

Indigenous Conflict in Bolivia Explored through an African Lens: Towards a Comparative Analysis of Indigeneity

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INTRODUCTION

On 21 February 2016, the Bolivian people voted in a referendum as to whether their president, Evo Morales—who grew up in an Aymara village and is widely hailed as the first indigenous president—should be exempted from the constitutional limit on presidential terms. On 14 March, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal finally declared that he lost his bid to stand again after losing by the slimmest of margins (Resultados del Referendum 2016).

Elected first in 2005 and twice since, Evo Morales has undeniably had the most successful tenure of any Bolivian president, quite possibly in the history of the Republic. Among the many points one could make about his tenure, one of the most striking is how indigeneity has been drawn from the margins of political life to its very center (Canessa 2014; Postero 2017).

Today almost a third of national deputies are indigenous whereas thirty years ago virtually none were.

There is no question that Evo Morales' administration can chalk up some impressive successes, but there have also been conflicts.¹ Some of these were predictable since he worked to wrest power away from the traditional elite descended predominantly from Europeans. Less predictable is the conflict with indigenous people (Canessa 2014; McNeish 2013), especially, but by no means exclusively, from smaller, lowland groups. Yet, Evo Morales is celebrated across the world and has successfully lobbied the United Nations to

change “Earth Day” to “Earth Mother Day” in order to reflect indigenous principles. He regularly hosts indigenous groups, not only from across the Americas, but from as far away as New Zealand. As one Lakota activist from North Dakota commented to me in the Bolivian capital city of La Paz, “He is the world’s indigenous president.”

How then to understand the sense of betrayal (Sánchez López 2015: 27) on the part of indigenous people who feel they helped put Morales into power but argue that his agendas do not recognize their own, now constitutional, rights to consultation? How could the president speak so clearly to indigenous rights in his inauguration and in international forums but express dismissive irritation when indigenous groups at home resist his plans for roads, oil exploration, and development in general? One way to understand these conflicts is in terms of historical tensions between the large highland populations of Quechua and Aymara speakers (from which Evo Morales hails) and the multiple and much more marginalized small groups that occupy the eastern lowlands. Seeing this tension between highlanders and lowlanders as drawing on historical antipathy between the two groups dating back to the time of the Incas, however, oversimplifies a complex situation. It, moreover, obscures the very modern nature of contemporary indigenous discourses and reduces a conflict to historical cultural difference, thus ignoring the contemporary structural complexities and nuances of the tensions.

I will first offer a short history of indigeneity in Bolivia to demonstrate that these conflicts between indigenous groups, and indigeneity itself, are principally contemporary phenomena. Second, I will explore ethnography and debates on indigeneity from West Africa, and Cameroon in particular, for a comparative perspective and a different take on what appears to be a peculiarly Bolivian situation. I do not pretend to offer any insights into how indigeneity is perceived or practiced in Africa but, rather, draw on Africanist scholarship for inspiration. As a country with a majoritarian indigenous discourse, Bolivia has more in common with many African countries than with its Latin American neighbors. This article

thus points to the benefits of comparative analysis across two continents that are rarely considered together in this way. Finally I will present five nested pairs of concepts as analytical tools in order to more clearly distinguish between indigenous discourses, especially when they come into conflict.

BEING INDIAN, BEING INDIGENOUS IN BOLIVIA

Bolivia is widely regarded as one of two nations in the Americas (the other being Guatemala) as having an indigenous majority² and its indigenous president has put indigenous symbols at the very heart of national discourse. Such indigenous demographic and political dominance needs, however, to be considered in detail. Bolivia has a very substantial number of people descended from pre-invasion populations who have been historically excluded from power and denied citizenship, even since independence from Spain (Langer 2009) and right into the twenty-first century. It is tempting to see the history of Bolivia as one where a European minority has dominated an indigenous minority until the advent of Evo Morales. This “two Bolivias” perspective, although useful for pithy newspaper accounts is largely rejected by scholars (Dunkerley 2007). To imagine a straight-line narrative from the residents of what is now Bolivia when the Spanish arrived to present day politics is to do violence to a diversity of context and experience (although see Thompson and Hylton 2007). That is, although there is a long history of identifying people as Indians or indigenous, the people to whom these terms refer, their status with respect to the state, and the degree to which these are ethnic or racial labels, changes considerably over time.

In most of the colonial period, Indians, as the very diverse groups of peoples were called by the Spanish, constituted a separate “republic” (along with the republic of Spaniards). For much of this period the term “Indian” denoted a fiscal status (Harris 1995: 354) with attendant labor obligations such as the *corvée* in the mines, much more than an ethnic one.

Independence from Spain brought formal citizenship to Indians but, in practice, Indians

continued to be excluded from power and were still required to pay tribute. Olivia Harris argues that it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the distinction between those (Indians) who paid tribute to the state and people who “enjoyed access to their labour as intermediaries of the state” became increasingly an ethnic one (ibid.: 361).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, there were concerted efforts to dispossess the “free” Indian communities of their lands, including the fertile areas around Lake Titicaca. Indians, as had often been the case, resisted, such as in the uprising led by Zárate Wilka in 1899, but by the beginning of the twentieth century many Indians were tied as serfs to large estates and attempts to introduce schooling for Indians were violently repressed. Most Indians remained monolingual and illiterate as a result. It was in these decades that the image of the Indian became closely associated with atavism, poverty, and ignorance (Larson 2004).

The Chaco War with Paraguay (1928–1935) was a watershed moment as many *mestizo* (“mixed race”) officers found they did not share a language with their Indian troops. This mutual incomprehension was widely credited with contributing to large scale bloody chaos and, ultimately, defeat. This experience of the largely *mestizo* officer class in the Chaco War fed their sense of frustration against the small oligarchy and also sharpened their sense of a divided Bolivia. This led to a progressive military dictatorship under Germán Busch (1937–1939) (succeeded by a conservative regime which reversed many of his reforms). The war and Busch’s dictatorship are widely seen as foreshadowing the 1952 Revolution which was started by Indian peasant militias taking control of the haciendas where they lived and worked. The Revolution overthrew the oligarchy and although the strength of the Indians peasants’ movement ensured a 1953 Agrarian Reform act and the abolition of serfdom (*pongueaje*), power remained in the hands of the new, mostly *mestizo*, elite.

The new government was very well aware of the problem of having a large uneducated Indian population and promulgated the 1953 Education Reform Act that by the end of the

decade ensured there were schools in almost every village. They also saw Indians as atavistic and overnight abolished the category of “Indian,” declaring that all would be undifferentiated citizens. Indians were henceforth described as *campesinos*, or peasants.³

In practice, this meant representing Indian culture as national folklore (often performed by *mestizos*⁴) and turning Indians into cultural *mestizos*, modern and Spanish-speaking. The modern Bolivian citizen was considered to be a *mestizo* and if this meant an acceptance of an Indian heritage it was one resolutely resigned to the past.⁵

There was, however, a very small Indianist party during this period led by Fausto Reinaga whose almost lone voice influenced the next generation of activists. His slogan was “as Indians they oppressed us and as Indians we will be liberated.” He explicitly rejected the designation “indigenous,” regarding it as racist (Reinaga 1967: 96): his struggle was an Indian one, not an indigenous one. Nevertheless, outside Reinaga’s small circle, few people publicly identified as Indians; rather, this was a condition from which they tried to escape. Reinaga drew inspiration from the revolt of Tupak Katari in 1780 (from whom he also claimed kinship on his mother’s side), yet he was also deeply influenced by anti-colonial movements and writers such as Franz Fanon (Canessa 2010; Lucero 2008). The 1980s saw the emergence of a small number of Indianist groups influenced by Reinaga. These emerging movements drew at least as much inspiration from the global civil rights movements of the 1960s and anticolonial struggles as from a sense of regional historical injustice.

Nevertheless, between the 1952 Revolution and the 1990s, the ruling class fantasy that the Indian population was gradually but inexorably disappearing seemed to be confirmed. The small and largely ineffectual Indian political groups seemed utterly marginal to national politics. Successive censuses marked the decline in indigenous languages and this was seen as an indication of the progressive disappearance of the Indian in Bolivian life. This was also apparently confirmed by the fact that in the post-revolutionary period there were very few

occasions when Indians mobilized across regional and ethnic lines and the predominate ideologies of justice and change were a spectrum of leftist discourses. It was becoming increasingly clear, however, that leftist groups were in political retreat, culminating in the collapse of Soviet communism. In addition there was a growing sense of pervasive racism against people of indigenous descent that had long been ignored by class-based political discourses. Until this point Indian struggles were local and fueled by a deep sense of historical injustice and the struggles of the late twentieth century were very different from those of even just a few decades previously, much less of previous centuries, and certainly people identified as Indians or indigenous in radically different ways. In fact, by the 1980s there were very few people in Bolivia who self-identified as either.

The final decades of the century, however, saw a growing international awareness of the plight of indigenous peoples. In preparation for the UN declared Decade of Indigenous Peoples (1995–2004) numerous seminars and workshops were organized inviting indigenous peoples from all over the world. The UN also appointed a Special Rapporteur on Indigenous People, Martínez Cobo (1986), who issued one of the most widely used definitions of indigeneity that laid down the important principle that the key diagnostic for indigeneity is self-identification. Although Martínez Cobo suggests that indigenous people might be descendants of populations living in a region at the time of colonization, he also declared there was no necessary connection between indigeneity and (European) colonization. The UN's recognition of indigenous issues was followed by other international bodies such as the International Labour Organization which, in 1989, passed resolution 169 recognizing indigenous and tribal peoples for the first time in international law. The actions of both the UN and the ILO opened up the possibilities for peoples in Africa and Asia where there was no significant history of European settlement to identify as indigenous. This was soon followed by a series of World Bank directives that recognized the particular plight of

indigenous people.⁶ In addition, a number of European and North American NGOs began to align themselves with indigenous people in fighting rainforest destruction, especially in the Amazon region. Indigenous people were widely believed to have more harmonious relations with the environment and, in turn, many indigenous groups began to articulate their land claims in terms of environmental issues.

It is in this globalized context that scholars noted an “indigenous awakening” or “resurgence” in Latin America (Albó 1991; Bengoa 2000; Brysk 2000; Stavenhagen 2002). It is tempting to see a direct continuity between Indianist movements of, say, the eighteenth century and those of today, but they are profoundly different on a number of levels. For instance, historical Indianist mobilizations took the form of localized struggles whereas since in the late twentieth century such struggles have been played out on a global scale, drawing on international networks and alliances across ethnic groups. They are also characterized by the involvement of NGOs, which simultaneously reinforces these processes through seeking to develop global consciousness of indigenous issues. It is thus no coincidence that the “indigenous resurgence in Latin America” occurs at exactly the same time as people in Africa and Asia begin to identify themselves as indigenous, too.

The rising international profile of indigenous people and especially the development of a parallel environmental and ethical discourse contributed greatly to the two most celebrated success stories of indigenous mobilization in Latin America: the Zapatistas who declared war against the Mexican state in 1994 and the rise of Evo Morales in Bolivia. These are telling examples because, as Courtney Jung (2009) has demonstrated, the Zapatistas did not start out as an indigenous movement but as a social movement; they developed their indigenous discourses as the movement progressed.⁷ Similarly, Evo Morales’ initial ascent did not revolve around his indigeneity, and in fact he was generally known as the leader of the coca growers’ union and not an “indigenous” leader at all. His conversion to the indigenous cause

was as rapid as it was complete. He led a coalition of coca growers, urban poor, leftists, intellectuals, landless peasants, highland peasants, and forest dwellers. Most of these, perhaps all, could claim descent from pre-Columbian populations, but to describe them all simply as “indigenous” would be to obscure some enormous differences between them. Morales’ inauguration in January 2006 was replete with indigenous symbolism and rhetoric. However it was not until 2003 that he began to publicly identify as indigenous and articulate his political aims as indigenous ones.

Morales, not unlike the Zapatistas, uses inclusive language and takes indigeneity to articulate a wide range of social causes as well as the defense of natural resources for the nation. In fact, especially in the first years of his presidency, he was rather fond of quoting their slogans (Albro 2005). Manifestly influenced by the Zapatistas, he declared indigenous people to be the “moral reserve of humanity” (Goodman 2007). The association of indigenous people with social ethics, morality generally, politically progressive ideologies, and environmental consciousness is very modern indeed. When I discussed these issues with Aymara people I knew in Bolivia they were all surprised and puzzled that anyone would associate such values with people like them, including that badge of indigenous consciousness, environmental awareness.⁸ It is worth underscoring that the association of indigenous people with environmental issues, which is such a powerful element in contemporary discourses, was largely if not totally absent in the rights struggles of indigenous peoples until the end of the twentieth century.

These Mexican and Bolivian examples underline the contemporary context of indigenous movements in Latin America; they also point to a distinction between the historical Indian subject and a modern and globalized indigenous one. That is, it is important to stress that indigeneity is no more a given for Latin Americans than for people anywhere else. More importantly, its current expressions owe much more to visions of indigeneity developed in

New York and Geneva than in indigenous peoples' cultural and political pasts.

CONTEMPORARY GLOBALIZED INDIGENEITY

Although contemporary indigenous identities usually draw on historical local struggles for justice, in practice, it is very often the case that people come to identify as indigenous through a dynamic and dialectic engagement with international actors, reflecting their interaction with the discourses of global networks of international institutions and NGOs. This is most obviously true in areas of the globe such as Africa, where indigenous discourses appear as very recent phenomena. San in Botswana who, with the aid of international NGOs argued in court for the defense of their land rights on the basis of their indigeneity (Sapignoli 2012), are one example. Dorothy Hodgson offers another and she has carefully documented the role of NGOs in fostering an indigenous identity for people such as Maasai in East Africa (2011). It is not, however, just in places such as Africa where we find NGOs play an important role in developing indigenous identities; it is also very much the case in Latin America.

The Bolivian 1990 *March for Territory and Dignity*, which many (e.g., Albó 1996) see as an important turning point in indigenous mobilization, actually drew enormously on NGOs not only for the organization of the march but also for its very conception. This is not to say that activists such as Marcial Fabricano did not also have a key role, but it is important to recognize the role of CIDOB (the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia) that organized the March. CIDOB and APCOB (Support for Peasant-Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia) were both founded, respectively in 1980 and 1983, by German anthropologists Jürgen Riestler and Berndt Fischermann in collaboration with Guaraní leader Bonifacio Barrientos Iyambaei. Riestler continued to have a major role in CIDOB well into this century and he was able to draw on international political and financial support for the organization. Here in Bolivia, as elsewhere in Latin America (Langer and Muñoz 2003), international NGOs have a huge role to play in shaping the expression of local struggles as

explicitly indigenous ones.

The 1990 march, an 800 kilometer trek from the tropical lowlands to the capital city, was a turning point for indigenous mobilization for a number of reasons. The residents of the capital city were stunned to see thousands of lowland indigenous people descend on their city and this appeared to contradict the idea that lowland indigenous people were inexorably disappearing from history (Albó 1995). Another significant point is that there was an alliance between highland and lowland indigenous people for the first time. For much of the 1990s, however, highlanders did not, by and large, see themselves as indigenous but, rather, still held onto the 1950s euphemism for Indian, *campesino*, or peasant. Urban people also generally avoided an identity label, even if they had rural Aymara and Quechua roots. When I first went to Bolivia in the late 1980s, I was surprised that people who were “obviously” indigenous in my eyes were rather taken aback at the suggestion that they would be considered as such. As I was forcefully told, “Indigenous people live in the jungle.” Within a decade, however, this had begun to change—and not only in Bolivia—as there was a veritable explosion of groups in the world identifying as indigenous. The 1990 march was also significant because it resulted in huge international pressure⁹ on the Bolivian government to recognize the Isiboro Secure national park as the first indigenous territory in the country.

This combination of mobilization around local issues, NGO involvement, and international media recognition proved to be a potent recipe for success and it was by no means only in Bolivia that such an alliance of interests produced results. Aside from the Zapatista rebellion mentioned above, in Brazil some Afro-Brazilian groups developed new indigenous identities (French 2009); in Africa marginal and threatened groups such as San in Botswana (Nyamnjoh 2007), Maasai in East Africa (Hodgson 2011), and Ogoni in Nigeria (Watts 2004) positioned themselves as indigenous people with concomitant discourses in their struggle for land and other rights (see also Rupp 2011), and in Asia a number of

subaltern people successfully argued for their rights as indigenous peoples (Karlson 2003) and, in some cases, even set up their own individual autonomous regions (Shah 2010).

There are many examples of people recognized as indigenous in, say, Geneva or New York, but not in their home countries.¹⁰ This recognition and support has enabled local groups to use international connections in similar ways to put pressure on national governments, resulting in a ‘boomerang effect’ (see Keck and Sikkink 1998; see also Hodgson 2011). This process is not always smooth, however, and one of the challenges facing activists is how to translate “indigenous” into local languages. This is as much a problem in China (Hathaway 2010), where there have been moves to revalidate terms for marginalized ethnic groups that were previously derogatory, as it is in Bolivia where there is rarely any word that even approximates “indigenous” in indigenous languages.

The Aymara speaking people I work with in highland Bolivia describe themselves as *jaqi*, people, a status founded on community life and shared ritual and one that can change when, for example, moving to the city. Although there is clearly a sense of difference between them and others, and they see themselves as descendants of precolonial peoples, they do not situate themselves within the kinds of linear histories that characterize Western views. It is only in recent years and with the advent of President Morales that *any* member of this community has identified as *indígena* at all. At the risk of stating the obvious: “indigenous” is not an indigenous concept.

The process by which Evo Morales embraced indigeneity as a political ideology remains obscure. It may very well be that he was inspired by the “Water War” in Cochabamba, where residents mobilized against water privatization. Initially this was a group of urban residents and rural farmers, many of whom spoke Quechua. The leaders soon discovered that framing their struggle in terms of ancestral rights and invoking Andean deities gained them more traction with the international press and the movement began to articulate an explicitly

indigenous struggle (Laurie, Andolina, and Radcliffe 2002). It was also the case that an Aymara leader, Felipe Quispe, was successfully mobilizing in the highland area around La Paz with a very Indianist and specifically Aymara discourse. He enjoyed little national appeal, but certainly got traction within the Aymara heartland.¹¹

Whatever the reason, even if he was a relative latecomer to the politics of indigeneity, Evo Morales embraced the concept with energy and consummate skill. For example, he publically staged an unofficial inauguration among the ruins of the pre-Incaic Tiwanaku civilization. Although unofficial in the sense of not being constitutional, it had much more pomp and ceremony than the official version (Salman and de Munter 2009). It was in this context that he laid out his principles of governance and made clear that he received his mandate, not just from having handsomely won an election, but also by receiving the staff of office from three *amautas*, indigenous wise men, and the indigenous population in general. Morales has returned to Tiwanaku many times to renew his mandate and underline the indigenous basis of his political legitimacy.

Indigeneity has also been used instrumentally by Morales in lobbying internationally against the war waged against coca producers, where he presents coca as a traditionally indigenous product. Morales has also argued for the state control of natural resources based on the argument that indigenous people hold a privileged position in being able to defend national patrimony. Finally, Morales introduced a new constitution which reflects this; it not only recognizes indigenous rights but places indigenous values at the very core of the nation-state. Indigeneity encapsulates the values of the nation, especially those of 'living well' (*vivir bien*) enshrined in the constitution, which is in opposition to free market neoliberal capitalism; indigeneity also operates on the international scale as a language through which it is possible for Morales to lobby against the West in general and the United States in particular. It is significant that indigeneity has been transformed from being the language of

resistance to the state by people on the political margins to the language *of* the state in expressing its legitimacy and has also become integral to the language of governance. This is evidenced in his inauguration, when he announced national indigenous New Year celebrations (Canessa 2012b) and sponsored a national indigenous wedding ceremony (Postero 2017).¹² Indigeneity, therefore, is clearly being mobilized by Morales to create a new set of national and indeed nationalist values.

Such a broad and ecumenical concept of indigeneity has largely worked well for Morales in providing him with the opportunity to present himself favorably on the international stage. In addition, the scope of his conceptualization of indigeneity affords him the ability to articulate, with considerable success, a very wide range of discourses in his political favor within Bolivia: the nationalization of natural gas; dealing with conflicts in the eastern lowlands dominated by a white minority; and providing the political means to generally undermine the traditional white elite. Morales' ideology is self-consciously progressive: it seeks to combat racism; place indigenous women in positions of power; redistribute wealth to marginal people, especially offering provision for older people and children; and to redistribute the benefits of extractive industries and agribusiness to a wider range of people, thus undermining Bolivia's historical oligarchic tendencies. This is significant because the recent history of coca growing in Bolivia is the story of peasants and miners pushed out of the highlands as a consequence of drought, lack of investment, economic mismanagement at the hands of dictators, and neoliberal reforms in the 1980s which hit the poorest hardest (Kohl and Farthing 2006). These displaced Aymara and Quechua speakers settled in lowlands areas, displacing forest-dwelling peoples in the process.

Morales has been highly successful in fashioning a new statecraft and developing elements of a new national culture through the creation of an ecumenical indigeneity, one that traverses many ethnic groups. On an international level, Morales also invokes indigeneity to

argue for the nationalization of gas reserves and in a general struggle against multinational companies. On a national level he very quickly came up against a number of issues when his national policy of development and redistribution confronted small local groups who were able to invoke the constitution and legislation enshrining prior consent for development in indigenous territories.

INDIGENOUS COLONISTS

One of the first areas of contention is the issue of highland *colonos* or colonists. That Aymara and Quechua speaking people, descendants of pre-Columbian populations, are widely described by others as colonists should give us pause. Most definitions of indigeneity describe indigenous peoples as victims not agents of colonialism and many scholars have argued for a productive engagement with concepts of indigeneity precisely because it is a means through which relatively powerless people can make justice claims. To adopt an indigenous identity is to claim certain rights on the basis of historical priority in the face of contemporary moves to deny or abrogate those rights. At its simplest, indigeneity is a primordialist argument that states, “We were here before you and your moves today or in the past to restrict our rights to this land are illegitimate.” The scales of time (how distant in the past the land was usurped) and space (how big the territory in question is) will vary enormously but the basic argument remains the same. Justice and powerlessness are, however, relative concepts and there is a danger is assuming that indigenous people are always and everywhere in the right.

These Aymara and Quechua peasants from the highlands are quite clearly victims of colonialism and in my work on an Aymara community over two decades (Canessa 2012a), I trace in some detail the ways in which the people of Wila Kjarka suffer from the effects of colonialism in numerous ways, not least of which is the consequences of economic and political marginalization. They are relatively fortunate in the extent and quality of the land

they possess, but many of their immediate neighbors in the surrounding hills are not. For them, the promise of a new beginning in the lowlands, where land is plentiful and they can make a good living, seems not only attractive but just. They know that there are other people who live there, *indígenas*, but they are traditionally hunters, not farmers, and have in any case vast acres of land which they “do not use.”

In the lowland town of Rurrenabaque, where I conducted fieldwork in 2012, Aymara and Quechua traders dominate the market. In a series of interviews these traders talked about how they brought civilization to the Indians who did not even “know how to work” and commented, “There was no civilization here before we arrived.” On numerous occasions highlanders expressed to me an unambiguous condescension if not outright racism for the indigenous inhabitants of the area, even if many of the male merchants were married to local women. Marrying local women, many of whom were in their teens when they married, was seen by many men as simply one of the prerogatives of living in the area. Some even talked of “buying” women for next to nothing.

The juxtaposition of colonization and the taking of indigenous women is not coincidental; it has been, in fact, both an image and practice of conquest since the arrival of the Spanish (Canessa 2012a). The difference here is that it is Aymara men who are invoking this kind of relationship, inserting themselves into a colonial relationship as colonizers rather than colonized. As we will see below, the President himself is by no means immune from this kind of language.

The state’s recognition of indigenous territory, on the one hand seeing the entire nation as indigenous, and on the other recognizing smaller indigenous territories within the state, created new understandings of “indigeneity” with the potential to create conflict between different indigenous groups. Highlanders, for example, arrive at recognized and demarcated indigenous territories in the lowlands claiming settlement rights on the grounds that they too

are indigenous (López Pila 2014). Paradoxically, the state's recognition of an Indigenous Peasant Community (Territorio Indígena Originario Campesino [TIOC]) may actually expose indigenous lowland groups to increased pressure from colonists from the highlands rather than protecting them. The nomenclature of the legal entity indicates a conceptual parity between indigenous people and originary peasants. The former are people with historical claims to lowland areas and the latter are Aymara- and Quechua-speaking peasants with highland origins who do not necessarily attach themselves to a particular geographic area in the same way. In lowland areas highlanders are widely believed to be more able at dealing with national bureaucracies and are said to arrive with state authorized papers giving them the right to settle in TIOCs.

The argument of being indigenous, with its implied entitlement to settle in whichever indigenous territory chosen, highlights an important mechanism that is missing and yet necessary in the practices of the state: a legal or even conceptual distinction between indigenous groups. This example also demonstrates how certain indigenous groups are perceived, whether by themselves or by others, to have more legitimacy and power than other groups. Thus, in overlooking fundamental differences between indigenous groups, the state is not only failing to recognize the *hierarchy* of power between indigenous groups but may actually exacerbate it.

These tensions between indigenous groups were largely invisible outside Bolivia until in 2011 work began on a road through the TIPNIS—the reserve set up as a result of the aforementioned 1990 march—which occasioned yet another march to the capital. Once again, the Tsimanes, Moxetenes, and Yuracarés set off on the 800 kilometer journey to La Paz. On this occasion, though, the marchers were stopped by angry coca growers who were in favor of the road since it, among other things, opened up new lands for coca cultivation. The specific issues presented by the TIPNIS conflict are numerous,¹³ but in this article I want to

focus on the key issue of opposing indigenous discourses as well as opposing indigenous people.

This conflict bewildered many of Morales' international supporters because it was indigenous coca growers who were physically opposing the marchers. What is interesting, too, is that in August 2011 he echoed the vision of colonization when he was reported as asking his followers to convince the indigenous people of TIPNIS to give the green light to the construction: "You, *compañeras* and *compañeros*, need to explain, to guide the indigenous *compañeros*. Their own mayor is moving to convince them not to oppose [the road]." Later he added: "If I had time I would go and woo the Yuracaré *compañeras* and convince them not to oppose. That is, young men, you have instructions from the President to seduce (*conquistar*) the Yuracaré women so that they won't oppose the building of the road." He immediately consulted: "Approved?" and applause was heard from the assembled (Chipana 2011).

This sexualized language of colonization draws on a centuries-old European trope of conquest. It would have been surprising enough had these words been uttered by a white politician but it is particularly arresting that they come from someone who is the poster child of the international indigenous rights movement and who has set out to decolonize the state and place indigenous values at its very center.

How to deal with what appears to be such a profound contradiction? It is partly accounted for by the fact that indigeneity is usually seen by scholars and activists as a language of the oppressed not the oppressors, so it is difficult to use indigeneity to account for displacement and dominance, especially when both parties are indigenous. There is a temptation to see the TIPNIS situation and the conflict it represents as yet another manifestation of antipathy between highlanders and lowlanders or as proof that Evo Morales has betrayed his indigenous principles. The conflicts, however, cannot simply be reduced to

historical or culture distinctions between highlanders and lowlanders because there are comparable tensions and conflicts between highlanders too; nor is it clear on what basis one can evaluate contrasting indigenous principles. What analytical tools, then, do we have to make sense of such a conflictive situation and, in particular, what can we learn from Africanist scholarship?

INDIGENEITY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Comparative studies show that indigeneity is not easily defined and cannot simply be reduced to local historical and cultural identities, but rather is better understood as a matter of political processes. In their celebrated collection on indigeneity, Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (2007) recognize the problems of seeing indigeneity as simply an issue of identity (although this is clearly an element). Tanya Murray Li (2000) has made an important intervention in seeing indigeneity as a “positioning,” that is, essentially a political relation and one that rises out of engagement and struggle (*ibid.*: 151). Echoing these and other perspectives that seek to eschew essentialist definitions, de la Cadena and Starn suggest,

As it always has been, indigenism today is a process; a series of encounters; a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming, in short, and not a fixed state of being. In its most ambitious expressions ... the new indigenism seeks to undo hegemonic signifiers, affect their usual semantic chemistry to produce new valences, and thus reconfigure indigeneity itself opening it up to the acknowledgement of historical contemporaneity and radical social justice. Obviously because indigenous activism is not a monolithic entity but, on the contrary, a necessarily fragmented process, some of its fractions are included in the dominant and the hegemonic ... whereas others emerge as counterhegemonic formations—and still others straddle both or move from one to the other (2007: 10).

De la Cadena and Starn’s definition, along with many others, decouples indigeneity from

cultural specificity. This is a necessary move because once anthropologists (and others) begin to define identity in terms of specific cultural traits, they rapidly descend into issues of authenticity and arguing for cultural continuities across time. This “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1988) may be strategic but it is, nevertheless, essentialist and pushes people to express their identities across a limited and static range of cultural possibilities. De la Cadena and Starn indicate an important point in noting that indigeneity can be hegemonic or counterhegemonic, but they do not elaborate on this crucial distinction or how it might be approached analytically (see. Burman 2014). The problem is that they leave us with very little analytical purchase—much less a clear sense of what indigeneity actually is—and they provide no comparative framework for examining competing discourses or conflict. In fact, they resolutely avoid it. Other attempts to look at indigeneity globally (e.g., Hodgson 2011) look at how indigenous movements articulate with international bodies and processes and demonstrate a shared experience, but do not conceptualize differences between indigenous discourses.

There is no question that indigenous groups are connected to a very globalized network of activists, organizations, and institutions with very developed and rapid communication between the various nodes. Where there is paradoxically much less communication is in academic scholarship across different regions. Scholars note, and with some regularity, that indigeneity in Africa and Asia is rather different from that in settler states such as Australia and Argentina (e.g., Hodgson 2011: 1037; Kenrick and Lewis 2004; Pelican 2009: 52). In the latter countries, who is and is not indigenous appears to outside observers to be relatively unproblematic. In Africa and Asia, however, many national governments often declare the entire population to be indigenous; indigeneity is presented as being controversial, threatening to divide people, and a very recent import. The issue of indigeneity in Latin America, in contrast, is understood to be intimately associated with the colonization of

Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; in Africa fewer Europeans settled (and many left) and most countries have overwhelming majorities of people who are of non-European descent. Nevertheless, as I have demonstrated above, indigeneity as an identity is thoroughly modern: when colonized peoples in America and Africa resisted the state (colonial or otherwise) they did not do so as indigenous people per se, but rather as local subordinated people opposing whatever state oppressed them. It was only in the late twentieth century that indigenous peoples began to develop shared political identities across borders.

Scholars are also, of course, concerned with the specificities of the phenomena they are exploring and are sensitive to the historical depth of what they are observing. These differences, however, obscure some very important commonalities, and if Africanists do not draw on the experience of Latin America, the obverse is equally true. When Adam Kuper opened up a controversial set of issues in his 2003 article and book (2005) where he questioned indigeneity as an anthropological concept, it was almost entirely Africanists who contributed to the debate (but see Ramos 2003; Canessa 2008). Kuper focused on indigenous peoples as hunter-gatherers and their immediate descendants as somehow embodying an *Urkultur* and much of his discussion is about undermining a set of assumptions surrounding this. Here, among other things, he draws on the “Kalahari debate” prompted by Edwin Wilmsen’s (1989) book, which suggested a shared history between San and their neighbors rather than one of profoundly different origins. Although the issue of hunter-gatherers does not resonate with many Latin American indigenous peoples who have been engaging in settled agriculture for longer than some European groups, both debates point to the problems of seeing indigeneity as primarily rooted in a long history and ancient culture. Both debates also demonstrate the arbitrariness of favoring one set of marginalized peasants over another.

I do not agree with Kuper that the solution is for anthropology to ditch indigeneity as a concept altogether. Rather, like the concept of race which we can all concur does not exist at

an objective level, it is nevertheless an important focus of enquiry since many people behave as if it does. Similarly, indigeneity is an increasingly powerful way of engaging with the world and has considerable meaning for many people. The challenge is how best to understand it and develop analytical tools to distinguish between different kinds of indigenous discourse.

More recently, scholars of principally francophone sub-Saharan Africa have been engaged in a growing discussion on the question of autochthony versus indigeneity among Africanist scholars (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Geschiere 2009; Geschiere and Jackson 2006; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Jackson 2006; Leonhardt 2006; Pelican 2009), arguing that autochthony was a colonial tool for differentiating between people whereas indigeneity, of much more recent provenance, is linked closely to contemporary globalized discourses of identity. Although sometimes comparisons are made with Belgium (Ceuppens 2011), France (Jackson 2006) and The Netherlands (Geschiere 2009), there has been, to date, no attempt to consider what these discussions might contribute to an understanding of indigeneity in Latin America. Here, I argue that African and Latin American scholarships of indigeneity have much to say to each other and, from the perspective of a Bolivianist, may shed more light on the thorny issue of conflict between indigenous people than a simply Latin Americanist comparative framework would allow.

In particular, this comparative analysis can offer some insights into how to approach the issue of inter-indigenous conflict that is very rarely dealt with. A notable exception is the work of Li (2002) in which she discusses an incident where Dayaks in Indonesia killed a number of refugees in an act of ethnic cleansing. It is not, however, simply that such occurrences are rare, but rather, as Pelican (2009: 61) points out, “The ideology underlying the concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ suggests the shared burden and the equality of indigenous groups.” Her discussion of the experiences of the Mbororo, Kirdi, Baka, and

Bagyeli in Cameroon alerts us to the dangers of such an assumption and, once again, echoes the experience of different groups in Bolivia, where it is not a matter of being more or less indigenous, but of a differentiated access to social and political capital (see Hilgers 2011).

The relative powerlessness of indigenous people is clear in the definitions offered by the UN and ILO 169 as well as in Saugestad's (2001: 43) attempt at synthesizing definitions of indigeneity.¹⁴ As a consequence, analytical tools have not been developed to deal with situations where indigenous people *are* dominant either in a region or, in the case of Bolivia, nationally. Here Bolivia might appear to be an unusual case of a nation with a majoritarian indigenous population. If, however, we consider African examples, we can see many instances of indigeneity conceived as something shared by most nationals.

Seeing powerlessness as a characteristic of indigeneity contributes to an important sense of advocacy among many anthropologists who engage with indigenous people—one with which I have great sympathy—but these may be put in a quandary when indigenous people behave in way which demonstrates a *lack* of respect for other cultures or when indigeneity is embraced by people who are not immediately recognizable as the ethnic “other” from a Western perspective.

In Bolivia, *Camba* elites of the eastern lowlands draw on the distinctiveness of lowland indigenous culture to argue for autonomy from what they see as a highland indigenous state (Fabricant 2009; Gustafson 2009; Perreault and Green 2013). This should not, however, be taken to extend to affording rights or recognizing the territories of lowland indigenous groups.

This is not unlike Afrikaner Boer attempts to seek recognition as an indigenous people before the United Nations in 1995 in arguing that, since indigeneity is about “belonging naturally to the soil” and since Boers only exist in South Africa (<http://www.volkstaat.net/>), they, too, should be considered indigenous. It is worth noting that Dutch speakers on the

southern Cape self-identified as African to distinguish themselves from more recent European migrants. At any rate, these two, unambiguously illiberal, examples of indigeneity clearly illustrate the ways in which indigenous discourses do not fall neatly into the realm of accounts of the unambiguously oppressed.

Until now I have focused on indigenous identities and discourses from the margins of state enterprises. It is also, however, the case that discourses of indigeneity are not only espoused by people on the margins of the state but may also be articulated by majoritarian peoples at its very center who may feel marginal or disenfranchised and use indigeneity discourses to lobby for greater resources, rights, or inclusion more generally. This is a relatively new kind of indigeneity discourse in Africa and Latin America (an exclusionary sense of belonging within a nation state has a much longer history in Europe), but is growing rapidly as indigeneity gains global currency and may be quite at odds with the political interests of those at the margins of the state. The fundamental difference between these two discourses is profound even as the differing ethnic and political identities they produce are rarely, if ever, discussed.

MAJORITARIAN AND MINORITARIAN DISCOURSES

In many parts of Africa, some states have developed strong discourses surrounding autochthony to distinguish between various kinds of citizens. This is a confusing term because in many contexts it is clearly a synonym to indigeneity, as it indexes an originary relationship to the land. In Cameroon, however, a distinction is made between autochthonous and indigenous people and an exploration of these discussions is very useful in understanding some of the apparent contradictions one sees in Bolivia since they relate to majoritarian and minoritarian discourses.

What is the difference between autochthony and indigeneity? Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) emphasize that “indigenous peoples” are usually conceived of as marginalized

“others” in need of protection in “their own lands,” whereas the “autochthon” is typically conceived of as an “in-group” in need of protection from scrounging strangers who have immigrated into and are threatening to take over “one’s own homeland” (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 386; see also Gausset, Kenrick, and Gibb 2011; Zenker 2011).¹⁵

Autochthony in Cameroon and in other West African countries appears to be linked with a populist nationalism and nativist citizenship, rather as in Europe, in which majoritarian peoples express anxiety about those whom they classify as various kinds of in-comers including people displaced by colonial states. These are distinguished from ‘indigenous people’ who are marginal and clearly different from the majority population.

An example of the latter would be the Baka of Cameroon (Leonhardt 2006) who, despite having occupied their territory for at least as long as anyone else, are not considered to be citizens. As Leonhardt (*ibid.*: 78) notes after Bretin (2005), “Baka citizenship exists only on paper. It is also apparent that even where it exists on paper, it is often only in the form of an absurdity.” On the other hand, Baka’s lack of citizenship means they can escape much of state bureaucracy, including the payment of taxes, as well as the gendarmerie. Leonhardt gives examples of contemporary Baka even today abandoning their settled lives to return to the forest, perhaps to escape the demands of their patrons, or the state.

Because they are not “people of the soil,” Baka hunter-gatherers are not considered full or even adequate citizens; they simply do not have the same stake in the country. As people of the forest, they are seen to have an indigenous status. But paradoxically, they are not considered autochthonous, for the discourse about autochthony is tied to citizenship and the state from which the Baka are excluded. This association of indigeneity with marginality and cultural distinctiveness is underlined by the case of Mbororo who are historically Sahelian pastoralists, some of whom have settled in Cameroon, and consequently cannot claim priority, but are often recognized (e.g., by the United Nations) as indigenous because of their

cultural distinctiveness and different way of life, even as they are not recognized as being autochthonous in Cameroon because of their status as migrants (Pelican 2009).

Mbororo migrating pastoralists and Baka hunter-gatherers demonstrate that the key diagnostic of being indigenous (but not, in Cameroonian terms, autochthonous) is marginality from the state. It does not matter that Mbororo settled within the borders of Cameroon within living memory and that Baka occupied their lands long before their neighbors arrived; what matters is their real or perceived lack of assimilation into the state. There are similar examples of indigenous people in Asia who are defined much more in terms of difference from the majority population than through long residence in a particular place. The key issue here is whether indigeneity is articulated as a majoritarian discourse or one used to articulate the concerns of minority groups: indigeneity, even on the level of international discourse, is not really about originary peoples, strictly speaking, or cultural distinctiveness per se, but about the ways in which groups are incorporated into the state. It is this differing relationship with the state that produces meaningful ethnic distinctiveness.

CLAIMS ON THE STATE AND CLAIMS AGAINST THE STATE

Geschiere notes, “One of the nodal points in the ambiguities surrounding the surge of autochthony and other forms of belonging is ... their relation to national citizenship” (2009: 24). The relation between indigeneity discourses and citizenship, that is the way individuals relate to the state, is profoundly important. There are, of course, different ways one can relate to the state. Africanist scholarship can help us elucidate the difference between indigenous claims *against* the state (typically by marginal peoples, *indigènes*) and indigenous claims *on* the state (typically by majoritarian peoples, *autochtones*).

In practice, however, and especially as it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid the state, indigenous people may deploy both tactics. That is, they may seek resources from the state even as they wish to diminish the state’s influence. This is particularly the case when an

ethnic group is in the process of becoming assimilated to state practices. Juliet Erazo (2013) gives the excellent, detailed example of the Kichwa community of Rukullakta in eastern Ecuador, where there is an attempt to consolidate indigenous territory, a process that involves complex (and sometimes contradictory) relations with the state as people attempt to develop new disciplines of citizenship (both within Rukullakta and the Ecuadorian state) and disciplines of sovereignty. Many of the tensions that this work details arise from the fact that Rukullakta leaders are both making claims on the state and against it as they simultaneously seek inclusion and autonomy. In this case, seeing the tensions in terms of the different claims they are making against the state offers a point of illumination in a complex situation.

Ecuador offers another very good example of how indigenous discourses can traverse ethnic identity with the case of the Shuar, some of whom are actively fleeing the state, while others are rapidly assimilating and others still negotiating between the two poles. Each of these groups embraces different claims against and on the state with those rejecting the state making the most clear claims against it, those most assimilated to state practices regularly making claims on the state, and the ones with a more ambiguous position employing a mix of the two (Buitrón 2016; and personal communication, 26 May 2017). In Peru, Evan Killick's (2008) work among the Ashéninka offers the example of how land titling as a move toward autonomy, a move principally directed as a claim against the state, produces tensions when the process also creates situations where claims are made on the state.

Thinking in terms of claims on or against the state is useful in making distinctions between different indigenous positions vis-à-vis the state. That they may be held in tandem is useful because such an analysis points to contradictions and tensions in the ways states relate to indigenous peoples and vice versa. In Bolivia, the state has tried to offer both models and so it is not surprising that this has created conflict and confusion: its majoritarian discourse is at odds with its recognition of, for example, territorial rights of specific groups; it is thus

inevitable that its positions on a range of issues appear contradictory. Its move from an indigenous discourse that is insurgent and counterhegemonic and brought the government to power is at loggerheads with its conversion to indigeneity as a hegemonic discourse—a language of governance—around which the nation can identify.

HEGEMONIC AND COUNTERHEGEMONIC DISCOURSES

Burman makes a useful intervention (2014) in distinguishing between hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses of indigeneity in relation to Bolivia. These hegemonic indigenous discourses are not largely held by people rooted to historic territories within the state. Rather, they are de-territorialized in the sense of being urban, landless peasants, or simply without a strong sense of belonging to particular ancestral lands. The cultural expressions of their indigeneity are broad symbols (such as the coca leaf) rather than daily community practices. Hegemonic indigenous discourses may be espoused by the state itself or majoritarian people within it and can often be used to exclude outsiders such as immigrants or other indigenous peoples who do not enjoy full citizenship broadly understood.

In contrast, counterhegemonic indigeneity is a claim against the state. The indigenous people who articulate this discourse may or may not be the more original inhabitants of the state, but they are best understood in terms of their marginality from their state. They are typically territorialized in the sense that they have a strong attachment to ancestral territories or, alternatively, a particular way of life, for example as pastoralists. Their salient feature is their weak citizenship and their vulnerability within the nation to land claims against them as well as dispossession, exploitation, and racism.

National hegemonic indigeneity has, by definition, a wide reach and is particularly linked to a kind of state formation (see Geschiere 2009: 129). In fact, it shares many features with nation-building programs from nineteenth-century Europe onward that attempt to form new national identities around shared symbols. These may very well draw on local cultures,

but are folklorized as they make the move from being rooted in community or religious life into symbols of the nation. As with any nation-building project, there will be much, often eclectic, invention of tradition as first outlined by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

The point to underline here is that not all indigenous groups have equal access to this nationalist hegemonic discourse. Counterhegemonic discourses of indigeneity are the kind we might associate with Baka of Cameroon, San of Botswana and Moxetenes, Tsimanes, and other groups in Bolivia currently in struggles against the self-styled indigenous government. San and Bakgalagadi of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve live in a state where “everyone is indigenous,” but have recently successfully won a court case against the government in the process of which they represented themselves as indigenous people, in effect compelling the state to recognize their (differing) indigenous status (Sapignoli 2012). There are obvious echoes here with Bolivia, where if the state has not formally recognized everyone as indigenous, the President declared in 2007, “We are all originary people (*originarios*). Some of us are millenarian originary people; others are contemporary originary people who arrived more recently, but in the end are originary [too]” (Brockmann Rojas 2012). I have translated *originario*, perhaps inelegantly, as “originary,” but I might easily have chosen “indigenous” or “autochthonous.” Mariá Eugenia Brockmann Rojas, who listened to this speech with friends in Cochabamba, immediately registered the confusion this caused as people were surprised to be identified as *originarios* and some wondered how this related to being indigenous (2012). Evo Morales spoke these words in the context of rallying support for a new constitution that ultimately recognized the indigenous originary peasant (*indígena originario campesino*) as a new political subject and, in essence, the imagined citizen of the new constitution. In this clumsy and hotly debated formulation, various groups of people were included under a single if tripartite term that indicates subaltern belonging.¹⁶ But such a formulation should immediately alert us to tensions and ambiguities within it.

Current tensions in Bolivia are often seen in simple terms between highlanders and lowlanders (Perreault and Green 2013), that is, difference rooted in history and culture. Conflict is thus seen in ethnic terms, but in fact the real tension is between those who articulate a marginal indigenous discourse rooted in local practice and autonomy and those who articulate a national indigenous discourse, some of whom are colonists but many others live in cities. For the former, indigeneity is a discourse relating more closely to autonomy over land, whereas for the latter it is much more about a national identity that includes them at the center and, moreover, where the nation's resources are to be exploited for their benefit in particular. Many highland groups, although once ardent supporters of the President and, like he, with roots in Aymara peasant communities, may nevertheless be alienated from the modern indigenous statecraft that seeks to create a national indigeneity and is suspicious or even hostile to local groups seeking autonomy, even in the highlands (see Canessa 2014). The Morales government has been in open conflict with CONAMAQ, a group that represents the highlands and is organized in *ayllus*, historical territorial units (Burman 2014).

CONAMAQ came out in support of the TIPNIS movement because they share a common set of interests based on territorialized identities, "in the sense that territory was at the heart of their political positions and their configuration of indigenous identities" (Burman *ibid.*:263). It is therefore not enough to reduce the conflict epitomized by the TIPNIS case to historical enmity between highlanders and lowlanders, since clearly alliances are made across these groups. What Burman's research explicitly shows is that CONAMAQ overcame their cultural antipathy towards lowlanders in the context of the development of contemporary indigenous (as opposed to Indianist) politics since the 1990s. CONAMAQ and other lowland groups share a counterhegemonic discourse of indigeneity against the state. The indigeneity of CONAMAQ leaders is thus very different from that embraced by the president, even if they are from the same ethnic group. It is no coincidence that, unlike Morales' coca growing

supporters, CONAMAQ represents people with clearly defined historical territories, quite different from the de-territorialized people who make up the majority of the president's support.

TERRITORIALIZED AND DE-TERRITORIALIZED INDIGENEITY

Of course, these “de-territorialized” groups are only such in terms of their geographic origins. Perhaps a better way of looking at the issue is in terms of the scale of the territory that people imagine: there are those that see themselves as indigenous because they belong to a defined territory within the state and others who see themselves as indigenous because they have a structural and historical position within the entire territory of the state.

In Bolivia, de-territorialized coca growers are by no means the only group who access national indigenism. In her work with landless peasants (de-territorialized *par excellence*), Fabricant (2012) has shown how these groups synthesize histories of struggle from highland and lowland groups in their struggle for land. These are people who mostly do not speak an indigenous language and are obviously *not* rooted to their land since access to land is their principal platform. They do nevertheless index indigeneity as a source of moral positioning and claim to justice on the basis of a history of struggle and past injustice. The symbols of Tupak Katari, the eighteenth-century Aymara leader, are important not simply as a source of inspiration, but as an articulation of a moral position, a sense of justice. Landless peasants see themselves as the indigenous dispossessed and direct their anger not against other indigenous people but at large-scale landowners. They are a very clear example of people who use indigeneity to make a claim on the state which, since the election of Evo Morales, they see as some sense theirs.

De-territorialized people's indigeneity coalesces around key symbols such as historical figures or the coca leaf, but is not generally rooted in daily practice. They may possess a “lite” indigenous identity (Grisaffi 2010: 433), but one that nevertheless can be mobilized

effectively. This is very much the indigenous discourse developed by Evo Morales and his government in Bolivia. As well as the coca leaf, the creation of new marriage ceremonies and indigenous New Year celebrations are all examples of an ethnic identification rooted in the national rather than the local community. It is not simply that these symbols are easily acquired, but rather that they differ from the cultural practices of people for whom “culture” is as much rooted in daily economic and social life as it is broad symbols of identity. For example, in the highland Aymara community of Wila Kjarka people are simply unaware of many of the symbols of national indigeneity, including the Aymara New Year. Their indigeneity is rooted in a community life with reciprocal labor practices and a set of rituals that bind the community and ancestors together. For Wila Kjarkeños, migration to the city and a change of lifeways quite simply entails a loss of identity; one is simply no longer *jaqi*, that is, fully human. Their indigeneity is very different from that articulated by the president even if he, too, identifies as Aymara. One could even say that though they might belong to the same ethnic group they are indigenous in profoundly different ways; that is, although indigeneity may appear to be principally about cultural and ethnic expression it is, more accurately, a particular rights discourse that can cut across ethnic identity.

Ironically, one of the consequences of this national indigeneity is that it threatens to exclude those marginal people who have less access to this symbolic capital—those who in other circumstances might unambiguously be described as indigenous, a situation strikingly similar to that of some marginal peoples in Cameroon (Pelican 2009).

Symbolic and Substantive Indigeneity

Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2007 : 424) note that this national discourse of belonging is a new “emptier” form of ethnicity. “Emptier” in the sense that it does not need to be rooted in cultural practice, but rather that it can coalesce around a broad set of shared symbols. Writing about Pygmies, Leonhardt (2006) notes the difference between “symbolic” and “substantive”

autochthony. Baka have the former; that is, they can index a distinct lifestyle and cultural difference but cannot translate this into substantive autochthony that relates to citizenship and the state (see also Geschiere 2009: 98). Coca growers in Bolivia may have a weaker claim to an indigenous status—that is their symbolic indigeneity is less secure—but they are in a much better position to translate whatever symbolic indigeneity they have into substantive gains.

People such as Tsimanes and Ese Ejja in Bolivia, two of the least assimilated lowland groups, may have strong symbolic indigeneity but are too clearly aligned with the primordial (if internalized) “other”—much like Baka of Cameroon—to turn their symbolic indigeneity into something substantive. They cannot speak for the nation the way other groups can and still hold to a marginal indigeneity from which they can lobby against the state using their international networks and NGO support. This is why the (indigenous) national government is so suspicious of international indigenous NGOs.

In fact, coca growers in Bolivia have a very uneasy relationship with indigeneity as an identity rather than a political discourse. Alessandra Pellegrini’s (2016) work among coca growers in the Yungas region, a traditional coca-growing area, observes many instances of ambivalence towards indigeneity. For these coca-growers, the politics of indigeneity is most closely associated with the governing MAS party and its policies that clearly favor coca growers. There nevertheless remains a residual ambivalence with respect to their highland kin as well as lowland neighbors. Pellegrini notes that people in the Yungas have pity on their monolingual relatives who are, unlike them, poor; at least, that is their perspective.

Highlanders “do not know how to make money.”¹⁷ This is another example of how a sense of indigeneity is not always coterminous with ethnicity.

CONCLUSIONS

Indigeneity is a globalized discourse and people’s consciousness as indigenous peoples is

formed in the processes of national and international mobilization, flows of ideas, and the resources of NGOs, the UN, and so forth, who hold seminars, courses, and internships where indigenous leaders are formed (Escárcega 2010). As a consequence, the differences between, say, Botswana and Bolivia are much less salient than one might suppose and scholars of indigeneity can draw much from each other across regions of the globe.

The Africanist discussion of autochthony versus indigeneity may seem, at first glance, to be utterly arcane in terms of a Latin American experience of five centuries of indigenous struggle, where in Africa in many cases one cannot even count five decades. In this sense, Aymara-speaking people of Wila Kjaraka in highland Bolivia I have visited for almost three decades have as much and as recent an indigenous consciousness as, for example, the Baka of Cameroon. These new expressions of indigeneity and the global politics they articulated were fundamentally different from what had gone before; it should not surprise us that, even if they inevitably draw on a particular history, they have much in common with coeval expressions of indigeneity across the world.

If one goes beyond the debates of indigeneity and autochthony as classificatory problems and instead traces their content in terms of rights discourses and, in particular, the specific relation to the state each seeks to articulate, then a confused landscape becomes suddenly much clearer. More importantly, the debates about autochthony and indigeneity in Africa point to different ways indigenous discourses can be deployed. The fundamental difference is that the former is a claim on the state and imagines a belonging that covers the national territory whereas the latter is a much more localized discourse articulated by people who are on the margins of the state.

This formulation allows one to distinguish between different groups in countries such as Bolivia, where there is a myriad of indigenous groups—each with their struggle—who may yet be in conflict with each other. It is not a matter of who is “more” indigenous, but rather of

seeing the different claims made on the basis of indigeneity.

As the globalized concept of indigeneity continues to develop, there will be a continued growth of people identifying and mobilizing as indigenous. It is becoming increasingly important to move from seeing indigenous people as essentially marginal and powerless and sharing a basic position and experience to distinguishing between different kinds of indigenous discourses. The Africanist literature has inspired me to see that there is a fundamental difference between the indigenous discourses of majoritarian populations who seek to access the state's support to those who struggle against the state. It is not sufficient to see the former as illiberal and the latter as progressive, because the sense of dispossession and marginality people feel is often highly contextualized and nuanced. Even within the same, small, group there may be, and in fact will almost certainly be, important differences. In fact, as I have illustrated above, there may be different expressions of indigeneity within the same ethnic group. Distinguishing between different indigenous groups in terms of the kinds of rights claims they make resolves some profound paradoxes and sheds important light on cases such as that of Bolivia, where indigenous groups in a state run by an indigenous government are in conflict.

Looking at indigeneity and conflict in Bolivia and West Africa illuminates the binary nature of indigenous discourse. In this article I have identified five nested pairs of concepts, each pair allowing for a differing, but intimately related, perspective on indigenous discourses. Together they offer tools for analysis whereby not only can different indigenous claims be distinguished, but with which we can put power relations and relations with the state at the center of our analysis.

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Abstract: Since Evo Morales was first elected President of Bolivia in 2005, indigeneity has moved from being a language of protest to a language of governance with concomitant profound changes in how indigeneity is imagined and mobilized. However, one of the striking features of Morales's presidency is his administration's open conflict with various indigenous groups. Although a number of scholars have addressed these issues, they have largely focused on the peculiarities of the Bolivian example in a Latin American context; this has obscured the advantage of significant comparative analysis with other areas of the world. I argue that indigeneity as it is currently practiced and understood is a recent global phenomenon and that there are more similarities between African countries and Bolivia than is generally appreciated. In particular, scholarly debates surrounding the difference between autochthony and indigeneity, and the case of Cameroon in particular, have much to offer in our understanding of the Bolivian case. To date, the primary frame for understanding indigeneity is an ethnic/cultural one and this can obscure important similarities and differences between groups. The comparative framework presented here allows for the development of analytical tools to distinguish fundamental differences and conflicts in indigenous discourses. I distinguish between five related conceptual pairs: majoritarian and minoritarian discourses; claims on the state and claims against the state; de-territorialized peoples versus territorialized peoples; hegemonic and counterhegemonic indigeneity; and substantive versus symbolic indigeneity. These nested pairs allow for analytic distinctions between indigenous rights discourses without recourse to discussions of culture and authenticity.

Key words: indigeneity, conflict, state, Andes, Africa, Bolivia, Cameroon, autochthony, Morales

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¹ His most important accomplishment is undoubtedly the fact that poverty, which disproportionately affects indigenous people, has dropped consistently and dramatically over a wide range of indices (Farthing and Kohl 2014: 33).

² This is, however, not a simple issue: the 2001 census declared 66 percent of the population (including those under fifteen years of age) to be indigenous; in 2012 only 43 percent of the population was so declared. There is no question that this is due to the phrasing of the question and the political and social contexts in which each of those censuses occurred. This does illustrate that deciding who is and is not indigenous is by no means straightforward even in these two censuses which allowed people to self-identify.

³ This, however, was widely used as a euphemism. *Mestizo* peasants then and now do not refer to themselves as *campesinos*, but rather *agricultores*—small scale farmers.

⁴ See, for example, Bigenho 2005.

⁵ In this it was similar to *indigenismo* movements across Latin America, beginning with Mexico after the Revolution. *Indigenismo* was concerned much less with contemporary indigenous peoples who were encouraged to assimilate but to absolve emerging middle classes of the “problem” of racial impurity and indigenous descent.

⁶ Today the World Bank recognizes that the majority of the world’s indigenous people live in Asia.

⁷ Their leader, the balaclava-clad subcomandante Marcos, is not indigenous but his regular internet communications placed indigeneity as a discourse for not articulating a wide range of

progressive courses such as, for example, gay rights, which had not hitherto been associated with indigenous people's rights.

⁸ For example, when I told my friends that the leader of the Pachakuti Indigenous Party, Felipe Quispe, had told me in an interview that natural gas was an indigenous issue because it was the Pachamama's (earth mother) fart, they were totally nonplussed, even though the Pachamama is one of their principal deities.

⁹ The march gained rapid international attention and was reported even in German regional newspapers.

¹⁰ There are also many cases where leaders articulate a strong indigenous identity but the people they represent are uncomfortable with the label. Boullosa (2017) offers an Argentinean example.

¹¹ Quispe's ideology would shift, partly in response to Morales, but not in time to prevent his being totally eclipsed by the leader of the coca growers' leader. Quispe never really appealed beyond his Aymara base.

¹² His sponsorship did not only extend to initiating and presiding over the procedures but also acting as a formal ritual sponsor the *padrino*, a role usually reserved for respected married members of the community. This sponsorship creates important fictive kinship ties.

¹³ See Canessa 2014; Laing 2015; McNeish 2013; and Sanchez Lopez 2015.

¹⁴ An important element here is that of scale: indigenous people live in countries and are defined by those borders. Native Papuans may be considered indigenous if they live in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, but not if they live in the state of Papua New Guinea across the border since Papua New Guinea is an independent state with a majority Papuan population. One could consequently argue, although to my knowledge no one has yet, that there are no indigenous people in Bolivia since the majority population and the one most clearly represented in the government is composed of those descendants of the pre-conquest

population. One reason for this might be that although indigenous people have been numerically dominant it was only recently that one could argue that they are politically dominant.

¹⁵ Peter Geschiere (2009) outlines the very specific and ultimately arbitrary reasons Dutch speakers settled on the Greek word *autochtonie* to articulate a set of nationalist concerns; in francophone West Africa, *autochtonie* is inherited from the French colonial apparatus. As Geschiere notes, in francophone North America, *autochtonie* has a very different meaning and I would add that it is very rarely used elsewhere in the hemisphere and, when it is, it is used synonymously with indigenous (e.g., Orobitg 2012). At most, in Spanish “*autoctonía*” is preferred over “*indigeneidad*” because the latter is a rather inelegant neologism borrowed from English but, even so, it is very rarely used. It is quite clear that in many contexts autochthony and indigeneity are interchangeable, even within Africa, the only real difference being that indigeneity has much more of a global currency. But it is worth pointing out that the UN treats *autochtonie* simply as a translation of indigeneity, and so in French the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People is the *Déclaration sur les droits des peuples autochtones*. The UN’s insistence on translating “indigeneity” as “autochtonie” has caused some confusion in countries such as Cameroon, where the term has a very different history and “*indigènes*” who are on its margins such as forest dwellers are now sometimes described as “*autochtones vulnérables*.”

¹⁶ For a detailed account on the various tension and conflicts that ultimately resulted in the adoption of this term, see Garcés 2011.

¹⁷ For other examples of people with unambiguous pre-Columbian roots who speak an indigenous language but are uncomfortable with identifying as indigenous, see Shakow 2014.