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# Indigenous Peoples and the New Extraction

## From Territorial Rights to Hydrocarbon Citizenship in the Bolivian Chaco

by  
Penelope Anthias

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*A growing body of literature examines how the rise of “neo-extractivist” states in Latin America is reconfiguring the relationship between resources, nation, territory, and citizenship. However, the implications for indigenous territorial projects remain underexplored. Ethnographic research in the Bolivian Chaco reveals the ways in which indigenous territorial projects are becoming implicated in and being reimagined amidst the spatializing struggles of a hydrocarbon state. The tension between indigenous peoples’ desire for inclusion in a hydrocarbon-based national development project and their experiences of dispossession by an expanding hydrocarbon frontier has given rise to competing modes of “hydrocarbon citizenship” in the Guaraní territory Itika Guasu, where a vision of corporate-sponsored indigenous autonomy is pitted against new forms of state-funded development patronage. These dynamics challenge resistance narratives and resource-curse theories, revealing how resources act as conduits for deeper postcolonial struggles over territory, sovereignty, and citizenship.*

*Un creciente cuerpo de literatura examina cómo el surgimiento de los estados “neo-extractivistas” en América Latina está reconfigurando la relación entre los recursos, la nación, el territorio y la ciudadanía. Sin embargo, las implicaciones para los proyectos territoriales indígenas han sido poco exploradas. Investigaciones etnográficas en el Chaco boliviano revela cómo los pueblos indígenas están repensando sus proyectos territoriales en el contexto de las luchas espaciales de un estado extractivista. Destaco la tensión entre el deseo de los pueblos indígenas para su inclusión en un proyecto de desarrollo nacional basado en los hidrocarburos, y sus experiencias de despojo por la expansión de la frontera hidrocarburiífera. Esta tensión ha dado lugar a modos opuestos de “ciudadanía de hidrocarburos” en el territorio Guaraní Itika Guasu, donde una visión de autonomía indígena patrocinada por una empresa petrolera se enfrenta a nuevos proyectos de desarrollo financiados por el estado. Estas dinámicas cuestionan narrativas de resistencia y teorías de “la maldición de los recursos,” revelando que los recursos actúan como conductos para luchas postcoloniales por el territorio, la soberanía y la ciudadanía.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous peoples, Extraction, Bolivia, Neo-extractivism

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In a 2007 speech, the Bolivian vice president and academic Álvaro García Linera laid out his vision for “dismantling neoliberalism,” a model he associated with social fragmentation, privatization, and an erosion of the state and

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democracy. In his vision, state development of and distribution of rents from Bolivia's subsoil resources—the “socialization of collective wealth”—would go hand in hand with the construction of a new, unified Bolivian national society. This society, characterized by grassroots participatory democracy and sustained social movement activism, would be overseen by an “empowered state” that would provide “an international armor” for social struggles while being “controlled and permeated by their demands,” including, implicitly, the demand for economic distribution. He summarized his vision as follows:

This struggle against neo-liberalism is based on four fundamentals: varying forms of democratic expression (community-based, territorial-based, direct, and participatory), the recovery by society of its collective wealth, the reinforcement of the state—subordinated to society—for the sake of international protection, and, lastly, unification of the social movements. Country and city come together, also indigenous people and peasants, young and old workers, the unemployed and the homeless, and the landless and the destitute.

As García Linera made clear, Bolivia's “new extraction” is more than an economic project or a set of pro-poor policies; it is a project of nation making—of redefining the national community and the state's social contract with its citizens—on a par with Bolivia's 1952 agrarian revolution and illustrative of oil's capacity to “elevate and expand the centrality of the nation-state as a vehicle for modernity, progress, civilization” (Watts, 2001: 208).

In this paper, I draw on ethnographic work in the Guaraní territory of Itika Guasu in Bolivia's gas-rich Chaco region to explore how lowland indigenous peoples<sup>1</sup> are situated within this new hydrocarbon-based national development project. I argue that, while lowland indigenous peoples seek inclusion in the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism—MAS) project of state-led decolonization, the state's continuing refusal to recognize their territorial rights in the context of extraction produces feelings of exclusion and betrayal. This has given rise to competing modes of “hydrocarbon citizenship” in Itika Guasu, where a vision of corporate-sponsored territorial autonomy based on direct negotiations with hydrocarbon companies is pitted against efforts to integrate the territory into new forms of gas-funded state development patronage. These dynamics demonstrate that indigenous peoples are becoming implicated in the competing spatializing modes of a hydrocarbon state in ways that challenge both resistance narratives and resource-curse theories. They must be placed in the context of a longer indigenous struggle for territorial autonomy in the Bolivian lowlands, a struggle that predates the election of Evo Morales and has unfolded in articulation with an expanding extractive-industry frontier.

The paper is structured as follows. I begin by reviewing previous work on oil and the (post)colonial nation, arguing that resources must be understood as conduits for deeper postcolonial struggles over territory, authority, and citizenship. I then examine the intimate and unstable relationship among hydrocarbons, nation, and territory in Bolivia and its evolution under the MAS government. I go on to trace the evolution of the Guaraní struggle for territorial rights in Itika Guasu, highlighting the way a project of multicultural citizenship became articulated with and undermined by conflicts over the governance of gas. The final section examines the competing modes of hydrocarbon citizenship

that have emerged in Itika Guasu since 2010 as Guaraní leaders seek to renegotiate the relationship between territory, nation, and extraction.

### EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY AND THE (POST)COLONIAL NATION

In the social-movements literature, indigenous peoples are often depicted as engaged in a “defense of place” against globalizing forces—including extractive-industry development in their territories (Escobar, 2008).<sup>2</sup> It is acknowledged that indigenous peoples have been engaged in long struggles for recognition of their territorial rights after histories of colonial dispossession and that, even where such recognition is granted, states often prioritize capitalist resource-accessing claims over indigenous claims to territory (Sawyer and Gomez, 2012). While geographical and anthropological scholarship complicates constructions of indigeneity as fixed in place and linked to particular forms of development (Povinelli, 2011; Radcliffe, 2015), indigenous movements often employ these tropes of identity and place to make political claims about their rights in relationship to the environment (Fabricant, 2013).

A rather different narrative is offered by the literature on extractive industry, which has tended to focus on how a resource—as a commodity and vehicle for cultural meanings—shapes the contours of the economy, polity, society, and environment of the country in which it is located (Watts, 2009). Scholars have been particularly preoccupied with the question why countries with an abundance of natural resources (particularly oil) are so often plagued by poverty, undemocratic governance, and violent conflict, elaborating various theories of the “resource curse” to explain this.<sup>3</sup> Rather than delving into the history, identity, or knowledges of people involved in resource conflicts (indigenous or otherwise), resource-curse theories understand conflict as an outcome of the spatiality, material qualities, and economic value of resources, which are often seen as disrupting an otherwise stable national social order.

Neither perspective is adequate for understanding the dynamics that are emerging in the indigenous territories of the Bolivian Chaco. Neither a simple story of place-based resistance nor a manifestation of a generic resource curse, the Chaco’s incorporation into a transnational hydrocarbon economy has unfolded through “complex accommodations, compromises, complicities, oppositions, and violence” (Watts, 2012: 440; also Mitchell, 2011). These processes have been shaped by historical configurations of race, territory, property, and power and by recent histories of local indigenous and national political struggle. Rather than treating resources as a driver of conflict, this paper highlights the fact that resources act *as conduits* for deeper postcolonial struggles over territory, sovereignty, and citizenship. In the context of Bolivia’s new extraction, the subsoil has emerged as a key terrain for struggles over citizenship and nation (Perreault and Valdivia, 2010). I reveal how indigenous peoples are reframing their territorial projects on this new terrain of hydrocarbon citizenship in ways that build on their earlier efforts to “remap the nation.”

In making this argument, I draw on accounts that interrogate the intimate and unstable relationship between extractive industry and the postcolonial nation (Ferguson, 2006; Perreault, 2014; Perreault and Valdivia, 2010; Sawyer, 2004; Valdivia, 2008; Watts, 2001). While the subsoil is often symbolically and

materially implicated in constructions of the nation, these constructions are frequently subject to contestation by populations that may seek to redefine the relationship between a resource, capital, the state, and its citizens.<sup>4</sup> Such contestation engages fundamental questions of political authority and territorial sovereignty—questions that are infused with colonial histories of racialized dispossession. Rather than seeing conflict as a product of oil's corrupting influence, a postcolonial account highlights the contested territoriality of the postcolonial nation-state (Ferguson, 2006; Wainwright, 2008) and the hidden role of natural resources in producing the illusion of national coherence (Coronil, 1997).

A compelling account of the unstable relationship between oil and the postcolonial nation is provided by Michael Watts's notion of "oil's double movement." As Watts (2001: 208) observes, "Oil simultaneously elevates and expands the centrality of the nation-state as a vehicle for modernity, progress, civilization, and . . . produces conditions that directly challenge and question these very same, and hallowed, tenets of nationalism and development (the national development project)." This occurs because oil creates expectations that the state will deliver development and modernity to its citizens but entails a "Faustian pact" between the state and capital that reveals the nation and the state to be "sham, decrepit, venal, and corrupt notions." The problem of the state's legitimacy is compounded by the spatiality of extractive activity, in which social and environmental impacts accumulate in resource-rich territories (often marginal to the national development project and populated by ethnic minorities) while resource wealth is accumulated and managed by national elites, often on the basis of the state's claims to ownership of the subsoil.

Of course, compared with Africa, Latin America has a quite different and much longer experience of both colonialism and postcolonial development. The widely popular resource nationalist government of Bolivia, with its strong redistributive agenda, seems to stand in stark contrast to the "decrepit, venal, and corrupt" Nigerian oil state. Nevertheless, the relationship between nation and subsoil in Bolivia continues to be marked by the contradictory dynamics of oil's double movement, which have intensified under the MAS government. These dynamics are particularly visible in the Chaco region, where an ambitious project of nation building and state-led decolonization is unfolding in tense articulation with spatial struggles around the governance of gas.

## HYDROCARBONS, NATION, AND CITIZENSHIP IN BOLIVIA

Throughout history, constructions of Bolivian national identity have been intimately linked to resource extraction—from the silver of Potosí to the tin of Oruro, the Amazon's rubber, and the Chaco's gas (Perreault, 2014). National elites have risen and fallen with resource booms. Extractive industry has also shaped the dynamics of indigenous peoples' ambivalent relationship with the nation. Historians have seen in the 1932–1935 Chaco War, which enlisted thousands of highland Indians in a national military endeavor to protect the Chaco's gas reserves, the origins of modern Bolivian nationalism and the 1952 agrarian revolution (Klein, 1992; Zavaleta, 2011 [1967]). The agrarian reform that followed formally recognized Indians as citizens, ending centuries of debt peonage in the highlands.<sup>5</sup> Yet Chaco indigenous peoples continued to be excluded from de

facto citizenship, in part because of racial stereotypes that framed them as “savages” who were impossible to whiten or civilize (Kay and Urioste, 2007). Bolivia’s emergence as a hydrocarbon nation thus entailed a widening arc of national membership that included some indigenous peoples as citizens while excluding (and dispossessing) others—an early iteration of oil’s double movement.

The 2005 election of Evo Morales marked a watershed moment in this history of nature and nation. Morales’s election emerged from a wave of social protests contesting a deeply unpopular set of neoliberal reforms implemented since the mid-1980s (Kohl, 2006; Postero, 2007), which had opened up the subsoil to investment by transnational oil companies and enabled them to reap a staggering 82 percent of the profits (Hindery, 2013). On taking office, Morales declared Bolivia’s gas fields “national patrimony” and saw them theatrically occupied by the military while contracts with transnational oil companies were renegotiated. The new regime greatly increased the state’s share of oil and gas rents—money that has been channeled into a range of social programs addressing malnutrition, illiteracy, school attendance, child and maternal mortality, and old age pensions. This “neo-extractivist” economic model (Gudynas, 2010) has been accompanied by an official agenda of decolonization focused on redressing the political marginalization faced by indigenous peoples throughout the country’s history. Bolivia’s 2009 Constitution declares Bolivia a “plurinational state” and recognizes a variety of rights for “indigenous peasant originary peoples,” including autonomous governance of their territories. In short, state control of gas rents has provided the basis for a historic project of nation building that both revalorizes indigeneity and enables poor Bolivians to share in the economic benefits of extraction.

However, this has not signaled an end to conflicts around the governance of extraction. Rather, the emergence of the nation as an anchor for “spatializing spectacle” under the MAS has been accompanied by the emergence of alternative spatializations that demand “a reconfiguration of the state’s territorial order” (Gustafson, 2011: 222). Most visibly, Morales’s first term (2006–2009) was dominated by elite-led departmental autonomy movements in Bolivia’s resource-rich eastern lowlands (D. Bebbington and Bebbington, 2010; Fabricant, 2009; Gustafson, 2011; Perreault, 2014; Perreault and Valdivia, 2010). While such movements have now largely subsided amidst political accommodations between the MAS and the traditional elites, conflicts over political authority, fiscal control, and the governance of extraction have continued, particularly in the gas-rich Chaco region.

Where are indigenous peoples positioned in relation to these struggles? As Gustafson (2011: 223; see also Fabricant and Postero, 2013) notes, demographically marginal lowland indigenous populations have faced pressure to align themselves with either the nationalist or the regionalist project. Other accounts focus on the way indigenous peoples have responded to extraction in their territories. Here some writers depict a fundamental conflict between extractivism and indigenous visions of “living well” (Escobar, 2008; Gudynas, 2010), while others document a more heterogeneous and pragmatic set of indigenous responses (D. Bebbington and Bebbington, 2010; T. Bebbington and Bury, 2013; Hindery, 2013; McNeish, 2013). What none of these accounts fully examines is the way indigenous peoples are seeking to reframe and reposition their own historically grounded territorial projects amidst the multiscalar conflicts of a hydrocarbon state.



In what follows, I explore this question in the Guaraní territory of Itika Guasu, in the Chaco region of Tarija Department. The Guaraní are caught up in oil's double movement—they face the promise of inclusion in a plurinational hydrocarbon state alongside the everyday denial of their territorial rights and resource sovereignty claims in the context of extraction. While this double movement has intensified under the MAS government, its origins can be traced to the 1990s, when a multicultural citizenship regime unfolded alongside a boom in hydrocarbon development in indigenous territories.

### CONVERGENT FRONTIERS: THE STRUGGLE FOR TERRITORIAL RIGHTS IN ITIKA GUASU

Bolivia's largest lowland indigenous group, the Guaraní defended their Chaco territory against the Inca, Spanish, and Bolivian forces until the late nineteenth century, when an expanding cattle-ranching economy, a series of military defeats, and the state's policy of awarding frontier lands to nonindigenous settlers left them increasingly marginalized within their territory. The discovery of hydrocarbon reserves during the 1920s and the Chaco War with Paraguay over their control accelerated Guaraní dispossession.<sup>6</sup> By the late twentieth century, most Guaraní were living on marginal lands or on haciendas, trapped in relations of debt bondage (*empatronamiento*) with nonindigenous landowners. Guaraní communities of the Chaco began to organize in the late 1980s as part of a wave of indigenous resurgence across the Bolivian lowlands that centered on the demand for territory (Lehm, 1999). In 1996, following a series of national indigenous mobilizations and a policy reform process sponsored by the World Bank, the Ley del Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria (National Agrarian Reform Service Law—INRA Law) established the collective title *tierra comunitaria de origen* (native community land—TCO), a new concept under which indigenous peoples could claim rights to their ancestral territories (Anthias, 2018).

Not only did the TCOs fall short of indigenous demands for territory in important respects<sup>7</sup> but their recognition coincided with the opening up of indigenous territories to extractive-industry development. In 1996, alongside the INRA Law, the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada established an "energy triangle" consisting of a new hydrocarbons law, the capitalization (privatization) of the state hydrocarbons firm Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos, and the construction of a natural-gas pipeline to Brazil (Hindery, 2013). By 2008, 20 of Bolivia's 84 TCOs were subject to contracts for hydrocarbons exploration or exploitation (CEADESC, 2008). TCOs gave indigenous peoples no rights over the subsoil, which remained the patrimony of the Bolivian state.

TCO Itika Guasu demonstrates the explosive results of this multicultural double movement. Made up of 36 Guaraní communities, the territorial claim overlies the Margarita-Huacaya (formerly Margarita) gas field, which contains Bolivia's most significant gas reserves (Figure 1). The Spanish company Repsol YPF<sup>8</sup> acquired the concession on May 14, 1997, less than two months after the TCO's official recognition. Despite this recognition, Repsol did not consult the

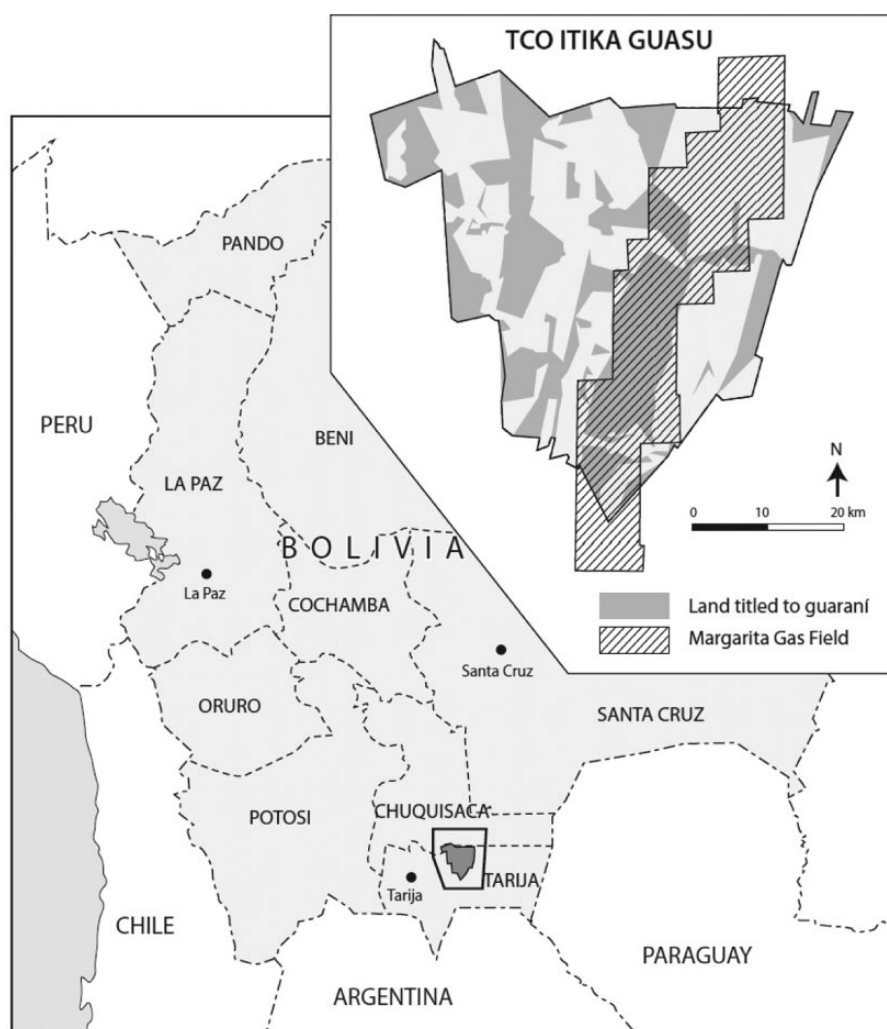


Figure 1. Itika Guasu and the Margarita gas field (Anthias, 2012).

Guaraní about planned developments but signed land use agreements with private land claimants that were subsequently used to justify private rights to these properties in the context of the TCO titling process, preventing their redistribution to the Guaraní (Anthias, 2012).

In the seven-year conflict that followed (2003–2010), the question of land rights in the TCO became intimately connected to Guaraní claims for participation in hydrocarbon governance. In correspondence with Repsol and the Ministry of Hydrocarbons, the Guaraní presented their rights to prior consultation, economic compensation, and socio-environmental monitoring as an extension of their territorial rights, which were recognized but still only partially consolidated under the TCO titling process (APG IG, 2007). Repsol insisted that all of its installations were located on private property the “owners” of which had been compensated through private agreements. Following several years of tense negotiations with Repsol’s subcontractor Maxus (Centro



de Estudios Regionales de Tarija, 2003), the Guaraní finally took their complaints to Repsol's head office through involvement in a regionwide nongovernmental organization (NGO) campaign entitled Repsol Mata (Repsol Kills).

The escalation of this local conflict over indigenous rights and extraction took place against the backdrop of national mobilization in response to the injustices of neoliberal hydrocarbon governance in Bolivia, catalyzed by government plans to export gas from the Margarita field to the United States via Bolivia's historic rival Chile (Hindery, 2013). When national protests culminated in the election of Evo Morales in December 2005, Guaraní leaders in Itika Guasu were hopeful that the new government would support them in their conflict with Repsol and their struggle to consolidate their land rights. In practice, these hopes were disappointed; they were told by the government that their negotiations with Repsol were between "private parties" and the state could not intervene. In private negotiations, the government accused the Guaraní leaders of being "the single biggest threat to Bolivia's energy development," while Morales publicly dismissed their claims to consultation and compensation as blackmail (interview, Entre Ríos, April 24, 2009). In July 2010, the leadership learned that the government had granted 20 new environmental licenses to companies to operate in the TCO without consultation—something they denounced as "explicitly violat[ing] the property right that corresponds to us as a legally recognized TCO" (APG IG, 2010). The TCO titling process remained paralyzed—a fact that Guaraní leaders attributed to the state's interest in the territory's gas reserves.

Guaraní hopes of recovering territorial control through the state-led land titling process ultimately unraveled in the context of an expanding hydrocarbon frontier. This unraveling began during the so-called neoliberal period, when the state prioritized the resource-accessing claims of a transnational oil company over the implementation of Guaraní land rights. It continued under the government of Evo Morales, when, despite their claims to membership of a "plurinational" Bolivia (APG IG, 2010), the Guaraní found themselves once again on the margins of the nation-state, framed as obstacles to a state-led redistributive development project that depended on unrestricted access to resources beneath their territory. In both periods, new forms of cultural and territorial recognition unfolded alongside a weakening of indigenous peoples' capacity to exercise territorial control in practice.

This provides important context for understanding why Guaraní leaders in Itika Guasu have ultimately sought to pursue their struggle for territorial recognition and autonomy beyond the arena of state law through direct negotiations with hydrocarbon companies. A key moment in this shift occurred in 2009, when they wrote to the Ministry of Land demanding an indefinite suspension of the TCO land titling process in Itika Guasu.<sup>9</sup> A second key development came in December 2010, when they signed an "agreement of friendship and cooperation" with Repsol that included both written recognition of their property rights and the creation of a US\$14.8 million Itika Guasu Investment Fund.

## REIMAGINING TERRITORY IN THE AGE OF GAS

On March 23, 2011, community members and leaders from throughout Itika Guasu gathered in Ñaurenda, the organization's birthplace, to celebrate its

twenty-second anniversary. Celebrations began with an evening “cultural event” in which alternating Guaraní music groups accompanied classes of schoolchildren dancing the *rueda* (wheel), interspersed with speeches wishing everyone a happy birthday and a happy future. The atmosphere was surprisingly flat; most of the audience sat silently through the hours of acts. When at midnight 22 rockets were let off in celebration, the response was muted. Speakers blasted the usual Spanglish version of “Happy Birthday” and the audience was asked to stand and participate, but there was little response.

The next morning was spent preparing for the official parade, speeches, and lunch, which had mobilized all the community’s women. Throughout the preparations, a rolling announcement prepared by Radio Niskor<sup>10</sup> blared from loudspeakers, informing people of the achievements of the recent agreement with Repsol. In fact, no one seemed to be listening; those gathered seemed more preoccupied with last-minute preparations or catching up with friends from other communities. Eventually, the speeches began. Representatives of the Guaraní leadership, local NGOs, the army, and the municipal, departmental, and provincial governments spoke in turn, each giving his personal (and political) take on the anniversary. Notable in this staged performance of plurinational citizenship was the presence of a representative from Repsol, who sat alongside other speakers and was repeatedly welcomed although he remained silent. When the turn of the community’s president to speak came, he said that 2011 was a “special year” for the Guaraní of Itika Guasu, who had “cause for celebration.” He went on:

On December 29 [2010], we signed an agreement with Repsol Bolivia SA that put an end to the difficult confrontation that we’ve maintained for many years. But we signed without renouncing any of our rights and gained full legal recognition of our ownership of the TCO and of the existence of the Assembly of the Guaraní People of Itika Guasu.

This speech could simply be read as an effort to appease community members, many of whom had grown skeptical of the leadership’s opaque negotiations with Repsol. Nevertheless, my informal discussions with leaders in 2011 suggested that many of them viewed territorial recognition as a key achievement of the agreement. By “recognition” they meant a written agreement in which the oil company recognized the Assembly of the Guaraní People as the “owner” of TCO Itika Guasu.

The agreement with Repsol is illustrative of the fact that agreements over extractive-industry development and related infrastructure development have come to *stand in for* state-sanctioned land titles as a symbol of territorial recognition. An agreement with the former departmental prefect of Tarija in 2010 relating to the construction of a highway through the territory was heralded by the Guaraní leaders as the first time in history that the departmental government had given “legal recognition that the Assembly of the Guaraní People Itika Guasu is the owner of Itika Guasu” (informal conversation, Entre Ríos, April 11, 2011). Later that year, a constitutional sentence (October 25, 2010) relating to a conflict between the Guaraní and the departmental road-building company provided such a strong legal endorsement of Guaraní land rights that some leaders described it as worth *more* than a government land title (informal conversation, Tarija, June 23, 2011). One leader told me, “We’re going to give it

to every institution so that they know, so that they too can read it" (informal conversation, Entre Ríos, December 22, 2012). These forms of territorial recognition gain meaning in the context of the MAS government's failure to recognize the Guaraní's territorial rights through the TCO titling process or in hydrocarbon negotiations. As one leader put it, "The former governor of Tarija . . . has already recognized everything, and the company [Repsol] has also recognized the rights of the people, but the only one who doesn't want to recognize [our rights] is the government. . . . Abroad, in other countries, the Assembly of the Guaraní People is recognized, but the only one who hasn't recognized us is the government" (informal conversation, Entre Ríos, December 22, 2012).

Even more striking is the way in which territorial autonomy has been reframed in the wake of the agreement with Repsol. Since the early days of the land struggle, the TCO has been associated with the quest for autonomy, or becoming *iyambae* (free, without an owner), initially associated with the severing of exploitative labor contracts with hacienda bosses and the restoration of independent subsistence livelihoods. The Morales government has seen the emergence of new visions (and largely unviable procedures) for advancing indigenous autonomy as a political project (Garcés, 2011). Without necessarily abandoning these tropes, in the wake of the agreement with Repsol the Guaraní leaders began to talk about the Itika Guasu Investment Fund as a route to and a symbol of indigenous autonomy. In his 2011 anniversary speech, the Assembly's president referred to the fund as "part of our long-term funding strategy, which will permit us to carry forward our own development," concluding, "This guarantees our real autonomy and that of our children."

This new form of corporate-sponsored indigenous autonomy was contrasted favorably with the autonomy being offered by the MAS government. One day in late 2011, Román was telling me about the ongoing process for establishing formal indigenous autonomy in a Guaraní municipality, which he dismissed as "not real autonomy" because of the non-Guaraní presence in the municipal government.<sup>11</sup> When I asked what "real autonomy" was, he referred to the agreement with Repsol: "We negotiated *on our own* with the company; now we're managing the money *on our own*; we made our development plan for the next 20 years *on our own*." The fact that the money came from a transnational oil company and the agreement was negotiated with the help of foreign lawyers was unimportant—"on our own" meant independently of elite-controlled regional institutions and the MAS government, both of which had sought to contain the Guaraní's territorial project. Yet, "on our own" also had a deeper significance; it framed the agreement as another step in the Guaraní's long struggle to break relations of dependency and exploitation with hacienda owners: "Before, you had to work for the boss; he would pay you in coca. If the women wanted to wash clothes, first they had to grind maize. You had to work a whole month just to get some sugar for your mate, but now you are working on your own. You're doing things yourself." To emphasize the point, he compared the fund—the interest from which would fund community projects—to "a donkey that you fatten and breed every year," concluding: "*That* is autonomy." Imagined in these terms, the investment fund had transformed gas—a nonrenewable resource whose extraction requires little indigenous participation—into a sustainable source of subsistence to be owned, nurtured, and

exploited by the Guaraní. This discourse placed the negotiations with the oil companies on a continuum with the struggle to gain independence from local hacienda bosses. The vision of autonomy Román described was quite different from that articulated to me by older community members who were involved in the early days of the land struggle, who spoke of their dreams of “recovering territory” as a space of “freedom” where grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers had lived happily “from the forest, from land, from hunting, and looking for honey, and making their products” (interview, Ñaurenda community, May 5, 2009). Whereas the latter vision depended on community members’ *material* access to territory, this new notion of autonomy rested on the leadership’s ability to capture gas rents. As another leader put it, “We’re already autonomous! Because now we’re not maintaining ourselves here with [help from] other local institutions. We’re not dependent on NGOs, on the [regional government] anymore—all those things” (interview, Entre Ríos, December 28, 2011).

At the 2013 anniversary celebration—a reportedly lavish event featuring a local rock band—the TCO’s president formally declared Itika Guasu an “autonomous” territory. The poster advertising the event (Figure 2) provides insight into a vision of gas-funded TCO-based indigenous development. At the center, against a backdrop of the Pilcomayo River, is the outline of the TCO, which, in place of its official title, bears the label “native community *territory*.” This renaming can be read as a critique of the official titling process for offering land rather than territory and as the assertion of a self-defined *political* vision of territory that goes beyond agrarian rights. This assertion of territorial sovereignty is echoed by the line at the top of the poster declaring the Assembly of the Guaraní People the “owner of TCO Itika Guasu”—an assertion that reproduces a discourse of property while challenging the state’s authority to arbitrate property rights. Below the map outline, five photographs depict the forms of development envisaged from the Itika Guasu Investment Fund, among them the acquisition of tractors for maize cultivation and the provision of technologically advanced medical services. Inscribed above these images is “Toward the Land without Evil and Indigenous Autonomy,” a slogan that links a precolonial Guaraní territorial project<sup>12</sup> to a contemporary vision of gas-funded indigenous development.

This vision challenges official framings of indigenous autonomy under the MAS as a state-sanctioned administrative process (Cameron, 2013; Garcés, 2011), as well as academic discussions that associate indigenous autonomy with noncapitalist, subsistence-oriented, territorially based development (Blaser et al., 2010). It reveals how, in the context of a frustrated struggle for territorial rights, the Guaraní have pursued their own “Faustian bargain” with transnational capital, locating their territorial project within the broader spatial struggles of a hydrocarbon state in a way that competes with both nationalist and regionalist projects. Rather than reading these dynamics as an example of rent-seeking behavior, I have sought to highlight that hydrocarbon negotiations have come to be understood (at least by Guaraní leaders) as a key terrain for achieving recognition, dignity, and autonomy—goals that TCO land titling had failed to achieve.

The project of corporate-sponsored autonomy proved controversial and divisive both in Itika Guasu and in the regional context. Negotiations leading up to





Figure 2. Poster announcing the twenty-second anniversary of the Assembly of the Guaraní People Itika Guasu.

the 2010 agreement with Repsol were accompanied by the erosion of mechanisms of community participation and leadership accountability, which generated a growing lack of trust in the leadership. The introduction of unregulated “salaries” for leaders after the agreement generated further tensions, including within communities. In early 2014, these tensions culminated in the emergence of a rival leadership supported by some community members and by local and regional elites. Yet, rather than advocating a return to the multicultural discourses of territory of the early days of the land struggle, this new leadership promoted a rival vision of hydrocarbon citizenship articulated with national forms of gas rents distribution.

Aside from their suspicions of corruption and fiscal mismanagement, communities had a further reason for rejecting the leadership that had signed the 2010 agreement with Repsol. As part of the leadership’s vision of territorial autonomy—and in defiance of the MAS government and regional elites—they were demanding prior consultation for *all* projects (state, private, and NGO) implemented within TCO boundaries. Many community members—living in conditions of poverty with minimal access to basic services—felt that their

leadership's combative and isolationist stance was obstructing the arrival not just of NGO projects but also of new gas-funded state development projects. Such projects have proliferated in Tarija Department under the MAS government as state institutions (municipal, provincial, and departmental) have struggled to spend an unprecedented influx of revenue from the direct hydrocarbon tax and peasant movements have lobbied for its distribution via rural development projects.

When I returned in 2014 to visit the remote Guaraní community where I had lived during my doctoral fieldwork in 2011–2012, the 13 households were in the process of being connected to the electricity grid. While this was a historic development, people complained that the departmental project had reached them four months late because of the Guaraní leadership's demand for prior consultation. Access to state medical services had also been disrupted, the community nurse complained, because of the leadership's insistence on providing "their own" doctors (paid from the investment fund). It was during this trip that I learned of the formation of an alternative leadership supported by municipal, provincial, and departmental elites—long-time supporters of right-wing parties who were now largely aligned with the MAS. The leadership denounced these rivals as "henchmen" (*capangas*) of the provincial government, citing the latter's provision of approximately 10 pickup trucks "to enable these individuals to move around . . . TCO Itika Guasu with the publicly stated intention of breaking up the [Guaraní] organization" (Equipo Nizkor, 2014). More important than this logistical support was the promise of a variety of development projects, a prospect that appealed to many community members.

For the next two years (2014–2016), the rival leaderships existed in parallel, occupying separate offices in the small transit town of Entre Ríos—the former holding meetings with local state authorities, the latter living in a siege-like state and issuing regular press releases denouncing political intervention by the MAS. In April 2016, when I visited Tarija, the two leaderships were engaged in a lengthy legal battle involving a string of complaints, sentences, and demands for legal protection directed at distinct levels of governmental and judicial authority as well as at a broader indigenous movement that was itself deeply divided. Which of the rival groups, if either, will ultimately prevail remains uncertain, but one thing seems clear: territorial politics and development in Itika Guasu, as in much of the Chaco,<sup>13</sup> have become inextricably tied to the governance of extraction.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the ambivalent ways in which indigenous territorial projects are becoming implicated in and reimagined amidst the spatial politics of Bolivia's new extraction. These shifting configurations of indigeneity, territory, and extraction exceed the analytical limits of resistance narratives and resource-curse theories. Rather than being a simple defense of place, indigenous territorial projects seek to *reconfigure* the relationship between territory and extraction. While this involves claims to a share in gas wealth, these claims are not reducible to rent-seeking behavior but must be understood in



the context of longer struggles for territorial recognition and autonomy – struggles that were encouraged but ultimately frustrated by the multicultural project of TCOs. Rather than simply *agents* of territorial conflict, resources are *conduits* for deeper struggles over territory, sovereignty, and citizenship. Resources *raise the stakes, expose the limits, and shift the terms* of postcolonial recognition. They lay bare the contested territoriality of the postcolonial nation-state—a territorial configuration forged through histories of racialized dispossession that provide the starting point for both indigenous and nationalist projects.

Michael Watts's concept of oil's double movement provides a useful way of understanding the tensions of neo-extractivist development in Bolivia and the dilemmas faced by indigenous peoples at the nation's resource frontiers. The MAS government demonstrates the capacity of hydrocarbons to elevate the nation-state as an agent of social development, economic liberation, and cultural decolonization—a project that interpellates indigenous peoples as citizens of a plurinational Bolivia. At the same time, indigenous peoples face intensifying resource extraction in their territories, a process that degrades their ecosystems while undermining their territorial rights and sovereignty claims. These dynamics are part of a longer double movement that began in the 1990s, when a boom in hydrocarbon development unfolded alongside new forms of cultural recognition targeting marginalized ethnic groups.

The recent leadership struggle in TCO Itika Guasu presents a compelling illustration of the way this double movement is fracturing indigenous movements in Bolivia. Community members' hopes that the plurinational state will deliver development to its most marginalized citizens exist in tension with a radicalized leadership's assertion of territorial sovereignty in the face of a reconfigured alliance of capital, the state, and landowners. Most striking is that this takes the form of a Faustian pact with a Spanish oil company—a project that both mimics and challenges the MAS government's neo-extractivist project. Regional and national indigenous leaders are also pursuing their own (potentially conflicting) visions of gas-funded indigenous development. Rather than simply exposing the *tensions* between indigenous peoples and new left governments, these dynamics reveal how indigenous encounters with extraction are producing new forms of political authority and state formation.

These dynamics raise difficult political and ethical questions. On the one hand, they challenge essentializing tropes of indigeneity, forcing us to acknowledge that indigenous peoples may seek to participate in and benefit from an extractivist development model. Those who do so do not deserve to be vilified.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, it is important to ask who benefits and who loses from such forms of indigenous extractivism. What are the long-term social, political, and environmental consequences for indigenous communities? What power relations underwrite indigenous engagements with transnational companies or state projects? What forms of territorial development do they make possible, and what territorial imaginaries do they make invisible or unviable? Indigenous peoples of the Chaco are deeply preoccupied with these questions, which are of urgent importance for activists, scholars, and indigenous movements in Latin America.

## NOTES

1. Following Li (2000: 3; see also Hall, 1996), I view self-identification as indigenous as neither natural nor invented but “a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes and repertoires of meaning and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle.” While acknowledging the multiple and shifting deployments of indigeneity in Bolivia (Canessa, 2012), this paper focuses on the experience of lowland ethnic groups who were excluded from Bolivian citizenship until the late twentieth century, when they began organizing around (and/or were interpellated by) a globally articulated discourse of indigenous rights and multicultural citizenship.

2. Like many social-movements scholars, Escobar emphasizes movements’ use of transnational networks, such as conservation NGOs, to advance their territorial projects.

3. For a critical review of this literature, see Watts (2009) and Porter and Watts (n.d.). Resource-curse theories have had a strong influence on political ecology work and the environmental security and development policy literatures. Some work on extractive industry, including by political ecologists, challenges the way such theories construct the relationship between nation, territory, and extraction.

4. Sawyer (2004) reveals how in Ecuador oil became a focal point in a broader struggle around citizenship and governance and part of a longer debate about Indians’ place in the nation. Valdivia (2008) also shows how oil mediates the relationship between the Ecuadorian state and its citizens, providing the basis for popular expressions of “petro-citizenship.” Perreault (2014) highlights the central role of the subsoil in political and cultural struggles in Bolivia (see also Perreault and Valdivia, 2010).

5. Ironically, the 1953 agrarian reform’s ambitious nation-building project came at a cost for the nation’s resource patrimony. U.S. funding for the reform—part of cold war efforts to prevent the spread of communism (Murphey, 2009)—was made contingent on the granting of oil concessions to U.S. firms, secured under the 1956 hydrocarbon law (Perreault and Valdivia, 2010).

6. After the war ended, many ex-combatants—mainly from poor rural highland communities—settled in the Chaco and tried their luck as cattle ranchers. Many of these new settlers gained property titles following the 1953 agrarian reform, precipitating a more aggressive occupation of indigenous lands and the spread of exploitative labor practices.

7. Most important, pressure from landowner organizations secured recognition for private properties within TCOs that are prioritized over indigenous land rights if the claimants can demonstrate productive land use. TCOs also made no provisions for indigenous autonomy. Indigenous organizations also criticized the state’s ability to redraw TCO boundaries.

8. Repsol holds the concession with partners British Gas and Pan American Energy.

9. The letter expresses concern that the titling process was serving to consolidate private land claims within gas-rich areas of the TCO, thereby weakening Guaraní claims for consultation and compensation (APG IG, 2009).

10. Radio Nizkor is an Internet-based project of the international human rights advocacy organization Equipo Nizkor. See <http://www.radionizkor.org/about.html> (accessed May 29, 2016).

11. On the limitations of the process for establishing indigenous autonomy under the 2009 Autonomies Law, see Garcés (2011), Albó and Romero (2009), and Cameron (2013).

12. The “land without evil” (Guaraní *ivi maraei* or *kandire*) refers to the myth of a primordial land of material abundance free from suffering, the search for which is thought to have motivated past Guaraní migrations.

13. Leaders in Itika Guasu are not alone in seeking to articulate their visions of territory and autonomy to an extractivist economy. In 2011, leaders from the Concejo de Capitanes Guaraníes de Tarija (Council of Guaraní Captains of Tarija) presented a proposal for the creation of a departmental indigenous fund consisting of 15 percent of Tarija’s gas rents to fund the implementation of indigenous territorial management plans. Their proposal replicates and provides an indigenous-controlled alternative to the highly contested national Indigenous and Native Peoples’ and Peasant Communities’ Development Fund, which receives a fixed share of the national direct hydrocarbon tax. In early 2012, the national Guaraní Autonomies Officer told me his ideas for the creation of a national Guaraní oil company to undertake extraction within Guaraní territories.

14. See Povinelli (2002) and Cattellino (2010) for a discussion of how indigenous peoples who fail to live up to (often unrealistic) cultural stereotypes may risk losing their rights.

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