

Decolonising territory through land reform? Lessons from Bolivia's Native Community Lands

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Presentation Overview

1. Why Bolivia matters for Scotland
2. Context: Indigenous territorial claims in Bolivia
3. Legal framework: Native Community Lands
4. Implementation challenges in the Chaco
5. Lessons and takeaways

Why does Bolivia matter for Scotland?



- Relational histories: Modern European ideas of property and agrarian improvement developed alongside and through processes of colonial dispossession
- Latin American Indigenous Peoples and states have pioneered experiments in communal land rights since the 1990s

Historical Context: Indigenous Land Struggles



- *Indios* denied land and citizenship rights under colonial and postcolonial rule
- Indigenous territories awarded as private properties to criollo and mestizo elites
- 1952 agrarian reform: highland redistribution, lowland exclusion
- Guaraní faced debt peonage system
- Bolivia's "unfinished agrarian reform" reflects ongoing coloniality



Grassroots Indigenous Resurgence

- 1980s-90s Indigenous organising and countermapping efforts across Latin America

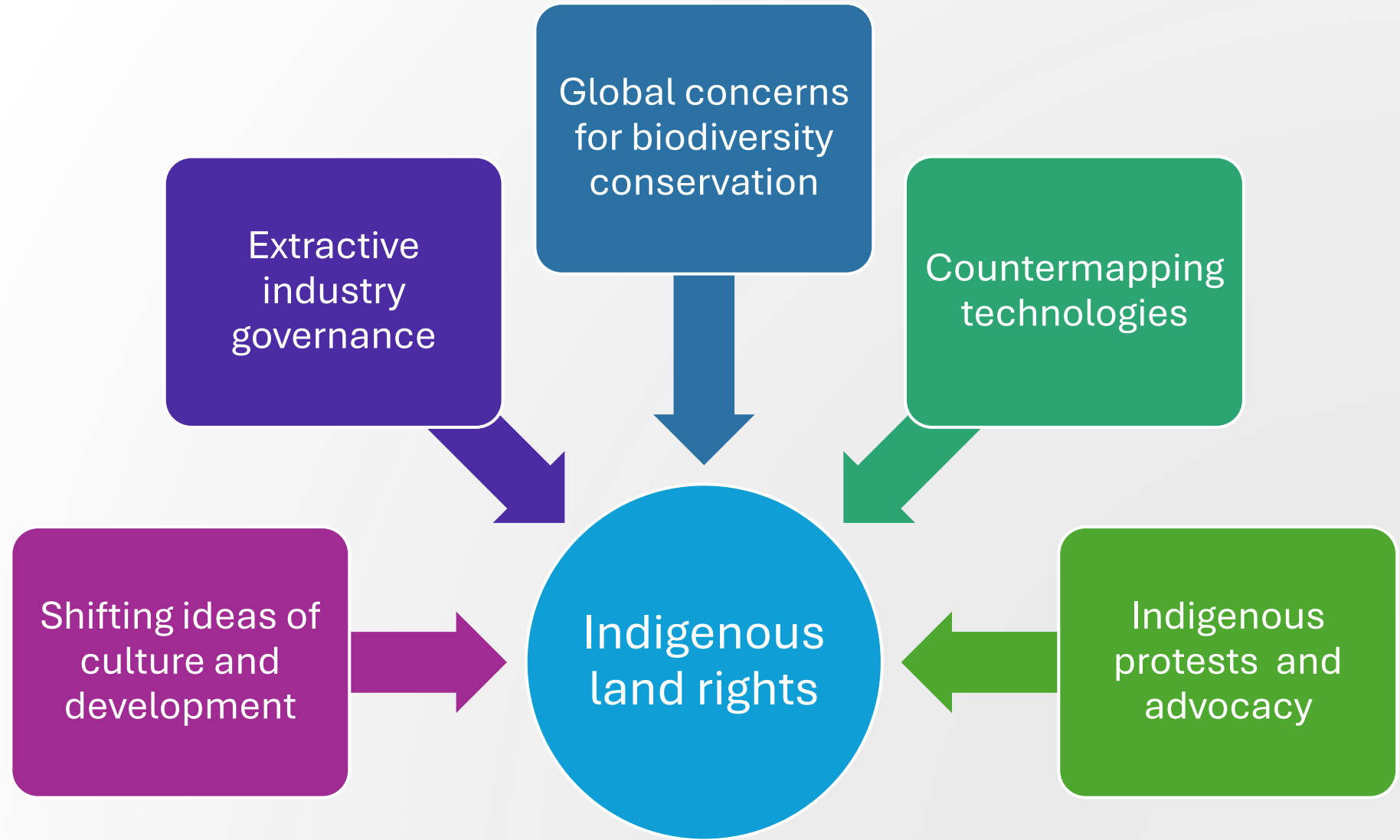
- 1992 “500 Years of Resistance” Campaign

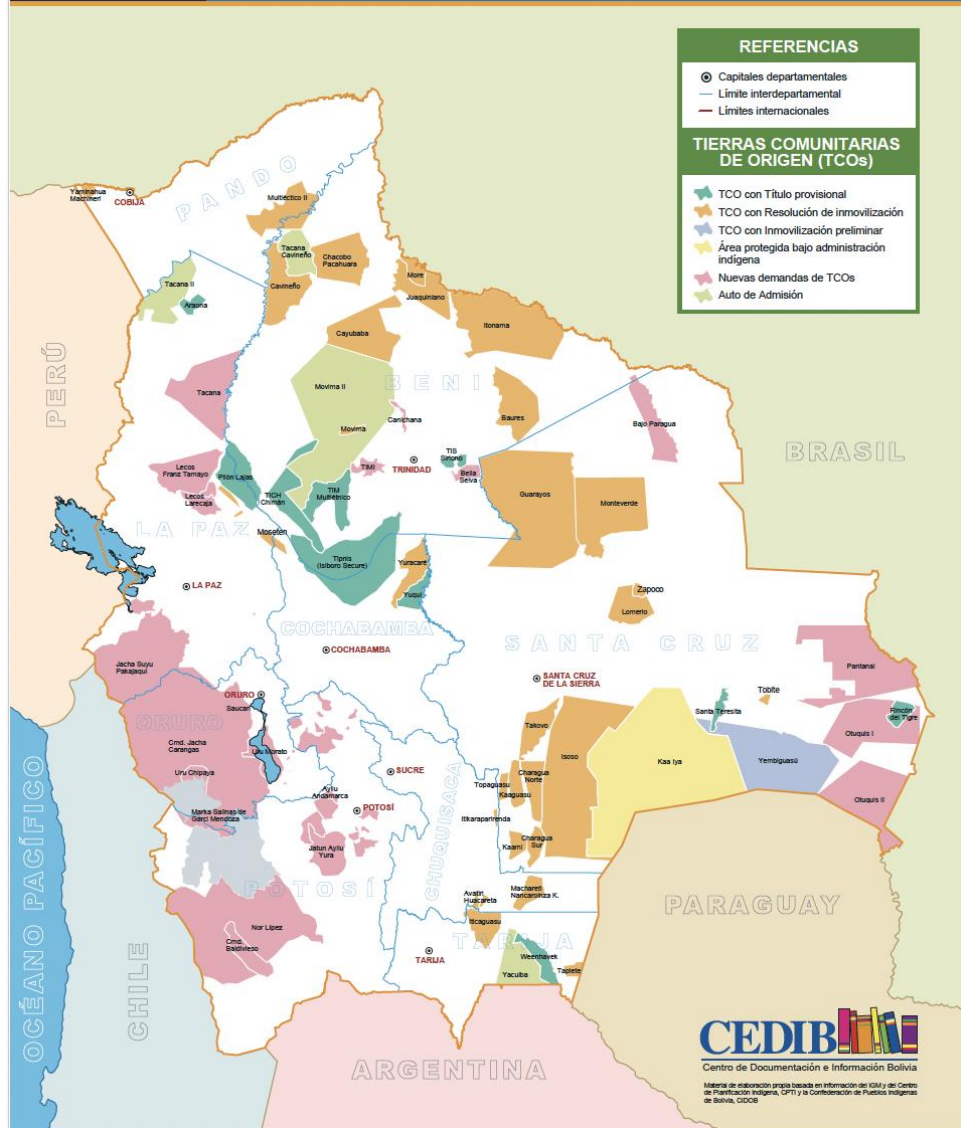
- 1990 Lowland Indigenous “March for Territory and Dignity” in Bolivia



Global Policy Shifts

The “territorial turn”: 200M hectares titled to Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities in Latin America by 2008

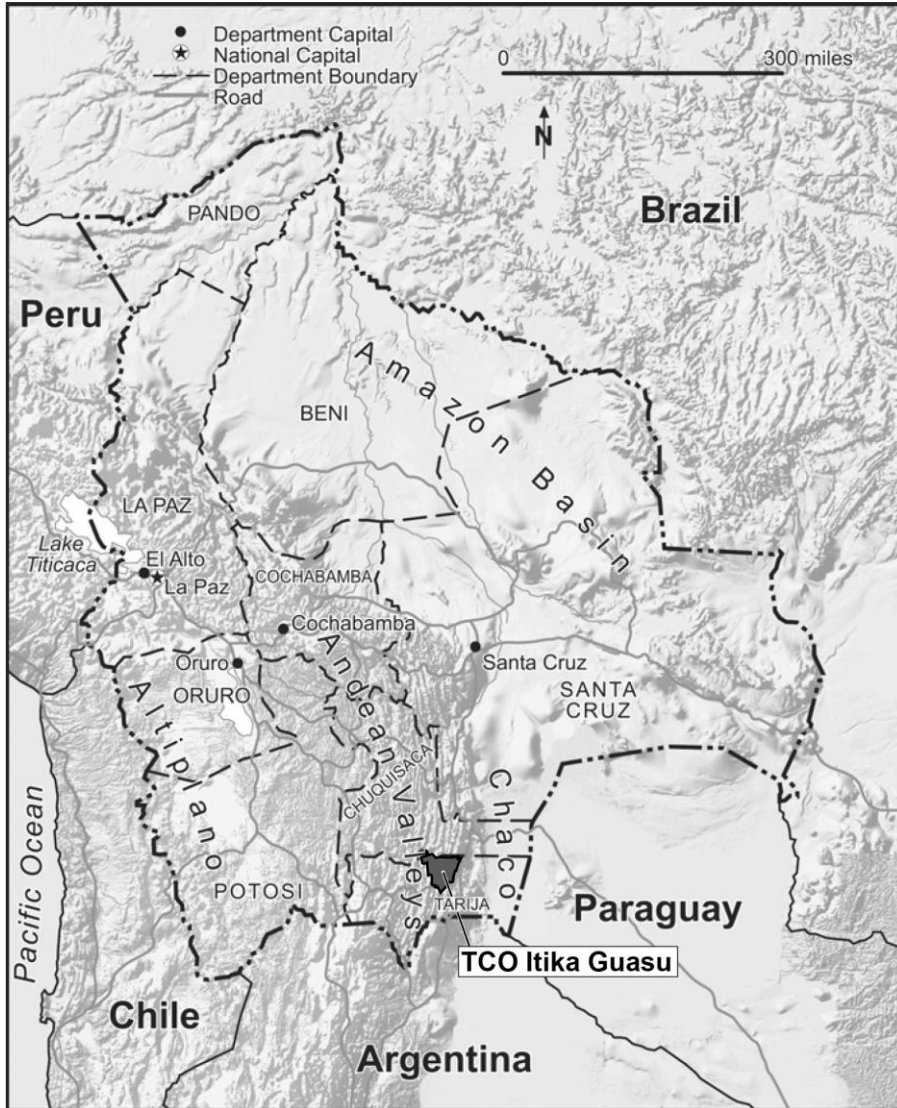




Native Community Lands (TCOs)

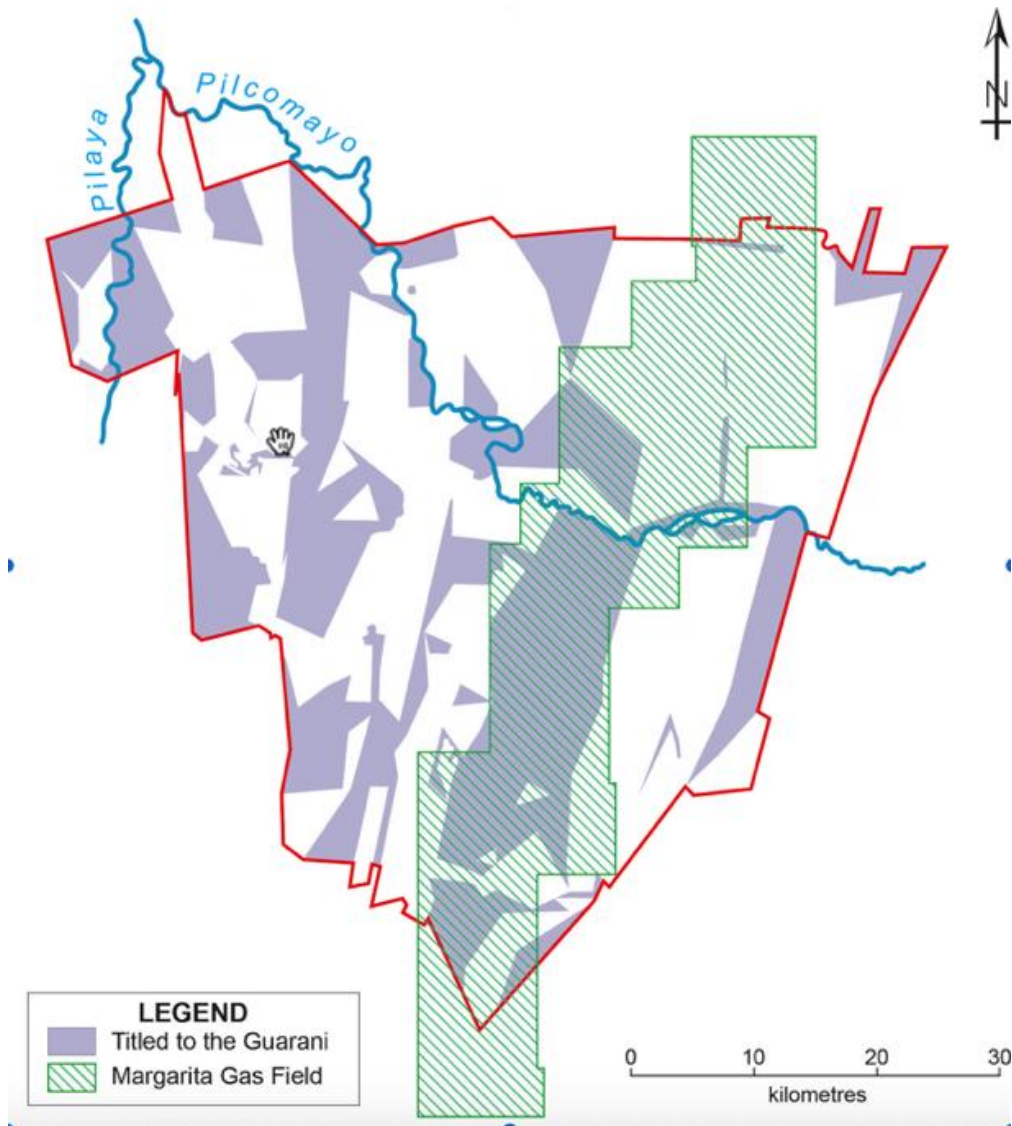
- Defined by 1996 INRA Law as Indigenous habitats ensuring survival and development (ILO 169)
- Funded by World Bank and DANIDA
- Inalienable, indivisible, irreversible, collective
- Indigenous critiques: 'Land not Territory' - exclusion of governance and subsoil rights
- Prioritised private land claims within TCOs provided they show productive land use
- ~23% of Bolivia now within TCO claims (not all titled)

Implementation Challenges: Chaco Region



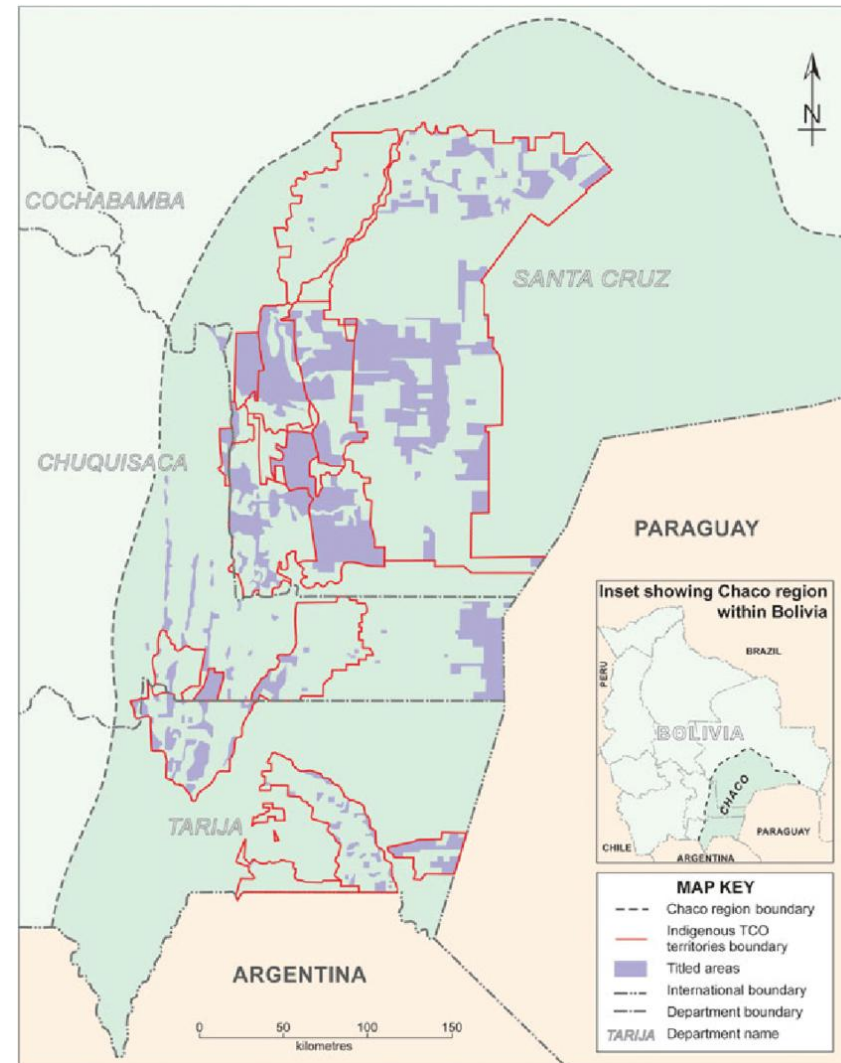
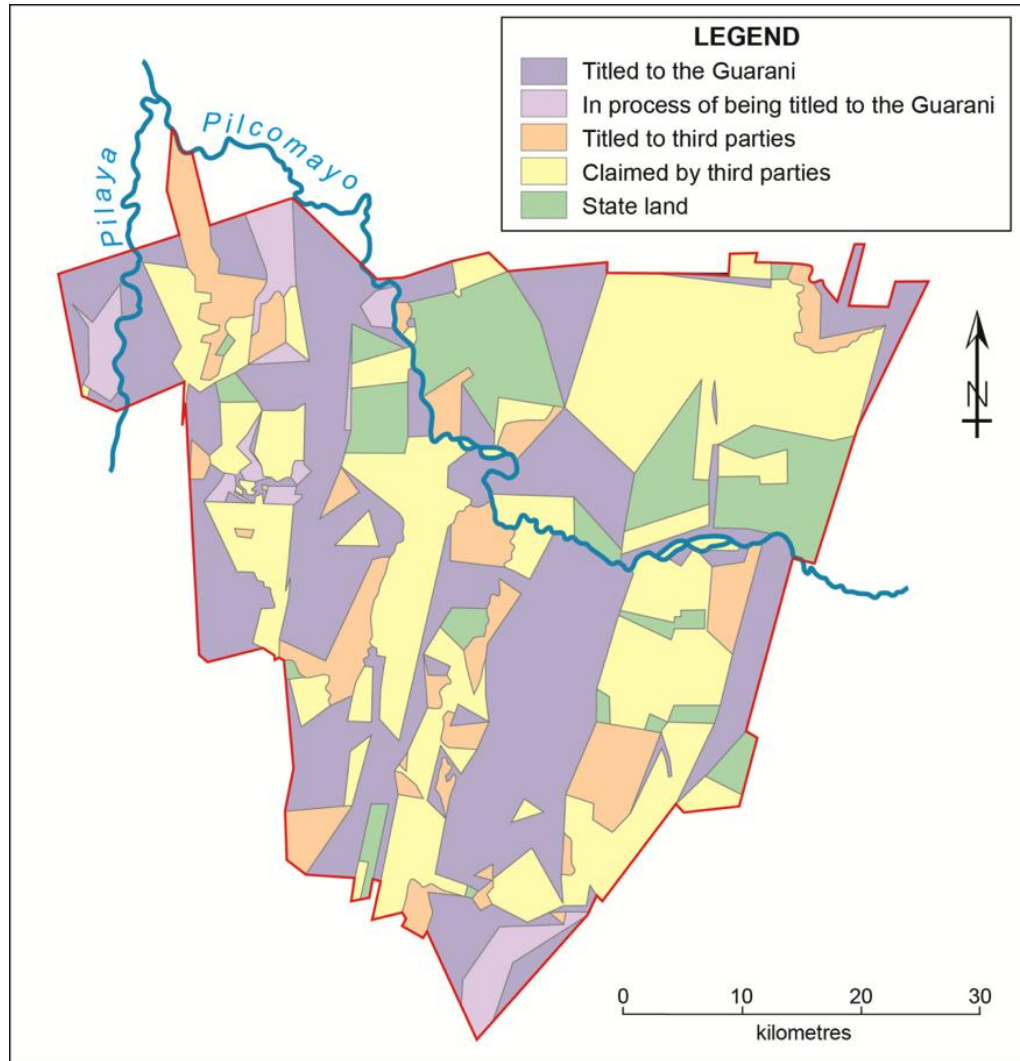
- Case: TCO Itika Guasu (Tarija Department)
- Mapping compromises: from ancestral territory to Indigenous Spatial Needs
- Landowner opposition and racialised power dynamics
- Threats, lobbying, and corruption
- Colonial discourses of rights
- Informal negotiations over property boundaries

Extractivism and TCO titling



- Hydrocarbon development overlaps with TCO claims
- Easement contracts justify productive land use
- State interests in gas extraction stall titling processes
- Private rights undermine Guarani claims to prior consultation

Legal results of TCO titling





Property vs territory

Hardening of boundaries of properties and communities undermines Indigenous land use practices based on shared resources and fluid boundaries

Ongoing challenges



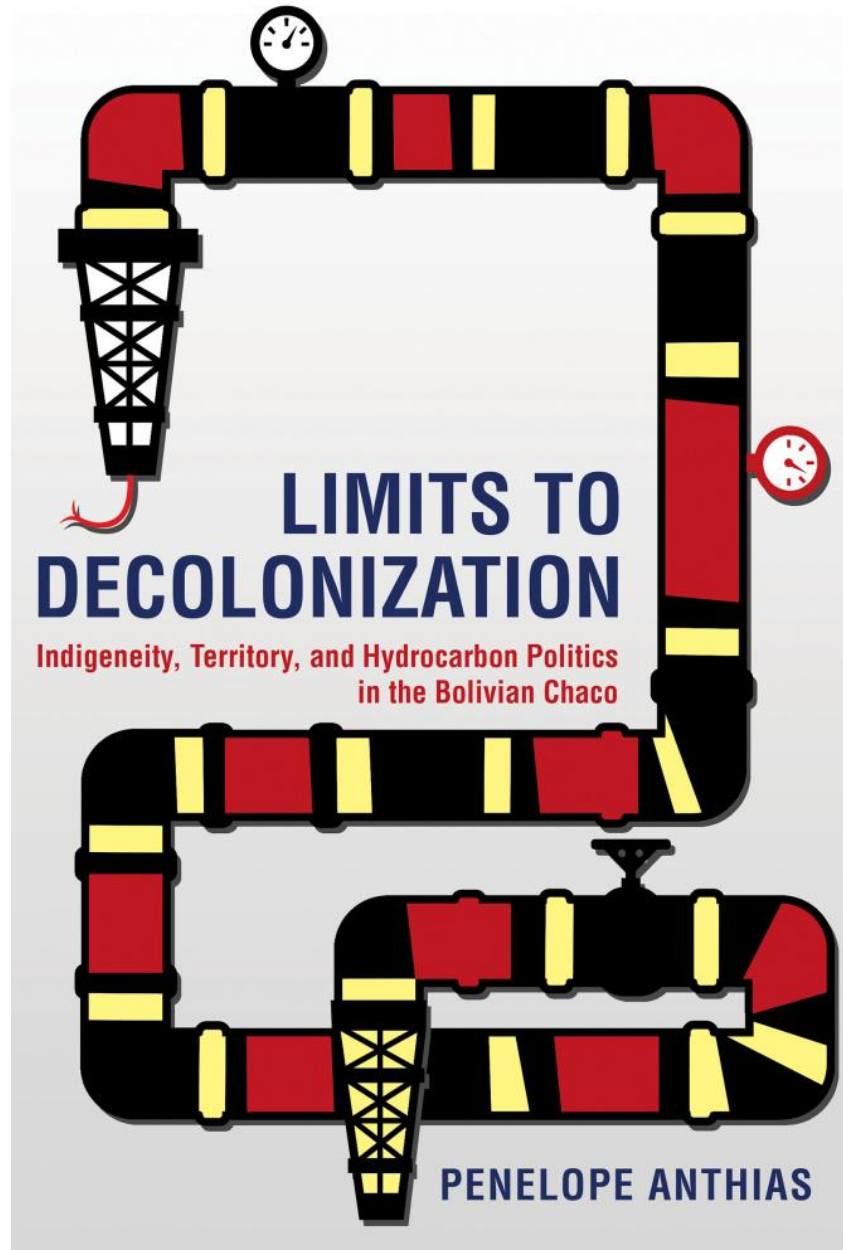
- Land scarcity exacerbates livelihoods challenges
- Environmental degradation: drought, contamination, loss of fish
- Poor public service provision in TCOs
- Fragmented Indigenous organisations
- Persistent marginalisation despite legal recognition

Lessons from Itika Guasu

- TCOs emerged through decolonial struggles + global rights agendas
- Gains: reconfigured relations around land and citizenship
- Limits: racialised inequalities, extractivist economy
- Legal recognition \neq territorial self-determination
- Indigenous strategies evolving toward territorial autonomy

Key Takeaways

- Decolonisation is an ongoing process – legal reforms not enough
- Power asymmetries and capitalist interests may constrain transformative change – importance of ongoing social pressure
- Tensions between Indigenous land ontologies and Western practices of cartography and property
- Need for research on land reform legacies: comparative insight strengthens reflexivity in land policy



Thanks for listening!

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