



# Imagining a highway

Global connections in an indigenous conflict

Anne de Jonghe

# Imagining a highway

Global connections in an indigenous conflict

Master thesis  
Cultural Anthropology:  
Multiculturalism in comparative perspective  
2014, Utrecht University

Anne de Jonghe  
annedejonghe@gmail.com  
3954846

Supervisors: Katrien Klep and Yvon van der Pijl  
Photograph cover: Giuseppe Iamele  
(Mirada en la oscuridad – niña yurucaré-, comunidad 3 de Mayo)

*'In a world of becoming, however, even the ordinary, the mundane, or the intuitive gives cause for astonishment – the kind of astonishment that comes from treasuring every moment, as if, in that moment, we were encountering the world for the first time, sensing its pulse, marvelling at its beauty, and wondering how such a world is possible.'*

Tim Ingold (2011: 64)

# Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Field Maps	2
List of Abbreviations	5
1. Introduction	7
Debates on indigenous citizenship	9
Global connections in 'indigenous' conflicts	12
researchh context	14
Structure	18
2. TIPNIS: The earth will be angry	20
History of the TIPNIS region and its inhabitants	23
Resource paradise	28
Biodiversity	31
3. Cochabamba: Everything is the opposite	35
The development narrative	36
The resistance narrative	43
4. Trinidad: Courage	49
The power of law	52
Movements: the production of the Chaparina raid	58
5. Conclusion	65
6. Epilogue: The Vulnerable Anthropologist: reflections on researchh	68
Theories of being an anthropologist	70
Fieldwork	71
Writing	74
Bibliography	77
Appendix: Methods of Reflection	84

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the people that made this period of research possible. First of all I would like to thank all the people I have met in Bolivia. I want to thank Boxer, for all the inspiring conversations we had, for making me feel safe and taking me along. Thank you Roxana, for teaching me Spanish and for your friendship, hospitality and enthusiasm. I am indebted to the people from the TIPNIS park, who have welcomed me in their houses and let me participate in their struggle. I am astonished by the power and passion they have showed me for their struggle. Especially Nazareth, Adolfo, Fernando, Maria and Adolfo have been making me feel welcome and took the effort to explain me their ideas on the TIPNIS highway. And last I would like to say thank you to Oscar and Tom, whom made the last weeks of my stay in Bolivia into a better goodbye than I could have wished for.

At home I would like to thank my supervisors Katrien Klep and Yvon van der Pijl. Katrien has been very supportive in the whole process of my research and her encouragements and sharp thought have made me more enthusiastic than I could have ever been without her. Yvon helped me through the final writing of my thesis, and her fresh look and enthusiasm broadened my view. I would like to thank Atie, Henk, Merlijn, Jelle and Marijke for staying close to me, even though I was far away. My friends and family have been helpful in reading chapters and pieces every once in a while and providing me with comments. Moreover, they have given me the joy of being back home and the proximity of friends and family. A very special thanks to Ploni, for making me coffee and listening to my thoughts and all the afternoons we spend together studying. Also, I would like to thank my fellow anthropologists Simone, Nick and Sofie who have all been very inspiring to me in a completely different way. And last but not least, I would like to thank Jordy for supporting me, always remaining interested and for his intelligent remarks, for being patient while my mind was still in Bolivia.

¡Muchas gracias!

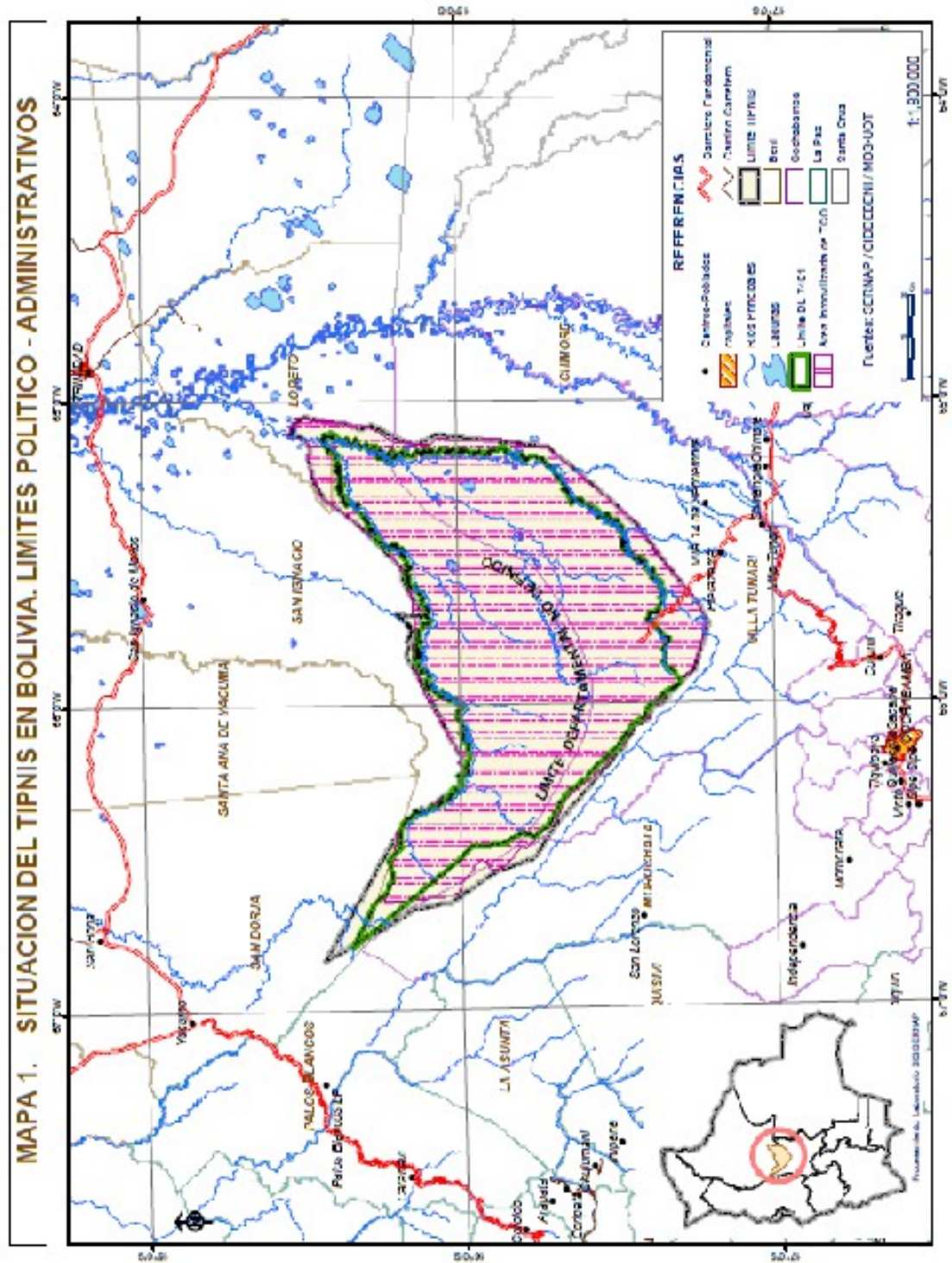
# Field Maps

## Map of Bolivia



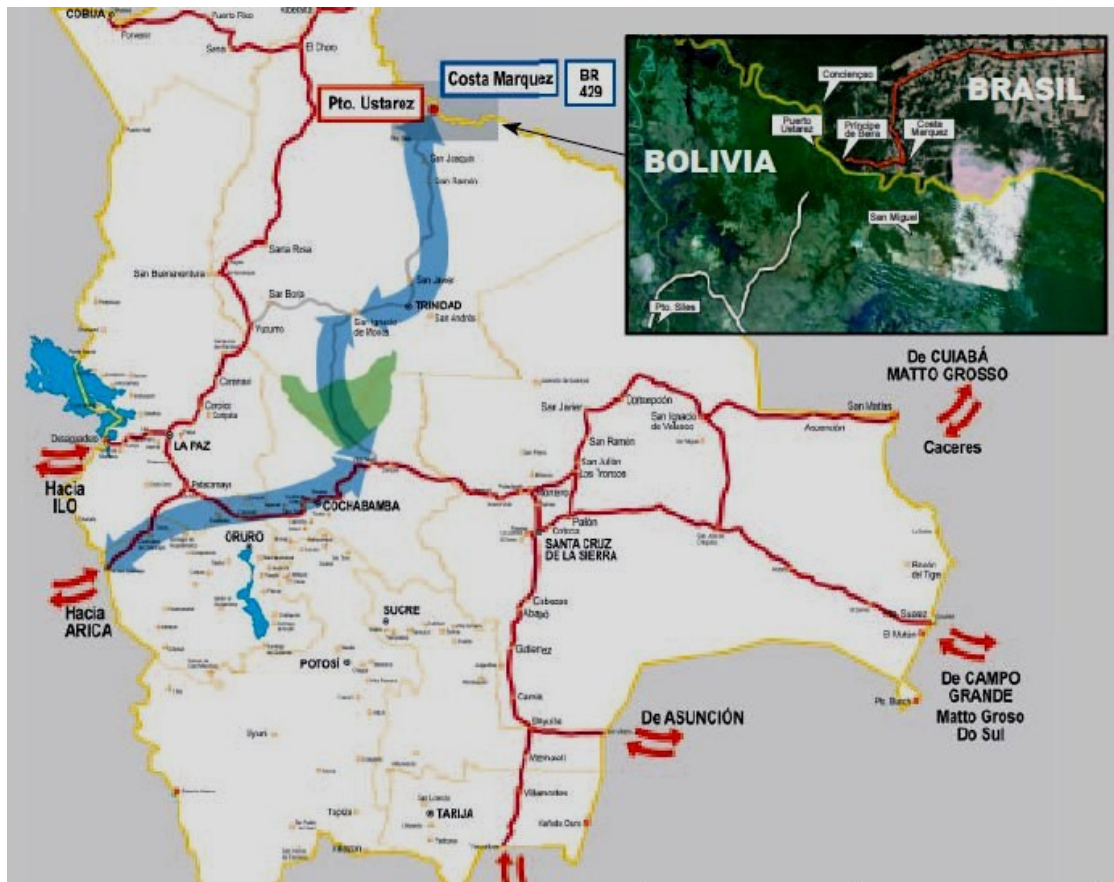
Credit: <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/bolivia.pdf>

# Map of TIPNIS



Credit: Plan de Manejo -Territorio Indígena – Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécre

## Map of Highway Connections



Credit: Cedib

## Map of the Route of the Eighth March



Credit: Pagina Siete



## List of Abbreviations

A.B.D.D.H.H.	Asociación Boliviana de Derechos Humanos (Bolivian Association for Human Rights), involved with the TIPNIS struggle.
CEDIB	Centro de Documentación y Información Bolivia (Centre of Documentation and Information Bolivia), based in Cochabamba.
CIDOB	Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia), the umbrella organization of the indigenous organizations of the lowlands.
CONAMAQ	Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu), the umbrella organization of the indigenous organizations of the highlands.
CONISUR	Consejo Indígena del Sur (Indigenous Council of the South), the indigenous organization of the TIPNIS-inhabitants living in the southern part of the territory, led by Gumersindo Pradel.
CPITCO	Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Trópico Cochabamba (Central of Indigenous Peoples of the Tropics of Cochabamba).
CPIB	Central De Pueblos Indígenas del Beni (Central of the Indigenous Peoples of Beni)
FOCOMADE	Foro Cochabambino sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (Cochabamba Forum about the Environment and Development), an independent Bolivian NGO, local organization of FOBOMADE.
FOBOMADE	Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (Bolivian Forum about the Environment and Development), an independent Bolivian NGO.

FSUTCC	Federación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Cochabamba (Single Federation of Peasant Workers of Cochabamba).
IIRSA	Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional de la Suramericana (Initiative for the Integration of Southern-American Regional Infrastructure), the prospected highway is part of this initiative.
ILO	International Labor Organization, part of the United Nations.
MAS	Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement toward Socialism), the political party led by Evo Morales
NGO	Non Governmental Organization.
TIPNIS	Territoria Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure (Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory)
TCO	Territorio Comunitario de Origen (Designated Communitarian Land), the legal title applied to indigenous territories.
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development, often blamed for bribing the TIPNIS inhabitants.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

On August 15, 2011, inhabitants of the *Territoria Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré* (TIPNIS) in Bolivia started marching from Trinidad towards La Paz to protest against the construction of a highway through their territory. The Bolivian government of Evo Morales and the MAS party decided to build this highway, funded by Brazil, which is part of a Latin-American project to develop infrastructure for trade. The road not only benefits international trade between Brazil and Chile, but also has national benefits according to the government and different social movements in their base. Trade will become easier in the Chapare, which is an important agricultural area. Also, the road is important because it opens up the TIPNIS territory: the government can get access to build schools and hospitals; farmers can penetrate further to colonize the area and oil companies might get easier access to their already contracted oil fields. However, many indigenous people from the TIPNIS revolt against this highway. They feel their autonomy over the territory and their status as an indigenous group is ignored and the environment is severely threatened by the construction of a contaminating highway with all its consequences. The march against the road found wide support from different indigenous organizations across the country. After more than a month of marching, on the 41<sup>th</sup> day away from Trinidad, there was a clash. On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> of September police arrived. *Cocaleros* had organised a counter march. The *cocaleros* live south of the TIPNIS territory and have a booming agricultural industry. They might profit when a road will be built because it gives them access to new markets as well as more land. The government sent police for the sake of safety for everyone. The police blocked the road in Chaparina to keep the peace. Keeping the peace was not what happened: the police violently intruded the camp where the marchers slept, cooked and ate. As eyewitnesses and indigenous marchers told me, men, women and children were scared away and forced to seek refuge in the woods. In all the chaos mothers lost track of their children, something which is referred to by the indigenous groups from TIPNIS often to demonstrate the brutality of the act. Many marchers were captured ferociously. They were hauled away into buses that were awaiting to take them to Rurrenabaque. At last on arrival in Rurrenabaque the people living there courageously encircled the vehicles and forced the police to free the captives. The marchers were able to continue to La Paz. The violence and the intensity of the raid in Chaparina shocked the whole

country and captured the attention of international media. An indigenous government was knocking down an indigenous protest brutally, what was going on?

Until today the repression in Chaparina remains a crucial chapter in the struggle against the highway and against the government of Evo Morales and his MAS party. The struggle against the highway is ongoing. Often the indigenous groups from TIPNIS refer to the event in Chaparina: still there is no justice, no dignity and no recognition for the hardships they have gone through. Up till now the government has not taken up responsibility and refuses to admit that anyone in the government ordered the police to start the raid. Chaparina has become a symbol for a feeling of marginalization by the indigenous people in their fight for their territory. Also, this march, known as the eighth indigenous march, was the first large-scale insurrection against Morales' government. Until this march Morales could count on a broad base, founded in many different social movements such as indigenous organisations. The struggle against the road can be reflected upon as the cracks that the Morales government is beginning to show. The raid in Chaparina urged people in many different cities to take to the streets to express their anger towards the governments violent measures. Morales' popularity dropped dramatically.

How could it happen that an indigenous government was up against its own indigenous citizens? This thesis will explain what the TIPNIS controversy is about and which stories and imaginaries are connected to it. Entering the field, my purpose was to unravel the different indigenous claims and to see how different stories of being indigenous and citizenship are part of the TIPNIS struggle. However, while conducting fieldwork I realized that trying to understand what the controversy is about through the lens of indigeneity and citizenship would give me a limited understanding of what is going on. People were telling me about global oil and drug markets, trade between Brazil and China, the proliferation of highland colonizers in the lowland indigenous territories, the dependence of the state on extractivism and their century-long experience of marginalization. TIPNIS is not only a park where a group of indigenous people is fighting for autonomy over their territory against a government that claims to be indigenous. The highway has enlarged the possible meanings that can be attached to the TIPNIS. The controversy is highly contentious and many stakeholders are involved, e.g. the Brazilian state and economy, the global capitalist market, indigenous lowland communities, indigenous highland communities, the current revolutionary government, social movements and international environmental organisations. This controversy about the

highway lays bare the tensions within the Bolivian nation-state. The controversy is about much more than a highway. It is about what it means to develop, how to get beyond colonial relations, how to facilitate cultural difference in one nation-state and how to protect the environment. The highway has become a decisive theme that puts many relations within Bolivia and Latin- America on edge.

Many different issues have become entangled in the controversy over the TIPNIS highway. This is a messy entanglement, for the many meanings attached to the highway are not fixed, they are constantly re-imagined. The TIPNIS highway does not represent '*a network of connected points, but a meshwork of intervowen lines*' (Ingold 2011: 63). Everything there is has a trajectory of becoming, and along this trajectory different lines meet, entwine and separate again (cf. Ingold 2011). I have come to perceive the TIPNIS highway as such a meshwork, where all these different lines of life get tangled up. Imagining the TIPNIS highway as a meshwork enables one to get an idea of the interdependence and the messiness of the different meanings attached to the highway and the TIPNIS. I argue that we should not forget the crucial role of these awkward connections. Questions about this conflict are not only about how different narratives on indigenous citizenship are articulated. To understand where these narratives originated we have to find a way to examine the connections made and unmade in this controversy.

### **Debates on indigenous citizenship**

Anthropologists of Latin-America have written extensively about indigenous struggles in the last twenty-five years (e.g. Brysk 2000; Canessa 2007; Albro 2006; Rasch 2008). Indigenous revolts against powerful leaders and institutions have been a popular theme of debate. The academic discourse on being indigenous has been greatly influential and has had its consequences on international policy directed towards being indigenous and the articulation of being indigenous within the indigenous movements (García 2005). Kuper (2003) sparked the debate on indigeneity by arguing that writing about being indigenous is essentialist. Being indigenous in the current indigenous movement is often a euphemism for 'primitive'. Kuper (2003:395) compares the ideas of being indigenous to the Nazi's blood and soil argument: the ones that have lived somewhere longest are prioritized over 'immigrants'. However, Kuper does not take account of other leading criteria in defining indigenous peoples (Kenrick and Lewis 2004:5). Besides priority in time, with respect to the occupation of land and (self-)identification, the relation to a history of dispossession and marginalization is

crucial in defining indigenous peoples. Being indigenous is not the same as being primitive, especially not in Bolivia where urban citizens are increasingly identifying themselves as indigenous (cf. Canessa 2007).

The meaning of being indigenous changes over time and place (Canessa 2007). Bolivia is a good example of existing differences between indigenous claims. The relation of the *cocaleros* with indigeneity demonstrates the ambiguity of Morales' indigenous claim. The *cocaleros* are a group of coca leaf farmers living south of the TIPNIS. Evo Morales' road to presidency begins in the *cocalero* movement. Being indigenous has been an important feature in this movement. According to Grisaffi (2010), the *cocaleros* promote a 'light' version of being indigenous: they use an indigenous claim to legitimize coca (Grisaffi 2010). However, in relation to the TIPNIS conflict they consider themselves less indigenous than the people from the Amazonian lowlands, and their indigenous identity is subordinate to their farmer identity. Thus being indigenous is used strategically (cf. Sylvain 2005): when it can function as a legitimization of one's crop, in this case. In other situations it is important not to be too indigenous: when compared to small communities in a national park opposing against a road through the legitimization of being indigenous, the *cocaleros* are quick to label themselves as less indigenous. The lowlanders indigenous identity is considered primitive. Being indigenous in Bolivia has become one of the key political projects of the current government.

International circumstances have pushed the rise of indigenous movements in Latin-America and Bolivia. The 'Indian question' has been stated increasingly: '*should indigenous citizens have all the same rights and obligations as the other citizens, or should they also be granted special rights as the descendants of the original peoples of the Americas? And if so, what special rights?*' (Postero and Zamosc 2004: 5). From the 1900s onwards an increasing number of international resolutions has been passed in order to empower indigenous groups. These laws originated in the debate sparked by Kymlicka (1995). Kymlicka (ibid.) develops an idea of how different groups can be equally recognized in a liberal democracy by acknowledging difference. A multiiform nation-state should not only implement individual rights to protect individuals, but should also have collective rights to give specific rights to specific groups. This enables a universalistic, as well as a differentiated politics (Taylor 1994). Differentiated politics is the answer to the multicultural question: what to do with cultural difference in a nation-state? The weakness of Kymlicka's theory is that it presupposes a liberalist way of thinking. Indigenous rights are integrated in a liberal democracy that has already been defined (Sieder

2007). Hence, only a limited perception of being indigenous is recognized (cf. Hale 2004; Sieder 2007; Dagnino 2003).

In 1990, the International Labour Organisation established convention 169, which has been an important lead in defining indigenous law in Bolivia. This convention promoted the autonomy of indigenous groups and cultural preservation. International attention added to the 'political associational space' for indigenous groups (Yashar 2005). In Bolivia the ILO convention induced the first indigenous march organized by TIPNIS inhabitants. After this march Bolivia officially ratified the 169 Convention and recognized TIPNIS and other territories as indigenous territory. The Popular Participation Law of 1994 has relied heavily on Convention 169 in defining indigenous peoples. As Postero (2007) shows, in Bolivia the 1990s were marked by neoliberal reforms, which included increasing recognition of indigenous rights. The space created by neoliberal reforms was used by indigenous groups to contest democracy (cf. Postero 2007; Rasch 2008). Before the 1990s nation-building projects were based on an ideology of *mestizaje*: the ideal group of citizens was a homogenous group of citizens, descending from Spanish colonizers. In order to be a citizen, one should assimilate with the *mestizaje* identity (cf. Chaves and Zambrano 2006). Different scholars argue that through the increasing recognition of indigenous rights, the *mestizaje* ideology was slowly replaced by an ideology of difference (e.g. Gros 2000; García 2005): '*Cultural difference is no longer a criterion for exclusion, but one of inclusion in a multicultural political community*' (García 2005: 165). This is how the indigenous project could become a political project for social change (cf. Canessa 2007).

Though different authors argue that the politics of difference now is dominant in the definition of citizens in Latin-America (e.g. García 2005; Canessa 2006), being indigenous did become a criterion for inclusion in a limited way. Inclusion always means exclusion as well (Wimmer 2002). The Bolivian government recognizes a certain indigenous group and this is not the indigenous identity all groups agree upon. The state-sponsored ideal indigenous citizen is different from the self-ascribed indigenous identity of the TIPNIS opposition. These multiple ways of being indigenous and how these are recognized produce friction (cf. Canessa 2007). Hence, the debate on the meaning of indigenous citizenship is complicated by the Bolivian situation, where an indigenous leader experiences revolt from indigenous groups. There is a clear gap between different indigenous claims. The question is how these indigenous claims have come to be so different. These indigenous imageries hide different connections to other stories.

## Global connections in 'indigenous' conflicts

The debate on indigenous citizenship does not offer sufficient analytical tools to understand the influence of global drug markets, contracts with oil companies, the protection of Nature, the Brazilian economy etcetera. It is necessary to value the global connections to come to a deeper analysis of the TIPNIS controversy. At the heart of trying to understand the messy web of meanings attached to the TIPNIS conflict from a different perspective is Anna Tsing's analytical framework introduced in her book *'Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection'* (2005). In her book, Tsing aims to develop a different way to study and understand global connections. I imagine the highway as a clear cut asphalted piece of landscape in a forest. However, when one starts to think about its possible consequences and all the different meanings that can be attached to it, it becomes messy. The seemingly clear-cut asphalted piece of land turns into a chaotic gathering of lives and stories.

Globalization is the recurrent buzz word that marks our era. In the academic world, the media, corporations and social movements alike, the global imagery appears to be seductive (Appadurai 2000; Tsing 2000). It calls attention to the increasing interconnections, where time goes faster and space becomes more dense. The world is imagined as one. We are hauled into this global flow together, the North and the South, the city as well as the country, the poor and the rich. *'Like modernization theory, the global-future program has swept together scholars and public thinkers to imagine a new world in the making'* (Tsing 2000: 328). But what does this global imaginary reflect? Whereas the universality of this world in the making and its power to influence the remotest corners is often taken as a given, I argue that we have to find ways to understand the world in a more fragmentary manner (cf. Tsing 2005; Ingold 2011). The global can mean something very specific. Global connections lead to awkward encounters, which produce friction (Tsing 2005: 3).

Thinking about the global and the local is obviously connected to a certain idea of place. As Tsing asks: *'where would one locate the global in order to study it?'* (Tsing 2005: 3). The global might be situated worldwide, while the local could, for example, be situated in a small village. But is this geographical understanding correct? Traditional thinking about areas *'...all tend to see "areas" as relatively immobile aggregates of traits'* (Appadurai 2000: 8). Areas are not forever defined, they are imagined in their boundaries. Spaces are made through interactions, they are defined through interactions, which makes them complex, unboundable and ever-changing (Massey 2004: 1). The global, the regional, the national and the local are all different scales to classify our world. They are contrasted with each other, but relations between and



within them are fluid and unpredictable (Forrest 2011). As humans we live along places, we encounter each other on different scales. Ingold (2011) proposes an understanding of life not within spaces but along paths. *'Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot.'* (Ingold 2011: 148). I imagine the TIPNIS controversy as such a knot, where different lifelines come together, where different projects of scale-making encounter.

Traditionally anthropologists have engaged in an holistic approach, where fieldwork was done to reveal patterns in a cultural system (Tsing 2005; Hannerz 2003). However, I start out from another viewpoint. I imagine the world as fragmentary, meshworked and awkwardly connected (c.f. Nordstrom 2007; Ingold 2011; Tsing 2000). To understand the world in its connections is pivotal, but these connections are not pointing in one direction. The highway forms an important marker in changing relations. The plan to construct a highway opened up the TIPNIS territory as a frontier. A frontier is a place of which the meaning is not yet defined. A place that has different dreams and aspirations attached to it. A place of 'wildness'. A place where, depending on the construction of a highway, some may reap its rewards whereas others will see their dreams turn into nightmares (cf. Tsing 2005). While pursuing different goals, collaborations between different stakeholders are formed. I speak of collaborations instead of co-operations for neither the goal pursued by different parties nor the power relations among groups are the same. These collaborations again produce friction, since the meaning people give to the world and the aspirations they have are not the same. Through collaborations the TIPNIS controversy has created new meanings and encounters. It is the highway that forms the trigger for these encounters.

Whereas I argue that it is impossible to understand the TIPNIS controversy without understanding its fragmented connections, I do not aim to leave the indigenous citizenship debate behind entirely. The question how people consider themselves part of democracy and how they contest this same democracy is of utter importance. These debates are exactly how people give meaning to the controversy and articulate their point of view. Too often the TIPNIS conflict is only understood as if two narratives are opposing each other. On the one hand there is the development narrative of the government and the grassroots organizations supporting the government: economic development for the whole country is the most important legitimation for the highway. On the other hand there is the resistance narrative which

disposes of the authoritarianism of the current government and fights to protect the autonomy of indigenous groups. These narratives are important lines of the knot the TIPNIS controversy is, but following these is not sufficient to understand the contentious meaning of the controversy.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the disputed meaning of the highway through the TIPNIS. I will explore how the concepts explained above may be helpful in examining the debate about indigenous citizenship. In doing so I can not only offer a deeper understanding of the contentiousness of the TIPNIS controversy, but also a means to look at how an apparently concrete project such as the construction of a highway reveals many frictions in our fragmented world. I will try to unravel the knot the TIPNIS controversy represents and examine how people articulate the frontier, their partaking in democracy, the TIPNIS territory and their indigenous identity.

### **research context**

The understanding of our world as fragmentary, full of awkward encounters and connections induces questions about fieldwork. The traditional holistic approach to get an understanding of one unified system is unhelpful when trying to understand global connections. The complexity of the controversy and all its connections urged me to do multi-sited ethnography. Unravelling the meshwork, meant I had to follow many lines and stories and the linkages between them. I did not get a comprehensive understanding of one group of people living in a certain cultural system, but tried to understand bits and pieces of many different stories. This is what has been called multi-sited ethnography by Hannerz (2003) and Marcus (1995) or what Tsing calls patchwork ethnography: '*The essence of multi-sited ethnography is to follow people, connections, associations and relationships across space*' (Falzon 2009: 1-2). It differs from the traditional understanding of multi-sited ethnography where 'multi-sited' only refers to different sites. The goal of the kind of ethnography I envision is not to study a field or fields with clear boundaries, suitable for generalizations and comparison, but to find linkages and awkward encounters between fields (cf. Hannerz 2003; Tsing 2000).

I conducted fieldwork for three and a half months in different places in Bolivia. My choice to conduct fieldwork in Bolivia was motivated by the current political situation in which an indigenous government is entangled in a conflict with indigenous peoples. The locations I

visited to study the controversy were interesting because in every place people had different relations to the highway. Cochabamba, the capital of the Cochabamba department, is where the southern part of the highway might be built. Here many social organisations concerned with protecting the environment and supporting indigenous groups in their fight over territory are situated as well as the head offices of different federations and other movements supporting the government. I spent some time in Villa Tunari, the main centre of the Chapare province which borders the TIPNIS, and spoke with different people working in the village. I was also in Trinidad for about a month. In Trinidad there lives a group of about fifty people coming from the TIPNIS territory. They articulate their opposition from here and have strong bonds with departmental employees and the press. I undertook a trip with the people from Trinidad to different villages where the eighth march had passed and had the chance to meet people from other indigenous organisations and municipalities.

In the field I was not searching for a truth (though sometimes I did wonder which stories were more true than others); my aim was to study how people *articulated* their standpoint in the controversy and which narratives about their lives they connected to it. I wanted to know how people talked about the controversy and which ideas and interests lay behind their narratives. To get a grip on the narratives I had three questions in mind: how do people understand the highway? How do people understand the TIPNIS territory and how do they relate to the government? Through these questions I did not aim to find the exact history of events, but how certain events shaped the way people give meaning to the current situation and how a highway through an indigenous territory could have multiple meanings.

I conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with people from numerous organisations<sup>1</sup>. These interviews were mostly with people used to speaking to press interviewers and as a result the information I received was often exactly in line with public statements. In this sense, informal chats were much more valuable to me to understand the nuanced details of what was going on. Often, while I was chatting with people I would explain about the prospective construction of the highway and the possible consequences. Small talk with people on the street, market vendors, or hanging out while no official meetings were planned, taught me the most. I spent some time in the archive of CEDIB in Cochabamba analysing newspapers and laws and decrees concerning the TIPNIS. This gave me an idea of how the controversy was framed for the

---

1 CPITCO, FSTUCC, SomosSur, Las Seis Federaciones del Tropicó, Tinku, FOBOMADE, CPIB, CIDOB, Subcentral TIPNIS and Subcentral Sécure, Territorios en Resistencia and FOCOMADE. For the meaning of these abbreviations I would like to refer to the List of Abbreviations (p. )

Bolivian public. I attended different meetings where I did not only pay attention to the content of what was said, but also how meetings were held and how people spoke with each other. I attended two meetings in Cochabamba where different organisations met to organise a commemoration of the Chaparina raid. I attended many meetings in Trinidad where the leaders of the TIPNIS opposition, delegates of the Beni department and community leaders discussed different issues at hand. With them I also went on a trip to hold a Chaparina commemoration. We spent some days in busses, camped on a farm, waved the flags of resistance, sang and listened to speeches. After this trip I partook in a blocking of the Trinidad streets with TIPNIS opposition people: this gave me the chance to see how direct action against the government's measures is dealt with.

I started off my researchh slowly. In advance I deliberately choose not to align myself with an organisation. Though I felt uncertain in the field about this strategy, reflecting back it did enable me to do researchh in very different situations and I was relatively independent. I was able to talk to conflicting parties and could move in between them quite easily. Another reason for a slow start was my Spanish. Though I took a few lessons in the Netherlands it was nowhere near enough to grasp the complicated stories of the TIPNIS controversy. My lessons in Bolivia greatly contributed to my understanding of Spanish and over time it got better. Also, communication was different and it took me a while to get used to it. People often talk a long time, walking around the situation they want to describe. Answers are usually not given directly, but first elaborate stories are told. Also questions are not posed in the way I am used to asking them. These communication differences were barriers on the one hand, on the other they enabled me to be very alert to how people spoke about the controversy.

In Cochabamba I got in contact with different people of social organisations. I met Aarón<sup>2</sup>, who worked for Tinku, an organisation promoting social communitarianism through workshops and activities, on the main square. Aarón is an energetic activist always talking about the history and future of Bolivia. He brought me into contact with others. I spoke with people from different federations, the first one occupied with the surroundings of Cochabamba<sup>3</sup>, the other being the Six Federations of the Tropics<sup>4</sup>, which is a powerful federation active near TIPNIS. I spoke with the president of CPITCO<sup>5</sup>, the indigenous organisation in the Chapare. I went to

---

2 Most researchh-participants have been anonymised, except for public spokespersons.

3 Federación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Cochabamba – Single Federation of Peasant Workers of Cochabamba

4 Las Seis Federaciones del Trópico – The Six Federations of the Tropics

5 Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Trópico Cochamamba – Central of the Indigenous Peoples of the Tropics of

parties for *pachamama* organised by Tinku. I spoke with Carlos, a social scientist who is part of the *territorias en resistencia* network. He advised me to talk with the president of Focomade<sup>6</sup>. Their president brought me into contact with Bolívar. Bolívar became a friend and important contact, I learned a lot from him and he opened many doors for me. He is a retired engineer who spends all his time and energy with the TIPNIS opposition. He took me to meetings with different activists and advised me to speak with other people of other activist organisation in Cochabamba. It was also Bolívar who urged me to go to Trinidad and provided me with the contacts to gain enough trust to be welcome in the TIPNIS opposition community. In Trinidad I spent a lot of time in the Subcentrales, which were two communities where the people coming from TIPNIS lived. Adolfo Chavez, the president of CIDOB<sup>7</sup>, the overarching indigenous organisation of the lowlands, stayed there at that time. Adolfo was always making jokes and often had a mischievous smile on his face, but when meetings started or when a conversation turned to the subject of TIPNIS or the government he would change into a very serious, hard-working leader. Also the presidents of the different Subcentrales<sup>8</sup> lived there, Fernando Vargas and Emilio Noza, as did different community leaders, their wives and children. I often hung out in Fernando's office while he would tell me with passion about his reflections on *la lucha* (the battle). Another important person in Trinidad was Nazareth Flores: I got her phone number in Cochabamba and she introduced me in the Subcentrales. She is the president of CPIB<sup>9</sup> and an incredibly energetic woman. The Subcentrales were of great importance for my research. They were the home of the TIPNIS opposition and at that moment, all their activities revolved around there. I went there every day, hanging out. It was their home, office, place to meet. All contacts met there, press, departmental deputies, the human rights commission, friends, wives, doctors. Here I got a grasp of the daily life of activism. In Villa Tunari people were busier, less eager to talk with an anthropologist from the Netherlands. However, my presence in Villa Tunari made me sensitive to the other side of the story. I was able to observe daily life there, to have small talk with people present there and to find out that their reality is entirely different.

I did multi-sited fieldwork (cf. Hannerz 2003; Marcus 1995) in the sense that I studied in

---

Cochabamba

6 Foro Cochabambino sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo – Cochabamba Forum about the Environment and Development

7 Confederación de los Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia – Confederation of the Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia

8 The inhabitants of the TIPNIS park are organized in three different organisations, of which two are opposing to the highway: Subcentral TIPNIS and Subcentral Sécuré.

9 Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Beni – Central of the Indigenous Peoples of Beni

different places and followed different perspectives. Ingold (2011) inspired me with his understanding of the world: we are in the world and have ever changing relations with this world, and only through being alive in the world can we make sense of it. The meshwork of the TIPNIS controversy and my understanding of it was also about me as an anthropologist. Before going on fieldwork and during my time in Bolivia I asked myself many questions on what it means to be an anthropologist, what it means to be the instrument of study, to be vulnerable, to be involved or not. Humanistic academic skills provided me with methods to not only study the TIPNIS controversy and how people made sense of it, but also how I made sense of my fieldwork and what were the issues of me as an anthropologist. I systematically set down three times a week to reflect on my fieldwork experience and used different methods to get to the core of what was going on. This material I will use to write an epilogue on the line of the anthropologist in the TIPNIS meshwork, where I will also elaborate on the humanistic methods used.

## **Structure**

The chapters in this thesis are divided along the places where I have conducted fieldwork. The TIPNIS controversy, as well as this thesis, is like a meshwork (Ingold 2011). Different lines need to be followed. By following some of these lines, I will open the door to a world in which the TIPNIS controversy is the protagonist. Some spaces will be left open, some lines will not be followed. In chapter one I will give a tour through the TIPNIS territory. The viewpoint in this chapter will be the landscape TIPNIS as an actor and the stories it can tell us. TIPNIS is considered a frontier with many different meanings attached to it. In this chapter it will become apparent that the making of TIPNIS as a bounded territory is contentious. Also, the multifold meanings of the TIPNIS will reveal the complexity of the controversy. In chapter two I will introduce the different narratives which are present in Cochabamba.. These narratives will prove polemic, as these stories tell almost opposite versions of the truth. The one narrative is the development narrative, in which the highway is road towards development. The second narrative is the resistance narrative; in this narrative TIPNIS is like paradise and the current government is framed as a manipulator and predator. Chapter three will be about Trinidad, where I met the people most affected by the construction of the highway: the indigenous people from the TIPNIS. I will use the case of the people in Trinidad to explain why it is insufficient to analyze the opposition against the road as a conflict where two parties stand opposite of each other. In this chapter I aim to demonstrate the need to move beyond

indigenous citizenship. I will use the analytical framework proposed by Anna Tsing (2005) to do so. Chapter four will be a concluding chapter in which I will elaborate on the value of the argument made. I will end with an epilogue in which I will reflect on my role as an anthropologist. There, I question the connection an anthropologist makes in the field and the difficulties and the joys that are part of this.

## Chapter 2

### TIPNIS – The earth will be angry

*Cuando el agua faltará*

*When water is lacking*

*Y el petróleo ya no habrá*

*And there will be no more oil*

*Cuando el aire apestará*

*When the air will smell bad*

*La tierra se enojará*

*The earth will be angry*

*Danza de la lluvia*

*Dance of the rain*

*Música verde*

*Green music*

Poem from the book: *Reflejos del Isiboro Sécure en la Amazonía Boliviana*

by Giuseppe Iamele (2012)

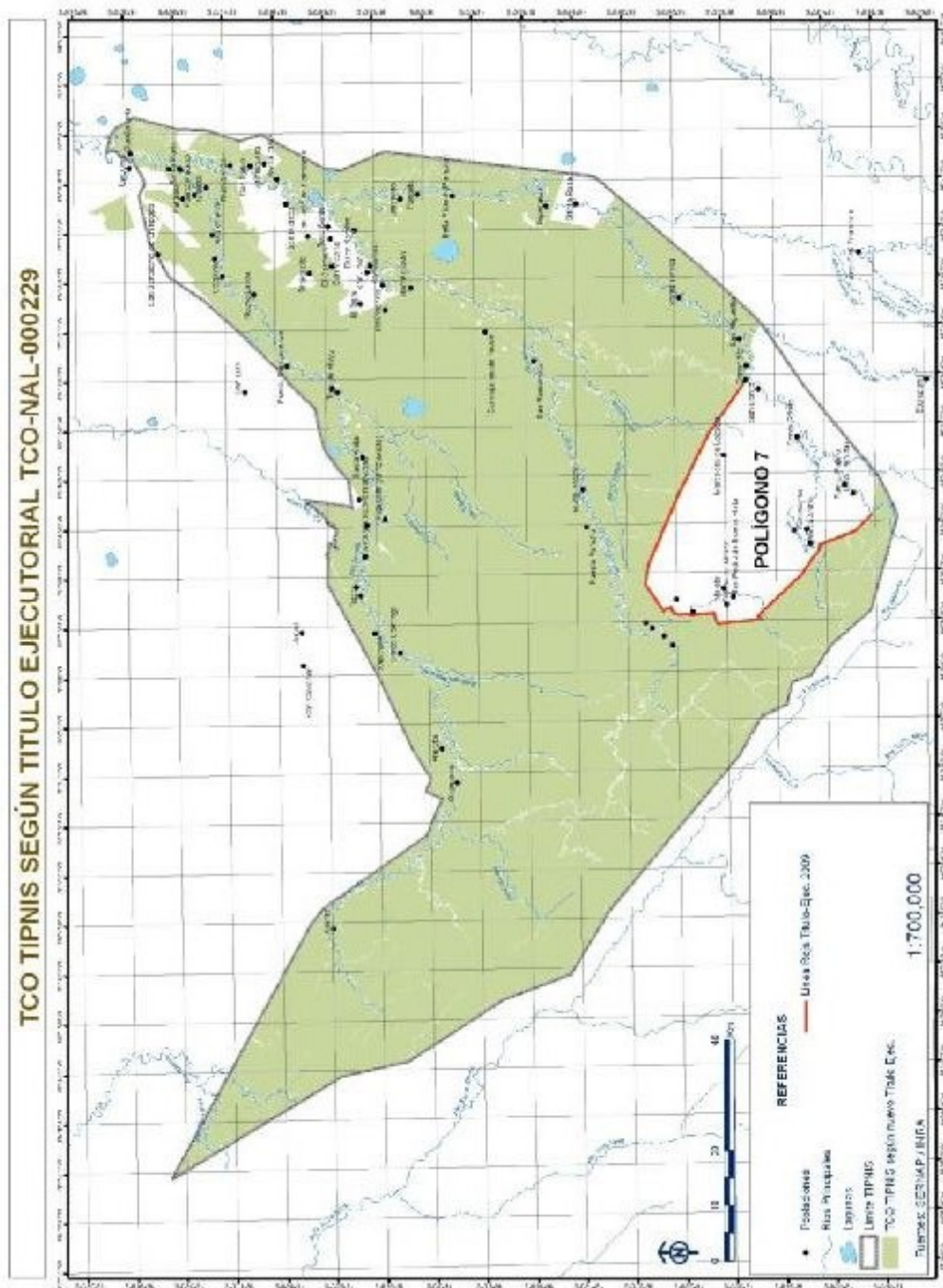
The focus of this chapter is the landscape of TIPNIS, its inhabitants and its resources. Opposing narratives are articulated by the people concerned with the TIPNIS controversy: the development narrative which designates the highway as a means towards development for the whole country and the resistance narrative which aims to protect the environment and respect the autonomy of the inhabitants of the park. However, the question I will answer in this chapter is where these narratives meet. The answer appears evident: the stories all revolve around the TIPNIS landscape. Anthropologists often write about indigenous struggles from the perspectives of indigenous citizenship and the way people articulate and contest their citizenship (e.g. Canessa 2012; Rasch 2008). However, to get a grasp of the interdependence of people involved and to move beyond polemic discourses, it is necessary to start by approaching the TIPNIS landscape as a lively actor (cf. Tsing 2005). In the past forty years TIPNIS has been subject to increasing connections to the Bolivian nation-state, Latin America and the world. The highway marks a new stage in these increasing connectivities. The meanings of the landscape of TIPNIS have changed and are now changing more drastically than ever. To write about these changing connectivities means to search for forms to imagine the landscape as an actor.

Different authors have imagined space in a globalizing world. Global connections have been imagined as '*space growing smaller and times more instantaneous*'. Whereas Harvey (1989)



understands globalization as compression, Tsing (2005) argues for an inspiring opposite: *'Space is hugely enlarged; far from miniature and easy it becomes expansive, labored, and wild, spreading muddy, malarial frontiers.'* (Tsing 2005: 75). Instead of a world growing smaller, increasing connections mean increasing meanings are attached to places. Whereas fifty years ago TIPNIS was only present in the dreams and nightmares of a few, now people from all over the globe have their aspirations for the place. From a distant indigenous territory it has become wanted for its fertile agricultural grounds, natural beauty and biodiversity, ability to connect the northern part of Bolivia to the south, as a mine for resources, etcetera. It has become a frontier: a place where wild dreams of the future seem within a hair's breadth. Frontiers have been imagined as the transitional zone where resource-based economic growth proliferates (Barney 2009). The pitfall in understanding frontiers is the linear development the existence of a frontier implies: capitalism would usurp land and impose its powerful homogenizing market ideology on the land (Harvey 2005). However, opening up territory for resource extraction proves messy. In the frontier there is an encounter between different livelihoods, dreams and ideas of what life is (cf. Tsing 2005). They are meeting places in which its not yet defined meaning is negotiated. TIPNIS has become such an 'empty' place with endless opportunities which anyone can claim.

Obviously TIPNIS is not empty: its meanings already are plentiful. In this chapter I will give a tour through TIPNIS and its meaning as an actor. TIPNIS' value as a place to dream for will become clear, as will the fragmentation and fluidity of frontier culture. I will introduce the paragraphs with different maps to illustrate the different meanings TIPNIS has. First I will give a background on its near inhabitants and the dream of TIPNIS as a refuge (cf. Scott 2009). Second I will demonstrate its value as a resource paradise for capitalist markets and third I will explain its value as an example for the preservation of Nature.



Map 1.1 TIPNIS and Poligono Siete. Poligono Siete is officially not part of the indigenous territory, its borders are highly contested.

Credit: Sernap.

## History of the TIPNIS region and its inhabitants

The inhabitants of the TIPNIS and its surroundings have had very different dreams about their future in this landscape for decades. The indigenous inhabitants of the TIPNIS speak of a holy place, where one can live autonomously, without too much state interference. Farmers in Villa Tunari on the other hand see the land as a means towards trade and agricultural possibilities. The people living around and in TIPNIS share a dynamic history. The TIPNIS is closely linked with an area bordering the south of TIPNIS: the Chapare. The Chapare is an important agricultural area, where a lot of coca is grown. Activities in the Chapare constantly put pressure on the soil in the national park. While the *cocaleros* are in favour of the road, indigenous inhabitants of the TIPNIS are not. The TIPNIS opposition often stress that they do not want to grant the state the right to decide over their territory. TIPNIS is their big house (*casa grande*). In TIPNIS, they have their livelihoods, in tune with nature, which they tirelessly emphasize in every meeting. In the city of Trinidad, a central city for the opposition group, people from TIPNIS have a hard time finding their living. City life contrasts with their lives in TIPNIS. Whenever I asked them what is so different living in the city they stress how weird it is to have to pay for everything, while they are used to being able to get most things from their environment. Phillip told me: *'We are here to protect our lives, our lives there [in TIPNIS] are different than our lives here [in Trinidad]. At home we are free. We can fish. We do not buy things, we can find them around us.'* Phillip is the father of a community leader from one of the TIPNIS communities, he stayed at the Subcentral where I was always hanging out. I would often find him there sitting in a chair next to his friend. Most of the time we sat together was spent in silence, but sometimes we chatted about the differences between their home and mine. On the other side of the TIPNIS there is a different place: Villa Tunari, the village which seats the most important municipality of the Chapare region bordering TIPNIS. There is a lot of hustle and bustle going around there. It is the capital of the coca-growing district. From Villa Tunari up until the borders (and even crossing the borders) of the TIPNIS there are coca-fields. People do business here, and the many shops, agricultural fields, infrastructure projects and trade bring people from all over Bolivia to the town because money can be made. At the beginning of the highway there are many stalls, and while I was hanging around there I chatted with some of the women working there. They reflect on the highway as a good thing; they cannot even imagine it not being something good: *'It will give me more business, and not just for me, for all the people working here'* says Elena for example. She is a woman owning a small stall selling drinks and fried fish. Livelihoods look entirely different here and people are

more concerned with earning money for a living: Maria, a girl my age with a young son, moved to a village in the Chapare from Santa Cruz to find work. I met Maria on a hot morning in Elenas stall while she was waiting for a car to take her and her son to her village. She does not like living in the Chapare, as it is too hot and the food is bad; but she can make a living so she manages. The highway is an opportunity for her to earn money.

The different livelihoods play a pivotal role in the controversy surrounding the construction of the highway. People obviously want entirely different things from the TIPNIS landscape and have different connections to the soil. However, not always have the lives of these people been so closely intertwined. Although migration from the highlands to the Chapare started in the 1970s, it was not until the 1980s that the Chapare's possibilities became incredibly attractive. As a consequence of Structural Adjustment Programmes the mines in the highlands were closed. Ex-miners found opportunities in the Chapare with its fertile agricultural grounds. Bananas, yucca, citrus fruits and especially coca were cultivated (Flores and Blanes 1984). There was no regulation and the state was practically absent, it was a free for all. Land was appropriated as agricultural land. Coca-growing proved to be a lucrative business, as its returns are higher than any other crop. Also, it is the plant needed to produce cocaine, which made the crop extremely lucrative. Since the area was not densely populated, the existence of the people already living there could largely part be ignored.

The history of the people already living there dates back further: the region has long been a place of refuge. Jaime Galazer, an economist doing his PHD on TIPNIS, explained to me the meaning of TIPNIS as a refuge. When the colonial state was built, indigenous groups escaped from the Spanish and *criollo* administrations to this faraway, inaccessible landscape to live peacefully and keep the state at arms length. From 1767 onwards the administration forced indigenous peoples into labour on big haciendas (Albó 2012). Lowland indigenous groups fled further into the forest, where they could live autonomously respectful of the lives of their ancestors. They went to TIPNIS in search of *loma santa*: the ideal paradise. *Loma Santa* is where you can live, work and find your food (Costas Monje and Virginia Ortíz Echazú 2010). TIPNIS symbolizes this *loma santa* where one can live freely. The inhabitants claim to live largely independent of the nation-state and capitalist markets, as is demonstrated by the way Philipo and others talk about their home. When in the 1980s highlanders started to colonize the nearby region more expansively, tensions arose and the struggle to defend the *loma santa* became urgent.

From the end of the 1980s onwards the dynamics between the *cocaleros* and the indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS have been in interplay. The *cocaleros* have been and are constantly trying to expand their access to land for agriculture. In 1990 the indigenous inhabitants marched to La Paz to get recognition for their territory. The Territoria Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré (TIPNIS) was then granted indigenous status, but the struggle to defend the territory did not cease. The *cocaleros* have continually contested the borders and advanced their coca fields, which eventually led to a compromise in relation to the TIPNIS borders. A small part of the national park of TIPNIS is not part of the designated indigenous territory: Poligono 7 (Rojas Lizarazu 2011). In this region *cocaleros* own land for agriculture and are officially free to organise the land according to their *sindicatos*<sup>10</sup>. The indigenous communities living here have been strongly influenced by the (political) economy of the *cocaleros*. To cultivate land, they have to align with the *sindicatos* of the *cocaleros*, which puts them in a marginalized position. The hunger for more land to cultivate has never stopped and pressure on the indigenous territory is ever continuing. The borders of the indigenous territory do not seem to be respected by the *cocaleros*, as is proved by stories of people in Villa Tunari that go on trips inside the indigenous territory to look at coca fields and even visit communities there. A road will make this process of colonisation easier.

Frontiers are imagined sites where differences meet (cf. Forrest 2011). *Cocaleros* and indigenous inhabitants represent different ways of living in the territory. A highway will open up the territory further and the remoteness which has been a prerequisite for its function as refuge will be lost. From a refuge the whole territory will become a frontier. Or, as a matter of fact, TIPNIS already is a frontier: the possibility of a highway has opened up space for new aspirations for the landscape. Increased access to the territory means possible enclosure by states as well as markets (cf. Scott 2009, De Angelis 2002). The state encloses its periphery in its administrative system. Another imaginary of enclosure is the proliferation of capitalism (Harvey 2001, De Angelis 2002), usurping more land in a capitalist system. In these places a transformation takes place: from non-state space to state space (Scott 2009), from relatively independent capitalist markets to a new hub to expand these markets: a frontier is made. A frontier is a place in transition, not yet fully regulated, not yet fully mapped (Tsing 2005). Nowadays the *cocaleros* are imagined as the representatives of the capitalist markets, whereas

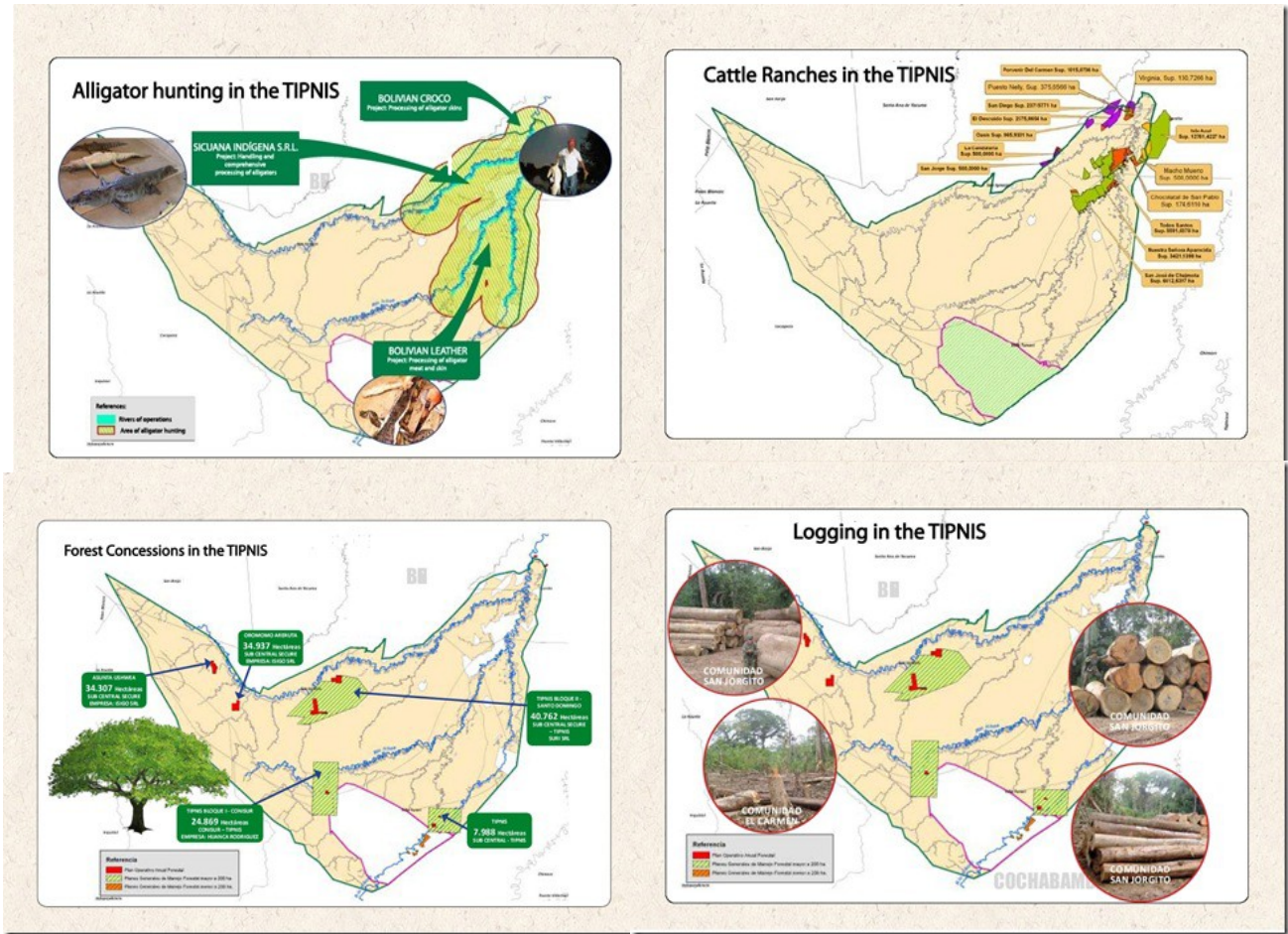
---

10 Many Bolivian workers have organised themselves in *sindicatos*: labour unions. The organisational structure of these labour unions amongst the farmers is very strong in the Chapare. The umbrella of the smaller *sindicatos* is always a federation, which, in the case of the Chapare, is an extremely powerful organisation.

the indigenous people in search of *loma santa* are imagined as part of our precious natural parks. The indigenous inhabitants are under the threat of enclosure by the *cocaleros* and at the same time they depend on the same territory.

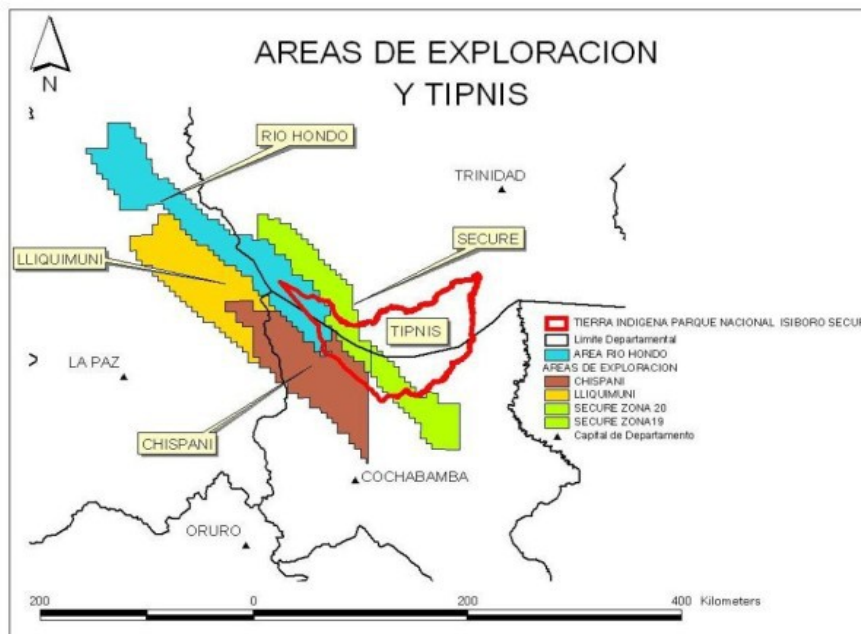
Frontiers are edges, boundaries that separate within from without. All the stakeholders in the TIPNIS area imagine a certain boundary to their area. The boundary of the imaginary of the *cocaleros* was officially the border of *Poligono Siete*, whereas the boundary of the indigenous imaginary was the border of their indigenous territory. The official boundaries clearly marked where the landscape of TIPNIS as imagined by the indigenous stopped and where the landscape of TIPNIS as imagined by the *cocaleros* was allowed to begin. There has always been much hassle over the exact borders of *Poligono Siete*, which demonstrates the constant negotiation over the meaning of the landscape. With the prospect of a highway these boundaries are contested and thrown into great confusion. When the different imaginaries converged, the need to define the borders rose. Increased migration from the 1980s onwards already meant that dichotomous imaginings of the landscape had to find a new way to inhabit the region simultaneously. The Chapare as an agricultural area was attractive for the migrants precisely because it had been a place of refuge. The unfamiliarity and remoteness of the region meant opportunities. When the lives of the *cocaleros* and the indigenous inhabitants drew nearer to each other, friction between them became stronger. Highways and commercial agriculture clash with the more remote lifestyle of the indigenous inhabitants where agriculture serves only basic needs and access to markets is not essential. The prospected highway has ushered in a next stage in this debate.

Fragments from the field



Map 1.2. Explorable resources in the TIPNIS.

Credit: <http://links.org.au/node/3152>



Map 1.3. Contracted oil fields in and surrounding the TIPNIS.

Credit: [www.laprensa.com.bo](http://www.laprensa.com.bo)

## Resource Paradise

Many stakeholders are involved in the TIPNIS controversy. They all want something from the TIPNIS territory. What can be gained for monetary markets is at loggerheads with what can be gained for people opposing the road. The first weeks of my fieldwork I kept hearing new stories about which economic benefits could be gained from TIPNIS and who would benefit from a highway. There is wood, oil, national connections between Beni and Cochabamba, cocaine, international connections between Brazil and the Pacific Ocean, Brazilian soy intended for the Chinese market and tourism. Among the beneficiaries are Brazilian farmers, foreign oil companies, drugs-traffickers, the government, the *cocaleros* and China. Those opposed to the road showed me maps where one could see which parts of the territory hide oil underneath their surface. These parts have already been contracted to big oil companies (see map). Reynaldo, a friend working for the Villa Tunari municipality <sup>11</sup>, told me there are trucks to log wood in places where otherwise there would be no sign of human activity. A Cochabamba social scientist <sup>12</sup> explained to me that coca leaf is processed to base paste and sometimes the end-product of cocaine even within the TIPNIS territory. On top of this, maps shown by the federation of the *cocaleros* show how many big farms are present, and how tourism and wood logging already takes place within the territories boundaries. It made me wonder, which role the resources of the park play in the controversy about the road and how we can understand their attraction and economic value.

The controversy and the meaning of the TIPNIS region has much to do with Bolivia's fragmented relation to extractivism (McNeish 2013). Bolivia has a long and debated relation with extractivism. In colonial times the land was much wanted for its mineral resources. '*There was a long period of time that the Bolivian people did not benefit of the exploitation of their resources*', said the Vice President in a speech for the youth in Cochabamba. It is a statement that is heard often. Foreign companies made the profits, while international markets defined the price of raw materials. In their struggle to get beyond colonialism, many Latin-American countries have tried to find a way to go beyond their dependence on extractivism. Though Morales' government has a strong discourse against capitalism, its economic dependence on the capitalist world market remains fundamental. The energy production of Bolivia has increased since the inauguration of the MAS government (World

---

11 Since information about illegal activities within the borders of the TIPNIS is sensitive, I can not elaborate on the identity of the people providing me with this information.

12 Since information about illegal activities within the borders of the TIPNIS is sensitive, I can not elaborate on the identity of the people providing me with this information.



Bank data <sup>13</sup>). In 2012 the sector most important economically were hydrocarbons, mines, energy and transport (Gandarillas 2011). Exploiting national resources such as the oil underneath the TIPNIS is part of a nation and continent wide project towards development. To become less dependent on the price of raw materials, development of the economy is necessary. The exploitation of resources and the construction of infrastructure attract private investments (van Dijck 2008; García-Linera 2012). The MAS government, as other leftist governments of Latin America, have thus invented neo-extractivism: exploitation of energy resources and minerals, has become the means to battle unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Gudynas 2010). The resources of the TIPNIS territory form an important opportunity to boost the Bolivian economy and take steps towards development. However, development for the Bolivian economy does not mean it will benefit the people actually living in the area from which the resources are extracted (Bebbington and Bebbington 2010). This is exactly what the opposition from TIPNIS argues: the highway will not benefit them; the extraction of their resources will not benefit them; they will not gain a thing.

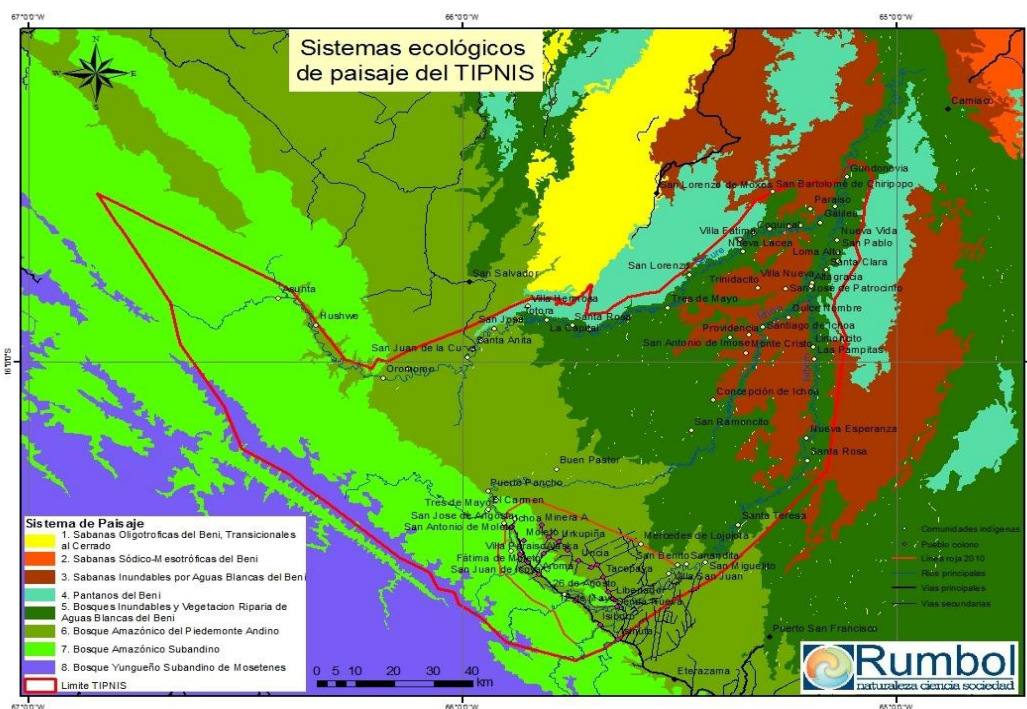
Development is often thought of as a national project (Lang 2013; Harvey 2001), though it is dependent on a worldwide market. Harvey (2001) argues for a global perspective on space which surpasses nation-states borders to understand how local and global space interact. In this interaction a frontier emerges (cf. Tsing 2005). Harveys conceptualisation proves helpful to interpret the TIPNIS controversy and its dependence on a global capitalist market. Harvey defines the constant need to expand of neoliberal capitalism as spatial fix: '*...the term "spatial fix" describes capitalism's insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring*' (Harvey 2001: 24). Land, such as TIPNIS, is appropriated and becomes part of a development dream. These expectations give rise to an explosion of meanings attached to a landscape; all its resources become commodified and contested. The people from TIPNIS try to defend their territory against the global capitalist market and its development. The people of TIPNIS have another perception of development, which neither corresponds to the global one, nor to the current national project. How they contest these projects will be reflected upon in the next chapters.

Logging wood, increasing infrastructural connectivity, cashing crops, tourism, extracting oil, these are all possible economic activities within the TIPNIS. These economic activities depend heavily on the global economic market and a dream for prosperity. Whereas in the second half

---

13 <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.EGY.PROD.KT.OE/countries/BO?display=graph>

of the twentieth century modernization was the process that would bring prosperity for all, now globalisation has taken its place (cf. Tsing 2000). The increasing connectivities to markets are supposed to bring prosperity. Something new is about to happen and everyone should be part of it. All stakeholders in the TIPNIS controversy relate differently to the global dream. As social scientists we should not think along the lines of globalisms, but study how people connect with them (cf. Tsing 2005). The discourse of the Bolivian government on the one hand counters globalization, but economically they are highly dependent on global connections to gain from extractivism. The indigenous groups from TIPNIS rebel against the global market intruding on their park, but on the other hand they connect to a global environmental protection project. A global dream can mean the extraction of resources, but it can also mean protecting Nature.



Map 1.3. Ecological systems in the TIPNIS.

Credit: EAE

## Biodiversity

The TIPNIS controversy provoked international attention with the Chaparina raid. Many international media wrote about the controversy, contrasting the construction of the Bolivian highway with Morales' plans to protect *pachamama*, Mother Earth<sup>14</sup>. On Avaaz<sup>15</sup>, an online activist network, there have been two petitions to 'protect the Amazon'. An image of evil companies threatening an environmental paradise was created. TIPNIS is not only the home of people and of resources valued by a capitalist market, it hides great biodiversity which is worth protecting according to Western platforms such as Avaaz. TIPNIS is thus meaningful in the context of saving the environment. It is important to note that in the ideas of the inhabitants of TIPNIS the conception of nature as put forward by Avaaz and environmental organisations is not undeniably the same. Their relation to the TIPNIS landscape is a more complicated one than living in a natural reserve deserving protection. However, I can not deny the value of TIPNIS as a natural reserve and in the course of the meanings of the landscape; I will elaborate on this.

14 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-15144719>, <http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2011/10/28/evo-morales-bolivia-rainforest/>,

15 [Www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org)

Internationally the construction of roads is often reflected upon as a threat to the environment. The TIPNIS highway is part of a continent-wide project to ameliorate infrastructure called IIRSA. Within the IIRSA project the endangered environment is said to be given priority. One of the conditions for the construction of roads for IIRSA is that first a report has to be produced outlining the environmental consequences and possible strategies that could these mitigate environmental problems (Van Dijck 2012). researchers from different fields study the social, economic and environmental impact of roads. The Evaluacion Ambiental Estrategica (Rojas Lizarazu 2011) is an elaborate report on what is there to be found within TIPNIS and what could happen if a road is built, such as deforestation, erosion, contamination of the soil (Rojas Lizarazu 2011).

The TIPNIS territory's biodiversity is classified following a certain system. Following these classifications policy can be created to minimize environmental impact on the park. The classification that counts for the understanding of TIPNIS as a natural reserve follows the rules of modern science, done by academically educated researchhes. They search for universal truths and in this search they have to find compatible knowledges (cf Tsing 2005:89). *'The unfamiliar becomes the familiar through this process, and generalization can occur'* (Tsing 2005: 89). The TIPNIS territory has become known through is generalized global value as Nature. The Evaluacion Ambiental Estrategica (EAE) (Rojas Lizarazu 2011) is written according to these scientific rules on Nature and is referred to by many different parties to demonstrate the value of the TIPNIS. The EAE tells us that TIPNIS is a very diverse landscape because it is situated where the high mountains merge into tropical lowlands. For this reason it has three rather distinct areas: the SubAndino mountains, just below 2000 meters, which are wet and are an important habitat for wild animals. Second, the PiedeMonte, where hills replace the higher mountains, this place fulfils an important role in supplementing the Amazon Basin. Third there are the pampas: tropical savannahs highly subjected to floods; this is the region where a lot of indigenous communities live and which is special because of the symbiosis between the land and humans. Clearly, the TIPNIS territory is very rich in different ecosystems. A highway will not leave these ecosystems and biodiversity untouched. International environmental organisations and academics (van Dijck; Laurance et al. 2009) use these reports to protect the Amazon. I do not mean to suggest these classifications do not have any value, they certainly do. However, I do want to uncover the presumptions within this system.

Protecting the environment has become a global project. The TIPNIS territory, rich in biodiversity, appeals to this need to protect 'our Nature'. Nature in this sense is a global system, uniting all life (Tsing 2005, 91). The concept of Nature as a unifying classification system originates in the Greek philosophy of Aristotle as well as in Christian heritage (Tsing 2005: 91). Nowadays, Nature or the environment is often understood as '*that part of nature that is vulnerable to human made devastation and disaster*' (Tsing 2005, 123). At a symposium on infrastructure through tropical forests (Utrecht 16<sup>th</sup> december 2013), the importance of sustaining our tropical forests was the main theme of debate. A question raised more than once in the symposium was how we, as scientists, can spread our knowledge on the protection of the environment and aid developing countries in these projects. In this sense, Nature is the opposite of the interferences of mankind. Highways form a threat to ecological systems and their consequences should be mitigated. Together, we are responsible for the ecological system and projects such as the road through TIPNIS should get sufficient support from experts to be realized with as little harm to Nature as is possible.

When Nature becomes the opposite of mankind, how is the presence of indigenous people understood? Are they part of Nature? Or are they part of the human threat to Nature? In the United States indigenous groups were often evicted from their lands for the sake of Nature protection (Tsing 2005: 100). In the IIRSA projects, academic discourse and contemporary environmentalist organisations indigenous inhabitants are seen as part of Nature: '*the fragmentation of forests and the ultimate destruction of ecosystems and the public goods they deliver to the local, regional and global community, including their function as a habitat for indigenous peoples, animals, and plant species*' (Van Dijck: 1). Also the title of an article by Finer (et. al.) is striking: '*Oil and Gas Projects in the Western Amazon: Threats to Wilderness, Biodiversity, and Indigenous Peoples*' (Finer et al. 2008). The indigenous groups are considered part of Nature. This makes them endangered species like the plants and animals from the TIPNIS. They are part of a certain place: TIPNIS as a natural reserve, not a resource valley, nor a place with a history of settlement. Classifying them as part of Nature makes their existence timeless and traditional. They become victims of modern technology and global capitalism.

Nature appears to be a powerful globalism. Wild places become unified and known as Nature. The global and the local are wrapped together in this process (cf. Tsing 2005). When TIPNIS is classified as Nature worth protecting it gives the struggle against the road a globally recognized force. People from all over the world signed the petition on Avaaz.org because they

understood that the Amazon, Nature, was threatened. The knowledge created by the EAE is also recognized by the global institutions of science, which gives the struggle against the road again a powerful legitimation. In the protection of the environment collaborations are created, among scientists and environmentalists, among indigenous and environmentalists. However, their understandings of Nature are not equal. Scientists, environmentalists and indigenous groups all relate to this global idea of Nature but they do so in their own specific way.

The TIPNIS landscape has been subject to an increase of imagined meanings. These meanings do not only change the way people think and speak about the TIPNIS territory, they genuinely change the landscape. In the Chapare the landscape changed profoundly: a soldier working on an army base near Villa Tunari whom I chatted with during breakfast at the market one morning, told me about the increase of roads, people, houses, agricultural fields and tourism over the last fifteen years. In the surroundings of Villa Tunari there are many people working with trucks to improve infrastructure. Also within the territory trees are cut, the presence of agricultural fields expands and more and more people cross the borders of the TIPNIS.

Roads open up territory, they unlock resources, for they enable people to export products. Opening up territory and allowing more people access is a messy business. In this chapter I have demonstrated the messiness of the meaning of a landscape when more and more people have dreams for it. There are many perspectives on the TIPNIS landscape and some are more powerful than others. All stakeholders have to relate to TIPNIS, all stakeholders have to create a certain imaginaries in which their interests fit the best. In this messy explosion people have to create tools to make their imaginaries powerful: relating to national and global projects creates this power. Since the future of the landscape is not yet determined, the negotiations over its possibilities convert to a whirlwind. All parties make efforts to stake powerful claims: TIPNIS means Nature, or Development, or Life. At the frontier all these elements meet and unite. At the same time boundaries are separating what belongs to Nature and what belongs to Development. The negotiations over the TIPNIS territory are a dynamic play between union and separation. Gaps between the different understandings of TIPNIS are used creatively to enforce claims. Nature can not go hand in hand with Development. Being indigenous can not go hand in hand with harvesting coca leaf. At the same time this all happens in the TIPNIS landscape. This friction arising over the territory inspires people to dream, but their dreams are never equal.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Cochabamba – Everything is the opposite**

This chapter is about the different narratives present in the TIPNIS controversy. The narratives about the controversy are polemic and seem to argue the opposite of each other. The polarity of the narratives has its roots in the different meanings attached to the TIPNIS territory, as discussed in chapter one. In conflicts there are always different sides of the story, or even different stories. In this chapter I will introduce the way people talk about the controversy and which narrative they choose to tell. Both narratives connect to certain seductive universals (Tsing 2005). Universals are generalizations that we cannot not want for they allow us to unite with others (cf. Tsing 2005). Though universals carry the suggestion of being globally applicable, they only become meaningful when people connect to them in their own specific way. Universals are able to mobilize people and to build bridges between ideas that at first hand seem entirely different. However, they are not packages of knowledge applicable everywhere at any time; in their engagement the meaning of universals encounters friction. In this case, people understand development, being indigenous, freedom and nature differently, but they do all speak about these themes. Between these different ways of engaging the universals, gaps are created, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. Sometimes the different engagements meet and produce friction.

In the analysis of the narratives people articulate about the controversy, the concepts explained above, such as (engaged) universals and gaps, can be useful in understanding how these narratives have come to be so polemic. The idea of universals helps in finding out how people relate to power and which engagements are powerful.

## The development narrative

### *Stories from the field*

One afternoon I visited the office of Las Seis Federaciones del Tropicó. The building housed different social movements and was full of posters of Evo Morales and Whipala<sup>16</sup> flags. I met with the secretary of the Federation, Hilda, who immediately agreed to do an interview. During the conversation a friend of hers and a radio reporter joined in. The content of what was said is a story I have heard often whenever I spoke to government-affiliated movements. Below is a short version of the conversation we had:

*H: There is a big difference between the cocaleros and the indigenous. The farmers live of agriculture, the indigenous of nature. The indigenous do not really have trade, just rice and alcohol. They do want to live from agriculture.*

*A: And the road, what would the people living there think of it?*

*Hiber, Hilda's friend, stands up and shows me a map: Look, a highway is necessary. There is no good connection to Beni now, in Beni life is expensive, products are difficult to come by, people can not leave. And it is necessary for trade with Brazil.*

*Hilda: The road is already there, there is only 12 kilometres missing, the rest is already there. It is necessary that the highway will come, for the cocaleros, for the indigenous, for everyone. Because they want schools, hospitals. There are more services now already, because the government is working really hard on development, but there is a small group that does not want the highway.*

*M: Why is there such a conflict then? How could the march against the road become so big?*

*H: Because these people are against the government, there were very few people in the march that were actually from TIPNIS. They were people from all over the country who wanted to oppose the government, they were funded by the US. And they were environmentalists from the city, they oppose the highway as well. But they have never been in TIPNIS for a long time, they do not know how life is there, how difficult it is. The highway is necessary. It is not an option that it will not be constructed. The government works well on development and that is necessary.*

*M: So how do you think the government is doing, in general?*

*H: Great, the situation now is so much better than before they got to power. Previously the*

---

<sup>16</sup> The Whipala is an indigenous symbol, commonly used in flags. It is a 7 by 7 square patchwork with different colours. The symbol represents the different indigenous peoples from the Andes, as Aarón explained me, The Whipala is recognized by the Bolivian state as a national symbol, together with other indigenous symbols which can also be found on flags.



*indigenous and the originarios<sup>17</sup> never had any power. Now there is development, and the farmers and the indigenous have a voice, the government is working for them. They have more rights. They have the ability to protect their patrimonio<sup>18</sup>. Everything is better, with Evo.*

Excerpt from an interview: 04-09-2013, Cochabamba

---

17 The term *originario* is often used in the highlands to indicate indigenous groups, whereas the people in the lowlands more commonly use the term *indígenas*. The constitution recognises '*autonomía indígena originario campesina*' (the autonomy of indigenous farmers). The nuanced way these terms are used in different groups is too complicated to explain in this thesis.

18. Patrimonio refers to the cultural heritage and has received more space in the new constitution of 2009, introduced by the MAS government.

*'Highways are the roads towards the development of the whole country'*, is written on a banner used in a march in favour of the highway. IIRSA, a Southern-American project to ameliorate infrastructure in the continent, uses the promise of development as a rationale for their projects. In their logic better infrastructure will lead to strengthening the position of Latin America in the global market (van Dijck 2008). The Bolivian state repeats this development argument in their propaganda. A highway will not only bring economic benefits for the national Bolivian economy, it will also contribute to the development of the indigenous groups living in the TIPNIS: they will get drinking water, schools, hospitals and access to democracy. As the interview above describes, in this logic a highway is necessary for prosperity. I wondered how this notion of development became so powerful and how the story of prosperity relates to other Universals, such as being indigenous or democracy.

The presidency of Evo Morales marked a watershed in Bolivia's history. As Evo said in his inaugural speech on the 21st of January 2006: *'We have been condemned, humiliated ... and never recognised as human beings. We are here and we say that we have achieved power to end the injustice, the inequality and oppression that we have lived under.'* Friends of Aarón, the activist promoting social communitarianism, often speak about the time before Evo as part of an era where *campesinos* (farmers) and *originarios* (indigenous) did not have any perspectives. They were poor and had no chance to speak up to powerful leaders and neoliberal companies. Now, with Evo and his MAS party in power there is a perspective for people who were always marginalized in history. The manner of speaking about the shift described above is exemplary of how people talk about the Evo Morales's presidency. The time before Evo, in the rhetoric of the movements that support him, becomes a unified past, one large period of time. Alvaro Garcia Linares, the Vice-President of Bolivia, held a dialogue with the youth in Cochabamba, he said:

*'Never before in history the indigenous have had so much to say, never before were they part of democracy, as they are now. Previously many people used to be excluded: women, workers, the indigenous. There were mechanisms of exclusion. Now the indigenous are in power... The light was always the exterior, the United States, Canada. And the money always went to them... That had to change.'*

Dialogue with the youth, Alvaro Garcia Linares, 31-08-2013, Cochabamba

The presidency of Evo Morales symbolizes a change towards prosperity. Whereas the period

before Evo is imagined as dark, now the light can be found within Bolivia.

The Process of Change (Proceso de Cambio) is a powerful classification to mark all the changes taking place in Bolivia. Garcia Linares explained in his dialogue with the youth that the Process of Change entails several revolutionary changes: power is shared more equally, social movements are allowed to participate in decision-making processes, decolonization, the nationalization of industry, equal distribution of riches and industrialization in order to make money. Infrastructure projects, the construction of schools and the recognition of indigenous rights in the constitution are all part of this Process of Change. These policies are part of the socialist ideology the current government is trying to carry out. The Process of Change is imagined as revolutionary and suggests a breaking with the past. It entails a national project, where all citizens are allowed to participate in the democracy and in the riches the Bolivian soil hides. However, in order to carry out the Process of Change the Bolivian state has to create economic surpluses. Andrés, an employee of the Federación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Cochabamba (FSUTCC), stresses the riches Bolivia has. However, these sources of wealth have always been exploited by foreign companies and by other countries. '*Evo gave back the gas to the people, now we have something to say about what happens to Bolivian resources*', said Andrés. The government can achieve prosperity by means of selling their resources and redistributing the income over the entire country.

Countries dependence on resources has often been described as a resource curse. This dependence can lead to economic and political distortions (Bebbington and Bebbington 2010: 262). The natural resources Bolivia has are an important part of their economy, and the political struggle taking place. Before Evo the surplus went to the Spanish and later to powerful foreign companies: this led to several revolts in the beginning of this millenium such as the Gas war and the Water war. As a result of this unrest, Evo Morales and the MAS were able to get into power. The common assumption is that now that the benefits of extractivism are in the hands of the Bolivian state, it can finance the Process of Change. Gas and oil is mainly found in the Lowlands. This is the territory of the indigenous people and it will be subject to extraction in order to finance the Process of Change. This is considered fair for the indigenous are not the ones to own the Bolivian riches. As José, a radio journalist working for Radio Kawsachun Coca, explained to me: '*Extractivism has been taking place for more than thirty years, the people in the north log their woods, they make money for themselves and not for the community. And now, they are against a highway because they are against deforestation, though they have been cutting trees for thirty years already*'. The resources of the TIPNIS

territory do not belong to its inhabitants, they belong to the Bolivian nation and are supposed to bring development for everyone.

Bolivia's indigenous peoples form an important theme in the bonds with the past. The indigenous identity is used as a legitimation for the current government and the development they pursue. Defining oneself as indigenous, can enable one to obtain power over the definition of land and national culture. In the buildings where the FSUTCC and Las Seis Federaciones del Tropicó have their offices there were large paintings of a famous indigenous leader from history: Tupac Katari. Tupac Katari was an important indigenous leader in the Bolivian struggle for autonomy and the words he spoke on his deathbed are famous: '*I die, but I will return and I will be millions*'. Indigenous revolts form an important part of the *patrimonio*: the heritage. The term *patrimonio* is used to explain the indigenous heritage of the past: it suggests the militancy and power of indigenous groups and involves the idea of *pachamama*, the traditional clothing style and the traditional use of coca leaf. In the last decade, more people have been claiming an indigenous heritage (Canessa 2007; Albó 2008). However, the meaning of being indigenous in the highland cities is different from TIPNIS's indigenous groups: lowland indigenousness means that they are poor, have no access to the state and are less developed. When I asked what the difference was between the lives of the *cocaleros* and the indigenous in TIPNIS, Hilda emphasized that the indigenous are poor and that they are in need of services. The indigenous from TIPNIS are not considered part of the powerful *campesino originario* identity: their indigenous identity is not so much related to place but more to their clothing style and use of coca leaf (Grisaffi 2010). The indigenous identity of TIPNIS inhabitants is much more related to place and at the same time refers to their dependence on Nature, which makes them poor.

In the political project of the MAS government the *cocaleros* are at the base of indigenous identity, with the sacred coca leaf as a crucial symbol. Nonetheless, in the TIPNIS controversy the *cocaleros* are the opposite of the indigenous. Being indigenous in the development narrative can thus mean two different things: on the one hand it is part of a strong national community-making project. On the other hand one should be careful not to be too indigenous, like the indigenous from the TIPNIS. The power the political project of creating a national indigenous identity is extensive. Through this identity the union of the Bolivian community is stressed. In different interviews, I hinted at a division in the country and people always refuted my questions concerning this. Andrés, the FSUTCC employee told me: '*Even though we*

*[the Bolivian nation] are different groups, we are united in this difference. Evo Morales took care of that, the Process of Change united us'. The indigenous identity promoted by the Bolivian government can be considered part of the imagination of a national community.*

In order to create a strong union to support the government villains are imagined: Nature-lovers and rich people, who are both considered neoliberal imperialists. The opposition to the highway is looked upon as a rebellious neoliberal group, pitted against the socialist indigenous government of Evo Morales. The indigenous groups from the TIPNIS are accused of being bribed by United States forces. Eberardo, a documentary maker I met through Aarón, tells me the opposition consists of neoliberal colonizers. *'They have been bought by USAID and companies from Santa Cruz'*. This is an often heard accusation: the opposition gets paid by the US or neoliberal companies to destabilize the state. The other villains of prosperity are the environmentalists. As Morales said in a meeting with *las seis Federaciones de Coccaleros del Tropico* on the first of October 2011:

*'Some institutions say: we will defend the environment, while they are actually defending capitalism, the green fund, the carbon fund. What is that? That is capitalism continuing to destroy the environment in the entire world, and in return they give crumbs to the countries that still have forests'.*

Nature is something that belongs to the foreigners, the Westerners, the people that do not belong in Bolivia. *'They are environmentalists, they know nothing about the hardships of life within the TIPNIS borders'* said Aarón. The environmentalists are consorting with the enemy, the West, they have fallen for imperialist ideas and lost their bonds with the Bolivian *patrimonio*.

The imagining of a new Bolivian community (Canessa 2012) does not leave a lot of space for difference. The current government promotes a certain indigenous identity which is highly based on highland Aymara groups (Albro 2006, Postero 2010, Grisaffi 2010, Canessa 2007). The extent to which the government and this development narrative is excluding for the indigenous groups from the territory is not being discussed by the parties telling this development story. The indigenous claim made by the groups from the park is ignored and twisted until it becomes a claim against the development of an indigenous state. The discourse is very nationalistic, *patrimonio*, *pachamama*, and *campesino-originario* are words often

articulated in the development narrative. Foreign institutions on the other hand are considered evil forces that should finally take their hands off Bolivia. The Bolivian community what the MAS government is trying to create is very homogenous and voices of resistance are completely delegitimized. The people telling these stories copy the discourse the government is articulating.

## The resistance narrative

### *Stories from the field*

After a few weeks in Cochabamba I got involved with the 'environmentalist' network. I spoke with social scientists who have been researching the TIPNIS territory and met people from different activist organisations supporting the struggle against the road. Most of them have been to TIPNIS a number of times. One afternoon, I meet Bolívar after having interviewed the president of FOCOMADE. Bolívar, a retired engineer, is part of the network of territoriosenresistencia.org. He became an important contact and a friend. That first afternoon we met he explained to me the following:

*B: You should read the EAE; this researchh demonstrates that the environment will deteriorate and the communities will not benefit at all when a highway is constructed. Evo Morales pretends he is the defender of Mother Earth, of Indigenous Rights. But it is not like that, it is the opposite. The government only wants extractivism. They work along the logic of extractivism, but concealed by a discourse of campesinos, indígenas and madre tierra. But everything is the opposite. It is a double discourse.*

*M: How did it become such a conflict?*

*B: Gumersindo Pradel<sup>19</sup> is aligned with the sindicatos. They have marched as well. The government is using Pradel. That march was prepared very well. Everywhere the marchers went places to sleep had been arranged, food was provided for. The government arranged all that. Gumersindo Pradel says the indigenous want the highway, but they have never wanted the highway. They know that their territory will be colonized.*

*M: And why is it that some newspapers accuse Fernando Vargas of being a criminal?*

*B: Many newspapers and television stations are manipulated by the state. Ostensibly, they are independent, but in the end the state owns them. The government has many opportunities to manipulate people, by bribing them with gifts. We are fighting against the power of the government, together with the indigenous from the territory. This fight is more difficult for them [TIPNIS inhabitants] for they can not work on their lands and they can barely move. There is a check on gas, legitimated by controlling drug traffickers. There is strict monitoring of gas use,*

---

19. Gumersindo Pradel is the president of CONISUR, the indigenous organization representing a part of the southern communities of the TIPNIS.

*under the veil of tracking down drug traffickers. The TIPNIS inhabitants can not move and at the same time the government indirectly supports the drug traffickers. The government divides everyone, by giving gifts. Even CIDOB is divided, one part supports the government, another part the indigenous struggle.*

Excerpt of an interview: 06-09-2013, Cochabamba

In many other conversations Bolívar expressed how much he loved going to TIPNIS, how beautiful life is there, how the freedom of the people there appeals to him. Whenever he talks about TIPNIS, he is full of admiration.



In La Paz, as well as Cochabamba, many walls are graffitied with slogans about the TIPNIS controversy. '*Development is not by a highway*','*TIPNIS can not be touched, the jungle resists!*' are often written statements. The people I have met in Cochabamba work in a broad network of social activist organisations, such as FOCOMADE, *territoriasenresistencia.org*, SomosSur and the Bolivian Association for Human Rights (A.B.D.D.H.H.). These organisations form a platform of 'alternative' information. They are engaged in informing people through different networks on different subjects, such as the TIPNIS controversy. They produce a massive amount of documentation and hold seminars and workshops; they could be viewed as an intellectual elite. The themes they discuss largely overlap with the themes in the development narrative, but they are viewed upon from an entire different perspective. The highway is the spark that fuels a larger debate about the current political situation of Bolivia.

Whereas in the development narrative people understand the presidency of Evo Morales as a watershed in Bolivian history, the people connecting to the resistance narrative have a more varied understanding. Maria, a Dutch woman who has lived in Bolivia for more than thirty years, founded Somos Sur in 2005 to provide a platform of alternative information. Maria said: '*I was in the Netherlands when Morales was elected. I hurried back to Bolivia to support him and to support the Process of Change. We were hopeful and very happy he got elected.*' This feeling of hope is described by others as well: with the rise of a socialist indigenous leader things could change, Bolivia might finally attend to its long marginalized peoples and rely less on neoliberal foreign institutions. Evo Morales started out the same for Maria as for the developmentalists: as a symbol for prosperity. However, after a few years had passed, hope was lost. When I showed Maria a leaflet I received which defines the TIPNIS opposition leaders as criminals, Maria got furious: '*This is what they [the government] do, they manipulate everything, they tell lies, and they have the power and means to do so.*' The government bribes people, as Bolívar explained me: '*They offer gifts, in this way they divide the people from TIPNIS, even the communities are divided*'. Even though people like Maria and Bolívar agree Bolivia needs a Process of Change, their trust in the current Bolivian government has vanished. Evo does not represent the change he once promised, he now represents disappointment.

The government is said to carry out a double discourse, as Bolívar said in the interview. The concept of a double discourse is often mentioned when people refer to the manipulation by the current government. The concept of the double discourse refers on the one hand to the development narrative. The developments and changes promised by this narrative are agreed

upon. John, the president of FOCOMADE, said: '*Of course they [the indigenous from the TIPNIS] want development, they want schools, hospitals, access to markets, but how will they get it when the highway is miles away from them?*'. While the enticing promises are agreed upon, they are not believed. These promises are all considered *mentiras* (lies). This is the other side of the double discourse: '*It is the logic of capitalist extractivism*', as Bolívar said. As a consequence of a highway the territory of TIPNIS will be further exploited, contaminated and colonized. The indigenous will be marginalized and will lose their autonomy over the territory, whereas they are the ones who know how to live in harmony with their environment. The so-called development is not beneficial for Bolivia, it only benefits a few. The development narrative is dismissed as manipulative and untrue.

The development the current government promotes is misleading and will not contribute to all the developments the Process of Change promised. Excluded groups, such as the TIPNIS inhabitants, are not included in the democracy at all, nor do they benefit from a more equal distribution of resources. For this reason the indigenous groups need to be protected from development and extractivism. Sarela, a sociologist who has worked for more than twenty years in the TIPNIS territory explained the *cocaleros* lives are a threat to the indigenous groups from TIPNIS. When the TIPNIS territory is taken by *coca* farmers, the indigenous are unable to continue their lives. Opening up the territory for capitalist development means decreasing opportunities for the indigenous: they will be unable to sustain themselves using their environment the way they used to. Maria and Bolívar both speak about TIPNIS with a lot of admiration, admiration for the setting sun over the river, the birds, the sounds, the fresh smell. In TIPNIS life is free. The indigenous live in harmony with nature and pose no threat to it. The extractivists, or developmentalists, are 'predators' hunting the natural reserves and they will destroy it. The indigenous TIPNIS inhabitants are an example of how to live in tune with nature, and this should be protected. Whereas the government emphasizes the value of Mother Earth (*pachamama*) as part of the heritage, this term is not used by the opposition. The indigenous identity expressed in the development narrative is dismissed as double discourse as well. John, the president of FOCOMADE, explained why he deliberately distances himself from the term *pachamama*: '*Pachamama has been kidnapped*'. *Pachamama* refers to traditional deities, but the government has chosen to fill the idea of *pachamama* in a way that benefits them. The opposition, the ones that genuinely want to protect the earth, speak about the *medio-ambiente*: environment. A highway, logging of woods, extraction of oil and

colonisation of agricultural land form a threat to the environment in which the indigenous inhabitants live peacefully.

The opposition is pitted against the nation-making project of the government. They do not connect to the homogenous indigenous identity created and they nuance the so called development-project. The development narrative opposes against a global capitalist project and the past interference of foreigners with Bolivia. The people telling the resistance narrative demonstrate the manipulation the government stoops to in order to maintain their national project. Somos Sur for example organises workshops with indigenous leaders to make these leaders think about their role when they might be seduced to receive bribes. The opposition do tell a story of globally recognised imaginaries of Nature and Freedom. This is also how their narrative becomes powerful: it relates to universals which are globally known, through these universals they get the opportunity to collaborate.

I argue that the pitfall of the controversy are these polemic narratives. Both parties do not take each other seriously and the others demands are demonized. There is no understanding of the different meanings people attach to the park. In both narratives perpetrators and victims are defined. It is very attractive to speak in this manner because it creates voice. Pointing fingers at the ones that are mistaken also gives the speaking parties a right to speak up. The dichotomy of these narratives is created along the line of different universals. The TIPNIS conflict demonstrates how conflicting engaged universals can be and how complicated the process of engaging them is.

Democracy is the first universal on which the narratives clash: whereas the 'developmentalists' consider the homogenous national project of the MAS government a proper representation of the Bolivian people, the 'environmentalists' emphasize which manipulative means the government is using to create a base. Inside the gap between these two versions is the endlessly complicated situation Bolivia is in: it is a poor country, the differences between groups of people are huge (for example the lowland and highland climates necessitate vastly different lifestyles), Bolivia is dependent of foreign markets for selling their resources and at the same time Bolivia's resources have long been exploited by foreign companies. The same complicated dynamics apply to the universal of being indigenous: being indigenous has traditionally been the language of resistance (Canessa 2007). Over the past ten years this language of resistance has had to change towards a

language of governance. The indigenous identity based on highland ideas is now promoted by the MAS government. The lowland indigenous identity is different from the highlanders; their identity ties in more with their relation to land. They use being indigenous as a language of resistance to articulate their differences. The universal of Nature, for the resistance group, is a strong argument to protect the TIPNIS and the people living in it. Nature and being indigenous are closely intertwined. At the same time the concept of Nature is deconstructed by the development narrative as a part of a global neoliberal project.

The analysis of these polemic narratives demonstrates how differently people experience their world, and moreover, how extremely differently they imagine the country they live in. It is the suggestion of the generalized value that universal ideas carry that makes them unable to listen to each other.

## Chapter 4

### Trinidad – Courage

*'Vengo de esa tierra que ya no esta, donde antes he vivido en libertad'*

*'I come from that land that does not exist anymore, where I used to live in freedom'*

From the song '*Coraje*' (Courage), sung by Nazareth Flores at the Chaparina memorial

**Conflict:** 1. an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles. 2. fighting between two or more groups of people or countries.<sup>20</sup>

In Trinidad live the people most affected by the construction of a highway. The people staying in Trinidad are from different small communities in the park, it is their territory that might be contaminated, colonized and taken by wood loggers and oil companies. As sung in the song: the land where they used to live quietly now does not exist anymore, but they will try to defend it. Because of the plans to construct a highway a group of about fifty people moved to Trinidad to speak up in order to protect their villages. The TIPNIS inhabitants have a marginalised position, however they are not powerless. They are the indigenous from the park. In a country where the government is legitimized by its indigenous identity, being indigenous can be a powerful claim to make. To articulate objections to the highway the TIPNIS inhabitants creatively use their indigenous identity, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. This identity confirms and at the same time contests the indigenous identity promoted by the Bolivian government.

As I explained in chapter one, there are many stakeholders that have aspirations for the TIPNIS territory. Within the boundaries of TIPNIS illegal wood loggers take down trees, farmers harvest their coca crops, cocaine is produced and international companies own contracts to extract the oil underneath the surface. The possible economic benefits of the TIPNIS territory are huge and there are many predators. Although all these stakeholders have aspirations for the place, the conflict is mainly articulated amongst the government and its opposition. The TIPNIS opposition criticizes the the government as the guarantor of their rights. The state has an ambiguous role, for it has to represent all stakeholders. The most powerful claim the TIPNIS inhabitants can make is the claim of being indigenous: as I have described before the inhabitants have autonomy over their territory because they are

---

<sup>20</sup> [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/conflict\\_1](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/conflict_1)

indigenous. The TIPNIS inhabitants use their indigenous identity strategically.

The conflict over the TIPNIS highway is often framed as a conflict between different perceptions of being indigenous (cf. Canessa 2012). Both the government and the TIPNIS inhabitants use an indigenous claim to express their viewpoints, but nevertheless they are up against each other. This is an extraordinary situation, since before the current Bolivian government indigenous conflicts occurred mostly with non-indigenous governments (e.g. Postero 2007, Brysk 2005, Sieder 2007). Being indigenous always implies a relation to the state (e.g. Canessa 2012, Sieder 2007, Postero 2007) and many scholars targeted their research at how indigenous movements politicized their identity (e.g. Rasch 2008, Grisaffi 2010, Brysk 2005). In this imagery indigenous movements are considered a group with a certain indigenous claim and the state is the possible giver of indigenous rights. In the Bolivian case, where the conflicting parties both claim to be indigenous, Andrew Canessa (2012) proposes that scholars should examine the different indigenous claims made. In doing so in the TIPNIS controversy for example, the highland indigenous claim articulated by the government stands opposite of the lowlanders indigenous claim articulated by the TIPNIS inhabitants.

I propose a different viewpoint for I think these analytical frameworks have two very important shortcomings While conducting fieldwork I was confronted with the complexity of the TIPNIS controversy : all the different stories I heard forced me to alter my perception of the conflict as an indigenous conflict. First of all, by examining different indigenous claims made by different parties, the conflicting parties are imagined as unified. Although groups opposing the highway make comparable indigenous claims and work together to get these heard, fieldwork has taught me they make many other claims as well. To understand why indigenous identity is of importance for the opposition, it is necessary to also get a grasp of these other claims and stories. Second, the role of the state as a giver of rights is often taken for granted. Although the academic debate on indigenous politics observes that the indigenous rights the current Bolivian government has recently granted to indigenous peoples are slightly biased towards highland indigenous identity (cf. Canessa 2007, Postero 2010), it does not offer tools to examine the manner in which the state does not abide by its own rules anymore. The academic debate on being indigenous lingers on a too simplistic imagery of this conflict in which two parties disagree with each other over what it means to be indigenous.

In this chapter I will use two cases to demonstrate the messiness of the TIPNIS conflict. I will analyze these cases with the help of the analytical framework Anna Tsing (2005) proposed.

First I will demonstrate that the indigenous rights granted by the current government can be considered a politics of appearances. Tsing (2005: 57) uses the term *economy of appearances* to describe the making of a dramatic spectacle in order to gather investment funds. I would argue that the turbulent history of Bolivia's indigenous groups gave the current government a million<sup>21</sup> reasons to 'sell' their legitimacy as indigenous to the public. The TIPNIS opposition demonstrates that the government is not abiding by their own rules and is merely using them to illustrate their hegemonic imagery. Demonstrating this means an incredible increase of the TIPNIS opposition's scope, which has enabled them to collaborate with many. Hence, the second part of the chapter I will dive deeper into the messiness of the indigenous movement. The indigenous movement may be considered a '*forest of collaborations*' (Tsing 2005: 245) between different parties. The forest, literally, is their common objective. All these groups of people united in the commemoration of the violent Chaparina raid. The Chaparina raid is a forceful travelling package where images, songs, morals and organizational plans come together (cf. Tsing 2005: 227). However, what exactly this Chaparina raid symbolizes differs for different groups of people, as well as their reason to oppose the highway. Different people, working together, have very different perspectives on the forest, the people living in the forest and the nation-state of which the forest is part.

---

21 Reference to Tupac Katari, a famous indigenous leader from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who said: I will return and I will be millions .

## **The power of law**

*Many days I spent at the Subcentral TIPNIS. I attended meetings, press conferences, or hung around while there was not much to do. One day a truck drove by, that the people living in the Subcentrale did not recognize. Anxiety arose. Adolfo Chavez, the president of CIDOB, sent some of the men around the block to check out who were driving this truck. The atmosphere was tense. Five men had a stroll around the block. They came back laughing, and explained it was only a doctor. They got scared because they thought it was police checking on them. I did not understand what the fuss was all about, but later on Fernando, the president of Subcentral TIPNIS and Bolívar, my retired-engineer friend, told me what had happened: on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June there had been a meeting in San Pablo, a village within the TIPNIS park. Community leaders of the different subcentrales and Gumersindo Pradel<sup>22</sup> were present. Gumersindo Pradel walked away and tried to escape from the meeting. People took hold of him and accused him of trying to run, dragged him back towards the meeting and forced him to sign a document which said he would never again claim that the indigenous groups wanted a highway. Fernando laughed at me and said: 'What did you think, that we like to stay in here in the Subcentral all day? Of course we do not do that voluntarily, we can not leave or we will be arrested'.*

*Later on I learned more from the newspapers: different newspapers wrote Gumersindo Pradel was maltreated and subjected to communal whiplashing<sup>23</sup>. Gumersindo Pradel decided to report the leaders of the struggle against the road for attempted murder. Fernando Vargas argued that Gumersindo Pradel had no right to take this case to the constitutional court. It is stipulated in the law that indigenous groups can have their own jurisdiction. The maltreatment of Gumersindo Pradel thus was a form of communal justice about which the constitutional court had no right to judge. Pedro Nuni and Adolfo Chavez, the other accused leaders, declared they were not even physically present at the meeting. All three have refused to appear in court and for this reason they have been under detention in the Subcentral. Surrounded by many TIPNIS inhabitants they were safe enough not to get arrested.*

Summary of two field reports: 19-09-2013, 20-09-2013

---

22 Gumersindo Pradel is the leader of the CONISUR: the indigenous organisation representing most of the southern communities of the TIPNIS.

23 [http://www.la-razon.com/nacional/Vargas-anima-rechazo-Pradel-TIPNIS\\_0\\_1858614166.html](http://www.la-razon.com/nacional/Vargas-anima-rechazo-Pradel-TIPNIS_0_1858614166.html) ,  
[http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/nacional/20130711/caso-pradel-causa-conflicto-jurisdiccional\\_220203\\_474568.html](http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/nacional/20130711/caso-pradel-causa-conflicto-jurisdiccional_220203_474568.html)



In Bolivia indigenous groups are, to a certain extent, allowed to administer justice and decide what is a crime and how perpetrators should be punished. This customary law is usually performed without the government getting involved. While I was conducting fieldwork several cases of customary law were described in newspapers and referred to in public debates: alleged perpetrators were doused in gasoline and set afire. Never have I heard that the government interfered in this brutal cases. However, in the case described above the police was quick to denounce the incident of violence against Gumersindo Pradel in San Pablo as a crime. At the same time the indigenous movement used the indigenous claim to justify what had happened in San Pablo. They claimed that Gumersindo Pradel had maltreated them by speaking in favour of the road in name of all indigenous groups, which granted them the right to whiplash Gumersindo Pradel. Adolfo Chavez, president of CIDOB and detained in the Subcentral, commented: *'I was not even there, the 20<sup>th</sup>, I only arrived the 21<sup>st</sup>. The government abused their power, they neglected our vigilance'* (Interview with Adolfo Chavez: 19-09-2013). In the case described the tension between customary and constitutional law comes to the fore. Both parties creatively use this tension for their political project. Legal pluralism is not uncommon in Latin-America, nor is it unproblematic (Simon Thomas 2009). Autonomy over jurisdiction is one of the important rights indigenous groups have in Bolivia. To which extent this autonomy is recognized remains a difficult question. It is at least remarkable that the government did not grant the TIPNIS inhabitants autonomy in the case described above. The government uses their constitutional power now that it suits their political project of demonizing the TIPNIS leaders. On the other hand the law is an important tool for recognition for the indigenous groups, so they will not let their rights to jurisdiction be taken away easily.

The 1980s and 1990s marked a juridification of indigenous rights (e.g. Sieder 2007; Postero 2009, Brysk). Indigenous groups increasingly became recognised as distinct groups with specific rights (e.g. Postero 2007; Albro 2006; Canessa 2007). The TIPNIS territory and its inhabitants have shared in this increase of recognition. Nowadays, the legal status that the TIPNIS territory and its inhabitants have is their most powerful tool to contest the presence of others in their territory. John, the president of Focomade, whom I interviewed in Cochabamba, said: *'The new constitution provided more autonomy for different groups, such as the indigenous, but it is all a political game'* (Interview with John: 06-09-2013). The TIPNIS opposition get a lot of support when they argue the state is not respecting their rights. The legal status of the TIPNIS territory is a result of a decade-long struggle, and the fact that the

first indigenous government of Bolivia is threatening this legal status is a powerful reason to contest the validity of the government.



Image: Press Conference with the leaders of the indigenous struggle at the Subcentral in Trinidad.

The 1970s showed an increased mobilization of indigenous movements, supported by anthropologists (Brysk 2000). Global attention for indigenous groups sparked increased recognition in international human rights as well as national laws in Latin-America (cf. Brysk 2000, Postero 2007). This provided indigenous communities with a powerful tool to contest the implementation of economic trade policies depriving them of their territories (cf. Bebbington and Bebbington 2010). When the ILO passed Convention 169, the struggle over the definition of indigenous rights started. Being indigenous became a status which something could be gained from. Indigenous groups all over the world had something that brought their struggles together. Worldwide indigenous revolts united in this ILO convention. The recognition of indigenous groups in international resolutions as well as national laws emerged

from a dynamic relation between local and global projects on indigenous identity (Brysk 2000). In 1984 regional Amazonian indigenous movements founded COICA (Coordinating Council of the Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon Basin), for example, which in turn collaborated with American as well as European environmental organizations. By creating such a 'global panindigenous movement' (Brysk 2000:97), the urge to get legal recognition in constitutions became more pressing.

In Bolivia the global project for indigenous rights became a national project in the 1990s. Since the 1990s there have been nine indigenous marches in Bolivia, all of which had their legal consequences. The first indigenous march in 1990 has led to the recognition of TIPNIS as an indigenous territory. In this march the indigenous groups from TIPNIS claimed the indigenous identity expressed by the ILO convention applied to them and should they be recognized as such. By ratifying the convention in national law the state demonstrated its bonds with the international thought on indigenous peoples. In 1996 the territory received recognition as TCO (indigenous communitarian territory). This legal recognition of the TCO was part of the law of national agrarian reform service which classifies agrarian property. This was important because communitarian property was finally recognized legally. Global cooperation of increasingly mobilized indigenous groups thus had an important influence in shaping Bolivian law. Nowadays these laws are crucial in defining indigenous identity.

The increasing recognition of indigenous peoples in the nineties went hand in hand with neoliberal policy (Postero 2007). The gap between indigenous rights recognized in a neoliberal democracy and the recognition of their different cosmology remained significant (cf. Postero 2007). This led to civic unrest in the beginning of the new century, such as the gas and the water war (Harten 2011). From this gap Evo Morales and the MAS came to power, it was exactly the friction between the laws that did recognize indigenous groups and the remaining unequal economic chances and power relations that gave Evo Morales his legitimation. After decades of struggling for indigenous inclusion in the Bolivian nation-state, Evo Morales and the MAS came to represent indigenous justice for everyone. Many of the TIPNIS opposition support groups expressed their initial hope and trust in Evo Morales: '*We thought he would change Bolivia*', said Filippo, the older man I used to sit with. When Evo Morales was elected, he held a traditional ceremony in the remains of an ancient city which is an important spiritual place for Bolivia's Aymara inhabitants. The message of his speech was now Bolivia's indigenous people came to power, things would change with respect to their cosmology: '*A light of hope emerges from the people who never forgot their ancestors, recalling*

*the form of life which we live in complementarity, solidarity and especially in harmony with Mother Earth.*<sup>24</sup> With this ceremony the indigenous identity of Evo and his MAS party is greatly emphasized. At the beginning of his presidential term, Morales dramatized his indigenous identity, in words and deeds.

Employment of indigenous ideology by the Bolivian government did not cease after the inauguration ceremony. The history of indigenous movements is marked by constitutional recognition, as I described above. In 2009 the Bolivian state declared a new constitution to legally implement their ideology based on indigenous ideas. In the new constitution the TCOs were further established and indigenous groups were granted more autonomy. The constitution of 2009 was revolutionary for it also incorporated indigenous values such as *vivir bien* and *Pachamama*. The government was applauded for this revolutionary act: '*Finally all our different cultures have been recognised, now we are a plurinational state*', Aarón expressed one day as we were strolling down the grocery market. Through the revolutionary indigenous laws the Morales administration refused to be part of a global project and created a strong national imagined community (cf. Anderson 2006). The language of these indigenous acts remained a language of resistance: they articulate an indigenous identity of the Bolivian nation in contrast to a global capitalist project, as is constantly repeated in the discourse of the government (e.g. Garcia Linera 2013) and forms a strong legitimation of the power of Evo and the MAS. The law that protects *pachamama* (Mother Earth) is a good example of the conjuring of scales: through the implementation of the *pachamama* law projects on different scales merged into the national project of protecting Mother Earth. The law provided the current government with dramatic stories for the international stage. Evo Morales demonstrates his involvement with Mother Earth and indigenous values. At the Climate Summit in Cancún Evo Morales distanced himself from global Nature protection where carbon rights can be sold and promoted a traditional Bolivian indigenous way of living with the environment. In an open letter on climate change, Evo Morales wrote: '*Humankind is capable of saving the Earth if we recover the principles of solidarity, complementarity and harmony with nature in contraposition to the reign of competition, profits and rampant consumption of natural resources*'<sup>25</sup>. However, these statements obscure other projects carried out, such as the construction of the highway through a national reserve. Nationally, the government is developing extractivist strategies to finance their change. They are constructing roads and highways, contracting foreign

---

24 <http://www.eleco.com.ar/noticias/Pol%C3%ADtica/26658:1/Evo-Morales-exhorto-a-los-pueblos-del-mundo-a-no-caer-nunca-de-rodillas-frente-al-capitalismo-.html>

25 <http://links.org.au/node/769>

companies to exploit resources, and at the time of writing a law is being passed to make mining in protected territories easier, which is extremely contaminating for natural reserves. The TIPNIS highway is an example among many projects that would be considered the opposite of protecting Mother Earth. Bolivia's economic development is heavily dependent on extractivism, as I explained before. Extractivist measures neglect indigenous rights over territory and aim at prosperity for the whole country. A law such as the *pachamama* law obscures all these different projects and highlights a certain story which does not reflect what is going on.

The TIPNIS inhabitants are dismantling the politics of appearances of the MAS government by relying on their indigenous identity. If they are not respected as indigenous citizens, what does the government mean by including indigenous ideas? If their forest is subordinate to the money made by extracting resources, then what does living in harmony with Mother Earth mean? On the one hand, the TIPNIS opposition uses the *pachamama* law to demonstrate the double discourse articulated by the government: it sounds good but in reality the government does the opposite. A highway through their territory would destroy the environment and thus it would be the opposite of protecting *pachamama*. The TIPNIS inhabitants also creatively use their rights to autonomy, as is demonstrated by the above example. First of all, the legal recognition of their autonomy entails that the TIPNIS inhabitants are the ones to decide what is a crime in their territory. Moreover the right to autonomy the TIPNIS inhabitants claim are what the government does not grant them. They demonstrate that the laws issued by the government are enforced hypocritically. Meanwhile they argue that they take these same laws very seriously, for it is the most powerful identity marker they can claim. For the TIPNIS inhabitants it is beneficial to appear indigenous. The TIPNIS inhabitants to a certain extent approve of the indigenous laws constituted by the government, but their contestation consists of demonstrating that the laws are not abided by.

The laws that recognize indigenous rights should not be taken at face value. In Bolivia they are used to create a politics of appearance. Global, regional and local projects have together created a powerful incentive to define oneself as indigenous. But definitions, laws and rules do not always reflect reality. The extractivist dreams of the MAS government do not go well with their indigenous nation-making project. It is exactly the friction between the discourse, or the politics of appearances, and the actual projects that should work for the prosperity of the country that gives the TIPNIS inhabitants a powerful means to contest the government.

## **Movements: the production of the Chaparina raid**

### *Stories from the field*

*For days we had been preparing our trip to Chaparina, making lists who was coming, arranging vehicles to get us there, fixing these vehicles, buying supplies, meeting representatives of other organisations and the department. The first stop on our trip was in San Borja. Unfortunately we missed the commemoration there because our car broke down halfway through the night and we had to wait all morning for a bus to take us further. We got there just in time for lunch. The local church welcomed us in their garden. In the afternoon we traveled on to the exact place of the raid, a farm in Chaparina near Yucumo. That night we camped out on the fields, cooked dinner over a fire and watched a movie projected on my towel. That morning it was very quiet, except for the crowing roosters. At nine o'clock cars started to arrive. Press representatives, leaders of other indigenous organisations, representatives of San Borja and the Beni department suddenly filled the pastures. Behind the three graves of people who died during the marches speeches were held. Different cameras were focussed on the 'stage'. Leida, the vice president of subcentral TIPNIS, emphasized the role of the women in the raid. The president of the Beni civic committee told us to open our eyes to this so-called indigenous government that acted so brutally. A representative of the AB.D.D.H.H. was present, as well as other representatives of indigenous organisations. Many different people made speeches, all emphasizing the brutality of the Chaparina violence and the solidarity amongst the opposition.*

Summary of different field reports: 22-09-2013, 23-09-2013, 24-09-2013.

The raid in Chaparina is the most forceful symbol of the history of marginalisation the TIPNIS inhabitants experience. The violence in Chaparina is referred to in almost every conversation and meeting: this is where the government crossed a line. The TIPNIS inhabitants politicized their objections against the highway through direct action: they went to the streets. The Chaparina raid moved a lot of people across the country. In the aftermath of this event the TIPNIS inhabitants gained wide attention. After two years the Chaparina violence still incited many different groups across the country to organize commemorations. In this remembrance many different parties participated, forming a coalition to oppose state repression. Chaparina serves as a charismatic package, an *'allegorical module that speak to the possibilities of making a cause heard'* (Tsing 2005: 226). The Chaparina raid is an imaginative demonstration of what the opposition is fighting for; there are books about it, documentaries, songs and pictures of women being dragged away by the police. All these images bring the opposition together against the villain the current government. The TIPNIS inhabitants are the heroes in their fight for their territory. Although the network of opposition groups appears unified on the surface, their collaboration is messy. Their understanding of the struggle is different, yet they find enough resemblance to work together.

Mobilization is the most important way to respond to grievances. Pedro, the indigenous deputy of Beni who is one of the TIPNIS opposition leaders, told me after we had spent the day blocking the street: *'This is the only way we can get heard. Direct actions cost money and that forces them to listen to us, so it is very important we do this'* (Conversation with Pedro Nuni: 02-10-2013). In these mobilizations collaborations are made between many groups. During the march lowlands indigenous organizations joined with the highland indigenous organisation, the national human rights ombudsman, different environmental as well as human-rights NGOs. They share information and images, such as the Chaparina raid, and together they obtain more leverage to get heard (cf. Brysk 2000). At first I thought that the TIPNIS inhabitants were the protagonists in a complicated network of social organizations objecting to highway and that the statements the TIPNIS inhabitants made were the articulation of the entire network. The messiness of the relations between these social organizations seemed merely a detail. But seeing all these people acting together in Chaparina I realized that it was exactly this messiness that created the scope and leverage to get their different voices heard, and that it was exactly this messiness that enabled so many interests to come together in this one conflict.



Image: The commemoration of the TIPNIS park with representees of many different organisations.

The TIPNIS communities have mobilized many different indigenous organisations across the country both during the march and afterwards. Their forest has come to represent many different universals. First and foremost it represents the autonomy of indigenous peoples and their agency over their territory. The umbrella organisations for lowland indigenous organisations and highland indigenous organisations respectively, CIDOB and CONAMAQ, marched together to demand the defense of territory, life and indigenous peoples. They united in their indigenous claim: those were their territories that were threatened by extractivist developments. Although the highway through TIPNIS was what sparked the march, other indigenous organisations were able to participate to make comparable claims. The Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní for example participated in the march to prevent the government from pursuing hydrocarbon activities in the Aguarague park<sup>26</sup>. By marching, and by commemorating, these groups demanded autonomy over their land. These demands were not

---

26 [http://constituyentesoberana.org/3/noticias/tierra/082011/080811\\_1.pdf](http://constituyentesoberana.org/3/noticias/tierra/082011/080811_1.pdf)



just demands about the highway through the TIPNIS park: these groups demanded that the government would not touch indigenous territories at all. Carlos, a sociologist from Cochabamba, said: *'If TIPNIS falls, everything will fall'* (Conversation with Carlos Crespo: 04-09-2013). Many indigenous groups support the TIPNIS inhabitants in their struggle, as is also demonstrated by the presence of many at the commemoration. However, they do not all just struggle against the highway, they struggle for the autonomy of their own territories and their own self-determination: the protection of TCO's in general is in danger when the government stops respecting the borders of TCO TIPNIS. The indigenous groups have a joint history of resistance, and the eighth indigenous march was the successor of earlier march. In Chaparina the indigenous government of Bolivia knocked down this march brutally. This violence left the indigenous marchers bewildered: in their history of resistance, never had they seen such violent response. Chaparina is now an important symbol expressing this shared experience of injustice and the severity of the current conflict.

Second, the manner in which the TIPNIS inhabitants live in their territory is a catalyst for collaboration. These collaborations received wider attention after the Chaparina raid, for this was a remarkable event. However, the raid in itself did not remain particularly important. It is seldom mentioned in the frame where the TIPNIS forest is a forest that is part of global Nature. TIPNIS inhabitants often express THAT they do not view natural resources as commodities and they use their perspective on living in the forest creatively. Their notion of the earth overlaps with that of environmental organisations, both national and international, and the TIPNIS inhabitants make an effort to articulate these potential similarities. They often stress their concern for the environment in meetings and in the statements they make. Today (30-03-2014) for example, Fernando Vargas posted a message on Facebook : *'...We will continue to fight until the governments understand the true value of our nature and of the planet that we live on... LONG LIVE THE FIGHT FOR THE DEFENSE OF OUR PLANET, LONG LIVE THE PRINCIPLE OF LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE'*. By emphasizing that the TIPNIS inhabitants do not only defend their own territory, but more importantly the *'lungs of the earth'*, they align themselves with environmentalists. Amazon Watch, for example, made an effort to support the marchers and the TIPNIS inhabitants are still in contact with some of its member-organisations. Amazon Watch is an NGO that aims to protect the Amazon and the indigenous peoples living in it. They wrote a letter to Evo Morales in support of the TIPNIS struggle. In a promotion film on their website they state that they support indigenous peoples

as *'forest guardians that protect our precious forests'*<sup>27</sup>. These collaborations are global and the support the indigenous opposition receives comes partly from these Western organisations. By actively promoting their role as forest guardians, the voice of the TIPNIS inhabitants is heard around the globe.

Third, in the commemoration for Chaparina many departmental representatives were present to express their support for the struggle. Their collaboration arises from a shared experience of dispossession. Although the Beni department is on the one hand an agent of the state, the relative departmental autonomy allows for the collaboration between the department and the opposition to the government. Beni is part of the lowland region which is often referred to as Media Luna. The differences between the highlands and the lowlands are vast, which greatly contributes to the difficulty of reconciling all difference within the nation-state. The lowlands contain vast tracts of gas reserves and the soil is more fertile for agriculture. In the media, the lowlands region is framed as a rich and right-wing part of the country in the media. The Media Luna is the economic engine of the country, but since the inauguration of Evo Morales they have seen a decline in power. The departmental representative attending the Chaparina commemoration (25-09-2013) said: *'there is an image that we are not part of Bolivia... we are the children of this land and that is why we defend it'*. The Chaparina raid signifies another breach of departmental autonomy. Through the collaboration with the TIPNIS inhabitants they create a voice to oppose the government. They defend TIPNIS and through defending TIPNIS they demonstrate their legitimacy to keep a certain degree of power.

The last group of collaborators can be found in Cochabamba. Also in Cochabamba memorials were held for the acts committed in Chaparina. Different organisations in Cochabamba work together closely with people from the TIPNIS opposition. Different organisations in Cochabamba demonstrate that the Bolivian democracy is becoming less democratic. The package of violent images that Chaparina reflects to them illustrates the enormous betrayal of the democratic gains and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Maria, the founder of SomosSur for example, mentions the raid in the same breath with government manipulation of the media. The commemorations of Chaparina are used to inform people about the wrongdoings of the government. Bolivia has been subjected to dictatorship and corruption for decades. When Morales was elected, many felt it as a turning point in the hard fight towards a more just democracy. As I described in the previous chapter, people were hopeful, people who had been marginalized and been denied proper citizenship rights would be included. The raid

---

27 <http://Amazon Watch.org/>

in Chaparina marked an enormous threat to the hard won democracy rights. Chaparina has become the signifier (cf. Laclau 2000) to demonstrate what should not happen in a proper democracy. The political abstractions in the new constitution formed by the MAS government were incredibly promising; many of the marchers were even part of the process of writing this constitution that recognized Bolivia as a pluri-national state with more autonomy for different (indigenous) groups. Not only the marchers were torn apart on September the twenty-fifth 2011, it was also the credibility of the national constitution and its recognition of Bolivia as a pluri-national state that was relinquished.

The meaning of Chaparina for the groups of collaborators differs and overlaps. In the process of struggling against the highway, these groups are constantly attempting to find agreements. They are confronted with many differences, yet they choose to emphasize their similarities. The TIPNIS inhabitants want to protect their territory, mostly because they want to keep their own authority over the territory, and this aspiration is recognized in other indigenous groups as well. They want to protect their environment against contamination and extractivism, just like environmental organizations. They feel the boundaries of their territory are crossed, as in the case of the Beni department. And lastly, the TIPNIS inhabitants demonstrate that they are not respected in the Bolivian democracy, which is an experience they share with people from NGOs in Cochabamba. The package of Chaparina is an important symbol for all of them, representing a nightmare and at the same time sparking hope for solidarity, hope for shared dreams and, above all the fight that is fought together. The Chaparina raid and the devastating effects a highway will have on the lives of the inhabitants are protested against for from different perspectives. It is not despite the internal frictions that they fight together, it is by virtue of these intercultural frictions that they can create a voice.

The people living in Trinidad are those most affected by the construction of the highway. They have succeeded in making their cause heard and have managed to mobilize people across the country in order to enforce their demands. While conducting fieldwork I first aimed at unraveling indigenous claims and the indigenous inhabitants of the TIPNIS park were of incredible importance in this sense. Nonetheless, while attempting to grasp the indigenous claims made by TIPNIS inhabitants I got confused. It appeared to me as if I would be enforcing the conflict if I articulated what their indigenous claim consists of. Nonetheless, it is the indigenous claim that gives them power to contest the current developments, just as the

indigenous claim made by the government is giving them legitimacy. In this chapter I have explored an alternative approach to the conflict in which the TIPNIS inhabitants are protagonists. I first demonstrated that the government cannot be reflected upon as merely a giver of rights. The rights given to indigenous groups in Bolivia over the past years do not simply reflect the policy on indigenous peoples. On the contrary, they are creatively used as an indigenous claim. Indigenous claims are part of a politics of appearances. Second, I aimed to reveal the awkward relation the TIPNIS inhabitants have with other opposition groups. The TIPNIS opposition is not a unified group; rather, they are a fragmented group of people and organizations that manage to come together by creatively ignoring differences and inventing similarities. A conflict is much more than an active disagreement between two opposing parties, and this particular controversy is not simply about tensions between two indigenous imageries. The conflict is constituted by frictions within projects and collaborations.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to demonstrate the awkward connections involved in the TIPNIS controversy. I aimed to shed light on the incredible repercussions that the prospective construction of a highway has. The question I posed in the introduction was: how could it happen that an indigenous government was up against its own indigenous citizens? A claim to an indigenous identity has long been a claim to justice for marginalized and dispossessed minority groups (cf. Canessa 2007). The multicultural debate asks how the state can include different minority groups. In Bolivia, indigenous groups have gained increased legal recognition since the 1990s. Remarkably, Bolivia nowadays has a government that identifies itself as indigenous, nonetheless there are conflicts between the government and indigenous groups. Canessa (2007, 2012) argues that these indigenous conflicts arise over different indigenous claims. By examining what a certain indigenous claim entails, we may understand why different indigenous groups end up in a conflict.

I aimed to reveal that the TIPNIS controversy is not just about friction between indigenous claims. I argued viewing the TIPNIS controversy as an indigenous conflict is unhelpful for it envisions two unified parties standing opposite of each other: the state and the TIPNIS opposition. In this analysis the state has an indigenous identity which conflicts with the indigenous identity of the TIPNIS inhabitants. Although it is tempting to isolate the indigenous claims people are making, TIPNIS inhabitants are not merely indigenous peoples. I argue that these indigenous claims are the tip of the iceberg. Underneath the water we can find other stakeholders, such as the Brazilian economy, drug-traffickers and global NGOs. There are many other stakes, such as economic development, the protection of Nature or agency over the landscape. In order not to end up in the polemic discourses articulated by the adversaries of the controversy, where it is the capitalist state standing opposite of the traditional indigenous inhabitants, I have searched for an alternative analysis which does justice to the complicated dynamics in the TIPNIS controversy.

In chapter one I have sought to include the material aspects of the conflict. Stakeholders involved imagine different resources in the park. While the highway is opening up the territory to an enormous increase of possibilities, at the same time it is shutting off its function as a refuge and as a natural reserve. Changes in the environment, such as the arrival of colonizers from the highland or the construction of a highway, interfere with the imagined

borders of the park. The prospective construction of the highway has already changed the social as well as the physical landscape the TIPNIS inhabitants live in. The leaders have been forced to move to Trinidad, many people have been unable to attend their fields, the colonizers have increasingly invaded the park, which has left its marks on the TIPNIS territory.

In chapter two I have elaborated on the different narratives articulated in Cochabamba. I sought to explain how different universals lent power to these narratives. State-supporting groups often spoke about development and prosperity. For them, the current government symbolises justice for marginalized groups. To them, finally, the Bolivian people have the chance to develop, to get access to democracy, to have a voice in the nation. A national Bolivian indigenous community is created through stories of Bolivia's history and the change that is taking place with the current government. Those opposed to the highway in Cochabamba tell a completely different story. They deconstruct the development narrative by arguing that it is no more than a facade. The opposition fights to protect Nature and the freedom of indigenous peoples. They oppose the homogenous indigenous identity promoted by the state. Both narratives make use of seductive universals: development, nature, freedom. But the engagements they make are entirely different. The polemity of these narratives gives both sides more leverage.

In chapter three I explained why the conflict can not simply be considered an active disagreement between two opposing indigenous claims. Rights are understood to express the manner in which indigenous people are accommodated within the state. However, I have demonstrated that framing the conflict as indigenous creates leverage and scope, for the state as well as for the opposition. The juridification of indigenous identity has created a strong incentive for the TIPNIS opposition to express their indigenous identity. It is through their indigenous identity that they can expose the hypocrisy of the government. At the same time the government uses the legal recognition of indigenous peoples as a politics of appearances: the legal recognition of indigenous peoples is used to demonstrate the legitimacy of the government. By appearing indigenous, the government can sell itself to the public. The TIPNIS opposition is exposing this politics of appearances by demonstrating that they, as indigenous peoples, are not granted these rights. Although legislation is often understood as an expression of the position minority groups have within a nation-state, I demonstrated laws are sometimes employed for political projects instead of being used in a legal system. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that the TIPNIS inhabitants have awkward relations with other opposition groups. They have been able to mobilize many different groups across the

country, not despite of but by virtue of their differences. The TIPNIS opposition is not a unified group, but rather a coming together of many different people with many different reasons to oppose the government. Nonetheless, they creatively ignore their differences and invent similarities. In doing so they profoundly increase their leverage to get heard.

The TIPNIS landscape hides many treasures and people have been eager to tell their version of their hunt for TIPNIS' treasures. Together these contrasting stories constitute the meaning of the possible construction of a highway. I have tried not to make these stories appear idiosyncratic, but rather I aimed to reveal the awkward connections between the fragments: the stories people tell about the highway are profoundly contradictory. Whereas the friction between the stories expressed by the state and those expressed by the opposition create a conflict, the friction within the TIPNIS opposition creates scope and leverage. These powerful stories all creatively imagine heroes and villains. Multiculturality appears very complicated to facilitate in a nation-state, especially when people understand and dream about their world so differently. In the analysis of this multicultural conflict I aimed to include relations which are not merely between the state and its citizens. As scholars, we have to keep in mind that many chaotic relations are involved in conflicts, moving beyond the borders of a nation-state. Including the dreams and nightmares that lie hidden in the iceberg below the water surface can lead to a better understanding of the roots of a conflict and might even contribute to a more informed dialogue between actors.

## Epilogue

### The Vulnerable Anthropologist: reflections on researchh

*'Let's face it. We are undone by each other, and if we're not, we're missing something.'*

Judith Butler (2004:23)

In this thesis I have traced the different meanings attached to the TIPNIS controversy. I have tried to unravel the meshwork of '*entangled lines of life, growth and movement*' (Ingold 2011: 63). The researchher is not outside the meshwork that is researchhed, moreover I have been my own instrument. I think the anthropologist takes an important place in conducting fieldwork. I am one of the lines that have led to the stories that are in this thesis. The clue to examine myself as an anthropologist was a slow question. A slow question (*trage vraag*) is a question that can not be answered, it is a question that is bonded with an experience of chaos and impotence (Kunneman 2009:15). A slow question does not ask for a solution, but for interpretation and meaning. To some questions we do not have the answers, but this does not mean we should not ask them. The question I have asked myself during the time of this researchh was: what is my position as an anthropologist in the field?

Although slow questions are not usually asked in scientific books or articles, I think they are fundamental. Since anthropologists are their own instruments, questions about our role are important in understanding what the value of our work is. As social scientists we do not merely have our technical skills to study other people; we are humans, involved, emotional and vulnerable. Kunneman (2009) introduced the term normative professionalization: as professionals we have to think about our normative frames, as well as the value of our work. In our professional lives we need to ask slow questions to provide our jobs with normative value, for we act and think normatively. We all find moral difficulties in our professional lives. We should not ignore these difficulties, but instead face them and examine them, be it other persons, certain subjects, or other perceptions of the self. To understand and to value our jobs as anthropologist, I think it is important to examine these kinds of slow questions. Through these we can find the use of our work and the passion to do it. I argue for asking them.

In this epilogue I will elaborate on the meaning I give to being an anthropologist. First I will give a theoretical reflection which mirrors my viewpoint before I went on my fieldtrip. Second



I will show my vulnerability in the field and the doubts, dreams and nightmares that fieldwork created for me. And third I will explain how my opinion changed during the process of writing this thesis. I will conclude with my current vision on anthropology, but I would like to stress these are not answers but interpretations of slow questions.

## **Theories of being an anthropologist**

*'It is our belief that anthropology can contribute to deeper understanding of the often contradictory and complex matter of struggle for a better world.'*

(Anthropology and Activism n.d.)

While writing the proposal for this thesis I went looking for answers to the following question: how can anthropology be useful? I have submerged myself in anthropological and philosophical literature to find possible answers. The main theme that inspired me was involvement with the field as opposed to the neutral, objective role of a researcher. I was inspired by activist anthropology, arguing to take a stance. The issue of involvement in the field has been a theme in anthropology since its beginnings. In the colonial period anthropologists often had the objective of contributing to the development of 'primitive peoples' towards civilization (Nash 2001; Behar 1996). However, after this stark engagement with development in the colonial period, social scientists became wary of taking a position. Cultural relativism gained grounds in anthropology, especially when postmodern criticism became conventional in social sciences. Cultural relativism was a political critique to oppose the contribution that anthropologists made to the destruction of native lands and peoples in the colonial period (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 418). Nowadays, anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Charles Hale promote an activist anthropology, or a compassionate turn. As anthropologists we often enter the lives of marginalized groups or fields of resistance. Scheper-Hughes (1995: 409) argues we have to choose sides and fight together compassionately with the people we work with, cultural relativism is no longer appropriate in the world we live in. However, this viewpoint is not unproblematic. Traditional normative frames have crumbled. It is exactly the disenchantment of the world that has led to value-neutral science. Yet, the compassionate turn argues for morally involved science, but how can we become morally involved when we depart from neutrality?

Bauman (1995: 43) argues there is no grand narrative to deduce our morals from, modernity is a time of disenchantment where erratic powers no longer define our sense of meaning, as Weber (2009) stated about a century ago. So if we can not find a moral compass in grand narratives, we can only find it within ourselves and in our daily encounters (Bauman 1995: 43; cf. Taylor 2002). We can experience a moral compass in our encounters with different others. Whenever we encounter these differences we become vulnerable. We are dependent of each other; our self is constituted in relation to the other (cf. Taylor 1994). We think the boundaries

of ourselves stop at our skin, we delineate ourselves, however: '... *this language... does not do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own, irreversibly, if not fatally.*' (Butler 2004, 25). In these encounters with the other, our selves are undone. It is thus dangerous to create a moral scheme, because it can never do justice to the chaos of reality (cf. de Wit; Andrade 1995). However, does this imply that we should not get involved at all? When working with other people, is it even possible to be emotionally and morally detached? I think not. We can only let ourselves be undone and experience what is the right thing to do. From there anthropologists can start thinking about their role, by thorough reflection on what happens in the field.

An important argument against involved science is that it would reduce complexity. When a researcher chooses a side, this biases the way the researcher frames his or her research. Scientists should strive not to get involved, not to get undone. We have to pursue objectivity to be open for all knowledge. However, one can never leave history, identity and social background behind entirely (Hale 2008). Postmodern criticism has revealed the impossibility of this. This has led to a cultural relativism, where making judgements is intolerable. Activist anthropology inspires to take a different viewpoint on objectivity by recognizing the moral and political involvement people have with each other, as well in the role of a researcher. This augments the space for reflection on situatedness and understanding a problem from within. Objectivity is thus not the pursuit of neutrality, or the striving to let go of our backgrounds, but a deep consciousness about one's own political and moral standpoint. We can think about our imagines and reflect on them.

## **Fieldwork**

*'Anthropology's highest mission is to start from where people are and go with them wherever they take you.'*

(Hart en Ortiz 2008: 3)

In the field I have used four different methods<sup>28</sup> to examine my position as an anthropologist. These methods were based on courses on academic skills at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. Every week I sat down to reflect. The first method I used was the reflection on sources of inspiration. This reflection explores important themes that are connected to the slow question. About one source of inspiration, for example, an anthropologist friend from the

---

<sup>28</sup> In the appendix a description of the different methods can be found.

Netherlands, I wrote: *'She exudes confidence. She is there. In the world. She goes with the flow.'* While reflecting on this I realized I had all these expectations of doing fieldwork in which everything would be grand, but these expectations were now getting in the way of just doing fieldwork, in the way of letting things come as they were.

Second, I used the Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperider and Whitney 1999) to reflect on best practices and important situations. This method leads to out-of-the-box thinking and is used to further develop visions. I used stories which made me feel positive to search for clues that defined my experience of success. One story I used is about a taxi-ride in the beginning of my fieldwork period. I chatted to the driver and we had to wait a bit for others to join us on the ride. In that moment I realized I was often too direct and I should take more time to chat with people. This small story gave me insight in what made me enthusiastic: seeing new things, feeling welcome, understanding something, being in control.

Third I used the polyvocal reflection inspired by Dennis Merzel (2009). The goal of this reflection is to breach a limited self image and become sensitive to the polyphony within the self. This method enabled me to gain more insight in the friction within me. For example, in one of the reflections I wrote about the voice of enthusiasm: *' I am very happy. I love to run around through the office all day and tell everyone they are doing so well, that I love to work together, that we are getting better and better... But sometimes I get tired, I have to make everything energetic and solve all troubles. I would like some time off sometimes'*. This made me realize I sometimes found it hard to submit to the fact that it was difficult to do fieldwork, that it was not always fun. Apparently it was an effort to remain enthusiastic and apparently I did not allow myself to be a bit weary every once in a while.

And fourth I took four moments to do a scenario reflection, revolving on a dream and a nightmare scenario. This reflection can yield tools to think about plans for the future and how to get there. It is important to give insight in what can be learned from certain experiences. At the end of August 2013 my perfect future looked like this: *'I speak with a lot of people here, they are always glad to see me and eager to talk to me, they give me other contacts and take me to different places. I really enjoy it'*. My nightmare looked like this: *'Nobody wants to talk to me, men are constantly flirting with me which drives me crazy, my new friends are not nice at all when I get to know them better, I am no one here in Bolivia and I can not even talk about that with the people at home'*. I wanted to learn to be safe in unknown situations, to feel certain of what I was doing, and I wanted to learn to be open about what I thought and felt, to the people at home and the people I had met in Bolivia.

These methods have proven to be very insightful for me. The data I gained through these give insight in the difficulties and questions I encountered in the field and how this shaped the way I now look upon my period of fieldwork. As may be clear, everything went differently from how I thought it would go, and this was difficult for me. I thought I would be easily involved, and that this involvement would incite me to ask questions about how to deal with that. I also thought being vulnerable would enable me to feel connected to the people I met. Although these themes constantly came back in my reflections, it was not as romantic as I pictured it to be. There I was, on the other side of the world, not speaking the language, not knowing the social rules. Sometimes it was horrible. In other moments, when I did manage to make sense of something, it was fantastic.

I had a culture shock. This has been a very important factor in doing my research. In the beginning this often made me angry. I could not grasp the world around me and it felt as if there was no one there trying to make me understand. The differences I encountered affected me, my worldview staggered. I tried really hard to be relaxed about it, but I felt incredibly dependent and unsafe. My friends in Bolivia used to joke to me that I was a small child (niña), but actually I really felt like a small child. The most simple things were difficult to me: for example buying groceries, people would stare at me and barely respond to what I said. It frustrated me. 'I' existed in relation to others, but where was 'I' when all others were gone? When all the ties were cut loose, and I could not understand the symbols and social rules, I felt the knowledge about myself unsure. Although I was very aware that this was part of doing fieldwork, it made me feel weak. It was difficult to work, it was difficult to keep pushing myself to explore. I had a job to do: to make sense of a conflict in the world where I had arrived, but how to do it when it did not make any sense at all? Judith Butler described this feeling accurately:

*'I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one's own deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing.... I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well.'* (2004: 21)

Culture shock is the shared experience of anthropologists doing fieldwork, it is what makes fieldwork a *rite de passage* (cf. Sluka and Robben 2007). It colours the fieldwork experience and the knowledge gained for it defines one's being in the world.

Another important issue in my fieldwork was involvement. I wanted to feel connected to

other people, to the controversy, to Bolivia. In the light of activist anthropology I thought this was important. One day I was at a meeting in Trinidad, I lost track, because listening to people speaking Spanish in the tropical heat for hours in a row was exhausting, I was looking at my friend Adolfo, speaking passionately, and thought: *'What do I care if they build a highway or not? I do not care. I am not from here. This is their life, not mine.'* I wanted to care about it so much, but I was entirely new to this, I was a researcher and I did not understand anything when I first arrived. I did not even speak Spanish. I could not be involved immediately in the sense I had projected. It displaced my thoughts of anthropology to realize this. What was fieldwork worth if I did not care? Maybe I was the objective, distant researcher, the sort of researcher I did not want to be.

But when I left, I did feel this connection I had looked for. Leaving Trinidad, leaving Bolivia, felt like losing something important. Where the beginning of fieldwork, marked a loss of everything that was familiar, leaving Bolivia marked a loss of freedom and people I had come to care about.

All these experiences together were very important in relation to my slow question. It is from this position of vulnerability and dependence that I did my research, collected my data. My role as an anthropologist in the field was more distant than I had projected it to be. My contribution to the field was small, if there was any. In contrast to my story, I often heard stories from fellow-anthropologists of a great time in the field, meeting new people, doing things you never did before and learning a lot. Perhaps people told me stories of culture shock, but I never really heard them. In Bolivia, I could not ignore it. Neither could I ignore how important this process was for understanding the knowledge I gained.

## **Writing**

On getting back home from fieldwork an entirely different period began. Back home, where everything is safe and known, we write. I wrote about Bolivia, about the stories I found. I was surprised by the friction between these two experiences. In the field I was entirely vulnerable, constantly confronted with things I did not understand. Back home, I was sitting behind my laptop for days. My vulnerability changed into a certain confidence and authority. However, this was not a smooth process, it raised new questions about the job of an anthropologist. Can I be the author of what is told? What do I anonymize? What are the consequences of what I write down? And, most importantly, is there any use in what I am doing?

During fieldwork we depend on the people we work with, but when we write about them, we

suddenly take authority and write about their lives. What does that imply and how can we deal with these different positions? The stories I collected were told by people. In the field I was completely dependent on them. They let me into their lives for a while and allowed me to ask questions, be a student of what was their daily lives. This was a very modest job to do. Writing these stories down, I felt resistance to melting them into my own story, to merge them with my analysis. I did not understand what was going on there, certainly less than the people there did, am I allowed to interpret their stories then? What is giving me that authority? The simple answer is: my profession as an anthropologist is. This is problematic and made my dilemmas end in circles. When asking what makes my profession valuable, I can hardly answer that it is the profession in itself.

Different issues were part of this struggle. People told me things in confidence, though they were aware of my role as a researcher. The people from TIPNIS that refused to do an interview with me, but always wanted to chat; am I allowed to write down what they told me? Even if I can, am I aware of the possible implications of my written words? Though they might be small, I should at least think about it. And can I deconstruct the indigenous claim by demonstrating the other connections, whereas that was what every meeting was about? During the process of writing I gained more distance to the field and strangely, all these dilemmas became more manageable. These dilemmas are comparable to the more grand moral dilemma I described in the first paragraph: can we take a stance? By simply reproducing the stories I heard in the field, my thesis would be useless. I had to take authority to make sense, but this was not easy to do. The choices represent my point of view and are a reflection of my training as an anthropologist, which is not neutral either.

So last, but not least, I wondered, what is the use of this thesis? What would one learn if one read it and how could the people in the field gain from what I am writing down? Scheper-Hughes (1995) argued we could write texts that make people think:

*'The new cadre of "barefoot anthropologists" that I envision must become alarmists and shock troopers-the producers of politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity, and bad faith'*

Scheper-Hughes (1995: 417)

Through anthropology we can recognize stories that might otherwise go unheard. In the case of this thesis, the stories I told would not go unheard, as the people I worked with have a strong voice in Bolivian society. Their voice is what interested me in the first place. However,

the connections I have made are not the ones they made. I have wanted to break through the polemicity of the controversy and show why people get into such a vehement conflict.

This research has been a great journey, through anthropology, the world and my conceptions of myself and the world we live in. I thought that I would become an activist in the field. I thought that I did not care at all while I was in Bolivia. I have continuously questioned the use of my work. So what is this job I am doing, which I have come to love? What I have learned during my training is to listen to all the different stories and to tell them. I have learned not to be scared of differences and not to be scared to let my worldview collide with another. As anthropologists we learn to see things and we learn to think with other perceptions, our endeavour is to find different ways of being (Ingold 2011:239). While doing that, we can take the readers of our texts with us and open doors to new universes. It is a modest as well as an influential job and I hope I have opened at least a tiny door.



## Bibliography

Albó, Xaviér

2012 Contextualización: Una mirada profunda del TIPNIS. *In: Coraje: Memorias de la Octave Marcha Indígena por la defensa del TIPNIS*. Alex Contreras Baspineiro, ed. pp 12-40. ERBOL, 142 Fundación Tierra, CEJIS, Somos Sur, CENDA, Campaña en Defensa del TIPNIS, BOL PRESS, FOCOMADE, Radio FIDES: Cochabamba, Bolivia.

2008 Movimientos y poder indígena en Bolivia, Ecuador y Perú. Vol. 71. CIPCA.

Albro, Robert

2006 The culture of Democracy and Bolivia's Indigenous Movements. *Critique of Anthropology* 26 (4): 387-410.

Andrade, Roy D'

1995 Moral Models in Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409-440.

Anderson, Benedict

2006 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun

2000 Grassroots Globalization and the researchh Imagination. *Public Culture* 12 (1): 1-19.

Barney, Keith

2009 Laos and the making of a 'relational' resource frontier. *The geographical journal* 175 (2): 146-159.

Bauman, Zygmunt

1995 *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Bebbington, Denise Humphreys and Anthony J Bebbington

2010 Extraction, Territory and inequalities: Gas in the Bolivian Chaco. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 30: 259-280.

Behar, Ruth

1996 *The Vulnerable Observer*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Brysk, Alison

2000 From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Butler, Judith

2004 Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. London: Verso.

Cadena, Marisol de la

2010 Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond Politics. *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2): 334-370.

Canessa, Andrew.

2007 Who is Indigenous? Self-identification, Indigeneity, and Claims to Justice in Contemporary Bolivia. *Urban Anthropology* 36 (3): 14-48.

2012 Conflict, Claim and Contradiction in the New Indigenous State of Bolivia'. *desiguALdades.net Working Paper Series, No. 22*, Berlin: *desiguALdades.net researchh Network on Interdependent unequalities in Latin America*.

Chaves, Margarita and Marta Zambrano

2006 From blanqueamiento to reindigenización: Paradoxes of mestizaje and multiculturalism in contemporary Colombia. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*: 80.

Cooperider, David L. en Diana K. Whitney

1999 Appreciative Inquiry. San Francisco: Berett Koehler.

Costas Monje, Patricia and María Virginia Ortiz Echazú

2010. Estudio de caso N° 2: TIPNIS, la coca y una carretera acechan a la Loma Santa: Territorio Indígena en Cochabamba y Beni. Informe 2010: Territorios Indígena Originario Campesinos entre la Loma Santa y la Pachamama. La Paz: Fundación Tierra: pp. 266-287.

Dagnino, Evelina

2003 Citizenship in Latin America. *Latin American Perspectives* 30 (2): 3-17.

De Angelis, Massimo

2002 Separating the doing and the deed: capital and the continuous character of

enclosures. *Historical Materialism* 12 (2): 57-87.

Falzon, Marc Anthony

2009. Introduction. *In: Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary researchh*. Marc Anthony Falzon, ed. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

Finer, Matt, Clinton N. Jenkins, Stuart L. Pimm, Brian Keane and Carl Ross

2008 Oil and Gas Projects in the Western Amazon: Threats to Wilderness, Biodiversity and Indigenous Peoples. *PLoS ONE* 3(8): e2932. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0002932

Flores, G and J Blanes

1984 ¿Donde va el Chapare? Cochabamba: Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social CERES.

Forrest, Crystal

2011 Fostering Fantasies: Imagining the Frontier. *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology* 12 (1).

Gandarillas, Marco

2011 Se prepara la restitución del triángulo energético. *PetroPress: Revista de análisis e información sobre políticas públicas en recursos naturales, industrias extractivas y medio ambiente* 26: 4-10.

García Linares, Alvóro

2012 Geopolítica de la Amazonía: Poder Hacendal-Patrimonial y Acumulación Capitalista. La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional.

García, Maria Elena

2005 Making Indigenous Citizens: Identity, Development, and Multicultural Activism in Peru. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 10 (2): 457-459.

Grisaffi, Thomas

2010 'We are Originarios... We Just Aren't From Here': Coca Leaf and Identity Politics in the Chapare, Bolivia. *Bulletin of Latin American researchh* 29 (4): 425-439.

Gros, Christian

2000 De la nación mestiza a la nación plural: el nuevo discurso de las identidades en el contexto de la globalización. *In: Museo, memoria y nación*. G. Sánchez and M. E.

Wills, eds. pp. 361-364. Bogotá: Mincultura, Museo Nacional, PNUD, IEPRI, ICANH.

Gudynas, Eduardo

2010 The new extractivism in South America: ten urgent theses about extractivism in relation to current South American progressivism. Bank information Centre.

Hale, Charles

2004 Rethinking Indigenous Politics in the Era of the 'Indio Permitido'. NACLA Report on the Americas Sept.-Oct: 16-21.

2008 Introduction. *In: Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Methods and Politics of Activist Scholarship*. Charles Hale, ed. pp. 1-30. Berkeley: University California Press.

Hannerz, Ulf

2003 Being there... there... and there! Reflections on multi-site ethnography. *Ethnography* 4 (2).

Hart, Keith en Horacio Ortiz

2008 Anthropology in the Financial Crisis. *Anthropology Today* 24 (6): 1-3 .

Harten, Sven

2011 *The Rise of Evo Morales and the MAS*. London: Zed Books.

Harvey, David

1989 *The Condition of Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.

2001 Globalization and the "Spatial Fix". *Geographische Revue: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion* 2 (3): 23-30.

2005 *A brief history of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Iamele, Giuseppe

2012 *Reflejos del Isiboro Sécore en la Amazonía Boliviana*. La Paz: Fobomade.

Ingold, Tim

2011 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kenrick, J., and J. Lewis

2004 Indigenous Peoples' Rights and the Politics of the Term "Indigenous."  
*Anthropology Today* 20 (2): 4-9.

Kunneman, Harry

2009 *Voorbij het Dikke-Ik: Bouwstenen voor een Kritisch Humanisme*. Utrecht:  
Humanistic University Press.

Kuper, Adam

2003 The Return of the Native. *Current Anthropology* 44(3):389-402.

Kymlicka, Will

1996 The Politics of Multiculturalism. *In: Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal  
Theory of Minority Rights*. Written by Will Kymlicka. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Laclau, Ernesto

2000 Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political  
Logics. *In: Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*.  
Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, eds. London: Verso.

Lang, Miriam

2013 Prologue: Crisis of Civilization and Challenges for the Left. *In: Beyond  
Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America*. Miriam Lang and Dunia  
Mokrani, eds. pp. 5-14. Quito: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg.

Laurence, William F., Miriam Goosem and Susan GW Laurence

2009 Impacts of roads and linear clearings on tropical forests. *Trends in Ecology and  
Evolution* 24 (12): 659-669.

Marcus, George E.

1995 Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited  
Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95-117.

Massey, Doreen

2004 Geographies of Responsibility. *Geografiska Annaler: Serie B, Human  
Geographer* 86 (1): 5-18.

McNeish, John-Andrew

2013 Extraction, Protest and Indigeneity in Bolivia: The TIPNIS Effect. *Latin American  
and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 8 (2).

Merzel, Dennis Genpo

2009 *Big Mind Big Heart: Finding Your Way*. Salt Lake City: Big Mind Publishing.

Nash, June C.

2001 *Mayan Visions: the quest for autonomy in an age of globalization*. Psychology Press.

Nordstrom, Carolyn

2007 *Global Outlaws: Crime, Money, and Power in the Contemporary World*. Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press.

Postero, Nancy Grey

2007 *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

2010 Morales's MAS Government : Building Indigenous Popular Hegemony in Bolivia. *Latin American Perspectives* 37 (18).

Postero, Nancy and Leon Zamosc

2004 *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.

Rasch, Elisabeth

2008 *Representing Mayas: Indigenous Authorities and the Local Politics of Identity in Guatemala*. Ph. D. dissertation. University of Utrecht.

Rojas Lizarazu, Rafael.

2011. *Evaluacion Ambiental Estrategica Para El Desarrollo Integral Sustenablee del Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure – TIPNIS*. La Paz: Rumbol.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy

1995 *The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology*. *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409-440.

Scott, James

2009 *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South- East Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Simon Thomas, Mark

2009 *Legal Pluralism and interlegality in Ecuador, The La Cocha murder case*.

Sluka, Jeffrey A. and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, eds.

2007 *Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology: and Introduction*. In: *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. pp. 1-28. Boston: Blackwell Publishing.

Sieder, Rachel

2007 The judiciary and indigenous rights in Guatemala. *I-Con* 5 (1): 1-30.

Sylvain, Renée

2005 Globalization and the idea of 'Culture' in the Kalahari. *American Ethnologist* 32 (3): 354-370.

Taylor, Charles

1994 The Politics of Recognition. *In: Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Amy Gutman, ed. pp. 25-37. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

2002 *De Malaise van de Moderniteit*. Kampen: Kok Agora.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt

2000 The Global Situation. *Cultural Anthropology* 15 (3): 327-360.

2005 *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connections*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Van Dijck, Pitou

2012 Troublesome Construction: The Rationale and Risks of IIRSA. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 85: 101-120.

Weber, Max

2009 *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Routledge.

Wit, Theo de

2005 Het schuim der aarde: over de politieke risico's van een humanisme zonder transcendentie. *In: Humanisme en Religie: Controverses, Bruggen, Perspectieven*. Joachim Duyndam, Marcel Poorthuis and Theo de Wit, eds. pp. 339-353. Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon.

Yashar, Deborah

2005 *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: the rise of indigenous movements and the postliberal challenge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# **Appendix**

## **Methods of reflection**

The methods used to examine the question 'what is my position as an anthropologist in the field?' have been inspired by the course 'Academic skills' at the University of Humanistic Studies.

### **Reflection on sources of inspiration**

The reflection on sources of inspirations is a method created by Ina Brouwer and is part of the methods that use art as a tool for reflection. In order to carry out this reflection the next steps need to be followed:

1. Write frankly about your personal source of inspiration.
2. Which meaning does the source of inspiration have for you?
3. What do you feel while you are writing about the source of inspiration?
4. Which themes of existence appear?
5. How do these themes relate to your slow question?
6. In which way are these themes currently important in your life?

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative Inquiry is a method created by Cooperider and Whitney (1999) in order to develop visions. It is used to derive best practices from stories that describe a positive experience. This method contains the following steps:

1. Discovery:
  - Find out what is going well by using two positive stories.
  - Where is the energy in these stories?
  - Which are similar characteristics in the stories?
2. Dreaming:
  - Fantasize about what you would like to happen (out of the box)



What if: the best (from your stories) is always happening: what does the world look like according to you? Which opportunities present themselves? Go beyond reality.

3. Designing:

Determine what you need to make your dreams come true (co-construction and a transformation from dream to reality).

4. Destiny:

Determine the direction which you want to head to with your life or work.

### **Polyvocal reflection**

The polyvocal reflection, based on a book by Dennis Genpo Merzel (2009), is used to bring the polyphony within the self to the surface and to breach a limited self image. In this method, the self is imagined as an organisation in which different 'voices' have different roles. The method to do this reflection contains the following steps:

1. Define an amount of voices that you would like to hear, for example: the voice of freedom, the voice that does not want much, the voice of the student, the voice of desire, etc.
2. Let these voices speak one by one. The next questions should be asked:
  - Could you explain something about yourself?
  - How do you feel in the organisation?
  - What is your contribution at the moment?
  - Do you feel that others listen to you?
3. After letting the different voices speak, one needs to write associative about the outcomes. The next questions need to be asked:
  - Which voices are loud?
  - Which voices are asleep?
  - Which voices whisper?
  - Which voice could be helpful in relation to the slow question?

### **Scenario reflection**

The scenario reflection is created by Huib Schwab. In this reflection inSécurities as well as motivations for the future can be brought to the surface. It is a writing exercise, containing the following steps:

1. Draft a perfect future in 15 minutes.
2. Derive at least seven themes from this story.
3. Draft a nightmare scenario in 10 minutes.
4. Determine steps to stay away from the nightmare.