

Introduction

Shortly after midnight, early on Christmas Day 2010, the Cultural Centre of San Andrés Pisimbalá, a small town nestled in Colombia's western mountain range, was transformed into a battlefield. Celebrations were interrupted by gunshots that left four people seriously injured, and machete attacks that left another dozen with minor wounds. This would be the first of many violent episodes in a conflict between indigenous and peasant residents over territorial control and the implementation of ethnocultural education in schools. For almost a decade now, life in San Andrés has been disrupted by a series of land invasions, house and crop burnings, forced displacement, and threats. Ten years after that fateful episode, the local school is still closed to peasant children and the conflict remains unresolved.

In a similarly remote region, this one bordering the northern Bolivian Amazon, in the early morning of 16 May 2007 around 600 peasants marched from the town of Apolo towards Madidi National Park. Armed with chainsaws and rifles stolen from the local police, they threatened to start logging this internationally famous biodiversity hotspot, in protest against the issuing of a land title that granted a large portion of the community territory to a newly constituted indigenous organisation. The park's occupation marked the culmination of a long-lasting dispute between the local peasant union and the Leco indigenous people that completely altered the coexistence of families and communities, who were suddenly split along new ethnic boundaries.

A few years earlier, some 3,000 km north of Apolo along the western edge of the Peruvian Amazon, a conflict between an Awajún indigenous community and peasant settlers ended in one of the deadliest episodes of

civil violence in recent Peruvian history. On 17 January 2002, a few dozen peasant families living in a settlement called Flor de la Frontera awoke to find themselves under siege from a group of armed Awajún. The siege, intended to evict the settlers from illegally occupied indigenous land, left sixteen people dead and seventeen wounded – most of them women and children.

These three episodes are paradigmatic examples of inter-communal conflicts that have emerged over the last thirty years across the Andean region. These disputes are between peasants and indigenous peoples – groups identified along class and ethnic lines – who occupy remote rural areas characterised by widespread poverty, social marginalisation, environmental fragility and a deep colonial history. Most of these conflicts tend to become endemic and protracted over time, generally remaining at relatively low-intensity levels with occasional escalations and peaks of violence. That they take place in remote settings and have relatively moderate levels of violence may help explain why they fall outside the radar of the national media, public debate and scholarly attention.

Yet these conflicts deserve attention not only because of the negative impact they have on local communities, but also because they open up new and important questions in contemporary debates on equality and diversity. Why are groups that have peacefully cohabited for decades suddenly engaging in hostile and violent behaviours? What is the link between these conflicts and changes in collective self-identification, claim-making and rent-seeking dynamics? And how, in turn, are these changes driven by broader institutional, legal and policy reforms? To address these questions, this book employs extensive empirical material that delves into stories of recent inter-communal conflicts in three Andean countries: Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. It maps the actors, motives and time frames of these conflicts and situates them in the broader context of the socio-political transformation that the region has undergone in recent decades. In particular, the book shows how the rise in inter-group competition is linked to the implementation of a new generation of legal, institutional and policy reforms that, since the early 1990s, have introduced special rights and protection for ethnic (indigenous) groups.

A new consensus on the need to grant legal guarantees to ethnic minorities was forged at the international level in the 1980s and, since then, has trickled down to domestic policy across the world. The approach has become particularly influential in Latin America, where vibrant indigenous movements have successfully pressured governments to respond to their demands for recognition, rights and, in certain cases,

Introduction

3

self-government. Contentious indigenous politics has led to a new model of citizenship and statehood, in stark contrast with the assimilationist paradigm that had prevailed since the mid-twentieth century. Inspired by globally famous theories of recognition (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 2001), this new model postulates that the formalisation of differentiated rights for ethnic groups is a precondition for social coexistence on peaceful and equal grounds. Over the last thirty years, Latin America, and the Andean countries in particular, have pioneered the implementation of the recognition agenda mainly through constitutional reforms that formally recognised the multicultural or plurinational nature of their societies. These reforms introduced new ethnic-based rights, granting indigenous peoples certain degrees of territorial and administrative autonomy, political representation, direct participation in decision-making processes and access to special social provisions. In this context, I include within the ‘recognition reform’ category a broad set of institutional, legal and policy changes, ranging from more moderate versions inspired by neoliberal multiculturalism to more radical plurinational regimes, while I understand recognition as the process of institutionalisation of special rights to social collectivities determined along ethnic lines.¹

As has been extensively documented, recognition reforms have had an empowering effect on traditionally marginalised indigenous groups and, in turn, have strengthened democratisation and improved the quality of political communities in countries traditionally beset by persistent discrimination and inequality. Yet these positive effects have come with unforeseen social costs. In contrast to the mainstream progressive interpretation of the politics of recognition as offering more peaceful and inclusive arrangements for ethnically diverse societies, this book argues

¹ This is a rather narrow definition of recognition as it focuses specifically on ethnicity and institutionalised politics. In the literature, recognition has been understood in very different ways. As many as twenty-three different usages of the notion ‘to recognise’ have been identified, grouped into three main categories, namely recognition as identification, recognising oneself and mutual recognition (Ricoeur 2005). While left-Hegelian political philosophers have tended to emphasise the positive normative dimension of recognition as a precondition for the fulfilment of a ‘vital human need’ (Taylor 1992, 26; see also Honneth 1995; Kymlicka 1995), Marxist and post-structuralist philosophers have conceptualised recognition as a potential source of estrangement and as an inhibitor of social transformation (Sartre 1943; Althusser 1971). Sociological literature has tended to focus on recognition claims as the expression of struggles of marginalised social groups for social incorporation (Bauman 2001; Hobson 2003), and more recently on recognition gaps, defined as disparities in worth and cultural membership between groups in a society (Lamont 2018).

that these politics contain seeds of conflict. While they aim to improve social inclusion, under certain conditions they increase social differentiation in cultural and socio-economic terms, expand the gaps between communities of rural poor, reduce incentives to cooperate, and generate new types of social conflict, which I call recognition conflicts.

I define *recognition conflict* as a pattern of behaviour in which social groups consistently engage in contests with each other over goods, services, power, social boundaries and/or leadership as part or as a consequence of the recognition of specific ethnic rights. Parties in competition self-identify as members of distinct and bounded communities, divided along ethnic and/or class lines. Although public authorities are often called into question in the framework of these conflicts, state involvement is not a condition for recognition conflict to happen. To be sure, the high volume of disputes in which groups (particularly ethnic groups) claim different forms of legal and social recognition by the state are excluded from this definition. These ‘vertical conflicts’ have been crucial triggers of wider recognition reform in Latin America and beyond, and have been the subject of extensive investigation (Davalos 2005; Yashar 2005; Lucero 2008; Merino Acuña 2015). The definition of ‘recognition conflict’ proposed here aims to uncover instead the horizontal dimension of recognition claims, that is, those situations in which the main dispute occurs between two (or more) social groups or communities in conflict with each other. This horizontal dynamic has seldom been the object of research in its own right. Although conflicts are often complex phenomena and both horizontal and vertical dimensions are sometimes coexisting features of a single dispute, I argue that there is an added value in untangling those axes and identifying inter-communal conflicts as a distinct phenomenon within broader struggles for recognition.

The rather broad definition proposed here seems pertinent to studying a phenomenon with common roots but outcomes and material implications that vary greatly. The recognition conflicts studied in this book range from increased inter-group competition to open violence and involve a broad spectrum of actions: from hatred discourses and political competition to discriminatory acts, threats and blackmail, and to outbreaks of violence and physical aggression. This book constitutes the first attempt to provide an empirically grounded analysis and a theoretical framework for understanding these widely overlooked types of conflict, which have emerged over the last twenty years alongside the strengthening of ethnic-based rights. It challenges the primary logic of recognition, according to which the granting of minority rights should

reduce conflict, revealing that, under certain conditions, recognition can become the main source of conflict itself.

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE AGE OF RECOGNITION

Throughout history, multi-ethnic communities have been the norm rather than the exception. This is true also for the contemporary world. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of modern territorial states contain two or more ethnic communities of significant size (Connor 1973). Esman (1994) identifies three main sources of ethnic pluralism: conquest and annexation, European colonisation and decolonisation, and cross-border population movements. In modern times, ethnic heterogeneity has often been the source of conflict and political instability. Throughout the twentieth century, the doctrine of national self-determination inspired anti-colonial struggles and legitimised autonomy claims by ethnic minorities within national borders. Over the past few decades, economic globalisation has also favoured the movement of people, at times increasing social tensions in receiving societies. These instabilities have made it urgent for states to explore new strategies for ethnic diversity governance. Recognition has been one of these. Despite the fact that moral principles, a sense of justice and just struggles vary widely within and across human societies (Eckstein & Wickham-Crowley 2003), the paradigm of recognition has had a reach across different and diverse countries. This is probably because it addresses some of the most urgent anxieties of modern democracies concerning how to guarantee the peaceful and fair coexistence of ethno-cultural groups within liberal state architectures.

Recognition of ethnic groups through institutional and legal reform has been the object of important national debates from Canada to Argentina, from Kenya to Norway and from Nepal to the Philippines. But the most audacious steps to institutionalise recognition of ethnic groups have been taken in Latin America. The region, which hosts approximately 50 million indigenous peoples (UNDP 2013), has the highest rate of ratification of Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (fifteen out of twenty-two countries),² the only binding international norm on ethnic-based rights. This enthusiasm can at least partially be explained by the need to overcome the dark past of dictatorial regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, which provided an

² Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela.

incentive for the ratification of conventions in general, as part of Latin American countries' international rehabilitation (Panizza 1995; Lutz & Sikkink 2000). The impact of international law on domestic legislation, however, has been more than symbolic. Since the early 1990s, constitutional reform took place across the region to formally recognise the multicultural or plurinational nature of Latin American societies, while introducing ethnic-based rights which granted a degree of territorial and administrative autonomy, political representation, and access to special social provisions (e.g. in education and health) to indigenous peoples (including, in certain cases, Afro-descendants; see Hooker 2005; Paschel 2016). Where constitutions were not amended, indigenous rights were often included in legal frameworks and nationwide policies through, for example, systems of quotas for political representation and affirmative action in the education sector (Van Cott 2005b; Rousseau and Dargent 2019).

These reforms were not only the result of 'norm cascade' mechanisms, in which the chance of ratification increases once a norm has proven internationally successful (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998); they also stemmed from bottom-up pressure from a growing number of indigenous movements active at national and international levels. Since the 1980s, organisations representing indigenous peoples have been founded in a number of Latin American countries, including Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico and Nicaragua. The so-called indigenous 'awakening' or 'resurgence' (Albó 1991; Bengoa 2000; Le Bot 2009) occurred in tandem with the rise of global indigenous movements and thanks to the financial and advisory support of a myriad of non-governmental organisations and activists, mostly foreigners, that formed alliances with local communities to win battles of recognition (Jackson 1995, 2019; Andolina et al. 2009; Canessa 2018). Throughout the 1990s, indigenous organisations consolidated and, in certain cases, made their first steps into national political arenas, while ethnic identities regained traction as sources of self-identification and markers of social differentiation and group belonging (Rivera Cusicanqui 1984; de la Cadena 2005). The rise of indigenous movements and their politicisation has been linked to the new opportunities enabled by the democratisation processes that followed the collapse of dictatorial regimes across the region, and particularly the efforts to generate more open electoral and party systems (Yashar 1998; Van Cott 2005a) and to strengthen local governance and participation (Andolina et al. 2009; Rousseau & Dargent 2019).

The positive assessment of recognition in the framework of democratisation processes in Latin America has meant that, in practice, the effects of these reforms on social and political ethnicisation (and therefore more rigid social boundaries) have been read almost exclusively through the lens of the empowerment of traditionally marginalised and impoverished communities and their enhanced participation and social inclusion. Indeed, as research on indigenous politics has amply shown, these reforms were a key step towards the rebalancing of a system of exclusion and discrimination rooted in the colonial past (Brysk 2000; Hale 2002; Sieder 2002; Postero 2007; Lucero 2008). They were key factors in strengthening the social and political organisation of indigenous peoples and converting them into political actors in many Latin American countries, from Mexico to Colombia, Ecuador to Bolivia (Van Cott 2005a; Yashar 2005). Latin America is therefore considered the region in which the recognition agenda has been implemented most successfully and in a relatively unproblematic and peaceful way. In this context, and in the absence of major ethnic conflict of the kind frequently seen in other parts of the world (Yashar 2005), scholars have generally been reluctant to focus on the effects of the ethnicisation of social conflict and collective identities on the overall cohesion of societies and communities.

This attitude has contributed to widening the gap between continentally siloed debates on ethnic politics. Indeed, mirroring the position of the vast majority of governments in Asia and Africa, scholars studying ethnic politics in these continents have remained somewhat sceptical about recognition. If in Latin America the focus has been on the emancipatory potential of indigenous rights for social inclusion and on fighting old discrimination rooted in the colonial past, in Africa and Asia discussions have revolved around the destabilising potential of ethnic politics and its malleability vis-à-vis political and economic change (Posner 2005; Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). Scholars have been especially sensitive to the potential for indigenous politics to exacerbate local inter-ethnic conflicts and reinforce class hierarchies that further marginalise the poorest people (Li 2002; Pelican 2009; Shah 2010; Sylvain 2014). What are the roots of this continental divide on recognition? I argue that politics rather than ethnic demography is the key factor at play here. This is rooted in a very pragmatic assessment of the potential for geopolitical destabilisation linked to ethnic appraisals, which is related to the relative power of ethnic groups with respect to central government, as well as to their loyalties, interests and sense of belonging to the nation-state. Even a very rapid assessment of these features leads to the conclusion that both the

fragilities in the process of consolidation of national identities and the disruptive potential of irredentist claims are much more serious in most African and Asian countries than in Latin America (Gutiérrez Chong 2010). Also, in most Latin American countries, no single ethnic group makes up more than 20 to 30 per cent of the population. Without a clear discriminated-minority-vs-ruling-majority divide, the very claim for autonomy based on discrimination loses traction (for an in-depth analysis of factors that might explain these divides see Kymlicka 2007).

It is hardly a coincidence, then, that in Africa and Asia minimalist approaches have prevailed, which means that few groups are treated as ‘indigenous’ and the term is chiefly reserved for scattered and nomadic minorities. In Latin America, however, maximalist interpretations dominate (with some exceptions, such as Peru), which suggests that all the populations that existed before colonisation should be considered ‘indigenous’. Countries’ different attitudes have also been influenced by the role of international organisations, which have certainly been more proactive in the implementation of indigenous rights in Latin America compared to any other region. In particular, in the African context, international organisations have been framing indigenous rights as a humanitarian matter, focusing on very specific minorities (those living in remote regions, hunter-gatherers and those particularly marginalised even among multiple ethnic minorities) and trying to avoid issues around self-determination for national minorities (such as the Kurds, the Tamil, the Tuareg, etc.). A minimalist attitude is also mainstream among anthropologists and subaltern studies scholars focusing on Asia and Africa, who have often denounced the essentialist idea of culture and identity embedded in the concept of indigeneity, although they disagree on whether essentialism could, in certain cases, benefit social struggles (e.g. through strategic essentialism, Spivak 1990) or foster new inequalities (Kuper et al. 2003).

In the effort to bridge this continental divide, this book finds inspiration in the work of scholars focusing on other world regions that have, in recent years, started to document the unforeseen and troubling effects of recognition reforms. In certain cases, what Shah (2007: 1806) calls the ‘dark side of indigeneity’ means that local use of global discourse by well-intentioned urban activists can in fact reinforce a class system that further marginalises the poorest. In others, the effort to ‘become tribal’, motivated by access to affirmative action and autonomy, has generated new tensions among local communities over the determination of what constitutes tribal culture and competing claims for authenticity

(Middleton 2015). My aim is to contribute to this body of literature by advancing a broader theoretical and conceptual framework that will identify and understand the under-researched phenomenon of recognition conflict in Latin America, while supporting my claims through cross-national empirical evidence.

A NEW AGENDA ON POST-RECOGNITION

This book puts forward a new perspective on the study of recognition and ethnic politics by introducing three major shifts: (1) from recognition to post-recognition; (2) from indigenous groups claiming recognition to broader social communities; and (3) from the Global North to the Global South.

From the ‘Epic’ to the ‘Tragedy’ of Recognition

Scholarship on recognition and ethnic mobilisation in Latin America can be divided into three main generations. The first generation of research, which I analyse in detail in Chapter 2, considered ethnicity a relatively marginal category for social action and subsumed the study of ethnic groups within a broader approach to the rural question through class lenses. This reflected in part the prominence of peasant movements across Latin America between the 1950s and early 1970s. Following the crisis of these movements and the initial rise of new social actors with strong ethnic associations throughout the 1980s, the attention of scholars (especially anthropologists) became more explicitly focused on the ethnic question, in many cases with sympathetic if not militant attitudes in support of cultural and identity-based claims and forms of organisation. Identities suddenly became central concerns for activists, scholars and practitioners alike, while ethnic differences could no longer be ignored nor reduced to class differences. Although they may greatly overlap in practice, they began to be perceived as ‘qualitatively different’ (Orlove & Custred 1980: 167). This differentiation had two interpretative implications for the understanding of the rural poor as political actors: on one hand, the rural poor went from being perceived as reactionary to being the progressive vanguards of social change; on the other, the material differences that were used as traditional markers of social boundaries were assimilated into cultural and identity cleavages, blurring the distinctions between poverty, class and ethnicity. With the age of recognition reforms that started in the early 1990s, political scientists in particular

became very interested in questions around when and under what conditions indigenous movements were created, and how their claims relate to broader democratic arrangements, potentially constituting a ‘post-liberal turn’. The debate, opened by influential works such as Yashar’s *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America* (2005), was followed by a vast amount of scholarly production trying to understand the new political role of ethnic movements in Latin America and their impressive successes in moving from recognition claims to recognition reforms (see, e.g., Van Cott 2002 on multicultural constitutionalism).

The focus on recognition as either a normative principle to guide institutional reforms or a framework for claim-making means that most academic work has so far concentrated on the period preceding recognition, while scholarly interest has generally waned once recognition is granted. It is understandable that the *epics* of recognition struggles have been of great inspiration to scholars. Historic indigenous mobilisations and social uprisings, such as the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico in 1994 and the first march for dignity and territory in Bolivia in 1990, were paradigmatic turning points in the entire Latin American political scenario. Yet recognition is not the end of the story, but rather the beginning of a different, perhaps less epic, tale.

By shifting the focus to the post-recognition phase in order to capture the practical consequences of the implementation of indigenous rights, this book is setting the agenda for a fourth generation of research on recognition, one that focuses on post-recognition. In this endeavour, I draw inspiration from recent work across the social sciences that has embarked on the task of dismantling well-established assumptions around the relationship between ethnicity and political and economic processes. In particular, constructivist approaches have highlighted how ethnic identities and boundaries are often the product of political and economic change, rather than key variables that explain that change (Chandra 2012; Wimmer 2013; Singh & Vom Hau 2016). More specifically, scholars have explored the impact of state institutionalisation of ethnic categories (i.e. formal recognition through, e.g., census forms or systems of national ethnic certification) on inter-group relationships and violence. The argument, in brief, is that institutionalisation boosts ethnic differentiation, creating a competitive dynamic that increases the likelihood of spiralling aggression (Lieberman & Singh 2012; 2017). In line with the constructivist turn in ethnic studies (Wimmer 2013), the empirical cases presented in this book illustrate how recognition reforms have major performative effects on identity and social boundaries, which in