Research Articles

The TIPNIS Conflict in Bolivia

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Abstract: Soon after the formation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009, the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) became the epicentre of a conflict over the construction of a road, initiated by Evo Morales's administration, that would run through the park. Initially undertaken by the Brazilian company OAS, and funded by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), the project was justified on the grounds that it would link the departments of Beni and Cochabamba, and bring development to an isolated locality. However, indigenous peoples from the lowlands opposed the scheme, and, together with their counterparts in the Andean region, organised a march that was violently dispersed by the Bolivian armed forces. In this article, I analyse the political processes in this Andean country, notably the reconfiguration of power from 2011 onwards, in parallel with economic measures adopted by the government. I conclude with observations about the relation between the national and regional spheres, arguing that indigenous repression forms part of a new developmentalist agenda.

Keywords: TIPNIS; Decolonisation; Political Forces; Indigenous Movements; Extractivism; Bolivia.

Introduction

Soon after the founding of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009, a conflict developed around the construction of a road meant to connect San Ignacio de Moxos in the department of Beni to Villa Tunari in the department of Cochabamba, running through the Isidoro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). The project, driven by the government of Evo Morales, was initially justified on the grounds that it would link two regional centres and bring development to an area that was difficult to access, especially during the rainy season. It was opposed by lowland indigenous peoples, organised under the banner of the regional Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the East, Chaco, and Bolivian Amazon (CIDOB). With the support of Aymara and Quechua peoples linked to the National Council of Allyus and Markas of Qulasuyu (CONAMAQ), CIDOB staged an 'Eighth Indigenous March in Defence of TIPNIS'. The protest, a walk from Trinidad, the capital of Beni, to La Paz, was cut short in Chaparina when members of the armed forces of Bolivia violently dispersed the marchers.

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The project was also opposed by citizens not affiliated to any political party, former senior government leaders, as well as opposition politicians from the region known as Media Luna.[1] Primarily comprising large land owners in the Bolivian East who had historically adopted a combative and racist stance against indigenous peoples, this group found itself gradually drifting away from power after the rise of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), including its branch in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Denunciations of government plans to exploit hydrocarbons in the park, demands to expand coca farming, and even the implementation of a project under the auspices of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) that would serve Brazilian hegemonic aspirations in the region were cited as the underlying motives for the construction of the road (see Paz 2012; Fischermann 2012; Prada 2012; Tapia 2012). Therefore, the case of TIPNIS seemed to embody growing dissatisfaction with the administration of the Plurinational State. Moreover, it pointed to a broader process, linking extractivism to development strategies and Brazilian leadership.

In fact, the 'Chaparina Massacre', as it came to be known, attested to the existence of neoextractivism in the region. This issue has gained the attention of theorists from different fields, including Veltmeyer and Petras (2014), Lang and Mokrani (2011), Aráoz (2012), Acosta (2011), and Gago and Mezzadra (2015). Gudynas (2009) defines it as the intensification of extractive activities, encompassing different sectors, like hydrocarbons, minerals, and monocultures, with large-scale production for export. In this view, the strengthening of these activities is tied to the emergence of progressivist governments in the region, and their adoption of a developmentalist model. Critical of neoliberalism, these left and centre-left governments regard extractivism as indispensable for the generation of wealth and its redistribution through developmental social programmes. Gudynas regards Bolivia as an example of a radical type of progressivist government, whose implementation of extractivist projects is driven by a centralised state. Svampa (2013) characterises this as the 'Commodities Consensus', as opposed to the Washington Consensus. Driven by the high value of natural resources in the international market, this approach also brings with it an emphasis on the construction of regional infrastructure and a series of environmental and social implications, among other negative consequences. Following those interpretations, Chaparina could be read as synonymous with the emergence, or even the recrudescence, of social conflicts involving the state repression of minorities affected by neoextractivism, and the construction of mega-projects within the scope of IIRSA.

But Chaparina also reflects the restructuring of the government's support base, consolidated under the Pact of Unity, and the reconfiguration of political forces in the country. The Pact has cracked, disintegrated, and been rearticulated, bringing the internal divisions to the attention of the various organisations involved. From the moment the Eastern elite was destructured, the overt and covert interests of all the organisations that originally made up the Pact became ever more apparent, and even incompatible in some cases. Growing disagreements among those groupings led to the emergence of the so-called 'parallel' organisations whose leaders sought to preserve the government alliance, promoting a rearticulation of government forces and the marginalisation of indigenous opposition groups.

In this article, I argue that the clashes around TIPNIS were actually 'the tip of the iceberg' of an underlying web of asymmetrical relationships and power struggles involving old and new players in Bolivian politics. It reveals the tensions inherent in the process of decolonisation, which could have been avoided by an analysis centred on the regional level. Next, I offer a history of mobilisation around land and territory in Bolivia, highlighting the disputes and alliances between indigenous and peasant organisations, particularly on the lowlands and specifically in TIPNIS. I continue with an analysis of the articulation and reconfiguration of political forces under successive Morales administrations, and a brief discussion of the discursive strategies used by the government and its support base after the repression. My goal is to contextualise Chaparina, demonstrating the relevance of the domestic political landscape for evaluating this event, and its connection with a range of themes, some of them mentioned above. I conclude with some remarks about the relationship between the national and regional levels, referring, once again, to issues around extractivism and developmentalism.

Mobilisation in the lowlands and the struggle for land/territory: a historical overview

On 25 September 2011, Bolivian and foreign television networks broadcast images of members of the Bolivian Armed Forces violently dispersing the Eighth Indigenous March. The excessive use of violence, including the use of clubs and gags, the tear-gassing of the marchers, and their arrest was aimed at demobilising the march after attempts at dialogue had failed (Amnesty International 2013). The march was provoked by the fact that the government had started to build the road through TIPNIS without consulting its indigenous inhabitants. At least since 2007, as Chávez (2012) notes, they have insisted on being consulted about any project undertaken in their territories, a right guaranteed by Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, the right to prior consultation was incorporated in the Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Framework Law on Autonomies, which require the state to consult indigenous communities and authorities about any legislative or administrative measures that would affect them, or the exploitation of any natural resources in their territories.[2]

The principle of prior consultation discloses a close link between the principles of autonomy (self-government) and self-determination, namely the non-submission of indigenous peoples to any external determination involving their territories. The conflict over TIPNIS is directly related to these principles, whose compliance would imply a *de facto* government recognition of indigenous peoples as political actors. It is also linked to the defence of indigenous territory, access to which has historically been problematic, given the various forms of expropriation to which its peoples have been subjected, particularly due to the expansion of agriculture. Thus autonomy, self-determination, and access to territory are issues that cannot be disassociated from one another, or from the concentration of land ownership.[3]

Since colonial times, the territory inhabited by indigenous peoples has been systematically reduced, a trend that has continued throughout the Republican period. In the case of the Bolivian lowlands, besides the establishment of Catholic missions, farming, ranching, and rubber extraction increasingly restricted the space available to indigenous peoples. Extractive activity in particular mirrored colonial relationships even after independence, a period in which the profitable chinchona bark trade gradually gave way to the exploitation of rubber. To maintain their business, the rubber barons promoted the forced recruitment of indigenous peoples, thereby worsening their displacement. As a result, indigenous peoples began to search for other regions where they could live, which sometimes led to tensions with Catholic missionaries, as highlighted by Córdoba (2012).

On the highlands, the Aymaras and Quechuas continued to live under the *pongueaje* (peonage) system, providing forced labour to ranchers. Even though colonial institutions were formally abolished with independence, practices like *pongueaje* did not end until after the Revolution of 1952 (Choque 2012; Larson 2005). Agrarian reform implemented during the revolution reached a turning point on the highlands with the restitution of land as well as its subdivision, promoting the conversion of natives into peasants. In this period, communal production and the traditional politics of the indigenous Andean communities were replaced or subsumed by the modernising logic of syndicalism, and the close relationship of its leaders with the government, consolidated in the Military–Peasant Pact concluded in the 1960s by General René Barrientos.

Another measure introduced at the time was the state-directed colonisation of Aymaras and Quechuas and their removal to the lowlands, which reduced pressures for fertile land and the population concentration in the Andean region. Decree 3464, which established rules for agrarian reform from 1953 onwards, targeted tropical and subtropical zones in particular as areas available for colonisation, a process that intensified at the beginning of the 1960s with the establishment of the National Institute of Colonization (INC). Among the tropical zones, the region of Chapare in Cochabamba featured not only in directed colonisation but also in spontaneous migration, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, prompted by mine closures, a severe drought on the highlands, and an economic crisis. Over the years, coca rose to prominence over other local crops due to the growing international demand for cocaine.

In this process, the 'colonisers' gradually contributed to the expansion of the agricultural frontier, sometimes penetrating spaces inhabited by other ethnic groups and igniting land/territorial disputes among indigenous peoples themselves, while the large private estates remained untouched.[4] The colonisers organised themselves into unions, grouped under the Syndicalist Confederation of Bolivian Colonisers (CSCB), which demanded more land and infrastructure, given the abandonment by the state experienced by many settlers who had participated in processes of directed colonisation. Corruption in the registration of title deeds and even state repression during the breakdown of the Military-Peasant Pact were other factors that fuelled CSCB demands (see Rivera 2003). In the case of Chapare, the colonisers organised themselves into Six Federations of Coca Growers. Although linked to the CSCB, these federations adopted a more independent stance, and played a prominent role in Bolivian politics during the 1990s and 2000s.

On the lowlands, besides directed colonisation, the government promoted the allocation of large tracts of land to logging companies and agribusiness, especially after the 1950s, as part of a strategy for civilising indigenous groups. While modernisation was viewed as desirable on the highlands, where the Aymaras and Quechuas were farming their plots of land, it was seen as even more important in the regions inhabited by nomadic indigenous peoples, who subsisted on hunting and gathering. In the 1990s, land speculation and concentration boomed, following the expansion of soy bean production throughout South America (Urioste 2011). This trend, especially in Brazil and Argentina, resulted in a search for new land in neighbouring countries, including Bolivia.

Hence the indigenous peoples on the lowlands found themselves constrained by a rapid process of land occupation that entailed the loss of their territories. This prompted them to form the CIDOB in 1982, and to organise the First Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity in 1990. This unprecedented mobilisation drew a large number of protestors, and gained widespread support. Given the organisational difficulties among the various regional groupings, the fact that the march was held successfully was something of a surprise. It was from this moment on that the defence of territory, understood as a space that encompasses community life, emerged as a demand capable of uniting and creating a common identity among the indigenous peoples of the lowlands, who belong to more than 30 distinct ethnicities (Chiquitanos, Guarayos, Guaranis, Ayoreos and Yuracarés, among others). Given that indigenous community life involves traditional political authorities, the debate around defending the territory occupied by indigenous peoples also involves a demand for the recognition of indigenous autonomy: 'The Bolivian State must recognize our right to rely on our territory, to have our own natural organizations, and to elect our traditional authorities' (Orozco, García and Stefanoni 2006: 69). This claim, encapsulated in the notion of 'autonomous indigenous territories', will remain on the agenda of indigenous peoples, unfurling in the sphere of land/territory-autonomy/self-determination. It will also continue to be defended by other indigenous groups, like their highland counterparts grouped under CONAMAQ.

This demand was incorporated into the Constitution of the Plurinational State under the term Indigenous-Native-Peasant Territory (*Territorios Indígena Originario Campesinos*, or TIOC), which reflects the dispute between indigenous peoples and people defined as peasants (which include colonisers and coca growers): although they have the same ethnic origins, peasants regard private property as the basis of their production and their relationship with the land.

This context is reflected in the relationships around TIPNIS, involving tensions between indigenous peoples and coca growers as well as agriextractivists. Established in 1965 under Law 07401, the park was also recognised as an indigenous territory, following national pressure resulting from the first march as well as international pressure, with the latter favouring the protection of rainforests, largely inhabited by Yuracarés, Mojeños-Trinitários and T'simanes. In 1987, these groupings organised themselves as Subcentral TIPNIS. In the mid-1990s, the park was classified as a Communal Land of Origin (*Tierra Comunitaria de Origen*, or TCO), having been the constant target of vassalage and exploitation by external forces. One such force was the expansion of agribusiness and

the extractivist forestry industry involving the elite of Beni, which was favoured by the state. Another was the expansion of coca farming into TIPNIS, notably in small villages in Polygon 7, a settlement area in the municipality of Villa Tunari in Chapare. These developments, which created tensions between indigenous peoples and coca growers, led to the proclamation of the Red Line on the border between Polygon 7 and the TIPNIS TCO.

However, this measure did not prevent the penetration of colonisers into TIPNIS, just as its transformation into a state park did not stop illegal logging. Both these trends demonstrate the vulnerability of indigenous peoples to the gradual loss of territory due to continued colonisation, which is also expressed in the difficult relations between the coca growers and the 'original' inhabitants of TIPNIS. Field research conducted by Orozco, García and Stefanoni has mapped the difficult coexistence between these players. Relations between lowlands indigenous peoples and coca growers have been affected at various stages by disputes around access to land and the defence of territory, and those tensions are also reflected in the rearticulation of forces in the park. This has led to the formation of new organisations, notably the Indigenous Council of the South (CONI-SUR), comprising some of the indigenous families who live close to the Red Line and therefore constantly interact with the coca growers. Unlike Subcentral TIPNIS, which has maintained its position against the expansion of coca farming, and concentrated itself in the department of Beni, the new organisation has adopted a close relationship with the municipality of Villa Tunari, which is governed by MAS, with a strong presence of the Chapare Coca Federations.

According to Orozco, García and Stefanoni, the establishment of CONISUR 'is framed within the perception that the communities of the southern Park are not included in the decisions made in Trinidad, at the leadership level' (2006: 68). This geographic isolation and the marginalisation of CONISUR from decision-making by Subcentral TIPNIS were key factors in the disagreements between these organisations around the construction of the road, which was meant to benefit people living in the south of the park.

However, conflicts between the coca farmers and the indigenous lowlands communities sometimes gave way to the adoption of a common strategy against agribusiness and the local racist elite. In fact, their history of collaboration predates the formation and rise to power of the MAS, in what has become known as the 'process of change'. These moments of collaboration include the Second National March for Land and Territory, Political Rights, and Development in 1996. Also called the 'March of the Century', it involved the combined forces of CIDOB, the Unified Syndical Confederation of the Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), Bartolinas Sisa, and the CSCB, whose members departed from various regions of the country and headed for La Paz to submit a set of demands (García 2004). These included the titling of indigenous territories and lands as well as changes to the INRA law, notably its definition of 'agro' areas (areas capable of becoming 'agrarian' and therefore suitable for commercial exploitation) that played a central role in the neoliberal reforms.

Also in 2002, natives, peasants and colonisers joined forces on the Fourth March for Popular Sovereignty, Territory, and Natural Resources, demanding that a constituent assembly be convened, an idea raised by the First Indigenous March in 1990. Up to that

point, the issue of access to land and territory pitted the interests of large land owners against those of indigenous communities and small producers. I will now discuss the formation of the Pact of Unity, and briefly analyse the pervasive racist logic underpinning Bolivian politics.[5]

The Pact of Unity and its fragmentation

The political empowerment of natives, colonisers, coca farmers and peasants cannot be separated from a long process of resistance. One of the more recent driving forces of this process was the state's adoption of neoliberal policies, which prompted groupings with conflicting interests and objectives into forming a united front of resistance. When they managed to 'capture the state', giving rise to a new ruling elite and the passing of various reforms by the Morales administration, Bolivian politics became even more polarised. In fact, the MAS electoral victory in 2005 and the convening of the Constituent Assembly, aimed at forging a new social pact and increasing the participation of these groups in state institutions, amounted to a kind of cataclysm.

In various areas, especially regions governed by the opposition, indigenous peoples and peasants were suppressed by local elites, and automatically equated with the new ruling party. Between 2005 and 2007, in the Department of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the economic epicentre of the country dominated by commercial cultivation and stock farming, a wave of violence against peasants and indigenous peoples was observed. Regardless of belonging to diverse lowland ethnic groups, or being Aymaras and Quechuas who had migrated to the capital, these people were classified as members of or sympathising with the MAS. In this instance, the elite, organised as the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, and with the Santa Cruz Youth Union (Unión Juvenil Cruceñista) and the Nación Camba as their armed wings, demonstrated their 'civility' in physical and verbal attacks against groups and citizens in favour of political change in Bolivia.[6] Notable statements include: 'It was [the Constitutional project] protected by the peasants, who do not have discernment'; and 'I want to remind you that 148 socialist constituents, resentful Indians, cannot make decisions for more than 9 million inhabitants. We are organised to act, whether with fists, ideas, or bullets' (see Guerreros del Arcoiris 2007). This aggression multiplied in the interior of the Department, leading to attacks on the homes and headquarters of peasant and indigenous organisations (see Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia 2013).

Santa Cruz also saw the formation of the 'Autonomous Junta', comprising the political leaders of the Media Luna ('half-moon'), a cluster of four departments that opposed the Morales government and the MAS, with the aim of drawing up departmental statutes. The drafting and approval of these statutes took place alongside the Plurinational Constitutional Project, thereby subverting the National Electoral Court, which was responsible for managing the electoral process related to the new constitution. In opposition to 'indigenous autonomies', 'departmental autonomies' embodied the notion of political and economic decentralisation, and represented an attempt by the old elite to remain in power in this region.

Another important factor was the increase in the number of land invasions in Santa Cruz in the first years of the MAS government, and the adoption of the Agrarian Reforms of 2006, which were mostly implemented on the lowlands.[7] In this period of mobilisation throughout the country, popular expectations coalesced around the processes of institutional transformation. Given the historical marginalisation of indigenous peoples by local elites, the facts highlighted above seem to suggest a strong connection between the idea of rupture, represented by the new government and its reform programme, and the wave of racism throughout Bolivia, especially in the East.

In 2004, in the context of the struggle for change in Bolivian society, which at that time meant reaching the executive branch and drafting a charter that would reflect its plurality, native, peasant, coca farmer and coloniser organisations decided to enter into the Pact of Unity. As noted previously, despite their disagreements at several stages over access to land and territory, those same groups had already combined forces against neoliberal policies, as in the March of the Century and the Fourth March. The idea now was to consolidate the connection of the main socio-political forces organised by CIDOB, CSUTCB, Bartolinas Sisa, CONAMAQ, and CSCB and their affiliates, which would then support each other. Given the violent response from the opposition, particularly after the MAS won the 2006 elections, the Pact of Unity represented a way of ensuring the constant mobilisation of support for the new government and the refounding of the Bolivian state via the Constituent Assembly.

Although the Pact of Unity organisations supported the government, this did not represent an unconditional or automatic link between the former and indigenous peoples, who preserved their independence; unlike CSUTCB, Bartolinas, and CSCB, they did not join the MAS. The Pact went on to draft a new constitution in the Constituent Assembly, despite attempts by the opposition to undermine this process. In that period, then, the differences among natives, peasants, coca farmers and colonisers were negotiated in parallel, sustained by an alliance in support of change and against the offensives of the old elite. However, this political configuration came under growing pressure during the second Morales administration from 2009 onwards, as disagreements between the government and indigenous groups became more frequent. As the CIDOB leader Lázaro Tacóo has noted:

> The president's first term was interesting. He would hold government meetings with all his ministers, and we would hold social movement meetings. There was synchrony during his first term, and we reached an agreement: 'Minister, why don't we find a solution for this?' And in this way, we moved forward. But this changed during the second term. [...] Look, of these five organizations [that make up the Pact], those that belong to the party complain to the president that some of his ministers are not playing by the rules, in accordance with the 'process of change' and that they are asking for change. [...] And the president, instead of sitting down and discussing this internally, goes public, before the media and says: 'I'm

wasting time meeting with the peasants. And the natives of the East are blackmailers'. Please, the natives of the East! In our indigenous territories, where we already have a constitution, if there has to be a megaproject of extractivist resources or some other project of interest to the State, there must be a prior consultation, open, informed, in good faith, to discuss the pros and cons of the project. And once the results of the environmental and social impact studies are available, there is compensation. The president, instead of understanding this, calls us blackmailers. [...] We, the indigenous peoples, are disillusioned.... During his first term, we held a march because we did not want to eliminate the TCOs, at least we were able to consolidate this. But in 2010, when he was reelected, he distanced us further through the Temporary Electoral Law. We had submitted a proposal for 18 representatives to the Plurinational Legislative Assembly: 18 members and 18 alternates. So each group of people would feel represented. When we spoke to the president, he reduced the number to 14 [...] and as they were drafting the law, it suddenly became 11, and then 7. During the vigil we held here in La Paz, we said: 'Hell, the president played at the expense of our rights.' [..] That was our first 'clash', but then the Framework Law on Autonomies appeared. [...] They wanted the basis for achieving autonomy to be five thousand inhabitants. In the East, the peoples are minorities. Therefore, we requested inclusion because otherwise, we would not be represented in the Plurinational Assembly. So those groups with less than five thousand would never achieve autonomy. That was our issue and, since they did not want to resolve it, we held a march, a demonstration in 2010. [...] We demanded inclusion based not on the number of votes, but on the number of peoples. With the Framework Law on Autonomies, our disagreement with the government increased. We asked for respect for the Constitution. Then, in 2011, there was the TIPNIS issue. [...] (interview with Lázaro Tacóo. La Paz, October 2012, cited in Delgado 2014).

This passage points to a significant shift in approach during Morales's second presidential term. Initially, this change was associated with issues of governability and the decision-making process within the executive branch that had previously included the social movements, but was now increasingly taking place in isolation. Tacóo's remarks point to a breakdown of the participative democracy adopted during the first years of the Morales government, in which the social movements governed together with members of the Pact of Unity, as protagonists of the 'process of change'. Political participation now shifted to merely consulting the government's support base, which does not constitute effective political participation (Delgado 2014). At the same time, the government established an alliance with the opposition, and restructured its links with indigenous communities, peas-

ants, colonisers and coca farmers. In order to understand the complex political game in Bolivia – that is, how the government was able to construct an alliance with the opposition and, in parallel, regain the support of the majority of participants in the Pact of Unity – I now need to deepen the analysis.

In the interview cited above, Tacóo refers to the fact that the non-community members of the Pact of Unity (that is, indigenous organisations not governed by community rules) were opposed to replacing the term TCO with 'indigenous territory', as this would exclude peasants and their demand for access to land. Negotiations in the constituent assembly resulted in a decision to refer to Indigenous-Native-Peasant Territories (*Territorios Indígena Originario Campesinos*, or TIOCs), which would encompass both groups. Nevertheless, as the government began to display an unfavourable attitude towards indigenous communities on issues that were causing disputes with non-community (and several non-indigenous) allies, the political situation for the communitarian indigenous groups took on new colours. While decision-making at the national level was recentralised, creating a gap between the cabinet and the social movements, the alliance with peasants, colonisers and coca farmers – many of them formally linked to the MAS – was being reinforced at the same time.

Negotiations over the Electoral Law and the Framework Law on Autonomies illustrates this dynamic, which also had implications for land owners and the extractivist opposition. Among other things, in a move ostensibly aimed at improving governability, the number of indigenous representatives in Congress were reduced, and conditions introduced for achieving indigenous autonomy, which the agriextractivist elite had opposed from the outset. Moreover, the Framework Law contained a series of preconditions for registering autonomous territories within the TIOCs that restricted their formation.

These territories not only had to have a minimum of inhabitants, but also had to be contiguous (a requirement affecting most TIOCs, since they tend to comprise non-contiguous spaces), and even needed to conform with departmental boundaries.[8] Because achieving autonomy implies the exercise of self-government and free determination by the communities in indigenous territories, this would signify an even tighter restriction on their exploitation by those located outside of territorial boundaries. Therefore, this issue affected not just the extractivist elite but also peasants, colonisers, and coca farmers seeking land titles in the midst of the implementation of agrarian reform, the scarcity of available fertile land, and the fact that most previously cultivated land had become impoverished. Even in the case of the coca farmers, whose recognised area had been increased from 12 000 hectares to 20 000 hectares, access to land would be problematic, especially when confronted with the suspension of agrarian reform at a later stage.[9]

Initially, agrarian reform was focused on the lowlands, comprising the drainage of lands and titling of several TIOCs. It was implemented mainly in the Amazon region and the fields of Santa Cruz, provoking a clash with the old elite, who reacted not only by formulating 'independent' autonomic statutes, as stressed earlier, but also by trying to organise a political coup, to be undertaken by a group of paid mercenaries. Led by the Hungarian-Bolivian Eduardo Rózca Flores, the group's mission was to assassinate Morales and the vice-president, Álvaro García Linera. The coup was foiled by Bolivian intelligence

in 2009, and the elites were gradually disassembled and politically isolated, with several leaders being dismissed or even imprisoned. At the same time, the MAS broadened its support base on the lowlands, taking in several members of the Santa Cruz Youth Union, as recorded by Reguerin et al (2010).

While seemingly paradoxical, these events are actually expressions of the same political strategy, which encompasses both the majority of allies as well as the opposition forced into the Media Luna. The isolation of the old elite has been accompanied by measures aimed at diminishing conflict, including recognising the legal security of large estates, thus providing land owners with some sense of security of tenure. The slowdown of agrarian reform, which started in Morales's second term, also fits into this framework. In sum, the government set out to weave a superficial and fragile alliance with the agri-entrepreneurs. It must be remembered that many of them are Brazilian producers who were, as Gimenez (2010) points out, strongly supported by the Lula government. Given Brazil's role as the great promoter of regional development, and its status as the largest buyer of Bolivian gas, this political manoeuvre by the Morales government helped to avoid tensions with this neighbouring country as well.

Therefore, in order to remain in power, the new governing elite sought to neutralise its political opponents by expanding the party base in the East (especially in Santa Cruz de la Sierra), and creating an environment in which the opposition adapted to the new dispensation while protecting Brazilian business interests at the same time. Initially, this process was associated with other measures that legitimised the government and its allies, and sought to establish a minimum of consensus among them, such as the idea of joint governance with social movements and the titling of TIOCs. While the latter step met the demands of indigenous communities, it was also a relatively quick means of implementing agrarian reform in that, according to Urioste, much of the space occupied by indigenous peoples was public land. But, once the various demands from its support base started to restrain the new governing elite, it reverted to the same strategies for remaining in power, to the detriment of indigenous peoples.

The titling of TIOCs and the 'alliance' with the lowland elite, ensuring land ownership in a region where a large percentage of land acquisitions were irregular, as well as the halting of agrarian reform from 2010 onwards, created a context of pressure on peasants. This pressure translated into constraints on indigenous territories, especially in the lowlands, where the most extensive TIOCs were concentrated, some comprising thousands of hectares, as mapped in the Atlas of the Indigenous and Native Territories of Bolivia, published in 2010.[10] TIPNIS comprises more than a million hectares. The TIPNIS title of ownership was issued by the government and delivered to the Subcentral in 2009, the same year in which the contract for the construction of the road was signed with OAS and BNDES, as stated in Resolution 0300/2012 of the Constitutional Court of Bolivia.

Therefore, by implementing different measures, the government managed to 'neutralise' the elite in the lowlands and ensure the support of peasants, colonisers and coca farmers, while closing off the national decision-making process at the same time. Another important factor was the construction of a discourse against indigenous communities, as

I will demonstrate in the next section, contributing to the escalation of tensions within the government's support base. For now, it is sufficient to state that, starting with TIPNIS, those tensions culminated in the fragmentation of the Pact of Unity, with CIDOB and CONMAQ deciding to withdraw from this alliance, as documented in the resolution issued by those organisations in 2013.[11] The fact that this step was taken nearly two years after the Eighth March is relevant, because it seems to reflect an attempt by those organisations to conserve the Pact and their alliance with the government. The rupture of the Pact was a last resort, following the increasing marginalisation of indigenous communities.

The reconfiguration of Bolivian politics became more apparent, therefore, after the conflict over TIPNIS, motivated by divergent interests and strategic moves made by the Morales administration. This rearrangement of political forces is reflected in Tacóo's remarks, as quoted earlier. I will now examine how the government framed the discourse around TIPNIS after the Chaparina confrontation.

The government's reaction after Chaparina

The repression of the Eighth March and the arrival of some marchers at the administrative centre of the country, with the aim of putting pressure on the president, resulted in Law 180, which reduced the status of TIPNIS by not only prohibiting the building of the road, but also any project in the park that directly affected its inhabitants. The adoption of this law was not divorced from the national context, which included pressure from those in favour of the road. Those forces, largely organised under CONISUR, provided the support that later justified the adoption of Law 222, which called for 'prior' consultation. This was followed by CIDOB's organisation of the Ninth March, in contravention of the law, and the political divisions in the Confederation. This division culminated in the formation of the 'parallel CIDOB' which, contrary to the original organisation's stance, preserved the alliance with the government.

In the process, the government discourse about indigenous communities changed from one of a formal apology for prior injustices to an attempt to convince them to accept the road and, finally, to discredit them. In the process, I would argue that the Morales administration updated the racist discourse adopted by the extractivist elite, which stereotypes and diminishes indigenous peoples as the 'other'. As noted previously, this discourse, which is found throughout Bolivian society, is most violently expressed in the East. In the government discourse, notions of 'criminality' and being an 'enemy' are added to the idea of backwardness attributed to indigenous peoples, forming an 'economy of stereotypes'. Doty (1996) uses this expression in her study of North–South dynamics, showing how it manifests itself in discursive strategies such as classification, which work to maintain and reproduce a hierarchy of social relationships. In the Bolivian case, I observe that the government has turned to discrediting and criminalising indigenous peoples as rhetorical strategies.

In *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, published in 2012, a year after the Massacre of Chaparina, the vice-president, Álvaro García, summarised the discourse adopted by the Morales administration about the incident. He stated that the building of the road would work

against the interests of the old agricultural elite. Because of this, the ascent to power of the MAS and the reforms introduced from that point forward, the opposition from Media Luna had used TIPNIS to discredit the government and co-opt indigenous leaders. Within this dynamic, CIDOB and its directors represented the old elite's struggle to retain and renew colonial structures and mechanisms. Those mechanisms saw the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that financed lowland indigenous organisation as important agents for masking the interests of other governments, particularly the US government, which were closely linked to those of the land owners. Thus CIDOB was reproducing 'mechanisms of clientelist co-optation and ideological and political subordination to European and US funding agencies, such as USAID' (Garcia 2012: 26). The 'colonial environmentalism' practiced by NGOs were underpinned by clientelist and even illegal relationships between their directors and the elite. Similarly, the occurrence of some irregularities and a gap between organisations and their support bases, which is relatively common among social movements, enabled the vice-president to discredit and criminalise their leaders in the following terms: 'A significant number of leaders of the indigenous marches of 2011 and 2012, like Vargas and Fabriciano, have been reported for the illegal sale of lumber for years, including the sale of wood from TIPNIS itself [...]'(2012: 35).

The same discourse is found in other documents, propaganda, and even statements by leaders of the MAS. These include an anonymous and undated publication entitled *Qué se esconde detrás del TIPNIS* ('What lies behind TIPNIS'), which began to circulate in 2012, aimed at discrediting the protestors and legitimising the government's response.[12] It lists a series of activities inside the park that reflects the allegedly corrupt and predatory exploitation of natural resources, and argues that the profits are concentrated in the hands of indigenous leaders and entrepreneurs, in addition to NGOs, at the expense of the Park`s inhabitants. The publication contains various documents, including photocopies of cheques and identification documents of role players, agreements between CIDOB and the political elite of Media Luna, and the minutes of a Brazilian court process. The documents are presented as 'documented evidence', and are numbered and authenticated. Hence, by claiming to present the results of a thorough investigation, *Qué se esconde detrás del TIPNIS* was clearly aimed at legitimising García's argument.

This government narrative has silenced any mention of the 'Chaparina Massacre' and the role of the state. Given its association with attempts to criminalise and discredit indigenous peoples, it reveals an economy of violence that goes beyond its physical form to what Shapiro (1997) describes as 'discursive violence'. However, unlike the obliteration of indigenous peoples observed by the author, or their relegation to museums and their identification as 'noble savages' (Earle 2007), the current official discourse accepts their presence, even though it sets out to diminish them. This constructs a narrative that denigrates indigenous groups which oppose or differ from the government, counterposing them with a positive image attributed to the state, and promoting their political marginalisation.

This serves to reinforce the long history of racist thought in Bolivian society by renewing the vocabulary in the discourse of the old elite, displayed, among others, in official documents before Morales's election. Seen in this light, depicting lowland indigenous peoples as criminals or profiteers merely replaces older notions of them as 'savages', or

people with 'no discernment'. This new discourse displays a sense of superiority, used to justify the government's domineering attitude towards indigenous communities, and has broadened the gap between them amid the conflicts of interest and power struggles in the current Bolivian political scene.

Conclusion

In this analysis, I have sought to assess the reconfiguration of political forces in Bolivia and its relevance for understanding the conflicts around TIPNIS, as well as their consequences. In this perspective, the conflict has developed not only between the new elite and its 'traditional' opposition (the old elite), but also strikes at the core of the ruling alliance, stirring up latent conflicts marked by diverging interests and identities. Once the old elite was weakened by the Morales administration, opposing demands emerged among participants in the Pact of Unity, imposing difficult constraints on the government. In order to retain political support, the government prioritised its alliance with the largest sections of its power base (the peasants, colonisers and coca farmers) to the detriment of indigenous communities. In the course of this process, 'parallel organisations' have been formed in an attempt to replace the old indigenous organisations, and assure their political isolation. The Eastern elite has been neutralised not only by impairing it but by forming a fragile alliance with its leaders. This rearrangement of political forces is reflected in the government discourse that reproduces and updates the racist vocabulary of Bolivian elites, especially those in the Media Luna.

Another important factor is the role played by Brazil during the Lula administration, which actively supported the Brazilian Santa Cruz land owners, and whose neodevelopmentalist-extractivist model was adopted to a greater or lesser extent throughout the region. The regional character of this model is emphasised not only by Gudynas and other theorists of neoextractivism, but also by those who focus exclusively on developmentalism. As regards this last point, the literature identifies the ascent of leftist governments in the region with an economic model characterised by the 'return of the state' and the combination of public and private investments aimed at promoting growth and social equity, albeit with variations in each country (Vidal 2008; Boschi and Gaitán 2009).

In the case of Bolivia, the state has clearly assumed a central role in development, as set out in various government documents, including the National Plan for Development (2006-2011) and the Political Constitution. Both documents argue that this role is essential for creating a just, prosperous and sovereign nation. However, this strategy has led to the recentralisation of the state in parallel with the mechanisms for decentralisation introduced by the new social pact, such as indigenous, municipal and departmental autonomies (Delgado 2014). Among others, it has been expressed in a series of nationalisations in different sectors, starting with hydrocarbons, although this is still not meant to detract from foreign investment. In fact, the Morales government has sought to attract foreign investment through the diversification of partners, an important strategy for boosting the national economy and sustaining the government's social transfer programmes. At the regional level, the government subscribes enthusiastically to the regional integration

mechanisms led by Brazil, among them UNASUL, which has absorbed the IIRSA project portfolio, linking it to the South American Council of Infrastructure and Planning (CO-SIPLAN) (Delgado and Cunha 2016).

This attests to Bolivia's adaptation to a project carried out at the regional level. As regards TIPNIS, the road symbolises an adherence to the extractivist camp since the start of the regional neodevelopmentalist project. It is worth noting that in 2003, plans for the road were incorporated into the Santos-Arica bi-ocean megaproject, as pointed out by Molina and Gómez (2014). On the one hand, the road directly benefits the coca farmers of Polygon 7. On the other, it is connected with the exploitation of hydrocarbons, a vital economic activity, based on obtaining income from the exploitation of natural resources and its concentration in the hands of the state, establishing what Laserna (2006) calls a 'rentier economy'. It is no coincidence that, in the same month that the Supreme Electoral Court disclosed the final results of the 'prior' consultation, Alvaro García announced the government's decision to start hydrocarbon-related activities in national parks (Corz and Lazcano 2013).

Finally, it should be noted that land has played a central role in the Chaparina affair, and continues to shape political and economic processes in the country. On the one hand, the Morales administration regards land and its transformation into commodities as a route to development and to improving Bolivia's regional status. On the other, land use determines actors' identities and their political positions, provoking or rekindling tensions and conflicts, and fuelling alliances that help the government to remain in power through physical and discursive violence. In this sense, Chaparina represents a clear case of 'internal colonialism', as defined by Rivera (1993), not only because it recalls the colonisation of the lowlands, but because it reveals a renovation of violence and the racist logic that underlies it, sustaining a new accumulation project in South America, and propelling indigenous resistance. Hence, the events around TIPNIS reflect a range of diverse but interconnected themes, transecting the local, national and regional spheres.

However, the vital role of the reconfiguration of political forces in Bolivia and the historical roots of the conflicts surveyed above suggest that any analysis should contemplate the domestic context. This, in turn, suggest that domestic dynamics remain crucial for understanding political disputes and how they condition strategies adopted by political actors. Moreover, my analysis has revealed a connection between the Bolivian political game, the idea of 'internal colonialism', and the regional expansion of an extractivist-developmentalist agenda. Therefore, the case of TIPNIS seems to confirm the relevance of the current trend among International Relations theorists to consider what appears to be local or national dynamics, thus confirming, as indigenous peoples used to tell me, that 'all facts in life are interrelated'.

Notes

1   The Media Luna comprises the departments of Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija, located in a half-moon shape in the east of the country, all of which are marked by the presence of agribusiness and the exploitation of hydrocarbons and lumber.

2   See Nueva Constitución Política del Estado [New Political Constitution of the State] Art. 30, paragraph 5; Article 304, paragraph 21; and Ley Marco de Autonomías y Descentralización Andrés Ibánez [Framework Law on Autonomies and Decentralization Andrés Ibáñez], Art. 87.

3   I follow the indigenous definition of territory as a space composed of tradition, a vision of the cosmos, and values that shape indigenous organisational structures, while land is interpreted as a 'natural space of life'. See Huanacuni 2007.

4   Although they came from the highlands, those settlers were originally called 'colonisers' and not colonists which, especially for indigenous peoples from de lowlands, evokes the idea of the former group as 'foreigners'. As a result, in 2008, the 'colonisers' changed their denomination to intercultural', as in the Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia, following other organisations' incorporation of names that would somehow reflect the decolonial discourse reproduced by the government and endorsed by theorists such as Mignolo, Dussel among others. See Delgado 2014.

5   For an extensive postcolonial analysis of the racist logic underlying Bolivian society and its historical roots, see Delgado 2014.

6   Founded in 1957, the Santa Cruz Youth Union is an armed branch of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz. Formed in 2000, Nación Camba seeks to bring about the 'full sovereignty' of the department, that is, achieve its full independence from the rest of the country. See http://nacioncamba.org/ and Reguerin et al 2010.

7   Information collected by the Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia (Cedib) from Bolivian newspapers points to conflicts that spread through Santa Cruz, including the regions of Guarayos or Chiquitanía and the area around the capital itself, all conducted out by the Landless Movement and indigenous groups against landowners. See Cedib database, Conflictos Territoriales 2006-2012.

8   According to article 29, paragraph III of the Framework Law on Autonomies, 'The Indigenous-Native-Peasant territories that transcend department limits could constitute indigenous-native-peasant autonomies inside the borders of each department, establishing Manco communities between them to preserve their administrative unity'. See also Albó and Romero 2009 on this subject.

9   Regarding the changes at the state level around the theme of coca and the fight against drug trafficking, see National Council for Combating Illicit Trafficking 2007.

10   Among the different reports on the subject, see La Razón 2010.

11   See Resolución 01, 18 de enero de 2013.

12   I obtained a copy of this publication on a CD at the Bolivian Consulate in Rio de Janeiro in July 2012. A summary is available on the internet at https://www.scribd.com/document/104213760/Que-se-esconde-detras-del-Tipnis.

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