POST-NEOLIBERAL NATURE?
COMMUNITY WATER GOVERNANCE IN PERI-URBAN COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA

by

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Abstract

Since the turn of the century, Bolivia has been undergoing a leftward political shift that many scholars have described as “post-neoliberal.” This shift is inflected with communitarian and ecological sensibilities, and politicians frequently depict “community” and “nature” as two axes around which a new, post-neoliberal world order can be imagined. The overarching purpose of this thesis is to explore the friction between the country’s putatively post-neoliberal politics and existing community water governance in Cochabamba, Bolivia. This is pursued through two sub-themes: a comparison of the government’s post-neoliberal rhetoric to its resource management policies; and a comparison of celebratory conceptualizations of community governance to the governance strategies of community-run water systems in La Maica, a region of peri-urban Cochabamba. The thesis argues that, while the Morales government rhetorically celebrates “community” and “nature” as essential pillars of post-neoliberal governance paradigm, reality differs from rhetoric in two ways. First, the Bolivian government’s natural resource agenda has involved a shift towards centralized, state-led management, rather than community governance. Second, actually existing examples of community resource governance are intertwined with non-community institutions and multiple scales of governance, implying that communities are contextually embedded and hybridized structures. The progressive (post-neoliberal) potential of community resource governance therefore depends on both its context-specific manifestation and the support that it receives from the state. Primary data for this thesis was gathered during four months of fieldwork in Cochabamba (June to October 2011), and the four methods employed were expert interviews, interviews with community leaders in La Maica, water user surveys in La Maica, and document analysis.
Preface

This research was carried out following approval by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Review Board (BREB). The approval certificate number is H11-01029, and the Principal Investigator is Dr. Karen Bakker.

This thesis represents original research and no part of it is published elsewhere.
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<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish (If Applicable)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAPS</td>
<td>Potable Water and Sanitation Authority</td>
<td>Autoridad de Agua Potable y Saneamiento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBA</td>
<td>Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas</td>
<td>Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestro América</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANESAPA</td>
<td>National Association of Potable Water and Sanitation Service Companies</td>
<td>Asociación Nacional de Empresas de Servicio de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASICASUR</td>
<td>Association of Southern Community Water Systems</td>
<td>Asociación de Sistemas Comunitarios del Agua del Sur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASICASUDD-EPSAS</td>
<td>Association of Community Water Systems of the South, of the Department, and Provider Entities of Water and Sanitation Services</td>
<td>Asociación de Sistemas Comunitarios de Agua del Sud, Departamental y Entidades Prestadoras de Servicio de Agua y Saneamiento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBNRM</td>
<td>Community-Based Natural Resource Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro AGUA</td>
<td>Andean Center for the Governance and Use of Water</td>
<td>Centro Andino para la Gestión y Uso del Agua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COB</td>
<td>Bolivian Workers' Center</td>
<td>Central Obrera Boliviana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHM</td>
<td>Misicuni Hydro-Electrical Consortium</td>
<td>Consorcio Hidroeléctrico Misicuni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMIBOL</td>
<td>Bolivian Mining Corporation</td>
<td>Corporación Minera de Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORDECO</td>
<td>Development Corporation of the Department of Cochabamba</td>
<td>Corporación de Desarrollo del Departamento de Cochabamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONAMAQ</td>
<td>National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Bolivia (Qollasuyu)</td>
<td>Consejo de Ayllus y Markas de Qollasuyu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSUTCB</td>
<td>Single Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia</td>
<td>Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMAGUA</td>
<td>Environment and Water Executive Entity</td>
<td>Entidad Ejecutora de Medio Ambiente y Agua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPSA</td>
<td>Provider Entities of Water and Sanitation Services</td>
<td>Entidades Prestadoras de Servicio de Agua y Saneamiento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEJUVE</td>
<td>Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto</td>
<td>Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FENCOMIN</td>
<td>National Federation of Bolivian Mining Cooperatives</td>
<td>Federación Nacional de Cooperativas Mineras de Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTAA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreement of the Americas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross National Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTZ</td>
<td>German Technical Cooperation Agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFI</td>
<td>International Financial Institution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IRC</td>
<td>International Water and Sanitation Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Import Substitution Industrialization</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japanese International Cooperation Agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP</td>
<td>Popular Participation Law</td>
<td>Ley de Participación Popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>Movement Towards Socialism</td>
<td>Movimiento Al Socialismo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERCOSUR</td>
<td>Common Southern Market</td>
<td>Mercado Común del Sur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMAYA</td>
<td>Ministry of Environment and Water</td>
<td>Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUS</td>
<td>Multiple Use Water Service</td>
<td>Servicio de Usos Múltiples de Agua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEP</td>
<td>New Economic Policy</td>
<td>Nueva Política Económica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTB</td>
<td>Grassroots Territorial Organization</td>
<td>Organización Territorial de Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROAGRO</td>
<td>Agricultural and Livestock Sustainable</td>
<td>Programa de Desarrollo Agropecuario Sustentable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROAPAC</td>
<td>Program on Potable Water and Sanitation in Small and Medium Cities</td>
<td>Programa de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado Sanitario en Pequeñas y Medianas Ciudades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMIC</td>
<td>Integrated Watershed Management Program</td>
<td>Programa Manejo Integral de Cuencas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP</td>
<td>Private Sector Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMAPA</td>
<td>Municipal Potable Water and Sanitation Service</td>
<td>Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENASBA</td>
<td>National Service for the Sustainability of Basic Sanitation Services</td>
<td>Servicio Nacional para la Sostenibilidad de Servicios en Saneamiento Básico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSIP</td>
<td>Small-scale Independent Provider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCO</td>
<td>Original Community Territory</td>
<td>Tierra Comunitaria de Origen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIPNIS</td>
<td>Isiboro Sécuire Indigenous Territory and National Park</td>
<td>Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCD</td>
<td>World Commision on Dams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMSS</td>
<td>None (University in Cochabamba)</td>
<td>Universidad Mayor de San Simón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasuni-ITT</td>
<td>None (Ecuadorian national park)</td>
<td>Yasuni Ishpingo Tambococha Tiputini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPFB</td>
<td>Bolivian State Oil Deposits</td>
<td>Yasimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Boliviano</td>
</tr>
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Acknowledgements

As is always the case with such projects, this thesis would never have been realized if not for the numerous people who offered their support, criticism, and encouragement along the way.

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Finally, and most of all, thanks are due to my parents, for always asking me how I am feeling instead of how my research is going.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Locating Community in the Peri-Urban

At this historical moment we are awash in communities, and the ‘self-governing community’ is one of the defining articulations of neo-liberal rule.

(Watts 2004, 197)

1.1 Introduction

In the spring of 2010, Bolivian President Evo Morales gave the opening speech to the People’s World Conference on Climate Change (Conferencia Mundial de los Pueblos sobre el Cambio Climático) in the town of Tiquipaya, just outside of Cochabamba, Bolivia. To the thousands of people who had shown up to participate, he declared that a new non-capitalist world system was necessary to protect nature and save humanity. “The new communitarian socialist system,” he said, “will eliminate all forms of colonialism and imperialism, and assure peace between the communities and Mother Earth.” He closed the speech by shouting “Qué vivan los pueblos del mundo reunidos en defensa de la Madre Tierra!” (Long live the communities of the world meeting in defense of Mother Earth!) (Morales Ayma 2010).

Less than an hour by trufi\(^2\) from where Morales was giving his speech, a community in peri-urban Cochabamba was throwing a party to inaugurate a new water system. The water system had been a joint venture between a local NGO, a private company, the municipal government, and group of previously existing community-run water systems operating in a part of the city known as La Maica. Once inaugurated, the new water system would also be under community control. Although the thoughts of the Maiqueños (residents of La Maica) were not necessarily on the ways that their actions contributed the defense of Mother Earth, their community organizing around resource governance nonetheless appears to exemplify the spirit that Morales was calling for in his speech.

1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2 Public transit in the greater Cochabamba area consists of buses and the smaller trufis, vans and cars that follow a fixed route and charge a fixed tariff like buses.
I begin this thesis with the two focal points illustrated in the anecdote above. First, I begin with Bolivia’s supposedly “post-neoliberal” shift, heralded by the election of left-leaning current president Evo Morales. In his speeches and in his advisors’ reports, community and nature are frequently depicted as two axes around which a new world order can be imagined; post-neoliberalism is inflected with an ecological sensibility, in which both people and nature are to be liberated from the predations of capitalism. Second, I ground this analysis in the study of community water supply in the peri-urban zone of Bolivia’s third-largest city, Cochabamba—site of one of the best-known anti-privatization movements of the past decade (the Guerra del Agua, or Water War), and today a city where numerous micro-communities (each made up of between 20 to 300 families) have formed to govern their water resources. These “water committees” were actively involved in the Water War, an incident that is said to have set the stage for the country’s post-neoliberal shift, and they seem, upon first impression, to embody the values promulgated by Morales and his colleagues. Yet there are significant tensions between the post-neoliberal agenda pursued by the Morales government and actually existing forms of community resource governance, and the goal of this thesis is to explore them.

This introductory chapter proceeds as follows. First, I summarize the main purpose and argument of my research. Second, I introduce three conceptual ideas that will permeate subsequent chapters: water governance, community governance, and (peri-)urban socio-natures. Third, I describe the methodology that I employed in gathering data for this thesis, which included expert interviews, community leader interviews, water user surveys, and document analysis. Finally, I summarize each chapter and trace the narrative arc of the thesis as a whole.
1.2 Purpose of Research

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to explore the friction between supposedly “post-neoliberal” politics in Bolivia and actually existing community water governance in peri-urban Cochabamba. This will be pursued through two sub-themes: first, a comparison of the government’s post-neoliberal rhetoric to its resource management policies, and second, a comparison of celebratory conceptualizations of community resource governance to the governance strategies of Cochabamba’s water committees.

After exploring the theoretical roots of Bolivia’s recent left turn and its implications for resource governance (Chapter 2), I will analyze the community water systems’ internal governance practices (Chapter 3) and their past and present struggles for recognition as an acceptable scale of urban water governance (Chapter 4). In Chapter 3, I focus on a single peri-urban region known as La Maica; in Chapter 4, I look at water committee politicization across the peri-urban south of the city. While there are water committees throughout Cochabamba, I focus explicitly on peri-urban south because it has the lowest public water connection rate and is generally considered the poorest region of the city. 3

Broadly, my argument is that although the Morales government rhetorically celebrates “community” and “nature” as essential pillars of post-neoliberal governance paradigm, reality differs from rhetoric in two ways. First, the Bolivian government’s natural resource agenda has involved a shift towards centralized, state-led management, rather than community governance. Second, actually existing examples of community resource governance are intertwined with non-community institutions and multiple scales of governance, implying that communities are contextually

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3 Cochabamba is divided into 14 political districts, and the “southern peri-urban zone” officially refers to districts 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 14. Of these, 5 and 6 have limited public connections, but 7, 8, 9, and 14 have virtually none. I will elaborate on this spatial inequality in Chapter 3.
embedded and hybridized structures. The progressive (post-neoliberal) potential of community resource governance therefore depends on both its context-specific manifestation and the support that it receives from the state.

1.3 Governing (Urban) Water Supply

“Water governance” refers to the institutions and decision-making processes by which water is distributed, used, and monitored. The concept encompasses questions of who makes decisions about water and on what ideological foundations as well as the more classic “management” questions of how to capture, transport, and treat water.

Water governance ideology has shifted significantly over the past three decades, as policymakers in many parts of the world have moved away from the “hydraulic paradigm” that was dominant in many countries for much the twentieth century. “Predicated on an assumption of abundant water supplies, this paradigm emphasized the deployment of hydraulic technologies to meet the inevitable growth in water demands engendered by modernization” (Bakker 2010a, 31). This was the era of massive techno-fixes, associated most notoriously with “mega-dams” but also, in cities, with large-scale treatment plants and piped transport systems. These projects were often tied to nation-building agendas. Enormous dam projects exhibited the power of the state while supplying the energy and water necessary for industrial production and large-scale agriculture; household water connections, meanwhile, were emblematic of membership in the modern state (Bakker 2010a). Some scholars describe this as a “productionist” approach to water governance, in which the state controls and “produces” water in accordance with a larger development plan (Swyngedouw 1995; Marvin and Laurie 1999).
More recently, some policymakers and development “experts” have proposed and implemented water governance policies that could collectively be referred to as a “market paradigm.” Although the shift towards this paradigm is contested and certainly not complete, it has had a major impact on the ways that countries and cities around the world govern their water resources. It is generally understood as encompassing an increased private participation in water supply, the introduction of market-based principles into water distribution, and the deregulation of water management (Bakker 2005; Finger 2005). This paradigm is part of a broader “neoliberalization” of resource governance, which gained popularity in the water sector during the 1980s and especially 1990s (I will explore this more fully in Chapter 2). Large-scale state intervention in water governance was actively discouraged in part because it was seen as economically inefficient, wasting valuable resources and incurring unmanageable debt. A market-based approach would supposedly streamline the water distribution process, guaranteeing that water was put to its most “productive” uses in ways that maximized economic growth while minimizing social and environmental externalities.

The market paradigm is also associated with a re-scaling of water governance responsibilities and decision-making processes. The term “governance” is itself reflective of this process, as it signals the involvement of multiple scales of actors with multiple affiliations (public, private, non-profit, and civil society) (Bakker 2010a). This shift from “government” towards “governance” is not unique to the water sector. Rather, it is part of a more generalized “hollowing out” or fundamental reconfiguration of the state apparatus such that many of its responsibilities are relegated to multiple regional divisions with smaller territorial purviews. This process is also known as devolution or decentralization (Jessop 1997). Considered one of the main characteristics of neoliberalization, reconfigured state-society relations have had a major impact on environmental governance in
general. In the water sector, this re-configuration, in combination with new understandings of the “natural” flows of water, has contributed to a simultaneous “scaling up” (to the watershed level) and “scaling down” (to the local or community level) of governance structures and decision-making processes (Cohen and Davidson 2011). These multi-scalar management strategies at times coincide with political boundaries, but they may also follow ecological and social scales, bypassing the nation-state and associated territorial hierarchies.

Within the broader debate over water governance, urban water supply has received special attention, as cities have greater water needs and, frequently, face greater challenges with respect to unequal distribution and pollution. Here, the focus for the last several decades has been on the merits of private supply versus public supply (Bakker 2010a; Budds and McGranahan 2003). Privatization is associated with the “market paradigm” of water governance, and was encouraged – or indeed, demanded – of many cities in developing countries through conditionality of loans given by international financial institutions (IFIs) (Lobina and Hall 2008; Prasad 2006). While the justifications were multiple, some of the major points raised by proponents were that privatization would increase economic efficiency, foster sustainable resource use, and improve water supply quality (Shirley 2002). Indeed, many international development agencies pushed privatization or private sector participation (PSP) as a “pro-poor” intervention (Bakker 2007). Despite these expectations, urban water privatization has often been met with fierce resistance and/or eventual reversal, as was the case in Buenos Aires, Jakarta, and Cochabamba (Loftus and McDonald 2001; Bakker 2007; Assies 2003). But public water supply is no panacea, either: many public utilities in developing countries only supply water to the (usually middle- and upper-class) city core, while water needs in sub-urban, peripheral, and “slum” areas either go unmet or are met with varying configurations of small-scale private vendors and communal sources. In these contexts, it is often
the case that only a small minority of citizens receive the full benefits of citizenship, including the emblematic public water connection (Chatterjee 2004; Bakker 2010a).

In the absence of a clear winner in the public versus private debate – neither mode of governance has proven itself a cure-all in economic, social, or ecological terms – discussion has turned to potential alternatives. In various guises, appeals to water user participation have permeated this debate, whether through the creation of water advisory boards, the incorporation of community organizations into municipal water plans, or the celebration of small-scale independent providers (SSIPs: privately owned water vending tanker trucks, water kiosks, and sachet water). These participatory models vary significantly by level of involvement and display profoundly different social and ecological outcomes, but they are often all grouped unhelpfully in the same “third way” category because they all fall outside of the public-private dichotomy. This confusion is important to note because, although many disparate groups see merit in the idea of participation, they are often advocating very different governance models. “Mainstream developmentalists,” which include the World Bank and many other international development agencies, see participation in the light of improved accountability and harnessed human capital, and they might support the creation of participatory spaces such as water advisory boards. Increasingly, this group is also celebrating the proliferation of SSIPs, which were formally viewed as the unfortunate byproduct of the public or private utility’s failure to extend coverage to the whole city (Albu and Cyrus 2002; Solo 1999; Stoler et al. 2012). “Alter-globalization” activists, on the other hand, see participation as a step towards “deep democracy” and “social control” of water governance processes, and may be more inclined to support previously existing community-run water systems. While it is true that the urban water debate has been overly narrow in its concentration on public versus private, a more nuanced analysis of the purported alternatives is needed to re-focus the conversation.
In Table 1, I have distinguished between three broad kinds of urban water user participation. For the remainder of this thesis, I will be focusing only on the third column, community water systems; from this perspective, Table 1 is meant to distinguish my definition of “community” from other forms of participation in an urban setting. All three columns, of course, are generic categories that capture neither the nuances of participation nor the dynamics of inter-institutional partnerships (e.g. public-private-community partnerships).

**Table 1: Forms of Participation in Urban Water Supply Governance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supply Infrastructure</th>
<th>SSIPs</th>
<th>Water board/council</th>
<th>Community System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin</strong></td>
<td>Private entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Top-down or bottom-up</td>
<td>Bottom-up (community-organized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Make a profit</td>
<td>Participatory spaces created to advise on/monitor water use</td>
<td>Supply water to community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infrastructure ownership</strong></td>
<td>Private (individual or small company)</td>
<td>Usually affiliated with a public or private entity</td>
<td>Community or neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infrastructure access</strong></td>
<td>Owner(s) of infrastructure and designated people</td>
<td>Public or private entity managers or employees</td>
<td>All community members (neighbors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water user tariff</strong></td>
<td>Payment to owner(s) of infrastructure</td>
<td>Payment to public or private entity</td>
<td>Free or nominal community tariff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility for infrastructure maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Owner(s) or contracted employees</td>
<td>Public or private entity</td>
<td>All community members (neighbors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization structure</strong></td>
<td>Hierarchy with owner as highest authority</td>
<td>Board members elected to represent territorial unit or appointed by public/private entity</td>
<td>Cooperative, union, neighborhood association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision-making process</strong></td>
<td>Owner(s)</td>
<td>Vote by elected/appointed council people</td>
<td>Community consensus or vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administration</strong></td>
<td>Owner(s) or employees</td>
<td>Employees of public or private entity</td>
<td>Elected or appointed community members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4  “Community,” Community Governance, and CBNRM

Historically, the notion of “community” has been mobilized for a wide range of political purposes and dissected from numerous academic angles. Political theorists often consider community (or its cognates, “civil society” and “the social realm”) to be the third dimension of modern society, complementing the “public” and the “private” by providing some measure of social cohesion and group-identification (Bakker 2010a; Arendt 1958; Rose 1999). At various moments throughout history, theorists and activists have hailed community as “the antidote both to the state and its bureaucratic apparatus of political administration and control, and to the free market celebrated by liberal individualists and neo-conservatives” (Rose 1999, 169, emphasis in original). Other scholars, however, treat the idea of community with some skepticism, both because it has a tendency to be “romanticized” as unrealistically cohesive and egalitarian, and because an unqualified celebration of community can confer excessive governance responsibilities on to marginalized groups and facilitate the reduction of state services. Here I will elaborate some of these contradictory conceptualizations and their implications for the idea of community resource governance.

Scholars who take a critical stance toward “community” often focus on “de-romanticizing” the idea. They point out that communities are heterogeneous, have internal power inequalities, and are by definition exclusive, in that the existence of community members implies the existence of non-community members (Li 2002; Krogman and Beckley 2002; Dukes and Firehock 2001; Blaikie 2006). They also warn against the “local trap,” or the assumption that local level governance is inherently just or accountable (Purcell and Brown 2005). Given that all scales are constructed through political struggle (Delaney and Leitner 1997; Swyngedouw 2004a), constituted through daily practice (Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005), and relational inasmuch as they can only be
understood in reference to other scales, “good governance” is no more likely to exist at the local scale than at any other scale. Feminist critiques of political theory that reject the public-private dichotomy (on the grounds that the public is portrayed as dominant and “women’s work” is relegated to the private), sometimes propose community as a preferable term that acknowledges the role of social relationships in constituting political society (Friedman 1989; Gibson 2002), and sometimes treat it with caution as community governance can imply a conferral responsibility for a range of governance processes to the informal realm, where women, immigrants, and minorities often have undue responsibility (Tronto 1993; Lawson 2007). Finally, many political economists have pointed out that a celebration of community governance is compatible with, and even facilitates, neoliberal restructuring in that it enables a conferral of responsibilities from the state to civil society. They argue that “the ‘self-governing community’ is one of the defining articulations of neo-liberal rule” (Watts 2004, 197; see also Schofield 2002; Larner and Craig 2005). They frequently highlight the fact that the idea of community was central to the Clinton and Blair administrations, where it was “infused with notions of voluntarism, of charitable works, of self-organized care, of unpaid service to one’s fellows” (Rose 1999, 171).

On the other hand, numerous scholars see significant potential in the idea of community governance, even while acknowledging the limits outlined above. Their expectations are often informed by a set of beliefs about what a community is and how it operates. Proponents of community governance frequently imbue “community” with positive moral qualifiers such as “harmonious,” “egalitarian,” “ethical,” or simply “fair.” At its core, these ethics assume that community members are willing to subordinate personal interests to community interests. Another way of thinking about this is that community members are assumed to have the same interests, such
that their personal interests are the collective interests, and the community is internally homogenous.

For example, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy explains community thus:

…[C]ommunity is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. It is constituted not only by a fair distribution of tasks and goods, or by a happy equilibrium of forces and authorities: it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion, or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself [sic] only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community (Nancy 1991, 9, emphasis added).

There is an affective quality here, in that community members are thought to have strong emotional ties to the community that, in turn, form the basis their individual identities. J.K. Gibson-Graham calls this a “commonality of being” or an “ideal of sameness” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 86).

In her critique of political economic theory, Gibson-Graham has argued that there is a plethora of non-capitalist forms of economic exchange already taking place, which she calls “community economies” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006). Community economies are conceptualized as functioning through logics other than supply and demand, taking ideas such as kinship, reciprocity, and equality into consideration.

While Gibson-Graham characterize community as the basis of an alternative economy, several prominent Latin American scholars have framed it as an alternative to the state, which they contend is a western imposition that is incompatible with indigenous social structures and worldviews. Uruguayan scholar Raúl Zibechi, for example, argues that the major social mobilizations that have taken place in Bolivia in recent years were essentially community-based uprisings in opposition to state-imposed policies. According to him, the “salient characteristic of a society without a state” is a “multiplicity of indivisible communities… a ‘non-division’ that allows them to assert their difference,” and he argues that numerous rural and urban communities in Bolivia fit that description (Zibechi 2010, 16, emphasis in original). He includes the Cochabamba water committees
on a list of such communities. Similarly, Bolivian sociologist Carlos Crespo argues that community autonomy, or self-governance, is a fundamental freedom that is contradicted by the existence of the state, and that this idea has greater synergy with anarchist politics than with “pluralinational” liberalism, as the latter is supportive of indigenous autonomy only insofar as it remains “subordinated to the reason of the state” (Crespo 2011).

Importantly, many mainstream developmentalists (such as international development agencies and NGOs) share an interest in the idea of community, although their reasoning and objectives differ fairly significantly from those of indigenous and anarchist scholars. For entities such as the World Bank, the qualities of reciprocity and mutuality are supplemental to “good governance,” in that they foster conditions necessary for transparency, efficiency, and sustainability. In their vocabulary, this is called “social capital,” and it is far from an alternative to capitalist exchange – it can, if anything, support the entry of marginalized people into the market. In other words, mainstream developmentalists are attracted to community for the same reason that many political economists are wary of it: it can facilitate a reduction of state services and support free market exchange.

Community, then, has the potential both to entrench neoliberalization and to act as a platform for its contestation. This apparent contradiction is reflected in the discourse around the idea of community resource governance, which has been enthusiastically embraced by numerous academics, NGOs, and policymakers and roundly criticized by many others. Here it is important to distinguish between “bottom-up” cases of community resource governance, which are community-designed and born out of a collective interest, and “top-down” cases, which are often implemented with significant input from NGOs or development agencies that sometimes have ulterior agendas (e.g. ecological conservation – see Dressler et al. 2010). Alter-globalization activists and scholars
often use examples of the former variety to demonstrate resistance to neoliberalization; the Cochabamba water committees are frequently referenced in this category, as are the Landless Workers’ Movement in Brazil and the Chipko movement in India⁴ (c.f. Shiva 1988, 2002; Wright and Wolford 2003). The latter variety is closely associated with Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), a popular development model in which an external actor (often an NGO) partners with a community to co-construct a resource governance system. Although early analyses of these development projects were very enthusiastic, more recent scholarship has pointed out that there is as great deal of variation in the “success” of CBNRM cases (Leach, Mearns, and Scoones 1999; Agrawal 2002). As Melissa Leach and others bluntly put it, while CBNRM “attracts widespread international attention, its practical implementation frequently falls short of expectations” (1999, 225). These projects, moreover, are sometimes said to be compatible with neoliberalizing policies (Dressler and Büscher 2008; McCarthy 2005b). In Bolivia, for example, the number of CBNRM projects has risen since the early 1990s, congruent with the introduction of neoliberal land-use and multicultural policies (Zimmerer 2009). Examples of CBNRM projects implemented in this time period range from forests to vicuñas (wild camelids related to llamas) (Larson 2003; Renaudreau d’Arc 2005).

Indeed, most “successful” cases of CBNRM have involved forests and wildlife – resources that can be relatively easily demarcated and/or monitored. Community water governance has received relatively less attention, in part because the results have been, if anything, more ambiguous than average CBNRM. Water is a flow resource, and resists claims to community ownership just as

⁴ The Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement *(Movimiento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, MST)* is a movement of farmers who occupy and cultivate land that has been abandoned by the state. It has been ongoing since the early 1980s. The Chipko Movement in India consisted mostly of women who fought against deforestation by hugging and forming human chains around trees in India in the 1970s.
much as it resists private enclosure (Bakker 2003). Any community water access point can easily suffer from overdrawning or pollution at another point in the aquifer or watershed, a fact that has hindered community water systems over and above the limitations common across all cases of CBNRM (Cleaver and Toner 2006; Ostrom 1990).

Within the (albeit limited) community water governance literature, there is significant variation between rural areas, where governance institutions are often based on traditional access rights, and urban or peri-urban areas, where governance institutions have been more recently established and where water quality is more dubious. It is the latter form that will be the focus of this thesis.

1.5 Peri-urban Socio-Natures

The “urban transformation” of the developing world has incited significant interest among academics and policymakers (c.f. Henderson 2002; Cohen 2006). According to UN projections, by 2030 more than half of developing country citizens will live in cities, and by 2050 that number will increase to two thirds (Montgomery 2008). Whether or not this shift will have the predicted impacts – which range from catastrophic food security forecasts to largely positive economic outcomes – it is already changing the spatial and political configuration of cities, and indeed nation-states, across the world. So-called “megacities,” or cities with more than five million people, are growing rapidly, with the majority of new residents settling in the outskirts or “peri-urban” areas. These newcomers move for a variety of reasons, but many are economic migrants whose rural livelihoods were threatened by agribusiness, climate change, unclear land rights, and so on.

Municipal water coverage often fails to extend to peri-urban areas – or, even if it reaches some areas, it is unable to keep pace with increasing demand – and new residents are forced to seek
alternative means of access. They drill wells, tap pipelines, build new networks, and otherwise alter the flow of water through the city. Water, however, is only one aspect of the natural world that is “metabolized” through the urbanization process: from the rocks that are the base ingredient of concrete to the oil that permits the movement of vehicles, the city is literally produced through the transformation (metabolization) of nature. Urbanization, in other words, is an ecological as well as social process (Bakker 2010a). In saying this, I follow a (growing) group of urban geographers and political ecologists who see nature not only in the “green spaces” of cities – parks and greenways and the like – but also in the circulatory flows of resources and waste (Swyngedouw 2004b; Gandy 2002; Kaika 2005; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006) Throughout this body of work, which is often called “urban political ecology,” water is perhaps the most frequently referenced resource (c.f. Loftus 2009; Smith 2001; Keil 2005). Its entrance to and exit from the city must be carefully engineered to meet growing water needs, yet it is a notoriously “unruly resource” whose flow difficult to control (Bakker 2004).

In the absence of public or (universal) private supply, water in peri-urban areas is harnessed through a variety of mechanisms. Some families dig or drill private wells for personal use; some neighborhoods combine forces to drill wells for communal use; and some individuals drill wells and sell the water to others via tanker trucks, water kiosks, sachets (plastic bags), or just by the bucket. Many people rely on a combination of these sources to meet their water needs. Importantly, water uses in peri-urban areas are often productive (income-generating) as well as domestic (drinking, cooking, bathing, cleaning, etc.) This is the case both because recent migrants carry over practices from rural areas and because the city is encroaching on to lands that were previously rural (Kjellén and McGranahan 2006; Allen 2003). Productive water uses include everything from vegetable
gardens to livestock to agricultural plots to at-home businesses; water needs, in terms of quality and quantity, vary accordingly (van Koppen 2006; Moriarty 2008).

In addition to different water uses and access mechanisms, peri-urban areas often suffer from a lack of waste removal – both human waste and assorted refuse. Sewage and sanitary services are even less common than piped municipal water, and trash removal is intermittent if it happens at all. I mention these two facts because of their impact on water systems: leaching from open-pit latrines, poorly built septic tanks, and garbage dumps are frequent sources of groundwater contamination. When a well is mere meters away from the septic tank, chances of groundwater pollution are quite high (see Ghielmi, Mondaco, and Luján 2008 for a relevant report about peri-urban Cochabamba).

Despite these challenges, water must be procured. Where peri-urban neighborhoods cooperate to dig communal wells and/or install a community-owned piped network, the institutions and practices that they use to govern the shared system are often derived from rural or indigenous governance structures. These institutions, however, are often re-imagined in the urban environment, as they necessarily interact with urban entities (e.g. private companies, NGOs, municipal government) and deal with urban problems (e.g. increased concentration of waste, increased water demand). The strategies that they employ to govern water and to guarantee their long-term access to it are the subject of Chapters 3 and 4.

1.6 Case Study Site: Cochabamba, Bolivia

Nestled in an Andean mountain valley at an altitude of 2,800m, Cochabamba in many ways represents a mid-point between the country’s two larger cities, the political capital La Paz-El Alto (in the high mountains the west) and the economic powerhouse Santa Cruz de la Sierra (in the lowlands
to the east). Its name derives from two Quechua words: *qucha* (lake) and *pampa* (plain). Historically, the Cochabamba area was considered the national breadbasket, origin of the country’s supply of fruit, vegetables, and grains, but in more recent years its economy has shifted to manufacturing. The most recent census (2001) puts the city at a population of just over 500,000 with a growth rate of 2.5%; the total metropolitan population (which includes six surrounding cities) is closer to 1,000,000 (Ledo 2008, 10, 6). This number grew dramatically in the 1980s following the collapse of the tin market and the subsequent lay-off of 23,000 miners, many of whom moved to urban centers to look for jobs (Kohl and Farthing 2006). Since then, it has continued to increase as agriculture becomes less viable for small-scale farmers.

The public water utility, SEMAPA (*Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado*, Municipal Potable Water and Sanitation Service) has been in charge of supplying water to the city since its establishment in 1985 (with a brief intermission from 1999-2000, when its privatization incited the Water War) (ANESAPA Website). To date, however, it fails to serve about half of the city’s residents. The southern peri-urban region, which is generally considered the poorest and fastest growing part of the city, has the least access to public water supply, with the vast majority of houses unconnected and unlikely to be connected any time in the near future. Instead, most of this zone is served by water vending tanker trucks, which drive up and down the street semi-regularly and dispense water into barrels, buckets, and any other receptacle the customer provides. They charge up to twenty-five times more per cubic meter of water than SEMAPA, and the water is of more questionable quality (Achi and Kirchheimer 2006, 214). Although SEMAPA is hardly noted for its

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5 In descending order of population, these cities are: Sacaba, Quillacollo, Colcapirhua, Tiquipaya, Vinto, and Sipe Sipe.
excellent water quality, the water vendors are completely unregulated; while some obtain water from reasonably safe sources, there is no guarantee that they all do.

In much of the peri-urban south, groundwater is limited and these tanker trucks – known regionally as *aguateros* – are the only source of water. In other places, neighborhoods have drilled wells and built communally owned water distribution networks to distribute the water. Where there is no groundwater, some community groups and neighborhood associations have built distribution networks but attached them to large storage tanks instead of wells; in this way a neighborhood can purchase a large amount of water from an *aguatero* at a bulk price, and distribute it among residents for a lower cost per cubic meter. In both cases, the infrastructure is communally owned and accompanied by a management structure known as a “water committee.” Internal organization varies between committees, but there is usually a president who organizes and runs weekly meetings and a secretary who is in charge of collecting tariffs from community members (usually between 0.5Bs and 1Bs per cubic meter\(^6\)). Both president and secretary – and any other authority position the water committee might include – are elected or appointed on a rotational system, depending on the water committee’s internal regulations. There is usually one water committee member per family, and this person is responsible for attending meetings and may have to take a turn at leadership. This organizational system represents the convergence of several influences, including miners’ unions, indigenous communities, and NGO-encouraged methods of consensus building and cooperation.

In the year 2000, the water committees played an important role in the Cochabamba Water War, in which various groups in and around the city rose up to protest the privatization of municipal water supply. In November 1999, then President Banzer had passed a law on potable water and

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\(^6\) These numbers are derived from surveys conducted in La Maica. The exchange rate at that time (August-September 2011) 6.82 bolivianos to 1 Canadian dollar.
sanitation (Ley 2029 Agua Potable y Alcantarrillado) that both facilitated the granting of water concessions to private entities and made it illegal for any two water concessions to occupy the same territory (Assies 2003). In other words, if a private company were granted a concession to manage a city’s water, then no other entity – including individuals, private entities, and community groups – would be able to legally pump groundwater, divert surface water, or even collect rainwater. Just a few short months after this law was passed, the private company Aguas del Tunari - a consortium in which the largest shareholder was a subsidiary of the American firm Bechtel – was granted the concession for Cochabamba’s water. Although the deal was publicly tendered, Aguas de Tunari was the sole bidder, and was accordingly able to negotiate a very favorable deal that included a guaranteed 15% profit (Bakker 2008).

The quickly organized resistance movement, led by the Coordinadora de Defensa de Agua y de la Vida (Coalition in Defense of Water and Life, hereafter the “Coordinadora”), brought together three disparate but equally infuriated groups: urban water users who saw their water bills skyrocket up to 150%; rural irrigators who felt that the concession threatened their irrigation water rights, which were based on the traditional usos y costumbres (uses and customs); and peri-urban water committees, who had been told that they could no longer draw water from their wells because Aguas del Tunari had exclusive rights to the aquifer (Assies 2003). Their organizing resulted in three major uprisings. The first, in January 2000, consisted of a massive march and town meeting in the Plaza 14 de Septiembre, the heart of the city. After this first protest, a government delegation was able to negotiate a deal with the leaders of the Coordinadora: a commission would be assembled to study water tariffs, the community water systems would be allowed to continue pumping groundwater, and Ley 2029 would be revised within 45 days. In February, the government released its conciliatory proposal, which recommended a 20% water tariff increase. This recommendation was poorly
received. A second round of street protests began, this time focused on forcing the government to rescind the Aguas del Tunari’s contract. For the next two months, negotiations continued at a sluggish pace, finally culminating in a multi-day protest starting April 6th. Three days later, it was announced that Aguas del Tunari would withdraw, and by April 11th a modified water law, Ley 2066, was announced. This new law contained 36 articles; for the water committees, the most relevant of these was that concessionaires would not have monopoly rights within concession areas and that peasant and indigenous groups would only have to register their water uses once (for the “useful life of the service”) instead of updating their license every five years (Assies 2003; Perreault 2006; Olivera and Lewis 2004; Bakker 2008; Barlow 2002).

This struggle has become an emblem of “resistance” to the privatization of water supply in particular and the neoliberalization of nature in general. But improvements to water access in Cochabamba have been, in practice, minimal: the restored SEMAPA still fails to supply water to much of the city, the “citizen directorate” that was elected to SEMAPA’s board post-Water War failed to change the internal culture of the utility, and the majority of southern peri-urban residents continue to rely on expensive aguateros for their water needs. As a city, the search for a more socially just form of water supply is not over. In this context, many activists and NGOs have started to promote community-run water systems as such an alternative: instead of considering them the “thirsty poor” because they are unconnected to the supposedly universal network, why not support them as they are, and even try to replicate them in other parts of the city? Although such a proposal immediately raises questions about scalability and water quality, it remains an intriguing idea. The relevance of community-run water supply systems is heightened in the context of general debates over water and development, in which community water governance models of various kinds have
been increasingly resuscitated (and debated) over the past decade (Bakker 2008; Ostrom 1990; Trawick 2003; Shiva 2002).

La Maica, District 9, Cochabamba

Although this thesis engages with the politicization of Cochabamba’s water committees as a group (particularly in Chapter 4), the primary data regarding water uses, access points, and governance systems was collected in one southern peri-urban region, known as La Maica (for maps, see Figure 2 on page 75 and Figure 3 on page 84). As part of District 9 – the only officially agricultural district of the city – La Maica is not completely representative of the peri-urban south. Many families have been here for three generations or more, which is not the case in Districts 7, 8, and 14, where many people are relatively recent migrants. La Maica is also a dairy zone, and close to 90% of households have at least one cow; most households also have small agricultural plots on which they grow feed for the cows. Their water needs are productive as well as domestic, and they rely on a mixture of aguateros, community wells, private wells, shared irrigation canals, and nearby rivers to meet all these needs. Data regarding other water committees was collected through interviews and document analysis, as discussed below.

1.7 Methodology

The primary data analyzed in this thesis was gathered during four months of fieldwork in Cochabamba (June to October 2011). Data was collected about the day-to-day water needs and challenges of peri-urban water users, their strategies of political mobilization, and the broader political context in which they were operating. To these ends, the four methods employed were
expert interviews, interviews with community leaders in La Maica, water user surveys in La Maica, and document analysis.

1.7.1 Expert Interviews

I conducted 32 semi-structured “expert interviews” in Cochabamba and La Paz with people knowledgeable about water governance in La Maica, Cochabamba, and Bolivia in general. These people included academics, NGO leaders and employees, activists, SEMAPA directors and ex-directors, municipal government employees, and directors at the national Ministry of Water and Environment, among others. Please refer to Appendix A for a complete list of interviewees and Appendix B for a sample interview schedule (in English). The interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and the audio was recorded. Names were recorded, but the interviewees had the option of having their names omitted from any research report or publication. The (few) people who made such requests are listed in Appendix A as anonymous informants.

1.7.2 Community Leader Interviews (La Maica)

La Maica is made up of seven smaller territorial units: Maica Norte, Maica Central, Maica Chica, Maica Quenamari, Maica Kaspichaka, Maica Sud, and Maica Arriba. Each of these corresponds to an OTB (Organización Territorial de Base, Grassroots Territorial Organization), which is an official (government-approved) scale of decentralized administration that is eligible to receive municipal funding for public works projects (more on this in Chapter 3). In La Maica, each OTB has a directorate composed of a president, vice-president, secretary, and the presidents of all the water committees located within the OTB territory. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six of the OTB presidents in La Maica. I was unable to get in touch with the president of the OTB Maica
Kaspichaka, so I interviewed the vice-president instead. These interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and the audio was recorded. Names were not collected. See Appendix C for a sample interview schedule (in English).

1.7.3 Water User Surveys (La Maica)

I conducted surveys addressing water sources, uses, challenges, and governance structures in La Maica households. I surveyed eight people in each of the seven “Maicas,” for a total of 56 surveys. When possible, I attempted to distribute surveys evenly among water committees and to survey people involved in committee leadership (presidents, vice-presidents, and secretaries). These surveys lasted between 10 and 15 minutes, and were conducted verbally. See Appendix D for a sample survey (in English). The results of these surveys were compiled in tables and graphs and presented to the leaders of La Maica in a research report in October 2011.

1.7.4 Document Analysis

Throughout the fieldwork process, I gathered documents written by NGOs, SEMAPA, the water committees, and various government agencies, in addition to scholarly works. These documents included legal agreements, maps, educational material, research reports, and group constitutions. The data garnered from these documents was incorporated into my analysis alongside the academic literature review.
Both the surveys and the interviews with community leaders were conducted in the presence of a research assistant, Carlos Vilela\(^7\), whom I hired to help me navigate La Maica (both its physical landscape and political structure), facilitate introductions with community leaders and members, and translate between Spanish and Quechua when needed. The vast majority of Maiqueños are bilingual in Spanish and Quechua, so I conducted most of the surveys and interviews directly in Spanish. A handful of surveys respondents, however, only spoke Quechua, and in these cases Vilela translated my questions and their responses.

Vilela was also the president of the OTB Maica Central, and it is possible that his presence as a local authority figure affected the answers given by survey respondents and interviewees. This possibility occurred to me early on, but several local academics suggested that Maiqueños would be more willing to talk to me if I showed up with a community leader whose opinion they trusted than if my research assistant were a local college student, which had been my initial plan. Given my limited time in the field (I had one month for the survey portion of my fieldwork), I decided to hire Vilela, and I did not feel that his presence was compromising responses. That said, it should nonetheless be noted as a potential barrier.

I conducted this fieldwork while affiliated to the Centro AGUA (Centro Andino para la Gestión y Uso del Agua, Andean Center for the Governance and Use of Water) at Cochabamba’s Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS). While I am indebted to the academics there for kindly offering me their time, support, and contacts, it is possible that my affiliation also could have had a dampening effect in a few of the expert interviews, as there are some notable tensions in the world of Cochabamba water politics that cannot always be anticipated or well understood by someone coming in for a limited period of time.

\(^7\) Not his real name.
1.8 Chapter Summaries

Having laid out the main pieces of my conceptual framework in this introduction, I continue in Chapter 2 with a theoretical analysis of Bolivia’s so-called “post-neoliberal” shift and the corresponding implications for resource governance. Since the turn of the century, Bolivian politics have been shifting leftward, first evident in increased social movement activity and later in the 2005 election of Evo Morales and the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo, Movement Towards Socialism); this new socio-political environment is often described as “post-neoliberal.” In this chapter, I examine the origins of this leftward shift, the way it has been discursively presented by the Morales government, and the ways that it has manifested in resource governance. I argue that the Morales administration has drawn on indigenous-inspired conceptions of community and nature to describe its post-neoliberal project, but that in practice it has tended to centralize resource governance and exploit resources for the purpose of increasing revenue for social projects. I further argue that both of these tendencies – one rhetorical, one practical – were shaped in part through neoliberalizing policies. Neither indigenous-inspired community resource governance nor state-run resource governance is definitively “more post-neoliberal” than the other, as both represent potentially progressive re-interpretations of neoliberal policies. The challenge will come in defining the terms of their co-existence.

In Chapter 3, I begin my exploration of co-existing resource governance models by delving into the governance strategies practiced by water committees in La Maica. Specifically, I am interested in the degree to which the water committees can maintain autonomy (self-governance) when trying to govern a resource that flows a scale that is neither small nor territorially bounded. In asking this, I am engaging with the idea of “community autonomy,” which has been variously conceptualized as both congruent with and an alternative to neoliberal governance. Using La Maica
as a case study, I argue that the water committees face challenges that are produced outside their territorial boundaries, such as scarcity and pollution, and that they confront these challenges by drawing in and relying upon networks of public, private, and non-profit actors. These outside actors, in turn, influence the water committees’ internal governance practices, which diminishes the degree to which they maintain autonomy over their water systems. While peri-urban community water systems do constitute an alternative form of water supply, they can be better understood as operating within the urban institutional fabric rather than autonomously. They are hybrid structures that have arisen from the interactions between neoliberal policies, pre-existing indigenous and rural governance structures, and inter-institutional alliances; their progressive potential is contingent on the shape that these socio-natural hybrids take and the authority that they are accorded.

I move beyond La Maica in Chapter 4. Here I interrogate the scalar strategies that the water committees have both used to gain legal recognition and are currently using to guarantee their long-term integration into municipal water plans. The chapter is divided into two sections. First, I document the water committees’ scalar negotiations since the Water War, tracing their rise from unacknowledged neighborhood groups to legally sanctioned water providers. I argue that they “jumped scales” by creating an umbrella organization to act as their city-level representative, by reaching out to international activists and NGOs, and by associating themselves with “sanctioned” scales of decentralized governance. Second, I examine the use of scalar arguments by both the water committees and the public authorities in their construction of two competing visions of future municipal water governance. The water committees argue for multi-scalar water governance in which the community systems would continue to exist independently within the city, buying treated water in bulk from the public utility, but the public utility and other municipal authorities assume that the ideal future city would be one in which everyone was integrated into a single universal
network. Both sides bolster their visions with scalar arguments that represent different configurations of pre-neoliberal, neoliberal, and post-neoliberal logic. Different eras of water governance are associated with different scalar arrangements; by appealing to and re-interpreting the logic that sustained these arrangements, the water committees are not only demonstrating their ability to transcend the “small-scale” label but also their temporal embeddedness in regional water governance history, which is itself a continuing nexus between the socio-political context and international water governance paradigms.

Finally, I conclude in Chapter 5 by summarizing my arguments and considering their implications for conceptualizations of “community” in a potentially post-neoliberal context. Bolivia is a country where the majority of people have never benefited from electoral politics, and where community is currently being mobilized as an alternative not only to neoliberalism but also to the state itself. Despite the fact that community governance is compatible with neoliberalism, it represents an important platform from which rural and indigenous people across the country have historically challenged their chronic marginalization. I close by reflecting on the need to assess the progressive potential of community governance contextually, as its spatial and temporal embeddedness will result in multiple interpretations of the meaning and power of “community” in contemporary Bolivia.
Chapter 2
Between State and Community:
Bolivia’s Left Turn and Natural Resource Governance

But as always when the state takes over a country’s principal wealth, it is appropriate to ask who runs the state (Galeano 1973, 268).

The new colonialism is environmentalism, at the lead of the capitalist countries (President Evo Morales, quoted in La Nación 2012).

2.1 Introduction: Fissures of the New Bolivian Left

In August 2011, more than 500 indigenous Bolivians set out on a march from Trinidad, a city in the eastern lowlands, to La Paz, the country’s highland capital, a distance of more than 350 miles. They were protesting the construction of a highway that was slated to bifurcate TIPNIS (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure), a protected national park and indigenous territory belonging to the Yuracaré, Moxeño and Chimán peoples; it is commonly referred to it as the “lung of the country.” The Bolivian government claimed that the highway would help develop the Amazonian lowlands by facilitating the movement of goods between La Paz, Trinidad, and Brazil. The indigenous protestors, however, felt that the highway was more likely to increase (already rampant) deforestation by cocaleros (coca-leaf cultivators), serve as a drug trade route with Brazil, and facilitate exploitation of TIPNIS hydrocarbon deposits by Brazilian companies. Moreover, they were furious that their recently won right to prior consultation regarding activities that would affect their territories – guaranteed in the 2009 Bolivian Constitution – had been (in their view) summarily ignored (Hines 2011; Webber 2012).

Among the many Latin American examples of social mobilization in opposition to large-scale “development” projects of the past century, this conflict stands out because of the government at which protests were directed. When the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo, Movement towards
Socialism) swept into power in 2005 under the leadership of Evo Morales (Bolivia’s first President of indigenous origin), it did so on an anti-imperial and anti-neoliberal platform, promising to prevent the exploitation of Pachamama (Mother Earth), protect the rights of indigenous people, and pursue a development agenda based around the idea of *buen vivir* (living well). During the TIPNIS protest, however, the rhetoric was quite different: as the protestors marched to La Paz, Morales and his colleagues made several statements that likened environmentalism to colonialism, accused foreign NGOs of manipulating indigenous people, and framed the protest as a right-wing attempt to discredit Morales and the MAS. Observing from the outside, it was increasingly hard to believe that this was the same president who had recently said, in a speech made to the United Nations, “If we talk, work, and fight for the well being of our people we first have to guarantee the well being of Mother Earth; otherwise it will be impossible to guarantee the well being of our citizens” (Morales Ayma 2009). Protection of *Pachamama* was considered a key element of the “new left” government in Bolivia, and Morales seemed to embody that stance. A fissure, however, seemed to be emerging between Morales’s environmental promises and his environmental policies.

Morales’s election was part of a broader political “left-turn” that swept across Latin America in the past decade, prompting many commentators to speculate whether the region has entered a new, “post-neoliberal” era (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009a; Sader 2009, 2011; Ceceña 2009; Burdick, Oxhorn, and Roberts 2009; Grugel and Riggirozzi 2009). The term post-neoliberal is commonly used to describe social, political, and/or economic shifts that represent breaks with or interruptions of some aspect(s) of neoliberal hegemony (Brand and Sekler 2009). These transformations can take place at different scales, be carried out by different actors, and vary in the degree to which they represent discontinuity with neoliberal doctrine (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009b). With respect to Latin America, the term has been used to encompass both the election of governments that align
themselves in opposition to neoliberal re-structuring of the 1980s and 1990s and the multiplicity of social movements whose demands include but also extend beyond anti-neoliberal sentiment. Bolivia is one of the countries to which the term is most frequently ascribed. Emblematic events in Bolivia’s putative transition away from neoliberalism include a series of protests in the early 2000s against the privatization of the water and gas industries (which resulted in the expulsion of two presidents), and the subsequent election of Morales, which was heralded as a victory for the social movements and the dawn of a new post-neoliberal era (Webber 2009).

In the seven years since his first election, however, many scholars have argued that there is more continuity than discontinuity between Morales’ policies and those of his predecessors. To support their arguments, they often point to resource governance decisions: increased mineral and hydrocarbon extraction, decreased protection of indigenous territory, and decreased investment in water supply infrastructure (Webber 2011; Bebbington and Humphries Bebbington 2011; Perreault 2009; Spronk 2012). These examples indicate significant disparity between Morales’s environmental rhetoric and his approach to resource governance. This schism presents an interesting set of questions for scholars engaged in the “neoliberal natures” debate. Given the academic interest in “neoliberal natures,” (Bakker 2007, 2009, 2010b; Castree 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Himley 2008; Heynen et al. 2007a; Mansfield 2007) it is appropriate to consider how the recent (albeit contested) shift to post-neoliberalism has affected resource governance in Latin America. This topic, grounded in the case of Bolivia, is the focus of my chapter. Moreover, this analysis speaks to debates over alleged post-neoliberalism. In a place so frequently described as post-neoliberal (Sader 2011; Macdonald and Ruckert 2009a), what does environmental governance look like? How might we accordingly conceptualize “post-neoliberal nature”? 

Specifically, I argue that the ideas of “community” and “nature” – as inspired by indigenous community values and governance structures – are central to the Bolivian government’s post-neoliberal rhetoric, but that in practice the government has tended to pursue an agenda of resource centralization, often overriding community governance systems, and exploitation, often at the expense of both nature and the surrounding communities. I contend that the government is discursively drawing on a conception of indigenous community that represents a convergence of existing identity categories, certain neoliberal policies, and international interest in indigenous rights. The government’s actions, meanwhile, reflect partial continuity with the neoliberal extractivist agenda and a partial resuscitation of the pre-neoliberal commitment to state-led industrialization. The divergence between the government’s rhetoric and policies reflects the difference between these two ideological strands, which are both partly shaped by neoliberal legacies and can both be considered post-neoliberal experiments. Thus, there are at least two (contradictory) varieties of post-neoliberal resource governance co-existing in Bolivia, limiting the degree to which the government is capable of presenting a cohesive challenge to neoliberalism.

I begin by reviewing debates around neoliberal natures and the putatively post-neoliberal turn in Latin America. Then I turn my attention to Bolivia, examining the multiple origins of its left turn, the discourse the government is using to frame its post-neoliberal agenda, and the resource governance agenda that the government is pursuing. With respect to the latter, I review trends and recent reforms in three sectors: hydrocarbons, mining, and urban water supply. I conclude by considering the meaning of “post-neoliberal natures” in Bolivia and present a table summarizing the resource governance structures associated with the two dominant ideological tendencies at work within the Bolivian left.
2.2 Neoliberal Natures and Latin American Post-Neoliberalism

2.2.1 Neoliberal Natures

Literature exploring the environmental dimensions of neoliberalization projects has increased exponentially in the last decade. While much of this is concerned with the environmental impacts of neoliberal reforms, a growing number of scholars are dealing directly with the ways that environmental governance is constituted by and constitutive of the processes of neoliberalization. “Nature” is both physically redesigned and conceptually re-imagined in ways that suit the “stretching” and “deepening” of commodity chains under neoliberalism (Heynen et al. 2007b). In other words, neoliberal environmental governance implies an attempt to manage nature in a way that maximizes its efficient and (economically) productive use.

But first, it is important to define (or attempt to define) neoliberalism. A notoriously slippery concept, it is generally thought to denote “a politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification” (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010b, 184) that is characterized by the expansion of the market economy (unfettered, as far as possible, by state interference via regulation), the reconfiguration of the state’s role from guarantor of economic freedom (especially the defense of private property), and the individualization of citizens, who are encouraged to “innovate” in the pursuit of financial profit (Jessop 2002; Brenner and Theodore 2002). Neoliberalism, however, rarely if ever exists in a pure form, typically coexisting with other discourses and organizational patterns in a dialectical manner. It is instead the interaction of neoliberal policies within their specific contexts that is of interest: the process of neoliberalization (Jessop 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). The results are “variegated,” in that neoliberalization exploits and “produces geo-institutional differentiation across places, territories, and scales; but it does this systematically, as a pervasive, endemic feature of its basic operational logic” (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010a, 330; see also Smith 1984).
Globally, this variegated process seems to have been enacted in two stages, although this is a generalization and not necessarily accurate for all countries. During the era of “roll-back neoliberalization” (1980s, roughly) policymakers actively dismantled Keynesian-welfarist institutions, while during the era of “roll-out neoliberalization” (1990s to present) they focused on the strategic construction of “neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance and regulatory relations” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384). In general, the second phase involved an attempt to manage the social repercussions and inherent contradictions of the first phase, while simultaneously creating the infrastructure to deepen the reforms that it introduced. In the world of environmental governance, these phases might be seen as corresponding to, first, the era of increased privatization and use of market instruments and, second, the era of “participatory governance,” in which management and decision-making responsibilities are devolved to local “stakeholders.” It is important to note here that the neoliberal interest in participatory governance makes the suggestion that “community” could constitute a post-neoliberal alternative particularly ambiguous. I will come back to this.

“Neoliberal natures” refers generally to the interaction of these neoliberalizing processes with “nature,” which is understood as ranging from traditional resources to biochemical compounds to animals to the human body. Literature taking the neoliberal natures approach generally asks how neoliberal policies have shifted the ways that these biophysical natures are commodified, governed, and imagined in relation to society. Neoliberal environmental governance – the focus of the present analysis – is taken to signify specific changes in resource management institutions (values, norms, laws), organizational structure (decision-making bodies and hierarchies), and governance (decision-making practices) (Bakker 2007, 2009). These specific changes usually refer to a combination of privatization (full or partial), deregulation (and reregulation), commercialization, marketization, and re-scaled governance. The use of the term “governance” itself is suggestive of a complex decision-
making process that takes place on a wide range of scales and involves a wide range of actors (government, civil society, private entities, and so on) (Perreault 2008). While not all of these elements have to be present for a case to qualify as a neoliberal nature, nor must the reforms be employed to their fullest, it is nevertheless analytically useful to compare cases against the expected characteristics of neoliberal resource governance. One might examine the multiple mechanisms through which a single resource is “neoliberalized” or pursue the effects of a single neoliberal reform, such as privatization, on multiple resources (c.f. Mansfield 2007).

To many, there is nothing new in the idea of “neoliberal natures”: Marxist analyses have always maintained that nature is central to capitalist production, as resources provide the building blocks that are “metabolized” under capitalism (c.f. Benton 1996; O'Connor 1998; Smith 1984). Indeed, many scholars engaged in refining the neoliberal natures debate have done so within a Marxian political economic framework (though that is increasingly not the case, c.f. McAfee 2003; Bakker 2010b). As such, the sudden explosion of interest in neoliberal natures – rather than merely nature under ongoing capitalism - is often attributed to a change in both the pace at which nature is transformed under capitalism and the expansion of capitalism’s reach into nature, both at micro (molecular) and macro (sea, forests, etc.) levels. Neoliberalism, moreover, signals the unfurling of ideological and institutional complexes that support market fundamentalism, suggesting a newly entrenched capitalism that pushes the boundaries of which aspects of nature can be commodified, by whom, and to what end.

In recent years, a series of “neoliberal natures” frameworks has significantly refined the collective critical eye while offering a consistent matrix across which to compare disparate empirical cases (Bakker 2007, 2010b; Castree 2008a, 2008b; Himley 2008; McCarthy and Prudham 2004). These frameworks have been used primarily to evaluate the impact of neoliberal reforms on
resources – that is, nature that has been appraised (and desired) based on economic utility: minerals, hydrocarbons (petroleum and natural gas), water, forests (lumber), and fisheries (*inter alia* Bridge 2004; Bakker 2004; Mansfield 2007; Heynen et al. 2007; Bury 2004; Harris 2009; McCarthy 2005b). A few more exploratory avenues have been recently taken, including animals (as food and as pets – c.f. Shukin 2009; Nast 2006), micro-organisms (McAfee 2003), and ecosystem services (Robertson 2004, McAfee 2010), but the bulk of the literature has predominantly focused on primary commodities.

The neoliberal natures approach has proven extremely useful in analyzing resource governance in Latin America, where scholars have focused significant attention on minerals (Bury 2004; Budds 2010), hydrocarbons (Kaup 2008, 2010; Humphries Bebbington and Bebbington 2010), water (Bakker 2008; Perreault 2009), and forests (Klooster 2003; Wilshusen 2010; also see Liverman and Vilas 2006 for a review of all sectors). Recent regional political shifts, however, beg the question of whether the neoliberal focus is still apposite. In the next two sections, I examine Latin America’s left turn and its implications for resource governance.

### 2.2.2 Latin America: From Neoliberalism to Post-Neoliberalism?

Latin America was one of the most profoundly neoliberalized regions of the world. Starting with the US-supported military coup in Chile in 1973, Latin America became the laboratory of neoliberal experiments designed by (mostly American) economists (Sader 2009, 171; see also Macdonald and Ruckert 2009a; Sader 2011; Burdick, Oxhorn, and Roberts 2009; Grugel and Riggiorzzi 2009). Faced with the failure of the regionally dominant economic model, ISI (Import Substitution Industrialization), many Latin American countries were obliged to approach international financial institutions for support. These institutions attached conditionalities to their
loans that required countries to privatize and deregulate key industries, remove trade barriers, and introduce fiscal austerity (Stiglitz 2002; Leiva 2008). The guiding principle was the primacy of market-driven development, which was thought to exist only where capital was allowed to flow freely, unimpeded by state regulation, tariffs, and other economic barriers (Leiva 2008). In Latin America, the reforms “transformed the social, political, and cultural landscapes that had developed during the mid-twentieth-century” (Roberts 2009, 2).

In the last fifteen years, however, the political pendulum has started to swing in the other direction, as countries across the region elect left-leaning and often explicitly anti-neoliberal presidents. Frequently, these elections followed on the heels of increased indigenous and social movement activity. Perhaps counter-intuitively, many “neoliberal” reforms had opened new doors for these social movements: although some policies weakened labor unions (the traditional class-based organizing structure), others inadvertently supported identity-based organization with (relatively) significant decision-making autonomy (Goldfrank 2009; Yashar 2005; Lucero 2009). In Bolivia, the two most important sets of policies in the latter category were focused on decentralizing governance and introducing multicultural policies. Multicultural policies are frequently associated with neoliberalism because they encouraged identity-based (rather than unionized) social organization, splitting a once-powerful mobilization platform into multiple smaller groups, and because they sought to transform indigenous people into productive members of the neoliberal state (Hale 2002, 2005). But despite their neoliberal associations, policies such as these set the stage for eventual elections of “new left” governments across the continent.

Generally, the start of the (electoral) “pink tide” in Latin America is associated with Hugo Chávez’s landslide victory in Venezuela in 1998 and his promise of a “new socialism for the 21st century” (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009b, 1). In subsequent years, eleven other countries followed
suit: Chile (Ricardo Lagos in 2000 and Michelle Bachelet in 2006), Brazil (Lula da Silva in 2002 and Dilma Rouseff in 2010), Argentina (Néstor Kirchner in 2003 and Cristina Fernández Kirchner in 2007), Uruguay (Tabaré Vázquez in 2004 and José Mujica in 2009), Bolivia (Evo Morales in 2005 and 2008), Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega in 2006 and 2011), Honduras (Manuel Zelaya in 2006), Ecuador (Rafael Correa in 2006 and 2009), Paraguay (Fernando Lugo in 2008), El Salvador (Mauricio Funes in 2009), and Peru (Ollanta Humala in 2011). Of that long list, only two countries have returned to the right: Chile (with the 2010 election of Sebastián Piñera) and Honduras (with the 2009 election of Porfirio Lobo Sosa) (Burdick, Oxhorn, and Roberts 2009; Panizza 2009; Silva 2009). The nine remaining leftist countries are accompanied, of course, by Cuba.

There are commonalities among these governments: they have all moved towards either nationalizing or increasing state revenue from key industries (such as extractive industries, electricity, transportation, communications, etc.); they have all increased or improved social programming to varied degrees; and (almost) all of them have rejected international trade agreements such as the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) in favor of regional cooperation such as the ALBA and MERCOSUR. But there is also remarkable variety among them, raising the question of whether more specific sub-categories might be developed under the general “new left” label. Jorge Castañeda’s (2006, 29) simple distinction between “modern, open-minded, reformist, and internationalist” leftist countries (Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil, in that order) versus “nationalist,

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8 ALBA stands for Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas) and is a regional economic, political, and social agreement. Its main member states are Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. MERCOSUR stands for Mercado Común del Sur (Common Southern Market) and is an economic and political agreement among Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay.
strident, and close-minded” leftist countries (Venezuela, Argentina, and Bolivia) has been roundly criticized, but usually without providing a suitable substitute framework (Cameron 2009; Riggirozzi and Grugel 2009; French 2009). Fernando Calderón (2008) presents slightly more nuanced version that divides leftist governments into three ideological groups: practical reformism (roughly equated with Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil), national populism (Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, Argentina), and indigenous neodevelopmentalism (Bolivia and Ecuador). He acknowledges that there is significant overlap between the three categories and that no country falls neatly into a single category; that said, his typology offers a useful way of comparing Latin American variants of new left.

The question of whether or not any of these categories - or the governments associated with them - can be qualified as “post-neoliberal” has elicited heated debate. On one hand, many scholars argue that they are pursuing a version of “third way capitalism,” or “neoliberalism with a human face.” In other words, they see the new left governments as propagating a socially palatable version of market fundamentalism, and they argue that the adjective “post-neoliberal” cannot be applied on the grounds that revolutionary rhetoric far exceeds the scope of actually implemented reforms. They draw attention to continuities in fiscal policy, including independent central banks and avoidance of debt (Webber 2009), increased resource extractivism (Bebbington and Humphries Bebbington 2011), limited investment in public utilities (Spronk 2012), and irregular protection of indigenous territories (Tierras Comunitarias de Origen, TCOs) (Anthias 2012). These arguments are supported by theoretical analyses of neoliberalism that highlight its “variegated” nature. In these conceptualizations, neoliberalizing processes are seen as constitutively incomplete, polymorphic, and

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9 Castañeda also included Mexico is this second category on the assumption that Andrés Manuel López Obrador was going to win the 2006 presidential election. Obrador ended up losing the election to his most right-wing opponent, Felipe Calderón, by a margin of 0.58%. 

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endemically path-dependent, rather than either a single global template or an unpatterned contextually specific presence (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010b); Latin American policy experiments thus represent new articulations of a still hegemonic market-disciplinary agenda.

On the other hand, some scholars provide more (cautiously) optimistic readings of the leftward shift, and see great promise in constitutional and legal reforms (Sader 2011; Fuentes 2012; Roberts 2009; Harris and Roa 2012). These scholars are more inclined to use the term “post-neoliberal,” but even their more celebratory interpretations do not frame the concept in opposition to neoliberalism, instead seeing it as “characterized mainly by a search for progressive policy alternatives arising out of the many contradictions of neoliberalism” (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009b, 6). These alternatives “contain remnants of the previous neoliberal model, as neoliberalism does not suddenly disappear” (Ibid, 6-7). While acknowledging continued tensions between, for example, the demands made by social movements and the policies implemented by elected governments, scholars in this camp tend to ascribe significance to leftist victories, both at the ballot box and on the street. They argue that the term “post-neoliberalism” is useful because it grants a deserved degree of optimism to a region that is undeniably engaging in new political-economic experiments. It also signals the fact that all new policies introduced in the region will have to contend with the region’s neoliberal legacy; the idea of post-neoliberalism could therefore be interpreted as a cautious acknowledgement that changes are underway but necessarily interacting with neoliberal histories (Harris and Roa 2009).

My aim here is to think about consider this broader debate around post-neoliberalism in Latin America in relation to resource governance in Bolivia. In what ways has the political shift influenced resource governance, and what does this mean for the idea of post-neoliberalism? With those questions in mind, I turn now to Bolivia’s left turn and resource governance trends.
2.3 Post-Neoliberalism in Bolivia

2.3.1 Post-Neoliberal Roots and the Shaping of Community in Bolivia

Bolivia’s most recent leftward swing is usually traced back to the year 2000, when the residents from in and around the city of Cochabamba rose up to protest the privatization of municipal water supply, as outlined in Chapter 1. Success in Cochabamba – marked by a reinstated public utility and a modified Water Law (Ley 2066) – is said to have been the catalyst for a similar Water War in La Paz-El Alto in 2005 and more widespread protest against the privatization of the natural gas and oil industry in 2003 (also known as the Gas War). This latter mobilization is attributed with the literal flight of then-president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who caught a plane to Miami at the height of the Gas War and has lived in the United States ever since (Spronk and Webber 2007; Perreault and Martin 2005). “Goni,” as he is colloquially known, is the president most frequently identified with the neoliberalization of Bolivia: raised in the US, he spoke Spanish with a gringo accent, was the principal owner of Bolivia’s largest private mine, and had “an unwavering commitment to neoliberalism” (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 67). Although his self-imposed exile did not immediately result in victory for the left - there were two short-term presidents between his departure and Morales’s election - it certainly represented the beginning of the end for politics-as-usual.

Although it would be convenient to draw a straight line from the Water War in Cochabamba to election of Evo Morales, the historical roots of these social uprisings extend far deeper. The question here is less whether there are historical contingencies and more how far back one should trace: indigenous mobilization obviously has an extremely long history in Bolivia (extending back to the early years of colonization), and it is difficult to put a finger on the precise circumstances that helped determine its current trajectory. Nevertheless, several scholars have suggested that policies enacted
in the early 1980s had a dramatic impact on social movements across Bolivia, shifting both the way that people organize and the demands that they make (Yashar 2005; Kohl and Farthing 2006; Postero 2007). In this section, I explore the impact of neoliberalizing policies in community political engagement in Bolivia, which contributed directly to the eventual post-neoliberal shift, and in shaping the meaning of “community” in Bolivia.

Neoliberalizing policies in Bolivia were introduced in two waves: the “structural adjustment” wave of the mid 1980s (which followed on the heels of decades of ISI), and “social neoliberalism” wave of the early 1990s (Kohl and Farthing 2006; Yashar 2005). During the era of ISI, most mobilization took place along class lines; the 1952 National Revolution had famously resulted in the nationalization of the tin mines and the creation of COB (Central Obrera Boliviana, Bolivian Workers’ Center), which was one of the most powerful trade unions in the world in its day (Assies 2003). The political party in power for the bulk of post-revolutionary period continually sought to rally citizens around a nationalist identity through the construction of symbolic large-scale development projects and the maintenance of a vast publicly employed workforce. Deborah Yashar points out that, in addition to not mobilizing along ethnic lines, indigenous groups in Bolivia enjoyed relative autonomy from the state: despite nationalist projects, the state maintained only a weak presence in many corners of the country. Notably, many of the (state-instituted) peasant unions in the western highlands had gradually re-introduced traditional communal land ownership, this time as hybrid institutions known as “communitarian agrarian unions.” Eventually consolidated under the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Single Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia—CSUTCB), “they had effective control over the natural resources that conditioned the daily lives and the survival of peasant families” (Regalsky 2010, 40).
When the international tin industry collapsed at the beginning of the 1980s, then-president Victor Paz Estenssoro introduced the first round of neoliberal restructuring in the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP, *Nueva Política Económica*) - “South America’s second most radical neoliberal restructuring programme (after Chile)” (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 60). It offered a typical “roll-back” menu of privatization, trade liberalization, and industrial deregulation; it also severely weakened the trade union structure by provoking the lay-off of 23,000 of the country’s 30,000 miners (Ibid, 71). Although COB brought together a variety of unions, including peasants unions, worker unions, and middle-class unions, its leadership had always been drawn from the miners’ unions (Spronk 2007). When the mining unions collapsed, COB was crippled.

This first round of neoliberal restructuring had two important impacts in terms shaping the politicization and meaning of community in Bolivia. First, it led to a rapprochement between many rural Bolivians looking to protect their communal land rights and foreign NGOs working on indigenous issues, which influenced the way that rural Bolivians self-identified. Land privatization was threatening the communal ownership practiced by many peasant unions, and this fact coincided with increased international interest in “traditional” land use and indigenous self-governance (Regalsky 2010; Andolina, Radcliffe, and Laurie 2005). The relationship between international NGOs and rural Bolivians became increasingly important, in part due to decreased availability of public social services (a role that some NGOs came to fill) and in part because the international donor agenda leant legitimacy to rural communal land claims. For example, the important *ayllu* movement was catalyzed by NGO involvement. The *ayllu* is the central spatial organizing concept of many Andean indigenous (Aymara and Quechua) people; *ayllus* are communities united by shared territory, language, kinship ties, and leadership structure, and they are federated at larger scales as *markas* and *suyus*. The *ayllu* movement in Bolivia corresponds with the federation and increasing
politicization of *ayllus* in the highland departments of La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The NGO *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* (Workshop on Andean Oral History) was instrumental to initial mobilization (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 159).

Second, although it shattered the once-powerful workers’ unions, the first round of neoliberal restructuring also encouraged the infiltration of union-like governance systems into other settings, including agricultural areas, peri-urban areas, and mining co-operatives, as the thousands of laid-off miners migrated to other parts of the country and took up other occupations (Spronk 2007). Importantly, many of these miners moved to Chapare, a lowland area of the department (state) of Cochabamba, and began to cultivate coca, a plant whose leaf is central to Andean culture but whose cultivation was illegal due to its status as the raw material of cocaine. Prior to the 1980s, *cocaleros* were not very numerous, and concentrated mostly in the Yungas (a valley in the department of La Paz), but the collapse of the mining industry and a boom in the North American cocaine market caused a sudden spike in their numbers that was most evident in Chapare (Dangl 2007, 38). *Cocaleros* represent an interesting cross-section of Bolivian society: although often indigenous by heritage, they do not necessarily identify as such, and have a strong autonomous governance system. Given their shared history in mining, they base their unions on a similar structure, and have a predominantly class-based sense of identity (Kohl and Farthing 2006). They responded to US-led anti-coca campaigns throughout the 1980s and 1990s with an increasingly politicized discourse that became one of the most prominent voices of the eventual leftward shift.

Other laid-off miners moved to peri-urban areas, such as the region around Cochabamba, and to El Alto, the sister city of La Paz. In Cochabamba, the union structure had a powerful influence on the governance system of the water committees (Spronk 2007), which will be my focus.
in subsequent chapters. In El Alto, they contributed to the FEJUVE\textsuperscript{10} systems, which were the organizational basis of both the Gas War and the 2005 La Paz-El Alto Water War (I will explore this latter event in section IIIc) (Zibechi 2010). Finally, many of the formerly unionized miners decided to join mining cooperatives, or self-organized groups of miners that, without any guarantee of payment and only rudimentary tools, extract mineral from otherwise abandoned mines. There are currently around 50,000 cooperativistas in Bolivia, and their governance system somewhat resembles that of mining unions (Absi 2005; Fornillo 2009). Although they were not actively engaged in the protests that brought about the post-neoliberal shift, they are currently one of Evo Morales’s major voting blocks and accordingly represent an important interpretation of “community” in the post-neoliberal era.

The second neoliberal transition, from structural adjustment to “social neoliberalism,” inadvertently boosted the organizational capacity of both multiple rural, indigenous, and peri-urban groups. In 1993, President Sanchez (Goni) introduced the \textit{Plan de Todos} (Plan for Everyone), an omnibus law that included policies intended both to deepen the neoliberal transition and to make it more socially palatable for citizens; this was the “roll out” neoliberalism that was meant to complement the “roll back” NEP. Two aspects of the \textit{Plan de Todos} stand out in relation to the idea of community: a series of multicultural reforms and administrative decentralization.

Goni’s vice president at this time was Víctor Hugo Cárdenas, an Aymara intellectual. Cárdenas had been a founding member of the Katarista Movement in the 1970s, an urban-based indigenous movement that sought to “organize along the intersection of ethnic and class lines” with the goal of exposing and counter-acting neo-colonialism and racism (Yashar 2005, 170). Unlike

\textsuperscript{10} FEJUVE stands for \textit{Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto}, or Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto.
many of his fellow activists, however, Cárdenas did see contradictions between his cultural goals and market-oriented policies (Buechler 2009). Once elected vice president, he played a key role in writing multicultural reforms, which included a second agrarian reform that recognized indigenous territories under the title *Tierras Comunitarias de Origen* (Original Community Lands, TCOs), the introduction of bilingual education in indigenous languages and Spanish, and the designation of Bolivia as a “multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural” nation (Buechler 2009; Perreault 2009). In addition to these multicultural reforms, he also helped passed the *Ley de Participación Popular* (Law of Popular Participation, LPP) in 1994, which divided the country up into 311 municipios that were eligible to receive state money to undertake development projects. Twenty per cent of the national budget was earmarked for these municipios, along with responsibility for construction and maintenance of schools, roads, clinics, sports facilities, and irrigation systems (Farthing and Kohl 2005). The municipios now serve “as a basis for political mobilization by social movements and opposition parties” (Perreault 2009, 141).

One of the indigenous movements that most benefited from these policies was the ayllu movement. After several years of NGO pressure, Bolivia ratified the International Labour Organisation Convention 169 on indigenous rights in 1991. In 1994, Constitutional reforms redefined Bolivia as a multicultural and pluriethnic state and recognized indigenous communal land rights (Van Cott 2000). Not long afterwards, in 1997, the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Bolivia (CONAMAQ\(^{11}\)) was created. Many highland indigenous groups started shifting their affiliation to CONAMAQ from CSUTCB, in part because they viewed the latter’s promotion of the

\(^{11}\) *Consejo de Ayllus y Markas de Qollasuyu*, or Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qollasuyu, where Qollasuyu refers to the highland region of Bolivia.
union structure and involvement in party politics as colonial, external, and inauthentically indigenous (Andolina, Radcliffe, and Laurie 2005).

They ayllu movement challenges accepted structural hierarchies and decision-making processes through their rejection of unions and party politics, but it is not without its ambiguities. While the influence of NGOs, international indigenous rights discourse, and decentralization policies inadvertently provided the basic tools and space for indigenous organizing in Bolivia, many scholars have argued that they also fundamentally re-constructed what it means to be “indigenous” along lines more suitable for neoliberal goals. Put perhaps most eloquently by Andolina and others, this situation has created an “inversion of indigenous efforts for culturally appropriate development to something closer to developmentally appropriate culture” (2005, 680, emphasis in original). In line with Charles Hale (2002, 2005), these scholars frame multicultural policies as an attempt by international development agencies and financial institutions to “weaken class-based movements and divert public attention from the growing inequality engendered by neoliberalism” (Buechler 2009, 88). The double-edged sword of Latin American multiculturalism points to the ambiguity of indigenous-inspired conceptions of community, as it has been reinforced by neoliberal policies that could be interpreted as impeding class-based contestation and enabling the absorption of indigenous identities into the neoliberal development agenda.

Decentralized governance also significantly strengthened the cocalero unions, a fact that eventually enabled Evo Morales to run for president. The cocalero unions, which already acted as unofficial local governments in the Chapare region by settling disputes and collecting taxes for community projects, acquired democratic control of the region with the introduction of municipios. In the 1995 elections, they won seats in all three of the municipios associated with the Chapare (Villa Tunari Puerto Villarroel, and Chimoré) as well as the two sub-municipios (Shinahoata and Entre Ríos)
(Farthing and Kohl 2005). They formed a political party called the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) at the head of which was the leader of the *cocalero* union – Evo Morales. This transition from grassroots activism to party politics leant legitimacy to their ongoing struggle against US-led coca eradication programs and USAID-designed “alternative development” schemes while also allowing them to access public funding for development projects of their choosing. Most importantly, it was Morales’s entry point into party politics, and paved the way for his eventual election to President of the republic (Kohl and Farthing 2006).

All of these versions community – the *ayllu*, the mining cooperative, the peri-urban association, the *cocalero* union, and the peasant association – represent different configurations of neoliberal policies, pre-existing social structures (such as the *ayllu* and the mining union), and international development discourse. Their existence is shaping what “community” means in Bolivia today. In the next section I show that, since ascending to the presidency, Morales has drawn on values closely associated with some of these configurations, notably the resurgent *ayllu* system, to speak about his post-neoliberal agenda.

2.3.2 Post-neoliberal Rhetoric and the Notion of Community

One of the foremost conceptual ideas that the Morales government is using to talk about his version of post-neoliberalism is the notion of community. Although community is certainly not the *only* conceptual tool, it has a broad appeal as both an organizing principal (community as a core value) and policy prescription (community as the best form of governance). In the next section, I will look at its (fraught) role as a policy prescription in the environmental sector, but here I will examine its use as a discursive tool by the current administration. In this section, I first show the Morales government is framing community in relation to indigenous values and then explore its
importance within two of the government’s organizational concepts: communitarian socialism and 
buen vivir.

In his first years in office, Morales put together a constitutional assembly (asamblea 
constituyente) to write a new constitution, which was ratified in 2009. Compared to previous Bolivian 
constitutions, this one stands out for its attempt to incorporate indigenous values into an otherwise 
standard liberal document. For example, Article 8, under the heading “Chapter 2: Principals, Values 
and Purposes of the State,” declares:

“The state assumes and promotes as moral-ethical principals of the plural society: 
amá qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa (don’t be lazy, don’t be a liar, and don’t be a thief), 
suma qamaña (living well), ñandereko (harmonious life), teko kavi (good life), ivi 
marací (earth without harm) and qhapay ñan (noble path or life)” (Nueva 
Constitución Política del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2009, Article 8).

In many articles of the constitution, the link between indigenous nations and the nation-state 
is made with the idea of “community” or “village” (comunidad or pueblo). Often it is used 
synonymously with indigenous and/or rural social organization; Chapter 4, for example, is entitled 
“Rights of the Indigenous Originary Rural Nations and Villages (pueblos). In other cases, however, it 
is used to refer to the Bolivian nation state as a whole, in a way that suggests a communitarian- 
inspired nationalism, as in “Sovereignty resides in the Bolivian village (pueblo), and is exercised in a 
direct and representative way” (Article 7).

The values that are ascribed to the idea of “community” in this document and in much 
recent political discourse are associated with indigenous community structures, particularly the ayllu. 
Although any attempt to list the “key values” of the ayllu system is inescapably reductive, there are a 
number of words that continually crop up in accounts of their internal organization: 
complementarity, reciprocity, solidarity, harmony, autonomy, and consensus (c.f. Romero Morales 
2006; Fenández Osco 2010; Mamani Ramírez 2011). Complementarity – perhaps the most unusual
value on the list - refers to the idea that difference is real and should be held in balance (as opposed to the liberal idea that everyone is equal) (Postero 2007). A complementary approach to multiculturalism would imply that “equitable diversity is best pursued through some degree of explicit segmentation between ethnic and racial groups” (Andolina, Radcliffe, and Laurie 2009, 100). This differentiation does not equate with isolation, but it does aim to foster “counterspaces based on valuations of the local that challenge overtly those of official decentralization” (Ibid). Together, the above values act as the territorial and organizational foundation of the ayllu system. As Aymara intellectual Marcelo Fernández Osco puts it:

“In Indigenous mobilization and actions express an Indigenous episteme and world view that structures socio-political relations and practices according to a model of horizontal solidarity rather than a vertical chain of command characteristic of the modern state. This form of solidarity is inclusive not only of humans but also of non-humans (i.e., the so-called natural and cosmological world). The main site and source of these practices is the ayllu, which although debilitated in its territorial reach, still embodies a promising perspective for life” (Fernández Osco 2010, 28).

As explored in the previous section, the ayllu movement does not engage in party politics, and is more interested in creating and maintaining “counter-spaces” that cross municipal, regional, and national borders. Despite this fact, the movement’s growing strength has brought the ideal of “community” to the political fore, and ayllu values have been discursively incorporated into Morales’s post-neoliberal project.

One form in which the ayllu values make an appearance is through the idea of “communitarian socialism.” While the ayllu system offers a functional alternative to party politics, communitarian socialism seems to be more of a rhetorical device. In some ways a refinement of Venezuela’s “socialism for the 21st century” – a phrase coined by German philosopher Heinz Dieterich in 1996 and popularized by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez – communitarian socialism is also an explicit attempt to make socialism relevant to activist groups such as those
promulgating the *ayllu* movement. In an interview with Morales conducted by Dieterich, Morales says that communitarian socialism is “an economic model based on solidarity, reciprocity, community, and consensus. Because, for us, democracy is a consensus. In the community there is consensus, in the trade union there are majorities and minorities” (Dieterich 2006). Fundamentally, according to him, indigenous peasant communities are already practicing socialism, and a leap into party politics would be a scalar jump rather than an ontological jump.

Here, Morales is continuing a long tradition of uniting diverse groups of people under one ideology through appeals to cultural difference: Lenin aimed to foster “ethnic nationalism” by introducing socialist ideas via local languages and cultures, and “roll-out” neoliberal multiculturalism aimed to funnel the “social capital” of many cultural groups into the productive (i.e. financially profitable) sphere. In other words, “under both communism and neoliberalism, ethnic group identities are acceptable compromises between individualism and collectivism” (Buechler 2009, 84). In Latin America, Marxists have long wondered how to foment a class-based revolution in a predominantly agricultural, indigenous society; the Peruvian philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) is one of the most famous of these. Today it might be argued that Vice President Álvaro García Linera continues his legacy: he is a *mestizo* sociologist, steeped in Marxist literature, who has been involved in indigenous organizing since the *Katarista* movement of the 1970s and 80s. Like Mariátegui, he is constantly vocalizing the importance of connecting indigenous cultures to the socialist “old left” (though, unlike Mariátegui, he says that it is socialism that must be adapted, rather than the indigenous cultures with which it is mixed). He claims that Morales’s political philosophy (*el evismo*) is unique in its ability to do this: “Evismo walks the line between the national-popular... [he] dialogues with the old left in the national-popular domain. He takes on multiple Marxisms that exist
in the national political space, but he subordinates them completely to the Indian project (*proyecto indianista*)” (García Linera 2006, 28-29).

Communitarian socialism, then, could be seen as just one more unlikely discursive marriage, reflecting an uneasy political compromise, along with “Andean-Amazonian capitalism” (*capitalismo andinoamazónico*, García Linera’s catchphrase) and “national-popular,” where “popular” is taken to refer to often-indigenous peasants. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the degree to which the *ayllu* movement and other forms of indigenous organizing are influencing national politics, through the borrowed conceptual idea of “community.”

The most frequently discussed organizing principle for post-neoliberal Bolivia, however, is not communitarian socialism. It is, instead, the idea of *buen vivir*, which seems to have sparked more interest among scholars, activists, and politicians than any other idea of the post-neoliberal era. It is enshrined in the new Bolivian constitution under the Aymara phrase *suma qamaña* and in the new Ecuadorian constitution under the Kichwa *sumak kawsay*. The two phrases have slightly different meanings: according to Eduardo Gudynas, the first refers to “*buen vivir* in the sense of fullness,” while the second “could also be interpreted as a life rich in community, or *buen convenir*” (Gudynas 2011, 233, emphasis added). *Buen vivir* translates roughly as “living well,” but *buen convenir* is more along the lines of “living well together.”

At its broadest interpretation, *buen vivir* eschews the western equation of happiness with continuous economic growth. In terms of foundational principles, it parallels the *ayllu* movement by espousing many of the same ethics - solidarity, reciprocity, complementarity, and so on. This resemblance is evident in a recent (2011) book, edited by Ivonne Farah H. and Luciano Vasapollo, entitled “*Vivir bien: ¿Paradigma no capitalista?*” (*Living well: A non-capitalist paradigm*?), in which the concept is analyzed from every conceivable angle in an attempt to distill it into specific moral
principles, a national identity, and legislation. Community is central throughout, and the *ayllu* makes several appearances as the ideal version of community, where desirable morals are nurtured: “the *ayllu*, in this sense, is the garden (*chacra*) that makes the growth of affection and protection possible” (Bautista 2011, 116). Similarly, another chapter notes that “the fundamental addition of this ‘Bien Vivir’ revolution lies in the incorporation and complementation (*complementación*) of the indigenous communitarian cosmovision into the way of knowing and conceiving of reality on the part of the west” (Galafassi 2011, 276).

The “community” envisioned through the lens of *buen vivir*, moreover, is composed of both humans and non-humans, and demands that the values of reciprocity and complementarity be considered in interactions with both. Uruguayan scholar Eduardo Gudynas calls the idea of *buen vivir* “biocentric,” in that it de-centers the human figure within the development model. As he puts it: “*Buen vivir* aims to break with classic visions of development obsessed with perpetual economic growth, linear progress, and anthropocentrism (Gudynas 2011, 232). This is another feature that *buen vivir* shares with the idea of the *ayllu*, as expressed in Fernández Osco’s quote earlier on in this section. Both understand the natural world as a central feature of community, in which non-humans and humans “conviven,” or live well together. This is a key feature of the way that post-neoliberalism is discussed in Bolivia, particularly by government officials but also by numerous activists and scholars: post-neoliberalism is said to herald a shift away from resource exploitation and towards harmonious existence with nature, a goal that is directly influenced by an indigenous conceptualization of community.

At the same time, *buen vivir* is often conceptualized in conjunction with rights – an individualized, liberal construct (c.f. de Sousa Santos 2007) – and individual “capacity building,” neither of which have much bearing with communal good or indigenous worldviews. In her analysis
of Ecuador’s version of *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay*), Sarah Radcliffe emphasizes the degree to which indigenous values have been incorporated into the state’s national agenda: “Sumak kawsay has a complex genealogy that draws from politico-intellectual reflections on development by marginalized indigenous subjects, combined in selective ways with a state-based leftist programme for greater equality” (Radcliffe 2012, 241) She argues that state policymakers interpret *buen vivir* in relation to rights and state-led welfare. The same argument might be made in Bolivia, where *suma qamaña* seems to have translated into a program of resource centralization, as explored in the next section.

2.3.3 Resource Governance in Bolivia: Centralization and Exploitation

The government has attempted to incorporate values associated with indigenous communities, including a non-exploitative attitude towards nature, into its post-neoliberal agenda. Nevertheless, I contend that environmental policy under Morales is characterized by tendencies to centralize governance and exploit resources for the purpose of economic growth, both of which have the potential to undermine the community governance structure and community claims to resources. To illustrate this argument, I sketch recent legislative history in three of the most conflictual resource sectors in Bolivia: hydrocarbons (oil and petroleum), minerals (currently dominated by gold, silver, and increasingly uranium), and urban water supply.

The hydrocarbon sector is of prime importance to the Bolivian new left. Conflict over natural gas revenue arguably set the stage for Morales’s rise to power, and one of his main campaign platforms was a promise to nationalize gas and restore the state owned company YPFB (*Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Boliviano*), which had been dismantled through a series of neoliberal reforms in 1980s and 1990s (Tapia 2007; Kaup 2010). At the time of Morales’s election, many groups across the country (including indigenous social movements, unionized employees, and middle class
professionals) were in favor of nationalizing oil; the main goal was to get the revenue out of foreigners’ pockets. Morales proceeded carefully with this nationalization – more in the model of a “hostile take-over,” in which the government bought up the majority of company shares, according to Brent Kaup (2010) – starting in 2006. Natural gas is currently Bolivia’s number one export (Reuters 2012), and the revenue from natural gas, liquid petroleum gas, and condensed petroleum and gas accounts for close to 20% of GNI (Spronk and Webber 2007). Bolivia’s “stunning macroeconomic performance” under Morales’s administration has been attributed to the new taxes levied on the gas industry in combination with a hydrocarbon price boom (Shultz 2010, 4). The windfall revenue from these taxes has been directed towards three new cash-transfer programs (aimed at, respectively, children in public schools, the elderly, and pregnant women) and public infrastructure (roads, tractors, health clinics, water connections, etc.) (Ibid).

Nationalization has not lessoned the injustices faced by communities near hydrocarbon deposits, however. Most hydrocarbons are located in the Bolivian Chaco, in the department of Tarija. Extraction here has triggered intense resistance from the indigenous Guaraní people, who say that their demands and territory are being subordinated to the interests of the state coffers (Humphreys Bebbington and Bebbington 2010). Moreover, an attempted new hydrocarbon frontier to the north of La Paz has been met with fierce opposition from indigenous groups there (Bebbington and Humphries Bebbington 2011). The government is constitutionally bound to consult with indigenous groups before undertaking activities in their territories, but they are not obliged to respect the indigenous groups’ wishes. Even just the process of consultation is increasingly under threat, as it is seen as an “obstacle to investment,” according to the head of YPFB, Carlos Villegas (La Razón 2010). It seems that community autonomy an only be respected when it is of no economic interest to the state. Centralized hydrocarbon governance, although
initially supported by most social movements across the country, has resulted in increased state revenue at the expense of the communities who live on or around hydrocarbon deposits.

The Bolivian mining sector (mostly gold, silver, and – increasingly – lithium) presents a more complex case than hydrocarbons, as a comprehensive analysis must be attentive to both dominant mining operations – sometimes public, sometimes private – and the mining cooperatives, whose numbers have increased significantly since the collapse of the public mining corporation following the first wave of neoliberal restructuring (Absi 2005). When Morales was campaigning for presidency, he made two separate but contingent promises about the mining sector: to revitalize the public mining corporation, COMIBOL (Corporación Minera de Bolivia) by nationalizing foreign-owned mines, and to allow the cooperatives to continue operating unimpeded by state regulation (Cameron 2011; Fornillo 2009).

In a way, these promises represent conflicting agendas, as one aims to centralize resource governance and the other allows largely unmonitored autonomous extraction. Since coming to power, Morales has upheld the latter promise in full but only partially kept the former. The vast majority of existing private mines have not been nationalized, though partial public ownership is now required of new foreign mines. The government is currently in the process of approving a new Mining Law to replace the one passed in 1997 (Ley 1777); it is expected to require private mining companies to work through equal (50-50) partnerships with COMIBOL and increase tax on profits from 35% to 50% (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 231). Extraction at both foreign and state-owned mines has continued apace, with accompanying environmental and social devastation taken as necessary conditions for development. On the other hand, the MAS has been extremely careful to not interfere with cooperative activities, as they represent one of the party’s largest voting blocks (Fornillo 2009). The cooperative miners’ federation, FENCOMIN (Federación Nacional de Cooperativas
Mineras de Bolivia, National Federation of Bolivian Mining Cooperatives) has moreover stymied government efforts to increase mining royalties; the cooperativistas’ “large numbers and militant origins as unionized miners have enabled them to mobilize effectively and given them enormous clout against government efforts to regulate or tax their sector” (Kohl and Farthing 2012). To mollify the cooperative sector, the MAS has redesigned the Vice Ministery for Cooperatives (under the Ministry of Mines and Metallurgy) and appointed people from FENCOMIN to important positions within it (Fornillo 2009).

In this case, the government seems to be privileging the community governance structure over the public governance structure. While this is true, the communities that they are privileging can hardly be seen as aligning with the indigenous-inspired values that the government nominally supports. Much like the cocaleros, the cooperatives’ organizational system is based on the mining union; the name “cooperative” is misleading, as their internal operations are far from egalitarian, and their environmental and social records are deplorable (Absi 2005). The environmental damage caused by their activities draws them into occasional conflict with non-mining peasants and indigenous people. Although the government has not moved as much towards centralizing the mining sector as it has the hydrocarbon sector, it has nevertheless continued to support resource exploitation for the sake of economic growth.

Where does this leave water? It may seem odd to discuss water – especially urban water supply - alongside hydrocarbons and minerals. The latter two both generate wealth at the obvious expense of immediate ecological surroundings, whereas water is much more often contaminated than contaminating. But urban water supply is worth analyzing for two reasons. First, conflicts over the privatization of municipal water in Cochabamba and La Paz-El Alto were absolutely key to the Bolivian leftward shift. Second, urban water supply has at least one major parallel with the extractive
industries: just as extractive industries were centralized and developed at the expense of local communities, so too were public municipal water utilities restored following the rejection of private companies, despite the fact that many of the protest participants had been representing something closer to community water governance. This occurred in both Cochabamba and La Paz–El Alto following their respective water wars.

As I discussed in Chapter 1 and mentioned in the sections above, members of community-run water systems (water committees) from peri-urban Cochabamba played a key role in the Water War, in which they ousted the foreign private water company and, according to many, set the stage for the post-neoliberal shift (Bebbington 2009; Postero 2010; Perreault 2006). But community water governance in Cochabamba remains, post-Water War, a marginalized endeavor that has never been incorporated into city water management plans. Although the newly modified Water Law decreed that concessionaires would not have monopoly rights to water within their concession and that peasant and indigenous water supply systems would be able to obtain indefinite licenses rather than having to reapply every five years (Assies 2003), these reforms do not support community-based water governance so much as sanction its continued (marginalized) existence. The public utility, SEMAPA, has been returned to its position of dominance, virtually unchanged since the pre-neoliberal era. A similar situation occurred in La Paz–El Alto following a protest, led by the FEJUVE neighborhood associations in El Alto, against the private water company Aguas del Illimani (a consortium in which the largest shareholder was Suez). Aguas del Illimani had dramatically increased charges for new connections and reduced the total number of new connections it was willing to make, leaving some 200,000 unconnected (Spronk and Webber 2007, 42). Following a general strike across the two cities, the Bolivian government announced that it would terminate the contract with the Aguas del Illimani (Laurie and Crespo 2007). The protest was
shorter than in Cochabamba but the result was the same: a restored public utility. Since this protest, the FEJUVE associations have lost considerable momentum, in part because many of their leaders were taken on as ministers in the Morales government, a move that increased popular support for the government while weakening potentially dissident voices (Kohl 2010).

As is the case for hydrocarbons and somewhat the case for mining, the tendency in urban water supply has been towards centralized governance (in this case, at the level of the city). With regards to urban water, centralization has taken place not so much at the expense of communities – as with communities near extraction sites – as it has at the preclusion of the community governance structure. This is an important point: not only have communities near mining sites and hydrocarbon fields suffered under resource extraction policies, but the community resource governance structure has generally been allowed to exist only where the state has no interests (i.e. no minerals/hydrocarbons) or where the state does not have the capacity to reach (i.e. where the public water network does not offer sufficient coverage). Water laws, moreover, are developed at the national level and implemented across the country, regardless of variation in local governance structures. While the recently revised potable water and irrigation laws do contain provisions for the water usos y costumbres (uses and customs) of rural and indigenous groups, the government still controls key decisions about water licenses, concessions, and tariffs. Urban water supply, like hydrocarbon and mineral sectors, is characterized by a trend towards state-ownership, governance centralization, and national-level legal frameworks.

2.4 Bolivian Post-Neoliberal Natures?

In comparing the three sectors sketched here to the way that the Morales government talks about post-neoliberalism, a schism is evident: while the government rhetorically emphasizes the
importance of community autonomy and harmony with nature, its resource management policies tend to centralize governance under state ownership and exploit resources for the purpose of generating revenue for social projects.

This does not mean that resource governance is automatically not post-neoliberal, as it could be argued that redistributive uses of resource wealth justify overriding community autonomy and constitute a post-neoliberal development model in their own right. The profits generated by hydrocarbons and the mining industry, for example, represent the government’s main source of revenue, and the MAS “makes no bones” about the links between “fiscal realities, extractive policy and political projects” (Bebbington and Humphries Bebbington 2011, 137). The government’s stated intention is to use this wealth both to minimize departmental inequalities (by transferring resource wealth to those departments that have no or little extractive activity) and to bolster social programming, following the precedent set by President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Indeed, as indicated by the hydrocarbon sector described above, some of these progressive aims have already come to pass. Vice President Alvaro García Linera calls this “economic decolonization” because the wealth is no longer leaving the country. He states:

“Decolonization means staunching those bloodflows [referring to wealth generated by resource extraction] so that the surplus that is generated is reinvested within the country, which is what we have done with the nationalization decree and the gradual recovery of the public companies and the foreign exchange policies, the tax policies governing remittances of earnings, etc. The best example is the government take on oil and gas revenues… This is the material basis of economic sovereignty” (García Linera, quoted in Svampa et al. 2009).

These are reasonable goals, but García Linera’s economic decolonization exists uneasily alongside indigenous post-colonial projects, which often seek community autonomy and are based on worldviews that call for the harmonious co-existence of humans and nature. Bolivian scholar Luis Tapia argues that, although nationalization and pluri-nationalism have both been central
projects of the Morales government, “simple nationalization is not compatible with an egalitarian pluri-nationality in the economic realm or the political realm” (2007, 61). Nationalization implies a certain (state-led) management structure and decision-making process that do not correspond with the internal structure of the many “subaltern communities” that make up the pluri-national state; to subordinate the communities to the state invalidates the idea of pluri-nationalism (and, I would add, subordinates their “subaltern” governance systems). Tapia summarizes his position thus:

“In Bolivia, there has always been non-corresponding relationship between the political institutions of the state and the diversity of communities (pueblos) and cultures existing in the country, in the sense that the collection of state institutions were defined exclusively on the basis of the dominant culture, and the principal result of this was exclusion, in spaces of political power, of members of other subaltern communities and cultures since the process of conquest” (Tapia 2007, 50).

Here we reach the crux of the problem: the Bolivian state has incorporated indigenous language into the constitution, has agreed to pursue community-based values, and has enacted provisions that allow indigenous communities to pursue their own models of self-governance in their own spaces, but the dominant model of governance – the political hierarchy, decision-making process, and policies – remains a liberal social democracy. As Tapia points out, the schism between the two models is perhaps nowhere more obvious than over the question of resource nationalization, which subordinates the interests and ideals of the many communities to the nation-state.

What does this mean for possibility of post-neoliberal natures, and post-neoliberalism more generally? I suggest that there are two competing tendencies within the Bolivian left, and that they have remarkably different interpretations of what “post-neoliberal natures” would look like. The first represents a convergence of existing indigenous social structures, neoliberalizing policies (mostly decentralizing and multiculturalism), and international interest in indigenous rights; this
“alter-modernity left” is focused on community autonomy in harmony with nature, and is the ideological strand on which the Morales government draws to build its rhetorical post-neoliberal project. The second represents a continuation of the resource extraction that has dominated the Bolivian economy since the colonial era, coupled with a renewed interest in social programming and centralized governance that characterized the pre-neoliberal years of ISI; this “established left” more closely resembles the Morales administration’s resource governance policies. In making this distinction, I am borrowing from Arturo Escobar’s separation between Latin American States, which he says are challenging the social inequality generated by neoliberalism but not the basic western notions of progress and economic growth, and social movements, which he frames as pursuing post-colonial projects that, to varying degrees, point to “post-capitalist, post-liberal, and post-statist options” (Escobar 2010, 3). About Bolivia, he says specifically:

“[T]he contemporary Bolivian process… [is] a struggle among cultural-political projects, between those based on liberal and communal logics, and between state and non-state forms of power and politics; this tension is reflected in the contrasting projects advanced by social movements and by the State; while the former can be seen as pursuing post-liberalism, the State is embarking on an alternative modernization project under the direction of the established Left and Morales’ government” (Escobar 2010, 4).

Escobar is not the only person to have noted this disconnect. Pablo Solón, former Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations, recently made a similar observation in reference to the government’s poor handling of the TIPNIS march:

“There has been some kind of contradiction between what we wanted to do and what we have really achieved … inside the Bolivian government there are two tendencies, one that says we should follow the traditional development model and the other that says we should follow a new paradigm … we call it 'living well', not only in harmony between humans but between humans and nature” (Pablo Solón, quoted in Ledebur 2012).
Neither of these quotes highlight the fact that social movements have been (albeit inadvertently) strengthened by neoliberalizing policies. As such, the statements might seem to simplify – even romanticize – the origins and potential of indigenous-based social movements and ideologies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both academics and politicians have observed these “two tendencies”.

To think conceptually about the impact of these tendencies on resource governance, I present a generic conceptual framework (Table 2). This framework is an adaptation of the neoliberal natures typologies elaborated by Karen Bakker that distinguished between state, market, and community resource governance (2007, 2010b), but it attempts to capture underlying variation in purpose and regional (Latin American) specificities. As with all such matrices, actually existing resource governance rarely falls into a single column, displaying instead a mixture of established left, alter-modernity left, and neoliberal characteristics. The same resource, moreover, might be governed through two overlapping (and potentially competing) systems; the case of peri-urban community water governance explored throughout the rest of this thesis offers a prime example of such overlap, as the community systems exist alongside the public municipal network and are technically within the territory of the public concession. Despite these obvious limitations, the table is meant to capture the dominant rationales informing resource governance decisions in putatively post-neoliberal Latin American countries. The major differences between the two tendencies stem from an interest buttressing the state on the part of the established left and an interest in community initiatives on the part of alter-modernity left. The established left is thus associated with programs of nationalization and scales of governance that correspond with political boundaries, whereas the alter-modernity left is associated with community, co-operative, and indigenous structures and territorial networks.
My purpose in presenting such a table is to illustrate the extent to which two ideologies, each with a long lineage in Latin America, can come into conflict over the management and use of resources. Let me be clear: I am not equating specific movements or even individuals with these ideologies in the form that they are presented in the table, but rather distinguishing between two ideological strands that are influencing natural resource policy debates.

**Table 2: Neoliberal and New Left Resource Governance in Bolivia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Neoliberalism</th>
<th>Established Left</th>
<th>Alter-Mordernity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principles</strong></td>
<td>Growth, profit</td>
<td>Growth, equity</td>
<td>Harmony, complementarity, <em>bien vivir</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Goals</strong></td>
<td>Generate capital</td>
<td>Generate capital for social programs</td>
<td>Exist in harmony with nature, maintain autonomy with respect to resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional historical association</strong></td>
<td>Neoliberal era (1980s and 1990s in Bolivia)</td>
<td>ISI (1950s-1970s in Bolivia)</td>
<td>Indigenous mobilization (1990s-present in Bolivia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
<td>Private companies and individuals</td>
<td>State (nationalization)</td>
<td>Community (commons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regulatory framework</strong></td>
<td>Market mechanisms, contracts</td>
<td>Constitution, laws</td>
<td>Customary practices and norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision-makers</strong></td>
<td>Individuals, experts, companies</td>
<td>Administrators, experts, public officials</td>
<td>Community leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational structure</strong></td>
<td>Private company/corporation</td>
<td>State-determined political hierarchy (municipal, regional, national)</td>
<td>Co-operative, union, indigenous structure (e.g. <em>ayllu</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource user participation</strong></td>
<td>Consumption (individual purchasing)</td>
<td>Election process, litigation</td>
<td>Direct participation, collective action, consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary scale of governance</strong></td>
<td>Decentralized (small scale)</td>
<td>Nation state (large scale), official nested hierarchy</td>
<td>Community (small scale) indigenous scalar hierarchy (e.g. <em>ayllu, suyu, marka</em>), territorial networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If there are two competing versions of post-neoliberal resource governance in Bolivia, what are the implications for the idea of post-neoliberalism in general? Several scholars have suggested that the Bolivian government’s resource management record indicates much more continuity than discontinuity with neoliberalism because extraction and disregard for affected communities have continued apace (Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington 2011; Webber 2009). Their definitions of “real” post-neoliberalism might then align more closely with the “alter-modernity” column in Table 2, in which resource exploitation is minimized and communities are granted the power to determine their own development paths. I contend, however, that both the alter-modernity left and the established left have been influenced by (different) neoliberal legacies: an identity-based system of social organization in the case of the former and an ongoing interest in capital accumulation in the case of the latter. Neither is completely neoliberal nor obviously post-neoliberalism. They are two distinct attempts to re-work the entrenched neoliberal governance structure for progressive purposes.

The extent to which the co-existence of these two strands can be qualified as post-neoliberalism is debatable. Certainly, if the two strands disagree so fundamentally that they are constantly coming into conflict with another – as seems to be the case in recent months, both with regards to the TIPNIS march and numerous conflicts between the government and mine-affected communities – then they present an anemic challenge to neoliberalism. At the moment, Bolivia might be better understood as practicing a multiplicity of post-neoliberal experiments rather than presenting a cohesive solution or alternative to neoliberalism. In the long term, it seems likely that the government will need to engage both of its country’s ideological tendencies – in practice, not just in rhetoric – if it hopes to maintain the support of its citizens.
2.5 Conclusion

As I write this chapter, the same indigenous groups that marched last August in protest of the proposed highway through the TIPNIS have started to march again. In an effort to reach an agreement quickly, the government refused to indefinitely suspend the consultation process that it had promised the protestors at the culmination of the first march. The consultation is constitutionally ordained, and the first march was partially aimed at demanding it, but the protestors wanted to ensure certain ground rules before setting a date for the consultation to start. The Morales government, however, wanted to push it through quickly, and agreed to postpone it only temporarily. Feeling pressured, the TIPNIS protestors decided to march again. They set off at the end of April 2012, and are still marching as of June (Achtenburg 2012; Los Tiempos 2012). One of the leaders was quoted as saying that the march is “not against President Evo Morales, but against his policies that violate the rights of Mother Earth and the Bolivian Constitution, approved by the MAS government” (Achtenburg 2012).

Tensions of this variety are becoming increasingly common across Bolivia. As evident in the brief review of three Bolivian resource sectors, Morales’s government is maintaining a course of centralized governance, the purpose of which is to generate wealth for social programs; resources are managed by administrators and “experts” within a constitutional and legal framework. This is not to deny either the significant changes that have been made to incorporate indigenous and alter-modernity interests into the constitution or the wider range of people who have been appointed to positions of power in the current government – indeed, one of Morales’s main strategies to bring social movements into dialogue with the government has been to appoint their leaders various ministerial posts. But the difference between the government’s rhetorical stance and its actions has been striking: one hand waves through impassioned speeches about community autonomy and
Pachamama, while the other enacts reforms to concentrate resource governance decision-making capacity in state hands. Conflict seems inevitable: nature has, it seems, become the lightning rod of new Bolivian left.

The concept of post-neoliberal natures in Bolivia can refer to one of two distinct forms of resource governance with contradictory objectives: the first draws on indigenous conceptions of community and nature, while the latter draws on pre-neoliberal (ISI) traditions. Both models of resource governance have also been shaped in part by neoliberal legacies, in the form of decentralizing and multicultural policies in the case of the former and in a continued emphasis on resource extraction in the case of the latter. The Bolivian government emphasizes the first model rhetorically, but tends to pursue the latter in practice. Both models represent defensible alternatives to neoliberalism, but incompatibilities between them could be disastrous for the Bolivian left.

In subsequent chapters, I will address the reality of co-existing public and community resource governance by looking at community-run water systems in peri-urban Cochabamba. I will return to the patterns explored here in Chapter 5, where I consider the varieties of urban water supply that co-exist in Cochabamba in the wake of the Water War and their implications for the idea of “community”.
Chapter 3

Autonomous Community?
Governance Strategies of Cochabamba’s Water Committees

Figure 1: Multiple Use Water System, OTB Maica Central.
Photo by the author.

3.1 Introduction

At the intersection between the two main roads that run through Maica Central, a community in peri-urban Cochabamba, Bolivia, there is a large white sign that announces the presence of a “Sistema de Agua Potable de Usos Multiples” (Multiple Use Potable Water System). Along the top of the sign are the logos of the various organizations that made this multiple use water system possible: the municipal government, the municipal water utility, a local NGO, the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), and the UNDP. Beneath these logos is written “Agua Para Todos” (Water for All), the name of the inter-institutional project that brought such a varied set of agencies together in support of a group of independent community-run water systems (see Figure 1 above).
The role that ought to be played by “community” in urban water supply has witnessed a recent surge in interest among alter-globalization activists, mainstream developmentalists, and scholars. Many alter-globalization activists, although resistant to privatization of water supply, are hesitant to promote state ownership, which has been associated with ambiguous social and ecological outcomes (Bakker 2008; Ostrom 1990; Barlow and Clarke 2002). They see community-owned water systems as a genuine alternative to the public versus private debate that seems to have reached an impasse in the last decade. On the other hand, many mainstream developmentalists are interested in the possibility for community participation to support economically efficient, environmentally sustainable, and politically transparent resource use (Mansuri and Rao 2004; Easter and Hearne 1993). In this framing, community is imagined as a cognate of social capital, and community participation in decision-making processes is seen as potentially supplementary to economically productive resource use. While some scholars are supportive of the idea of community governance for some or all of the reasons above, others have roundly criticized it on the grounds that it is compatible with and even encourages neoliberalization. They argue that it facilitates the transfer of management responsibilities from the government to the informal sector, where marginalized people often carry heavy burdens (Watts 2004; Schofield 2002, Larner and Craig 2005; Tronto 1993).

In all of these conceptualizations, the idea of autonomy, or self-governance, is central. Proponents of community governance see autonomy as a necessary pre-condition for the anticipated benefits, while critics suggest that autonomous governance is the ultimate manifestation of neoliberalism. This debate has particular salience in contemporary Bolivia, where autonomous governance is a central organizing principle of the putatively post-neoliberal era. While autonomy has been – and remains – a rallying call of many indigenous social movements across the country, in
2010 the Bolivian government introduced a law that sanctioned and laid out jurisdictions for several different varieties of intra-statal autonomies (departmental, municipal, regional, and indigenous), claiming that it was part of a broader shift towards an alternative, post-neoliberal national governance plan. On the other hand, the idea of autonomies has also been mobilized by right-wing forces in the country, particularly during a period in 2007-2008 when four oil-rich departments (states) in the eastern part of the country (Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni, and Pando) declared themselves autonomous in protest of the government’s redistributive objectives (Eaton 2007). While this conflict has since been resolved, the ambiguity of autonomy remains notable, even as President Morales and his administration continue to tout it as a fundamental component of the pluri-national, inter-cultural state.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bolivia’s putatively post-neoliberal shift was catalyzed in part by protests over water privatization in Cochabamba, and one of the main groups of actors in this Water War was community-run water systems. Increasingly, alter-globalization activists and scholars are suggesting that these water committees represent a superior approach to water governance – and governance more broadly – that does not rely on either state provision or private supply (Bustillos Zamorano 2012; Zibechi 2010; Interview Carlos Crespo 2011). These activists and scholars justify their evaluation in part on the assumption that the water committees are autonomous and correspondingly able to make decisions that best reflect the long-term needs of the community.

Given this context, it is appropriate to ask to what degree the Cochabamba water committees are actually autonomous. In this chapter, I draw on primary data gathered in one peri-urban region of Cochabamba, La Maica, to explore this question. I am interested in the degree to which the peri-urban community water systems are politically independent from their broader urban context, and how they should be correspondingly (re)conceptualized in relation to Bolivia’s political
climate. I argue that, despite much rhetoric to the contrary, these community systems are not autonomous but do constitute a (hybrid) form of alternative water governance. The challenges that the community systems face in terms of pollution and scarcity are produced at the level of the city and can only be addressed through inter-institutional cooperation. For this reason, community water systems draw in and rely upon networks of non-community actors for support; these outside actors influence the governance strategies practiced by the community water systems, complicating conventional interpretations of autonomy. Instead of aligning with either post-neoliberal expectations of community autonomy or critical judgments about the supplementary role that community autonomy plays for neoliberal rule, the water committees are non-autonomous, hybrid entities that play a major role in defining the terms of their own embedment within the urban institutional fabric.

I begin by reviewing the debates around community resource governance and community autonomy. After discussing the origins, geographical distribution, and important political role of the Cochabamba community water systems, I turn to La Maica. I describe how La Maica’s water governance challenges of pollution and scarcity are related to the urban whole and use one recent “multiple use” water project to show the ways that peri-urban community water systems interact with (and are influenced by) non-community entities. Finally, I consider the implications of hybridity for visions of post-neoliberal water supply.

3.2 Community Resource Governance and Autonomy

Interest in communities’ ability to govern their own resources has waxed and waned among scholars and practitioners over the past several decades. Once dismissed on the assumption that people would never cooperate to govern the commons – as per Garett Hardin’s *The Tragedy of the*
Commons (1968) – empirical evidence to the contrary sparked a storm of investigation in the 1980s and 1990s. Christened “Community-Based Natural Resource Management” (CBNRM), this new field quickly amassed numerous followers who tried to explain success (or failure) of community management on the basis of institutional principles (Agrawal 2002; Leach, Mearns, and Scoones 1999; Ostrom 1990), adaptive capacity (Armitage 2005; Smit and Wandel 2006), and land rights (Spierenburg, Steenkamp, and Wels 2008; Magome and Murombedzi 2000). By and large, this early work was celebratory and hopeful, even while noting challenges.

More recently, this enthusiasm has faded. The social and environmental impacts of CBNRM are often ambiguous and difficult to evaluate. “While CBNRM emerged with promised and hope, it often ended with less than ideal outcomes when institutionalized and reconfigured in design and practice” (Dressler et al. 2010, 5). It has been criticized on numerous grounds: for assuming that communities are homogenous, coherent, and benevolent; for conflating community control with community benefits; and (more pragmatically) for the lack of indicators and assessment monitoring, making it difficult to prove the existence of purported benefits (Li 2002; McCarthy 2005a; Krogman and Beckley 2002; Dukes and Firehock 2001). From an equity standpoint in particular, there is much doubt about the forms that contemporary CBNRM has taken. A recent review of the rise and decline of CBNRM points out that a resurgent protectionist conservation ethic has interacted with CBNRM in such a way that it sometimes “disempowers the very communities it was meant to support” by prioritizing biodiversity conservation and regulating locals’ resource use (Dressler 2010, 12). Others have approached community from a scalar angle, arguing that positive environmental or social outcomes are no more likely at the local scale than at any other scale; expectations to the contrary have been dubbed the “local trap” (Brown and Purcell 2005; Purcell 2006 – I will return to
this in Chapter 4). The risk of romanticizing community is emphasized in a number of places throughout this literature.

Over the last few years, this critical conversation has intersected with the neoliberal natures literature (reviewed in Chapter 2). In the neoliberal natures framework, administrative devolution is often considered part of the neoliberalization process. This stands in contrast to representations of the community governance, in which collective management and/or ownership is held in opposition to the logic of neoliberalism (Bakker 2007; McCarthy 2005b; Mansfield 2004). While administrative devolution and full ownership are two very different forms of community participation, there is some gray area between the two where neoliberalization and communitarianism blur. In these cases, scholars have started to use the language of “hybrid neoliberalism” to describe the co-inflection of neoliberal restructuring and the search for grassroots democracy. James McCarthy’s analysis of community forestry is particularly representative of this body of work. He argues that conceptualizations and enactments of community are complementary to “roll-out” neoliberal ideology, making community forestry supplemental to neoliberal processes (2005b). Taking a slightly different approach, Peter Wilshusen looks at the everyday responses to the neoliberalization of forest management in Mexico, arguing that communities have “accommodated neoliberal policies and programs by adopting hybrid logics, property regimes, forms of organization, and modes of exchange” (Wilshusen 2010, 767). Yet others have used the term “neoliberal hybrid” to describe the proliferation of public-private-community partnerships in New Zealand (Larner and Craig 2005) and agri-environmental programs in Australia (Lockie and Higgins 2007). In the Bolivian context, Karl Zimmerer has identified the rise of CBNRM projects and protected areas with the spread of “soft” neoliberal policies designed to foster a certain kind of “environmentality” through an emphasis on indigenous identity and structured “participatory practices” (Zimmerer 2009). These interpretations
are in line with the work of political economists who insist that: “there are no ‘pure’ or paradigmatic neoliberal transitions, but a series of institutionally mediated and geopolitically specific hybrids” (Peck 2004, 595, emphasis added). These hybrids result from the co-existence and co-evolution of neoliberalization and contestation (in the form of social movements, non-capitalist economies, alternative imaginaries, and so on) (Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2007).

Despite these numerous examples of neoliberal-community articulation, in Bolivia the idea of community governance is a central component of the government’s post-neoliberal project. As discussed in Chapter 2, the government is pitching a particular conceptualization of community governance – informed by indigenous values and social structures – as an alternative to neoliberal governance. Is this a false alternative, given that community governance is not incompatible with (and can sometimes facilitate the entrenchment of) neoliberal rule?

Within this debate, the idea of autonomy plays a central role. By definition, an autonomous community is capable of making decisions regarding its day-to-day internal operations and long-term development plans independently from the influence of outside entities, be they NGOs, the state, or private actors. For the proponents of community resource governance, including both alter-globalization activists and more mainstream developmentalists, autonomy can be imagined as a necessary precursor to positive governance outcomes, including ecologically sustainable and socially equitable resource use (Fernández Osco 2010; Choque and Mamani 2001; Zibechi 2010). For critics, particularly those who interpret community as supplemental to the neoliberalization of resource governance, autonomy can be depicted as the ultimate manifestation of neoliberalization (Watts 2004, 197). But to what extent can a community be truly autonomous, given the hybridity frequently experienced between communities and the broader socio-political context?
The answer to that question may be different in rural and urban contexts. Examples of autonomous community resource governance are drawn, more often than not, from rural and often indigenous areas. Some of the classic examples include common land in rural Japan (McKean 1982), communal forest management in rural India (Gadgil and Guha 1992), the zanjera irrigation communities in the Philippines (Ostrom 1990), and shared irrigation systems in the Andes (Trawick 2002, 2003; Wutich 2010). In peri-urban and urban areas, on the other hand, community resource governance is less geographically and ontologically isolated. As explored in Chapter 1, peri-urban community-run water systems operate alongside a multitude of other providers: public and/or private municipal systems, legally sanctioned bottled water sellers, informal vendors, private industries with their own wells, private household wells, and irrigation systems (Bakker 2010a). Water users interact with a host of non-community actors simply by virtue of the densely interwoven networks that define urban environments (Braun 2005), and many of these non-community actors can come to play important supporting roles for the community system.

In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the impact of such interactions on the internal governance patterns of community-run water systems in peri-urban Cochabamba, which I contend are non-autonomous hybrid entities, and the corresponding implications for conceptualizations of community governance in relation to neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism.

3.3 The Biophysical and Political Waterscape of Cochabamba

The city of Cochabamba is divided into 14 political districts that vary considerably in terms of access to potable water and sanitation. The southern region of the city, which is composed of districts 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 14, is generally acknowledged to have the least access. According to Carmen Ledo (2008, 82), only 22.2% of the 250,000 residents in this region have connections to the
public water utility, SEMAPA. This number translates roughly into partial access for districts 5 and 6 and no access at all for districts 7, 8, 9, and 14 (Grandydier Felipe and Tinta 2006) Many of the connections that do exist only supply water on an intermittent basis, varying between one and five times per week (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Map of the City of Cochabamba. Cartography by Eric Leinberger.

Water scarcity has been a problem in the region for decades, given overexploited groundwater aquifers and a watershed that drains northwards, away from the city (Vera Varela 1995). SEMAPA’s water is drawn from both surface water and groundwater sources, with the former meeting 40% of the utility’s demands. Two systems of dams and storage facilities capture surface water and deliver it to the northern and central areas of the cities, while four sets of deep wells to the west of the city deliver water to the central and (in a limited sense) the southern regions
(SEMAPA 2003). These wells are hotly contested: the municipalities in which they are located, El Paso and Quillacollo, have a long history of mobilizing in defense of groundwater wells that serve multiple water uses (domestic and irrigation) (Arellano 2011; Crespo 1999), but SEMAPA has thus far successfully argued that these wells are necessary if it is going to continue servicing the central and south-central districts.

The areas of the city where the water shortage is most experienced are also the areas of highest population growth (Ledo 2008). According to the most recently conducted census (2001), 43.87% of the city’s population resides in the southern zone, or the zona sur (Antequera Durán 2007, 109). Migrants come primarily from highland Bolivia and are frequently indigenous Quechua-speakers who have left behind agricultural or mining livelihoods in search of more stable incomes in the city. SEMAPA’s ability to keep pace with the rising demand is notoriously poor, with water and sanitation coverage rates falling far below those of the country’s two other major metropolitan areas, La Paz/El Alto in the highlands and Santa Cruz in the lowlands (MMAyA 2009, 24-25). Both SEMAPA and the municipal government admit that performance has been dismal, and link this failure to unmanageable population increase as well as internal governance failure (Laurie and Marvin 1999).

For the many houses in the peri-urban south that either lack public connections or receive insufficient quantities of water from them, there are two main sources of potable water: aguateros, small-scale venders that sell water of questionable quality at exorbitant prices, and community-owned supply systems, also known as water committees. While aguateros travel in tanker trucks and are present throughout the zona sur, the existence of water committees is dependent on the quality and quantity of groundwater available in a given neighborhood. Cochabamba has highly uneven groundwater distribution, with the (generally wealthier) northern areas of the city sitting atop
plentiful aquifers and large parts of the (generally poorer) southern region without any fresh groundwater at all. Where water is available, community-owned wells and distribution networks supply water to between 20 and 300 families. These communal networks have varied origin stories: while some were completely grassroots projects born out of a shared need for water, others were established with the help of religious, non-profit and international aid organizations. The governance structures of the groups are correspondingly different, although most have a committee leader (either elected or chosen based on a rotating system) and charge committee members a nominal fee to pay for electricity and well maintenance. Some of the more recently established committees do not even have a source of groundwater; instead, they buy water in bulk from aguateros (at a significantly reduced cost) and distribute it through their networks. The long-term goal in such cases is usually to connect the network to a more affordable source of water, which they hope will become an option upon the completion of the Misicuni dam project, a prospect that I will address in Chapter 4. The exact number of water committees in the peri-urban south is unknown, but different sources suggest anywhere between 100 and 350 (Interview Carlos Orosepa 2011).12

The water committees overlap and interact with OTBs (Organizaciones Territoriales de Base, or Grassroots Territorial Organizations), units of political participation that were recognized in 1994 through the Ley de Participación Popular (LPP). This omnibus law was implemented during the presidency of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, a mining magnate whose legacy is closely associated with the neoliberalization of the Bolivian economy and political processes (Perreault 2008). It is

12 The number of water committees is highly political, with different people mobilizing numbers that suit their interests. For example, ASICASUDD-EPSAS, an umbrella organization for many (but certainly not all) the water committees, claims that there are around 350 community systems in the zona sur, whereas government registries keep the number closer to 120. While counting the committees was beyond the scope of this research, it is important to keep these basic disagreements in mind when analyzing representations of community based systems in Cochabamba.
frequently classified as a moment of “roll-out” neoliberalization, in which the government attempted to apply a palliative to the social damage caused by economic re-structuring in the 1980s. Its purported goal was to decentralize decision-making processes in order to shift government resources to neglected rural towns, but the mechanisms for re-distributing power were controversial. OTBs were created from previously-existing community organizations, but the stipulation that only one OTB was allowed per territorial area fomented a number of legitimacy conflicts, most notably around contested indigenous lands and the urban-rural interface (Kohl and Farthing 2006).

Moreover, as many water activists in Cochabamba are quick to note, the OTBs are highly politicized entities that are vulnerable to elite capture (Driessen 2008). The LPP created more than 300 municipios and earmarked 20% of the national budget for them. OTBs can access these funds by proposing community development projects to their comunas, or local government branches, and some activists say that this fact makes OTBs unwilling to oppose government actions (Interview Gastón Zeballos 2011).

The relationships that water committees maintain with their respective OTBs are therefore somewhat unstable, depending on the goals of the OTBs. Some experts have also noted that power struggles crop up between the OTBs and the water committees, the latter of which have been extending their activities into non-water related domains such as sports grounds and festivals (Interview Gastón Zeballos 2011; Interview Carlos Crespo 2011). These tensions are exaggerated in the peri-urban region, where urban OTBs are sometimes also competing with agrarian sindicatos (unions) over land use decisions (Interview Franz Quiroz 2011).

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13 Municipios are similar to counties in the US in that they are focused on urban areas but include their immediate rural surroundings (Perreault 2008).
3.4 Water Committees as Autonomous Alternatives

Peri-urban water committees, and especially those from the southern part of the city, played a pivotal role in the much-celebrated Cochabamba Water War. Although sometimes portrayed as a war between a foreign privately-owned water company and urban residents who refused to pay skyrocketing tariffs, more nuanced analyses have argued that the Water War was successful only because they drew together a historically antagonistic group of urban residents with connections to the public utility, peri-urban water committees, and rural irrigators (Assies 2003; Perreault 2006, 2008). The latter two groups mobilized a discourse that appealed to conceptualizations of indigeneity by focusing on traditional rural water uses (*usos y costumbres*) and communal water governance. This recourse proved highly successful, despite the facts that peri-urban “communal” water systems are technically on private land, a number of the committees had been recently established with the assistance of foreign NGOs, and many residents on the extreme outskirts of the city had no access to groundwater at all (Laurie, Andolina, and Radcliffe 2002).

The protests prompted the city government to rescind the concession that had been granted to the foreign private conglomerate *Aguas del Tunari*. They also resulted in important institutional and legal changes in Bolivia: the potable water and sanitation law (Ley 2066) was revised in 2000 as a direct outcome of the conflict, and in 2004 the irrigation law (Ley 2878) was updated for the first time in 98 years. These two laws officially recognized traditional water uses (*usos y costumbres*), established that concessionaires would not have monopoly water rights within their areas of concession, granted community water systems the right to apply for and receive concessions for indefinite periods of times, and decentralized irrigation governance (Perreault 2008; Kohl and Farthing 2006). In 2006, after further conflict over the privatization of water in El Alto-La Paz, the national Ministry of the Environment and Water was created to oversee and bring together the
activities of all three water-related sectors (potable water and sanitation; water resources and irrigation; environment and climate change). Following this, a host of new public entities was created to register, train, and provide technical assistance to community water systems. Most recently, the human right to water was enshrined in the 2009 Constitution, following the precedent set by Uruguay and an increasing number of countries around the world. At the moment, several groups in Bolivia are developing proposals for a comprehensive law that would address the specifics of this “human right” in regards to both potable water and irrigation (Interview Rocío Bustamante 2011; Interview Martin Vilela 2011).

Many scholars and activists also see the water war as the event that set the country’s leftward agenda. Indeed, a direct course has been charted from the Cochabamba water war of 2000 to the gas war of 2003, the water conflict in El Alto-La Paz in 2005, and the eventual election of Evo Morales in 2005 (Perreault 2006; Webber 2011; Spronk and Webber 2007; see also Chapter 2). Given this significance, and putting aside the debate over whether it has had a significant impact on water supply in Cochabamba, the Water War has become an important symbol for many anti-neoliberalization social movements. Images of Quechua women throwing homemade bombs at police on motorcycles remain burned on the shared retina of activists around the world.

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14 The three entities to which I refer are AAPS (Autoridad de Fiscalización y Control Social de Agua Potable y Saneamiento Básico), SENASBA (Servicio Nacional para la Sostenibilidad de Servicios en Saneamiento Básico) and EMAGUA (Entidad Ejectora de Medio Ambiente y Agua). The first regulates and oversees the activities of all water providers, be they community owned, public, private, or cooperative; the second aims to strengthen community water systems through training, facilitating technology transfers, and best practices research; and the third executes projects on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment and Water.

15 Many scholars argue that the Water War had little long-term impact on the city, as public water coverage still does not extend to the zona sur (southern zone of the city), downtown coverage remains intermittent at best, and the attempt at participatory governance from within SEMAPA through the election of “citizen directors” to the utility’s executive board proved unsuccessful for reasons that have been attributed to corruption, lack of interest, and under-defined roles (Spronk 2007, Interviews Zeballos)
The water committees are tightly bound up in the symbolism of the Water War, both by virtue of their activity in it and through their perceived embodiment of an alternative form of water governance. Importantly, activists frequently describe the water committees as “autonomous” and “autogestionario” (self-governed). These words are part of the broader regional activist vocabulary and are applied to a handful of other exemplary organizational structures, such as cooperatives and workers’ unions. For example, in August 2011 I attended the first annual International Workshop for Self-Governing Entities (Taller Internacional de Empresas Autogestionarias), which was organized by the activists who had led the charge during the water war (notably, one of the main leaders of the Water War, Óscar Olivera, gave the opening and closing remarks) and attended by representatives of water committees, water cooperatives, and water workers’ unions (i.e. SEMAPA employees). The purpose was to develop and strengthen self-governing structures, and the water committees acted as one of several such models.

Increasingly disappointed by the performance of President Morales and the MAS, many activists are suggesting that such autonomous structures could provide the basis for an alternative to the caudillismo for which Latin American leaders (elected or otherwise) are famous. In an interview in a Bolivian newspaper, Olivera recently declared:

“We are working for a political option, and I don’t mean electoral; a third, totally autonomous political option, which would be independent from all interference or subordination to any party or caudillo. I repeat, the only unique way of effectively changing the living conditions of the people is not through caudillos. In the Water War there was no caudillo. Óscar Olivera [referring to himself] was a spokesperson, and so was Omar Fernández [former leader of the irrigators’ union]. Who made the struggles of 2000 and 2003? The community” (Bustillos Zamorano 2012).

Olivera’s “third way” is quite distinct from the “third ways” of Clinton and Blair, which promoted various syntheses of neoliberal economic policy with strategic social programming. Instead, Olivera’s third way is positioned in opposition both to neoliberalism and the state. In a
country where the state’s “universal” services have only ever extended to a minority of the population, this positioning makes sense: returning to the “pre-neoliberal” era of centralized production, whether of water supply or any other service, would hardly be an improvement. Indeed, the assertion that decentralized governance is a key component of neoliberalization, as much of the literature suggests, is only partially applicable to Bolivia. The introduction of OTBs in the 1990s certainly reflects a roll-out neoliberal agenda, but the stronger community-based forms of governance – such as the water committees – already existed. When asked about the connection between decentralized governance and neoliberalism, Bolivian sociologist Carlos Crespo replied:

“That is true in developed countries, of course. In third world countries, I don’t believe it as much. Where there are functioning states, where there are figuras caudillistas (authoritarian figures), it’s difficult to have that kind of thing. Even in the neoliberal period, centralization in the water sector was strong. That hasn’t changed with Evo’s process. But the theme isn’t neoliberalism or not neoliberalism, the theme is the state. The theme is that there is always an external power that decides in the name of the [water] sector” (Interview Carlos Crespo 2011).

Crespo’s and Olivera’s statements pit autonomous community governance against corporate control of all varieties, whether led by the state or by a private company. Given this framing, it is interesting to ask to what extent the water committees, as prime examples of such community governance, are actually autonomous. Despite their importance to activists and social movements, there is little empirical work addressing the water committees’ day-to-day governance practices. A close analysis of one group of water committees would clarify the degree to which the water committees’ rhetorical positioning is reflective of their internal operations; it is to that topic that I turn now.
3.5 La Maica: Politics and Water

La Maica is located in the southwest of Cochabamba, framed by the airport to the east and the River Rocha to the south. It is one of four sub-sections of District 9, which has largest territory and the lowest population density of all the 14 districts. It is, moreover, the only one to be tagged “agricultural,” a descriptor that is reflected both in land use and in the presence of 32 sindicatos agrarios (agricultural unions), which are not to be found in any other district (Antequera Durán 2008). These sindicatos function alongside 150 OTBs and juntas vecinales (neighborhood organizations) with varying degrees of cooperation. In some cases they come into conflict with one another, particularly where prioritizations of water uses are at stake, while in other cases the same people run both the sindicatos and the OTBs, using the latter’s stamp only when in need of public funding (Interview Franz Quiroz 2011).

Institutional relations in La Maica generally fall into the latter category and are characterized by strong cooperation between sindicatos agrarios, OTBs, and water committees. The region is divided into seven smaller Maicas, each of which corresponds with a single OTB and five of which sit atop an aquifer of more-or-less fresh water (Maica Central, Maica Norte, Maica Sud, Maica Quenamari, and Maica Kaspichaka – See Figure 3 below). These five Maicas each contain between two and seven water committees, for a grand total of 22 committees, each of which supply water to between 36 and 290 member-families (see table). Most of these committees are between 20 and 28 years old, and were built with money and labor generated within the community. The presidents of the committees are either democratically elected or appointed on a rotational system; these presidents then sit on their local directory board, which functions simultaneously as OTB and sindicato. The last two Maicas (Maica Chica and Maica Arriba) have not been so fortunate with their groundwater, and
rely on *aguateros* for all of their household and livestock-related water needs. Their OTB president and directory board is chosen through a community-wide vote.

![Map of La Maica](image)

*Figure 3: Map of La Maica. Cartography by Eric Leinberger.*

The vast majority of families in La Maica practice some degree of small-scale dairy farming (between one and thirty cows) as either their primary or secondary source of income. Of the 56 families surveyed for this research, 86% owned at least one cow whose milk was destined for sale, while 73% depended on dairy production as their primary source of income. Most families sold the milk to PIL Andina (*Planta Industrializadora de Leche Andina*), one of Bolivia’s largest dairy product manufacturers, for a fixed rate of 3.2 bolivianos per liter,\(^{16}\) though some sold their milk to neighbors who produced cheese and yogurt to sell city center markets. In addition to the income from dairy production, *Maiqueños* frequently run small businesses (stores, restaurants, garages, etc.) or are

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\(^{16}\) The exchange rate in September 2011 was 6.82 bolivianos to 1 Canadian dollar.
employed as transportistas (taxi or bus drivers), tradesmen, and factory employees. It is difficult to estimate average household income with any accuracy, as survey respondents were hesitant to share such information, but other studies have indicated that 37.4% of the peri-urban south falls below the poverty line (earns less than $2/day), a figure that can be used to intuit living standards in La Maica (Ledo 2008).

Virtually all of the families who have dairy operations also grow several hectares’ worth of crops for their livestock, usually oats, alfalfa, corn (both for livestock and human consumption) and 
*pasto lolium*, a type of grass that was introduced within the last 15 years for its ability to grow in saline soil and for its nutritional value for dairy cows (Ampuero 2009). Although La Maica is technically served by shared irrigation system that draws water from the nearby lake La Angostura, in dry years there is rarely enough water to reach the entire area. The shortage of water from La Angostura, coupled with the introduction of *pasto lolium*, which prefers damp soil, has led to the widespread use of sewage water to supplement irrigation shortages (Ampuero 2009; Medrano Vargas 2001). Depending on the location of their fields, farmers either access sewage water directly by (illegally) tapping the pipes that lead to Alba Rancho, or they access it indirectly by pumping water from one of the three rivers that run through the area (rivers Rocha, Tamborada, and Valverde), all of which receive large quantities of mostly untreated water from Alba Rancho and act as dumps for several factories, including a chicken processing plant, a plastic factory, and a tannery (Ghielmi, Mondaco, and Luján 2008). Moreover, virtually none of La Maica is connected to the public sewage system, and the companies that drain septic tanks usually empty them straight into the rivers. The polluted water acts as a fertilizer for *pasto lolium*, and many farmers surveyed said that the grasses simply would not grow if they were to irrigate only with water from La Angostura. But these advantages will likely be fleeting, as wastewater has high salt concentrations its continuous use as irrigation
water eventually turns fertile soil into unproductive white deserts. Loss of land is a huge blow to any subsistence farmer, but choosing to irrigate with wastewater greatly increases dairy output in the short term. With that trade-off in mind, most farmers choose to gamble the longevity of their soil.

Beyond soil salinization, the decision to irrigate with wastewater also puts community-owned wells at an immediate and pressing risk of contamination. Indeed, several studies conducted in District 9 have indicated that the practice of irrigating with partially treated sewage water represents one of the top two risks for wells in the region, along with leachates from K’ara K’ara, the city dump. Extremely high levels ammonium nitrate, sulfates, iron, and magnesium have been found in many of the community-owned wells, as have above average levels of acidity and salinity (Ghielmi, Mondaco, and Luján 2008).

The two major challenges facing Maiqueños in terms of water governance, then, are scarcity and pollution. In a sense, both of these are produced in relation to the city. The connection is more obvious in the case of pollution: it is the city’s non-functional wastewater treatment plant that is polluting a source of irrigation water, and it is the city’s rapidly growing dump that is leaching into the aquifer. Although it is true that many residents prefer to use the polluted water as irrigation because of its high fertilizer content, this benefit would be safely obtained if the Alba Rancho plant actually treated all the wastewater that passed through it. Other residents are simply using it because they have no alternative when La Angostura runs dry.

But scarcity is also socially produced, in the sense that dwindling groundwater is caused by human-induced stress at multiple points of the aquifer, and socially constructed, in the sense that it is used by policymakers to justify continued water inequity. The water shortage in Cochabamba is not absolute: some northern regions of the city have artesian springs that supply unlimited water, and residents often dig private wells in their backyards to supplement the service they receive from
SEMAPA. The public network should be able to transport sufficient water from the north to the south, but is stymied by an ancient network of pipes that “resembles a basket, losing water from every point,” (Interview Carlos Crespo 2011). Moreover, the proliferation of private wells across the city presents an unquantified drain on the city’s groundwater (Interview Rocío Bustamante 2011). In both those ways, the scarcity is produced through human (in)activity. The discourse of water scarcity is then used to explain why the peri-urban south is still water-poor. As Lyla Mehta argues in her analysis of water scarcity in Kutch, India, water scarcity is “constructed differently by different social and political actors, often to meet political ends” (Mehta 2003, 5066). Policies portray scarcity as natural and chronic, and the “solutions” as human and interventionist – larger dams, larger distribution networks, and larger fees.

Whether produced or not, however, water pollution and scarcity remain part of the daily lived experiences of most residents in the peri-urban south. Addressing these large-scale challenges as a single water committee would be extremely challenging, if not impossible. Instead, the strategies that they have developed involve drawing in a network of non-community entities for support. Many of these networks form nodes around NGOs, and it is to an NGO-led project in La Maica that I turn now.

3.6 La Fundación Aguatuya and Agua Para Todos

Academic analyses of work by NGOs in developing countries often focus on the ways that NGOs make assumptions about community needs, “disempower” communities by creating dependences on donor funded-project, and act as the “human face” of neoliberalization (Nederveen Pieterse 1998; Fisher 1997; Bebbington 2004). The very proliferation of NGOs in the 1990s in Latin America has been widely associated with neoliberal policies that reduced public services and instead
granted public funds to non-governmental organizations. Their projects were most often intended not to directly replace the disappearing social safety net, but rather to target populations in dire poverty and remove barriers were preventing them from participating (economically) in society (Taylor 2009).

These are certainly salient insights, but the narrative casts the participants of NGO-led programs as passive masses at the mercy of NGO designs. In the case of water committees and NGOs in Cochabamba, at least, these roles are not always so straightforward: rather than passive recipients of water projects, committees work to identify and capture the attention of organizations that can help them satisfy their water needs. In the case of La Maica, these needs encompass both domestic and productive water uses, and residents use NGOs as gateways to donor funding, technological improvements, and legal and/or technical assistance. Their interactions involve push and pull in both directions, with inevitable adjustments and compromises on both sides.

In this section I analyze a recent project that was mostly orchestrated by a local NGO known as Fundación Aguatuya. I chose to focus this project because its impact was highly visible in La Maica (and in many other parts of the zona sur) and because it exemplifies the kind of inter-institutional alliances that I wish to explore. It should be noted that there are number of other local and international NGOs that also work with water and sanitation in peri-urban Cochabamba, and that they engage in this sort of alliance-building to varying degrees. While I believe that Aguatuya is reasonably representative of a well-networked local NGO in Cochabamba, it is possible that it pursues these alliances more aggressively than its compatriots.

Aguatuya was conceived in 2002 as the Programa Aguatuya, a side project of the private company Plastiforte, manufacturer of industrial plastic pipes. According to Aguatuya’s director, Gustavo Heredia, members of Plastiforte had started to notice that a large segment of their clients
were coming from the *zona sur* to buy pipes for their community water systems, and that many of them could not afford the high quality pipes that were most suitable for the quantities of water that they needed to transport. Programa Aguatuya was formed to provide financial assistance (in the form of grants and small loans) to this population. Within three years, the program had proven so successful that Aguatuya broke away from Plastiforte and became a foundation, though it maintained strong connections to the private company. Two of the employees of Plastiforte also moved to Aguatuya, including its director (Interview Gustavo Heredia 2011).

In 2004, Aguatuya launched its flagship project, Agua Para Todos, which was based on an inter-institutional alliance between Aguatuya, the municipal government of Cochabamba, SEMAPA, and the UNDP. The project was formalized in 2005 with the signing of a five-year multilateral agreement. Its mandated goal was to assist in the construction of new distribution water networks for peri-urban communities “with the idea of connecting to the central municipal system in the future.” (Aguaytuya 2011). With this long-term goal in mind, specific tasks were assigned to each of the participating members: the UNDP was primarily a financing agency, the municipal government assisted in identifying demand, and SEMAPA assured that the designs met the municipal water system’s technical specifications. During its five-year lifetime, the Agua Para Todos program benefited 4376 homes, according to its own calculations (Ibid).

Heredia describes the process by which sites were selected as beneficiaries of the Agua Para Todos project as “demand-driven.” Rather than approach peri-urban residents with a plan, they waited for residents to approach them. In many cases, this relationship was facilitated by Plastiforte, which had already been selling piping to water committees for a number of years. The Agua Para Todos project, however, had its specifications. First, it needed to partner with OTBs rather than water committees, as the work was to be financed in part through funds that had been earmarked
for OTBs by the 1994 *Ley de Participación Popular* (LPP). I spoke with several activists and academics in Cochabamba who criticized this necessity, as it undermined the authority of the committees and could exacerbate pre-existing tensions between the committees and the OTBs. Second, the project was only intended to build distribution networks, not to improve or identify sources of water. Any OTB that partnered with Agua Para Todos had to either have access to a freshwater aquifer or be interested in building community cisterns for bulk purchases of *aguatero* water. Most of districts 7, 8, and 14 are without access to groundwater, and the Agua Para Todos projects that were introduced here offered the latter service: the pipes were put down, the cistern was erected, and Aguatuya assisted the OTB in establishing a water committee governance strategy that would allow it buy water in bulk from *aguateros* and distribute it at a reduced cost throughout the community. In many parts of District 9, on the other hand, residents have access to (relatively) abundant groundwater and water committees pre-date the Agua Para Todos project by several decades. Their struggles are more often associated with water pollution and project financing than with water scarcity. Moreover, much of District 9 is agricultural – a fact that sets it apart from the others – and residents often need water in greater quantities because they use it for both domestic and productive purposes.

This last limitation was of particular interest to Aguatuya, which was actively exploring the concept of multiple use water (*usos múltiples*, or MUS), the idea that household water use in peri-urban and rural areas is often used not only for domestic purposes, but also for small-scale productive purposes. The most commonly cited examples of homestead-level productive water use include livestock, vegetable gardens, fruit trees, family-run restaurants, and, in the case of Bolivia, the production of *chicha*, a mildly alcoholic drink made from fermented corn (van Koppen 2009; Moriarty 2008; Rimbaud and Le Neouanic 2010). While these water uses are certainly not new, in as far as people have been using water for small-scale production for hundreds of years, city and
regional planners often do not account for them because they do not fall under the purvey of the two traditional sectors, potable water and productive water (usually understood as water for irrigation or industrial use). The novelty of MUS lies in planning water delivery systems that support actually existing uses. The simple logic of this idea belies the paradigm shift that it entails, as the water sectors in most countries are governed through distinct institutions and legislation.

Numerous investigations conducted both by the local university (Universidad Mayor de San Simón) and by foreign researchers have shown significant evidence of multiple use water practices in the municipalities surrounding Cochabamba (especially Tarata and Tiquipaya) and in some cases have suggested ways that these uses could be supported by technological and policy innovations (Bustamante et al. 2004; Duran et al. 2004; Quiroz, Bustamante, and Heredia 2007). In 2005, Aguatuya was recruited by several MUS advocates from the IRC (International Water and Sanitation Centre) to help pilot an MUS distribution network in Challacaba, a sub-community of La Maica. The success of this intervention, as well as that of two similar projects in nearby Chaupisuyo and Vinto, convinced Aguatuya that multiple use water was a theme worth pursuing; this proved advantageous for Maica Central when they approached Aguatuya looking for support.

3.7 Maica Central and the Agua Para Todos Project

Given their reliance on dairy production and agriculture, residents of La Maica rarely use their connections to community water wells for strictly domestic purposes (drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, washing clothes, etc.) In fact, at the time of research, seven of the twenty-two wells were pumping water that was either salty or too filthy for human consumption, although surveys indicated that people continue to use this water for cleaning and bathing. In these cases, the primary purpose of connections to community-owned wells is not to supply potable water but to
supply water for dairy cows, each of which consume upwards of 60L of water per day. Cows thrive on water with low to medium concentrations of salt, so the community wells provided an ideal source. Purchasing water from aguateros for drinking and cooking is considered a reasonable expense, but purchasing water in large enough quantities for their cows would be prohibitive, and Maiqueños view threats to this important economic input with grave concern.

It was precisely such a threat that motivated the OTB Maica Central to seek outside support for their water systems. Although Maica Central has more available groundwater than Maicas Chica and Arriba, it is often salty and the volume of flow is low. (Of the seven wells in La Maica that could not be used for human consumption, four were located in Maica Central.) In 2007, the region had six water committees that together supplied water to around 280 households, but increased demand coupled with leaky distribution networks was resulting in severe water shortages. When the Maica Central OTB met for its monthly meeting, discussion turned to ways to supplement water – not just for a single committee, but for the whole OTB. Thoughts went to a well that Maica Central had drilled four years beforehand, a well that had been intended for irrigation but that had been abandoned due to governance conflicts. Because it had been intended for high-volume use, people speculated that it would be capable of providing water to every household in the region. All that was needed was a new distribution network – a network that would be the size of all the other six networks combined. For a project of this scale, the Maiqueños decided that they would need financial support.

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17 In 2005, the OTB Maica Central wanted to drill a well for irrigation water. They submitted a proposal to their subdivision of the municipal government, the Comuna Itocta, and it was approved. After the well was drilled, however, it quickly became a source of friction, as residents of Maica Central disagreed over how much water could safely be pumped. Collectively the community decided that no one should use the well until they could determine a better way to manage the water (Interview Yhasmany Medrano, Aguatuya 2011).
According to both the director of Aguatuya and the president of Maica Central, it was the OTB that found the NGO, not the other way around. The president of Maica Central, Yhasmany Medrano, explained that he and others had gone “knocking on doors” looking for support from the Comuna Itocta, the municipal government, various NGOs, but was having difficulty attracting interest. In Cochabamba, as in many cities, support for projects that expressly engage with productive water use is limited, as the cleavage between domestic and productive water affects not only the purviews of public institutions but also the mandates of non-governmental organizations (Interview Gustavo Heredia 2011). Water for People, for example, is an NGO that works in La Maica but only on potable water and sanitation projects (Interview Betty Soto 2011).

Eventually, however, representatives of Maica Central made it to the steps of Plastiforte, whose directors pointed them to Aguatuya. Maica Central signed on to the Agua Para Todos project in 2009. Over the course of the next year, Aguatuya and residents of Maica Central dug trenches, installed a system of underground pipes to transport the water, and connected households to the new system. The pipes, of course, were purchased from Plastiforte, and the residents of Maica Central began calling the new system Manguera Azul, or Blue Hose, after the color of Plastiforte’s plastic tubes. The funding came from a mixture of sources: the municipal government, Maica Central’s LPP funds, Aguatuya, the UNDP, and the community. Residents of Maica Central provided all the labor – overseen, of course, by Aguatuya and SEMAPA. To complete the system, Aguatuya donated what Maiqueños described as “the mother of all water towers” – a hydraulic pump with the capacity to pump groundwater at a much faster rate than that which was available in small systems.

In the first year, the project proved itself to be a huge success from a statistical point of view: 290 households had been connected to the Manguera Azul system and the volume of flow was
sufficient for all the region’s dairy cows as well as household needs – cleaning, washing, and even cooking. As the water was drawn from a deeper aquifer, it was not as salty as the water supplied by the six smaller systems. All the people surveyed and interviewed in Maica Central praised the system and spoke of the relief that they felt to have a stable source of water for their cows.

3.8 Autonomous Governance?

In signing on to the Agua Para Todos project, Maica Central drew a complex network of actors into its territory, tightening the strings that attached it to the rest of the city. The connection between the community and the NGO became a point of contact between two already dense institutional networks. While certainly not the only point of contact – the deep well, for example, was the product of a prior project between Maica Central and the municipal government that had not involved Aguatuya at all – it was a particularly fertile point. All of these interactions erase any possibility of autarky (self-reliance) on the part of Maica Central, but the implications for autonomy (self-governance) are subtler. There are three major points that can be made, however.

First, the use of Plastiforte plastic tubes locked Maica Central into being a long-term Plastiforte client, as Plastiforte tubes are not standard size and damaged pipes cannot be replaced with any other brand (Interview Carlos Crespo 2011; Interview María Eugenia Flores Castro 2011). Several activist and academic interviewees spoke of the danger of breeding “dependence” and undermining community autonomy through such arrangements. They also mentioned stories of cases in District 14 where Aguatuya projects had been very poorly received because the close affiliation of the private company brought back the bad taste of Aguas del Tunari (Interview Fredy Villagomez 2011; Interview María Eugenia Flores Castro). If anything were to happen to the water network or if the community members ever wanted to expand it, the decision of which tubes to use
– and at what cost – would already be made for them. This certainly reads as a compromise of long-term autonomy.

Second, SEMAPA’s involvement in the project was as overseer, there to ensure that the system matched the technical requirements of the public network, such that if SEMAPA were to ever become capable of supplying water to the peri-urban south, it would be able to absorb the smaller system directly into the larger one. This is a very contentious issue in Cochabamba, as I will explore more in the next chapter. As a general rule, SEMAPA employees are engineers who have been trained to understand water supply as on a municipal scale, both from economic and infrastructural perspectives. In a sense, SEMAPA’s presence acts as a disciplinary force, asserting state authority by cementing the welfare of its population (Chatterjee 2004).

Third, Maica Central’s experience in this project has influenced the way it approaches new water challenges. For example, in June 2011, the pump on the deep well that supplied water to the Manguera Azul broke. After trying and failing to repair it, Maiqueños recognized that they were going to have to drill a new well if they wanted to continue using the new distribution system. Sensibly, they decided that two wells would be preferable, in case a similar situation ever occurred. They took a proposal for two new wells to the Comuna Itocta, asking both to use their LPP funds and for a municipal contribution, as they had learned to do through their participation in the Agua Para Todos project. Although the proposal was approved in August, the announcement was followed by months of delays stemming largely from the fact that one of the authorities had written the wrong date next to his signature. In the meantime, Maiqueños were wasting enormous sums on aguatero water for their cows.

I was conducting surveys in August, during the height of the dry season, when the region had already been without water from the Manguera Azul for two months. I was going door-to-door
in the company of the OTB president Carlos Vilela\textsuperscript{18}, who introduced me to interviewees and, on the few occasions that it was necessary, translated between Spanish and Quechua. Immediately after each survey, the conversation almost invariably turned to the topic of the well, with numerous questions and much frustration directed towards Carlos. “We are suffering,” they said repeatedly, and urged Carlos to approach the Comuna Itocta again, or, if that did not work, to take their complaints directly to the mayor’s office. Carlos, who had little more access to a realistic timeline than they did, would respond regretfully that he was pressuring as many people as he could.

One of the people he pressured during this time was Gustavo Heredia, the director of Aguatuya. The leaders of Maica Central were conscious of the fact that they were soon going to have two deep wells and only one high-caliber hydraulic tower – the one that had been donated by Aguatuya. Carlos returned to Aguatuya’s office and broached the issues directly by reminding Heredia that moments such as this – wherein the Manguera Azul system stopped working – made bad press for Aguatuya, given the system’s status as poster-child for the Agua Para Todos project. The argument was less convincing than it might have been if the problem had been with the new distribution network rather than the well, but it nevertheless seemed to have some impact, and Aguatuya’s director promised that the foundation would donate a new tower as soon as the new wells were drilled. When this finally happened in November 2011, Aguatuya made good on its promise.

While increased reliance on outside actors does not negate community agency – the decision to approach Aguatuya, for example, was conscious and consensually reached – it is reflective of a change in governance strategy. The original six water systems in Maica Central were built and maintained without outside assistance or funding, whereas the Manguera Azul system was built and

\textsuperscript{18} Not his real name.
is being maintained with both. The water committees’ ongoing relationship with the municipal government and Aguatuya is influencing their decision-making process, shifting their response to water problems from an inward gaze to an outward gaze. This is a subtle distinction, because Maica Central is still making the decisions, but I argue that the community-public-private-NGO articulation makes the governance process less autonomous and more relational. It also calls for a re-conceptualization of community governance that recognizes this inter-institutional dependence.

These points, however, do not negate the very tangible benefits that the Agua Para Todos project brought to Maica Central in the form of abundant water delivered through household connections. Relational community governance is not necessarily negative, but it does present an inconsistency between activist rhetoric about community governance and its reality. Community governance involves many more actors than those who live within the neighborhood’s borders, a fact whose acknowledgment might result in a more realistic depiction of alternative municipal water governance.

3.9 Conclusion

Peri-urban community water systems from the zona sur are integrated into the rest of Cochabamba through their shared water source and their shared institutional network. The main challenges that the water committees face – pollution and scarcity – are physically produced and socially constructed in relation to the rest of the city. The networks of actors that the water committees rely on to address these challenges influence the committees’ internal governance strategies in a way that calls the descriptor “autonomous” into question. In the case of Maica Central and the Agua Para Todos project, governance approaches were influenced by a long-term obligation to do business with the private company Plastiforte, the disciplinary presence of SEMAPA’s
technical requirements, and an increased reliance on the NGO Aguatuya’s support. By virtue of their location in a peri-urban region, where the entanglements of people, nature, and the built environment are denser than in rural areas, the community water systems govern water in a way that cannot be described as strictly autonomous, and must instead be understood as spatially embedded in their socio-natural context.

If the water committees cannot be understood as autonomous, what does that mean for their conceptualization vis-à-vis the ideas of neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism? Autonomy is associated with neoliberalism by its critics and framed as a key element of post-neoliberalism by its proponents. The Cochabamba water committees are usually linked to the current, supposedly post-neoliberal era, and are held up by activists and scholars as an alternative to governance by both the state and private entities; certain (more politicized) committees also identity themselves as such an alternative. These optimistic interpretations are predicated on the assumption that the water committees are self-governing, a characteristic that allows them to be framed in such direct opposition to other modes of governance. But the water committees can also be linked to the neoliberal era: they were strengthened by the LPP in the 1990s, and they continue to work with NGOs whose very presence in the country is partly the result of decreased public services. In this framing, autonomous governance on the part of the water committees would facilitate the process of state withdrawal at work since the early 1980s.

But the water committees are not autonomous, and their engagement with multiple actors across multiple sectors speaks to their hybridity with relation to the ideas of neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism. They do represent an alternative form of water governance, but it is relational rather than autonomous, and as such is neither mostly neoliberal nor mostly oppositional to neoliberalism. Instead, an alternative governance structure has arisen from the interactions between neoliberal
policies, pre-existing indigenous and rural governance structures, and inter-institutional alliances. This structure can be progressive, but it is not necessarily so, and acknowledging the inherent ambiguities of these community-run water systems is an important step towards building a citywide governance arrangement that reflects existing inter-institutional cooperation, such as the one I will examine in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Scalar Negotiation and Visions of Water Governance in Cochabamba

The existence of community water-supply systems in urban areas also presents us with a dilemma. Should community water-supply strategies be integrated into urban water management, or eliminated through the expansion of networks? (Bakker 2010a, 41)

4.1 Introduction

In the decade since the Water War, discussions about the future of municipal water governance in Cochabamba have reached a stalemate. On one side of the table are peri-urban community water system leaders and activists who insist that any plan for future water governance must integrate their systems as indivisible decision-making units. They imagine a city wherein water is co-managed between the public utility, SEMAPA, and the pre-existing community water systems (water committees). On the other side of the table are the engineers and public administrators who manage SEMAPA, and who tend to see community water systems as temporary fixes along the road to complete networked utility service – useful in the short-term, but ultimately financially inefficient and environmentally unsustainable. They speculate that members of peri-urban water committees, if given the chance to connect directly to the public network and never worry about their community systems again, would happily adapt to their public connections.

Crucially, the arguments share a common lynchpin: both sides see the successful completion of the Misicuni dam project as key to the mobilization of their plans. This project, which has been under consideration since the 1950s and under construction since 1996, aims to double the amount of water that SEMAPA has at its disposal, as well as providing water to several neighboring municipalities, increasing irrigation water in surrounding rural areas, and generating significant hydroelectricity. From a regional perspective, moreover, Misicuni promises economic and alimentary independence from Bolivia’s two larger metropolitan areas, La Paz and Santa Cruz, a fact that has
imbued it with a significance that greatly surpasses its paper promises. Despite its uncertain termination - the projected completion time is continually re-slotted for dates further in the future - the hopes and plans of key stakeholders in the water debates continue to rotate around the axis of Misicuni (Laurie and Marvin 1999). While this is less surprising from the perspective of those arguing in favor of eliminating the water committees, given the continuity of the large dam ideal and the productionist logic of the municipal water utility, it might be supposed that the water committees’ commitments to social and environmental justice would preclude the kind of interventions that big dam projects entail.

This standoff represents the continuation of a struggle over the appropriate scale of urban water governance that has been taking place in Cochabamba for the last two decades. In this chapter, I examine this historical and ongoing struggle, looking specifically at the water committees’ scalar re-negotiations and discursive scalar arguments. My argument is two-pronged. First, I argue that, since the Water War, the Cochabamba water committees have been in the process of re-negotiating the scales of governance that they are allowed to occupy and influence. Second, I contend that this struggle is currently being waged through appeals to scalar arguments that have specific regional and historical associations. The water committees’ enlistment of different scales with different temporal associations shows both the multi-scalar reach and temporal embeddedness of the community water systems – and the idea of “community” in general.

The chapter is organized as follows. I begin by reviewing scholarly debates about scale, with particular reference to its conceptualization in resource governance literature, its relation to the idea of “community,” and its articulation with global trends in water governance. I then examine the scalar strategies used by water committees in their rise from unacknowledged neighborhood associations to legally recognized water providers, focusing on their use of scalar strategies to bring
about this transformation. From past struggles I turn to visions of future water governance, starting with a historical overview of the Misicuni dam project and continuing on to explore the two competing visions of the future. I look specifically at the ways that each side has used scalar arguments to bolster its own proposal and delegitimize the other’s. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the water committees’ temporal embeddedness in regional water governance history.

As elaborated in Chapter 3, there is significant variation among these water committees in terms of history, governance structure, water quality, and water needs, but in this chapter I’ll be focusing on the scalar maneuvering of water committees as a collective, and referring to them as such. While the last chapter was focused on intra-community governance processes, this chapter looks at inter-scalar relations; the spaces of interest lie between water committees (as a group) and other scales of governance. Moreover, all the water committees are implicated in the ongoing scalar negotiation, even when they are not actively participating: the total number of water committees has become a negotiating tool, and the legal rights won by some water committees are conferred onto all of them. It is therefore analytically useful to think of the water committees as operating with a shared agenda, even if that is not exactly how their political mobilization has borne out in practice.

4.2 Scalar Politics of Resource Governance, Community, and Water

“Scalar politics” and “politics of scale” have attained the status of buzzwords in much critical spatial scholarship, and perhaps especially in work by political, economic, and urban geographers (Brenner 2001). Indeed, the “scalar question” has been so frequently addressed over the past three decades that some scholars have raised concerns that it may be overshadowing other core geographical concepts such as space, place, and territory (Leitner and Miller 2007), while others have suggested that its repeated use has led to an “analytical blunting” and a corresponding reduction of
its illuminating capacity (Brenner 2001). Even more critical voices have suggested that scalar analyses have a tendency to reify a hierarchical perception of the world in which the “global” acts upon the “local,” effectively silencing local resistance movements (Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005; Massey 2005). This latter group of scholars is normally associated with poststructuralist approaches that “aim to develop a relational sense of space as open, multiple and becoming” (MacKinnon 2010, 21). Despite their critiques, interest in the scalar reconstructions of political and socio-economic transformation remains strong, with recent scholarship suggesting ways that relational and scalar interpretations of the world could be complementary (MacKinnon 2010; Amin 2002; Leitner 2004); it is within this last group that I situate the present analysis.

Scale has also proven to be a productive avenue of inquiry for political ecologists and other nature-society scholars. Multiple “varieties” of scales – associated with social, political, economic, and ecological processes – overlap in the construction of resource governance arrangements, and their interactions have very real implications for environmental justice and sustainable resource use. In some cases, unclear jurisdictions and boundaries breed conflict, while in other cases fragile scalar alliances can be formed in attempts to preserve or disrupt existing power relations (Cash et al. 2006; Bulkeley et al. 2003; Norman and Bakker 2009; Lebel, Garden, and Imamura 2005).

Indeed, given the scope of this work, it may seem surprising that, as recently as 2005, J. Christopher Brown and Mark Purcell declared that political ecology tended “to provide an undertheorized conception of scale” and that it would gain from “a closer engagement with a growing literature in political economy that takes scale and ‘the politics of scale’ as a specific analytical focus” (Brown and Purcell 2005: 608). Their underlying purpose in making this statement was to warn political ecologists away from the “local trap,” or the tendency to ascribe favorable characteristics to local-level resource governance. Although they have been criticized for equating
the use of the phrase “politics of scale” with an examination of scale (Neumann 2009), at least part of their argument remains valuable, particularly if one considers it not in reference to just political ecology but instead to the broader field of resource governance.

In this larger category, which includes work addressed to both scholars and policy-makers, there remains a certain disconnect between those researchers engaged in (critical) multi-scalar analysis and those who are focused on the institutional practices of local or community-based resource governance. The former group takes the work of political and economic geographers as central to their analysis, understanding that scales are socially constructed rather than ontologically given, continually re-constituted through social practice, and relational inasmuch as they can only be understood in reference to other scales (c.f. Harris and Alatout 2010; Perreault 2008; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003). Friction between scalar power hierarchies is often a source of conflict, an aspect of scalar theory that has not been lost on political ecologists dealing with resource conflict and resource-based social movements (Perreault 2005; Le Billon 2001; Sneddon 2002).

While researchers in the latter group also deal with scale in their work, they are generally focused on practical management questions and therefore often interested in the most appropriate scale of resource governance rather than the contested processes of scalar (re-)production. For example, many researchers working on a range of development issues in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s argued that localization of decision-making processes was key to redistributive justice and ecological conservation (Fairhead and Leach 1996; Peluso 1992; McKean 1982; Ostrom 1990; Tsing, Brosius, and Zerner 1999). Although numerous criticisms of community-based natural resource management, or CBNRM, have since been raised (see Chapter 3), they have mostly focused on internal differentiation and inequalities within the community unit, rather than the co-constitution of the local and other scales of governance (Leach, Mearns, and Scoones 1999; Agrawal and Gibson
1999; Turner 1999). In other words, the scholars who have focused on community-based resource governance are the ones who are less interested in the production of “community” as a scale of resource governance and more interested in its functionality as such (Larson and Soto 2008). While both are important avenues of inquiry, greater attention to scalar politics could help nuance the currently polarized debate over which is the most appropriate management scale and, as Brown and Purcell suggest, encourage a more critical stance towards community-based projects.

The overlap and interaction between “community” and the “local scale” is of particular interest to the present analysis. Community has a distinctly territorial – and corresponding scalar – element to it. It represents a scale at which a governance regime is territorialized, which can correspond with a village, a region, or a nation-state, among others (Watts 2004). Regardless of the size, territorial circumscription is analytically assumed, though in practice different actors can belong to multiple communities at multiple scales that are at cross-purposes with one another. Often, actors are assumed to have the closest sense of identification with and knowledge of the local scale. These are the basic premises on which supporters of CBNRM build arguments that local residents have a greater interest in conserving natural resources, are more familiar with local ecology, and are more willing to distribute natural resource wealth equitably among community members (Tsing, Brosius, and Zerner 1999). They are also the basic premises that have been criticized as part of the “local trap” (Brown and Purcell 2005; Purcell and Brown 2005). The interchangeable use of “community,” “local scale,” and “small scale,” however, is still frequently evident in resource governance literature. In this chapter, I use the word “community” with the explicit goal of exploring scalar transgressions beyond the local.

The question of how community interacts with scale is particularly salient given the current global trend towards decentralized, local, and community-based resource governance, which follows
a more general trend towards decentralized governance of all varieties (McCarthy 2005b; Batterbury and Fernando 2006; Geddes 2005). In the international water sector, interest in devolved governance structures has been accompanied by a set of policy instruments that many commentators describe as the neoliberalization of water resources, as they promote the role of private interests and the valuation of water as an economic good (Bakker 2010b; Himley 2008; Harris 2009). Through this lens, emphasis on local participation and devolved responsibility is seen as evidence of “state retreat” and “roll-back neoliberalization” (Jessop 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; see also Chapter 2). Governing at the local scale is perceived as a relatively new phase in water policy, temporally rooted in development trends of the 1990s. It is contrasted with the era of “mega-projects” that came before, and that aimed to address water shortages with technical, interventionist, and extremely large-scale solutions. This prior era is often (negatively) associated with the big dam projects of the 1950s – 1980s, the ecological and social impacts of which contributed to a desire for context-specific, small-scale solutions to water problems (Roy 1999). Preferred or recommended scales of water governance are therefore temporally contingent, and predilection for the local scale in any given region must be understood (at least in part) in the context of water sector development trends globally. Bluntly put, scales of water governance have particular temporal associations, and the local or small scale is frequently associated with the neoliberal era.

Of course, these global trends interact with place-based politics, histories, and priorities. In Latin America, neoliberal economic restructuring governance of the 1970s and 1980s had devastating social impacts (Yashar 2005). In many countries, however, the second wave of “soft” or “roll-out” neoliberal policies of the 1990s inadvertently provided tools for anti-neoliberal resistance movements (Bustamante, Crespo, and Walnycki 2012). In these cases, governance decentralization took place in tandem with the introduction of multicultural reforms that “gave indigenous
populations contradictory positions within which to rework or resist economic, social, and political reforms” (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006, 90; see Chapter 2 for more detail). In Bolivia, this contradiction was evident in policies such as the 1994 Ley de Participación Popular (Popular Participation Law, LPP), which decentralized governance and earmarked a large percentage of the state budget for decentralized territories, the introduction of bilingual education in indigenous languages and Spanish, and the designation of Bolivia as a “multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural” nation (Buechler 2009; Perreault 2009). Although indigenous people were able to articulate their (often anti-neoliberal) positions from multicultural and decentralized platforms, these positions were folded into the social neoliberal paradigm in a way that had the potential to undermine cultural difference. Opinions differ over whether on this is an example of neoliberalism furthering its own project by fostering “developmentally appropriate culture” (Andolina, Radcliffe, and Laurie 2005), or whether it is an example of neoliberalism creating the conditions necessary for its own resistance, as per Polanyian analyses (c.f. Silva 2009). In either case, it is important to acknowledge that the idea of community occupies a particularly ambiguous position in Latin America (in addition to the many other ambiguities from which it suffers): both strengthened by certain neoliberalizing policies and the platform from which anti-neoliberal resistance is mobilized.

As explored in Chapter 2, many scholars have argued that these recent anti-neoliberal struggles are tipping the regional political balance and launching it into a new, “post-neoliberal” era (Sader 2011; Macdonald and Ruckert 2009a; Burdick, Oxhorn, and Roberts 2009). What effect, if any, has this shift had on the scale at which resources are governed? In Bolivia, the idea of “community” is central to the post-neoliberal project, inspired in part by the “ayllu,” the basic territorial and political unit of indigenous highland (Aymara and Quechua) governance. But, to the extent that “community” and “local” coincide and were both bolstered by certain “roll-out” neoliberal policies,
there are some obvious continuities between the favored scales of neoliberal governance and the current, post-neoliberal era.

The leftward shift in Bolivia has also coincided with a more global interest in “multi-scalar” water governance – that is, a simultaneous scaling up to the “natural” scale of water movement, the watershed or river basin, and a scaling down through the creation (or strengthening) of participatory spaces such as water boards, councils, committees, etc. (Reed and Bruyneel 2010; Norman and Bakker 2009; Cohen and Davidson 2011; Molle 2009). The results of these governance experiments have been mixed, but the influence of this multi-scalar shift is reflected in the current search for an alternative structure of water supply in Cochabamba. In this context, multi-scalar governance plans might represent a recent site of local co-option of internationally popular “best practices” rhetoric, this time in a supposedly “post-neoliberal” context.

4.3 From Neighborhood Associations to Recognized Water Providers

“Water committees,” or community-owned and governed water systems, can be found throughout the city of Cochabamba, including the north, the city center, and the south. They exist wherever a group of neighbors decided to pool resources to drill a well, install a pump, and build a network of pipes to connect the households. The systems vary in age, but the oldest have been operational for around twenty-five years. Membership to a water committee does not preclude access to and use of other water sources; many people in the north and city center are very likely to have public water connections alongside their community water connections, and others might also buy water from private vendors for drinking. The majority of water committees, however, are located in the peri-urban south of the city, in Districts 7, 8, 9, and 14, where the public network does not exist, and it is on these water committees that I’ll be concentrating in this chapter.
The water committees breached municipal, national, and international consciousness more or less simultaneously, with the outbreak of the Water War in 2000. Prior to the Water War, many Cochabambinos living in the city center were unaware of the existence of water committees just to their south; those who knew assumed that they were makeshift systems that would quickly be dissolved when SEMAPA finally extended its supply network to the southernmost reaches of the city. This is certainly not the situation any longer. Water committees played a major part in the Coordinadora de Defensa de Agua y Vida (Coordinator of Defense of Water and Life), the grassroots organization that coordinated protests against the foreign private conglomerate Aguas del Tunari, largely because the latter had been awarded sole access to surface water, groundwater, and even rainwater within the area of the concession (see Chapter 1 for more detail). This provision granted the company the right to take control of all autonomous water systems without compensating the people who had built them (Olivera and Lewis 2004).

Water committee members joined the protest to secure continued access to their respective community systems, but the act of joining forces with other committees led to a re-orientation of scalar demands: instead of demanding autonomy for one community, they were demanding respect for the idea of peri-urban community water governance. This broader battle did not end with the re-instatement of the public water utility. Indeed, one of the few lasting legacies of the Water Wars, which to many has been reduced to a “metaphor made of eggshell” (Interview Julio Rodriguez 2011), is that the water committees are now conscious of their own powers of self-organization (auto-organización) (Interview Carlos Crespo 2011; Interview María Eugenia Flores Castro 2011).

One of the major demands made by the mobilizing resistance forces during the Water War was the modification of the Potable Water and Sanitation Law (Ley de Servicios de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado Sanitario, Ley No. 2029), which had been hurriedly passed in 1999 in order to provide a
framework for private participation in the water sector (Shultz 2008). Several features of this law had raised the ire of water committees. To begin, it introduced a system of concessions and licenses for potable water, the former of which were to be awarded to centers of over 10,000 people and the latter of which would cover smaller populations. Concessions were to be awarded for 40 years, whereas licenses could only be obtained for five; concessionaires, moreover, “would have exclusive rights over the concession area, which meant that existing local organizations such as cooperatives or neighborhood associations would be forced to enter into contracts with the concessionaires” (Assies 2003, 17). On April 11, 2000, a modified law (No. 2066) was passed as a direct result of the Water War. From the perspective of water committees who did not have access to the public network (and who, for the most part, still do not), the most salient improvements of Law 2066 were that peasant and indigenous organizations would be able to obtain indefinite water licenses and that concessionaires would not have exclusive rights to water in their concession areas. Put simply, the small scale would be allowed to exist within the large scale, as opposed to being subsumed by it: this was the first battle won by water committees (in cooperation with other rural and urban water governance structures) in their bid to be recognized as a legitimate scale of water governance in the greater Cochabamba region.

The changes to the Potable Water Law did not grant the water committees a significant amount of official power, but they did set the stage for subsequent mobilization. In the years following the Water War, many water committees banded together and in 2004 formed the organization ASICASUDD-EPSAS (Asociación de Sistemas Comunitarios de Agua del Sud, Departamental y Entidades Prestadoras de Servicio de Agua y Saneamiento; Association of Community Water Systems of the South, of the Department, and Provider Entities of Water and Sanitation Services). This umbrella organization was formed with the help of the church-based NGO Centro Vicente Calles (Interview
Carlos Crespo 2011; Achi and Kircheimer 2006) and relies primarily on international donor agencies for funding. Its mission is to act as the collective voice for the committees while also providing technical, legal, and administrative assistance, including assistance with applications to become licensed water suppliers. Although not all of the water committees in the peri-urban south have joined ASICASUDD-ESPAS, it remains one of the most important actors in the city’s waterscape, working closely with several NGOs (Fundación Abril and Agua Sustentable being two of the most prominent) and proposing alternative forms of citywide water governance, a topic to which I will return later in this chapter.

Cochabamba’s water committees present an interesting bid for official recognition because they exist parallel to officially sanctioned units of decentralized governance, the OTBs (Organizaciones Territoriales de Base, or Grassroots Territorial Organizations). These latter were created through the 1994 Ley de Participación Popular (Popular Participation Law, LPP), an omnibus law that divided the country up into more than 300 municipios and directed 20% of national tax revenues towards them (Perreault 2008, see also Chapter 3). OTBs have access to funding for development projects through their municipios and have been granted responsibility for “creating community development plans, ensuring local oversight and mobilizing community labour for public works” (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 132).

Many authors have argued that the LPP and its accompanying legal recognition of OTBs have facilitated grassroots mobilization, as in the case of current President Evo Morales’s rise to power from the head of the national cocalero union (Farthing and Kohl 2005). To a certain extent, this is true: many OTBs pre-date the implementation of the LPP, they adhere to their own governance norms, and they are able to access state funding for projects that they design. This could be interpreted as a redistribution of state resources that makes space for genuine participatory
planning. But on the other hand, the OTBs have become the only sanctioned space for participatory and decentralized governance. The neat, nested hierarchy that describes endorsed decentralization extends from the state to departments, provinces, municipalities, cantons, parishes, and OTBs (Andolina, Radcliffe, and Laurie 2009, 85). Grassroots organizations that exist outside of this hierarchy have to gain some access to the structure if they wish to apply for state funding, and they usually do this by working with (or within) OTBs.

The relationships that water committees maintain with their respective OTBs vary significantly, from nearly complete cooperation, with the water committee presidents sitting on the OTB directorate (as in the case of La Maica; see Chapter 3), to direct antagonism. From a water committee’s perspective, cooperating with the OTB can be an extremely strategic move because it gives them access to the “sanctioned” (state-approved) governance hierarchy. Associating themselves with their OTBs allows the water committees to access state funding if, for example, they need financial assistance in drilling a new well or laying out a new distribution network. In a sense, the water committees are “jumping scales,” even though it is a lateral jump rather than a vertical jump.

For water committees that have antagonist relationships with their OTBs, joining ASICASUDD-EPSAS is one way to circumvent the established decentralized system and fortify their small “counterspaces” by affiliating with a larger scale. Fortification comes in the form of financial support as well as political support: ASICASUDD-EPSAS cannot access public funding because it works with water committees rather than OTBs (Interview Gustavo Heredia 2011), but it does have access to international funding. In this sense, ASICASUDD-EPSAS functions in much the same way any local, politically savvy NGO, whose power is sustained not by state recognition but by local and international approval.
The role played by NGOs in Latin American social movements has been the subject of much academic scrutiny, in part because of the key role that they play in network-building (Escobar 2008; Bebbington 2004; Andolina, Laurie, and Radcliffe 2009; Brown 2012). The term NGO (non-governmental organization) conjures a small-scale organization dedicated to specific local issues, but the reality in Latin America is much more multi-scalar. Some NGOs are functionally transnational, with their headquarters in (most often) Europe or North America and “local offices” all over the world, while those that were created locally often network aggressively with foreign NGOs and donors to stay afloat, especially in hostile political environments. The “NGO-ization” of Latin America (Alvarez 2009) corresponds with state retreat during the neoliberal era of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, when international donors increasingly identified NGOs as civil society representatives and effective mobilizers of development projects. While neither was true in all circumstances, NGOs became the most prominent nodes of the international development network. This remains true today: social movements looking for international support can use NGOs as platforms from which to “jump scales” or “throw boomerangs” to global activist networks and foreign funding bodies (Smith 1984; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

ASICASUDD-EPSAS is not the only organization that fulfills this function for water committees in Cochabamba, but it is certainly one of the most influential. It treads the line between NGO and water service provider; the adoption of the word “EPSAS” (Entidades Prestadoras de Servicios de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado Sanitario; Provider Entities of Potable Water and Sanitation Services) into its title in 2010 is evidence of this politicization. The 2000 Potable Water Law (No. 2066) introduced a system of licenses (for larger water providers or municipal governments) and registries (for indigenous communities and campesino associations/unions); all the entities that were granted either a license or a registry would be recognized as an EPSA. Later, the 2009 Bolivian
Constitution made privatizing water or granting concessions illegal and enshrined the license/registry system (Article 373:II), making EPSA status significantly more valuable. Since its founding in 2004, ASICASUDD-EPSAS had been known simply as ASICASUR (Asociación de Sistemas Comunitarias del Agua del Sur; Association of Southern Community Water Systems), but in 2010 it received legal recognition through a departmental decree (No. 2457) and added the ending EPSAS. This choice shows evidence of a desire for community water systems to not just be left alone by the state, but to be actively recognized on the same legal footing as SEMAPA. Thus, from a water committee’s perspective, joining ASICASUDD-EPSAS is an act of “scale jumping” in two senses: first, it gives them access to the global network of international NGOs, and second, it allows them to function collectively as a larger, more “official” entity in urban and regional water politics.

With that goal in mind, ASICASUDD-EPSAS is the most vocal proponent for co-managed water between Misicuni, SEMAPA, and the water committees. Indeed, of the six bullet points that make up its mission statement, one states: “To construct and drive the implementation of CO-MANAGEMENT as a model of public-community water and sanitation governance” (ASICASUDD-EPSAS website). Although it does not say it explicitly in this context, its vision of co-management depends on the successful completion of the Misicuni dam project.

4.4 El Sueño de Misicuni

“When we look at Misicuni, the panorama is even worse [than SEMAPA]. Yet another year has passed, and we have the tunnel - along with the more than 70 million dollars that it devoured during its drilling - transformed into, as someone predicted it would be, the largest and most expensive bat cave in the world. From the dam, to its complementary projects, to the hydro-electrical generator, absolutely nothing more than the usual promises” (Los Tiempos 2010).

“We are convinced that the principal cause of the delayed construction of the PMM [Proyecto Múltiple Misicuni – Misicuni Multiple Use Project] is the deep conviction
held by every Cochabambino and, of course, the governments, that the cost of the PMM is so high that it will possibly never be carried out. They don’t say it openly but it’s a kind of cancer that acts silently in the subconscious of people, enervating and incapacitating the social body” (Vera Varela 1995, 8).

“In reality, the only solution is Misicuni… It has become the dream of every Cochabambino” (Interview Franz Quiroz 2011).

For much of the twentieth century, “big dam” projects epitomized (a western conception of) development. From the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River in Nevada (1936) to the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in China (2006), development “experts” throughout the ages have touted colossal dams as the solution to rural poverty, food shortages, energy crises, and general “underdevelopment.” These dams typically cost many millions of dollars, often prompting governments to take out equally colossal loans from international development agencies, the most common of which is undoubtedly the World Bank. So revered were these dams that the World Bank did not turn down a single one of the 6,000 project proposals that were submitted between 1947 and 1994 (Roy 1999, 28-29). In addition to their purported developmental necessity, big dams also symbolized nation building, mastery of nature, and the path towards modernity. With the global shift away from Keynesian economics and towards neoliberal policies, interest in these goals has similarly shifted, though it certainly has not disappeared. The global dam frenzy reached a peak in the early 1970s, and has been declining since then, especially in North America and Europe (WCD 2000, 9). Frequently cited factors for reduced interest in dams include huge ecological damage, enormous numbers of displaced people, and unsatisfactory economic gains (c.f. Qing, Thibodeau, and Williams 1998; Khagram 2004; Fisher 1995). Although the displacement of the “big dam” paradigm by a market-based paradigm is by no means complete – in Brazil, for example, there has
been a recent increase in dam construction – there has been an at least partial shift away from state management and towards decentralized governance.

In this context, the Misicuni dam occupies an ambivalent position in the hearts of Cochabambinos and the politics of their city. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as a hangover from the big dam era, during which “the harnessing of and control over water was inscribed in the political-economic struggles that underpinned Latin American urbanization processes” (Swyngedouw 1995, 392). It carries all the hallmarks of that period, including ambitious landscape re-engineering plans, uncertain and perhaps acute ecological and social damage, and a hefty price tag requiring substantial foreign support. Its political lineage is also visible in its adherence to a one-solution-fits-all plan, which will theoretically resolve scarcity problems for potable water and irrigation in the municipality of Cercado (in which Cochabamba proper is located) as well as the neighboring municipalities of Quillacollo, Tiquipaya, Colcapirhua, Vinto and Sipe Sipe, all while generating 80 megawatts of electricity per year (Los Tiempos 2009). Given the substantial damage that similar dam projects caused in other countries, Cochabamba might be expected to sigh with relief that its own World Bank-sponsored dam project did not come to pass.

But on the other hand, the dam is of the utmost importance from the perspective of regional identity and autonomy. Beyond offering an answer to the anxiety-producing questions of rapid urbanization and potential desertification currently threatening the Cochabamba valley, Misicuni was sold to Cochabambinos as a way of cementing regional independence by guaranteeing “local” control of water; that is, by relying on water from the Cochabamba valley catchment (Laurie and Marvin 1999). This idea became so central to regional identity politics that any politician who tries to negate the importance of Misicuni is destined for unpopularity.
On a day-to-day basis, the overwhelming sentiment towards the dam is one of exasperation, as evidenced by the first quote at the beginning of this section. Few people still trust the projected completion dates, as they have been pushed back ad nauseam. At the time of writing, the most recent of these delays was announced in December 2011, when the group that is managing construction, the *Consorcio Hidroeléctrico Misicuni* (CHM; Misicuni Hydro-electrical Consortium) indicated that the project would likely not be finished until the beginning of 2014 (Rojas 2011). But despite the general frustration and the assertion on the part of many that they have given up waiting for Misicuni, there remains a sense that it is the only solution to the chronic water shortages that have fuelled conflicts between municipalities as well as between urban and rural water users.

A brief sketch of the project’s technical aims and political history is helpful in understanding its omnipresence in regional politics. The main purpose of the project is to dam and divert water from the Misicuni, Viscachas, and Putucuni watersheds to the city (see Laurie and Marvin 1999 for a detailed map). The Misicuni watershed is separated from the city by the Tunari mountain range, and it drains northwards, away from the city, which has always been frustrating for Cochabambinos anxious to supplement their own failing water sources (Laserna 2000). Once dammed, the water will be channeled southwards, through a 20-kilometer tunnel that cuts through the mountain side, and connected to a pressurized piping system that will transport it to a hydro-electrical plant roughly 1000m below (IDB 2009). The tunnel was completed in 2005, but the rest remains in progress.

The dam has been present in thoughts of local politicians and engineers since the height of the big-dam era in the 1950s, but it wasn’t debated seriously for another two decades, and has been moved on and off the table several times since then. Plans and budgets were drawn up in the early 1970s, but were thwarted when General Hugo Banzar Suarez seized state power and diverted funding towards petroleum-rich Santa Cruz over Cochabamba. In the early 1980s the project
surfaced again, but a national economic crisis prompted international finance to withdraw its support. In the latter part of the decade it was presented to the city as an option: dam or airport? The city chose the airport, and Misicuni was returned to the backburner (Laurie and Marvin 1999; Vera Varela 1995).

Construction finally began in 1996 during the presidency of Gonzolo Sánchez de Lozada, who rose to power promising regional autonomy and an improved economy through private financing. The dam seemed certain until the question of privatizing Cochabamba’s water supply was raised. The World Bank insisted that the best way to make SEMAPA an attractive purchase for private companies would be to scrap the Misicuni plan and replace it with a smaller-scale, much cheaper option known as Corani (Laurie and Marvin 1999; Marvin and Laurie 1999; Vera Varela 1995). The public outcry against this was such that the president apparently “resorted to biting irony by asking whether Cochabambinos wanted water or Misicuni” (Tapia 2000, 16). Eventually the concession that was granted to the private company Aguas del Tunari\(^{19}\) included an agreement to build Misicuni within two years – a reason that the company has cited for the significant tariff increases it had to levy on the water users of Cochabamba, which were a major instigating factor in the Water War (Spronk 2007).

Since the Water War, construction of the dam is finally underway with some momentum. Having attracted funding from the Inter-American Development bank and the Italian government, it is scheduled for completion in 2013, with another year expected to pass before the dam fills to capacity (Interview Carlos Pelaez 2011). When fully operational, it should produce 3100L of water per second, 2000L of which is earmarked for drinking water and 1100L of which will supplement

\(^{19}\) Aguas del Tunari was actually formed by a consortium in which International Water Limited, a subsidiary of the US-based multinational Bechtel, held the majority share (Spronk 2007).
irrigation water (Ibid). Many questions remain, however, particularly in regards to post-construction management. According to local newspaper Los Tiempos, SEMAPA will be charged with managing all the drinking water produced by Misicuni (Jordán Arandia 2011). This produces much anxiety for surrounding municipalities – each of which has its own public utility that will have to coordinate with SEMAPA to receive water – as well as for SEMAPA itself, which does not have the necessary infrastructure and managerial capacity to deal with the influx of water. In collaboration with JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency), SEMAPA has been expanding its network of pipes throughout the south-eastern part of the city (Districts 7, 8, and 14) so that it can be in a position to use the water when Misicuni is ready to deliver it, but the question of how to navigate through the archipelago of water committees in the peri-urban south remains salient.

In their 1999 paper, Laurie and Marvin traced Misicuni’s frequently foiled plans up to the end of the century, looking specifically at the ways that they interacted with more recently introduced neoliberal policies (movement towards the privatization or ‘capitalization’ of industry, reliance on the logic of the market, etc.) Their central argument, that a particular nexus between neoliberalization and globalization have created spaces for alternative interpretations of modernity, hinges on this key point:

“Although Misicuni has been linked to a technocentric definition of modernisation, at different points the project has been able to reinvent itself to appeal to the particular development ideology of the time by shifting from an emphasis on an integrated project to a focus on electricity and then to a concern with drinking water. So now in the 1990s, in the face of the neoliberal challenge of water trading, Misicuni is attempting to reinvent itself again, this time as a cultural resource” (Laurie and Marvin 1999, 1409).

This was not the last time that Misicuni would be re-invented. Twelve years after Laurie and Marvin’s article, Misicuni remains central to a water agenda that has supposedly moved beyond the neoliberal institutions of the 1990s. The current era has been interpreted as “post-neoliberal” (see
Chapter 2 for more on this), but Cochabamba’s approach to water supply has not made a clean break with the past. With one foot pointed toward a new kind of water governance based in a multi-scalar, needs-driven, and community-based vision, the other is firmly planted in the large-scale, productionist, state-driven idea of what urban water supply needs to look like – in other words, the logic of water management that became before the introduction of market-based drivers and efficiency measures. Perhaps nowhere is this schism more visible than in attitudes towards Misicuni, which is gestured towards with two very different objects in mind.

4.5  Vision 1: Large-Scale, State-Driven

Immediately after the Water War, the activists who had led the charge against Aguas del Tunari were left with two possible courses of action: either they could encourage the re-instatement of the public utility (albeit with stipulations that would increase “social control”) or they could build an entirely new governance system. They chose the former option, believing that SEMAPA could become a genuinely “public” entity with significant citizen input, rather than the inefficient bureaucracy it had notoriously been prior to the Water War (Spronk 2007).

Like many public water utilities, SEMAPA employs a set of governance strategies that have been described as “productionist” (Swyngedouw 1995; Marvin and Laurie 1999) and “policy-driven” (Allen, Dávila, and Hofmann, 2006). In general, these strategies support large-scale, technical solutions that aim to solve problems experienced by large segments of the population, as opposed to focusing on individual neighborhoods or households. It assumes that problems of access, scarcity, and poor quality are naturally produced, and uses their existence to “legitimize a productionist ideology [that] helps to avoid discussing, let alone tackling, the thorny issue of water distribution and environmental justice in a context of growing scarcity” (Swyngedouw 1995, 399). Instead of
addressing these fundamentally constructed social inequalities, productionist governance strategies focus on expanding transmission capacity. This is accomplished through massive projects that extend piped networks, increase water availability (through, for example, diverting rivers, building dams, and digging deeper wells), and build new treatment plants. As Swyngedouw notes, the productionist methods tend to lag considerably behind actual demand, perpetuating the inequalities that they claim to be rectifying.

Nina Laurie has compellingly argued that productionist water supply in Cochabamba is linked to a national, masculine identity that was marginalized by privatization in 1999 (Laurie 2005). The people who had controlled water management in Cochabamba up to that point – the municipal government, city engineers, and SEMAPA – were deemed un-modern, steeped in an era that Bolivia must move beyond. The Water War was about more than simply ousting a foreign private company and its neoliberal rhetoric; it was also about restoring this identity to a position of power. Although the movement that ousted Aguas del Tunari was a “hybrid” force, composed of a mixture of feminized actors (indigenous people, women, and/or poor people) and marginalized masculinities, the hybridity did not continue over to the post-Water War era. In choosing to re-install SEMAPA, the Coordinadora deferred to the established authority, which set the stage for continued productionist management.

There were provisions, of course, that were meant to re-invent SEMAPA in a way that reflected the hybridity of the resistance movement. Most important of these was the introduction of a “citizen directory” (directorio ciudadano) into the board of SEMAPA directors. The board of directors had previously been staffed exclusively by professionals (mostly engineers) and politicians, with the mayor at its helm; the citizen directors were meant to be elected directly by city residents and represent marginalized interests. But election turnout was dismal (2000 votes in a city of
650,000) (Bakker 2008) and only worsened in subsequent years. There is a general perception that the citizen directors were just as susceptible to the board’s culture of nepotism and personal gain as SEMAPA’s engineers and city politicians, and disappointed citizens have stopped demanding that the elections take place at all (Interview Gastón Zeballos 2011; Interview Carlos Pelaez 2011). As far as the public utility is concerned, water governance in Cochabamba now operates in almost exactly the same way as it did prior to the Water War.

In the decade since this status quo was restored, SEMAPA has embarked on a number of projects that represent a continuation of its productionist strategies, including the JICA project, which installed a network of pipes throughout Districts 7, 8, and 14, cost many millions of dollars, and has so far made absolutely no difference in the lives of people living in these Districts, as the pipes will remain dry until Misicuni becomes a reality. The other obvious example of productionist logic can be found in the Misicuni project itself, which is similarly costing an exorbitant sum and has yet to yield any results. In line with Swyngedouw’s assertion that productionist mega-projects can rarely keep pace with the demands of urban life, there is some speculation that Cochabamba’s population will have grown so much by the time Misicuni is completed that it won’t actually be able to provide water for all the city’s residents, let alone the surrounding municipalities (Interview María Eugenia Flores Castro 2011).

To justify SEMAPA’s continued role as main water provider in the city, proponents of large-scale supply have mobilized two major scalar arguments. The first is associated with the “economies of scale” theory, or the idea that average unit production costs will decrease with increasing output levels, resulting primarily from the effects of fixed costs (e.g. once a water pipe is installed, increased usage reduces average costs related to the pipe’s installation and maintenance) but also from workers’ learning curve, access to capital, and so on. In the case of Cochabamba’s water, it makes
more economic sense for the city to put down one network from which everyone would draw at the household level, as middlemen would decrease the city’s average revenue per cubic meter of water. Capitalizing on the economy of scale would make it easier for SEMAPA to afford to build new networks, or at least to justify them to the international donors on which most of its projects rely.

This argument might ring truer if it were at all reflected in local history. SEMAPA has had the advantage of economies of scale for many decades, and it has not extended its service to the peri-urban south. Of course, there are many reasons for this, not least among them a shortage of funds, but the fact remains that the economic gains of working at a larger scale do not necessarily translate into better service. As a local NGO leader puts it, when describing the advantages of community systems:

“Everyone says, ‘But, it’s a little system of 80 houses, it doesn’t have economy of scale,’ but they’ve changed their network [of pipes for their community system]. Semapa hasn’t changed its network in forty years! And won’t do it any time soon, either. Or, if it does, it won’t do it with its own money – it will get credit from the World Bank, or credit from the municipal government… So this business of economy of scale… it doesn’t guarantee either sustainability or good service” (Interview Gustavo Heredia 2011).

The second productionist argument appeals to ecological scales. It makes two assertions: first, that failing to govern water at the scale of the city will lead to resource depletion as water users overdraw from their immediate surroundings, and second, that smaller scales would not be able to control flows of pollution into their water source. Both of these arguments are valid. Most of the Cochabamba water committees pump groundwater from aquifers, and as such are intimately tied to all other aquifer users and polluters. Many water experts are concerned about the lack of control or monitoring of community and private wells in Cochabamba in general; no one knows exactly how much is being drawn from the aquifer or what the long-term effects will be for the valley, which some speculate is undergoing a process of desertification (Interview Rocío Bustamante 2011; Laurie,
Andolina, and Radcliffe 2002). Water contamination, on the other hand, is a more certain problem. At least one major study of the water quality of community wells in District 9 found them polluted to varying degrees (Ghielmi, Mondaco, and Luján 2008). The sources of contamination were traced back to the nearby city dump, K’ara K’ara, which is leaching into the aquifer, and to the city’s only wastewater treatment plant, Alba Rancho, which receives waste water far in excess of what it is capable of treating and discharges the (partly) treated effluent directly into the River Rocha (Toledo Medrano and Amurrio Derpic 2006). This river runs throughout the southern peri-urban zone and many farmers pump it for additional irrigation water. Virtually untreated sewage water sits on the fields and soaks into the ground, in some cases right next to where the community well draws its water.

It is true that these are not problems that a community water system can tackle while working in isolation; they are produced in relation to the city, and would need to be addressed at a larger scale. But rejecting the committees on the basis that they are too small to deal with these larger “ecological” problems avoids dealing with the much trickier questions of environmental justice and inequitable resource access (Crespo Flores 2009). If water were managed only at the level of the city (as opposed to the multi-scalar proposal outlined in the next section), would the city address the important question of why both K’ara K’ara and Alba Rancho are situated in the southern zone? Or why there is so much preoccupation about wells in the southern part of the city, when many households in the north also have private wells that few people discuss in relation to scarcity? The water committees are not trying to work in isolation, as shown in Chapter 3 and as evident in their involvement in ASICASUDD-EPSAS, in part because they know that their wells are polluted and their water sources unreliable (Interviews with OTB leaders in La Maica). But relinquishing complete decision-making control to SEMAPA seems unlikely to serve their interests,
as the long history of racial and class segregation within the city will almost certainly influence the city’s future policy prescriptions (Interview Carlos Crespo 2011).

The large-scale, productionist model of water supply represents a continuation of the status quo in Bolivian and Latin American politics more broadly. Having rejected the water marketization and privatization, Cochabamba would return to large-scale, interventionist policies predicated on a regional (masculine) identity, capable of overcoming the “natural” limitations of the waterscape. But this city remains a gleam in the eyes of city technocrats, and an alternative vision continues to act as a foil to the re-introduction of hegemonic productionism.

4.6 Vision 2: Multi-Scalar, Community-Based

“I think that one possible solution for Cochabamba would be for some entity - like Semapa, or Misicuni - to make a large network, for example one line that goes all around the city. Just an idea: one good tube, filled with good quality, high-pressure water, nothing else. And each little system could connect itself to this tube… I think that that would be a much better kind of governance, a shared governance, co-management, where there’s citizen participation through the cooperatives, from the water associations, as well as state participation” (Interview Gustavo Heredia 2011).

The second proposed solution to Cochabamba’s water problems has been put forth by a mixed group of water committees (led by ASICASUDD-EPSAS), water activists, NGOs, and academics. There are some variations on the proposal, but in essence it would involve the sale of water in bulk from either SEMAPA or Misicuni to the water committees, which would control the distribution and pricing of water in their respective communities. SEMAPA would theoretically only have to build one main pipe around the city and control the connections made by each community system. Or, alternatively, SEMAPA might sell water to ASICASUDD-EPSAS and allow the latter function as both the price negotiator and distributor. In short, the water might go from Misicuni to SEMAPA to ASICASUDD-EPSAS and finally to the water committees; or it might skip SEMAPA,
ASICASUDD-EPSAS, or both. Practically speaking, all the entities want to be involved in the water transfer, so it might be more politically feasible to include everyone in the supply chain (Interview Franz Quiroz 2011). In either case, the price of water that individual users pay is expected to be lower than what SEMAPA charges its urban water users, because all the purchases would be made in bulk.20

From the perspective of the water committees, this scenario is appealing because it would reduce their reliance on state provision. Many committee members remain distrustful of the municipal government that sold their water rights to a foreign private company, and are wary of surrendering their decision-making capacity. In interviews, committee members stressed that they liked knowing that if something were to happen to their network then their president would be swift to react – or risk the wrath of the neighbors. The general perception of SEMAPA is that of a distant authority figure whose interest in the well being of peri-urban residents is minimal at best. The water committees are willing to work with SEMAPA if it means reducing their dependence on the high-cost aguateros, but allowing SEMAPA to make decisions in their name is one step too far for residents whose historical interactions with the water utility have been largely negative.

Much like the idea of decentralized governance in general, the committees’ desire for co-management is appealing to both “alter-developmentalists,” who are generally seeking an alternative to the private-public dichotomy that has characterized water governance for the past several decades, and many mainstream western development experts who view participation as the key to culturally appropriate but still economically efficient resource use. Each side attributes different

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20 This tariff arrangement has its drawbacks, however. Economist Franz Quiroz has shown that the fees that Semapa charges its urban users is substantially lower than the cost of production (about 2.6 bolivianos per cubic meter vs. 4.5 bolivianos per cubic meter). He argues that selling the water in bulk and lowering the tariffs even further is politically popular but not financially sustainable (Interview July 2011).
characteristics and value judgments to the local scale, even while both suggesting that it is a “good” scale on which to confer governance responsibility. The first group imagines the local as harmonious, culturally integrated, and perhaps more respectful of nature, while the second imagines that local actors’ interest in conserving resources for the future will cause them to make more efficient management decisions (see Chapter 1).

In trying to maintain autonomy over their water resources, the water committees make claims to both sets of scalar attributes. As explored in Chapter 3, the water committees appealed to ideals about “community” and indigenous identity both during the Water War and in the years afterward. They drew on the language of “usos y costumbres” to justify their continued access to water that was legally, at that point, part of a larger concession area (Perreault 2008), and supporters of the multi-scalar water distribution plan often describe the committees as structured around values of solidarity and reciprocity (Grandydier Felipe and Tinta 2006). But these supporters also make the case that water committees would be better economic stewards than SEMAPA because they have a personal interest in ensuring that no one else taps their pipes. As the director of the local NGO Aguatuya put it: “If there’s a leak in SEMAPA’s network, SEMAPA will repair it in six months. But the same system, if it’s a community system, they’ll repair it the next day, because they don’t have the luxury of wasting money” (Interview Gustavo Heredia 2011). Moreover, they appeal to associations between the local scale and efficient (i.e., non-bureaucratic) management strategies. The southern peri-urban region of Cochabamba has the highest population growth rate in the city (Ledo 2008), and the water committees have so far been addressing the growing demand for water more effectively than SEMAPA. Says Gastón Zeballos, leader of a water committee and water activist through the NGO Fundación Abril:

“The southern zone is growing more, migration from other departments has been
strong... and I don’t know how the current government will deal with it, even if Misicuni is finished. They’ve been building [Misicuni] for a long time, it's in process, but you know that all projects always have a margin of error. I don’t know if it will cover all the demand that continues to grow in the southern zone, and there aren’t any plans coming from the municipal government that could slow [the growth] even a little” (Interview Gastón Zeballos 2011).

Zeballos casts doubt on the idea that SEMAPA or the city government could ever supply enough water for the entire peri-urban south, pointing to the protracted project times and inaccurate calculations that happen when attempting to solve problems on such a massive scale. But the argument that water committees are better able to meet the growing demand of peri-urban areas is predicated on the assumption that entry into a community water system is easy. Many water committees charge steep connection fees for new members, while others limit entry because they are worried about the ability of their well(s) to keep pace with increased demand (Interviews with OTB leaders in La Maica). While this concern would likely dissipate once committees had access to water from Misicuni, it does not necessarily follow that they would embrace incomers with open arms, as increased membership entails a larger network with more maintenance and a more complicated decision-making process.

From the perspective of SEMAPA and the municipal government, the co-management plan should have some appeal - insofar as it would reduce the amount of required public infrastructure, monitoring, and maintenance. Instead of active opposition, their general objection is that co-management would make water supply too complicated, and that most water users would probably prefer to receive water from SEMAPA and without thinking about it, just like all the urban residents. Says Carlos Pelaez, head of SEMAPA’s project planning unit:

“Right now, we don’t have experience selling water in bulk. It could be that the same users [who are asking for co-management], when they start to manage their systems, will decide to let Semapa take over. Or, if it’s going well for them, they might just continue with their own administration. That will all depend on how the users
respond. Because the committee takes charge, and in some case there have already been fights between the [leaders of the] committees and the users, because [the users] say no, we would prefer that Semapa be in charge. Until we have more experience, it will be difficult to judge” (Interview Carlos Peleaz 2011).

Pelaez refers to internal power differentials and conflicts within water committees to explain why it might be easier for SEMAPA to be the sole, de facto water supplier, though he is very diplomatic in making this assertion.

Amidst the discussion over whether or not the water committees are a suitable scale of water governance, it is easy to miss the subtle way that Misicuni is re-worked by supporters of the co-management plan. If Misicuni was re-imagined in the late 1990s as a (regional) cultural resource to guarantee its continued pursuit in the face of neoliberal water trading and privatization (Laurie and Marvin 1999), it is now being cast as a key component of an alternative development scheme. The co-management proposal could be categorized as aspiring to an “alternative modernity” (Escobar 2010), but the foundation on which it is built (Misicuni) is inextricably related to previous epochs and hegemonic views of modernity. Even though it is now being claimed by community water systems that associate themselves with the search for an alternative governance system, it will still likely carry with it many of social and ecological effects of big dams that have come before. Indeed, this has already been the case, as people living in area surrounding the dam project have been forced to re-locate because their land was going to be flooded (Laurie, Andolina, and Radcliffe 2002).

On the other hand, this is an interesting and potentially progressive scalar maneuver for a movement that identifies itself (to a certain extent) with indigeneity. As much as recent (neoliberal and post-neoliberal) development models in Latin America have attempted to make space for indigenous people, there remains a sense that “Indian culture is incorporated into development thinking and practice within particular imaginative geographies of policy… [that] fix indigenous
development to *limited scales, spaces, and social groups* reflecting a spatially fixed vision of culture as localized, ethnically homogenous, and founded on gendered divisions of labor” (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006, 84, emphasis added). In short, indigenous peoples (and their development “needs”) are coded as rural and “local.” The Cochabamba water committees are peri-urban, not rural, and they are asking for multi-scalar governance underpinned by social control rather than local governance alone. Their imaginary scalar negotiations are not, then, a simple matter of appealing to the “good” attributes of local level governance, but also a careful re-working of the scales that indigenous and community governance is allowed to influence.

### 4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made two separate but linked arguments in reference to scale and Cochabamba’s southern peri-urban water committees. In the first part, I traced the role played by scale – political, economic, and social – in the events that have led up to the current municipal water governance situation, arguing that the current (fragile) arrangement is the result of the water committees’ strategic engagement with different scales of governance. Scale, as numerous political theorists have argued, is socially constructed and in a constant process of re-negotiation; this observation provides a useful lens through which to think about the implications of the water committees’ scalar engagement for the idea of community – which, as I mentioned earlier, is often associated with local-level governance. Although each of the water committees is technically small-scale (they serve up to 200 families and their infrastructural capacity is minimal compared to that of SEMAPA), they are also creating new scales (such as ASICASUDD-EPSAS), jumping scales (through affiliation with both OTBs and NGOs), and envisioning a multi-scalar system of municipal water governance. All of these maneuvers represent deliberate manipulations of scale, through
processes as diverse as open conflict (the Water War), inter-institutional networking, and discursive enactment; they demonstrate the degree to which the water committees – and communities in general – are not necessarily “fixed” at the local scale.

In the second part, I looked at the two proposed long-term solutions to water problems in Cochabamba, showing how their efforts to maintain/re-construct municipal power relations employ scalar arguments that are in constant articulation with international water governance paradigms and constructions of regional and indigenous identity. This argument speaks to the regional and temporal associations of scales of governance. In a sense, it is impossible to speak about a scale of water governance – be it a neighborhood, the city, or the watershed – without referencing a specific configuration of international “best practices” rhetoric, local interests, and pre-existing management structures. These associations can be re-fashioned for political ends, as demonstrated by the water committees’ enlistment of the Misicuni dam, which originated in the productionist “big dam” era of water supply, interacted with regional identity claims, and is now represented as the largest scale of a redistributive justice project. Similarly, in their appeals to the “good governance” practices of the local scale, the water committees are enlisting ideals associated with the neoliberal era of water governance, but are using them to legitimize their ongoing presence in the city. Their vision of “multi-scalar” governance somewhat corresponds with the current international consensus on the best practices of water governance and is simultaneously articulated with the Bolivian leftward shift and post-neoliberal community-oriented project. The water committees and their vision of future municipal water governance are temporally embedded in regional water governance history, which is itself a continuing nexus between the socio-political context and international water governance paradigms.
Chapter 5
Conclusion: Community Governance in a Post-Neoliberal Context

5.1 Introduction

In various guises, interactions between “community” and “nature” have risen to the political forefront in Bolivia. Indeed, at the time of writing they account for several front-page newspaper stories. The second TIPNIS march, led by indigenous groups from the eastern lowlands, is presently less than 100km from its destination of La Paz. Meanwhile, a group of indigenous and peasant people from Mallku Qhota, in department of Potosí, have started their own march to the capital to demand the reversal of a concession that the government recently granted to a subsidiary a Canadian mining company. In the department of La Paz, a group of cooperative miners from the town of Colquiri have occupied a private mine that had been operated by the Swiss company Glencore. In response to the last event, government-employed miners are demanding that the mine be removed from both foreign and cooperativista hands through nationalization. Protests in support of TIPNIS marchers, the indigenous groups from Mallku Qhota, the cooperativistas from Colquiri, and the government-employed miners are spilling into the streets of La Paz, blocking roads in the departments of La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí, and have resulted in more than twenty injuries so far (Mamani Ramírez 2012; Mejía 2012).

What can be distilled from such complex entanglements? To begin, they speak to the ambiguity of community, in terms of both community’s conceptual roots and the socio-environmental impacts of community resource governance. In the case of the TIPNIS and Mallku Qhota protests, an uneasy alliance has formed between indigenous activists and environmentalists, each group of which might conceivably be instrumentally engaging the other in the pursuit of its
own goals. Although this scenario might have positive outcomes from ecological and environmental justice perspectives, it complicates ideas about the relationship between indigeneity, nature, and community. The mining cooperatives’ appeals for autonomy are made alongside some of the most ecologically damaging forms of mineral extraction (in addition to some of the worst labor conditions, where numerous children are employed and safety equipment is non-existent) (Absi 2005). These contradictory positionings of “community” support arguments made by numerous political ecologists: there is nothing inherently superior about resource governance at the local level, and the idea of community can be mobilized in ways that are not necessarily progressive (Brown and Purcell 2005; Bakker 2008; Watts 2004).

But these current events also demonstrate the salience of “community” to the question of resource governance in contemporary Bolivia, even when the ecological and social outcomes of community resource governance are less than clear. Community governance of many varieties has been practiced in Bolivia for centuries, although it has certainly been transformed through its interaction with colonial and political-economic forces. More recently, community-based mobilizations in opposition to neoliberal environmental policies helped set the course for the country’s leftward political shift. Since coming to power in 2005, President Evo Morales’s political discourse has been characterized by a commitment both to protecting Pachamama and to supporting the semi-autonomous social movements that set the stage for his election, including indigenous communities, cocalero unions, and water committees, among others. My goal in this thesis has been to consider community resource governance in this context, wherein communities fighting for natural resources helped bring about a putatively post-neoliberal era that is, in turn, marked by a discursive interest in the ideas of community and nature.
To that broader end, my research has been structured by two questions, as introduced in Chapter 1. First, I asked to what extent the Bolivian government’s environmental policies are reflective of the rhetorical importance it accords to the ideas of nature and community. This question engages with the material impact of post-neoliberal politics on resource governance, and it was the focus of Chapter 2. Second, I asked to what degree an existing case of community water governance (water committees in peri-urban Cochabamba) exhibits qualities that certain post-neoliberal optimists – such as the Bolivian government and a wide range of scholars, activists, and NGOs - often associate with the idea of community governance. In other words, I compared actually existing community governance to its idealized counterpart. This question was central to Chapter 3, where I evaluated the extent to which the water committees can be considered autonomous, and Chapter 4, where I explored their engagement with scale in their quest for long-term integration into municipal water management.

What are the implications of these two questions for my overarching purpose, to examine the friction between post-neoliberal politics and actually existing community resource governance? I conclude this chapter by suggesting that they point towards the need for conceptual refinement of community governance that takes the socio-political context into consideration. In Bolivia, community governance has interacted with and been strengthened by neoliberal policies, but it has also been mobilized as a powerful alternative governance paradigm with (in some cases) redistributive potential. Analyses of community governance – and other such post-neoliberal experiments – should be accordingly attentive to the context-specific (and potentially progressive) ways that it can be operationalized.
5.2 Rhetoric vs. Policies: State Support of Community Resource Governance

In Chapter 2, I explored the importance of the notion of community to the Bolivian government’s post-neoliberal project. Here, values associated with the idea of community and drawn from the *ayllu* system form the basis of much indigenous mobilization and NGO-based activism. They have, moreover, filtered through activist and indigenous discourse to the national government’s rhetoric, where they inform alternative development models such as “communitarian socialism” and *buen vivir*. In this discourse, the community is elevated both as an organizing principal (community as a core value) and policy prescription (community as the best form of governance). Despite the pervasiveness of community-related discourse, however, environmental policy has followed a significantly different trend, characterized by centralization and resource exploitation. Although the revenue generated by natural resources has been ploughed into social programs, the tendency to centralize decision-making processes has subordinated both the community governance structure and actual communities who seek to make claims to the resources. This has been the case in the hydrocarbon sector, where communities near gas fields have been engaged in numerous ongoing struggles with the state-owned hydrocarbon company YPFB, and (to a lesser extent) in the mining sector, where the state-owned company COMIBOL and the mining cooperatives have come into significant conflict with farming and indigenous communities across the country.

This pattern is also evident in water governance in Cochabamba, as I explored in Chapters 3 and 4. At the moment, community-run water systems and the (centralized) public municipal utility co-exist in the city, but the utility and the city government are interested in extending the network in a way that would subsume the community systems under the management of SEMAPA. Such an intervention is not currently possible, as SEMAPA does not generate enough water to supply the
entire peri-urban south, but it will become a more realistic option once the Misicuni dam is completed.

Scholars frequently describe the desire to offer universal coverage to the entire city via a single large-scale network as a “productionist” impulse and associate it with the “municipal hydraulic paradigm” of the pre-neoliberal era (Swyngedouw 1995; Marvin and Laurie 1999). Since the Water War and subsequent expulsion of the private water supply company from Cochabamba, this productionist attitude has been dominant within SEMAPA, but has been held in check by the myriad of water committees who have used scalar maneuvers to elevate their political position and negotiating capabilities (see Chapter 4). SEMAPA and the city government tend to assume that the water committees are temporary hiccups along the path to universal coverage; even while respecting the water committees’ current areas of concession, they have not yet incorporated them into long-term city management plans, making clear their preference for centralized management.

In adopting this position, SEMAPA is also taking a tacit stance on the relative importance of community autonomy versus the twin ideas of economies of scale and ecological scales of water flow. Theoretically, by servicing the whole city, SEMAPA will lower its costs per household connection; by managing water at the level of the city, it will be able to distribute water equitably and address sources of pollution. This perspective is not illogical: southern peri-urban residents do suffer from uneven groundwater and significant water pollution, and these are problems that can conceivably only be addressed at a larger scale. It would likely be unwise from the perspectives of both the city and the water committees to leave the latter completely independent from citywide water management plans. But this sort of independence is not what the water committees want: they are lobbying instead for a multi-scalar solution that would allow them to maintain some measure of self-governance while co-operating with SEMAPA. The municipal government’s skeptical attitude
towards even this form of governance speaks to its tendency to its inflexible stance on the appropriate scale of urban water management.

Overall, what we see in Cochabamba water supply conflict is similar to what we see in Bolivian resource management in general: much lip service is paid to the importance of community, but in practice both the community management structure and actual communities are subordinated to the city government's goals. There is a profound divergence between official attitudes towards community governance and actual policy implementation, and this rift extends all the way down into urban water supply.

5.3 Imagined vs. Actual: Spatial and Temporal Embeddedness of Communities

Both alter-globalization activists and mainstream developmentalists have imbued the idea of community with many idyllic traits, as discussed in Chapter 1. Alter-globalization activists often make appeals to an idea of community that protects the collective good and (in Latin America) is associated with the current, post-neoliberal era (c.f. Pleyers 2009). Mainstream developmentalists, for their part, often value community because they see it as a space of heightened accountability, where “stakeholders” have a personal interest in conserving resources (c.f. Helling et al. 2005). Both alter-globalization activists and mainstream developmentalists are interested in potential for community autonomy, and both groups tend to conflate communities with “local,” circumscribing them to them to small, territorially uninterrupted scales. Scholars have criticized both interpretations of community, pointing out a tendency to romanticize on the part of alter-globalization activists and a propagation of “soft” neoliberalism the part of mainstream developmentalists (Mansuri and Rao 2002; McCarthy 2005a; Geddes 2006).
In contemporary Bolivian, it is the alter-globalization interpretation of community that is most frequently referenced in political forums (though academics have certainly considered both perspectives; I will return to this in the next section). As I mentioned earlier, community rhetoric inspired by indigenous governance systems has permeated government, activist, and NGO literature. But how does actual community resource governance compare with visions of community erected through such discourse?

At the outset, the Cochabamba water committees appear to embody many of the qualities identified by alter-globalization activists. They are small scale, in that each system serves between 20 and 200 families; they appear to be self-governing, in that they each follow their own internal decision-making process; and they are strongly associated with the post-neoliberal era, as they were at the forefront of the Cochabamba Water War that is said to have been the catalyst for the most recent (and ongoing) political shift. But the reality is less clear-cut, as I demonstrated through an examination of the water committees’ internal governance practices (focusing on La Maica) and strategies to ensure long-term incorporation into municipal water governance plans (looking at the southern peri-urban region as a whole).

In Chapter 3, I showed that the water committees function in a way that complicates use of the word “autonomous.” In order to address the problems of scarcity and pollution, the water committees often draw in and rely upon networks of “non-community” actors, including NGOs, academics, the municipal government, and private companies. These outside actors, in turn, influence internal decision making practices. In the case that I explored, in Maica Central, this has happened in three ways: first, residents are now obliged to buy all their transport pipes from a single private company; second, they have come to rely more heavily on one NGO; and third, the public utility’s role in ensuring that Maica Central’s new water system matched the technical requirements
of the public network has made it more likely that the water committees will one day be incorporated into the public network, an eventuality that many water committees are actively fighting against. Given these influences, I suggest that the water committees’ interests are too entangled with those of outside actors for them to be considered autonomous. They are, instead, fully embedded in their institutional landscape, and their governance strategies reflect their inter-institutional connections.

In Chapter 4, I examined the water committees’ engagement with and manipulation of scale. I showed that, in their quest to be recognized as a suitable scale of urban water governance, over the last decade the water committees have created an umbrella organization (ASICASUDD-EPSAS) that enables them to function at the scale of the city, worked with NGOs that allow them to jump scales to access international networks of activists, and associated themselves with OTBs to access the government-sanctioned scales of funding distribution. I further showed that this struggle is currently being enacted discursively through the mobilization of a vision of multi-scalar municipal water governance. The water committees sustain this vision by appealing to the scalar logics of different governance paradigms (such as the belief that the local scale represents the most efficient level of governance, an idea that is frequently associated with neoliberal ideology) and by enlisting different scales of governance (such as the Misicuni dam, a large-scale project whose historical roots extend back to the 1950s). This multi-scalar vision thus involves the incorporation of numerous scales of governance with various temporal associations. In elaborating this plan, the water committees reveal not only their engagement with multiple scales but also their engagement with regional water governance history – and thus their spatial and temporal embeddedness in regional water politics.
The embeddedness of the water committees speaks to the contextual specificity with which all cases of community governance must be treated: not only does this particular case deviate from alter-globalization expectations, but it is probable that most examples of community governance deviate as well. Of course, the peri-urban location of my case makes spatial and historical embeddedness more observable, as socio-natural entanglements are denser in urban areas (Braun 2005); nevertheless, it seems likely that only a small minority of examples of community governance that could claim true spatial and temporal separation from their larger socio-political contexts.

5.4 Community Governance in a Post-Neoliberal Context

What are the implications of these findings for conceptualizations of community in a putatively post-neoliberal context? More often than not, scholarly analyses of community governance tend to either dismiss it as a facilitator of neoliberalization or hail it as an alternative to neoliberalization (McCarthy 2005a; Watts 2004; Shiva 2002; Roy 1999). How might the Bolivian context challenge this dichotomous reading?

Before addressing that question, an elaboration of the two opposing arguments is in order. The first position maintains deep skepticism about the potential for community to provide the basis for any sort of meaningful alternative to neoliberalism. Neoliberal natures literature exemplifies this stance, as it frequently lists devolved governance as a characteristic of neoliberalization; in this framework, the conferral of management responsibility to smaller political units, be they following political or ecological scales, is intended to compensate for the reduction of state services (Bakker 2007; Harris 2009). Community governance is therefore not incompatible with neoliberalism, even when it pre-dates the enactment of official decentralization policy (as it very often does). Despite appearing antithetical to the neoliberal prescription of privatization and marketization, the “self-
governing” ethos facilitates – and even encourages - state retreat (Watts 2004). Uncritical celebration of community governance, moreover, implicitly rejects the possibility that the state can spearhead redistributive governance projects. Many political ecologists maintain that in many ways the state remains “the best vehicle through which consumers’ interests can be balanced against one another, and against other interests,” and are accordingly wary of community (Bakker 2008, 246). They stress that celebration of community as an alternative to neoliberalization runs the risk of exacerbating the very patterns of inequality that were established under neoliberalism.

Conversely, much alter-globalization and anti-neoliberalism activism identifies the community as the source of progressive politics. This is also an identifiable trend within much Latin American scholarship, in which community is framed as the basis of an alternative to both neoliberalism and colonialism – two projects that are considered inseparable from one another (Zibechi 2010; de Sousa Santos 2007). Prominent Latin American political theorist Raúl Zibechi, for example, argues that the state itself is an impediment to the realization of a political-economic system that resonates with indigenous worldviews, and that it should be dismantled and replaced with a decentralized system based on the ayllu (Zibechi 2010). Community governance – with all of its expected institutions and customs – is framed as an alternative to neoliberalism that does not involve a return to the state-led governance paradigm that preceded it (and of which many activists and scholars remain suspicious, as governments have not always been willing or capable of equitable resource distribution).

In Bolivia, both positions could be (and have been) persuasively argued, making it a compelling context in which to consider the contemporary politicization of community. On the one hand, community governance has existed alongside and been strengthened by neoliberal policies since the first round of economic restructuring in the 1980s. At this time, the union structure was
crippled by a series of harsh austerity measures, effectively weakening what had been the primary system of social organization since the 1952 national revolution. In this context, other forms of self-identification, particularly ethnic, became increasingly relevant. In the 1990s, the government introduced an elaborate system of administrative decentralization and a set of multicultural policies. These encouraged community-based identification by allowing social movement leaders to run for office, by enabling community organizations to access state funding through their respective OTBs, and by associating indigeneity with a particular set of cultural, linguistic, and territorial rights (Postero 2007; Yashar 2005; Van Cott 2008). On the other hand, the community-based governance structures eventually became launch pad for the articulation of anti-neoliberal and anti-colonial demands. The ayllu movement, the MAS, and even the Cochabamba water committees have all used tools rendered through multicultural and neoliberalizing policies to contest hegemonic socio-economic processes (Van Cott 2008). Moreover, in the current political context, community is becoming a post-neoliberal touchstone, referenced by everyone from indigenous activists to scholars to Evo Morales. Rural and urban mobilization based around interpretations of community played a central role in instigating the Bolivian leftward shift, and the idea of community is central to the post-neoliberal vision promulgated by politicians and activists. Might community governance merit a conceptual reframing in a context where it has been so fundamental to post-neoliberal theorizations and mobilizations?

I contend that any sort of dichotomous reading is inappropriate in the Bolivian context, as both positions could be plausibly argued but would fail to capture the dynamic political reconfiguration that community governance can represent. Community governance can act as the basis for an alternative governance structure, but its progressive potential is contingent not only on its internal governance practices but also the degree of support – and respect – accorded to it by the
state. In the case of the Cochabamba water committees, their long-term integration into municipal water politics is predicated on their ability to convince SEMAPA and the city government that community involvement is worth supporting. Similarly, the success of communities across the country that are contesting hydrocarbon development, mineral extraction, and highway construction depends, at least in part, on the government’s reaction; the degree to which these communities can become viable and progressive resource governance alternatives depends on the ways that they are integrated into and supported by the government’s post-neoliberal agenda.

More broadly stated, I argue that any conceptualization of community governance must be extremely attentive to the socio-political context in which it is being practiced and promoted. The water committees that I studied are institutional hybrids that involve multiple actors working at multiple scales with multiple social, political, and environmental goals. They retain, however, considerable agency in dictating the terms of their hybridity, as illustrated both by their active drawing in of non-community actors and by their proposal for multi-scalar co-governance with SEMAPA. This indicates an active experimentation with the idea of community governance; it is an ongoing re-interpretation and re-politicization of what “community” means in Bolivia today. This is a country wherein the majority of people have not historically benefited from electoral politics, regardless of the party in power, and the community exists as a platform from which citizens might challenge chronic marginalization. The idea of community must therefore be read contextually, its potential evaluated against its site-specific interpretation and deployment.

My argument about community governance is related to arguments that several scholars have made about post-neoliberalism in general (c.f. Macdonald and Ruckert 2009a; Burdick, Oxhorn, and Roberts 2009). Although Bolivia is often identified as a post-neoliberal vanguard, its leftward shift does not represent any sort of cohesive project. Instead, a variety groups within the
country are experimenting with alternatives to neoliberalism that have all, to varying degrees, arisen from or been strengthened by the legacy of neoliberalism; community resource governance represents one such experiment. These ventures are all spatially embedded, in that they are born through interaction with local socio-political arrangements, and temporally contingent, in that they represent the re-interpretation of aspects of previously dominant governance paradigms. The degree to which they can be considered progressive development models is, like that of community governance, dependent on their internal configurations and the ways that they are integrated into their broader regional and national political processes.

5.5 Gaps and Future Research Directions

While writing this thesis, I encountered numerous avenues that I could have taken but had to pass over in the interest of time and precision. It is important to note that I have not done justice to the Bolivian union, which was the most important form of social mobilization prior to the collapse of the tin market and the subsequent introduction of neoliberal policies in the 1980s. Unions remain strong today, and they continue to represent an important form of community that is quite unlike the indigenous ayllu, the water committees, or even the mining cooperatives – though they have certainly influenced the last two. Along the same lines, it would have been extremely informative to compare the social structure(s) of rural indigenous people to those of the water committees, as the latter often reference institutions of the former (such as usos y costumbres) without necessarily claiming indigenous identities themselves. Finally, my conclusions regarding the Cochabamba water committees would have benefited from comparison to community water management structures in other Bolivian cities, which include several (smaller, less numerous)
community-run systems around El Alto and the Santa Cruz water cooperatives, of which one, SAGUAPAC, is the largest urban water cooperative in the world.

In future research, I hope to take on some of these comparisons. Specifically, I plan to explore the ways that the union structure and indigenous community structures are interacting in the current political context, and how identities associated with each are being mobilized for specific political economic purposes. This avenue of inquiry could continue to focus on water committees, but it could also be interestingly applied to the mining cooperatives, which not only draw on both forms of social organization but also often have contradictory attitudes towards nature and natural resources. On the one hand, they rely on (very ecologically destructive) resource exploitation for income, but on the other hand they often interpret and engage with Pachamama in ways that reflect indigenous worldviews (Absi 2005). The ambiguous position of mining cooperatives seems to exemplify the contradictory roles played by the idea of community in Bolivia, and a careful examination of their historical origins and role in the contemporary mining sector could help nuance my analysis.

5.6 Final Reflections

In this thesis, I have launched two parallel arguments with respect to community resource governance in Bolivia. First, the community-centric rhetoric that forms the backbone of the government’s post-neoliberal rhetoric is not carried into its environmental policies, and second, actually-existing community resource governance is marked by internal governance practices and long-term negotiation strategies that challenge idealized visions of community governance conjured by the Bolivian government, activists, and NGOs. In this final chapter, I have also considered the implications of these arguments for conceptualizations of community governance in Bolivia.
Although community, as numerous scholars have pointed out, is an ambiguous concept whose celebration could unintentionally reify inequalities entrenched through neoliberal policies, I have attempted to salvage some of the political potential of (hybrid) community resource governance. There is a point at which the mutability of neoliberal policies – and their progressive potential (Ferguson 2009) – must be recognized, and that point varies considerably between sites. As Zibechi puts it: “Community does not merely exist, it is made” (Zibechi 2010: 14). And if it is made, it can be re-interpreted, re-configured, and re-made.
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Appendix A: Expert Interviews and Affiliations

Anonymous Informant - AAPS
Anonymous Informant - Vice-Ministry of Potable Water and Sanitation
Bustamante, Rocio - Universidad Mayor de San Simón
Campanini, Oscar - Former Agua Sustentable Employee
Canedo, Giovana - Agua Sustentable
Castrillo, Luis - GTZ/PROAPAC
Corani Pocomani, Ruben - EMAGUA
Crespo, Carlos - Universidad Mayor de San Simón
Ferreira Villalpando, Lorena - SENASBA
Flores Castro, Maria Eugenia - Fundación Abril
Heredia, Gustavo - Fundación Aguatuya
Hube Bascón, Catherine H. - EMAGUA
Ledo, Carmen - Universidad Mayor de San Simón
Leygue, Armando - Former Director of SEMAPA
Marka, Luis - Vice-Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation
Oropeza, Carlos - ASICASUDD-EPSAS
Patiño, Carolina - Cochabamba Government Employee
Pelaez, Carlos - SEMAPA (Planning Department)
Peñaranda, Ida - Fundación Abril
Quiroz, Franz - Universidad Mayor de San Simón
Rios Vicente, Ramiro - Departmental Government
Rocha, Fidel - CORDECO
Rocha, Manuel - Cochabamba Irrigation System La Angostura
Rodriguez, Julio - Engineer/Consultant
Salazar, Luis - PROMIC
Smits, Stef - International Water and Sanitation Centre
Soto, Betty - Water for People
Vega, Daniel - PROAGRO
Vega, Ronny - ANESAPA
Vilela, Martin - Agua Sustentable
Villagomez, Fredy - Fundación Abril
Zeballos, Gastón - Fundación Abril
Appendix B: Sample Expert Interview Schedule

1. Name:
2. Date:
3. Affiliation:
4. Can you tell me a bit about your experience working in [organization]? When did you become involved, why, and on what themes have you focused?
5. For you, what are the principle problems related to water in the Cochabamba at this moment?
6. What about the south of Cochabamba in particular? And La Maica, if you know it?
7. Have any of those problems improved or worsened in the years since the Water War?
8. What do you see as potential solutions to [problems identified]?
9. Who do you see as the principle actors in the water governance in the southern peri-urban zone?
10. Which of those actors does [interviewee’s organization] work with? How?
11. How has the way that [various actors identified] relate to each other changed in the years since the Water War?
12. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of community water supply, as practiced by the water committees in the peri-urban south?
13. What do you think of “big projects” that the city is carrying out to bring water to the southern zone? (Misicuni, JICA, etc.)
14. What do you think of the multi-scalar water plan proposed by ASICASUDD-EPSAS?
15. What do you think about the participation of NGOs in water supply?
16. How do you think the water committees could be best supported? (By the city, SEMAPA, NGOs, etc.)
Appendix C: Sample Interview for La Maica OTB Leaders

1. Date:

2. Position in the community:

3. When were you selected for this position? How? How often are selections made?

4. How often do members of your OTB meet? What do you discuss?

5. How often do you meet with other OTB leaders of La Maica? What do you discuss?

6. How do the OTBs relate to:
   a. The water committees in La Maica?
   b. SEMAPA?
   c. ASICASUDD?
   d. The municipal government of Cochabamba?
   e. NGOs? Which ones?

7. What do you think are the greatest challenges related to water in La Maica? And in your OTB?

8. What do you think would be potential solutions to those problems?

9. Have you noticed any changes in the way water is managed in Cochabamba since the Water War? And in La Maica?

10. What do you think of the big projects the city is planning to supply water to the southern zone (Misicuni, JICA?)

11. Do you think it’s important that the OTBs and water committees maintain autonomy from the city in terms of water management?

12. What do you think of NGOs involved in water supply in La Maica?

13. How do you think SEMAPA and the city could best support OTBs and water committees in terms of water management?
Appendix D: La Maica Water Use Survey

1. Date:
2. Maica:

Part A: Personal Information

3. Gender:
4. How many people live in this house? How many women/men?
5. What are the sources of income for the family? Who in the family does this work?
   Dairy/Livestock/Other agriculture/Sales (of what?)/Transportation/Construction/Professional work
   /Factory work/Housekeeping/Other
6. What is the most important (largest) source of income for the family?

Part B: Sources of Water

7. What sources of water do you and your family use?
   Personal well/Community well/La Angostura (irrigation)/River Rocha/Other River/
   Aguatero/Rain/Other
8. For each source:
   a. What do you use the water for?
   b. Where does the water come to? Inside the house/outside the house?
   c. [If it is an outdoor source] Who in the family collects the water?
   d. Is there water every day, all day?
   e. How much do you pay for this water?

Part C: Uses of Water

9. Do you have animals? What kinds? How many?
   Cows/Pigs/Sheep/Horses/Donkeys/Hens/Chickens/Guinea Pigs/Ducks/Other
10. Do you sell any of the products from these animals? How much do they produce? How much do
    you sell it for?
11. Which source of water do you use for your animals? How much water do they need?
12. Who in the family looks after the animals?
13. Do you have crops? Which ones?
    Corn/Wheat/Potatoes/Alfalfa/Oats/Pasto Lolium/Other
14. What size are your plots? How much do they produce? What do you do with it?
15. Do you irrigate your crops? How often?
16. What sources of water do you use to irrigate? How much do you pay?
17. Are there other productive uses of water in the house?
    Restaurant/Cheese-making/Garden/Chicha (local corn-based alcohol) production
18. What sources of water do you use for these activities? How much?
    much?
20. What kind of toilet do you have?
    Pit Latrine/Septic tank/Dry toilet
21. Do you have to maintain it? How?
Part D: Water Governance

22. Do you belong to a water committee? Which one? For how long?
23. What is the water quality like?
24. What do you use the water for?
25. Does it provide enough water? Do you have 24 hour access?
26. How much do you pay per cubic meter of water?
27. Who do you pay? What happens when you don’t pay?

Part E: Questions for Water Committee Presidents

28. For how long have you been president of the water committee?
29. What are your responsibilities?
30. What is the process for selecting presidents?
31. What other positions are there on the board of your water committee?
32. What are their responsibilities?
33. How often does the board meet?
34. How often do all the water committee members meet?
35. What do you discuss at the meetings?
36. How many members are there?
37. How many wells does the water committee have?
38. How old are the wells and the pipes? Who built it? Did you get any outside help?
39. How much does one have to pay to join?
40. What are the greatest challenges facing your water committee?
41. How do you think the city, SEMAPA, NGOs, etc. could best support your water committee?

Part F: NGO Presence

42. Have any water-related NGOs worked in Maica [name of Maica]?
43. How did they come to be involved here?
44. What do you think of their projects? Are they still operational? Have they improved quantity or quality of water availability? What do you use the water for? Has this increased your family’s income? Did it change how much you pay for water? Have there been any problems with the projects?
45. What do you think about NGOs in general? Would you like to see more NGOs working in La Maica, or less?