

*Dam Politics: Bolivian Indigeneity, Rhetoric, and Envirosocial
Movements in a Developing State*

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ABSTRACT

How is the natural environment used and understood in contemporary Bolivian politics? To answer this question, this thesis examines two environmental conflicts, one past and one contemporary. In 2011, indigenous communities from the Indigenous Territory and Isiboro Secure National Park participated in the Eighth March for Territory and Dignity to protest the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos Highway planned for construction through the TIPNIS. Using the existing literature, I show how this protest utilized distinct forms of environmentalism to combat state resource claims. My contribution to the field is the exposition of how the environment is used and understood surrounding the indigenous resistance to the Chepete-Bala dam. I have found that, much like the TIPNIS conflict, the indigenous peoples from Madidi national park and the Pilon Lajas reserve utilize their indigenous identity to craft a distinct place-based environmentalism to combat government claims to their territory. Additionally, through careful examination of the Coordinadora Para La Defensa De La Amazonia's actions and statements, I uncover the nuanced politics that non-governmental organizations must navigate in order to express any type of environmentalism in Bolivia. I argue that these development projects cannot be fully understood without attention to the ways in which both state, indigenous, and other non-governmental actors use and construct their understanding of the environment. This original research serves to add to the existing literature on socioenvironmental conflicts in Bolivia, and in light of global climate change, it hopes to more broadly inform socioenvironmental policy-making by impressing the importance that social factors have on the natural world.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Context

Globally, environmental discourse and concern have never been more important. The Earth's climate is growing hotter each year, and with this comes a plethora of subsequent issues: sea waters are rising and becoming more tumultuous, rain is falling too much or too little, and food will become more difficult to grow by conventional methods. This climate change is exceptionally visible in Bolivia. One lake, Lago Popoó has almost entirely vanished, and another is evaporating away as well. Glaciers are rapidly disappearing, with almost a third already gone in 2011 (Glennie, 2011). This is because the Andean highlands in particular are growing more arid - less rain is falling to refill its already low water resources (Escrura, Vazquez, Cestti, De Nys, & Srinivasan, 2014).

In light of the climate issues facing the country and the world, President Morales champions notions of sustainability and environmentalism, valorizing Bolivia's unique indigenous connection to Mother Earth in the process. In October 2015 before the Climate Summit in Paris, Bolivia hosted the People's Climate Change conference in Cochabamba. This prelude to the global conference was to represent "unheard" voices of the United Nations climate summit (Al Jazeera, 2015). They put together a ten-point plan to combat climate change, with solutions ranging from diverting military spending to climate change initiatives, the creation of an international climate court to hold countries accountable for their carbon emissions, and eliminating technology patents to allow the

sharing of new energy technologies (Shankleman, 2015). The plan, in classic Morales fashion, linked capitalism to the destruction of Mother Earth.

As a champion of the environment and marginalized indigenous Bolivians, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government drafted and passed a new constitution in 2009. Multiple clauses immensely augmented the rights given to indigenous communities throughout the country. The most important of these new statutes for environmental movements has been Articles 2 and 30, which guaranteed the respect for indigenous autonomies and ensured consultation before extractive projects began on lands where indigenous peoples lived. Despite their own constitution and Morales's rhetoric on protecting Mother Earth, the MAS government has ignored these clauses in pursuit of environmentally degrading development projects. This thesis examines two of these instances: the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos Highway planned for the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Secure (Indigenous Territory and Isiboro Secure National Park, TIPNIS) and the Chepete-Bala dam on the Beni River. Both projects generated nation-wide opposition, and both incited indigenous-led environmental resistance. The government supported neither of the movements, instead attempting to delegitimize them, and, in the case of the TIPNIS 'massacre,' violently repressed it. Why would a pro-indigenous government (and proudly indigenous president) ignore one of its greatest campaign promises and marginalize indigenous environmental movements? What does this say about Bolivian indigeneity and its links to the environment? These questions are part of Bolivia's environmental narrative, and answering them will help to show the environment is used and constructed in Bolivian politics.

The TIPNIS is located in the Beni, a department in eastern Bolivia bordering Cochabamba. In 1996, it was declared an Original Community Territory, which under the 1994 Constitution legally barred the migration of farmers to the region. It recognized the indigenous peoples living in the park and allowed for two economic models of development to co-exist, permitting the area's indigenous to continue living as they had and labeling a distinct area as one which the migrants could move to. This created what came to be called the 7th Polygon, where the majority of migrants were Andean coca growers (Fernández, 2012). In 2011, the government incited the passions of the same population when it proposed building a highway through the heart of the TIPNIS. It claimed that the road would bring economic development and better access to healthcare for the region, despite its location being far from most of the communities it claimed to help. The indigenous populations of the park felt that the government had violated its constitution as it did not give them the required "prior consultation" before seeking to initiate the project. In response, they organized the Eighth March for life, dignity, and territory, marching from the TIPNIS to La Paz. On the 25th of September, the march was violently halted by national military. Undeterred, they continued and arrived to cheering crowds in La Paz and gained concessions from the government.

The march, at core, was founded on a type of environmentalism. The indigenous tribes of the TIPNIS were marching to protect their way of life, which necessarily involved their link to the TIPNIS environment. They are river people, meaning they use the rivers for transportation and food. Any large alteration to their territory would be an attack upon their culture, livelihood, and homes. This, at least, is the environmental narrative utilized by the marchers. Much research has been conducted on the

environmental tensions surrounding the project, and those articles are discussed later in study. They highlight the distinct social and cultural expressions that environmentalism assumes in Bolivia, revealing the tensions between development, indigeneity, and environmentalism which creates a distinctly Bolivian, socioenvironmental narrative.

The Chepete-Bala project is a planned series of two dams on the Beni River, which runs between the Madidi National Park and the Pilon Lajas reserve. These dams would flood one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet, though the concerns surrounding the project include more local ones in addition to the scientific concern for biodiversity. As with the TIPNIS case, the government did not consult the indigenous populations living in the area for approval of the project, instead selectively choosing correspondents from the communities who the government already knew supported the project (Coordinadora Para la Defensa de la Amazonia, 2017). It also refused to release its ecological and economic impact surveys, which it also conducted without the consent of the area's inhabitants. Many communities would be affected by the flooding or rerouting of water, and some would have to relocate. As with the TIPNIS march, the indigenous protest asked the government to consult them about the project, seeking to express why they opposed the dam. In response, the government said that "small groups" were influencing the communities, implying that the indigenous peoples of Madidi and Pilon Lajas do not know what is best for them. The conflict generated by the planned Chepete-Bala dams, much like the TIPNIS road, has exposed nuanced tensions between indigenous identity, the government's ecologically-destructive development model, and Bolivian environmentalism.

Table 1: Sentiments, Actions, Justifications of Actors: A cursory overview

| Government | NGOs, Organizations | Grassroots – Individual Sentiments |
|--|--|---|
| Is very wary of NGOs due to their historical representation of foreign influence. | Have historically provided developmental aid in absence of state | Some feel abandoned by the government (rural antiplano visit) |
| Military control of water during drought (Water Scaracity Crisis in November 2016) | Skepticism of Government censorship | Feel government is corrupt (host family, Requena, Arguedas) |
| Police control of protesters (TIPNIS) | The Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN) contributes to conservation, but not to social activism. | Lowland indigenous cultures are marginalized by state patrimony. |
| “Vivir Bien” rhetoric, which claims to respect the rights of Mother Earth and indigenous peoples | Fundación Solón: Multipurpose NGO, opposed the Chepete-Bala dam. | Ties environment to indigeneity to legitimize territory claims. |
| Extraction-led development | Suyana and Programa de Fortalicimiento Integral: development NGOs. Uninvolved in social activism. | Eighth March: TIPNIS protest. Demanded that the state recognize their territorial rights. |
| Claims to represent all indigenous peoples, and its 2009 Constitution respects indigenous rights | | Chepete-Bala: 12-day vigil. Cited Article 30 of constitution. |

Research Question & Hypothesis

In the global context of climate change and environmental concern, Bolivia is in a unique position. As a developing country, it could follow the usual trend and development via extraction and export of natural resources, or it could become a model of sustainable development for the region. Various actors can influence which direction the country will take due to the distinct place environmental discourse has in Bolivian

politics. Acknowledging this fact, this thesis seeks to answer the following question: How is the environment used and discussed in Bolivian politics?

To answer this question, I examine the political discourse surrounding two environmentally-destructive ‘megaprojects’ proposed by the government: the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos Highway and the Chepete-Bala hydroelectric dam. Both projects would significantly alter the landscape and ecological systems of their perspective protected areas, making the environment an integral part of the political discussion and protest. The political discourse and response surrounding these projects involves the themes of environmentalism, indigeneity, social movements, and developmental economics, all of which will be generally explored in the Chapter 2 of this thesis and later expounded upon in the case studies of Chapters 3 and 4.

By the facts revealed in examination of these cases, I argue that, while the environment is touted as an important part of the country’s culture, it is often used as an agent of political positioning and posture. The state of the environment is not, in and of itself, the reason for its importance on the political scene. Instead, environmental claims are often more local or economically founded, and utilizing an actor’s relationship to nature is more effective than a concern-for-nature type of environmentalism. This is not to say that the actors do not have larger beliefs about the environment, but that, for politics, the discussion of the environment is a tool used by both sides to position themselves as the more legitimate actor.

Methodology

In order to answer this question, I first had to arrive at the question. Based on my observations from Bolivia and my personal interests, I became interested in Bolivian environmental movements and organizations. Specifically, I sought to examine recent protests within Bolivia and connect them to a potentially distinct form of environmentalism. This thesis is qualitative in nature, and so I decided to approach the topic of environmentalism in Bolivia generally as to allow for the data I collected to speak for itself. To achieve this end, I performed semi-structured interviews in Spanish with two key informants: Ursula Arguedas and Cecilia Requena. Ursula Arguedas is an admin of the Facebook Page “No a la Represa de El Bala” (No to the Bala Dam), and Cecilia Requena is an increasingly referenced political analyst and environmental activist in the country. These interviews served to refine my question while providing me with background information and perspectives unavailable through regular media outlets.

In addition to these interviews, I utilized the Coordinadora Para La Defensa De La Amazonia’s (Coordinator for the Defense of the Amazon, CODA) exposition of personal testimonies from the San Miguel del Bala population that will be affected by the Chepete-Bala dam. These are a series of 20 interviews, each ranging from one to four minutes long, and I use them as a primary source, taking into account not only how the speakers are portrayed, but also what that portrayal means in the broader political context. I use a number of Bolivian and foreign news sources to elaborate on the political context and positioning of the two cases. Finally, much of my fieldwork took place on Facebook, as it

served to connect me to the marginalized voices of the affected peoples. All of these interviews and sources were in Spanish.

While a structured interview follows a well-defined order of questions, the semi-structured style allows for the interviewee to speak more freely. It was accepted and in many ways ideal if one question lead them to speak on other areas. This branching would reveal connections between words and topics. Usually, the interviewer can anticipate the areas and issues the interviewee might bring up during the conversation, and they can then find that area in their list of prewritten questions and follow-up questions.

Specifically, I prepared a document of questions and follow-up questions. They were sorted thematically and were written in both English and Spanish. The themes included:

- Inter-indigenous hierarchies
- Bolivia with outsiders
- Nature
- Conservation movements/NGOs
- Vivir Bien
- Politics
- Coca
- Water
- The Amazon
- Indigeneity
- TIPNIS
- International Rhetoric
- Environmental Education
- Land
- “the process of socialization”

This type of interview structure allowed me to follow the interviewee’s conversation thematically, enabling me to draw out more detailed answers or to make the interviewee restate their answer in different words. Because I was considering ontologies of nature and how they justified their claims about the environment, word choice and

presentation of an issue were extremely important. I spent time carefully crafting my questions as to elicit responses that would indicate the interviewee's beliefs and ontologies. To achieve this, I kept my questions simple, asking generally about a theme or topic to allow for as broad or as minimal a response as the interviewee wished to supply. Additionally, I remained vigilantly aware of the demographic I spoke with. The interviews with Arguedas and Requena showed me the language used by environmentally conscious, middle to high class Bolivians. This class distinction is extremely important when considering justification and ontology, as their concerns will not be congruent with an impoverished Bolivian's nor a government official's.

I decided not to limit my medium of communication to any one form, as both written and verbal communication have their pros and cons. Interviews over email allow the respondent to carefully and mindfully craft their answers. In theory, the answers they give are exactly what they want to say. This is how I spoke to Ursula Arguedas, one of the three creators of various Facebook pages dedicated to the dissemination of anti-Chepete-Bala information. What is lost through this medium is the immediacy of the verbal response and any physical reactions of the respondent. Just as email allows for more thoughtful response with exact language, verbal interviews force the respondent to immediately answer the question, giving less time for thought. Theoretically, this approach can generate more truthful or less careful responses as the respondent does not have much time to carefully select their words. This is how I spoke with Cecilia Requena, an educated political activist and environmental investigator. These were the only two interviews I successfully scheduled and conducted myself. Both were conducted in Spanish.

Cecilia Requena is a self-described rational ecologist and social activist. For my investigation, I used her as a key informant due to her credentials. She has a Master's in Business and Public Policy, with a Postgraduate degree in Socioenvironmental Education from the Latin American Studies department of the National University of La Plata in Argentina (Post Grado en Formación Socioambiental de la Facultad Latinoamericana de La Plata). She has become an increasingly prominent environmental investigator in Bolivia and co-authored *Bolivia en un mundo 4 grados más caliente: Escenarios sociopolíticos ante el cambio climático para los años 2030 y 2060 en el altiplano norte* (Bolivia in a 4-degree hotter world: Sociopolitical scenarios of climate change in 2030 and 2060 in the northern plateau). Her study, sponsored by the Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia (Strategic Investigation Program in Bolivia, PIEB), examined the plausible environment scenarios Bolivia will encounter in the years 2030 and 2060 if the current CO₂ emission rates do not decrease. She has been interviewed on Bolivian radio stations and news outlets about the state of Bolivia's socioenvironmental development, using a global perspective to critique the government's developmental megaprojects. Given her experience and qualifications, I give her words due weight, using them to help frame the general discussion around these megaprojects. During our interview, I asked her to elaborate on the following themes:

- Who she is, what she does.
- The state of Bolivian conservation movements
 - Why no one wants to be a visible leader of these movements
- The cultural difference between La Paz and Santa Cruz as regards the environment and social movements.
- The Chepete-Bala hydroelectric dam
- The TIPNIS Eighth March
- Use of Social Media to organize social movements

- The challenges of environmentalists working in a developing country (specifically Bolivia)
- Water Scarcity
- Vivir Bien

In addition to interviews, I used government published documents, the current Bolivian Constitution, Bolivian newspapers, and speeches given by Evo Morales as primary sources. *El Cambio* is the government published newspaper, and it casts all issues in favor of the government's actions. It was a particularly useful source for the Chepete-Bala project. I used articles from *Página Siete* and *La Razón* as secondary sources. They gave me the context and reality of current events. All articles from Bolivian news sources were in Spanish.

Facebook pages served me as primary sources. While these pages are not usually socioeconomically diverse in their followings, they offer a direct window into social organization around a given issue. Additionally, they are used as a platform for the dissemination of marginalized viewpoints. One of the pages that provided me with the most data was the Coordinadora Para La Defensa de la Amazonia's Facebook page. On it, they disperse news and documents pertaining to the Chepete-Bala project, including interviews they conducted with inhabitants from San Miguel del Bala, the area where the Bala dam will be built. Careful examination of the interviewee's testimonies and portrayal revealed the linguistic politicking and positioning that surrounds this project. I perused multiple explicitly anti-Chepete-Bala pages as well, examining the type of news and information spread and the reactions to these posts. While these social media sites are available to many, a particular demographic dominates the discussion on these pages.

This demographic is not the focus of this thesis, and instead I simply recognize this dimension as a factor that likely influences the rhetoric utilized by the actors.

My time and experience in Bolivia during July and August 2016 serves me as a primary source. Much of what I saw and heard shapes the narrative of these environmental issues. I spoke with the field engineers that worked for Suyana, a Swiss developmental NGO working in the Bolivian highlands. This interview exposed the profundity of water scarcity in the highlands and contextualized its impacts on both people and land. Travelling with them into the plateau above La Paz put me in contact with extremely impoverished populations, and the campesino voice is an important contribution to the national Bolivian environmental narrative. With my classmates, I spoke with Robert Brockmann, a National Information Officer of the Bolivian United Nations Development office, and on a different day we visited Hugo Borrea, the creator of Programa de Fortalicimiento Integral whose current project deals in climate mitigation on the plateau. Both occasions served to elaborate on the countries environmental issues in the context of development. The conversations I had with my host family and friends likewise served to spur the development of this thesis topic. While none of these conversations are cited directly in this thesis, they served me by providing the context by which I investigated my question.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is organized as follows. The first chapter introduces the events and themes involved in this thesis. Chapter two is my literature review in which I explore the

themes of environmentalism, challenges to development, indigeneity, and Bolivian social movements as pertains to environmental politics. Chapter three discusses the events and rhetoric surrounding the TIPNIS conflict, with subsections examining government actions and resistance to the government actions and politics. Chapter four examines the conflicts over the Chepete-Bala dam in detail with subsections on government actions, indigenous resistance, and the efforts of the CODA. Chapter five concludes my thesis, discussing any difficulties encountered during the study while providing suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Dam Politics: Bolivian Indigeneity, Rhetoric, and Envirosocial Movements in a Developing State

Introduction

To understand how the environment is used in political rhetoric and positioning, it is necessary to first establish the ontologies of the environment in Bolivia. This literature review will elaborate on several key themes that pertain to Bolivian environmentalism. First, I give a theoretical discussion of the types of environmentalism to provide perspective on the distinct Bolivian forms of it. I follow this with a brief history of the Bolivian system of protected areas and National Parks. This leads into a short discussion on the general challenges developing countries face when trying to balance the environment and development. Next, I discuss the concept of indigeneity, focusing on its link to the Bolivian environment and politics. This leads to a small section that discusses Bolivian social movements, as pertains to the environment. Together, these themes reveal the importance of environmental claims in Bolivian politics.

Constructs of Nature & Environmentalism

Ellen's understanding of "nature" is useful in the Bolivian context. He argues that, "How people conceptualize nature depends on how they use it, how they transform it, and how, in so doing, they invest knowledge in different parts of it" (Ellen, 2008). Essentially, nature is not a fixed, solid construct. It is classified and distinguished based on people's interaction with their habitat and ecosystem, meaning nature's definition will

vary based on people's perspective (Croll & Parkin, 2002). If nature is a fluid construct, then it can be manipulated in conversations of control and power. As Croll and Parkin surmise, "Control and therefore power is thus central to discussions of the environment and its relations to culture and human endeavor."

As a starting point, environmentalism can be loosely defined as "the ethical and political perspective that places the health, harmony, and integrity of the natural environment at the center of human attention and concern" (Ball, 2011). Beneath this definition exist many subdivisions and types of environmentalism. A few are important in the Bolivian context, and their exposition will help elucidate how the environment is utilized as a political tool. Hope breaks this larger construct of environmentalism down, considering it a dynamic construct that possesses ecological, ontological, and political connotations. Recognition of these "interlinked dimensions of environmentalism" serves to more completely reveal environmentalism's narrative in Bolivia (Hope, 2016). A first dimension is concern over the varied impacts humanity makes on the planet. Second is a recognition of an anti-essentialist view of nature, meaning that nature is perceived and valued differently per group. A third and final recognition is that these issues are political by necessity and are frequently tied to themes of social justice. Understanding the interplay between these types of environmentalism and constructions of nature is necessary for examination of environmental politics.

It is important not to essentialize indigeneity and environmentalism, though indigenous peoples are able to claim exclusive environmentalisms. As Cohen argues in his exposition on cultural identity, only indigenous peoples can truly claim to be tied to the ancestral lands where their "symbolic resources," such as sacred places or animals

necessary for the practice of culturally important hunting skills, exist (Cohen, 1993). This is how harming “nature” is often equated to harming indigenous peoples, as the destruction of their home is the destruction of their culture as well. Hope termed this “place-based environmentalism,” referring to a people’s care for the land based on its cultural significance to them (Hope, 2016). When any type of environmentalism is employed as a means of political movement by marginalized populations, it could be called “environmentalism-from-below,” which is how Hope described the Octava Marcha (Eighth March) from the TIPNIS.

Protected Areas & Sustainable Development

A recent, pertinent history of Bolivian Protected Areas and the institution in charge of monitoring their economic and environmental integrity, the Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (National Service of Protected Areas, SERNAP), will help to elucidate part of Bolivia’s environmental political structure. The first protected area was the Sajama National Park, created in 1939 with the objective of protecting its queñua forests (Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia, 2012). Later, in the 60s, the TIPNIS was founded. In 1974, the first government institution was created to monitor the use and development of APs, but did not act with consideration for biodiversity or indigenous inhabitants as the SERNAP does now. It was not until the first Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity in 1990, led by communities from the Beni whose land was threatened by logging companies, that a PA became legally recognized as an indigenous territory. This spurred the development of the National System of Protected

Areas (SNAP) in 1992, whose purpose was to contribute to the processes of conservation, the maintenance of biodiversity, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

The SNAP is of 123 legally established APs. This represents some 20% of Bolivia's geographic space. The SERNAP is in charge of 22 APs, which together represent 76% of the SNAP's combined land mass and 15.5% of Bolivia. For comparison, just under 13% of the United States is protected land, and Costa Rica hosts 27.6% of terrestrial land protection (United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 2017). The same organization states that Bolivia has a 30.87% coverage of protected land. Regardless of which statistics are more accurate (those reported by PIEB or by the UN), both indicate the country's large percentage of land covered by protected areas. Figure 1 shows these protected areas as of 2012.

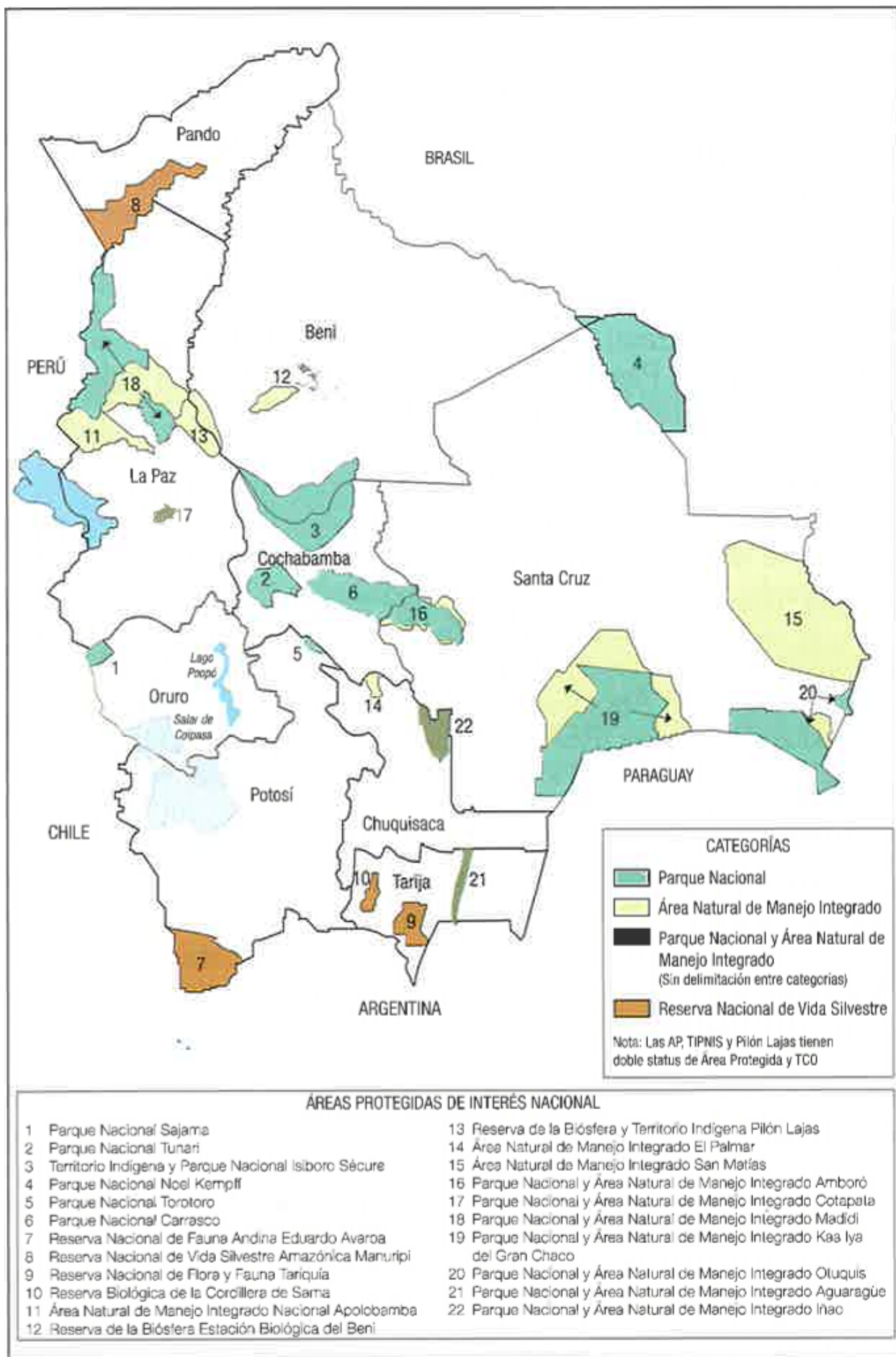


Figure 1: Protected Areas of National Interest (Source: SERNAP)

This attention to nature comes at an unusual time in the country's development cycle. Historically, developing countries usually choose immediate economic gains and growth over the long-term impacts of their current market practices (Schilling & Chiang, 2010). This is because non-renewable commodities generate substantial income, and these same countries must pay their debt and develop at the same time. Making the switch to renewable forms of energy or altering their development track to represent a more sustainable model is a fraught maneuver and is certainly one that does not pay off in the short term. This is the current challenge of Bolivia, one that has been made more difficult by its recent political promises and rhetoric.

Promises to reverse the effects of neoliberalism and the statement of greater commitment to Bolivia's 'historic responsibility to Mother Earth' (Morales, 2015) are at the foundation of the MAS discourse. Particularly, capitalism was positioned as a great evil that continues to harm the earth. Seeking an alternative to the free market development of capitalism while also valorizing indigenous culture, the state drafted a new plan under the name *vivir bien* (roughly translated as "living well"). This state-led development and environmentalism sought to "go beyond Western modernity," meaning the MAS sought an alternative development that was a complete break with neoliberalism's construction of developmentalism (Gudynas, 2013). This alternative included recognizing the rights of nature, addressing the Western ontological nature-society divide, and finding economic growth by means other than deegrative extraction. This search for alternatives can be filed under the complicated construction of *vivir bien*.

Vivir bien means different things dependent upon the speaker, but Gudynas identifies four key areas of the Bolivian construction: gender, nature's rights,

plurinationality, and indigenous cosmovisions. Towards this end, the MAS frequently invokes the name of Pachamama (Mother Earth) as it speaks out against capitalist actions, imaginary or real, in the state. Morales himself created his own “10 commandments to save the planet, starting with a call to end capitalism” (PL, ABI, 2008). In Bolivia, where capitalism is cast as an evil worthy of its own 10 commandments, *vivir bien* has been positioned against the capitalist idea of “living better.” It serves, then, as a justification for the Bolivian pursuit of *vivir bien*’s model of development. Thus, we see how the Bolivian anti-neoliberal development model has essentialized *vivir bien*. Being anti-capitalist means being pro-Pachamama, making capitalism the opposite of caring for nature.

This model of alternative development guided by *vivir bien*, however, became difficult when confronted with the reality of Bolivia’s economic situation. In the name of a more equitable distribution of wealth, the government nationalized resource extraction and deepened the existing extraction of minerals, gas, oil, and began to export new resources such as iron and lithium (Gudynas, 2013). Agriculture shifted towards soy and other monoculture for export. By 2012, Bolivia had achieved its highest levels of export income of over \$11 billion, around 90% of which came from oil, gas, minerals, and soy. Thus, extractivism is deeply entrenched in the Bolivian economy, despite the dictates of *vivir bien*. The new 2009 Bolivian Constitution acquiesced to this reality. By lumped the rights of nature into “cultural and economic rights” and not giving nature its own, distinct rights, it failed to disembark from the neoliberal separation of nature and society.

Though the plan nominally ensures the rights of Pachamama at the national level, Gudynas argues that the original idea was altered over time to reflect a more planetary

connotation. The global environment was under threat from climate change, but this did not carry down to local level responsibilities. At the summit on climate change convoked by the Morales administration in 2010 at Tiquipaya, they refused to discuss the environmental situation inside their country despite having extensive criticism for the industrialized countries. This criticism was based on the understanding of the importance of Pachamama within *vivir bien*.

This shift from the original stance was drastic, and the government has defended its departure by claiming that multiple factors acted against their ability to fully realize *vivir bien* as the guiding force. Vice President García Linera published *Geopolítica de la Amazonía*, largely in response to the TIPNIS fallout, which recognized that Bolivia's original "model of development" had not much changed. He blamed multiple factors. Bolivia is a small country, meaning it is hard to daily defend the counterrevolution, especially when their society is "deeply fragmented and corporate." Additionally, this historically monumental revolution that seeks to change property rights and economic distribution had, at the time, only been in power for 6 years (Linera, 2013).

This position justified the continuance of extraction-led development, despite its incongruence with the dictates of *vivir bien*, and it is this model of development that led to projects such as the TIPNIS road and the Chepete-Bala dam, both of which have generated social protests that have divided the government and its people, emphasizing its departure from the *vivir bien* it touts. The government's legalistic response has been to redraft its laws and rhetoric to relegate *vivir bien* as more of an ideal guiding principal than a concrete law. Its framing law of October 2012 did just this. Despite speaking on promised areas like territory rights and environmental restoration and management,

Gudynas argues that it reads more like a proclamation, one that “calls for living in ‘complementary, in harmony, and in equilibrium with Mother Earth,’” but offers no path for its realization (Gudynas, 2013). For Gudynas, the final departure from *vivir bien* was the law’s restoration of the idea of development. Restoring the preexisting constructs of development signified the acceptance of extractivism as it was now the road in the model of “integral development” the law selected.

Indigeneity

Li’s synthesis and formation of “positioning” and indigenous identity are useful as a framework for discussing the environmental politics in this thesis, as an essential part of the discourse around extraction and resource sovereignty in Bolivia is the use of indigenous identity as a positioning tool for resource claim. She finds that cultural identities are created around a history, but are not fixed, instead being subject to the interminable interplay between history, culture, and power (Li, 2008). Essentially, having indigenous identity is not simply a blood tie, but additionally involves history and culture which, together, play into politics.

During the 1990s, Bolivia enacted several multicultural reforms that attributed a “rights- and resource-bearing” connotation to the identification (Weber, 2013). Later, Evo Morales added more layers, tying indigeneity to anti-globalization and anti-neoliberal sentiments and emphasizing the defense of natural resources, which imperialist countries like the United States had taken advantage of. Being indigenous, then, has become a hefty consideration. As Kohl has found, indigenous identification in Bolivia is an increasingly fluid construct (Kohl & Farthing, 2006). Census data shows that many

individuals change their indigenous identification across years. While this phenomenon warrants further investigation, this is not the question of this project. Instead, I seek to elucidate the role that indigenous identity plays in environmental politics in Bolivia as a part of a broader survey on the state of environmentalism there, and understanding how indigenous identity is constructed is an important element.

Bolivian indigenous nationalism can be generally defined as the MAS's attempt to represent all Bolivian people. Its slogan is "Somos pueblo, somos MAS," which means "we are the people, we are MAS" (which is also Spanish for "more") (Postero 2010). It sought to appeal to all Bolivians, which it construed as poor and indigenous. It pursued this heterogeneous indigenous identity by calling their future state "plurinational." This plurinationality is defined by Gustafson as "a state that merges constitutive sovereignty rooted in the national people (*pueblo*) and indigenous plurality and self-determination" (Gustafson, 2009). Thus, the state claims to represent the interest of all indigenities, and its tripart platform would accomplish this. One, permit and validate social movements, which at the time were primarily indigenous-led, and let them be the foundation of the MAS governance (Postero, 2010). Two, combat neoliberalism, which was cast as the primary cause of Bolivian suffering. Three, revive national sovereignty, which US imperialism had removed. This included legalizing the production of coca and assuming control of the country's natural resources. In summary, the MAS attempted garner wide political support by claiming an indigenous nationalism, and in doing so essentialized indigeneity with resistance to capitalist and Western forms of development.

Indeed, MAS's 2009 constitution backs this platform, at least rhetorically. It recognizes 36 distinct national ethnic languages including Spanish, and it guarantees

various rights for indigenous peoples. Article 2 of the Bolivian Constitution “guarantees free determination under the State, including the right to autonomy, to self-governance, to culture, to recognition of institutions, and to the consolidation of territories, that all are supported by this Constitution and the law (“se garantiza su libre determinación en el marco de la unidad del Estado, que consiste en su derecho a la autonomía, al autogobierno, a su cultura, al reconocimiento de sus instituciones y a la consolidación de sus entidades territoriales, conforme a esta Constitución y la ley”) (Bolivia, 2009). Article 30 details the state’s commitment to indigenous peoples. Section 2.15 states their right to “obligatory prior consultation enacted by the State in good faith, respecting the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources in inhabited territories” (“...el derecho a la consulta previa obligatoria, realizada por el Estado, de buena fe y concertada, respecto a la explotación de los recursos naturales no renovables en el territorio que habitan”). Additionally, point 16 states that the communities should benefit from whatever exploitation of natural resources that might occur in their territory. Bound by this guarantee of territorial sovereignty, the state must compete for legitimacy in its resource claims. This is where Postero’s definition of “indigenous nationalism” serves to greatly elucidate the complex social reality of the state’s environmentally degrading megaprojects, such as the TIPNIS road and the Chepete-Bala dam. It becomes a game of political positioning. Who is more indigenous – the state that represents all indigenities, or a few indigenous communities representing themselves? Whichever actor is more indigenous wins the resource and territory claim.

One important consideration for the government’s indigenous nationalism is that not all Bolivian indigenous cultures share the same values. While Evo Morales has done

a remarkable job selling his indigenous nationalism, his home and support base is “overwhelmingly constituted by Quechua and Aymara-speaking peasants” (Canessa, 2006). Though the Chapare, his home, is in the lowlands, his original coca-grower union is filled by highland indigenous migrants to the area. This is to say, much of his espoused indigeneity is predominated by highland-culture, and lowland cultures are marginalized. Postero found that the MAS’s indigenous nationalism was “decidedly Andean” and did not equally value the “historically more marginalized lowland indigenous peoples” (Laing, 2015). While this is not the primary focus of this thesis, it is an important consideration. If the lowland peoples feel marginalized by Evo Morales’s preference for Aymaran and highland imagery and rhetoric, the MAS’s claim to represent all indigeneities loses some of its power. Further, as I will show in later sections, lowland indigenous movements can use his indigenous nationalism against the state’s claims.

Constraints of Social Activism in Bolivia

Political and social protests are a common sight in the capital city of La Paz. One particular protest that acquired intense media interest in July 2016 was the sit-in and hunger strike of disabled peoples. From all over Bolivia, several hundred disabled peoples made their way to Plaza Murillo in La Paz, sometimes travelling for multiple days, to ask the government for better working conditions and more disability benefits. The government responded by putting up barricades manned by its national guard. In August, as I was returning to Zona Sur from the airport in El Alto, my minibus had to take a long detour through the side streets of La Paz because a relatively small group of protesters (perhaps 100), were blocking the entrance to the main, central road leading

from El Alto into La Paz. The businessmen next to me were vocally and visibly unhappy about it, remarking that small protests which disrupt the daily flow should be illegal. Movements such as these are how Bolivians push for effective change in their government, and concerns for the environment are often expressed in the same way.

While the current government is patient with and indeed facilitates social protests, it has shown much less willingness to allow any official non-government organization to facilitate any form of protest. This is because NGOs have a rocky relationship with the MAS government due to its history. During Bolivia's neoliberal reforms in the late 80's, NGOs became the most popular alternative to state programs to meet the needs of the population (Galway, Corbett, & Zeng, 2012). Thus, because many received funding from the World Health Organization, the World Bank, or other foreign development sources, NGOs came to represent foreign presence in Bolivia. Under Morales, their influence was inflated to represent capitalist countries tampering with the MAS's sociopolitical movement. As Petras shows, Morales's distrust is founded, as NGOs are often tied to the policies and donations of their country of origin (Petras, 1997).

This is derived connotation is particularly difficult for NGOs that work with the environment. Because the state of the environment is a key area of MAS discourse and economic development, any action taken in defense of the environment against the government is construed as anti-Bolivian. As Morales sees it, the MAS has concern for the earth as a core tenant of its policy, so how could anyone else claim to oppose them based on concern for the environment? Additionally, much of Bolivian GDP comes from rents on natural resources and monoculture, both of which intensely alter their ecosystems. Acting on behalf of the environment against the state becomes an attack on

the development of the country. The result is a hardline for NGOs. Any participation in protests or even simple support of a protest could spell expulsion from the country.

This is what almost happened to the Solón Foundation (Fundación Solón), an organization that vociferously opposes the Chepete-Bala dam project. As an organization dedicated to “contribute to the practice of humanity” (which includes respecting the rights of Mother Earth) and one that freely explores alternative development models, Fundación Solón is a non-governmental organization that was founded in 1994 by Walter Solón Romero, a Bolivian artist, to “foment the creativity and the critical view of the rebel spirit” and to “confront the injustices and dream of a different world” (Fundación Solón, 2017). Recently, Fundación Solón was in vehement verbal opposition to the Chepete-Bala dam megaproject, which it saw as harming both indigenous sovereignty and nature, which it constructs as essentially synonymous with Mother Earth. As its proliferation of anti-Chepete-Bala news and information were perceived as anti-government by the MAS, Morales threatened to expunge the organization from the country (El País, 2016).

While NGOs must be careful if expressing discontentment with government actions, they may still contribute to conservation in Bolivia. The Friends of Nature Foundation (FAN) is one of the largest Bolivian organizations dedicated to “conservation, preservation, and management” of nature. They compiled and created the *Socioenvironmental Atlas of the Bolivian Yungas and Lowlands*, which is a comprehensive survey of the Yungas and Lowlands that details the water systems, indigenous territories, state of conservation, and species richness amongst other things. The FAN, while

certainly a leader in Bolivian conservation efforts, only contributes to the generation of knowledge and is inactive in the political arena (Requena, 2016).

If an NGO does not compete with the government's environmentalism, it is much freer to work with the environment. Hugo Borrea is a wealthy Bolivian lawyer who started his own NGO called the Programa de Fortalicimiento Integral (Program of Integral Strengthening). He takes pride in his organization's careful navigation of cultural patrimony with the communities it works with. PFI's current project is to build a forest along the mountain slope opposite of the Yungas. They have employed Aymaran communities to help test their hypothesis. This hypothetical forest would increase the amount of moisture in the area, as the trees would capture and contain the moisture that rolls into the plateau from the Yungas. Their consequent transpiration will release more water into the atmosphere, and thus it will rain more. His is not the type of work the government will step in to stop, as, should it succeed, it would only benefit the marginalized Bolivians living in the plateau. The PFI, much like the FAN, does not interfere with government projects. Both deal in environmental concerns, but they do so within the confines of an antagonistic state.

While NGOs must tread carefully around this line, the Bolivian people have more freedom to express environmental concerns if their protest is composed of individuals or communities. If the MAS movement is truly one for all Bolivians, then all individual Bolivians can claim that nationalism. Historically, the state has listened to these movements and given concessions, as happened with the Eighth March from TIPNIS. Whether or not a mass movement against construction of the Chepete-Bala dam would entirely halt the government's plans remains to be seen.

Contribution

Utilizing prior research conducted on the environmental politics of the TIPNIS protest and under MAS governance in general, I hope to expound upon the narrative with my research done on the current resistance against the Chepete-Bala project. Since the TIPNIS conflict, the country has implemented new laws and has adapted to an ever-changing global and national landscape. Through rhetoric surrounding the Chepete-Bala dam, I hope to show how the environment is still intractably involved in national politics. Thus far, no other articles examining the environmental politics surrounding the Chepete-Bala dam have been published. This will be one of the first.

Chapter 3

The Isiboro Secure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS)

Introduction

In this section, I review literature on the conflict generated by the TIPNIS road. I provide a brief history of the park, followed by a discussion of government action and the indigenous resistance to the road. I highlight the types of environmentalism utilized by both the state and indigenous actors, specifically showing how the environment is used as a political positioning tool to gain leverage in the larger debate.

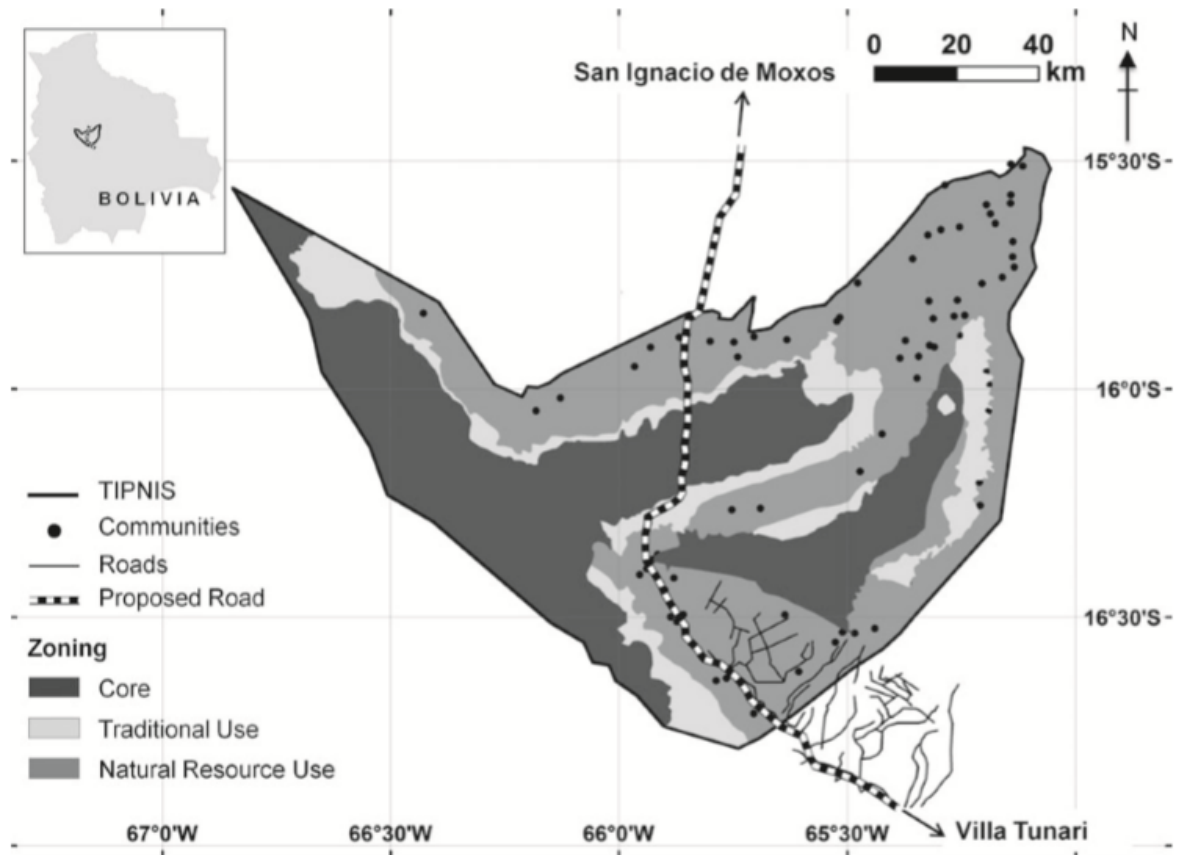
The Isiboro Secure Indigenous Territory and National Park was created in 1965 as a Protected Area. Located in lowland Bolivia, just east of the La Paz department, it experienced massive migration in 1952 as part of colonization campaign to populate the lowlands started by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) (Mendizábal, 2010). In response to the pressure from the subsequent deforestation, the three main indigenous tribes of the Beni, the Yuracaré, Mojeño, and T'simane, joined together in 1990 for the first “march for justice and dignity,” and achieved legal recognition in 1996 as an Original Community Territory (TCO). This effectively barred immigration to the region and designated parts of the territory as off limits to agriculture. Between then and 2010, the group marched seven times.

In 2011, these same communities participated in the Eighth March to protest the unwanted construction of the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos Highway, which would cut through the middle of their territory causing great ecological harm. The march was met with violence by the state police in a small town called Chaparina, where

international media picked up on it (Fabricant & Postero, 2015). This incited national and international outrage, and gathered extensive social support for the marchers. Morales temporarily halted the project, but in 2013 he attempted a ‘postfacto consultation project,’ which again spurred protest. After a second march, the state dismissed the project for good.

Controversy surrounded the project, and many speculated that Morales had motives ulterior to helping the region’s inhabitants. There were multiple and varying reasons that led people to question him, but perhaps the most pertinent was the outcry from the very people it deigned to help. The people he claimed the project would help are river peoples, travelling primarily by boat from community to community. Further, while the communities maintained that a road could have been useful, the majority lived well outside of the road’s immediate area (Hope, 2016). The road, once completed, would have “cut through the heart of the TIPNIS,” cutting across the area’s rivers which run from west to east into the Amazon (see Figure 2). Not only would this alter the course of the rivers for the entire region, likely having cascading ecological effects downstream, but it was also geographically distanced from the communities it claimed to help.

Figure 2: "Route of the Proposed Road through the TIPNIS." Source: (Liang 2015)



There are varying reasons why the government could have chosen this placement for the road based. The first is his link to the *cocaleros* (coca growers), who had been vying for greater access to the park. This would not be so serious an allegation if the type of coca grown in this region were useful for public consumption. Instead, the predominant type of coca grown in this region is unsuitable for the domestic and cultural uses permitted by Bolivian law (Requena, 2016). Its only logical destination, then, would be the cocaine market. Another factor is that 25.5 percent of the TIPNIS had previously been granted to companies for hydrocarbon exploration, and Brazil's involvement linked the road to region development via extraction (Hope, 2016).

While the purpose of this thesis is not to highlight the contradictions behind the government support of the TIPNIS highway, these same contradictions and the indigenous response to the project are inextricably tied to environmentalism. First, the project itself physically impacted the TIPNIS, generating concerns from environmentalists over its systemic effects. Additionally, if the hidden purpose of the project was indeed to push development via extraction of hydrocarbons, then the state is acting against its own environmental claims and laws. Second, identity politics from both sides attempted to justify the environment as rightfully theirs. The government positioned itself as the indigenous, caretaking authority of Mother Earth, meaning though their indigenous nationalism the project was implemented in favor of all indigenous Bolivians. The indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS utilized an environmentalism-from-below, place-based environmentalism to combat the state's claims and authority.

Government Speech and Actions

Morales's response to the public opposition and claims of corruption over the project was to claim interference by foreign NGOs. More specifically, he claimed that these NGOs had influenced the leaders of the opposition, essentially misguiding them to believe that the project would not benefit them. It was an attack on all Bolivian peoples, though the indigenous leaders were the ones who had been misled. The protests continued, leading President Morales to declare that, regardless of what the "alleged defenders of the environment" want, his government would build the road and complete it within the current term (La Razon, 2011). Thus, the movement was publicly construed as an environmental one, though as Hope has shown it was not so simple as just

protecting the environment. She sees the conflict as one “where the form, rate and pace of development are being contested, in ways entangled with socioenvironmental concerns.” Her research reveals the dissonance between the government’s claim of an anti-neoliberal care for Pachamama and its drive for development and growth. Additionally, it speaks to the concept of indigeneity in Bolivia in light of how the constitutionally protected rights of the TIPNIS inhabitants were neglected in the government’s pursuit of the project.

The MAS governance has acted against its respect for indigeneity on multiple occasions, both with the TIPNIS road and the Chepete-Bala Project. On both occasions, it sought to circumvent its legal obligation of consultation. With the TIPNIS road, it carried out selective consultation with project supporters to claim community support for the project. After using this small sample size to prove indigenous support for the project, it ignored independent ecological surveys that warned against the projects, instead administering its own and then refusing to release the results (Laing, 2015) (Requena, 2016). The project was supported by *cocaleros*, *madereros* (loggers), and farmers, and the Morales criticized the lowland indigenous opposition, saying that he “could not understand why the indigenous siblings of the east, of the Amazon, and of the northern La Paz department oppose the development that all Bolivians need,” (No puedo entender que hermanos indígenas del oriente, de la Amazonía y del norte paceño se opongan al desarrollo que requiere el pueblo boliviano) later saying that even if Bolivia respects Mother Earth, it cannot stop “rational” and “exploitative” development of their natural resources (Mendizábal, 2010).

Once the project had failed and the state had dismissed it, Vice President Alvaro García Linera wrote and published *Geopolítica de la Amazonía (Geopolitics of the*

Amazon), in which he defended the state's actions of "progressive extractivism" as necessary not only for the development of the country, but also to help the lowland indigenous peoples who had been historically exploited by lowland elites, particularly ones in agribusiness (Fabricant & Postero, 2015). To break up this ingrained system of exploitation, the MAS governance must develop the region to allow the indigenous peoples greater sovereignty. Further, if the old relationship between elites and indigenous peoples no longer exists in the same way, the exploitative relationship still exists. Now, it exists between the indigenous peoples and NGOs. These NGOs have confused the lowland indigenous peoples with a discourse about "colonial environmentalists" to make them believe the government does not support their indigenous rights. Here, again, the government attempted to justify its extractivist actions as being pro-indigenous, which here meant liberating them from the big, agricultural, business elites that threatened their lands as well as the NGOs that addled their minds.

Anti-road Response

According to Hope, the TIPNIS conflict was steeped in socio-environmental concerns. She described the protest as being a type of environmentalism she called "environmentalism-from-below." Further dissection of the protest reveals how nature is valued in these societies, which frames the environmental discourse utilized by the protesters (Hope, 2016). The Eighth March and its continued protest was not a direct rejection of the road, the MAS movement, or economic development. Rather, it was a protest for the right to negotiation and discourse. They wanted their voices to carry the

political power designated to them by the Constitution and wanted a voice in the economic development plans that involved their home.

To achieve this end, the movement utilized multiple strategies, but perhaps their most well-received was the mobilization of their indigeneity. Specifically, under the Bolivian Constitution, the indigenous peoples have ownership of their ancestral lands and a right to prior consultation over any development projects planned for their lands. The territorial rights they claimed were based on their victorious first march in 1990 that succeeded in getting them legal recognition of “proven historical attachment” to the area. This claim was a key point in their campaign against the state’s actions: that the state had ignored their “indigenous” rights.

Much of the motivation for the marchers was focused on this governmental overstep because, as many of Hope’s interviewees said, the TIPNIS was home. This was where they had raised their families and lived for generations. They were tied to the land, dependent upon its plants, animals, and rivers. She called this a “place-based environmentalism,” one that stems from reliance upon the land’s natural resources that foments this cultural appreciation and value. It was not that the protesters were against development of the region, but they felt the road was not an appropriate development plan as it did not support their particular needs and values. Instead, they expressed concerns over things such as lack of access to immediate healthcare, which the road at its planned location would not provide them. They proposed a simple solution: build the road so that it wrapped around their territory. Otherwise, it would not pass by any of their communities, and none of the proposed benefactors would ever use it. It would cut through the “heart of the TIPNIS” uselessly.

Analysis

The TIPNIS conflict shows how indigeneity in Bolivia has become increasingly wrapped up in “environmentalism-from-below” responses to government actions. As argued by Laing, it has become a game of identity politics. Indigenous identity has been re-fashioned to have an essentialized inclusion of connection to the environment ‘in order to legitimize competing resource sovereignty claims’ (Laing, 2015). She found that the government had “reified an essentialized Aymaran identity” through adoption of *vivir bien*, recognition of the rights of Pachamama and discourse that “capitalism is incompatible with environmental sustainability” to legitimize claim and craft a type of state resource nationalism. This Aymaran cast, however, hinders the government’s ability to truly represent all indigenous peoples of Bolivia. By wearing coca wreaths and following highland, Aymaran traditions and cultures, the Morales government necessarily marginalizes the lowland indigeneities who do not share the same customs. Its claim to be Pachamama’s protector, then, becomes a suspect for investigation. Pachamama is the Andean construct of Mother Earth – lowland indigenous cultures tend to use *Madre Tierra* (also Mother Earth). If the state’s claim to protect Pachamama sought to rhetorically legitimize the state’s use of natural resources as nationally oriented and ecologically sensitive, then what of those that revere *Madre Tierra*, not Pachamama?

This is one such way the TIPNIS marchers differentiated themselves from the state’s indigenous nationalism: frequent reference to *Madre Tierra* and not to Pachamama. During the TIPNIS marches, the CIDOB positioned themselves as people inherently linked to and dependent upon their land in the TIPNIS. Any loss of natural resources or biodiversity was a loss of culture and livelihood for the tribes of the TIPNIS.

Additionally, they invoked the name of Evo Morales as “the main defender of the rights of indigenous peoples and of the Madre Tierra” while declaring a state of emergency based on their rights, the constitutional clauses of territorial determination and integrity, and the rights of Madre Tierra. This shows how the lowland identity was re-constructed to “resist and undermine dominant knowledges” around the state’s resource extraction claims (Laing, 2015).

In addition to national-level identity politics, The TIPNIS communities’ political claims transcended local politics by invoking global language and context. By framing the road in the context of climate change, they elevated the issue to one of planetary importance. During Laing’s time participating in the Ninth March, she found that the TIPNIS would frequently be referred to as the ‘pulmón del mundo’ (lungs of the world) and ‘corazón de agua dulce’ (heart of fresh water) of Bolivia and/or Latin America. The TIPNIS road was also literally considered a global issue during the Extraordinary Meeting of Community Leaders of the TIPNIS No. 29 when the health of the area was linked to ‘global warming.’ The invocation of this global language and context served to counter the government’s “rhetorical tools” and use of Pachamama and *vivir bien*. By placing the TIPNIS highway in the global context of climate change, they turned it into an environmental issue.

In conclusion, the TIPNIS conflict revealed how the environment is tied to themes of development, indigeneity, and politics in Bolivia. Now, six years later, the government has attempted another project, utilizing many of the same rhetorical strategies as it did with the TIPNIS highway. Building upon the research over the environmentalisms of the TIPNIS conflict, in the next chapter I will show how the actions surrounding the

Chepete-Bala dam have many of the same characteristics as the TIPNIS ones. In particular, the environmentalisms utilized by both sides are essentially the same as the ones from the TIPNIS conflict.

Chapter 4

The Chepete-Bala Dam

Introduction

The Beni River begins in the Andes between La Paz and Cochabamba, flowing northward into the Amazon Basin through Madidi National Park and Natural Area of Integrated Management and through the Pilon Lajas Biosphere and OCT. Madidi National Park is globally renowned as one of the most biodiverse places in the world, and its existence reached global audiences as National Geographic featured stories from the park as their cover story in its March 2000 issue (Sartore, 2016). Rurrenabaque is a port town and launching point into the Madidi National Park, and is located on the Beni river north of San Miguel del Bala, along the northern edge of the park. It is the hub for ecotourism in the region, with Lonely Planet describing it as “civilization’s last stand” with restaurants, cafes, and hotels that “cater mainly to Western tastes” (Lonely Planet, 2017).

In November of 2016, the Morales government began pushing forward another development project. Two narrow stretches of the Beni River, the Chepete and San Miguel del Bala, had been considered since 1958 as ideal sites for a system of two hydroelectric dams. The first dam would be built at the Chepete, and the Bala would be built second some ten years. Together, the government says they would generate some 3.676 megavolts of electricity, which it plans to sell to Brazil. It claims the project would affect less than 2% of the protected area (Layme, Morales: Debemos hacer más represas para que no falte agua, 2016).

Despite the government's claim that the project is necessary for Bolivian development and that the project's area of impact is small, it has raised serious economic and political concerns in the country. "There is no way to defend this project," said Cecilia Requena as she detailed the project's economic and ecological absurdity. The first dam (the Chepete stretch) would cost between 6,900,000,000 and 6,300,000,000 USD based on independent assessments (Salón, 2016) (Solís, 2017). Bolivia's GDP is roughly 33 billion USD, meaning this project is extremely expensive for Bolivia to undertake (World Bank, 2015). This estimate does not include the 1000 kilometers of line necessary to bring the energy to Brazil for sale in Cuyaba (Salón, 2016). In addition to being financially unrealistic, the government has refused to release its preliminary ecological surveys to the public. Even further, they conducted the final studies and plans without advising the local indigenous populations of their actions, which is mandated by the 2009 Constitution.

While the economic and political concerns are used to condemn the project, its ecological and geographic impacts have served as the impetus for resistance. Building the dam in its planned place would lead to cascading ecological consequences downstream. The Beni River runs through one of the most biodiverse areas of the planet, flowing into the Amazon from the Andes, carrying minerals and nutrients from the highlands down into the lowlands. Cutting this source off would mean less of the mountain's nutrients for the natural systems downstream, and it would impact the indigenous and traditional farmers that rely on the basins floodwaters to bring nutrients to the soil (Requena, 2016). More immediate than the downstream aftermath, the newly flooded area would kill a lot of vegetation, whose decomposition would release an alarming amount of Methane gas

into the environment, contributing to global climate change. It would also inundate four indigenous territories dam creates its lake, and displace almost four thousand people (Solís, 2017). While the government maintains that the flooding would not harm the populations themselves, it still completely changes the historical and cultural landscape of the tribes. Traditional hunting grounds will be submerged, and places of cultural or spiritual significance could be lost in the rising waters. Figure 3 shows the projected flooding of the area.

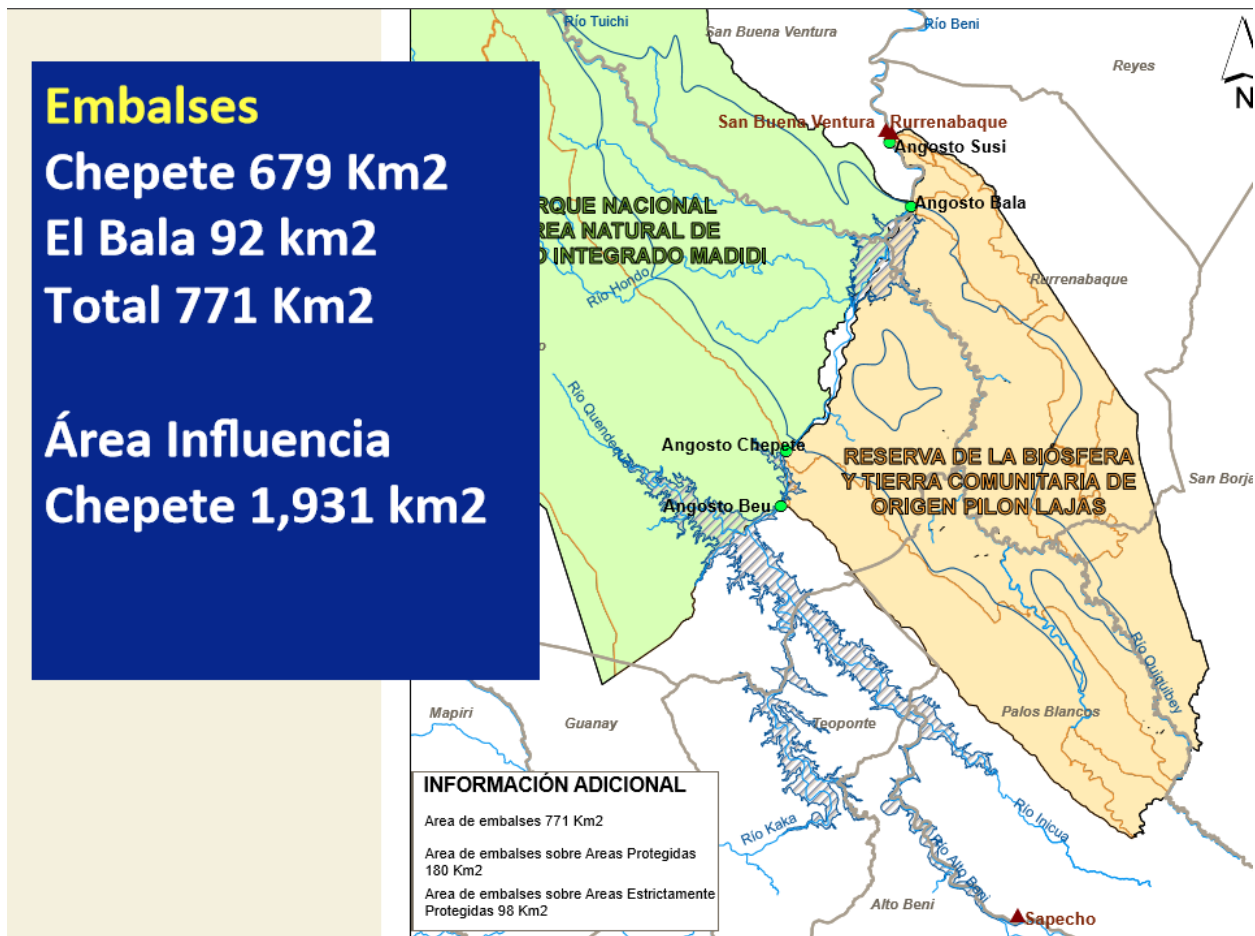


Figure 3: Projected flooding of the Chepete and the Bala Dams. Source: (Salón, 2016)

Unsurprisingly, the indigenous peoples that would be affected by it have rejected it for various reasons: lack of government transparency, lack of government consultation, and because, ultimately, this area is their home. They mounted a resistance to the project,

completing a 12-day vigil near the site where the Bala construction would begin, holding signs that cite Article 30 of Bolivia's constitution. During this time, the government attempted to explain the indigenous resistance as misguided, and Morales spoke various times to the importance of the project. At the time of this project, the resistance had not succeeded in completely halting the project, although the 12-day vigil had succeeded in forcing Servicoms, a geotechnical survey company, to remove its equipment from both sites.

The conflict surrounding the Chepete-Bala project is steeped in environmental politics. Much like in the TIPNIS conflict, the affected communities utilize place-based environmentalism to try and convince the government to drop the project. Further, they invoke their indigeneity to justify their resistance to the project, which they claim is not worth the destruction it will bring to the protected areas on either side of the river. The government, much like in the TIPNIS conflict, has attempted to explain the resistance as problem of "socialization," claiming that the indigenous peoples are only resisting because they have been confused by of "small groups" (Véliz, 2016). This chapter will elaborate on these themes, and show how the environmentalism is key to understanding the conflict.

Government Speech & Actions

Morales has claims that the protestors of the project have been indoctrinated by "small groups" (Pinto, 2016) that opposed the construction based on personal interest and fear of plausible environmental disaster (Véliz, 2016). The government further specified,

accusing four NGOs of creating the resistance based on personal interests. Principally, the Minister of Autonomies, Hugo Siles, accused Fundación Solón, but more specifically Pablo Solón, of pushing his personal interests. He deepened the accusation, saying that Solón was also responding to foreign interests. This narrative serves as a delegitimization tactic against those indigenous people that oppose the project by removing their autonomy, claiming they are the unwitting actors of “small groups.”

Much like with the TIPNIS conflict, the government is competing with the indigenous peoples of the Madidi area for resource claims. To do so, they must prove that their interests and their representation of all Bolivians carry more weight than the relatively small number of protesters that do have a constitutionally legitimate claim on the area. Some days after the initial controversy surrounding the dam, Morales attempted a new claim: that Bolivia should create more dams so it would not lack water (Layme, Morales: Debemos hacer más represas para que no falte agua, 2016). Despite the dearth of ecological knowledge present in this statement, Morales generated this argument at a time of severe drought. He tied the dam to a national environmental crisis: water scarcity. By elevating the issue to a national scale, he attempted to usurp the indigenous resistance by belittling its claims to the region. If the government can claim to represent all Bolivian indigeneities, then it can theoretically justify making these “greater good” decisions.

Anti-dam Response

The indigenous peoples of the Madidi and Pílon Lajas reserves were understandably upset by the government’s actions. Not only had the government ignored

their right to prior consultation on the project, but it then claimed their resistance wasn't in fact theirs but that it belonged to "small groups." They rejected these claims, saying that "In saying that we let ourselves be misled, you are depreciating the intelligence and rational capacity that we have not only as indigenous peoples of the *tierras bajas*, but also as indigenous peoples of Bolivia" (Al decir que nos dejamos engañar usted esta menospreciando la inteligencia y capacidad de razonamiento que tenemos no solo los indígenas de tierras bajas sino todos los indígenas de Bolivia) (Véliz, 2016). Here, the protestors utilize their indigeneity to position themselves as mistreated by the pro-indigenous government. They elevate Morales's belittlement to a national level, claiming that an attack on their intellectual capacity is simultaneously belittling all Bolivian indigenous peoples. After this, they decided they no longer wanted prior consultation, as it was too late, and instead elevated the matter more broadly to be one about respect for indigenous rights and respect for the constitution (ANF, 2016).

In a similar fashion to the TIPNIS conflict, the protestors utilized a place-based environmentalism to justify their resistance to the dam. "We have not forgotten that we have lived forever in these lands that you now want to destroy" ("No olvidemos que nosotros vivimos desde siempre en estas tierras que ahora usted quiere destruir") (Véliz, 2016). Morales is not just destroying the earth, but he is consciously destroying the land where they have always lived. This again elevates the government's actions as disrespecting indigenous rights.

While the true resistance lies with the indigenous population of the Madidi and Pilon Lajas protected areas, the knowledge of the economic and ecological impact was indeed bolstered by environmentally conscious groups. Fundación Solón in particular

was referenced in many news articles as one of the organizations that frequent spoke on “the irreversible harm to the environment” that the government would commit. It shared independent investigations and statistics of the Chepete-Bala project, which often contradicted the government’s purported data. It created its own videos and slide presentations to educate the public on why the project is infeasible and ecologically abhorrent to those concerned about its effect on the natural world. For this reason, the government singled the NGO out and threatened to kick it from the country, claiming that it was “manipulating the indigenous peoples into organizing against the Chepete-Bala project” (El País, 2016).

Coordinadora Para la Defensa de la Amazonía

One of the main organizers of the indigenous resistance was the Coordinadora para la Defensa de la Amazonía (Coordinator for the Defense of the Amazon, CODA). The CODA is a grassroots response from the Rurrenabaque community to the Chepete-Bala dam project. Utilizing grassroots methods, it helped to organize the 12-day vigil held in opposition to the dam. It created a Facebook page through which it spread news and events to its followers. Additionally, it used Facebook as a platform for sharing its conducted interviews with the indigenous inhabitants of the San Miguel del Bala community. Its YouTube channel has a total of 26 videos, including a series of 20 interviews in which a single community member details why they oppose the Chepete-Bala dam, a video from the 10th day of the vigil, and a video from the victory march held after Servicons removed their equipment from the site.

While the interviews the CODA conducted and posted were likely the ones that most supported their claims, the videos serve to give face to the resistance. These community members were portrayed not as indigenous peoples toting tribal artifacts and garments, but as relatable to all Bolivians (Coordinadora Para la Defensa de la Amazonia, 2017). Often, they were portrayed in their working environments. A horse nibbled Yamil Nay Vargas's sleeve as he spoke, and two men were interviewed as they laid concrete and tile on their front porches. Children were seen laughing and moving in the background, and one child breastfed as Encarnación Mejía spoke. Most interviews began with the interviewee giving their name and detailing the size of their family. Then, with some variant of "I say no to the Chepete-Bala dam because" they began to list why they opposed the project. Most of the interviewees did not want to leave the land they had lived on since birth, and many women questioned where they would go once displaced. Some highlighted their dependence and coexistence with the land, expressing concern that once it floods it will no longer be able to provide the same resources. A few highlighted that tourism was a primary income for the community, and destroying the environment with the dam would stop people from coming. Some placed the displacement of animals and plants on the same level as human displacement. In all, none understood why the government ignored them, and they hoped that these videos would reach all Bolivians to help them stop the project.

In these interviews, the environment is an essentialized part of "home." They utilize this place-based environmentalism to justify their opposition to the project. Altering the river, flooding the land, and destroying the environment is also the destruction of their homes. It then becomes an economic question as well. They survive

not only on the tourism that comes because of the environment, but also on the primary resources provided by the environment. This positions them as both living with and by their environment, and any action against the environment therefore becomes an attack on their very way of life. By combining the issues of environmental destruction with destruction of home and culture, they show that the Chepete-Bala conflict is ultimately an attack on their indigenous rights.

The CODA posted a titled “Aclaracion y Publica” to their Facebook page. It seeks to clarify what the CODA is, what it is not, and what it supports. Careful analysis of this document reveals the politicized reality of environmentalism that ecologically conscious actors face in Bolivia. Thus, with due significance, the first point is that it is not an NGO. Its sixth point claims they do not receive economic support from any national or international NGO. It is supported by the money and volunteerism of the Rurrenabaque people that “respect life and love their earth” (Coordinadora Para La Defensa De La Amazonia, 2016). Their second point claims they do not misinform the public, and that in fact they have support from “practically the whole country.” The clarification that it is not an NGO certainly stems from the government’s frequent clashes with what it sees to be self- or foreign-interested organizations that disseminate anti-MAS, false information. Being an NGO would invalidate the CODA from having any political clout or voice. Further, their descriptions of its constituency and support must also be mentioned. By claiming that its support comes from a people that “respect life and love their earth,” it claims that it stands for life and the Madre Tierra, meaning the Chepete-Bala project does not and by extension, the MAS and Evo Morales do not. To expand impact of the claim, it notes people from most of the country supports their efforts, this time demonstrating

that their organization is one of Bolivia. For their efforts to be supported by “practically the whole country,” it competes with the MAS’s claim to represent all Bolivians.

Points three through five were an apparently necessary clarification: the CODA has never received economic support from Fundación Solón. Further, it clarifies that the only information Fundación Solón provides the Bolivian population is informative and appropriately cited. While this information is shared on the CODA’s social media outlets, the CODA does not only use Fundación Solón’s work. The document clarifies in point five that they refer to many experts and professionals of various academic backgrounds, both national and international. To further establish its impartiality, point seven states their lack of political or personal interests and carefully indicates that it is not an opposition party to the MAS.

All of these clarifications are to avoid possible government criticism and consequent delegitimization. An association with Fundación Solón would place them amongst NGO environmentalist groups, meaning they would lose credibility as an indigenous, community grassroots organization. This credibility is a necessary component for the validity of their claims against the project, as being legitimately indigenous and Bolivian are two of its mostly valid claims in the eyes of the government. Yet, the CODA recognizes that Fundación Solón’s work and data are valuable for their cause, and so still employ it. To help justify its use, they label its work as “for the Bolivian population in general” and as “informative and documented with corresponding sources.” First, by claiming that it is for all Bolivians, it competes with the government’s claim that Fundación Solón is an NGO that purports an individual’s agenda – not a Bolivian one. Then, stating that it cites appropriate sources makes it technically credible,

which the government cannot refute if it is operating on objective fact. Points five and seven on professional references and political alignment are an attempt at transparency and conflict avoidance. By recognizing that they indeed receive foreign counsel removed the possibility that the government could uncover foreign influence in their affairs, and by explicitly stating they are not an opposition, they make it much harder for the government to claim that they are.

Points ten through twelve utilize even more of the staple rhetorical strategies. It clarifies that the organization is for the country's development, but that it believes it should be strengthened "responsibly." This means investing in the areas of eco-tourism, clean energy, and generally the sustainable development of their region and that of the entire country. Their next point evokes the name of the Madre Tierra as it claims the group seeks to live with mutual respect with her. The placement of this point after a call for sustainable development seems significant, as if anything other than "responsible" development is necessarily against Mother Earth. To finish the logical trail, the twelfth point clarifies the organization's effort to respect indigenous communities, Nature, and the established laws and norms. The CODA is following the Bolivian ideals and constitutional laws, and by stating that they do, it creates a duality in which the government is not.

The document ends with a call for professionals working on the project to be ethical and to recognize that the project will "attack" the most biodiverse place in world. This would affect entire families, ignore the Constitution they operate by, and completely alter the economic "vocation" of the affected municipalities with floods and droughts. This, they argue, should be considered an attack on the right to life. Thus, the CODA

appeals to the humanity and ethics of the involved professionals, that this “noble fight” should “take up the flag of respect for life.” By finishing with a direct address to the professionals working on the project, the CODA positions itself as an alternative authority to the state. The professionals could choose to either obey the state and continue with the project, or they could “respect life” and ethically side with the CODA and affected communities.

Analysis

The Chepete-Bala conflict necessarily involves the environment as it will alter the geography of the landscape, but the environment itself is utilized in multiple types of environmentalism expressed by both the state and resistance. Many of the tactics employed were the same as those used during the TIPNIS conflict. The state attempted combat the inhabitants claims to the land by discrediting their claims as misled by “small groups” that worried about what environmental destruction could happen. Here they invoked the same indigenous nationalism as with the TIPNIS road, attempting to create a with-us or against-us dichotomy. This generalization attempted to undercut the valid environmental and political claims made by the affected peoples.

The resistance utilized multiple environmentalisms to legitimize their claims against the state. Because the state delegitimizes environmentalism for the environment’s sake by construing it as either misled or selfish, they used their unique relationship with the region to claim a place-based environmentalism. This environment was part of their way of life, so destroying it would in tandem destroy them, or at least say their culture is

unimportant. The state cannot do this, as it is bound by its constitution and rhetoric of indigenous nationalism to respect indigenous ways of life. The resistance visually used this claim with their posters telling the state to respect Article 30 of the Constitution. Thus, the politics of this conflict cannot be understood without careful analysis of the actors' relationships to nature.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Bolivia is a developing state, and the majority of its national income comes from sales of hydrocarbons and monoculture crops. Its extraction-based development model does not mean it is insensitive to the possible ecological harm caused by extraction, but as Juan Carlos Pinto of the Vicepresidency's office said, the government has mouths to feed. Can they afford to be so environmentally-minded when their people need food? Thus, faced with the economic realities of a developing country, the government's perspective on environmentalism used to counter state claims is largely negative. Despite this, the government has espoused *vivir bien* as its form of state-sponsored indigenous nationalism, and in this construct of indigeneity is an essentialized link to the environment. The government, by touting this indigenous nationalism, crafted a dual claim: that it possessed the right to extract natural resources from the environment while simultaneously being an international voice for indigenous environmentalism. Any opposition to the state from Bolivian citizens, then, could be cast off as confused, misled, or self-interested.

This claim marginalized any indigenous or environmental resistance to the government's developmental projects in the TIPNIS and on the Beni River. The affected communities of both projects had to compete with the state for territory claims, which meant finding ways to make their claims to the environment more legitimate than the state's. To get the full narrative of indigenous identity politics in Bolivia, then, one must understand the actors' relationships with nature. In the same way that the TIPNIS conflict underscored how the interplay of identity politics in legitimizing resource claims, the

Chepete-Bala dam is mired in the same discussions, framed by the same conflict of interests. Much of the state's current rhetoric about the Chepete-Bala project mirrors that used during the TIPNIS events, so much so that it could be considered as an extension of the original environmental, political positioning discourse seen during the TIPNIS conflict. In both cases, the government tried to delegitimize the lowland indigenous claim of territorial sovereignty by claiming it was a foreign one or misled by non-indigenous actors. By both claiming foreign subterfuge and by claiming it represented all indigenous peoples of Bolivia, the state positioned the projects and resistance to the project as nationalist endeavors. Necessarily, this also separated the lowland indigenous identity of the protestors from the indigenous nationalism purported government. Despite this rhetorical strategy, the TIPNIS Eighth March was successful in stopping construction, and the 12-day vigil held in resistance to the Chepete-Bala dam forced the surveying company off the banks.

Through the two cases of the TIPNIS conflict and the Chepete-Bala dam, this study has shown various ways in which the environment is used in Bolivian politics. Particularly important is the environment's significance for identity politics. For the TIPNIS conflict, Laing found that lowland indigenous identity can be contemporarily understood as a counter to the state's claim on their natural resources. The marchers sought to counter state resource sovereignty claims by reifying its identity around "notions of ecological sustainability" (Laing, 2015). This is not to say that lowland identity is simply a counter movement, but simply an assertion that their purported identity and narrative cannot be completely understood without sensitivity to the political climate. My contribution to the field is the discovery that the Chepete-Bala resistance

utilized many of the same tactics, employing place-based environmentalism in their from-below resistance. Given the contemporary nature of this conflict, prior research has not been conducted, making this study one of the first.

Ideally, I could have spent time with the communities that will be affected by the Chepete-Bala project to interview them and better learn their perspectives on the projects. As it is, I was limited to representations of them via interviews with informants, news articles, and Facebook. Additionally, my number of interviews with informants was regrettably small. More would have given me better data with which to comment on both the Chepete-Bala and TIPNIS conflicts.

For further research, I recommend examining how the state is handling the current water scarcity crisis. Both the Chepete-Bala and TIPNIS conflicts were localized projects, meaning there were clear aggressors and objectives. With water scarcity, however, there is no resistance to point a finger out, so how will the state react? This research would be pertinent not only because water politics are increasingly important on the global scale, but also because understanding any nuances of these politics will better inform policy-making for water scarce countries. This would complement my study, and add important new chapters to Bolivia's socioenvironmental narrative.

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