

# Performing Indigeneity in Bolivia: The Struggle Over the TIPNIS

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## ABSTRACT:

*In this article, we describe the performances of indigeneity during the so-called “TIPNIS controversy” in Bolivia. In 2010, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) government announced its plans to build a highway through lowland indigenous lands and territories. This controversy—particularly the fact that Morales failed to consult with lowland Indians before beginning the project—sparked two spectacular indigenous marches organized by the Confederation of Bolivian Indigenous Peoples (CIDOB) from lowland Bolivia to the highland capitol. This article examines how these protests called into question the legitimacy of the Morales government, which claimed to stand for all indigenous peoples. We make two major interventions. First, we suggest that indigeneity here serves as what Povinelli (2011) calls an “ethical substance,” a site of moral reflection and conduct in a certain era or social world. We argue that performance becomes a central site for moral reflection about indigeneity, gender, and the articulation of alternative social worlds. Second, we inquire into the politics of performance, arguing that debates over indigeneity are played out in particular power-laden fields, where actors have differentially distributed capacities and vulnerabilities. We examine how multiple actors perform indigeneity in order to push through their own ethical and political agendas, such as state development or gender equality. How does performance*

*help us theorize indigeneity as an ethical substance, at once semiotic and material, that distinct actors can claim access to and use for their own benefit? How and in what ways does performance become a political tool for challenging the state? [Keywords: Performance, indigeneity, gender, ethical substance, politics, governmentality, TIPNIS, Bolivia]*

### **Introduction: Vigil for a “Failed” Event**

In 2012, the elected leaders of Bolivia’s lowland indigenous organization, CIDOB (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia) staged a public vigil in the main plaza of the lowland capitol of Santa Cruz, Bolivia. It was August 9, the Day of Indigenous Peoples. The organizers had erected a big tent with photos of the recent marches CIDOB had organized to protest the government’s proposed plan to build a highway through an indigenous territory and national park known as TIPNIS (Isiboro Sécore Indigenous Territory and National Park). The photos showed the 1,200 kilometer journey made by the lowlands community members and their highland allies the previous year to bring an end to the highway project, which had not been the subject of a prior consultation as required by the new 2009 constitution. The TIPNIS project proved to be a lightning rod for national and international debates about extractivist development, pitting indigenous and environmental organizations against the government. While struggles between indigenous peoples and extractivist development projects are common across Latin America, the TIPNIS controversy drew international attention because Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first indigenous president and the leader of what he refers to as Bolivia’s cultural, democratic revolution, pushed the highway despite the opposition of some indigenous communities. This led to two spectacular marches organized by CIDOB and an organization of highland indigenous communities, CONAMAQ (the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu). The 2011 march led to a temporary victory, but in 2012, a follow-up march fizzled, without reaching any agreement with the government. The march’s leaders returned empty-handed to the lowlands, only to find that the government had organized a takeover of their organization’s headquarters by a sector of indigenous people in favor of the highway. Locked out of their headquarters, Adolfo Chávez, CIDOB’s president, and other officials from his organization

waited in the plaza, trying to rouse public support. On that August day, we sat in the park with friends from nearby Guaraní communities, who cried as they described the shocking takeover of CIDOB the week before. Echoing their sorrow, Chávez explained that the TIPNIS case represented a “most notorious abuse of our rights.” “Even though the laws establish with clarity that the government should respect the [TIPNIS] territory and national park, we are feeling the contempt this government—like no other government before—has for us, the indigenous people of the eastern lowlands, the Chaco, and the Amazon.”<sup>1</sup>

In this moment of crisis, Adolfo and his staff did what they had often done in the past: frame their cause by performing representations of “good” indigeneity, linking their defense of territory to images of nature. That morning, a few faithful CIDOB staff had assembled the tent, using the sorts of photographic images that had been disseminated widely in national and international media coverage of the 2011 march. Glossy posters showed mothers carrying children strapped to their backs in colorful fabrics. Long lines of peaceful marchers wearing t-shirts and flip-flops trudged up steep roads from the tropics into the freezing cold of the Andes mountains, carrying banners of the beautiful *patujú* flower, a symbol of the tropical forest. To make their struggle for territory relatable to the urban *mestizos* whose support they were trying to gain, the organizers filled the tent space with large green plants. “This is to represent the nature we are fighting for,” one CIDOB staffer said. Posters decrying government repression of the 2011 march accompanied t-shirts for sale bearing the slogan: “For the dignity of all the Indigenous Peoples.”

In this article, we describe how the TIPNIS controversy was fought in large part through performances, with different groups—the government, lowland elite, feminist groups, and lowland indigenous organizations—using images and symbols of indigeneity to support their demands. Indigeneity is a fundamental site of politics where disagreements about national sovereignty, who is recognized as political subjects, and peoples’ relationship to land, get played out with high consequences. We show how various actors perform the “virtuous” or “good” Indian in order to stake claims and legitimize their conduct. As the TIPNIS case shows, especially when combined with representations of gender, indigeneity provides useful cultural and ethical material on which to base political and economic contestations, because its tropes are well known and malleable.

We make two main interventions into the literature relating to indigeneity and performance. First, we suggest that indigeneity here serves as what Povinelli (2011:10), following Foucault, would call an “ethical substance,” a central site of moral reflection and conduct in a certain era or “social world.” Who counts as legitimately indigenous and what ethical work such evaluations entail has been the center of Bolivian politics since the colonial era. It is especially so in the era of Morales, whose government claims to have enacted an emancipatory indigenous state benefitting Bolivia’s poor and indigenous population. That is why the TIPNIS controversy became such a watershed moment for the Morales government: the government’s ethical and political commitments to bettering the lives of all indigenous peoples came into question. We suggest that an analysis of the varied TIPNIS performances provides a critical lens into the ways performance acts to shape social worlds, as actors articulate specific figurations of ethical substance.

Second, we inquire into the politics of performance, arguing that these debates over indigeneity are played out in particular power-laden fields, in which actors have differentially distributed capacities and vulnerabilities. We describe how the Bolivian state uses its position of relative power to define and perform the “good Indian.” Specifically, we show how the Morales administration pits an imagined, pre-modern, passive (female) lowland indigenous figure against a modern, politically agentive (male) highland Aymara figure. In contrast, despite all its efforts to perform the “good Indian,” in 2012, CIDOB did not have sufficient political power to garner public support or force the state to accede to their demands. Meanwhile, other actors were able to use their performed versions of the good Indian to push their ethical political agendas, such as state development or gender equality. We argue that the interplay between gender and performances of indigeneity is a key site of politics in this case. How does performance help us theorize indigeneity as an ethical substance, at once semiotic and material, that distinct actors can claim access to and use for their own benefit? How can we evaluate performance as a political tool?

### **Performances, Politics, and Ethical Substance**

Anthropology has taken up performance as a way to theorize the presentation of self (Turner 1988:77, 81). Victor Turner defined performance as social and/or cultural drama, in which mundane communicative phenomena

such as “speech behavior” and the “presentation of self” played out in everyday life. For example, Dwight Conquergood (1991) showed how individual performances give marginalized subjects (whether Latino youth in gangs or Hmong immigrants in Wisconsin) the ability to invert power structures and rewrite dominant narratives. Similarly, Sarah Warren (2009) shows how urban Mapuche women in Argentina construct their indigenous identity through gendered performances involving “authentic” clothing, jewelry, and language, risking reinforcing gender stereotypes for the possibility of enhanced ethnic visibility. But Sergio Huarcaya (2015) points to the distinction between Judith Butler’s now famous 1988 concept of “performativity,” the construction of the subject by the reiteration of norms, and “performance,” “bounded acts done by a subject who consciously performs” (2015:809). He argues, and we agree, that indigeneity is “both performed and performative” (2015:809ff). As we show below, who and what constitutes “indigeneity” is constructed both through governmentality, that is, through norms emanating from both market logics and state discourses, as well as through individual and collective agentic performances.

We add to these anthropological approaches to performance by drawing from Elizabeth Povinelli’s rich theorization of what she calls “ethical substance.” Povinelli does not use this term in relation to performance; instead, she uses it to analyze a form of liberal governmentality in which particular arrangements of tense, eventfulness, and ethical substance make distributions of life and death, endurance and exhaustion, seem practical and sensible. We find particularly useful her focus on the ways that societies come to define certain objects as central sites of moral and ethical concern. She uses Michel Foucault’s definition of ethical substance as “the prime material (*matière principale*) of moral reflection, conduct, and evaluation” (2011:10). What, she asks, is the material on which such ethical work is carried out in particular places and times? How are social worlds aggregated through arrangements and manifestations of this ethical substance? This substance, she suggests in the case of the native peoples of Australia with whom she collaborates, is simultaneously material and discursive. It is created through forms of representation and language, and lived and embodied under differently structured material conditions (2011:14ff). It is a site of discursive framing and governance, but it is also very much material, as the bodies, lives, and deaths of native peoples are the substance through which the ethical debates are carried out.

We consider indigeneity a key ethical substance, a central site by which life and death have been organized in colonial and post-colonial societies. Scholars have described the discursive and material means by which indigenous peoples have been constructed as objects, labor, and non-humans (cf. Hall 1996). Their territories have been occupied, their bodies tortured and massacred. Over the last decades, however, as indigenous peoples have organized and proposed alternatives to coloniality, capitalism, and liberalism, they have made visible new “potentialities” (to use another of Povinelli’s terms) immanent in the ethical substance of indigeneity (2011:12–14). A central part of the Morales revolution has been to bring indigenous peoples and their values, ethics, and practices to the center of the nation. In part, this has been about rewriting the age-old constitution of the state and society based upon a European logic. Through laws, policies, and performance, Morales has linked his political and economic agenda of resource extractivism to a particular form of indigeneity. As Andrew Canessa puts it:

[i]n Morales’s Bolivia, political legitimacy rests on being indigenous (although this is, of course, contested). On many occasions Morales has positioned the indigenous as being the best place from which to defend and protect the nation’s resources and to push for social justice on a very wide front. Indigeneity provides his government with the legitimacy to rule and a platform from which to protect the nation against cultural and economic globalization (even as he embraces many of its key aspects); in short, indigeneity is the foundation of a new nationalism. (2014:17–18)

But, as Canessa points out, indigeneity is not a neutral or static notion; rather, it is a constructed category that is under constant renovation and contestation. It is also relational. On the one hand, as Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (2007) point out, “indigenous cultural practices, institutions, and politics *become such* in articulation with what is not considered indigenous within the particular social formation in which they exist” (2007:4). On the other, indigeneity has always been composed of opposing images: the noble savage versus the dangerous cannibal, the educated peasant farmer versus the radical revolutionary.

Charles Hale (2002, 2004) has argued that these dualities took a specific form in the neoliberal era. He showed how shifts in state ideology

towards multiculturalism paired with aggressive neoliberal policies led to a new form of governance that reconstituted racial hierarchies in new forms (2004:16). The core of neoliberalism's "cultural project," he argued, was "the creation of subjects who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of capitalism" (2004:17). As a result, using a term first formulated by Bolivian scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Hale argues that this form of governance "proactively creates and rewards" the "*Indio permitido*," the authorized Indian whose demands for rights do not challenge the state or global capital, while it condemns its "undeserving, dysfunctional Other," the "*Indio prohibido*," the prohibited Indian, to "racialized spaces of poverty and social exclusion" (2004:19).

Hale's analysis clarified what scholars across Latin America were observing, giving us a vocabulary to describe the subject positions "responsibilized" multicultural indigenous actors appeared to be inhabiting. It is important to recognize the specificity of the historical moment that Hale carefully traced. The *indio permitido* was a subject position produced during the neoliberal period in Latin America and Hale relied on a Foucaultian framework to explain the effects of a particular form of neoliberal governmentality. He described how non-state actors like NGOs and international aid agencies encouraged or discouraged different kinds of conduct. One of the hallmarks of neoliberal governmentality is that it works through the "techniques of the self," rewarding subjects who enact the appropriate behavior themselves. Thus, Hale noted, in the neoliberal era, visibly repressive tactics were rare. Instead, neoliberal governmentality served "the more reasonable proposition of nudging 'radical' demands back inside the line dividing the authorized from the prohibited" (2004:19).

Our analysis of the performances during the TIPNIS case shows two important shifts in thinking about how the image of *indio permitido* has been articulated during the Morales era. First, while there have been numerous debates about whether the Morales regime is "post-neoliberal" or rather an extension of neoliberalism (see Postero and Goodale 2013), we see here that the *indio permitido* continues to have purchase in a period where the state uses what Foucault (1991) would call its "sovereign power": direct state violence, legal sanctions, and economic cooptation. That is, notions of good and bad Indians continue to circulate in the narratives we recount here, but they are not only those emanating from a neoliberal logic, as Hale described. Instead, the Bolivian state mobilizes such discourses as tools of sovereignty, reinforcing those indigenous groups

who support state's capitalist accumulation and extractive industry projects and sanctioning those who fail to acculturate to the workings of the market.

Second, rather than only being a site of self-government or a means to access government technologies of care, we show that indigeneity is also a fundamental site of politics where actors use performance to overtly contest what form of development is appropriate for local communities and who gets to decide. Thus, being a good Indian or bad Indian in the Morales era results in more than encouragement or abandonment; it is more than a cultural project. It is also political project about development, extractivism, and sovereignty, fought at the site of ethical substance. This has material implications: as we show below, being a "bad Indian" (in this case, resisting a particular form of development) can result in jail, organizational takeovers, violent physical repression, or the dispossession of territory. Thus, the agentive performances of indigeneity we document in this article are political acts of disagreement. Facing this mode of government, indigenous people, their allies, and the state all carry out politics through spectacle, protest, and performance.

Why are spectacle and cultural performance so important? Scholars have noted how ritual, drama, and carnival can offer a critique of the existing social system by presenting alternative forms of living and social ordering (Guss 2000, Mendoza 2000). Daniel Goldstein (2004) argues that spectacles call attention to oneself or one's group by means of public display. Specifically positioned social groups and actors attempting to stamp society with their own agenda can produce such alternative visions through "political action based on visual display" (2004:18). Obviously, this is most clear in the spectacles of the state; it is through spectacle that national political communities are imagined, created, and communicated to subject-citizens (Anderson 1983, Joseph and Nugent 1994, Corrigan and Sayer 1985). But spectacles can also be tools for political protest, serving as a means for marginalized groups to thrust themselves into the public sphere "through dramas of citizenship" (Holston and Appadurai 1999). Diana Taylor (2003) has pointed to two sources performances can draw upon: the archive, made up of historically documented, often written, cultural artifacts; and repertoire, embodied and oral expressions. There is a long history of social movements in Bolivia using the repertoire of embodied performance as a vehicle for structural change. These include hunger strikes against the dictatorship, highland Andean women

blocking major roadways with their bodies, and the Landless Movements squatting on rural hacienda lands to protest inequities in land distribution. In the TIPNIS case we describe here, multiple actors use such repertoires to debate not only the appropriate form of national development but also the fundamental political questions of who decides.

### **Performances and State-making in Bolivia**

Morales and his MAS (Movimiento Al Socialismo, or Movement Towards Socialism) party came to power in 2005 by challenging the neoliberal policies of previous regimes and promising to redistribute the patrimony of the country to its poor and indigenous populations. This anti-neoliberal agenda was paired with a promise to “decolonize” the Bolivian state, to overcome the structures and practices of racism against its majority indigenous population, and to implement a new vision of sustainable development based on indigenous cosmovision, or *vivir bien* (living well).<sup>2</sup> In 2006, Bolivia held a Constituent Assembly with popularly elected delegates, many of them from indigenous and working class backgrounds. The Assembly, and the constitution it produced in 2009, marked a radical change for Bolivia, which had previously been governed by a white-mestizo political class. The new constitution declares Bolivia to be a plurinational state, and institutionalizes a set of rights for Bolivia’s “indigenous originary peasant peoples” (Bolivia 2009, Article 2). Thus, Morales and the MAS were charged with bringing into being a new revolutionary state and institutionalizing a process of change.

As Farthing and Kohl (2013) note, the robust rural oral history traditions in Bolivia facilitate cross-generational transmission of past injustices, transforming storytelling, commemorations, and rituals into critical sites for political mobilization. Morales has been particularly adept with this repertoire, using embodied performances of indigeneity to play upon emotions of the disenfranchised masses—for whom indigeneity has become a sign indexing their oppression as well as a platform for claiming rights (see Canessa 2014). James Jasper (1998) has urged social movement scholars to take emotions seriously, arguing that emotions and affective reactions are integral to building social movement. He suggests, in fact, that people are often recruited into movements after suffering what he calls “moral shocks,” leading them to channel their anger into righteous indignation and political activity (409). This brings our attention back to

the question of ethical substance: we suggest that political performances draw emotional responses precisely because they impact deeply held ethical positions.

The Morales administration has tapped this deep well in many of its performances. Morales began his administration with a memorable inauguration ritual at the archaeological complex at Tiwanaku, where he was blessed and cleansed by Aymara spiritual leaders. There, invoking the Andean notion of *pachakuti*, or reversal of the world order, he declared the beginning of a new millennium of justice for indigenous peoples of the continent (Postero 2007). Morales often rallies support for critical legislative reforms through spectacular events mobilizing indigenous history and tales of oppression and injustice. For example, when Morales passed the New Agrarian Reform law in 2006, he organized social movement activists in the city of Peñas, the site of the brutal death of 18th century anti-colonial Aymara Revolutionary Tupac Katari. Addressing thousands of peasant farmers, he declared: “I stand before you today...at the site where Julian Tupac Katari was *descuartizado* [quartered]...We are here to liberate our country, and Katari is the principal reference point for the indigenous struggles in Bolivia and a constant reminder of the obligation to decolonize Bolivia” (See *La República* 2006). Through these performance events, Morales embodies the spirit of Katari as the leader of a movement liberating the country from a colonialist and racist history. Here we see the hegemonic redemption story of the new state, which promises to put the evil of colonialism in the past and lead the way to a future of justice (see Meister 2011). Gathering up past and contemporary struggles over land and territory, Morales makes his national project of decolonization seem universal, uncontested, and deeply ethical.

A second important narrative that Morales embodies has to do with what Kohl and Farthing (2012) call “resource nationalism.” In contrast to the long history of natural resource extraction—first by the Spanish conquistadors, then by white-mestizo elite, and finally by transnational corporations—the MAS state promises to construct a new form of justice based on redistribution of resource wealth to the indigenous and poor. This position has enormous emotional weight with Bolivia’s poor, especially as it is combined with a strong system of public redistribution through *bonos*, or cash transfers (Postero 2013). During the MAS administration, the economy greatly improved (CEPAL 2012). As Morales’s definitive 2014 electoral victory showed, this combination of economic stability and spectacular

performance has been an extremely effective tool of state formation; despite widespread criticism of Morales, peasants, laborers, and working classes rallied behind him.

As was clear from earlier examples, Morales initially argued that indigenous values could be mobilized to create radical changes like land reform, management of natural resources, and protection of Mother Earth. In recent speeches, however, Morales has changed the emphasis, arguing that the country's goal is "economic liberation" (Morsolin 2015). Elsewhere, we have argued that "economic liberation" has become a powerful new consensus in plurinational Bolivia, building on and replacing previous revolutionary discourses of indigeneity, decolonization, and even global climate change (Postero and Fabricant forthcoming, Postero 2017). In the MAS state's new vision, one version of indigeneity is now re-articulated as part of global capitalism under the rubric of national sovereignty. Morales uses an ethical stance here as well, arguing that profits from extractivism will benefit indigenous communities, as well as support national sovereignty.

### **The TIPNIS Project**

It was within this context of development, extractivism, and "economic liberation" that TIPNIS exploded. In 2010, Morales announced a plan to build a highway linking the tropics of Cochabamba to the Brazilian border. The highway was to be funded by the Brazilian National Development Bank, opening new possibilities for trade with Brazil. The Morales government claimed that the highway would bring prosperity and trade to lowland peoples and help the state achieve control of the national territory. But the proposed highway would run through the Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park, both a forest preserve and collectively held indigenous territory. Many residents feared that the road would bring ever-greater ecological destruction to a region already deeply affected by cattle ranching and illegal forestry. They were particularly concerned that it would open up their lands to further colonization by Andean coca-growers, who already inhabit one section of the park. Other local indigenous communities were pleased with the possibilities that the paved road might bring: linking them to bigger cities and markets, and bringing increased access to education and health care systems. This lack of uniformity in indigenous views around resource extraction and development shows that national narratives of autonomy and sovereignty have different

local articulations to indigenous communities. In his analysis of the TIPNIS case, John McNeish (2013) explained these opposing views by pointing to differing relationships with resource extraction: some indigenous communities are linked to the market in deeper and more positive ways than others. Building on McNeish's argument, Anna Laing (2014) explains the contrasting ideas about territory, rights, and nature as a reflection of competing demands for resource sovereignty. Cecilie Hirsch (2012) points to the local impacts: as a result of these conflicting views, leaders were forced to make difficult pragmatic decisions about whether and how to bring resources to their communities.

It is important to emphasize that not all the marchers were opposed to development in general, or even the construction of highway. Marilyn Karayuri, a Guaraní journalist who worked as part of the communications committee of the marches, told us that the marchers were mostly concerned that they had not been consulted about the placement of the road or the potential damages to the environment. Instead of fulfilling the constitutionally mandated obligation to consult communities about development projects that might impact them, President Morales notoriously declared: "Like it or not, we will construct this highway" (*La Jornada* 2011). Moreover, says Karayuri, the TIPNIS struggle represented a much larger concern than the highway. "If they could enter in this territory that was titled by the government, and a national park, they would enter into any indigenous territory. So TIPNIS signified the gateway to all indigenous territories."<sup>3</sup> This was critical because many lowland indigenous communities saw this government as once again sacrificing them and their territories for "national" development, the benefits of which they would not reap. This was the crux of the issue, as lowland communities saw the state's actions as undermining an ethical responsibility to protect indigenous lands and territories. This was the reason CIDOB and CONAMAQ decided to mount the non-violent marches.

The first march, in 2011, captured international attention when the national police intervened in the small town of Chaparina, firing rubber bullets and tear gas at the protestors, including women and children. This changed the public debate substantially, and when the march finally arrived in La Paz, the center of Morales's political support, it received a massive, warm welcome. Morales was forced to declare the park *intangibile*, or untouchable, and to carry out an ex-post facto consultation. Some communities were satisfied with the results of the march and the government's

concessions. But others were not. Some even suggested that the intangible declaration was actually a form of spiteful punishment by the Morales state, a kind of bad-faith invocation of ideals of environmental protection and sovereignty, to show that the TIPNIS activists were so extreme as to oppose all development. The state violence as well as its discursive formulations of the protesters as obstacles to national progress are examples of how the state continuously marked the marchers as “indios prohibidos.”

Then, amid dissent within regional and national indigenous groups, in 2012 CIDOB mounted a second march to protest the consultation process, arguing that MAS had coopted many indigenous leaders and set up parallel organizations to support the government. Again, this was an ethical challenge to the state, arguing that it had violated the ethics of participatory democracy and collective indigenous decision-making. The 2012 march received much less public attention than the previous year’s march, in part because the lowland organizations were split on whether marching again was a good idea. When marchers finally reached La Paz, the government refused to negotiate with them, and they returned home empty-handed to the lowlands. As we showed in the opening scene, they were left to perform their virtuous indigeneity to passersby in the plaza in Santa Cruz, hoping for support from the mestizo elite. In part, this appeal set up a familiar narrative of victim and protector, where the mestizo residents of Santa Cruz could play the role of “defender” against Aymara colonizers writ large. It appealed to the elite desires for territorial control of the lowlands, a space that they imagined as having been invaded in recent years by Aymara and Quechua migrants. Claiming historic rights to this territory and to native peoples of their region allowed the lowland elite to make a call for regional autonomy, which they portrayed as a matter of justice. Despite these appeals, however, the government subsequently claimed the consultation with the TIPNIS communities showed substantial approval of the highway. In late 2017, the state announced it would begin construction shortly.

## **Public Discourses and Performances During the TIPNIS Controversy**

So, how did the Morales government use indigeneity and performance during the TIPNIS crisis? First, it is important to note that, like all states, the MAS-led state is not a homogenous entity with one single vision or set of tactics. There was an enormous range of opinions within the state apparatus about the TIPNIS case. As we carried out fieldwork in 2012 and 2014, we heard dissent even from MAS militants working in state ministries, especially those indigenous intellectuals who had been delegates to the Constituent Assembly and had worked closely with lowland indigenous organizations there. One indigenous leader literally backed out of her government office when we asked her about it. The Minister of Defense, María Chacón renounced her position after the Chaparina violence and the National Ombudsperson issued a harsh critique of it (Defensor del Pueblo 2011).<sup>4</sup> Yet Morales and his closest advisers put forth a united front defending the road. In a controversial 2013 book, Vice President Álvaro García Linera argued that the highway would protect lowland peoples from rapacious patrimonial-hacienda elite and foreign corporations that currently control the region. To break up their power, he said, the MAS state should regain territorial control over the region in order to provide for the greater good. This discourse of national sovereignty then became a strategy for defending this resource rich region from foreigners and NGOs. “In the Amazon, then, it is not the indigenous peoples who have taken control of the territorial power, as occurred years ago in the highlands and valleys... But it is the despotic landowner order that predominates the region and has controlled indigenous organization” (García Linera 2013:8, see Beaulieu and Postero 2013)

In this quote we can see echoes of Hale’s *indio permitido*, as García Linera invoked a discourse labeling one set of indigenous peoples as “good Indians” and others as “bad Indians.” Morales usually frequently refers to the highland Aymara or Quechua people when describing the country’s modern development agenda. He especially lauds as “good Indians” the new Aymara middle and upper-middle class emerging in La Paz as a result of their transnational trade with China. This is not an anti-capitalist discourse, but rather a discourse from within the global capitalist framework. As Emily Achtenberg states, “it has been clear that the MAS has [transitioned] from a government of social movements to a big tent hegemonic power consolidated around a pro-growth, extractivist,

neodevelopmentalist agenda cast in national-popular terms” (2016:374). High profile megaprojects that evoke national pride like the spectacular aerial cable car between La Paz and El Alto and the Tupac Katari satellite that brings Internet to schoolchildren, all represent new and dominant symbols of a modern progressive nation. These shining new initiatives stand in stark contrast to the ways the TIPNIS protestors were represented as living in the past and resisting progress. National peasant union leader Roberto Coraite suggested the TIPNIS protesters should choose between the road, which would bring them trade and development, or else “stay in clandestinity, as indigents, remaining as savages” (*La Prensa* 2011). The lowland indigenous figure is frozen in a pre-modern state, while the Aymara become a symbol of modernity and progress within this capitalist system of extractivism and development.

The good–bad narrative is further cemented through representations of gender. For instance, speaking to his highland supporters in the coca growing area in 2011, Morales famously urged them to seduce the women of the TIPNIS to gain support for the highway (Erbol 2011). In this statement, we see the trope of the passive lowland indigenous woman waiting to be penetrated by the active masculine Andeans. Again, this contrasts with images the government puts forward of the militant Aymara and Quechua women insurgents, such as 18th century anti-colonial leaders Bartolina Sisa and Gregoria Apaza,<sup>5</sup> as well as the more contemporary images of Aymara women blocking roads during critical moments of anti-neoliberal protests. The image of Andean masculine power echoes in the many artistic posters that circulated online and papered the country’s walls during the controversy, showing the highway as a phallic symbol, slicing open and raping the forest (see Beaulieu 2014b). One popular image shows Morales wielding a phallic shaped chainsaw, cutting down a tree. The overarching message of these images is clear: the road is a violent and gendered form of penetration. Such gendered discourses of control through rape, violence, and conquest of lands harken back to the colonial forms of patriarchal oppression that scholars have so ably described (see Stephenson 1999, Weismantel 2001, Canessa 2005). While many of these images came from critics of the road, they reinforced the gendered representations that put lowland indigenous peoples in a subordinate role. In this view, the Andean state leads the country to modernity and progress while lowland Indians are pacified and controlled by the Aymara. National

sovereignty is tied to the submission of lowland indigenous lands, territories, and bodies.

### **Lowland Narratives: The Figure of the Suffering Indigenous**

During the struggles over TIPNIS, the MAS government was in a privileged position to articulate its stance through many public performances. Yet, the TIPNIS activists were able to present their own narratives as a result of the massive media attention the case received. These alternative narratives demonstrate the ways symbols and spectacular protest can act as resistance to the Morales state as well as how they can legitimize the ethical position of the lowlands peoples, the material of the ethical substance. We now turn to the efforts of lowland indigenous organizations, demonstrating how they used many of the same symbolic elements to construct very different representations. Again, we want to emphasize the multiplicity of perspectives that abound in lowland communities. In examining the semiotics of performance, we see that this multiplicity was reduced to produce the figure of a noble group of “Good Indians” bravely resisting the state and defending the environment.

In 2011, the leaders of the TIPNIS march uploaded a video to YouTube called “Message from TIPNIS to the World” (YouTube 2011). In it, Justa Cabrera, a Guaraní woman from Santa Cruz, and then president of CNAMIB (Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Bolivia, National Federation of Indigenous Women of Bolivia), the women’s organization within CIDOB, described the struggle this way:

TIPNIS is our home and our life. We the indigenous people live, hunt, and fish; our life is based on the contact with nature. And so we demand that our government respect our cosmovision and our life.... TIPNIS is the lung of the forest that serves the Bolivian people, and Latin Americans and the world. (YouTube 2011)

These declarations, echoed over and over by TIPNIS spokespeople, were augmented by an array of symbols and images. When the organizers were planning the 2011 march, the communication committee strove to find symbols to give it a coherent image. These symbols become part of what Dell Hymes (1981:79) called a “communicative repertoire” that helped to

give meaning to the social interactions between the marchers and an audience that included both the Morales state and civil society. The obvious choice for TIPNIS protestors was the patujú flower, one of two national flowers of Bolivia (along with the Andean *kantuta*). Although both the central and state governments had used the patajú flower in their performances, (see, e.g., Vice President Garcia Linera's 2014 book, where an image of the highland flag, the *wiphala*, is superimposed on each petal of the patajú flower), the CIDOB organizers decided it would be the best symbol, along with the arrow, a well known sign of lowland indigeneity. Marilín Karayuri says they chose the patujú flower because it is red, green, and yellow, the colors of the Bolivian flag, but more importantly, because it grows in all of the indigenous territories. It was an important symbol of the natural world they were trying to conserve.

The territory has always been our home and that is what we have to defend. And so, this is what we discussed in the preparation for the march, the theme of the conservation of life, not just of our lives but also of nature's life. Ultimately, we are one, nature and the indigenous people, along with other human beings. Because the protection of the environment has always been in our hands.<sup>6</sup>

As Laing (2015) and Kaijser (2014) have also shown, the association between indigenous peoples and nature reinforces the trope of the virtuous eco-Indian, and works to link indigenous interests with larger concerns for the environment and the global climate. While the battle over TIPNIS raged, images of beautiful and vulnerable nature abounded in blogs produced by activists online and posters on the walls across the country. These were not the creations of CIDOB or the marchers, but of their many allies, including students, artists, and environmentalist organizations. One iconic image was a poster that read: "Is this really progress? Let's save TIPNIS." The image shows the lush Amazon forest, with verdant trees and a brilliant blue sky, cut through by a highway. A huge leopard lies dead in the foreground, run over by an SUV. Here, nature, as represented by the tragic leopard, also stands in for the indigenous people of TIPNIS, semiotically linking the body of the lowland Indian and Mother Earth. This tugs on the heartstrings of the audience, urging them help "save" both the lands and the people. These posters and online images received a lot

of attention, but indigenous organizers felt somewhat ambivalent about them. Marilín Karayuri explains:

Yes, there was a lot of support [*apoyo*] and lots of images disseminated by people trying to support TIPNIS. But we the indigenous peoples don't need to see these cartoons, or see this on TV, because we live it...It is not the same, but it is good to try to transmit what we in the world of the indigenous people live, and why we want to conserve nature...But we have always made clear: [These supporters] can speak, but not in our name! They are not authorized...And many people have taken advantage of our situation to benefit their own struggles, to make themselves seen.<sup>7</sup>

Karayuri has reason for her concerns. We have described above how, as regional elites struggled against the Morales government, they adopted the lowland TIPNIS peoples as part of their struggle, calling attention to the wounded Indian–wounded Earth narrative. The political organ representing these elites is the *Comité Cívico* (Civic Committee), whose members are unelected spokespeople for regional interests. Founded in the 1950s by prominent members of the regional elite, the *Comité* today represents a conglomeration of business interests. In 2012, the *Comité* characterized the violence committed against TIPNIS protestors as human rights violations, and used this charge as part of their broader efforts to destabilize the political power of the Morales regime<sup>8</sup> (Fabricant and Postero 2013). By claiming the lowland Indian as their own, these elites could promote a regional narrative of autonomy. This became essential for protecting lands and natural resources in the lowland region of the country, where modernity or progress was not about an Aymara vision of capitalism, but rather a lowland and mestizo vision tied to ideals of whiteness, European spatial order, and capitalist accumulation. In 2012, we witnessed a regional *cabildo*, or mass public meeting, in the lowland capitol of Santa Cruz, where elites used the TIPNIS struggle to push for regional autonomy. The TIPNIS representative, José Antezana, spoke to the cheering crowd:

We have come as citizens to demand respect for democracy...It is the right and obligation of all of us Bolivians to defend this national park so that they do not destroy it with the highway the government wants to construct...But we are going to defend this territory. I assure

you, brothers: the highway is not going to pass through TIPNIS even if THE GOVERNMENT INSISTS. This territory belongs to us, it is our right, we have legal title!

In Antezana's speech, we see the "wounded TIPNIS" spokesperson personifying the violations of human rights and the abuses of democracy. This worked powerfully for regional elites because it allowed them to link their cause to the human rights victims and the ethical substance of indigeneity. The elites see the region of Santa Cruz as a territorial body wounded by Morales's politics and by Aymara and Quechua invaders migrating to their region, that wound echoed by the bodies of the many hunger strikers who protested against the state in 2008 pushing for departmental autonomy. However, it is not just the Santa Cruz elites who make these connections. In the 2014 political campaign, the Verdes (Green) party invited Fernando Vargas, the lowland indigenous leader of the 2011 march, to be its presidential candidate. Its campaign posters of endangered frogs made similar connections between environment, indigeneity, and human rights, challenging the MAS as authoritarian spoilers of the environment. (This did not prove any more successful for the Verdes than it did for the Santa Cruz Civic Committee. The Verdes only won 3 percent of the vote.)

The last element of the TIPNIS narrative we point to is gender. If Morales used patriarchal and gendered discourses to justify the TIPNIS project, the protestors also used images of women to reinforce their performances of the good Indian. Lowland indigenous women were often strategically placed at the head of the protest march. In part, their presence had such an impact because women appeared as both mothers and as culture bearers marching to protect their children's human right to culture (Beaulieu 2014a, Engle 2010). But the marches increasingly featured women as leaders as well. In 2011, Justa Cabrera, the Guaraní leader of CENAMIB, the women's organization within CIDOB, whom we cited above, struggled to bring the voices of indigenous women into the public view. Having lowland indigenous women leaders was important, she said, because they "represented a culture that should be valued by society, not as before when they were triply discriminated against for being a woman, indigenous, and poor" (Terrazas 2012). In 2012, TIPNIS march president Berta Bejarano was increasingly thrust into the spotlight. A 47-year old Moxeño activist, she was joined on the march by 6 of her 10 children (see Achtenberg 2012).

Some saw Berta as a criminal—in 2007, she was detained for smuggling cocaine. MAS officials used this as a reason not to negotiate with her. The televised images of Doña Berta and Doña Justa standing up to police and making demands to the MAS state during the TIPNIS protests telegraphed the strength of lowland indigenous women, as well as of the movement in general, countering the dominant phallic practices of the state. Their images drew attention to the oppression they had survived. Yet, scholars make clear that these struggles are far from over in local communities, where women are often silenced and discriminated against, particularly in the political arena (see McNeish and Arteaga 2013). Thus, TIPNIS performances showed only one side of indigenous women’s struggles, pushing their efforts for gender equality aside to represent them primarily as warriors for the environment and their cultures, again reproducing dominant and one-dimensional narratives of both gender and indigeneity. We echo McNeish and Arteaga’s critique that gender inequality in the community may have been obscured through these performances, but we also argue that the compelling images of indigenous women did work to decenter the masculine narrative of the government and create sympathy for the march (see Achtenburg 2012). Women’s suffering during the march, which made for compelling media images, performed important semiotic and ethical work: it tied the unmarked everyday struggles of rural indigenous life—what Povinelli (2011) would call “quasi-events” or endurance—to the monumental sacrificial “event” of the march. As a result of these performances, members of the Bolivian public who normally would not take responsibility for the precarious situations these indigenous mothers live in as their lands are invaded by forest companies, mines and wells, or colonizers, suddenly found themselves forced to take an ethical position on the TIPNIS “crisis.”

### **Mujeres Creando: Performative Acts of Solidarity**

One important way this effect was amplified was through the work of La Paz-based *Mujeres Creando*, an anarcho-feminist collective made up primarily of middle-class mestiza intellectuals who participate in a range of feminist and anti-poverty work, including graffiti commentary, street performances, spectacles, graffiti, and online discussions. Scholars have written about the ways in which *Mujeres Creando* used embodied performance in public spaces of La Paz to disrupt everyday forms of patriarchy

(see Monasterios 2006). By maintaining a constant presence in the streets, they offer a robust critique of other forms of oppression (gendered, labor, class-based, urban/rural) and call for an autonomous feminism. Their graffiti has become a common site in Bolivia, often articulating critiques of the Morales state. It is important to note that their organizing work takes place mostly in urban areas, far removed from the daily struggles of rural indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, *Mujeres Creando* carried out important acts of solidarity with the TIPNIS marchers. Their interventions in the TIPNIS case were yet another example of how they use creativity and humor to poke fun at the government's hegemonic narrative. Thus, the TIPNIS struggle formed part of their larger agenda of political provocation for the urban public audience in La Paz.

Once again, the indigenous leaders of the TIPNIS march were a little wary about other people making unauthorized representations of them. Some were uncomfortable with the gender politics of the group, who they saw as radical and extremist, something that had little resonance in lowland indigenous communities. Marilín Karayuri reported that the male leaders even jokingly told the indigenous women organizers not to get too close to these feminists, who might tempt them to rebel against the men, or worse, become lesbians. But in the end, they agreed that if *Mujeres Creando* didn't interfere with the TIPNIS demands, or speak in their name, their support would be welcome.

During the 2011 march, *Mujeres Creando* sprayed city walls with bright red paint representing the blood of TIPNIS and painted graffiti on city walls, with slogans such as "Police, what kind of change is this? You teargassed women and children." Then, they created a massive street mural, welcoming the TIPNIS protestors when they arrived in La Paz in September 2012. At the top, they spray-painted "*Soy TIPNIS*" (I am TIPNIS), and below they created three life-sized masks.<sup>9</sup> The first mask is a tiger/cheetah with an open mouth. On their website, they clarified what each mask means.<sup>10</sup> For the first mask, it reads, "With animal skin, with animal force, with animal ferocity, I am Struggle." The second is a green human face with a frog creeping across the nose and a patajú flower on its hat. Their explanation for this mask reads, "With the green of plants, lungs to enable us to breathe, scream, sing and live. I am Hope." The last mask is a blue face with birds and flowers on its forehead, and a huge red tongue sticking out of a pink mouth. They explain: "With the blue of water, the principle element of life, to stick out the tongue thirsty for justice, for laughter, for

liberty. I am Liberty.” The accompanying text for all the masks explains that “this is not an anthropological or folkloric imitation of the use the inhabitants of the TIPNIS make of masks. We have allowed ourselves to make other, different masks, imagined from the ideas and sentiments that they are contributing on each of the days of their march. Imagination connects us!” *Mujeres Creando* hoped these images would inspire both the TIPNIS protesters and the residents of La Paz. Like carnival masks the world over (Turner 1988), these masks invert the dominant stereotypes (i.e., indigenous are close to nature), playfully rearranging them into a tool of protest. Again, Jasper’s analysis of emotions becomes relevant here. How and in what ways do these forms of protest and performance build “emotive connectivity” across race, class, gender, identity? We suggest that they were using these emotional tactics to build upon the “moral shock” the TIPNIS controversy produced, drawing attention to the broader public’s concerns about the Morales administration’s unethical and authoritarian style. This provided a space for larger national debates about the ethical substance of indigeneity.

*Mujeres Creando* also used masks in the performance they called the “March of the Bertas.” During the second TIPNIS march in 2012, the government vilified the march’s leader, Berta Bejarano, bringing up her past criminal charge. *Mujeres Creando* took up her cause, with graffiti like “Berta, being a [drug] mule doesn’t annul you; We are one with you.” *Mujeres Creando* also protested the state’s ex-post facto consultation process in TIPNIS, with graffiti that became famous in its own right: “Evo, your consultation insults all the people.” On July 5, 2012, when the march finally arrived in La Paz, *Mujeres Creando* led a march of indigenous women protesters—including Berta and her fellow lowland leader, Nazareth Flores—and urban residents who joined them on the way into Plaza Murillo, the plaza that houses the Parliament. Protestors carried signs that read, “For the Dignity of Women” and “We are all Berta.” Participants held up life-sized photos of Berta’s face, forming masks that they wore over their faces and on their hats. As police formed a blockade with their shields, thus blocking the roads, women pasted these photos on the shields the police were holding. Eventually, the police denied them entry to the plaza, tear-gassed them, and sprayed them with freezing cold water. This was a particularly violent tactic, given the difficulty these women from the tropics experienced in the frigid winter of La Paz. It also made clear that the state would go beyond the representational dimension to use state violence to

gain control. Nevertheless, Mujeres Creando leader Maria Galindo concludes the march was successful, as it brought highland and lowland women together in protest in contrast to Morales and his Ministers, who sought to divide and conquer. Maria Galindo defended the Bertas march against government accusations that they had acted as infiltrators, by arguing that they had used Berta's face with her permission and that she had participated in the march with pleasure (*gusto*). Most importantly, she said, the march returned Berta to her rightful place as leader of the march, after the mainstream media had gone along with government accusations, sidelining her in favor of male leaders (Galindo 2012).

We describe these creative performances because they show once again how the TIPNIS case became a site for very different political actors, each promoting their own interests. We have great respect for Mujeres Creando and see their performances as compelling attempts to provide an inspiring and creative vision of the environment, the fields of force facing indigenous peoples, and gender relations while posing a harsh critique of the MAS state. Yet, as they themselves admit, these are urban imaginaries produced by women with very different trajectories and interests from the indigenous women participating in the march. It is possible to see their acts of solidarity, in which they claimed, "we are all Berta," as in fact producing the same sorts of dualisms that the state and the Right wing elite do: good Indians, who perform appropriately feminist gender relations, like Berta and the women leaders, and bad Indians, like the President, who don't. In what ways might this claim ignore the specific gendered inequalities that exist in rural indigenous communities like TIPNIS? Of course, this returns us to the age-old question that has bedeviled feminism: which women can speak for all women? Who is the "we" in "we are all Berta"? Here, we see contestations over the ethical substance of indigeneity being battled on the (fictional) faces and bodies of indigenous women, the material and the discursive blending in performance.

Each of these actors—the MAS, the Right-wing Cruceños,<sup>11</sup> and feminists—claims that the good indigenous people of TIPNIS belong to their virtuous half of a duality. The MAS state says they are part of the progressive, modern, plurinational state development project; the Cruceños says they are part of the collective victims of the authoritarian state; and Mujeres Creando says they are part of the radical feminist project protesting the masculinist MAS state. While TIPNIS protesters might share some part of

these different agendas, it is doubtful their positions can be distilled down this simply. As scholars have shown, indigenous women often articulate complex positions in which demands for women's rights emerge from—and not in opposition to—collective demands for indigenous rights (see Speed 2008; Speed, Hernández Castillo, and Stephen 2006). Moreover, as we have shown, the TIPNIS activists created their own dualisms, claiming they were part of the human rights project as well as the environmental project to save Mother Earth. In their discourse, in essence, they are saying “we” are Mother Earth. Thus, each of these groups performs a “we” that incites their audiences—be they the Bolivian public or the state itself—to ethical acts: supporting the government and the road; fighting the “evil” state by embracing regional identity; struggling against patriarchy; or saving the planet and the forest by defending TIPNIS. Perhaps, these very dualisms are necessary for movements to rally support and gain international traction.

### **Exercising State Power**

Describing these acts as performances may give readers a false impression that they were innocent or playful theatrical dramas in the public sphere. We want to make clear that these were anything but playful. Instead, they were tools in political contestation between the powerful state, regional interests, NGOs, and relatively weaker lowland communities over the fate of their lands and the environment. Thus, the playing field for the representational battles was not level. The state used all its tools to win, mounting a multi-pronged campaign to silence and undermine the TIPNIS protests and continue the national development project. Perhaps the most egregious example is the repression directed at the marchers in Chaparina in the 2011 march, discussed above, when police violently assaulted the marchers, beating them, and dispersing them into the forest. It was a watershed moment for Bolivia. This was the eighth indigenous march since 1990, all of which had been peaceful. Never before had the state used violence against the marchers, even when the state was run by neoliberal white-mestizos. Marilín Karayuri expresses a commonly held lowland response to the Chaparina. Years later, she says, she is still deeply hurt (*dolida*). “How is it possible that a president who makes himself known as indigenous, or at least acts in the name of indigenous people, did this? How can he call himself indigenous while he is repressing

indigenous people? ...It has left many people permanently marked...It is like you are in shock.”<sup>12</sup> In Marilín’s words, we come face to face with the ethical substance: she calls the morals of this administration into question, questioning Morales’s conduct, urging a reevaluation of indigenous bodies and lives.

Then, in 2012, the government again used violent force to support the CIDOB takeover that impelled Adolfo and his followers to the vigil in the plaza. Our Guaraní friends who witnessed it remain traumatized to this day. Roberta and her husband, a leader in the organization, lived in a small house within the walls of the headquarters. She had just given birth to twins and was recovering from her Caesarian section when the newly elected leaders forced their way in, assisted by police firing teargas. When she and other members tried to oppose them, they were beaten, their hair pulled, and they were knocked to the ground. Roberta fled with only her babies clinging to her, sobbing at the betrayal.<sup>13</sup> As Adolfo pointed out that day in the plaza, it was incredibly painful to lose the CIDOB headquarters, the “house that had born witness to so many laws, so many triumphs for the indigenous movement” over the 30 years of its existence.<sup>14</sup> The new CIDOB president, Melva Hurtado, gave a press conference shortly thereafter, promising to work with the government toward “development” for the region (*La Jornada* 2012). Over the following year, the state used other means to end resistance. In 2013, as McNeish and Arteaga (2013) and Beaulieu (2014a) show, the MAS charged the former TIPNIS leaders, including Adolfo Chávez, with serious crimes and caused them to take refuge in an NGO until the Supreme Court overturned their cases. Morales called the protesters “enemies” of Bolivia, accused them of being supported by USAID (and thus being manipulated by the US government) (Achtenberg 2011a, 2011b). His government banned many foreign NGOs, including IBIS-Dinamarca, the Danish aid group that had provided infrastructural support to CIDOB for many years. Meanwhile, the government “invested” in embattled TIPNIS communities, paying indigenous leaders and buying outboard motors for community boats. The “counter campaign” was covered by the media, while the old CIDOB was unable to get the attention they had during the marches. “Our hands were tied,” says Marilín Karayuri. “Facing their economic power, what could we do? We had no resources, no vehicles, no projects. We were completely blocked.”<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

This was the context in which we found Adolfo Chávez, CIDOB's president, sitting in the plaza in 2012. Despite all of the sacrificial marches, press conferences, and performances of the virtuous eco-Indians, as well as the support of environmentalists, feminists, lowland elite, international media, and even public opinion in La Paz, the TIPNIS marches failed to meet their objectives. It is tempting to conclude that Adolfo and CIDOB failed because they were unable to embody the *indio permitido*, since they challenged extractivist development that is at the base of the government's "economic liberation" agenda. That may be true, but we argue something different: that their performances of the "good Indian" and the coercive and violent responses to it by the state made visible how indigeneity continues to be the ethical substance through which Bolivian society contests its past and creates its future. Thus, performance is a central site through which social worlds are articulated. TIPNIS made clear that the Bolivian state is willing to sacrifice lowland peoples to a model of development based on natural resource extraction, and the majority of Bolivians—for now—will support the state. Yet, the performances we describe here presented indigeneity in a variety of ways, manifesting this ethical substance in ways that made visible the continuing tensions in Bolivian society, and also making clear the potentialities within these alternatives. State performances showed clearly what the *indio permitido* meant in this context: agreement with extractivism. But this image of indigeneity was troubled by the other performances we describe. While some have critiqued the government's enactments of Andean cultural practices as being cynical and folkloric (Portugal 2015), the performances by the TIPNIS protesters and their allies, both environmentalist and feminist, articulated a clear picture of the state as an unethical betrayer of indigenous interests. By enacting their status as victims, the TIPNIS protestors made legible the fact that the state was committed to development at all costs, even if it meant undermining the rights to consultation and self-determination established in the new constitution. Their suffering made Morales look hypocritical, and particularly demonstrated that this new revolutionary indigenous state was, at its heart, not that different from all other states: willing to use its sovereign power to enforce control. Like Gandhi's hunger strikes, the performances of failed marchers acted as a mirror onto the social world Morales and his development agenda had created. It asked: what kind of state is this? What kind of ethics does it reflect? What kinds of suffering does it accept?

Our analysis of the TIPNIS protests also draws attention to the ways performances can redefine the categories under debate, acting as a site of politics. If, as Andrew Canessa (2014) has pointed out, indigeneity provided Morales with the legitimacy to rule, then the failure to protect lowland indigenous communities and lands from rapacious development delegitimized and undermined his administration. But the protests also illustrated that indigeneity is not a neutral or static category; rather, it is multiple and under constant revision. In this case, the protests illustrated the malleability of indigeneity by highlighting the multiply constructed versions of indigeneity that offset and undermined the dominant narratives. As Guarani journalist Marilín Karayuri indicated, not everyone participating in the march opposed development or even the construction of the highway. Some indigenous protestors were fierce advocates for the construction of the road. What protestors opposed was how the government used selected state-authorized notions of indigeneity to push through its vision of national development. In contrast, the protestors' performances illuminated the fact that indigenous communities in the lowlands had been shut out of the decision-making process, which they framed as a violation of the ethical obligations of the indigenous state, as well as fundamental to participatory democracy. So, in this case, lowland peoples used other images of indigeneity to stand up to the Aymara state, providing compelling images of noble and wounded Indians for the many sectors of Bolivia who were also opposing Morales.

Lastly, we see the ways in which the feminist group *Mujeres Creando* used lowland indigenous peoples as a means to "out" the Morales government for its highly unethical, hyper-masculinist form of governance. If lowland indigenous protestors highlighted the multiple ways of being indigenous, then *Mujeres Creando* also pointed towards the multiple indigenous feminisms. Gender has permeated the discourses and enactments of colonization and is inseparable from the coloniality of power. Yet, this gendered form of power is also asserted by a state led by an indigenous leader. By describing the gendered implications of the performances of both the state and its feminist critics, we draw attention to the complicated and fluid relation between ethnicity and gender, where gender can be a site of sovereignty, oppression, and resistance.

Performance made visible several things not previously legible, including the on-going ethnic and gendered fragmentations and stratifications,

the cracks and the breaks within the system. Through their performances, protesters contested state control over images and discourses of indigeneity/gender, battling over the ethical substance of indigeneity. If the state used a monolithic vision of Aymara progress through development, notions of lowland Indians resisting development flipped the “passive Indian” into an active category undermining the power and authority of this hyper-masculinist state. So, here, performance has the capacity to rewrite, to invert, to reverse age-old colonial representations of Indian versus white, of female versus male, and of development/progress versus backwardness, calling into being new social worlds. ■

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, August 9, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Vivir Bien* is a contested concept that is often attributed to indigenous cosmovision, or worldviews. *Sumaq kawsay* (Quechua) and *suma qamaña* (Aymara) can be translated as “living well,” and are held up as a form of sustainable development. However, the origins and discursive effects of this concept are highly contested. See the 2017 special issue of *LACES* 12(2) for a vigorous debate between Latin American intellectuals on this topic.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication, July 11, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> The report of the Defensor del Pueblo (the National Ombudsman) concluded that the police’s actions had been disproportionately violent and amounted to human rights violations. The police also insulted the protesters, using deprecatory racial terms, which is now against the law in Bolivia, and violated their rights to political association. Finally, the Defensor concluded that the government violated the indigenous communities’ right to a *consulta previa* (prior consultation) under the constitution and International Labor Organization 169, the binding international convention establishing indigenous peoples’ rights to culture and territory (Defensor del Pueblo 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Bartolina Sisa was an anti-colonial revolutionary, who, along with her husband Tupac Katari and sister-in-law Gregoria Apaza, led an indigenous uprising against Spanish control in 1781. They headed an army of some 40,000 people that laid siege to the city of La Paz for some six months.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, July 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication, July 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Many lowland elites have been opposed to the Morales government since it took power, systematically attempting to destabilize and undermine his regime. In response, the central state has used its power to suppress this opposition, jailing many for a variety of charges. Several high-profile Santa Cruz leaders fled the country in exile. As a result, lowland critics charge the Morales regime with human rights violations. In 2015, they mounted a large poster of “political prisoners” and “exiles” in the main plaza.

<sup>9</sup> To see the images, go to <http://www.mujierecreando.org>.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.mujerescreando.org](http://www.mujerescreando.org).

<sup>11</sup> Cruceño is a term used to describe someone from the department of Santa Cruz.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication, July 11, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication, August 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, August 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication, July 2016.

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#### Foreign Language Translations:

Performing Indigeneity in Bolivia: The Struggle Over the TIPNIS

**[Keywords:** Performance, indigeneity, gender, ethical substance, politics, governmentality, TIPNIS, Bolivia]

本土性展演在玻利维亚: TIPNIS公路计划引发之冲突

**[关键词:** 表演, 本土性, 性别, 道德实体, 政治, 治理术, TIPNIS公路计划, 玻利维亚]

Перформанс абигоориености в Боливи: Борьба о TIPNIS

**[Ключевые слова:** перформанс, аборигенность, гендер, этическая сущность, политика, управляемость, TIPNIS, Боливия]

Executando Indigeneidade na Bolívia: A Luta pelo TIPNIS

**[Palavras-chave:** Performance, indigeneidade, gênero, substância ética, política, governamentalidade, TIPNIS, Bolívia]

دية الأهلنة في بوليفيا: الصراع على تيبينيس

**كلمات البحث:** الأداء، الأهلنة، الجندر، المادة الأخلاقية، السياسة، الحكومية، تيبينيس، بوليفيا