Reshaping notions of citizenship: the TIPNIS indigenous movement in Bolivia

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The TIPNIS conflict has become a milestone in contemporary research about indigenous movements and Bolivia. Since 2011 when the conflict openly emerged, different views and interpretations have arisen to tackle a puzzle that has multiple dimensions, actors and motivations. This paper seeks to discuss the tensions emerging between the politics of indigeneity and the notions of citizenship in the contemporary indigenous movements in Bolivia. The focus of the analysis is the TIPNIS social conflict and the political outcomes of the VIII march in 2011. The analysis illustrates the complexity and heterogeneity of the indigenous politics in Bolivia and the political dynamics that allowed this conflict to transcend the local sphere to become a catalyst for broader social agendas. These dynamics reveal both the internal tensions among the indigenous organizations in the understanding and the application of the New Political Constitution and the long-term tensions over territories between peasants and indigenous groups.

Keywords: citizenship; indigeneity; political spaces; TIPNIS; Bolivia

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Bolivia has experienced a social and political process that not only questioned the neoliberal model, but also generated the first democratically elected indigenous president (Evo Morales) (Dunkerley 2007). This process was originally based on an alliance among the Bolivian indigenous movements, coca growers associations, trade and peasant unions and other grassroots organizations in order to create a political instrument that later became the political party ‘Movement Towards Socialism’ (MAS) (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013).

The positioning of indigenous thinking and its access to political power are two key features of current Bolivian politics (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013). The incorporation of the ‘Vivir Bien’ approach,1 (‘living well’ or Suma Qamaña/Suma Kawsay) into the Bolivian Political Constitution symbolizes the legal and official recognition of an indigenous worldview (Fernández 2009). However, and in spite of the strong indigenous rhetoric Morales government display, the increasing conflicts with indigenous organizations2 over the past few years reveal a complex scenario of confrontation and negotiation in which citizenship and the exercise of rights are key elements in the politics of indigeneity and the narratives to re-envision the relationship between the people, the state and the development process.

Citizenship is one of the most disputed categories in political analysis. How to understand the concept and who claims it make it complex and changeable. To some, citizenship is a relational concept with the state and an array of rights and duties defined (Bellamy 2008). It is also a social bond for a community with meanings, practices, forms of communication and identities (Jones 1994). It can be conceptualized as a status versus a practice with an inherent dialectic between subordination and political choice (Lister 1997).

In the indigenous social movements, the prevailing ideas about citizenship and the nation-state have been challenged and changed over time (Yashar 2005). According to Albro (2010) the expansion of citizenship rights has been the principal characteristic of the reinvention of Bolivia both within the legal sphere of 17 Political Constitutions since 1826 and within the history of social struggles. However, beyond solely the domain of recognition of rights, the politics of indigeneity embedded in the contemporary Bolivian process reflects the heterogeneity of the indigenous political project between the lowland and highland indigenous organizations and the particular dynamic emerging vis-à-vis the state based on an indigenous identity (Gustafson 2009).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the tensions emerging between the politics of indigeneity and the notions of citizenship in contemporary indigenous movements in Bolivia. The focus of the analysis is the TIPNIS social conflict and the political outcomes of the VIII march in 2011. This particular event is relevant on account of three aspects:
finally because it confronted the existing political arena of participation and indigenous rights in the context of a pro-indigenous government; secondly, it was able to position into the political debate the inconsistencies of the development model and lastly, it showed different challenges in the construction of a Plurinational State.

The conflict started on August 2011 when three indigenous groups (Yuracaré, Moxeño, and Tsimane) decided to protest to stop the government’s plan to build a road through their territory. After 65 days, 2500 people marched for 375 miles from the lowlands to the Andes, though the march was brutally repressed by government security troops. In October, the city of La Paz witnessed an important historical event in Bolivian history. Thousands of people welcomed and escorted the VIII indigenous march for the defense of the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure (TIPNIS) to the Government Palace, creating an impasse for Morales’ government, who was forced to negotiate with the protesters and to stop the road development project.

This work emphasizes the VIII march only (August–October 2011) because it marks an important chapter in the increasingly conflictive relationship between leftist president Evo Morales and the social movements that brought him to power (Laing 2012; Morales 2013; Zimmerer 2013). The TIPNIS case altered the discursive landscape allowing other actors to promote a agenda of indigenous rights and environment (Fabricant and Postero 2013 cited in Postero 2013). Also, the violent repression in Chaparina is seen as the most significant crisis of public confidence of Morales’ government since he came to power in 2006, and at the same time it revealed the complexity in the dynamics of indigeneity in Bolivia (McNeish 2013; Morales 2013).

This is an ongoing conflict, and further events have developed since the VIII march in 2011. In the academic domain, the TIPNIS case has been approached from different points of view: the conflicts in the interpretation and application of indigenous rights and the governance and democracy challenges of Morales’ government (Morales 2013); the contradictions of the indigeneity rhetoric as a language of opposition versus a language of governance (Canessa 2012); the inconsistencies of the Mother Earth discourse embedded in the processes of environmental governance and indigeneity (Zimmerer 2013); the struggles around extraction of resources in the post-neoliberal development model (Humphreys Bebbington and Bebbington 2012; Paz 2012b) and the land use and rights conflicts in protected and indigenous territories (Arellano-López 2012) among others.

Of particular interest is McNeish (2013) who questions the over simplistic approaches in this case and examines the complexity of interests in indigenous relationships between themselves and the state. Through the TIPNIS controversy, the author argues that the politics of indigeneity are linked to wider sociopolitical processes in which land and identity are in constant tension. In a similar vein, Laing (2014) analyzes the case of TIPNIS in terms of the identities emerging around resource conflicts and how these seek to legitimize claims about sovereignty and governance. Reyes-García et al. (2014) trace the historical reconfiguration of the Tsimane territory and how it evolved in relation to the state and different interests (colonist, logging companies, conservationist). The paper argues that the arduously won land rights did not imply political rights for the indigenous communities in terms of control and access to land and forest resources. Together, these studies provide important insights into the political dynamics around territorial rights both in political and material terms. This paper seeks to enhance this debate by analyzing the relational terms between indigeneity and citizenship when negotiating and claiming rights in political spaces, particularly those related to territory and resource control.

While a variety of definitions of the term indigeneity have been discussed (see Guenther et al. 2006; Sarivaara, Maatta, and Uusiautti 2014; Shaw 2002; Venkateswar and Hughes 2011) this paper adopts the definition of De La Cadena and Starn (2007, 4) who define indigeneity – in terms of cultural practices, institutions and politics – as historically contingent, dynamic and emerging in larger social fields of difference and sameness. Similarly, De La Cadena (2010, 336) defines indigeneity as ‘forces and practices’ with the capacity to disrupt the political scenario. Last, indigeneity as self-determination is seen as inherently political, since it seeks the access to, and expansion of, decision-making in material, cultural and political domains (Fowler 2011).

This paper argues that the TIPNIS case reflects that indigenous organizations are far from being homogenous or having a unified discourse especially in relation to citizenship and indigeneity. Both aspects raise issues of legitimacy of grassroots organizations, the nature of assumptions behind the conflicts per se, the mix of actors and their motives, and the rhetorical devices articulated in the discourse and political strategies.

The paper is divided in the following way: Section 2 presents the contemporary political background of Bolivia including a chronological recount of the most important events of the indigenous movements and the historical background of the lowland indigenous organizations in the political scenario. The following section discusses the context of the TIPNIS and provides the details about the conflict that emerged in 2011. The third part begins by discussing the different notions of citizenship along Bolivian history and indigenous struggles, then analyzes two aspects: first, the complexity embedded in the TIPNIS platform of demands in order to demonstrate the broader interests behind the social protest; and second, the links between indigeneity and the exercise of citizenship. The final section summarizes the main elements of the paper.
2. Background of Bolivia

2.1. The diversity and conflicts

The contemporary indigenous social movements in Bolivia are directly linked to protests over the management and distribution of the benefits of natural resources, in particular, natural gas and land. To some, the gas conflicts of 2003 and 2005 directly contributed to the election of Morales and to the ascendance of indigenous groups as political actors within the state (Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington 2011; Perreault 2008).

The MAS party as a dynamic force in Bolivian politics emerged from the waves of protests since 1999. Its success could be partly explained by its ability to provide a political platform for different social movements and to produce an appealing ideology of nationalism and indigenous politics (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013). According to Pedraza (2012) the political predominance of the MAS party is described by two aspects: first, the alliance with the lowland indigenous movement which gave to Morales and the MAS party a national presence and second, the appropriation of the indigenous discourse and the social demand of a Constituent Assembly. Both aspects gave to Morales the political positioning to transcend the sectarian demands of the ‘cocaleros’ to a national agenda of social change. Once the Constituent Assembly was concluded in 2007, the lowland/Amazonian indigenous groups did not find space for their political agenda, and clashes with other groups started to emerge. As Perreault (2008) suggests, the indigenous population in Bolivia is large and diverse and the regional divisions are central when discussing indigeneity in the country. The division between Quechua/Aymara Andean groups and smaller Amazonian indigenous groups is a potential source of conflict due to political and cultural recognition and rights over resources and territory.

During the first period of Morales’ government (2005–2009) the Constituency Assembly was a contested platform for the lobbying and confrontation of political forces and groups of civil society, including different indigenous grassroots organizations (see Chávez and Mokrani 2007; Postero 2010; Regalsky 2010; Romero-Bonifaz 2005; Rousseau 2011). The approval of the New Political Constitution in 2009 was a conflictive outcome and an achievement of the indigenous movement. This historical demand was based on the ethnic diversity of the country changing the Bolivian political system from a ‘republic’ to a ‘plurinational state.’ It is worthwhile mentioning that some points concerning indigenous rights and territories were already acknowledged in the previous Constitution from the decade of the 1990s. What the New Constitution (2009) incorporated was specific articles related to equality of indigenous nations, the self-determination of indigenous, universal education incorporating the discussion of decolonization and the recognition of indigenous ancestral land (Agrawal et al. 2012). According to the New Political Constitution (Art. 2) the self-determination of indigenous people in their territories encompasses the right to autonomy and self-governance, their culture and the recognition of their institutions. In a further definition (Art. 30: I–III) the state acknowledges the right to consultation in indigenous territories as well as the resource management of renewable resources within their territories.

In the period 2009–2013, the most important achievement of the indigenous movements was the recognition and promulgation of the law of indigenous, municipal, departmental and regional Autonomies (Fontana 2012); yet in practice the Autonomies have not been fully implemented and there is a general disappointment with the administrative barriers (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013).

The approval of the New Political Constitution in 2009 and the recognition of indigenous communities in the political arena had reconfigured the state, the local governments and the citizenship practice. Nonetheless, there are important tensions emerging due to the implementing mechanisms of the free prior and informed consultation in indigenous territories and the nonbinding agreements of these processes by the State (McNeish 2013; Schilling-Vaccaflor 2013). The challenges ahead are complex; in particular, how this decentralizing process of Autonomies and the political empowerment of indigenous communities (in particular the Amazonian grassroots groups) will redefine the power struggles with the state and other stakeholders.

The tensions among indigenous organizations that previously supported Morales reveal the inconsistencies of the government’s ‘Mother Earth respect’ discourse as it clashes with the realpolitik of an extractive development pattern. In the “neoextractivism”, Morales’ government intends to build new roads to expand the hydrocarbon and mining industries in order to maintain fiscal stability and to fund social programs (Bebbington 2009; Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington 2011; Gudynas 2013; Salman 2013). In a manner, many of the current conflicts in Bolivia can be classified into three categories: (i) conflicts for the agricultural frontier expansion in protected areas, (ii) conflicts among indigenous groups for land distribution and (iii) conflicts related to indigenous rights, extractive activities and the state (Mayorga 2010).

Despite government efforts and social policies of redistribution, it seems large sectors of people are discontented with the process, particularly indigenous organizations both in the highlands and lowlands that perceive the extractive frontier expansion as a threat to their livelihoods and to the arduously conquered autonomy (McNeish 2013). The official political discourse revalues the extraction of natural resources as the fundamental motor of economic growth for the reduction of poverty – purposely omitting the negative and devastating environmental and cultural impacts. As Laing (2012, 1052) considers, this discourse operates in order to create a binary imaginary between ‘civilization/savagery’ and ‘modernity/tradition’ in the
highland against the lowland indigenous groups. In this regard, the TIPNIS conflict had a resonance at the international level, showing Evo Morales as less than consistent at home in his global appeal for ‘Mother Earth defense’ (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013).

2.2. The empowerment of the lowland indigenous

In 1990, the lowland indigenous organizations started the first massive collective mobilization against the invasion of highlander colonizers, powerful cattle raisers and timber merchants in their territories. Over 34 days, 800 people from the Mojeño, Siorionó, Yuracaré and T’siman ethnic groups of the Amazonian region walked from the city of Trinidad (Beni) to the city of La Paz. The so-called I marcha por el territorio, la vida y la dignidad (‘First indigenous march for the territory, life and dignity’) was particularly relevant because it positioned the lowland groups as political stakeholders who had a clear political agenda including the respect for their rights and the indigenous territories; also it gave to the grassroots organization ‘Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia’ (Bolivian Confederation of Indigenous Peoples, CIDOB) an unprecedented relevance in the political scenario (Albó 2008; Cortéz 2011; Postero 2013; Suárez 2002; Yashar 2005).

As a result of this massive march, the indigenous territory and national park Isiboro-secure (TIPNIS) was formally recognized as the first indigenous territory of Bolivia (Tierra comunitaria de origen (TCO)) and later, in 1994, the Political Constitution formally recognized the indigenous rights and identified the Republic of Bolivia as multietnic and pluricultural (Agrawal et al. 2012; Albro 2010; Ortiz 2011).

Over time, the consecutive protests of the indigenous lowland organizations have shaped many of the social changes implemented in the country; in particular, those related to rights of territories. For instance, in 1996, the central goal of the movement was the implementation of the prior informed consultation right and a law that would regulate these procedures. It was only in 2007 that consultation processes with communities were officially incorporated, particularly in the hydrocarbon extractive industries (Schilling-Vacaflor 2013).

Although this formal recognition is an important step in the indigenous empowerment process, in practice, it has several contradictions, for example the consultation processes are not binding. As a result, the ‘consultation process’ becomes a mere administrative step and not a political right of indigenous communities (Paz 2012a, 2012b; Postero 2013). Between 2007 and 2012, around 27 consultations with communities were held and there are several critics of the procedures and the political space communities have in order to address modifications or to negotiate with the state and the companies (see Schilling-Vacaflor 2013).

3. Chronic of an announced conflict: the TIPNIS social struggle

The indigenous territory and national park Isiboro-secure (TIPNIS) is located between the departments of Beni and Cochabamba8 (see the appendix). It was declared a National Park9 in 1964 and later, in 1990, it was recognized as the first indigenous community territory of three ethnic groups (Mojeño-Trinitario, T’siman and Yuracaré). It has an extension of 1,091,656 hectares and a population of around 6000 indigenous people distributed across 64 communities who mostly live along the river Isiboro and Securé within the limits of the indigenous territory. In addition, there is an area colonized by displaced Aymara and Quechua peasants from the highlands,10 outside the indigenous territory but inside the south area of the park with 20,000 people (mostly coca grower families) associated with the 52 coca unions of the Tropic of Cochabamba Federation11 and 14 surrounding indigenous communities.12 The first invasions of the TIPNIS territory started in the decade of the 1980s after the neoliberal structural adjustment program and the closing of Bolivia’s largest state-owned mines causing the dismissal of 40,000 miners who moved to the urban areas and to the low lands of Bolivia in large numbers13 (Albo 2012; Arellano-López 2012; Colque 2012; Fundación-Tierra 2012; Pedraza 2012).

The conflicts between the indigenous groups and the highland indigenous colonizers (nowadays known as ‘comunidades interculturales’) originated in the different productive and organizational livelihoods of each group. On the one hand, the indigenous groups have a communal logic, small-scale agriculture and resource use, whereas the colonizers (Quechua and Aymara migrants) seek individual property of land and the expansion of agriculture – mostly monoculture of coca – in the forest areas (Cortéz 2011; Webber 2012).

This case was a ‘chronic announced conflict’ because even before the road disagreement emerged in 2011, in the Isiboro-secure there was already an explosive combination of territory struggles and different interests groups in the political scenario.

3.1. The conflict

In 2008, Evo Morales announced the construction of a road linking the city of San Ignacio de Moxos (department of Beni) with the town Villa Tunari in the Chapare area – also known as the heartland of Bolivia’s commercial coca production in the department of Cochabamba. The Brazilian government had pledged US$332 million to pay for the construction of the road and the Administradora Boliviana de Carreteras signed a very polemic contract for the design and the building of the road with the Brazilian company OAS Ltda. The 360 km road is divided in three parts (tramos). The second part (tramo II) is designed to pass through the middle of the TIPNIS (Fundación-Tierra
Table 1. TIPNIS conflict: arguments and actors.

| In favor                                                                 | Against                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) A road would bring market access, economic development; access to  | (1) Experiences of opening roads in the Amazon region (Brazil, Peru,    |
| basic rights such as water and sanitation, education and medical services | Ecuador, and Bolivia) had shown devastating effects on the environment,   |
| as a result well-being to indigenous people                             | disorganized land settlement, land concentration, deforestation, invasions |
|                                                                         | of indigenous territories, small-scale mining and predatory timber      |
|                                                                         | extraction                                                               |
|                                                                         | Besides the cultural effects of loss of traditional forms of social     |
|                                                                         | capital, it would also cause social conflicts, inequality, loss of      |
|                                                                         | indigenous languages and knowledge.                                       |
|                                                                         | It is estimated that in this case, in 18 years, 65% of the forest would |
|                                                                         | be deforested.                                                            |
| (2) The State has the duty of connecting the territory. The Amazonian    | (2) The TIPNIS indigenous organizations won the right of their           |
| area is not adequately linked to the rest of the country and the road   | territory thanks to collective mobilizations over many years             |
| San Ignacio de Moxos-Villa Tunari is a historical demand of these towns | The road is designed to pass through the middle of the park (where few    |
|                                                                         | communities are located) and benefits the south area where coca grower   |
|                                                                         | colonizers are located                                                    |
| (3) Geopolitical positioning of the State                                | (3) The TIPNIS indigenous claim the respect and recognition of their     |
|                                                                         | rights to determination and autonomy in their ancestral territory       |

The actors involved:

(i) Coca grower colonists of the TIPNIS who argue in favor of the road
(ii) Evo Morales and the MAS party with political and geostrategic interests
(iii) The Government of Brazil and the Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (IIRSA) initiative to construct the bi-oceanic corridor
(iv) The Brazilian construction company
(v) Oil and gas companies (REPSOL, Petroandina SAM) who have a concession of 30 years in the area
(vi) Subcentral Indígena del Isiboro Securé and CIDOB
(vii) CONISUR
(viii) Environmental NGOs

Sources: Reyes-García et al. (2014), De Almeida (2010), Cortéz (2011), Ortiz (2011), Webber (2012), Fundación-UNIR (2011), and Arellano-López (2012).

2012). The main arguments in this conflict are summarized in Table 1.

From the point of view of the TIPNIS indigenous communities the decision to reject the road project is directly linked to three aspects: (i) the fear of ‘avasallamiento’ or invasion of coca colonizers (in addition to cattle owners, logging companies and drug trafficking) in their communal land, (ii) the fear of losing their traditional livelihood and (iii) because they claim the respect of their indigenous rights formally recognized in the New Political Constitution in terms of the consultation, negotiation and determination of indigenous territories regarding activities that might affect them.

The open conflict started in June 2011 when Evo Morales officially inaugurated the construction of the road ‘Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos’ without respecting the New Constitution and the indigenous right to consultation with regard to their territories. In spite of the efforts of the indigenous organizations to meet with the President in person and to discuss their arguments against this project, the government ignored them (Fundación-UNIR 2011, 2012).

In August 2011, 700 people organized by the Subcentral TIPNIS and CIDOB allied to the highland organization National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Quallasuyu (CONAMAC) started the ‘VIII march for the territory, life, dignity and the indigenous rights’. After the march had started, different Ministers were sent to enter into dialog with the protestors with no results; at the same time, the government disqualified the legitimacy of this civic action arguing that the indigenous organizations were manipulated by the ‘oligarchy elites, the green imperialism of Western NGOs and the US government’. Moreover, at some point the TIPNIS inhabitants were called ‘savages’ who were backward in development and it was considered that the paternalistic ‘State’ needed to save them (Ortiz 2011; Postero 2013; Prensa 2011; Cambio 2011; Webber 2012).

The VIII march received immediate attention from the press and day by day, an increasing number of people manifested their support of the TIPNIS;14 at the same time, the TIPNIS marchers faced a series of obstacles and clashes with people affiliated to the MAS party along the way. The critical point of this conflict was reached on 25 September, when the VIII march was brutally repressed in the town of Yucumo by Police forces. The magnitude of the violence against unarmed men, women and children generated a very negative reaction at national and international levels; as a result, different communities, organizations and people, especially in the cities massively manifested their support of the TIPNIS15 (for example, the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) called a powerful general strike in...
the cities) and forced the government to release the imprisoned indigenous leaders and to let the march continue to the final destination: La Paz city (McNeish 2013; Pedraza 2012; Webber 2012). It is worthwhile noting that part of the massive support also included opportunistic interventions of the right and centre-right wing opposition political parties to the government (Morales 2013).

After 65 days of walking from the lowlands to the Andean region, the TIPNIS march grew to 2500 people in the road and finally arrived at La Paz city on 19 October. The massive welcome and solidarity of the city was overwhelming and it is considered one of the most impressive manifestations of public support in the contemporary history of Bolivia (Achtenberg 2011; Albo 2012; Fundación-Tierra 2012; Stuart 2012; Tamburini 2012).

On 24 October, Evo Morales finally agreed to meet the indigenous leaders of the march and to promulgate the Law No. 180 (ley corta) to stop the construction of the road and to declare the TIPNIS as an intangible area.16 The intangibility category was quite polemic and was perceived as a long-term revenge against the TIPNIS protestors since it not only stopped the construction of the road but also restricted many productive activities within the territory, including tourism, commercial activities and forest extraction (Hirsch and McNeish 2011).

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, this is an ongoing conflict. After the signing of the law, there was a ‘countermarch’ of CONISUR (grassroots organization formed by the coca grower colonists and 14 surrounding communities of the south area of the park) demanding a consultation process in favor of the construction of the road. In 2012, the government started a ‘consultation’ process in the TIPNIS area ignoring the previous agreement and Law No. 180. According to the government, 55 communities agreed to build the road and 11 communities did not participate in the process. The critics are diverse and focus on the kind of questions proposed, the irregularities along the process and legitimacy issues since this process was done without agreement from the indigenous organizations (Farthing and Kohl 2014; McNeish 2013). To the present day (May 2014), the road project is paralyzed but the different indigenous organizations are still on trial for the violent events of Chaparina.

4. Multiple notions of citizenship

Citizenship can be understood as obligations and forms of rights – civil, political and social17 – as Marshall (1950) defined in liberal thinking, as well as political struggles to define practices and social arrangements. From this point of view, citizenship could be the platform for social struggle because it holds expectations of power redistribution and fulfillment of rights (Turner 1993). From a right-based perspective, citizenship is conceptualized as an actor-oriented practice rather than state-centered. It refers to both the agency of citizens to expand and to exercise political, economic, social and cultural rights and also recognition and self-perception of those claiming rights (Gaventa 2002).

In the Bolivian case, Rojas (2013, 585–589) identifies five notions of citizenship: first, the ‘tributary citizenship’ in which indigenous populations had communal land property rights as a form of citizenship in exchange for payment of tribute to the new Republican State. The next phase is characterized by the dispossession of communal land and a ‘neo-civilizing narrative’ that resulted in a ‘dispossessing citizenship’ for indigenous. Third, the so-called universalizing citizenship was linked to the national revolution of 1952 in which universal rights to vote, education and land were granted; however, as Albro (2005) states, the concept of citizenship had a homogenizing feature under the category of mestizo, denying the indigenous identity and perpetuating practices of exclusion from political life.

In the neoliberal era during the eighties and nineties, the so-called managed citizenship was established through the Law of Popular Participation (LPP).18 This law not only reengineered the state; most importantly, it opened new spaces for indigenous communities to be incorporated into the state functioning as municipalities with the mandate to decide and to prioritize local needs according to the funds transferred from the central government (Jeppesen 2002). Some critics argue this Law was intended to depoliticize indigenous resistance (Medeiros 2001; Rojas 2013), to assimilate indigenous into nation-state as ‘hierarchically subordinate to intercultural citizens’ (Albro 2005, 435) and that it was central to the neoliberal strategy to secure governance of the population (Postero 2007). Nonetheless, the contemporary social changes and the empowerment of indigenous communities are directly linked to the political outcomes of this Law. According to Kohl and Farthing (2006), the LPP expanded both spaces for political participation and functional political and social forms of citizenship. Similarly, Whitehead and Gray-Molina (2003) highlight that this Law not only caused a redistribution of income between the urban and the deprived rural areas, but also, it meant an expansion of political capabilities and growing political learning with long-term effects.

The last notion of citizenship is identified as ‘acts of indigeniosity’ and it is linked to the visibility and the irruption of the indigenous movements into national politics since 2000 (see Crabtree and Chaplin 2013; Dunkerley 2007; Kohl and Farthing 2006). In particular, Rojas (2013) argues that this type of indigenous citizenship is a contention process between two narratives: equality and politics of emancipation on the one hand, and politics of decolonization and difference on the other. The emancipatory potential of it lies in the fact that equality claims are not universal, but rather, contextual, as they are the consequence of gaps among members of society.

For the analytical purpose of this work, two ideas are central in the next sections: first, indigeneity and
citizenship are relational terms when negotiating and claiming rights in political spaces; however, as Fontana (2014) argues, the claims for indigenous rights, recognition and citizenship have an economic dimension linked to access to resources. In this sense, the TIPNIS conflict is an exemplification of how political struggles transcend the solely legal recognition of citizenship to the material domain of management of resources and territory. Second, the exercise of citizenship implies power struggles and multiple narratives about citizens and the state.

4.1. Beyond rights: multiplicity of interests in political spaces

The TIPNIS case is not a simple collective and sectarian mobilization. Different authors characterize it as a new movement and an independent political stakeholder with social demands that concern both the rural and the urban from the lowlands to the highlands (Albo 2012; Crabtree and Chaplin 2013; Pedraza 2012).

The conflict has an economic root: the road is supposed to connect and to expand market relations in a protected and indigenous area. The opposition to this project could be seen as an open questioning of the extractive development model and the inconsistency of Morale’s government (Cameron 2012).

From this point of view, neoeconomic and the narratives around indigenous resistance and environmentalism are interesting angles of the debate; however, they simplify the complexity of resource conflicts and indigenous communities (McNeish 2012). In the TIPNIS case, there are different interests and tensions within the same communities that are not completely clear or acknowledged in the analysis; for instance, the idea that protestors were not opposing the road per se, but a route that would not benefit the communities. As a result of the government’s negation to enter into a dialog and the omission of the consultation right to indigenous communities, the conflict escalated and the opposition to the road became the central demand (McNeish 2013). From this point of view, the discourse to protect nature was complementary to the main priorities of this movement: the defense of the territory and indigenous autonomy.

First, the platform of demands of the VIII march was broad and diverse. The first point was the immediate stop to the road project in the TIPNIS; but additionally there were 15 demands including the respect of the indigenous territories and consultation rights, productive development, the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) mechanism and the direct compensations to indigenous territories, and some demands of other indigenous organizations (Fundación-Tierra 2012). Accordingly, these demands reflected the diversity of economic interests in the communities and the particular interest of other indigenous lowland organizations to participate in the VIII march (McNeish 2013).

Regarding this diverse platform of social demands, it could be argued that it included different points that previous collective mobilization unsuccessfully tried to negotiate. Hirsch and McNeish (2011) argue that 13 demands were similar to those CIDOB pushed forward in the march of 2010.

… At the beginning of this march, there were already 13 points to negotiate, but the government doesn’t pay attention to the indigenous march; it is not the defender of the indigenous. (Ernesto Noetamo, leader mojeño quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 114)

… This march is precisely the result of the non-obedience of the government regarding our demands of territory and our rights. The government demonstrated that never defended our territorial rights. Everything said was to get our support in the election process since 2005. (Adolfo Moye, Ex-President Subcentral TIPNIS quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 98)

The following extracts of interviews reflect different points of view regarding the diversity of interests in the VIII march. First, the conception of indigenous autonomy seems to be intrinsically linked to the management and control of resources within the economic domain. Second, the collective mobilizations around indigenous territories are political platforms for organizations and learning spaces for people. Also, even if the different indigenous organizations might have different demands, the defense of territories seems to be the articulating claim to build solidarity and the social fabric within the lowland indigenous movement.

… After the march, I will return to define new strategies to face the indigenous autonomy of the TIPNIS, considering we need to define an indigenous policy of development within the framework of the park protection and forms of economy and development that don’t affect the conservation area. (Fernando Vargas, President of Subcentral TIPNIS quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 82)

… In the march one has personal projections. Obviously, everything depends on the trust one is able to generate at grassroots levels and among other organizations … I was privileged for working with 3000 brothers in the march who had different languages, customs and experiences although we all had the same objective that was to defend our territories. (Miguel Charupa, Secretary of the political committee VIII march quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 152)

Second, the different understandings of ownership and sovereignty represent the worldviews of grassroots organizations in the diversity of Bolivian civil society and the central issue of disputes: territories. Different highland organizations like CSUTCB,19 the Federation of Peasant Women Bartolina Sisa or the cocaleros unions are in a continuous struggle over land distribution. In their view, the lowland indigenous communities and the recognition of indigenous Territories (TCO) represent the ‘new latifundios’ (Erbol 2010). The TIPNIS conflict demonstrated that land struggles are at the core of competing interests
between lowland indigenous organizations like CIDOB or the APG and the colonist/cocaleros who are the strongest constituencies of the MAS party (Morales 2013).

... The government is lying when they say we can’t afford the luxury of not having a road. This is false, we want a road and we had said this to the government, but we want a road that doesn’t pass through the TIPNIS because it will destroy the habitat of our indigenous brothers. We already know what will happen, the colonization will start and these people won’t plant cassava or banana but will plant coca. Our indigenous brothers have their patrimony in their territory; they use the resources in a rational way. Also we are very worried because the government says there will be a new law that will affect our territories and they won’t be ours anymore. This [VIII] march is not only about the defense of the TIPNIS, but it is about all the territories in the country”. (Ernesto Noetamo, leader mojeno quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 114)

... without territory what would we do? where would our children live? This is our house, it cost a big effort of our parents and it still cost us... it seems the I March of the 90s is not over... if we let them to push us away as they did in the south area of the park, we won’t have resources. (Layda Humaday, indigenous woman from Moxos quoted in Huancá 2012, 207)

Third, beyond an opposition to a road in the middle of an indigenous territory, this case questions how political forces establish regime legitimacy. On the one hand, Laing (2014, 11) argues this case shows different indigenous identities (from the state and the low lands organizations) emerging around claims of territory and legitimacy. The territory entails a ‘socioecological meaning’ and also has a political significance in exercising self-determination and autonomy outside ‘state jurisdiction’. On the other hand, Morales (2013, 82) states the differences among political constituencies – whether indigenous or not, highlands or lowlands, pro or anti official policy – reflect the challenges and the different meanings implementing the indigenous autonomy and the establishment of a plurinational state.

... We want to tell the Government that ‘this’ is the Plurinational State. Here we are the 34 indigenous groups. We want to tell the President Evo Morales that the State is built with these people. He should not concentrate the power only on CSUTCB, the ‘Bartolinas’ and the intercultural communities. We, these indigenous groups took him to the power. Why he forgets so quickly? (Celso Padilla, President APG quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 56)

4.2. Indigeneity and the exercise of citizenship

In the TIPNIS conflict, the power struggle is particularly concentrated on the political agency for the exercise of citizenship rights as defined in the New Political Constitution; in concrete terms: rights to indigenous autonomy, self-governance, self-determination and consultation in their territories. As a result, the TIPNIS movement represents the lowland indigenous demands with new strategies in the political field. It emerges as an actor with an important political capital and has a struggle/resistance history that sustains the symbolic and tangible social demands they claim (Pedraza 2012).

The following extracts of interviews show two important elements: on the one hand, the political discourse of the TIPNIS seeks the legitimacy to demand the application (and respect) of the arduously won indigenous rights in their territories. On the other hand, the VIII march events could be seen as the milestone in the negotiating process of the Morales government and the lowland indigenous movement. This conflict not only created an impasse with the grassroots the government claims to represent and obey; but also, it revealed that Evo Morales can encounter strong opposition when indigenous organizations make strategic alliances with other, non-indigenous, organizations specially in urban areas.

... all action is political, but there are two ways in politics: one that seeks for the social good and the other one that seeks power. The indigenous movement seeks politics for a common good and not the power as the MAS party. The indigenous movement is not a political party and it was born due to the violation of our legitimate rights. (Fernando Vargas, President of Subcentral TIPNIS, quoted in Paredes 2012).

... This [VIII] march was totally political and an action for the recovery our ownership. I did know about active citizenship but my best practice was this march. We had negotiated with the government and the indigenous organizations; it was a tough learning process ... It was particularly gratifying and fundamental the support we had from the rest of the Bolivian population. (Miguel Charupa, Secretary of the political committee VIII march, quoted in Fundación-Tierra 2012, 152)

In the TIPNIS case, one of the government’s arguments to build the road was to promote access to development and social rights to the distant indigenous communities. This leads to some key questions about citizenship: How is citizenship understood and experienced by the TIPNIS indigenous population? Should it be framed in terms of service delivery and access or as politics of recognition? Cornwall et al. (2011) link these questions about citizenship with the historically constituted expectation of the state. In the Bolivian case, there are different imaginaries of the state and citizenship. In the ‘paternalistic State’, citizenship is linked to material obligations and the redistribution of wealth by the state. In the ‘dominant State’, citizenship and how to exercise rights are determined by the group in power and its corporate interests. Last, in the ‘day to day State’, citizenship is linked to the provision of basic services and equality of access (PNUD-Bolivia 2007, 445–446).

The TIPNIS case particularly challenges the ‘dominant State’ imaginary. This movement questioned the base itself of the Plurinational State and the political hegemony of the
MAS as the unique and legitimate representative of the indigenous organizations. Furthermore, the social demands of autonomy and consultation represent empowering forms of participation for indigenous groups or what we could call the ‘non convenient rights of indigenous groups’. The inclusion and recognition of these rights are not simple; they imply the loss of power by the group in power. Most important, in concrete terms, these indigenous rights provide a legal domain of action to 190 indigenous territories (around 34% of the national territory, considering those territories that are still in the process of being recognized) (Fundación-Tierra 2011).

5. Final remarks

A key question is, ‘what makes this movement different from the rest and the almost daily manifestations of social organizations in Bolivia?’ The TIPNIS crisis highlighted the long-standing historical struggle for land and indigenous rights since the First March for Territory and Dignity in 1990. Its polarizing essence reveals different regional and ethnic identities in the context of a pro-indigenous government and it also reveals the complex struggles for economic interests within grassroots organizations (Morales 2013).

Furthermore, what was initially perceived as a local conflict for a road became a social protest with the legitimacy to represent a political position of indigenous organizations that were traditionally overlooked. Also, the TIPNIS movement openly questioned the incoherence of the ‘indigenous environmentalist’ discourse of Morales’ government about Mother Earth rights. Most important, the arguments of the TIPNIS protestors were coherently based on the recognized rights in the New Political Constitution about the consultation process and the right to self-determination in their territories.

The analysis of the TIPNIS movement and the VIII indigenous march put forward in this paper illustrates the complexity and heterogeneity of the indigenous politics in Bolivia and the political dynamics that allowed this conflict to transcend the local sphere to become the catalyst of a broader social agenda. These dynamics reveal both the internal tensions among the indigenous organizations in the understanding and the application of the New Political Constitution and the long-term tensions for territories between peasants and indigenous groups in the lowland and highlands.

The political spaces in which citizenship is negotiated in this case show that the motivations and strategies of collective action have multiple interests. These include claims for rights but also political platforms and resource control. In the Bolivian context, the territories and the management of resources are at the epicenter of disputes among the state and its extractive development model, peasants and indigenous groups.

The TIPNIS conflict is a representation of different narratives of citizenship and the tensions for power struggles. These struggles and the processes of negotiation and consensus are part of the deepening of democracy. This case represents a complex puzzle in the Bolivian democratic process. Beyond the opposition to the road in the middle of an indigenous and protected area, this event has set an important precedent in the construction of a ‘plurinational State’.

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Notes

1. The ‘Vivir Bien’ philosophy is part of the social indigenous movements in Bolivia and Ecuador since 2000. It emerged as a criticism to the current economic paradigm that prioritizes rapid economic growth, stimulates corporate greed, material accumulation and consumerism as the only paths to happiness, without considering the planetary limits and the need to live in a more harmonic human community. This philosophy emphasizes the challenges of sharing a finite planet and has three central criticisms: (i) the (imagined) infinite process of production of commodities based on a consumerist society that sustains the model, (ii) the modernist belief of infinite progress/technology for a better future, (iii) the imposed western view of development in the south, but in particular to indigenous people (Farah and Vasapollo 2011).

2. The term indigenous people/communities have no unified definition. This paper will use the definition suggested by Stevangen (2005 quoted in Reyes-García et al. 2014, 283) who suggests the concept implies: ‘a specific territory for the occupation and use; the perpetuation of cultural features; self-identification and the recognition by others as a distinctive collectivity and experiences of exclusion, marginalization, dispossession or discrimination’.

3. After the signing of the agreement to stop the road project and the declaration of the park as an intangible area (the intangibility is a legal norm that strictly forbids: illegal settlements in a protected area, commercial logging and activities or projects with impacts on the environment), there was a countermarch organized by Consejo Indígena del Sur (CONISUR) (a collective of communities and organizations of peasant and coca growers located in the colonized area in the south zone of the park) to demand a ‘consultation process’ in order to continue with the road project (Law 222). On 26 March 2012, the TIPNIS grassroots organizations started a new civic action (IX indigenous march) to repeal the ‘consultation law’ and to demand the respect of the previous agreement signed with the President. Between July and December 2012, the controversial consultation with the communities was done and there were different protests against and in favor. According to the government, 55 communities agreed to build the road and 11 communities did not participate in the process. The critics are diverse and focus on the kind of questions proposed, the irregularities along the process and legitimacy issues since this process was done without agreement from the indigenous organizations. In 2013, the TIPNIS grassroots organizations presented a case against the Morales’ government to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights (CIDH) and the conflict between pro- and anti-highway sectors within the TIPNIS has intensified since.
the government’s controversial results. Also, the recent criminal charges against the TIPNIS indigenous leaders, the slow judicial process and the impunity to find the people responsible of the Yacuma/Charapuma massacre in 2011 are sensitive aspects of the conflict.

4. In October 2003, the Guerra del Gas, or ‘Gas War’ started when citizens’ groups, particularly FEJUVE El Alto and other grassroots organizations opposed the government plan to export natural gas to the USA and Mexico via a Chilean port. The violence, the repression and the number of civilian deaths caused a massive rejection from the population. After several days of conflict, the President Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada had to resign and fled the country. In 2005 a new wave of protests demanding the nationalization of hydrocarbons caused the resignation of the President Carlos Mesa and the call to general elections in December of that year when Evo Morales won by a majority of votes (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013; Perreault 2006).

5. The New Political Constitution of 2009 defined Bolivia as a Plurinational State. This implies the acknowledgment and inclusion of different nations and multiculturalism. It is a state project that recognizes different cultural forms in equality and the pluralism in the sociocultural, linguistic, political and economic domains (Radhuber 2012). In terms of inclusion, it seeks to promote an active involvement in decision-making processes of the state affairs and there is a strong emphasis on revaluing the indigenous cultures, customs and worldviews (Poster 2013; Schilling-Vacaflor 2013). In practical terms, the Plurinational State guarantees the self-determination of indigenous people in their territories within the unity of the state. These rights include the autonomy, self-government, culture, and the recognition of traditional institutions (New Political Constitution, Art. 2).

6. According to the New Political Constitution (Chapter IV, Art. 30; Chapter IX, Art. 403) indigenous groups have collective rights over their territories – including land, renewable and nonrenewable natural resources – and the ‘rights to consultation, autonomy and self-governance’ regarding projects and activities that affect their livelihoods. These rights are also recognized by the Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (1991) and the United Nations Declaration about Indigenous Rights (2007) and Bolivia was the first country in the world to sign this declaration and incorporate it into the Constitution.

7. The indigenous right to consultation is based on the communal legitimacy of property: the indigenous groups inhabited their territories in a precolonial era, thus, they have the rights to determination, autonomy and self-governance (Paz 2012a).

8. Bolivia is divided into nine departments: La Paz, Pando, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca, Tarija, Potosi and Oruro. It has 339 municipalities.

9. The TIPNIS has a double administration: first, the Sub-central Indígena del TIPNIS and the Sub-central de mujeres indígenas del TIPNIS (both affiliated to the Central de Pueblos Étnicos Mojeños del Beni and to the CIDOB). Second, as a protected area the indigenous organizations coordinate action with the Servicio Nacional de Areas Protegidas (SERNAP).

10. According to the Census 2012, around 31% of the population self-identifies as indigenous, there are 36 different indigenous groups, but there is a high predominance of Aymara and Quechua population (56%) from the highlands.

11. The TIPNIS is divided into four areas: (i) South region which was originally expropriated by the oil company Shell in the decade of the 1960s and where most of the coca colonizers are located now. (ii) Central region considered a hotspot of biodiversity and the best preserved and more isolated area. (iii) Third region characterized by savanna and forest area inhabited by cattle raisers and communities. (iv) Fourth region where most of the indigenous communities are concentrated and it is an area characterized by different ecosystems such as subandino and foothills (piedemonte).

12. According to Colque (2012), the south part of the park (also called polígono 7) was legally recognized as individual property of colonizers and not as an indigenous territory affecting 14 communities who lost the continuity of their territory and got locked in the area. These communities are associated with the CONISUR and many indigenous people later entered into the coca agriculture economy of the area.

13. The process of internal migration made a deep impact on the way Bolivia is now organized. From the directed migration of the state in the 1950s, the spontaneous migration in the 1970s to the massive migration in the 1980s (PNUD-Bolivia 2010).

14. For a detailed chronology of the VIII march, see Fundación-Tierra (2011). Marcha indígena por el TIPNIS: la lucha en defensa de los territorios y Fundación-UNIR (2011). Análisis de la conflictividad del TIPNIS y potenciales de paz.

15. As evident in these kinds of events, part of the massive support also included opportunistic interventions of the right and centre-right wing opposition to Morales (Webber 2012).

16. The TIPNIS civic action had a list of 16 demands besides the opposition to the road construction. The polemic UN-REDD Initiative was also included in the demand list and the total closure of the natural gas extraction from Auyaguarque from which 90% of the gas currently sold and consumed in Bolivia is extracted (Webber 2012).

17. Civil or legal rights such as property rights. Political rights including right to vote, rights of association and rights to participate in the government. Social rights such as unemployment benefit and provision of health and education (Turner 1993).

18. According to the LPP, each municipality has autonomous elective governments and a budget of 20% share of national taxes, proportional to the number of inhabitants. In addition, this law recognizes the Territorial Base Organizations (OTBs) (Communities of peasants), the indigenous people and the neighborhood assemblies as subjects of this law.

19. Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (The Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia) (CSUTCB)/Asamblea del Pueblo Guarani (APG).

20. Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia ‘Bartolina Sisa’ (Bartolina Sisa National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Native Women of Bolivia). CSCIB – Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia (Syndicalist Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia).

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Appendix

Figure A1. Map of protected areas in Bolivia.
Source: SERNAP.