

Race and Racism in the New Bolivia

MARCHING TO LA PAZ

The 2011 historic Indigenous March for Life, for Indigenous Rights and for the Environment was the eighth such march in Bolivia since 1990, when indigenous organizations began a tradition of walking from the lowlands up the Andes to La Paz to bring public attention to their demands. Often wearing only sandals, the marchers covered nearly 750 miles on their journey from the tropical forest of the Beni region to the cold, dry highlands of La Paz. Mothers marched with their children strapped to them. As protestors entered Cochabamba, a city halfway along the route, they filled the plaza with music and lowland accents. Protestors planted the Bolivian flag in the middle of the plaza alongside a banner bearing the *patajû* flower, a symbol now associated with lowland indigenous culture. They shouted: “We are defending ourselves from destructive capitalism, long live the march!” Urban residents, students, intellectuals, and non-governmental (NGO) representatives joined the rally. Surrounding the plaza, they chanted in unison: “We are all TIPNIS!”

This march was in response to President Morales’s plan to build a highway linking the tropics of Cochabamba to the Brazilian border, to be funded by the Brazilian national development bank, opening new possibilities for trade with Brazil. The Morales government claimed that the road would bring prosperity and trade to lowland peoples and help the state achieve control of the national territory. But the proposed highway would run through the forest preserve and communally held indigenous land of the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré (TIPNIS; Isiboro Sécuré Indigenous Territory and National Park). The protesters charged that the road amounted to internal colonialism, and that



FIGURE 12. Indigenous women protesters in the 2011 TIPNIS march. Credit: MMajias. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>.

just like earlier governments, Morales was sacrificing indigenous peoples to capitalist extractive development.

At least at the beginning of the MAS administration, its “revolution” and ambitious anti-neoliberal agenda was based on a profound revaluation of indigenous and peasant peoples and their customs. According to the new constitution passed in 2009, a central goal of the new plurinational state is to end the centuries of discrimination against the country’s indigenous peoples, who make up a large majority of the population. While these reforms have produced enormous advances for Bolivia’s poor and indigenous peoples, an analysis of the ways they have been experienced and resisted demonstrates that they have also created a new “moment of danger” in which race plays a central role (Pred 2000: 8). On the one hand, the government’s combined focus on reversing neoliberalism and revaluing indigeneity sparked a strong and often racist countermovement among the white–mestizo agribusiness elite sectors of the eastern lowlands, who pushed for regional autonomy and independence from the central state. On the other, despite government rhetoric, the country continues to be deeply enmeshed in an extractivist capitalist development model that adversely affects indigenous communities. In this chapter, I show how indigenous peoples’ bodies and territories continue to

suffer political and economic violence as Bolivia struggles to negotiate between global capitalism and social and economic justice. Ironically, even in plurinational Bolivia, a country known across the world as a model for indigenous liberation, racist colonial discourses are reproduced in the process.

Here, again, we find discourses about indigeneity on the blurry boundary between politics and policing as understood by Jacques Rancière (1999). They function both as a tool useful in the state's struggle against racism, making indigenous people visible, and as a means of consolidating state power and reinforcing racism. But in emphasizing the ongoing and complex contestations over race, this chapter shows how difficult such politics can be to enact. While the emancipatory discourse of indigeneity was fairly successful in the highlands, it was not so well received in the lowlands, where entirely different racial and cultural logics prevail. If the MAS used politics to claim a "miscount" in previous political accounting justifying the decolonizing agenda of plurinational Bolivia, the mestizo elite in Santa Cruz and the protesters in the TIPNIS case made counterclaims to having been wronged, producing enormous pushback. More important, because the MAS government continued its commitment to extracting natural resources, it reinforced the racialized practices linked to it. This chapter examines the racial politics of the MAS state to determine what the decolonized plurinational Bolivian state became in practice.

THE STRUCTURES OF INEQUALITY

During the neoliberal era of the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional white-mestizo political class instituted orthodox restructuring, including privatization of state-owned enterprises, cut backs on social spending, and opening the country to foreign capital (Postero 2007a: 190–93). Laying off thousands of (mostly Andean) miners at the state mining corporation, the state privatized most publicly owned enterprises and cut public sector employment (Arze and Kruse 2004: 27). Bolivia's small-scale farm economy was also devastated by the commercial liberalization, because the products of peasant farmers and herders were unable to compete with cheaper imports. As the poor shouldered these burdens, incomes for the local economic and political elites tied to transnational capital rose (Portes and Hoffman 2003: 65). The result was an increasing sense among most Bolivians that the elite and foreign capital had commandeered control of the national economy, and that this continued the colonial patterns of domination and exploitation. As the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (PND; National Development Plan) described in chapter 4 explained, neoliberalism continued to privilege whites and mestizos, while Bolivia's indigenous and peasant populations bore the brunt of the reforms.

As elsewhere, neoliberal reforms in Bolivia were not limited to the economic sphere. Instead, these economic policies were part of a larger set of changes,

pairing economic reforms with a discourse of “market democracy” linking free trade to the promotion of democracy. This resulted in policies such as decentralization, the devolution of state power to cities/regions, on the one hand, and the empowerment of civil society, on the other. The Bolivian Law of Popular Participation (1994) was a prime example of such neoliberal governance. Under this form of “neoliberal multiculturalism,” indigenous and social movements were encouraged to participate in development and budget decisions at the municipal level. While this scheme did recognize indigenous people as legitimate actors, the overarching racism in the country and the continuing control of political parties by the white–mestizo elite made it difficult for indigenous people and their representatives to gain meaningful access to the political process. But the neoliberal reforms had unexpected consequences. Indigenous and peasant activists also began to use the neoliberal political structures to contest local elections. As we have seen, in 2002, the MAS was formed, uniting highland Andean peoples, lowland indigenous groups, labor and the traditional Left, and many progressive mestizos, and in 2005 its leader, Evo Morales, became president.

However, in the eastern lowlands, where the white–mestizo agribusiness elite was threatened not only by the MAS’s challenges to neoliberal economic policies but also by its racial politics, Morales’s election was bitterly opposed. In the lowland capital of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the call to “decolonize” Bolivia and embrace indigenous rights was not a welcome one, and it reconfigured the fields of force at play in Bolivia, ushering in a period of transition and social upheaval (García Linera 2010). With a charismatic leader and a growing indigenous coalition, the MAS-controlled state had new grounds to transform the economy and impetus to take command of the lowland region’s considerable resources. At the heart of this region lies the department of Santa Cruz, which accounts for more than 42 percent of the country’s agricultural production.¹ The neighboring state Tarija, also part of the lowland region, accounts for 80 percent of the natural gas. The highlands’ rich deposits of zinc, silver, tin, and other minerals were once Bolivia’s economic mainstay, but since the mid twentieth century, the center of economic activity has shifted to the lowlands, where agribusiness elites raise cattle and grow soy beans, sunflowers, and sorghum for the global market. This large-scale agrarian production has involved the usurpation of new lands and resources and the funneling of wealth from the periphery to urban centers (Gustafson 2006).

I have worked for the past five years with the anthropologist Nicole Fabricant to think about the relation between race and political economy in Santa Cruz. Many of this chapter’s insights are the result of our enormously productive collaborations. Fabricant and I have described how the lowland’s political economy produced and continues to reinforce racialized structures of power. Documenting the ways in which particular forms of capital accumulation map and re-map spatial meanings onto territories, bodies, and people (Pred and Watts 1992; see also

Fabricant and Gustafson 2011), we argued that the exploitation of the lowland region has long relied on the vulnerabilities of indigenous people whose lands hold exploitable natural resources and whose labor underlies agricultural production. Expansive capitalism has defined the lowlands in terms of globalized commodities such as rubber, sugar, and soy, creating a class of large landholders whose original holdings in rubber and sugar plantations were later transferred to agro-industrial capital. The same class continues to hold economic power, now holding huge swathes of the lowlands in soy and other agribusiness commodity production (Fabricant and Postero 2013). This long history of resource-based extraction and large-scale agricultural production in the lowlands came under threat in the 1990s when indigenous people began to organize and mobilize for territory. It came under even greater threat when Morales was elected and promised to redistribute the patrimony of the country, and even more alarming, promised radical land reform.

Regional elites were strongly opposed to Morales's agenda, which they saw as a direct threat to their economic productivity. They also contested the interference in regional politics and business by the central state, echoing narratives of historical domination by La Paz. *Cambas* (a term used for *cruceños*, or people from Santa Cruz)² have long rebelled against the control of the central state, mounting a number of independence and autonomy movements over the years (Pruden 2012; Peña Hasbun 2003). This *camba* identity is often expressed as a deeply felt sense of injustice, especially in relation to Andeans and the Andean capital, La Paz. *Cambas* imagine themselves as racially, ethnically, and culturally different from the Andean people whom they see as invading their lands and usurping natural resource wealth in the region (Fabricant 2009). They see themselves as independent and hard-working, building their frontier state with their own entrepreneurial efforts. This difference—coded sometimes as cultural and sometimes overtly racialized—was mobilized both by the Morales government to justify and legitimize progressive reforms and by the *camba* elite as a basis for opposition. As Morales's power increased, the lowland civic committees, unelected associations of powerful political actors, began to organize a regional autonomy movement, shaped around historical discourses of being an “oppressed” or “victimized” region (Pruden 2012). During the Constituent Assembly, the right-wing opposition did everything possible to oppose the MAS process of change, and especially the agrarian reform, from boycotts of the process to a massive campaign of hunger strikes across the lowlands (Fabricant and Postero 2013). This political movement was also characterized as a cultural struggle, as *cambas* opposed their customs, values, and histories to those of highland indigenous peoples, often expressing these differences through violent acts of racism.

The racism against indigenous people was particularly harsh during the Constituent Assembly held in Sucre. For instance, Morales appointed an indigenous woman, Silvia Lazarte, as president of the Constituent Assembly. Lazarte, who had

only a few years of schooling, had worked as a domestic and a labor activist. During the Assembly process, she suffered many terrible insults at the hands of the opposition, including being called a “llama”—the iconic herd animal of the Andes. During the celebrations of the inauguration of the Assembly, the streets were filled with international reporters and indigenous delegates proudly wore their *polleras* or carried the whips signaling their positions of authority. Yet, soon, as the business of the assembly began, racism reared its head. In the first month of the Assembly, a battle emerged about whether to return the seat of government to Sucre, Bolivia’s constitutional capital, and make that city the full national capital again (as it had been until 1898). The MAS flatly refused to debate this issue, enraging the residents of the city and provoking massive street protests against the MAS—and indirectly anyone who “looked” like a MAS delegate. What this meant in practice was the indigenous or rural delegates were insulted, chased, and on many occasions beaten by local people. Andrés Calla and Khantuta Muruchi see these racist outrages as the result of indigenous delegates being perceived as having “transgressed” their traditional place in society, rather than as political disputes over the issue of the nation’s capital (Calla and Muruchi 2011: 301). The silent racism that always existed in Bolivia became openly visible during the Constituent Assembly because historically excluded people like Lazarte were seen as dislodging the political elite and taking spaces of political power long denied them, such as roles in the Congress or in the Constituent Assembly. Calla and Muruchi describe the racism these delegates endured on a daily basis, such as being brushed aside by mestizo delegates who could not conceive of such rural persons being fellow delegates, or being insulted in the streets for carrying bags of coca. (Coca chewing is a regular daily practice of many highland indigenous people, and is also associated with the cocaleros, the peasant union led by Morales.) (303–4). Some delegates were forced to change their clothes to avoid public humiliation; others avoided the main plaza, a potent symbolic site of elite power. One delegate described being driven from the streets when wearing her pollera: “They said ‘Indian pigs, mules, go back to Oruro’” (305).

During this tense time, racial incidents increased across the country. In Santa Cruz, the Autonomy movement led by the Civic Committees was accompanied by a thinly disguised racial campaign. Civic leaders argued that Andean migrants were invading their city, taking land and economic opportunities from local people (Fabricant 2009; Gustafson 2006). Elites openly asked how Morales, an uneducated Indian, could be the president. A Santa Cruz youth group carried out numerous attacks against Andean migrants to the city, and city officials banned street vendors, “protecting” the city from the dangers of unhygienic Indian bodies (Fabricant 2009). Perhaps the most shocking incident of this overt racism came during the last conflicted days of the Assembly in Sucre, in May 2008, when opponents captured a group of Andean MAS supporters. Hurling racist insults at

them, the attackers forced them to strip to the waist, and kneel down in the plaza, kissing the flag. Humiliated, with tears in their eyes, the victims bowed in shame and fear (see P. Calla Ortega 2011). This incident, which was captured on video, horrified the country, and demonstrated how close to the surface colonial relations of domination and subjugation remain.

Here we see race at the center of the debate: indigeneity, long linked to practices of domination, took on new meanings in the context of the power struggles between the MAS and the lowland elite sector. On the one hand, indigenous activism and ideas were held up by the Morales government and the social movements it represented as the solution to centuries of colonial oppression. On the other, the old faces of racism continued to be potent tools of contestation. Allan Pred and Michael Watts have pointed out that periods of reconstruction are inevitable structural attributes of capitalism, which regularly undergoes transitions. The result, they argued, is invariably contestation, in which local actors defend their specific interests and identities through re-mappings of space and forms of difference (1992: 11, 17). We can see the pushback from the lowland elite, then, as a response to the emancipatory politics of indigeneity in this first period, as the MAS state shook the established order, rupturing the status quo and making clear that the old order would undergo radical changes. Yet the next part of the story makes us question this dualistic characterization. Let us turn to the case that rocked Bolivia: TIPNIS.

THE RACIAL POLITICS OF MORALES'S DEMOCRATIC AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION: SACRIFICING INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES

In 2011, the government announced its decision to build a highway from Villa Tunari in Cochabamba to San Ignacio de Mojos in the Beni region. The road would pass through TIPNIS, one of Bolivia's largest and most diverse tropical reserves and home to sixty-three Moxeño, Yuracaré, and Chimane communities. President René Barrientos Ortuño originally declared TIPNIS a national park in 1965. Then in 1990, after the first indigenous march, the March for Territory and Dignity, President Jaime Paz Zamora issued a presidential decree declaring it an indigenous territory to be co-managed by the three groups living there. Soon, TIPNIS was at risk of colonization by the many highland migrants to the Chapare region of Cochabamba, who make their living growing coca. In 1992, the TIPNIS indigenous leader Marcial Fabricano and Evo Morales, then the leader of the Cocalero organization of Chapare, agreed on the borders of the park and drew a "red line" setting off areas not open to settlement. Finally, in the neoliberal era, TIPNIS was designated a *territorio comunitario de origen*, or TCO, under the new agrarian reform law. TIPNIS is now a preserve consisting of 3,869 square miles, home to sixty-three communities, organized into two *subcentrales*. The southernmost area,

the so-called Polígono 7, is occupied by coca growers and is severely deforested (Achtenberg 2011a; Paz 2012).

The proposed road through TIPNIS is part of a 190-mile highway being built to connect Bolivia's heartland to its Amazonian hinterlands and link Bolivia to international trade routes. When the controversy broke in 2010, two sections of the road were already under construction; the middle section crossing the TIPNIS had not yet undergone environmental review or the constitutionally mandated consultation process. Some local indigenous communities were pleased with the possibilities the paved road might hold: linking them to bigger cities and markets, and bringing increased access to education and healthcare systems. Others, however, feared that the road would bring ever greater ecological destruction to a region already deeply affected by cattle ranching, illegal forestry, and coca growing. Many were particularly concerned that it would open up their lands to further colonization by Andean coca growers, who already inhabited Polígono 7. In his analysis of the TIPNIS case, John Andrew McNeish (2013) explains these opposing views by pointing to differing relationships with resource extraction: some indigenous communities are linked to the market in deeper and more positive ways than others. Building on McNeish, Anna Laing (2015) argues that the contrasting ideas about territory, rights, and nature that emerged on the marches reflected competing demands for resource sovereignty. As a result, Cecilie Hirsch argues, local leaders were forced to make difficult pragmatic decisions to bring resources to their communities, some supporting the road, others, the march (2012).

It is important to emphasize that not all the marchers were opposed to development in general, or even to the construction of highway (and not all were indigenous). Mónica Tapera, a Guaraní journalist who worked as part of the communications committee of the march, told me that the marchers were mostly concerned that they had not been consulted about the placement of the road or the potential damage to the environment. This was the crux of the crisis: the government had begun the highway project without carrying out any consultation with the local indigenous organizations, and then, when challenged, took an intransigent stance. Morales said that the consultations were not binding and that whether the indigenous organizations liked it or not, this road would be built. "Quiero decirles, quieran o no quieran, vamos construir este camino y en esta gestión vamos a entregar el camino Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos" (I want to tell you, like it or not, we are going to construct this road and this administration is going to deliver the Villa Tunari–San Ignacio de Moxos highway) (*La Jornada* 2011). Tapera says that for this reason, the TIPNIS struggle represented a much larger concern than the highway itself. "If they could enter in this territory that was titled by the government, and a national park, they would enter into any indigenous territory. So TIPNIS signified the gateway to all indigenous territories" (personal communication, July 11, 2016).



FIGURE 13. The 2011 TIPNIS march. Credit: RAraoz. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>.

Unsurprisingly, indigenous organizations characterized the government's position as a reenactment of the worst sort of colonialism. They argued that the great majority of the indigenous people in the park did not want the road and feared the terrible environmental damage that would inevitably occur. Studies show that deforestation by the *cocaleros* has already begun to bleed over the "red line" into the park, harming the flora and fauna, as well as threatening the livelihoods of the people (Defensor del Pueblo 2011). When their arguments went unanswered, the national lowland indigenous Confederación de Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB), along with some highland organizations, including the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Marcas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), began a massive march from the lowland capital of Trinidad, in the Beni region, to La Paz. The march, which included several thousand indigenous people, including women and children, received enormous support from students, environmentalists, and urban labor sectors across the country, as well as lowland elite leaders, who used the controversy as an opportunity to once again criticize the authoritarian character of the Morales administration.

Morales refused to negotiate in what was "the chronicle of a conflict foretold" (Prada Alcoreza 2012), and the whole country watched the march on TV. Finally, on September 25, 2011, the national police intercepted the marchers and violently



FIGURE 14. The 2011 TIPNIS march. Credit: RAraoz. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>.

assaulted them, beating them, firing tear gas, and causing many injuries. The report of the Defensor del Pueblo (the National Ombudsman) concluded that the police's actions had been disproportionately violent and amounted to human rights violations. The police also insulted the protesters, using deprecatory racial terms, which is now against the law in Bolivia, and violated their rights to political association. Finally, the Defensor concluded that the government violated the indigenous communities' right to a *consulta previa* (prior consultation) under the constitution and International Labor Organization 169, the binding international convention establishing indigenous peoples' rights to culture and territory (Defensor del Pueblo 2011).

This shocking event led to both public anger and confusion. Wasn't this the indigenous president whose allegedly decolonizing plurinationalist state had radically re-represented indigenous people and their customs? In other words, had they not implemented a new distribution of the sensible, making indigeneity the central positive value? The increasingly obvious gap between Morales's discourse about indigenous values and his deeds, and particularly the violence against the vulnerable marchers, turned public opinion. When the march arrived in La Paz, there was a massive and supportive welcome, with crowds holding signs reading "¡Todos somos TIPNIS!" (We are all TIPNIS!). The government finally relented,

signing an agreement that TIPNIS would be *intangible*, or untouchable. In the months that followed, the government issued a new proposal for a community consultation, which was contested as too late (how can a prior consultation happen after the fact?) and too restrictive (since it would only take into consideration the desires of the communities inside TIPNIS). This would sideline CIDOB, the more politically powerful national organization, and make the small indigenous communities in the park vulnerable to pressure from both the government and the cocaleros.

Over the next year, the government carried out the new consultation process, negotiating with several new indigenous and colonizer groups that had appeared, many in favor of the highway. Concerns about who had the right to represent the TIPNIS communities surfaced, and eventually CIDOB and the TIPNIS sub-centrales mounted another march in 2012 to demand a fair and legal consultation. Faced with competing indigenous groups and a government that appeared to be negotiating, the public gave much less support to the second march, even when the police sprayed the marchers with water hoses and tear gas in La Paz in July 2012. When the government adamantly refused to meet their demands, the marchers returned to their communities to fight the highway project from within their communities.

Then the government orchestrated the takeover of CIDOB, the national indigenous organization established in the early 1990s. The 2012 march had exacerbated long-existing fractures within CIDOB, and in August 2012, a parallel, government-friendly group that does not oppose the highway held elections and voted in a new governing board. That group forced its way into CIDOB's Santa Cruz headquarters, backed by the police. Many of my Guaraní friends from Santa Cruz tried to avert the takeover, but they were overwhelmed by force. One woman, who lived on-site, described the horror of seeing the beloved headquarters of lowland activism taken over by "goons." She and her newborn twins had to flee, suffering beatings from the newcomers and inhaling tear gas. CIDOB's originally elected leaders held a vigil in front of the church in the main plaza for several weeks. I spent several days with them there, observing their desperate efforts to gain support from the media and the public. It was literally unbelievable to them that the state's clientelist tactics had defeated their organization. Many noted the irony that CIDOB had been able to withstand thirty years of struggle with white-mestizo politicians, only to be undone by an indigenous president. I come back to this development in chapter 6, to show how this co-optation helped consolidate the MAS government's development agenda throughout the lowlands.

The TIPNIS consultation officially concluded in December 2012 with a favorable vote for the road. However, Bolivia's human rights ombudsman Rolando Villena issued a harsh critique of the consultation process, which he characterized as "authoritarian, colonialist, and unilateral." "In addition to failing to comply with

international requirements for a prior consultation (before financing and construction commitments), to be carried out in good faith and in accordance with indigenous customs and governing structures, . . . the process did not achieve the agreement of all parties, as required by the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal (TCP), as a condition of its constitutionality” (Achtenberg 2012).

There was an enormous range of opinions within the state apparatus about the TIPNIS case. During fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, I heard dissent even from MAS militants working in state ministries, especially those indigenous intellectuals who had been delegates to the Constituent Assembly and had worked closely with lowland indigenous organizations there. The minister of defense, María Chacón renounced her position after the Chaparina violence, and the national ombudsperson issued a harsh critique of it (Defensor del Pueblo 2011). Yet Morales and his closest advisers put up a united front defending the road. Why was the government so stubborn about this project in the face of such substantial indigenous and public opposition to it? The highway project would support the extractivist development model and dovetails with a larger regional integration project known as IIRSA (Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America), which will establish trade corridors across the region, and open access to oil and gas blocks already contracted to foreign gas companies. The Brazilian Development Bank was slated to pay 80 percent of the estimated \$415 million for construction (J. Webber 2012). There are many concerns about the highway, and growing Brazilian imperialism is one of them (Friedman-Rudovsky 2012). The government argued that the road would bring critical resources to the residents of the park and access to markets for their products. This would allow greater access for education and healthcare, make their products more competitive, and provide opportunities for new enterprises, such as sustainable forestry and ecotourism (Achtenberg 2011b). Second, the road would link all parts of Bolivia, giving Bolivia sovereign control of its territory. This is a long-held national interest. Finally, the new road would challenge the monopoly of financial interests of lowland oligarchy, who control much of the lumber, meat, and agricultural production in the zone.

The best explanation of the government’s position is that articulated in Vice President García Linera’s book *Geopolítica de la Amazonía: Poder hacendal-patrimonial y acumulación capitalista* (Geopolitics of Amazonia: Landed Hereditary Power and Capitalist Accumulation) (2012b). As Devin Beaulieu and I have argued, this text is a forceful argument for the role of the state and the need to develop Bolivia’s natural resources (Beaulieu and Postero 2013). *Geopolítica* surveys the social and political history of the Bolivian Amazon to buttress García Linera’s claim that the TIPNIS march and CIDOB are tools of what he calls “extraterritorial environmentalism.” Real power in the Amazon, he says, rests with foreign companies, the governments of developed capitalist countries, regional bourgeois-seigniorial landlords, and NGOs. Lands collectively titled to indigenous communities, like

TIPNIS, he argues, actually serve to subsume indigenous territory and natural resources under the control of a feudal, or patrimonial-hacienda, “arch of power and domination.” He says the “pseudo-environmentalism” rallied by the TIPNIS march and its supporters against state extractivism is a paternalistic “environmentalism for the poor” that in Manichaean colonial fashion divides Bolivia’s popular indigenous-peasant bloc between romanticized “good” lowland indigenous communities living in harmony with nature and vilified “bad” highland peasants out to ravage nature for illicit drug markets (García Linera 2012b: 75–76). García Linera is a brilliant theorist and he rightly points out that indigeneity is not as simple as people often assume. Indigenous people do not only live on communal lands, and many people in the cities and in zones of colonization also self-identify as indigenous. The literature on the TIPNIS controversy initially, at least, tended to pose lowland peoples against the coca growers, characterizing the TIPNIS communities as authentically indigenous (but see McNeish 2013 and Laing 2015).

Yet García Linera matches this essentialist regional dichotomy with his own dualisms. For García Linera, historically poised against the reactionary “arch of power” in the Amazon is the plurinational state, whose foundation is the “syndical capture of state power” (2012b: 9). “In the Amazon, it is not the indigenous peoples who have taken control of territorial power, as occurred years ago in the highlands and valleys, where agrarian unions and communities performed the role of indigenous micro-states with a territorial presence, and in reality were the material foundation for the construction of the present plurinational state,” García Linera argues (25). In contrast to the virtuous highlanders, he portrays the oppressed lowland indigenous people as the passive victims of patrimonial-hacienda power (internal capitalist accumulation), on the one hand, and foreign corporations (external capitalist accumulation), on the other. Without any apparent agency to defend their lands or their livelihoods, he suggests, they can only be saved by the state. Thus, García Linera assumes that all indigenous demands must be subsumed to the state and to the hegemony of its integral capitalist development model.

García Linera sees the highway as the crucial means of wresting control of the Amazon from foreign powers by extending the sovereign reach of the state: “OUR State . . . the Amazon is ours, it belongs to Bolivians, not to North Americans or Europeans, nor to the companies or NGOs that claim to be ‘teaching us to protect it’” (66). Declaring that the Bolivian state will take sole responsibility for protecting Mother Earth, he asserts: “We will never accept the principle of shared sovereignty in any piece of Bolivian territory. Whoever at this point is opposed to the presence of the state in the Amazon is in fact defending the presence in it of the United States. There is no in-between position” (*ibid.*). Apparently, state will not share the Amazon even with the indigenous peoples who live there.

Finally, García Linera argues against anti-capitalist critiques of natural resource extractivism. Rehearsing an argument he made previously in a widely debated

Le Monde article (2012a), he insists that extractivism is not the fundamental issue for the transformation from capitalism to socialism. Critics confuse a technical system with mode of production, he says. The capitalist mode of production is rather a fundamentally political problem of “planetary geopolitical dimension” beyond the scope of one country. Thus, for him, only worldwide communism can overturn this mode of production (104). Rather, as a technical form, extractivism can be “a point of departure” for overcoming capitalism (107). He argues that critiques that “fill the mouth with injuries against extractivism” (ibid.) miss the point that it is a material means to generate wealth and distribute it with justice, in order to satisfy the basic and “urgent necessities of the population” (110). For García Linera, the current task is to fulfill these basic necessities, part of a much longer historical process that is now understood as decolonization.

Critics point to other reasons for the government’s position. The coca growers of the Chapare were anxious to expand their land base, and TIPNIS offered them an opportunity to gain more land without having to invade the agribusinesses of the Santa Cruz oligarchs or those lands already colonized by other highland migrants. The cocaleros have already invaded the southern part of TIPNIS, and many of the lowland indigenous residents have been incorporated into the coca-growing business as low-paid labor (J. Webber 2012). Clearly, the Morales government was responding to this important constituency, which has been actively advocating for the road, in part because it will make it easier to sell their coca, but also because it will make more forest land available for farming (Paz 2012). So, it is important to recognize that there are conflicting interests among different sectors and classes of indigenous and rural peoples in the area (Frantz 2011; J. Webber 2012; McNeish 2013). Critics also worry that the road will enable illegal narco-trafficking and logging, further benefiting the rich, and by extension the state, through channels of corruption (J. Webber 2012). The possibility of there being large reserves of hydrocarbons within TIPNIS also emerged. The minister of hydrocarbons admitted this possibility during the crisis, and gas concessions in the area have already been allotted to two companies (Prada Alcoreza 2011; Paz 2012). The bottom line for the MAS government, however, is that this highway will allow for increased state sovereignty over the Amazon, as García Linera made clear in his 2012 manifesto (2012b).

The TIPNIS conflict once again brought the relation between indigeneity and development into the public arena, but with a different and ironic twist. This time, it was an indigenous president who raised the “Indian Question,” suggesting that the TIPNIS indigenous communities were acting as obstacles to national development. Here we see what Morales’s claim to head “the indigenous state” allowed him to do. Having taken the mantle of emancipatory politics, fighting for a new decolonized plurinational Bolivia, he felt entitled to define who is an acceptable decolonized subject, the *descolonizado permitido* we saw in the description of the collective marriage in chapter 3. Morales used the classic strategy of labeling one

set of indigenous peoples as “good Indians” and others as “bad Indians” (see Hale 2002). In his many public performances, Morales frequently used the symbol of the highland Aymara or Quechua as those pushing forward a modern development agenda, and Túpac Katari and other highland anti-colonial leaders have become icons of this new, modern progressive nation. A communications satellite dubbed Túpac Katari 1 was built and launched in 2013 by China on behalf of the government of Bolivia, which has also named airplanes in the military airline after Katari and other revolutionary leaders (see Tórrez Rubín de Celis and Arce 2014: 123). A widely distributed poster inaugurating the satellite has the now familiar pairing of Morales and Katari’s faces, along with the words attributed to Katari at his death, “Volveré y seré millones” (I will return and be millions). With this satellite, the Bolivian state promises to go beyond the nation-state to “decolonize space” (124).

Probably the culmination of this symbolic pairing was the spectacular screening in 2012 of the film *Insurgentes* (Insurgents), a state-funded movie tracing indigenous and popular rebellions from the colonial period through the republican era to the gas and water wars of the early 2000s, and ending in the election of Morales. Just as the second TIPNIS march ended, somewhat defeated, and its leaders headed back to their communities to regroup, the grand opening of the film took place in La Paz. President Morales and Vice President García Linera walked down a red carpet to meet the famed Bolivian director Javier Sanjinés. In its montage style, the various insurrections across Bolivia’s history become continuous, leading naturally to Morales’s triumph (see Tórrez Rubín de Celis and Arce 2014: 157).

If these performances of the virtuous and heroic Andean past promised a new Andean modernity, this was in stark contrast to the ways the TIPNIS protestors were represented as living in the past and resisting progress. For instance, the MAS militant and national peasant union leader Roberto Coraite suggested that the TIPNIS protesters should choose between the road, which would bring them trade and development, or else “stay in clandestinity, as indigents, remaining as savages” (*La Prensa* 2011a). Of course, this obscures the fact that many of the protesters were not opposed to the construction of the road, but to the fact that they had not been consulted about its placement or possible environmental consequences. Arguing that the road would bring the benefits of modernity, like health care and education, to the TIPNIS communities, as well as access to the market for their products, Morales flatly discounted their desires to protect their territories. When the communities refused to back down, government ministers accused CIDOB of taking money from USAID or being puppets for external NGOs (Achtenberg 2011a, 2011b). Here we see the government reprising classic racist tropes of earlier governments, claiming indigenous people were childlike or too easily manipulated to be full citizens. Like the early modernizing states, the MAS government argued

that the best solution to the “Indian Question” was for these unruly Indians to submit to the larger good of national development.

Yet it is not only the government that is returning to discourses about indigeneity to defend its position. Lowland indigenous people I spoke to during the march felt the government’s actions represented a horrifying reappearance of colonialism and a terrible betrayal of Morales’s claims to defend indigenous peoples. Critics characterized the government’s actions as “internal colonialism” and decried its cynical efforts to demean the movement (see Contreras Baspineiro 2012). Across the country, indigenous people and intellectuals questioned Morales’s commitment to indigenous autonomy and even his identity as indigenous. Rafael Quispe, a prominent Aymara leader, suggested that in its dealings with the TIPNIS protesters, “the government has revealed its true identity. The indigenous mask has fallen off, and its neoliberal face is revealed” (cited in Orellana Candia, 2011).

These responses make clear that, for these indigenous citizens at least, the MAS government’s efforts to make indigenous people visible has not been sufficient for emancipation or for a real lived sense of decolonization. The recount carried out by the Constituent Assembly was significant, but it appears to have only opened the door to contestation, and has not fully reconstituted a Bolivian society where there is a consensus about indigeneity. One possible lesson is that politics is not made through definitive revolutions, but rather through reiterative disagreements (see Ardití 2007). The TIPNIS case sparked ongoing contestation, inasmuch as the dispute illuminated the limited ability—or willingness—of the plurinational state to enact the promises it had made about representing and protecting indigenous peoples and their lands and customs.

Indigenous groups and their allies also resorted to classic tropes of indigeneity to support their cause, this time claiming to represent the “good Indians” bravely resisting the state and defending the environment. If Morales was not “really indigenous,” the TIPNIS protesters claimed they were. Fabricant and I have described how, throughout the controversy, the interests of indigenous protesters were represented in the media, and especially by environmentalist allies, as linked to the viability of the Amazonian forest (Fabricant and Postero, forthcoming). This association between indigenous peoples and nature reinforces the trope of the virtuous eco-Indian, and also works to link indigenous interests with the larger concerns for the environment and global climate. As the battle over TIPNIS raged, images of beautiful and vulnerable nature abounded in the massive poster production online and on the walls across the country. One iconic image was a poster that read: “Is this really progress? Let’s save TIPNIS.” The image shows the lush Amazon forest, with verdant trees and a brilliant blue sky, cut through by a highway. A huge leopard lies dead in the foreground, run over by an SUV. Here nature, as represented by the tragic leopard, also stands in for the indigenous people of TIPNIS. The body

of the lowland Indian and Mother Earth are semiotically linked, tugging on the heartstrings of the audience.

But it was the seemingly racist and violent aspect of the administration's dealing with the TIPNIS case that really shocked people, both in Bolivia and abroad. As I have mentioned, the Defensor del Pueblo's 2011 report determined that the military attack at Chaparina violated human rights in numerous ways, including racist epithets the police used in the attack and violent acts against the women and children on the march (Defensor del Pueblo 2011). If there was any question about colonial politics resurfacing, Morales made things crystal clear when he suggested to his supporters, the coca growers, that they should go out and seduce local indigenous TIPNIS women to garner their support for the road (Erbol 2011). A congresswoman from the Left–Center Movimiento sin Miedo (MSM; Movement without Fear) party, Marcela Revollo, summed up the feelings of repugnance Morales's comment had produced across the country: "Oh, the cost of hurting and humiliating the bodies of these women, the indigenous of TIPNIS. . . . That is an act that is profoundly patriarchal, sexist, and colonial. That is how the Spanish colony entered the American territories, raping and damaging to conquer the territory" (ibid.).

Revollo's comment makes an important point: once again, indigenous people are paying the costs for capitalist development. The TIPNIS affair provides an eerie repetition of previous epochs of state sacrifice of indigenous peoples' territories in the name of progress, as the geographies of exploitation continue regardless of who leads the state. While the MAS state faces the complex tensions described above and must represent a spectrum of indigenous and non-indigenous constituents, in the end, its entanglement with global capitalism appears to enable, if not justify, a renewed sacrifice of indigenous communities, along with a renewed racist discourse.

THE WOUNDED INDIAN BODY

If, in his efforts to push through a highway to support international trade, Morales utilized classic racist tropes of the Indian, the right-wing opposition's reaction to the TIPNIS struggle was little better. First, it is important to note that by the time of the TIPNIS proposal, the civic committees in the eastern lowlands had lost most of their real power. During the Constituent Assembly in 2006 and 2007, they were able to mount a strong opposition platform and nearly brought the Assembly to a standstill. At home, they were able to convoke huge public demonstrations in the streets pushing for departmental autonomy and increased shares of revenues from the hydrocarbon industries. At that apex, the Santa Cruz Civic Committee held a public meeting attended by a million flag-waving protestors. The civic committees were backed by the agribusiness sector, which feared Morales's anti-neoliberal

rhetoric meant the end of their successful export business.³ But, after a violent takeover of public buildings in what was called a “prefectural coup” in 2008 and then a bloody massacre of MAS supporters in the northeastern department of Pando the same year, the political fortunes of the lowland elites began to diminish. Their opposition lost further force after the passage of the new constitution, which instituted a form of departmental autonomy. Although lowland leaders complained that the new political structure does not give them enough local power (for instance, departments do not have authority to raise taxes), the substance of their demands was met. The department of Santa Cruz is now an autonomous region, which has its own governor, elected by its people, and a new autonomy statute, passed in 2015. Two further blows decimated the Comité Cívico’s opposition to the MAS. First, Morales negotiated a deal with agribusiness leaders, encouraging them to continue production without fear of nationalization or export bans. In essence, he realized how important the business sector was for food sovereignty as well as national income. This agreement left the civic committees without their financial backers, so their protests began to look like toothless bluffing. Then, government agents uncovered a conspiracy to assassinate President Morales and traced the funding back to several prominent lowland leaders. This tainted the entire civic committee with the possibility of terrorism, and many fled to other countries to avoid prosecution.

In this weakened state, the civic committee was forced to push its agenda through different means. Camba leaders presented themselves as the victims of an authoritarian government set on destroying them through illegal and immoral acts. Fabricant and I examined how camba activists framed their cause in human rights terms, arguing that their political leaders were persecuted and exiled. They emphasized their victimhood by using social protests of the kind most often used by those with few political options, like hunger strikes and posters of “disappeared” leaders (Fabricant and Postero 2013). While these acts garnered them little sympathy from the highlands or at the national level, they acted, as such forms of political protest often do, to foment solidarity among their followers.

The TIPNIS situation offered them a way to expand this strategy. When the 2012 TIPNIS march ended in defeat and CIDOB was taken over, CIDOB’s leaders returned to Santa Cruz to the open arms of the civic committee. A TIPNIS/CIDOB encampment in the main plaza with placards decrying government abuse echoed the camba’s messages of political persecution across the plaza. The civic committee held press conferences defending the TIPNIS protesters, drawing similarities between the highland migrants to Santa Cruz, who have colonized the rural zones, and the highland coca growers who were ready to invade TIPNIS. Many in Bolivia argued that the camba elites were cynically utilizing the indigenous to advance their own interests. While it is clear that the *cívicos* were trying to breathe new life into their badly damaged movement with this alliance with the TIPNIS activists,

what I draw attention to here is the way they used a particular representation of indigenous people to do so. Like the MAS government, the opposition used racial politics to bring political pressure to bear. And, like the government, the Right was rewriting history and geography to create a new identity and a new place in Bolivian society. Ironically, they use an old trope of powerless and wounded Indians to write themselves into a new role: the protector of Indians.

This was obvious at an August 2012 political rally in Santa Cruz put on by the civic committee that Fabricant and I attended. Thousands of people dressed in the green and white colors of the Santa Cruz flag jammed the city's largest soccer stadium. At the height of the assembly, *camba* leaders introduced a young indigenous leader from the TIPNIS rebellious communities. Reminding the audience of the violent attacks on indigenous marchers and all the sacrifices they had made during the 2011 march, he called upon the *camba* public to join the marchers' struggle for justice and human rights. The crowd, many wearing "Defend TIPNIS" T-shirts, roared their approval. Using symbols evoking indigeneity and democracy, the civic leaders created a "representational field" where two bodies—the indigenous (symbolically wounded by the highway crossing their community and physically wounded in the Chaparina attack), and the mestizo *cambas* (symbolically wounded by being marginalized and persecuted by the nation-state)—are linked and condensed into one single struggle against a state that violates human rights. By doing so, this alliance legitimates the struggles of the *camba* elites because it associates them with the sacrifice and wounded bodies of the indigenous marchers (Fabricant and Postero 2014; Jones 2009).

This surprising strategic political alliance also revealed the highly racialized power relations upon which it was erected. At this rally and across the city that summer, Fabricant and I heard *cambas* supporting the TIPNIS protestors using sadly familiar paternalistic and colonial tropes. At the CIDOB vigil in the plaza, passersby gazed at posters of women and children marching in the cold mud of the Andes. They often expressed their admiration for these sacrifices necessary to protect their traditional way of life in the forest. "Sadly," one woman said, "when they enter civilization, that is when their degradation begins." Another said "we have to defend them, they are ours. . . . If we let them, they [the *cocaleros*] will overcome them." Here we see how the sacrificed bodies of the TIPNIS indigenous people open the space so the *camba* elite can play the role of benefactor and protector of the indigenous, who are evoked as childlike and backward. Using a human rights framework, they re-represent themselves as allies in victimhood. This is truly ironic, given how the lowland elite historically exploited indigenous labor in the haciendas and sugarcane plantations, often using violence to discipline the workers. But this truth is obscured by their newfound kinship with the "good Indians" who—like the *cambas*—are victims sacrificed to the MAS agenda.

Here, once again, we see how enduring colonial and racist images of the Indian emerge as a tool for contesting larger political and economic battles. Yet these tropes produce new positions for those who use them in this period of transition. The *camba* elite, shaken from its position of privilege by the reordering undertaken by the MAS government, responded to the unfamiliar world by a “phantasmagorical” rewriting of history and re-remembering of the geographies of oppression (Pred 2000). The Bolivian Right in this plurinational period projected a reality in which others (the MAS state) were the racists and they were the upholders of law and democracy. Yet this “would-be” re-representation was belied by the situated practices of racism that escaped the rhetoric.

THE OPEN QUESTION OF RACE

This chapter has explored the ways in which the remarkable transformations in Bolivia since Morales’s election have shattered traditional structures of political power, restructured economic models, and challenged cultural constructs. In the “process of change,” as the MAS calls its agenda, everyday notions of belonging were up-ended, as new geographies of power produced new subjects and meanings. With a new indigenous president and a new constitution enacting new valuations of indigeneity, the fields of force radically changed. Yet old imaginaries and meanings of indigenous people haunted this period of change. As the decolonization process shook up the old order of things, actors on all sides of the “Indian Question” attempted to rewrite the narrative, using bits and pieces of the past, combined with new discourses of indigenous and human rights to suit their present agendas.

What does this tell us about the decolonization and the indigenous state? The Bolivian case I have described shows how diverse actors used a politics marked by disagreement to restructure notions of indigeneity and to produce decolonization. In this long-awaited revolution, however, historical continuity appeared just as salient as disjuncture. In plurinational Bolivia, so far, colonial relations of race have been reconfigured as indigenous people take power, but they have not disappeared—even though erasing them is the proclaimed central goal of the indigenous state. While it is clear that the MAS reforms are in fact making significant improvements to Bolivian society, I suggest the TIPNIS controversy demonstrates a troubling continuity: from the colonial period to the current moment, the extractivist development model continues to be structured around exploitation of indigenous bodies and lands. It is precisely in a moment of supposed “restructuring” of this model that the situated practices of racism in place since colonial times reemerge in both traditional and new forms. This result has important implications for the potential and long-term success of the emancipatory politics of the

MAS. If, despite demanding and, in fact, carrying out a constitutional “recount” of the previous orderings of society to make indigenous peoples and their cultures visible, the state is not able to put that recount into practice in a meaningful way, we must ask whether this politics is successful. Rancière (1999) makes clear that in his vision, emancipatory politics does not always produce a reordering, but does make visible the wrongful (or scandalous) order and those previously excluded from it. It produces a space for new political subjects to disagree with that order. If we take this definition, we might say the MAS process of decolonization has been successful. The contestations we see in this chapter make clear, however, that because the state is so deeply committed to continuing the long-term extractivist models of development that produced and maintained that racist order, the plurinational state has not yet been able to create a new order. In fact, we might argue that it serves to police the existing order. Yet prying open the uncomfortable question of race in contemporary Bolivia reveals that it is a site of continued reworking and reiterative disagreements, where actors are constantly making new aspects of racism visible and challenging them.