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between Pachamama and Mother Earth: gender, political ontology and the rights of nature in contemporary Bolivia

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abstract

Focusing on contemporary Bolivia, this article examines promises and pitfalls of political and legal initiatives that have turned Pachamama into a subject of rights. The conferral of rights on the indigenous earth being had the potential to unsettle the Western ontological distinction between active human subjects who engage in politics and passive natural resources. This essay, however, highlights some paradoxical effects of the rights of nature in Bolivia, where Evo Morales' model of development relies on the intensification of the export-oriented extractive economy. Through the analysis of a range of texts, including paintings, legal documents, political speeches and activist interventions, I consider the equivocation between the normatively gendered Mother Earth that the state recognises as the subject of rights, and the figure of Pachamama evoked by feminist and indigenous activists. Pachamama, I suggest, has been incorporated into the Bolivian state as a being whose generative capacities have been translated into a rigid gender binary. As a gendered subject of rights, Pachamama/Mother Earth is exposed to governmental strategies that ultimately increase its subordination to state power. The concluding remarks foreground the import of feminist perspectives in yielding insights concerning political ontological conflicts.

keywords

rights of nature; Pachamama; extractivism; decolonial feminism; indigenous political ontology; Bolivia

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In April 2010, a large network of indigenous groups, climate activists, feminists and NGOs came together in the Bolivian town of Tiquipaya for the World's People Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Nature. Bolivian indigenous president Evo Morales gave an impassioned inaugural speech. He recalled the fiasco of global governance in Copenhagen, where the year before the so-called developed countries had failed to reach a binding agreement for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Invoking Pachamama, the indigenous term for the vitality that animates the earth, he asserted that, 'We have two paths: either Pachamama or death. Either capitalism lives or Mother Earth lives. Of course, brothers and sisters, we are here for life, for humanity, and for the rights of Mother Earth. Long life to the rights of Mother Earth! Death to capitalism!' (Morales in *Democracy Now!*, 2010). Morales' cry is a striking example of the political mobilisation of Pachamama in Latin American politics. This speech defines Pachamama in post-Enlightenment terms as the subject of rights that is threatened by the unbridled commodification of the material world. Capitalist development, Morales indicates, stands in opposition to the flourishing of Pachamama on which human life depends.

The reference to Pachamama/Mother Earth, a fixture of Morales' public speeches and appearances, is powerful in many ways. It summons to the political scene an entity of indigenous cosmology that is still central for Andean communities (de la Cadena, 2010, 2015). It suggests that its persistence is at odds with ongoing processes of dispossession that fuel colonialist and capitalist social relations. With a move intended to place Bolivia at the forefront of transnational climate justice movements, Morales has connected the indigenous Pachamama to a key figure of global environmentalism: the earth as a mother in need of saving. As rising temperatures accelerate glacial retreat and dry up Bolivian bodies of water, this would seem a necessary gesture of a leader with direct experience of the effects of climate change. Yet, as I show in this article, the rendering of Pachamama as a gendered subject of rights is also problematic when enacted within a project of state consolidation that heavily relies on the expansion of extractive industries.

Using feminist and decolonial theory for analysing political events, visual artifacts, legal documents and activist interventions, this essay explores the equivocation surrounding Pachamama and Mother Earth. It considers its manifestations in the interactions between Morales' government and Bolivian feminists in a context marked by the protagonism of indigenous peoples and cosmovisions. Inspired by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004), I use equivocation to index a disjuncture between different ways of making worlds—that is, networks of living and nonliving beings, locations and meanings. Insofar as worlds are not static realities enclosed in themselves, the notion of equivocation is useful for interrogating uneven power relations and processes of translation in colonial and postcolonial encounters. As a mode of communication occurring between different perspectival positions, equivocation allows us to attend to the ways in which indigenous alterity is acknowledged or disregarded through acts of colonial violence and assimilation. While it recognises mixtures and exchanges, this concept also points to the ways in which colonised people have learned to carve out spaces of autonomy within ongoing colonial relations.

Building upon notions of radical alterity and equivocation, scholars of indigenous movements have looked at recent uprisings in Latin America as instances of an insurgent 'political ontology' that challenges the hegemonic Western partition between humans who speak through politics and nature that speaks through science (Latour, 2004; de la Cadena, 2010; Blaser, 2013). In the invocation of Pachamama/Mother Earth as a subject of rights, they see a challenge to the Western exclusion of

nonhumans from the political fold. However, the normative gendering of Pachamama in the Bolivian context raises questions about the role of gender and sexuality in the power-laden relations that inform political ontology. This essay interrogates the political stakes of translating the indigenous Pachamama as the normatively gendered Mother Earth. I begin by introducing Pachamama, its place in Andean cosmologies and the historical processes through which the Andean entity has been rendered as a maternal being. Next, I explore what happens when Pachamama becomes a gendered subject whose rights depend on a state committed to an extractive model of development. In discussing how Bolivian decolonial feminists contest the conflation between Pachamama and Mother Earth, I argue that these activists unsettle both the Western separation between nature and politics *and* the hierarchical organisation of gender reproduced through state recognition. Feminist interventions show that the equivocation around Pachamama and Mother Earth is tied to issues of state power, gender, nature and property. In the concluding remarks, I offer some considerations about the import of feminist perspectives in yielding insights about political ontologies.

colonial translations

To be sure, the association of Pachamama with the image of maternal wholeness does not begin with Evo Morales' government. So, how did the translation of Pachamama as a nurturing mother come into being and with what effects? The analysis of precolonial histories and colonial chronicles reveals that the inscription of the ancient Andean deity in a normative maternal imaginary has roots in the European project of conquering indigenous worlds. These texts describe the Andean entity in terms that closely resemble Christian notions of proper femininity. But they also highlight different, decidedly less reassuring images of the earth which remain relevant in contemporary Andean life. In what follows, I consider the process of colonial translation that has rendered Pachamama as a normatively gendered being, part of what feminist philosopher Maria Lugones (2010) calls the 'colonial gender system'.

Indigenous thinkers and scholars of the Andes describe Pachamama as the earth's generative powers (Silverblatt, 1987; Pacari, 2009), and 'the very construction of life itself' (Macas, 2010, p. 19) that provides the condition of possibility for human life. Although the precolonial Pachamama was usually translated as Earth-Mother or World-Mother and connected to fertility, it was not primarily defined through the qualities of purity and moral virtue that characterised the Virgin Mary. Throughout the period of European colonisation, however, this Andean being was associated with the Virgin and turned into a nurturing mother. The trope of Pachamama as *madre tierra* (earth mother) appears frequently in the writings of Spanish chroniclers. The missionary Cristóbal de Molina, author of *Chronicle of the Fables and Myths of the Incas* (2011 [1573]), described offerings and prayers to Pachamama, regarded by the Incas as their mother and the mother of fire, corn and other seeds. Alonso Ramos Gavilán, an Augustinean friar dispatched to Peru in the early seventeenth century, related that the 'Indians' worshipped the earth and offered sacrifices (Davidson, 2010). According to Gavilán (in *ibid*., p. 36) they asked 'her to respond to them like a good mother, nourishing her children, and they called her Pachamama, which means Mother Earth'.

The identification of Pachamama with the Virgin Mary can be observed in a series of eighteenth-century paintings in which the body of the Christian mother is shaped as a mountain. Among these, the

anonymous *Virgen del Cerro* (1720) (*Virgin of the Mountain of Potosí*, now in the collection of the Museum Casa Nacional de Moneda in Potosí) is the most well-known. Here the image of the Virgin is conflated with Potosí, the silver-rich mountain that, starting in the sixteenth century, became the economic heart of the Spanish colonial empire. Mary's head radiates and her hands, framed by the triangular shape of the mountain, are opened in a hieratic gesture. Her vestment is richly decorated with paths, vegetation, animals, indigenous people, Spaniards and Inca rulers. The Virgin and the Andean landscape form a single entity; she is one with the earth that makes up the mountain. The Holy Trinity holds the crown above Mary's head. The European powers, the Pope and the Spanish king, appear at her feet, surrounding a terrestrial globe to be conquered and mapped. On either side are the Sun and the Moon, two important figures of Inca cosmology.

According to the Bolivian art historian Teresa Gisbert (1994, p. 20), 'the identification of Mary with a mountain, whether it is Potosí, Puracani, or Sabaya, is similar to her identification with Mother Earth. Mary substitutes the spirits of the mountains identifying herself with the earth, which is the material from which these are made'. Gisbert contends that in the process of assimilation to Christianity, Pachamama has become a universal divinity, a single goddess that subsumes the multiplicity of Andean deities. Yet, the assimilation of Pachamama into the Christian framework presented several difficulties. Although linked to generative earthly powers, 'the Indian deity is not virginal, chaste, or pure' (Salles Reese, 1997, p. 38). For the European missionaries, Pachamama and the Andean women who revered it also evoked lust, lasciviousness and moral chaos.

Art historian Carolyn Dean (2010, pp. 68–96) observes that in the ancient Andean world, Pachamama was feminine, while discrete parts of the landscape, such as stones and mountains, were often described as male. The Inca interacted with Pachamama through a range of agricultural and architectural techniques which integrated features of the landscape into the built environment. The outcomes of these relational practices were uncertain; they could bring prosperity as well as destruction. Archaeological records of pre-Hispanic time indicate constant negotiations between people and unpredictable earthly powers. The affirmation and preservation of Inca political power required a struggle for bringing unruly nonhuman beings under control through persuasion, cajoling or the use of force (Wilkinson, 2013). When treated with respect, the earth could respond with abundant harvests. Failure to pay proper attention to Pachamama, however, could lead to arid soils, illnesses and even death. Although capable of generating life, the pre-Hispanic Pachamama could hardly be described as a benevolent, all-giving mother.

In the *Virgen del Cerro*, Mary's body is mapped onto Pachamama and other Andean earth beings. The eighteenth-century painting expresses the imposition of the European order on the Andean world. Within this order, the Virginal earth functions as a conduit, a mediator, for the relationship between divine power and worldly authorities. Unlike Pachamama, this feminine figure has no powers of her own, only that which is given to her by the fatherly sky. One could interpret this as the imposition of the nascent modern European political ontology and its dualistic logic over indigenous configurations of politics.

Throughout Western modernity, the relation between nature and society has been organised around a rigid binary in which the earth constitutes the feminised and racialised backdrop for human endeavours. Andean ontology, instead, privileges complementary pairs whose positionality shifts rather than being

fixed and permanent. Oppositional elements require a third space, the space of coming together and conjoining.[1] Writing about the animated landscape of the Incas, Dean (2010, p. 96) notes, 'the particular gendering of space, natural forms, and even people shifts depending on the relationship of the complements to one another in a particular instance'. Pachamama is a central other-than-human entity in the Andean cosmovision that, despite being usurped by Christian/European monotheism and relegated to the realms of superstition and folklore, remains important for contemporary Andean communities. The indigenous jurist Nina Pacari (2009, p. 32) explains that in the Andean cosmovision, 'all beings of nature are invested with an energy called *samai* and, as a consequence, they are living beings: a rock, a river (water), a mountain, the sun, the plants, that is, all beings are alive and also enjoy being part of a family, (and feel) happiness and sadness as human beings do'. Pacari defines Pachamama as a woman capable of generating life; however, the relation between masculinity and femininity, what indigenous people call *chachawarmi*, is not always one of rigid opposition.

Feminist philosopher Maria Lugones (2010) elucidates the complexity of current uses of *chachawarmi*, a term often translated in the binary terms of man/woman. She suggests that this concept simultaneously conveys and exceeds the fixed, hierarchical, heterosexual opposition between man/woman that has been imposed through the coloniality of gender[2] on 'cosmologies incompatible with the modern logic of dichotomies' (*ibid.*, p. 743). Drawing on the work of the Aymara linguist Filomena Miranda, Lugones contends that the complementarity expressed by *chachawarmi* needs to be thought in relation with *utjana*, the communal dwelling in the land. Taken together, these concepts situate practices of complementarity within communal living. In the context of Aymara communities, *chachawarmi* refers to what one does rather than what one is. For example, when Miranda, a scholar who lives in the city of La Paz, is called to participate in the government of her *ayllu*, she does so with her sister thereby taking the place of their father and mother (the *ayllus* is a concept to which I will return in a moment). By doing that, she becomes *chachawarmi* without being man/woman. As Lugones points out, however, *chachawarmi* also carries a normative meaning in the everyday life of contemporary Bolivian indigenous communities. Complementarity can conceal power hierarchies that subordinate women to men, economically and politically. For Lugones (*ibid.*, p. 748) such translation of *chachawarmi*, reveals how 'the long process of subjectification of the colonized toward adoption/internalization of the men/women dichotomy as a normative construction of the social [...] was and is constantly renewed'. *Chachawarmi,* in other words, is normatively translated but, at the same time, also practised and lived in ways that differ from the colonial/modern gender system.

Thus far I have identified ongoing colonial processes through which Pachamama has been reframed as a normatively gendered figure. I suggest that its assimilation to the nurturing Virgin Mary, and the attempted erasure of earthly powers incompatible with the colonial project of appropriation, prepared the ground for the conflation between Pachamama and Mother Earth. Yet these are figures with different genealogies, involved in different practices. Mother Earth has been a ubiquitous presence in transnational environmental organisations and movements. Some ecofeminists employ it to elaborate on the ways in which reproductive capacities across species have been a site of accumulation for colonial

[1]In her study of the Mesoamerican world, Sylvia Marcos (2006) describes a precolonial cosmology centred on a fluid duality and a shifting balance achieved through continuous movements.
[2]Refusing to adopt gender as a category that organises social life across time and space, Lugones (2007) argues that colonial power employed the binary gender system as part of a broader strategy to dehumanise colonised populations and control territories and sexualities.

capitalism. Advocating a re-enchantment of the world, the Indian scientist and activist Vandana Shiva (2006) reclaims Mother Earth as the harmonious web of life, supporting beings that inhabit the planet. For other feminist thinkers, however, Mother Earth is problematically associated with naturalised heterosexism and the reduction of women to reproductive functions (Sandilands, 1999; Alaimo, 2000). Furthermore, the reassuring image of the benevolent earth obfuscates the turbulent complexity of geological, biological and chemical processes that human action affects and amplifies but is not capable of controlling (Tola, 2016). As Stacy Alaimo (2016, p. 535) puts it, Mother Earth encourages 'humans to expect to be coddled and loved unconditionally by the planet'. In the next sections, I show how in recent Latin American politics, Pachamama has been translated and mobilised in divergent ways, some of which conflate the Andean being with a Mother Earth whose reproductive powers are placed under state control. I explore the relationship between the framing of Pachamama/Mother Earth within a patriarchal and heteronormative version of *chachawarmi* and its incorporation into the juridical framework of the Bolivian state. Moreover, I consider how Bolivian feminists, some of them active in indigenous movements, many others working in alliance with indigenous women, understand Pachamama in ways that challenge the extractivist politics of gender and nature.

the rights of Pachamama

Part of the leftist tide that swept Latin America between 1999 and 2008,[3] the rise to power of Evo Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia was the outcome of a prolonged season of political unrest that overthrew two neo-liberal presidents. In the early 2000s, street protests, strikes and road blockades successfully opposed the privatisation of the public water system in the city of Cochabamba, a neo-liberal reform that the World Bank had negotiated in exchange for US$600 million in debt relief (Hindery, 2013, p. 60). The water war was a catalyst for other social movements, including protests against the privatisation of natural gas in the indigenous city of El Alto and a movement of unionised coca growers contesting US-led drug policies in the Andes.

Although the mobilisations in Bolivia involved a multitude of political subjects, including rural and urban water committees, farmers, factory workers, coca growers, women and miners, the presence of indigenous organisations and world views was central. In the Cochabamba water war, for example, campaign posters referred to the role of Andean deities in the resistance to neo-liberal privatisation: 'Pachamama, Wiracocha, and Tata Dios gave [water] for us to live, not to do business with' (Andolina, Laurie and Radclifee, 2009, p. 144). The words of the Aymara scholar Pablo Mamani Ramirez are helpful in making sense of this claim. Ramirez (2004, p. 81) writes, 'in the logic of the *ayllus*, water cannot be bought or sold, or subjected to market logic because water is a vital part of life: it is the blood of the Pachamama'. This means that in the *ayllu*, a precolonial form of collective life which is still practiced in the Andes, water is not just a natural resource but constitutes an expression of Pachamama, a being that participates in the life of indigenous communities.

[3]After a decade of leftist governance, Latin American nations including Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela have moved to the right, with conservative elites capitalising on growing popular discontent and economic decline.

The anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2015) further clarifies this point by identifying the *ayllu* as a socio-natural formation created by the interactions between human and other-than-human beings. The *ayllu*, she argues, is formed through the negotiations between the indigenous people in the Andes (the *runakuna*) and a multitude of earth beings (*tirakuna*) made of earth and water. In the Andes, from Peru to Bolivia, collectives of humans and other-than-human beings, including Pachamama, have assumed political valences when confronted with the neo-liberal privatisation of natural 'resources' such as water, mineral-rich mountains and land. In this sense, contemporary indigenous struggles are not just struggles *for* resources. Rather, they constitute the insurgence of a political ontology that, unlike the Western modern political arrangement, does not entail a distinction between active human subjects and malleable natural resources. From this perspective, contemporary indigenous movements, as part of a long effort to persist in the context of ongoing colonial relations, illuminate disparate ontologies and ways of making worlds that exceed the Western single notion of reality.

Approved in 2009, the Bolivian plurinational constitution formalised into law and incorporated into the state elements of indigenous political ontologies. Its distinctive feature, also present in the Ecuadorian constitution passed in 2008, is the use of the indigenous notion of *vivir bien* or *buen vivir* (from the Aymara term *suma qamaña* and the Quechua *sumaq kawsay*) as organising the principle of collective life. Used since the early 2000s by indigenous intellectuals and translated into English as 'living in plenitude', *vivir bien* has been taken up by a variety of political actors including government officials, environmentalists and feminists critical of the Western model of development. David Choquehuanca (2010), an Aymara activist and Bolivian Minister of Foreign Affairs until 2017, has described *vivir bien* as a mode of living that differs from the capitalist concept of *vivir mejor* (living better). *Vivir bien*, Choquehuanca (*ibid*., p. 452) writes, means 'to reclaim our life in complete harmony and mutual respect with mother nature, with Pachamama [...] where we are all part of nature and there is nothing separate'. For Ecuadorian indigenous activist Mónica Chuji (in Lalander, 2014, p. 154), *buen vivir* implies an understanding of nature as an inherent part of the social fabric rather than a factor of production. Gesturing towards the alliance between indigenous struggles and other social movements, the sociologist Eduardo Gudynas (2011) has argued that *buen vivir* is rooted in indigenous lifeways and connected to feminist and environmentalist efforts to create alternatives to Western projects of development. What is remarkable about the Bolivian and the Ecuadorian legal framings of *buen vivir* is that they define nature or Pachamama in the post-Enlightenment terms of rights.[4] These measures constitute what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012, p. 39) calls 'juridic hybrids'. Taking up elements of different legal systems, they combine aspects of Western notions of rights with indigenous views of justice.

The Ecuadorian constitution explicitly links *buen vivir* to a distinctive conception of Pachamama 'of which we are all part and is vital to our existence' (*Constitition of the Republic of Ecuador,* 2011 [2008]). The constitutional preamble articulates the project of constructing a 'new form of citizenship coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature' (*ibid.*). Elaborating on this new form of citizenship, Article 71 declares that Pachamama 'has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles' (*ibid.*). Although former Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa, an urban,

[4]First published in 1972, the pioneering essay *Should Trees Have Standing?* by legal scholar Christopher Stone (1996 [1972]), provides an example of the Western liberal argument for the rights of nature. Stone's proposal to enroll nature into the realm of law has influenced Western NGOs that promote the rights of nature at the transnational level. These include the US-based Pachamama Alliance and the American Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), which played an important role in the Ecuadorian campaign for granting legal standing to Pachamama (Fitz-Henry, 2012).

Catholic, non-indigenous politician, was elected with the support of indigenous organisations that assumed *sumak kawsay* as a key principle, he repeatedly declared that the inclusion of Pachamama in the constitution was a concession to the 'infantile' demands of indigenous groups and environmentalists. While Correa signaled his discomfort with the conception of Pachamama as a right-bearing entity, Evo Morales embraced the Andean being as central in the pursuit of the *proceso de cambio* (process of change). Although the Bolivian constitution does not go as far as to establish Pachamama as a subject of rights, *vivir bien* and the rights of Mother Earth have ranked high in the political agenda of Morales' government.

A former coca-grower union leader and the first self-identified Aymara president of a country where, according to the 2012 national population Census, 42 per cent of the population identifies as part of an indigenous group (a precipitous drop from the 62 per cent of 2001) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2013),[5] Evo Morales' leadership emerged out of social movements. He came to power with the promise to reinstitute the dignity and sovereignty of indigenous people and reverse decades of neo-liberal hegemony in the country. Yet, he has come under scrutiny for sexist and homophobic remarks,[6] and in 2016 lost a referendum on a constitutional amendment that would have allowed him to run for a fourth term in 2020. This contradictory political figure has turned the generativity of Pachamama/Mother Earth into an asset for bolstering both economic growth and his own reputation in climate-change negotiations. As I recalled in the opening of this article, Morales took a leading role in the World People's Conference on Climate Change and urged the General Assembly of the United Nations to adopt the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth* drafted in Tiquipaya.[7] In 2012, the Bolivian Legislative Assembly passed the *Framework Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well (Ley marco de la Madre Tierra y desarrollo integral para vivir bien)* (La Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, 2012), which connects the guiding principle of *vivir bien* to the rights of nature. Remarkable in many ways, the law defines Mother Earth as a juridical person and establishes that natural processes 'are not considered commodities, but gifts of the sacred Mother Earth' (*ibid.*, p. 4). The law, a compromise between the exigencies of economic growth and the pressures of indigenous groups and other activists, mentions the environmental impact of the hydrocarbon and mining sectors and obliges the state to prevent any harm to Mother Earth. It declares that indigenous communities have the right to be consulted about development projects affecting their territories, but they do not have the power to veto them.

Legal initiatives for the rights of nature in Bolivia and Ecuador raised hope and excitement among indigenous organisations, environmental groups and intellectuals. Eduardo Gudynas (2011, p. 445), who collaborated with the Ecuadorian Legislative Assembly, claimed with hope that *buen vivir* and the rights of nature opened up the space for a new conception of political community, one that includes nonhumans as part of an extended polity. Such a reconfigured polity would have destabilised modern Western political ontologies

[5]The statistics about the decrease of indigenous populations provoked much debate in Bolivia. The political analyst Pablo Stefanoni (2016) points out that one of the factors causing this change was the terminology used in the Census. Whereas in 2001, the Census asked whether individuals identified with an 'indigenous or native' group (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2001), in 2012 it adopted the category 'indigenous native peasant' (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2013), already present in the new Constitution and the legal framework promoted by the MAS government. The conflation between indigenous people and rural peasants may have dissuaded many urban dwellers from self-identifying as indigenous. According to the Aymara sociologist and activist Silvia Rivera Cusincanqui (2015, p. 88), the Census results show that the MAS policies turned 'the indigenous majority into a minority' by creating a division between rural populations and mestizo urban sectors.

[6]Morales is notorious for sexist and homophobic comments. In 2011, during the protests over the project of building a 190-mile road cutting through the indigenous territory known as TIPNIS, he called on his supporters to seduce indigenous women so that they would stop opposing the road. In 2015, Morales interrupted an official speech when he noticed that the Health Minister Ariana Campero was not paying attention. According to media reports, he said, 'I don't want to think that you're a lesbian. Listen to me' (La Razón, 2015).

[7]World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, 'Rights of Mother Earth: proposal *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*', https://pwccc.wordpress.com/programa/ [last accessed 8 February 2018].

centred on individual human agents that converge in the sovereign nation state through the social contract. In recent years, however, a widening rift has emerged between extractivist states that confer rights on Pachamama and social movements opposing developmentalist agendas.

Since the MAS rose to power, it has been relying on the expansion of the extractive industries as a source of revenues for supporting social services and anti-poverty measures. The Marxist intellectual and Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera (in Webber, 2011, pp. 98–99) has called this project 'Andean-Amazonian capitalism' and has defended it as a necessary step towards socialist transformation. The land areas conceded to gas and oil companies have increased from 7.2 million acres in 2007 to 59.3 million in 2012 (Achtenberg, 2015). Large-scale projects in the hydrocarbon and mining sectors have been booming under the MAS administration. As a result, exploration and drilling activities are threatening water streams, producing toxic waste and transforming indigenous landscapes. In recent years, the Bolivian government has invested about one-billion US dollars in the development of the gas industry and expanded Bolivian networks of interdependence with foreign capital. The largest share of Bolivia's gas goes to Brazil through the Brazilian state-run company Petrobras, and to Argentina through the Spanish company Repsol (Fabricant and Gustafson, 2016). Only about 10 per cent of Bolivian gas is used for domestic consumption. In the mining industry, transnational companies often operate through a network of independent local cooperatives that in some cases disregard labour and environmental standards. The government is currently directing large investments in the extraction and production of lithium, a rare mineral used for smartphones, computers and electric car batteries. German and Chinese enterprises are providing financing and technology for exploiting the abundant lithium reserves located in the salt plains of southwestern Bolivia. The risk of extensive toxic damage resulting from the use of chemical solvents, however, is raising concerns among indigenous groups and environmentalists.

Continuing along this path, in May 2015, Morales issued a Supreme Decree that opened a number of protected areas and indigenous territories to processes of extraction (Achtenberg, 2015). In the summer of 2017, Bolivia passed a law that put back on the table the much-contested construction of a road cutting through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (known as TIPNIS), where about 30 per cent of land has been allotted to hydrocarbon concessions.[8] Large sectors of the Bolivian population still support what Jeffrey Webber (2016) calls the MAS politics of 'extractive distribution', which has reduced poverty and illiteracy and increased spending in infrastructures. But Morales faces the growing opposition of indigenous organisations, feminist groups, urban youth and environmentalists. Already in 2012, for example, the federation of Bolivian highland indigenous people, CONAMAQ, dissociated itself from the *Framework Law of Mother Earth*. For the organisation, the law is at odds with the indigenous cosmovision because it prioritises an economic logic that frames Pachamama and nature as a resource available to appropriation. According to CONAMAQ, the law takes an instrumental approach to the rights of nature (Carta de la Brigada Indígena, 2012). This position partially overlaps with that of the feminist group Feminismo Comunitario, which I discuss in the following section. Although indigenous

[8]The conflict around the TIPNIS has been a political minefield for the MAS government. Indigenous groups fiercely oppose the road project designed to connect the Andean and Amazonian regions and facilitate hydrocarbon exploration. In 2011, a protest march to La Paz was brutally repressed by the national police. In the wake of public outrage over the police response to protests, Morales announced the cancellation of the TIPNIS highway. The law passed in 2017 reversed this decision.

organisations and feminist groups do not propose a unified discourse in relation to Pachamama, they invoke this figure in ways that diverge from governmental narratives and policies.

Several excellent analyses of the processes of accumulation taking place in Bolivia have discussed its socioecological implications (Hindery, 2013; Fabricant and Gustafson, 2016) and its class content (Webber, 2011, 2016). My primary interest here is in the under-explored gendered dimension underlying the incorporation of Pachamama in the process of state building. The strategic '*pachamamismo*'[9] articulated by Morales, privileges a personified version of this earth being. While inaugurating new gas lines for poor urban households in Bolivia, Morales thanks Mother Earth for providing the country with cheap gas. In the international scene, he positions himself as the protector of a feminine figure in need of saving from the plundering of savage capitalism. I want to suggest that the Bolivian government frames Pachamama as a benevolent mother whose re/productive powers, including the 'gifts' of oil, gas and lithium, are placed under state control. Through a process of colonial translation, the state turns this earthly force into a normatively gendered subject. It confers rights on 'her' while at the same time asserts its sovereignty over her mineral gifts.

Scholars working within feminist, queer and indigenous studies have demonstrated that the politics of state recognition is laden with paradoxes, failed promises and regulative effects (Brown, 2002; Povinelli, 2002; Coulthard, 2014). In Gayatri Spivak's (1999, p. 172) idiom, rights are that which we cannot not want. But rights do not come by themselves. They are fought for and conferred, usually by a state that recognises claims for rights and governs through them. Given the current intensification of extractive economies and the commodification of the earth, the rights of Pachamama/Mother Earth might be something one cannot not want but whose regulative effects need critical questioning. The inscription of Pachamama/Mother Earth in the Bolivian legal framework has produced a new subject of rights, but one ultimately subordinated to the state that exercises sovereign power through law. In Bolivia, feminist responses to the political use of Pachamama have done much to highlight the connection between the normative gendering of the Andean matrix of life and the regulative effects of the politics of rights.

equivocations between Pachamama and Mother Earth

Bolivian feminist groups have taken issue with Evo Morales' political use of Pachamama. Their words and deeds bring into relief the tension between the normative translation of Pachamama performed by the state, and the articulation of different possibilities of thinking and dwelling in the earth. Departing from those Western feminist orientations that embrace the modern investment in the individual, private property and a linear conception of time, the organisation Feminismo Comunitario weaves together feminism, the critique of the ongoing colonial dispossession, and indigenous cosmology. On several occasions, the group has complicated the rendering of Pachamama as Mother Earth. In a statement issued at the People's World Conference on Climate Change, Feminismo Comunitario (2010) noted, 'We understand Pachahama, the Mapu, as a whole that goes beyond visible nature. [...] We argue that the understanding of Pachamama as synonymous with Mother Earth is reductionist and sexist, as it refers to reproductive capacities only to keep women and the Pachamama under patriarchal power'. The activists

[9] For a critical view of *pachamamismo* as ideology, see Cuelenaere and Rabasa (2012).

do not entirely reject the rights of Pachamama nor its characterisation as female. But they problematise its conflation with Mother Earth on three counts.

First, there is the matter of property: 'while people are part of the Pachamama, the Pachamama does not belong to anyone' (*ibid.*, 2010). This means that as the vital energy that provides the condition of possibility for disparate beings, and an impersonal force that exceeds the image of the nurturing Mother Earth, Pachamama cannot be reduced to natural resources to be appropriated, extracted and transformed in the process of economic development. Second, there is the problem of rendering Pachamama/Mother Earth as an all-giving female body and, by association, of confining women to the realms of reproduction and care. The state's exploitation of the corporeal resources of Pachamama is connected to the control and exploitation of women's bodies and labour within a patriarchal context. Such criticism assumes particular relevance in a country where abortion remains illegal except for cases of incest or rape, and where over the last few years there has been a shift towards the extreme precarisation of female labour (Webber, 2016).

Third, there is the question of positioning Pachamama within a heteronormative understanding of *chachawarmi*. Specifically, Feminismo Comunitario opposes the reference to the cosmos as father in debates about *vivir bien* and the Andean cosmovision. The Aymara intellectual Fernando Huanacuni Mamani, a law professor and official of the Morales' administration, offers an eloquent example of this particular version of Andean complementarity.[10] Huanacuni Mamani (2010, p. 76) writes, 'According to the original indigenous cosmovision, we are children of the Cosmos and Mother Earth; all that exists is generated by them. [...] Life emerges from this relation of complementary pairing ... This implies going back to forming enduring relationships like our ancestors lived ... It is necessary to re-establish the man-woman relationship but as an enduring relationship'. For Feminismo Comunitario, however, the reference to the fatherly Cosmos by indigenous thinkers close to the government is an attempt to domesticate Pachamama, to minimise and subordinate its powers to a masculine heterosexual authority. Mujeres Creando, an anarcho-urban feminist collective based in La Paz, has expressed similar concerns. In a text collectively written during the process of constitutional revision, the collective notes that the version of *chachawarmi* taken up by the Morales administration establishes an obligatory hierarchical relationship between man and woman (Galindo and Creando, 2014). These positions coalesce productively with Maria Lugones' (2010) argument about the ambiguity of *chachawarmi* in contemporary Bolivia.[11] This concept can be reconfigured in practices that emphasise a shifting complementarity or are translated and embodied according to the hierarchical gender binary that produces the naturalisation of women's oppression.

These feminist contestations expose some perplexing aspects of the entry of Pachamama in Latin American politics. The state has recognised the earthly force as a subject endowed with political rights, but one that in the process has assumed normative gendered features and is subordinated to the state apparatus by means of law. On the one hand, Pachamama is recognised as central for developing alternatives to the Western project of development. On the other hand, the conferral of rights on

[10] I am taking my cue here from political theorist Regina Cochrane (2014, p. 583) who argues that Huanacuni Mamani's call to return to ancestral values is grounded on a heteronormative 'version of gender complementarity'.

[11] Taken together, Lugones and communitarian feminists offer a nuanced understanding of the complexities of *chachawarmi*. However, there are also significant differences in their views of gender relations in postcolonial Latin America. For Lugones (2007, 2010) gender hierarchies were produced by the colonial system. In contrast, the communitarian feminist Julieta Paredes (2010) maintains that colonial patriarchy combined with precolonial forms of gender oppression. For a discussion on gender, power and coloniality see Walsh (2016).

Pachamama depends on its inscription in a 'colonial gender system' (Lugones, 2010) that turns the vitality of the earth into a motherly figure. Casting Pachamama as a subject of rights, then, runs the danger of locking up this earth being, and with it Bolivian women, into a subordinated identity (Brown, 2002). The dissenting voices of Bolivian feminists make visible the equivocation between Pachamama and Mother Earth. That is, they highlight the disjuncture between two figures that the Bolivian government conflate and yet remain distinct for communitarian, decolonial and indigenous feminists. The rights of Pachamama envisioned by Bolivian activists are not the same thing as the rights of Mother Earth articulated by the law. The government's conflation between the two has political effects in that it recreates Pachamama as a gendered subject whose body can be freely appropriated within a project of state-directed development. In contrast, the feminist emphasis on Pachamama as an entity that does not belong to anyone but affects everyone complicates both the Western separation between nature and politics *and* the gender binary that goes hand in hand with it. It resonates with indigenous movements for which subjects and objects do not stand in hierarchical opposition but are related as knots in a thread. As an earth being involved in socio-natural collectives that have been persisting in the Andes in spite of colonial violence, Pachamama is defined by generative capacities that are not legible through a rigid gender binary.

This divergence shows that in Bolivia, the state and the activists are using the same concept, Pachamama, to index divergent networks of living and nonliving beings, locations and meanings. If, as Mario Blaser (2013, p. 547) argues, an ontological political conflict is a 'conflict involving different assumptions about what exists', I would suggest that what is occurring in Bolivia is a conflict between the state that assumes Pachamama as a docile Mother Earth and those activists, including feminist and indigenous groups, who understand it as a powerful being capable of fostering political action. At stake in this conflict, one in which issues of difference and generativity play a significant role, is the articulation of different modes of living and making political decisions in relation to Pachamama.

conclusion

In exploring the equivocation between Pachamama and Mother Earth in the Bolivian context, I have attended to the political valences of Pachamama within struggles deeply informed by indigenous modes of being. Drawing on Marisol de la Cadena (2010, 2015) and other scholars of indigenous political ontology, I have argued that the Andean earth being has been participating in Bolivian struggles not just as a resource, but as part of collectives that do not entail a distinction between human agents and things to be managed in the exercise of political power. In this sense, Pachamama unsettles the separation between nature and society at the core of prevalent Western understandings of politics. I have simultaneously described Pachamama as an entity involved in a system of shifting differences and sexual fluidity. Unlike the Virgin Mary and Mother Earth, this generative earth being exceeds the boundaries of proper femininity. By intertwining these two aspects of Pachamama, I have sought to add a layer of complexity to debates on political ontology. Mario Blaser (2013) maintains that political ontology is concerned with the enacting of reality and traversed by struggles that bring into being the entities that make up political collectives. Such an analytical framework directs

attention to the persistence of ways of living that challenge colonial assumptions about the earth as a mere backdrop of political action. This is a powerful move, but one that may need to consider more carefully how questions of gender and sexuality come to matter in ontological political conflicts. Although the conferral of rights on nature in Bolivia carried the potential of reconfiguring the dominant distinction between nature and politics, it has been producing paradoxical effects. Specifically, Pachamama has come to count as part of the plurinational state as a nonhuman being whose generative potentials have been translated into a rigid gender binary. As a gendered subject of rights, Pachamama/Mother Earth is exposed to governmental strategies that ultimately increase its subordination to power. Thus, insofar as gender and the politics of rights are employed for governing collectives of beings, the critical tools developed by feminist activists and thinkers remain relevant for addressing conflicts about what exists and how to sustain ways of life alternative to the capitalist and colonial appropriation of the earth.

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