Migrants' Voices

Negotiating Autonomy in Santa Cruz

by
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The regional autonomy movement based in Santa Cruz draws on long-standing regional divisions, and it has solidified amid the breakdown of the elite-led political party system and the national election of Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism—MAS). Critics and national government supporters view regional autonomy as a defensive stance taken by elites against the redistributive policies, expansion of indigenous sovereignty, and widening popular democracy under the MAS. But lowland regional leaders and elites have begun to present autonomy as inclusive and popular in order to broaden support and challenge the Morales government. Largely removed from debates over autonomy are migrants to the rapidly urbanizing city of Santa Cruz who in many cases experience uneven integration into host communities. Despite the autonomists' efforts at fostering inclusion and popular buy-in, highland migrants' support for autonomy is weak, while lowland migrants generally favor autonomy and skilled highlanders—more integrated into Santa Cruz—tend to support it conditionally. Migrants of all three groups perceive class disparities within the city to be as salient as regional and ethnic divisions.

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The regional autonomy movement, based in Santa Cruz, draws on long-standing regional divisions in Bolivia between the Andes and the eastern lowlands. It has solidified amid the breakdown of the elite-led political party system and the national election of Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism—MAS). Critics and national government supporters view regional autonomy as a defensive stance taken by elites against the redistributive policies, expansion of indigenous sovereignty, and widening of popular democracy under the MAS. But lowland leaders and elites have begun to present autonomy as popular and inclusive in order to broaden support and challenge the Morales government. To deepen this

effort, the Santa Cruz Civic Committee, a leading pro-autonomy organization, and the departmental government have staged *cabildos* (mass rallies) in low-income areas of the city's expanding periphery such as the iconic barrio Plan Tres Mil, where highland migrants are concentrated. They have also publicly promised more resources to satisfy a range of citizen demands, including health care, education, roads, and bridges, all supported by increasing natural-gas revenues generated in the lowlands.

This article explores how migrants to the city of Santa Cruz perceive and are affected by the regional autonomy movement. The extent to which the demand for autonomy is viewed as socially inclusive or marginalizing raises questions about the integration and differential rights of migrants who have not crossed international borders but are often treated as outsiders in host communities. The paper finds that despite the autonomists' efforts at fostering inclusion, highland migrants' support for autonomy is limited, especially among the lower-class and/or recently arrived, while lowland migrants generally favor autonomy and skilled highlanders—more integrated into Santa Cruz—tend to support it conditionally. The findings also suggest that, given the deepening socioeconomic inequality that marks contemporary Santa Cruz, migrants of all three groups perceive class disparities within the city to be as salient as regional and ethnic divisions.

URBAN GROWTH AND MIGRANT
ATTRACTION IN SANTA CRUZ

Santa Cruz, once a remote frontier in Bolivia's eastern lowlands, has become the center of the country's major production zone as a result of a half century of national and international investment to boost lowland export commodities. Paralleling this concerted state intervention, the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra—the capital of the department—grew from a population of 43,000, spread across 5,700 hectares, in 1950 to more than 1 million, extending over 25,000 hectares, in 2001 (GMSC, 2004). The city and its immediate environs produce 42 percent of the nation's marketed agricultural output and 34 percent of its industrial gross national product (UNDP, 2004). Santa Cruz now houses the Bolivian headquarters of multinational agricultural and petroleum firms including Archer Daniels Midland, British Gas, Spain's Repsol, and Brazil's Petrobras. Wealthy compared with the Bolivian Andes, Santa Cruz leads the country in gross domestic product (GDP), exports, and living standards. From 1992 through 2007 Santa Cruz Department contributed 30 percent on average to Bolivia's GDP, with growth rates consistently higher than those of the national GDP (INE, 2007).

In 2001 Santa Cruz Department received Bolivia's highest level of net migration, 428,000 (up from 74,000 in 1976). According to the most recent census, roughly 25 percent of the department's 2 million inhabitants and 38 percent of the city's 1.1 million in that year were born outside the department, with the majority coming from Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, and Potosí (INE, 2001a). The city's projected 2010 population of 1.6 million (INE, 2001b) shows growth continuing at a high rate. Highland migrants—those whose communities of origin lie in the Andean valleys and altiplano—have formed enclaves

in rural parts of the department such as Yapacaní and San Julián and in peripheral areas of the city of Santa Cruz. The state promoted migration to the Santa Cruz region during the 1960s and 1970s through official programs to supply labor and reinforce agro-industrial expansion, and these were surpassed by "spontaneous" settlement (Stearman, 1985; Urioste and Kay, 2005). The impetus of regional economic growth—combined with "push" factors of economic crisis and structural adjustment along with severe altiplano droughts in the 1980s—has intensified migration flows to Santa Cruz in the past two decades (UNDP, 2004).

Development within the city and region of Santa Cruz has, however, been uneven. The extractive industries generate wealth, but it is concentrated in the urban middle and upper classes of select city neighborhoods and does not generate significant levels of employment (UNDP, 2004; Gray Molina, 2005). Spatially, the *mancha urbana* (literally, "urban stain") has extended far beyond the city's once-planned series of ring roads (*anillos*), particularly along its southern and eastern edges (Prado et al., 2005). High status and established families are associated with the *casco viejo* (central district) but are dispersing to newer upmarket suburbs such as Equipetrol and Urbarí on the near north side and south of the center (Limpias, 2003). Migrants from the Andean highlands and rural Santa Cruz, seeking work or the prospect of better wages, education, or an escape from extreme poverty, have reshaped the city by claiming space beyond the outer rings. Marginal "satellites" such as Plan Tres Mil are now marked by rapid population growth, poverty, precarious services, and insecure land title (Feldis, 2002; GMSC, 2004).

THE RISE OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY

Over the past decade, the dominant elites that have benefited from economic expansion from agro-industrial and extractive development on the periphery of Santa Cruz have joined forces regionally to promote autonomy for lowland Bolivia, named the Media Luna (Half Moon) for its crescent shape (Barragán, 2004). The Santa Cruz Civic Committee, a body of regional business and professional associations, wants to see the Media Luna—the four eastern departments of Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija and now a fifth, Chuquisaca, out of Bolivia's nine departments—gain authority to administer natural resources and land distribution (Prats, 2006; Urenda, 2006). Moreover, autonomists deem the highlands hostile to foreign investment, state-dependent, and prone to political instability (Barragán, 2004; Peña, 2006).

Regional divisions stemming from its variegated geography and distinct ethnic cultures have shaped Bolivian politics since the colonial era (Farthing, 2007; Roca, 1999). While regionalism in Santa Cruz and the lowlands is not new, it is taking on an increasingly ethnic dimension (Schroeder, 2007). The rhetoric of division and impending "civil war" between *collas* (an epithet for those of highland origin) and *cambas* (lowlanders), however, serves to mask the entrenched class interests that underpin the claims to autonomy (Gustafson, 2008). Lowland business and landholding elites frequently couch threats to their class power in terms of regional neglect, overlooking long-standing state investment in the production of lowland commodities and the influx of

highland labor since the breakup of the semifeudal haciendas in 1952 (Eckstein, 1983; Soruco, 2008).

Accordingly, the autonomy project is bolstered by appeals to a strong place-based identity (Paasi, 2003). This civic-regional identity is asserted in distinction to Andean collective identities (Blanchard, 2006). The idea that ethnic identity is, as Barth (1969) suggested, more about boundaries between groups than about the cultural content within those boundaries points to the importance of relations between migrants and their hosts in processes of self-definition and social reproduction. Cruceños' claim to a distinctive regional history and identity that predate Bolivian independence has strengthened amid waves of interregional migration (Stearman, 1985; Peña et al., 2003). The notion of "lowland exceptionalism"—of the East as a socioculturally and regionally separate space—is interwoven with questions of race, ethnicity, and geographic distance from centers of power during earlier periods of Bolivia's history (Roca, 1999; Pruden, 2003).

While regional autonomy has received scholarly attention (Plata, 2008), analysis has often reduced it to a question of control over oil and gas resources. In Santa Cruz, the pursuit of autonomy is linked to securing the existing land-ownership structure in support of large-scale agribusiness profits while preserving racial and economic privilege in the face of a new constitution and MAS policies for redistributing resources and wealth (García Linera, 2006; Soruco, 2008). The notion of autonomy rests on a territorial understanding of Santa Cruz linked to control over land, resources, investment, and jobs. As shown in the Santa Cruz "Autonomy Statute," the subject of a May 2008 referendum and a de facto regional constitution, autonomists seek departmental authority for signing contracts with multinationals and the administration of schools, health care, justice, subsoil resources, land distribution, and even internal migration, while curtailing the national government's reach and legitimacy (Asamblea Provisional, 2007; Sánchez, 2007).

In practice, few people seem to understand what autonomy will mean on the ground and what its outcomes will be, particularly for the poor. By strategically presenting autonomy as a catchall, movement leaders seek to build support beyond the landholding elites. The lack of specific content parallels broader trends observed in Bolivian political economy under governments of "pacted democracy" (1982–2005), in which a "tendency to conceal political intentions" characterized far-reaching policies such as the privatization of state enterprises (Salman, 2007: 114). Further, by framing their demands in terms of "autonomy," regionalists have adeptly portrayed Morales and the MAS as epitomizing the resented "centralism" that has historically characterized Bolivian political administration (Malloy, 1989).

Autonomists emphasize the region as an effective scale of government and market-oriented development, but theirs is also an urban movement with a specific territorial logic. Regionalist leaders have deployed a range of public events, symbols, and aesthetics to link ideological support for autonomy with particular urban spaces (Gustafson, 2006). In the Media Luna, pro-autonomy sentiment links urban residents of Santa Cruz with those of provincial hubs such as Montero and San Ignacio who frequently appear at rallies and those of the closely allied departmental capitals Tarija and Trinidad. The Santa Cruz Civic Committee has staged dozens of actions to protest "centralism" and

press for state recognition of autonomy. These have included *cabildos* (mass rallies in the city center), department-wide "civic strikes" or work stoppages, conferences and seminars, and the occupation of national government offices by extreme pro-autonomy groups. In the Cabildo del Millón (Rally of One Million) of December 2006, thousands of Cruceños convened in the streets surrounding the huge Christ statue near the city center, a symbolic site of *cruceñidad* (Blanchard, 2006). The title of the event was an exaggeration, but the right-leaning Santa Cruz newspaper *El Deber* reported hundreds of thousands in attendance, with many arriving in buses from provincial centers arranged by the departmental government (*El Deber,* December 16, 2006). This display of "civic regionalism" featured slogans against centralized bureaucracy, the MAS, and President Morales. The event was festive and later included live music and dancing.

During this period, regionalist symbols including green-and-white banners of the departmental flag and the green cross of the city's coat of arms pervaded the city center, adorning civic rallies, flapping from tailgates of cars and taxis, and framing local businesses surrounding the central plaza. These Cruceño symbols are less common outside of the fourth ring, in the unplanned zones that sprang up in the 1970s and 1980s. The Civic Committee has started staging pro-autonomy events in the urban periphery, however, including a smaller cabildo in Plan Tres Mil's main plaza in January 2007. Such gatherings aim to universalize autonomy's appeal in an effort to challenge the Morales government. Plan Tres Mil (Three Thousand Plan), set up to relocate 3,200 local families displaced after the Río Piraí flooded in 1983, now has a population of more than 100,000, with over 40 percent born outside the department (INE, 2001a). According to *El Deber* (January 10, 2007), more than 10,000 gathered despite rain and threats of clashes with MAS militants. Rubén Costas, the department's prefect, was present and remarked, "There is no regionalism here. This is the laboratory of the new Bolivia. Here are people of all types, and that is Santa Cruz." Such language portrays autonomy as a universal goal rather than a separatist or elitist cause. Days later, Costas returned to Plan Tres Mil to present the department's annual budget, suggesting the increasing political importance of this section of the city's periphery.[1]

Despite these recent efforts at social inclusion, the focus on regional autonomy within local civil society reinforces the long-standing tensions between highlanders and lowlanders. In particular, campesinos of Andean origin in MAS strongholds of rural Santa Cruz such as San Julián and Yapacaní have been condemned as "usurpers" and "invaders" through their efforts to claim land, which are viewed as threatening the region's health and wealth (Urioste and Kay, 2005; Gustafson, 2006). The notion of "invasion" is also used in urban Santa Cruz, where collas are linked to criminality (Prado et al., 2005), poor hygiene and sanitation (Arias, 2009), and "illegal" occupation of public and green spaces (Blanchard, 2006; Ruiz, 2009).

Given this undercurrent of racism and xenophobia, those who publicly oppose autonomy have faced intimidation and violence. During the "civic strike" of August 1, 2007, for example, several merchants whose shops remained open at the Abasto market were allegedly attacked and their property vandalized by members of the young men's branch of the Civic Committee, a proto-militia called the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (Santa Cruz Youth Union—UJC).[2]

The merchants at markets such as Abasto are overwhelmingly of Andean origin. The implicit linking of citizen "rights" to the prosperity of Santa Cruz with support for autonomy, backed up by extralegal violence, effectively diminishes the prospect of contestation from below (Argirakis, 2008).

MIGRANTS' VOICES: VIEWS ON INCLUSION AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY

Largely removed from debates over autonomy are migrants to Santa Cruz, many of whom experience uneven integration into their host communities. Many are included as providers of cheap labor but also excluded, confined to marginalized areas. Drawing on 14 months of field research in Santa Cruz (2006–2007), this study is concerned to foreground migrants' responses to autonomy, their views on regional polarization, and their participation in political and community organizations. Do migrants feel included in the push for regional autonomy?

The main sources of information for this study were structured interviews with a nonrandom sample of 50 migrants, complemented by participant observation at numerous public meetings and rallies and open-ended interviews with leaders of *juntas vecinales* (neighborhood associations), district-level *subalcaldes* (sub-mayors), city council members, planners and municipal employees, representatives of civil society organizations, and academics. Respondents in the sample of migrants were selected to be broadly representative of the larger migrant population in the city of Santa Cruz, with a range of ages and gender diversity and of places of origin and lengths of residence that reflects data found in the census. Standardized interviews included closed- and open-ended questions, and responses to the latter were grouped into categories for analysis.

Respondents were organized into three categories: (1) highland migrants living in peripheral areas of the city, (2) migrants from rural Santa Cruz and the lowlands living in peripheral areas of the city, and (3) skilled highland migrants living in relatively affluent areas near the city center. Interviews with 20 highland and 20 lowland respondents were conducted in three outlying urban areas most affected by migration, Districts 8, 10, and 12, popularly known as Plan Tres Mil, El Bajío, and Palma Sola, respectively (Figure 1). Interviews with 10 skilled highlanders took place in Districts 11, 4, and 5, which are relatively affluent and (except for District 5) located within the city's fourth ring.[3] In addition to place of origin, skilled highland migrants were distinguished by holding postsecondary or professional degrees, and the highland and skilled highland respondents differed by place of residence, occupation, and income level.[4] The results are consistent with my observations during field research and show general tendencies for the migrant groups, but they cannot be generalized to the migrant population at large.

Overall, migrants appear to have been motivated by aspirations for a better economic future in Santa Cruz, discontent with livelihood potential and blocked opportunities in places of origin, and a desire to rejoin family members. Similarly, affordability was the most often cited reason for choosing a specific destination neighborhood, outnumbering family ties and hometown

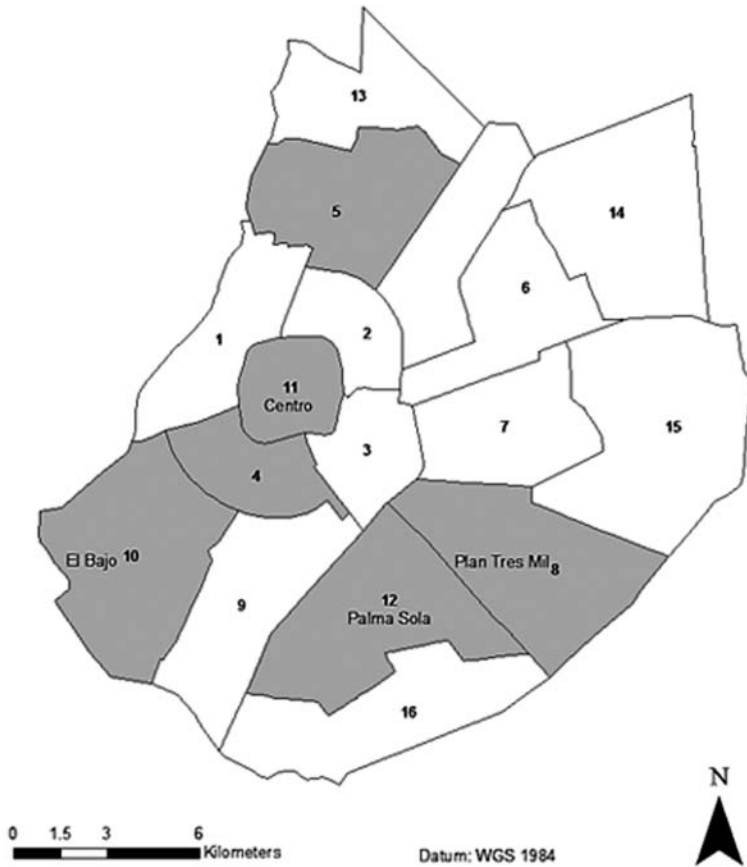| District	No. Interviews	Income Level
11	5	High
4	3	Medium-High
5	2	Medium-High
8	17	Low
10	15	Low
12	8	Low

Figure 1.   Map of the city of Santa Cruz showing urban districts, income levels and interview locations.

connections. Eighteen respondents reported visiting their hometowns once a year, and 14 respondents reported doing so "frequently" or more than once a year. Many, especially those from smaller, rural communities, explained that they visited for the annual fiesta. Thirty respondents stated that they planned to stay in the city.

Aside from the dislocation of the experience of migration itself, newcomers to Santa Cruz, particularly those from outside the lowlands, often face an environment rife with discrimination. Scholars have observed that those of Andean origin are typically viewed as "the other" in lowland Bolivia (Blanchard, 2006; Stearman, 1985). The majority of respondents stated that they had not experienced discrimination in Santa Cruz either in employment, housing, or service delivery. Looking within the interview groups, however,

12 poor highlanders said that they directly felt discrimination, in contrast to only 3 lowlanders and 2 skilled highlanders. Ramona Rivera,[5] a 24-year-old highland woman, noted that she had felt anti-colla bigotry more sharply in the past five years—that "hatred of people from the interior" was increasing in the polarized political climate. Humberto Martes, a 35-year-old male skilled highlander who worked at an educational publishing house, reported that when applying for jobs he had to produce more documents than long-term residents. He recalled hearing accusations of "collas coming to take away jobs from Cruceños" while selling books as a traveling salesman when he first arrived in the city.

Experiences of discrimination and boundaries between social groups also play out in urban space in Santa Cruz. When considering both implicit and explicit spatial divisions, the majority of respondents perceived boundaries between Cruceños and collas within the city. Specifically, three highlanders recalled getting dirty looks in the central plaza and feeling unwelcome to linger. Elizabeth Flores, a 23-year-old woman in the lowlander group, in contrast, said that social relations were fluid and that no set physical barriers marked the city: "There are few places in Santa Cruz with only one type of person." Although she had never visited fashionable sections such as Equipetrol, which others described to her as "exclusive," she felt that residents were not constrained by the sense that specific places belonged only to certain uses, social groups, and identities. Several respondents observed that spatial boundaries were also related to class and that with sufficient economic status barriers could be crossed more easily. Others believed that the autonomy campaign, with its tendency to associate highlanders with the "Andes-centric" state, was heightening the sense that "outsiders" were unwanted in particular urban spaces.

To elicit perceptions of and support for regional autonomy among respondents, open-ended questions were asked and the responses coded as "Yes," "No," "Mixed opinion," "Indifference," and "Support for other forms of autonomy." Although the "Yes" (21) outweighed the "No" (12) responses, another 17 respondents, just over one-third of the sample, either expressed a "mixed" view (10) or favored alternative forms (7), including provincial and indigenous autonomy. Views of regional autonomy divided respondents sharply by interview group. Unsurprisingly, lowlanders and highlanders diverged, with highlanders (9 poor and 1 skilled) accounting for all but 2 of the respondents who expressed unqualified opposition, whereas more than half of the lowlanders (13) supported it. Skilled highlanders (5) were more likely than the other groups to express mixed opinions. In addition, of the 7 respondents favoring alternative forms, 6 were poor highlanders. The MAS and indigenous movements have proposed provincial and indigenous autonomy as an alternative means of "reconfiguring national space" and distributing resources and sovereignty (García Linera, 2008).[6] These proposals—included in the new constitution adopted in a January 2009 referendum—would effectively diffuse autonomy claims at the departmental level. Several highlanders asserted that regional autonomy could threaten national unity, pointing to tinges of separatism. The highlanders who favored regional autonomy said that they did so largely because it might allow them to avoid traveling to the capital La Paz for *tramites* (paperwork) and to request *items* (budget items for services or salaries) from national ministries.

The majority of lowlanders embraced regional autonomy as a means of boosting the department budget and keeping resources in Santa Cruz. Several said that Santa Cruz contributed more than it received from the central government, echoing the rhetoric of the Civic Committee and the departmental government. None of the lowlanders supported proposals for indigenous autonomy. Indicating the way in which "autonomy" is interpreted for political ends, Edith Negrete, a 26-year-old lowland woman, explained that autonomy would benefit Santa Cruz and was needed to safeguard private property rights: "Autonomy will provide more for the region. The soy, sorghum, and sunflower crops will be more productive with more of our own resources to invest. Without autonomy, the government will take over our property." Those opposing autonomy also showed malleable understandings, as indicated by two highlanders who feared that they would soon need passports to enter Santa Cruz.[7]

Skilled highlanders tended to have more nuanced views of autonomy and regionalist politics. Most favored transferring key state functions to the department through a federalist system but believed that wealth should be shared with poorer regions to reduce inequalities. Three skilled highlanders qualified their approval with professions of support for departments such as Oruro and Potosí that voted against autonomy in the 2006 referendum.[8] Further, many disliked the campaign's operational approach. Several cited the lack of concrete policy discussion, surmising that the campaign's simplicity might broaden its appeal. Others regretted regional leaders' inflexibility and the closing down of dialogue with the MAS. Fernando Aliaga, a 34-year-old engineer at a hydrocarbons firm, criticized the department's declaring "*Autonomía al Andar*" (Autonomy on the March) and naming a "Pre-Autonomy Council" without the consent of the national congress. He noted that autonomists have condemned not only MAS supporters but also those who advocated a moderate and conciliatory approach to the central government.

In December 2007, several prominent local leaders and intellectuals who opposed the MAS but had criticized the autonomy movement were publicly denounced as "traitors to the region" on signs posted in Santa Cruz's central plaza. The denunciations did not target migrants specifically, and the so-called traitors included well-established Cruceños. Nonetheless, such political actions have a chilling effect on dialogue and discourage political involvement among newcomers.

Examining attendance at pro-autonomy cabildos is another way to assess perceptions of autonomy and participation in the regionalist movement. About one-third of the respondents said that they had attended a cabildo or similar event. Many of the others cited lack of time and transport expenses, and some admitted fears of the violence that could erupt amid the politically charged rhetoric. One lowlander said that he had attended several cabildos and enjoyed the festive atmosphere despite his own indifference to autonomy. He added, "People are just seeking fun and enjoyment." Of the highlanders who opposed autonomy, only three had attended them. Humberto Irineo, aged 57, said, "I don't agree with the politics, so why should I go?"

Janeth Perez, a neighborhood-association leader from barrio San Antonio in Plan Tres Mil,[9] recalled that for the first pro-autonomy cabildo, held January 28, 2005, to protest rising prices of government-subsidized diesel, she and other

leaders had been urged to rally support and bring community residents to the event. The issue of diesel prices was possibly intended to unite elite interests in agro-industry with the interests of the popular classes, whose transport costs were rising. The Civic Committee organized mini-buses, and she arranged for over 100 people to go. "But when we arrived, it was all changed. It was no longer about diesel, and only about the demand for autonomy, the referendum vote. This wasn't what we wanted, and they hadn't consulted with us" (interview, Plan Tres Mil, March 10, 2007).

Support of the MAS among the interviewees mirrored the views of regional autonomy, with most poor highlanders in support of it and lowlanders mainly unsupportive or with mixed opinions. As with autonomy, the skilled highlanders differed from the poor, mainly opposing the MAS or holding mixed views. None of the respondents described themselves as MAS militants.

Respondents had varying opinions of whether regional political divisions affected social interactions in their neighborhoods. Five highlanders who lived in Urkupiña, a heavily Andean-origin section of Plan Tres Mil, said that regional tensions had little effect on neighborhood relations. Respondents from mixed areas of Plan Tres Mil and District 10, however, noted occasional verbal altercations and rivalries that stemmed from regionalized politics. In some cases, these had spilled over into disputes in the neighborhood association, including accusations of corruption, misuse of funds, and connections to political parties. Isidro Quispe, a 35-year-old highlander, noted that officials in the District 10 subalcaldía were active in the new Autonomía Para Bolivia (Autonomy for Bolivia—APB) party, which represented the departmental government. He added that many of the municipal posts, including jobs in hospitals and district schools, had gone to APB activists. Roughly half of the skilled highlanders also felt that regional divisions affected neighborhood relations. Several stressed the influence of the pliable local media, whose steady flow of support for regionalist positions had exacerbated hostility toward the central government.

MIGRANTS AND COMMUNITY POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Of the 50 respondents, 22 stated that they held a formal organizational membership or office. Trade unions and *gremios* (guilds representing workers mostly in informal commerce) figured prominently among the organizations mentioned. None of the respondents reported membership in the Santa Cruz Civic Committee. Further, 17 respondents participated in neighborhood development efforts through a neighborhood association. Participation in local development in urban Bolivia is primarily organized through these associations. The 1994 Law of Popular Participation officially recognized neighborhood associations as agents of development and charged them with applying for funds from the municipality (Kohl, 2003). Many of these associations were formed when their communities were first established; in Districts 8, 10, and 12, the oldest dated to the early 1980s.

The neighborhood associations' primary responsibility is to obtain public works—street lighting, paved streets, a square or park, electricity, or a sewage

system—for their neighborhoods. While in poorer communities they play a vital role in obtaining access to public resources, in affluent areas, where residents tend to be less involved in neighborhood issues and do not need to band together to gain adequate services, they are often overlooked. Only one skilled highlander was active in a neighborhood association. In contrast, seven poor highlanders and nine lowlanders stated that they participated in neighborhood development efforts through neighborhood associations. Participants did not necessarily view themselves as members but often attended the monthly general assemblies open to all residents of the area or contributed labor to community projects organized by the associations such as setting up a soccer field or building a new school classroom. Three respondents sat on the board of a neighborhood association. These boards, typically with between 12 and 14 members, are elected by local residents.

Many spoke favorably of the neighborhood associations' role in local development and advocating for the neighborhood. Others said that they largely avoided local development efforts, citing disillusionment with unfinished projects and the tendency for associations to become tied to political party interests. In fact, many neighborhoods had two competing associations, one allied with the main pro-autonomy opposition party, PODEMOS, and one known to support the MAS.[10] Participation in neighborhood development decisions through neighborhood associations appears to be related to length of residence. All but one of the 17 respondents who participated in neighborhood associations had lived in Santa Cruz between 6 and 20 years. (The other had lived there less than 5 years.)

The recent literature has emphasized the neighborhood associations' role as intermediaries between citizens and the Bolivian state (Goldstein, 2004; Arbona, 2007; Lazar, 2008). In the heterogeneous communities of Santa Cruz, the neighborhood associations also potentially mediate between migrants and longer-term residents. Fernando Prado, an architect in charge of planning for the municipality from 2002 to 2006, noted that, given the way local development is structured, the neighborhood associations must rally support in order to access municipal funds: "I found that the cambas and collas have interests that coincide, in most cases. They accept each other because they need each other's help, so that water, public transport, and other basic needs will arrive. They might joke and call one another 'collas,' but their experience doesn't fit the divisiveness they see on the TV news" (interview, September 27, 2007).

Many of the leaders interviewed agreed with Prado's assessment. Delfín Perez of District 12 said, "Outside of the fourth or fifth ring, we live same way, collas, cambas. The divisions come between us and the people in the first or second ring, those in the center." This statement indicates that class disparities may outweigh regional or ethnic divisions, particularly among peri-urban residents. Luis Amurio, the neighborhood-association president in an outlying section of Plan Tres Mil, himself from rural Cochabamba, observed that long-term residents often welcome newcomers and view them as an asset to the community: "Having more people enter the area gives us more neighbors and less open land. We are a dispersed neighborhood, and the houses are distant from one another. The newcomers help us fill in the open land and in this way help us in obtaining street lighting, more schools, and transport and

opening up the future for the entire community." This view seems rational given that revenue sharing between central and local governments and between districts and neighborhoods is based on population size. It also reflects the fluid identities found in Santa Cruz, in contrast to the situation in El Alto, where forms of collective organization from migrants' shared communities of origin are often practiced within neighborhood-association structures (Arbona, 2007).

In Bolivia, city halls gained new salience as sites of economic activity with the advent of popular participation in the mid-1990s. According to Prado, municipal elections became hotly contested by political parties, newly aware of the votes to be gained in the dense peripheries of urban centers. Whereas the parties had previously focused on national elections, local politics grew in strategic importance with the decentralization of fiscal resources.[11] These dynamics give peri-urban residents political power, potentially reordering the local political landscape.

Despite these changes, perceptions of whether the city attended to the needs of the neighborhood varied. In particular, highland and lowland respondents emphasized the municipality's inattentiveness, asserting that it had forgotten about their neighborhoods. Humberto Irineo, who worked as an ambulant vendor at a municipal market, said, "The area is completely abandoned. I come from the interior [highlands] and that's how I see it. There are places in the provinces with better conditions." He added that it was possible to make a complaint through the oversight committee representing Plan Tres Mil, but this had to be done in the same year as the budget for the particular item was approved. "In many cases, the committee doesn't have capacity to make the complaints," he observed.

Reflecting the increasing politicization of local development, several Plan Tres Mil residents noted that elected city officials and appointed representatives of the influential Santa Cruz Civic Committee were noticeably absent from the barrio's anniversary celebration in March 2007. At the event, President Evo Morales unveiled a plan for public investment in market infrastructure and roads in the barrio (*El Deber,* March 19, 2007). "This year the mayor and councilors decided not to come because supposedly the Plan Tres Mil residents are all Masistas," observed an 18-year-old lowland woman. Another resident said of city and civic officials, "They showed us their backs." Supporting the national government is anathema to the project of the Civic Committee and pro-autonomy local officials.

DISCUSSION

Neighborhood associations and other forms of organizing for local service delivery had served as an entry point into local politics for some of the respondents. Through these participatory structures, newcomers and longer-term residents engage the state at the local level. Moreover, the neighborhood associations appear to mediate between social groups, particularly in the heterogeneous sections of urban Santa Cruz, fostering social integration. Despite ongoing struggles to make the city more responsive, a majority of

respondents in this study expressed confidence in the process and a desire to be involved.

Respondents' perceptions of autonomy were more internally divided. Although the demand for regional autonomy has an antihighland dimension, it seems possible for people of highland origin, Andean Cruceños, to voice support for it and to be included in its ranks. Advocating such a view in a speech given in July 2007 in Montero, a regional sugar-producing center, Prefect Rubén Costas declared, "A Cruceño is someone who loves and works for Santa Cruz." The implication is that place of birth and ethnicity are less determinant of social integration than allegiance and affiliation. In other words, to be loyal to Santa Cruz and aspire to share in its prosperity one need not have sprung from its soil. In turn, by participating in autonomy rallies and other regionalist events, some migrants may be subtly challenging notions of identity imagined in terms of "boundedness and containment" (Paasi, 2003: 480; Barth, 1969). Through their involvement, newcomers to Santa Cruz have influenced the contours of the autonomy campaign, which increasingly seeks popular buy-in. Carlos Dabdoub, a neurosurgeon and prominent civic leader who holds a post in Costas's administration, took a somewhat different approach: "Those who do not defend Santa Cruz do not deserve to live in Santa Cruz" (Sánchez, 2007). The public labeling of critics as "traitors" by pro-autonomy groups while relying on threats of extralegal violence and racial fear suggests that Costas's formula for loyalty and inclusion cannot be taken at face value.

Underpinning the regional autonomy agenda is a geopolitical strategy of opposition to Morales, the MAS, and the pursuit of an interventionist and redistributive state. Autonomists advocate boosting regional authority while buffering the region from national regulatory and demographic pressures, a form of deterritorialization aimed at limiting the reach of the nation-state (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). In the process, regional leaders mobilize a place-based identity while concealing the class interests underlying claims to autonomy. This approach seeks to "reterritorialize" Santa Cruz while preserving the structure of power and entitlement that has long shaped regional society. The autonomy project rests on colonial legacies rooted in an extractive economy, control over land, and a racialized social hierarchy (Pruden, 2003; Soruco, 2008) while pursuing global capital and regional competitiveness (Dabdoub, 2001).

Much scholarly writing on globalization stresses the increasing scale of the movement of goods and services across national borders, but there is also a move to reterritorialize space through what Turner (2007) called an "immobility regime" that is geared to controlling the ability of migrants to enter a country. Turner interprets this as a paradox of globalization, which witnesses increased "mobilities" alongside "new systems of closure" (2007: 289). Claims to autonomy in Santa Cruz transpose these aims subnationally, asserting openness to trade and investment for the region while limiting the entry of undesirables who might drain resources and make social demands. The reemphasis on regional boundaries complicates the reception of migrants, particularly highlanders, who in this climate are often deemed unwanted outsiders. This reduces the overall possibilities for migrant political protagonism.

CONCLUSION

Demands for autonomy have had contradictory effects for migrants in Santa Cruz. Regionalist leaders have begun to present autonomy as inclusive in an effort to gain support beyond a tiny wealthy minority and in the hope of defeating Morales. This move parallels shifts at the national level in the direction of popular participation and decentralization in which all manner of localities, including populous urban peripheries, have acquired a new political voice.

This paper has attempted to foreground the voices of migrants in Santa Cruz, whose views are rarely heard amid the debates raging over autonomy. Despite efforts to build popular support, less than half of the interviewees favored greater regional autonomy. Pro-autonomy sentiment appeared to be strongly associated with place of origin, with lowlanders more likely to embrace it than highlanders, whether poor or skilled. This suggests that pro-autonomy leaders have largely succeeded in appealing to Cruceños' long-standing regional pride to animate the struggle. But there are exceptions to the highland-lowland divide in autonomy views, and some highlanders voiced support for autonomy. This stance does not necessarily entail a blind embrace of regionalist demands. Some may support autonomy in the hope that it will bring them acceptance, shared prosperity, and social mobility in Santa Cruz while perhaps remaining skeptical of specific guarantees issued by regional leaders. The skilled highlanders most closely approached this position; many of them conditionally supported autonomy while expressing ambivalence about the campaign's approach and the intense polarization that this has sparked.

Despite their large and growing numbers, migrants in Santa Cruz have yet to find a coherent political voice. The majority seems to find little to be gained and much at risk in taking a strong position amid the social unrest surrounding the autonomy campaign. Those who have marched in support of the MAS and against regional autonomy have mostly been campesinos from Yapacaní and San Julián in the agricultural zone north of Santa Cruz, communities organized by the Federacion de Colonizadores (Federation of Settlers) and also deeply transformed by Andean migration.

The political prospects for an urban oppositional movement are challenged by a range of factors, including the lack of strong social ties among migrants in a city in which newcomers hail from nearly every corner of the country. In some cases, the dislocation of migration itself creates a form of self-exclusion that parallels structural forms of marginalization. This is especially the case for poor highlanders, who of the three interview groups are perceived as the most alien to the social order of Santa Cruz. Having witnessed the violence unleashed on campesino protesters, urban-based migrants may fear reprisals for contesting the regional project. Alternatively, some of the migrants interviewed saw benefits in autonomy for the region as a whole and sought to be included in opportunities for prosperity. In pushing for belonging in an increasingly diverse Santa Cruz, some supported autonomy, at least on the surface.

The violence toward those who contest the regional autonomy project reached a crescendo in September 2008, when supporters of Pando's

pro-autonomy prefect massacred a group of campesinos affiliated with the MAS.[12] With Morales's reelection in December 2009 with 63 percent of the national vote—and 43 percent in Santa Cruz Department (up from 30 percent in 2005)—the contours of regional autonomy continue to shift, and the prospects for bottom-up organizing among migrants for social rights outside the influence of regional elites may improve.

NOTES

1. Costas delivered the presentation to the departmental legislative assembly in a theater built by the Catholic-affiliated nonprofit Fundación Hombres Nuevos, based in Plan Tres Mil since 1992.

2. In January 2005 UJC members allegedly attacked a pro-MAS march at the fourth ring, north of the Christ statue (*El Deber,* January 29, 2005). During the national upheaval of October 2003, members of UJC and Camba Nation, a pro-autonomy group, beat up campesinos marching against President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in the central plaza, and the leader of a provincial civic committee kicked to the ground an Andean woman wearing a *pollera* (traditional skirt) (see Gustafson, 2006; Barragán, 2004: 27).

3. Taking into account the socioeconomic variation within these urban districts, I selected neighborhoods in two *unidades vecinales* (neighborhood units, the smallest territorial planning units) of different income levels for each district on the basis of census data. Residents often recognize two or three neighborhoods within a neighborhood unit.

4. The skilled highlanders included three engineers or managers for hydrocarbons firms, an information-technology consultant, a journalist, a public-relations manager for a private firm, a quality-control technician, an actor, and two schoolteachers.

5. Pseudonyms are used for respondents throughout the paper.

6. Some sectors within the MAS, such as old-guard left nationalists, have opposed the inclusion of indigenous autonomy in the new constitution. See Gustafson (2009) for further discussion of indigenous autonomy.

7. The rumor of requiring passports for collas in Santa Cruz, while unsubstantiated, seems indicative of public perceptions.

8. These departments have the lowest per capita gross domestic product in the country (UNDP, 2004).

9. Perez is a neighborhood association leader but not part of the sample. Several of the highland respondents reside in this neighborhood.

10. Following the recent disarray of traditional parties in Bolivia, PODEMOS emerged as the main center-right opposition to the MAS and is allied with the Civic Committee in Santa Cruz.

11. Local elections have taken place in Bolivia since 1985, with the Law of Municipalities. Before this the president appointed mayors.

12. According to Amnesty International, there were 19 deaths in this incident; the majority were MAS-affiliated peasants. http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/regions/americas/bolivia.

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