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**Транснационализм и национализм в бо-
ливийском анархизме, 1900-1930**
**Intersections between transnationalism and
nationalism in Bolivian anarchism, 1900 -
1930**
**Intersecciones entre transnacionalismo y
nacionalismo en el anarquismo boliviano,
1900-1930**

Аннотация: Транснациональные связи боливийского анархизма с подобными движениями континента имели большое значение для его зарождения и развития. Цель данной статьи – анализ международных корней боливийского анархизма, исследование того, как эти связи оказали на действия анархистов Ла-Паса и Оруро в национальном масштабе. Здесь рассмотрим участие анархистов в общенациональных дискуссиях о нации в период 1900 – 1930 гг. Также статья затронет такие ранее не исследованные в литературе вопросы как отношение анархизма к индейской проблеме, к Чакской войне, к конъюнктуре послевоенной Боливии.

Ключевые слова: боливийский анархизм, транснационализм, национа-

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лизм, индейский вопрос, Чакская война

Abstract: The transnational connections established by Bolivian anarchism with other movements of the region were very important for its emergence and development. The main objective of this article is to analyze how those transnational roots were articulated in a complex -not contradictory- way with the intervention of the anarchists of La Paz and Oruro in a national dimension. We will deal with their participation in the debates and transformations that occurred between the 1900s and 1930s around the definition of the Bolivian nation. In this way, the present article manages to reveal certain hitherto unexplored aspects of the Bolivian libertarian movement, related to its action and ideological positioning on the “indigenous problem,” the Chaco War and the immediate post-war period.

Key words: Bolivian anarchism, transnationalism, nationalism, indigenous question, Chaco War.

Resumen: Las conexiones transnacionales establecidas por el anarquismo boliviano con otros movimientos de la región, fueron muy importantes para su surgimiento y desarrollo. El objetivo central del presente artículo es analizar como esas raíces transnacionales se articularon de forma compleja -no contradictoria- con la intervención de los y las anarquistas de La Paz y Oruro en una dimensión nacional. Nos ocuparemos de su participación en los debates y transformaciones que ocurrieron entre las décadas de 1900 y 1930 en torno a la definición de nación boliviana. De esta manera, en el artículo logramos develar ciertos aspectos hasta ahora inexplorados del movimiento libertario boliviano, relacionados con su actuación y posicionamiento ideológico sobre el “problema indígena”, la Guerra del Chaco y la inmediata posguerra.

Palabras claves: Anarquismo boliviano, transnacionalismo, nacionalismo, cuestión indígena, Guerra del Chaco.

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Introduction

Although relegated by the latest transnational turn historiography, the Andean Region has characterized by the development of transnational connections established between the anarchist movements of Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In particular, these diffusion and exchange networks were very relevant to the libertarian movement of the first country, which was nourished in its formative stage by the circulation of activists and the sending of propaganda materi-

als from the south of the continent.

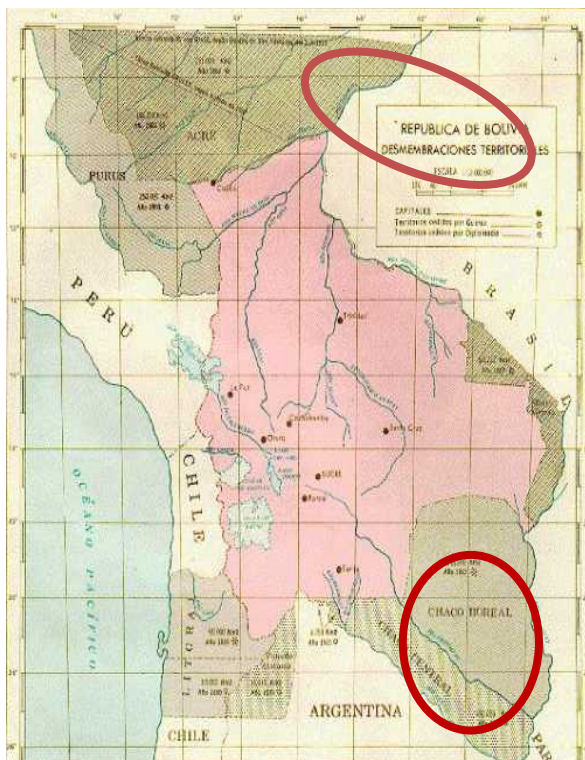
Despite the relevance of these transnational links, what we are interested to analyze in this article is the challenge that the Bolivian anarchist movement faced in another dimension: the national one. Put another way: could not the isolation that the local anarchists felt as such and -as they claimed- wanted to overcome by establishing transnational connections, have led them alternatively to worry about and get involved in the current issues that occurred within the borders of Bolivia? Issues as important at that time as those concerning the definition of the nation, a field in dispute for the configuration of racial identities (white, mestizo, “chola” and indigenous) and the consequent ethnic exclusion or inclusion, which was both political and social.

The period between the 1900s and 1930s is key to studying this complex -not contradictory- intersections, insofar it allows us to see, on the one hand, the transnational roots of a movement that towards 1920 was in the full stage of emergence, and on the other, the debates and transformations that took place around the notion of the Bolivian nation.

Bolivia and its Mediterranean condition

As a result of the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), in which Chile defeated Bolivia and Peru, Antofagasta Bolivian province was annexed into Chilean territory. That meant for the first country to lose not only the valuable nitrate fields located in that area but also the Pacific coast. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed by the two countries in 1904, sanctioned the result of the war.

That is how Bolivia became a Mediterranean territory, without direct connections either to the Pacific or the Atlantic Ocean. Later, Bolivian territory -as it was configured in 1825 after its independence from Spain- suffered other losses, occurred in the Acre and Chaco regions afterward two subsequent military conflicts, waged against Brazil (the Acre War, during 1899-1903) and Paraguay (the Chaco War, during 1932-1935).

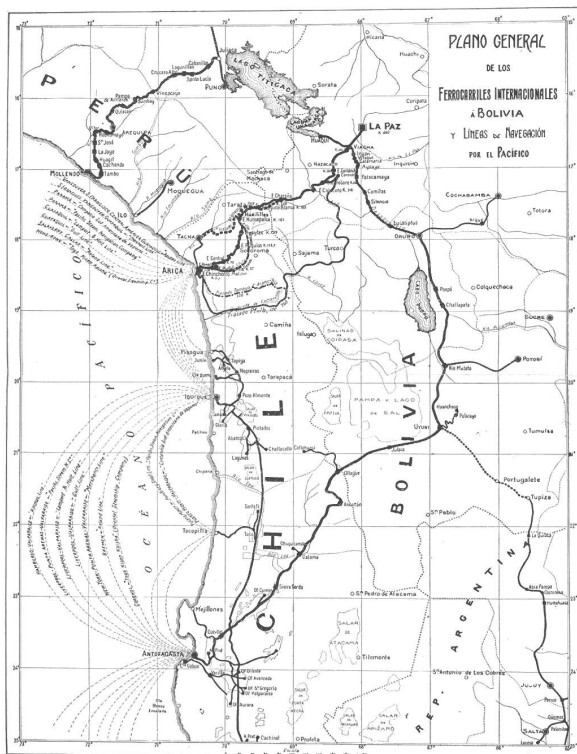


In this map, it is possible to see Bolivia's alleged territorial “dismemberments” since its constitution as an independent republic, in 1825. In red circles are marked the losses caused in the late 19th Century by the War of the Pacific and the Acre War, and later, in the 20th Century, by the Chaco War.²

The resulting geographical confinement and isolation, caused by those important territorial losses, were reinforced by its railroad policy. International railroad connections late developed had two principal purposes: to link Bolivia with foreign markets (Antofagasta-Oruro Railway [1892]; Railroad Arica-La Paz Railway [1913]) or to

² República de Bolivia. Desmembraciones territoriales. Available in: <http://www.mappersy.com/Alleged-territorial-losses-of-Bolivia-Map> (Consultation date: 24/06/2020).

promote the integration of its internal markets (Villazón-Tupiza-Atocha Railway [1925], connected to the North Central Railway of Argentina), rather than being associated with a policy aimed to promote foreign immigration and colonization³.



In this map of the “Norte Grande,” it is possible to see the territorial configuration before the War of the Pacific and the international railways constructed (Antofagasta-Oruro and Arica-La Paz) and to be built in Bolivia (Villazón-Tupiza-Atocha) by 1913. (Plano general de los ferrocarriles internacionales a Bolivia y líneas de navegación por el Pacífico. In Decombe Echazarreta. *Historia del Ferrocarril de Arica a la Paz*, Santiago: Ministerio de Industria i Obras Públicas, 1913. P. 130).

All these factors explain why during the first decades of the 20th

³ Contreras, 2017. P 322 and 325.

Century, despite all the official efforts⁴ made to attract “healthy and useful” immigration⁵, Bolivia received very few European immigrants. According to the 1900 census, 1,816,271 people lived in Bolivia, and 7,425 (0.4%) were foreigners coming from different parts of the world; only 1864 (0.1%) of them were Europeans. Fifty years later, the 1950 census showed a 3,019,031 population, of whom 35,471 (1.1%) were foreigners and 9,784 Europeans (0.3%). A significant proportion of that foreign population came, in both censuses, from South American neighboring countries⁶.

As we will see in the following section, this fact didn't prevent the ideas of social redemption such as mutualism, socialism, and anarchism -already circulating in the Latin American space since the latest decades of 19th Century- from coming and taking root in Bolivian highlands.

Transnational turn and Latin American anarchism. A map with some gaps

In the case of Latin American anarchism, the transnational turn operated during the last decade has made significant contributions in terms of describing and analyzing the regional dynamics of the libertarian movement. The application of this approach promoted the emergence of new issues, as well as rethinking old problems. What place did these studies give to the Andean Region? And within it, to the anarchism movement developed in and around Bolivia? To answer these questions, we must go a little further back in our historiographical inquiry.

During the last century, anarchism in Latin America has been studied from the perspective of methodological nationalism. Despite

⁴ For example, the Free Immigration Regulations of 1907 and 1926.

⁵ República de Bolivia. Anuario de Leyes y Disposiciones Supremas. La Paz: Litografías e Imprentas Unidas, 1921. P. 751.

⁶ República de Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Estadística y Propaganda Demográfica. Censo general de la población de la República de Bolivia. La Paz: Taller Tipo-Litográfico de José M. Gamarra, 1904. P. 9 and 39; República de Bolivia. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos. Censo Demográfico 1950. La Paz: Editorial “Argote”, 1955. P. 3 and 80-83.

the merit of a wide range of productions⁷, the “blinkers” put on by the narrow framework of the nation-state, ended up distorting its outlook in several ways.

The vast majority of these authors saw only one possible - essentially passive- way of linking between America and Europe, which would have involved the displacement of people and the “importation” of ideas, at a precise moment (the founding moment of anarchism) and in only one direction (from Europe to America). The corollary that derives from all those interpretations is that there would have been no relations between the local libertarian movements. And so, the case of Bolivia, where there was anarchism, but due to its Mediterranean condition few European immigrants, remained as a marginal case in historical terms and difficult to explain in historiographical terms⁸.

A critical reading to the corpus of works written in recent years on Latin American anarchism from a transnational perspective⁹, show us an imbalance between studies related to three areas (the transatlantic, the Caribbean, and the Rioplatense)¹⁰ to the detriment of others, such as the Andean Region. An omission we can summarize in a sentence: the Atlantic Ocean versus the Pacific.

By saying this, we are not relativizing the importance of some studies focused on the last region. But these, we must note, are very few and focus primarily on the Chile-Peru links, based mainly by the activism and solidarity of the maritime workers, which acted under the influence of the International Workers of the World on the two countries' coast¹¹.

Thus, Bolivia still appears as an absent country in the map constructed from these latest investigations. This absence highlights how, in a certain way, the new interpretations end up supporting and reproducing the “historiographical consensus” reached by the na-

⁷ Gómez Müller, 1950 (2009); Nettleau, 1972 and 1975; Viñas, 1983; Cappelletti and Rama, 1990; Cappelletti, 1990; Vitale, 1998.

⁸ Margarucci, 2020, a.

⁹ Hirsch y Van der Walt, 2010; Shaffer y de Laforcade, 2015; Migueláñez, 2018.

¹⁰ Shaffer, 2014.

¹¹ Hirsch, 2010; Savala, 2019.

tion-state centered 20th Century historiography. Despite the discussion and epistemological break down established between methodological nationalism and transnationalism, there are a thematic continuity and geographical predilection among both approaches when they deal with Latin American anarchist past.

In recent years, trying to fill in these gaps, along with Chilean historian Eduardo Godoy Sepúlveda, we have proposed and developed some interpretative lines on the spread of anarchism in Bolivia. In our research, we have focused on the movements of workers and activists produced during the first three decades of the 20th Century around the “Norte Grande.” A cross-border space that includes the northern Chilean region rich in saltpeter, the Argentinian northwest, and the Bolivian highlands (the “altiplano” as known in Spanish).

Bolivia emerges as a quite particular case, where the arrival and dissemination of anarchist ideas occurred in several indirect ways (in opposition to the unique direct way of European immigration considered by historiography), through the routes opened first by the muleteers and later by the railroad tracks. These routes were traveled from two neighboring countries, Chile and Argentina, by “pampinos”¹², miners and peasants (who went and returned, not once, but several times), by activists and by an underworld more typical of literature than of history, inhabited by those vagabond and wandering men -anarchic to the core-, the “crotos” and “linyeras”¹³. □

When enquiring about this circulation, we had to necessarily incorporate into the analysis and give ourselves the task of reconstructing the -until then- unknown relations established by the libertarian movements of those three countries, which not only benefited Bolivian anarchists. As the sources showed to us, they were two-way relations, equally prolific in terms of their impact on all the actors involved in them¹⁴.

¹² Name given to the workers of the saltpeter pampa of northern Chile.

¹³ Seasonal workers who, mounted on the freight trains wagons, traveled through Argentina harvested areas. Родригес Гарсия, 2014. С. 246-265.

¹⁴ Margarucci and Godoy Sepúlveda, 2017, 2018 and 2020; Margarucci, 2020, b.

While much remains to be explored in this area¹⁵, we can venture the following hypothesis. In the Bolivian case, the transnational diffusion and exchange networks were, if not more intense, at least more determinant than in other spaces, to feed the emergence and development of local anarchism. This importance may be explained, as the combined result of several particularities, derived from Bolivia's political and socio-cultural historical process.

First, its geographical confinement and isolation, a feeling that the anarchists themselves made explicit in more than one occasion, as the Bolivian worker Hilario Terán in 1923. Recently arrived in the Argentinian northwest, Terán explained in a letter addressed to the Argentine Regional Workers Federation and *La Protesta* of Buenos Aires, the main difficulties faced by the social movement in his country: ignorance, and international isolation. There, in the main mining centers

the proletarian masses are almost totally unaware of the ideas of social emancipation that are stirring up the rest of the world (...) Just as these producing masses ignore the world, the world ignores them. Bolivia is an unknown country, and that is why I think the international exchange of ideas and relations between us is more necessary¹⁶.

Second, the high levels of state repression combined with a permanent lack freedom press, and the Aymara and Quechua cultures attachment to an essentially oral communicative tradition, limited Bolivian anarchism capacity to edit its propaganda materials, such as books and periodicals, profusely requested during the '20s to Argentine and Chilean libertarian groups¹⁷.

In the same way, the interruption of those transnational diffusion

¹⁵ For instance, start rebuilding the layout of the network that united, between 1920 and 1940, the anarchists of Argentina and Bolivia. As we already know, this network was established in Argentina over the departing railway tracks from Buenos Aires to the main cities of the northwest (Tucumán, Salta, and Jujuy), connected with the Bolivian ones in La Quiaca-Villazón border crossing.

¹⁶ *La Protesta*. Buenos Aires. January 6th, 1923.

¹⁷ Margarucci, 2020, b.

and exchange networks -transitory first during the Chaco War, then definitive (by the end of 1940)- may help to understand, as an explanatory variable among others, the processes of decline and crisis of Bolivian anarchist movement occurred at that time.

However, the aim of this article is not to continue deepening this hypothesis, which we are leaving open for future research. What we intend to analyze here, is how those transnational roots were articulated with the national dimension reached by local anarchists, in a context marked by the debates and disputes meanings around the definition of the Bolivian nation.

As some authors have lately shown, we have to keep in mind that transnationalism doesn't mean to forget the nation-state. It means to adjust our look to several interrelated scales of analysis ranging from local to transnational: the different scenarios of struggles where alternatively anarchists used to move. Furthermore, according to them, if we deepen in the concrete historical process, we shall see that anarchism and national identity weren't incompatible at all¹⁸.

National debates and Bolivian anarchism. From the indigenous question to the Chaco War

During the first decades of the 20th Century, the Bolivian political and intellectual scene seems to be obsessed with searching for and specifying the essential elements of national identity.

“What is Bolivia?”, “Who are the Bolivians?” were the two main questions posed by the white ruling class in La Paz, Bolivia's capital city since the Federal War waged in 1899 by Liberal-Federalist and Conservative-Constitutionalist forces.

In addition to these issues, the debates among intellectuals revolved around another crucial question. “What to do with the Indian/s?” as some scholars posed in late researches¹⁹. The fear underlying this matter was one: the war of races, also recent, as it appeared in the indigenous rebellion led by Pablo Zarate Willka in the context

¹⁸ Bantman and Altena, 2017. See especially in this compilation the article of Davide Turcato.

¹⁹ Irurozqui Victoriano, 1992; Stefanoni, 2010.

of the Federal War²⁰.

The answers to this last question, beyond differences, oscillated between exclusion or incorporation through education. In the decade of 1910, two prominent intellectuals, Alcides Arguedas and Franz Tamayo, participated in a debate “in which they synthesized and defined most controversially the efforts to know, define and normalize the presence of the Indian population in the national community”²¹.

In *Pueblo Enfermo (Sick People)* (1909), Arguedas regretted the lack of European immigration and blamed the indigenous people (described as inferior, ignorant, savage, criminal, and alcoholic races) for Bolivia’s incapacity to reach modern progress. The Indian as the “fatality of the Republic”²². A year later, Tamayo published *Creación de la Pedagogía Nacional (National Pedagogy Creation)* (1910), where through some previous published editorials articles in La Paz newspaper *El Diario*, tried to contest Arguedas’ positivists and Darwinists ideas about natives peoples. There, he denounced their unfair situation, their poverty, and social indignity historically caused by the white ruling class. He highlighted their capacity as a creative labor force, a condition which, in his view, converted them in the depository of national energy. The solution that Tamayo proposed to “regenerate” morally and intellectually all social and racial groups -so that they could carry out the intellectual and manual functions that corresponded to their position-, was based on public instruction. Education should be first administrated between white, then between mestizos (which Tamayo criticized as well as Arguedas), and finally between indigenous people²³.

In either case, ethnic identity was denied, considering it incom-

²⁰ Condarco Morales, 1965.

²¹ Irurozqui, 1992. P. 564.

²² Giller, 2014. P. 8. The different indigenous people version he may presents in *Raza de Bronce (Bronce Race)* (1919) doesn't vary in essence from this first version. Although Arguedas theoretically abandons the previous perspective, denounces the abuses committed by the mestizos against them and promotes their redemption, this new version he presents is an ideal, opposed to a real Indian that he continues to despise from a biological and cultural point of view. See Stefanoni, 2010. P. 9.

²³ Irurozqui, 1992; Giller, 2014. P. 6-10.

patible with the white/creole nation. Although there were nuances, fundamentally, the discourse on these questions did not vary between the period of liberal (1899-1920) -in which this debate took place- and republican (1920-1930) governments²⁴.

While these debates continued, during the decade of 1920, anarchism in La Paz and Oruro, reached its moment of emergence and boom. In September 1923, some activists from the Libertarian Worker Center (Centro Obrero Libertario) founded the Libertarian Group La Antorcha (Grupo Libertario La Antorcha), first anarchist political-cultural. Others came after it: similar discussion and propaganda groups and unions by trade or workplace. In 1927 builders, mechanics and lathe operators, carpenters and tailors, together with the culinary, florists and market vendors “cholas”²⁵, constituted the Local Workers Federation (Federación Obrera Local, FOL) of La Paz, an entity which promoted in 1930 the reorganization of the Labor Workers Federation (Federación Obrera del Trabajo, FOT) of Oruro. Between 1927 and 1932, in those cities, anarchism became a very relevant social and political force²⁶.

How did anarchism reach that relevance? Undoubtedly, due to its participation in artisans, “craft workers” and industrial workers’ urban struggles, in which they demanded salary increases and better working conditions. For having involved in the period of intense conflicts and social mobilization opened by the impact of the world 1930 crisis in Bolivia. But perhaps, this remarkable influence may have been also related to the early intervention of local anarchism -

²⁴ Stefanoni, 2015. P. 47-81.

²⁵ Ximena Soruco defines the chola as an “urban mestizo woman who wears Spanish clothing from the 18th Century, braids and a borsalino hat and therefore differs from the mestizo and creole woman who uses fashionable western clothing”. Their typical dress was a multilayered skirt, which for the elite was a “hegemonic symbol” of a disorganized and contaminated body, in allusion to the alleged lack of hygiene and the pathologies suffered by them. Such were the arguments in the mid-thirties for banning culinary from using trains (a fact that motivated their union organization) or for trying to impose a health card, issued by the Hygiene Police. The unionized cholas, however, appropriated their “polleras” as a symbol of resistance. See Soruco, 2017; Stephenson, 1997; Margarucci, 2015.

²⁶ Margarucci 2018, a and 2020, c.

may be, unwittingly- in that contemporary conjuncture described before. We refer to the contribution made by libertarian activists in the debate on what that Bolivian nation was, expanding its social scope and developing a concept of their own of “inclusive nation”, as opposed to that “exclusive” one proposed by the ruling class²⁷.

To illustrate this aspect, for now, we will concentrate on the following question: how Bolivian anarchists got involved with the “indigenous problem”?

As we have shown in other works, the anarchist movement of La Paz developed solid and lasting links with the indigenous-peasant movement of the altiplano²⁸. From 1924 until the beginning of the Chaco War in 1932, the libertarians of Bolivia’s capital city related to the agrarian conflict in different ways: denouncing and fighting the archaic forms of production and social relations in the countryside, setting up a network of contacts and support for the struggles that the “caciques-apoderados”²⁹ movement was giving at that time

²⁷ In the above-mentioned article, Turcato points out very well the difference between both concepts of the nation: “an inclusive one, based on voluntary identification, solidarity and fuzzed cultural boundaries, and an exclusive one, based, to varying degrees, on fear, coercion, and insurmountable cultural boundaries.” Turcato demonstrates that “an inclusive idea of nation doesn’t clash with anarchism” because both “reject the principle of congruence between nation and state.” See Turcato, 2017. P. 30 and following pages.

²⁸ Margarucci and Maldonado, 2018. See also Lehm and Rivera Cusicanqui, 1988. P. 41-43; THOA, 1986.

²⁹ The “movement of the caciques-apoderados” emerged during the decades of 1910 and 1920, gathering the actions and demands of a new generation of indigenous leaders, empowered by the authorities or the members of the “ayllus” (communities) to act in behalf of them. Their responsibility was to petition the government authorities for three basic issues: schools, citizen equality, and restitution of usurped lands. As Laura Gotkowitz shows, the rights recognition demand was accompanied by another one: the “true incorporation into the Bolivian nationality”. The legal struggle, which also led in some occasions to violent outbursts (for instance, in Jesús de Machaca in 1921 and Chayanta in 1927), made them recourse to the urban world, in search of the services of lawyers and scribes. In some cases, the “caciques-apoderados” asked politicians, intellectuals, and labor organizations to

and spreading the Idea among the natives³⁰.

Luis Cusicanqui Durán, mechanic and lathe operator, propagandist, organizer, link with other fighters, conspirator, persecuted by the law, a truly “foundation stone” of Bolivian anarchism, showed up in this first peasant “rebellious cycle”³¹.

He was a mestizo, but he used to recognize himself as an Indian. He spoke both Spanish and Aymara. He signed his articles in the press, alternatively, by his name or with the pseudonym “Indio Aymara”. From that “chi’xi” (hybrid) mestizo identity as Silvia Rivera accurately defines, he wrote in 1929 “The voice of the Peasant. Our Challenge to the Great Mistes of the State. Who are the only true thieves and criminals of the present day.” A beautiful manifesto, full of hatred and accumulated rage, where he lists and details the multiple abuses suffered by indigenous people yesterday and today, in the colony and the Republic. Cusicanqui speaks of a “Bolivian Indian”, of the sympathy that he awakens among the state and church men, but only from a hypocritical speech, because “behind all of it, our complete disappearance is forged in the heart of civilization, which hand out gallows laws”. The memory of the indigenous resistance, to which he adds the struggle of the libertarian urban artisans, lead him to conclude and “alert” the “Indian brothers of the American race, that spilt blood will be the harbinger of the revolution overthrowing this vile society, cursed a thousand times over”³². Cusicanqui himself used to receive in the city, converse in Aymara, and exchange experiences with the famous cacique apoderado, Santos Marka T’ola.

support their efforts. In this circumstance, a group of caciques converged with the Local Workers Federation. See Gotkowitz, 2007. P. 43-100.

³⁰ Anarchism in La Paz was not alone in its effort. There is concrete evidence of links established between Sucre artisans and urban workers and the indigenous-peasants movement, during the 1927 Chayanta rebellion. There also some clues about propaganda made in the nearby countryside area by activists close to Oruro Labor Workers Federation during 1930. See Stefanoni, 2015. P. 88-100; Margarucci, 2020, c. P. 198-199.

³¹ Rivera Cusicanqui, 1986.

³² Cusicanqui, Luis. *La Voz del Campesino. Nuestro reto a los grandes mistes del Estado*. 1929. Archivo Luis Cusicanqui, Colectivo Chi’xi, La Paz, Bolivia.

As we can see, the anarchists, through their concrete actions and written word, were also participating in the debate of the elites, proposing a redefinition of the limits of the Bolivian nation. A nation that, built not only in the arena of discourse but fundamentally of struggle, included the excluded indigenous people. In the most radicalized visions, which questioned the status quo (the state, the “vile society”), it is worth asking if there was space in it for the white oligarchy. Apparently, not.

If between the decades of 1900 and 1920, the issue of the nation emerges from intellectual debates and anarcho-indigenous struggles, in 1930, it goes hand in hand with the Chaco War. And here, libertarians will play an important role too showing the notion of the Bolivian nation that they rejected.

In Oruro, the Labor Workers Federation pronounced itself on more than one occasion against a war that threatened to be fought against different enemies, both external and internal. Against the Paraguayan forces, but also, against the rebellious worker movement, dangerously influenced by “the communism and the plagues that under this denomination invade the national territory”³³ -as the official newspaper *La Razón* claimed when the Defense Social Law started being discussed by Bolivian deputies in December 1931³⁴.

Days before May 1st, 1932, when the conflict was already an open secret, its directive -despite the criminal proceedings initiated against two of its members accused of treason against the homeland- launched a courageous manifesto entitled “To the people of Bolivia threatened by War.” In this anti-war manifesto, there is an interesting game in the investment proposed by the anarchists about patriotism-antipatriotism, combined with the typical libertarian precepts of internationalism and anti-militarism imbued -like Cusicanqui's Indian manifesto- with a revolutionary horizon:

“They are slandered (...) as anti-patriots [referring to the accused leaders of the FOT] for having cheered to the workers of Paraguay and the whole world, as if they didn't know that the proletariat is internationalist,

³³ *La Razón*. La Paz. December 3rd, 1931.

³⁴ Margarucci, 2018, b.

as exploiting capitalism is also internationalist (...)

Antipatriots are not those who oppose the massacre of peoples and the complete ruin of the country (...). The traitors to the homeland are those who have sold the national territory in tatters (...) the Littoral [to Chile] (...) the Acre to Brazil; those who have finished mortgaging the rest to North America bankers (...). For those, there are no processes or prisons (...). On the contrary, those are the great men, the exemplary patriots (...)

We oppose the war because we have the solemn promise of the workers of Paraguay and all of America that they will never go to war; that to a war declaration by their governments, they will respond with a general insurrection (...) with the Social Revolution: a revolution that, erasing the absurd frontiers of bourgeois selfishness, shall implant in the American Continent the Great Homeland of Equality, Love and Work”³⁵.

The persecution of the activists and destiny of Oruro's FOT constitutes a small sample of what happened to the radicalized labor movement of Bolivia during the war, a victim of the repression and clandestinity that led to its virtual paralysis. Meanwhile, the war will serve as a spur to make emerge with the force of arms, a wider Bolivian nation where it did not exist before.

Put it another way: the “nationalizing effect” and the “critique consciousness” activated between urban and indigenous soldiers in Chaco's shared trenches, the human costs, and the result of the conflict, led in Herbert Klein's words to the “established order dissolution”³⁶. As Rivera points out “the crisis of the oligarchic state was a slow process of dismantling its ideological and moral sustentation”³⁷. Also, the idea of the nation on which it was based. In this

³⁵ La Directiva (Federación Obrera del Trabajo de Oruro). Al pueblo de Bolivia amenazado por la guerra. April 24th, 1932. Archivo privado Trifonio Delgado, La Paz, Bolivia.

³⁶ Klein, 2000. P. 200.

³⁷ Rivera Cusicanqui, 1985. P. 159.

scenario, anarchism will reappear to give new battles, both political and symbolical.

In 1935, the Local Workers Federation of La Paz was reorganized and the Culinary's Union was founded, made up entirely of cholos. This allowed in the following years the organization of trade unions of "recovers" -street and markets vendors, also cholos- and in 1940, the Female Workers Federation (Federación Obrera Femenina, FOF)³⁸. We are not, therefore, facing the disappearance of anarchism in afterwar Bolivia, as the old historiography stated.³⁹ How did the anarchists process the experience of war concerning the issues we have been discussing?

They did not renounce to their internationalist preaching, as we see for example in the May 1st, 1937 manifesto of the Local Workers Federation in which they affirmed that "the path undertaken by the workers of this Local Workers Federation is precisely to continue the work of the martyrs of the tragedy of Illinois", they remembered the figure of Kurt Wilckens from Argentina and highlighted the "example of heroic Spain"⁴⁰. Nor to antimilitarism.

They combined this discourse, with some suggestive reflections on the participation of the proletarian class in the war as a source of social and political rights.

Luis Cusicanqui, in an unfinished manifesto addressed to the constructor workers (a guild of fundamentally indigenous composition) between 1937 and 1938, denounced the "contempt" shown by the oligarchy towards the workers despite them having gone to war

without protesting (...) without asking what is your homeland, why do you die? If you have victories won with blood and sacrifice that belongs to the "galoneados" [distinguished] gentlemen (...) as they abandoned you in the war, also in times of peace they abandon you in the jobs.

Cusicanqui warned a sad irony: "the lazy, those incapable from

³⁸ Margarucci, 2015.

³⁹ Lora, 1970 and 1980.

⁴⁰ Federación Obrera Local. Manifiesto de la Federación Obrera Local. 1886 -1° de Mayo-1937. 1937. In Lehm and Rivera, 1988. P. 66.

the office, those leeches who can't even fit a brick are awarded [with] diplomas (...) the same as those who ran from the Chaco are given honors [and] decorated” while “the true ones who defended the homeland [lie] in the fields of the Chaco (...) forever and their bones bloom like a field of daisies demonstrating to future generations the beauties of War”⁴¹.

Another example of this discourse appears in mid-1938, when the street vendors mobilized against the threat of eviction from their workplaces, finding firm support in the Local Workers Federation. A newspaper of the time covered one of those mobilizations, calling it “the proletarian parliament of the most extreme transcendence.” The press stressed that the cholos “speakers spoke in Aymara, Quechua, and Spanish” and recovered an important speech, in which appears the same idea of Cusicanqui's last manifesto, justifying inclusion in the nation through a class discourse anchored in the worker's effort during the war:

What are we, Chinese or Turkish? Aren't we Bolivian? Haven't our sons and husbands burst like toads in the Chaco, now that they want to take us the bread out of our mouths? Down with the privileged wealthy! We want the street, we need the conquest of the street (...)
Is it a shame for the city that the poor sell in the streets?⁴²

This unknown woman referred to what she and others had lost - their male sons and husbands- during the recent tragic war. But also, because of that participation, her powerful voice teaches us that she and others had gained plenty. The right to be and work in the streets, and above all, the right to be called and treated after all as Bolivian citizens.

Libertarian feminist unions, gathered in a unique federation, gave their members the chance to verbalize their strong will to be included in that old exclusive nation that once belonged to the privileged wealthy. The same nation which in the heat of the occurred transformations, began to fall apart along with the oligarchic order. And

⁴¹ Cusicanqui, Luis. *El Andamio*. In Lehm and Rivera, 1988. P. 68.

⁴² *La Calle*, La Paz. August 10th, 1938.

what is more important, those unions -feminine but also masculine-provided working class the tools to do all that, by itself.

Some preliminary conclusions and questions

Despite its transnational roots and internationalist discourse, anarchism in Bolivia was not unaware of what was happening around it. Local anarchists weren't alien to the debates and the transformations that, by the time of its configuration as a movement, took place regarding a very sensitive subject: the definition of the Bolivian nation. An issue that, as we tried to demonstrate in this article, was a field in dispute for the configuration of racial identities and the consequent ethnic, political, and social exclusion or inclusion. Libertarians could not be oblivious to this, because they and the great mass of the Bolivian population were discriminated against in all these areas, for speaking like an "indio" or dressing like a chola.

In other opportunities, we have argued that anarchist ideology rooted in Bolivia among different "oppressed" social groups - artisans, craft workers, urban and mining workers, cholas women, and indigenous peoples-, whose identity was forged in the complex intersection of the class, ethnicity, and gender.

After analyzing the praxis and discourse of the anarchists of Bolivia between the 20' and 30' regarding the indigenous "problem", the Chaco War and the immediate post-war context, we also discover that they were far from posing their interventions in terms of a statist and nationalist idea of the nation. Unlike other expressions of the lefts or the emerging nationalism that would eventually triumph in the 1952 Revolution, they didn't use notions of homeland or "Bolivianidad" (the "Boliviality") as the basis for constructing their actions and arguments. At this point, it would be interesting to ask ourselves if Bolivian anarchists, especially after the Chaco War, did not end up outlining and defending what we a priori can call a "plebeian national identity".

An identity, not tied to statehood strings, not willing to renounce to transnational commitments and internationalist ideals, not engaged with the old and new right or left-wing versions of nationalism, but decided to change the present and the future of those vast

majorities -urban workers and indigenous people, anonymous men and woman- that for years and years felt, because they indeed were, foreigners in their own country.

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