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**Guarayo organic leadership and its existence in relation to external
stakeholders; marginalised narratives on subjugation, ethnoromanticism, and
gender.**

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Abstract

Whilst indigenous self-determination and autonomy over land and resources is claimed to be ensured by the Bolivian government, many communities must contend with the power dynamics of wider society and the conflicting as well as inflicting interests of different stakeholders, such as the state, businesses, or NGOs. Such is the case for the Guarayo people of the Bolivian lowlands, clearly facing the consequences from the expansion of large-scale agribusiness and extractive industries. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of community leadership in protecting the rights of the Guarayo people, when facing the challenges from various stakeholders. The study examines mechanisms of oppression, such as the subjugation of Guarayo lands and resources, and identifies the main actors involved. It includes a literature review and ethnographic investigation into the experiences of leaders in the Bolivian lowlands, with a focus on the Guarayos. The main findings reveal a misalignment between state-appointed leaders and the organic leadership structures and aspirations of the indigenous communities they represent. Various tactics, ranging from persuasion, bribery, and manipulation in less severe cases, to more infringing actions such as the framing, incarceration, and abduction of opposition figures, are used to maintain control over the leadership positions. Furthermore, on the topic of gender, female leaders, which may be perceived as non-traditional and influenced by external actors like NGOs, actually fosters greater resilience against succumbing to the state's internal colonial agenda, as women showed more resistance, particularly against deforestation and political clientelism.

Key terms: Guarayos, indigeneity, subjugation, land occupation, gender, organic leadership.

Guarayo organic leadership and its existence in relation to external stakeholders; marginalised narratives on subjugation, ethnoromanticism, and gender

Centuries of subjugation have put constant pressure on indigenous communities in the defence of their rights, as well as the preservation of their cultures. While nowadays most indigenous communities have a right to self-determination and autonomy over their lands and resources, they must contend with the power dynamics of wider society and the conflicting as well as inflicting interests of different stakeholders, such as the government, businesses, or NGOs (Bosch, 2018; Estremadoiro Flores 2023). This will often lead to the exploitation of their land and resources for economic or political gain. Such is the case for the Guarayo people of the Bolivian lowlands. With reports of 237 cases of land subjugation, and more than 100 properties being taken by force, the land of the Guarayos is clearly facing the consequences from the expansion of large-scale agribusiness and extractive industries as well as the occupation of their communities by settlements from highland *campesino* (peasant or rural) population, and drug traffickers (Estremadoiro Flores 2023). The territories that are being stolen represent not only the land in which communities stand on, but are also intimately connected to their cultural, spiritual, and economic well-being, as it holds the resources, history and identity of those who inhabit it. Despite this, businesses and political institutions disregard local, territorial identities and demands, and proceed with actions benefiting their economic and political gain. (Montalvo Barba, 2014).

In this political climate, community leaders have been identified to play an essential role in the defence of indigenous rights by acting as mediators between their respective communities

and external actors (Montalvo Barba, 2014). Yet, for the Guarayo people, a political system such as the Bolivian one, based on patronage and favouritism, poses a danger of disrupting the leaders who emerge from within the community. As a result, community leaders are losing credibility among their own people and may face threats to their agency as well as territory (Montalvo Barba, 2014). The question of how indigenous communities adapt to these pressures remains a crucial issue. Fostering community leadership is essential to ensuring that the voices and perspectives of indigenous communities are heard and respected, so that it is possible to develop strategies for advocacy and negotiation that promote their interests and preserve their cultures (Montalvo Barba, 2014). By taking on leadership roles, indigenous community members can work to strengthen their communities, resist subjugation and exploitation, and advocate for their rights to self-determination and autonomy over their lands and resources (Bosch, 2018).

Building on the aforementioned, the following research question emerges:

“What is the role that leadership plays in safeguarding the rights of indigenous communities and how does it exist in relation to the external stakeholders; on the example of the Guarayo people.”

The purpose of this ethnographic exploration is to examine the role of community leadership in protecting the rights of the Guarayo people. In this paper I will investigate the various mechanisms of oppression, such as the subjugation of Guarayo lands and resources, and identify the main actors involved. Furthermore, there will also be an analysis on how community leadership can exist, resist, and negotiate with external actors, such as the state and businesses. By analysing the experiences and viewpoints of community leaders, this paper aims to highlight the significance of promoting community leadership and agency as a means of preserving indigenous cultures, languages, identities, and traditional knowledge.

Before delving into the existing literature on the situation at hand, I wish to acknowledge my positionality and how it shapes my approach to the topic, as well as the position I take while writing and conducting interviews. I am a young woman of Bolivian as well as German nationality. My Bolivian roots come from my mother's side, who is from a small Quechua community in the rural areas of Cochabamba. Although I grew up mostly in Quillacollo, the urban periphery of Cochabamba, I also have lived in Germany as well as other countries. Throughout my life I have had close exposure to the topic of indigeneity, mostly from the Quechua perspective, but it has been shaped by the distance that a European nationality brings to the experience of indigeneity. This was, for example, through attributions such as lighter phenotypic complexion and a European citizenship. As will later be delved into, the concept of indigeneity is a complex one. Whilst my mother calls herself indigenous, wears the clothing of a Cholita (a Woman who wear distinctive traditional clothing characterised by a voluminous skirt), speaks quechua, and has involved us, her children, in some of the cultural quechua/aymara traditions, I myself cannot assertively claim this indigeneity. Instead I can say that I have been in exposure to the indigenous experience, but navigated it marginally.

A nuance to add to this topic, in the context of the paper, is that I have mostly been involved with the Quechua communities and traditions. The Quechuas represent one of the two predominant indigenous identities, which means that their experience of indigeneity will differ greatly from that of the Bolivian lowlands. Quechuas and Aymaras will typically be at the centre of conversations on indigeneity, whilst the lowland communities' experiences often fall within the margins. Furthermore, higher positions of power that are attributed to indigenous people, are mostly held by the Quechua and Aymara indigenous people, and denunciations of internal colonialism on behalf of them, have emerged through the years. Therefore, it is essential to

consider how my connection to the Quechua community and European heritage may impact my interpretation and comprehension of the experiences of the Guarayo people.

The reason I chose this specific topic was because the exposure I had to the conversations about the demands of the lowland communities, through my family and their close friends, arose curiosity in me. But I had, and still have, limited background knowledge about the actual situation of the lowlands. Because of this reason, for this capstone I will refrain from providing too much of my own interpretation and assume the position of listening as much as possible. While conducting the interviews, it became clear to me that this topic elicits strong emotions and firm standpoints of people. As one participant pointed out, usually strong opinions will be problematized or even censored, therefore, although there is certain reasoning behind censoring, I do not see myself in a position to do that, so I will limit my editing of the narratives that do not belong to me. Furthermore, I am only interviewing a specific demographic to which I have access through contacts, which means that essential perspectives from other demographics will not be presented, therefore the results of this ethnographic exploration can and should be further delved into.

My approach

In order to better understand the processes that the Guarayo communities undergo, the following research process was conducted. The approach of this thesis can be divided into two main components: first a literature review and second an ethnographic research in the form of a series of interviews. Both the literature review and the interviews utilised the method of thematic analysis to identify the principal themes as well as structure of the text. Once all pertinent

information was gathered from the readings and interviews, it was categorised by topic and coded accordingly. These topics were then grouped into themes and sub-themes.

The literature review was conducted in order to have a better ground knowledge going into the interviews, as well as establishing what has been mentioned already, and which voices might find themselves at the margins of the current narrative. For this, I accessed the digital library of the Universidad Catolica Boliviana to investigate originary populations of Bolivia, specifically filtering for results concerning the Guarayos. Further readings were also obtained via alternative search engines such as Google Scholar and Smartcat. Additionally, some of the literature was suggested by a gatekeeper and accessed through online databases provided by my university.

The ethnographic approach was chosen due to my personal preference for enquiring into lived experiences. Because of geographical constraints, the ethnographic work was limited to online interviews. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an information sheet, and short preliminary conversations were held in order to establish rapport. The initial interview was conducted with a gatekeeper who had experience working with several indigenous groups across the Bolivian lowlands. Subsequently, the gatekeeper provided contacts for individuals of interest to further investigate the Guarayo experience. However, due to the leaders' busy schedules and limited access to electronic devices required for online interviews, the number of participants in this ethnographic study is quite small. Additionally, it should be noted that although all interviewees were well-informed about the situation of the Guarayos, two of them were not Guarayos, but Guarani. Nevertheless, their perspectives and experiences were considered valuable within the context of the study, hence the decision to include the results of their interviews in this capstone project.

As will be discussed later, political threats carry significant weight, and shedding light on serious issues regarding these matters can result in potentially difficult outcomes. Consequently, participants might have been cautious to speak with complete liberty. The most candid answers were spoken by those people who I knew more extensively, and who had already encountered and overcome significant threats. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, complete candour was not demanded nor expected from all participants. Nonetheless, participants were open about their experiences and struggles, something I deeply appreciated.

Interviews were held in a semi structured manner, and open ended questions that aimed at addressing the following key points:

- characteristics of leadership in the guarayo community
- Degree of consolidation of community leadership
- Destructive devices

The anticipated outcome of this research project was that the government and businesses would be identified as factors that impede indigenous ethnic groups' ability to practise their distinct forms of leadership and community organisation. Possible explanations hypothesised that power imbalances and economic control contribute to the lack of representation and political agency for the lowland groups. Furthermore, the research expects factors such as gender and age to significantly influence these dynamics.

Background on historical as well as contemporary political organisation and power dynamics

The Guarayos land is known for its abundant resources, thanks to the highly fertile soils found there. Consequently, not long after the revocation of forest concessions by the state, heavy disputes over land ownership started (Estremadoiro Flores 2023). This quest for the possession of the land has resulted in conflicts, abductions, and even loss of life in the fight for territory. The strongest of such conflicts occurred in October 2021 when a group of armed men ambushed, kidnapped, and tortured 17 people, including journalists, police officers, and civilians (Mamani, 2022). As previously mentioned, over 100 *predios productivos* (productive land) has since been forcefully taken, and 237 cases of land subjugation have been reported (Estremadoiro Flores 2023). "We are in a state of emergency as the Guarayo people, and we need the support of our national leaders because our land, our TCO (Communal Lands of Origin), is being taken away from us," said Cirila Tapendaba, the president of Copnag (Central de Organizaciones de Pueblos Nativos Guarayos) (odhva, 2021). She denounces community leaders who are inciting land subjugation and allowing illegal deforestation to happen (odhva, 2021) and, as is stated by other news articles, calls for the increased presence and support from the state (Estremadoiro Flores 2023). Before proceeding with my own exploration of the lived experiences of leaders of the lowlands on the situation of land occupation in the Guarayo territory, I will delve into the historical background of the region, as well as conceptualization in the literature on concepts such as indigeneity, state, power and pluralism.

Historical background of the bolivian lowlands, with a focus on the Guarayos

The Guarayo communities today are primarily divided into four groups: those living along the San Miguel-Sapocós rivers, communities in the Iténez river referred to as "pausernas", communities in the Blanco river known as "tapacuras", "chapacuras", or "chapacoros", and the Guarayos from the Madre de Dios and Beni rivers (García Jordán, 2006). The Guarayos were first mentioned in Western literature in 1573 (Vellard, 1976), but systematic colonisation was only reached in the Guarayo regions around the end of the 18th century, when Spanish colonisation was reaching its end (Stötzel, 1980). Before the arrival of the Spanish colonisers and the missionaries, the Guarayos were organised around the extended family as the fundamental social unit. This was characterised by a lack of vertical differentiation of society, and weaker forms of authority, with the eldest of the extended family as an authority figure with not too much power (Stötzel, 1980). Social relations were based on a web of obligations, in which each member depended on others (Stötzel, 1980). Once colonisation efforts started, certain forms of leadership with higher vertical differentiation started to emerge, as an attempt to avoid colonisation. However, these leaders were not highly consolidated, resulting in its failure to uphold (Stötzel, 1980). Spanish colonisers eventually forcibly relocated the Guarayos from territories close to Brazil, to San Javier. Here they introduced social differentiation in terms of rank and authority by establishing the *cabildo* system, with *caciques* and *corregidores* (Cors, n.d.), terms that will later be delved into. The *Caciques*, the highest authority figures, were chosen based on their willingness to cooperate, religiosity, and diligence (Stötzel, 1980). Much of the older literature refers to the Guarayos as the "feroces guarayos" (fierce Guarayos) due to their refusal to remain in slavery (Cors, nd). They were known to flee imprisonment or starve themselves to death, choosing death over captivity (Vellard, 1976). However, there are accounts

which contest these claims, suggesting that another part of the Guarayos allowed for proximity and even willingly resided in the towns that were founded with the aim of converting indigenous people to Christianity. On this account, missionaries would delegate certain positions of leadership which were accepted with no bigger resistance from the Guarayo people, however, it is stated that this was only accepted due to their interest for the tools provided by the religious actors (Stötzel, 1980). They had no hesitations about leaving the towns and returning to their previous way of life once they no longer received such benefits. (García Jordán, 2006)

The colonisation of other lowland populations began much earlier. Santa Cruz, the primary city in the lowland regions of Bolivia, was established in 1561 by Spanish colonists. With the growth of economic activity in the region, colonists enslaved and forcibly relocated many nearby indigenous populations to the city's surroundings (Held, 2022). Moreover, between 1682 and 1744, a total of 26 Jesuit missions were established in many parts of what is now the lowlands of Bolivia (Held, 2022). Contrary to the methods of the Spanish colonists, some of these missions emerged through a series of agreements that would result in an alliance between Jesuits and those leaders who would later become the *cabildos*, at the expense of the alternative leaders, such as the *shamanes* (Strack, 1991; Stötzel, 1980). Both of these developments led to a phenomenon that was particularly prevalent in the lowland regions but was also observed throughout Latin America: the process of syncretism between Christian and pre-colonial cosmovisions (Held, 2022). This process completely transformed the history and cultural organisation of indigenous groups in the regions, through introduction of new ideologies and cultures, as well as the continued deterritorialization of indigenous populations. Nevertheless, different organisational structures and cultural elements were maintained, primarily in those areas that now constitute the former missionary settlements (Strack, 1991).

In 1842, many missionary settlements were dissolved, only a few years after the foundation of the Bolivian Republic. This was intended to liberate the populations, but instead, many indigenous communities, such as the Chiquitos and Guarayos frequently found themselves under new subjugation by mestizo farmers (Stötzel, 1980). Unlike in the Bolivian Highlands, semi-slavery situations of indigenous people on large cattle farms persisted in the Lowlands. Even after the Agrarian Reform of 1953, an initiative that aimed to redistribute land ownership from wealthy landowners to the campesinos, the dependency on wealthy *mestizo* (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent) farmers remained, as the reform was not applied to the lowlands (Stötzel, 1980). This was the case because there was a distribution and allocation of lands to indigenous people, but this was not accompanied by the delegating of the official titles of these territories. In the concrete case of the Guarayo populations it was around 1939 that the missionaries were disempowered, and Guarayos was declared a “delegación nacional” (national delegation), but, just as in the other parts of the lowlands, the structures of the missionaries and dependency on the *mestizo* farmers were maintained (Stötzel, 1980). The Guarayos were economically exploited by the white or *mestizo* population, who barely paid them, if at all, for their labour, especially for work related to hammock production. (Stötzel, 1980)

An exception to this pattern for the colonial period in the lowlands were the Guarani people of today's Bolivian Chaco region, who had never been colonised. Instead they were subjugated by the Bolivian armed forces in 1892. In 1992, the collective took action to regain indigenous territory and autonomy, but the last enslaved guaranies would only be liberated in the 21st century (García Jordán, 2006). Furthermore, other remote ethnic groups like the Ayoróde population maintained independent life in colonial times, in their case until the 20th century (Strack, 1991).

Political organisation of the Guarayos nowadays

In line with the history of most of the Bolivian lowlands, the political organisation practised by the Guarayos has been influenced by years of colonialism, resulting in a syncretism between "traditional" and "modern" forms of authority. The following are different forms of authority recognized among the Guarayos:

Cabildos constitute a council of community members, usually older and male, who are responsible for making decisions regarding communal lands, natural resource management, community rights, and dispute resolution (Held, 2022; Bosch, 2018). They are represented by the *Cabildantes* and the *Caciques*, who are those members that hold the highest communal authority (Mamani Subirana & Delgadillo Pinto, 2015). The **Comunal** is another form of political organisation represented by the entire community and is responsible for implementing and carrying out decisions made by the *cabildo* (Mamani Subirana & Delgadillo Pinto, 2015).

Other forms of authority that are also recognized, include **shamans** and **traditional medical leaders** who mediate disputes and promote broader well-being (Montalvo Barba, 2014). On the legal political organisation level, there are **mayors and councils** who dispute power with the indigenous authorities, except in indigenous autonomous zones recognized by the Bolivian constitution, which do not exist in the Guarayos province (Mamani Subirana & Delgadillo Pinto, 2015). "**Revindicative participation**" is also a form of political participation in which individuals and groups mobilise to demand the provision of services, improvement in their quality, modification of tariffs, or any other action that ensures better service provision (Montalvo Barba, 2014).

Moreover, there is a growing emergence of leadership figures within organisational structures. One example is the Central de Pueblos Nativos Guarayos (**COPNAG**) (Central of

Native Guarayos Peoples), which was established in 1986 (Viruez, 2015). Similarly, established in the same year, the women's organisation Central de Mujeres Indígenas Guayayas (**CEMIG**) (Guaraya Indigenous Women's Center) initially aimed at fostering economic initiatives but quickly evolved into a platform advocating for the political rights of Guarayo women. This organisation has served as a gateway for women to access positions of power (Viruez, 2015).

The situation that the different Guatayo leaders are going through raises the question of: how can positive leadership be incentivised? And how can organic leadership be understood in the context of the Bolivian state and their relationship to different indigenous populations? To aim at answering these questions, it is important to look at actual political structures of indigenous participation set by the new constitution.

Government and indigeneity

The increase of participation of indigenous people, and the inclusion of indigenous thought in the official government of independent Bolivia was a slow-moving process. When the first constitution was created, it heavily drew inspiration from western canons such as North American federalism, French centralism, and general European individualist liberalism. However, indigenous thoughts and forms of organisation were not included (Barie, 2007), and it was not until 1979 that indigenous people entered the parliament for the first time, with only two out of 157 members being indigenous (Cárdenas, 2011). Over the following elections, indigenous representation slowly increased, and indigenous thought was given more and more spotlight. The examples most predominant in people's minds are the appointment of the Aymara Evo Morales as indigenous president in 2006, the Aymara vice president Victor Hugo Caredenas in 1993-1997, and, the presidency of Andrés Santa Cruz, son of a mestizo man and an aymara indigenous woman, in 1829 - 1839 (Paz Soldán, 2006; Sobrevilla Perea, 2009). Yet indigenous

female participation was only achieved in 1997 when one urban indigenous woman was elected for the first time as deputy in the national parliament (Cárdenas, 2011). By 2009, there were 38 indigenous people in the parliament, with eight of them being indigenous women (Cárdenas, 2011).

With the increased representation of indigenous populations in political settings, there has been a gradual shift towards greater recognition of indigenous rights and cosmovisions in jurisdiction and constitution. In 1994, the "ley de participación popular" (Law of people's participation) was implemented, which recognized the validity of indigenous jurisdiction (Bosch, 2018). Renewable natural resources were recognized as free for indigenous populations to use, but non-renewable resources still belonged to the state. Furthermore, in 1996, the territorial rights of indigenous people, including the granted ability for indigenous women to own land, were also recognized in the law for the National Agrarian Reform "Ley del SNRA" (Cárdenas, 2011). Adding on to that, in the decade of 2010, there was a further recognition of the rights of indigenous people, by including the exclusive use of territory by indigenous communities, as well as the introduction of the term "pluralismo jurídico" a term which recognizes the coexistence of different legal systems and states to respect the "hierarchical equality between indigenous jurisdiction and state jurisdiction" in the new Constitution (Bosch, 2018). But all of these initiatives remain far from uncriticized, as will become evident with the results from this ethnographic indagation, more and more people are raising criticisms of ethno-romanticization and instrumentalization of the indigenous identity whilst concomitantly prioritising economic gain over indigenous communities.

Bolivia and concept of indigeneity

Bolivia has garnered international attention for its unique position as a country with a significant indigenous population in power positions and a political agenda that promotes pluralistic values while acknowledging the contributions and concerns of indigenous communities (Valdivia Rivera, 2021). However, the indigeneity of the Bolivian government has become a contentious issue among its own people. Particularly under this criticism is the MAS government. The MAS political party, led by Evo Morales and founded in 1997, emerged with the aims to defend indigenous rights and social justice, as well as represent anti-imperialist principles. Stating that they have done so by advocating for land reform, the nationalisation of key industries, and the redistribution of wealth to address historical inequalities (Wolff, 2020). But more and more, it has been them who have faced the previously mentioned criticism of benefiting from the praise for superficial displays of indigeneity while prioritising mainstream politics and global economic interests over the interests of indigenous communities (Montalvo Barba, 2014).

As a result, their indigeneity is being questioned with the claim that a state which does this, cannot possibly call themselves indigenous. The debate which arises from this, is then, what is indigeneity dependent on? Phenotype? Power? Practices? I do not seek to answer these questions; instead, this debate is presented because it provides relevant insight into the social dynamics of the Bolivian population and its consequences on the attainment of indigenous rights.

The concept of indigeneity in Bolivia is not fixed or homogeneous, but rather is influenced by a range of cultural, social and historical factors. Rates on self identification can provide significant insight into this phenomenon. It has been recognized that Bolivia's ethnic self-identification is highly volatile, which is reflected in the contrasting numbers of indigenous

presence in the country. The 2012 census reported 41% of the population as indigenous, whereas the census previous to that reported 71% Statista (2022). Independent calculations, such as Seligson, reports that 64.82% of the population are cholos (someone of mixed indigenous descent, but who has adopted certain aspects of western culture) and only 18.36% are indigenous (Cardenas, 2011). Meanwhile, Luis Verdesoto and Moira Zuazo report that only 15% of the population are indigenous, and 60% are cholos (Cardenas, 2011). This volatility can be attributed to many explanations, one of such being simply the formulation of the question, available categories (if mestizo was not present, identification as indigenous drastically decreased) or political situation.

Indigenusness is typically used as a broad, encompassing term. However, in her book “Yo soy libre, y no indio: Soy Guarayo” García Jordan introduces a nuanced perspective on how this concept applies to the Guarayo people and the general lowland population. She asserts, “The term Indian was a colonial construct intended to homogenise the vast ethnic and cultural diversity encountered by the Spaniards in the 16th century.” This implies that indigeneity should not be seen as an inherent or organic concept, but rather as one that arises from the homogenising influence of the Western colonisers. One only becomes an “indio” once they have experienced the imposition and the associated consequences that this label carries. The title of the book suggests how the Guarayos' reluctance to embrace colonisation and to remain under its rule, asserts their identity, not as indigenous, but instead as Guarayos. However, this perspective is not widely known or shared.

This tension between different conceptions of indigeneity is a clear reflection of the present power imbalances. The state promises the equal standing of governmental systems and all indigenous systems, but if the state reinforces power dynamics, a concept that many say is

contradictory to indigenous thought, can it call itself indigenous? These criticisms reveal the wider inequalities between certain indigenous communities and others. And it shows how the way that people relate to indigeneity, and how they use the term, can also create dimensions of privilege and imposition. These expressions of power will be further delved on in the next section.

Power and pluralism

"When a state legal system coexists with indigenous orders, it can assume a centrifugal disposition, attracting all disputes to its centre, and seeking to resolve them within its own sphere." (Matc Galanter, 1981)

As mentioned, "Pluralismo jurídico" asserts the equal standing of indigenous and governmental systems, accentuating the aspect of cooperation, with each actor fulfilling the other's expectations (Bosch, 2018). However, indigenous communities of the lowlands continue to raise concerns about the issues that power dynamics, implicit hierarchies, corruption, and subordination bring to the interaction between state and community leadership (Montalvo Barba, 2014). It has been highlighted that power imbalance is still present in the Bolivian system, which is one that is supposed to be equal. Reports of Corruption, clientelism, and co-optation of local leadership, are common, with this resulting in personal, economic, and partisan political gain at the expense of communal demands (Montalvo Barba, 2014). This is only further amplified by the political instrumentalization of indigenous people (Cárdenas, 2011) and the favouring of elites and governmental actors for exploitation of natural resources concerning the territory of indigenous populations (Montalvo Barba, 2014).

According to Harris in his book "Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches," all traditions are a result of intricate societal interactions that exist in a delicate but functioning balance. The introduction or imposition of foreign cultures and modes of production can cause significant disruptions not only in beliefs but also in the lifestyles of communities, leading to negative impacts on their balance and wellbeing (Harris, 1985). While no society is innocent of collective notions of reality and their impositions, some actors produce more ideology than others. This generates hierarchies and disrupts the natural process of political organisation and leadership by delegitimizing local leaders (Bosch, 2018). In this context, traditional participatory, organisational, and cultural forms of communities are undermined, and the risk of losing their collective and conciliatory character becomes a strong threat (Montalvo Barba, 2014).

Therefore, it is crucial to understand the power imbalances present in the interaction between the state and indigenous communities and recognize the importance of amplifying the agency of indigenous communities. It has been recognized that agency and community participation can have profound positive effects, including, but not limited to: A) Enabling the liberation of populations to build and consolidate a participatory democracy based on their own values. B) Facilitating the process of transforming individuals, groups, and communities in response to their own needs and demands. C) Promoting community participation, which allows people to collaborate in recognizing and seeking solutions to the problems that the community faces (Montalvo Barba, 2014).

Results

The leaders of the lowlands

Erwin is a sociologist with extensive working experience in international organisations, Bolivian governmental institutions, and NGOs dedicated to indigenous communities. He mainly works by educating communities on their legal rights so that they can defend themselves when interacting with the state and other external stakeholders. Furthermore, he assesses indigenous organisations and deputies of the Santa Cruz Department. On the topic of leadership in the lowlands, he highlighted that although factors for the eligibility of leaders vary among different indigenous communities, some patterns can be found throughout. One eligibility factor that he presents is the one of age, with older individuals being perceived as wiser and thus suitable for leadership;

“The whole journey you take through life is experience. And when a time comes when you are considered a mature person you have to pass on your knowledge to those who come after you. That's why there is a majority representation of older people.”¹

Further factors mentioned by him include abilities such as fighting, hunting, fishing, and knowledge of traditional medicine, which are seen as integral to a good leader. Due to the gendered association with the practices of hunting and fishing, primary participants in positions such as cabildos tend to be male. In this context, he points out the importance of recognizing that indigenous conceptions of gender and political participation differ from those in Europe. Female participation may not be readily visible through a Western lens, but decision-making within the home often involves both men and women, with men only taking the lead in formal cabildo discussions. But nowadays, patterns are shifting. Two of the leaders interviewed, Marcelina and

Marisol, were women, and one of them became a leader when she was only a teenager. With them, both the factors of age and gender were less important.

Marisol, a Guaraní leader, started off as the secretary of communication when she was just 17 years old. Over the years she advanced through the ranks, as secretary of organisation and even as the vice president of her organisation, to then eventually assume the position of *dirigente* (position of leadership within an indigenous social or political) which she proudly affirms was bestowed upon her by her *capitania* (Guaraní equivalent to a collection of local communities). Reflecting on her formative years, Marisol states:

“At the time when I first joined, my people gave me support, because most of the leaders were older people. And they were mostly men. We are talking about 40 and above. And the women were also older people with families. At that time I was 17 years old, single, obviously it was a challenge, because at that time I still didn't understand all the processes. It was a bit difficult for me to accept the position. But as they told me, you have to assume the charge, they told me that they will support me in every process. But the important thing was that there was a young woman there.”²

Women occupying leadership positions seems to emerge from a communal initiative. As both Marisol, but also Marcelina spoke of the support and trust of the community as playing an integral role to them becoming leaders. Marcelina, from a community close to Ascension de Guarayos, joined the CEMIG by initially only attending local meetings, eventually the community bestowed her the trust to assume higher positions. She started as the local vice president, to eventually be assigned her current position of president of the CEMIG. She now represents the women of 10 ethnic communities from the Guarayo territory. What can be seen is

that while men have traditionally held positions of power, women are gradually gaining access to these roles throughout the lowlands of Bolivia, a phenomenon which will later be elaborated on.

Strong leadership

When discussing the resilience and unity of a community and its leaders, various factors come into consideration. Marisol has recognized the importance of leaders staying in, or returning to their own community. Without demeaning the act of migration, and the potential values that come from it, she asserts that staying connected to the land fosters a deeper bond with the community and it encourages leaders to prioritise the collective's well-being over individual interests.

“The moment you leave this proximity, when you live in an urban centre, then your very own vision, your points of interest are different. It sets the issue of collective rights having to be defended aside. One becomes individualistic because you have to work to survive.[...] I have been a vice-minister and then I went back to the community and I live in the community to show that one must return to where one belongs. Because we are fighting for land rights and for the vindication of rights. Then it serves of nothing to undergo all that struggle, all that sacrifice and then leaving the community empty, right?”³

Erwin, on a broader level, recognizes factors such as horticulture as having an impact on organisational consolidation. He mentions communities that developed horticulture present a stronger organisational consolidation, whereas those that do not practise horticulture present more incipient leadership as they experience more vulnerability to the impacts of the state, NGOs and the church, who can also act as destructive devices to organic leadership.

Furthermore, both Erwin and Marcelina talk about resilience to expressions of disrespect and threats, as a vital factor that a leader must have.

“I tell you, I have many enemies. I have been threatened, they send me threatening messages because I always speak out without a filter. Because that's how I feel calm. If I am ashamed to speak, I go back home sad, sick because I couldn't speak. In order for me to go home with a sense of ease, I have to say the things that hurt me. It's inside me. So I say it, and that's where I sometimes receive disrespect and threats. But for me, that's what being a leader is all about. It's looking for women's rights to be respected. Because we have the same rights as men. To hold office, to be heard, to have access to land, well to everything, for me that's being a leader”⁴

"There are few of us who write what we see because most are afraid.... I do not fear the government, I tell them their truths, I have already been prosecuted twice and they have not been able to prove anything. That is why I have recognition within the indigenous peoples, they invite me precisely to speak, to analyse without fear".⁵

Destructive devices as hindrance to organic leadership

Destructive devices can be seen as strategies that actively impact and weaken the organisational consolidation of indigenous communities. While the results of my literature review did acknowledge the existence of such strategies, the interviews revealed a more pronounced picture

State, dirigentes, and businesses

One interviewee mentions how although the law states that indigenous peoples will have their representative elected by uses and customs, this is not the reality. Deliberate procedures,

particularly coming from the MAS government, obstruct the path for organic leaders to attain these positions.

“They are not going to take a true leader of the community. The indigenous people of the lowlands cannot elect their representative because the representative that they elect, if he does not agree with the MAS policy, the MAS does everything, they start a revocation process, they even imprison him or persecute him. They do not let him work or represent his people in the spaces that are recognized in the political constitution of the state.”⁶

“The [Guarayo] community is being invaded by settlers from the highlands, even with weapons. In other words, they can already be considered gangs of delinquents because they put on hoods and kidnap people, specifically leaders. There is no rule of law that is respected in the country. If you are not a masista, you are subject to them even inventing evidence so that they can put you on a trial.”⁷

Instead, the leaders who hold positions within the government, and who are supposed to represent the interests of the lowland populations, are those who are selectively chosen based on their alignment with the state's ideology. The state, through its various mechanisms, significantly contributes to the erosion of authentic leadership. This is achieved through manipulative political strategies, the subjugation of lands, the co-optation of organisations, the alteration of established organisational practices, and the deliberate redirection of government projects to favour highland communities over lowland communities. However, it is crucial to recognize that this issue is multifaceted and interconnected, as there are many stakeholders at play. One factor to keep in mind is the role that *dirigentes* play.

The role of the *dirigentes* is to oversee the enforcement of land certifications and ensure equitable land distribution and the protection of land rights for all. Unfortunately, we witness a prevalent occurrence of corruption within this system. Marisol highlights how some of these *dirigentes* succumb to bribery, resulting in increased subjugation of land. This observation is further reinforced by Marcelina, who emphasises the need for nuance in understanding this complex issue.

“The government says that big businessmen can only have up to 500 hectares. But nobody follows up on that. Nobody complies. Even the local leaders themselves negotiate. They make an agreement where they leave 2000, 3000, 4000 hectares to the big businessmen. So there are no limits.”⁸

“Here we are talking about the Guarayos TCO’s, which is titled around 1 million 352 thousand hectares. But there are many Guarayo brothers and sisters who do not even have a little piece, a hectare of land. Why? The land of Guarayos, it’s very shameful, I always say when it comes out internationally on social networks. How they fight, they talk about land occupation. But it is the leaders who give the land. So when other people see that, other people see this, and they say: we are also going to be leaders. Whether they are leaders or not, they make decisions. They are the men They form a group to create a community. They say well I have so much land, so many hectares, we will give it to them. And they take money from the campesinos. Then the campesinos claim their money and they fight among themselves. That's what they call occupation. The campesino brothers and sisters don't just come and say get out of here, I'm going to go over there. It's because someone told them I'll see you there.”⁹

Not only is this affecting the own population's access to land, but it creates further implications for the future. Marcelina points out her worry, that deforestation, mining, and climate change are taking away the life of the community.

“Everything used to be beautiful here in the community where I live. There were canoes, people went fishing and caught fish. It rained when it was supposed to rain. And when it was drought, it was drought. But what we are living through is already worrying. People only think about now. Today. They dedicate themselves to dismantling. They don't think about the future. What are we going to leave for our children, for our grandchildren? In other municipalities they already work with gold, with mercury, that's poison.

Here in our territory we have already been hit by drought, floods, hurricane-force winds in the municipality of Ascension. The lagoon is drying up, the rivers are drying up, you can't catch the bugs anymore, the fish have gone far away. Fire has come to us. So it's very worrying. We have to look for something. To have more hope, So that everything is not destroyed.”¹⁰

Ethnoromanticism

International presence also impacts the way ethnic communities interact with the state, and the processes in which leadership is formed. Bolivia, being known for having an “indigenous government”, has received a lot of international attention and support, but also resulted in a tendency towards ethnoromanticism. Erwin points out that this has led to the tokenization and instrumentalization of indigenous identity, as well as a lack of accountability for the imposition and internal colonisation that the Bolivian government enacts.

“In the outside world when the president [Evo Morales] came out it was the big sensation: The INDIO president, the INDIO president. I remember in Germany when he arrived, there was a caravan welcoming him. Because it was “folklore” to see an indigenous president.”¹¹

“They [the MAS party] want to represent the indigenous people. Because supposedly the MAS is the party of the indigenous. And all indigenous people should be included there. However, MAS is one of the most atrocious and vandalistic elements that is eliminating the organisational form of the lowlands.”¹²

Erwin also identified NGO presence as being one of the forces of influence on leadership giving an example of the Beni region:

“At CEPIB we approved a project, and one of the demands was to work the gender concept into the organisational structure. Because it was a demand from the Danish NGO financing us. A female gender secretariat, and a female secretary were appointed, who didn't even know why they were there. I went to do a mid-term evaluation, and at the board meeting, I saw only men. I only saw two women who were serving coffee and soda, and I said to the leader of that time, Ernesto Noé, one of the traditional leaders of CEPIB, Hey, tata, where are the gender and communication secretariats? But haven't you seen? He tells me: They are the ones who bring us coffee and soda.”¹³

As he tells this story he points out: “one does not know whether to laugh or to cry”. With this quote he exemplifies how people from communities will do as they are told by the NGOs, move as NGOs tell them. However, the efficiency of these interventions needs to be examined closely. But Marcelina adds a point of nuance to the conversation. She points out how NGOs and

international pressure for working on the topic of gender have brought considerable improvements. Not only has the presence of women in high ranking positions such as the municipality, or as concejales increased, but this has also come with improved rights such as being recognized as legal entity, as well as a newfound confidence to speak up as a woman.

“There is an initiative, a support on behalf of ngos. [...] Women value this, they are making the most out of it. That's how we have lost that fear to speak up in a meeting, in a general meeting. Because there was no such thing before. Us women had a lot of fear, at least those of us women who are indigenous.”¹⁴

At the intersection of gender and indigeneity

Both of the female interviewees consider themselves as organic leaders, indicating that they emerge naturally from community initiatives. However, they have encountered doubts regarding their legitimacy from their male counterparts. Yet, what is slowly being observed, is that the presence of women in power positions, which deviates from traditional structures, will often lead to a heightened defence of traditional values. In contrast to male leaders who may be more inclined to align themselves with co-opted parties, female leaders, despite being a product of "modernization," might be more likely to uphold traditional indigenous values. Marcelina supports this viewpoint by highlighting the noticeable gender difference in the prioritisation of land issues and collective well-being.

“Here it's us women who are the ones who are fighting the most. It is not to praise oneself, but rather to say that when there are problems, such as the issue of territory, we women are the ones who take the lead. Women have now lost their fear that they carried

before. That only men could be the boss. Now it is the women who come out more to defend, if there are fights, it is the women who oppose.”¹⁵

Regardless, assuming the role of a leader brings about its own set of complications. Marisol contemplates her position as a female leader and the challenges she has faced, specifically highlighting the backlash and sexist comments directed towards her. Interestingly, she notes that these issues are more prevalent in her interactions with highland leaders. As a striking example, during her tenure as vice president, she encountered instances where these leaders refused to meet with her, insisting on communicating exclusively with a male representative. Marisol reflects upon this situation:

“You talk about the Mama Talla and the Apu Mallku [figures of authority (as a couple) in andean organisational forms], about the same hierarchy that men and women should have. But in practice you don't take it seriously. In the end, the one who defines, who does everything, is the Apu Mallku. And the Mama Talla just sits back. They don't even ask her opinions, and they can't even talk to her in the meetings”.¹⁶

Marcelina echoes this perspective.

“It makes you want to cry sometimes, wanting to participate and not being able to. And one ends up arguing with the person because one feels that they are not listening. Because the men think that we are going to go against them so they do not take us into account, as if we were their enemy.”¹⁷

This is only exacerbated by the fact that they carry not only the marginalisation of their gender, but also of their ethnic identity.

“Sometimes for us [indigenous women] the effect was double. Because people always think that we, as indigenous peoples, don't have intellectual capacity. Or that you are always seen as uneducated and all of that.”¹⁸

In addition to the resistance faced from male counterparts, female indigenous leaders also encounter economic barriers. Unlike men who have income sources like forest management, Guarayo women generally lack such opportunities. For crucial leadership activities such as fighting for the land, there are expenses involved, such as transportation and meals, which need to be covered, and which can consequently not be afforded by many of the women.

“If there is, for example, a land occupation and one wants to go to participate, if one does not have economic resources, one cannot move [also because NGOs don't fund these interventions]. That is the problem we women have. So the others just do what they want, at least with the land issue. I feel an impotence of not being able to do anything and not be heard.”¹⁹

Furthermore, female leaders are expected to fulfil not only their responsibilities as representatives but also as the heads of their households, taking care of their families and children. This places a double burden on them, requiring them to balance their leadership duties with domestic obligations.

“I see my compañeras, the local presidents, who assist in the fights, in the meetings, in the workshops or on the trip that one makes, with their baby. I see my compañeras carrying their baby and I look to the other side where there are men, and which man is going to carry his son on the trip or in the meeting? None. Women are the ones who bear the most responsibility. Oh how strong us women are”²⁰

“I felt like a reflection, a mirror. Because everyone was looking at me when I made a mistake. and that was very heavy for me too. Sometimes I felt so bad because sometimes I would say no, I feel tired, I can't. But because of the responsibilities I had, I felt I couldn't say I was tired. And my colleagues would tell me we are here and we are going to support you because you are surrounded by a majority of [older] male colleagues.”²¹

Concluding thoughts

This ethnographic exploration focused on the political authority of indigenous communities and how it persists relative to different stakeholders, such as Ngos, businesses, and the Bolivian state. While external pressures on these communities are well-documented, only a limited number of sources have explicitly denounced how perpetuating the influence of these different stakeholders is. This is particularly the case with the state's involvement in land occupations and cooptation of leadership positions, as sources fell short on explicitly stating how strongly it manifests itself, ranging from persuasion, bribery, and manipulation in less severe cases, to more infringing actions such as the framing, incarceration, and abduction of local organic figures who counter the states ideology. Actions all taken in order to promote those leaders who align with the state's interests and objectives. This creates a misalignment between organic leaders and those in positions of leadership. Despite being designated as intermediaries between the state and indigenous populations, these state-appointed leaders often lack a genuine connection and alignment with the organic leadership structures and aspirations of the indigenous communities they are supposed to represent. Whether they never had such a connection or lost it due to their distance to the community, the outcome is that organic leadership within the Guarayo community becomes co-opted. This disconnect raises questions about the efficacy and authenticity of the

state's efforts to incorporate indigenous perspectives and voices into the political decision-making processes.

But these patterns are not new, as they mirror the historical patterns rooted in colonialism, which have long since significantly transformed the social and political organisation of the Guarayos. As was gathered from the literature, the precolonial Guarayo political system functioned under a non-hierarchical structure, where authority was vested in the eldest members of extended families, but their range of influence and power was limited. However, with the arrival of Spanish colonists and missionaries, the introduction of hierarchical systems, such as cabildos and the exclusion of less hierarchical figures such as shamans from positions of authority occurred. These interventions led to the cooptation of indigenous leaders and a fundamental shift in the governance structure within the Guarayo community. In the present day, the actions of the government can be seen as a continuation of this. We are currently in a neocolonial state wherein economic interests are prioritised and achieved through the appropriation of land resources and the suppression of voices. What is notable in the current context is that these dynamics are perpetuated not only by external forces, as was the case in the past, but also by indigenous individuals themselves, creating a sort of “internal colonialism”. This raises important questions regarding the state's standing and intentions. What does it mean when the government proclaims its indigeneity, and their support for the rights of indigenous people, when they call the Amautas (andean moral or spiritual authority) to “bless” the formal meetings, whilst holding the wiphala and the coca leaves, calling upon the Mama Talla and the Apu Mallku, yet it is this very same government that proceeds to sell land to the business who will pay the highest price for it, resulting in the destruction of territories belonging to those whom they claim to protect.

It is increasingly important to question the notion of indigeneity. As argued by García Jordan, the category of “Indigenous” only emerged with the arrival of colonists. People from various cultures and traditions became labelled as indigenous due to their shared experience of oppression by the colonial West, becoming the same because all are seen as the same. Therefore, upholding a rigid definition of "indigenous" may lead to defending a perspective filled with generalisations, stereotypes, and misguided expectations. The prevalence of ethnoromantic stereotypes and expectations perpetuates the oppression of the most marginalised communities. From this ethnographic research, it becomes evident that this manifests itself in the state's performative display of indigeneity and the commodification of the term, trivialising it into a mere performance rather than a genuine commitment, and thereby using it in order to legitimise imperialist actions.

Moreover, this very same impact can also be observed in the conversation around the contemporary initiative to include women in leadership positions within the Guarayo community. The promotion of women's or youth participation in indigenous communities has been a case of debate, especially if it is promoted or demanded by external actors like NGOs guided by gender policies. Criticism stems from the argument that newer forms of participation would weaken traditional, culturally rooted “indigenous” structures of representation and community organisation. However the promotion of women's participation has apparently not weakened the indigenous organisation, and, on the contrary, seems to provide a more solid defence of communal rights. Referring to the literature, many organisational forms practised today in the lowlands, such as the cabildos, were organisational structures imposed by external European forces. The literature does not address gender in pre-colonial leadership, and instead states that old organisational structures focused on age. The gendered aspect, marginalising women from

positions of power, seems to have arisen due to cooptation. The interviews reveal that the approach of female leaders, which may be perceived as non-traditional and influenced by external actors like NGOs, actually fosters greater resilience against succumbing to the state's internal colonial agenda, as women showed more resistance, particularly against deforestation and political clientelism. One possible explanation for this phenomenon lies in the historical marginalisation of women in leadership positions since the era of colonisation. Their limited exposure to the state's influence across the decades may have resulted in a lesser assimilation of the state's ideologies and modalities of operation. As a result, women in leadership positions have become effective political leaders, precisely because they exist outside the confines of the neocolonial structure, enabling them to resist external pressures and contribute to the advancement of the Guarayo community on their own terms. It is important to further explore whether this represents an opportunity for the fostering of organic indigenous leadership.

It is essential to clarify that questioning the concept of indigeneity, the discussion, of the indigeneity of the state, and the examination the interpretations of organic indigenous practices and their manifestations should not draw attention from the fact that these communities, whether they identify as indigenous or not, whether their leaders are organic or not, still are actively facing the vulneration of their rights. Engaging in discussions around these conceptions should not divert attention from the unequivocal fact that there are societies, of men, women, elders, and children, whose fundamental rights are being violated, and who demand immediate, meaningful, and sincere action.

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Appendix

1. “Todo el recorrido que haces en la vida es experiencia. Y cuando llega un momento, estaba considerado como una persona madura, tienes que transmitir tu conocimiento a los que vienen detrás de ti. Por eso hay una representación mayoritaria de personas mayores.”
2. “En la época en la que recién me incorporé, mi pueblo me apoyó, porque la mayor parte de la dirigencia eran personas mayores. Y mayormente eran hombres. Estamos hablando de 40 a arriba. Y las mujeres, también eran personas mayores con familia. En esa época yo tenía 17 años, soltera, obviamente era un desafío, porque en ese tiempo yo todavía no entendía todos los procesos. Me costó un poco poder aceptar el cargo. Pero también como me decían ellos. Tienes que asumir, me decían que me van a apoyar en todo proceso. Pero lo importante era que hay una mujer allí, joven.”
3. En el momento que uno se deja el acercamiento, que vive en un centro urbano, ya la misma visión, el mismo interés es otra. Deja de lado este tema los derechos colectivos se tienen que defender. Uno se vuelve individualista porque tienes que trabajar para sobrevivir. He sido viceministra y después volví a la comunidad y vivo en la comunidad para demostrar que uno tiene que volver de donde uno es. Y por este mismo tema de pelear por los derechos y la reivindicación de los derechos. Entonces de nada servirá que tanta lucha, tanto sacrificio y dejar vacío a la comunidad no es cierto?”
4. “Y le cuento, yo tengo muchos enemigos. He sido en su momento amenazada, me mandan mensajes a veces bien amenazantes porque yo la verdad hablo siempre así de frente. Porque así me siento tranquila. Si yo tengo vergüenza de hablar. Me regreso a mi casa triste, enferma porque no pude hablar. Pero para llegar tranquila a mi casa tengo que decir las cosas que me duelen. Lo tengo adentro. Entonces yo lo digo y es allí donde a veces recibo falta de respeto, amenazas. Pero para mi, ser líder, es eso. Es buscar como que se respete el derecho de las mujeres. Porque tenemos el mismo derecho que los varones. Ocupar el cargo, ser escuchada, al acceso a tierra, Bueno a todo. Para mi es eso ser líder.”
5. “Somos pocos los que escribimos lo que vemos por que la mayoría tiene miedo.. Yo no le tengo miedo al gobierno yo les digo las verdades, ya me han hecho dos procesos penales y no han podido demostrar nada. Por eso tengo un reconocimiento dentro de los pueblos indígenas, me invitan precisamente para hablar, analizar sin miedo.”
6. “Ellos no van a llevar a un verdadero líder de la comunidad. Los indígenas de las tierras bajas no pueden elegir a su representante porque el representante que lo eligen si no está de acuerdo con la política del MAS, el MAS hace todo, lo encarcela o lo persigue. No lo deja trabajar ni representar a su pueblo en los espacios que están reconocidos en la constitución política del estado”
7. “El pueblo [Guarayo] está siendo invadido por gente colonizadora del altiplano, hasta con armas. O sea ya son pandillas de delincuentes porque se encapuchan y hacen secuestros de las personas, dirigentes. No hay un estado de derecho que se respete en el país. Si no eres masista, estás sujeto a que inclusive se inventen pruebas para que te metan a un proceso.”

8. “El gobierno dice que los grandes empresarios sólo pueden tener hasta 500 hectáreas. Pero nadie le hace seguimiento a eso. Nadie cumple. los mismos dirigentes. Con los grandes empresarios, los grandes ganaderos. Hacen un acuerdo donde les dejan 2,3,4 mil hectáreas a los grandes empresarios. Entonces no hay recorte.”
9. “Aquí hablamos de la tco guarayos que esta titulado alrededor de 1 millón 352 mil hectáreas. Titulado la tco guaraya. Pero hay muchos hermanos hermanas guarayas que no cuentan con un pedacito, una hectarea de tierra. Porque? La tierra de guarayos es muy vergonzoso digo siempre que sale a nivel internacional por las redes sociales. Como pelean, hablan de avasallamiento. Pero son los dirigentes que dan la tierra. Entonces al ver eso otra gente se autonombran. dicen: nosotros también vamos a ser dirigentes. Sea dirigente o no dirigente, toman decisiones. Son los varones que crean comunidades, crean grupos de personas del occidente. Entonces le dicen bueno yo tengo tierra tantas hectáreas nosotros les damos. Y les sacan plata de la gente a los campesinos. Después ya los campesinos reclaman su plata y ya pelean entre ellos. Allí lo llaman avasallamiento. Los hermanos campesinos no llegan así nomas diciendo salte de aquí yo me voy a meter allá. Es porque alguien le dijo yo te veo allá.”
10. “Antes todo era una belleza, por decir aquí en la comunidad en la que yo vivo, la laguna era una belleza. Había canoas, la gente se iba a pescar, se pillaba pescado. Llovía cuando tenía que llover. Y cuando era sequía era sequía. Pero ahora ya es preocupante lo que ya vivimos ahora. La gente solo piensa en ahora. En el hoy. No piensan en el futuro. Se dedican a desmontar. ¿Qué vamos a dejar a nuestros hijos para nuestros nietos? en otros municipios ya trabajan con oro, con mercurio, eso es veneno.
11. “En el mundo exterior cuando salió el presidente era la gran sensación: El INDIO presidente, el INDIO presidente. Me acuerdo cuando estaba en Alemania y llegó el indio de Evo Morales, hubo una caravana de recibimiento. Porque era un folklore ver a un indio presidente”
12. “Ellos quieren representar a los indígenas. Porque supuestamente el MAS es un partido de los indígenas. Y que todos los indígenas deben de estar incluidos allí. Sin embargo, el MAS es uno de los elementos más atroz y vandálico que está eliminando la forma organizativas de las tierras bajas”
13. “En la CEPIB aprobamos un proyecto, y una de las exigencias era que se trabaje el concepto de género dentro de la estructura organizativa. Porque era una exigencia de los daneses. Se creó una secretaría de género y se nombró secretaria que ni sabía porqué estaba allí. Yo fui a hacer una evaluación de medio término, y en la reunión de directorio, veo puro hombre, solo veía a mujeres que estaban sirviendo el café con refresco, y le digo al dirigente de ese tiempo estaba como presidente de la CEPIB Ernesto Noé, uno de los tradicionales dirigentes, oye tata y donde están las secretarías de género Y de comunicación? Pero no has visto? me dice: " Son las que nos traen el café y el refresco.”
14. “Hay un emprendimiento, un apoyo, de parte de ongs. Las mujeres lo están valorando, aprovechando. Les dan apoyo, a las comunidades, a las mujeres. Fue así que gracias a esto también hemos perdido ese miedo de poder hablar en una reunión, en una asamblea, Porque

antes no había eso. Las mujeres teníamos mucho miedo, al menos las mujeres que somos indígenas.”

15. “Aquí somos las mujeres las que somos más luchadoras. No es por alabarse, si no que cuando hay problemas como el del tema territorio, somos las mujeres las que vamos por delante. Ya las mujeres, han perdido el miedo que llevaban antes. Que solamente los varones podrían ser el jefe. Pero ahora son las mujeres las que salen más a defender, si hay peleas, son las mujeres las que dicen no.”

16. Ustedes hablan de la Mama Talla y el Apu Mallku. Sobre la misma jerarquía que debe tener el hombre y la mujer. Pero en la práctica ustedes no lo asumen. al final, quien define, quien todo, es el apu malpu. Y la mama talla allí atrás nomas. Ni le piden opiniones, y tampoco puede hablar con ella en las reuniones”

17. “Da ganas de llorar a veces, al querer participar y no poder. Y uno termina discutiendo con la persona porque una siente que no es bien escuchada. Porque piensan los varones que vamos a ir en contra de ellos y por último no nos toman en cuenta entonces como si fuéramos su enemiga.”

18. “Pero a veces para nosotras [las mujeres indígenas] era doblemente. Porque la gente siempre piensa que nosotras como pueblos indígenas, no tenemos capacidad intelectual. O que siempre se le ve que no tiene estudio y todo lo demás. ”

19. “Que haya, por ejemplo, un avasallamiento y uno quiere ir a participar, si uno no tiene recursos económicos no se puede mover. Ese es el problema que tenemos las mujeres. Entonces ellos nomas hacen lo que quieren al menos con el tema tierra. Para mí es una impotencia de no poder hacer nada y no ser escuchada.”

20. “Yo veo a mi compañeras, a las presidentas locales, que también asisten en la lucha en las reuniones, en los talleres o en el viaje que uno realiza, con su bebe. Veo a mis compañeras cargando a su bebe y miro al otro lado donde hay varones, y ¿cuál varón va a cargar a su hijo en el viaje o en la reunion? Ninguno. Las mujeres somos las que mas llevamos la responsabilidad. Qué tan fuertes somos las mujeres.”

21. “Yo me sentía como un reflejo, un espejo. Porque todo el mundo me estaba mirando cuando me equivocaba . y eso ha sido muy fuerte también. Yo a veces me sentía tan mal porque a veces yo decía no, me siento cansada no puedo. Pero por las responsabilidades que tenía yo sentía que no podría decir que estaba cansada. Me sentía a veces así. Y las compañeras me decían estamos aquí vamos a apoyarte porque estás rodeada de mayor parte compañeros.”