

The Promise of a Highway: Awkward Connections in an Indigenous Controversy.

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This paper examines the awkward connections involved in the conflict over a highway in Bolivia. When the government planned to build a highway through the indigenous territory of TIPNIS, the inhabitants of the territory sparked revolt against the government. Though opposing narratives are easily identified (economic development conflicts with protection of the environment and the autonomy of indigenous peoples), I will argue that perseverance in these narratives might only enforce the boundaries articulated in the conflict. Therefore, the complexity of this case presents a challenge to the analytical framework of indigenous citizenship. Three months of fieldwork were conducted in Bolivia in order to unravel the claims made in the TIPNIS controversy. In this paper, I give a tour through TIPNIS and the meaning of its landscape as an actor, working with literature on globalisation, state and resource extraction. Three examples illustrate how the landscape of TIPNIS is awkwardly connected to the aspirations of different stakeholders. First, the history of the TIPNIS inhabitants and the friction between the livelihoods of the farmers and the indigenous is elaborated upon. Second, an analysis of the relation the land has with its resources and integration in the global market is provided. Third, the ambiguity of the concept *nature* and the confusing role human beings occupy in this concept is demonstrated. In this way, I suggest that an understanding of the awkward connections in these kinds of conflicts will contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of what happens when a vision of economic development as prosperity conflicts with other people's visions on a prosperous future.