

Hands Raised Up: Corruption, Power, and Context in Bolivian Mormonism

David Clark Knowlton

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a strong authority structure. Power seemingly originates at the center of the Church, with the prophet and apostles, and radiates outward from there.¹ This system of authority developed in the context of the Church's efforts to colonize the U.S. Intermountain West, in its struggles with the U.S. federal government, and in its shift from a village to a suburban faith.² Now this system must take account of its growth in many countries.

Although the system has been carefully reorganized to manage an international religious organization and associated business interests, when the Church leaves the boundaries of its homeland it enters different socio-historical contexts. There its forms and procedures take on a different relevance and reality, some intended and some unintended. As a result, one must observe and theorize how the organization takes motive, purpose, and even form from the varied contexts in which it operates. It is not enough, when one attempts to understand Mormonism in other societies, to simply take account of the formalities of Church structure. One must also see how local context is created and provided by the Church's existence in local societies, its local thinking about them, and about the Church. But this project is not simple, in part because of the way Mormonism understands itself.

Prelude: Form and Content

The LDS Church struggles to impose not only form, but also content, as it builds its authority structure around the globe. It expects the form and content to follow as a manifestation of people's acceptance of

Mormon principles and as a sign of their faith.³ It expects that people will adopt a “gospel” culture and a “gospel” attitude toward authority and power. For example, Apostle Dallin H. Oaks articulated this general logic in the Church’s general conference after working to manage the Church in the Philippines while residing there:

[The Gospel] requires us to make some changes from our family culture, our ethnic culture, or our national culture. We must change all elements of our behavior that are in conflict with gospel commandments, covenants, and culture . . . I am not contrasting the culture or traditions of one part of the world with another. I am contrasting the Lord’s way with the world’s way—the culture of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the culture or traditions of every nation or people. No group has a monopoly on virtue or an immunity from the commandment to change. . . . We say to all, give up your traditions and cultural practices that are contrary to the commandments of God and the culture of His gospel, and join with His people in building the kingdom of God. There is a unique gospel culture, a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This gospel way of life comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. It is given expression in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives.⁴

Building a universal Church organization and culture is important to Mormon leaders.⁵ But reading Oaks against the grain illustrates that national, ethnic, and family Mormonisms are also developing as the LDS Church interacts with local societies through its members, if through no other medium. That seems to be the point of his warning. Nevertheless, little scholarly work has been done as yet on the international Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and on how, though a transnational organization, it builds local religious structures and organization.⁶

This paper provides one ethnographic example of this more general process by exploring the context in which local LDS leadership was challenged in 2004 in the city of El Alto, Bolivia. To do so will require discussing the conflict in some detail, based on ethnographic fieldwork.⁷ Following the idea of Victor Turner that, in social dramas, one often sees the structure of a society more clearly arrayed than in ordinary circumstances, I hope that this paper will bring better understanding of the mechanics of transnational religious authority and the specifics of how this international structure requires and acquires local contexts.⁸

The Drama: Act One

Just after a public conflict occurred in the ward conference of an active and strong ward in an area of former miners in El Alto, Bolivia, I arrived on June 27, 2004, at the home of central players in the conflict.⁹ I had frequently stayed in this neighborhood over the years and knew these members well. I was also well acquainted with other families in this ward and other wards in the stake. Everyone was talking about the conflict. So, although this was not a situation I was formally researching, I took notes. What follows is based on those notes.

At ward conference, the second counselor in the stake presidency had asked, per standard procedure, for people to lift their hands to manifest support for their bishop. He had been bishop for several years. This time fourteen people, some of them ward leaders, raised their hands against him. The second counselor, I am told, paused in the reading of the names of ward authorities and said in a severe tone, "No member in good standing would ever raise their hands against their [leader's] authority." He further said that members could be excommunicated for doing so. The meeting was put on hold, and each of the fourteen, as well as some who had not raised their hands in opposition, were called one by one into an office to meet with the stake president. He challenged them, people said, about why they lifted their hands in opposition to the bishop. He asked who set them up to do it and suggested there was a plot in the ward against the bishop. He named a particular family in the ward as the authors, precisely the family who was so soon to be my host. In this particular family, the wife had raised her hand in opposition; the husband had not.

Interlude: Making Context

It is unusual for members to lift their hands in opposition during a ward conference, especially such a large number of people. Including children, the congregation that day may have numbered perhaps two hundred. If so, more than 10 percent of the adults raised their hands. Even more strikingly, many of them were senior members of the ward.

Up to this point in our argument, this social drama can be understood completely within standard Mormon terms. However, that afternoon and evening, and during the following days, people could not stop talking about the events. Since I stayed with one of the families that had participated against the bishop, I unwittingly found myself among the op-

position. Inevitably this turn of events colors my presentation, but it did give me a depth of material about those who felt motivated to lift their hands. I have also carefully chosen a theoretical frame to mitigate any bias I might have.

In those conversations, the members present created a context for their actions grounded in the gospel and in the experience and culture of their neighborhood. Over and over people made reference to the role their *villa*, as neighborhoods are often called, had played in the overthrow of the nation's president in October 2003. They mentioned the bullets that flew through their neighborhood, the trenches they dug to stop armored personnel carriers from circulating, the tear gas, and those killed. They spoke about their heritage as miners who had stood up against the Bolivian state on many occasions and how, when miners had marched from rural mines to support the uprising against the president, their neighborhood had received them with communal tables and support. They cited two popular slogans that justified the actions in 2003, "*El Alto de pie, nunca de rodillas*" and "*Sangre de minero, semilla de guerrillero*." The first means "El Alto on its feet, never on its knees," the second: "miner's blood, warrior's (or fighter's) seed."

These members said they had fought to bring down a corrupt governmental regime and must fight against injustice wherever they are. As people talked, their theme of injustice began to focus on corruption and favoritism. They discussed how the central government of Bolivia had been corrupt and celebrated their villa's role in overturning it. They argued strongly for the importance of transparency in governmental affairs. In order for transparency to occur, they held that people had to demand it and stay alert for corruption in order to name it and challenge it. They felt that this responsibility was incumbent on ordinary people.

They argued that the bishop was corrupt and provided much detail of the alleged corruption. It included pocketing tithing funds and inflating ward numbers to get more money from the Church (budget allotments from Church headquarters are based on membership and attendance) which he would then pocket on the basis of false receipts. They said he favored his friends and was actively promoting those friends by giving them benefits. Many people claimed to have personally witnessed these actions and said this was why they had voted against him.

The interesting issue here is not so much the accusation of corruption against the bishop and, as we shall see below, against stake officials.

Unfortunately accusations of corruption are quite common in the Latin American LDS Church, as an anonymous reviewer of this article pointed out. Troublesome though these charges are, the importance of the situation for this paper lies in how Church authority was submitted to the filter of Bolivian political events as the members who narrated the events justified their actions in breaking with the LDS norm and raising their hands against the bishop by casting it as a struggle against corrupt leaders—leaders who, the members felt, violated priesthood covenants. Following the violent events in their community some nine months earlier, the people claimed it was their obligation to stand up against corruption and improper use of authority.

They also argued from Doctrine and Covenants 121 that the bishop had exercised “unrighteous dominion” and, borrowing from the Book of Mormon, “priestcraft.” In Spanish, the parallel term is *superchería sacerdotal*, literally priestly superstition or the worship of priesthood. But the justification for action came not from their reading of LDS scripture alone but from the way they narrated local history. The two bases merged and fed on each other.

The Drama: Act Two

Two days later I was awakened at 6:00 A.M. when someone knocked heavily on the metal gate on the street outside the home of the family whom the stake president accused of organizing the opposition. The dog started barking fiercely and the head of the family went to see who was there.

It was three members of the stake high council, dressed in black slacks and black leather jackets. They were long-time friends of the family and fellow Church workers. The family’s father asked them into the house. Although I stayed in my room, I heard almost everything. They greeted the family members, commented on the weather and on national politics, and then handed them a letter summoning them to a disciplinary council in the stake center scheduled for the following Sunday. The family read the letter, and then invited the high councilors to sit down at the dining room table to have breakfast with the family. I was invited to come to the table as well, where we discussed national political events.

Since the family was scheduled to travel to Lima and would not be in town that Sunday, it mobilized its own networks, including the area leader, Elder Carlos Amado. As a result, the disciplinary council was post-

poned until August. On Sunday, August 15, 2004, the family members appeared before a stake disciplinary council on charges of “conduct unbecoming members” because of the allegations of corruption they had made against their ward bishop and stake presidency.

I was away from La Paz for more than a month but happened to arrive, unknowingly, on the day of the rescheduled council. The father of the family I had stayed with asked me to attend. As part of the council, the stake president told some ten people who had come as witnesses in favor of the family that their testimony was not needed. While the family was in a separate room alone, he said to the gathered witnesses and high council members that the stake presidency knows things the members do not, which he was not at liberty to discuss in order to protect the privacy of the family. He said, “Good members of the Church do not need witnesses.”

Standing before some twenty people in the stake center classroom in a gray suit, white shirt, and tie, the president shook his head with its shock of prematurely gray hair and said, “You come before us to tell us that the xxxx¹⁰ family did not organize opposition to Bishop xxxx of the xxxx ward but we know they did. We know the xxxx [family is] very popular in the ward and that they have performed lots of service to individual members. But we have spoken with members who say they were urged by the[m] to raise their hands against the bishop at the same time the xxxx family made allegations of corruption against us leaders of the Church. You say one thing. The others say something else and we believe them.”

The president stared at one young man, who had closely cropped hair and a pained look in his eyes, and said, “You . . . say that you doubt that the[y] organized any opposition. How can you say that when we know they did? This is not about doubt, it is about knowledge. Can you say you know they did not organize opposition to their leaders?”

“Yes, I can say I know they did not,” the young man said as he raised his head to look the president. He later said in the disciplinary council hearing, “As I told you in our interview, President, I have my own reasons for raising my hand against [the] bishop. . . . That is why I raised my hand. I am not a puppet.”

In response to the question of whether the stake president could stand before the members and the witnesses and affirm that the leadership—he, his counselors, and the bishop—were free of corruption and had never performed corrupt acts, the stake president became angry and refused to answer the question. He said, “The accusations are against [the]

Bishop. I am a Judge in Israel. That is my calling. This is not about the leaders but about whether the xxxx [family] has organized opposition to them.”

Ultimately, after this unusual, and perhaps improper proceeding, the family was disfellowshipped. Subsequently, other members wrote to General and Area Authorities protesting this treatment of the family. Some also wrote, without mentioning the family, to protest the corruption in the stake. Uniformly, they were told to support their leaders and place the issue in the Lord’s hands. After attendance and ward participation declined, the bishop was replaced in 2005. By the end of 2005, the stake presidency was also replaced. In 2006 the family was restored to full fellowship.

Background: Mormonism in Bolivia

Bolivia currently has twenty-two stakes, six in the city of La Paz and its suburb, El Alto. Mormonism entered Bolivia in 1964.¹¹ It had achieved a membership of 137,817 by the end of 2003, according to official Church records, growing since 1995 by 77 percent.¹² However, if Bolivia’s membership is like that of Chile’s and Mexico’s, then only about 20–25 percent of those listed as members (somewhere between 28,000 and 34,000, or about 1,200 to 1,600 per stake) are the committed, active members who operate the Church’s lay authority structure and minister to the rest.¹³

It appears that this core active population of Mormons is committed and passes on that commitment to succeeding generations, according to data published by the Bolivian anthropologist Javier Albó. Eighty-two percent of people born to Mormon households continue to claim LDS membership. In contrast 68 percent of those born into Holiness households, 72.4 percent of those born to undefined non-Catholic households, 76 percent of those born Adventist, 81 percent of those born to families in the historic Protestant denominations, and 88.9 percent of Pentecostals remain with their faith.¹⁴

These numbers indicate the strong hold that new Latin American religions have achieved. Mormonism seems particularly strong. This finding, significantly, suggests that concepts of Mormon hierarchy are not an easily abandoned religious philosophy but have probably sunk deep roots into the hearts and souls of those who strongly affirm a Mormon identity. It also means that it would be highly unlikely for Bolivian members in this

committed group to openly express or proclaim controversies that arise within their religious world unless they felt strongly motivated to do so. Protest over controversies would require a religious motivation as well as a motivation in harmony with the social context. It would indeed require unusual circumstances and a strong feeling of rightness for them to speak out against Mormon leaders. The uprisings and violent repressions of 2003 that led to the overthrow of the nation's government provided such conditions.

The people who challenged the bishop and stake president did not see their actions as contrary to their religious devotion. Although they consciously drew from local history, they also nested those actions in religious devotion. They saw it as their role to challenge what they saw as bad local leadership to encourage the upper-level Church authorities to take action. As a result, they did not see their activities as conduct unbecoming members, as the stake president charged, but as necessary acts of faith and devotion to the gospel.

Analysis: Three Issues of Authority

The conflict we are exploring calls attention to at least three deeply resonant concepts of authority. Each connects Church processes in various ways with Bolivian reality. One sees conflicts as struggles between self-interested factions. The second recognizes the right of people at the base of social organizations to oversee and correct the performance of their leaders. The third argues that power relationships in the Church should proceed from the top down. This last concept did not afford any way to publicly and legitimately ventilate the claims of corruption and assess their validity. As we shall see, these concepts of authority have a rich ethnographic basis in Mormon and Bolivian society and experience. These concepts deepen the local context of Mormon action and religiosity.

One: The Logic of Factionalism

In the stake president's interviews with members following their opposition to the bishop, the stake president relied on a logic of authority that has deep resonances within the Bolivian world, factionalism. This concept appears to be the basis for the disciplinary council against a single family, one in which only the wife actually raised her hand in opposition;

the husband did not. To my knowledge, none of the other members who raised their hands were subjected to Church discipline.

The family singled out was susceptible to claims of factionalism because of their sociological status in the villa, ward, and stake. The husband, the son of a miner, grew up in the mining camp of Huanuni. He is also a long-time member of the Church, a returned missionary, and a former high councilor. At the time he was a temple worker and a popular Gospel Doctrine class teacher for the young adults. Furthermore, he is a college graduate. His wife, also college educated, holds a lucrative job in the city. Due to an accident, the husband stays home, cares for the house, engages in neighborhood politics, and works to help his wife's business. The wife, also a long-time member, was a popular Young Women's stake leader. Although born in the country's south, she is from an Aymara family—the majority population of El Alto—and grew up in La Paz. Their home is a hive of social contacts.

The family stands out in the ward and stake, then, for many reasons. Its members are professionals in a hard-scrabble, working-class neighborhood with high levels of poverty and unemployment. They are widely respected within the neighborhood, and particularly the ward, for their civic involvement and for their concern for local people. They are deeply connected with both the miners and Aymara populations of the neighborhood, as well as with Bolivia's secular, professional elite. Many of their neighbors, especially members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, visit them frequently. Their family home evenings on Monday nights almost always have invited, and sometimes surprise, guests who join in the singing of hymns, the gospel discussion, and the sharing of refreshments. Furthermore many people call them first, before seeking Church leaders, when someone is hospitalized suddenly or has some other crisis. They are respected in the ward and community.

In other words, they have a base of power in the respect that people have for them and in their class position; this respect exceeds that of the bishop at the time of the incident, a former miner employed as a janitor for the Church. They have been in the Church as long as anyone there; they are well educated and reasonably well off financially, yet they do not depend on the Church for income. They are better connected in Bolivian society than most of the stake leaders, but they are less integrated into the patronage system of the stake—that is, the network of connections and mutual support that appears to lead to callings and to rising in the hierar-

chy. However, they are very well connected in the broader society of regional Mormonism.

In response to the focus on this family, many people in the area, both members and others, saw the stake presidency as a faction, built from a set of interrelated families who were not from La Paz or the mining community. They claimed that these families formed a *logia tupiceña*, a “mafia” from the southern Bolivian town of Tupiza. For more than twenty years, my interviewees claimed, this interrelated set of families had controlled the stake and had drawn a group of bishops and stake leaders into their domain by providing access to goods and wealth. It has been argued that they have treated the Church as a basis for personalism—the practice of personal ties taking precedence over formal procedure—and prebendalism—using political office for personal exploitation and gain to finance loyal supporters.¹⁵ Many in the group are Church employees and, people say, consequently receive salaries far above the going rate for people of their educational level in the country. The Church was an important base for the social mobility of this group whether its members were corrupt and prebendal or not. This dependency on the Church for economic success gave plausibility to all the claims that circulated about their other activities, as did statements that the stake president and colleagues made about their wealth vis-à-vis the bulk of the poor members in El Alto. The stake president was reported to have said that Church leaders received material blessings because of their obedience to Church authority. Many saw this statement as an attempt to sanctify a very Bolivian logic of self-interest and prebendalism under the guise of a very Mormon theology of prosperity—that is, that blessings flow to the righteous.

That factionalism should underlie both sides’ understandings of the logic and motives of the other is ironic, given that the manifest question was one of obedience to Church authority or legitimacy of Church authority. Though the family and the stake presidency are situated differently in local society in ways that make both susceptible to be considered factions caught in struggle, the claim of each side in justifying itself was, as we have seen, to following the gospel and to legitimacy in using contemporary Bolivian concerns. Arguments about factionalism were attempts to take away the legitimacy of opponents.

The conflict had not emerged overnight in June. Rather, there was a history of disagreements involving the family and the stake authorities. In March 2004, the wife, then the stake Young Women’s president, had

been called to a disciplinary council for publicly accusing the stake presidency of corruption. She had questioned the budget disbursement by the stake in a stake meeting. Whenever the Young Women asked for money to carry out activities, they would almost always be told there was no budget. She found out from an area authority that the total budget for the Young Women was some 6,000\$Bs, about 700\$US. "But none of that money ever flowed into the organization," she said. She further claimed that the funds for the Young Women were spent improperly on personal interests of the stake presidency, rather than on the Young Women. A former journalist and well connected, she had become aware of the many accusations circulating about the stake presidency's misuse of funds and power to enrich themselves. As a result, in exasperation she claimed, she said, "The leaders are corrupt."

After being called before the stake presidency to answer for this statement, she was denied the sacrament for two months. By June 2004 that issue had been resolved, however, and she was back in good standing.

The argument of factionalism against the stake presidency stems from observation by many people in the stake that a group of interrelated families seemed to have had a lock on stake authority for years. Despite concern at the local level that others should also be allowed a chance to exercise stake leadership, external Church leaders seemed to support this group of outsiders who had migrated to El Alto and assumed Church authority over the Alteños (the people of El Alto). Since 1985, when I first came into the area while doing doctoral work, I have heard complaints from many people about this set of leaders and their methods of exercising Church authority. Nevertheless, in 2004, these concerns escalated from mere complaints to concrete action against the bishop and stake presidency because of political events in Bolivia.

Factionalism runs deep in Bolivian society and is the counterpart of prebendalism and personalism. The idea that secular, political affairs develop from the struggle of factions, with their representative leaders obtaining prebends to finance their networks of supporters, is a strong one. This notion was part of the accusation against the Bolivian president, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, that led him to resign and flee the country. He tried to label his opposition as driven by the factionalist interests of outsiders, particularly on the radical political left, but was not convincing. A claim of factionalism is a way of attempting to dismiss the action of

mass movements, instead displacing the focus toward individuals and factional leaders.

Furthermore, in 2004 factions in many parts of the country used arguments of corruption to challenge the leadership of entrenched elites. This challenge took its most violent form in actions against several mayors in rural municipalities. In the case of Ayoayo, opponents of the mayor accused him according to claims of Indian law and community justice.¹⁶ He was sentenced to death and burned alive. Then, as a means of challenging the claims of the mayor's opposition, the national press argued that a *faction* had abused Indian justice and national law by submitting the mayor to capital punishment.

I was doing formal fieldwork in Copacabana in early June 2004 when I went to La Paz and found this crisis in the stake. In Copacabana, a group of townsmen rose up against the mayor who, they argued, was corrupt and represented a mafia that had taken over the municipal organization.¹⁷ They accused him of depending on an abusive group of rural supporters to keep him in power. When challenged, these supporters marched into town and threatened the townsmen with violence unless they acquiesced to the mayor. When the townsmen, in turn, threatened to kill the mayor, he was saved only by the intervention of the Bolivian marines.

Factionalism in Bolivia depends on a fragmented social order built on relationships to elites for power and benefits. But the term can also be an accusation to deny legitimacy to one's opponents. This usage was intended to deny legitimacy on both sides of our drama, although draped by the two sides in a different quilt patched together from both Bolivian and gospel arguments.

Two: The Logic of Vigilance from Below

As we have seen, people in this ward and stake in El Alto, Bolivia drew not only on Latter-day Saint scriptural and official logics to understand the crisis and decide on courses of actions, but they also relied on understandings drawn from their Bolivian experience. These latter emphasized the social and moral responsibility of the social base to exercise oversight over authority. As a result, at the same time that they challenged Bolivian discourses of authoritarianism, personalism, and prebendalism, the people's commitment to exercise oversight on officials' use of authority stemmed, as they openly claimed, directly from recent political experi-

ence. But that experience is also important because, as García Linera observed, facing lethal force and overcoming it strengthened people against the ordinary fear that underlies traditional relations of power in Bolivia.¹⁸

In September and October of 2003, Bolivia underwent one of the most significant crises in its entire history, one which transformed the feeling of political possibilities in the face of power. Although it impacted the entire country, the crisis depended on the active mobilization of El Alto's population.¹⁹ Within that area, some of the strongest conflicts and greatest degree of mobilization were in the neighborhood covered by the ward under consideration here. Because of protest and resistance by people in El Alto, the nation's president, Gonzalo ("Goni") Sánchez de Losada, was forced to flee the country and resign the presidency in October 2003.

Sánchez was caught between the demands of the multilateral lending agencies, which sustained him and his administration of technocrats, and the social movements that were rising on the basis of the Indian movements, the labor unions (including the miners), and the neighborhood associations. These latter made a strong critique of Goni's government. They challenged its authoritarianism, its resistance to the demands of the common people, its implementation of the will of the international sector (symbolized by the United States), and its human rights violations, particularly the use of violence and repression against citizen's groups, to stay in power. They argued that power comes from the people and that government's responsibility is to consult with and carry out the will of the people. When it loses that legitimacy, they claim the right to mobilize against it and force change.

Social movements became central political actors in Bolivia during the years of neoliberalism, between the mid-1980s and the present.²⁰ The country has found itself in a situation where pressure on the government by social mobilizations, strikes, marches, the blockading of roads, etc., leads to negotiation and changes in government policy. In many ways, social movements have become an arm of the country's system of government. If nothing else, they have opened a way for people to make their voices manifest beyond the simple system of elections, occasional consultations, and polls. They give importance to pressure from below, and the public becomes a direct voice in government and not just a voice represented.

Although Goni's administration justified itself in terms of bureau-

cratic efficiency and professional ethics, as well as claiming to be a movement against corruption, it was widely felt that the regime continued the old order of personalism, the building of political coalitions through the giving of prebends, and corruption—in the sense that individuals could take personal advantage of political office. After Goni left, substantial reports were published in the press about the many millions of dollars Goni and his followers allegedly took from this impoverished country where many people survive on two dollars a day.²¹ The neoliberal discourses of modernization and development that Goni promoted were subsequently skeptically received as a kind of disguise for business and exploitation as usual. Many concluded that neoliberal regimes can function only with the severe repression of ordinary people. Equally significantly, this episode led to a general critique and suspicion of authoritarian discourses, such as those arguing for trust and faith in leaders and their authority.

In response to Goni, the movements proposed a kind of representative government in which the government was not the maker of decisions but primarily the implementer of decisions taken by the people as a whole. This latter idea was important because part of the criticism of the central government was that it merely implemented and administered policies and decisions made by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the U.S. government. Authority delegated from international political or economic entities became suspect in contrast to power from the people. Sovereignty, not of the government, but of the people, became an issue, and the government as the people's representative became an ideal to many people. Throughout the country, governments and business organizations were suddenly evaluated according to norms of transparency. Accusations of corruption and questions about representation became standard ways of questioning the legitimacy of political leaders and authorities.²²

The neighborhood of the ward under consideration here contains primarily miners and their families. The miners were relocated to the cities after the economic collapse of the government-owned mining corporation (COMIBOL) following the imposition of neoliberal reforms in the eighties. Despite their new class position and new lives, this population retains strong historical memories of the mid-twentieth-century miners' movement's radicalism. At that time, miners were probably the most significant political force in the country and one generally resisted by U.S. interests.²³ This memory was drawn on openly during 2003, along with a

memory of Indian community, in both the collective mobilization, the solidarity given to contemporary miners who marched from camps far outside of La Paz, and the collective tables or *apthapis* (in which pooled resources fed locals and visitors during the crisis). Furthermore, the experience of facing bullets and tear gas led the people of this neighborhood, along with many others in El Alto, to claim the historical right and obligation to question structures of exploitation.²⁴ If their heritage was, as they felt, the historic struggle of the working class, then they should continue that struggle against authoritarianism and domination wherever they found it.

This changed sense of possibility has transformed much of social life and process in El Alto. It recently forced Bolivian President Carlos Meza to recognize the will of the people rather than that of the multinational water company or the multinational petroleum companies. Feeling himself caught between the social movements and the autonomy movement of lowland Bolivia, Meza resigned in June 2005. The head of the nation's Supreme Court, Eduardo Rodríguez, thereafter assumed the nation's presidency in preparation for national elections. The winner was Evo Morales, not only the first Indian president of an American nation but the first in Bolivian history to be elected by a majority of greater than 50 percent. Never before in Bolivian democratic history has a candidate for president won with more than half the votes. Now, under Morales, the social movements continue to be a vanguard in the struggle over the privatization or nationalization of water utilities and the nation's petroleum resources. Their pressure has changed the political field in which the current president operates and requires that he take them into account. They promise to be an important force in Bolivia's politics for some time to come.

Thus, as the clouds of tear gas lifted and the trenches filled that had been dug to stop the advance of armored personnel carriers in late 2003, El Alto settled into a more ordinary existence. Nevertheless people discussed their contribution to the events of October 2003, related those events to their miner heritage, and discussed the impact that experience would have on their lives. They were justifiably proud of the pivotal role they had played. They came to see El Alto as a central player in national affairs and, furthermore, as a kind of conscience and watchdog of the nation.

This newfound pride and power were manifested in the aforemen-

tioned slogans: *El Alto de pie, nunca de rodillas* (El Alto on its feet, never on its knees), and *sangre de minero, semilla de guerrillero* (miner's blood, warrior's seed). Given the feeling, memory, and experience behind these slogans, it is not surprising that Mormons in El Alto voiced similar sentiments about Mormon leadership and the management of LDS property and congregations in what they felt to be an act of religious obligation.

Three: The Logic of Authority in Mormonism

Mormonism emphasizes the delegation of power from the top. This emphasis symbolizes the authority to act in the name of God and stresses that the centralized authority embodied in the General Authorities represents God.²⁵ In contrast, the allocation of power from the bottom to the top, from the many to the one, is generally considered untenable in Mormonism, since the Church views itself as a restoration by God of proper Christianity, rather than as a church of the people.²⁶ Mormon central leadership sees itself as sanctioned by its proximity to God and as authorized to act in his name. This idea leads to a sanctification of the leadership structure itself as an argument for Mormonism's religious validity and, therefore, "truthfulness." Nevertheless, as in the case of all power or authority, its functioning depends socially on the acceptance of its legitimacy by local members of the Church. The Church may wish not to recognize allocation of power by the grass roots; but without some form of such allocation, the Church would effectively cease to exist. People have to agree to a group's power for the group to function. The group may obtain independent bases of power that allow it to impose itself on people, but that does not change the fundamentally relational nature of power by which people agree to accept its claims and acquiesce to it.

As a result, Mormonism lives in tension between its insistent claim to divine authority, grounded in a structure of revelation to prophets and apostles who guide the Church in the Lord's name, and its reality as a social organization that requires people to accept its claims and allocate power to it. Instead of seeing this act as part of the creation of the power of prophets and apostles, Mormons tend to see it as a moral act, i.e., obedience and acceptance of "the Lord's way." As such it becomes labeled as submission to the will of God, rather than as an act of giving power to a social organization. The reality of allocation from the base to the center, then, disappears from view in a Mormon understanding of power and authority, obscured by the idea of power coming solely from God and the

importance granted to its acceptance. Other kinds of power, such as when someone feels authorized to disagree with the Church, are therefore marginalized as coming from Satan and as questions, not of personal views or a social organization, but as an attack on God's sacred authority and as a rejection of God's will. The self is generally not seen as a very stable or useful basis of organizational power.²⁷ Allocation is necessarily invisible and generally unspoken, except in the narrow frames allowed by this structure.

In its corporate structure—control over Church property and resources held by the Quorum of the First Presidency, control over the naming of leaders, and control over finances and independent wealth from business investments—the Church has built a structure that favors the ideology of delegation of power from the top. Its social organization and its independent, legally protected base of power support the idea that power comes from a pinnacle that represents God. Individuals have little independent power, other than that of acquiescence, despite the fact the Church would cease to exist if people quit acceding to its power demands.

This basic theological stance and the social structuring of authority are further instilled within Mormon religious practice. Members are regularly encouraged to “support” and “sustain” their leaders. The image of “support” recognizes and makes real for members the Church's divine sanction. Members regularly lift their hands in public to affirm their support of the Church's leadership. Members must give satisfactory answers about their support to gain entrance into LDS temples. Acquiescence moves here from a passive acceptance to an active affirmation that is manifested in key symbols like “priesthood,” “support,” “prophet,” “leadership,” and “authority.”²⁸ This movement is an important spiritual and religious act, consonant with the general Mormon emphasis on action and activity. It becomes one of the markers by which Mormons evaluate their own and others' “righteousness” and “spirituality.”²⁹

As a result, members are expected to demonstrate in their hearts, minds, and bodies acceptance, deference, and obedience to authority.³⁰ In this very lay Church, all worthy men hold the priesthood and expect to have a specifiable line of authority stretching from Jesus to them. The order and direction of authority are important and organize the Church and much of Mormon life. Within Mormonism, authority becomes one of the major markers of status, and people learn to recognize it and perform it appropriately through the use of titles and language, as well as appropriate

body stances.³¹ As a major aspect of Mormon life, it is hard for authority to be emphasized too strongly.

Nevertheless, the required acquiescence of members to Church hierarchy is not always forthcoming. Despite the emphasis on obedience by Mormon hierarchy and its instantiation in Mormon practice, there is real diversity among Latter-day Saints.³² Individuals vary about when they see the concept of “support” as the best way to shape their response to a leader’s actions and words, and they also vary on what “support” entails in particular circumstances. They likewise vary by the broader philosophies and practices of power they use to make sense of their Mormon world. As a result, LDS authority can be the subject of other discourses and other readings, as people attempt to understand and evaluate Church leadership within their own, including locally dominant, frames of reference.³³ Mormonism does not exist in isolation, either as an organization or within the lives of its members. Because of this fact, the function of Mormonism at local levels depends on that context. Church authority and leadership acquire, by this means, a connection with local understandings of how power and leadership should operate. Sometimes that connection enables the system to operate as the elite would prefer; and at other times, it leads to tension, argument, and even social drama.³⁴

Mormon authority moves within local sociopolitical structures that either support it or enter into tension with it. Although it operates within the specific sphere envisioned by Mormon theology and the space given to religion within society, the general understandings of authority that typify secular society also influence this religious sphere. Despite the different domains of government and politics on one hand and of religion on the other, the ideas, understandings, expectations, patterns, and histories of leadership play with and against each other. One example of these mutual influences is the way Mormon leaders speak about the political system within Church meetings.

Mormon leaders in Bolivia frequently contrast the secular system with what they call “the Lord’s way.” Part of this comparison juxtaposes the concept that the Church’s authority comes from God against the constant struggle for power and its maintenance in the Bolivian political system. LDS leaders contrast the Church, with its focus on sacrifice, service, respect for divine authority, and stable trustworthy processes, with a Bolivian system of personalism, prebendalism, corruption, venality, constant struggle, etc. The experience of people in Bolivian politics, with its con-

stant strikes, arguments, blockades, military actions, and accusations of corruption versus their experience in wards and stakes should give them a “testimony” of the sacredness of the latter. Indeed, its difference from Bolivia is argued to be a proof of Mormonism’s divine sanction.

This frequent comparison results in an ongoing dialogue between local processes and Mormon structures through the actions and discussions of local leaders and members. Generally, as we have seen, this dialogue affirms Mormonism’s authority structure if the person wishes to see himself or herself, and be seen by others, as a righteous, active Mormon. Sometimes, however, it can call into question Mormon understandings of leadership. Mormon authority can be challenged when popular democracy becomes important locally, as it did in Bolivia’s increasingly prominent social movements, and when members discern that Church leaders function more like the political leaders the movements contest than the spiritual leaders they claim to be.

Conclusion: Universalism Needs Local Context

The stake presidency in this incident no longer hold their previous positions, nor does the bishop. They have been replaced. The disfellowshipped family is now back in full fellowship. This crisis is over. Nevertheless, this social drama illustrates how Mormonism can operate in the context of local areas. As a social drama, the issues show fissures in a stark clarity not often found in ordinary life.

The social reality of El Alto and its role, amid violent repression, in overturning the national presidency of Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada arguably made possible a break with existing practices of Mormon authority. People broke with deeply established convention and raised their hands against the bishop in ward conference. The secular events, as processed in the minds of members, offered a justification for challenging a deeply engrained logic of delegation of power from above. These members argued, borrowing also from LDS scripture, for the allocation of power from below and for the important role of the base in guaranteeing the proper functioning of institutions that have been captured by corrupt elites. They saw themselves acting to preserve religious authority by using religious and secular arguments for allocation over delegation.

The stake presidency and previous holders of those offices had often used Bolivian society and politics as the Other that contrasted with the Lord’s way. They claimed legitimacy for themselves as the Lord’s

anointed on the basis of power delegated from the central Church and, ultimately, from God. They claimed that opposition to the bishop and themselves was due to a single family and their followers, whom they depicted as a faction. For their part, the opposition claimed that the stake presidency was a venal faction that exploited the Church for personal gain and to build networks of supporters. Such logic is deeply embedded in Bolivian society and politics, especially in the antecedent events of 2003.

Though crises such as the one described above offer particularly sharp illustrations, Mormonism does not draw on local context just in moments of crisis and social drama. Rather the larger background of this case illustrates how deeply the structure of Mormon authority is engaged with Bolivian society. Even though the Church hopes to give form and content to its authority structure, neither form nor content is very meaningful without local context to interpret it. In this sense Mormonism is deeply syncretic; its attempted global universalism of the gospel depends inevitably on local understandings and practices to function. But to fully understand this syncretism, we need many more studies from places around the globe where local Mormonisms are being born.

Notes

1. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books 1994), and his *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997). There is a need for a careful and thorough analysis of how LDS power operates, but such is not the purpose of this paper.

2. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

3. This point develops from thinking through Douglas Davies's *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), and from meditation on the writings of such LDS General Authorities as Dallin H. Oaks's October 2003 general conference address, "Repentance and Change," on culture and the gospel, <http://www.lds.org/conference/talk/display/0,5232,49-1-401-12,00.html> (accessed May 5, 2005).

4. Oaks, "Repentance and Change."

5. The Mormon insistence on universalism is just one of many attempts to create or impose the universal in this globalized world. As such, it conflicts with attempts to maintain or create the particular, the local, and the nonuniversal.

6. For Mormonism in Latin America, see F. Lamond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987); Marcus Martins, “The Oak Tree Revisited: Brazilian LDS Leaders’ Insights on the Growth of the Church in Brazil” (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1996); and Mark Grover, “The LDS Church in Latin America: A Bibliography,” compiled March 2002, <http://www.lib.byu.edu/departs/hum/markweb/LDSchurchinla.htm> (accessed May 5, 2005).

7. I was in Bolivia in 2004 to research the intersection of neoliberalism and rural workers. Portions of that research are reported in David Knowlton, “Queremos hablar: El bloqueo de junio de 2004 en Copacabana como ejemplo de la sociología de movilizaciones masivas,” in *Conflictos políticos y movimientos sociales en Bolivia*, edited by Nicholas A. Robbins (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural Editores, 2006), 19–32. The crisis broke out in the LDS ward while I was in La Paz. I started taking field notes and interviewed as many of the participants as I could. I returned to Bolivia with self funding to fulfill an obligation to the rural school of Huacuyo and again happened to be in La Paz for the court held against the family mentioned here. Again I conducted interviews and kept notes until I had to return to the United States. This was not a planned project but research in which I observed what happened and tried to gather as much information as possible. The critique of Church leaders and the relationship to secular social change and miners’ history is from the people of the area. The theoretical framework in which it is placed is mine. One caveat: Despite my efforts to interview both supporters and opponents of the factions in this crisis, I was not able to interview the bishop and had only a brief conversation with the stake president; I did, however, interview supporters of their position.

8. See Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1994); and for a discussion of issues with global Pentecostalism, see David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (London: Blackwell, 2001). See also Victor Turner, “Social Dramas as Ritual Metaphors” in his *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 23–59.

9. El Alto has two stakes and numerous wards. The editor of this special series on international Mormonism asked me to veil as much as possible the location of this drama and the identities of the actors, given the ethically troublesome nature of the accusations of corruption. Although this was a public drama, well known to many Church members in the area, I have tried to do so to the degree possible without negating the way that the specific location was important for the formation of context.

10. Given the sensitivity of this situation, the series editors asked me

not only to veil the identities of these people but to avoid the use of pseudonyms. This makes for a bit of stylistic awkwardness, but has merit.

11. *Deseret News 2005 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2004), 278.

12. Calculation mine, based on figures in the biennial *Church Almanacs*.

13. David Clark Knowlton, "How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Chile and Mexico," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 53–78.

14. Xavier Albó, *Una casa común para todos: Iglesias, ecumenismo, y desarrollo en Bolivia* (La Paz, Bolivia: CIPCA, 2002), 73, Chart 3.5C.

15. See "prebendalism," *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prebendalism> (accessed September 18, 2006).

16. See David Clark Knowlton, "Indigenous Law, National Law, and Multilateral Institutions: The Problem of the Assassination of Mayors in Bolivia," in *Law, Justice, and Civic Virtue: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Utah Valley State College Conference by the Faculty*, edited by David Keller (Orem, Utah: Center for the Study of Ethics, Utah Valley State College, 2005), 91–102.

17. David Clark Knowlton, "Rechazo del alcalde y bloqueos de caminos: Notas de Copacabana para analizar el problema de las municipalidades" (Rejection of the Mayor and Roadblocks: Notes from Copacabana toward an Analysis of the Problem of the Municipalities), Paper presented at the Association of Bolivian Studies Third International Conference, February 2005.

18. Álvaro García Linera, Raúl Prada, and Luis Tapia, eds., *Memorias de Octubre* (La Paz, Bolivia: Muela del Diablo Editores, 2004).

19. This important conflict is becoming part of the literature. See, for example, Hugo José Sánchez, *Una Semana Fundamental: 10–13 de Octubre 2003* (La Paz, Bolivia: Muela del Diablo Editores, 2003); and García, Prada, and Tapia, *Memorias de Octubre*. See also David Clark Knowlton, "The Burned Palace and the State in Flames: Neoliberalism and the Politics of Sovereignty in Bolivia," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 2003.

20. On the importance of the social movements, see Roberto Laserna, *Conflictos Sociales y Movimientos Políticos en año 2000 en Bolivia* (Cochabamba, Bolivia: CERES-DFID, 2001); Fernando Calderón and Norbert Lechner, *Más allá del estado, más allá del mercado, la democracia* (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural Editores, 1998); and Fernando Calderón and Alicia Szmukler, *La Política en las Calles* (Cochabamba, Bolivia: CERES, 2000).

21. As I was writing this section, a Bolivian wire service, for example, more than a year and a half after Goni's departure, carried a report of new

charges being brought against Goni and his ministers for acts performed while in power. "Ministros de Goni fueron imputados por masacre sangrienta y homicidio, Caso Octubre Negro tiene nueve imputados," *Bolpress*, May 19, 2005, <http://www.bolpress.com/politica.php?Cod=2005000625> (accessed May 21, 2005).

22. See, for example, Knowlton, "Indigenous Law, National Law, and Multilateral Institutions."

23. See, for example, Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1992).

24. Anne Marie Ejdesgaard-Jeppesen, "Change and Continuity in Political Dissent: Re-examining Miner's Memories," Paper presented at the Bolivian Studies Association meetings, Miami, Florida, 2005; photocopy in my possession.

25. For background on the anthropology of Mormon authority and its relationship with Mormon theology, see Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*.

26. I rely here on Richard N. Adams's distinctions in *Energy and Structure: A Theory of Social Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 42–43.

27. I have been struck for many years by the use of the term "self-styled," "self-proclaimed," or "so-called" as adjectival phrases that dismiss the authority of people who contrast, for one reason or another, with the views of the Mormon hierarchy. While these terms have a use in broader American culture, they are particularly relevant for Mormonism, where agency is seen as being more about choosing to follow either the divine or its opposition, rather than being a development of some self as in more normative American discourse. This usage strongly supports the institution and organization as sources of legitimacy and authority, dismissing any individual thought or action.

28. Sherry Ortner, "On Key Symbols," *American Anthropologist* 75, no. 5 (1973): 1338–46.

29. David Clark Knowlton, "Celestial Bodies, Celestial Selves: Sex, Semiotics, and Drama in Mormon Persons and Cosmogony," Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 2001.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Thomas Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*; and Knowlton, "Celestial Bodies, Celestial Selves."

31. The theme of internal hierarchy and status differentials in people's interactions in Mormon group life remains to be adequately explored.

32. This variety can be seen in the conflicts between intellectuals and LDS General Authorities that obtained substantial press. As an entrée to this literature, see Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998); and Richard Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000).

33. David Clark Knowlton, "Authenticity and Authority in Mormonism," *Religion and the Social Order*, special issue on "The Issue of Authenticity in the Study of Religions," edited by David G. Bromley and Lewis F. Carter, 6 (1996).

34. Turner, "Social Dramas as Ritual Metaphors."