

## **Beyond the Nation-State: the metaphorical remapping of ethnicities**

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Contemporary social movements in Bolivia inhabit a moment where the contradictions between struggles over democratization and economic development are particularly acute. While the newly formed Plurinational State is doing well macroeconomically, it is encountering nevertheless major social unrest. This may very well be because both the theory and practice of social movements have undergone a notable and much discussed transformation, turning away from earlier engagements with economicist policies, socialist politics and the discourse of class in favor of a politics of democratization couched in terms of civil society (Doane, 2005; Nash, 2001).

Evelina Dagnino (1998) has summarized the changes Latin America has undergone in terms of the rise of non-party, democratizing, grassroots activism. The influence of Marxist theory, rooted in party politics, has given way to Gramscian concepts of hegemony fixed in a politics of democratization and on a type of Foucauldian emphasis on decentered power and the politics of everyday life (Escobar and Álvarez, 1992). This politics of democratization is voiced through “civil society,” away from the formal mechanisms of the state, thus generating counter-hegemonic claims that transform the state and its top-down rhetoric on “interculturalism” partly through instituting and practicing democracy at the local level. These practices seek not to  
250 topple the state but rather to democratize it “from below” (Álvarez *et al.*, 1998).

Democratizing processes involve interactions of a new order and intensity. In Bolivia, cultural interactions between social groups in the past have generally been restricted, sometimes by the facts of an irregular geography that kept the country poorly integrated, and at other times by active resistance of the *mestizo* (mixed-races) elite to interact with the indigenous *Other*. More recently, however, new migratory forces from rural to urban areas have affected the relationship between indigenous and *mestizo* identities. As we will see along the essay, this relationship is in Bolivia an embattled one. It is possible to say that in this country the Nation and the State have become one another’s projects. They are at each other’s throats and the hyphen that links them implies a disjunction rather than a conjunc-

tion. This disjunctive relationship—I call it “deterritorialized”—may be rejected through the battle of the imagination, beyond the territorial Nation-State and its pedagogical dimension. But “deterritorialization” also leads to “reterritorialization,” where the forces of cultural gravity seem always to pull away from the formation of large-scale ecumenies, like the Plurinational State, toward smaller-scale accretions of intimacy and interest. Let me explain briefly this process.

### **New cartographies of indigenous power**

By “deterritorialization,” I mean a cultural flow that contemplates the metaphorical displacement of the Nation-State. “Deterritorialization,” then, is not simply the forced migration either because of land seizure, or the search for wage work, but the “whole landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (Appadurai, 1966, p. 33). I am talking here of a “society in movement” (Zibechi, 2006), of an “ethnoscape” which allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these migrating identities. “Ethnoscapes” are metaphorical constructs, inflected by the political situatedness of different sorts of actors, particularly diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements.

While a lot more could be said of Appadurai’s take on “deterritorialized nations” and the larger question of displacement that it expresses, it is appropriate to reinforce here the idea that the term is not only a reflection on migratory forces, on the shifting of spaces, but a question of the

temporal asynchronies that affect the relationship between indigenous and *mestizo* identities. In other words, “deterritorialization” also means that the past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. To the contrary, it leads to an asynchronic warehouse of motley present cultural scenarios to which recourse must be taken as appropriate, depending on the scene to be enacted and the hostages to be rescued.

252 Since the central problem of today’s remapping of ethnicities is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization, there is ultimately the need to ethno-racially remap and “reterritorialize” the domination and inequality between indigenous peoples and *criollo-mestizo* elites. This “reterritorialization” is most significant for understanding Bolivia today. The indigenous resurgence is thus simultaneously transforming state and territory, yielding a distinct metaphorical construction beyond the pedagogical territorialization of the Nation-State under white-*mestizo* supremacy. This is not to say that the “pedagogically territorialized” metaphor of the *mestizo* Nation-State has been not only “deterritorialized” by the society in movement of multiple identities, but fundamentally “reterritorialized” and remapped from the position of indigenous rationalities and ways of thinking. As we will see later, fluviat metaphors are at the core of this displacement and remapping of the white-*mestizo* state.

In some ways, the state’s pedagogical legitimacy has collapsed; in others, it is being reconstituted by both new and

re-emergent movements. We will see this process of metaphorical reconfiguration in the latter part of the essay, particularly the “new cartographies of indigenous power” (Mamani, 2011) that challenge the linear, instrumental rationality of “progress” that still defines the pedagogical positivist philosophy of the state. Indigenous peoples seem to be developing new metaphors that express their own strategies of counter-power. This indicates that they are not passive actors, but rather profoundly active ones, because through and from the interstices of the state’s power they are reaffirmed as indigenous peoples and reconstruct their power, establishing what we might call “new ‘reterritorialing’ metaphors of communal identity.” As these identity claims express themselves in the assertion of distinct forms of social organization or knowledge production, they undermine the state’s most recent tactics for territorial expansion through bare power. These are, of course, elements of cultural ethno-genesis in process, not merely a “return” to a mythical past. As we will see in the case of TIPNIS (Territorios Indígenas del Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore, or Indigenous Territories of Isiboro Sécore National Park) and the unfolding of indigeneity in the Amazon lowlands of Bolivia, we are now encountering a “reterritorializing” process at odds with the developmentalism of the Plurinational State. Thus “discovered” and now more visible than ever, these Amazon populations have become social and political actors engaged in the production of a territoriality that is not only a space for the exploitation of natural resources but also an

“ethnoscape” for the reproduction of social and religious life. In this case, geography is being transformed into a reference of identity as part of the memories and cartographies of indigenous power. What the Amazon movements are teaching us is that “geopolitics” must not only be understood as a kind of modernizing strategic planning from the center of the Plurinational State or governmental power, but also that the State must acknowledge that the population has the capacity to produce its own geopolitics from its own indigenous cultural matrices.

254 The pedagogical territorialization of the Nation-State, its multicultural “deterritorialization,” and the “reterritorialization” of indigenous movements, are three facets that currently dominate the debates on the future of the Bolivian state and society. Fluvial metaphors are at the core of this debate on the remapping of ethnicities.

### **The territorial Nation-State**

Any view of the world must take place in both space and time; no space exists outside of time, nor time without space. In this essay, however, I argue that the “spatialization of time,” that is, prioritizing the analysis of “space” over the concept of “time,” which is now being questioned by anthropologists and ethnologists, privileges the “territoriality” of civic institutions over the analysis of ethnic traditions that are localized in different senses of times. Following Harry Harootunian, I call them, “non-contemporary temporal registers.” Later on, I will pay special attention to the growing effort to make identities “flow” like

calm, orderly rivers, without letting this effort at postmodern explanation of identity observe with equal care the fact that the new constructions of identity flow in tumultuous, disorderly streams, like those “currents” and “corners” of time that Ernst Bloch (1991, p. 106) and Reinhart Koselleck (2004) theorized about under the rubric of “the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.”

I agree with studies that analyze movement between “porous” spatial boundaries, because they show how rural life has been turning into urban life; at the same time, however, it worries me that the subject of temporality might be set aside, for its relative abandonment and subordination to reflections on space continues to affect social and historical analyses. The spatial turn seen in some recent research on the “refounding” of the Bolivian Nation is related to the importance taken on by migratory movements. This social event leads me to think that the “spatialization of time,” regulated by modernization and development, conceals the temporal asynchronies, the conflict-ridden times, which are so forcefully suggested by the social migrations taking place right now in the world in which we live.

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As the relationship between space and time should be of key importance to those who wish to impart a balanced meaning to reality (Harootunian, 2005), it seems to me that an analysis of reality can only bear fruit if it pays attention to what Bloch has described in these terms:

The *objectively* non-contemporaneous element is that which is distant from and alien to the present; it thus embraced *declining rem-*

*nants* and above all an *unrefurbished past* which is not yet ‘resolved’ in capitalist terms. (1991, p. 108; emphasis in original.)

I think it is also important to bear in mind Bloch’s assertion about history.

History is no entity advancing along a single line, in which capitalism for instance, as the final stage, has resolved all the previous ones; but is a *polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity, with enough unmastered and as yet by no means revealed and resolved corners*. (1991, p. 62; emphasis in original.)

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Since many historians and social scientists refuse to reflect on the Nation from the repressed past, their analyses have solely to do with the construction of the civic Nation. Today, however, there is a felt need to go farther, to overcome the hard, fixed, homogeneous nature of this Nation-State. Thus new arguments arise, many types of ideological and discursive positions (postmodern, postcolonial, and so on) question the rigidity of the boundaries constructed by nationalism, the modern narrative regulating history. While contrasting this fixedness with the much more fluid and changing nature of the multiple identities that live within the Nation—today we use the terms “plural Nation” and “plurinationality” in Bolivia—the task of extracting the Nation-State from the “hard boundaries” of modernity is a possibility that, while necessary, remains problematic. In any case, new demands for recognizing citizenship, arising from the internal migrations of recent decades, have caused cracks in these “hard boundaries,” this *mestizo* condition, making the metaphor much more fluid, much more sensitive to the ethnic demands of new social movements.



This is how “otherness” is built, a fact that reveals the limits of the Nation conceived as a homogeneous community. I now turn to a new stage, a new interpretive dimension of the national.

### **Deterritorialization and metaphors of flowing**

Leaving the territorial boundaries of twentieth-century modernity behind, historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty’s assert that we have now sailed “into the uncharted waters of the twenty-first” century (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 23). Questions remain about the telos of modernity and preoccupations with development and with the old pedagogical policies that, in the case of Bolivia, derive from both the oligarchic-liberal state and from the reformist nationalism of the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the “uncharted waters” themselves have headed off in a different direction in present-day Bolivia. They’ve moved beyond the sensory and territorialized dimension of *mestizaje* associated with the 1952 revolution, which introduced the social suture between the civic and the ethnic. How can this change be explained? What is this new kind of flow that modifies representation?

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After three decades of predominance in the Bolivian social imaginary, in the mid-1980s “revolutionary nationalism” and its homogenizing version of *mestizaje* fell into a deep political and moral decadence. As social scientist and journalist Pablo Stefanoni recently wrote: “It was, paradoxically, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) itself that proposed, in the midst of the eco-

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nomic collapse brought on by hyperinflation and the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America and around the world, abandoning state capitalism” (2010, p. 117). Indeed, this exchange of state capitalism for economic liberalism, which in Stefanoni’s words had already been “perfected” by the skills of mining entrepreneur Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, dominated the neoliberal political agenda. Thus, the displacement of pedagogical policies since the 1980s have been the new ways of navigating waters that, as we will see, have been filled with conflict since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the Bolivian case, I think that this displacement was linked to the new trajectory taken by the iconic model of *mestizaje*, separated now from its modernity-based developmentalist discourse. I turn now to this displacement, which connects with one of the most interesting “deterritorialized” readings of the present, and set forth by the economist Carlos Toranzo Roca, a sharp-eyed researcher of the pluricultural and multilingual face of Bolivia today. For Toranzo, the territorialized nationalist model had not lost its relevance, but it had changed in the flow of time. He concludes that we Bolivians, whether rural or urban, are “facts of community and a presence of diversities” (2009, p. 49). We Bolivians, however, have changed iconic models (the phenomenon of identities being, basically, movement), a fact that I would like to emphasize in particular. I will concentrate, then, on this change, this “metaphor of flowing,” which now represents identities from a very different viewpoint.

Reading a book by the Argentine historian Ignacio Lewkowicz, who has dedicated himself to the study of contemporary subjectivity (2004), I am reminded of the fact that we often talk about the “stream of consciousness,” but we don’t realize that we are using a metaphor that displaces itself in a very peculiar way: flowing like a stream, like a river that changes and is never the same. Thought of from its banks, Lewkowicz tells us, “the river is the image of fluidity conceived as ‘change’ into which we cannot ‘step twice’” (2004, p. 235). But if everything in the river changes, the transformation follows an ordered, permanent meaning: a source, a course, and an outlet. Thus, “the river is the meaning of the water between its source and its outlet” (*ibid.*).

This image of the river’s ordered fluidity gives us a way to “rethink” *mestizaje*, because Toranzo uses this very image to explain, as I have noted, how “everything flows in time” because “no one is identical to what he was in the past” (2009, p. 50). Toranzo uses this Heraclitan metaphor to express the opening of the *mestizo* Nation to historical processes that are much more complex, that leave no one unscathed, petrified in his original state: “No, there are no exactly identical copies in history; this is valid for all of society, even its elites, who have also changed over time” (2009, p. 58). The result of all historical processes is that no one is identical to what he was in the past. There cannot be, then, “an” unchanging *mestizo* Nation, but rather a historical process, a flowing of races in permanent change. Note, however, that this flow of *mestizajes* has an end, an exact outlet: the Nation and the republic. 259

We will see, nevertheless, that the “deterritorializing dimension” that supposedly explains our expansive and complex present has serious disadvantages for charting the future. This dimension sends us back to the doubts that Chakrabarty set out at the beginning of his essay on humanism (2009).

### **The metaphor of the amphibian**

260 I think that the “deterritorializing dimension” cannot remain stuck in the “uncharted waters” of Chakrabarty’s image in his essay on humanism. Recent events oblige me to return to “dry land” in order to cover the theme of cultural integration. I refer to the need to recover the fruitful dialogue between “contemporaneously non-contemporaneous” spaces and times, such as that promoted by the first peoples of the lowlands in their “Marcha for Territory and for Dignity” and “Quest for La Loma Santa.” Each of those mobilizations led in the 1990s to powerful symbol-building, which, as the author of a recent book on the subject notes (Canedo, 2011), created a new utopia, a “re-signifying of territory,” which argues for the establishment of a new social and economic order. The utopia created by these first peoples did not reject modernization; rather, it balanced modernization with ancestral symbols of identity that helped the inhabitants of the lowlands, of Amazonia, to resignify their territory. This return to the ancestors, to the mythical, religious past, promoted greater tolerance and understanding of the complex interaction between human beings and nature. In the same way, it generated new asso-

ciations that crossed—defiantly yet peacefully—the territorial and pedagogical borders drawn by the state, including the limits on its current understanding of what “plurinationality” means.

The tenacity with which the indigenous people protected their land and their territory in that movement in 1990 led to a new modern way of thinking that does not simply give in to the plans already laid out by modernity; a way of thinking that scrupulously respects human rights but at the same time recovers Enlightenment humanism and turns it into a legacy for the dispossessed, for the rest of humanity. Since that time, the lowland movements have not sought to return to nationalism; instead, they have opted for something unprecedented, for something that searches, lovingly and with utter generosity, for the whole self that modernity denied when it opted for mere individualism. I think that this territorial resignification is *sui generis*, for it does not claim to encompass Europe, nor to apply the programs of progress and development unreflectively. The new program returns to nature with the hope that nature might shelter humanity without being attacked and devastated by the blows of modernity and its globalized capitalism. As Arif Dirlik has recently expressed it:

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The new times call for a new politics. The spaces for this new politics are to be found not outside of but in the contradictions of a globalized capitalism. The challenge presently is not to overthrow a globalized capitalism, or to replace the capitalist state with a socialist one, neither of which appears as an imminent possibility. The challenge rather is to build up a more just and sustainable society from the bottom up, to socialize the spaces offered by these contradictions. (...) (Dirlik, 2011, p. 54.)

We noted earlier that, although the “pedagogical dimension” built the Nation-State, its “deterritorialization” produced, as a counter-effect, the flow of identities that ended in its dismantling. Beyond these two dimensions, here I postulate the concept of “integrating (re)territorialization,” that is, the capability held by today’s indigenous movements of building a dialogue, a “cross-fertilization” between modernity and their ancestral culture. It seems to me that the amphibian is the metaphor that best expresses this new displacement. This is the metaphor that Orlando Fals Borda used in his analysis of the riverine world of Colombia (1979). Today it is called for in analyzing countries and regions where cultural diversity is the source of renewed interpretive potential. The metaphor is useful because it “takes knowledge from one context and transfers it to another, reworking it in consequence of the new context” (Mockus, 1994, p. 37). Let us take a closer look at this metaphor.

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In a broad sense, the term amphibious, meaning “both lives” or “both ways of life,” applies to every community that “develops reliably in more than one cultural traditions and that facilitates communication between them” (Mockus, 1994, p. 37). As a metaphor of communication between cultures, the image of the amphibian helps to overcome the differences that crop up in contemporary societies with high levels of cultural diversity and social segmentation. On one hand, the metaphor brings the law closer to morality and culture, which is where discrepancies between different cultures traditionally lie. On the other, the amphibi-

an can glimpse the possibility of overcoming the violence to which power resorts when it resolves conflicts. The metaphor of the amphibian illustrates the possibility of elaborating norms that are compatible with difference; it also shows that it is possible to build a dialogue between cultures.

Drawn from research by Basil Bernstein (1990) on education as a social process of the circulation of knowledge, the metaphor of the amphibian represents the capacity of cultural difference to “obey partially divergent systems of rules without a loss of intellectual and moral integrity” (Mockus, 1994, p. 39). It is precisely that integrity that allows the amphibian “to select and rank bits of knowledge and morality in a given context in order to translate it and make it possible to appropriate it in another” (*ibid.*). This applies to the dialogue between the ancestral and the modern; the “March for Territory and Dignity” of the lowland first peoples is a revealing example of the “culture of integration” represented by the amphibian.

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The “March for Territory and Dignity” put forward a social demand that completely changed the way in which land grants were made and the way in which land was occupied—two processes that had figured as exclusively material phenomena in Latin American agrarian history. In the Amazonian peoples’ march, they were demanding that the state recognize not only their right to land, but an imbricated set of material and symbolic values. Territory was therefore transformed into a symbol for the claims to autonomy that the first peoples demanded from the state and from the power groups that had subordinated them.

By living in modern life as much as in their ancestral life, the Mojeños—an important Amazon ethnic group—were expressing the capacity that cultural difference has for crossing cultural codes, for demanding that legislation must not consign custom to oblivion but, to the contrary, must recognize and value it. Legalism as imposed from power was not enough, because the Mojeño—the lowland inhabitant, the interpreter and translator of cultures—insisted also that the written rule should not pretend ignorance of cultural customs. The marches in 1990 therefore demanded the “cross-fertilization” of law with morals and customs. And this fertilization also helped to spread democracy, because it allowed what was legal to communicate with what was morally valid and culturally relevant, even if positive law did not specifically recognize them. In this way, the rise of new “soft boundaries,” amphibian borders that can connect the modern with the ancestral, allowed for the “(re)territorialization” of concepts that interwove to provide novel, creative answers to the predatory forward march of developmentalism. Arif Dirlik explains a view of amphibian borders that parallels my own:

Place as metaphor suggests groundedness from below, and a flexible and porous boundary around it, without closing out the extra-local, all the way to the global. What is important about the metaphor is that it calls for a definition of what is to be included in the place from within the place—some control over the conduct and organization of everyday life, in other words—rather than from above, from those placeless abstractions such as capital, the nation-state, and their discursive expressions in the realm of theory. (2011, p. 57.)



In the face of the subjugation of communal land, in the face of the colonization of rural spaces, the “March for Territory and Dignity” and the “Search for the Loma Santa” created the possibility that arguments from the distant past might “shortcut” the distance between customs and the law. Indeed, the power of culture sought to reduce the separation between ancestral customs and the specific procedures that were foreign to sacred interpretations and the ethical motivations that were beyond the grasp of positive law. The systemic functionality of law, its instrumental rationality, also subject to goals, exempted the law from having to attend to religious and cultural arguments, and it emphatically distinguished between legal arguments and arguments by those human groups that found the values that broadened their freedoms in their ancestral morality and customs.

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Using cultural and religious arguments belonging to the time “of the gods” (Chakrabarty, 2000) to influence the communicative acts that develop in the “public sphere” is tremendously difficult. Such arguments exceed the limits of the instrumental reasoning of power and of the positive law that legitimates it. But the amphibious peoples who cross and interrelate cultures seem to understand the urgency of making these systems compatible and of adapting them to the needs of the present. Hence the “cross-fertilization” of law with morals and culture is surprisingly current today, for it has confirmed that the struggle for land and territory is not just about protecting the human rights of indigenous Amazonian peoples, but about extending

its protection to nature, making its recognition the “main political and epistemological problem of the twenty-first century” (Komadina, 2011). Indeed, this “epistemological problem” appears with remarkable clarity in the recent march of lowland indigenous peoples in defense of TIPNIS, which I will explain below. By demanding in that march that the state recognize the legitimate rights of indigenous peoples, they were insisting on respect for the laws that guarantee them not only their human rights but also the rights that tie nature to the defense of territory. The observation of these rights also implies the need to investigate more deeply the very rationale of “plurinationalism.” Indeed, the rationale of the current Plurinational State of Bolivia is complicated when that state harms the very rights that it helped to place in the Bolivian Constitution that went into effect in January 2009.

### **Plurinational State or intractable State?**

In order to identify itself with the principles that flow from the civic Nation and to guarantee the rights of its ethnic nationalities, the present Bolivian state—defined in Article I of its 2009 Constitution as a “Unitary Social State of Plurinational, Community-Based Law”—took an unprecedented step in Latin America, because by explicitly accepting the multivocality of the Nation, it called into question the logocentric reductionism that had hitherto made the *mestizo* and *criollo* perspective the key to observing Bolivian nationality.

The Constitution defines the state as “Plurinational” and “Community-Based” (*Plurinacional, Comunitario*) because it takes into account the diverse forms of community life at the economic, political, and cultural levels. The Constitution also institutionalizes the ancestral Andean principles of solidarity, reciprocity, economic complementarity, and equitable distribution of wealth. By recognizing the existence of Nations and indigenous peoples predating the colonial period, it expressly affirms their ancestral dominion over the territories and guarantees their freedom of self-determination. The Constitution expressly recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to self-government and allows for their consolidation as autonomous territorial bodies.

The Constitution recognizes a right to “free, prior, and informed” consultation with the people who would be affected by natural resource exploitation in their territory and to respect for “their norms and local procedures” (Article 352). In other words, consultation with indigenous peoples is to be “binding and obligatory,” because it derives from an explicit mandate in the Constitution (Article 203). This mandate obliges the state to solicit the informed opinion of indigenous peoples. It also obliges the state to wait until the first peoples make a determination about proposals that might alter or modify their rights to their territory.

Despite the tremendous step forward that the Constitution represents in the recognition of the rights of first peoples, I see the recent march in defense of TIPNIS as confirmation not only of the surprisingly current nature

of the first peoples' struggle to defend land and territory, but also, and more importantly, of the renewed presence of paradigms of knowledge that are in conflict today. This clash can be observed in the two key metaphors. One is the primacy of the "highway," a metaphor of power, which, setting aside the roads that may lead to the liberation of the peoples who have been subjugated since colonial days, sums up the developmentalist project of the current state, obdurate in its industrialization process even if that means social imbalance and trampling on the rights of others. The other is the metaphor of the amphibian, which, as expressed by one of the inhabitants of Sécure Alto who said that "my highway is the Sécure river, I don't need any other" (Quispe, 2011, p. 1), suggests a river flow very different from the sort of flowing we have observed, affirming the need that indigenous peoples have to commercialize their products. In this new flow of the river's waters, the amphibian rejects the "civilizing" process that remains embedded in the spheres of power, and instead demands that its legally agreed-upon rights should include the rights of nature—that is, that the reach of constitutionally guaranteed rights should also, as I have indicated above, make moral and cultural change possible. The amphibian metaphor is opposed to the social and economic "superhighway" metaphor envisioned by the state. Opposed, because it trades it for a just and balanced social life that will only be possible if culture and morality can continue to play the regulating roles that are not sufficiently guaranteed by law.

Let's look at how the amphibian represents the situation of Bolivia's Amazonian lowlands. Covering nearly 11,000 square kilometers (more than 4,200 square miles) between the savannah of Beni department and the Andean foothills of Cochabamba, TIPNIS is an indigenous territory and, at the same time, a national park that has enjoyed the protection of the Bolivian state since the 1990s. This territory nevertheless was under pressure from various socioeconomic demands that have impacted its ecosystems over the past twenty years. The south of TIPNIS, around the sources of the Isiboro, Moleto, and Ichoa rivers, has been affected by the incursion of coca farmers and a road that Shell built for oil exploration in the 1970s. The forested mountains here thus underwent drastic transformations that have harmed the ability of its aquifers to replenish themselves and of its wildlife to reproduce. Central TIPNIS is in a better state of conservation; this is an immense region of rivers and tributaries that guarantees a good living for the indigenous peoples who hunt and fish there. The wetland forest in this central region teems with snakes, lizards, turtles, and a huge diversity of fish and birds. A third region, characterized by important riparian forests adjacent to the Isiboro and Sécure rivers, makes it possible for a great diversity of wild grasses and fish to reproduce; this region is settled by peasant communities devoted to livestock raising. Finally, a fourth region lies in the upper Sécure river valley, an Andean piedmont zone settled by indigenous communities that are also devoted to hunting and fishing.

The state resolved to build a highway whose second phase would cross this protected area, from the Cochabamba foothills to the Amazonian flatlands of Beni. Financed by a loan from Brazil and built by a Brazilian corporation, the highway threw a spotlight on the importance of TIPNIS and the propositions and principles of the new Constitution of the Plurinational State. As I have explained above, the state had pledged to comply with the principle of “prior consultation” with the peoples who inhabit these territories and was legally unable to set aside or alter their rights unilaterally. In reality, the highway planned by the state would not have much of an effect on the south of TIPNIS, where the environment has already been heavily impacted by coca farming. However, by cutting through TIPNIS, it would have a very significant impact on the other regions. Not only would it alter the fragile ecosystem that makes human and animal life possible throughout the area; it would also split the central zone, carving the best-conserved rainforest anywhere in South America in two.

It was in defense of this territory that one of the most important fights to conserve the environment and to safeguard human rights and the rights of nature has been carried out since June, 2011. This is the “March for the Defense of TIPNIS,” a second edition of the march for “Territory and Dignity” that was held in 1990. Indeed, the march is about the constitutional right of indigenous peoples to govern their own territory. Also, not only does it touch on deciding between a civil engineering project—the high-

way—and a national protected area; it also shows, as clear as day, the clash between two world views: the first is anthropocentric, devoted to the pronouncements of man as the lord and ruler of nature; the other is polycentric, because it conceives of nature as a legal subject with the “power to give speech to all those who gather there to argue over it. In any case, as shown by the conflict over TIPNIS, nature speaks a language that is incomprehensible to political power” (Komadina, 2011, p. 1).

The anthropocentric view is the one the state takes on when it looks at the conflict. It is disquieting to see how the state manipulates first peoples, or unilaterally assumes the ability to define social dilemmas, twisting them and subjecting them to laws of refraction that distort them. I wonder, then, whether the Plurinational State isn't trying to reintroduce the “national culture” project that nationalist elites set in motion in the mid-twentieth century. Its developmentalist logic, which renews the old quest for national integration, seems to confirm the suspicion that, if it persists, it runs the risk of ending up as a form of authoritarianism just as irksome as what we have had in past decades.

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Newly regulated by the teleological historicism flowing from the pedagogical and prospective dimension of nationhood, the highway has the same physical and symbolic importance as the old territorializing desires of the 1952 National Revolution. This developmentalism grew from the conviction that nature must be tamed, just as the Indian must be assimilated into the Nation-State. And just as the

development discourse of 1952 was an erasure of difference, those responsible for such erasure today are not just far-away development bureaucrats, but the very advocates of the Plurinational State, native leaders who have internalized the culture of developmentalism, which is a problem that describes the complicity in erasing differences of all modernizing states. As Dirlik puts it:

Indeed, it is difficult to say in historical hindsight which, a voracious capitalism ever invading places or a nation-state inventing homogeneities, has been the bigger problem in the creation of such generic categories. The question may ultimately be moot because the complicity of state and capital (or in the case of existing socialisms, of state and managerial bureaucrats) extends over the history of modernity. (...) It inevitably raises questions about the universality of categories of social analysis, which are all products of the same modernity that produced developmentalism, and are implicated in it one way or another. (2011, p. 58-9.)

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According to Carlos Romero Bonifaz, then minister of the Presidency and official spokesperson for the Plurinational State, the highway across TIPNIS “will give cohesion and historical sense.” This statement—a modernized version of the old paradigm of a struggle between “civilization” and “barbarism”—seeks to turn the supposed territorial “chaos” of the first peoples into a new nationalist strategy, constructed by a way of seeing that newly refracts, distorts, and breaks reality because it touches on objective truth—it is obvious that development is necessary—in certain selected points, in the same way that any highway project is only concerned with the path that the highway will take, discarding all other roads proposed by the indigenous people of this large territory as less spectac-



lar. And this logic is well aware that reality can become a frail enemy when the state has armed itself with good rhetoric. Thus, the Bolivian reality that the minister sees is like a measuring rod placed in the water along the banks of a river: it first bends, then breaks. Refraction is the phenomenon I am describing here. Developmentalist thinking is refractory because it participated distortedly in reality, causing serious violations of human rights and nature. The minister's way of seeing is refractory, because his anthropocentrism understands human action as an interference in nature with the purpose of orienting it exclusively towards material productivity.

If the highway “gives cohesion and historical sense,” that imposition emanating from power sets apart and relegates anyone who thinks differently, calling them “barbarians,” enemies of progress. As an important member of the new team of epic builders, the minister counters ethnic pluralism and substitutes for it the coveted cultural homogeneity, which can be more easily administered, and whose manifest destiny is none other than to bear witness to the supreme victory of man over the forces of nature. For that is what the highway will be, if it cuts across TIPNIS: a battlefield in which nature, the ancient enemy of progress, will at last sign its unconditional surrender. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, the discourse of power is completely uncritical of modernization, making “the figure of the engineer”—or the highway builder—“one of the most eroticized figures of the postcolonial developmentalist imagi-

nation” (2010, p. 53). It is precisely this emphasis on development that marks the split between those who hold power and the subaltern sectors living in the farthest reaches of the territory. Behind this new pedagogical politics crouch the officials of the emerging Plurinational State, making excuses for their developmentalism at the expense of diversity. And the Plurinational State will deserve no credit from future generations unless it adjusts its viewpoint and pays attention to the demands of those who question it with well-founded right. Not to do so implies a presbyopia or myopia, which in the recent TIPNIS case would call into question the very construction of plurinationality.

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