



Weakened States and Market Giants: Neoliberalism and Democracy in Niger and West Bengal

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Abstract

This article argues that the contemporaneous phenomena of the 'third wave of democratisations' and the 'second wave of liberalisations' – or neoliberalism as it were – has disrupted the promise of democracy in the Global South. While the mainstream literature considers that democracy and the promotion of open market economies are mutually reinforcing, I claim that they in fact clash around the roles of the state, which both democracy and neoliberalism seek to reform, but in opposite directions. Democracy requires a broadened and responsive state system, mediating between social classes, while neoliberal reform typically shrinks the state system and shapes it to the preferences of elite classes. In this article, this thesis is explored in historical and comparative ways. I build an analytical framework through a comparison between the Bolivian National Revolution of 1952 and the democratic reforms undertaken under Evo Morales. Using this tool, I compare the fraught relations of Niger with French nuclear giant Areva and those of West Bengal with Indian industrial giant Tata. These comparisons, developed following descriptions of historical backgrounds, show why the vexed issue of the reform of the state should constitute a central research agenda if we are to grasp the fundamental conditions of the prospects of democracy in the Global South today.

Résumé

Cet article affirme que la coïncidence de la « troisième vague de démocratisations » avec la « deuxième vague de libéralisations » – néolibéralisme – a bouleversé les promesses de démocratie dans les pays du Sud. Alors que la littérature traditionnelle considère que la démocratie et la promotion d'économies de marchés ouverts se renforcent mutuellement, nous pensons qu'en réalité, elles s'affrontent sur les rôles de l'État, que la

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démocratie et le néolibéralisme tentent de réformer, mais dans des directions opposées. La démocratie nécessite un système étatique élargi et réactif, assurant la médiation entre les classes sociales, tandis que, généralement, la réforme néolibérale rétrécit le système étatique et le façonne selon les préférences des classes élitistes. Dans cet article, cette thèse est explorée de manière historique et comparative. Nous construisons un cadre analytique en comparant la révolution nationale bolivienne de 1952 aux réformes démocratiques entreprises sous Evo Morales. Utilisant cet outil, nous comparons les difficiles relations du Niger avec le géant nucléaire français, Areva, et celles du Bengale occidental avec le géant industriel indien Tata. Ces comparaisons, développées à la suite de descriptions de contextes historiques, justifient la constitution d'un programme central de recherche sur l'épineuse question de la réforme de l'État si nous voulons saisir les conditions fondamentales des perspectives de la démocratie dans les pays du Sud.

Introduction

The 'third wave of democratisation' coincided with a 'second wave' of economic liberalism. The story of the democracy 'waves' – as detailed by Huntington (1991) – shows the first one surging from the American suffrage extensions of the early nineteenth century and ebbing with the advent of fascism in Europe in the 1920s. Allied victory led to a second, 20-year-long wave, which includes India (the 'second wave' democracy case in this study); and a third wave took momentum after Portugal's 'carnation revolution' of 1974, extending to countries in Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe and finally Africa, up to the mid-1990s. This story accounts for the fact that, starting somewhere in the mid-1970s, political conditions gradually changed or shifted in many parts of the world in favour of some form of political liberalisation, mostly taking the shape of a revival of representative democracy. In the Global South particularly – in Asia, Latin America and Africa – this was to a decisive extent the result of the fact that authoritarian models of state-led development were failing on many scores. Where the economic engine of the model performed more satisfactorily, the authoritarian nature of state leadership created serious problems.¹ In the more numerous cases where economic performance was dismal, the political oppressions of authoritarianism added to economic misery. Whichever the case, increasing numbers of people saw authoritarianism, or more specifically, the lack of political participation, as the root cause of the problem. A democratic reform of the state appeared to be the solution in places as different as Bolivia and Niger – two of the three cases studied in this article.

At roughly the same time, as noted above, a wave of liberal economic reforms trickled out of institutions in Washington DC in the late 1970s, quickly gathering sufficient thrust to sweep through most countries in the Global South by the mid-1990s. Historically, an earlier age of liberalism had ruled the economy in many countries from the mid-1850s to the Great Depression² and the newer one was accordingly named 'neoliberalism'. The proponents of this neoliberal reform diagnosed that there was a fatal problem with the authoritarian model of state-led development that was then hegemonic in the Global South. But while advocates of democratic reform targeted the *authoritarian* part of the proposition, neoliberal reforms focused instead on its *state-led* segment.

It therefore so happened that, by the early 1980s, two reform agendas emerged in the Global South: one which was broadly based on domestic movements, and sought a democratic reform of the state, demanding the end of authoritarianism together with increased political participation in the 'state system' (see below); and the other which largely came from the outside and pushed for neoliberal reform of the state, insisting on an end of its stewardship of development and on a free rein for 'market forces'.

So, while the target of the two reform agendas was the same – the state – their objectives were very different and even, to some significant extent, incompatible. They were, at any rate, in competition, and the success of the one would scuttle the progress of the other.³ Democratic and neoliberal reforms did not – and still do not – have compatible goals regarding the role of the state. The empirical record shows that the two reform agendas were not originally promoted by the same actors, nor did they rest on the same vision of the role of the state, much to the contrary. For the democracy promoters, key implications include the winding down of the state's repressive capacities and the preservation of its 'developmental' ones – meaning that the state was to remain a political engine capable of transforming the structure of the economy through direct involvement of its specific powers; for the promoters of neoliberalism, on the other hand, the imperative was for the state to create the conditions for market expansion, a mission which may well entail an overhaul of its repressive apparatus, at least at some early stage. To better clarify the significance of these and related implications, a brief theoretical analysis is in order.

Here, I draw especially on aspects of neo-Marxist perspectives on the state as developed by Ralph Milliband (2009 [1969]) as well as on the brief synthesis later provided by Robert Solo (1978). I am principally interested in their view of the state as a *system of power* made of several 'functional elements' that are operated firstly to create – through a degree of autonomy – a state of

equilibrium among social classes, but ultimately to further the overarching interests of the dominant class(es). In the case of Milliband, such functional elements include government, but also 'the civil service, the complex of public agencies, the military, the judiciary, and the police' (summarised by Solo 1978: 832). Such a concept of the state as a system of power has – for my purposes – at least two important dimensions: first, it prevents us from understanding state power as limited to itself and situated above all other forms of power intervening in the polity; and second, and more importantly, it is also helpful in evaluating the *magnitude of state power*, and the fine grain of the changes that can be made to increase or decrease that magnitude in relation to a set of objectives – such as happened in the interlocking courses of democratic and neoliberal reforms in the Global South.

Combined with a comparative synopsis of two major experiences of democratic reform in Bolivia – the National Revolution of 1952 and the current, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) attempt – this understanding of neo-Marxist theories of the state will be used to develop a conceptual framework on state reform agendas. The key elements of the framework will then be applied to an analysis of two case studies from Niger and the Indian states of West Bengal and Gujarat. So the comparison is chiefly between Niger and India, with Bolivia supplying only an exemplary story for building the theoretical fodder used in the case studies. Why Niger and India? The empirical challenge for this study was to find cases that are different in terms of geographic location, yet similar in terms of political system and reform policy. The difference of geographic location is a proxy for the more substantial – as far as the objectives of the study are concerned – difference of historical process and its implications for our times, which is why the South-South Research Consortium that funded the research project behind this article suggested that authors should compare cases across, rather than within, the three Southern continents. On the other hand, the significance of my study derives also from a comparison between democratic and neoliberal reform. This means that the selected cases should both have undergone such reforms in one way or another. Not many countries in Asia correspond to this description: either countries have known democratic but no neoliberal reform (South Korea, Taiwan), or they have known neither democratic nor neoliberal reform (most of South Asia). India was the only clear case in the circumstance, but its processes being of a complexity that evidently defies the parameters of a comparison with Niger, I have found more useful to break them down into an internal comparative case study focusing on West Bengal and Gujarat. Niger was chosen precisely for the apparent simplicity and linearity of its trajectory, which make for an economical examination of the issues at hand.

Bolivian Lessons: Towards a Conceptual Framework

In 2006, Bolivians started, under President Morales, a radical democratic reform of their politics. A new constitution adopted in 2009 reinvented the country as a 'plurinational state'.⁴ To this ostensibly 'post-liberal-democracy'⁵ evolution, MAS appended an ambitious National Development Plan grounded in the uplifting principles of Dignity, Sovereignty, Productivity and a Democracy of Living Well. The constitution and the plan organise a full *political* and *economic* framework with which to reform the Bolivian state in the name of democracy, and against the neoliberal reform that had been in force since the early 1980s. Vice-President García Linera (2006; García Linera and Ortega Breña 2010) provided – and continues to provide – sophisticated and influential analyses of the process, while on 1 May 2011, Morales signed a presidential decree intended to 'bury' the one from 1985 which had launched neoliberal reform.

Although these moves and measures ostensibly intend to overturn the neoliberal reform of the state of the past three decades, many serious analyses suggest that they have in fact simply 'reconstituted' (in the words of Jeffery Webber (2011)) the neoliberal state. The brief version of the story could run thus: by the late 1990s to early 2000s, the failure of neoliberalism to solve Bolivia's social and economic predicament had become so endemic that the country was once more in a state of prolonged crisis. Especially the privatisation of hydrocarbons had shorn the state of revenue, and in the early 2000s, it found itself unable to stave off the calamitous consequences of – among other things – coca eradication and the Argentinian economic collapse (Kohl and Farthing 2009; Farthing 2010). Escalating crises and social conflicts destroyed the presidency of Sánchez de Lozada and led to a referendum on the nationalisation of hydrocarbons in July 2004. The referendum sought (in the words of President Carlos Mesa) a 'relegitimisation'⁶ of the state through reviving some of the policy orientations that obtained before neoliberalism. However, only MAS garnered the political power base needed to implement its key outcome, the nationalisation of hydrocarbons. Yet, after this was done the constraints created by the preceding neoliberal politico-economic regime effectively led MAS to conduct what Kaup terms a 'neoliberal nationalization': 'While it technically returned physical control of Bolivia's natural gas to the state, the space opened up for private investment in the hydrocarbon sector in the 1980s and 1990s still exists. Transnational firms still extract the majority of Bolivia's natural gas, and most of it is still sent to more profitable export markets' (Kaup 2010: 135). (I.e., instead of supporting the industrialisation agenda the referendum propounded.)

As has been pointed out by various critics, this turn of events seems to generally characterise MAS efforts at democratic reform. James Petras (2013) thus stresses that MAS has consistently stuck to largely orthodox economic policies. Social spending, public investment, pay raises for public sector workers all remain at very modest levels, while banks and businesses have been benefiting from the embrace of low taxes, stable currency and government blandishments – up to and including resisting strikes and labour pressures. The government holds on to foreign reserves earned through the export of boom-time commodities and increased royalties, a policy that better serves the purpose of luring foreign investors with the possibility of accessing hard currencies than that of investing in the internal economy. In the same vein, infrastructure spending has been chiefly aimed at facilitating transport of agro-mineral exports, a constant of Bolivia's various historical eras of liberal ascendancy. A similar orthodoxy-abidance is clearly noticeable in MAS's investment and labour policies, to the extent that, as a conclusion to his indictment, Petras labelled Morales a 'radical conservative' (2013), i.e., someone who cloaks conservative policies with radical affirmations. If using more moderate language, similar criticism has been levelled by various authors (Cunha Filho, Gonçalves and Dalla Déa 2010; Regalsky and Ortega Breña 2010; Webber 2011), with Webber mounting a solid case of Morales' governance as 'reconstituted neoliberalism'.

Maybe such assessments are too severe. Given MAS's clear thrust toward democratic reform, they may simply reveal that this agenda is being stemmed by the sturdier legacies of neoliberalism. It is useful, in this light, to contrast MAS's relative failures (for now) with the outcome of Bolivia's first effort at democratic reform, the National Revolution of 1952, which did succeed in transforming Bolivia's society while creating a new state, famously known as the *Estado del '52* ('the state of '52').⁷ A brief comparison between democratic reform then and now may begin to put us on the track of understanding the nature of the limitations of MAS's attempt at offering to present-day Bolivians the fresh start they received from the *Estado del '52*.

The events leading up to the arrival of MAS and of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) to power respectively in 2004 and in 1952 were both marked by a structural crisis of the economy and violent conflict at the societal level. In particular, the novelty in 1952 was the rapid politicisation of labour (workers and peasants) as a result of the collapse of the elite order, after the Great Depression destabilised tin capitalism, and the Chaco War debilitated the military. In a clear sense, it was oligarchy (the tin barons and the so-called *rosca* state that served them) and autocracy (military leaders) giving way, for the first time in Bolivia's already long independent history, to democracy (workers, peasants and nationalist leaders). From an

analytical point of view, what happened was the convergence of a certain kind of political will from the top – that is, within the MNR leadership – and of a certain kind of popular agency from below, agreeing on a political programme of democratic reform (universal vote, nationalisation of mines and agrarian reform) and using certain transformative institutions (the Corporación Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL), the Ministerio de Asuntos Campesinos and the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) to execute the programme. These institutions were meeting-ground organisations, in the sense that they created a space of close collaboration between state agents and labour representatives.⁸ All four elements – political will, popular agency, agreed-upon reform programme and meeting-ground institutions – had been necessary and sufficient to the initial success of the revolution, that is, the reform of the state so that it became capable of large-scale nationalisation of mines, wide-ranging land distribution and, more generally, efficient stewardship of the welfare of the larger population.⁹ This process in turn put an end to the cycle of Bolivian history that started when the gradual rise of mining capitalism – going back to the presidency of Linares, 1857–61 – made Bolivia a poster child of classical-liberal economic governance.

Ideological divergences and pressures from its enemy within and without compromised the revolution before it set Bolivia on a definitive course.¹⁰ The arrival of neoliberalism in the 1980s was, to a significant extent, a literal reversal of history: economic liberalism – recognisable under a new garb – was reasserting its pre-eminence against what was clearly its antagonist – democracy.

In these changed conditions, by the early 2000s, Bolivia was again in a state of crisis strongly reminiscent of the one which preceded the National Revolution. The new oligarchy proved even more brittle than the older *rosca*-supported one, and the piling up of social catastrophes traceable directly to neoliberal-inspired policies triggered a collapse in state legitimacy marked by unprecedented violence.¹¹ Similar also to the period leading up to 1952, there was a new type of popular mobilisation brewing in the country, in this case, that of politicised indigenous and mestizos groups. Thus, in general, the story of MAS's rise to power shows the presence of at least three of the four key elements detected as crucial for the success of reform in that of the MNR: political will from above, popular agency from below, and agreement around a programme of democratic reform.

This did not take shape without often tense – and occasionally murderous – conflicts, but as a final element, the MAS process added a 'transformative constitution' (Sunstein 2001) rather than the transformative *institutions* that were a hallmark of the MNR reforms. This particular fact is key. It shows that the reform undertaken by MAS is not directly aimed at the state.

The constitution establishes new legal norms for the relations of state and society, but although it can legislate the action of state power, it does not organise new functional elements (such as COMIBOL or the Ministry of Peasant Affairs in 1952) that would transform the magnitude of state power in support of a new class equilibrium, or in the service of a new dominant class.¹² It must be noted on this latter score that if reforming the state means, in this framework, building new organisations and getting them to work according to plans, neoliberal reform has been a simpler species of reform of the state: it has mainly consisted in removing, rather than building organisations. Overturning this process against the constraints – in state capacities especially – that it has created is the defining challenge of a democratic reform of the state *after* neoliberalism.

Equipped with these lessons, I now turn to the case studies, and, in the conflictual situations that are presented, I will discuss especially whether *or not* elements of political will, popular agency, a reform programme and transformative institutions tend to come into play, why, and with what implications for potential democratic reform.

The two case studies are about relations of states with market giants – Niger and Areva NC, West Bengal/Gujarat and Tata Motors – but my interest is not focused on the details of these relations. The cases have been selected on the basis of the light that they may shed especially on the power of the state following neoliberal reform, and given the peculiar social conditions in which they develop. In both cases, the four elements of the conceptual framework described above will be tested against the specific contextual elements of the case, and a short assessment will be drawn. Following this, I draw a brief conclusion on the meaning of the study for the issue of democratic reform in the Global South.

Niger: Rekindling the Social Contract

The Nigerien state was ‘restructured’ by neoliberal reform in the period 1982–98. Independent from France in 1960, the state saw prevailing revenue sources dry up in the early 1970s, when the great Sahel drought reduced the country’s agriculture to a shambles and tropical commodities, such as groundnuts, Niger’s primary export, lost much of their market value. But Niger’s subsoil held large amounts of high quality uranium ore that had come online in 1968, and there was a mounting global trend in uranium consumption – significantly energised mid-decade by the oil shocks – which brightened the state’s prospects, especially after 1974. In April of that year, military men had toppled the single party regime of the Parti Progressiste Nigérien (PPN), in the wake of rural famine and the general economic crisis that was

gripping the country. The windfall of uranium revenue led to ambitious plans of creating a 'société de développement' ('development society') one which would be based on defeating the spectre of hunger, transforming agriculture and improving education and health. Though authoritarian, the regime envisaged this development society to take shape through a gradual democratic reform of the state.¹³ In the meantime, it drastically increased the rate of public investment, which grew to 27 per cent of GDP and spawned several new public enterprises, rural development projects and infrastructure overhaul agendas. Much of the new investment also went into infrastructure for mining, and the regime created an expert-led organisation, the Office National des Ressources Minières (ONAREM) to both prospect the territory and oversee the state's interests in existing operations (such as the French-led exploitation of uranium in the desert north).

Time was not on the side of the Nigerien state, however. While it took advantage of the easy international lending period of the late 1970s, guaranteed by its uranium revenue, the latter rapidly plummeted by the end of the decade. Soon, Niger found itself saddled with enormous debt, shorn of the best part of its revenue, and managing a large expenditure programme in agricultural development and social policy. A soul-searching 'national debate' on the agricultural sector organised in 1982 took stock of the unsustainability of development plans, and the government approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial relief. By the end of decade, public investment had been reduced to around 9 per cent of GDP.

The impact of neoliberal reform can also be measured in the evolution of the structure of GDP. In the first two decades of independence (1960–80), the growth input of the primary and tertiary sectors (the latter, largely dominated by the so-called informal economy, and more generally controlled by unproductive commercial capital) went down from a combined 82 per cent of GDP in 1960 to 42 per cent (primary sector) and 35 per cent (tertiary sector) 20 years later, with much of the de-growth occurring in the period 1975–81. Meanwhile, the secondary sector had grown to 23 per cent. If it had been possible to sustain this trend at a regular pace, Niger would have joined the ranks of so-called transitional economies by the early 2000s. As a result of the end of public investment, the primary and tertiary sector – and their insignificant wealth creation capacities – have gone up again while the secondary sector now fluctuates at around 4 to 5 per cent of GDP.

The stunted evolution has also put the Nigerien social contract in disarray. In the early independence period (1960–74), the elite class of the *commis*¹⁴ had taken over a state that was supported by the peasantry through commercial agriculture and taxation. The *commis* legitimised their rule through the development agenda, to be achieved through their mastery

of modern science. By ruining agriculture – and literally decimating the peasantry – the great drought-cum-famine of the early 1970s seemed to upend the elite class's legitimacy and in any case put an end to the social contract of the country's First Republic (as the PPN's rule is formally known in Niger). Uranium, however, provided the basis for a successor social contract, whereby the specific distinction of the elite class (the mastery of modern science) was still serving the state, but for the more wholesome benefit of a now unexploited peasantry. The thinking¹⁵ was that since drought and famine had shown that the peasantry could not contribute to development (let alone support the state) until agriculture had been radically transformed through higher productivity, the proceeds of uranium should be used to effect that transformation. After the debt crisis nipped this plan in the bud, structural adjustment did not propose an alternative solution. It destroyed the position of the elite class, both materially (layoffs following restructuring of state services) and symbolically (it was no longer in control of the development project that, despite its failings, still legitimised its leadership). When Niger democratised in 1991, the country no longer had a working social contract – that is, a specific relation of accountability between the ruling class and those being ruled. This was an inauspicious introduction to democratic reform.

The economic policy of neoliberal reform in this case was externally enforced austerity.¹⁶ It would be properly described as a method of creating an acceptance of the reality of 'under-development': lacking the financial capacities for jumpstarting a process of economic transformation, the state simply had to be cut down to size and let things follow their 'natural' market-led course. The entire apparatus set in place to engineer the transformation of agriculture was thus gradually scaled down and phased out. By 1991–92, its two pillars, the agricultural credit institution Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole and the national development bank were both gone, which led to the rapid collapse of the cooperative system put in place in the early 1960s to create a policy space for the state in the rural areas.

Parallel to this process, budget cuts starving the country's sole university of credits had led to student unrest.¹⁷ After an incident in February 1990 that caused three deaths among students, the regime became reluctant to use repression, folded and gave way to a democratisation process (Summer 1991) led by the leaders of burgeoning political movements, unions and student organisations. The objective was vocally that of democratic reform directed against structural adjustment. A slogan then popular on the streets of Niamey (Niger's capital) was the alliterative French-language phrase 'Le PAS ne passera pas'.¹⁸ At this juncture, there were elements of political will and popular agency at work, but the latter, only faintly. The driving

actors of the democratic reform movement belonged to the elite class of the country, and this shows that political will was distinctly more important than popular agency. And while democratisation initially put a break on structural adjustment, the endemic fiscal crisis led the new leaders of the state of Niger to relent by 1995 and to accept further retrenchment, especially since international aid – which, after the fall of uranium, had become the principal source of revenue – grew increasingly tied to agreements with the IMF and the World Bank, the two armed hands of neoliberal reform.

While in theory, these institutions only advocated economic liberalisation, in practice they insisted on a radical makeover of the state system. By the late 1990s, this was effectively achieved. In 1999, when the first government of the fully ‘neoliberalised’ state of Niger – the government of President Mamadou Tandja, 1999–2009¹⁹ – took office, the state of Niger had a thinner system, limited to government apparatus, basic administration and defence and security. Such a system essentially removed it from society and erased the complexes of organisations which used to determine responsiveness and policy formulation and implementation in the past. To ensure a modicum of governance, decentralisation was adopted in 1998: local communities could elect their own home governments, which could collect smaller taxes than national policy would have demanded. Though dramatically substandard, local government is cheaper, and is something Niger’s indigenous peasants could afford.

Hence, the Nigerien leader who got himself voted as the head of the state after 1998 was no longer heading the same state as those in the previous era. In particular, he would have at his disposal far fewer tools and apparatuses for developing and conducting policy. Since the state system is a unit, changes in some component parts affect the entire functioning of the unit. Thus, not all state organisations were eliminated by neoliberal reform, but their overall policy impact was modified and, in general, reduced by the disappearance of suppressed entities.²⁰

In the mining sector, the above-mentioned ONAREM existed until 2007, when it was divided into two distinct entities, one in charge of its duty of overseeing the mining interests of the state (the Société du Patrimoine des Mines du Niger, SOPAMIN) and the other succeeding to its prospection mission (the Centre pour l’Exploration Géologique et Minière, CRGM). SOPAMIN and CRGM, together with a mining code adopted in 2006, underline the continued hopes which the state of Niger invests in mining as the primary source of public funds. But as we have seen, this reliance dates back to 1974 and was initially part of a project which had organised state power in certain specific ways to achieve its aims. Three decades later, after neoliberal reform, this emphasis on mining revenue had become an

orphan strategy, even though the Nigerien state finds it must still pursue it. Thus, upon taking office, Tandja and his government immediately focused on increasing mining revenue. As various officials told this researcher, his party had come to power in a world where 'there [were] no friends, only interests'.²¹ Aid is volatile and conditioned to often unrealistic prescriptions and expectations, and increased taxation remains a problematic proposition in the conditions of Niger.²² Increasing revenue from mining, on the other hand, could finance a degree of state autonomy. The Nigerien Fifth Republic maintained excellent relations with the IMF and its leaders never appeared to reject neoliberal principles – in fact, its ruling party, the Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement, tended to present itself as a 'liberal' party, in the French sense of the word (i.e., economic, not political/social). But state autonomy was sought for two interrelated reasons: first, the ability to arrange public spending in ways that would help the prospects for re-election of the president; and second, the latter was a member of the military junta that tried to spur the transformation of agriculture in the 1980s, and he explicitly wanted to revive that policy, at least in part. Significantly, however, Tandja did not resort, in pursuance of this double goal, to amending the state system. Instead, he used a non-institutional mode of action popularised by aid regimes, putting in place a so-called 'special programme' of the President of the Republic – a fundraising outfit which both enhanced his personal prestige and channelled money into projects targeting the agricultural sector and the '*monde rural*' ('rural population'). As his attempt at overturning the constitution and restoring autocracy in late 2009 clearly shows, Tandja's project was far from a democratic reform of the state. He strongly identified with Niger's elite class, using the 'special programme' in a framework of evergetism that enhanced his elite stature, and reserving the discussion of issues of central relevance to the state to members of the elite class. He said as much in a televised speech where, after glorying in his paternal care for the hungry peasants of Niger, he concluded: 'As for important topics, such as the issue of uranium, of petroleum, they do not concern those poor people.'²³ The rhetoric of care for the peasantry has been a staple of Niger's elite class since the *commis* of the 1960s, but in the neoliberal era, it no longer corresponds to a structure of responsibility such as the one evidenced by the social contracts that existed under the First Republic and the military regime.

Such specious elite views, non-institutional modes of action and the temptation of autocracy – underlined by a greater reliance on the repressive functions of the state²⁴ – are at least strongly stimulated by the neoliberal state system if not caused by it. A parsimonious system with little direct connections to society is hence better controlled by and for the advantage of

the elite class. With many fewer public institutions, it leaves extensive room for non-institutional manipulations that sidestep the need for democratic accountability. In such a context, it appears natural to argue that the more 'important' issues are not the concern of the people. If the case of Tandja provides a vivid illustration of the exercise of power in a neoliberal state system, it should not be construed as an isolated instance of the fact. After Tandja was removed in 2010, the Nigerien political class which, in its majority, had opposed his attempt at autocratic restoration, tried to rekindle the process of democratic reform of politics which started in 1991 and had run into the sand of neoliberalism.²⁵ A new constitution adopted in 2011 legislated strong legal protections for journalists and opposition figures, casting opprobrium on the repression of the Tandja era. Language in both the constitution and the political programme of the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS), which won the elections, indicted autocracy and called for the strengthening of democratic institutions. Unlike in previous Nigerien constitutions, the framers of this one went out of their way to name and reject 'dictatorship' as a form of government, while the first point of the PNDS's (2011) programme insists that 'Niger needs strong institutions rather than strong men', stressing that 'strong, creditable and sustainable democratic institutions' must be built to protect the 'respectability' of 'the republic'.²⁶

The stance implies that the PNDS government, unlike its predecessor, demonstrates a degree of political will toward democratic reform. If its criticism of neoliberalism is not strident, it certainly also quietly guides its key actions. In a deliberately anti-Hayekian move, the new government resurrected, in its first cabinet, the Ministry of Planning that was an early casualty of neoliberal reform in the 1990s. The public sector soon thereafter went on a veritable recruitment binge. In the first two years of its tenure, the PNDS government hired over 30,000 people in the public sector, significantly more than the entire private sector (over 22,000 recruits) – and also more than the MNSD (Mouvement National pour la Société du Développement) government during much of its ten-year tenure.²⁷ In particular, it offered positions in provincial and rural health units to *all* new medicine graduates who applied to serve the state while also ramping up the provision of state scholarships to students. Given the systemic nature of state action, these and other moves of the PNDS can, however, achieve their aims only if they succeed in transcending the neoliberal state system that has solidified in Niger since the mid-1990s. In my hypothesis – derived from the conceptual framework described in the first section of this article – this would be possible only as a result of a successful democratic reform of the state, insofar as this specific reform agenda has been the historical

antagonist of neoliberal reform. Are the elements of such a democratic reform of the state – political will, popular agency, common programme and transformative institutions – present enough in today's Niger to sustain a shift in that direction? The question posed in this way can obviously receive no straightforward response, especially in the short space of this article, and what I propose here is to end this exploration of the Nigerien case with the 'important topic' of mining as a way to approaching the aforementioned four elements.

As previously noted, under the Fifth Republic, there were renewed efforts at increasing mining revenue. Niger's mining law was revised in 2006, raising royalty rates for larger exploitations from 5.5 to 12 per cent. However, if the new rule applied to petroleum – which had come online in the late 2000s – the biggest prize, uranium, held by French industry giant Areva NC, was shielded at the time from the new levy by the fact that the contract tying Areva to the state of Niger would expire only in 2013.²⁸ Not only did Areva continue to pay low-end royalties to Niger, it also kept the generous fiscal exemptions and related benefits it had inherited from the previous mining law, adopted in 1993. In 2013, when Areva needed to negotiate an extension contract, it faced a PNDS government that had hedged its bets for the revival of state-led development on increased revenue from the mining sector. Indeed, while in 2000 the sector contributed only 5.5 billion CFA francs to state revenue, by 2007 it was contributing over 82 billion – an incredible 14-fold increase in just over six years.²⁹ The vagaries of commodity markets have since brought this down several notches – still, always above 50 billion – but if uranium – by far Niger's choicest mineral riches – were to pay high-end royalties as legislated in 2006, the impact on state revenue would be quite dramatic. Areva resisted this. The company had signed the expired contract under the law of 1993, an investor-friendly piece of legislation from a time when foreign capital was snubbing the country's mines. On the other hand, its mining titles were secured in 1968 for 75 years. In 2003, WAEMU put out a community mining code which guaranteed 'fiscal stability' for the duration of mining titles in member countries. Claiming that community law supersedes national law, Areva argued that, as per WAEMU's regulations, the exemptions and tax breaks it received in 1993 should last until 2043 – that is, 75 years after 1968, the duration of its mining titles.

The ensuing showdown between Areva and the state of Niger – and more generally, Niger's relationships with mining companies – has mobilised sections of the populace in support of the state's positions in the protracted negotiations. Outwardly, the mobilisation was concentrated in civil society and the student union, and geographically limited to the capital and the northern city of Agadez. However, it ended up extending into the written

press, social media, and both television and radio debates and editorials, including and especially in 'national languages', in a country where only about 10 per cent of the population use the official language (French). For the first time in Niger's history, uranium and other mining interests thus became a topic of discussion among 'the poor people' (to quote Tandja's nonchalant phrase). Demonstrations were strategically directed at the media – including the international media, which have an echo in France – even though the aim commonly agreed upon by leaders of civil society organisations and unions involved was to maintain pressure on the government of Niger. But it also became manifest that the Nigerien government hardly needed prodding and was intent on modifying the terms on which Areva exploits Niger's uranium. Additional demands required Areva to rebuild transport infrastructure and, more importantly, to cede to Niger the control of Cominak and Somaïr, the two companies from which the state draws shareholder dividends – a move which amounts to a renegotiation, if not a rejection, of the entente that underlies Areva's operations in Niger since 1968.³⁰ The consensus on the issue also extended to the opposition parties, and if the Areva negotiation was still a current story at the time of writing, it is in fact only a sequence in Niger's struggle to redefine its mining policy.

So there is clearly a congruence of political will and popular agency on this particular issue. To be sure, popular agency is here outwardly limited to the elite class. Mine workers have remained quiescent and the popular classes, both urban and rural, only comment and observe. Given the historical context described at some length in this section, however, the meaning of this episode is easier to interpret. Niger's natural resources do not belong in the major league in their categories. While uranium is abundant and of high quality, it is also difficult to export given the distance to the sea – nearly 2,500 kilometres – and the worsening security situation in the country's desert north. Regarding petroleum, with only 20,000 barrels a day, Niger counts among the smallest producers in Africa. And gold, produced in Western Niger, is far more volatile in value than either uranium or oil. But Niger's experience has shown that the surplus capital needed to jumpstart the process of development can come neither from taxation, nor from agriculture (in its current state) – while aid (at least Western aid) is tied to austerity prescriptions, which do not aim at transforming the economy. Thus, the mining rent appears as the state's only remaining option, especially as it seeks to revive the *state-led* development project disallowed by neoliberal reform. The desire to hold on to power (Tandja), or a more ideological intention at reforming the state (Issoufou), have created political will to redefine Niger's mining policy to the advantage of the state. This political will is supported by popular agency – limited to the elite class – and quieter popular support from other classes of Nigerien society.

However, this has not led to an agreed-upon reform programme. There is clearly *elite class consensus* around the notion that capital from mining rent – together with the investment and lending that it would attract – would rekindle Niger's social contract and ultimately re-establish the legitimacy of the elite class as the country's ruling class. But this consensus does not appear to crystallise into a reform programme that would also associate the other classes in the Nigerien polity. If it limits itself to shoring up elite rule, as it appears to be doing, it is safe to say the PNDS's thrust – or pledge – to institutionalise democracy in Niger will make only trivial dents in the neoliberal state system of the country.

West Bengal: Renouncing Political Will

The case of India is very different from Niger. Even leaving aside the size and complexity differentials (India is more comparable perhaps to Africa than to a sub-unit of Africa such as Niger), in the spectrum of structural economic transformation, or development as it were, Niger lies at an initial point – with Bolivia further ahead, but closer to Niger than to India – while India is now largely a transitional economy. If the main concern of the state of Niger is primary capital extraction from natural resources, the Indian state coordinates capital-intensive industrialisation and is faced with the problem of redistribution; and while Niger's sociology is a comparatively simple one (simpler, certainly, than in the pre-colonial era), India's is much harder to chart with the required tact and accuracy, given in particular the fact that caste and culture play an important role alongside class. Sticking to a class framework, it can be said that India has three key class-groupings: the monopoly (now corporate) capitalist and big bourgeoisie layers; the rural gentry and closely linked small bourgeoisie; and the masses of the toiling people, in town, country and forest.³¹ In this way, the underlying story of India's evolution broadly lends itself to the conceptual framework set out in the first section of this article, and the fact that India is so different from Niger is a good test of its relative worth as an analytical tool for the purposes of this article.

More than in the case of the Nigerien state, the product largely of the independence era, key functional elements of the Indian state were created during the colonial period. That was especially the case of those elements which neoliberal reform tends to preserve: basic administration, defence and security. The colonial government needed economic order and security for the sake of imperial investors. Given the vital importance of India to the imperial economy of Britain, these requisites had the benefit of providing India with good basic state institutions by independence.³² Also, it was under British domination that the class distribution of modern India – as

distinct from the one extant in the Mughal and Rajput period – gradually took shape, leading to an early independence social contract where, similar to what we have seen in Niger, the modern-educated elite seized control of the state in the name of development.

The large internal economy of India and its more complex class distribution complicated this, however. In particular, not only were the interests of the propertied and popular classes distinct, there were also significant differences among the propertied classes, with differing interpretations of the meaning and implication of development. The early development policies of the Indian state show, at any rate, that the preferred model was state-led, and the dedication of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, to parliamentary democracy also ensured that this state-led model of development was not to be authoritarian as in much of the Global South at the time. The state ramped up its power, built infrastructures and formulated an industrial policy as well as an agricultural intensification policy that led to a 'green revolution' toward the end of the 1960s. These mainstays of development policy would satisfy the propertied classes, while populist programmes undertaken especially under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1966–77) directed state patronage toward the poor. Indira Gandhi also used the power of the state to expand credit and savings into the rural areas and through the country's large 'informal' sector (bank nationalisations of 1969).³³ All of these policies, though serving chiefly the propertied classes, sometimes at the expenses of the popular classes,³⁴ had real overall transformative potentials and (in some cases) effects.

The Indian model ran however into a crisis of transition by the mid-1960s. While the propertied classes had successfully replaced – with the indispensable help of the state – imperial capitalists through the first decade of independence, the next stage was to successfully compete with international capitalists to avoid being consigned to a peripheral and menial position in the world economy. Also, without transition, India's vast poor population was feeling more acutely the brunt of exploitation and neglect.

The transition crisis not only generated a conflict within the ruling class – between those who tied their ideal of prosperity to a state-protected internal market and those who wanted the state to open up the country – but it also happened in a difficult context, both nationally and internationally (in the late 1960s, drought and famine, war with Pakistan, and currency instability; in the 1970s, the oil shocks and recession). The transition crisis translated politically into a crisis of the state and of parliamentary democracy through much of the 1970s. While a fragmented and weak political opposition failed to defeat Indira Gandhi at the polls, she turned toward so-called 'pragmatic' policies, which no longer reflected the choices of the now

deeply divided ruling classes, but essentially seemed to strengthen her hold on power. Economically, those were inadequate policies, fostering a corrupt status quo³⁵ and increasing dissatisfaction in the ruling classes. The latter phenomenon took several forms, including a high-minded defence of democracy by the elderly socialist Jayaprakash Narayan in 1975–76, but mostly, the objective became to put an end to Gandhi's rule. Lashing out against her opponents during the state of emergency she had proclaimed in June 1975, Gandhi succeeded in uniting their political representatives in the motley Janata Party, which beat her at the polls in 1977. But the economic situation only further deteriorated – in part because the Janata Party proved incapable of backing the policies of its ablest Prime Minister, Charan Singh (1979–80) – and Gandhi returned to power in January 1980.

In the changed conditions of the 1980s, Gandhi – imitated after her assassination in 1984 by her successors – started reorienting the state toward market liberalisation. This was announced – indirectly – in both the Industrial Policy Statement of July 1980 and the Sixth Five-Year Plan, which showed a new willingness to stimulate the transition of the Indian economy into international levels of competitiveness. Measures linking industrial growth to export performance were taken in diverse policy areas, and were poised to expand corporate capitalism, even if in limited ways. Some incoherence marked those policies, where exports ended up being absorbed by domestic demand and where liberalisation spurred both a costly – in terms of balance of payments – import of capital goods and the transformation of state-protected monopoly capitalism into international-allied monopoly capitalism, among other policy miscarriages.³⁶ Overall, however, they were not a failure from the point of view of policy-makers. They managed to expand the scope of corporate capitalism without undermining the state system. Liberalisation was a means toward the end of the transition to higher industrialisation, which was still to be organised by the state. Thus, the fiscal crisis resulting from the policy incoherencies of the 1980s, though apparently similar to the one which destroyed the fragile economies of Bolivia and Niger in the early 1980s, became here the pretext for using that instrument (liberalisation) more freely.

Indeed, in the case of India, a radical break that could be characterised as 'neoliberal reform' did not occur. The break, if such it was, came in 1980,³⁷ when market liberalisation became a key policy option for the Indian state, and when segments of the industrial sector emerged or grew thanks to its decisions. This in turn made possible some of the reforms developed in the 1990s, both technically and – more importantly – politically. While the central Indian governments of the 1990s may well have harboured neoliberal reformers,³⁸ it remains that neoliberal reform as a package could not easily be implemented in

the context of a country where the ruling classes had recognised the pacifying value of the democratic process – certainly after the troubles of the late 1970s – and where there was no firm consensus among them on neoliberalism. How then are we to characterise what happened in India after 1991?

The balance of payments crisis had to be solved, and this was done chiefly by drastically reducing public investment. The general effect of the market liberalisation initiative, combined with this decline in public investment, expanded the power of corporate capital as an agent in the Indian development model. Moreover, the central state's activism was reduced across the country, giving that much salience to regional disparities, as responsibilities for development were gradually offloaded onto individual states. (This process is akin, in a more informal way, to the decentralisation reform seen in the case of Niger.) On the other hand, despite the continuing – yet still modest – opening up of the economy to international market forces, the measured pace of neoliberal-style reforms has preserved the coherence of the internal economy and the dominance of national industry actors. What was accomplished by the reforms was to put India's wealth – land, labour, government work – at the service of those actors through the steady but disparate birthing of a market economy – the neoliberal concept of development as it were – across the country. The state-led development model has, in this way, lost most of its significance, but it has not been straightforwardly replaced by neoliberal reform (as in Niger or Bolivia). Rather, it is now left to individual states within the Union to define – in accordance with regional conditions – the uses to which they would put the liberalisation instrument, in a context where competition to attract private investment greatly constrains or reduces their choices. It is this ambiguous situation that I now propose to explore by engaging in an exercise similar to the one conducted with the Nigerien case: that is, approaching the issue through a single revealing event – here, the transfer of a car plant from West Bengal to Gujarat – and assess thereby the implications for democratic reform in the case country.

The short story is this: in the early 2000s, Tata Motors, an Indian market giant, created stiff competition among states for receiving the site of the plant for its new project, the 'Nano' a cheap mini-car with the famously low price tag of 'one lakh' (100,000 rupees or US\$2,300), designed for India's struggling majority population. West Bengal beat the competition by leasing land to the company in Singur, a small rural town in the vicinity of state capital, Kolkata. The land, intended to host both the car plant and its ancillaries in an industrial complex, was expropriated from farmers using an abusive interpretation of eminent domain law, and cash compensation. Some of the farmers protested, first in the courts (where they lost their case),

then on the streets, causing repression and the intervention of a coalition of rights-defending organisations and individuals, as well as that of opposition politicians. Given the turmoil and violence, Tata Motors reviewed its options and, in October 2008, was invited into Gujarat by an SMS from that state's Chief Minister, Narendra Modi (now the country's Prime Minister). Gujarat offered land already occupied by the state at Sanand to the 'Nano' project, thus avoiding controversy.

The event has been abundantly analysed and commented on by Indian scholars.³⁹ I am here interested in two aspects of what had transpired at that point: the attitudes of actors in West Bengal relative to the Tata project and the underlying idea of development behind its support by the West Bengal government; and a comparison of these attitudes with the Sanand denouement.

The West Bengal state was run at the time by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), which of course inspired no end of irony owing to the fact that it had courted a market giant while trampling on the rural proletariat. This is all the more curious since CPI-M, which, by then, had been in power in Kolkata uninterruptedly for 31 years, had grounded its hegemony in rural supremacy. The scholarly consensus on this subject is that CPI-M in West Bengal had created stability at the expense of development. More specifically, since the late 1970s, the party had successfully displaced the larger landowning classes – favourable to Congress – and brought about a West Bengal of smallholders, including through 'Operation Barga', a policy of land reform which secured the rights of sharecroppers against rich landowners. These actions provided a stable basis for the party's dominance in the majority poor population of the state. At the same time, West Bengal was, however, also taken into the general Indian dilemma of transition to a higher stage of development which had started to brew in the country in the 1970s.

In this case, the lack of development was directly connected to the hegemonic structure of CPI-M, since a system of smallholding, largely subsistence agriculture, can hardly provide the surplus capital needed for starting such a process (compare to Niger). As a result, large sections of the peasantry suffered a process of marginalisation, while even the beneficiaries of CPI-M policies were confronted with the limitations of stagnant development. Democratic reform might have provided a solution through the ideal combination of political will and popular agency leading to transformative institutions, and this was clearly what was envisaged by the reform of the Panchayat (rural government) system in 1983. Not only was the new Panchayat Act adopted that year destined to better organise popular agency at local levels, it also aimed at providing the institutional space the state needed to implement its rural development policies (including the then on-going Operation Barga). But as the instability created by economic

stagnation increased, the party also increasingly resorted to patronage and intimidation – rather than to democratic practice – to maintain its hold on power, an objective which eventually became paramount.⁴⁰ By the early 2000s, the CPI-M was moving toward neoliberal reform in order to attract private capital, arguing that ‘land reform was not an end in itself and industrialisation was necessary for moving into the next phase of development’.⁴¹ The key implication here is that the party had decided to give up on the transformation of agriculture – which, from a political point of view, would have entailed democratic reform – and opted to climb onto the national bandwagon of corporate-led development.⁴² From this perspective, its mistreatment of smallholders is logical, although it was also self-defeating. Indeed, all analysts are agreed that the population of Singur was not hostile to the Tata project, and many among them expected to profit from industrial work and attendant business. However, they did not understand this to mean that agricultural work needed to be forfeited altogether. The underlying concept of development for the rural poor combined the relative *security* of agriculture – relative to potential salaried jobs – to the relative *opportunities* of industry, while the government in fact viewed agriculture and industry as opposites because, in the existing scheme of things (which it was principally responsible for creating), the latter produced capital, and the former did not.

The situation in West Bengal was therefore this: there was no political will for democratic reform among the rulers of the state at that point;⁴³ yet there was much popular agency, both among the smallholders and the petite bourgeoisie that staffed civil society; a reform programme could not take form in the absence of the political will factor and potentially transformative institutions (Panchayats, Ministry of Land and Land Reforms) remained therefore in a state of inaction. In Gujarat, the state took over the Tata project and the process went down quietly. There is no space here to engage into an effective comparison between the two processes, but the Gujarat case might well show that, within the larger framework of corporate-led development that emerged from the liberalisations of the 1980–90s, differing forms of appropriation of the model are possible, and it is perhaps right-wing Gujarat that swerved farther away from the orthodox neoliberal approach – although, certainly using another method than democratic reform. In the case of West Bengal, the people eventually voted the CPI-M out in 2011, replacing it by a coalition led by the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), the party of Mamata Bannerjee. One of her first decisions was to organise the vote of a law that would return 400 acres of land to the unwilling farmers of Singur, but Tata – which still holds the lease – has successfully resisted the law at both West Bengal’s High Court and India’s Supreme Court.

Conclusion

Despite the received wisdom of the mainstream literature in political science, the coincidence of the 'third wave' of democratisations and the 'second wave' of economic liberalism was a misfortune for democracy. The mainstream literature generally assumes that neoliberal reform and democracy are mutually sustaining, and that roadblocks to democracy are to be found in a country's internal factors, a conclusion preordained by the premise. Indeed, since, in this view, democracy and neoliberal capitalism are the two faces of the same coin, the notion that neoliberalism may be one such hurdle is essentially meaningless. Moreover, since neoliberalism is bound up with globalisation, there is a clear reluctance to stress the negative role of external factors, such as the agendas of multilateral organisations or the strategic operations of Western powers.⁴⁴ By looking at a single historical process, such as the reform of the state, in which competing forces representative of democratisation and neoliberalism can be shown to be at work, this 'internal/external factors' debate can be displaced by a more fruitful comparison. For in studying the effects of two divergent reform agendas of the state, we are comparing effective processes, not biased conjectures.

On this score, it is obviously fair to say that in the poorer countries of the South, the democratic reform of the state was meant to strengthen it, not weaken it. The intention was that the overhauled strength of a reformed state could be put to work on development, on the basis of participation from all classes of society, instead of being used and misused by the small cliques that profited from authoritarian rule. And it is equally fair to say that neoliberal reform, on the other hand, sought to weaken the state and let competition in the marketplace determine winners and losers, with no demonstrated concern for the society that people form under a state. The comparison between Niger and India (and, arguably, that between West Bengal and Gujarat *within* India) reveals that in this struggle, the neoliberal has tended to gain the upper-hand, and it is here that the study shows that we may put the stress on internal factors. If democracy was essentially promoted by internal forces, and neoliberalism by external ones, the relative defeat of democracy should primarily be explained by failings from the (internal) forces that supported it. In this study, such failings have been analysed through an interpretive outline derived from Bolivian history, and a longer study could delve into the living details of how the outline worked in each case, what caused success, and what prompted failure.

Another major conclusion of the study indicates that neoliberal reform especially weakened the weaker – Niger rather than India and, within India, West Bengal rather than Gujarat. And finally, given that democratic reform

is in fact the antagonist of neoliberal reform when it comes to the state and to development, one may conjecture that only by embracing it could countries that have been subjected to the neoliberal regimen transcend their predicament. Further research in both reform agendas – their social conditions, political implications and economic parameters – is however needed to effectively understand both the theory and the practice of democratic reform. Such understanding, I believe, is much needed.

Notes

1. The best case in point is perhaps that of South Korea, an economic ‘miracle’ under the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, but also a political impasse, leading to the massive instability of the late 1970s that included the assassination of Park (1979), the Gwangju massacre (1980) and its fractious aftermath. Only democratic reform ultimately gave the country a way out many years later.
2. Among the cases studied in this paper, Bolivia is a poster child of the first age of economic liberalism. It embraced the policy early on, under the presidency of Linares (1857–61) and became one of its major victims following the Great Depression.
3. Of course, the mainstream literature in political science holds the exact opposite to be true. During the heyday of the ‘third wave’, well-respected authors Diamond, Linz and Lipset, writing on the countries of the Global South, thus claimed that ‘all democracies ... are to some degree capitalist; production and distribution of goods are determined mainly by competition in the market, rather than by the state, and there is significant private ownership of the means of production’ (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989: xxi). Over thirty years later, the same pronouncement was repeated unblinkingly by Leon (2010): ‘All liberal democracies are also market-oriented economies.’
4. This is glowingly described by Albrow as ‘for now the culmination of a long process ... to shape the postcolonial terms of political participation, which has been historically defined by the profound marginalization of its indigenous and popular majority’. Quoted from ‘Confounding Cultural Citizenship’, p. 71.
5. See Wolf (2013).
6. ‘After the referendum’, Mesa had told the daily *La Nación*, ‘the state has recovered an important degree of legitimacy’. Quoted in *The Free Library/South American Political and Economic Affairs*, an online resource.
7. ‘It was a state of vast reach’, write Arze and Kruse (2004: 24), ‘playing a central role not only in capital formation and allocation but also employment. It was a provider of services and the focus of social demands, making itself present as never before in people’s daily lives and the agendas of social struggle.’
8. This includes COB which, though a union federation, was deeply unmeshed with the revolutionary state, its main leader, Juan Lechín, being First Minister of Mines and Petroleum, and then vice-president in 1960–64.
9. For a well-rounded presentation of the effects of this third role of ‘the state of ’52’, see Klein (2011).
10. See Malloy (1970).

11. In their paper, Arze and Kruse note, for instance, that 'the second administration of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada ... killed more people in 14 months than did Gen. Hugo Bánzer's seven-year military dictatorship' (2004: 23), which was noted for its peculiar brutality.
12. Kohl's review of MAS 'governance' (i.e., state action) stresses several parameters of a 'chaotic style of governance' (2010: 113) that especially denote the fact that this type of institution-building is either very slow to emerge, or altogether not forthcoming in today's Bolivia. This may be partly related to the emphasis on the concept of 'cultural identity', which has played a far greater role in MAS's popular agency than in MNR's. Some scholars – generally sympathetic to neoliberal reform – consider this a welcome change from class identification (see Haarstad and Andersson 2009), ignoring that emphasis on cultural identity does not preclude, and may indeed reinforce, class identification – especially in a conservative fashion: but maybe they know this all too well!
13. See the long theoretical preamble – a veritable essay – of the National Charter adopted to this effect in 1987. The Charter, write the authors of the *Historical Dictionary of Niger*, 'defined the development society, the concept of the state, and the organization of the executive councils tasked with the mission of pushing the country forward using rules for (the motto went) 'consultation, dialogue and participation'.
14. From a French word meaning 'clerk' or 'civil servant' depending on the context. During the colonial period, the *commis* occupied clerical positions in government and business, and became the slim buffer class between the colonial rulers and the African population, developing a lifestyle closer to that of the Europeans and essentially growing into a local bourgeoisie after independence. In Niger, the PPN was the party of the *commis*, which came to power upon defeating – mostly through fraud and violence – the Sawaba party, a leftist formation that represented the country's semi-urban proletariat of the *talakawa* ('little folks'). See Van Walraven (2013).
15. This is mostly found in the grey literature of ministry reports and consultancy documents. The narrative part of this analysis is based on documentation graciously provided by the Niamey-based Bureau Nigérien d'Etudes et de Conseil en Développement Rural, as well as on interviews with officials from the agriculture ministry, both former and current. See also Raynaut's (1999) introduction to *Politique Africaine's* special issue on Niger.
16. See Gervais (1992; 1995) who interprets this as a story of Niger dragging its feet to implement much needed reforms.
17. Students – as well as civil servants – were routinely singled out in the neoliberal literature of the time as the enemies of 'reform', which they would oppose in view of keeping their 'privileges'. See, for Niger, especially the work of Gervais (1992; 1995; 1997).
18. Literally, 'SAP [structural adjustment programmes] will not come to pass'. For an early analysis of such democratic resistance to neoliberal reform, see Beckman (1991).
19. Tandja remained in office nearly two months after the expiry of his second term, in December 2009, and had to be forcibly removed from power by the army in February 2010.
20. For a full analysis of the rationale of neoliberal reform of state institutions in Africa, see Mkandawire (2009).

21. This now very conventional wisdom in Niger – leaders of the student union repeated the same phrase during interviews – seems to encapsulate a (neoliberal) zeitgeist that stresses individualism and competitiveness, including with regard to inter-state relations.
22. Increased taxation is the preferred avenue for revenue mobilisation in neoliberal reform, as is shown by prescriptions from both the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the IMF. The state of Niger is trying to comply, with limited success and the memory of the serious popular unrest that rocked the country after IMF-pushed tax hikes in 2005.
23. From the Nigerien weekly *La Roue de l'Histoire* (2014). Interestingly enough, this was stated four years after his fall, which underlines the strength of his class beliefs.
24. One symbol of this was the establishment, in 2003, of the high security prison Koutou Kalé, in a craggy wilderness some 30 kilometres outside the capital. Though officially destined for 'hardened criminals', it soon became famous for hosting pesky journalists and troublesome opposition figures arrested on trumped-up charges or through harsh interpretations of the law.
25. At that specific juncture, the events of 1991 received for the first time symbolic public recognition: a street was renamed after the National Conference of the summer 1991, and the sports hall in which it had convened was also given the name 'palace of the sovereign national conference' following a solemn christening ceremony.
26. Constitution of Niger's Seventh Republic, Preamble, and 'Niger: La Renaissance. Programme PNDS Tarayya 2011', p. 5.
27. A recent investigation by this researcher among university graduates shows a newly-expressed preference for public sector jobs, while until very recently all studies indicated preference for the private sector in that population.
28. However, in order to grab a newly-found giant uranium deposit, the biggest in Africa, Areva accepted, in 2007, a 50 per cent increase in the kilo price paid to Niger.
29. See the report commissioned in 2011 by the Niger branch of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, chapter II, *ab initio* (pages non-numbered). Online resource.
30. Areva, which is 91 per cent owned by the French state, is a successor company to the constellation of French public institutions and enterprises that dealt with the fledgling state of Niger in the 1960s. France took control of Somaïr through aid, when the Nigerien state borrowed from its cooperation agency to buy its shares in the company. French control of Somaïr and Cominak in particular means that the state of Niger lacks intelligence in the commercialisation of the ore and the profitability of the companies, something which has constantly strengthened the French hand during negotiations.
31. Inspired and adapted from 'Indira Gandhi: an attempt at a political appraisal', an anonymous (signed 'K.B.') essay in a 1985 issue of *Economic and Political Weekly* ('K.B.' 1985).
32. For a summary, see Maddison (2006 [1971]).
33. This is of notable importance, contributing to creating India's peculiarity as a poor country with large domestic savings – later useful for sustaining large-scale investments.
34. This was especially visible during the building of large dams, which would necessitate land confiscation and the displacement of masses of people, who were generally poor.

35. This situation, characterised by disparaging phrases ('Hindu rate of growth', 'license-permit-quota-subsidy raj', 'political economy of stagnation'), was summed up by Mansingh as 'a nexus among corrupt politicians, corrupt bureaucrats, and corrupt business houses' (2006: 30). The paroxysm of Gandhi's authoritarian tendencies was reached when she declared a state of emergency in June 1975. Writing in hindsight, Mansingh described the episode (which lasted 21 months) as an 'aberrant ... period of incipient authoritarianism' (*ibid.*: 207), which is just what it was, although analysts pondering events at the time feared the worst (Kozicki 1975). For a rich contextualisation, see chapters 9 and 10 of Ananth (2010).
36. See the detailed contemporary analysis of the new measures and their economic effects in Kurien (1989).
37. Here, there is agreement between Kohli (2006) and Corbridge Harriss and Jeffrey (2013). The latter also show the underlying continuities between what had gone on since the 1960s and what became possible after 1980.
38. Such would have been Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister in 2004–14 and Finance Minister in 1991.
39. See in particular Sud (2008) to be read against the background of her earlier piece (Sud 2007); Roy (2011); Baumik (2011); and Kumar (2012).
40. See the analysis of Bandhyopadhyay and Dinda (2010: 10).
41. *ibid.*: 14.
42. Before the Singur debacle, the CPI-M had encountered a similar fiasco at Nandigram, in March 2007, when it tried to transfer farmland to the Indonesia-based Salim Group's industrial project of a Special Economic Zone there. It did not learn from the episode.
43. But perhaps there was some among the larger ruling classes, especially if we believe the claims of Mamata Bannerjee, then the major opposition figure, now Chief Minister and also Minister of Land and Land Reforms – the one potentially transformative institution for rural West Bengal.
44. The role of China in defeating the promotion of democracy, human rights and good governance is one exception in the more recent literature – for no obvious reason other than the fact that China is not a Western power, since the same behaviour, or even worse, is observable in American or French foreign policy, for instance.

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