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THE ROAD AS A NATIONAL CHRONOTOPE IN BOLIVIAN CINEMA

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Abstract: This paper examines the cinematic chronotope of the road in four Bolivian films—Paolo Agazzi’s *Mi Socio* (1983), Rodrigo Bellot’s *¿Quién Mató a La Llamita Blanca?* (2006), Jorge Sanjinés’ *La Nación Clandestina* (1989), and Juan Carlos Valdivia’s *Zona Sur* (2009). While these films differ from one another in terms of the historical contexts of their production and release, and also in terms of cinematic genre, the road, and the national highway in particular, features prominently in them all. Across these films, the road figures as a site of both national aspiration and failure. The road operates in these films as a model of spacetime that functions not only as a spatiotemporal structuring element of the films’ narratives, but also a surface of contact between national subjects and their state. Additionally, building on Mikhail Bakhtin’s exploration of the picaresque novel that saw the chronotope of the road as key to understanding the “sociohistorical heterogeneity of one’s own country,” I suggest that the roads in these films are not just spaces of heterogeneity but also spaces for its ideological framing, aligning with historical changes in discourses of Bolivian identity, specifically a move away from an integrationist nationalism towards a recognition of the plurinational character of the Bolivian Republic. Where road trip films *Mi Socio* and *La Llamita* provide filmic fantasies of infrastructures’ unifying capacity, the films *La Nación Clandestina* and *Zona Sur* depict the road as a spacetime populated by personae in conflict. Pessimistic assessments of the possibility for national coherence emerge from these latter two films’ depiction of the road as a spacetime of disconnect and rupture between incommensurate worlds of the city and the countryside, a chronotope riddled with potholes of anti-Indian racism.

Blocking Highways

Our plans to travel between two small towns in the Bolivian Amazon faced a roadblock. A national union, the Confederación Obrera Boliviana (COB), had called a country-wide strike to protest the government’s laying off of 180 workers at a factory of the state-run Enatex textile company near the nation’s capital, La Paz, high in the Andes. I was travelling with two Bolivian

colleagues to speak to a group of rural teachers enrolled in a master's degree program. We had left Riberalta by taxi and the likelihood of arriving to Guayaramerín, a town on the Brazilian Border, seemed slim. Members of the COB had taken over a tollbooth stop on a bridge on our route and were not allowing any vehicles to pass. The question of how, or even why, we would pass the blockade stirred considerable anxiety in me, both on ideological grounds and out of practical concern for my safety. As a union member and labor supporter I opposed crossing a picket line and as a conspicuously white male U.S. citizen I cringed at the prospect of setting myself up as a visible and easy representative of neoliberal Empire in a confrontation with striking Bolivians. "Shouldn't we be respecting the COB's call?" My colleagues assured me that we were, in fact, respecting the strike, and explained that the blockade was for vehicles, a halt to the movement of goods and commerce, and that people could pass on foot without problem.



Figs.1 & 2: Approaching the blockade of the Confederación Obrera Boliviana, Beni, June 23, 2016. Source: Swinehart

Our car driver stopped a few hundred meters before the blockade, we got out and walked. Roughly two dozen men and women sat in the hot sun by the barricade they had erected of tree branches, mopeds and a few trucks, with their union's banner unfurled across the better part of the road. There was no big confrontation between us and them and, instead, we exchanged passing greetings and walked through without problem, as did others. We quickly found a driver of a minivan on the other side. When enough people looking for a ride joined us, we made our way to Guayamerín. The roadblock functioned as a human sieve, communicating stoppage while simultaneously allowing certain flows of people and things to continue unabated.

Bolivia is a country with a particularly rich history of union militancy and combative social movements (Dunkerley 1984; Rivera Cusicanqui 1987; Hylton and Thomson 2007). Roadblocks like this one feature prominently among Bolivia's powerful social movements repertoire of tactics. I had often heard roadblocks described not just as *bloqueos* but as *huelgas*, or "strikes." This synonymy between *bloqueo*/blockade and *huelga*/strike expands the semantics of strike, moving its locus from the site of production to the paths of distribution— to the arteries of national commerce, that is, to its roads. Rather than *huelguistas* ('strikers'), participants in strikes are often referred to as *bloqueadores* 'barricaders' because of the form these protests so often take.

In coordinating the activities of union members in the Amazonian north of the country with their comrades in the remote Andean highlands, this roadblock was not only a disruption to a national artery, but was also an act of unification of diverse peoples across a massive territory. Bolivia's constitution recognizes 36 indigenous languages as official in addition to Spanish and describes the state as a Plurinational Republic. It is a sparsely populated country in a territory a little more than one and a half times the size of Texas and twice the size of France. In addition to being separated by large distances, Bolivia's approximately nine million citizens are also divided by political, linguistic, and ethnic gulfs. The historic divide between the descendants of European colonizers and the indigenous people who comprise the nation's majority stands out among them, but so too do regional tensions between the highlands and lowlands, and among indigenous communities themselves.

Roads unify this expansive and diverse territory and, as we see with the COB's strike, have become a stage for political drama. This is true as a part of everyday politics, in the case of strikes like the COB's, and also at the level of national policy. A proposed highway between the currently disconnected capitals of the adjacent departments of Cochabamba and Beni has been cause of the biggest political challenge faced by the government of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) and Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president. The road project passes through a protected nature reserve referred to with the acronym TIPNIS (standing for Indigenous Territory and Isiboro Sécure National Park) that includes native Moxeños, Chimán, and Yucaré communities. The construction of this highway has illuminated inter-indigenous tensions. The project has set twelve thousand indigenous Moxeños, Chimán, and Yucaré people, whose territory this road would traverse, in conflict with coca cultivators who are largely Quechua and Aymara migrants from the highlands, and who comprise Morales' historic base of support (McNeish 2013; Webber 2012).

Highland settlers looking for easier distribution of goods and access to markets align with the developmentalist aims of the state and capital, while the indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS opt out of integration into a national road system in a politics of refusal (Simpson 2014) and align more with environmentalists who aim to conserve the nature reserve.

The COB's blockade and the conflict over TIPNIS provide two instances where we see that, whether in blocking roads or building them, Bolivia's highways are at once the nation's arterial system and also its contested body. Roads are contested not as metaphors, but as metonyms, as spatial interfaces with the nation-state that evoke its whole through its infrastructural parts. In what follows, I argue that roads contribute to the configuration of Bolivian nation-making in another way, within filmic representations of Bolivian nationhood. Here, I will draw on Bakhtin's (1981) notion of chronotope to discuss moments in Bolivian national cinema where viewers encounter the road as a motif of national aspiration and unification, but also of conflict and disarticulation. I propose that a critical engagement with film can contribute to our understanding of the construal of national space through infrastructure, particularly a nation's roads. Like in the COB's blockade and in the struggle over highway construction in TIPNIS, in the films discussed here, the road is a space in which the tensions of Bolivia's social heterogeneity come into focus. As filmic representations of this heterogeneity, the roads in these films become spaces in which the framing of the Bolivian nation parallels historical changes in discourses of Bolivian identity, specifically a move away from the assimilationist nationalism of the mid-twentieth century and towards the plurinational character of the Bolivian nationalism of today.

National Highways and the Reel World

Bolivian cinema has had intimate entanglements with race, indigeneity and nationalist projects since its inception. The earliest feature length films in Bolivian film provide cinematic instances of indigenist cultural production (De La Cadena 2000). Pedro Sambarino's *Corazón Aymara* (1925) situated folkloric Aymaras amid pastoral Andean landscapes while José María Velasco Maidana's *Wara Wara* (1930) offered a cinematic rendering of a conquest era tale of an Inca princess. These films presented Aymaras and Quechuas as a source for a great national past and a folkloric (and subdued) contemporary element within a nationalism led and defined by urban mestizos. Writing of the cinema of this period, anthropologist Jeff Himpele writes that, "the

modernizing national cinema was at once a visual register of the modernization of the nation-state itself as well as an index of the indigenous past that modernism conjures up” (Himpele 2008: 107).

Following the 1952 revolution, the government of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) founded the Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano (ICB) to advance the nationalist projects of modernity and assimilation. Himpele writes of the ICB period that, “Bolivian filmmakers pursued fantasies of modernization in state-sponsored works that were saturated with images of industrial progress and tones of optimism that promised and prepared Bolivians for a future as a coherent mestizo nation within a prosperous bourgeois state that would fully participate in the consumer economy and the international system of nation-states” (Himpele 2008: 117). Particularly in the films of Jorge Ruíz, scenes of infrastructure such as railroads, oil pipelines, and “para infrastructure” (tractors, construction equipment) were visually central to the thematization of industrial progress (Himpele 2008: 114).

In films of more recent decades, infrastructure makes a quite different appearance within Bolivian cinema and to different ends. Rather than as a harbinger of modernity as in the mid-century films of Jorge Ruíz, the national highway recurs instead as a motif or, as I will explain below, as a spacetime or chronotope (Bakhtin 1981) in which figures of regional, ethnic, and class identity come into contact and often conflict. These contemporary filmic representations of the nation’s diversity resonate with both neoliberal multicultural discourses of “interculturality” that developed through the 1980s and 1990s in Bolivia and across Latin America (Hale 2002; Gustafson 2009), and with discourses of the plurinational in post-Morales Bolivia, and its legal codification in the 2009 Constitution (Postero 2017).

This was the case in a series of films that were presented to me by Bolivian moviegoers as representative, important tokens of Bolivian national cinema. Bolivian national cinema, like other Latin American “national cinemas” became national only through both transcontinental exchanges of technologies and filmmakers and dynamic resistance and engagements with Hollywood (Himpele 2009: 94). Rather than taking Bolivian cinema as a self-evidently unified entity, I am using “national cinema” here as an emic category to which Bolivians themselves orient as an arena of cultural production of ongoing interest and commentary.¹

¹ National cinema is also a category of the political economy of film distribution determining the availability, or lack thereof, of films themselves. Pirated copies of international films are easily attained in markets across the country, but this is not case for “national films” for which piracy is a punishable offence. Despite the relative difficulty of finding DVD copies of these films, they exist, and are often available online in their entirety.

Bolivians spoke to me of *cine nacional* in ways that signaled both pride in their national culture, but also an interest in orienting me, a foreigner, to the nature of Bolivia, Bolivians and life in their country. The films that served this purpose varied in genre, and in terms of what feature of national life my interlocutors hoped they might illuminate. The films of the revolutionary marxist neorealist director Jorge Sanjinés like *La Nación Clandestina* ('The Clandestine Nation'), *Yawar Mallku* ('Blood of the Condor') and others were presented to me as windows onto the lives of rural, indigenous highlanders (although the people making this claim were often urban and rarely indigenous themselves). The 2006 madcap caper *¿Quién Mató a La Llamita Blanca?* ('Who killed the little white llama?'), while comedic, was presented to me as showing Bolivia "how it really is" in all its absurdity, corruption, diversity and beauty. This is the film's own conceit, as explained by its narrator in its opening scenes. Paolo Agazzi's 1983 *El Socio* ('My Partner') was presented to me as "a classic," a heartwarming tale that explained tensions between highlanders and lowlanders, but that ultimately displayed the beauty and possibility of national unity. Another film that was pointed out to me as an indication of Bolivian cinema's ability to offer serious and artistic social commentary was Juan Carlos Valdivia's 2009 *Zona Sur* (Southern Zone). These films span different genres and decades, and differ in terms of being more "commercial" or "serious." The films of Jorge Sanjinés and *Zona Sur* fall squarely into the latter category, while *Mi Socio* and *La Llamita blanca* were presented to me as films that enjoyed a wider, mass audience. The way in which they are united, however, is in their Bolivian-ness, as tokens of *cine nacional*.

If not as prominent on the world stage as quinoa or alpaca wool, these films were presented to me as national products of the finest quality. Nationalist pride alone, however, had not motivated these films' proponents. They were mentioned to me, the foreign researcher, because they had already rung true with the diverse Bolivians who brought my attention to them as reflecting something true about their country. Beyond simple didacticism, though, there was something else. Bolivians of such diverse generations, social classes, regional and ethnic backgrounds encouraged me to see these films that I had the sense that watching them was due diligence for the foreigner interested in Bolivia, as a necessary catching up with a cultural common ground that included a repertoire of filmic representations of Bolivian national reality. In this sense, these films seemed to achieve an Andersonian status in their role as nationalist texts emerging from and presupposing the national imagined community (Anderson 1983) they depict, while reflexively constituting and entailing it. Bolivian anthropologist Andrés Laguna Tapia has argued as much, underscoring how

often the national drama of these films also unfolds cinematically in dialogue with the nation's roads. Tapia's (2014) argument echoes the motivations of my interlocutors who introduced these films to me when he argues that, "Bolivian Road movies are an attempt to regain the warm and cozy homeland that was lost throughout the country's history. They are an attempt to rediscover the Bolivia where everyone feels welcome, hosted, well received, spoon-fed" (Tapia 2014: 100). This assessment underscores the centrality of the road within filmic nationalist allegories, capturing the sentiment of some, but not all, the films discussed here. What can be added is that in these films we also encounter discord and conflict.

In seeing the road as a recurring motif within Bolivian national cinema, we can take to heart Anand Pandian's insight that the reel world of cinema does not stand outside of the real world of experience (Pandian 2015). Recognizing lived experience as unfolding within the material contexts within which it occurs, Pandian asks us to remember that films figure into this array of material things in our world as reflexive, dynamic objects that are not simply like any other. Pandian argues that film productively figures into our phenomenological horizon, operating itself as a mode of thought, as more than just any other object in our surround, and also as more than simply a representational force. "We might instead begin to confront cinema itself as a medium of thought, as a way of thinking with the visceral force of moving images" (Pandian 2015: 15).

That fictional worlds exist in a dynamic and dialogic relation to the social worlds from which they emerge is not, of course, a completely novel insight. Writing a century ago, Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin argued that, "however forcefully the real and represented world resist fusion...they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them" (Bakhtin 1981: 254). Bakhtin termed the fictive worlds projected through literary discourse "chronotopes," or "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). Bakhtin emphasized the unity of spacetime, calling the chronotope the temporal "event world" of the novel, the sealing of multiple narrated events into a perceptually coherent spatiotemporal envelope.

Linguistic anthropologists have expanded Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope beyond literature to account for how people project ideologically infused spatio-temporal horizons for all kinds of activity (Agha 2007; Blommaert 2015; Dick 2010; Faudree 2012; Lempert and Perrino 2007; Wirtz 2014). Applying this Bakhtinian heuristic has demonstrated that chronotopic

construals of reality appear in everyday discourse to set up contrasting event worlds on scales both large and small, and varying degrees of contestation, whether contrasts between “the office” and “happy hour” (Blommaert and De Fina 2016: 4-5) or between differently, but officially, licensed versions of reality. For example, Asif Agha points out that the conflict between evolutionary versus biblical accounts of human origins “is a dispute about which competing chronotope (‘evolutionary history’ or ‘biblical time’) better accounts for the place of parties to this dispute within the Order of Things; each chronotope informs an official picture of the world (linked to canonical texts and institutions) in one circle, and is an object of derision (and sometimes rage) in the other” (Agha 2007: 322). The moral and cosmological stakes are high in debates about creationism, but the chronotopic nature of reality is no less innocent of politics in social formations of smaller scales. Whether concerning one workplace’s norms for who goes for drinks after work, where, and for how long, or concerning notions of who is included, and how, within the Nation, the construal of chronotopes for human activity concerns nothing less than the authorization of reality.

In establishing the spatiotemporal contours of events, chronotopes function as figure-ground semiotic construals that entail actors operating within them, often stereotypic models of personhood naturalized through processes of enregisterment (Agha 2007). For example, the classroom and the court are both spaces that suggest activities of a particular temporal duration (class periods, trials) but also models of personhood stereotypically associated with them—teachers and students in the classroom and the judge, jury, lawyers, and litigants in the court. In this sense, the chronotope is more than simply the spatio-temporal framework the Greek etyma of its name suggest. Rather than simply “spacetime,” chronotopes provide models of space-time-persona that present unified figure-ground relationships in which socially legible figures become situated within and against their spatiotemporal ground, or more precisely, reflexively presupposed and entailed through their chronotopic surround.

Among the literary chronotopes Bakhtin examined, he recognized chronotopes of the road as widespread in literature, particularly in adventure narratives. In traveling along a road, the journey itself provides a structuring logic of a linear succession of events that comprise an overarching narrative. Foregrounding the communicative implication of the road as an infrastructure of human encounter, Bakhtin asks us to consider “of special importance [...] the close link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road (‘the open road’), and of various types of meeting on the road. The chronotope of the road, the unity of time and space markers is

exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity” (98). In such cases, the journey and the narrative-arc are one: the movement through space marks off the chronology of events and is a pretext itself for encounters among diverse characters. What was true for the adventurers of Greek myth and Spanish picaresque novels can also be said of road films. Here, it is worth quoting Bakhtin at length:

“The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road (“the high road”), the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people—representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages—intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another. On the road, the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances. The chronotope of the road is both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement.

(Bakhtin 1981: 243-244)

In Bakhtin’s account of the picaresque novel, the road within these representational worlds is a spacetime through which varied persona who would otherwise not come into contact with one another do. The road serves as a spacetime of exception from the chronotopes with which these figures would otherwise be associated. In these films, the road traversing the national landscape becomes the event horizon of national social dramas, “the road is always one that passes through familiar territory, and not through some exotic alien world. ... It is the sociohistorical heterogeneity of one’s own country that is revealed and depicted” (Bakhtin 1981: 245). In the context of the films of Bolivian *cine nacional* that I discuss below, national subjects, Bolivians, become legible figures against and within a semiotic ground of the road, the entire space-time-persona configuration constituting a chronotopic model of Bolivian nationhood.

Connections and Disarticulations on Filmic Highways

I will discuss here four films of Bolivian that foreground the chronotope of the road: Paolo Agazzi’s *Mi socio ‘My partner’* (1983), Jorge Sanjinés’ *La Nación Clandestina ‘The Clandestine Nation’* (1989), Rodrigo Bellot’s *¿Quién Mató a La Llamita Blanca? ‘Who killed the little white llama?’* (2006), and Juan Carlos Valdivia’s *Zona Sur ‘The Southern Zone’* (2009). These films, two from the 1980s, and two from 2000s, present filmic chronotopes of the road that alternately dramatize both the communicative and unifying possibilities of national infrastructure, but also its

imminent risks of national disarticulation, conflict, and failure. All four films thematize interethnic or regional strife as challenges to Bolivian national unity, and the road is consistently the spacetime wherein this conflict crystallizes. In all of these films, in different ways, the road serves both as an infrastructural metonym for the Bolivian state, and is foregrounded as the condition of possibility for national coherence.



Figs 3-6:

The films also differ in terms of how the road is situated as a spatiotemporal rationale structuring the logic of each narrative. This would seem to be most straightforwardly the case for *Mi Socio* and *La Llamita*, both being “road-trip” films in the most traditional sense as they involve protagonists leaving home and gaining new perspective from their travels on the road. In both, the narrative and the depicted journey converge throughout much of both films, with cross-country treks comprising the bulk of the films’ action. The real time of a journey is elided within representational realism through vignettes, scenes, and moments that achieve a sense of spatiotemporal unity through continuity editing. Importantly, however, both films depart from a narrative structure completely determined by the journey itself. *Mi Socio* opens with a scene of devastating tragedy that would follow the rest of the film’s action within a strictly chronological account of events: the ending comes first, making the rest of the film an extended memory. In *La Llamita* the narrative follows a sequential temporal order that progresses through the film, but one that is regularly interrupted and complicated by split screen simultaneous views, juxtapositions, and extradiegetic textual sidebars. Even with these temporal disjunctures, the principal narrative arc of both *La Llamita* and *Mi Socio* follows a traveling pair of protagonists traversing the national highway with scenes at their roadside stops along the way.

While *La nacion clandestina* is not a “road movie” in the sense of the last two, the film follows its protagonist on a walking journey along the road from the capital city of La Paz leading to his home village. This journey provides the narrating matrix of the film in which the protagonist’s memories of the past become depicted as a series of events embedded within and punctuating the trek by foot. In this film, then, there is a toggling between the narrated chronotopes of his memory and the narrating frame, the chronotope of his journey. In sharp contrast to these last three films, *Zona Sur*’s dominant chronotope is not a journey on a road at all, but a chronotope of the bourgeois home. In this film, the chronotope of the road functions as a contrast, providing a radical break from a home-as-prison motif that characterizes the rest of the film. The encounter on the road, we will see, provides its own chronotope of a tense and problematic interstice between these worlds.

All four films feature the road as a Bakhtinian heteroglossic chronotope in which interethnic, multilingual, interregional, and urban/rural encounters occur. In *Mi Socio* and *La Llamita* the road trip, and the challenges along the way, constitute a redemptive process through which diverse co-nationals come into contact with one another and overcome prejudice. Where the road chronotope in the two “road trip” films presents the road as a site of multicultural encounter and connection, in the two others the road becomes primarily a site of tension and disarticulation where supposed co-nationals come into exchanges that only betray mistrust and enmity.

National Unity – *Mi Socio* and *Quién Mató a La Llamita Blanca*

Mi Socio depicts the journey of a truck driver moving goods from the city of Santa Cruz in the tropical eastern lowland of Bolivia to the nation’s capital in the highland west. The film follows the driver’s relationships with the farmers, artisans, and business people whose goods he transports as he travels from the lowland tropical east, through the inter-Andean valleys and to the high Andean plains and the capital city of La Paz. The dramatic tension in *Mi Socio* unfolds around the relationship between the *colla* (highlander) truck driver, Vito, and a young stowaway orphan Brillo (‘Shiny’), a *camba* or easterner from Santa Cruz. After another truck driver hurts Vito’s dignity by calling his Volvo truck old and broken down in comparison to the other driver’s newer, bigger model, Vito bets the other driver twenty beers that “Mi Socio,” his truck, can make the trip from Santa Cruz in the lowlands to La Paz in the highlands in four days. Complications ensue when

Vito discovers Brillo stowed away in his cargo. The two face challenges, overcome mistrust, and find in one another the son and father the other never had.

Scenes at truck stops, the roadside, and a crashed wedding are linked through long shots of the highway traversing Bolivian landscapes that establish the travelers' ascent from the lowlands to La Paz high in the Andes, a movement across not just differing geographies but also kinds of people populating them. The nationalist character of these long shots is underscored in the accompanying soundtrack with songs whose lyrics emphasize friendship and unity between *collas* ('highlanders') and *cambas* ('lowlanders') and travel along the nation's roads, such as the following: "We come from the plains, crossing green valleys, we'll arrive at the pampas, uniting cambas and collas. Arriving in many towns, we share with their people joys and sorrows."² The film's theme song became a popular hit and remains a popular song within the repertoire of Bolivian folk music. The film itself remains popular enough that on the 27th anniversary of its release, the Bolivian Highway Commission ran a series reuniting the lead actors to promote advances in highway construction, which I return to below.

The less sentimental and more comedic *¿Quién Mató a La Llamita Blanca?* foregrounds regional conflict but highlights the racialized nature of the *camba/colla* divide more than *Mi Socio* (for more on this contrast see Babel 2014; Gustafson 2006; Swinehart 2012). As in *Mi Socio*, *La Llamita* places the circulation of commodities as a driving force in the films' narratives, but here the commodity in question is the most notorious, and most profitable, of Bolivia's exports—cocaine. The film follows an urban Aymara couple from El Alto, the Aymara majority city above La Paz, on a cross-country road trip as they smuggle a huge quantity of cocaine across Bolivia from La Paz in the west to the Brazilian border in the east. All the while, the film cuts to the activities of the federal agents who follow them in hot pursuit together with the corrupt politicians and U.S. agents who orchestrate both sides of the operation. The film is narrated by a Bolivian comedian, Guery Sandoval, who appears throughout in varied costumes—as a La Paz businessman, an Aymara day laborer, a carnival goer, etc. The editing style incorporates text, news reportage, multiple frames, and generally adopts a Web 2.0 aesthetic reflective of its 2006 release. The nearly kaleidoscopic, multimodal nature of this presentation itself can also be read as a visual instantiation of the "pluri-multi" reality of the nation the film aims to represent.

² Desde los llanos venimos, cruzando por verdes valles, a las pampas lleagaremos, uniendo a cambas y collas...llegando a muchos pueblos, con su gente compartimos alegrías y tristezas.

Viewers are presented with a cast of characters who evoke regional stereotypes at their most overstated. One of the Federal agents is a white, racist easterner who brandishes nothing less than a swastika flag in his office. The central protagonists, “*los tortolitos*” (‘the love birds’), are two *cholos*, or urban Indians, from the majority Aymara city of El Alto. The two are outlandish in their crass vulgarity and criminality. Along the stops of the journey, the female protagonist, Domitila, changes her wardrobe at each stop to don women’s clothing typical of the region—the short skirt and broad-rimmed hat of a Cochabambina Quechua woman, for example. By the conclusion of both films, the characters have confronted and overcome regional stereotypes and ethnic prejudices in the course of traversing the nation and its roads. In contrast to the integration into a modern state as promised by the representations of infrastructure in the films of Jorge Ruiz and the ICB, however, these roads facilitate the traversing of a multicultural, and what will be officially after the 2009 constitution, plurinational terrain.

Tensions of the Plurinational - *La Nación Clandestina* and *Zona Sur*

Jorge Sanjinés’ *La Nación Clandestina* (1989) and Juan Carlos Valdivia’s *Zona Sur* (2009) differ from one another in terms of the historical contexts of their production and release, and also in terms of style and aim, but share different investments in social realist commentary. Sanjinés emphasizes the role of memory in the construction of the narrative while Valdivia approaches a sense of real-time ordering of events with scenes shot in long takes that circle endlessly, nearly provoking nausea. These films’ pessimistic assessments of the possibility of an integrated unitary national project emerge from their depiction of the road as a spacetime of disconnect and rupture between incommensurate worlds of the city and the countryside, a chronotope riddled with potholes of anti-Indian, specifically anti-Aymara, racism. Both films depict a spatialization of racialized violence in La Paz in which the road plays a crucial role, both as a space for encountering the “sociohistorical heterogeneity of the nation” in Bakhtin’s terms, but also, more specifically, a surface of contact between national subjects and the state.

Directed by Bolivia’s most renowned and prolific director, Jorge Sanjinés, *La Nación Clandestina* is set against the backdrop of the social upheavals that marked the death throes of military governance during early 1980’s Bolivia. The film follows a tragic figure, Sebastián Mamani, who we discover was raised in the city, left by his impoverished Aymara parents as a child to labor in the care (or rather, neglect) of an urban Aymara artisan. After disastrous attempts

to reintegrate himself into the life of his *ayllu* (traditional indigenous Andean community) as an adult, he is ultimately banished from the community. The encompassing chronotope of the film is Mamani's long walk from La Paz to his home *ayllu* with the events of his life presented as flashbacks recalled during his journey of return, his memories punctuating the experience of the long walk home. There is continuous toggling between chronotopes within the film, between the narrated chronotopes of his memories and the narrating chronotope of his journey. Along the road to his *ayllu*, Mamani encounters other Bolivians, each encounter presenting instances of miscommunication, unreciprocated requests, and open hostility. He comes across a road block "authorized by twenty provinces;" unconcerned with politics, he pays no mind to their demands. Later in his journey, Mamani encounters a white, urban leftist fleeing the military, only to be stopped shortly after by the very soldiers who were pursuing the leftist. He is equally indifferent to the requests of both the road blockers and the urban leftist, just as they are equally demeaning and racist in their treatment of him. While the protagonist is intent on returning to his community to die, these other figures appear to traverse separate roads entirely, pursuing other trajectories, (the strike wins, the communist captured, the revolution prevails) each with a temporal horizon of finality other than Mamani's own.

Mamani's goal is more than simply to return to his community, but to regain their love and acceptance through a dramatic act of self-sacrifice. Throughout his journey he carries on his back a massive mask of a figure from Bolivian folklore, *Tata Danzante*. The performance of *Tata Danzante* in community celebrations is effectively an act of ritual suicide to ensure a community's health and abundance. In the course of a community's celebration a *Tata Danzante* dancer's enormous mask exhausts him and ultimately crushes and asphyxiates him. The enormous, ominous mask hangs visibly on Mamani's back throughout his journey. We can note that the word 'persona' itself comes to us from the Latin word for mask. The different personae placed upon Mamani throughout his life course weigh on him as a burden through his journey until the end. The chronotope of the road here is multivalent, as a national chronotope populated by personae reflecting Bolivia's diversity and also as a biographic chronotope of Mamani's life course, the journey ending in his death.

Also set in La Paz, Juan Carlos Valdivia's 2009 *Zona Sur* follows the relations between a downwardly mobile, but privileged, white family and their Aymara domestic workers in the wealthy southern La Paz neighborhood of Calacoto. The interpersonal drama depicted in the film



Figs. 7-9: Screenshots from *La Nación Clandestina*

is largely animated by the divorced matriarch's precarious class status her anxieties of race and gender as they relate to her lesbian daughter dating a working-class mestiza and her aimless drug abusing young adult son, and her relationship to her Aymara domestic workers, who provide company for the overlooked youngest son in the family. While most of the film is in Spanish, entire scenes of dialogue are in Aymara but without subtitles, forcing Spanish monolingual viewers to confront their own limitations with the language of millions of their Aymara co-nationals. The climax of the film comes with the Aymara butler's taking the matriarch's car to reach his village on the shore of Lake Titicaca to attend his own son's funeral. Like in *La Nación Clandestina*, the road in *Zona Sur* is a path of return to an Aymara *ayllu*, but comes as a radical break in, rather than structural thread through, *Zona Sur*'s narrative. The road chronotope in *Zona Sur* is a pivot in the film's narrative, a rupture in which underlying tensions come

forth. A bourgeois-home-as-prison trope is evoked throughout the film with scenes of family members looking to the horizon through home windows as if trapped behind them. This confined confining chronotope of the home contrasts starkly with the scene of the funeral shot on the high plain, an open and expansive landscape. This scene is chilling for its seemingly "timeless" pastoral rendering of somber Aymara tradition. Aymara mourners, warmly clothed in traditional dress sit in on the ground in a cold and exposed hilltop landscape. They sit huddled, silently eating a traditional *apthapi* ('potluck') of cooked tubers and dried meats, the stark and expansive landscape stretching out behind them, Lake Titicaca in the distance.

The contrast between the open spacetime of the high plain and the claustrophobic bourgeois home/compound/prison is radically contrastive. What links these worlds? If the link between the confined suburban home and the open high plain is the national highway, it is a tenuous link, made difficult by the conditions of Bolivian apartheid. The road that connects these worlds is a moment of interface with the Bolivian state in which the butler, Wilson, is stopped at a checkpoint and interrogated in a moment of "driving while Aymara." Wilson is elegantly dressed for a funeral and

sitting beside a female family member who is also dressed in black, with the coffin of his deceased son in the trunk. The police officer doubts that the car is his and even accuses him of having stolen it. During the exchange the officer speaks in Spanish while Wilson answers and protests bilingually in Aymara and Spanish. The officer understands but never reciprocates, a fraught heteroglossia in which the Aymara voice protests, is rendered unintelligible, or perhaps worse, irrelevant. The hostilities do not escalate and the officer lets them pass. The mobility afforded by the road is guarded by the state's armed representative, enforcing the humiliation and displacement already heaped upon Wilson by his employer.



Figs.10-11: The bourgeois home as prison



Fig. 12: The police stops the butler Wilson

Fig.13: The funeral for the butler Wilson's son

Conclusion

National road systems facilitate the possibility of communicative encounters of all sorts--merchants move their wares, migrants relocate, families reconnect. A road system may remain a site for communicative action even when it has ceased functioning, as is the case when protesters erect blockades, or demand they not be built. The COB's blockade I mentioned in opening, to my relief, was more porous than I expected and focused on the movement of commodities and goods,

and merely slowed down human movement between points. In taking over the nation's roads, COB's members asserted control over the nation's economic activity, if only for a day, by extending the work stoppage of one factory to the entire nation through a seizure of the routes of distribution. The movement to keep a highway out of TIPNIS communicates a politics of refusal (Simpson 2014) to engage in the asymmetrical communication (i.e. colonization) a new highway would facilitate.

More than just "road trips," the journeys at the center of *Mi Socio* and *La Llamita* also depict infrastructure as the foundation for economic activity and the sociality and interdependence it enables. Writing about infrastructure and communication in the wake of the expansion of rail and the advent of the radio and the telephone, Edward Sapir tempered an emergent technological determinism of his own day with a recognition of the communicative limits of infrastructure:

It is to be noted that such instruments as the railroad and the radio are not communicative in character as such; they become so only because they facilitate the presentation of types of stimuli which act as symbols of communication or which contain implications of communicative significance. Thus, a telephone is of no use unless the party at the other end understands the language of the person calling up. Again, the fact that a railroad runs me to a certain point is of no real communicative importance unless there are fixed bonds of interest which connect me with the inhabitants of the place.

(Sapir 1951: 79)

What are the fixed bonds of interest that hold a nation as diverse as Bolivia together? *Mi Socio* and *La Llamita* both provide filmic fantasies of infrastructure's unifying capacity. They provide chronotopes in which the technical and the conceptual semiotics of infrastructure (Larkin 2008: 224, 226) are not just clearer, but articulated within a nationalist framework. These filmic chronotopes of redemptive and harmonious traversing of national territory have become entextualized (Bauman and Briggs 1992; Silverstein and Urban 1996) such that they themselves too can travel on their own discursive roads. They can be referred to citationally in conversations among friends (Nakassis 2016), be recommended to a foreign anthropologist, shared with younger generations, or even, become available as a citable resource for the Bolivian Highway Commission (Administración Boliviana de Carreteras, or ABC). In 2008, the ABC cited precisely these filmic tropes to promote their projects and to justify public expenditures for them. The ABC drew on the widespread appeal of these films in their promotional spots advertising the expansion of road service and the adding of lanes to regional highways in the late 2000s. Twenty-seven years after

Mi Socio's original release, the ABC filmed a *Mi Socio* reunion in which the actors who played Vito and Brillo reunite on a bus while the film is playing on an interior bus monitor for the trip's entertainment. The ABC also ran commercials about the expansion of single lane highways to double lane, separated highways with the narrator of *La Llamita* appearing in locales around the country.



Fig. 14: *Mi Socio* “27 years later”



Fig.15: The 1983 film playing as bus entertainment



Fig.16: Vito and Brillo Reunited



Fig.17: 3,252 km constructed in three years

The other films discussed above, *La Nación Clandestina* and *Zona Sur*, appear in contrast as less likely candidates for the boosterism of the ABC. The nation's highways in these films are not just the ligaments of the nation's flesh, economic arteries flowing with people and goods, but chronotopes populated by people in conflict, persons engaged in varyingly hostile acts of mutual unintelligibility. The chronotope of meeting on the road in these latter two films is in each instance spatiotemporally fraught with the desire to be allowed to pass, to leave the encounter – to be spared the disciplining sanction of strike leaders' authority, to avoid the imposition of the refugee, to ignore the interrogations of the military, or to see the cop at the checkpoint let you drive on. Rather than a heroic or hopeful response to Sapir's “fixed bonds” we encounter the opposite, people doing their best to break free from them.

Real world road dramas like the COB strike or the battle over TIPNIS surround the production and reception of representations of roads in Bolivian cinema while these representations figure reflexively into understandings of what “the national” is for Bolivians themselves. Aspirations for a unified (and unifying) road system, free of blockages are very much in place, as attested to both by the ABC campaign and the Cochabamba-Trinidad highway project, yet recent filmic representations of the road, whether optimistic or more fraught with tension, tell a different story. While midcentury filmic representations of infrastructure like those of Jorge Ruiz and the ICB projected a heroic march toward modernity, the roads of *La Llamita*, *Mi Socio*, *Zona Sur*, and *La Nación Clandestina* do not simply celebrate an integrative model for the nation, even when they are at their most optimistic, as in the cases of *La Llamita* and *Mi Socio*. The roads of these films provide chronotopic scenes of heterogeneity, sometimes more and sometimes less fraught with the tensions that mark contemporary Bolivia, anticipating the recognition of the plurinational character of the country and the move away from the homogenizing nationalism of an earlier era.

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