

Geopolitics of the Amazon - Part II

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See part I (ESSF, article 27323), [Geopolitics of the Amazon - Part I](#)

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Capitalist subsumption of the Amazon indigenous economy

Finally, in addition to the vertical nature of this despotic power there is a territorial dependency of the regional power structure itself. The major part of the Bolivian Amazon lies in the department of Beni, and the major productive activities in the region today are ranching, timber extraction and chestnut harvesting.

It is estimated that there are 3.5 million head of cattle in Beni, 41% of the national total. The historic markets for this production, which powers the activity of small and medium ranchers and farming communities, are the highlands of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí, and the Cochabamba and Chuquisaca valleys. However, the meat processing chain is not situated in the area where most of the production occurs. Although the cattle are raised in Beni, the final sale and processing are carried out in Santa Cruz. So while a three-year-old calf costs 2,315 Bolivianos (Bs.) [1] in Beni, the same animal is worth Bs. 2,790 in Santa Cruz, and that is where more than 90% of the Beni cattle are processed. Thus the producers in Beni are subordinated to intermediaries who deliver the cattle to Santa Cruz, and in addition to the price of the processed meat, which regulates the market price of the chain of cattle production both downward (to the rancher in Beni) and upward (to the final consumer), they are in the hands of a business stronghold well-known for its right-wing political trajectory. The three largest slaughterhouses in Bolivia are in Santa Cruz : Fridosa, owned by Beltrán de Lazo ; Frigor, owned by Monasterio ; and the Chiquitano abattoir. These slaughterhouses regulate the price of meat nationally. Thus the major economic activity in the Amazon region, which depends almost exclusively on meat processing, is dependent on a small group of businessmen who not only hold this Beni regional production captive but also fix the prices of cattle on the hoof and of meat for mass consumption by families.

Something similar occurs with the other extractive activities in the Amazon. If you take a close look at the origin of the businessmen, warehousemen or marketing companies in the country, a large number come from Santa Cruz ; [2] and the transportation and processing of the products of these activities, and with them the generation of major volumes of added value, are carried on outside of Beni.

On the whole, we are dealing with a business bloc that emerges from big hacienda property and has begun to diversify its productive activities, consolidating itself in the semi-industrial processing of raw materials and livestock from the Amazon. This bourgeoisie, a participant in the despotic-hereditary rationality of the old Amazon power structure, has inherited all of the habits of the landlord class : the abusive relationship with the peasants and indigenous peoples, a violent local authoritarianism, the hereditary link with the state power, and the conservative mentality. In some ways it reminds one of Marx's comment, in reference to the feudal landlords who became businessmen in 19th century Germany, that "The mode of living, production and income of these gentlemen [...] gives the lie to their traditional pompous notions." [3] Irremediably reactionary thanks to their ownership of land, their mode of living and political action, but completely bourgeois in their entrepreneurial economic activity.

This has enabled them to divide their conduct toward the indigenous peoples. When it is matters of land occupancy or the organization of local political life, the landowner despotism is what prevails ; the indigenous peoples and peasants are treated as one more accessory of their property, and they unscrupulously impose their opinions on them with no negotiation whatsoever. But when it involves business, as in the purchase of timber, chestnuts, alligator skins or livestock, this bourgeoisie is capable of subordinating its racist prejudices to market logic and establishing mechanisms of market domination through which it has always considered the indigenous peoples as its vassals or inferiors. This mercantile "generosity" has meant that the relations of domination over the indigenous peoples have been reworked and formally subsumed under capitalist development. [4]

The relation between hacienda land ownership and capitalist production in the east and the Bolivian Amazon has led to a specific way of formally subsuming the non-capitalist work of the small peasants and indigenous producers to capitalist relations through the imposition of a specific type of land rent.

The agro-industrial-agrochemical-merchant capitalist nucleus subordinates the non-capitalist agrarian modes of production through the imposition of prices at the time of sowing, harvesting and marketing of the cultivated or harvested products, and through the monopoly of processing (timber, chestnuts) and credit. This applies to soy, sugar, cattle, sunflowers, sorghum, corn, and to timber, chestnuts and alligator hides. To some extent the actual development of Beni, sustained by cattle raising, is limited by the huge transfer of regional rent to the elite that monopolizes the processing of the meat and the fixing of its sale prices on a national level. This is an elite that derives rent from distribution (but not in production) and is thus a landholding class in itself.

Hence it is no surprise that the major separatists have been the agro-industrialists Marinkovic, Monasterios, Matkovic, Costas, Nayar, etc., who still possess huge expanses of land, their wealth derived primarily from this appropriation of the rent of the land, and not so much from the possession of the land — which in reality is unproductive — which is why it was subject to reversion. Generally speaking, there are very few production units of more than 5,000 hectares devoted to agriculture and major cattle-raising lands are scarce as well, given the 5 hectares per head of cattle required by law. The lands are usually for fattening the herds, and their ownership is maintained until roads are built, improved or projected (as in the case of the Lowlands project), after which they are sold parcel by parcel both to small and medium producers and to Mennonites, Brazilians and Russians. That is the process, for example, in the impressive parcelling out of land (50-200 hectares)

in the north and east of Santa Cruz (San Julián, Cuatro Cañadas, Montero, etc.).

On the other hand, making the most of the relations and hierarchies of class and nationality, the business-landowner class has integrated the management of the indigenous TCOs into the supplying of raw materials for their industrial activities. A large number of the TCOs in the lowlands sell wood illegally to the lumber companies and the infinite number of sawmills that exist in their interior, generating a market subsumption of these Community Lands to extractivist business activity through the application of various mechanisms of extra-economic coercion that reduce purchase costs and raise business revenues. A significant number of the leaders of the indigenous marches of 2011 and 2012, such as [Fernando] Vargas and [Youci] Fabricano, hold formal indictments for the illegal sale of wood going back years, including the sale of wood from the TIPNIS itself, [5] considered until recently as the “lungs of the world” ; lungs now perforated by the illegal extraction of wood and leather, as if by nicotine-induced cancer.

And insofar as the indigenous peoples have not invaded the processes of transformation of raw materials that exist in the large new indigenous territories, the timber, alligators, chestnuts, rubber or fish products continue to be purchased by the lumber mills and landholding businesses at ridiculous prices and under the same “enabling” [6] modalities of the traditional economic and social dependency of the past. The same thing is happening in the growing provision of other means of existence (sugar, salt, flour, clothing, steel tools, gasoline, etc.), that the enabler, *hacendado*, businessman or merchant provides to them ; and, holding the monopoly for the transfer of these products, delivers them to the indigenous peoples for 5 to 10 times more than the market price.

In a short period of time, millions of hectares of the TCOs that are located in a large part of the Amazon are being newly integrated within the mechanisms of seigniorial and hereditary domination by the businessmen-*hacendados* who use the leaders as intermediaries for the depredation and economic dependency of their communities. We have termed this formal subordination of the TCOs and the parks to the generation of profits for businessmen-*hacendados* the *subsumption of indigenous territories and natural resources to internal capitalist accumulation*. And when the TCOs and national parks are subject to the circuits of capitalist accumulation (profit) of foreign companies, we speak of a *subsumption of indigenous territoriality and nature to external capitalist accumulation*. The Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore is no exception to this situation of formal subsumption of the indigenous economy and of nature to capital accumulation.

The Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore (TIPNIS)

The TIPNIS is an area of the Amazon located on the border between two departments : southern Beni (an entirely Amazon department) and northern Cochabamba (region of valleys). It contains a diversity of ecosystems thanks to its widely varied altitudes, the outstanding ones being the rain forests known as the Bosque Nublado de Ceja, the Bosque Húmedo, the Bosque Pluvial Subandino, the Bosque Húmedo Pedemontano, and the Bosque Húmedo Estacional, and the marshy palm groves, flood plains, and bogs of Cyperáceas as well as a large number of lakes. [7]

For more than a hundred years the determination of the limits between the two departments was the source of numerous regional conflicts, and one of the reasons why Barrientos, the military dictator, issued a Decree (No. 07401, 22 November 1965) declaring a zone situated between the Isiboro and Sécore rivers a National Park (PNIS). [8]

In 1990, in the wake of the indigenous peoples’ march of many lowlands peoples, another decree [9] was issued creating the Territorio Indígena, which was to include the entirety of the national park. Seven years later, on April 25, 1997, the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA, the agrarian

reform institute) issued resolution 000002, which created the legal entity known as the Tierra Comunitaria de Origen (TCO). [10] But because indigenous peasants of the valleys as well as ranchers were present within it, an executive order, the Título Ejecutorial TCO-NAL 000229, was issued in June 2009, during the *seneamiento* process that recognized 1,091,656 hectares as belonging to the TIPNIS TCO. [11]

The principal inhabitants of the Parque Nacional Territorio Indígena Isiboro-Sécure are the following three indigenous nations :

1. The Moxeña-Trinitaria nation.

It is said that the Moxeño people originate from the Arawak people, who are thought to have developed the great hydraulic culture of the Amazon plains. They are the major population within the TIPNIS, and they engage in agriculture and cattle-raising, in addition to hunting, fishing and gathering. They maintain some links with the market, especially in Trinidad, that are now part of their basic strategy of economic reproduction. They are organized on the basis of the nuclear family. [12]

2. The Tsimán (or Chimán) nation.

This is a people who rebelled against the Jesuit reservations ; their present economic structure is based on agriculture, hunting, fishing, gathering and the sale of calves. They also work as labourers for the cattle ranches and the forestry companies.

3. The Yuracaré nation.

This is the oldest nation in the southern Amazon region. The Spanish Jesuits encountered them initially when they ventured into this zone in the late 16th century. [13] Their present economic activity is centered on agriculture and fishing with regular links to the market. Their organization is centered on the nuclear family.

While all the communities are engaged in agriculture, there are some that apply a pattern of special occupation that involves the settlement, relocation and formation of new communities. [14] According to reports in the 1990s, about 40% of the communities assessed in 1992 had disappeared a decade later. However, in recent years there has been a major consolidation of large communities owing to the dynamic growth of agriculture partially linked to the market. The major products of the indigenous economy are rice, cassava, corn, bananas, cacao and fruit trees. [15]

According to the data in the 1993 First Indigenous Census, Isiboro-Sécure Pilot Area, of the 4,563 inhabitants of the Park 68% were Mojeño, 26% Yuracaré, 4% Tsimán and the remaining 2% of other ethnic origin. [16] The results of the 2001 Population and Housing Census showed a reduction in the indigenous population of the TIPNIS lowlands to 3,991 persons as of that date. [17]

As regards the system of internal organization — on the basis of the nuclear family — of these peoples, the *cabildo* (a type of community assembly) is the organizational form among the Mojeños ; in the case of the Yuracarés and Tsimánes, however, the organization is more flexible, and is oriented around the leaders of the family and communal clans. [18] It was not until 1987 that a supra-communal organization arose, the TIPNIS Subcentral, followed later by another in the southern zone of the Park, the CONISUR. These were the bodies that were most representative of the lowlands indigenous peoples within the TIPNIS. [19]

Apart from these indigenous nations that inhabit the National Park, there are two populations that also live in its interior (one of them is also of indigenous origin, but from the highlands) :

4. Aymara-Quechua Andean migrant population.

The presence of Andean indigenous peoples in what is now the southern region of the TIPNIS goes back to pre-colonial times, but it was in the early 20th century, and particularly from the 1960s on that this increased. Beginning in the 1970s a road was built that extended to the Yuracaré community of Moleto within the National Park. [20] The majority of the inhabitants of Aymara-Quechua origin are organized in community agrarian unions affiliated in turn to centrals and the peasants' federation. They are agricultural and occupy about 92,000 hectares, or 7% of the total area of the TIPNIS.

5. "Creole" population of Beni.

Within the Park as well there are approximately 25 cattle ranches in a 32,000 hectare area located at the confluence of the Isiboro and Sécuré rivers. [21] The local indigenous population is hired from time to time by the hacendados, who control the major flow of business in the local economy.

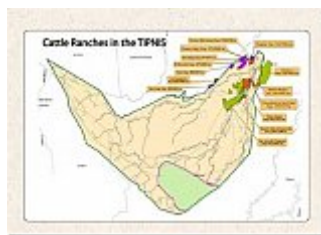
Along with all the traditional activities that the indigenous communities carry on in the TIPNIS, in recent decades they have expanded into other kinds of intensive economic activities directly linked to the industrial processing market : lumbering and gathering alligator hides.

In the case of the wood industry, the ones involved are the indigenous peoples with rights to the regulated use of the distinct varieties of trees that grow in the TCO, although because this is also a National Park there are legal restrictions on its indiscriminate use ; obviously, in the absence of the state these cannot be enforced. According to the reports by the leaders themselves, it is clear that the major portion of the high volumes of the cutting and processing of wood in the TIPNIS is illegal and affects the entire territory. [22] In the recent trips we made there, we could make out roads, tractors, trucks and mobile sawmills within the so-called "nucleus zone" or "virgin zone." Until a few months ago, there were various forest concessions in the interior. For example, the company ISIGO SRL had a concession of 34,307 hectares near the community of Asunta, and 34,937 hectares in Oromomo. The Huanca Rodríguez company held 24,869 hectares in concessions in the south of the TIPNIS, while another lumber company, SURI SRL, had 40,762 hectares in the same "virgin" nucleus of the National Park. [23]

As if that were not enough, there are various other forest concessions to companies like Cimagro, Havel, Fátima B, Fátima A and PROINSA, [24] which safely and systematically induce these lowlands indigenous peoples themselves to pillage the forest within the TIPNIS, to supply themselves with wood, so that subsequently they can process and market the developed products in the local and international markets.

Likewise, the hunting of alligators is an activity carried on by the indigenous peoples, but one that is directly linked to business interests. It is estimated that each year 1,500 alligator hides, [25] after being processed, are converted into luxury articles for sale in European markets.

In the north-eastern TIPNIS, at the confluence of the Isiboro and Sécuré rivers, three companies — Bolivian Leather, Bolivian Croco, and Sicuana Indígena SRL, responsible for purchasing the alligators captured by the indigenous peoples — process them for later sale. [26] Since there is no state presence in the Park, it is safe to assume that the number of alligator hides exceeds the number officially reported by these companies, making this activity a transaction that is negotiated between indigenous leaders and companies.



Also within the TIPNIS there is an airport for the exclusive use of wealthy foreign tourists, who for \$7,600 can enjoy the use of a luxurious private hotel, [27] engage in private fishing and purchase the native handicrafts. Paradoxically, the indigenous peoples never use this airport, and the river has become their sole means of transport, along which it takes seven to ten days to reach a populated centre in which to make their own purchases.

Similarly, within the National Park, aerial photography has detected other clandestine landing strips, possibly linked to various illegal activities, mainly narco-trafficking.

As one can appreciate, while the TCO has allowed the ownership of the land and the use of its resources by the Amazon indigenous peoples, the major resources of the TIPNIS — alligators, forests, cacao — form the lowest and worst paid link in a chain of business procurement, processing and marketing. As in other regions of the Amazon, the work of the indigenous peoples (as providers of raw materials) and the natural wealth of the TIPNIS have been *formally subsumed* in processes of capitalist production heavily integrated with international markets. Thus the community ownership of the land has also become the lowest link in the corporate chain of value production and capitalist accumulation.



Plurinational State and dismantling of the Business-Patrimonial power

This system of ultra-conservative regional power in the Amazon, constructed over more than a century, has only recently, since 2006, broken down. When the old ruling classes lost control of the national state to the popular indigenous-campesino social movements, the system based on landed estates suffered a mortal blow. The alliance of political power with hacendado landlord and extractivist corporate interests, the material basis of the despotic regime in the Amazon region, was broken, creating a possibility of regional “dual power” : on the one hand the *hacendado*-business classes, on the other the government structure with power of decision over economic resources and lands, triggering increasing conflict and social struggle throughout the lowlands.

The revolutionary state put an end to the delivery of lands to the property-owning classes, took land away from the *latifundistas* and turned over a large share of this land to the ownership of indigenous communities and nations. From 1996 to 2005, 5 million hectares were granted to the indigenous peoples of the lowlands ; but between 2006 and 2011, these grants amounted to 7.6 million hectares and an additional 1.4 million hectares were expropriated from the *hacendados*, radically transforming the structure of ownership in the Amazon region. While 20 years ago the medium-sized private companies possessed 39 million hectares, they now have only 4.1 million hectares. [28] However, this structural modification in property relations on the land has not been sufficient to dismantle the despotic hacendado-business power, since there is a need to dismantle the supply and corporate processing mechanisms that are strangling the indigenous peoples’ economy.

Hence the revolutionary government, in addition to modifying the structure of land-holding, which *dissociated the routine of the hacienda* from state action, has promoted state mechanisms of regional governance that operate independently of the dominant bloc in the territories, facilitating resources to the municipalities, credit to the campesinos and investment funds to the indigenous peoples, and establishing supply firms that regulate the prices previously monopolized by the local employers, providing means of water transportation for peoples living along the rivers, building public roads (previously the property of *hacendados*), etc. And since the state in the last five years has tripled its investments and social expenditures, its presence has begun to be felt independently, in the form of rights, cash transfers and redistribution of wealth, whereas in past times the little that the people had was thanks to the “favours” of the local bosses, the political machine, or the NGOs.

The state has operated independently of the land-owning classes and that has initiated a process of collapse of the old conservative managerial order in the Amazon. An intense class struggle has

begun to unfold, and little by little it is reconfiguring the new regional power relationships. The presence of a state detached from the land-holding classes, expressed in social rights and with the function of redistributing the expanding common resources, has dealt a mortal blow to the hacendado-patrimonial structure in the Amazon, triggering an intense struggle for reconfiguration of territorial power in the region. To a certain extent it can be said that since 2006, with the Government of social movements and President Evo Morales, a kind of democratic revolution has occurred from “below,” based on the initiatives of the campesinos, indigenous peoples and popular urban sectors, and from “above,” from the state, that is now helping to unfetter and deploy the vital energy of the peoples and popular social classes in a region characterized until quite recently as being the most conservative in the country, dominated by a regime of despotic hacendado power.

As in any revolutionary process, the state not only condenses the new correlation of political and economic forces of the emerging society, of the successful social struggles, but in addition becomes a material and institutional subject that helps to promote new social mobilizations that transform the structures of domination still present in certain regions and spheres of the society. The present role of the Government of social movements in the Amazon, Chiquitanía and Chaco, in which previously there existed modes of hereditary domination based on ownership of the land, is precisely that : to help clear the road for the local popular and indigenous forces to deploy their emancipatory capacities in opposition to the prevailing regional powers.

This rising revolution in the regional power relations in the Amazon, Chiquitanía and the Chaco, has unleashed a violent and aggressive counter-revolutionary reaction. In the case of Chiquitanía and the Chaco, landlords like Anderson or Monasterios participated directly in the attempted coup d'état of September 2008, when they tried to create a parallel government in the four lowlands departments : Pando, Beni (both of them in the Amazon), Santa Cruz and Tarija. And in fact these same actors, in complicity with outside powers that do not want to lose extraterritorial power in the Amazon, are the ones that were behind the recent TIPNIS marches.

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P.-S.

* <http://lifeonleft.blogspot.ca/2012/12/geopolitics-of-amazon-part-ii.html>

Notes

[1] The Boliviano (BOB), or Bs, currently trades at approximately 7 to 1 U.S. dollar. - Tr.

[2] For a history of the rubber hacendados-businessmen in the early and mid-20th century, including Añez Romero, Suárez Arana, Soruco, Franco, Zambrana, Velasco, Justiniano, Landivar Roca, Toledo Suárez, Kreidler, Amelunge, Elsner, El Hage, Durán Ortíz, Roca Ayala, Vaca Diez, Monasterio Da Silva, Bowles Darío Gutiérrez, etc., see Oscar Tonelli Justiniano, *El Caucho Ignorado*, Editorial El País, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 2010. According to the author, a major share of these families who settled in the Amazon north to engage in rubber production are native to Santa Cruz.

[3] Karl Marx, “The Trial of the Rhenish District Committee of Democrats,” February 8, 1849, in

Marx & Engels Collected Works, Vol. 8, p. 323.

[4] On the concept of formal subsumption and actual subsumption of the work process and production process under capitalism, see Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book I, Chapter 6. [In English, see also Marx, *Capital Vol. I* (Vintage edition, 1977), Appendix : “Results of the Immediate Process of Production.” - Tr.].

[5] *Qué se esconde detrás del TIPNIS*. La Paz, 2012

[6] “Enabling” (habilito) has to do with the advance in money and cash to initiate an undertaking that, in the case of the lowlands peoples, is converted into an advance on future production or ownership of raw materials that are found in the TCO (wood, chestnuts, rubber, etc.).

[7] Vargas, Cynthia ; Molina, Wilder ; Molina, Miguel, “El territorio indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure (TIPNIS) en un escenario con la carretera San Ignacio de Moxos-Villa Tunari. Análisis de los posibles efectos sociales, ambientales y políticos de la carretera en el TIPNIS.” Project MAPZA-GTZ, 2003.

[8] Decreto-Ley Número 07401, Gaceta de Bolivia.

[9] Decreto Supremo Número 22610, 24 September 1990, Gaceta de Bolivia.

[10] Various translated in English as “Original Community Land,” “Native Communal Land,” “Traditional Communal Land,” or some other combination of these terms. Often just “TCO” in English. - Tr.

[11] *Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica para el Desarrollo Integral y Sustentable del Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure*. TIPNIS, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua, Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas, Cochabamba, July 2011.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[13] Hans Van den Berg, *En Busca de una Senda Segura. La Comunicación Terrestre y Fluvial entre Cochabamba y Mojos (1765-1825)*, PLURAL/Universidad Católica de Bolivia, La Paz, 2008.

[14] “Dos concepciones del territorio : indígenas y colonizadores en la zona de colonización del TIPNIS”, in Orozco, Shirley ; García Linera, Álvaro ; Stefanoni, Pablo. “No somos Juguete de Nadie”. Análisis de la relación de movimientos sociales, recursos naturales, Estado y descentralización. Agruco/COSUDE/NCCR Norte-Sur/Plural, La Paz, 2006.

[15] *Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica*, op. cit.

[16] Quiroga, María Soledad ; Salinas, Elvira, “Áreas protegidas y territorios indígenas en la Amazonía boliviana”, Grupo de Reflexión y Acción sobre el Medio Ambiente, mimeo, La Paz, 1996.

[17] *Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica*, op. cit.

[18] “Dos concepciones del territorio : indígenas y colonizadores...” op. cit.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica... op. cit.

[21] Ibid., p. 29.

[22] Attached to the official web page of the CIDOB, until June of this year, was a denunciation of the illegal sale of a substantial amount of wood in the TIPNIS to logging companies by the leader Marcial Fabricano between 2000 and 2003.

[23] Qué se esconde detrás del TIPNIS, op. cit.

[24] Evaluación Ambiental Estratégica... op. cit. p. 173.

[25] Ibid., p. 170.

[26] Qué se esconde detrás del TIPNIS, op. cit.

[27] Ibid.

[28] INRA, Informe 2012.