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## Who is Marching for Pachamama?

### An Intersectional Analysis of Environmental Struggles in Bolivia under the Government of Evo Morales

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# Who is Marching for Pachamama?

An Intersectional Analysis of Environmental  
Struggles in Bolivia under the Government of  
Evo Morales

Anna Kaijser



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Struggles in Bolivia under the Government of  
Evo Morales

Anna Kaijser



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One: Natural resources are not God given but must be wrested from previous economies and ecologies in violent extractions.

Two: such violence leaves none of us unscathed.

Three: This assault is no neighborhood storm. It gathers force from afar, entangling multiple local-to-global scales. For more on this, dear reader, please read on.

Anna Tsing (2005) *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* p.50



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# Abstract

Evo Morales and the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) took office in Bolivia in 2006, riding on the wave of fierce popular protests against previous, neoliberal regimes. Morales was depicted as the country's first indigenous president. His government promised a radical transformation of national politics and re-branded Bolivia as a "plurinational state". Under MAS, indigenous subjectivity has moved from a marginalized position to center stage, and become a key condition for political legitimacy.

This development is reflected in environmental politics. In international forums, the Bolivian government has claimed to represent a green indigenous alternative, a "culture of life", as opposed to a Western, capitalist "culture of death". However, on home ground, critics have accused MAS of coopting aspects of indigenous identity for its own interests and not applying its green agenda within the national borders. The national economy is dependent on intense extraction and export of natural resources, a trend which has not diminished under Morales. Thus, the first Bolivian government to frame itself as indigenous now stands behind initiatives for resource extraction and infrastructural expansion. This raises questions about whose rights are privileged when different actors express conflicting claims based on indigeneity.

In this thesis, two salient themes are explored: MAS' positioning in international climate change negotiations, and the conflict around the plans to construct a highway across the TIPNIS national park and indigenous territory. Drawing on poststructural and postcolonial feminist theory, I analyze intersecting processes of power in Bolivian environmental struggles by unwrapping two figurations: the *endangered glacier* and the *ecological indigenous*. These have become emblematic, and are mobilized by various actors for different purposes. Situating these figurations in national and international discourses, I show how they may shift in meaning and both reinforce and challenge relations of power.

The research material was generated through ethnographic fieldwork and collection of written texts. Through this study of contemporary Bolivia, I shed light on how power dynamics play out in the framing of environmental problems and their solutions; questions which should be central to research on environmental issues in all contexts.

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# Chapter 1 Beginning the March

*Pacha*, a concept used in the Aymara and Quechua indigenous languages of the Andes, signifies earth or the world in Andean cosmology. *Pacha* integrates time and space, encompassing “what is’, all that exists in universe, ‘reality’” (Estermann 2006:157, my translation). *Mama* can mean mother, but is also a polite way to address women, similar to the Spanish *señora*, or “lady” in English. It may also refer to a source of fertility (Harris 2000). In Andean cosmology, *Pachamama* is a feminine “supernatural figure” (Rockefeller 2010:77). She is an “incarnation of space and time” (Harris 1980:85); she represents a holistic notion of the world, encompassing all living beings, including humans, and denotes “the ‘earth’ as foundation for life” (Estermann 2006:157, my translation). Alongside this all-embracing character, *Pachamama* may also denote the place-specific, cultivated land of the community, and mediate between the farmed, domesticated earth and the wild mountain peaks (Harris 1980). Her name is popularly translated as *Madre Tierra* in Spanish and Mother Earth in English; a simplified translation of the ambiguous *Pachamama* into a character recognizable to wider audiences.

Unlike other figures in the Andean cosmology, who are often the protagonists of legends, and physically embodied in mountain peaks and other specific features of the landscape, in the Aymara and Quechua traditions there are no narratives told about *Pachamama*, and no visual representations of her (Sikkink and Choque 1999; Rockefeller 2010). As the anthropologist Stuart Rockefeller puts it, she is not a character in narratives because “she is the basis for narratives. She is unlocalized because she is the condition of locality” (Rockefeller 2010:80; see also Damian 2007).

Yet, ritual offerings to *Pachamama* are widespread (see Harris 1980; Rockefeller 2010). In the Andes I have witnessed many ceremonies in which incense, coca leaves and animal fat were burned as a sacrifice to show respect for *Pachamama* or to invoke her powers as crops were harvested, a house constructed or a meeting inaugurated. People participating in these rituals would, in general, self-

identify as Catholics, which illustrates the religious syncretism in the area: a legacy of the Spanish colonization and imposition of Christianity. Through this violent encounter, as a missionary strategy, *Pachamama* became explicitly identified with the only central female figure in Christian mythology, the Virgin Mary. *Pachamama* is commonly manifested through images or statues of *Virgens* (Virgins), which are very popular across the Andes (see Harris 2000; Damian 2007; Rockefeller 2010). She is also invoked in more cheerful, everyday rituals. In both urban and rural *fiestas*, and not least among young, middle class university students and activists in La Paz and Cochabamba, I have often – half-jokingly, half-seriously – been encouraged to pour some liquor from my glass on the ground as a salutation to her. The anthropologist Olivia Harris similarly notes: “it is common in middle-class circles today to make a small libation to Pachamama before starting a drinking session or a party” (2000:207).

During the past few decades, with a rising indigenous movement, the interest in a popularized and politicized version of *Pachamama* has grown in Bolivia and other parts of Latin America. As I will show in the coming chapters, in contemporary Bolivia, *Pachamama* is invoked by the government and other actors to symbolize a pre-colonial origin, and a radical alternative to Western values. She “has almost come to represent the nation, standing for the oppressed Andean majority as well as the space itself within whose boundaries the nation state is embodied” (Harris 2000:203). Thereby, she stands for the interconnectedness of the (Andean) Bolivians with their territory – conceptualized as the nation state – along with the strive for decolonization and liberation from imperialist patterns. This is a symbolism that is also familiar in international settings, given the worldwide fame of Mother Earth as associated with “indigenous culture”. As Harris writes:

[t]he figure of the earth mother in Andean culture seems to me to stand at the intersection of indigenous knowledge and the various cultural needs of different outsiders. Known generically as Pachamama this figure is at once the most accessible and the most opaque of Andean divinities. (2000:201)

In the incarnation as Mother Earth, *Pachamama* is an established cosmopolitan character that represents a universalized indigenous worldview, grounded in what is depicted as an ancient respect for life and nature. She transcends scales, making a certain representation of Andean indigenous culture accessible to “outsiders”: she translates “indigenous knowledge” to a world in desperate search of answers to questions of life and death: Where did we come from, and where

are we going? How can we learn more respectful and sustainable ways of relating to nature? But with the celebrity and accessibility come certain simplifications. While in Andean tradition *Pachamama* is multifaceted – she can give generously, but she can also be aggressive, imposing destruction and disease (Harris 2000) – in recent manifestations and political mobilizations only specific characteristics of her are stressed. She is portrayed as a generous nurturing mother, but who is exposed and vulnerable to the actions of humanity, and in need of our care.

In the past decades, indigenous people have gained increased international recognition as valid political subjects. This is manifest especially in relation to environmental issues, where indigenous people are assumed to embody a special type of wisdom (Nygren 1999; Murray Li 2000). The claim to act in defense of *Pachamama* is thereby assigned symbolic value in local settings as well as in international arenas. In this study of recent political processes in Bolivia, I explore what happens in a national context where various groups compete over the legitimacy to march for *Pachamama*, in a physical or symbolic sense.

## Setting up a dialogue

My story about Bolivia begins with *Pachamama*. I see her as an entry point for exploring how particular assumptions about human-nature interaction take form, gain dominance and are challenged by other assumptions, and how they are backed up with different knowledge claims. *Pachamama* represents a *cosmovisión* (worldview), an ontology of human-environment relations, based on certain knowledge claims, which is mobilized and altered in ongoing political projects and struggles in Bolivia, in processes that both reproduce and challenge existing patterns of power. Who has access to *Pachamama*? Who can, most rightfully, claim to speak for her? These processes of assertion and negotiation, as I will show, play out across scales, from communities to international forums, and in conversation with other ontologies.

Statements about the environment also reveal things about the speaker and the context in which she or he speaks. As a point of departure in this work I take the conviction that the categories of “environment” and “society” are not static, but emerge in particular times and places. I am interested in the processes of power that play out in environmental meaning-making: the power to define humans and the environment and the relations between them, to define environmental

problems and adequate strategies for their solutions, to define the ideals for an environmentally sustainable lifestyle, and to define who can be considered to embody such a lifestyle. Such definitions are not innocent, but emerge within certain relations of domination and subordination, shaping which subjectivities and which knowledges are considered legitimate for making claims.

My ambition is to enter into a growing and dynamic field of research that explores human-environment interaction and co-becoming through analytical frameworks generated in critical social theory. I seek to place *Pachamama*, in her various manifestations, in dialogue with sustainability science and political ecology, two broad research fields concerned with human relations to the environment.

## Research context, aims and questions

In 2006, president Evo Morales and his *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS – Movement towards Socialism) government – a broad coalition of indigenous and social movements – took office in Bolivia. During the subsequent years, environmental issues have become increasingly politicized in the country, and tied to a wider political project of re-defining the Bolivian nation in line with what is depicted as indigenous culture, in explicit contrast to previous, neoliberal regimes. The figure of *Pachamama* has been central in this project as an emblem that serves to authenticate a national environmentalism deeply rooted in pre-colonial tradition. The MAS government has positioned Bolivia as a radical actor in international environmental politics, and portrayed capitalism and Western lifestyles as the source of environmental problems. These claims are articulated and legitimized through a simultaneously universalized and locally based indigenous position, which is promoted as a “culture of life”, as opposed to a Western “culture of death” (Morales Ayma 2009; Aguirre & Cooper 2010).

Meanwhile, in the domestic context, popular movements have accused MAS of not applying its radical green politics on home ground. The Bolivian economy, like in the rest of Latin America, is heavily dependent on intense extraction and export of natural resources, including minerals, gas and oil and large-scale agriculture. Access to resources, control over territory and the distribution of benefits and consequences of infrastructural development projects have been at the core of political conflicts and mobilizations since pre-colonial times; this continues under the MAS regime. What is new in this process is that a

government that frames itself as indigenous now stands behind initiatives for extraction and infrastructural expansion. This raises important questions about indigeneity and national identity as foundations for territorial rights and environmental concerns, and about whose rights are privileged when different actors express conflicting claims in terms of indigeneity. Also, it may be asked what room there is for advancing alternative positions in local, national and global settings that are structured by the strive for continuous economic growth, only achievable through intense exploitation of natural resources.

In this thesis I address recent environmental politics in Bolivia by engaging two themes that have been especially salient in Bolivian environmental politics during the past few years. Firstly, I discuss how Andean glacier retreat has become a key narrative in MAS' positioning on climate change, in international as well as domestic forums. Secondly, I address how differing positions in the struggle over a highway planned to cross TIPNIS (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Secure*), a national park and indigenous territory, have been articulated invoking notions of indigeneity. I explore the intersecting processes of power at play in these examples by unwrapping two figurations, the *endangered glacier* and the *ecological indigenous*, that have become emblematic nodes of reference, mobilized by various actors for different purposes. Situating these figurations in local, national and international discursive contexts, I illustrate how they may both reinforce and challenge certain relations of power, which are manifested in particular practices with tangible material consequences.

The aim of my work is to explore – through the analysis of contemporary Bolivia – how dynamic, intersecting relations of power are articulated, reinforced and challenged in environmental politics and struggles.

My research questions are as follows:

1. How have intersectional power dynamics played out in the environmental struggles that have evolved in Bolivia under the government of Evo Morales?
2. What tensions and ambiguities arise when the Morales government claims to represent a nexus of indigenous identity and radical environmentalism? What does it imply for articulations of knowledge and subject positions in environmental struggles?

An additional ambition and intended contribution of my work concerns the development of theory and methodology. Through this thesis, I aim to demonstrate how insights from feminist critical theory may be engaged to contribute to a more profound understanding of environmental politics and struggles. Particularly, I engage and develop intersectionality and the technique of figurations as valuable approaches for analyzing environmental issues. Based on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, I elaborate a methodology, which is then put to work through a set of methods for generation and analysis of research material. Although this study focuses on a specific context, I hope that my theoretical and methodological frameworks may also be adopted in analyses of other settings.

## Situating the study

Here, I explain my choice of contemporary environmental politics in Bolivia as the focus of this study. Thereafter, I place the Bolivian context within a wider setting, in relation to environmental discourse formation and political processes on international stages. After that, I introduce my take on political ecology and sustainability science as the disciplinary ground on which this study takes place.

### *Why Bolivia?*

A long-lasting interest in Latin America lay behind my choice of research site. In the fall of 2008, when I applied for the PhD position through which this work has been realized, I was living in La Paz, doing an internship with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). This was the most recent component of a longer engagement with the Latin American region, which had begun with a trip to Peru and Bolivia in 2003 and continued with another internship and field studies for my master's thesis in Santiago de Chile in 2007-2008.

By the time I started my PhD studies, an intriguing environmental-political process was beginning to take shape in Bolivia. At the international climate negotiations of COP15 (the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC) in Copenhagen, December 2009, I listened to Bolivian delegates talking passionately about defending *Pachamama*. During my first fieldwork in La Paz I heard compelling stories about the government's environmental positioning, but

also about the critical movements that were starting to mobilize within the country. The field seemed to tremble with tensions and contradictions, and I decided to explore what was going on. Since then, I have become increasingly captivated by the complex co-articulation of indigeneity, environmental concerns and ambitions of de-colonization that have taken place in Bolivia, in government projects and policies as well as among social movements and the political opposition.

*The larger picture: global environmental politics*

Meanwhile, I was making myself familiar with theories about politics and discourse formation on environmental issues. I was very inspired by the work of Karin Bradley (2009a) who, studying attitudes in a Stockholm suburb, explored how the notion of an environmentally sustainable lifestyle was co-constructed with a certain kind of white, middle-class Swedishness, regardless of actual patterns of resource use. This ideal of environmental subjectivity was placed in contrast to working-class and immigrant dwellers that, even though their resource consumption was generally lower than for the middle-class group, were depicted as less environmentally aware. This, in turn, affected municipal strategies, which were directed toward changing the behavior of the working-class and immigrant populations. Bradley's work became an important starting point for me, as it spurred my interest in how the definitions of environmental concerns and sustainability are interlinked with articulations of privileged subjectivities in particular contexts, and thereby may reflect, reinforce or, possibly, challenge relations of power.

Great injustices prevail regarding the distribution of resources and environmental risks, where individuals and groups are privileged or disadvantaged due to income, gender, ethnicity, age, geographical place or other interrelated factors. Yet, such power relations are often obscured in the formulation of policies and strategies (Bradley 2009b).

The international field of environmental politics is vast and diverse, with a multitude of actors competing over definitions and strategies. How environmental problems and their solutions are framed depends on which perspectives are dominant in the specific moment. Several scholars have identified a discursive framework of ecological modernization and green governmentality, which arguably have dominated international environmental politics since the 1980s. Ecological modernization is presented as a win-win formula: a decentralized, liberal market model that reconciles economic growth



and environmental protection (Hajer 1995; Mol & Spaargaren 2000; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2007). From an ecological modernization perspective, environmental problems are caused by flaws in market mechanisms that can – indeed should – be solved through adjustments within the existing economic order, for instance through payment for pollution or greenhouse gas emissions, or for the use of ecosystem services (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2007; Warner 2010). Green governmentality refers to the call for a global governance of the environment.<sup>1</sup> According to the green governmentality paradigm, environmental problems should be managed through large-scale, top-down strategies and concerted actions driven by modern states and informed by high-level science (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2007; Rutherford 2007).

Alternative perspectives run parallel to and challenge the ecological modernization-green governmentality paradigm. For instance, Bäckstrand and Lövbrand refer to an undercurrent of civic environmentalism. Radical versions of civic environmentalism propose a fundamental change of the economic and political world order. A more moderate, reform-oriented type argues for bottom-up approaches and increased stakeholder and civil society participation in environmental politics, for increased fairness and legitimacy (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2007). Civic environmentalism discourses have never had a dominant position in high-level environmental politics, but have exerted a certain influence through a watchdog position in relation to hegemonic paradigms, for instance in the presence of civil society organizations as observers (without any formal influence) in climate negotiations (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2007). A global discursive realm dominated by ecological modernization-green governmentality – with a watchdog space for alternative perspectives – can thus be regarded as the stage where claims about environmental problems and their solutions take form and gain legitimacy.

Environmental-political processes in Bolivia are entangled with processes at the global level. The Bolivian delegates' compelling statements about *Pachamama* that I witnessed at the COP15 need to be related to an international discursive

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<sup>1</sup> The term governmentality was introduced by Michel Foucault to describe a form of power exercised by states over populations. Rather than control over territory itself, it implies monitoring of the people living in the territory (Foucault 2002). Green governmentality extends Foucault's concept to the entire planet, promoting the idea of human stewardship over nature.

setting. In the MAS government's rhetoric, dominant international approaches to environmental problems were framed as yet another instance of imperialism, reproducing colonial relations and privileging Western development models and forms of knowledge. A break with the capitalist economic system was suggested as the only solution to climate change. The Bolivian government's discourse can be read as a challenge to the ecological modernization-green governmentality paradigm, and regarded as a radical form of civic environmentalism. It emerged in dialogue with global but also local processes, and therefore needs to be understood within the specific context of Bolivia in the early 2000s. This, I elaborate on in Chapter 4.

### *Disciplinary home*

My path through academia has been winding, passing through fields of social anthropology, gender studies and international development before arriving at sustainability science. As an attempt to situate my study on a disciplinary map, I would call it feminist sustainability science embracing political ecology, relying theoretically on critical social theory, and methodologically on ethnography and interpretive text analysis.

Research done within the broad field of political ecology addresses the power-laden relationships between nature and society, suggesting that the ways in which we relate to nature are not innocent, but always permeated by power (Robbins 2012). The field's "originality and ambition arise from its efforts to link social and physical sciences to address environmental changes, conflicts, and problems" (Paulson et al 2005:17). While political ecology encompasses a variety of approaches, research under this flag is often constructed around environmental conflicts and the politics inherent in control over and access to natural resources (Agrawal 2005). Work within political ecology addresses how differences in experiences, knowledges, interests and influence among social groups manifest in practices like control over natural resources and organization of labor. Political ecologists encourage close analysis of particular contexts, but also stress how specific settings are interconnected across scales (Robbins 2012). In this thesis I adopt this ambition of multi-scalar analysis in my endeavor to show how local, national and global processes play out in the Bolivian research context. My approach is in line with what Arturo Escobar calls an "antiessentialist political ecology", advancing the idea of nature not as essential or stable, but as co-emerging with social processes (Escobar 1999; 2008). I mobilize a theoretical framework of poststructuralist and postcolonial feminism,

with an emphasis on the situatedness and context-specificity of power dynamics, subject formation and knowledge.

The institutional home for my study is within sustainability science, a field dedicated to exploring “the fundamental character of interactions between nature and society” (Kates et al 2001), advanced through research “with equal attention to how social change shapes the environment and how environmental change shapes society” (Clark & Dickson 2003). I perceive the greatest contribution – and certainly the greatest challenge – of sustainability science to be the pushing and transcending of the boundaries between the “natural” and the “social”, treating them as though they belong within the same sphere. There is an explicit interdisciplinary ambition to address complex socio-natural dynamics by drawing on a variety of disciplines, without simplifying and letting go of important insights from disciplinary scholarship (Kajikawa 2008; Jerneck et al 2011). These are challenges that I have taken on in my research. Furthermore, my work is inspired by the empirical ambition of sustainability science to explore the entanglement of social and environmental processes in empirical studies, as well as the normative ambition to critically investigate problematic practices and trends (Kajikawa 2008; Jerneck et al 2011; Wiek et al 2012). I believe that a political ecology approach is well suited to advancing these aims of sustainability science.

Unlike much other work done within the field of sustainability science I do not aim to propose any practical strategies towards increased sustainability. My contribution to the field is rather to engage theoretical and methodological perspectives emerging from feminist poststructural and postcolonial streams of thought in the analysis of my research material. This is an effort to bring sustainability science into closer dialogue with critical social theories, as called for by Anne Jerneck et al (2011). I hope that such efforts may provide the tools for more profound understanding of power relations in particular contexts, and thereby help to navigate towards more sensitive and inclusive, and less violent, environmental strategies and responses.

In this study, I address environmental politics primarily through analyzing symbolic representations of subjects and of human-environmental relations in claims made by various actors. My aim is to explore the very processes of power that are embedded in, and reinforced or challenged by, such representations. As outlined in my theoretical framework (see Chapter 2), I regard the symbolic and the material as co-constitutive and inseparable. Symbolic representations, reflecting certain power-infused assumptions about humans and the

environment, have an impact on definitions of environmental problems and environmental sustainability, which in turn affect, for instance, strategies towards their solutions. Study of discourse formation on environmental issues is thereby, I argue, not only justified but also necessary.

## Thesis structure

The thesis consists of seven chapters. In this introductory chapter, I present the context of my study, the aims and the research questions. I also situate the study in a larger setting of international environmental politics, and outline the interdisciplinary location of my research project. In Chapter 2, “Exploring Power, Constructing Knowledge,” I introduce my theoretical and methodological points of departure, along with the methods engaged for generating and analyzing the research material.

In Chapter 3, “Negotiations of Bolivianness: Situating the *proceso de cambio*,” I explore the political project of Evo Morales and the MAS, which has been termed *el proceso de cambio* (the process of change). I place this ongoing political process within the recent history of continuous struggles over resources, influence and the definition of the nation and national identity.

Following this is Chapter 4, “*Vivir bien* or Simply Live Better? Utopias and Tensions in Environmental Meaning-Making under MAS.” Here I address recent environmental politics, introducing the two main themes of this study: the government’s positioning on climate change, and the conflict around a highway construction project. I relate these themes to discourses of indigeneity in national and global contexts.

Chapter 5 is called “Our voice is the voice of the snow-capped mountains which are losing their white ponchos’: The Charisma of the Endangered Glacier.” Here, I explore the MAS government’s positioning on climate change through unpacking the figuration of the endangered glacier. I analyze how this figuration has been mobilized in the formulation of an official Bolivian stance on climate change, what assumptions about human-nature relations are embodied by the endangered glacier, and which knowledge claims are invoked. Linking the Bolivian context to wider geographical and historical settings, I discuss how the endangered glacier has emerged as a globally recognizable symbol for climate change.

The second figuration, the ecological indigenous, is the focus of Chapter 6, “From the *Loma Santa* to the Green Lungs. The Ecological Indigenous as Cosmopolitan Subject.” Engaging with the ecological indigenous as another key figuration, I explore the struggles over a highway that is planned through the TIPNIS national park and indigenous territory. I address the history behind the protected area and how the widely recognized position of the ecological indigenous is mobilized by various actors in relation to the conflicts about it. Thereafter I discuss possible implications of invoking this figuration.

In the final chapter, “Ending the March”, I revisit the research questions and the main conclusions that I have generated through the study. I discuss contemporary environmental politics in Bolivia and some of the tensions and power dynamics that I have identified and explored. Finally, I look into the possibilities of radical utopias for altering understandings about the environment and stimulating engagement and mobilization.

# Chapter 2 Exploring Power, Constructing Knowledge

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore intersecting processes of power at play in the realm of environmental struggles in Bolivia under the government of Evo Morales and the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*). Specifically, I address the exercise of power involved in the definition of knowledge about environmental problems and their solutions. I also look at the definition of legitimate claims and who is allowed to make them. In this chapter I will introduce the theoretical framework, analytical tools and research methods that I engage to generate and analyze my research material. My theoretical and methodological choices derive from certain epistemological assumptions regarding knowledge and knowledge production, which I will now present.

## What can be known and by whom? Knowledge as situated

Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. 'Epistemology' is about knowing the difference. (Haraway 1991a:161)

The knowledge generated in this study is specific to the context and formed by my particular position as a researcher. This goes for all knowledge production, and does not in itself make it any less relevant. In line with rich and productive realms of thought developed within poststructural, postcolonial and feminist scholarship, I argue that for any knowledge claims to be considered legitimate, it is necessary to recognize the context and conditions under which the research has been produced, and to reflect upon the researcher's role.

The post-Enlightenment notion of scientific knowledge production as “neutral” and thereby “objective” has been increasingly challenged during the past decades by postcolonial and feminist theorists who have pointed out that what is framed as universal knowledge in fact emerges from particular, historically and geographically specific experiences and lines of thought; it is a privileged, Western, masculine perspective. As a response to the ideal of science as objective, critics have developed alternative epistemological approaches (Ashcroft et al 1995; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002; Ribeiro & Escobar 2006; Lykke 2010). In these approaches the researcher subject is re-framed from a detached, unbiased knower to a person, situated in a particular context and with certain assumptions and interests that inevitably influence the knowledge that is produced (Lykke 2010). Questioning predominant scientific criteria, Sandra Harding argues for a “strong objectivity”, rooted in the experiences of the knower, as opposed to the “weak objectivity” of falsely value-neutral science (Harding 1986; Harding 1991). Expanding upon these ideas, Donna Haraway criticizes claims to universal knowledge, which invoke what she calls the god-trick: the scientific ideal of “seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1991b:189). The god-trick, she argues, gives the uncategorized, invisible knower the power to categorize, according to pre-determined standards. However, Haraway is equally concerned with the position of feminist standpoint theory (see Harding 1986; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002) that gives primacy to knowledge rooted in experiences from marginalized positions, for instance, black, woman or lesbian (Haraway 1991b; Prins 1995; Lykke 2010). With this position, she argues, comes the risk of “romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful” (Haraway 1991b:191), and assuming that, for instance, “women” is a stable category with shared experiences and common points of view. As a proposal for a more responsible and sincere conceptualization of knowledge, Haraway proposes the idea of situated knowledges. This is an epistemological position in which knowledge is regarded as always partial and contextual, rooted in subject positions that are themselves unstable, under constant alteration. Knowledge always originates in certain positions, and the only way for it to be in any sense objective is to recognize its situatedness (Haraway 1991b).

This, however, does not imply that all knowledge is equally valid. In the notion of situated knowledges, Haraway combines deconstruction of stable subject positions and master narratives with the emancipatory ambition and critical analysis of power that are integral in feminist and postcolonial thinking. Situated knowledge implies responsibility: each knower is located somewhere,

and therefore can be held accountable (Haraway 1991b; Prins 1995; Bartsch et al 2001; Lykke 2010). No positions, not even those of the subjugated, are innocent (Haraway 1991b). On a similar note, Anna Tsing discusses the simultaneity and interconnectedness of various types of knowledge. This diversity of knowledges, she argues, does not mean that all knowledge claims are equally good. Tsing writes: “Continuous life on earth depends on getting your knowledge into as good shape as possible” (Tsing 2005:81). I take this as strengthening the case for taking responsibility for construction of knowledge(s) through, in my case, academic research. Taking responsibility, in this context, involves continuous self-reflection and honesty in accounting for positions taken and choices made throughout the research process.

In my work, I bring these lines of thought into the analysis of complex and interconnected relations among humans and in human co-becoming with the environment. This is a non-innocent and normative project, grounded in my (situated) concerns about inequality, loss and destruction, and in the conviction that

[w]e need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future. (Haraway 1991b:187)

Below, I further elaborate my perspectives on how power operates through definitions of knowledge and knowers. Thereafter I introduce tools for analyzing situated positions, and present how I put these to work methodologically.

## Who gets to speak about nature? Understanding power

Power is an elusive concept with a wide range of interpretations. In this section I introduce my view on how power is constituted, how it operates and how it might be analyzed. In line with the work of Michel Foucault, I regard power not as an entity in itself; it “exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action” (Foucault 2002:340). Power is relational and a process of continuous (re)production rather than a fixed structure. It is not necessarily enacted through coercion, violence or other types of direct force (Foucault 2002; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002; Feindt & Oels 2005). What is perceived as true and taken for granted at a certain moment is an effect of processes of subjection and resistance, of definition and negotiation. The most forceful and effective



exertion of power takes place when it is perceived as normal and reasonable – when subjects, by their own choice, behave in accordance with dominating forces.

Regarding power as a process of (re)production of social and socio-environmental conditions stresses its dynamic character, and thus allows accounting for resistance, negotiations and change. Addressing power dynamics based on this conceptualization is at the center of much work within the field of political ecology (see contributions to Paulson & Gezon 2005).

In order to approach and decipher processes of power in my research field, I engage a number of concepts and tools on different levels of abstraction. This theoretical and methodological framework may be perceived as rather eclectic, drawing on a range of theorists from different disciplinary fields. Certain tensions exist between some of these scholars and concepts, which I will discuss. Still, a common denominator among the approaches that I bring up is the ambition to critically analyze power as a process, incorporating both symbolic and material dimensions, and to interrogate and deconstruct claims to universal truths. In these critical approaches, I also see a shared dedication to questioning dominant structures and imagining alternatives and change. Putting together this collection of theoretical and methodological tools is a way for me to combine Foucault's quite abstract thinking on power dynamics with the commitment of exploring specific and situated structures, which is a central aspect in much feminist scholarship. The chapter is thus less of an exercise in academic posturing, than a sincere attempt to sketch out a ground of theory, methodology and methods that help me take responsibility for my positions, my situatedness and my objectives as I approach my research field.

I treat discourse and subject formation as conceptual frameworks to address power on a more abstract level. Discourse theory is employed as a vocabulary for conceptualizing how power is constituted and operates through the interplay of meanings and practices. Thereafter, I move to discussing theories on subject formation as a continuous practice taking form within relations of power. As a means to explore power as expressed in particular conditions of dominance and subordination, I engage intersectionality, an analytical tool that aims to shed light on how power relations are multi-faceted and dynamic, and situated in particular contexts. Thereafter, aiming to identify and illuminate intersections of power in my own field of study, I turn to the idea of figurations. Figurations is a technique that allows the analysis to center on particular, situated and embodied characters that act as nodes for relations of power in a specific context.

### *Discourse - the power of knowing*

In the Foucauldian mode of thinking, power is inseparable from knowledge; what counts as knowledge, or truth, is an effect of power. This bond is conceptualized as power/knowledge. Paul Robbins asks, “[h]ow do specific ideas about nature and society limit and direct what is taken to be true and possible?” (Robbins 2012:70). Such questions can be addressed using the idea of discourse.

The concept of discourse has come to be widely applied for theorizing perceptions of the environment, how such perceptions shift, and how they influence practices (see Sharp & Richardson 2011). On the contributions of discourse to analysis of environmental politics, Peter Feindt and Angela Oels write:

The study of environmental politics has been transformed by discourse analysis in a number of ways. First, the environment is no longer regarded as lying ‘outside’ society but as discursively co-produced. Environmental problems are not taken as objectively ‘given’ but their representation is recognized as an effect of linguistic regularities, which implies that their constitution reflects strategies of power and knowledge. [...] Knowledge about nature is historically and socially situated just the way all knowledge claims are. (Feindt & Oels 2005:168)

In the work of Foucault, discourses are conceptualized as a system of statements which set the limits for what is considered sensible to say, think, write and do at a certain time and place, and what is not (Hall 1997). Discourses are temporary fixations of meaning that require continuous reproduction. They are sites of resistance and negotiation, and under constant transformation (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002; Feindt & Oels 2005). Yet, at certain points in time and space they may be perceived as stable structures and have tremendous influence. The power of a discourse is thus a power of definition, of making particular claims and particular knowledges appear as natural and unquestionable. These knowledges favor particular actions, referred to as discursive practices, through which discourse is reproduced and reinforced (Hall 1997; Baxter 2003). In that way discourses are simultaneously constituted by, and constitute, practice (Hall 1997).

Discourses that become dominant succeed in defining “truth” and “reality” in a particular context, relying on particular systems of knowledge production that are accepted as valid and legitimate (Feindt & Oels 2005). However, there is always more than one discourse at play in any setting. As Judith Baxter writes,

“[c]ompeting discourses work to determine and fix the meanings of the material world and hence our experience of social realities” (2003:9). The interplay of discourses is a negotiation of the definitions of “reality”, of how we perceive the world around us.

Discourse theory is often surrounded by an aura of complexity and inaccessibility, which makes it appear intimidating and difficult to use. I find Tsing’s approach to discourse uplifting and constructive in de-mystifying the concept. She considers discourse one of many “vocabularies for understanding culture and power”, and “particularly useful for bringing together issues of meaning and practice in examining the construction of power” (Tsing 1993, note to p.8). Like any theoretical tool, discourse can be used in multiple ways, and there are many different approaches associated with it. Rather than fighting to define the “right way” of employing discourse theory, I see it as important to use it in a way that makes sense in the particular study (for a discussion about the value of multiple, co-existing approaches to discourse for generation of various kinds of knowledge, see Baxter 2003). In my own work, I engage discourse as a tool for theorizing aspects of power, illuminating the simultaneity and co-construction of symbols/representations, material conditions and actions.

Thinking through discourse is helpful for shedding light on how conceptualizations of environmental problems, and indeed of the environment itself, do not simply reflect a reality of material conditions, but are embedded in particular systems of assumptions and knowledge claims. This kind of thinking does not mean a denial of biophysical realities, but instead aims to explore “the truth claims one makes in nature’s name and how these truth claims authorize particular agendas that then shape social and biological being and becoming” (Escobar 2008:129).

In order to discuss strategies and solutions for tackling environmental problems, it is necessary to first formulate what these problems are. This is inevitable in practices of decision-making, since, as Maarten Hajer and Wytse Versteeg state:

[n]ature has to be rendered linguistically intelligible. Without such an interpretative process it would be hard to imagine problem-solving at all, because actors would have to return to first principles continually. (Hajer & Versteeg 2005:177)

The arena of environmental politics can be regarded as a discursive battleground where dominant and alternative discourses struggle over meaning and definition (Hajer 1995; Bradley 2009). The articulation of power/knowledge – determining what is considered legitimate knowledge and thereby legitimate actions to take – is what is at stake in these discursive struggles (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2006). “[T]he act of naming a new reality is never innocent”, as Arturo Escobar and Susan Paulson point out (2005:259). How environmental problems are framed depends on the discourses at play at the specific moment, thus on dominant understandings of the environment and its relation to human societies. This, in turn, has impact on the imagined solutions, and actions taken to address environmental problems. As elegantly expressed by Hajer and Versteeg (2005:176), “[i]t matters whether the environment is discussed in terms of the spaceship-ness of the Earth, the greenhouse-ness of climate change, or the disease-ness of pollution.”

When a phenomenon that is identified as an environmental problem is elevated to the central stage of the global political agenda it achieves status as preminent, as *the* most important and urgent issue. This has been the case with, for instance, deforestation, acid rain, and, more recently, climate change (see Hajer 1995; Adger et al 2001; Methmann et al 2013). This elevation of particular problems is closely tied to the way environmental strategies are imagined. Thus, through the dominance of specific discourses both the urgency of certain environmental problems and the range of thinkable strategies for solving them appear as self-evident (Hajer 1995; Feindt & Oels 2005). Mainstream debates and negotiations rely on particular core assumptions and mostly remain within a certain discursive frame of ecological modernization and green governmentality (as suggested e.g. by Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2007). According to this joint paradigm, environmental problems can and should be solved within the existing economic and political systems. Ideas that diverge too much from this frame have no place inside the main political spaces, but are relegated to alternative, more marginal contexts and forums. The self-evident and prominent status of certain environmental issues and suggested strategies is legitimized by references to the particular knowledge domain of scientific research (Feindt & Oels 2005). What problems and solutions are made important and acceptable in central forums is the effect of discursive negotiations and, ultimately, power.

Addressing environmental issues through the concept of discourse obviously does not imply denying the existence or severity of environmental problems. Rather, discourse is a device for conceptualizing the inseparability of the

symbolic and the material: how assumptions about the environment matter for practices and actions. As Feindt & Oels point out,

[s]aying that environmental problems are socially constructed does not mean that there are no illnesses, malnutrition, loss of species and natural beauty, floods etc. caused by contaminated water and polluted air, by drought, logging or a rising ocean level. Instead, it means that there is not one authoritative interpretation of these events but multiple contested interpretations. When occurrences are interpreted as elements of dynamic and systemic developments, as anthropogenically caused or as posing management problems, the realm of environmental discourse is entered. (Feindt & Oels 2005:162)

Engaging with discourse can thus illuminate the power processes involved in environmental politics, and help to show how the definition of problems and strategies is not objective or innocent, but shaped by dominant patterns of meaning-making, rooted in certain relations of power/knowledge.

### *Subject formation*

In processes of power/knowledge, specific ways of relating to the world are privileged, which inform what kinds of practices are considered logical and sensible. This involves the establishment of certain subject positions as legitimate, normal and desirable and others as illegitimate, deviant and undesirable (Feindt & Oels 2005; Rutherford 2007; Escobar 2008). Within a Foucauldian understanding, subjects are regarded not as fixed, based on any individual essence or characteristics, but as constructed within discursive practices that define which range of subject positions are available to whom at a certain instance (Baxter 2003).

While some feminist scholars have claimed that the rejection of fixed subject positions is problematic as it might invisibilize structural oppression of women or other groups (see Hartsock 1990), other feminist researchers have engaged Foucault's ideas to advance theorizing on power and subject formation. Notably, Judith Butler's work on gender and other aspects of identity as performative – thus continuously reproduced through accepted practices – has been an important contribution to grasping processes of power involved in subject formation without re-constituting essentialized categories. She warns that basing claims on stable subject positions, for instance grounded in binary gender categories, neglects differences within these categories, and that it “presumes, fixes and constrains the very ‘subjects’ that it hopes to represent and liberate”

(Butler 1990:148). In line with Butler and other feminist scholars, I argue that a dynamic and context-sensitive take on subject formation may entail potentials for new kinds of emancipatory political practices, based not on fixed categorizations but on common interests and experiences in a particular setting (see Butler 1990; Haraway 1991a; Mohanty 2003).

Recognizing subjects as non-essential, and dependent on continuous reproduction, allows for a recognition of agency and change. Repression can lead to subjugation but also to resistance, and can have subversive effects (Agrawal 2005; Butler 2009). As Escobar notes, “discourses and practice are not only determinants of the self but also tools for identity construction – in short, ‘socially and historically positioned persons construct their subjectivities in practice’ (Holland et al 1998:32)” (Escobar 2008:217). Escobar gives an example of how such resistance may arise. Drawing from his research among Afro-Colombian activists, Escobar explores how, in this context, black communities emerged as political subjects with particular demands, questioning the prevailing patterns of “subordination as usual” (Escobar 2008:206). This, he argues, could only happen under certain discursive conditions, in which such a questioning could be meaningfully articulated and collective action thereby made possible.

Robbins states that “[c]ases from around the world demonstrate that the contestation of ecological priorities is also one of identities” (2012:219). How environmental issues are understood and acted upon is, as I have argued above, under continuous alteration and negotiation. The subjects that become recognized in these debates emerge within specific circumstances, dominated by particular discourses, which provide the frame for what can be said and done, and by whom – thus what is a legitimate argument and who is a legitimate actor. In my analysis of recent environmental debates in Bolivia, I trace the emergence and political mobilization of certain subjectivities as intertwined with discourse formation around environmental issues, and explore how subjects are co-constituted with environmental and political processes. Here, the subject position of indigenous has become central, as indigeneity and environmental concerns are both symbolically and materially connected. The current government has framed its politics of environment and territorial rights within a wider political project of constructing a de-colonized state in which indigenous tradition is a key feature. As I will show in the following chapters, a wide range of actors in Bolivia now invoke indigeneity as a means to legitimize their political claims. This can be traced to legacies of popular resistance movements

under earlier regimes, as well as to international discourse formation around indigeneity and environmental issues.

When the environment, or the ways of understanding and/or relating to the environment, is altered, it affects what subjectivities are possible, thinkable or deemed legitimate. Conversely, alterations in subject formations affect human ways of relating to the environment. For instance, control over and governance of environmental resources create particular opportunities and constraints for action and mobilization (Robbins 2012). In his work on state-community relations in northern India as they play out in forest conservation, Arun Agrawal explores how villagers have come to define themselves and their actions in relation to the environment; thus how actors, with his term, emerge as environmental subjects. This happens as the environment, through the establishment of conservation regimes, becomes a recognizable concept for the villagers. Agrawal argues that this subject formation is only partly related to commonly recognized categories such as gender and caste, and that in order to understand these processes it is necessary to move beyond such categorizations and explore which subjectivities emerge and gain meaning within the specific circumstances (Agrawal 2005).

### *Emergent indigeneities*

Agrawal calls for “a more robust exploration of the politics of subject formation” in political ecology (2005:210). Feminist political ecologists have made an important contribution here by exploring how subjectivities come forward in relation to ideas of nature or the environment, for instance how gender categories are co-constructed with human-environmental relations (see e.g. Nygren 1999; Paulson et al 2005; Nightingale 2011). In a Latin American context, Juanita Sundberg explores how identities “are at stake in the daily discourses, practices, and performances of natural resource management, struggles over access and control, as well as the very definition of whose environmental knowledge counts” (Sundberg 2004:44). Learning from her research in a protected area in Guatemala, she considers environmental conservation projects as sites in which identities take form. Sundberg illuminates how categories such as men/women, white/non-white, modern/traditional, and North/South are not stable and pre-existing entities, but established through enactment in specific relations and encounters. When the community in which Sundberg did her fieldwork was declared part of the Maya Biosphere Reserve – a large national park – local residents strived to be included in decision-making

processes in the area. In these endeavors, aspects of ethnicity and race were mobilized and challenged. Male community leaders formed an organization with the ambition to channel NGO (non-governmental organization) funds into a locally managed conservation project framed around indigenous culture. When visiting researchers started to show interest in the women in the community as carriers of local knowledge about medicinal plants, women were invited to form their own sub-group in the local conservation organization, subordinated to the male community leaders. Sundberg shows how a certain kind of female indigeneity, associated with ancient knowledge and practices, was consciously emphasized in the encounters with NGOs and researchers. This, she argues, altered community members' self-identification as indigenous while local gender relations were both reinforced and negotiated (Sundberg 2004).

Sundberg notes that ideas about knowledge are central in the construction of legitimate environmental subjects. Oppressed groups may gain recognition and legitimacy by claiming access to particular kinds of knowledge associated with certain positions, grounded in, for instance, place, ethnicity, age or gender. Indigeneity here comes forward as an especially powerful category, or a "universal concept", with "the ability to spread across cultures and engage with large numbers of different people" (Canessa 2012:11). Since indigeneity is central to the articulation of environmental claims in many settings, including the Bolivian context that I explore in this work, I will here briefly elaborate on how this subject position gains meaning.

The category of "indigenous" itself originates in colonial encounters, to signify an "other" as opposed to the modern, colonizing subject. Indigenous people, as a universal category, are generally perceived as the "ultimately marginalized" (Ashcroft et al 1995:214), the most unquestionably colonized in the name of territorial control, economic development, scientific research or top-down conservation initiatives. However, at the same time indigenous people are ascribed a certain inherent, ancient type of knowledge imagined as deriving from a special and almost divine connection with nature.

Agrawal points out that "what is today known and classified as indigenous knowledge has been in intimate interaction with western knowledge since at least the fifteenth century", and therefore it is "difficult to adhere to a view of indigenous and western forms of knowledge being untouched by each other" (Agrawal 1995:422). Yet, in both dominant and alternative environmental discourses, indigenous knowledge is frequently referred to, in many cases as a uniform entity. As environmental problems have generated increased concern



and their solutions seem far away, the interest in indigenous knowledges and forms of life as possible pathways to a more sustainable future has grown (Nygren 1999; Tsing 1999; Murray Li 2000). This implies a risk of reproducing an image of indigenous peoples as homogenous and located outside of time and politics, disregarding differing and changing interests among and within indigenous groups, and the fact that the indigenous is in itself a historically specific and contested category. Drawing from fieldwork on the edge of the nature reserve Indio-Maíz, Nicaragua, Anja Nygren explores encounters between migrant peasants, “development experts”, researchers and environmentalists. She traces depictions of rural communities in environmental discourses, where “non-industrial people were seen as paragons of ecological virtue, with scant attention paid to the existing diversity of environments, cultures and histories, and to the larger questions of knowledge and power” (Nygren 1999:274). She identifies a link here to global alternative discourses on the environment, where “local”, and especially indigenous, people and knowledge are mobilized strategically, and warns that

[t]here is a risk that the Indians are approved as useful partners in these alliances only to the extent that they conform to Western images as ‘authentic others’ who demonstrate stewardship qualities toward nature. (Nygren 1999:274-5)

Nygren notes the distinction between what is perceived as authentic, indigenous knowledge and, on the other hand, the environmental knowledge of the settler communities that she interacted with. Among other researchers and in environmental movements, the settlers were considered “contaminated by modernization”, and lacking the “pristine otherness” of communities that were seen as more truly indigenous (Nygren 1999:270):

All these images are based on a sharp dichotomy according to which tropical forest dwellers either are ecologically noble or they are not. The Indians are essentialized as peoples of simplicity, purity and environmental wisdom, while the non-Indian colonists are portrayed as rootless, corrupted and lacking environmental knowledge. (Nygren 1999:275)

The peasants in Nygren’s study constantly played on and negotiated perceptions of themselves in interactions with “development experts” and visiting researchers, very well aware of what was expected of them, and actively took part in constructing themselves and other groups. Nygren captures some of the complexities that are central in my own work. Indigeneity is a mark of otherness

in postcolonial relations that may contribute to reinforcing (post)colonial power patterns and essentialized images, overlooking differing interests, experiences and agencies within the category of the indigenous. Yet, passing<sup>2</sup> as the right kind of indigenous subject may also be an asset as it is associated with a desirable kind of environmental knowledge, and therefore can serve to mobilize resistance and legitimize claims. This tension is evident in contemporary Bolivian politics, as I will come back to in the following chapters.

### *Strategic mobilizations of indigenous identity*

As Agrawal (2005) suggests, mobilization in the face of environmental governance may lead to the construction of new political subjects. Anna Tsing, working in Indonesia, addresses how subjugated indigenous identities in her research context are consciously mobilized to make environmental claims in relation to nature conservation policy (Tsing 1999; 2005). Tsing shows how such processes take form in spaces of dialogue with development and conservation agents. In these encounters assumptions and imaginations about the indigenous are played on by local communities in order to gain voice, by appearing as legitimate rural/indigenous subjects with particular relations to and knowledge about the local environment. Thus, while the communities that Tsing studied depend on their environment and have a sincere interest in its protection, they may emphasize particular arguments and frame their arguments in certain ways, and thereby strategically play along with policymakers' expectations of indigenous peoples.

Tsing emphasizes the agency of individuals and communities that she has studied in the mobilization of indigenous identity. This aspect is also addressed by Tania Murray Li in her work on articulations of indigeneity in Indonesia. Murray Li discusses how playing on fantasies or expectations about the indigenous may open up opportunities but also entails certain limitations related to the "fields of power or 'place of recognition' which others provide" (2000:152), thus the room to maneuver given to the indigenous subject in a certain discursive context. The indigenous is not an essential, static subject, but

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<sup>2</sup> Passing is a concept in sociology that signifies the possibility of an individual to be perceived as a member of a certain category (based on e.g. ethnicity, class, gender or sexual preference) that she/he would normally not be considered as belonging to (see Skeggs 1997; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). Here, I use it to illuminate the performative aspects of identity.

neither is it simply a role that one can take on or discard; it is a relational position made available under particular conditions. Murray Li states:

My argument is that a group's self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. (Murray Li 2000:151)

Based on her fieldwork in the Bolivian Amazon, Gabriela Canedo Vásquez points out that the legal connection between territorial rights and indigenous identity in the country has motivated more explicit claims to indigenous identity among local communities, what she describes as an “identity strategy – demonstrating the plasticity of identity – that the groups utilize through this or that trait to demand territory” (2011:50, my translation). Andrew Canessa, also working in Bolivia, notes that “[i]ndigenous groups may find it irresistible to meet outsiders’ expectations about a primordial and mystical relation to the land or a highly essentialized view of culture when to do so may open up the only political space to discuss land rights, autonomy and so on” (2012:11).

Using the language of Gayatri Spivak (1990), such articulation of indigenous identity as a way of legitimizing claims can be conceptualized as strategic essentialism, in which an essentialized position or category is temporarily accepted and mobilized for political purposes. Reflecting upon her concept, Spivak writes: “[t]he strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized. This is the impossible risk of a lasting strategy. Can there be such a thing?” (1993:3) In other words, in order for strategic essentialism to remain a *strategy*, everyone involved in the use of it should remain aware that the specific position or category is being mobilized temporarily and for specific objectives; otherwise it risks developing into just *essentialism*, reinforcing notions of essential characteristics. Playing on assumptions of essential subject positions thus involves the risk of the strategy itself reinforcing these same assumptions. Spivak continues: “[s]o long as the critique of essentialism is understood not as an exposure of error, our own or others’, but as an acknowledgment of the dangerousness of something one cannot not use. I would stand by it as one stand among many” (1993:5). While it is important to recognize the constructed and non-essential character of subject positions, it is equally important not to categorically dismiss

mobilizations of such positions. We all make strategic use of the subject positions available to us, in order to be recognized as legitimate subjects with legitimate claims, when things that are important to us – territory, recognition, access to resources, legal rights – are at stake. This is what Spivak refers to as “something one cannot not use”. The strategic mobilization of indigenous subjectivity emerges through awkward encounters (Tsing 2005) in certain discursive settings in which it makes sense; it thus ought to be regarded as cosmopolitan and “modern” – entangled in and interacting with ongoing economic and political processes – rather than place-bound and “traditional” (see Escobar and Paulson 2005). In the coming chapters, I show how, in Bolivia, mobilization of indigenous subjectivity takes place in conscious dialogue with international discourse formation. I argue that the indigenous here becomes a cosmopolitan subject position, recognizable to local as well as global audiences.

I have discussed how power, as dynamic processes, plays out through discourse and subject formation. Now, I will turn to the analytical framework of intersectionality. While intersectionality is not associated with any particular ontological or epistemological positions, I regard it as useful to combine with the poststructuralist understanding of power as operating through discourse and subject formation, which I have outlined above; intersectionality allows for approaching the interconnectedness and simultaneity of power relations as they play out in settings ranging from individual encounters to symbolic representations and institutional practices (see Winker & Degele 2011).

### *Intersectionality: sensitive analysis of power dynamics*

Feminist thinkers have since long been at the forefront in theorizing subject formation through exploring particularly how gendered subjects are constructed, negotiated and continuously altered (see e.g. de Beauvoir 1973(1949); Wittig 1982; Butler 1990). While the primary focus of feminist theorizing and activism has, unsurprisingly, been the category of gender, there is a long-term practice of also including other categorizations as grounds for subject formation and relations of power (see e.g. Lykke 2005). Scholars like Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty have combined postcolonial and feminist theory to show how discourses of gender and race/ethnicity are co-constituted (Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1988). *Othring* is a key concept in postcolonial theory which describes a discursive process in which individuals and groups are categorized and divided in “us” and “them”, or “self” and “other”, where those who do not fit into the “us”/“self” are perceived as different and often inferior. The “self”

cannot exist without the “other”, and stigmatization of the “other” serves to legitimize privileges and discriminatory practices. This is an important theoretical contribution that illuminates how subjects and social categories are constructed in hierarchical relations with each other.

Along with contributions from anti-racist and postcolonial feminism, poststructuralism and queer theory have been important for questioning and destabilizing constructions of “woman” and “man” as coherent categories, and recognizing how gender interacts with, for instance, class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age, caste, and place, in the emergence of subject positions. Based on such insights, intersectionality has developed as an analytical tool for sensitive analysis of how power operates along multiple lines of categorization.

The first use of the term intersectionality is accredited to the American law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her criticism of the mainstream feminist movement being dominated by white, middle class women’s interests and perspectives (Crenshaw 1991). Since then, intersectionality has spread widely and been proclaimed as a major contribution of feminist theory (Davis 2008). It has been interpreted and applied in various ways within and outside of academia (Phoenix & Pattynama 2006; Cho et al 2013); however, the common objective is to address how multiple structures of dominance and subordination interact in complex patterns of power (Brah & Phoenix 2004; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). These power patterns are continuously negotiated and altered, and gain meaning in their specific historical and spatial contexts. In other words, different variables and categorizations are used – often simultaneously and in combination – as grounds for access to or exclusion from power and resources, legitimized through systems of ranking in which certain characteristics are perceived as superior to others (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). The same individual may have a dominant position in a certain context or relation, but be marginalized in another, given her or his situatedness in the specific setting. Power structures do not operate in parallel, nor do they simply “add on” to each other. For example, a black, working-class woman does not face “triple marginalization” in the formula of gender + race + class. Rather, these categories are jointly co-constructed, so that class structures are gendered, gender relations are infused by race, and so on (Tsing 1993). Intersectionality, as a sensitive analytical tool, “helps reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories” (Cho et al 2013:797).

An element of intersectionality that I would like to stress here – and which is in line with the theoretical approaches introduced above – is its ability to illuminate how subject positions are not fixed, but fluid and under constant reproduction and re-negotiation in every single context and instant of interaction (Lykke 2005; Nightingale 2011). Situated subject positions are enacted, reenacted and contested within specific circumstances, and through everyday practices. This includes relations to the environment, or the “non-human”. There is an emerging interest in engaging feminist theorizing on power and subject formation in research on environmental issues. In recent studies, intersectionality is employed as a tool for understanding how human subjects and social categories are co-constructed with understandings of the environment (see Nightingale 2011; Kaijser & Kronsell 2013). Not only are human subjects formed in interaction with nature; humans and the environment are co-shaped through continuous “becoming with” (Haraway 2008). Farming, animal breeding, city planning, tourism, garbage recycling and the extraction and consumption of natural resources are examples of processes in which human and non-human subjects are constituted and in which power relations play out. As Andrea Nightingale puts it,

[a]ttention to everyday, seemingly mundane, spatial practices gives insight into how people produce a particular relationship with ‘others’ including their environments, that are rarely ecologically neutral. [...] How bodies move in relation to physical objects such as the forest, the water tap, the hearth, food containers, religious icons, and substances bodies consume is of vital importance to the production of subjectivities and ecologies. (Nightingale 2011:154-5)

The interconnectedness of power relations among humans and between humans and nature has been theorized in, for instance, ecofeminism and critical animal studies (see e.g. Adams & Donovan 1995; Cudworth 2005; Twine 2010). These streams of thought are valuable for intersectional analysis of how power relations are shaped.

Categories are often taken for granted and assumed to be based on natural differences (Winker and Degele 2011). Therefore, in order not to contribute to further essentialization, categorizations themselves need to be critically scrutinized. An intersectional approach can shed light on how individual and group subjectivities emerge in processes infused with power, and how social categorizations are reproduced and mobilized in political projects. The aim of working methodologically with an intersectional perspective is not to include as

many analytical categories as possible, but to reflect upon which categories emerge and are made relevant in a specific context. Irene Molina (2013) stresses that intersectionality is a political, rather than simply a theoretical, tool. Researchers engaging with intersectional approaches, she argues, need to move outside of the academic comfort zones and look into real-life political processes. This is an important reflection. Intersectionality emerged as an indisputably political project; the ambition to identify and understand the construction of identity categories and power relations among them implies an aspiration for deconstructing and moving beyond these, and towards different, more equitable and inclusive, paths. Recognizing the unstable and heterogeneous character of social categories may facilitate political agency organized not around essentialized sameness, but around shared interests and objectives in a particular setting (in line with Butler 1990, see above). The need for these kinds of strategic coalitions (Mohanty 2003) or affinities (Haraway 1991a; see also Bastian 2006 and Escobar 2008) has long been emphasized by feminist theorists. An intersectional understanding is valuable in such projects. In my work, I draw on these insights to explore how intersecting power relations emerge and play out in the context of Bolivian environmental politics, but also discuss potentials and initiatives for destabilizing categories and articulating political agency beyond essentialized subject positions in this field.

In a critique of “neoliberal US ‘posteverything’ academic and political culture” (2013:968), Chandra Mohanty suggests that theoretical exercises that only emphasize the fluidity of identity without any profound analysis of power – what she terms “postintersectionality” (Ibid.:974) – may obstruct the understanding of systematic and structural oppression, and thus undermine political projects of resistance. She maintains that intersectional work needs to stick with its mission of identifying and criticizing structures and institutions of power. This is a highly important remark, which will guide the analysis in the following chapters of this thesis. An intersectional approach needs to steer clear of the risk of individualizing all experiences and dismissing collective projects as essentialist. Racism, (hetero)sexism, classism, and other abounding forms of structural oppression are very tangible in structuring our lives. What an intersectional approach aims for is not to question their existence, but to illuminate how they are made to make sense, to be naturalized and taken for granted, and how they co-constitute each other in each instance and encounter.

The objective of my work is not to delegitimize any political movement or project. Rather, my aim is to show how power and resistance operate within a

specific context; how, within particular structures of power, certain aspects of subject formation become important and legitimate for projects of political mobilization. This approach is not disconnected from any analysis of structural oppression, as I hope to make clear. Neither does it neglect material conditions nor real-life experiences of marginalization. My analysis is not meant to privilege the symbolic at the expense of the material, but to demonstrate how “symbolic ideas of difference are produced and expressed through embodied interactions that are firmly material” (Nightingale 2011:153; see also Kaijser & Kronsell 2013).

In my work on Bolivia, I engage intersectionality as a tool for thinking about processes of power, manifested in discourse and subject formation, in relation to environmental struggles. However, intersectional analyses of specific contexts require concrete methodological tools. In order to identify and discuss intersecting subject formations, I use the technique of figuration.

### *Figurations: embodying intersectionality*

Figuration is a technique that aims to shed light on processes of power and meaning-making through the narrative of a familiar figure, a subject position situated in dynamic patterns of domination and subordination. Inspired by the work of Linn Areskoug (2011) and Nina Lykke (2010), I engage figuration as a method for illuminating and analyzing intersectional power relations in my research material. I see figurations as a means to place my intersectional analysis in the specific context of study, illuminating how power is inscribed in places, landscapes and institutions, is reproduced in particular practices and plays out on human and non-human bodies.

Figurations, mainly associated with the work of Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, are “performative images that can be inhabited” (Haraway 1997:11, in Bastian 2006:1029). In the words of Haraway, “a figure collects up the people; a figure embodies shared meanings in stories that inhabit their audiences” (Haraway 1997:23).

Haraway’s work is populated by a diverse collection of figurations, among which the *cyborg* is the most famous (see Haraway 1991a). A cyborg is “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 1991a:149). Originally signifying a real or fictional being with both organic and mechanical parts, in Haraway’s work the cyborg represents “a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what



counts as women's experience" (Haraway 1991a:149). The cyborg figuration, as a transboundary, hybrid, and yet unmistakably embodied subject, is engaged to destabilize binary categories of organism/machine, man/woman, human/animal or nature/culture. Through the figuration, Haraway challenges such categories, showing their non-universality as they are all interconnected and historically specific. As George Marcus puts it, "Haraway's cyborg has been an especially influential construct in stimulating field researchers to think unconventionally about the juxtaposed sites that constitute their objects of study" (1998:88). The cyborg comes with a political, utopian vision of a "cyborg world" of "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway 1991a:154) – thus, the radical deconstruction of fixed subject positions and power patterns and, thereby, the possibility for new forms of solidarity and affinity.

A figuration embodies a positional and changeable subjectivity; it is a temporary fixation that makes sense to the reader/spectator due to its familiar subject position and situatedness in recognizable relations, and its ability to "resonate with already existing collective meanings" (Bastian 2006:1030; see also Åsberg, Hultman & Lee 2012). Figurations can be regarded as nodes where categorizations intersect and gain meaning. With their physical presence, embodying the inconsistent diversity of experiences, knowledges and affinities that form part of any subject (human or otherwise), they can point to the dissonances and incompleteness of subjects and illuminate their constructed, situated and power-infused character. In that sense, the notion of figuration is in line with the understanding of subject formation that I presented above. Through their concern with symbolic meanings as embodied in material relations, figurations may also shed light on how the symbolic and material are inseparable in subject formation (see Bartsch et al 2001).

The figurations around which I arrange my analysis are the *endangered glacier* and the *ecological indigenous*. These are further introduced in my discussion of methods, below. For reasons that I will return to, I regard them as illustrative of ongoing processes in Bolivia. Through these figurations, I aim to unwrap subject formations in order to illuminate intersectional power relations. As Marcus (1998) points out, working with figurations such as the cyborg requires thorough methodological considerations and definition of research methods. This will follow in the remaining part of this chapter.

To sum up: so far I have outlined the theoretical framework with which I approach and make sense of my research field. Now, I will move on to discuss my methodological points of departure and the methods I have chosen for generating and analyzing the research material.

## Generating knowledges

In this section I align my theoretical framework, introduced above, to my methodological approach and research methods. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, I maintain that knowledge is always situated (Haraway 1991b), which implies that context-specific knowledge offers more valid accounts of the world than supposedly universal and all-encompassing explanations (Flyvbjerg 2006). Therefore, I explicitly seek knowledge and stories emerging from multiple voices in the particular research setting (see Baxter 2003; Lykke 2010). Concretely, the approach is reflected in how I use an intersectional perspective to explore differences and specific instances of power relations while questioning categories that essentialize certain characteristics. The overall understanding resulting from my research may carry meaning beyond the specific research context, namely as one example of how environmental issues, subjects and social categories are co-constituted in processes of power. Thereby, my research allows for analytical generalizations and for transferability of findings into similar settings (Yin 2003:28).

### *What is a field? Aspects of “being there”.*

What is fieldwork? What constitutes a field? The classic ethnographic approach, which prescribes spending several years in a particular study site, has been challenged in recent years (Hannerz 2003; Hastrup 2012). In a world with constantly evolving global interconnections, it is increasingly difficult to delineate a geographically bounded “field”. As my own research shows, processes in a certain context cannot be separated from processes across a wider range of space and time; scales co-emerge in continuous interaction and interdependency. As Tsing (2005) points out, exploring such complexity methodologically is not as simple as positioning different scales in relation to each other – for instance, studying “local” effects of “global” processes – since scales are themselves discursively constructed, performed, and negotiated

through encounters and interactions between people in particular times and places (see also Gezon & Paulson 2005).

Various actors struggle to invoke scales, for instance through promoting narratives of “local traditional knowledge” or “global environmental problems”, with varying levels of impact (Tsing 2005). Researchers, in our endeavors to construct knowledge(s), are inevitably involved in such scale making through our choices of sites and framings. I am complicit: In this thesis, I present the narrative of a “Bolivian context” and its entanglement with “international” discourse formation. Such categorization and scale making is hard to avoid in efforts to make sense of the world. The best we can do as researchers is to continuously question our assumptions, provide honest accounts of our choices, and keep reflecting upon them, which I attempt to do in this discussion about research methods.

This thesis is to a large extent based on qualitative ethnographic methods. I have conducted interviews with a variety of actors and engaged in participant observation in different settings. These methods are recognized as suitable for studying the entanglement of processes across scales through particular, situated relations and experiences, an endeavor clearly in line with my theoretical approach (Baxter 2003; Sundberg 2004; Gezon & Paulson 2005).

Marcus suggests multi-sited ethnography as a means to study global processes and interconnections. Multi-sited ethnography, he writes, “moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus 1998:79). This is a way of methodologically addressing the constructedness of scales suggested by Tsing (2005 – see above), contesting the distinction between local and global: “[t]he global is an emergent dimension of arguing about the connection among sites in a multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1998:83). This type of research can be done, for instance, through following people, ideas or objects through space and time, in order to include various voices and stories (Ibid.). I regard my work as a type of multi-sited ethnography, in which I have moved in a variety of geographical and social contexts to trace multiple perspectives, experiences and accounts of environmental meaning-making in Bolivia.

Large parts of my research material were generated during three periods of fieldwork in Bolivia in 2010 and 2012. I was based in La Paz, where most of the organizations and people that I wanted to talk to were located, but I also

traveled to other places, including Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Trinidad, Villa Tunari and the TIPNIS indigenous territory and national park, to do additional interviews and participate in meetings and events.

“Being there”, a notion with almost magical connotations in anthropology (see Hannerz 2003), has lately been creatively challenged and expanded. Yet some degree of physical presence should not be underestimated. Without contributing to the further mystification of “being there” – and recognizing that a definite *there* is hard to imagine – my trips to Bolivia have been essential for the research. Simply being around, exposed to everyday events, political gatherings and protests, newspaper headlines and graffiti paintings, and surrounded by people with opinions on what was going on in the country, often turned my pre-formed assumptions upside-down and reminded me of the complexity and instantaneousness of the research context. Things change quickly in Bolivia. There is a high turnover rate of staff in government administration and other organizations, and political actors and their relations to each other are constantly altered. Each time I came back to the country, I needed to revisit my pre-formed assumptions, which was very fruitful for the study. I believe that visiting various parts of the country at different moments and moving between social contexts has been a suitable approach for following the processes that took place during the years of research.

Faster and more accessible means of travel and communication have made it easier for the researcher to keep in touch with interlocutors and learn about developments in the research site from a distance, and have made it increasingly challenging to define what comprises a field (see Hastrup 2012). From my office in Lund it is convenient to keep up with news reports and blog posts from Bolivia, and, like Kirsten Hastrup (2012), I discovered that many of my interlocutors are on Facebook and email, easily available for comments and follow-up questions. The strategy of moving in and out of a field encompassing multiple sites (geographical and, for instance, web-based) has well suited my project as it has allowed me to revisit the field continuously and stay in touch with ongoing processes as my theoretical and empirical insights have advanced.

In addition to the multi-sited ethnography, I have studied written material in the forms of academic texts, government policies and strategies, legal documents, blog posts, publications by Bolivian and international NGOs and foundations, and newspaper articles. I have gathered texts from visits to libraries, bookstores, archives or NGO offices; others have been given to me by interlocutors. Regularly visiting the websites of Bolivian newspapers,

government ministries and major organizations as well as blogs reporting about the political development in the country has helped me to follow processes in Bolivia especially during periods when I have not been there physically. The generated body of texts is large and diverse, and I perceive it to provide a rich picture of the environmental debates in Bolivia during the MAS era, although it is by no means a systematic or all-encompassing selection.

### *Doing ethnographic research*

An internship with Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) in La Paz, before I started my PhD, gave me insights into Bolivian society and political processes and equipped me with valuable initial contacts for my fieldwork. This pre-acquaintance with the field provided me with some familiarity to a complex networks of actors and helped me to locate and contact initial interlocutors. Most of the people and organizations that I contacted agreed to participate in my study (in a few cases after some insistence on my part). I was fortunate to make connections with a number of individuals who are well known in their respective communities, and whose names served as gate openers to actors who I would have otherwise had difficulties in reaching. Through a combination of persistence and luck I managed to access interlocutors from a variety of groups and contexts, including several people who may be regarded as key persons due to their specific positions, knowledges or experiences.

During my field visits, I made around sixty semi-structured interviews (see Aull Davies 1999; Kvale 2008) with a variety of people, including current and previous government officials, environmental and human rights activists, people involved in social movements, academic researchers, development cooperation staff and representatives from local and foreign NGOs and foundations. Interlocutors were accessed mainly through snowball sampling; I followed the networks of initial contacts, and continued to ask interview participants for further contacts. This proved to be a useful method in a context where the composition of key actors changes continuously and people will often not respond to emails or calls unless you can refer to some common acquaintance. However, it requires some reflection upon who you are associated with – see below. During my stays in La Paz I developed a network of acquaintances, mainly activists and researchers, with different kinds of insights in Bolivian politics. At the outset of each fieldwork period, I made sure to meet with some of these people to get an update on what had happened since last time, and to

have the chance to ask uninformed questions. These contacts were extremely valuable for my ability to orient myself in the rapidly shifting field.

My selection of interlocutors is not intended to be a representative sample; rather, my aim has been to gather as many voices, stories and perspectives as possible. My research may be described as a kind of “patchwork ethnographic fieldwork” (Tsing 2005:x), in which I continuously moved between various contexts and groups of actors; from the sober offices of government ministries and international development agencies in downtown La Paz to activist meetings in NGO headquarters or on the streets and to an Amazon community accessible only by river boat. Obviously, this diversity of interlocutors and interview settings meant that the encounters varied significantly in character. Ethnographic interviews generally aim at creating dialogue between researcher and interlocutor, in which meaning and deeper understanding is created together through the encounter, rather than finding out facts or truths (Madison 2012). Yet, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, like all relationships, is always infused with power and pre-formed assumptions. This, I discuss further below.

Besides the interviews, I made participant observations in various kinds of meetings and events and during excursions to contested and politically loaded places. These observations also entailed moving among very different settings. I tagged along with interlocutors to meetings where the international donor community’s approaches to Bolivian government strategies were discussed in the offices of embassies and international organizations. I went to forums arranged by the government in which new political visions were presented. I joined seminars on climate change and environmental issues organized by universities and NGOs. I attended activist gatherings, protests and manifestations. I traveled to a meeting with the resistance movement on the edge of the TIPNIS indigenous territory and national park. Apparently, my role and approach shifted a lot between various sites, and introducing my study and myself I was received very differently – as a fellow activist, as a young student, as someone with contacts outside the local setting whose reports could perhaps reach wider audiences. Sometimes I felt alienated and out of place as I came straight from an activist meeting or a busy market place to attend a formal reception at a fancy hotel, or vice versa. My participant observations were important for studying how different actors presented themselves and interacted with each other. They helped me to identify key organizations and individuals, central themes of

debate and shifting rhetoric. Being thrown between contexts was also a great exercise in reflecting upon my own position, as elaborated on below.

On some travels I was accompanied by other people on similar missions. The trip to TIPNIS was made together with a Norwegian PhD candidate and a Swedish bachelor's student, both conducting fieldwork on topics similar to my own. I traveled to Villa Tunari together with another Swedish bachelor's student. On both of these journeys I benefited enormously from the company, as we shared practical tasks, contacted interlocutors and carried out interviews together and discussed field experiences with each other, even after returning home. On another occasion, I was invited to join two Swedish journalists on an excursion to a village outside La Paz. This was an arrangement that both of us benefited from; they needed my help as someone familiar with the area and the Spanish language, and I got the chance to participate in a field trip that would have been difficult for me to do by myself.

I carried out most of the interviews in Spanish. In some cases English (or, on a few occasions, Swedish) was the more obvious common language. For each interview I developed a tailored interview guide, which I followed loosely, allowing for unexpected topics to arise. Interview questions were subject to continuous revision, depending on whom I talked to and evolving over time with the political development in the country and my deepening insights in the field. The interviews were recorded. Most of them were transcribed afterward, a process that became an important stage of analysis in itself. Listening to the records helped me clarify issues that I had missed or misunderstood in the interview situation, and allowed me to revisit the interviews with new questions and insights as my frame of interpretation evolved. Sixty recorded interviews is obviously a lot of material to take care of – it generates an “embarrassment of riches” (Aull Davies 1999:114) that requires immense time and work to analyze. Some of the early interviews turned out to be less important for the focus of my research as it developed over time, and mainly helped me widen my overall understanding of the field and map out the actors. Other interviews served to point me in new directions, while some provided new perspectives or addressed aspects that I would otherwise not have thought of. While not all of the interviews were eventually analyzed in detail, all of them were important for my comprehension of the context and the identification of key themes to explore further. Engaging in dialogue with such a large number of people with different perspectives has generated valuable insights into the complexity of the research field.

During the research period my topic became increasingly sensitive as political tensions grew in Bolivia. At the outset of my second fieldwork, in early 2012, I was urged by friends and interlocutors to be careful – there might not be risks for me personally, I was told, but perhaps for the people I interviewed. Some interlocutors explicitly asked me not to tell anyone that they had talked to me. Of course this was a little unsettling. I had never heard anything like that in Bolivia before, and did not expect it. I have strived to address these issues, and contradicting stories, in my analysis, and made my best efforts to protect the integrity and safety of my interlocutors.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained my project to the interlocutor and made sure that s/he understood that the interview would be used for my research, which everyone consented to. I asked the interlocutors whether they wished to remain anonymous. In the thesis I have chosen to reveal the names of interlocutors only when their identity is significant – when they can be considered key persons in Bolivian environmental politics – or if they have been interviewed in their public role as representatives of, for instance, a government ministry or an organization. Other interlocutors have been anonymized, and in some cases I have refrained from giving direct quotes for fear that they might be traced to a certain individual.

### *Making sense of the material*

Aull Davies points out that “[t]he process of analysis is intrinsic to all stages of ethnographic research, and not something that begins once data collection is complete” (1999:193, see also Widerberg 2002). My analysis started at the moment when I planned the study, and continued as I defined the theoretical and methodological framework, formulated interview themes and generated material, but was intensified during the last stages of the research process.

My ethnographic fieldwork and collection of different kinds of texts resulted in a great variety of data – field notes, records, transcripts, written material – in Spanish, English and Swedish. I approached the material through a continuous interpretive process in which I first went through all texts, interview transcripts and field notes searching for salient themes. The material was then more carefully analyzed with these themes in mind, in an iterative process where I moved between theory, research questions and empirical material. I gave the themes different colors, and used these colors to code the material, in order to achieve a clearer overview and a better conception of what themes could be regarded as most central. In this process I did not aim to arrive at a coherent



picture; rather, I strived to remain attentive to differences, contradictions and multiple voices (see Opie 1992). In addition to interpreting what was expressed in the material, I looked for silences, for what was *not* said. Given the abundance of material, I needed to make a selection of what merited more careful analysis. This was a continuous procedure, as pieces of data that I had initially put aside as less relevant sometimes appeared to be crucial as the analysis proceeded. This movement between the parts and the whole is addressed by Karin Widerberg. She discusses the broad comprehension of the field that emerges through qualitative research, a comprehension that is more than merely the sum of the transcripts or other written material. Ethnographic research implies picking up more than what is “actually” being said, and that which may be difficult to put into words – gestures, tone of voice, perceived attitudes among interlocutors towards the research – but which, all in all, adds to the researcher’s overall understanding (Widerberg 2002).

As outlined above, the overarching aim of this work is an analysis of processes of power, explored through theories of discourse and subject formation. I have chosen to make sense of my research material through intersectional analysis, focusing on two particular figurations. Figurations are situated in intersecting power relations, particular to certain discursive settings. The technique of figurations is suitable for carrying out empirical analysis based on a poststructural approach to power, as it works as a sensitive methodological tool for analyzing context-specific intersections of power dynamics. I find it an accessible device for addressing discourse formation in the material that I engage with.

### *Engaging figurations*

Through careful, in-depth analysis of my research material, and in addition to insights in the research context generated through fieldwork, I identified two figurations in which many of the ongoing processes of environmental politics intersect: the *endangered glacier* and the *ecological indigenous*.

The tropical glaciers of the Andes, among which several are located in Bolivia, are retreating due to temperature changes, and have gained worldwide fame as prominent victims of climate change. Andean glacier retreat means decreased water availability for downstream communities, and a loss of cultural value for highland Bolivians. The figuration of the *endangered glacier* is inspired by Mark Carey who writes that “[i]n recent decades, glaciers have become both a key icon for global warming and a type of endangered species” (2007:497). Due to their

visibility, their charismatic appearance, and their sensitivity to warming temperatures, glaciers have great symbolic value and have become projection surfaces for ideas about climate change and proposed strategies and solutions. Glaciers are often named and ascribed personal characteristics by people living close to them. Like fabled animals, they are treated as individuals in popular narratives. They are discursive constructs and continuously redefined, while also independently “acting” – moving, freezing, melting – and interacting with humans, landscapes and weather (see Carey 2007). Therefore, I argue, the endangered glacier may be envisioned as a figuration, which can be unwrapped to address intersections of power.<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 5 I discuss how the endangered glacier has emerged as a key figuration in the Bolivian government’s positioning on climate change, as it has come to embody climate threats and certain imaginaries about human-environmental relations.

The figuration of the *ecological indigenous*, imagined as living in harmony (and often almost divine connection) with nature, has a long history in environmentalist and human rights discourses. It invokes popular narratives on indigenous ancient knowledge and inherent respect for nature, and resonates well in forums ranging from local popular movements to international media and NGOs. As I explore in the following chapters, within the Bolivian context, indigeneity has been central to the current government’s political project of reconstructing the state and national identity, with the explicit aim of decolonizing the country. The indigenous has moved from a marginalized position to become a privileged national subject. This recognition of the indigenous, and its association with particular forms of environmental knowledge in national and international discourses, has made the ecological indigenous an important position which bears certain legitimacy, especially in claims to territorial rights. In Bolivia, much of recent environmental politics can be read as a discursive struggle about the definition of and access to the ecological indigenous. This I elaborate on in Chapter 6.

I hope to show, through these two figurations, how categorizations may not only be imposed from outside and result in oppression and othering, but also how

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<sup>3</sup> For a similar treatment of a non-human (and non-animal) category as a figuration, see Bartsch et al and their discussion about the subjectivity of wetlands. They argue that “[t]he battle over wetlands illustrates the way that ecosystems are political subjects: subjects to be violated by the politics of categories and also subjects in their own right” (2001:151).

they can be internal and intentional, generate empowerment and solidarity and be re-defined and strategically mobilized to reach political objectives. Hereby, I adhere to the political potential of figurations; they are not mere illustrations of status quo, but also possess the capacity to challenge it. In the words of Lykke, “a figuration cannot be understood in isolation from current societal power relations and the position of the subject within them. But at the same time it can make up a site of resistance against these, and here the visionary aspect of the notion comes into play” (Lykke 2010:38). Thereby, in Braidotti’s words, they can be characterized as “political fictions” (Braidotti 2002:7, in Lykke 2010:38). Inspired by anti-racist and postcolonial feminism, figurations may be employed to question taken-for-granted subject positions and categorizations in order to create room for alliances, or affinities, based not on perceived sameness, but on common interests (Bastian 2006).

Together with Annica Kronsell (Kajser & Kronsell 2013), I have previously developed a set of sensitizing questions that may help researchers maintain awareness of possible intersecting structures when analyzing empirical material. Here, I have slightly altered these questions to better address my research topic and material:

Which social categories, if any, are represented or absent in the material? Can any explicit or implicit assumptions be observed about social categories and the relations between them? What subjectivities are mobilized and serve to legitimize claims?

What type of environmental knowledge is recognized and privileged? How is nature represented? How are relations between humans and the environment portrayed?

Are any norms discernable in the material regarding relations among humans, and to nature and resources? Are any standards expressed for environmentally friendly behavior? How are these norms reproduced, reinforced or challenged? What practices enable these processes?

In Chapters 5 and 6, I pose these questions to the figurations, as a method of structuring my intersectional analysis and exploring the interconnectedness of symbolic representations and material, embodied practices. The questions are

used not as a blueprint for analysis, but as sensitizers facilitating attention to the intersectional perspective throughout the analysis.

### *Writing as a method*

I write a book only because I still don't exactly know what to think about this thing I want so much to think about, so that the book transforms me and transforms what I think.

This quote by Michel Foucault (2002:239-40), scribbled on a sticky note, has been taped to my computer screen for a few months. On good days, it pretty well describes my work process, or at least how I would like it to be. The act of producing text has been an integral aspect of the research, from the very beginning of the project and particularly during the last couple of years. Gathering loose thoughts into words has helped me to develop my thinking, and often, as Foucault puts it, transformed it. In accordance with Laurel Richardson, I see writing as part of the inquiry – “a method of discovery and analysis” (Richardson 1994:516) – rather than a simple “writing up” after the material is gathered (Richardson 1994; see also Lykke 2010). On my trips to Bolivia I kept a daily field log where I would write down what I had done and whom I had interviewed and contacted, but where I also reflected upon interviews, events attended, news and current debates, chats with friends and strangers, places visited, and my own feelings and everyday experiences. The logs were an important space for early analysis, and became even more important at later stages as they helped me to make sense of the field material (keeping a research log is recommended by e.g. Richardson 1994). During these past years I have also written different kinds of texts for various forums: seminars, conferences, academic journals, an edited volume and audiences outside of academia. Although it entailed a lot of work that did not feed directly into the final product of this thesis, this writing, and the reactions that the texts generated, encouraged me to think of my research topic from new angles, something that has proven very valuable for the analysis. I have also been lucky enough to make contacts with colleagues and friends with whom I have exchanged readings and input; such friendly forums have been a great source of inspiration and constructive challenges throughout the research process.

### *Reflections upon my role as a researcher*

The Foucauldian conceptualization of power, which I draw on in this work, encompasses the recognition of how claims to knowledge are tied to the exercise of power. This implies certain responsibilities on the behalf of researchers. Regarding knowledges as situated encourages a reflexive stance towards my own identity as a researcher in relation to the interlocutors and research context. Such reflection, as Haraway suggests, is not primarily subjective and self-oriented, but adds to the integrity and validity of the study (Haraway 1991b; Marcus 1998).

Reflection upon the researcher's role in knowledge construction is key in many strands of feminist scholarship. "Feminists generally take the whole process of knowledge production to be a social process, and so one in which power relations are inherent", write Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland (2002:42). They continue: "What is feminist in the process of interpretation is the theoretical framework, and the political and ethical concern with deconstructing power relations, and making the researcher accountable for the knowledge that is produced" (2002:116). The story presented in this thesis is one told by me, and one for which I am entirely accountable since I, inevitably, have the last word in deciding how people and processes are represented (see Madison 2012). All material has been filtered through my interpretation, which is as non-innocent as any others'. As a researcher, I am a situated subject. Adhering to the epistemological position of situated knowledges brings with it a significant element of responsibility, and the commitment to thoroughly reflect upon my own role in the production of knowledge that is my study – even though such reflection can obviously never address all possible aspects of power dynamics at play in the research process (see Opie 1992; Phoenix 1994, in Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002).

Each context poses specific requirements and challenges to the researcher. Passing in diverse types of settings and talking to a variety of actors requires some insight into the field as well as some chameleon skills. Reflecting upon my own role in relation to the interviewees is complex, as I interviewed people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and positions. What the interlocutors told me is undoubtedly related to their perceptions of me and my relationship to other actors. With or without my intention or awareness, my role and position shifted as I moved between contexts. Among urban environmental and human rights activists I was sometimes a comrade with whom to share experiences and strategies, and sometimes an intruder regarded with skepticism. Among

community leaders and anti-highway activists in TIPNIS I was an outsider observer who could possibly advocate for their case to distant audiences. Among academic researchers I was either a colleague or a student in need of advice. Among government officials and NGO directors, I suppose that I was yet another persistent foreign researcher coming to ask questions.

Marcus addresses the shifting role of the researcher engaged in multi-sited ethnographic studies. He describes such research practice as a kind of activism in which the ethnographer moves between “cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments” (1998:98) in encounters with different groups of actors. Throughout my study, I have found myself increasingly engaged in the field, and affiliated with people in various positions. In most encounters, I felt deeply sympathetic to the interlocutors as they communicated their perspectives, which differed greatly from each other. Some of the interlocutors became my friends, and in many circumstances I would not have been able to distinguish my personal engagement from my position as a researcher – a distinction that I, in any case, do not regard as necessary or even valid. As stated above, researchers are situated subjects.

In general, I believe that being an outsider, but one with some familiarity to the field has been quite an advantageous point of departure; as a foreigner I am not immediately associated with any particular group of local actors. My position in the varying research contexts was paradoxical and shifting. The fact that I am a fairly young woman (and in Bolivia often perceived as younger than my actual age) may have helped me in gaining access to people and stories. On many occasions, I was surprised by how easily I was admitted into ministries and high-level offices. I assume that I was often perceived as a young foreign student with limited insight, someone who did not come across as intimidating or challenging. I may on the other hand have been regarded as naïve and therefore not someone to take very seriously – something that I sensed mainly in encounters with older, male interlocutors with higher social status, who were generally very polite but distanced towards me. They kindly received me in their offices or met me in downtown cafés, took time to answer my questions and wished me luck with the thesis, but I did not sense that they regarded me as someone who might offer insights that could be of any value to them.

Yet, at the same time as I am a young woman, I am also a white, Western, middle class academic. This position brought about both advantages and constraints. Many of my interlocutors explicitly regarded participation in my study as an opportunity to communicate their perspectives to wider audiences.

Often, I was asked to spread accounts to forums outside of Bolivia. Others showed initial skepticism towards my work and my very presence, questioning my legitimacy as a Western outsider to say anything about the Bolivian context. This is a matter that I need to take seriously. Orin Starn writes: “[t]here can be no escape from the dissonances and paradoxes of the colonial past and the postcolonial present of Anthropology in the Andes” (1994:13). (Post)colonial patterns of power prevail in Bolivia and form the basis of a collective memory of colonial oppression and indigenous resistance. There is a long tradition of foreign scholars coming to the area in order to glean research material, quite often benefitting only their personal careers – ethnographic records may thus easily be regarded as just another resource depleted from the Latin American continent.

A postcolonial power analysis and an explicit ambition towards de-colonization have during the past few years been articulated into the government’s project of re-defining the nation and national identity, and were manifested among some of the people that I encountered in Bolivia. Especially, a group of young activists and university students from urban areas showed apparent skepticism towards me and the other Scandinavian researchers with whom I traveled to TIPNIS (see above). This was an interesting and thought-provoking experience, since I did not sense any such skepticism from the community members and activists from the local area who participated in the journey and the same event. I struggled to build trust among the urban activists, and eventually felt greater acceptance from them, although they remained quite reserved. I am thankful for all reminders of my situatedness, however painful or discouraging they may have felt at the time. Like all encounters, my interactions with the people that I met during fieldwork are power-infused sites where subjectivity is re-constructed and negotiated. The legitimacy and ethics of my work depend on my ability to recognize the processes at play – what Starn would call “a restless hermeneutic of reflection and engagement” (1994:25). I hope that I have managed to work such recognition into my study and analysis.

This said, I refrain from making a sharp distinction between local/traditional and Western/scientific knowledge. As I have discussed above, such categorization is inadequate since systems of knowledge have been in constant interaction for hundreds of years (see e.g. Agrawal 1995). Although I recognize the exercise of power involved in each instance of knowledge production, I don’t see my research process as “extracting” knowledge from anywhere, but rather as

part of a complex and continuous dialogue across scales, in which knowledges are constructed and negotiated.

Given my attention to the co-constitution of the symbolic and the material, and the power in defining things like reality and knowledge, I regard it as crucial to reflect critically upon the words and concepts that I use in this work (see Baxter 2003). Like Lykke, I see language as “active in the production of research results” (Lykke 2010:163). No act of naming or defining is ever innocent, and I need to take responsibility for what I express and how. I agree with the words of Lykke: “Scientific research produces realities and worlds, and precisely because research, for good and for bad, is never without real effects, the researcher cannot allow herself or himself to avoid taking moral co-responsibility for the consequences” (2010:159).

One important theme for reflection is the matter of translation. Translation always involves the loss of some levels of meaning (Aull Davies 1999). This study has been conducted in three parallel languages: English, Spanish and Swedish. I consider my command of all these three languages, written and spoken, to be sufficient for the purpose of communicating with interlocutors and accessing written material. Yet, as pointed out by Charlotte Aull Davies, “no matter how competent ethnographers are in another language, they must remain aware that translation in any case is far from a theoretically neutral activity and that their own perspective, both professional and personal, will influence their translations” (1999:113). Sharing a native language, on the other hand, does not in itself guarantee sharing of references or meanings, as these may differ among groups of speakers (Aull Davies 1999). All dialogue and interpretation of data entails some degree of translation between social and cultural contexts (see Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). For researchers this poses the requirement of remaining attentive to the potential effects of these translations. Throughout my research process, I have done my best to keep an awareness of the terminology I use, and how it may come across in relation to different audiences. I have done my best to define concepts and terms used throughout this thesis, and to motivate my choices of these and not others.



## Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have presented the theoretical foundations of my research, and the methodological approaches with which I have generated and analyzed the research material. I believe that my conceptualizations of power and the analytical tools that I have engaged to address it are adequate for the purposes of my study. With these tools and the variety of material, I am confident that I am able to fulfill the aims and address the research questions introduced in Chapter 1. Apart from the empirical contribution generated by the analysis of power dynamics within environmental politics in the particular context of Bolivia under the MAS regime, I hope to also make theoretical and methodological contributions through my engagement with figurations as an analytical tool for addressing intersectional power relations.

Drawing from this theoretical and methodological framework, in the following chapters I will move on to an analysis of the setting in which I have carried out my research.

# Chapter 3 Negotiations of Bolivianness: Situating the *proceso de cambio*

When Evo Morales and the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, or Movement towards Socialism) government took office, they signaled a departure from previous models of governance, and a new form of political project. The government has explicitly aimed at a reformulation of Bolivian national identity and the state itself that breaks with colonial patterns and invokes local, indigenous values. Their initiatives have gained great support, but also incited resistance and criticism.

In this chapter I explore Evo Morales' government project and the contemporary political developments in Bolivia and place these in a greater context. I provide a brief insight into historical and ongoing struggles over access to land, resources and national identity, and discuss how these are intertwined in the formation of subjectivities.

## Initiating the *proceso de cambio*

In early 2000, a massive and broad mobilization of protesters in Cochabamba – Bolivia's fourth largest city – succeeded in forcing the private company Aguas del Tunari, owned by the multinational corporation Bechtel, to withdraw from its far-reaching attempts at privatizing the public water network. As part of neoliberal policies for boosting the national economy, deregulation of the water market had opened up to a new law on water privatization, passed by the government in 1999 after pressure from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. This in turn enabled Aguas del Tunari's initiative in Cochabamba (Postero 2007). The privatization plans would have implied

rising costs for the use of water, including even rainwater harvesting, but were shattered by the furious resistance, popularly called the Water War (Kohl & Farthing 2006; Turner 2010).

Three years later, in October 2003, a diverse alliance organized demonstrations against the government's plan to export natural gas through Chilean ports for further transport to the United States and Mexico. The plan was another strategy within the neoliberal measures towards strengthening the Bolivian economy through incomes from natural resource exportation. Opponents argued that this would be yet another example of resource extraction that would not benefit the people. Antagonism toward Chile and the United States further boosted the popular resentment. The protests, termed the Gas War, were concentrated in El Alto, the second largest city in the country, located in the highlands above La Paz. After sixty-seven protesters had been killed by police and military forces in the violent confrontations, President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, whom the protesters held accountable for the gas exportation plans and for the killings, was compelled to resign from his post. He dramatically escaped to Miami and was replaced by Vice President Carlos Mesa (Olivera 2004; Kohl & Farthing 2006; Revilla 2011; Crabtree & Chaplin 2013). In the Water and Gas Wars growing discontent with neoliberal measures and social marginalization led to popular uprisings. These two conflicts, focusing on access to the vital resources of water and energy, are often referred to as key events for subsequent political developments in Bolivia.

When I first went to Bolivia, as a young backpacker, in November 2003, the country was still shaken by the Gas War. Roadblocks around El Alto – a commonly used tool for political protest in the highlands – made it difficult for my travel companion and me to cross the border from Peru, and when we finally arrived by bus to La Paz I felt like I was in a city holding its breath. Continuing our odyssey to Cochabamba, we crossed paths with activist groups that were bristling with expectations and exhilaration, and participated in a mass demonstration for the right to water, echoing the legendary Water War. We had stumbled into Bolivia in the middle of the swelling popular uprisings that would two years later contribute to the landslide election of MAS.

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in South America, with wide income gaps and deep tensions along economic and ethnic lines. As in the entire region, colonial structures of segregation and discrimination prevail long after European colonization officially ended. Since the nation was created after independence from Spain in 1825, its history has been turbulent with continuous struggles

over territory, resources and national identity. The country has experienced decades of political instability, and presidents have repeatedly been forced out of office by furious popular uprisings. (For a comprehensive account of Bolivian history, see Klein 2011.)

In 1952, the MNR (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* – Revolutionary Nationalist Movement) took power through a revolution that broke with an established order of political and economic power, and with prevailing definitions of citizenship and national identity. During most of the 1960s and 1970s, a chain of military governments held state power through repressive dictatorships, until the return to civilian rule in 1982. The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by neoliberal regimes and Washington Consensus-style structural adjustment programs that cut public expenditure and generated mass unemployment, resulting in widespread poverty and marginalization (Barragán 2008; Klein 2011). These processes incited a rise of popular movements basing their claims in terms of class, and, increasingly, indigeneity. Such movements became an important political force around the millennium shift, with the Water War in 2000 and the Gas War in 2003 frequently referred to as milestones (Postero 2007; Barragán 2008; Canedo Vásquez 2011).

### *MAS' political project*

Bolivia is currently governed by President Evo Morales, and the MAS (*Movimiento Al Socialismo*). Gaining popularity during the popular uprisings of the early 2000s, MAS won the 2005 elections with a sensational 54 percent of the votes, and took office in 2006. In 2009 they were re-elected for another term in office. MAS is a diverse coalition of labor unions and popular and indigenous organizations that joined forces in the *Pacto de Unidad* (Pact of Unity).<sup>4</sup> The government's political project, referred to as *el proceso de cambio* (the process of change), is characterized by criticism against the imprints of neoliberal regimes and Western capitalism. The overarching objective is to decolonize the country,

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<sup>4</sup> The constellation of the *Pacto de Unidad* has shifted, but since 2006 its core has consisted of five organizations: the Unique Confederation of Rural Laborers of Bolivia (CSUTCB); the National Confederation of Peasant Indigenous Originary Women of Bolivia - Bartolina Sisa; the Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (CSCIB); the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB); and the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ). CIDOB and CONAMAQ later left the pact, and the umbrella of organizations behind MAS has largely dissolved in recent years.

referring to freedom from a postcolonial order (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2006; Howard 2010; Fabricant 2012). Decolonization, as Anders Burman points out, may denote a variety of processes, brought together in the broad ambition toward

revalorisation of what is deemed subaltern and/or denied by colonial power since 1532 [the year of Spanish conquest] and the elimination of the sociopolitical, cultural, epistemological and economic mechanisms of domination that underpinned the colonial project. (Burman 2011:69)

This aim is written into the new constitution, which, after a long negotiation process and fierce resistance from the political opposition, was approved by referendum in 2009. The government has increased state control over natural resource extraction, which was a central demand raised by the popular movements around the turn of the century. It has launched land redistribution reforms (Klein 2011) – although not to a sufficient extent, according to critics (see Mamani Ramirez 2011b). Also, the MAS government has initiated a number of welfare programs, which have contributed to decreased poverty and improved literacy rates (Webber 2013). MAS still has vast popular support, and, although the dissatisfaction with and distrust in the government has increased over the years, the significance of the election of this social movement-based and indigenous-identified regime should not be underestimated. Not least the increasing and highly visible participation of representatives from indigenous and popular movements in decision-making bodies has been of great symbolic and practical importance.

### *Internal opposition*

While the MAS government in its early years had great support from large portions of the population, the government also faced strong opposition. Five years after my first visit in 2003, I went back to La Paz in September 2008 for an internship with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). In the first few months I spent many anxious evenings watching Bolivian television news reports about upheavals in the so-called *Media Luna* (Half Moon), the Eastern lowland departments of Beni, Pando, Tarija and Santa Cruz. In this area, local right-wing political leaders fiercely opposed MAS' politics, and protest organizations attacked government buildings and NGO offices. Morales responded by sending troops to the areas of unrest. He accused the opposition of planning a coup together with the US government under

George W. Bush, and ordered the US ambassador to leave Bolivia.<sup>5</sup> Roads were blocked and international flights were suspended because of the conflict. On television there was talk about civil war, and in the staff meetings at Sida we were urged to move carefully in the city.

There is a long history of tension between the Western highland and valley areas of Bolivia, and the Eastern lowlands. These two areas have divergent histories with different geographies, cultural, ethnic and demographic patterns, and systems of land distribution and organization of labor. Yet, they have always been connected and interdependent through migration, trade, land use, resource extraction and colonization (Barragán 2008; Klein 2011; Fabricant 2012). In the highlands colonial structures of land control were abandoned through agrarian reforms largely driven by politically organized peasant syndicates after the 1952 revolution. In the lowlands, with far less organized popular mobilization, these reforms were weakly enforced and land ownership was increasingly concentrated in large private corporations, with indigenous people drawn into forced labor through systems of credit and debt (Klein 2011; Fabricant 2012). When MAS was elected, the landed elite in the lowlands – Spanish descendants and more recent immigrants from Europe and the United States – who had been among the primary beneficiaries of previous governments’ agendas, saw Morales’ initiatives to land redistribution and empowerment of indigenous groups as a threat (Fabricant & Postero 2013). This resistance to the Morales government was clearly racialized, reflecting persistent racist assumptions about indigenous people as inferior and threatening (Hale 2011). The lowland elite’s fears of losing their privileges eventually declined as the Morales government made agreements with the economic elite ensuring continued land control, and eventually the political unrest ebbed. Yet, the opposition groups in the lowlands “continue to feel alienated from the national political arena and vulnerable to the whims of an Andean-run central government” (Fabricant & Postero 2013:3, see also Perreault & Green 2013). These tensions have also manifested in the political struggles on environment,

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<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, resulted in the Bolivian ambassador being expelled from the US, and President Hugo Chavez forcing the US ambassador out of Venezuela in solidarity with Morales – a scenario that not only inspired cartoonists in national newspapers, but also further chilled the already frosty diplomatic relations between the US and the two left-leaning Latin American countries.

resource extraction and infrastructure projects during the past few years, which I will continue to elaborate on.

## Contests over national identity

The historically specific spatial construction which is currently labeled Bolivia is anything but homogeneous. Traveling through Bolivia will take you from the majestic, glaciated mountains of the Andes and the windy, barren Altiplano highlands to lush, fertile valleys and the Amazon rainforest; from the winding, buzzing streets of La Paz lined with ragged colonial buildings to the wild-westish ranches and deep jungles of the Eastern lowlands. The socio-cultural landscape is as diverse, shifting and difficult to map as the natural. Different parts of Bolivia carry differing experiences of contests over land and resources, entangled with the formation of group identities and political subjectivities.

Although about two-thirds of Bolivia's area consist of lowlands, its population has since ancient times been concentrated in the highlands. Here, human settlements have for thousands of years adapted to the extreme altitude and the cold and dry climate, with agriculture and animal herding as the main livelihood activities. Potatoes and quinoa, among other crops, have been cultivated and llamas, alpacas and vicuñas have been kept as domestic animals, for carrying burdens and for their meat and wool (Klein 2011). While various cultural groups have historically inhabited the Altiplano, from the 12th Century and until the Spanish conquest, the area was dominated by the Aymara and, later on, the Quechua (Inca) empires, organized in complex social structures with strict systems for division of labor and control over land and resources. The Altiplano societies early on initiated a small-scale colonization on lower altitudes, to ensure access to foodstuff that could not be produced in the highlands. The Quechua and the Aymara have a long history of organized resistance to colonial and post-colonial structures (Barragán 2008; Klein 2011).

Flying from the El Alto airport, located on the Altiplano at about 4000 meters above sea level – the highest international airport in the world – down to Trinidad, in the lowland department of Beni, is breathtaking. The regular aircraft seats only sixteen passengers, and has a beige interior design that is distinctly 1970s. During the one-hour flight, the tiny plane daringly navigates between Andean mountain peaks, glides down over a dense rug of green forest and lands on a narrow airstrip one hundred and thirty meters above sea level,

where, after coming from the thin and chilly high plateau air, the passengers are greeted by a wall of hot humidity; a different world.

The vast Amazonian lowlands have been populated since long before colonial times. Lowland indigenous peoples have resisted both attempts at domination by the highlands, and, later, to a large extent, Spanish conquest. While Quechua and Aymara cultures and, subsequently, the Spanish colonial society came to dominate the highlands and valleys, the indigenous groups in the lowlands maintained much of their own languages and cultures as their land was, until the 20th Century, rather inaccessible (Klein 2011). There are around 30 recognized indigenous groups in the Bolivian lowlands. These are much smaller and more diverse than the Quechua and Aymara, and less urbanized (Perreault & Green 2013). While many of these groups based their subsistence mainly on hunting and gathering, others developed intricate systems of agricultural production. Large-scale colonization of the lowlands by *mestizo-criollos*<sup>6</sup> and Quechua and Aymara people from the highlands has taken off quite recently, since the mid-1900s, and with a major push in the 1970s and 1980s (Klein 2011).

### *Who is Bolivian?*

According to the latest census, of 2012, the Bolivian population amounts to slightly over 10 million (INE 2013). In this census, of the Bolivians over fifteen years of age, forty-one percent self-identified as belonging to one of the thirty-six recognized indigenous groups, or as Afro-Bolivian (INE 2013; Villa 2013). By far, the largest indigenous groups, according to census data, are the Quechua and the Aymara, who make up about eighty percent of those that self-identify as indigenous (INE 2013). The 2012 census results caused some stir in the public debate as they showed a substantial decrease in the auto-definition as indigenous, which amounted to sixty-two percent in the previous 2001 census. Various interpretations of this decline have been presented. President Morales

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<sup>6</sup> While *criollo* traditionally refers to people of Spanish descent raised in Latin America, *mestizo* signifies “those of mixed Spanish-Indian ancestry, assimilated to *criollo* culture” (Sanjinés 2004:1). *Mestizo-criollo* is a term often used to denote people of mixed European and indigenous descent, who have dominated Bolivian economy and politics since colonial times. While acknowledging that this category – like all social categories – is ambiguous and incoherent, I employ it in my work as it is well established and recognized in the Bolivian context.



suggested that it may have to do with a growing “colonizing mentality” in the country (Mendoza 2013). Political opponents to MAS argued that the census results demonstrated that the government-incited *proceso de cambio* and the new constitution were based on a faulty assumption of Bolivia being an indigenous state, which needed to be challenged and reversed (Ibid.). The Jesuit priest, anthropologist and public intellectual Xavier Albó attributed the results to the way the survey was designed. Only those who had first replied “yes” when asked whether they considered themselves “*indígena originario campesino*” (originary peasant indigenous) or Afro-Bolivian, were then asked to which indigenous group they belong. The category *indígena originario campesino* was introduced in the 2009 Constitution as carriers of certain legal and territorial rights (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Art 2). Albó suggests that the respondents may have felt alienated or confused by this “conceptual hieroglyph”, or ticked “no” because they considered themselves to be urban and therefore not peasants (Albó 2013, my translation). Albó concludes that “you can be at the same time Aymara, Guaraní, etc. and mestizo” (Ibid., my translation), and thereby points to the ambiguous, intersectional and relational character of social categorizations; they do not exclude each other, even within the same individual. Which category is emphasized depends on time and context. *Mestizo* – signifying mixed Spanish-indigenous descent – was not included as a category in the census, as the government considered it a colonial imposition (Villa 2013). There was some debate before the census on whether or not this category ought to be included. It should be mentioned here that the *mestizo* option has not been included in any Bolivian census since 1900 (Albó 2008).



“No soy Aymara, no soy Quechua, soy mestizo” (I am not Aymara, I am not Quechua, I am *mestizo*). Graffiti painting commenting on the non-inclusion of the category “*mestizo*” in the 2012 census. Photo by the author, La Paz, October 2012

Statistical data on ethnic categories has long been a controversial topic in Bolivia. What the dramatic shift in self-identification as indigenous from 2001 to 2012 primarily indicates is perhaps the fluid and relational nature of subject positions (see also Perreault & Greene 2013). While racial discrimination and unequal resource distribution along postcolonial patterns prevail in Bolivia, ethnicity has been ascribed various meanings across time (Canessa 2006; Postero 2007; Mamani Ramirez 2011a). The categories of *mestizo* and indigenous have shifted throughout history (see Saignes & Bouysse-Cassagne 1992). After the revolution in 1952 in which the MNR (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* – Revolutionary Nationalist Movement) took power through massive popular mobilization, class was brought forward as the main basis for political subjectivity in Bolivia. The MNR had an assimilationist agenda with the objective of incorporating the Quechua and Aymara populations – who had until then not been recognized as citizens or political subjects by the elites in power – into a common national *mestizo* identity, assigning them full citizen

status (Sanjinés 2004; Albó 2008). Similar processes of constructing national subjectivity around the *mestizo* took place all over Latin America in the 20th Century (Canessa 2006). As Susan Paulson points out, this endeavor can be interpreted as either aiming towards the eradication of racism, or towards the eradication of racially marked groups (Paulson 2012). As citizens, the Quechua and Aymara populations were also recognized as part of class structures, instead of *indigenas*, a separate category. This in turn altered the self-images among these groups, with an emphasis on class awareness. In the following period, people in the highlands self-identified and organized primarily as workers or *campesinos* (peasants) rather than in terms of indigeneity, and a class-based analysis of power relations dominated the political agenda (Canessa 2006; Albó 2008).

### *The indigenous as emerging national subject*

The assimilation into a common national *mestizo* identity, however, was not without friction. Undercurrents of indigenous resistance have existed since colonial times (Sanjinés 2004; Albó 2008; Barragán 2008). For several decades, indigeneity has gradually ascended as a key foundation for political subjectivity, and during the last part of the 20th Century indigenous identity became an increasingly important basis for expressing political demands. Rossana Barragán contends that “[t]he paradigm shift from proletariat to indigenous people has taken place as part of a dialogue between political leaders, social movements and NGOs supported by international organizations” (2008:52). This is a fascinating story, which I will now briefly trace.

Burman (forthcoming) explores the history of the shifting meanings of the Spanish term *indígena* (indigenous) in Bolivia. Since colonial times, it has been used as a pejorative label, denoting the marginalized and less civilized other. Until the 1952 revolution, *indígena* was used in a demeaning manner to refer to all people who were not categorized as white or *mestizo*. After the MNR took power, the highland indigenous population was re-classified as *mestizos* or *campesinos* in official rhetoric, but this term was not applied to the native communities in the lowlands, who continued to be categorized as *indigenas*, signifying a “primitive alterity” (Burman, forthcoming; see also Canessa 2007). During the second half of the 20th Century, radical organizations were formed by Aymara and Quechua activists and intellectuals who challenged the *mestizo* as norm for citizenship, and instead promoted Aymara and Quechua culture and experience. Burman argues that this emerging consciousness of a subjectivity

different from the *mestizo* partly resulted from the assimilationist project incited by the MNR: when Aymara and Quechua populations gained status as citizens they also gained the right to education, which enabled young activists to study at universities and to form student organizations, in which experiences of marginalization were analyzed in terms of racism, in addition to class structures. The newly formed organizations emphasized the agency of Quechuas and Aymaras as political subjects, and nurtured an increasing politicization of ethnic identity (Burman, forthcoming).

Under the neoliberal regimes of the last decades of the 1900s and early 2000s government officials, like in other countries in the Latin American region, promoted a discourse of “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Hale 2004; Postero 2007; Fabricant 2012) partly in response to demands from popular movements and as a way to recognize diversity in the population without talking about class or redistribution (Paulson & Calla 2000; Paulson 2002; Postero 2007). In Bolivia, this discourse was embodied, for instance, in the appointment of the Aymara intellectual Víctor Hugo Cárdenas as Vice President to President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, a white businessman with a strong “gringo” accent from a childhood in the US (see Burman, forthcoming). The neoliberal multiculturalist current echoes an international tendency of increased recognition of the indigenous as a legitimate subject position (see Hirtz 2003; Niezen 2003; Dove 2006). This government discourse paradoxically served to further empower oppositional indigenous movements by strengthening indigeneity as a motive for political demands (Paulson 2002; Postero 2007; Burman, forthcoming). In the fervent popular movements around the millennium shift, the intersection of indigeneity and class took a central position in the articulation of claims (Patzí in Zapata Sapiencia 2006; Postero 2007).

The election of Evo Morales for presidency undeniably had a great symbolic force: the appointment of a person identified as indigenous as the country’s highest authority and public face incited pride and a sense of empowerment among many, and was by others seen as a threat to the prevailing *mestizo-criollo* hegemony. Yet, the president himself embodies much of the ambiguity and instability with regard to intersecting identity categories (see Canessa 2006). Morales is commonly depicted as the country’s first indigenous president. Upon his election in 2005, he held an inauguration ceremony at the Pre-Columbian archeological site of Tiwanaku. Aymara rituals were carried out and Morales expressed his respect for *Pachamama*, a central figure in Andean *cosmovisión* (worldview). Burman (forthcoming) notes: “[d]uring his first year in office, Evo

Morales often stated that ‘now we, the indigenous peoples [los pueblos indígenas], are president!’”. However, the president’s identity as indigenous is not straightforward. He was born in 1959 to a family of subsistence farmers in a rural community in the highland department of Oruro. In the 1980s, his family moved to the lowland area of Chapare, joining an increasing flow of highland-lowland migration. Morales started his political career within the ardent union of cocaleros, coca farmers. He has often self-identified as Aymara, and sometimes as Quechua. In other contexts, he has talked about himself as Andean, or indigenous, or emphasized his cocalero background. Critics have questioned his legitimacy as indigenous, pointing out that he comes from a partly *mestizo* family, and that his command of any indigenous language is poor (see Canessa 2007; Fabricant 2012).

The MAS government’s *proceso de cambio* contains an explicit ambition of transforming the state and national identity according to local, indigenous tradition, as opposed to what is indicated to be a neoliberal, Occidental model. In the 2009 constitution, Bolivia was officially proclaimed a “plurinational state” (Klein 2011), a definition that is now formally recognized in international forums. As mentioned above, the same constitution launches a new subject of citizenship, the *indígena originario campesino* (originary peasant indigenous) (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Art 30). Canessa suggests that this somewhat awkward term may serve to include more people than simply *indígena* (indigenous) (Canessa 2012; see also Burman, forthcoming). However, as suggested by Albó (2013) in the quote above, this “conceptual hieroglyph” may arguably also have an alienating effect, which the latest census results may be interpreted to indicate.

While centered on the idea of plurinationality, the MAS government’s project of redefining Bolivian citizenship has been criticized for privileging elements from Andean, and primarily Aymara, indigenous culture. According to critics, MAS’ political project is centered on the highlands and “carried out from an ‘ethno-Aymara indigenous perspective’” (Albro 2010:72). The Andean indigenous groups have a long history of political and intellectual mobilization and of recovering and promoting a cultural narrative and identity, a project that has also received support from non-indigenous academics and advocates (Barragán 2008). This has made the Aymara a very visible group in Bolivia, and there is a tendency to use Aymara as a proxy for indigenous (Albro 2010; Canessa 2012). Robert Albro states that “[t]hrough the period of protest and into the Morales era, the collective Aymara experience has in many cases continued to define

indigenous identity in Bolivia as a whole, often to the detriment of a growing diversity of kinds of indigenous experience” (Albro 2010:77). On a similar note, Andrew Canessa points out that “the Morales government is seeking in the twenty-first century to create a national culture based on indigenous culture. Paradoxically, this national indigenous culture holds a very strong potential of excluding marginal indigenous groups.” (Canessa 2012:30) However, although the government has expressed its political project mainly in terms of Andean tradition, it is not the case that all highland indigenous people are automatically privileged in relation to the state. Rather, the government privileges a certain kind of “hegemonic indigeneity” tied to national identity (Burman, forthcoming), thereby implicitly subsuming interests of indigenous people within the national interests regarding territorial control and autonomy (Burman, forthcoming; Canessa 2012). Such tensions have become evident not least in conflicts around environmental and natural resource issues, which I will explore in later chapters.

### *A language for indigeneity-making?*

As discussed above, while under previous regimes attempts have been made to unite the population under a common *mestizo* identity, “the indigenous’ is now increasingly seen as being iconically national” (Canessa 2006:243). Indigenous – predominantly Andean – traditions and concepts are frequently referred to in the government’s rhetoric, including the principle of *vivir bien* (or *suma qamaña* in Aymara), “to live well”, in harmony with the community and the environment, with respect for *Pachamama*. Given their refusal of specific definitions, *Pachamama* and *vivir bien* have been interpreted and used in a variety of ways in Bolivian politics and public debates during the past few years. As I discussed in Chapter 1, *Pachamama* is often translated as *Madre Tierra* in Spanish and Mother Earth in English, but could instead be conceptualized as a holistic understanding of space and time, in which humans are integrated (see Harris 2000; Rockefeller 2010). *Pachamama* is an ambiguous character; she is associated with both the wild and with the situated, cultivated land, and may bring both fortune and disaster (Harris 1980; Rockefeller 2010). However, in MAS rhetoric, certain features of her are accentuated, which I will come back to. In 2012 the rights of Mother Earth were institutionalized in the Law number 300, the *Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien* (Legal Framework on Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well) (Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional 2012b). *Vivir bien* is promoted as a fundamental principle for MAS’ political project, notably in the 2009

constitution, where it is introduced as one of the key “ethical-moral principles of the plural society” (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE, Art. 8, my translation). In a personal interview, Juan Pablo Ramos, who served as the Minister of Environment during the first years of the MAS regime, emphasized the uniqueness of *vivir bien* as a principle for national politics: “*vivir bien* means the alternative, the option, to take a distinct route, diametrically opposed to the traditional developmentalism, the classic utilitarian visions, capitalism, socialism. From Bolivia, from the Andean zone, we are proposing something alternative” (Ramos 2012, personal interview, my translation). The concept of *vivir bien* is typically juxtaposed against a Western capitalist model labeled *vivir mejor*, or “to live better”. The later is described as individualist striving for constantly improved material wellbeing, without respect for other people or for nature (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia 2006:11; Morales Ayma 2011).

*Vivir bien* and *Pachamama* as key concepts in the articulation of an Andean-indigenous political agenda have been inherited from Aymara and Quechua intellectual movements and radical organizations of the 1990s. Karl Zimmerer argues that they are central to the “indigeneity-making” of these movements and, subsequently, to the MAS government’s “speaking like an indigenous state”, which serves to give the impression of unity and consensus among the plurality of indigenous groups in the country (2013:9). Nicole Fabricant discusses how the Morales government has “used and manipulated particular grassroots cultural strategies” and “symbolic reclamations of space” in its attempts to construct a plurinational and decolonized nation state (Fabricant 2012:7-8). She writes: “[a]s Morales continued to mobilize indigenous history and struggle in his public reclamations of land/territory, national industries, and spaces of governance, that created a more intense partnering of sorts between movements and the state” (Ibid.:8). However, as I will elaborate on below, this unity is fragile and full of tensions. MAS has been accused of coopting indigenous concepts and struggles as a cosmetic legitimization of its rule, without working towards any profound changes, and the government’s credibility as an “indigenous state” is contested, not least in the area of environmental politics.

### *Intersecting subjectivities*

Indigenous subjectivity is thus nowadays widely used by a variety of actors, for self-identification and to make political demands. However, as I have shown, indigeneity is not a coherent and independent category, but under constant

negotiation. It is embedded in intersecting patterns of power, and gains meaning in relation to other subjectivities. Tom Perreault and Barbara Green address how the meaning of indigeneity shifts over time and space, and how the subject position of the indigenous is intertwined with, for instance, class and place:

In Bolivia, while the term ‘indigenous’ (indígena) is used to refer to Amerindian groups, it increasingly expresses subject positions and political claims that are not ethnically confined. This is not to argue that ‘indigenous’ no longer has meaning as a socially constituted subject position. Nor is it to adopt a form of radical constructivism in which individuals can select (and deselect) their ethnicity at will. Rather, it signals the fact that indigeneity in Bolivia is not only an ethnic marker and that it intersects with, and is mutually constitutive of, socioeconomic class and geographic region, serving to articulate diverse subjectivities and political claims. (Perreault & Green 2013:48)

Since colonial times, being indigenous has, in Bolivia and all over Latin America, been synonymous with being poor and excluded from decision-making spaces. Thus, indigeneity is not simply defined on the basis of culture or ethnic markers, but constructed through marginalization in relation to the more privileged *mestizo-criollo*, which is another category founded on economic status as much as on ethnicity (see also Canedo Vásquez 2011). Ethnicity and class are interdependent and negotiable: money, social status and moving in certain urban spaces can have a “whitening” effect on individuals with “indigenous” appearance, and being able to pass as “white” opens for upward mobility in society (de la Cadena 1992; Canessa 2012). Access to such strategies is gendered: women and men face very different possibilities due to, for instance, gender divisions on the labor market. In a beautiful account, Susan Paulson and Pamela Calla (2000) describe how a woman from a rural community enacts and negotiates gender, ethnicity and class in different spaces and social contexts through clothing, language and gestures. In her village she “performs each task in coordination with her relatives and compadres” (Paulson & Calla 2000:115). Vending at the market place in Cochabamba she skillfully enacts her indigeneity in encounters with urban clients, re-establishing their sense of racial and class superiority in relation to her as a strategy for marketing her potatoes. Paulson and Calla hereby illustrate how gender is co-constituted with class, ethnicity and space in the performance of social relations.

While scholars often refer to gender, ethnicity, and class as categories central in social relations in Bolivia (see Widmark 2010; Mamani Ramirez 2011a), gender



has not been as strong an articulatory force in political projects. The governments of the late 1900s treated gender as an area of expertise, strongly influenced by international development agencies that promoted a universalized version of gender equality (Ranta-Owusu 2010). Initiatives were taken up within the Secretariat of Ethnic, Gender and Generational Affairs – a unit created in the mid-1990s under the Ministry of Human Development – for articulation of more locally informed, context-sensitive approaches in which gender and ethnicity were treated as intertwined. However, such initiatives were not embraced by the growing popular and indigenous movements where gender perspectives were often regarded with suspicion and seen as a Western idea imposed from above with the intention of dividing the political opposition (Paulson & Calla 2000; Paulson 2002; Ranta-Owusu 2010).

Under the MAS government, gender equality has not been a central political ambition. However, the representation of indigenous women in decision-making bodies has increased significantly. One of the Andean concepts that have been integrated in MAS political project is *chacha-warmi* (man-woman), a principle in which men and women are regarded as different, but equally important for the harmony of the community, reflecting the harmony of the *pacha*, or the universe (Harris 2000; Estermann 2006; Maclean 2014). In the words of Burman,

[c]hachawarmi is a concept that is enthusiastically endorsed by many Aymara activists in the current ‘process of decolonisation’ and conveys the prevalent Andean notion of gender complementarity: of the married, heterosexual couple as the fundamental social subject in society, and of female and male forces as the opposing but complementary constituents of the cosmos (Burman 2011:66-67).

In contemporary political discourse, *chacha-warmi* is used as a way to talk about gender within a local epistemology; Eija Ranta-Owusu (2010) describes this as a way to reclaim and decolonize the idea of gender equality. Proponents of *chacha-warmi* argue that oppression of women came with colonization, and that in pre-colonial Andean society, men and women had different roles but equal social status (Burman 2011). There are tensions between feminist and women’s sections of Andean indigenous movements, who tend to adhere to the principle of *chacha-warmi*, and urban middle class and radical leftist feminist groups – including the well-known La Paz-based collective *Mujeres Creando* – who advocate for gender equality based on a gender power analysis and criticize the *chacha-warmi* perspective for romanticizing and glossing over gender inequalities

in the Bolivian society (Ranta-Owusu 2010; Burman 2011; Maclean 2014). The concept, according to critics, can also be seen to reproduce gender binaries and ideals of heterosexual married life, which marginalizes, for instance, unmarried women and sexual minorities (Burman 2011; Maclean 2014).

Burman suggests that *chacha-warmi* may be understood not as describing a pre-colonial or current reality, but as a “strategy for change” and part of a decolonizing project. It can be seen as having an emancipatory potential to break with structural inequalities – all depending on in which ways, and for which purposes, the concept is being used (2011:90). However, Kate Maclean (2014) argues that in MAS’ politics, *chacha-warmi* is employed as part of its use of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1990) to promote its political project, an adoption which does not take into account the complexity of the concept, nor its potential of challenging power relations. Criticism has been expressed by both indigenous women’s organizations and urban feminists against the MAS government not taking seriously *chacha-warmi*’s potential for challenge and change.

In the following chapters, I will explore how subjectivities are expressed and constituted in contemporary environmental politics in Bolivia. As I will show, indigeneity holds a central position here, to some extent along with a class perspective. While gender has not been a strong basis for articulation of claims, feminist undercurrents exist in the environmental-political field, something that I will return to.



# Chapter 4 *Vivir bien* or Simply Live Better? Utopias and Tensions in Environmental Meaning-Making under MAS

In contemporary Bolivia, environmental issues are at the core of government politics and popular resistance, and an arena in which subjectivity and national identity are being mobilized, reinforced and challenged. This is undoubtedly the case in many places; however, in Bolivia these processes have played out in new ways during the past few years of MAS rule. Environmental issues have risen on the agenda and become an important arena for political positioning, internally as well as in international forums. In both the government's environmental discourse and discourses of resistance, certain aspects of subjectivity have been promoted and mobilized, entwined with certain knowledges, experiences and norms for relating to the environment. These processes of representation are co-constituted with material aspects, primarily with regard to assumptions about geographical belonging, and the access to and control over territory<sup>7</sup> and natural resources.

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<sup>7</sup> In Bolivian accounts, a distinction is often made between *tierra* (land) and *territorio* (territory). While *tierra* is used to refer to the land or space in a physical sense, *territorio* is more complex, denoting used or inhabited land, which implicitly takes into account "the transformation of 'natural' space to 'occupied' space and thereby transformation by social and cultural structures" (CEDIB 2008:10, my translation; see also Canedo Vásquez 2011). Thus, *territorio*, or territory, is a political category that entails notions of bordering and belonging and grasps processes of change. Work on the conceptualization of territory is done within geography (see e.g. Elden 2010). In this thesis, I use the term "territory" recognizing its cultural and political significance.

In this chapter I explore how environmental politics have been articulated within MAS' *proceso de cambio*, and how a radical environmental positioning invoking indigenous worldviews has collided with an urge towards resource extraction as a means to economic development and national sovereignty. I situate this tension in relation to historical and current struggles over territory and resources. After that, I turn to two issues that have dominated environmental debates in Bolivia during Morales' years in office: MAS' positioning on climate change, and the controversy around a planned highway. Towards the end of the chapter, these issues are placed in the context of global discourses about indigeneity as associated with certain kinds of environmental knowledge.

## Articulating the environment in the *proceso de cambio*

In previous governments of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, environmental problems were primarily dealt with as technical issues (Forno 2012, personal interview). This is, of course, not an apolitical way of dealing with the environment<sup>8</sup>, but it makes environmental issues appear less obviously politicized than has been the case during the past few years. Early on in the MAS government, environmental politics were drawn into the *proceso de cambio*, as part of the formation of a plurinational state, based on what is depicted as an indigenous *cosmovisión* (see Gustafson & Fabricant 2011). Respect for *Pachamama* and the imperative to *vivir bien* ("to live well") have been important elements in this process, as key principles in formulating an alternative to dominant environmental discourses associated with Western neoliberal ideals, referred to as a model of *vivir mejor*, "to live better", striving for constantly augmented material wealth (see Chapter 3). In an interview in the busy *Café Ciudad* in downtown La Paz – a common meeting place for local intellectuals and activists – Juan Pablo Ramos, who was the Minister of Environment during

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<sup>8</sup> Rather, the environmental approach under previous governments was more in line with a dominant global discourse of ecological modernization – green governmentality, in which it is assumed that environmental problems ought to be solved within existing political and economic structures. The environmental approaches of previous Bolivian governments included, for instance, conservation initiatives such as creation of natural reserves, but did not challenge modes of production and distribution.

the first years of the MAS regime, described to me his experiences from this period.

Working as minister was passionate. Very exhausting [laugh]. But very productive because we were in a first period of the *proceso de cambio*. There was correlation in the construction of an alternative model, of an alternative paradigm based on the *vivir bien*. So there was no doubt where we were going. [...] There are various elements which show that we were going onto a different route. The creation of a paradigm alternative to developmentalism, the traditional, classic, extractivist vision. (Ramos 2012, personal interview, my translation)

Ramos referred to the political landscape at that time as a “stage of opportunity” where “it was talked specifically about the environment and its linkages to the cultural, the indigenous” (2012, personal interview, my translation). This discursive shift can be traced back to a number of factors.

Firstly, issues related to the environment, territory and natural resources have been strongly articulated by indigenous and social movements in the past decades, and were advanced by the MAS government as it took office with the ambition of forming a “social movement state” (Gustafson 2009:255), which would advance the agendas brought forward by critical movements in the 1990s and early 2000s (Hosse 2010, personal interview; Pacheco 2012, personal interview; Ramos 2012, personal interview; Fabricant 2013). An international current of attention to environmental issues, evident in the agendas of organizations like the UN, the World Bank and bilateral development cooperation agencies, has also been an important factor not least for discourse formation on climate change (Fabricant 2013, see below). Although MAS strived to frame its environmental principles as a distinct alternative, firmly rooted in local values and traditions, these principles largely resonated with international alternative environmental discourses of environmental justice, eco-socialism and what has been presented as an indigenous environmental perspective (Ramos 2012, personal interview; see also Smith 2007; Dryzek & Stevenson 2013). Another important factor was the influence from certain individuals in key positions, which I will elaborate on in the section on MAS’ climate change positioning, below.

The construction of a Bolivian alternative environmentalism was initially a strong element of MAS’ political project, and is still important in official discourse. However, the green ideals – referred to as *pachamamismo* by political

opponents and critical voices – have come to clash with another powerful principle of resource extraction as a means to de-colonized national sovereignty and development, sometimes termed *extractivismo* (extractivism) or *desarrollismo* (developmentalism). In order to understand these tensions, an elaboration on the conditions of access to land and natural resources in recent history is needed.

## Politics of territory and resources

Since colonial times and until the mid-1950s, land ownership in Bolivia was dominated by *mestizo-criollo* elite families under a feudal system of *haciendas*. Between 1946 and 1952, a crisis in the mining industry led to massive unemployment and augmented demand for agricultural land in the highlands, along with an increased political mobilization of peasants that eventually contributed to the takeover by the MNR (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*) in 1952 (Radhuber 2008; Klein 2011). In 1953, shortly after seizing power, and in response to pressure from the indigenous peasants that were among its support base, the MNR government implemented an agrarian reform in which land was confiscated from *haciendas* and redistributed to the peasants who had worked for them. The land was distributed through a system of *sindicatos*, peasant unions, which were becoming an important political force (CEDIB 2008; Klein 2011).

The land reform enacted under the MNR regime was an effort to shift from the *hacienda* domination, to a system where commercial actors and indigenous farmer communities co-existed (CEDIB 2008). An effect of this reform was an increasing land fragmentation in the Andes, with the *campesino* (peasant) communities having to split their land into smaller and smaller shares as their populations increased. The MNR government feared that impoverishment and starvation among the peasants would lead to popular uprising and guerrilla formations, and sought ways to avoid this scenario. One strategy was to encourage farmers from the highlands to colonize the Eastern lowlands, granting them farming land. This was in line with the populist-nationalist project of the MNR; the state territory of the lowlands was considered empty and unproductive, and a potential site for settlement and economic development. In this process, the voices and interests of the indigenous communities inhabiting the lowlands were ignored (CEDIB 2008; Canedo Vásquez 2011; Paz 2012, personal interview). The strategic colonization of the lowlands, spurred by

distribution of state territory, was continued under subsequent governments with varying political orientations (CEDIB 2008; Klein 2011).

While in the highlands the land redistribution largely meant reallocation of land from *hacendados* – *hacienda* owners – to indigenous *campesino* communities, in the lowlands, the main share of land ended up in private corporations as a result of widespread corruption. Over forty percent of the lowland territory that the state allocated between 1953 and 1993 was handed to private enterprises in the agricultural sector, while small-scale farmers received less than ten percent. This accumulation of land enabled the landed elite to continue exploitation of poor, mainly indigenous, people as workforce (CEDIB 2008; Radhuber 2008). During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century infrastructure was expanded in the lowlands, driven by conscious government strategy and initiatives from a growing lowland elite of *mestizo-criollos* and European settlers. The city of Santa Cruz, which had until then been a small provincial town, experienced a boom in population increase and gained importance as a center for agricultural production and oil extraction, mainly in the hands of large private land-owners and exploiters. The *cruzeños* – inhabitants of Santa Cruz – thereby also became an influential voice in national politics, which had until then been concentrated in the highlands (Klein 2011). Roads were constructed connecting Santa Cruz with Cochabamba and La Paz, enabling easier access to the lowlands and thereby facilitating intensified colonization (Klein 2011; Paz 2012, personal interview). This internal colonization has continued under the MAS government, which I will get back to below.

### *Construction of indigenous territorial rights*

The agrarian reform of 1953 did not result in a more fair and transparent distribution of territory; land ownership, especially in the lowlands, continued to be characterized by corruption, and concentrated to a small economic elite (Fabricant 2012). As a means for coming to terms with the pervasive irregularities in land tenure, and in an effort to respond to demands voiced by both indigenous movements and large-scale land owners, in 1996 the *Ley INRA* (*Ley del Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria*), Law No 1715, was passed under President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (the same President who later resigned during the 2003 Gas War, see Chapter 3). The objectives were to establish a functioning institutional structure for land distribution and to create more efficient markets through enforcement of land titling (Fabricant 2012). As part of the INRA reform, in response to a growing mobilization around territorial



demands by indigenous groups, a new type of territorial tenure was created, the TCO, or *Tierra Comunitaria de Origen*; this concerned autonomous and communally owned indigenous land (Bolivian Government 1996; CEDIB 2008). The TCO standard was created in consistence with the ILO *Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples* from 1989, which Bolivia had ratified in 1991 (Barragán 2008). According to the legal description, communities of indigenous peoples and *campesinos* (peasants) that inhabit TCO territories have exclusive rights to benefit from the resources in the area, which should be managed according to their own forms of economic and cultural organization (CEDIB 2008). The territories cannot be sold, divided, or confiscated. No taxes are paid for the land (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Art. 394; CEDIB 2008).

The land reform established by the *Ley INRA* was not adequately enforced, due to weak institutional capacity and political will. Land titles were allocated without proper regularization, and particularly in the lowlands, large-scale landowners continued to control vast areas (CEDIB 2008; Canedo Vásquez 2011). This was often the result of corrupt land distribution under previous military regimes, which the INRA reform had not adjusted (Klein 2011). In 2006, shortly after gaining office, Evo Morales decided on a new agrarian reform regulation in which the regularization process since 1996 was evaluated. This was given high priority and within a couple of years large amounts of land – state territory and land which had until then been poorly regulated – were subject to regularization. Particularly, the amount of TCO territory increased significantly. Between 2006 and 2009 the Morales administration distributed 31 million hectares to peasant and farmer communities – five times more than what had been distributed under the INRA reform up to 2006 (CEDIB 2008; Klein 2011). However, Karl Zimmerer (2013) points out that the distribution of community land titling has reinforced power relations in the communities, ensuring that control over land has remained in the hands of the most influential community members, to the disadvantage of the less powerful. With the new national constitution enacted in 2009 the administrative category of TCO was replaced by TIOC: *Tierra Indígena Originario Campesino* (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Article 293; Fundación UNIR 2011). This classification has been considered vague. For instance, it is not clearly defined whether or not it includes settler communities (Canedo Vásquez 2011). In 2010, there were 190 recognized TIOCs in Bolivia (Fundación Tierra 2010).

### *Resource nationalism*

Bolivia is rich in renewable and non-renewable natural resources including natural gas, oil, minerals, wood and fertile land, on which the national economy is strongly dependent. Struggles over access to these resources play a central role in Bolivian history (see Klein 2011). The Spanish colonization was principally driven by the quest for minerals and other natural resources. After independence these resources largely remained in the hands of the former colonial elites, and later they have mainly been controlled by foreign private enterprises. Like in many former colonies, great wealth has thus been extracted from Bolivia, without much benefit to the majority of the population (for a captivating and furious account of the plundering of Latin America, see Galeano 2009 (first Spanish edition 1971)). Under the neoliberal governments preceding the MAS era such patterns were strengthened. Popular protests against the neoliberal regimes were spurred by discontent with these conditions, and culminated in the Cochabamba Water War of 2000 and the Gas War in El Alto in 2003, which were landmarks in the process of shifting power dynamics that brought MAS into government (Klein 2011; Radhuber 2012; Fabricant 2013).

Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing (2012) argue that a popular narrative on natural resources has been an important undercurrent in Bolivia's power struggles and political development. This narrative, which Kohl and Farthing refer to as *resource nationalism*, leans on "a deep collective memory of looting and the promise of wealth tied to silver and gold that goes back to the Spanish conquest" (Kohl & Farthing 2012:1; see also Achtenberg 2013). Nationalist and anti-colonialist principles are here combined with calls for national control over and more equal distribution of incomes from natural resources. A related issue concerns the Bolivian dream of access to the ocean. The country lost its former coastal territory to Chile – and thereby ended up being landlocked – during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883). This remains a wound in the national history, with both symbolic and material dimensions; the benefits for trade relations and sovereignty associated with controlling imports and exports through a port are entangled with dreams of national territory by the ocean. Claims to the coast are often voiced in Bolivian political and public discussions and are a recurring theme in diplomatic relations with Chile and Peru, and on March 23 each year the *Día del Mar*, Day of the Ocean, is commemorated in La Paz.

In the narrative of resource nationalism, natural resources are closely tied to national identity and are given an almost mythical status as the path to poverty alleviation, development and sovereignty. Whether or not these aims are actually

achievable through state control over the incomes from natural resources, this framing has a strong mobilizing force, which became evident especially in the Water and Gas Wars (Kohl & Farthing 2012; Radhuber 2012; Zimmerer 2013). Thus, in order to appear as a viable alternative, Evo Morales needed to align his political project with this popular narrative. In the words of Kohl and Farthing,

[a]s social movements have the power to paralyze the nation and bring down governments [...], the success, and perhaps survival, of the Morales administration depends on its abilities to juggle popular imaginaries for greater benefits from extraction with its pro-indigenous and pro-environmental discourses while continuing, and in fact expanding, the dependent extractive economy. (Kohl & Farthing 2012:226)

MAS came into power with an explicit mission of nationalizing natural resources and using the incomes for public welfare and poverty alleviation (Kohl & Farthing 2012; Radhuber 2012). This has to some extent been realized; one of Morales' first measures was to increase state control over hydrocarbon and mineral extraction. While this was not actually an act of nationalization per se, the new policy changed the relations between the government and the extraction companies, ensuring greater tax revenues from the profits (Klein 2011; Kohl & Farthing 2012; Webber 2013). Although the government has promoted a radical environmentalist discourse, it has not seriously questioned resource extraction within the national borders, even though some voices within the government have contested the extractive politics. In government rhetoric, resource extraction is primarily framed as a necessity for realizing the MAS-incited *proceso de cambio*, aiming towards de-colonization and independence, and beneficial for the nation as a whole.

The MAS era has coincided with increased commodity prices for Bolivian export products, resulting in GDP growth. The government has initiated social welfare programs including monthly grants for school children and elderly people and allowances for pregnant women and women with small children (Mendonça Cunha Filho & Santaella Gonçalves 2010; Radhuber 2012; Zimmerer 2013). In government rhetoric, these measures have been accredited to incomes from natural resources (Kohl & Farthing 2012; Paz 2012, personal interview; Webber 2013). These government initiatives gained popular support, but the extractivist policy has also caused concern and generated internal conflicts involving issues of environment, national identity and indigeneity. As

Zimmerer writes, “[i]n Bolivia, as well as other countries in Latin America and elsewhere, recent environmental governance has been situated in shifts of renewed resource extraction, nationalism, indigenous identity, and debates over sustainability” (2013:1). While increased state incomes from natural resource extraction has meant economic room for welfare projects, extraction has environmental and social consequences for people who are affected by negative impacts on the local level (McNeish 2013). In response, environmental movements have sided with communities that are threatened by or suffer from negative impacts – including loss of territory and livelihoods – to protest against the government’s extractivist politics. The environmentalist ideals and the urge for resource extraction – linked to national and foreign economic interests as well as political demands from various actors – are both strongly established in MAS’ political project, but have proven difficult to reconcile. These tensions have grown into a serious crisis of credibility for the MAS regime.

I will now move to two issues that have been at center stage in the field of Bolivian environmental politics during the MAS years, as the government has presented a national environmental position in line with its *proceso de cambio*, but at the same time faced criticism from popular movements and the political opposition.

## MAS’ climate change positioning

Shortly after MAS assumed office, the government’s attempts to position itself as a green, alternative actor and a guardian of the environment, both domestically and in international forums, became evident within climate politics. From being treated as a mainly technical issue, handled by the *Programa Nacional de Cambio Climático* (PNCC), a unit established under Hugo Banzer’s government in 2000, climate change started to climb on the national political agenda. It was subsumed under the wings of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, customarily called the *Cancillería*. After one year in office, in 2007, MAS began to change the Bolivian standpoint in international climate change politics. During the early years of MAS rule, Bolivia assumed a radical position which can be traced to various factors, including a rationale from social movements in previous decades, influence from development cooperation actors and key individuals on important political positions, observable changes in the environment at the local level, and an increased global concern about climate change.

Fabricant (2013) points out that some Bolivian popular movements started to address climate change around the turn of the millennium, as impacts of climate change became more evident – and, I would add, as information about climate change gained wider circulation, enabling the framing of events like floods and erratic rainfalls in such terms. Glacier retreat is one visible impact with severe consequences for access to water, one of the natural resources that the popular movements have historically organized around, notably in the Water War of 2000. The MAS government’s engagement with climate change is thus rooted in the agendas of the movements that swept them into state power. During the interest peak in climate change, Bolivian civil society actors, particularly those of the *Pacto de Unidad* – the coalition of organizations behind MAS – were actively consulted by the government and had influence on the national climate positioning.

Foreign development cooperation agencies were instrumental in promoting the climate issue by channeling funding into climate-related projects (as recommended for instance by the Commission on Climate Change and Development 2009). I got a glimpse of this growing attention to climate change among development actors during my internship with Sida in La Paz in 2008. Together with other staff members, I participated in a capacity-building session on climate change held by a group of Swedish consultants that Sida invited to Bolivia, and was invited to meetings where groups of international donors got together to discuss collaboration around this issue. Fabricant addresses how development actors such as Oxfam International supported discourses of indigenous customs and *cosmovisión* as a means of dealing with climate change (Fabricant 2013; see also Oxfam 2009). This was manifested for instance in the foreign donor funding of the government-incited *Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático*, the Bolivian Platform for Climate Change, with the mission of developing civil society responses to climate change, which then fed into the official national discourse formation on the issue, promoted by the government (Hosse 2010, personal interview; Fabricant 2013).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Plataforma has later left its alliance with the government and continues to work with other civil society organizations.

### *Bringing a national position to international forums*

The first office term of Evo Morales and MAS, from 2006 to 2010, coincided with a period of unprecedented international attention to climate change. Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006, the 4<sup>th</sup> report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to these two actors attracted popular engagement and a media frenzy that peaked in the UN-led COP15 climate negotiations in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. At this and other international climate events, the Bolivian government promoted a position that has been termed green radicalism (Dryzek & Stevenson 2013; Stevenson 2014), and which resonates with what Heather Smith (2007) calls an "indigenous discourse" on climate change. This position may be seen as a radical version of what Bäckstrand & Lövbrand (2007) describe as civic environmentalism (see Chapter 1). Here, the capitalist system is identified as the root cause of climate change and incompatible with sustainable solutions. The Bolivian delegates emphasized that Bolivians, like other people in developing countries, are suffering adverse climate change impacts to which they have contributed very little (see Aguirre and Cooper 2010). Claiming that its contents were too weak and only served Western, capitalist interests, Bolivia was part of the group of countries that refused to sign the Copenhagen Accord, the outcome document of the COP15 climate negotiations. These countries also disapproved of the arguably non-inclusive and undemocratic process in which the document had been produced, by a small number of political leaders behind locked doors. In the end, the Accord was not approved by enough of the participating states and thus could not pass as a formally binding UN document; it was merely "taken note of" by the meeting.

During the COP15, the charismatic Bolivian lead climate negotiator, Angelica Navarro, gave a compelling speech at the alternative gathering KlimaForum, presenting Bolivia's position. She claimed that given their historical and current emissions, rich countries have a mounting climate debt to developing countries that they need to repay, and suggested ways in which this could be done. She emphasized that the Bolivian government was not "begging for aid", but asking developed countries to comply with their responsibilities, as outlined in the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) (KlimaForum, December 10, 2009). In the same speech, Navarro attributed climate change to capitalism, and a "dictatorship of money", in which

“...developed countries have lost their south and their north. They have to come back to have a harmonious life with nature. And we have to, from the south, teach them back to do that. We are bringing capacity building to the north, on how to build a harmonious, and also hearty relationship between human beings and the earth. We are not two, we are just one. [...] But it seems that the developed countries have a better relationship with money, they respect money more than the earth, and they value money more than the earth. The relationship is completely thrown and we have to teach them to do better. So, that is why I'm here. *Jallalla Pachamama!*”<sup>10</sup> (KlimaForum, December 10, 2009)

Here, Navarro clearly invoked cultural and spiritual aspects, alluding to well-recognized associations of indigenous people with respect for the environment – not least by ending her speech with an exclamation in Aymara. She boldly suggested that as a nation built on indigenous worldviews, Bolivia has special environmental knowledge to offer developed countries through “capacity building”; a term often used in international development lingo for transfer of knowledge from northern countries to the global south. Thereby she challenged general assumptions about whose knowledge counts, and whose lifestyle should be considered as a model for sustainability.

Evo Morales gave a press conference at the COP15 on December 20, 2009 voicing Bolivia's position. He emphasized again that capitalism is to blame for climate change and repeated the calls for repayment of climate debts (Morales Ayma 2010). Like Navarro, Morales brought indigenous, predominantly Andean, concepts into his statements, as he associated the capitalist system causing climate change with Western values and lifestyles, depicted as diametrically different to Andean and other indigenous traditions. The president presented an indigenous/Andean “culture of life” as an alternative to the Western, capitalist “culture of death” (Morales Ayma 2010:89), and underlined the importance of living in harmony with *Pachamama*, following the principles of *vivir bien*. Morales further equated the destruction of Mother Earth with colonization and exploitation of indigenous people. “Just as our black and indigenous brothers were treated as slaves and their rights were not recognized in the past century, now our Mother Earth is being treated as if she were a thing without life which has no rights” (Morales Ayma 2010:92). In this statement he

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<sup>10</sup> “Long live Pachamama”, in Aymara.

accentuated the links between people and territory and the connection between environmental protection and indigenous rights. These were central aspects in the Bolivian government's early climate positioning, inspired by local popular movements along with alternative environment, climate change and indigenous rights discourses on the international level (see Smith 2007; Fabricant 2013). The Bolivian negotiating team at the COP15 thus invoked a depiction of Bolivia as a society that stands for an inherently harmonious relationship with nature, grounded in ancient knowledge and a holistic vision of humanity as an inseparable part of Mother Earth – a representation of Bolivia as a nation defined by the ecological indigenous, a figuration that I will explore in more depth in Chapter 6.

### *Speaking for the people?*

The Bolivian delegation actively addressed and sought alliances with activist audiences outside of the official negotiations, and was applauded by international climate justice movements. A central element of the Bolivian government's positioning was an ambition to speak not only for Bolivians but to give voice to “the people” in general, the world's population that is typically not being heard in global climate politics (see Aguirre and Cooper 2010; Stevenson 2014). Rejecting the UN-led international negotiation process, which was deemed exclusive and unfair, the Bolivian government organized an alternative summit, the *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*, which took place near Cochabamba in April 2010. A banner used on the conference homepage illustrates the ambitions of the MAS government to act as defenders of Mother Earth, standing for an alternative vision and steering a global movement for climate justice.



Banner from the homepage of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, 2010.



In this photomontage, Evo Morales is depicted as leading the way for a diverse group of activists holding signs saying “climate justice” and “climate debt”. The rainbow-colored flag just behind Morales is the *whipala*, the emblem of the indigenous peoples in the Andes, which MAS has adopted as a national symbol that now sways next to the official Bolivian tricolor on government buildings in La Paz. In the background is an iconic view of Lake Titicaca, located on the Altiplano, the high plateau, on the border with Peru. Apart from depicting Morales as the heroic forerunner of a global “people’s” mobilization against climate change and reinforcing his status as the leader of the movements that broke with neoliberal regimes and brought MAS into power, this picture may also be read as reinforcing the Andean as representing the plurinational Bolivian nation.

The alternative gathering attracted 35 000 participants from 140 countries (Turner 2010). Seventeen parallel groups worked on different themes, and the outcome of the meeting was a *People’s Agreement*. The document is essentially a collection of the proposals that Bolivia had previously presented in the UN-led negotiations. Among the key messages are major emission reductions in developed countries, repayment of a climate debt to “developing countries and our Mother Earth”, and recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights and knowledges (People’s Agreement of Cochabamba 2010; Turner 2010). The People’s Agreement was brought by the Bolivian delegation to the COP16 in Cancun, in November–December 2010, as a proposal for the negotiations. In Cancun, Bolivia held on to its position and kept promoting itself as standing for an ecological indigenous alternative. However, Bolivia’s proposals and the suggestions presented in the People’s Agreement were ignored in the UN-led process. The Cancun Agreement, which is the official outcome of the negotiations, is very similar to the Copenhagen Accord of the COP15. Bolivia was the only participating country that did not sign this agreement. It should be noted that one reason that some countries that refused to sign the Copenhagen Accord eventually chose to sign the Cancun Agreement – apart from greater satisfaction with how things were handled in Cancun as compared to Copenhagen and a pressure to finally come to an international agreement as the time frame of the existing agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, was running out – may have been economic pressure from developed countries. Developing states were threatened with cuts in climate aid if they did not sign, and promised financial support if they did. For instance, after COP15 the US reportedly cut aid to Bolivia and Ecuador (see The Guardian 2010).

### *Shifting tactics of negotiation*

A key person in the MAS government's positioning on climate change from 2008 to 2010 was Pablo Solón – Bolivia's ambassador to the UN, head of the *Cancillería* and the country's lead negotiator in Cancun. During my fieldwork in La Paz in 2010, his name kept coming up in interviews with activists, government officials and NGO staff, who pointed him out as “the man” behind MAS' position. As the lead negotiator for Bolivia he also received international attention for the country's radical opposition to the Cancun Agreement (see e.g. *The Economist* 2010). Solón was criticized, also by people who had previously expressed support for Bolivia's position, for “isolating” the country. His tactics were deemed unwise and ignorant of the negotiation process (see e.g. Zemans 2010). Solón himself explained his strategy to me in the following way:

We, I said that we should make the proposals even though the possibility that they will get agreed on is very small. Why? Because this time we were talking about a crucial theme. [...] I think that it is much better to have a clear position, to stay alone on an issue that is so crucial to humanity, than climb onto the wagon and accept, in the end, what the Northern countries have prepared. (Solón 2012, personal interview, my translation)

This position was repeated by a staff member at the *Cancillería*, who argued that it is more important for the Bolivian government to stick to its principles than to be supported by others.

“It has been hard, but we don't think that we have been wrong. You have to separate: one thing is the support from other countries to the politics, if you are accompanied or not, and the other thing is if the position is wrong. [...] We don't think that Cancún has meant any advance for us. Regarding the national position, we don't think it is a mistake not having signed Cancún. Being alone is a cost that each country has to evaluate with the interests and the position that they have.” (Personal interview 2012, my translation.)

Solón subsequently left the posts as UN ambassador and lead climate change negotiator, and became a fierce critic of what he and many others perceive as a shift in the government's political project, with increasing incoherencies, especially in relation to the TIPNIS conflict, discussed below. (For instance Solón's criticism was expressed in an open letter to Evo Morales, see *Climate Connections* 2011). The position as lead climate negotiator was taken over by René Orellana, whose strategy has been to ally more with other actors, and

develop alternative instruments to those agreed on in the international negotiations (Pacheco 2012, personal interview; personal interviews with staff members of the *Cancillería*, 2012). In particular, Bolivia has allied with the G77, a coalition of developing countries articulating common interests within the UN.<sup>11</sup> At the subsequent COPs, after 2010, Bolivia has maintained a critical position, but kept a lower profile and attracted less attention than in the two previous negotiations. This may have to do with a fading international interest in climate politics, but is also related to conflicts of interest within the government, deriving from difficulties in unifying the various demands of MAS' supporters, and a turn towards a different political path of increasing *desarrollismo*.

Critical voices both within Bolivia and internationally have intensified in the past few years, questioning Bolivia's position. At the alternative conference in Cochabamba, disappointment was voiced by national indigenous and environmentalist organizations. The conference focused on international issues and strategies, while groups that wanted to address local issues and conflicts were not allowed into the official event site. Instead they formed an alternative working group, Working Group 18, on "Collective rights and rights of the Mother Earth", in which discussions on "contradictions between the external discourse on capitalism of the conference and the ongoing domestic mega-projects and extractive industries contributing to social injustice and climate change within Bolivia and Latin America" were raised (Agi & Ben, in Turner 2010:64; Mamani Ramirez 2011b). The MAS government has had difficulties in maintaining their ideals of state-controlled resource extraction, environmental protection and recognition of indigenous rights, which were initially reconciled in the political agenda aiming towards de-colonization, but which have increasingly been seen as incompatible (see Kohl & Farthing 2012; Morales 2012).

The dissatisfaction voiced at the Cochabamba conference marked the beginning of a more generalized criticism against what was regarded as a double discourse in MAS' politics, as the government was accused of not applying its radical green approach at home. By this time a broad popular movement for environmental issues started to mobilize, especially focused on the struggle over

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<sup>11</sup> During 2014, Bolivia holds the chair of the G77, which rotates on a yearly basis.

the national park and indigenous territory TIPNIS (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Secure*), a conflict into which much of the environmental debate since 2010 has been channeled.

## The TIPNIS conflict

In 2009, the Bolivian government signed a contract with the Brazilian construction company OAS to build a highway that would link Villa Tunari in the department of Cochabamba with San Ignacio de Moxos in the department of Beni (Mokrani & Uriona 2012). The highway is part of a larger plan for connecting the Atlantic coast with the Pacific by a road traversing Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and Peru (SERNAP 2011<sup>12</sup>), prepared under the IIRSA, Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America. IIRSA was established in 2000 with the aim of “promoting the development of transport, energy and communications infrastructure under a regional perspective” (IIRSA webpage). The Bolivian part of the highway consists of three sections, together amounting to 306 kilometers. The second, middle section is planned to cross TIPNIS, *Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure*, a national park and indigenous territory located on the border between the departments of Cochabamba and Beni.

TIPNIS covers an area of more than 12 000 km<sup>2</sup> and is inhabited by the lowland indigenous groups Yuracare, T’siman and Moxeño-trinitario which amount to a population of about 12 000 people divided into sixty-four communities. These communities co-administrate the area together with the Bolivian state, through the government agency for protected areas, SERNAP (*Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas*) (Fundación Tierra 2012). TIPNIS was the first area under this model of environmental governance in Bolivia (Zimmerer 2013). It is legally classified as a TIOC – *Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino* (Indigenous Originary Peasant Territory) – a form of

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<sup>12</sup> The environmental evaluation for sustainable development of TIPNIS, which I refer to here and later, was done by a group of consultants for the government agency SERNAP (Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas). The evaluation is critical to the highway construction. For political reasons, it was never released. Although not officially recognized, the report is widely distributed.

communitarian land tenure for indigenous communities recognized in the constitution (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Article 293). TIPNIS is recognized as a hotspot of biodiversity (Fundación Tierra 2012). It is feared that if this natural reserve is not respected, exploitation of other protected areas will follow. The TIPNIS issue has therefore become emblematic in recent environmental debates in Bolivia, and a massive resistance movement of environmental, human rights and indigenous activists have joined forces to protest the highway plans.

Several state and private interests – including economic, geopolitical and territorial – are joined in the highway project. The road would link lowland producers of agricultural export products such as soy and biofuels to Bolivian and foreign markets, serving the interests of Bolivian and Brazilian commercial actors. It would open up for easier access to the area, facilitating expansion of the agricultural frontier and exploitation of natural resources such as wood, oil and gas in the protected area (Paz 2012, personal interview; Prada 2012). Furthermore, it would connect La Paz and Cochabamba with the city of Trinidad without having to pass through Santa Cruz, as is the case today. Not only would this be a considerable shortcut compared to the existing route – it would also circumvent Santa Cruz and thereby the influence of the lowland elite, which has opposed the MAS government (Espinoza 2011; Kohl & Farthing, personal interview 2012).

Although plans for advancing production and infrastructure development in the lowlands were already in place during Spanish colonization, the area was long regarded as too remote and inaccessible for any larger-scale exploitation to be profitable (Paz 2012, personal interview). During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, more intense expansion into the lowlands took off, as a result of economic policy, demographic development and changed politics of land and natural resources. Large-scale farmers and cattle breeders – *mestizo-criollos* and immigrants from Europe and the United States – established themselves in the area, and commercial logging increased (Paz 2012, personal interview).

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, the area has experienced intensive immigration of Aymara and Quechua settlers from the highlands, fleeing unemployment and land scarcity. As an effect of the 1979 oil crisis, declining profits from agricultural and mineral exports and mismanagement of the state economy under the military dictatorships of the 1970s, Bolivia faced economic disaster and hyperinflation in the early 1980s. In 1985, President Victor Paz Estenssoro responded to the crisis with neoliberal economic treatment in the form of

structural adjustment programs, which included severe cuts in government expenses and public service, and dismantling of state agencies in the mining sector. While halting the crisis in the state economy, these measures led to increased social misery, especially in the mining centers of Oruro and Potosí, where unemployment rates skyrocketed (Klein 2011). Upon losing their source of income, a large share of the miner families migrated to the lowland region of Chapare, which was by then accessible by road, in search of alternative livelihoods (Klein 2011).

The highland-lowland migration has to a large extent been – and still is – encouraged by the state as part of a conscious nationalist strategy to colonize the lowlands in order to extend government control and avoid popular uprisings among the well-organized highland farmer and mine-worker syndicates (Fabricant 2012; Paz 2012, personal interview). It is also part of the resource nationalist agenda, in which natural resource exploitation is considered as a means for economic development that will be of common good to the citizens and will increase national sovereignty; thus, exploitation of the fertile and resource-rich lowlands is framed as necessary and advantageous for the state.

### *The territoriality of coca*

Migration into the lowlands in the late 1900s was a difficult and demanding endeavor for the highlanders, who were not used to the climate and environment (Fabricant 2012; Leon 2012, personal interview). Given the remoteness, there was limited access to export markets for agricultural products. Many migrants ended up as *cocaleros* in the rapidly expanding coca cultivation that was becoming an important parallel, and illegal, economy (Klein 2011; Kohl & Farthing 2012). Coca is suitable for cultivation in the lowland areas and gives several yields each year. Moreover, the leaves are dried after harvest and thus do not need to be immediately brought to the consumers, as is the case with fruit or other fresh products. Coca production is thereby less sensitive and less dependent on rapid access to markets. As mentioned above, President Morales has a background as a coca farmer. He started his political career within the *cocalero* syndicates, of which he is still the leader – a choice that has generated much concern and which remains a matter of public debate. The *cocaleros* constitute an important support base for MAS, and thus have significant political influence (Farthing & Kohl 2012).

Coca is a crop native to Bolivia, and dried coca leaves were chewed as a stimulant among Andean indigenous nobilities long before the Spanish

colonization. After the European conquest its use was spread to wider groups, and the demand increased as the Spanish realized the utility of coca, which eases hunger and tiredness, to keep the indigenous labor force carrying out heavy work in the high-altitude silver mines (Klein 2011). The use of coca is widespread in Bolivia and has great cultural and economic significance. Chewing coca leaves is still essential in the mines and for other workers carrying out demanding physical labor, and is a common habit especially in the highlands. It has important social functions similar to drinking coffee or tea in other parts of the world (see Spedding 1997). Coca is used for a variety of medical purposes. Upon arriving in La Paz I was often offered tea brewed from the leaves as a remedy for altitude sickness. The leaves are also used in religious rituals and shared during meetings to create a spirit of camaraderie. The coca leaf has become a symbol of Bolivian culture, used as an emblem on souvenirs offered to tourists on the *Sagarnaga* market street in La Paz. However, the coca production that expanded in the Bolivian lowlands in the 1980s is not primarily intended for domestic consumption, but to supply international drug networks. Coca is needed for producing cocaine, and coca growers in the Amazon are the lowest and least paid link in the chain of narcotraffic (Klein 2011; Farthing & Kohl 2012; Paz 2012, personal interview).

In the early 1980s, the United States launched a new strategy for tackling the spreading drug abuse – the *War on Drugs* (see Gamarra 1997). This strategy included efforts directed towards the coca-producing countries in South America, where compliance by the governments was attained under the threat of cutting development funds. Coca farmers in Bolivia became the target of US military operations, and, under the flag of development aid, programs involving economic compensation to farmers who shifted to other crops were initiated (Schclarek Mulinari 2011; Farthing & Kohl 2012). The compensation programs had limited effects, and towards the end of the 1990s the battle against coca had become increasingly violent. Under President Hugo Banzer, the conflict was fully militarized. Chapare was placed under siege, and large areas of coca plantations were destroyed. This attack was met with fierce resistance by the increasingly well-organized unions of coca producers, and eventually the government had to withdraw. The *cocalero* resistance gained great popular support, and became an important symbol for the struggle against neo-colonial, US-controlled forces (Schclarek Mulinari 2011; Farthing & Kohl 2012). In 2004, President Carlos Mesa permitted coca cultivation within defined limits, subject to regulation and control (Farthing & Kohl 2012). When MAS took office in 2006, Morales quickly introduced a new policy for coca production; a

participatory program based on social control and managed through the *cocalero* organizations. Bolivia is the world's third largest producer of coca leaves (Farthing & Kohl 2012), and the export of coca remains a major source of income for the country, in parallel with the formal economy.

The internal colonization has incited territorial conflicts between settlers and lowland communities (Klein 2011, Kohl & Farthing 2012). Settling in TIPNIS itself is officially illegal, but the government has not done much to prevent it (see Canessa 2012).

### *Mobilizations for and against the highway*

The highway plans are surrounded by controversy. The former Minister of Environment, Juan Pablo Ramos, chose to leave his post rather than being responsible for signing the contract with the construction company, and fierce resistance has been mobilized against the project. In August 2011, the *VIII Gran Marcha Indígena por la Defensa del TIPNIS, los Territorios, la Vida y la Dignidad y los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas* (the 8th Indigenous March for the Defense of TIPNIS, Territory, Life and Dignity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>13</sup>) started from Trinidad to La Paz, a distance of 602 kilometers (Fundación Tierra 2012). Among the protesters were indigenous groups from the lowlands and the highlands, along with urban environmental and human rights activists. Notably, many marchers waved the whipala, the rainbow-colored flag that the MAS government has adopted as an emblem for the plurinational republic (see above), thus mobilizing the same symbol but for a project that challenges government politics. A list of sixteen demands was promoted by the march, addressing indigenous peoples' rights to territory, autonomy and social services, and requesting that laws and regulations on environment and indigenous rights be enforced. However, most attention was directed towards the road project in TIPNIS, which the marchers condemned. The march was organized by Subcentral TIPNIS, one of the three representative organizations in the

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<sup>13</sup> Counting from the first Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity (from Trinidad, Beni to La Paz) held in 1990, which is often referred to as a starting point for more organized lowland indigenous resistance.



protected area<sup>14</sup> along with CIDOB, the main organization for lowland indigenous peoples. It was supported by CONAMAQ – the umbrella organizations of the highland indigenous peoples, and a range of other organizations (Mokrani & Uriona 2012). CONAMAQ and CIDOB were among the movements that brought MAS into power in the early 2000s, and part of the *Pacto de Unidad*, the alliance of a number of social, indigenous and workers' movements that was a key support base for the Evo Morales government, but both organizations subsequently left this union. Since then, MAS has attempted to take over CIDOB and CONAMAQ. This has resulted in the groups dividing into factions: a CIDOB and a CONAMAQ that work in line with the government, and the *CIDOB Orgánica* and *CONAMAQ Orgánica*, which oppose it (Ríbera Arismendi 2013; Achtenberg 2014; Página Siete 2014).

On September 25, 2011 the marchers were confronted by police forces in the village of Chaparina, Beni, and violence against marchers was reported (see Fundación UNIR 2011; Morales 2012; McNeish 2013). This incident further raised public support for the march, and led to one of the most severe crises for the MAS government during its term in office (see Zimmerer 2013). More people joined the march as it approached La Paz, and when it reached the capital on October 19 it had grown from a few hundred to around 2000 participants and was greeted by thousands of supporters. The issue also gained a fair amount of attention in international media. Faced by this critical mass, the Morales government after some reluctance agreed to negotiate with the protest leaders. The negotiations resulted in the legal act 180, or *La Ley Corta*, which was passed on October 24, 2011 (Kenner 2012; Mokrani & Uriona 2012). The law declares TIPNIS “sociocultural and natural patrimony, zone of ecological preservation [...] and habitat of the indigenous peoples Chimán, Yuracaré and Mojeño-trinitario whose protection and conservation are primordial interests of the Plurinational State of Bolivia” (Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional 2011, Article 1.1, my translation). References are made to the constitution and its legal protection of TIPNIS as national park and indigenous territory, and it is stated that settlements by people not belonging to the three local indigenous groups are illegal and may be subject to forced displacement (Ibid.). One formulation in

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<sup>14</sup> Today, three major representative institutions exist in TIPNIS: the Subcentral TIPNIS, the Subcentral Sécure and the CONISUR. These organize different groups of TIPNIS inhabitants, including both lowland and settler communities.

the law has generated confusion and concern. Article 1.3 declares TIPNIS a *zona intangible* – an inviolable zone. No specification is made of what this implies in practice (Fundación Tierra 2011; Mokrani & Uriona 2012). On one hand, it may prohibit intervention in TIPNIS by outside actors such as oil and wood enterprises and settlers. On the other hand, with a stricter interpretation, it may also restrict the lowland communities’ rights to use the territory for hunting, gathering, cultivation and other practices that they depend on for survival. The term *intangible* has been subject to continuous debate, especially as it was also applied in the subsequent consultation (more on this below).

A few months later, another march, in favor of the road and of permitting enterprises in TIPNIS, was arranged by CONISUR (Indigenous Council of the South) – an organization of coca growers and communities along the route of the planned highway. This march of about 4000 people arrived in La Paz on January 30, 2012 and its leaders were invited to negotiate with the government (Mendoza Alvarez 2012). The outcome of this meeting was the legal act 222, *Ley de consulta a los pueblos indígenas del Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure –TIPNIS* (Law on consultation of the indigenous peoples of TIPNIS), passed on February 10. With this law, it was decided that a consultation was to be organized, in which the inhabitants were to be asked whether or not they were in support of the proposed highway (Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional 2012a).

The Bolivian Constitution states that *indígena originario campesino* groups have the right to prior consultation regarding “exploitation of non-renewable natural resources in the territories in which they live” (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Chapter 4, Article 15, my translation). This is in line with the ILO Convention no 169, which Bolivia signed in 1991, and which proclaims

that indigenous and tribal peoples are consulted on issues that affect them. It also requires that these peoples are able to engage in free, prior and informed participation in policy and development processes that affect them. (ILO 1989)

A number of controversies arose in relation to the consultation, which was eventually organized by the government during the fall of 2012. The consultation did not take place prior to the decision to build the road, but after the contract had already been signed. Moreover, it was unclear whether the consultation was in fact binding or simply advisory (Paz 2012). The formulation of the questionnaire was also debated, as it posed the question of whether

TIPNIS was to be considered *intangible*; thus, for the consulted communities, rejecting the highway would mean giving up their rights to use the area for farming, hunting and gathering (Mokrani & Uriona 2012). It has further been reported that government officials have handed out gifts in the form of, for instance, boat engines and promises of development projects as an attempt to influence the opinion in communities within TIPNIS (FIDH 2013).



”Evo tu consulta insulta” (Evo, your consultation insults). Graffiti message from the feminist network *Mujeres Creando*, La Paz, October 2012. Photo by the author.

After the consultation was finalized, the government stated that 80% of the consulted communities approved the construction of the highway. This result was questioned by various critics including a commission, representing the Catholic Church, the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in Bolivia and the Inter-American Federation of Human Rights, which had observed the process. These organizations reported that the consultation had not been carried out in accordance with the ILO Convention and the Bolivian Constitution (FIDH 2013; see also Ribera Arismendi 2013).

Meanwhile, the resistance continued. Another protest march, the ninth indigenous march since the first one in 1990, began in Trinidad in April 2012. It showed a less united movement and failed to mobilize as much popular support as the previous march had done. The government has consciously tried to divide and discredit the protest groups, accusing them of being bought by the right-wing opposition and by foreign, particularly United States, interests.<sup>15</sup> The conflict is far from being resolved; it will most probably continue for some time after the present study is finished.

### *Wider implications of the TIPNIS conflict*

The TIPNIS issue has dominated environmental debates in Bolivia during the years of my investigation, and has gained meanings and implications far beyond the area itself. It has taken on great symbolic significance and come to channel much of the discontent with the MAS government (Laing 2012). Many argue that the TIPNIS conflict has been an important defining moment in which a shift within the government's political project became obvious; when the parts of MAS advocating for resource extraction and infrastructural development gained dominance, signaling a break with the environmentalist currents in favor of a *desarrollista* approach (McNeish 2013). Bolivian critics describe it as evidence of the government maintaining a double discourse.

Elizabeth Peredo Beltrán, head of the influential Fundación Solón (to which the ex-lead climate negotiator and UN ambassador Pablo Solón has personal and professional ties), pointed out the year 2010 as marking a shift in Bolivian environmental debates, a “moment of inflection”, in which “a kind of schizophrenia was established between a very radical rhetoric and a *desarrollista* practice, with little reflection or conscience.” (Personal interview 2012, my translation.) Pablo Solón gave a similar interpretation of a political shift towards a more developmentalist-oriented approach:

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<sup>15</sup> The fear of attempts to political control by the US has been recurring throughout MAS' term in office. Given the history of well-known US interventions in the Latin American region, for instance its support of the military coup against the Salvador Allende government in Chile in 1973, and the US War on Drugs that affected Bolivia in the 1990s, this is not totally out of the blue.

I think that in the Bolivian phenomenon there is a change that has been going on for a year, a year and a half, more or less. That this vision of *vivir bien*, of harmony with nature, of the rights of Mother Earth, had some weight in the government. And in this last period a vision has been applied which is more *desarrollista*, right? [...] And obviously, this *desarrollista* vision, when implemented, collides with the other vision. And what it seeks is to cancel it, dilute it, constrain it. This is what is going on. And its greatest peak has been the TIPNIS conflict. Because there the contradictions flourish in a very tangible form. [...] The national position is redesigning, redefining the international position. Because, obviously, a government cannot live with a contradiction of this kind between what it says on the international level and what it does on the national level. In some way it needs to resolve the contradiction. (Solón 2012, personal interview, my translation)

Juan Pablo Ramos, the ex-Minister of Environment, distinguished between two stages in the MAS-incited *proceso de cambio*; first a “stage of opportunity”, in which an alternative paradigm was articulated, and then a “stage of contradictions”, marked by extractivist visions and classic development ideals. TIPNIS, he argued, is the most visible expression of these contradictions (Ramos 2012, personal interview, my translation). Another interlocutor, who is involved in an urban environmentalist movement, suggested that with TIPNIS a paradigmatic shift became visible and “the government’s politics were stripped naked” (personal interview 2012, my translation).

Among critics of the MAS government, the TIPNIS conflict is thus regarded as a manifestation of a political shift, towards increased *desarrollismo*. Solón and Ramos have both previously occupied key positions within the government, and chosen to resign because of this change of direction. People who were affiliated with the government when I interviewed them in 2012 expressed the issue differently. Diego Pacheco, who has been part of Bolivia’s climate negotiation team under the leadership of René Orellana, argued that along with the preoccupation for Mother Earth, the government also needs to handle issues of development and poverty alleviation; it is a matter of finding equilibrium between these two challenges. In his words, “[b]efore it was only about Mother Earth, now it isn’t anymore [...] those who only think about development need to think more about Mother Earth, and the other way round” (Pacheco 2012, personal interview, my translation). A staff member of the *Cancillería* (the Ministry of Foreign Relations) pointed out that with MAS’ ambition of creating

a different kind of state, it is inevitable that divergences within the government arise. When I asked for her opinion on the TIPNIS conflict, she responded:

We consider...well, the TIPNIS issue is complicated and delicate, but it is not a theme that we, as a plurinational state, with such an interesting position that we have on balance with nature, that should be the motive for silencing us. [...] Bolivia is not going to shut up due to an internal problem, right? We think that we have a much bigger responsibility, and I don't think any of the countries... If we are going for who is morally and ethically perfect, and who has an absolutely clean face, to be able to promote a more sustainable development in balance with Mother Earth and with poor people and societies. Nobody is completely without stains. (Personal interview 2012, my translation)

These contrasting voices illustrate the tensions that have unfolded in the field of environmental politics – closely tied to issues of territory and natural resource extraction – under the MAS rule. Canessa (2012:23) describes the contradiction in Bolivian politics as follows:

- (1) The Morales Government makes an explicit commitment to alternative models of development, whereby 'living well' is prioritized over economic growth.
- (2) The Morales Government is committed to a program of economic growth based on the exploitation of natural resources such as oil, gas and lithium and the expansion of coca.

Opinions diverge greatly regarding which route the government ought to take in order to comply with its mission to build a politics on the principles of *vivir bien* and care for *Pachamama*. As Pacheco and the *Cancillería* staff member quoted above suggest, this mission is juxtaposed with an imperative to economic development and public welfare, to be financed by resource extraction and infrastructural expansion, which is also strongly articulated within MAS. Resource extraction needs to be understood in a globalized, postcolonial context of market mechanisms and terms of trade. Bolivia is heavily dependent on exporting natural resources, and is in a certain, marginalized position in relation to more influential, industrialized countries. It should furthermore be noted that very few countries live up to their environmental commitments. Perhaps it cannot be expected of a small country like Bolivia that it should put aside the urge for economic growth. However, initiatives for infrastructural development and resource extraction have different consequences for different parts of the

population, something that the government rhetoric tends to obscure. Furthermore, MAS has made commitments, not least in the 2009 constitution, for which it, as a democratically elected government, ought to be held accountable. I will return to these issues in the following chapters.

## Divergent mobilizations of indigeneity

The recent political development in Bolivia needs to be understood within wider discursive settings. The emphasis on indigeneity among social movements and in MAS' political project echoes a global discourse in which indigenous identity is assigned meaning and legitimacy. The elevation of a particular kind of indigeneity as defining the nation takes place on a symbolic level, which – as I have shown above and will continue to explore – is closely intertwined with actions that have consequences for material conditions. I will now turn to a reflection upon the construction and implications of the indigenous as a recognizable subject in Bolivian politics during the MAS era.

### *Global recognition of indigenous subjectivity*

Frank Hirtz suggests that the category of the indigenous is made possible within modernity; the indigenous is a relational identity that emerges as the “other” only in contrast with “modern” identities (Hirtz 2003). It may even be a category that is needed in contemporary society, to represent “other” modes of thinking and ways of being. Since the 1980s, the indigenous has come forward as an increasingly recognized category, and indigeneity has gained international legitimacy as a subject position from which to make demands for legal and territorial rights (Niezen 2003). As Michael Dove points out, local movements that would previously have been articulated in terms of other aspects, such as class, ethnicity or religion, have in many cases been reframed as indigenous – by the participants as well as from the outside (Dove 2006). An often-mentioned example is the Zapatista movement in Mexico. After initially framing their claims in terms of class, as the struggle of the country's poor, from 1995 onward, the Zapatistas have emphasized their indigenous roots, which has generated wide publicity and support (Bob 2005). Definition and inclusion of the indigenous category in the UN framework, along with the attention given to indigenous subjectivity and rights by other international development actors, has both reflected and augmented this global trend (Hirtz 2003; Niezen 2003; Dove

2006; Postero 2007). The years of 1995 to 2004 were declared the decade of the indigenous people by the UN.

The political project articulated by Evo Morales and MAS resonates with this recent global discourse on indigeneity. The indigenous position has gained a legitimizing force especially when it comes to environmental claims and concerns, where the indigenous has come to signify special knowledge about and connections with nature (Tsing 1999; Dove 2006). MAS' positioning as an indigenous alternative in international climate change forums can be read in light of what Heather Smith (2007) recognizes as an "indigenous discourse", challenging dominant frameworks in climate change politics based on invocations of indigeneity. Smith has analyzed a number of declarations emerging from assemblies such as the International Indigenous People's Forum on Climate Change and the Indigenous People's Caucus in the UNFCCC process (which participates in the climate negotiations without any decision-making power), and identified some recurring themes. The indigenous discourse questions the construction of climate change as a global issue with global solutions, facilitated by Western scientific knowledge. Instead, climate change is seen as caused by the existing economic order that builds on detachment from and commodification of nature.

In the documents that Smith has studied, differential and unequal impacts of climate change are pointed out, and indigenous peoples and their ways of life are identified as especially vulnerable. Criticism is often directed towards a "Western" lifestyle, which is seen to represent unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and racist, colonialist structures aimed at controlling indigenous peoples and their territories. An indigenous mode of relating to nature is promoted, emphasizing attachment to nature rather than dominance over it. This is often framed in terms of traditional knowledge and spirituality. Indigenous knowledge is presented as central for tackling environmental problems. The reference to nature as "Mother Earth" continues to crop up in these documents (Smith 2007). For instance, in the 2009 Anchorage Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change, it is stated that

[t]hrough our knowledge, spirituality, sciences, practices, experiences and relationships with our traditional lands, territories, waters, air, forests, oceans, sea ice, other natural resources and all life, Indigenous Peoples have a vital role in defending and healing Mother Earth. (Anchorage Declaration 2009)



MAS' positioning on climate change takes place in dialogue with this globalized indigenous climate change discourse. Thereby, it addresses several scales, providing statements that resonate with local movements as well as with universal articulations of indigeneity. Also popular mobilizations against the government's politics have been articulated in dialogue with international discourses on indigeneity. I will come back to this in subsequent chapters. However, I do want to emphasize that placing Bolivian actors' claims within a discursive context in which indigeneity is privileged does not, in my work, imply an aim to discredit these claims. Indigeneity is one of multiple intersecting subject positions that may be accentuated for political purposes. As subjects situated in shifting processes of power, all of us need to mobilize the positions that are available to us. The movements depicted as indigenous are actors in contemporary society, acting within the discursive spaces that make particular articulations make sense in particular moments. Bolivian actors' mobilizations of indigeneity have been incited by earlier popular movements, geopolitical interests, development agencies, international networks and academic writing, all of which have melted into each other. My work is driven by what I regard as a need to analyze the ways in which indigeneity is defined, which voices and articulations pass as indigenous in particular contexts, and which intersectional relations of power are manifested or obscured in these processes.

### *Access to indigeneity in an indigenous state*

Indigeneity is generally associated with a marginal position in relation to state power (Canessa 2012). In its definition of who is to be regarded as indigenous, the ILO *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169*, from 1989, emphasizes descent, tradition and geographic belonging recognized as distinct from – and, notably, less advanced than – the rest of the nation:

(a) members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries whose social and economic conditions are at a less advanced stage than the stage reached by the other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;

(b) members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries which are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation and which, irrespective of their

legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than with the institutions of the nation to which they belong.

(ILO 1989, Article 1)

Interestingly, the Convention defines indigenous people as living more in accordance with norms that were formed in the past, “at the time of conquest or colonisation”, than with “the institutions of the nation to which they belong”, and that are, then, supposedly more “modern”. These phrasings reflect widespread assumptions about “the indigenous” as a stable category embodying a certain authenticity by maintaining a “pure”, pre-colonial culture. Such assumptions are a key aspect in the articulation of contemporary Bolivian environmental debates, and embodied in the ecological indigenous, a figuration which I will explore further in the coming chapters.

In Bolivia under Evo Morales, the indigenous is no longer defined as “other” in relation to the state, but at the center of the state project. When the state proclaims itself as indigenous, being indigenous per se can no longer be depicted as a marginalized position. The institutionalization of the indigenous as the model national subject raises questions regarding how indigeneity is to be defined and what claims to this identity are to be privileged in a state where “political legitimacy rests on being indigenous” (Canessa 2012:17). As Canessa writes,

[t]he Bolivian case points to a number of interesting tensions and contradictions which occur when indigeneity shifts from being a language of opposition to the language of governance; from when it moves from articulating the discourses of vulnerable minorities to those of national majorities. (Canessa 2012:32)

Canessa points out that not all the individuals and organizations that may be classified as indigenous have the same access to a privileged indigenous subjectivity defined by MAS. While certain groups come forward as “iconic citizens” (Canessa 2012:30), others remain excluded. Anders Burman, on a similar note, suggests that a hegemonic indigeneity brought forward by the MAS regime has been challenged by a counter-hegemonic indigeneity articulated by popular movements, especially in relation to the TIPNIS conflict (Burman, forthcoming). While the government-promoted indigeneity project “firmly ties *lo indígena* to Bolivian nationhood and the state”, the counter-hegemonic articulation questions state control over resources and territory (Burman

forthcoming). This challenging version of indigeneity, Burman argues, would not have appeared without the state-promoted indigeneity project; it emerges in relation to it, and the two are co-articulated, borrowing from each other. He concludes:

Thus, indigeneity is not a fixed thing with a definite meaning, but a powerful device charged with different meanings by different actors and through which political subjectivities and visions are molded and articulated in changing contexts of territorial struggles. (Burman, forthcoming, p. 34)

In Chapters 5 and 6, I return to particular aspects of the Morales government's climate change positioning and the TIPNIS conflict. These themes are used as starting points for an analysis of how intersectional subjectivities are co-constructed and negotiated in environmental debates and struggles, and, vice versa, how environmental discourses take form in dialogue with recognizable social categories and power relations between them. Furthermore, I address how indigeneity, intertwined with other social categorizations, is mobilized and contested among a variety of actors in Bolivian environmental politics. I explore the linkages and tensions between indigeneity, territory, natural resources, development projects, knowledge claims, subject formation and legitimacy.

## Chapter 5 “Our voice is the voice of the snow-capped mountains which are losing their white ponchos.” The Charisma of the Endangered Glacier

The Chacaltaya mountain peak is located thirty kilometers away from La Paz, an hour's drive on winding and bumpy roads. In the back of the minibus I feel slightly carsick, yet excited about the scenery: dry, windswept mountainsides, lakes shifting in green, blue and yellow, the dramatic skyline of the Cordillera Real and, below, the myriad houses of La Paz and El Alto clinging fearlessly to the slope. The driver points out peaks and glaciers, teaching us their Aymara names and translating them to Spanish. He recites versions of some of the various myths that surround them, tales of violent battles between masculinized mountains: Mururata, (Aymara for chopped head), he says, got his flat shape in a duel with Illimani (Golden Eagle). Mururata's head fell down and became the Sajama (Exiled) volcano, further away on the Altiplano (the high plateau).

It is a Saturday in November 2008. On the bus are seven young Swedish women, most of us idealistic development cooperation staff and volunteers living in La Paz. The trip is partly tourism, partly professional interest. Like so many others, we come to Chacaltaya to have a look at climate change.

As we step out, I feel the elevation of more than five thousand meters in my body. Panting, we start to walk uphill. Until only a few years ago, this mountain hosted a large glacier and a skiing resort. Now, apart from some small patches of grainy snow, the slant is bare, and the lift stands motionless. In an uneasy mood, we follow the guide to the mountain peak. We hope to get a glimpse of Lake Titicaca, on the border with Peru, but the clouds keep it out of sight. After a short but exhausting walk in the cold, thin air, we go inside the little cabin by

the ghostly ski lift to catch our breath and drink some hot coca leaf tea before we head back to the city.

When I return to La Paz two years later, I learn that the last ice of the Chacaltaya glacier has melted.



Chacaltaya: the mountain cabin above the abandoned ski lift. Photo by the author, November 2008.

## What intersects in the endangered glacier?

While Evo Morales and MAS struggled to promote their radical position in international forums on climate change, as discussed in Chapter 4, the majestic glaciers surrounding La Paz kept receding, continuing a trend that has been going on for several decades. These glaciers have great symbolic and material significance among people in the Andes. Their retreat became a central theme in the early climate change discourse of the Morales government. In this chapter, I trace the invocation of glacier melting in statements by MAS representatives.

Linking these accounts to how glaciers have been depicted historically and in contemporary international debates on climate change, I discuss how and why glaciers acquire such symbolic significance.

Glaciers are usually located in remote places. Most people do not live close to a glacier; most have never even seen one, but are nevertheless concerned about their disappearance (Cruikshank 2005; Orlove et al 2008). The charismatic character of glaciers incites us to care about them, and relate to them as subjects with agency and personal characteristics. Glaciers threatened by increasing temperatures have lately gained celebrity status as victims of global warming. Mark Carey identifies a narrative about glaciers as endangered, which, he claims, has co-emerged with an increasing awareness about climate change. In this “endangered glacier narrative”, retreating glaciers are portrayed in similar terms as a species in danger of extinction; mourned and in need of protection. As Carey writes, “[i]n recent decades, glaciers have become both a key icon for global warming and a type of endangered species” (2007:497).

I have chosen to engage Carey’s concept of the endangered glacier as a figuration and a node for an analysis of the Bolivian government’s positioning on climate change. I explore how the endangered glacier is represented in this positioning, and how and for what purposes it is mobilized. By unwrapping the endangered glacier figuration, I aim to illuminate how symbolic and material aspects are inseparable in the construction of environmental issues. I also point to the intersections of power that are embodied in the figuration, as it invokes certain understandings about humans, nature and the relationship between them: about which claims are regarded as valid and who is perceived as a legitimate environmental subject. A key theme of this chapter regards how what is recognized as knowledge is an effect and a manifestation of power, and how it is intertwined with practice.

My analysis draws loosely on the questions elaborated elsewhere by Annica Kronsell and myself as an entry point for intersectional analysis (Kaijser & Kronsell 2013). These questions address which social categories are represented or absent in the research material, how human-nature relations are portrayed, which kinds of knowledges are privileged, and whether any norms for behavior are conveyed. (The complete questions can be found in Chapter 2.)

## Glacier retreat in the Andes: embodying climate change

Glaciers appear in places where winter snowfall exceeds melting in the summer for an extended amount of time, so that the snow accumulates and turns to ice. As long as there is balance between snowfall and melting, the glacier remains, but if the losses surpass the gains – for instance due to warmer climate or changed precipitation patterns – the glacier loses mass.

Only five percent of the world's glaciers are found in tropical areas, and almost all of the existing tropical glaciers are located in the Andes. Climate change impacts are not equally distributed over the planet, but differ due to geographic factors; for instance, scientific projections show that increases in temperatures will be greater in large continental (inland) areas, and areas of high elevation (Hoffmann and Requena 2013; IPCC 2013). In the Andes, an inland mountain region, escalating temperature increases have lately been observed (Vuille et al 2008). In addition, changed precipitation patterns, with less predictability and shorter and more intense rain periods, are expected (Seth et al 2010). With the local temperature constantly being close to the melting point, the Andean glaciers are sensitive even to small changes, and are now receding (Mark 2008; Vuille et al 2008; Chevallier et al 2011). The glaciers in the Bolivian *Cordillera Real* mountain range, part of the Andes, shrunk by forty-eight percent between 1975 and 2006 (Soruco et al 2009). This negative pattern is expected to continue and accelerate as intensified warming is projected in the tropical Andes (Vuille et al 2008).

Disappearing glaciers have received great attention, locally and internationally, in the past few years (Carey 2010). Glacial retreat in the Bolivian Andes has frequently appeared in international scientific and public discussions on climate change and as a common reference in international mass media (see Rosenthal 2009; Shukman 2009). In the first period of Evo Morales' presidency, as global warming climbed high on the national and global political agendas, Bolivian government representatives often referred to the melting of these glaciers as part of their positioning on climate change.

### *Encounters of glacier knowledges*

Within view of the Bolivian administrative capital of La Paz, surrounded by Andean mountain peaks, are several glaciers, and, nowadays, ex-glaciers. Among those, the Chacaltaya and the Illimani are especially symbol-laden, and have recently gained international fame as poster children for climate change.

Chacaltaya, meaning “Cold Road” in Aymara, was until recently the world’s highest and most equatorial lift-served skiing resort. The original rope tow operating on the slope, run by a car engine, was installed in 1939, and was the first in South America. Since 2009 the glacier has entirely disappeared, leaving the skiing infrastructure on bare ground as an eerie monument to what had been and as a solemn reminder of what may come. The mountain cabin, which once upon a time used to shelter cold and tired skiers, has been turned into a museum; its walls decorated with diplomas, photos of the old days of glory and a pair of antique wooden skis. Worse than the tourists and the local elite being deprived of a winter playground are the communities below Chacaltaya seeing an essential water resource disappear along with the glacier.

Instead of skiers, the place is now frequented by tourists and visiting politicians and development cooperation staff, who come to Chacaltaya to take a look at climate change. As part of their brief visit to Bolivia, the International Commission on Climate Change and Development made an excursion to the former glacier, which is described in their final report:

One of the most famous of the nearby glaciers was Chacaltaya, which encyclopedias still describe as among South America’s highest glaciers (5,421 meters) – 18,000 years old and containing the world’s highest ski resort served by a lift. Yet when the Commission visited Chacaltaya in March 2009, there was virtually no glacier, no snow, and only the empty shell of a ski resort, which had been functioning until 10 years ago. Piles of skis, Alpine posters, and a lift motor are all still in place. (Commission on Climate Change and Development 2009:43)

This kind of melancholic portrayal of retreating glaciers – similar to my own notes from a visit to Chacaltaya (see above) – has become part of a standard narrative of climate change, in which the figuration of the endangered glacier is mobilized. As I show in this chapter, this narrative is embedded in, and can serve to promote, certain discourses on causes, effects and suggested solutions in relation to climate change.



Illimani, Aymara for “Golden Eagle”, is the second highest mountain in Bolivia, and crowned by another glacier, which on clear days makes a beautiful and dramatic backdrop to La Paz. It figures on most postcards of the city and on its official shield. For *paceños*, the inhabitants of La Paz, it is a basis for identification, representing the city and its Andean surroundings: “the residents identify not only with the city and with the nation but also with the highland region of the country, embodied in the summits of Illimani” (Orlove et al 2008: 13). The glacier, like Chacaltaya, is an important water reservoir for downstream communities, as well as a powerful symbol. In recent years, numerous journalists, development cooperation officials and researchers have traveled the winding roads to villages on the mountainsides to hear the local residents lament the shrinking ice and erratic water flows, placing the blame on climate change. Especially the village of Khapi, just below the glacier, has become a hotspot for adaptation projects, researchers, journalists and climate tourists.

In November 2010, I accompanied two Swedish journalists to Khapi, to help translate their interviews with villagers and to get a chance to see the area, which is difficult to access without a car. The journalists had rented a jeep with a driver who took us along the narrow roads zigzagging the steep mountainsides. We made stops on the way so that we could take pictures and talk to farmers working the fields along the road about how the melting glaciers and the changing weather patterns were affecting their lives. Most people were willing to talk to us, and they all told similar stories about changing water availability, which many spontaneously attributed to climate change. In Khapi, we were met by large boards informing us about local water and irrigation projects run by several actors, including the Ministry of Environment and Water as well as Bolivian and foreign NGOs, and supported by European development cooperation funds. An elderly man guided us through the village, pointing out the past and present stretch of the glacier and explicitly blaming its retreat on the effects of global warming. This was clearly not the first time that he had received visitors in search of climate change. Similar testimonies have been repeated in various forums. In a report about South American glacier retreat, an inhabitant of Khapi gave the following account:

Now, in the months of August to November, large quantities of water come down because the glacier is melting, and this water leaves to never come back. [...] People say, what is happening? Here, some say that Achachila [grandfather in Aymara] is furious, Illimani is furious. But no, this is because of climate change. (Aruquipa Lazo 2011:140, my translation)



A board in Khapi. The Ministry of Environment and Water provides information about a water resource management project supported by a number of European development cooperation agencies. The white text at the bottom reads “productive and social investment for *vivir bien* [to live well]”; *vivir bien* is a central principle in the government’s political vision (see below). Illimani can be seen in the background. Photo by the author, November 2010

The attribution of climate change as the cause of glacier melting is widespread among people in and around La Paz. During my stays in La Paz I noticed that this issue was spontaneously brought up in all kinds of encounters: in chats with taxi drivers commenting on the changing mountain scenery, by activists and academics, and by the cleaning lady at an NGO office that I visited. There is a general awareness of the issue of climate change that extends to rather remote places. This becomes evident in the statements by people in Khapi (though it may be expected that the awareness of climate change is particularly high in this village, given its dependency on the Illimani glacier for water, along with the

remarkable presence of water management initiatives and foreign journalists and researchers coming to look at the vanishing glacier).<sup>16</sup> In the villagers' accounts, their own observations and experiences of disappearing ice and changing flows of water are mediated by pieces of scientific explanations and government rhetoric; references to global warming caused by the Western world mingle with local testimonies of the disappearance of the Illimani glacier. I argue that such fusion of knowledge claims from diverse sources is part of all meaning making, and demonstrates the difficulty in distinguishing between, for instance, "local" and "scientific" knowledge – they are intertwined and emerge in dialogue with each other. Later in this chapter, I illustrate how the MAS government's references to glacier retreat draws on various types of knowledge. I also discuss how the endangered glacier figuration embodies a variety of knowledge claims, which in turn are rooted in relations of power.

### *Narrating the landscape*

Andean glaciers fill an important function as natural water reservoirs, as they store precipitation in cold and wet seasons and release it during warmer and drier months (Ramirez 2012). Together with other expected climate change impacts, such as increasingly irregular rain seasons, their recession seriously affects downstream communities, where people find their livelihoods threatened. The fast melting also temporally increases risks of flooding hazards. In addition, glacier retreat has consequences for the generation of hydropower, which the La Paz area to a large extent depends on for its energy supply (Vergara et al 2007). Besides the direct material losses and risks, the glaciers have great cultural and spiritual value among people in the Andes. They are iconic symbols of the region; they have names and are often referred to as deities or mythical characters, and their disappearance is mourned (Orlove et al 2008; Vilela 2011).

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<sup>16</sup> Kirsten Hastrup has encountered something similar in her research in Greenland, where climate change is very present in the minds of her local interlocutors. She writes: "Once the ordinary weather variability is perceived as climate change, it implies an unknown agency in the social, and what is more, it means that the (global) natural scientific scenarios enter into the local sense of place. [...] In northwest Greenland there is no way to forget about these scenarios, given the strong presence of natural scientists. Science has become an important actor in the network of connections by which people live in the district." (Hastrup 2012:158)

Drawing on ethnographic research in a Bolivian highland community, Lynn Sikkink and Braulio Choque (1999) discuss the rich mythology in the Andes, in which the landscape itself is seen as shaped by gods and mythical beings: “Unlike other cultural landscapes that record in myths the passage of gods, ancestors, and trickster figures, and their effects on the landscape, Andean geography is a gargantuan arrangement of bodies, body parts, and the objects these beings used or left behind as they went on their ways in times past.” (1999:168) This mythology is not static, but under constant alteration, reflecting social dynamics and human relations to the environment. Sikkink and Choque write: “In this way there is an ongoing link between the animated landscape and the humans that inhabit it – and the link is re-configured and modified continually to fit the landscape more closely to the human community.” (1999:180-1)

Social landscapes of power relations are projected on, and discursively co-constituted with, the natural landscape in myths and narratives – from Quechua and Aymara myths about the mountains to today’s narratives about vanishing glaciers. Legends attached to the landscape are widespread and also well-known in urban areas. During my stays in La Paz, friends and interlocutors often pointed out peaks and rock formations visible from the city, recounting different versions of stories about them. Such stories encompass and reflect both ancient myths and modern conditions, as they evolve and are modified to make sense in contemporary settings. In popularized versions, they are re-told to tourists and other visitors. When our tourist guide told stories about mountain peaks on the way to Chacaltaya – as described in the introduction to this chapter – the disappeared glacier was placed within an existing mythology about the Andean highlands, made legible to an audience of outsiders. With his presentation of the landscape the guide ascribed it value but also to some extent turned it into a commodity, to be consumed by us as climate change tourists. I will later discuss in more depth how such simultaneous valuing and commodification of landscapes, and particularly glaciers, may both reinforce and challenge intersectional patterns of knowledge and power.

Narratives about the landscape and human – nature relations in the Andes have lately been invoked in the Bolivian government’s positioning on climate change. The endangered glacier has been assigned a key role here. This I will explore in the next section.

## The endangered glacier in MAS' climate positioning

During the peak of interest in climate change on the global scene of politics and public debates, from approximately 2007 to 2010, Bolivian government representatives frequently brought up retreating glaciers in order to legitimize and strengthen Bolivia's positioning on climate change, both in international forums and within the country. In the MAS government's rhetoric, references to endangered glaciers served the purpose of demonstrating climate change impacts which Bolivians have done very little to cause and which hardly anything can be done to mitigate – an example in line with the country's official stance on climate change. Glacier retreat incited by global warming can easily be attributed to historical and current emissions generated through expansive development and economic growth in industrialized countries. Thus, it is a suitable illustration of Western capitalism and lifestyles as being the main culprit of climate change.

Part of the Morales government's attention to glaciers was inherited from social movements. Glacier retreat has severe consequences for access to water – one of the natural resources that the movements have organized around, notably in the Cochabamba Water Wars of 2000 (see Chapter 3). During the interest peak in climate change, Bolivian civil society actors made statements about this issue that fed into the government's positioning (Fabricant 2013). Glacier melting was also addressed by international development actors, as becomes evident for instance in the account from the International Commission on Climate Change and Development cited above.

References to endangered glaciers have been given by Bolivian government representatives in various high-level forums to promote their radical non-capitalist stance. I will now give a few examples of how glacier retreat has been presented in such forums. These accounts illustrate how the endangered glacier figuration has been invoked in MAS' climate discourse. I introduce them as an entry point for identifying embedded assumptions about knowledge and subjectivity.

On April 23, 2008 Evo Morales gave a statement to the 7th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, listing “[t]he 10 sins of capitalism and the 10 commandments to save the planet, humanity, and life”. Here he blamed capitalism for causing overexploitation of natural resources that leads to climate change. Among the proposed commandments are “End capitalism”, “A world

without imperialism or colonialism”, and “Respect for Mother Earth”. Under the fourth commandment, “Water as a human right belonging to all living beings”, it is claimed that “[t]he biggest impact of climate change is in water sources. Our snows and glaciers are disappearing”. The last sentence of the statement, under commandment number ten (“Live Well. Don't live better at others' expense. Build communitarian socialism in harmony with mother earth.”) reads: “[i]ndigenous communities will not be silenced until we achieve real change, because our voice is the voice of the snowcapped mountains losing their white ponchos” (UNPFII 2008).

At the COP 15 in Copenhagen, December 2009, Morales gave a press conference in which the Bolivian proposals to the negotiations were presented. Again, respect for Mother Earth and anti-capitalist critique were central features. Morales argued that a one-degree centigrade decrease of the temperature must be realized in order to prevent disaster and to “save our sacred glaciers and lakes” (Morales Ayma 2010). During the same week, at the alternative summit KlimaForum which was organized by civil society actors, Bolivia's lead negotiator Angelica Navarro stated that “whatever amount of money you give me, it will never — and I repeat — it will never compensate a single glacier that will be lost in Bolivia, a single species that will be lost in one of our rainforests” (see Democracy Now 2009). It may be noted that in this speech, Navarro rhetorically placed glaciers in the same category as animal species, conceptualizing the two as equally endangered by the climate change caused by Western ways of life. This, I will return to below.

### *What does the endangered glacier do?*

In the statements cited above, symbolic values attached to glaciers as endangered are invoked to promote a certain, alternative discourse on climate change. Morales and Navarro both brought up Andean endangered glaciers in their argumentation for Bolivia's position at COP15, in which Western capitalism was blamed for climate change and repayment of Western climate debts to developing countries was demanded. This discourse is legitimized through what is depicted as an Andean *cosmovisión*, involving a particular relationship to nature. Morales' powerful allegory of the snow-capped mountains losing their ponchos establishes a kinship between culture and territory, between the mountains and their indigenous inhabitants among whom the poncho is, famously, a traditional piece of clothing for men – a symbol of the Andes that is accessible to a global audience. Here, a close connection is made between

mountains, glaciers and human (indigenous) bodies. The Andean people are envisioned to speak with one voice, which is also the voice of the mountains; humans and mountains are suffering the same tragedy, together. Such rhetoric exemplifies the claim of speaking for *Pachamama*; the cultural, spiritual and material environment in which humans are embedded, according to a popularized and politicized Andean “culture of life”, juxtaposed with the threat of a Western, capitalist “culture of death”. As discussed in the introductory chapter, *Pachamama* is a complex figure in Andean mythology, associated with fertility but also with destruction. However, in her contemporary incarnation as Mother Earth, she comes forward as a conscious and gendered being with rights and agency; a caring but vulnerable mother, threatened by human actions and in need of respect and protection by humans. This is how she is mobilized in the MAS government’s climate discourse, which suggests that Western failure to care for Mother Earth – as a symbol for nature – is what endangers the glaciers.

A very explicit norm for environmentally sustainable behavior is articulated through the endangered glacier figuration. This norm is particularly conceptualized as *vivir bien*, to live well. As discussed in previous chapters, *vivir bien* is an Andean concept that has been assigned a key role in the formulation of MAS’ political project. The message of Bolivian delegates for international climate negotiations has been that through the disruption of the *vivir bien* principle under modern capitalism, Western countries are responsible for the climate change that put the glaciers in danger of extinction. Again, an Andean *cosmovisión* is invoked; a holistic conceptualization of nature as encompassing humans. The Bolivian way of relating to the endangered glaciers, according to the government’s rhetoric, is characterized by recognition of this interdependency, expressed by a respect for Mother Earth that is depicted as inherent in generalized indigenous tradition. This alternative norm is positioned against a Western lifestyle model, in which the connection to nature is lost and glaciers are sacrificed in the restless quest for economic growth.

In the government’s rhetoric, a strong linkage is thus articulated between Mother Earth, glaciers, and indigenous people. The main aspect of subjectivity represented in the Bolivian invocation of the endangered glacier figuration is that of indigeneity, with an emphasis on Andean indigenous groups. This may be viewed in light of the ongoing political project aiming towards a reformulation of the Bolivian state and national identity (discussed in Chapter 3), a project in which a particular representation of Andean culture is predominant. Here, glaciers and the highland communities that depend on

them are elevated to a status as emblematically Bolivian, which further adds to the symbolic importance of glacier retreat. In the accounts about the endangered glacier provided by government representatives, a particular manifestation of the indigenous is mobilized as a privileged category for articulating political claims.

The indigenous, in the government's climate discourse, comes forward as a consistent and coherent subject position, with an intrinsic connection to the threatened glaciers. There is no discussion about possible tensions or differentiations among indigenous people: the indigenous is represented as a stable category, united in a vulnerability to the glacier retreat caused by climate change, which is imposed by an external "culture of death". Furthermore, the indigenous are made to represent the entire Bolivian people – and, ultimately, the majority of the world's population that does not have access to decision-making on climate change. This construction of the indigenous as a comprehensive national – and universal – subject has been contested by critical voices within the country: a stream of criticism that has in recent years destabilized the legitimacy of the Morales government as representing the common interests of the Bolivians. Also, MAS' political agenda has shifted since 2010, giving less primacy to environment and climate issues. This becomes particularly evident in the conflict around the planned highway through the TIPNIS indigenous territory and national park, which I explore in the next chapter.

Regarding the types of knowledges that are drawn on in the government's invocation of the endangered glacier figuration, on one hand, indigenous knowledge is brought forward, with the endorsement of Andean ancient traditions and ways of life. On the other hand, references to the endangered glacier are explicitly backed up by natural science accounts of climatic changes causing glacier retreat, which can be traced in accounts from the government. For instance, Evo Morales' specific call for a one degree temperature decrease as needed to save the Andean glaciers draws on a scientific understanding of climate change, based on temperature measurements and climate data. It may be placed in the same category as the two-degree target, which is the agreed limit for average global warming as defined in the outcomes of international climate negotiations (see UNFCCC 2014).

Glacier retreat is apparent and visible in the Andes and entails great material and socio-cultural consequences. Yet, the emphasis placed on disappearing glaciers in Bolivian government positioning on climate change cannot be explained by these factors alone. The government's invocation of the endangered glaciers is



enabled by scientific attribution of glacier retreat to global warming, and related to contemporary and historical concerns and engagements with glaciers that stretch far beyond the country's borders. In the coming sections, I will address the emergence of the endangered glacier figuration as an internationally recognized symbol of climate change and discuss how it is infused with power relations that produce certain knowledges and subjectivities.

## The charisma of glaciers

Glaciers occupy a central position in scientific research and public awareness of climate change. Studies of glacier mass variations provide valuable data for assessing climate change and predicting its future impacts (Soruco et al. 2009). Glacier retreat is often brought forward as a canary-in-the-coal-mine indicator for impacts of global warming, and the prediction of ice sheet melting at the poles and subsequent sea level rise is a source of worry in public climate change discussions. Furthermore, glaciers serve as spectacular archives for historical climate data. Through analyzing ancient ice accessed through ice core drilling, scientists can learn about climatic changes several hundred thousand years back in time.

There is scientific consensus around the retreat of glaciers as an effect of human-induced climate change (IPCC 2013). However, as argued by Hajer and Versteeg, the fact that a particular environmental issue receives widespread attention “cannot be deduced from a natural-scientific analysis of its urgency, but from the symbols and experiences that govern the way people think and act” (2005:176). The rise of glacier melting as an emblematic issue in climate change discourse has to do with processes of power-knowledge in which environmental problems, their causes and their privileged solutions are defined. Glaciers assume space as a compelling symbol that serves to illustrate and legitimize certain stances on climate change. Here, I address some aspects of the symbolic significance of glaciers.

Glaciers matter. Gretel Ehrlich points out that these masses of ice seem to be ascribed an intrinsic value that goes beyond their direct usefulness to humans and which makes their destruction appear as nearly immoral (in Orlove et al. 2008). In the words of Peter G. Knight, glaciers “transcend glaciology and bear upon altogether bigger issues of the environment and its changing future” (2004:392). Knight suggests that the fascination with glaciers can to some extent

be explained by their mysterious character and their sheer enormity: “grandeur, terror and magnificence approaching the sublime” (2004:392). They possess a majestic, almost transcendental appeal, which may be referred to as nonhuman charisma: “the distinguishing properties of a non-human entity or process that determine its perception by humans and its subsequent evaluation” (Lorimer 2007:921). Jamie Lorimer discusses how humans come to perceive certain other species as charismatic, which in turn has implications for ideals and practices in nature conservation. While Lorimer refers only to animals as bearers of nonhuman charisma, in my analysis I extend the concept to also cover places and natural phenomena, in this case glaciers. Part of the charisma of glaciers could be explained by their constant movements and shifts, which make them appear to be conscious subjects. There is a long cultural history in societies across the world of depicting glaciers as gods, monsters, animals or mystic beings with their own agency, capable of feeling and acting, and receptive to prayers, ceremonies, pledges and grief (Cruikshank 2005; Carey 2007; Rhoades et al. 2008).

I will now move on to discuss aspects of power, manifested in constructions of knowledge and subjectivity, which are involved in portraying glaciers as endangered.

### *Situating the endangered glacier*

The endangered glacier contains elements of earlier perceptions of glaciers. Tracing discourses about glaciers in Europe and the US several centuries back, Carey shows how glaciers have historically been seen as menaces; as sublime; as scientific laboratories; as sites for mountaineering and tourism; as remote, empty spaces to dominate; and as wilderness. Historically, glaciers have been regarded with fear and awe, as a real or imagined threat (Carey 2007; 2010). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, worries prevailed of a new ice age caused by advancing ice sheets from the poles. Racialized associations in Western Europe and North America of glaciers (and people inhabiting mountain areas) with wilderness and backwardness have contributed to their association with threats, but simultaneously spurred imperialist perceptions of glaciers as distant and dangerous places to conquer (Carey 2007). All these understandings, Carey argues, seep into the endangered glacier narrative of today.

As glaciers embody such a multitude of meanings, they “offer a platform to implement historical ideologies about nature, science, imperialism, race, recreation, wilderness and global power dynamics” (Carey 2007:497). The

endangered glacier is constituted by, and re-constitutes, particular knowledges and practices. It has emerged in a certain discursive framework, in which nature and environmental issues are constructed in specific ways: “[a]t the center of the endangered glacier narrative are questions of power – the power to define nature and, in turn, the power to create specific laws and policies (and not others)” (2007: 501).

Thus, symbolic representations reflect and reconstitute subject positions and encourage particular practices. The labeling of glaciers as endangered is therefore neither neutral nor innocent. The contemporary endangered glacier figuration is situated in a postcolonial setting, in particular patterns of power-knowledge, which, for instance, may encourage top-down intervention and control over glaciated areas through scientific missions, tourism and protection initiatives. One example is the ongoing contest about the Arctic region, where the melting of glaciers and ice sheets opens up new possibilities for transport, oil extraction, mining and other profitable projects. This incites global concerns motivated by interests in control over territory and resources. It also spurs calls for conservation and protection, illustrated by captivating images of disappearing masses of ice that invoke the charisma of the endangered glacier.

As becomes evident in the statements by Evo Morales and Angelica Navarro presented above, the Bolivian government called upon existing perceptions of glaciers as charismatic, awe-inspiring and endangered when communicating their message to international audiences. However, the endangered glacier figuration was here mobilized to support an agenda that challenges those that dominate international environmental politics. This illustrates how figurations are not stuck within certain discursive spaces, but may take different shapes in different contexts. The Bolivian climate change discourse invoked the endangered glacier to question postcolonial structures and promote alternative knowledges. While it endorsed radical, alternative ideas, the Bolivian positioning in international forums was enabled by existing, widespread perceptions of glaciers as endangered – otherwise it would not have made sense on an international stage. This, again, illustrates the entanglement of knowledge claims and discourse formations across scales.

### *Valuable and consumable*

In discourses on climate change, the endangered glacier is thus depicted much like an endangered animal species: a strikingly charismatic species, to speak with Lorimer’s words. Donna Haraway, in her reflections upon human interaction

with other species, writes that the term species itself “structures conservation and environmental discourses, with their ‘endangered species’ that function simultaneously to locate value and to evoke death and extinction in ways familiar in colonial representations of the always vanishing indigene.” (2008: 18) Considering a species to be “endangered”, thus, assigns to it the value of being worthy of protection – an effect of its nonhuman charisma. Yet, at the same time it contains an element of othering, in which the species is condemned to danger and possible extinction, and its fate placed in the hands of human protectors. As Haraway remarks, this has consequences for conservation endeavors. On a similar note, Carey writes: “people have worried about glacier loss because they themselves will lose something if the ice disappears. Glaciers become endangered because they are both valuable and consumable” (2007:520). When glaciers are framed as an endangered species, they are subjected to valuing and othering, comparable to the valuing and othering of endangered tigers, elephants or polar bears. These discursive processes have implications for how political rhetoric and environmental campaigns and strategies evolve around them; they are emblemized, commodified, universalized and appropriated for a wide range of causes.

Haraway and Carey both observe the colonial heritage that manifests when endangered species, or, in this context, glaciers, are constructed in ways similar to the colonial image of the indigenous. In the Bolivian government’s mobilization of the endangered glacier, this discursive link is played on and turned around to pose criticism against Western dominance. Andean culture, as a proxy for a generalized indigenous tradition, is elevated to a modern model for relating to nature, that the rest of the world ought to follow in order to avoid glacier retreat and other environmental disasters. Once again, the link between the endangered glacier and the (inherently ecological) indigenous people is reestablished. This may be read as a form of strategic essentialism, in which an essentialized image of the indigenous is mobilized for certain purposes (Spivak 1990). When indigenous people are promoted as ideal environmental subjects, this entails another form of othering and a risk of commodification, as Andean glaciers and indigenous people become international symbols of climate change and attractions for climate tourism. In Chapter 6, I will further elaborate on the implications of equating indigeneity with special attachments to the environment.

## Concluding discussion

Social landscapes of oppression and resistance are projected on, and discursively co-constructed with, the natural landscape in myths and narratives – from Aymara legends about mountain gods to globally recognized narratives about vanishing glaciers. Contemporary and universalized stories are no less mythical than ancient legends, and none of them are innocent; they all contribute to defining what is considered valid and true, and thus fill political purposes.

The endangered glacier is made to make sense, and made to matter, through its situatedness in recognizable, temporarily fixed, patterns of power and knowledge. Representing retreating glaciers as endangered re-inscribes particular power relations, but – as becomes evident in the Bolivian context – the endangered glacier figuration may also be mobilized to de-stabilize such relations, and suggest others. The figuration is a node for intersecting processes of power; it is an embodiment of contradictory discursive practices, a site where knowledges, subjectivities, norms and privileges are negotiated. In the endangered glacier, the simultaneity of the symbolic and the material becomes evident, as its endangered material existence co-evolves with symbolic dimensions.

The endangered glacier figuration gains meaning within a certain discursive space. Its ambiguity is part of its success – the figuration is widely recognized on the international level and may be called upon to support a variety of stances, with different definitions of problems and solutions regarding climate change. The endangered glacier may for instance, within an ecological modernization-green governmentality paradigm, be employed to legitimize top-down conservation initiatives, like in the creation of nature reserves or efforts to sustain glaciers through local, technical fixes. In Bolivia, the MAS government mobilized the endangered glacier to support the problem definition and proposed solutions of the radical, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist climate change discourse that dominated Bolivian environmental politics from 2007 to 2010 – something that would not have been possible without the pre-existing, international recognition of this figuration.

Which stories can be told by whom, and where, and when? Various factors, including the specific postcolonial setting, a change of national government, vibrant and influential popular movements, geophysical conditions, and a moment of international attention to climate change, contributed to the

emergence and promotion of MAS' radical climate discourse. The mobilization of the endangered glacier among Bolivian actors is illustrative of the complexity, fluidity and interconnection of scales that characterize discourse formation on climate change. As we have seen, the emblematic issue of glacier retreat has been carried to wider audiences through its embodiment in the powerful and evocative figuration of the endangered glacier. By drawing on existing symbolic and material meanings of glaciers in the Andes, Bolivian actors have established a continuum between culture and territory, human and nature, tradition and an ongoing political project; here, the mountains losing their ponchos of ice become victims of the same "culture of death" as the indigenous people inhabiting them. Thereby the endangered glacier has been adopted and adjusted into a story that resonates well in international forums, but which also speaks to local knowledges and subject formations.

As we have seen, the endangered glacier, as promoted in MAS' climate discourse, invokes certain subject positions – particularly that of indigenous people as embodying a special relation to the environment. In the next chapter I continue my intersectional analysis of Bolivian environmental politics with a focus on subject formation. My analysis revolves around another figuration that has become central in Bolivian environmental debates, the ecological indigenous. I unwrap this figuration by studying how it has become mobilized in the conflict around the planned highway through the TIPNIS national park and indigenous territory.



# Chapter 6 From the *Loma Santa* to the Green Lungs: The Ecological Indigenous as Cosmopolitan Subject

March 2012. The sun above is burning; the water below is brown and murky. A sleepy feeling of everyday life sets in on board the wooden boat as we slowly thump upstream on the Sécure River. I sleep on top of a bag of Brazilian wheat, do a couple of interviews, play cards, read, and watch women wash their toddlers' clothes in the river and hang them to dry. On board are representatives of the umbrella organization Subcentral TIPNIS, along with NGO staff, journalists and activists from Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Trinidad and La Paz, and three researchers from Scandinavia: a Norwegian doctoral student, a Swedish bachelor's student and myself.

After thirty hours of traveling we finally reach Gundonovia, a community at the edge of TIPNIS, where resistance to the contested highway project planned to cross the protected area is concentrated. Villagers greet us as we wade across the flooded grass plain and show us to the school, where we put up our tents inside the empty classrooms. Community leaders from all over TIPNIS have traveled for days, in some cases more than a week. Now they to gather to take a decision about organizing a second protest march against the highway and for strengthened recognition of indigenous territorial rights. In the afternoon, with three days' delay and after meticulous registration of the participants, the meeting finally begins with a formal, ceremonial inauguration. In my recording of the meeting, an appeal to God to bless the meeting and the struggle and a collective Our Father and Ave Maria can be heard through a child's crying. Everyone joins in the singing of the Bolivian national anthem before the meeting agenda and the different groups of participants are introduced.



The meeting continues for two days, chaired by Fernando Vargas, the charismatic and strong-minded leader of Subcentral TIPNIS. The *corregidores*, community representatives – all men – are seated on rows of benches. The rest of us gather along the wall-less sides of the shelter, or outside of it. From the outset the agenda is clear, and the speakers take turn to agree with it. Testimonies from concerned villagers are mixed with reports from NGO representatives expressing their support of the resistance and outlining the expected consequences of the road project. Hours and hours pass in the hot shelter buzzing with exaltation and tropical insects. Children fall asleep on their mothers' laps while candies and large bottles of brightly colored soda are passed around. Towards the end of the meeting, after midnight on the second day, the community representatives rise, one by one, to express their commitment to protecting their territory. The only plausible decision is made: a second protest march against the highway will be arranged, starting at the end of April. The exhausted participants are delighted, and the party begins. *¡Viva la marcha!*



Community representatives at the resistance meeting in Gundonovia. Photo by the author, March 2012

## What intersects in the ecological indigenous?

In 2009, the Bolivian government decided to construct a highway crossing the *Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure*, TIPNIS, a national park and indigenous territory (Mokrani & Uriona 2012). These plans were met by fierce resistance and led to what is considered to be one of MAS' worst crises since they took office in 2006 (McNeish 2013; see Chapter 4 in this thesis). The conflict is commonly framed as a clash between the government and lowland indigenous communities, but is far more complicated than that; it is an intricate field where conjunctions of environmental protection and indigenous rights mix with local, regional and international territorial, geopolitical and economic interests, entangled with resource-nationalist ambitions in MAS' *proceso de cambio* (see Chapter 4).

In this chapter I explore how intersecting structures of power play out in the TIPNIS conflict, through engaging a figuration that I call the *ecological indigenous*. The ecological indigenous figuration embodies the idea of the indigenous who lives in harmony and close contact with nature, and who thereby possesses special environmental knowledge. The image of the ecological indigenous is well-recognized internationally and has a long history in environmentalist discourse (see Canessa 2006; Dove 2006; Hames 2007), which I discuss below. In my analysis, I explore how this figuration is mobilized in the context of the TIPNIS conflict, looking into which actors refer to it, in which ways, and for what purposes. I illuminate how the figuration of the ecological indigenous is conceived at a moment in which environmental discourse formation takes place across scales, so that a meeting taking place in the Bolivian Amazon becomes at the same time a local, national and global event. The analysis here focuses on subject formation and how it is enacted through processes of power.

Different ways of naming the figuration can of course be imagined. Several scholars (Ulloa 2003; Hornborg 2005; Doane 2007, among others) refer to the “ecological native” when discussing the assumed linkages between indigeneity and environmental consciousness. Others talk about the “ecological Indian” (Harkin & Lewis 2007) or the “ecologically noble savage” (Hames 2007). I have chosen to use the word “indigenous” as it seems to make most sense in the Bolivian context, where *indígena* is widely employed for self-identification and in political projects (see Chapter 3). “Savage” (*salvaje*) and “Indian” (*indio*) have

more pejorative connotations, and the term “native” I have hardly ever come across in a Bolivian context.

As in Chapter 5, I will use a set of sensitizing questions developed by Annica Kronsell and myself (Kajiser & Kronsell 2013) as a point of departure for my intersectional analysis of the recent developments in TIPNIS. These questions address which subject positions are represented or absent in the research material, how human-nature relations are portrayed, which kinds of knowledges are privileged, and whether any norms for behavior are conveyed. (The complete questions can be found in Chapter 2.) I use them as a device to make sense of my material, and specifically to identify and analyze power relations that intersect in the figuration of the ecological indigenus.

## From virgin land to TIOC: recognition and resistance

In April 2012 I travelled with another Swedish researcher to Villa Tunari, a small town in the Cochabamba department, not far from the southern border of TIPNIS. Villa Tunari was established by settlers in the last decades of the 1900s. It is located by the highway leading to Santa Cruz – which, when it opened in the 1950s, dramatically changed accessibility of the lowlands and literally paved the way for Santa Cruz’ rapid expansion in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – and is one of the connecting points for the contested highway through TIPNIS. The small town is stretched out alongside the road, busy with heavy trucks transporting goods between the lowlands, valleys and highlands, and is a hub for tourists, as it is the gateway to several national parks. My travel companion and I, interested in the settler communities’ perspectives, spent our days in Villa Tunari walking around the town and asking people about the road construction that we knew was taking place just outside of the city. Most people seemed reluctant to talk with us about this issue.

One morning we took a motorcycle taxi to the closest national park, the *Parque Nacional Carrasco*, a few kilometers away. Along the bumpy road, we passed through settler villages where coca leaves were spread out to dry between the houses. The villages looked modest, though there were sporadic signs of relative wealth, such as parabolic antennas and, occasionally, a shiny new car. In the park a 20-year old guide, himself from a settler family, showed us around the incredibly beautiful forest, telling us about the sleeping habits of bats, the medical and religious uses of certain plants and the consequences of illegal

hunting. His knowledge of the local flora and fauna was impressive. I asked him whether the area had previously been inhabited by indigenous people. No, he replied: “Before the colonizers, nobody lived here. It was all virgin land”. (My translation.) I was perplexed about his firm answer, but felt uncomfortable prodding him any further.

The statement by the young tourist guide reflects a common assumption about the eastern lowlands. When I later repeated it to Rosario Leon, a sociologist and anthropologist with extensive professional experience from the area, she shrugged: “well, that is what people will tell you” (Leon 2012, personal interview, my translation). The Amazonian lowland area where TIPNIS is located has been inhabited by indigenous communities for thousands of years. Since pre-colonial times it has been subject to struggles over territorial and resource control, and to continuous re-mapping, directed from the outside. The story of TIPNIS is a story of redefinition, in which the geographical borders, the legal status and purpose of the area, and who is considered to belong there, have been continuously altered.

For centuries, the Amazon has been the focus of a multitude of interests and fantasies, related to economic benefits, development, modernization, territorial control, national identity, refuge and the dream of wilderness and pristinity (see Hecht and Cockburn 1990). In what is now Bolivia, there is a long tradition among political and economic elites of considering the lowlands as a site for control and colonization. The invisibilization of lowland indigenous peoples is a persistent undercurrent in the story of TIPNIS, and of the Bolivian lowlands in general. Indigenous groups have inhabited the area since pre-colonial times. Yet, since before the Spanish conquest it has been treated as unoccupied land, open for exploitation (SERNAP 2011; Tapia 2012).

The notion of the lowlands as a site for exploration and occupation, and the neglect of local communities’ voices and interests, is tied to a prevailing view of lowland indigenous people as less modern or civilized, both among *mestizo-criollos* and among Quechua and Aymara groups (Canessa 2007; Canessa 2012). The Bolivian philosopher and political scientist Luis Tapia argues that this tendency is reproduced in current Bolivian state politics, based on Andean ethnocentrism. “The idea of spaces for colonization is part of a structural racism present in the configuration of the Bolivian state in relation to the lowlands”, he writes (Tapia 2011:263, my translation; see also Fundación UNIR 2011). Arguments and negotiations about the land and its use have taken place among political, economic and intellectual elites for hundreds of years. In the many and

varying endeavors of economic and infrastructural development, territorial control and nature conservation, the voices of the lowland indigenous communities have been largely absent. This history explains the assertion by our tourist guide, whose parents had arrived in Villa Tunari as part of the large waves of migration from the highlands, encouraged by consecutive governments of different political colors. The lowlands were presented as virgin land to the highlanders: for them, escaping poverty and precarious conditions, settling in the lowlands meant a new chance for a better life.

### *The creation of a national park*

The initiative to create a protected area in the lowlands came from two influential non-indigenous men, who envisioned the national park as a refuge for indigenous groups (Paz 2012; Paz 2012, personal interview). One of them was a Jesuit missionary, and the other one a “fanatic explorer of the jungle” (Paz 2012, personal interview, my translation) who worked for the Bolivian state and had close contacts with both the local indigenous communities and the national government. The Isiboro-Sécure national park was created on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 1965 by Supreme Decree 7401, under the government of President René Barrientos (Bolivian Government 1965). It was the first protected area in Bolivia, a status that has contributed to its considerable symbolic value in subsequent debates. The indigenous inhabitants are not mentioned in any way in the legal document, which only considers protection of the flora and fauna and the natural beauty of the area (Bolivian Government 1965); yet, in practice, the creation of a national park meant a certain degree of protection for the local communities, as it regulated access to the land and limited the possibilities for exploitation of natural resources in the area.

During the following decades pressure on the region was augmented with the increasing presence of commercial farmers, cattle breeders and loggers. An influx of settlers from the highlands intensified especially with the mass unemployment following the dismantling of state agencies in the mining sector that was part of the neoliberal structural adjustment programs of the 1980s. Many miner families ended up as coca growers in the lowlands, encroaching on the borders of the protected area (Klein 2011; Kohl & Farthing 2012 – see also Chapter 4).

### *Defining indigenous territory*

While the national park had originally been constructed from the outside, without any formal involvement of its inhabitants, it was gradually recognized by the Yuracare, T'siman and Moxeño-trinitario communities inside it, who started to organize around claims to strengthened territorial rights (Canedo Vásquez 2011; Paz 2012, personal interview). In 1990, the first *Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity* was organized under the umbrella of the lowland indigenous organization CIDOB, to demand territorial rights. The president at the time, Jaime Paz Zamora, at first contested the initiative, but then realized that it would be a “historical error for the government to oppose the march”, as this could have possibly generated further protests and political unrest, and instead decided to receive the marchers and show them his support (Forno 2012-04-24, personal interview, my translation). After this first march, the Isiboro-Sécure national park was recognized as indigenous territory in the Supreme Decree 22610, signed on September 24<sup>th</sup> 1990 by President Paz Zamora, which added the classification *Territorio Indígena* to the name of the national park and thereby created what is today referred to as TIPNIS (*Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure*) (Bolivian Government 1990). The success of the 1990 march resulting in the creation of TIPNIS opened up a path towards more marches and continued territorial demands of indigenous peoples in Bolivia (Forno 2012-04-24, personal interview).

In 1997, after a category of indigenous communitarian land ownership had been formally defined through the INRA law (*Ley del Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, 1996, see Chapter 4), TIPNIS was legally classified as a TCO, *Tierra Comunitario de Origen*, a standard form of land tenure based on indigenous status. Its area was extended to also include communities outside of the original borders of the national park (Prada 2012). In 2009, in accordance with the terminology defined in the new constitution, this label was changed to TIOC, *Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino* (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia 2008: CPE Article 293; Fundación UNIR 2011; McNeish 2013). Yet, while the legal protection was being established, migrants from the highlands had continued to enter the park. In 1994 a “red line” was drawn within the TIPNIS borders in order to prevent further advancement into the protected territory; settlement was allowed inside the area defined by the red line, referred to as the *Polígono 7*, but not beyond it. In practice, however, the line has gradually been moved further into the park (SERNAP 2011). The lowland indigenous communities in the *Polígono 7* are heavily outnumbered by the settlers, who

amount to about 20 000 families (SERNAP 2011; Fundación Tierra 2012). Several lowland indigenous communities within this area have taken up coca cultivation and individual ownership structures and been incorporated in the *cocalero* (coca farmer) syndicates (Paz 2012). In 2009 Evo Morales decided to reduce the TIPNIS protected area by nearly a ninth of its total previous space, due to pressure from settlers.

### *Territory and indigenous subjectivity*

The borders of TIPNIS, like most borders, were initially an arbitrary legal construction; they were not defined in accordance with any existing arrangements among the lowland indigenous communities themselves. However, after the national park was created, and facing further pressure from settlements and resource exploitation, the indigenous communities in the park gradually embraced it as their territory, recognizing the externally created borders as their own. Sarela Paz, an anthropologist who has studied the TIPNIS area since the 1980s, explained the process as follows:

This is the moment – when everything else is in a state of conflict, occupied – this is the moment when the communities living inside adopt TIPNIS entirely as their territory. Or, of course it is part of their territory; it was their territory in the past, but not with these borders. There were other borders that were knit in different ways. But in this context of pressure – of occupation, of subjugation of land which was encouraged from La Paz, with no recognition of what was going on inside – it ended up being their territory, their only refuge, which they needed to defend. (Paz 2012, personal interview – my translation)

Thus, the discursive practices of legislation and mapping have tangible material impacts regarding who has access to territory. These practices are not neutral, but driven by a variety of interests. These interests include conservation initiatives as well as a quest for economic development through resource exploitation, driven by both neoliberal ideals and dreams of national sovereignty. Intersectional relations of power are embedded in these processes, as influence over the distribution and use of national territory is related to factors such as economic status, ethnicity, gender, place, and education level. The indigenous communities in the lowlands are generally far from decision-making about the spaces that they depend on for living.

The Bolivian anthropologist Gabriela Canedo Vásquez (2011), who has worked among Moxeño communities, addresses the importance of territory for

indigenous people in the lowlands – in material terms, as a precondition for subsistence and livelihood, as well as in symbolic and cultural terms, as a site for the reproduction of group identity. She describes how lowland indigenous groups have increasingly organized to make claims for legal recognition and territorial rights. Her analysis focuses on the concept of the *Loma Santa*, which is used by indigenous communities in the TIPNIS area to refer to their territory. *Loma* means an elevated place, safe from the seasonal inundations of the lowlands. The addition *Santa*, which signifies sacredness, indicates Christian missionary influence – another example of religious syncretism induced by colonial encounters (see Chapter 1). In local tradition, the *Loma Santa* is described as a mythical place, protected from external hazards, which the communities dream of finding. During the past decades, the concept of *Loma Santa* has gained a different, political significance, as it has come to symbolize and legitimize lowland indigenous claims to land rights, and been adopted as a mobilizing force in the communities’ struggles against increased pressure from colonization and resource extraction (see Canedo Vásquez 2011). Here, it becomes evident how symbolic representations and material aspects are intertwined, and how they relate to subject formation, in struggles over access to territory. The mythical *Loma Santa*, originating in particular religious, social and material organization in the past and in encounters with early Christian missions – is mobilized in particular territorial demands at another time and under different conditions. The legendary quest for the mythical place has been translated to a very concrete political struggle for sustained control over legally recognized land in the form of the TIOC (*territorio indígena originario campesino*, as defined in the 2009 constitution). The territorial struggles co-evolve with recognition and mobilization of indigeneity as a basis for political subjectivity. This becomes evident in the TIPNIS conflict, as I discuss further below.

### *Mobilization of indigeneity in territorial struggles*

Focusing on the linking of indigeneity with territory in recent Bolivian politics – for instance the legal recognition of communal indigenous land through the TCO/TIOC – Canedo Vásquez recognizes how indigenous identity has been mobilized in territorial struggles. Among the communities that she has studied, she argues, “you can talk about an identity strategy (*estrategia identitaria*) – establishing the plasticity of identity – that the groups utilize, drawing on certain traits, to demand territory” (Canedo Vásquez 2011:50, my translation). The term “identity strategy” does not mean that indigenous identity is regarded



merely as an instrument for achieving a certain objective. Rather, it indicates that actors have a certain amount of room to maneuver and can use their “identity resources” (*recursos identitarios*) (Ibid.) within particular, contextual conditions in which these make sense as a means to gain legitimacy and support. As I discussed in Chapter 3, in MAS’ political framework, indigeneity is a favored identity category, and therefore a sensible category to mobilize for making claims.

Even though there is a long history of indigenous resistance to colonization and resource extraction in the lowland area, it is only recently that lowland indigenous peoples have emerged as a political force on the national scene. While in the highlands roadblocks is a common way of protesting, lowland organizations have instead organized, so far, nine large-scale marches as a means to voice their demands (Radhuber 2012). With the first *Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity* in 1990, lowland activists came forward as a united group articulating shared demands for legal recognition and rights under a common umbrella of indigenous identity. The success of the 1990 march, which resulted in the creation of TIPNIS, opened up a path towards more marches and continued territorial demands articulated in terms of indigeneity in Bolivia (Forno 2012-04-24, personal interview). This co-articulation of indigeneity and claims to territory in Bolivia needs to be understood in relation to an increasing recognition of indigenous people’s rights in international forums, which I examine below.

Since 1990, subsequent marches have been key forums for articulation of political claims under the flag of a united movement. As Canedo Vásquez (2011) points out, the claims to legal recognition of territorial rights based on a unifying indigeneity may be read as compliance with an external political system with colonial heritage. At the same time, she continues, criticism of this kind disregards the agency of lowland indigenous people in formulating demands that correspond with the possibilities available in a certain context, and builds on an essentialized image of these groups as separated from political processes of the state – an image often reproduced in rhetoric about the lowlands, which I will come back to. What really becomes evident through the lowland communities’ organization, Canedo Vásquez claims, is exactly their awareness of the political landscape, and their agency as contemporary political subjects. If voicing demands in terms of indigeneity is perceived as a way to access legal recognition, for instance through the TCO/TIOC, people will employ this as a conscious strategy.

Like all projects drawing on strategic essentialism (Spivak 1990), this mobilization of indigeneity involves a risk that differences within and between communities are overlooked, as they are perceived from the outside as a homogenous group. In turn, organizing and being recognized as a particular kind of indigenous may affect the self-identification among people in these communities, resulting in an increasing emphasis on indigeneity and an invisibilization of other aspects of identity and social organization. These processes may reinforce existing power imbalances. For instance, TCO/TIOC land is allocated to communities, relying on their internal patterns of organization, which might benefit the community members with most influence. Legal recognition that takes the community as the basic unit may therefore exacerbate existing internal patterns of domination and marginalization (see Zimmerer 2013). Interviewing activists and academics with knowledge about TIPNIS, I was told about power imbalances and conflicts of interest, as community members have differing influence in decision-making. There have also been cases in which community leaders have sold land or natural resources illegally to outsiders without consulting the rest of the community.

### *Turning to the TIPNIS conflict*

In the TIPNIS area, increasing recognition of indigenous peoples' rights in national legislation has been paralleled with increasing demands and growing tensions around access to territory and resources. Since 2009, these tensions have escalated in the conflict around the highway construction. Two marches have been organized from the lowlands to protest against the road plans, and one to support the highway (see Chapter 4). Apart from the MAS government and the lowland indigenous and settler communities whose livelihoods would be directly affected by the road, a variety of actors have taken part in the conflict, including regional politicians in the Eastern lowlands, popular movements, church representatives, local and foreign NGOs, researchers and urban activists.

The conflict has gained symbolic value far beyond the borders of TIPNIS (see McNeish 2013), and attracted some international interest (see The Economist 2011; Friedman-Rudovsky 2011). It has been framed, for instance, as indigenous peoples' struggle for their rights and ways of living, as a fight over natural resources and territorial control, and as the MAS government's ultimate break with their earlier environmental ideals in favor of a *desarrollista* (developmentalist) agenda. The planned road has been portrayed as a

development project for the benefit of the entire country, as a means to further colonization and exploitation orchestrated from the highlands, as the proof of MAS' alliance with large commercial interests, and as catering to Morales' *cocalero* (settlers engaged in coca cultivation) comrades, and, in turn, the informal drug economy.

While all of these depictions bear some relevance, none of them fully encompasses the complexity of the situation. The highway project and the struggles around it are intricate and have been assigned a multitude of meanings, involving dynamic articulations and mobilizations of subjectivities. Especially, indigeneity has been engaged as a privileged subject position from which claims may be made. This, I address in the next section.

## The ecological indigenous in the TIPNIS conflict

I will now explore co-articulations of indigeneity and environmental-political claims in relation to the TIPNIS conflict. While the political struggles around TIPNIS are complex, and involve a multitude of actors and interests, much of the debate has revolved around the figuration of the ecological indigenous. I will trace how this figuration is mobilized as a means of lending legitimacy to claims about the environment, and discuss the underlying power dynamics and possible implications of such mobilizations.

### *Articulations across scales*

Representations of the ecological indigenous were frequent at the resistance meeting in Gundonovia, which I attended in March 2012. Ecological indigeneity was articulated by the gathered community members, but also encouraged by the NGO leaders and activists from outside. The environmental knowledge and sustainable practices among the lowland indigenous communities were emphasized, and juxtaposed with the threat of destruction from settlers and government-incited resource extraction and infrastructural projects exemplified by the highway. A resistance movement leader from a different part of the protected area gave a speech about the importance of defending TIPNIS, "our *casa grande* [see below] and home of the ancestors". He connected the anti-road resistance to similar struggles all over the planet, claimed that the movement could overthrow the government and ended by

asking whether “we” would let *colonisadores* take over “our” land. “NO!” exclaimed the audience.

At the meeting, I was struck by the cosmopolitan character of the rhetoric. Claims were framed in concepts and categories easily accessible to participants and audiences of any international debate on environmental politics. Like the resistance movement leader cited above, many speakers linked the TIPNIS conflict to global matters. I got the impression that the meeting participants were continuously challenging and re-constituting scales in their argumentation, situating themselves firmly in the local setting while simultaneously, and consciously, staging an international environmental-political event.

The president of the Subcentral TIPNIS, Fernando Vargas, explicitly stated that the TIPNIS controversy is a global concern, linked to other national and international environmental issues. He particularly mentioned climate change and its adverse impacts in Bolivia, exemplified in the case of Andean glacier retreat – an emblematic topic in Bolivian and international climate discourses (see Chapter 4). Other meeting participants repeated such references to national and global issues, although the grip of the local context remained present in the articulation and affirmation of community members’ worries about losing their homes and livelihoods. TIPNIS was referred to, almost interchangeably, as *pulmón verde* (green lung), an often-used metaphor in international environmentalist rhetoric, and particularly in references to the Amazon; *Pachamama* – the figure in Andean mythology often translated as Mother Earth, and widely employed in Bolivian national politics under MAS (see previous chapters); and *Loma Santa* (see above) or *Casa Grande* (big house), which are concepts used among the local indigenous communities for relating to their territory. This blending of terminology from different contexts – local, national and global – illustrates how the resistance movement has consciously attempted to communicate their case and obtain credibility across scales, invoking the attachment of lowland indigenous communities to the environment, and thereby their position as ecological indigenous.

### *Linking indigenous subjectivity to environmental concerns*

Sarela Paz notes that issues of environmental conservation have long been crucial for lowland indigenous communities, as they depend on the surrounding environments for sustaining their ways of life. Before indigenous voices were taken into account, defenders of indigenous peoples’ rights realized that environmental protection of the areas in which indigenous communities lived

also implied some protection of the livelihoods and territorial rights of these communities. This was one of the underlying forces behind the creation of the country's first national park, which was later to become TIPNIS, as described above. Later on, environmental protection became a key theme around which the lowland indigenous movements themselves organized and voiced their claims (Paz 2012, personal interview).

The linkage between indigenous rights and environmental protection has lately been increasingly emphasized, and articulated in new ways, by the lowland activists and other actors. “[I]ndigenous mobilisations are never simply local events”, Canessa (2006:247) points out, and as illustrated by the rhetoric of the resistance meeting in Gundonovia, the TIPNIS conflict indeed takes place in dialogue with national and international environmental politics. Bolivian and international NGOs are active parts in this process, as they bring the TIPNIS issue into a wider context of environmental struggles, and communicate it to larger networks. The ecological indigenous is a category which acquires meaning across scales. It reflects the anxiety and fear among local communities facing a threat to their home environments, and the MAS’ government’s promotion of an indigenous alternative model for development – which in turn has opened up a privileged discursive space in the country for co-articulations of indigeneity and environmentalism. It also resonates with a global attention to environmental threats and desperate turn to what is depicted as indigenous knowledge for guidance.

The narrative of the ecological indigenous defending their Amazon territory against greedy outsiders is well recognized within and beyond Bolivia. This familiar image has been reproduced in international media coverage of the conflict (see for instance Friedman-Rudovsky 2011) as well as in national campaigns and media reporting.



Cartoon from the Bolivian newspaper *La Prensa*, August 25, 2011, and republished in the blog *Bolivian Thoughts*. The government helicopter's warning "beware, almost all of them are heavily armed with cell phones!" refers to phone calls that the government claimed took place between protest leaders and the US Embassy in La Paz, and which, it was argued, indicated that the marchers were manipulated by foreign interests.

The association of the TIPNIS protests with international environmental movements – made legible through the cosmopolitan and, at the same time, locally anchored, figuration of the ecological indigenous – can be illustrated with this cartoon, published in a Bolivian newspaper during the first anti-highway mobilization. Marching among the protesters, who are otherwise depicted as caricatures of lowland indigenous people, are blue characters recognized as the extraterrestrial indigenous tribe from James Cameron's blockbuster movie *Avatar*, which Evo Morales is known to have proudly identified with as allies in the struggle against capitalism and imperialist exploitation (Huffington Post 2010; Stefanoni 2010). The moving across scales here is not limited to the earth, but stretches to anti-colonial resistance and territorial struggles in outer space;

somewhat ironically made accessible to an earthly audience by the US movie industry.

### *Divergent mobilizations of the ecological indigenous*

Indigenous communities in TIPNIS and anti-highway activists from outside are not the only actors in Bolivia who mobilize the ecological indigenous figuration to legitimize their claims. Several analysts point out how right wing politicians and autonomy movements in the *Media Luna* – the Eastern lowland departments of Beni, Pando, Tarija and Santa Cruz – have expressed support for the communities in TIPNIS. These actors invoke a common lowland history in which indigenous and *mestizo-criollo* inhabitants are united as victims of colonial domination and invasion from the Andes (Fabricant & Postero 2013). This narrative of affinity and shared suffering is not new to the TIPNIS conflict, but has a longer history. It was also, for instance, an element of the fierce political opposition in the *Media Luna* in the early years of MAS government (Fabricant & Postero 2013; Perreault & Green 2013). In the discourses of lowland *mestizo-criollo* right wing and autonomy movements, lowland indigenous peoples have been portrayed as “our ethnics” and as “culturally and racially superior to the Andean (Aymara or Quechua) indigenous peoples”, who are depicted as invaders (Perreault & Green 2013:50).

Right-wing groups in the lowlands have been accused of taking advantage of the TIPNIS resistance as a means to weaken the MAS government, by casting themselves as defenders of the local environment and its ecological indigenous inhabitants (Ramos 2012, personal interview; Fabricant & Postero 2013). Nicole Fabricant and Nancy Postero (2013) point to the irony here, as great parts of the *mestizo-criollo* lowland elites rely economically on exploitation of natural resources, including large-scale soy production and hydrocarbon extraction, which cause great environmental destruction (see also Zimmerer 2013). Moreover, feudal practices of keeping indigenous workforce under slave-like conditions prevail in parts of the lowlands (see Gustafson 2010), which illustrates the sustained colonial, racialized systems of injustice that the lowland elite’s support to the TIPNIS movement serves to gloss over (Fabricant & Postero 2013). There is also a recent history of political persecution by the right-wing lowland elite of indigenous organizations in the area. An activist whom I interviewed in La Paz described how right-wing opposition groups attacked the headquarters of Subcentral TIPNIS in Trinidad, among other offices of organizations in the lowlands, during the political crisis in the first years of the

MAS government. Lowland indigenous organizations have been among Evo Morales' supporters, but this support has decreased with the TIPNIS conflict.

A theme referred to in the cartoon above is the MAS government's attempts to undermine the credibility of the TIPNIS movement by pointing to its supposed associations with the lowland right-wing as well as international (and particularly US) actors. The Morales government has sought to discredit TIPNIS resistance leaders by portraying them as suspicious, allied with the political opposition and colonial forces, with the mission to deceive the indigenous people in the area (Chávez & Chávez 2012; Tapia 2012; Webber 2013). MAS officials have argued that the resistance movement is only a fraction, and not representative of the indigenous communities in TIPNIS. The movement is accused of obstructing the interests of the Bolivian nation as a whole, and the TIPNIS communities in particular, that have the right to benefit from the development that a highway would bring (Radio Nederland 2012). "This is not a march to defend the rights of Mother Earth", said the President in an interview. He went on to argue that the marchers were not one united group, and that the right-wing has used the protests as an opportunity to destabilize the MAS government (Radio Nederland 2012). This rhetoric serves not to challenge the ecological indigenous-ness of the lowland indigenous communities in general, but that of the resistance leaders.

Portrayals of lowland indigenous people as "savages" (*salvajes*) are recurring in the TIPNIS debate, as in a statement by *La Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (CSUTCB). They are the largest peasant workers' union in the country, rooted in the Aymara movements of the 1980s and 1990s, and one of the organizations of the *Pacto de Unidad*, the group of organizations behind MAS. In September 2011 a representative of CSUTCB asserted that the union supports the highway construction, since it does not want the "indigenous in TIPNIS [to] keep on living like savages" (El Diario 2011, my translation).

In the government's pro-highway rhetoric, the road is framed as a common good that will benefit the entire Bolivian population. It is described as a means of improved transport and easier access to the natural resources that are needed for economic growth, and, in turn, poverty alleviation, dignity and independence from colonial patterns (Paz 2012, personal interview; Hindery 2013). The road project equals modernity, progress and national independence: a view in line with a resource nationalist perspective (as introduced in Chapter 4). Here, the MAS government is framed as a protector of the lowland



indigenous and their right to development, conceptualized in the principle of *vivir bien*, to live well (see Chapter 3), while the anti-highway movement is depicted as a threat to this opportunity for development. Such posing of local indigenous peoples' interests against national interests is not unique to Bolivia, but a recurring theme in many places. For instance, in a South American context, Waltraud Morales (2012) provides examples from Peru, Brazil and Paraguay, where similar conflicts are taking place.

The government's accusations of linkages between the resistance movement and right wing and foreign interests have in turn led to worry among the anti-highway activists of being allied with foreigners, as it might undermine their legitimacy. My own body came to embody such a threat during the resistance meeting in Gundonovia. Together with two fellow *gringas* – a Swedish and a Norwegian researcher – I was asked to move to the back of the meeting room by a young activist from La Paz who was documenting the event. She did not want our apparently non-Bolivian faces on her tape, as she feared that it would damage the public image of the resistance movement. This incident illustrates how the outside recognition of the anti-highway protesters as passable representatives of the authentic ecological indigenous is a crucial asset for the credibility of the movement. This image is under constant attack and needs to be reproduced continuously.

The conflict over TIPNIS has largely turned into a fight over definition of and access to the figuration of the ecological indigenous, which risks concealing structural and very tangible patterns of power and subordination. As pointed out by Fabricant and Postero,

[w]hen discourses truncate the long histories of uneven access to means of production and to resource wealth, they simply provide justification for any group to claim rights to 'their natives'. Fashioning themselves with symbols of the 'good' or 'suffering' Indian', both the Morales administration and the elites of Santa Cruz claim to have human rights on their side. (Fabricant & Postero 2013:13-14)

There are clearly reasons to be concerned when the figuration of the ecological indigenous, stripped of historical and contemporary structural conditions, is used to legitimize interests that reach far beyond the particular site of contest. However, depicting indigenous TIPNIS activists as simple tokens in a political fight between the MAS government which is "willing to sacrifice them for the sake of national development" and the right-wing opposition which is "willing

to commodify their suffering and sacrifice to oppose the MAS” neglects the agency of indigenous communities to mobilize images of themselves and form strategic alliances with whom they can (Fabricant & Postero 2013:13; see also Canedo Vásquez 2011). The simple categorization of “indigenous TIPNIS activists” also overlooks any differing interests within this diverse group.

As I have indicated above, the ecological indigenous – like the endangered glacier presented in Chapter 5 – is a cosmopolitan figuration; it is simultaneously local and universal, and it makes sense across scales. In the past decades recognition of indigenous rights has been tied to environmental matters on international scenes. This has opened up a discursive space for the ecological indigenous figuration. Without this space, the figuration would not have been so attractive to mobilize in the Bolivian context. In the next section, I further explore how articulations of the ecological indigenous in Bolivia are intertwined with representations of this figuration in international forums.

## The charisma of the ecological indigenous

As the severity of environmental problems has gained increased recognition worldwide and the solutions seem far away, an interest in traditional knowledges and forms of life as possible pathways to a more sustainable future has grown (Tsing 1993; 1999). In international forums, including for instance UN conferences and documents, indigeneity has been increasingly co-articulated with environmental concerns for several decades. The indigenous here comes to stand for environmental wisdom and a kind of intrinsic sustainability. Such representations, as I have shown, are invoked in Bolivian politics. However, a close study of this particular context points to the tensions and enactments of power involved when mobilizing the ecological indigenous.

### *International recognition of the ecological indigenous*

The idea of indigenous people possessing an inherently close relation to and ancient knowledge about nature is frequently reproduced in key documents within international environmental politics, such as UN agreements. For instance, Principle 22 of the 1992 *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the so-called Earth Summit) states that “[i]ndigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in

environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices” (UN 1992). A similar statement is included in *The Future We Want*, the document resulting from the more recent United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the so-called Rio+20 in 2012:

We recognize that the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities make an important contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and their wider application can support social well-being and sustainable livelihoods. (UN 2012, Article 197)

In internationally recognizable representations, indigenous people have come to stand for a deep and ancient, spiritually anchored environmental knowledge. Based on his study of resistance to a granite quarry among Mi'kmaq indigenous communities in Canada, Alf Hornborg argues: "...natives are offered a niche in the dominant cosmology as speakers of spiritual truths of which everybody is, at heart, aware” (2005:204). In modern environmental politics, the indigenous are expected to say things that would be impossible for other actors to articulate if they want to be taken seriously – for instance talk about respect for Mother Earth. Such recognition of the indigenous, as associated with a certain ecological perspective, has made it a valuable position, which carries a powerful appeal and certain legitimacy. As Astrid Ulloa observes, “representations of indigenous peoples have changed from ‘the savage colonial subject’ to ‘the political-ecological agent’” (2003:1).

Molly Doane, drawing from fieldwork on popular movements, resource extraction and environmental conservation in Mexico, notes that this kind of representation serves to create a “symbolic association between endangered lands and endangered people” (2007:459). In the Bolivian political context, various actors have mobilized this type of symbolic association for different purposes (as discussed e.g. by Canessa 2006; Canedo Vásquez 2011; Fabricant 2013; Fabricant & Postero 2013; Burman forthcoming). The MAS government has emphasized particular representations of indigeneity in their overall political project and in their positioning on climate change, which I have shown in this and previous chapters. The TIPNIS conflict, in the words of McNeish (2013:237) has “revealed anew the complex dynamics of indigeneity” in Bolivia; as illuminated above, various actors have attempted to make claims to the subject position of the ecological indigenous.

### *Awkward indigeneity*

In Bolivia, a country where about half of the population self-identifies as indigenous, and where recent government ambitions towards a re-formulation of the nation has revolved around indigeneity, the notion of a coherent indigenous subject with special environmental knowledge and representing an ideal, sustainable lifestyle is inevitably ambiguous and awkward. Ongoing political processes in the country demonstrate the instability of the indigenous, along with other subject positions. In Bolivia today, who might be considered indigenous is a highly politicized matter of definition – the category may apply to lowland communities in TIPNIS as well as, for instance, *cocalero* settlers, urban and rural Aymara and Quechua groups in the Andes, and the President himself. As I have shown, there are no definite, common indigenous interests, and no unified stance among or within different indigenous groups and communities (this was also emphasized by Peredo Beltrán 2012, personal interview).

The ecological indigenous is a central political subject in Bolivia, and available to a wide range of actors. The figuration has been mobilized to legitimize claims from various directions, not least in the TIPNIS conflict. To some extent, the Bolivian environmental debate may be read as a field of discursive contest about who may pass as the most authentic, and thereby most legitimate, ecological indigenous subject – or, otherwise, as the most devoted defender of this figuration.

## Challenging essentialization

Calling upon the figuration of the ecological indigenous implies the invocation of certain norms and assumptions about human-environmental relations. In order to pass as authentic to national and international audiences, the ecological indigenous needs to embody such norms, and perform an inherently harmonious relationship with Mother Earth. This relationship is supposedly rooted in a deep and ancient environmental knowledge or wisdom which is both particular and universal, as it may be referred to across scales, in forums ranging from the local to the global, and be included in international agendas such as the outcome document of the “Rio+20” conference, *The Future We Want* (see UN 2012, Articles 39 and 197). In the Bolivian context, as my research shows, this cosmopolitan ecological indigenous-ness is put to work by the MAS government

in its positioning in national and international forums, as well as by the right wing opposition and business representatives, and by critical popular movements that explicitly link the TIPNIS struggle to global environmental issues.

References to the ecological indigenous figuration, as I have addressed above, tend to entail a generalization in which “the indigenous” is treated as a stable subject position limited to a few recognizable characteristics. There is a risk here for overlooking power patterns and differing interests among and within communities, deriving from intersecting factors, for instance gender, marital and economic status, age, location, belonging to a particular community and place, access to schools, health care and external markets, and source of income – thus the complexity of subjects and their embeddedness in structures of power and subordination. However, the figuration is not unambiguous or fixed, but under constant redefinition. In this section I point to accounts that highlight intersecting aspects of subject formation that are embodied in the ecological indigenous.

### *Recognizing structural conditions*

Paz emphasizes the importance of considering structural conditions when trying to understand the ongoing conflicts around environmental protection, access to resources and indigenous rights, rather than collapsing all intersecting aspects into an essentialized notion of the ecological indigenous: “I keep insisting on the theme of the structural conditions of subjects. They are not essences walking through history [*esencias caminando a través de la historia*]” (2012, personal interview, my translation). She is worried about what she perceives as an appropriation of the indigenous subject in national and international environmental debates:

Such appropriation is, for me, not a minor issue. It is not a theme that shouldn't be thought of. Because then we may fall in the affirmation that the indigenous people, since they have strong relationships with nature, themselves think of nature. And this affirmation, I think, is not correct. It tends to be essentialist, or primordialist. Or, if you like, fundamentalist, because it basically says that the indigenous peoples are always resonating with nature, in dialogue with nature, in harmony with nature. No! [...] This distinct appropriation, and the explanation and analysis of this appropriation, is not to be found in the indigenous being. It is found in the structural and historical processes under which specific indigenous peoples have lived. Because these processes are very diverse and varied. And it is very important to pay attention to this, because it helps us to

explain why a moment like this has arrived. Indigenous peoples have different positions in relation to Mother Earth. (Paz 2012, personal interview, my translation)

Here, Paz voices a concern about the lack of recognition of the particular situatedness of groups and individuals in structures of power, which underlines the appropriation by various Bolivian actors of a particular, essentialized ecological indigenous position. Similar concerns are expressed by Rosario Leon:

There are limits in the attribution of *one* logic, *one* form of being to indigenous people, neglecting the diversity, and in supposing that they are non-capitalists. [...] There is a lot of romanticism and politics around indigenous people. They are people affected by domination, sacrificed communities, modern indigenous. The pure indigenous don't exist, but the government keeps believing in 'trilobite indigenous' [*indígenas trilobites*] – immune, immutable, conserving intact social structures. These are oppressed people who have adapted to the circumstances. They are living in the limitations of their situations. Their ancient knowledges are not working under today's circumstances. How can we imagine that they are maintaining pure structures? (Leon 2012, personal interview, my translation)

Patricia Chávez and Marxa Chávez (2012) argue that it is not necessary to *mitificar* indigenous peoples – to regard them as mythical beings, as if their realities were not entangled with the structures of subordination and exploitation of capitalist society – in order to understand that their particular, subjugated positions in these structures condition their space for political power and resistance (see also McNeish 2013). A young environmental activist that I spoke with in La Paz took a similar stance, emphasizing the importance of capitalist economic structures in creating positions of marginalization. He maintained that the class perspective has been lost in the past decade's privileging of ethnicity and culture (personal interview, 2012-10-11). As addressed in Chapter 3, class relations in Bolivia have been co-established with ethnic categorization for centuries, and these cannot be separated from one another (see Webber 2013).

### *Feminist critique*

In addition to, and entangled with, analyses based on class and economic structures, an undercurrent of feminist critique has emerged in relation to the TIPNIS conflict, and voices that stress women's experiences and agency in the protest movement have been raised.

At the resistance meeting in Gundonovia that I attended, the stage was dominated by men, but a few female community representatives spoke up. One of them addressed the other women, asking “Where are the women? I have not heard you here, sisters.” She went on: “the government keeps talking about *Pachamama*, but who is that? If they care about *Pachamama* they should respect us women!” Here, the meeting participant raised two issues that other critics have expressed in various contexts. First, the lack of female voices in the resistance movement despite the considerable participation of women, and second, that the government has assigned rights and agency to the environment, conceptualized through the feminized figure of *Pachamama*, while at the same time inciting resource exploitation and infrastructural projects. Feminists and female activists have pointed to tendencies of machismo in the government’s rhetoric, drawing parallels between disrespect for nature/Mother Earth and oppression of women.

A large portion of the participants in the anti-highway resistance movement were women. While female activists were assigned or took on traditionally feminine tasks of cooking and childcare during the protest marches, female indigenous protest leaders also played an important role as organizers, spokespersons and active participants (López Uriarte 2012). Many children participated in the marches. One six-month old baby died from respiratory illness during the second march, and several women had miscarriages along the way. This led the Minister of Communications, Amanda Dávila, to accuse the marchers of using their children as human shields. Female marchers and feminist activists responded that women from lowland communities had no choice but to bring their children, or otherwise stay home, since nobody else was available to care for the children (Achtenberg 2012).

A female protest leader, Berta Bejarano, was subject to media attention. She had some years earlier been convicted of smuggling, after she was discovered at a Brazilian airport with capsules of cocaine in her stomach. Bejarano claimed that she did it out of desperation to support her children. Discrediting her as a criminal, MAS government representatives refused to include her in the negotiations with the protest leaders. This led the well-known feminist activist and debater María Galindo, of the La Paz-based radical feminist network *Mujeres Creando*, to remind people of president Morales’ background as a coca grower and accuse his government of hypocrisy. Berta Bejarano became a symbol for women in the resistance movement when *Mujeres Creando* together with female indigenous activists organized a solidarity march of 500 women and

children, “the march of the Bertas”, carrying posters depicting Bejarano’s face (Achtenberg 2012; Galindo 2012). On the homepage of *Mujeres Creando*, Galindo stresses the symbolic value of the march as it brought attention to the agency and experiences of the diversity of women participating in the march, and to the important role of Bejarano and other female protest leaders (Galindo 2012). Thus, in this event, urban feminists and female anti-highway marchers joined forces to promote a common feminist agenda.

In a public speech in the Cochabamba department in August 2011, president Morales encouraged young men in the areas around TIPNIS to seduce female anti-highway activists in order to make them forget their opposition to the road. He added that if he had the time, he would do it himself. Female indigenous leaders reacted strongly and commented that the female activists are subjects with a firm political conviction, and not for sale. María Galindo, from *Mujeres Creando*, linked the exploitation of the protected area with the exploitation of women’s bodies as two aspects of the same patriarchal and colonial project (Vacaflo 2011). In connection with the first anti-highway march *Mujeres Creando* made a campaign stressing women’s and children’s experiences from the march and dedicated an issue of their journal *Mujer Pública* to the topic *Mujer Globalizada, Naturaleza Aniquilada* (Globalized Woman, Conquered Nature). The issue featured women’s accounts from the struggle and ecofeminist-inspired analyses of the co-exploitation of women and nature.

Understanding figurations as nodes where categorizations intersect and acquire meaning (see Chapter 2) helps to illuminate the complexity, inconsistency and context-specificity of subject positions. Accounts that stress class, gender and other aspects of subjectivity among the members of indigenous communities and movements indicate the situatedness of these individuals in intersecting relations of power. Such power relations are embodied in the figuration of the ecological indigenous, since the figuration cannot be isolated from material and social realities. People who are depicted as ecological indigenous, or themselves identify with this figuration for political purposes, come from somewhere: they exist physically in particular settings, under particular conditions.

The ecological indigenous figuration, as I have shown, is not fixed. Neither is it necessarily defined and imposed from outside, but also adopted by indigenous movements for identification and as a conscious strategy (see Bastian 2006; Lykke 2010). It is continuously re-defined and re-appropriated by various, and differently situated, actors. It is mobilized for different purposes, to support dominant and challenging discourses, to discredit antagonists or create alliances.



In the next section, I conclude my analysis of mobilizations of the ecological indigenous in the TIPNIS conflict, and point to opportunities and risks that may arise in these processes, within the Bolivian political context.

## Concluding discussion

The internationally recognized ecological indigenous emerges in a postcolonial setting, where information travels fast and the local is awkwardly entangled with the regional and the global. It resonates well in forums ranging from local popular movements to international media and NGOs. This makes the figuration, at certain moments, an attractive position from which to make claims to rights and territory (Tsing 1999; Murray Li 2000). The ecological indigenous becomes an attractive figuration partly due to its vagueness, which makes it possible for various groups to make claims to this position and define it in differing ways.

As I have shown, the ecological indigenous is a powerful position from which to make claims, not least in the contemporary Bolivian political context. Yet, mobilizing this category entails potential problems. It implies an a-political and a-historical essentialization of the indigenous and indigenous knowledge, with the risk of assigning indigenous communities to a position outside of time and modernity, and tied to a very particular place, neglecting their very strong entanglement with current economic and political contexts, and obscuring processes of power and domination on global, regional, national and local scales. Canessa captures such dilemmas as follows:

There is an inherent tension between the universality of indigeneity as a powerful and enabling globalized context and the fact that the discourse of indigeneity is one that lays claim to a cultural and temporal specificity: it always argues for a particular status for those attached to a particular place since a particular time. The attachment to ultimately arbitrary axes of space and time almost inevitably lead to essentialist discourses to account for why one people should have rights over a particular territory on the ground that they have occupied it since a particular date. These frictions and tensions are not only creating new hierarchies between indigenous people but they are exposing contradictions at the heart of the nation-state and conflict between people who one might otherwise expect to be in alliance. (Canessa 2012:11)

Thus, to conclude: employing the image of the ecological indigenous in the articulation of political demands may serve to reproduce essentialized categories within postcolonial, racialized power structures and reduce the possibility of speaking from any other standpoint. It may also exclude people who do not identify as indigenous, or indigenous people in urban areas, and overlook other intersectional power relations and bases for political subjectivity.

This is a major concern. Yet, from a more pragmatic, activist point of view, mobilizing the ecological indigenous can, at certain moments, be a successful political strategy – indeed the only strategy available for some actors in Bolivia, and elsewhere. In the words of Tsing, who writes about Indonesia: “[t]he fantastic aspect of tribal identity does not make it irrelevant to marginalized people who pass as tribals; to the contrary, it is the fantasy of the tribe that becomes the source of engagement for both tribals and their metropolitan others” (Tsing 1999). Translated to the Bolivian context, passing as ecological indigenous – a category emerging in a postcolonial, postindustrial, globalized setting – provides a space for articulation of claims, and reasonable chances that these claims may be heard and deemed legitimate. This can be understood as strategic essentialism (Spivak 1990), in which an essentialized position or category is temporarily accepted and mobilized for political purposes (see also Paulson 2012).

In other words: the positioning of lowland indigenous communities as a homogenous and inherently ecological collective may involve certain problems. However, identification with the figuration of the ecological indigenous is also, for people involved in struggles for territorial rights and environmental protection, a possibility for making and legitimizing political claims; claims that might otherwise not have been heard. Speaking with Spivak, the ecological indigenous becomes something that the activists cannot not use (Spivak 1993; see also Canessa 2012). This possibility was very present at the meeting in Gundonovia, and, as addressed above, it has underlined much of the indigenous mobilizations in Bolivia during the past few decades.

Yet, drawing upon the ecological indigenous is not a universal trick that anyone can turn to. As becomes evident in the TIPNIS case, the ecological indigenous is under continuous negotiation, and who gets to define the figuration in specific contexts is very much a matter of power. While the ecological indigenous is recognized as a legitimate subject position in Bolivia, permission to it is restricted. Many different actors mobilize their versions of ecological indigenous for different political purposes, but, as Canessa (2012:28) points out, “once an

indigenous discourse is broad enough to include a majority of people, it is surely inevitable that some groups will have more access to indigenous capital than others”. Indigenous capital, as Canessa terms it, is largely tied to political and economic power. In the end, such forces determine who is the legitimate ecological indigenous, and define the rights and needs of this figuration – in line with dominant political and economic interests. Similarly, in an international context, while indigenous people and knowledge are included in discourses on environment and human rights, calls upon these categories are largely marginalized in political processes, as becomes evident in the (non-) responses to Bolivia’s claims in international forums, where approaches of ecological modernization and green governmentality prevail. These issues I will address further in the final chapter.

# Chapter 7 Ending the March

The ways in which environmental issues are conceptualized, and how solutions for them are envisioned, are not self-evident or neutral, but embedded in relations of power that shift in time and space. I started this thesis project with the ambition to explore the power dynamics involved in environmental politics and struggles in a particular setting: Bolivia under the government of Evo Morales and the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS). The following questions guided me on this endeavor:

1. How have intersectional power dynamics played out in the environmental struggles that have evolved in Bolivia under the government of Evo Morales?
2. What tensions and ambiguities arise when the Morales government claims to represent a nexus of indigenous identity and radical environmentalism? What does it imply for articulations of knowledge and subject positions in environmental struggles?

In this chapter, these research questions serve as a jumping off point, from which I sum up the main conclusions that I have generated through my work, and discuss wider implications of my analyses. An additional objective of this project has been to develop a methodology for engaging feminist critical theory for studying environmental politics and struggles; I devote some space for reflection upon how this ambition has contributed to this study. In a more general sense, I also discuss what these theoretical and methodological approaches may offer to research on environmental issues.

## Exploring environmental struggles in contemporary Bolivia

In Bolivia, the years around the millennium shift were marked by uprisings of ardent popular movements, articulating political claims at the intersection of class and indigenous interests, and destabilizing prevailing structures of power. When Morales and MAS, a diverse coalition of popular movements, won the elections in 2005, it was perceived as a radical change in the political landscape. Morales was dubbed the first indigenous president in Bolivia, and, with MAS, representatives of groups that had previously been largely excluded from decision-making were installed in the government and ministries. MAS promised a break with previous, neoliberal regimes. Its political project, *el proceso de cambio* (the process of change), was framed as an ambition towards transforming the state and national identity according to indigenous, primarily highland, values and traditions, and the ultimate abandonment of remaining colonial patterns. Recognition of the indigenous population and their experiences and interests was a central feature here, and Bolivia was officially re-branded as a “plurinational state”. This political project is reflected in the new constitution of 2009 (Congreso Nacional de Bolivia 2008). Under MAS, indigenous subjectivity has thus moved from a marginalized position to center stage. Across the political spectrum, claims are made in relation to indigeneity, which have become a key condition for political legitimacy in Bolivia – not least in the sphere of environmental politics.

Morales’ first years of government coincided with a global attention to climate change, which was reflected among international development cooperation agencies working with Bolivia. Moreover, environmental issues had long been on the agendas of the organizations that were among MAS’ support groups. Access to territory and resources is a recurrent matter of controversy in the country. Towards the end of the 20th Century and around the year 2000, broad movements mobilized around claims to the right to water and to a more just distribution of the benefits from extraction of gas and other natural resources. Thus, environmental issues, entangled with matters of territorial rights and access to natural resources, were already recognized by the international development community and among popular movements when Morales took office. This tendency was strengthened as part of the new government’s *proceso de cambio*.

Environmental issues were increasingly politicized during the early years of MAS rule (as discussed in Chapter 4). This was articulated not least in international forums. Particularly in the UN-led climate negotiations of 2009 and 2010, the Bolivian delegates promoted an anti-capitalist, Andean vision of environmental sustainability, a “culture of life”, as opposed to Western neoliberal models that were depicted as a “culture of death” (see Morales Ayma 2010:89). The Bolivian government explicitly aspired to represent a radical green alternative, based on a perceived indigenous tradition of sustainable practices and respect for *Pachamama* – the ambiguous spiritual figure in Andean cosmology who is popularly translated and simplified into the better-known character of Mother Earth.

### *Tensions and resistance*

However, MAS’ articulation of an environmental position is ambiguous and contested. Internal differences of interest within the diverse groups that constitute the government’s support base have resulted in contradictory statements and actions, and the radical green ambition has collided with a parallel urge towards economic development as a means to national sovereignty, to be reached through intense natural resource exploitation and investments in large-scale infrastructure. Thereby, environmental politics are closely tied to, and clash with, questions of control over land and resources. Criticism and resistance against MAS’ politics have been expressed among diverse indigenous, environmental and human rights movements as well as within the right-wing political opposition. These are actors with differing objectives. Resistance movements have organized around the defense of a particular territory from threats of exploitation, or to support environmental and human rights issues in a broader sense. In the case of the right-wing opposition, the criticism against MAS aims to protect the interests of large-scale landowners and commercial enterprises and undermine the credibility of the government (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Environmentalist and human rights movements, along with Bolivian and foreign researchers and public intellectuals, have claimed that the green and pro-indigenous image of the Morales government obscures aggressive exploitation, internal colonization of lowland areas and intense natural resource extraction (see Chávez & Chávez 2012; Prada 2012). It has been argued that MAS’ radical rhetoric masks an agenda that caters to the interest of particular groups while marginalizing the majority (Canessa 2012; Laing 2012). The criticism and

resistance against MAS' politics has been channeled primarily into the struggle against a highway which the government plans to construct through the TIPNIS (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Secure*), a lowland national park and indigenous territory. A broad anti-highway resistance movement grew strong in 2011-2011, and the conflict led to a major crisis for MAS.

## Analyzing intersectional power dynamics through figurations

The tensions mentioned above illustrate how environmental politics are entangled with economic and resource interests, and an arena where relations of power are manifested, reinforced and challenged. As a means to explore such tensions I engaged the notion of figurations, an analytical tool developed to understand how subject positions take form and interact within structures of power (see Chapter 2). In my research material I identified two figurations that embody the tensions and intersectional power dynamics in contemporary environmental politics in Bolivia; the *endangered glacier* and the *ecological indigenous*. Through unwrapping these two figurations I analyzed the MAS government's positioning on climate change, and the conflict around the highway planned through TIPNIS.

The endangered glacier incarnates the threat of global warming, and is widely mobilized to promote various approaches to climate change. In Bolivia, the MAS government has invoked this figuration in domestic and international contexts to refer to the Andean glaciers that are retreating due to temperature increases. The ecological indigenous represents the widespread image of indigenous people as living in harmony with, and possessing special knowledge about, nature. In contemporary Bolivia, where indigeneity has been a key component of re-constituting a national identity, this is a powerful figuration which bears great legitimacy, but it also resonates with international audiences.

These two figurations are mobilized by different actors and for varying, and sometimes conflicting, purposes in Bolivian environmental politics. Identifying knowledge claims and subject formation as processes of power, I discussed the subversive potential of the figurations to challenge dominant assumptions, but also the risks that may arise as they are invoked. For instance, calling upon them may serve to reproduce essentialized images of indigenous people as a

homogenous collective, overlooking internal differences and power relations based on intersecting factors such as gender, age and economic status. I found that in struggles over the figurations, not everyone has equal access to the moral capital that they embody: the privilege of definition here follows established, although not unchallenged, patterns of economic and political influence.

The figurations are mutually legitimizing, but also challenge each other. As I addressed in Chapter 5, the legitimacy of the references to the endangered glacier in the MAS government's climate positioning depends on the successful mobilization of the ecological indigenous as representing a coherent Bolivian identity. In the TIPNIS conflict, discussed in Chapter 6, the government's appropriation of the ecological indigenous has been contested by a broad resistance movement. To some extent, this challenge to the government's privilege of definition has been successful – the protesters destabilized the notion of the ecological indigenous as a homogenous national identity, and the government faced costs in terms of a crisis of representation and credibility. This points to the entanglement of subject positions in dynamics of power, and their ambiguity as they shift with time and context.

### *Meaning-making across scales*

While claims to be marching for *Pachamama* are attached to the local, Andean context, they are intimately involved with discourse formations far beyond it. In a globalized world of instant communication, legitimacy is acquired on various scales simultaneously, through processes that, in turn, are part of the making and remaking of these scales (see Tsing 2005; Paulson & Gezon 2005). Bolivian actors actively produce scales through their invocations of “local” cultures and values, and their staging of “global” concerns. This happens, for instance, in the government's self-representation as an Andean, indigenous alternative in international climate negotiations. It is also reflected in the anti-highway movement's framing of the defense of TIPNIS as connected to an international struggle to defend nature and indigenous communities against global forces of capitalist expansion.

The two figurations that I engaged for my analysis– the endangered glacier and the ecological indigenous – embody key aspects of contemporary Bolivian environmental politics, but also illuminate the multi-scalar dynamics in which these political processes are embedded. They are cosmopolitan figurations in the sense that they are easily recognized by global audiences. Yet, how they are mobilized by Bolivian actors depends on the particular conditions within this



context. As Anna Tsing points out, “universalist causes are locally reconfigured, even as they are held by a wider-reaching charisma” (Tsing 2005:246).

The successful mobilization of figurations like the endangered glacier and the ecological indigenous depends on their wide-ranging recognizability, and thus on a certain degree of temporary simplification. However, as I have shown, figurations are not fixed, but under continuous re-definition. They move between discursive settings and shift across time and space. They are adapted and re-adapted to make sense in particular situations and in particular struggles. This is the promise of figurations; they may play on pre-formed assumptions and then turn these upside-down; they may encompass multiple voices, thus becoming sites of creative resistance. I will discuss this further toward the end of this chapter.

### *The significance of the particular*

What is special about Bolivia under MAS? As I have discussed, ambiguities arise when a government claims to represent the nexus of environmental concerns and indigenous rights, and articulates an agenda in explicit opposition to colonialism and capitalist expansion. Anna Laing warns that the spectacular radicalism of the Morales government’s “post-neoliberal” project may distract analysts from “the grounded and placed realities of contentious politics” (2012:1051). MAS may promote decolonization and plurinationalism; yet, for people who are marginalized in the ongoing *proceso de cambio*, such as lowland indigenous communities, the governmental project in practice has meant continued and renewed colonialism and exploitation. For researchers to avoid being seduced by “the smokescreen of the ‘plurination’” (2012:1051), Laing concludes, “the importance of placed analysis is vital to the comprehension and construction of alternative forms of modernity and knowledge production.” (2012:1053, emphasis in the original)

The story of external economic and geopolitical forces threatening environments and local communities is familiar. The Bolivian story presented here may come across as just yet another chapter in this grand narrative. Yet, engagement with particular contexts – the “placed analysis” called for by Laing (see above) – reveals local experiences, and the inconsistencies, complexities and frictions that they entail. My theoretical and methodological approaches, outlined in Chapter 2, emphasize the particular as the level of analysis. Through this framework, I have been able to explore processes that are specific to Bolivia under MAS, though also connected to discursive settings beyond it.

An ambition of this work has been to integrate insights from feminist critical social theory and methodology into sustainability science. The study draws on poststructural and postcolonial feminist theories, which are characterized by a questioning of claims to objective knowledge, and an understanding of subject positions as shifting and continuously re-enacted, rather than fixed or essential. Specifically, I have attempted to develop ways of engaging intersectionality as an approach for identifying and exploring processes of power in environmental politics. As a method for bringing intersectional analysis closer to embodied subject positions, I introduced the technique of figurations. The aim of these approaches is to embrace complexity, differences and partial perspectives, rather than arriving at definitive, generalizable answers. What I present in this thesis is a situated story generated at a specific moment and in a particular setting. Yet, I believe that my study also bears significance outside of this setting. By sketching out the complexity of one context, I hope that I may raise awareness about the complexity of every context, and the importance of taking such complexities into account when telling our stories about humans, the environment, and relations within and between these arbitrary categories.

## The desperate hope of utopias

The average global temperature keeps increasing, as indicated by the latest IPCC report (2013). Greenhouse gas emissions keep rising as consumption and transportation increase. Forests are cut down to make space for cattle, cash crops, biofuels, and infrastructure projects. Extraction of minerals and fossil fuels cause pollution. Negative consequences of climate change and environmental destruction are evident, and unequally distributed among the world's population, depending on intersecting factors such as place, gender, economic status, ethnicity and age (see Tuana 2008; Terry 2009; Kaijser & Kronsell 2013). While there is widespread awareness about the severity of environmental problems, the strategies for solutions that arise on international and national political arenas are stubbornly insufficient. Ecological modernization and green governmentality approaches keep dominating the international environmental agenda, privileging market mechanisms rather than deep systemic changes. There seems to be little room for envisioning alternative paths.

While the Morales government's positioning at the UN-led climate change negotiations of 2009 and 2010 attracted some attention and sympathy, not least among left-wing, climate justice activists, it did not have much real political impact. Bolivia's proposals were largely ignored in the negotiations, and since 2011 Bolivia has kept a much lower profile than before in the negotiations. Similarly, although the discursive landscape in Bolivia has shifted somewhat with the *proceso de cambio* and the past years' dynamic struggles over environmental meaning-making, the fundamental issues remain: roads will be built, natural resources will be extracted and agriculture will continue to expand, in response to quests for economic gains and territorial control on local, national, regional and global levels.

Critics have argued that Bolivia under Morales follows a pathway similar to the previous, neoliberal regimes. The national economy has grown steadily in the past years, driven by the extraction and exportation of natural resources, and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund now refer to the country as a model for the rest of the Latin American region (Webber 2013). Even if the political will towards transformation would be consistent, it is difficult to realize utopian visions within a global economic system that aims for endless expansion. As Nicole Fabricant points out, MAS' project of radical transformation has had only modest effects: “[m]ultinational corporations and agrarian elites continue to hold on to economic power—while the possibilities that indigenous ways, customs, and traditions can lead to radical political and economic change have proven limited” (Fabricant 2012:187).

Yet, MAS' radical green positioning expanded a discursive space for continued articulation of radical environmental discourses, within the country and internationally. Elements from alternative positions are sometimes incorporated in high-level rhetoric. For instance, Mother Earth and the need for “harmony with nature” are mentioned in the Rio+12 document *The Future We Want* (UN 2012, Article 39), and since 2009 the UN recognizes April 22 as International Mother Earth Day, after an initiative by the Bolivian government. Such inclusion may be read as a disarming of challenging perspectives through the cooptation of their concepts into mainstream discourse – but it may also be seen as a tiny shift in what can be imagined and expressed in international political forums, about what counts as valid knowledge and who is a legitimate knower.

Within Bolivia, the government's promotion of indigenous rights and environmental protection has opened up a space for discussion, negotiation and the articulation of criticism. Popular movements have long been a powerful

force in the country, and have in recent years developed in collaboration and close dialogue with, or in resistance to, MAS' political project. "There has never been a better moment for building environmental movements", claimed the ex-Minister of Environment, Juan Pablo Ramos, in a personal interview (2012, my translation). "Now you need to talk about the environment and the indigenous, and convincingly. [...] Now, tell me, who can talk about any project without *vivir bien*, without the rights of Mother Earth?" A government that claims to defend Mother Earth and the rights and values of indigenous people, and writes this objective into the legal system, can also be held responsible if it fails to meet its expectations. Questioning of MAS' agenda, and especially the protests against the highway project, has fostered new, diverse and creative alliances of activists from different parts of the country, working in urban and rural settings, and with varied priorities and points of view. As a result of this resistance, the road construction has been delayed and complicated – a temporary interruption in the business-as-usual, which may be the best any environmental movement can hope for; as Tsing remarks, "[p]ublic forests worldwide are threatened and at best tentatively preserved" (2005:268). In addition to disturbing this specific infrastructural project, the mobilization of diverse actors and voices for a common cause brings hope for continued broad and dynamic political engagement in Bolivia.

### *What we cannot not use*

"Utopian critiques are critical perspectives which we cannot do without – even if they will not be realized" (Tsing 2005:268). Also tiny victories in the form of slight discursive shifts need to be recognized. Perhaps, these depend on a certain amount of strategic essentialism; the temporary adoption and mobilization of an essentialized subject position to achieve certain objectives (Spivak 1990). All of us use the strategies available to us. We all draw on recognizable stories and subject positions in order for our voices to be heard. Despite the risks involved in invoking these, paraphrasing Gayatri Spivak (1993:5) they may be "that which we cannot not use", or that which we can use only with great caution, or that which we can perhaps learn to use if we are devoted – or desperate – enough.

The "we" suggested here is of course problematic; who it includes is a key concern for intersectional analysis, where inclusion and exclusion are regarded as processes of power. The intersectional approach which I have engaged in this study questions fixed subject positions, and, in turn, any homogenous "we". In

line with Tsing (2005:245) I argue that it is crucial to “move beyond the common-sense assumption that solidarity means homogeneity”, and that “[d]ifferences invigorate social mobilizations.” Her statements echo the calls raised by feminist theorists for alliances and political organization beyond essentialized subject positions (see Haraway 1991a; Mohanty 2003), which were discussed in Chapter 2. In the Bolivian context, as I have shown, recent environmental struggles have involved actors from various places and contexts, and with diverging agendas. These conflicts have been an arena for enactment and reinforcement of pre-existing power relations, but also for formations of coalitions and expressions of solidarity across and beyond differences.

In the end – who does, really, march for *Pachamama*? In this work, I hope to have illuminated how any answer to this question is highly contextual, and utterly important. The ability to call upon *Pachamama* and to claim the right to defend her is a matter of situatedness in dynamic and intersecting relations of power. In contemporary Bolivia, defense of *Pachamama* has both been lifted into the government’s agenda and taken on by critical popular movements and the political opposition. Here, the act of marching for her – physically or symbolically – signifies a claim to the legitimacy to define environmental problems and their solutions, and, in a wider sense, “nature”, “society” and how “we” are supposed to live in this world.

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