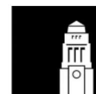

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What's in your wardrobe, Mr Morales? A study in political dress

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What’s in your wardrobe, Mr Morales? a study in political dress

ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of dress in popular political communication. My discussion focuses on the so-called ‘cultural democratic revolution’ led by Evo Morales, and the emergence of a ‘government in poncho and tie’, which aims at visualising a plurinationalist State in Bolivia. The strategic use of casual clothes and football shirts are examined as cases of political performativity in a developing Latin American democracy. What is the role of political dress in the formation of circles of political voters/fans? How does the electorate perceive Morales’ political imagery? How does an alternative styling of the democratic system problematise a more formal and uniform style of democratic leadership? Central to my argument is the notion that dress functions as a multi-layered language where different items of clothing reflect different narratives. In my view, Evo Morales has become a layered narrative through which histories and past knowledges are reflected in a ‘pluriform’ vestimentary style.

Key words: *Evo Morales, dress, cultural democratic revolution, performance politics.*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to show that the orchestration of a ‘cultural and democratic revolution’ in Bolivia has relied largely on fashion as a medium of political and popular communication. Specifically, I am interested in looking at political fashion through the lens of Evo Morales, the country’s first indigenous president. I will begin by making a brief introductory note of the way colonial domination in the Andes has led to a divestment of autochthonous material culture, to the extent that redressing Indianness in Bolivia has become crucial in the emergence of ethno-political and popular democracy in recent years. Further, I will argue that the transition from neoliberal democracy to the democratic revolution of Evo Morales has been shaped by the postcolonial fracture between what some scholars call the ‘two Bolivias’ (Dunkerley 2006), where geo-political divisions are marked by an emotional appeal to two very distinct sets of histories, traditions, and dress codes. A representative democracy where the Western model is mimetically integrated into the Bolivian system has been abandoned by the Bolivian government in lieu of a self-tailored, and largely anti-American democracy visualised according to dress codes and cultural narratives that are no longer drawn from external sources, but which insist on highlighting local tradition.

I will contend that an *evo*-lution in political dress has helped to communicate a *plurinationalist project*, whereby the uniformed image traditionally associated in Bolivia with political leadership (from the eye-catching garments of the heroes of independence, to the dashing uniforms of military figures like Hugo Bánzer, to the business uniform of neoliberal politicians in the late 1990s) has been substituted by a ‘pluriform’, that is, a layered political garb that seeks to convey the horizontalising and pluralistic political scheme of Morales’ government. Although this discussion of current political fashion in Bolivia should include a variety of important items in the presidential wardrobe, not least his ‘Indian coronation’ garments and his *cocalero* look, I will focus instead on two lesser-known items. Firstly, I will discuss the use of football shirts as a strategy of political communication, particularly during the presidential campaign of 2005. Subsequently, I will analyse the famous striped jumper

worn by Morales in his international tour of 2006, as well as his use of designer Andean dress. All the items of clothing discussed in this paper have supported Morales' media campaign and his attempt to fashion a popular and accessible political image that blurs distinctions between popular culture and politics. The effects of Morales' unconventional image-management are presently read as a mechanism in what Brian McNair would call 'performance politics' (2007), that is, a revolution in the 'persuasive arts' that is the consequence of far-reaching political and technological developments, such that politics has become not only a persuasive but a performative art, where considerations of style, presentation, and fashion become of equal if not greater importance than content and substance (McNair 2007; Salazar-Sutil 2008).

Colonial striptease

Insofar as the region of the high Andes is heir to an ancient textile and manufacturing tradition, even before its inception as an independent country in 1825, dress played a particularly pungent role in Bolivia. Elayne Zorn notes that in Andean cultures dress is relevant inasmuch as it 'remains a major creative industry in which people invest substantial resources of time, materials, money, and labour, with the secondary effect that people use ethnic fashion to make statements about themselves' (2005: 116). The use of dress as an 'identitary statement' is particularly significant. That a statement can be relayed through sartorial codes carries strong political undertones, which are reinforced by the history of exclusion and the European appropriation of indigenous material cultures during the colonial period.

In his study on the history of material culture and consumption in Latin America, Arnold J. Bauer points out that the scramble for identity, the need to redraw, or cross over the lines of social relationships, are often marked by such acts of visible consumption, perhaps even more so in colonial and postcolonial societies where power and the reference for fashion are often established by foreigners (2001: 9). In other words, the only path available to Bolivia's nation-building project has been by imitation and the subsequent

importation of Western fashion. The European model remained the standard cultural mirror against which all Bolivians were impelled to identify themselves. These conditions of self-representation created a historico-cultural dependency on European and more recently American stylisation, with the secondary effect of a denigration or underestimation of local dress. Evo Morales often recalls the story of how his parents were barred from public areas like Plaza Murillo, in downtown La Paz, because Indians did not have the right to walk the same streets as white-mestizo citizens. As part of a politics of postcolonial exclusion, Andean dress was somewhat denigrated to the category of souvenir or tourist attraction, available for foreign consumption in 'traditional markets' as an oddity or relatively innocuous youth fashion. The notion of a sophisticated, high-society, or indeed, political fashion tailored on the basis of indigenous textiles and woolly hats is a recent development in postcolonial Bolivian society.

Mariselle Meléndez (2005) makes a further point about the relation between clothing and political domination in colonial Spanish America. She notes that 'the absence or lack of clothing functioned as a determinant factor to classify and categorize the Amerindian other. This suggests that insofar as difference was visually and discursively constructed through the rhetoric of clothing (2005: 17), the Church and Spanish crown required not only a strong political and military offensive but also a forceful cultural penetration. Fashion was as much a weapon as the Bible. If colonial and neo-colonial policies have focused on whether conversion and subjection of indigenous populations should be accompanied by material changes (primarily in food and dress), the sustained denigration of indigenous fashion could only lead to the erosion, and in some cases, the eradication of a fully-fledged sense of indigenous political selfhood. Likewise, the scantily dressed Indians in the tropical regions of Bolivia would have been forced to 'dress up' as part of a cultural transformation that included the imposition of Western values, language, religion and modes of behaviour.

Those who continued to wear traditional Indian clothes were seen to repudiate the preferred mode of personal presentation, to the detriment of their political rights. According to Bolivian sociologist Fernando Mayorga, in addition to being a mechanism of identity-

formation, clothing has traditionally defined possibilities of social mobility in Bolivia, thus operating as an ideological mechanism of exclusion in the political sphere (2003: 52). Marcia Stephenson also points out that the problem is not only that the Indian was forced to dress up, but on the contrary, that colonialism was likewise characterised by an act of identitary striptease. In other words, stripping the Indian off was tantamount to colonial empowerment, which depended on the debasement of Indian identity by means of a cultural disrobing. By unclothing the Indian body, the Indian could not help but feel weakened by dint of its exposure to ridicule. For the colonial authorities, the removal of the Indians' clothes was necessary for the purpose of public hygiene and so as to prevent what they saw as a serious threat of contamination.

And not only were Indians deemed to be impure. Furthermore, from a colonialist point of view, and during the earlier part of the colonial period, it was even debatable whether Indians were fully-fledged human beings or, to the extent that they were *not* made in God's image, whether they were animals deprived of souls, and therefore bound to nakedness. According to Stephenson, Bolivian *cholos* were publicly undressed and inspected. Naked, marked as a pathological or contaminative essence, the Indian was cleansed and spruced up in order to accommodate Indianness to stylistic and behavioural European standards. By classifying traditional dress as a pollutant, and thus enforcing 'decent' European clothing, colonial domination was imposed largely through the expropriation of a sense of materiality. Crucially, undressing was not only an individual impugnation and the intrusive revelation of bodily intimacy, but also the erasure of cultural dignity (Stephenson 1999: 143). As Javier Sanjinés points out (2004), ruling ideologies have imposed a notion of identity on cholo-Indians, forcing them to recognise themselves not through the properties and attributes of their own social and material being, but in terms of the negation and undressing of their identity (186), what Aymara activist Felipe Quispe calls *janiwa* or non-subjectivity of the Indio (in Sanjinés 2004).

Bolivian politics divided by two

Once indigenous cultures were largely subdued or contained, the negation of Indianness meant that for the first half of the 20th century the post-colonial tussle between the peasant-proletarian and the dominant white-mestizo class could no longer be conceived exclusively in terms of sartorial discourse, because indigenous material culture no longer posed a threat to the dominant party. Instead, what ensued was an ideological struggle, particularly between the landowning bourgeoisie and Marxist intellectuals whose aim was to blur distinctions between indigenous peoples and the proletariat, in order to apply Marxist philosophy to postcolonial Bolivia. Dress played little part in the narrativisation of revolutionary politics, so radical Marxist politicians and conservatives dressed much in the same way: in suits and ties.

In recent decades, however, media democracy has prompted political resistance to shy away from class discourse to a social movement whose efficacy rests on the mobilisation of performative resources (Mayorga 2003). Bolivian Vice-President Alvaro García Linera notes that the recent emergence of grassroots political leadership could only happen as a result of a transformation in the visual outlook of the political actors, a transformation that affected the sartorial façade of the political leader and the ritual scenery of the political act (2005: 174). García Linera explains that there is no class domination without a cultural domination running through it, which signifies and materialises it, meaning that the struggle of the peasant class in Bolivia is also, and above all, a national and ethnic struggle (2005: 169). From this perspective, the question of dress is once again, like in Colonial times, an important facet of Bolivia's political struggles.

Amongst urban Aymara Indians, for example, particularly in the highlands of La Paz and El Alto, dress has become one of the most striking statements of postcolonial self-identification. And whilst items of clothing like the skirt (*pollera*), the bowler hat, the coloured poncho, and the whip (*chicote*) are not exactly indigenous in origin, they now function as cultural bounders that help to delimit the primarily indigenous region of La Paz from the oil-rich departments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni, Pando, and Chuquiasca. Commonly known as

the *Medialuna* or 'Half-Moon', these five states have united against Morales ethno-political and plurinational project in order to espouse the interests of a regional private sector, particularly in the oil and gas industries.

Partly as a result of many of the colonial circumstances mentioned above, the country is bisected into two political camps: the *masistas,* or followers of Morales' *Movement Toward Socialism* party (MAS), and the *cívicos,* which are federal committees led by state governors opposed to Morales' social reform, and determined to press on for a more autonomic federal system. The difficulty with achieving real integration between these 'two Bolivias' (Dunkerley 2007), has led to what Vice-President Alvaro García Linera calls, after Antonio Gramsci, a 'catastrophic equilibrium' (*empate catastrófico*). For the so called 'half-moon States' in the rich, oil-producing, eastern fringe of the country, ethnic democracy does not appeal as a legitimate presidential style. As far government detractors are concerned, the problem is not only Morales' indigenous roots. Nor is it a question of defining the political spectrum in terms of conventional right and left wing parties. President Sánchez de Lozada's right-wing and neoliberal administration in the early 90s featured an Indian Vice-President. So, the problem lies further. The catastrophic equilibrium that has almost paralysed the political system in recent years is derived from a fundamental clash between the centralisation of a popular State and the de-centralisation of the private sector, stubbornly vying against each other for control over the Bolivian economy.

Whilst La Paz is intent on a revolution in democracy that would nationalise Bolivia's oil and gas reserves, the opposition movement, led by the city of Santa Cruz, has claimed autonomy in order to manage the production of hydrocarbons privately. In order to communicate this geopolitical tug-of-war, the question of economic control is coupled with a dispute over the way power should be visualised and symbolised by the Bolivian political and parliamentary class. In other words, what is at stake here is the symbolic identification of dominant Bolivian identity. As such, should the Bolivian national symbol be the Aymara flag, the *wiphala*, or should it be the Bolivian tricolour? Should Bolivians look to Simón Bolívar as their patriarchal model or Indian resistance heroes Tupac Katari and Bertolina

Sisa? And finally, should parliamentarians be expected to wear hats and sandals, suits and ties, or both? These questions alert us to the scramble for visual symbolism in the formulation of a new image of Bolivian political leadership.

On the basis of this political partisanship, Evo's wardrobe deliberately highlights the difference between MAS' indigenous and unionist base and the white/mestizo opposition based in the wealthy city of Santa Cruz by visualising the lines that cut through the Bolivian political system. However, Morales has sought to achieve something else: to overcome the discourse of exclusion/inclusion by merging the dichotomist imagery of the Bolivian political class into a plurinational style. In other words, whilst there are those who wear indigenous dress, and those who wear suit and tie, Morales' government seeks to represent what Pablo Stefanoni calls a '*gobierno de poncho y corbata'*, or government in poncho and tie (2006: 23-6). The difficulty with the integrationist and pluralistic project put forward by Morales is that it does not suit those who do not wish to share their regional cultural patrimony with the State.

Nowhere is this motley plurinational reality more graphically conveyed than in parliament. Since the inauguration of the new congress in 2002 indigenous deputies have worn traditional dress and they have spoken in native languages. As a *campesino* deputy pungently put it: 'Congress 'smells of coca and wears a poncho and sandals' (in Van Cott 2007: 95). Doubtless, the clash that is symptomatic of Bolivian parliamentary politics is not only a vestimentary one, but also a personal confrontation between individual members of parliament. Violent exchanges between parliamentarians in suit and tie, and those wearing indigenous garments, however, have erupted in recent years highlighting diametrically different cultural identities artificially combined in a parliamentary system that does not necessarily provide the necessary solutions to the catastrophic impasse in Bolivian politics.

1- FROM NEOLIBERAL DEMOCRACY TO THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Through a (democratic) glass darkly

One could argue that the difficulty with the project of global democracy is compounded by the imposition of a cultural narrative, particularly as written by the United States, which underpins the democratic experience. Roces and Edwards point out (2007), that the 1990s saw a rise in the use of 'national dress' for the purpose of strict political and diplomatic protocol, so when Bill Clinton distributed airforce-inspired bombardier jackets to participants of the APEC summit in 1993, he effectively kick-started the tradition of linking local and global communities through the cosmetics of traditional dress. The point is that despite the success and appeal of Western democracy, the system of image-management and glocal visualisations that has become characteristic of contemporary democratic systems does not necessarily reflect many of the local realities that add up to the Bolivian voting majority. What I mean by this is that, despite being a representative system, the democratic experience is not necessarily intended as a reflection of local groups in many postcolonial countries, but as a mimetic representation of glocal protocol like the one devised by Clinton in the 1993 APEC summit. The 'democratic mirage' flattens and narrows the choices by which people can represent themselves politically, establishing a political class that in many non-Western countries seems quite alien to its voters. As Mapuche poet Elicura Chihuailaf puts it, there is an 'obnubilated cultural mirror' against which the Indian sees a televised reflection of unisize, human prototypes: always blonde, always Caucasian (1999: 88). Possibilities of alternative self-formation are rigidly controlled by the glocal performative criteria of capitalist democracy.

So what happens when alternative democratic 'looks' and visualisations of the democratic process seek a recognition that is popular in its appeal? Take, for instance, Ecuador's Rafael Correa or Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. The image in the obnubilated cultural mirror has changed. As the steam has lifted from the glass of representative politics, the political image no longer reflects an American model. In the case of Bolivia, a new presidential wardrobe raises important political and cultural questions. Not least: is it

possible to fashion a model of Bolivian political identity that is not derived exclusively and ethnocentrically from the Western experience? If so, can such a project seek to address the question of political self-determination in a way that clashes with a dominant democratic model? For many people in Bolivia, the answer to these questions is clearly no. Failure to imitate the sober prototype of international political dress will lead to Morales' disparagement in international political catwalks, and his alienation from the international community. However, this has not been the case, and whilst Morales has broken diplomatic relationship with the United States, he has gained powerful allies like China, Iran and the Bolivarian project led by Hugo Morales. Furthermore, Morales proved that global democracy is not as democratic as it would like to think it is if it cannot accept the transformation of its venerable sartorial rules.

Insofar as there is a recognisable schema of predictable ingredients in conventional political dress (Maynard 2004: 54), which is eschewed by Morales' unique protocol, Morales can also secure the affective support of a public disenfranchised with conventional politics. The conservative and uni-chrome style of democratic politics is problematised by a politician whose style many people in Bolivia can recognise as their own. In other words, Morales insists on dressing *down* the political image, thus minimising the differences between the political and voting class. This horizontalisation of political power by means of the 'casualisation' of political dress is not synonymous with the oversimplification of the politician's image. Indeed, the symbolic complexity and plurality of Morales' political performance makes his wardrobe anything but simplistic. One must draw a distinction here between simplifying and downplaying political fashion.

That politicians should receive exclusive and often private education; that they should be polished public speakers, and in the vast majority of cases; that they should be male, are prerequisites of a global model of democratic leadership that is gradually beginning to crumble. The obnubilated cultural mirror of democracy is showing cracks. The election of female presidents in Latin America, an indigenous president in Bolivia, and a mixed-raced president in the United States, all point to a need to re-style politics in the

Americas according to a different set of principles. It is hard to tell, however, whether the obnubilated mirror is beginning to show a more genuine reflection, and whether political representation in many cases is more faithful to voter-identity, or whether this is simply a fad in democratic politics. In the following pages, I will interrogate the way in which the democratic visualisation of power in Bolivia has been transformed by unconventional political dress, and how the use of football gear and casual clothing have revolutionised the image reflected by the democratic mirror.

The* evo*-lution of political fashion

The role played by fashion in the construction of political identity in Latin America has been addressed by a number of authors (notably Bauer 2001; Root 2002, 2008; Zorn 2005; Roces and Edwards 2007). Crucially, Elayne Zorn shows that the complexity of fashion industries in the south-central Andes does not always neatly line up with identity being demonstrated or claimed. According to Zorn, in the experience of the Sakaka nation in the Bolivian highlands, people fashion their dress using diverse materials from various sources, into many styles, which help them construct not only one 'essential', but rather multiple, Sakaka identities, within a distinctive indigenous fashion system (2005: 140). By insisting on gender, ethnic and national features of identity-formation many of the works mentioned above have largely overlooked the pluralistic and post-identitary nature of political self-representation. In my opinion, revolution in democracy has allowed Morales' MAS government to break away from identity politics, mimetic dependency, and the obnubilated cultural mirror that prevailed during preceding administrations, notably Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's. It is precisely the exceptional and unprecedented nature of Morales' post-identitary political image that has elicited so much media attention both in Bolivia and abroad.

In an article entitled *Performing Andean Identity* Mark Rogers points out (1999) that the constructedness and conflictuality of identity creates a situation in which it is now difficult to maintain simple dichotomies of domination and resistance and especially to associate

those positions with fixed cultural identities. In the Bolivian case, one cannot speak simply of a dominant and subaltern discourse because the borderline is more porous and it is no longer demarcated in terms of class or party divisions. Hence, the notion that Morales is an 'indigenous president' is somewhat misleading. His profile is considerably more complex than that. He was brought up as a *colono*, or migrant worker, not as an Aymara Indian proper. This means that Morales developed a bipolar social identity that enabled him to shed a stable sense of Indianness in lieu of a political post-identity that could be performatively negotiated and adapted to changing socio-political circumstances.

On the basis of this statement, the aim of the Morales government has not been to divest 'seigniorial democracy' and to obliterate preceding political fashions by banning suits and ties from cabinet in order to fix the political style of the *masista* movement. Rather, Morales' tonic has been a moderate one. The attempt to build a plurinational State has led Morales' administration to a political aporia: how can the State unite the disparate groups of people that make up modern Bolivia? Morales has spoken of a truce between the communitarian *indigenista* project and global financial capitalism in order to develop a hybrid system which Vice-President Alvaro García Linera has dubbed 'Andean-Amazonian capitalism' (2006). This is not so much a struggle between two clear-cut ethnic camps, or two fixed identitary positions: dominant v. dominated. Rather, various political and cultural identities are being brought together in an increasingly volatile political crucible. Morales' coalitional set-up must therefore use a number of different sartorial dress codes in order to represent a plurinational and horizontalised State, which means that whereas some ministers may go for an all-out indigenous 'look', Vice-President Linera is more likely to be seen wearing garments like the suit, perhaps even the tie. Bolivian Foreign Secretary David Choquehuanca, himself an Aymara Indian, explains the sartorial fracas at the heart of Bolivian politics:

> 'How can I turn those who wear ties to someone who wears embroidered pullovers like the one I'm wearing? Because I can't turn into someone who wears a tie, can I?

> We need to complement each other: respect those who wear ties, respect those who wear poncho, respect those who wear feathers.' (quoted in Subercaseaux and Sierra 2007: 71, *my translation*)

The re-styled *masista* politician is no longer an abstract symbol of the State whose fixed uniform hints at the monolithic and statuesque nature of the political class. Instead, current political fashion is designed to be an everyday representation of changing national identities. Furthermore, political performance is hereby the result of a loss of identitary singularity and stability, which enables the performer/politician to be simultaneously a number of identitary fabrications. The absence of the prototypical uniformed statesmen thus calls for an act of performative representation that is also a surrogate model. In other words, the vacancy or apparent failure of conventional politics calls for alternate and contingent ways of performing stateliness in contemporary Bolivia. The shift away from traditional political styling is defined by a loss of convention and protocol, and an *evo*-lution of political dress characterised by plural and adaptable performative qualities. In sum, performance politics makes possible the substitution of uniformity and the rigid codes of conduct of neoliberal democracy for an image that requires a more strategic image-management, where the visual boundaries between politician and voter are not so clearly defined. The sartorial border is in fact a modulation that is being continuously re-aligned, a limitless postponement of semiotic interpretation.

From uniform to pluriform

The rejection of the military and business uniform means that political fashion can no longer be articulated from a singular cultural source, but only through layers, through separate items of clothing that make up a plural and kaleidoscopic visual discourse. In other words, dress is not so much a unitary ensemble that fixes identity to a physical location; it does not mark out a stable political habit. What we find in Morales' wardrobe is a potpourri of Bolivian archetypes: the miner, coca farmer, the footballer, the family man, the indigenous

leader, the sophisticated international statesman, the sex symbol. And insofar as the physical body is divided into extremities, each clothed by a separate item of clothing, so the politician can be broken up into a disjointed and pluriform composition. This means that whilst he has abandoned a uniform that treats the entire body as one integrated figure, Morales depends on subtle and yet crucial items of clothing that highlight separate bodily and identitary features: i.e. a miner's hat, an elegant jacket with Indian motifs, a football jersey, a pair of sandals, black Wrangler jeans, and traditional Aymara accessories. The political body is now subdivided. A (sub) body politic, as it were, is thus characterised by a breakdown of the compositional unity of the politician into pieces of identity and bodylines strategically stitched together in order to convey the notion of the plurinational State. Crucially, by carving the politician into separate units of dress the dismemberment of the politician's body enables separate politicalised organs to be emphasised by contrasting units of clothing, which are symbolic of a plurinational contrast. The helmet, for instance, emphasises a beheaded body, a bodiless head whose emphatic bright colours and round shape are a symbol of the traditional mining culture of Bolivia. Thus the politician becomes a collection of organs that do not necessarily belong to the same body, but which have been amputated and reconnected as an artificial persona, performatively stitched together.

In sum, the political style fashioned by Morales indicates fragmentation and dismemberment through dress. Morales is thus characterised by his broken Spanish, his blurred cultural and biographical narratives, his random and clashing vestimentary style, his flip-flopping trajectory to the Quemado Palace. All these unconventional and incongruent aspects of Morales' image point to Morales' formation in an extra-political and eclectic sphere, mainly in the ambit of political activism, social movements and a type of grassroots political organisation known in Bolivia as 'political instrument'. Furthermore, this transformation of the political image constitutes what Ribeiro and Escobar call 'post-identitary politics' a result of the pluralisation of power, histories, and knowledge (2006: 5). By breaking lose from a concrete and definitive sense of identity, political personhood can be designed in response to political moods or electoral swings, unexpected political

turnabouts or windfalls. Such is the level of volatility of post-identitary politics, that political communication *qua* fashion has become ever more gaseous: it is not so much an element of performance but *perfumance*, as Jon McKenzie would put it (2001). Morales' vaporous image is designed precisely to blur easy distinctions. Furthermore, Morales seems to suggest that there is no premeditation whatsoever in the way he dresses, that his casual style is by no means prefabricated, and that most criticisms regarding his 'look' are elaborated by the media, scholarly commentators and detractors.

3- EVO MORALES AND FOOTBALL WEAR

'Pelotero' to president

In the remaining section of this article I will discuss two specific garments used by Evo Morales during his first year as president. Firstly, I will analyse an item of political dress that has received little attention from scholars, namely the football shirt. The question that guides this section of my research is to what extent a football jersey can function as a mechanism for the mobilisation of democratic capital. I will subsequently turn my attention to Morales' famous multicoloured jumper or *chompa*, which he wore during his first international tour in January 2006. I will contend that although these garments did not necessarily leave a lasting effect on its audience at the time, they buttressed Morales' meteoric rise to international fame.

Evo Morales is said to have learnt to play high-altitude football with a ball made of cloth, whilst dribbling in between llama herds (Stefanoni 2006: 53). Football played an important role during Morales' childhood years both as a socio-networking activity and a test to his leadership skills. In 1980, the effects of drought forced many Aymara families away from their homes, so when Morales' family migrated to the coca-farming region of Chapare in the tropics of Cochabamba, football became a common language that enabled him to cope in an alien environment. Morales found in football a socialising, and later, a political activity. The constitution of this denotative sense of team-culture is, in the words of Argentinean anthropologist Juan Pablo Ferreiro, a multiple and fragmentary identitary

process that acts in the manner of a palimpsest, inscribing, overlaying and deforming one content over the other (2003: 58). Thus, the notions of mobilization, division, integration and success that underlie the sport can easily blur and refract outside the sporting event itself, spilling onto a socio-political performative context. These are heteronymous factors that help constitute a popular image, what Mayorga calls the 'gestation of extra-political prestige' (2003:203). In an interview with Chilean daily *El Mercurio*, Morales explained the role played by football in his political gestation:

> Football is everything in Bolivia, in the countryside, the cities, in the altiplano […] The truth is that sport bonds people. I would say, even, that it was thanks to football that I became president. In my native land […] in Orinoca, I founded and organised a football team called 'Fraternity', and I looked for support from other families in order to compete in community championships […] and when I was 14- 15, I owned the club, I was the captain, the delegate, I was the referee […] When I was 15 or 16, the community leaders decided that I should be manager of Orinoca's football team […] I had no formation, only the will to play football. So I started to meet people. 'Where are you from' 'Are you a peasant, party-member, are you travelling… who are you? My first post was as Sports Secretary- we are talking about 1980, when I was 19 or 20. As you can see, it all began with that sport. That is where my unionist and political trajectory starts, all the way to the presidency. I often say it was not only coca leaf […] but also football that led me to the presidency (El *Mercurio,* 2008a. *My translation*).

On the basis of this candid confession, it appears that Morales found in football an agglutinative experience not only amongst his Aymara community, but also in the context of migrant settlement and political organisation. Ricardo Díaz explains that Morales' fondness for the sport makes his relationship with unionism all the more effective, not least because the promotion of football has always been a crucial programme in grassroots political

organisations in Bolivia (2004: 178). Trade unionism, grassroots political organisations and social movements were becoming increasingly vital in the Bolivian political scene at the time Morales moved to the coca-farming region of Chapare. As US pressure on coca-eradication mounted throughout the 80s and 90s, so the need to organise coca-farmers into well-organised social movements grew. This resulted in the growth of farming unions across the Chapare, and the creation of six federations or syndicates of coca growers. Morales became known amongst members of the *Federación del Trópico* as the *jóven pelotero* (the young ball-boy), apparently because he was always seen carrying a ball under the arm (Stefanoni 2006: 55). Football and political crises seemed to collide, drawing Morales into a remarkable career that catapulted him from sports organiser, to union leader, to politician, to world renowned statesmen.

Morales has also pointed out that the values germane to football are not necessarily political, but that the sport is a 'personal mission' (Morales 2006b). In fact, a local football association official claimed in March 2008 that Morales had signed for second-division club *Litoral*, traditionally associated with the Bolivian police force (*La Razón* 2008). The President made his debut wearing the Number 10 shirt in a game against Deportivo Municipal, where despite failing to score after 41 minutes, he led his team to a 4-1 victory. That Morales should wear this particular number is perhaps telling of his celebrityhood. The Number 10 shirt is associated with some of the most prestigious and mythical Latin American footballers, including Pelé and Maradona. Perhaps most importantly, the Number 10 shirt is associated in Bolivia with local idol Marco Antonio "Diablo" Etcheverry, whom Morales has often played with, and whom he described on occasion as a 'patrimony of Bolivian football' (*La Razón,* 2006a*)*. Shortly before his official retirement from professional football, Etcheverry was invited to the Quemado Palace in La Paz. The footballer received a portrait of himself made of coca leaves in exchange for a signed Number 10 shirt. Whether in impromptu kickabouts with his cabinet and bodyguards or in multitudinous exhibition matches, Evo has taken on the role of the Bolivian Number 10 in order to display the same mythic qualities as iconic players like Etcheverry. By associating himself with the popular

mythology of football, Morales has fashioned himself as a footballer-president in a way that is enthused with popular cultural images that not only blur the distinction between football and politics (Salazar Sutil 2008), but also highlight an image of success and national glory.

Morales' football events blur the distinction between political rally and football match, between voter and fan. Football and politics become combined metonyms whose layers of interpretation and hyperlinkage enable fans to move in an out of the sports field, traversing political, cultural, and media-related spheres. And insofar as jerseys and other football garments can be used outside the context of football, Morales can always use the Number 10 shirt in political events in order to remind his fans that his celebrityhood is extra-political, and that his star-quality is the product not only of his footballing skills or technique, nor his oratorical skills, but that his appeal lies with a capacity to cross over from football to politics and back again, in a field where politics and popular culture are retroactively and persuasively linked.

Politicising national colours

The national shirt has become a statement of the construction of an ideal sense of belonging, which as Bolivian sociologist Fernando Mayorga points out, is an elusive project that can only be materialised when an unlikely football victory in the international stage provides the Bolivian people with a sense of pride (2003: 40). In his study on Nationalism and Sport (2006), Anthony King points out that the flag and shirt facilitate the growth of distinctive nationalist identities in an increasingly global sphere. King stipulates that such graphic displays as the red strip in flags, jerseys and face-paint symbolise the transformation of English identity in an age of globalisation. That the Union Jack is no longer employed as the emblem of English fans (as it used to be the case), usefully illustrates how the process of globalisation encourages the formation of new national communities (2006: 254). Similarly, by investing himself with the green shirt (Bolivia's footballing colour), the President can be visually linked with a relatively recent idealisation of a supra-identitary Bolivia, in the context of a globalised community of nation-states. James Dunkerley notes that the

overthrow of the neo-liberal-patrimonial state embodied by right-wing President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003, did not take the form of direct armed attack, but precisely in a performative display of national colours (2007:13). Morales' declaration of allegiance to the national flag, as opposed to the *wiphala* flag at the end of the 2005 election campaign, is a performative act not unlike his display of the Bolivian football shirt.

In addition, President Morales utilised football as a metaphor of political victimisation shortly after his election, when he clashed with the International Football Federation regarding a veto on high-altitude football. Morales denounced FIFA's veto not only as a provocation on Bolivian sovereignty, but 'a death sentence on the universality of football' (*El Mercurio* 2008b). Morales made clear that FIFA's decision to ban international games above 2,750 metres above sea-level amounted to a moratorium on Andean football, insofar as most Bolivian stadia are located above FIFA's arbitrary line, including the Estadio Olímpico Hernando Siles, located at 3,637 metres above sea level. Furthermore, Morales used the Hernando Siles as a symbol of performative resistance against the International Football Federation. In order to persuade the international community that high altitude football did not pose a health risk any more than the scorching temperatures of the Brasilian tropics, Evo Morales staged a number of protests in La Paz. What is more, together with a cabinet team and former members of the 1994 Bolivian national squad, Morales played in a snowy slope near Bolivia's highest peak, mount Sajama, at approximately 6,500 metres above sea level. Failure to convince FIFA President Joseph Blatter meant Morales stepped up his campaign at an international level, rallying the support of famous Latin American footballers like José Luis Chilavert and Diego Armando Maradona. By combining the question of national sovereignty with football, Morales consolidated the affective link between himself and his voter/fans, which looked to their president as they would do to their national squad or team manager.

The striped jumper and the Ambassador of Andean fashion

Perhaps the most famous item of clothing in Morales' wardrobe is his striped *chompa*, an acrylic red pullover featuring blue and white stripes. Chompa, an Anglicism of the word jumper, is a colloquial term in many South American countries used to refer to a knit pullover. The presidential chompa became a notorious statement during Morales' international campaign in early 2006. As Argentine radio producer and ombudsman Juán José Larrea put it (2006), 'the woollen chompa, knit with 54% of the national vote and approximately 70% of basic unsatisfied necessities in Bolivia, upstaged conversations which Morales had with political leaders and entrepreneurs'. Indeed, Morales' outstanding achievement was his ability to transform, update, and stage a public image through the effective manipulation of the media as a mobilising force. During his first international tour as President, Morales met various world leaders including Luis Felipe Zapatero of Spain, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, and Hu Jintao of China wearing this striped pullover. The pullover was seen as a media sensation, being described as the 'garment of discord' by *Reforma* in Mexico, 'a lack of respect' and 'an impropriety of huge proportions' (in *La Razón* 2006b). Meanwhile the Spanish press took on, by and large, a somewhat racist tone; one headline calling Evo Morales *indio rebelde*, or rebel Indian (in Van Dijk 2006). The Spanish daily *El País* overlooked the chompa rather disparagingly as a 'gesture of simplicity' (*El País* 2006a); whilst in his column against populist regimes on January 15, Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa described the presidential jumper as 'astute modesty' or 'studied ambiguity' (*El País* 2006b). The question many journalists asked themselves in Spain was whether the decision to attend an official reception with King Juan Carlos wearing the multicoloured pullover was a deliberate act of subversion and disrespect. Very few noted the possibility that it could have been neither. Perhaps the whole racket about the chompa illustrated the overcomplicated way in which the political sphere is mediated and image-managed.

Either way, Morales has not used the jumper again in official meetings, and despite being a short-lived, flight-by-night media fad, the effects of what is perhaps a largely

unplanned campaign have been to gather a media circus that has been travelling with Morales ever since. Morales understands that the nature of media exposure is short-lived, and that to regain the attention of the world press he needs to continue reinventing himself in new, original, and eye-catching ways. For many critics, however, there was something truly upsetting and unpardonable about the acrylic jumper. The point is: although Morales' failure to adhere to protocol is not an act of resistance, it was met by the Spanish media with a great deal of criticism. The King did not comment on Morales' chompa, but he was not entirely pleased, it seems. Which is why, when the two dignitaries exchanged presents, Morales got a tie.

Marilyn Miller observes in her study of the *guayabera* or breezy shirt, that informal sartorial codes call attention to their wearer's role as mediator between economic classes, between local and global economies, between mass production and custom preparation, between national and transnational ideologies, and between negotiations of cultural difference and belonging (2005: 218). In her study of Nelson Mandela's political dress, Margaret Maynard (2004) adds that the use of casual garments, tieless shirts, or alternative designer clothes play a crucial symbolic role in performing democracy as a global cultural phenomenon, as well as a local political transformation. Taking her cue from Appadurai, Maynard suggests that the commodification of the democratic leader can transcend specific cultures, which may explain why Morales has become an internationally recognised commodity, sold in the way of news articles in the press, as new articulations of academic research in international journals, or as a series of new fashion products in the high streets of La Paz. According to Maynard, garments such as Mandela's 'Madiba' shirt move in and out of the commodity state, actualising a meaning that functions unequally as popular commodity or symbolic gift (2004: 57). Taking place outside normal and customary circuits, intercultural garments such as the 'Madiba shirt' or the Presidential chompa are used as signs of political solidarity and boundary formation whose enhanced use-value gives them a fetishistic quality, much like the football shirt discussed above.

The global impact caused by Evo Morales' garments is such that, like Ahmadinejad's tan jacket in Iran, a version of his chompa has been merchandized in the streets of La Paz and in the worldwide net. What is more, Bolivian knitware company *Punto Blanco* even launched a new line called 'Evo Fashion', celebrating Morales' casual political style. According to the manufacturing company that commercialised 'Evo's chompa' in Bolivia, it was by public demand that the product had to be put on sale (at a cost of 70-80 bolivianos, equivalent to 10 US dollars). According to the New York Times (2006), at the height of 'evomania' in the first months of 2006, up to 300 sweaters were sold a day. Average wage in Bolivia for formal urban employment stood at USD 70 per month in 2004 according to the US Department of State, which indicates that despite not being a moderate selling prize, the jumper was a sell-out commodity nonetheless. Despite phenomenal sales in the early months of 2006, evomania was a temporary fad, contrary to Mario Vargas Llosa's caustic prediction that Morales' dress-down signature style of striped jumpers would rapidly become the sartorial preference of the *bien-pensant* European and North-American camp-followers (in Dunkerley 2007: 18). But whilst the jumper may have not lasted in the Bolivian high street, the underlying political statement did.

Of late, Evo has shown that he is not entirely averse to designer clothes. On the contrary, the more elegant section of Morales' wardrobe is styled by famous Bolivian fashion designer Beatriz Canedo Patiño. Known as the 'Alpaca Queen', Patiño is a pioneer in the design and manufacture of refined Alpaca clothes; indeed, her garments have styled a number of renowned politicians including Hillary Clinton and Jacques Chirac. In 2006, she was secretly appointed to design Morales' inauguration suit. She was informed that the outfit should not include a tie, but that it should be made in Bolivia, and that it had to 'contain something of the Aymara culture' (*La Razón* 2006c). In an interview with the Spanish daily *El Mundo,* Patiño remarked:

> Evo gives himself grace, he has got his bearing, and it gives us such pride that he should clothe himself with the camelids of the altiplano. He will be our Ambassador of Andean fashion. (*El Mundo* 2006. *My translation*).

Morales is therefore perceived not only as a politician and footballer, as we have seen above, but also as a fashion icon that has made alpaca designer clothes a signature mark of Bolivian politics. Hence, the further we explore the image of this complex and modulating political figure, the more it becomes apparent that no single site of identity-formation is available, that the identity is no longer fixed, but that Morales can shift from footballer, to fashion icon, to world statesmen, with as much ease as one who slips into a pairs of old sandals.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that political dress cannot be analysed as a communicative system uttered as a singular source of cultural knowledge and history. Dress is not equatable with a fixed conceptual programme, but a fluctuation, a 'palimpsestic aesthetics' (Stam 1999) that contains growing layers of signification. Much in the same way Bakhtin reads the discourse of the novel, the political body speaks in multiple languages or layers and items of clothing simultaneously. Morales' plurinational wardrobe contains items which when put together form a hodgepodge of Bolivianness. The State cannot be conceived as a single, monolithic stratum, but a stream of localities, nationalities and histories that pour into a chimeric and idealised composite.

Morales can be described as an unstable identity, the performance of what May Joseph (1999) calls 'nomadic citizenship'. This nomadic self is fraught with changes and adaptations in a process of ongoing re-spatialisation. Morales has travelled around Bolivia and the world performing the Indian, the miner, the footballer, the Nobel Prize nominee, the international freedom fighter, the cocalero. Dress responds to a 'cultural weather', a contingency that politicians try to take advantage of by means of a strategic performative

display. Ethno-politician and nationalist leader Ollanta Humala makes a similar point in a criticism of his opponent for the 2006 Peruvian elections:

> This man [Alan García] changed into a caricature. During the campaign Mr García would try the coat [casaca] of Comandante Ollanta Humala- the nationalist, anti-systemic coat. Then he'd try his suit and tie like a traditional politician and he would look out of his window to check what the weather was like, to see whether he should wear the coat or the suit. (Humala 2007)

The ambit of Morales' nomadism is determined by an equally stormy political climate. Morales, however, is not willing to perform caricatures or political stereotypes. Morales refuses to wear a tie. A line is drawn politically, geographically and sartorially in order to create a multiple space of inclusion, albeit it precludes the Bolivian 'media luna' states. Morales has insisted that he does not want to put off foreign investors, that he wants '*socios, no patrones'* (partners, not bosses). Still, the vestimentary statement is clear: like Humala, he cannot identify with the traditional, uniformed politician. Morales has reached the end of a long trajectory of re-spatialisations and performative turns. Here, his seemingly endless re-invention has hit a brick wall. The performance of conflict may have allowed Morales to earn surplus vote in an Andean-Amazonian democratic system. But performance will not be enough to ward off violence if he is to press ahead with the constitutional and social transformation put forward by MAS. Bolivia has always been on the brink of confrontation. Neither football, nor political rhetoric, nor performance, seem forceful enough to resolve the stand-off. Unification lies beyond the strategies employed so far by Morales, in the resolution of the central paradox of the MAS government. Is this administration democratic or revolutionary? Surely, it cannot be both things at once.

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