DEFORESTATION IN BOLIVIA
A Discussion of the Implications for Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

Bolivia became one of the front figures for environmental rights when they in 2012 implemented the Mother Earth law. The ideas were a more empowered indigenous community and development happening with respect for the rights of nature. There has however since then been an increase in the deforestation in Bolivia, culminating in the 2019 forest fires.

To get a deeper understanding of why this is happening, and what the implications of it has been for the indigenous communities living in the areas, this project discusses the role of deforestation in the Bolivian development model and the empowerment process and challenges of the indigenous communities. This will be done from the perspectives of scale and power, which are central concepts to both Political Ecology and Empowerment Theory.

Political Ecology and Empowerment theory both claim that any research of environmental degradation at a local scale should always be analyzed in the national and global context in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the power relations.

Based on this framework, this thesis has discussed *What has been the role of deforestation in the Bolivian development model – and what has been the implications of this on indigenous communities and movements?*

Deforestation has been found to play a major role in the Bolivian development model, but mostly due to a high level of dependency of exports, which lays the foundation for funding social reforms and initiatives. This, however, breaks with the *Buen Vivir* model, which was implemented as a development strategy based on the indigenous epistemology of Pachamama; the respect for mother earth.

Deforestation has been found to have quite severe implications for those indigenous communities that live in the area; the threat of forced migration, forest fires and the interest from transnational corporations have been the most prominent findings.
In this clash between policies and promises, there has however also been found to be a strong indigenous resistance, which has manifested itself in different ways; in the communities that have acquired autonomy over their territories, some communities have managed to decrease deforestation rates through careful forest management strategies. Other communities have tried to get ahead of state-managed extractive strategies by making agreements with the transnational companies interested in their lands. Common for them is the empowerment through collective power, which has clearly shown that many of these communities partake in at least a process of empowerment.

This has led to the conclusion that deforestation in Bolivia is increasing due to a high degree of market dependency, giving it a central role in the social reforms planned in the 2016-2020 development model. The increased deforestation does bring a set of challenges to the indigenous communities, however, there has been a strong collective in the face of these challenges, from where some empowerment processes have started.

Table of Content

List of Abbreviations

ABT – La Autoridad de Bosques y Tierra *(The authority of forest and land)*

BNDES – Banco nacional do Desenvolmiento *(National bank for Economic and Social Development)*

CEDIB – Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia *(Center for documentation and Information Bolivia)*

CENDA – Centro de Comunicación y Dessarrollo Andino

CIFOR – Center for International Forestry Research

CIPTA -En Consejo Indígena del Pueblo Tacana – *(Tacana Indigenous People Counsil)*

FAO - Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations

IGO - Inter-governmental Organisation

INESAD – Instituto de Estudios Avanzados en Dessarrollo *(Institute for Advanced Development Studies)*

INGO - International non-governmental organisation

INRA – Instituto Nacional de Reforme Agria *(National Institute for Agricultural Reforms)*

MAS - Movimiento al Socialism (*Movement to Socialism)*

MMAyA – Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua (The Ministry for Environment and Water)

MTD - Marcha por el Territorio y la Dignidad (*The march for Territory and Dignity*)

NGO - Non-governmental Organisation

PDES – Plan de Dessarrollo Económico y Social (Plan for Economic and Social Development)

PE – Political Ecology

REDD+ - Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degredation

TCO - Tierras Comunitarias de Origen *(Indigenous Community Territories)*

TIPNIS – Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isoboro Sécure *(Isoboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory)*

TNC – Transnational corportation

UP - Unity Pact

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WCS – Wildlife Conservation Society

List of figures and tables

Figures

Tables

1. Introduction

1.1 Research interests

The Amazon rainforest is often described as the lungs of the World. While covering an extensive area of land, each year it is shrinking with an alarming speed. In 2019 the world watched as the largest recorded forest-fires spread over the Amazon. It created international and national outrage; While the media paid most attention to Brazil, the (Plurinational state of)[1] Bolivian lowlands were hit just as hard.

In the case of deforestation, generally, the Western media paints a picture of national governments being the 'bad guys'; burning the forests and depleting the resources. However, reality is often much more complicated than that. Extracting these resources can for many nations be the easiest way to get the financial surplus necessary to implement progressive social policies. The phenomena often present itself in developing-, often former colonial, nations. (Robbins, 2012)

According to Peet & Watts (1996) and Robbins (2012) these nations often fail to consider is that the exploitation of nature comes with its own set of ecological, social, cultural and economic consequences that would need to be addressed as well; Land grabbing, water contamination, conflict (due to for example unequal distribution of wealth), hyperinflation (as in the case of Venezuela) are but a few of the issues that follow countries highly dependent on natural-resource extraction and exploitation. (Robbins, 2012; Peet & Watts, 1996)

At first glance the situation in Bolivia seems to fit within this framework: They have a long history of deforestation due to amongst other things, illegal land-clearing, vague forest management and neoliberal economic strategies. (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010)

In many Latin American nations, the peoples most exposed to these consequences are often the indigenous[2] living close to the impacted areas. Often the indigenous populations are powerless in the face of government or internationally driven extractivist activities. With almost half (44%) of the Bolivian population identifying as indigenous, indigenous autonomous rights over their ancestral land

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[1] From here on referred to as Bolivia

[2] Indigenous will in this thesis be following the definition as presented by the UN, that defines them as such:
 "Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live." (UN DESA, n.d.)

therefore remain central in the discussion of indigenous resistance to extractivist activities (CIA World Fact Book, n.d.)

But during the latest decades a variety of reforms have tried to address this issue. Latest the Morales government (2006-2019)[3] was globally recognised for their ambitious Constitution. In it, *Buen vivir* (living well) introduced increased indigenous rights to, amongst other things, their ancestral territorial land. Moreover, inspired by the indigenous epistemology and its view of Pachamama (Mother Earth), the Morales government implemented the Mother Earth Law (Law 300) in 2012, accepting the rights of nature into the country's legal framework. (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

This makes Bolivia a case in point, that might serve to paint a much more complex picture of why deforestation is happening in developing nations and the implications it has had for the indigenous empowerment process.

1.2 Problem statement

Bolivia placed itself on the map with the 2009 constitution initiating what was framed as the process of change; it was to be a shift from the neoliberal model to the indigenous inspired ideology of *Buen Vivir*. The goal was to empower the indigenous population and alleviate poverty by redistributing wealth and land. All of this was to be implemented with respect for the rights of nature; *Buen vivir*, was thereby not just about ensuring the rights for marginalized people but also for nature; biodiversity and the forests. The idea of the Morales government was a more empowered indigenous community with a set of national development policies that was not only inclusive and socially responsible, but also served to prevent extractivist activities. Thereby encompassing the rights of nature into the Mother Earth Law; basing their policies on an indigenous epistemological understanding of *living well*; with nature as part of the community. (Brann, 2018)

But during the government period there has been a steady increase in the deforestation rates of Bolivia. This has led to a growing critique of the Morales and their development policies. There is already extensive literature and academic writing that emphasize how political influence over nature

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[3] Morales and most of his officials stepped down during on November 10th, 2019, during the writing of this thesis, after days with military pressure and accusations of rigging the election on October 20th, 2019. The focus of this project will be the period of the Morales government, due to the very fluctuant current political situation.

and extractivist development models can create marginalization in local communities, resource depletion and environmental crisis. In the case of Bolivia, many (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010) are looking back at the Morales government as a failed attempt to shift away from extractivist neoliberal policies.

This project does therefore not seek to explain whether or not Bolivia is still following neoliberal policies, but rather discuss why there has been an apparent failure to incorporate the indigenous idea of Pachamama (the respect for Mother Earth) into the development strategy, and what implications this has had for indigenous empowerment in the indigenous communities. It will do so from the perspective of Political Ecology and Empowerment, discussing first the role of deforestation in the Bolivian government's development strategy, and secondly what implications this has had on the indigenous communities within the framework of empowerment theories. By doing this, the aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between the different actors in relation to the environment, arguing that the implications and empowerment challenges for indigenous communities cannot be taken out of the global and national contexts.

1.3 Problem Formulation

In order to analyse the abovementioned factors, the following research questions have been created.

> *What has been the role of deforestation in the Bolivian development model – and what has been the implications of this on indigenous communities and movements?*

2. Deforestation policies in Bolivia- a short historic overview

According to an estimate by Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Bolivia is covered in 54,7 million hectares of forest, equivalent to 49,8 % of their total span. A significant amount of this forest is lost each year. FAO estimates that the annual deforestation rate lies at 0,34 %. (Kuper, Pabón, Surkin, & Hirsch, 2013)

To understand the mechanisms behind this, this following chapter will be presenting an overview of the Bolivian history of logging and forestry policies.

During the last 40 years, one might identify multiple paradigms of deforestation policies in Bolivia. First the period prior to 1970s, with little to no regulation and forest management. Secondly 1970-1980s with the Washington Consensus[4] and the introduction of neoliberal policies, with the first Forestry Law from 1974. The first part of this period was characterized by a high state influence over allocation of logging rights, an expansion of the logging business, benefits for large landholders, corruption and unheard indigenous protests. From the mid-1980s more neoliberal policies where implemented; In the 1990s indigenous protests turned to movements, which resulted in a more Indigenous inclusive policy being implemented from the mid-1990s and the following decade. Lastly the change of the millennial and the election of Morales and the indigenous epistemology-inspired natural conservationist development idea *Buen Vivir* will be presented.

2.1 1970s & 1980s

Before the 1970s, Bolivia had no official forestry policies. The government's financial policies were mainly dedicated to mining and agricultural expansion. In this period, large-scale holdings were favoured when it comes to land distribution. (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010; FAO, 2018)

In 1974 the first Forestry Law was implemented. This emphasised the role of the state in amongst other thing assigning logging permits and access to forestry. It was intended to be inclusive of both large-scale holders as well as smallholders. However, as applicants needed to prove their capability

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[4] Coined in 1989, "The Washington Consensus refers to a set of broadly free market economic ideas, supported by prominent economists and international organisations, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the EU and the US. Essentially, the Washington consensus advocates, free trade, floating exchange rates, free markets and macroeconomic stability." (Pettinger, 2017)

to produce timber, most smallholders were never granted logging permits. (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010; Kileen, et al., 2008)

Many of the large-scale companies received logging permits to ancestral indigenous lands, which led to a series of land conflicts and resistance from local indigenous groups. This partly due to the intrusion on land already occupied by local communities, but also because those of the smallholders, indigenous and other local communities that were informally involved in the logging often received a lower pay for the timber than the large-scale corporations. (Ibid)

In the 1980s a crisis hit the Bolivian economy due to plummeting international tin prices, of which Bolivian economy was highly dependent; the changes to the exchange rate affected the timber export as well as the agricultural commodities. To alleviate this, the state introduced a more liberalized trade of timber and other exports. The Bolivian economic and development policies complied completely to all the principles of the Washington consensus, which helped shortly, but also led to an increase in unregulated logging. (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010)

The logging in this period was focused on short-term management. The state ended up with little control over logging, most of which was managed informally and/or illegally. There were not made any conservation effort, and the incompliancy with logging and harvesting plans from the large companies had no consequences due to corruption and an amiable connection between them and the government. (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010)

2.2 Neoliberalism

By 1990 the scope of the consequences of the past two decades was clear: Logging happened in 20 million hectares of forest, controlled by only 173 timber companies. 14 million of these ha were private forests, and many of them placed in ancestral indigenous territories, thus continuously inciting conflict between loggers and indigenous groups. In this period, logging expanded further north, as most of the high-value species had been depleted in the Santa Cruz area.

The Washington Consensus opened the Bolivian timber production up to the international market. At the same time the country was challenged by the transition to a market economy. As the market-oriented approach favoured the middle- and large-scale holders of land, unrest grew amongst smallholders and indigenous communities. On the 15th of August 1990 it culminated in what was to be known as *La Marcha por el Territorio y la Dignidad* (The March for Territory and Dignity

(MTD)). The March was arranged by a group indigenous people[5] from the Bolivian Lowlands of Beni and Santa Cruz. Following their exclusion from the national park, where they resided, they were demanding the sovereign rights to their ancestral territories, as well as clear demarcation, logging rights and a plan for sustainable forestry. (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

Following the march, a president-issued supreme decree was implemented on September 24th, 1990 establishing the indigenous territory of the marchers, leaving the communities in control over the use of the disputed areas. However, as this was issued as a decree it was not necessarily permanent, as any sitting president can issue new and remove decrees. (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

While the 1990s marked the beginning of a policy more inclusive of the indigenous communities, the economic focus remained on improving export access to the international market. But also, to alleviate some of the social consequences that followed in the wake of the liberalisation of the market economy. (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010) "Compensation policies had been implemented through the introduction of multiculturalism, citizen participation, decentralization, access to natural resources and an area-based conservation policy" (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019, p. 116) With the 1994 Popular Participation Law, the state granted the possibility for partial financial and political autonomy to local municipalities. In the same year the government reformed the Constitution, acknowledging Indigenous Community Territories *(TCOs)*. (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Dockry & Langston, 2019)

In 1996 two new laws were implemented in relation to forestry. The Forestry Law (Law 1700 of 1996) and the Land Law (Law 1715 of 1996), both were designed to address some of the issues that had been prominent in the past decade of following the Washington consensus. The two laws were tightly linked as the Land reform provided with the legal framework for the forestry law. (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

The Land Law (Law 1715), intended to deal with this by recognising the indigenous rights to their ancestral land. Furthermore, it tried to address the corruption that had happened with past governments. Combined these three laws from the mid-1990s created a significant change in the national policies of Bolivia, as it gave indigenous communities the possibility of applying for autonomy and rights over their ancestral territories through the recently established The National

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[5] From the Mojos, Sirinó and Chimanes indigenous communities (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

Institute for Agricultural Reforms *(Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agria (INRA))*. (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Dockry & Langston, 2019)

The Forestry Law (Law 1700) addressed the issues that had been developing since the 1970s with poor forest development plans. It was intended to promote a more sustainable forest use as well as a more equal distribution of access to forest resources than before. It was drafted by a commission that consisted of forest stakeholders (including indigenous community leaders) and government officials. However, the law is often criticized for still mainly facilitating land distribution to larger companies. (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010)

There was thereby a significant change in the amount of indigenous inclusion in the years following the march; with the establishment of TCOs in the new Constitution, the Land Law provided the legal framework for identifying and demand the TCOs and the Forestry Law provided the structure for a more sustainable forest management. (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

One of the main ideas of the Forestry Law was to divide and reallocate land to different groupings: Indigenous communities (TCOs), local groups of inhabitants (who had lived in the areas for a minimum of 4 years), small-hold farmers, and private corporations. (Ibid)

This division was made to facilitate an equal distribution of forest resources. It however, failed to address the conflicts between the different beneficiaries. The small-hold farmers, who had received 50 ha per family, wanted more land, while the indigenous communities were angry that thousands of hectares of public forest were handed over to locals. Mostly due to the very vague definition of what it meant to be local.[6] All three of them furthermore criticized the reforms for favouring private corporations. Very little was gained economically by the indigenous communities and small-hold farmers, as, even though they had right to the land, lacked the infrastructure to benefit from it; they therefore remained highly dependent on corporations for the extraction of timber. (Dockry & Langston, 2019; Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010)

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[6] It was defined as group of inhabitants who had lived in the region for a minimum of 5 years. (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019)

The reforms, however, did manage to limit the span of the forests logged. By the middle of the 2000s, the whole World looked towards Bolivia for sustainable forest management, as they had the largest percentage of certified sustainable forestry in the world. This was largely due to the influence the 1990s indigenous movements had in the development of the law. (Dockry & Langston, 2019; Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010)

2.3 2000s and the transition to Buen Vivir

The mobilisation of the indigenous peoples in Bolivia grew only stronger passing the turn of the millennia. In 2004 the Unity Pact (UP) was created between five of Bolivia's largest Indigenous and small-hold farmers organisations. Together they formed the *Movimiento al Socialismo – Movement for Socialism* (MAS) – the party that would present Evo Morales as their presidential candidate the following year. (Hirsch, 2017)

When Morales took presidency in 2006, after a landslide election, he became the country's first indigenous president. His main policies included equality, indigenous rights, and the implementation of a more sustainable development model inspired by the indigenous cosmovision of harmonious living with Mother Earth, Pachamama. Morales was since re-elected in 2009, 2014 and 2019[7].

The MTD had thereby formed the foundation for the implementation of Indigenous Communal Territories in the constitutional amendment of 1994, and the forestry law of 1996, had invited indigenous organisations to the table; Now the indigenous movements now entered the political arena. The organisations of the UP became a paramount factor in the process of creating the new constitution of 2009 as well as the Mother Earth Law of 2012. (Hirsch, 2017)

The assent of Morales marked a turning point in Bolivian politics; it formed part of the left-wing Latin American movements known as the Pink Tide.[8] It was the beginning of a period mostly recognised for the implementation of the concept of *Buen Vivir*; which translates to 'Live Well';

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[7] Few days after the 2019 election, Morales was pressured into resigning from his position, due to a growing unrest in the population following his 4th consecutive term, despite the constitution only allowing for 3. (Miranda , 2019; El Comercio, 2019)

[8] Pink Tide is an umbrella term for the nations participating in the political shift to the left in Latin America in the early 2000s (e.g. Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia). Often focusing on nationalizing extractivist activities and promoting extensive social reforms. (Sankey, 2016)

drawing on the aforementioned indigenous epistemology of Pachamama, of which both Bolivia's 2009 constitution and the Mother Earth Law were based. (Guardiola & García-Quero, 2014)

Buen vivir is often viewed as an alternative to normative development practices. It was a product of the left-wing indigenous movements in Bolivia and Ecuador in the early 2000s. Buen vivir is not a development model as such, but an alternative approach to the idea of development. It rejects the linear idea of development and criticizes economic growth as the main goal and means for development. Instead it holds harmony within the communities[9] and quality of life as what is to be strived towards. And each culture, society and community must find their own path to reach this. (Gudynas, 2011)

The Buen Vivir policies are thereby highly influenced by the cosmovision of the indigenous communities and organisations involved in the new Constitution. It was presented as a break with the neoliberal forestry policies that had been predominant in the last decades. Instead it focused on the redistribution of wealth, indigenous rights and natural conservation. One of the main distinctions was the implementation of the rights of nature in the constitution which offered an alternative to the hegemonic idea of nature as commodifiable and was a ground-breaking idea within forest management policies. (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Gudynas, 2011) This was endorsed when UP and the Morales government implemented the Mother Earth Law in Bolivia, which focused not only on human rights but also emphasized the rights of the environment and prioritized the indigenous populations.

These reforms were pioneering of the time, but they did not present themselves without challenges or criticism.

As the state presence was greatly increased in the areas, that through the 1990s had gained a deal of autonomy, friction arose between the economic development and the indigenous rights to their ancestral lands. At this point Buen vivir broke into two different directions; those who allowed for

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[9] Guardiola & García-Quero (2014) defines the communities as a space in which people interact, share knowledge and gain skills. In the context of Buen Vivir it is often used to describe people with shared cultural and linguistic values, but it cannot solely be put down to culture or language. One of the key differences in this conceptualisation is the inclusion of the environment; not only as the place in which development takes place, but as a part of the community; nature, the ecosystem, including flora and fauna should likewise be included. (Guardiola & García-Quero 2014, Gudynas, 2011)

natural extractivism if it led to the possibility for social development (statist model), and those who maintained the ideal of non-linear alternatives to development. (Pachamamista and Conservationalist) (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Gudynas, 2011)

Internationally, however, Bolivia remained true to the idea of the non-commodification of nature. It is most clear in their refusal to participate in the 2010 REDD+ system *Payment for Ecosystem Services*[10]. Because it was seen as a "commodification of nature which is regarded as both neoliberal and a breach of indigenous people's rights" (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019, p. 112).

According to the 2018 *The State of the World's Forests* FAO-report, Bolivia is currently:

> *committed to expanding its food production and exports, to allocating productive land to smallholder indigenous people and to managing forests sustainably and equitably for food, non-food and timber production, as well as for regulatory and cultural services" (FAO, 2018, p. 75)*

The most recent *Economic and Social Development Plan (2016-2020)* (PDES) presents plans for an increase in cultivated land from 3.5 million to 4.7 million hectares by 2020. The plan states that this is to ensure food security and sovereignty (independence from imports). However, many argues that this development plan, as it was followed by a series of decrees allowing for burning small (20 ha per holder) areas of forest, was the main reason behind the massive forest fires of the summer of 2019. (Monasterio, 2019; Müller, Pacheco, & Montero, 2014). While legally and institutionally Bolivia is working towards lowering the national level of deforestation, it is seemingly paradoxical with the current agricultural expansions and infrastructural plans that are currently being unrolled in the country.

In sum, Bolivian forestry policies have shifted a great deal over the last 50 years. From having no state control in the period prior to the 1970s, the Bolivian government implemented the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and expanded their extraction of natural resources (including timber) significantly.

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[10] The Payment for Ecosystem Services is a REDD+ payment initiative for "reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation" which lies at 5 US$/TnCO2 (UN-REDD Programme, 2016)

Following was growing unrest amongst the indigenous populations of the affected areas, who benefitted little from the economic policies. This culminated with the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity; reclaiming indigenous rights to their ancestral lands, which was implemented in the following years through a series of reforms. These movements laid the foundation for the Unity Pact; a collective of indigenous movements, who in 2004 created MAS – the party for whom Evo Morales would run and win the presidential election. Following the win for the UP and MAS, a series of social and environmental reforms have been implemented under the umbrella of *Buen Vivir*. Most noticeable are the 2009 Constitution and the Mother Earth Law. They were created focusing on the indigenous epistemological understanding of *Pachamama* – Mother Earth; viewing nature as included in the community and emphasize indigenous and environmental rights.

It is apparent that there in recent years have been a strong interconnection between the environment, indigenous movements and the government policies. At the same time there is evidence pointing towards the government following extractivist strategies with the increased deforestation, the implications of which this thesis seek to discuss.

3. Methodology

In this thesis I aim to discuss *What has been the role of deforestation in the Bolivian development model – and what has been the implications of this on indigenous communities and movements?*

First, however, a presentation on the strategy for answering the problem formulation will be presented in this chapter. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the ontological and epistemological considerations. **Secondly,** this is followed by an explanation of the choice of theoretical perspective. **Thirdly** follows an account of the methods of the data collection process and what factors influenced the choice of data. **Lastly,** the chapter ends with a brief discussion of the limitations to the study.

3.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

Ontology is a research philosophy, that concerns itself with the nature of reality. In social sciences the ontology treats with the way the research perceives and deals with the social reality.

This project follows an interpretivist ontological position and accepts that the social reality is constructed, not from external factors, but from the constant intersubjective interactions between social actors. Reality is thereby seen as constantly changing and interpreted. (Bryman, 2016)

Where ontologies are concerned with the nature of reality, epistemologies deal with the nature of knowledge and how to obtain it. In social sciences the main arguments revolve around whether the social world can be studied with the same procedures as natural science.

This thesis will likewise follow an interpretivist epistemology. Knowledge is not objective but influenced by the social context in which it has been created. (Bryman, 2016) "Knowledge is relative, and so too is social reality. There are multiple versions – or voices […] – in social reality that research must capture and in a way that does not give authority to the social researcher's account." (Brewer&Miller, 2003, p. 311) The main goal of an interpretivist research or analysis is thereby not to create an objective study, but a study that considers the different subjective understandings, voices, of the reality which is to be analysed.

As this thesis takes an interpretivist position, I recognize that the world is created and shaped by the social interactions between individuals and groups. This signifies that this project does not seek to find a fundamental truth, but rather it seeks to understand the way deforestations is experienced by different actors. The project thereby accepts that there will be a significant difference between the social reality of the Bolivian political sphere and the indigenous communities.

Taking an interpretivist position furthermore implies an understanding of all knowledge as being constructed and thereby influenced by the social reality of the researcher. This means that my background and perception of reality will inevitably have some influence on how I develop the research. As will it of the authors of the data I collect. When making an interpretivist epistemological project it is therefore important to make sure to collect a comprehensive selection of source from a variety of authors. In this project I have been very conscious to collect data not only from western authors, but to include data from e.g. local, national *and* international NGOs, rapports articles from both Bolivian and international media, as well as including academic articles from both Western and Latin American researchers in Spanish and English. This wide array of data will allow me to get a more nuanced perception of the situation, thus aid in counteracting the personal bias of the researcher, which constructivism argues will always exists.

3.2 Choice of Theoretical Framework

In this thesis I will be applying the theories of Political Ecology and Empowerment to discuss whether environmental changes, namely deforestation practices in the Bolivian rainforest, affects the indigenous communities and in what way. It will do this through an analysis of power relations between mainly the government and the indigenous communities, considering the role of the different 'scales' and their influence on deforestation processes in Bolivia.

Political ecology (PE) is broadly speaking more of a type of research than a theory, which lies on the border between geography, social sciences and economy. While the field is broad and can be difficult to define, there is a fundamental agreement between political ecologists that at the very core of the field is the idea that environmental changes (such as climate change, extractivist activities, e.g. deforestation, oil extraction and mining, as well as natural disasters) is not happening naturally, but a product of political and social practices, which links it to the interpretivist position that this project takes. (Peet&Watts, 1996; Robbins, 2012)

17

It is argued that these changes affect different groups differently and often unequally. In this context is serves well to provide a connection between nature and human actors and how the exercise of power on one scale could shift relations on another scale. Political Ecology can thereby provide an instrumental framework to discuss the environmental impacts on communities, and the power relations behind this; the field, however, is still quite broad. This issue will be addressed by delineating it, focusing on what political ecology argue regarding exercises of power and empowerment.

In the focus on power, there is a natural parallel to empowerment theory as presented in *Rethinking Empowerment*. While the theorists used all focus on women's empowerment and movements, I have found the theory to be quite applicable to all marginalized groups, and thereby also indigenous communities in Bolivia. The link to Political Ecology especially exists in the way they understand exercises of power and the multi-scalar approach to observing these, making it clear that the implications for indigenous communities in Bolivia needs to be understood in the national and even global contexts. In this thesis the theories will therefore be implemented to discussing how power relations have not only affected deforestation, but also how deforestation has shifted power relations in the Bolivian context.

3.3 Method and data collection

This thesis will be elaborated following an iterative research strategy; it goes back and forth between the data and theory (Bryman, 2016); each time reaching a deeper understanding of each of them.
To answer the problem formulation a mix of qualitative and quantitative data will be utilized. Often solely qualitative data is used within the paradigm of the interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2016), I however, have chosen to include some quantitative data, which will be relevant, especially when it comes to questions relating to the extent of deforestation in Bolivia and its role it plays in the country's economy.

The method of the project, however, will be a qualitative analysis of the data collected; this includes interpretative analysis of archival records, documents, statistics and rapports. In this regard the analysis will also be dependent on e.g. news articles and NGO/INGO accounts and interviews to provide insight. Ideally, this data could have been collected first-hand, e.g. on how indigenous communities in Bolivia experience the extractivist policies. However, one of the greater limitations

to this study is the geographical limitations, as it will not be possible for me to travel to Bolivia and collect the data needed.

This makes the sourcing a critical part of the process. To ensure validity, I have therefore sought to sample data from multiple sources and cross-referencing it with each other. The data has therefore been sampled from various sources: including copious academic research papers, articles, books and publications, governmental, non-governmental sources, news articles as well as NGO/INGO reports. Some data, especially regarding indigenous communities, has not been translated from Spanish (or only been translated to Spanish), data have been collected from both English and Spanish sources; so as to ensure the broadest possible compilation of data and thereby the deepest understanding within the limits of the study. This furthermore provides data for the analysis originating from different backgrounds.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interpretivist position of the project acknowledges that knowledge is not neutral but influenced by the context in which it has been created. Collecting data from a large variety of sources and comparing their findings, can counteract the biases found in the individual texts and data, and thereby help ensure both reliability and replicability of the study; this process is quite like that of the methodological triangulation one might do in e.g. a case study. (Bryman, 2016)

3.4 Limitations

Even though a lot of measures have been considered to ensure the reliability of the project, there are almost a degree of limitations to a study such as this. As mentioned earlier, is the geographical limits that makes it impossible to collect data such as interviews and questionnaires from those subjects central to the study: the indigenous communities. And as field methods such as participant observations and key informant interviews are a main factor in creating a pluralistic understanding of the environmental implications for a social group, (Bassett & Peimer, 2015) this will limit how well I am able to understand the way the indigenous experience the exercises of power. In this regard, I am depending on others to have collected this data before me, in which case I will have to accept a certain lack of significance – as the data collection would have been collected with a different research question in mind.

4. Theoretical framework

In this thesis I aim to apply two approaches: Political Ecology and Empowerment. Neither of these can without conceptualization be considered theories, nor are they methodologies in the common understanding of it. Rather, I see them as research paradigms, consisting of multiple approaches and theories. To some extent Political Ecology could be considered a field of study in itself, placed on the border between economics, political studies and geography. Empowerment, on the other hand, has since the turn of the millennia become a somewhat normative term, used by almost all (and very different) actors involved in development practices. (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002)

Empowerment does essentially revolve around power-theories. The key distinction between different approaches and the understanding of different actors of empowerment policies and practices thereby lie in the way power is defined. (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002) This is very similar for political ecology.

Political Ecology seeks to investigate the unequal distribution of power between different actors. The link with empowerment theory, which I will be making in this project, exists in the way power is defined and understood. There is a variety of distinct approaches to PE. This results in almost as many definitions of power. While many early scholars on the subject defined power as something that some actors simply had over other actors; more recent research sees power as something being exercised; progressively as well as recessively. Leaving the purely structural understanding of power, thereby opens for the study of shifting power relations, and with that, empowerment.

4.1 Introducing Political Ecology

The interconnectedness between nature and humanity has been a field of study for centuries, however, in the past decades, scholars have been paying more and more attention to linking environment and society (Robbins 2012). The field of political Ecology emerged in the 1970s within scholars of geography but was quickly implemented in political and social studies as well.[11]

Robbins (2012) defines Political Ecology as such: "[it] can be understood to address the condition and change of social/environmental systems, with explicit consideration of relations of power." (Robbins, 2012, p. 20) Because of its broadness, PE can hardly be considered a theory nor a method.

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[11] For a complete overview of the historical development of Political Ecology, see Robbins (2012)

"In part, this is because political ecology has unquestionably formed a general constituency: a global conversation revolving around a set of specific themes, one that adopts a specific sort of critical attitude. " (Robbins, 2012, p. 85) Rather than considering it a theory, it is a *community of practice,* with different schools, researchers, students and professionals, who, all study the structures of winners and looser in relation to the human-environment interaction.

Bryant (1998), in this regard, claim that political ecology should always be an investigation of power: the unequal distribution and how these power relations participate in the creation of a politized environment. Svarstad, Overå and Benjaminsen (2018) further argues, that some of the key elements in Political Ecological research is the examination of "the political dynamics surrounding material and discursive struggles over the environment in the third world." (Svarstad, Benjaminsen, & Overå, 2018, p. 351). In this regard, one of the main focuses of political ecology is how environmental change can contribute to reducing or reinforcing already established socio-economic challenges and inequalities (Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Svarstad, Benjaminsen, & Overå, 2018).

This support Robbin's claim that rather than a theoretical framework, Political Ecology is an approach to environmental and political research. However, within these 'conversations' a wide array of theories and methods can be applied. A single theoretical framework for political ecology therefore does not exist but needs to be delineated from existing writings on PE, or adapted from other fields.

4.1.1 Principles of Political Ecology

To do this, it is important first lay out the foundation of the field. In trying to collect the different streams, Paulson & Gezon (2005) have made a comprehensive overview of the core principles of PE. They present four core ideas behind the political ecology framework, which transcend the different approaches to the theory, based on the writings of some of the main theorists within the field (Piers Blaikie, Peter Watts and Harold Brookfield). **First**, PE is to be considered research revolving social relations and their effect on nature. They draw upon the writings of Watts (1983), to explain how resource use is essentially a product of social relations. Consumerism and its organisation happen within the social context and can easily create a tendency to overproduction and over-consumption; Resource extraction and the pressure it adds to the environment is thereby seen as a product of society and human actors. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005)

Secondly, they draw upon another father of modern Political Ecology, Piers Blaikie, in arguing that Political Ecologist need to recognize that there will always be a variety of positions and perceptions

in regard to environment; essentially accepting and studying the different stakeholder's interests and rationales when it comes to environmental change. This is often, as in Robbins (2012), summarized as accepting that there will always be individuals or groups who gain from environmental changes, as well as individuals or groups who are affected negatively. Furthermore, as will be elaborated on in relation to the environmental subjects and identity thesis, it can signify how some groups find unity and mobilize in the wake of environmental problems. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005)

Thirdly PE will almost always focus on different levels (often referred to as scales) of impact; a *global connectedness*. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005) This notion addresses how global-local relations present themselves, interact and how this shape each other. This is to be understood as the local spaces is not only influenced by global actors, and political and economic processes, but the local spaces likewise can influence these processes. Robbins (2012) has integrated this principle into a *chain of explanation* (see page 26). This provide a narrative structure for the researcher interested in investigating the multi-scalar interactions and power structures. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005; Neumann, 2008; Robbins, 2012)

Lastly, the concept of mutually reinforcing relationships between economics, politics and ecology regarding marginalisation; here, like the third core concept, it is also argued that there exists an interconnection between marginalization and environment, economy and politics; that they influence each other. The essence here, however, is how extractivist processes can cause but also be the product of social inequality and marginalisation. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005)

4.1.2 The Environmental Subjects and Identity

The four principles are almost present in one way or another in Political Ecology research. They can thereby be considered the common denominator, linking the distinct types of research together. While this constructs the foundation for the research, there are still a lot of distinct approaches and arguments to be considered. Robbins (2012) has defined 5 main arguments, or hypotheses, that is often encountered in PE research: 1. *The degradation and Marginalization* thesis, 2. *the Conservation and Control* thesis, 3. *The Environmental conflict* thesis, **4. *Environmental subjects and Identity* thesis,** 5. *The Political Object and Actor* thesis. [12] These all draw on different aspects of Political Ecology. These should however not be considered fixed constructions, as they often overlap and draw on each

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[12] For a comprehensive explanation of the 5 theses, see Robbins, 2012

other. This project will draw mainly on the arguments from the *Environmental subjects and Identity thesis*.

The argument contends that social movements, and new emerging ideologies are derived from power struggles; that in the face of environmental conflict or challenges, communities are drawn together – sometimes despite differences in class, race or gender. This in turn can lead to collective action and awareness. Robbins argue that this happens as "Institutionalized and power-laden environmental management regimes have led to the emergence of new kinds of people" (Robbins, 2012, p. 216)

With new kinds of people, he refers to how they define not only themselves, but how they understand the world and the environment around them. The idea being that new environmental behavior and action does not originate from people's inherent attitude towards nature. Rather environmental conflict, changes and challenges construct the conditions and incentives for local communities and groups to find unity. This can lead to mobilizing movements and securing political representation. (Robbins, 2012)

Drawing on examples from different Latin American movements, including Belizean Mayan movements and Andean communities in Ecuador, Robbins (2012) presents how movements and unions form and mobilize; not just against extractivist activities, but rather against the hegemonic understanding of nature in the respective countries. One of Robbins' arguments is that this might lead to new *collective identities* and form new linkages between groups of peoples who might otherwise not have been allied; crossing class, gender and ethnicity.

Often PE research tend to focus on what has gone wrong within in a specific case, area or situation (e.g. the Degradation and Marginalization-, and the Environmental Control theses[13]). Researchers frequently study how marginalization is increasing due to unequal distribution of resources as a direct consequence of, or how groups of people are affected (often negatively) by certain environmental issues, tracing the power relations back to 'where it went wrong'. With the *Environmental Subject and Identity Thesis*, a new approach has been suggested: The focal point here is not just on how communities and small-hold farmers at the local scale become marginalized; but rather how new epistemologies and ideologies emerge in the wake of environmental conflict and contribute to the process of *empowerment*. Robbins describe this thesis as considering "how actions, ideas, and identities are entwined with the necessities and complexities of power." (Robbins, 2012, p. 215). This

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[13] See Robbins (2012) pages 157-175 and 176-198

is not to say that the environmental subjects and identity thesis rejects the notion of marginalization and disempowerment of already marginalized peoples in environmental disputes, but rather, that environmental conflicts in some situations create the right circumstances for mobilization and empowerment.

This interconnection local populations that rise against the global hegemonic understanding of nature and national extractivist activities introduces the idea that environmental conflict and movement is not just happening at one level. Instead it insinuates that here is a link between what is happening globally and nationally which can affect local populations and vice versa.

4.1.3 Scales

In Political Ecology this is referred to as *scales*. This aligns with Paulson & Gezon's third core principle; the *global connectedness* and the relation between the local and the global. In this Political Ecology generally assumes that environmental problems exist on a variety of scales, ranging from an *individual* to *local, regional, national* to a *global* scale. The experiences and extent of environmental challenges can vary significantly, depending on what scale you are looking at. At the local scale it could be a question of drought leading to a smaller crop yield, while climate change and atmospheric changes would be examples of global scale environmental issues. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005; Neumann, 2008)

However, recent studies within the field has shifted its focus from e.g. ultimately global or ultimately local scales, to allow for a multi-scalar analysis. In a globalized world, states, transnational corporations and multilateral institutions cannot be taken out of the equation when studying local situations, and likewise local implications cannot be ignored when researching the impact of new policies or global tendencies. International economic activities can contribute to environmental challenges on every scale: from the local to the global. There has in more current PE work, been an acceptance of an intersectionality between the different scales. Recent arguments therefore contend that "the global is conceived as one aspect of a localized site" (Paulson & Gezon, 2005, p. 10). The understanding here being that even if the research was focused to a specific local case, there would in most cases still be global influence, which should not be left out of the research. (Paulson & Gezon, 2005; Neumann, 2008)

> *the ways in which an issue is shaped in global discourses and policies provides important context for interpreting specific cases on the local level, while specific local experiences influence and shed light on global trends and processes.* (Paulson & Gezon, 2005, p. 14)

In this regard, to study what is happening locally it is essential to focus not just on the local sphere in which the phenomena are happening, but rather include the external factors and conditions that often occur globally. This multiscale approach to the analysis is one of the ways in which Political ecology serve to present the complex image of the human-environmental relationship.

Robbins, in his work, present a model for how to approach multi-scalar Political Ecological research. It is a chain of explanation, linking the different scales to one another.(See Figure 1, page 26)

Starting from the *global scale*, with transnational finance, international institutions and transnational firms, he suggests looking into how these influence and have power over the state. This could be through transnational finance (e.g. the global market economy and exports, large TNCs with interests in the country (often in relation to extractivist activities) and pressure from IGOs or INGOs). The state in turn have power over local and regional institutions (e.g. implementing legislative work and policy-making) which is studied at the *national scale*. This leads on to the communities at the *local scale*, and then from here over the *environment*. Robbins thereby contends that it is from the local scale there is a direct connection with the environment. In this, Robbins support the claims of Paulson & Gezon that you cannot study the global without the local and vice versa. (Robbins, 2012; Paulson & Gezon, 2005)

The interesting thing about this chart is that the arrows do not only go down from the global to the local scale, but rather point in both directions from each scale; influence and power goes both ways. This supports the main arguments from the *Environmental Subjects and Identity* thesis; that environmental changes and conflicts can become a catalysator for the empowerment-process. This model is a quite comprehensive framework for how to do Political Ecological Research; going from the local to the global or from the local to the global; linking all the levels in between. It thereby

Figure 1: The Chain of Explanation
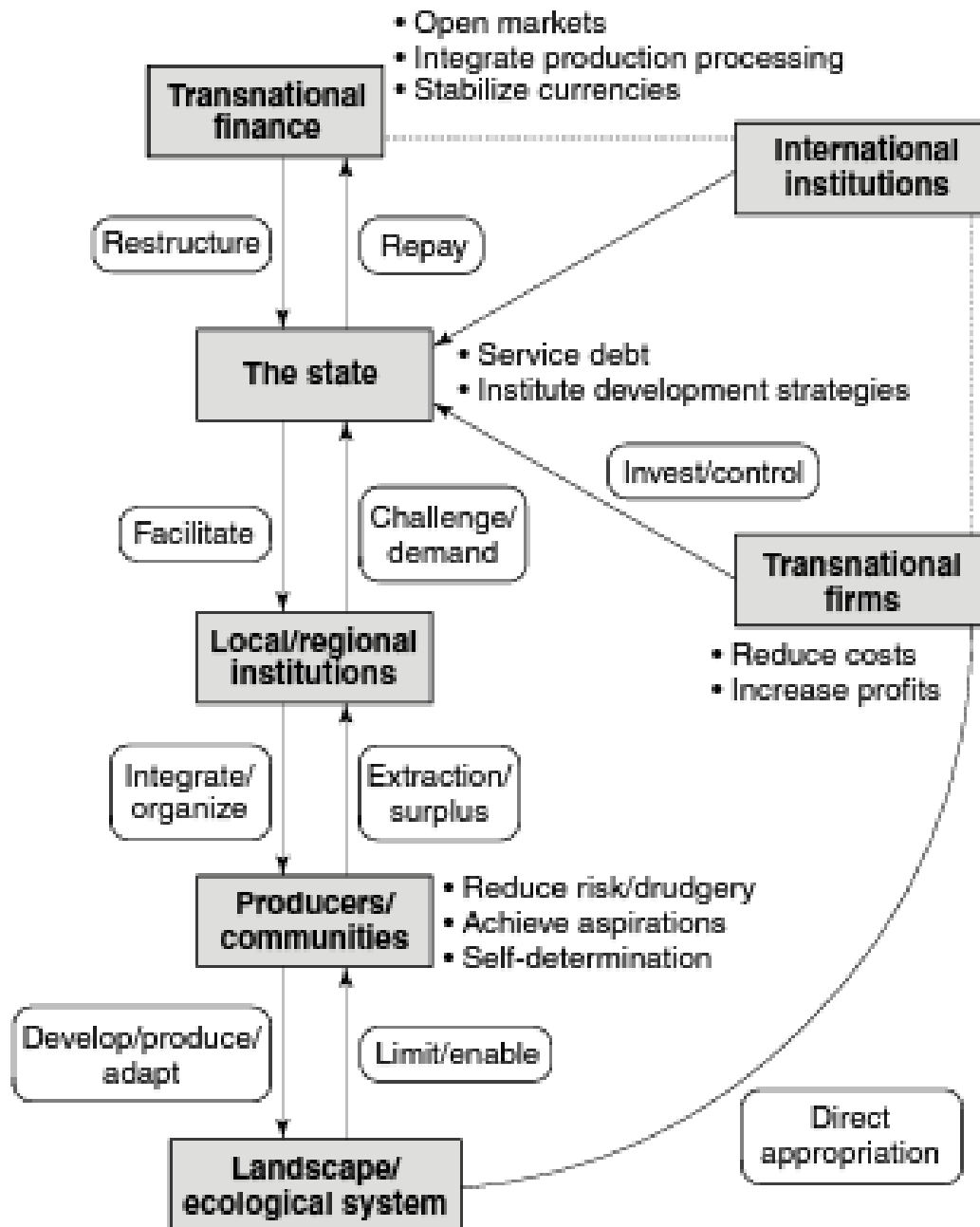
(Robbins, 2012, p. 89)

It is likewise important to understand, that scale and place is not considered merely as something physical it is not a level that has a definite start and end. The scales transcend time and space; looking into historic connections and how this affects the contemporary situation; global influence on local communities is not just something happening as an isolated situation, but rather, requires a multi-

scalar approach. Thereby, the implications for indigenous communities in rural Bolivia should be analysed and discussed not only from the perspective of the local scale, but also viewed in a national and global scalar context.

4.1.4 Power

The interaction between the scale is often exerted in the shape of power relations and made clear through an analysis of these. It therefore becomes important to understand the relation of/between the different actors with the environment. As political ecology takes the position that the environment will always be shaped by political and economic actors[14], the concept of power becomes a central in political ecology research.

The power relations are thereby understood as actor-oriented within political ecology. Svarstad, Benjaminsen & Overå (2018), argues that it is imperative to initiate any analysis of actor-oriented power relations by studying individual actors, before leading up to a discussion of the interconnectedness of the actors in relation to whichever environmental issue is the focus of the study. (Ibid)

> *Political ecology analyzes environmental problems from the vantage point of power relations and distributional issues (who benefits and who looses from environmental change and how) and with a critical eye on the uneven processes through which environmental problems are discursively and socially constructed.* (Kallis, 2008)

In this regard power is seen as a question of why certain values and ideas predominate (Paulson & Gezon, 2005; Kallis, 2008) Often power struggles are divided into two types: Struggles about meanings and ideas and struggles about practices. The first one treats knowledges and discourses; what we know about nature, how it is perceived and framed. It generally considers what is accepted as the norm and practice within society. The latter can be understood as who controls the environment; it is sometimes referred to as structural power and is the power that lies in e.g. holding a position within an institution or government.

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[14] Actors can be defined as anything from indigenous communities, the state, NGO/INGO/IGOs and TNCs.

Ahlborg and Nightingale (2018) define power as: "a relational, situated and contingent capacity to act" (Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018, p. 384) Power is thereby not only understood as something existing within your position on the 'scale'; the *structural power*, but also constructed through interactions, discourses and politics. Svarstad, Benjaminsen and Overå (2018) exemplifies this with policy-making: Power exists statically in being in a position of governance, having the capacity to create new laws and policies, but even more so in the practices and the "abilities to create, legitimize and disseminate perspectives on topics and specific cases in influential ways. (Svarstad, Benjaminsen, & Overå, 2018, p. 353) It is therefore paramount to study not only who has power, but how it is exercised, and what effects this has on the other scales and actors. (Kallis, 2008)

The commodification of nature and market dependency

The position of *power over nature*, is often exerted economically and politically. This is sometimes referred to as *the commodification of nature*, which can be understood both as an epistemological position that nature is a resource to be exploited for profit, but also a practice*,* and could be applied to any situation where a 'price' is put on nature. It thereby does not only refer to extractivist activities, but also to conservation efforts through 'conservation finance'. That is to say, preserving nature through putting an economic value on it (e.g. forest certificates and carbon fees) (Kopnina, 2016)

At the local scale, the commodification of nature in practice often happens as a necessity in marginalized communities, where the value of the price that is put on nature is their only source of income – or a steadier source than alternatives. (Emel & Neo, 2011; Peet & Watts, 1996) From an economics perspective it is therefore inevitable that a commodification of nature will happen under these circumstances. Nevertheless, Kopnina (2016) claims that "commodification is often seen as disadvantageous to local communities, as they rarely derive profits from natural commodities " (Kopnina, 2016, p. 25) Robbins (2012) contends that this happens as the value lies not in the primary good, but in the finished, manufactured goods. He rejects that it only happens locally. Rather it is a symptom of market dependency which is often experienced at the national scale.

Often developing nations experience a high degree of market dependency, as their primary source of income are still primary products traded on the global market. While most of the revenue from these products is accumulated elsewhere, many of these nations are still highly depending on the income for their national economy. They thereby become locked in a situation where the only means to

generate revenue is through the exploitation of their natural resources. Like many other concepts within the framework of Political Ecology, this transcend the national-global scale, and the tendency can likewise be seen at a local level. (Robbins, 2012) Local communities are often tied up in the global economy, "new demands for capital can only be met by exploiting their local natural resources" (Robbins, 2012, p. 58) This create a landlocked situation, from which neither state nor local population can easily emerge (Peet, Robbins & Watts, 2011)

Political ecology and influence from feminist power theories

Marked dependency show that while all actors hold power over nature, not all actors hold equal power; and that often those most marginalized are also those who benefit the least from the commodification of nature. (Kopnina, 2016) In this regard, newer political ecology draws on much feminist power theory: Power can be repressive or productive; meaning it can promote marginalization or empowerment. These two are often understood as opposing forces, Ahlborg & Nightingale (2018), however, argues that the two should be understood as intertwined. Paulson & Gezon (2005) likewise contend that that the power relations are rarely as simple as actors with power exerting it over those with less power; but rather that the power relations are constantly shifting. It is in this shifting power relations, I have found empowerment theory to create the possibility for a deeper understanding of the case of Bolivian indigenous movements. This moreover aligns nicely with the ideas of empowerment from the environmental subjects and identity thesis, which does not reject that exercises of power over the environment can lead to marginalization, but at the same time could initiate the empowerment process at the local scale. (Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018; Paulson & Gezon, 2005; Robbins, 2012)

4.2 Introducing Empowerment

Empowerment theory could thereby provide this project with a deeper insight into these complexities, which in combination with the framework of PE could serve for a more comprehensive understanding of the implications for indigenous communities in Bolivia.

Empowerment has become one of those terms that are overused in anything treating with development policies or ideas; from the World Bank to grassroot NGOs. The field spreading across fields of study, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religious beliefs, empowerment is seen applied to all

marginalized groups, with one common denominator: for an empowerment process to happen, someone needs to be 'disempowered'.

In this thesis I will draw mainly from the concepts of feminist empowerment theories, specifically the ideas presented in *Rethinking Empowerment* (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002). While this project does not seek to analyse the power relations between genders, I find the framework to be very applicable to all groups of marginalized peoples. Thereby, it can be easily adapted to writings on indigenous empowerment. Many of the concepts and ideas presented in this theory are closely linked to the main concepts of political ecology as they are presented previously in this chapter.

4.2.1 Placing the Power in Empowerment

Thus, empowerment studies have often focused on how to improve conditions for marginalized, local populations. Parpart, Rai & Staudt (2002), argues that this often results in wrongly dismissing the role of national and global actors. In this regard, the multi-scalar approach of PE could prove an adequate supplement to the concepts of empowerment, as "Global forces, whether economic, political or cultural, are both marginalizing some and enhancing the powers of others" (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002, p. 4) They thereby maintain that the first step to approach empowerment is to look into the connections between the global, national and local forces.

Their second idea is that it is critical to emphasize that power is not just to have *power over* people and resources, rather it is the exercise of power at all scales. Where power is often understood as something one possesses, Parpart, Rai & Staudt (2002) thereby claim that it is something one exerts.

To analyse this, they present some of the principal places where one might see the exertion of power: *power over, power within, power with (collective power)* and *power to*.

> *We believe empowerment must be understood as including both individual conscientization power within as well as the ability to work collectively, which can lead to politicized power with others, which provides the power to bring about change.* (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002, p. 4)

Power over can be understood as the hegemonic ideas and discourses, national and international structures inhibiting or marginalizing the disempowered groups. Examples of entities that exercise a power over marginalized groups could be official institutions and other authorities which partake in

constructing and shaping spaces. Another example is global finance; the market and TNCs. (Staudt, Rai, & Parpart, 2002)

Power within focuses on the individual's conscientization. This refers to the writings of Paolo Freire, who argue that in order to gain power, the oppressed need to realize that they have none. They need to reach conscientization. (Freire, 1970; Staudt, Rai, & Parpart, 2002)

The power with (which in this project will be referred to as *collective power* (cf. the *Environmental subjects and identity thesis)*), lies in the way groups challenge the status quo through collective action; the discourses and policies. This is most often seen as social movement and grass-root organizations.

Through individual conscientization and collective action people gain the "power to make changes" (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002, p. 4). It is here the empowerment process becomes most clear. It is often most efficient through the collective actions. What Parpart, Rai and Staudt identifies in *Rethinking Empowerment,* is that the changes brought through collective action, however is often more of a process and rarely a definite outcome. The process of empowerment should thereby be understood as fluid and unpredictable. It occurs over time and space and should therefore be analysed in this context. Empowerment as an outcome is the achievement of certain goals. It however, remains important to notice that these goals do not always reflect true empowerment. For instance, state or institution-led empowerment projects might have a definition of what lies in 'being empowered', which does not coincide with the experience of those partaking in the process of empowerment. (Ibid)

In this regard, empowerment should be understood as the way actors experience and challenge power relations. This can easily be inhibited by institutional and discursive practices. While individuals become empowered through conscientization and groups through collective action, there should be paid attention to the political practices, laws, economy, hegemonic cultural ideas and discourses, as these will affect whether the empowerment process is enabled or constrained. (Ibid)

Empowerment is thereby not something that happens solely individually, but likewise within institutional, material and discursive practices; as well as on different scales – connecting the theory once again to that of Political Ecology.

> *While the local is important as a focus for discussion on empowerment […] our belief [is] that the local is embedded in the global and national, and vice versa. The interconnectedness of the three levels provide a framework for out interrogation of empowerment, gender and development* (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002, p. 16)

The global and national forces, such as economy, politics and culture will, according to Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002), always create a shifting power relation, which affect even the most marginalized or secluded populations, either regressively or progressively

Collective power: Movements and empowerment.

One of the ways this manifests progressively is trough social movements. Bodur and Franceschet (2002) argue that one of the main ways to achieve empowerment is through the emergence and growth of movements, thus focusing on *collective power.* They present two main theoretical propositions regarding the emergence and success of movements within the framework of empowerment. While their focus is mainly on women's social movements, the theory can like most empowerment research easily be adjusted to fit any sort of marginalized group. (Bodur & Franseschet, 2002)

Their first argument is that to fully understand why movements emerge, one must acquire a deeper understanding of the context of their marginalization as marginalized groups often find ways to use the existing, hegemonic discourses to their advantage. Through contradictions between the prevailing discourses and the day-to-day experience individuals unify and mobilize. However, this mobilization is often short-lived as the goals from which they emerge are resolved and they lose momentum. (Ibid)

In other instances, the movements are institutionalized as activist are incorporated into state agencies or NGOs working as a link between the marginalized group and the state. While this might lead to more inclusive policies it can also increase inequality between members of the same marginalized group. While some become empowered, others are left at status quo – or even become disempowered as what started as a mobilization moves into the state apparatus represented by a few members of the community. This process depends a lot on the type of state and the relationship the movements have with it. (Bodur & Franseschet, 2002)

In this regard, the role of the state in which the movements arise is paramount. States can both be promoters of empowerment and marginalizing policies. Sometimes the former is presented as a set of strategies and ideas formulated by the government of how to empower a marginalized group in their society. States trying to implement empowerment, often has the opposite effect. Rather than lead to empowerment, it can lead to a new set of issues by placing marginalized groups in a situation where they would have to not only redefine their idea of empowerment, which might be contradictory to the one established by the state, but also the strategies of how to reach it. (Bodur & Franseschet, 2002)

In this they take a participatory approach to the notion of empowerment; it must start at the local scale, with a collective identity, and while influenced by national and global factors, empowerment is not something that can simply be handed over by the state. (Bodur & Franseschet, 2002; Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002) This notion of the collective identity is likewise central to the *Environmental subjects and identity thesis* in Political Ecology research. The idea here is that the collective identity can emerge when faced with environmental conflict. (Robbins, 2012)

4.3 Linking Empowerment and Political Ecology

Political ecology is the study of how environment and human actors are interconnected and affecting each other. Many researchers, such as Robbins (2012), Paulson & Gezon (2005), and Bryant and Bailey (1997) argue that this should be done from the perspectives of power and scales. Often the research focuses on how power is exercised over marginalized actors; linking marginalization with environmental degradation. In this type of research power is seen as something exercised by more powerful actors over less powerful actors. Aahlborg and Nightinggale (2018) emphasize how newer political ecology research draws on a feminist approach to power, and that rather than seeing power as structural, power is defined as both repressive and productive; it can lead to marginalization, but also to empowerment. These should not be understood as in opposition, but rather intertwined and constantly shifting.

Robbins' (2012) *environmental subjects and identity thesis* supports this feminist approach to political ecology. It explains how environmental conflict does not just lead to marginalization, but could be a catalysator for social movements, initiating a process of empowerment, as local populations find unity in the opposition to degradation and marginalization.

In this regard, an apparent parallel between feminist empowerment theories and political ecology's notions of power and scale emerges. While empowerment theory is especially focused on women's empowerment, the theories could still prove relevant in the case of indigenous peoples in Bolivia, as the foundation of the research is how marginalized peoples are involved in the process of empowerment.

Parpart, Rai & Staudt (2002) have created a set of concepts to define the relations where power is exercised; which supports the claims of political ecology that they can be both repressive (e.g. *power over*) and progressive (e.g. *collective power*). Like Political Ecology, this theory argue that power

does not just lie in the position of the actor, but also in the way they exercise it. In this regard, both empowerment theory and the environmental subjects and identity approach to political ecology are mostly focused on how power shift in the interconnection between the local, the national and the global scales.

To study this, Robbins has created a model, *the chain of explanation,* which serves to illustrate and operationalize the complex interconnectedness of the power relations between the different actors in regard to environmental conflicts. Together with the different notions of power, conceptualized by Parpart, Rai & Staudt, it creates a quite comprehensible framework

5. Analysis

5.1 Introducing Analysis

The main goal of this analysis is to gain an understanding of how a country that was a front figure in environmental legislations just a few years back is still experiencing an increased rate of extractivist activities - in this case, deforestation – and what impact this has on the indigenous communities living in these areas.

The first part of the analysis will revolve around the role of deforestation in the Bolivian development model. Considering the pressure from the international economy, the commodification of nature and market dependency, this will be an analysis of the exercise of power on a national scale; mainly focusing on some of the key legislations implemented regarding deforestation and their 2016-2020 development plan.

Second will be an analysis on em*power*ment on a local scale. The focus will be on the implications of the legislative work on deforestation for indigenous communities and how power relations are exerted over, with and within the communities; looking into the *effects* of the exercise of power. In accordance with the concept of scales from Political Ecology, the local will be linked with the analysis of the national (and international) scales; leading up to a discussion of the interconnectedness between the national and local scales and the environment – and the dynamic structure of the power relations between them.

5.2 The National Scale: Deforestation in the Bolivian Development Model

National legislation and the role of Deforestation

Despite implementing one of the World's most ambitious conservation laws, Bolivia still experience a great deal of extractivist activities. Instead of declining, deforestation rates are steadily increasing. (See Figure 2, page 37)

Figure 2: Annual Deforestation, Bolivia
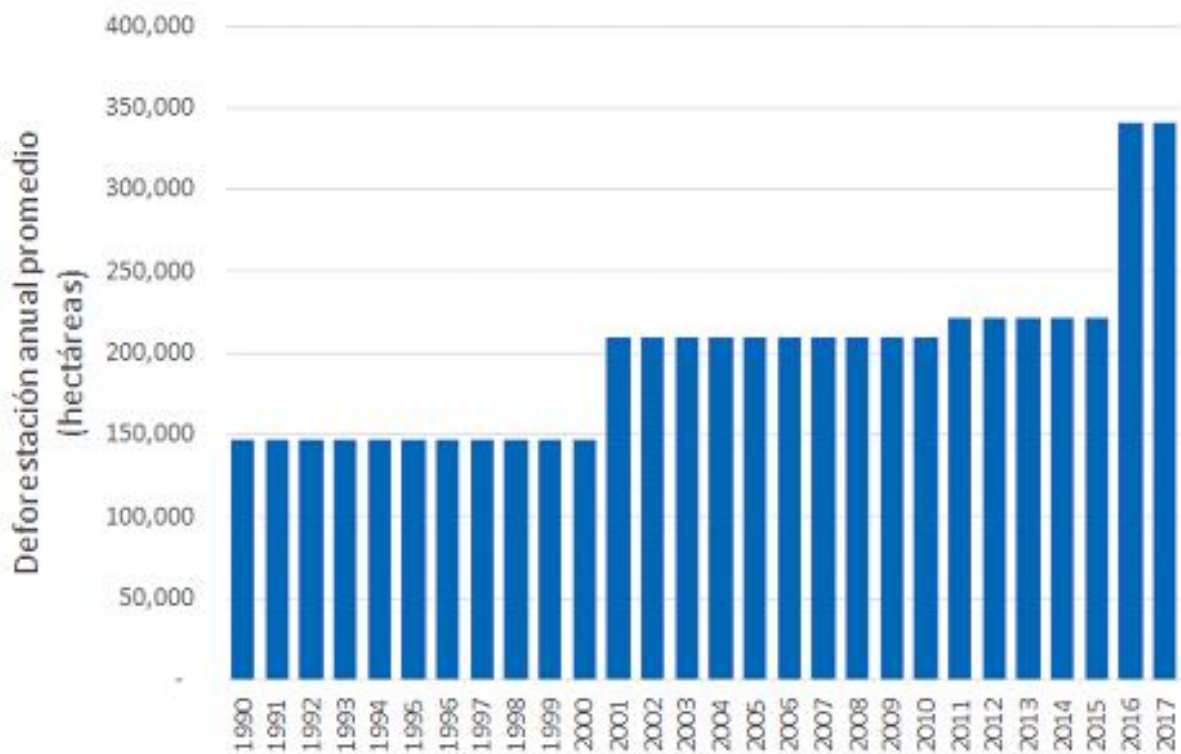
(INESAD, 2019)

Deforestation has, according to Instituto de Estudios Avanzados en Desarrollo (INESAD) [15], gone up from about 150.000 hectares in the 1990s to an annual average of somewhere between 250.000-350.000 hectares in the period from 2011-2017. (Tabucbi, Rigby, & White, 2017; INESAD, 2019; MMAyA; ABT, 2016-2017)[16]

In the *Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Social 2016-2020* - Economic and Social Development Plan 2016-2020 (PDES), the government propose an increase in the agriculture and cattle sectors, to finance some of their social projects and ensure food security. In doing so, they plan for an expansion of cultivated area from 3.5-4,7 million hectares. (El Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2016)

As Bolivia is one of the poorest nations in Latin America (The World Bank, 2018), there is a need to gather funding for the projects presented in the PDES. Bolivia has little resources to do this, save

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[15] Institute of advanced development studies: One of Bolivias leading independent think tanks.
[16] Numbers vary slightly depending on the sources and their methods of calculating the clearing. The official numbers from MMAyA are the lowest, whilst INESAD's are the highest.

exploitation of their natural resources and agricultural expansions. This could be a symptom of what in Political Ecology is defined as *market dependency*. Theorist agree that this is a tendency that has roots in the power structures of the market that emerged during the colonization-period. Robbins (2012), argue that today the market dependency is most prevalent in the way natural resources are exploited as the only means of generating revenue for the state as well as the small-hold farmer. (Robbins, 2012)

Looking at their exports, it becomes apparent that almost all Bolivia's revenue comes from the sale of raw materials and primary goods (see37). Market dependency generally occurs when this happens, as most of the value of the products are accumulated later in the supply-chain; leaving little left for the producers of the primary product.

Figure 3: Annual exports, Bolivia, 2017
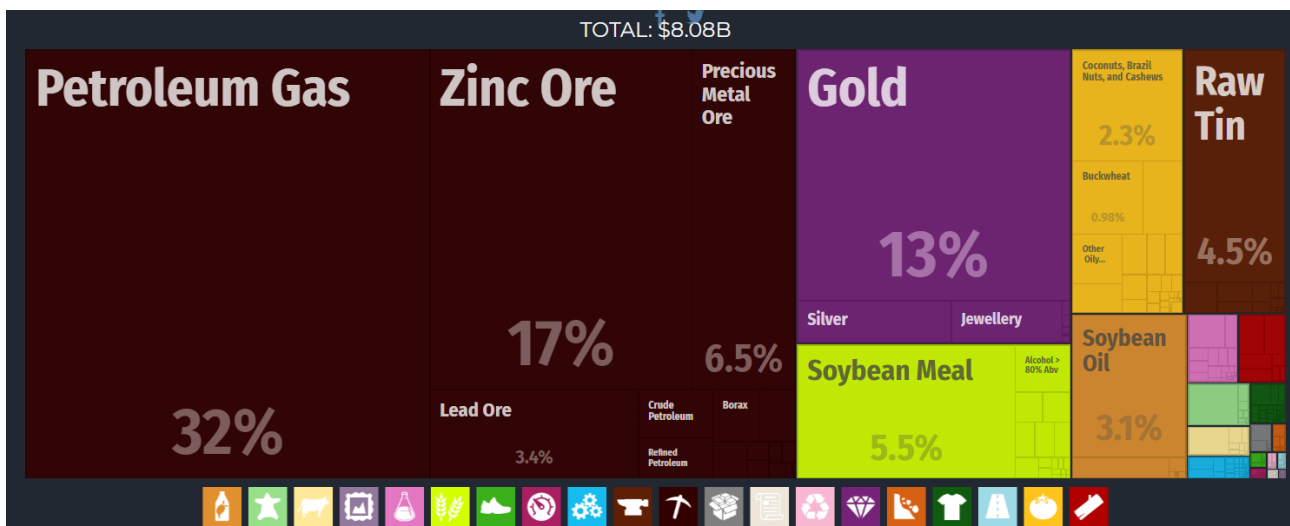
(OEC, 2017)

The commodification of nature

Market dependency and the commodification of nature are greatly interconnected. Understanding nature as commodifiable can lead to market dependency, as it in this regard is accepted to 'put a price' on nature.

This stands in quite a strong contrast to the Law 300: Mother Earth Law (of 2012). In article 4, paragraph 2 it for example reads: "**The non-commodification of the environmental functions of**

the Mother Earth. The environmental functions and natural processes of the components and systems of life of Mother Earths, are not considered marketable, but rather gifts from the holy Mother earth[17] (Own translation), This clearly states that the environment is non-commodifiable; and does the rest of the Law 300 and much of the Constitution. (Ley 300: Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien of 2012; Constitutución Politica del Estado of 2009)

The non-commodification of nature has also been a key word in the Bolivian political discourse and strategy internationally. For example, the REDD desk explains that there were two reasons behind Bolivia terminating their partnership. "(i) Because it represented the commodification of nature; and (ii) because it was seen as a way for rich countries to evade their historic responsibility for climate change and need to reduce domestic emissions by transferring the burden of action to poorer countries" (Kuper, Pabón, Surkin, & Hirsch, 2013)

The increased deforestation (and other extractivist activities) are thereby apparent clashes with *Buen Vivir's* take on the environment, where nature is seen as part of the community and non-commodifiable. Robbins (2012) support the argument that creating an influx of revenue from extracting natural resources often becomes the most natural way for a developing nation to implement ambitious social reforms. In doing so, they are increasing the direct power exerted over nature by the state. In this regard it is common to see an increased state control over the market. This is also the case for Bolivia when it comes to deforestation, and it is clearly illustrated when looking at the transition from illegal deforestation to legal deforestation. The government has in little less than five years about halved the amount of illegal logging in Bolivia (see Figure 4, p. 39). This however, has not signified a decline in forest clearings, but rather an increase.

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[17] "**No Mercantilización de las Funciones Ambientales de la Madre Tierra**. Las funciones ambientales y procesos naturales de los componentes y sistemas de vida de la Madre Tierra, no son considerados como mercancías sino como dones de la sagrada Madre Tierra" (Ley 300: Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien, art. 4.2, 2012)

Figure 4: Illegal and legal deforestation rates in Bolivia
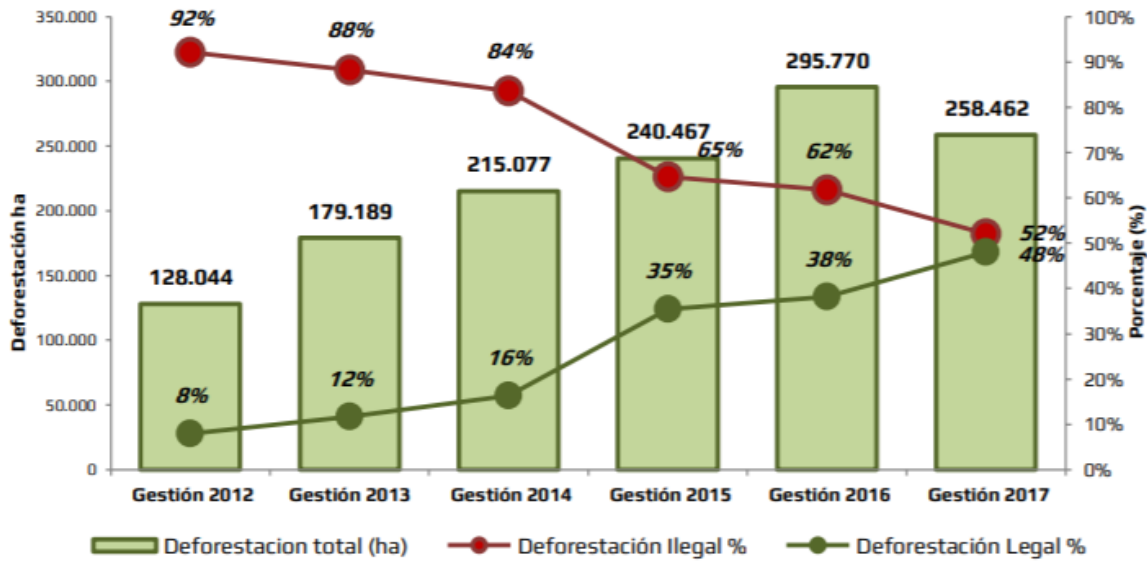
(MMAyA; ABT, 2016-2017)

200.000 hectares of *legal* deforestation (as is planned in the PDES) annually would in this regard be a large increase, even compared to 2016, where deforestation rates were at their highest. During that year, 295.770 hectares were logged, but 67 % of this was due to illegal logging, making the government-approved conversion of forest land to farm land 112.393 hectares – little more than half of what the new development plan is planning on. While illicit deforestation rates therefore fall, the total deforestation has annually been on the rise. This serves to illustrate the rather high level of structural *commodification of nature* happening in Bolivia, and that the state is increasing its exercise of power over nature significantly.

One of the ways in which the Bolivian government is managing and intensifying the agricultural expansion is through forestry law 741. Implemented in 2015, the law grant permission for all small properties, communities and collectives[18] to clear 20 hectares of land. (Ley 741 de Autorización de Desmonte Hasta 20 Hectáres of 2015) This can be viewed as another proposition to give smallholders a starting point. The law, while it does emphasize sustainable forestry and respect for Mother Earth, does not procide the guidelines for how to do this, and there are no obligations to analyze any possible environmental complications this would have. (Monasterio, 2019) The result is a very easy conversion to make illegal logging legal – as there is really little difference other than now being

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[18] These classifications of property-holders were defined with the 1996 forestry law (law 1700)

enabled by the Bolivian government. Furthermore, there are little to no consequenses if more than 20 ha's are cleared and many indigenous and local communities have protested the very low fines placed on illegal fires as culprits for the 2019 forest fires. (Monasterio, 2019) (Ley 741 de Autorización de Desmonte Hasta 20 Hectáres of 2015; Ley 1171 de Uso y Manejo Racional de Quemas of 2019)

They are remarkably low (see Table 1) and while there is a differentiation relational to the size of the of property[19], the difference is very little. An indigenous community would have to pay approximately $34 as a base-fine and $0,34 per burned hectare from there.[20,21] On the other end of the scale, the industrial farmers would have to pay the same base fine, and an additional fee of $2,04 per hectare of burned forest. This is a remarkable small amount for the larger industrial farmers. (Banco Central de Bolivia, 2019)

Table 1: Fines for Illegal burning of land/forest

TIPO DE PROPIEDAD	Monto UFV por hectárea quemada	Monto en UFV Por tipo de propiedad
Propiedades colectivas (comunidades indígena originario campesinas)	1	100
Pequeña propiedad agrícola	1	20
Pequeña propiedad ganadera	3	50
Mediana propiedad agrícola	3	50
Mediana propiedad ganadera	3	60
Propiedad empresarial agrícola	6	100
Propiedad empresarial ganadera	6	100

(Ley 1171 de Uso y Manejo Racional de Quemas of 2019)

The fines are also a very clear example of commodification of nature. There has been put a value on the forest, and a very low one with that. Often when this happens, it is the local communities that suffer the consequences, as they benefit very little from the extraction taking place but suffer the consequences of it. (Kopnina, 2016)

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[19] From the top: (indigenous collectives, small-hold farmer, small-hold rancher, medium-hold farmer, medium-hold rancher, industrial farmer, industrial rancher. (Ley 1171 de Uso y Manejo Racional de Quemas of 2019)

20 UFV is a unit used to indicate a price relational to price-fluctuations on the market and in the exchange rate, and calculated daily. (Banco Central de Bolivia, 2019)

21 According to the central bank of Bolivia, the UFV is. It is currently (12th of December) rated at 2,32872 Bolivares per unity, equivalent of approximately $0,34. (Banco Central de Bolivia, 2019)

In the 2016-2017 rapport from the ministry of for environment and water (Ministery del Medio Ambiente y Agua (MMAyA) on the state of the Bolivian forests, the MMAyA acknowledges that the agricultural sector is expanding to meet up with the goals of the national development plan, and that this has been the cause of the increased deforestation rates. (MMAyA; ABT, 2016-2017)

They, however do not necessarily agree that the expansion of the area is the only way of reaching the goals. Instead it is acknowledged that looking into new technologies and methods might amplify the crop yield, thus reaching the goals without further clearing of forests. This however, is a great example of how the market dependency creates a landlocked situation when it comes to environmental protection. To invest in these new technologies would require some sort of funding. In this regard it can be assumed that the Bolivian state either would have to take this out of their current budget (thus compromising some of their other development project), further expand the agricultural frontier, or rely on international investments. The most readily available resource of the three would most likely be to expand the agricultural sector and allow for more deforestation, as this is one of the sectors, they will have most control over. This clearly illustrates the power relations between nature and politics in developing nations. As nature is the most readily available resource, this also becomes the easiest.

International influence on national policies

There are multiple parts of the development plan that does deal with the protection and conservation of nature and a more sustainable production (El Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2016); this however, might end up falling short as the means of which to fund this is unsustainable extraction and exploitation of nature. It becomes a downward extractive spiral from which many nations, including Bolivia has a difficult time breaking out from.

This, nonetheless is not just due to national development policies or poor management. The ambitious environmental protection laws in Bolivia are not only challenged by the national development strategies, but also the international market economy. In the Morales government period, food prices

have generally been on the rise compared to earlier years. Rising from 118 in 2005 to 177.2 in 2019[22] (FAO, 2019)

Rising market prices are one of the ways the world economy can indirectly exercise power over the environment. This is, as established in the theoretical framework, closely linked with the *market dependency.* As market prices rise, there will be a boom in the sector that experience the increased marked prices – in this case the agricultural sector. As made apparent by Figure 5, in 2005 the annual foodstuff exports from Bolivia amounted to $232M. In 2017 this had doubled to $557M. (OEC, 2017)

Figure 5: Food stuff exports
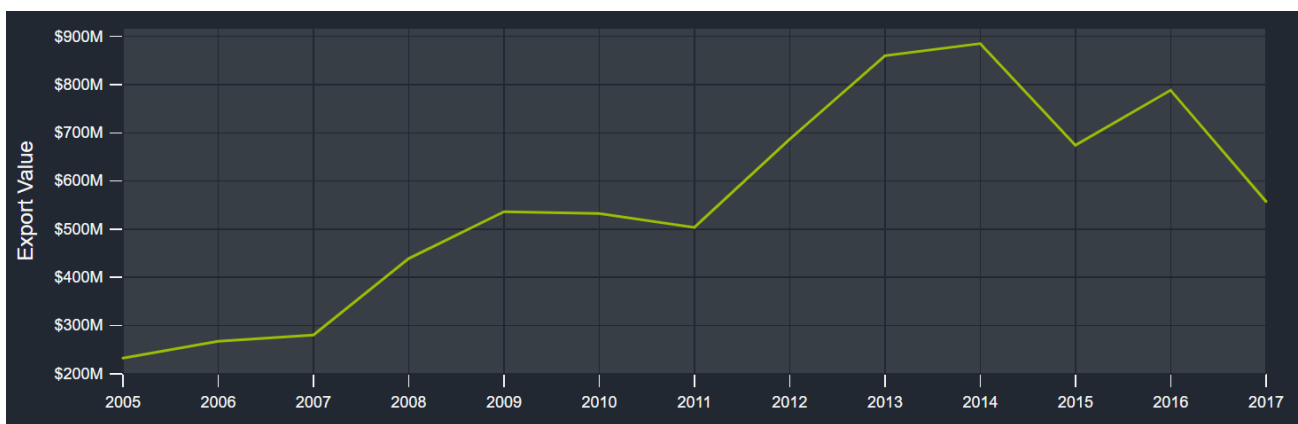
(OEC, 2017)

Numbers from CEPAL further support this argument. They have calculated an expansion of the agricultural sector of 6.9% just from 2018-2019 (this can mostly be attributed to the PDES). (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2019)

One of the main arguments behind this agricultural expansion is to break free of depending on importing foodstuff. (Fraser, 2014) The development model lays it out as a proposition to be completely self-sustainable when it comes to foodstuff, and in this regard, be completely free of any international influence – and thereby market dependency. (El Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2016). This however stand in starch contrast to the current tendencies in Bolivian foreign exchange policies.

One of the clearest examples of international influence driving Bolivian environmental policies is the demand from the growing Chinese market. According to numbers from CIFOR, 50% of deforestation is happening to increase cattle-ranching. (Fraser, 2014) This increase comes at the same time as

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[22] "[The index] is a weighted average of the price relatives of the commodities included in the group, with the base period price consisting of the averages for the years 2002-2004" (FAO, 2019)

export-agreements on cattle-production have been made with China, aiming to reach a yearly export of 40.000 tonnes of bovine meat by 2020. (El Deber, 2019)

Meanwhile there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of people employed in the agricultural sector (see Figure 6). The lower numbers of employment in the agricultural sector, while the sector is expanding, does show a tendency of fewer, but larger farms in Bolivia. This is partially due to international companies buying or renting farmland. According to the 2013 Danida and INESAD rapport on *the drivers, causes and actors of deforestation in Bolivia*, (INESAD; DANIDA, 2013) most of the Bolivian soy production is now in the hands of foreign companies. This could lead to the assumption of a more industrial agricultural sector in Bolivia driving the deforestation.

Figure 6:Employment in Agriculture in Bolivia
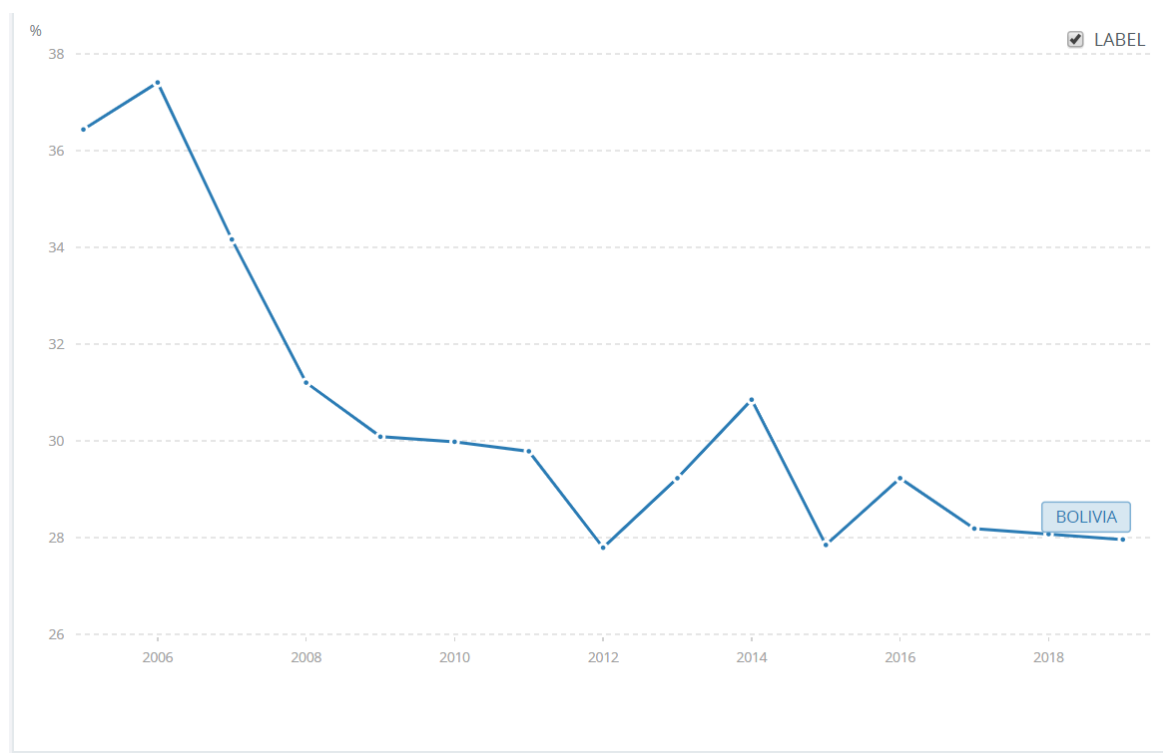
(The World Bank, 2019)

This argument is supported by REDD+, who state that around 70% of Bolivian soy production is foreign owned. Low market prices in Bolivia is one of the drivers behind this international interest (INESAD; DANIDA, 2013; Kuper, Pabón, Surkin, & Hirsch, 2013), Land and petroleum are cheap compared to the surrounding nations and leaving open opportunities for inexpensive production – and thereby a higher revenue. (INESAD; DANIDA, 2013)This goes to show that the international

economy in many ways are a driving factor behind deforestation in Bolivia, and while the national development policies certainly are playing a large role, there are many tendencies that show a great deal of international power over the deforestation process. This illustrates how while Bolivia may be an autonomous state, they are not completely free from international influence and power.

5.3 The Local Scale: Implications for the indigenous communities and movements

Moving from the Global and National scale it is evident that deforestation is central to the Bolivian development strategy, mostly due to agricultural expansions, and cattle ranching set in place to fund social projects; In implementing these strategies, the government exercise a great deal of power over the environment, but it is relevant to notice that this is influenced by a high degree of dependency on the international market, which in this way is also to be understood as exercising power over the indigenous communities. In accordance with the chain of explanation (Robbins, 2012), and the power-framework presented by Parpart, Rai & Staudt (2002), what happens on a global and national scale will always affect local populations and from there the environment. This is also the case in Bolivia.

5.3.1 Power over

The law 741 has had massive implications for the indigenous population and clearly show how power is unevenly distributed. The law allow for all small hold farmers to clear up to 20 hectares of forest per person, with very little assessment of environmental impact or control beforehand. (Ley 741 de Autorización de Desmonte Hasta 20 Hectáres of 2015) Many organizations point to the law as the catalysator for the forest fires in 2019. (Monasterio, 2019; Antezana & Salazar, 2019). 20 different protected areas were affected as were 285 different indigenous communities, totaling 38.204 people (see Table 2, page 46) Some of these being the uncontacted and isolated communities in Ñembi Guasu. In this case, the deforestation poses a direct threat to their existence. (Monasterio, 2019)

The forest fires show that there is a high level of multi-scalar influence on the very direct conquests for the indigenous population; while the government is indirectly influenced by the international market economy and a public demand to alleviate poverty; the environment and indigenous communities pay the price.

Table 2: Indigenous communities affected by the fires

Indigenous people	Territory	Est.population	Communities	Region
Chiquitano	Monte Verde	3060	140	Santa Cruz
	Lomerío	6481	29	
	Pantanal	6387	29	
	Esecatato Auna Kiixh	2795	19	
	Zapocó	222	1	
Guarayo	Guarayo	14496	27	
Ayoreo	Rincón del Tigre	384	1	
	Santa Teresita Cimí	157	1	
	Uncontacted community of Ñembi Guasu	-	-	
Cayubaba	Cayubaba	2084	21	Bení
Baures	Baures	632	7	
Sirinonó	Sirinonó	406	2	
Araona	Araona	100	8	
Total approximately		38204	285	

(Monasterio, 2019)

It is however, not as simple as this; while the data is very limited on this subject, a couple of rapports done by international organizations (CIFOR, DANIDA, INESAD), have found that poverty (ultimately market dependency), and a large amount of migration from the rural communities to the cities, has created a difficult situation for those who 'stay behind'. Small hold farmers are amongst the poorest of the Bolivian population (INE, 2016) and clearing 20 ha of land would facilitate a steadier income for these people. The farmers thereby have incentive (and legal permission) to clear the forests. (INESAD; DANIDA, 2013; Fraser, 2014)

This situation demonstrates how environmental degradation and marginalization can often be seen interconnectedly. The DANIDA/INESAD rapport found that "in most places [in Bolivia] agriculture provides more food security and higher incomes than forest livelihoods" (INESAD; DANIDA, 2013, p. 5), thus creating a situation where those most marginalized would have to face the choice between conservation and food security. In this regard, poverty and marginalization does not only have huge implications for those facing it, but also for the environment.

Thereby one might argue that market dependency does not just operate on a national or international level; but also, at a local scale with small-hold farmers trying to sustain themselves or their families. For many, the easiest and most effective way to earn a living is often by cattle ranching, as they do not require much infrastructure to (drive) to the market; and cattle can generate a steady income with little labor efforts, due to natural reproduction. (INESAD; DANIDA, 2013)

Bolivians need to prove a social or financial function of the land they hold in order to be permitted to keep it. In this regard, it becomes crucial for those indigenous communities who have not yet been classified as TCO to make use of the land somehow; proving social function of land is not easy and many therefore rely on proving financial function (Müller, Pacheco, & Montero, 2014; Pellegrini & Dasbupta, 2011). To do this, some communities rely on deals with TNCs, (Anthias, 2016) which makes them very depending on the international market.

The state and empowerment

The state sees the empowerment of the indigenous communities as holding a crucial role in combatting the deforestation; which is made clear in the recommendations from the MMAyA-rapport. Here they emphasize that stronger participation from the civil society and the communities is needed to prevent deforestation.   In the PDES, and the Mother Earth Law, they likewise place the redistribution of land central in the empowerment and conservation processes. (Ley 300: Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien; El Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2016; MMAyA & ABT, 2017)

This approach by the government has resulted in significant increase in the amount of land belonging to and being cultivated by indigenous people and local communities. According to Forests of the World, "the indigenous peoples have secured almost 20 million hectares of land as collective property. However, their territorial entitlement is in fact close to 45 million hectares" (Forests of the World, n.d.) This is compared to 7,7 million hectares before the Morales government (CEDIB, 2008)

It is evident by the PDES and the Mother Earth Law, that a part of the development strategy, to place more power with the indigenous and thereby facilitating the empowerment-process. (Ley 300: Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien; El Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2016; MMAyA & ABT, 2017) However, while they grant access to land, there is at the same time an

increased state control over the allotted area. This is to ensure sustainability, but at the same time also very vaguely defined and hard to implement in practice. (Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019)

Collective Power and environmental subjects/identity

While the power over the communities by the state and the market is undisputable, there are also cases illustrating the importance of *collective power* in the shape of movements and communities, that are formed by threats of deforestation and helping to prevent further deforestation. Robbins (2012) refer to this as *environmental subjects and identity*; that not only is the environment shaped by people (who have power over it), but people are also shaped by the environment.

The Tacana communitities are a great example of how *collective power* can be a catalysator for the empowerment-process, but also for how nature, and communities' interdependence, takes part of shape one another. In the 1990s 20 different communities from the area constituted the Tacana Indigenous People Counsil (CIPTA) to advocate their rights to their ancestral lands. Through CIPTA, The Tacana people claimed their land in 1997 after the new land reforms were implemented and was allotted 389.303 ha of land to be classified as Indigenous Territory. (Brenna, 2015; Painter, Wallace, & Salinas, 2017; WCS, n.d.)

While Bodur and Franseschet (2002), argue that often these movements, that rise in the face of a specific challenge (in this case the prospect of losing the rights to the land), deflate once the conflict has been resolved, this has not been the case for the Tacana. With the allotted land to be shared between 20 different communities there was a need for some sort of governance. CIPTA that started as a movement, became a local form of self-governance, where all 20 communities discuss the best ways to manage and develop sustainably with respect for nature. This is a clear example of empowerment as an outcome, as they have reached *their* goals of autonomy over *their* territories through collective action (Painter, Wallace, & Salinas, 2017).

By self-organizing within the communities, the indigenous communities are able to create a more sustainable way of supporting themselves than the more normative idea of extractivist activities, which fits within their life in harmony with the forest. Key here is their understanding of the forest as part of the community and the foundation for their way of living: "The forest, besides being the foundation of our economy, generates a source of life for us to live in peace. Imagine if there were

no forests: we would be threatened with disappearance." (Constantino Nai (President of CIPTA) in Painter, Wallace & Salinas, 2017, minutes 0:55-1:10)[23]

Robbins (2012) argue that environmental conflict can lead to a more united community, which can lead to new ideologies, awareness and environmental action. In the case of the Tacana people, there has been a significant change, which all started with autonomy over their territories; Through the CIPTAs collective governance structure they have been able to create a positive impact on the environment around them: Deforestation rates in their area have fallen drastically, to an extent where the forest is growing rather than diminishing. (Brenna, 2015) They thereby become an example of the interconnection between empowerment and conservation. (Tamburini, 2019; Brenna, 2015; Painter, Wallace, & Salinas, 2017)

But while living secluded in the Bolivian Amazon, the economy is still depending on ecotourism and selling commodities, which are all symptoms of commodification of nature. What is different in this instance from e.g. deforestation for cattle production to China, is that the products and experiences sold from these communities partake in the empowerment process of the people living within these communities, sustaining, rather than marginalizing them. And instead of having a situation of environmental degradation, the market here supports their empowerment process, their chosen way of life and the conservation efforts they are making. (Painter, Wallace, & Salinas, 2017)

Recently the government increased interest in their territories due to the discovery of oil and gold in the river that runs through the reserve. The initiation of these activities are a starch reminder that the local can never be isolated and that while far on the process of empowerment, the Tacana are still subordinate in the face of the power of the global market economy. (Los Tiempos, 2019; El Deber, 2019)

Other communities, such as the Guaraní communities embrace these challenges. The Guaraní, another self-governed indigenous community, have directly negotiated extraction contracts with the Spanish Oil company, Repsol. While this case is of oil-extraction, it, compared with the Tacana communities illustrate another very clear example of indigenous empowerment in situations of deforestation and extractivist activities. According to community leaders (in Anthias, 2016), the deal with Repsol emerges as an opposition to the government planned extraction. Where indigenous communities are

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[23] "El Bosque, aparte de que nos genera economía, nos genera una Fuente de vida, porque podamos vivir tranquilo. Imagínase si no hubiera bosque, estariamos amenzados a desaparecer" (Constantino Nai (President of CIPTA) in Painter, Wallace & Salinas, 2017, minutes 0:55-1:10)

often left completely *powerless* in the face of these plans (Pacheco, Jong, & Johnson, 2010; Tabucbi, Rigby, & White, 2017), which are often made in agreement with state institutions such as ABT, or the government, the community get increased control over the process by managing these contracts themselves. Through the *collective power,* of the community they break from the increased control exerted by the state. The direct negotiation with Repsol has allowed for a development fund to be implemented and managed by the communities themselves, thus facilitating inclusion and participation of the communities, rather than being submitted top government-decided, top-down managed development project. (Anthias, 2016)

Social movements

While the government has intended to create social policies redistributing the income from natural resource extraction, there thereby seems to be apparent dissatisfaction amongst some of the indigenous communities. While the Guaraní shows their distrust in the government's capability of guaranteeing their autonomy over the forest, and therefore has made agreements with the companies interested in their lands, others revolt against the prospect of extractivist activities and land-clearing.

In the face of environmental challenges, Bolivian indigenous populations have shown a remarkable capability for organization and mobilization. While many of these communities are quite secluded and different from one another, there is a tendency and history of finding collective power. Something that might have started with the March for Territory and Dignity in the 1990s, but only has grown since then. MTD is a great example of how the power with others can bring about the power to make a change; The march became a turning point for indigenous movements in Bolivia, as it brought together different communities, and gained them political influence. This is in itself a clear example of the environmental subjects and identity thesis of political ecology. But it also marked the beginning of a more organised and inter-solidary indigenous collective, which to a large extent has sent ripples up to today, as the MTD created the foundation for Morales' party, MAS, and thereby the indigenous inclusion in the new constitution and new land reforms. (Dockry & Langston, 2019)

This, in the meantime, shows how complicated power structures are. According to Bodur and Franceschet (2002), those partaking in the empowerment process in movements who later enters a position in state, governance or any sort of institutional position, often end up exercising power over

the people who once were allies. This could explain some of the massive conflicts that has been between indigenous people in Bolivia and the Morales government.

A great example was the opposition to the Villa Tunari highway. In 2011 the building of a highway through TIPNIS was planned. This was met by extreme protests from the indigenous communities as it would require clearing a massive area of land through the forest, and thus challenging the autonomy of the communities in the area. (García, Bolivia: Los porqués del conflicto del TIPNIS, 2011) Moreover, the plans were agreed upon, without consulting the autonomous communities of Yuracaré, Tsimane and Moxeño-Trinitario, through whose territories the highway would run, first. (CENDA, 2018) In this regard the Bolivian government could be understood as revoking some of the power these communities had already claimed through their autonomy over the TCO.

This conflict however, also illustrate the strength of collective power. As they had 20 years earlier with the MTD, the indigenous communities gathered and marched. The march followed the exact same route as the MTD, thus sending signals of communal power that transcended the highway conflict and made references to the march that some extend had laid the foundation for the government. These are very powerful signals to send, and challenge the governments claims of promoting empowerment and indigenous rights – and with this, the rights of nature. (CENDA, 2018; CEDIB, 2012), and the march led to massive protests once it reached La Paz. The pressure from the collective force of the protesters made the Brazilian Development Bank, Banco Nacional do Desenvolmiento (BNDES), who were funding the highway, cancel the contract due to the legal conflicts between the construction and the Mother Earth Law. (Global Witness, 2016)

The examples go to show that while there has been a high degree of both national and international influence on the Bolivian Forests, there is likewise a strong indigenous community, which through the power they find in the collective in different ways try to confront the challenges that is brought on them by the deforestation policies.

6. Reflections

What becomes apparent when looking at the analysis that is that the government do not have many alternatives but extractivist activities to fund their projects. Power in political ecology is defined "as a relational, situated and contingent capacity to act" (Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018, p. 384); On one hand, the government has very limited power to act; they are depending on the market for their social reforms. The government can in this regard be seen to be caught between public demands and promises to the indigenous movement who were part of getting Morales the presidency, and the international economic system. On the other hand, they have an undeniable capacity to create and shape the laws, legislations, budgets and strategies of the nation. In this capacity lies a degree of structural power.

The policies they are promoting shows a great deal of extractivist based development – exerting power over nature, rather than including it as 'part of the community' such as the 2012 Mother Earth law prescribes. The chain of explanation as presented by Robbins fit quite nicely into this picture; placing the national scale between the international and local scales. The progressive policies can be seen to be caught between the demand from the empowered indigenous movements and the realities of the ways they can be funded.

The challenge for Bolivia is thereby to find a balance between conservation and growth. While the Bolivian economy is growing, so are the deforestation rates. While other extractivist activities likewise contribute to the growing economy, which have not been the focus of this project, it is clear from the 2016-2020 development plan, cattle contracts with China and agricultural expansions, that Bolivia is counting on some income from increased deforestation.

These are some of the examples which serves to illustrate how Bolivia might be too depending on the market, to be able to make a complete shift towards the indigenous epistemological understanding of nature, such as it has been written in the Mother Earth Law. Much research (e.g. Gautreau & Bruslé, 2019; Müller, Pacheco, & Montero, 2014) argue that this is due to an unwillingness of shifting from neoliberal politics. Some of them define this as "post-neoliberalism"; that Bolivia in trying to break free of neoliberalism simply has created a new and unique type of neoliberalism.

My argument, however is that while the characteristics might be those of a typical neoliberal approach (commodifying nature and depending on an extractivist source of income), there is still a major focus on sustainability, food security, redistribution of wealth and indigenous autonomy over forest areas

and deforestation prevention strategies. These are tendencies that could indicate that the Bolivian government still intends to follow Buen Vivir and the indigenous epistemological understanding of nature, but simply do not have the power to break free of the international market economy. The tendencies with market dependency are typical for former colonial nations (Emel & Neo, 2011; Robbins, 2012). To further investigate this, it could prove relevant to include an international economic analysis, for example with the theoretical framework of the *Dutch Disease/Resource Curse,* to get an in-depth understanding of how economic dependency drives political choices. At the same time, it would be necessary to expand the focus from deforestation to a policy analysis of the whole development strategy and their total dependency on natural resource extraction (including natural gas, oil, mining etc.).

There is a tendency of breaking with the from the indigenous epistemology of Pachamama and the original ideas of Buen Vivirr, in the deforestation policies as they show clear signs of commodification of nature – which at its core is a complete opposite of the Pachamama ideals.

Bodur and Franseschet (2002), argue that often when members of movements become part of the state-system there is created a shift in the power relation; the members of the movements that move in to a status of structural or institutional power, become more empowered and often end up disempowering their former allies. This argument would need to be elaborated further through an analysis of the presidency of Evo Morales and his relations with the movements. What can be seen from this project is that through their development strategy, the government is buying into the hegemonic understanding of the commodification of nature, rather than making the paradigm shift towards nature as part of the community. This does not only have consequences for the forests, but also for the people living there. On one hand, the fires, threats of being forced to migrate and increased deforestation clearly show that in many instances the indigenous are powerless in the face of extraction and national legislation. On the other hand, the conflicts could in some instances seem to lead to the communities finding a collective resistance.

The conflict between *Buen Vivir* and the commodification of nature has created a discontent with the government policies that are exemplified in various ways, which have one common denominator: the power of the collective. This analysis has shown that there is ample reason to support the claim of Robbins (2012) that local populations find unity in the face of environmental challenges and empowerment-theory's claim that the capacity for change often comes from the power of the collective. Most clear is the example of the TIPNIS movement, which were capable of stopping the

construction of the TIPNIS highway through marches and protests where a large group of different indigenous communities came together; clearly demonstrating how environmental conflict can in some instances bring people together from different communities and ethnicities.

This capacity is regognised by the Bolivian government, and one of the key aspects in the government's plans to combat deforestation is the inclusion of the communities and their collective power. The success of this can be seen in the case of the Tacanas, who through collective power have significantly decreased deforestation rates in their territories. The government's role in this, however could be discussed. While autonomy has been granted through government institutions, it would not have been possible without CIPTA and the communities that are part of it. The situation of the Tacana peoples furthermore goes to show that empowerment is a process, and that what start as a movement for a specific right can lead to a self-sustaining enclave of communities, who in many ways have cracked the code for sustainable forestry. This only happens because they have found *collective power*. Where the Tacana before was threatened by deforestation and forced migration, they have now found an approach that sustains themselves and the nature around them. This shows a connection between deforestation prevention and empowerment, supporting the general claims of political ecologist that marginalization and degradation are often linked.

While data on this has been quite scarce there have been some suggestions that the individuals who do not have strong economic resources engage in deforestation to make room for agriculture and cattle production for a steadier income than forest livelihoods. This could indicate that those communities who are far in the empowerment process will be more likely to engage in conservation efforts than those who are not.

It is however essential to discuss that the communities, while autonomous are not completely free of the power exerted over their areas by the government or international institutions, as companies show growing interest in agriculture, oil and mining.

The rights to exploitation have historically always been granted by state, and increasingly high state management of forestry makes state institutions such as INRA and ABT act as intermediaries between the communities and the market. In this regard, communities that have the rights to the land, are still depending on the government to define how they can use it. This limits the autonomy greatly and with that also the possibilities for the empowerment processes; this raises the question of whether or not land in these instances really owned by the local communities.

The Guaraní communities try to get in front of possible environmental conflicts by making agreements with the companies interested in their lands; this could suggest a distrust in the governments capacity to protect them in the face of these conflicts. It also suggests that whilst some communities, such as the Tacana does manage to prevent deforestation as part of the empowerment process, others still engage in extractive activities, and depend on the income from large transnational corporations for funding. What these two cases have in common is that they both have tried to cut the ties with the national scale and the state's power; the Tacana by becoming self-sustaining, and the Guaraní by disregarding government development policies and directly contracting with the TNCs. This could prove an interesting case for further studies, comparing how the Tacana and the Guaraní respectively deal with the threat of international extractive interests.

To say that deforestation is the reason behind most indigenous movements in Bolivia, would be an overstatement. The environment and rights over ancestral territories (and with that the limitation of international and national influence) however remain a central point and one of the great challenges to this is deforestation (Müller, Pacheco, & Montero, 2014), however, other extractive activities (such as oil and mining) are also contributing to these tendencies, which should be included in further research.

This signifies that while there might be a great deal of empowerment happening within indigenous communities; especially when considering *collective power*, they are to some extent still *powerless*, when looking at the bigger picture.

In this regard Political Ecology and Empowerment complement each other nicely. The multi-scalar approach to actors' power over nature has given insight into how the market affects the governments' decision making, and how in turn, this affects the indigenous communities. Empowerment has especially been capable of showing how indigenous empowerment emerge from the collective. However, data on the national and global scales have been much more accessible than that of the local scale. The three examples that have been drawn in this project, with the TIPNIS movements, the Tacana and Guaraní autonomous communities are some of the more prominent examples – some of those who 'speak the loudest', so to say. The data found has thereby mostly been from indigenous movements protesting the deforestation; this has on one hand shown that there is an extent of social movements rising to face the deforestation processes. This was expected when comparing these findings to those of Robbins on movements in Belize and Ecuador. On the other hand, this data mostly

proves the point of collective power, as presented by Parpart, Rai & Staudt (2002). From this, however it cannot be assumed that all indigenous find collective power and engage in empowerment processes in the face of environmental degradation, but rather that data is not available from those who are not as far in the process of empowerment, or so isolated that data collection is difficult and not easily accessed. The matter here, is of course, that it leaves a gab in the research, which raises new questions for further inquiry: What about those who are not protesting the deforestation loudly or actively engaged in processes of change? How do they experience deforestation – and is there a possibility that some are benefitting from these new reforms? It is somewhat implied in the INDESAD/DANIDA rapport that there are communities and small hold farmers who participate in deforestation, because cattle production gives a larger income than forest livelihoods, but this data would need to be substantiated with the perspectives of those indigenous communities.

There are thereby many different angles to the question of the implications of deforestation for the indigenous communities. Some have experienced an increased empowerment and control over the areas in the wake of protest over extractivist activities on their lands, while others are seemingly participating in the deforestation activities, and others might be yet to be investigated.

Ultimately, deforestation policies and their implementation serve to illustrate that some of the central conflict between the (former) Bolivian government, and the indigenous communities are perhaps not a question of *buen vivir,* or no *buen vivir,* but should rather be seen as a clash between social development and environmental protection within the *Buen vivir* ideology. While the government can be seen as intending to keep within the ideology of *Buen Vivir,* the high degree of market dependency inhibits this shift towards a more Pachamamist understanding of nature, thus creating discontent within the indigenous communities.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this project was to discuss the role of deforestation in Bolivian development plans, and how this in turn has affected the indigenous communities and movements, to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between environment, politics, economics, and the indigenous.

Political Ecologist argue that all environmental impacts should be viewed as multi-scalar and interconnected. In this regard all actors are seen as holding power over the environment, but the environment might likewise affect upward on the flowchart, changing the way policies are conducted and communities organize. Deforestation in Bolivia is not an exception.

Deforestation is the result of many different factors and actors in Bolivia as well as internationally. Many scholars have claimed the increasing deforestation (and extraction of other resources) in Bolivia, to be an unwillingness to break from the neoliberal policies.

However, from the perspective of Political Ecology, this project has shown that deforestation in Bolivia is a more complex situation of power influence by different actors. It is not just a question of bad government management leading to marginalization and degradation. Deforestation does, in the terms of agricultural expansion, play a central role in financing the Bolivian development (alongside natural gas extraction and mining), but mostly due to a high degree of market dependency which is difficult to break free from, when trying to implement increasingly ambitious social reforms.

This has led to a continuance of the commodification of nature, which stands as a direct contrast to the general political discourse of Buen Vivir and the indigenous epistemology of Pachamama. Pachamama, living in harmony with nature as a part of the community, which laid the foundation for the Buen Vivir ideology, is thereby threatened by Bolivia's high degree of market dependency for financing their development projects.

This has not only been found to be true in relation to the development plan on a national scale, but also in the communities, where it is often more profitable to engage in e.g. cattle ranching or soy production, than forest livelihoods. Marginalization and poverty can thereby be seen as threats to conservation efforts. To say that the indigenous communities are powerless, however would also be mistaken.

Deforestation in Bolivia has led to forced migrations, disputes over land and fires that threaten many communities; but it has also created a surge of indigenous movements and shown their capacity for mobilization and finding alternatives to the government-driven deforestation. Through the

Many of the rights and social reforms that have been implemented can be attributed to what started with the MTD and has continued up through the Morales government period, up until today. This clearly illustrates that indigenous empowerment is an ongoing process and an ongoing struggle and that it is often incited by environmental disputes.

Linking this to empowerment theory, this insinuates that there might be a correlation between *collective power* and forest conservation: While further data would need to be collected on this matter, the situation of the Tacana community and the TIPNIS movements rising up against deforestation and the individual communities that have been found to partake in the process could show that from the collective power the deforestation in Bolivia to some extent creates a stronger collective. However, on the other hand, there are also data indicating that those who are not engaged in the indigenous movements partake in the deforestation practices as they are more profitable than forest livelihoods.

Empowerment theory and Political Ecology have proven a good combination for studying empowerment processes in relation to environmental degradation and have in this project shown that there is a strong interconnection between the different scales who exert power over nature. Deforestation has played a significant role in the Bolivian development model and has had implications not only nationally but to a large extent both positive and negative implications in the communities.

8. References

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