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Between an alternative modernity and alternatives to modernity?

-   A case study of the Tipnis-conflict within

the Bolivian "Process of Change"

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Abstract

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Between an alternative modernity and alternatives to modernity? – A case study of the Tipnis-conflict within the Bolivian "Process of Change"

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This thesis aims at understanding, from a world-system analytical and decolonial perspective, the structural causes behind the outbreak of the Tipnis-conflict in Bolivia in 2011. Through interviews with representatives from the governmental party MAS and social movements that have taken up different positions in the conflict, and in dialogue with world-system analytical and decolonial theorists, the thesis argues that the conflict to a certain extent can be seen as an articulation of what Colombian social scientist Arturo Escobar regards as a partly antagonistic tension between two different emancipatory projects within the Bolivian "Process of Change": on the one hand a political struggle against neo-liberalism to form an alternative, more inclusive, modernity while improving the relative position of the Bolivian state in the world interstate system; on the other hand a struggle for transforming Bolivian society beyond the bounds of modernity, in order to form a post-liberal political project that would constitute an alternative to modernity. However, the thesis also argues that due to the lack of formulation of a concrete alternative to modernity above the community level, both sides of the conflict have come to embrace certain features of the alternative, more inclusive, modernity project.

Key words: Bolivia; modernity; coloniality; world-system analysis; indigenous movements; Process of Change

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1. Introduction

This thesis was born out of, on the one hand, a passionate interest in the processes of social change that currently are taking place in several Latin American countries, and on the other hand, a curiosity for world-system analysis as an academic tool to interpret the world we live in.

My interest in Latin America had made me aware of the so-called "Process of Change" taking place in Bolivia since Evo Morales was elected President of the Republic in late 2005. The election of Morales became an internationally well-spread piece of news, since Morales was claimed to be the first indigenous president in a country where a white-skinned elite had governed the indigenous majority, politically and economically, since independence from Spain in 1825.

Meanwhile, my interest for world-system analysis made me read scholars developing Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system analytical conceptual framework from a Latin American perspective, introducing the notion of "coloniality" in scholarly research and debate. While maintaining Wallerstein's historical materialist assumptions, I noticed this "decolonial" perspective could be used to understand contemporary Latin American political situation in general and the rise of indigenous and afro-descendants' movements in the region in particular.

In 2010, international mass media reported how the government of Ecuador, lead by the outspokenly pro-indigenous president Rafael Correa, experienced a conflict with indigenous peoples in the Amazonian basin - peoples who supposedly formed part of the social base for governmental support. When the Bolivian government in July 2011 was reported to experience a somewhat likely situation, it seemed to me there was some kind of pattern between those two conflicts. How come historically marginalized sectors were rebelling against progressive governments that were speaking in their name? One of the "commentaries" that Immanuel Wallerstein's regularly publishes one his website convinced me that a world-system analytic perspective could be used as a tool to grasp a deeper understanding of the conflicts between the progressive governments in the Andean region and the indigenous peoples whose interests the governments proclaim they defend (Wallerstein 2010). For that reason, I chose to investigate the conflict the Bolivian government was struggling with. Basically, this conflict was about the construction of a road through a zone recognized by the state as a national park and indigenous territory, called Tipnis. Sectors from within the Tipnis in alliance with other civil society organizations opposed the state-led road project and a conflict broke out.

The very basic question that has guided me through this investigation has been *Why did the Tipnis-conflict break out within the "Process of Change"?* The aim has been to investigate the structural causes behind the outbreak of the conflict, through interviews with both sides of the conflict and in dialogue with a world-system analytical and decolonial theoretical framework. More generally, the thesis can be regarded as an attempt to see to what extent such theoretical perspective can be useful to understand contemporary conflicts within the Latin American processes of social change where indigenous movements' alternative worldviews challenge state power.

The thesis has been structured in the following way. After explaining the reasons for choosing the subject of the thesis and presenting the question at issue as well as the aim of my investigation, I will now pursue with the theoretical framework whereon the thesis has been built. I will handle with those of Immanuel Wallerstein's analytical assumptions that have been most useful to me, I pursue with a critical discussion of Wallerstein's conceptual framework, then I follow with Anibal Quijano's term "coloniality", and I finish the chapter presenting Arturo Escobar's view, based on Wallerstein's and Quijano's assumptions, that Latin America today is at a crossroads between two different political projects.

After discussing my methodological framework, I intend to give the reader a brief political overview of the current political conjuncture Bolivia is living and I try o see how Escobar's crossroads-perspective can be used to understand the Bolivian political process in general. Thereafter, a short section with basic facts about the Tipnis-conflict follows. Then, we turn to the main arguments of the antagonists in the conflict by quoting some of my interviewees and by I analyzing these quotes from my theoretical framework. After a critical discussion on the road opponents' vision of the state, we turn to the final chapter, wherein a synthesis of the arguments of both sides of the conflict will be made, linking them to a world-system analytical and decolonial perspective while discussing critically the validity of Escobar's crossroads-perspective to comprehend the character of the conflict.

2. Theoretical framework

In Latin American social research, the decolonial perspective I intend to use in the thesis has largely been built upon Immanuel Wallerstein's conceptual framework. I will therefore briefly present those aspects of Wallerstein's work that I find relevant for the thesis; thereafter I

pursue the chapter by discussing the term "coloniality", as used by Aníbal Quijano. After that, I link those perspectives to Arturo Escobar's view that Latin America today finds itself at a political crossroads.

Wallerstein's World-System

In 1974, North American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, by publishing the first volume of *The Modern World-System*, provided social sciences with a new conceptual framework to analyze the modern world. Wallerstein proposed the main unit of analysis in social sciences not be the state – as usually had been the case – but what he calls "the modern world-system"[1]. According to Wallerstein, capitalism is a social and historical system that came into being in Western Europe in the late 15th century and the beginning of 16th century. Throughout the centuries, this world-system has experienced successive phases of expansion and contraction, until compassing, by the end of the 19th century, the entire globe. This social system is a "world-system" in the sense that it is organized through one single division of labor, i.e. it is a "world" in itself. Wallerstein argues the world-system is capitalist in the sense that its ruling principle is the endless search for capital accumulation. Moreover, the division of the world-system into different political units – i.e. states being part of a world interstate system – permits the persistence of this ruling principle, as those social actors who endlessly search for capital accumulation can move their economic activities from one state to another, if they find their interests threatened by other social actors (such as the feudal class in 15th century's Western Europe or the labor movement in the 20th century), according to Wallerstein.

Characteristic to the modern world-system is that the economy is organized in a hierarchy of profit-creating activities, which are constituted in global production chains. According to their grade of monopolization, these economic activities succeed more or less in creating profit. Economic activities that enjoy a high grade of monopolization are more profit-creating and thus more "central" to the system than economic activities that are less monopolized (i.e. activities where competition is more arduous), which create less profit and thus are more "peripheral" in the system. Depending on the strength of their state machinery, different states tend to gather economic activities of different degree of monopolization. Depending on the amount or share of central economic activities, different states can thus be considered to occupy a core, peripheral or semi-peripheral position in the modern world-

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[1] Wallerstein has given explanations to his concept of the "modern world-system" in several publications. This excerpt is a synthesis of ideas presented in Wallerstein 1974, 2000 and 2004.

system. According to Wallerstein, the search for capital accumulation made the world-system expand from Western Europe to other parts of the world. The areas being incorporated to the system became "peripheralized", i.e. economic activities resulting in low rates of profit were collocated to these areas. Obviously, mining activities in the Andes during the colonial period and thereafter were highly profitable for the world-system as a whole, but profits were transferred mainly to the core areas of the world-system.

Even though Wallerstein emphasizes that his analyze of modern capitalism is not determinist, he does claim it is very hard for a state that finds itself in a peripheral position in the world-system to climb to a semi-peripheral or a core position, although it is not impossible. Over time, peripheral zones tend to remain peripheral, even though there are always exceptions to this. Some countries manage to climb; others sink in their position vis-à-vis other states. However, the very hierarchy between states is intrinsic to the functioning of the capitalist world-system, as it would not be possible for social actors to create highly profit-creating semi-monopolies of economic activities, if all political units of the system enjoyed equal positions in the system. In that case, the ruling principle of the system would not longer be the endless search for capital accumulation and the system would thus cease to be capitalist, Wallerstein argues.

Critique of Wallerstein's conceptual framework
Since Wallerstein published the first volume of *The Modern World-System* in 1974, critique against his conceptual framework has been sharp, not least within the intra-Marxist debate. The critique formulated by North American sociologist Stanley Aronowitz provides us with an example of this. Among other things, Aronowitz accuses Wallerstein for underestimating the importance of some of the internal contradictions of capitalism, e.g. relations of production, in the evolution of this mode of production. While Wallerstein does not at all discuss the importance of the commodity form, in particular commodified labor force, as a defining feature of capitalism, Aronowitz claims Wallerstein has replaced the importance Marx gave to the social division of labor by a division of labor that is technical-geographical. Therefore, his theory of social change becomes more dependent on exogenous features, than of the internal dialectical processes of the mode of production, Aronowitz claims (Aronowitz 1981).

Nevertheless, while Aronowitz and others provide critique of Wallerstein's analytical approach mainly because of its lack of theory of the production process in capitalist *core* countries, I believe a world-system analytical framework can provide us with a useful

tool to interpret contradictions in processes of social change taking place in *peripheral* areas of the capitalist system, areas to which social scientists – both Marxists and others – have tended to pay a low degree of attention. Moreover, in order to overcome eurocentrism while studying a social process trying to do the same, I have deliberately chosen to build the thesis upon theorists who have the outspoken aim to fight eurocentric structures of thought in social sciences.

Quijano's Decolonialism

In an article published in 1992, five hundred years after Columbus' first journey to the Americas, Wallerstein and Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano argue that the European conquest of the Americas was necessary to the birth of the modern world-system. Without the cheap raw materials and the bullion that the colonization of the Americas provided Europe, capitalism would not have come into being and Europe would not have been able to rise as it did (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992). For Quijano, while seeing "modernity" as synonymous to the birth of the modern world-system - and hence to the colonization of the Americas -, modernity was from its very beginning a partly colonial phenomenon. In order to conceptualize the colonial character of modernity, Quijano invents the term "coloniality", which he argues is constitutive to modernity. While colonialism refers mainly to economic and political relations, "coloniality" is used to refer to hierarchically ordered cultural, racial, linguistic and epistemic relations in the modern world. After achieving political independence from Europe, the white elites that constituted the center of power in the newborn states south of Rio Grande, did not intend abolishing coloniality. Quite contrary, "Latin America" (a term invented in 19th century Europe)[2] - and especially those social groups in the continent regarded as less "modern", such as indigenous peoples and afro-descendants - remained inferior in their cultural, racial, linguistic and epistemic relations vis-à-vis Western Europe (and later North America) (Quijano 2008).

More over, as coloniality is constitutive to modernity, the attempts of modernization that Latin America has experienced since its independence - in the first 25 years of the 19th century, in the case of most of the countries - have been partly colonial projects, in the sense that modernization has always been understood as a process to become more alike Europe and North America (i.e. the core countries in the world-system) not only in economic but also in cultural terms. Becoming modern has implied leaving behind what has

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[2] For a critical discussion on the concept of "Latin America", see Mignolo (2005)

been identified by modernity as backward and traditional: cultures, languages, socioeconomic and political organizations and structures of knowledge of the indigenous and black populations of the continent (Ibid.).

Hence, Quijano argues Latin America is in need for decolonization, by what he means a political project to leave behind modernity/coloniality, politically and economically, as well as culturally and epistemically. This view is what is called a "decolonial" perspective. Quijano recognizes that within modernity/coloniality there have been several political projects, both theoretical and practical, that have been critical towards modernity and have wished to construct an alternative modernity, which is the case of the Marxist tradition. Nevertheless, these critical projects have never questioned their own eurocentrism and have thus remained in a broad liberal tradition that is the child of modernity/coloniality. Moreover, Quijano argues that even though the entire globe is compassed by the modern/colonial world-system and hence nothing truly exists "outside" modernity/coloniality, there are traditions and practices within the indigenous populations in Latin America that to some extent transcend modern/colonial epistemic assumptions, e.g. the separation between humans and their surrounding nature, the separation between economy and the rest of society, the idea of the nation-state and the idea of representative democracy. Quijano argues that these practices, without regarding them as purely extra-colonial/modern, can serve as a ground to construct a pluralist political project that transcends modernity/coloniality (Ibid.).

Escobar's crossroads
From a world-system analytical and decolonial perspective, Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar argues that Latin America today finds itself at a political crossroads, which is visible in the political processes taking place in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. While the social struggles of the continent have resulted in left-winged political movements reaching governmental power in various Latin American countries during the past ten years or so, both states and social movements find themselves between two different projects that Escobar qualifies as partly complementary and partly antagonistic. The first project is defined as the struggle against the neo-liberal model that was introduced in the continent in the 1980s. This project can be defined as that of creating an *alternative* modernity as it aims at stopping neo-liberal policies and sometimes at constructing a new economic order, such as "socialism for the 21st century", proposed by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. Escobar defines the other project as *resistance to modernity*, a struggle that has been carried on by indigenous and afro-descendent groups since the conquest of the Americas and the subsequent transatlantic slave

trade. Escobar argues that the failure of developmentalist policies in the 1950s and 60s and that of the neoliberal experiment in the following decades, have made possible the birth and strengthening of the indigenous movement of the continent and have provided the indigenous movement with the opportunity to present itself on the political scene, questioning the validity of the entire project of bringing about modernity to Latin America. The aim of this project would be to construct a post-liberal society that among other things transcends the ideas of the centrality of the nation-state, the separation between humans and nature, and the separation between economy and the rest of society. According to Escobar, these two struggles – against neoliberalism and against modernity – currently coexist within the political processes taking place in Latin America, both at state level in countries where there is a progressive government, and at the level of the social movements that constitute the base for social support of the progressive governments. Whether or not these two projects can coexist harmoniously is still an open question, Escobar argues (Escobar 2010).

Besides these two projects that find themselves within the progressive political processes in the region, Escobar recognizes there is currently also a third political project. This project is that of the political right and the oligarchy to preserve the economic and political power they have enjoyed since formal independence from Europe, a power that today is being threatened by the political force of the leftist processes (Ibid.). However, as this third project is outside rather then inside the Latin American processes of social change, it is not within the interest of the subject of the thesis.

The theoretical framework presented above, i.e. Wallerstein's modern world-system, Quijano's decolonialism and Escobar's crosscroads-hypothesis, is believed to constitute a tool for analyzing the structural causes behind the outbreak of the Tipnis-conflict in Bolivia in 2011. After discussing methodological issues, we will see how Bolivia's peripheral position in the modern world-system, the intrinsic coloniality of modernity and the current strength of the indigenous movement within the "Process of Change" all interfere in the complexity of the conflict.

3. Methodological framework

Earlier research

Much social scientific research has been accomplished in the world-system analytical and decolonial tradition, not least concerning social movements' struggle for societal transformation. Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has dedicated work to investigate epistemologies and judicial systems at the crossroads between modern science and

those structures of knowledge that have become marginalized by modernity. Santos discusses how knowledges and experiences invisibilized by modernity can enter in fruitful discussions and practices together with critical traditions of modern epistemologies, within the social movements' struggle for social transformation (Santos 2004 and 2008). However, while Santos has investigated how this is done in the normal and daily pace in the struggle of the social movements, there is currently a lack of investigation how the tension between modernity's critical tradition and those advocating for transcending modernity's epistemic assumptions is expressed in the political conjuncture in areas where processes demanding social transformation have reached state power. Investigating this further could provide both social movements and scholarly research with useful information, not least concerning the role of the state in the processes of social transformation at the time of the current conjuncture of the modern world-system.

A case study

Methodologically speaking, the choice to investigate the structural causes behind the outbreak of the Tipnis-conflict has meant that the research for the thesis has taken the form of a study of a unique case, as referred to by social scientist Alan Bryman. By definition, results from a case study are hard to generalize to broader social scientific research, but according to Bryman the result of a unique case study can nevertheless be used to grasp a better understanding of a larger context or process (Bryman 2008, p 77). Thus, it can be argued that the results presented in this thesis possibly could be used to better comprehend certain features of the current processes of social change in Latin America.

Selection of interviewees

After reading literature on Bolivian social and political history, I went to Bolivia to accomplish interviews in order to understand the outbreak of the conflict. After landing in Bolivia at the end of October 2011, I started interviewing people who had taken up different positions in the Tipnis-conflict. I believed interviewing representatives from both sides of the conflict was an adequate method to grasp an understanding of the reasons for the outbreak of the conflict. I decided I wanted to hear the point of view of the governmental party MAS and those social movements agreeing with the government on the project of building a road through the Tipnis. Also, I wanted to hear the voice of those social movements who were opposed to the road construction. In my interviews, I aimed at getting a comprehension of the main reasons why my interviewees supported or opposed the construction of a road through

the Tipnis. Besides, I wanted to know how they regarded their opponents main arguments and if there seemed to be any common points in the perspective of the two sides of the conflict. I hoped the interviews would provide me with a broad spectrum of different ideas and perspectives on the road project and that this in turn would permit me to abstract their arguments in order to understand the structures behind their different standpoints.

I deliberately chose not to interview the right-winged opposition in the country, as Escobar identifies these parties as belonging to the political project of the oligarchy. Hence, the standpoint of these parties does not lie in the interest of a thesis that aims at understanding the internal, and not external, contradictions of the Bolivian political process of social change. In total, I accomplished 16 interviews in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. La Paz is Bolivia's political center so it was natural to find people to interview there. The city of Cochabamba is important for two reasons. Firstly, half of the Tipnis area lies within the borders of the Cochabamba department[3], so the entire Cochabamba-region is sensitive to the question of a road that would go through the Tipnis and connect Cochabamba with the department of Beni. Secondly, Cochabamba is of great political importance in Bolivia, since it was the scene of the Water War – a major social uprising in 2000 - and since president Evo Morales made his political career in the province of Chapare, Cochabamba. Meanwhile, the city of Santa Cruz can be regarded as the capital of lowland Bolivia, i.e. of the Eastern part of the country, and has to a certain extent become opposed to the Andean city of La Paz during the last decades. Realizing interviews in these three different Bolivian cities provided me with material containing a polyphonic view of the Tipnis-conflict. All interviews were accomplished in Spanish and recorded by me. A list of all interviewees can be found in the Appendix.

Before arriving in Bolivia, I had not on forehand planned whom I was going to interview, even though I had tried to get in touch with some potential interviewees by e-mail. Some of the people I interviewed, such as Leonilda Zurita and Walter Limache, were the result of personal contacts. Others, e.g. Adolfo Mendoza, were possible to interview thanks to the help of those I had interviewed previously. My interview with María Galindo in La Paz was made possible just by walking to the café managed by the feminist group she is leading and by explaining my project. In the case of Justa Cabrera, I met her just by chance running into a demonstration against the road project that her organization was having on the central square of Santa Cruz, where I happened to have a walk. Her helpfulness also made it possible

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[3] *Department* refers to a geographic unit and political level between the state and the municipality. In total, Bolivia is divided into nine departments.

for me to interview Julieta Ramos and Mariana Guasanía from CIDOB. All interviews took place where the interviewees so proposed, mostly in an office, sometimes at a café and once in the home of the interviewee. Most interviews endured from 30 to 60 minutes, even though one interview was just five minutes long, while two others took up to two hours each.

The sort of selection of interviewees I did for the thesis can be categorized as a "snowball selection", according to Bryman, as it is a selection that starts with a low number of informants who are used to get in touch with a larger group of people willing to get interviewed. This kind of selection is suitable for qualitative research strategies, when the composition of the population to be investigated is unknown, Bryman argues (Bryman 2008, p 196-7). In our case, the snowball selection was the most suitable as it provided me with the possibility to get in touch with government officials and representatives from different social movements. Given that the thesis aims at understanding both sides of the conflicts, and that theses sides largely are built up of social movements, asking a initial group of interviewees for other possible contacts resulted the most useful. Moreover, it seems that a certain amount of personal confidence, provided through my personal contacts, was necessary to get in touch with the majority of those I interviewed.

Among the interviewees, six were outspokenly supporting the road project, seven were opposing to the construction of the road, and the remaining three cannot be said to have a clear position in the conflict, but they still provided me with useful information about the conflict and helped me deepening my understanding of the arguments of both sides. Even though I had not or forehand planned whom I was going to interview – as I could not foresee to what extent people would be willing to get interviewed by a foreign student investigating a highly sensitive political issue – I managed to fulfill my objective to interview people on both sides of the conflict, representatives from the governmental party MAS and social movements, as well as a couple of politically engaged intellectuals. The relative amplitude of interviewees permitted me to get a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the conflict, which serves as base for analyzing of the conflict.

Ethical discussion

Bryman discusses the importance of ethical behavior in social scientific research. Among other things, Bryman underlines the importance that all informants in a social scientific study are informed of the aim of the study and that they are treated with greatest possible confidentiality. When it comes to interviews, the personal integrity of the interviewees are many times guaranteed by the researcher who promises them anonymity in the publication of

the research results (Bryman 2008, p 131-5). However, none of the interviews I carried out in my fieldwork were anonymous. As I mainly interviewed representatives from social movements with an outspoken political agenda, my interviewees wanted their standpoints to be known. To be given anonymity would thus be meaningless for them, but also for me, as the position and organization of my interviewees are important for analyzing the conflict. Nevertheless, I previously informed my interviewees of the aims of the study and that I intended to interview both sides of the conflict.

Before arriving in Bolivia, I feared it would be hard for me to accomplish interviews with representatives from social movements on the specific issue of the Tipnis-conflict, as this conflict was a highly sensitive and politicalized issue during the time I spent in the country. I imagined how people would neglect my interest in the conflict and possibly regard it as a eurocentric intromission in the internal affairs of a sovereign country. However, what I did find was quite the contrary. I was told by a personal contact that government officials generally are keen on being interviewed by foreigners, in order to spread the standpoints of the government worldwide. Not only this seemed to be correct, but also those opposing governmental measures acted in the same way, and were thus available for interviews. Even though the relative easiness with which I managed to get in touch with possible interviewees can be problematized and interpreted as the result of a hierarchic relation between Europe and Latin America, the willingness of both sides in the conflict to get interviewed, made it possible to hear multiple voices and get a nuanced picture of the conflict.

4. The Process of Change – A Brief Political Overview

In order to facilitate a contextualization of the Tipnis-conflict, I intend to provide the reader with a brief overview of the Bolivian political situation for the last years and in particular the so-called "Process of Change" that began with Evo Morales' ascension to Presidency of the Republic in early 2006. Moreover, I intend to understand in what sense this political process can be said to be at a crossroads, as argued by Escobar.

Struggling against neo-liberalism

Since the mid-1980s, when the neo-liberal economic model was first implemented in Latin America, Bolivian social movements have experienced an intense political struggle against neo-liberalism. This struggle seems to have reached a point of major importance in the first years of the 21st century when two major social uprisings took place in the country: the

"Water War" (*Guerra del Agua*) in 2000 against water privatization in the city of Cochabamba and the "Gas War" (*Guerra del Gas*) in 2003 demanding nationalization of natural resources (Harnecker and Fuentes, 2008). The political instability, the intensity and the accumulation of social struggles against neo-liberalism culminated in the election of Evo Morales, leader of the coca-farmers' trade union, as the president of the country in December 2005. Evo Morales gained support from the social movements and the established political left, on a program that included nationalization of subsoil natural resources, promotion of a more equal distribution of the national income, and a call for elections to an assembly that would write a new constitution for the country (Hylton and Thomson 2007). The election of Evo Morales was internationally reported upon as the election of the first indigenous president in South America. In Bolivia, being a country with an indigenous majority, this was considered a major anti-racist achievement. The government calls the political process initiated by the election of Evo Morales as president the "Process of Change" (*Proceso de Cambio*), a concept that has become socialized throughout Bolivian society in order to refer to the period posterior to Morales' ascension to presidency (Schlarek Mulinari 2011).

As part of the anti-neo-liberal policy, the Morales government has among other things nationalized subsoil natural resources and initiated state-financed programs to fight poverty and increase literacy and public health. In the international arena, Bolivia has joined ALBA, an organization for Latin American integration with the outspoken aim to build socialism in the region. Over all, this policy has lead to hard confrontations with the right-winged political opposition, which is based in the city of Santa Cruz in Eastern Bolivia. In 2008, the country seemed to be on the verge of civil war. However, after Morales declared the North American ambassador *persona non grata* the situation calmed down, the opposition weakened and the government reinforced its political power (García Linera 2011).

Struggling for the rights of the indigenous peoples
Since the 1990s, several *Marchas Indígenas* – i.e. huge weeklong indigenous demonstrations with people walking over far distances - have taken place in Bolivia. These demonstrations have been expressions of the indigenous movements' demand for territory, social justice, and respect for indigenous languages and traditions. The indigenous movements have denounced the successive Bolivian governments for being racist and colonial and not taking the indigenous peoples - estimated to constitute at least 60 percent of the Bolivian population – into account. The indigenous struggle in Bolivia has grown alongside the struggle against neo-liberalism. Often, social movements have demanded political measures both to fight neo-

liberalism and racial discrimination against indigenous peoples. When Morales was elected president, the indigenous movement was a crucial force supporting him. The Morales government has taken measures to provide the indigenous peoples with greater political and territorial autonomy, which has been an important demand by the indigenous movement (Harnecker and Fuentes 2008).

One of the most remarkable measures of the Morales government has been the implementation of a new political constitution that was promulgated by referendum in early 2009. This constitution implies that Bolivia has changed its official name from the "Republic of Bolivia" (*República de Bolivia*) to the "Plurinational State of Bolivia" (*Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*), a change that signals a certain political discourse. Usually, this change of name is looked upon as a recognition of the indigenous peoples' claim that Bolivia is not a nation-state with only *one* national culture. Instead, the new constitution recognizes the existence of 36 different peoples within the plurinational state, each of them constituting a nation of its own, with its language, culture and worldview. Moreover, the constitution states that all these 36 nations are equal vis-à-vis one another and the state. In particular, article 30 of the constitution recognizes the right of the indigenous peoples to live according to their own traditional way of life and habits. The first articles in the constitution also include concepts and principles of pan-Andean-Amazonian philosophy and worldview (*Nueva Constitución Política del Estado* 2008).

There is currently an ongoing debate among indigenous movements and politically engaged intellectuals about how "the Andean worldview" (*la cosmovisión andina*) to a larger extent could be implemented in Bolivian society. Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui emphasizes the importance of the *ayllu*, i.e. the alternative form of decision-making in indigenous communities, wherein among other things the political responsibility of the community is being rotated among households. Moreover, characterizing for the Andean indigenous communities is the *ayni*, the common work the community performs altogether. Rivera Cusicanqui and others, such as Bolivian sociologist Félix Patzi Paco, argues that the *ayllu* and *ayni* could be hold as sources of inspiration in order to transform society in a post-liberal direction, substituting liberal ideas of decision-making (representative democracy) and labor (salary work), based on a separation between the sphere of economy and the rest of society (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010; Patzi Paco 2009).

Not least has the environmentalist feature of the idea of "Good Living" *(Buen vivir)* gained social support outside Bolivia, especially since Morales has referred to Andean worldview at international climate summits, arguing that the needs of "Mother Earth"

(*Pachamama*) must prevail over the needs of economic expansion of capitalism (Lambert 2011). Aymara intellectual Fernando Huanacuni Mamani claims that while modernity has regarded nature as something to be dominated by man, Andean worldview emphasizes humanity's dependence on its surrounding nature (Huanacuni Mamani 2010).

Two projects within one process?

When Escobar argues that Latin American is at a crossroads, the Bolivian "Process of Change" serves as an example to visualize what he means. According to Escobar, the "Process of Change" is an articulation of different social and political forces with partly different roots and aims. While there is a strong anti-neo-liberal axe within the process, there is also a force with indigenous roots that challenge the entire project to bring about modernity to the region. In Escobar's words these different forces are partly complementary and partly antagonist. As we have seen above, these forces have been complementary in the sense the different Bolivian social movements have collaborated in a united fight both against neo-liberal policy and discrimination against the indigenous peoples. This political unity permitted a strong social base for the election of Evo Morales as president of the country in late 2005 and the initiation of the "Process of Change". In the process of writing the new constitution, the so-called "Pact of Unity" (*Pacto de Unidad*), conformed by indigenous as well as non-ethnically based peasant organizations, was created. The "Pact of Unity" has been regarded as the principal social base for governmental support in Bolivian society (Puente 2011). However, according to Escobar these forces are also partly antagonist in the sense that the anti-neo-liberal axe can be said to represent an *alternative* modernity as it aims at transforming Bolivian society in a somewhat leftist direction. On the contrary, the axe represented by the indigenous movement questions the base for the modernization process and questions to a certain extent the legitimacy of the state, which is regarded, being a product of modernity, as colonial *per se*. According to Escobar, there is currently a tension between these two projects within the "Process of Change" (Escobar 2010).

5. Basic facts about the Tipnis-conflict

In this chapter I intend to provide the reader with very basic facts about the territory called Tipnis and a short overview of the outbreak of the Tipnis-conflict. The section aims at providing a better comprehension of the arguments of the supporters and opponents of the road project, which will be presented in the following chapters.

In 1965, the Bolivian government under the rule of General Barrientos decreed the area on the borders between the department of Beni and Cochabamba to be a national park. In the beginning of the 1990s, after the "First Indigenous March" that demanded the legal right of the indigenous peoples to the territory where they were living, the same territory was also given the judicial status of an indigenous territory and the area was named *Tipnis*. The double judicial status of the zone meant that the indigenous peoples living in the Tipnis enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy over their territory, and that the area should be protected by the state from outside intervention. In 2006, the newly elected Morales government took measures to reinforce the indigenous autonomy over the Tipnis (Centro de Estudios y Apoyo al Desarrollo Local et al., 2011).

The Tipnis is an area covering slightly more than one million hectares. About 12 000 individuals, from three different indigenous peoples – *yuracarés*, *moxeños-trinitarios* and *chimanes* –, each of them with their own language and culture, are legitimately living in 64 different communities within the park. These peoples' economic activities mainly consist in hunting and fishing, even though it has become more and more common that people temporarily leave the area in order to perform salary work outside the park in order to get monetary income and thus the possibility to buy merchandise not available in the Tipnis (Ibid.).

However, since the 1990s, in the southern parts of the Tipnis, coca-farmers from the province of Chapare (in the department of Cochabamba) have cut down trees in order to prepare the terrain for cultivation of the coca-plant. These coca-farmers are commonly referred to as *colonizadores*, i.e. colonizers, as the characteristics of the coca-cultivation forces them to abandon their land after a certain amount of time – while soil gradually becomes infertile as a result of heavy use of chemical pesticides in the cultivation process - and search for new fertile land where they can cultivate more coca-plants. Moreover, enterprises in the wood industry have been reported to cut down parts of the forests in the Tipnis in order to export the excellent wood of the national park. As a consequence, indigenous inhabitants of the Tipnis have been forced to leave what was their home and move deeper into the Tipnis, because of the gradual invasion of both coca-farmers and wood enterprises (Ibid.).

In May 2010, Bolivian Plurinational Assembly (parliament) approved of plan, planned by previous Bolivian governments and financed by the Brazilian Bank of Development, to pursue the building of a road through the middle of the Tipnis, that would connect the department of Beni with the department of Cochabamba though (Ibid.). The vice-

president later argued it was not possible to connect the two departments without passing through the Tipnis, due to geographical reasons (FM Bolivia 2011-09-21).

At the time of this approval, two thirds of the road had already been built, but the third part, which would pass directly through the Tipnis, was yet to be constructed. Sectors within Tipnis started protesting against the road project, gaining support from other sectors, both rural and urban, in the civil society. Other sectors, both within the Tipnis area and others, announced their support of the government's road project. In mid-August 2011, the opponents started the "8th Indigenous March" that would walk all the way from Villa Tunari in the department of Beni to the city of La Paz, where the government has its seat. However, in September the demonstration was stopped by the police force and the political tension between the opponents and supporters of the road reached its climax. The police eventually let the demonstrators pursue their march to La Paz where they arrived in the second half of October. At their arrival in La Paz, the government started negotiating with the demonstrators and the political tension somewhat calmed down. (Cabrera Lemuz 2011) What the practical result of these negotiations eventually would be, and if the road would be built through the Tipnis or not, was though still an open question when I left Bolivia at the end of 2011.

6. Supporting the road

In this section I will discuss the main arguments that those of my interviewees who support the road through the Tipnis presented. I found there are three types of reasons for supporting the road project: economic, political and social. Below I will present quotes from the interviews and a short discussion on each one of these quotes. At the end of the chapter I will analyze these arguments from Escobars' view that the Bolivian "Process of Change" is at a political crossroads.

Economic reasons

The single argument mostly repeated by my interviewees in their defense of the road project, was that the road construction would bring economic benefits to the country in general and to the departments of Beni and Cochabamba in particular. Let us see the following quote, pronounced by Jorge Castellón, a member of board of the male peasant organization CSUTCB in the department of Cochabamba, one of the organizations of the "Pact of Unity" that supports the road:

Analyzing, what aim does the road have, what vision does it have? It is for the future, for our children, for our grandchildren, can't you see? It will strengthen Cochabamba, it will strengthen Beni. And it will guarantee to a larger extent the basic alimentary needs of the families in the entire plurinational state, right? There is meat, there is cattle-raising in Beni. They have to go all the way around Santa Cruz to get to Cochabamba, imagine that. Maybe the inhabitants of Beni don't have potatoes, you don't know. But when the road is there, given that Cochabamba is the very heart of Bolivia, and even more as small producers produce more potatoes, cereals, everything, more products will get there. Of what there can be more, is solidarity. (Interview with Jorge Castellón)

Jorge Castellón expresses common ideas among the supporters of the road, namely that the road would mean an economic and commercial integration of the departments of Cochabamba and Beni. As there currently are no roads available for direct large-scale transportation between these neighboring departments, commercial actors from Beni who want to sell their products to consumers in the central or western parts of the county, today have to do that via the department of Santa Cruz. This detour increases the costs of transaction, both because of the longer transportation, and because of the profits the intermediaries in Santa Cruz make. As Beni is an important producer of meat, this means that inhabitants in Cochabamba have to pay higher prices for meat consumption, and the producers get a lower income than they would if there were a road that made possible direct commercial exchange between Beni and Cochabamba.

More generally, this view also expresses the idea that a road between Beni and Cochabamba would strengthen the Bolivian domestic market, something that presumably would increase the country's GDP. In this sense, Castellón argues that the road would guarantee the basic alimentary needs of Bolivian families all over the country. Moreover, claiming that the road would generate "more solidarity", Castellón seems to refer to the idea that a more commercially integrated country would become internally stronger and would bring people closer, not only in terms of transportation, but also in political terms. This is related to the second kind of reasons the road supporters present, to which we now turn.

Political reasons

Gustavo Torrico, a former member of the national Chamber of Deputies on behalf of the MAS party and now a political advisor to the party, emphasizes the political importance of the construction of a road between Beni and Cochabamba:

Gustavo Torrico: So one has to find a middle path, but in reality what has been central in the Tipnis-conflict is geopolitics, one could say, of the big business owners from Santa Cruz. That is what has been central.

Hansalbin Sältenberg: The owners of wood business, of meat business…?

GT: All business owners from Santa Cruz!

HS: Because they have got a market monopoly?

GT: They have got a market monopoly. For example, in Beni they raise cattle and they have to sell their products at a higher price because of the distance and because of the price chosen by the business owners in Santa Cruz. In Santa Cruz there is not a lot of cattle-raising. There is some, but it wouldn't be enough not even for a fourth part of the country. In reality, it is Beni. So, these business owners from Beni sell to those of Santa Cruz who get the surplus and they sell it to the rest of the country. That is one thing. The other is the dependency between Beni and Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz gives what they think they should give to Beni. And Beni becomes its natural market and hence Beni towards Pando, right? Because we who live in La Paz, even though we are on the border, we cannot connect to Pando. (Interview with Gustavo Torrico)

First, Gustavo Torrico states that there are geopolitical interests in the Tipnis-conflict. Thereafter he presents the same economic arguments that we saw Jorge Castellón stating above. Thereafter, Torrico mentions the dependency between the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando. As the city of Santa Cruz usually is considered to be the center of the right-winged political opposition in the country, it has become of central importance for the governmental party to diminish the economic and political power of that department vis-à-vis the central government, especially since the attempt of coup d'état in 2008. When Gustavo Torrico talks about the Tipnis-conflict as a result of a conflict between different geopolitical interests, this is probably what he refers to. Due to the lack of connections for large-scale transportation between Beni and Pando and the western and central parts of the country, these departments become not only economically but also politically dependent on Santa Cruz. Therefore, it is argued by the Gustavo Torrico, it is necessary to construct a road that would connect Beni with Cochabamba in order to diminish the power of the Santa Cruz over Beni and Pando, a power that constitutes a potentially political threat to the central government and to the entire "Process of Change".

Social reasons
A third kind of argument that has been very common in the Tipnis-debate, is the idea that a road through the Tipnis would bring social benefits for the indigenous inhabitants of the zone. Let us see the following quote from Leonilda Zurita, president of the MAS party in the department of Cochabamba:

Of course, I leave my home, I grab a taxi, while they [the Tipnis inhabitants] *have to go by boat for one day, two days to get to the square, let's say from the market to their house, their home. So there is no education, no health care. In two days a person can die. They tell us 'we want to have a life like yours'. Of course, one must also protect their ancestral wisdom, their cultures, their language. One has to preserve that.* (Interview with Leonilda Zurita)

Leonilda Zurita refers to the lack of infrastructure and social welfare institutions in the Tipnis in order to explain her support for the road project. According to her, the lack of roads in the Tipnis makes it take long for the inhabitants of the area to get to the nearest urban area. The lack of educational and public health institutions combined with these poor infrastructural conditions leads to high mortality and a low educational level among the Tipnis. Zurita argues that the Tipnis inhabitants have the same right to social benefits as other Bolivian citizens and she sees the road construction as something that would contribute positively to the inhabitants' social and material life conditions. Moreover, knowing that the opponents to the road argue that the road would destroy the indigenous inhabitants way of life, Zurita underlines the necessity of defending their traditions.

As Leonilda Zurita used to be the national secretary-general of the women peasants' federation *Bartolina Sisa*, I asked her what effects she estimated the construction of a road through the Tipnis would have on the life conditions of the Tipnis women. She answered the following:

The woman would rather become more valued. Because we have got capable women among the indigenous in the zone. They say to us 'why do we women get so many children, we want you to help us, we women want to be like president Evo'. Of course, there are schools just to a low age, not any further. So, as far as I understand, prepare workshops, help, orientate, raise their level of consciousness and how to preserve their ancestral wisdom being yuracarés, their languages…So, I think we women can help our indigenous sisters so that they can become authorities, so they can becomes deputies, we have already got substitute deputies, we want them to become judges, we want them to become mayors, but yes, one has to help, one has to strengthen, orientate, raise the level of consciousness. (Interview with Leonilda Zurita)

Leonilda Zurita argues, repeating the main idea in the previous quote, that the road would constitute a possibility for the Tipnis women to enjoy the same social benefits – in this case the right to knowledge of contraceptive methods, as well as the right to a general education – that other Bolivian women have. She also underlines the disposition of other women to help the Tipnis women and to promote their political force within the "Process of Change". Once again, she emphasizes the necessity to preserve a part of

their way of life but also the will of the Tipnis women to live more like non-indigenous women.

Looking on the above arguments from the perspective that the political process taking place in Bolivia is an articulation of two different projects, as argued by Escobar, it seems that the defenders of the road project belong to what Escobar calls the anti-neo-liberal project. They hope a road through the Tipnis would bring about a stronger state, a more politically and economically unified country; that it would increase Bolivia's GDP and weaken the strength of the right-winged opposition's political project. In that sense, we can interpret the defenders of the road as advocates for an *alternative* modernity, as they want to challenge the historical weakness of the Bolivian state-machinery – a result of the country's peripheral position in the world-system to speak with Wallerstein -, and increase the social welfare programs promoted by the central government in order to diminish the poverty that has characterized the country since its foundation. Moreover, the idea that a stronger state would improve the social situation for the Tipnis inhabitants seems to reflect a fairly modern way of thinking. It is also expressed that modernization equals emancipation, both in terms of economic opportunities and gender equality, as argues by Zurita.

7. Opposing the road

In this section, I will use quotes from my interviewees to grasp the main arguments of the opponents to the road project. I believe the arguments against the road project can be categorized as socio-political, environmental, and economic. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss how these arguments can be looked upon from Escobar's crossroads-perspective.

Socio-political reasons

The single most common argument presented by the opponents to the construction of a road through the Tipnis, is that a road through a zone that is legally defined as an indigenous territory would be anti-constitutional. The opponents argue that article 30 in the new constitution, approved of in a referendum in early 2009, is on their side. While the constitution is considered to be an important advance in the struggle for the recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples, the government is accused of not fulfilling the content of the constitution:

Theoretically it has already been written. The march that occurred was because we want it to happen practically, that the written law becomes reality, right? And the respect for our rights and the territoriality that we have. Because we are victims of the oppression of the colonizers and other people who are not therefrom. They are not from the place, they come from the inner parts of the country. (Interview with Bernabé Noza)

In the above paragraph, Bernabé Noza, one of the leaders of the central organization of the Tipnis peoples, argues that the opponents of the road are demanding that the constitutional right of the indigenous peoples to their own territory is respected. If so were the case, the indigenous peoples in the Tipnis would have the right of veto over the road project and they could also obligate the central government to stop coca-farmers from cultivating more land in the Tipnis zone.

In my interviews, the opponents of the road constantly referred to the Bolivian constitution, not only regarding the indigenous peoples' right to the territory, but also regarding the preservation of the indigenous peoples' way of life, as expressed below by Julieta Ramos, vice-president of CIDOB, the organization of the indigenous peoples in the Bolivian lowland:

For us indigenous people it is important to have and take care of our worldview as indigenous peoples, our living with nature, and that has been an aim. More than that, the road is not like they say…that only a road can bring about development, but on the contrary, it is the duty of the government to develop educational and health care programs, not making a road. That's it. (Interview with Julieta Ramos)

Here, Julieta Ramos emphasizes the importance for the indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life, especially concerning human beings' relation to nature, which Julieta Ramos fears would be severely damaged by the road. She also rejects the idea that building a road brings development. She agrees on that there is a lack of social welfare institutions in the Tipnis, but she declares that the government must fulfill the social rights of the Tipnis inhabitants, although no road is constructed.

As I had asked Leonilda Zurita if she thought that the road would affect the Tipnis women in any special way, I asked the same question when I met Mariana Guasanía, the national gender secretary of CIDOB. She responded the following:

Of course! Of course! Because we women, imagine, we are the ones who stay at home, we stay there when our husbands sometimes…for example we have lack of clothes, there are no in there, he leaves for work and we don't have money…the man leaves for work in order to buy what we need, what we can't buy in the in territory, we stay there. We are the ones who suffer from our needs; we are the ones who see what there really is in our territory, in our big

house as we say, where we have everything. We have meat, we have fish, we have fruits, a series of things to make our house and there is wood, leaves, everything. Everything. That's why we say it is our big house. And if they come and divide the territory in halves, what will happen? Would you like somebody to come into your house without permission? So, we women are there and we see this necessity, because we stay there, with our children. (Interview with María Guasanía)

In the above paragraph, María Guasanía gives a materialist explanation of why women would be the most affected by the road. While men tend to leave the Tipnis periodically to perform salary work outside the zone, Tipnis women tend to stay in the zone and take care of their families and homes. Moreover, Guasanía underlines that the indigenous peoples in Tipnis consider the entire park to be their home, as it is the place from where they get their alimentary subsistence. Thus, building a road through the Tipnis would mean a destruction of their home. According to Guasanía it is foremost women that would suffer from this, as it is mainly they who live a day-to-day life in the Tipnis.

Environmental reasons

Already mentioned in the quote above expressed by Julieta Ramos, another set of arguments used by the opponents to the road, is of environmental character. First, we will look at another quote from Bernabé Noza, from the central organization of the Tipnis peoples:

Well, we consider the territory to be our own mother, of whom we should take care and preserve. Make an adequate use of the necessity of every people, that is, not to exaggerate, right? But taking care of and also protecting the environment. And protect the trees, which are one's lungs, because they generate the air that we breathe. (Interview with Bernabé Noza)

First, Bernabé Noza refers to the andean-amazonian idea that nature constitutes a "mother" for human beings and that humans have the obligation to take care of mother earth. Thus, to construct a road though the Tipnis, besides the negative environmental effects that the construction of a road brings, it would also be morally indefensible, as the road would harm mother earth. This can be interpreted as an example of how environmental defense goes hand in hand with a defense of indigenous worldviews, but also of their alimentary subsistence, emphasized previously by María Guasanía, as a road construction would possibly limit the food supply for fishers and hunters, dividing the zone into two parts.

Justa Carbrera, president of the indigenous lowland women's federation CNAMIB, emphazises that a road would have severe negative effects on nature as well as on the Tipnis inhabitants, whose daily life depends on the stability of nature:

Well, for us women, because it is a territory where indigenous peoples live, it is important because it is the origin of the rivers. If they build the road there the rivers will run dry and the entire habitat of the jungle will get lost. It is very important to see this and not only for us indigenous but for everybody, for all of Bolivia. That's it. (Interview with Justa Cabrera)

Justa Cabrera reinforces the idea mentioned above by Bernabé Noza, that the indigenous peoples in the Tipnis are living a life that depends on the stability of the eco-system. If that stability is broken, the life of the indigenous peoples will be severely affected. That is probably how one can understand the importance for indigenous peoples of treating the eco-system as a "mother".

Economic reasons

Just like the defenders of the road present economic arguments for their position in the conflict, the opponents also refer to the economy to demonstrate that a road through the Tipnis would not be beneficial. According to some of my interviewees, the road project is a perpetuation of an economic model that does not benefit the majority of Bolivians. First, Georgina Jiménez from the NGO CEDIB:

A giant country like Bolivia, that hasn't connections between villages, is a country that culturally assumes roads as part of the development. But our roads, the famous development of the country, do not correspond to our national necessities, but rather they correspond to the linking necessities of other countries in Latin America, in South America, and more concretely right now with the corridors for natural resources exportation. As Bolivia is in the heart of South America and it is important both to Brazilians and Chileans to be able to pass through….And it is a backward country when it comes to infrastructural development. So, the aspiration that Bolivians have to be able to connect to others is always identified with roads. (Interview with Georgina Jiménez)

Georgina Jimenez criticizes the idea that building new roads automatically would bring benefits for Bolivia. She argues that Bolivia's neighboring countries, with stronger economies, will benefit economically from infrastructural projects in Bolivia, while Bolivia itself not necessarily will do so. Thus, development materialized by road building does not lie, in this case, within the national interests of the country, she argues.

Walter Limache, the leader of NINA, an educational program for the country's main peasant and indigenous organizations, is sharper in his critique of the role of the road in South American geopolitics:

Bolivia is still characterized by selling raw materials. Our economy is based on that. There is no formation of a model. And Tipnis responded to a development model. Moreover, it did not even respond to a model for domestic development, right? It rather responds to a regional model, easily visualized within IIRSA[4], the infrastructural initiative. In this model, the construction of the road is clear, and you have been told it will bring development and you will become integrated. (Interview with Walter Limache)

According to Walter Limache, the road project through the Tipnis is part of the same economic model that has made Bolivia exporting raw materials since Spanish conquest and subsequent colonization. From Limache's viewpoint, this model does not favor Bolivia itself, but rather the stronger economies in the region. Thus, a road through the Tipnis that supposedly would bring development to Bolivia could actually bring about a development of the underdevelopment, to use André Gunder Frank's famous phrase. Instead of improving the economic position of the country, the road can be seen as a model that fixes Bolivia's peripheral position in the capitalist system.

Now, from Escobar's crossroads-perspective, we see that among the opponents to the road project, there are arguments that prima facie would fit into what Escobar calls the project of creating *an alternative to* modernity. The arguments emphasizing indigenous autonomy vis-à-vis central state power, the importance of preserving indigenous peoples' way of life, and the environmentalist idea that conserving the eco-system prevails over economic growth, all seem to challenge modernity and can thus be regarded as ideas appointing towards *an alternative to* modernity. However, the economic critique of the road construction, a critique that emphasizes the interests of the Bolivian nation-state, seems harder to categorize within this conceptualization.

8. Towards a transformation of the state?

Leaving the arguments of both sides of the conflict behind, we will in this short chapter provide the reader with a critical discussion on how the road opponents' vision of the state somewhat problematizes the assumption that the conflict can be regarded as an

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[4] IIRSA, abbreviation for the *Initiative for Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America*. See http://www.iirsa.org

articulation of Escobar's crossroads. Among road opponents there seems to be a view that it is in some way necessary to struggle for a strengthened state-machinery. Let us see the following quote from Georgina Jiménez:

Well, the first thing is that the state in Bolivia has never been present in these [rural] *sectors. Not even in the peripheral zones here, in* [the city of] *Cochabamba. The state is shining of absence. Bolivia is a country where the population assumes state responsibilities. In the southern part of Cochabamba, you will see that there is no water. Who guarantees the administration of water? The neighbors! They are organized into water committees, they take care of the well, they handle it. The state does not exist. […] The state is absent! And that is one thing that was terribly deepened during the years of neo-liberalism. What neo-liberalism did was to bring about the state's lack of care for its citizens.* (Interview with Georgina Jiménez)

In the above quote, Georgina Jiménez answers the question of whether the road would improve the inhabitants' life conditions through a supposedly strengthened state. She expresses that it is absurd to think that would happen, as the Bolivian state historically and structurally has been incapable of meeting its citizens' basic needs. However, this view is declared without any romanticism of an absent state, and it seems that the quote reveals a certain wish for a stronger state that would care for its citizens, even though Jiménez finds it improbable that it would occur. The view that a stronger state with capacity of bringing social welfare programs to its citizens is desirable seems to be shared by all my interviewees, independently of their standpoint in the conflict. This standpoint somewhat problematizes the assumption that road opponents would be fairly anti-modern and incarnate the project of *an alternative to* modernity, while being the modern state one of the pillars of modernity.

Moreover, one can ask oneself whether or not the road opponents' emphasis on indigenous autonomy is to be regarded as a will to transcend modernity. Senator Adolfo Mendoza, who belongs to the MAS party and thus is a supporter of the road project, expresses the following:

Defining "untouchability"[5] *as valid to everybody but for the indigenous is in reality a reconstruction of a particularist vision of the plurinational. […] A state that is some of it organs, in this case the ministries, interprets the plurinational as a submission to the state's central measures and the domestication of the plurinational vis-à-vis a central state. And on the contrary, from some indigenous leadership, because not all of them share the same perspective, an interpretation of the indigenous as a particularist question.* (Interview with Adolfo Mendoza)

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[5] In negotiations with the government, road opponents from the Tipnis proposed the Tipnis to be declared "untouchable" (*intangible*), meaning that the state and coca-farmers would not be allowed to intervene at all in the Tipnis zone.

In the above quote, Mendoza argues that an increase of the indigenous peoples' autonomy over the Tipnis – something that supposedly would give them the right to veto the road construction - would not automatically bring about a transformation of society. Moreover, he warns that the emphasis on indigenous autonomy equals a particularist vision of state power, defined as "plurinational" in the new constitution. What Mendoza probably means is that an increase of indigenous autonomy does not mean that the state automatically is being transformed, rather its colonial character - remembering that the modern state in Quijano's decolonial perspective always is colonial *per se* – could be reinforced, as the right of defining who can enjoy autonomy and on which grounds this autonomy can be achieved is conferred to the state. In that sense, promoting indigenous autonomy, as the road opponents do, would not equal a formulation of *an alternative to* modernity, but rather a multicultural political project within the epistemic grounds of modernity.

Moreover, the economic critique against the road project, expressing the idea that the road does not correspond to the national interests of Bolivia, reveals a somewhat nationalist position. Bernabé Noza from the Tipnis-organization claimed that the road project was the result of *Brazilian imperialism* (Interview with Bernabé Noza 2011). This position seems to be that of a traditional struggle for national liberation against colonialism and imperialism, a struggle that certainly is critical to modernity but that still aims at reinforcing the nation-state, and thus appoints at creating an *alternative* modernity.

9. A tension between two emancipatory projects?

In this final chapter, I intend to briefly summarize the arguments of both sides of the conflict, see how they can be interpreted from a world-system analytical and decolonial perspective and how they can be understood from Escobar's crossroads-perspective. Moreover, I intend to understand those aspects of the conflict that are difficult to analyze from Escobar's perspective and to give a possible explanation of why it might be so.

The intrinsic coloniality of modernizing policies
As argued by Wallerstein and Quijano, since Spanish conquest and subsequent colonization in the first half of the 16th century, the territory today called Bolivia has been conferred a peripheral position in the modern world-system, expressed though high levels of poverty, a large economic and political dependency on other countries and a

weak state-machinery. Moreover, the peripheralization of Bolivia also meant that indigenous cultures, languages and epistemologies were placed in an inferior position vis-à-vis the Western world, as an expression of modernity's intrinsic coloniality (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992).

We have seen that the supporters of the road project can be understood as an incarnation of the call for an *alternative* modernity, in the sense that they refuse Bolivia to remain in the economically peripheral position the modern world-system has conferred to her, and they wish to strengthen the state-machinery through modernizing policies. In our case this political project is expressed by building a road, which they argue would lead to a deeper economic and political integration of the country and render possible governmental programs promoting social welfare and equality among Bolivian citizens and hence leave neo-liberal policy behind.

The opponents to the road project express fear that this modernizing policy would worsen the Tipnis-inhabitants life conditions, both materially and culturally, in the sense that the road would make food subsistence within the park more difficult and that the inhabitants' "traditional way of life" – i.e. their worldview finding itself in an inferior position to modern epistemic assumptions – would be extinguished. From this point of view, the road project is a continuation of the European colonization of South America that began in the first half of the 16th century. The differences between supporters and opponents on how the road would affect the Tipnis-women reveal antagonistic positions, which also can be interpreted from a decolonial perspective. Therefore, the road opponents can be seen prima facie as an incarnation of what Escobar defines as the project of creating *an alternative to* modernity, in the sense that they reject the arguments for modernizing policies and possibly appoint at creating a society organized beyond the bounds of modernity. However, our critical discussion on the road opponents' vision of the state problematizes this assumption and shows that even the road opponents to a certain extent seem to struggle for an *alternative* modernity, i.e. a societal project that is critical to modernity but that does not challenge its base.

Transcending the bounds of the modern world-system?
Hence, while Escobar's crossroads-perspective can be used to understand the road supporters as incarnating an anti-neoliberal project that wishes to form an *alternative* modernity while raising Bolivia's peripheral position in the world-system by opting for a stronger state-machinery in order to increase national integration and social equality; the road opponents can

only be seen as *partly* incarnating a political project aiming at *an alternative to* modernity. Road opponents can be said to criticize the entire project of bringing about modernity to Bolivia to the extent they emphasize the right of indigenous autonomy, the preservation of indigenous peoples' "traditional way of life" and the preservation of the environment at expense of increased state power and economic growth. However, their critique of lacking state-sponsored social welfare programs and their fear that a road would correspond more to foreign interests than Bolivia's own, seems to reveal a wish for a stronger, but differently organized, state apparatus. Besides, the idea of reinforced indigenous autonomy does not necessarily mean that modernity itself is being challenged. In that sense even the road opponents seem to form part, at least to a certain degree, of a political project of creating an *alternative*, more inclusive, modernity.

Nevertheless, Georgina Jiménez' seemingly resigned belief that the government is incapable of strengthening the state in a non-neo-liberal direction, seems to reveal a wish to organize society in an alternative way, transcending the bounds of the modern state and hence the bounds of the modern world-system. However, it is probably the very lack of an outspoken project to replace modernity - which would implicate the construction of a material base transcending the structures of the capitalist world-system - that prevents us from saying that the road opponents clearly can be said to be part of a project forming *an alternative to* modernity. Even though there is an ongoing debate on these issues in Bolivia, wherein some voices point at socioeconomic and political organizational forms in indigenous communities as sources of inspiration of how a post-capitalist society beyond the bounds of modernity could be organized, there seems to be a lack of formulas of how this could be achieved beyond the community level.

Obviously, creating a societal project to replace modernity and the capitalist world-system cannot be reduced to an act of voluntarism, as the possibilities of creating such a project is largely dependent on the structures and secular tendencies at global level of the current world-system. Nevertheless, if time brings road opponents to formulate ideas of economic and political transformation pointing in the direction of transcending modernity – which also would be a useful scholarly task -, it still remains unclear whether this would strengthen the antagonistic feature of the relation between the two projects within the "Process of Change", or whether it rather would strengthen the relation's complementary side, providing the anti-neo-liberal project with means its to sharpen its critique of the capitalist world-system.

Appendix: List of interviewees

Below I present a list of my interviewees, in the order I interviewed them, with their names and the position they held within their respective organization.

Interviewees in La Paz

- Gustavo Torrico, political advisor of the MAS party and leader of the political activist group Los Pitufos. He was a member of the national Chamber of Deputees on behalf of the MAS party between 2002 and 2010 and served as vice-minister of domestic security in 2010.

- Fernando Huanacuni, Chief of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and author of various books on Aymara worldview

- María Galindo, leader of the autonomous feminist activist group Mujeres Creando

- Walter Limache, leader of the adult educational program NINA, whose participants are members of peasant and indigenous organizations

- Bernabé Noza, member of board of the central organization of the peoples living in Tipnis

- Adolfo Mendoza, a senator of the MAS party, from Cochabamba

Interviewees in Cochabamba

- Isabel Domínguez, president of the women peasant organization Bartolina Sisa in the department of Cochabamba. She was previously the national secretary-general of the same organization and she was also a member of the Constituent Assembly.

- Jorge Castellón, member of board of the male peasant organization CSUTCB in the department of Cochabamba

- Leonilda Zurita, president of the MAS party in the department of Cochabamba. She was previously the national secretary-general of Bartolina Sisa.

- Leonel Cerruto, president in Bolivia of Kawsay, a pan-Andean organization for adult indigenous education

- Georgina Jiménez, member of board of CEDIB, a NGO that documents the life conditions and political struggle of the indigenous peoples in Eastern Bolivia.

Interviewees in Santa Cruz

- Justa Cabrera, president of the lowland indigenous women's organization CNAMIB

- Aleksandra Berger, communication analyzer at CEJIS, a NGO working with the rights of the indigenous peoples in Eastern Bolivia
- Hernán Áviles, member of board of CEJIS in the department of Beni
- Julieta Ramos, vice-president of CIDOB, the organization of the indigenous peoples of Eastern Bolivia
- Mariana Guasanía, national gender secretary of CIDOB

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Castellón, Jorge, interviewed on November 15th 2011

Cerruto, Leonel, interviewed on November 18th 2011

Dominguez, Isabel, interviewed on November 15th 2011

Galindo, María, interviewed on November 8th 2011

Guasanía, Mariana, interviewed on November 23rd 2011

Huanacuni, Fernando, interviewed on November 1st 2011

Jiménez, Georgina, interviewed on November 19th 2011

Limache, Walter, interviewed November 8th 2011

Mendoza, Adolfo, interviewed on November 10th 2011

Noza, Bernabé, interviewed on November 9th 2011

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