

Good Living for Whom? Bolivia's Climate Justice Movement and the Limitations of Indigenous Cosmovisions

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Climate change has become an important issue in Bolivia as communities across the lowlands and highlands are beginning to feel the direct effects of the ecological crisis. While Evo Morales, the current president of Bolivia, has surfaced as an international superstar for the climate justice movement, behind his public appearances at UN climate conferences are indigenous organizations and social movements who work daily to map out strategies for adaptation and mitigation. This paper analyzes how indigenous climate justice activists in Bolivia mobilize a particular vision of Andean indigeneity, frozen in time and space, to make specific political claims about their rights in relationship to the environment and propose alternative economic structures. Many activists argue that the ecological problems of this century are a direct result of advanced capitalism, which has turned lands, forests, and natural surrounds into commodities. However, their timeless vision of indigeneity, particularly using the imagined ayllu or pre-Columbian land-holding patterns as solutions to climate crisis, poses dangers for the millions of Bolivians who live and work in urban centers.

Keywords: Climate change; resources; indigeneity; ayllus; social movements

Bolivia, like other countries in the Global South and North, is beginning to feel the direct effects of climate change. In the Bolivian Amazon, regions have suffered from terrible floods, while the desert lowlands have witnessed severe droughts. In the highlands, the two main glaciers that provide drinking water are shrinking. The Chacaltaya glacier disappeared completely this year and others have lost 40–50% of their capacity. These melting glaciers are affecting availability of water in places like La Paz and El Alto (Hoffman, 2005, 2008; Ramirez, 2011). It is for these reasons that Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, has proposed the sweeping policy reform agenda of climate debt – which has to do with the debt owed to the Global South by industrialized countries because of their primary responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.¹ Climate debt is just one of the many creative proposals emerging from poorer countries and, more specifically, from indigenous peoples, who are scaling up their demands from a national to an international level. While most observers and

commentators have focused on Morales as the central figure, a range of social movements and indigenous groups has influenced his decision-making and amplified his power.

This paper will explore *La Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático*, the Bolivian Platform for Climate Change, or one sector of Bolivian civil society's response to climate change involving national and international NGOs and social movements. To set the necessary historic context, the article begins by describing the creative strategies employed by movements fighting to reclaim resources from the 1990s to the early 2000s. These movements were focused on mobilizing indigeneity, particularly Andean indigenous visions, as justification for resource reclamation and resource sovereignty. The concerns and politics regarding extractivism morphed over time into a series of critical questions regarding the linkage between movement-building, the degradation of the environment, and climate change. Secondly, this paper analyzes how climate justice activists mobilize a particular vision of Andean indigeneity, frozen in time and space, to make specific political claims about their rights in relationship to the environment. In turn, these movement activists have proposed alternatives to the capitalist model of development, which they see as causing the ecological problems of our century.

Importantly, despite anthropology's best effort to complicate analyses of indigeneity, many Aymara activists choose to characterize their struggles in earlier representations of native peoples and their communities as unchanged. This is especially the case as indigenous groups use parts of their mythic history and cultural forms to construct political and ecological ideals of the nexus between indigeneity and environmental reform. In this way, these symbols have evolved from a powerful 'justification' for change to the reform 'solution.' In this paper, I question the migration of these discourses into international arenas as solutions to contemporary, complicated, and interconnected problems. How can such solutions provide the necessary framework for reversing the damage wrought by climate change? Can pre-Columbian models of collective land-holding and subsistence agriculture provide the necessary infrastructure to deal with climate related issues?

The data for this article has come from extensive ethnographic fieldwork in La Paz and El Alto during the months of June, July, and August 2009–2012²: observing spaces of organizing, participating in climate-related meetings in Bolivia and international spaces of climate negotiation. Further, I interviewed key members of the climate justice movement in La Paz, Bolivia. I turn now toward the history of resource-based struggles of the climate justice movement in La Paz and the creative strategies of resistance in the 1990s and 2000s in order to illustrate the transformation of activism from 'reclaiming the commons' and 'questions of national sovereignty' to new concerns regarding environmental restitution and climate change.

From Resource Recovery to Environmental Retribution

In the 1990s and 2000s, social movements creatively mobilized ideas about natural resources as intimately tied to the public good. For instance, they framed water as part of the 'commons' (Assies, 2003; Perreault, 2008) and gas as essential to national

sovereignty (Perreault, 2006; Spronk & Webber, 2007). Both of these examples illustrate popular resistance against neoliberal efforts to privatize public resources. Bolivia, along with other nations in the Global South, accepted privatization as conditions of IMF and World Bank loans in the 1980s to 'structurally adjust' their ailing economies. Part of the international development bank prescription was to liberalize trade (particularly international trade), privatize state-owned industries and services, and introduce market-oriented management practices to reduce the public sector (Kohl, 2002; Perreault, 2005; Kohl & Farthing, 2006). Acting within this neoliberal framework, politicians sought to selectively roll back specific state functions, particularly the provision of social services and regulatory restraints on corporate practices (Perreault, 2005). The first round of neoliberal reforms took effect in the mid-1980s under President Victor Paz Estenssoro and the second round in the 1990s, which included the privatization of transportation, electricity, water resources. A package of decentralization policies was also enacted. Neoliberal reforms had a particularly complicated relationship to the processes of environmental transformation, environmental governance, and environmental movement development (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Perreault, 2005). Geographer Karen Bakker (2002), for example, has described the ways in which resource privatization rerouted governance away from states and municipalities and toward external, sometimes transnational, corporations.

In the case of Bolivia, resource-based struggles sparked conversations that circulated across issues of indigenous citizenship, national sovereignty, and the rewriting of new legal frameworks like the constitution. Bolivians have referred to these movements as part of a broader '*proceso de cambio*' or processes of change (Postero, 2010; Canessa, 2012). It was within this context that a wealth of academic scholarship emerged after the Water Wars of 2000, exploring the ways in which the privatization of water sparked new forms of organizing across identitarian, class, and regional distinctions. As Albro (2005) and Olivera and Lewis (2004) noted, the Water Wars mobilized a discourse centering on the defense of indigenous 'traditional use and distribution of water' as collective cultural right. Many of the protestors were urban mestizos (not self-identified indigenous); yet *usos y costumbres* became a powerful discourse which cut across race, class, and social sectors in order to negotiate for 'collective' water rights. Geographer Tom Perreault (2008) notes that this discourse of water governance, based on traditional customary practices of water management, was mobilized and scaled up to the level of regional water concerns through complex and dense associational networks of NGOs. These water movement activists mobilized essentialized discourses of *usos y costumbres*, emphasizing indigenous uses of water in order to create a strategic platform for local and regional struggles to reclaim water from private hands.

Three and a half years after the Water Wars, when President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada announced his plan to export Bolivia's gas through Chile by pipeline, a number of groups, largely located in the Aymara city of El Alto, developed a campaign to resist the dispossession and alienation associated with the extraction and exportation of this resource – known as the Gas Wars of 2003. The Gas Wars amplified the ways in which local movements could help frame a national political

agenda to recover control over a resource that was seen as the country's national patrimony (Perreault, 2006). Demands for nationalization were fused with other demands for indigenous rights, greater indigenous representation, and the rewriting of the constitution (Gustafson & Fabricant, 2011). This organizing around resource reclamation, recovery, and nationalization propelled ex-coca grower and union leader Evo Morales to the Presidency of Bolivia. Morales was elected on a platform to a) undo the legacy of neoliberal reforms, b) incorporate the indigenous majority into the country, and c) implement the October Agenda, which included nationalization of resources, constitutional convention, and an end to impunity. What the election of Morales represented was a joining of a local movement politics to a national change agenda and in turn the electoral politics of shaping and advancing a legislative agenda to turn back neoliberal reforms. This was a rapid ascent of both the power and ambition of Bolivian social movements. Some part of the promise was that the movement had captured the state and in turn had an opportunity to create a 'social movement state' (Gustafson, 2009). What remained unclear was the degree to which movement leaders could negotiate this shifting terrain of politics and change.

As part of his broader platform to undo the legacy of neoliberalism, Morales promised to direct resource wealth from the affluent to the poor to generate economic development; but, as scholars have noted (Kohl & Farthing, 2012; Postero, 2013), structural constraints of extractive industries in combination with the limitations of electoral legislative processes have produced daunting obstacles to the achievement of these goals. Kohl and Farthing (2012) focus on the clash between social movement ideals of resource reclamation and realities of long-term extractive dependent economies. Postero (2013) has honed in on Morales' self representation as an international 'savior of Mother Earth' and the discrepancies between 'discourse and deed' as he continues the nation's reliance on an extractive economy. Recently, these conflicts have exploded around *El Parque Nacional y Territorio Indígena Isiboro-Sécure* – the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory, popularly referred to as the TIPNIS case (Paz, Forthcoming; Camacho, 2012). Morales signed a contract with a Brazilian development agency to run a massive highway through indigenous lands and territories in lowland Bolivia. Despite Morales' 'social movement state' (Gustafson, 2009) and performances of allegiance with distinct indigenous communities, he has not only moved forward with proposals to construct the highway, but also undermined lowland indigenous organizations by publicly outing them as 'connected to US imperialistic endeavors' and silencing opposition to the highway. As McNeish (2013) argues in this volume, these new conflicts have fractured and demobilized many movements in contemporary Bolivia. The broad-based umbrella organizations of highland and lowland indigenous social movements – which made the election of Morales possible and served as an engine for the broader *procesos de cambio* – have largely been dissolved.

In the 1990s and 2000s, movements focused on issues of resource recovery and successfully scaled up demands to regional and national levels. Their political use of indigenous rural usos and costumbres of water, as in the case of the Water Wars, had a concrete agenda: to reclaim 'the commons' from private hands. In the case of gas,

issues of resource sovereignty or national development were also very concretely tied to indigenous incorporation into the nation-state and the rewriting of the constitution. Toward the end of this millennium, many of these same movements have begun to focus their attention on climate change, particularly as rural indigenous communities have begun to feel the direct effects of such ecological shift. Postero (2013) notes that the Amazonian regions have suffered terrible floods over the last few years: these floods have uprooted whole communities while destroying productive engines and possibilities for self-sufficiency. Increasingly, indigenous peoples in the highlands describe more extreme weather patterns, including warmer winters and much colder summers. Among the El Alto residents, the glacier retreat was quite visible from their homes. Many spoke about the physical signs of global warming. However, some colleagues in El Alto told me that they experienced more water in their *pozos* or wells and were uncertain as to how this retreat would affect long-term water availability.

With this threat of global warming and radical environmental shifts, which could potentially undermine livelihoods, communal life, and social organizations, indigeneity has surfaced once again as an alternative frame of explanation and change. This time, however, indigeneity is not a platform for how to reclaim resources from transnational corporations, but rather a means to present distinct 'cosmovisions' drawn from indigenous cultural history and practices as an alternative to capitalist forms of production and distribution.

One important part of this alternative platform is the proposal by some activists to return to the ayllu – Pre-columbian land-holding patterns based upon kin relations and collective work patterns (Murra, 1975, 1978; Zuidema, 1977). The ayllu has circulated from localized and ethno-territorial projects, to national policy for climate change and even to international climate change negotiations. The central tenet of the politics of the ayllu is that indigenous peoples need to adopt a model of development built upon Andean communal and productive strategies (Lucero, 2011). Ayllus were the basic units of the archipelago-like communities that stretched over multiple ecological zones and existed well before Europeans arrived in the Americas over five hundred years ago (Murra, 1975, 1978). Many ayllus and *markas* (a larger communal unit made up of several ayllus) maintained their organizational form well into the Republican period. Following the Social Revolution of 1952, however, ayllu governance faced its biggest threat as the state imposed a uniform *sindicato* (union) model throughout the rural areas (Lucero, 2011; Rivera Cusicanqui, 1987). In part, this transformation of ayllu to *sindicato* was about incorporating indigenous peoples into the state apparatus, or what Albó refers to as rebaptizing Indians as peasants (Albó, 1991). Despite these state-based efforts of control, there have been several cases in which rural communities in the altiplano continued to act as autonomous ayllus.

Ayllu as Political Discourse of Culture and Land Reclamation

The rebirth of the 'ayllu' as a political discourse, with the capacity to scale up as a global symbol for indigenous rights, occurred in the 1980s with NGO support.³ The activist Aymara intellectuals of the Taller de Historia Oral Andina, or Andean Oral

History Workshop, also known as THOA, have carried out much of the intellectual work of reconstituting the ayllu. The THOA movement, under the leadership of Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (1987), calls for the recognition of the original colonial territorial bounds in order to reclaim rights to land, community, and to the reestablishment of traditional Andean forms of governance.

Anthropologists have written about the ways in which THOA activists use the ayllu discursively as an alternative counterpublic and oppositional consciousness (see Weismantel, 2006; Orta, 2001; Stephenson, 2000). While THOA does the intellectual work, CONAMAQ (National Council for Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu) was founded in 1997 to do some of the political work of reclaiming and reconstituting the traditional ayllu and *marka* structure in Western Bolivia (Perreault & Green, 2013). This work has involved eighteen indigenous/originario organizations from the Altiplano and Andean valleys (from the departments of La Paz, Oruro, Potosi, Cochabamba, Chuquisaca and Tarija). CONAMAQ defines its mission as an ethno-territorial project, with an emphasis on reconstituting an imagined cultural space of the indigenous past (Perreault & Green, 2013). They conceptualize the *ayllu* as an egalitarian and Pre-columbian kin-based and collectively owned territorial space: the key to their political work is claiming autonomy and self-sufficiency.

CONAMAQ's Vision for Alternative Forms of Development

Today, CONAMAQ is a key member of the Bolivian Platform for Climate Change, which was founded in 2009 in order to develop Bolivian legislation on climate change and promote concrete proposals for international action. The Platform is comprised of international NGOs such as OXFAM International (a British NGO focused on issues of poverty and inequality), Christian Aid (a British relief and development agency), and CAFOD (a British development agency focused on issues of social justice), along with rural social movements such as CONAMAQ (the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qullasuyu), The Bartolina Sisa Movement (a rural peasant movement which focuses on women's struggles), CIDOB (the Confederation of Lowland Indigenous Peoples, which focuses on indigenous rights in the lowlands), CSUTCB (the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers, which is the largest peasant union in Bolivia), and CPESC (the Confederation of Ethnic Communities or Towns of Santa Cruz) (Oxfam, 2009).

Within the climate justice arena, CONAMAQ has mobilized the *ayllu* as an alternative to expansive and destructive capitalism. In large part, its members see extractive industries and Bolivia's dependency upon non-renewable natural resources as not only harming the environment, but also contributing to climate change. As well, the movement has mobilized a universal indigenous discourse of 'Buen Vivir' or 'living well.'⁴ (Interview, June 10, 2010). This discourse and practice emerges out of idealized Andean constructs of gender complementarity: harmony and equilibrium between men and women, egalitarian ayllu communities, and protection of natural environment. This cosmivision and the discourse of historic meaning and contemporary aspiration of the ayllu has a specific meaning in relationship to living well. It means living in harmony and equilibrium with others and the larger environment.

This 'imagined ayllu' (Weismantel, 2006) as space of egalitarianism, gender complementarity and small-scale, sustainable forms of production set a course for rebuilding social, economic, and environmental relationships in an era of crisis.

As Political Scientist Antonio Lucero (2011) notes, these ideas regarding 'ayllu' as an alternative to capitalism did not occur in a vacuum, but rather are part of complicated 'development encounters' between indigenous peoples and their international supporters. As John Gledhill (2005) notes, international development projects in the 1980s and 1990s emphasized 'culture heritage and revitalization' as critical to their work.⁵ In many ways, this has to do with the convergence of neoliberal economic reforms – which opened Bolivia's borders to international development solutions to problems of poverty and inequality – and multicultural reforms which simultaneously created a space for indigenous recognition and political influence. It is within this context, for example, that Oxfam International directly supported groups such as THOA's work on the ayllu because they conceptualized the ayllu as an ancient form of community organization that served as a device of empowerment to articulate disparate claims and defend rights (Andolina, 1999, 2001; Albro, 2005). This is something that Andolina, Laurie, and Radcliffe (2009) discuss as the institutionalization of indigenous agendas within official development policies.

International development organizations, while once addressing issues of land, water, and gender, have recently focused much of their work on climate-related issues and disaster relief (Oxfam, 2009). They have also mobilized strategies of 'culture revitalization' such as investing in the ayllu in order to deal with these problems. They rely upon cultural frames and models to promote new forms of adaptation and risk management against disaster that are culturally acceptable to indigenous groups and therefore more likely to be utilized. The expectation is that these works of culture revitalization and alternate practices will reduce the chance of catastrophes and enable local indigenous communities to provide emergency relief throughout Bolivia alongside the government.

The marrying of local belief or custom with NGO resources and technique was expected to maximize the impact of specific environmental initiatives. As Lucero (2011) notes, international development organizations like Oxfam International help root politics in domestic soil and scale downwards. However, he also astutely points out that they serve 'authenticating' roles, serving as part of the complex processes of legitimizing certain identities while delegitimizing others. This is particularly important when it comes to issues of climate change: Oxfam International has several projects in lowland Beni and in the rural highland areas.⁶ However, as Roger Quiroga, the Oxfam Director of Disaster Relief, told me, *all* of their projects fit within this ethno-territorial model of development (Interview, June 10, 2010). Along with a team of archaeologists, Oxfam has launched a project in the Beni region where it has rescued a Pre-Columbian system for dealing with droughts called *camellones*: raised earth platforms which protect crops during moments of flooding.⁷ In the highlands, the organization has supported ayllu projects as ethno-territorial projects and as alternatives to large-scale agricultural dependency and to promote food sovereignty. He described these projects as successful because 'these indigenous communities have deep connections to land, territory, and space' (Interview, June 10, 2010). However,

he contrasts rural indigenous communities with the urban, arguing that it is very hard to address climate change in 'El Alto because they do not have deep connections to territory [...] they are a hotel city, in constant motion' (Interview, June 10, 2010). When it comes to urban or periurban areas, this ethno-territorial model can leave many indigenous peoples out of the conversation, legitimizing certain indigenous identities, while deligitimizing others.

Ayllu and The Good Life in National Projects on Climate Change

Rafael Quispe, the leader of the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qullasuyu, has been involved in the Platform for Climate Change in Bolivia since its inception in 2009. It was a cold day in July 2010 when I met him in the CONAMAQ headquarters located close to the Plaza España in Sopocachi, La Paz to discuss the Platform's national proposals for addressing climate change. A middle-aged man in his early 40s, Quispe was dressed in an Aymara Fedora Hat and a colorful woven shawl. Like other members of CONAMAQ, he wore these indexical markers of indigeneity with obvious pride. When I asked him about the proposals coming out of indigenous organizations, he launched into a discussion about how capitalism was destroying the planet.

Capitalism is the problem. It is extractive, consumerist, and developmentalist. In this sense capitalism and socialism are the same. We have to speak of a new model of development, an alternative to this system. Because both capitalism and socialism will go on hurting the planet. The development model of the indigenous peoples is the *ayllu* or the communitarian model. This is the solution.

His response seemed nearly identical to an interview conducted by Bill Weinberg, a US journalist reporting for NACLA (Report on the Americas), several years earlier in 2009 for a September/October 2010 issue. When asked by Bill Weinberg about an alternative to resource extractivism, Quispe launched into a verbatim response:

Capitalism or socialism is extractive, consumerist, developmentalist. In this sense, they are the same. We have to speak of a new model of development, an alternative to the system. Because both capitalism and socialism will go on changing the planet. And the development model of the indigenous peoples is the *ayllu*, the communitarian development model. We original peoples for thousands and thousands and thousands of years have been living in equilibrium and respect for our Pachamama (Mother Earth), from whom we emerged.

The only difference was that Quispe added for Weinberg: 'We original peoples for thousands and thousands of years have been living in equilibrium and respect for our Pachamama.' One could analyze this performance of indigeneity as the ways in which people 'package identity' for North American audiences. Anthropologists and journalists, often representing these struggles to a broader community, have access to desperately needed funding. Therefore, these interactions become sites of performance for indigenous leaders who hope to wield some power and monetary gain. Possibly, Quispe felt as though this simplistic and essentialized vision of 'unchanging indigenous peoples who live in harmony with natural surrounds' would be a direct ticket to international recognition and support.

This performance of indigenous peoples as protectors of natural environments, living in equilibrium with Mother Earth and relying upon an egalitarian democratic system or structure of 'ayllu' democracy resembles early anthropological representations of native peoples and their closed corporate communities. This body of literature in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the ayllu as untouched by colonialism and expanding capitalism, and 'lo Andino' or Andeanism reflected a long ethnological area studies literature that imagined and understood native peoples in relation to ecologies, often in deterministic and essentialized ways (Isbell, 1977; Brush, 1977; Bastien, 1978; Allen, 1988). Orin Starn's (1992) attack upon ethnographers for 'missing the revolution,' which he characterized as failure to understand how broader global and political economic shifts affect native or South American peoples, very much influenced a new wave of anthropology. However, despite his attempt to rewrite this problematic history, what most appeals to some Aymaras like Quispe is this very idea of 'lo Andino': native peoples as timeless, grounded in rural realities, and inherently connected to local ecologies.

In sharp contrast to the increasingly dynamic academic approaches to indigeneity, 'the noble savage' or 'eco-Indian' has traveled, been transformed, and deployed by indigenous peoples for political purposes (Dove, 2006). As Tom Perreault and Barbara Green (2013) argue, groups like CONAMAQ in the West and autonomous movements in the East mobilize essentialized understandings of indigenous identity in order to legitimate historical claims to territory and political rights. They are primarily interested in the ways in which indigeneity has come to inform conceptualizations of territory and of nation. Mobilizing indigeneity to claim rights to space, territory, or natural resource wealth has been important in concrete political projects like CONAMAQ or Camba Nation; but what happens when the same strategies travel into the realm of climate change?

In this instance, romantic ideals of indigeneity serve as grounds for restitution for historic environmental injustice wrought by long histories of resource extraction. As Kohl and Farthing (2012) argue this dependency upon extraction has been referred to as the 'resource curse,' which they note has been a simplified way of looking at resource dependency. Nevertheless, from silver and gold mining in early history to much more recent natural gas extraction, the abundance of natural resource wealth has not benefitted Bolivia. Alongside such forms of extraction is environmental degradation. Linda Farthing (2009) has written about this kind of environmental injustice. She states:

You don't have to look far to see the destruction. Even the most casual visitor to La Paz is likely to cross the turbid, foaming waters of the Choqueyapu River, which cuts across the city, some of it underground. From its head-waters 21 miles to the north in the altiplano, the crystalline glacial flow tumbles into the magnificent basin that cradles La Paz and is transformed into an open sewer. Heavy metals from the Milluni mine some 20 miles northeast of La Paz, industrial waste from neighboring El Alto's textile and food industries, and household garbage mix into a poisonous stew that races downhill to the community of Río Abajo. (Farthing, 2009, p. 26)

This kind of environmental degradation has disrupted ways of life for many indigenous communities. Some communities have been unable to use the waterways for

agriculture and been displaced as a result of such ‘a toxic and poisonous stew.’ As indigenous peoples search for answers, then, it seems reasonable that representatives like Quispe would blame both capitalism and socialism as being equally destructive in terms of ‘harming the environment.’ While both capitalism and socialism have track records in terms of environmental degradation, Pre-columbian ways of life are imagined as purer and more ecologically sustainable.

What is somehow left out of this conversation is the ways in which indigenous peoples have contributed to the development of capitalism and benefited from extractive industries that have wreaked havoc upon the natural environment. Some scholars of the Amazon have pointed out the ways in which indigenous communities have been involved in extractive industries such as logging instead of conserving ‘their forests’, as happened with the Kayapo (Turner, 1995). Further, anthropologist Juliet Erazo (2013) discusses the REDD+ projects⁸ (reducing emissions from deforestation by purchasing carbon credits) and the ways in which particular indigenous communities see the benefit in commoditizing nature for much-needed infrastructure development. As problematic as REDD+ projects are when it comes to commoditizing nature, these indigenous groups do not necessarily place themselves inside the noble savage slot, but rather see the advantages of these market-based mechanisms. Despite Jose Antonio Zamora Gutierrez’ (Bolivia’s current Minister on the Environment and Water) proclamations that these mechanisms make indigenous peoples believe that they will provide enough resources to solve poverty in peasant communities,⁹ Erazo (2012) illustrates how some natives see REDD+ programs as improving the well-being of their communities and leading directly to much-needed development. Much contemporary anthropological work on indigeneity captures the ways native communities take part in these kinds of market-based mechanisms (McNeish, 2013), yet indigenous movements like CONAMAQ fail to capture this dynamism in their political work and discourse. Increasingly more problematic and dangerous has been the migration of these discourses from national agendas to international arenas as solution to the climate crisis.

Scaling up The Ayllu and ‘The Good Life’ in International Climate Arena

According to Platform members, they have influenced Morales’ stance on the need for radical climate change policy (Interview, June 12, 2010). Bolivian climate negotiators, Morales in particular, were outspoken in the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the 2010 Conference in Cancun, Mexico, and more recently the 2012 event in Doha, arguing that ‘the climate is not for sale.’ Morales has also advanced an agenda that demands that the Global North lead with mitigation actions and concrete financial and technological transfers to the Global South.

Despite such efforts, there has been a stalemate at the international level because industrialized nations continue to resist assuming responsibility for their share of greenhouse emissions. Obviously, there is much at stake in reaching a binding international agreement. The forces at work to stall or halt this initiative were in part revealed by The International Forum on Globalization through its Report ‘Faces behind

a Global Crisis' (Hellberg, et al. 2012). They 'outed' US carbon billionaires investing enormous sums of money to halt climate change policy solutions. While Bolivia has taken a radical stance in international climate change negotiations by, for example, proposing alterations to our global political economic system, it holds very little power to enact such solutions when opposed by billion dollar fossil fuel giants like the Koch Brothers (who since 1998 have spent \$12.6 million on campaign contributions to both houses of congress to lobby against climate change, and \$6 million in dirty energy money to representatives in congress since 1999). US intransigence largely accounts for the international impasse at UN climate conventions. Doha is but the most recent example of failed attempts to solidify binding agreements on climate change that accords with scientific recommendations (see Fabricant & Hicks, 2013).

It is within this context, then, that the World's People Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth was convened in Tiquipaya, Bolivia in April of 2009. In large part, this event was intended to signify the civil society's response to this international stalemate. Morales decided that if voices from the Global South were not recognized at the UN meetings, then, Bolivia would simply take international matters into its own hands. Over a three day period, seventeen working groups comprised of activists, labor organizers and indigenous peoples met to discuss issues of climate change ranging from climate debt to the dangers of carbon trading. Importantly, CONAMAQ surfaced critical concerns regarding the contradictions between the expansion of an extractive model of development and proposals for climate justice. Their strong opposition to the government's climate policies resulted in their expulsion from the conference. As a result, they set up a table outside the conference, called Mesa 18. In turn, they demanded the expulsion of all extractive industries from Bolivia (Weinberg, 2010). They also encouraged the government to adopt a new development model based upon the ayllus and local self-sufficiency (Weinberg, 2010). More specifically, the ayllu model's approach to development (including collective land holding, equitable distribution of resources, rotational leadership, and accountability) was proposed at the conference as an alternative to destructive and expansive capitalism, more concretely in response to extractive industries. Their final resolution was not officially adopted at the conference. However, key ideas regarding this ayllu development model were presented at the conference and have come to influence climate organizing in Bolivia. Critically, this was a signal moment in which the ayllu had moved into the discourse of international climate change bodies.

The Cochabamba meetings concluded with the writing and passing of the People's Agreement, which was another instance of ayllu and Buen Vivir being infused into international discourse. One important objective of this document was to pass proposals for new commitments to the Kyoto Protocol and to present these proposals at subsequent UN meetings. In this document, Buen Vivir is posed as an alternative to the continuing degradation of the environment when the authors note, 'we must recognize Mother Earth as a source of life and forge a new system based upon the principles of: harmony and balance among all and with all things; complementarity, solidarity, and equality; collective well-being and the satisfaction of the basic necessities of all; people in harmony with nature; recognition of human beings for what

they are, not what they own; elimination of all forms of colonialism, imperialism and interventionism; peace among the peoples and with Mother Earth' (People's Agreement of Cochabamba, 2010).

More recently, however, *Buen Vivir* has scaled up, not only to inform national development policy, but also international and transnational climate negotiations. Eduardo Gudynas (2011) argues that the early formulations of the *Buen Vivir* emerged in reaction to classical development strategies, either due to its negative social or environmental impacts, or the debatable economic effects. Geographer Sarah Radcliffe (2011) astutely points out the limitations of this model in Ecuador as indigenous worldviews have become institutionalized by the state, warning of the dangers of imagining this as a post-development, post-neoliberal moment. But what happens when such discourses migrate across national borders?

According to the documents that emerged from this conference, the objective is not to return to a pre-industrial era, but rather to use parts of pre-history to re-establish the links between humans and nature that have been ruptured by extractive industries. In a theoretical sense, this proposal inverts what Marxist geographer David Harvey (2006) describes as the web of capitalism. Harvey emphasizes the diverse material processes (physical, ecological and social) that must be appropriated, used, bent, and reshaped to the purposes and paths of capital accumulation. His idea of the material 'embedding' of social processes in the web of life has to do with the capacity of the 'accumulation' mode of production to literally transform everything into commodities (Harvey, 2006). The Platform for Climate Change proposes an alternate web that inverts these dynamics: new relationships between humans and nature, and new responsibilities of the state, which include protection of air, water, soil, biodiversity, forests, etc. The two primary ideas, that are proposed as solutions to the climate crisis are: (a) return to the *ayllu* model of development, coming out of a highland Andean understanding of territory, kin relations and land ownership, and (b) the universalizing of *Buen Vivir* as a broad-based indigenous construct for living differently, re-embedding the economic, social, and cultural into a system which lives in harmony with Mother Earth.

A burgeoning literature in geography has unpacked the conventional belief that spatial scales are a given. They suggest that social actors constrain, create, and shift scales, and actors can change power and authority by working across distinct spatial scales (Swyngedouw, 1997a, 1997b; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003; McCarthy, 2005). They can alter access to resources, decision-making processes, and even power relations, particularly with respect to resources. However, globalized discourses of *ayllu* and good life, when they become detached from concrete political projects, pose dangers as they migrate into international arenas. In their very migration, such constructs lose its territoriality and materiality: for example, what are the multiple variables of economic inequality, access to resources, and climate change that might be interacting to cause increasing vulnerability in both urban and rural communities? How will the *ayllu* create concrete solutions (re: plans for adaptation and mitigation) in urban and peri-urban spaces of Bolivia? In the following section, I turn toward one critical example of climate change/climate crisis in urban El Alto, which illustrates the

limitations of this primarily rural and indigenous vision of the ayllu as solution to climate change. This booming migrant city is an important example of the multiple and intersecting variables – related to economy, urban inequality, and ecological shifts – left unaccounted for in Platform documentation. Free floating ayllu discourses or a ‘return to our roots ideology’ does not incorporate the millions of people living and working in informal economies in El Alto, nor does it provide material and concrete solutions to deal with water scarcity.

Climate Change and Water Scarcity in Urban, El Alto

Migration to the city of El Alto exploded in the 1980s, in the era of neoliberalism. The city expanded from approximately 11,000 in the 1950s to a city of 1,184,942 in 2010. After the Social Revolution of 1952, the government and foreign aid organizations directed assistance to Bolivia’s eastern lowlands, where a new group of agricultural exporters began to emerge on the land that had been unaffected by the land reform. A series of military dictatorships in the 1970s exacerbated this inequality in the East as they gifted large extensions of land to friends as political patronage. Aymara peasants never received the credit, technical assistance, price support that enabled lowland commercial agriculturalists to develop and prosper (Gill, 2000; Arbona, & Kohl, 2003). Moreover, the fragmentation of landholdings through inheritance reduced the average size of fields and made subsistence agriculture more difficult. Many set their sights on the city of La Paz and migrated to the area known as La Ceja, the eyebrow of El Alto.

Sketching the complicated urban terrain and the new water problems associated with climate change must begin with the haphazard and uneven development of the city. This is the economic element that seems to have been left out of climate change conversations based upon Platform and rural visions. The rapid migration led to an intensified need for services, resources, employment and basic infrastructure during a period of neoliberal reforms that took aim at the public sector and radically reconfigured the economy toward private entities (Kohl, 2002; Kohl & Farthing, 2006; Arbona, 2007). It is no coincidence, then, that migrants had to construct and build their own water infrastructure, independent of municipal or state-based direction, leading to leaky and faulty pipeline construction.

Simultaneously, self-management was further codified by the privatization of El Alto’s municipal water supply in the 1990s. This played on a philosophy of ‘green neoliberalism’ where privatization was explicitly sold by international financial bodies as a means of overcoming limited resources and local expertise, pricing water appropriately to promote conservation and benefiting both multinational corporations and poor consumers (Laurie & Crespo, 2007; Spronk & Crespo, 2008). Aguas del Illimani (a consortium led by French company Suez) capitalized on this self-organization of Alteños (Lazar, 2008; Zibechi, 2010) by relying upon their labor once again to build infrastructure. Since ‘profit’ was the bottom line for private water companies, Aguas del Illimani relied upon cheaper materials and shallow tubing, and required neighborhoods to commit labor each month to building and maintaining the system. All of this created increased susceptibility to leakage and contamination. In some

areas, residents built their own clandestine networks and pipelines, while in other areas, they turned to ground water for meeting basic needs (Revilla, 2011).

Aguas del Illimani's concession was unsuccessful. After several years of increased fees for initial connection and monthly service, and failure on the part of the company to extend service to 200,000 residents, part of their initial commitment, the *Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto*, Federation of Neighborhood Councils or FEJUVE (an organizational umbrella which brought distinct community organizations together) was instrumental in mobilizing residents to resist privatization (Spronk, 2007; Finnegan, 2002).

These problems of infrastructure reaching communities have not gone away, but rather, have been exacerbated by increased population pressures as more and more rural Aymara migrate to urban El Alto. Compounding this problem of population pressure is the issue of global warming and melting glaciers. Communities across the altiplano get much of their water from precipitation during the rainy season, but during the dry season, glaciers play a critical role in buffering water supply. Scientists from *La Empresa Pública Social de Agua y Saneamiento*, The Public Social Water and Sanitation Company, EPSAS (the state based water company that replaced Aguas del Illimani), reported that reservoir volumes were 30% below average in 2009, and concern has been rising that rationing water will become necessary in the near future. Although the Bolivian Altiplano is not as arid as some regions of the globe, it is a large region that will face water scarcity due to the lack of technical expertise and resources for large-scale infrastructure development to address this problem. Each solution (building new dams, pumping groundwater) is likely to exacerbate declining environmental quality. While there remains considerable scientific uncertainty about the effects of glacial melt on the regional hydrological cycle, there is also a pressing need to begin developing long-term solutions to the problem, particularly in urban areas like El Alto where over one million people work in the informal sector. The lack of a voice (from El Alto and other complicated urban environments in the Platform) and the lack of research focusing on how climate change might interact with urban infrastructural problems, economic insecurity and population pressures could set the scene for climate-related disaster. Further, ideas regarding ayllu development model and Buen Vivir, unless they are grounded in political economic detail of life in urban and periurban areas, remain abstracted from everyday struggles of these residents.

Alteños do not imagine returning to rural areas and 'reconstituting ayllus,' for many of them moved to the urban environment because they could not survive as small-scale subsistence farmers. As one Alteño relayed to me, 'My life is in this urban area, I do not want to return to the rural community where my parents are from ... my children are here, my work is here, and my life is here in this city' (Interview, June 15, 2010). Further, the ideas regarding Buen Vivir are not only sufficiently vague, but focus primarily on rural realities: how to live in harmony with the environment? How to protect the natural surrounds? They fail to incorporate urban concerns such as the daily problems of poverty and inequality in these complicated urban areas, the lack of sanitation services and/or toxic waste seeping into their waterways, to mention just a few. Living well in a place like El Alto would incorporate a whole new vision of service delivery and infrastructure development.

What will be the solution when it comes to issues of water scarcity and climate change in urban areas? What will adaptation and mitigation look like? This concern over how urban areas will organize around climate change extends well beyond Bolivia. Sociologist Daniel Cohen (2013) discusses similar challenges facing the favela movements in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. While the urban poor in Rio might be disproportionately vulnerable to flooding and landslides (which climate change is already exacerbating), more often they are deprived of adequate sanitation, and more exposed to contamination where they live and to air pollution during their longer commutes. These kinds of daily struggles of poverty and inequality are more pressing than global warming, which seems far on the horizon and rather intangible. The political ecological critiques of productivism and consumerism are hard to sell to poor people's movements or to unions. In the case of Bolivian urbanites, the radical Aymara 'return to our roots' discourse is also hard to sell to the urban poor as well.

In conclusion, there are several problems with the new use and mobility of essentialized indigenous constructs as a solution to climate change. An over-reliance or focus on indigenous ways and customs as detached from political and economic realities can prove dangerous. Ideas like *Buen Vivir* (as they travel from concrete ethno-territorial projects to globalized discourses) can be easily picked up by distinct groups, commoditized, and refashioned to advance corporate/rightist agendas. On one hand, rural indigenous organizers commoditize this idea of the egalitarian *ayllu* where indigenous peoples protect and preserve the natural environment. On the other hand, agribusiness elites have had to claim an indigenous identity (linking themselves to lowland indigenous groups through spectacular performances) in order to stake claims to the lowland region and to critical resources in the region (Fabricant, 2009; Fabricant & Postero, 2013). So why shouldn't we be wary of indigeneity as a free-floating construct or signifier? Who gets to claim rights to the indigenous? How and in what ways do these essentialized constructs limit the possibility for the real critical work that needs to be done on climate change: bridging of urban and rural space, indigenous and mestizo concerns, reflections upon consumption and extractive models of development from all angles.

The ecological crisis is bound up with our economic system. As David Harvey and others have noted, this latest phase of capitalism has turned land and productive resources into disposable commodities that are being exploited and discarded. If and when discourses of indigeneity (in the form of *ayllu* and *Buen Vivir*) have the power to provide concrete solutions in both rural and urban areas, then, this could be a first step. Some of these details must include how to provide governmental support for self-sustaining agricultural communities, to find new and alternative forms of energy (reducing dependency upon fossil fuels), and to implement productive engines that do not continue to destroy the environment and that have the potential to create jobs and stimulate the economy. The Morales government, as of yet, has not figured out how to do this.

This probably will not happen based solely upon the work of Bolivian social movements. I suggest joint efforts between activists in Global North and those in Global South will be necessary. After all, the international stalemate has everything to do with money and power coming from billionaires who are invested in non-

renewable resources and the very capitalist system which depends upon fossil fuels and extractive industries to fuel a particularly comfortable life of consumption.

As anthropologist Bret Gustafson notes (2013), moving beyond 'extractivism' in the South does not seem like a real possibility in a place like Bolivia, deeply dependent upon resources like natural gas for economic development and social programming. He asks: What might need to happen to move political debate and discussion toward a deeper articulation between workings of power and politics and the fossil fuel industry? These insights extend beyond rural/urban, beyond indigenous/non-indigenous divides, and focus on how difficult it may be for activists in the Global South to take a 'privileged' anti-carbon, anti-fossil fuel stance when a large portion of the economy depends upon such forms of resource extractivism. Nevertheless, climate change is perhaps the single most important issue of our time. Groups like 350.org, a US-based organization attempting to build a global grassroots movement to address climate change, are trying to bridge these divides by organizing communities across the North and South, East and West. But perhaps more work needs to happen in each country (bridging rural and urban realities, indigenous philosophical tenets and non-indigenous worldviews) in order to come up with solutions for how communities will adapt to these problems. Researchers, practitioners, and movement activists will have to be dynamic, elastic, and creative in their thinking because the same old solutions will not provide the necessary structural, infrastructural and technological support necessary to deal with the extent and scale of the problems we will all be facing.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the members of the Bolivian Platform for Climate Change and the *vecinos* of El Alto for their time and generosity. I am indebted to Tom Perreault for his insightful comments and suggestions. I wish to extend a special thank you to Nancy Postero for her support, guidance and patience in this process. Thanks to all the anonymous reviewers for strengthening the argument of the paper. All errors are mine.

Notes

- [1] According to the Bolivian Platform for Climate Change, in order to reverse the effects of climate change, humans must accept a carbon threshold representing the total amount of carbon that the Earth's natural systems can absorb. Consonant with the threshold is a tax that would be levied on the highest nation state users of carbon resources. This tax would redistribute resources from wealthier to relatively poor economies. At an international level, negotiations focus on how to share the Earth's atmospheric space between rich and poor countries, and how to share the means – the financing and technology – required to live in this space (see World People's Conference on Climate Change, <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/category/working-groups/08-climate-debt/>).
- [2] This is part of an interdisciplinary and longitudinal study on the localized experiences of and the new organizational tactics to address water scarcity as a result of the melting glaciers in the highlands. Kathryn Hicks from the University of Memphis and Carlos Revilla from UNITAS (National Unity of Institutions for Social Action), a Bolivian-based NGO focused on social justice, are also principal investigators.
- [3] Oxfam International played an important role in supporting these early Ayllu projects. As Lucero (2011) notes, the relationship between THOA and Oxfam America is emblematic of

- the transnational nature of the resurgence of the ayllus. Support for indigenous organizations marked a trend in the 1980s when Oxfam America began to fund indigenous organizations as part of its rights-based approach to addressing issues of poverty and social exclusion.
- [4] In Aymara, Buen Vivir is referred to as Suma Qamaña. In Guarani, Good Living is Ñandereko. In Quechua, Buen Vivir is Sumak Kawsay.
 - [5] As Nancy Postero (2007) notes, much of this NGO discourse and practice was shaped by multicultural reforms passed under the Sanchez de Lozada administration in the 1990s, which recognized Bolivia as a 'multiethnic' and 'pluricultural' nation.
 - [6] Similar NGO-funded projects in the 1980s and 1990s have encouraged the use of creative strategies from the ancient Andean past in order to deal with agricultural problems in the contemporary period. Due to the failure of the Green Revolution to provide food security, several governments, working in collaboration with NGOs, created the Proyecto Interinstitucional de Rehabilitación de Waru-Waru en el Altiplano (PIWA), which aimed at assisting local farmers in the reconstruction of system of raised fields that evolved on the high plains of the Andes about 3000 years ago. These waru-warus consisted of platforms of soil surrounded by ditches filled with water. They produced bumper crops in the face of floods, droughts, and the killing frosts common at altitudes of almost 4000 m. Some of these projects proved quite successful (see Altieri, 1996).
 - [7] For more on Oxfam's project, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8187866.stm>.
 - [8] There has been a lot of discussion about REDD+ (to reduce emissions from tropical deforestation and forest degradation, the second largest source of emissions that cause climate change) at international climate change negotiations. The Bolivian delegation has been quite outspoken in these international arenas, pointing toward the ways in which the forest has been turned into carbon stocks. Further, the forest provides a role as food security, a water source and biodiversity for indigenous populations. REDD reduces the function of the forest to just one, carbon stocks. For more on this, see <http://www.rtcc.org/news-flash-bolivia-opposes-redd/>
 - [9] See Climate is Not for Sale, <http://links.org.au/node/3130>

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