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Between the Rights of Nature and the Right to Develop: Bolivia under Evo Morales

Callum McCormick

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Politics

Birkbeck College, University of London

I acknowledge that this work is entirely my own

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## **Introduction**

- The New Left and the Problem of Ecology
- Critical Marxism and political Ecology
- Principal Concepts and Methods
- Research Structure

### *Section 1: Historical and Theoretical Foundations*

#### **Chapter 1. Restructuring Latin America: Neoliberal Paths and Political Crisis pp. 29-63**

- i. Twin Crises: The End of ISI and the Debt Crisis
- ii. From Nationalisation to Privatisation: Changing the Relationship between State and Economy
- iii. Neoliberalism and the 'Environmental Fix'
- iv. Bolivia: Neoliberalism, Sustainable Development and its Legacy

#### **Chapter 2. From Sustainable Development to Post-Development: Key Themes in Latin American Environmental Thought pp. 64-111**

- i. Contesting Sustainable Development
- ii. Unequal Exchange, Sustainable Development and Post-Development
- iii. From Development to Post-Development: *Buen Vivir* and the Cultural Critique of Development
- iv. Locating the Problem: The Last Five Centuries
- v. Capitalism, Development and Rationality: The Work of Enrique Leff

#### **Chapter 3. The Tyranny of Geography: Bolivia's Land, Resources and Politics pp. 112-142**

- i. Shaping Bolivia: War, Misrule and Borders
- ii. The Earth in Microcosm
- iii. Demographics are Destiny: Who are the Bolivian People?
- iv. Bolivia, Environmental Crisis and Climate Change
- v. Between the Rights of Nature and the Right to Develop

### *Section 2: Bolivia under Evo Morales*

#### **Chapter 4. National Development in a Plurinational State: The Contradictions of Evo Morales' Bolivia pp. 143-161**

- i. Morales' Project and the Bolivian State in Perspective
- ii. National Development: The Politics of Mobilising Resources and People in Contemporary Bolivia

#### **Chapter 5. 'We Are Not Park Keepers': Between Green Capitalism and Neo-Extractivism in the Bolivian Amazon pp. 162-190**

- i. The March Towards the East: Then and Now
- ii. States and Capital in the Amazon
- iii. Extractivism and the Fate of Bolivia

**Chapter 6. The Rights of Mother Earth: Is Bolivia Constructing a New Model of Development? pp. 191-222**

- i. The Rights of Nature and the Expanding Circle of American Liberalism
- ii. The Rights of Nature as Law: Compromises and Contestation
- iii. What Remains? Salvaging Nature's Rights
- iv. The Spectre of Green Imperialism

**Chapter 7. Natural and Political Limits: The Process of Change and The Future of Bolivian Development pp. 223-254**

- i. On Winning Before You Have Won: Is Anyone Against the Process of Change?
- ii. Subduing the Media Luna: The Nationalisation of Bolivian Politics
- iii. After the Boom: What Survives the Slowdown?
- iv. Digging a Hole: The 2014 Mining Law and the Politics of Conflict
- v. An Energy Capital or an Energy Crisis

**Conclusion**

## Tables

Table 1. Comparison of Major Features of Rights of Nature and Right to Develop Concepts

Table 2.1. Average Percentage Variation in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Selected Latin American countries

Table 2.2. Percentage Share of Total Income to Income Groups in Selected Latin American countries

Table 2.3. Selected Institutional, Legal and Policy Changes in Bolivia Promoting Sustainable Development Between 1993-1996

Table 3.1. Price in US Dollars of Main Bolivian Mineral and Metal Exports

Table 4.1. Number and Area of Active Forestry Rights to 2010 (> 200 Hectares)

Table 5.1. Vote for Morales for President, by department

Table 5.2 % of Population with Residential Electricity Access

## Figures

Figure 1.1. Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity of Bolivia

Figure 1.2. Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity of Switzerland

Figure 2. Bolivia's Lost Territory

Figure 3. Kori Chaca gold mine

Figure 4. Comparative Rates of Deforestation per capita

Figure 5. Permanently Productive Forestland

Figure 6. Chronology of the TIPNIS controversy

Figure 7. Map of TIPNIS

Figure 8. Principal Roads through Bolivia

Figure 9. Stages of the Proposed Villa-Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos Road

Figure 10. 'More Development, More Roads'

Figure 11. Bolivia Foreign Trade 2014-15

Figure 12. Current Hydrocarbon Concessions in National Parks

## Glossary of Main Acronyms

CEDIB: Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia

CEPA: Centro de Ecología y Pueblos Andinos

CEPAL: Comisión Económica para América Latina

CIDOB: Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia

COB: Central Obrera Boliviana

CONAMAQ: Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu

CSUTCB: Confederación Sindical Unión de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia

FOBOMADE: Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo

IMF: International Monetary Fund

INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Bolivia

LIDEMA: Liga del Defensa del Medio Ambiente

MAS: Movimiento al Socialismo

NDP: National Development Plan

SERNAP: Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

YPFB: Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos



## Chronology

1952-1964: National Revolution

1964-1982: Military junta overthrows government of Victor Paz and a period of military rule begins

1985: Return to democratic government

1990: 1<sup>st</sup> Indigenous March for Dignity and Land

1996: The passage of Ley INRA by President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada

2000: Cochabamba Water War

2002: Evo Morales comes second in the Presidential Elections

2003-2005: Gas War and the deposition of President Sánchez de Lozada

2005: Morales wins the Presidency

2008: Defeat of Recall Referendum

2009: Passage by referendum of new constitution. Foundation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Morales re-elected with increased majority.

2011: Protests against plans to build a road through the TIPNIS national park

2012: Passage of the Framework Law of The Rights of Mother Earth for Development and Living Well

2014: Re-election of President Morales.

2015: Victories for opposition in subnational elections

## Abstract

*The government of Evo Morales is emblematic of the new left governments in Latin America that emerged at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Growing out of a crisis of the neoliberal project in Latin America as a whole and Bolivia in particular, Morales' government has overseen a period of economic and political stability in a country not known for either. Globally, Morales has become associated with the 'rights of nature' discourse and radical environmentalism, being named the 'World Hero of Mother Earth' by the General Assembly of the United Nations. At the same time, however, the model of development pursued by his government has continued to rely on the extractive industries to produce economic growth. This has produced fractures within the social movements on whose behalf Morales claims to govern. My argument in this dissertation is that it is only possible to understand the contradictions of environmental policy in the Morales era by reflecting on the particular features of Bolivian society. During his tenure, the 'defence of Mother Earth' has been vitiated by a commitment to territorial sovereignty and national development, which the government has justified by reference to what I call the 'right to develop'. It is only by understanding the interaction of these two competing 'rights', I will claim, that we can analyse the nature of Morales' project thus far and assess its prospects for long term political and environmental sustainability. I also argue that critical assessment of the Bolivian experience under Morales can illuminate wider challenges facing political movements committed to elaborating an environmentally sustainable and socially equitable development model in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

## Introduction

I think that the phrase of Karl Marx is today more valid and dramatic than ever, there is hardly any time left: socialism or death, but real death— of the entire human species and of life on planet earth, because capitalism is destroying the planet, capitalism is destroying life on earth, capitalism is destroying the ecological equilibrium of the planet. The poles are melting, the seas are heating up, the continents are sinking, forests and jungles are being destroyed, rivers and lakes are drying up; the destructive development of the capitalist model is putting an end to life on earth. I believe it's now or never.<sup>1</sup> – Hugo Chavez

The emergence of a new left in Latin America at the beginning of the century has provoked an avalanche of writing in response.<sup>2</sup> While some governments of the 'pink tide' are experiencing various degrees of economic atrophy or political instability, most notably in

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<sup>1</sup> Chavez, Hugo Frias, President Chavez's Speech to the 6<sup>th</sup> World Social Forum – Americas, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2006, available from <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1728>

<sup>2</sup> Books such as Barrett, Patrick, Chavez, Daniel, and Rodriguez-Garavito, Cesar, *The New Latin American Left: Utopia Reborn* (Pluto Press, London, 2008), Levitsky, Steven, and Roberts, Kenneth M. (eds), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2011), Weyland, Kurt, Madrid, Raul L., and Hunter, Wendy (eds), *Leftist Government in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010), Philip, George and Panizza, Francisco, *The Triumph of Politics: The Return of the Left in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador* (Polity, Cambridge, 2011), Kozloff, Nikolas, *Revolution! South América and the Rise of the New Left* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2008), Silva, Eduardo, *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009), Sader, Emir, *The New Mole: Paths of the Latin American Left* (Verso, London, 2011) take a region-wide or at least multi-country approach. These are the more wide-ranging overviews, with the authors or the editors tackling a variety of themes in the same volume. Most of these collections have no specific chapters or sections dealing with environmental politics, although, of course, much of the content – particularly that which deals with the political economy of natural resource use – deals with practices that have ecological implications.

Venezuela, Bolivia under Evo Morales increasingly resembles a successful vision of relative calm and stability. Since his ascension to the Presidency in 2006, Morales has overseen a period of strong and sustained economic growth and a stable internal political climate in comparison with the country's history. Rising real incomes and new anti-poverty measures, including old age pensions and payments to mothers of young children, have solidified support amongst Morales' poor and indigenous supporters. The very presence of 'Brother Evo' in the Burnt Palace at Plaza Murillo has done much to challenge the racist and colonial structures of Bolivian society and has allowed the Indian majority to assume their place at the centre of national life.

The relative success of Morales' time in office, and the apparently judicious administration of Bolivia's economy and state institutions that it is built upon, nonetheless poses its own dilemmas. Elected amidst a wave of popular revolt against the technocratic neoliberal political class which had governed the country after the return to civilian rule in 1985, Morales was quickly bracketed with the other radical governments that took power in Latin America. Alongside the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, he became the leading regional and international representative of 21st Century Socialism. However, the government's ten years in office has already provided ample evidence for the view that the change has not been as great as had hoped, or feared. In particular, the environmental and social cost of the development agenda the government has pursued to fund its redistributive policies has come under increased critical focus.

### **The New Latin American Left and the Rights of Nature**

Although the body of literature which has developed in response to the new left reflects a wide variety of theoretical perspectives, political sensibilities and conceptual apparatus, it is possible to identify a common set of themes or areas of enquiry. Most of the edited collections in English that focus on the left turn in Latin America include work that can be placed under a fairly stable set of headings. A vast amount of work on topics such as social

movements and the state<sup>3</sup>, democratisation, the role of civil society<sup>4</sup>, political economy<sup>5</sup>, regional integration, citizenship and nationality, race and gender has accumulated as Latin American scholars and political theorists more generally have attempted to wrestle with the implications of the upturn in leftist struggle, and success, on the continent.

The problem of ecology and environmental policy was initially given only cursory or secondary importance in most analyses of the new left agenda. While that fact has recently begun to change, with new collections and essays particularly on the persistence of so-called 'extractivism' among the continent's left governments, the area is still under addressed.<sup>6</sup> My research looks to go some way to addressing this lacunae in the literature on the Latin American new left in relation to the problem of ecology.

My core argument here is that ecological dilemmas are central to the *politics* of the new left in Latin America and the government of Bolivia specifically. It is only by fully integrating the ecological dimension into an analysis of the new left that we can understand its origins or uncover its developmental tendencies. Not only did socio-environmental struggles play a crucial role in creating the political conditions that allowed the new left to emerge, the long-term prospects of the new left will depend in large part on whether it is able to construct a systematic alternative to hegemonic forms of development for which the ecological dimension is largely absent. In other words, my research responds not only to a gap in the literature, but also to a *problem* with it.

A full account of how the new left has responded to environmental crises is central to understanding it. My focus on Bolivia stems from two reflections: firstly, that the geographic, political and historical particularities of Bolivia mean that ecology immediately takes centre stage in any serious analysis of its development. Secondly, that its government above all

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<sup>3</sup> Petras, James F. and Veltmeyer, Henry, *Social Movements and State Power: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador* (Pluto Press, London, 2005) gives a critical overview, written from a radical socialist perspective, of the interaction of social movements and states in four Latin American nations.

<sup>4</sup> Cannon, Barry and Kirby, Peadar (eds), *Civil society and the state in left-led Latin America* (Zed Books, London, 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Macdonald, Laura, and Ruckert, Arne (eds), *Post –Neoliberalism in the Americas* (Palgrave, London 2009)

<sup>6</sup> See Bebbington, Andrew (ed), *Social Conflict, Economic Development and the Extractive Industry* (Routledge, London, 2011) and Lopez, Emiliano and Vertiz, Francisco, *Extractivism, Transnational Capital, and Subaltern Struggles in Latin America*, *Latin American Perspectives*, November 5, 2014, for important recent interventions on this topic. The state of the research in Spanish is radically different, where the environmental logic of the left governments has been under sustained criticism from major scholars for a significant period of time.

others of the new left gained its international reputation, and national political coherence, on the basis of its rejection of neoliberal capitalist development that has had significant environmental impacts.

Evo Morales' discourse in office has been replete with denunciations of capitalism's destruction of the natural environment, warnings about the impact of burning fossil fuels on the global climate and attacks on core capitalist economies for their refusal to accept responsibility for or work to reverse ecological destruction. Explaining his view about the dire nature of affairs after the weak agreement reached by at the 2009 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Cancun, Mexico, Morales claimed that the choice facing the planet was clear: 'Capitalism dies or Mother Earth dies. There is no middle option'.<sup>7</sup>

The other factor making research on the environmental policies of the new left government in Bolivia compelling is the extent and effects of the ecological crisis itself. Leaving aside the likely effects of global climate change on the region as a whole – to which Bolivia is particularly vulnerable<sup>8</sup> – environmental change and the struggle over control and use of natural resources has framed political conflict there for at least a decade. This is most obvious in the example of the Water War in Cochabamba in 2000 and the Gas Wars of 2003-5 which came to symbolise the terminal crisis of neoliberalism that preceded the emergence of MAS and the election of Evo Morales in 2005.

In addition, many of the struggles and contradictions that have emerged since the Morales government came into power in Bolivia have revolved around the politics of the environment. These conflicts have often revolved around contested understandings of economic and social development and disagreements about what constitutes acceptable environmental impact. In my research, I conceptualise this dispute as the clash between the 'rights of nature' and the 'right to develop'. This dispute clearly has broader significance both for nations that are developing within the context of global environmental change and for development theory and its favoured models more generally.

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<sup>7</sup> *El Universal*, Evo Morales: Muere el Capitalismo o Muere la Madre Tierra, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2010, available from <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/729259.html>

<sup>8</sup> Oxfam International, Bolivia: Climate change, poverty and adaptation. October 2009

What I attempt to bring out in this study is the way in which competing development goals and strategies have developed and been transformed in the face of the 'reality' of contemporary development. In the case of Bolivia, geographic and environmental realities, and historical inheritance, have produced a very particular set of constraints on development. What I find is a clash between a critique of the philosophical standpoint of capitalist development and the actual developmental course undertaken, much of which follows and indeed deepens the dependent, primary export model.

However, what I intend to bring out and to stress is that we cannot understand this clash using a simple hermeneutic of cynicism. The gap between 'rhetoric and reality' cannot be filled in by superficial or glib assumptions of political expediency or casuistry. Instead, I want to explore this gap by reference to the historical and geographical features of Bolivian society and to the nature of the political conjuncture in which the Morales government operates. In approaching the question this way, I want to challenge moralistic approaches to political analysis – which rely on narratives of loyalty and betrayal - and instead stress the importance of structural constraints and opportunities for political movements and governments in Bolivia. In sum, whatever the shortcomings of governance under Morales, I argue that it is broader structural deficits and imperatives that explain the tensions and innovations in its attempt at a novel form of environmentally-sensitive development.

What I do want to show, however, is that the problems of ecology are of critical *political* importance to the viability and direction of the government. If the Morales government, and its counterparts in the sister Republics, are unable to translate their political-ideological claims about the environment into concrete projects that reduce the dislocation and turmoil caused by environmental change, the 'sustainability' of the movements *qua* effective political movements will be limited. As I will suggest at points throughout the study, this effect is already becoming apparent in Bolivia. Unless real steps are undertaken, the crisis that engulfed the neoliberal order will re-emerge and consume the new left.

In this sense, critical analysis of the progress of Bolivian development under Morales produces insights of significance to matters out with Bolivia itself. Despite the vibrant scholarly and political debate on the relationship between hegemonic development strategies and environmental damage, at the very best there are only the basic coordinates of an alternative

development agenda. Failure to piece together these fragments into a viable political and economic strategy will certainly create the conditions for another round of failed development and political retreat for the left across the continent.

### **Critical Marxism and Political Ecology**

My research project is informed by a critical Marxist perspective. This perspective helps me to develop a conceptual framework with which to approach the research problems and aims I have identified above. I will attempt to construct an argument that develops a sophisticated account of the relationship between capitalist economic restructuring (neoliberalism), the de- and re-composition of the network of social relations, political change and its impact on the environment.

My approach is informed by a current Marxist theory that finds its clearest expression in the work of Gramsci and then Althusser. In this form, Marxist theory does not treat politics as an ‘epiphenomenon’, but instead attempts to determine the dimensions within which political struggles can reshape ideological terrain and create new institutional and material practices that challenge capitalist domination or hegemony.

What I would choose to stress about this approach is its insistence on an ‘active’ account of social and political change – an account, in other words, that is non-deterministic and non-teleological. It is also one in which the role of ‘ideas’ in establishing the hegemony (‘domination’ or ‘leadership’) of dominant social groups is accounted for. Note that, viewed from the other side, this also translates into a recognition of the role of ideas in challenging and breaking down bourgeois hegemony and *in the construction of new hegemonies*. My focus on the discursive challenges to neoliberalism launched in Latin America is informed by this perspective and by Gramsci’s view, following Marx, that ideas which are ‘widely held’ take on a material force. This is one reason why I reject, as I said earlier, easy distinctions between government rhetoric and apparently transparent ‘reality’.

At this point, I want to briefly state what I mean by political ecology, and how I see it relating to and complementing the critical Marxist perspective I have laid out above. The purpose here is to establish, at least provisionally, the reasons why I think critical Marxism and political ecology can be reconciled as forms of theoretical practice that is, as a way of *doing* social



research. This is a separate question as to whether they are reconcilable at the level of politics and philosophy. The integration of 'political ecology' with Marxism is, in other words, a separate question to the integration of the 'politics of ecology' with socialism.

The crucial element of political ecology as a field, one that makes it immediately attractive from a Marxian perspective, is its insistence on the centrality of political economy to the study of human ecology – that is, to the study of the interactions between human groups and their immediate natural environment. Political ecologists are committed to the view that in order to 'understand what is happening to the environment, we have to understand the origins, development, structure and dynamics of capitalism: its systematic imperatives'.<sup>9</sup> Political ecology attempts to challenge 'apolitical ecologies' grounded in technocratic standpoints and common-sense assumptions. It 'combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy... [It] encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources and also within classes and groups within society itself'.<sup>10</sup>

While much early political ecology was neo-Marxist in its approach, focussing explicitly on the class dynamics of environmental change and resource use, later political ecologists have tended to distance themselves from the 'reductionist' implications of this work. However, the claim made by David Harvey that 'all ecological projects are simultaneously political-economic projects and vice-versa' remains foundational for the field.<sup>11</sup>

Harvey's reflection builds upon elements of Marx's own analysis, particularly from the "earlier" work, in which his embeddedness in a tradition of philosophical materialism was perhaps more explicit than in *Capital*. Moreover, much of the intellectual 'toolkit of political economy' and therefore of Marx's "immanent" critique, revolves around questions of access and control of vital resources.<sup>12</sup> These questions are similarly indispensable for tackling questions of environmental change since the use of resources inevitably has an environmental impact.

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<sup>9</sup> Peet, Richard, Robbins, Paul and Watts, Michael J. (eds), *Global Political Ecology* (Routledge, New York, 2011) p. 16

<sup>10</sup> Robbins, Paul, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2004) p. 6

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Bryant, Raymond L., and Bailey, Sinead, *Third World Political Ecology* (Routledge, London, 1997) p. 28

<sup>12</sup> Peet, Richard, and Watts, Michael, *Liberating Political Ecology*, in Peet, Richard, and Watts, Michael (eds), *Liberating Ecologies: Environment, Development and Social Movements* (Routledge, London, 2004) p. 6

These connections, it is important to note, were ones recognised in Marx's own writings. Thus, for instance, Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology* open their materialist critique of Feuerbach's idealism with a claim for the foundational status of nature for critical analysis of human societies:

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature...The writing of history must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men (sic).<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the fact that Marx's thought was deeply embedded in a naturalist philosophical tradition, as for instance John Bellamy Foster has argued, does not mean we can simply pass-over or ignore the limits of Marx's approach to the problem of ecology. Nonetheless, the central aims and themes of political ecology seem to me to complement and enrich the insights we can draw from Marxism.

At the same time, many critical political ecologists have made their debt to Marxian analyses of capitalism clear. In their overview of the development of political ecology, Richard Peet and Michael Watt identify three themes around which the field of political ecology has coalesced. The first is the

...study of the impact of capitalist development on the environment; second, the social and political implications of environmental protection, conservation and management; the political economy of the way new natures (species, landscapes and ecosystems) are produced.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that the key themes of political ecology intersect at crucial points with Marx's critique of political economy. Political ecology does not restrict itself to looking at 'green politics' in isolation from the wider economic and political context, but draws insights from

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<sup>13</sup> Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich, *The German Ideology Part One* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1996) p. 42

<sup>14</sup> Peet et al, *Global Political Ecology*, p. 25

other critical discourses, including Marxism, in a fashion that broadens and enriches its theory of environmental change.<sup>15</sup>

Both critical Marxism of Gramscian type and political ecology hold that struggle over environmental change occurs in a context conditioned by other ideological, political, economic and conjunctural elements. The debates currently raging in Latin America over the natural environment cannot be separated from debates over the direction of economic policy, the role of the state, racial and gender oppression and so on. Political ecology, as a 'field of critical research predicated on the assumption that any tug on the strands of the global web of human-environment linkages reverberates throughout the system as a whole', to use Paul Robbins' evocative phrase, allows for the development of the kind of critically engaged analysis required.<sup>16</sup>

The basis for a positive encounter between political ecology and critical Marxist theory is also to be found in a rejection of the methodological individualism typical both of neoclassical economics and 'apolitical' ecology, and the insistence on a *social* and *relational* methodological standpoint. Those looking for a renewal of critical Marxist theory on the basis of an engagement with the insights of political ecology have stressed the centrality of holism to both traditions.

The socio-historical approach to human existence is holist and the concept of the biosphere is likewise holist. Social relations as interactions in the biosphere are viewed in dialectical fashion. A Marxian political ecology or an ecological Marxism will only be constructed if we manage to overcome the fetishisation of human relations with nature severed from social relations. Two-traps, mirror-images of one another, are therefore to be avoided: on the one hand, what Jean-Paul Garnier calls the 'naturalisation of social conditions'...on the other hand, the socialisation of the contradictions of the destruction of nature'.<sup>17</sup>

The lesson from political ecology is that holism cannot only be social, historical and biophysical. As Joan Martinez Alier has explained, neo-classical political economy and its

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<sup>15</sup> Bryant and Bailey, *Third World Political Ecology*, p. 28

<sup>16</sup> Robbins, *Political Ecology*, p. 5

<sup>17</sup> Harribey, Jean-Marie, Ecological Marxism or Marxian Political Ecology?, in Bidet, Jacques and Kouvelakis, Stathis (eds), *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Brill, Leiden, 2011) p. 206

intellectual descendants faced the 'insurmountable ontological difficulty of taking future generations into consideration'. By situating the question of inter-generational justice in the centre of its analysis, political ecology gives Marxist theory the ability to address something it had previously ignored.<sup>18</sup> The Marxist critique of inequality generated by capitalist property relations is extended and deepened if it treats seriously the injustice of future generations inheriting a degraded and dangerous ecosystem.

Finally, the strength of political ecology, and perhaps its sharpest point of distinction from 'apolitical' ecologies, is its insistence that what constitutes an environmental problem is not 'given' but socially constructed by political and ideological contestation. The question of who gets to determine what constitutes environmental damage or crisis cannot be separated from how other forms of knowledge and systems of meaning are constructed and become hegemonic.<sup>19</sup>

Geoff Mann's case for a 'Gramscian' political ecology is grounded in his recognition of the ideological-political context in which environmental problems get recognised *as problems*. The ideological and political are also fundamental since they are the terrain upon which hegemonic discourses and social practices are reproduced and challenged.

The ways in which people come to grips with the geographical power of environmental change- the ways they explain how and why it happened- are, then, not mere *ex post facto* causal propositions, epiphenomenal to geography and history. Rather, they are moral claims on the adequacy of history's "truth" to this place, on what should be with the passage of time.<sup>20</sup>

This is another way of saying that environmental change is always being legitimated and/or contested as it goes on. As I show in my discussion of neoliberalism, new regimes of accumulation and political systems involve restructuring human-environmental relations and this process requires ideological or ethical justification. So in the discourse of neoliberalism, environmental changes are rationalised on the basis of global 'competition', comparative advantage, economic and labour efficiencies, economies of scale and so on. I intend to argue

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 206

<sup>19</sup> Peet and Watts, *Liberation Ecologies*, p. 20

<sup>20</sup> Mann, Geoff, Should Political ecology be Marxist? A case for Gramsci's historical materialism, *Geoforum* 40 (2009) p. 341

that the government of Bolivia is part of a challenge to these hegemonic discourses, but that the development of this challenge is already approaching some limits. The underlying and broader aim of this research is to map the connections between the political-ideological critiques of capitalism's environmental destruction that have emerged in Latin America and the development of real socio-material alternatives.

### **Principal Concepts and Methods**

In this section, I will set out in more detail my understanding of the two concepts, the rights of nature and the right to develop, included in the thesis title, and how I intend to use them to frame the thesis as a whole. I will also provide a guide to my methods for the study.

'The Rights of Nature' is a concept I discuss in depth in the third chapter. In general, I associate this idea with the claim that the solution to environmental crisis is to enact legal rights for natural objects. This idea has gone through a variety of iterations. Initially, as I show in the chapter, it was a product of a radical liberal American discourse which associated social and political progress with the extension of rights to previously excluded categories of persons—blacks, women, homosexuals and so on. In this form, the rights of nature were considered a part of the expanding circle of American liberalism. Nature which had legal standing in the courts would by definition be protected. This is congruent with the prominence of a (human) rights framework within recent liberal-democratic discourses, especially those influenced by the American legal tradition, although its extension to entities other than individuals (for example to corporations, nations or nonhuman phenomena) has generated considerable theoretical controversy.

Latterly, however, the concept has become firmly embedded in radical environmental and anti-capitalist discourses in Latin America, firstly in Ecuador and now in Bolivia. In this form, vindication of the rights of nature is considered part of a general project of displacing the irrational, Western derived philosophies of nature that dominate modern attitudes to the environment. These Western standpoints -'transported' to the continent by *el encuentro* with the Spanish and, more surreptitiously, by the structures of global capitalism - are to be replaced by authentic indigenous forms of knowledge and social practice which integrate nature into a network of harmonious and reciprocal social relations. Nature here is not understood as a class of objects to be 'recognised', but as the totality of human and non-

human life and the physical and biological processes which make life possible and potentially fulfilling. In this form, the 'rights of nature' are part of a general awakening of social consciousness and political practice, the struggle for *vivir bien*, or the good life.

In chapter six, I also attempt to show *why* environmental movements and policy in Latin America, particularly in the Andean republics, have come under the influence of rights of nature discourses, and how this discourse has been incorporated within the wider framework of *vivir bien*.

The concept of development is, of course, highly contested across a number of disciplines and intellectual traditions. I understand development, as Jorge Larraín explained, to be closely bound up with the advent of capitalism. Economic systems prior to capitalism, organised primarily around agricultural production and production-for-use, tended to be stagnant and to change only incrementally over time.<sup>21</sup> Capitalism and the generalisation of commodity production created the conditions for the dynamic and durable expansion of wealth we recognise as a condition for development.

The classic work on the topic, Eugene Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth* (subtitle: 'A non-communist manifesto') makes a similar point from a different perspective. Rostow described the moment of development – what he called 'take-off' – as the culmination of a gradual process in which internal and external factors make the transcendence of 'traditional society possible'. This process unleashed 'hitherto unused natural resources and methods production', created a new class of entrepreneurs committed to rational application of technologies and led to the transformation of the 'basic structure of the economy and the social political structure'. These changes allowed for a 'steady rate of growth' to be maintained thereafter.<sup>22</sup> As I show in chapter 3, this view of development has been thoroughly scrutinised by Latin American scholars. In that chapter, I also discuss alternative theories of development in more detail.

At this juncture, I want to briefly state what I mean by the right to develop. It should be noted that it is not derived from 'right to development' that was recognised by an UN Declaration

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<sup>21</sup> Larraín, Jorge, *Theories of Development* (Polity Press, London, 1998) p. 2

<sup>22</sup> Rostow, W.W., *The Stages of Economic Growth* (CUP, London, 1971) p. 8

in 1986.<sup>23</sup> While this declaration contains instructive details of a possible right to development, I am not specifically referring to it when I use the phrase right to develop. Instead, I use the right to develop to explain a *particular* discourse used to defend the political and economic strategy of the Bolivian government. This includes the view that the Bolivian state has a right to and *must* mobilise all the territory and resources of the Bolivian people with the aim of alleviating poverty and integrating society. This right is, as I will argue, often raised in opposition to what are seen to be burdensome demands for conservation and environmental protection from Bolivian environmentalists, social movements and foreign agencies, either governments or NGOs. This right is often invoked, in other words, in the negative form – that is, it emerges whenever the government feels this right is being questioned or undermined.

Table 1 sets out the basic political coordinates of these rights discourses, but I develop on both these concepts in the body of the research. My thesis is that we can understand the development of the Morales government and Bolivian society over the last decade if we understand the interaction between these two ‘rights’. It is important to stress, in addition, the notion of Bolivia being *between* these rights. What I will show over the course of my study is that these competing discourses are constantly transforming and being transformed as they are articulated by different social forces and in different contexts. For instance, as has already been noted, the government’s approach to the rights of nature shifts depending on the audience being addressed (a national or international setting, for instance) or the political conjuncture (if there is an environmentally controversial policy being discussed).

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<sup>23</sup> United Nations, Declaration on the Right to Development (1986), available from <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r128.htm>

Table 1. Comparison of Major Features of Rights of Nature and Right to Develop Concepts

	<b>The Rights of Nature</b>	<b>The Right to Develop</b>
<i>Agent of Development</i>	Local communities, social movements	The state, political parties, national leadership
<i>Primary purpose of Development</i>	Protect environment; defend rights of indigenous communities; establish harmonious social and natural arrangements	Territorial integration, poverty alleviation, national sovereignty
<i>Worldview</i>	Plurinational, Indigenous-centred, communitarian	Nationalist, socialist, developmentalist
<i>Main antagonists</i>	Capitalism; non-indigenous 'western' values; the nationalist state	Neoliberalism; imperialism; 'radical' environmentalism
<i>Extractivism</i>	Opposed	A legitimate and unavoidable stage of development



My principal method of research is documentary analysis. . This may loosely (although not in the more technical way it is sometimes deployed) be associated with critical discourse analysis. This includes extensive analysis of a variety of sources, governmental and non-governmental. My main governmental sources are laws and publically available government planning documents – particularly the various national development plans the Bolivian government has produced during its tenure. My aim is to interrogate these documents in order to show how they have been informed and regulated by political and ideological contestation within Bolivia, and in Latin America as whole.

I draw a distinction between these official documents are other types of sources linked to the government. For instance, I also draw on speeches and remarks made by senior ministers in the government in relation to environmental and development problems. I also critically analyse book length works published by senior ministers, particularly the Vice President Álvaro Garcia Linera, to assess the state of the debate on the critical questions within the government at any one point.

The non-governmental sources are primarily the work of groups and analysts inside Bolivia. In particular, I look at the work of a number of environmental NGOs, media networks and research institutes inside Bolivia. The most important of these are the Environmental Defence League (LIDEMA), The Centre of Documentation and Information (CEDIB) and the Bolivian Forum for the Environment and Development (FOBOMADE). The media networks include Bolpress and Erbol. In relation to these, it is important to note that they have become, in some sense, a recognised source of opposition to the government, particularly over the trajectory of development policy.

My main focus is on the progress of the debate at the ‘national’ level. I stress this national scale because it allows me to analyse the strategies at work at their fullest point of political and social maturation. Since my stress is on Bolivian politics at the national level, this means that development contestation at the local or international scale are not directly addressed, except to the extent that they have translated into national political disputes. For example, I do not address the actions or strategies of the Bolivian government at international environmental forums, despite the fact that this may be a rich area of study.

In addition to these sources, I also draw on a research trip I undertook in October 2014 – during the Presidential and parliamentary elections. Although no material from this trip has made its way directly into the thesis, I credit it with enriching my understanding of research topic and correcting some errors in my thinking, particularly in relation to the politics of the regional divide in Bolivia.

### **Dissertation Structure**

In this section I explain the structure of my dissertation in order to show the underlying logic through which my research is presented according to seven chapters that are organised in two main sections. This section will therefore serve as a roadmap for readers.

I have divided the research into two main sections. The first sections includes chapters that deal with the historical and intellectual foundations which I feel are indispensable to tackling the material in the fullest fashion possible. In the first chapter I address the development and ultimate crisis of the neoliberal model across the continent as a whole. For an understanding of any government of the new left, not least that of Evo Morales, an account of neoliberalism seems to be vital. The neoliberal era forms still the ultimate negative horizon of Bolivian political discourse. I take a continent wide approach in this chapter so that I can develop as full account as possible of the ways in which neoliberalism ‘situated’ itself across a variety of heterogeneous societies. In Bolivia, as I show, neoliberal governments adopted radical measures aimed at promoting private investment into the natural resource sector at the expense of the state. They did so even while being a relatively early and enthusiastic adopter of the then nascent sustainable development discourse. This conjuncture produced a convergence between environmentalist and nationalist demands, as the state was called upon to return to the development fold to defend the natural patrimony of the country from the depredations of foreign exploitation.

In the second chapter, I address the growth, almost in parallel with the rise of neoliberalism, of sustainable development discourse and environmental politics in the 1980s and 1990s. What I show is that this discourse was appropriated and radically transformed by a generation of Latin American scholars, for whom the failures of development policy had been all too evident. In particular, I plot the growth of alternatives-to-development and post-development schools, particularly in the work Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas and Enrique

Leff. What I intend to show is how environmentalism became fused with a broader civilisational critique of the 'West'. This fed into and was enriched by emerging indigenous politics and discourse on the continent. This fusion of these political and intellectual strands, *indigenismo* and radical environmentalism, is a crucial factor in explaining the debates over development policy in contemporary Bolivia.

Thirdly, I explore the specificities and vagaries of modern Bolivia's historical and geographic inheritance. I look at how the country's politics have been bound up with a desire to have the state properly occupy the territory it notionally governs and the disasters which have perennially occurred for to its inability to do so. In the face of the extreme topographical, climatic and demographic fragmentation of the country, Bolivian nationalists and modernisers have sought to integrate state with territory and society with state. I also look at the particular set of environmental challenges facing the country. I argue that the country faces environmental crisis on several fronts, and that traditional forms of development are only exacerbating the difficulties.

With the historical, intellectual and geographic context provided by the first three chapters, the second section of my thesis delves directly into the fraught politics of development policy in contemporary Bolivia. In the fourth chapter, I consider the changes to the nature of the Bolivian state initiated by Morales, in alliance with Bolivian movements, in light of the perennial weakness of the Bolivian state. By analysing the perspective laid out in the 2006 National Development Plan, I attempt to address the form of state-led development proposed by the MAS government. Here, I set out the contradictions between a formal commitment to plurinationality, including a strong conception of indigenous territorial sovereignty, with the demand for an expanded role for the national state in 'industrialising' natural resources.

In the fifth chapter, I look at how these dissonant features of the MAS project have played out in the Bolivian Amazon. In this chapter, I directly address the controversy over the TIPNIS affair in light of Garcia Linera's defence of the government's position in a recently released book. I engage with the Vice President's argument that the explosions over the road reflected a confluence of the twin perils of economic backwardness and reactionary intrigue. More seriously, I critically analyse the debate over 'extractivism' between Garcia Linera and his

former colleague in the *Comuna* group, Raul Prada. What I try to illuminate in this exchange is how debates over Bolivian development have come to hinge on contending assessments of the limits which prevailing social and material conditions place on policy options. While advocates of the rights of nature may be correct in their concrete analysis of the government's agenda, they become less convincing when addressing themselves to the question of practical alternatives.

In the sixth chapter, I recapitulate the emergence of a distinct rights of nature discourse from within the American academy of the 1970s. The limits of a rights based approach to nature, while intellectually innovative and novel, were found in the failure to confront foundational questions about the role of dominant economic systems in reproducing environmental loss and damage. When the rights of nature approach was integrated with radical, indigenous based movements on the Andes, it found renewed intellectual foundations. I look closely at the development of the Rights of Mother Earth Law through its various forms, amendments and iterations. As the law progressed from the social movements to parliament and then to the President's table, fierce disagreements between the social movements and MAS were brought to the surface. At the heart of these disputes were fundamentally different concepts of the nature of the 'process of change' and of the purpose (or even existence) of the development process. Nonetheless, I will argue that the compromised final bill retains traces of its radical foundations and still provides a possible framework for those looking to defend the environment in Bolivia.

In the final chapter, I assess the current status and future prospects of the Morales project, in light of the dislocations and fractures I have highlighted in the previous chapters. I point out that despite continued electoral success, at least at the national level, political and natural limits to the project are already appearing on the horizon. The bad blood that has been built up with some of the social movements is showing signs of weakening MAS hegemony on its *altiplano* strongholds. At the same time, the social content of MAS itself is being diluted by increasingly close links with lowland elites.

More fundamentally, however, the government is beginning to be forced to confront the natural limits of its development project, in the form of stagnating income from gas exports and falling proven gas reserves. This is promoting a radicalisation of the extraction process,

including wholesale hydrocarbon exploration in the protected National Parks. At the same time, the government's failure to properly address itself to Bolivia's internal energy needs is increasingly at odds with its ambitious plans to transform Bolivia into the 'energy capital of South America'.

In this final chapter, I will extend and summarise the primary theoretical claim of the dissertation: namely, that without implementing the sort of environmental protections mandated by the rights of nature, real and lasting social and economic development is not possible. I argue that if the Bolivian government fails to address the question of long term environmental sustainability, then the evident progress in the social and economic field will ultimately be undermined by environmental crises, economic shocks and their associated political effects. Elements of this trajectory are already traceable, as I show, in current developments in Bolivia. In its rush to assert Bolivia's right to develop, the government is generating conditions likely to push both the biophysical limits of the country but also the political limits of Bolivian society.

## *Section 1: Historical and Theoretical Foundation*

### **Chapter 1 - Restructuring Latin America: Neoliberal Paths and Political Crisis**

In order to understand the rise of the new left in Latin America in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is first necessary to register the profound economic and political restructuring that the region underwent in the two preceding decades. The neoliberal revolution in the continent and the arrival of movements and governments of the left are connected in one obvious sense – that one followed another. More significantly, declared opposition to neoliberal policies and their effects in the countries of Latin America are often the dominant motifs of the movements, parties and leaders that have emerged across the continent in the past decade.

In what follows, I give an overview of the development, application and effects of neoliberalism in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. The chapter is divided into four subsections. My focus in this chapter will be on the region as a whole. I feel this broader perspective is justified here so that I can establish an as full as possible account of the practice of neoliberalism in Latin America. This reflects the fact that the Bolivian government emerged in a conjuncture determined by this broader historical and political context. One of the things I want to draw attention to by pursuing this course is the multiplicity of neoliberal paths that Latin American countries have walked. In this way, I want to reject at the outset an account of neoliberalism that treats it as a kind of rigid and monolithic dogma. Neoliberalism should not be understood as a state of affairs that can be decreed into existence, but as a name given to a set of ideas that motivate agents who operate in a variety of different institutional and historical contexts. The history of neoliberalism in Latin America is therefore necessarily the story of the uneven and nonlinear development of certain kinds of policies in certain kinds of circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

In what follows I provide a description of the move towards neoliberal reform in Latin America and its relationship to the emergence of a crisis with a dual character in Latin American society. In the first place, a severe economic crisis provoked by a debt crisis brought calls for liberalisation and economic restructuring. At the same time, an intellectual and ideological

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<sup>24</sup> As David Harvey notes, this is the pattern witnessed during the neoliberal turn as a whole. Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (OUP, Oxford, 2005) p. 13

exhaustion of the model of state-led development created conditions in which new ideas could gain a footing. In this sense, I reject mechanistic accounts of the emergence of neoliberalism in which it is simply imposed by 'elites' on a prone, helpless population.

I provide an assessment of the effects of neoliberalism on the institutional and political frameworks of several Latin American countries, focussing on the ways in which neoliberalism destabilised 'corporatist' political structures and the patterns of social allegiance which they hinged upon. My thesis is that neoliberalism's disturbance of these corporatist structures was crucial in the development of insurgent, anti-status quo political formations in the continent. In this sense, the irony of the neoliberal project, one goal of which, according to Harvey, is the 'restoration of ruling class power', is that it has resulted in a broad based challenge to hegemony in the region.<sup>25</sup>

I want primarily to conduct a political reading of neoliberalism's history in Latin America. I pay particular attention to the relationship between the adoption of neoliberal policies and changes in the state's function in Latin American countries. My intention is to show how the advent of neoliberalism in Latin America was linked to a shift among ruling classes on the question of what the state was for. An argument is developed that the neoliberal agenda was not only economic, but also called for a fundamental transformation of social relations in the continent. The state's central role in economic affairs, which promoted a fiercely politicised social and political life, was rolled back.<sup>26</sup>

I then address the issue of environmental change directly, drawing heavily from recent work completed on the 'neoliberalisation of nature'. I argue that many of the political-economic changes wrought by neoliberal restructuring had destabilising environmental impacts. The effects of neoliberal reform on the environment, particularly those resulting from its goal of the 'marketisation of nature', were crucial in creating the conditions for mass political resistance and opposition to neoliberalism. In sum, the period was one in which the rights of nature and the right to develop were politically and programmatically linked. As I will

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 142-151

<sup>26</sup> Some architects of the neoliberal project were conscious that the 'politicisation' of 'social and economic life' in the developing world that resulted from the state's prominent role in resource allocation needed to be undone. For an example, see the quote from Peter Bauer and Basil Yamey in Bello, Walden, *Dark Victory: The United States, Structural Adjustment and Global Power* (Pluto Press, London, 1994) p. 21

demonstrate, this unity of the two concepts against neoliberalism did not survive as the question of an alternative development strategy was posed.

**i. The Twin Crises: The End of ISI and the Debt Crisis**

Behold the sea you hope to traverse in a fragile boat, its pilot utterly unskilled.<sup>27</sup>

- Simón Bolívar

It is impossible to understand the neoliberal growth in Latin America without acknowledging the crucial role that moments of crisis played in promoting the adoption of neoliberal measures in Latin America. That is, added to the so-called 'long march through the institutions' – the gradual process of establishing ideological hegemony – neoliberalism was also able to gain ground quickly during periods of uncertainty and crisis. This crisis should be understood not in economic terms but also in its intellectual and political dimensions. This is particularly important when we come to consider the collapse of the neoliberal political project in Bolivia in the middle of the previous decade. The political crisis of neoliberalism emerged from its ultimate inability to address the twin attacks of environmentalism and the return of the desire for state-led development.

At this stage, I would like to stress that I am suspicious of any account of the history of neoliberalism in Latin America that treats it solely as something that was imposed on recalcitrant societies by international agencies, or that treats Latin American neoliberal politicians as 'agents' of the interests of global capitalism in any direct sense.<sup>28</sup> As Ronaldo Munck puts it, 'neoliberalism did not simply spring fully formed from the heads of the Chicago

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<sup>27</sup> Bolívar, Simon, *El Libertador: Writings of Simon Bolivar* (trans. Frederick H. Fornoff), (OUP, Oxford, 2003)

<sup>28</sup> Although useful in many ways, I would cite Latin American Bureau, *The Poverty Brokers: The IMF and Latin América* (LAB, London, 1983) as an early example of this type of reaction. More recently, it has been claimed that the neoliberal regime fell into crisis in Latin American because neoliberal politicians in Latin América were simply the technocratic adjuncts of transnational elites, see Margheritis, Ana and Pereira, Anthony W., *The Neoliberal Turn in Latin América: The Cycle of Ideas and the Search for an Alternative*, Latin American Perspectives Vol. 34, No. 3 (May, 2007). Among other things, dismissing neoliberalism as 'alien' to Latin América weakens attempts to understand how it mobilised significant support among ordinary people and obscure the ways in which it may reconstitute itself in different settings. In other words, if neoliberalism is imposed by a certain type or 'class' of person, does it follow that neoliberalism is therefore not present when this type disappears?



Boys' but reflects a 'conjuncture' marked by 'complex political and discursive' elements.<sup>29</sup> As Gwynne and Kay point out, the IMF and the World Bank had been calling on Latin America governments to liberalise their economies for fifty years, so the pressure of international institutions, although part of the explanation for sure, does not explain the neoliberal tide in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the success and extent of neoliberal reforms was determined by the degree of organised social and political opposition that they encountered and, particularly after democratisation, political elites could not be sure that all their policy goals could pass necessary political hurdles.<sup>31</sup>

It is necessary, therefore, to augment any analysis of the role of international institutions with recognition of other factors – including elements of ideological and political crisis – determining the precise balance of forces that established the conditions for neoliberal hegemony. My approach therefore emphasises the ways in which economic crises and a parallel loss of legitimacy for other models of economic development provoked the political alignments and projects committed to neoliberal reform. Approaching the question in this fashion is crucial to addressing questions further down the road as to how and why the neoliberal project in Latin America ran into difficulty, both in the form of economic stagnation and political and social opposition.

My aim therefore is to set out a political history – to give, in other words, an account of the ways in which neoliberalism emerged into and transformed (or attempted to transform) pre-existing social and political relations, patterns of economic development and models of state action and power. Having established these conditions, a fuller picture of the conditions in which opposition to neoliberalism would begin to take shape and what form that opposition would assume will be demonstrated.

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<sup>29</sup> Munck, Ronaldo, Neoliberalism, Necessitarianism and Alternatives in Latin América: There is no Alternative (TINA)?, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Jun., 2003) p. 496

<sup>30</sup> Gwynne, Robert N., and Kay, Cristobal, Views from the Periphery: The Future of Neoliberalism in Latin América, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Feb., 2000, p. 142

<sup>31</sup> Analysts of the comparative 'success' of leaders in pushing through neoliberal reforms suggest that Political leaders from dominant 'populist' parties were more likely to succeed in passing legislation due to their often close connections with trade unions. Murillio, M. Victoria, From Populism to Neoliberalism, *World Politics: Labour Unions and Market Reforms in Latin América*, *World Politics* 52 (January 2000) pp. 135-174

The political history of neoliberalism in Latin America is bound up with global and regional economic crises. The establishment of OPEC in 1972, the Arab-Israeli War of 1972-73 and the subsequent quadrupling in the price of oil caused very serious economic destabilisations in several Latin American countries. Latin American economies were forced to borrow money in order to service the cost of increased oil imports at a time when the price of their exports was falling due to the global recession.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the ratio of debt (to both private lenders and international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF)) to GDP of the Latin American states more than doubled between 1973 and 1983.<sup>33</sup>

The debt crisis also exposed some serious flaws in a development model that had made Latin American countries particularly vulnerable to balance of payment difficulties and foreign currency shortages.<sup>34</sup> The strategy of import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) that prevailed across the continent after the end of the Second World War, with its attempts to minimise exports and promote the emergence of an internal market catered for by domestic production had been crucial to creating sustained growth in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>35</sup> Attempts to develop the internal market and reduce the amount of exported goods led to a dramatic fall in Latin America's share of global exports in the period of ISI.<sup>36</sup>

The goods which Latin America did export were still, for the main, the raw materials, food stuffs and low value-added manufactured goods that were particularly vulnerable to sharp variations in price. The importation of high technology capital goods from the industrialised North, pursued with the goal of eventually breaking Latin America's dependence on the developed economies, had instead landed Latin American countries with increasingly expensive servicing and replacement costs. At the same time, progress in developing an industrial base was patchy across the region with the car industry in Brazil that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s being an exception rather than the rule. Exports of manufactured

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<sup>32</sup> Honeywell, Martin, *The World Debt Crisis*, in Latin American Bureau, *The Poverty Brokers: The IMF and Latin America* (LAB, London, 1983) as

<sup>33</sup> French-Davis, Ricardo, *Foreign Debt and Development Alternatives in Latin America*, *International Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1987) p. 37

<sup>34</sup> Saad-Filho, Alfredo, *The Political Economy of Neoliberalism in Latin America*, in Saad-Filho, Alfredo and Johnston, Deborah (eds), *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (Pluto Press, London, 2005) p. 223

<sup>35</sup> Pomfret, Richard, *Diverse Paths of Economic Development* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, 1992) p. 72

<sup>36</sup> Gwynne, Robert N., *Globalization, Neoliberalism and Economic Change in South America and Mexico*, in Gwynne, Robert N. And Kay, Cristobal (eds), *Latin America Transformed: Globalization and Modernity* (Arnold, London, 1999) p. 73

products were also held back by the reluctance of Latin American industrialists to invest the time and money in the risky adventure of creating export markets – not least because the state was often opposed to such ventures.<sup>37</sup> Foreign credit was one way in which Latin American economies delayed confrontation with more fundamental contradictions in their economic structures.

The effects of the oil price shock that fed into the debt crisis were, of course, distributed unevenly across the region, to the extent that what some economies experienced as crisis others experienced, at least temporarily, as a boom. The clearest example of the latter type is Venezuela. Holding the largest oil reserves in the region and key to the establishment of OPEC, the oil price rise created new hope in Venezuela for an extended period of prosperity that would work to preserve the relatively stable political structures that had made Venezuela the ‘exception’ among Latin American states in the post-war period.<sup>38</sup>

The ‘pact of Punto Fijo’ signed in 1958 by both major political parties and a series of smaller centrist groups had excluded the forces of the radical left from otherwise democratic political arrangements and ensured the country was governed in a more or less consensual and stable fashion until the 1990s. Central to this ideological and political consensus was a shared commitment by the two main parties, Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) and Acción Democrática (AD), to an import-substitution model of development, directed and driven by the state and funded by the revenues from oil exports.<sup>39</sup> In the 1970s, with oil prices rising, this development model looked particularly attractive, and the state duly nationalised the oil industry and created the PDVSA which would develop into one of the most important state owned oil companies in the world and a key player in Venezuelan society and politics.<sup>40</sup> However, the rise in the oil price exacerbated an already

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<sup>37</sup> Hirschmann, Albert O., The Political Economy of Import-Substituting Industrialization in Latin America, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Feb., 1968) pp. 28-29

<sup>38</sup> For a critical overview of the ‘exceptionalism thesis’, see Ellner, Steven and Salas, Miguel Tinker, *Introduction: The Venezuelan Exceptionalism Thesis: Separating Myth from Reality*, Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Mar., 2005), pp. 3-19

<sup>39</sup> Parker, Dick, Chavez and the Search for an Alternative to Neoliberalism, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Mar., 2005) p. 39

<sup>40</sup> George Philip describes how the nationalisation, when it occurred, was achieved on a ‘consensual’ basis, with both the social democratic AD and the more conservative COPEI both supporting the move, in Philip, George, *Oil and Politics in Latin America: Nationalist Movements and State Companies* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982) pp. 293-312

existing problem with Venezuelan economy, namely its over-reliance on oil exports as a source of revenue, to the detriment of the development of other economic sectors.<sup>41</sup>

The explosion in the availability of the credit available to Latin American countries from foreign financial institutions rich with new deposits from oil-producing economies appeared to offer countries without Venezuela's natural endowments a much needed source of revenue for state-led development projects and social spending. The debt burden of Latin American states exploded, increasing by a factor of 14 between 1970 and 1983, rising from \$15 billion to \$216 billion.<sup>42</sup> When the creditors became uneasy about the capacity of the Latin American states to pay these debts, or at least to continue finance repayments, credits lines were withdrawn and several Latin American states were faced with a crisis.<sup>43</sup>

The prospect of Latin American nations – particularly Mexico, which by 1983 had costs for merely servicing its foreign debt that were far greater than the value of all of its exports<sup>44</sup> - defaulting on their debt, most of which was held by financial institutions in the North, necessitated IMF action.<sup>45</sup> As is well known, many of the debt restructuring plans agreed with nations in Latin American by the Fund were 'conditional' on the countries undergoing what the Fund saw as long overdue economic reforms, such as further financial deregulation, reductions or removal of barriers to imports, curtailments of social spending and privatisation of state owned assets.

That the debt crisis developed most acutely in Mexico defied expectations, since Mexico was a net exporter of petroleum and had been more open to direct foreign investment than other

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<sup>41</sup> Terry Karl, studying the effects of oil reserves on the economy and society of several developing countries, called this the 'paradox of plenty'. Karl, Terry, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1997). Much of the literature that is critical of Venezuelan economic policy under Chavista government stresses the fact that Venezuela has largely failed to move away from its dependence of oil as a source of revenue in his time, see for instance Corrales, Javier, *Repeating Revolution: Chavez's New Politics and Old Economics*, in Weyland, Kurt, Madrid, Raul L., and Hunter, Wendy (eds), *Leftist Government in Latin America: Successes and Shortcomings* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010) pp. 28-57. Even scholars more sympathetic to the Bolivarian regime suggest that it has so far failed to develop a viable alternative economic model and instead has become 'even more dependent on exporting less and less oil' in its time under Chavez, Philip and Panizza, *The Triumph of Politics: The Return of the Left in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador* p. 147

<sup>42</sup> Walton, John, *Debt, Protest and the State*, in Eckstein, Susan (ed), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements* (University of California, Berkeley, 1989) p. 304

<sup>43</sup> Gwynne, p. 76

<sup>44</sup> Honeywell, p. 3

<sup>45</sup> Note, of course, that in doing so IMF was not only 'bailing out' Latin American countries but the financial institutions that faced huge losses due to their exposure to now near-toxic debts.

Latin American countries.<sup>46</sup> The IMF prescriptions, which included large cuts in public spending, the opening up of the internal market to exports and the liberalisation of financial markets, caused a sharp recession in Mexico and across other debtor states – with GDP growth only slightly recovering towards the end of the 1980s.

Table 2.1. Average Percentage Variation in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Selected Latin American countries

Country	1970-1980	1980-1990
Argentina	2.8	- 0.9
Bolivia	3.9	0.1
Chile	2.6	2.6
Colombia	5.4	3.77
Mexico	6.7	0.5
Peru	3.9	- 1.2
Venezuela	1.8	0.4

Source: CEPAL (1993). Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean. New York

As Table 2.1 suggests, two countries withstood the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s significantly better than the rest. Firstly, Chile, which had achieved sluggish growth in the 1970s after being an early adopter of a particularly radical form of neoliberal restructuring under General Pinochet, weathered the storm. Although, as Eduardo Silva explains, the onset of the debt crisis did force a change in Chilean policy, creating a shift from the radical liberalisation policies of the mid-1970s to a more ‘pragmatic’ policy that took account of domestic industrial as well international financial interests.<sup>47</sup> In the case of Colombia, although it undertook neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and increased the pace of reform in the 1990s, it never took the path of short periods of drastic reform as did other Andean nations such as Peru or Bolivia.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Walton, Debt, p. 304

<sup>47</sup> Silva, Eduardo, Capitalist Coalitions, the State, and Neoliberal Economic Restructuring: Chile, 1973-1988, *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Jul., 1993) pp. 548-558

<sup>48</sup> Huber, Evelyne and Solt, Fred, Successes and Failures of Neoliberalism, *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2004 p. 153

As I said above, it is not the case that neoliberalism was simply imposed on Latin American societies. In the first place, this would be to imply that Latin American policy makers had some other ready-made development model at hand which they would have pursued if it were not for the IMF. In fact, the decade between the oil price shock and the debt crisis of 1983 represented the 'last hurrah' of ISI, which had failed, for the reasons I have suggested above, to build upon its successes in achieving growth and a degree of income redistribution in the 1950s and 1960s. While, of course, more radical development models that broke more fundamentally with capitalism were conceivable, nothing of the sort looked particularly likely at the time – not least because the debt built up in the 1970s had tied Latin American economies to the structures of global financial capitalism more fully than any time at least since the Great Depression.

In this sense, the crisis opened up a space in which Latin American states were both in need of economic assistance from international agencies and, at least among 'elite policy-makers', open to radical ideas that they hoped would restore post-war levels of growth. Even among ordinary Latin Americans, promises of an end to recurrent problems of high inflation (a persistent side-effect of ISI) proved attractive and helped to insure, at least initially, a degree of popular acquiescence to a degree of market reform.<sup>49</sup>

Even those on the whole critical of the practice of neoliberalism in Latin America recognise the stabilisation of the inflation rate in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s as a positive outcome of the period.<sup>50</sup> Market liberalisation was less successful in restoring rates of GDP growth in Latin America – although growth did come back after the 'lost decade' of the 1980s - far less improving levels of income and wealth inequality. As Table 2.2 suggests, while many of the poorest in Latin America saw their share of income remain flat or indeed fall in the 1990s, those at the top of the income distribution saw their share increase and sometimes quite sharply, particularly in Colombia and Argentina.

The elements of the conjuncture that opened up across Latin America can thus be summarised. The explosion of foreign held debt exposed Latin American economies to

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<sup>49</sup> Armijo and Faucher found that 'the single biggest reason for support for reformist politicians is that market reforms have ended inflation', in Armijo, Leslie Elliot and Faucher, Phillippe, "We have a Consensus": Explaining Political Support for Market Reforms in Latin América, *Latin American Politics and Society* Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer, 2002) p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> Margheritis, p. 26

economic crisis as credit lines were withdrawn in the early 1980s. The burst of the debt bubble created the economic and political conditions in which demands for liberalisation emanating from financial institutions and 'globalised' national elites gained a wider hearing. The intellectual exhaustion of ISI was brought into focus in the form of an economic crisis that provoked a substantial rethink of development models. It was against this background that governments sought an alternative, more durable, approach.

Speaking in 1989, the Presidential candidate of the Brazilian social democratic party PDT, Leonel Brizola said that 'we are living at the end of a development model; the only possibility of we have of continuing to grow is to dismantle the archaic structures of Brazilian society and integrate the rest of the population into the market.'<sup>51</sup> Brazil had been rather slower than other Latin American nations in its move towards aggressive neoliberal measures, but Brizola's account can be taken to be typical of the assessment of Latin American politicians in the period. State led development was now associated with an anachronistic political and economic system that only full subsumption under the market could disrupt and replace.

The collapse of ISI – of which the debt crisis was the clearest expression – therefore opened up a period of political as well as economic reconfiguration. In his discussion of crisis, Gramsci argues that political crisis is often precipitated when the ruling class has 'failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the masses'.<sup>52</sup> The failure of ISI amounted to just such a failure. The pursuit of neoliberalism became ubiquitous precisely because of the dual nature of the crisis that had produced it.

The ideological hegemony that neoliberal established – the belief, as it has often been put, that 'there is no alternative' to the formula of market liberalisation – was formed, in the specific conditions of Latin America, on this terrain of parallel ideological and economic crisis. Reform was not only intended to ameliorate the effects of a short-term crisis, but to displace an entire network of political and ideological relations. In the next section, I look more closely at what these relations were and the effects were of their disruption.

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<sup>51</sup> Cited in Castaneda, Jorge G., *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (First Vintage, New York, 1994) pp. 147-148

<sup>52</sup> Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1991) p. 210

Table 2.2. Percentage Share of Total Income to Income Groups in Selected Latin American countries

Country	1990	2002
Argentina		
Bottom 40%	14.9	13.4
Top 10%	34.8	42.1
Bolivia		
Bottom 40%	12.1	9.5
Top 10%	38.2	41
Chile		
Bottom 40%	13.2	13.8
Top 10%	40.7	40.3
Colombia		
Bottom 40%	8.4	7.2
Top 10%	41.8	39.1
Mexico		
Bottom 40%	15.8	15.7
Top 10%	36.6	33.2

Source: CEPAL (2004). Social Panorama of Latin America 2002-2003. New York



ii. **From Nationalisation to Privatisation: Changing the Relationship between State and Economy**

It is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the state must not intervene to regulate it. But since in actual reality civil society and state are one and the same it must be made clear that *laissez-faire* too is a form of state “regulation”, introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means.

- Antonio Gramsci

Rather than run through the whole list of neoliberal measures, I want to look more closely at one, privatisation, and attempt to draw out what it illuminates about the nature of the neoliberal project as a whole. Here I want to address what I see as ambivalence in neoliberalism, one that is perhaps missed in some accounts of it. In particular, I want to suggest a more complicated picture that might first appear between neoliberalism and the question of state power. This speaks more broadly to the vision commended by neoliberalism of the state’s role in society. While the neoliberal agenda is sometimes depicted as a ‘dismantling’ of the state, I would instead call the process a reconfiguration aimed at the ‘depoliticisation’ of the state’s role in Latin America.<sup>53</sup> I raise it as a central part of my argument because I wish to demonstrate later that overturning this depoliticisation has been at the centre of the radical left governments in Bolivia. The right to develop, the re-entry of the state in the development process, begins to emerge in the midst of this critique.

At the heart of neoliberal discourse lies a critique of state control over economic activity. Large scale privatisation and ending state intervention in its purest form - that of direct management of production and investment in a particular industry or sector – reduces state control over the economy in a very clear sense. What I want to suggest however is that neoliberalism’s relationship to the question of the state’s role in the economy is more complex than the ‘ideal’ of simply removing state involvement. Rather than no role for the state in the economy, neoliberals envisaged new forms of state intervention in the economy

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<sup>53</sup> Massey, Douglas S., Sanchez R., Magaly and Behrman, Jere R., Introduction: Of Myths and Markets, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 606 (Jul., 2006) p. 10

and in society as a whole, with a whole series of consequences for politics and the structure of social and natural relations in which the state is embedded.

Firstly, I want to outline what I mean by privatisation and then demonstrate that it was in fact central to the neoliberal project in Latin America. Geographer Erik Swyngedouw has summarised privatisation as a

...process through which activities, resources and the like, which had not been formally privately owned, managed or organised, are taken away from whoever or whatever owned them before to a new property configuration that is on some form of 'private ownership'. Privatisation, therefore, is nothing else than a legally and institutionally condoned transfer of entitlements.<sup>54</sup>

Privatisation is thus of a piece with wider patterns of non-productive accumulation – that is, accumulation not dependent on the production and sale of commodities – that David Harvey has called 'accumulation by dispossession'. According to Harvey, accumulation by dispossession, including the privatisation of formerly state-owned assets and industries, was central to capital's attempts to restore its profitability after the crisis of the 1970s.

In the case of privatisation in Latin America, recognition of the role of the IMF is crucial, as there was a very strong relationship between the extent of privatisation and indebtedness to the IMF.<sup>55</sup> Privatisation of what were seen as 'inefficient' state owned enterprises was a common feature of IMF conditionality for debt relief to Latin American countries faced with crisis in the 1980s. The claim was that 'privatisation sharpened the incentive for efficient management and thereby improves performance'.<sup>56</sup> The pace of privatisation, sluggish in the early part of the 1980s, increased significantly in the region towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, and formed a crucial part of the so-called 'second stage' of liberalisation.

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<sup>54</sup> Swyngedouw, Erik, *Dispossessing H2O: The contested terrain of water privatisation*, in Heyner, Nik, McCarthy, Prudham, Scott, and Robbins, Paul (eds), *Neoliberal Environments: False promises and unnatural consequences* (Routledge, Oxford, 2007) p. 52

<sup>55</sup> Brune, Nancy, Garrett, Geoffrey, and Kogut, Bruce, *The IMF and the Global Spread of Privatization*, IMF Staff Papers, Vol. 51, No. 2, International Monetary Fund 2004 pp. 197-198

<sup>56</sup> Williamson, John, *The Progress of Policy Reform in Latin America*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 1993, p. 30.

Between 1988 and 1997 there were 104 privatisations of state-owned enterprises in Latin America, a number significantly less than in Eastern and Central Europe but greater than East and Southeast Asia and far more than in the Middle East and North Africa in the same period. On average, the sale of state assets brought \$15 billion of revenue to Latin American states.<sup>57</sup> This figure varied significantly from country to country – for instance, Bolivia received none of the revenues from the sale of its state owned enterprises, which were instead ‘reinvested’ in the newly privatised firms.<sup>58</sup> Argentina (1989-1993) and Mexico (1990-91) raised \$9.8 and \$13.7 billion respectively from privatisation schemes.<sup>59</sup> In Argentina, the reforms led to a collapse in the number of workers employed in state owned industries, from around 350,000 in 1989 to around 65,000 in 1993.<sup>60</sup>

Most likely to be put up for sale were state owned telecommunications and utilities. In Mexico, the privatisation of telecommunications, performed in a manner viewed by some as not entirely transparent, transformed Carlos Slim into one of the richest individuals on the planet.<sup>61</sup> Bolivia saw extensive privatisations of its oil and gas sector and of state owned tin mines, which led to the sacking of 30,000 tin miners.<sup>62</sup> As we will see later, this association of neoliberalism with the collapse of the mining industry would create particular imperatives after the era of neoliberal *government* had ended.

Some states were more cautious about the extent and location of privatisations. Chile, which adopted neoliberal measures long before any other Latin American state, kept its copper mines in state hands.<sup>63</sup> Venezuela meanwhile kept its oil industry under formal nationalisation; although it did, under pressure from managers within the PDVSA – the ‘state

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<sup>57</sup> Brune, Nancy and Garrett, Geoffrey, *The Diffusion of Privatization in the Developing World*, Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, August 30-September 3, 2000

<sup>58</sup> Birdsall, Nancy and Nellis, John, *Winners and Losers: Assessing the Distributional Impact of Privatization*, Centre for Global Development, Working Paper Number 6, May 2002, p. 38

<sup>59</sup> Green, Duncan, *A Trip to the Market: the impact of neoliberalism in Latin America*, in Buxton, Julia and Phillips, Nicola (eds), *Developments in Latin American Political Economy: States, Markets and Actors* (MUP, Manchester, 1999) p. 18

<sup>60</sup> Madrid, Raul L., *Labouring Against Neoliberalism: Unions and Patterns of Reform in Latin America*, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Feb., 2003) p. 91

<sup>61</sup> Winter, Brian, *How Slim Got Huge*, *Foreign Policy*, No. 163, Nov. – Dec. 2007

<sup>62</sup> Webber, Jeffrey, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation and the Politics of Evo Morales* (Haymarket, Chicago, 2011) p. 20

<sup>63</sup> Massey et al., p. 14

within a state' as Hugo Chavez would later describe it – open up the oil industry to foreign private capital.<sup>64</sup>

The wave of privatisations across the region was no doubt motivated by a series of fiscal considerations. States were looking to remove the burden of often inefficient and loss-making industries and to use the windfall from sales to plug holes in budgets. Of course, revenues from privatisations do not form part of a long term strategy for fiscal stability – at one stage there will be nothing left to privatise.

I want to use the remainder of this section to suggest some ways in which the privatisation of state owned enterprises fit into the neoliberal framework that was emerging and how it was indicative of shifts among Latin American elites over the function of the state in their countries.

The presence of state owned enterprises within the ISI reflected a specific model of state power – one in which the state would play a central and direct role in 'modernising' Latin American economic structures. Implicit in this development of industry is the emergence of an independent and urban working class. The persistence of traditional agrarian structures - which often involved the deliberate under-utilisation of labour in order to keep wages low<sup>65</sup> - jeopardised the development of industrial production by threatening the labour supply and inhibiting creation of an internal market for manufactures.<sup>66</sup> As such, where state led development – either in the form of nascent industries protected from foreign exports by tariffs or other forms of trade regulation or in the form of direct production – was successful in promoting industrial production it also faced the challenge of politically integrating the new urban working classes.

In Venezuela, this was achieved by an agreement between conservatives, the armed forces and the social democratic formation AD to form a social pact that would integrate working

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<sup>64</sup> Mommer, Bernard, *Subversive Oil*, in Ellner, Steve and Hellinger, Daniel (eds), *Venezuelan Politics in the Chavez Era: Class, Polarization and Conflict* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2003) p. 132

<sup>65</sup> Feder, Ernest, *Latifundia and Agricultural Labour in Latin America*, in Shanin, Teodor, *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Penguin Books, London, 1979) p. 92

<sup>66</sup> Hamilton, Nora, *State Autonomy and Dependent Capitalism in Latin America*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Sep., 1981) p. 316

class demands – including for a share of the oil revenue – into constitutional arrangements, albeit in a subordinate fashion that frustrated more radical projects.<sup>67</sup>

Mexico, where the revolutionary constitution of 1917 had instituted a serious agrarian reform program, the conditions were favourable for a more thoroughgoing industrialisation. The government of Lazaro Cardenas (1934-40) had nationalised the oil industry in 1938, under pressure from both a radical labour movement within the industry and a newly emergent industrial bourgeoisie keen to harness the oil industry for its own development.<sup>68</sup> When Cardenas completed a similar nationalisation of the railways, he in effect handed control over the industry to the corresponding trade union, on the basis that the trade union had demonstrated its capacity to run the railways more efficiently than state administrators.<sup>69</sup> State involvement in organising production became a popular method of incorporating potentially rebellious political constituencies into the rubric of political movements tied to a nationalist and developmentalist ideology.

In Argentina, the process of state led industrial development that began after the 1929 crash expressed itself politically in the form of Peronism – which knitted together the sections of society, including the rural and urban working classes and sections of capital tied to the development of the internal market, which had been excluded in the oligarchic period.<sup>70</sup> Argentina had not, however, been faced with the same impetus towards agrarian and social reform that Mexico had in the aftermath of its revolution and so maintained a more powerful, or at least politically confident, land owning class, suspicious of the effects of industrialisation on its export interests. In this case, a working class that was emerging into political consciousness in a state previously dominated by oligarchic interests incorporated itself into a political and state structure that was rapidly changing, in an attempt to legitimate its

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<sup>67</sup> Karl, Terry, *Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela*, Latin American Research Review, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1987) p. 84

<sup>68</sup> Philip, *Oil and Politics*, p. 214

<sup>69</sup> Navarro, Moisés González, La obra social de Lázaro Cárdenas, *Historia Mexicana*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Oct. – Dec., 1984) p. 366

<sup>70</sup> Corradi, Juan Engenio, *Argentina and Peronism: Fragments of a Puzzle*, Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974) p. 7. In the classic account of Peronism, the Argentinian sociologist Gino Germani accounted for the support of Peron through reference to the Political immaturity of recently urbanised and proletarianised elements in Argentinian society. Germani, Gino and de Yujnovsky, Sibila S., El surgimiento del peronismo: El rol de los obreros y los migrantes internos, *Desarrollo Economico*, Vol. 13, No. 51 (Oct. – Dec., 1973) pp. 435-488

distributional demands.<sup>71</sup> Peron, for his part, saw the incorporation of working class and trade union demands into the fabric of economic and social relations as crucial to achieving ‘harmony’ between labour and capital and for establishing a base of political support.<sup>72</sup>

The element of political incorporation or subordination that was involved in nationalist developmentalist practice is accentuated in the Bolivian case, where nationalisation of the tin mines in aftermath of the 1952 revolution was part of a strategy aimed at warding off deeper, structural social transformations. Again, as in Mexico, the workers – or, more accurately, the trade unions – began to take part in the administration of the nationalised industries – most importantly in Bolivia in the tin mines.

The radicalism of the Bolivian tin workers – a product of their shared, and harsh, conditions of labour, location in geographically isolated areas and racialised class solidarity – formed the backbone of the Bolivian workers and the revolutionary movement for the majority of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They were central to the formation of the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) in 1952 and, importantly, did not view trade unions merely as a means of improving their bargaining position over wages and conditions but as instruments of national and industrial democracy.<sup>73</sup>

The promise of *cogestion* or co-management in mines previously ruled more or less autocratically until then was attractive, although its ultimate result was to lead radical union movements into stifling bureaucratic structures.<sup>74</sup> For the state, led after the revolution by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), the incorporation of the miners into the management of the mines forestalled the achievement of deeper social transformation and the ‘industrial democracy’ in the mines, and indeed the dominance of the MNR, would not last long.

The case of Chile is illuminating in this context. Chile had pursued an orthodox import-substitution model of development under conditions of political democracy since the 1930s.

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<sup>71</sup> Adelman, Jeremy, Reflections on Argentinian Labour and Rise of Peron, *Bullet of Latin American Research*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Sep., 1992) pp. 255-256

<sup>72</sup> Brennan, James P., Prolegomenon to Neoliberalism: The Political Economy of Populist Argentina, 1943-1976, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (May, 2007) p. 52

<sup>73</sup> Zapata S., Francisco, Los mineros como actores sociales y políticos en Bolivia, Chile y Perú durante el siglo XX, *Estudios Atacameños*, No. 22 (2002) p. 94

<sup>74</sup> Arganaras, Fernando García, The Mechanisms of Accommodation: Bolivia, 1952-1971, Review (Ferdinand Braudel Center), Vol. 15, No. 2, Spring, 1992, p. 303

The working classes, politically represented by robust socialist and communist movements, had been successfully integrated into this political system.<sup>75</sup> The pursuit of national development supported by a 'multi-class coalition' was however precarious, since it knitted together (or attempted to) social groups whose interests were often highly divergent, for instance organised labour and domestic industrialists.<sup>76</sup> The ascension of the Marxist Salvador Allende to the Presidency in 1971 marked the beginning of the end of the period of political stability and cross-class support for the developmental state. The ties of political integration weakened as the demands of the working class for structural transformation of the economy increased. The democratic political system collapsed (or, more accurately, was overthrown) in a military coup in 1973 and the practice of political integration gave way to violent repression and the suppression of working class institutions.<sup>77</sup> The end of strategies of political integration was therefore closely associated with the end of ISI and the pursuit of a neoliberal development model.

The purpose of these quick illustrations is to show the deep connections that existed between ISI – an important part of which was the presence of state ownership – and attempts by nationalist movements to integrate politically, in particular, the urban working class. This strategy was pursued in a context in which direct bargaining over the share of national income accruing to labour versus capital was the *main axis of political contestation*. When the state was divested of much of its role in direct production, Latin American elites attempted to formulate a new role for the state within the 'market economy' that could replace its integrationist and developmentalist role under ISI.<sup>78</sup> The neoliberal turn also implied, therefore, a new approach to the question of political integration.

One way to understand the dimensions of this new relationship is to note the emergence of what Jordana and Levi-Faur call 'regulatory capitalism' in Latin America.<sup>79</sup> They record a

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<sup>75</sup> Loveman, Brian, *The Political Left in Chile, 1973-1990*, in Carr, Barry and Ellner, Steve (eds), *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1993) pp. 23-24

<sup>76</sup> Silva, Eduard

<sup>77</sup> For a series of articles on the events and outcomes of the Chilean coup, see the special issue of *Latin American Perspectives* issued not long after. *Chile: Blood on the Peaceful Road*, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer, 1974

<sup>78</sup> Munck, Ronaldo, *Workers, Structural Adjustment, and Concertation Social in Latin America*, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (Summer 1994) p. 92

<sup>79</sup> Jordana, Jacint and Levi-Faur, David, *The Diffusion of Regulatory Capitalism in Latin América: Sectoral and National Channels in the Making of a New Order*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Mar., 2005) pp. 102-124

burgeoning of independent regulatory authorities in Latin America in the 1990s – that is, during the same period of time as the most aggressive privatisation took place. Regulatory agencies established a ‘delegation of power from ministers and ministerial departments to arms-length bureaucracies that are staffed and governed by technocrats and professionals’. Through the mechanism of these new agencies, ‘public policy is increasingly delegated to experts who are embedded in transnational professional communities and share similar perceptions of the problem of late-modern societies.’<sup>80</sup> Importantly, their analysis found a significant correlation between the creation of new regulatory bodies and the degree of privatisation in individual countries and sectors.<sup>81</sup>

The claim that privatisation implies the ‘removal’ of the state from economic activity is, according to Swyngedouw, one of the ‘central myths of the neoliberal model’. In fact

...the state or other governing arrangements are centrally involved in ‘regulating’ and ‘organising’ privatisation and dispossession. They change laws, rules, and conventions and produce new legal and institutional frameworks that permit and ‘regulate’ privatisation, often imposing all manner of conditions that force privatisations through. After privatisation, a state-controlled regulatory institutional framework invariably has to be implemented, just to make sure that companies enjoying ‘natural’ monopoly conditions ‘behave in competitive ways’.<sup>82</sup>

What privatisation spoke to was not a blanket rejection of state involvement in the economy – not all forms of which are rejected even in neoliberal theory.<sup>83</sup> The objection to state owned enterprises reflected, among other things, disapproval of the ways in which nationalised industries had been directly associated with an over-politicisation of society in Latin America and of the costs, economic and political, of directly integrating subordinate social groups into the political system. Neoliberal governance helped to resolve these political factors without actually diminishing centralised control.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 103

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 108

<sup>82</sup> Swyngedouw, Erik, *Dispossessing H2O*, p. 56

<sup>83</sup> For an interesting discussion of the forms of state economic intervention and the ways in which they are conceptualised by international institutions dominated by neoliberal thought, see Biersteker, Thomas J., *Reducing the Role of the State in the Economy: A Conceptual Approach to World Bank and IMF Prescriptions*, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Dec., 1990) pp. 447-492



The primacy of the state in the direction of economic affairs became associated with the turbulence of Latin American politics and society, and restructuring the relationship between state and economy became central to the strategy of achieving pacific and 'normalised' political systems. Much of the neoliberal reform occurred at a time when countries in Latin America were emerging out of periods of military dictatorship – allegedly provoked by the political instability associated with the state's position in allocating and redistributing resources under ISI – allowing neoliberal economics to become associated with the curtailment of the power of the state in society more broadly.<sup>84</sup>

Neoliberalism did not simply 'de-link' the state and economy. The state and the economy are necessarily interlinked but the nature of the linkages can change and be transformed by political action. The state in the ISI period had been 'captured' by forces intent on creating and supporting corporatist or integrationist political systems and this required a particular modality of state involvement. The dismantling of much of this structure in the neoliberal period was based on a conviction that the era of direct integration had to be replaced, *not by nothing*, but by forms of state action aimed at the promotion of markets and the establishment of a new relationship between state and citizen in Latin America.

In his study of the 'second stage' of Latin American neoliberal reform Naim predicted that Latin American leaders, having 'discovered the market', quickly learn the need to 'rediscover the state'.<sup>85</sup> For Naim, this rediscovery amounted to an appreciation of the need for 'new public agencies that are crucial to the functioning of an open, market-based economy'.<sup>86</sup> The mistake of Latin American neoliberals, on this account, is that they failed to quickly replace the 'pernicious' institutions, ruled by bureaucrats under the thumb of 'political bosses', that proliferated in the ISI era with new independent bodies appropriate to the role of the state as imagined by neoliberal theory.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Of course, for analysts sympathetic to the neoliberal project, these processes of liberalisation and democratisation do not just occur alongside each other but are causally linked. For a restatement of this thesis in relationship to Latin American experience see Dominguez, Jorge I., *Free Politics and Free Markets in Latin America*, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 9, Number 4, October 1998, pp 70-84. For a more cautious account, see Weyland, Kurt, *Neoliberalism and Democracy in Latin America: A Mixed Record*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring, 2004) pp. 135-157

<sup>85</sup> Naim, Moises, *Latin America: The Second Stage of Reform*, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 5, Number 4, October 1994, pp. 32-48

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33

Privatisation then spoke to wariness about the political implications of the state being too directly involved in the allocation of resources. What neoliberalism commended - state intervention aimed at the creation and maintenance of *private control* over the allocation of labour and resources – gave concrete political expression to the desires of Latin American industrial and political elites for a new modality of state power, beyond the hyper-political instability of the ISI period. The goal was to ‘transform the economic role of the state and generate new institutions to promote the competence and culture of the market’.<sup>88</sup> That is, understanding neoliberal reform of the state’s economic role entails acknowledging that change must also entail ‘political transformations’ which involve the creation of ‘new institutions and new social relations’.<sup>89</sup> This process involved disrupting some of the integrationist or ‘corporatist’ links that had been established in the period of ISI.

For their part, trade unions – in most cases the most direct “losers” when industries were privatised - often had to adapt to circumstances in which political parties to which they were officially loyal were forcing through neoliberal measures to which they were opposed. In Venezuela, corporatist bonds between the state and labour – represented politically by Acción Democrática (AD) and industrially by the CTV – became weaker as the state became increasingly dependent on foreign loans to finance development and the working class share of national income fell.<sup>90</sup> When AD President Carlos Andres Perez performed his *gran viraje* (great shift) in 1989 by announcing a series of neoliberal reforms – one of which, a removal of a price control on gasoline, provoked sustained rioting in Caracas, in what became known as the ‘Caracazo’ - the CTV called the first Venezuelan general strike since 1958.<sup>91</sup>

The Caracazo itself provoked a crisis of identity about leaders of the CTV. The eruption of urban Venezuelans was wholly unexpected, and confirmed to many leaders of the trade union movement that they had become detached from the ‘working class’ whose interests they purported to represent. The Caracazo is emblematic of the shifting location of social contestation in the neoliberal order. The eruption of Venezuelan urbanites – public transport

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<sup>88</sup> Blanco, Carlos, *Reform of the State: An Alternative for Change in Latin América*, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 606 (Jul., 2006) p. 235

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 236

<sup>90</sup> Coker, Trudie, Growth and Decay of Organised Labour in Venezuela, 1900-1998, *International Labour and Working Class History*, No. 60 (Fall, 2001), pp. 192

<sup>91</sup> Bak, Lennart, Populism and Labour Relations in Latin America, *International Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer, 2001) p. 89

users, students, commuters – in reaction to the sudden price increases testified to the way in which free-market reforms could create reservoirs of dissent and disobedience, even as the traditional organs of the left and the working class were marginalised or accepted neoliberalism.

In Argentina, the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), the historically Peronist Argentinian trade union confederation, staged a battle with President Carlos Menem (1989-1999), a member of the Justicialist Party linked to the trade unions, over Menem's attempt to liberalise the labour market. While it had acquiesced in some of the other neoliberal reforms that did not have as direct effect on the power of the trade unions – for instance tax reform – the CGT did protest at the labour market reforms, since they would have had a material effect on their ability to organise. Their campaign eventually managed to block some significant parts of the legislation that Menem had proposed.<sup>92</sup> The case is interesting because it highlights, as Raul Madrid points out, that the success of Latin American leaders in pushing through neoliberal reforms often depended on what kind of political support they could mobilise. It was also often determined by the distribution of powers within political systems – for instance, executive branches often had the power to privatise state owned assets without legislative agreement, whereas other areas, such as tax or labour reform, required legislative approval.<sup>93</sup>

The 'historical bloc' established by corporate relations under ISI were progressively dismantled by the adoption of neoliberal measures. It is important to note, at the same time, that this collapse of corporatist relationships between state workers and social-democratic parties also signalled the demise of certain modes of political subjectivity. The principal aim of incorporation into political system – from the perspective of the urban working classes – had been to establish legal and political bases upon which to make distributional claims on the resources of the state. This pattern also implied a particular delimitation of the sites of social contestation – struggles were over wages, benefits and the elements comprising the 'social wage', including public spending on health, education and other services.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 75

<sup>93</sup> Madrid, *Labouring Against Neoliberalism*, p. 56

Neoliberalism created opportunities and indeed the necessity for social realignment in spaces – material and intellectual – that were outside (or rather relatively free from) the domination of either capital or the state. Formally integrated social sectors were cast adrift, sent into the wilderness of the deregulated labour market and the increasingly informal economy that began to dominate. The disruption created by a new orientation towards export markets, often achieved through moves to large-scale production of cash-crops with capital intensive techniques, threatened the stability of communities and social systems in rural areas.

In Bolivia, the effects of this process of liberalisation were especially acute, reflecting the particular characteristics of the Bolivian social and economic structure. In the midst of an early 1980s economic crisis caused by falling prices for tin, the new civilian government introduced a package of liberal reforms known as the Nueva Política Económica (NPE).<sup>94</sup> As government investment in public services declined, the quality of the services suffered, increasing public support for privatisation which, it was claimed, was now required to provide much needed ‘investment’.<sup>95</sup> In the economically vulnerable rural areas of the western highlands, the liberal reforms were particularly costly. The removal of restrictions on imports of agricultural goods forced domestic food producers to compete with cheaper foreign imports, particularly from Argentina, Chile and Brazil. As the level of Bolivian imports increased, local producers were forced out and rural economies suffered, leading to what Arze and Kruse have called ‘the emptying of the countryside’ as rural workers headed to the towns and neighbouring countries looking for employment.<sup>96</sup>

While rural workers headed to the cities, changing the demographic character of the country in the process, both the rural and urban unemployed began to descend into the Chapare region of Cochabamba to seek an income in coca production. Rather than integrating the production into the legal economy, the government pursued strategies of eradication, enabled and encouraged by the American region-wide drug war. Such was the success of the eradication policy pursued by Colonel Banzer’s government of the early 1990s, the American ambassador was proclaiming Bolivian efforts as a ‘Latin American success story’. Despite this attempted destruction of a component of the country’s economy, coca production continued

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<sup>94</sup> Kaup, Brent Z., *Market Justice: Political Economic Struggle in Bolivia* (CUP, Cambridge, 2013)

<sup>95</sup> Arze, Carlos and Kruse, Tom, *The Consequences of Neoliberal Reform, Report on Bolivia, NACLA Report on the Americas*, Nov-Dec 2004, p. 23

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28

to account for up to 8% of GDP<sup>97</sup>, in part because the government offered no meaningful alternative economic or development strategies to the coca producers.<sup>98</sup>

As employment opportunities in the mines, domestic private industry and state enterprises all declined, the number of Bolivians working in the informal economy increased significantly so that by the 1990s around two thirds of Bolivians relied on the sector.<sup>99</sup> These changes were not only of economic significance: apart from producing widespread economic suffering they dramatically altered the model of citizenship and social integration which had prevailed in the country since the 1952 revolution. The trade unions, the traditional institutions for representation of popular interests in the post-52 regime, had opposed the neoliberal reforms, but the decline and privatisation of the state-owned mines and the reduction of public sector employment had dented their power. Indeed, the neoliberal governments had some success in creating the impression that COB and the miners' unions were responsible for the economic chaos of the 80s and early 90s.<sup>100</sup>

While the NPE and the later, perhaps even more radical, 'Plan for All' which completed the privatisation of state enterprises, produced a period of fiscal and economic stabilisation, the Bolivian elite was unable to convert this into an era of sustained economic growth or stable political institutions. It was in this context of failing economic reform and political instability that the social movements linked to indigenous identity and rebellion emerged as the key agents of social contestation in the 90s and early 2000s. As Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing explain, while the neoliberal reforms had successfully neutered the syndicalist unions, they had not managed to find stable channels for the still vibrant traditions of resistance and confrontation among the popular classes.<sup>101</sup>

As such, rather than normalising society and politics in Bolivia and Latin America more generally, putting an end to the turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, neoliberalism opened up new chasms that existing political systems could not bridge. In particular, as I argue in the following

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<sup>97</sup> Kohl, Benjamin and Farthing, Linda C., *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance* (Zed Books, New York, 2006) p. 74

<sup>98</sup> Kohl, Ben and Farthing, Linda, *The Price of Success: Bolivia's War Against Drugs and the Poor*, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Volume 35, 2001, Issue 1

<sup>99</sup> Arze and Kruce, *Consequences of Neoliberal Reform*, p. 27

<sup>100</sup> Ibañez Rojo, Enrique, *Democracia neoliberal en Bolivia? Sindicalismo, crisis social and estabilidad social política*, *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1993

<sup>101</sup> Kohl and Farthing, *Impasse in Bolivia*, p. 81

section, the politics of the environment and natural resources gained increased focus as a source of tension in this period. As the neoliberal governments attempted to solve the problem of sluggish growth, they turned towards nature as a source of new untouched sources of wealth and investment. As this process gained momentum, the legitimacy of the neoliberal governments came into question.

### **iii. Neoliberalism and the 'Environmental Fix'**

Part of the purpose of the broader focus I have taken in this chapter is to stress the multiplicity of ways in which neoliberal politics became 'situated' in various contexts. Approaching the question of the 'territorialisation' of neoliberal logic takes us directly to the problem of the environment. In the first place, neoliberalism's social, political and economic restructuring necessarily implied the production of new relationships between Latin American societies and their natural environments. It was in this context that the axis of political contestation began to shift away from direct confrontation over the division of the proceeds of economic growth and towards problematisation of dominant forms of development. In its place, new forms of contestation emerged, grounded in a more general critique of the practice of development as such and of the environmental costs of that development.

While environmental change is an inescapable outcome of the reproduction of society in general, neoliberal capitalism produced particular negative environmental outcomes in Latin America. To be clear, this is not to say that neoliberalism explains all environmental change in Latin America since the 1980s, or that the answer to the question 'what causes environmental degradation?' is neoliberalism. Rather, I want in this section to look at some of the ways in which neoliberalism altered environmental conditions in Latin America, and to address the political questions that emerged as these effects began to make an impact.

In addressing the body of literature on the 'neoliberal environments', I want to focus on a question elaborated most consistently in the work of critical geographer, Noel Castree. For Castree, it is necessary to understand not only *how* nature has been neoliberalised (for

instance, through privatisation of natural resources or through commodification of genetic material) but *why* this process has occurred.<sup>102</sup>

Castree locates this neoliberal imperative in the limits of capitalism and its unending search for sources of stable economic growth. This is what Castree calls the 'environmental fix' to the cycle of growth and crisis. Capital resolves its internal contradictions by expanding into previously untapped natural resources.<sup>103</sup> However, this 'fix' can only take place in delimited political and spatial contexts and this poses problems for the sustainability of this solution. In the first place, the 'environmental fix' faces the ultimate barrier in the form of biophysical and, more immediately, political limits.

The political limits arise in the form of legitimisation crises for the state in which these fixes occur. Since the state is charged with the rational and efficient management of the resources under its control, the damage or mismanagement of these resources that might occur from their subjection to market forces can lead to political and social discontent. More particularly, the use of the market to allocate previously commonly held resources by definition opens up politically combustible questions of access. Alongside questions of access to natural resources, as Werner G. Raza points out, conflicts over the distribution in 'time and space of the costs of environmental damage' also begin to emerge.<sup>104</sup>

One of the specific effects of Bolivia's total assimilation into the global market in the 1980s (that is, in the period of neoliberal restructuring) was a move, in relative terms, towards the development and export of 'renewable' natural resources.<sup>105</sup> The share of lumber in total Bolivian exports increased from 0.7% in 1985 to 5.4% in 1995, for example.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the share of mining and mineral extraction in total exports declined. The ownership and control of renewable resources also became a central focus of socio-environmental struggles in Bolivia – a process that crystallised in the famous events of the Water War in Cochabamba in 2000 and also in the longer struggle to protect coca producers from the effects of the US-

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<sup>102</sup> Castree, Noel, *Neoliberalising Nature: the logics of regulation and deregulation*, *Environment and Planning*, 2008 Volume 40, p. 140

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147

<sup>104</sup> Raza, Werner G., *Desarrollo capitalista, neoliberalismo, y ambiente en América Latina: Un breve sinopsis*, *Ecología Política*, No 20, 2000, p. 161

<sup>105</sup> Raza, Werner G., *Desarrollo Sostenible en La Periferia Neoliberal* (CID, La Paz, 200) p. 91

<sup>106</sup> CEPALSTAT, Data Bases and Statistical Publications

led war on drugs.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps predictably, one of the effects of the United States' war on the Colombian “narco-terrorists” has been to boost cocaine production in other Andean countries, Peru and Bolivia particularly.<sup>108</sup>

In this context, the role of the state changed from that of the ‘guardian’ of the natural patrimony of a country to guarantor of private property rights and the basis for the ‘proper functioning of the market’.<sup>109</sup> As I will show in the following section, this is precisely the state of affairs which emerged in Bolivia in the neoliberal era. In reaction, a series of administrations in the 1980s and 1990s adopted environmentalist language, in the form of a turn towards instituting sustainable development as a goal of economic policy. Nonetheless, these reactions were not able to contend with the political forces let loose by the state’s replacement in the development process by foreign capital.

The reduction or removal of barriers to private management of natural resources created a political conjuncture in which defence of nature and opposition to the retreat of the state converged. In these conditions, defence of the rights of nature and of a leading role for the state in development were not seen as contradictory but as conditions of mutual possibility. Only the state could ‘defend’ nature from the depredations of subjection to the market, and the state could only be vindicated as a key part of the development process if it regained control over territory and natural resources. The political crisis of neoliberalism in Bolivia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred when its dominant political agents could no longer fulfil this legitimating function.

However, as I will show later in the thesis, the relationship between state involvement in the development process and the exploitation of natural resources is more complex than was perhaps reflected in the initial reactions against neoliberalism. There is no inherent reason why a state-led development process *must* promote greater sustainability than one led by the forces of the global market. State intervention into the development process may alter the form of natural resource use or change the distributional character of the economic activities associated with it, without altering the content of extraction and expansion.

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<sup>107</sup> For an overview of both these struggles, see Dangl, Benjamin, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (AK Press, Oakland, 2007)

<sup>108</sup> *El Espectador*, Guerra contra coca en Colombia alimento los cultivos en Perú y Bolivia, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2012

<sup>109</sup> Gudynas, Eduardo, *Ecología, Desarrollo y Neoliberalismo* (CEBEM, La Paz, 1995) p. 19



#### **iv. Bolivia: Neoliberalism, Sustainable Development and its Legacy**

Bolivia had three Presidents in the 1990s. Jaime Paz Zamora, the left-winger turned liberal reformer and convinced partisan of the war on coca production in the country ruled between 1989 and 1993. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada ('Goni') had his first of two periods in office between 1993 and 1997 – this being rather more successful than his brief Presidency between 2002 and 2003 that ended in his exile. Bolivia saw out the new millennium under the rule of reformed caudillo and military dictator for much of the 1970s Colonel Hugo Banzer. The particular party political allegiances and particular parliamentary configurations of the governments they led are rather less important than their shared commitment to the political changes and economic liberalisation Bolivia experienced in the decade.

Part of this commitment was the vigorous pursuit in the period of the demands contained in the Agenda 21 proposals that emanated from the 1<sup>st</sup> Earth Summit in 1992, to which Bolivia was a signatory. Between 1991 and 1996, Bolivia embarked on a significant legal and institutional restructuring with the aim of implementing the goal of sustainable development at all levels of the state (national and departmental). Table 2.3 sets out just some of the juridical, policy and institutional changes that took place in the period.

Table 2.3. Selected Institutional, Legal and Policy Changes in Bolivia Promoting Sustainable Development Between 1993-1996

Year	Institutional Change	Legal Change	National Policy
1993	Creation of Ministry of Sustainable Development, Implementing of System of Protected Areas		
1994		Law of Popular Participation	General Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the Republic
1995		Law of the Regulation of the Environment, Law of Administrative Decentralisation,	Departmental Plans for Forestry
1996	Creation of the Bolivian Council for Sustainable Development, Regulatory System for Renewable Natural Resources, Creation of National Institute for Agrarian Reform	Forestry Law, Law of National Service for Agrarian Reform	Strategy for the International Insertion of Bolivia, Strategy for the Productive Transformation of Agriculture

Source: Elaborated on basis of 1997 Bolivian Submission to the UN<sup>110</sup>

<sup>110</sup> United Nations, National Implementation of Agenda 21: Bolivia (1997), available from <http://www.un.org/esa/earthsummit/bolvia-c.htm>

Table 2.3 does not include the majority of the significant changes in the administrative structure of the state (the creation of 311 new municipalities and other forms of decentralisation) that were often advanced in the name of creating avenues of ‘popular and local decision-making’ in the development process and natural resource governance. The 1995 Law of Administrative Decentralisation, for example, delegated significant responsibility to the Prefects<sup>111</sup> of Departments to formulate and implement plans of significant environmental importance, such as construction and maintenance of roads, rural electrification, irrigation, conservation efforts, and promotion of tourism.<sup>112</sup>

Alongside efforts to decentralise problems of environmental management, among other state functions, the national state also took up the cause of sustainable development. The creation of the National Secretariat of the Environment and then of the first Ministry for Sustainable Development (1993) reflected an attempt to integrate management of natural resources and the pursuit of social and economic development under a neoliberal framework. Bolivia was the only Latin American country to create such a Ministry and empower it with responsibility for national development policy, reflecting the enthusiasm with which the governing elite adopted the concept of sustainable development.<sup>113</sup> The National Council of Sustainable Development, led by President Sánchez de Lozada, attempted to overcome intergovernmental conflicts between the new Ministry and other sectors of the government more sceptical about this new institution and its broad scope.

All of this was consciously considered as part of the neoliberal restructuring of the country. The Bolivian government’s 2001 submission to the Johannesburg Earth Summit summarises the institutional and policy changes in the ten years since Rio thus:

To achieve sustainable development, we have adopted policies to achieve economic growth in the framework of macroeconomic stability. Among others, these are the

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<sup>111</sup> Before 2005, the Executives in Bolivia’s 9 departments were called Prefects. They are now governors.

<sup>112</sup> Pantoja, Claudia Muñoz-Reyes, *Políticas e instituciones para el Desarrollo económico territorial: el caso de Bolivia* (CEPAL, Santiago, 2009) p. 18

<sup>113</sup> CEPAL, *La Sostenibilidad del desarrollo en América Latina y el Caribe: desafíos y el oportunidades*. July 2002. p. 160

opening of markets, to improve the mechanisms of promoting exports and investments, of privatising or capitalising state-owned enterprises, and of modifying tax policy. At the same time we have understood that strictly economic methods are not enough to satisfy the needs of the majority of society, achieving a more equitable distribution of income and promoting increased social development. For this, long term structural reforms in health and education, and adopting processes of administrative de-centralisation, popular participation and reforms of land tenancy are required [my translation].<sup>114</sup>

This conflation of the pursuit of free-market reform and sustainable development was not unique to the government of Bolivia, but an example of the way of in which the discourse of sustainable development was interpolated by neoliberal governments generally. Institutional reform of the state was accompanied by the privileging of private enterprise and its organisations – such as the Confederation of Private Enterprises of Santa Cruz and the National Council of Industry (CNI) – and certain NGOs within the decision-making apparatus.<sup>115</sup> The USAID financed private led initiatives in areas such as ‘clean technology’ alongside the CNI.<sup>116</sup> Private enterprises were encouraged to produce their own auditing bodies and mechanisms of abiding by environmental regulations.

Bolivian governments of the 1990s adopted the relatively new environmental discourses for a number of reasons. Pursuing environmental goals or developing institutions related to the environment or conservation was certainly a good way to access financing from private or multilateral agencies. It also served to head off criticism about any potential environmental effects of development policy. It is likely, however, that governments did respond to real concerns about how relatively fragile Bolivian ecosystems would respond to the new round of extraction and expansion which was being planned and executed.

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<sup>114</sup> República de Bolivia, Informe de Situación del Desarrollo Sostenible en Bolivia: Evaluación del Sector Industrial Manufacturero. September 2001

<sup>115</sup> Barkin, David, Superando el paradigma neoliberal: desarrollo popular sostenible, in Una nueva ruralidad en América Latina? (CLASCO, Buenos Aires, 2001) pp. 87-88

<sup>116</sup> República de Bolivia, Informe de Situación del Desarrollo Sostenible en Bolivia: Evaluación del Sector Industrial Manufacturero. September 2001

Jaime Paz Zamora's decree in 1991 – the rather portentously titled 'Historic Ecological Pause' – barred any new forestry concessions in Bolivia for five years, so that the government could create new mechanisms of rationally controlling the system of forestry management in the country. Although the decree was largely not implemented, it did suggest that the neoliberal governments did see some role for the state in managing natural resources – although, largely this meant better administration of their appropriation by enterprises.<sup>117</sup> In large part, sustainable development and environmental management meant regularisation and rationalisation of the methods by which Bolivian natural resources were managed and appropriated. Zamora's 1992 Law of the Environment contained a vision of sustainable development clearly developed from within the framework created by the Brundtland Report. (In fact, its conceptual definition of sustainable development is essentially a repeat of Brundtland's).<sup>118</sup>

Under pressure from indigenous and *campesino* groups, Sánchez de Lozada's 1996 Forestry Law attempted to improve the titling of forested land and increase regulation of the forestry industries – principally rubber and wood. In fact, the greatest result was to increase the concessions made to industry and enterprise and to increase encroachment on indigenous communities. The law included some gestures towards sustainability. For instance, it split up 20 year concessions into 20 parcels of land, and required annual rotation of the parcel being forested, under the assumption that by the 20<sup>th</sup> year the first parcel would have 'recovered'.<sup>119</sup> However, mechanisms for ensuring that requirements were being complied with were weak, resulting in frequent violations and illicit appropriation of rare and valuable woods. The law also contained no provision for the reforestation of lands under concession, rendering the endeavour by definition unsustainable. These weaknesses are perhaps explained by the fact that the \$120 million cost of implementing the new juridical framework was borne almost entirely by the forestry industry itself (\$38 million) and international finance, in particular from the USAID.<sup>120</sup> NGOs with connections to USAID continue to play a

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<sup>117</sup> Hufty, Marc, Auroi, Claude, Fuente, Manuel de la, *Gobernancia, Gobernabilidad, y democratización: A Donde va a Bolivia?* (Plural Editores, La Paz, 2005) p. 156

<sup>118</sup> República de Bolivia, Ley de Medio Ambiente. April 1992

<sup>119</sup> *La Razón*, Certificación Forestal y sostenibilidad de bisques, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012, available from [http://www.la-razon.com/suplementos/la\\_gaceta\\_juridica/Certificacion-forestal-sostenibilidad-bosques\\_0\\_1676832373.html](http://www.la-razon.com/suplementos/la_gaceta_juridica/Certificacion-forestal-sostenibilidad-bosques_0_1676832373.html)

<sup>120</sup> Gobierno de Bolivia, Programa Integral del Desarrollo de la Amazonia Boliviana (La Paz, 2003) p. 4

role in the forestry concession systems.

Similarly, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform created in 1996, supposedly aimed at restarting the process of land reform began in 1953, created the first TCOs (indigenous lands) in Bolivian law but had such an onerous and complex titling structure that in the first seven years only 1.3 million hectares out of 16 million subject to application were formally titled.<sup>121</sup> It also imposed tax requirements on all legally titled landowners, removing the principle held over from the revolution that the worker of any plot of land was its legal owner.<sup>122</sup> In 2003, the year of Sánchez de Lozada's flight from his second Presidency, the inequality of land distribution had not improved. 7% of Bolivian landowners owned 83% of all agricultural lands, a concentration that was adding to population pressures on urban centres and promoting agro-industrial expansion.

Werner G. Raza's *Sustainable Development in the Neoliberal Periphery* is the most systematic attempt to account for the relationship between development strategy and environment in Bolivia in this period. As Raza explains, the excitement that greeted the new focus on sustainable development – which reached its high point in the creation of the new ministry of sustainable development – quickly gave way to both opposition from within the governing elite about the political importance of environmentalism and to scepticism from environmentalist circles about the depth of the government's commitment. The focus of the government of Sánchez de Lozada quickly moved, particularly after 1995, from the environment to the economic and political restructuring of the state along neoliberal multicultural grounds.<sup>123</sup>

Nonetheless, the Ministry for Sustainable Development – well financed in large part by foreign agencies – maintained its role in development planning, for instance holding responsibility for the promulgation of Sánchez de Lozada's 1995 development scheme 'Change for All'.<sup>124</sup> This plan, which was underpinned by the notion of sustainable

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 172

<sup>122</sup> García, María del Pilar Valencia, and Zurita, Ivan Egido, *Los Pueblos Indígenas de Tierras Bajas en el Proceso Constituyente Boliviano* (CEJIS, Santa Cruz) p. 96

<sup>123</sup> Raza, Werner G., *Desarrollo Sostenible en la periferia neoliberal* (Plural Editores, La Paz, 2000)

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 117

development, borrowed largely from Brundtland and the World Bank, set out Goni's goals of 'capitalising' (part or wholly privatising) several state enterprises, including many, such as the YFPB, that were involved in the extraction and use of natural resources.<sup>125</sup>

It is also important to note that this entrance of sustainable development into the discourse in Bolivia, in association with the discredited neoliberal elites, impacted on how the discourse was received from then on. As I show in the chapter on the passage of the Rights of Mother Earth Law, the notion of sustainable development and its suitability for a project of environmental protection was one of the key conflicts between the government of MAS and the social movements. While the government remained committed to the notion of sustainable development, augmented by the idea of *buen vivir*, the social movements, perhaps reflecting on the lessons of Bolivia in the 1990s, remained sceptical of the whole idea of development, sustainable or otherwise.

In this chapter, I have set out the content in which this more radical environmentalism emerged. In particular, I have tried to show how neoliberal governments across the continent responded to the crisis in traditional development models by changing the form and content of state intervention in the development process. This produced associated shifts in the institutional and political balance of societies across the continent, upsetting corporatist political arrangements which had emerged during the period of state led development. This process created problems for the neoliberal reformers, particularly as the social and environmental costs increased. Bolivian governments of the periods responded with new measures aimed at promoting 'sustainable development', looking to head off growing criticism of their governance of the natural resources of the country. In this context, the question of the state's role in the development process and natural resource use fused, helping to produce the great social explosions which finally ended the period of neoliberal governance in the country.

In the next chapter, I analyse the development of environmental thought within Latin America. Much of this thinking emerged in parallel with the neoliberal restructuring I have

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 118

analysed. It was grounded in the emerging Western discourses, primarily sustainable development, but radicalised and reinterpreted many of its core doctrines. This is in part reflected by the fact that sustainable development had become a politically indeterminate doctrine, compatible as I have shown, with governments like those of Bolivia in the 1980s and 1990s. These environmentalist thinkers committed themselves to broader historical inquiry on the legacy of Western rationality and its impact on conceptions of the environment. In this way, they found common cause with emerging indigenist discourses, which were also looking to promote decolonisation and the revindication of alternative forms of knowledge and social practice. This encounter between radical environmentalism and indigeneity sparked a fruitful period of environmental thought. Its legacy is reflected in the contemporary debates over the development strategy of governments on the Andes today.



## Chapter 2. From Sustainable Development to Post-Development: Key Themes in Latin American Environmental Thought

Attempts to explain the structures and often the failures of Latin American economies and societies in the post-independence (1825- ) era was central to the emergence of critical theories of development. Many of the theories of development that became constitutive of scholarly debate on the subject, particularly among critical development theorists, took Latin America as their key empirical resource and historical touchstone. As such, the fate of these development theories and of Latin American societies became closely intertwined. Latin America became not only a laboratory for emerging development strategies (as in the case of neoliberalism), but also for the political and intellectual currents seeking to contest these strategies.<sup>126</sup>

This is the case in the elaboration of theory of unequal exchange by the economists grouped at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the 1950s, which criticised the assumption that productivity increases and free trade would lead to an increase in living standards and incomes in less developed economies.<sup>127</sup> The work of Andre Gunder Frank and the dependency thesis was explicitly grounded in the failure of global capitalism to produce economic growth and development in the global South as a whole, but in particular in Latin America.<sup>128</sup> The extension and partial revision of the dependency theory in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and the proponents of the World Systems approach continued this focus on Latin America underdevelopment as a key problem for development theory.

In part, of course, the particular focus on Latin America in many of the key works of critical development theory – by which I mean any theory of development critical of politically and

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126 Sader, Emir, *The Weakest Link? Neoliberalism in Latin América*, *New Left Review* 52, July-August 2008, pp. 5-31

127 Economic Commission for Latin America, *The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems* (Santiago Chile, 1950)

128 See Frank, Andre Gunder, *Latin América: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (Monthly Review, New York, 1969) and Cardoso, Fernando Henrique and Faletto, Enzo, *Dependency and Development in Latin América* (University of California, Berkley, 1979) trans. Marjory Mattingly Urquidi, and Sunkel, Osvaldo, and Paz, Pedro, *El Subdesarrollo Latinoamericano y la Teoría del Desarrollo* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, México, p. 1991)

intellectually hegemonic strategies - reflects the high proportion of influential Latin American writers working in the area. Latin American scholars focussed on addressing the nature and problems of their own societies often constructed theories of development as a mode of explanation and political-strategic orientation. In another sense, however, the nature of Latin American economic and social history provided fertile soil for critical development studies quite apart from the intellectual biographies of the principal scholars in the field.

The course of Latin American (under)development seemed to pose a challenge to the optimism of classical development theory about the potential of capitalist progress in the third world.<sup>129</sup> Latin America represented, as it were, an ongoing refutation of those expecting the dynamic and liberating capacities of capitalism to ease the passage from backwardness to modernity. In the context of Latin American politics, this often converged with movements challenging the subordination of the 'original' peoples of the continent. As I discuss below, a holistic 'cultural' critique of development emerged, which questioned the dominant forms of rationality propping up dominant development agendas.

The transformation of development theory and policy inaugurated by the explosion of interest and concern over the environment in the 1980s and 1990s has if anything increased the significance of the region to those working in the field. The particular ecological and geographical features of the region –the presence of the Amazonian rainforest, high biodiversity, relatively high percentage of virgin lands and wilderness, important freshwater deposits and so on –meant that the environmental turn in development policy – at least at the level of official and academic discourse if not at the level of practice – had specific consequences for Latin America. As researchers at the Woodrow Wilson Centre put it in the early 1990s, 'Latin America exhibits special characteristics in regard to the potential threat that is posed by environmental protection.'<sup>130</sup>

This turn in development theory towards incorporation of the environment as an important

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<sup>129</sup> Including it must be said certain variations of Marx and Engels' own views on capitalism and its historically progressive role.

<sup>130</sup> Toolchain, Joseph S., and Rudman, Andrew I., *Economic Development and Environmental Protection in Latin America* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1991) p. 2

variable was reflected both in the documents of the leading international development agencies and in the work of the critical development theorists and those whom their work had influenced. The fraught debates in and between Latin American academic and governmental circles today reflect the contradictory nature of the process through which the environment was integrated with existing models of development theory and practice.

I want to demonstrate in this chapter how scholars working on Latin American development have responded to the challenge of 'sustainable development' and calls for environmental protection. In particular, I set out how theorists influenced by the earlier critical theories of development, in large part in response to Latin American experience, have wrestled with the new focus placed on Latin American environments. I show how they have attempted to square the emphasis on social justice and equity that typified earlier critical development models with the focus on environmental crisis in order to formulate a general critique of capitalist development in the region. Understanding how the categories of sustainable development and environmental protection have evolved in the critical debates on Latin American development is crucial to illuminating the intellectual and political conditions in which new left governments, such as that in Bolivia, are now operating.

### **i. Contesting Sustainable Development**

Distinguishing itself from simple measurements of economic growth, the concept of development has come to envelop a variety of social, economic, cultural and political indicators.<sup>131</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, the environment gained increasing prominence as a vector in measures of development. This reflected both increasing public concern about the progress of environmental degradation and the emergence of vigorous social movements and political parties, particularly in the already developed economies, contesting the impact of 'industrial society' on environmental conditions.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Pearce, David, Barbier, Edward, and Markandya, Anil, *Sustainable Development: Economics and Environment in the Third World* (Earthscan Publications, London, 1997) p. 2

<sup>132</sup> Offe, Claus, *New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics*, *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4, *Social Movements* (Winter 1985) pp. 817-868

Evidence about the impacts of human activity on nature, for instance the depletion of the ozone in the upper atmosphere caused by widespread use of CFCs, added to growing unease about the unintended consequences of mass consumption. Disasters such as the meltdown of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl and the horrific human costs and environmental aftermath dramatised the dark side of technological and industrial society.<sup>133</sup>

Inevitably this growth in concern and interest in the environment found its way into thinking on development. Models of development that did not take into account the issue of natural resource depletion, pollution and waste were discredited. Development that undermined itself by eroding the natural bases and support for life was not really development at all. It was illusory economic growth at the expense of long-term welfare. Sustainability was initially then a critical concept – it served to highlight a problem, the problem of dominant social goals and their reliance on a dangerous misapprehension of the relationship between human beings and their natural environment.<sup>134</sup> Primarily, environmentalists have focussed on ensuring that economic systems – and their attendant social and ethical values - predicated on perpetual growth are replaced by those recognising the finite nature of the Earth and its resources.<sup>135</sup> This conflicted with models of development in which exports are prioritised and with many mainstream economists' belief that technology renders resources indefinitely elastic such that there are no definitive limits to growth.

The definition of sustainable development that gained most traction and framed much of the initial thinking was provided by the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future*. Sustainable development was characterised as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.<sup>136</sup> Brundtland's (limited) defence of economic growth made more radical environmental critics sceptical, who charged that this definition 'allows politicians and economists to prattle on about 'sustainable growth' even though current patterns of

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<sup>133</sup> Blowers, Andrew, *Environmental Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Policy*, Urban Studies, Vol. 30, Nos 4/5, 1993, pp. 775-796

<sup>134</sup> Jacobs, Michael, *The Green Economy: Environment, Sustainable Development and the Politics of the Future* (Pluto Press, New York, 1991) p. 59

<sup>135</sup> See Dobson, Andrew, *Green Political Thought* (Routledge, London, 1994), particularly pp. 72-123

<sup>136</sup> United Nations, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*, 1987

economic growth and genuine sustainability are wholly contradictory concepts'.<sup>137</sup>

Nonetheless, Brundtland's conception of sustainable development as that which is consistent with intergenerational justice framed future debate. It was this definition that underpinned the discussion and concluding report of the first United Nation Earth Summit held at Rio in 1992. The document developed during this conference – a 'turning point in world history', according to John Bellamy Foster<sup>138</sup> – stressed the need for an 'integration of environment and development concerns', as well as calling for significant financial flows from the developed world to the developing world as a step towards an 'equitable world economy'.<sup>139</sup>

The World Bank devoted its annual World Development Report in the same year to the theme of Environment and Development, with the aim of reconciling economic development with the environment and overcoming the notion that the two were in any sense in conflict. It 'strongly endorsed' the definition of sustainable development adumbrated in Brundtland, and suggested, in a striking formulation, that there was 'no difference between the goals of development policy and appropriate environmental protection'.<sup>140</sup>

By the 1990s, sustainable development had become part of the consensus thinking among governments, international bodies, civil society and leading multilateral development agencies. Rather than posing any fundamental challenge to the structures of the global political economy, the environment was to be neatly integrated with hegemonic development strategies in the form of sustainable development. This meant marginalising the elements of environmentalism hostile to capitalism. It also meant rejecting the limits to growth approach adopted most famously in the Club of Rome's 1972 report.<sup>141</sup>

Economic growth and capitalism were, according to the new global consensus, not only

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<sup>137</sup> Pepper, David, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (Routledge, London, 1996) p. 74

<sup>138</sup> Bellamy Foster John, *Sustainable Development of What?, Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, 1996, p. 129

<sup>139</sup> United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, *Agenda 21*, 1992

<sup>140</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 1992, Development and Environment*, p. 7

<sup>141</sup> Meadows, Donella H., Meadows, Dennis L., Randers, Jorgen, and Behrens III, William W., *The Limits to Growth: A Report of the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (Universe Books, New York, 1972)

consonant with sustainable development, they were inseparable. As Wolfgang Sachs puts it, 'while [the concept of environment] was originally advanced to put development politics under indictment, it is now raised like a banner to announce a new era of development.'<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, this increasing emphasis on environmental protection and sustainable development coincided with the growth of emphasis on the role of free markets and the rollback of the state in development strategies. Even the relatively progressive Agenda 21 promoted rapid extension of free trade, removal of state support for 'less productive' agriculture, the end of 'inefficient' import substitution schemes and other relatively orthodox neoliberal prescriptions. Article 33:6 of Agenda 21 claims that 'economic conditions, both domestic and international, that encourage free trade and access to markets will help make economic growth and environmental protection mutually supportive for all countries.'<sup>143</sup> I have already shown in the prior chapter how this policy framework was absorbed and adapted by Bolivian governments of the 1990s.

From this perspective, traditional features of the developmental state were thus held to be a barrier to economic growth and environmental protection. Even where the market was deemed to be at fault or at odds with the goal of sustainable development, the solution was assumed to be the creation of new markets and the removal of state-induced 'distortions'. The problem of market failure – the inability of the market, for a variety of reasons to price various environmental products and services – was either dismissed as illusory or as an acceptable alternative to the worse alternative of bureaucratic regulation. In this vein, Anil Markandya, a key free market economist working on issues of sustainability, wrote in a series of essays for the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN that it

...is a misconception that the presence of market failures justifies the reduction in the role of the market in resource allocation and an increase in the role of the government. To the contrary, mitigation of market failures through secure property rights, internationalisation of externalities, increased

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<sup>142</sup> Sachs, Wolfgang, *Planetary Dialectics: Explorations in Environment and Development* (Zed Books, New York, 1999) p. 56

<sup>143</sup> UNCED, Agenda 21

competition and reduced uncertainty will enhance the role of markets in allocating resources such as water, land, fisheries, forests and environmental services and would make unnecessary the establishment of cumbersome and often inefficient public institutions for resource management and conservation.<sup>144</sup>

In its contribution to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, The International Monetary Fund (IMF) explained that its 'primary contribution to sustainable development' lay in promoting international monetary co-operation, the balanced growth of international trade, foreign exchange rate stability and orderly foreign exchange arrangements between countries'. Thus, as Duncan French remarks, the IMF believed that its commitment to sustainable development involved it continuing to do exactly what it was already doing, on the grounds that 'only economic growth can generate the additional resources needed to address environmental problems'.<sup>145</sup>

Environmental protection and conservation were thus reconciled not only with capitalism and growth per se, but with a particular model of capitalism hostile to the state's role and convinced of the necessity of expanding free markets to economic and social development. Sustainable development and environmentalist discourse rose alongside and in relation to neoliberal discourse and politics. The adoption and re-articulation of sustainable development by the simultaneously ascending neoliberal paradigm meant, on the one hand, that almost everyone was apparently committed to sustainable development and, on the other, that what the term actually meant became increasingly unclear.

Nonetheless, it would be incorrect to suggest that the colonisation of the concept of sustainable development by governments and multilateral bodies committed to free market reform and increasing economic growth was entirely successful. The discourse of sustainable development and environmental protection continued to sustain and inform critical accounts

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<sup>144</sup> Markandya, Anil, *Policies for Sustainable Development: Four Essays* (FAO, Rome, 1994) p. 215

<sup>145</sup> French, Duncan, *International Law and Policy of Sustainable Development* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005) p. 195

of neoliberalism.<sup>146</sup>

It became increasingly clear that the environmental record of neoliberal governance meant that the contradictions between the environment and dominant development strategies bodies such as the World Bank had attempted to smooth over or deny altogether, could not be easily overcome. Reconciling environmental protection and unrestrained market forces proved more difficult in practice than it did in theory. Significant evidence suggested that the adoption of neoliberalism – even under the apparent auspices of a sustainable development framework – worsened the environmental conditions in the region.

Twenty years after the first Rio summit and its propagation of sustainable development framework for the globe, the tensions between dominant economic systems and commitments to sustainability only seem to be increasing. Whereas global civil society organisations had been among the main drivers and supporters of Agenda 21 and the 1992 report, the stance they adopted to the events and final report emanating from the Rio +20 meeting was in many cases bitterly hostile. The chief executive of Oxfam assessed the summit as having been a ‘hoax’ in which,

...they came, they talked, but they failed to act. We elect governments to tackle the issues that we can't tackle alone. But they are not providing the leadership the world desperately needs. Paralysed by inertia and in hock to vested interests, too many are unable to join up the dots and solve the connected crises of environment, equity and economy.<sup>147</sup>

The political director of Greenpeace was terser: the summit was an ‘epic failure’. It is illuminating that, despite the failure of the summit to agree to any of the substantial and binding environmental reforms - such as punishing state subsidies for fossil fuel producers - which activists had been calling for, there was an agreement to ‘expand the concept of

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<sup>146</sup> See, among many others, Haque, M. Shamsul, *The Fate of Sustainable Development Under Neoliberal Regimes in Developing Countries*, *International Political Science Review* (1999), Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 197-218

<sup>147</sup> Oxfam, Final Statement at Rio +20, 22nd June 2012, available at <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2012/06/rio-oxfam-final-statement>



sustainable development to include poverty eradication and social inclusion’.

A continued extension of the conceptual boundaries of the notion of sustainable development – such that no one is opposed to it – seemed to mask the more fundamental problem. Raised to the level of normative universal such that it can be the stated policy of both Shell (who ‘contribute to sustainable development by meeting the world’s growing energy needs’) and environmental activists, sustainable development increasingly ceased to be a critical, or indeed meaningful, concept.<sup>148</sup> In the next section, I want to look at how Latin American scholars have attempted to retain this critical dimension of the discourse of sustainability.

## ii. Unequal Exchange, Sustainable Development and Post-Development

The environmental movement is chiefly a middle class movement confined to rich countries. The split between the rich and poor over this issue prevails both within and between countries.

- Sterling Brubaker<sup>149</sup>

The relationship between the environment and development was not alien to Latin American development theory. As early as 1978, The Economic Commission for Latin America had developed projects aimed at critically engaging with the problem of environmental crisis in the context of Latin American underdevelopment. Nonetheless, as Michael Redclift and David Goodman point out, many of the major works in Latin American development theory had little or nothing to say about the environmental dimension of development and underdevelopment.<sup>150</sup> Although, as they concede, many of these works, for instance Andre

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<sup>148</sup> Shell UK, Sustainable Development in Shell, available at <http://www.shell.co.uk/gbr/environment-society/sustainable-development.html>

<sup>149</sup> Brubaker, Sterling, *To Live on Earth: Man and His Environment in Perspective* (John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1972) p. 169

<sup>150</sup> Redclift, Michael, and Goodman, David (eds), *Environment and Development in Latin America: The Politics of Sustainability* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1991) p. 45

Gunder Frank's *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*, were written before the environment was prominent in the political or intellectual discourse anywhere.

In this section, I want to lay out how the notion of sustainable development was received in Latin American scholarly debate, and then set out how it was articulated in the context of the already existing critical development theories. In the section following this, I set out how the practice of sustainable development under the neoliberal governments in Bolivia progressed, and assess how this shapes the approaches of the current Bolivian government to the issue of the environment.

The first thing to recognise is the crucial difference between the context in which the environmentalist challenge to development theory was received in the North and in Latin America. In the North, environmentalism was posed primarily as a critique of development that had already occurred. Green critiques focussed on scaling back already developed economies ("de-growth"<sup>151</sup>), dematerialising economies, reducing waste and lowering consumption of finite materials and resources. The problem in the 'rich' world was, if anything, one of overdevelopment, of a fictitious abundance powered by enormous labour and energy inputs, all predicated on the catastrophically misjudged presumption that there were no limits to economic growth. This perhaps in part explains why environmentalism in the North developed an increasingly spiritual and idealist tone, as activists and environmentalist thinkers became convinced that a radical restructuring of ethical systems was required if Western populations were to be 'weaned off' their unsustainable lifestyles.<sup>152</sup>

In Latin America, the primary problem facing governments, peoples and scholars was the opposite one – the repeated and persistent disappointment or collapse of economic development strategies. As I hinted at in the introduction, Latin American development was already thoroughly problematised, theorised and studied, primarily because of its failure, long

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<sup>151</sup> Martinez Alier, Pascual, Unai, Vivien, Franck-Dominique and Zaccai, Edwin, Sustainable de-growth: Mapping the Context, criticism and future prospects of an emerging paradigm, *Ecological Economics* 69 (2010), pp. 1741-1749

<sup>152</sup> Pepper, David, Determining, Idealism and the Politics of Environmentalism – a view point, *International Studies of Environmental Studies*, 1985, Vol. 26, pp. 11-19

before the dilemma of environmental protection and sustainability gained any traction. Underdevelopment in the form of continued reliance on the primary export sector for income and employment, dependency on the developed economies for capital – in the form of investments, capital goods or technology transfers – and continually worsening terms of trade already deformed Latin American economies and societies. The problem of the environmental sustainability of economic development in the region quickly became enmeshed within these broader debates about the fate of Latin America in the global economy.

I set out two different approaches to the problem of sustainability that have helped shaped Latin American thinking on the matter. Firstly, there is the theory of unequal ecological exchange and the matter of the so-called ‘ecological debt’. And then, I want to address the Latin American critique of development-as-such in the form of theory of ‘post-development’, of particular importance in the case of Bolivia where it is associated with idea of ‘buen vivir’ and found its way, in an ambiguous fashion, into the official discourse. The latter of these two was the current most critical of the discourse of sustainable development as it emerged both in government and academic circles in the 1990s.

First of all, however, I want briefly to set out how the debate on sustainable development has translated in Latin America. The first thing to say is that while Latin American scholars often accepted and adopted the concept of sustainable development that emerged post-Rio, they stressed the need to track the sources of unsustainable development and to identify the primary winners and losers of environmental destruction. Sustainable development, considered properly, implied a rebalancing of the global economy in which some –heretofore dominant – interests would be negatively impacted. Conflicts over the precise meaning of sustainable development also reflect the particular ecological and economic features of particular economies.

The environmental problem is eminently political. We are all in favour of environmental protection that doesn’t contradict our own interests. The countries that depend on the exploitation of forests are disposed to form a line against the contamination by fossil fuels and those that accommodate the production and

commercialisation of fossil fuels are disposed to defend the land threatened by deforestation.<sup>153</sup>

The Colombian ecologist Augusto Angel Maya argued that the attempt to extend the benefits of development to all people is not possible within the current form of social organisation. While the Brundtland Report correctly identified the North-South conflict inherent in the logic of sustainable development, it failed to identify the mechanisms by which these conflicts could be resolved in favour of sustainability and equity. In this sense, the title of *Our Common Future* named an aspiration rather than an existing state of affairs. The progress of globalisation across the globe has led to a degree of economic unification but increasing social and environmental polarisation.

The notion of development is consonant with an environmentalist perspective, but only if the latter can be transformed in accordance with the demands of sustainability. In Maya's work there is an acceptance of the fact of technological development as an irreducible part of humanity's evolutionary development, and a rejection of utopian-idealist arguments for a 'return to the ecosystem'.<sup>154</sup>

The solution to the environmental problem does not consist in encasing (*encajar*) man within the ecosystem. It doesn't consist, therefore, in knowing how to 'conserve', but in understanding how to transform well. Humanity does not have any evolutionary alternative but the transformation of the eco-system [my translation].<sup>155</sup>

This, then, places Maya among the Latin American scholars more open to the prospect of development as a social goal. He does not share the radical scepticism about the role of technology evinced, for instance, by Enrique Leff and the post-development school – about whom I say more below. He is critical of the Cassandra element of the environmentalist

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<sup>153</sup> Maya, Augusto Angel, *Desarrollo Sostenible: Aproximaciones Conceptuales*, available from [http://portaloab.colnodo.apc.org/apc-aa-files/57c59a889ca266ee6533c26f970cb14a/augusto\\_angel\\_maya\\_desarrollo\\_sustentable.pdf](http://portaloab.colnodo.apc.org/apc-aa-files/57c59a889ca266ee6533c26f970cb14a/augusto_angel_maya_desarrollo_sustentable.pdf)

<sup>154</sup> Maya, Augusto Ángel, *La Diosa Némesis: Desarrollo Sostenible o Cambio Cultural* (Corporación Universitaria Autónoma de Occidente, Bogotá, 2003) p. 12

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12

movement, perpetually announcing the approaching end of the world. That said, this does not make Maya's analysis any less radical in its prescriptions or sceptical about the ability of current economic models to integrate the twin imperatives.

Maya's account retains an important materialist and social dimension. For him, the logic of sustainable development necessitates a transformation in the patterns of not only of development, but of life as a whole. This reflects the fact that there is no organic solution to the problem of human-nature relations – the current state of human evolution is not going to be reversed and neither is nature's resistance going to be overcome. For Maya, the problem of the environment is a problem of culture, a problem of the inability of dominant forms of social organisation, values and practices to properly include the environmental element.

This concern for the cultural element of sustainable development grounded in a critique of dominant values and social goals – largely absent from official Western discourse on the issue – typifies much Latin American thought.<sup>156</sup> In some cases it leads to calls for an abandonment of the notion of development itself, sustainable or otherwise, since this concept itself is judged to be helplessly bound with monological search for economic growth at the expense of the environment. In most cases, however, it translated into calls for changes in the institutional structures of societies, states and private enterprise in order to accommodate new attention given to environmental effects of social action. Attempts at this shift in the institutional structure, particularly in the sectors regulating the appropriation of natural resources, were often frustrated by the fiscal instability of the state, ideological commitment to state rollback and the emphasis on improving economic indicators.<sup>157</sup>

This was part of the approach to the problem of achieving sustainable development in Latin America taken by CEPAL's 2001 submission to the United Nations Earth Summit at

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<sup>156</sup> As I have shown above, the pursuit of sustainable development is often held not only to be consonant with orthodox economic growth, but the former is assumed to be impossible without the latter.

<sup>157</sup> Guimarães, Roberto P., and Bárcena, Alicia, *El Desarrollo Sostenible de América Latina y el Caribe desde Rio 1992 y los Nuevos Imperativos de Institucionalidad*, in Leff, Enrique, Ezcurra, Exequiel, Pisanty, Irene, and Lankao, Patricia Romero (eds), *La Transición hacia el Desarrollo Sostenible: Perspectivas de América Latina y el Caribe* (PNUMA, México City, 2002) p. 22

Johannesburg in 2002. It too stresses the commitment contained in Agenda 21 with the aim of ensuring incorporation of the environment into development planning, and the effects of the period of adjustment in the 1990s on this effort.<sup>158</sup> As CEPAL pointed out, the creation of institutional environmentalism in the states of Latin America involved a shift in the traditional approach to natural resource management in Latin America, in which environmental conversation had traditionally been included under the rubric of sectoral agencies, for instance agencies dealing with planning of mining, public health and urbanisation.<sup>159</sup>

As Maya stresses, the relative scale for discussion of unsustainable development and environmental destruction is planetary – the primary carbon sinks, for instance, are the atmosphere and the oceans everyone on Earth relies upon. The development that has occurred heretofore has not progressed evenly and equitably across the globe, but has left some countries wealthy and others poorer, some economically developed and others still underdeveloped. In the same sense, environmental destruction does not progress evenly. The ‘costs’ of environmental crisis are, as has often been noted, borne disproportionately by the poorer nations, and by the poorer populations within those nations. In this sense, the problem of sustainability touches on the problem of equity, both between nations and within them.<sup>160</sup>

Any form of development that progressively increases the environmental and social costs for a certain class of economies and societies is not sustainable either environmentally or economically. It is for this reason that in Latin America, the problem of global inequity and uneven development has frequently motivated critiques of dominant development strategies. This is most obviously the case if we look at the problem on unequal environmental exchange. Of course, in Latin America, the theory of unequal exchange is most clearly associated with the work of Raul Prebisch and others at CEPAL between the 1950s and 1970s. In critical development theory, the idea is perhaps most closely associated with Samir Amin, an Egyptian socialist and development scholar with close links to the current Bolivian government. Amin’s work is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is significant for its attempts to trace the roots of unequal exchange to higher rates of labour exploitation in the

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<sup>158</sup> CEPAL, *La Sostenibilidad del Desarrollo en América Latina*, p. 158

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, p. 160

<sup>160</sup> Friends of the Earth, *Poverty, Justice and the Environment*, London, 2004

peripheral economies of global capitalism than in the centre and secondly, for its relatively early recognition of the possibility of unequal exchange in the global environment. Amin's 1977 work *Imperialism and Unequal Exchange* perceptively noted how increasing concern of the environmental effects of industrialisation in the developed countries would increase the incentive to transfer the most polluting and waste producing industries to underdeveloped countries.<sup>161</sup>

Importantly, for Amin and other proponents of unequal exchange, the inequalities arising from international trade were not the result of failures, but constitutive of the system of exchange itself. International trade was inherently unequal and these inequalities are guarded and nurtured by those who administer and control it. This of course hints at the general thesis of the 'underdevelopment' school in critical development studies, in which the failure of development in the satellite economies is a reflection of the specific form of their integration into the international economic system.<sup>162</sup>

Amin's insight was most clearly and consciously developed in a 1998 article by environmental economist Alf Hornborg. Hornborg follows Amin and others in asserting the role of international trade in transferring value from the periphery to the centres of global capitalism. Hornborg however develops an account of international trade that includes within it the transfers of energy from the periphery to the centre and the return of entropy (or waste) from the latter to the former. Like Amin, he suggests this process cannot be easily amended by the reordering of markets or alterations to the price mechanism – as is called for by in Howard Odum's concept of global 'energy equity'.

A major rationale of international trade is precisely the transfer of energy and other resources from peripheries to centres of accumulation, the commendable principle of 'energy equity' would amount to nothing less than to deprive world trade of its *raison d'être*.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Amin, Samir, *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (Monthly Review, New York, 1977) p. 143

<sup>162</sup> See Gunder Frank, *Latin América: Underdevelopment and Revolution*

<sup>163</sup> Hornborg, Alf, *Towards an ecological theory of unequal exchange: articulating world system theory and ecological economics*, *Ecological Economics* 25 (1998) p. 131

Studies of the costs of this unequal exchange in Latin America have focussed on the particular patterns of development and international exchange that predominate on the region. One study of the impact of unequal environmental exchange in Colombia concludes that:

Environmentally unequal exchange and environmental stressed caused by the pattern of nature intensive specialisation of the Colombian economy can be identified in various ways: by the direction of net flows of material resources and water, which have a clear orientation out of the country: 720 million tonnes of material (1970-2004) and 388 billion litres of water (1961-2004) is the net biophysical balance of the commercial transactions that occurred in both periods.<sup>164</sup>

Investigations into the extensive transfer of materials and resources from Latin American countries to the developed economies under the rubric of the unequal environmental exchange increased in the 1990s.<sup>165</sup> Although the issue of ecological debt (discussed elsewhere) was central to the discourse of unequal environmental exchange, the problem of sustainability was also crucial. The economies of Latin America were confined to transfer of primary materials because of the failure of development, to escape the export model of development and create lasting and sustained internal sources of growth. Unsustainable and environmentally costly economic patterns were today's price for prior abortive attempts at lasting development.

As Joan Martinez Alier points out, the unwillingness to talk about the environmental costs of trade between the exporting economies and the North extended from multilateral agencies and Northern governments all the way to the governments of Latin America itself. He contrasted the relatively relaxed attitude of Latin American governments to transfer of their

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<sup>164</sup> Perez-Rincon, Mario Alejandro, El intercambio desigual del comercio internacional colombiano, *Ecologia Politica*, No. 33 (2007), p. 122

<sup>165</sup> Ganem, Javier and Peinado, Guillermo, *Estructura Productiva, Comercio Internacional y Ambiente. Indicadores Biofisicos de la Economía Argentina desde la Perspectiva del Intercambio Ecológicamente Desigual*, available from [http://www.fcecon.unr.edu.ar/web-nueva/sites/default/files/u16/Decimocuartas/ganem\\_peinado\\_estructura\\_productiva\\_comercio\\_internacional\\_y\\_ambiente.pdf](http://www.fcecon.unr.edu.ar/web-nueva/sites/default/files/u16/Decimocuartas/ganem_peinado_estructura_productiva_comercio_internacional_y_ambiente.pdf)



natural patrimony to the vigorous defence of territorial claims in the region.<sup>166</sup>

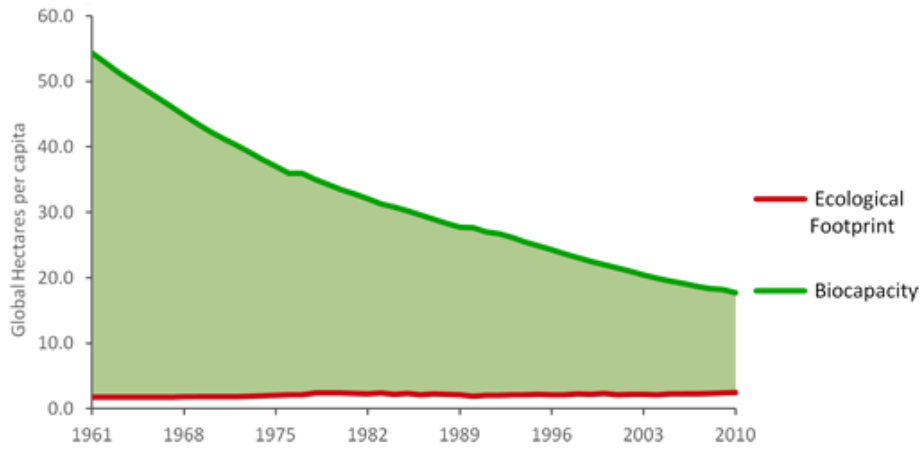
One clear measure of unequal environmental exchange is the ecological footprint. The ecological footprint can be defined as the 'amount of land and water required by a population to produce the resources it consumes and to absorb its waste'.<sup>167</sup> The patterns of global consumption show that the demand for goods, services and waste absorption of Latin American countries are generally lower than their biocapacity (their capacity to support populations and absorb waste) and that the footprints of the developed economies generally exceed biocapacity (see figure 1.1 and 1.2).

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<sup>166</sup> Martinez Alier, Joan, *La Deuda Ecológica vs. Deuda Externa. Una Perspectiva Latinoamericana*. Paper presented at Conference External Debt and the End of the Millenium, Caracas, 1998, p. 17. Available from <http://www.invaf.com.mx/pdf/L062.pdf>

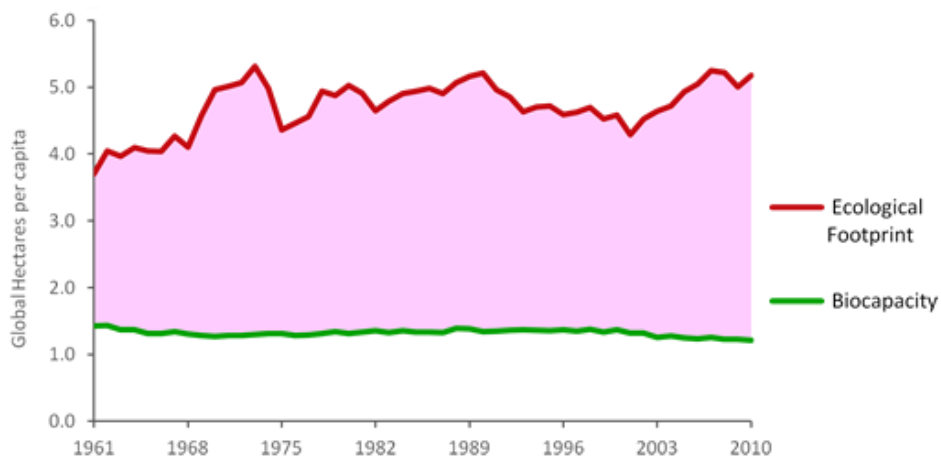
<sup>167</sup> Ganem and Peinado, *Estructura Productiva*, p. 6

Figure 1.1 Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity of Bolivia



Source: FootprintNetwork.Org (2015)

Figure 1.2 Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity of Switzerland



Source: FootprintNetwork.Org (2015)

The existence of environmentally unequal exchange between the Latin America and the centres of global capitalism, it was now argued, undermines the goal of sustainable social and economic development in the region. As Figure 1.1 shows, while the ecological footprint of Bolivians has largely stayed the same since the 1960s, the biocapacity of the country has gradually declined. Biocapacity can be reduced by processes such as population increase (a relatively minor factor in Bolivia), ecosystem degradation, and changes in agricultural practices.

Environmentally unequal exchange facilitates the transfer of excess biocapacity from the developing world to the countries of the developed world. This is the biospheric subsidy contained in the system of international unequal exchange. The developing economies pay for this subsidy not only in current transfers of excess capacity, but in the costs of gradually reducing their own future biocapacity by adopting environmentally degrading techniques and practices in order to satisfy global demand.

### **iii. From Development to Post-Development: *Buen Vivir* and the Cultural Critique of Development**

As I have shown, the call for sustainable development, at least in the Latin American context, contained powerful critiques of existing development models and the structures of international trade. Nonetheless, like the classic critical theories of development, it maintained commitment to development, albeit a form of development transformed by the imperative of sustainability. In the 1990s, the whole notion of development came under sustained criticism in Latin America as scholars and activists rejected not only unsustainable development, but the discourse of development as such. The post-development school combined a post-structuralist ontological and epistemological position with certain post-colonial intellectual traditions influential, in particular, in the Andean nations, with their higher levels of indigenous population and more contentious racial and identity politics. In Bolivia, this concept has found its way into official discourse, as I explore in greater depth in Chapter 4. In this section, I want to focus on the emergence of post-development, focussing on its critical relationship with the discourse of sustainable development. My argument here advances my principal claims within the dissertation as a whole, by showing how this concept

shaped environmental critiques that would become part of the contestation of development policy under Morales.

Post-development's most prominent advocate is the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar. At the heart of Escobar's work is the notion that the social construction of development and underdevelopment is as much an act of power as the economic conditions themselves. Escobar's claim is that the hegemonic representations of development/underdevelopment come before the material relations these concepts attempt to embody. His interest lies not in discovering why Latin America is underdeveloped or how it can develop, but in problematising these categories themselves in order to discover the relations of domination they embody. And on the basis of this, Escobar asks what epistemological strategies allow us to make determinations about development and what forms of knowledge or ways of knowing do these strategies rule out or dominate.

In *The Creation of the Third World*, Escobar tracks the emergence of the notion of underdevelopment after the Second World War as part of a new taxonomy of the globe into First, Second and Third worlds, each corresponding to a set of economic and political structures. It was in this context in which the idea of Latin America and the rest of the third world as being underdeveloped emerged. Escobar catalogues the role of development policy in Latin America in the United States' struggle against communism. Lack of economic development, it was assumed, would create the conditions for communist intrigue and subterfuge in the Western Hemisphere and that this would jeopardise American security. Development policy – the transfer of modern technology and capital to the developing world - thus had a distinct cultural and political objective, to prevent the spread of communism and promote the growth of sound bourgeois societies in the third world.

Technology, it was thought, would not only increase material progress: it would give, moreover, direction and meaning. In the extensive bibliography of the sociology of modernisation, technology was theorised as a form of moral force that when used would create an ethic of innovation, production and “results”.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Escobar, Arturo, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo: Construcción y deconstrucción del Desarrollo* (Fundación Editorial, Caracas, 2007) p. 72

Alongside this transfer of technology, the Americans also created new institutions aimed at the production of knowledge about Latin American society, economy and geography. Latin America became the object of an explosion in research in the fields of political science, sociology, social psychology and economics. While this research was often carried out by interloping Americans, Latin Americans themselves were often recruited, trained in the disciplines developed in American universities and schooled in their research techniques. While this generated a wealth of information about Latin American society, it also involved the 'loss of autonomy and the blockade of alternative modes of knowledge'.<sup>169</sup> The 'tree of knowledge' grown in the North was sent to the South.

The intellectual assumption guiding these efforts was that in Latin America the United States could see an image of its past. Latin America's backward condition reflected America's own state before it went through the necessary stages of development. The word development itself, of course, contains within it an implication of this kind of linear process, a coming-into-being with an end and a beginning and a passage between the two points. It is in this historical and political matrix that Escobar locates the beginnings of the development discourse.

Development as a discourse, as I noted earlier, is a necessary illusive concept, the outcome of a series of prior theoretical, practical and normative determinations. As Escobar notes, its overdetermined nature is part of the power of development as a concept in the social sciences and as a discursive strategy directing social action.

To understand development as a discourse it is necessary not to look at its own elements but to its system of reciprocal determinations. It is this system of relations that allow the systematic creation of objects, concepts and strategies; the determination of what can be thought and what can be said...That is to say, the system of relations establishes the rules of the game: who can speak, from what point of view, with what authority and with what qualifications; it defines the rules to follow for the emergence, naming, analysis and eventual transformation of whatever problem, theory or object in a plan or policy.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, p. 75

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p. 80

From this constructivist perspective, development as a discursive strategy aims to arrange a particular set of concepts and articulate them within a wider set of relations and rules. It fixes and regulates the means by which a diverse set of social problems – poverty, environmental crisis, lack of capital and so on – can be identified and addressed, and by whom and in what ways. It is for this reason that the ‘expert’ – the economists, the sociologists and others who staff the vast institutional national, international and non-governmental complex of development policy are indispensable. It is they who do the work of identifying new problems, creating new subjects and clients and expanding the domain of development strategy. In this sense, the explosion of interest in sustainable development and the environment represents, for Escobar, another successful expansion of development’s conceptual magisterium.

The purpose of development and development policy, Escobar argues, is to represent social life as ‘technical problem and as an object of rational control’.<sup>171</sup> In the age of sustainable development it seems necessary to add to this that the environment or nature itself is now subject to the same representations. It is important to note that, for Escobar, the subjection of the Third World to the development industry is not just a discursive or political strategy aimed at securing hegemony (although it is this), but a violent and destructive process that reproduces real relations of domination and power.

On some occasions development proved so important for the countries of the third world that their leaders subjected their people to an infinite variety of interventions, to increasingly totalitarian forms of power and control. So important that the elites of the first and third world accepted the price of massive impoverishment, the sale of the natural resources of the third world to the highest bidder, the degradation of human and physical environments, the killing and torture and the condemning of their indigenous populations to almost extinction. So important that much of the world began to think of itself as inferior, underdeveloped and ignorant and doubted the value of their own cultures, deciding it was better to establishing alliances with the champions of reason and progress. So important, finally, that the obsession with

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 97

development hid the impossibility of fulfilling the very promise that this development appeared to make.<sup>172</sup>

Escobar then, as Salvador Orlando Alfaro notes, implies a strong relationship between the discourse of development and Western attempts to dominate and subject the Third World. Indeed, despite Escobar's avowed anti-essentialism, he ultimately erects a highly mechanistic account of development in which a vast institutional complex staffed by more or less self-serving experts and bureaucrats "administers" Western domination over the peoples of the Third World. This leaves very little room for an account of how hegemonic discursive strategies can be contested and reformulated in order to reshape or challenge relations of domination. In Escobar's account, development is simply imposed on the Third World from without.<sup>173</sup>

What, then, is the role of post-development in this analysis? Of course, the purpose of affixing the prefix post- to an existent concept is not to suggest a clean break. Instead, we tend to think of it as reflecting a certain holdover or trace of whatever 'post' prefixes in the new concept. 'Post-Marxism' is not Marxism, but neither is it entirely divorced from Marxism or absent all trace of it. This, in a sense, is how Escobar approaches the concept of post-development. Post-development emerges as a concept in its critical interactions with development. Similarly, the movements for another form of development (or, rather, alternatives to development) only gain their substance as they contest dominant models of development and their attendant forms of rationality and ways of knowing.

Where one spoke of Development – or its flip side, Revolution – one is now allowed to speak a very different language: that of the "crisis" of development, on the one hand, and "new social movements" and "new social actors" on the other.<sup>174</sup>

Escobar stresses that the possibility of alternatives to development resides primarily in

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 98

<sup>173</sup> Alfaro, Salvador Orlando, *Notas Críticas sobre el discurso del postdesarrollo*, Realidad, No. 78, 2000, p. 670

<sup>174</sup> Escobar, Arturo, *Imagining a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements*, *Social Text*, No. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues, p. 20

movements stressing their 'local autonomy, culture and knowledge'. In the case of Latin America, he suggests that the retreat of the state – the ultimate harbinger of the techniques of domination and cultural assimilation - from its development role opened up new space for resistance and emancipatory political practice.<sup>175</sup> Specifically, Escobar's work stresses the importance of the local and the particular as a site of resistance to development policy's colonising and homogenising strategies.

Post-development looks then to make visible the practices of cultural and ecological difference that can serve as a basis for alternatives, it is necessary to take into account that these goals are inextricably linked up with conceptions of locality, of place and of consciousness based-in-a-place.<sup>176</sup>

As such, the goal of alternatives to development is not directed at 'the whole of society but rather as something that concerns first and foremost local and regional communities.'<sup>177</sup> This emphasis on the local and hostility to the state found in Escobar and others has some importance if we think about it the context of perhaps the most important concept in present post-development thought, *buen vivir*, which although emerging initially from within indigenous movements in the Andes, has now reached its way into the official discourses – and laws – of the state itself, including in Bolivia. What is the role of this concept, rooted in the imaginaries and histories of indigenous resistance, when it becomes part of the discursive structure of the state? What is the consequence of what Alberto Acosta calls the journey of *buen vivir* from the 'social periphery to the global periphery?'<sup>178</sup>

Bolivia proposes the *el buen vivir*, not to live better at the expense of others but *un buen vivir* based on the experiences of our peoples. Living Well is living in community, in brotherhood and complementarity. Where there are neither exploited nor exploiters, excluded nor those who exclude, or the marginalised or those who

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 27

<sup>176</sup> Escobar, Arturo, *Una Minga para el postdesarrollo: lugar, medio ambiente y movimientos sociales en las transformaciones globales* (Universidad Nacional de San Marcos, Lima, 2010)

<sup>177</sup> Escobar, Arturo, *Imagining a Post-Development Era*, p. 21

<sup>178</sup> Acosta, Alberto, *El Buen Vivir en el camino del post-desarrollo: Una lectura desde la Constitución de Montecristi*, Policy Paper 9, October 2010



marginalise. To steal, rob and attack nature would probably allow us to live better, but not to live well [my translation].<sup>179</sup>

Bolivian Foreign Minister since 2006 David Choquehuanca's outline of the notion of *Vivir Bien*<sup>180</sup> summarises the key ideas contained in *buen vivir* as it has developed in Bolivian discourse. Like all ideas in development (or alternatives to development) it remains a contested term with different meanings in different social and environmental contexts and for different social actors.<sup>181</sup> As Alberto Acosta – the Ecuadorian economist and President of the Constitutional Assembly held in that country between 2007 and 2008- points out, the term is widely used among activists in Ecuador, while in Bolivia it remains in large part confined to some Aymara intellectual and governmental circles.<sup>182</sup>

Its use in the debate over development in contemporary Latin America continues in large part to represent an attempt to come to terms or to contest the legacy of previous (failed) models. As such, it remains a 'concept in construction', part of a broader political searching across the continent for an alternative to the past.<sup>183</sup> Its prominence reflects wider processes of change in societies in which indigenous populations have attempted to challenge and turnover traditional conceptions of development that were often hostile to their interests and identity. Nonetheless, as Acosta again notes, it would be a mistake to miss the way in which *buen vivir* is part of a continuing *global* dialogue about the nature of development. It reflects indigenous, pre-Colombian cosmovisions *in conversation with* other 'Western' intellectual traditions, including deep ecology, socialism and the sustainable development discourse.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Choquehuanca, David Céspedes, Hacia la reconstrucción del Vivir Bien, *América Latina en Movimiento* 452, February 2010

<sup>180</sup> In Bolivia, the more common formulation is *vivir bien*, in Ecuador it is *el buen vivir*. Both mean the same thing. I use the Ecuadorian version in this chapter because it seems to be the common form in the academic literature.

<sup>181</sup> Gudynas, Eduardo, *Buen vivir: Germinando alternativas al Desarrollo*, *América Latina en Movimiento* 462, February 2011

<sup>182</sup> Acosta, Alberto and Gudynas, Eduardo, *El buen vivir más allá del Desarrollo*, Desco, p. 72

<sup>183</sup> Gudynas, Eduardo and Acosta, Alberto, *El buen vivir o la disolución de la idea del progreso*, in Rojas, Mariano (ed), *La medición del progreso y el bienestar. Propuestas desde América Latina* (Foro Consultivo Científico y Tecnológico de México, México City, 2011) p. 108

<sup>184</sup> Acosta, Alberto, *Solo imaginando otros mundos, se cambiara este. Reflexiones sobre el Buen Vivir*, in Farah H., Ivonne, and Vasapallo, Luciano (eds), *Vivir Bien: Paradigma no Capitalista?* (CIDES-UMSA, La Paz, 2011) p.

Within this dialogue, let me identify three central themes, all of which form the basis of a critique of development and attempt to point towards alternatives. Firstly, a key theme of *buen vivir* is the notion that traditional forms of development are based on the false assumption that economic growth and increased consumption are both by definition positive and possible forever. *Buen vivir* challenges this notion, and ‘puts the emphasis on the quality of life, but not one reduced to consumption or property’.<sup>185</sup> A great part of this emphasis on quality of life stresses the extension and deepening of reciprocal social and community relations, what the Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef calls ‘development that is about people and not about objects’ or ‘human-scale development’.<sup>186</sup>

The second feature I want to mention is the twin principles of equality and inclusion. *El buen vivir* presumes that the economic inequality and patterns of social exclusion generated by capitalist development is at odds with the happiness and welfare of the majority of people. The goal of inclusion is complementary here since the logic of exclusion and exploitation are both held to undermine democracy and serve the interests of a minority.<sup>187</sup>

The third feature of *el buen vivir* that should be highlighted is its commitment to harmony and reconciliation between human beings and nature and a rejection of the ‘anthropocentrism’ of traditional development. As such, *buen vivir* implies that nature has its own value irrespective of its value to human beings – particularly economic values – and perhaps even that nature is a subject with its own ‘rights’, interests and so on. This is an idea that has attracted particular attention in Bolivia and which I return to below.

What is important here however is the relationship between the discourse of *buen vivir* and that of sustainable development. Writers on the idea of *buen vivir* remain ambivalent and cautious about the discourse of sustainable development, generally uneasy about it being bound up with an idea of ‘progress’ with a generally invidious history in Latin America. Nonetheless, as Vanhulst and Beling note in their useful commentary on the subject, *buen*

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<sup>185</sup> Gudynas, *Buen vivir*, p. 462

<sup>186</sup> Max-Neef, Manfred, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections* (Apex Press, New York, 1991) p. 16

<sup>187</sup> Acosta, *Solo Imaginando*, p. 204

*vivir* arises from within the framework provided by sustainable development. In some sense, *buen vivir* provides the outline of an immanent critique of sustainable development discourse, tackling tensions and political contradictions.

The discourse of *buen vivir* is inscribed in the global discursive camp of sustainable development because it contemplates the relation of mutual dependence between humanity and the environment in a specific manner. On the one hand, it proposes to overcome the dualism society/nature proper to European modernity. In this sense Eduardo Gudynas can speak of a biocentric turn: ‘the good life of human beings is only possible if it is able to secure the survival and integrity of the fabric of life of nature...That is to say, *el buen vivir* reflects in large part the spirit of the scientific and political over society and the environment in the 1970s.<sup>188</sup>

It is possible to think of *buen vivir* as a form of dialogue between Escobar’s stark critique of the entirety of development as an intellectual/political project and sustainable development. It shares Escobar’s strong defence of cultural plurality and opposition to the hegemony of Western forms of knowledge, expertise and so on. One sharp difference however that it maintains with Escobar’s work is that it is consciously embedded in the discourses of activists and movements directed at transforming the institutional bases of at least two Andean republics. It is not confined to a particularistic and limited political agenda aimed at reconstituting the ‘local’ as a site of partial and fleeting resistance to the vast institutional complex of development. Instead, it addresses itself confidently as a new regulative principle for the whole of society and even, according to David Choquehuanca, is ‘offered to the world’.

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<sup>188</sup> Vanhulst, Julien, and Beling, Adrian E., Buen vivir: la irrupción de América Latina en el gravitacional del Desarrollo sostenible, *Revista Iberoamericano de Económica Ecológica* Vol. 21: 01-14

#### iv. Locating the Problem: The Last Five Centuries

The history of western culture until now has moved between these four perspectives: geocentrism, homocentrism, ethnocentrism and individualism. Western thought has always placed man in a struggle against nature in all its forms [my translation]

- Maximo Paredes Condori<sup>189</sup>

In this section, I want to bring out more explicitly a historical assumption underlying this cultural critique of capitalist development and emergence of *buen vivir* as an alternative developmental horizon. This is the argument that the ultimate source of the deformations of development result from the original sin, so to speak, of the Spanish colonisation.

In the introduction to *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, their evocative fusion of ecology and that other great tradition of Latin American thought liberation theology, Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo neatly encapsulate two influential views among radical Latin American and indigenous environmentalists:

‘In the course of their historical and cultural development, human societies have always interfered with the environment. There was aggression, but also a sort of pact of respect and collaboration. Human societies produced improved species used in diet, as with potatoes, maize and tomatoes – to take only the products of the Aztec, Maya and Inca cultures of America. Ecological disturbances were not very serious. In the last four centuries, however, with the coming of the industrial era, aggression against nature has been carried out systematically and pitilessly’.<sup>190</sup>

There are two claims in this passage; firstly, that in a time *before* the “coming” of modernity (and note the particularly Latin American connotation of the word “coming” here) there was relative ecological balance and harmony. Secondly, that the ecological crisis is the product of

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<sup>189</sup> In Molina Mamani, Florencio, *Cosmovisión Andina* (Latinas Editores, Oruro, 2013)

<sup>190</sup> Boff, Leonardo, and Elizondo, Virgil, *Ecology, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, in Boff, Leonardo and Elizondo, Virgil (eds), *Ecology, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (SCM Press, London, 1995) p. xi

an attitudinal shift, a change from an ethic grounded in “respect” to one of aggression and non-compassion. These two themes are absolutely foundational both to the development of environmental thought in Latin America.

In this section, I want to address the first of these two, namely, the problem of the conquest and the legacy of colonialism, and how this experience has influenced current debates on the environment. Much of the work done on the relationship between colonialism and the environment in Latin America has had as its centre an account of the colonisation as simultaneously physical and conceptual-epistemological. The colonisation, properly understood, did not *solely* involve the displacement of populations and the imposition of new modes of extraction and production. It also simultaneously brought with it a worldview that replaced and de-legitimised the cosmovisions of the destroyed Empires.

At the centre of this worldview were novel – from the perspective of the indigenous Americans – conceptions of nature and of its relationship to human beings. For the first wave of Spanish colonialists, the extent of the natural wealth they discovered in the New World appeared almost preternatural. Their wonder - and latterly dread - at the extent and magnificence of the ‘wild kingdom’ they had encountered, particularly the lost paradise of Amazonia, continues to shape Western perceptions about the environment in Latin America. This aspect of the myth of Columbus is accurate, but others, such as the claim that the continent when discovered was sparsely populated, are not.<sup>191</sup> In fact, the conquerors encountered many areas, particularly in central and south America, that were perhaps more densely populated than parts of Europe. For Columbus and his travellers, however, it was the presence of the natural bounty that impressed much more than the human beings.

They knew that in the Indies they would encounter human beings, and that they would probably be different...their clothes and ways of life called for attention, but the natural world made a far greater impression on them [my translation].<sup>192</sup>

The conquerors were not satisfied to simply admire the fecundity of nature on the New World. The goal of the first expeditions was to locate and mine the sources of precious metal on the continent; of which there were many, with silver being particularly plentiful. The

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<sup>191</sup> Miller, Shawn William, *An Environmental History of Latin America* (2007, New York, CUP) p. 10

<sup>192</sup> Peláez, Raquel Álvarez, *La Conquista de la Naturaleza Americana* (CSIC, Madrid, 1993) p. 26

Spaniards faced an initial problem in that the land, while apparently bountiful, appeared to them to lack the necessary food sources. The paucity of four legged land mammals for hunting caused them particular concern. They lacked the knowledge to identify and use many of the root plants that were feeding the local populations.<sup>193</sup> Slave labour was needed to mine, reducing the population that could be put to work providing food or other necessities. In response, they decided relatively early on that they needed to import many of the essentials if their endeavour was to be a success. Sugar, for instance, was brought over on Columbus' second voyage and immediately took, becoming a mainstay of the economy during the colonial period.

The first, second and last imperative of the first conquerors was, it would be fair to say, pillage – a powerful motif in Latin American economic history since.<sup>194</sup> The natural world they encountered provoked wonder – and an explosion of interest in botany and natural history among educated Europeans – but it also appeared to pose as many dangers as it did opportunities. At least initially, the main prizes were to be located in riverbeds, mountains and quarries, not in the tropics. Many features inherent to the tropical conditions – raging rivers, poisonous snakes, insects and spiders, hurricanes and so on – were direct obstacles to the conquerors' goals.

The natural world that was encountered posed a danger while it promised wealth. This contradictory relationship to the environment they found themselves in found expression in the ambivalent conceptions of nature that the colonialists brought with them from the old world. Many Latin American ecologists have taken a particular interest in precisely how the colonists – those who followed and continued the work of the first conquerors - transplanted their cultural conceptions from the old world to the new.

Eduardo Gudynas, among others, has argued that the mechanistic accounts of the natural world coming from Francis Bacon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to Rene Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century framed later colonialists' attitudes to the environment. Among other things, Gudynas points out that the colonisers held the view that the existence of wild, unconquered nature on the new continent was a sign of the insuperable backwardness and sloth of the indigenous

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p. 33

<sup>194</sup> Roberts, J. Timmons, and Thanos, Nikki Demetria, *Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and Environmental Crises in Latin America* (Routledge, New York, 2003)

population. For them, the domination of nature – seen as beautiful and life-giving but also as dangerous, capricious and perhaps devilish – was bound up with notions of historical progress that became hegemonic in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>195</sup>

Included in this conception of nature was the rejection of the view of the natural world as a unified and coherent whole. Instead, nature was viewed as a parcel of ‘resources delinked one from another’.<sup>196</sup> The effects of the search for minerals on rivers, for instance the build-up of silt, were rarely considered – a fact that distinguished the colonists from indigenous populations who had worked the same riverbeds.<sup>197</sup> Any notion of the interactions and interdependence of the features of the natural world was replaced by a rigid taxonomy of ‘things’ the relations between which were obscured.

The claim that the hope of prosperity and wealth lay in an increased utilisation of Latin America’s natural resources survived the wars of independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to motivate the elites that led the new republics. Commenting on the role of the new ‘oligarchies’, Guillermo Castro states that ‘the oligarchic elites identified themselves, at the same time, as representatives of North Atlantic civilisation and as champions in the struggle for progress and against nature and the barbarism of the societies they lead.’<sup>198</sup>

The zeal for the war against nature that emerges in much Latin American thought of the Republican period was not abstract. Rather, it was held that the continent’s environs were *specifically* fertile ground for barbarism and so had to be subdued if progress on the continent was to take place.

There was good reason for hostility to nature in the ruling ideology of the Republican era. The long period of non-capitalist development in Latin America meant that when independence arrived, just in time for the growth in global trade and production in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the continent still had relatively abundant natural resources. The continent was quickly

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<sup>195</sup> Gudynas, Eduardo, *Ecología, Economía and Ética del Desarrollo Sostenible* (CLAES, Montevideo, 2004) p. 12

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15

<sup>198</sup> Castro H., Guillermo, La crisis ambiental y las tareas de la historia en América Latina, *Papeles de Población*, April-June, 24 (2000), p. 41

enmeshed in the networks of an emergent global capitalism, providing much needed primary resources, as well as becoming a source of land and, to some extent, labour.<sup>199</sup>

As both Gudynas and Castro argue, motivating the battle against nature was the belief that progress and latterly economic growth would be the outcome. If only Latin America could mobilise its resources, then it's 'backwardness' would be overcome. This vision was at the heart of governments of the left and the right in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The danger with making economic growth the 'supreme paradigm for action', particularly in societies blighted by poverty and inequality, is that the problems of the 'quality of life for the great majority continue to be relegated to a future more or less distant'.<sup>200</sup> In Latin America, the notion that prosperity exists over the hill of yet another bout of economic expansion and resource exploitation has become a staple. It is one that survives today, even amidst the governments of the new left.

This tension becomes even more acute as the destruction of the natural environment and the effects and incidence of poverty become ever more closely linked. The result is a form of government that cannot deliver economic prosperity or deal with the social dimension of the environmental crisis. The environmental and social crises, in this sense, are both manifestations of a failed insertion into the global market – itself a legacy of colonisation and the inability of elites to formulate effective national policy.<sup>201</sup>

Furthermore, the failure of Latin American nations to sustainably develop or use their natural resource bases reflect, on this view, the partial or even illusory nature of the period of decolonisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The survival of colonialism – albeit mediated through the leadership of 'national' mestizo elites – puts a break on attempts to establish rational management of natural resources, or to overcome the influence of hegemonic conceptions of nature brought by the Spanish.

In this sense, decolonisation - understood as an ongoing process rather than an historical fact - and the pursuit of ecological justice become entangled. As I will show in greater depth later,

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, p. 43

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 46



this is exactly the status of much of the present debate in Bolivia. However, at this stage, there are two elements I want to flag up.

Firstly, that the goal of decolonisation *today* takes on a political and ethnic expression in the form of *indigenismo*, that is, in an increasingly assertive ethnic politics that looks for recognition from and transformation of the state.<sup>202</sup> Secondly, and more controversially, an argument emerges that the colonisation disrupted environmentally sustainable communities, and that one path out of the environmental crisis is to renovate or restore the ‘lost’ Andean ecological harmony. In this way, the practices that exist among *existing* indigenous communities become a model form of social practice that the state ‘scales up’. This notion of a return to a pre-Hispanic equilibrium with nature is part of what has been called the ‘Andean utopian’ element in the programme of the MAS government in Bolivia.<sup>203</sup>

From a different perspective, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui had already reached a similar assessment in his writing on another Andean nation, Peru. In sharp distinction to the majority of Latin American Marxists of his generation for whom the ‘indigenous question’ would ultimately disappear with the march of history, Mariátegui argued that Peruvian socialism could be nourished by the collectivist traditions of land ownership among the indigenous.

‘Collective ownership of cultivatable land by the ayllu or set of related families, although it was divided into individual and non-transferrable lots; collective ownership of water, pasture land, and forests by the marka or tribe...cooperative labour; individual appropriation of harvests and produce.’<sup>204</sup>

The destruction of all this, along with the ‘native tradition’ of worship of Mother Earth or Pachamama, was, for Mariátegui one of the ‘least discussed results of colonialism’. He pointed that rather than the colonial system improving the agriculture of the Andean highlands, the Spanish system – initially slavery and latterly a form of feudalism – failed to

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<sup>202</sup> See, for instance, Linera, Álvaro García, *Democracia Liberal vs. Democracia Comunitaria*, in Walsh, Catherine, Linera, Álvaro García, and Mignolo, Walter, *Interculturalidad, descolonización del Estado y del conocimiento* (Edicions del Signo, Buenos Aires, 2006)

<sup>203</sup> Postero, Nancy, Andean Utopias in Evo Morales’ Bolivia, *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 2:1, (2007) pp. 128

<sup>204</sup> Cesar Ugarte, cited in Mariátegui, José Carlos, *An Anthology* (Monthly Review, New York, 2011) trans and eds. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, p. 73

produce higher yields, and reduced much of the once self-sustaining Andean populations to 'servitude and peonage'.<sup>205</sup> In a similar vein to Castro, Mariátegui identified the half-hearted nature of the independence and Republican movements, led by an emergent bourgeoisie but tied firmly to the interests of rural aristocracy, as the root of Peru's failure to develop economically or resolve the iniquity in landholdings.<sup>206</sup>

One of the aims of Latin American thinking on the colonisation has been to explain the difference between the developments of Spanish rule in southern American with that of the English colonisation of the northern part of the continent. Mariátegui himself suggested that the people of Latin America had been unfortunately burdened with colonisers from a declining and backward area of southern Europe, who had nothing to offer except monarchical absolutism and a Roman Catholicism in the grip of counter-reformation. This is one variety of an explanation that explains the difference by reference to the quality and nature of the colonisers.

In his essay on the history of the environment in Latin America, Luis Vitale argues instead that the distinct ecology of the zones the different colonists encountered was crucial in shaping the direction of the respective colonial projects. The English found a land without a developed agricultural system with which to work or particularly fertile lands, or with abundant sources of precious metals. Subduing the somewhat scattered and nomadic Native American populations was also unlikely, at least in the initial stages. This forced the first English colonisers to work and develop the land themselves.

The Spanish, on the other hand, encountered extremely fertile land, replete with precious minerals and metals, and relatively developed political and economic systems. These were the conditions for an abrupt incorporation in the global market and quick wealth extraction. The Spanish did not set about working the land – indeed they chronically underused the land, a problem that persisted in Latin American history thereafter. They appropriated wealth and *technology* – the Incans for instance were perhaps ahead of Europeans in metallurgy and pottery – and set about transferring it to Spain often for the settling of Royal debts, or using it to finance wealthy lifestyles in the colonies.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p. 73

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, pp. 82-83

‘The subsistence economy of the indigenous communities was replaced by the production of primary materials and the extraction of precious metals destined for the international market. The Spaniards introduced exchange value and the monetary economy to a society that had only known use value and the natural economy.’<sup>207</sup>

The end of the subsistence agriculture of the indigenous, alongside their conscription into the mining labour force in which life expectancy was short, helped to dramatically shrink the population on the continent.<sup>208</sup> The extermination of populations which had been thoroughly integrated into local ecosystems radically impacted the environment on the continent.<sup>209</sup> The Spaniards quickly introduced the continent’s first agricultural monocultures, producing imported crops such as wheat and sugar. Extensive animal husbandry changed the face of large parts of the territory. For Vitale, these abrupt and dramatic shifts in the environmental layout produced an ‘ecological disequilibrium’, a driver of environmental the crises that Incan techniques had largely managed to avoid.

‘Before colonial conquests, social and productive organisation in these regions had developed under the conditions imposed by the ecological potential of local environments. The accurate environmental knowledge acquired by these peoples along with their agricultural technologies – adapted to the characteristics and topological conditions of their territories – allowed for broad cultural development’.<sup>210</sup>

Reflecting different traditions of Latin American thought, although all sharing a political perspective broadly on the left, Gudynas, Castro, Mariátegui and Vitale all testify to the fact that a reckoning with the impact of the colonisation of the Americas has been central to debate surrounding environmental history in Latin America. The colonisations effects were not confined to the physical reorganisation of space and the displacement – and eradication – of indigenous populations deeply integrated with the environment. The colonial period also initiated a shift in the dominant intellectual forces of Latin America, one that survived the

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<sup>207</sup> Vitale, Luis, *Hacia una Historia del Ambiente en América Latina* (Nueva Imagen, México, 1983) p. 46

<sup>208</sup> The population on the continent was perhaps higher than that in Europe at the time of the invasion. Some estimates put the population loss among some native societies, due to disease, starvation as well as planned genocide, at 95% of the pre-Columbian level. See, Stannard, David E., *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (OUP, Oxford, 1992)

<sup>209</sup> Vitale, *Hacia una Historia*, p. 46

<sup>210</sup> Leff, Enrique, *Green Production: Towards an Environmental Rationality* (The Guildford Press, New York, 1995) p. 26

Republican era and the integration of the continent into the global market. The indigenous conception of nature as an integrated and harmonious whole was displaced in favour of an instrumentalist approach that treated nature as a collection of objects which it was the duty of human beings to appropriate and exploit.

This aspect of the environmental debate in Latin America has re-emerged in a pronounced and directly political fashion in the discourse over environmental policy on the continent today. The sense of urgency that has erupted in the calls for a thoroughgoing decolonisation in part derive from a resurgent pre-occupation, particularly since the 1970s, with the effects of capitalist development on the natural world. These debates are also increasingly inflected by a renewed sense of *what was lost* in the conquest.

The impact on the environment of the Spanish arrival is framed, at least in part, by the question of what it replaced. Most Latin American scholars have made two principal claims about the effects of the colonial period. Firstly, that in particular the development of homogenous agriculture and the introduction of cattle rearing had long-term, damaging effects for the American landscape. And secondly, that the conquest obliterated cultural forms and agricultural techniques built up through centuries of experience with the land, and that this loss of knowledge contributed to environmental destruction.

The notion that the arrival and the colonial period disrupted a form of ecological harmony is not uncontested. The American geographer William Denevan's influential paper, *The Pristine Myth*, directly takes on the view that pre-Columbine America was an untouched landscape and that indigenous resource management was uniformly sound. Denevan points out to evidence of significant pre-Columbian modification and manipulation of the 'virgin' tropics, and raises the possibility, more controversially, that the lack of big game on the continent was the product of fierce over-hunting rather than species absence. Ultimately, Denevan makes the case that the destruction of much of the indigenous population ensured the recovery of ecosystems on the continent as resource and habitation pressures decreased.

'The pristine image of 1492 seems to be a myth, then, an image more applicable to 1750, following Indian decline, although recovery had only been partial by that date.'<sup>211</sup>

The importance of challenging the fundamentally unsound notion of an empty and untouched continent does not preclude distinguishing between varieties of 'humanised' landscapes and the 'forms of production and consumption that a given society has'.<sup>212</sup> Denevan's lays particular emphasis on the environmental stress or relief caused by demographic shifts, neglecting the differential impact of the forms of society-nature relations of the pre-Columbian and colonial periods

Denevan makes no mention of the impact of an extraordinary increase in cattle-rearing on the continent. Colonialists often filled the fertile lands vacated by dead or fleeing indigenous farmers with cattle, meaning that in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Mesoamerica had similar demographic trends to mainland Europe – increasing numbers of sheep and cattle and falling human populations.<sup>213</sup> The explosion of cattle-farming – along with other attempts to 'Europeanise' the landscape – often slowed down or impeded the regeneration in tropical regions that Denevan argues occurred after the Spanish conquest.<sup>214</sup>

Natural resources and land that had previously been integrated into human communities in order to facilitate socio-biological reproduction were transformed into sources for quick and lucrative extraction of wealth. The proximate effect of the socio-ecological shift initiated by the conquest, a rapid and disastrous collapse in the population, aided of course by outbreaks of disease, war and slavery, reduced resource pressures in previously populated zones, but at the expense of long-term rational appropriation and use of natural resources.

While it is important to avoid romantic accounts of the pre-Columbian Empires, it is clear that traditions of indigenous thought and practice in relation to the land and the natural world

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<sup>211</sup> Denevan, William M., The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americans in 1492, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, Vol. 82, No. 3, The Americans before and after 1492: Current Geographical Research (Sep. 1992) p. 381

<sup>212</sup> Ramos, Alberto Cortes, *Sociedad y Naturaleza Antes and Después de la Conquista y Colonización de América Central*, presentación, University of Costa Rica, 2003, available from <http://www.ciicla.ucr.ac.cr/recursos/docs/biblioteca/revista-intercambio/ano1/presentacion.pdf>

<sup>213</sup> McLeod, Murdo J., *Spanish Central América: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720* (University of Texas, Austin, 2008) p. 211

<sup>214</sup> Ramos, *Sociedad y Naturaleza*, p. 9

more broadly are now central to the *policy* debate in several Latin American nations, particularly Bolivia and Ecuador. Rather than positing a mythic return to a utopian past, these ideas are being raised as part of a serious and systematic critique of ecological crises and their causes.

**v. Capitalism, Development and Rationality: The Work of Enrique Leff**

The insertion of Latin America's environment into the world market began with the colonial period. The colonial economies extracted vast amounts of minerals and precious metals from the land, riverbeds, mines, and quarries of the continent, rapidly exhausting rich deposits in centuries and sometimes decades. Nevertheless, Latin America was only finally absorbed into the orbit of global trade and production with the victory of the independence movements and the start of the Republican era in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It would prove vitally significant that the beginning of proper Latin American statehood coincided with the birth of global capitalism. From their very inception, and with the passionate support of both rural elites (the so-called *latifundio*) and the urban intelligentsia, Latin American national economies were swept up into global capitalism. Latin America's economic development and the vagrancies of capitalism as a global if not yet fully universal mode of production became inseparable.

The specific form of the incipient globalisation of Latin America's economies would have direct and irreversible environmental consequences. Driven forward by the ideologies already discussed, the mobilisation of Latin America's natural wealth was, from the beginning, placed at the heart of strategies for growth. Development, understood as the passage from a backward and stagnant economic position to a modern and dynamic one, would follow once Latin American nations had discovered the most efficient ways to transform the continent's natural wealth into marketable commodities.

Throughout the twentieth century, Latin American political thought – and thought about Latin America – was dominated by the problem of development, or more precisely, by the apparent failure or limited success of various economic development strategies. In the period since the 1970s, the traditional indices of the failure of development – poverty rates, unemployment rates, levels of inequality and so on – have been augmented by a number of environmental factors. The poverty of the dominant development strategies was testified to not only by social and economic crisis, but by an increasingly acute and widespread breakdown in

important ecosystems, and the despoliation and pollution of both urban and rural landscapes. Studies of poverty and ecology became fused, particularly for writers looking for alternatives to hegemonic development strategies and the priorities that were driving them.<sup>215</sup>

In this section, I want to address particular attention to the work of Enrique Leff, a Mexican economist and environmentalist. Leff is an important figure for our discussion for two principal reasons. Firstly, he has been at the forefront of those linking the ecological and social crises on the continent, finding in them the common cause of exhausted development strategies. Secondly, Leff's own intellectual work seems to inhabit two worlds simultaneously. Present in his work is a variant of ecological Marxism heavily influenced by the American writer James O'Connor, in particular the latter's influential thesis on the 'second contradiction of capitalism'.<sup>216</sup> In addition, Leff has maintained an interest in how the social construction of nature as a concept has shaped development strategies and economic policy in Latin America. The environmental crisis on the continent is, for Leff, an expression of a wider *crisis of western civilisation*, testifying to the final exhaustion of its orthodox modes of rationality – mainly economic and scientific. In its place, Leff's environmentalism revolves around a double-pronged strategy directed, politically, at what he calls the democratic and *social re-appropriation of nature* and, intellectually, in the revitalisation of the lost or suppressed knowledges and cultural forms of indigenous Americans.

Leff combines a focus on patterns on capital accumulation and their effects on natural resources, with a preoccupation with the production of knowledge and how this impacts the social construction of nature. This is significant, since one of the main areas of contention in contemporary debates has been over whether to conceptualise the current transformations going on in Bolivia as a purely anti-capitalist revolt in rejection of the commodification of nature, or as a cultural decolonisation in which previously excluded forms of knowledge are recuperated by the state. In this sense, Leff's own intellectual journey illuminates a tension about the direction of the government of MAS and Evo Morales on the question of

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<sup>215</sup> Leff, Enrique, *Pobreza, Gestión Participativa de los Recursos Naturales en las Comunidades Rurales – Una Visión desde América Latina*, *Ecología Política*, No. 8 (1995), pp. 125-136

<sup>216</sup> O'Connor, James, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: a theoretical introduction*, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1988

environmental policy. I will first give an account of the key themes in Leff's major works before drawing out some of these connections.

In *Ecología y Capital: Racionalidad Ambiental, Democracia Participativa y Desarrollo Sostenible* (Ecology and Capital: Environmental Rationality, Participatory Democracy and Sustainable Development), Leff constructs a critique of existing development strategies that in many ways resembles the work of Vitale and Gudynas. What distinguishes Leff's work, however, is his thoroughgoing examination of the role of capitalist production in generating the epistemological and ontological problems that these other theorists have identified. In other words, he attempts to draw connections between the dominant mode of transforming nature through labour and production and the epistemological and ontological categories a given society generates.

The strength of Leff's work lies in his effort to analyse the *dynamic interaction* between dominant rationalities and the social and ecological impact of capitalist production without reading one off from the other. At the same time, Leff sees what he calls 'economic rationality' as fundamentally contested, even under conditions of capitalist production. For him, the existence of ecological crisis and the viability of other forms of social production that exist within capitalism work to 'problematise established paradigms'.<sup>217</sup> The purpose of social theory and of critical political ecology more specifically, is to...

'...understand the specificities of the historical processes and the effects induced in the national environment by the rationality (economic, political, cultural) of the use of natural resources, and the productive processes of a determinate social formation.'<sup>218</sup>

Leff's work hinges upon this attempt to map the material relationship between productive processes, dominant rationalities and the natural world, particularly in the underdeveloped economies and fragile ecosystems of the global South. Although the theoretical influences are more pronounced in his earlier writing, Leff's project is avowedly historical materialist, and therefore owes much to Marx and Marxism.

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<sup>217</sup> Leff, Enrique, *Ecología y Capital: Racionalidad Ambiental, Democracia Participativa y Desarrollo Sostenible* (UNAM, México, 2005) p. 68

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 124-125



However, Leff's analysis of economic rationality, and the environmental effects of the hegemony of the economy over other domains of social life, also leads him to a critical relationship with so-called 'orthodox Marxism'. For Leff and other environmentalist thinkers in Latin America, and in the 'global South' generally, Marxism – or at least the forms of politics with which it was linked in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – is thoroughly implicated in the ecological crisis.

Although critical of the operations of capitalism, orthodox Marxism often repeated the mistakes of bourgeois thought in its understanding of nature. Since the ecological crisis is not only born of capitalism, however defined, but of a broader *civilisational* fault, Marxism itself is, at best, insufficient to grasp the problem. Historical materialism, in Leff's hands, becomes a tool for identifying the limits of heretofore existing Marxism and its silence or aporia on the environmental question.

The environmental problematic emerged as a symptom of a crisis of civilisation, questioning the bases of economic rationality, the values of modernity and the fundamentals of the sciences that were fracturing knowledge of the world.<sup>219</sup>

Leff's suspicion of the 'fracturing of knowledge' that accompanies the maturation of science and the proliferation of technology establishes clearly his distance from the classical Marxist tradition. In that tradition, the development of science and technology is of a piece with the development of the productive capacities that make a post-capitalist society possible. Notable dissenters such as Walter Benjamin and members of the Frankfurt School aside, the prevailing view of science as a form of social practice in Marxism has been that it makes possible the rational management of production that is necessary for human freedom and holds the promise of liberation from labour. In Leff's view, modern science is complicit in the imposition of inappropriate technologies to local ecosystems, the disarticulation of cultural forms and the loss or de-legitimisation of indigenous knowledges that accompany capitalist development in the developing world.<sup>220</sup>

'Marxism has shared', writes political ecologist Hector Alimonda,

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<sup>219</sup> Leff, Enrique, *Globalization, Environmental Rationality and Sustainable Development*, accessed at <http://www.ambiente.gov.ar/infoteca/leff08.pdf>

<sup>220</sup> Leff, *Towards Green Production*, pp. 30-31

‘...with all science of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and a large section of current science) the optimistic idea that the progress of science and of technology helps to domesticate nature, and that it is always possible to find technical solutions to problems, an idea that, justifiably, environmental thought has put in doubt’.<sup>221</sup>

This has resulted in a regular convergence between Marxist politics and the most ‘economistic’ development strategies – that is, those aimed at a vigorous expansion of the productive forces frequently at the cost of the environment. In light of the heightened awareness of the environmental costs of development strategies that have often failed even on their own terms, the critical legacy of Marxism in Latin America cannot sustain itself apart from the insights and evidence of political ecology.

In part, then, we can conceive of Leff’s project as the attempt to establish an emancipatory politics *simultaneously* grounded in Marx’s critique of capitalist production and in the ‘green’ critique of industrial civilisation and technological modernity. Liberation, for Leff, involves the recuperation of the knowledge(s) of the harmonious whole that science, technology and capitalist production have obscured. It consists of a thorough re-integration of cultural forms and the natural world and the elaboration of an environmental rationality that challenges the hegemony of economism over contemporary thought. The possibility of sustainable development rests not only in democratising forms of social production, but in contesting the rationalities that sanction environmental destruction.

[...] the established world order holds unto a dictionary of signifiers and discursive practices that have lost of their capacity to sustain life: dialectic logic, universal logic, unity of sciences, essences of things, eternal things, eternal truths, transcendence of thought, and intentionality of action and deeds, resonate and echo the nostalgic remainder of a world forever gone. Something new is emerging in a world of uncertainty, chaos and unsustainability. Through the interstices opened by the cracking of monolithic rationality and totalitarian thinking, environmental complexity

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<sup>221</sup> Alimonda, Héctor, *La Colonialidad de la Naturaleza. Una aproximación a la Ecología Política Latinoamericana*, in Alimonda, Héctor (ed), *La Naturaleza Colonizada: Ecología Política y minería en América Latina* (CLASCO, Buenos Aires, 2011) p. 33

sheds new lights on the future to come. This “something” is expressed as a need of emancipation and a will to live’.<sup>222</sup>

Leff’s attack on the forms of scientific rationality which he charges with being blind to the problem of complexity and inherently ‘metaphysical’ becomes a call for a revived dialectical reason, one open to heterogeneity and diversity. Dialectical reasoning opens up the possibility for an understanding of ‘interrelations and feedbacks’ in the natural world, breaking the grip of instrumental reason and totalising political projects. ‘Complex thought’, Leff claims,

‘provides an heuristic scheme capable of analysing the interrelated processes that determine socio-environmental changes, while the dialectic, as critical thought, illuminates the endless road of realisation – a permanent revolution in thought and of social transformation – that mobilises a society towards the construction of a new social rationality [my translation].’<sup>223</sup>

Leff’s defence of dialectical reasoning, and his elaboration of its political effects, is launched not only against the totalising impulses of global capital and western culture, but also against the ‘ontological monism’ of prominent ecologists, particularly the anarchist writer Murray Bookchin. Indirectly, Engels’ own *The Dialectic of Nature*, with its account of the great unfolding of dialectic reason within the natural world, is also placed under suspicion.

Both Engels and Bookchin, Leff charges, look to ground philosophy and forms of social practice in a revelation of the laws governing the unfolding of nature. In Engels’ case, the discovery of the dialectic within nature mirrors the history of the development of social forms. The logical structure of contradiction and overcoming that regulate the passage from one social epoch to another are repeated in natural history. So, in the famous opening to the second chapter of his work, Engels can claim that,

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<sup>222</sup> Leff, Enrique, Political Ecology: a Latin American Perspective, Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS), available at <http://www.geopolitica.ws/media/uploads/leffPoliticaecologyeolss.pdf>

<sup>223</sup> Leff, Enrique, *Ambiental Racionalidad: La reapropiación de la naturaleza* (Siglo XXI editores, México, 2004) p. 64

‘It is, therefore, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development, as well as of thought itself’.

Less important than what Engels perceived the ‘laws of dialectics’ to be is his conclusion about their application to both human and natural history, hereby included under the single umbrella of ‘historical development’. For all its oft-criticised positivism and determinism (of which perhaps Lukács is the most illustrious critic), Engels’ account did contribute to the necessary task of breaking down hard and fast distinction between nature and culture, between social and ecological forms. The rigid structure of his dialectical materialism and its consequent descent at points into an unhelpful teleology aside, Engels’ *Dialectics* undermined the notion of nature as a fixed and permanent structure, as an ornamental Great Chain of Being, and pointed out the great processes of change, of creation and dissolution, that comprised natural history.

As two prominent contemporary ecological Marxists Brett Clark and Richard York have pointed out, Engels’ work represents an ‘early and unfinished attempt’ to understand how human beings ‘are conditioned by their historical, structural environment’ and how conscious human intervention can affect and indeed alter the natural world. In this sense, it represents an imperfect effort to explicate a ‘co-evolutionary’ view of social, cultural and natural forms.<sup>224</sup> In the elaboration of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature, the notion of co-evolution of human and natural forms, of their dynamic interaction and development, was vital.

Bookchin, an anarchist but also writing from a dialectical materialist position, attempts, in some sense, an elaboration and modernisation of elements of Engels’ analysis. Central to Bookchin’s philosophy is an account of how ‘second nature’ – the ensemble of human institutions, social practices and cultural forms – arise out of ‘first nature’. Bookchin rejects the view that humanity simply imposes itself on the natural world, instead arguing that second nature is ‘the result of first nature’s inherent evolutionary processes’.<sup>225</sup> Human interference with the natural world is a result of processes within nature itself. Human beings

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<sup>224</sup> Clark, Brett and York, Richard, *Dialectical Nature: Reflections in Honour of the Twentieth Anniversary of Levins and Lewontin’s The Dialectical Biologist*, *Monthly Review* (2005), accessed at <http://monthlyreview.org/2005/05/01/dialectical-nature>

<sup>225</sup> Bookchin, Murray, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, p. 131

are a product of evolution *in the natural world*, a fact that undermines any attempt, either from arch technocrats or misanthropic ‘deep ecologists’, that seek to paint human social activity as somehow apart from or alien to nature.

Key for Bookchin is the status of human understanding about the nature of this relationship between human beings and the natural world.

What is at issue in humanity’s transformation of nature is whether its practice is consistent with an objective ecological ethics that is rationally developed, not haphazardly divine, felt or intuited...A humanity that failed to see that it is potentially nature rendered self-conscious and self-reflexive would separate itself from nature morally as well as intellectually.<sup>226</sup>

The process leading from biological to social evolution, from first to second nature, has resulted, perhaps because of a mistake rather than any inherent tendency, in societies blighted by the logic of hierarchy and competition. In Bookchin’s ecological ethics, both first and second nature give way – in a good dialectical sense – to a third, ‘free nature’ that represents the *coming-into-being* of the potential of human reason to understand itself as emerging from and embedded in nature.

Humanity, far from diminishing the integrity of nature, would add the dimension of freedom, reason and ethics to it and raise evolution to a level of self-reflexivity that has always been part of the natural world.<sup>227</sup>

Human consciousness fully realised would represent the self-knowledge of the evolutionary process – an ‘ecological society would be a fulfilment of a major tendency in natural evolution’ and is only possible on the basis of a *change* in the ways in which humanity interferes in the world. This change, properly constituted, would reflect the recognition of an objective ecological ethics present within the co-evolutionary process itself.<sup>228</sup>

As Leff notes in his critique of Bookchin’s philosophy, the claim that an ecological society will ‘develop spontaneously from evolutionary biology’ seems difficult to square with knowledge

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 134

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 136

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 140

of the real developmental tendencies of global capitalism. The proliferation of new hierarchies both within and between states, the increasing pace of environmental degradation on a planetary scale and the apparent lack of any sustained political initiative to roll back the damage already done do not point to a system departing from dominant (ir)rationalities. Bookchin's account ultimately results in the claim that 'human subjectivity and thought' are 'mere extensions of natural evolution', and so leaves little room for the political, social and cultural conditions necessary for the kind of rupture required to suspend the progress of environmental chaos.

Perhaps even more consequentially, Leff senses an incipient authoritarianism – or even totalitarianism – in the claim that a revolutionary project can ground itself in the 'internal dialectic of nature'.<sup>229</sup> Against Bookchin's vision of a political project grounded in the unfolding of evolutionary processes, Leff poses the construction of an 'environmental rationality' that is always incomplete and insecure, part of a 'permanent revolution' in thought and action in which human beings attempt to re-orientate themselves towards sustainable relations with nature.

Within this environmental rationality, utopia arises as a politics of diversity and differences, based on the potentialities of nature, technology and culture, that is constructed socially through a political theory and strategic actions, and not as a simple "actualisation" of the real-existent'.<sup>230</sup>

Leff's defence of heterogeneity and the plurality of knowledge in the face of Bookchin's great unfolding reflect not only his post-structuralist epistemological and ontological standpoint, but also an aspect of Latin American political thought. Instead of ecology becoming yet another vehicle for the transmittance of a falsely universal (that is, ideological) ethic, Leff defends what Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos called the 'world of many worlds'.

The cause of the environmental crisis in part lies in the universalising impulses of global capital. All aspects of human experience – space, particularly ecological space, time, culture and so on – become mere features of the process of capital's unfolding into the world. Bookchin conceives of ecological ethics as an addition to this process, one that arrests its

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<sup>229</sup> Leff, *Racionalidad Ambiental*, p. 50

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50

destructive effects and sets it on the 'right path'. For Leff, environmental rationality suspends all false universalities (what Marx would call ideologies), although not in favour of a dull 'localism'.

What I wish to emphasize here is the specifically Latin American element of Leff's problematic inasmuch as this consists of a focus on the specific effects of underdevelopment on society-nature relations on the continent. The transformation of nature into commodities or 'objects of work' that is the hallmark of capitalism takes a particular form in the countries of the global south. The accelerated appropriation of the natural resources of the 'tropical countries' and super-exploitation of the labour of indigenous populations of colonised lands contribute to an *expansion of capital*, but also to a persistent underdevelopment of local and national economies.

Underdevelopment, for Leff, is understood not as a stage or as a status, but as a process that is constantly created and recreated. The 'international division of labour, the unequal exchange of commodities and environmental degradation are generated in the process of the globalisation of capital' are all features of a development model that consistently destroys the natural bases for sustainable social production. Underdevelopment and environmental degradation are fused in Latin America, both the product of the manner of the continent's insertion in global capitalism. The expansion of capital – or "growth" – can now only increase the pace of environmental destruction, creating new forms of underdevelopment that retard the possibilities for rational use of resources or social justice.

The differences of the level of development between nations are the result of the transferral of the wealth generated through the over-exploitation of resources and of labour power of the dominated countries by the dominating countries.<sup>231</sup>

Leff builds up the work of earlier critical theorists of development, particular Ander Gunder Frank, but his addition of environmental crisis gives the familiar tale of underdevelopment an almost tragic dimension. Not only does capitalist development "produce" the process of underdevelopment, the destruction of nature that follows from development slowly erodes the stock and health of natural wealth that are the only hope for an alternative model. Above

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. 156

all, what is lost in the process of capitalist development is not simply the wealth and labour shipped to the dominant nations in the form of commodities, but the 'productive potential' of the third world.<sup>232</sup> "Development" slowly erodes and undermines the possibility of future sustainable development.

This critique of development-as-such dovetailed with the eruption of indigenous politics at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Ecuador and Bolivia, it sustained a radical new environmental discourse, the 'rights of nature'. When governments linked to the indigenous uprisings came to power, these ideas ceased to be academic analyses, but features of public policy, law and constitutional politics. The purpose of my study is to address the progress of these ideas in the government of Evo Morales. My analysis so far has concentrated on the discursive and ideological shifts, and on the historical and material developments, that have paved the way for and help explain the receptiveness and form of radical but ambiguous environmentalism associated with the Morales regime. In the following chapter, I look at some of the specifics of Bolivian history, politics and geography. By doing so, I can begin to set out how and why this radical environmental vision and its proponents have clashed with the reality of development in contemporary Bolivia.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 156



### Chapter 3 - The Tyranny of Geography: Bolivia's Land, Resources and Politics

The questions which have emerged to dominate the debate over Evo Morales' development policy are shaped crucially by the political and economic conjuncture I reviewed in Chapter 1 and the critique of development I assessed in the previous chapter. This chapter goes further into the particularities of Bolivian history, geography and society itself, in order to give a fuller picture of the context in which the conflict between development and the rights of nature occurs. In this chapter, I give an account of the way in which modern Bolivian politics was shaped by a very particular geographic and historic inheritance. This inheritance ensured the predominance of questions of territorial occupation and national integration in various 'modernisation' strategies pursued particularly after the 1952 National Revolution.

The failure of the Bolivian state to adequately police its border or integrate its territory was reflected in a fragmented nationhood, dispersed across a multiplicity of class, racial and regional identities. In this historical cauldron, problems of geographic salience and the politics of nationhood became fused. As Brooke Larson explains in her account of class and economic transformation over 400 years in Cochabamba, a 'binarism' emerged consisting of

...two mutually exclusive cultural heritages – and irreconcilable political imaginaries – that seemed to boil down to the acceptance or rejection of market capitalism, agrarian reform privileging peasant smallholding, and integrative nationalism.<sup>233</sup>

A political tradition emerged in which the development was associated with the state's 'occupation' of its territory. Bolivia's backwardness was associated with its failure to integrate its land and people, and it was this backwardness that made it prone to perennial dilutions of its sovereignty. It is this political tradition that feeds directly into the discourse of the Morales government about the right to develop and in part motivates present controversies about the relationship between development and natural resource use.

In the first section of the chapter, I briefly explain the various historical episodes in which Bolivia has managed to lose territory to its neighbours. I discuss the effect of these various catastrophes on Bolivian national life and politics. In the second section, I look at the varied

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<sup>233</sup> Larson, Brooke, *Cochabamba 1550-1900: Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation in Bolivia* (Duke University Press, London, 1998) p. 342

and diverse geographic, climatic and topographical features of the country and show how these create a unique set of environmental challenges.

### **i. Shaping Bolivia: War, Misrule and Borders**

If the wishes of the man for whom the country is named had prevailed, Bolivia might not exist. *El Libertador* Simón Bolívar was suspicious that the territory and the people of the Audiencia of Charcas – an administrative district firstly of the Viceroyalty of Peru and latterly of the Viceroyalty of La Plata – should or indeed could sustain independent self-government.<sup>234</sup> Bolívar felt that after liberation, Upper Peru would naturally be absorbed either by the already established Peru or by the territory now covering Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Already acutely aware of the forces that would undermine the unity of liberated America, Bolívar did not wish to see any more independent Republics than was necessary. Weak and divided states would not be able to withstand the pressures and demands that would inevitably be arriving from the great powers. In his view, the administrative lines of Spanish rule served as the legal and political foundations for the successor states. Carving new and unheralded states out of the territory of the continent was both illegal and foolhardy.

It was to the benefit of the patriots of the Audiencia of Charcas that it was not Bolívar but Jose Antonio de Sucre who removed the last vestige of Royalist resistance from Upper Peru in 1825. Although rebellions had begun early in Bolivia and resistance had carried on throughout the independence wars, the territory was one of the last to be separated from Spain. Over the head of *El Libertador*, the victorious general called a national assembly of the patriots of Charcas. The assembly was to be held at the University in Chuquisaca (now named Sucre after the general and first President of Bolivia) which had been a redoubt of Republican and radical intellectual traditions. The patriots gathered were to decide between three options: amalgamation with lower Peru, amalgamation with Argentina, or establishing their own republic. After some twisting of arms (there was a degree of feeling for union with Peru, none existed for similar arrangements with Argentina), the decision was unanimous: a new republic would be established. Perhaps in an attempt to assuage the reluctant Liberator, the national assembly decided to name the republic after him and invite him to assume the

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<sup>234</sup> My account of the history draws particularly on Klein, Herbert S, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (OUP, Oxford, 1982); Klein, Herbert S, *Parties and Political Change in Bolivia: 1880-1952* (CUP, Aberdeen, 1969); Morales, Waltraud G., *A Brief History of Bolivia* (Checkmark Books, New York, 2004)

Presidency. Not unaffected by vanity and moved by the rapturous welcome he received upon arrival in the new republic, Bolívar eventually relented and accepted the independence of Charcas. For their part, Argentina and Peru welcomed the new republic as a buffer between them, and a marked improvement on the territory being joined to that of their rival.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia covers roughly half the territory that the republic established in 1825 did (see Figure 2). Around a million square kilometres of the land claimed by the act of independence have been lost to the state, as the result of war, land swaps and cession of territory. Undoubtedly the most damaging loss occurred between 1879 and 1883, when the majority of the littoral province, an awkward southwest extension of the republic that provided an outlet to the Pacific, was lost in war to Chile. The signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1904 which recognised Chilean sovereignty over the littoral left Bolivia a landlocked republic, and the loss of the *salida al mar* (route to the sea) continues to animate Bolivian national sentiment and its restoration remains a focal point of Bolivian foreign policy under Morales.

Figure 2: Bolivia's Lost Territory



Source: New York Times (2012)

The calamitous prosecution of the Pacific War finally ended the era of the military caudillos who had governed the republic since its foundation. They made way for a series of civilian

governments dominated by the then emerging mining interests. The Rosca, the name given to the close relationship between liberal politicians and the Big Three mining corporations, would dominate the country's politics until the National Revolution in 1952.

Under the Rosca more land was ceded, this time in the northeast of the country, where Bolivia's failure to explore or occupy not least develop the easterly portions of the country in the Amazon basin had allowed significant informal Brazilian colonisation of the province of Acre, motivated by the rubber boom at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To most Bolivians though, losses in the Amazon were not felt nearly as much as the loss of the Pacific ports had been. Most highland Bolivians (the vast majority of the population) did not hear of the Acre controversy with Brazil, even fewer had ever been in the wilderness of the eastern and north-eastern provinces.<sup>235</sup>

Of much more effect on national political life was the defeat to Paraguay in the Chaco War. The Chaco – an arid lowland area the size of Texas that stretches from the Paraguay River to the foothills of the Andes and from the Amazon basin in the North to the Pampas in the south – is shared between Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina. The region became particularly important to the republic after the loss of the littoral. Bolivians hoped to replace the route to the Pacific with access to the Atlantic via a port on the navigable section of the river Paraguay. Paraguay, for its part, rebuffed Bolivian claims and had gradually moved westward into the disputed Chaco Boreal. The discovery of oil in the region heightened the economic importance of the territorial disputes over the Chaco and made both sides more strident in their various demands. The presence of New Jersey's Standard Oil in the region also fed speculation that the dispute was being manufactured by imperialist interests – a thesis explored, and perhaps exaggerated, by Eduardo Galeano in *Open Veins of Latin America*.

When war eventually broke out in 1932 after a fairly minor incident at a port on the Bolivian portion of the Pilcomayo, a westerly tributary of the Paraguay, the Army saw it as an opportunity to restore the prestige it had lost after the debacle of the Pacific War. Bolivia entered the war with significant advantages in personnel and armaments.

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<sup>235</sup> For an interesting account of the Acre boundary controversy and of the other losses of land in Bolivian history, see Fifer, J. Valerie, *Bolivia: Land, Location and Politics since 1825* (CUP, Cambridge, 1972)

The war however would follow a familiar and from Bolivia's perspective disastrous pattern. Highland indigenous recruit brought down to the Chaco were totally unsuited and maladapted to the environment – many were defeated by sickness before the fighting began. For the rest, the prospect of sacrificing themselves for this remote and alien piece of land did not stir the blood. The Bolivian supply lines to this distant, detached south-eastern portion of the republic were completely inadequate.

Like the Pacific War before it, the Chaco War would illuminate the extent of the fragmentation of the Bolivian economy and national life. As the Paraguayans, possessing significant logistical advantages and superiorities in organisation and morale, pushed the Bolivian positions north, the oil fields of Santa Cruz came under threat of annexation.<sup>236</sup> For many cruceños, rule from Asuncion seemed more appealing than the rule of the culturally, economically and physically remote La Paz. Some in the eastern lowlands, particularly the sectors which viewed themselves as culturally and racially distinct and superior to the mestizaje *altiplano* elites, saw the war as an opportunity to win autonomy.

Ultimately the Bolivians, their supply lines shortened by retreat and with additional zeal provided by fear of impending disaster, were able to push the Paraguayans back and prevent any annexation or defection. 50,000 Bolivians, and 40,000 Paraguayans, had been killed. The Chaco War had decisively been lost. The clear route to the Atlantic was now beyond reach, Bolivia's landlocked position re-enforced and more territory lost. Once again, defeat in war had shown up the failure of the governing elite – this time it was the tin barons and their political representatives who had been unable to provide redress to national grievances. The boundaries established through the treaty with Paraguay in July 1938 were the boundaries that held when Evo Morales was sworn into office in January 2006.

## ii. The Earth in Microcosm

It is a cliché to say that Bolivia is a land of contradictions. It is an Andean republic, 70% of which sits within the Amazon basin. It is home to mountain ranges that feature permanent glaciations at their peaks *and* dense tropical forests. Its landscape veers between the arid 'moonscapes' of the highlands to the lush vegetation of the tropical and subtropical lowlands.

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<sup>236</sup> Hughes, Matthew, Logistics and Chaco War: Bolivia versus Paraguay, 1932-35, in *The Journal of Military History*, Volume 69, Number 2, April 2005, p. 5

It has extraordinary endowments of natural resources, but poverty remains endemic. It remains one of the few countries in the world with totally undisturbed expanses of land, with a rich biodiversity in native flora and fauna.

The geography of Bolivia is traditionally described as being divided into three sections. The dry, cold and semi-arid tableland between the western and eastern ranges of the Andes, known as the *Altiplano*, occupies the western portion of the country, around 16% of the total country, but has dominated economic, social and political life in the country since its foundation. The *Altiplano* extends southeast for around 600 miles from the south of Peru to the southwest of Bolivia and reaches a maximum of 120 miles in width, around 75% of its surface is inside Bolivia, with the remainder extending into Chile and Peru. It lies between 10,000 and 14,000 feet above sea level. The extent and quality of the vegetation and the possibilities for agriculture change dramatically according to altitude on the *altiplano*. The lack of cloud cover means that diurnal temperature variations are extreme, with 20-25 degrees Celsius normal during the day and as low as minus 10 degrees Celsius common at night.

The fertile and moist shores of Lake Titicaca - the largest navigable lake in the world at 12,500 feet above sea level - were the site of early human settlements in the area. Around 30 miles from the capital city La Paz the lake, now shared between Peru and Bolivia, had significance within Incan mythology, in which it was the scene of the birth of the Sun and the creation of the first human beings. Lake Titicaca drains through the Río Desaguadero to the highly saline Lake Poopó in the south. Further south sits the great salt flats of Uyuni.

The area surrounding Lake Titicaca has always provided somewhat better prospects for agriculture than the rest of the *Altiplano*. Scarcity of water, dramatic changes in temperature from day to night and high altitude makes cultivation difficult but not impossible. As such, the *Altiplano* has supported significant populations sustained by well-suited local crops such as potato, oca and an indigenous grain named quinoa that has recently gained some favour in the health food shops of London and Paris for its nutritional qualities. The European colonisers found wheat and barley particularly suited to the temperate uplands. Much of the farming done in the *Altiplano* is conducted with very little or no technology and few if any agricultural inputs. The native llama and alpaca are kept as beasts of burden and are also sources of wool

and meat. In the higher altitudes of the *Paramos*, near the limits of cultivation for even the hardiest Andean tuber, grasslands are used primarily as pastoral land for cattle and sheep.

The rich mineral deposits located in the Real Cordillera (eastern range) of the Andes shaped the economy of the region during the colonial period and were important to the Incan economy before that. The discovery of the great silver mine at Potosi by the Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century sparked an extraordinary silver rush that made the city at one point the most populous and one of the wealthiest in the western hemisphere. The mining riches to be found in the Andean ranges, including at Potosi, were the proximate cause of the founding of a new Spanish court and settlement (or *Audencia*) at nearby Chuquisaca. Although the silver seams were eventually exhausted, Potosi and other departments of the southern *Altiplano* such as Oruro remained important sources of minerals, above all tin, through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

La Paz, located in a 2000 feet basin in the *Altiplano*, gained prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a commercial town, providing a break for travellers during the trip from Potosi to the Peruvian coasts. Overlooked by the highest peak of the Cordillera Real, Mount Illimani, La Paz gradually displaced Sucre as the administrative centre of the colonial economy in Bolivia. Today, while Sucre remains the administrative capital of Bolivia, La Paz is the de facto capital and the site of government. El Alto, a fast growing working class indigenous city, sits on the plains above La Paz and has absorbed much of the internal migration from the countryside over the last few decades.

Traditionally La Paz has been a bastion of left-wing and nationalist politics, and its location, making it somewhat vulnerable to blockades of roads and armed bands surrounding it from elevated positions, have helped to determine the outcome of countless rebellions and struggles, most notably during the 1952 Revolution.

The difficulties of communication and transport between La Paz and the *Altiplano* and the valleys and Lowlands of the rest of the country has always been one of the principal impediments to national development in Bolivia. As I have already discussed, inability to link the Andean centre of national economic and political life with the section (a majority in geographic terms) of the country located in the Amazon basin was one reason Bolivia has been continually shrinking throughout its history.

Only a few kilometres from La Paz are the subtropical forests of the Yungas valleys. Yungas is a Quechua word naming the north western section of the humid warm slopes of the eastern range of the Andes. It has traditionally been the centre of coca production, along with Chapare, given its climatic suitability and its relative proximity to population centres on the *altiplano*. The leaf of the coca plant has been a mainstay of indigenous culture since the Spanish. The leaf is chewed to provide relief from hunger, pain, and is purported to provide relief from altitude sickness for recent arrival to the *altiplano*. The plant itself is the basis for cocaine, and as such has become a crucial element of the Bolivian (black) economy and a source of dispute between farmers, the government, and the United States – the final location for most of the cocaine produced in the Andean tropical valleys.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, increased demand and changes in the Bolivian economy in the 1980s and 1990s attracted more Bolivians into the coca-producing industry, giving the *cocaleros* increasing prominence in national politics. Their opposition to the US-backed eradication schemes of various governments after the return to civilian rule in 1982 became a lightning rod for wider opposition to liberal reforms, the traditional political elite and a resurgent indigenous identity. Evo Morales is himself a former *cocalero* from the Chapare region of Cochabamba and leader of the trade union that represents the coca producers, and initially gained national prominence as an opponent of various governments' aggressive suppression of coca production.

Moving southward is the region of the *valles*, a flatter, less elevated and more temperate region of the transitional valleys. Included in this region is the department of Cochabamba (and the city of the same name), sometimes referred to as a 'breadbasket of Bolivia' for the fertility of its soils and the success of agriculture in its temperate valleys. The land falls to between 6000 and 9000 feet and the clouds carried from trade winds from the Atlantic that are barred from the *Altiplano* by the Cordillera Real provide reliable and highly seasonal rains. Wheat, corn, bananas, potato, yucca and sugar cane are produced here, principally for the highland population centres.

The sections of the *valles* located in the southern department of Tarija are much less important sources for domestic food production. The department of Tarija, bordering Argentina to the south and Paraguay to the east, covers sections of the *altiplano*, the sub-



Andean valleys and the Bolivian portion of the Gran Chaco. The economy of the department – until recently relatively peripheral to the Bolivian national economy – has been transformed by the discovery of significant natural gas deposits. On most estimates, Bolivia now has the second largest reserve of the hydrocarbon on the continent after Venezuela. Of the around 540 million cubic feet of natural gas produced in Bolivia in 2012, some 370 million were produced in the department of Tarija.<sup>237</sup> In 2002, the value of all exports of products from the department of Tarija was \$17 million. In 2012, the same number was more than \$1 billion, driven almost entirely by the extraction of natural gas from the Chaco.

The Oriente - historically the least densely populated and under-developed region of Bolivia - covers around 70% of the territory, including the Bolivian Amazon. Around a quarter of the Bolivian Amazon is currently under protection, either directly through the national state or by departments or provinces.<sup>238</sup> This land, lying 3000 feet above sea level, is divided into the gas rich dry Chaco in the south east, the vast savannahs and plains of the department of Santa Cruz where commercial farming and the oil industry dominate, and the tropical forest of the country's remote north eastern departments, Pando and Beni. These three departments (Tarija is sometimes added, despite much of it existing in the *altiplano* and valleys) comprise what is referred to as the *media luna* (half moon).

Sharing a cultural and geographic distance from life on the *altiplano*, a hostility to rule from La Paz, and regional economies geared towards the export of agricultural products and hydrocarbons, the *media luna* formed the centre of opposition to the government of Evo Morales. In the 2008 recall referendum which President Morales won with a convincing 67% of the total vote, the vote to recall was won convincingly in Beni and Santa Cruz, while the pro-Morales majority was slim in the two southern departments of Tarija and Chuquisaca (site of the *de jure* capital, Sucre). As the Bolivian writer Fernando Molina notes, the opposition to Evo Morales in the *media luna* is as much motivated by deep-rooted regional antagonisms in Bolivian society as it is by political, class or racial distinctions.<sup>239</sup> As an Aymara born in Oruro,

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<sup>237</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Bolivia, accessed online at <http://www.ine.gob.bo/>

<sup>238</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, Segunda Comunicación Nacional del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia ante la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático. December 2009, p. 15

<sup>239</sup> Molina, Fernando, Bolivia: la geografía de un conflicto, *Nueva Sociedad*, No. 218, November-December 2008, pp. 4-13

Morales represents above everything else the continuing leadership of the *altiplano* over Bolivian national life.

Unlike agriculture in the *altiplano*, production on the *llanos* of Santa Cruz department is well capitalised and the bulk of it is geared towards export markets. Traditionally, the main products have been coffee and sugar cane, but since the 1990s soybeans have grown to dominate in the eastern departments. In 2000, more than half of all the cultivated areas in Santa Cruz – some 600,000 square kilometres – were taken up by the production of soy. The figure in 2008 was around 850,000 square kilometres, almost a third of the total cultivated area in Bolivia. Soy production itself is extremely land intensive and requires large amounts of agricultural inputs and fertilisers. It also places a high burden on the nutrient base of the soils, absorbing large quantities of nitrogen and phosphorous. Quick exhaustion from perpetual soy monocultures increases the pressure for the expansion of agricultural frontiers. Some 80% of the land use change from forestry to agriculture in Bolivia occurs in the department of Santa Cruz, principally due to soybean expansion and clearing for new pastures.

In the northern, sparsely populated departments of Beni and Pando, on the low-lying basins known as the Mojos plains that form the transitional zone between the savannahs of Santa Cruz and the rainforest proper, cattle herds are the dominant feature of the landscape. There is some sugar cane production in Beni, but agriculture is of far less importance than it is in Santa Cruz. The lack of a reliable road connection between Beni and the valleys and highlands of the west has been a constant obstacle to economic development in the region.

In 2011, the prospect of the Morales government consenting to a road connecting Villa-Tunari in the department of Cochabamba with San Ignacio de Mojos being constructed using Brazilian investment provoked a crisis for the government. The route of the proposed highway would have taken it through the Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro-Secure (TIPNIS), a nature reserve incorporating indigenous communal land. I look at this episode in much greater detail in chapter 5.

### iii. Demographics are Destiny: Who are the Bolivian People?

According to the latest (2012) census conducted by Bolivia's National Statistics Institute, the population of Bolivia is 10,000,254 with an annual growth rate between 2000 and 2012 of 1.7%. The population is almost exactly gender balanced. 31% is under the age of 14 and 6% is over the age of 65. The period of the highest rate of population increase was that immediately following the National Revolution 1952.

While the current population represents an almost 400% increase on the 1950 number, Bolivia's population density, at around ten persons per square kilometre, remains the lowest of the major Latin American countries. The geographical and topographical diversity of the country can mean that national statistics often hide complexity. The population density in the department of Cochabamba, home to the third most populous city of the same name, is around 33 persons per square kilometre, in the northern departments of Beni and Pando the numbers are 2.1 and 1.3 respectively.

There are however some demographic shifts that have impacted the country more evenly. By 2010 all 9 administrative departments of Bolivia, apart from Pando in the north, where subsistence farming on the *altiplano* still plays a dominant role, had majority urban populations. This is the end effect of a dramatic rural-urban immigration that Bolivia has undergone since the 1950s. Around two thirds of Bolivians now reside in urban areas, a figure that rises to 75% if one takes into account settlements in close proximity to urban developments and 'peri-urban' development. This is the reverse of the figure in the 1950s, when around two thirds of Bolivian were rural dwellers.

The reasons for such dramatic internal migration range from low levels of technological development of agriculture that kept productivity gains and therefore income growth relatively stagnant – although the 1953 land reform did address some of the more egregious inequalities in land ownership. The urban bias of the developmentalist policies that dominated government policy after the 1952 revolution – the subordination of the interests of the rural economy to urban populations through price controls on agricultural products, taxes on imported agricultural inputs and so on – also made the cities attractive options as a

source of employment and income.<sup>240</sup> The failure of the Bolivian state to address its territorial fragmentation through provision of adequate transportation infrastructure – either in the form of roads or a rail network – meant there was little incentive for farmers to increase production since there was no way to get new goods to market. In some cases, the rural *campesinos'* migration to the countryside was only partial, occurring at different stages of the year to reflect shifting labour demands in the countryside and towns.

The fastest growing cities are La Paz, El Alto, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The latter has become the second most populous city in the country, attracting those seeking work in the growing agribusiness ventures – although often the commercial farming is highly mechanised and not labour intensive - the timber and wood processing industries and the oilfields.

El Alto has become symbolic of the informal nature of much of the recent urbanisation, emerging as a city in its own right in the 1960s and 1970s after La Paz began to gradually expand onto the elevated areas on the southwest of the city in order to accommodate recent migrants. As in many informal urban settlements, particularly those that are still quickly expanding as El Alto is (at a rate of around 5% per year), there are deficiencies in the lack of basic health and environmental services. This is reflected in lower rates of access to potable water in El Alto when compared with La Paz and significantly inferior coverage by the sewerage system provided by the public water utility EPSAS.<sup>241</sup> In other senses, the urban development on higher land has made sense. El Alto, for instance, is significantly less susceptible to the landslides that affect portions of La Paz, located in a 2000m basin in the *altiplano*.

The 2001 census put the Bolivian birth rate at 3.7, with an average age of reproduction at around 28. Like most Latin American countries, abortion is illegal in Bolivia, except where the life of the mother is threatened or in cases of conception through rape. Since assuming power in 2006, the MAS government has not attempted to amend this law, although recent attempts

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<sup>240</sup> For an account of the factors motivating rural-urban migration in two La Paz communities in the late 1970s, see Preston, David A., *Farmers and Towns: Rural-urban relations in highland Bolivia* (UEA, Norwich, 1978)

<sup>241</sup> A World Bank report in 2011 found that the sewerage system was serving only 52% of the population of El Alto in 2007, compared with 87% in La Paz proper. World Bank, *Servicios Municipales y finanzas en Bolivia: Hacia el acceso universal en agua y saneamiento*, June 2011, p. 81, available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/270611468201565063/pdf/657460P10669500anzas0en0Bolivia0IDU.pdf>

by MAS legislators to contest the constitutionality of the abortion ban have received some support from Morales.

The poverty rate in 2009 (defined by the government as an income lower than 595 bolivianos per month in urban areas, or around 80\$, and around 420 bolivianos in rural areas) was 51%. In the rural areas, the rate was closer to 70% and in the urban areas closer to 40%. Within the poverty figures, the incidence of extreme poverty (less than 313 bolivianos per month in urban areas, or around 43\$, or 241 bolivianos in rural areas) was 15% in urban areas and 48% in rural areas.<sup>242</sup> Almost all of these indicators have been on the decline since at least the late 1990s, and the pace of decline has quickened since the MAS government came to power and instituted an income and wealth redistribution, including significant increases in the minimum wage and cash transfers to mothers of children and the elderly.

While the incidences of extreme and moderate poverty have declined in the preceding decades, the rates of income and wealth inequality have proved more durable. In 1974, around 59% of all income accrued to the wealthiest 20%, with around 2% going to the poorest fifth. In 2007, these numbers were 60% and 4% respectively. While economic growth has significantly improved the incomes of the poorest in Bolivian society, income gains have continued to be distributed iniquitously across the population.

From a strictly geographical perspective, the designation of Bolivia as an Andean Republic might seem dubious since more than two thirds of its territory lies in the Amazon basin. The aspect that draws together the Andean nations is as much shared cultural and ethnic patterns as it is geography. Like Peru and Ecuador, a large section of Bolivians identify as being of indigenous origin.

The two main indigenous groups are Quechua (around a quarter of the population), settled mainly in Cochabamba and Potosi, and the smaller but still large Aymara population, around 4 out of 5 of whom live in the department of La Paz, with other populations in Oruro to the south of the *altiplano*. Including these two principal groups, the constitution of the

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<sup>242</sup> Unidad de Analisis de Politicas Sociales and Economicas, Sexto Informe de progreso de los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio en Bolivia, La Paz, December 2010, pp. 30-37

Plurinational State recognises the presence of 36 indigenous communities and original peoples in Bolivia's territory.

The Quechua speakers are the descendants of the Incan conquerors of the *altiplano*. Quechua was the official language of the Incan empire and was mandated for the populations which the empire assimilated. The Aymara language is believed to be derived from a much older civilisation on the continent - one that spread over Chile and Peru perhaps from as early as 600 BC to around 1000AD - named after an ancient city in western Bolivia named Tiwanaku. The survival of Aymara in the face of the arrival of the Incans on the Bolivian *altiplano* is itself an historical unlikelihood, given the usual fate of populations that sought to resist full subordination to the empire.

As Donna Lee Van Cott explains in her indispensable account of the growth of ethnic politics in the Andean republics, linguistic, regional and ethnic distinctions within indigenous communities have long inhibited the growth of indigenous social movements:

Internal fragmentation and conflict permeates the history of indigenous people's organisations and parties. The political rivalry between the Aymara and Quechua groups is particularly pronounced. The Aymara have led the *campesinos* movement, sometimes espousing an exclusionary Aymara ethno-nationalism, while the Quechua are more numerous but less politically organised.<sup>243</sup>

Ethnic and linguistic rivalries aside, the most important distinction with indigenous communities has been that between the lowlands and highland. Differing wildly in their relation to the traditional political system, economic fortunes and modes of life, distinctions between the now largely urban highland populations, the *campesinos* of the valleys and the largely forest dwelling peoples of the Oriente continue to animate political conflicts.

The rest of the population is either mestizo ("mixed race") or white. These distinctions often have less to do with ethnic or racial heritage than they do with cultural and linguistic cleavages. A rural highland Quechua speaker can arrive in La Paz, adopt European dress, learn

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<sup>243</sup> Van Cott, Donna Lee, *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics* (CUP, Cambridge, 2005) p. 52

Spanish and therefore 'become' mestizo. The distinctions also increasingly carry important politically symbolic information.

In the 2001 census, some 62% of Bolivians identified themselves as a member of one or other indigenous group or *pueblo originario*. In the 2011 census figures, however, this number had fallen to 40%. This apparent shift in self-identification has prompted suggestions that the census is itself an inappropriate tool for settling the question of identity, attempting to impose rigid Western categories on complex patterns of identity and language.<sup>244</sup> What the shift in self-identification over the period of only a decade demonstrates is the highly fluid nature of ethnic categories.

There are good historical reasons why the notion of ethnic identity in Latin America has always been filled with contradictory elements. On the one hand, very few women were among the original Spanish arrivals, and so the conquistadors and the first colonists often took on wives from among the 'Indian' communities. At the same time, through the *mita* system that mandated labour in the mines for Indians for a portion of the year and the *encomienda* that effectively tethered Indians to landowners, the Spanish cruelly exploited local populations. Even so, there was significant cultural cross-pollination and inter-marriage between the colonists and the local populations, resulting in majority mestizo populations across the continent.

The sections of the population who hold to the designation 'white' in Bolivia – significant sections of the population in Santa Cruz in particular – do not do so on the basis of a detailed family tree that reveals no trace of miscegenation. Rather, their 'whiteness' reflects a cultural and regional identity that claims superiority over both the Indian populations but also over the compromised mestizo populations of the *altiplano*. In this sense, their cultural/racial designation recapitulates that of the Spanish colonial administration, with its distinction between *criollos* (ancestral Europeans born in the New World) to *peninsulares* (those born in Spain). At stake is not much racial lineage, but rather a more textured measurement of fidelity to a cultural and regional identity, especially when that identity is seen to be perpetually

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<sup>244</sup> La Razón, Mirada a la identidad indígena desde un 'adentro' y un 'afuera', 25<sup>th</sup> August 2013, available from [http://www.la-razon.com/index.php?url=/suplementos/animal\\_politico/Mirada-identidad-indigena-adentro-afuera\\_0\\_1894010661.html](http://www.la-razon.com/index.php?url=/suplementos/animal_politico/Mirada-identidad-indigena-adentro-afuera_0_1894010661.html)

under threat, prone before acculturating forces and so on. Significant migration from the highlands to Santa Cruz – a trend only likely to continue as the region’s economy outperforms the *altiplano* – has added to the zeal of the ‘autonomists’ in the eastern departments. Increasingly demographic shifts look like upsetting the political domination of the traditional elite inside the department. Indeed, as I will argue in the final chapter, President Morales has already begun to forge new alliances in the eastern departments, based on a shared commitment to economic expansion and export-led development.

#### **iv. Bolivia, Environmental Crisis and Climate Change**

In this section, I want to augment the general analysis given above with a greater focus on the contemporary environmental problems facing Bolivia. I focus specifically on two key areas of environmental concern: the explosion of quinoa cultivation on the *Altiplano* and the rebirth of the mining industry and its effect on water supply. I use both these examples to emphasise the scale of the environmental concerns present among researchers *and* the highly fraught and contested political debate which has emerged regarding these assessments. In addition to this local and national context, there is also the spectre of global climate change, to the effects of which Bolivia is particularly vulnerable.

The extremely diverse topographical and geophysical conditions within Bolivia render any general assessment of the country’s environmental condition problematic. While Bolivia faces real and serious environmental dangers and problems, some of which I will detail below, it also contains vast expanses of untouched land. It also has a large proportion of its territory under state conservation or indigenous communal ownership. It is a country with extraordinary natural resources and productive potential that is still blighted by high rates of poverty and fares badly on many of the usual markers of human development. It is a ‘beggar on a throne of gold’, as the Bolivian saying goes.<sup>245</sup>

In addition to its environmental challenges and potentials, Bolivia faces very specific issues when it comes to adapting to the effects of global climate change. The dangers from global climate change are very different in the eastern lowlands than they are in the western highlands. The presence of a large expanse of the Amazon rainforest and the extraordinary

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<sup>245</sup> Osborne, Harry, *Bolivia: A Land Divided* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1956) p. 2



biodiversity contained within put Bolivia at the centre of global debates on deforestation and land use change. Changes in the hydrological cycle induced by increased temperatures could lead to both increased drought in the *altiplano* and greater risk of flooding on the lowlands. Climate shifts could increase the potential yields from some of Bolivia's main agricultural products, while making other traditional forms of farming practically impossible. Bolivia's geographical diversity means that it would be impacted in a variety of diverse and contradictory ways if the course of human-induced climate change is not changed.

This, of course, makes strategies of mitigation and adaptation to these effects more complex, both politically and physically. This is one reason why the politics of environmental sustainability and climate change in Bolivia are themselves so fraught and seemingly confused. An additional factor is the intersection of some of the historic and contemporary regional disputes I have already discussed with controversies over the use and control of Bolivia's natural resources. As the centre of the Bolivian economy increasingly moves from the *altiplano* to the fertile lowlands and, above all, to the oil and gas extraction industries of the south-east and east, the problem of resource management is inevitably entangled with distributional conflicts between populations and regions of the country. There is more to be said about this backdrop. I want now to set out some of the main environmental challenges facing Bolivia while addressing throughout the ways in which climate change is expected to affect (or is already affecting) them.

According to the latest report on the state of the environment in Bolivia by the Environmental Defence League, a third of the territory of Bolivia, approximately 35 million hectares, showed signs of either degradation of soil-vegetation or forms of contamination. Another third was considered well-conserved (75% of this was land held in various forms of protection) and the other third was deemed to be at an intermediate environmental state. Within these figures however were important divergences between regions and departments of the country. A report by the departmental government in Santa Cruz showed that 81% of the land in that department exhibited signs of low to severe degradation. The expansion of the agricultural frontier in Santa Cruz is in large part a response to the degraded state of much of the department's soil. Much of this degradation itself results from the expansion of intensive

farming monocultures, in particular the soya production that dominates the agriculture of the department.<sup>246</sup>

Soil degradation is not only a problem for the departments of the eastern lowlands. On the *altiplano*, the expansion of quinoa production onto marginal lands at higher altitudes in order to accommodate growing international demands has increased reduced vegetation cover and put pressure on already scarce water resources.<sup>247</sup> The MAS government for its part has aggressively promoted the ‘industrialisation’ of quinoa production on the *altiplano*, extending generous terms of credit to the producers particularly concentrated in Oruro and Potosí.

President Morales has justified this expansion of quinoa on economic, cultural and food sovereignty grounds. While quinoa is a native species and is widely consumed in Bolivia, most of the new production seems destined for a world market. Negative cultural stereotypes associated with quinoa – that it is a “food of the poor” - have meant that increased production has so far failed to alter Bolivians’ growing taste for often imported bread and pasta. In 2011-2012, wheat flour was the sixth largest Bolivian import in dollar terms after diesel, steel, and various forms of motor vehicle.<sup>248</sup>

Unless the government is able to amend this deep-seated cultural obstacle, the claim that increased production of quinoa will lead to ‘food security’ seems doubtful. At this stage, the commercialisation and expansion of quinoa on the *altiplano* – with its attendant ecological risks – seems primarily motivated by international demand.<sup>249</sup>

Of course, there is no inherent problem with the export of agricultural surpluses, and the extraordinary genetic variety of quinoa and the grain’s remarkable suitability to the harsh conditions of the *altiplano* make it an ideal crop for export. The growth of quinoa as a source of greater incomes for often the most impoverished subsistence farmers on the *altiplano* is to be welcomed. However, as Bolivian environmental, agricultural and *campesinos*

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<sup>246</sup> LIDEMA, Estado Ambiental de Bolivia 2010. La Paz 2010, p. 7

<sup>247</sup> Orsag, Vladimir, Degradación de Suelos en el *Altiplano* Boliviano, Análisis-IBEPA, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2009

<sup>248</sup> IBCE, Bolivia: Principales Productos Importados desde el Mundo según Volumen y Valor, 2011-2012, available from <http://ibce.org.bo/documentos/informacion-mercado/2011-2012/Bolivia-Imp.%20de%20100%20ppales%20prod%20segun%20vol%20y%20val,%2011-12.pdf>

<sup>249</sup> América Economía, Bolivia: gobierno promulga norma que incentivará la producción de quinua, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011, available from <http://www.Americaeconomia.com/negocios-industrias/bolivia-gobierno-promulga-norma-que-incentivara-la-produccion-de-quinuamn>

organisations have pointed out, the scale and pace of the international demand have induced practices that threaten the long term environmental sustainability of the production.<sup>250</sup>

The rush back to quinoa production among rural highland communities has also placed additional pressures on land use, exacerbating the perennial problem of agriculture on the *altiplano* of extremely small land holdings. The problem of soil degradation is particularly pressing for Bolivia because so little of the country's surface (only around 3%) is actually under cultivation. Sustainable management of the area under permanent cultivation – rests for soils, crop rotation, and replacement of nutrients and so on – is the only alternative to a permanent, environmentally damaging eastward expansion of the agriculture frontier or the push of *altiplano* agriculture onto the salinated soils of the south.

One of the principal sources of stress for *altiplano* agriculture and soils has always been the availability of water. Irrigation is often minimal and the location of the *altiplano* between two mountain ranges keeps precipitation to a minimum. One reliable source of water for both agriculture and the population centres on the highlands are the snowmelts from glaciers of the tropical Andes. 95% of the world's tropical glaciers are in the Andean republics, 22% of them being in Bolivia.<sup>251</sup> For obvious reasons, these tropical glaciers are particularly vulnerable to the effects of global warming.

The glaciers in the Bolivian portion of the Cordillera Real lost 40% of their volume between 1975 and 2006, according to French researchers.<sup>252</sup> The 2007 IPCC report on Latin America predicted the complete loss of the relatively small Chacatalya glacier, and in 2009 Bolivian scientists reported that the glacier had indeed disappeared. The much larger Zongo glacier has lost around 10% of its surface, but the pace of its retreat means it too is likely to disappear in 2045-2050.<sup>253</sup> The rate of retreat in the Cordillera Real – including those covering Illimani, Charquini, Serke Kholui and Huayna Potosi – increased between 2006 and 2010. The

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<sup>250</sup> Fundación PROINPA, Producción orgánica de la Quinoa Real. Cochabamba 2005

<sup>251</sup> PNUMA, El Fin de las Cumbres Nevadas: Glaciares y Cambio Climático en la Comunidad Andina. Lima 2007  
<http://www.pnuma.org/deat1/pdf/glaciaresandina.pdf>

<sup>252</sup> Oxfam New Zealand, Climate Change, Poverty and Adaptation in Bolivia. London, 2009

<sup>253</sup> Magrin, G., C. Gay García, D. Cruz Choque, J.C. Giménez, A.R. Moreno, G.J. Nagy, C. Nobre and A. Villamizar, 2007: Latin America. Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 581-615

recent increase in the rate of retreat results from the shrinking of the glaciers, which makes them more vulnerable to climatic changes. Decreases in precipitation in that section of the Andes and increases in the air temperature at altitude have also contributed to glacial retreat in the Real Cordillera

The shrinking of the glacial area in the tropical Andes poses significant challenges for the provision of water to the rapidly growing urban populations on the *altiplano*. Three of the four drainage basins that are used to supply water to the populations of La Paz and El Alto receive almost a third of their water from snowmelts from the glaciers, particularly important are those of Huayna Potosi and Illimani.<sup>254</sup>

The loss of these sources of drinkable water would endanger the already inadequate provision in growing cities, particularly El Alto which already suffers from poor provision of basic health and sanitation services. The *altiplano* therefore faces the prospect of population increases coinciding with the decline in the supply of drinkable water. Climate change threatens both more frequent droughts and extended dry seasons as well as the disappearance of freshwater supplies from Andean glaciers.

In these conditions, it would seem imperative to be particularly judicious with the use of existing water resources on the *altiplano*. The recent rebirth of the mining industry on the *altiplano* however has added to the demands on local water supplies, and threatened existing lakes, rivers and aquifers with contamination from industrial residues and runoffs. Motivated by recoveries in the prices of Bolivia's main exports – tin, lead, wolfram, silver, gold, copper and zinc – the period since the early 2000s has seen a sharp increase in mining activities in the departments of the *altiplano*.

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<sup>254</sup> Stockholm Environment Institute, *El Cambio Climático y la Crisis Agua en La Paz y El Alto*. 2013

Table 3.1 Price in US Dollars of Main Bolivian Mineral and Metal Exports

Commodity	2005	2011
Tin	3.37	11.98
Lead	0.44	1.1
Zinc	0.61	1
Wolfram	106.25	142.24
Silver	7.24	19.65
Gold	454.76	1561.59
Copper	1.64	4.04

Source: Instituto Nacional Estadística de Bolivia (2015)

The value of all Bolivian exports of ores and precious metals tripled between 2006 and 2011, reaching about \$2.5 billion. As will I discuss in greater depth in Chapter 7, the MAS government has assiduously promoted the expansion of the extractive industries on the *altiplano*. The Ministry for Mining and Minerals has repeatedly stressed how the mining industry, left dormant by the collapse in the mining industry in the 1980s and 1990s, has been revived in departments such as La Paz.

The association of the era of neoliberal governance with the collapse (or destruction) of the mining industry – with all its attendant effects on employment and the strength of the trade union movement in Bolivia – has allowed MAS to position its promotion of mining as an anti-neoliberal policy.

The environmental costs of this return to intensive mining on the *altiplano* continue to be extreme. Unlike the hydrocarbon and energy industries, it has not pursued nationalisation of the mines. Mining under the MAS government remains...

‘...dominated by the transnational companies who continue to define the economic structure of mining in Bolivia, controlling prices and production chains. This view is notably different to the one we have seen occurring in the hydrocarbons sector’ [my translation].<sup>255</sup>

<sup>255</sup> LIDEMA, El Sector Minero. La Paz 2010, p. 21

Lake Poopó, the second largest lake in Bolivia with a surface of around 1,000 square kilometres, sits in an area of low rainfall (around 380mm per year) and high potential evaporation in the centre of the department of Oruro. The most significant of the other lakes in the system, also fed by the slow moving Rio Desaguadero from the north, with a surface of around 214 square kilometres, is Lake Uru-Uru. Uru-Uru lies around 150 miles from Lake Poopó to the north. Poopó also supports around 23 sub-basins, smaller watersheds that form part of the larger watershed, mainly to the east. The basin of Lake Poopó is located in one of the most intensely mined portions of the department. In areas in which stresses on water supply are already severe for climatic, altitudinal and geographic reasons, the mining industry has since the colonial period been a source of additional risk of contamination and water insecurity for local populations.

The principal environmental costs of mining relate to use of often scarce local water resources within the mine, the run-off of untreated industrial waste water into adjacent hydrological systems, and the build-up of base metals – included cyanide, lead and cadmium – in water sources.

After 3 years of campaigning, local environment and social movements – including representatives of communities based in the basin, fishermen’s groups and others – won their bid to have the government declare the region as being in ‘environmental crisis’ in October 2009.<sup>256</sup> The government’s accession came less than a month after CORIDUP (the umbrella group representing impacted constituencies) threatened to commence road blockades if their demand was not heeded. The government’s stated reason for the declaration was that ‘salinisation and contamination’ of the soils posed an imminent risk to human health food security in the area. The Supreme Decree mandated the authorities to do everything necessary to mitigate and counteract the sources and effects of the contamination. Almost four years since the declaration of emergency, local campaigners have insisted that very little has changed and that the environmental emergency declared by the government has yet to lead to significant efforts to restore the environment around the Lake.

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<sup>256</sup> CEPA, Pronunciamiento sobre Decreto Supremo 0355 de emergencia ambiental, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2010, available from [http://cepaoruro.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=485:pronunciamiento-sobre-decreto-supremo-0335-de-emergencia-ambiental-02-06-10&catid=31:coridup&Itemid=41](http://cepaoruro.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=485:pronunciamiento-sobre-decreto-supremo-0335-de-emergencia-ambiental-02-06-10&catid=31:coridup&Itemid=41)

Figure 3: Kori Chaca gold mine, run by the Inti Raymi Mining Company



Source: La Razón

The Kori-Kollo gold and silver mine in the Saucari province of Oruro is the subject of particular concern. The mine was opened in 1982 by a Bolivian mining company named after an Incan religious festival Inti Raymi (EMIRSA). EMIRSA was until 2009 a wholly owned subsidiary of the Denver based Newmont mining company. In its 31 years of existence – the mine was not operating at full capacity throughout this period – an entire mountain has disappeared, and the mine now reaches a depth of 250 metres. The various investments in the mine by its owners amount to almost \$350 million over the lifetime of the mine.

In 2009, perhaps due to the increasing controversy over the operations at Kori-Kolla, Newmont sold its share in EMIRSA to a Guatemalan firm. The nearby Kori Chaca, also operated by EMIRSA, has been in operation since 2005. The communities around Kori-Kolla have long reported premature death of cattle, the loss of harvests and the salinisation of soils and waters. Several scientific studies confirmed the presence of toxic residues and salinisation in the watersheds near the mine.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> La Razón, Auditora ambiental al Proyecto 'Kori Kollo', 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012, available from [http://www.la-Razón.com/suplementos/la\\_gaceta\\_juridica/Auditoria-ambiental-proyecto-Kori-Kollo\\_0\\_1694230645.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/suplementos/la_gaceta_juridica/Auditoria-ambiental-proyecto-Kori-Kollo_0_1694230645.html)

Contamination is not the only source of conflicts between the mining company and the local populations. The rate of water use and the diversion of existing sources to the mines have also brought complaints and resistance from farmers, cattle raisers and rural communities. A report by Inti Raymi put Kori-Kollo's water use since its opening at 50 million cubic metres. Other estimates put the figure at roughly double that. The company also claims that its use of waters from the Rio Desaguadero amounts to only 0.03% of river's annual flow. In addition, Kori Chaca is currently being fed by waters diverted from the Desaguadero through the disused Comibol canal. This canal was previously providing water to the indigenous ayllu (communal land) Sora Chico in the El Choro municipality.<sup>258</sup> All water that passes through the mine immediately becomes useless to the local community either as drinking water or as an agricultural or pastoral resource.

An environmental audit published in Oruro in 2012, conducted by the audit firm PCA on behalf of the government, declared that while pollution in the 'central regions' of the Kori-Kollo area may be the responsibility of EMIRSA, some of the contamination in the area was the result of poor drainage and flooding on the banks of the Desaguadero.

The audit was the first conducted in Bolivia of an open cast mine for approximately 25 years, and the findings of the investigators provoked dissension among communities who had led opposition to EMIRSA's activities in Oruro.<sup>259</sup> Complaints surrounded the fact that investigation of the possible contamination associated with the mine had been restricted to an area within 5km of the mine. It was suggested that this did not reflect the real potential impact of 20 to 25 years of intensive opencast mining in a watershed. There was also no mention made of the production methods favoured by EMIRSA – one that relied upon the use of high levels of cyanide, tonnes of which had been used and was left unaccounted for in the environmental audit.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> La Razón, El agua tiene otro destino por la explotación 'a cielo abierto', 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012, available from [http://www.la-Razón.com/suplementos/especiales/agua-destino-explotacion-cielo-abierto\\_0\\_1551444919.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/suplementos/especiales/agua-destino-explotacion-cielo-abierto_0_1551444919.html)

<sup>259</sup> CEPA, Sobre la Auditoría Ambiental a Kori Kollo: El silencio también es complicidad, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012, available from [http://www.cepaoruro.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=977:sobre-la-auditoria-ambiental-a-kori-kollo-el-silencio-tambien-es-complicidad-6-11-12&catid=18:educacion-ambiental-e-intercultural&Itemid=45](http://www.cepaoruro.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=977:sobre-la-auditoria-ambiental-a-kori-kollo-el-silencio-tambien-es-complicidad-6-11-12&catid=18:educacion-ambiental-e-intercultural&Itemid=45)

<sup>260</sup> CEDIB, Socialización sobre auditoría ambiental de Kori Kollo a las comunidades de Challacollo, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014, available from <http://www.cedib.org/titulares/socializacion-sobre-auditoria-ambiental-de-kori-kollo-a-las-comunidades-de-challacollo-cepa-13-6-13/>



In response to these and other deficiencies within the PCA report, CORIDUP commissioned a report to be conducted by a research team from the Technical College of Oruro (OTU). The report from the University researchers focussed on the shifts in the Desaguadero since the beginning of the operations at Inti Raymi. Their study demonstrated that in 1983 (a year after the commencement of operations at the mine) the Desaguadero began to shift its course right, at the same time as lagoons appeared to the south and west of the mine, despite the fact rainfall over the last 25 years in this arid section of the *altiplano* has been historically low. Overall, the river's course, essentially unchanged for 40 years, began to exhibit changes downstream of the mining operations. The reporters suggested that a build-up of sediments was the principal cause in this shift in the river's course. The investigation also revealed a build-up of waste metals, toxic materials and the appearance of highly saline soils downstream of the mine.<sup>261</sup>

The current strategy of CORIDUP is to force the municipal authorities in Oruro to enforce the government's decree of an environmental crisis in the Lake Poopó basin, and they met with officials in La Paz in April of 2013 to push its case for the decree to be taken seriously. They have also called for the environmental audit conducted by PCA to be rejected as the basis for future environmental plans in the region.

While the issue of the social and environmental costs of mining is primarily a problem on the *altiplano*, the Oriente is increasingly subject to the same tendencies of expansion of mining interests. A recent report on the phenomenon of lowland mining by CEDIB (Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia) detailed the emergence of mining in the lowlands and its likely effects on the landscapes and ecosystems of the eastern regions.

The mining spots that characterised the map of Bolivia since its birth have changed; it is now a fact that mining operations have been established in a large section of the east, especially in Santa Cruz. This shows that Bolivia has been incorporated into the Latin American current, exemplified by Peru and Colombia, of the granting of mining concessions in a big part of its territory [my translation].<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Mollo Mollo, Norma and Rocha Bellot, Monica Zelma, UTO: Kori Kollo contaminó el agua y acalero la salinización de suelos, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013, available from <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2013072602>

<sup>262</sup> Tejada Soruco, Alicia, Minería en las tierras bajas (CEDIB, Cochabamba, 2012)

This migration of the great mining interests down onto the Bolivian lowlands has so far not been associated with any significant move away from the practices favoured on the highlands. Open cast mines are now the favoured option for those who have won concessions on both the *altiplano* and the lowland departments. The local and departmental governments are similarly reluctant to impose environmental and social regulations on the companies, who often bring not only the chance of income and employment, but also new funding for roads and other infrastructure. As the CEDIB report wryly notes, while the autonomists of the eastern departments have made much of their hostility to government “from the west”, in the area of mining policy the two camps are in perfect and complete harmony.

One particularly environmentally dangerous aspect of the extension of mining onto the lowlands is the rate at which new mining concessions are being granted in nationally or regionally protected stretches of land. Much of Bolivia’s protected land lies in the departments of the east. For example, there have been significant concessions to the Kyleno and SIDERESTE companies in the marshland Departmental Reserve of the Tucavaca Valley of Santa Cruz. Located in the La Plata basin – the second most important in Latin America – the marshlands are rich in biodiversity, and perform important environmental functions, regulating floods and dry seasons central to the economy and life of eastern Bolivia.

The concessions in the marshland areas are perhaps the most environmentally significant, but they are not nearly the largest awarded by the Santa Cruz authorities. Many of the concessions granted in areas protected also cover lands held as communal indigenous territories, or are close to such territories. The main group representing many of these lowland indigenous communities CIDOB (Confederación Indígena Del Oriente de Bolivia) has been perhaps the most vociferous and consistent of all Bolivian social movements in its rejection of mining concessions both in indigenous lands and in Bolivia as a whole. Generally less warm to the MAS government than social movements representing highland populations, CIDOB has consistently criticised the MAS government for, among other things, its promotion of the mining industry, which it views as potentially destructive to indigenous lands and culture, and an affront to indigenous worldviews. The expansion of mining into or near the lands of increasing numbers of lowland indigenous communities is becoming and will continue to be an increasing source of conflict between these groups and the central government in La Paz.

Implied in the gradual migration of the mining industry down into the Bolivian lowlands are elevated risks to the already vulnerable forests. Half of Bolivia is covered by forests. This figure includes not only the rainforest proper – permanent humid forest covering - but the dry deciduous forests of the Chaco, the semi-humid Yungas Valley and the Andean foothills. The land suitable for permanent forest covering comprises around 80% of the total forested area, around 40% of the total surface of Bolivia. The forests play a relatively minor role in the Bolivian economy, but they do support around one third of the rural population in the country. Among these populations are around 200,000 indigenous persons from a variety of groups who have collective land titles that contain significant extensions of forested area. They also support, principally through their provision of firewood and construction materials, communities in the sub-Andean valleys of Tarija, Chuquisaca and Cochabamba.<sup>263</sup>

Around 20% of Bolivia is considered a Protected Area by the state, most of which is nationally protected, while the rest is under municipal or departmental control. The department of Pando in the extreme north of the country is 90% covered in humid tropical forest. More than one third of Pando's territory is also under the control of *campesinos* or indigenous populations, making the department a testing ground for sustainable forestry strategies.<sup>264</sup> This has not prevented significant deforestation in Bolivia. While some deforestation results from land use change and energy demands from population centres on the *altiplano*, the vast bulk occurs from the expansion of the agricultural frontier in the lowlands. Land use change – essentially the pushing back of the tree line in the eastern lowlands for agricultural and pastoral lands – accounts for around 80% of all of Bolivia's emissions of greenhouse gases. The conversion of forested lands for other uses amounts to a quarter of the global total of emissions of greenhouse gases.

While Bolivia's per capita emissions of carbon dioxide and equivalents are lower than the regional average, its rate of deforestation per capita, at around 320 square metres per person per year, is certainly one of the highest in the world (graphic below). Bolivia's forests are being converted at the rate of around 300,000 hectares per year. 90% of this deforestation is considered 'unauthorised' by the state, although it has shown itself either unable, unwilling

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<sup>263</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, *Estrategia Nacional Bosque y Cambio Climático*. La Paz, 2009, p. 14

<sup>264</sup> LIDEMA, Informe de estado ambiental del departamento de Pando 2009. La Paz 2011

or perhaps both to undertake any real steps to counteract the trend. Significantly, while rates of deforestation decline in other Amazonian states like Brazil, Bolivia's forests are being placed under increasing pressure as the eastern lowlands are integrated into the national economy and internal migration to the lowlands continues.

In addition to the expansion of the agricultural frontier and clearing for pastoral lands, the wood industry has increased in size and has become a key driver of deforestation. Illegal logging – that is, logging conducted by actors who have not been awarded concessions by local, departmental or national authorities – is widespread.

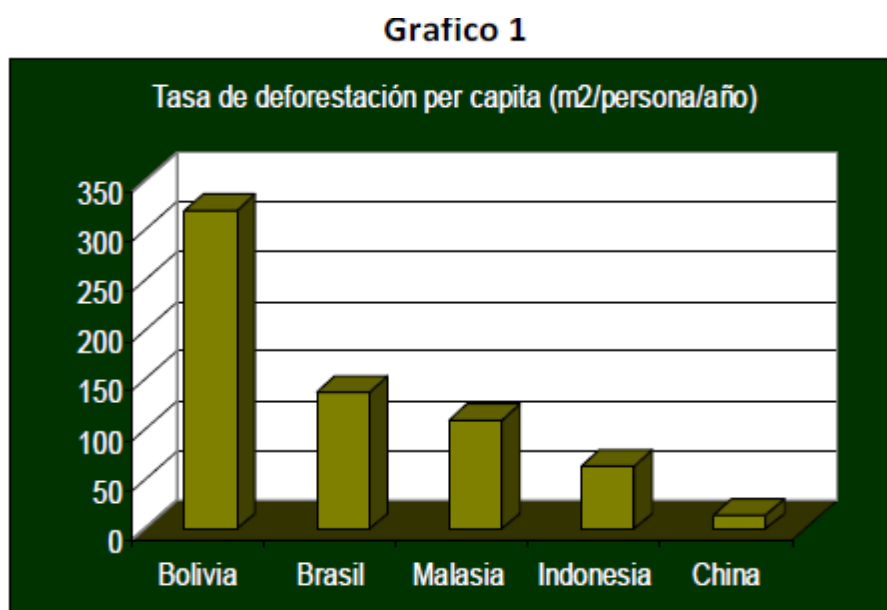
President Morales has repeatedly criticised and suggested amendments to the Forestry Law, passed in 1996 under the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (“Goni”), that was widely seen as a gift to the large timber interests and illegal producers. Between 1996 and 2011, some 68% of the total forestry concessions had gone to the timber industry, with 14 families holding concessions over 2.5 million hectares. In January 2013 President Morales signed an amendment to the Forestry Law that would recognise some titles over some illegally cleared land if the owners agreed to sign up to the government's Programme for the Production of Food and Restitution of Forests, pay a fine and grow food for the internal market.<sup>265</sup> The government's “pardons” are likely, as was immediately recognised, to increase the pace of illegal logging, giving the impression that future laws will again pardon previous infractions.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Bustamente, Ruben López, A 17 años de la Ley Forestal, Los Tiempos, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2013, available at [http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/opiniones/columnistas/20130713/a-17-anos-de-la-ley-forestal\\_220464\\_475158.html](http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/opiniones/columnistas/20130713/a-17-anos-de-la-ley-forestal_220464_475158.html)

<sup>266</sup> Rojas Quiroga, Ricardo, La Ley No. 337 estimula la ampliación de la frontera agrícola y perdona a los depredadores del bosque, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013, available from <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2013021507>

Figure 4. Comparative Rates of Deforestation per capita



Source: Urioste (2010)<sup>267</sup>

Deforestation presents dangers to the global ecosystem in the form of lost carbon sequestration, releases of stored carbon and changes in the hydrological cycle. The loss of forest cover also increases Bolivia's own vulnerability to the effects of climate change, increasing the risks of floods on the eastern lowlands, landslides on the inter-Andean valleys and endangering Bolivia's biodiversity. These changes and effects are not, of course, restricted only to the future. The department of Beni in 2008 saw its worst floods in 50 years, leading to the loss of 20 thousand hectares of farmland and almost 25 thousand cattle. The effects of 'El Niño' – named as the cause of the 2007 and 2008 floods that impacted the lowlands – also make the Bolivian climate more unstable and less predictable.

**v. Between The Rights of Nature and the Right to Develop**

I come, now, to the principal argument being developed in this dissertation: the relationship between the rights of nature and the right to develop as this is being negotiated under the Morales government. In this section I introduce the tension between these two rights by

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<sup>267</sup> Urisoste E., Andrea, Deforestación en Bolivia: Una Amenaza Mayor al Cambio Climático, Working Paper, September 2010, available from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bolivien/07570.pdf>

linking it to the analysis of Bolivia's distinctive territorial and environmental challenges in the earlier parts of this chapter.

Bolivia is a country threatened by the full panoply of environmental problems and dangers from climate change. The presence of glacial retreat in the Andean tropics, desertification in the arid south east and deforestation and floods in the tropical lowlands testify to the immensely complex nature of environmental politics and policy in the country. It is not therefore surprising that its environmental politics should be equally complicated and contested.

The extraordinary geographical, climatic and cultural diversity of Bolivia, along with its entrenched poverty and history of oppression and struggle, add to these exceptionally contested and fraught environmental politics. Regional and racial antagonisms intersect with and exacerbate resource conflicts, as I have tried to outline above. The election of Evo Morales and the MAS government in 2005 inaugurated a new era in this contestation. One can see Morales' election as bringing to an end the cycle of rebellions that paralysed the country and created a revolving door at the Presidential Palace between 2002 and 2005. In this sense, Morales' government marks the end of the period of rebellion and beginning of the period of reform.<sup>268</sup> Or one can see Morales as embodying the final rejection of the neoliberal era and his government as instituting a radical transformation of Bolivian society.

As I mentioned in the introduction, since his ascent to the Presidency, Morales' international image has been dominated by two factors. Firstly, he has been – correctly – associated with the broader leftward shift in governance across the region. Secondly, he has become the symbol of global resistance to environmental crisis and the effects of climate change on developing nations and indigenous peoples.

In the following chapter, I delve more closely into the conditions which brought Morales to power and have sustained him since. I show that it is only possible to understand Morales' project if it is recognised as being embedded in the historical, social and geographic conditions I have set out here. It is this context that has determined the shape of political development of Bolivia over the last 180 years. It is possible to understand Morales as a product of a general

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<sup>268</sup> This, for instance, is Jeffrey Webber's thesis.

turn against neoliberalism in the region. However, the nature of the turn against neoliberalism in Bolivia is highly specific and contradictory. As the government has pursued its 'post-neoliberal' development strategy, questions have emerged over how this strategy comports with its stated environmental goals. As I have shown in this chapter, a deepening environmental crisis and vulnerability to global climate change make this question indispensable to a judgement of the sustainability of the change that has begun in Bolivia.

#### **Chapter 4. National Development in a Plurinational State: The Contradictions of Evo Morales' Bolivia**

In the previous section of my thesis, I have set out of the political, intellectual, historical and environmental conditions which set the stage for Evo Morales' assumption of the Presidency. I have argued that Bolivian society was marked by the crisis of neoliberal governance, producing a collapse in confidence in the country's traditional political elite. Amidst the failure of the neoliberal project, Latin American scholars and environmentalists began to focus on the environmental impact of the continent's 'failed' development strategy. They attempted to sketch out alternative models of post-development, grounded in encounters between Western-based environmental traditions and emerging indigenous-based movements and ideas. This intellectual awakening occurred alongside and fed into a growing awareness of Bolivia's own environmental challenges and the role of geographic and environmental factors in Bolivia's history of maldevelopment. When Morales came to power after the implosion of the neoliberal political elites, this confluence of circumstances had created a fertile political and ideological conjuncture, one suitable for the elaboration of a distinctive development strategy responsive to the radical environmental agenda.

In this second section of my thesis, I will interrogate the development policy of Morales, paying particular attention to the conflict between the rights of nature and the right to develop, in light of the foundations I have established until now. This section aims to trace the uneven and contradictory perspective and policy adopted by Evo Morales since he came to power. I critically analyse how the Morales government has negotiated the question of development strategy and environmental protection. In particular, I address how the two discourses I have identified have unfolded and clashed in a series of political, legal and institutional clashes that have occurred over the period of Morales' presidency. What I intend to show is that environmental policy has become the key vector of contestation and disruption to the 'process of change' Bolivia is undergoing. I argue that the roots of much of this controversy can be located in particular features of Bolivian history and geography, particularly the relatively low capacity of its state and territorial diversity and breadth. As the government's development policy and its environmental impact have come under increasing



scrutiny, an increasingly hostile attitude to environmentalist critics has been adopted. As I show in these chapters, this tension came to the fore most clearly in a series of direct confrontations over the government's policy in the Bolivian Amazon and over the Rights of Mother Earth law. It is in the midst of these conflicts that the government's right to develop language has emerged. Ultimately, I argue that without a recognition of the biophysical and political limits of the policy of extraction-led development, the political project being pursued by Morales will not be able to sustain itself. Indeed, as I show, despite the appearance of relative stability, the edges are already beginning to fray. In this sense, the rights of nature and the right to develop are not, in the long term, in conflict, but conditions of mutual possibility.

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By the time Evo Morales and the MAS swept into office by national elections in December 2005, Bolivia had experienced 6 years of political turmoil and social conflict. The explosion of the *Guerra de Agua* in Cochabamba in 2000 after a botched attempt at privatisation of the water treatment and distribution system in Bolivia's third largest city signalled the start of a new period of class struggle and political crisis. The stakes were even greater during 2002-2003, when a rebellion against President Sánchez de Lozada's plans to allow construction of a pipeline to the Pacific coast in order to facilitate the export of the natural gas brought the country to the edge of another social revolution.<sup>269</sup>

The election of Morales, a representative of the coca producers beset by US-backed efforts throughout the 1980s and 1990s to tackle cocaine trafficking *and* the first person of indigenous American descent to be elected President in a majority indigenous country, gave expression to the extent of the disenchantment with the political class who had ruled Bolivia after the restoration of democracy in 1985. Morales, by dint both of his political opposition to the neoliberal policies of his immediate predecessors and his ethnic ancestry, reflected a bend, if not a break, in the road of modern Bolivian history.

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<sup>269</sup> See among others Webber, Jeffrey, *Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia* (Brill, Leiden, 2011) and Dangl, Benjamin, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (AK Press, Oakland, 2007)

Most powerfully of all, Morales embodied the victory of the social movements of Bolivia's indigenous majority, reflecting their passage from political and social exclusion to the centre of national life. Morales' election victory was the symbolic triumph of these democratic movements of Bolivian civil society against the hierarchical and exclusive structures of the Bolivian state. These structures, which had survived and to an extent eased the transfer of political power from the military to civilian governments, were designed to inoculate the formal political process from potentially destabilising social and political conflicts. Bolivia was a paragon of the 'low intensity' democracy of the neoliberal era.<sup>270</sup>

In the late 1980s and 1990s these state structures ensconced a political elite which, as I have shown in Chapter 1, had largely reached consensus on the formula that was required to modernise Bolivian economy and society. The crumbling of these structures in the midst of the political crisis of the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflected the final exhaustion both of the Bolivian state in its orthodox, exclusionary form and of the political legitimacy of these elites.

The election of a constituent assembly in the early years of Morales' Presidency, and the agreement by popular referendum in 2009 of a new constitution of the now Plurinational State of Bolivia gave concrete form to these demands for democratic and institutional renewal. At the heart of the new democratic constitutional settlement was the recognition of the existence and rights of the 37 ethno-linguistic nations and peoples in Bolivia. Full legal sovereignty within ancestral community lands – already partially conceded under previous governments – was to be the legacy of the new plurinational political arrangement.

In his first term in particular, Morales relied on this connection with indigenous and peasant social movements – particularly those organised in the Unity Pact – to defend his Presidency from violent secessionist movements based in the Oriente.<sup>271</sup> By the time his second term had begun, the confrontations with the East had largely subsided, with both sides signing an effective truce.<sup>272</sup> There has even been a degree of cross-pollination between the two 'poles',

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<sup>270</sup> Gills, Barry and Rocamora, Joel, *Low Intensity Democracy*, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1992

<sup>271</sup> Svampa, Maristella, *El "Laboratorio Boliviano"*; *Cambios, Tensiones y Ambivalencias del Gobierno de Evo Morales*, in Svampa, Maristella, Stefanoni, Pablo and Furnillo, Bruno (eds), *Debatir Bolivia: Perspectivas de un Proyecto de descolonización* (Taurus, Buenos Aires, 2010)

<sup>272</sup> Zibechi, Raul, *Developmentalism and Social Movements in Bolivia*, *Americans Program*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2014, available from <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/13900>

particularly in the run up to the 2015 general elections. With MAS hegemony extended and secured, the divisions began to appear in the 'national-popular' front over the practical content of the Constitution, in particular over the question of natural resource use and development policy.

For the most part, this tension between MAS and the social movements remains mainly subterranean, expressing itself as the muted discontent of ex-members of the government or radicals disenchanted with the pace of change, or the direction of travel overall. In some cases, it has erupted in social explosions that have threatened to undermine the image of cohesive and linear progress and laid bare some of the sharper contradictions in the process. The government's current level of security and popular accord demonstrate that, by and large, these eruptions have not yet challenged its political supremacy.

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that we can only understand the political project of MAS in light of the particular features of Bolivian society. This includes an analysis of the historical development of the Bolivian state and its articulation with the territory and populations formally under the control. As I explained in the previous chapter, at the centre of this history has been one of institutional weakness and regionalisation of society, politics and economy. At the heart of the right to develop discourse and the MAS project is the transcendence of these long term structural weaknesses of Bolivian society. This project has generated frictions between MAS and the social movement base from which it derives its legitimacy.

In the second section, I look in detail at the 2006 National Development Plan. This document revealed in detail the political and ecological perspective informing the MAS project. It is significant for being the first such document produced by the MAS government, and thus allows us to understand, in retrospect, the pace of events over the last decade. This document revealed a profound rejection of the rollback of the state from the development process that had occurred in the neoliberal era. It did not, however, mandate any dramatic overhaul in the essential structure of the economy, in the form, for instance, of a move away from the primary-export model. This partial and limited critique largely avoided any rejection of the aims and practice of development as such. In this sense, while sharing a critique of neoliberalism, it parted ways with the radical environmentalism of the type I have addressed

in Chapter 2. This has created fissures within a section of the social movement base, which is committed to a more foundational critique of the development agenda.

**i. Morales' Project and the Bolivian State in Perspective**

To understand Evo Morales' political project it is necessary to register the most basic fact about him, and interrogate that fact until it reveals answers. Evo Morales is a President of Bolivia, and Presidents of Bolivia are conditioned by the historical, social and geographic features of Bolivian society. That is, there are a certain set of goals, criteria of achievement, territorial objectives both internally and externally, that are *relatively* stable across a variety of historic Bolivian leaders, parties and movements. Although many of these shared goals would reach back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can speak with more confidence about the period after the Federal War of 1899, when the liberals defeated the conservative oligarchy, preserving the location of the central government in La Paz and began the modern age of Bolivian politics.

This is not to say that the history of the political process, the lurches from radical to conservative governments, eras of revolution and reaction, shifts in the locations of social and political power, are insignificant. Rather that, *within* any political strategy being pursued at a particular moment, there exists a set of relatively stable institutional and structural interests that are embedded within the apparatus of the Bolivian state. These interests are conditioned and delimited by the interests of the dominant sections of Bolivian society but are not determined by them. It is only within the context of these broader interests that we can critically analyse either what Morales has done in power, or speak with any clarity about the journey Bolivia has embarked upon under him.

It is sufficient to just suggest some of these stable features at this point, as there will be more to be said about all of them later. The pursuit of features form the essential core of a discourse I have called the right to develop. Firstly, we can say with great confidence that from the birth of the republic in 1825, *synchronising political and territorial sovereignty* has been a critical overarching theme in Bolivian politics. Second is the overcoming of the *geographically and economically uneven* nature of economic and social development inside Bolivia. Third is the *securing and mobilisation of Bolivia's natural resources* as a means of economic growth and social development. Fourth is the *political integration of Bolivia's indigenous majority into the*

*structures of the state*. And lastly is the achievement of meaningful *political independence* from both its neighbours and hegemonic regional and global powers.

The Bolivian state came into being in certain conditions, with certain political, geographic, cultural and economic inheritances from the Spanish and Incan Empires, and even earlier civilisations clustered on the *altiplano*. The state structures and political institutions Bolivia has developed are a product of the dynamic relationship between the state as a *potentially* sovereign power and the concrete social, economic, geographic and cultural in which it is embedded. Evo Morales is *in power* in Bolivia to the extent that he has inherited stewardship over an institutional ensemble that has accumulated over almost two centuries. ‘The nature of these institutions and organisations’, as state theorist Bob Jessop explains, and ‘their articulation to form the ensemble and their links with the wider society will depend on the social formation and its past history’.<sup>273</sup>

From this perspective, we can see why René Zavaleta christened Bolivia one of Latin America’s ‘apparent states’. While maintaining all the de facto qualities of statehood, the Bolivian state remained alien and hostile to many of its subjects, only incidentally and negatively an aspect of their social existence.<sup>274</sup> The Bolivian state, absent most of the time and exercising its domain in a foreign tongue for the remainder, was permanently in crisis, seeking to find and create legitimate functions and power bases. Its governments treated the country much as the Spanish had, as a land of ‘mugging and adventure’, in the words of Walter Reynaga.<sup>275</sup>

This does not mean that the political problems of Bolivia are simply perennial or cyclical. It means that when asking what Evo Morales is doing as head of state in Bolivia, it is important to address what being head of state in Bolivia entails. We can then address the political project of Evo Morales both in terms of its *novelty* – what it has broken with and the differences it represents from its predecessors – and its *continuity* not just with the ‘neoliberal’ era, but with the general nature and structures of the Bolivian state as they have developed since independence. It is in this context that we can understand James Dunkerley’s assessment of Morales’ ‘normality’.<sup>276</sup> His Presidency has straddled the line between themes

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<sup>273</sup> Jessop, Bob, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place* (Polity Press, London, 1990)

<sup>274</sup> Zavaleta Mercado, Rene, Cuatro conceptos de la democracia, *Dialéctica*, No. 12, September 1982, p. 28

<sup>275</sup> Reynaga F, Walter, *Bolivia al Poder* (MTL-TK, La Paz, 2004) p. 59

<sup>276</sup> Dunkerley, James, *Evo Morales, the ‘Two Bolivias’, and the Third Revolution*, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, 2007, p. 165

of rupture – the constitution, the renaming of the state, his own ethnicity – and political patterns inherited from entrenched historical experience.

Addressing Morales' project means addressing the particular way in which the Bolivian state has embedded itself in its society and territory, the types of social relations it has generated, sustained or dissolved and the way in which it relates to the geographic and demographic conditions it finds.

Evo Morales has inherited what the Spanish sociologist Pilar Domingo has called the 'unfinished project of state building' in Bolivia.

Characteristic of almost any point in Bolivia's development is the gap between the state-building aspirations of successive regimes and dominant ideological orientations and the reality of dramatically weak or inefficient state structures and weak state presence in large areas of the country.<sup>277</sup>

This struggle to build state capacity has been at the heart of the Morales government. Its attempt to extend the institutional and territorial reach of the Bolivian state is definitional of the political project of the Morales government. This involves extending the reach of the state both horizontally and vertically. Building the horizontal capacity of the state has involved extending the territorial reach of the state, improving lines of communication and transport between the various departments and regions of the country, and reinforcing Bolivia's territorial claims with its neighbours, Chile in particular.

This project has placed Morales' government at odds with the developing autonomist movements of the eastern lowland departments, where Bolivia's natural gas and oil wealth is concentrated. This contest between the central government located in La Paz and the departments of the *media luna* has been a pivotal feature of Bolivian political life. The precise nature of the conflict over control of resources, tax revenues, public spending and infrastructure and administrative authority between the La Paz elites – of all political variants,

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<sup>277</sup> Domingo, Pilar, *Revolution and the Unfinished Business of Nation- and State-Building*, in Grindle, Merilee S., and Domingo, Pilar (eds), *Proclaiming Revolution: Bolivia in Comparative Perspective* (Harvard, Cambridge, 2003) p. 366

including both civilian and military governments – and the eastern departments has shifted as geographic and economic changes have altered the balance of forces.

So, as Bolivian sociologist and economic Rossana Barragan has explained, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the primary source of conflict derived from the claims of the governments of the eastern departments for a share of the revenue generated from mining centred on the western highlands. These departmental governments fought to have the mining incomes classified as ‘national’ rather than departmental or local resources, and for the distribution of the wealth generated by their exploitation to be equally national. The export income generated in the mining centres of Potosi and Oruro (now the poorest departments of Bolivia) was re-classified after 1872 as ‘national income’, to which each Bolivian region had a claim. In this sense, the build-up of institutional capacity and public services – such as they were – in the then isolated and impoverished eastern lowlands was funded by income generated by exports and ‘tributes’ taken from indigenous communities in the highlands.<sup>278</sup>

The irony here, of course, is that now the flow of resources is reversed, as the mining industry collapsed in 1985 and the hydrocarbon boom began in the 1970s, the governments of the eastern lowlands have been bitterly opposed to La Paz’s claims on the revenues of the oil and gas sector.

The Morales government came to power in the aftermath of a series of decentralising measures enacted by governments of the 1990s that had recognised increased autonomies for Bolivia’s nine departments. The social crisis that had erupted in the country in the early 2000s developed alongside an increasing pressure for greater autonomy for the eastern regions, led by the authorities in Santa Cruz. Morales attempted to absorb the demand for greater regional autonomy within the framework of the constitutional assembly convoked by the central government. Ultimately, after serious *popular* mobilisation in the eastern departments and ‘wildcat’ referendums for autonomy held without the support of the Bolivian state, the eastern departments obtained much of the decentralisation they had been demanding.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Barragán, Rossana, *Hegemonía y ‘Ejemonias’: las relaciones entre el Estado Ventral y las Regiones (Bolivia, 1825-1952)*, *ICONOS*, 34, 2009, pp. 39-51

<sup>279</sup> Centellas, Miguel, *The Santa Cruz Autonomia Movement: Preliminary Considerations on a Case of Non-Indigenous Ethnic Popular Mobilization*

As Miguel Centellas has argued in his account of the *autonomía* movement in the regions, the demand for autonomy for the eastern regions can be best understood as a 'social movement' organised on a populist relationship between an 'elite' leadership and a mass base. This example becomes particularly illustrative when we need to consider subsequent developments, when sections of the MAS social movement base began to break with Morales' political project. In particular, it draws our attention to the fact that the attempt by Morales' government to extend and develop the institutional reach of the Bolivian state has the capacity to provoke significant opposition, not only among the traditional conservative elites, but among sections of the popular classes. At the same time, the pursuit of central control over the autonomous regions can produce blowbacks in the form of regionally based movements demanding more from La Paz. The violent protests of the Civic Committee of Potosi against perceived indifference from La Paz to its demand for regional investment demonstrate this. In short, despite a relatively distinctive attempt at negotiating nation-region tensions, the Morales government is obliged to address perennial problems that are central to state building in Bolivia and that often, crucially for my argument, revolve around natural resource issues that are simultaneously implicated in wider imperatives to develop.

Alongside these attempts to build the institutional capacity of the state in the various departments of Bolivia – a historic goal of the Bolivian state – the MAS government has also sought to achieve new forms of political integration. Attempts to develop state structures that recognise – in the formal legal sense - the rights of indigenous communities precede the arrival of Evo Morales as President. Significant efforts at establishing indigenous sovereignty and regularising titling of lands occurred under various administrations of the 1990s.

This process was bolstered by the increasing prominence of ideas of 'indigenous led development' in mainstream development theory and practice during the 'second wave' of neo-liberalism. As I have suggested in the first chapter, neoliberal governments in Bolivia – although thought to be overwhelmingly hostile to the indigenous population – in fact encouraged changes of this type to an extent.

Indigenous social ties, stable community structures and patterns of reciprocity were conceptualised as 'social capital' and integrated into development practice as attempts were



made to correct the mistakes of the era of structural adjustment.<sup>280</sup> The increasing prevalence of what Charles Hale has called 'neoliberal multiculturalism' played a particularly significant role in the politics of the Andes, where the rising indigenous social movements and neoliberal governance converged on the ground of a shared hostility to the strong state.<sup>281</sup>

On this view, the reforms enacted in the constitution agreed in 2008 reflect the culmination of a longer process, rather than any significant departure from past practice. The difference with the Morales government lies in part in its insistence that it not only represents the interests of the indigenous majority, but that it is a *government of the social movements*. Now, of course, there is a certain natural ambiguity in this formulation in the English language, one which it is useful to explore.

In the sense in which the MAS government intends it, the government of Evo Morales represents, in vice-President Álvaro García Linera's term, the 'capturing' of the state by the social movements. In the government's discourse, the social movements are now in power in the shape of the government, and are transforming the traditional institutional structures of the Bolivian state in their own image.

Viewed from the other angle, however, the process is exactly the opposite. The social movements which were previously arrayed against the institutions and structures of the Bolivian state, and threatening a fundamental social transformation, are now *being governed* by state institutions. The radical sociologist Raul Zibechi reflects this view when he argues that the 'new progressive and leftist governments' (among which we can count that of Evo Morales) 'are part of the state's adaptation to the new situation of widespread insubordination from below'. From this perspective,

...progressive governments are necessary for the preservation of the state. They are the most effective agent for disarming the anti-systemic nature of the social movements, operating deep within their territory and as the revolt brews.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> See Andolina, Robert, Laurie, Nina, and Radcliffe, Sarah A., *Indigenous Development in the Andes* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2009)

<sup>281</sup> Hale, Charles, Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central América, *PoLAR*, Vol. 28, No. 1 2005, pp. 10-28

<sup>282</sup> Zibechi, Raul, *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movement* (AK Press, Oakland, 2012) p. 290

While rejecting the somewhat functionalist implications of Zibechi's formulation, it is clear that his insistence on interrogating critically *who* and *what* is being governed by governments like that in Bolivia is crucial. The assimilation of various elements of the Bolivian social movements into the structure both of MAS and then of the government itself clearly has implications both for the movements and the government. At various points in the period of Morales' rule, the convergence between the state, indigenous communities and social movements that 'represent' them has not been as smooth as government discourse has claimed. As I will show in the final two chapters, during the periods in which sections of the social movements have found themselves opposed to government policy, the government's control over the apparatus of the Bolivian state has been decisively mobilised. The 'convergence' between the social movements and the institutions of the state can only be considered provisional, subject to the wider demands of the 'process of change'.

The reason for the stuttering pace of fusion between state and social movements under MAS can, in part, be located in Garcia Linera's theorisation of this process. Writing before MAS came to power, Garcia Linera analysed the failure of the neoliberal governments to overcome the institutional weakness of the Bolivian state. Under their guidance, the gulf between the illusion of statehood and actual development of civil society deepened. Local and regional forms of power, mediated by old and new social movements, proliferated both in the rural highlands and in the growing majority indigenous cities of Cochabamba and El Alto.<sup>283</sup> These local sources of power served functions ranging from civil policing to cooperative production and service provision. Grounded in a nationalist and indigenous symbolic language, these forms of power set themselves against the culturally and politically foreign classes which dominated the institutions of the state.<sup>284</sup>

The transformation of the Bolivian state required, according to Garcia Linera, that it conform itself with the 'real social dynamic' of Bolivian civil society. This meant shedding itself of the ossified structures of liberal government built up since the foundation of the republic. The

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<sup>283</sup> García Linera, Álvaro, *Crisis del Estado y Sublevaciones Indigeno-Plebeyas en Bolivia*, in García Linera, Álvaro, *La potencia plebeya: acción colectiva e identidades indígenas, obreras y populares en Bolivia* (CLASCO, Bogotá, 2009) p. 429

<sup>284</sup> In some cases, this sense of the 'alien' nature of the politicians linked to the old oligarchy has condensed into myth: for instance, one regularly hears from Bolivians as fact that Goni could not *even* speak Spanish. He could in fact speak Spanish, but apparently with a very heavy American accent.

state needed to build up an organic connection with the populations it attempts to govern and represent, and this would require a process of decolonisation and indigenisation. At the heart of this would be a vindication of the 'political-epistemic insurgencies' of the indigenous majority and an end to the hegemony of western derived knowledge and forms of rationality.<sup>285</sup> In other words, it was not just a matter of reforming the state – building more central capacity or devolving powers – but of transforming its very nature according to a model that broke with Western orthodoxy regarding the very nature of the modern state.

Rather than civil society being made to conform itself with the state through coercive and repressive means, the state would be 'occupied' by civil society (understood as those representing the ways of being and doing practiced by the social majority). Through its hegemony over the popular and middle classes, the 'national-popular' bloc would integrate the state with civil society. In his inauguration address for his second term as Vice-President, García Linera described this process as the passage from the 'apparent state' of Zavaleta to the 'integral state' (Gramsci). This, he said, was about overturning 180 years of Bolivian history.<sup>286</sup>

In this context, it is necessary to restate the formulation of David Harvey used in the introduction – that this political project is simultaneously a material-ecological project. From the perspective of political ecology, a political project cannot be assessed apart from its socio-ecological features. Political projects and development strategies are comprised of definite forms and patterns of regulation for the appropriation of natural objects. In Bolivia, this linkage between state and political power and the appropriation of the country's natural resources has always been clear. We can think, to give one example, of the way in which the decline of the silver industry and the rise of the tin barons at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century helped to shift political power from Sucre to La Paz.

However, the particular feature of the present context is that it is not only the question of what and to whose benefit natural resources are exploited which is politicised, but the entire 'project' of developing Bolivia by unearthing its mineral and energy deposits. The MAS

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<sup>285</sup> Walsh, Catherine, Interculturalidad, plurinacionalidad y decolonialidad: Las insurgencias politico-epistemicas de refundar el Estado, *Tabula Rasa*, No. 9 July-December 2008, pp. 131-152

<sup>286</sup> García Linera, Álvaro, *Del Estado aparente al Estado integral: La construcción democrática del socialismo comunitario* (Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional, La Paz, 2010)

government is caught in the difficult position of pursuing a 'traditional' development policy - aimed at resolving the five major issues of Bolivian statehood which I adumbrated above - in a conjuncture in which environmental consciousness and movements, as well as experience of environmental damage itself, render such a policy increasingly contentious.

As the program of national development has progressed, it is precisely this *political* aspect of the form of the interaction between human societies and their environment which has been denied by the Bolivian government. The exploitation of Bolivian natural resources and environments, particularly mineral and energy deposits, is, for the government, a historic necessity. The only serious question is the political and distributional character of this exploitation. For Garcia Linera and Morales, the bolstering of the state and the occupation and integration of all national territory is a means of ensuring that the development of natural resources benefits the state and Bolivians. It is not a means of ending the exploitation of natural resources, in fact, precisely the opposite is the case. However, the present conflict over development in Bolivia exists in large part because such a standpoint is no longer sustainable. In this sense, the emergence of the right to develop discourse reflects the Bolivian government's recognition that *development itself* is now a contested norm. This is the new feature of politics in the Plurinational state

This is also why the goal of national development - of extending and bolstering the capacity of the Bolivian state to modernise Bolivian economy and society - has increasingly clashed with the Plurinational legal structure enshrined in the Bolivian constitution. In its concrete form, this contradiction expresses itself as the clash between a comprehensive, state led development project, reliant on the extractive industries, and an indigenous worldview promoting alternative development strategies grounded in the rights of nature and indigenous territorial sovereignty. I want to explore these tensions, and link them to my earlier remarks about the nature of the Bolivian state and the role of Evo Morales as its head. To do so, I am going to focus my attention on the most significant policy document so far produced by the MAS government - the 2006 National Development Plan (NDP).

In particular, I focus on the role mobilisation of natural resources plays in the government's attempt to tackle not only poverty but the regionally uneven social and economic development of Bolivian society. Rather than focus on the way in which the NDP diverges

from the 'neoliberal orthodoxy' of Morales' immediate predecessors, I focus on the NDP's prescriptions for integrating Bolivian territory and populations within the structures of the state. The NDP, in this sense, can be understood not only as a setting out of a new government's economic agenda of a government, but a critical analysis of how the Bolivian state is to exist in a conjuncture transformed by the emergence of indigenous power and the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s.

**ii. National Development: The Politics of Mobilising Resources and People in Contemporary Bolivia**

Even a cursory analysis of the 242 pages of the NDP reveals that the document is just as much about Bolivia's past as it is about its future. The long initial introduction and the introductions to each chapter and section locate the analysis and policies to be pursued by the MAS government within the broader trajectory of Bolivian history. The NDP is as much a critical engagement with the various development strategies the Bolivian state has pursued as it is the laying out of a new one.

The first thing to say is that while NDP obviously denounces the neoliberal policies of the government's predecessors (describing them as a hangover from colonial domination) and its effect on the persons and peoples of Bolivia, it strikes an optimistic tone throughout about the nature of the conjuncture the new government has inherited.

Bolivia exists in an excellent national and international setting: the government has the backing of the population; there is an economic cycle in which the prices of prime materials are increasing, and lastly, it can count on among the most significant reserves of hydrocarbons on South American, which will allow the accumulation of significant economic surpluses. The central challenge of the government is to use these resources in solving the demands that afflict the majority of society [my translation].<sup>287</sup>

As this passage makes clear, for the government, the legitimacy of the new government is as much an 'asset' of Bolivia as the hydrocarbon deposits. The fracturing of the relationship

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<sup>287</sup> República de Bolivia, Plan Nacional de Desarrollo: Bolivia digna, soberana, productiva y democrática para Vivir Bien. 2006

between state structures, populations and the resources of the land that emerged in the neoliberal period is to be replaced by a new harmony.

To diagnose the failures both of the period following the national revolution of 1952 and the neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s, the NDP blames what it calls the 'weakening' of the Bolivian state during both periods. In the case of the former, even though the post-revolutionary regime pursued policies intended to break the dependence on primary exports and promote 'development from within', it was unable to prevent the capture of state structures by traditional elites. National development became the development of state capitalism, which bolstered the hold of elites and solidified the effective exclusion of the majority of Bolivians. The national revolutionaries understood and wanted to overcome the effective exclusion of the majority of Bolivians from national life, but failed to break definitively with the colonial inheritance of the Bolivian state, meaning that they could never meaningfully challenge the patterns of social, political, economic and cultural discrimination that scarred Bolivian society. Deprived of its real bases of social support, the project of national revolution broke down and took with it the nucleus of the welfare state that had started to emerge.

The neoliberal age, for its part, weakened the state by effectively depriving it of any role in promoting national development or in administering the distribution of resources. As I suggested in Chapter 1, and as the NDP concedes, the 1980s and 1990s saw the proliferation of a variety of more or less isolated 'development projects', as connections between multilateral financial agencies, NGOs and local indigenous populations pursued development apart from the traditional structures of the Bolivian state. For the multilateral agencies, the exclusion of the state suited an ideological agenda committed to ensuring a central role for the market in resource allocation and development. The involvement of the state in development was considered a bureaucratic and costly hurdle to private investment in local or regional development projects. For the indigenous communities and NGOs, the Bolivian state represented an axis of discrimination and exclusion which could be circumvented by international financing. The Bolivian state, for its part, welcomed the multilateral investment

as a tool of national development in an age in which it had retreated from any notion of direct state-led economic development.<sup>288</sup>

The 'democratic and cultural revolution' requires the synthesis of both these approaches. In order to break with the model of dependent, export led development, the state is required to 'promote and lead' the redirection of national resources and wealth towards sectors and producers directed at 'internal accumulation'. At the same time, the state itself needs to undergo a process of decolonisation, stripping itself of the legacy of cultural and social discrimination, integrating previously excluded communities and their networks of production and distribution. The democratisation and cultural decolonisation of the structures of the Bolivian state creates the foundations for a new productive and sustainable stage of national development.

Although much of the NDP pertains to the question of key natural resources (or what it calls the 'strategic sectors of the economy'), only limited space – around half of one page – is given to the question of what is called 'environmental management'. This section criticises the 'uncontrolled exploitation' of natural resources in the neoliberal era and the enrichment only of 'certain groups' as a result. This has been replaced by what it calls a 'holistic vision' which recognises the need to 'take from nature that which is necessary for development, at the same time as protecting it'. It also commends a greater role for the state in regulating this process and in ensuring that damage to the natural world and vulnerable communities is minimised. The section on the development of the mining industry also stresses the need for community consultation and environmental licensing of mining operations, although, as I've already pointed out in Chapter 3, there are certainly cases where these protections have been of minimal consequence.

In its particulars, the economic aspect of the development strategy repeats the traditional goals of left and radical reformers in Bolivia. What distinguishes the political project as a whole, as the NDP explains, is that national development no longer implies the 'modernisation' of the indigenous majority, but instead will rely on the 'energy and capacity derived from our [Bolivia's] multiculturalism'. This forms the basis of the already emerging multicultural institutional order, in which the diverse populations and traditions of Bolivian

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<sup>288</sup> National Development Plan, p. 6

society are integrated into the society and mobilised to facilitate equitable development.<sup>289</sup>  
The age of development as 'imposition and authoritarianism' is over.<sup>290</sup>

Of course, as 8 years of Evo Morales' presidency has demonstrated, it takes more than affirmation to remove the spectre of imposition and authoritarianism from economic development. Battles over road construction projects, over the effects of mega-mining, deforestation, the effects of hydrocarbon extraction on water supply and numerous other environmental and social conflicts have shown that one can perhaps have national development, and one can perhaps have Plurinational politics and indigenous rights, but that having them both simultaneously presents challenges.<sup>291</sup> Stated bluntly, indigenous autonomy is, as Luis Tapia has noted, a barrier to the kind of development imagined by the NDP. Sovereignty over territories also implies governance of resources and environments. It is precisely this which is guaranteed by the constitution of 2009.

If the state's ultimate objective and *purpose* is to mobilise these resources, it also implies a political claim of supremacy over territory. The problem emerges, in other words, of pursuing the kind of state-led national development authorised by the NDP, without the nation-state. For Tapia, the government has resolved this tension by effectively overriding indigenous sovereignty – in violation of the constitution. Its use of the discourse of *vivir bien*, according to Tapia, is a crude attempt to legitimate an authoritarian developmentalist practice.

It is in this cauldron that the right to develop discourse emerges as *increasingly* separate from and antagonistic towards other discourses grounded in the notions of *vivir bien* and Pachamama. Its reference points are much more recognisably modernist and developmentalist. They do not draw as much on indigenous knowledges and practice. Instead, its basic coordinates are set out in the five features that I earlier argued were perennial elements of Bolivian nationalist projects. Its foundational claim is that Bolivia has a right to develop its natural resources in a fashion which best addresses the needs of the Bolivian people *and* that this development has been (and is being) thwarted by hostile foreign agencies, ranging from states to non-governmental agencies, sometimes in league with

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid p. 8

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>291</sup> This is a point made by, among other, Luis Tapia. See, for a brief discussion, Tapia, Luis, *Bolivia: La Relación entre el Gobierno, Los Pueblos y Los Campesinos Acumula Tensiones*, CETRI, November 25<sup>th</sup> 2013, available from <http://www.cetri.be/Bolivia-La-relacion-entre-el?lang=en>



fractions of the Bolivian population. This notion of frustrated development as a product of foreign or reactionary intrigue (rather than, for instance, structural inequalities in the global economy), as Gustavo Soto points out, is a recurring feature of Bolivian discourse reaching back into the days of the Rosca.<sup>292</sup> In this form, national development is part of a political struggle against the forces of imperialism, some of which today ‘hide’ their true goals in environmentalist language, a notion I will say more about in the next chapter. For the critics of this discourse, the notion of national development itself, particularly if that development is based on environmentally destructive practices, is a feature of Bolivia’s subordination, not a route out of it. In this sense, the advocates of the rights of nature and the right to develop clash not on the fact of Bolivia’s subordination, but on how that subordination manifests itself and the ways to confront it.

While the government pursued its national development agenda, it neglected to recognise, or perhaps did not wish to, that development itself was now being contested. It has assumed, perhaps not unfairly, that the reaction against neoliberalism was largely confined to distributional questions – what share of the spoils from exploitation of Bolivia’s natural resources should each party get? As such, it did not promise or want any dramatic overhaul of the basic structures of the extractive economy. However, what quickly emerged was that much of the base of MAS was generating critiques and political imaginaries which went far beyond another round of nationalist development. The subterranean intellectual traditions of the environmentalist scholars I examined in Chapter 2 are vital to this process.

As I will demonstrate in greater detail later, the fracturing of the social movement base that brought Morales to power, and the disarticulation of sections of these movements from ‘their’ government, has often happened under the pressure of this contradiction between national development and the promised multicultural and decolonised state. More fundamentally, this fracturing stands in for the deeper problem of Bolivia’s vulnerable ecosystems’ capacity to carry the weight of a new stage of development. At the moment, the relative stability in the economy and real progress in reducing poverty levels that Morales has overseen keeps this central contradiction at bay. But the government’s increasingly confrontational attitude to its indigenous and environmental opponents – threatening to

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<sup>292</sup> Soto S, Gustavo, *Neo desarrollismo y derechos indígenas en Bolivia*, Circulo Achocalla, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2013, available from <http://www.circuloachocalla.org/neo-desarrollismo-y-derechos-indigenas-en-bolivia/>

close down the critical media network and NGO Erbol because of its receipt of foreign funds, for instance – suggests an awareness of the volatility beneath the apparently stable and successful surface.<sup>293</sup>

The government has also pursued a strategy of splitting the movements that represent indigenous interests. CIDOB, the organisation that represents lowland indigenous communities which was crucial to the re-emergence of a clear indigenous voice in Bolivian national life, now has two leaderships, each claiming legitimacy over and against the other, one close to the government and the other oppositional. The government *of the social movements* is increasingly exerting a pressure *within* the organisations in whose name it rules.<sup>294</sup>

In this chapter, I have argued that the source of the disputes between the government and the social movements can be traced back to fundamental disagreements about the nature of the conjuncture Bolivia faced in 2005-6. For the principal players in MAS, a new round of nationalist development was called for, in which the historic aims of the revolution of 1952 would be completed and the Bolivian state and people liberated. These aims were brought into conflict with the efforts of social movements and environmentalists to imagine a new model of development consistent with the rights of nature and the indigenous majority, some of which was consonant with the traditional goals of national development and much of which was not.

In the following chapter, I address how the developmentalist goals of the government have been manifested in the Bolivian Amazon. In particular, I address the controversy over the proposed road construction through the TIPNIS national park. In this episode, the most politically damaging episode of Morales' time in office, the contradictions which I have sketched out here rushed to the surface. This placed the government on the intellectual and political defensive and forced them into elaborating new political postures and legitimating

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<sup>293</sup> *La Razón*, Evo Morales anuncian que se erradicaran las ONG que usan dineros del exterior para complotar contra el Gobierno, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2013, available from [http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/Evo-Morales-erradicaran-ONG-Gobierno\\_0\\_1966603380.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/Evo-Morales-erradicaran-ONG-Gobierno_0_1966603380.html)

<sup>294</sup> *Página Siete*, CIDOB divide por el Gobierno del Morales, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013, available from <http://www.paginasiete.bo/nacional/2013/9/25/cidob-dividida-gobierno-morales-1311.html>

discourses. In the wars over state-led capitalist development in the East, the government reached for a language grounded in the right to develop to defend its position.

## Chapter 5. 'We Are Not Park Keepers': Green Capitalism and Neo-Extractivism in the Bolivian Amazon

In the previous chapter, I argued that the policies pursued by Evo Morales can be understood as reiteration of previous political projects aimed at building state capacity and promoting territorial and political integration of Bolivia. In addition, I argued that, in the present conjuncture, pursuit of these aims cannot be divorced from the questions of development policy, environmental policy and indigenous rights. The ability of the state to integrate the whole of its territory in order to advance its political and economic goals implies a certain type of interaction of with indigenous communities, and other communities, in those territories. The environmental discourse which has taken root in Bolivia expresses the convergence, therefore, of indigenous territorial sovereignty and the rights of nature. In this chapter, I want to concretise and develop this argument by looking at the experience of 'national development' in the Bolivian Amazon. My goal here is to show how the government's increasingly militant developmentalist agenda has produced not only political conflict, but new discourses and intellectual encounters. My focus on the Bolivian Amazon is vital, since it is this area – with its world-famous and diverse ecosystems and various indigenous populations – which has generated the sharpest contradictions and the broadest fronts in the clash between the rights of nature and the right to develop.

The Amazon is also crucial since, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, Bolivia could be described geographically as an Amazonian country. Approximately 52% of Bolivian territory is covered by forested land of one type or another. There are many varieties of forest found in Bolivia, ranging from the humid tropical *selvas* of the departments of Beni, Pando and La Paz in the north of the country to the dry forests of the Chaco in the south-eastern stretches of the country. Figure 5 highlights the 48% of the land designated by the 1996 Forestry Law passed by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada as being 'permanently productive forestland' – that is, land suitable for forms of sustainable forestry that will preserve coverage, biodiversity and environmental services. As the map suggests, the vast majority, around 80%, of Bolivia's forested land is found in the departments of the northern and eastern lowlands, particularly Pando – which is almost entirely Amazonian – Beni and above all Santa Cruz.

Besides the Amazon rainforest proper, the seven typically designated forested regions are the Bajo Paragua and Guarayos, both shared between Santa Cruz and Beni, Chore of Santa

Cruz and Cochabamba, the premontane Amazon of Beni and La Paz and finally the extensive, dry Chiquitania of Santa Cruz. 68% of this land has been marked as suitable for sustainable forestry 'without restrictions', while 26% of areas are protected by the National Park scheme. Of the close to 28 million hectares designated as suitable for sustainable forestry without restrictions, 8.5 million were part of active forestry rights in 2010.

Forested lands are held in a number of property forms, including private, public, and collective arrangements. There are individuals with private property rights over forested areas. The state holds land under both the National System of Protected Areas (SERNAP) and land parcelled out in temporary forestry concessions to individuals or companies. The collective forms of ownership comprise either land titled to indigenous nations and peoples under the Native Community Lands (TCOs) system, or community property in which small owners have individual access and use to land titled in common.<sup>295</sup> Table 4.1 illustrates the distribution of current forestry rights covering areas greater than 200 hectares according to these various property forms. Titles or access rights of this type account for 98% of all the forested area under 'sustainable production'.

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<sup>295</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, Mecanismo Conjunto de Mitigación y Adaptación para el Manejo Integral y Sostenible de los Bosques y la Madre Tierra. August 2012

Table 4.1. Number and Area of Active Forestry Rights to 2010 (> 200 Hectares)

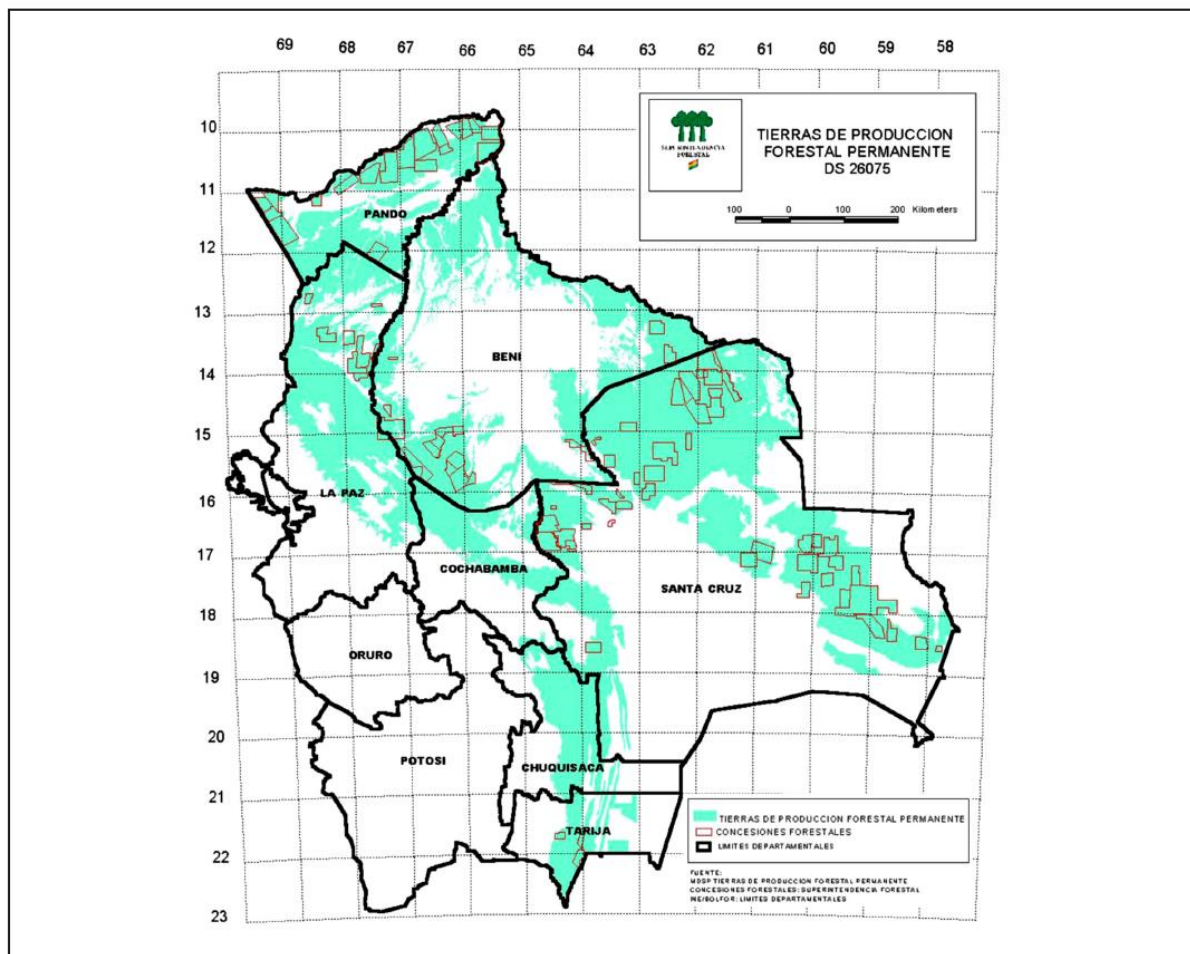
Property Type	No. of Grants	Area (ha)
Concessions of Public Hands to Businesses	51	3,880,774
TCO's	83	1,420,162
Private owners	261	1,411, 809
Campesino Communities	108	804, 278
Concessions to Local Social Associations (ASL)	20	473, 155
Contracts for Forestry in Public Hands	2	225,400
University/Research Grants	3	262,367
Total	528	8,507, 915

Source: Quevedo and Urioste <sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Quevedo, Lincoln and Urioste, José Luis, El Estado del Manejo Forestal en los bosques naturales tropicales de Bolivia, available from [http://www2.congreso.gob.pe/sicr/cendocbib/con4\\_uibd.nsf/630713E1F882F97D05257CC40073118C/\\$FILE/Quevado\\_Lincoln.pdf](http://www2.congreso.gob.pe/sicr/cendocbib/con4_uibd.nsf/630713E1F882F97D05257CC40073118C/$FILE/Quevado_Lincoln.pdf)

Figure 5. Permanently Productive Forestland



Source: Barrantes (2005)<sup>297</sup>

As the debate over the direction of travel of development and environmental policy under the Morales government has gained speed, particularly in the second Morales term (2010-2015), the politics of the Bolivian Amazon and the issue of forestry management and conservation have become increasingly contentious and central.

The crisis that threatened the government in 2011 over the construction of 177km of highway dissecting Indigenous Territory National Park Isiboro-Secure (TIPNIS) dramatised a broader conflict over government policy. My focus in this chapter is not solely on TIPNIS, but on how the conflict has illuminated the structural contradictions at the heart of the 'process of change' Bolivia is undergoing. In particular, I trace how the government's bruising albeit

<sup>297</sup> Barrantes, Roxana (ed), *La Política forestal en la Amazonia andina. Estudio de caso: Bolivia, Ecuador y Perú* (CIES, Lima, 2005)

short lived retreat over TIPNIS provoked an increasingly strident tone to emerge in which the right to develop discourse took on a new and important legitimating function.

To do this, I look in detail at two works: one produced by the office of the Vice-President, Álvaro García Linera, and a reply to this work by a former colleague of García Linera and critic of the Morales government, Raul Prada. My aim in this chapter is firstly to explain the theses of both books and their relationship to one another, and then to look at how the discourses of both authors maps onto wider debates about development policy and the present strategic objectives of the Bolivian state.

In the first section, my focus is on the relationship between the national government and the eastern lowlands since 1952. My argument is that while the revolutionary government had attempted to integrate the lowlands into national economic life, the eastern departments were generally sheltered from the political and land reforms introduced on the highlands. This background is vital, since a version of this argument became a decisive feature of the government's argument that the absence of 'state-led development' of this area had left the region politically and socially backward. In this fashion, the government's mobilisation of the natural resources of the Amazon would be conveyed as a 'historically progressive' move and its environmentalist critics as an agent of foreign reactionary intrigue.

In the second section, the background and details of the TIPNIS case are reviewed, in the context of an examination of García Linera's defence of the government's position. Here, I show that García Linera attempted to position the critics of the expansion of the state into the Amazon as either dupes or conscious allies of global capital. Portraying environmentalism as the 'face' of global capitalism in the Bolivian Amazon, García Linera transforms the pursuit of development into a struggle against those wish to preserve Bolivia's 'backwardness'. In response to this, in the third section, I address the work of Raul Prada Alcoreza and the concept of extractivism, which has become central to the debate over the government's development strategy. I argue that the government and its critics share a greater degree of common ground than is implied by some of the hot rhetoric deployed. This reflects the fact that the contradictions confronted are not only ideological and intellectual, but reflect stubborn features of Bolivian society and its development. The defence of the rights of nature



by environmental critics and the government's invocation of the right to develop both speak to aspects of a complex social dynamic that, in many ways, escapes both of them.

**i. The March Towards the East: Then and Now**

In the aftermath of the revolution in 1952, a key aim of the developmentalist state was the integration of the sparsely populated, isolated lowlands of the eastern and northern departments with the rest of the country. The principles of the agenda pursued after 1952 had already been established by nationalist military governments of the 1940s, who had been convinced of the need to expand the reach of the state within its territory by the experience of defeat in the war in the Chaco. Given the suitably triumphalist title of the 'march towards the east', the post-revolutionary government of Victor Paz sought volunteers from among the highlands *campesinos* for new colonisation ventures in the jungles and savannahs of the lowlands. This would solve simultaneously the apparent problems of 'overpopulation' and land scarcity on the *altiplano* and untapped resources and vacant territory in the east.<sup>298</sup>

The goal of these ventures was in part economic – the lack of effective contiguity between the Amazonian lowlands and the centres of national and economic life on the *altiplano* inhibited economic development of both areas. At the same time, political and geopolitical imperatives motivated attempts to integrate the lands of the east.<sup>299</sup> The inability of the Bolivian state to develop an effective presence or enact permanent occupation of the Amazon in particular had precipitated disastrous cessions of land to Peru and above all Brazil. Doubts about the ability of the La Paz governments to govern the distant stretches of land in the east had been at the centre of early opposition to the establishment of an independent Bolivian republic. Concerns over the absence or weakness of state institutions created doubts about the political-territorial viability of the Bolivian republic. The fact that the *majority* of the state's lowlands territory existed as effectively cut off from the rest of the country was viewed by post-revolutionary governments as an invidious legacy of the republican, liberal and military governments, seen as too busy practising clientalism and defending personal power bases to enact properly *national* development strategies.

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<sup>298</sup> Sandoval Arenas, Carmen Dunia, *Santa Cruz: Economía y Poder, 1952-1993* (FUNDACION PIEB, La Paz, 2003)

<sup>299</sup> Benton, Jane, *Agrarian Reform in Theory and Practice: A study of the Lake Titicaca region of Bolivia* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999) p. 52

A thoroughgoing integration and assimilation of the eastern lowlands into Bolivian national life would symbolise the departure of Bolivia from its permanently 'backward' economic and political life. Bolivia's emergence into authentic modern nationhood and statehood would be assured by a newly industrialising economy on the *altiplano*, the disinheritance of the mining oligarchs and *latifundios*, the bolstering of state institutions and state capacity particularly in the lowlands, and the effective occupation and mobilisation of all Bolivian territory.

The 1953 Agrarian Reform broke up the latifundios on the *altiplano* and in the valley regions. The principle of 'the land to those who work it', established firstly by peasant trade unions and the left had been absorbed into the programme of the MNR (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement) before their takeover in 1952. The wave of land occupations, particularly in Cochabamba, that followed the revolution in La Paz meant that the Agrarian Reform was, in many cases, recognising in law land titles that *campesinos* had already established in fact.<sup>300</sup>

The Agrarian Reform also created the INC (National Colonisation Institute) in order to facilitate and organise migration of highland *campesinos* to the east, and initially it did so for around 70,000 families. There were also efforts to attract immigrant farmers from Germany, Japan and Canada to the fertile *llanos*. In 1956, the government signed an agreement with the Japanese authorities to establish 4 Japanese 'colonies' in the eastern lowlands: Okinawa I, II, and III, and San Juan de Yapacani.<sup>301</sup> In 1962, the Inter-American Development Bank provided funding for a colonisation plan covering three lowland regions: the Alto Beni or northern La Paz, the Chapare of Cochabamba and the Yapacani-Puerto Grether in Santa Cruz.

Alongside these and other state directed, top-down attempts at internal colonisation, other long form processes put in motion by post-1952 governments redistributed population more evenly across Bolivian territory. Santa Cruz was a particular beneficiary from new migration, as the wealth generated from the growth of the oil and gas industry and expanding agribusiness drew large numbers from the declining economic centres of the *altiplano*. The collapse of the mining industry in the 1980s and the increasing pressure on rural incomes and

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<sup>300</sup> Carter, William E., Revolution and the Agrarian Sector, in Malloy, James M., and Thorn, Richard (eds), *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia since 1952* (University of Pittsburgh, London, 1972) p. 242

<sup>301</sup> Bazzaco, Edoardo, *Dinámica Demográfica, Flujos Migratorias y Proceso de Urbanización en el Departamento de Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Un estudio De Caso*, in Luzón, José Luis and Marcia Cardim (eds), *Problemas Sociales y Regionales en América Latina* (Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2009)

general urbanisation transformed Santa Cruz de la Sierra into the second largest city by population in the country. The percentage share of the entire population living in the east has tripled from 12% to around a third in the course of the last 50 years.<sup>302</sup>

One important factor to note is that while the Agrarian Reform generally weakened the economic and political power of the large land owners on the *altiplano* and the *vallés* – although not destroying it entirely – the same cannot be said of the process in the lowlands. While the Santa Cruz *hacendados* had feared that their fate would be the same as that of the large landowners in the west, the nationalist government was much more interested in promoting the capitalisation and modernisation of agriculture in the tropics. A thriving capitalist agriculture in the fertile lands of Santa Cruz could service the domestic market and help to reduce imports of food. The supply of credit to large farms willing to modernise and introduce technology in Santa Cruz promoted the same concentration of property that the revolutionary government was dismantling on the *altiplano*.<sup>303</sup>

## ii. States and Capital in the Amazon

This historical and political framework becomes important when we address contemporary debates around the policy of the Bolivian state in the tropics. It is necessary to understand that these debates about the proper role of the Amazon in Bolivian economic development are, in some respects if not all, re-activations of past struggles and contradictions. In other words, ecological and environmental contradictions have been mapped on to already existing contradictions in regional and national development policies. Understanding the interplay of ‘new’ ecological concerns with the historic strategic objectives of the Bolivian state helps us to get past some of the more Manichean distinctions that have emerged. These distinctions were most pronounced during the 2011 dispute over the construction of a highway connecting Cochabamba and the Amazonian department of Beni, part of which would have

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<sup>302</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *At a Critical Juncture of Crisis and Change: Regional Transformations in Bolivia*. December 2003

<sup>303</sup> República de Bolivia, *Informe de Situación del Desarrollo Sostenible en Bolivia: Evaluación del Sector Industrial Manufacturero*. September 2001, p. 39

dissected a central area of a major national park located in the valleys below the *Altiplano*.<sup>304</sup> Figure 6 provides an outline of the main events of the controversy.

Figure 6. Chronology of the TIPNIS controversy

Chronology of the TIPNIS controversy
April 2011 – House of Deputies approves the construction of the Villa-Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos highway
August 15 <sup>th</sup> 2011 – 2000 members of affected indigenous communities begin a 600km march to La Paz to demand the cancellation of the project
September 25 <sup>th</sup> 2011 – Violent police intervention in the town of Yucumo, aimed at ending the March, provokes outrage and comparison with previous episodes of repression.
October 25 <sup>th</sup> 2011 – Morales signs a law Short Law effectively ending the threat of construction through TIPNIS
October-December 2011 – March by indigenous populations –mainly from the colonised sections in the south - in support of the road construction allows Morales to amend the Short Law and begin a ‘consultation’ of the communities within the Park.
June 2012-April 2013 – Government conducts consultation with 69 communities in the park over the construction. Final results, disputed by some observers, reveal 80% support for the project among the inhabitants within the Park. Government announces construction will be delayed until after the 2014 Presidential elections.

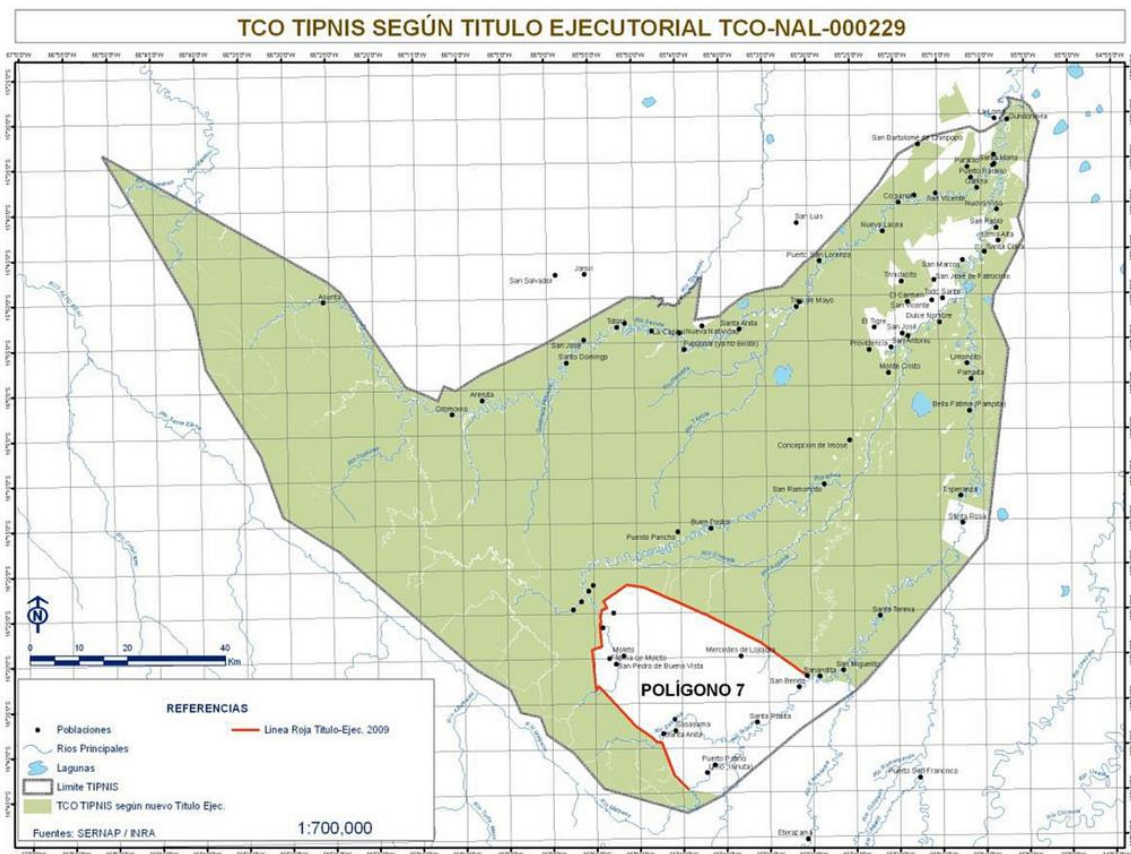
In 2011, in the aftermath of the government’s bruising confrontation with an alliance of environmentalists, indigenous communities and their allies over the project, Vice-President Álvaro Garcia Linera presented a new work, *Geopolitics of the Amazon: Hacienda-Patrimonial Power and Capitalist Accumulation*, which sought both to anatomise the conflict and defend the government’s economic development strategy. Garcia Linera insisted that the opposition

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<sup>304</sup> In this section, I have decided to intersperse presentation of the details of the conflict with Garcia Linera’s response to the government’s defeat. I have presented my argument in this fashion since my main objective is not to analyse the conflict, but to understand how the government, and Garcia Linera in particular, responded to the defeat and to relate this defence to the broader aims of the thesis.

to the route through TIPNIS – a map of which is shown in figure 7 - was motivated by a desire to prevent the road altogether, preserving the Santa Cruz meat processing industry’s monopoly control over cattle ranching in Beni. A link between Beni and Cochabamba would allow meat and other Amazonian products to pass directly from the northern departments to the highlands and valleys (see figures 8 and 9), cutting out the need for passing through Santa Cruz. The road proposed would run from Cochabamba to Beni and would also allow the state to create an effective presence in the Amazon, challenging the authority both of the local elites and the green and pro-indigenous NGOs who have entrapped indigenous communities in another layer of clientalism.

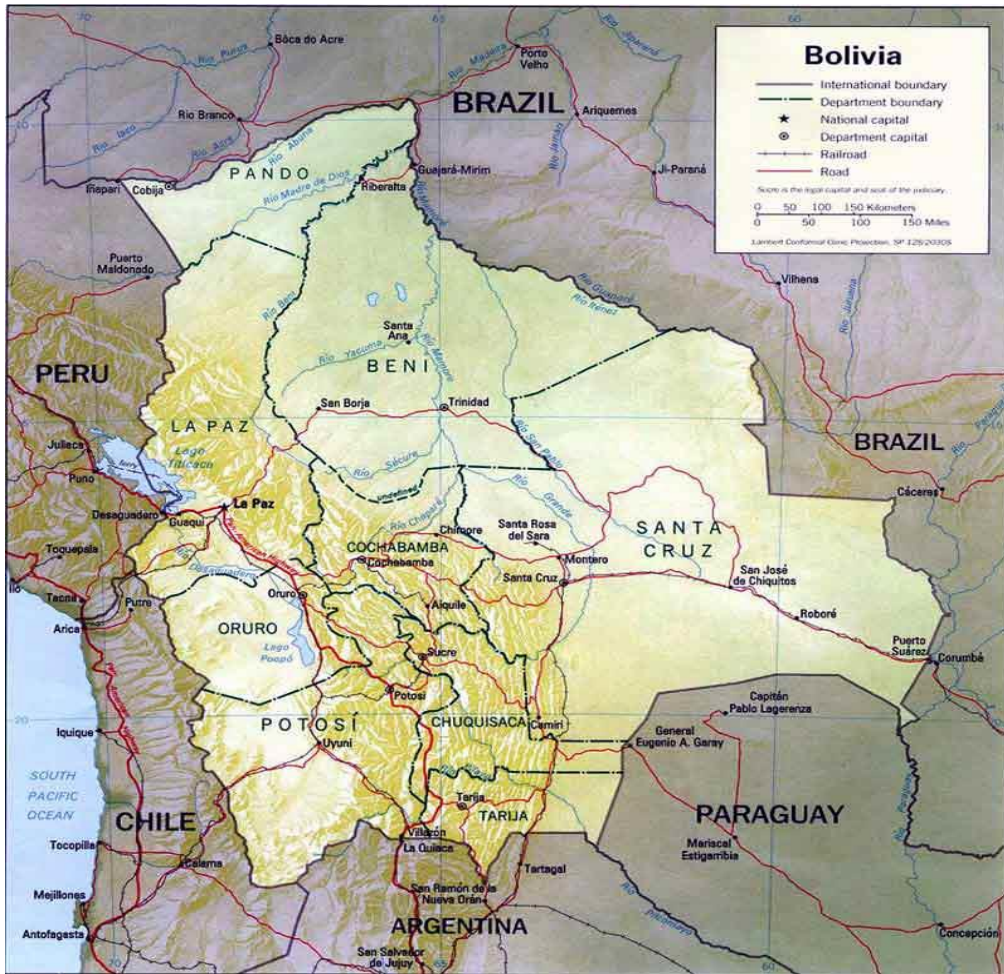
Figure 7. Map of TIPNIS



Source: Cambio Climatico (2011)<sup>305</sup>

<sup>305</sup> The important aspect to note here is the concentration of populations in the north-eastern section of the park. The section in the south of the park is marked out by the so-called ‘red line’, beyond which the cocaleros are not permitted. Critics noted that the proposed route would lead straight through this section and exit in the north section of the park. This, they argued, would enable the further expansion of the cocaleros beyond the red line into the heart of the park.

Figure 8. Principal Roads through Bolivia



Source: SoyMapas (2010)<sup>306</sup>

<sup>306</sup> The important aspect to note here is the lack of a major road between Cochabamba and Trinidad.



Figure 9. Stages of the Proposed Villa-Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos Road



Source: Pagina Siete (2014)

Opponents of the proposal suspected that the road formed part of IIRSA, a Brazilian funded infrastructure project designed to strengthen the integration of South American economies. Garcia Linera denied that, pointing out a road linking the valleys and the Amazon has been seen as a goal of Bolivian national development since the Revolution. When the 8<sup>th</sup> Indigenous March - led by CIDOB and the leaders of indigenous territories inside TIPNIS - departed from

Trinidad in Beni to La Paz on August 15<sup>th</sup> 2011 in an effort to prevent construction, it won support from highland indigenous groups such as The National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ). This unity was established primarily on the grounds that the government's attempt to begin construction of the road without undertaking a *consulta previa* (a form of binding prior consultation required by the constitution for any development project in an ancestral land) endangered indigenous rights *in general*. In this sense, at the height of the TIPNIS struggle, the issue of the road itself became secondary as a *source of opposition* to the government.

The reckless and dismissive approach that had been taken to indigenous rights – and the apparent violation of the constitution that is the foundational political achievement of the Morales government – provoked the greatest resentment. A government that had rested its political legitimacy on its break with the past in terms of the treatment of indigenous communities by the 'nation-state' appeared to be acting very similarly to those previous governments. According to the assessment of Paola Martinez, it was at this juncture that the social movements began to focus their disagreements with the government not only on MAS but on the person of Evo Morales, something that until then they had been reluctant to do.<sup>307</sup> A violent police attack on the marchers' encampment at the Beni town of Chaparina using tear gas and mass arrests escalated the crisis for the government. The rapturous welcome of the indigenous marchers by the citizens of La Paz when they had completed their march demonstrated that the issue had tapped into wider layers of discontent. Morales announced the suspension of the construction of the road the following day. The exact source of the order for the clampdown in Chaparina is still to be determined, although opposition claims have attempted to link Morales or the office of the Vice-President directly with the order.

When Morales reluctantly signed the law proclaiming TIPNIS an 'untouchable' zone in October 2011, it was nevertheless made clear by Government Ministers and MAS deputies and senators that the issue was not finished.<sup>308</sup> Within a few months, another march towards La Paz by representatives of communities inside TIPNIS in favour of the road - close to the

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<sup>307</sup> Martinez, Paola, *Bolivia frente a la IIRSA: Entre el extractivismo y la integración* (CLASCO, Buenos Aires, 2013), p. 13

<sup>308</sup> Los Tiempos, El Presidente promulga la ley corta del TIPNIS, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011, available from [http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/economia/20111025/el-presidente-promulga-la-ley-corta-del-tipnis\\_146889\\_303848.html](http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/economia/20111025/el-presidente-promulga-la-ley-corta-del-tipnis_146889_303848.html)



cocaleros who have already colonised a section of land previously part of the national park<sup>309</sup> – gave Morales the opportunity to re-open the question of the road. For them, the road was key to promoting access to healthcare and education for isolated communities within the park. The development, according to one representative of these communities, had been blocked by ‘ecological extremists’ who cared more about ‘plants and animals than the indigenous’.<sup>310</sup> In the meantime, the government rejected calls – including from former UN Ambassador under Morales, Pablo Solon – to countenance a more expensive route for the road that avoided the heart of TIPNIS.

Instead, a new bill was signed to undertake the *consulta previa* of the communities inside the national park, something which the government had initially felt it did not need to do.<sup>311</sup> Taking place between July and December 2012, the government announced on December 7<sup>th</sup> that 55 of the 69 communities consulted within the park had approved of the construction of the road. Three had rejected the proposed route but wanted the road, and the other 11 had formally boycotted and attempted to block the consultation process.<sup>312</sup> Garcia Linera, who had been key to building support among communities within the park, announced that the government intended to ‘respect the will of the people’ and construct the road. Nonetheless, despite this formal acceptance of the road, the likely start date and completion of the road remains unclear. The government had already cancelled its contract with the Brazilian contractor to construct the road after cost overruns and delays on the sections of the road outside TIPNIS.

Beginning with an account of arguments he has presented elsewhere, Garcia Linera’s *Geopolitics* attempts to situate the crisis caused by the TIPNIS affair within the wider context of Bolivia’s ‘democratic and cultural revolution’.<sup>313</sup> The election of Evo Morales to the

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<sup>309</sup> Much of the criticism of the government’s action suggested that the whole project reflected an attempt by Evo, a former cocalero himself, to pursue the sectional interests of the coca producers who wish to expand deeper into the national park.

<sup>310</sup> Eju!, Anular la ley corta del Tipnis es el objetivo de marchistas afines a Evo, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011, available from <http://eju.tv/2011/12/anular-la-ley-corta-del-tipnis-es-el-objetivo-de-marchistas-afines-a-evo/>

<sup>311</sup> For Garcia Linera, while the constitution mandated consultation for the use of natural resources, it did not mandate it for the construction of roads.

<sup>312</sup> La Razón, En el Tipnis 55 comunidades apoyan vía por el parque; el Gobierno anuncia construir una carretera ecológica, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012, [http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/Tipnis-comunidades-Gobierno-construir-carretera\\_0\\_1738026274.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/Tipnis-comunidades-Gobierno-construir-carretera_0_1738026274.html)

<sup>313</sup> García Linera, Álvaro, *Geopolítica de la Amazonia: Poder hacendal-patrimonial y acumulación capitalista* (Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional, La Paz, 2013) p. 8

Presidency reflected the *penetration* of state institutions by organised sections of civil society representing the vast majority of Bolivians. The ascendance of this new hegemonic social block to state power has effected a shift in the *class basis* of the Bolivian state. In place of the racialised and exclusionary class rule of the neoliberal technocracy, the Bolivian state has become an instrument of popular will and self-government at all levels. At the heart of this process of change has been the extension of true citizenship to the indigenous majority, including recognition of their full sovereignty over traditional lands, and a decisive break with neoliberal capitalism.

The historic nature of the cultural-democratic revolution initiated by the MAS government was certain to produce a reactionary backlash. It is in this context – the inevitable counter-revolution – that Garcia Linera attempts to situate the TIPNIS struggle and other criticisms of the government’s agenda. The particularly regrettable feature of the TIPNIS struggle, for Garcia Linera, is that it reflects the growth of counter-revolutionary agency within the heart of the revolutionary camp.

The tragic path of history unfolds in such a way that the counter-revolution can come from within a faction of the revolution’s own constructors, who without necessarily intending to, but as a result of an exacerbation of their own corporate, regional or sectoral particularism, and by not taking into account the overall development of the correlation of social forces at a national and international level, end up defending the interests of the Right and undermining their own revolutionary process. This is what happened with the so-called “march for TIPNIS” [my translation].<sup>314</sup>

Garcia Linera moves on this from warning to a broader examination of the main actors – local, regional, national and international – in the Bolivian Amazon. He begins by recounting the fact that the colonial administration centred around the mining concerns on the *altiplano* and the agriculture of the valleys had relatively little reach into the eastern tropics. This absence of effective state institutions in these regions survived into the republican era. The vacuum produced by the absence of the state in the Amazon promoted the growth of patrimonial relationships between indigenous communities, urban communities and the local elites.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 14

Garcia Linera paints a picture of the Amazon and the tropical lowlands as home to a social structure in which the indigenous communities and rural and urban working class are in thrall to a collection of powerful and wealthy families – large landowners, timber interests, rubber interests – who have been able to capitalise on the absence of the national state, and use their monopoly of economic and social power to effectively ‘govern’ the Amazonian states as personal fiefdoms.

Additionally, while the subaltern classes *on the altiplano* responded to the absence, inefficiency or cruelty of the state by creating institutions of popular and collective democracy – trade unions, peasant collectives, popular political parties – no similar institutions emerged among the indigenous or rural workers in the eastern lowlands.

...In the Amazonian region, things happened very differently [than they did on the *altiplano*]. The despotic hacienda system remains, and neither the indigenous organisations, nor the *campesinos*, nor the workers of recent emergence, have been able to create an organisational or discursive counter-power capable of breaking this haciendal-patrimonial power [my translation].<sup>315</sup>

In this constellation of local and regional actors, Garcia Linera argues that the growth of the influence of NGOs among indigenous peoples in the Amazon has created another layer of ‘clientalism’. In light of the source of the majority of their funding, Garcia Linera prefers that NGOs be known as OOGs – Organisations of Other Governments. He accuses the Indigenous Confederation of East and Amazon Bolivia (CIDOB), the main group representing lowland and Amazonian indigenous groups and one of the main protagonists in the fight over TIPNIS, of receiving funds from various American sources, in particular USAID. In 2013, after accusing the agency of ‘conspiring against Bolivia’, the Morales government expelled USAID – with its \$50 million dollar Bolivian budget – from the country.<sup>316</sup>

According to Garcia Linera, the matrix of local, regional, and transnational actors in the Amazon has ensured that the region remains cut off from the Bolivian state. The absence of the Bolivian state, Garcia Linera argues, does not mean that exploitation of the Amazon’s

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 26

<sup>316</sup> BBC News Online, US Protests against Bolivia’s decision to expel USAID, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-América-22370494>

resources does not occur – a belief he imputes to the government’s critics over TIPNIS – but instead ensures that capitalist accumulation occurs exclusively under the auspices of the local elites and transnational actors. He points to the extensive and lucrative industries that exist already in TIPNIS, including luxury tourism, logging and the collection of reptiles for skin-activities that undermine the image, spread by environmentalist NGOs and opportunistic elements of the indigenous communities inside TIPNIS, of a pristine “virgin forest”. These environmentalist critics of the development through TIPNIS were attempting to ensure that the Amazon would continue to be an object of northern environmental ‘management’. In this sense, the best friends of global capitalism in the Amazon are those derailing the attempts of the Bolivian state to integrate the Amazonian regions with the rest of the country. Only by subjecting the Amazon to the *sovereignty of the Plurinational state and its democratic structures* can the forests be properly conserved.<sup>317</sup>

As I argued in the previous chapter, this vision of state sovereignty implied a particular kind of relationship between national and ‘local’ political structures, particularly the various forms of indigenous autonomies guaranteed by the constitution. The dispute between MAS and those social movements at the heart of the opposition to the highway construction reflected a concrete expression of this contradiction in the ‘process of change’. For its part, since the initial retreat in 2011, the government has conducted what may be described as a campaign of revenge against leaders and organisations involved in the opposition to the highway construction, particularly CIDOB. In July 2013, arrest warrants were issued for three CIDOB leaders, Adolfo Chavez, Fernando Vargas and Pedro Nuni. The three leaders were accused of – and admitted – horsewhipping Gumerindo Pradel, a leader (‘cacique’) of a group which had been supportive of the highway in the San Pablo community of TIPNIS on June 22. Pradel had attempted to call a meeting of community leaders in an attempt to displace Chavez, Vargas and Nuni from their positions of leadership. The three accused Pradel of violating community norms and planning their assassination. After the whipping, Pradel was forced to sign a document committing himself to never speaking publicly in favour of the highway.

After the government issued an arrest warrant on the grounds of attempted murder – sparking suspicion that the incident was being used to punish individuals who had damaged

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<sup>317</sup> AGL, *Geopolítica*, p. 66

the government – a debate erupted over whether punishments of this type were the prerogative of local indigenous authorities, or whether only the Bolivian state had the authority to administer justice. The three accused refused to make themselves available to the judicial authorities, as they regarded the method of punishment consistent with indigenous customs and believed it was therefore outside the jurisdiction of the state.

The former Bolivian human rights ombudsman under Morales, Waldo Albarracin defended the public whipping as consistent with indigenous norms, and pointed out that previous leaders had been similarly treated without provoking state sanction.<sup>318</sup> The three took refuge in the headquarters of an indigenous organisation in the department of Beni, and the government's threats to retrieve the leaders brought threats of a strike by the local Civic Committee in Beni. In October 2013, a Constitutional Tribunal lifted the arrest warrants on the three leaders while the case was being heard by the constitutional court, allowing the three leaders to emerge from their seclusion in Beni.<sup>319</sup>

Garcia Linera also suggested that CIDOB was reliant on international funding for some of its activity and that its leadership therefore represented a vector of 'foreign influence' in Bolivia. It is indeed true that funds from a variety of international actors including financial institutions and western NGOs were crucial to financing the organisational infrastructure – including a network of offices and full-time leaders- of CIDOB. One obvious problem, however, with Garcia Linera's insinuation that CIDOB has become an agent of imperialist manoeuvring is that the activity and demands of CIDOB have hardly altered since the group's formation in the 1980s.

Their main concern, as Donna Lee Van Cott explains, has been to protect the titling of indigenous lands and ensure indigenous communities have control over the use of natural resources within their territory. This posture frequently brought CIDOB into conflict with the neoliberal governments of the 1980s and 1990s. The 1<sup>st</sup> March of the indigenous people from the lowlands for Land and Dignity – conducted at the height of the neoliberal reforms – called for government recognition of collective titles to ancestral lands, at a time when these lands

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<sup>318</sup> *La Razón*, Agresión a Pradel abre debate: Justicia Ordinaria o Comunitaria, 12 July 2013, available from [http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/Agresion-Pradel-Justicia-Ordinaria-Comunitaria\\_0\\_1868213213.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/Agresion-Pradel-Justicia-Ordinaria-Comunitaria_0_1868213213.html)

<sup>319</sup> *La Razón*, TC admite recurso y deja en suspenso proceso y ordenes de apremio contra los dirigentes indígenas Vargas, Chávez y Nuni, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013, available from [http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/TC-indigenas-Vargas-Chavez-Nuni\\_0\\_1921007966.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/nacional/TC-indigenas-Vargas-Chavez-Nuni_0_1921007966.html)

were under threat from expanding ranching, timber production and agro-business. This and other forms of pressure from below were enough to force reforms that created the TCOs and established a degree of indigenous autonomy in ancestral lands in the lowlands.<sup>320</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> March from the lowlands in 2002 for a Constituent Assembly reflected and popularised a growing call for a restructuring and democratisation of the state. As Patricia Chavez explains, while the struggles of indigenous communities on the *altiplano* and the *vallés* were crucial, the movement in or *from* the lowlands had special significance:

The marches from the East – marches to the seat of government through roads that showed the precariousness of the inter-regional and inter-provincial road network in the country - grabbed the collective imagination as a living depiction of the tough paths that needed to be overcome in the politics of the relationship between the people and the national and departmental governments.<sup>321</sup>

The terrain created by the indigenous lowland mobilisations was vital to the growth of the rebellious social movements across the country that led to the election of Evo Morales in 2005. It was the indigenous movements of the Amazon themselves that highlighted the failures of the La Paz elites to address the needs of the people of the entire country, particularly those in the sparsely populated Amazonian departments of Beni and Pando. They dramatised the exclusion of most Bolivians from the political system and suggested an alternative in the form a constituent assembly. This mobilisation of the lowland indigenous peoples has carried a particular historical weight in Bolivian national life, something the fight of TIPNIS amply demonstrated. In this sense, the opposition of *some* of the indigenous communities represented by CIDOB to the road through TIPNIS can hardly be described as opportunistic or suspicious since it conforms to a historic pattern of activity.<sup>322</sup>

Garcia Linera's attempts to recast defence of indigenous lands or rejection of unsustainable extraction as an expression of reactionary intrigue thus seem, at least in the case of CIDOB, curiously ahistorical. As I explain in the next section, one reason Garcia Linera pursues this weak argument against CIDOB is that, for him, extraction-led development and the

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<sup>320</sup> Chávez, Patricia and Mokrani, Dunia, La Dinámica Instituyente de los Movimiento Sociales en Bolivia, Documentacion Social, January-March 2009

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 33

<sup>322</sup> Van Cott, Donna Lee, From Movements to Parties, pp. 60-62

mobilisation of natural resources is not a 'choice' that confronts Bolivia. It is an inevitable feature of Bolivian society in its current stage of historical development. In this sense, critics – knowing this to be the case – must either be pursuing other aims (or the aims of others) under the guise of environmentalism or they are hopeless romantics.<sup>323</sup>

What this position missed is that the opposition mobilised by the social movements did not only represent their objection to the project or to the government's belligerent stance in relation to consultation, but to the worldview motivating a project such as TIPNIS – 'developmentalism'. As Adolfo Chavez, leader of CIDOB at the time of the crisis, explains, the indigenous communities were well aware of the 'international reputation' of the government for 'defence of Mother Earth'. This 'double discourse' wished to cast the defenders of TIPNIS as 'traitors' for defending the same values which Evo would eloquently proclaim at the United Nations.<sup>324</sup>

### iii. Extractivism and the Fate of Bolivia

In the final section of *Geopolitics*, Garcia Linera addresses himself – with varying success – to the elements of the present conjuncture in Bolivia and Latin America as a whole, of which the TIPNIS crisis was a symptom. In particular, he attempts to deal with the question of 'extractivism' and what role the Bolivian state should play in the protection or appropriation of Bolivian natural resources and environment as it pursues development goals. Maristella Svampa offers the following definition of extractivism as it has developed across Latin America:

...a pattern of accumulation based on the over-exploitation of largely non-renewable natural resources, in addition to the expansion of frontiers towards territories previously considered "non-productive".<sup>325</sup>

For Svampa, the new extractivism is not a political destiny but a choice informed by a civilisational horizon. It is a choice occasioned by the subordination of Latin America in the

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<sup>323</sup> One can also safely assume that the headquarters of the party of hopeless romantics is located somewhere outside Bolivia.

<sup>324</sup> BoliviaPlurinacional, VIII Marcha Indígena: La Defensa del TIPNIS unió a toda Bolivia, No. 4, Mach 2012, p.2

<sup>325</sup> Svampa, Maristella, *Extractivismo neo-desarrollista y movimientos sociales: Un giro ecoterritorial hacia nuevas alternativas?*, in Lang, Miriam and Mokrani, Dunia (eds), *Más Allá del Desarrollo* (Abya-Yala, Quito, 2011) p. 184

global division of labour, but *one to which there are alternatives*. The new period of extraction under the left governments of Latin America, particularly in Bolivia and Ecuador, reflect their pursuit of one set of political and social objectives over another. Svampa and other environmentalist critics' assertion of the existence of choice in development strategy is important to stress.

As she points out, following Enrique Leff, the new extractivism under the developmentalist governments of the new left produces an 'environmentalisation' of the struggles of indigenous communities. The struggle for land has converged with demands for access to and control over the 'common goods' of the environment. Defence of the rights of nature and the rights of human beings who pay the cost of environmental destruction have become intertwined. In the case of the Bolivian government, this results in a dilemma between the rights of the new activist state to implant itself in the development process, and the right of indigenous communities to say 'No' to extractive industries.<sup>326</sup>

For his part, Garcia Linera starts off on "so-called extractivism" by attempting to establish that all modes of production – that is, a particular ensemble of economic and social relations corresponding to a particular level of development of the means of production – are distinguished by the manner in which the human beings within it relate to nature.<sup>327</sup> In all cases, human beings must transform nature in order to reproduce themselves socially. What distinguishes capitalism as a mode of production is a specific standpoint with respect to nature. While in pre-capitalist societies, the materials of nature are seen as use-values – that is, objects to be appropriated in order to fulfil a human need or desire – in capitalism, natural objects become exchange values, the 'material vehicles of profit'.<sup>328</sup>

A component of each mode of production, including capitalism, is a particular technical form of the relationship between human beings and nature. This includes both the tools and productive forces available for transforming nature and the relative complexity of the transformation taking place. These complexities can range from the simple extraction of primary materials such as wood, rubber or tin; industrial or artisanal processing of these materials, or, at the higher stage of development, the creation of new primary materials in

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p. 189

<sup>327</sup> García Linera, *Geopolítica*, p. 101

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, p. 99



the forms of ideas and symbols which are then ‘worked on’ to establish new levels of complexity.

The upshot of Garcia Linera’s logic is that, like other current and former developing countries, Bolivia’s place in the international division of labour within the global capitalist system confines it to the extraction of primary materials. The only real political choice is over the *role of the state* in organising and configuring this extraction and how to *distribute the wealth* it generates.<sup>329</sup> While other regions and countries previously confined to the role of primary exports - such as China, and to some extent Brazil and Mexico - have managed to climb the scale of complexity in their transformation of nature – that is, shift their role in the international division of labour – they have nonetheless failed to escape the global capitalist system. The struggle for socialism, for Garcia Linera, is the movement to strengthen the tendencies and movements ‘communitising’ the means of life and production, not for a new division of labour within global capitalism.

Garcia Linera thus charges the critics of the Bolivian government’s extractivism with confusing the struggle against capitalism with the struggle against a particular *technical system for the processing of nature*.<sup>330</sup> What is called ‘extractivism’ is thus a possible feature of all societies, capitalist and otherwise, and so its presence or absence cannot be a measure of the ‘process of change’ Bolivia is undergoing.

One of the most prominent of the critics Garcia Linera addresses in *Geopolítica* is Raul Prada Alcoreza – his former colleague in the *Comuna* group. Prada’s response to Garcia Linera, the *Misery of Geopolitics*, links the issues of TIPNIS, the Amazon to the wider question of extractivism in Bolivia and across the continent. Prada accuses Garcia Linera of mobilising an outdated and reductionist variant of orthodox Marxism in defence of the government’s economic policies. Despite the communitarian-socialist ‘horizon’ of the Bolivian government, its policies are ensuring global capital’s ability to appropriate Bolivia’s natural resources at prices that do not reflect the social-environmental costs to Bolivians.

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<sup>329</sup> In this fashion, Garcia Linera confines the causes of the collapse of neoliberal governance within these parameters

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, p. 107

The reliance of Bolivia on extractivist activities is not an automatic expression of its location in an international division of labour, but the outcome of a complex articulation (interaction or appropriation) between a particular form of economic activity and the *Estado rentista* (rentier state). The state *appropriates* extractivist economic practices and attempts to direct and structure them in order to serve its own strategic aims. This creates a vicious cycle of dependency between, on the one level, the state and the extractivist activities, and on the other, between the national economy and the international markets that consume primary materials.<sup>331</sup>

The distinction between classic extractivism of the colonial or republican era – or the neoliberal era - and what Eduardo Gudynas has called the ‘neo-extractivism’ of the new governments of the left in Latin America is that that the degree of state control is greater and that there is more redistribution of the proceeds of extraction. Prada claims that these are ‘conjunctural’ rather than ‘structural’ modifications of the development model that cohered under liberal and neoliberal regimes.

Crucially for Prada, extractivism in the global south is part of an attempt to resolve the crisis of global capitalism, helping to locate and integrate new potential sources of profit through dispossession of commonly or publically owned natural wealth. While the concept of modes of production and the technical forms of labour are part of the historical background they cannot, like they do for Garcia Linera, account for the specific set of practices that define extractivism. Neither can they explain the cycle of rebellion and resistance that each new round of ‘predatory’ capitalism provokes.

We are witnessing in Latin America an explosion of the struggles of people and communities against the extractivism of big mining and the exploitation of hydrocarbons. These struggles are connected to the defence of water and of life, to the defence of water sheds and communities, from those who suffer the contamination. These conflicts can be explained as the result and consequence of a mode of development, of predatory and contaminating forms of exploitation, of the

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<sup>331</sup> Prada Alcoreza, Raúl, *Miseria de la Geopolitica*, 2013, available from <http://www.rebellion.org/docs/157961.pdf>, p. 18

use of intensive and expansive technologies that cause the loss of soils on a massive scale [my translation].<sup>332</sup>

In a direct reference to the Garcia Linera's work, Prada ridicules the notion that all societies are 'extractivist' because they extract resources. This reduces the 'concept of extractivism to the verb "to extract"'.<sup>333</sup> Nonetheless, Prada's own polemic betrays a certain hesitancy on this question. After criticising Garcia Linera's 'frivolity' on this point, he uses a three-tiered typology of extractivisms derived from Uruguayan ecologist Eduardo Gudynas, the last of which Gudynas calls 'indispensable extractivism'. This indispensable extractivism is the final stage of a transition away from the predatory extractivism that now dominates the economies of much of Latin America. It describes those extractivist activities which are genuinely necessary and made to conform to social and environmental imperatives, and which are directly linked to local and regional – as opposed to international – markets.

Given this, it is not entirely clear what the real, effective difference is between Garcia Linera's claim that extractivism is a technical form of labour present in all societies and Prada's acceptance of the idea of some kind of *base level* of extractivism. Despite ridiculing it as patently false, Prada seems to repeat Garcia Linera's claim that extractivism is not an independent concept, but part of an ensemble of concepts necessary to describe all possible forms of economic organisation. Even the term he uses to name the end point of the transition he envisions – what he calls *postextractivism* – suggests the presence of a trace of extractivist practices in any feasible social order. That is, while one can agree with Prada's curt dismissal of Garcia Linera's rejection of extractivism as a worthy concept at all, there are clearly conceptual boundaries that still need to be properly traced.

The route out of extractivism requires, for Prada, a structural shift in the economy of the kind that the Bolivian government has failed to initiate. He calls for a radical programme including nationalisation of all the extraction industries and the removal of all mining, forestry and hydrocarbon concessions from transnational companies. This would allow the state to fully integrate the environmental costs of natural resources production, raising the price of these goods for potential buyers and reducing pressure on eco-systems and resource taps. This

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<sup>332</sup> Prada Alcoreza, Raúl, *Miseria de la Geopolitica*, p. 17

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16

would create the conditions for a de-linking of the national economy from international markets, replacing them with national and regional markets, promoting the integration of all regional economies, with a drive towards integrating local agricultural production and urban populations. All of this would involve the full participation of workers, indigenous communities and urban populations. This is the plan, he claims, that is envisioned in the Constitution of the Plurinational State, with its call for 'comprehensive and participatory planning' of the Bolivian economy.<sup>334</sup>

As such, despite the apparent diversions in their economic prescriptions for development in Bolivia, both Prada and Garcia Linera envisage a significant and integrating role for the Bolivian state. Prada's vision is not one of a state stripped of its capacity, institutional dynamism or territorial expanse. Certainly this part of Garcia Linera's critique of the 'left environmentalists' – that they wish to see the Bolivian state reduced to a dilapidated rump and its people being employed as 'park keepers' of the Amazon by foreign governments and NGOS – does not seem to hold. That said, one can detect a tension in Prada's ambitious programme of an economy radically decoupling itself from global markets and setting about extensive planning to fulfil its own needs through democratically controlled, ecologically sound production. Namely, what would the environmental costs be of the kind of development inside Bolivia – telecommunications, energy, transport, educational and so on - that would be required to achieve such a programme? How would a state that had broken off links with international capital in the abrupt sense Prada calls for stave off institutional collapse and decline while initiating this extensive redirection of social life? In this sense, Garcia Linera's objection that the Bolivian state needs resources in order to have capacity to act at all – whether it be to preserve Bolivia's natural resources or unsustainably deplete them – seems important to uphold.

Prada himself makes a version of this argument in his response to the TIPNIS affair. He points out that if the government was concerned merely with integration of the country and improving state presence in the Amazon, it should have been far more open to alternative routes proposed that would have connected Villa Tunari and Beni but circumnavigated the heart of TIPNIS. The National Service for Protected Areas (SERNAP) produced just such a

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid, p. 20

design that skirted the border of the park, but the government vetoed it on the grounds of cost, despite the fact that the Brazilian government suggested its willingness to finance different more expensive routes if it preserved the project.<sup>335</sup> The fact that the government failed to consider other routes is the best evidence of other reasons for wanting a highway through TIPNIS itself.

Moreover, both agree *in principle* that a central goal of Bolivian economic policy – whether we call it ‘national development’ or an alternative to development – should be to displace foreign *control* of Bolivian development. The MAS government has not made an attempt to remove trans-nationals nor reduce the scale of their involvement in Bolivia’s extractive industries. Nonetheless, as even Eduardo Gudynas and other critics concede, a substantially broadened role for the state in directing investment and disbursements of income has *shifted the terrain of the relations between state and capital*.

While Prada can contend that the ‘rentier State’ has simply been renovated for a new era, this ignores the way in which the ‘process of change’ *reconfigures the historical and political terrain* on which it operates, sometimes in ways its protagonists do not fully understand or intend. A conjuncture is comprised of a dynamic and shifting set of relations and practices in a particular time and space, none of which are ‘set apart’ from the rest. There is no *simple* return to the policies of the developmentalist state, for the reason that the conditions – social, political, economic and geopolitical – upon which that model emerged no longer hold. The policies of the MAS government may share *characteristics* of previous development models, but it cannot be a clear recapitulation of them. This matters if we want to think not only of how to categorise historically and politically the policy agenda of Morales government, but also how we judge individual measures that it takes.

In this specific sense, it is not enough to note the continuities between the MAS government’s economic policy and prior governments, without also noting the influence of the much older strategic national and international objectives of the Bolivian state. Both Garcia Linera and Prada’s focus on global capitalism fail to capture the mechanisms through which even a ‘radical’ government can inherit a whole set of institutional and historical imperatives. The government’s pursuit of historic national integration objectives such as the assimilation of the

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 32

Amazon, or its irredentism in the form of repeated calls for a return of the long lost 'route to the sea' reflect how these state imperatives gain their own logic or autonomy. What *is* specific is the way in which these imperatives are articulated within the context of the government's discourse and the current conjuncture. In other words, the Morales government is the first nationalist government which is required to pursue a developmentalist agenda under political conditions in which the fusion of indigenous agency and environmental critique has made the very notion of development contentious. It is this new political and ideological matrix which produces the right to develop discourse, as a means of defending what would previously have been uncontentious.<sup>336</sup>

As the government attempts to press forward with its extraction led development model, the contradictions within the 'process of change' will appear again, perhaps in the same form or perhaps in some other. Raul Prada suggests that the government, sensing this fact, may be preparing the ground for a wave of physical violence to add its 'symbolic violence' against the communities of the Amazon. This may be true, but in doing so, the government would have to risk the same response – the same split in its own ranks and loss of political legitimacy – that greeted the violence against the marchers at Yucumo in 2011. The temporary crisis for the government stemmed from a deeper contradiction that cannot be addressed by violence, either symbolic or physical. How can a government that has inherited development goals suited to the needs of a 'nation-state' pursue them within the structures of a Plurinational State that is defending Mother Earth? For the government, the alternative to policies such as the highway through TIPNIS is a state of permanent backwardness for the communities living there and the weakness of the state in relation to its 'competitors'.

This impasse demonstrates how and why Bolivia is increasingly caught *between* two competing discourses, the rights of nature and the right to develop. For advocates of the former, the exhaustion of the 'development agenda' is clear and uncontested. For them, Bolivia cannot afford – in terms of the costs for biophysical systems and human communities – another round of development. Such a project is, according to this view, already doomed to fail. Nonetheless, as I have argued above, the demand for Bolivian society and resources to be removed from the global circulation of commodities and labour clearly rests on a whole

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<sup>336</sup> It is important to stress here that what is new is the contestation of *development as such*, rather than just different development strategies. Bolivia, of course, has seen a great deal of contestation of the latter.

series of assumptions which it seems reasonable to be sceptical of – chiefly, that there exists a coherent strategy in the form of cogent public policy, which Bolivia can adopt, which will tackle poverty, promote well-being but which does not amount to more ‘development’.

Nonetheless, as a critical analysis if not as a strategy to be adopted, Prada’s criticisms appear to hold. In particular, he correctly identifies how Garcia Linera has attempted to elide the role of political choice in the government’s development agenda. By relying on an exaggerated deterministic framework to explain the government’s policies, Garcia Linera ignores the way in which, even within given restrictions, the government is free to pursue one set of imperatives over another. During the TIPNIS affair, even allies of the government suggested that re-routing the road either around the park or through a less environmentally sensitive area could build support for the project. Fernando Vargas, one of the leaders of the campaign against the project, repeatedly explained they would support a road between the departments which did not go through the ‘heart’ of TIPNIS.<sup>337</sup> The government flatly rejected these proposals – on grounds of cost. Given that most of the funding of the road was coming from a Brazilian firm, this explanation seems unconvincing. What is more likely is that the government did not wish to signal a retreat that would damage its political authority. This reflects the fact that, for the government, development and extraction of Bolivia’s resources is not a means to an end or a regrettable necessity, but a political virtue. Development is a right of the Bolivian state and its people. ‘Fundamentalist environmentalism’, as the Vice-President called it, represents an attempt to restrict this right. Reflecting on this wider significance of the TIPNIS episode, Ismael Guzman points out that,

In structural terms, the indigenous march was questioning the foundations of the prevailing model of development in the country, basically based on the extraction of natural resources and consequently on environmental degradation, guided by an extremely anthropocentric worldview. In this sense, it showed the conflict between two visions of development that are in essence opposed and likely to generate conflicts. At the same time it raised the challenge of finding balance in the context of

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<sup>337</sup> Territorios en Resistencia, Territorio o Muerte, TIPNIS o muerte! Entrevista a Fernando Vargas, July 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, available from <http://www.territoriosenresistencia.org/noticias/territorio-o-muerte-tipnis-o-muerte-entrevista-a-fernando-vargas>

respect for the cultural plurality and ecological diversity of the country, within the framework of establishing el *vivir bien* [my translation].<sup>338</sup>

In the following chapter, I take this argument further by looking at the background, development and formulation of the Rights of Mother Earth law. This law, signed by President Morales in 2012 – that is, after the resolution of the TIPNIS affair – represented the most advanced piece of environmental legislation so far signed by the government. Indeed, in much of its content, it is among the most ambitious in the world. Its content explains much of the international reputation of Morales for his defence of nature. Nonetheless, as I will show in my analysis of how this law developed, the final version that was signed bears the scars of a fierce legislative and political battle. As the content of the initial bill, formulated with the direct input of the social movements arranged in the Unity Pact, was scrutinised, members of the government became concerned. For them, the law threatened to jeopardise the program of ‘national development’ Bolivia required. The battle over development goals I have analysed in this chapter was transposed to the legislative agenda, with more consequences for the government’s relationship with the social movements and its reputation for commitment to environmental goals.

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<sup>338</sup> Guzmán, Ismael, *Octava Marcha Indígena en Bolivia: Por la Defensa del Territorio, la vida y los derechos de los pueblos indígenas* (CIPCA, La Paz, 2012) p. 6



## **Chapter 6. The Rights of Nature: Is Bolivia Constructing a New Model of Development?**

The argument I have pursued in the two previous chapters showed how contentious the questions of development and environmental protection have become in Bolivia, particularly during President Morales' second term. The conflict over the mobilisation of the resources of the Bolivian Amazon dramatised deeper contradictions within the 'process of change'. The government's 'developmentalist' agenda, built on territorial integration and resource extraction, alienated sections of the social movement base. An intellectual if not political split emerged, with the government's development strategy accused of consisting of a recapitulation of discredited and unsustainable development models inherited from previous regimes. In response to this crisis, the government's discourse took an increasingly strident tone, recasting indigenous and environmentalist critics as a threat to Bolivia's right to develop.

At the same time, the government of Evo Morales never completely disavowed the environmentalist concerns and language for which it had become internationally feted. It continued to remain formally committed to a defence of nature, even in the midst of ambitious and contentious development goals. Again, in this context, the government attempted to articulate both the discourses I have identified. The government worked with the social movements and environmentalists between 2010 and 2012 to formulate and eventually pass its new 'Rights of Mother Earth' law. Evo Morales stressed that this was not simply another piece of environmental legislation – as I demonstrated in the first chapter, previous (neoliberal) Bolivian governments had introduced relatively advanced environmental legislation. Instead, according to the President, this law signalled the government's commitment to an indigenous alternative to destructive and dominant Western rationalities and development models. Recognition of the rights of nature was understood as a marker of the civilisational change Bolivia was undergoing.

In becoming the second Latin American country to pass a legal provision enshrining the rights of nature, Bolivia followed Ecuador, which had included a section on the rights of nature in a new constitution established under President Rafael Correa in 2009. Article 71 of the Ecuadorian constitution stipulates that 'Nature...has the right to integral respect for its

existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes'. Article 72 states:

'Nature has the right to be restored. This restoration shall be apart from the obligation of the State and natural persons or legal entities to compensate individuals and communities that depend on affected natural systems'.

In this form, the rights of nature are held to exist *in separation* from the interests held by human beings or "legal entities" in relation to natural systems. Any individual or group can call upon public authorities to uphold the rights enumerated in articles 71 and 72. This allows for legal recourse for damage done (rights infringed), then, not only to a specific piece of land, forest, river or even ecosystem, but to nature itself. In setting out the independence of nature's rights from any *immediate* human interest, the articles of the Ecuadorian constitution reflected a radically biocentric standpoint. Nature, in this legal framework, becomes a legal subject, an independent bearer of rights.

The affinities between the Ecuadorian constitutional provision and the law that was approved in the Bolivian legislature are striking. The passing of the Short Law of The Rights of Mother Earth (*Ley Corta de Derechos de la Madre Tierra*) by the Plurinational Legislative Assembly was timed so as to allow President Morales to present the proposal to the United Nations Climate Change Conference that was taking place in the Mexican City of Cancun that month. The Short Law was a distillation of a much larger draft of a Framework *Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra para Vivir Bien* (Law of the Rights of Mother Earth for Living Well) that had been drawn up by a commission which included the Unity Pact – an umbrella organisation comprised of key Bolivian social movements, indigenous and peasant organisations, including those which confronted the government over TIPNIS - and members of the Legislative Assembly.

The proposal put to the Bolivian parliament by the Unity Pact expressed in large part the principles and positions that had been determined earlier at the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in April 2010 in Cochabamba. The conference - intended as an antipode to the annual UN Climate Change Conferences, which were adjudged by some environmentalist activists and the Morales regime itself to be compromised by the excessive influence of transnational corporations and the developed

nations – was attended by a range of social movements and NGOs from all over the globe.<sup>339</sup> The three day conference culminated in the publication of a ‘people’s agreement’ that laid the blame for climate change and ecological crisis firmly at the door of global capitalism and the developed nations.<sup>340</sup> It was in the publicity and reaction to these developments that President Morales’ status as a global environmental hero was established. The environmental editor at *The Guardian*, John Vidal explained that the law is the first ‘granting nature equal rights to humans’ and ‘is expected to lead to radical new conservation and social measures to reduce pollution and control industry.’<sup>341</sup> Canadian environmental group the Sierra Club praised the measure in 2012 as a ‘move away from a western development to a more holistic vision’.<sup>342</sup>

In the first section of this chapter, I want to trace the development of the concept of nature’s rights in the history of environmental ethics - particularly in the United States. While it is tempting for observers in the West (and in Bolivia too, for that matter) to romanticise the rights of nature as a specifically indigenous concept, it is important to recognise that the concept has a history in Western ecological thought that cannot be ignored. Locating the concept within this wider discourse is necessary in order to shut off any attempt to dismiss the idea as a product of the conditions of “underdeveloped” Latin American nations with large indigenous populations. It is also vital in order to understand the source of some of the limitations of this discourse as a grounding for environmental politics.

The writings of Nash and Stone reflected the conjunction of certain American political and ideological traditions with the growth of environmental concern and consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Importantly for Nash and Stone, capitalism and the legal framework of liberal democracy provide the foundations upon which both writers attempt to construct a case for environmental rights. While its advocates in Latin America are much more critical

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<sup>339</sup> Building Bridges Collective, *Space for Movement? Reflections from Bolivia on climate justice, social movements and the state* (Footprint Workers Co-Op, Leeds, 2010) p. 52

<sup>340</sup> World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, People’s Agreement, <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/support/>

<sup>341</sup> *The Guardian*, Bolivia enshrines natural world’s rights with equal status for Mother Earth, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/apr/10/bolivia-enshrines-natural-worlds-rights>. The Huffington Post and technology magazine Wired ran similar stories.

<sup>342</sup> *Sierra Club*, Bolivia Gives Legal Rights to Mother Nature, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2012, available at <http://www.sierraclub.ca/en/main-page/bolivia-gives-legal-rights-mother-earth>

of capitalism and liberal democracy than these American forerunners, I argue that the rights of nature discourse still carries the trace of these liberal, Western origins.

My claim is that a 'rights-based' approach to environmental protection is inadequate, and cannot ground the kind of radical environmental agenda its proponents want it to. I will show that the dominance of 'rights extension' as a discursive framework for progressive politics breaks down in the case of the environment for two reasons. Firstly because there is no possibility of agency on the part of the objects to which the rights are extended. Secondly, and more importantly, because domination of the natural world and its objects is so absolutely central to the dynamics of capital accumulation that these rights could never be properly enforced, unless these economic imperatives were themselves transformed or removed. As the Rights of Mother Earth Bill made its long journey through parliament, many of the protagonists drew the same conclusion: Bolivia could have capitalism and development, or it could have the rights of nature, but not both at the same time.

Nevertheless, the process of passing this law revealed and extended the deep political and intellectual chasms which were beginning to appear inside Bolivia over the development agenda of the government. The contentious progress of the Rights of Mother Earth from its initial form as a Short Law (what amounts in the Bolivian legal system to a general statement of principles lacking full legal force) to a full Framework Law (a law regulating the production of new laws and the amendment of old ones) showed that the disagreements over development policy and its environmental impacts were not confined to particular projects, but expressed conflicting visions of Bolivia's future.

In what follows I set out the disagreements – at some points quite fundamental and drastic – between the social and environmental movements and the government of Evo Morales over what exactly the Rights of Mother Earth entailed and required. At the heart of this dispute, it became clear that Morales did not favour an approach to environmentalism which would allow it to be used as an obstacle to development. Instead, as I will show, Morales and members of the government increasingly sought to utilise a discourse I have called to 'the right to develop' to vitiate the apparently non-negotiable character of the kind of radical environmentalism being proposed. Ultimately, the version of the bill that was passed reflected this contentious legislative process. Nonetheless, as I will argue in the final section

of this chapter, the final bill still contains elements of the radical environmentalist perspective of the original authors of the bill. To this extent, it demonstrated that, despite their efforts to head off 'fundamentalist environmentalism', defence of Mother Earth is still a crucial legitimating discourse of the government of Bolivia.

#### **i. The Rights of Nature and the Expanding Circle of American Liberalism**

Despite its current prominence within the movements for social and environmental justice in two Andean nations, the idea of nature's rights is not peculiar to indigenous peoples in Latin America. In fact, the idea has deep roots in debates on the environment in the United States. Although it is not the starting point for American thought on nature's rights, an article written in 1972 by a Professor of Law at the University of Southern California, Christopher Stone entitled 'Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects' provides a useful point of entry.

In the article, later turned into a book, Stone argues that the 'moral development' of human beings has entailed the expansion of the ethical community – that is, in the numbers and types of human beings who are considered worthy of moral consideration. He records the incredulity and scepticism with which American judges, in a previous era, had responded to claims that African-Americans or women were rights-holders – or least rights-holder *on a par* with white men. 'Throughout legal history', he reflects, 'each successive extension of rights to some new entity has been, theretofore, a bit unthinkable.'<sup>343</sup> Our ethical and legal systems get caught in a mutually re-enforcing cycle as the fact that a class of persons or objects is currently beyond the ethical pale makes consideration of their legal rights seem nonsensical. Nevertheless, the history of America is the history of ethical leaps of faith whereby previously discounted groups are brought within the legal and moral fold. The next stage of this process of ethical extension, Stone claimed, ought to be one in which the environment is given the standing in legal systems which it is presently denied:

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<sup>343</sup> Stone, Christopher D., Should Trees Have Standing? Towards Legal Rights for Natural Objects, *Southern California Law Review* 45 (1972) p. 453

I am quite seriously proposing that we give legal rights to land, forests, oceans, rivers and other so-called natural objects in the environment – indeed to the natural environment as a whole.<sup>344</sup>

When environmental degradation or pollution occurs, our current legal frameworks do not recognise the damage done to, say, a stream or a lake *as such*. Instead, the only way in which polluters can be held to account is if a ‘lower rapine’ – that is, some other human being down the water chain – can be shown to have been injured by the pollution of the water.<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, if damage done to an environmental object can be shown to have negatively affected a human being, any damages or fines levied against the guilty party do not accrue to the environmental object, but to the individual. In other words, the environment is of ‘importance only indirectly, as lost profits to someone else’.<sup>346</sup> The costs *to the environment* are not factored.

Stone recognised that his solution to this problem, to give natural objects rights, was likely to attract some incredulity – although these objections were already in part anticipated by the earlier remarks regarding the difficulties of ethical extension. In the first place, the question of who was to uphold or enforce the rights that were to be accorded to natural objects seemed to be begged. Clearly this is one place where the narrative of ethical extension breaks down – natural objects were never going to form their own version of the NAACP to agitate for environmental reform. Stone suggested that this objection could be addressed by a reflection on the fact that our legal system is replete with defenders both of inanimate objects (corporations, trusts, nation-states) and with human beings unable to exercise their own rights due to age, health or mental capacity.

If it was possible for a corporate lawyer to divide damage done to a corporation, it seemed more than reasonable to hold that it was possible for a ‘guardian’ of some natural object to observe harm done to rivers or forests by human activity. At a practical level, the pursuit of rights for nature, at least as advanced by Stone, amounted to an attempt to prevent industry from considering natural objects a ‘free gift’ to the production process. Stone argued that in order to abate the destruction of nature, the legal system must ‘carve out a property right’ in

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid, p. 456

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p. 459

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, p. 474

it and thus ‘create monetary value’.<sup>347</sup> ‘I am proposing’, he explained, ‘that we do the same with eagles and wilderness as we do with copyrighted works, patented inventions, and privacy: *make* the violation of rights in them to be a cost by declaring the “pirating” of them to be the invasion of a property interest.’<sup>348</sup>

On this account, the problem of environmental destruction resulted from an *insufficient* valorisation of the natural world. The extant political-economic order had produced environmental destruction by its inability or unwillingness to fully integrate the environment. The problem, from Stone’s perspective, was the environment’s exteriority in relation to prevailing property regimes, not the regime itself. In one sense, Stone’s argument can be seen as an anticipation of later work that would invoke natural accounting or ‘natural capitalism’ as a solution to our ecological crises. In their book on the subject, Hawken, Lovins and Lovins claim that:

Establishing values for natural capital stocks and flows...or – as natural capitalism does – *behaving as if* we do so, is a first step towards incorporating the value of ecosystem services into planning, policy and public behaviour’.<sup>349</sup>

The strategy of valuing nature (by giving it a price in dollars and cents) has taken hold among international bodies aiming to deal with climate change.<sup>350</sup> The task of valuing ‘ecosystem services’ (for instance, pricing the services rendered to the ecosystem by pollinating bats, birds and insects) was a major one for the recent Rio +20 environmental summit.<sup>351</sup> This approach, although viewed with suspicion by many environmental NGOs and movements, was welcomed by groups calling for ‘the development of methodologies that can integrate natural capital considerations into the decision making process of all financial products and

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 476

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 476

<sup>349</sup> Hawken, Paul, Lovins, Amory B., and Lovins, L. Hunter, *Natural Capitalism* (1999, Earthscan, London) p. 155

<sup>350</sup> World Development Movement, *Rio +20 Summit: Whose Green Economy?* Available at [http://www.wdm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Rio%20%2B20%20briefing%20design%20web\\_final.pdf](http://www.wdm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Rio%20%2B20%20briefing%20design%20web_final.pdf)

<sup>351</sup> For a theoretical development of the concept of ‘pricing environmental services’, see Swallow, Brent M., Kallesoe, Mikkel F., Iftikhar, Usman A., van Noorwijk, Meine, Bracer, Carina, Scherr, Sara J., Raju, K. V, Poasts, Susan V., Duraiappah, Anatha Kumar, Ochieng, Benson O., Mallee, Hein and Rumley, Rachel, Compensation and Rewards for Environmental Services in the Developing World: Framing Pan-Tropical Analysis and Comparison, *Ecology and Society* 14(2): 26, 2009,

services'. Such an approach, according to one 'green' group linked to finance capital, 'has risks' but could lead to 'relevant business opportunities'.<sup>352</sup>

On this basis, it is possible to detect a relationship between the notion of nature's rights and attempts to assign natural systems a monetary value. For Stone, the rights of nature were a means to ensure that nature would be valued in the legal system – that is, that destruction of it would incur a cost. This would make potential violators think twice about causing destruction or, at least, extract the money needed to repair damage *post facto*.

Roderick Nash, building in part on Stone's work and on the tradition of nature's rights within American thought, explained that the development of the idea of according nature rights could only be understood in the context of a broader story about the expanding horizons of American liberalism. In comparing the movements for an ethics that incorporates the interests of the environment with the growth of the Abolitionist movements in antebellum America, Nash tried to establish 'grounds for regarding environmental ethics as a logical extrapolation of powerful liberal traditions as old as the republic'.<sup>353</sup>

Environmental ethics was thus considered of a piece with a progressive, albeit thoroughly idealist, conception of the American legal, political and social history. Nash's commitment to an idealist reading of American history was reiterated by the assertion that 'the reason [for the growth of the anti-slavery movement] was the emergence of liberal ideals in association with the democratic revolutions in England, France and the United States'.<sup>354</sup> The struggle for nature's rights recapitulates the abolitionist's campaign against the enslavement of Africans in the American south, the critique shifting – without any dramatic overhaul of its internal structure - from the enslavement of Africans to the 'enslavement of the Earth'.<sup>355</sup>

Stone and Nash's decision to ground their advocacy of the rights of nature within an unmistakably optimistic account of American history posed not insubstantial problems for their environmental ethics. In the first place, there is a certain deficiency in their account of America's evolution from an 18<sup>th</sup> century slave-holding republic to a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal

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<sup>352</sup> *Natural Capital Declaration*, available at <http://www.naturalcapitaldeclaration.org/the-declaration/>

<sup>353</sup> Nash, Roderick Frazer, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (University of Wisconsin, Madison) p. 200

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, p. 202

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8



democracy. The story of an almost passive, automatic expansion of the 'magic circle of rights-holders' is extremely problematic, excluding, as it does, the struggles of women, blacks and the popular classes from the history of their own emancipation.

The problem with this assumption, as Gayil Tashir explains, is that 'ecological problems are essentially different from other social problems, [the] politics of identity involves an empowerment of the disadvantaged communities and giving them a voice of their own, while ecological issues would always require a second-order representation'.<sup>356</sup> The discourse of rights extension thus relies upon a false equivalence between the fate of exploited nature and of oppressed human groups.

The strategy of rights-extension is attractive because it utilises a hegemonic discursive framework, allowing environmentalists to 'adopt' pre-existing frameworks of political language and action. However, if nature were to be accorded rights, these rights would assume their place among the dense constellation of rights and rights discourse that constitute capitalist societies. In this instance, the contestation of environmental destruction would simply be displaced onto the legal plane.

In addition, the *legal* rights of nature would continually be confronted by the dynamics of capitalist production as a barrier to their full realisation. The subordination of nature within capitalist production is not a function of its 'rightlessness', but an effect of the laws of capitalist production itself, specifically its inherent tendency to pursue expansion of itself irrespective of natural limits. For this reason, legal rights for nature would almost inevitably imply a restriction on production that would either render them unenforceable or necessitate a more general confrontation with the dynamics of accumulation.

Indeed, it is precisely in its encounter with indigenous thinking that these lacunae in the rights of nature discourse were revealed and confronted. By being integrated into the Andean cosmology and revolutionary political imaginary of Bolivian indigenous groups, the idea of nature's rights became a pole around which critical discourses of development could coalesce and begin to shape and influence the political conjuncture which had opened up in Bolivia. In

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<sup>356</sup> Tashir, Gayil, *The role of environmentalism: From the Silent Spring to The Silent Revolution*, in Wissenburg, Marcel and Levy, Yoram (eds), *Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism: The End of Environmentalism?* (Routledge, London, 2004) p. 28

this process of integration, many of the elements of the liberal iteration of the rights of nature framework were transformed. In particular, the notion of 'nature' as an exteriorised collection of objects and things to which *we extend* rights was challenged. Instead, recognition of the rights nature becomes a process by which human beings recognise themselves as bound up with the cycles and circuits of the Earth and begin to transform the totality of social relations in order to create harmony between themselves and their natural environment.

In this vision, *Pachamama* – commonly translated into Mother Earth – stands not only for 'nature' or even the Earth, but is understood as a kind of ultimate reality, *conditioning* our experience of time and space. As the source of all life it is the 'archetypal germinant', according to Olivia Harris and Thérèse Bouysse-Cassagne's seminal exploration of the Andean cosmology.<sup>357</sup> Above all, nature or Mother Earth is understood as active participant in our social reality, as a subjective precondition for collective human action and meaningful life and not as the object of individual human appropriation or valuation. Talk of the rights of nature reflects the need to recognise the relationship of reciprocity and harmony between human beings and *Pachamama*. In distinction with the rights of nature approach enunciated by Stone, the rights of nature under the aspect of Andean cosmology are not simply a 'legal fiction' adopted by the state to further environmental aims. They reflect the real and concrete status of nature as an *active subject in the world*.<sup>358</sup>

Explaining this shift, the Ecuadorian environmental activist Esperanza Martínez Yáñez says that:

For the Amerindian cultures, it is *nature which grants rights to persons* and not persons to nature [emphasis added]. Recognition of the rights of nature is a reiteration of *mestizaje*, on the one hand it reflects elements of Western culture and on the other of hand of indigenous cultures, born as a result of a clash of cultures that has left deep wounds and, in turn, [created] new identities [my translation].<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Harris, Olivia, and Bouysse-Cassagne, Thérèse, Pacha: En Torno al Pensamiento Aymara, in Bouysse-Cassagne, Thérèse, Olivia Harris, Tristan Platt and Veronica Cereceda, *Tres Reflexiones sobre el Pensamiento Andino* (Hisbol, La Paz, 1987) p

<sup>358</sup> Cruz Rodriguez, Edwin, Del Derecho Ambiental a los Derechos de la Naturaleza: sobre la Necesidad el Dialogo Intercultural, *Jurídicas, No.1, Vol. 11, p. 97*

<sup>359</sup> Martínez Yáñez, Esperanza, *La Naturaleza entre la Cultura, la Biología y el Derecho* (IETM-ABYA-YALA, Quito, 2014) p. 11

This notion of the rights of nature discourse as being part of an *emerging* and evolving perspective is key to understanding it. In stressing its '*mestizaje*' origins, Martin Yanez points out how the rights of nature perspective as it exists in contemporary Latin America is not grounded simply in a preference for 'traditional' intellectual forms over Western modernity, but in an ongoing engagement between Western and non-Western environmental traditions. It is for this reason that when writing about their vision of *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien*, the *Coodinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indigenas* insist that 'we are [engaged] in the construction of new paradigms: this is a new scenario. The indigenous people do not come alone, we come with proposals'.<sup>360</sup>

In 2008-2009, with both Ecuador and Bolivia engaging in new constitutional processes, and in the case of Bolivia the creation of a new state, the political space existed from these emergent paradigms to shape the political and economic framework. By allowing the traditions of 'deep' Western environmentalism to 'resonate' with indigenous concepts of *Pacha* and *Ayllu*, space was created which allowed indigenous, environmentalist activists to reimagine the rights of nature discourse.<sup>361</sup> In the Ecuadorian case, there were environmental activists who preferred not to push for the introduction of rights of nature language into the constitution. They felt that such language was too radical for it to pass into constitutional language, and in failing it would foreclose the possibility of getting other 'moderate' environmental proposals onto the agenda.<sup>362</sup>

In Bolivia, the debate took another direction in which the discourses of Pachamama and the rights of nature confronted the political and economic reality of a model of development entirely dependent on the extraction of non-renewable resources. In addition, there emerged an increasingly assertive ideological effort to 'balance' the rights of the nature with the right of Bolivia to develop its natural resources. For some, aspects of the rights of nature language emanating from sections of the indigenous and environmental movement threatened to foreclose any possibility of Bolivia achieving other social and economic objectives, specifically the goals of national development I have discussed in the previous chapter.

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<sup>360</sup> CAOI, *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien: Filosofía, Políticas, Estrategias y Experiencias Regionales Andinas* (Oxfam America and SAL, Lima, 2010) p. 10

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<sup>362</sup> Fundación Pachamama, *Experiencia: Reconocimiento de los Derechos de la Naturaleza en la Constitución Ecuatoriana*. April 2010.

Indeed, as I will show in the following section, for the protagonists who did wish to abolish Bolivian capitalist development, this implication was never denied. For those who saw Bolivia's right to develop as potentially threatened by a radical interpretation of the rights of nature discourse, there was immediate pushback. The Law of the Rights of Mother Earth forced open the question of development policy and required participants in the legislative process to disclose their competing and contesting visions of Bolivia's future.

## ii. The Rights of Nature as Law: Compromises and Contestation

Two different questions arise simultaneously when studying the Bolivian experience of passing rights of nature legislation. One is the extent to which the rights of nature discourse I have examined above was transformed by its encounter with the radical, indigenous based environmentalism I discussed in chapter 2. Secondly is the extent to which the law which was passed reflected and looked to address the particular environmental concerns of Bolivian society. In answering both questions, it is necessary to distinguish, as I do below, between the original version of the law proposed and accepted *in principle* in 2010 and the revised version of the law accepted by Bolivian parliamentarians and subsequently signed into law by Evo Morales in 2012.

The gap between these two iterations of the Rights of Mother Earth illustrated, as did the conflict over TIPNIS, the clash between distinct worldviews which have emerged to contest development policy under Evo Morales. Comparing the two versions of the law also make it possible to identify more or less precisely what *specific elements* of the natural rights agenda conflict with an economic structure still grounded in the expanding appropriation of nature's energy and mineral stores. On the other hand, the purpose of the comparison is not to indict the Morales government on simplistic grounds of 'betrayal'. As I argued in my introduction, the hermeneutic of cynicism reveals little and misses a lot.

Instead, as I will show, the version of the law that was passed by the Bolivian parliament still contained within it the kernel of a radical departure from the practices that have engendered ecological crisis and social inequality. What is required is an analysis of what space the law opens up for the development of new social practices that can contribute towards the reorganisation of the relationship between human beings and nature in Bolivia.

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The short Law of the Rights of Mother Earth was originally formulated in October 2010 after consultation between Bolivian social movements (organised in the Unity Pact) and the Plurinational Legislative Assembly. This law envisaged itself as a part of a post-capitalist social model. The rejection of the capitalist model of nature-society relations was indicated by the name given to the law itself and in the concepts central to it. As the preamble to the full draft of the initial law explains,

Mother Earth, planet Earth, Pachamama, Mother Nature, are distinct names that encode and include the various relations that maintain human beings, along with the other living beings, ecological regions, and biodiversity...with the paths and footprints, the circuits and cycles, the components, elements, materials and beings of nature. We reject other names which express relations of exploitation, expropriation and disassociation of nature, that represent mercantile, commercial or capitalist relations [and] we rule out the term 'natural resources', which expresses the relation of despoliation that is part of the global-capitalist system [my translation].<sup>363</sup>

In place of capitalist development – conceived simultaneously as a development model that has dominated Bolivia and as a world-historic form of civilisation that has excluded the majority of the population from civil and political life – the social movements proposed a society based on the attainment of *vivir bien*. *Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra* defined the concept as a 'civilisational horizon and alternative culture to modernity, capitalism and development', grounded in notions of harmony and complementarity.<sup>364</sup> It invokes the need for the 'elimination of inequalities and mechanisms of domination'.<sup>365</sup> The term is used in relation to a range of problems and areas of social practice in the law, ranging from the production and consumption of basic necessities (article 13.II.2), to democratic public control over resources and the extension of political participation. The category implies promotion of certain forms of productive activity (those required to produce basic necessities, create cultural fulfilment and spur forms of collective control or sociality, for example) and limits

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<sup>363</sup> Pacto de Unidad y Comisión Mixta de la Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, Anteproyecto de Ley de la Madre Tierra. 2011 p. 77

<sup>364</sup> Ley de la Madre Tierra, p. 81

<sup>365</sup> Ibid, p. 81

As I remarked earlier, *Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra* was designed as a framework law. Article 1 of the first draft stated that the objective of the law was to be a ‘standard source’ (*norma fuente*) for the development of legislation at ‘all levels of the state’. As such, it set out the ‘duties and responsibilities’ of the State and society to uphold the rights for nature and to establish the institutional framework to make that possible. In a fashion similar to the wording of the Ecuadorian constitutional provision, the rights deal with the Earth’s ability to maintain its own vital functions and only as a *consequence* to any direct human interest. More interestingly from an ecological perspective, the law avoids language depicting the Earth as a static or fixed system. Article 3 stated that the duty of state and society is to maintain a ‘dynamic equilibrium with the cycles and processes inherent to Mother Nature’. Article 4 holds that nature is a ‘dynamic living system comprised of an indivisible community of all living beings’. In this sense, the law avoided advocating a mystical – and impossible – retreat of human beings from nature. By recognising ‘dynamic equilibrium’ as the goal of the law, the law defended the Earth’s right to maintain itself as an autopoietic system without advocating a mystical-utopian retreat from nature (precisely, it should be recalled, what Garcia Linera accused the critics of extractivism of advocating).

The law did not seek to prohibit human appropriation of environmental goods. Instead, Article 20 stipulated that the ‘planning, management, use and appropriation of the components of Mother Earth’ must be regulated by recognition of the ‘interrelation and complementarity of its components’. Article 8 also held that ‘cultural systems form a part of Mother Earth’. Explaining this aspect of the law, Rodolfo Machaca, a member of the Confederación Sindical Union de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Trade Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia, CSUTCB) said that ‘in the West and in neoliberal politics, the Earth and human beings are separated, but here we are integrated’.<sup>366</sup>

Human societies and nature are interdependent and related - each imposing conditions and limits on the form and development of the other. The crucial point is that neither is static or wholly determined by the other, but constantly constituted and re-constituted in a fashion that either maintains ‘dynamic equilibrium’ or does not. In this vein, the law contested the

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<sup>366</sup> *FM Bolivia*, Movimientos sociales colectivizan Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012, available from <http://noticiasbolivianas.fmbolivia.net/noticia95068-movimientos-sociales-colectivizan-ley-marco-de-la-madre-tierra.html>

ontological grounds of the division between renewable and non-renewable resources. This distinction was said to rely upon a mistaken notion that each element or component of the Earth's cycles could be considered in separation from the other. In the context of the 'indiscriminate exploitation of capitalism' all life is vulnerable to damage, a fact that the distinction between non-renewable and renewable was judged to renounce.<sup>367</sup> In place of the system of classification, it proposed a conception of nature as unified, autonomous *whole*. It should be noted that although the law rejected the renewable/non-renewable distinction on these *ontological* grounds, it did preserve it as a way of ordering different varieties of economic activity. As such, the law sought to preserve different standards governing the utilisation of renewable as against non-renewable natural components.

Article 22 classified a component as renewable 'when its rate of replacement is equal to or greater than its rate of destruction'. The classification procedure would be guided by 'participatory processes' that respected the 'sovereignty of the Bolivian people'. In the case of resources (components) that reside within indigenous territory, the classification was to be decided according to indigenous norms and customs.

Importantly for what was to follow, the law also attempted to establish guidelines for the development of natural resources<sup>368</sup>, renewable and non-renewable, which exist within indigenous owned lands in Bolivia. In large part the law restated the principles that had been included in the 2009 Bolivian constitution guaranteeing indigenous participation in the regulation of the exploitation of natural resources in their territory. Article 32:15 of the constitution holds that the State 'respects and guarantees' the right of indigenous peoples to consultation to be conducted 'in good faith' prior to any development of non-renewable resources in their territory. Article 32:17 guarantees the indigenous the 'use and exclusive exploitation' of renewable resources.<sup>369</sup>

The Law of Mother Earth took this protection of indigenous sovereignty even further. It would have provided not only for the consultation of the indigenous but would have required 'prior and informed consent' for projects aimed at the exploitation of non-renewable resources on

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, p. 77

<sup>368</sup> I use this term only as a short-hand and as an explanatory device. As I said, the Unity Pact's version of the law explicitly rejects this concept.

<sup>369</sup> República de Bolivia, Constitución Política del Estado. 2009

indigenous land. Attempting to strengthen the position of indigenous land-holders in relation to development projects, the law asserted the need for the outcome of consultations to be binding on the government or agencies involved. In this sense, the law posed a potential challenge to the extensive view of state sovereignty that I have already addressed in the previous chapter.

As such and very significantly, the government's draft of the bill, introduced to parliament almost 18 months after the bill was initially proposed, elided this strong conception of indigenous rights, partly on the grounds that the natural resources of the country ought to be used for the benefit of all Bolivians. MAS deputy Julio Salazar suggested to Bolivians that the rights of Mother Earth should be seen as one of four fundamental rights – the right to escape poverty, the right of the indigenous to be consulted and the right of the state to its development, being the others.

Precisely as I argued in the previous section, one way in which the rights of nature could be neutered is to downgrade them to simply one of a number of competing rights to be 'balanced'. According to Salazar, the right to development was one of these competing rights which needed to be upheld. Not surprisingly, the government's bill is replete with evidence of this attempt to 'balance' the radical environmentalism of the original bill with the imperatives of development.

Article 47.6 of the government's bill *obligates* the state to 'promote industrialisation of the components of Mother Earth', albeit in the framework of 'respect' for nature. It perhaps is unnecessary to point out that the original version of the law avoided the term industrialisation altogether. The government's bill also speaks of the need for the state to 'create the conditions for the distribution of the wealth generated by strategic sectors of the economy, based on the appropriation and transformation of renewable and non-renewable natural resources'.<sup>370</sup> The government's bill, *Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral para Vivir Bien* (Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well), concludes in article 23:2 that under the conditions of sustainable development the components of Mother Earth

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<sup>370</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. La Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, *Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral para Vivir Bien*. June 2012



- or 'natural resources' - can be used and appropriated by human beings 'as is required by the Constitution'.

However, when the revised version of the law was approved by both houses of the Bolivian legislature in September 2012, the majority of the opposition was motivated by the changes to the law on consultation of indigenous communities. On some accounts, the version of the law approved by the legislative assembly amounted to a power grab by the state and a retreat from certain provisions contained not only in the original law but in the Bolivian constitution.

Bartolomé Clavero, a professor of Law at the University of Seville and a former member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, posited that the changes to the consultation process in the revised version of the law amounted to a violation of the constitution, of the rights of indigenous communities and the rights of nature. Clavero flagged up amendments in the later version of the law pertaining to the ability of indigenous communities to exercise collective control over the exploitation of natural resources in indigenous land. Questioning the stance of the law in relation to water rights in indigenous communities, Clavero points out that the law calls for respect for indigenous norms and the right to consultation only in cases where it is 'appropriate'. This test of 'appropriateness' (*cuando corresponda*) is, Clavero argues, a legalistic ruse that the Bolivian government has utilised in order to 'reserve power in the state'.<sup>371</sup>

Furthermore, while the government's version retained the commitment to 'consultation' of indigenous communities, it 'said nothing about the value of the result of this consultation'. For Clavero, and other indigenous activists, this amounted to reducing indigenous participation to a purely formal exercise and abrogated any responsibility the state had to respect the outcome of consultative processes. The law, on this account, worked to undermine statutes contained in the Bolivian constitution and in international agreements on the rights of indigenous peoples to which Bolivia has agreed.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Clavero, Bartolomé, Bolivia: Ley de la Madre Tierra Contra Derecho de Pueblos Indígenas, BolPress, available from <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2012061202>

<sup>372</sup> Article 32:2 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Bolivia is a signatory, holds that 'States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilisation, or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources'.

*Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático* (Bolivian Platform Against Climate Change, or PBFCC), a Bolivian environmental group, identified two qualitative shifts between the two versions of the law. The second of these related to how the notion of indigenous consultation had ‘evolved’ in the later version of the law:

Prior Consultation in the Law of Integral Development [i.e. the government’s version of the law] is diluted in a conception of citizen participation and opinion...the results of any consultation are, as such, only suggestions that the government can choose whether or not to consider, so it cannot be considered obligatory for the government to respect agreements achieved in the consultative process.<sup>373</sup>

Members of CONAMAQ denounced not only the omission of the need for consent but the form of the consultation process itself. The version of the law agreed by the House of Deputies expands the right of consultation to the ‘whole of the Bolivian people’ and thus undermines the right of indigenous peoples to autonomy within their land.<sup>374</sup>

As PBFCC pointed out, the original law had attempted to establish a holistic conception of the interests of indigenous groups, natural systems and Bolivian society at large. The government’s bill, they claimed, fragmented and separated these interests, framing indigenous interests and those of the ‘Bolivian people’ as if they existed in a state of conflict. In the same vein, Clavero argued that the strategy of ensuring indigenous sovereignty over natural resources within their territory could not be conceived separately from the struggle to achieve ‘decolonisation’ of the country as a whole. Objections to the perceived weakening of the pro-indigenous elements of the law developed and fed into a wider criticism of the government’s reluctance to accept the more radical social and economic implications of the Unity Pact’s draft.

As with the conflict over TIPNIS, the question of environmental protection and indigenous rights were fused in criticisms of the government’s changes to the bill. For the critics, the

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<sup>373</sup> PBFCC, Posicionamiento de las organizaciones e instituciones de la Plataforma Boliviana Frente al Cambio Climático respecto del proyecto de Ley de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral Para Vivir Bien, available at <http://www.cipca.org.bo/files/NOTA%20RIO%20+20%20PLATAFORMA.pdf>

<sup>374</sup> Erbol, CONAMAQ: Consulta de Ley Madre Tierra viola Derechos de los pueblos indígenas, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012, available at [http://www.erbol.com.bo/noticia/indigenas/29082012/conamag\\_consulta\\_de\\_ley\\_madre\\_tierra\\_viola\\_derechos\\_de\\_los\\_pueblos\\_indigenas](http://www.erbol.com.bo/noticia/indigenas/29082012/conamag_consulta_de_ley_madre_tierra_viola_derechos_de_los_pueblos_indigenas)

government's weakening of protections for indigenous communities served the development agenda the government had demonstrated it was intent on pursuing, removing potential obstacles to access to natural resources. In the aftermath of the TIPNIS conflict, the government's sensitivity on this point had clearly been raised. In this context, the right to develop began to play an increasingly important role in the government's political and discursive strategy. Julio Salazar effectively conceded this point when responding to criticism claiming that the government's version of the law did not respect the consensus reached between the Unity Pact and Bolivian legislators in 2010. The changes the government had introduced, he claimed, reflected the need for a 'balanced law that cannot be purely environmentalist. [We] cannot deprive ourselves of development, the development of our peoples'.<sup>375</sup> For Salazar, then, environmentalism and development were set off against each other in a zero-sum game – every move towards a 'pure' environmental law would threaten the pursuit of development. Whereas the Unity Pact's law had rejected the term development, proposing *vivir bien* as an alternative socio-cultural horizon, the government resurrected the concept, using it to push back ideologically against the perceived threat of ecological absolutism. In this sense, the government's bill reflected the belief that its ability to mobilise the country's natural resources, and re-distribute the wealth generated, would be threatened by a law with overly stringent – or "unbalanced", in Salazar's terminology – environmental protections.

In a letter sent to the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Rebecca Delgado – a MAS representative from Cochabamba – CONAMAQ insisted that they could not support the new version of the bill because, among other reasons, it recuperated the notion of 'natural resources' that had been absent from the Unity Pact's draft. In dropping the influence of indigenous worldviews in favour of the language of development and natural resources, the law had reduced the talk of Mother Earth to, in essence, propaganda.<sup>376</sup>

Bolivian sociologist and MAS critic Raul Prada Alcoreza was no less scathing about the changes. The bill the Senate approved had 'nothing to do' with Mother Nature and was instead dedicated towards preserving the 'extractivist colonial model of dependent

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<sup>375</sup> Erbol, Proyecto de la Tierra Madre plantea que empresas otorguen garantía económica, available at <http://www.erbol.com.bo/noticia.php?identificador=2147483963084>

<sup>376</sup> Fobomade, CONAMAQ: Ley de la Madre Tierra o de aprovechamiento de recursos naturales?, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012, available at <http://www.fobomade.org.bo/art-1867>

capitalism<sup>377</sup> For Prada, this was more proof that with the MAS government nothing had changed ‘except the actors. The scripts and the roles remains, but the discourse has changed. The drama of all this is that the executioners now speak the language of their victims: the beings of Mother Earth, the indigenous original peoples and the Bolivian people’. In the more parsimonious reflection of an indigenous parliamentarian the government’s version of the law is ‘pro-capitalist’.<sup>378</sup>

While not wishing to doubt the perspicuity of many of the criticisms of the government over the rights of nature law, I want to argue that many of the important aspects of the original law are nonetheless retained in the government’s bill. In the next section I want to set out more specifically what is in the government’s version of the bill and focus particularly on the elements of the first draft that *survived* the clearly extensive “re-drawing” of the legislation. The fact that the government have felt it necessary to preserve the bill at all, albeit denuded of important features, reflects the contradictory nature of their position. If the government were incapable or unwilling to support the radical restructuring of society that the initial law proposed, it is also true that they did not feel capable of dispensing with the law altogether. (The long gap between the approval of the law in its short form in December 2010 and its acceptance in its final version in September 2012 suggests that ditching the idea altogether was a possibility). I want to suggest that the truth of the government’s version of the law stands somewhere between Garcia Linera’s inflated claim that it ‘establishes a new relationship between man and nature’ and Prada’s assessment of it as an executioner’s alibi. It is this sense that I mean we can understand the present conjuncture as one in which we are *between* two different strategies or political discourses.

### iii. What Remains? Salvaging Nature’s Rights

The original version of the law proposed had two overlapping and related objectives. It firstly attempted to define the philosophical standpoint and concepts that would guide the new social, economic and cultural model underpinning nature’s rights. I have attempted to set out

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<sup>377</sup> Alcoreza, Raúl Prada, Lo grotesco político y la padre tierra, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012, available at <http://horizontesnomadas.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/lo-grotesco-politico-la-ley-padre-tierra.html>

<sup>378</sup> Somos Sur, “Es Procapitalista”: Parlamentarios Indígenas y el Conamaq impugnan la Ley de la Tierra Madre, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2012, available at <http://www.somossur.net/bolivia/politica/seguimiento-al-nuevo-estado-plurinacional/1043-es-procapitalista-parlamentarios-indigenas-y-el-conamaq-impugnan-la-ley-de-la-madre-tierra.html>

some of the basic claims of that model and the parameters of its ecological and social critique of the model of dependent capitalist development that dominated – or *dominates* – Bolivia and other Latin American economies.

The other main area of elaboration in the law concerned what exactly new institutions and legal forms were authorised by this new model and how these institutions would work with the existing structures of the Bolivian state. Again, as I have already said, as a framework law, the Rights of Mother Earth is intended not only to govern and regulate the production of new laws and rights; it also retroactively obligates certain changes to existing institutions and statutes. The interesting aspect of the government's law is that much of the *institutional and legal architecture* proposed by the Unity Pact is preserved.

In the first place, the law preserves the legal responsibility of natural and legal persons for 'accidental or deliberate environmental destruction, to mitigate the dangers associated with their practices and to guarantee restoration of environmental systems'. The definition of the term 'restoration' is important here, since it does not only refer to the damage inflicted on human beings.

Restoration...is the process of intentional modification of a living area or system of life, altered with the objective of re-establishing the diversity of its components, processes, cycles, relations and interactions...so that they approximate the conditions before the damage (Article 30:10).

The clear emphasis on the duty to restore the environment is an important step. If it were to be fully effective it would ensure that the full cost of environmental destruction would be borne by those who damage it. It should be clear that since much of the damage done to 'nature' also negatively affects a determinate human community, the right of the environment to restoration would also provide human beings greater opportunities of sustainable and safe use of environmental resources.

To provide an example: the effects of mining on water security in rural Bolivia have been dramatic. Mining endangers the access of communities to fresh water both by generating pollution of water sources, including groundwaters, and by depleting sources through consumption of huge magnitudes of water in the process itself. In the community of Totoral,

located three kilometres from the large Bolívar Mine in the south-western department of Oruro (birthplace of Evo Morales), local families are entitled to around 30 litres of water a week, while the mine is utilising 120 litres a second. More than one Bolivian hydro-chemist has found Totoral to be among the regions of Oruro worst affected by the pollution of watersheds and rivers. Studies of the soil surrounding the Kori Kollo mine, also in Oruro, found the presence of cyanide at the rate of 63mg per 1kg.<sup>379</sup>

One of the problems with the mining industry has been the inability of the Bolivian government to properly oversee mine licensing or to ensure that the large mining companies are actually conforming to the agreements made. The San Cristobal Mine, for example, was approved on the basis of an environmental impact report that was only made available to the public *after* the licence had been issued. In this case, the impact report overestimated the amount of rainfall in the area and so underestimated the effect of the mine on the ability of local communities to access water sufficiently. Consequently, it also underestimated the length of time that would be required for groundwaters to replenish themselves after the mine licence expires. The inability or unwillingness of the government to undertake an effective analysis of the water usage of the mine has meant that the mining company – in this case, the Japanese multinational Sumitomo – has been able to monopolise the flow of information and stymie community attempts to challenge their rate of water use. Evo Morales visited the mine in June 2009 and, despite knowledge of the objections raised by social movements and local groups about the extent and effects of the mine’s water use, reiterated his support for the project and others like it, and reiterated the legitimacy of the mine’s environmental licence. In 2015, Garcia Linera restated the government’s commitment to its relationship with Sumitomo, guaranteeing that the facility would not be nationalised. ‘As socialists’, he said, ‘we are intelligent enough to use foreign investment to generate taxes and introduce technology’.<sup>380</sup>

If the law is successful in making companies responsible for the restoration of environmental damage (for instance, the poisoning or over-exploitation of water resources) then it is possible to imagine two likely effects. Firstly, companies might cease to benefit from adopting

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<sup>379</sup> *JornadaNet*, Advierten que la minería está provocando doble perdida de agua, available from <http://www.jornadanet.com/n.php?a=82654-1>

<sup>380</sup> *La Razón*, García Linera descarta estatización de la minera San Cristóbal y garantiza sus operaciones, 27 July 2015

tactics like those of Sumitomo in the case of the San Cristobal mine – that is, monopolising the evidence relating to their environmental impact and thus preventing serious oversight. It may incentivise avoidance of negative environmental impacts, since the company will be liable not only for the cost of damages but the cost of *restoration*. The likelihood that with each ‘unit’ of environmental damage they will incur an even greater cost of restoration down the way could persuade companies to amend their practices.

On the other hand, it could incentivise precisely the opposite type of behaviour – that is, greater secrecy about the environmental impacts of resource extraction and even more elaborate attempts at obfuscation and the silencing of criticism. In her study of Texaco’s oil drilling activities in the ‘Oriente’ (Amazonian Ecuador) in the 1980s and 1990s, Judith Kimmerling observed that the strategy of compensating indigenous peoples whose land the drilling would often occur upon and/or negatively affect became a way for the company to disorientate and divide opposition to its activities.

[They] buy off selected individuals and communities cheaply, creating or exploiting divisions among residents and making promises they do not keep...they attempt [Texaco] to substitute relatively minor community development works for serious environmental protection; and that they use selected residents as a shield against criticism by environmentalist who are reluctant to appear questions the right of the residents to negotiate their own destiny.<sup>381</sup>

By establishing the Earth as a subject of *collective* public interest the law may ward off attempts to sidestep the problem of general ecological crisis by establishing partial compensatory arrangements with individuals or groups in any one location. Again, the notion of a collective right over the Earth could help to avoid the dilemma whereby one community is “played off” against another (as happened in the ‘Oriente’) resulting in a *general* ecological crisis in the region.

Some of the strongest sections of the social movements’ version of the law were those dealing activities associated with the extraction of hydrocarbons. These industries would be subject

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<sup>381</sup> Kimmerling, Judith, Oil, Lawlessness and Indigenous Struggle in Ecuador’s Oriente, in Collinson, Helen (ed), *Green Guerrillas: Environmental Conflicts and Initiatives in Latin América and the Caribbean* (Latin American Bureau, London, 1996) p. 69

to ‘recurrent and inter-institutional monitoring and environmental audits conducted with the participation of social organisations’ (Article 25:4b). Again, this notion of recurrent environmental auditing, with the involvement of the local affected population is preserved in the version of the bill that Evo Morales signed (Article 144:2).

Clearly, in cases like those in San Cristobal or Bolívar, the effects of such a provision – if actually enforced – could be significant and beneficial to the local populations. One of the problems identified in the case of San Cristobal was the lack of resources of the Ministry charged with conducting and enforcing environmental agreements – resulting in a process lacking legitimacy and effectively controlled by the company, to the exclusions of local communities and their representatives.

*Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral para Vivir Bien* tries to address this problem by creating a body (the Plurinational Climate Justice Entity, PCJF) assigned with the goal of coordinating adaptation and mitigation of the effects of global climate change in Bolivia – something initially proposed by the Unity Pact. This body is charged with,

Development of an operative and methodological framework [in order to] to begin the process of adaptation to climate change, promoting the construction of climatic resilience...with an emphasis on the processes of sovereignty, particularly food security, management of water and the prevention and reduction of risks owing to the impacts of climate change (Article 238).

The government’s law creates a fund (the Plurinational Climate Justice Fund) for the PCJF to administer in order to achieve these aims – the finance coming from the Bolivian treasury, central bank, international financial organisations and, so it is hoped, private donations. The creation of a state-funded body and a legally sanctioned ombudsman designed specifically to prevent and mitigate the effects and risk of global climate change, specifically in relation to food and water security, could be dramatic in Bolivia – particularly if it ends the underfunding of environmental oversight in Bolivia.

Nonetheless, the government’s bill clearly includes a reticence in relation to strict regulation of the extractive industries. The initial law attempted to recast the relationship between the extractive industries and wider society, arguing that ‘any business [involved in] mining or



hydrocarbon activities should be considered a service provider, in harmony with the rights of Mother Earth.’ This notion of the mining industry as a ‘service provider’ was unsurprisingly excised from the government’s bill. The MAS government was evidently concerned with how the multinational corporations operating in the Bolivian hydrocarbon and mining industries would react to being labelled ‘service providers’.

One explanation of their hesitancy is that, despite the ‘nationalisation’ of Bolivian natural gas by the Morales government in 2006, most natural gas production in Bolivia is still carried out by transnational energy firms producing for foreign markets, above all Argentina and Brazil.<sup>382</sup> Gas and oil represent more than half of all Bolivian exports. Despite the government’s share in the revenue from gas having increased markedly after the MAS nationalisation, the government thus far has been unable to repair the damage done to the state gas company YPFB in the 1980s and 1990s. YPFB lacks the technical expertise or capital to either engage in production in existing sites or to fund and carry out explorations of new potential gas fields. The extraction and marketing of Bolivia’s main source of export income and fiscal revenue is still dominated by the same transnational firms who took up the generous contracts that were offered in the period of neoliberal restructuring.

Having forced many of its private ‘partners’ in the hydrocarbon industries to accept amended contracts that guaranteed increased taxes and rents for the Bolivian treasury, the government was perhaps understandably hesitant about being seen to be attempting to impose “harsh” environmentalist measures that might restrict the activity, and thus the profits, of these companies.

Without attempting to downplay the important differences between the two versions, it is clear that many of the important elements of the original bill were maintained in the version that was eventually passed. As I argued earlier, that the government felt the need to go forward with the bill, despite its bitter confrontation with environmentalists over TIPNIS a year earlier, indicated the ambiguous position it continues to find itself in. Committed to a development agenda in many ways consistent with that of previous regimes, it remains unable or unwilling to cede the ideological and political terrain of Pachamama to its critics. As

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<sup>382</sup> Kaup, Brent Z., *A Neoliberal Nationalization?: The Constraints of Natural-Gas-Led Development in Bolivia*, *Latin American Perspectives*, 2010, 37, p. 135

I show in the next section, however, even while signing the new bill, the government continued to contest the meaning of the rights of nature, and to assert the danger of environmentalist radicalism to Bolivia's integrity and development.

#### iv. The Spectre of Green Imperialism

Figure 10. 'More Development, More Roads'



Source: Inter Press Service (2011) <sup>383</sup>

Speaking after Evo Morales signed the law into effect on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2012, Garcia Linera remarked that 'our policy originates in the indigenous nations; it cannot be manipulated or confused with that other logic called green capitalism'. In its own way, the Janus-like position revealed in this quote is extremely illuminating. It reflects how the government wants to maintain the legitimising role of indigeneity by claiming that the government's bill reflects indigenous worldviews, even though many of the indigenous organisations initially involved with the bill were now totally opposed to it. At same time, it attempts to establish a discursive boundary through which it can distance its policy from some supposedly alien element ('green capitalism'). <sup>384</sup> In the same interview Garcia Linera expounds on the 'predators' and

<sup>383</sup> *Inter Press Service*, Carretera del TIPNIS entre Desarrollismo y Buen Vivir, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2011, available at <http://ipsnoticias.net/nota.asp?idnews=98929>

<sup>384</sup> *Los Tiempos*, Promulgan ley para eliminar latifundios, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012, available from [http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/nacional/20121016/promulgan-ley-para-eliminar-latifundios-\\_189009\\_401736.html](http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/nacional/20121016/promulgan-ley-para-eliminar-latifundios-_189009_401736.html)

'hypocrites' who claim to be protectors of the eco-system, but are instead the representatives of this green capitalism, or, as it has been put elsewhere, of "green imperialism".<sup>385</sup>

As indicated in the previous chapter, the spectre of green capitalism has weighed heavily on much of the language that has emanated from the Bolivian government on the issue of the environment. Speaking in 2012, Morales sought to highlight the role of 'green imperialism' or 'green capitalism' in the efforts to deny Bolivia's right to develop:

The environmentalism of capitalism, the green economy, is also a predatory colonialism because it allows the obligations of the developed countries - to preserve nature for future generations - to instead be imposed on so-called developing countries, while they continue to relentlessly destroy the environment. The Northern countries are enriched by an orgy of predation of the natural sources of life, while they oblige us, the countries of the South, to be their poor forest-keepers.

They want to eliminate our sovereignty over our natural resources, limiting and controlling the use and exploitation of our natural resources. They want to create mechanisms of interference [so they can] monitor and control our natural resources. They want to judge and punish the use of our natural resources with environmental arguments.<sup>386</sup>

Taken from the speech delivered by Morales to a plenary meeting of the Rio+20 summit in June 2012, this quote provides a fitting illustration of the position of the MAS government in relation to the environmental agenda. The MAS government wants to establish that it is pursuing a stout defence of nature, establishing a 'new relationship between nature and man' (Garcia Linera), while, at the same time, holding that environmentalist critics of its economic policy are prosecuting a naive and utopian green politics that serves the interests of global imperialism. Walking this discursive tightrope is a complicated task. One way in which the government has attempted to navigate its way through this dilemma, as the Morales speech at Rio+20 suggested, is to recast the issue of the environment in nationalist terms. I have already shown how this strategy works inside Bolivia in the previous chapter. In this form, it

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<sup>385</sup> Steinsleger, Jose, La USAID en Bolivia, La Jornada, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2012, available from <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/02/08/opinion/023a1pol>

<sup>386</sup> Morales Ayma, Evo, "La Economía verde es el Nuevo colonialismo para someter a nuestros pueblos, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2012, *Aporrea*, available at <http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a145588.html>

attempts to recast internal opponents as vectors, willing or unwilling, of foreign and/or reactionary intrigue. Here, I want to look more closely at the geopolitical dimensions of this claim.

One obvious way in which Morales' discourse operates is to situate the demands of the global environmental in a particular historical context. The West wishes to deny Bolivia, and the developing nations more broadly, the development it has already achieved – often at the expense of these same developing nations. For instance, the demands from the developed nations for environmental protection, in the form of criticisms of the rate of de-forestation in the Bolivian Amazon, which as I pointed out earlier is the highest of any Amazonian nation, are understood as imperialism's attempts to prevent Bolivia from developing its national resources and tackling poverty.<sup>387</sup> It is noted that one reason the Amazon rainforest is *such* a vital source of carbon sequestration is that the incredible rate of deforestation in the developed countries has reduced forest coverage in other parts of the globe. In this sense, the developing nations are to be held accountable for the crimes of the developed economies.

Furthermore, while the spectre of green imperialism in Morales' discourse could seem disingenuous, it is important to point out that some political ecologists have indeed suggested that environmental politics requires a move beyond classical interpretations of state sovereignty. Thomas Kuehls' *Beyond Sovereign Territory*, written broadly from a poststructuralist perspective, argues that global ecology and global capital both represent 'smooth spaces' that are the proper site of ecopolitics, and not the 'striated spaces' represented by the inter-national and inter-state political system. He illustrates the argument by referring specifically to the problem of deforestation in the Brazilian portion of the Amazon rainforest.

Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon rainforest has been challenged by politicians and environmentalists on the ecological grounds that the importance of this rainforest extends far beyond the territory of Brazil.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, Amazon deforestation grows outside Brazil, August 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, available at <http://www.sfgate.com/science/article/Amazon-deforestation-grows-outside-Brazil-3832770.php>

<sup>388</sup> Kuehls, Thom, *Beyond Sovereign Territory: The Space of Ecopolitics* (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1996) p. x

According to Kuehls, the rainforest fulfils vital functions in the global ecosystem and this makes strong conceptions of Brazilian sovereignty over this part of its territory problematic. In this sense, according to Kuehls, the global environmental movement increasingly mirrors global capital, prosecuting its struggle on the global 'open space' generated by capital's 'deterritorialising logic'. Under the conditions imposed by the globalisation of capital's network of social relations, 'ecopolitics exceeds the limits of the sovereign state'.<sup>389</sup>

It is certainly true that bioregions, such as the Amazon rainforest, do not conform to traditional units of political analysis. The larger environmental campaign groups, such as Greenpeace, have developed an impressive global reach and infrastructure so that they are capable of preventing and bearing witness to environmental destruction on a *planetary scale*. There is though a dangerous element to the discourse of 'global ecopolitics'. While Kuehls accepts that the global environmental crisis is primarily a problem originating in the global North, arguments similar to those he advances have been used in order to justify the 'curtailing' of certain rights for states in the developing world. It is precisely this aspect of some environmentalist discourses which produces, or at least helps to induce, nationalist political reactions.

Scholars and activists associated with Wolfgang Sachs and the Global Ecology perspective have been at the forefront of challenging attempts by Northern elites to use the environmental agenda to subordinate populations and states in the global South. Vandana Shiva has highlighted the ambiguous way in which the notion of the 'global' is deployed in much green discourse:

The global does not represent the universal human interest, it represents a particular local and parochial interest which has been globalised through the scope of its reach. The seven most powerful countries, the G-7 [now the G-8], dictate global affairs, but the interests that guide them remain narrow, local and parochial.<sup>390</sup>

Shiva defends the 'sovereign rights' of indigenous people and southern nations over potentially 'global' resources such as biodiversity and identifies the fact and rhetoric of

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid, p. 54

<sup>390</sup> Shiva, Vandana, The Greening of the Global Reach, in Sachs, Wolfgang (ed), *Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict* (Zed Books, London, 1993) p. 150

globalisation as the grounds upon which the North attempts to make the developing world bear the cost of environmental destruction for which the North is responsible.

The 'global environment' thus emerges as the principal weapon to facilitate the North's worldwide access to natural resources and raw materials on the one hand, and on the other, to enforce a worldwide sharing of the environmental costs it has generated, which retaining a monopoly on benefits reaped from the destruction it has wreaked on biological resources...Through its global reach, the North exists in the South, but the South exists only within itself, since it has no global reach. The South can only exist locally, while only the North exists globally.<sup>391</sup>

Evo Morales' scepticism regarding demands emanating from the North about how Bolivia needs to protect its environment is thus warranted. The globalisation of capitalism, which has done so much to generate the environmental chaos is now attempting to use the chaos as a pretext for extending its political reach even further.

The problem is not that Morales and the MAS government have been too hostile to capitalist globalisation, but that they have not been hostile enough. That is, while Morales denounces the effects of global capitalism on the environment and defends Bolivia's sovereignty over its natural resources, the MAS regime has pressed ahead, for the most part, with patterns of production that continue the foreign extraction of Bolivia's natural resources. The criticisms from campaigners and social movements that have emerged over the government's commitment to the Rights of Mother Earth are clearly not motivated by a desire to see Bolivia subordinated to a Northern agenda, either "green" or capitalist. Indeed, as I argued in the previous chapter, if anything the environmentalist critique of the current structures of the Bolivian economy relies on an unrealistic assessment of how possible it would be for Bolivia to de-link from global commodity markets.

The MAS government translated the radical demands of the social movements for a profound rupture with the model of capitalist development into a law driven with contradictions and antinomies. These contradictions in part reflected the government's commitment to

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., p. 152

extraction led development and its attempt to curtail any disruption of that which might have resulted from some provisions in the earlier version of the bill.

However, some of these contradictions were present even in the initial version of the bill. In part, they reflect the limitations of a rights based and legalistic approach to the problem of environmental destruction. As I have argued here, the rights of nature approach was prone to be diluted both by the overwhelming force of centrifugal economic imperatives and by the intellectual and ontological problems involved in extending rights beyond human beings.

This reservation notwithstanding, I have attempted to show that the passage of the law reflects the continued existence of a space in which critical discourses of sustainability and development can emerge. While the events of TIPNIS weakened the bond between the government and environmental movements and discourses, the bond was not entirely broken. Even if The Law of the Rights of Mother Earth is not fully implemented or its provisions diluted (a not unlikely prospect, given the long delays in actually implementing the law<sup>392</sup>), the fact of its passage helps create the terrain on which extraction led development and environmental damage can be contested. If Bolivian development policy and politics is existing between the rights of nature and the right to develop, the law's existence pulls the balance in favour of this advocating the former.

As I will show in the next chapter, this basis for legal and political contestation of the development agenda is becoming increasingly vital. In this chapter and the previous one, I have shown how the rights of nature and the right to develop discourses have clashed over development in the Amazon and in the development of environmental legislation. As the government of Evo Morales enters its 10<sup>th</sup> year, there are no signs of this conflict coming to an end. On the contrary, as I will demonstrate, the natural and political limits of the government's development agenda are beginning to emerge. As the unsustainable nature of extraction-based development is revealed in a series of political setbacks and environmental warning signs, the government is faced with the choice of radicalising its agenda in one of two directions: either, it can pursue the radical environmental agenda outlined in the Law of Mother Earth, or, as it appears to be doing, it can extend and deepen its current development

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<sup>392</sup> FOBOMADE, A 2 años de la Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral para Vivir Bien: está en vigencia?, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, available from <http://www.fobomade.org.bo/art-2393>

model. At stake in this choice is not only the environmental state of Bolivia, but the viability of the Morales project.



## Chapter 7. Natural Limits and Political Limits: The Process of Change and The Future of Bolivian Development

Control me. If I can't advance,  
push me, brothers and sisters.  
Correct me constantly, because I  
may err.

- Evo Morales<sup>393</sup>

The strange nature of the 2014 national elections in Bolivia reflected many of the profound changes that had taken place in the previous 10 years. On the one hand, MAS supremacy over and against its opponents at the beginning of the campaign left no doubt about who would wind up the winner. At the same time, MAS and Morales were not content with simple victory. They promised victory in all 9 of Bolivia's autonomous departments. With such a victory, Bolivia could legitimately be said to have entered into a new phase in its modern social and political development.

Bolivian politics was no longer to be dominated by the metaphor of the *media luna*, divided between east and west, lowland and highland or indigenous and white. MAS had appointed itself as the political instrument for Bolivia's emergence into full nationhood and sovereignty. In the aftermath of the decisive Morales victory, Garcia Linera assured Bolivians that attempts to 'divide the country' were now at an end. The political forces committed to the dislocation and fracturing of Bolivia had been defeated. The MAS programme for government was grounded in the belief that Bolivians now had a 'very strong sense of belonging', in a country in which only one 'state, economy and society' existed.<sup>394</sup> What became increasingly clear throughout the course of the campaign was that this national hegemony required that many of the distinctive features of the *Masista* project be jettisoned.

This final chapter looks at the details of this campaign and the aftermath. In doing so, it assesses what the MAS project – now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of government – has meant for Bolivia

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<sup>393</sup> Hylton, Forrest and Thomson, Sinclair, *Revolutionary Horizons: Past and Present in Bolivia Politics* (Verso, London, 2007) p. 15

<sup>394</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, Vicepresidente: La Media Luna Dejo de Existir y en estas Elecciones se demostró que solo hay una Bolivia, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, available at <http://www.vicepresidencia.gob.bo/Vicepresidente-la-media-luna-dejo>

and how the party-movement has moved in the preceding decade. In particular, I want to examine Morales' hope that Bolivia will become the 'energy capital of South America' and his new alliance with agribusiness industries in the valleys and the Amazonian East. What do these new dispositions mean for the prospect – so central to the Bolivian rejection of the neoliberal model – for a move beyond globalised capitalist extraction towards Andean communitarian-socialism? In this final chapter, I will argue that the political project being pursued by MAS bears little resemblance to that which its supporters in Bolivia and outwith had anticipated would be the case in 2005. The current direction of travel for Morales and his government is towards a radical intensification of the process of resource extraction and a dynamic integration of vast swathes of Bolivian territory into the flows of the global market. These changes promise to speed up rather than mitigate dangerous and unsustainable ecological rifts within the country, threatening the long term viability both of development and ecosystems.

In the first two sections, I look at the failed political opposition to MAS at a national level, testified to by the comprehensive victory of President Morales and the MAS parliamentary candidates in 2014. Morales' successful attempts to integrate formerly hostile political forces in the eastern departments also signposted a new stage in the hegemony of Garcia Linera's 'national-popular bloc'. These forces have been ameliorated in part, I argue, because they share a commitment to the export led development model MAS is pursuing.

In the final three sections, I analyse three potential and developing sources of difficulty for the Morales political project. Firstly, I address the economic difficulties arising due to the fall in the price of Bolivia's energy exports. I will argue that this emerging crisis is causing a radicalisation of the development agenda pursued in the first two terms, including new exploration in the protected national parks. In conjunction with this radicalisation of the development agenda, the right to develop discourse itself has become increasingly assertive. Secondly, I address the conflicts over the drafting and passing of the 2014 Mining Law, which was intended to promote the acceleration of the growth of the mining industry by providing a new and 'secure' legal foundation for an industry dominated by foreign capital. In particular, I address the sections of the law which further retreat from the principle of Prior and Informed consent and attempt to criminalise the growing resistance to the environmental effects of the industry on communities on the *altiplano*. In the final section, I contextualise the acceleration

of the extraction process in the context of an emerging energy crisis in the country. This crisis is producing more emphasis on alternative sources of energy production, particularly hydroelectric power, a form of energy production with its own environmental problems. This crisis has emerged even while the government pursues ambitious plans to turn Bolivia into the energy hub of the region.

My goal in this chapter is to address myself both to the current and future prospects of the Bolivian development model and the implications this has for the political sustainability of the MAS project. As I argued in the introduction, the issues of environmental sustainability bear directly on questions of political durability. It is becoming clear that the disputes over development policy which I have discussed provide indications of the predicament the MAS government will face over the coming period.

Having resolved against a break with primary export led development, MAS has made itself a hostage to fortune – of falling international demand and prices. It also faces further, even more fundamental long term barriers in the form of natural limits, such as the low and falling level of proven natural gas reserves and the pressure on key natural resources, such as water, caused by the extractive industries. As I have argued, the distinction between the rights of nature and the right to develop appears increasingly false. Without a turn away from the current export model, economic development will stall, promoting ever more desperate pursuit of new motors of extraction, social and environmental dislocation and political crisis and revolt. While these processes are only still in their incipient stages, the direction of travel is clear.

**i. On Winning Before You Have Won: Is Anyone Against the Process of Change?**

The four opponents lined up against Morales in the Presidential election each neatly represented the political inadequacies of the opposition to the Morales government. Individually they each stood for particular constituencies – of differing sizes, political orientations and social compositions - whom MAS had never won over or had gradually lost in the course of their period in office. The failure of the opposition candidates on both the right and the left lay in their failure or unwillingness to articulate a coherent critique or alternative to the policies pursued in the previous 9 years.

As a result, Morales' victory in October 2014 seemed predestined and was ultimately emphatic. He gained over 61% of the vote in the first round, more than 35% ahead of his nearest challenger. The scale of Morales' victory over the scattered and incoherent opposition forces testified to the success of MAS in strictly political terms. The scale of the victory meant that MAS was able to secure the 2/3 parliamentary majority required to amend the constitution, something that would be necessary if Morales was to run again.

The nature of the formal political opposition Morales and his party faced in 2014 is illustrative of the current conjuncture in Bolivian society. Standing for the Green Party and in alliance with sections of the now split CONAMAQ, Fernando Vargas – a principal figure in the protests against the government over TIPNIS – was a plausible candidate to channel some of the popular discontent with the government's approach to development strategy. Vargas proclaimed his candidacy as a continuation of the struggle over TIPNIS and said that he would stand on a platform of defence of nature and opposition to 'colonial capitalism'. While Morales had 'used' the indigenous majority to come to power, Vargas suggested that Evo had governed in alliance with the businesses looking to exploit and destroy Bolivia's environment.<sup>395</sup> Ultimately, Vargas came last of the five candidates after suggesting that Morales could only win with the aid of electoral fraud.

The weakness of Vargas' campaign reflected the peculiar status of the section of the indigenous social movements which now finds itself alienated from the 'process of change'. Despite the ferocity of the conflicts and symbolic damage caused by the TIPNIS affair – in particular the images of state repression of the opponents of the construction – Morales had maintained his personal popularity and MAS continued to enjoy the loyalty of a number of the social movements. The failure of Vargas' largely symbolic and poorly resourced campaign showed that these conflicts over the direction of the 'process of change' were a long way from translating into an effective political alternative to Morales or MAS.

In contrast, the principal conservative opposition to Morales' re-election came from the extremely well-resourced and prominent Santa Cruz businessman Samuel Doria. Doria's stance in relation to the process of change illustrated a great deal about the political

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<sup>395</sup> Eju!, Si don Evo gana, será con fraude, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014, available from <http://eju.tv/2014/10/si-don-evo-gana-ser-con-fraude>

hegemony MAS had achieved in its 8 years in power. Unmistakeably a figure of the right and the business class, Doria spent much of the campaign persuading voters that it was not his intention to overturn wholesale the economic policies pursued under MAS. According to Doria, no one in their 'right mind' was now looking to reverse the contracts agreed to between the state and the gas companies since the 'nationalisation' of 2006. President Morales pointed to interviews in which Doria had proposed reducing the state's share in the income by roughly 30% for future contracts. Doria claimed that these incentives were necessary to promote future discovery and investment and did not affect current deals.<sup>396</sup>

In this sense, Doria's campaign represented a new pragmatic approach on the part of the old Bolivian elites. While their social position and their long records in public life would easily demonstrate their fierce hostility to state interference in the hydrocarbons industry, the new reality required a degree of adaptation. In order to pose any kind of electoral and political challenge to Morales, the right felt it necessary to come to some kind of accommodation with the changes in Bolivian society since 2006.

This reflected the way in which the upheavals which had brought Morales to power in the first instance fundamentally transformed the political terrain of the country. The legacy of the failure and popular revulsion of the neoliberal era still incapacitates the traditional right, leaving them incapable of offering a consistent and coherent alternative to Morales. In the election of 2014, all of Morales' opponents, with perhaps the exception of ex-President 'Tuto' Quiroga, ran on a platform of maintaining the essential features of the government's economic policy.

For his part, Morales was keen to bring previously hostile forces into the MAS fold, or at least to neutralise them as potential threats. He made serious and successful efforts to win over much of the old Santa Cruz elite which had led the revolt against the new constitution and this provoked the unsuccessful recall referendum in 2009. The pertinent question is why Morales would be so keen to envelop these previously hostile forces, given their inability to galvanise any kind of serious opposition to his rule at the national level. This is particularly the case if we assume that Morales' goal is a radical transformation of Bolivian society, since he

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<sup>396</sup> El Deber, Dora Medina dice que si está a favor de la nacionalización de gas, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014, available from <http://www.eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/doria-medina-dice-favor-nacionalizacion.html>

would be incorporating into his fold social forces bitterly opposed to any change in the economic and social fundamentals of the country. In the case of the 600 members of Colonel Banzer's former party in Santa Cruz who moved to MAS en masse before the elections, the conversion was dramatic and wholesale.<sup>397</sup>

However, as I have argued, such a tactic squares with the political and economic strategy of national development and integration which MAS has pursued. If we understand that the goal of the Morales era is to overhaul the architecture of Bolivian society, territory and economy along national-developmental lines, then the political armistice with the Santa Cruz elites is coherent.

By closing their 2014 campaign in a former stronghold of the 2008 autonomist revolt in Santa Cruz, MAS hoped to both cement and embody this new national hegemony. It was, as the leader of the MAS movement in Santa Cruz put it, a 'strategy of territorial occupation'.<sup>398</sup> The strategy of territorial occupation pursued at the economic and social level thus spills over and becomes embodied in a newly configured political terrain.

At the same time as the opposition is squeezed geographically, economic growth and political success render opposition movements, at least on the terrain of electoral politics, marginal forces. In these circumstances, the only barriers to the hegemony of MAS are opposition outwith parliament, for instance such as those generated during the *gasolinazo* or the TIPNIS affair. Or, as I will argue is more likely, challenges in the form of growing ecological limits to the development strategy being pursued.

## ii. Subduing the Media Luna: The Nationalisation of Bolivian Politics

With victory in the elections guaranteed by the divided and fractious nature of the opposition, Morales made winning in all 9 departments of Bolivia his principal electoral goal. To this end, he made several agreements with previously hostile business groups, particularly in the vital agriculture export sector which has traditionally dominated politics in the area.

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<sup>397</sup> Pagina Siete, Grupo de adenistas renuncia a su partido para sumarse al MAS, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2014, available from <http://www.paginasiete.bo/nacional/2014/9/3/grupo-adenistas-renuncia-partido-para-sumarse-31182.html>

<sup>398</sup> El Deber, MAS cerrara su campana en el bastión autonómico, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014, available from <http://www.eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/mas-cerrara-campana-bastion-autonomico.html>

The goal of national development in fact depends on this 'depolarisation' of Bolivian politics taking place. It reflects at the level of politics the supersession of the regional and local dislocations that MAS is looking to achieve in the economy. It also reveals, on one level, lessons learned by MAS from the experience in Venezuela, where permanent polarisation has produced a sclerotic economic and political condition used by the right to undermine the 'revolutionary' project itself. More fundamentally, the polarisation of the first Morales term was a barrier to the form of social development MAS is now keen to undertake.

For their part, the *cruceño* elites have grown to appreciate the economic and political stability provided by MAS. As long as economic growth continues, they are prepared to consent to a redistribution of national income to popular sections, perhaps for lack of a viable alternative. At the same time, it is mutually understood that rapprochement is dependent on MAS not pursuing more radical fundamental change which would overhaul the form of development or dramatically change Bolivia's position in the global export markets. As the editor of *Nueva Sociedad*, Pablo Stefanoni, puts it:

To achieve this "blue tide" [blue is the colour of [MAS], the President has promoted a large number of projects, from dams to roads, including the expansion of the agricultural frontier. The equation is clear: to defeat the *cruceño* elite, MAS must form a pact with a section of the business class and accept their 'model of accumulation'.<sup>399</sup>

The paradox of all this, as Stefanoni writes, is that these same elites were bitterly hostile to Morales' initial election, fearing that he would transform the country into a 'new Cuba'. At the heart of the new concordat with the agroindustrial elites in the east is not only political but economic interests. Morales has made himself open, for instance, to relaxing various restrictions, including those contained in the Law of Mother Earth, on the use and consumption of GMO crops in the country. Many producers in the region feel that these crops are necessary to maintain competitiveness on the global markets, particularly in soy, in which they have to compete.

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<sup>399</sup> Stefanoni, Pablo, Elecciones 2014: Post-Indianismo, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2014, available from <http://www.nodal.am/2014/10/elecciones-bolivia-2014-post-indianismo-por-pablo-stefanoni/>

The use of these crops continues to be opposed by most of the social movements representing those involved in agricultural production. At a meeting in April of 2015 in Santa Cruz of business interests, the President and the social movements, Morales stated that the ban (already flouted in many areas) could only be upheld if the producers opposed – principally the smaller indigenous producers – could show that organic, GMO-free production could meet Bolivian needs. The likelihood, however, is that any expanded production that might come from increasing the agricultural frontiers and greater yields will not be to satiate Bolivian demand but to increase the level of exports.<sup>400</sup>

The medium and large owners were also able to win an extension in the period they are given to prove that the land they owned is being used productively. Under the current regulation provided for by the Agrarian Reform law (INRA), the state can annul landowners' titles if land is not being used after 2 years. MAS itself had reduced this time period from 4 years in 2006. This measure is designed to prevent hoarding of productive land and speculation. The recent agreement in Santa Cruz increases this time period to 5 years – a compromise with the landowners, who wanted to see the oversight facility ended altogether. The leader of 'organic' (non-government aligned) CIDOB, Adolfo Chavez – a critic of the government prominent in the TIPNIS revolt – said the change proved the government was completely 'strapped to the landowners'.<sup>401</sup>

As Table 5.1 illustrates, the new positive orientation towards the eastern departments adopted by the government produced the desired result in 2014. The MAS Presidential ticket won in 8 out of 9 departments of Bolivia – much to Morales' disappointment, Beni stemmed the tide and gave its backing to Doria. The strongholds of the governments in the highlands and valleys saw a relative softening in the Morales vote between 2009 and 2014. Oruro and La Paz, the two most strongly pro-Morales departments in the country, both saw double digit falls in support.

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<sup>400</sup> *La Razón*, Morales abre posibilidad del uso de semillas transgénicas, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2015, available at [http://www.la-Razón.com/index.php?url=/economia/Cumbre-Morales-abre-posibilidad-semillas-transgenicas\\_0\\_2257574232.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/index.php?url=/economia/Cumbre-Morales-abre-posibilidad-semillas-transgenicas_0_2257574232.html)

<sup>401</sup> El Diario, Función Económico Social de la Tierra, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015, [http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2015/2015\\_04/nt150428/nacional.php?n=35&-funcion-economico-social-de-la-tierra](http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2015/2015_04/nt150428/nacional.php?n=35&-funcion-economico-social-de-la-tierra)



Table 5.1: Vote for Morales for President, by department

Department	2005 Pres	2009 Pres	2014 Pres	% change 2009-2014
Oruro	62.5	79.5	66.4	- 13.1
Potosi	57.8	78.3	69.5	- 8.8
Tarija	31.6	51.1	51.7	+ 0.6
Santa Cruz	33.2	40.1	49	+ 8.9
Beni	16.5	37.7	41.5	+ 3.8
Pando	20.9	44.5	52.1	+ 7.6
Cochabamba	64.8	68.8	66.7	- 2.1
La Paz	66.6	80.3	68.9	- 11.4
Chuquisaca	54.2	58	63.4	+ 5.4

### iii. After the Boom: What Survives the Slowdown?

Notwithstanding the slight weakening of support in former bastions in the western highlands, the project initiated by Evo Morales to transform Bolivia was greatly strengthened by the 2014 result. It showed that the economic stability that MAS had produced, and the substantial improvement in living standards it had brought in its wake, could continue to undergird political stability. The electoral platform on which Morales ran for re-election was very much centred on this notion of continuity and fulfilment of the agenda pursued in the first two terms. The principal slogan of the campaign, 'Con Evo Vamos Bien' ('With Evo we are doing well'), testified to this optimistic vision of the future of the country under MAS government.

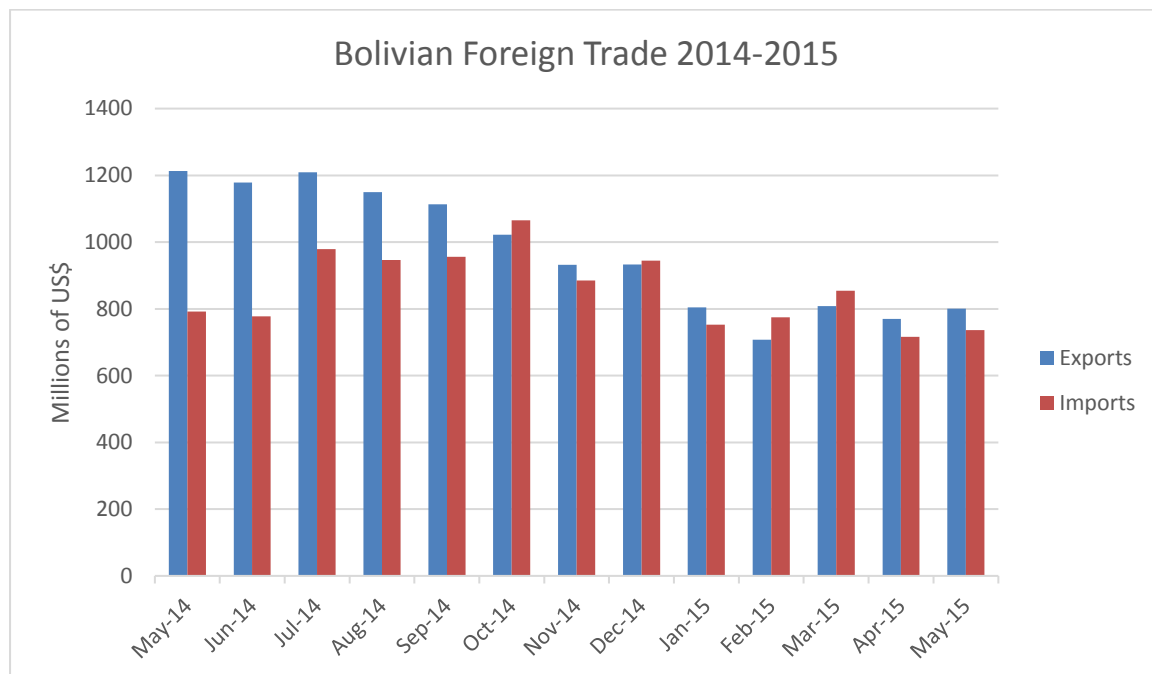
Evo's campaign included ambitious promises to transform Bolivia into an 'energy centre of South America'. This plan included a new initiative to introduce nuclear energy into the country for the first time, expand hydroelectric power and develop other forms of clean energy that will allow the country to be in a position to export 3000 megawatts of energy by 2025.<sup>402</sup> Expansive agreements have already been signed with both Brazil and Argentina,

<sup>402</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. Ministerio de Comunicación, *Centro energético de Sudamérica: Bolivia generara más de 3.000 MW con plantas hidroeléctricas*, available at <http://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/?q=20141005/16950>

which remain the principal markets for Bolivian energy exports, to take advantage of this growth.<sup>403</sup>

This effort to expand the forms and scale of energy production in the country is central to achieving the objectives set out in the Agenda Patriótica 2025 – the government’s 13 point plan to change Bolivia fundamentally in preparation for the 200 year anniversary of the country’s founding. It was set out in 2013 and passed into law in January 2015, when it was becoming increasingly clear the hydrocarbon export boom was slowing, creating holes in the government’s broader development agenda.

Figure 11. Bolivia Foreign Trade 2014-15



Source: INE (2015)

The falling price of natural gas and thus of the value of Bolivian exports left Bolivia facing its first foreign trade deficit since 2003.<sup>404</sup> In line with the government’s development strategy,

<sup>403</sup> Energy Press, Bolivia y Brasil firman acuerdo para exportar energía, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2015, available from <http://energypress.com.bo/noticias/bolivia-y-brasil-firman-acuerdo-para-exportar-energia/>

<sup>404</sup> Los Tiempos, Bolivia afronta saldo negativa en su comercio, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015, accessible at [http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/economia/20150507/bolivia-afronta-saldo-negativo-en-su-comercio\\_300778\\_664684.html](http://www.lostiempos.com/diario/actualidad/economia/20150507/bolivia-afronta-saldo-negativo-en-su-comercio_300778_664684.html)

such falls in the value of exports can only necessitate even more aggressive expansion of the primary export industries, in an attempt to fill in value gaps with quantity increases.

Even this strategy, however, has to contend with the ongoing problem of low and falling levels of proven reserves in the country. Figures on the current proven reserves of natural gas are contested, but will likely fall at the lower end of the range of 10 to 20 trillion cubic feet. It is undoubtedly true that low levels of investment in exploration and high levels of export to Brazil and Argentina have caused the level of proven reserves to fall in the period since the nationalisation.<sup>405</sup>

One way to reverse this decline (apart from reducing exports) would be to reduce levels of domestic consumption. Instead, the government is endeavouring to promote increases in some forms of domestic consumption, for instance by reducing the number of vehicles that rely on imported petroleum and diesel and increasing the number that can run on combustible forms of natural gas. The scale of the revolt unleashed in 2011 by the government's attempt to remove large subsidies from imported petroleum – an expense which eats up anything up to a third of the state's income from gas exports- means that these efforts are likely to be pursued cautiously.

As such, Morales signed Presidential Decree 2366, which set a new priority and established guidelines for the next wave of hydrocarbon exploration in the Protected Areas.<sup>406</sup> This was a part of the larger plan announced by Garcia Linera, discussed in earlier chapters, of integrating these areas into the national economy through the means of hydrocarbon extractions. An analysis conducted by CEDIB described these new moves into the protected areas as the creation of a 'new oil frontier'.<sup>407</sup>

As CEDIB notes, the purpose of the decree is not necessarily to open up the parks for the first time – many contracts held by the YPF already includes zones in the national parks, as the graphic below shows – but to formalise the principle that there is no ultimate barrier, either in scale or in territory, to oil and gas exploration of the country. While the decree makes

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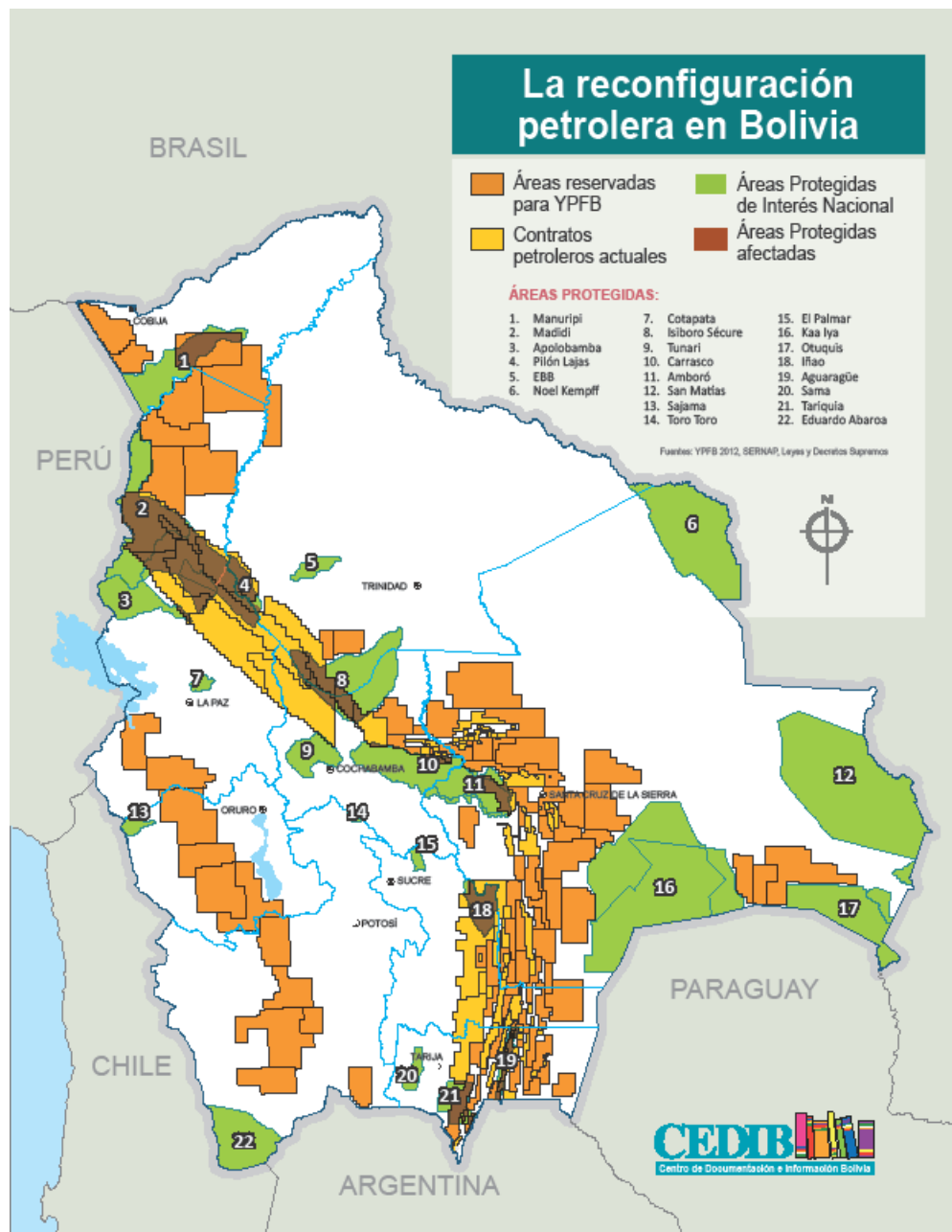
<sup>405</sup> LIDEMA, Estudios de caso sobre problemáticas socioambientales en Bolivia – Hidrocarburos: Contexto general y problemático socioambiental, December 2013, p. 133

<sup>406</sup> Decreto Supremo 2366, <http://www.cedib.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/DECRETO-SUPREMO-N%C2%BA-2366.pdf>

<sup>407</sup> Campanini T., Jorge, [http://www.cambioclimatico-bolivia.org/archivos/20150619225851\\_0.pdf](http://www.cambioclimatico-bolivia.org/archivos/20150619225851_0.pdf)

reference to environmental standards, including those demanded by the Law of Mother Earth, it fails to recognise that the Protected Areas have only been designated as such because the ecosystems they cover are considered especially vulnerable or important. In other words, an area is either protected because it fits a given set of criteria or it is not. The notion of environmentally sustainable oil and gas exploration in an area already registered as protected is a contradiction in terms.

Figure 12. Current Hydrocarbon Concessions in National Parks



Source: CEDIB (2014)

Despite this, there are already contracts agreed for exploration in 11 of the 22 protected areas, mainly in the northern Amazon and Chapare regions. President Morales and the YPFB insisted that initial exploration would only affect 0.04% of the total surface of the protected areas. However, Morales strongly defended the principle of exploration in the protected areas that his Supreme Decree had permitted:

We have decided, *we have every right* [emphasis added], it is our right to conduct explorations in the so called protected areas and we are going to do this very strongly...We are only going to explore in seven protected areas and only in 0.04% of the surface. How does this affect the environment? [My translation] <sup>408</sup>

In framing the matter of contentious development as a question of national rights, the President's discourse attempts to suggest that those opposed to such a development strategy are engaged in *prima facie* violation of the Bolivian state's sovereignty. As such, and as Morales went on to propose in the same speech, any prospective opposition must be in some sense marshalled or fermented from outwith the boundaries of the state/nation. The communities living in the areas must be on guard, he says, against 'manipulation' from NGOs intent on pursuing the goals of an international environmentalist movement hostile to Bolivia's march towards sovereignty within its own borders.

The government's position on the areas, in line with how they have deployed the right to develop discourse in previous controversies, is that the areas protected are home to some of the poorest, most ill served communities in the country and that the extraction industries would be able to provide needed income and services. They also pointed out that any business investing in exploring for deposits would be required to donate 1% of the total value of any investment to fund SERNAP.

In line with the newly aggressive approach, the government has sped up its 'restart' of the TIPNIS project. Despite the manifest deficiencies of the 'consultation process' it set up after its defeat in 2011, it seems clear that the road will now be constructed.<sup>409</sup> In this sense, the

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<sup>408</sup> Pagina Siete, Evo anuncia exploración con "muchísima fuerza" en áreas protegidas, 21<sup>st</sup> July 2015, available from <http://www.paginasiete.bo/economia/2015/7/21/anuncia-exploracion-mucha-fuerza-areas-protegidas-63876.html>

<sup>409</sup> CEDIB, Verificación de la consulta en el TIPNIS, 2013, available from [http://www.cedib.org/post\\_type\\_documentos/consulta-tipnis-compendio-de-informes/](http://www.cedib.org/post_type_documentos/consulta-tipnis-compendio-de-informes/)

battle over TIPNIS increasingly appeared less like a passing moment of crisis and more a sign of things to come. Indeed, as the legislation discussed in the following section shows, the animating causes of the TIPNIS conflict or the battles to protect the national parks are not confined, but are windows on new and dangerous faultlines spreading throughout Bolivian society and within the process of change itself.

#### **iv. Digging a Hole: The 2014 Mining Law and the Politics of Conflict**

It was a sign of President Morales' confidence in the run-up to the elections of 2014 that he decided in early March of that year to propose new regulations of the country's mining sector. The law governing the industry had remain essentially unchanged since Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada's 1997 Mining Law was passed with the intention of finalising the privatisation of the industry. The complex of actors and interests involved in the industry and the conflicts which it generates – particularly with local, often indigenous, communities over questions of water use and territorial rights - make it a politically contentious area. In 2014, the industry was facing similar challenges to those discussed in the previous chapter in relation to hydrocarbons – falling international prices and revenue to the state, and pressure from key sectors of the industry for an extension and intensification of the extraction dynamic. At the same time, the conflicts which have characterised the industry in Bolivia, and in the Andes more generally, were expanding and becoming more explosive.

The disputes and dissension raised by the Ley de Minería y Metalurgia (Law 535) contributed to a renewed round of conflict between the government, social movements and environmental groups over the capacity of local, often indigenous communities to challenge the extractive industries and assert their constitutionally protected rights to sovereignty over their territory. In this section, I explore these disputes in so far as they provide further evidence of the government's increasingly cavalier attitude to the environmental concerns of Bolivians sceptical of the extraction-led development agenda. In particular, I address the sections of the law which set out new procedures for achieving the Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous communities for use of their territories by mining contractors. I also focus on the sections of the new law which effectively seek to criminalise contestation of the mining industry and its impacts on adjacent communities. The elements of the Mining Law which seek to delegitimise and criminalise collective efforts aimed at contesting the model of

extraction-led development represent a new, and politically significant, moment in the dispute over the rights of nature and the right to develop in contemporary Bolivia.

The Bolivian mining industry has a tri-partite structure – state, private and cooperative. The once dominant state enterprise COMIBOL, despite the 2009 Constitution’s commitment to recognition of the mines as part of the national patrimony, has never recovered from the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, such that in 2012 only 5.5% of the value generated in the industry was from the state sector. The private sector has remained the most important element of the industry, accounting for almost three-quarters of all the value generated in the industry, with a number of Japanese, Canadian and Chinese multinationals operating most of the larger mines in the western Highlands. Until 2007, private investors were also providing almost all of the new investment in the sector – although private investment levels declined sharply between 2007 and 2013.<sup>410</sup>

Lastly, the 125,000 cooperative miners comprise close to around 90% of those who actually work in the industry. The cooperatives were formed in the aftermath of the collapse of the state owned mining industry in the 1980s and their number more than tripled in the subsequent two decades.<sup>411</sup> In effect, most operate as small businesses rather than profit-sharing cooperatives, relying on a particularly labour-intensive exploitation of smaller seams by large numbers of miners, often poorly paid and lacking the labour and social protections provided to those in the state-owned mines. The cooperatives also benefit from a number of privileges not afforded to the private sector proper, such as their exemption from a 37.5% tax rate and a reduced royalty.<sup>412</sup> Indeed, despite the fact that their activities amounted to more than a quarter of all the revenue from the industry, the cooperatives contributed less than 1% of direct taxes paid. The growth of the cooperative miners was very much encouraged by the 1997 Mining Law and the governments of the neoliberal era, as the state sought to maintain an income from the industry without the fiscal burden of the state-owned enterprise and the unionised workforce.

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<sup>410</sup> UDAPE, *Diagnósticos Sectoriales – Minería*. September 2015, p. 21

<sup>411</sup> This figure and the others in the paragraph are taken from Sandi Bernal, Eliodor, *Minería, Desarrollo y Conflictividad Social* in Tejada Antonio, Aramayo, *La Veta del Conflicto: Ocho Miradas sobre Conflictividad minera en Bolivia (2010-2014)* (Fundacion Unir, La Paz, 2014) p. 34

<sup>412</sup> The royalty calculated as a percentage of the gross revenue of the concern and varies on account of a range of factors, including the metal or mineral being mined.

The cooperative miners' numbers have also given them and their union FENCOMIN a considerable social weight and political significance such that President Morales is generally perceived to be amenable, if not deferential, to their interests and preferences. In fact, despite this assessment, the relationship between the cooperatives and Morales has remained more ambiguous, with the cooperative miners looking to maintain a political relationship with the government which protects their interests and allows them to disrupt any movement towards more extensive nationalisations.<sup>413</sup> Morales, for his part, has adopted a sometimes politically perilous strategy of balancing the interests of the cooperatives, the transnationals in the private sector and the much smaller group of workers in the state-owned mines.<sup>414</sup>

Since the recovery and growth of the industry in the early 2000s, a key demand of the cooperative miners has been the state's acceptance of a number of contracts which they had signed 'partnering' them with private industry. After President Morales had come to power, the issue of the regulation of the mines had remained on the agenda, particularly since the standing law regulating the industry was a hangover from the despised 'Goni' era. The aim of the law introduced by Morales to the lower house of parliament in 2014 was to remove the legal ambiguity surrounding the mines and, according to President Morales, to again recognise the mines as a national asset, just as they had been after the 1952 Revolution, bringing to an end the era of neoliberal regulation.

When the first draft of the law was introduced in March 2014, existing cooperative-private contracts were not only to be deemed legal but provision was to be made for additional contracts of this kind. Unexpectedly, given that the law had been drawn up in discussions with the principal actors in the industry with the aim of achieving 'consensus' (the indigenous organisations were excluded from the discussions), the law was held up in parliament amid a growing controversy and rebellion from MAS deputies. These objections surrounded the

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<sup>413</sup> For an interesting analysis of the government's 'balancing' role in the industry, see Fornillo, Bruno, Proletariado minero, nacionalización económica el reposicionamiento actual de la Central Obrera Boliviana, POLIS: Revista Latinoamericana, 24:2009

<sup>414</sup> As a good illustration of this, see the agreement signed between the government, the state-owned enterprise and the cooperatives for the nationalisation of the Colquiri mine, which allowed the cooperatives to maintain their pre-existing areas and involved the sharing of seams between the cooperatives and the unionised miners. *La Razón*, Gobierno, mineros and cooperativistas firman acuerdo para nacionalizar la mina Colquiri, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2012, available from [http://m.la-razon.com/economia/Gobierno-cooperativistas-acuerdo-nacionalizar-Colquiri\\_0\\_1635436530.html](http://m.la-razon.com/economia/Gobierno-cooperativistas-acuerdo-nacionalizar-Colquiri_0_1635436530.html)



legality of several direct partnership agreements which had been made between the cooperatives and private interests.

The Mining Minister Mario Virreira was fired by President Morales (who professed to be shocked at the existence of the contracts) and the offices of COMIBOL were raided as part of an audit of the state enterprise. As accusations that its leaders had sanctioned illegal arrangements between private interests and the cooperatives emerged, a revised version of the law was then introduced which would have annulled the cooperative-private agreements. Faced with this threat to these contracts, FENCOMIN organised a series of protests and blockades, some of which ended in violence, with the aim of having the law shelved or changed. With the election approaching, Morales agreed to amend the law, allowing the cooperatives to re-negotiate their existing contracts in line with the new law and to contract with private companies as part of 'mixed enterprises' with COMIBOL but forbidding any further direct private-cooperative agreements.

While much of the debate surrounding the law centred on this dispute over the economic future of the industry, significant sections of the law touched directly on the debates over the environmental and social costs of the industry, which had become particularly salient after the emergence of a number of high-profile conflicts between mining interests and local communities. These conflicts and the change in language introduced by the 2009 Constitution contributed towards increasing uneasiness within the industry, particularly after the boom in prices witnessed during the early to mid-2000s had peaked and reversed. For the state, this atrophy in the industry's growth was also a concern, leading as it had to an almost 20% fall in incomes from royalties between 2011 and 2013.<sup>415</sup> The impression that Bolivian mining was now an insecure legal and political environment contributed to the sharp fall in private investment in the industry between 2007 and 2013, from a high of almost \$400 million to less than \$140 million in the year before the new law was passed.<sup>416</sup> The collapse in investment also reflected two key concerns of the mining concerns, both of which the new law sought to address.

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<sup>415</sup> UDAPE, *Diagnósticos*, p. 32

<sup>416</sup> *ibid*, p. 21

The first related to the question, or threat, of nationalisation. Since the nationalisation of the gas industry in 2006, there had been suggestions that President Morales would adopt a similar approach to the mining industry. The references to the mines as a 'national asset' in the 2009 Constitution increased suspicions that the position of foreign firms in particular was not secure. The decision of the government to seize the assets of Canadian firm South American Silver Corp - taken amidst an increasingly bitter dispute with a number of indigenous communities over contamination of water sources and soil degradation which was devastating local agriculture – increased suspicion among private investors that further seizures would take place.<sup>417</sup>

In fact, despite the case at Mallku Khota, much of the fear of a general nationalisation was overstated. The structure of the industry and the political importance of the cooperative miners – strongly opposed to wholesale nationalisation – made it unlikely that Morales would move in this direction. The aim of the law introduced in 2014 was to normalise and update the regulation of the industry and, in line with the goals of the government in other key sectors of the economy, to bolster the role of the state in relation to other economic agents. Only days after his October re-election, President Morales insisted that there were no plans to nationalise the mines and that, if necessary, he would *strengthen* the position of the multinationals in the sector.<sup>418</sup> The Vice Minister of Mining Policy confirmed that the government's view was that 'there must be certainty that allows mining operators to invest with adequate security' and promised tax incentives for investment in plant and machinery.<sup>419</sup>

In line with this approach, a number of provisions in the law bolstered the position of the mining interests, especially in relation to their ability to confront the increasing number of conflicts between communities and actors in the industry. The key elements in this regard relate to the issue of Prior and Informed Consent, so central to the battle over TIPNIS, and to the criminalisation of efforts to disrupt mining activities. The law also contained provisions intended to facilitate a *spacial* expansion of the industry, removing legal restrictions to

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<sup>417</sup> CEDIB, Minería, Tierra y Territorio: Mallku Khota. October 2012

<sup>418</sup> El Comercio, Evo Morales no planea nuevas nacionalizaciones en Bolivia, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014, available from <http://elcomercio.pe/mundo/latinoamerica/evo-morales-no-planea-nuevas-nacionalizaciones-bolivia-noticia-1763747>

<sup>419</sup> Quoted in Eliana Suarez y Suarez, Maria, Bolivian Mining Law: Brief Overview of the Situation of the Mining Sector in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, SILLAC. December 2014.

exploration of potential new deposits and expanding mining into the national parks, just as new regulations discussed in the previous section had encouraged the migration of the hydrocarbon industry into the protected areas.

In relation to Prior and Informed Consent, the law instituted a number of changes which indigenous and environmental groups felt amounted to a violation of rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Firstly, Article 207 of the law explained that the principle of prior, free and informed consent to mining activities applied only to the exploitation phase of the mining process and not to the 'exploration' phase.<sup>420</sup> Notwithstanding the question of whether this conforms to the definition of *prior* consent, the prospecting and exploration phase can often involve profound environmental impacts, including the construction of new roads, the inward migration of large numbers of workers and the use of other natural resources, particularly water, required for the mining process. Many of the mining conflicts which emerged after 2010 occurred during this 'exploration' phase, as indigenous communities objected to 'invasions' of their territory by firms without any kind of consultation or regulation.<sup>421</sup> Rather than instituting a new and clear requirement for consent to be given before the exploration phase, the law only requires an Exploration and Prospecting Licence to be obtained from AJAM, the newly created authority intended to oversee the administration of the industry.

The law also puts a series of curbs on the extent and length of the consultation process at the point of exploitation of the deposits. Article 211 of the law limits the number of meetings which can take place as part of the process to a maximum of three, all of which have to take place within 4 months and must include all those potentially impacted by the project, not only the representatives of the indigenous communities. In the event that a consensus is not reached after these meetings, the state, in the form of the Minister for Mining, will step in to arbitrate and reach a final decision on the proposal 'taking into account the interests of the state and the participants'. Perhaps fairly, many indigenous representatives felt that this model was not one constructed on the principle of 'consent', since it seemed to place the ultimate decision making power in the hands of the state, not the people which the Constitution recognises as sovereign within their territories. It reduced consent to a 'merely

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<sup>420</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, Ley de Minería y Metalurgia. May 2014

<sup>421</sup> Robb, Kathryn, Moran, Mark, Thom, Victoria and Coburn, Justin, Indigenous Governance and Mining in Bolivia. Institute for Social Science Research. May 2015, p. 18

administrative question' and replaced democratic procedures with bureaucratic manoeuvring.<sup>422</sup> Of course, the suspicion of the indigenous organisations – already split and alienated by the other conflicts with the government which I have discussed – also reflected the fact that they been excluded from the discussions for the draft bill.

In addition to this slimmed down consultation process, the bill included provisions clearly aimed at subduing some of the ongoing conflicts which were plaguing the industry, particularly in Oruro, Potosi and La Paz. In particular, Article 99 of the law appeared to criminalise a whole raft of methods which communities had been using to disrupt and confront mining interests:

The Plurinational State guarantees the legal security of investors in legally established mining enterprises, which, among other rights, enjoy the right to demand of the relevant public authorities action against individuals or groups which seek to impede or prevent the effective exercise of their recognised mining rights [my translation].

Article 100 confirms that these actions refer to the traditional forms of Bolivian protest, land invasions and obstruction of roads and, ominously for the social movements, both individuals and 'collective persons' would be held to these standards. Perhaps not unfairly, the social movements involved in leading or supporting those in conflict with the industry suspected an attempt to lay the ground for an intensification of the repression of those engaged in the mining disputes.

Despite the difficulties facing a number of the key organisations opposed to the passing of the bill – particularly CONAMAQ and CIDOB, both now organisationally split between supporters of the government and an 'organic' oppositional grouping – they were able to organise a national meeting in May 2014 in La Paz to discuss their opposition to the bill. What emerges from an analysis of the response of the social movements to the 2014 Mining Law, and of the bill itself, is that both the state and the social movements were operating from positions of weakness in the drafting of the law, albeit of very different sorts.

Politically, the government's position was secured by the changes made to the law in May 2014, forbidding any new direct contracts between the cooperatives and private firms. The

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<sup>422</sup> CEDIB, Cumbre Social sobre Proyecto de Ley Minera. La Paz. May 2014, p. 23

law was introduced by Vice President Garcia Linera in front a crowd of unionised miners in Oruro. The Vice President proclaimed the law a ‘transcendental moment in Bolivian history’, the first of its kind which reflected the language and interests of miners themselves and finally made Bolivians, not ‘foreigners’, the masters of the industry. The Mining Minister, Cesar Navarro, boasted that it would contribute funds for the constructions of new schools and hospitals while protecting all the employment in the industry. He also lamented the fact that the 1997 ‘neoliberal’ law had held back the process of exploration for new deposits, something he promised the new law would immediately reverse. With the legal system now providing ‘juridical security’ to the main actors, mining would become a ‘pole of development’ in the mining regions, generating employment and wealth.<sup>423</sup>

The law will no doubt fulfil its function of providing greater legal security to the main actors in the industry and re-establishing a more prominent role for COMIBOL and the state in developing Bolivia’s mineral wealth. Even prior to the new law, the government had already begun to substantially increase public investment in the industry.<sup>424</sup> However, on the fundamental questions of the overall trajectory of Bolivian development, the law did not break any new ground. The law (Article 173) includes some measures presumably intended to break the cycle of export dependency and promote national refining and industrialisation, for instance requiring that all raw, unrefined metals and minerals be offered first to Bolivian industrial concerns, private and state, with only the ‘excess’ being eligible for export. In his speech presenting the law, Garcia Linera argued the law would so alter the landscape that by 2025 one hundred percent of the minerals produced would be refined and commercialised in Bolivia. In fact, despite the government’s formal commitment to moving towards ‘industrialisation’ and away from primary exports, the percentage of Bolivia’s minerals exported as processed metals has fallen since 1996 from around half to only 20% in 2014.<sup>425</sup>

The mining law also contained no solutions whatsoever to the conflicts over the environmental and social costs of the industry, nor did it provide any strategy for mitigating the impact of mining on the already vulnerable communities and ecosystems in some of the poorest, least developed regions of the country. Instead, Article 111 guarantees to the

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<sup>423</sup> Ministerio de Miniera y Metalurgia, Ley No. 535 del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. May 2014, available from <http://www.mineria.gob.bo/documentos/LEY535.pdf>

<sup>424</sup> Ministerio de Minería y Metalurgia, Minería Noticias, Year 2, Number 10, March 2016

<sup>425</sup> Fundacion Milenio, Informe de Milenio sobre la Economia: Gestion 2014, June 2015, No. 37, p. 48

contract holder the 'right to use of water' in the 'mining area' (the land covered by the contract) and in the mine itself. In effect, as Oscar Campanini notes, these changes amount to an effective 'deregulation' of the mining industry in relations to its water use, permitting the industry to freely appropriate water resources, often from areas which already suffer from water shortages or problems with contamination caused by previous mining operations.<sup>426</sup>

Law 535 makes no significant changes to the system of environmental licencing which underpins the minimal environmental standards of the mining industry at the moment, except to place the Ministry of Mining and Metallurgy rather than the Ministry of the Environment and Water in charge of granting them. This is despite the fact that up to 80% of the mining cooperatives, of which there are now more than 1600, operate without the required environmental licence.<sup>427</sup> Even for those operations which do submit to the environmental licencing system, the regulators from the departmental governments often lack either the technical capacity or resources to effectively monitor ongoing environmental effects.<sup>428</sup>

Of course, it is precisely this *weakness* or fragility of the state's institutional capacity for oversight in relation to the mining interests which means that communities and organisations often have no choice but to attempt to challenge the industry outside of the formal, legal structures of participation.<sup>429</sup> It is in this sense that the law emanates from a position of weakness on behalf of the government, which proclaims that Bolivia has the right to develop and exploit its natural resources but which cannot muster the capacity to even effectively monitor the ways in which these resources are being appropriated or gauge the impact on the long-term prospects for economic and social development of the mining regions.

In this context, the effort to de-legitimise and criminalise the ongoing conflicts over the mining industry make more sense, since its amount to an acceptance of the fact that, despite

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<sup>426</sup> Campanini, Oscar, Impactos de la Política Minera sobre los Recursos hídricos y el medio ambiente

<sup>427</sup> El Día, 80% de las Cooperativas evade licencia ambiental, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2014, available from [https://www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?cat=357&pla=3&id\\_articulo=158697](https://www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?cat=357&pla=3&id_articulo=158697)

<sup>428</sup> Andreucci, Diego and Gruberg, Cazon, Evaluación de la Gestión Socio-Ambiental del Sector Minero en Bolivia: El Caso de la Cuenca del lago Poopo (Mau, Cochabamba, 2015) pp. 75-76

<sup>429</sup> Arze Alegria, Alejandro, La Lógica del Conflicto Minero, in Tejada Antonio, Aramayo, *La Veta del Conflicto: Ocho Miradas sobre Conflictividad minera en Bolivia (2010-2014)* (Fundación Unir, La Paz, 2014), p. 53

the claims to the contrary, the national-developmental state to a large extent remains prone before the dynamics of extraction, export and exploitation which have dominated Bolivian economic history. The government's commitment to expand the extractive industries into all of Bolivia and to ensure that the benefits resound to the benefit of all Bolivians is now framed as the essence of the 'process of change' and of the right to develop. What the law stays silent on are the environmental and social *costs* of the industry and of the model of development of which it forms a crucial part.

For those groups and organisations for whom these costs are the crucial issue, the passing of the law reflected their ongoing and deepening weakness. Excluded from the process of drafting the law, their political isolation mirrors the decline of the 'rights of nature' perspective within the decision-making process of the government. For them, the law represented final proof that Evo had collapsed into the position that Bolivians could 'eat metal and drink oil'.<sup>430</sup> Rather than lighting a path out of the morass of extractivism, the law signalled that the government was firmly committed to another phase of development in which the rights of nature and the rights of the indigenous would be side-lined. Responding to the initial draft of the law, the governing council of 'organic' CONAMAQ assessed the situation in light of its organisational dilemmas:

The aggression of the government towards our own organisation has now been explained, its instructions to its militants to invade our headquarters and form an illegitimate and 'spoof' parallel organisation, [was intended] to quieten our voice and to have supposed indigenous authorities slavish to the attack on Prior Consultation and our territories which they are preparing with this Mining Law [my translation].<sup>431</sup>

One militant of CORIDUP-Oruro also reflected this growing sense of alienation from the government's strategy, asking 'What good is it for brother Evo to defend Mother Earth at a national and international level if he does not comply with it [here]?'<sup>432</sup> As with the dispute over TIPNIS, the position of the social movements was not for a blanket 'No' to mining, but

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<sup>430</sup> Andreucci and Gruberg, *Evaluacion de Gestion Socio-Ambiental*, p. 61

<sup>431</sup> CONAMAQ, *Anteproyecto de Ley Minería es un Atentado contra Los Derechos de los Pueblos Inidgenas y contra la Constitucion Politica del Estado*, March 19<sup>th</sup> 2014, available from <http://www.redunitas.org/pronun%20conamag%20ley%20mineria%20%2020.03.14.pdf>

<sup>432</sup> Servindi, *Bolivia: Politica minera favorece transnacionales en desmedro de indigenas y economia nacional*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013, available from <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad/91130>

that the government should produce legislation that complies with and respects existing legal norms, including the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth and the Constitution. The proposals agreed by the social movements at the National Meeting on the Mining Law in La Paz did not call for immediate nationalisation or cessation of all mining activities, but for a version of the bill that ‘avoided environmental damage, implemented technologies for the treatment of water; as well as restrictions on mega-mining and mega-exploitation of aquifers’.<sup>433</sup>

Again, the defence of the rights of nature did not imply a commitment to the impossible demand that Bolivia cease developing its natural resources. Instead, the criticism of the Mining Law was that it represented a further retreat into the uncritical promotion of a certain model of development, based purely on the extraction of non-renewable resources, as if this strategy represented the only viable route out of dependency and underdevelopment. In its exclusion of the indigenous movement from the decision-making process and undermining of their ability to give or withhold consent to the activities of the extraction industries, alongside the provisions aimed at the ‘criminalisation’ of protest, the government again framed indigenous opponents or environmental conflict purely as an obstacle to be overcome. Rather than building on the creative and fruitful language of Law of the Rights of Mother Earth - with its insistence on development in harmony with the natural world and inclusive of all Bolivians - the law marked another regress into development as a punitive exercise, disciplining populations who will not accept the ‘right’ of the state to exploit its natural resources.

#### **v. An Energy Capital or an Energy Crisis?**

In addition to his overhaul of the mining sector, President Morales had ambitious plans for the Bolivian energy sector. It had a key role in the plans for development and integration across the country and indeed the continent that were central to his election platform in 2014. Bolivia was to become an ‘energy capital’ of the continent – powering economic growth in the major economies of the region to benefit of ordinary Bolivians.

To achieve the goal of becoming, in the words of the Minister for Energy Luis Alberto Sánchez Fernández, the ‘principal articulators of the energy integration of Latin America’, the

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<sup>433</sup> EcoAmericas.com, Ley Minera boliviana es vista como retroceso ambiental, July 2014, available from [http://www.aida-americas.org/sites/default/files/\\_EcoAmericas%20JULY%202014\\_1B%20en%20espa%C3%B1ol.pdf](http://www.aida-americas.org/sites/default/files/_EcoAmericas%20JULY%202014_1B%20en%20espa%C3%B1ol.pdf)



government has signed significant bilateral energy agreements with Peru, Argentina and Brazil. The details of all three deals were different, reflecting the nature of the existing ties and needs of the three countries, but all conformed to a central principle whereby the YFPB and the state electricity company ENDE would become players in an international or regional energy integration agenda.<sup>434</sup>

While the government pursues this ambitious international development agenda, there are signs of an increasing energy crisis within Bolivia itself. The cause of this crisis is real and stubborn problems with the Bolivian energy model which the government has largely failed to address in its 10 years.

One issue is the continued overreliance of gas powered thermoelectric generators to meet the country's energy needs. At the moment, this sector produces around 70% of all Bolivian energy needs – an increase of around 10% since Morales became President.<sup>435</sup> This is problematic in part for the reasons I mentioned above – that proven gas reserves are falling and for economic reasons exports must be prioritised. Rather than addressing this issue, the state continues to subsidise gas destined for use in domestic thermoelectric generation. The social purpose of this subsidy, of course, is to improve the access of the poorest Bolivians to sufficient energy. Indeed, the subsidies have secured for Bolivians the lowest tariffs for residential electricity on the continent.<sup>436</sup> Nonetheless, as Table 5.2 shows, many Bolivians still lack access to residential electricity, and there remains a significant gap between provision in rural and urban areas. The Agenda Patriótica 2025 mandates that all Bolivians will be covered by 2025.

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<sup>434</sup> Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. Ministerio Hidrocarburos y Energía, Nuestra nueva meta es ser articuladores principales de la integración energética de Sudamérica, 21<sup>st</sup> July 2015, available at <http://www2.hidrocarburos.gob.bo/index.php/prensa/noticias/1145-%E2%80%9Cnuestra-nueva-meta-es-ser-articuladores-principales-de-la-integraci%C3%B3n-energ%C3%A9tica-de-sudam%C3%A9rica%E2%80%9D.html>

<sup>435</sup> La Razón, CEDLA: Bolivia sufre crisis de generación de energía eléctrica, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2014, available at [http://www.la-Razón.com/index.php?url=/suplementos/financiero/CEDLA-Bolivia-generacion-energia-electrica\\_0\\_2015198594.html](http://www.la-Razón.com/index.php?url=/suplementos/financiero/CEDLA-Bolivia-generacion-energia-electrica_0_2015198594.html)

<sup>436</sup> Tapia Herbas, Mauricio, Determinación de un adecuado precio del gas natural para el sector eléctrico, Revista Latinoamericana de Desarrollo Economico, No. 19 May 2013, p. 108

Table 5.2. % of Population with Residential Electricity Access

Year	1976	1992	2001	2005	2010
Urban	74	78.6	89.4	87	90.1
Rural	6.8	11.8	24.5	33.0	52.7
Total	34.3	46.1	64.4	67.1	77.1

Source: IADB<sup>437</sup>

As we have seen, there are material and financial reasons why thermoelectric generation is an unsustainable route to meeting these targets. Bolivia's location in part of the Amazon basin makes hydroelectric power a plausible alternative. During the government's ten years in power, the amount of the country's electricity generated from this course has actually fallen by around 10%.

If the government is to turn towards this source to meet future demand and reduce pressure on the natural gas sector, it will face a number of practical, financial and environmental difficulties. The dam construction necessary to fulfil current hydroelectric projects has already produced significant opposition from local communities and environmentalists. The proposal to build a hydroelectric facility near Cachuela Esperanza in the northern Amazon, close to the frontier with Brazil, has provoked particular controversy.

The project is part of the IIRSA integration project which also included the road through the TIPNIS. The aim of this particular project is the physical integration of the part of the Amazon basin lying in the Peru-Bolivia-Brazil frontier with ports on the Pacific coast. The pivotal Bolivian part of this project is the river Madeira and its tributaries. Hydroelectric power in this section of the Amazon tributary system has been mooted by various Bolivian governments since the 1980s. Its inclusion in the IIRSA schematic gave these efforts more impetus and also opened up the possibility of funding to make construction viable.

President Morales commissioned the Canadian firm TECSULT-AECOM to assess the financial and practical feasibility of construction. Their report in 2009 concluded that the proposal was financially sound, as long as a portion of the energy was exported to Brazil – something which

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<sup>437</sup> Inter-American Development Bank, Evaluación Rápida del Sector Energía en Bolivia. 2013

was in any case inevitable since much of the funding was to be provided by Petrobras.<sup>438</sup> Although the government has defended the proposal on the grounds that it could provide for the energy needs of areas often neglected by the state, the electricity needs of the communities surrounding the dam amount to around 5% of the total likely output.<sup>439</sup>

ENDE ultimately rejected the feasibility study conducted by TECSULT on the grounds that it had neglected to conduct a significant study of the environmental costs of the dam. In particular, it did not include an assessment of the topographical features of the zone around the dam, an area already highly vulnerable to floods and inundation.<sup>440</sup> This became particularly sensitive in 2014 when the department of Beni faced dramatic flooding, possibly linked to the already existing network of dams around the northern Brazilian frontier.<sup>441</sup>

Despite the logic of national and regional integration lying behind initiatives such as the dam at Cachuela Esperanza, the actual dynamic at play suggests an invidious political ecology. As Henkjaan Laats explains, the logic of projects such as Cachuela are perverse for a nationalist political project:

In general, we can question the sovereign character of the project: a project that has to be funded by foreign loans, probably from Brazil; a project that must be constructed by foreign companies, probably Brazilian, and a project the majority of energy from which will be exported to Brazil. They will not offset the damage caused by the dam and costs will have to be paid by the Bolivian population.<sup>442</sup>

Despite this, Morales has recently reaffirmed his commitment to the dam and to others on the Brazilian frontier. Pablo Stefanoni has diagnosed efforts such as this as the outcome of the weakness of the state. He points out how weak states, such as Bolivia, are prone to attempting to plug the gap of their own weakness with sheer force of 'political will'. This is

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<sup>438</sup> Costa A.K.N., Viban C.F., Cardoso D.E.V., and Guerra S.M.G, *Brasil y sus intereses en la construcción de Cachuela Esperanza, Bolivia*, *Polis: Revista Latinoamericana*, 39 (2014), p. 4

<sup>439</sup> Martínez, Paola, *Bolivia frente a la IIRSA: Entre el extractivismo y la integración*, p. 24

<sup>440</sup> Finkel, Amancaya, *Pérdidas millonarias por el contrato ENDE – TecSult*, October 3 2013, available at <http://www.paginasiete.bo/revmiradas/2013/10/3/perdidas-millonarias-contrato-ende-tecsult-2275.html>

<sup>441</sup> Achtenberg, Emily, *Are Brazil's Dams to Blame for Record Floods in Bolivia?*, *NACLA*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, available at <https://nacla.org/blog/2014/3/31/are-brazil%E2%80%99s-dams-blame-record-floods-bolivia>

<sup>442</sup> Laats, Henkjaan, *Proyecto hidroeléctrico de Cachuela Esperanza: Megasuena o Megapasadilla?*, *América Latina en Movimiento*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2009, available from <http://www.alainet.org/es/active/35482>

reflected in a desire for grand projects designed to overcome technical weakness and backwardness.<sup>443</sup> These grand gestures nonetheless produce political and environmental unsustainably that undermine the conditions for development of any kind.

The constructions of mega-dams, exploration into the national parks, the new Mining Law which is designed to encourage even more extraction of minerals in the highlands and further expansion of the agricultural frontier are signs of a new, even more intensive stage of extractive development. In the short term, it is likely to contribute towards growth rates still among the most robust on the continent.

Nonetheless, the political limits of these efforts are already becoming clear. The intellectual and organisational weakness of the political opposition to some extent has sheltered Morales from a full reckoning on the political front. However, the setbacks on the *altiplano*, particularly in El Alto, in the local elections are suggestive of significant obstacles in the medium term. If this new stage of extraction produces more explosions like TIPNIS, the political costs could be much higher and arrive more quickly than might be assumed.

The question of socio-environmental limits are clearly more difficult to judge. If this new stage of development puts pressure on already vulnerable ecosystems, these limits could also become an obstacle – one to which there are few ways of overcoming. The questions of natural limits are more immediate for an economy like Bolivia's. It does not 'export' the cost of environmental destruction. Instead, as in the case of the megadam at Cachuela Esperanza, it 'imports' the environmental and social costs of energy production for other societies.

As I said in my introduction, the choice between the right to develop and the rights of nature is ultimately misleading, particularly when the development agenda pursued is so heavily based on extraction, as it is in Bolivia. The development of Bolivia's economy over the period since 2013, in particular, clearly shows that such development is a dangerous trap. This is highlighted in the fact that despite Bolivia's record income from gas and oil, despite the re-emergence of the mining sector and the never-ending expansion of the agricultural frontier in the East in past decade, the basic imperatives of the economy have not been altered at all. There is no evidence whatsoever of Bolivia attempting or achieving any significant

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<sup>443</sup> Stefanoni, Pablo, Bolivia hoy: rupturas, inercias y desafíos, *Revista de Estudios Bolivianos*, Vol. 18, 2011, p. 44

diversification of its economy. Indeed, as I have argued here, the very opposite is the case – the extraction-led development only produces the conditions for more extraction-led development.

And while it would be foolish to forecast any imminent ‘collapse’ of the Morales project, it is also clear that the political and ecological conditions for sustained ‘development’ of this type can never be satisfied. Despite the macroeconomic and political stability, the persistence of an economic structure which is, by definition, unsustainable renders the project highly vulnerable to shocks. For those committed to the kind of social and economic transformation the Bolivian ‘process of change’ promises, this issue is therefore decisive. We do not have to look far beyond Bolivia to find examples of societies, heavily reliant on extraction and export income, which cannot sustain the political and social cohesion necessary for social progress when the global commodity markets come calling.

In this precise sense, the environmentalist ‘critics’ of the government, the advocates of the rights of nature in the social movements and the NGOs, point towards the only truly sustainable future for Bolivia. I have argued in this dissertation that the full outline of a sustainable development model, particularly in the invidious conditions in which Bolivia finds itself in the global division of labour, does not exist. However, the basic coordinates are there. They are sketched out in the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth and in the demands of the social movements for harmony and equilibrium between human beings and nature. They call for a move away from extraction based development and towards an integration of the rhythms of social life with ecological cycles. They are not about utopian returns to the past or retreats from nature, but the dynamic interaction of human beings and their natural environments in a form that can sustain the long-term survival and flourishing of both.

Even if this development model, or post-development model, is not yet fully fleshed out, it exists, to paraphrase Vice-President Garcia Linera, ‘on the horizon’. Although it may not be reached, Bolivia can move towards it. Bolivia’s ‘process of change’ promised a journey towards this horizon but it has stalled. It can and must start again.

## Conclusion

In the course of the argument I have presented in this dissertation, I have generally avoided discussion of the distributional impacts of the development policy Evo Morales has pursued as President of Bolivia. As is well known and very much worth noting, the development policies I have analysed here have, on the whole, produced significant improvements to the incomes and living standards of most Bolivians, particularly the poorest. There is no question that dynamic extraction and export of minerals and fossil fuels produces income which, distributed in a certain fashion, can support alleviation of poverty.

I have chosen to focus my research and argument on the question of environmental impacts and natural resource use for two main reasons. Firstly, when I began my research into the policies pursued by Evo Morales, the discourse of natural rights and its intersection with indigenous-based environmentalism, seemed to me to be novel and pointed to a potential new basis or form of radical environmentalist politics. It also appeared to me to be an under-analysed feature of the Bolivian 'process of change' and of the new Latin American left more generally.

Secondly, the argument I have pursued in this dissertation is guided by the view that the progressive distributional effects of a development policy cannot be sustained unless that policy is politically and environmentally sustainable. This is particularly the case in a country as politically volatile and environmentally fragile as Bolivia. For this reason, I have argued that the viability of the Morales project as a whole cannot be separated from the questions of environmental sustainability analysed here.

To this end, I set out in this dissertation to highlight and illuminate two competing political languages which are emerging in this conjuncture, both of which give voice to the profound debate which the country has seen on the question of development policy and environmental rights over the last ten years.

In the first section of my thesis I demonstrated the profound political and ideological crisis which opened up the space for radical critiques of hegemonic development strategies to emerge. The malaise and end of the neoliberal era produced a profound questioning of the entire edifice of hegemonic development strategies. Newly assertive indigenous communities

and social movements fused their demands for territorial sovereignty with an advancing criticism of the environmental costs of the dominant, 'Western' development models coming from a generation of radical Latin American scholars.

Nowhere was this conjunction of indigenous based resistance and environmental and political radicalism stronger than in Bolivia. Moreover, the particular historical, geographic and political features of the country made the question of territory and natural resources all the more politically volatile. It was in this context that Evo Morales became the first indigenous President of Bolivia, promising an end to the violations of the rights of the Bolivian people and a vindication of their historic struggles against capitalism and for dignity.

In the second section, I looked at how this confluence of political crisis, indigenous awakening and environmental consciousness had been translated, or not, into the development policy pursued by Evo as President. In the fourth chapter, I argued that Morales' commitment to plurinationality and indigenous rights, including in their territorial lands, increasingly clashed with his desire to expand the capacity of the Bolivian state and integrate the territory of the country. This nationalist development model, I argued, implied a relationship to the country's natural resources and to its people which did not conform to the promise of a new state based on cultural and territorial sovereignty. I argued that it was in this context that the government had adopted an increasingly strident defence of its developmentalist agenda which seeks to delegitimise environmental concerns, what I have called the right to develop discourse.

In the following two chapters, I looked at how this contradiction had played out in two decisive confrontations: one over the development of the Bolivian Amazon and the other over the passage of a signature piece of environmental legislation. In both these cases, I noted how the government was forced to defend its development agenda against criticisms from many of the social forces which had formed the backbone of the movements which made Evo Morales President. I analysed the intellectual foundations of the government's agenda and assessed their attempts to cast environmentalist critics as, at best, hopeless romantics or, at worst, agents of reactionary agitation.

In the final chapter, I looked at the state of the Morales project ten years in. On its face, Evo Morales' time as President has been a success. Not known for either, Bolivia has experienced a period of relative political and economic stability. The right-wing opposition is demoralised

and divided, offering only weak or no alternative to the Morales project. Morales' hegemony now extends across the whole territory of the country, even to the formerly hostile lowlands. However, it is increasingly clear that the political and natural limits to the process will ultimately have to be confronted. The next even more aggressive stage of the search for hydrocarbon deposits will extend the industry's reach into ever-more environmentally and politically sensitive ecosystems. The 2014 Mining Law has added to the sense that a new, even more intensive stage of extraction-led development is beginning and that, in this context, the rights of nature and of the indigenous communities are going to be placed under even greater strain. The government's goal of becoming an 'energy capital' is already producing severe social and environmental costs for Bolivian society. To defend this new radical development agenda, the government's discursive position has itself been radicalised. It has staked its future on the belief that there are no limits to this form of development. The insight of the rights of nature discourse which flourished in Bolivia, and is even still linked with the present government, is that such a belief is foolish. The question is whether the course can be altered before these mistakes consume Bolivia's socialist government.



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