

10 Sovereignty against extractivism

Re-centring decolonisation on Indigenous territorial struggles in Bolivia

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10.1 Introduction

Since the political crisis that accompanied the presidential elections in October–November 2019, Bolivia has been once again at the centre of debates over the achievements and shortcomings of reforms initiated under the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party (Valdivia Rivero, 2021). The electoral victory of October 2020 by MAS candidate and former Ministry of Finances Luis Arce represented a decided popular rejection of the reactionary Áñez government, which had been characterised by corruption, violence, repression and a nefarious handling of the Covid-19 crisis (McNelly, 2021). While this was rightly celebrated by many as the reassertion of a democratically elected mandate, some of the structural contradictions that led to the October 2019 crisis remain. These relate to deep social and political divisions, not only between elites and popular classes, but cutting through popular classes themselves. In this chapter we focus specifically on the tensions and divergences between the two main subaltern political projects articulated in Bolivia in the last decades, and their respective visions with regard to territory and extractivism: the “state-campesino” project put forward primarily by the main rural worker or campesino unions, out of which the MAS emerged; and the “communitarian-Indigenous” project, advanced by Indigenous (*indígena* and *originario*) organisations in the country – as well as campesino communities not aligned with unions – today largely opposed to the MAS (Chávez, 2016).

We advance existing debates by suggesting that both blocs articulate a transformative vision and praxis, which developed in large part as a response to the neoliberal extractivism dominant in Bolivia in the 1990s. However, while the MAS’s state-campesino vision is centred on the defence of *national* sovereignty, and aims to *regulate* extractivism while also facilitating its expansion, Indigenous-communitarian organisations’ struggles focus on reasserting *territorial* sovereignty and plurinationality, largely *in opposition* to extractivism (Radhuber and Radcliffe, 2023). This is not to deny that Indigenous organisations are diverse, or that they also engage in or relate pragmatically with extractive activities (Marston, 2020; Anthias, 2018).

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But we maintain that the political horizon of the country's main Indigenous movements fundamentally transcends the predatory and colonial logic of extractivist development, striving for the preservation or reconstitution of communitarian modes of social reproduction (Tapia, 2014; Webber, 2015; Chávez, 2016).

To sustain this claim, this chapter details the political visions, demands and proposals of Indigenous organisations in Bolivia, in the context of their changing relationship with campesino unions and the MAS. Our empirical arguments draw primarily on a content analysis of 81 position statements released between 2011 and 2015 by Bolivia's two main national Indigenous confederations, of the highlands and lowlands respectively: Confederation of Indigenous Organisations of Bolivia (CIDOB) and National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ).¹ Our interpretation of these documents and the events they refer to is informed by several years of engaged field research in the country, and by secondary literature including media articles, NGO reports, books and journal articles on Bolivia's social movements, state politics, and contentions around agrarian, mineral and energy extractivism.

The chapter is structured as follows: In Section 10.2, we trace the emergence of the Indigenous-communitarian project in struggles over territory, and detail how it converged with the state-campesino project under the framework of "plurinationality". Section 10.3 explores the roots of the MAS's political project, arguing that the latter's strategy for regulating extractivism set the conditions for the marginalisation of Indigenous movements. In Section 10.4, we focus on how Indigenous-communitarian organisations responded to increasing extractivist expansion and political disarticulation. Before concluding, Section 10.5 argues that sustained state repression and hostility from the main campesino unions has increased Indigenous organisations' incentives to form alliances with the Right, and contributed to motivating their opposition to Morales in the lead up to the 2019 crisis.

10.2 From territorial sovereignty to plurinationality

The notion of territory and associated ideas of territorial sovereignty are central to the political visions and strategy of Indigenous organisations in Bolivia. Indigenous definitions of *territorio* conceptualise it as a living space that comprises human, non-human and more-than-human relations (de la Cadena, 2010; Escobar, 2018; Inturias et al., 2019). Struggles for the defence of territory interweave with claims to resource sovereignty, autonomy and political recognition (Anthias, 2018). In their core, they are material struggles over modes of production and reproduction, that is, over livelihoods and forms of living (Vela-Almeida et al., 2020). But territory is also fundamental for the formation of collective identity and historical memory. "It is no coincidence, therefore, that the first element of mobilisation of lowland indigenous

peoples is precisely territory” (García Linera, Chávez, and Costas, 2010, p. 240).

In the last four decades, Indigenous organisations have deployed manifold political tactics in the defence of territory, often as part of contestations of extractivism. These include conflict and negotiation with transnational corporations (typically in the case of hydrocarbon companies in Guaraní territories; see Anthias, 2018); the strategic use of institutional legal spaces for political representation; land titling within a framework of neoliberal multiculturalism and, later, plurinationality (Vacaflor Rivero, 2014; Postero and Fabricant, 2019); and the mobilisation of instruments of international law (such as the International Labour Organisation’s Convention 169 on the rights of Indigenous and tribal people) (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2017). Territory also featured centrally in the demands of the Indigenous Marches since 1990, a series of mobilisations through which Indigenous organisations began to articulate their project at the national level (Tockman, 2016).² This led to state recognition of Indigenous territorial claims (TCOs, Orinary Community Lands), which cover a large portion of the country (Anthias and Radcliffe, 2015). Such legal recognition is an important milestone, following complex and power-laden struggles between Indigenous nations and the state, spanning multiple decades. Since then, TCOs have become a key site for imagining and exercising territorial sovereignty and self-government.

Territory, and sovereignty over territory and its resources, are the material basis of decolonisation for the Bolivian Indigenous movement (Tapia, 2014). They are the product of an accumulation of struggles against the expansion of capitalist relations and of extractivism, in different cycles of expanding frontiers of natural resource appropriation and labour exploitation since colonial times. Territorial sovereignty contains and immanent critique of capitalism, colonialism and extractivism, and the possibility of alternative ways of life, social organisation, political management, and cultural, linguistic and spiritual expression (cf. Webber, 2015).

10.2.1 *The Indigenous-campesino Unity Pact*

Indigenous organisations played a key part in the conjuncture of popular struggles against neoliberalism (2000–2005) that enabled the rise to power of the MAS. They were also crucial in the elaboration and defence of the plurinational state framework, the main social movement agenda for constitutional reform. Indigenous movements became a “counter-hegemonic” political actor, converging with other struggles for radical democracy and the re-appropriation of the country’s natural resources (Andreucci, 2019; Gutierrez, 2014).

Indigenous struggles were central to this cycle of mobilisations in at least two ways. First, the demand for a constituent assembly to rewrite the country’s constitution, which emerged from the aforementioned Indigenous Marches, was appropriated nationwide as a shared demand of Bolivia’s

popular classes, particularly in the Cochabamba Water War in 2000 (Gutierrez, 2014). Second, self-identifying as “Indigenous” became a key axis in subaltern resignifications of “the Bolivian people” (Burman, 2014). In this conjuncture, whereby popular struggles were conceived as in opposition to white-mestizo neoliberal elites and their “imperial” (US) allies, indigeneity emerged as a shared marker of subalternity among several social sectors.

In 2004, the Indigenous-campesino Unity Pact was formed, bringing together the most important rural workers’ unions and Indigenous organisations into a common platform demanding constitutional reform.³ Luis Tapia (2011, p. 92) defines the Unity Pact as the collective “organic intellectual” of Bolivia’s Indigenous and campesino people, in the sense that it elaborated its ideology and demands and directed its political organising. An important aspect of this convergence is the definition of a unitary political actor – “Indigenous-originario-campesino peoples” (PIOCs) or nations (Chávez, 2016). We will see later how, after the rise of MAS to power, as it became clear that the economic-political power of the latifundia and of transnational extractive capital would not be limited as much as initially hoped, the political projects of the campesino unions and Indigenous organisations began to diverge starkly, evidencing the fragility of such an articulation.

10.2.2 *The plurinational horizon*

The constituent proposals elaborated by the Unity Pact in 2006–2007 were the most ambitious attempt to bring together the state-campesino and Indigenous-communitarian projects into a shared political horizon. “Plurinationality” and the related idea of a “plurinational state” emerged as the overarching framework that brought these two trajectories of struggle together, articulating them with Bolivian society more broadly. Through a new constitution, the Unity Pact aimed to initiate a process of decolonisation of the state, alongside a redistribution of wealth and political power to popular classes and traditionally marginalised groups such as Indigenous and campesino peoples, in opposition to extractive and agrarian capital. The proposal adopted key demands from the preceding cycle of anti-neoliberal struggles – such as the nationalisation of natural resources – alongside other Indigenous-campesino revendications, including land redistribution and territorial self-government.

In Section 3 of the 2006 constituent proposal (“Tierra y Territorio”; see Garcés, 2010), key principles emerging from Indigenous struggles were established, including the right to a binding consultation process for activities affecting Indigenous territories (typically extractive projects); and the principle of co-ownership and co-management of natural resources between PIOCs and the state. Rural workers’ and campesino unions centred on the demands of land redistribution and the limitation of latifundia.

The rest of the proposal’s revendications went beyond the interests of Indigenous-campesino movements: it included principles such as sovereignty

over natural resources for all Bolivian people, within the framework of plurinationality; food sovereignty; plural economy (that is, for the promotion of public, cooperative, and communitarian (re)productive forms); and important principles of social justice, redistribution of resources, and strengthening of public services. This demonstrates the ability of the Unity Pact to represent not only Indigenous-campesino demands over land and territory, but those of all the subaltern classes, rural and urban, which were being expressed in anti-neoliberal mobilisations (Tapia, 2011). Yet, the transformative ambitions crystallised in this proposal would be significantly reduced in the process of its institutionalisation, during the first years of the Morales government.

10.3 The “domestication” of plurinationality

The process that led to the approval of a new constitution in January 2009 unfolded throughout the course of Morales’s first term (2006–2009). The *Constitución Política del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia* (approved by popular referendum in 2009) reduced the transformative character of the Indigenous-campesino proposal, in at least two key ways. First, during the negotiations with conservative parties, in the context of aggressive opposition by the social forces representing the landed oligarchy, it renounced a comprehensive agrarian reform, particularly by not limiting the extension of latifundia (Webber, 2017). Second, it did not recognise the principle of Indigenous “co-government” over their territories and of the natural resources found wherein, for instance by not giving the right to “free prior and informed consent” a binding character (Tapia, 2014). According to Unity Pact activist Fernando Garcés (2010), all this marked a key point of rupture between the Indigenous movement and the MAS, and prepared the terrain for the subsequent phase of conflict. He refers to this process as a “domestication” of plurinationality, whereby the core material bases of Indigenous self-determination are sidelined or subordinated to the interests of the new power bloc.

The unwillingness to fully recognise Indigenous territorial sovereignty in the constitution, for Tapia (2014), was meant to facilitate the expansion of extractivism.⁴ Indeed, over the first years of the Morales government, the primary-exporting character of the Bolivian economy was significantly deepened (Andreucci and Radhuber, 2017). Increased capture of resource rents (particularly from natural gas) in a conjuncture of high international commodity prices, greatly revitalised state finances and the overall economy, improving the material conditions of many of the country’s poor. This created broad popular support for extractivism, including by campesino unions. Indigenous communities and organisations, most affected by the expansion of extraction in their territories, were increasingly isolated in their continued opposition to it.

All this is part of an overall shift, from the revolutionary or at least radically transformative ambitions of the popular struggles against neoliberalism,

to a project of capitalist reform and consolidation, led by the MAS (Tapia, 2011; Webber, 2011). The roots of this “reformist” turn were already present before 2006. The MAS was already seeking to contain the most radical elements of anti-neoliberal and Indigenous popular mobilisations as early as 2002, and was instrumental to reducing the autonomy and transformative ambitions of campesino unions as well.⁵

With the deepening of the primary-exporting character of the Bolivian economy, the divisions and conflicts between the Indigenous organisations and the MAS became more explicit. Tensions that were already latent, and began to surface in the constituent process, became increasingly explicit in Morales’s second term (2010–2014). They reached their highest point during the conflict around the construction of a highway through the TIPNIS (Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and Natural Park) in 2011–2012 (Delgado, 2017).⁶ Indigenous mobilisations then attracted support nationwide. The two national Indigenous organisations, CIDOB and CONAMAQ, joined the VII Indigenous March that left TIPNIS for on 15 August 2011. The march was attacked by the police in the town of Chaparina, resulting in several injured protesters, and campesino unions were encouraged by the MAS to stop the march violently. Upon their arrival to La Paz, the marchers were received by thousands of sympathisers. Even working-class organisations, such as the Bolivian Workers’ Central (COB), a close ally of the MAS for most of the time Morales was in power, called a strike and released statements in solidarity with the marchers (Ochoa, 2012).

This caused a crisis of legitimacy for the Morales government, as Indigenous organisations were accused by the government of being manipulated by the landed oligarchy and by foreign agents of imperialism (Webber, 2015). In this context, a crackdown on Indigenous organisations began: CIDOB was forcibly taken over by the MAS in 2012, and the same happened to CONAMAQ in 2013–2014. This marked the end of the Unity Pact as an organic social movement, and its reconstitution as a government-controlled organisation. It signalled the beginning of a systematic governmental strategy we refer to elsewhere as “political dispossession” (Radhuber et al., 2021), which resulted in an extreme fragmentation and disarticulation of Indigenous organisations, reducing the ability of communities to mobilise politically.

10.4 Indigenous responses to extractivism and dispossession (2011–2015)

This section presents our analysis of the main position statements released by CIDOB and CONAMAQ between 2011 and 2015.⁷ The statements centred on advancing three sets of demands: (1) opposition to the MAS’s criminalisation and disarticulation of Indigenous organisations; (2) greater territorial sovereignty and the critique of extractivism; and (3) increased Indigenous participation within a genuinely plurinational state.

10.4.1 *Criminalisation and division of Indigenous organisations*

Several of the position statements we analysed denounced the criminalisation and division of Indigenous organisations on the part of the government or the MAS party. As a response, they put forward strategies for re-unifying their communities and organisations. One of the main demands refers to the need to respect these organisations' "organic" (that is, autonomous) structures. An announcement to the public national and international opinion of 2013 declared the necessity of a "renewal and repositioning of the Indigenous movement of the TIPNIS and the lowlands" (Sub Central de Pueblo[s] Indígenas: Mojeños–Yuracaré–Chimane del Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré, 2013). It "appeal[s] to urban, unionised, popular and citizens' groups ... to conform and realise strategic alliances with the Indigenous movement, in order to consolidate one sole platform of demands from which to approach our struggle" (ibid.).

Demands for organisational autonomy are linked to reaffirming a political project of territorial sovereignty. For example, Resolution 04 of the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples – a meeting of CIDOB, CONAMAQ and the National Confederation of Indigenous Women of Bolivia (CNAMIB) – "reaffirm[s] the pact of Indigenous originario nations and people through CIDOB and CONAMAQ, for the defence of territory, natural resources and free determination", and their "commitment to defend [their] Indigenous originario territories and life form from the permanent aggression, violence, intimidation and threats by the national government" (CIDOB, 2013). This leads them to emphasise their "organic and independent planning, that is, independent from particular interests and instances that are foreign to [their] organic structures" (ibid.).

10.4.2 *Territorial sovereignty and critique of extractivism*

A second core set of demands re-situates sovereignty as a means for decolonial transformation, as it brings forth concerns for control over land and territory and the critique of extractivism. Both organisations claim integrity of their original ancestral lands via mechanisms such as the recognition of communitarian titles and of Indigenous autonomous territories. Territorial sovereignty, in this instance, is not limited to just controlling a delimited space; it is a means and space of livelihood and abundance (de la Cadena, 2010; Anthias, 2018).⁸

The organisations' demands for control over their territories are accompanied by a critique of extractivism. Overall they highlight the necessity to achieve a development model and government form that would respect the rights of Mother Earth (CONAMAQ, 2014a). CIDOB explicitly denounces the displacement and elimination of Indigenous peoples as a result of extractivism. Both organisations question the extractivist development model advanced by the MAS and demand the construction of a plurinational communitarian state based on Indigenous self-determination.

There is explicit reference to mining and hydrocarbon extraction, as well as to infrastructural and energy projects such as highways and mega-dams. Both organisations denounce, for instance, water contamination and other negative environmental impacts (“*pasivos ambientales*”) related to extractivism. They also place strong emphasis on a historic demand not less relevant in the present: the right to “free, prior and informed consent” (FPIC). This is considered a fundamental right of Indigenous peoples in international legal treaties, and by the Bolivian constitution. But, as Indigenous organisations denounce, it is rarely fully implemented, as in the well-documented case of TIPNIS (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2017). Moreover, its scope has been limited through legal changes in recent years, for instance the 2014 Mining Law (cf. Andreucci and Radhuber, 2017), vocally opposed by CONAMAQ (2014b).

Similar opposition is expressed in relation to agrarian extractivism, for instance the Law on the Agricultural Productive Communitarian Revolution, which was seen as promoting transgenic crop production. Another demand related to extractivism, put forward by the Assembly of the Guaraní People (APG) (a member of CIDOB) is the “Pause for Mother Earth”, a definitive suspension of all hydrocarbon activities in the Aguaragüe National Park, because they contravene the constitutional principle of sustainable use of natural resources in the park” (APG, 2011; 2015), and to guarantee “that their patrimony and that of all Chaco population would not be destroyed” (APG, 2015). In several instances, CIDOB emphasises that cultural and natural biodiversity is part of their territory, and claims an integral management of natural resources according to Indigenous visions of sustainable development.

10.4.3 Indigenous recognition and political participation

The need to construct a truly plurinational state is expressed throughout the documents. A key aspect of this is the meaningful political participation of Indigenous peoples in decision-making, established by the 2009 constitution. The APG, for example, demands greater inclusion in energy politics, “through active participation ... in the formulation, application and supervision of public state policies” (APG 2011).

The strategies designed by both confederations strongly focus on moving their struggles to the state terrain. They both claim respect for their individual and collective rights. For instance, 38 out of the 47 documents released by CIDOB explicitly emphasise their demand for recognition and enhancement of rights to collective property on their territories, particularly as regards natural resource management.

In the Organic, Political and Ideological Mandate of the First National Meeting of Indigenous People (CIDOB/CNAMIB/CONAMAQ, 2013), we find a synthesis of these demands. Denouncing that Indigenous people are victims of human rights violations on the part of the government, the document reclaims “the right to participate in the construction of public politics”. Besides emphasising the right to FPIC, the organisations claim “respect for

their own structures and institutions as well as for the collective rights of indigenous people, led by the organisations legitimately constituted by their bases and recognised by regional and international organisations” (ibid.).

In sum, the core demands we examined in this section – against repression and “political dispossession”, for territorial sovereignty and against extractivism, and for greater political participation within the plurinational state – show the contentious relationship between Indigenous organisation and the MAS in this conjuncture. They point to territorial sovereignty and self-determination, explicitly mobilised against extractivism and dispossession, as the core of an “Indigenous-communitarian” political project. The defence of territory against the imposition of extractive projects pits Indigenous organisation against the state, but the plurinational horizon of the Bolivian constitution, and the continued political work to build alliances nationally and transnationally, show how Indigenous struggles transcend a purely local dimension of resistance.

The Section 10.5 expands on how Indigenous conflicts with the MAS and its state-campesino project played out in the lead up to the 2019 crisis, and how resistance to extractivism and political dispossession was and is maintained alive in the face of increased repression and fragmentation.

10.5 Political dispossession, “double co-optation” and the 2019 crisis

In the third term of the MAS government (2015–2019), the extractivist economic model was further entrenched, on at least five fronts: (1) the expansion of hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation in Indigenous territories and protected areas; (2) the construction of highway projects, such as the one that crosses the TIPNIS; (3) mining exploration and exploitation projects that privilege private actors (4); the implementation of six mega-hydroelectric projects; and (5) various laws that favour the expansion of agribusiness (Radhuber et al., 2021).

The relaxation of environmental regulations and Indigenous rights was the centrepiece of this phase of extractivist expansion. For instance, in 2015, through three Supreme Decrees (2298, 2366, and 2400), hydrocarbon activities were allowed to enter protected areas – which in many cases overlap Indigenous territories – and the environmental protection measures included in the 2005 Hydrocarbons Law were relaxed, alongside Indigenous rights to “free prior and informed consent” (FPIC). The expansion of the hydrocarbon frontier, agrarian measures that favoured deforestation and the large soy agribusiness, as well as the first phases of construction of mega-dam projects intensified the confrontation of Indigenous communities with the state and MAS supporters (Radhuber et al., 2021).

After the disarticulation of the Unity Pact, and faced with practices of political dispossession, ideological undermining, and the aggressive opposition of rural workers’ unions, Indigenous organisations found it increasingly difficult to construct alliances with or find solidarity from other popular or

subaltern sectors. In this context, some Indigenous leaders sought alliances with or were co-opted by the Right, or even controversially accepted to be political representatives of conservative parties.⁹

This contributed to the extremely complex political configuration of October–November 2019. Prominent Indigenous organisations and environmental and human rights NGOs had given support to the “21F” movement against the re-election of Morales (see footnote 2). Just weeks prior to the 2019 crisis, an Indigenous march took place denouncing agro-extractivist policies and their links to raging forest fires in the Chiquitanía, supported by environmental and Indigenous rights NGOs and progressive middle-class sectors. The Indigenous march’s demands converged with a large “pro-democracy” protest (“*cabildo*”) in Santa Cruz. Despite its environmentalist, pro-Indigenous and pro-democracy discourse, however, the *cabildo* was organised by the city’s far-right “Civic Committee” (Arigho Stiles, 2019; Jasser 2020), then led by the ultraconservative Luis Fernando Camacho, a member of the *cruceño* landed elite who subsequently emerged as one of the leading and most extremist figure of anti-Morales demonstrations nationwide (Hylton, 2020).

The systematic *modus operandi* of the MAS, centred on disarticulating Indigenous organisations and controlling their leaderships, on one side, is mirrored on the other side by attempts by conservative parties in the lowlands to infiltrate Indigenous territorial movements. As an example, a right wing parliamentarian from Camacho’s Creemos party proposed that every *cruceño* (citizen of Santa Cruz) should sponsor (“*apadrinar*”) an Indigenous member of the XI Indigenous March that left Trinidad for Santa Cruz in September 2021 (Ijurko, 2021). Furthermore, the Patujú flower – the official national symbol of Indigenous peoples from the lowlands – was used as an official flag during the Áñez government, and has been adopted as a symbol of “resistance against the subjugation from the Andes” by the *cruceño* elite, conveniently marking a counterpoint to the Andean Whipala. All this constitutes a situation we call “double co-optation” – that is, of attempts to control Indigenous organisations by parties on both ends of the political spectrum – which heightens fragmentation and political dispossession and creates enormous difficulties for organising organically in defence of territory.

10.5.1 *Indigenous resistance continues*

Despite the context of political dispossession and double co-optation, the Indigenous-campesino communities continue to struggle in defence of their territory. New fronts of resistance and mobilisation have appeared or gained political importance in recent years. In the Chiquitanía region in the department Santa Cruz as well as in the northern department of Beni, land use change and land grabbing are being resisted by regional Indigenous organisations, which have also struggled for the recognition of Indigenous autonomies (cf. Postero and Fabricant, 2019). Campesino communities in the

Tariquí National Flora and Fauna Reserve (Tarija department) – not aligned with the main campesino unions – continue to mobilise in defence of their livelihood against new projects for hydrocarbon extraction.¹⁰ This movement distinguished itself for its female leadership, and for bringing together the struggle against extractivism with a critique of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism (Chávez and López, 2018). The Association of Communities (*Mancomunidad de Comunidades*) of the Beni, Quiquibey y Tuichi rivers, and other organisations from across the Bolivian lowlands, continue to resist the construction of mega hydroelectric projects such as El Bala-Chepete, Cachuela Esperanza and Rositas, which will have grave impacts on natural reserves and Indigenous territories (Radhuber et al., 2021).

Some community movements saw and rejected the infiltration and manipulation on the part of political parties, particularly from the Right. The foundation of CONTIOCAP (National Coordinating Committee for the Defence of Indigenous Campesino Territories and Protected Areas), which emerged from the Tariquí struggle in late 2018, was an attempt to create a fully autonomous Indigenous-campesino organisational structure, free from interference of both parties and NGOs. However, over time there have been diverse positions among the different organisations that are part of CONTIOCAP, some of which converged with those of the regional (conservative) Civic Committees (e.g., CONTIOCAP, 2019).

At the same time, the Tariquí sub-central has maintained its autonomy, based on the strength of the union and its grassroots assemblies in the face of the Morales, Añez, and Arce governments alike. Notably, in Chiquiaga, the Northern part of the Tariquí Reserve, organised women successfully blocked the entry of oil companies through a five-month blockade in 2019 (López, 2019). This shows how Indigenous organisations continue to strive to assert their autonomy and build a transformative project from below, against extremely difficult odds.

10.6 Conclusions

In this chapter we have argued that, while there are important ways in which the MAS's state-campesino political project improved the regulation of extractivism, it has also facilitated its unprecedented expansion. To be sure, the extractivist character of the Bolivian economy, as much as the production of many “resource-rich” countries as primary-exporting peripheries, is a product of five centuries of colonialism, and a structurally ingrained feature of contemporary capitalism. The MAS's strategy has had the merit of stabilising and consolidating extractive capitalism in Bolivia, increasing wealth redistribution and “trickle-down” to the popular classes, after two disastrous decades of neoliberalism. At the same time, this has deepened and expanded the reach of global relations of natural resource and value appropriation in Bolivia, at the expense of Indigenous and campesino communities.

During and after the October–November 2019 crisis, as the MAS attracted widespread solidarity from the internationalist Left, the legitimate claims of Indigenous organisations were side-lined or, worse, conflated with the reactionary ambitions of the Bolivian Right. This, we maintain, is racist and colonial, as well as politically problematic. Thinking of political alternatives to the present multidimensional crisis entails recognising not only the accomplishments of national state-centred decolonisation, but also attending to and expressing solidarity with Indigenous-communitarian struggles for territorial-based sovereignty. And, inspired by the experience of the Unity Pact, continue to support an “organic”, bottom-up articulation of diverse emancipatory, subaltern projects.

Notes

- 1 The members of CIDOB self-identify as indígena, whereas people belonging to CONAMAQ prefer the term originario (usually translated into “native” or “originary”). In the chapter we’ll use “Indigenous” as a general term for both, and “originary” when referring specifically to CONAMAQ members.
- 2 The first “March for Territory and Dignity” was organised by multiple Indigenous organisations in 1990. Its 800 participants walked over 600 km from the Bolivian lowlands to La Paz, the seat of government, to demand self-determination as peoples, and over land, resources and territory. Since this first historic march, which led to the creation of the first Indigenous territories in Bolivia per presidential decree, ten more Indigenous marches for land and territory have been organised over the course of over 30 years (Lehm and Lara 2021).
- 3 Besides the Indigenous confederations CIDOB and CONAMAQ, the Unity Pact comprised the three largest campesino unions: the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB); the National Confederation of Campesina, Indigenous, and Originaria Women of Bolivia-Bartolina Sisa (CNMCIOB-BS); and the Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia (CSCIB).
- 4 The regulation of extractivism followed two main principles, derived from “neo-structuralist” political economy (Webber, 2011). First, an emphasis on import-substitution industrialisation, which the current government of Luis Arce continues to underscore. And second, partial nationalisations and other mechanisms to increase state extraction of resource rents, following the principle of subordinating transnational firms to the needs of the Bolivian people (operating in the country as “partners, not bosses”).
- 5 Already in 2001, the campesino sectors sympathetic to MAS managed to establish a parallel leadership to that of Felipe Quispe, with whom they were in constant disagreement and conflict. This “parallelism” continued until 2004–2005, which meant that mobilisations did not take place jointly within CSUTCB. In 2006, with the inauguration of Morales as president, the national campesino confederation finally elected a leadership that was close to the MAS. Quispe had a clearer continuity with the Indianista (or Katarista) tradition, which was markedly more radical both in terms of its class politics and of its opposition to colonialism (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010).

- 6 The recognition of the area as an Indigenous territory was one of the achievements of the 1990 Indigenous March. In 2011, local Mojeños, Yuracaré and Tsimane Indigenous organisations, grouped into the Subcentral TIPNIS, opposed the highway project, fearing it would threaten their communities and territories, by favouring the expansion of coca-growing and hydrocarbon frontiers.
- 7 Here we focus on statements of the two confederations, as the main representatives of the Bolivian Indigenous movement nationally. As confederations, CIDOB and CONAMAQ are made up by many individual organisations and nations (or ayllus), which have their own autonomy and have released many similar public statements. For instance, the Assembly of the Guaraní People (APG), a founding member of CIDOB, is the largest regional Indigenous organisation in the country; it represents many individual Guaraní territories and capitánías (chiefdoms), who often make their own pronouncements about ongoing territorial conflicts.
- 8 Some of the documents analysed refer for instance to the Indigenous imagery of the Loma Santa. The Loma Santa is an important political, discursive and religious referent of the Mojeño peoples of the plains of what is now the department of Beni. It refers to a place – longed for and sought after in long pilgrimages – that is bountiful and limitless, where the communities can live in peace and abundance, without the presence of outsiders, “karayana” (whites). This is linked with the idea of territorial recovery, in opposition to the Jesuit missions and, under the Republican state, to the presence of cattle ranchers, logging companies and other forces that penetrated into their territories (Canedo, 2011).
- 9 For instance, in 2014, Rafael “Tata” Quispe, a former representative of CONAMAQ, joined the neoliberal party Frente de Unidad Nacional and, in 2020, accepted the position of Director of the Indigenous Development Fund under the Áñez government. The same position was later held by Fernando Vargas, a former Indigenous leader of the TIPNIS movement.
- 10 The case of Tariquía shows that the distinction between a campesino and an Indigenous “bloc” is not clear-cut. Campesino communities opposing extractivism and not aligned with the country’s main unions find more strategic convergence with organic Indigenous organisations; conversely, there are parallel structures or factions of Indigenous organisations that are controlled by or support the MAS.

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