Pluralizing Paradigms: Rights of Mother Earth in the Plurinational State of Bolivia

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Abstract: In this project, I examine the complex relationships between humans and the environment in a context where legal rights are extended to recognize pluralism within the human population, and granted to the beyond human world as *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth). In order to frame my research, I ask: *How can histories of unequal power relationships be redressed?* I utilize political ecology frameworks and postcolonial theories to explore the power relations involved in environmental politics, conflicts and ethics, both in how they came to be and the current realities of ongoing events. I situate my project mainly in contemporary Bolivia, and ask more specifically: *How and why were constitutional and legislative rights given to Madre Tierra in Bolivia, and in what ways have they been realized?* I delve into the importance of our histories and how they continue to affect and implicate today.

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PREFACE

> While obviously all people have relationships with, and ideas about, the environment, since it is the medium in which we live and which sustains us as human beings, must we all possess a common view of nature that bounds our perceptions of the environment in similar ways and sees it as distinct from other phenomena? (Christine Walley 2004, 139)

My academic interests in political ecology, perceptions of nature, and socio-ecological relationships can be traced back to reading Christine Walley's chapter, "Where There Is No Nature," in my first Environmental Studies class. The diversity and complexities of ideas and relations and how they shape our identities and the ways in which we understand and interact with the world has inspired not only my academic endeavors, but has also become interwoven in my day-to-day life. I continue, both generally and personally, to be intrigued by the significance and diversity of the relationships between humans and our natural environments.

Cuban-American anthropologist, Ruth Behar has called for "an anthropology that breaks your heart," urging academics to feel and articulate the contradictions and details of engagement, and to avoid working at a safe and objectifying distance (1997). This proposition inspired me to pursue a topic for this paper which I'm invested in and actively engaged with. While living in Bolivia last year I saw: hopelessness deep underground in *Cerro Rico's* barren silver mines, poverty in the pleas from children on street corners, dedication to promote democracy as every citizen walked to their designated voting notaries, spirituality in the flames during the monthly Quechua *Q'oa* ceremony, and a united community which took over the streets during the festivals of *Día de Peatón* (Pedestrian Day).

Although I learned and experienced an incredible amount while living there, the contradictions and intricacies continue to perplex me. Why do Bolivians continue to support a man who has been in office for over twelve years, yet still has not followed through on many of his promises? Why are multimillion dollar shopping malls being constructed while *Vivir Bien* (Living Well), an alternative model to capitalism which denounces consumeristic lifestyles is being promoted? How can legal rights and recognition be granted to *Madre Tierra* (Mother Earth) yet the country's economy is still reliant on resource extractive and exploitative industries? It is questions such as these that have inspired me to pursue the topic of this paper.

I guide my research by asking the framing question of: *Can histories of unequal power relationships be redressed?* Accordingly, this paper ponders the complexities of contemporary environmental and interpersonal politics, conflicts, and ethics. I situate this paper spatially in the context of Latin America, and more specifically contemporary Bolivia, but socio-ecological relations and conflicts are deeply embedded in our histories, narratives, and paradigms, therefore encompassing a wider temporal dimension. In order to gain an in-depth and more focused answer, I ask: *How and why were constitutional and legislative rights were given to Madre Tierra in Bolivia, and in what ways have they been realized?* I utilize postcolonial theories, political ecology frameworks, historical contextualization, and qualitative analysis of current events and texts, in order to support my claim that; *Bolivia's unique historical circumstances, particularly of recent counter hegemonic resistance, has allowed for constitutional and legislative recognition of Vivir Bien and rights to be granted to Madre Tierra. However, such ideals are unrealistic for a government to promote as the reality of all decision-making is selective and it is impossible to satisfy all actors.* Because I claim that the reason why these changes have happened is contingent on the country's specific history, an in depth understanding does not imply that what has happened is easily, if at all, replicable. Despite this fact, I do think that it is an important story to tell, and that there are some very interesting lessons to be learned.

I will begin by providing historical background and definitions of the relevant themes and theories within the disciplines of postcolonial studies and political ecology which help to contextualize the ongoing realities of contemporary Bolivia. This will be followed by a more extensive explanation of my chosen qualitative methodological approaches, and the specific details of my research, which delve into the theoretical, logistical, and concrete happenings of present-day Bolivia. I first tackle how and why primary documents such as the constitution and secondary legislation have been rewritten and then move on to analyze the content of these important texts. This will then be supplemented with a case study in order to provide a concrete illustration of some of the ongoing tensions and power relationships between the multitude of involved actors. I then move on to explaining my findings and analysis, finishing with the broader implications and my concluding thoughts.

Before I officially begin, I want to declare that although I am deeply invested in the topic, the intention of this paper is not to provide solutions or deduce anything or anyone as good or bad, right or wrong. While researching and writing, I attempted to follow Indian scholar, literary

theorist, and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's research strategies, primarily of 'working without guarantees.' My goal for this paper therefore is to provide a deep explanation of what is going on, to use theory and experience to glean why it is happening, and to do so under the assumption that a sound conclusion may not be the end result.

COLONIALISM AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

We currently live in a world where "more than a billion people lack sufficient shelter, food and clean water; where lakes, rivers and top soils are dying; where cultures clash and war, genocide, and acts of terrorism seem ordinary" (Watkins and Shulman 2008, 1). These facts remind us of the ways in which our history, particularly of colonialism and imperialism, have shaped and continue to shape present realities. Theories from the field of postcolonial studies are far reaching but broadly address the effects and consequences which colonialism and colonial legacies have had, both on humans and non-human environments, and particularly as they relate to hierarchical power relations (McEwan 2009). Leela Gandhi describes postcolonial studies as, "disciplinary projects devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and crucially interrogating the colonial past," therefore investigating both general patterns and specific encounters (1998, 4).

The term colonialism is important in understanding the cultural exploitation that ensued with Europe's expansion over the last 500 years. Edward Said, considered to be the founder of the academic field of postcolonial studies, defines and distinguishes between the often-confused concepts of imperialism and colonialism. The former denotes "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory," whereas the latter, although almost always a consequence of imperialism also includes, "the implanting of settlements on distant territories" (1993, 8). European colonialism became a "sufficiently specialized and historically specific form of imperial expansion" justifying its general usage as a distinctive kind of political ideology (Ashcroft 2009, 40). The 'colonial complex' can be described basically in four stages; (1) Colonization begins with a forced involuntary entry; (2) The colonizing power alters basically or destroys the indigenous culture; (3) Members of the colonized group tend to be governed by representatives of the dominant group; and (4) The system of dominant-subordinate relationship is buttressed by racist ideology (Kortright 2003, 132). As a result, the majority of relations were structured around doctrines of cultural hierarchy

and supremacy, and the colonialists, for the most part, saw their culture as superior, which was often tied to the crude application of Cultural Evolutionary or Social Darwinist theories (Bruno 2014).

The fact that Bolivia has long held the title of being the poorest country in South America can be viewed as an outcome of its unusually brutal history with conquest and colonization. For hundreds of years after their arrival in the 16th century, the Spanish maintained "a monopoly on power," continuously "preventing Indians from organizing themselves and accessing wealth" (Bruno 2014, 135). Although indigenous citizens continued to make up the majority of the population, through European implemented economic, political, and social structures they were constructed as "poor, backward, and culturally retarded" (Canessa 2012, 6). Bolivian society was sharply bifurcated between Spaniards and Indians, and "the intermediary category of *mestizo* or *cholo*, made little headway toward breaking down the stark racial division" (Mahoney 2010, 165). In less than two generations, the indigenous populations had been completely subjugated and totally despoiled. All aspects of life were either syncretized or ruined, "Spanish systems of government were grafted onto pre-Spanish kinship organizations, ecologically dispersed settlements were converted into nucleated villages, and local and state religions were syncretized into a new folk Catholicism highly mixed with the symbols and myths of Mediterranean popular religion" (Klein 2003, xi).

European colonial expansion and the development of a modern capitalist system of economic exchange were in many ways coterminous. The perception of the "uncharted" colonies as "primarily established to provide raw materials for the burgeoning economics of the colonial powers" was heavily enforced and even institutionalized (Ashcroft 2009, 40). Consequently, features of the natural environment were cast as commodities solely to be economically benefitted from, and Rafael Puentes has argued that Bolivia specifically, and Latin America generally, was the birthplace of the modern flawed and exploitative capitalist system (2015). Colonial interactions such as these have conditioned environmental use and conflict in modern times, and have shaped economic, political, and ecological structures. Because of such structural legacies, scholars in postcolonial studies work to come up with theories in order to better understand the past and how to come up with solutions and alternatives for the future (Bailey and Bryant 1997).

From Plural to Binary

The idea of binarism was first introduced by French structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. He proclaimed that signs have meaning not by a simple reference to real objects but also by their opposition to other signs, and further that these oppositions explain the most extreme form of difference possible; sun/moon, birth/death, black/white, etc...(Ashcroft 2009). Contemporary post-structuralist theories have demonstrated the extent to which such binaries necessitate violent hierarchies, which in colonial discourse frequently appear in variation of the fundamental and stark colonizer/colonized distinction (ibid., 34-37). Andrew Canessa explains that, "the term *indian* is obviously one of European origin," and that in its usage it "denoted a simple power relationship between Europeans and a large number of diverse people whom they had the power to collectively assembly under a single term: Before 1492, there were no indians in the Americas" (2012, 6). Many aspects of indigenous society, including their multiple ethnicities and pluralist *cosmovisións* (worldviews), could not be neatly translated into colonial languages, epistemologies, and ontologies, and were therefore either altogether rejected or pitted against a colonial idea, promoting harsh and binarized categorical thinking.

The assumption that the basis of human civilization consists in a progressive detachment from 'nature' dominated the colonial period and has been continuously promoted and justified, both explicitly through institutions and implicitly embedded in social and personal interactions. For example, the Aymara concept of *suma qamaña*, Quechua notions of *sumak kawsay*, and Guaraní ideas of *ñandereko*, *teko kavi*, *ivi maraei*, and *qhapaj ñan*, were all unable to be translated or understood by the Spanish. These words, although coming from and based on the ideas of different cultures, have all been translated into Spanish as *Vivir Bien,* and then again into English as Living Well. When *Vivir Bien* is recognized as an idea that is continually being created instead of a static concept, it eludes simple definitions and translation becomes problematic. According to scholars such as Eduardo Gudynas, who is credited for being one of the most creative contemporary theorists and environmental thinkers in Latin America today, the term loses a lot of its meaning in this sequence of translations (2011). The difficulty in translating such terms is due to the fact that they:

> Include the classical ideas of quality of life, but with the specific idea that well-being is only possible within a community. Furthermore, in most approaches the community

concept is understood in an expanded sense, to include Nature. [*Vivir Bien*] therefore embraces the broad notion of well-being and cohabitation with others and Nature. In this regard, the concept is also plural, as there are many different interpretations depending on cultural, historical and ecological setting. (ibid., 444)

In its original and indigenous contexts, *Vivir Bien* also rejects the classical and teleological understandings of a unidirectional linear progression of history, one which follows a precise path from past to future. It instead promotes the idea of simultaneous; directionality, spatially, temporality, and metaphysicality.

Pachamama, is another example of a perplexing and plural indigenous concept which has often been misinterpreted and misunderstood. *Pacha* which refers to the totality of being, "not only encompasses space and time, but also a form of life that overcomes the nature of space and time. It is the ability to actively take part in the universe, to immerse one's self in it, to be it" (Gudynas 2011, 446). When combined with *mama*, or mother, *pachamama* insinuates the telluric mother of all beings. It is a concept which embraces the idea that all living systems and living organisms are interrelated, interdependent and complementary (ibid.). Because this idea was incongruous with Spanish conceptions, particularly with notions of capitalism, ideas of *Pachamama* were delegated as folklore and fantasy. Although the term transcends temporal boundaries and involves a complex understanding of all beings as interrelated, in a contemporary context it is often translated into Spanish as *Madre Tierra*, and English as Mother Earth. Further, in western contexts, Mother Earth has been additionally interpreted, condensed, and understood solely as 'nature,' leaving behind the important aspects of interrelated plurality and excluding the concept's main essence.

When understood in their traditional indigenous contexts, concepts such as *sumak kawsay* and *Pachamama* intrinsically transcend binarized categories due to their relationality and plurality. Val Plumwood, a leading voice in and advocate of ecofeminism, explains that the human/nature dualism, which has been enforced with the loss of plurality, is at the core of environmental destruction because it promotes, "human distance from, control of, and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature as the Other" (2005, 4). Additionally, the demarcated binary of colonizer/colonized has temporarily transcended these colonial encounters and continues to influence the ways in which we conceive of and relate to both human and non-human beings. Colombian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar makes the argument that

many ideas and practices which we consider to be our "universe," or accepted standards today, have arisen out of the expansion of certain cultural and ontological commitments of European colonial societies.

> With the modern ontology, certain constructs and practices, such as the primacy of humans over non-humans (separation of nature and culture) and of some humans over others (the colonial divide between us and them); the idea of the autonomous individual separated from community; the belief in objective knowledge, reason, and science as the only valid modes of knowing; and the cultural construction of 'the economy' as an independent realm of social practice, with 'the market' as a self-regulating entity outside of social relations, all of these ontological assumptions became prominent. The worlds and knowledges constructed on the basis of these ontological commitments became 'a universe.' This universe has acquired certain coherence in socio-natural forms such as capitalism, the state, the individual, industrial agriculture, and so forth. (2010, 9)

Colonial Hegemony

In the 1930s, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci coined and popularized the idea of hegemony. Gramsci was interested in why ruling classes were so successful in promoting their own interests in a society. Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination, which often manifests in the form of subtle and inclusive power, is exerted through a combination of coercion and consent. Hegemony supports the dominant ideology in that it presents the ruling class's interests as common and mutually beneficial, thus giving ideas the power to become normalized and taken for granted (Loomba 2015, 32). Additionally, Gramscian notions of hegemony stress the incorporation and transformation of ideas and practices belonging to those who are dominated, rather than the simple imposition from elites.

The interactions which took place between the Spaniards and the local Aymara and Quechua populations in the high-altitude town of Potosí demonstrate how deeply seeded these ideas are within Bolivia. In 1557, the Spanish claimed to have 'discovered' incredible deposits of silver in mountains such as *Cerro Rico*. In order to profit off this discovery, and without tarnishing their 'elite' social status, the Spanish exploited the local population into mining for them through the manipulation and use of indigenous symbols. The Spanish constructed devilish sculptures of *El Tío* (The Uncle), a figure which is considered to be the "lord of the underworld" in traditional indigenous mythology, deep within the mining shafts (Boccara 2014). Through the appropriation of a familiar figure, the indigenous workers were coerced into believing that if they

did not work hard in the mines they would be condemned, both brutally by the Spanish and spiritually by a higher cosmological being. In such coercive relations, the Spanish creatively intertwined their imperialist intentions with the allure of collective prosperity, ergo forging consent and compliance among indigenous workers. Additionally, Puentes claims that because so much wealth and temptation was presented, a "*mentalidad de los mineros*" or a get-rich-quick mentality was created in Potosí, and that this is a pattern which he continues to observe in present day Bolivia (2015).

In understanding these theoretical concepts, it becomes apparent that unequal power relationships were constructed in part due to the fact that "harsh coercion worked in tandem with a consent that was part voluntary, part contrived" (Looma 2015, 34). "Although European colonialism involved a variety of techniques and patterns of domination, penetrating deep into some societies and involving a comparatively superficial contact with others, all of them produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry" (ibid., 10). In this way, hegemony can be understood in the context of a colonial construction, but also as a form of power which inevitably changes and adapts over time. Today, such systems and techniques are normalized, repeated, and practiced in current political, social, ecological and economic paradigms.

DEVELOPMENT AND NEOLIBERALISM

Although many important events occurred between initial colonial contact in the 1500s and the 1950s, a comprehensive explanation of that time period goes beyond the scope of this paper. I did not arbitrarily decide to skip ahead to this more recent time period, but instead direct attention to it because of the global focus and attention of 'development' during this time. After the Second World War many parts of the world were in shambles, therefore sentiments of 'development,' 'progress,' and 'improvement' gained currency. Ideas were conceived then backed by economic theories and presented as 'practical responses' to global challenges such as poverty and wealth distribution. According to Michel Foucault's theory and the analysis of Arturo Escobar, development can be understood as a power device which reorganizes the world, "giving new legitimacy to the international division of labour in the capitalist context, by means of an immense set of discourses and practices" (Lang 2013, 5). The inaugural speech made by Harry Truman in 1949, and documents, reports, and programs released by international

organizations such as the United Nations, are often cited as examples of how definitions, ideas, and paradigms of development were globally established.

> More than half of the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people….I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. (Harry Truman 1949)

> There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of cast, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs 1951, 15)

In a separate report released in 1951, the United Nations referred to Bolivia as "a beggar sitting on a throne of gold," alluding to the country's abundance of natural resources and its grinding poverty and human misery. By the mid 20th century, concepts of development had become almost indistinguishable from those of economic growth, and notions of human well-being and equality were invariably pushed aside. "Growth and progress were said to take place in a series of stages, whereby the backward countries ought to be inspired by the advanced economies and follow their example" (Gudynas 2013, 15). In accordance with Euro-American theories, "culturally preferred ways of being are stationed as endpoints, with sequential stages of change laid out like stepping stones on a path towards them" (Watkins and Shulman 2008, 32).

Within development discourses, a division of the world was created though a stark dichotomy between developed/underdeveloped or First World/Third World nations. Development goals implicitly assumed Western standards to be the 'benchmark' against which to measure the 'progress' of the underdeveloped nations, and the "yardstick with which to measure" was gross national product (GDP). This further perpetuated the hegemonic idea of the West's superiority across cultural, economic, and scientific disciplines. Subsequently, many in the so-called 'Third World' began to internalize these definitions and think of themselves as inferior, underdeveloped, and ignorant.

> I got underdeveloped when I was thirteen years old, when President Truman took office and coined the word 'underdevelopment.' I was one of the two billion people who that very day became underdeveloped. We were not. We were a different kind of people and

suddenly we all became underdeveloped. If you become underdeveloped, it's a very humiliating condition. Very undignified condition. You cannot trust your nose. You need to trust the experts that will bring you to development. You cannot dream your dreams because they are already dreamt. That is the model... (Esteva quoted in Watkins and Shulman 2008, 33)

Global discourses and projects of development were dismissive of local and indigenous knowledges, including insight of and about the environment. Development projects therefore continued to devalue the multiple ways of life, social relationships, and knowledge systems that existed in the Global South, classifying them as 'backward' and in dire need of assistance (Watkins and Shulman 2008). Similar to the before mentioned colonial techniques, ideas of 'progress' encompassed; high levels of industrialization, the mastery of 'man' over 'nature,' and the modern use of science and technology. From the perspective of countries such as the United States, "Bolivia was a poor, struggling nation of backward rural peoples with valuable natural resources whose best chances of development depended upon a massive infusion of capital, advanced technology, and technical assistance" (Healy and Paulson 2000, 17).

Neoliberal Hegemony

The global dimension of neoliberal hegemony, or when neoliberalism expanded to most corners of the world, began with Thatcherism in England and the Reagan-Bush years (Escobar 2010). The first decades of this period represented the peak of "financial capitalism, flexible accumulation, free-market ideology, the fall of the Berlin wall, the rise of the network society, and the so-called new world order" (ibid., 7). Generally speaking, neoliberalism functions as a hegemonic regime promising economic growth and political stability, and entails a series of structural reforms intended to reduce the role of the state in the economy, assign a larger role to markets, and create macroeconomic stability. These were imposed primarily by international governance agencies and financial institutions in collusion with the national elites of 'developing' countries. The neoliberal versions of development discourse offer no options other than export growth and competition, and "given the capitalocentric thinking that dominates the field," there is an undeniable unilinear trajectory of progress (J.K. Gibson-Graham 2006, 45). Additionally, one of the most notable implications of neoliberalism was the entrenchment of individualism and consumerism as cultural norms (Kohl and Farthing 2006). In the first two decades of neoliberal globalization which began in the 1980s, "policies that subordinate the broader public interest by privileging the private sector while minimizing the role of the

government in production" were implemented in over 100 of the world's 'Third World' and 'developing' countries.

In many regards, Bolivian's condition was deemed "dismal," therefore it became a "guinea pig" for acute neoliberal reforms and structural adjustment programs under the auspice of a variety of actors including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and American economist Jeffrey Sachs (Beunder and de Kleijn 2014, 3). In an effort to launch the country into an increasingly competitive global environment, the Bolivian government agreed to privatize five of the largest state-owned enterprises to transnational corporations. These neoliberal programs publicly and strategically cast natural resources, such as water, minerals, and hydrocarbons as commodities to be exploited off of for profit. According to Lang, "Latin America was seen merely as the source of raw materials for the enrichment of the Global North" (2013, 6).

The rapid growth in foreign direct investment failed to provide economic prosperity or improve the living standards for the poor majority in Bolivia and the government proceeded to lose additional revenue. Instead of initiating social, economic, and political stability, neoliberal reforms brought about "increasing levels and diverse forms of organization within a burgeoning 'civil society' (peasant organizations, unions, labor centrals, civil committees, and neighborhood associations)" and an intensification of the class struggle and associated political conflict and social movements (Hindery 2013, 179). According to economist Tim Write, neoliberalism primarily failed in Bolivia due to the "individualist assumptions that form its philosophical underpinnings" (in Kohl and Farthing 2006, 191). He argues that this individualism was unable to take root in a context where traditional indigenous communal culture still has strong influence, and that "these entrenched social patterns have resisted the incursion of an economic philosophy built on definitions of individual autonomy that, if examined in the context of human history, are an anomaly" (ibid., 193).

As I've just explained, Bolivia's history is entrenched in unequal power relationships, in which it has generally received the short end of the stick. Before explaining why these historical narratives are important in Bolivia today, I will provide a brief description of the field of political ecology and an explanation of how I utilize it as an additional research and analysis framework.

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Political ecology is a broad and interdisciplinary field which ponders the intersections of political, ecological, economic, social, and cultural forces. It is often understood as the academic field which explores and deals with the complexities in the relationship between humans and natural environments. According to the *Encyclopedia of Environment and Society*, the discipline seeks to "describe the dynamic ways in which on the one hand, political and economic power can shape ecological futures and, on the other how ecologies can shape political and economic possibilities" (Robbins 2007, 1384). These ideas suggest that both nature and society are subject to social constructions and they therefore continue to be reconceptualized and redefined. This holds true when addressing *Madre Tierra* and the different conceptions of indigenous identity in the context of Bolivia.

The geographic focus on the 'Third World' within political ecology was a reflection of the pressing need to understand how historical legacies are continuing to influence modern day ecologies and politics. In this way, the field has very similar aspirations to those of postcolonial theorists, and scholars in both engage in temporally and theoretically difficult investigations. The integration into a global capitalist economy, natural resource extraction and dependency, environmental degradation, and centralized political control are all structures which scholars have sought to explain in their relation to socio-ecological relations (Bailey and Bryant 1997). In their analyses, political ecologists often attempt to describe "the spatial and temporal impact of capitalism on Third World peoples and environments," and also the ways in which the state and other local actors "may intervene in economic activity to promote environmentally destructive activities" (ibid., 3). In socio-ecological conflicts, such as those that arise in regards to natural resource extraction and distribution, inequalities are inevitably created as the reality of all decision making is selective and it is therefore impossible to appease all actors. In these scenarios, the environment is often, or arguably always, socially constructed, manipulated, and used as a tool to gain wealth, power and prestige (Castree and MacMillan 2001).

In his work in the field of political ecology, Paul Robbins hopes to "encourage those concerned with more traditional political economy that an increased sensitivity to the influence (and perhaps even the interests) of non-humans is essential for better politics, explanations, and ethics" (2012, 4). As it has evolved, the field of environmental ethics has adopted a variety of

positions and theories, yet the consensus seems to be "that an adequate and workable environmental ethics must embrace non-anthropocentrism, holism, moral monism, and, perhaps a commitment to some form of intrinsic value" (Katz and Light 2013, 2). Environmental ethics has been critiqued for many reason, one of which being the fact that the deriving theories and philosophies are difficult to translate into practical action, and are therefore problematic for the implementation of environmental policy.

Frameworks of political ecology outline methods with which to think about large systems of interaction, such as those that are intimately tied to identity and cultural politics, and also question where power comes from, who and what has it, and the resulting consequences. It therefore serves as a useful frame of reference when exploring my framing question of the possibilities of redressing unequal power relationships. I will now move into a more detailed discussion of how the aforementioned theories and frameworks relate to the specific situated context of socio-environmental relations and politics in contemporary Bolivia.

SITUATED CONTEXT

Figure 1. Map of Bolivia, a landlocked country in the center of South America which shares borders with Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile. Provided for visual contextualization. Source: The World Factbook.

Focus Question and Methodology

In order to gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of what I've just explained, I geographically situate my research in Bolivia (Figure 1), and ask more specifically: *How and why were constitutional and legislative rights given to Madre Tierra in Bolivia, and in what ways have they been realized?* I attempt to address this question and explore the ways in which Bolivia has refounded itself and what exactly this has entailed by employing a variety of different qualitative methodological approaches.

In order to answer my descriptive and explanatory questions which ask, *how* and *why,* I will first expand on the historical contextualization which I've previously discussed. This will then be supplemented with a literature review, principally of Salvador Schavelzon's ethnographic work and a briefing paper put together by researchers at The Democracy Center (2012, 2007). "Re-founding Bolivia: A Nation's Struggle Over Constitutional Reform" was orchestrated by The Democracy Center based in Cochabamba, Bolivia in order to help citizens "more fully understand what the constituent assembly and the process of constitutional reform means for Bolivia" (Olivera et al. 2007, 3). I complement this information with material from Schavelzon's book, *El Nacimiento del Estado*: *Etnografía de una Asamblea Constituyente,* (*The Birth of the State: Ethnography of the Constituent Assembly*) in which he chronicles the events that have "shaped the Bolivian politics of this era" and further presents "assumptions and political visions that arose between those who lived through the arrival and the evolution of the construction of a new state" (2012, 15). Further, by closely reading and using text analysis sites such as Voyant Tools, I work my way through the constitution and other legal documents, such as laws, precepts, and executive statements, analyzing the ways the texts were written, and looking for themes, patterns, and keywords. The majority of the quotes that I use from the 2009 constitution were translated by The Constitute Project (constituteproject.org) or NYU's *GlobaLex* (nyulawglobal.org)*,* both of which are electronic sites dedicated to international and foreign law research. All other language translations in the paper are done by me unless otherwise noted.

The obvious next step for my research, in order to address the second part of my focus question, *in what ways have they been realized,* would have been to analyze the ways in which the rights of *Madre Tierra* were discussed, questioned, and decided on in a jurisdictional setting. Unfortunately, either this has yet to happen or information is unattainable online. This, I assume,

has to due most likely with the recency of these changes. I therefore chose to focus on a recent conflict, the construction of the controversial highway in a protected indigenous and highly biodiverse region in central Bolivia, as a case study. I conducted a discourse analysis, examining news articles, photographs, and political cartoons, from a variety of sources such as major Bolivian newspapers (*El Deber, La Prensa, El Diario*), political blogs (bolivianthoughts, boliviadiary), and governmental and non-governmental organizations' websites (apcbolivia.org, bolivia.gob.bo). Through these sources I observed the ways in which the conflict was being reported in the hopes of discovering something of the underlying assumptions being made, and ethical positions taken by those involved (Butteriss et al. 2000).

Then, because the actors, both human and non-human, embroiled in the case study are multiplex, I used a political ecology framework developed by Raymond Bryant and Sinéad Bailey in *Third World Political Ecology*, which involves **identifying** different actors (which I will point out in **bold**) who are vying for access to natural resources (1997). It involves interpreting the political role that actors play in human-environment interactions in three ways: (1) Situating local-level findings and specific actors into a larger body of theoretical and comparative perspectives; (2) detailing the motivation, interests, and actions of different actor groups, focusing especially on the strengths, weaknesses, and relative power they possess in relation to other actors; and (3) placing politics at the center of political ecology, emphasizing that all human-environment interactions are mediated by politics, and that all actors, even weak ones, possess some level of agency with which they pursue their own interests (ibid., 25).

Based on my above stated research questions and chosen methodological approaches, I will now dive more deeply into addressing why Bolivia's history has allowed for constitutional and legislative recognition of *Vivir Bien* and rights to be granted to *Madre Tierra*.

Hegemonic Resistance and Social Change

Postcolonial theorists and development critics claim that because of enduring inequalities and skewed power relations, resistance and retaliation by the colonized, underdeveloped, and oppressed are to be expected. The 1990s marked the rise of social movements around the world in response to the detrimental hegemony of neoliberalism and the overarching failures of development. In Bolivia, discontent and resistance had the ability to "erupt across the political

spectrum" and nationalist, indigenous, and socialist counter-hegemonic discourses were pushed to the fore (Kohl and Farthing 2006).

> The anti-neoliberal backlash in Bolivia is based on a profound grasp of the historical and continuing economic and political processes that have shaped the country. Bolivians are aware that the mines of Potosí produced over half of the world's production of silver for over 100 years, yet today the city is one of the poorest in the hemisphere. They remember that the country's tin resources created wealth not for the majority but for a handful of families. Schoolchildren rehearse the War of the Pacific with Chile that cost them their access to the sea and rich nitrate (and later copper) deposits over 125 years ago. The memory is renewed in the national imagination every year and the slogan, 'It is the duty of all Bolivians to reclaim their right to the sea', is posted in public buildings, and even seen on the spine of telephone directories. After 500 years, the indigenous majority of Bolivia has had enough. (ibid., 3)

Between 2000-2005, Bolivia witnessed a wave of unprecedented popular uprisings, all of which were characterized by a strong presence of indigenous groups. These movements "discovered strength in several crucial battles" such as; the 2000 Water War in Cochabamba against the privatization of all water resources, and the 2003 Gas War over the ownership and use of domestic gas reserves (Beunder and de Kleijn 2014). On October 17, 2003, "500,000 people, almost a third of the population of the major cities of La Paz and El Alto took to the streets with slogans demanding 'Gas for Bolivians, not for multinationals' and 'Death to neoliberalism' (translated in Kohl and Farthing 2006, 11). Some observers have recognized these uprisings as a strong indication of, "a resurgence of indigenous worlds and the rejection of the liberal system based on representative democracy and private property" (Escobar 2010, 30). Julieta Paredes, a Bolivian activist and feminist, explains that Bolivia is considered to be a country defined and exemplified by social movements and revolutionary protests, and Álvaro García Linera (the current vice president of Bolivia) has referred to the first five years of the 21st century as a "genuine revolutionary epoch" (2012, 2011). Bolivia's social and political instability provided a climate in which historically oppressed social groups were able to have a voice in the public arena. This historical moment can be "defined by an interaction between several variable elements in a situation: when those above can no longer govern as they did before; when those below will not tolerate being oppressed as they were before; and when this double impossibility is expressed by a sudden efflorescence of the masses" (Bensatïd 2002, 150).

> Counter-hegemonic demands can develop due to tensions from new forms of marginalization or as the trappings of new wealth accruing to a successful minority become increasingly visible. Of course, in countries with a colonial past, especially

among people aware of this legacy, the distribution of benefits from processes such as natural resource extraction or the lack of opportunities for the contradictions between hegemonic ideologies and material reality to surface. (2006, 17)

This quote from Kohl and Farthing explains the dissatisfaction which the majority of Bolivians were feeling about neoliberal policies, but also that these feelings went beyond the recent changes and ignited those repressed about other foreign oppressions.

Through understanding Bolivia as "a nation built on the fabric of exploitation and exclusion," and on the hegemonic paradigms and ontologies of non-Bolivians, an answer to the *why* part of my focus question become clear: the people were ready for change (ibid., 18). The overwhelming social movements and counter-hegemonic resistance of the early 2000s was characterized by two principal demands: the nationalization of the county's gas reserves and calls for a constitutional assembly. Both demands intended to undo and replace the oppressive systems which had continually and undeservingly been imposed on them, and to politically, economically, ecologically, and socially "refound" the nation.

A Refounded Bolivia

The chaotic social climate of the early 2000s and overwhelming distrust and desires for change of the populace provided the opportunity for the formation of a new political party. *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement for Socialism, or MAS) branded itself not as a conventional political party, as they had come to be distrusted throughout Bolivia, but as a new 'political instrument,' which gained traction by employing a nationalist discourse against all forms of foreign imperialism. Because of the existing social context, MAS was able to "harness historical ethnic hostilities together with an extremist anti-imperial agenda" and as a result, a great alliance was forged in order to promote change and reconstruct Bolivia (Shoaei 2012).

Running on a platform based on radical transformation, and principles of equity and inclusivity, Evo Morales Ayma became the first indigenous president to take office in Bolivia (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The day before Evo Morales Ayma assumed the presidency he held a symbolic ritual in Tiwanaku, the spiritual and political center of the most powerful pre-Columbian culture of the Altiplano, where he "resurrected himself as the supreme leader of the Aymaras" and was crowned *Apu Mallku* (Bruno 2014, 135). According to Bruno, Morales felt "compelled" to incorporate such a symbolic act into his inauguration ceremony in order to meet the psychological needs of his constituents, epitomizing the "ubiquitous and acute presence of the Spanish conquest and colonization in the national psyche" (ibid., 135).

In 2005, Morales captured the presidency with a majority of the popular vote (54 percent), marking the first time a presidential candidate had won an electoral majority since the return to democracy in 1982 (Madrid 2011). During his campaign, Morales vowed to:

> End five hundred years of colonialism and the neoliberal policies of the past, nationalize the country's gas reserves, industrialize its raw materials, redistribute land and income to the poor, respect indigenous rights, protect 'Mother Earth,' democratize the political system, and guide the country to a transition towards socialism. (translated in Beunder and de Kleijn 2014, 3)

Particularly when compared to Bolivia's previous presidents, Morales has been recognized and praised for his ostensibly unwavering commitment to indigenous and ecological rights, and for his critiques of Western ideological and epistemological influences, such as capitalism (Hindery 2013). MAS and the Morales administration has branded itself as "a government of social movements" who "*mandar obedeciendo*" ('lead by obeying') a slogan often associated with the revolutionary Zapatista movement in Mexico (Svampa 2013). Bolivian citizens, such as Julieta Paredes, claim that "the election of Evo Morales [was] the *product* not

the *embodiment* of a revolutionary wave of protests," and further, that his election was thought to be the answer to many social, political, and environmental issues (2012, 6).

During his childhood, Morales lived and worked on his family's coca farm (coca is a plant which has historic, indigenous, and economic significance in Bolivia) in the Chapare region in eastern Bolivia. In the 1980s Morales became active in the regional coca-growers union and quickly made his way up the leadership ranks. Prior to being elected president, the closest Morales had been to political participation was his engagement in anti-government direct action protests. His lack of political training was perceived positively by the public, and his past of being a charismatic leader in a grassroots social movement provided Morales with techniques and credibility which would become pivotal to his presidency (Webber 2011). Álvaro García Linera is another crucial member of the MAS administration as he has been vice president since 2006. Although not indigenous by heritage, Linera has been involved in the Katarist "*Ayllus Rojos*" (an eclectic amalgamation of Marxist-indigenous activists), and was instrumental in organizing the *Ejército Guerrillero Tupaj Katari* (Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army), both of which are important to Bolivia's indigenous insurgent history (Soloway and Ellerbeck 2015). Additionally, Linera has been recognized internationally for being one of Latin America's leading Marxist intellectuals, and has published multiple politically controversial books. As a team, Morales and Linera combine charisma and intellect and strategically denounce foreign investment and imperialism in their country, promoting a tenacious 'Bolivia for Bolivians' rhetoric.

MAS's victory was an achievement in democratic race relations and indigenous rights were thrust to the center of the national political agenda to an unprecedented degree. Following centuries of indigenous liberation struggles against Spanish colonialism, followed by internal hierarchical race relations throughout the republican and liberal era, the election of an indigenous president was seen an an incredible triumph. During the start of his first term, Morales took steps towards refounding the Bolivian state by aligning national goals with indigenous ideologies, such as the nationalization of hydrocarbon reserves and the promotion of *Vivir Bien* as an alternative system to capitalism. The ideals underlying such a refounding were expected to entail a more "substantial transformation of modern institutions," in order to "create multiple spaces for the alternative worlds and knowledges which have remained invisible, or, that have been actively produced as non-credible alternatives to what exists by dominant discourses" (Escobar 2010, 40).

Morales has argued that indigenous citizens have never aptly ameliorated from the country's development, and that in moving forward more benefits would flow into the nation, especially to the historically subjugated individuals and communities (McEwan 2009).

Morales won his first presidential election as a result of lengthy processes of social struggle, whose protagonists were neither the traditional left nor political parties, but social movements of smallholder farmers, women, city-dwellers and indigenous peoples. These marginalized and heterogeneous groups "managed to transcend their sectoral demands and put forward new proposals for the country as a whole" (Lang 2013, 6). Through this sweeping mobilization, "most Bolivians realized that without a new constitution, based on a fundamentally revised social contract, the economic processes defined by capitalism and global neoliberalism would continue to impoverish them" (Kohl and Farthing 2006, 4). In order to attend to these demands, MAS has been mandating a nation-wide economic, political, social, and cultural transformation, known as *Processo de Cambio* (Process of Change, or PC). A key goal of which has been the administration's promise of transforming the Republic of Bolivia into the Plurinational State of Bolivia, a process which involved the democratic election of delegates, the convening of a constituent assembly, and the egalitarian style re-writing of the country's constitution (Paredes 2012, Laing 2015).

Constituent Assembly and Constitutional Breakdown

Beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, Latin American countries such as Colombia (1991), Ecuador (1997-98), and Venezuela (1999) convened *las asambleas constituyentes* (constituent assemblies) in order to revise or rewrite their countries' foundational texts (Olivera et al. 2007). According to scholars at The Democracy Center, a constituent assembly provides the peaceful and democratic means by which a country can "define the bases of law for the country" (ibid., 4). The idea for the 2009 constituent assembly in Bolivia was that it would be a legal manifestation of the desires of the people, doing so by "ripping the existing constitution by its roots and starting over" (ibid., 3). Vice president Linera has explained the depth and scope of the changes in his country by emphasizing their historical and cultural complexity:

> The Constituent Assembly is conceived of and was convoked to create an institutional order that corresponds to the reality of who we are. Up to now, each of our 17 or 18 constitutions has just tried to copy the latest institutional fashion French, US, European.

And it was clear that it didn't fit us, because these institutions correspond to other societies. We are indigenous and non-indigenous, we are liberal and communitarians, we are a profoundly diverse society regionally and a hybrid in terms of social classes. So we have to have institutions that allow us to recognize that pluralism. (translated in Escobar 2010, 5)

Anthropologist Salvador Schavelzon explains that the 255 delegates were elected to the assembly not primarily through political parties, but through indigenous communities, labor unions, women's organizations, and other instruments of social organization (2012). The assembly was presided over by Silvia Lazarte, a *campesina* from Villa Tunari in the Chapare, and the delegates represented all of Bolivia's regions and ethnic groups in order to draft the new constitution equitably and comprehensibly (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013). In its essence "the dream of the assembly was to create, on a national level, the kind of community-based political decision making that many of the nation's indigenous used in their own villages and towns," and to directly represent the desires of the people (Olivera et al. 2007, 9).

Bolivia's history demonstrates that the country's political foundations were both constantly changing (Figure 3) and inherently contradictory. Bolivia's initial constitution was drafted in 1825 by Venezuelan Simon Bolívar, and was based on a European constitutional model. Bolívar regarded the president as being "the sun which, fixed in its orbit, imparts life to the universe," and in his constitution, the president was appointed by the legislature for life and had the right to appoint his own successor (Río 1965, 45). The document enforced the idea that a country is a single and homogenous nation-state, "*La Nación Boliviana es la reunión de todos los Bolivianos,*" reducing and consolidating the heterogeneous native population (Art. 1). Spanish was the only recognized language in the antiquated constitution, which was incredibly oppressive to the majority of the population, all of whom spoke or identified with an indigenous language (Nolte and Schilling-Vacaflor 2012). The Spanish language was considered to be refined and elite and in this way, the Spanish were able to create and sustain hegemony as they systematically excluded indigenous citizens, and forced common interests around their 'linguistic supremacy.' Individuals who were once proud of their indigenous languages were forced to learn Spanish and assimilate to european lifestyles for fear of being ignored or deemed incapable or "culturally retarded" (Canessa 2012, 6).
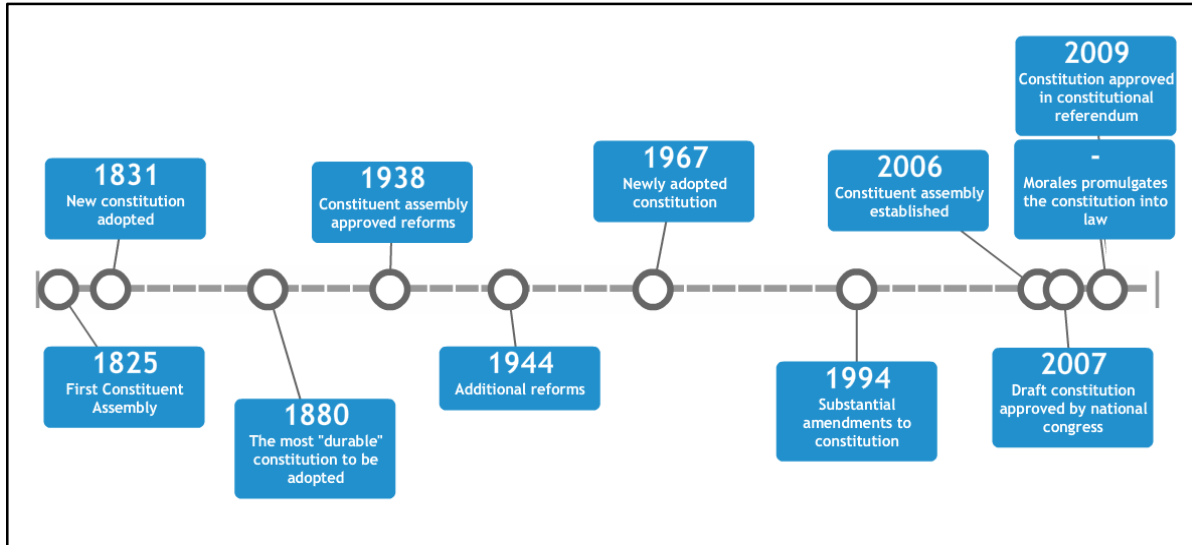
Figure 3. Timeline showing Bolivia's history of constitutional reforms. It is significant that the country's initial constitution was drafted in 1825, "in an era driven by the mentality of foreign colonization and in which the indigenous population was robbed of land, rights and citizenship" (Olivera et al. 2007, 3). Since the adoption of the original constitution there have been many changes and ratifications, as Bolivia, Bolivians, and the rest of the world have changed and evolved. Dates for the timeline came from constitutionnet.org.

Comparatively, the new constitution states that the "period of the mandate of the President or Vice President is five years, and they may be reelected once for a continuous term" (Art. 168). It also recognizes the languages spoken by 36 indigenous groups on equal footing with Spanish, all of which are identified as "official languages of the state," and Article Five mandates that central and departmental governments must always use at least two of these official languages. Indigenous rights and recognition, and cultural pluralism are transversal conditions of the new constitution, guaranteeing "equal coexistence between different ethnic groups without imposition and subordination" (Nolte and Schilling-Vacaflor 2012, 356).

The possibilities revolving around the renaming of the state as Plurinational seemed to be endless, and Fernando Garcés, a museum director at *Universidad Mayor de San Simón* noted that "at the time of the constitutional assembly, there was an enthusiasm. The whole range of possibilities was open, and we could do everything" (translated in Soloway and Ellerbeck 2016). Olivera explains that in renaming the country 'Plurinational,' the government recognizes "the distinct identities of millions of people linked by common cultures and languages, peoples whose identities existed long before Bolivia's national boundaries were ever drawn," and further that it represents more than the simple recognition of plural identities, but that it also, "indicates respect for traditional systems of justice, representation, and decision-making," all of which had long been repressed or ignored (2007, 9).

After determining that the rewriting of this foundational document was driven in part by a political process which started with the widespread counter hegemonic reactions to the neoliberal market reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and with the election of a radical indigenous figure who subsequently elected a constituent assembly, I began analyzing the constitution's text. I started with the preamble, as this preliminary statement helps scholars, lawmakers, and citizens to "understand the constitution as a whole, in its intent, its basic meaning, and its fundamental tenets" (constitution.laws.com/preamble). It also acts as a uniting statement which promotes underlying interests and a nationalist imaginary. I used features of Voyant tools, an online analysis program, to find patterns and create a visual representation (Figure 4) which refers to the historical struggles of indigenous citizens and other social movements mentioned in the preamble text. The section emphasizes the respect of economic, social, legal, political and cultural pluralism, while also formulating the goal of overcoming the colonial, republican, and neoliberal state. It asserts that Bolivia is to be refounded "with the strength of Pachamama and with the grace of God." Although the preamble has an incredibly symbolic and idealistic tone, Schavelzon proclaims that it does not reflect the tensions which "encapsulated a project that sought to be the state and transform it simultaneously" (2012, 45).

Figure 4. Textual analysis of the preamble in the 2009 constitution. The image on the left was created with the tool 'cirrus' which centrally positions the terms that occur most frequently. "As the algorithm goes through the list and continues to attempt to draw words as close as possible to the center of the visualization it will also include small words within spaces left by larger words that do not fit together snugly." The middle image is a preview of the text which was analyzed, and the image on the right was created with the tool 'links.' It illustrates, "a collocation of terms in a corpus by depicting them in a network through the use of a force directed graph". The frequency of the word in the selected text is indicated by its relative size, and the strength of the line explains their rhetorical connections. Note the inclusive rhetoric such as; collectively and communitarian, and the importance of the terms, 'state,' 'social,' and 'struggles.'

The Preamble states, "*dejamos en el pasado el estado colonial, republicano y neoliberal*" (we left behind the colonial, republican, and neo-liberal State) and the first article of the

document declares that Bolivia is "a unitary, plurinational, communitarian, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, social decentralized state, with territorial autonomies" that is founded on "political, economic, judicial, cultural, and linguistic pluralism" (Art. 1). This definition of nation's model confirms the complexities embedded in the refounding of the nation-state.

The idea and concept of *Vivir Bien* (living well) is an important objective of the document and appears in the first twelve articles of Part I. The section incorporates fundamental indigenous ideologies and cultural principles as essential to the state's ethical and moral principles, and further, their obligation to represent the wishes of the indigenous populace. In an interview published by La Paz based newspaper *La Razón*, David Choquehuanca, minister of external relations and expert on Andean cosmovision, explains that Article 8, below, outlines the fundamental ethical concepts of *Vivir Bien*.

I. The State adopts and promotes the following as ethical, moral principles of the plural society: *ama suwa* (do not be lazy, do not be a liar or a thief), *suma qamaña* (live well), *ñandereko* (live harmoniously), *teko kavi* (the good life), *ivi maraei* (land without evil) and *qhapaj ñan* (noble path or life).

II. The State is based on the values of unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, interdependence, harmony, transparency, equilibrium, equality of opportunity, social and gender equality in participation, common welfare, responsibility, social justice, distribution and redistribution of the social wealth and assets for well being.

Furthermore, Eduardo Gudynas explains that the ethical and moral principles included in the *Vivir Bien* sections are linked to the economic organization of the State. "The Bolivian constitution introduces an economic plural model (in the sense of diverse cultural origins of economic activities), and its objectives are to increase quality of life and well-being for all Bolivians" (2011, 443). This section of the constitution envisions an alternative model of development and a mixed economy that allows for public, collective, individual, communal, associative, and cooperative forms of collaboration. The tensions entailed by this conception and inclusion of scale are multiplex, for instance "between indigenous autonomies within the context of a plurinational state and the forms of departmental autonomy defended by private business groups; between direct democracy and representative democracy; administration of natural resources by the state in accordance with integral development versus a mixed economy model where resources are allocated by the market" (Escobar 2010, 27).

Moving along in the constitution, the entire second section explains the "fundamental rights and guarantees" assured by the state and protected by the document. Chapter Five concentrates specifically on environmental rights.

> **Article 33.** Everyone has the right to a healthy, protected, and balanced environment. The exercise of this right must be granted to individuals and collectives of present and future generations, as well as to other living things, so they may develop in a normal and permanent way.

> **Article 34.** Any person, in his own right or on behalf of a collective is authorized to take legal actions in defense of environmental rights, without prejudice to the obligation of public institutions to act on their own in the face of attacks on the environment.

These clauses express the government's aspiration to protect and provide a "healthy and balanced environment" for all Bolivians now and in the future, yet they place the majority of the responsibility on citizens themselves. The government is attempting to counsel citizens into more liable and accountable actions in regards to socio-ecological relations by presenting "a healthy, protected, and balanced environment" as a common interest for all and furthermore that its protection is mutually beneficial. The constitution's recognition of "the environment" as, "a collective subject of public interest" prompts that it is the duty and obligation of "any person" to speak up on behalf of the more than human world because it cannot speak for itself (Soloway and Ellerbeck 2015, 6).

Despite the brief mention in the preamble, *Pachamama* and *Madre Tierra* are not explicitly mentioned again in the constitutional text. It was once the constitution was passed (2009) that attention then turned to creating the secondary laws and institutions needed to give form to these new constitutional principles.

Mother Earth Laws

It is in subsequent precepts that *Madre Tierra* is clearly and officially recognized in Bolivian legislation. *Ley* 071 - *Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra* (Law of the Rights of Mother Earth), and *Ley 300 - Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien* (Framework Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development to Live Well) have both been ratified by the MAS administration (2010, 2012).

Law 071 defines *Madre Tierra* as, "a dynamic living system comprising an indivisible community of all living systems and living organisms, interrelated, interdependent and

complementary, which share a common destiny" and explicitly states that *Madre Tierra* is "considered sacred, from the worldviews of nations and peasant indigenous peoples" (Art. 3). This definition, which emphasizes "all living system" breaks down the dichotomous human/ nature relationship, indicating the reciprocal and symbiotic affinity between all beings. The law continues to explain the legal status and exercise of the rights of *Madre Tierra*:

> **Article 5.** For the purpose of protecting and enforcing its rights, Mother Earth takes on the character of collective public interest. Mother Earth and all its components, including human communities, are entitled to all the inherent rights recognized in this Law. The exercise of the rights of Mother Earth will take into account the specificities and particularities of its various components. The rights under this Act shall not limit the existence of other rights of Mother Earth.

> **Article 6.** All Bolivians, to join the community of beings comprising Mother Earth, exercise rights under this Act, in a way that is consistent with their individual and collective rights. The exercise of individual rights is limited by the exercise of collective rights in the living systems of Mother Earth. Any conflict of rights must be resolved in ways that do not irreversibly affect the functionality of living systems. (translated by NYUlawglobal.org)

The law promotes notions which are based on ontological assumptions in which beings always exist in relation to one another and never as 'objects' or individuals. It also prioritizes "the exercise of collective rights" which can be viewed as an attempt to end aspects of the hegemony of liberal modernity with the activation of communal forms of organization based on indigenous practices (Escobar 2010).

Although the law clearly defines and prioritizes *Madre Tierra*, it lacks explicit requirements and goals. Franz Chávez, a Bolivian correspondent for Inter Press Service, explains that because there are no "quantifiable targets that would make it possible to assess implementation," citizens and lawyers have little grounds to tangibly work with, therefore making the law primarily symbolic (2014). An exception to this vagueness appears in the final article, Article Ten, of the law which mandates that a *Defensoría de la Madre Tierra*, or a defense or ombudsman of Mother Earth, be established. This appointed official's role would be to regulate, report, and denounce the behavior of humans to the planet, which would go beyond mere discourse since it would be an instance of regulated and authoritative control (Díez Lacunza 2016). However, this position has yet to be created since the law's proclamation in December of 2010.

In October of 2012 Law 300 was signed into approval as a continuation of the agenda of Law 071. The framework law aims to link the three concepts of: *derechos de Madre Tierra* (the rights of Mother Earth), *desarrollo integral* (integral development), and *Vivir Bien* (Living Well), proclaiming that the three cannot be considered separate entities and that they all must work in conjunction.

> **Article 1.** The present law is to establish the vision and the essentials of integral development in harmony and balance with Mother Earth in order to Live Well, guaranteeing the continued capacity for regeneration of the components and systems of life of Mother Earth, recovering and strengthening the local and ancestral knowledges, in the framework of the complementarity of rights, obligations and duties; as well as the objectives of integral development, and the bases for the planning, governance and investment, and the institutional framework and strategy for its implementation.

The definitions section of the law, the first three of which are shown below in Figure 5, is particularly helpful in clarifying and understanding the document and its intents.

ARTÍCULO 5. (DEFINICIONES). A los efectos de la presente Ley se entiende por:

1. **Aprovechamiento.-** Es la utilización de los productos de los componentes de la Madre Tierra por personas individuales y colectivas para el desarrollo integral, con fines de interés público y/o comercial, autorizados por el Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, en armonía y equilibrio con la Madre Tierra.

2. **Componentes de la Madre Tierra.-** Son los seres, elementos y procesos que conforman las zonas de vida, que bajo condiciones de desarrollo sustentable pueden ser usados o aprovechados por los seres humanos, en tanto recursos naturales, como lo establece la Constitución Política del Estado.

3. **Desarrollo integral.-** Es el proceso continuo de generación e implementación de aspectos y procesos sociales, políticos, culturales, ecológicos, económicos, productivos y afectivos, así como de medidas y acciones comunitarias, ciudadanas y de gestión pública para la creación, provisión y fortalecimiento de condiciones, capacidades y medios materiales y afectivos culturalmente adecuadas y apropiadas, que promueven relaciones solidarias, de apoyo y cooperación mutua, de complementariedad y fortalecimiento de vínculos edificantes comunitarios y colectivos para alcanzar el Vivir Bien en armonía y equilibrio con la Madre Tierra.

Figure 5. **(1) Use or exploitation** - The use of the products of the components of Mother Earth by individual and collective persons for integral development, for purposes of public and or commercial interests, authorized by the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in harmony and balance with Mother Earth. **(2) Components of Mother Earth** - They are the beings, elements and processes that make up the areas of life, which under conditions of sustainable development can be used or exploited by human beings, as natural resources, as established in the Political Constitution of the State. **(3) Integral Development -** It is the continuous process of generation and implementation of social, political, cultural, ecological, economical, productive and affective aspects and processes, as well as communitary and citizenry measures and actions, and public governance for the creation, provision and strengthening of conditions, and culturally adequate and appropriate capacities and material means, which promote relations of solidarity, support and mutual cooperation, of complementarity and strengthening of positive community and collective ties in order to achieve Living Well in harmony and balance with Mother Earth.

The rest of the document outlines principles for making the shift from the historically imposed classical development models to an integral model, which would prioritize Bolivia and Bolivians instead of global markets. An intention of the law is that national development would

continue to expand, but would prioritize Bolivian well-being and prosperity as well as simultaneously promoting a healthy and balanced environment. The framework law is complex in that it covers a wide range of topics including climate change, biodiversity, forest fires, and natural resources, but the most significant objective is the incorporation of indigenous and egalitarian ideals with those of integral development (Chávez 2014).

The new constitution and subsequent laws in Bolivia have gained international attention for granting legal recognition and rights to *Madre Tierra*, and the country has been applauded for being at the forefront of the environmental movement. Yet because of the vagueness of wording, the inclusion of contradictory ideas, and the lack of concrete targets, little objective action or quantifiable changes have been made. The laws which I have just explained articulate the rights of *Madre Tierra* in a way which is dependent on citizenly rights, collective responsibilities, and deliberate action. Law 300, in particular, and additionally the constitution convolutes the rights of *Madre Tierra* and conceptions of *Vivir Bien* with the promotion of development and economic models. These contradictions and the unrealistically prescribed and elusive goals have been grounds for criticism both domestically and abroad.

> The task was nothing less than to found the country anew and to transform it into a plurinational state, meaning the transformation of the postcolonial state to reflect the diversity of nationalities and peoples. However, neither the process of drafting the new constitution nor the subsequent implementation of the new constitutional precepts, were able to escape from the enormous pressures resulting from the involvement in the current world system. (Lang 2013, 6)

Due to the fact that there are no documented court cases where these laws have come into question, I will now move on to my chosen case study in order to provide an example of how these recent changes have been executed.

TIPNIS Case Study

Throughout my explanation of the following case study I utilize a political ecology framework outlined by Sinead Bailey and Raymond Bryant (1997). In doing so, the **key actors**, human, non-human, and politics involved in the case will be bolded for recognition and emphasis. In this section I will further document their motivations, interests, and actions, paying special attention to the strengths, weaknesses, and relative power they each possess.

Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure, or TIPNIS, refers to the 5,298 square mile triangular area of land located in the center of Bolivia. The region is one of the most biologically diverse and vital ecosystems in the country and was therefore declared a **national park** in 1965 under **Supreme Decree 7401** (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013). Additionally, the land is home to over 12,000 indigenous citizens, primarily the **Mojeños-Trinitarios**, the **Chimanes**, and the **Yuracarés** (Friedman-Rudovsky 2012). In 1990, the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia* (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia, or **CIDOB**) an umbrella organization whose mission is, "defending the rights of the indigenous peoples of the lowlands of Bolivia," in order to "effectively be incorporated and participate in the political, social, economic, and cultural decisions of the country," organized a protest march (apcbolivia.org). The demonstrators walked over 370 miles from the Amazonian city of Trinidad to the capital city of La Paz, a route which has historical ties to Tupac Katari (the Aymara indigenous leader of a major insurrection in the colonial-era). This protest march led to three **Executive Decrees** (22609, 22610 and 22611) one of which in particular **22609**, declared TIPNIS and other areas in Bolivia, as *Tierra Comunitaria de Origen* (protected indigenous territories, or **TCO**s).

Although there was certainly undisclosed prior planning, the controversial events regarding the conflict began in 2010 when the proposal for a major *carretera* (highway) was announced to the Bolivian public. The project, which had an expected overall cost of over $450 million, would be divided into three segments; (1) from Villa Tunari to Isinuta; (2) Isinuta to Monte Grande; and (3) Monte Grande to San Ignacio de Moxos. The map shown in Figure 6 displays the proposed route for the 182 mile highway, which would connect the Beni and Cochabamba departments of the country. Historically, the Bolivian public has been highly supportive of an infrastructural linkage, with the exception of the middle 32 mile section which would cut directly through the protected TIPNIS area (Soloway and Ellerbeck 2015). Figure 6 also shows that prior to public announcements about the project the government had already begun construction of the road (the grey lines) on either side of the TIPNIS area. This has been viewed as a blatant disregard for any other alternative routes (shown by the purple dashed lines) which have been proposed by environmentalist such as Juan Terrazas. Additionally, the map exposes the known hydrocarbon reserves (the pink and green areas) in the region.
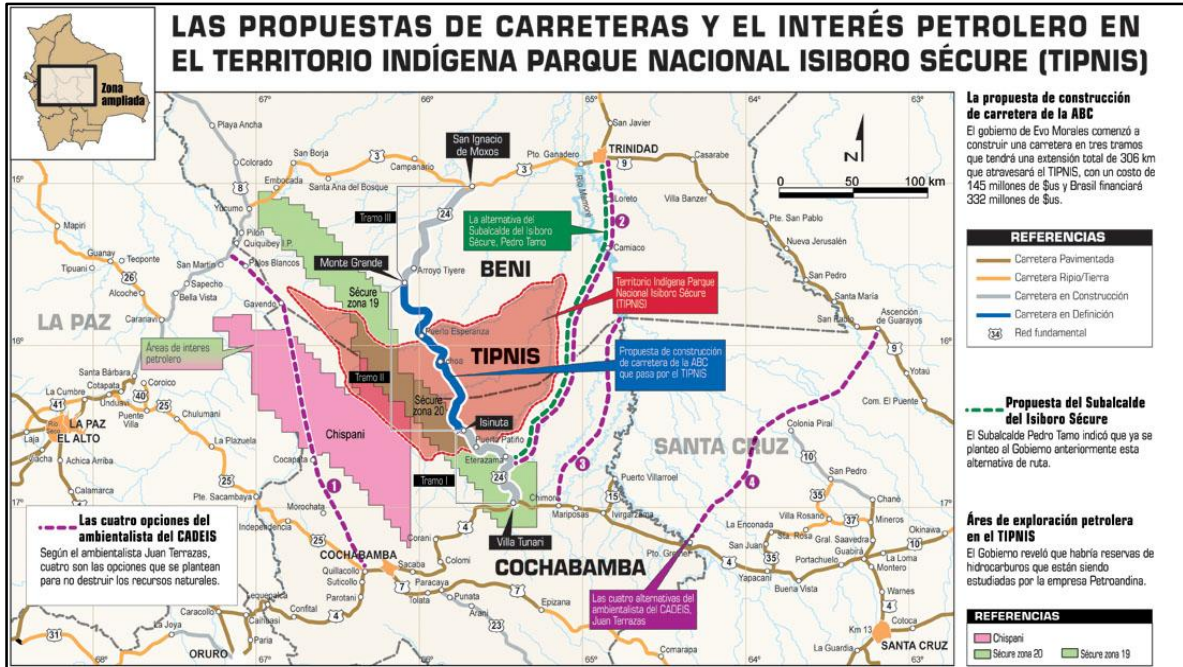
Figure 6. Map displaying TIPNIS, in red, the triangular piece of land in the center of Bolivia. The blue section of the proposed road would go directly through the national park and protected indigenous territory. The purple dashed lines show four alternative routes for the road, proposed by environmentalist Juan Terrazas. Source: www.in.com.bo.

The two central figures of the MAS administration, president **Evo Morales** and vice president **Álvaro García Linera** have been at the forefront of organizing plans for the highway's construction. In his book, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía,* Linera explains that there is a historical need for the road dating back more than 300 years, referring to its potential to promote communication and trade amongst rural indigenous groups and improve security from aggressive outsiders (2012). Additionally, he asserts that the road would be a mechanism for achieving territorial control of the Bolivian geography and would create economic capital and domestic prosperity, backing his "Bolivia for Bolivians" discourse (Soloway and Ellerbeck 2015). Morales has argued that the highway's integration of the country's Amazonian and Andean regions would bring services and economic benefits to isolated communities which is necessary for the "distribution and redistribution of social wealth and assets for well-being" which are constitutionally mandated (Art. 8). In Morales' initial announcement of the highway's construction he acknowledged that the project would, "ask of **Mother Earth** to sacrifice some of her scarce resources," but that, "the benefits for all would, undoubtedly, outweigh these losses" (translated in Beunder and de Kleijn 2014, 5). By promoting such "benefits for all" Morales is employing tactics of coercive hegemonic language in order to justify the destruction caused by

the road. Figure 7, a political cartoon printed in Cochabamba based newspaper *La Prensa*, illustrates citizen disapproval of this notion, contending that the road's construction would quite literally destroy TIPNIS and kill *Madre Tierra*.
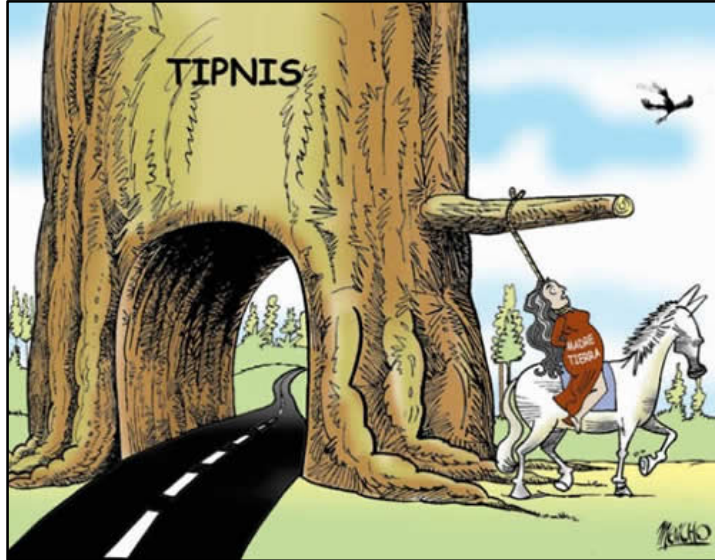

Figure 7. Cartoon from *La Prensa* (2011) showing how the road would 'cut directly through' the park's natural resources, subsequently killing Mother Earth.

As I mentioned earlier in my discussion of the neoliberal projects in the 1980s and 1990s, the majority of the Bolivian public highly rejected the widespread privatization of Bolivia's natural resources. In 2006, Morales passed **Supreme Decree 28701**, nationalizing the country's crucial **hydrocarbon** reserves. "Whereas in historical episodes of struggle, the people have conquered, at the price of their own blood, the right for our wealth in hydrocarbons is to return to the hands of the nation and be used for the benefit of the country" (first line of the decree, translated by the American Society of International Law 2006). Through re-nationalizing these resources, Morales was directly following through on his platform's promises and complying with the desires of his people, while also indirectly attempting to break long-standing foreign economic dependencies and promote national sovereignty, autonomy and security.

The bulk of the money made in these nationalized sectors has been directed towards funding *bonos*, or domestic social-welfare programs. Currently, one third of Bolivians regularly receive some form of financial government assistance, and according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), extreme poverty was reduced from 37.5 percent in 2002, to 22.4 percent in 2009 (Munoz 2015). Because of such a

proactive discourse, the MAS administration has been able to validate massive extractivist projects, even in national parks and TCOs, as necessary in order to finance these programs, as they provide "benefits for all."

Historically, Bolivia has invested minimally in infrastructural projects, and according to the ECLAC Bolivia was rated as having the second worst transportation infrastructure in the entire continent (2014). In contrast, the country of **Brazil** has some of the best transportation infrastructure. In 2009, BNDES (Brazilian National Development Bank) offered to help with both the planning and the funding of the road, loaning Bolivia over 80 percent of the cost for construction (Laing 2015). Its motivations for backing the project have primarily been regional dominance (Figure 8), and access to ports on the Pacific coast of the continent. Both objectives are part of a larger Brazilian project, The Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA), a vast network of 531 mega development projects aiming to "propel the continent into the 21st century" (Webber 2011, Friedman-Rudovsky 2012, 2). Brazil's huge economic investment of approximately $360 million, yields it influence and power in the situation.
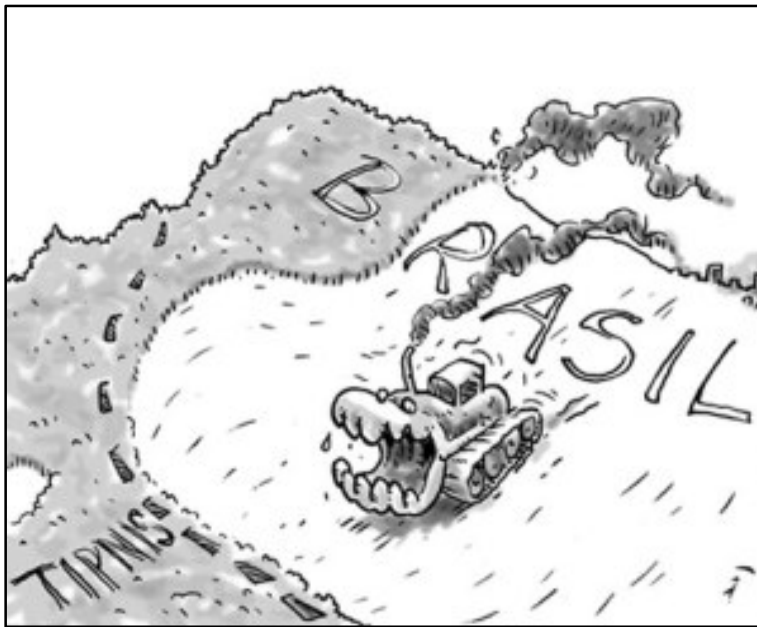

Figure 8. Cartoon featured in *El Dia* (2011) illustrating Brazil as an advocator and financer of the road intended to go through the middle of Bolivia. By providing economic capital, including the technology and tools to construct the road, such as bulldozers, Brazil is aiming to achieve more regional dominance.

Colonizadores (Quechua and Aymara peasants) and *cocaleros* (coca growers) are actors who, for the most part, are in support of the road's construction. Aymara and Quechua peasants

are often referred to as *colonizadores*, which directly translates to colonizers, by the lowland locals as they have migrated from their native homes in the Andean highlands and western Altiplano to settle in the fruitful Amazon (Webber 2012). They have growing interests in expanding their territories through the expropriation of **land**, as they can accrue direct profits from appropriation. The *cocaleros,* or coca farmers, are also motivated by the deforestation of **timber** and expansion of land so that they can increase cultivation and harvest of **coca**, a plant which has cultural ties to indigenous customs and rituals, and also plays a huge role in Bolivia's informal economy. The fact that Morales identifies as being Aymara and has a history with the coca growers union is important, as these actors expect that he will both agree and support them because of their shared identities and histories.

Due to the controversiality of this case, there are of course, the actors in opposition to the construction of the road. The aforementioned **2009 constitution** includes articles which claim to protect the integrity of different environments and peoples within the country and even pays special attention to the Bolivian Amazon in which TIPNIS is primarily located.

> **Article 352.** The exploitation of natural resources in a determined territory shall be subject to a process of consultation with the affected population, called by the State, which shall be free, prior in time and informed. Citizen participation is guaranteed in the process of the management of the environment, and the conservation of ecosystems shall be promoted, in accordance with the Constitution and the law. In the nations and rural native indigenous peoples, the consultation will be carried out with respect given to their own norms and procedures.

> **Article 391.** The State shall prioritize the sustainable, integral development of the Bolivian Amazonia, through a comprehensive, participatory, shared and equitable administration of the Amazon jungle. The administration shall be directed to the generation of employment and the improvement of the income of its inhabitants, within the framework of protection and sustainability of the environment.

The constitution also requires an **Environmental Impact Assessment** (EIA), which in the case of TIPNIS was written by the *Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas* (National Service of Protected Areas, or **SERNAP**). Their assessment claimed that the project would cause widespread damage to the region such as; "contaminating the park's three main **rivers**, opening large areas of forest to illegal logging and settlement, and altering habitats that are home to eleven **endangered species** and rare primates" (translated in Webber 2012, 166). Additionally, the EIA warned that the road would threaten the traditional way of life of the reserve's three dwindling indigenous cultures, the Tsimanis, the Yuracarés and the Mojeño-Trinitarios.

Biologist Percy Bautista of Bolivia's Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz demands that "the construction of the highway would be a mortal blow to the entire ecosystem" and that the negative effects would be irreversible (translated in Friedman-Rudovsky 2012, 4).

Despite these warnings, the MAS administration failed to fulfil the obligation of prior consultations with the local communities, and paid little attention to the advice laid out in the EIA before taking action to construct the road. This complete lack of communication consequently angered the local indigenous groups of the TIPNIS region. In his article, "Revolution Against Progress" Webber notes that the Mojeños-Trinitarios, Chimanes, and Yuracarés communities have historically been, and continue to be, anti-capitalist as they are primarily based on "collective self-reproduction through small-scale agricultural activities, the extraction of forest resources, reciprocity, and artisanal production" (2011, 160). According to their traditional lifestyles, these groups argue that they would not directly benefit from the construction of the highway and have thus refuted its construction (ibid.). This being said, there are still some native TIPNIS residents who have expressed frustration with their isolation and lack of transportation options, and have therefore been in favor of the highway's construction (Friedman-Rudovsky 2012).

In order to make their frustrations visible, the lowland indigenous groups banded together with the help of CIDOB (referenced earlier in regards to their organization of the 1990 marches). In 2011 another protest march was executed, but this time it was specifically in defense of TIPNIS and against construction of the highway. The march, which grew from 500 people at the outset to 2,500 people en route, with additional mass expressions of support in the form of "thousands upon thousands taking to the streets in solidarity in the cities, including a general strike called for by the Bolivian Workers Central" created an undeniable presence within Bolivia (Webber 2012, 162).

The real conflict of this case study erupted when the national government deployed a police attack on the protesters in September of 2011. The interaction quickly turned violent and led to four reported deaths, including a child. In a press conference the following day, Morales lamented and repudiated the violence and abuses committed by the police and announced that in response he would suspend the construction of the highway. Although this news was received well by most, it prompted outrage among *cocaleros* and *colonizadores*, as they felt betrayed by

"one of their own," referring to Morales (Laing 2015). Furthermore, BNDES "quietly" signed an agreement officially terminating their loan and involvement in the project for the time being.

By 2015, the conflicts which had arisen over the development project in TIPNIS were no longer making the major headlines in the news, until Morales announced in June that he was working on plans to resume construction, "The road, my friends, will be realized." In his declaration speech, Morales pointedly denounced environmental and indigenous rights **NGOs** that opposed the highway accusing them of being financed by imperialist incentives particularly from the United States. Linera has been particularly integral in this discourse, and has been known to "cast activists and NGOs as unwitting agents of foreign imperialism, jeopardizing Bolivia and Bolivians right to chart their own course for development" (Soloway and Ellerbeck 2015).

Based on the description of these events which I've just provided, it becomes clear that there are a variety of actors who are all vying for resources, power, and control. Additionally, the enormous pressures, both nationally and internationally, which have continued to influence Bolivia's current events present themselves and are seemingly inescapable.

ANALYSIS

After describing what is happening in regards to Bolivia's recent political changes and the major events surrounding the TIPNIS case study, further analysis must be done in order to understand why it is all happening. First, I will explain broadly how 'nature' and, specifically how Madre Tierra, have been articulated by the different actor groups in the TIPNIS case study. I will then return to the specifics of the laws and sections of the constitution, in order to show how the ways in which they were written has allowed for such disputes to ensure. Lastly, my analysis will attempt to shed light on how and why contradictions and unequal power relationships persist, both among human actors and also socio-ecologically, between humans and the non-human world.

'Nature' as Power

In their chapter, "Dissolving Dualisms: Actor-networks and the Reimagination of Nature," Castree and MacMillan engage and discuss "the politics of impurity" (2001, 208-224). This idea explains that, "political programs designed to protect or exploit nature can only ever be

justified in human terms," and that "nature politics" are never more than a process of determining "what kind of nature should be fashioned to satisfy whose ends" (ibid., 208). Based on this assumption, I looked at the ways in which 'nature' broadly, and *Madre Tierra* more specifically, have been used and manipulated in order to gain authority, control, and power. It becomes clear that even in a country where "rights" are granted to Mother Earth, 'nature' continues to be constructed and used as a tool to gain power. After recognizing all of the actors involved, it became clear that each claimed to be 'defending the rights of nature' yet often in contradictory ways.

Government

During his twelve years as president, Morales has relied heavily on promoting environmental rights and discourses in order to gain popularity, support, and credibility. This tactic has worked both domestically and abroad. On August 29, 2009, The United Nations General Assembly declared Morales as "World Hero of Mother Earth," with a medal and a parchment scroll (Figure 9). Morales has welcomingly adopted this role, and because of his charismatic attributes has been able to refer to and promoted himself as such. Furthermore, because of their political incumbency representatives of the MAS administration have an incredible amount of power in any situation which involves Bolivia's decision making and affairs.

Figure 9. The president of the United Nations General Assembly, Rev. Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann giving Morales a medal, declaring him as "World Hero of Mother Earth." Source: www.laht.com.

In addition to their positive proclamations about respecting *Madre Tierra*, Morales and Linera have additionally played a defensive role. They have recently and publicly put down activists and environmental and indigenous NGOs as unwitting (or sometimes wittingly) agents of foreign imperialism. They frame many aid and activist programs as having villainous intentions in a way which threatens Bolivia's sovereignty and autonomy. In Linera's book, *Geopolítica de la Amazonía,* he goes as far as to define NGOs not as "Non-Governmental Organizations" but as "Organizations of Other Governments on Bolivian Territory" whose intentions are to promote neocolonialism and threaten Bolivian sovereignty (2012).

> Shouldn't we protect the environment? Of course we should! Our Constitution establishes that and we have approved extraordinarily avant gardist laws in this sense. The government is concerned with balancing the necessity of wealth generation to redistribute it. We are also obliged to protect the natural fundament of the planet. But that is a decision and task of OUR state, our legislation, our government and our public policies. The Amazon is ours, of the Bolivians, neither of North Americans, Europeans, nor of companies or NGOs that pretend to teach us how to protect it. If they wish to protect the environment, they should do it with their forests, floods and hills instead of interfering in how we decide to cherish our natural environment. (Linera 2012, 66, translated in Lalander 2014, 168)

(E)NGOs

On the other side of this debate, domestic and international indigenous and environmental NGOs have fiercely criticized the government's aggressive promotion of development projects, and their lack thereof in regards to prior consultation with local communities. The very recent, as of April 8, 2017, threat of termination of the *Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia* (CEDIB), which is one of the biggest and most important libraries in the country, is an accurate example of this. In addition to being one of the most prestigious academic sources of information, they are also a human rights organization that is known for denouncing violations by transnational companies and the national government alike. According to Marco Gandarillas, the current director of CEDIB, "In 2015 they [the vice-president] publicly attacked us, discrediting our research and claiming we were foreign agents. There was an attempt to expel us from the country. Following that, a law tried to make us and our objectives illegal, so that we would fall into line with sectoral and national policies" (Hill 2017).

Also within Bolivia, the EIA written by SERNAP about the TIPNIS area proclaimed that the highway's construction would threaten the "traditional way of life" of the local indigenous

populations, and that it would invariably harm the area's "vital ecosystem." In order to promote their stance that their intentions are to preserve 'nature' for 'nature's sake,' NGOs and groups such as SERNAP galvanize around images of endangered species and indigenous peoples dressed in their ancestral clothing and engaged in traditional tasks.

Many environmental NGOs have goals similar to western environmentalist ideals of conservation and therefore construct a need to preserve and protect a pristine and wild 'nature.' Especially in regards to the Amazon, as it is considered to be the largest reservoir of water and biodiversity in the world, NGO's metaphorically compare the region to "the lungs of the world" (amazonwatch.org and greenpeace.org). 'Scientific research' is often provided in order to back up their argument that development in such areas would be catastrophic, and that these core zones must therefore be left untouched, undeveloped, and 'wild.'

Indigenous and Other Citizens

In, "Can the subaltern speak?" Indian literary critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that because of the entrenched power of colonial discourses, some colonized or otherwise subjugated people are unable to represent themselves (1985). Due to their political marginality, many important individuals and groups are sometimes invisible to decision-makers, planners, and donors. Yet history has shown that ignoring them does not make them disappear, and their role in "managing, maintaining, or harvesting environmental systems usually becomes all too clear as conflicts erupt" (Bailey and Bryant 1997, 203). Spivak has also introduced the concept of "strategic essentialism," which defines a strategy employed by oppressed groups in order to gain political power. To realize this approach heterogeneous groups must come together and, "represent themselves and act as a single large group while at the same time understanding that such collective identities are inevitably composed of numerous different smaller groups with competing and conflicting interests" (Ashcroft 2009, 223).

The notion that indigenous citizens are inherently 'wise stewards' of the environment and 'protectors of *Madre Tierra*,' was actively reproduced in the TIPNIS protest marches. For example, metaphors which compared the lowland indigenous groups to Na'vi characters from the film *Avatar*, shown in Figure 10, were advertised and popularized (2009). In the film, the expansion of a human mining colony threatens the continued existence of the local Na'vi tribe, an indigenous humanoid species. In the case of the TIPNIS conflict, the lowland indigenous

groups are able to draw on dominant "ecologically noble savage" myths in order to maintain their preferred lifestyles, to promote their autonomy, and stay away from government regulations (Hames 2007). By uniting different heterogeneous groups, organizations such as CIDOB have supported the creation of common identities and grievances in order to legitimize contemporary indigenous struggles, and have actively used their fundamental right to, and inherent connection with, 'nature' as justification and leverage.

Figure 10. Cartoon featured in *El Deber* (2012). A metaphorical tactic employed comparing the TIPNIS conflict to the movie *Avatar*. The film's main plot involves a battle between the Na'vi, who are native to the land, and the human colonizers who want to mine a rare and valuable mineral not found on Earth.

The notion that different groups of people and individuals, even when residing in the same environment and share certain experiences, may have conflicting ways of thinking and distinctive value and belief systems that affect their attitudes and actions, is apparent in this example. Although also primarily indigenous, the *cocaleros* and *colonizadores* have profoundly different ideas and strategies than the lowland indigenous groups in the case study example. Although they all reside in TIPNIS, the *cocaleros* and *colonizadores* promoted themselves as protectors of 'nature,' because they want to continue profiting off the natural resources, such as land and timber. For many of them, 'nature' is a commodity which supports their livelihoods, both socially and economically, and they therefore aimed to defend it and themselves.

The complex and controversial events of the TIPNIS case study explain that political ecological conflicts are as much a struggle over meaning as they are battles over material practices. The different actor groups show how conflicting perceptions, discourses, and

knowledge claims, particularly revolving around 'nature,' clashed and implicated decision making. Morales and his administration actively promote *Madre Tierra* in their rhetoric in order to gain popularity while simultaneously denouncing critics as destroyers of 'nature;' NGOs claim that 'nature' is for everyone and therefore must be preserved and left alone; the indigenous protesters are able to draw on dominant myths about their intrinsic connection to 'nature' in order to maintain their preferred lifestyles and communal autonomy. Despite all of these different productions and social constructions of 'nature' for political, social, and economic reasons by different actors, in the end, the national government has the most power and therefore the final say.

Conflicting Ideals and Recurring Patterns

Fanon claims that political leaders of all underdeveloped and colonized countries are terrified at the prospect of the long road that lies ahead, and they therefore must appeal to the people and tell them; "Let us roll up our sleeves and get to work," pushing their nation into a kind of creative frenzy, involving actions of hugely disproportionate nature (1961, 32). Morales' political ascent was marked by his seemingly unwavering commitment to both indigenous and ecological ideals and his promise to completely transform and refound his country. His fearless and confident rhetoric has made him the voice of an unremittingly oppressed peoples and a champion of the masses, yet in analyzing some of the major events of the last decade, such as the rewriting of the constitution by the constituent assembly and the TIPNIS conflict, conflicting ideals and recurring patterns emerge.

Although they have become pillars of contemporary Bolivian politics, *Madre Tierra* and *Vivir Bien* are entities which cannot easily fit into the philosophical structure of a modern constitution and nation state. Both notions are based on ontological assumptions in which all beings exist in constant flux and relation and never as 'objects' or individuals, which disallows quantifiable benchmarks or targets to be institutionalized. The fact that *Madre Tierra* encompasses the idea of well-being for everyone and harmony amongst all people and the environment, promotes an unrealistic utopian standard which the government cannot implement. Additionally, the concept of *Vivir Bien*, which is based on the values of "unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, interdependence, harmony, transparency, equilibrium, equality of opportunity, social and gender equality in participation, common welfare, responsibility, social justice," are wonderful ethics to live by, but are too

difficult to administer and protect in law, as they would require that all beings are treated equally. Although their inclusion in the constitution can be seen as, "an epistemic-political event that disrupts the modern political space because it occurs outside such space, as a challenge to liberalism, capitalism, and the State," the incorporation of indigenous ideals into the governmental framework at the national level has been impossible to sustain (Escobar 2010, 39). Although they are very different contexts, the Morales administration's usage of indigenous ideals such as *Vivir Bien* and *Madre Tierra* can be likened to the coercive tactics of the Spaniards when they manipulated indigenous symbols to achieve public compliance.

Additionally, the renaming of the country as Plurinational, which indicates respect for traditional systems of justice, representation, and decision-making, and the overarching equality amongst heterogeneous groups, are ideals which are great in theory yet highly impractical in reality. The pluralist model, based on the respect for autonomy of indigenous peoples and communities has clashed with the political authoritarianism of the Executive and the monist legal culture of the judiciary. According to Escobar, "there are serious doubts as to the capacity of the State to open up to the languages and demands of autonomous movements" in the ways in which it proclaims to (2010, 38). The TIPNIS case study also showcases that all decisions are tilted to favor some interests over others, contradicting the egalitarian notions of plurinationalism.

Based on my chronicle of the TIPNIS case study, it seems as though actors from all sides are resorting back to old patterns despite the fact that the country was recently 'refounded.' Based on the provided historical context, it becomes clear that Bolivia's narrative is laden with movements of social change, protests, and grassroots actions from marginalized groups. The strength of this tradition, of popular organizing from the bottom up, has been such that it has been said that "in no other Latin American country have popular forces achieved so much through their own initiative" (Hylton 2007, 8). These movements have historically put pressure on those in power, and they are the reason for the country's recent 'refounding,' yet they rarely ever directly invoke politics or specific laws.

If those who were opposed to the road's construction had sued the government on the grounds laid out in the articles of the newly written constitution and recent precepts, instead of resorting back to their old ways of protest marching and striking, it is possible that the events

would have played out differently. For example, Article Nine of Law 071, and Article 34 of the new constitution could have supported the road's legal and official annulment.

> **Article 9.** The Duties of the people are to, report any act that violates the rights of Mother Earth, living systems, and/or their components, and attend the convention of competent authorities or organized civil society to implement measures aimed at preserving and/or protecting Mother Earth. (Law 071)

> **Article 34.** Any person, in his own right or on behalf of a collective is authorized to take legal actions in defense of environmental rights, without prejudice to the obligation of public institutions to act on their own in the face of attacks on the environment. (Constitution)

On the other hand, the decision of the national government to begin construction of the highway on either side of the TIPNIS area prior to public announcement, can be considered a ploy in which to convince the local people that it was the best and only route for the road's construction. Then, when the government's plan was met with opposition, violence was deployed in order to force consent and to remind the public of the government's authoritative power. These tactics of coercion, consent, and direct violence, are comparable to those used by the colonial leaders and military regimes which had been in power for the majority of Bolivia's existence. Additionally, because of the historical weight of liberalism and neoliberal policies, the State is now more equipped to "control or govern," rather than "release, the energies of social movements" (Escobar 2010, 46). Similarly, the sturdy entrenchment of capitalist and modern practices in a global world system compels that the country continues to fuel the hegemony of particular ways of organizing the economy (e.g. capitalist markets), culture (e.g. the individual), and society (e.g. hierarchical).

A huge chasm exists between the government's powerful discourse and optimistic ideology which have materialized in recent symbolic legislation, and the reality of continued extraction-based practices, environmental injustices, and social inequalities (Svampa 2013). Figure 11, a cartoon that was published in *El Diario* after the highway was allegedly postponed, reveals this contradiction in which the realities of what is going on completely differs from what Morales promotes. Rafael Quispe has voiced the disappointment that many have begun to feel about Morales, "We thought that he represented hope. We identified with him. He won. We gave him all the power. But the 'process' [referring to the government's 'process of change'] has

given us nothing. It has been all discourse, no application. He speaks of Mother Earth, yet he is the foremost violator of Mother Earth" (translated in Hindery 2013, 220).

Figure 11. Political cartoon from *El Diario* (2012). Morales, with his eyes covered, is saying "…we must take care, respect and protect Mother Earth…" while the forest in TIPNIS is simultaneously being bulldozed.

Initially in his election, Morales received fairly unwaveringly support from the indigenous populace and from academics and elites on the political left. Yet recently even his former comrades have recognized his unreliability, accusing him of "betraying his own political agenda, unjustly libeling all critics as right-wing conspirators, and abusing state power to silence them" (Beunder and Kleijn 2014, 1). For example, former Minister of Defense Cecilia Chacon quit after Morales deployed the violent police raid on the TIPNIS marchers saying, "This is not the way. We agreed to do things differently" (2011). The events surrounding the proposed TIPNIS highway are significant because they concretely reveal the contradictions between the "eco-communitarian discourse, protective of nature and in favour of protecting Mother Earth," and the reality of the extraction-based political practice of the Morales administration (Svampa 2013, 134). Raúl Madrid points out that while the Bolivian government frequently engages in "radical, even incendiary rhetoric" the majority of its "economic and social policies have not represented a dramatic break with the past" (2011, 60).

These incongruities have been influenced by systemic hegemonic structures which have been historically perpetuated and established. The process of coordinating a constituent assembly to rewrite the entire constitution, the restructuring the political system, and the enacting of subsequent laws have been galvanized due to Bolivian citizens' explicit actions and desires for

change, yet historical structural legacies and the resultant normalized, repeated, and internalized techniques, continue to prevent radical change in Bolivia. Both Bolivian leaders and the public have resorted to using the same strategies which characterize their historical narrative. The practical possibilities established in the new constitution regarding indigenous ideas of *Madre Tierra* and *Vivir Bien* and the plurality and recognition of all citizens equally must be rooted socially. This consciousness raising process concerning ethnic and environmental rights involves learning processes and require time as well as clarity in the judicial texts. Based on my research no precedent has been established, therefore unfortunately no grounds exist as a standard for reference in the future.

Environmental Pragmatism

Despite the fact that some of the recently amended laws lack quantifiable targets and promote conflicting ideals, does not mean that the government lacks power, but quite the opposite. As evident by the description of the TIPNIS conflict, there are constitutional and legal contradictions "regarding the rights of nature and indigenous peoples versus the rights of the state to exploit and commercialize natural resources" (Lalander 2014, 166). This has been the epicenter of recent social clashes between environmental and ethnic social movements and the Bolivian government. Although the 2009 constitution and Laws 071 and 300 trump obligations of human beings to *Madre Tierra*, the mechanisms and procedures through which those responsibilities might be enforced, are not identified. This omission of detail and clarification has allowed Morales and his administration to maneuver in ways which, "have caused some to question the depth of his commitment to the rights of nature and the rule of law" (Weston and Bollier 2013, 64). The case study also showcases that all decisions are tilted to favor some interests over others, and despite the promotion of ideas such as *Madre Tierra* and *Vivir Bien*, the interests of developers and national sovereignty continue to be prioritized over those of the local public.

In revisiting the specific wording of the constitution, I point out that it is never stated that giving rights to *Madre Tierra* means 'leaving her alone' or 'keeping her pristine.' Instead the constitution's entire second chapter indicates the importance of the incomes derived from the extractivist activities of natural resources.

I.   The industrialization and sale of natural resources shall be a priority of the State.

II. The profits obtained from the exploitation and sale of the natural resources shall be distributed and reinvested to promote economic diversification in the different territorial levels of the State. The percentage of profits to be distributed shall be approved by the law.

III. The processes of industrialization shall be carried out with preference given to the place of origin of the production, and conditions shall be created which favor competitiveness in the internal and international market. (Art. 355)

Additionally, Law 300, even in its name complicates the rights of Mother Earth with economic development. It defines *Madre Tierra* as, "the beings, elements and processes that make up the areas of life" which, "can be used or exploited by human beings, as natural resources" is highly contradictory and problematic. Although environmental concerns are undoubtedly central in these laws, the integral development component adds a more pragmatic dimension in considering human needs and rights as well, primarily done through the notion of *Vivir Bien*.

In general, a pragmatist approach towards the environment can be explained as anthropocentric, "since human beings are the only ones that can discuss values, simply because the human perspective is the only one we can really understand" (Lalander 2014, 152). The recognition of environmental rights in the 2009 constitution and further in Laws 071 and 300, seemingly reflect a transition from an anthropocentric view of natural resources to a relatively more biocentric one, as they incorporate reciprocity and the interrelation of all beings, yet pragmatism tends to dominate over the more ecocentric approaches in recent developments such as the TIPNIS conflict.

In his article "Power, Knowledge and Political Ecology in the Third World," Raymond Bryant's explains that political and economic elites have "invariably sought to justify specific, usually highly unequal, patterns of human use of the environment in terms of 'the greater social good'" (1998, 80). This idea is exemplified by Morales, and his justification for hydrocarbon exploration and mining as strategic for the nation and fundamental for social welfare and well-being. The funding of *bonos,* social welfare programs aimed at improving education, health, sanitation, and public infrastructure, from the revenues made by the nationalization of natural resources, such as hydrocarbons in the TIPNIS case, is what Kevin Munoz calls, "pragmatic with a national twist," and Eduardo Gudynas refers to as, *"neo-extractivismo progresista,"* (progressive neo-extractivism) (2015, 2016). These scholars, along with Rickard Lalander who

asserts that the vindication on behalf of the government "clearly falls within the categorical framework of environmental pragmatism," implying that Morales is simply continuing colonial and neoliberal economic and extractivist programs, yet addressing them in regards to respecting *Madre Tierra*, and further implicating them with social benefits in order to *Vivir Bien* (2014, 166). This explains a fundamental paradox in the state's responsibility between "its role as developer, and as protector and steward of the natural environment on which its existence ultimately depends" (Bailey and Bryant 1997, 55).

Because of this paradox, the government ends up violating "the same constitution that only recently represented their greatest political success," ensuring confrontation with the grassroots supporters who "brought them to power, not just by means of their vote but through their accumulated historical struggles" (Lang 2013, 7). Additionally, indigenous groups, particularly CIDOB, have argued that the laws regarding *Madre Tierra* are more about "legitimizing the Morales government's developmentalist agenda" rather than about "rethinking the extractivist model and transitioning towards alternative, more ecological, modes of development" (CIDOB representative, translated in Achtenberg 2012).

Based on everything I have just described, explained, and analyzed, it becomes clear that it is because of Bolivia's unique historical narrative, specifically of it's highly indigenous movements of counter hegemonic resistance to the structural legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism, which have allowed for constitutional and legislative recognition of *Vivir Bien* and rights to be granted to *Madre Tierra*. There was an overwhelming desire among the Bolivian population to promote decolonization, plurality, and indigenous ideals in order to break out of the uneven and oppressive power structures which have dominated Bolivia's existence. The people were able to come together and rewrite the rules which govern them, but unfortunately these have not been cultivated or upheld in practice. Ideals which have been brought to the forefront of Bolivian politics, such as Plurinationalism, *Madre Tierra*, and *Vivir Bien*, have all been unrealistic for the government to promote, as the reality of all decision making is that it is prejudice and therefore impossible to appease all actors.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Based on the evidence I've just provided, which problematizes the validity of the newly created constitution and additional laws and their implementation, a fairly bleak conclusion arises. Despite some seemingly enormous transformations at the institutional level the challenges that Bolivia is facing are much the same as they were 50, 150, or even 500 years ago. It seems as though Bolivia is at an impasse. Are 500 years of colonial legacies and further forms of hegemonic dominance and imperialistic control necessary requisites for the oppressed to gain political recognition and participate in the political, social, economic, and cultural decisions of the country? Are the 'rights of nature' and 'eco-communitarian' discourses merely rhetorical tools and social constructions employed in order to gain power, authority, and credibility? Can histories of unequal power relationships actually be redressed? Despite my evidence, which seems to give rise to disheartening answers to such questions, I do believe that some very important lessons, broader implications, and conclusions can be gleaned. In this section I return back to the themes discussed at the beginning of my paper while also reflecting on the findings which I've just presented. I move forward with the goal of further addressing my framing question which addresses the role of structural orders and power relationships.

Decolonization

Within the discipline of postcolonial studies, the discussion of decolonization is relevant particularly when investigating if and how histories of unequal power relationships can be redressed. In an everyday sense, decolonization implies, "the reversal of the colonial order, undoing the wrongs of history, and releasing colonized subjects from domination, injustice, and oppression," while in contemporary Bolivia, decolonization involves, "overthrowing the exploitative, unjust, and discriminatory order that persisted beyond independence from Spain and into the twentieth century; it evokes a range of related meanings from liberation to emancipation, democracy, and autonomy" (Howard 2010, 177).

A significant critique and aspect which must be duly expressed is that decolonization, both in theory and in practice, does not promise or even claim that it is possible to return back to a 'pre-colonial time.' Spivak has repeatedly cautioned against the idea that pre-colonial cultures are something that we can easily recover, warning that "a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities" (1988, 276). Such an impossibility is analogous

to that of ecosystem restoration, the scientific study which aims to renew and restore degraded or destroyed ecosystems and habitats to their original states. In order to come up with alternative solutions for the future and to move past detrimental historic legacies, romanticized ideas about returning to a better or more pure time, must be abandoned.

One important feature of decolonization, which is particularly relevant to my paper, is in addressing the ways in which colonial behaviors, paradigms, and techniques have been internalized in colonized countries. My section which points out the 'recurring patterns' within my case study explains the realities of this idea. Elisa Vega Sillo, a member of Bolivia's Vice Ministry of Decolonization, notes that although colonialism and neoliberalism are recognized as being some of the original perpetrators, "we realized that it's not [foreigners] that are oppressing the indigenous peoples, but now it's a system that has been constructed, and we have accommodated this system" (translated in Dangl 2015). Scholars in the field of psychology have claimed that even the idea of decolonization can have the ability to help people understand the multiple layers of interpretation through which the world has been imposed on them (Watkins and Shulman 2008). This is considered a kind of "decolonization of the mind" which can be liberating and can foster radical change and social and psychological reorganization.

Decolonial programs have the potential to open spaces for the resurfacing or production of marginalized ontologies and epistemologies, yet this has proven to be a discursive struggle. On the one hand, the government promotes a range of projects signifying decolonizing action in the cultural, social, political, and ecological fields and the Bolivian majority have stated such as desires through their actions of counter hegemonic resistance. Yet, on the other hand, such messages are countered by the reality of projects which seem to be maintaining the status quo, and the appropriation and manipulation of complex indigenous ideals within the modern political state and its discourse.

Socialism and MAS as New Hegemonic Rule

Despite the fact that the newly ratified constitution states that the Bolivian president has a two-term consecutive limit, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled in April of 2013 that the rule did not apply to Morales' initial term because it had taken place before the new constitution came into effect, therefore allowing him to remain as president (BBC news 2013). Because of this, Morales has held the presidential position for over 12 years. Despite the fact that Morales has

been criticized from the left for failing to implement a revolutionary rather than reformist agenda, and from social movements for not responding to indigenous demands for prior consultation and territorial autonomy, a recent poll revealed that 64 percent of Bolivians still support him (Kohl and Bresnahan 2010).

MAS, an acronym which stands for, Movement for Socialism, elicits the trend of 21st century socialism happening throughout Latin America. "A critical attribute of twenty-first-century socialism is that it is built by social movements and by people organizing from below; it does not arise from government fiats nor from self-defined vanguard parties. By transforming circumstances, the people are transforming themselves" (Burbach et al. 2013, 9). In addition to MAS's political ascendancy in Bolivia, socialism is making an appearance in other countries through a variety of social actors. In Chile the 2011 student rebellion ignited Chilean social movements, which are now rethinking the country's socialist legacy. In Brazil the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Movement of Landless Rural Workers, or MST), is the largest social organization in the hemisphere, and one which continues to espouse socialism in its platform and in the daily practices of its land reform settlements. These movement towards socialism as radical political and economic social reorganizations can be understood as an attempt to redress internal and interpersonal unequal power relationships, and Arkonada and Santillana assert that, "the construction of new hegemony will come out of civil society," meaning that popular forces will become hegemonic as the state becomes an instrument of "collective interests and a universalizing political project" (2011).

Although the MAS administration has come to power via this alternative route, has continuously promoted a discourse of egalitarian and harmonious interpersonal and socio-ecological relations, and is theoretically counter-hegemonic in regards to Bolivia's political leadership in the past, in practice it has not dismantled current hierarchical and unequal relationships. Although the bid for hegemony of Morales and the MAS-affiliated bloc theoretically "threatens to disrupt the language/knowledge/power paradigm that has hitherto helped define relations of power," based on my research, and the longevity of Morales' presidency is redefining these relations in new problematic ways (Howard 2010, 182). For example, in the TIPNIS case study which I previously outlined, many conflicting viewpoints were brought into confrontation, and despite valid claims from all actor groups the final decision making was always done at the national level.

In 2016, Morales lost a national referendum which would allow him to stand for a fourth term in office. Throughout my research I have yet to come across discussions of other viable candidates for the 2019 election, and therefore Bolivia's political future is very much undecided. Moving forward, further research must be conducted in order to discern how a new administration will handle the political changes which I have chronicled in this paper, and also to track the progression of 21st century socialism and the resulting effects.

Structural Challenges and Alternatives

The prefix 'post,' not only denotes 'after' or 'posterior to,' as the dictionary describes, but also highlights the need for radical reworking, a discontinuity from the past, and a redirection for the future (McGee 2013). Discussions of post-capitalism and post-development are two of the many notions inspiring scholars across disciplinary fields to scrutinize the past, so that they can reconsider the present and create alternatives for the future. Escobar has claimed that the addition of 'post' has the ability to signify that the economy is not "essentially or naturally capitalist," that societies are not "naturally liberal," and that "the state is not the only way of instituting social power as we have imagined it to be" (2010, 55).

The notion of post-development explains the possibility of visualizing an era where economic development will cease to be the central organizing principle of social life. The dominant development model, which I explained earlier, has been implemented across the world further stratifying social relations but also continuing to wreak havoc on the natural environment due to its dependence on accumulation fueled by the exploitation of natural resources. For example, indigenous knowledges have often been seen as an obstacle to Western notions of development, however with the failure of development interventions to reduce global poverty rates and rising inequality, "the universal applicability and hegemony of western knowledge and the ideological foundations of a linear history of progress and development are being fundamentally questioned" (McEwan 2009, 198).

Arguably for the first time since its integration into the global market and capitalist system, Bolivia is focusing on its integral growth, attempting to move away from its dependence on other countries, corporations, and institutions, and instead focusing on the economic prosperity of the Bolivian population. Eduardo Gudynas has been the primary scholar to study *Vivir Bien* as a serious alternative development model. In his article, "Buen Vivir: Today's

Tomorrow" he explains that "*Vivir Bien* will not stop building bridges, and will not reject the use of Western physics and engineering to build them, but the ones that it will propose may well have different sizes and materials, will be placed in other locations, and certainly will serve local and regional needs and not the needs of global markets" (2011, 446). He emphasizes the centrality of ethics and equity in these projects, which contrasts to the developmentalist ideas of consumerism and 'living better' at the expense of others.

Similarly, post-capitalism considers the economy to be made up of a diversity of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist practices. Although to date, few viable alternatives to capitalism exist, scholars such as J.K. Gibson-Graham have noted that "how we imagine, frame and talk about our economy influences how we act" and that, "in order to remake the economy we need different representations and framings that enable new modes of calculation and materialization" (2006). Based on this idea, Gibson-Graham have published images such as the 'economic iceberg' (Figure 13) with the intention of opening up conversations, and "honouring our common knowledge of the multifarious ways in which all of us are engaged in producing, transacting, and distributing values in this hidden underwater field, as well as out in the air" (2006).

Figure 13. The iceberg image was drawn by Ken Byrne for the Community Economies Collective (2001); and published in J.K. Gibson-Graham's book, *A Postcapitalist Politics*. The image is "an explicitly pedagogical version" of what Gibson-Graham have called the diverse economy framework (2006, 70).

Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano has said that, "it is a time of *luchas* (struggles) and of options. Latin America was the original space of the emergence of modern/colonial capitalism; it marked its founding moment. Today it is, at last, the very center of world resistant against this pattern of power and of the production of alternatives to it" (2010, 168).

Scholars such as Arturo Escobar and Eduardo Gudynas claim that the discourses and strategies currently being implemented in Latin American countries suggest radical possibilities towards these alternative movements and social reforms. These concepts do not describe an ideal state to be arrived at in the future but instead something that is always being modified and explicated. The emergence of such ideas does not mean that capitalism and development cease to exist, but rather that their "discursive and social centrality are displaced somewhat" so that "the range of existing social experiences that are considered valid and credible alternatives to what exists is significantly enlarged" and in this way, "another world(s) is (are) possible" (Escobar 2010, 12).

A huge implication of such ideas is the chasm that exists between theory and reality. These concepts recognize many of the fundamental issues plaguing today and therefore discuss and create alternatives, yet their implementation has yet to change or dismantle historical and hierarchical dominant structures. According to Ellner, "we are now witnessing a plethora of struggles and confrontations that zigzag across the pages of history: between classical liberalism and post-liberal politics, extractivism and post-development, global capitalism and solidarity economies, patriarchy and feminism, nation-states dominated by the descendants of the colonizers and the new plural-national states," and that these contradictions and the overarching need for alternatives will be prominent in decision making processes moving forwards (2014, 40).

Relationality and Pluralizing Paradigms

Throughout my paper the notion of paradigms, or the shorthand descriptions of world views, the collection of values, beliefs, habits, and norms which form the frame of reference of a collectivity of people, has been significant (Devall 1980). My research demonstrates that dominant paradigms have the capability of being destructive and oppressive, particularly when

they revolve around dualisms and binaries which create violent hierarchies. The fundamental colonized/colonizer binary continues to create unjust ethnic and racial relations. The man/woman dichotomy promotes patriarchy, sexism, and rigid gender binary norms. The man/nature separation, continues to justify human being's exploitation, disregard, and disrespect of the 'more than human' world. These are just a few examples of how dualist ontologies and binarized ways of thinking perpetuate negative relationships, both interpersonally and socio-ecologically, today.

A huge priority therefore must be the recognition of relationality and the pursuit of pluralism. No longer can our ideas and relationships be structured by such hierarchical and contrasting ways of thinking, but rather be more accepting of and engaged with multiple ways of being. We all must aim to emphasize; "relationality and reciprocity; the continuity between the natural, the human and the supernatural; the embeddedness of the economy in social life and the restricted character of the market; and a deeply relational worldview that shapes the notions of personhood, community, economy, and politics" in order to come up with creative solutions (Escobar 2010, 6). Lander claims that when the plurality of ideas are recognized we will be pushed to engage in complex negotiations, difficult dialogue, alliance building, and above all, dynamics of reciprocal learning and reflexive self-questioning (2013, 87).

> At stake in many cultural-political mobilizations in Latin America at present, it is argued, is the political activation of relational ontologies, such as those of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendents. These relational ontologies can be differentiated from the dualist ontologies of liberal modernity in that they are not built on the divides between nature and culture, us and them, individual and community; the cultural, political, and ecological consequences of taking relationality seriously are significant; relationality refers to a different way of imagining life (socio-natural worlds). (Escobar 2010, 4)

With all of this being said, my research also leads to a more contradictory conclusion. In renaming the country as Plurinational and incorporating the complex and non-dualistic notions of *Madre Tierra* and *Vivir Bien,* Bolivia has attempted to bring these ideas into fruition. Yet the inclusion of complex terms comes with more difficult confrontations and decision making, therefore, change happens slowly.

Further Research

Within the situated context of Bolivia many different avenues for future research exist. To date, the highway through TIPNIS is still being contested, therefore a study could continue to track the progress of this development project and its resulting implications. Additionally, as I stated before, Bolivia's political future is undetermined, providing many opportunities for future research.

Prior to Bolivia, Ecuador also rewrote its constitution, in which it renamed the country as Plurinational, promoted *Buen Vivir* (similar to Bolivia's Vivir Bien), and recognized *Pachamama* as an entity with rights (2007). Gudynas claims that the articles dedicated to environmental rights in Ecuador's constitution are less ambiguous than those in Bolivia's, which has allowed for its consummation (2010). A recent study done by Craig Kauffman and Pamela Martin supports this as they've just published a study comparing 13 different lawsuits in respect to the 'rights of nature' in Ecuador since 2008 (2017). Hopefully in the future, a similar study could be conducted in Bolivia, and possibly another which compares the two countries.

Scaling out even more, further research could inquire about how these discussions are influencing international and global discourses. In 2010, the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth was hosted in Cochabamba, Bolivia. During the conference, important documents which have legally recognized Mother Earth were written, signed, and endorsed by over 50 countries (pwcc.wordpress.com/partners). "The People's Agreement," and "The Rights of Mother Earth," were the two main papers produced during the conference, and both have since been cited and recognized internationally (2010). The documents created a new international governing institution, the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature. The idea of this 'people's tribunal' is to investigate, try, and decide on cases involving alleged violations of the documents adopted at the conference. Proposed by Alberto Acosta, former President of Ecuador's constituent assembly, the idea was inspired by the International War Crimes Tribunal (2002) and the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (1979), established by citizens to investigate and publicize human rights violations. "Just as these tribunals provided social pressure to create and strengthen international human rights law, the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature is meant to foster international Rights of Nature Laws" (Kauffman and Martin 2017, 137). These international conferences and courts have

provided platforms where ideas, narratives, and experiences are shared, and their impacts and results should further questions and documented.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and analysis which I've provided, it becomes clear that there was an overwhelming desire among the Bolivian population for social, political, economic and ecological transformation. Ideas of decolonization, plurinationalism, *Madre Tierra* and *Vivir Bien*, have all been stimulated and embodied in Bolivia's contemporary political sphere in an attempt to break out of the uneven and oppressive power structures which were historically created and contemporarily preserved. No longer are many Bolivians willing to accept their role as the 'colonized' or the 'underdeveloped,' but rather will continue to promote their diversity and alternative viewpoints. I therefore reiterate that Bolivia's unique historical circumstances, particularly of recent indigenous resistance to historical and contemporary hegemony, have allowed for constitutional and legislative recognition of *Vivir Bien* and rights to be granted to *Madre Tierra*.

Despite these paradigm shifting and counter hegemonic intentions, my research shows that such ideals are unrealistic for a national government to promote. These concepts integrate notions such as harmony and equality into constitutional and legal documents, yet the reality of all decision making is that it is selective and therefore impossible to satisfy all actors. Additionally, radical changes such as decolonial programs, the reorganization of the political structure, and shift towards 21st century social, cannot be expected to happen overnight. At this point, neither the new constitution nor the subsequent precepts have been able to "escape from the enormous pressures resulting from the involvement in the current world system," including both, "internal and external pressures in the economy, and others resulting from the weighty inheritance of states that are profoundly colonial" (Lang and Mokrani 2013, 7). This does not mean that they do not have the potential to promote and pursue radical change in the future, as it is important to keep in mind the timescale of such changes.

As I proclaimed at the beginning of the paper, my intention was never to end with a prescribed framework, solution, or answer, and I was fully, and occasionally painfully, aware that I was 'working without guarantees.' Instead I've explored thought provoking questions which are being tackled in discussions by various actors all over the world, and I've delved into a

utterly complicated topic. While I've chronicled what I believe to be a significant and important series of events, I continue to be baffled by the intricacies and complexities of this topic.

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