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The Recursive Indian*:* The Significance of Complementary Ethnic Alterity in the Bolivian Tipnis March

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Abstract: This paper explores ethnic alterity in the Bolivian Tipnis crisis, showing how the assessed validity of claims to indigenous, Indian and colonial identities was significant in shaping government strategy and responses among 'citified Indians' of La Paz and El Alto, and highland indigenous social movements. Whilst Kuper (2003, 2017) claims the modernist discourse of indigeneity can distract attention from 'real local issues', Andean ethnicity is relational, roles assigned and re-assigned in a continually shifting political theatre, where the 'rebel Indian' recurs historically, challenging colonial hegemony and reorienting the discussion towards issues of territorial autonomy.

Keywords: indigeneity , TIPNIS , alterity , ethnicity , performance , Bolivia

Introduction

To many the 2019 ousting of 'indigenous' President Morales was a shocking event and accusations of interference from hegemonic interests - seeking to enrich themselves from Bolivia's resources and opposing the President's supposedly left-wing agenda - surfaced in international media. It is interesting to note the enduring power of a claim to 'indigenous' identity in international circles, and the assumptions that accompany it; it was widely assumed that Morales was an environmentalist protecting his people against extractivism. Such an assumption, however, ignores the actions and words of those at the centre of events. Whilst Morales's claim to such a stance had been reappraised and rejected by wide sectors of the Bolivian populace, academics and activists, internationally it was still resonant. Kuper's (2003; 2017) now classic analysis highlights how western understandings of citizenship are founded on 'ties of blood to ancestral soil' (2017:181); indigeneity as a political strategy is jeopardised by modern racialised norms of the ‘savage/primitive’ which may obscure “real local issues” (*ibid.*180). In the Andes ethnic/racial identities are constantly shifting and constituted through social characteristics like dress and behaviour (Wade, 1997), rather than ‘ties of blood to soil’; culturally more resonant than the discourse of indigeneity is the recurrent myth-historical figure of the ‘Indian’, a specific construction influenced by modern European archetypes, yet not reducible to them. The Indian exists in relational contrast to his counterpart, the ‘coloniser’, and such ethnic claims are constantly assessed through performance.

Morales and his MAS (*Movimento Al Socialismo,* Movement Towards Socialism) party were accused of ‘colonial’ behaviour with regard to the construction of a contentious road across the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park *(Território Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Securé*, Tipnis). In October 2012 some of Bolivia’s main indigenous social movements sent a damning letter declaring that ‘this state is no more than the continuation of the old colonial, republican state’ over treatment of a protest march by the indigenous inhabitants (see e.g. http://miradoriu.org/spip.php?article373). The incident broke the 1997 Pact of Unity, an agreement between the five main social movements of the country to support one another over common agendas, which had provided the stability needed for the MAS to be elected. The government claimed the road was in the national interest, connecting the states of Cochabamba and Beni, and funded by a $332 million loan from Brazil’s National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) under the Initiative for Regional Integration in South America (IIRSA). The protestors objected that it bisected their territory and was likely to open up the area to further invasive highland migrants (called *colonos*, colonisers) farming the cash crop coca, and that they had not been consulted about it as is their constitutional right. Two segments of the road, leading from San Ignacio de Moxos and Villa Tunari to the northern and southern edges of the 1,091,656ha territory, had already been constructed. It emerged that the state had authorised 25.5% of the Tipnis territory as hydrocarbon concessions, 17.7% of these directly controlled by the state hydrocarbon company YPFB (Yacimentos Petroleras Fiscales Bolivianos) (CEDLA 2012).

My aim here is to explore constructions of ethnic identity surrounding the Morales government, marchers, and social movements, all of whom claim to be 'indigenous'. I will highlight how ethnic identities arranged about the opposite poles of the 'Indian' and 'coloniser' are continually constituted and re-constituted in a relational role play, as actors shift between being 'more or less Indian' than their interlocutors (de la Cadena 2000); this can have a significant impact at the level of national politics, as key sectors of the populace shift their sympathies accordingly. I will assess the relevance of Kuper's arguments concerning inherent flaws in the concept of indigeneity - whether it can indeed in this context be said to distract attention from 'real local issues' (2003; 2017). The 'rebel Indian' is a well-established archetype (Taussig, 1986) who returns recurrently in cyclical Andean time, standing up to the violent expropriation of the coloniser. I will argue that the re-appearance of this figure had the effect here of reorienting national politics around crucial issues of territorial sovereignty. Understanding the specific cultural archetypes at play is essential to analysing responses to the march amongst 'citified Indians' and social movements; modernist concepts can however also be revealing, especially where we consider the strategies of the indigenous state. Morales, who identified as the country's first 'indigenous' President, was very much aware of the power of circumstantially shifting ethnic alterities and made good use of it on the domestic and international front; however the events I explore here constituted an 'unmasking' in which his ethnic claims were appraised and found unconvincing.

I conducted multi-sited ethnographic research from 2010-14 among recent migrants to the cities of La Paz and El Alto from the Quechua-speaking highland village of Kaata, Apolobamba. These included elected leaders, representing this Callawaya region, from the social movements, notably the highland indigenous social movement the Conamaq, the

National Council of Marqas and Ayllus of Qollasuyo. In writing this article I draw on my ethnographic experience of the scene in the capital as the march made its way up and arrived, as well as the subsequent negotiations in 2011, in conjunction with mediatised representations of the marchers focusing on ethnic identities across rural-urban spaces. Whilst I am not an ethnographer of the lowlands, and sound ethnographic accounts of the TIPNIS have been produced in the wake of the March (see eg. Laing, 2015, 2020; Hope 2016), I was well acquainted with one family of Tipnis marchers, contributing to my proximity to events, and I spent a couple of days visiting them as the march passed through the coca-producing Yungas region in September-October 2011, later joining the march as it crossed the Cumbre or high pass into La Paz.

Spatial and ethnic relations in the Andes

I take 'indigenous' as an identity category which actors claim strategically, and will explore its relation to alternative ethnic identities such as Indian, colonial and mestizo. Javier Albó (1991) identified 'the return of the Indian', as opposed to 'peasant' or 'syndicalist' identities, as a nexus for social and economic organisation in Bolivia, opening the way for new 'territorial' demands comprising resource sovereignty and autonomy, a trajectory which came to be the mainstream state rhetoric under the Morales government. In contrast to such approaches focusing on the liberating potential of Indian/indigenous identities, Kuper's (2003; 2017) 'return of the native' highlights the inherent racial issues in 'indigeneity', conceived as the 'other' of modernity, which binds adherents within a narrow racialised stereotype stemming from a tradition of the 'savage'.

Shifting and circumstantial ethnic identities are significant in constructing contemporary discourses of exploitation and extractivism, interacting with a modern discourse fetishising indigenous peoples as the protectors of 'nature' (Brosius, 1999; Cepek, 2008, 2014; Conklin, 1997, 2002; Conklin and Graham, 1995; Fairhead and Leach, 1996;

Tsing, 2005; Turner, 2002). Indigeneity is conceived as a response to the delocalising effects of modernity that renders those it labels ‘indigenous’ simultaneously ‘modern’ as they encounter it, such that modernity makes possible the articulation of environmentalism and indigenous identity at the very moment it renders it unrealisable (Hirtz, 2003). Indigenous politics however also open up room for marginalised peoples to manoeuvre, even if they utilise strategic essentialisms (Li, 2000). Modernity fetishises this ‘other’ as a mirror image of itself; the capitalist subject seeks in ‘the indigenous’ a reified ‘other’, as ‘modern’ society has from the ‘savage’ for centuries (Kuper, 2003, 2017). Indeed this status as ‘the people outside of capitalism’, with a claim to represent ‘nature’, continues to predominate in the usage of and expectations connected to the term ‘indigenous’ in international forums, a key component of the ‘global ecological imaginary’ (Conklin and Graham, 1995). MacNeish (2013) and Laing (2015) argue that the ‘ecologically noble savage’ trope influenced perceptions of the Tipnis march, whilst in fact the marchers’ stance was more nuanced than a simple affiliation with ‘nature’. As Ellingson claims, the ‘myth of the myth’ of the ecologically noble savage “[b]ecomes a symbolic attractor that draws to itself the cultural energies invested in all kinds of other symbols, ideas and programs of action” (2001:385); here I will seek to investigate the locally specific meanings at play.

In combination with a modern classificatory schema, specifically Andean spatial and racial logics influence relations of mimesis and alterity between city and jungle dwellers. As Taussig (1986) has demonstrated, the Amazonian jungles are widely seen by Andeans as a heartland of Indian alterity and seat of anti-colonial resistance, a theme resonating through literature and myth. The supposed escape of the reigning Inca Tupac Amaru into the jungle in the early Spanish colony has created a rich mythological tradition of the return of the ‘true Indian' from this region, and its power to upset colonial dominance, visible for example in Arguedas’s (1958) fictional depiction of a threatened uprising of jungle Indians led by rebel market women. In Taussig's analysis, shamans mediate the power of alterity and can employ it to cure highlanders, who feel an underlying guilt stemming from the knowledge that they have profited from the colonisation of the Indian, who also dwells in the hidden heart of the mestizo self (Taussig, 1986). The 'other' is thus conceived as a source of healing, much like the indigenous eco-warrior espoused as the antidote to rampant capitalism.

Whilst the Colombian context Taussig explores, with its predominantly *mestizo* highlands, is somewhat different from the southern Andes, where Aymara and Quechua speakers are a majority, the Amazonian jungles were ever the margins of the Inca Empire, inhabited by savage *chunchos*, and continue to be seen as a refuge of the wild Indian 'other' of highland civilisation. While social movements, government and Tipnis marchers might all be 'indigenous' to outsiders, highlanders might identify as '*originaros*' (originary people), Quechua, or by a more specific regional identity like Callawaya, and secretly suspect themselves to be 'Indians', a derogatory term connoting dirt and poverty. Generally community members refer only to lowlanders as 'indigenous'. Aymara migrating to the lowlands to grow coca often consider that their influence in the area is 'civilising' (Canessa, 2014). In contrast to the mestizo or savvy *cholo* (citified Indian) city dweller, the Tipnis marchers were associated with the jungles and expected to be unable to cope with the urban environment.

The Indigenous President

Evo Morales adopted a representational politics of indigeneity (Postero 2017), laying claim to the mythic tradition of the return of the 'true Indian ruler', according to the legacies of Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari. His Presidency was to be an overthrow of the colonial state, realising the long awaited *pachakuti* or world transformation, conceived as a reversal of the colonial social order (see eg. Author, 2020). His actions, however, compromise the ideals of territorial autonomy central to the discourse of indigeneity espoused by indigenous social movements and Tipnis dwellers (Burman, 2014; Laing, 2020; Canessa, 2014; Postero, 2017) and, as was evident in the reception of the Tipnis marchers in La Paz, by a wider sympathetic populace.

Canessa claims that Morales speaks of ‘indigenous peoples’ as a widespread class or majority subaltern. Half of the 62% of the population who self-identified as pertaining to an ‘indigenous ethnic group’ in the 2001 Census are city dwellers, who Canessa terms - along with those who have migrated to the lowlands to grow cash crop coca - ‘de-territorialised’ indigenous peoples. As Morales represents this base, other indigenous groups can become excluded (Canessa, 2014). In the wide popular reception of the march in La Paz and subsequent de-legitimisation of Morales, however, urban ‘de-territorialised indigenous’ people showed wide sympathy with the Tipnis marchers, discrediting Morales’s version of indigenous politics. While city- and country-dwelling peoples and coca growers may well have different priorities, it is important to remember that individuals also move between these roles; the families I worked with often consisted of individuals spanning all these categories, who migrate seasonally, shifting dress and identity as they do so (Author 2020).

Extractivism has increased vastly under the MAS: the land area conceded to gas and oil in Bolivia has expanded from 7.2 million acres in 2007 to 59.3 million in 2012, creating issues with the groups whose territories are directly affected (Anthias, 2016; Bebbington, 2009; Gudynas, 2010; Hope, 2015; Laing 2020; Postero, 2017). In May 2015, a law was passed opening up the country’s national parks, some of which are simultaneously indigenous reserves, to hydrocarbon exploitation. Commentators argue that the redistribution of the resulting, and significant, state gains are equivalent to neoliberal measures to alleviate extreme poverty, in line with those of other administrations (Arze, 2016; Webber, 2011). They fall short of the social revolution implied in the *pachakuti*.

Ethnic alterity

Ethnic identities in the Andes are often performative, mutually defining and delimiting themselves through dance and dress (Author 2020, Bigenho, 2002; Mendoza, 2000; Turino, 1993). Participants reflexively dramatise their lives and values through cultural performances, opening these up to discursive contestation and debate (Guss, 2001). I consider the events surrounding the Tipnis march as a theatrical evocation more complex and deeply embedded than strategic self-representation, constituting an arena in which values are debated though the enactment of well-known characters from dance and myth, like 'the coloniser' and 'the Indian'.

Indian identities came to be ideologically opposed to the market as Indians were excluded from it over the liberal period, resulting in an ideological construction of two polarised parallel ethnic oppositions, such that

Indian : white = non-market : market (Harris, 1995).

Andean race is fundamentally binary: white and non-white, superior and inferior (Weismantel, 1991:xxxii); however there are many 'in-between' categories such as *mestizo/a* (mixed race) *cholo/a* (citified Indian). These are shifting and relational identities, such that a market woman may abuse the porter, her social inferior, as a 'dirty Indian', yet in another context be insultingly called 'Indian' herself, by someone considering themselves superior in wealth, city manners and education. In an interaction, what is important, it seems, is that one actor should be *more* and one should be *less* Indian (de la Cadena, 2000), a crucial observation key to understanding the Tipnis events.

Unsurprisingly, people of Kaata do not willingly self-identify as 'Indians', preferring terms like *originarios* or Callawaya. I never heard 'Indian' used as an auto-referent, and in reference to others it is highly insulting. As an older man explained, the young people who migrate to the cities or coca fields might refer derogatively to his generation as "Indian[s], with empty pockets"; the word Indian appears in this sense precisely as de la Cadena highlights, used by one wishing to claim a more mestizo identity. Young people who leave Kaata and its fields consider themselves ethnically transformed (Author, 2020). Coca is seen in Kaata as a cash crop luring young people away from the native subsistence landscapes of their villages, causing the 'death of the highlands', which lack viable cash economies and suffer long-term economic exclusion.

Morales rose to prominence as leader of the coca cultivators' union in the Chapare, negotiating with the Tipnis representatives in this capacity in 1992 over the expansion of coca growing in the park. Morales employs coca to signify indigenous identity and thus solidarity with the 'decolonisation' process (Grisaffi, 2010). Coca has been strategically employed by the Chapare unions as a symbol of indigeneity:

> 'By delegating responsibilities to the millenarian *hoja sagrada* (sacred leaf) the coca growers do not have to be forever present doing indigenous things, because conveniently the coca leaf stands in for the people concerned' (2010:427).

Whilst this strategic use of coca might be convincing in some contexts, and indeed has been vital in helping Morales represent the indigenous social movements, in the Tipnis case coca came to be allied with 'colonial' interests, as the road was seen as an attempt to open up the area to the 'colonisation' of coca growing migrants. For highlanders like many from Kaata or their representatives in the Conamaq movement, the claim to indigenous ethnicity through coca was less than convincing, and it was the president's actions on which he was appraised.

Reclaiming Territory and 'Indigeneity': History

When Morales was elected in 2006, the 'indigenous' government inherited many expectations, having come to spearhead a mass movement which toppled the neoliberal administration of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada with street protests and road blockades during the turbulent and hopeful period of 2001-2005. The Constituent Assembly process of 2007-9 responded to social movements' demands to re-write the Bolivian constitution, replacing the ‘colonial’ state. It was compromised however by the MAS refusal to let social movements represent themselves and by high-level eleventh hour negotiation with the conservative opposition (Garcés, 2011; Postero, 2017; Webber, 2011, 2012). In 2006 the main social movements of Bolivia, conjoined under the Pact of Unity, held meetings across the country, culminating in the National Assembly of Indigenous, Peasant, Originary and Colonists’ Organisations, which put forward a Proposal for the New Political State Constitution. We might return with Postero (2017) to this as a fair representation of the demands of the social movements and popular sectors encompassing the ‘indigenous’ agenda in 2006.

The proposal argued that enabling autonomy and self-determination were crucial changes the country required (Postero 2017). Autonomous regions were understood as the mechanism through which territorial sovereignty would be expressed, to suture the wounds of colonialism. Self-governing communities with autonomous control over their juridical and political organisation were to converse with the central government of a ‘pluri-national’ state, participating in “making decisions about exploration, exploitation, industrialisation and commercialisation of non-renewable resources in their territories” (Pacto de Unidad 2006:12). These demands were significantly ‘domesticated’ in the final constitution, which stipulated strict requirements to attaining autonomous status, meaning only 12 communities were eligible to apply, including the Tipnis area (Garcés, 2011; Postero 2017).

These key demands of the social movements resonate with the longstanding aims of indigenous movements across Latin America, characterised since their inception by demands for self-determination and autonomy (Van Cott, 1995). Territorial autonomy combines respect for indigenous legal norms and governance of the lands they inhabit with respect for lifestyles pertaining to those places (de la Cadena, 2010, 2015; Escobar, 2008, 2016). Contesting extractivist territorial models, territory comprises a decolonising project of indigenous worlding.

During the 2011 'VIII Indigenous March in Defence of the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park for Life, Dignity and Indigenous Rights', the Tipnis dwellers were marching for territorial rights and indigenous autonomy. The inhabitants, from a variety of groups including the Mojeño-Ignaciano, Yuracaré and Chiman gained rights to the territory as a *Tierra Communitario de Origen* (TCO) in the 1990s under the neoliberal agrarian reform law. Under the 2009 Constitution the land became a TIOC, an Originary Indigenous Peasant Territory (*Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino*), the new status including coca growers who had recently migrated to the Southern sector of the park as 'intercultural' residents. In 2010 it emerged that the state had planned the Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos road to run through its centre; a third of the territory had been marked out for hydrocarbon extraction under the MAS (CEDLA 2012). Whilst the 2009 constitution requires the state to consult indigenous peoples and their organisations where resources on their lands are to be exploited, this clause had not been respected.

The Tipnis March

The case of the Tipnis dwellers caused widespread controversy. With the support of the lowland indigenous movements, grouped together under the CIDOB (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia), they set out on 15th August 2015 to march 600kms from Trinidad, Beni, to La Paz, 3,600m above sea level, in protest about the MAS inflexibility as to the road. They took the same route as eight successive Marches for Territory and Dignity; the original in 1990, also organised by the CIDOB, had done much to articulate the 'return of the Indian' in national discourse (Albó, 1990). As the march passed through coca growing territories near Yucumo on 25th September 2011, their camp of men, women and children was attacked by police; the marchers were beaten and forcibly restrained and many fled into the jungle. They later regrouped and continued to La Paz. The violence had the effect of attracting public attention and support for them increased enormously; solidarity for the marchers as fellow Indians attacked by a violent colonial state resonated with those I worked with.

The Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), the powerful 'union of unions', called a national strike in solidarity, and a police cordon was created around the presidential palace as crowds protested vehemently against the repression. An occupation was set up in the Plaza San Francisco at the centre of La Paz, where groups of citizens from all walks of life stood debating the issue and an information tent gave updates. There was considerable anger among the social movements and populace that the government had sanctioned violence against the marchers. People realised that the incident weakened the MAS, which many still hoped to be a party for the people, and that it might result in a threat from their right-wing political opponents, but the marchers were widely acknowledged to have a legitimate cause for complaint. Among those debating in the Plaza were committed supporters of the MAS who defended the government, whilst there were constant accusations that those against them were from the middle classes and hostile to the revolutionary process of change (personal fieldnotes).

By the time the march reached the Cumbre, the high pass to the valley in which La Paz lies, the Conamaq had also declared their support. I stood among a crowd of supporters who cheered as the march surmounted the Cumbre, led by the Conamaq delegates arrayed in their regional costumes and rainbow flags. Behind them came the Tipnis dwellers, in travel worn t-shirts and straw hats, their shoulders bent with the effort of the climb.

There was by this time considerable sympathy for the march, manifested in the widespread concern for how the marchers would manage in La Paz, especially as many were accompanied by young children, who it was feared would catch pneumonia in the comparatively cold highland climate. The matter was much discussed on the daily news shows most households watch in the early evenings. As I accompanied the marchers towards La Paz, women wearing the *pollera* skirts connoting 'citified Indian' or *chola* identity and clutching shopping bags lined up along the side of the road. As we passed, one cried out, 'Strength Tipnis! Sixteenth of July Street of El Alto is with you!' ('*Fuerza Tipnis! Calle 16 de Julio de El Alto está con ustedes*!'), and they ran amongst the marchers, pressing warm children's clothes into their hands. This was not an isolated event: an announcement had to be put on the news and in the papers requesting that people halt donations of children's clothes, as the marchers had more than they could possibly take home with them (personal fieldnotes). These were not the wealthy middle-class right wing opponents the MAS claimed were supporting the march; the neighbourhood organisations of El Alto had constituted one of Morales's key support bases, contributing to his election with their roadblocks, rioting and calls for change in the 'Gas Wars' of 2003.

Popular solidarity was re-directed to the provision of foodstuffs for the approximately 2,000 marchers. *Cholo* market sellers and other well-wishing householders supplied food, stopping by the marchers' encampment at the university to drop off a chicken or a few kilos of rice or potatoes. Over time contributions were carefully adapted to the tastes of the jungle dwellers through an on-going mediatised conversation: their requests for fish, meat and yucca were urgently transmitted by a sympathetic press. Small business holders refused to charge marchers for services like transport and mobile phone repairs, and La Paz Football Club let them into the weekend match for free (see e.g. Quispe 2011).

On the 19th October 2011, as the March arrived, the city stopped for the day, and the streets and squares of La Paz were packed with supporters forming a 'human cordon' cheering for the tired marchers as they trooped in, some of them moved to tears by the strength of the reception. Crowds cheered 'Welcome Tipnis!' and 'Don't touch the Tipnis!' (*Tipnis no se toca carajo*!), and the marchers' slogans were taken up enthusiastically as they passed. Some ran out to shake the hands or slap the backs of the marchers. I squeezed into the crowds before the Presidential palace in the main square, which riot police usually close to any protest, waiting for the march to arrive.

A leading opposition senator from the wealthy lowland city of Santa Cruz, Germán Antelo, now attempted to take advantage of the temporary lack of support for the MAS, marching before the Presidential palace as only winning politicians usually do, smiling to the crowd, surrounded by his entourage. ‘Out, opportunists!’ cried the man beside me, his cry taken up by the jeering crowd. The supporters of the march and those who showed up to the square were not simply trying to destabilise the MAS; people considered the march an important event, yet this did not mean that they sympathised with the right, despite attempts to portray the supporters as consisting of wealthy ‘white’ people trying to impede the government’s empowerment of the ‘colonised’ (see e.g. García Linera 2012).

The Tipnis case continued to be articulated through ethnicised language and concepts. In the wake of the widespread outrage over the violence they had suffered and mass popular support, the government were keen to open dialogue with the marchers, who kept them waiting for an entire morning in the Vice-President’s chambers, demanding to be received in the Presidential Palace itself. Marchers armed with bows and arrows, archetypal symbol of lowland indigeneity, occupied the square outside the Presidential palace. The outcome of the negotiations was that an agreement, later formalised as Law 180, was signed declaring the TIPNIS a ‘*Zona Intangible*’ or ‘Intangible area’. ‘Intangible’ in Bolivia is often used in the sense of *‘Patrimonio Intangible’* (Intangible Heritage), a status conferred by the United Nations, referring to a ‘cultural’ heritage of actions rather than things, such as the Oruro carnival or Callawaya culture. ‘Intangible’ in Spanish, however, translates literally as ‘untouchable’. The Director General of Heritage in the Ministry of Cultures told me in September 2011 that there was no set definition of the term ‘intangible’, but that it was coming to be used to describe, for example, colonial houses in the city centre, and meant that they could not be demolished. Moments before the law was passed, Vice President García Linera voiced his concerns to the media that 'intangible' was not defined in the constitution, but that it might be inimical to business activities 'discovered' in the park, such as agreements to exploit 157,000 hectares of forest for timber, and a 'five star hotel', which turned out to be a community run eco-tourism project (see e.g. Corz and Farfán, 2011). The government subsequently terminated the ecotourism programme, which had generated $20,000 per month for five communities. The meaning of the word slid towards 'untouchable', inferring that the park must be preserved as pristine nature (personal fieldnotes). It thus metamorphosed from an interpretation ensuring indigenous autonomy to one confining adherents within just such a narrow modernist view of indigeneity as Kuper (2003; 2017) warns against.

In this ethnically charged theatre, the MAS seems to have exploited the expectation that 'the Tipnis', as the group of protestors became known, were '*indígenas*' confined by modernist categories to embodying the 'other' of development. Morales appeared to concede to the marchers entirely with the intangibility law, then revealed that shockingly, with its eco-tourism and logging, the Tipnis was not the antithetical natural realm that modernity would impute to the marchers. In February 2012, a counter-march by inhabitants of the coca-growing southern communities of the Tipnis protested the restrictions of the intangibility law: as a marcher told Cisneros "this intangibility law means that no one moves or touches anything" (http://rebelion.org/docs/230307.pdf). The debate was reduced to an all-or-nothing approach to development, playing on the common imaginary of these bow and arrow-wielding *indígenas* as representing 'nature'. Morales, an astute politician, thus sought to wrong foot the marchers by 'revealing' them as inauthentically inhabiting the realm of indigeneity laid out for them, one dialectically opposed to capitalist modernity.

Though the Tipnis dwellers were perceived to be against development, their rejection of the road had in fact started as a demand that it run a different course. The road was planned to run though Polygon Seven, an area inhabited by 20,000 *cocalero* families, and simultaneously, many claimed, to follow the contours marking the optimal altitudes for growing coca, opening up the territory to more highland migrant *cocaleros*. Subsequent research has revealed that the road routes itself through 'pools of natural gas' (CEDLA 2012; Hope 2016:922). The indigenous Tipnis dwellers had requested that the road run instead along the Sécure river, where the majority of them live, to connect them to urban amenities. When their demand was ignored, their case hardened into complete rejection of the road. Ironically then, the opposition started as a set of demands for inclusion into development; the issue, then, was not with development *per se*, but who has the rights to enjoy the fruits of it and to make decisions in the territory. Demands for education, housing and health services were added to the agenda of those marching against the road. The complexity of the issue cannot be separated into neatly opposed dialectical categories of indigeneity versus development, with the marchers occupying the 'ecologically noble savage' spot (MacNeish, 2013; Laing, 2016); it was rather the "form, pace and rate of development" which were contested (Hope 2016). Extractivism and territory here came to a head-on conflict, and faced with this, the indigenous movements and wide sectors of the capital, through their support for the Tipnis dwellers, indicated that their sympathies lay in the defence of territory and self-determination, and of Indian bodies against state repression, rather than the 'national interest'. Awareness among the social movements that the road formed part of a resource nationalism strategy reinforced their resistance in the defence of territory and self-determination (Laing, 2020).

Long and increasingly fraught negotiations over the Tipnis involved the definitive split of the Conamaq and CIDOB from the MAS, breaking the Pact of Unity.[1] The rural and urban workers' unions, the CSUTCB and COB, ostensibly maintained their support for the MAS, yet the COB announced it was forming its own political party, as did the Conamaq. In October 2012 the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organisations (CAOI) and the Conamaq sent a damning letter, declaring that "this state is no more than the continuation of the old colonial, republican state", in response to the government's behaviour over the Tipnis (see e.g. http://miradoriu.org/spip.php?article373). The language here clearly establishes the MAS as colonising 'other' to the social movements, as merely the current manifestation of a corrupt colonial state, rather than a revolutionary entity. In 2013 a pro-government faction of the Conamaq endorsed by the MAS took control of the Conamaq offices, establishing themselves as a parallel organisation to elected leaders who were highly critical of the government; similarly, in the CIDOB in 2012 a MAS-supporting faction split from the organisation's legitimate authorities, calling themselves the 'organic CIDOB' (Laing 2020). The Tipnis episode was thus key to re-defining the relations between indigenous social movements and the state, and the subsequent phase of the MAS government. Burman reports that “as the Conamaq and many others perceive it, the primary threat to indigenous territorial control… comes from [the] government” (2014:267).

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[1] Their participation in the march made their opposition to the MAS clear, and when the next meeting of the Pact of Unity was held on 17-19 November 17 2012 in Sucre, the CONAMAQ and CIDOB were absent.

Analysing the event in terms of Ethnic Alterity

To take a nuanced view of how ethnic identities work within Bolivia, we can return to the everyday situation of the marketplace, where what is important in the racist insults hurled back and forth is not that ‘we are all Indian’, of some shade or another, but who is *more* Indian (de la Cadena, 2000). Among the people with whom I was working, and within wide sectors of the highlands, Morales’s behaviour was seen to constitute a moment of rupture in which his claims to be leading a government of the colonised lost their validity in the public eye. The Tipnis marchers were clearly ‘the Indian’ in the case, helping to shift perceptions of Morales towards the archetypal ‘coloniser’, who violently repressed their legitimate territorial claim.

Reinforcing Morales’ colonial status were the accusations that the road served coca growing ‘*colonos*’ and would ‘open up’ more of the territory to them, thus promoting the interests of the MAS base above other sectors. Morales had relied on coca to establish his indigenous identity; however here coca emerged was aligned with the ‘colonial’ side of the spectrum, further challenging the legitimacy of his claim.

At the heart of the Tipnis incident, we see the tensions between territorial autonomy and the extractivist complex. The pro-indigenous and extractivist policies of the MAS came to a head-on collision here, as was inevitable, as a group concerned with territorial autonomy stood in the way of extractivism (Laing, 2020). Through taking advantage of the underlying ethnicised nature of the support for the marchers the government attempted to trap and wrong-foot them within the modernist role of the ‘true indigenous’ they (believed that) they embodied for their supporters. The very nature of the trickery reflects a stereotypical mode of mestizo manipulation of a less literate, less city-savvy, other, again confirming the MAS as 'the coloniser'. When the marchers failed to live up to the 'intangibility' they were tricked into accepting, they were held up for betraying the public faith. This was an ingenious way of dealing with the issue, although it was ultimately less than convincing.

In addition to resonating with modern tropes such as the 'ecologically noble savage', the situation shows the power of enduring Andean mythical and historical tropes of the 'true Indian', recurring to foster anti-colonial rebellion (Taussig, 1986). Morales claimed to be the legitimate heir to this tradition, representing the end of colonial rule. However, the Tipnis episode articulates another 'return of the Indian' as active challenge to and effective disruption of the state, which was - in its repressive treatment of the challenge - thereby identified as 'colonial'. Whilst there might not be any chance of escaping modern dualities once they are introduced (Pálsson, 1996), they exist here alongside other narratives and identities, such that the continuous and surprising re-appearance of 'the Indian' in a new manifestation significantly re-shifts the discussion towards the issues of territorial sovereignty which had been increasingly side-stepped by the MAS. The Tipnis marchers were some of the very few claimants to a TIOC status judged legitimate under the 2009 constitution; when their rights to consultation and territorial sovereignty were challenged, this constituted an open betrayal to the cause of territorial sovereignty.

In response to criticisms of the government's 'colonial' behaviour in the Tipnis, Vice President García Linera published an essay suggesting the Amazon is a colonised zone where indigenous peoples are in thrall to NGOs and corporate landowners (García Linera, 2012). The state needs to exert a presence in these areas to overcome existing colonial dynamics:

> 'If there is any danger of submission to external powers, it is precisely the absence of a state in the Amazon… in terms of rights and protection [this] has resulted in the formation of the landowner-despotic power over the communities and the indigenous

> peoples and the subsequent penetration of foreign powers which, on the pretext of "protecting the Amazon," the "lungs of the world," etc., have extended an extraterritorial control — via some environmentalist NGOs — over the continental Amazon ' (Garcia Linera, 2012)

García Linera's claim rests on a vision of indigenous peoples that renders them politically powerless victims (Fabricant and Postero, 2015). Morales claimed that the Tipnis leaders had been persuaded to march by meddling 'foreign' NGOs; likewise in García Linera's rendering, it is foreigners who are the 'colonists'. The government's actions are, they claim, in the national interest, a strategy of liberation for the colonised lowlanders. The ethnic lines are again redrawn, reversing the slip-up over the Tipnis episode by relocating the MAS towards the 'colonised' side of the spectrum.

The claim was judged unconvincing by the indigenous movements, leading to the letter cited above and the movements' subsequent repression. In contrast to the 'wide swathes' of the population who supported the 2011 march (Webber 2011), the counter march received only a 'lukewarm' reception (Morales, 2013), and the issue undoubtedly represented a turning point for the indigenous government. The TIPNIS events continued to be controversial and to serve as a rallying point for opposition to the MAS; community organisers from the Aymara lakeside village of Achacachi, for example, and ex-Tipnis leaders signed a 'Joint Declaration for Life and Against Totalitarianism' in 2017, identifying Morales's government as a "common enemy who attacks, humiliates and submits us in the name of a false development using a lying, colonial discourse and imposing his will through act of violence and corruption" (see e.g. https://tinta-roja.com/2017/08/24/declaracion-conjunta-los-indigenas-del-tipnis-los-hermanos-achacachi-la-vida-totalitarismo/ ; my translation).

Conclusion

We can re-examine Kuper's (2003; 2017) argument that indigeneity can distract attention from real local issues, which in this case are territorial autonomy, hydrocarbon and coca-based exploitation, and the right to violent repress political protest and impress state violence on Indian bodies. In this case roles are shifting, meaning that no one can sit securely in the indigenous positionality, but rather actors are continually appraised on their performance. This performance is judged according to attribution of Indian/colonial identity, with the centuries of characterisation that these carry. The MAS claim to be 'the rebel Indian' through its strategy of 'representational indigeneity' was widely judged to be unconvincing, and the assignation of complementary ethnic roles made it thus all the easier to thus 'unmask' them as colonisers. In this case the 'recursive Indian' re-shifted the discussion towards territorial autonomy, and the established legitimacy of the character to make this challenge contributes to its resonance. The 'rebel Indian' can thus have the effect of reminding everyone of exactly what the really important local issues are.

Central attributes of the recursive Indian's character remain the same through history and myth, as do those of his/her colonial counterpart, who tricks him/her out of his land and violently oppresses his/her protests. Howard-Malverde (1997) suggests that cyclical Andean time is like sailing round an island, seeing the same characters reappear through history in different guises. We can explain the huge popular support for the Tipnis marchers as sympathy with the 'true Indian', resonating with mythic Andean tropes of the wild rebel coming up from the lowlands to challenge the centre of civilisation. In their support for the march, the *cholos* and social movements express underlying feelings of identification with this colonised 'other', epitomising the repressed Indian at the heart of the self. In this myth it is the unjust coloniser who is challenged, and the MAS is here explicitly cast in the 'coloniser' role. In this way the Indian returns, as it always does in the Andes, to challenge the colonial centre. Memory is a mechanism explaining the present to itself, costumed in the attire of the past (Rappaport, 1990). Ethnic identities are re-enacted through the theatre of these well-mediatised events, redolent with historical and mythical overtones, and animated by dramatic tension between the 'indigenous' and 'colonial' roles, where the conflicts around autonomy and extractivism, nature and culture, are experienced and contested.

In his classic essay, Platt (1986) proposed that for the people of Macha, North Potosí "the fundamental structure of the cosmos is dual, and humanity must face both ways at once in order to benefit from the complementary but antagonistic forces around them" (1986:242). The complementary nature of indigeneity and coloniality stems from their mutual implication, and one completes the other, elucidating contemporary concerns as a conversational antagonism. Platt's observation also resounds with contemporary accusations on the national stage, and especially emerging through the Tipnis events, that Morales has a *doble cara* (double face): on one side, he presents a convincingly 'Indian' visage, yet when considering those like the Tipnis dwellers who get in the way of development, he embodies the dialectically opposed yet complementary stereotype of the coloniser.

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