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Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“The territory is defended in the territory: Analysis and contributions of the Indigenous resistance to a road project in the Isiboro Sécuré Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS), Bolivia.”

verfasst von / submitted by

Ari Kim Sanchez Uria

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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To the Tsimanes, Yurakares and Moxeños, their struggle and resistance was the main inspiration for this thesis.

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Abstract

The indigenous groups of lowlands in Bolivia have employed various social and political methods of resistance to safeguard their lifestyles and territories. One of the most notable cases is Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS). In 2011, over 1,000 indigenous individuals embarked on the VIII March, covering more than 300 kilometers on foot to reach La Paz city. They protested against a highway's construction that would not only divide the TIPNIS in half, but also have irreversible effects on the natural environment of the indigenous people.

Taking up the TIPNIS case, the aim of my research is to describe and analyze the current situation of the resistance of the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS to the Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos road project. Despite the TIPNIS significant political impact on the MAS government, recent social and political issues have overshadowed this conflict in public debates. My research aims to provide an up-to-date analysis of the TIPNIS case until 2023 which includes a historical review of the conflict, divided into four periods (Pre-Colonial, Reductional, Republican, and Contemporary) for a detailed understanding of the characteristics of the TIPNIS struggle and the indigenous groups involved.

This thesis examines and explains how the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS have contributed to the national and regional concepts of territory, development, and decolonization. The research approach is based on Global Studies perspective and involves interviewing key TIPNIS actors, including indigenous leaders from the TIPNIS Sub centrals, local experts from Bolivian NGOs who have been following the case since 2011, and international academics who specialize in indigenous groups of the lowlands.

The main findings of the study point to a reunification of the indigenous movement in the TIPNIS with a unified political position and total rejection of the construction of the road project. In addition, the construction status of the highway apparently is paralyzed for various economic and political reasons that are explored in this thesis. Finally, the notions and understandings about territory, decolonization, and development of indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS suggest that we get rid of essentialist and homogenizing discourses. These ideas emphasize the significance of both collective action and the ability to coexist peacefully in shared spaces.

Abstrakt

Die indigenen Gruppen im Tiefland Boliviens haben verschiedene soziale und politische Widerstandsmethoden eingesetzt, um ihre Lebensstile und Territorien zu schützen, haben indigene Gruppen im Tiefland Boliviens seither verschiedenste soziale und politische Widerstandsformen eingesetzt. Einer der bemerkenswertesten Fälle ist der Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS). Im Jahr 2011 begaben sich über 1.000 Menschen der indigenen Völker auf den VIII. Marsch und legten mehr als 300 Kilometer zu Fuß zurück, um die Stadt La Paz zu erreichen. Sie protestierten gegen den Bau einer Autobahn, die nicht nur das TIPNIS in zwei Hälften teilen würde, sondern auch irreversible Schäden Auswirkungen auf die natürliche Umwelt der indigenen Bevölkerung hätte.

Ziel meiner Forschung ist es, ausgehend vom TIPNIS-Fall, die aktuelle Situation des Widerstands der indigenen Gruppen der TIPNIS gegen das Straßenprojekt Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos darzustellen zu beschreiben und zu analysieren. Trotz der seiner erheblichen Auswirkungen der Geschehnisse auf die MAS-Regierung, haben aktuelle soziale und politische Probleme diesen Konflikt in der öffentlichen Debatte überschattet. Meine Forschung zielt darauf ab, eine aktuelle Analyse des TIPNIS-Falls bis 2023 bereitzustellen, welche und umfasst einen historischen Rückblick auf den Konflikt, unterteilt in vier Perioden umfasst (vorkoloniale, reduktionistische, republikanische und zeitgenössische), um ein detailliertes Verständnis der Merkmale zu ermöglichen des TIPNIS-Kampfes und der beteiligten indigenen Gruppen zu ermöglichen.

Diese Arbeit untersucht und erklärt, wie die indigenen Gruppen der TIPNIS zu den nationalen und regionalen Konzeptualisierungen von Territorium, Entwicklung und Dekolonisierung beigetragen haben. Der Forschungsansatz basiert auf der wissenschaftliche Perspektive der Global Studies Disziplin und umfasst die Befragung wichtiger TIPNIS-Akteure, darunter indigene Anführer der TIPNIS-Unterzentralen, lokale Experten bolivianischer NGOs, die den Fall seit 2011 verfolgen, und internationale Wissenschaftler, die sich auf indigene Gruppen im Tiefland spezialisiert haben.

Die Studienergebnisse der Studie deuten auf eine Wiedervereinigung der indigenen Bewegung im TIPNIS mit einer einheitlichen politischen Position und einer völligen Ablehnung des Baus des Straßenprojekts hin. Darüber hinaus ist der Baustatus der Autobahn offenbar aus verschiedenen wirtschaftlichen und politischen Gründen, die in dieser Arbeit untersucht werden, vorerst eingestellt worden. Abschließend verdeutlicht das Schließlich legen die Vorstellungen und Verständnisse über von Territorium, Dekolonisierung und Entwicklung der indigenen Völker der TIPNIS nahe, dass wir uns von essentialistischen und homogenisierenden Diskursen und Ansätze zu überwinden sind verabschieden. Diese Ideen betonen die Bedeutung sowohl des kollektiven Handelns als auch der Fähigkeit, in gemeinsamen Räumen friedlich zusammenzuleben.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The *Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré* – TIPNIS (Isiboro Sécuré Indigenous Territory and National Park) is an Indigenous territorial reserve home of three dwindling Indigenous groups: Tsimanes, Yurakares, and Moxeño-Trinitarios. Moreover, it is configured as one of the largest places of natural reservoirs of flora and fauna in the region. The TIPNIS is located between the departments of Beni and Cochabamba in Bolivia, South America.

The TIPNIS made international headlines in 2011 when over 1000 of the natives who live there and other indigenous groups began the VIII March covering over 300 miles from Trinidad to La Paz, in protest over the construction of a highway through the TIPNIS. The park's ecosystem is fragile, and the inhabitants depend on it, so the highway project could cause widespread damage, contaminating the park's three main rivers, opening large forest areas to illegal settlement, and altering natural habitats of endangered species.

The road project named Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos highway is a priority project for the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) current political party in the presidency not only due to its country and region integration policy but also the extension of the agricultural frontier and settlement. Additionally, the road project is part of the Brazilian economic interests for regional integration through a network to connect the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean.

In August 2017, the former president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, signed law No. 969 that annulled the intangibility of the TIPNIS. Consequently, in June 2022, the governor of Beni, Alejandro Unzueta, asked to continue the construction of the highway through the TIPNIS, due to the continuous blockades in Santa Cruz, which harm Beni's economic development. The conflict between the government and the TIPNIS is a social and political phenomenon that continues to be a current issue of great interest for Indigenous rights, territory, and development.

In that sense, the main objective of this master thesis is to *describe and analyze the current situation of the Indigenous resistance to the Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos road project in the TIPNIS, and its contributions to the notions of territory, development, and*

decolonization. It is considered relevant to analyze the current situation because after the annulation of the intangibility with law No. 969 in 2017 this topic was less discussed, little information was available, and there is uncertainty about the road construction status. In addition, discussing the TIPNIS contributions to the notions of territory, development, and decolonization not only could help us to understand better the ways of living of indigenous groups, which promotes the implementation of more accurate policies but also could set an example of peaceful resistance which can be used by other marginalized groups.

This thesis starts with a review of current research, followed by an explanation of the methodology used and the theoretical framework. The results are divided into two parts. The first part covers the historical context and a description of the TIPNIS case, while the second part includes the analysis of the findings, the discussion, and the conclusions.

For my thesis, I utilized two research methods in the methodological section. Firstly, I examined both first-hand and second-hand sources, which included regional newspapers, legislation, official state documents, and academic documents. These sources provided information on the history, legal situation, and current political and social state of TIPNIS. Secondly, I conducted seven interviews with key TIPNIS actors. These interviews were divided into three groups: Indigenous leaders (presidents of the subcentral of the TIPNIS), Local experts (Bolivian NGOs), and international experts (international academics). The theoretical section introduces the topic's theoretical relevance and discusses four key concepts: ethnicity, decolonization, territory, and development.

The first part is a historical overview of the TIPNIS that includes its legal establishment, distinctive features, and a brief synopsis of the road project. For this purpose, the territory's social and economic context, and historical background are discussed by categorizing it into four distinct eras: Pre-colonial, Reductional, Republican, and Contemporary. Finally, it is described the creation of the park, its legal constitution, and the characteristics of the three ethnic groups that inhabit the TIPNIS: Moxeños-Trinitarios, Yurakares, and Tsimanes.

In the second part of this thesis, I present the findings and analysis of seven interviews, along with other supplementary information. This section will cover the status of TIPNIS

in regard to road construction, the state of social organizations in TIPNIS, and evaluate its contribution to the concepts of decolonization, territory, and development in the region. Lastly, I present my conclusions. The thesis contribution aims to provide updated information on the TIPNIS case until 2023. Additionally, it presents a summary of the historical and social process behind the TIPNIS configuration and creation, taking into account the perspectives of indigenous leaders, regional actors, and international experts.

2. STATE OF ART

The TIPNIS case has been thoroughly examined from various angles including the environmental, social, economic, and political aspects. This is due to its global importance in regard to Indigenous rights and territory. Additionally, the topic delves into the complexities and contradictions between different models of development and sustainability, particularly in developing regions of the world.

According to Hope (2021), the case of TIPNIS re-politicizes the conception of nature and conservation not only by a series of policies, climate agendas, and their ontologies, but also by rejecting neo-extractive international mandates, making people more active in conservation, and incorporating the autonomy of their territory into discussion.

In words of Eichler (2019), the TIPNIS highlights inconsistencies in international policies around indigenous rights, particularly in relation to infrastructure investment and models. These legal mechanisms dispossess Indigenous groups of important decision-making processes; therefore, the State displays many mechanisms of power coercion through a series of non-democratic and violent acts against indigenous groups. In addition, Hope (2022) argues that the international development infrastructure is sometimes disconnected from the anti-extractivist demands of indigenous territories, because the Sustainable Development Goals agenda incorporates legal interpretations favorable to the States and the growth of development, minimizing the historical demands of marginal groups.

Not only the international law framework has been considered in the academic analysis of the TIPNIS, but also the legal scope of domestic and local laws and their economic and political implications. Montgomery (2003) exposes that the increasingly favorable laws

and policies for Indigenous groups of lowlands like the Political Constitution of 2009 which it had little impact on the empowerment of Indigenous rights and access to territory. On the other hand, Lalander (2014) and Hope (2015) mention that the TIPNIS case displays the constitutional contradictions in Bolivia regarding the rights of nature and Indigenous people versus the rights of the State to exploit natural resources. Sanchez-Lopez (2015) states that both the internal tensions among the Indigenous organizations in the interpretation of the Political Constitution and tensions for territories between peasants' settlers and indigenous groups in the lowlands display the incoherency between the extractivist model of development and the indigenous interests.

However, the comprehension of the local legal framework is limited because it does not incorporate a broad understanding of the problem in deeper aspects. In that sense, according to Morales (2013), the TIPNIS conflict not only marked one of the most significant social and political challenges to Evo Morales, but also resulted from the increased political recognition and credibility that the Indigenous peoples of the lower lands have gained, which has brought new paradigms for discussion. Bruslé (2017) goes beyond and explains that the struggle of TIPNIS is the result of a failed process of cultural recognition which imprisons the Indigenous peoples in an idealized category as guardians of the forest and misunderstands their special relationship with the land.

Other scholars have focused more on arguing that it is necessary to think of the TIPNIS case as something that goes beyond territory demands and nature conservation. In that sense, Laing (2015) shows that the indigenous struggle of the TIPNIS was a cultural struggle for the recognition of collective political representation. Moreover, Hope (2015) mentions that indigenous opposition to the road project is due to the project's disregard for their political-territorial rights. On the contrary, Walton (2019) argues that the TIPNIS communities took advantage of the situation to put their own visions, identity, and environmental protection logics into the debate against other Western ways.

Some experts argue that the fight for land and recognition of rights in TIPNIS requires a new understanding of decolonization. According to Delgado (2017), there is a link between the concept of "internal colonialism" (as proposed by Rivera in 1986) and the Bolivian government's adoption of a neo-extractivist plan to expand the region. Therefore, the case of TIPNIS reveals the continuation of a colonial dynamic that was

never surpassed. In addition, Laing (2019) mentions that there is a persistent logic of coloniality embedded within the MAS party that reproduces old practices of non-recognition of territory rights. In that sense, the author mentions that the TIPNIS protestors were enacting a decolonial move using non-violent protest and delinking from the state colonial machinery through self-determination (Laing, 2019).

The TIPNIS situation highlighted the need to rethink and redefine what it means to be indigenous in a pluralistic society. According to Fabricant and Postero (2019), the TIPNIS drew upon alternative narratives of indigeneity to resist the Aymara state, led by Evo Morales. Additionally, Sanchez-Lopez (2015) argues that it represents diverse understandings of citizenship. Bruslé (2017) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the cultural and social justice of indigenous groups in the lowlands, and suggests that ethnic classification should be more flexible, as indigenous identity is fluid and non-uniform.

Albó (2021) reflect on the problems of the Indigenous territories of the southern Amazon of Bolivia, taking as reference the TIPNIS case, from three dimensions: 1) its organic political dynamics in the process of social mobilization, 2) a socio-spiritual analysis of their territory, 3) and its economic nature and sociocultural aspects. From a more geographical and law perspective.

Tamburini (2019) presents more than 200 maps of more than 50 indigenous territories of the lowlands of Bolivia that have been claimed against the state for their legal recognition as indigenous territories, this document allows a geographical and legal understanding of the TIPNIS from a broad perspective, and in contrast with other similar territory issues which are less known. Ortiz (2012) made one of the most extensive recompilations of literature written by participants, Indigenous leaders, scholars, journalists, activists, and experts about the TIPNIS issue until 2012. It is one of the most important documents to read in detail the daily events from the voices of the same actors during the VIII indigenous march, the arrival to La Paz, and its violent repression by the police forces in Chaparina.

Furthermore, Albó (2011) and Rivera (2016) suggest the importance of seeing and understanding the longer and shorter collective memory history of the Indigenous of

lower lands. Also, Makaran (2019) encompasses the urgency of explaining and making visible the active political and leadership role of Indigenous women who have gained more positions but less visibility in the discussions of the TIPNIS case.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study field of Global Studies has been caught up in the various globalization processes and their multiple effects on societies and individuals (Campbell, et al, 2010). According to Steger (2017), globalization refers to a multidimensional set of social processes that interact in a worldwide frame, which fosters people's growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.

In that sense, Global Studies could be defined as the approach to looking at the world from a multidisciplinary perspective, based on the ideas and theories of diverse academic fields and to establish interdisciplinary connections between them (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017). In addition, Global Studies “analyzes social, political, and economic processes and transformations that affect not only the world as a whole but also specific localities in particular, complex and sometimes contradictory ways” (Campbell, et al, 2010:3). Furthermore, the Global Studies approach can be understood as a “local-global continuum” (Campbell, et al, 2010:73) where a topic or issue is situated in a broader context, allows a transdisciplinary framework for its analysis.

The resistance of the indigenous people of the TIPNIS against a road project could be a practical case of Global studies analysis due to the contradictions between hegemonic models of development, collective territory versus individual territory. Moreover, it drives us to think about the conception of decolonization from the Indigenous groups of lowlands in Bolivia. Furthermore, it displays the complexity of the definition of territory for the TIPNIS which is strongly linked with autonomy. Finally, the notion of indigeneity is put into discussion, since this conflict involves different Indigenous groups coexisting in a multiethnic space.

From a Global Studies perspective, I analyzed the TIPNIS case using four collective engagement thematic areas across social sciences and humanities disciplines (Darian-

Smith & McCarty, 2017). These include ethnicity, territory, development, and decolonization.

What does it mean to identify as Indigenous in Bolivia? This question remains a topic of debate, because of the differences and characteristics of the 36 nations and indigenous groups within the country (Díez, 2018). While I do not aim to provide a definitive answer, I do wish to explore this topic and compare it to the perspectives of the Indigenous groups of the TIPNIS.

According to Article 1b of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169 (1989) considers indigenous groups as “peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions”. Due to the diversity of indigenous people, an official definition has not been adopted by the UN-system, although, the system considers some criteria, for instance: self-identification, strong link to territory and nature, distinct language, culture and beliefs, non-dominant groups of society, historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies, etc.

The Political Constitution of Bolivia (2009) defines Indigenous people in Article 30. I. *“Es nación y pueblo indígena originario campesino toda la colectividad humana que comparte identidad cultural, idioma, tradición histórica, instituciones, territorialidad y cosmovisión, cuya existencia es anterior a la invasión colonial española.”* (It is an Indigenous-native-peasant nation or community any human collectivity that shares cultural identity, language, historical tradition, institutions, territoriality and cosmovision, whose existence predates the Spanish colonial invasion). However, Díez (2018) mentions that the Political Constitution of Bolivia definition makes use of three separate identities: Indigenous, native and peasant under one term: Indigenous-native-peasant people. Without any anthropological validation or political authenticity.

Many attempts have been made to order and classify the diversity of indigenous identities in Bolivia. Criteria such as class identity versus ethnic identity, communal land versus

individual land, and unions versus other forms of organizations have been used, but these categories tend to simplify and create dichotomies (Ellerbeck, 2012).

Therefore, the IV Indigenous March in 2002 raised the need for a new Constituent Assembly in Bolivia. Subsequently, in 2004, the lowland indigenous groups joined four other peasant and indigenous organizations and signed the Unity Pact, a pact that articulated shared interests in the formation of a new State (Albó, 2021). During the development of the Constituent Assembly in 2009, the Unity Pact played an important role in the drafting of the new Constitution. To avoid self-identification conflicts, the pact assembled a new term to recognize all nations and peoples in a single formula embodied in the Constitution's legal framework: indigenous-native-peasant (Ellerbeck, 2012). For Loayza (2011) that term is the result of an orderly, non-violent separation of the notions of "native" from the "foreign". Considering this political process, the term indigenous-native-peasant people reflects the consolidation of a political and social coalition driven by indigenous and peasant organizations, that later was appropriated by the MAS party.

For Ellerbeck (2012), the term indigenous-native-peasant people generate opposing positions. On one hand, it represents the achievement of the Unity Pact by bringing together peoples and nations, and organizations with different identities: some who consider themselves "indigenous", others who consider the term indigenous to be colonizing and prefer to call themselves "native", and others who identify themselves with a class identity as "peasants". On the other hand, the term represents the fragility of a coalition that tries to homogenize heterogeneous identities in a phrase.

Although the MAS government has based much of its discourse on the union of peasant, indigenous, and popular interests, this "coalition" gradually began to show fractures. These tensions are not new but originated in the difficulties of agglutinating groups with different cultures, identities, historical processes, and territorial conceptions (Ellerbeck, 2012). However, the author mentions that the differences between social organizations are not as relevant as the differences between the organizations and the MAS government, which was the final cause of the disintegration of the coalition.

The departure of two main organizations from the Unity Pact; the VIII and IX Indigenous Marches from the lowlands; the intensification of an antagonistic discourse between

indigenous organizations and the government; the disdain of lowland indigenous groups by other social sectors; political mismanagement; and the TIPNIS highway controversy intensified tensions and ended up breaking the coalition (Ellerbeck, 2012),

Therefore, the term "indigenous native peasants" also wavered in its social and symbolic significance, opening the way to its "free" and generic legal interpretation. However, despite these differences in identity and interests, there was an organic Unity Pact as a historical and legitimate demand of the indigenous and peasant organizations. The reconstitution of this coalition will require a change of discourse and action by the government and social organizations.

Despite the term "Indigenous people" is a generic and broad term, it could be also linked to another anthropologic term: ethnic groups.

3.1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity is an abstract concept that may include references to both collective and individual aspects and it depends on the meaning of other concepts, such as ethnic group and ethnic identity (Isajiw, 1993), in that sense, the author defines ethnic group as "...a community-type group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who may not share this culture but who identify themselves with this ancestral group." (Isajiw, 1993:411) and, on the individual level, ethnicity is defined as "a social-psychological process which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity (...) one of several social phenomena which produce a sense of identity" (Isajiw, 1993:412). Additionally, the author mentions that a multiethnic society inevitably could produce multiple ethnic identities (Isajiw, 1993).

In addition, the author mentions that there are several types of ethnic groups: primary (which exist in the same place in which historically been formed) and secondary (origin in a society different from the one in which they currently exist) ethnic groups; folk-community (kinship and close family friendship) and nationality-community (collectivity united by a distinct culture) ethnic groups; dominant majority (determine the character of the society's basic institutions) and subordinate minority (may preserve their institutions

and culture) ethnic groups; and immigrant (first generation) and established (already established in the larger society) ethnic groups (Isajiw, 1993: 415-417).

Cardoso (2007) suggests that identity has both individual and social dimensions that are inseparable. The author explains that ethnic identity is formed in opposition to another identity because it cannot exist in isolation. Therefore, ethnic identity is confirmed by rejecting the other identity (ethnocentric). As such, ethnic differences are a collection of socially constructed representations, practices, symbols, norms, and values (Cardoso, 2007).

In the words of Lehm et al. (2002), the anthropologist Barth (1976) mentions that the identification of an ethnic group does not only depend on the auto adscription but also on the way others include or exclude them. The inclusion/exclusion is dynamic; as Paulson (1996) mentions, one person could be considered *mestiza* o *mestizo*¹ in a certain context and Indigenous identity in another one. Cardoso (2007) and Paulson (1996) understand this process as a *creative use* of identity. Furthermore, Spedding (2006) notes that identity as Indigenous, white, or mestizo in the Andes is situational and can fluctuate over time and place. For example, someone who is mestizo in one context may identify as Indigenous in another.

According to Lehm et al. (2002), the management of identity in Bolivia involves a creative approach that reveals the existence of “*desprecios escalonados*” (stepwise disregard) (as proposed by Rivera, 1996) among indigenous peoples. This phenomenon allows for the construction of social hierarchies and reinforces colonial stereotypes of savagery versus civilization. However, in the Moxos Plains case, Lehm et al. (2002) note that there is a fluid ethnic interrelationship between various groups based on different types of exchanges, both positive and negative. This flexibility of the ethnic boundary allows for the emergence of new identities in some cases and the re-articulation of ethnic identities in others.

¹ Mestiza or Mestizo is the popular definition in Latin America of mixed race, especially one having European and indigenous descent.

3.2. Decolonization

Spedding (2011) argues that decolonization, as understood in Bolivia, is presented as a matter of taking conscience not only based on the logic of archiving a moral superiority over the colonizers but also idealizing the Andean and Amazonian societies by an essentialist and oppositional dualism between "the Indigenous" and "the West".

For the author, the concept of decolonization must go beyond the repetitive denunciation and identification of colonialism (Spedding, 2008) which is not about putting the colony upside down: being eternally indigenous and differentiated from Westerners. Spedding understands decolonization as the "search for schemes of thought that effectively decentralize the colonial process and the categories resulting from its central position" (Spedding, 2011: 95). The author demonstrates one possibility through the reinterpretation of Andean history, or as she calls the "Fifth Horizon".

The term Horizon refers to a historical period, based on archaeological records, that identifies the existence of a broad process of supra-regional integration in the Andes, mostly by the diffusion of the same artistic styles, ceramic, textiles, architecture, and others (Spedding, 2011:109-110). In that sense, the Fifth Horizon constitutes a continuous scheme of the Andean history², therefore it aims to conceive itself as autonomous and decolonized (Spedding, 2008).

Spedding (2008) argues that the First Horizon would be configured by the influence of the Chavín culture, as well as its first intermediate period³ represented by the Nazca and Moche. The Second Horizon is represented by the Tiwanaku and Wari cultures, as well as its Second Intermediate period of the "Señorios Aymaras": Charkas, Qharaqhara, Karankas, Pakajaqi, etc. The Third Horizon where the Incas emerged until 1532, then the Third Intermediate Period from 1532 to 1570. Followed by the Fourth Horizon, the

² Spedding (2008) identifies two types of schemes in history: *Revolutionary scheme* (that identifies events or moments that broke up with the society condition until that moment and begins something new. It is related with a vision of the country or society lacking control over its trajectory) and *Continuing scheme* (that identifies structural elements that have been existing through time despite the events or the actors. It is more related with countries or societies who see themselves as more independents and autonomous). Both schemes are interpretations, not true representations of history and past.

³ *Intermediate* refers to a period of socio-political fragmentation, marked by the emergence of localized and differentiated regional cultures (Spedding, 2011: 110).

establishment of the Colony in 1570 until 1780. In 1780, the beginning of the Fourth Intermediate with the gradual fragmentation of the Colonies, the processes of Independence, and other regional wars. Finally, 1980 - 1985 was the beginning of the Fifth Horizon, with the end of military governments, the adoption of nominally independent nation-states, and forms of regional collaboration and coordination such as Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) and Unión de las Naciones Sudamericanas (UNASUR).

Therefore, not only this interpretation of Andean history incorporates colonization into the dynamics of the region. The Conquest ceases to be “THE” constitutive moment that determines the totality of Andean history. But also, conceives the Andean culture and history in a way that assumes its hybridity and mutability of postcolonial cultures and definitively buries the ideas of authenticity and essentialism (Spedding, 2011:112-113).

In the same vein, Rivera (2010) mentions that the processes of decolonization do not involve substituting one worldview for another, nor denying the process of colonization or returning to an idealized past. For Rivera, the decolonizing process is open to the construction of new epistemological frameworks that pluralize, problematize, and challenge the notion of totalitarian, unique, and universal thought.

For Rivera (2018) the concept of Ch'ixi is the accurate translation of the variegated mixture of the mestizos. Ch'ixi is understood as a “color product of the juxtaposition, in small dots or spots, of two opposing or contrasting colors: black and white.” (Rivera, 2010: 69). The notion of ch'ixi obeys the “Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time, that is to say, the logic of the third included. A ch'ixi gray color is white and not white at the same time, it is white, and it is also black, its opposite” (Rivera, 2010:70). Rivera mentions that this concept poses the parallel existence of multiple cultural differences that do not merge, but rather antagonize or complement each other, and that each one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to the others in a contentious manner (Rivera, 2018).

Rivera argues that decolonization involves more than just embracing unconventional ways of thinking that have been dismissed by modern knowledge. It also involves challenging the notion of all-encompassing knowledge. In essence, we need to decolonize

our epistemological thinking which allows us to endow the subjects as sources of valid knowledge.

3.3. Territory

It is crucial to distinguish between land and territory. Land refers to the physical space designated for a productive activity and can be divided or split. Meanwhile, territory encompasses both the physical and spiritual space where a community engages in various activities based on their customs and traditions (Luján, 2011:60).

In accordance with Sack's (1986) ideas, the concept of territory is based on various strategies aimed at influencing and controlling objects or individuals within a particular space. Similarly, M. Santos (1996) views territory as a social construct that arises from the interactions and creations of the people who live in it. Nowadays, territories are not isolated and static; they are interconnected with other territories, transcending distances, and constantly exchanging information (Santos, 1996). López de Sousa (1995) adds that territory is a definite and marked space that determines power relations, sets limits, and operates on a referential foundation.

According to García (2004), the idea of land ownership in the Western context is more closely tied to an individual's civil rights. However, for Indigenous people, the land is closely linked to the community and its people and is therefore considered a political right rather than a civil one. Echeverri (2004) also explains that in the Amazonian context, Indigenous territories may have defined borders, but they are ultimately defined by the geographical landmarks that connect a human group to their history and the surrounding landscape.

Finally, Mazurek (2018) identifies five key characteristics of territory: 1) It is localized and has distinct natural features; 2) It is formed through the process of identity construction; 3) Human activity plays a significant role in managing and transforming the space; 4) The construction of a territory is dynamic and influenced by its history; 5) The definition of a territory can vary among social groups (Mazurek, 2018: 41-42). Additionally, there are four functions of territory that reflect its usage by society: living, appropriating, exploring, and exchanging (Mazurek, 2018).

3.4. Development

There is a lack of agreement on how to define development, partly due to the subjective nature of its definition (Chant & McIlwaine, 2009). However, Thomas (2000) identifies four key characteristics that define development. Firstly, development involves comprehensive change. Secondly, it is an ongoing and cumulative process. Thirdly, it involves social and individual changes. Lastly, development does not always have positive effects. Additionally, Lawson (2014) suggests that the meaning of development is influenced by the intellectual, institutional, and political context in which it is considered.

Chant & McIlwaine (2009) stated that economic growth has long been equated with development, but this view has been contested in social and cultural studies. Development can also encompass factors like access to quality healthcare, education, and nutrition, as well as subjective elements such as political agency, freedom, and democracy (Chant & McIlwaine, 2009).

According to Gardner and Lewis (2003), development refers to the social and economic changes that occur due to economic growth and public policies, whether initiated by the State, donor agencies, or indigenous movements. These changes can have both positive and negative impacts. Therefore, development is a combination of actions, a specific way of thinking, and an ideological concept (Chant & McIlwaine, 2009).

In contrast, Herrera (2005) mentions that development is often viewed as a concept that is rooted in Western ideals of power and political control. This is reflected in the use of terms like “modern,” “advancing,” and “better.” So, the author states that to expand our perspectives and embrace new ways of thinking, it is crucial to challenge these notions and demystify the concept of development (Herrera, 2005).

4. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this master thesis is to *describe and analyze the current situation of the Indigenous resistance to the road project Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos in the TIPNIS, Bolivia, and its contributions to the notions of territory, development, and*

decolonization. So, the research question for that purpose is: What is the current situation of the indigenous resistance to the road project Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos in the TIPNIS, Bolivia until 2023, and how does it contribute to the notions of territory, development, and decolonization?

In this thesis, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. Primary sources included minutes, public policies, maps, news, and census data, among other materials. Secondary sources consisted of articles, books, and academic papers. Additionally, qualitative methodology was employed, including interviews with key actors to supplement the information already available.

I considered that the qualitative method can offer a greater enrichment to the theme by complementing the information available with updated data and from multiple approaches. So, individual online semi-structured interviews were also applied as a primary source of data. A semi-structured interview is defined as “...an interview to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008: 3). Moreover, the semi-structured interviews are a mix of structured and unstructured interviews because some questions are predetermined, and others are not.

Brinkmann (2014) suggests that semi-structured interviews offer more opportunities to produce knowledge during the interview. This is because the interviewee is given more leeway to freely maneuver and discuss aspects, they consider important. Additionally, the interviewer has more chances to actively participate and contribute to the generation of knowledge. In comparison to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide a more specific framework for discussing relevant issues related to the topic at hand (Brinkmann, 2014).

Interviews with individuals have several advantages. It is easier to guide the conversation towards relevant topics, and they provide a secure and confidential environment for the interviewee, particularly when dealing with sensitive or taboo subjects (Brinkmann, 2012). The use of modern technology, such as telephones, computers, and programs like Skype or Zoom, also helps to overcome geographical barriers during interviews (Al Balushi, 2016).

In that sense, individual online semi-structured interviews were the chosen research method because allowed me to develop spontaneous questions not previously formulated according to the knowledge and experience of each one of the interviewees. For the interviews, I used two technological tools: Zoom, and WhatsApp Calls.

The primary results and information were derived from seven interviewees among Indigenous leaders, academic experts, and representatives of NGOs. To ensure the inclusion of relevant interviewees to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the case from a variety of actors and perspectives, I employed the snowball method of data generation (Noy, 2008) by asking each interviewee to suggest potential interview candidates. Firstly, I identified and interviewed two members of two Bolivian NGOs: *Centro de Investigación y Promoción del Campesinado* - CIPCA (Peasant Research and Promotion Center) and *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* – CEJIS (Center for Legal Studies and Social Research) who have been working and following the TIPNIS case since 2011, they helped me to put in contact with three current local Indigenous leaders and presidents of sub-central of the TIPNIS, TIPNIS orgánico, and Secure who also accepted to be interviewed. Finally, I identified and interviewed two international academic experts who have been working on the topic for many years: one assistant professor at Colorado State University, and the other specialist in social and indigenous aspects of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

The semi-structured thematic interviews were conducted between August 1, 2023, and August 26, 2023, and lasted between 45 and 60 min; all the interviews were held online due to the geographical distance, six by Zoom and one by WhatsApp call. The interviews focused on the topics of the current situation of the II section of the road project, the current situation of the organizational and representative bodies of the TIPNIS, ways of development, territory conflicts, ethnic situation, and decolonization understanding (Appendixes). In total, 61 pages of verbatim transcribed material were produced. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and quotes were translated into English.

The interview information and data were analyzed by a deductive qualitative content analysis. For ethical research purposes, the identity of the interviewees is put into three general categorizations: *Indigenous leaders* (three presidents of the sub-centrals: TIPNIS, Organic TIPNIS, and Sécure), *local experts* (two local experts/technicians of CIPCA and

CEJIS) and *international experts* (two international academical experts of lowlands Indigenous groups in Bolivia, one from the Colorado State University and the other one from WCS). When quoting or summarizing an interviewee's response, I specify which category they belong to so that the reader can identify them. The data was analyzed using deductive qualitative content.

SECTION ONE

5. The TIPNIS, historical background

The National Institute of Statistics of Bolivia (2023) considers that the Bolivian territory has three predominant geographic zones: *Andean*, situated over 3,000 MASL. (meters above sea level), which constitutes 28% of the national territory and is located between the western and eastern mountain ranges. It is made up of the Altiplano plateau, high peaks, and the geographic zone of the Titicaca Lake. Secondly, *the Sub-Andean*, considered the intermediate region between the *Andean* and the *Plains*, covers 13% of the territory. It includes valleys and subtropical valleys, with an average altitude of 2,500 MASL. And, the *Plains*, which covers 59% of the territory, is located north of the Eastern Cordillera and includes savannahs and extensive tropical rainforests, with an average annual temperature of 22°C to 25°C.

Likewise, in popular Bolivian jargon, we can distinguish two large geographical blocks. On the one hand, the so-called *highlands*, are made up of the *Andean* and *Sub-Andean* zones, and on the other hand, the so-called *lowlands* are made up of the eastern *Plains*. However, it is important to keep in mind that the expression *lowlands*, also known as *Oriente* (east) or Bolivian *Amazon*, are very general and reductionist denominations.

In that sense, the departments of Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz, northern La Paz, and northern Cochabamba are considered part of the *Plains* region of Bolivia (Lema, 1997). Furthermore, until 30 years ago, the departments of Beni and Pando were still considered only as reservoirs of natural resources, Santa Cruz, the most extensive region, was considered as mostly “empty” space, the north of La Paz was almost unknown, and Cochabamba was identified only as a fertile land. Different state and private power groups have been developing different policies and actions of territorial occupation of the *Plains*

through different historical periods. The incorporation of these territories into the geopolitical agenda of the country resulted in the assimilation of contradicted imaginaries and labels such as “empty lands”, “underdeveloped territories”, “source of inexhaustible resources” and “future of the country's development” (Villagomez, 2021: 169).

In this first part, I summarized the historical background of the TIPNIS, the colonization and settlement projects through four periods: Precolonial, Reduction, Republic, and Contemporary. To refer to the TIPNIS prior to its legal establishment in 1965, I will use the term *Moxos Plains*. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that historically the Moxos Plains encompasses not only and exclusively the TIPNIS, but also other multi-ethnic and geographic zones.

5.1. Pre-Colonial Period

According to Guzmán (2021), interethnic, political, economic and conflict encounters between Andeans and Amazonian groups have been taking place since long before the arrival of the Spaniards in America. However, little documented information is available from that period.

The author mentions that the Inca Empire (1200 C.E. – 1535 C.E.), probably one of the most extensive civilizations in the region in terms of territorial control, marked episodes of war and conquest against some Amazonian groups, who were already considered as “savages” (Guzmán, 2021). Moreover, Amazonian ethnic groups were called “Antis” or “Chunchos”⁴ by the Incas. The Inca empire had plans to expand their territory and political control over the Sub-Andean region up to the foothills (ranging from 2,500 to 500 MASL). This region was considered important due to its strategic political border, spatial reference, and intermediate location between the Andes and the Plains. Moreover, the region's fertile lands were suitable for agriculture and the exploitation of natural resources. (Guzmán, 2021: 92-93).

⁴ “Antis” and “Chunchos” are generic and derogatory terms applied by the Incas and other “civilized” Andean groups to Amazonian ethnic groups. These terms were already used before the arrival of Europeans, denoting an air of superiority on the part of Andean civilizations over Amazonian ethnic groups (Tyuleneva, 2011:2).

Several authors suggest that the first Inca raids on the Plains territory occurred during the governance of Inca Roca, between 1350 C.E. and 1380 C.E. (Tyuleneva, 2011:2). In words of Tyuleneva (2011) Garcilaso de la Vega and Guaman Poma insulated these conquests of the Inca Roca with the implementation of larger coca leaves crops⁵ which were and still cultivated in the humid and very humid subtropical forests. Subsequently, other Inca incursions to the Plains followed, led during the reign of other Inca nobles such as Pachacutec (1400-1471) and Tupac Yupanqui (1471-1493) (Rostworowski, 1995).

The Inca's expansion efforts faced obstacles from both natural barriers and the resistance tactics employed by Amazonian groups who utilized their knowledge of the land and employed various strategies (Guzmán, 2021:97). Although, the Incas not only engaged in conquests and settlements but also practiced economic exchanges. This led to mutual relations based on diplomacy and rapprochement with Amazonian groups (Renard-Casevitz, Saignes y Taylor, 1988).

The Inca's expansion was hindered by several issues, with the most significant being the conflict between the brothers Huáscar and Atahualpa over the throne. This resulted in a civil war that divided the empire. Additionally, the Spanish army, commanded by Francisco Pizarro, arrived, leading to the fall of Cuzco in 1533 (Rostworowski, 1995). Despite these challenges, efforts to colonize, settle, and exploit natural resources in the Plains continued throughout various historical periods, driven by different actors and dynamics.

5.2. Reductional Period

The interest of the Spanish colonial administration over the Plains region, at least at the beginning, was marked by the “Paititi”⁶ or “El Dorado” myth (Tyuleneva, 2012:2). The search for the Paititi, a land of unending richness, become an obsession throughout the

⁵ Apparently was the Inca Roca the one who introduced the consumption of the coca leaves among his subjects (Tyuleneva, 2011). Historically the consumption of coca leaves has a strong cultural, medical, religious, social, economic, and symbolic meaning among most of the Andean cultures.

⁶ The term "Paititi" evokes a rich land or Inca city, full of gold and treasures, supposedly located in the southwestern Amazon, which was sought since the XVI century. Could be considered as the equivalent of El Dorado, however it is not only a colonial myth, but has some Pre-Colonial roots, because in the sources that preceded that period, the figure of the Paititi appears under the denomination of a rich natural region of a river, a lagoon, etc. (Tyuleneva, 2012).

Spanish conquerors (Ramos Perez, 1973) in that sense, many expeditions were organized to find the Paititi region, that departed from the Cusco, Cochabamba, Alto Beni, Apolobamba and the Chiquitos plains (Block, 1997: 63). These expeditions resulted in the creation of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra in 1561, a strategically located city, due to its proximity to the Plains for continuing the search of the Paititi. Hence, the expeditions from Santa Cruz de la Sierra also changed their purposes into more profitable ones since the search for the Paititi always resulted in economic losses. So, hunting, enslaving, and trading Indigenous people of the Moxos Plains became more profitable expeditions rather than still trying to fund an unknown land (Guzmán, 2021:102).

These slave practices not only were common among the Spanish population and Creole⁷ settlers, especially among those who lived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra but also slave practices had a strong impact on the transformation of the Bolivian Amazonian ethnic order and population (Gantier, 1991). According to Block "...In the second decade of the seventeenth century, the population of the Moxos Plains began to form part of the Santa Cruz labor force. A list of encomiendas of the city elaborated in 1617, registers approximately 17% of the tributaries as members of the Moxos, Tubaiono, and Umano ethnic groups" (Block, 1997:66). In the next years, the expeditions to the Moxos Plains in search of the Paititi were suspended because they did not find either a gold city or the mentioned land full of treasures (Lehm, 1998), but the search was resumed in the 17th century, this time driven by the Jesuit Missions in the region (Guzmán, 2021).

In 1549, The Society of Jesus⁸ established their first reductional mission in Brazil. They held multiple roles, including that of educators, missionaries, entrepreneurs, and advisors to the royal Spanish and Portuguese authorities. However, their actions were often controversial as they sometimes criticized the authorities while at other times supporting them (Gradie, 2011). The Society of Jesus set up approximately 30 missions in South America, which were in modern-day Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina (Guzmán, 2021).

⁷ A person of pure Spanish descent born in America.

⁸ A Roman Catholic order of priests founded in 1540 in Paris, France by the soldier Ignatius of Loyola. (Gradie, 2011). They are commonly known as Jesuits.

Around 1592, the first Jesuits arrived in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia (Parejas, 2006). Between, 1682 and 1744 were funded around twenty-six reductions, among the most important: Loreto, Trinidad, San Ignacio, San Javier, and San José. The rest were smaller reductions and worked to reduce smaller ethnic groups like the Itonamas, Baures, Cayubabas, Movimas, Canichanas, among others (Lehm, 1998: 27). The Jesuit reductions of San José de Maharenos and San Luís, will be relevant in the continuity of the sense of territorial and spiritual belonging related to the TIPNIS territory (Guzmán, 2021).

The Jesuit missions in Bolivia consisted of concentrating and reducing the Indigenous groups of the Moxos Plains and other groups from the Lowlands in concise urbanized spaces based on the organizational dynamics of European/Catholic norms of settlement (Tomichá, 2002: 154-197). Thus, they forged new hybrid physical, control, social, and religious space configurations, commonly known as *Reductions* (Radding, 2010) that influenced the spatial configuration of the Plains. However, it is well documented that for the success of this reduction process, the Jesuits used a vast of Indigenous knowledge, such as to locate the construction of the Reductions in strategic zones avoiding stational floods or other natural handicaps, as well as the indigenous expertise to recognize and select fertile lands (Block, 1980:67).

In the case of the Moxos Plain, the missionaries tried to homogenize the Indigenous population with the use of only a few dialects of the Moxeño language, which was the most spoken language in the region (Altamirano [1715] 1979, as cited in Lehm, 1998). Although dialects of the Moxeño language emerged and adopted the names of the locations of the reductions, in that sense the dialects spoken were the Trinitario, Ignaciano, Javeriano, and Loretano (Lehm, 1998).

Lehm (1998:25-27) explains that establishing Reductions in the Moxos Plains was a slow process due to various economic and territorial interests in the area. Initially, the indigenous groups feared being captured and grouped together with other ethnic groups in the Reductions. As a result, they put up strong resistance, but Spanish slavers easily captured them and sold them as labor in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. In a second stage, Lehm (1998) notes that the fear of being enslaved helped the Indigenous groups adapt to the Reductional system. They saw the Jesuit missionaries as protectors against Spanish slavers.

Additionally, the Spanish brought diseases to the region, which led to a significant population decline in the Moxos Plains and expedited the Reduction process.

According to Lehm (1998:28), each Reduction had two administrative levels: the first one of faith and liturgy, in charge of a priest, and the second one, the economic and material administration, in charge of a parson. The territorial space was also divided in two, on one hand, they maintained the familiar “Chacras”⁹. On the other hand, the Jesuits introduced the “Common” space, where sugar, rice, cotton, and cacao were mostly cultivated for its exportation to Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Peru. In addition, the introduction of cattle, horses, and mules was a key element for the survival and success of the reductions in the Moxos Plains (Block, 1980). Orellana ([1704] 1972, as cited in Lehm, 1998) mentions that the introduction of cattle ranching played a crucial role in the survival of the reductions. It proved to be an attractive and productive economic factor for the Moxeños groups as it reduced their hunting time, which was considered against the Jesuit religious doctrine.

Altamirano ([1715] 1979, as cited in Lehm, 1998) states that in 1701 the Cabildos, led by a Corregidor and other important positions such as mayor, procurator, etc., were organized between the Indigenous people of each Reduction, following the Spanish pattern already implemented in the Paraguay Missions. Moreover, in most of the Reductions these important positions were covered by an *ethnic leader or Cacique* of the Indigenous groups. The Cabildos were the local government of each mission and fulfilled the function of mediation between the Jesuits and the Indigenous people. The Cabildos organized and controlled communal and agricultural work, also they played a key role in the diffusion of Christian religious doctrines, ritualistic and festive (Lehm, 1998:31).

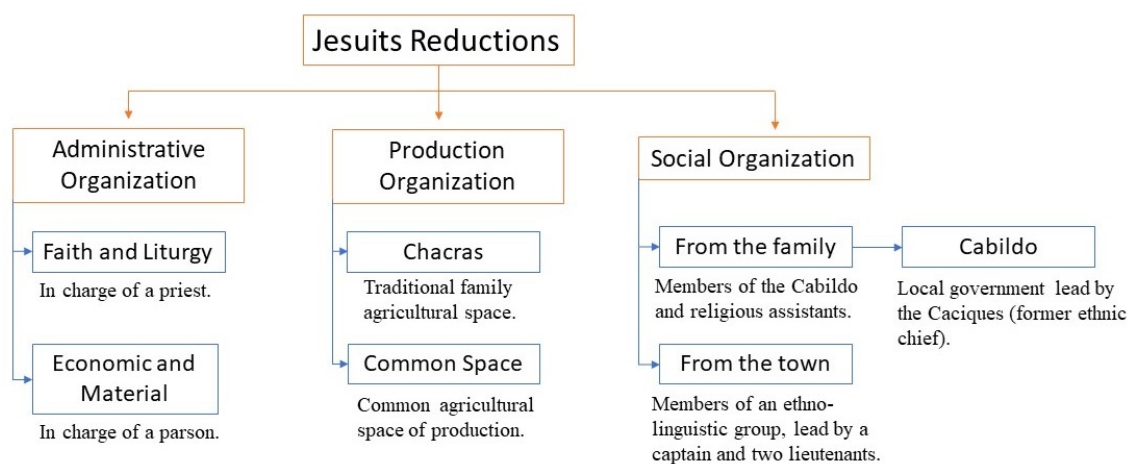
Furthermore, Lehm (1998) mentions that also arts and work practices of the Indigenous groups were adopted, mixed with Spanish ones, into formal works and social roles in the Reductions. For instance: musicians, sculptors, painters, blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, farmers, cowboys. As a result of this syncretism, the region also saw some

⁹ The “Chacras” are family agricultural spaces that function as integral systems to produce all types of agricultural products. The Chacra is a term mostly used in the Ayllus of the Andean zone (Añamuro, 2015).

cultural, ethnic, and social transformations that will be present even today in the Moxos Plains.

However, the Reductions also introduced dimensions of hierarchy in the social organization of the Indigenous population, a notion that was unknown for those groups. It existed two hierarchies, one named “from the family” which were members of the Cabildo and the religious assistants, and the other one called “from the town” where the indigenous people kept organized under ethno-linguistics criteria, it was led by a captain and one or two lieutenants (Block, 1980:109). **Table 1** presents a graphic of the organizational structure of the Jesuit's Reductions in the Moxos Plains:

Table 1: Organization of the Jesuits Reductions in the Moxos Plains



Source: Own elaboration based on data from Lehm (1998).

Lehm (1998) mentions that the Jesuit Reductions implied a notable change in the way of living and organization of the indigenous groups of the Moxos Plains. In addition, the Catholic religion became a crucial element in the everyday life of the indigenous beliefs through the celebration of Catholic rituals. Furthermore, Lehm (1998) mentions that for the evangelization of the Indigenous, the Jesuits applied “mnemotechnics” such as the constant repetition of Catholic dogmas and the use of theatrical representations. Nevertheless, in many cases, it resulted more in a syncretism process, where the Indigenous joined their own beliefs to the Catholic ones.

According to Block (1980), the Reductions created a "Misional culture" that aided the reduction process. This culture was a mix of indigenous cultural elements from the Moxos

Plains and European elements. However, Moreno (1973:47, as cited in Lehm, 1998) argues the opposite. He believes that the Reductions' success was due to the "Reduction agreement," which was an unwritten contract between the Moxeños groups and the Jesuits. The Moxeños groups agreed to be reduced by the Jesuits in exchange for goods, tools, and services. These services included protection against external Spanish hunters and slavers.

It is important to highlight that the reductional process also led to the resistance of the Indigenous groups. Eder (1985, as cited in Lehm, 1998) mentions that some Reduction centers were set on fire, some Jesuits were poisoned, but the most common act of resistance was the massive escape of the Indigenous people from those centers to the forests. Also, Block (1980) mentions that the extensive use of the limited natural resources in the region leads to confrontations even between the Indigenous groups of different reductional centers.

The Jesuits had gained considerable economic and political power because of the profits obtained by the establishment of their Reductions in America. In that sense, under the accusation of being behind the Esquilache Mutiny, Charles III, king of Spain, signed in 1767 the sanction that dictated the expulsion of the Jesuits from all the dominions of the Crown, including those overseas, and decreed the seizure of the patrimony that the order had in the empire (Cervera, 2015). Although the expulsion of the Jesuits, most of the economic, organizational, and social structures of the Reductions would remain until the half of the XIX century (D'Orbigny, 1958) but some of the imaginaries and narratives products of the Reductions are even present today in the social and millennial movements of the indigenous groups of the Moxos Plains (Lehm, 1998).

After the Jesuits were expelled in 1767, civil Spanish administrators replaced them in the Reductions and established new economic and administrative institutions. The new Spanish administrators tried to rebuild the Reductions through secularization and closer commercialization to the Crown in Spain (Block, 1980). Lehm (1998) also refers to the works of Moreno (1973) and Chávez (1986) who mention that the new civil colonial administration tried to integrate the Reductions by opening them to the regional market based on direct trade, so it was proposed the subjection of the Moxos to the Indias' General Laws.

The management of material goods and economy in the Moxos Plains' Reductions also passed to Spanish civilians. As a result, in 1772, the Council appointed a governor for the Reductions, who was answerable to the governor of Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Block, 1980). However, priests continued to manage the religious administration (Lehm, 1998). As Block details: "The Bishops of Santa Cruz would appoint the priests and, although their power would vary over time, they lived and worked in the Reductions until the end of the colony" (Block, 1980:183). Nevertheless, in some cases, some Caciques requested the new civil Spanish administrators to subject themselves to the indigenous tribute, because it allowed them to have more time for ritual and festive activities, as opposed to the long working days in the Reductions (Lehm, 1998).

Following the expulsion of the Jesuit missionaries from the Reductions, and the following administration by the new Spanish civilians, which lasted until the beginning of the 19th century, the projects of settlement and colonization continued impulse by the new Creole elites of the newly born Bolivian state.

5.3. Republican Period

According to Lehm (1998), Carvalho (1975) and Roca (1991) stated that the Independence Wars in Bolivia and the transition to the Republican period did not lead to significant changes in the administrative and social setup of the Reductions in the Moxos Plains. As a result, there were two uprisings by Moxeños in the area in 1810 and 1811. It is still unclear whether these uprisings were in support of the independence movement or were a genuine attempt at achieving autonomy for the Reductions.

After the Independence Wars, Bolivia faced an uncertain economic situation due to two decades of armed conflict against the Spanish crown. As a result, the national elites and rulers focused on promoting strong, fast, and aggressive national plans for development and natural resources exploitation in the Lowlands (Guzmán, 2021). Additionally, García Jordán (2001:268) argues that in the political Republican Bolivian discourse, colonization and immigration have been understood as the same, so the process of settlement and exploitation of peripheral regions were not controlled by the State.

In addition, the new regional elites believed that it was crucial to establish clear internal borders and privatize Indigenous territories for the construction of the “New State Nation” (Guzmán, 2021). Simon Bolívar (1825) and José de Sucre (1826), the first two presidents of the Republic, already have expressed their concern for colonizing the Plains, but Andrés de Santa Cruz’s government (1829-1839) gave it a legal body through the approval of the first laws of *adjudication of vacant lands* and colonization in some zones, such as the construction of the road from Cochabamba to Moxos and the borders of Tarija. The adjudication of vacant lands authorized the government to “distribute free of charge all the uncultivated lands that the Republic possesses” (García Jordán, 2001: 270).

During, José Ballivián’s government in 1842, it was created the Department of Beni, the former president not only sent State commissions to explore the territory but also he promoted the construction of roads and the development of the first geographic map of Bolivia (García Jordán, 2001). In that sense, the enactment of the Law of November 13, 1844, authorized the executive branch to *protect colonization in the territory*, as well as navigation and communication with the Atlantic through the Amazon and La Plata rivers (Guzmán, 2021:106). One year before, the State contracted the services of a Belgian Colonization Company with the purpose of stimulate the foreign colonization and cap the attention of international migrants, preferably European. However, the Company withdrew from this contract due to financial differences with the Bolivian Republic Congress (Guzmán, 2021:108).

The colonization and settlement of the Plains was a continuous project, supported by populist presidents like Manuel Isidoro Belzu in 1853. Belzu pursued the project through two incentives: granting land concessions and declaring international waters free for navigation in the region (Guzmán, 2021:107). The situation worsened in 1850, when the demand for leather increased due to the massive production of Brazilian industries. These industries captured indigenous people from the Reductions, forcing them to work in the industry. Some indigenous groups revolted against their captors, while others dispersed in the forest and moved away from the Reductions centers (Lehm, 1998).

Between 1870 and 1910, there was a significant economic event known as the Rubber Boom. This event involved the extraction and commercialization of rubber in the Amazon area, driven by the high international demand for this resource. However, the Rubber

Boom had a controversial impact on the development of the Amazon region. It attracted foreign entrepreneurs who privatized and established settlements, but this also led to practices such as slavery, forced labor, and physical violence towards indigenous populations. As a result, the indigenous population dramatically decreased during this time (Fifer, 1970; Lehm, 1998; Guzmán, 2021).

It is essential to note that Bolivia lacked precise border demarcations, so Fifer (1970:116-117) stated that the Rubber Boom was concentrated in the lower parts of the Mamoré and Itenez rivers, located in the northern and northeastern fringes of the Bolivian forests. Furthermore, during this second economic process, the “Siringueros”¹⁰ emerged as groups of workers and collectors, mainly consisting of indigenous people from various ethnic groups in the region, including the Moxeños from the Moxos Plain (Lehm, 1998).

As stated by Lehm (1998:44) the Rubber Boom generated a rupture of the *reductional pact* between the Indigenous people and the administrators of the Reductions, which translated into the articulation of a social movement based on a millenarian ideology pre-existing to this economic period. In that sense, Indigenous people escapes to the forest became millenarian migrations to their old territories. These millenarist movements were called the search for the *Loma Santa*, which is understood as a process of mobilization and reoccupation of the spaces inhabited and occupied by the Moxeños before the colony (Lehm, 1998).

5.4. Contemporary Period

The *Rubber Boom* not only attracted indigenous workers from the ex-reductions into areas of exploitation in the North of Beni, but also white and mestizo populations increased in those areas who began to settle and implemented agro-livestock establishments for the supply of sugar, alcohol, hides, and meat to the rubber barracks in the north of Bolivia (Lehm, 1998). As a result, the Bolivian government decided to overturn traditional land access and ownership systems, especially in the North Amazon, violating the collective

¹⁰ Denomination took it from the name of the tree from which the rubber is extracted: *Seringueira* (*Hevea brasiliensis*) (Fifer, 1970).

rights of indigenous people to the territory and transferring them to private actors and investors (Guzmán, 2021).

Due to the fall of the international prices of rubber, the white and mestizo population settled in the northern part of the Plains towards the Moxos Plains, located in the central and southern area of Beni, which would lay the foundations for the emergence of livestock production (Lehm, 1998). During the decade of 1940, the demand for beef from the emerging urban centers, especially miner centers in the Andean region such as Potosi, Oruro, and La Paz, put in evidence the importance of the natural resources of the Plains and the consolidation of private properties over those lands (Lehm, 1998) but also some sectors began to claim the construction of roads for the unification of the west and east.

In the following years and due to the implementation of the Agrarian and Education Reform in 1953, both consequences of the Revolution of 1952¹¹, benefited and legally consolidated the titling of land to cattle ranchers, which resulted in the expulsion and relocation (once more) of Indigenous populations to forested areas (Lehm, 1998). Furthermore, the Agrarian Reform promoted the so-called "*March to the East*" to increase population growth, settlement, development, and exploitation of natural resources in the east of Bolivia (Jemio-Ergueta, 1973). Moreover, the Education Reform, also product of the Revolution of 1952, reshaped the ethno-linguistic configuration in the Plains through the forced implementation of the Spanish language in rural schools, as a result the decreasing of the native language (Lehm, 1998).

One of the main issues in the TIPNIS has been the colonization and settlement of coca peasants and *interculturals* in the area during the end of the XX century. According to Beneria (2002), the current problems of fragmentation and settlement of the territory began in the mid-1960s, due to the crisis of the mining sector in the highlands and the dismissal of miners in the Andean region. Thus, in 1970 a road was built to a Yuracare settlement within the TIPNIS, consequently the road increased the colonization in the region. But, according to the author, it is from 1978, during the period of the drug trafficking boom in the dictatorship of García Meza, that the colonization processes

¹¹ It was a civil war and political demonstrations led by the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), in alliance with peasants, miners, liberals, communists' parties and other sectors, for overthrow the Bolivian miner oligarchy and implemented a new socioeconomic model (Mansilla, 1980).

accelerated due to the cultivation of coca leaves. During Victor Paz Estenssoro's government in 1985, a phenomenon called "Relocation" took place. This involved the closure of numerous mines in the Andean region due to Supreme Decree 21060, leading to a significant migration towards agricultural expansion areas like Chapare. This province is part of the TIPNIS and was heavily populated because of this migration (Beneria, 2002).

Over the next few decades, various development projects will be carried out at TIPNIS. However, indigenous groups will also begin to fight for the recognition and protection of their territory and rights, where the First March of the indigenous peoples of the Lowlands in 1990, named: For Territory and Dignity, will be the first and significant step towards a long historical and political trajectory of struggle that it will be reinforce during the next three decades.

6. The Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS)

The TIPNIS is an indigenous and natural reserve, located between the south of the department of Beni, in San Ignacio de Moxos and Loreto towns, and the north of the department of Cochabamba, in Villa Tunari and Morochata towns; two departments that have been facing historical territorial boundary problems between each other (SERNAP, 2011). The TIPNIS not only has the category of a multi-ethnic territory but also it has the category of protected area because is one of the most important natural reservoirs in Bolivia (Movimiento Regional por la Tierra, 2016).

In the first instance, the park was created under the label of Isiboro Sécure National Park, under the Supreme Decree 07401/65 of November 22, 1965, which aimed to protect the area, the hydrographic basins, the headwaters of the rivers, and the Indigenous peoples that inhabit the area (Tamburini, 2019). Furthermore, Resolution No. 012/90 of April 27, 1990, issued by the Forestry Development Center - Northern Region, under the former Ministry of Rural and Agricultural Affairs of Bolivia, declares the TIPNIS also as an Indigenous area. Subsequently, the Supreme Decree No. 22610 of September 24, 1990, recognized the Isiboro Sécure National Park as an Indigenous Territory too (Beneria,

2002). However, these administrative spaces were created on top of a pre-existing Indigenous territory, the Moxos Plains.

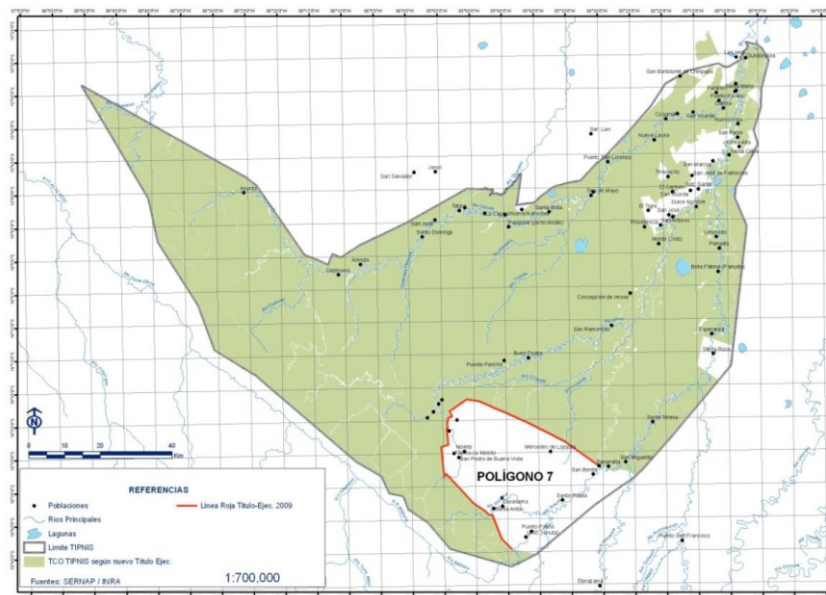
According to the SERNAP (2011) the administrative resolution of what was then the *Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria* – INRA (National Agrarian Reform Institute) issued the TCO-NAL-000002 title on April 25, 1997, granting the extension of the *Tierra Comunitaria de Origen* – TCO (Community territory of origin) as a provisional endowment to the TIPNIS sub-central area. Subsequently, in 1997, the TCO was legally consolidated as a collective property of the Indigenous communities within the area. In this sense, the TIPNIS Sub-Central of Councils, an organization representing the groups within the park, took over the management of this space. Nonetheless, since its origins, the TCO protected area was subjected to diverse pressures, such as the recognition of property rights for cattle ranches, marginal peasant communities, such as the Santa Rosa del Isiboro community, and the expansion and recognition of intercultural colonized zones (SERNAP, 2011). However, during this time no plan was developed for TIPNIS regarding the conservation of its natural resources.

From 1990 to 1997, Indigenous organizations were consolidated through the TIPNIS magistrates' meeting. These efforts led to significant progress in terms of planning instruments and program implementation due to co-administration between the TIPNIS Subcentral and *Centro de Investigación y Documentación para el Desarrollo del Beni* - CIDDEBENI (Research and Documentation Center for the Development of Beni) (Beneria, 2002). Additionally, the author notes that the red line was established and consolidated during this time in the Polygon 7. This agreement, made between the governments of Beni and Cochabamba and Indigenous Peoples and Colonists, established a border limit for intercultural and colonizers in the southern territory. The training of a team of park rangers and control and surveillance programs were also implemented (Beneria, 2002).

Thus, due to land titling and existing pressures, the TCO TIPNIS was delimited with an extension of 1,091,656 hectares, according to executory title TCO-NAL 000229 in June 2009, as we can see in **Map 1**. Although, the TIPNIS is surrounded by other Original Community Territories (TCOs) such as the Yuracaré-Yuqui TCO, the Ayopaya TCO, the

Moseten TCO, the Tsiman Indigenous Territory and the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory (TIM) (SERNAP, 2011).

MAP 1. TCO TIPNIS

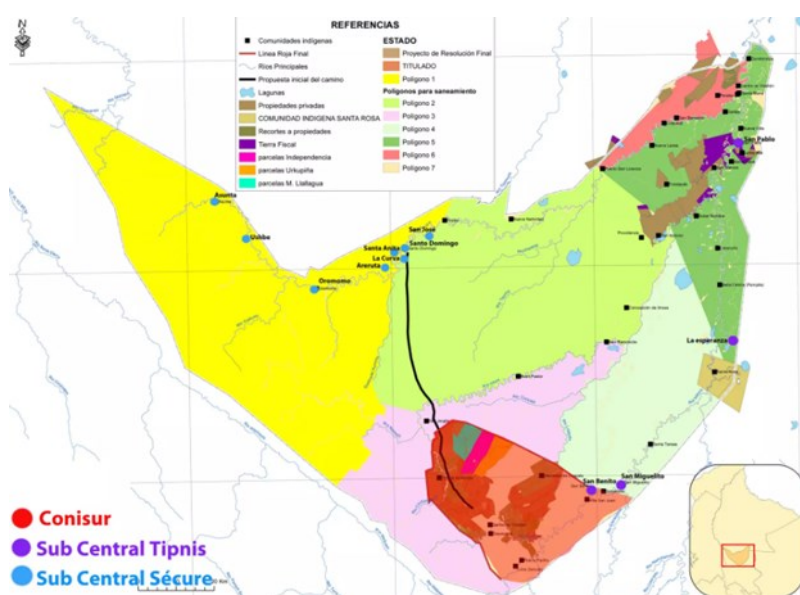


Source: SERNAP, 2011.

Currently, the organizational and representative bodies of the TIPNIS is made up of three organizations called sub-centrals which are distributed throughout the territory, as can be seen in **Map 2**. The *TIPNIS Subcentral* represents the entire area; the *Consejo Indígena del Sur - CONISUR* (Southern Indigenous Council) supported by most of the intercultural communities in the south of the territory but also some Yurakares communities; and the *Secure Subcentral* which represents all communities along the Secure River (Silva, 2002).

Each subcentral is led by a president who must be elected by the majority of the vote of the communities who belong to each subcentral during the Meeting of Corregidores, which is the main annual decision-making meeting in the TIPNIS. The sub-central president position is a social service for the community, so they do not have a salary (Beneria, 2002).

MAP 2. ORGANIZATIONAL DIVISION IN THE TIPNIS



Source: SERNAP, 2011

Moreover, the TIPNIS can be subdivided into five sub-regions: the upper secure; the central area of the Secure; the confluence of the Secure and Isiboro rivers; the southern area; and the central area. The definition of these sub-regions is based on ethnic, cultural, ecological, socioeconomic characteristics and environmental conditions that exist within the TIPNIS (Silva, 2002).

As I mentioned previously, the TIPNIS is a multiethnic space where several indigenous groups coexist. The most predominant groups are the Moxeño-Trinitario, Yurakares and Tsimanes. Also, the territory is inhabited by other non-indigenous group such as cattle ranchers, coca peasants, interculturals, and settlers. In the next section, the characteristics of these groups are detailed.

6.1. **Moxeños - Trinitarios**

According to the 2012 Census data, the Moxeños - also known as Mojeños, Mojos, or Moxos - have a population of 31,078 people in Bolivia. They are among the largest ethnic groups in the Bolivian Amazon region (Díez, 2018). In the Moxos Plains, records dating back to the pre-colonial period have been discovered hillocks, embankments, canals, and camellones forming a complex hydraulic system which means the advanced knowledge

of the Moxeños regarding the irrigation control (Rose, 2015). Therefore, based on archaeological evidence and the accounts of early chroniclers, it is believed that the Moxeño population was highly significant prior to the 17th century. It is estimated that they had a population of approximately 350,000 people and possessed advanced knowledge in constructing large urban centers (Lema, 1997).

The Moxeños are made up of diverse ethnic groups, with the same linguistic roots, the Arawac, but constitute 4 variants or dialects¹² that survived through time: Moxeño Trinitario, Moxeño Ignaciano, Moxeño Javeriano, and Moxeño Loretano. The Moxeño-Trinitario dialect is the one used by the Moxeños who inhabit the TIPNIS (Rose, 2015). Due to the accelerated loss of their dialect, the current Moxeño groups respond to a consensual acculturation scheme as a survival strategy (Díez, 2018).

The Moxeño culture is traditionally based in central and southern Beni, but their geographical space extends to the municipalities of Trinidad, San Javier, and San Pedro (Lehm, 1998). More specifically, in the TIPNIS, the Moxeño-Trinitario communities are settled along the Isiboro rivers: Sasama, Sécure, Ichoa, Chumimita, Chajmota, Plantota, Tayota, Lojojota together with the Yuracarés (Díez, 2018). As a product of strong floods during the decade of 1970, the migration process has been increasing to urban areas like Trinidad and Santa Cruz, especially women migration who search for work as housecleaning (Lema, 1997).

The extended family is the traditional way of organization, in that sense the communities are conformed between 30 and 50 domestic units, and there is a tendency to constitute nuclear families where the traditional patron is patrilocal (Lema, 1997). The *Cabildo* is the way of political and religious representation organization among the Moxos-Trinitarios, which stood since the end of the XIX century, each *Cabildo* is led by a *Corregidor* and other charges that follow a hierarchy structure (Lema, 1997).

There are two types of organizational structures in the Moxos community. The traditional structure still exists, while a more modern one allows them to communicate with the State. Since 1987, the Moxeños have organized themselves into sub-regions, with the "Meeting

¹² Dialects which correspond to the Jesuit missions built at the end of the 17th century, whose linguistic policy aimed to reduce the linguistic variety to a few general languages (Saito, 2009).

of Corregidores" serving as the highest governing body in each sub-region. The Corregidores choose an executive body called the Subcentral. The Subcentral of Cabildos, along with representatives of TIPNIS, the Indigenous Subcentral of San Ignacio de Moxos, the Indigenous Subcentral of San Lorenzo de Moxos, and the Indigenous Subcentral of San Francisco de Moxos, form the representation bodies of the Moxos. These Sub-centrals are part of the Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Beni - CPIB (Central of Indigenous People of Beni), which is part of the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano - CIDOB (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the Bolivian East) (Lema, 1997).

When it comes to medical services and education, the Moxeño people tend to go to Trinidad and San Ignacio, which are central urban areas. While most Moxeño communities have schools, they typically only cover the basics. As a result, community members often need to travel to these cities to complete high school (Lema, 1997). In terms of transportation, the primary means of moving goods and people is by navigating rivers. During the dry season, there are few roads available for travel (Díez, 2018).

According to the SERNAP (2011) report, the Moxeños-Trinitarios residing in TIPNIS primarily rely on agriculture and livestock for their livelihood. Additionally, they supplement their income through hunting, fishing, and gathering. They maintain a strong connection with the market, particularly with cattle ranchers and traders. This connection includes exchanging goods and services, as well as selling their labor on cattle ranches. In comparison to the Tsimanes and Yurakares, the Moxeños enjoy better economic and political conditions.

The Moxeño communities rely on farming, with work being done on a small scale by individual families. Each household owns a Chaco, which is typically no larger than one hectare of land, or occasionally two (Lema, 1997). The current local produce includes rice, corn, yucca, plantain, sugar cane, beans, pumpkin, sweet potato, citrus, coffee, cocoa, and tobacco. In some cases, the higher-producing sites may partially sell these products commercially, or barter them for foreign goods such as matches, kerosene, sugar, used clothing, tools, bullets, and alcohol from traders in nearby cities or rivers (Díez, 2018).

The Moxeños community has a Catholic religious background due to their historical reduction. For them, the TIPNIS area includes the "Loma Santa," which serves as a refuge when the Moxeño plains are flooded. Therefore, defending this territory holds significant religious and mythical importance for them (SERNAP, 2011).

6.2. Yurakarés

According to the 2012 Census data, there are 3,394 people registered as Yurakarés in Bolivia. This ethnic group is predominantly located within the TIPNIS and comprises scattered communities across two large areas in the provinces of Chapare and Carrasco (SERNAP, 2011). The Yurakarés inhabit the TCO Yuracaré along the Chapare and Ichilo rivers in the Chapare province, as well as the TIPNIS, which stretches between the Isiboro and Sécore rivers and extends towards the confluence of the Isiboro and Mamoré rivers (Van Gijn, 2006). The Yurakaré language is considered an isolated language, as it has no relation to any other language (Van Gijn, 2006).

In the last years, due to the continuous flow of settlers and drug traffickers in the tropical zones of the Carrasco and Chapare provinces, many Yurakarés have moved away from those areas to the north and the lowlands of the Moxos province in the north of the Sécore river, as well as into the forest of Tsimanes (Ribera and König, 1991: 11). They not only accepted interethnic relations with the Moxeños and the Tsimanes, but also with settlers and coca peasants especially in the south of TIPNIS (Díez, 2018).

In the TIPNIS they are represented mainly by the Sécore Subcentral. However, the only level that represents the entire people is the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano* – CIDOB (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the Bolivian East). (Van Gijn, 2009).

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, there is little known about the Yurakarés (Van Gijn, 2006). The first mention of the Yurakarés dates back to 1548 when they were noted as allies of the Chiriguano in their fight against the Spanish (Ribera and König, 1991). Despite the Jesuits' attempts to reduce them, the Yurakarés resisted. However, after the Jesuits' expulsion from the area in 1767, the Franciscan order took on a leading role in the region in 1768, with the goal of converting and reducing the Yurakarés living on the Sécore, Chapare, and Ichilo rivers (Paredes, 1997).

The last attempt to convert the Yurakarés was by the North American missionary organization, Evangelical New Tribes Mission (ENTM), which entered not only in the Chapare area in the 1950s but also the TIPNIS (Van Gijn, 2006). The ENTM evangelists have strongly influenced the religious beliefs of the Yurakars, which has meant a gradual loss of their cultural customs (Paredes, 1997).

Regarding education, during the 1990s, primary schools were established in the communities (Van Gijn, 2009). However, these schools are often not affordable for the majority of the Yurakaré, because the school programs are taught in Spanish, Trinitario, Quechua, and Tsimane language, so many children drop out of school after completing the basic cycle (Van Gijn, 2009).

The social structure of this group is centered around kinship ties, both through blood relations and alliances, with the nuclear family serving as the primary unit. Settlements are typically made up of multiple families functioning as a single economic and production entity that can adapt to economic, ecological, and social changes (Paredes, 1997). The expansion of kinship networks is the main way in which different settlements relate to one another. Settlements are usually semi-permanent and can have patrilocal, matrilineal or neolocal forms of residence. While families share the same locality and residence, they value their independence and avoid any unequal or asymmetrical contact resulting from the colonization by collas (Díez, 2018).

The resources that they use are diverse in terms of fauna, flora, water, and land suitable for agriculture. However, the economic activities of the Yurakaré are diversifying because of their increasing sedentarization as farmers (Díez, 2018). Small-scale agriculture dominates their economy, with each family cultivating their own Chaco. They typically grow crops that have a fast cycle and are suited for the subtropical climate, such as rice, yucca, corn, and plantain. Hunting and fishing are mainly male activities and play an important role in their subsistence. Meanwhile, young family members may earn money by temporarily selling their labor force in the city or a ranch (Van Gijn, 2009).

Furthermore, the Yurakaré people living in the Chapare area, in the south of the TIPNIS, have not only undergone major cultural changes due to the strong presence of colonizers and coca peasants, but also their gathering and hunting patterns have been affected,

leading these communities to practice more extensive agriculture, more intense livestock activity, and an economy more closely linked to the market (SERNAP, 2011).

6.3. Tsimanes

The Tsimane' also known as Tsimane, Chiman, Chimanes, or Tchimanés, according to the 2012 Census data, the population registered in Bolivia is 6.464 people. Most of the communities of this ethnic group are in Beni territory, on the periphery of the Tsimane forest. The Tsimane language is not classified in any of the linguistic families of the country, together with the Moseten language it forms an isolated linguistic group (Díez, 2018).

The Tsimane people were not converted by any religious group. Only in 1953 did the Catholic Fatima mission and the North American New Tribes Mission establish indigenous schools called "Horeb" that continued for many years (Diez, 2018). However, the Tsimane's spiritual beliefs and practices were largely unaffected by these missions, and they still follow a shamanic tradition. Their deities are structured based on extended kinship relationships and have certain hierarchical symbolic roles, such as lords of the hills, animal owners, and the spirits of the deceased (Pérez, 1983).

The Tsimanes reject foreign schools, not only because they fear forgetting their ancestral beliefs but also because they are not interested in maintaining inter-ethnic relations. While they do receive friendly groups in their territory, they usually do not visit other groups due to past negative experiences in relations, particularly with non-indigenous people who have exploited and deceived them (Alvarado, 1997).

One of the most important characteristics of the Tsimanes is that they have been classified as an *itinerant people with seasonal settlements* because they are constantly on move and have a dispersed and temporary occupation of the different areas of the territory. (Alvarado, 1997; SERNAP, 2011). Moreover, Tsimanes peaceful and non-confrontational nature, as well as their very flexible organizational structure makes the Tsimanes very vulnerable to other social actors and other ethnic groups, even within the TIPNIS itself (Izurieta – CIPCA, personal communication, August 2023; SERNAP, 2011).

In that sense, the Tsimane displaced in three legally recognized indigenous territories: The Tsiman or Chimán Indigenous Territory (TICH, D.S. 22611), with a surface of 401,322.8054 hectares; the Pilon Lajas Indigenous Territory and Biosphere Reserve (DS 23110), with an area of 369,264.4362 hectares, shared with the Mosetenes; the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory (TIM, D.S. 22611), which has 343,262.4479 hectares, shared with the Moxeños, Yuracarés, and Movimas; and few Tsimanes communities in the northwestern of the TIPNIS (D.S. 22610).

Because of the constant displacement of the Tsimanes through different geographic zones, it is not possible to establish one general economic and subsistence dynamic. However, all the Tsimanes communities practice a “*circular use of land and resources*” (Izurieta – CIPCA, personal communication, August 2023). For instance, the Tsimanes of the Beni Biological Station Biosphere Reserve manage their natural resources according to a yearly cycle that is divided into three phases. These phases are: 1) the cold season (surazos), when hunting and fishing are the main activities; 2) the dry season, also focused on hunting and fishing; and 3) the rainy season, when the Tsimanes harvest specific crops, fish, and do some hunting (to a lesser extent) (Díez, 1988).

The Tsimanes people rely on hunting, fishing, and gathering to sustain themselves and uphold their cultural practices throughout the year (Luz, 2012). While hunting is primarily a male activity, women may also join in on the hunt. If the hunt lasts for only one day, the man will go alone, but if it is an extended hunt, he will be accompanied by relatives and siblings. The Tsimanes use a variety of tracking techniques, such as imitating animal sounds and whistles, as well as traditional methods like bow and arrow and setting traps. While very few groups have started using firearms for hunting purposes, this is not yet widely adopted (Díez, 2018).

Alvarado (1997) found that only a few families cultivate a variety of crops for their own consumption. These crops include a) fruit trees like citrus, mangoes, cocoa, sugar cane, pineapple, papaya, joco and watermelon; medicinal plants like tobacco, cedron straw, lemon balm, and others; plants for textile and other uses such as cotton, chuchío, palm, chonta, urucú, tutumo and mate. b) The Chaco, which is a significant agricultural production region that grows rice, corn, yucca, plantain, banana, sugar cane, onion, tomato, and avocado. c) Domestic animal husbandry for recreational purposes and pets

such as dogs (for hunting), pigs, chickens, ducks, monkeys, parrots, maticos, and thrushes. Moreover, other economic activities such as labor sales in other communities and cities have been carried out over the years.

The basic social organization is the nuclear family, which maintains extended kinship ties with other nuclear families. Marriage has only become monogamous in recent decades due to economic reasons, but polygamous sororal marriage has not disappeared. Marriage takes place as soon as puberty is reached; the first residence is in the house of the woman's mother, and then in the house of the woman's mother (Alvarado, 1997).

The Tsimane society did not have a hierarchical structure in the past, so there was no chiefdom or Cacicazgo. The eldest man in a family was also the political leader, known as Konsasiki or councilor. Their responsibilities included overseeing social relations, offering advice, and their input was not always followed by the group (Alvarado, 1997). However, the constant invasion of their lands by loggers and settlers forced the Tsimane' to develop new forms of organization. In 1989, they elected an ethnic political authority, and this led to the emergence of new organizational structures in Horeb schools. The support of the Misión Nuevas Tribes and the influence of organizations like CPIB and CIDOB also contributed to these changes (Alvarado, 1997).

The Gran Consejo Tsimane (Tsimane' Great Council) serves as the primary governing body for all Tsimane communities. Led by the great chief and his magistrates, one representative from each community, the council also includes other officials in lower-ranking positions. The Gran Consejo Tsimane is responsible for safeguarding all Tsimane communities across the country, irrespective of their location in the TIM, TICH, TIPNIS, or other regions (Alvarado, 1997; Díez, 2018).

6.4. Settlers, interculturals, and cattle ranchers

According to SERNAP (2011) the presence of Andean settlers and coca growers in the southern zone of the TIPNIS dates to Inca times. As described in previous chapters, the area was an entry point for the search for natural resources and fertile land for cultivation. These colonization processes, especially in the Chapare area, adjacent to the southern part of the TIPNIS, began to manifest themselves with great force starting in the 1960s. In

addition, the construction of a road in the 1970s in this area up to the Yuracaré de Moletto settlement within the TIPNIS facilitated the increase in colonization. As was mentioned before, the massive production and boom in coca production between 1980-1987 turned the Chapare region into Bolivia's largest coca-producing area. In addition, the large-scale mining crisis and the relocation associated with mineral prices increased migrant settlements in the Isiboro sub-basin, especially in the foothills (Paz, 1991).

The space occupied by the settler population within the protected area is delimited by a red line, as we can see in **Map 2**, that has been restored and moved several times in the last 30 years, which covers approximately 92,000 hectares of territory (around 7% of the TIPNIS). They practice and generate less sustainable practices and greater ecological impact in the TIPNIS (SERNAP, 2011). Each one of these families owns an average of 16 hectares, with monoculture systems and intensive use of the forest that are not usually by the regeneration capacities of the ecosystem. The intensive use of resources such as wood and livestock has begun to transform the forest (SERNAP, 2011).

These settler population are commonly named “Interculturals”. According to Mamani (2021), “Interculturals” are a product of the colonization programs of the 1960s and 1970s in the lowlands, mostly of Quechua and Aymara origin. Their settlement process was based on the foundation of new communities, which caused some to return to their communities of origin. Of the ones who stayed, some died of tropical diseases, and the majority settled in an abandoned territory by the State. The author points out that the Interculturals are related to the MAS government since the political party foundation because Evo Morales is an intercultural peasant. The vote of this sector has been decisive for the empowerment of MAS in all the national elections and has sustained the definitive orientation of the land policy with the alliance between the national government and the agricultural groups of Santa Cruz.

Mamani (2021) mentions that the emergence of Interculturals as a political subject arises from a functional adaptation to agrarian capitalism characterized by the overexploitation of natural resources. Thus, in their colonization zones, there is a transition from subsistence agriculture to an accumulation model characterized by market-oriented monocultures (Mamani, 2021). Although they carry a historical agenda of peasant emancipation, in practice they are consolidating agrarian capitalist practices, gradually

abandoning citrus and fruit production to become cattle ranchers, soybean farmers, and mostly coca producers (Mamani, 2021).

The *Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales de Bolivia* – CSCIB (Confederation of Intercultural Communities of Bolivia), founded on February 18, 1971, is the largest confederation of the Interculturals that brings together most of its affiliated organizations, which managed to title nearly 25 million hectares for the 2.5 million intercultural people organized in 24 federations at the national level (Mamani, 2021). In recent years, they have gained direct and indirect control of state institutions such as the Ministry of Rural Development and Lands, which has been counterproductive for lowland indigenous groups who have been gradually losing their territory such as in the TIPNIS.

The presence of the Creole Benian population settled in 25 cattle ranches, covering around 32,000 hectares, are the minority population in the TIPNIS. These cattle ranches are located at the confluence of the Isiboro and Sécure rivers, in the North of the territory. These ranchers have occupied and accessed these lands during the decade of the 70s, and usually reside in local or regional urban centers of Beni, usually using the indigenous labor force of the TIPNIS during certain periods (SERNAP, 2011).

The **Map 3** shows the territorial distribution of four different groups inhabiting the TIPNIS region. The light blue lines designate the historical territories of the Yurakares, while the vertical orange lines indicate the area of colonist influence. The green pigmented spots correspond to the zone where cattle farming has a significant impact. The orange lines and rectangles highlight the Tsimane occupation area. The yellow zone represents the shared territory of Moxeños-Trinitarios and Yurakares, and finally, the pink-colored zone denotes the area where Moxeña-Trinitaria people reside.

SECTION TWO

From 1990 to 2013, there were massive mobilizations from the Indigenous groups of lowlands demanding that governments consider their territorial demands, respect norms, comply with commitments, and avoid giving their territories to foreign groups.

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According to Albó (2021) the I March of 1990, during the government of Jaime Paz Zamora, called *Por el territorio y la dignidad* (For Territory and Dignity), was led by Ernesto Noe, president of the CPIB; Marcial Fabricano, president of the TIPNIS Subcentral, Antonio Coseruna, president of the San Ignacio de Moxos Subcentral; and Tomás Ticuazu, leader of the Sirionó people. Along with them were around 300 indigenous people from the Moxeño, Sirionó, Yuracaré, and Tsimane peoples, who departed from the city of Trinidad to the city of La Paz.

Albó (2021) also mentions that the I March revealed to Bolivian society the existence of many other ethnic groups and cultures in the Bolivian plains and Amazon region. Moreover, it put into the national debate new understandings of the notion of territory. Thus, the I March achieved official recognition for the first four indigenous territories: Sirionó, multi-ethnic TIM, the Tsimane forest (later called TICH), and the TIPNIS (Albó, 2021). Nevertheless, the I March meant the beginning of a long and continuing work for recovery and recognition of their territories (Lehm, 1998).

The author argues that the II March, in 1996, during the first government of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (1993-1997), it complemented the demands of the I March because the Law of the INRA was under discussion, and in its drafts, the TCO was mentioned as a new form of agrarian property. In this way, the II March established the objective of consolidating in the Law their right to the TCOs and their land titles. The INRA Law was finally approved in October 1996 and incorporated other legal provisions so that community properties could be transformed into TCOs, also opening new horizons for the native-peasant peoples of the highlands to settle in the lowlands (Albó, 2021).

The III March, in the year 2000, was defined as "Indigenous, peasant and colonizers" march, which focused more on the problems of the North Amazon of Bolivia, seeking that the minimum unit of titling was 500 hectares in that area (Albó, 2021).

The IV March, in May and June 2002, became one of the most significant, because its central demand was a Constituent Assembly (Albó, 2021). This demand would materialize years later, because urgent changes and modifications to the Political Constitution of the State were mentioned, once again the peoples and ethnic groups of the lowlands promoted significant structural changes (Albó, 2021).

According to Albo (2021) the next three marches, during the first years of the government of Evo Morales and the *Movimiento Al Socialismo* – MAS (Movement towards Socialism), had a very different character because several of these indigenous peoples of eastern Bolivia felt part of the MAS government. As the author mentions, the V March, at the end of 2006, was to support the Law of Community Reconduct of the Agrarian Reform, which would be approved sometime later. The VI March, held in July 2007, but with the peculiarity of being directed to Sucre, and not to La Paz, as a measure to support indigenous groups in the Constituent Assembly, resisted by the opponents of the so-called Media Luna¹³. On the contrary, the VII March, held in June 2010, began to criticize the government policies, the VII March look to ensure the Autonomy Framework Law and other legal instruments for the indigenous peoples of the Lowlands.

7.1. The Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos Road Project

In 2005, Bolivia elected its first indigenous president, Evo Morales. This election brought many significant changes in terms of economic, political, social, and cultural agenda. One of the most outstanding points was that the former president Morales committed himself to watch over and protect the interests and rights of both indigenous groups and Mother Earth.

One year later of his first term, Morales government launched the national plan of development *Bolivia Digna, Soberana, Productiva, y Democrática para el Vivir Bien 2006-2010* (Dignified, Sovereign, Productive, and Democratic Bolivia for Living Well 2006-2010). In 2009, a new Political Constitution of the State was promulgated, which established the country as a Plurinational State with recognition of the 36 indigenous groups, and substantial changes in the autonomy's legislation and territorial organization and recognition of rights.

Both the National Plan and the Constitution were embodied in a government program that was focused on three phases: 1) political, social, and economic reorder; 2) redistribution of wealth; and 3) the start of selective industrialization. In that sense, the third one tried to start the industrialization process of hydrocarbons and lithium, and the development of

¹³ A regional and political group opposition to MAS and Evo Morales, constituted by the cities of the east of Bolivia: Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz and Tarija.

the country's road network, especially in the construction of strategic routes between capital cities and intermediate cities.

Therefore, the *Administradora Boliviana de Carreteras* - ABC, (Bolivian Highway Administration), through the international call for proposals No. 001/2008, invited companies to submit proposals for the construction of the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos highway on Route F-24, where the proposing company should suggest the source of financing, total cost, design, execution, and environmental impact (De Marchi, 2015). Furthermore, The F-24 road project takes up the idea of connecting the Andean valleys and the Moxeño plains or lowlands through the humid forests north of the Chapare (EEIA, 2010).

Brazil began to emerge as a strong economic country in the region with a state-owned development bank, the *O Banco Nacional do Desenvolvimento* – BNDES (National Bank for Economic and Social Development) which had a portfolio of large infrastructure projects in Latin America. In this sense, since 2004 it began with a political strategy of strong capital investment, territorial logic, and a project of a power country in the region (Fred, 2017). The former President Lula da Silva, through the creation of the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs, allows the BNDES to lend financial resources to large Brazilian corporations in the region, and Latin America has started to be relevant in the Brazilian foreign investment and development policy (Fred, 2017).

Thus, on August 1, 2008, the ABC granted the construction of the road to the Brazilian construction company OAS Ltda. which proposed to finance the project through the BNDES. The total cost of the proposal was 415.000,000 \$us, 80% of which will be financed by BNDES funds and the remaining 20% by the State (De Marchi, 2015). OAS proposed to build the road in three sections: First Section: Villa Tunari - Isinuta (47 km); Second Section: Isinuta - Monte Grande del Apere (177 km); Third Section: Monte Grande del Apere - San Ignacio de Moxos (82 km). The whole project (306 Km) is to be executed in 40 months (EEIA, 2010).

Therefore, the tension caused by obtaining the environmental permission files required for each section, especially for the second section, as well as the strong opposition of the indigenous groups in the area, caused the project to stop (De Marchi, 2015). Moreover,

in 2012, ABC rescinded the contract with OAS Ltda., arguing that the work was not progressing well, and at the end of the same year signed another contract under the figure of "exception" to execute only the First Section (Villa Tunari - Isinuta) with the *Empresa Boliviana de Construcción* (EBC) and *Asociación de Mantenimiento Vial* (AMVI) for a cost of 32.500,000 \$us (De Marchi, 2015).

According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs - IWGIA (2012) a chronologic summary of the more relevant events can be made as follows: On August 22, 2009, the former presidents Evo Morales and Lula Da Silva signed in Villa Tunari, Cochabamba, the protocol for funding the road project. Almost one year later, the Plurinational Legislative Assembly approved the protocol agreement. On February 15, 2011, the official final agreement was signed between Bolivia, BNDES, ABC, and OAS Ltda. So, on May 20, 2011, former president Morales promulgated Law No. 112, which ordered the construction of the road Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos. However, the ABC did not wait for this legal process, moreover, they ordered the execution of the construction of the road two years before the promulgation of Law No.112.

7.2. The VIII and IX Marchs and the Defense of the TIPNIS

The VIII indigenous march has some background in past conflicts generated by the penetration of interculturals and colonizers in the TIPNIS decades ago. The signing of the contract between Da Silva and Morales for the construction of the road and the presence of construction machinery without any prior consultation to the indigenous people of TIPNIS lead to the collective decision of march to the city of La Paz.

Decades before the sign of the road project, the entrance of interculturals and peasants into the TIPNIS not only implied a territory retreat for indigenous groups, gradually losing access to natural resources and modifying their collective uses of the land but also the incursion of destructive and polluting practices in the area (SERNAP, 2011).

Furthermore, Guzmán (2012), mentions that indigenous communities close to the colonization zones have modified their dynamics of land use and access to natural resources into a more individual and private ways, through parceling and division of the

land. In the same way, the political representations have been transformed from indigenous councils into agrarian unions.

In 2008, the social organizations of the TIPNIS have already considered the VIII March as a form of protest to the signing of the contract for the road project. Moreover, in September 2009, the situation became more and more tense due to a confrontation between indigenous peoples and interculturals over land encroachment within the TIPNIS (Albó, 2021).

In May of 2010, the XXIX Meeting of Corregidores of the TIPNIS took place in San Miguelito where the indigenous organizations established a non-negotiable rejection of the construction of the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos (Guzmán, 2012). According to Guzmán (2012), this was the first organic step towards the realization of the VIII indigenous march, moreover this rejection was ratified in August 2011 in the XXX Meeting of Corregidores of the TIPNIS held in the San Pablo.

In July 2011, during the 4th National Commission of the CIDOB, it was resolved to hold the VIII Indigenous March named: In defense of the TIPNIS for the Territories, life, dignity, and rights of Indigenous Peoples, to begin on August 15, 2011, from the city of Trinidad to La Paz following the same route of the I March for Territory and Dignity of 1990 (Albó, 2021). The main Indigenous people demand was to stop the construction of the road through the TIPNIS, and the right to prior, free, and informed consultation, as it is stipulated in the CPE (art.30 N 15), the ILO Convention 169 (1989), and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, both ratified by the Bolivian State (Albó, 2021).

Moreover, the VIII Indigenous March raised a platform of 16 demands to the central government. Of these 16 demands, 4 were related to the defense of the TIPNIS, regulatory development process, right to prior consultation, and indigenous autonomy. The rest of the demands focused on topics such as education, health, communication, housing, census, climate change, productive development, and water resources (Ortiz, 2012).

In August 2011, the indigenous participants of the VIII March suffer many difficulties in their journey to La Paz. For instance, the death of three indigenous participants, adverse weather conditions, blockades by communities who support Evo Morales and the MAS

party, many attempts to discredit and stop the mobilization, and misinformation to public opinion (Guzmán, 2012).

On September 25, 2011, in the town of Chaparina, the VIII March was violently intervened by police forces (Albó, 2021). The police repression not only left more than 100 indigenous people injured and around 200 indigenous people and leaders detained, who were forced to get into vehicles and taken to their places of origin; however, they were released under pressure. Also, several indigenous children were separated from their parents, causing them to become momentarily lost and scattered in the deep forest without protection (Guzmán, 2012).

The police repression results contrary to the expectations of the MAS. Although the MAS wanted to disintegrate and stop the VIII March, the indigenous people managed to rearticulate it some days after the intervention (Albó, 2021). The rearticulation of the VIII March generated even more support from the people. Not only other indigenous communities from the lowlands and highlands, volunteers, environmental activists, students, and general population joined the march, but also social demonstrations were held in most of the Bolivian capital cities condemning the MAS government for the police intervention in Chaparina (Ortíz, 2012).

Finally, the VIII March culminated its journey on October 19, 2011, when the indigenous people arrived in the city of La Paz, after 64 days of march (Albó, 2021). The participants of the VIII March were received like heroes with great enthusiasm and happiness by the people who paralyzed their work and school activities. The citizens of La Paz formed a human cordon from the entrance of the city to the center to protect and give the welcome to the Indigenous people of the TIPNIS. Consequently, the more support the VIII March gained, the more social pressure was on the MAS government for reach an agreement and establish a dialogue with the TIPNIS indigenous leaders.

Finally, both the TIPNIS leaders and Evo Morales signed an agreement that forced Morales to promulgate Law No. 180 of October 24, 2011, in defense and protection of the TIPNIS. However, according to Albó (2021), the notion of "Intangibility" stipulated in Law No.180 was used against the inhabitants of TIPNIS, asserting that no one could touch the park, not even the indigenous inhabitants. Furthermore, just after the promulgation of

Law No.180, the MAS government contacted other TIPNIS sectors influenced by the coca growers of Polygon 7 and other Tsimane communities in the northern end of the II section who had been visited by Evo Morales shortly before the conformation of another “parallel” march to the VIII March. Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyze more if this parallel march was a legitimate one or only promoted by the State.

The “parallel march” was led by the CONISUR that departed from the Chapare (Cochabamba) to La Paz. The CONISUR March requested that Law No. 180 must be repealed and the construction of the highway through the TIPNIS must continue. It is important to mention that the CONISUR March was also made up of indigenous people of the TIPNIS, however, some cocalero groups also joined later (Albó, 2021).

When the CONISUR arrived in La Paz in February 2012, Evo Morales received them in the Government palace. Therefore, the former president signed the promulgation of Law No. 222 of Consultation, he argued that there was no consensus between the indigenous peoples of the south who were demanding the road and the indigenous peoples of the center and north who rejected the road (CENDA, 2019).

Law No. 222 (2012) called for a process of “prior” consultation with the indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS to define the territory intangibility and the construction of the road. Law No. 222 also stipulates that the consultation process would be carried out within a maximum period of 120 days, respecting the norms and procedures of the indigenous groups, and the participation of the Plurinational Electoral Body as a observer. However, Law No. 222 jeopardized the intangibility criteria stipulated in Law No. 180, as well as the notion of “prior” consultation mentioned in the Political Constitution (Albó, 2021).

In response to the promulgation of Law No. 222, the XXXI meeting of the TIPNIS Corregidores decided to carry out the IX March of indigenous peoples. According to Cuiza (2012) the IX March demanded the defense of the TIPNIS territory, the rejection of the consultation Law No. 222, and the support to their indigenous leaders who had been called by the Public Ministry to testify for the supposed “kidnapping” of Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca in Chaparina during the police intervention to the VIII March in October 2011.

The IX March was accepted by 39 Corregidores of the 64 communities of the TIPNIS (ANF, 2012). Although, one of the government strategies to cushion the possible political costs of the XI March and to promote acceptance of the consultation process stipulated in Law No. 222 was to end the contract with OAS and BNDES in June 2012, leaving the highway project without funds (Opinión, 2012). Nevertheless, in October 2012, the construction contract for Section I of the highway was signed with two national companies, AMBI and PBC. This section included 47 km from Villa Tunari to Isinuta, (La Razón, 2013).

On June 27, 2012, the IX March arrived without major problems in the city of La Paz after 62 days of walking. However, the reception of the people of La Paz was not as massive as in 2011 (Cuiza, 2012) because the MAS government called for another march on the same day, congesting the entrance to the city and the streets (ANF, 2012). Some confrontations between the indigenous people of the IX March and the police forces held to enter the main square. Moreover, Evo Morales neither received them, nor attended their demands (Albó, 2021).

Cuiza (2012) reported that during the IX March, participants had to endure a two-week wait before the government began negotiating with certain sectors. This led to some protesters gradually leaving La Paz. However, protests and calls for an agreement between the TIPNIS and the government persisted in several other cities. Eventually, due to the frustration of waiting for a response, the IX March participants chose to relocate their efforts back to their own territory and return to the TIPNIS (Cuiza, 2012).

The consultation process in the TIPNIS began on July 29, 2012. According to Law No. 222 (2012), this process must carry out in a prior, free, and informed manner, respecting the norms and procedures of indigenous groups. The first part of the consultation process was to contact indigenous leaders and collect data and information, so it was informed about the existence of 69 communities in the TIPNIS. In this sense, the final report detailed that 58 communities exercised their right to consultation, and 11 communities decided not to participate. Of the 58 that participated, 53 communities approved the construction of the highway, 5 remained on the sidelines of it, of which 3 rejected the construction of the II section through the park (Ministerio de Obras Públicas, Servicios y Vivienda, 2012).

However, the TIPNIS communities demanded the participation of external institutions as observers of the process, so the *Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos Bolivia* – APDHB (Permanent Assembly of Human Rights), the *Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos* – FIDH (International Federation of Human Rights), and the Catholic church participated. These external institutions also presented an alternative report that provided compelling evidence about the lack of transparency in the consultation process (Gutierrez et al., 2013).

The APDHB and FIDH final report (Gutierrez et al., 2013) observes that the consultant process between November 29 and December 14 of 2012, did not comply with the "prior, free and informed" consultation regulations. Firstly, there was no "prior" character of the consultation because the MAS government decided to build the highway two years before the consultation process, which can be verified from the date of signing the contract with the Brazilian construction company OAS, therefore the communities did not have the necessary time to determine the most convenient decision for their territory (Gutierrez et al., 2013).

Secondly, there was no "free" character of the consultation. The report mentions testimonies that support that there was no active participation and opinions of all members of the communities, only the government technicians' criteria was imposed. Further, it details different forms of government pressure on the communities to accept the consultant, such as the endowment of food, materials, and delivery of bonds; but also, intimidation; threats of lawsuit, communication cuts and limitations to the access of resources to those communities that will be refused to participate (Gutierrez et al., 2013).

Thirdly, there was no "informed" character in the consultation. At least 19 communities mentioned that the positive or negative impacts of the highway were not reported by the government, on the contrary, the government pointed out the project as an "ecological" project. The environmental impact studies of the road were not presented to these communities as well, therefore the information provided was not sufficient for the decision-making process of the communities. Furthermore, the report (2013) mentions that some of the minutes were even changed altering the final decision of the communities on their rejection of the highway (Gutierrez et al., 2013).

Forty, the term “intangibility” was manipulated. The government mentioned that the term intangibility would prohibit the TIPNIS communities from having access to the territory's resources or other benefits such as education, health, and development projects, so removing it will allow the construction of the highway and other development projects. Therefore, many indigenous communities were confused, and they faced with the dilemma of “approve” the free use of territory resources or not (Gutierrez et al., 2013).

The report (2013) concludes by mentioning that the cultural norms and procedures of the TIPNIS communities were not considered either, it mentions that in 7 communities the consultation was not carried out in the indigenous places, and in 13 communities the consultation was not coordinated with the indigenous leaders and that the brigades of consultation arrived without previous notification, and 11 communities stated that the brigades of consultation did not take into account the presence of the entire community, only those who were agreed with the highway (Gutierrez et al., 2013).

Between 2013 and 2015, the TIPNIS case was not frequently discussed in the public sphere. This could be attributed to the results of the Consultation presented in the State final report. The report suggested that there was an indigenous "support" for the construction of the highway, which led to the public debate and media considering it a less pressing issue. In the same way, the consultation process generated not only separations and divisions within the TIPNIS organizations but also between families and communities. At the same time, the legal complaints against the TIPNIS leaders were exacerbated, especially those who participated in the VIII and IX Marches. Moreover, the construction works of sections I and III of the highways had already started in the pre-electoral scenario of the 2015 national elections.

The lack of favorable results of the IX Indigenous March deepened the problems within the indigenous movement, some regional organizations decided not to march and accused Adolfo Chavez, former president of the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia - CIDOB (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia) of authoritarianism and of signing agreements with the national government. Amidst accusations from both sides, elections were held for a new CIDOB president (Rodriguez, 2012). As a result, the CIDOB was divided after the Great National Assembly of Indigenous Peoples (GANPI) where Melva Hurtado was elected as president in July 2012, ignoring Adolfo Chavez

(Rodriguez, 2012). However, this division also permeated other CIDOB regions, such as the Central de Organizaciones de los Pueblos Nativos Guarayos – COPNAG (Guarayos Native Peoples' Organizations Central), which also has two parallel boards of directors, one of which participated in the IX Indigenous March.

Albó (2014) mentions that the MAS encouraged division in the CIDOB for being critical of the government. These discrepancies arose mainly over environmental issues, with their maximum expression in the marches for the defense of the TIPNIS between 2011 and 2012.

After five years of internal fights, the CIDOB tried to reorganize and elect a new president to replace Melva Hurtado, who was imprisoned for embezzlement of resources from the Indigenous Fund. So, in August 2017 during the GANPI there were multiple postulants, and the TIPNIS conflict further divided the candidates, where some of them used economic resources from the government to pay for the tickets to the meeting, practices that had already been denounced as government interference in CIDOB (EL Deber, 2017). As a result of this meeting, Pedro Vare was elected as president, who had sympathy for the MAS government. In October 2018 CIDOB celebrated its 36 years of foundation in Santa Cruz and proclaimed Evo Morales as its candidate in the 2019 elections (Viceministerio de Comunicación, 2018).

In December 2019, after the socio-political crisis in Bolivia, Gregorio Quetty of the Leco people, assumed the presidency of CIDOB after the regional authorities suspended Pedro Vare for his political leanings in favor of MAS. Quetty was already facing the existence of a parallel organization called Organic CIDOB led by Tomás Candia of the Chiquitano people (Cabrera, 2020).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demands of the CIDOB focused on asking the government to take sanitary measures in the indigenous territories. The CIDOB on its 39th anniversary in October 2021 organized a ceremony in which President Luis Arce also participated, which showed once again that there is still a strong sympathy for the MAS government (CAIB Tierras Bajas, 2021).

The TIPNIS debate returned to the public sphere on August 13, 2017, when the re-elected President Evo Morales promulgated in Trinidad, Beni Law No. 969 for the Protection,

Integral, and Sustainable Development of the TIPNIS which nullifies the intangibility of the TIPNIS and allows the construction of the road project (El Diario, 2017).

Therefore, Law No. 969 (2017) stipulates the prohibition of resource use and settlement in the TIPNIS by groups outside of the titled communities that inhabit the area. It also mentions the state's duty to promote integrated and sustainable development that consolidates the rights to integration, health, education, and poverty reduction, among others. However, these integral development activities should be framed mostly in the visions and understandings of the Indigenous peoples. Law No. 969 also allows the participation of private actors in the use of renewable natural resources and productive activities in the TIPNIS.

7.3. The TIPNIS case and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights - IACHR Report No. 113/20 (2020), in March 2012, former Congressman Pedro Nuny, representing the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS, presented an abstract action of unconstitutionality to the Plurinational Court of Bolivia against Laws No. 222 and No. 180. However, the Court did not rule on the unconstitutionality of Law No. 180. On July 25, of the same year, Fernando Vargas, former president of the TIPNIS Sub-Central, presented a constitutional appeal to the Constitutional Court requesting precautionary measures such as the suspension of the consultation process. However, on October 18, 2012, it was determined that during the consultation in the TIPNIS the rights of the indigenous peoples were not violated (IACHR, 2020).

As a last domestic legal instance, the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS filed a popular action. On February 28, 2013, the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal rejected this request, arguing that multiple popular actions had already been filed that could have been summarized in a single petition. Therefore, the popular action did not have an effective result (IACHR, 2020). On the other hand, the IACHR Report No. 113/20 (2020), mentions that the State argued that the representatives of the TIPNIS did not exhaust all the domestic legal actions and that there was a possibility of challenging decisions that were considered burdensome through the remedy of annulment.

On May 8, 2012, Pedro Nuny, the Bolivian Forum on Environment and Development (FOBOMADE), and other indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS presented a complaint to the executive secretary of the IACHR of the Organization of American States (OAS) and to the International Labor Organization (ILO) requesting precautionary measures in favor of the TIPNIS due to the imminent threat of risk to their territory and the collective life of the indigenous groups (SENA-FOBOMADE, 2012). Both international complaints pass on violations of human rights protected by the American Convention on Human Rights, ILO Convention 160, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The TIPNIS complaint presented to the IACHR invoked Articles 5, 8, 21, 23, and 25 of the American Convention in accordance with Articles 1 and 2. This complaint also states that the Bolivian State violated Articles 1, 2, 3, 5, 7.2, 8, 25, and 26.1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (IACHR, 2020). Also, it requested the IACHR to urge the State of Bolivia to generate legal provisions to guarantee the life of the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS, protection in favor of the communities living in isolation, protect the TIPNIS from the incursion of activities and actors outside the territory, apply protection measures and prevent possible clashes between settlers and indigenous people (SENA-FOBOMADE, 2012).

On July 30, 2014, due to the progress of the construction of the road, and the increase in human rights violations to the indigenous communities of the TIPNIS, the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia* - CIDOB (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia), and EarthRights International, joined the petition (Meza, 2020). After a long procedure and several public hearings, on June 22, 2020, Report No. 113/20 was approved, admitting the petition presented by the 64 indigenous communities of the TIPNIS (IACHR, 2020).

Therefore, the IACHR conducted an on-site visit to Bolivia in March 2023 to observe the human rights situation in the country. Public hearings and meetings were held with various State authorities and representatives of civil society and victims of human rights violations in the cities of La Paz, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and Sucre (OAS, 2023). The visit was led by the Chair of the IACHR, Commissioner Margarette May Macaulay; the

Rapporteur for Bolivia, Joel Hernández; the First Vice-Chair and Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, among others.

According to CENDA (2023) on March 29, 2023, in the city of Cochabamba, the IACHR held two public hearings. The first public hearing dealt with the case of the construction of the highway through the TIPNIS, where the audience was made up of indigenous authorities and former authorities, as well as activists and researchers. The session lasted more than an hour and a half in which each participant argued the violations of collective rights such as prior consultation, the right to territory in the face of encroachment, and the progress of works and efforts of the governments of Beni and Cochabamba to build the road.

The leaders of the indigenous peoples of the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory (TIM), the TIPNIS, and the Indigenous Council of the South (CONISUR), denounced three main points: 1) The unanimous rejection of the construction of the highway through the TIPNIS, 2) Encroachment on indigenous territories by the intercultural peoples, and 3) Absolute non-compliance with commitments, constitutional procedures, international agreements, and treaties, works and projects by the State. It also emphasized the political persecution, threats, and harassment suffered by indigenous leaders (CENDA, 2023).

As a result of the visit, in its report of Preliminary Observations of the “In Loco” visit to Bolivia (2023), the IACHR mentions in point 15 having received information on water contamination and its impact on health due to mining and indiscriminate use of mercury, as well as deforestation linked to extractive projects. Also, point 16 mentions that information was received on the progress of road construction in the TIPNIS and TIM territories, which, according to civil society, do not comply with Inter-American standards on free, prior, and informed consent. Similarly, complaints were received about the increase in illegal deforestation activities, land encroachment and fires resulting from uncontrolled agricultural expansion in protected areas, and the lack of a procedural code governing the agro-environmental jurisdiction.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As it was explained in the methodology section, through this second section the interview information is presented and discussed. The individual identity of the 7 interviewees is put into three general categorizations: *Indigenous leaders* (three presidents of the sub-centrals of TIPNIS, organic TIPNIS, and Secure), *local experts* (two experts/technician of CIPCA and CEJIS) and *international experts* (two international academical experts in lowlands and Indigenous groups in Bolivia, one from the Colorado State University and the other one from WCS). In that sense, these categories are used for referring to them. The terms “the interviewees” and “the participants” refer to the opinion of all the participants together.

8.1. Current situation of the road project Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos

The participants have reported that the road is about 50% complete when considering all three sections. However, the central area of TIPNIS, where the second section of the road is intended to pass through, remains preserved with only a few narrow roads visible in some parts. A local expert who visited the area in March 2023 has noted significant progress on the road due to the construction of bridges, gravel paving, and even asphalt in some areas, particularly in sections I and III. However, the bridges are not situated in critical, strategic, or border areas between indigenous and colonized zones in Polygon 7. The expert also mentioned that the road has deteriorated due to the effects of heavy rains, making it impassable even for the usual fleets of vehicles that transport people through those areas.

Another local expert mentioned that there are several positions regarding the progress and current state of the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos road, among which the “pro-road groups” formed by intercultural groups and supporters of the MAS government party, they stand out that it will be very close to completion, and other local expert added that they attempt to massively enter the area by confirming a “caravan of cars starting from Cochabamba to Trinidad”, and thus prove that the road was already viable, although there is no certainty that the caravan took place.

On the other hand, the participants mentioned that section III has not been completed, although there is gravel in some areas, and there are raised platforms. An indigenous leader corroborated this information by mentioning that there are dirt roads, some of which are graveled, between San Ignacio de Moxos and Monte Grande del Apere, both in Beni, which has already had some consequences for the area, he mentioned that “the constant penetration of settlers who go where the road is advancing, they are furrowing, entering a little at a time, making their plot there, this is constant, there are already about 50 farmers who are encroaching on the Tsimane Takuaral community”.

Other indigenous leaders indicated that in Section I there is almost “total penetration by intercultural groups and coca growers”, due to the advanced construction status of section one, and the coca peasants do not respect the red line demarcated as a boundary. He mentioned that there are already coca fields and "signs in the road that say: Lot for Sale", furthermore, another participant mentioned that cocaine factories have been found in the area.

After more than a decade of constant insistence of the government on the construction of the highway, and especially in the II section design, the interviewees pointed out the possible reasons for it. One indigenous leader mentioned that as early as 1996, Evo Morales was campaigning in the Chapare area, offering territories in the TIPNIS to the coca growers' groups settled in Polygon 7, apparently Morales had made a commitment to them to expand the coca production frontier and the occupation of lands in exchange for political and electoral support. In other words, infrastructure for favoring sectors that voted for Morales.

Other indigenous leaders mentioned that the government's insistence on the construction of the II section has to do with the search and exploration of new oil reserves because this unexploited zone is a potential place to find new oil deposits. In this sense, a local expert argued that after 11 years of conflict, the MAS government's insistence is not only for the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons but also for the attempt to increase the agricultural frontier. Unlike other government administrations, the MAS government has political and social actors that legitimize the road project in the TIPNIS, such as intercultural groups, coca growers, peasants, and cattle ranchers, furthermore, these groups have been co-opting strategic positions of power in mayors' offices, governors'

offices, and other state institutions. So these groups are able to influence with greater legal weight in the completion of the highway project.

On the other hand, a local expert stated that the “colonization and settlement target is not necessarily and exclusively the center of the TIPNIS but also the Tsimane zone known as TIM”, the TIM is also a protected area, indigenous territory and recently declared autonomous. The local expert mentioned that the area through which the II section of the road would pass is not as effective for coca cultivation and grazing as the areas where the road ends, in the TIM. In this sense, the section II, and therefore the design of the entire road, would generate a kind of “pincer threat to the TIM”, the entrance of intercultural groups through the Chapare from the south, and from Yucumo, and for the northern zone, the entrance of cattle ranchers and creole peasants.

An international expert stated that the government would not consider alternative options for section II as sections I and III would lose their original purpose. Although the road is not included in the IIRSA portfolio, the government's focus on regional integration and access to maritime coasts could be a reason for continuing with the current design. The expert explained that the road is part of the network that connects Bolivia, Brazil, and the Pacific, which reduces transportation time for exports like soybeans.

The participants expressed that the project road infringes on several constitutional rights. Firstly, it imposes limitations on a TCO and restricts their actions, which goes against the right to prior consultation as set out by the Constitution. This right is also supported by international legal instruments such as the ILO Declaration 169 and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the UN, both of which have been ratified by Bolivia. Additionally, the government's actions to divide the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS violate the autonomy and organizational processes of the territory. Secondly, the project road violates the rights of Mother Earth, which contradicts Bolivia's stance as one of the pioneer countries in recognizing land as a subject of rights. This is further compounded by the irreversible damage to the ecosystem and nature.

In addition to being illegal and violating rights, the negative social and environmental effects of constructing the road are a major concern. Despite the government's promises of benefits and development for the region, all interviewees agree that the negative impacts outweigh any potential benefits the road may bring to the TIPNIS communities.

In that sense, the interviewees mentioned that the II section does not bring any benefit to any community or family because it does not pass through an inhabited area, since the majority of the TIPNIS communities are in the northern zone, at the confluence of the Isiboro and Sécure rivers, moreover, an indigenous leader complimented that “the only way that we use is the river transport by water.”, referring that they mostly use the rivers for transportation rather than roads.

In that sense, the participants pointed out that the main problem with the construction of the II section, as the government’s design, will increase in encroachment, illegal settlements, land dispossession, land parcelization, privatization, and irreversible environmental damage. One international expert added that although the problem of settlers in the area was already present before the creation of the TIPNIS, this was one of the main reasons for establishing legal boundaries and protecting the area since the 1980s, since it was already foreseen that the increase in settlements would affect the most fragile zones of the TIPNIS, such as the headwaters of the rivers, which would have repercussions on the rest of the populations settled downstream, due to the water dynamics of the communities' use, such as fishing and water consumption. One indigenous leader mentioned that:

They come in and take the land from the community members, they begin to parcel it out and to cultivate coca, that is what they do and they are removing the indigenous brothers in that zone, and they are practically destroying everything, deforesting, killing animals, contaminating the water, and that is what we have seen, that is what the community has seen in all of Polygon 7

The participants mentioned that not only the entry of groups from outside the territory would mean a change in the population structure of the area, but also the effects produced by the migration to the cities by the community members, as one international expert said, this "emptying of the territory", is a dynamic in which young indigenous people leave to the capital cities to sell their labor force, has already been observed in other communities of the Andean zone, which are left with only children and elderly people. According to the experts interviewed, this disproportion in the population of the TIPNIS would affect the decision-making process over the territory, since the entry and settlement of non-indigenous groups would have an impact on the voting and power quotas. The TIPNIS is already a complex multicultural space, and the effects of the road would further

complicate the dynamics of political representation of the territory as well as affect the configurations of the TCO.

Within this framework, the international experts mentioned that the way of life of the TIPNIS groups differs greatly from the dynamics of the highland indigenous groups, which are the origin areas from where the intercultural and colonizing groups come. One of these is union control, which influences the organizational forms of political representation, as well as the system of land occupation that individualizes and privatizes access to resources, and contradicts the rotational and collective system in the TIPNIS, and there is even evidence of practices that break with the dynamics of exploitation and use of space, such as the economic charge for access to plots or the use of dynamite for fishing.

On the other hand, it is not possible to deny that roads and highways bring some benefits, in that sense all interviewees mentioned that both sections I and III, just like any other road project not only facilitate access to the communities in terms of time but also allow community members to go to the cities to sell their products or buy materials and food. However, they mentioned that the problem emerges when the sections only benefit certain communities, such as section I which has only benefited the intercultural settlements in the Southern Zone and especially to the coca producers and peasants, because it has become an optimal means of transporting their product. Furthermore, an international expert said that these sections do not represent a benefit and development in itself, since this “should be accompanied by development, economic, health and education programs”. Therefore, the interviewees said that the possible positive impacts of the highway Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos will not be equated with the negative ones in the TIPNIS.

For this reason, the participants mentioned that in recent years, some alternatives to the II section have been proposed by the government and the indigenous of the TIPNIS. One indigenous leader mentioned that during his administration, three alternatives were proposed: The first alternative, was through the Eva Eva Mountain range, connecting Trinidad with Cochabamba and La Paz. The second alternative, through Polygon 5 of the TIPNIS, which would pass through the Mamore bridges, then through San Ignacio, San Francisco, Bundonovia, San Bernardo, San Miguelito, Trinidadcito, and then find the

confluence with the Southern Zone of the TIPNIS. This alternative would benefit the communities more than the one proposed by the government. Finally, the third alternative is to border the Isiboro River area, starting in Villa Tunari, then passing through Santa Rosa, San Pablo, Bundonovia, Tamiaco, and on to Trinidad. However, none of these three options was considered by the government, according to the local experts.

8.2. Current situation and positioning of the TIPNIS organizations

According to the interviewee, in March 2023, in San Jose de la Angosta, a meeting of Corregidores was held, in which 52 of the 74 communities belonging to the three sub-central communities: TIPNIS, Secure, and CONISUR participated. A dialogue was held between the Corregidores, communities, and the national authorities to guarantee territorial security and avoid land settlement in the TIPNIS.

Despite the governor of Cochabamba and the mayor of Trinidad sponsored this meeting of Corregidores in March of 2023, both publicly expressed the need to resume the construction of the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos highway for the integration of both cities. In that sense, they were expecting a positive response to the construction of the II section by the TIPNIS communities. However, the resolution vote of the 52 communities of the Meeting of Corregidores was a unanimous rejection of the construction of the highway, different from the governors' expected result. Consequently, the authorities of Cochabamba and Trinidad abandoned the meeting. One local expert mentioned that:

...there was pressure from the authorities, authorities from the governor's offices, the governor of Beni, and the governor of Cochabamba were present at the meeting of Corregidores, with a very strong departmental state apparatus and presence, but this did not generate a change in the definition of the organizations.

Therefore, the Governor of Beni immediately proposed an alternative to this II section, using a departmental decree that would modify it, but since the departmental decree does not have the status of national law, the scope and legal viability of this proposal are in doubt, according to the interviewee. One indigenous leader mentioned that this proposal would be via San Ignacio de Moxos, San Borja, and Yucumo, and enter the city of La Paz. Although, this proposal is not clear, because, on the other hand, a local expert said that

this proposal would go around the TIPNIS and connect the city of Trinidad with Cochabamba through a town near the capital of Cochabamba. An international expert mentioned that this alternative would pass through Cocapata, Quiquibey, and reach La Paz. She concluded that:

I don't know how serious the governor's proposal is. I frankly believe that what he said is much ado about nothing, and he said this in the last meeting, in which they strongly rejected the construction of the highway, including CONISUR. I believe that the proposal was a little bit to save the image. It is not a project that makes much sense for Beni.

In the Resolute Vote of the last Meeting of Corregidores, the communities did not propose new alternatives to the II section, probably because they distrust the government and its previous non-transparent procedures, such as during the consultation process. The indigenous leaders argued that the consultation process for the highway was not in good faith as mentioned in the Constitution, the government carried out campaigns to buy the vote of the communities in favor of the construction of the highway, and the results of the minutes were modified, local decision-making procedures were not complied with, and the concept of intangibility was used against the indigenous people themselves, arguing that even if they voted for the intangibility of the park, they would not be able to use their resources. Regarding the experience of the Consultation process, the indigenous leaders said:

We had said we did not reject the road, but we did not want it to pass through the TIPNIS, and in the final minutes it appears that we had accepted the road through the TIPNIS, which was not the case, in most of the communities this was done, the communities said one thing, and, in the minutes, it said something else.

They [the government] grabbed a Corregidor and told him we are going to give you this, but we want you to sign this, they explained a little thing and said that they already agreed with the road, all of that has come up.

The participants had a consensus that the TIPNIS organizations were divided and fractioned in the last decade, not only between CONISUR and the Sécure and Tipnis sub-centrals, regarding their positions on the road, but also between the communities themselves and even inside the families. One local expert said, "They were even divided between parents and children, uncles and nephews...". This fragmentation promoted by the government resulted in the loss of legitimacy of their authorities and leaders, parallel meetings of Corregidores, lack of recognition of leaders and presidents, loss of credibility,

and lack of transparency in the management of the economic resources that were granted to the TIPNIS.

On the other hand, an international expert said the MAS government, because of the repression in Chaparina and the massive reception of the VIII march in La Paz, “modified its intervention and coercion strategies”, which were no longer so direct, but more “systematic and tactical”, mainly based on the “division and cooptation of leaders”. The government began to strongly influence the organizations and leaders of the TIPNIS through bribes, giving away motors, and jobs, and offering projects in exchange for political support, thus convincing the Corregidores to be in favor of the highway, and especially in the II section design.

As a result of these “divide and rule” strategy, the participants mention that parallel political organizations emerged in the TIPNIS, called the “organic and political factions”, which were both in conflict trying to demonstrate their legitimacy. On the one hand, the indigenous leaders and the local experts mentioned that the so-called “organic faction”, despite it had the political and resistance experiences gathered during the VIII and XI marches, the leaders of the organic faction were losing legitimacy and support from the communities. As an indigenous leader mentions:

[Organic faction] has no base, he [the president of the organic faction] lives here in Trinidad and his base is in Trinidad, not in the park, but we [political faction] were elected by the communities, not by 1 or 3 communities, but we were elected by most of the communities, the election was in Trinidad, and then the ratification was in the central zone of the TIPNIS.

On the other hand, the local experts and the indigenous leaders mentioned that the “political faction”, which authorities were elected in 2021 and who currently have the legitimate support of the 74 communities of the TIPNIS, they managed to rearticulate the sub-centrals and bring back trust to the communities, which resulted in a much more “unified and forceful political positioning of rejection to the road”. This process of reunification was possible due to the closer proximity of the leaders to their own communities. However, another indigenous leader mentioned that the “political faction” apparently would have a closer and better relationship with the MAS party, as he explained:

The government began to work with the organizations and communities [political faction], giving them some perks that to this day they do not have, motors, and some projects that were not completed, that is how the government was convincing that everything would be in their favor, the leaders were strong in 2011 and 2012, from then on the leaders allowed themselves to be subjected perhaps to some resources, they became silent, and almost everyone was already pulling for what the government wanted.

It is noted that after and during the COVID-19 pandemic, a dynamic of reunification of the TIPNIS organizations began to materialize. This unification and change in the positioning of the CONISUR sub-central, which was in favor of the construction of the road, could be related to these arguments presented by the interviewees: 1) the government was gradually abandoning its presence in the region due to economic and road financing factors, product of the 2019 political crisis and the Pandemic of the Covid-19, and that it would have possibly stopped fulfilling its promises with the presidents and leaders of the TIPNIS akin to MAS, which caused them to turn against the government in the last Meeting of Corregidores in 2023.s

2) The divisions and confrontations within the MAS party¹⁴, in this sense, the political wing linked to Evo Morales, the coca growers and intercultural sectors that supported the highway, has been losing weight in the current government of Luis Arce, and therefore the highway, or at least the II section, would not be as much of a priority as in the past.

3) There is a process of rearrangement of the lowland indigenous organizations, through a progressive unification in its territory, recognition as subjects of rights, and generational change of leaders, on the other hand, a misstructuring of the highland indigenous organizations, political strongholds of the MAS just as it happens in the annual meeting of the Trade Union Confederation of Intercultural Communities in August 2023¹⁵.

4) This change of position also has to do with a rejection of the developmentalist discourse promoted by the government. 10 years ago, many communities bought into this

¹⁴ Since Luis Arce won the bolivian national elections on October 2020, the factions of the MAS party have been divided between two wings, called Wing Arcista or Renovadora, and Wing Evista or Radical, because of the different perspectives of the management of the country, the economy, and mutual accusations of corruption and drug trafficking. This is having repercussions within the party, state institutions and policies.

¹⁵ The internal dispute within the MAS reached one of its strongest social organizations, during the congress of the Trade Union Confederation of Intercultural Communities, which culminated in clashes and a pitched fight in the city of Sucre, Bolivia on August 14, 2023.

development discourse and believed that the highway would bring development, but now they have realized the opposite.

Therefore, it is mentioned that the TIPNIS is developing new strategies for the defense of the territory because of the exhaustion of the strategies already used. The indigenous leaders mentioned that one of these strategies is to make their rejection and vote against the highway more visible in the public sphere, as well as to socialize a possible autonomous process, like the TIM, so the TIPNIS will become an autonomous region and with its own indigenous government and authorities.

They have not considered the possibility of carrying out an X Indigenous March, because this measure has been exhausting, and on the contrary, they said that they will defend their territory from the territory itself. Moreover, they are not looking for more laws to protect their territory, but only demand compliance with those that already exist. Although the relationship with the government has been weakened over the last few years, the new presidents of the three TIPNIS sub-centrals said that they have tried to establish a more direct relationship and coordination with the State and try to generate new strategies like direct meetings with ministries without intermediaries. Finally, it is reported that a commission is being organized to enter the Southern Zone of the TIPNIS in September of 2023 due to new reports of encroachment and settlement in that zone.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND LESSONS OF THE INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE IN TIPNIS

8.3. Notion and ways of development for the TIPNIS

One of the contributions is the notion of development in the TIPNIS. The indigenous leaders mentioned that development for them means having a better quality of life, and a dignified life, but that it also implies cultural aspects, education, health, and population growth in the communities. It is also mentioned that everyone wants to improve their quality of life concerning access to basic services such as water, electricity, and basic sanitation and that these are also constitutional rights that the State must guarantee. The indigenous leaders said:

...For us, it is to try to improve, to have a dignified life, or to give better education and health to our brothers who live inside the territory, that is what we are working on, I remember when I was a child nobody had their identity card, but before everybody went with their canoe and paddle and it took a week to go to Trinidad (...) we are not looking for our benefits but for their benefit. For me, development is that they are no longer with paddles but with a motor...

Development means, in the first topic, education, that our children study and graduate from high school, that they study and manage to have a career, to become teachers, nurses, assistants, they advance and change the area or the experience...

They also mentioned that the development in the cultural sphere has to do with the use, appreciation, and respect for their languages, beliefs, and traditions; They mentioned that the educational sphere has to do, on the one hand, with improving living conditions by obtaining a professional career, and on the other hand, education for avoid being deceived, and better understanding of their rights and the laws; the notion of health is related to access to health centers close to the communities, as well as the quality of the service. So, development also implies not only a greater presence of teachers and doctors in the territory but also more infrastructure and linguistic diversity. Currently, among the agenda of the new Tipnis authorities, it is mentioned that the possibility of having an indigenous university or an agricultural technical training center in the territory, but this is still being discussed and socialized by the communities.

However, some local and international experts said that this vision of development sometimes is permeated by structural changes and contexts, which in some instances promote a more “developmentalism” vision, for example, they mentioned that the school, or at least its curricular content, promotes the logic of personal and professional improvement without considering the identity traits and cultural origin of the students, so the school imposes a single and hegemonic model of “professional” and the success in life outside of their communities. And, in some cases, the school teaches false ideas about indigenous life as if it were underdeveloped and uncivilized.

The indigenous groups of the TIPNIS do not oppose to the benefits of development, they consider it their right to have access to the use of technologies for mobility, transportation, and communication. Modernization is an imminent process among the indigenous groups and its benefits are a collective right, whether they decide to make use of them or, on the

contrary, like certain groups among the Tsimanes, they have preferred to remain on the sidelines. So, the indigenous groups require the possibility to choose what kind of development they want and need. Finally, it is mentioned that development is about seeking the greatest benefits for the whole community and not only for oneself, which is contrary to the capitalist notions of development that first impulse individual benefit. In this sense, the concept of development is linked to the notion of collective living well. As one international expert said "...it is an integral notion that means living well with the family, with the community, with beliefs, with health...".

Another international expert has also emphasized the importance of autonomy for the indigenous peoples of TIPNIS, as it aligns with their understanding of development and the challenges that come with it. Autonomy, in this context, means utilizing natural resources while ensuring minimal disturbance, adopting sustainable resource management practices for the benefit of future generations, and incorporating traditional knowledge into these plans.

According to international experts, the notions of development are in constant tension, for example, she said "...the children should stay and preserve the territory, but at the same time they should go out to the city, study and have a profession...". Furthermore, there is a hegemonic vision of development that has permeated because some indigenous groups also understand development as money, construction, modernity, and insertion into the labor market, which is also their legitimate right, but "it is important to leave the polarized vision of development because it is made up of many nuances", other international expert complemented. So, development has benefits for the indigenous groups but it is important to ask them which of those benefits do they need.

Abandoning essentialist discourses in the notions of development is an urgent task, as it allows for a more comprehensive and flexible understanding of the concept of development in cases like the TIPNIS. The international experts referred that the discussion is not dichotomous: "capitalism-modernity, and total opening of space versus rigid intangibility, and immutability of indigenous peoples". Therefore, it is important to make individual and collective aspirations visible, otherwise, there is a tendency to promote a developmentalist and paternalistic vision, as one international expert said "...we must bring development to the place, because we see them as poor without

possessions and services. It is important to decolonize the visions of development and find alternatives that respond to the needs of the communities, and not to those ones that we believe. It will always be a mixture and tension of the different visions of development.”

8.4. Production and subsistence models in a globalized world

A local expert interviewed mentioned that “land titling dynamics” have tended to homogenize production processes within the TIPNIS, which may falsely lead people to believe that all the TIPNIS communities have the same development and production models. Although most of the productive activities are oriented towards local consumption, each village has its own dynamics. Furthermore, it is mentioned that the forest is strongly linked to all indigenous peoples' productive and economic models, as an indigenous leader said "...it is like our market".

An international expert said that nowadays the production models are diverse, in Moxos Plain, there are, on one hand, "non-monetary income" such as agriculture and production of corn, rice, plantain, cassava, and livestock that works not only for self-consumption but also in case of needing an "emergency" capital, ritual and festive. There are also activities such as hunting and fishing, and the indigenous people access to these resources will depend on the geographical location of their communities, therefore some communities will have greater access to certain types of resources over others. On the other hand, "monetary income", where indigenous families have access to the labor market, especially the younger members, both men, and women, who go out seasonally to work as laborers, cowboys, harvesting coca, or to the city of Trinidad as motorcycle cabs, clothes washers, etc. They also take advantage of other resources for sale such as livestock, timber, and cocoa, which have an increasingly national and international demanding market.

Another international expert said that these two systems of development and production could be understood as "reciprocity spheres" and "market spheres", in some communities the market may be more predominant, and in others more reciprocal. She mentions that the market sphere is not a new or recently introduced economic model, she said:

...there have been exchanges of materials and goods since the pre-colonial period, the findings of copper ornaments in a region where copper does not exist in the Beni shows you that exchanges existed over long distances, they are not closed societies, they have always been open societies, therefore the inclusion of the market is a process of transition, of expansion, of qualitative transformation.

However, the natural resource management plans of some TIPNIS communities have even achieved international accreditation for the sustainable use of their natural resources, such as the commercialization of wood. The international expert pointed out that the project road in the TIPNIS, and the roads in general, do not guarantee development and the linkage of indigenous people products to market economies because they were already being practiced these economical activities before any road project was implemented. The International expert argued that the rivers have been used for these purposes in the TIPNIS since ancient times.

The indigenous leaders mentioned that the Moxeños are the ethnic group most immersed in agriculture and cattle ranching as economic models, however, together with the Yurakares, they are mainly producers of corn, rice, yucca, plantain, banana, guineo, sweet potato, and fruit for self-consumption and sale small quantities in the market. Among the three ethnic groups, the Tsimanes, and to a lesser extent the Yurakares, are those who still strongly depend on hunting and fishing, rather than agriculture or the market. However, the economies and livelihood patterns of the three indigenous groups of the TIPNIS are strongly linked to the forest and rivers, which provide fresh water, fishing and are the main source of transportation between communities.

The interviewees also said that due to their missionary past, the Moxeños have a greater economic, cultural, and symbolic relationship with cattle raising, however, it is not as representative in economic terms as the Karayanas¹⁶ who have the largest production and raising of cattle in the TIPNIS. Some Moxeños communities practice cattle ranching as a subsistence model based on buying and selling, mainly to access and purchase necessities such as butter, salt, oil, soap, and school supplies for children. Some families have approximately 10-15 head of cattle; the number depends on each community and family. One indigenous leader mentioned that there are families that have up to 200 head of cattle. Selling cattle has certain advantages when Indigenous people need a quick access to

¹⁶ Used term to refer to the white cattle ranchers.

capital since this transactional activity does not depend on the waterways, which are impassable during the dry season and make it impossible to move cattle, and thus buyers have access by land.

According to the interviewees, one of the most common productive practices in the lower part of Secure, especially among the Moxeños and Yurakares, is the harvesting and collection of cocoa, which has a large market for chocolate production. There is an association of chocolate producers, made up of 21 Moxeño and Yurakares communities, which sells between 250 and 350 Bs¹⁷ per arroba of cocoa, and each community member can harvest or collect between 8 and 15 arrobas. Therefore, it is noted that the cocoa market represents one of the most important and organized economic sources in the TIPNIS, which has remained constant and united, even despite the divisions and difficulties during 2012 conflicts with the government. Among other activities, the indigenous leaders mentioned: timber sales, ecotourism, and community-based tourism which represent an important economic income for the communities.

However, interviewees point out that most of the Tsimanes communities have different land uses and practices, therefore their subsistence and production models could be different from the Moxeños and Yurakares. It is mentioned that the Tsimanes are in constant movement and have a presence in several territories, therefore, they don't have relation with the market economy, as a local expert mentions "...the Tsimanes have a circular use of the territory, they walk kilometers and move from one place to another, for this, the territory cannot end in a certain place, you cannot put a limit on them". It is an ethnic group that depends on activities such as hunting, fishing, and fruit gathering, and not on agriculture or the sale of products. It is mentioned that the Tsimanes preferred to stay out of market dynamics because there is still a strong link to the resources provided by their territory.

8.5. Notions and understanding of Territory.

An international expert mentioned that the case of the TIPNIS is pioneer regarding the understanding of territory since it was considered a TCO, due to the first march in 1990,

¹⁷ Approximately between \$35 and \$50.

as well as its double condition of indigenous territory and national park. The TIPNIS offers important challenges of co-administration with the State. In this sense, since the creation of the TIPNIS, it is possible to highlight different lessons learned in terms of co-management, negotiation between different interests, autonomous processes, and territorial protection.

The case of the TIPNIS has contributed in some dimensions to the understanding of the territory and its relationship with its inhabitants. However, the participants mentioned that in the processes of land titling and territorial management, the different forms of land use of the different indigenous groups were not considered by the State and the Laws. Therefore, some territorial and organizational notions are new for some communities, as a local expert said "...the Tsimanes, who have a more family clan-based organization, the unions, the sub-central organizations are relatively new practices for them, in that sense their reality had to adjust to the legal formats".

The interviewees mentioned that the case of the TIPNIS helps us to understand the territory not only as a geographic space for economic reproduction and population growth, but also as a space for cultural and social reproduction, where social, organic, and cultural relations between and within the communities can be deepened. Moreover, the case of the TIPNIS demonstrates that the coexistence between different groups with different histories and characteristics is possible by sharing collectively one territory. The indigenous leaders said, "coexistence between different groups while maintaining their own identity is possible", "the territory is collective" and is above the individual plot. "Everyone is the owner of the territory; it is not individualized".

A local expert has stated that the defense of the TIPNIS has been more effective when conducted from their own territory. This approach has allowed them to create opportunities for new potential leaders, families, and social support. By returning to their territory, they are better equipped to take necessary measures for the defense of their land because they are in a space they know well and understand its dynamics. This argument is not meant to diminish the importance of historical indigenous marches from previous years, but instead to suggest new strategies for defending their territory from within. This approach has yielded positive results in recent years and has led to the reunification of their political and representative organizations.

8.6. What is Territory in the TIPNIS?

According to the indigenous leaders, the territory is understood as the space where one lives without disturbing anyone, it is where natural resources are used by everybody, and where all needs are covered, he said “it is like a market where one develops one's daily life”. It is also mentioned that the territory is “where there is everything to eat, and drink, but also coexist with other forms of life simultaneously”.

In this sense, the territory is understood as a collective land, without owners, with a rotating system where the communities take turns to use the land and its resources, it is where one can coexist with nature, it is the area where one exists, but which is also cared for. The territory is as one indigenous leader said, “the big house where everyone lives and dwells”, “...the space where one is born, grows, is nourished”.

An international expert said that the territory fulfills multiple functions for indigenous groups, “it is their house, market, pharmacy, where the ancestors are and their origins”. It has a series of cultural, symbolic, religious, and material meanings, which differs from the conception of the State that only understands it in a limited way: “to mark borders and take advantage of natural resources”. The notion of territory in the TIPNIS it has a multiple-use space meaning that goes beyond of the economic conception.

Other international expert mentioned that with the TIPNIS case, the notion and understanding of territory in Bolivia, which had existed since the agrarian reform in 1952 as “land for agriculture”, did not respond anymore to the needs of the communities of the lowlands because these indigenous groups required large extensions of land, not parceled out, nor subject to agrarian unions, and individual owners. Therefore, since the I March of 1990, these systems have begun to be better understood, especially the land use, natural resources, and the conception of territory.

8.7. Interethnic relations in the TIPNIS

The participants mentioned that one of the main consequences of the II section of the road is the settling and parceling of the territory in the “heart” of the TIPNIS, which would not only have territorial and environmental consequences but also social and cultural ones in terms of inter-ethnic relations. In that vein, one local expert mentioned that the

“transformations regarding land access and tenure affect inter-ethnic relations” because it gradually consolidates a forced “mestization” in the communities. Another local expert mentioned that “...clan relations have been severed due to interethnic marriages...”, and the groups have been endowed with new identities, organizational forms, so use the territory.

The interviewees said that all communities are affected by this phenomenon, especially those located near colonization areas or urban centers. One of the indigenous leaders said that one of the common ways to enter a group, family, or community is through marriage and the constitution of parental ties.

As a result, indigenous leaders mentioned that these inter-ethnic marriages exist and are common, the most common are between Yurakare women and Moxeño men, on the contrary, the Tsimanes keep to themselves and separate from other groups. One indigenous leader said, “...now a days we live in a more mixed way”. Another indigenous leader mentioned that “...we get together with Moxeños and Yurakares. Not with the cattle ranchers, but with the colonizers sometimes yes, that has also allowed them to enter the TIPNIS zone little by little”. A local specialist complemented that marriage between colonizers and indigenous women is possibly one of the most frequent interethnic relationships in the TIPNIS, and even in popular jargon, Yurakares women who marry colonizers and intercultural collas, or vice versa, are jokily called “Collakares”.

Nevertheless, interviewees also pointed out that the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS, especially those ones close to the experience of the Jesuit reductions in the colonial era, such as the Moxeños, consider themselves to be a little more “advanced” than the Yurakares and the Tsimanes. According to a local expert, there is an “internal stratification” among the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS, but this becomes to change due to interethnic marriages that also help to break down these “imaginary” differences between TIPNIS indigenous groups.

An international expert said that these interethnic relations are also the effect of the migration of young indigenous people to the capital cities such as Trinidad or Santa Cruz to study or do their military service, where they get married to people of other ethnic affiliations. Although, the advance of the coca frontier through Polygon 7 still represents

the most important cause of interethnic relations, especially in the Yurakares communities who marry, live together, and make families with intercultural and coca peasants' groups in the south of the territory. It is reported that in the configuration of this new mix communities, some interculturals usually impose their social, organizational and cultural dynamics to the Yurakares.

8.8. Internal territorial conflicts in the TIPNIS

Despite the territorial conflict with settlers, coca peasants, and interculturals in the south of the TIPNIS, the interviewees mentioned there are internal conflicts among the indigenous communities, but these are not as serious as the ones with the settlers in the south. In general, the domestic conflicts do not have more repercussions, they usually are resolved by the indigenous authorities. The location of a community regarding another one, and its access to resources can generate tensions because communities are displaced in different places with different geographies. It is important to consider that indigenous communities are not static, they expand and grow, and even move as in the case of the Tsimanes. This dynamic process leads to an expansion of the use of the territory, so it generates tensions between communities over access to natural resources.

To the people in the region, the territory is boundless and divided into areas for control and use. This includes not only the community's free use of resources but also taking measures to prevent the excessive use of the space. It ensures that the other communities sharing the territory are not negatively impacted. It's a collective approach to owning and managing the land.

According to the interviewees, "envy over resources" is possibly the main trigger for internal conflicts; however, the indigenous leaders mentioned that of the three ethnic groups, the Tsimanes are the ones that have the least territorial conflicts with the other groups, due to their "circular use of the territory". They mobilize throughout the territory taking advantage of the resources where they are, and due to their peaceful nature, as one of the leaders mentioned, "...they [Tsimanes] flee from the conflict, they do not fight over land." However, the new forms of parceling and delimitation of the territory bring by settlers and interculturals cut off the flow of the Tsimanes. As a result, the Tsimanes began

to have identity barriers, and “imaginary” ideas of differentiation and stratification based on the location where they come from.

The participants mentioned that despite the conflicts with the intercultural and coca growers in the southern zone of the park, the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS faced conflicts with the ranchers who constantly sought to expand their grazing fields. To prevent this situation, the indigenous people began to wire up certain areas, and in some cases, the indigenous communities united and defended themselves. It was reported that in one case the dialogue did not prosper so they took an extreme measure, burning of one rancher's property.

8.9. Collective territory practices in the TIPNIS

During the interview, it was mentioned that in certain communities, families have their own Chaco. However, there is collaboration between them for *chaqueo*, which involves planting or harvesting. This serves as an opportunity for families and communities to come together and work in unison. This collaboration usually occurs between June and July. An indigenous leader further explained that the collective practices of the land are centered around the family. This involves working with their children and spouses. In some cases, certain territories are shared with other families and communities for the cultivation of specific products that require a larger labor force, such as rice.

A local expert has mentioned that certain communities practice reciprocity when it comes to the use of land and community work. For instance, in the case of the Moxeños, some communities apply the *"suplir"* (supply) method for preparing land for livestock grazing or agriculture, or during natural disasters like floods, fires, or heavy rain. This practice involves providing aid to a person or family who has lost their harvest or experienced difficulties in preparing their land. The recipient doesn't necessarily have to give back to the same person who helped them but can instead provide assistance to someone else. Unfortunately, this practice is slowly disappearing.

According to international experts, there are collective practices in the TIPNIS territory that cannot necessarily be classified as reciprocity practices. In TIPNIS, land access is not based on parcels because the community rotates the use of collective space. However, not

all communities are farmers due to the economic rationality of hunting, gathering, and fishing, which allows them to optimize their time. The experts also noted that the community engages in flexible collective activities, such as roofing a house, repairing a church, or harvesting crops, where part of the harvested product is given as remuneration.

8.10. Decolonization and Autonomy Process

When the indigenous leaders were asked what decolonization meant to them, they did not understand the word, but they understood the meaning. One indigenous leader mentioned that "...decolonization is that they [indigenous people] were enslaved, subjugated, without rights and now there is a right that has to be enforced". Other indigenous leader mentioned that while they do not understand the concept of decolonization it is constantly mentioned by the MAS government, and it is being "handled as a political instrument".

According to a local expert, the concept of decolonization is not commonly recognized in lowland communities, although they do grasp the idea through other terms. For instance, the Moxeños and Yurakares tend to refer to it as "autonomy and self-determination". One of the international experts complemented that the concept of decolonization is related to autonomy, in the sense that "... the autonomy reflects a tension between their understanding and that of the state".

Even though the term "autonomy" may not be commonly used across all communities, its definition is well-understood by indigenous groups. Autonomy signifies sovereignty, allowing them to have their own institutions, authorities, judicial system, and utilization of resources. Essentially, it is a means to overturn oppressive relationships. Also, autonomy is related to the search for the Loma Santa, especially for some Moxeños communities, however, a local expert mentioned that the "Loma Santa is a generational issue", and that the new generations have not appropriated this concept, "...maybe it is an intermittent topic, it fades and resurfaces" in certain periods.

Indigenous leaders were asked to explain what autonomy meant to them, and they defined it as "dependence on oneself", the ability to determine their own path, and the capability to manage their resources in accordance with their cultural practices. They also stated that autonomy involves self-governance and the ability to make their own decisions. However,

a local expert noted that the concept of autonomy in the lowlands still have a strong state bias.

8.11. A neocolonialism project in the TIPNIS?

Is there a neocolonialism project in the TIPNIS? One of the international experts mentioned that an approach that can help us understand the government's contradiction of attacking and boost settlement in indigenous territories is the concept of “internal colonialism”¹⁸ (Rivera, 2010). A local expert added that this concept suggests the government still views these areas as "empty" and "uncivilized" and therefore feels the need to "put them to work." Also, the Unity Pact¹⁹ in 2008 would have obscured these unequal relations among Indigenous groups in Bolivia.

The participants argued that the TIPNIS case brought to light the tensions between the indigenous groups of lowlands and the MAS government. The interviewees believed that the government's true intention was to promote the dominance of highland indigenous groups, which was not evident in the early years of the MAS government or the Unity Pact. One international expert mentions that dichotomies of “highlands vs. lowlands, peasant vs. indigenous, land vs. territory” were already present and constant in the MAS government. Therefore, the interviewees mentioned that the State's neocolonial idea of occupying the lowlands is based on viewing the inhabitants as uncivilized and underdeveloped. This is not a new concept introduced by the MAS government, but rather something that has been perpetuated since pre-colonial times.

According to an international expert, this hegemony can be understood according to Silvia Rivera's concept: “staggered contempt”, which in general terms refers to the fact that even within indigenous groups not all are consider equal. The international expert complemented, "the Aymara and Quechua consider themselves more developed and civilized than the Amazonians, it is a different logic than that of the collective territory".

¹⁸ Rivera understands internal colonialism as “...the set of diachronic contradictions of varying depth, which emerge to the surface of contemporaneity, and therefore cross the contemporary spheres of modes of production, state political systems and ideologies anchored in cultural homogeneity” (Rivera, 2010:36).

¹⁹ The Unity Pact is an alliance of union and indigenous social organizations that vindicate indigenous and agrarian rights, since 2005 it has been a strong ally of the MAS government.

Complementing the above, one local expert mentioned that the interculturals in the southern zone of the TIPNIS began to “assume a state role”, to constitute themselves as a “parallel State”, imposing their norms on the territory, such as the prohibition of free movement, which affects and modify the life of the indigenous communities of the TIPNIS. In this sense, it was also mentioned that the Plurinational State project, instead of consolidating multicultural processes, promotes neocolonialism processes based on an “Andean centrist” or “Anden hegemonic” logic. This is complemented by one indigenous leader who said:

The Aymara and Quechua had a subordinate perception of the lowland indigenous people, they say that better than a collective territory is to have one's plot of land, because it could be sold. They arrived with mercantilist ideas and individual use of the land.

8.12. Decolonization process in the TIPNIS

It is possible to promote decolonization exercises and practices based on the TIPNIS struggle. According to one local expert, claiming the autonomy of the right to self-determination, to their decision-making systems, are decolonizing exercises. He said, “Rejecting the highway project, as in the last Meeting of Corregidores, is a decolonizing act in itself”. Other participants point out that decolonization, as a social process, it has been applied since the beginning of the TIPNIS resistance. Considering that the TIPNIS communities and indigenous groups have survived and overcome different socio-historical periods and different power groups (as it is detailed in the First Section), would also mean an example of decolonization processes.

Another local expert explained that the indigenous groups in TIPNIS practice decolonization through their representative and organizational dynamics. The sub-centrals look for consultation with the communities before making any decision and do not mandate them to follow a particular course of action. This exercise of autonomy allows for the communities to ignore the sub-central office if they fail to comply with their mandates, which reinforces their autonomy. Furthermore, decolonization involves utilizing the communities' decision-making practices rather than imposing foreign cultural, political, and practical guidelines.

According to the participants, decolonization is put into action through practice and is based on the idea of autonomy. The recent meeting of Corregidores could serve as a practical example of this process, as long as decolonization is connected to autonomy. Despite some Corregidores and subcentral presidents expressing support and sympathy for the government and its road plans, the communities have made it clear that they reject this proposal. Therefore, the Corregidores and presidents must respect the decisions made by the families and communities, even if they personally disagree. Their duty is to reflect the interests of the majority.

The decolonization process is a lengthy and intricate one, as stated by an international expert who noted that there are still tasks yet to be completed. She emphasized the importance of decolonizing the concept of agriculture, which has historically carried a heavy civilizing connotation. Additionally, she stressed the need to identify specific groups and individuals as “subjects of rights” rather than relying on broad generalizations promoted by the State, such as the use of the term “native peasant peoples” to refer to all the diverse indigenous groups in the TIPNIS region.

8.13. What does it mean to be Indigenous people in the TIPNIS context?

Indigenous leaders stated that being indigenous means feeling connected to one's people, valuing one's ethnic heritage, respecting oneself, possessing knowledge about one's culture, environment, and nature, and refusing to negotiate over land. Additionally, being indigenous is characterized by humility, having endured, or currently experiencing discrimination, or having worked in subordinate positions without recognition or benefits.

According to a local expert for the TIPNIS being indigenous people is “to be a subject of rights and be a political subject”. However, the local expert mentioned that there has been a recent attempt to depoliticize this action, limiting indigenous people notion to resource management for subsistence, which makes the political subject “invisible”. Another local expert noted that the term indigenous people has been embraced in the lowlands with pride and without any pejorative connotation, unlike in the Andes.

The interviewees pointed out that the current situation of the lowland indigenous movement is different from what it was 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Therefore, it is important

to acknowledge and comprehend these historical moments, as they have played a role in shaping the indigenous world. The political subject of the indigenous people has undergone a transformation, reflecting the changes happening in the country, region, and globally. While there is recognition of the “indigenous political subject” in terms of opportunities and initiatives, their way of life has been altered, leading to the constant evolution of the “indigenous subject” and its meaning based on the prevailing circumstances.

Finally, the interviewees mentioned that the topic of indigenous identity in Bolivia resurfaced after the TIPNIS case in 2012. The interviewees were perplexed as to how a government that claimed to be indigenous and had elected the first indigenous person to power could neglect the rights of other indigenous groups and the mother earth. The indigenous leaders stated that the MAS government did not support nor protect the rights of lowlands indigenous people, and therefore, it could not be considered as government that protected all the indigenous groups. The lowland indigenous groups were particularly vulnerable to abuses of power. Two indigenous leaders said:

When an indigenous person assumes power, he forgets where he comes from, there is a lack of knowledge and alienation. The government only used the indigenous people as a political discourse to reach power, which is where people are better known.

Evo Morales only used the indigenous discourse at the international level, in practice his treatment of indigenous groups is different, he generates an image of indigenists when in real practice it is different.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Although the results of the so-called “prior” consultation process and the enactment of Law No. 969 removing the intangibility of the TIPNIS were convincing arguments for the MAS government to accelerate and complete the construction of the road through the TIPNIS, the practical reality seems to show the opposite the road project was stalled for multiple reasons.

The Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos road project's progress and construction status until 2023 are uncertain. While some interviewees were able to access the sector in March

2023, and indigenous leaders from three sub-central areas of the TIPNIS made observations, it's challenging to determine if there's considerable progress in the second section. The interviewees also mentioned that there are two positions about the project. On one hand, the group related to the MAS government, who support the road construction, such as some governors' offices, intercultural organizations, and coca producers. In addition, they try to generate a media narrative in which section II seems almost finished. On the other hand, other group conformed by NGOs, activists, indigenous groups, and political parties opposed to MAS. They use the TIPNIS for media purposes and argue that the second section isn't yet built.

Based on this information, it appears that the area where the II section of the highway would be built is still untouched. There is no evidence of any construction taking place. Various reasons have been given for this, including difficult weather conditions, particularly during the rainy season, which makes access to the area challenging. Additionally, there is a lack of economic resources and a shift in the MAS government's agenda in priorities regarding development projects. The political and public health crises in 2019 and 2020, such as the Covid19 pandemic and the political divisions within the MAS had a significant economic impact in the government's budget, which affected the construction of the road in the TIPNIS. However, the most significant factor is the political repositioning and reunification of the TIPNIS sub-centrals and indigenous organizations of the lowlands. All these events have influenced the current situation and led to the government halting the construction works.

The I and III sections of the project have shown significant progress. In Polygon 7, where the I section is located and is home to intercultural groups and coca peasants who support the MAS government, the section is almost complete and unfortunately, some parts have already been parcel out and privatized. As for the third section, it is noted that it would include the construction of bridges and the presence of "ripiados". However, this section crosses through TIM, another indigenous territory, and measures are being taken to prevent it from passing through their land.

In March 2023, the TIPNIS community gathered for the Corregidores Meeting and voted to reject the road project that would divide their land. The resolution was passed by 52 out of the 74 communities living in TIPNIS, including CONISUR, who initially supported

the project. This unification was a significant achievement despite the government's ongoing efforts to divide the community during the last 11 years.

It seems that the recent shift in leadership among indigenous communities is a result of a renewed connection between leaders and their social base. This connection may be due to the fact that leaders live within the community and have a direct relationship with their constituents. Additionally, a generational change in leadership has occurred as younger, less experienced leaders have been elected. However, these new young leaders not only bring new fresh ideas, strategies, and political projections for continuing the resistance and defense of the TIPNIS from their territory, but also, they managed to unify the three TIPNIS sub centrals and have a unify political position vis-à-vis the government.

Over the past decade of conflict, attempts to divide the TIPNIS through development and integrationist discourses have failed in the face of harsh reality. The State was unable to fulfill pledges made to indigenous leaders regarding education, resources, and development projects in the area. Meanwhile, those same indigenous leaders realized that the negative impacts of the road - such as river pollution, deforestation, and loss of flora and fauna due to unsustainable resource exploitation by external groups - did not outweigh the benefits of preserving the collective territory on which life in the TIPNIS depended.

Undoubtedly, there are many lessons and contributions from the TIPNIS case to the understanding of development, territory, and decolonization, at least from the conceptions of lowland indigenous groups in Bolivia.

Firstly, to ensure fair development, it's important to maintain an open-minded approach that doesn't rely on essentialism, idealism, and stereotypes. Indigenous communities have the same social, civil, cultural rights as any other group, including access to the benefits of modern technology. Therefore, it's essential to listen to both individual and collective voices when it comes to development. In places like TIPNIS, where multiculturalism and the environment are fragile, everyone should have access to the benefits of development, but they should also have the opportunity to choose which elements or alternative types of development they want. This includes hybrid and mixed development, where they can choose certain aspects and reject others based on what works best for their community,

for instance accept to have access to Internet but not to rads and highways because their dynamics of mobility depend more on rivers than roads. Development should be collective and benefit everyone, rather than being driven by individual interests. Finally, it's important to provide clear and truthful information about the benefits and consequences of development. Ultimately, the decision to pursue development should be left up to the indigenous groups themselves.

The notions of territory are nourished with the TIPNIS case, mainly from the phrase that gives the title to this thesis: Territory is defended in the territory. The indigenous people of lowland have utilized various means of demand and resistance throughout their historical struggle. However, in recent years, new strategies have been developed due to significant generational leadership changes. These include returning to the territory, connecting with social bases, engaging in continuous dialogue with families and communities, observing and witnessing daily life, and most importantly, establishing resistance from within that environment.

In the TIPNIS case, the territory is viewed beyond being a mere source of resources and space for economic and population expansion. It is also a place where interactions with others, even those who are different, take place. In the territory, common concerns and aspirations are shared, enabling past, present, and future generations to connect and learn from each other. This space encapsulates the ancestors and memories of the people, serving as a close link to their identity, allowing the community to progress and develop.

The case of the TIPNIS reminds us that territorial boundaries are insufficient as they attempt to impose a rigid structure on a diverse, complex, and multicultural reality. This outdated structure of limits aims to divide, privatize, and exploit land. The Tsimanes' constant circular movement within their territory illustrates that imposing limits and geographic barriers on their land use and exploitation practices can be highly restrictive. Such limitations can alter the Tsimanes' identities and organizational structures in unfavorable ways by creating artificial categories based on their location, which were not originally a part of the Tsimanes' way of life.

Therefore, for the TIPNIS, the territory is primarily a collective entity that should not be privatized as its collective use allows for a rotational system, generating more sustainable

dynamics. However, it should be questioned whether the definition of TIPNIS, in terms of territory and identity, is too general and reductionist for the diverse identity characteristics of the three indigenous groups inhabiting this area.

The TIPNIS case sheds light on the process of decolonization and provides insight into its meaning. Although the indigenous groups of TIPNIS may not be familiar with the term "decolonization," they are familiar with the concept. They acknowledge that the government frequently uses this term for political purposes, but for them, decolonization means achieving autonomy and sovereignty over their territory. In their perspective, true decolonization is about being self-governing and having control over their own lives, decisions, and territory. However, it has been reported that the government's efforts to promote economic development and land resource exploitation in a strongly Andean-centric manner have led to neo-colonial dynamics. This has resulted in authoritarian attitudes and the creation of a "parallel state" by colonizers and interculturals in the TIPNIS region. They impose charges and regulations that restrict free movement throughout the territory, making such practices increasingly prevalent in the region.

To conclude, the TIPNIS indigenous groups have resisted the imposition of dominant development models and the privatization of their land from multiply social sectors and State interests; they have also employed their understanding of autonomy through their representative organizations to overcome various socio-historical stages from pre-colonial times to the present; and their struggle against attempts to reduce, colonize, and dominate their vital space serves as an example of decolonization. The indigenous people's struggle and efforts to preserve the TIPNIS is an important example of decolonization. However, they continue to work towards creating new strategies to defend their territory from the territory.

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11. APPENDIXES

Thematic axes and questions to interviewees (Original)

1er EJE TEMÁTICO: *Situación actual de la carretera Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos.*

- ¿Cuál es el estado de construcción del Tramo II de la carretera Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos?
- ¿Cuáles serían los posibles efectos del II Tramo en términos étnicos y territoriales?
- ¿Qué otras alternativas carreteras existen al Tramo II?
- ¿Cuáles serían las aparentes razones para insistir que el Tramo II pase por el centro del TIPNIS? ¿Cuáles son los intereses del Estado?
- ¿Cuál es la posición del último Encuentro de Corregidores del TIPNIS sobre el Tramo II de la carretera por el TIPNIS?
- ¿Se conoce las consecuencias y/o beneficios de los Tramos I y III de la carretera, al sur y norte del TIPNIS?
- ¿Qué derechos constitucionales se violan con la implementación de la carretera tal y como se encuentra diseñada?
- ¿Qué irregularidades se identificaron durante el proceso de consulta para la construcción de la carretera?
- ¿Cuál es el estado de situación de las organizaciones representativas y políticas del TIPNIS? ¿Qué dificultades han presentado en los últimos diez años?
-

2do EJE TEMÁTICO: TIPNIS y Desarrollo

- ¿Cuáles son los modelos de producción y subsistencia de los tres grupos indígenas del TIPNIS?
 - ¿Cuál es el rol actual de la ganadería y la agricultura en las poblaciones del TIPNIS? Debido a que los textos sugieren que estas comenzaron a ser prácticas más intensivas en las comunidades indígenas del TIPNIS.
 - ¿Cuál es la dinámica de las prácticas colectivas de uso y tenencia de la tierra en el TIPNIS? ¿Cómo difiere de las prácticas andinas como el “Ayni” y la “Minka”?
 - ¿Cuál es la concepción de “desarrollo” para los grupos indígenas del TIPNIS?

3er EJE TEMÁTICO: TIPNIS y Territorio

- ¿Existen conflictos territoriales entre las comunidades y grupos indígenas que habitan el TIPNIS?
- ¿Cuáles son las características de los conflictos territoriales entre los indígenas del TIPNIS y los colonizadores y ganaderos?
- ¿Qué aportes nos brinda el caso del TIPNIS en el entendimiento o (re) entendimiento de las nociones de territorialidad y territorio?

4to EJE TEMÁTICO: TIPNIS y Etnicidad

- ¿Cuál es la relación interétnica e intercultural entre los grupos indígenas del TIPNIS?
- ¿Cuáles han sido los cambios y transformaciones socioculturales más significativos que se han producido en la zona en los últimos años?
- ¿Qué es ser indígena? Desde la concepción de los pueblos de Tierras Bajas, y específicamente desde el TIPNIS.

5to EJE TEMÁTICO: TIPNIS y Descolonización

- Un gobierno y partido político que se autoproclama indígena atenta contra los derechos de otros indígenas ¿Cómo se puede entender esta contradicción a partir del caso del TIPNIS desde un enfoque y agenda descolonizadora?
- ¿Cómo se entienden los procesos de descolonización desde los pueblos indígenas del TIPNIS?
- ¿Existen dinámicas neocolonizadoras en el TIPNIS?
- ¿Cuál es la dimensión descolonizadora desde la resistencia y lucha indígena del TIPNIS?

Thematic axes and questions to interviewees (English translation)

1st THEMATIC AXIS: *Current status of the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos highway.*

- What is the construction status of Section II of the Villa Tunari - San Ignacio de Moxos highway?
- What would be the possible effects of Section II in ethnic and territorial terms?
- What other road alternatives exist to Section II?
- What are the apparent reasons for insisting that Section II pass through the center of the TIPNIS? What are the interests of the State?
- What is the position of the last TIPNIS Corregidores' Meeting on Section II of the road through the TIPNIS?
- Are the consequences and/or benefits of Sections I and III of the highway to the south and north of the TIPNIS known?
- What constitutional rights are being violated with the implementation of the road as designed?
- What irregularities were identified during the consultation process for the construction of the road?
- What is the status of the representative and political organizations of the TIPNIS? What difficulties have they encountered in the last ten years?

2nd THEMATIC AXIS: *TIPNIS and Development*

- What are the production and subsistence models of the three indigenous groups of the TIPNIS?

- What is the current role of livestock and agriculture in the TIPNIS populations? Since the texts suggest that these began to be more intensive practices in the indigenous communities of the TIPNIS.
- What are the dynamics of collective practices in the TIPNIS?
- What are the dynamics of collective land use and land tenure practices in the TIPNIS and how do they differ from Andean practices such as "Ayni" and "Minka"?
- What is the conception of "development" for the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS?

3rd THEMATIC AXIS: *TIPNIS and Territory*

- Are there territorial conflicts between the communities and indigenous groups that inhabit the TIPNIS?
- What are the characteristics of the territorial conflicts between the indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS and the colonizers and cattle ranchers?
- What contributions does the case of the TIPNIS offer us in the understanding or (re)understanding of the notions of territoriality and territory?

4th THEMATIC AXIS: *TIPNIS and Ethnicity*

- What is the interethnic and intercultural relationship among the indigenous groups of the TIPNIS?
- What have been the most significant socio-cultural changes and transformations that have occurred in the area in recent years?
- What does it mean to be indigenous? From the conception of the peoples of the Lowlands, and specifically from the TIPNIS.

5th THEMATIC AXIS: *TIPNIS and Decolonization*

- A government and political party that claims to be indigenous is against the rights of other indigenous people. How can this contradiction be understood from the case of the TIPNIS from a decolonizing approach and agenda?
- How are decolonization processes understood from the perspective of the indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS?
- Are there neo-colonizing dynamics in the TIPNIS?
- What is the decolonizing dimension of the indigenous resistance and struggle of the TIPNIS?