanathan and Sethi 1998; Wade 1982, 1985).
8. Support for 'civil society' is often seen as the appropriate response to corruption in development 'good governance' policies. See, for example, 'Civil Society Participation and the Anti-corruption Strategy of the World Bank', at <<http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/civilsociety.htm>>.
9. 'Yo diría de la Junta, deben – hay veces, si pues, "un ratito ya" dicen, pues, pero ya no es eso; dicen que ellos ya se sacan. Les han ayudado [con dinero, cuotas], entonces ellos nomás a sus casas se lo hacen llegar. Si ellos nomás hasta casas se compran, con eso se hacen arreglar, dice. ... Ellos nomás dice que se aprovechan ... Otro cambia, lo mismo se hace. Otro cambia, con la plata se va.'
10. I use pseudonyms throughout this chapter. Don and Doña are polite Spanish terms for Mr and Mrs.
11. The Spanish word is '*malgastar*', which can also mean 'to waste'.
12. 'No podemos decir nada, no nos van a hacer caso. Igual es en [mi pueblo], igual engañan, es su trabajo.'
13. 'Eso mismo digo yo. Tal vez porque no hay plata.'
14. 'Da mucha bronca, no? Es decir, yo creo que estaba en un momento bien crítico, no, en un momento – ya, yo creo que solo uno puede hacer algo así cuando uno está desesperado, no? No tiene una salida, y a hacer, a llegar hasta este extremo, yo creo que ha debido estar bien desesperado para hacer eso, no, para vender su prestigio. Porque mucha gente más o menos pensaban en su capacidad, creían en su capacidad, pero como que ha hecho, no, se piensan que ha debido estar realmente desesperado, ha debido tener deudas, hasta vender su prestigio, todo su persona echarlo al tacho realmente.'
15. 'Tampoco no les pagan nada. ¿Quién va a caminar gratis? Tienen hambre, pues.'
16. 'Yo por lo menos tengo la idea de que ellos han hecho una inversión fuerte para ingresar a la Alcaldía y el síntoma inmediato que se nota es la recuperación de esa misma inversión.'
17. The mayor himself, in an interview with the weekly newspaper *Pulso* (19–25 Nov. 1999: 12–13), estimated that he had spent around US \$30,000 of his own money investing in community projects such as building basketball courts, buying TVs for schools, being 'godfather' to graduating classes.
18. 'Yo quiero trabajar más para la gente, sacar algo pero no mucho.'
19. 'Mi fin es hacerme conocer con la gente de allá; porque se fijan en tu persona, tienen respeto por lo que haces. Hay que ayudar a la gente, y después vota por quien te ayuda. Si tu les das un apoyo, invertir un poco para ellos, votan para ti.'

20. Fines are charged when parents do not attend demonstrations organized by the central Federation of *Juntas Escolares*.
21. '[Los dirigentes] se han olvidado de la zona. Se han olvidado totalmente. Ahora recién me parece que hay un poco de interés en la zona ... Nunca han tenido interés de la zona.'
22. 'No, no han hecho nada, no hay obras.'
23. A *ch'alla* is a libation, which consists of dropping some alcohol onto the floor, to feed Pachamama, and for good luck. See Abercrombie (1998) for a detailed discussion.
24. Gamarra argues that the technocratic element of Bolivian government, particularly noticeable in the administration of 1993–97, is evidence of the authoritarian legacy of the dictatorship era (Gamarra 2003).
25. He called it his '*chicote contra la corrupción*'. The *chicote* is a small whip that parents use to discipline their children.
26. 'Son corruptos, pero por lo menos cumplen.'
27. *Pulso*, 19–25 November 1999.
28. 'Nosotros hacemos fila para pagar impuestos, ellos hacen fila para robar.'
29. Representativity is a key problem for Bolivian party politics. See Gamarra and Malloy (1995), Domingo (2001) and Gamarra (2003).

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12 AFTERWORD – ANTHROPOLOGY AND CORRUPTION: THE STATE OF THE ART

Dorothy Louise Zinn

Without doubt the social universes within which disinterestedness is the official norm are not necessarily governed throughout by disinterestedness: behind the appearance of piety, virtue, disinterestedness, there are subtle, camouflaged interests ... [I]t is also among the tasks of a politics of morality to work incessantly toward unveiling hidden difference between official theory and actual practice, between the limelight and the backrooms of political life. (Bourdieu 1998: 87, 144)

Like any scholarly discipline, anthropology is nothing if not a product of the *Zeitgeist* in which it takes its shape and is cultivated. As such, this volume assumes as its timely focus the anthropology of corruption, certainly in part because there is currently a felicitous 'conjuncture', as Steven Sampson puts it, of corruption and anti-corruption discourses within a wider context of globalization, global ethics and neoliberalism. By this, I do not mean to imply that corruption merits our attention simply because of its trendiness as a topic – although such vogue might well be of use for gaining institutional and funding clout. Rather, what emerges from this volume is a picture in which corruption appears – as the editors put it – to somehow be quite fundamentally 'good to think' in our contemporary world. Indeed, on the ethnographic ground, corruption persistently crops up as one of those uncomfortable issues which can upset the well-defined agenda with which the anthropologist has stridden into the field, a weed in the English gardens of research proposals: in case after case, sensitive ethnographers have bracketed their initial research questions in order to pay heed to more insistent concerns regarding corruption amongst the people they work with. Hence, we tend to arrive at corruption through the backdoor (an appropriate metaphor when we recognize the issues of intimacy and secrecy surrounding it). The editors of this volume, Crispin Shore and Dieter Haller, have effectively managed to connect several of these ethnographic dots: by moving corruption to the centre of analysis, they draw together