

**ROMANCING THE ROAD:
THE VILLA TUNARI – SAN IGNACIO DE MOXOS HIGHWAY**

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in Global Development Studies
in conformity with the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

April, 2013

ABSTRACT

The 306 kilometer Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos highway project was designed in 2008 as part of an interoceanic corridor to foster greater integration of the capitalist economy in South America. Despite its double status as a protected ecological and Indigenous Territory, this highway was designed to cut through the center of the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). Construction began in 2011. The response was immediate; marches and protests were held both against and for the highway. Construction was then put on hold as consultations were held with communities who live within the borders of TIPNIS. Despite the existence of numerous documents regarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their operationalization has been deeply problematic.

The TIPNIS highway project received wide spread international attention when members of the Eighth Indigenous March in Defense of TIPNIS were attacked and detained by police in September of 2011. This thesis will illustrate that this was not an isolated phenomenon. Rather this, and subsequent events, are deeply embedded within the colonial framework in which they are taking place. By highlighting the larger power structures that exist, as well as the strength and courage of Indigenous Lowlanders and those who stand in solidarity with them, questions such as, '*Why is this highway project so contentious?*', become clearer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A wise man once told me that words on a page are dead. Once written they become frozen and can no longer dance as they are meant to. As such, in its ideal form, this thesis would be presented in an open dialogue between active participants coming together of their own volition and on equal grounding. Unfortunately, given the current requirements of academic research, the formulation presented here within is not in keeping with the spirit in which this thesis was created. For that please accept my humblest of apologies. That said, should you open your hearts and minds as you read what is encapsulated within these pages, it is my hope that this will evoke an emotional response that connects you with the people engaged in this dispute and their stories.

This thesis has been a joint initiative of numerous people. I would be remiss to not begin by thanking those in Bolivia who chose to welcome me into their communities and share their personal experiences. Without their support none of this would have been possible. I also owe my parents, fiancé and family the deepest of gratitude. Through personal sacrifice they made it possible for me to study among the global elite. This is a gift I do not take for granted. I would also like to thank the Canadian Government and Queens University who provided me with scholarships, grants and employment to fund the expense of my graduate studies.

A special note of thanks goes to Professor Susan Spronk at the University of Ottawa, and former University of Carleton student Cristina Francescone, for assisting me in finding my footing when I wasn't sure where to begin. I am also deeply grateful to the Ban Righ Centre at Queens University, who helped me with the difficult transition to academia. I also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the Department of Global Development Studies at Queens

University, who took a chance on me, when there were certainly many more qualified candidates for a position within this MA program. To Sarah Pugh, thank you for always ensuring my *i*'s were dotted and my *t*'s were crossed. To my classmates, thank you for reminding me to always ask '*Why?*'. In so doing, you helped me to understand the only limits that exist are those that we ourselves construct. Thank you to Professor Karen Dubinsky, you helped me to see that history is alive. Coming to understand this has changed my world in ways I cannot adequately express. And of course, to my always supportive and forever understanding Thesis Supervisor, Professor Richard Day, you continue to inspire me.

¡Que viva la Resistencia!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Foreword

For many academics and revolutionary tourists Bolivia has been touted as an example of hope and inspiration. With a long history of uprisings against neoliberal policies, such as the Water and Gas Wars, Bolivia has illustrated that the power of unity can overcome social injustice. Through my past work in Bolivia's Altiplano and Lowlands, Bolivia had come to occupy a space of inspiration for me. It is with these ideas in mind that I set off to do my fieldwork in Cochabamba, the heart of many past resistance movements. However, when I began my research I was surprised and taken aback by the current state of affairs. While the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) government had made many policy changes, which appeared wildly progressive when viewed from the Global North, their operationalization had more than fallen short of the vision which they espoused.

Analyzing North and South American newspapers before my departure for Bolivia, I had been perplexed as to why such a 'progressive' government could have agreed to and begun construction on the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) highway project against the wishes of those who lived in the area where it was to be built. It was only through learning about the deeper context in which these decisions were being made and carried out that I began to understand the complexities of the events taking place around this project. Much has been written in English academia on Evo Morales and the MAS government, discussing their merits and short fallings; rather than continue writing in this vein, this work is a humble attempt to center the perspectives of the many who have been marginalized from these discussions. I am exceptionally grateful to all of those who took the time to speak and share their experiences with me. I must iterate that I am not Bolivian, nor Indigenous, and as such I

cannot speak from a place of personal experience. However, those I spent time with urged me to take what I had learnt and share it with those in the Global North. As such, it is from a position of an ally in solidarity that I wish to proceed.

1.2 Overview

As John Holloway so loquaciously states, the beginning of any radical theoretical reflection must be the scream of horror, anger and refusal (Holloway, 2002). For it is from this rage that thoughts and actions are conceived, not from words. It is from the lived experience of racism, discrimination and marginalization that 700 Lowland Indigenous Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples set out on August 15th 2011 on the 610 kilometer Indigenous march in defense of TIPNIS from Trinidad to La Paz to demand their rights to dignity and respect (Baspineiro, 2012). This march was the eighth that had been undertaken regarding the TIPNIS territory. However, it was in September 2011, that their screams were heard on an international stage. For, on September 25th marchers were gagged, beaten and detained by the Bolivian police (Paredes, 2011). This however, was not an isolated incident. Rather it was but one particular moment embedded within a much larger framework of racism and marginalization.

Viewing these events from the Global North, a frequent reaction I have encountered among Settler populations is both shock and confusion. Many are appalled at the images and video footage of clear human rights abuses of the Indigenous marchers. However, they are also left perplexed as to why a road could garner such strong reactions. For as I have been told on numerous occasions, “But it is only a road?!”. In this thesis I will examine the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway project, with the intention of illustrating how this highway

project is much more than simply a road. Rather it is a project that is a part of and continuation of larger neo-colonial frameworks.

There are of course an infinite number of ways in which this highway project could be analyzed. For, as one Bolivian friend of mine recently said, “To study TIPNIS is to study all of the problems in my country”. Her statement may appear oversimplified, but it is in my opinion a very apt description of the current situation. This highway project involves numerous stakeholders, including but not limited to the Brazilian State, the Bolivian State, Cocaleros, Lowland Indigenous communities, Highland Indigenous Communities, Bolivian nongovernmental organizations, international organizations as well as Bolivians from across the entire country. It also encapsulates a window into larger debates regarding models of development and understandings of what living well means. Furthermore, it is but one manifestation of imposition and repression in a long history of colonial relations. It also highlights the place and power of social movements and alliances.

In Bolivia, there is a great deal of Spanish language literature which analyzes disputes regarding the TIPNIS territory and highway project. It is a subject of wide public debate in the streets, central squares and offices, as well as in newspapers and film. Unfortunately, far less has been written on these subjects in English within the Global North. Of course, one must remember that events related to the TIPNIS disputes are ongoing and although these disputes are rooted in phenomena with a long history, it is only recently that they have garnered international attention. As such, it is not surprising that there is currently a gap in English literature on this subject.

Some English language authors, such as Federico Fuentes and Jeffery Webber, have published literature which focuses upon social movements within Bolivia and their resistance to capitalism. In fact, the election of Evo Morales, an Indigenous Aymara man from a subsistence farming family in rural Bolivia, in 2005, was considered by many as a pivotal moment in the fight of Bolivia's social majority¹. And subsequently a great deal has been written in English on Morales and his political party the MAS. It is undisputable that the Bolivian State and state policies, such as neoliberalism, have had profound impacts upon the lives of Bolivians. I also agree that the election of Bolivia's first Indigenous President was a monumental moment. However, as Nelson Valdés says in speaking of Fidel Castro and Cuba, it is an error to focus upon a single individual. For individuals such as Castro and Morales are not the movement itself, but rather a reflection of the people at a particular moment in time (Valdés, 2008:27-40). As such, an analysis of contemporary Bolivia which merely focuses on Evo Morales misses a plethora of crucial points. An analysis which focuses on the Bolivian state and neoliberalism does help ground understandings of the conflicts over the TIPNIS highway project. However, this thesis will show that these understandings can and should be enriched through the addition of a neo-colonial lens which highlights race and racial relationships.

In keeping with the notion that in the beginning of this theoretical reflection is the scream of the Lowland Indigenous Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples, whose voices have been marginalized for centuries, I have chosen to utilize the theoretical paradigms of Indigenous decolonization, social movements and anti-colonialism. In this way, I aim to displace the state and Western models of development from a focal position and rather centralize the voices of those whose experiences and opinions are rooted in the TIPNIS Territory. In doing so, it

¹ See Chapter 2.4

becomes easier to understand that the TIPNIS highway is about so much more than just a road. And more importantly, it highlights the strength and courage of Lowland Indigenous communities who continue to fight for their dignity and respect.

This thesis will focus on the TIPNIS highway dispute through an examination of recent conflicts and the State-run consultation process. However, before delving into an analysis of these particular events, I will begin in Chapter 2 with an introduction which will provide a contextual platform of Bolivia's colonization, experiences under neoliberalism, mainstream development paradigms of modernization and Latin American regional integration, as well as some examples of resistance based social movements.

Chapter 3 will provide an overview of literature which discusses Indigeneity, social movements and colonialism as they relate to the TIPNIS highway construction. In this chapter I will illustrate the privileging of State-centered analysis in English literature in comparison to Spanish literature which focuses on Indigenous rights and discrimination. Chapter 4 will outline the methodologies employed to garner and analyze the data being presented in this thesis. Chapter 5 will provide a historical overview of TIPNIS as an ecological and Indigenous Territory as well as disputes and demonstrations that have subsequently arisen. Chapter 6 will discuss Indigeneity and culture as understood within Highland and Lowland Indigenous communities who live within the borders of TIPNIS. Chapter 7 will explicate the current consultation process as it relates to and deviates from Bolivian laws and International norms regarding Indigenous rights. Furthermore I will highlight the placement of the TIPNIS consultations as a continuation of marginalization and discrimination of the Lowland Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán Indigenous peoples. In conclusion Chapter 8 will interconnect the previous chapters in order to illustrate that clashes within Bolivia regarding the TIPNIS highway project are representative of

larger struggles within Bolivia that when examined illuminate neo-colonial and racist frameworks in the present.

The information contained within this thesis was obtained through academic and non-academic archival research over a period of eight months as well as participatory approaches with movement based activists in Cochabamba and La Paz during the month of August 2012. And while the objective of this thesis is to provide a space in English language literature which critically examines the TIPNIS highway project as a neo-colonial endeavour, I must reiterate my position. Throughout the research and analysis stages of this research project, I discussed the formulation of my thoughts with numerous Bolivian movement based activists for their reflection and feedback. However, during the entire process it was me who decided who I would speak with, what topics we would discuss, and ultimately what information would be included and how within this thesis. As such, this thesis does not attempt to propose solutions, rather, it attempts to add complexity and depth to discussions for English-speaking audiences.

This raises the question I so often hear from Settler friends in the Global North, “Why does it matter?”. Why does it matter that the Bolivian government has built two-thirds of a highway without the consent of and against the wishes of 15,000 Lowland Indigenous peoples? It matters because the project of modernization is global in its reach. The search for increased profits no matter the cost is devastating the lives of the majority of people around the entire world. As Esteva and Prakash state,

“Amongst the people struggling for some security in their lives, many assume that they have no more than one political option: that the best they can do is to protect their own situation; get some compensation for what they are losing; and hope that the promises offered in exchange for their sacrifices will one day be fulfilled. Such beliefs reinforce the ‘Global Project’” (1998:20).

Conversely, many Lowland Indigenous communities have had the courage to say “No!”. Their resistance illustrates that alternatives to the global force of modernization do still exist and have strength. Examining this highway project challenges readers to see it for what it really is and to speak out against it.

CHAPTER TWO: STAGE SETTING

2.1 Bolivia and colonialism

To understand the present one must look to the past. Of course, Bolivia's history spans many centuries and understanding the details of its complexities can take more than a lifetime. For the purposes of this thesis I will limit this historical analysis to issues of central relevance to the TIPNIS dispute; namely Highland and Lowland Empires and Nations, colonization, neoliberalism, modernization as well as social movements and resistance.

The Incan empire of the Andean highlands of current day Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador began in the 1200s and was centered in the valley of Cuzco. The Inca state was ruled by a king and power was arranged hierarchically among members of the royal family, nobility, and royal administrators. The empire reached its peak period of expansion in the 1500s (Vanden and Prevost, 2012:26). The Tiwanakan people, ancestors of the Aymara, had also established a large empire among the Altiplano and Lake Titicaca. The capital of the empire was located at Tiwanaku in present day Bolivia. However, in about 1460 the Inca defeated the Aymaras and integrated them into their Andean Empire (Morales, 2012:570).

The Inca King, Huayna Capac, died without identifying who would succeed the throne. Subsequently, his two sons, Huáscar and Atahulpa competed for the position. It was during this time that Francisco Pizarro and some 200 conquistadores arrived on the Peruvian coast in 1532. Taking advantage of this internal conflict and the spread of European diseases that decimated and debilitated whole populations, the Spanish gained control of the empire by 1535 (Vanden and Prevost, 2012:28-30). Soon thereafter the Spanish created a system of classification according to descent and skin color, known as *castas*. At the top of the social pyramid were the

white Spaniards who had emigrated from Spain, followed by their descendants, called *criollos*. Next were those of mixed ancestry with brown-coloured skin, known as *mestizos*. At the bottom were the Indigenous peoples and the African slaves (Vanden and Prevost, 2012:31).

The Spanish believed they were morally superior and were keen to amass material wealth (Vanden and Prevost, 2012:30-36). Land was taken and divided among the European settlers and worked by the Indigenous peoples and slaves brought from Africa. The Spanish crown did establish laws to ensure a minimal protection for Indigenous peoples, however due to distance these were difficult to enforce and often ignored outright by the Settler communities (Vanden and Prevost, 2012:35). Enormous amounts of wealth were taken from the Americas and shipped back to Europe to power its capitalist empire (Dangl, 2007:15). Over eight million Indigenous people have died in the silver mines of Potosí alone, and this extremely hazardous mine continues to operate to this day by the labour of economically impoverished Indigenous people (Dangl, 2007:16 and Morales, 2012:568).

Bolivia is an ethnically and geographically diverse country. As such, the history of the Andean highlands is only part of the story. Two-thirds of Bolivia is made up of lowlands (Morales, 2012:569). Due to the risk of tropical diseases, this is an area that was not colonized until much later (Albó, 2012a:60 and Vásquez, 2011:74). This region was known to Spanish colonizers as swamp land invested with mosquitos and ‘savage Indians’. The Indigenous peoples of this region were nomadic, and moved in accordance with the weather patterns. They spoke a variety of languages, including Pochoboconos, Punuanas, Tapimonos, Coririonos, Zanaboconos, Trubicanas, Maharenos and Cañacure, and their communities were located in close proximity to rivers and ranged in population from 30 to 200 people (Vásquez, 2011:74-76).

In the mid-1600s the Jesuits arrived in the lowlands and began their spiritual colonization of Indigenous communities. Initially communities resisted the missionaries, however, soon thereafter they provided a much needed refuge against *bandeirantes* [slave hunting expeditions] which were arriving from the East. Although integration within the Jesuit system safeguarded against being sold into slavery, Indigenous communities were drastically altered by the changes imposed by the Jesuits. The language of the colonizer was imposed, communities were fixed to permanent locations, and subsequently agricultural production and cattle raising were taken in lieu of nomadic patterns, which were considered ‘savage’. Furthermore, Indigenous councils were taken over by the Jesuits and the Catholic religion became the central organizing point of day-to-day life (Lehm, 1999).

The Jesuits were expelled by the Spaniards in 1767 (Baspineiro, 2012:29). In 1805 the new *criolla* administration abolished the ‘liberty’ of the Indigenous communities and forced them into collective work projects and other forms of exploitation. In the 1870s, companies were established for the exploitation of regional resources and in the 1900s large estates, known as *haciendas*, were built. The impacts on Indigenous communities were disastrous, decimating populations while leaving survivors in precarious positions of dependence and poverty. In response, many Indigenous lowlanders fled further into the forest in search of *La Loma Santa*². In 1952 a process of agricultural reform was implemented that subsequently consolidated the lowland *haciendas*. Furthermore, in 1970 a highway was opened between the cities of Santa Cruz and Trinidad which opened the region and its inhabitants to further exploitation³ (Vásquez, 2011:81-83).

² See Chapter 6.6(ii)

³ See Chapter 6.5

2.2 Bolivia and neoliberalism

As was illustrated in the previous section (2.1), Bolivia is a country that has been subject to domination by colonial powers for more than 500 years (Fuentes, 2007:95). A former Spanish colony, Bolivia was proclaimed independent after 16 years of war in 1825. Since then, Bolivia has endured many years of political instability and military dictatorship (Barr, 2005). The first democratically elected government began governing in 1982 (El-Mahdi, 2011:71). Shortly thereafter import substitution policies were eliminated in favour of neoliberal policies that strove to reduce inflation rates of more than 26,000 per cent (Barr, 2005:77) and increase trade liberalization (WB, 2009:xii). With the guidance of the Washington consensus, market-oriented reforms, such as private land ownership and deregulation, were introduced (Hunter, Madrid and Weyland, 2010:1). However, most market growth under neoliberal policies has been attributed to increases in market prices and demands, not increased production (Hunter et al, 2010:70). This left Bolivia vulnerable to market prices and dependent upon foreign aid (Hunter et al, 2010:70 and 75). The neoliberal emphasis on efficiency ended the monopoly role of state enterprises, which virtually eradicated the guarantee of stable employment for Bolivian workers and crushed union power (Barr, 2005: 79). The marginal economic gains that were made were held by a small group of elites (El-Mahdi, 2011:1 and 72).

In the late 1990s there was a growing dissatisfaction with the failed promises of neoliberalism (Barr, 2005:69). Furthermore, the focus on efficiency and productivity was perceived by many to be eroding Indigenous natural resource management practices (Godoy, Kirby and Wilkie, 2001:109). Coupled with an economic recession, trust in political parties plummeted and social unrest grew. This resulted in a cycle of violent protests (Barr, 2005:69-73).

In the 2002 election campaigns, Evo Morales, Manfred Reyes and Felipe Quispe all campaigned against the neoliberal agenda (Barr, 2005:75). Former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada won over Evo Morales by a mere 1.6 per cent, but was forced to step down in October of 2003 due to growing protests (Barr, 2005:69). Neoliberalism had not met expectations to increase standards of living and citizens no longer had faith in the economy's market orientation (Barr, 2005:85).

It was in this atmosphere of discontent that Evo Morales was elected with 54.7 per cent of the vote in 2005 (Fuentes, 2007:97). As Peruvian activist Hugo Blanco wrote,

“the new president is not the result of a simple ‘democratic election’ like many that frequently occur in our countries, it is an important step in the path of the organized Bolivian people in their struggle to take power into their own hands” (Fuentes, 2007:95).

Electing Morales was a rejection of neoliberalism (Fuentes, 2007:95). Rooted in a socialist agenda, MAS called for a radical decolonization of power through renationalization of the economy and the state (Fuentes, 2007:102). In the pursuit of social equity and justice Morales introduced a series of rigorous reforms that nationalized natural resource control and redistributed land (Fuentes, 2007:95).

In the quest to decolonize, Bolivia cut ties with governments in Europe and the United States, and formed greater ties with its Southern neighbours. In 2006 Bolivia joined the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (ALBA) and later integrated into the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) (Fuentes, 2007:103). Increased revenues generated from the nationalization of gas and other products were invested into literacy, health and infrastructural programs (Fuentes, 2007:105). Social programs such as *Bono Juancito* and *Renta Dignidad* reached millions of people and sought to address issues of inequality and exclusion

(Hunter et al, 2010:66). Public investment rose from \$629 million US dollars in 2005 to \$1.9 billion US dollars in 2009 (Hunter et al, 2010:67). Life expectancy, GDP and education levels all rose rapidly (Hunter et al, 2010:72).

Despite gains made, Bolivia remains one of South America's poorest countries (Fuentes, 2011). In 2011, Bolivia was ranked 108th of 187 countries on the human development index with an average life expectancy of merely 66.6 years (UNDP, 2011). Arguing from a modernization perspective, Hunter, Madrid and Weyland state, "The Bolivian economy is a low-growth, low-investment, and low-productivity economy located in the heart of a relatively low-growth region" (2010:69).

2.3 Modernization: IIRSA / LA integration and roads

In August of 2000, the Presidents of South America met in Brazilia. At this meeting they agreed to work together in order to strengthen the economic, social and political integration of South America. As part of this plan the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) was established. The objective of the IIRSA is described as promoting "the modernization of the regional infrastructure and the adoption of specific actions to promote the integration and social and economic development" (IIRSA, 2012). On December 4th and 5th of the same year, a meeting was held with the South American Ministers of Transport, Energy and Telecommunications in Montevideo, Uruguay, where a *Plan of Action for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America* was established and approved (Centro Cuarto Intermedio, 2011:35).

Projects of the IIRSA were conceptualized within a capitalist commercial logic that valued and promoted commercial exchange through megaprojects such as highways, dams and natural resource extraction (Fobomade, 2003 and Centro Cuarto Intermedio, 2011:36). Under this model South America is currently divided into 10 axes of integration and development. One of which, known as the *Eje Interoceánico* [Interoceanic Axis], was designed to create a transoceanic connection between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Fobomade, 2003:15). Under this plan Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Chile would be connected through a series of highways. Under the pretext of opening up opportunities for mainstream development, regions such as TIPNIS, which were further removed from densely populated regions, were targeted as priority areas for new linkages (Centro Cuarto Intermedio, 2011:36). It is in this context that the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway was designed to cut through the nucleus of TIPNIS.

Bolivia is a landlocked country with a low population density and challenging topographical conditions (IDB, 2010:8). In 2006 the Bolivian government introduced an ambitious National Development Plan (PND) that strives to combat poverty through increasing productivity and competitiveness (IDB, 2010:10). In this pro-market plan, the Bolivian transportation sector is seen as a current weakness that needs to be addressed through investment in road infrastructure in order to engage the entire Bolivian population in ‘productive’ economic activities, stimulate the economy and create competitive access to export markets for Bolivian products (IDB, 2010:10 and Hunter et al, 2010:10 and 64).

The construction and maintenance of roads is often touted as a means to rapidly improve quality of life. In theory roads reduce transportation costs, integrate dispersed economic bases,

improve traffic flow as well as provide many market-orientated employment opportunities⁴ (Ferguson, 1994:229 and IDB, 2010:10). According to the Bolivian Highway Administration only 30 per cent of Bolivia's roads are paved, 49 per cent are gravel and 21 per cent are dirt (IDB, 2010:8). Of those which are paved, few remain in good condition (IDB, 2010:8). As such the cost of transporting items is too high to be competitive in an international market (IDB, 2010:8). Furthermore, the state of roads can be disastrous to those who travel on them. For example, the 38 mile-long North Yungas Road is a largely unpaved narrow path along the mountainside without guardrails that claims the lives of approximately 100 people annually (Keeler, 2011).

2.4 Social Movements and Resistance

The discussion within this chapter has thus far primarily focused upon power over. Power over by force, by policy and by decision making. However, to return to where we started this discussion from, there is a scream. Bolivia's social majorities, who have been excluded from 'power to' by 'power over', have not been passive recipients through these processes. Rather, they have been actively engaged in resistance. To quote John Holloway,

“Our scream is a refusal to accept... A refusal to accept the inevitability of increasing inequality, misery, exploitation and violence. A refusal to accept the truth of the untrue, a refusal to accept closure. Our scream is a refusal to wallow in being victims of oppression, a refusal to immerse ourselves in that 'left-wing melancholy' which is so characteristic of oppositional thought... Our scream is a scream to break windows, a refusal to be contained, an overflowing, a going beyond the pale, beyond the bounds of polite society” (2002:6).

⁴ See Chapter 6.5 for details regarding the impacts of roads in practice

One could trace the history of subversion to colonial authority across time and space as authors like Sergio Serulnikov have (Serulnikov, 2003). However, for the purposes of this discussion, I will restrict the scope of my analysis to a mere few particular moments within this fabric of resistance in order to highlight both the agency and diversity of engagement.

The rebellion of 1780-1781 was an Indigenous uprising, led by Túpac Amaru II in Peru and Túpac Katari in Bolivia, against Spanish authority and the high cost of tributes (Brewster, 2005:23). In this period many wives and sisters of rebel leaders were elevated to positions of legitimate authority whereby they had the power to organize and carry out military objectives (Brewster, 2005:23-29). Among those who engaged in this battle were Bartolina Sisa and her sister-in-law Gregoria Apaza. These women and many others took part in physical combat, carried out espionage, protected military targets, planned military strategies as well as organized and led women only brigades (Brewster, 2005:23-25).

During this time period women were considered the property of their husbands and as such could not be tried. However, an exception was made and both Bartolina Sisa and Gregoria Apaza were charged with treason against the Crown (Brewster, 2005:25). Apaza was tortured then hung and quartered (Brewster, 2005:25). Sisa was raped and beaten before her execution. Later her head and hands were displayed in the areas where she had fought (Rousseau, 2011). While it is true that these women were murdered, it is important to note is that they acted upon their political beliefs and fought for their convictions. Furthermore, they have served as an inspiration to many others. In fact, organizations have been established in both of their names and are currently operating in Bolivia.

Several more recent well-known examples of Bolivian resistance movements include the Water Wars of 2000 and the Gas Wars of 2003. In September of 1999 a contract was signed in Bolivia with the Bechtel Corporation to privatize all sources of water in Cochabamba. The cost of water rose astronomically. Groups of campesinos and Indigenous Cochabambinos organized a movement of resistance and successfully managed to overturn the contract (Dangl, 2007:57-71). In the case of the Gas Wars, the construction of a gas line from Bolivia to the Pacific Coast for export via Chile was proposed in 2002. However, it was to Chile that Bolivia lost its Pacific territory in the Pacific War of 1879. Exasperated with the minimal sum Bolivia would receive for its export of gas to the United States, as well as the lack of concern for the well-being of Bolivia's social majorities, Indigenous Aymara, campesinos and labour movements from El Alto and other parts of the country set up blockades and protests in September and October of 2003. Together they successfully had the gas project details renegotiated as well as forced the resignation of President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (Gordon and Luoma, 2008:90-94 and Lazar, 2008:235-236).

Many Western authors, such as Benjamin Dangl and Robert Barr point to neoliberal policies as a garnering point in Bolivia for the creation of resistance based movements. While I do believe there is truth to this, I feel these policies are only one piece of the larger framework. In other words, neoliberalism is simply a more recent manifestation of a long-standing, colonial project that allows the social minorities of the Global North to accumulate more material items at the expense of the well-being of the majority of the world's inhabitants and the environment.

A group that explicitly aims to dismantle numerous structures of oppression is *Mujeres Creando*. This anarchist/feminist group was founded in 1992 by a group of mestizo urban lesbian women and is based in La Paz. They seek to engage directly with society in order to

denounce racism, sexism and homophobia (Dangl, 2007:166 and Day, 2008:46). This collective describes themselves as,

“rebel women, Indians and whites, lesbians and heterosexuals, old and young women, of the city and the countryside, believers and atheists, fat and thin, dark and light skinned all at once and different at the same time” (Dangl, 2007:165).

The group is relatively small in membership but their activities are well known (Dangl, 2007:164). They seek to deconstruct symbols and languages which are part of the patriarchal framework which they state have resulted in internal colonization (Monasterios, 2007:35). They employ graffiti, television shows, press coverage, theatre, poetry and workshops in pursuit of their efforts to disempower oppressive macro power structures (Monasterios, 2007:35 and Dangl, 2007:164-167). The Mujeres have also highlighted inequalities they say are perpetuated by their comrades of the political left (Dangl, 2007:169). They claim that many grassroots left-wing Indigenous structures do not recognize women as revolutionary figures but rather view them as secretaries who operate within gendered roles such as serving them tea (Dangl, 2007:169). As such, the Mujeres aim to decolonize multifaceted hierarchical structures simultaneously. Mujeres Creando creates new avenues for women’s participation in the struggles against social injustice which push the boundaries of gender stereotypes (Dangl, 2007:171).

In fact it was through involvement with cocalero union work in social movements that current President, Evo Morales, began his campaign for Presidency (Vanden, 2008:49, Lazar, 2008:2). Elected in 2005 with 54.7 per cent of the vote, Morales and the MAS government called for a radical decolonization of power through renationalization of the Bolivian economy and restructuring of the Bolivian government body (Dangl, 2007:197-220). This process was described as, “an unambiguous expression of the desires and hopes of the indigenous majority,

who had drawn large sectors of the other oppressed classes behind them, to begin to chart a new path for Bolivia” (Fuentes, 2007:102). In January of 2009 a referendum passed a new constitution which was adopted in February of 2009 which defined Bolivia as a Plurinational State (which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.4). Morales and the MAS party were re-elected in December of 2009 with 64 per cent of the vote (Morales, 2012:593).

These are but a mere few examples of resistance movements which illustrate the agency of Bolivia’s social majorities in the face of oppression and exploitation. And it is within this colonial fabric, made up of the threads of historical events, economic policies, models of development and social movements, that the TIPNIS disputes are taking place.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

A great deal of literature has been written on Bolivia, its social movements and more recently its relationship to neoliberal models of development. However, due to the recent nature of events regarding the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway project, far less has been written that specifically addresses this subject. This chapter will review that which has been written in the English language by academics, as well as journalists and activists. I will illustrate that this literature has been in large part limited to providing brief overviews of events to date, with little concentration on analysis. Of that which does delve deeper into such questions as, *why this conflict exists*, the central focus has been in large part on the state and through a lens of political economy. While the written work of these English-speaking authors has provided access of information to many Anglophones in the Global North, I believe that a review of material available in the Spanish language from Bolivia highlights the various complexities of this highway project from diverse theoretical positions. As such, this chapter will outline the contributions of both English-speaking authors and Spanish-speaking Bolivian authors to this subject. Given the limited scope of this thesis I will not be able to provide a full analysis of all of the complexities raised in Bolivian Spanish language literature. However, by illustrating the existing gap in depths of discussion between these two bodies of work, I aim to move English debates beyond Bolivian governmental successes and shortcomings and bring the neo-colonial structural roots of this subject to the fore.

3.2 Academic English

English academic literature pertaining specifically to the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway dispute is quite limited. This is likely in part because this issue only became a topic of wide international attention after the police attacks on marchers in September of 2011. Moreover, many mainstream news reports decreased their coverage of this subject after Evo Morales deemed the TIPNIS territory “untouchable” with Law 180 in October of 2011. The subsequent demonstrations and passing of Law 222, calling for consultation of all those who live within the TIPNIS territory, received less attention on the international stage. This consultation process only came to a close in December of 2012. Given the length of time required to collect, analyze, translate and compile data it is not surprising that there is little English language academic literature available on this subject at present. That said, there are a number of English-speaking scholars, such as Devin Beaulieu, an Anthropology PhD student at the University of California (University of California, 2012) who are presently following these events and it is likely that these scholars will be publishing their works in the near future.

However, there are three English-speaking authors who have written a number of articles in the form of an ongoing debate regarding Bolivia’s ‘process of change’⁵ and within these there are discussions regarding this highway project. The first of these authors is Jeffery Webber. Webber has written on the subjects of Bolivian social movements and the MAS administration in such books as, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales* (Webber, 2011b) and *Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in*

⁵ Bolivia’s ‘process of change’ is a complex subject which explores the relationships between grass-roots politics, the country’s social movements, people and the state, as well as highlighting achievements and limitations of change. For further information on this subject please see Crabtree and Chaplin, 2013.

Modern Bolivia (Webber, 2012c). He is also a lecturer at the University of London in the School of Politics and International Relations. Webber has been researching and writing about Bolivia for a number of years. In 2007 he co-authored the article *Struggles against Accumulation by Dispossession in Bolivia: The Political Economy of Natural Resource Contention* with Professor Susan Spronk. In this article they examine the context in which the social movements that resisted the privatization of water and gas in Bolivia emerged, and how their demands were framed by the role of these resources within the political economy (Spronk and Webber, 2007).

It cannot be overstated that there are very real connections between politics and economics. In fact, the work of James Ferguson illustrates all too clearly the dangers and repercussions of depoliticizing development initiatives (1994). As such, the political economy analysis that Webber provides deserves respectful attention. In late 2010, Webber wrote a paper that critically examined the actions of Evo Morales and the MAS since their electoral victory in late 2005. Entitled *From Rebellion to Reform: Bolivia's reconstituted neoliberalism*, this piece meticulously documents the gap between state-sponsored socialist rhetoric and the Bolivian capitalist reality. Through these contradictions Webber illustrates the way in which he believes neoliberalism continues to shape both policy and action. In doing so, he sharply draws a line against the romanticization of Evo Morales and his supposed battle against capitalism through decolonization.

I first read this article in early 2012, prior to my most recent fieldwork in Bolivia. My initial reaction was that of frustration. The statistics and examples that Webber provided left me with little doubt that Bolivia had not yet truly achieved communitarian socialism⁶. However, I

⁶ Communitarian socialism is a term used by Evo Morales when he was sworn in for a second term as President in January 2010. This term refers to a process of change that strives to achieve

felt that Webber was measuring the actions of Morales and the MAS against an impossible standard without due consideration for the difficulties of challenging hegemonic world structures, such as capitalism. Furthermore, I thought it extremely inappropriate for him to be passing this judgement from the comforts of the Global North. Since this time, I have read and re-read this and many other pieces of Webber's written work, allowing myself to reflect upon his analysis. However, it was only after several weeks of fieldwork that I was able to see beyond my initial reactions and re-evaluate the merit of Webber's work.

Webber deserves applause for his courage in taking a very difficult position. Even though he is explicitly committed to opposing imperialist meddling, he challenged the celebratory claims of many involved in the global justice movement who championed Bolivia's transformation, including Naomi Klein (Webber, 2010:¶5). Arguing that under Morales the Bolivian government had simply reconstituted neoliberalism, Webber unequivocally stated that analysis must move beyond an examination of rhetoric (Webber, 2010). His ability to foreground the limited extent of reforms in Bolivia, let alone revolutionary change, sparked a heated response from Federico Fuentes.

Fuentes, a resident researcher with the Fundación Centro Internacional Miranada in Caracas, Venezuela from 2007 to 2010 and an executive member of the Socialist Alliance, has helped to bring regular updates from Latin America to the Anglophone world through his work as editor of the blog *Bolivia Rising*, and also through his contributions to the Australian newspaper *Green Left Weekly*. He has also provided lectures in Australia and Canada regarding the Bolivarian process and has co-authored three books regarding the new left in Latin America.

well-being for all Bolivians through the communal sharing of wealth. See Burbach, 2010 for further details

Fuentes begins his retort to Webber by stating, “Any serious analysis of the dynamic of class struggle under the Morales government clearly contradicts Webber’s view” (Fuentes, 2011:¶1). Relying to a great extent on examples from the mining sector, Fuentes argues that the Morales government has been engaged in an “indigenous nationalism” whereby alliances have formed and deepened between indigenous and peasant-led anti-imperialist initiatives thereby broadening the support base of the MAS. He also argues changes, such as nationalization of resources, have had positive impacts in the economic sphere. Fuentes strongly advocates for the defense of the gains of the Bolivian process and argues that Webber’s perspective occludes “the real enemy”, i.e. imperialism (Fuentes, 2011:¶12).

Upon a first reading of this work I agreed with Fuentes’s arguments. Through my volunteer work with Toronto Bolivian Solidarity, I had also provided guest lectures and hosted events in celebration of the process of transformation I felt was unfolding in Bolivia. Fuentes provides a number of examples to illustrate that not only had Morales and the MAS expanded infrastructure and pursued new trading partners, but that this had evoked a powerful backlash from the elite, such as a failed coup attempt in 2008. Although, I no longer am a staunch supporter of this pro-Morales position⁷, I do find merit in Fuentes’s ability to speak regarding the very real constraints of resisting imperialism.

A subsequent rejoinder was provided to Fuentes by Webber, whereby Webber rearticulated his argument that neoliberalism was still firmly rooted in Bolivia. Webber also accuses Fuentes of being “little more than an uncritical spokesperson for the presidential Palace in La Paz” (Webber, 2011a:¶9). In this article, Webber correctly indicates that Bolivia’s social

⁷ I have taken this position given what I learnt through this thesis process regarding his role in perpetuating systems of inequality, as will be shown in further detail throughout this thesis (see Chapter 6.14 for specifics).

movements have a long history and provided the basis for the elections of Morales. In this way he illustrates that social movements are not of a fragmented nature that require the leadership of Morales in order to continue functioning. This argument highlights the strong distinctions between the Bolivian government and the Bolivian masses. Webber is not dismissive of indigenous liberation nor socialism, but he argues that agency in this regard comes from the exploited themselves and not leadership who claim to speak on their behalf.

The discussion of Morales and the MAS deepens when John Riddell enters the conversation, with his article in *Socialist Project: The Bullet*. Riddell is an activist and writer who is extensively involved in Toronto Bolivian Solidarity as well as the Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly. Riddell, like Fuentes, counters that reforms achieved to date are not simply superficial and have indeed had profound positive impacts for Bolivia's social majorities. He points to Bolivia's joining of ALBA, hosting of the Cochabamba Initiative for Climate Justice, struggles to defend coca in the US war on drugs, and the expulsion of the Environmental and Economic Development program of USAID to substantiate that processes of change are underway in Bolivia (Riddell, 2011).

I do believe that the government has engaged in numerous macro level discussions which challenge the global capitalist system, such as those examples raised by both Fuentes and Riddell. However, I also agree with Webber that Morales and the MAS have not truly broken away from neoliberal models. That said, it is not my intention in this thesis to argue whether or not Morales and the MAS are neoliberal. In fact, a large body of literature already exists on this subject⁸. I bring these particular state centered debates forward because they provided the

⁸ See Pearce 2011 for an example of such work.

foundation for the discussions that followed regarding the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway.

Writing specifically about this highway, in September of 2011, Fuentes responded to online letters which spoke out against the highway and the destruction of the Amazon it was said it would create (Fuentes, 2011b). Again he argued against what he felt was an unfair targeting of Evo Morales without due consideration for larger structures, including the role of transnational corporations and the governments who support them. He concedes that, “Mistakes have been made, and more are likely in the future” but hedges this by stating, “But they are the mistakes of a people of a small landlocked and underdeveloped country fighting constant imperialist assaults” (Fuentes, 2011b:¶51). Ultimately, he argues that all those engaged in the TIPNIS dispute desire “greater development” (Fuentes, 2011b:¶22).

The use of the word “mistakes” is a gross understatement. While Fuentes does locate the TIPNIS dispute within the larger framework of the Morales government and its discussions of movement towards socialism, his analysis remains again occluded by his defense of the government and its rhetoric. Fuentes disregards any discussion of the varying understandings of what development is, who those are that are protesting the highway construction, as well as the power relationships between them and the government. Power relationships are indeed an essential point of consideration as can be seen from the infamous September 2011 police repression of marchers, which took place on the very day that this article was posted.

Throughout his article Fuentes conflates Morales and the MAS with the group he falsely homogenizes as “Bolivia’s indigenous majority”. He argues that this group works together with other oppressed groups for the collective benefit of the majority. In this way he does not analyze

the inequalities of power within and across many diverse communities. However, his statement regarding benefits fits well within what I believe has been the MAS perspective on the TIPNIS highway. According to the new constitution⁹, Bolivia is a Plurinational State, where 36 distinct nations have rights. However, in practice within the TIPNIS highway project, the rights of lowland Indigenous communities have been seen as of lesser importance to the needs of those who constitute a larger population by size.

In January of 2012 Webber published a much more nuanced article regarding the TIPNIS highway (Webber, 2012a). Providing a historical overview of the rise of the MAS government and its activities during five years in power, Webber places the TIPNIS debates within a historical context. Drawing upon the work of Marx he illustrates how capitalist relations of production were organized within Bolivia and the subsequent stratification and class dynamics. In this way he illustrates how Aymara and Quechua peasants within TIPNIS stand to benefit from the highway at the expense of Lowland Indigenous communities¹⁰. Unfortunately, his analysis is limited to less than a page and is thus not able to engage in a complex discussion of race and power as it relates to this dispute. Webber then provides an overview of Brazil's economic interests in establishing this highway, as well as a brief description of the eighth TIPNIS march itself. While this does provide a much needed contribution to the English language discussion of the TIPNIS dispute, Webber brings the points he raises together in order to reassert that the changes that have taken place under Morales are very limited and demonstrate a continued engagement with the political economy of his neoliberal predecessors. As I stated before, discussions regarding Bolivia's political economy are vastly important for understanding contemporary situations. However, in bringing his analysis back to this point, deeper discussions

⁹ See Chapter 7.5

¹⁰ See Chapter 6.12(v)

regarding neo-colonialism as it relates to racial and socio inequalities in this highway project are again obstructed from the intense consideration they require.

In March of 2012 Fuentes responded to Webber (Fuentes, 2012). In this article, Fuentes again defends what he believes is Bolivia's challenge to capitalism and imperialism. Within this discussion he provides just over two pages in reference specifically to the TIPNIS highway dispute. Fuentes questions Webber's analysis, which he feels romanticises road opponents, while overlooking the need for this road in order to bring economic and social development in order to strengthen the fight against oligarchies and imperialism. Furthermore, Fuentes argues that foreign-based NGOs have spurred Lowland indigenous communities to oppose the road, in a new form of green imperialism. While his critique is important to the dismantling of simplified constructions of 'good guys' (Lowland Indigenous peoples) and 'bad guys' (Aymara and Quechua cocaleros), it also does not provide due consideration for inter-Bolivian power relationships and their connection to racial hierarchies. For example, he mentions the creation of law 222, which allows for consultation regarding the highway by all Indigenous peoples within TIPNIS. However, he does not acknowledge who is setting the terms of discussion, who is participating and under what conditions. Furthermore, his article closes by returning to supportive statements regarding the Bolivian state.

The final article I would like to refer to within this debate is the response written by Webber in October 2012 (Webber, 2012b). Webber points out that Fuentes has ignored the possibility that communities of resistance within TIPNIS are themselves directly confronting imperialism. Furthermore, he states that mistakes made by the Bolivian state were not simply errors but rather rooted in Bolivia's dependence upon capital within TIPNIS for its political economy. Webber argues that it is the logic of accumulation by dispossession, through mining,

gas and agro-industries, which is at the heart of the TIPNIS dispute. To substantiate this claim Webber outlines the limited agrarian reforms which have taken place and the continued reliance upon neoliberal export-oriented models of development by the MAS government. Furthermore, he critiques Fuentes for “accepting as the parameters of transformation the crumbs dispensed by a compensatory state” (Webber, 2012:¶12).

It is important to note that these Anglophone debates are taking place within leftist publications which challenge the merits of capitalism and imperialism. While Webber, Fuentes and Riddell may disagree on what is actually taking place in Bolivia, they share a vision of solidarity and continued commitment to the interests of the exploited and oppressed. These authors have been instrumental in sharing information regarding the TIPNIS dispute among English speakers. However, their State-centered discussions perpetuate the marginalization of the voices of those who have been, and continue to be, excluded from these conversations and are demanding to be heard.

3.3 Anglophone Blogs and Websites

Not all Anglophone work has omitted these voices. Blogs and websites have also served as important sources of information for Anglophones who are interested in following the TIPNIS dispute. Some sites that have been following this subject include the *North American Congress on Latin America* (NACLA), *Rebel Currents*, *Upside Down World* and *Indian Country Today*. These leftist sites provide a space beyond academia for people to obtain recent information regarding struggles against oppression and injustice. This knowledge can then be used as a tool for both advocacy and activism. However, it must be remembered that these sites are not peer

reviewed and as such it is important to cross check what they are stating with additional sources. Fortunately within these circles there are a number of authors writing regarding TIPNIS.

One such author is Emily Achtenberg. Achtenberg is a former Research Associate for the NACLA and an urban planner whose work focuses on Latin American social movements. She has written articles for a number of sites including Rebel Currents and the NACLA. Her work provides regular updates for Anglophones regarding the TIPNIS dispute. She has travelled to Bolivia, however, her articles primarily rely upon the information provided in Bolivian newspapers and websites, such as La Razón.

Unlike Webber, Fuentes and Riddell, Achtenberg's work does not focus upon the State and its political economy. Rather, through short one to three page articles, she focuses upon events at the micro level. In so doing, she highlights daily events and employs quotes from those involved in the dispute. Although she does at times provide the State rationale for actions taken, she is quick to follow this up with counter arguments. For example, in an article written for Rebel Currents in September of this year she wrote, “[Llorenti] has denied any responsibility for the episode, blaming disgruntled police factions... Despite outcries from human rights and indigenous organizations, he assumed his new UN post on September 5”¹¹ (Achtenberg, 2012a:¶1). At times she will make reference to recent historical events leading up to current events, such as Bolivian strategies for regional integration and the passing of laws regarding the TIPNIS territory (Achtenberg, 2011b), however very little analysis is provided. Given the space limitations for articles within blogs and websites this is not surprising.

¹¹ See Chapters 5.8 and 7.7 for further information regarding these events.

Rick Kearns is another author who has contributed to English online material regarding the TIPNIS dispute. Kearns is a freelance writer and poet as well as a teacher of Boricua heritage. His work focuses upon Indigenous issues within Latin America and his articles appear on such sites as *Indian Country Today* and *Bolivia Rising*. Like Achtenberg his written work is limited in length and focuses upon micro level events. In so doing, he highlights not only what is happening but also privileges the voices of Indigenous Lowlanders who are engaged in the TIPNIS dispute. Unfortunately, he does not provide references for the source of his materials. However, the quotes he employs are often a direct translation of those that are available in Bolivian newspapers and as such, it is likely that these are the source of his information.

A third author of online materials that discuss the TIPNIS dispute is Sara Bruziches, a research associate for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA). COHA is a non-profit, independent research and information organization which aims to raise the visibility of regional affairs and influence US policies towards Latin America (COHA, 2013). Her work is available through online sites including COHA and Brazil, which produces a monthly magazine regarding political, economic and social issues pertaining to Brazil (Bruziches, 2011). Her writing focuses upon the clashes between large-scale development projects and environmental sustainability. Her work is also limited in length, however she does provide a broad overview of the TIPNIS highway conception as well as pointing out its potential negative impacts upon both the environment and the people who live there. While she correctly points out there is an ideological clash between those who support and those who oppose the highway construction, she does not analyze its deeper roots. Furthermore, her discussion of Indigenous Peoples is limited to their relation to the land. The references she draws upon come from online news sources such as the

BBC and are limited to substantiating her referral to laws and details of the highway project itself.

Online English language contributors such as Achtenberg, Kearns and Bruziches, and the websites that display their work, must be congratulated for bringing up-to-date information to the Anglophone population in reference to the TIPNIS dispute. These authors bridge the limitations of physical and linguistic distance by leveraging their ability to access and publish information online. In so doing, they contribute to raising awareness, which is a vital step in creating bonds of solidarity. Unfortunately, given the limitations of space they are unable to discuss at length the connections between this particular highway project and its historical and macro structural roots.

3.4 Bolivian Spanish language publications

Fortunately, this lack of detailed information in the English language literature can be overcome by drawing upon the abundance of written Bolivian material, which is available in the language of Spanish. Within Bolivia the TIPNIS dispute is currently a topic of frequent conversation and debate. It has been a central focus within newspapers and news casts since the eighth Indigenous march of 2011. Furthermore, panel discussions and debates have been held across the country in public squares, community centers as well as academic institutions. Moreover many Bolivians have had direct contact with the struggles through watching and/or participating in marches, vigils and public speeches. As such, it is not surprising to note that many people, including academics, journalists and activists, are writing on this subject. What is important to note is that these written materials provide a deeper reflection upon what this

struggle is, as well as what it means, and why it is occurring. In exploring such questions they draw upon many themes which illustrate the deep complexities of what can easily appear from afar as simply a highway.

As there is an abundance of Bolivian information available, I have limited my analysis to five specific publications that are written by numerous authors that are central within debates regarding the TIPNIS dispute. These authors raise many nuanced points and often do not relegate their analysis to just one particular aspect. As such, I have chosen to discuss these written materials by publication rather than theme, in order to ensure I do not collapse the complexities of their arguments.

The first publication that was referred to me while in Bolivia on nearly a daily basis was *Coraje, Memorias de la Octava Marcha Indígena por la Defensa del TIPNIS*. Published in March 2012, this 206-page book was written by Bolivian journalist and author Alex Contreras Baspineiro. Despite being imprisoned multiple times for his reporting work regarding issues of social justice, Baspineiro is an avid journalist who has authored numerous books, hosted radio programs, and written film scripts (Giordano, 2004). Many Bolivians referred to this book as the most complete and current source of information regarding the TIPNIS dispute. This publication follows the events leading up to and including the Eighth march. The prologue begins with a dedication to those Lowland and Highland Indigenous communities who made great sacrifices in their fight for dignity. Introductory presentations and contextualization are written by Adolfo Chávez, the President of *la Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia* (CIDOB), and the Bolivian anthropologist Xavier Albó.

Relying in great part on quotes from and interviews with marchers, Baspineiro argues that the “pueblo Boliviano” have fought for years to change unequal power distribution. However, in reference to the TIPNIS highway, he argues that Morales and the MAS have done the exact opposite of upholding their promises to promote a continued process of change. Baspineiro argues that mega-development projects, such as those designed by the IIRSA and neoliberal policies, threaten both human rights and the environment. Furthermore, he denounces the acceptance of the TIPNIS highway and calls for an urgent rethinking of the ‘process of change’ in order to reposition the pathway forward. To substantiate and build upon his points Baspineiro makes use of numerous maps, photos and statistical charts.

This text provides a rich source of information regarding the Eighth march, as well as its deep linkages to macro structures, such as the growing power of Brazil and its sub-imperial activities in South America. It also discusses the interests of transnational corporations in exploiting natural resources for financial gain. Furthermore, it clearly articulates the gap between rhetoric and reality regarding the rights of Indigenous Bolivians. However, what I think is of most value from this text is its central positioning of the voices and experiences of Indigenous Lowlanders who are engaged in this continued struggle. In doing so, Baspineiro moves the discussion from state and policy to the life experiences of those who are directly impacted. This work thus provides a much needed humanization of an otherwise dry and removed development narrative.

A second book that was published in 2012 is entitled *La Victoria Indígena del TIPNIS*. It includes a prologue and series of five essays regarding the TIPNIS dispute and was written by well-known authors and academics in the fields of sociology, philosophy, anthropology and politics. By placing these pieces written from different academic perspectives together, this

book showcases numerous layers of the TIPNIS dispute. Sociologist Sarela Paz has written extensively regarding the TIPNIS dispute and in her article, *El conflicto del Territorio Indígena Paque Nacional Isiboro Sécure (TIPNIS) y sus consecuencias para el Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*, focuses upon the consequences of this conflict for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. She argues that the State is composed numerous nations which must all co-exist rather than be homogenized. In reference to specific articles of the new Bolivian constitution she argues that decisions must be made which respect all the nations of Bolivia and not simply those who have the largest population or hold positions of power. Sociologists Patricia and Marxa Chávez also discuss the issues of hegemony and subordination as they relate to this particular highway dispute in their article *TIPNIS: el reposicionamiento de las luchas sociales en Bolivia*. However, they focus upon the repositioning of Bolivian social movements as they are absorbed into or fragment away from the State. In so doing, they call into question who is defining and benefiting from the decisions that are currently being made. They focus upon racism and Indigenous subordination as well as the narrowing by the State of spaces for critique.

Sociologist Raúl Alcoreza argues in his article, *La Guerra de la madre tierra*, that the TIPNIS dispute is a particular fissure in a larger structural clash between capitalistic and anti-colonial world views. Outlining multiple objectives for the creation of this highway (including the expansion of the agricultural frontier, strengthening of inter-governmental alliances and profit generation from the extraction of hydrocarbons), he concludes that this development project will create underdevelopment and dependency for Indigenous Lowlanders. He also discusses the relationship of domination by cocaleros over Lowland Indigenous communities within a larger structure of power relationships, which he feels the Morales government has not changed. Philosopher Rafael Bautista also focuses upon power relationships in his article, *El 18*

Brumario del “Kananchiri”. Not only does he feel that change has not occurred under Morales, but furthermore, that the Plurinational State has taken the place of the colonial state, in viewing Indigenous peoples and ways of life as obstacles to progress. Moreover, Indigenous peoples are constructed as inferior in order to legitimize their domination. The final article in this publication, *Los pueblos de tierras bajas como minoría plural consistente*, is written by Luis Tapia, a politics and philosophy professor. His work shows how Indigenous Lowlanders are consistently constructed as a minority. Furthermore, he discusses how the colonization of Lowland Bolivia has fostered ethnocentric views which see Indigenous Highlanders, who have adopted capitalistic modes of production, as superior to Indigenous Lowlanders.

All of the essays contained within this text argue for the need to respect Indigenous rights as well as critique mainstream development. Each does so by bringing forward different pieces of what is an interconnected and vastly complex puzzle. Given the current state of affairs, it may appear that the title *The Indigenous Victory of TIPNIS* is misleading; however, the prologue argues that this book is representative of one particular moment in the continued fight and will be followed up with many others.

A third publication that has been produced in 2012 is the 101st Journal from the *Centro Cuarto Intermedio* (CCI) and is entitled *Marcha indígena: La política en el camino*. This journal seeks to open spaces for learning, debate and the formation of opinions in order to contribute to an empowered civil society (Centro Cuarto Intermedio, 2012:5). Within this journal there are two essays which address the TIPNIS dispute. The first is written by Sociologist Félix Patzi, who was formerly the Bolivian Minister of Education. He concludes that the MAS government does not believe in a Plurinational and intercultural State, and that diversity is subordinated and subsumed (Patzi, 2012:53). This argument is substantiated through an exploration of clashing

world visions regarding what is a good life. Within this clash he describes relationships of inequality internationally, within Bolivia, as well as within TIPNIS and while doing so he locates the actors involved, through relationships of class, race and location. Anthropologist Xavier Albó also explores the TIPNIS dispute through an essay within this same journal (Albó, 2012a). He states that this dispute catalyzes a myriad of issues, including economic, political and visions of development. He outlines who the fundamental actors are within this dispute and begins with Mother Earth. He also discusses at length the relationship between Lowland Indigenous communities and their organizations with cocaleros and their unions. However, it is important to note that his argument is nuanced and does not characterize those involved as good or bad. For example, while discussing the cocaleros colonization of the Chapare region, he brings forward their battles with the US and its war on drugs (Albó, 2012a:66-67). Both of these articles raise a number of points regarding the complexities of the TIPNIS dispute and provide clearly articulated outlines of those who are involved and how they interact.

Another publication produced by the Centro Cuarto Intermedio is *Los trasfondos del TIPNIS: la complejidad del conflicto*. Just over 100 pages in length this book is organized into eight chapters which each address a different aspect of the TIPNIS conflict. This work was written collaboratively by twelve authors who are historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political analysts, economists, philosophers, lawyers, agronomists, students and social communications specialists. The cross spectrum of disciplines involved really speaks volumes to the many subjects that are interrelated within this one highway project. The central argument running throughout the text is that this particular issue is much larger than the situation itself, i.e. the current conflict but rather is rooted in structural aspects. Some of the central structural aspects which are brought forward include globalization, economic development, integration,

colonization, racial relationships of inequality, land ownership, environmental degradation, the Plurinational State and the many understandings of what it means to live well. Although issues are brought forward thematically, the authors continually draw interconnections.

The final publication I wanted to bring forward was the journal *PetroPress*. This bi-monthly publication is produced by *Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia* (CEDIB). This non-profit institution seeks to achieve structural changes in Bolivia through contributing to and strengthening political action (CEDIB, 2013). Numerous articles have been included within *PetroPress* which specifically address the TIPNIS dispute. Primary authors on this subject include Georgina Jiménez and Pablo Villegas who are both research staff of CEDIB. Each of the articles that they produce focus upon different aspects of the dispute, such as the application of Bolivian and International laws (Villegas, 2012), economic development and colonization (Jiménez, 2011) and the role of Indigenous women (Díaz and Jiménez, 2011). These articles tend to be shorter in length (approximately two to 10 pages in length with many photographs, maps and charts) which provides less space for analysis. However, they provide up-to-date, thoroughly substantiated discussions of current events related to the TIPNIS dispute, and are available to readers both through print and online.

The breadth of topics covered within Bolivian TIPNIS literature is enormous. Different authors have individually and collaboratively provided an overview of current events, their historical and structural roots as well as many analyses which highlight different points of intersection between these elements. While some may focus upon the role of a particular actor or particular topic, all authors discuss unequal power relationships and interrelate a discussion regarding Indigenous Lowlanders. In comparison, of the few scholarly sources available in the English language, Anglophone articles are framed within debates about whether or not Evo

Morales and the MAS government are neoliberal, and the TIPNIS highway is most frequently only brought forward in order to substantiate or refute this claim. While English language blogs and websites do discuss current events and the people engaged in these struggles, they fall short in their analysis. Thus it is my intention to draw upon the Bolivian materials in order to add further complexity to English language discussion regarding the TIPNIS dispute. Unfortunately, due to scope limitations I am unable to discuss at length all of the copious layers of this development project. However, by focusing upon the marginalization and discrimination of the Lowland Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán Indigenous peoples, I can begin to open wider English language debates which move away from simply outlining events or debating the successes and short fallings of Evo Morales and the MAS government, and in so doing help restore the current separation of content from context.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGIES

“Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized” (Smith, 2006:7)

4.1 Introduction

Research is an endeavour framed within relationships of unequal power. Those carrying out research search for, record, select, interpret, organize and present material regarding those being researched. Furthermore, researchers use this assemblage of information to make claims (Smith, 2006:17). All of these steps are guided by the researchers’ underlying beliefs and/or assumptions regarding what to include or not, how, and in what way. As such, whether or not a researcher is cognizant of it, all research is representative of the paradigm employed by the researcher (Wilson, 2008:33). However, within much academic literature few authors explicitly write about and/or analyze their own placement within the research as well as their relationships to those being researched, let alone deconstructing who has the power to define, as well as the impacts of the researcher’s imposed grids of intelligibility (Scott, 1998).

It is for this reason I believe it is imperative to begin with a placement of myself and my choice to engage in action-based research. As a researcher and writer I am not a neutral being with a neutral position on the subjects being discussed. My personal experiences and beliefs have shaped my understanding, and by extension how I analyzed the information I encountered through the research process, what I chose to include, what I chose to omit and the way in which I wrote. Thus, in this chapter I will describe how and why I selected this subject of research, my positionality, how I designed and carried out this research, as well as the impacts all of these components had on the creation of this thesis.

4.2 Self-Placement

I am a Canadian Settler woman of Irish and Eastern European decent, who was raised in a working class family of meagre economic means in a rural environment. My first experiences with Bolivia were as an intern with the organization *Gregoria Apaza* in El Alto, that seeks to overcome psychological, sexual and physical violence against women through the pursuit of human rights (CPMGA, 2011). For half a year I lived with Bolivian families and learnt about the damaging effects of neoliberalism as well as cosmovisions that centered community relationships to the land and the universe, and did not privilege economic gain and individuality. I was shocked and inspired by the risks many Bolivians took in asserting their voice against authority. Upon my return to Canada I could not seem to satiate my yearning to understand why so many Bolivians were vigorously involved in political activism while it appeared to me that the majority of Canadians were not only uninvolved but rather apathetic.

I worked for a number of humanitarian organizations, both large scale (UNICEF and the Canadian Red Cross) and small scale (CESO-SACO). My colleagues and I often discussed agency and the various conceptions of aid and development but I frequently felt removed from the discourse of the Bolivian streets which had inspired me so greatly before. In an attempt to rekindle my past invigoration I joined Toronto Bolivian Solidarity, a politically left-wing volunteer group which is part of the Latin American Solidarity Network in Toronto. There I was able to discuss my thoughts at length. In 2009 I returned to Bolivia as an International Observer for the Federal elections, as well as to work with an independent film crew regarding processes of decolonization.

In Bolivia I am a foreigner with access to many privileges. Although this thesis research was unfunded, I had access to credit from the Global North and subsequently was able to afford

many things, such as travel and recording devices, that many of those I was working with could not. Furthermore, my light-coloured skin and English accent made me visibly distinct, and allowed me access to speak with and participate in forums that were closed off to many Bolivians. Moreover, I was able to ask questions without the same level of risk to my well-being that Bolivian non-elites would incur. As was described in chapter 2.1, Bolivia is largely structured within a hierarchical framework. My position of privilege within this structure shaped all aspects of this thesis research. And while I recognize my positioning, I still feel an affinity for the struggles that are taking place. Lack of access to resources and opportunities, prioritization of relationships with people and the environment, and discrimination from urban elites were also a large part of my upbringing. This is not to say that the challenges I faced were in any way the same as that of the Bolivians with whom I was engaging but rather that these subjects of debate were something that, prior to this research, I already felt strongly about and, from a different perspective, was familiar with.

4.3 Research Design

Nearly a decade after finishing my undergraduate degree in International Development and Cultural Anthropology, I felt a strong need to return to university. In my volunteer work I was learning about structures of oppression and strategies of resistance. Through my paid employment I was learning a lot about the internal workings of the aid industry but a learning process approach¹² was not emphasized; thus I was unable to question the frameworks we were operating within. Emery Roe phrased this best when he wrote, “The unresolved failure of project blueprints derived from development narratives thus often serves only to reinforce, not

¹² As described by Roe, 1991

lessen, the perceived need for some sort of narrative” (1991:228). I could no longer ignore the growing divide between my paid employment and my volunteer engagement.

I began my master’s degree seeking to learn more about social movements, decolonization and agency. I wanted to understand why I had seen so many protests in Bolivia, why they took the shape they did, what were their structural roots, and what were their objectives. With a largely romanticized understanding of struggle against power, I spoke with a faculty member of the Global Development Studies program regarding my areas of interest. He suggested I focus on a particular case study in which I could grapple with the questions I had and recommended researching the TIPNIS highway dispute. This was a subject I had first encountered within my volunteer work at Toronto Bolivian Solidarity. At that time I had found the subject perplexing, in that the highway project appeared to contradict the revolutionary rhetoric of the MAS government regarding Bolivian’s process of change. As such, I agreed this would be a great subject of focus and developed the broad research question, *why is the TIPNIS highway project so contentious?*, as an avenue to explore these thoughts.

I began by reading theories of development, such as modernization, dependency theory and neoliberalism, by such authors as Rostow, Prebisch, Hayek and Stiglitz. From there I began researching Bolivia’s political, economic and social history. While in late 2011 there was little English academic literature regarding the TIPNIS dispute, I was able to read about daily events through online news and blog sites such as BBC and Upside World. I also read extensively on discrimination, oppression and resistance in a multitude of contexts. After this I wrote a series of short papers for my course-based work regarding women, gender and social movements in Bolivia, impacts of the US war on drugs within Bolivia, and clashing visions of development within the TIPNIS highway dispute.

Through my review of existing literature I concluded that, in Bolivia decisions have often been made by non-Indigenous urban elites which privilege the concerns of non-Indigenous urban elites at the expense of the Indigenous majority. Furthermore, the design and construction of the TIPNIS highway (to date) had been carried out without involvement of those who would be most impacted by it. Given this context, I decided to carry out my research through the employment of participatory methodologies which would privilege voices that I felt had been marginalized from English debates on the subject.

As I have iterated numerous times already, positionality (as understood through, but not limited to, the interlocking components of cultural, social, gender, racial, geographical location, ability and class) shapes realities (Nath, 2009 and Dhamoon, 2011). Thus, taking a critical theoretical perspective, my ultimate objective was not the pursuit of knowledge in and of itself but the hope that this thesis can be used to challenge structures of inequality.

4.4 Establishing Preliminary Contacts

Now that I have situated myself and the framing of my research inquiry I can proceed with a discussion of the primary data action-based research process. When I confirmed with my university department that I would be going to Bolivia to learn more about the TIPNIS dispute, I began contacting people I knew both in Bolivia and Canada (who had been to Bolivia before) to get their input on where I should go and with whom I should speak. Beginning this research in a participatory manner was crucial for all that followed. Based upon what I had previously read on the subject of the TIPNIS road dispute, as well as my past experiences in Bolivia, I felt it was most appropriate to follow action-based research methodologies. By working collaboratively in all aspects of this research, I aimed to learn and share what I had learnt from the perspective of

those I was working with rather than simply my own perspective (Desai and Potter, 2006:191).

After numerous discussions I decided to begin in Cochabamba, the heart of many past resistance movements and the closest urban center to the TIPNIS territory. I wanted to establish contacts in the place where I was going to be doing research before arriving in order to confirm that my presence was welcome, that my scope of inquiry was relevant and of use to those with whom I would be working (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:79) thereby taking into account and challenging some of the inherent colonial aspects of research (Smith, 2006:2-7 and Barker, 2010).

I sent numerous emails of introduction to various NGOs and individuals, however I only received replies from one organization, *Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia* (CEDIB). This was not surprising to me, as it has been my experience both in Canada and Bolivia, that many movement-based activists prefer to meet in person (or if that is not possible over the telephone) and get to know a bit about one's positioning and prior engagement in social justice work before entering into political discussions. As one Bolivian told me, "If you are not here, how can we know who you are and if we want to talk with you?". This statement reinforces many significant points. First, interviews are not one directional. Those being interviewed also interview the interviewer, and as this statement illustrates decide whether or not they want to proceed with an interview. Second, physical presence is important, not only so that interviewees may ask questions, but also because it demonstrates a level of commitment on the part of the researcher. Of those I worked with throughout this research, they emphasized numerous times how I had to experience things first-hand in order to unlearn and learn. This is a point I will return to shortly.

The staff member at CEDIB who responded to my emails had assisted many people

before in Bolivian-based research and it was part of their job description to help people in finding materials. Furthermore, we had several shared acquaintances, who spoke to them about who I was and what I was interested in learning about. Those I knew from my previous work in Bolivia were located in other parts of the country, so upon arrival in Cochabamba, I first went to the office of CEDIB to speak with the staff member who I had been in touch with via email.

4.5 Archive: CEDIB

I outlined my research interests in the TIPNIS dispute and that which I had learnt from my literature review over the past year. I wanted to gather materials which could provide a longer term context for the current debates. For development projects are not isolated moments in time, rather, they are situated within larger contemporary and historical contexts (Desai and Potter, 2006:241). The staff member then asked me many questions regarding the specifics of my interest. Working in Canada I had had some difficulty in attaining information regarding the TIPNIS dispute, so I was surprised by the questions. The staff member then showed me many enormously overfilled folders they had put together for other researchers on the subject of TIPNIS. They also explained the different components of the issue these researchers were focusing on, such as representation of Indigenous Lowland women, connections to environmental degradation and the role of Brazil. It was at this point that I began to appreciate how shallow my understanding of the subject was. I was also humbled by the realization I was only one of many people researching this subject, and that furthermore I knew so very little about its intricacies. I asked for copies of longer articles written most recently on the subject and was given several *PetroPress* magazines, which as I mentioned in my literature review, is a publication produced by CEDIB. From there I began reviewing thousands of CEDIB's archived

newspaper clippings.

4.6 Public Squares

From Skype-based conversations with friends in Bolivia prior to my arrival in the country, I knew that consultations were just beginning regarding the TIPNIS highway. Furthermore, this had been a subject of intense focus within various Bolivian newspapers. During my first few days in Cochabamba I went to central public squares with some of the articles I had collected from CEDIB as well as daily newspapers. I did so because I wanted to utilize as many participatory methodologies as possible throughout my learning process. Thus rather than reading materials, such as *PetroPress*, solely in the space within which it had been produced and in discussion with those who had produced it, I wanted to engage in wider conversations from a more diversified perspective. By being in public squares I was able to read these materials within some aspects of the cultural, historical, socioeconomic, political, geographical and political contexts which had in many ways influenced the events contained within these texts (Desai and Potter, 2006:191). Furthermore, I was able to engage in conversations with people in the square regarding what I was reading. In this way I attempted to garner my understandings from the perspectives of those being researched and not just my own (Desai and Potter, 2006:191).

Although each day was different, many days it was retired mestizo men and unemployed Indigenous men from rural areas seeking work in the city approached me and asked who I was and what I was doing. I explained I was a student and was interested in learning more about the TIPNIS dispute. One of the most frequent responses I received was a query of what I wanted to know about it. From there, informal conversations ensued between us regarding various aspects

of the subject. During these conversations, those with friends in other parts of the country and those with additional contacts I had made at the CEDIB office, it was recommended that I focus centrally on the consultations.

I returned to the CEDIB archive to ask their opinion on the refined focus. They explained that a great deal had already been written on the TIPNIS marches and that the consultations were a current aspect of the dispute and thus would likely be of interest to many people, both in Bolivia and abroad. With these new parameters the staff member a CEDIB staff member was able to put together a disc of hundreds of electronic materials as well as paper copies of those which were not available electronically. Although this provided me with an abundance of material, I decided this was insufficient. I wanted to ensure that I had a firm grounding in as many aspects of the topic as I could, as each author is always influenced by their methodological and theoretical positioning (Desai and Potter, 2006:210). As such, each time I spoke with someone I asked them what materials and/or authors they recommend I read, as well as with whom I should speak. From there I was able to generate a large list of sources, with several pieces¹³ being referred to me over and over again. Moreover still, each day I read at least three newspapers from different political positions and made a list of the names of people and texts that were cited for further analysis.

4.7 Participants and Interviews

From a perspective of gathering information, I was very fortunate in the timing of this research. Because the previous TIPNIS marches and subsequent related events had garnered such a public response and because the consultations were currently being held, TIPNIS was a

¹³ These pieces are the Spanish language sources that were examined in the Literature Review Chapter 3.4

subject of wide debate throughout the time I was in Bolivia. Meetings and open debates were held in public squares, film nights and discussion groups were hosted in offices and universities. Press conferences were also frequently taking place. These were events to which I was welcomed and in which I was encouraged to participate. Furthermore, given that I was carrying out research, event coordinators also invited me to attend events that were only open to the press, which they explained they considered me part of, as I would be writing about what I heard.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Professor of Indigenous Education, explains that much academic work done by non-Indigenous researchers regarding Indigenous Peoples is of no worth to the Indigenous world, and often has been utilized to benefit the researcher and/or the existing colonial system (2006:3). At events, such as those listed above, participants iterated time and time again how important they felt it was for TIPNIS to be a subject of discussion. Furthermore, many people urged me to take what I was learning and share this information in my home country.

When I began interviewing I utilized a semi-structured format that included a list of themes but provided space for interviewees to explore their thoughts through their responses (Desai and Potter, 2006:144). In order to ensure a wide sample of perspectives I met with many people who were both for and against the construction of the TIPNIS highway. In this way I attempted to mitigate my own political biases in collecting research data (Desai and Potter, 2006:147). However, it quickly became apparent to me that this was problematic. Ethical issues should always inform all aspects of research (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:140). As I got to know those I was interviewing I was invited to attend closed events. Movement-based activists often have numerous commitments and have little time available to speak with researchers. Thus interviews can be an overburden with consequences despite the researcher's commitment to the

supposed empowerment of those being researched (Desai and Potter, 2006:189). Given this I felt it was more appropriate to meet with people at these events, rather than at separate times.

Furthermore, interviews I held one-on-one were shorter in length, and longer conversations were often held in larger groups and carried out simultaneous to other work that was being done.

While at these events I was, like all other participants present, expected to be an active participant. I could not and would not hide my position against the construction of this highway in the manner the Bolivian government was carrying out. As such, I did not feel comfortable engaging in events that promoted this construction and in my opinion violated human rights. Furthermore, I did not want to harm the rapport I was developing with those opposed to the highway. Moreover still, I did not want to participate in activities that could jeopardize the work those in opposition to the highway were taking so many risks to do. It is imperative that wherever possible research not be harmful to participants (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:140). Furthermore it is recognized within academics that research designs can and should shift as the perspective of the researcher shifts (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:17). As such, after two weeks I decided to no longer carry out research at events in support of the highway and consequently the majority of the information I gathered through participant observation as well as interviews was from positions in opposition to the TIPNIS highway.

Many research guides recommend ensuring a wide range of interviewees in order to ensure the researcher has taken into account diverse perspectives and experiences (Desai and Potter, 2006:147). While I agree that positioning and experiences greatly shape perspectives, I do not feel that garnering a wide range of perspectives is more important than ethics. As stated earlier, research is entangled with colonization and injustice (Smith, 2006:3). As a regular attendee at anti-TIPNIS highway events I became quickly recognizable and those present knew

about my research. Given my positionality as a privileged outsider I did not want to impose my research needs on those with whom I was working. Fortunately, many people came up to me and requested that I speak with them about their experiences and opinions regarding TIPNIS. Many of these people then introduced me to additional people with whom they felt I should also speak. Academic research recommends starting with as many contacts as possible to maximize interviewee diversity (Desai and Potter, 2006:147). Given that there are numerous organizations, groups and individuals who are engaged in activities in opposition to the highway and so many events being held in this regard, I had a number of starting sources from which this snowball technique ensued. As I engaged in more interviews I decided to not use my prefabricated list of topics and rather asked people to tell me what they thought I should know, and from there discussions ensued. By doing so, participants were able to discuss what they felt was most important in ways of their own choosing and many new discussion points were raised that I had not initially thought of.

As I was engaging in these conversations and activities taking place around them I choose to simultaneously take as few written notes as possible, as doing so created barriers between those I was working with and myself. However, in keeping with participatory approaches, when I did take notes I repeated these back to those I was speaking with to ensure I had recorded the information correctly. In the evenings before going to sleep I also wrote a journal regarding what I had observed, which include both text and drawings, such as who sat where in meetings and patterns of movement. This methodology allowed me to not only keep track of many phenomena I had observed, but also helped me to isolate areas of confusion as well as formulate conclusions which I could, and did, confirm with people and/or expand upon through further conversations at a later time. Over the period of the month I had filled two

journals and had hundreds of pages of fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are invaluable in that they provide a space for reflection, can illustrate the emergence of patterns which may otherwise appear as random, and can also assist in increasing ones' depth of understanding (Desai and Potter, 2006:183).

4.8 Quantification

This research was largely reliant upon qualitative methods, which foregrounded personal perspectives and social structures rather than quantifiable representation through numbers. However, in order to provide an overview of the scope and breadth of this research process, I will outline some of the numerically measurable parameters of this research. I conducted the fieldwork component of this thesis research in August of 2012. Twenty-five interviews were recorded and an additional 10 were not, as per the request of those being interviewed. These interviews ranged in length from 15 minutes to three hours. Moreover still, I had numerous informal conversations with individuals and groups. I attended and/or participated in two parades, three informational speaking circles, one public debate, one closed debate and one film night. During these events and through meetings and discussions at public and private spaces and venues I had the chance to speak with members of the following groups and/or organizations

- Anti and pro-highway activists
- Bolivian Governmental staff
- CEDIB (Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia – Center of Bolivian Documentation and Information)
- CEADDESC (Centro de Estudios Aplicados a los Derechos Economicos, Sociales y Culturales – Center of Applied Studies of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
- CIDOB (Confederacion de Pueblos Indigenas de Bolivia– Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia)
- CONAMAQ (Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas Del Qullasuyu – National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu)
- CONISUR (Consejo Indigena del Sur del TIPNIS – Indigenous Council of Southern TIPNIS)

- IDEI (Instituto de Estudios Internacionales de Bolivia – Bolivian Institute of International Studies)
- Federación del Trópico (Federation of the Tropics)
- FOBOMADE (Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo – Bolivian Forum on Environment and Development)
- La Subcentral TIPNIS (Subcentral TIPNIS)
- The Bolivian Red Cross
- UNICEF

4.9 Limitations

As was already mentioned, a great deal of this thesis research was done at public events and forums. Not unlike many other parts of the world, at these events there was a privileging of the male voice. Women, although the minority in numbers, were often present but did not speak for as long nor as frequently as their male counter parts. This is something that has been noted by many academics who have done research within Bolivia. For example, Anders Burman, when studying gender politics in the Bolivian Andes observed that in political meetings the majority of those in attendance are men and of the few women who do attend most remain silent (Burman,2011:71).

Many postcolonial feminists argue that current gender relations are a product of colonial relationships of domination and subordination that were instituted during imperialism (Sjoberg, 2009:188). Many Indigenous women and men promote the reintegration of Indigenous cosmovisions, such as *chachawarmi*¹⁴, as a central strategy to decolonize gender relations. Yet while this strategy is being promoted, most proponents of it would argue it is not currently practiced (Burman, 2011 and Lind, 2003).

¹⁴ Chachawarmi literally means “man-woman” and conveys the notion of gender complementary in which gender positions are dynamic and only arise in relation to one another and together create unity (Burman, 2011:66-79).

It is important to remember that there are multiple positions of identity based upon various axes and subsequently multiple interacting layers of oppression (Dhamoon, 2011:230-231). As Nisha Nath explains,

“women are positioned within different contexts, they bear diverse histories, they experience and resist subordination and discrimination in multiple and complex ways, and they are implicated in relations of power and privilege through their shifting positionality” (2009:3).

Thus, the women at the meetings were not simply women. Rather, many were Indigenous women. Due to socially constructed differences between us by race, experiences of racism, racial privilege and sexism (Moreton-Robinson, 2002:41), these women and I were able to participate in these forums in very different ways. As a result I was able to speak with far more men than women, which consequently impacted what I was learning about and how.

An additional limitation of this thesis project is that research was not carried out within the TIPNIS Territory. During the time I was in Bolivia barricades of barbed wire and other materials were put in place by Lowland Indigenous communities within TIPNIS, such as San Ramoncito, in order to stop the entry of *brigadas* who were carrying out the consultation process (Boletin Vertientes, 2012). Research with groups who have been marginalized has a long history of being carried out by researchers in immensely oppressive manners (Hooks, 1990). Many academic research guides now stress the importance of ensuring that research is not simply self-serving (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:167). References to the potential dire consequences of research, such as the work of anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon among the Yanomami, stand as stark reminders.

Given that many Lowland Indigenous communities were engaged in direct confrontation and were requesting that outsiders not enter the TIPNIS territory I felt my presence would go against their wishes and thus be unethical. Furthermore, given that the State had previously used

the presence of outsiders as a justification for their entry into the Territory¹⁵, I also felt that my presence could potentially be a hindrance to those who were asserting their rights. I did receive an invitation from a community member who offered to take me to TIPNIS to act as a witness to events as they unfolded. While I was in Bolivia there were journalists and researchers who did enter the TIPNIS Territory to do their work. However, given the context and ethical concerns of doing so, I declined the offer. That said, I was able to make contacts with and interview Lowland Indigenous community members within TIPNIS via telephone conversations. Furthermore, I was able to meet with TIPNIS community members (both Lowland Indigenous and cocaleros), who had travelled to the city to engage in the struggle from urban centers. In addition, I was able to meet with Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies who had travelled to TIPNIS while engaging in activism regarding the highway construction.

A final limitation of this thesis is regarding non-governmental organizations. International discourse regarding Indigenous Rights, such as the United Nations Declaration Regarding the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, sets the terms by which Indigenous Peoples are recognized and can make claims¹⁶ (Sylvain, 2002). Working within these frameworks, conservationists and NGOs have used Indigenous Peoples and their struggles in order to advance their own agendas. Often portraying Indigenous communities as living outside of the realm of modernity and in harmony with nature, this imagery corresponds with pre-existing values of donors and does not accurately represent Indigenous Peoples¹⁷. Rather, in so doing, it opens Indigenous communities to challenges regarding their ‘authenticity’ and rights to claims as

¹⁵ Example: The alleged kidnapping of Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca by TIPNIS marchers in Yucumo on September 24, 2011, which later proved to be false. See *El Diario*, 2012a for further details.

¹⁶ This is a subject which will be discussed further in Chapter 7.3 and 7.4

¹⁷ See Chapter 6.8

Indigenous Peoples¹⁸ (Hames, 2007).

Some proponents of the TIPNIS highway, including Evo Morales, have argued that conservationists and NGOs are forcing Indigenous Lowlanders to protest the highway construction (la Razón, 2012a). However, anti-TIPNIS highway Lowlanders I spoke with were very upset by the implication that they were simply pawns of these organizations. Furthermore, they felt the charge was insulting as it removed their agency and implied that they were incapable of making their own decisions. It is undeniable that there are unequal power relationships between many NGOs and Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, as I stated in the introductory chapter, there are an infinite number of ways in which this highway dispute could be analyzed. However, given that the objective of this thesis is to center the voices of Lowland Indigenous Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples, who have been marginalized from English language discussion of this subject, I felt it was most appropriate to focus this research on the concerns they raised. As a result, the role and objectives of conservationists and NGOs are not a central component of analysis in this research.

4.9 Data organization

Academic knowledge seeks to select, organize and present information through a process which privileges the existing order (Smith, 2006:36). In other words research is a colonial endeavour. Given this, I sought throughout this research process to challenge this unequal power relationship. This is not something that I only incorporated into the research component; it also shaped the formation and organization of this thesis. The central premise of this thesis is that the TIPNIS highway project is simply one moment of a larger neo-colonial context. This is not a

¹⁸ See Chapters 7.2 and 7.3

conclusion I reached on my own; it is something that those I was working with brought up numerous times and felt was exceptionally important I explain to people in Canada.

Given my positionality, this thesis could easily become Orientalist, in that it could make statements about Bolivia, authorize and describe these constructions, thereby teaching, settling and ruling it (Smith, 2006:2 and Said, 1978). I must iterate again, I am not Bolivian and I am not Indigenous. As such the events I am describing I have learnt about by listening to those who are directly involved. Reading this thesis one will note that direct quotes are used most frequently in the latter chapters, primarily Chapters 6 and 7. This is because this thesis is organized chronologically by events to date. As Chapter 3 illustrated, a great deal has been written regarding the TIPNIS dispute from its inception to the Eighth Indigenous March which was held in 2011. Given the inherent colonial nature of academic research, my positionality as an outsider, and the objective of this thesis to foreground voices and experiences that have been marginalized from discussions on this subject, the choice to privilege research and information from Bolivians was intentional. Where possible I choose to employ Bolivian Spanish-language sources that were written by and/or engaged directly with Indigenous Lowlanders of TIPNIS. However, with respect to more recent events, such as the TIPNIS highway consultations, less literature is currently available. As such, the discussion of these subjects within this thesis relies more heavily on conversations I had with Indigenous Lowlanders, their allies, cocaleros and TIPNIS highway supporters. By writing in this way I aim to strengthen direct lines of communication between those directly involved in the conflict and you the reader, and in so doing mitigate the potential to privilege my own voice and experiences.

In speaking of communication, the subject of translation must also be raised. While in Bolivia all of the written information that I gathered, as well as my engagement in activities,

events and conversations was conducted entirely in the Spanish language. Upon returning to Canada, I transcribed recorded interviews in Spanish to avoid any potential changes in meaning. While reviewing and analyzing this information I continued to engage with the material in Spanish. I only translated quotes and information from Spanish to English once they were placed within the final draft of this thesis so that they would be intelligible to an Anglophone audience.

It is of central importance that you, the listener, understand this thesis is organized and presented in its current format given the audience I am writing for. I am presenting the information in this arrangement so that it can make sense for you. Knowledge is not discovered nor owned, it is simply made visible through a set of relationships (Wilson, 2008:127). In this chapter, I have described the points of intersection where information was shared between those I was working with and me as well as how this information is now being made visible to you. And I thank you for being a part of this process.

CHAPTER FIVE: HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS TO CURRENT CONTEXT

“The negativity, the revulsion at exploitation and violence, is buried completely, drowned in the concrete of the foundation blocks of social science just as surely as, in some parts of the world, the bodies of sacrificed animals are buried builders in the foundation blocks of houses or bridges.” (Holloway, 2002:9)

5.1 Introduction

Words have been spoken but not heard, people have gathered to discuss but have not been heard, marchers have walked up mountains but they still have not been heard. Police have been sent to punish those who oppose authority and screams of protest have carried out across the globe. Promises were made and broken. Lives were lost yet the screams live on. Barbed wires and barricades have been set up, and tensions continue to mount as the government races forward in its insatiable integration quest. So how did things get this way?

A surface-level reading of current and historical events regarding the TIPNIS highway dispute, could lead one to believe that mistakes have been made but overall there is a continued commitment to adhere to and uphold Indigenous rights. It is my belief, though, that this reading is enormously flawed. Beneath the cloak of good intentions lies a long legacy of inequality and injustice which continue to marginalize the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples. In this chapter I will provide an overview of events specifically relating to the TIPNIS highway dispute and how they are connected to larger colonial projects, as outlined in the previous chapters. For, it is only by placing these specific events in their larger context that we can begin to understand their genocidal character.

To illustrate this point I will begin by describing the marginalization of Indigenous Lowlanders in the creation of the TIPNIS Territory as well as their responding demands for recognition. I will then outline the risks inherent in taking direct action against the Bolivian

State. A brief overview of the eight marches in defense of the TIPNIS Territory and the rights of Indigenous Lowlanders will highlight their courage to assert their rights. Links will then be made to highlight how these actions strengthened and created new ties among allies as well as raised awareness among an international audience regarding the violation of Indigenous rights within Bolivia. Subsequently details of the counter march in support of the TIPNIS highway will be outlined as well as recent events, which illustrate the intent of the Bolivian government to build this highway, in the words of Evo Morales himself, “Whether they want it or don’t want it”¹⁹ (Baspineiro, 2012:59).

5.2 Creation of Isiboro Sécure National Park

The Isiboro Sécure National Park (PNIS – Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure) was created on the 22nd of November, 1965 in the Bolivian law 7401²⁰. This 2.9 million acre ecological reserve in the Yungas region was created by the Bolivian Government to preserve the watersheds and headwaters of rivers. It was described as a zone belonging to the State which was rich in flora and fauna, and should be kept in a “virgin” state. In this law the region, PNIS, was perceived and treated as an empty space.

Micheal Asch, in discussion of the Canadian state discusses its acquisition of sovereignty and title, raises the deeply problematic nature of this conceptualization with respect to Indigenous peoples, as it rests upon assumptions of territory as “*terra nullius*”. This he describes as, “a territory without people, to reiterate, one that was either previously unoccupied or not recognized as belonging to another political entity” (2002:24). Although the PNIS is located in

¹⁹ See Chapter 5.8

²⁰ See appendix item 1

Bolivia this conceptualization also applies. In law 7401, the territory is described with reference to environmental features yet there is absolutely no mention of the Indigenous populations that already lived there. In so doing, the Bolivian State is relying upon a colonial perspective in that it does not recognize the sovereignty of the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples. Furthermore it is perpetuating colonization in that the Bolivian State is laying claim to its sovereignty of the region.

5.3 March for Territory and Dignity

This assertion, of course, did not go unchallenged. In 1990 the First Indigenous march for Territory and Dignity was held (Baspineiro, 2012: 13). Walking more than 600 kilometers from Trinidad to La Paz, Lowland Indigenous peoples called for recognition of their existence, as well as a stop to the colonization of their territory by Quechua and Aymara Settlers from the Andean highlands²¹. Yet it was not just their presence that they called attention to, they also demanded recognition of their territories. Pedro Nuni, a member of CIDOB, reflecting upon the march said,

“The march of the Lowland Indigenous communities of 1990 marked an important milestone, because until this moment Natives of Eastern Bolivia and the Amazon were not recognized. We showed Bolivia and demanded, as citizens, our rights be respected. We also asked for land and territory.” (Escobar, 2008)

Thus it was in 1990 that the territory was reclaimed as an Indigenous Territory. Passing of the Declaration 22610 on the 24th of September 1990, recognized the zone as both a national and Indigenous Territory. Furthermore, a red line was established to limit the advancement of colonization of the region (Baspineiro, 2012:55). However, it was only two decades later that legal title was granted by the State (TCO-NAL-00029) recognizing the zone as *Tierras*

²¹ A subject to be discussed in further depth in Chapter 6.12(i)

Comunitarias de Origen (TCO), which were converted to *Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino* (TIOC) by State decree in 2010 (Baspineiro, 2012:20-21). In synthesis TI (Territorio Indígena) was added to PNIS thus forming TIPNIS and recognizing the region under a double categorization as both an Indigenous Territory and a National Park.

5.4 Risks of direct action

It is important to remember that the decision to march is one that is not lightly taken; it requires sacrifice and heroics to undertake, and has large implications upon both communities and individuals. With only the goods that can be carried, marchers rely upon the assistance of the communities they pass for provisions and support. And it is not only the strongest members of the community who march. Rather from a Lowland Indigenous perspective, life is experienced together and not individually. As such, families march together, mothers, fathers and children are all involved (Baspineiro, 2012:52). Berta Bejarano, President of the Commission of March mobilization in defense of TIPNIS, was quoted as saying, “The women march together with our children because we believe it is safer to march with our children than to leave them in our home. And if we have to suffer, we will suffer watching over our children”. (Radio Interview with Somos Sur 20-08-2011) Berta’s comment is in reference not only to the importance of families being together but also the very real risk of violence, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Apart from the risk of violence, marching for months with little

food, water and rest is beset with health risks. In undertaking these initiatives many have fallen ill and some have even given their lives²².

“Muscle aches, blisters on the feet, cramps, respiratory problems, colds, diarrhea, and even fainting and the danger of an accident, looms at every meter of your trek. In some marches there is the lament of the death of people. In addition to this stoic journey of hunger, thirst and constant risk, there are days in which the marchers must withstand the excessive heat and dust, days of rain, and in the high places, the cold gales that punish them with all its rigor” (Baspineiro, 2012:52-53).

The life story of the Domitila Barrios de Chungara is world renowned and illustrates all too well the very real risks of taking direction political action in Bolivia. Domitila was an Indigenous woman from a rural area of Bolivian Andes who dedicates her life to fighting capitalist oppression. She was arrested multiple times for her political activity. While in prison she was severely beaten. The guards often taunted her with threats of rape, and torture of her husband and children. One time while incarcerated she was beaten quite aggressively (her teeth were broken, and she was kicked and punched in the stomach while more than eight months pregnant). She gave birth to a son in a cell on a wet pavement floor that was covered in water and her blood and then passed out from haemorrhaging. When she came to she found her child was dead (Viezzler, 1978). The risk of physical violence and repression for speaking out is not limited to Bolivia. The memoirs of numerous activists, such as Rigoberta Menchú, who did not have the privileged position of choosing to be politically active, highlight the everyday trauma of conflict and violence which is insidious throughout much of the world (Burgos-Debray, 1984). And while these examples may be from years past, these realities are still present today.

²² In the Eighth Indigenous March for Dignity and Territory, Pedro Moye was hit and killed by a van driven by a police officer, Juan Uche Nosa died from a stomach infection and Eddy Martínez Rivera died in a fatal plane crash returning from the march (Baspineiro, 2012:166).

5.5 Why march?

So why march? The reasons to take such a drastic measure are of course multi-fold. However, I think Baspineiro said it best when he wrote, “The government cannot stop the clock of history. The marches mark the systole and diastole of the liberation of oppressed peoples” (Baspineiro, 2012:51). By marching, Lowland Indigenous peoples and their allies are saying, enough is enough. They are taking back power, and asserting their voice and their right to dignity and respect. In a recorded interview which was disseminated across Bolivia Berta Bejarano said, “Indigenous Peoples are asking for respect for their constitutional right, their right to save the Territory. Because it is not a gift from anyone” (Radio Interview with Somos Sur 20-08-2011). In so doing, they move their struggles from invisibility to a central stage. Their presence then forces the State and those responsible to explain why the discord exists and also to take into account the consequences of their decisions and actions (Polet, 2007:12). However, it is important to note that there must be a minimum level of confidence in the ability to integrate their demands in order to assemble collective action (Polet, 2007:6). As such, the marches of Indigenous Lowlanders are different from the political actions of autonomous anarchist groups, such as the Zapatistas, in that they are not seeking to remove the State but rather seek a place for themselves within the State’s existence²³.

In addition to calling attention and demanding recognition the marchers are simultaneously challenging hegemonic power relations. The denial of Indigenous Peoples dignity and the subsequent consequences of this denial, as seen in Chapter 2, is a result of the

²³ However, since these marches there has been a shift from appeal to the Bolivian State to autonomous oriented actions, such as barring the entry of outsiders into Indigenous Lowland communities within TIPNIS and hosting parallel consultations in accordance with Indigenous Lowland customs (See Chapters 7.7 and 7.8 for further details). In keep with the current context of affairs I have analyzed the marches through the lens of autonomy oriented theorists.

European invasion of the Americas (Khasnabish, 2010:12). Yet by marching and speaking out they resist and challenge the status quo.

As Holloway so correctly points out, in addition to the potential to realise immediate demands, those involved in shared struggles can develop into a community of struggle who can together oppose capitalist social relations (2002:208). Those who see the marchers retain these images, and those who share their food or supplies also become a part of the struggle (Baspineiro, 2012:51). Of course one must remember that alliances do not simply emerge on their own. Rather, people must determine what they have in common. From this often comes a growth in awareness of shared struggles and the construction of a shared identity and/or adversary (Polet, 2007:8).

While statements were made that called for recognition of the rights of Indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS, speakers often referred to Indigenous rights as a whole. In so doing, connections to broader audiences were made and thus the appeal became one for the rights of Bolivia's majorities. For example, Fernando Vargas said, "We say to the Bolivian population to solidarize [solidarizarse] with our cause, with our demand, that is a just demand. We are demanding that the National government, of the Plurinational State, respect the lives of Indigenous Communities" (Radio Interview with Somos Sur 20-08-2011).

Through resistance-based actions, such as marches, there can grow a committed resistance and the creation of alternatives. These alternatives emerge out of a union of imaginations, hopes, aspirations and encounters (Khasnabish, 2008:8). In the case of the Indigenous Marches for Territory and Dignity this culmination of possibilities is precisely what occurred, as will be shown in the following sections.

5.6 Subsequent Marches

Since the First Indigenous March for Dignity and Territory a number of additional marches have been held with respect to TIPNIS. In 1996 there was a march for Territory, development²⁴ and the political participation of Indigenous communities through representation in government, while maintaining independence from political parties. In 2000, a march was held seeking official recognition of Lowland Indigenous languages. In 2002, the marchers demanded sovereignty and reform of the constitutional assembly to reflect this. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, in 2005 Evo Morales and the MAS government were elected through the unified efforts of Bolivia's social majorities. This was seen by many, both within and outside of Bolivia, as a historic victory. Waltraud Morales, a political science professor at the University of Central Florida, described the ascent and actions of the MAS government as a "Refounding Revolution" that "is an authentic multiethnic democracy that has given grassroots leaders, citizens' groups, and new social movements of women, indigenous peoples and the poor underclass, greater and more direct participation in governance" (2012:568). However, the ascendancy to State power does not in and of itself always equate to radical transformation of existing hegemonic power relations. As Raúl Zibechi, a Uruguayan radio and print journalist, so correctly points out, how social movements connect with the government and their ability to articulate their struggles is of the utmost importance, "The relationship between the two may produce a re-legitimization of the state and the neoliberal model with minimal changes or, conversely, it may allow those forces struggling to build another world to advance anew"

²⁴ Development as understood from an Indigenous Lowland perspective which is not to be confused with Rostow's modernization theory.

(2010:4). However, what is important to note now is that at the time of Evo's election there was hope that change was possible²⁵.

In 2006 the fifth TIPNIS march was held. This time marchers demanded collective rights for Indigenous communities. In 2007 a sixth march focused upon agricultural reform. During this time tensions continued to mount between Lowland Indigenous communities and Highland cocaleros who had settled in the south of the territory²⁶. In 2007, a seventh march was held in response to the governmental nullification of concessions and shared title within TIPNIS. Indigenous marchers demanded autonomy and the defense of their rights as Indigenous communities.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, in 2008 the TIPNIS highway was designed to connect the Department of Cochabamba, the Andean gateway, to the Amazonian Department of Beni (Achtenberg, 2011c and Bijork-James, 2011). A total of 306 kilometers, envisioned in three sections, the highway was designed to cut through the nucleus of the TIPNIS territory. Despite the existence of international requirements regarding consultation²⁷, there was no discussion with community members of TIPNIS (Shahriari, 2011). January 25th 2009, Bolivia's new constitution was approved by popular referendum (Assies, 2011:93). This new constitution recognized Bolivia as a Plurinational State, thereby recognizing the multiethnic and cultural composition of the country. The constitution also recognized "Indigenous originary peasant' autonomies", which

²⁵ This hope has since largely dissipated and is a key component to why actions have shifted from appeals to the Bolivian State to autonomy oriented actions.

²⁶ See Chapter 6.12(i)

²⁷ See Chapter 7.3

created spaces for asserting Indigenous regions of self-determination and government²⁸ (Assies, 2011:113 and Hunter et al, 2010:62).

On February 9th 2012, the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples were the first to declare their autonomy based on the new constitution. A formal statute of autonomy was presented by Indigenous leaders of these communities in Beni which cited articles, 289, 290, 291, 294, 296 and 385 of the new constitution as the legal grounding for their application for Indigenous autonomy and self-governance (Kearns, 2009).

5.7 Villia Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos Highway

Without consultation and despite the existence of the new Bolivian constitution, the Brazilian Constructions Company began construction of the highway in June of 2011 (Bijork-James, 2011). The total project cost is estimated at \$415 million US dollars, which translates to a cost of \$1,356,209 per kilometer (Business News America, 2011). The Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) agreed to provide 80 per cent of the costs in the form of a loan, with repayment within a 15-year period. The remainder of the costs were to be covered by the Bolivian state²⁹ (Business News America, 2011).

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the Bolivian government introduced a National Development Plan in 2006 that strove to combat poverty through a pro-market approach that increased productivity and competitiveness. To engage the entire Bolivian population in ‘productive’ activities and create competitive access to export markets for Bolivian products, a

²⁸ See Chapter 7.5

²⁹ See 5.12 for updates regarding funding arrangements

central area of concentration was increased investment in road infrastructure (IDB, 2010:10). However, it is not just the Bolivian state that has a vested interest in the project. As was also mentioned in Chapter 2, the IIRSA identified the Peru, Brazil, Bolivian hub as an area in need of greater transportation, energy and communicational integration (IIRSA, 2012). Furthermore, the project's former majority funder, BNDES strives to integrate Brazilian companies into markets outside of its borders and encourage export of Brazilian goods and services (BNDES, 2011). In addition, one would be remiss not to acknowledge that this road would connect Brazil with a Pacific port from which it can export its food and minerals to China (Shahriari, 2011).

The Bolivian State made decisions regarding the road project emphasizing that the project was a question for the State to debate and not subject to local veto (Bijork-James, 2011:4). In so doing, the State marginalized Lowland Indigenous communities from decisions that directly affected them. Using a paternalistic and modernization based discourse, many Highland Indigenous and urban non-Indigenous peoples further marginalized Lowland communities in their discussions regarding the road. As the following quote so clearly illustrates, they argued the road was beneficial³⁰, “[the highway] offers integration and development for *our* Indian brothers” (Arostegui et al, 2011 – emphasis added).

5.8 The Eighth Indigenous March in Defense of TIPNIS

Despite being marginalized from decision making, through identity construction built upon racist stereotypes which erase agency and conceal the structural roots of racial inequality, Indigenous Lowlanders have continuously fought for the realization of their rights. Evo

³⁰ See Chapters 6.9 and 6.10

Morales's statement that the TIPNIS highway would be built "Whether they want it or don't want it" in June of 2011, sparked a strong response from those opposed to the highway construction (Baspineiro, 2012:59). On August 15th 2011, 21 years to the day since the First Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity, Indigenous Lowlanders from TIPNIS began the long march to La Paz, requesting to speak with the president. Ernesto Noe, the Indigenous leader who began the first march, said,

"After 21 years the situation of Indigenous communities continues to remain the same and even worse. The difference is now we have an Indigenous government who doesn't want to respect Indigenous rights, doesn't want to respect our territory and doesn't want to respect our cultures; for that, we are left with no other alternative than to march again to La Paz" (Baspineiro, 2012:69).

Media coverage of the march garnered the support of other Bolivians and foreigners. As the protestors marched they were supplied with food and places to rest by other Indigenous communities, and the number of marchers grew immensely as supporters joined them (Bijork-James, 2011:1-2). Previously many Indigenous communities had supported the Morales government, however with the TIPNIS highway questions arose regarding the validity of Morales's progressive rhetoric. As the march continued many Bolivians rescinded their support of Morales and his government, and consequently his approval ratings dropped to below 40 per cent (Lyons, 2011). Morales, however, urged Indigenous Lowlanders to see his social vision through, arguing that unrealized potential would soon follow (Bijork-James, 2011:4).

Tensions grew as environmentalists, water rights activists and others expressed their solidarity with the marchers (Bijork-James, 2011:2). On September 25th 2011 tensions reached their breaking point. Uniformed police were caught on tape gagging, beating and tear-gassing the marchers (Paredes, 2011). Hospital records indicate more than 152 marchers were treated for

injuries (Bijork-James, 2011:3). Among those injured were Celso Pandilla, a leader of the Indigenous Guaraní, who suffered from multiple hematomas and Wilson Melgar, an Indigenous Sironó grandfather, who had an embolism and became paraplegic (Bijork-James, 2011:3). The injured were not first provided with health care but rather were arrested and detained. Children were torn from their parent's arms, families and spouses were separated. Approximately 240 detainees were forced onto buses (that did not have license plates), without water or information regarding where they were being taken (Bijork-James, 2011:3 and La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:123). The police troops also attempted to intervene in media coverage of the events by taking cameras and threatening the arrest of journalists. Some marchers managed to escape arrest by hiding in the bushes and were taken in by march supporters who kept their location a secret. Those detained were forced to switch vehicles and were driven to Rurrenabaque. However, on route, several of those detained managed to escape and walk to the closest town where they were able to reconnect with other escapees, and reveal the direction of travel of all those who had been arrested (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:123-127).

In speaking of the events Fernando Vargas described how he was beaten while he was threatened with murder. He also spoke out against the paramilitary violence. Despite the severe abuse he said,

“At that time I did not feel worried because I think that so far I have not done anything wrong. The only thing I've done is be here marching, defending the Territory, the big house of my brothers, so that it is not destroyed by the highway that supposedly will bring development... I felt proud that my mistreatment was while defending my community” (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:129).³¹

³¹ For additional personal testimonies of the attacks please see La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:129-137

In response, street protests were held in eight out of nine Bolivian departments, and in Beni there was a department-wide strike (Bijork-James, 2011:3). Vigils were held in cities such as La Paz that were attended by various prominent and influential leaders such as the historian Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui (Bijork-James, 2011:3 and La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:124). The government attempted to fly the detained back to the Department of Beni, however protests in Rurrenbaque, took over the airport and did not allow planes to land. Rather than confront the protestors the police let the detainees go (Bijork-James, 2011:3). The marchers were able to regroup in Quiquibey and resumed their march on September 30th (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:126).

The Bolivian government was quick to respond to the assaults. On September 26th, Morales made a public statement saying he had not authorized the police attacks and also asked for forgiveness from the families of those assaulted. The Police Deputy Commander, General Oscar Munoz and the Police Director, Colonel Oscar Chavez, were suspended (Parades, 2011:2). In a public declaration Vice Minister of the Interior, Marcos Farfan Farjat, resigned from his position and stated that the Bolivian Minister of the Interior, Sancha Llorenti, had ratified the police intervention with him. Sancha Llorenti denied that he had ordered the police attacks, however he did resign from his position (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:119-120). The Defense Minister, Cecilia Chacón, quit her position in protest of the police brutality and expressed her solidarity with the Indigenous marchers stating, "I do not agree with the intervention in the march and I cannot justify the measure when other alternatives existed." (RTT News, 2011). Morales also called for an immediate halt to segment two of the TIPNIS highway, which was scheduled to cut through the nucleus of TIPNIS. Yet, Morales also reminded listeners that the project was a question to be decided by the state (Friedman-Rudovsky, 2011).

On October eighth a proposal was passed in the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate on October 13th that suspended segment two of the construction pending consultation with Indigenous communities within TIPNIS and also called for a study of alternatives (Bijork-James, 2011:4). Many members of the media heralded this decision as the closure of the debates using captions such as, “Bolivian Leader bows to Pressure” (Lyons, 2011), and “Bolivia cancels controversial highway through Amazon” (France-Presse, 2011).

5.9 Alliances

The marchers arrived in La Paz on October 19th and were greeted by hundreds of thousands who had lined the streets to welcome their arrival (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:173-177). The solidarity between the marchers and march supporters far surpassed what many had thought was possible. Bolivians of all ethnicities and classes came out to support the marchers upon their arrival in La Paz. Indigenous leader Miriam Yubánure said,

"We will never forget the reception of all the *paceños y paceñas*³². Now we are crying from joy and no longer sorrow as we did in some sections of the March because we see children, women and men from all walks of life who are vying to give the hand or to invite us something. I had never imagined seeing so many people gathered and supporting our demands" (Baspineiro, 2012:163)

Offering drinks, food, clothes, shoes and many other material items, supporters chanted cheers of encouragement to the marchers such as, “TIPNIS is all of us” and “The Indigenous are our heroes” (Baspineiro, 2012:163). Indigenous marcher Vilma Mendoza stated, “The most beautiful of the whole march was the reception/welcome in La Paz” (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:175).

³² Paceaños and Paceañas are inhabitants/The people of La Paz (both masculine and feminine forms).

Social movements must be able to create a convergence between the social actors as well as generate a relationship between civil society and political society (Polet, 2007:7). In the case of this march, social injustices (such as the police attacks on September 25th) brought issues of inequality to the fore. Through the conversations that ensued there was a growth in collective awareness regarding the continuation of discrimination, racism and oppression. Through the vigils and other events, centers for the exchange of information were established that specifically aimed to support the marchers. One Indigenous woman who was involved in the vigils in La Paz stated, “We installed the vigils to directly help the brother marchers” (Díaz and Jiménez, 2012:10). In denoting the marchers as her brothers, this woman draws attention to the shared struggles of Indigenous Peoples across Bolivia.

In an interview, Rafael Quispe, Aymara leader and member of *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas Del Qullasuyu* (CONAMAQ), expressed his solidarity with the Indigenous Lowlanders of TIPNIS. He also explained how the struggles of the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples were the struggles of all Bolivians. Drawing connections between the TIPNIS dispute and the context in which it was taking place he stated,

“There is an Indigenous President, who in his beginnings said he was positioned in line with Mother Earth, with respect for collective rights, a vision of living well, all of that. But in practice does the contrary. Does not respect collective rights, does not respect Mother Earth... and TIPNIS represents exactly that” (Interview 10-08-2012).

The alliances that were formed were not contained within the borders of Bolivia but were global in their reach. Awareness regarding the plights of Indigenous Peoples was already well known through the Indigenous Peoples’ movement long before this march took place. As First Nations scholars Alfred and Cornthassel so pointedly note in reference to Indigenous Peoples, “All of these people confront the daily realities of having their lands, cultures and governmental

authorities simultaneously attacked, denied and reconstructed by colonial societies and state” (2005:599). However, through the march Indigenous Lowlanders were able to voice their struggles and assert their rights to the globe. Coverage of the march was disseminated through the internet via such sources as newspapers, blogs and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. However, as many scholars have so correctly pointed out, while the internet has played a key role in information dissemination it is not in and of itself social action (Khasnabish, 2010:166). That said, many members of the international community did take action to support the marchers. For example, former UN Ambassador to Bolivia, Pablo Solón sent an open letter to Morales saying, “One cannot speak of defending Mother Earth and at the same time promote the construction of a road that will harm Mother Earth, doesn’t respect Indigenous rights and violates human rights in an unforgiveable way” (Bijork-James, 2011:4).

5.10 Actions in La Paz

Marching down the mountain from El Alto to La Paz, the marchers made their way to the Plaza Murillo, the center of Bolivian governmental power. This is a site of significant importance. Designed in 1558, it is home to the Bolivian Presidential Place, the Cathedral and the National Congress (Gerl and Chávez, 2012:4). It is within this square that numerous political battles for liberty have been fought (Gerl and Chávez, 2012:6). In fact it was in this very location that both Barolina Sisa and Gregoria Apaza were executed (Crespo, 1999:17). This is also the location where the documents of Bolivian independence were signed in 1809 (Gerl and Chávez, 2012:7). The plaza continues to function as a central gathering plaza for those who seek to obtain and/or disseminate information (Crespo, 1999:17).

However, upon the marchers' arrival Morales was not present to welcome them, as he had just left the city for meetings in Cochabamba (La Fundación TIERRA, 2012:177 and Baspineiro, 2012:165). The whereabouts of the marchers was closely followed through the press and as such President Morales would have known their expected date of arrival in the city. The marchers were irate at this flagrant display of dismissal. Rosa Soto, who had marched all the way from TIPNIS over a period of more than two months, said, "Now the situation is clearer, this government does not represent Indigenous peoples" (Baspineiro, 2012:166). Morales lack of presence was not only taken as an insult but also as a further action of marginalization of Indigenous Lowlanders and their rights. Fernando Vargas, President of the Subcentral TIPNIS stated,

"At the least the President had to leave the Governmental Palace to welcome the marchers, but he did not appear. Which is to say that the marchers are not worth a damn to the Government, that the Bolivian people are not worth a damn to them [the Bolivian government]" (Baspineiro, 2012:166).

Despite Morales absence, the marchers remained steadfast in their objective to be heard and assert their rights. Melba Hurtado, President of the Indigenous Women's Central of Beni stated,

"To the President Evo Morales, we want to tell him that despite the violence, the cowardly attitude, despite the repression, we are here and we have come here so that you listen to us. Every blow, every kick is going to stay in the hearts of every woman and every child" (Baspineiro, 2012:166)

The marchers then went around the corner to the Plaza San Francisco. Upon their arrival bands played, speeches were made and emotions overflowed in the form of tears, hugs and songs.

Thereafter, the marchers returned to the Plaza Murillo while waiting for Morales to arrive.

However, being at an altitude of more than 3600 meters above sea level, at night the temperature

dropped drastically and marchers were left with little protection from the cold while sleeping on the cement. Supporters attempted to provide supplies to them, however, the police had set up barricades around the square and stopped the distribution of much-needed supplies such as food and warm clothing (Opini3n, 2011 and Baspineiro, 2012:168).

Despite the hardships the marchers were facing, they decided to stay in La Paz until their demands were resolved. During this time additional expressions of support and solidarity were made. Days later, when the President finally agreed to speak with those who had made the long march of over 600 kilometers, the Indigenous Lowlanders presented the state with a 16-page document that outlined their requests. A primary concern was the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway not pass through TIPNIS. In response, Morales signed a governmental agreement on October 23rd that addressed the majority of the points raised by the Indigenous Lowlanders. And a day later the government declared TIPNIS an “untouchable zone” under Law 180. According to Morales, “Therefore, the issue of TIPNIS has been resolved” (France-Press, 2011). Yet the disaccord was not as easily remedied as Morales implied.

5.11 Counter march

Only hours after the proclamation of Law 180 a vigil began in the principal square of Cochabamba. Members of the MAS government and many producers of coca demanded the continued construction of the TIPNIS highway. Juanita Ancieta, the President of Coordination for the Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba stated, “We decided to do a peaceful vigil with two delegates of the Trade Union to defend the road and ask that you hear the *real* Indians who want the road to pass through their communities which are located in TIPNIS” (Baspineiro,

2012:171 – emphasis added). Accusations were also made that Indigenous leaders of the march had been engaged in illegal activities such as the selling of animals and timber (Patzí, 2012:46). In so doing, pro-highway activists questioned the authenticity of the Indigenous marchers. The pro-highway activists also put pressure on the government to make decisions regarding the highway in consideration of the needs of the country as a whole rather than just what they deemed to be merely a segment of the population.

Pro-highway activists also set up blockades along the highway between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz in the month of November, demanding to be heard. In this heated context, the 41-day counter march of Indigenous CONISUR began. Marchers included members of the MAS, the Ponchos Rojos³³, as well as Quechua and Aymara settlers of TIPNIS. The march went largely unnoticed by the Bolivian masses and was received with apathy upon its arrival in La Paz on January 30th 2012 (Patzí, 2012:45-47). One *paceña* who had attended the arrival of the eighth march but not the ninth, while describing the atmosphere in La Paz upon their arrival said, “It was not the same. Far fewer people went out” (Interview 05-08-2012). Journalist Mario Espinoza Osorio noted, “the IX march did not have an effect like that of 2011” (Osorio, 2012:E6). Furthermore, many of the *paceña* population were convinced that the counter march was a governmental initiative to reassert its dominance and validate continuance of the highway construction (Patzí, 2012:48). After five days, the government passed Law 222, which called for consultation and annulled Law 180 (Villegas, 2012:12). What this means and its implications will be the basis of Chapter 7.

³³ The Ponchos Rojos is comprised of Aymaran Indigenous Bolivians who engage in struggles against the marginalization, discrimination and social exclusion of Indigenous inferiority and dependence (Achacachi, 2011).

5.12 Recent Events

In the beginning of this Chapter I stated that to view recent events as isolated anomalies was inherently flawed. The events raised throughout the discussion above, such as the creation of the TIPNIS Territory, subsequent marches for Indigenous rights, violence against Indigenous marchers, and counter actions in support of the highway construction, are all firmly rooted in the colonial context out of which they have arisen; hierarchical relations of power are unequivocally in place and continually reaffirmed. This then brings us to the present.

Although segment two of the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos was put on hold, that did not stop the continued construction of segments one and three of the highway which lead directly to and from the northern and southern borders of the TIPNIS Territory.

Citing construction delays, in early April of 2012, Evo Morales cancelled the contract for construction with OAS (Paredes, 2012). In doing so Morales made it clear that this action was not an affirmation of cancelling the highway itself, as he felt the highway continued to remain a “strategic necessity” (Achtenberg, 2012c). The construction contract was subsequently given to *Empresa Boliviana de la Construcción* (EBC), a Bolivian State owned contractor and *la Asociación de Mantenimiento Vial* (AMVI), a company owned by three cocalero unions³⁴ (Achtenberg, 2012a).

BNDES pulled out from their loan agreement and now the highway is to be built through the Bolivian Treasury (Achtenberg, 2012b). Despite the changes in who is carrying out and funding the construction, the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples continue to be marginalized from the decision making and actions that directly affect them and their Territory.

³⁴ Cocalero unions and their connections to Evo Morales will be discussed in Chapter 6.14(iii)

THE ACTORS

“There is a tendency to treat the oppressed as just that, victims of oppression. This emphasis may stir us to indignant action, but it tends to leave open completely the question of how oppressed victims can possibly liberate themselves – other, of course, than through the enlightened intervention of saviours like ourselves.” (Holloway, 2002:160).

6.1 Introduction

Now that we have established how things came to be as they presently are, we can begin to focus upon those who are involved. As has been iterated numerous times throughout this thesis, the TIPNIS road dispute is immensely complicated. As such, there are many stakeholders involved. However, for the purposes of this chapter I will focus upon three who live within the borders of TIPNIS, i.e. Mother Earth, Indigenous Lowlanders and Cocaleros. One could focus upon additional stakeholders, such as the IIRSA, Brazil, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, etc. but as was stated in the introduction the objective of this thesis is to centralize the voices of those whose experiences and opinions are rooted in the TIPNIS Territory. In so doing, I aim to displace the state and Western models of development from a focal position, and deepen English language discussion of this subject. This chapter will highlight debates regarding what living well means. Connections will be made throughout to the past in order to show how current disputes are but one manifestation of imposition, repression and resistance in a long history of colonial relations. However, as Holloway so aptly stated in the quote above, there is a risk in treating the oppressed as victims (2002:160). Rather than painting a bleak picture of persecution, I seek to bring forward the strength and courage of Lowland Indigenous communities who continue to fight for their dignity and respect. In so doing, I also aim to highlight the place and power of social movements and alliances.

This chapter has been subdivided into distinct subject headings. This grid of intelligibility has been applied in order to reveal why clashes are currently taking place. In reality these categories are interconnected in infinite ways, and as such are not so easily disentangled. Most anthropologists today would agree that social organization is not so simple as describing societies and their internally shared cultures (Barth, 1998:5). The work of Edward Said, most famously describes the dangers of fossilized image construction by outsiders.

“Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, . . . there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, . . . for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. (Said 1979: 7)”

Thus it is not the intent of this chapter to explicate the cultural elements contained within particular identity groupings. Taking an anti-essentialist approach, many academics have debated the validity of Indigenous identity construction. However, like scholar M. Cepek, I believe these discussions occlude significant dynamics (2008:198). While identity construction is a dynamic process, that does not, in my opinion, make it any less authentic. For as the previous chapters have illustrated very real disputes have taken shape in defense of and dispute over identities and their broader connections to rights. Given this, this chapter does not seek to authenticate or refute identity constructions but rather explore the points of interaction between groups of beings. It is these boundaries that define groups, and not the elements that are contained within them (Barth, 1998:6).

6.2 Mother Earth

Described by Indigenous Lowlanders and many Bolivian academics as the primary and most fundamental actor within the TIPNIS highway dispute is Mother Earth. Known throughout much of the Andes as *Pachamama*, she is the provider of life. The term literally translates from Aymara and Quechua to English as “Mother World”, however Pachamama is often applied more broadly to include the cosmos as a whole. Rituals and ceremonial acts are often carried out by Indigenous peoples in honour of Pachamama and in reciprocity for providing and sustaining life. As an Aymara Indigenous elder who had been trained as a healer explained to me, various elements such as, wool, incense, herbs and llama foetuses are prepared by initiated healers and offered to the Sacred Beings who are often referred to as Grandparents. Each element has its own meaning and reason for being, and as such which offerings are made varies in accordance with the ceremony (Interview 06-08-2012)

From a Lowland Indigenous perspective life and understandings of the universe are also intertwined in a similar way. Territory³⁵ is understood as the Mother who provides food and wood for building homes and communities. It is also the space where culture is practiced and reproduced and connections are maintained across generations past and present. Central importance is also provided to all of the elements of the territory, such as animals, fish, trees and water. Human life is dependent upon understanding people’s place within this system and maintaining a balance (Vásquez, 2011:151-156). Adolfo Chavez, a President of CIDOB and Indigenous Lowlander, explained to me, “We believe in nature because it is our life” (Interview 13-08-2012).

³⁵ Territory is not to be confused with Western conceptions of land. The difference will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6.4

6.3 Mother Earth and anti-colonialism

Showing respect for Mother Earth not only maintains balance within the cosmos, but was also described to me as an act of reclaiming identity. Actions such as making offerings serve to instil what scholar Eric Hobsbawm describes as “invented traditions”.

“ ‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 1983:1).

The invention of tradition has occurred worldwide across time, however it is visible most frequently in situations whereby social patterns are weakened and or destroyed (Hobsbawm, 1983:4). In the case of Bolivia, the Spaniards prohibited acts which celebrated non-Western deities, such as the mountains and the rivers. In fact, in an effort to eradicate the power of Indigenous spiritual practices, Indigenous spiritual sites were desecrated and Catholic spaces of worship were established in their place. For example in Tiwanaku, the birthplace of mankind according to the Incas (Quispe Huanca, 2010:300), sculptures ears were removed and crosses were carved over top of their bodies. Furthermore, stones were removed from the site to build a town and Catholic church upon the same sacred land (Janusek, 2004:256 and Heinrich, 1998). By carrying out offerings to Pachamama, Indigenous Peoples are reasserting connections to the past and their identity as Indigenous Peoples and simultaneously rejecting and disempowering colonial structures.

The Indigenous healer I spoke with, while speaking about making offerings, stated,

“This is our custom, the custom of our grandparents. We are reclaiming it before it is lost... It is something that many of us are scared of doing, these traditions. Thus we are providing courage to the people, for spirituality, health and their fate” (Interview 06-08-2012)

Customs such as these, express a struggle by Indigenous peoples against colonization. By embracing Indigenous customs, Indigenous peoples reject colonial teachings that to worship multiple gods is satanic and illustrates ignorance³⁶. Furthermore, it is a rejection of an inferiority complex imposed by colonists which espouses that the white man is intelligent, educated and elegant, and should be imitated while Indigenous peoples are sinners, lazy, barbaric and ignorant³⁷. Moreover still, by aligning with the environment, there is a rejection of Western worldviews which see the environment as a commodity which can be sold and exploited (Quispe Huanca, 2010:294). As Aymara University Professor Carlos Mamani Condori explains, “Colonial society is violent by nature in that its political base is war and devastation in order to plunder land and other resources” (2010:285). This is a point I will return to shortly.

The quote above from the Indigenous healer also made reference to fear. Speaking about the practice of Indigenous customs he stated they were, “something that many of us are scared of doing” (Interview 06-08-2012). This fear is rooted in the colonial impositions that aim to destroy Indigenous ancestral culture through violence. It is vital to note that while fear can be a real element it is not always paralyzing. As Aymara historian Felipe Quispe Huanca explains, “the whites homogenize us, they transform us into a species of mass eunuchs who bear the whippings of both the oppressors and the oppressed” (2010:294). While repression and violence against Indigenous peoples is alive, Indigenous peoples are actively engaged in these struggles (as has been illustrated throughout this thesis) and thus should not be characterized as mere victims.

³⁶ These teachings were employed in schools throughout Bolivia (Quispe Huanca, 2010:294-295).

³⁷ These teachings were also imposed throughout Bolivia since Spanish colonization (Quispe Huanca, 2010:294-295).

6.4 World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth

Indigenous peoples have been fighting for Mother Earth and recognition of her importance not only within Bolivia but also on an international scale. After the Copenhagen Earth Summit 2009, (which many of those I spoke with considered an utter failure for creating change regarding climate pollution), Bolivia organized a conference regarding the rights of Mother Earth and invited attendees from around the globe. In April 2010 the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth took place. I had the privilege to participate in some of the activities through online forums. Through large meetings and smaller working groups a proposal for the Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth was created. This Declaration recognized Mother Earth as a living being and outlined her inherent rights, as well as the obligations of human beings to her (Rights of Mother Earth, 2010). Throughout this process and at many other international forums such as the United Nations, Evo Morales was often at the forefront calling the international community to take action (Albó, 2012b:21). A culmination of these events was the creation of the Law of Mother Earth which was passed in Bolivia on December 8th 2010 (Albó, 2012a:56). This was of course a landmark gain, however the gap between rhetoric and reality remains apparent.

Indigenous rights and environmental activist, Pablo Rojas of Fobomade, explained to me that while it appeared that Bolivia was at the forefront of creating a new precedent, in practice environmental degradation was still taking place. In reference to the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth he said, "It was a theatre given by Evo Morales. In those same days of the Summit, days before, the construction of the Villia Turnari San Ignacio de Moxos highway was approved".

Elaborating upon this point he said,

“Actually we live in a Fascist state, Plurinational State is a name. Imagine, Mr. Evo Morales took the subject of Mother Earth to the world level. The subject of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. And here in Bolivia they are not fulfilled. There is not one action, not one to preserve Mother Earth.” (Interview 09-08-2012)

6.5 Environmental Degradation

Highways in and of themselves have devastating consequence on the environments in which they are built as well as communities in their proximity. Not only do the vehicles that travel across highways create large amounts of air pollution which then enter all other aspects of the ecosystem, but their construction can decimate local wildlife and fauna. Innumerable examples of this tragedy exist worldwide. However, an example fresh in the minds of many Indigenous Bolivians is that of the highway between Santa Cruz and Trinidad which was opened in 1970. This highway exposed the region between the cities to rapid colonization, indiscriminate exploitation of its natural resources and the displacement of numerous Indigenous peoples from their Territories (Vásquez, 2011:83).

The marshes and wetlands of TIPNIS are vital to hydrologic cycles in that they regulate the flow of water in the Amazonian lowlands (Bijork-James, 2011:5). TIPNIS also includes a wide variety of flora and fauna which are particular to the region. An ethnobotanical study concluded that there are more than 500 plants within the Territory which contain medicinal benefits (Los Tiempos, 2011:18). Furthermore, TIPNIS is home to more than 850 vertebrate animals (such as the jaguar, and the pink dolphin), which is one-third of all those within Bolivia and more than 20 per cent of all amphibious species within Bolivia (Los Tiempos, 2011:16).

Because of the territory's insularity, many of these species are endemic to the area and as such are particularly vulnerable when their habitats are altered in any way. In fact, more than 10 animal species of TIPNIS are already listed as endangered such as the Black Caiman (Friedman-Rudovsky, 2011 and Kearns, 2009).

In speaking of the TIPNIS highway lawyer and former *Defensor Del Pueblo*³⁸, Waldo Albarracin said the highway is, "a destruction of the environmental diversity, and in that sense it will benefit no one" (Interview 10-08-2012). Elaborating upon the devastating consequences this highway project would have on Mother Earth, one Indigenous elder explained to me,

"The countries that have developed, are now no longer seeking the title of development. Now we know that this development in the world does not bring the right path. It started with the Industrial revolution in England more than 500 years ago. And now there is a climatic crisis. There is an ecological crisis. And we see this ecological crisis is the product of development" (Interview 10-08-2012)

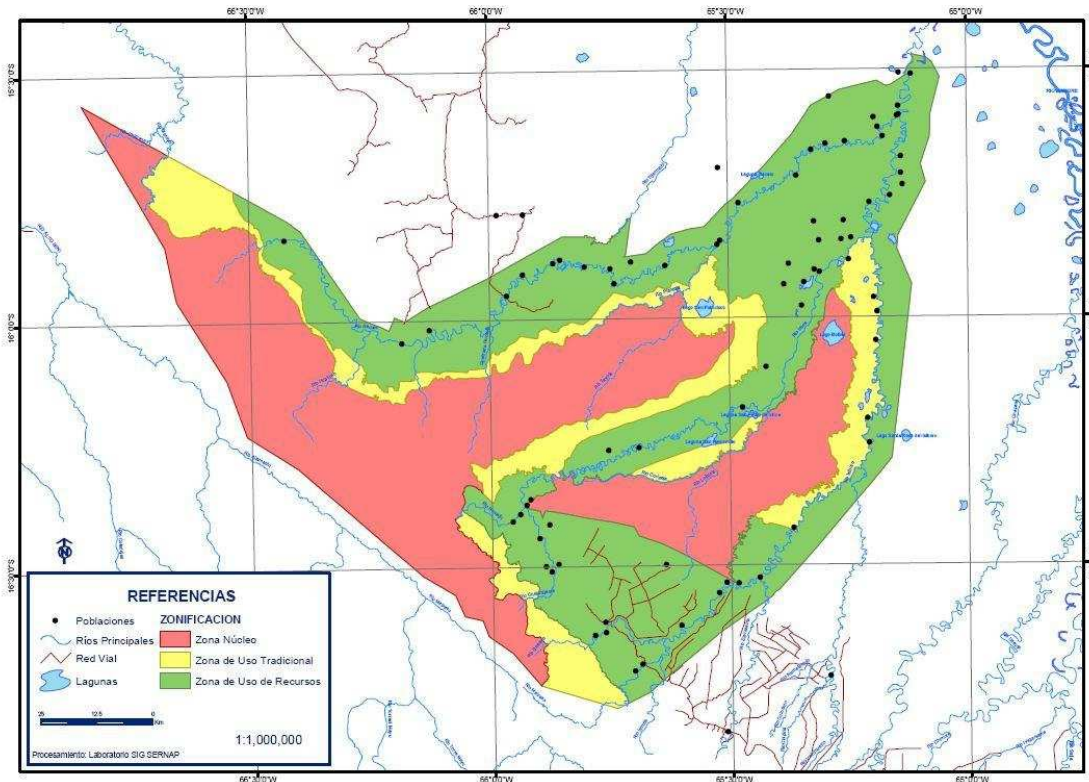
As was stated earlier this chapter, from many Indigenous perspectives, humans do not exist in isolation and the environment is made up of an infinite number of interconnected elements. Thus to clear a forest to build a highway is not a simple matter of clearing trees. Rather it has ripple effects on all organisms which are interconnected to those trees.

"In every tree there are a thousand little organisms, it [the tree] is home to a thousand little organisms. So if you kill a thousand trees, what will it bring? How many little organisms are going to die? How many little brothers are you going to kill?" (Interview with R. Quispe 10-08-2012).

And this is not simply organisms that can be measured by scientists, for, as one Indigenous man reminded me, it is within trees that the memories of spirits live.

³⁸ Human Rights Ombudsman

A major point of contention with this particular highway project is that it is designed to cut through the nucleus of the TIPNIS Territory. According to the National Parks Services TIPNIS is comprised of three distinct zones.



The first zone is the heart of the territory; it is more than 510,000 hectares and includes the entire Western hilly region through the center of the Territory and connecting to the rivers of the East. The second region, nearly 199,000 hectares, contours around the Eastern edge of the first and is known as a zone for traditional consumption. The third region, almost 594,000 hectares, is comprised of the region furthest East as well as south East, known as a zone for use of resources, where some forests have been cleared for activities such as cattle rearing and natural resources such as wood are sold within the market (Albó, 2012a:56-57)³⁹. Zones Two and Three have experienced varying degrees of environmental degradation through activities such as logging.

³⁹ Source of Map: Escuela Nacional de Formación Política, 2011.

However, Zone one is often referred to as a “protected island” which remains largely intact. The Villia Tunari San Ignacio de Moxos Highway is designed to cut through the first zone thereby slicing through its heart.⁴⁰

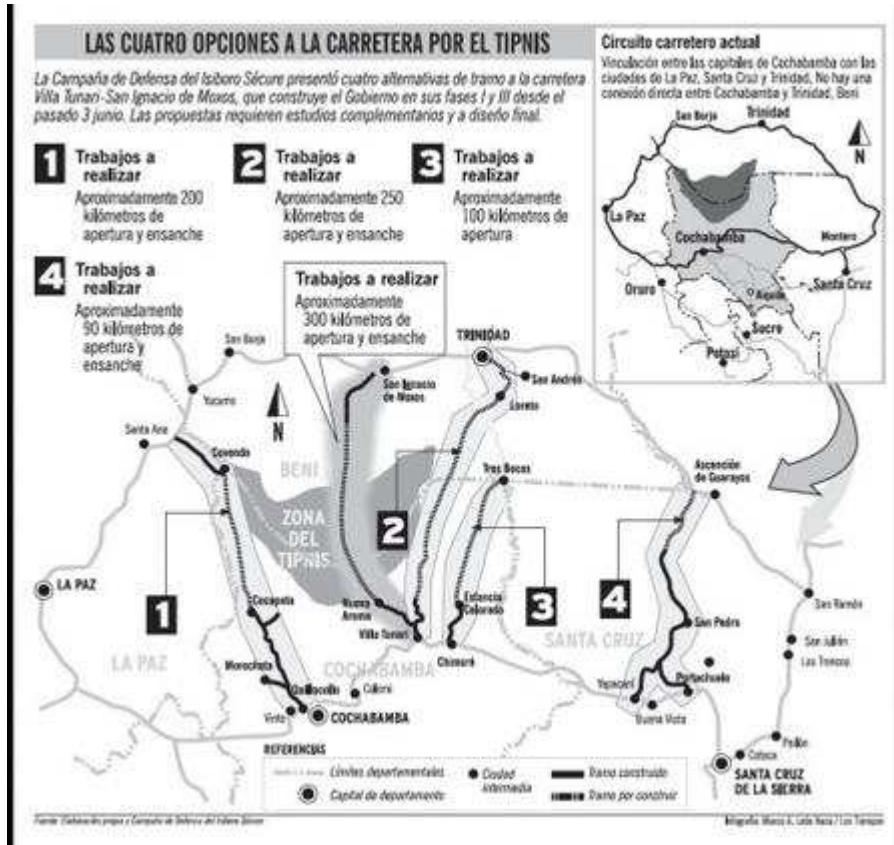


In my discussions with Indigenous lowlanders I was told over and over again, that it was not necessarily that they were against the construction of a highway, but the fact that it cut through TIPNIS. Expressing this sentiment Adolfo Chavez told me, “We don’t want the highway through the middle of TIPNIS. Why don’t they build it in another place, to the right or to the left? [of the TIPNIS Territory]” (Interview 13-08-2012). Many Highland Indigenous allies also echoed this concern. For example, Rafael Quispe said,

“What is in discussion is where the highway is going to go. That is what is in discussion. Many people say it has to go through the heart of TIPNIS, but that is an intangible zone. There, there aren’t many populations. It’s an Indigenous Territory... The nuclear zone is an intangible zone. So it comes from this situation that it may not pass through the center, it benefits no one, or two communities. Because the communities are close to the rivers” (Interview 10-08-2012).

⁴⁰ Source of Map: Achenburg, 2012d

Various alternative routes that go around TIPNIS (both to the West and the East) have been proposed by those against the construction through the Territory itself.⁴¹



However, these options are not being considered by the Bolivian government. This was made clear to me through various interviews with governmental and human rights lawyers who had been pressing for these alternative routes to be explored. There are many theories as to why this is the case but one that came up most frequently was that this route through TIPNIS would open access to the region's resources.

⁴¹ Source of Map: Achenburg, 2012d

6.6(i) Lowland Indigenous

As I have iterated numerous times already, TIPNIS has double categories of recognition; as a protected ecological site and as an Indigenous Territory. Three distinct Indigenous ethnic groups have lived within this Territory since long before registries were collected. Of course, these Indigenous nations were not bound by the present-day borders of the TIPNIS Territory, however those that have lived within this region are for who the Indigenous Territory is designated, are the Yuracarés, the Mojeño-Trinitario and the Chimán.

Before the arrival of the missionaries⁴², Indigenous Lowland communities were organized in small populations and lived according to subsistence patterns that followed the flow of the seasons, through hunting, fishing and gathering. Settlements were located in close proximity to rivers in order to aid with the provision of water, food and ease of transportation and communication. Populations were dynamic in that they moved sites in accordance with the periods of the rains. Furthermore, when communities began to grow larger in population it was not uncommon for them to split into multiple communities (Vásquez, 2011:73-76).

As was explained in Chapter 2, the settlement of missionaries and encroachment of *bandeirantes* in the region resulted in drastic consequences. Although population sizes were decimated and many communities were altered in unspeakable ways, Lowland Indigenous communities were not eliminated entirely. There is considerable debate on the subject of how many Lowland communities currently exist within TIPNIS⁴³ but most accounts state 65.

⁴² As explained in Chapter 2.1

⁴³ This debate is due to the frequent movement and reformation of Lowland Indigenous communities as well as debates regarding who is included, for example, whether or not cocaleros should be included.

Identity as understood within Lowland Indigenous communities has been defined in many ways. However, within the definition there are often references to relationships with nature and spirituality, language, customs and histories which have been passed along through ancestors (Vásquez, 2011:172). This is a point that I will return to shortly⁴⁴ in comparison to groups commonly referred to as peasants.

6.6(ii) Mojeño-Trinitario

Of the Lowland Indigenous communities within TIPNIS the most populous are the Mojeño-Trinitario, who are present in more than half of the communities (Albó, 2012a:61). Migrants from other parts of the Caribbean and the Americas, this nation is part of the Arawak linguistic family. Archaeological evidence shows that they arrived in the TIPNIS region aeons before the arrival of the Europeans (Querejazu Lewis, 2011:72). As their name indicates this ethnic categorization is an amalgamation of multiple branches of Mojeños, as understood by the Jesuits who settled in the region (Albó, 2012a:61 and Querejazu Lewis, 2011:74). As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the Jesuits, as part of their civilizing mission, took over many existing traditional positions of authorities and internal administration. The Jesuits' expulsion by the Spaniards in 1767 brought about new forms of administration from criollo's who forced the Indigenous into labour activities such as the production of sugar, rice and cacao (Vásquez, 2011:79-80). Under this new ruling the situation became worse and many Indigenous communities began rebelling. Others still fled further into the forest in search of *la Loma Santa* (Albó, 2012b:29).

⁴⁴ See Chapter 6.12(ii)

La Loma Santa is said to be a large hill surrounded by immense plains, where the spirit of the Trinitario's lives. In this place, free of want, there is no hunger. Appearing as a vision, most frequently to young girls, the visionary will guide their community in the direction of this Territory, where they hope to find tranquility and peace (Albó, 2012a:62 and Querejazu Lewis, 2011:74-75).

6.6(iii) Yuracaré

The Yuracaré nation has the longest history of presence within TIPNIS and has no linguistic affiliation with any other South American ethnic family. Communities are also small in size (many include no more than 10 families), however they are organized into semi-nomadic communities known as *Familia Grande* (grandparents, their children and grandchildren). The Yuracaré social structure has never been organized hierarchically and communities have been geographically dispersed. Located predominantly close to rivers, they previously relied upon hunting and fishing for their subsistence. However, the continuous encroachment on their Territory by colonizers has resulted in immense cultural changes. Many have taken up the lifestyle of the cocaleros⁴⁵ by producing coca or engaging in logging for the sale of timber (Albó, 2012b:26), and many youth are no longer able to speak their native language (Albó, 2012a:59 and Querejazu Lewis, 2011:71-72). Other communities have sought to distance themselves from the colonizers by moving further north, including outside of the TIPNIS Territory (Albó, 2012b:25).

⁴⁵ See Chapter 6.12(i) and 6.12(ii)

6.6(iv) Chimán

The majority of the Chimán nation live outside the borders of TIPNIS, many within the forests along the Maniquí river (Querejazu Lewis, 2011:76). Of the communities within TIPNIS their communities are located along the North Western border of the Territory. Previously their communities had been spread throughout more of TIPNIS, however, in response to the pressures of missionaries and colonization they moved to more inaccessible areas of the forest (Jiménez, 2011:19). Communities are organized in small family groupings with a designated representative, however this person does not hold any concentrated position of power (Querejazu Lewis, 2011:77). Of the six Chimán communities within TIPNIS, they are geographically far from the influence of the colonizing cocaleros, and are engaged in activities such as teaching tourists fly fishing through programs of catch and release (Albó, 2012a:60).

Several representative organizations have been created by Lowland Indigenous communities, all of which represent all three Indigenous nations. The first and principle organization is Subcentral TIPNIS which was created in 1987. The second, Subcentral Sécure, is a parallel organization which was created in 2003 due to internal ruptures. The third organization, *Consejo Indígena del Sur* (CONISUR), began as a branch of a larger organization for the representation of Indigenous communities within the Department of Cochabamba and later became its own entity (Albó, 2012a:62-65).

6.7 Zones of Refuge

North American scholar, James C. Scott argues that mobility allowed people to escape states by taking refuge in the ungoverned periphery, and furthermore, that the expansion and/or

collapse of a State was often accompanied by a growth in people searching for safety in new locations (2009:4-9). The movement of Lowland Indigenous communities, such as the search for *la Loma Santa*, has allowed many communities to remain at arm's length from state projects of colonization. And while the quest to continue colonizing more and more peoples and lands has not ended, the strength of these communities can be seen in numerous examples, such as the community Santísima Trinidad. Located within Polígono 7⁴⁶, made up of 140 families they still have their TCO status, despite being completely surrounded by cocaleros (Albó, 2012a:61).

From a state perspective this project of bringing non-state spaces, its resources and people⁴⁷ under its authority is presented as not only desirable but also benevolent. As Scott explains, the objective is to incorporate all activities into the state's gaze so that they become assessable and taxable, and can be confiscated (2009:4-5). In the case of TIPNIS, this Amazonian region was inaccessible to colonizers⁴⁸ long after the cities had been established within the Andes. The dream to bring this land and its people under state heel has been around for centuries. However, it was in 1780 that plans were put to paper. The Spanish governor Ignacio Flores illustrated a map showing a road that would connect the Amazonian region of Mojos with Cochabamba via Chapare, where TIPNIS is located. For Flores this road would be an opportunity to mitigate the risks associated with populations of "barbarians" (by which he was referring to the Yuracaré) by exposing them to "civilizing" influences and bringing them under state control. The road was also intended to open new lands for the cultivation of food products such as sugar (Platt, 2012).

⁴⁶ See Chapter 6.12(i)

⁴⁷ People are also seen by the State as a resource, as they can contribute to economic activities that increase the gross national product of the State.

⁴⁸ As was discussed in Chapter 2.1

These colonial aspirations are still at the core of the Villia Tunari San Ignacio de Moxos highway project, they are simply cloaked in the new terminology of “development”. Much like James Ferguson’s discussion of development projects in Lesotho (1994), communities within TIPNIS are constructed as untouched by the modern world, the underlying political situation is erased from view, and thus the problem of impoverishment is constructed as an issue which can be solved by apolitical technical development interventions, such as the TIPNIS highway. A vital aspect of this framing is constructing the image of the supposed beneficiaries, in this case the Lowland Indigenous communities of TIPNIS.

6.8 Fossilized constructions of Lowland Indigenous communities

Many of the highway supporters describe the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán Peoples as victims of poverty, who have been left behind in the modernization race. Brochures highlight their isolation, lack of material goods and need for salvation. For example, the Bolivian Ministry of Communication produced a brochure for public consumption which included such statements as, “TIPNIS, trapped in paradise”, “forgotten in Feudalism”, “time does not advance”, “Unaware of money and never had shoes” and “The song of TIPNIS: Two-hundred years without shoes” (Ministerio de Comunicación, Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2012). This depiction of Indigenous lowlanders as helpless victims in need of salvation provides justification for decisions to be made on their behalf by what are constructed as ‘enlightened saviours’, who practically beg to be applauded for sharing some food and carrying out the “work” of bringing the “truth” of TIPNIS to the readers.

This positioning was not only present in written materials but also informed the positions from which many pro-highway activists I spoke with presented their arguments. While pointing

to the brochure discussed above, and reflecting upon his travels within TIPNIS, one mestizo man stated,

“This is the reality in which the children of TIPNIS live, that the Indigenous of TIPNIS live in. That is why we are doing this project of integration. Justly, to improve their human development... their development is low because they live in a hut, sleep in palms in the day, in the night they sleep in hammocks... Eat, sleep and, well, that’s everything they have... So we went to see the reality, we arrived at the community of the Yuracarés. They live with so much sadness, how these families live, abandoned” (Interview 07-08-2012)

Another mestizo man, who adamantly claimed to be an activist for human rights since the Bolivian Water Wars, while speaking of his support of the highway stated in reference to TIPNIS, “there doesn’t exist, really, the necessities to live, to be human within [TIPNIS]”. (Interview 07-08-2012)

Many pro-highway activists place an emphasis on the children of TIPNIS and their vulnerability, adult’s lack of engagement in commercial work activities, and communities’ general lack of material items. Through this conceptualization, development becomes the interpretive grid through which Indigenous communities within TIPNIS become known. Understood as poor, ignorant beings existing in isolation, development initiatives provide the necessary solution to transform them into productive economic beings.

6.9 Modernization and transformation

While in Bolivia I met a number of highway supporters and all were firm in their position that the highway would be beneficial in multiple ways. Singing the praise of the modernized benefits of this highway, activists implored me to see the many supposed values this integration would yield for *their* “Indian brothers and sisters”.

“Yes, they are going to see a lot of development. For example, regarding what they do within [the TIPNIS], they fish, hunt and outside of that make cacao. So they’ll be able to sell their products. There [within TIPNIS] they cannot do it, there isn’t any road, no highway to get it out. So all of that is lost... With this form we are going to put include, integrate them”. (Interview 07-08-2012)

I responded by asking how this highway could possibly help with the transport of products such as cacao, when it was only going to pass by a mere two of the Indigenous communities. To this another mestizo man responded without any tone of doubt in his voice,

“Of course, directly they are not going to benefit because they are 200 kilometers more or less from where the highway will pass. But indirectly they are going to benefit because from there they can do to a hospital of the second level. There they can get a helicopter. To take care of their children, from there they can live. (Interview 07-08-2012)

I spoke to a number of activists who had set up informational booths to pass information to passers-by regarding what they felt were “the real facts” regarding TIPNIS and the highway. I also attended public speaking events where the merits of integration and development were discussed. Of those present nearly all were middle-to-late aged men with mid-to-light skin complexions. The speakers explained the TIPNIS highway was to be paired with developmental programs such as the mass production of cacao, “sustainable logging”, tourism (with the addition of restaurants and hotels)⁴⁹, all of which were slated to bring in huge amounts of wealth, which they explained on its own could greatly increase the quality of life for Indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS. The rationale they provided was strongly rooted in neoliberal thought, which emphasizes private-sector led economic growth through market-oriented entrepreneurship (Steger and Roy, 2010:50).

⁴⁹ See the following newspaper article for additional information regarding some of these development initiatives: Cambio, May 27, 2012, “El Cacao: una esperanza para desarrollar el Tipnis”

However, not all those present were in agreement. Yet very few of those in attendance who disagreed choose to speak out publically. Some walked away muttering and shaking their heads. Others pulled me aside and asked to speak privately about the matter. At first I wondered why they did not speak out, as it was what appeared to me an open opportunity for a public debate. However, I was shaken to the reality of the dangers of speaking out against those in positions of power when I saw on multiple occasions we were surrounded by police with large shot guns⁵⁰. Furthermore, many of those I spoke with reminded me of those who had suffered physical violence, incarceration and murder for speaking out against the wishes of those in power in the not so distant past. When I implored that this was a new government I was reminded of the police attacks on anti-highway marchers on September 25th of 2011, as was described in Chapter 5.8.

One Indigenous elder, who said he had grown up in extreme poverty and had been the victim of police brutality, described how it was not the Indigenous peoples of TIPNIS that were going to benefit but rather many others at their expense,

“The majority of the Bolivian population, 65 per cent are *originarios*, Natives. And we continue to be marginalized. Here they call us “Indian”. Now, there has entered into the house of the government, President Evo Morales, who is *originario*, Native, and he is the President... And now TIPNIS, that’s how marginalization is constant. The winners are the government. And now the transnationals. They want to pay seven million for a hotel. And a Bolivian can’t pay that. Those who are going to come are the Americans and the Spanish, the people of money. This government wants the highway, for what? They say they are going to raise the living standards of the people. Medicine, all that they need. Lies. That is the story of the rural areas.” (Interview 07-08-2012)

Another Indigenous elder who was also against the highway construction said,

⁵⁰ I raise this detail not to exotify the experience, but to illustrate the heightened climate of tension and fear in which these debates are taking place.

“They cannot talk about progress. The progress is going to be for Brazil, and those who are within the government. They are going to have riches. But we cannot change their [Indigenous communities within TIPNIS] form of life, the lives that they have in the countryside... That is how they are accustomed to living. There will be no change to see. What you will see is the change for the government, its people. As I was telling you, this class of people will become wealthy. And I am not in agreement, me because, how they gassed the people, like in the Water Wars and the Eighth march. They taped a woman’s mouth. And they did it without regret. They threw them in the road like a bag of potatoes.” (Interview 07-08-2012)

He then went on to talk about the impunity of those who were responsible for the September 25th attacks. Speaking for more than 30 minutes about the injustices of this development initiative he ended by stating if the road was built,

“it is going to be worse. It will be left a zone of poverty, a place of deforestation... The government is enchanted with doing this. But they are not going to bring progress to the countryside. The progress will be for them, for those who made it [the highway]”. (Interview 07-08-2012)

When I mentioned to highway supporters the possibility of these benefits being unaffordable for many and furthermore that other similar development initiatives had often resulted in the displacement of Indigenous communities who then suffered enormous consequences, the response I was met with was as follows, “Development doesn’t come from nothing” (Interview 07-08-2012). In short I was told the ends justified the means.

6.10 Property of the State

Not being convinced by neoliberal principles alone that this highway would be beneficial for Indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS, highway supporters explained there were additional benefits they had yet to explain to me. The project of state control of the periphery is not just about making economic subjects but also ensuring the land and people remain under its continual surveillance. After reviewing the economic opportunities the highway was slated to bring,

highway supporters frequently iterated this development project provided an opportunity for the Bolivian government to watch over the people and the environment. For example,

“We can be present and provide control. For example, if someone says to me they are continuing to produce coca, and you find that they are making coca we can go and verify and denounce it. Right? So we are doing the control for the State. So with that we have to help. Take care of our territory, improve the quality of life of our Indigenous, and enjoy the wealth that we Bolivians have” (Interview 06-08-2012)

The wealth to which this individual was referring was the natural resources located within TIPNIS which from his perspective belonged to all Bolivians. As I said earlier, falling under State purview not only incorporates you into its systems but it also makes regions and their resources easy for the state to confiscate. As Scott iterates so clearly in his discussion of enclosing the periphery, the land, its timber and its mineral resources are transferred to the property of the state. Another individual echoing his right as a Bolivian to access TIPNIS said, “And as Cochabambinos we want our children to know these places because they are to be enjoyed, they are beautiful and that they breathe that air and they go in those waters” (Interview 07-08-2012). Extending this argument further, many other proponents of the highway argued that it provided an essential route for the exchange of products between the departments of Cochabamba and Beni. This, in accordance with neoliberal principles, they felt would increase the availability of goods for people in both departments and subsequently lower their cost, thus providing purchasers better prices.

6.11 Enclosing the last of the ungoverned periphery

This project of enclosing the last spaces of refuge that remain, is leaving Indigenous communities few spaces to escape being absorbed into colonial rule and its commoditized ways of life. As an Indigenous Lowlander in speaking of this said,

“Now the *Loma Santa* is over, now there is no *Loma Santa* because now if we march and we go... we encounter with fences, we collide with wire, we collide with a gate, therefore the *Loma Santa* is over. *La Loma Santa* is now the communities where our *comunarios* live, this is the *Loma Santa*” (Orlando Yaviri in Vásquez, 2011:149)

This is something that has also been well documented by studies conducted by sociologists, anthropologists, environmentalists, biologists and anthropologists. For example, a Strategic Environmental Assessment conducted by the National Service for Protected Areas (SERNAP) found that TIPNIS is an area that has been continuously pressed by colonization. Indigenous communities have been displaced numerous times through the encroachment of agricultural and other economic activities as well as foreign settlement on their lands. The coordinator of the study stated, “The risk for them [Indigenous Peoples within TIPNIS] is that in the end they become absorbed by other cultures and models of life” (Panorama, 2011:5).

Describing how the last spaces of refuge are enclosed by the state, Scott explains how common-property is converted to private property, monocropping and plantation style agriculture replaces diverse forms of cultivation, distance-demolishing technologies are installed and finally how colonizers move to these regions, settling and absorbing those in their gulf into their sedentary patterns of life (Scott, 2009:4-13). This is exactly what is taking place with the Villia Turnari San Ignacio de Moxos Highway as will be seen in the following section regarding cocaleros.

6.12(i) Cocaleros

A key instrument in the state's quest to colonize TIPNIS and its inhabitants through displacement and integration are the cocaleros. In the 1960s and 1970s, after nearly 500 years of mining, tin prices collapsed and many Indigenous miners from the highlands were suddenly left without employment (Kurtz-Phelan, 2005:105). Many fled to the Chapare⁵¹ as economic refugees driven by necessity and desperation (Kurtz-Phelan, 2005:104). Here they were able to grow and sell coca which enabled them to pay for food, education and health care (Dangl, 2006:20). As one cocalero said, "The coca is the base of the economy in this region. Without coca there's poverty" (Gretchen, 2006: 18). An average cocalero family in the Chapare grows rice and bananas as well as several acres of coca to sell in the legal markets (Kurtz-Phelan, 2005:106). Coca is particularly popular for farming because it can be produced year round and is harvested every 3 to 4 months (Dangl, 2005:41).

Coca grows in semi-tropical regions of South America and when combined with a mixture of chemicals can be turned into a paste which is later refined into cocaine (Dangl, 2007:40). However, it has also been used for millennia for medicinal and spiritual purposes. Andean communities have used coca to aid in digestion, increase lung capacity, alleviate blood and heart problems, and suppress appetites (Dangl, 2007:38-39). Coca can be consumed in its natural state through the chewing of leaves but it is also a key ingredient in many beverages, soaps, anaesthetics, cough syrups, wines, chewing gums, food and medicine (Gretchen, 2006:17 and Dangl, 2007:37). Coca leaves are also used by *Yatiri*, traditional healers, to read and recommend treatments for those who are ill (Grisaffi, 2010:430). Furthermore, the cultivation of

⁵¹ The Chapare is a province in the Northern part of the Department of Cochabamba, within which part of the TIPNIS Territory is located.

coca is carried out according to reciprocal modes of labour organisation known as Ayni, which are key to the construction of social relations between men, women and communities (Grisaffi, 2010:431). Given this it is not surprising that coca is referred to throughout the Andes as a *hoja sagrada*, sacred leaf (Grisaffi, 2010:427).

Despite the many legal uses of coca, the settlement of cocaleros and their continually expanding areas of production have created a continual battle with the original inhabitants of the region, the Yuracaré, the Chimán and the Mojeño-Trinitario. Often referred to by non-cocaleros as peasants and colonizers, they have settled in the South Eastern region of TIPNIS in an area commonly referred to as Polygon 7. Since their settlement this area has been rapidly deforested in a manner that has been referred to as an uncontrollable expansion (Jiménez, 2011:21).

The displacement of Indigenous Peoples through the destruction of their Territories is an international phenomenon.

“Through environmental destruction like deforestation and pollution, direct violent eviction and territorial encroachment, or manipulative and coerced removal, indigenous communities are left without their traditional means of subsistence and thus are forced to join the overwhelmingly indigenous and mestizo urban poor or, well, die” (Fiorentini, 2009:18).

The high impact use of the land, to cultivate coca and accommodate rapidly growing cocalero communities, has been explained by many as rooted in the worldview of the settlers.

An Indigenous human rights and environmental activist iterated this point when he said in speaking of the relationship between Indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS and the cocaleros,

“It is a constant battle. The colonials devalue, discriminate, take from, and taunt our brothers within TIPNIS. Sadly, they have a colonial mentality, vision. The colonizing cocaleros have that vision. That our brothers from the communities are poor, they have to bring them modernity, development, progress.” (Interview 10-08-2012)

According to many Bolivian authors, there is a rupture between the views and objectives of Indigenous Lowlanders and the cocaleros that is being made quite visible by the TIPNIS dispute (Espinoza, 2011:8). Both have very different perspectives on their relationship with the environment and what it means to live well.

6.12(ii) Clash of visions regarding the good life

As was explained earlier in this chapter Indigenous Lowland nations understand their life as interconnected with that of the environment and all of the elements contained within it. From this perspective territory is an element which makes possible the existence of communities (Centro Cuarto Intermedio, 2011:45-46). From this perspective territory cannot be measured, quantified by boundaries, nor possessed (Vásquez, 2011:151). Mojeño Don Ignacio Pérez explained, “Territory for us is life” (Vásquez, 2011:152). Referring to not only visual elements of the environment, but also sounds, smells and tastes Indigenous Lowlanders place a central importance upon maintaining balance within the cosmos and their responsibility to ensuring it is alive and healthy for future generations (Vásquez, 2011:151-156). Mojeño Rosario Cunavi said the following in speaking of the need to protect territory, “We, as an Indigenous movement, we have raised and continue raising our children in our land in our territory, in our forest that exists; we, are fighting for our children, for the children of our children” (Vásquez, 2011:156).

As scholar Jeffery Hanson points out, ethnic identity is formed through a dialectic process whereby “self” is understood through an interplay with an “other”. Thus components of identity within the “we” are the historical outcome of interactions between multiple groups (Hanson, 1997:195). In juxtaposition of the Lowlanders sense of identity as interconnected with

the environment is that of the cocaleros. President of Subcentral TIPNIS, Fernando Vargas, explained that peasants, like the cocaleros, had a fundamentally different perspective from those of Indigenous Peoples. For them life has an economic connotation, whereby the earth is simply a medium to be cultivated through agricultural development to produce products which are to be sold in the market, whereas Indigenous peoples use large stretches of land in more sustainable forms without financial aim. Vargas explains that while cocaleros may have Indigenous roots they are no longer because they have been colonized.

“The Indigenous have their uses and customs, of organization between us. Contrarily, the peasant no longer speaks their language, does not have their community to represent them, so they have lost all of their culture, their tradition, their form of organization” (Vásquez, 2011:173)

Elaborating upon the distinctions between Indigenous peoples and cocaleros, one Indigenous movement based activist said, “When they see a tree it’s *not Wow, a tree*, where the memory of the spirits live of those passed and that inform our cultures. No, it’s *Wew, lumber*. How much money can we get out of that?” (Interview 09-08-2012).

In addition to these differences, from Lowland Indigenous perspectives land is overseen collectively and cannot be transferred nor sold. However, for the cocaleros individual land title is the norm (Vásquez, 2011:173). Despite TIPNIS double categorizations of protection, individual land titles have been granted to cocaleros (Patzi, 2012:49). After large outcry from Indigenous Lowlanders a boundary line was established, referred to as The Red Line, whereby colonizers were not allowed to penetrate further inland. Yet this boundary has been moved further and further within the borders of TIPNIS on seven separate occasions, thereby steadily increasing the amount of Territory being seized and degraded through colonial expansion (Albó, 2012:66).

6.12(iii) Evo Morales and the Cocaleros

An obvious question that arises is why is the Red Line not enforced? It must be remembered that Evo Morales, the current President of Bolivia, is also a cocalero. As was stated in Chapter 2.4, his involvement with social movements began through the cocalero unions. This involvement is something which he is still very active within. In fact, he remains President of the Six Federations of Cocaleros. And as many Bolivian authors, such as Diego Ayo, have pointed out, in order to continue to obtain votes he must continue to serve those who vote for him, his core constituency, the cocaleros (Ayo, 2012:5). And in this process of serving the cocaleros he has granted them more than 31,000 hectares of additional land to plant coca (Ayo, 2012:5).

Indigenous rights activist and ally Pablo Rojas explained Evo's positioning to me in this way, "A President who is not Indigenous. If we review the bibliography of Evo Morales we see that he has been colonized. From a young age he was raised in the Chapare, to cultivate coca. So he was raised with that mentality" (Interview 09-08-2012). Another mestiza woman explained the situation to me in this way, "Evo is not Indigenous. He speaks Spanish, he is a peasant. The problem is he still thinks he is the lead of the cocaleros. Granted, it has to be hard to govern a country, but we are not all cocaleros!" (Interview 12-08-2012).

One of the questions I asked those I spoke with was, if it was so well-known that coca was being produced within TIPNIS, why was nothing done to stop its expansion? The responses I received varied in the severity with which they spoke out against the agricultural expansion. However all affirmed that little to nothing was actually being done to prevent its continued expansion. One mestizo man said, "The government does practically nothing. Including saving

one *cato* of land, nothing more, to stop the continuous planting” (Interview 06-08-2012). Others including a former member of the Bolivian Government took their argument further and stated that the government was currently financing its affairs through the production of coca, and thus had no incentive to stop its growth (Interview 10-08-2012). Speaking on this point many of those I spoke with talked about the changes they had seen over the years with what they believed was an increase in drug money from the production of coca. One older mestizo man told me, “It’s a disaster. It’s all the fruit of drugs. Where I live, within three blocks they do drugs. And they know everyone is watching... everyone is living by drugs.” (Interview 07-08-2012). Speaking to this point one university student said of the TIPNIS highway, “It will become a drug trafficking highway and all of the violence that that brings” (Interview 06-08-2012). Regardless of whether or not the coca being produced within TIPNIS is being used for legal purposes its existence has resulted in an increased militarization of the Chapare region.

6.12(iv) US War on Drugs

Conflating the unprocessed coca leaf and cocaine, in the 1961 Single Convention On Narcotic Drugs the United Nations listed coca among category five, the most restricted categorization that includes highly illicit drugs that are said to have the most dangerous and detrimental properties, such as heroin (BBC, 2012 and Gretchen, 2006:16). In 1971 President Nixon declared a total war on drugs. Despite this, drug availability did not decrease (Booth, 2007). In the mid-1980s there was an explosion of crack cocaine in the United States. In 1986 President Regan declared that illicit drugs were a threat to national security and set in place many control policies (Youngers and Rosin, 2005:1-2). George H.W. Bush launched the Andean

Initiative three years later, thereby intensifying the war on drugs and changing the objective from reducing availability to eliminating drug production (Youngers and Rosin, 2005:1-3).

Bush's Andean strategy focused upon the criminalization of coca production in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. Tactics that infringed on civil rights, such as indiscriminate arrests and unlawful detentions, were employed which militarized the war on drugs (Isacson, 2005:15 and Ledebur, 2005:144). This repositioning changed the way in which security would be provided. First and foremost, the American State was seen as the one responsible for ensuring the protection of its members from threats which were positioned as stemming from a dangerous realm outside of the United States borders. The resulting policies stated overwhelming concern to protect US security and were largely detached from the lived experiences of many coccaleros (Isacson, 2005:54-55). These policies also did not account for the complex economic and social roots of illicit drug production and hence resulted in the criminalization of many poor coccaleros (Youngers and Rosin, 2005:4).

In Bolivia there is a direct causality between this militarization and violence. Since the US war on drugs began, Chapare has been devastatingly impacted by cycles of protest and repression (Ledebur, 2005:144). These effects have been felt most deeply by coccaleros and Indigenous peoples who live in this region (Grisaffi, 2010:429 and 433 and Dangl, 2006:20). Framed as the enemy of the US war on drugs, these peoples have been robbed, raped, tortured and murdered by the military during their efforts to eradicate the coca plantations (Grisaffi, 2010:430).

6.12(v) Cocaleros and the TIPNIS Highway

Wanting to learn more about coca production and its links to the TIPNIS highway I went to the office of the *Federación del Trópico de Cochabamba*. Here I met with various staff members who represented the interests of those who produced coca and who supported the Presidency of Evo Morales. I also had the opportunity to speak with several cocaleros from TIPNIS who had come to the city to pick up supplies. One man said he had been forced to move from various rural parts of Bolivia due to changes in the prices of commodities on the international market. He had moved to TIPNIS five years before as he felt there was no future for him in the city, where he would not find employment because of his “Indian face”. Within TIPNIS he said his life is humble but he has a parcel of land where he is able to produce food for him and his family, and what he described as a small amount of coca, which he could sell to buy additional supplies. Describing his home life as “precarious” he explained the hardships of living with few material possessions and few markets to purchase needed products, such as oil for his lamps, as electricity was only available for two to four hours a day within his community. He said he constantly worried about the health of his family, as his community had very few medications let alone medical treatment centers. For him the TIPNIS highway was a top priority, as he said it would bring access to health, food and education. In his opinion, economic development would advance human rights not only for his family but also for Bolivians across the country.

Speaking from the rhetoric of integration many cocaleros support the highway as it will provides a connection directly between their communities and the departments of Cochabamba and Beni. This highway would reduce their travel time to markets where they sell their coca as well as purchase additional items. And while many cocaleros are supportive of the highway,

many Indigenous Lowlanders continue to speak out against it. The government has used many tactics to ensure that this highway is constructed, including physical assault as was seen in Chapter 5.8. In fact, it seems they will stop at nothing in their insatiable quest. Demonstrating the extremes they will go, Evo Morales called upon cocaleros to convince Yuracaré to fall in love with them so that they would accept the construction of the highway (Soliz, 2011:2).

6.13 Conclusions

As this chapter has shown there are many layers of complexity to the TIPNIS highway dispute. At its core there are three primary actors within the TIPNIS Territory; Mother Earth, Indigenous Lowlanders and cocaleros. As this chapter has illustrated, this highway is a colonial plan to enclose, control and confiscate the resources and people of this region. Luis Macas, former President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, said,

“It is no accident that most of the remaining natural resources are on indigenous land. First the white world destroys their own environment, then they come asking for the last pieces of land they have put us on, the earth we have protected” (Fiorentini, 2009:17)

Sociologist and ex Minister of Education Félix Patzi, reminds us that Indigenous peoples are not simply guardians of the environment. Nor should they be treated as pieces of the environment such as trees and fauna. Rather they are people with feelings, capacities, imperfections, values and their own internal conflicts. They have rights and these must be respected (Patzi, 2012:36).

These rights have been documented both within Bolivian and International law. And despite this, these rights continue to be violated. An examination of this will form the subject matter of the following chapter which focuses upon the TIPNIS highway consultations.

CONSULTATIONS

“The state claims to be sovereign, to exercise power within its frontiers. This is central to the common notion of democracy: a government is elected in order to carry out the will of the people by exerting power in the territory of the state. This notion is the basis of the social-democratic claim that radical change can be achieved through constitutional means.”
(Holloway, 2002:13)

7.1 Introduction

“Free, informed and prior consent”; this is a phrase I heard endlessly throughout my time in Bolivia, and it is written again and again in the Bolivian literature regarding TIPNIS. All of the previous chapters have illustrated numerous ways in which unequal relations of power have manifested themselves within this dispute. As was mentioned in Chapter 5.12, the construction of segment 2 of the TIPNIS highway was put on hold in 2012, and a consultation was scheduled to be held with the communities of TIPNIS. The right to consultation is included within the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization as well as the Bolivian Constitution. And while these documents provide a degree of protection, it must be remembered that without application, these are simply words on paper.

Hierarchies of power that are firmly rooted in history are also alive and well within the TIPNIS consultations. This chapter will illustrate how greed and exploitation continue to tighten their grip on Indigenous Lowlanders and in turn highlight the struggles of Indigenous Lowlanders to assert their rights in the face of these violations. Beginning with the rise of recognition of Indigenous rights, as defined by outsiders, the hierarchical foundations that these definitions reaffirm will be reviewed. This will then be countered by these definitions as they have been described by Indigenous activists, such as Alfred and Corntassel. Subsequently the 2009 Bolivian Constitution and its requirements for “Free”, “Prior” and “Informed Consent”

under conditions of “Good Faith”, will be examined in comparison to the TIPNIS consultations. In speaking of the consultations, Maria Lohman, President of Somos Sur, said it best when she stated, “This whole thing smells bad right from the start” (Interview 13-08-2012).

7.2 Rise of Indigeneity & Recognition of Rights as Defined by Outsiders

In the 1960s there was a trend in academia towards studying Indigenous peoples through ethnic groupings. Ethnicity and ethnic groups were categorizations that were analyzed by scholars, however these categorizations did not refer to identity. Early anthropologists saw the development of humankind as a linear process whereby people moved from savagery to civilization. In their analysis of the ‘other’ they utilized the concept of race, as the unifying component of a national Indian identity which they connected to a pan Indian movement through a shared history of ‘occupation’ and oppression by settler communities (Hanson, 1997:197-198). In the 1970s the United Nations referred to Indigenous Peoples in a single voice, representing a large body of peoples who were united under a single banner (Niezen, 2003:2). The term ‘Indigenous’ had come to represent a grouping of greater than 300 million people across more than 4000 distinct societies (Niezen, 2003:4). This terminology became widely used in the 1980s, has grown in its usage since this time, and is now commonly employed by lay audiences (Niezen, 2003:2-3). However, the foundation upon which this conceptualization is built bears scrutiny. Discussions of what Indigeneity is were formulated in meeting rooms in Europe and rarely involved the inclusion of Indigenous peoples themselves (Niezen, 2003:4). Furthermore, the definitions that were articulated were often predicated upon ‘primordial’ beings with ‘primary’ attachments to land and culture, and their history is only described in response to oppression. Thus their existence is formulated upon the primary axis of victim. This

construction of Indigenous Peoples as fragile and in need of protection is the foundation upon which their rights were recognized⁵².

7.3 ILO, WB and UN Definitions

In order to substantiate the claims I have made above let us turn to the original documentation itself. The International Labour Organization (ILO) held a meeting concerning the rights of “Indigenous and Tribal Peoples” in Geneva in June of 1989. At this meeting, and under the guidance of the governing body of the ILO, those present discussed the assimilationist orientation of existing standards (such as the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention No. 107 of 1957) regarding Indigenous Peoples as well as what they referred to as the “aspirations” of Indigenous peoples for self-governance and maintenance of their identities. A new convention was written and adopted on June 27th 1989, and subsequently put into force on September 5th 1991⁵³. Bolivia ratified this convention in 1991.

The Convention itself states in Article 1(a) it applies to “tribal peoples... whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions”. In this we see the fossilized construction of Indigenous peoples status as indigenous bound by connections to “customs” or “traditions”. Furthermore, as per Article 1(b) they must inhabit a geographical region from which their populations descend before the time of conquest or colonization, “indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries”. Thus, there is an implicit requirement of connection to a

⁵² There are however, many who dispute this construction and have mobilized a counterforce. See Chapter 7.4

⁵³ A copy of the 1989 Convention can be found at <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C169>

geographical place. Furthermore, the unit of measurement is colonization itself. So according to this Convention not only must Indigenous Peoples fit the boundaries of what it is to be Indigenous (fixed connections to the past and place), but they must also be subject to colonization. An additional essential component of this convention is that it applies to Indigenous peoples within “independent countries” and is said to apply to rights “within the framework of the States in which they live”. Thus the sovereignty of the State itself is placed beyond question and reproach.

In September 1991 the World Bank (WB) also included a directive regarding Indigenous Peoples within its Operational Manual⁵⁴. Within this directive the WB establishes what they refer to as “guidelines” for projects regarding Indigenous peoples. In its Introduction subsection 2, this directive discusses the need for Indigenous peoples to benefit from development projects as well as avoid or mitigate potentially adverse effects upon Indigenous peoples. It is important to note that this directive is not a requirement but rather a suggestion for those engaged in development activities. Furthermore, it does not state negative impacts must be stopped but rather ‘avoided’ or ‘mitigated’. Thus validation is provided to continue supporting development initiatives despite their potential negative impacts upon Indigenous communities, who they believe should part-take in the supposed benefits, such as financial gain from the profits derived from resources within their territories. Within this WB directive Indigenous peoples are once again constructed only in the shadow of the colonizers. Within the definitions section they are described as “vulnerable to being disadvantaged” and “commonly among the poorest segments of a population”. Furthermore they are once again cast as ‘relics’ from the past, “They engage in economic activities that range from shifting agriculture in or near forest to wage labor or even

⁵⁴ See WB Operational Manual, Operational Directive OD 4.20 Page 1

small-scale market-oriented activities”. And their existence in connection to the environment is emphasized as , “a close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas”.

A third, and commonly referred to, document regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples is that of the United Nations. Adopted on September 13th 2007, at a UN plenary meeting, this declaration was passed with 143 votes. Bolivia ratified this declaration and incorporated it into their own laws on the 7th of November the same year (Cambio, 2012a:2). In its earlier incarnation, the 1987 Cobo report regarding the “Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations”, Indigenous Peoples were once again cast as existing in relation to colonization, “having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies” (Cobo Report, 1987:29). They are also minoritized, “They form at present non-dominant sectors of society” (Cobo Report, 1987:29).

The revised UN document of 2007 changes the language in which it describes Indigenous Peoples but the foundation remains inherently the same. For example, Article 11 refers to cultural traditions and customs. This article recognizes that these are dynamic, in referring to “the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures”. However, they are again cast as in connection to the past as the examples provided refer to “archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature” (UN, 2007:6). Furthermore, many of the articles reinforce the characterization of Indigenous peoples as existing in harmony with nature, “respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment” (UN, 2007:2). Moreover, Indigenous peoples are again defined in juxtaposition to colonization and their position as

dominated, “indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources” (UN, 2007:2). In addition, much like the ILO Convention described earlier, this UN Declaration also fundamentally reinforces the existing power structures, which favour colonizing States. In Article 46 it is stated that the Declaration cannot be interpreted as justification for the dismantling of existing independent States, “Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as... or construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States (UN, 2007:14).

All of the above is not to say that colonization and its implications for Indigenous peoples have not been devastating. Nor am I saying that there is not a deep connection between Indigenous peoples and their Territories. Rather I am saying that these should not be the parameters of defining Indigeneity, as is the case with the ILO, WB and UN. Moreover, it is deeply problematic for outsiders to be creating these definitions. For definitions such as these, which are constructed in this manner, reinforce colonial relations of power whereby Indigenous peoples exist merely as victims.

It is imperative to recall these definitions since their parameters define the boundaries by which Indigenous Peoples are being measured as authentic and by extension their ability to lay claims. As non-Indigenous academic Duncan Ivison notes, rights become known as “a bundle of specific interest that need to be justified to others”, rather than simply inalienable rights (Ivison, 2003:321). Furthermore, Indigenous peoples must adhere to the values, practices and institutions

prior to colonization in order to justify their right to their rights, which in turn restricts their ability to exist within contemporary realities⁵⁵ (Iverson, 2003:327).

7.4 Externally Derived Definitions as Understood by Indigenous Activists

The definitions examined in the previous section and their implications should not be conflated with global Indigenous movements. For these are two very separate conceptualizations. As First Nations academics and activists Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel so correctly point out these definitions and the discussions that follow from them centralize the Settler's power,

“colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler's power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power” (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005:601).

Alfred and Corntassel argue that these definitions create a “politics of distraction” that compartmentalize community values and place Indigenous Peoples in conflict with one another as they are forced to engage in battles over who is most authentic (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005:600). Furthermore, these types of discussions disregard grassroots Indigenous mobilization and rather focus upon a rhetoric of victimization and grievance. They also completely overlook the reality that not all Indigenous peoples were conquered, nor are all presently dominated. Furthermore, Indigenous models of Identity are disregarded, such as Peoplehood which emphasizes Indigenous strengths such as community (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005:606-608).

⁵⁵ In interviews many pro-highway supporters focused upon the discrediting of Lowland Indigenous Peoples Indigeneity in order to illustrate that they felt they were not truly Indigenous and therefore were not eligible to claim Indigenous rights. Examples they provided included engagement in economic activities, such as logging, and what they said was their “mixed blood” based upon intermarriage with non-Indigenous people.

Despite the many flaws that exist within international discourse regarding Indigenous rights, they do provide a platform upon which Indigenous peoples and their allies can appeal⁵⁶ to a broad audience. Often the first step in making these appeals was identifying as Indigenous and frequently thereafter making reference to the rights recognized within these documents as well as pinpointing violations of them.

When speaking with Adolfo Chavez he began by saying, “For us as an Indigenous community”. He then requested solidarity from myself, and the country of Canada, in their struggles to assert their rights as given by the ILO and the UN against a President, who he described as a “hypocrite”. Rafael Quispe echoed these sentiments and expanded upon them by speaking specifically regarding Indigenous peoples collective rights,

“We say to the rest of the world that we have an Indigenous President that in his beginnings had a position with Mother Earth, respect for collective rights, a vision of living well, all of this, no? But in reality he does the opposite. He does not respect collective rights. He does not respect Mother Earth. And TIPNIS represents exactly that.” (Interview 10-08-2012)

A large part of the conversations I had with allies on this subject was also focused on illustrating the disaccord between rhetoric and reality within Bolivia with respect to these rights. Sociologist Jorge Komadina said,

“In other countries, the socialism movement and the President Evo Morales himself appear as a defender of Indigenous causes, as carriers of the struggles of Indigenous Peoples, as architects of the Plurinational State which guarantees self-determination of Indigenous communities. The irony is that inside the country what we are seeing is that the government is subsumed in an anti-Indigenous attitude, at the very least against the Indigenous who are living in the Lowlands. And he is dividing the Indigenous movement. “ (Interview 13-08-2012)

⁵⁶ This is not to say this is the only mechanism available for recourse. Within Bolivia Indigenous Peoples and their allies were engaged in many activities in their struggles against the construction of the TIPNIS highway.

Speaking of the violation of Indigenous peoples rights in regards to the construction of the TIPNIS highway Waldo Albarracin said, “All of this is happening in this country, and we want it known at an international level. That they are violating the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and at the least provide a solidarity with the Bolivian community” (Interview 10-08-2012). He then went on to say,

“human rights has never been easy in Bolivia, nor in any part of the world. The political authorities, military, police, governmental, no authority is going to like the defense of human rights. Because they interpret them... they repress them and also the activists who defend human rights. But that is part of the rivers of those who defend rights” (Interview 10-08-2012)

7.5 2009 Bolivian Constitution

As was mentioned earlier it is not just in international documentation that Indigenous rights exist. Not only has Bolivia signed on to these accords but they have included them within their own constitution. Adopted in 2009, the Bolivian Constitution contains a plethora of articles that speak specifically to Indigenous rights. Many elements of this Constitution regarding Indigenous rights were in fact taken directly from UNDRIPs (Kiene, 2011:67) Article 30 of the new Bolivian Constitution as a whole outlines a list of Indigenous Peoples rights. Some of the elements included in this article include, the right to freely exist (subsection 1), to self-determination and territoriality (subsection 4), collective title of land and territories (subsection 6), and protection of sacred sites (subsection 7). Beyond Article 30, there are many additional articles that speak to Indigenous rights. Article 289 discusses self-governance and self-determination,

“Rural native indigenous autonomy consists in self-government as the exercise of the free determination of the nations and rural native indigenous peoples, whose population shares territory, culture, history, languages, and their own juridical, political, social and economic organisation or institutions” (Republic of Bolivia - Bolivian Constitution 2009:Article 289)

However, the most commonly referred to element of the Constitution with respect to the TIPNIS highway dispute, which was adopted from UNDRIPs (into subsection 15 of Article 30 of the Bolivian Constitution) is the right to “free, informed and prior consent”. Article 19 of UNDRIPS reads,

“States shall consult and cooperate in *good faith* with the indigenous peoples concerned through *their own representative institutions* in order to obtain their *free, prior and informed consent* before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them” (UN, 2007:8 – My own emphasis added).

7.6(i) Free, Prior and Informed Consent

A number of important points have been raised in the relation to rights, however, let us pause for a moment and reflect upon the right to consultation specifically, as this is a crucial point for understanding the TIPNIS highway dispute. International and Bolivian laws call for free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing measures that affect Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, as was pointed out in Chapter 5.11, after a series of marches regarding the TIPNIS highway, the government enacted Law 222. This law called for consultation with the Indigenous peoples of TIPNIS regarding whether or not TIPNIS should remain an untouchable zone, as was established in Law 180. In addition, Law 222 also called for dialogue to be opened on whether or not segment two of the TIPNIS highway should be constructed, methods of safeguarding TIPNIS from illegal activities, and establishing a plan of

governance for the TIPNIS territory. And while extensive paper-work exists for the protection of Indigenous rights their implementation has certainly not been the case with the TIPNIS highway, and this violation of rights has occurred in innumerable ways.

7.6(ii) Prior Consent

Violations of the Indigenous Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples right to consultation regarding the TIPNIS highway have occurred in almost all aspects of what is required according to International norms as well as within the Bolivian Constitution. To illustrate the extent of these violations I will review the terminology as described in rights based declarations and law in comparison to what has occurred in practice.

Let us begin with the term “prior”. Prior means before. This means consultation should have occurred as soon as the project was conceptualized; before a project is commenced. In the case of the TIPNIS highway the plans were first drawn up in 1780, long before the existence of laws regarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, the re-emergence of these plans came to fruition long after these rights had been established in written form. As was stated in Chapter 5.7, Indigenous Lowlanders were not included in any of the planning discussions regarding this highway project. And to reiterate a point that was stated earlier, the Bolivian State emphasized that this project was a question for the state to debate and not subject to local veto (Bijork-James, 2011:4). When construction began in June 2011 Indigenous Lowlanders had still not been consulted.

Gustavo Santiesteban, an Indigenous rights researcher for the *Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia* (CEADESC) was furious at the use of the term prior in regards to the TIPNIS consultations. He stated,

“In 2007, when they were thinking of including the section between Villia Turani San Ignacio de Mojo they had to do a consultation. Before now. All governments have to do prior consultation... Including formulating ideas of projects they have to do a consultation. Prior consultation comes from the moment the State has an initiative. Not when there is in reality a highway... before they signed the contract with the companies who were going to work on it and signing credit contracts... It must be clear that it has never been prior. It is now, now!” (Interview 13-08-2012)

The Process of Consultation regarding the TIPNIS Highway only began on the 29th of July, 2012. How can a consultation possibly meet international and national standards of requirement if it is conducted years after a project has been initialized? After contracts have been signed for both the funding and construction of the highway itself? After nearly two-thirds of the highway have been built? It is a violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and it is an insult to refer to the consultations with the name prior consultation, given the circumstances.

7.6(iii) Free Consent

A second point included in the definition of consultation is “free”. Free means without influence; it requires a neutral grounds on which for discussions to take place. This is another element which is impossible under these circumstances. As has been outlined in previous chapters, the existing hierarchy of power in Bolivia, which places Indigenous peoples among the bottom rungs, is present in all forms of daily life. One merely has to walk down the streets of any urban city and they will note that the majority of those who are in the streets begging for

change are Indigenous peoples. This is no coincidence, the power structures that exist serve to reinforce the power of the country's elites (settlers and their descendants).

In the case of the TIPNIS highway consultation, the government set the terms of the discussion. It was within the government's created Law 222 that a mere 120 days maximum were given in which to carry out the consultations (Villegas, 2012:14). The target date for completion was set for August 25th 2012, a paltry two months after their commencement. With more than 60 communities to consult, and taking travel time into account, this meant that there was no more than one day for each community to be consulted. The results of the consultations were to be compiled between August 26th and September 3rd 2012 and officially presented by the State just three days later, on September 6th. Researchers, such as Pablo Villegas, noted that this conversion of consultations into only a series of steps in accordance with strict timelines reduced the consultations to a mere act of authoritarianism, which greatly damaged Indigenous rights (Villegas, 2012:14).

Beyond time limits, it was the government who designed the team of 15 *brigadas*, non-Indigenous people from other parts of Latin America, who travelled to the communities to discuss the highway construction. It was the government who determined which communities would be consulted. And in this they choose to include communities from Polygon 7 who, as was illustrated in Chapter 6.12(i), are not Indigenous to the region and do not hold shared title within the TCO of TIPNIS. It is important to note that the cocaleros number more than 10,000 people, and as such form a majority population within the Territory, over the 5,000 Indigenous Lowlanders. Their inclusion in the consultations from the perspective of anti-highway activists I spoke with, both legitimizes their invasion of TIPNIS as well as sways the outcome of the consultation. This is because the cocaleros have a large population made up of many

communities, and each community gets one vote. Thus the number of votes that come from the cocaleros will have a large impact upon the overall number of votes.

On this subject Waldo Albarracin said, “The government is carrying out the consultation in places that have nothing to do with the Indigenous Territory” (Interview 10-08-2012).

Drawing out the unequal power relations between the cocaleros and Indigenous Lowlanders Gustavo Santiesteban said,

“The cocaleros are the majority demographically in the zone and in the political power of the State. They have their President, and others are fighting in terrible conditions of persistence... the relations of power are ghastly... But despite it all there is a force of persistence” (Interview 13-08-2012)

As was stated in Chapter 6, many Indigenous Lowland communities make decisions through extensive dialogue involving all community members and then reaching a consensus. This process is not given time limitations and is not subject to majority wins. International Declarations, such as Articles 18 and 19 of UNDRIPs, state that Indigenous communities must be consulted through their own representative institutions in accordance with their procedures. This is also stated in Article 30, subsection 15 of the Bolivian Constitution. As such, it is a violation of Indigenous rights for the Bolivian government to place time limits upon consultations. Furthermore, the Bolivian government cannot ask community members to vote and then count the number of those for and those against, taking the result to be that which has the most votes, as this directly violates the Indigenous Lowland custom of decision making by consensus. Moreover still, International Declarations call for consultations to be conducted according to Indigenous mechanisms. In the case of TIPNIS, as was discussed in Chapter 6.6(iv), there are a number of Indigenous organizations that are active within TIPNIS. It is these organizations that should be setting the parameters of the discussions not the government.

Additionally, in order for a consultation to meet the ‘free’ requirement the discussions cannot be purchased. In the case of TIPNIS, it has been well documented that the government travelled to at least 18 communities within TIPNIS giving gifts of boat motors, generators and school resources with the promise of more material items to come should they agree to having the highway built (Cambio, 2012a:4). In addition, the consultations are clearly not ‘free’ when the government issues statements such as the highway will be built “whether they want it or don’t want it”, as was done in June 2011 (Baspineiro, 2012:59).

If that were not enough, each time I turned the television on while in Bolivia I was bombarded with governmental commercials that stated how beneficial highways were for the wellbeing of country as a whole. How can a government possibly claim to be hosting an impartial consultation if simultaneously they are airing commercials that tout the benefits of highway construction? Speaking on this point, Maria Lohman said, “At the least they are spending a million dollars a month for their television jingle spot... For what? To convince us of this highway, that we have seen from the start is not legal” (Interview 13-08-2012).

A final element of the component “free” I would like to raise is that of TIPNIS as an untouchable zone. Law 180, regarding the intangibility of TIPNIS, was annulled with Law 222, as was described in Chapter 5.11. However, as many anti-highway activists explained to me, the TIPNIS highway consultations were designed not only to determine whether or not the highway would be built, but also the status of the intangibility. In other words, communities participating in the consultations are being presented with bundled options. If they accept the construction of the highway with a ‘yes’ vote, then they agree that the zone is not “intangible”, which opens the gateway for further exploitative development initiatives. However, should they vote ‘no’ to the

highway construction they are in so doing saying ‘yes’ to maintaining an untouchable status for the Territory.

As an outsider, at first this may seem appropriate but to understand what this would mean in practice this parcelling of choices must be examined. The intangibility status removes the ability of Indigenous Lowlanders to continue hunting and fishing on their Territory. Furthermore, it excludes the possibility of them cutting down any trees for the establishment of their communities. It also prohibits them from engaging in any activities for financial gain from the environment in which they live, this includes small-scale initiatives such as the fabrication and selling of handicrafts made from seeds and other organic materials.⁵⁷ Forcing those consulted to pick between these two options is a violation of International norms, as has been noted by such organizations as Amnesty International (Achtenberg, 2012e). Specifically, this choice violates Indigenous right to self-determination, such as that given in Article 4 of UNDRIPs which states their “right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their international and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions” and Article 20 which states Indigenous peoples right to “be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities”. Furthermore, it violates the Bolivian Constitution which as stated earlier, affirms Indigenous peoples rights to self-governance and autonomy within their Territories. Pablo Rojas referred to the giving of these two options as a death sentence to Indigenous Lowlanders way of life. He said, in short, Indigenous Lowlanders were being asked

⁵⁷ For example in 2011 Evo Morales terminated an ecotourism program in five communities within TIPNIS on the grounds that even sustainable development initiatives violated Law 180 (Achtenberg, 2012e)

what type of guillotine they would consent to the government using in its execution of their communities existence (Interview 09-08-2012).

7.6(iv) Informed Consent

A third part of the phrasing in the Declarations and laws regarding consultation is “informed”. This is a point that those I spoke to emphasized had been completely disregarded by the Bolivian government. I was told over and over again that environmental impact studies regarding the highway had not been conducted, let alone shared with those being consulted. Some of those I spoke with said, environmental assessments had been conducted independently by environmentalists and biologists but the government was not taking these into account. Maria Lohman said she had read a study that indicated within fifteen years the highway would result in a destruction of 65 per cent of the entire Territory (Interview 13-08-2012). Regardless of whether or not independent studies have been conducted, no environmental impact studies have been shared with those in the consultation.

A further element of contention with the point “informed” is that alternative highway routes, as was raised in Chapter 6.5, have not been examined. Routes that do not penetrate the TIPNIS territory have not been considered or discussed within the consultations. Rather communities are simply asked to say yes or no to this particular route. No room is provided for the discussion of alternatives to the West or East of TIPNIS. Speaking on this point, engineer and President of *Comité de Defensa Ambiental de Cochabamba* (CODAC), Gonzalo Maldonado Rojas said, “In this process we have lost what it means to build a highway. In place of solving technical problems we have totally transformed this into a political issue. In reality this highway

is a technical subject” (Interview 13-08-2012). “Informed” requires the availability and sharing of information regarding the prospective project. How can a consultation possibly be informed without having reviewed and discussed the implications of the highway project as well evaluating it in comparison to possible alternatives?

7.7 Good Faith Requirement

Consultation also calls for “good faith”. This requires a meaningful attempt by all parties involved to understand and consider the perspectives and concerns of each other. The examples illustrated above clearly show that the government is not carrying out this consultation in good faith. The government began this consultation long after it was required, they have not followed Indigenous practices in carrying out the consultation, they have attempted to buy ‘yes’ votes in the form of gifts, they have included people within the consultation that have no right to be included, and they have not shared the required impact studies. Furthermore, as has been seen throughout this thesis, an atmosphere of impunity already existed regarding the violation of Indigenous Rights within Bolivia prior to the commencement of these consultations. Highly illustrative of this climate, not only was Sancha Llorenti, the Bolivian Minister of the Interior, not charged for his involvement in the police repression of marchers in September of 2011; instead he was appointed by Evo Morales to the position of Ambassador for the United Nations (Achenberg, 2012a).

As if this impunity and other breaches of “good faith” were not enough, the government has pressed on with the consultations even after Indigenous communities have said they would not participate in this manner. After the consultations began, some communities, such as San

Miguelito, publically denounced the manner in which the consultations were being held and how they violated their rights as Indigenous peoples. This community specifically called for the evaluation of alternative highway routes that would not bisect the nucleus of TIPNIS (Opinión, 2012a:4a). Constructing barb wire fences and other physical barriers they banned the entry of the brigadas into their communities. According to many Indigenous allies that I spoke with the communities were not opposed to consultations as a whole, rather they were against the way in which they were being held in this case. Rafael Quispe said,

“Consultations have their proper mechanisms. Nobody is against the consultation. No, it is the form in which they [the government] want to conduct this consultation. Consultations are previous, of good faith, there is consent. They are informed. But in this situation, it is not previous, it is not consensual, it is nothing. It is none of these things” (Interview 10-08-2012)

Points of resistance were set up in many communities along the Sécure river and 22 communities publically renounced the request of the government to carry out the consultations in their communities (La Razón, 2012b:A8). Rafael Quispe told journalists, “Due to the corrupt manner of the justice we see, resistance is the only way to prevent a consultation that is not prior, as is mandated in the Constitution and in International norms (La Razón, 2012b:A8). In response members of the government, such as the Minister of Public Works Vladimir Sánchez, said that those who blocked the entry of the brigadas were in violation of Bolivian Laws, which obliged them to participate in the consultation (La Razón, 2012b:A8). However International norms, such as Article 2 of UNDRIPs, indicate that Indigenous peoples have the right to exercise their rights – this includes not being forced to enter into consultations which violate their rights as Indigenous peoples. Despite this, warrants were put out for the arrest of four Indigenous

Lowlanders⁵⁸ who as selected members of their communities, were leading the resistance to what they felt was a corrupt consultation (Los Tiempos, 2012b:A1). In response, Fernando Vargas said, “As Indigenous peoples we are conscious of the illegality of this” (Opinión,2012b:20a). These warrants were later retracted (Opinión, 2012e:4a), but the spirit of these actions, which were certainly not in “good faith” (as required in the right to consultation), has persisted.

Fernando Vargas, said the communities had no choice but to take action, as the governmental consultations had become violent due to their violation of the Bolivian Constitution as well as international norms that recognized Indigenous rights. The process of persecution of Indigenous leaders who resisted the consultation, through public slander and the creation of a climate of fear, was yet another clear sign that the process was not transpiring as it is required in law (Los Tiempos, 2012c:A3). In speaking specifically regarding the slander of Indigenous leaders by the Bolivian Government, Waldo Albarracin said, “They are looking to discredit the leaders of CIDOB, of the Subcentral TIPNIS. Their sole objective is to evade the rights that they [Indigenous Lowlanders] are reclaiming” (Interview 10-08-2012).

7.8 Overall Sentiments Regarding the Consultations

It was not just Indigenous Lowlanders and their allies who were concerned about the way the consultations were unfolding. Various human rights experts have stated that the Bolivian government was ignoring international agreements regarding Indigenous Peoples rights to consultations (Los Tiempos, 2012e:A8). Yoriko Yasukawa, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Bolivia, publically announced that there was concern the consultations had gone off

⁵⁸ Fernando Vargas, Joucy Fabricano, Adolfo Moye and Yerdith Fabricano

course, citing the order to arrest four Indigenous leaders (Los Tiempos, 2012d:A1). United Nations diplomat Jaime Navarro told journalists that he thought the government was not seeking consultation, but simply intended to construct the highway (Los Tiempos, 2012a:A2). Amnesty International also expressed their concerns regarding the manner in which the consultation was being conducted and said they feared this could create further conflicts (Los Tiempos, 2012a:A1). This did not deter the Bolivian Government in its quest to continue with the enforcement of the consultation process. Governmental Minister Carlos Romero told journalists, “There is no need to enter into a judicial debate, nor to propose any legal action, the consultation is developing with normality” (Los Tiempos, 2012c:A3).

Despite governmental protests to the contrary, Indigenous Lowlanders and their allies continued to denounce what they felt was a corrupted, falsified consultation that had been established merely for the appearance of due process and validation for a highway project which the government fully intended to see through to completion. Nazareth Flores, Lowland Indigenous leader of Central de Pueblos Indígenas de Beni (CEPIB) and affiliated with CIDOB, stated, “Indigenous Peoples are mourning the death of our brothers who participated in the marches and for all the government is doing against us, the persecution against our leaders”. She went on to say, “The oppositional leaders reject a consultation that the government is carrying out in 69 communities of TIPNIS in order to validate their road project, even though the executive thinks it is a minority resistance (Opinión, 2012c:2a).

Some who wrote editorials to newspapers said it was merely a cultural misunderstanding, whereby the government simply did not comprehend Indigenous perspectives. They called for

increased dialogue to resolve these supposed misunderstandings⁵⁹. However, many of those I spoke with were much more firm in their denouncement of the consultations as a whole.

Gustavo Santiesteban described the consultations as a holistic form of propaganda designed to convince outsiders that consultations had taken place. Elaborating on this he stated,

“It is disinforming, it is in bad faith, it is afterward, that is what they are calling consultation... This is not a question of majorities and minorities... This concept requires all of the specifications, free, before, informed, of good faith, orientation to the concept” (Interview 13-08-2012).

He went on to describe the consultations as a violation,

“It’s like a violation, a victim, in the case of a sexual victim, which is like the violations we live in this country, there is a ceremony of conquest and a list of demands. That violation has now happened. That is what is happening!” (Interview 13-08-2012).

Gonzalo Maldonado Rojas said,

“Since thirty years ago we’ve had laws and decrees and norms which protect the rights of Indigenous peoples. Today they exist, and we are not leading them, our Government is a promoter [of these rights]... and we see that they [the rights of Indigenous Peoples] are vulnerable. This signifies that we have lost our pathway with these rights which are totally inalienable... And one of the worst violators is the present government. Definitely, the participation and recognition of rights applies to all of the population, including Indigenous peoples, Indigenous originarios” (Interview 13-08-2012).

Jorge Komadina said,

“The application of the Political Constitution of the State is not guaranteed. The Constitution requires the application of prior consultation, requires self-determination of Indigenous communities. Requires their rights, but the government is not actually applying this constitution in reality” (Interview 13-08-2012).

⁵⁹ Example: Opinión, 2012d:7a

Pablo Rojas echoed this statements when he said, “You cannot hold a consultation like this. There exist multiple irregularities. We must remember this consultation is illegal, deceitful, illegitimate, it is not valid!” (Interview 09-08-2012)

There are an endless number of statements that have been made by Indigenous Lowlanders and their allies, both within and outside of Bolivia regarding the mockery these so called consultations are making of Indigenous peoples rights. And while each may vary in the details that they bring forward, the message remains the same. As this chapter has shown, these consultations are only that in name, in substance they are exactly the opposite. They continue to violate the rights of Indigenous Lowlanders and in so doing reinforce the colonial structures of inequality that have been in place for hundreds of years.

Yet despite the endless struggles, despite the violations, Indigenous Lowlanders continue to work together, strategize, speak up, take action and assert their rights. Not only are they making appeals for the respect of their rights as given in the Bolivian Constitution and international norms but they are also taking action to secure those rights for themselves and future generations. By creating blockades and refusing to participate in the consultations they demand recognition and respect. Furthermore, they have begun a process of hosting their own consultations with their own communities (those who are title holders of the TCO) according to their own customs through their own institutions. The results of these meetings are scheduled to be documented by their own communities and given to both the Bolivian State and International Observers (El Diario, 2012b). What will unfold from this remains to be seen. However, given that the assertion of state power and resistance to Indigenous subordination has a history centuries long, a simple resolution to this dispute will not likely be found in the near future.

CONCLUSIONS

“Our scream is a refusal to accept... A refusal to accept the inevitability of increasing inequality, misery, exploitation and violence. A refusal to accept the truth of the untrue, a refusal to accept closure. Our scream is a refusal to wallow in being victims of oppression, a refusal to immerse ourselves in that ‘left-wing melancholy’ which is so characteristic of oppositional thought... Our scream is a scream to break windows, a refusal to be contained, an overflowing, a going beyond the pale, beyond the bounds of polite society.” (Holloway, 2002:6)

8.1 The Big Picture

This thesis began by stating radical theoretical reflection begins with the scream of horror, anger and refusal. The information contained within the entirety of this body of work has sought to centralize voices and perspectives of those who continue to fight and demand to be heard. In listening to their words and in reflecting upon events to date it becomes clear that the TIPNIS road dispute is about so much more than simply the construction of a highway. By highlighting the larger power structures that exist, questions such as *why this project is so contentious* become clearer. The TIPNIS highway is a development project that is a tool of and deeply embedded within the colonial framework in which it is taking place.

To discuss the Villa Tunari San Ignacio de Moxos Highway without acknowledging its root source, is not only misguided, but is also complicit in strengthening the exploitation this project perpetuates. As Eduardo Galeano so eloquently explains, Latin America has existed at the service of needs of those at the helm of the global order of domination. Its environment and people have been bled profusely so the global elite could prosper (1973). Many stand to gain from the construction of this highway. But to discuss this generation of profit without acknowledging the violation of Indigenous peoples rights, upon which this profit is to be built, is deceitful, as the evidence provided throughout this thesis has so clearly shown.

8.2 Individual Threads

Each chapter of this thesis has focused upon different threads that when woven together form a tapestry. The images that emerge in the form of repeating patterns tell a story. This is a story of power struggles as well as resistance and courage. What began as a demand of appeal to the state has transformed into a scream of “*¡Basta!*”.

In the introductory and stage setting chapters I began with the questions I myself had before writing this thesis. Why would such a ‘progressive’ government build a highway against the wishes of those who lived in the area where it was to be built? And why was a highway garnering such a contentious response? In order to begin answering these questions I had to place this project within the deeper context in which decisions were being made and carried out. I began by examining the Inca empire and Spanish colonization of what is today Bolivia. And despite resistance movements, the hierarchies of power that these invaders established are still present today. In recent years, governmental officials claimed the issues of poverty and suffering (that ensued from these systems of inequality) were to be resolved through modernization. Elaborate plans for regional integration and infrastructural development were put in place by such initiatives as the IIRSA. Despite similar failed projects in many parts of the world, it was said that the construction of highways would bring infinite economic benefits. Re-emerging from the colonial archives of the 18th century, plans were put in place to construct a highway through the ecologically protected and Indigenous Territory of TIPNIS.

After exploring the broader context, I turned to a review of the existing literature regarding this TIPNIS highway project. Little English language academic literature is currently available on this subject, and that which is available has been published in politically left-wing

circles. While this literature does bring the topic to Anglophone readers, its focus is largely upon substantiating whether or not the MAS government and Evo Morales are neoliberal, with the TIPNIS highway serving as nothing more than a case study to substantiate the argument. Information regarding the highway itself is limited to a brief overview of events to date with little concentration on analysis. Outside of English language academic literature, information has been posted on political blogs and websites. While these authors do delve deeper into such questions as to why conflict exists regarding the highway, they are limited in scope given space restrictions, and thus cannot adequately address the many layers of complexity. Consequently, content is separated from the context.

Contrarily there is an abundance of Spanish language sources from Bolivia that address the TIPNIS dispute from numerous perspectives. While each author chooses to focus upon different elements of the conflict, all discuss unequal power relations and their connections with Indigenous Lowlanders. Given the gap between English language and Bolivian Spanish language sources this thesis sought to bridge the divide. However, it was not just literature but also primary research that formulated the bulk of information upon which this thesis was constructed.

It is impossible to separate the researcher from the research. As such, I explained my positioning, how this research was carried out, as well as its strengths and limitations. A point of primary importance is that I am not Bolivian, nor Indigenous; as such this thesis does not propose solutions but rather it aims to add complexity and depth to discussions for English-speaking audiences. An additional point that requires reiteration is that my ultimate objective was not the pursuit of knowledge in and of itself but the hope that this thesis will be used to challenge structures of inequality. Thus the words contained within this body of work are not

neutral. They take a position against discrimination, racism and exploitation, and they reaffirm that position continuously. However, it is not only the researcher but also the reader that has a presence in this text. Information was constructed into distinct categorical arrangements so that it would be intelligible to you, the reader.

After explaining how the information being read came to the pages you are reading I began connecting current events to their larger context. Drawing historical connections between the past and present I explained how the current marginalization of the Yuracaré, Mojeño-Trinitario and Chimán peoples is embedded within a colonial legacy. Detailing the creation of the TIPNIS Territory, acts of direct action by Indigenous activists, the formation of alliances as well as state acts of repression I showed that events such as the police brutality against Indigenous marchers on September 25th 2011 were not simply mistakes nor isolated incidents. Rather actions such as these are simply more recent manifestations of frameworks which aim to maintain the status quo.

Once current events were firmly grounded within their context I turned to a detailed discussion of those who are directly involved in this highway dispute. While there are many stakeholders, I choose to focus upon the three who live within the borders of the TIPNIS Territory. These were Mother Earth, Indigenous Lowlanders and Cocaleros. Centring the strength and courage of Lowland Indigenous communities, I explored various points of interaction between these groups of beings. In so doing I displaced the state and Western models of development from a focal position, and rather highlighted points of disconnect, tension and altercation between the primary stakeholders in this highway dispute. This focus yielded an exploration of why clashes are taking place and their positionality within the larger power structures.

Finally I turned to an analysis of the consultations that took place in 2012. Despite the existence of International norms and laws within the Bolivian State Constitution, this process was neither *free*, nor *informed*, nor *prior*, nor did the consultations take place in *good faith*, as is stipulated in the rights of Indigenous peoples. And this then brings us to the present. Despite the endless struggles, Indigenous Lowlanders continue to take action and assert their rights.

When each of these individual threads is brought back to its interconnected place within its macro-level tapestry, the image that emerges is both startling and empowering. Colonization is not a thing of the past. TIPNIS is the new battleground upon which the colonial system seeks to reassert its power and authority. However, Indigenous Lowlanders refuse to bow in defeat. Asserting their right to dignity and respect they are taking direct action to secure these rights not only for themselves but also future generations. In so doing, they seek the support of committed allies. That is where you come in.

8.3 Responsibility of the reader

You have joined me in this journey. Through the reading of this written text you have come to hear the voices of many people. These people took many risks in making it possible for you to learn about their life experiences, challenges and aspirations. As an active listener I ask that you remember that we are all connected in a circular web. Our lives, no matter the physical distance between us, are interconnected in ways far beyond our comprehension. Together we create the present and set precedents for the future. Each of us in our daily life has the power to re-inscribe or challenge the current world order. Do not be fooled. Neutrality is a fabricated illusion, dreamt up by those who seek to veil their own roles as oppressor. Together we can

create change. As one Indigenous knowledge keeper said to me, “Now you know our story. What will you do with it?”

Colonial systems of exploitation invade, pillage, plunder and destroy. Today these frameworks are often referred to as neo-colonial, implying there is something new about them. However there is nothing new about the lust for material gain no matter the cost. In fact, the details of this particular highway project reveal that the contemporary structures, and their shameless tactics to reinforce and strengthen their existence, bear little difference from their predecessors.

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