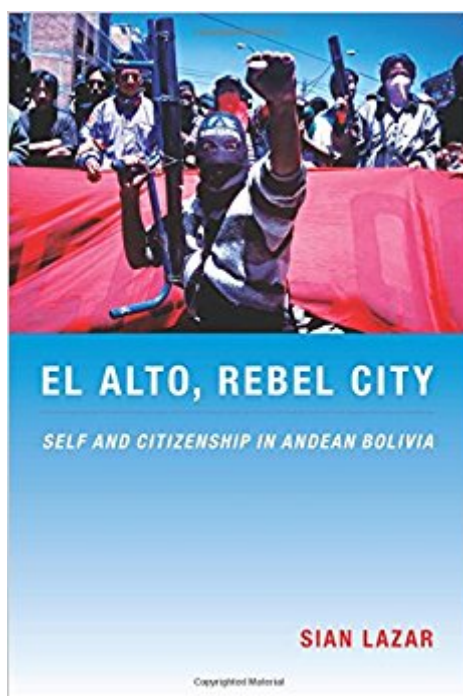


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# El Alto, Rebel City: Self And Citizenship In Andean Bolivia (Latin America Otherwise)



## Synopsis

Combining anthropological methods and theories with political philosophy, Sian Lazar analyzes everyday practices and experiences of citizenship in a satellite city to the Bolivian capital of La Paz: El Alto, where more than three-quarters of the population identify as indigenous Aymara. For several years, El Alto has been at the heart of resistance to neoliberal market reforms, such as the export of natural resources and the privatization of public water systems. In October 2003, protests centered in El Alto forced the Bolivian president to resign; in December 2005, the country's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, was elected. The growth of a strong social justice movement in Bolivia has caught the imagination of scholars and political activists worldwide. El Alto remains crucial to this ongoing process. In *El Alto, Rebel City* Lazar examines the values, practices, and conflicts behind the astonishing political power exercised by El Alto citizens in the twenty-first century. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1997 and 2004, Lazar contends that in El Alto, citizenship is a set of practices defined by one's participation in a range of associations, many of them collectivist in nature. Her argument challenges Western liberal notions of the citizen by suggesting that citizenship is not only individual and national but in many ways communitarian and distinctly local, constituted through different kinds of affiliations. Since in El Alto these affiliations most often emerge through people's place of residence and their occupational ties, Lazar offers in-depth analyses of neighborhood associations and trade unions. In so doing, she describes how the city's various collectivities mediate between the state and the individual. Collective organization in El Alto and the concept of citizenship underlying it are worthy of attention; they are the basis of the city's formidable power to mobilize popular protest.

## Book Information

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“This book contributes to Andean anthropology by providing an insightful and wellcrafted ethnographic account of practices and experiences of citizenship in the city of El Alto, and emphasizing the importance of engaging with urban research in the region.” - Melania Calestani, *Critique of Anthropology* “Lazar has written a fine study which substantially lives up to its claim to provide an ethnographic analysis of El Alto, and provides new insights for Andean studies in an urban context and of how citizenship is constructed through practice.” - Graham Thiele, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* “Sian Lazar’s book *El Alto, Rebel City* is a magnificent ethnographic study of a specific neighbourhood in the city of El Alto, Bolivia, in the years before Evo Morales became president. . . . The book is a goldmine for scholars caught between their attachment to the indisputable values of classic liberal democracy and the awareness that reality is different. It can teach us something about other possible ways of actually doing democracy without an inclination to make these practices more attractive than they really are. Like very few others do, this book actually takes us to the work floor of democracy where it is put into practice. Any desire to understand democracy or democratic mores in Bolivia (or elsewhere) should begin by reading it.” - Ton Salman, *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* “El Alto, Rebel City is a terrific book. The author broadly engages the civic life of residents in a working-class city. Offering a coherent account of collective selves in the making, Lazar reveals these to be the foundation of an innovative form of citizenship. The book deserves a broad readership, both of those interested in emergent identities in contemporary Latin America and, more generally, of those studying the new urban citizenries that are shaping global cities.” - Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld, *PoLAR* “The richness of these chapters provides useful material for those who work in Bolivia and contributes to a body of knowledge that allows scholars to piece together patterns of citizenship in multiple social contexts. . . . This book provides useful and compelling analysis of the dynamics of self and belonging that residents of Rosas Pampa and the *Asociaci3n de Pescaderas* frame their citizenship practices.” - Juan Manuel Arbona, *Journal of Latin American Studies* “El Alto offers a clearly written portrait of a city that has become key to understanding current Bolivian politics. This rich case study can inform conceptions of citizenship that emphasize the role of practices, social

organizations, and collective traditions. Scholars interested in the making of citizenship in Bolivia and its vibrant and changing society will find this book useful and inspiring. — Pablo Lapegna, *Hispanic American Historical Review* — “A marvelous piece of ethnographic analysis written with unusual clarity, *El Alto, Rebel City* provides a unique lens for viewing (and rethinking) the nature and strategies of contemporary, urban popular mobilization. — Brooke Larson, author *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes*, 1810 — “An important contribution to Andeanist anthropology, Sian Lazar’s innovative treatment of citizenship represents a new take on classic political and urban anthropology. Very few studies have explored with such nuance and personal intimacy the political beliefs and practices of poor residents of an Andean city. — Daniel M. Goldstein, author of *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia* — “*El Alto, Rebel City* is a terrific book. The author broadly engages the civic life of residents in a working-class city. Offering a coherent account of collective selves in the making, Lazar reveals these to be the foundation of an innovative form of citizenship. The book deserves a broad readership, both of those interested in emergent identities in contemporary Latin America and, more generally, of those studying the new urban citizenries that are shaping global cities. — (Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld *PolAR*) — “*El Alto* offers a clearly written portrait of a city that has become key to understanding current Bolivian politics. This rich case study can inform conceptions of citizenship that emphasize the role of practices, social organizations, and collective traditions. Scholars interested in the making of citizenship in Bolivia and its vibrant and changing society will find this book useful and inspiring. — (Pablo Lapegna *Hispanic American Historical Review*) — “Lazar has written a fine study which substantially lives up to its claim to provide an ethnographic analysis of *El Alto*, and provides new insights for Andean studies in an urban context and of how citizenship is constructed through practice. — (Graham Thiele *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*) — “Sian Lazar’s book *El Alto, Rebel City* is a magnificent ethnographic study of a specific neighbourhood in the city of *El Alto*, Bolivia, in the years before Evo Morales became president. . . . The book is a goldmine for scholars caught between their attachment to the indisputable values of classic liberal democracy and the awareness that reality is different. It can teach us something about other possible ways of actually doing democracy — without an inclination to make these practices more attractive than they really are. Like very few others do, this book actually takes us to the work floor of democracy where it is put into practice. Any desire to understand democracy or democratic mores in Bolivia (or elsewhere) should begin by reading it. — (Ton Salman *European Review of Latin American*

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