

## 8. Subaltern Geographies in the Plurinational State of Bolivia: the TIPNIS Conflict

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Thanks be to the Bolivian people! Once more, we are here in front of the cathedral of Santísima Trinidad to remind them that on this day, 21 years ago, we set out to demand indigenous territories from the government. (Ernesto Noe, 15 August 2011)<sup>1</sup>

Following this speech by the Mojeño leader, around 800 indigenous peoples departed from Trinidad in the Amazonian region of Bolivia on the Eighth Indigenous March named ‘for the Defence of the TIPNIS, for Life, for Dignity and for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’. The marchers were resisting the government’s plans to build a road through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS; Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure), which carries the dual status of a national park and legally recognised territory communally titled to the Mojeño-Trinitario, Yuracaré and Chimane peoples. Significantly, this infrastructure would open up the park to the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons. Two decades after the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity led by Ernesto Noe, which resulted in the legal recognition of four indigenous territories including the TIPNIS, the lowland indigenous movement – spearheaded by CIDOB (Indigenous Confederation of the Bolivian East, Chaco and Amazon; Confederación Indígena del Oriente, Chaco y Amazonía de Bolivia) – was retracing its steps towards the seat of government in La Paz (approximately 600 km). This time around the marchers were defending their constitutional right to free, prior and informed consultation, which had been neglected by the very government responsible for establishing the new Constitution and re-founding Bolivia as a ‘plurinational’ state in 2009. The conflict revealed a paradox: that despite the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo; Movement Towards Socialism) administration’s avowed goals of decolonising the nation-state and incorporating indigenous populations more comprehensively into decision-making practices of the state, “the sense remains that resource extraction blessed by the government trumps all other considerations” (Bebbington et al 2010: 313). Within this chapter, I contend that there is a persistent logic of ‘coloniality’ embedded within the MAS’s self-styled ‘indigenous’ state. Yet, indigenous movements continue their decolonial efforts through demands for self-determination, which would entail the delinking of state machinery from its colonial foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Fundación Tierra (2012).

This chapter explores the resisted, contested and negotiated configurations of the Bolivian decolonial path by bringing into conversation scholarship by the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD: see Escobar 2007; Mignolo 2007a) project in Latin America, with South Asian subaltern studies. MCD proponents have challenged postcolonial theorists for presenting a postmodern reading of subalternity, which Grosfoguel contends “represents a Eurocentric critique of eurocentricism” (2007: 211; also see Mignolo 2000). Instead, MCD scholars marshal a decolonial reading of subalternity, which critiques eurocentricism *from* and *with* subalternised knowledges. Postcolonial thinkers, such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, are questioned for grounding their work in the poststructuralism of Foucault, Lacan and Derrida. Mignolo argues that they present “a project of scholarly transformation within the academy” (2007b: 452) that remains internal to Europe. Instead, decoloniality is understood as a project of ‘*desprendimiento*’ (Quijano 1992) or ‘delinking’ (Mignolo 2007b) from contemporary legacies of coloniality. This includes coloniality of power (Quijano 1992, 2000), knowledge (see Lander 2000) and being (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Delinking starts from “other sources” (Mignolo 2007b: 452), such as the activism and scholarship of Mahatma Gandhi, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, to name a few examples. This politico-epistemic move is crucial for displacing Eurocentric knowledge and bringing subaltern epistemologies into the fold. To be sure, this is a move I look to pursue in this chapter by drawing on ethnographic engagement with indigenous movements in defence of the TIPNIS from September 2011 to June 2012, including six weeks on the Ninth Indigenous March (a second march in defence of the TIPNIS).<sup>2</sup>

That said, I work from a position that does not reject postcolonial critiques from the West in their entirety, in part since there is no ‘outside’ of modernity that can be recovered simply by focusing on marginalised and silenced voices in the Global South. To do so, risks a romanticism and essentialism of identitarian politics, particularly in regards to race and ethnicity. In reference to indigenous peoples, for example, Radcliffe recognises that “the emancipatory valence of indigeneity is neither natural nor automatic” (2017: 223), but rather relational. Indeed, this can be seen in the Bolivian

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<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic material was gathered through three methods: (i) participant observation in indigenous and urban movements in defence of the TIPNIS; (ii) 55 in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders, protest marchers, NGO workers and urban solidarity activists; and (iii) documentary analysis of public announcements from the marches and indigenous organisations. When discussing Escobar’s work, Asher rightly points out that some MCD scholars “ignore the problem of representation or resolve it through ethnography” (2013: 838). Yet, as Spivak contends it would be imprudent to give up on ‘retrieving’ the subaltern, instead she asks that the researcher “question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility” (1987: 200). This challenge is an undertaking that – although never complete – ethnographers are well versed in as part of the interplay between proximity and distance in the fieldwork encounter (see Davies 2008).

case, where there has been a substantial re-signification of indigenous identity politics over time. The MCD collective's views also seem at odds with the fact that a large number of its proponents hold academic positions in North American institutions. Asher points out that they evade the problem of representation and fall into the trap of "making the subaltern speak" (2013: 832). With this in mind, I agree with Asher that bringing Spivak (1987; 1990; 2014) into conversation with the MCD project would add conceptual rigour. More recently, Spivak conceptualises subalternity as: "the idea of no access to the structures of citizenship, the structures of the state" (2014: 10). Although indigenous peoples are recognised as constitutional citizens of the Bolivian state and given rights as collective subjects, the government has established certain limits and sanctions – a distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* political power – that constitutes a 'domestication' of decolonial trajectories (Garcés 2011: 46). Using Spivak's interpretation of the problem of representation, one may argue that factions of the indigenous populations are unable to 'speak' since they have not had their constitutional rights to self-determination (and free, prior and informed consent) respected and complied with. The TIPNIS protestors pushed at these limits and sought, as Saldaña-Portillo remarks in reference to indigenous Mexicans, a shift from "the position of the subaltern who evades representation ... to the position of constitutional subject: the Indian as citizen as Indian" (2001: 412). Fundamentally, I argue that the TIPNIS protestors were enacting a decolonial move aimed at transcending their own subalternity. Subalternisation can therefore be understood as a relational process constantly reworked through the spatial dynamics of cultural hegemony (Rabasa 2010).

This chapter will first outline the antecedents to the TIPNIS conflict, indicating some of the contradictions embedded within the MAS's decolonial project. I then discuss processes of coloniality within the state, including the government's use of police intervention against the indigenous marchers on the Eighth March and the use of a development narrative based on ideas of progress, modernity and assimilation. This section is followed by an examination of the ways in which the TIPNIS struggle has mobilised subaltern memories of a collective "colonial wound" (Mignolo 2005: 95). Although not widely chronicled by scholars of the conflict, I argue that analyses of colonial legacies are vital since they shape subaltern resistance in the present. Finally, I document the ways in which the lowland indigenous movement has resisted contemporary processes of colonial subjugation, namely through the use of non-violent protest marches to assert their right to be represented in the public sphere.

## The Plurinational State: A Decolonial Move?

In 2006, Evo Morales became president of Bolivia with 54 percent of the votes. The MAS, the party behind the so-called 'social-movement state' (Gustafson 2009a: 255), had its roots in the Unity Pact, a national alliance among the country's five principal peasant and indigenous grassroots movements, including the two indigenous organisations of the lowlands and highlands: CIDOB and CONAMAQ (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qollasuyu; Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyo). Despite fragmentary objectives, the Pact had a united vision to 'refound' the country "through the participation of indigenous peoples as *peoples* (pueblos)" (Garcés 2011: 50). That is to say, to foreground collective – rather than individual – subjects of decision-making within state structures. This conceptualisation of governance was articulated through the demand for a Constituent Assembly that aimed to transcend the colonial legacy of liberal democracy that accompanies the ideology of the modern nation-state. For some, this shift constitutes a decolonial transition (see Escobar 2010).

The decolonial project was substantiated through the 2009 Constitution that renamed the 'Republic' the 'Plurinational State of Bolivia' in recognition of the nearly two-thirds of the population who self-identified as indigenous in the 2001 national census (INE/UMPA 2003: 157). While there are many pluri-national and pluri-cultural states, Latin American nationalisms – as elsewhere – have fictionalised idealistic visions of an 'imagined community' based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity (see Anderson 1991). The Bolivian government has departed from this inherited colonial model, however, by re-imagining "a state that merges constitutive sovereignty rooted in the national people (*pueblo*) and indigenous plurality and self-determination" (Gustafson 2009b: 987). The Constitution rebalances democratic norms by acknowledging communitarian forms of decision-making practised by indigenous peoples, alongside individual citizenship regimes. In this way, state structures have incorporated what Slater has called "demo-diversity"; democracy that "emerges from indigenous roots" (2013: 75). This departure from the liberal democratic framing of state-society relations in Bolivia, as well as in other Latin American countries, has caused scholars to speculate on whether there has been a 'post-liberal' shift in civilian regimes (Nolte & Schilling Vacaflor 2012; Yashar 2005).

Further, the Constitution expressly grants indigenous autonomy and territorial self-determination. Under Article 403 of the Constitution, indigenous peoples inhabiting Original Indigenous and Peasant Territories (Territorios Indígena Originario Campesino; TIOCs) have,

the right to land; to the use and exclusive exploitation of renewable natural resources under conditions determined by law; to prior and informed consultation; to participation in the benefits of the exploitation of the non-renewable natural

resources that are found in their territory; the authority to apply their own norms, administered by their structures of representation; and to define their development in accordance with their own cultural criteria and principles of harmonious coexistence with nature (Gobierno de Bolivia 2009: 148).

These land titling efforts reflect a broader 'territorial turn' in Latin America, where there has been significant state recognition of communal indigenous property and land rights (see Bryan 2012; Offen 2003). Indeed, 'politico-territorial autonomy' has been the long-standing articulating demand of indigenous movements across Latin America (Díaz Polanco 1997).

Plurinationalism marks a transformative moment since previous governments have failed to assimilate the indigenous masses to the nation-state (Rivera Cusicanqui 1987). The 1952 National Revolution, in which workers and peasants overthrew the entrenched oligarchy of tin barons and landholders, resulted in the granting of universal suffrage and instigated agrarian reform that redistributed land to peasant labourers (see Dunkerley 1984). Nonetheless, class based interests superseded ethnic demands and indigenous movements were "considered to be an obstacle to the sovereignty of the State" (Rivera Cusicanqui 1987: 93). The COB (Central Obrera Boliviana), Bolivia's chief trade union confederation, took a central role in state politics and formed the backbone of working class resistance (Crabtree 2005; Dunkerley 1984). What prevailed was a nationalist,

ideology of *mestizaje* – the mixture of indigenous and nonindigenous – [which] was paired with the extension of individual citizenship rights to newly designated campesinos [peasant farmers] who, it was imagined, would set aside their collective cultural investments in keeping with the expectations of modernity (Albro 2010: 74).

The 'Indian question' was addressed through acculturation and civilization, rather than recognising indigenous cosmologies within the nation-state (Malloy 1970). Thus, decolonial visions of communal representation and territorial self-determination were sidelined in the interest of promoting a homogenous nationalism. Furthermore, the 1952 revolution had a very different impact in the Amazonian tropics of Bolivia sparking what Jones has referred to as the 'colonization of the Oriente' (1984: 71). Under the land reform decree, indigenous peoples were referred to as "in a savage state and with a primitive organization" and denied full-fledged citizen status (cited in Jones 1984: 76). Although the law was later changed, the view that the lowlands was *tierras baldías* (public or vacant lands) served to awaken investors to the opportunity of obtaining land titles, with the Amazonian region becoming a new frontier for development and expansion (Jones 1984; Lehm Ardaya 1999). In the area around the TIPNIS, this colonisation continued with the migration of Andean peasants to the south of the park after the closure of state mines under the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. The cultivation of coca has been the predominant livelihood of these migrants, converting the Chapare

province into the biggest coca producing area of Bolivia, with the *cocalero* (coca-grower) movement becoming a formidable political force (Healy 1991; Paz 2012). Since the 1990s a significant ethnicisation of national politics served to unite peasant and indigenous factions, however (see Postero 2007; Van Cott 2005). Most notably, various social movements and trade unions came together in popular resistance during the Water and Gas Wars.<sup>3</sup> These groups lent their support to the MAS, which showed a marked ability to subsume heterogeneous identities under an ‘indigenous nationalism’ that crosscut class and ethnicity (Stefanoni 2006: 37). Indeed, for Vice-President García Linares “Evo symbolises the breaking of an imaginary and horizon of possibilities restricted to the subalternity of the indigenous” (cited in Svampa & Stefanoni 2007: 147).

Tensions between the government’s self-styled ‘indigenous’ state and indigenous movements remain, however. Most notably, land and resource conflicts have been a key feature of the MAS’s three administration periods. There are two interconnected grounds for this contestation. Firstly, the MAS has significantly departed from the Unity Pact’s decolonial agenda on several fronts, for instance: the Pact originally proposed that indigenous peoples be granted veto power on the exploitation of non-renewable resources within their territories, but this was redacted from the final version of the Constitution; indigenous autonomy status is difficult to achieve due to restrictive administrative requirements; free and prior consultation processes with indigenous communities are not binding; and indigenous Deputies of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly are elected by majority, rather than through the procedures of indigenous communities (see Garcés 2011; Tockman & Cameron 2014).

Secondly, state-led neo-extractivism has severely threatened indigenous autonomy and territorial self-determination (see Bebbington 2009; Bebbington & Bury 2013). In 2006, the MAS initiated a ‘nationalisation’ of the country’s hydrocarbons industry increasing state funds from US \$287 million in 2004 to US \$1.572 billion by 2007 (Kaup 2010: 129). The government has used these revenues to enact social welfare programmes dramatically reducing absolute poverty rates from 60 percent in 2006 to 30 percent by 2011 (Kohl & Farthing 2012: 231). Resource extraction is integral to the country’s economic development plan, not least as 55 percent of Bolivia’s territory is of potential hydrocarbon interest (Bebbington 2009: 14). This has re-spatialising effects since the exploration and exploitation of sub-soil resources has expanded into new frontiers in the Amazonian region, an area inhabited by many indigenous communities (Bebbington & Bury 2013). Moreover, the Constitution acts to undermine indigenous rights to territorial self-determination as it declares hydrocarbons to be under the ownership of the state (Gobierno de Bolivia 2009, Art. 359: I).

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<sup>3</sup> It is without the scope of this chapter to discuss the complex configuration of these indigenous-peasant alliances (see Crabtree 2005; Perreault 2006).

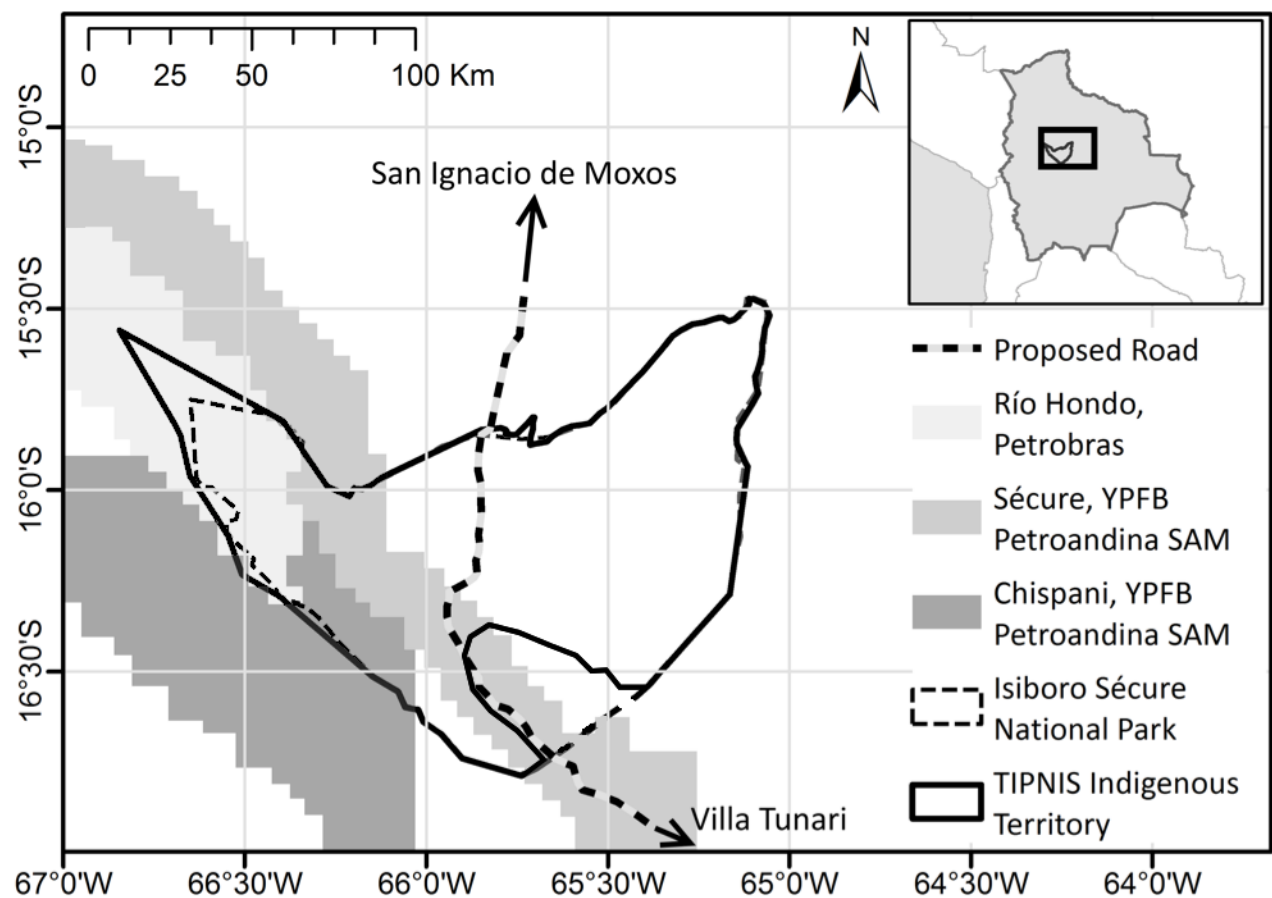
Does the Plurinational State of Bolivia constitute a decolonial move? It is noteworthy that the MAS has made concrete steps towards political and economic parity for many sectors of society, especially peasant and urban indigenous populations who form the majority of citizens who identified as 'indigenous' in the 2001 census (INE/UMPA 2003). Nonetheless, in the context of Latin America's 'Left turn' (Levitsky & Roberts 2011), it is vital to consider whether the government has instigated a decolonial de-linking from the hegemonic imaginary of the state by incorporating subaltern epistemologies. Subaltern studies theorists in Latin America have critiqued *both* neoliberal governmentality *and* more progressive ideologies on the Left, for reproducing colonial legacies of modernity (Rodríguez 2001). Indeed, plurinationalism has not been fully embraced by the nationalist Left (on Ecuador, see Radcliffe 2012). Quijano reflects that the vision of socialist revolution as "control of the state and as state control of labor/resources/product" is a "Eurocentric mirage" and that true decolonialism would require a "socialization of power" (2000: 572) to all societal sectors. As the Bolivian writer Bautista concludes, "to decolonise the state means dismantling the structural and conceptual content of its colonial constitution" (2010: 10). This change would involve the restructuring of state mechanisms to integrate the respective forms of decision-making carried out by ethnic nations. Without this, the MAS can no longer act as the articulator at an organisational level of indigenous demands (Tapia 2011: 41). The degree to which the plurinational state is inherently a decolonial move is therefore limited in part, as it fails to overthrow the coloniality of power embedded within modern state institutions and recognise the alternative spatio-political imaginaries of subalternised indigenous sectors.

### **Progressive Neo-Extractivism, Coloniality and the TIPNIS**

The TIPNIS conflict exemplifies these challenges for the plurinational project. The TIPNIS (an area of over 1.2 million hectares) sits on the border area between the departments of Beni and Cochabamba. This highly biologically diverse region was recognised as a national park in 1965 at a time when conservation was deemed important due to threats from increasing land colonisation in the Amazonian region as a result of the 1953 agrarian reform law (Paz 2012). The park is home to 69 communities and was legally recognised as an indigenous territory in 1990 as a result of the historic march led by CIDOB. The legal titling was made more concrete through a process of '*saneamiento de tierras*' (land cleansing) and in 1997 the indigenous communities were granted a TCO (Tierras Comunitarias de Origen; First Nations or 'Original' Communal Lands) title. At this time, a '*línea roja*' (red line) was established separating the TCO from a colonised area to the south of the national park, known as Polygon 7, that is predominantly inhabited by coca-growers (see Figure 1). The TIPNIS has been under threat despite this dual protection status, not only as a result of the proposed

road, but also due to interrelated processes, namely the expansion of coca growing and the oil and gas extraction (McNeish 2013). Notably, the road would open up access to natural resources with concessions granted for hydrocarbon exploration in 25.5 percent of the TIPNIS (CEDLA 2012; see Figure 1). Further, the conflict has pitted highland peasants and lowland indigenous peoples against one another, since many Andean migrants and coca growers living adjacent to the park have supported the road (Fabricant & Postero 2015). Significantly, this sector is a key base of support for Morales who made his name as the charismatic leader of the *cocalero* movement.

**Figure 1.** Map of the Hydrocarbon Concessions in the TIPNIS



Source: Based on public data from CEDIB (2015).

Government discourse proclaimed the necessity of the road for the integration of the eastern and western regions of Bolivia. The development agenda was rationalised through a discourse of ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’ that echoed the assimilationist logic of the government after the 1952 national revolution (Laing 2015; Sanjinés 2013). In reference to the TIPNIS conflict, Tapia writes that “[t]he idea of the lowlands as a space of colonisation corresponds to the lack of recognition of the existence of other peoples and their territories” (2012: 271). Tellingly, after the lowland indigenous



movement announced that they were going to organise a protest march resisting the construction of the road, the President declared “whether they want it or not, we are going to build this road” (Los Tiempos 2011: n. pag). “Progressive neo-extractivism” (Gudynas 2009: 188) evidently supplanted indigenous autonomy and territorial self-determination.

These tensions came to the fore on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011 when the TIPNIS conflict catapulted into national and international media attention following police intervention on the protest march. Using tear gas, rubber bullets and batons a group of approximately 500 federal police entered the marchers’ campsite at Chaparina and escorted them onto waiting buses to transport them to nearby towns with the aim of transferring the detainees back to their territories in military planes. Roughly 100 people were injured and two women suffered miscarriages. As television footage of the police violence emerged, vigils sprang up in Bolivia’s main plazas as protests against the government intervention grew. The Interior Minister Sacha Llorenti was forced to resign over accusations that he gave the police order. After five days the marchers regrouped and continued their journey to La Paz where they were greeted by tens of thousands of supporters on 19<sup>th</sup> October. The government cancelled the road contract under Ley Corta (Short Law) 180 promulgated on 24<sup>th</sup> October. The government’s use of force marked a fundamental crisis in the hegemony of the MAS to act as a ‘social-movement state’ (Gustafson 2009a: 255). McNeish suggests that it “sparked both a national political crisis and debate about the validity of the government’s credentials as a progressive government that supports indigenous rights” (2013: 221).

On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012, the road project was back on the agenda again after the promulgation of Law No. 222 as a result of pressure from a counter-march by TIPNIS highway supporters.<sup>4</sup> The new law re-opened the possibility of the road subject to a consultation with the 69 TIPNIS communities. The prior consultation process (widely referred to as the ‘post’ consultation) was carried out between July and December 2012 with the final report suggesting that 80 percent of the communities agreed to advance proposals for the road (TSE 2012). However, the consultation included eighteen communities of coca-growing peasant and a further eleven communities boycotted the consultations (TSE 2012). Furthermore, an independent ‘verification commission’ carried out by human rights organisations and the Catholic Church concluded that the consultation did not adhere to the respective organisational structures of indigenous communities and therefore failed to meet legal structures respecting the cultural diversity and world-visions of ethnic nations (FIDH-APDHB 2013). Even where communities agreed to the proposal of the road, it has been suggested that the

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<sup>4</sup> The counter-march was instigated by the Indigenous Council of the South (CONISUR; Consejo Indígena del Sur), representing coca growers and inhabitants of the southernmost part of the national park, outside of the indigenous titled territory.

consultation process was manipulated since the wording focused on whether communities wanted Law No. 180 – the act that cancelled the road project – to be restored. This was a double-edged sword, however, since it also described the TIPNIS as an *'intangible'* (untouchable) zone, which would prohibit the inhabitants of the park from using its natural resources for wealth production. The process of building consent was also marked by gift giving since the inception of the road project. For instance, the leader of the Ninth March, Bertha Vejarano, stated that she had seen the government “taking them [TIPNIS communities] gifts, buying their conscience. The government uses them, convinces them to say ‘yes to the road’, by taking them things that are not worth it. Taking them motors and cell phones” (personal interview, 15 May 2012).<sup>5</sup>

The communities of the TIPNIS do not oppose development *per se*, however. For instance, the platform of demands of the Ninth March included calls for the implementation of community development models in line with the world-visions and self-determination of indigenous peoples, the recognition of community organisations as actors in the mineral and hydrocarbon sectors and the right for communities to benefit from the revenues created through extractive industries (personal field-notes, 20 May 2012). Rather, indigenous communities seek representation in state decision-making processes through their respective organisational forms as outlined in the Constitution. For instance, for the indigenous leader and former President of CONAMAQ Rafael Quispe, the significance of prior consultation is more than just a legislative framework, since it “is a mechanism for other rights, such as self-determination, autonomy, [and] self-governance and that is important for us. It is one of the safeguards for protecting indigenous peoples” (personal interview, 29 April 2012). Further still, when asked whether the communities would have accepted the road project had they been consulted, the President of Sécure Sub-Central (one of two organising bodies within the TIPNIS), Emilio Noza Yuco affirmed that, “the communities would always accept a prior consultation process before approving a project. But now, they feel they have been humiliated, sidelined by the government” (personal interview, 9 May 2012). Fundamentally then, resistance to the road was also a call for greater self-determination over decisions affecting communally owned indigenous territories. In the next section, I demonstrate that the indigenous protest was shaped by collective memories of a ‘colonial wound’ (Mignolo 2005: 95) resulting from a long history of settler colonialism into indigenous lands. In turn, these memories were mobilised to fashion a subaltern version of the past to suit the political needs of the present.

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<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I use the real names of well-known representatives, but omit other names to protect confidentiality. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from interviews or non-English texts are my own.

## Mobilising Subaltern Pasts Toward Decolonial Futures

Intellectual engagement with the TIPNIS conflict has predominantly circulated around the extent to which Bolivia can now be conceived of as a ‘post-neoliberal’ state. Though pertinent, these discussions have not engaged fully with the historical experiences of colonial territorialisation and ensuing anti-colonial resistance in the Amazonian regions.<sup>6</sup> This is not surprising given that popularised chronicles of Bolivia have focused on the history of the Andean region, which Fabricant claims “has left a lasting mark on internal cultural politics and academic frameworks and continues to influence policy-making” (2012: 22). Here, I attempt to address this gap in the literature by using ethnographic engagement with the TIPNIS protest marches to illuminate the ways that “long memories” have served to instil “people with a sense of continuity, the inevitability of resistance, and the legitimacy of struggle” (Kohl & Farthing 2011: 196). Specifically, I focus on the ways that place-based millenarian movements ‘*en busca de la Loma Santa*’ (in search of the Holy Hill) have been re-articulated in pan-indigenous movements for the recognition of indigenous territory in lowland Bolivia.

The millenarian movements in search of the ‘*Loma Santa*’ were a series of migrations by the Mojeño peoples between 1887 and the 1990s from ex-Jesuit settlements in the department of Beni into the surrounding forests, including the area of the TIPNIS. The migrations sought a religious space – the Holy Hill – free from the strictures of (post)colonial domination. Movements sought a place of retreat away from the ‘*carayana*’ populations; a lowland indigenous term for white people or outsiders (Lehm Ardaya 1999; Riester & Fischerman 1976). The arrival of the Jesuit missionaries into Beni between 1684 and 1767 had an immense impact on indigenous society and culture (Riester & Fischerman 1976). The Jesuits rounded up local riverine communities into 16 ‘reducciones’ (centralised settlements) across the plains of the Moxos region in order to spread Christianity, civilise indigenous peoples and consolidate tax collection (Chávez Suárez 1986). The Jesuits laid the first territorial foundations of the colonial state in the remote ‘frontier’ regions of the Amazonian lowlands. Healy remarks that prior to the Jesuit missions “[a]ncestor worship, devotion to forest spirits, and jaguar cults flourished in a society closed off from the world” (2001: 363). Later, the reductions were taken over by secular officials who forced many indigenous inhabitants into service during the rubber boom of the late nineteenth century. The dire working conditions resulted in deaths and consequent hostility towards the *carayana* traders (Riester & Fischerman 1976; Van Valen 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> See Sanjinés (2013) for a notable exception.

It is in this context of socio-cultural change that in 1842 a series of migrations started to occur “in which people were pushed by liberal reforms, labor demands associated with the rubber boom, and floods, and pulled by the prospect of rich, higher lands which were distant from the authorities” (Van Valen 2013: 107). In 1887, these scattered migrations became a unitary movement under the leadership of an Itonama shaman named Andrés Guayocho. The leader guided migrations from Trinidad into the forests to the west of the Mamoré River in the united belief that a paradise on earth existed there that would grant the indigenous peoples freedom to live according to their respective world-visions. Guayocho considered himself to be a messiah and saviour of the Mojeño peoples from *carayanas*, whom he considered a damned race that were spreading evil into the land (Lehm Ardaya 1999; Riester & Fischerman 1976). Lehm Ardaya thus describes the *Loma Santa* as “a sacred space of abundance and free from the socio-cultural pressures that diverse actors of national society exerted on them” (1999: 9). The shaman leader combined the Christian faith brought by the Jesuits with local ancestral customs and “articulated a millenarian ideology” to give “supranatural sanction to the abandonment of Trinidad” (Van Valen 2013: 120). In doing so, he articulated legends of a Christian ‘promised land’ alongside pre-colonial spiritual beliefs, such as the practice of channelling deceased people and the use of jaguar and caiman worship.

The movement in search of the *Loma Santa* has been resurrected in later migrations lasting until the 1990s (see Cortés Rodríguez 1987; Lehm Ardaya 1999; Querejazu Lewis 2008). Many of these migrations settled in the adjoining forests next to the Sécure and Isiboro rivers (Querejazu Lewis 2008). For example, the TIPNIS communities of San Lorenzo, Trinidadcito and Santa Rosario were founded as part of these relocations. These waves occurred due to increasing colonisation of lands as a result of: the promulgation of the Law of Barren Lands in 1905 that opened the lowland regions to foreign investment; the collapse of the rubber trade (around 1910-1920) that led to a rise in cattle ranching, which required larger tracts of land; the 1953 agrarian reform law that encouraged the resettlement of peasant sectors, also known as *colonos* (colonisers), into the Chapare region; and the granting of ‘public’ lands to a government supported oligarchy during the military dictatorship period of the 1960s and 70s (see Healy 2001; Jones 1984; Lehm Ardaya 1999; Querejazu Lewis 2008). Yashar notes that between the 1960s and the 1980s “indigenous communities in the Beni confronted the ongoing threat of loggers, cattle ranchers, and *colonos* who occupied tracts of land considered by Amazonian Indians as open space for working, hunting, and residing” (2005: 206).

Oral testimonies and collective memories of the movements in search of the *Loma Santa* informed the political repertoires and cultural terrains of resistance during the TIPNIS conflict. Emilio Noza Yuco, the President of Sécure Sub-Central, explained that Mojeño-Trinitario peoples “always had a

religious vision that supposedly they knew biblically, that God had a place prepared for them” as a result of being “completely enslaved by the Spanish, the Jesuits and by everything” (personal interview, 9 May 2012). Beliefs of the *Loma Santa* were significant on the marches as many of the indigenous protestors are descendants of the second generation of the later 1950s-1980s migrations. In an interview with an indigenous protestor from a community located on the banks of the River Sécure, he talked of the migrations in the 1950s and sketched a map to show the places the communities had settled. He explained that the Mojeño ethnic nation in Trinidad “had made a belief of a symbiosis between the Catholic religion and our beliefs” and that his “ancestors believed that by looking again for the *Loma Santa*, they would find a place where everyone would be at peace” (personal interview, 19 March 2012). Indigenous marchers similarly practiced spiritual, ritual and festive components that amalgamated pre-Hispanic customs of the Mojeño peoples with the religious aspects inherited from the Jesuits. Indeed, Catholic beliefs and practices were part of the routine activities of the Ninth March. For example, through masses in towns or indigenous communities we traversed, prayers at the beginning of the marching day and the two mascots that led the marchers; the Virgin Mary and a wooden cross that read “Mojeño Cross: Permanent Mission”. The participants interviewed on the Ninth March gained courage from their faiths and often described themselves as the *‘hijos de dios’* (children of God). Emilio Noza Yuco stated that “all the people who are here today, they believe that this is a test from God, that if they love their territory, they will have to defend it” (personal interview, 9 May 2012). This relationship between pre-colonial identities of the indigenous peoples and colonial properties of the Western world is not deemed contradictory, however, and the integration of Christian symbols and concepts into millenarian movements is a common trait across the Amazonian region (Brown 1994). Brown argues that this element of indigenous movements does not signify acculturation as there are “robust efforts to wrestle control of Christianity from whites while reshaping it to meet the spiritual needs of Indian peoples” (1994: 299).

As demonstrated, the internal dynamics and motivations of the marches in defence of the TIPNIS were inflected with a millenarian element that predates the more recent rise of indigenous rights politics in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> Unlike in the past, retreat into the remote areas of the Amazon Basin can no longer secure politico-territorial autonomy though, since private enterprises, coca-growing and state-led extractivism have encroached into indigenous lands. Thus, indigenous movements have called for state recognition of territorial self-determination, alongside greater involvement in

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of multiculturalism and indigenous rights within Latin America, see Sieder (2002).

government decision-making structures, as a way to protect their ways of living and respective world-visions. I would therefore echo Wolford's observation that "the critical study of resistance requires an analysis of the ways different historical-cultural frameworks shape the decision to mobilize in particular people and places" (2004: 421). Crucially, these frameworks played a role in guiding the spatial politics employed by the lowland indigenous movement, an idea that I unpack in the next section.

## **Spatial Politics of the Indigenous Marches**

Since the inception of CIDOB – the umbrella organisation of the lowland indigenous movement – in 1982, the concept of 'territory' has become "an icon of indigenous-state relations" (Postero 2007: 49). Specifically, CIDOB has called for a degree of autonomy and self-determination over the governance of land and resources within ancestral territories, alongside greater participation in state institutions through their respective organisational forms (Yashar 2005). The plurinational agenda has been at the heart of these decolonial struggles and CIDOB therefore aligned itself to the MAS government through the Unity Pact. Yet, the Pact's indigenous and peasant members have long held contrasting views on key issues such as the nature of national development, the extent of land redistribution, the meaning and limits of political autonomy and the social control of the state (Garcés 2011). Tensions ran high when defining the organisational structure of the Constituent Assembly, for example, as the law established that representation would be through political parties "thus failing to acknowledge the demand of the indigenous organizations (many of them with limited regional presence) for representation as collective subjects" (Regalsky 2010: 46). As such, CIDOB representatives increasingly questioned the extent to which the MAS was fulfilling its promises of decolonising Bolivia. Consequently, in late 2011 – when the TIPNIS conflict was at its peak – the two indigenous movements of the lowlands and highlands abandoned the Unity Pact. Juan José Sardina, a leader from the highland indigenous organisation CONAMAQ, explained that they had chosen to leave the Unity Pact as they "were simply being used by the President for electoral spoils" (personal interview, 17 June 2012). Rosa Chao, a regional leader of CIDOB, stated that Morales had treated the lowland Amazonian peoples "as if we are *entendados* [stepchildren or illegitimate children i.e. looked down upon]". She explained that,

We had a dream that we [indigenous peoples] would be inside the parliament, with a minister, a vice-minister, deputies and senators. We are in the process, as at least now we have seven deputies. But for us, it [Bolivia] is not yet a plurinational state. It will be called 'plurinational' when we are represented by the ministries, vice-ministries and the mayors. (personal interview, 20 January 2012)

During the TIPNIS conflict the Morales administration continued to subalternise indigenous populations by limiting access to the structures of citizenship and the state (see Spivak 2014: 10). Following this view, the MAS could be said to be creating a re-spatialised internal colonialism that positions peasants and coca-growers as the dominant sector and the lowland indigenous as subordinate (Laing 2012).

Resultantly, CIDOB decided to re-establish more traditional forms of rebellious practice in order to make demands on the state. After the announcement of Ley No. 222, CIDOB set in motion the Ninth March named 'for the Defence of Life and Dignity, Indigenous Territories, Natural Resources, Biodiversity, the Environment, Protected Areas, Compliance with the State Constitution and Respect for Democracy' between 27<sup>th</sup> April and 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The marches in defence of the TIPNIS were attempts to visibly re-appropriate urban public spaces and articulate indigenous subjects as equal citizens of the nation-state. In her work with the Landless Peasants Movement in Bolivia, Fabricant states that indigenous marches are "about the use of the body – specifically, indigenous bodies moving visibly through national space". This tool of political action requires "sacrifice and determination, pushing the body through a severe regime of pain in order to gain legislative rights to land, resources, and alternative ways of living" (2012: 136). These embodied performances challenged the spatial segregation of indigenous peoples into enclosed rural areas, which the MAS had attempted to reinforce during the police intervention at Chaparina aimed at transferring the indigenous protestors back to their territories. The marchers were therefore problematising the nature of indigenous territories as an "ethno-environmental fix", which Anthias and Radcliffe argue has "inevitably de-politicized and de-historized the realities of postcolonial territoriality" (2015: 262).

Indigenous protestors on the Eighth and Ninth Marches walked through metropolitan centres, including the towns of Trinidad, San Ignacio de Moxos and San Borja. These spaces hold colonial significance as they were founded as Jesuit settlements in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, the marchers occupied sites of symbolic importance in La Paz, namely Plaza Murillo (the political centre, location of the Presidential Palace) and Plaza San Francisco (the religious centre, location of the Catholic Basilica). The marches in defence of the TIPNIS fundamentally challenged the ideology of the MAS as a social-movement state that represented indigenous peoples. For example, as the indigenous protestors entered Plaza Murillo on the Eighth March they chanted "*¿si este no es el pueblo, el pueblo dónde está?*" (if this is not the people, where are the people?) (personal field-notes, 19 October 2011). An illustrative space was the city of San Ignacio de Moxos, a hub of political support for the MAS. During the Ninth March, the inhabitants of the city prohibited the marchers from passing through the central plaza. A meeting was convoked to discuss whether the marchers

should force their way through the town with one community leader of the TIPNIS asking, “are we not Bolivians as well?” (personal field-notes, 7 May 2012). In the end the marchers decided to re-route around the outskirts of the town for fears of violent confrontations. Below is an extract from my field diary from that day:

I woke early to the noise of people packing up, alerting me to the fact that we were definitely marching today. We headed from El Algodonal towards San Ignacio de Moxos at around 8am. I was a little scared this morning after hearing that drunken locals had been circling our campsite on motorbikes through the night and threatening to hurt people. Even the researchers from the NGO Fundación Tierra [Land Foundation] had their car graffitied with the word ‘*traidor*’ [traitor] outside of their hotel in the town. We approached with some trepidation and were met with around 1000 of the city’s inhabitants lined up along the roadside chanting and shouting derogatory racial abuse against the marchers, calling them ‘*monos*’ [monkeys] and yelling “*caminen como perros, como lo que son*” [walk like dogs, as what you are]. (field journal extract, 08 May 2012)

In this instance, the language and practices of some residents of San Ignacio de Moxos negated the marchers’ right to occupy these public metropolitan spaces as Bolivian citizens. This likening of the indigenous marchers to animals reified subordinate representations of the marchers. This echoes the concept of ‘coloniality of being’ put forward by Maldonado-Torres (2007), in which subaltern subjects are dehumanised through the lived experiences of colonialism. Such antagonism was the cause of much concern for the marchers. The next day at a camp meeting in Puerto San Borja, Bertha Vejarano gave an emotionally charged speech in which she declared “they cannot deny our rights, as Bolivians, as citizens! We don’t even have the right to enter or move freely through the streets on public roads” (personal field-notes, 9 May 2012). Although the state and affiliated sectors attempted to control public sites within metropolitan areas, protestors on the Eighth and Ninth Marches actively resisted these practices and sought to re-appropriate these spaces and give them new meaning.

Moreover, the re-signification of public spaces was integral for gaining recognition and solidarity from other sectors of national society. The cultural expression of resistance and collective memories, or the “geopoetics of resistance” (Routledge 2000: 375), formed part of this political terrain. For instance, a song entitled *Coraje* (Courage) was the anthem of the Eighth and Ninth Marches (Figure 2). Originally written by the activist songwriter Luis Rico for the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, the song was resurrected for the Eighth and Ninth Marches and functioned as a multisensory register of subaltern politics, made up of sound (voices and guitars), bodies (dividing and blocking public space and joining in the performances) and representational objects (national, regional and indigenous flags, alongside indigenous symbols such as the Amazonian Patujú flower).



## ¡Coraje!

Vengo desde la selva, el bosque chimán,  
Donde niño y serpiente tienen su hogar,  
Vengo desde la tierra que ya no está,  
Donde antes se vivía en libertad.  
Vengo a decirles que allá siembran dolor,  
El que depreda, mata y corta la flor,  
El que mancha los ríos, el talador.

Chorus:

¡Coraje, coraje!  
La unión hace la fuerza,  
Y un corazón Americano,  
Crece a la luz del sol.

Les traigo en las palabras el corazón,  
Desde la amazonía Yuracaré,  
Les traemos la esperanza, la fe y la razón,  
Que cargan en sus espaldas hombre y mujer.  
La furia y la codicia del carayana,  
Está sembrando envidia y desolación,  
Y eso es lo que me duele en el corazón.

Chorus

Unidos los Movima y los Sirionó,  
Mojeños la esperanza, razón y fe,  
En contra el carayana depredador.  
Luchando en el Isiboro y el Sécuré,  
Por eso el territorio y la dignidad,  
Nos venimos buscando al caminar,  
De los hermanos la solidaridad.

## Courage!

I come from the jungle, the Chimane forest,  
Where child and snake have their home.  
I come from the land that is no longer there,  
Where once one lived in freedom.  
I come to tell you that pain is sown there,  
He who destroys, kills, and decimates the flora,  
He who defiles the rivers, the logger.

Chorus:

Courage! Courage!  
Unity is strength,  
And an American heart,  
Grows to the light of the sun.

I bring to you the heart in words,  
From the Yuracaré Amazon.  
We bring you the hope, faith and reason,  
Which men and women shoulder.  
The fury and greed of the *carayana*,  
Are sowing envy and desolation,  
And that is what pains my heart.

Chorus

United the Movima and the Sirionó,  
Mojeños, the hope, reason and faith,  
Against the destroyer *carayana*.  
Fighting in the Isiboro and the Sécuré,  
For territory and dignity.  
We are searching while walking,  
The solidarity of brothers.

Source: Personal field-notes.

The song gained notoriety through performances in a number of public spaces as a tool to articulate the collective demands of the indigenous movement to wider sectors of civil society. For example, Luis Rico and Nazareth Flores, one of the indigenous leaders of the movement, sang the anthem when the marchers entered Plaza San Francisco on the Eighth March. Their moving rendition swept through the crowd and invigorated the marchers after a seven-hour descent into the capital city. The music was especially poignant when the soft dynamics and slow tempo of the verses juxtaposed the gradual crescendo of the chorus and the impassioned call for '*coraje*' (courage) with hundreds of paceños (residents of La Paz) joining in. Nazareth had captured media attention because of her emotional oral testimony of the events at Chaparina when she was gassed, had her hands tied and

was thrown onto a truck resulting in a miscarriage. The crowd was stirred when she changed the last line of the song “*de los hermanos la solidaridad*” (the solidarity of brothers) to “*de los hermanos paceños dignidad*” (the dignity of paceño brothers). In this moment the song developed what Bigenho has described in her work on Bolivian music as “experiential authenticity”; or the shared experience of an embodied practice and sonorous performance that acts to create a common bond (2002: 17-18). The song played an integral role in gaining visibility (and audibility) for the demands of the lowland indigenous movement and in providing a cultural expression of urban solidarity. Crucially, the song also expresses collective histories of colonial subjugation in the lowland Amazonian region. The song refers in various ways to the ‘*carayana*’, identified here as a destroyer, killer, defiler and greedy logger. The colonial agent is positioned as the common enemy to the lowland indigenous peoples serving to consolidate collective action around a shared sense of place-based history.

As demonstrated, the spatial politics of the TIPNIS marches resisted normative imaginaries of the “ethno-environmental fix” (Anthias & Radcliffe 2015: 262) by articulating *national-public* space as *indigenous* space. In doing so, the marchers sought to strengthen ‘*interculturalidad*’ (interculturality) – a project to rebuild society based on communication, interaction and dialogue between different ethnicities and cultures – that has been part of the political discourse of indigenous movements since the 1990s (see Andolina et al 2009; Gustafson 2002). Subaltern agency is therefore key to deepening the meaning and concrete significance of decolonisation in Bolivia.

## Conclusions

This chapter has brought conceptualisations of ‘subalternity’ into dialogue with scholarship by the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality project in Latin America. I have articulated a relational understanding of subalternity based on access to citizenship and state structures. Through ethnographic engagement with the marches in defence of the TIPNIS I have brought a methodological focus to subaltern epistemologies and modes of representation as a “way of intervening in the present on the side of the subaltern” (Beverley 2001: 49). Specifically, I have demonstrated the limits of the plurinational project in Bolivia. While there has been a reconfiguration of the coloniality of power, empowering certain peasant and indigenous populations, a national development model based on state-led neo-extractivism has sidelined more radical demands for indigenous autonomy and territorial self-determination. In this vein, Amazonian indigenous communities continue to undergo a process of subalternisation as they are denied full access to the machinery of the state.

Yet, subaltern agency has also been critical to the decolonial project of plurinationalism, which has been re-crafted through practices of domination and resistance in the past and present. In particular, histories of (post)colonial subordination of lowland indigenous peoples have served to instil collective spatial imaginaries of territoriality, governance and nationhood. These subaltern geographies have shaped resistance to the government-backed road project, alongside attempts to make space for lowland indigenous peoples in the imaginary of the nation-state. The TIPNIS struggle has strengthened and given new meanings to the project of 'interculturality' (see Walsh 2009), further disrupting the hegemonic political order and its associated spatio-political structures. Indeed, this decolonial trajectory is apparent through CIDOB's contemporary slogan '*Bolivia nunca más sin los pueblos indígenas*' (Bolivia never again without the indigenous peoples).

More broadly, this analysis speaks to wider debates on whether decolonisation can ever be fulfilled within the confines of the colonial apparatus of the modern nation-state. As in Ecuador (see Radcliffe, this volume), the incorporation of indigenous subaltern agendas into the national constitution has not achieved *de facto* decolonisation. Indeed, MCD proponents have highlighted the need for a programmatic delinking from contemporary legacies of coloniality. Rather, they argue, decolonial thinking must be fostered from the sites of colonial difference. Analytical treatment of subaltern geographies therefore requires a commitment to receptivity and (un)learning *from* and *with* the spaces of what Mignolo calls "epistemic disobedience" (2011: 139).

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