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# Pink Tape: Leftist State Bureaucracy and Neoliberalism in the Mining Sectors of Bolivia and Ecuador

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**Pink Tape: Leftist State Bureaucracy and Neoliberalism in the Mining Sectors  
of Bolivia and Ecuador**

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## **I. Abstract**

Latin America is the locus of various policy experiments and social movements, where political and economic leaders have vacillated between prioritizing neoliberalism and social security since the 1960s. Scholars have observed Latin American leftist governments for viable alternatives to neoliberal economics, but such projects have effectively failed to truly change the course of economic development in Latin America (Weyland, 2010; Escobar, 2010). One of the most salient contemporary instances of this ideological conflict has been the issue of land use rights and neo-extractivism, particularly in mining conflicts in the Andes of South America. This thesis posits that so-called leftist political leaders of Ecuador and Bolivia have directly supported the durability of the neoliberal economic order in the mining industry, by molding political institutions that appear to prioritize social rights, while in practice subscribing to the neoliberal idea that prioritizing economic development over social and cultural rights will lead people to be materially better off. As such, only by threatening the economic interests of the states can community leaders advance indigenous and environmental causes. By examining the left-wing Correa and Morales governments of Ecuador and Bolivia, this thesis demonstrates how leftist Latin American nation-states, even those nominally committed to socialism and pluralism, deepen their rhetorical acknowledgement of diverse cultures, and increase participation in the political process, while at the same time maintaining the economic and material systems of neoliberalism in the form of neo-extractivism.

## II. Introduction

Latin America contains a diverse array of policy experiments and social movements geared towards planned economics, sustainability, and social justice, yet overall neoliberal economic development has prevailed throughout the continent. Following the election of several leftist leaders such as Presidents Hugo Chavez, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa in the 1990s and 2000s, scholars, politicians and activists alike have looked towards Latin America with a hopeful eye.<sup>1</sup> They examine the democratic socialist “Pink tide” or “turn to the left” of the early 21st century in Latin America for evidence of viable alternatives to the global capitalist system of neoliberal economics, which has promoted free-market capitalist ideas of the Washington consensus, such as reducing state authority through privatization, deregulation, and industrialization, since the 1980s and 1990s (Encarnación, 2018; Escobar, 2010). Looking for alternatives to neoliberal development, they examine whether leftist movements and politicians can change the neoliberal patterns of industrial extractivism that have prevailed in Latin America. One of the most salient contemporary instances of this ideological conflict has been the issue of land use rights and extractivism, particularly in mining conflicts in the Andes of South America.

Generally, the so-called “post-neoliberal” projects of the political left are widely viewed as having failed to succeed at the national level in Latin America, leading many scholars to propose various theories as to why these projects failed, and prescriptions as to how governments ought to proceed. Often, members of the political left blame isolated incidents and individual leaders, while members of the political right theorize that post-neoliberalism is simply infeasible.

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<sup>1</sup> Chavez served as President of Venezuela from 1999 - 2013, Kirchner served in Argentina (2007 - 2015), Lula da Silva served in Brazil (2003 - 2011), Morales served in Bolivia (2006 - Present-day 2018), and Correa served in Ecuador (2007 - 2017).

This thesis intervenes in the current debate by positing that so-called leftist political leaders of Ecuador and Bolivia have actually directly supported the durability of the neoliberal economic order in the mining industry, by molding political institutions that appear to prioritize social rights, while in practice subscribing to the neoliberal idea that prioritizing economic development over social rights will lead people to be materially better off. As such, only by threatening the economic interests of the states can community leaders advance indigenous and environmental causes. By examining the left-wing Correa and Morales governments of Ecuador and Bolivia, this thesis demonstrates how leftist nation-states in Latin America, even those nominally committed to socialism and pluralism, deepen their rhetorical acknowledgement of diverse cultures, and increase participation in the political process, while at the same time maintaining the economic and material systems of neoliberalism in the form of neo-extractivism.

The conflict between socialist and capitalist development in Latin America has been a significant political issue since the 1960s. In the 1970s, as a response to the growing influence of Marxism in the 1960s and polarization between working class and elite sectors, a series of military-led authoritarian governments, promoting liberalism in the form of deregulation and investment in heavy industry, spread throughout Latin America. Yet, largely due to the subsequent economic debt crises of the 1980s in Latin America, these states witnessed a return to civilian rule by the end of the 80s and early 90s. In the following struggle for state control, left-wing concern with authoritarian rule clashed with right-wing concern with union power, as well as a general desire to improve the economy. In order to improve the economy, nations looking for international loans were required to abide by neoliberal policies of structural adjustment. Western leaders and international organizations promoted neoliberal reforms based on the free-

market logic that removing the state from the market would allow markets to function more efficiently, allowing the economy to grow and welfare to increase as a result.

Consequently, in the 1980s and 1990s, leaders in Latin America implemented neoliberal market reforms, including deregulating labor and financial trade, cutting business taxes, and privatizing agricultural industries (Sadasivam, 1997, p. 635). Many Latin American nations underwent massive privatization of formerly state-owned enterprises, deregulation, and a decentralization of power from the central government to regional leaders, largely elite members of society who promoted pro-market, neoliberal reforms (Eaton, 2013, p. 422). In Ecuador and Bolivia, decentralization played an additional role in supporting neoliberal privatization and reducing the role of the state, as the state decided to delegate responsibility for public expenditures to regional administrations and encouraged capitalistic competition for resources between regions, often leading to concessions of local enterprises to private corporations and furthering inequality between different regions (Eaton, 2013, p. 422).

However, as a result of these neoliberal reforms, income inequality increased, unemployment increased with the loss of state jobs, and prices skyrocketed without food, oil and service subsidies (Bray, 1999, p. 68; Kurtz, 2004, p. 269; Crisp & Kelly, 1999, p. 542). Because these neoliberal policies failed to produce the industrial development and economic stability which provided the impetus for their adoption, a period often referred to by academics as the “long dark night of neoliberalism” (Eaton, 2013, p. 422), 21st century Latin American politics underwent a shift which scholars have referred to as “the Turn to the Left” (Escobar, 2010, p. 48). Political economic development has thus vacillated between neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism for over fifty years in the region. This paper contends that leftist leaders themselves have contributed to the durability of neoliberalism in Latin America by developing

political conventions that allow them to support social and cultural rights in rhetoric while also supporting neoliberal economic development in the form of neo-extractivism.

In the following sections, this study will proceed by addressing the methods and limitations of this research. Afterwards, the literature review will discuss the main concepts of this study, political institutions, neoliberalism, and neo-extractivism, and reviewing in more detail previous scholarship relevant to this paper, before delving into the actual case studies themselves. The case study section will focus on mining conflicts as a typical contemporary example of when governments are faced with a decision between neoliberal economic business ventures and social and cultural rights movements. The research is divided into two main sections, focusing first on Ecuadorian political institutions, and then Ecuadorian mining conflict over the use of land as an economic resource. The second section will discuss Bolivian political institutions, and then examine mining conflicts in Bolivia, as well. Ecuador provides an example in which the “leftist” government sides unequivocally with extractive corporations over the community, whereas Bolivia provides an example in which locals successfully pushed the leftist government to rescind the rights of an extractive corporation. Despite these differences, both cases will demonstrate how the leftist regimes in Ecuador and Bolivia have prioritized neoliberal economic logic over local and indigenous communities’ demands for social and cultural rights. Afterwards, an analysis of the previous research will establish the connection between the political institutions and economic outcomes of the mining conflicts. Finally, the conclusion section of this thesis will discuss the findings of the analysis, in which both Correa and Morales prioritize neoliberal economic development, and outline the broader implications of this inquiry.

### **III. Methodology**

#### *Importance of Case Studies Chosen*

The focus of this thesis relies upon two case studies in Latin America, specifically early 21st century mining conflicts in Ecuador and Bolivia, under the Correa and Morales regimes, respectively. The decision to focus on Latin America in order to study the relevant factors for post-neoliberalism development can be neatly summarized by the words of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano who noted that “Latin America was the original space of the emergence of modern/colonial capitalism,” while “today it is, at last, the very center of world resistance against this pattern of power and of the production of alternatives to it” (2008, p. 3). The importance of focusing upon these two countries is partially based on the fact that these two countries are both widely recognized to contain two of the most radical left-leaning regimes in Latin America.

In discussing the “turn to the Left” of Latin America, Escobar writes that “the urge for a re-orientation [sic]” of the political and economic institutions of neoliberalism was “most clear in the cases of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador” (2010, p. 2) and other scholars similarly follow suit in identifying Ecuador and Bolivia among the list of the most contestatory left-wing governments in early 21st century Latin America (Eaton, 2013; Weyland, 2012). Political scientist Kent Eaton posits that the “emergence of leftist presidents who reversed the market reforms” in first decade of the twenty-first century was “advanced furthest in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia” (Eaton 2013, p. 421). Based on his research of these three countries, Eaton noted that at the turn of the century the governments of Chavez, Correa, and Morales initiated a series of re-nationalization and recentralization of power in the central state government, while promising to utilize this re-consolidated state power towards human rights and social justice, indicating their commitment to left-wing politics (2013, p. 445). Weyland specifically evaluates Bolivia and Ecuador by how closely they align to Venezuela as the ideal of “contestatory” leftism (2010, p. 4). In like manner, in a NACLA report, Dr. Barry Cannon, specialist in

developmentalism in Latin America, categorizes Latin American countries according to the “threat level of the Left’s challenge to the neoliberal status quo”, designating Bolivia and Ecuador, among others, as countries “where neoliberalism faced a medium-to-high threat,” (2016, p. 330) This is the highest possible threat which Cannon accords, serving to mean that “more radical departures from market-based policies were undertaken in a greater number of areas of social and economic concern,” specifically in terms of nationalization, limiting bank autonomy, introducing price controls and debt defaults, and land redistribution (Cannon 2016, p. 330). Thus, these strong cases of leftism would provide the best opportunity for studying the attempts of leftist governments to challenge the current neoliberal economic order.

Additionally, as the ensuing analysis of the case studies will demonstrate, the selection of these two case studies allows the analysis to demonstrate that although Correa and Morales have acquired different reputations, as Morales is viewed as more radical, and have handled mining conflicts differently, both governments utilize similar political tactics and economic logic which allows this study to conclude that neoliberal logic is present in both of these leftist regimes. Although Ecuador lacks the organized mining cooperatives of Bolivia, and Bolivia failed to fully nationalize mining as Ecuador did, leading to varied outcomes in each state’s mining conflicts, both regimes tend overall to be resistant to the demands of the people. Both case studies reveal rhetorical ambiguities in each country’s national constitution, the use of militarism in support of corporations, and the supremacy of state finance campaigns. Although Correa and Morales have differed in their responses to mining conflicts, a comparison of these governments reveals that both governments subscribe to similar forms of neoliberal economic logic.

### *Method*

This thesis proceeds by researching and drawing comparisons between left-wing countries experiencing similar mining conflicts, and making connections between the political tools used by both Presidents and the motivations behind their decisions. The focus on the political conventions of each regime takes into account the constitutional frameworks, the actions of the executive office, mining statutes, and the judiciary. The analysis of the motivations behind the political actions in the mining conflicts analyzes the claims for the rights to use land, and the governments' responses to these claims. In these cases, corporate economic actors push for mining concessions in order to mine the land for commodifiable resources, whereas local communities resist these efforts and claim communal rights to the land and also point to the negative environmental impact of mining. The outcomes of these conflicts are characterized by each government's responses to these competing demands and the ultimate decision to award the rights to land use to one group over the other(s).

By focusing on the connection between left-wing regimes and economic institutions, this thesis builds upon extant theories about political institutions and capitalism by Hale (2005), Weyland (2010), Taylor (2016), and Chakrabarty (2008), by positing a deliberate relationship between left political leaders and the durability of neoliberal economics. This thesis also differs from many other scholars by applying such theories to Latin America, but is connected to these other scholars by remaining focused on formerly colonized populations. Moreover, while many other scholars have discussed the post-neoliberal potential of leftist regimes in 21st century Latin America, and many have analyzed the failures of these governments to challenge neoliberalism, this thesis analyzes specific mining conflicts which show the ways in which left-wing political regimes are directly responsible for the prevalence of neoliberalism in certain Latin American nations, rather than simply pointing to failures of personal leadership, or structuralist arguments

about the impotence of post-neoliberal systems in general. By analyzing the connection between the political regimes of post-colonial Latin America and neoliberal economics, this thesis provides a novel contribution to postcolonial studies and studies of international political economy more broadly.

### *Limitations*

This thesis is primarily focused on solely two countries in Latin America in one time period. Within these two countries, only a handful of conflicts within the mining industry specifically are analyzed. Other conflicts may provide more nuances, trends, and possibilities, such as isolated victories by local movements, which could challenge the extent of the applicability of this thesis. Similarly, studies of the conflicts between the people, the government, and corporations in other industries within these countries, such as the oil and gas industries, logging industries, and non-traditional sectors such as fair trade, biofuels and horticultural industries, could provide more support for this thesis, but such a large endeavor is beyond the resources and scope of this study. As this study has limited its focus to two countries in one region, it is important to acknowledge that future studies of leftist political systems in other regions of the world should also be used to analyze whether or not such leaders are able or willing to dismantle neoliberal economics and forge post-neoliberal institutions.

In limiting the focus of this study to a narrow time period at the turn of the 21st century, this thesis can only provide an analysis based on the political forces and economic trends present at the time. At the time of writing, the Correa government is no longer in place, while the Morales government is completing its final term in office, demonstrating greater durability. In the Latin American region as a whole, the turn to the left of the early 21st century which had been dubbed the “Pink tide” appears to have lost momentum and Latin America is experiencing

a return to the right or “New Right,” with neoliberal regimes replacing leftist leaders in the 2010s, including right-wing President Moreno in Ecuador who replaced Correa. Thus, it will be difficult for studies in the immediate future to argue the continuity of the phenomenon discussed in this thesis, which argues that even left-wing political actors have been failed to produce alternative post-neoliberal economic outcomes and in fact directly contribute to neoliberal industries, as few radical leftist regimes endure in Latin America, and as left-wing leaders are replaced by leaders who support neoliberalism. For further research on this topic, then, scholars may have to look towards regimes in regions outside of Latin America, such as Asia and Europe, where experiments with state-led economic programs and democratic socialism continue to push the boundaries of neoliberal free-market economics.

#### **IV. Literature Review**

##### *Key Concepts in Latin American Politics*

Latin American politics has been the object of interest for several political scientists and sociologists interested in the economics of development, as well as the broader issue of national socioeconomic arrangement. In response to the various eras of political domination and experimentation in Latin America, from imperialism to authoritarianism to socialism, scholarly analysts have weighed in on the merits and feasibility of Latin America’s various governmental systems and political ideologies, which have notorious relevance for the questions of indigenous rights and environmental sustainability in developing Latin American nations. Between the main political parties participating in regional and national elections, the main political approaches vying for dominance in Latin America can be divided between supporters of neoliberalism and proponents of post-neoliberalism. In political spheres, this conflict often takes the discussed as right-wing versus left-wing politics. The historical divide between these two competing

economic ideologies which define the political right and left wings in Latin America provides the historical background for this thesis.

### *Neoliberal Economics*

In this paper, it is argued that the global neoliberal economic order is sustained by political institutions, as these institutions can be viewed as having been designed by and for the benefit of neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism, a system of free-market logic, is defined by Kurt Weyland as comprised of fiscal austerity measures, privatization, openness to foreign trade, and deregulation (Weyland, 2004, p. 136). Neoliberalism is associated with the political right-wing; as Barry Cannon explains, “the Latin American Right has coalesced around a neoliberal project” based on the idea that free trade, foreign direct investment, the private sector, markets, and competition “are the best way to solve pressing economic or social problems” (2016, p. 328). As such, the neoliberal project can be well-defined as a free-market project of the political right-wing.

Furthermore, neoliberalism has specific consequences for indigenous land use rights and environmental-related policy issues, such as state mining concessions which are the focus of this thesis. Neoliberalism has been recognized as paving the way for corporate capital and transnational agro-industries to use force and legally questionable means of circumvention to acquire and convert large areas of land towards large-scale export-production (Kay, 2015, p. 81). Specifically, Cristobal Kay notes that “mining activities, aquaculture...and forest plantations are depleting and polluting fresh water resources” (2015, p. 79). Going forwards, Kay hypothesizes that “agribusinesses, supermarkets, financial capital and 'translatina' conglomerates will continue to extend their domination over the Latin American rural landscape and beyond” (Kay, 2015, p. 80). These processes are known as and referred to by many scholars as neo-extractivism. Kay

directly connects the pro-capital liberalization policies of neoliberalism to the deterioration of rural labor conditions and environmental degradation (2015, p. 76-77). In this way, the right wing of Latin American politics has been associated with unsustainable, mass extractivism which has been enabled by neoliberal policies.

### *Global Neoliberal Economics*

Internationally, the global neoliberal economic regime has been theorized to exert pressure on nation-states. Similar to Chakrabarty's connection of political and economic institutions, Dave Hill and Ravi Kumar expounded upon the socializing effect of the global economic regime (2012). As summarized in their abstract, in analyzing instances of "global, national and local neoliberalisation of...education," these authors reveal the "machinations, agenda and impacts of the privatising and 'merchandisation' of education by the World Bank, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), biased think tanks, global and national corporations and capital, and the full political spectrum of Neoliberal governments" (Hill, 2012). As a result of the socializing power of global economic regimes, according to Hill and Kumar, the "consequences of implementing policies that include privatization...and the involvement of banks and private enterprises with the purpose of optimizing profits" includes such effects as deepened racial divisions, gendered social classes, and the role and shape of markets and education in the era of globalised Capitalism (Hill, 2012, p. 8).

Relatedly, other scholars have touched upon the relationship between political regimes and the global neoliberal economic regime, in various works. For example, Vincent Navarro worked to synthesize a wide variety of scholarship on neoliberalism and globalism, in order to find that "the international economic order of 'capitalism without borders'" and associated "political regimes" affected population health (2007, p. 1). Navarro identifies ways in which the

global neoliberal order shapes political institutions, which in turn shape public health. Many other scholars have also discussed the ways in which global neoliberalism has shaped national political issues, but fewer have analyzed the specific instances and mechanisms by which leftist national political leaders have sustained the logic of neoliberal economics (Coburn, 2004; Muntaner, Lynch, and Smith, 2001; Navarro and Muntaner, 2004). The thesis in this study attempts to show how left-wing political actors have worked to support neoliberal economic outcomes.

### *Post-Neoliberalism*

Post-neoliberalism<sup>2</sup>, by contrast, has been described by Escobar as “a space/time when social life is no longer seen as...determined by the constructs of economy, individual, instrumental rationality, private property, and so forth as characteristics of liberalism modernity” (Escobar, 2010, p. 12), a new non-capitalist paradigm of conceiving of social organization. As Escobar explains, with reference to political scientist Benjamin Arditi’s work, the political left is associated with post-neoliberalism, generally aiming to alter the status quo, go beyond classic neoliberalism, and “enact anti-neoliberal policies” (2010, p. 6). For Escobar, post-neoliberalism describes any and all political projects that deviate from and/or counter the hegemony of neoliberalism and do not attempt to claim that there is a singular viable form of economic development. In other words, post-neoliberalism is the idea that “the economy is not essentially or naturally capitalist, societies are not naturally liberal, and the state is not the only way of instituting social power as we have imagined it to be” (Escobar 2010, p. 12). Hence, in opposition to neoliberalism, post-neoliberalism can take the form of pro-labor policies,

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Post-neoliberalism’ and ‘post-liberalism’ are used interchangeably in political scholarship (Escobar, 2010). In this work, ‘post-neoliberalism’ will be used to refer to the concept, in order to emphasize its direct antithetical relationship to neoliberalism.

regulation of industry, and state intervention in the economy, and the prioritization of social justice. Often, the political campaigns of the political left-wing promote such post-neoliberal policies of economic development.

The left wing relationship to economic policy is more divided than that of the right, between moderate and radical post-neoliberal approaches, a difference which can be found both cross-nationally as well as between the state-level and grassroots level of politics. Even scholars in favor of neoliberalism recognize the left as a coalition of different groups with varying commitments to post-liberal transformation. In analyzing the “pink,” or left, governments of 21st century Latin America, Weyland argues that there are two main camps of leftist governance, differentiated by their moderate, or realist, versus radical, activist contestation of neoliberalism (2010, p. 3). The relatively radical movements within the left are seen as having a greater commitment to post-neoliberalism. In a parallel manner, radical leftist movements with a greater commitment to post-neoliberalism are committed to finding an environmentally sustainable approach to development.

However, by and large, post-neoliberal projects are widely seen by both proponents and opponents as having failed to materialize (Escobar, 2010; Weyland, 2004). For example, in an analysis of “the Bolivian experiment in postneoliberal politics,” George Gray Molina argues that Morales’ government, “although postneoliberal in the chronological sense, may not be sufficiently postneoliberal in raising labor and welfare standards at home and transforming Bolivia’s role in the global economy” (Weyland, 2010, p. 57). Regarding the extent to which movements and actors within the left have been committed to post-neoliberalism, many scholars have found that post-liberalism is an ideal which has yet to be realized or become politically

dominant (Kay, 2015; Escobar, 2010; Weyland, 2010). Leftist leaders who “promised a new post-neoliberal development agenda,” became quite moderate in practice (Kay 2015, p. 78).

### *Neo-Extractivism*

In discussing the relationship between neoliberalism and the environment, scholarship has recognized that the consequences of industrial economies of scale, deregulation, and private corporations has been large-scale, unsustainable extractivism of natural resources for export to commodity markets. This process of export-oriented industrial extractivism, which Latin American governments often nationalize and utilize in order to increase state revenues, has been termed “neo-extractivism” (Kay, 2015, p. 78). Interestingly, Kay writes that “the 'pink' tide in Latin America,” rather than bring about post-neoliberal development, has more often than not “been a neo-developmental strategy which has continued with the neo-extractivist (largely in mining, agriculture, forestry and fisheries) export-oriented economic process of the previous neoliberal governments” (Kay, 2015, p. 78). In fact, according to Kay, the leftist governments of the pink tide have achieved export-oriented neo-extractivism “sometimes paradoxically with greater intensity and success” (Kay, 2015, p. 78). This paradox merits further and more detailed examination.

Mining has comprised a large part of neo-extractivism in Latin America. In his exploration of neo-extractivism, Kay writes that “the shift to non- traditional exports was mainly driven by new capitalist entrepreneurs originating from, or linked to, the mining, industrial, commercial and financial sectors” (2015, p. 75), demonstrating the significant position of mining corporations. Escobar characterizes Ecuador under Correa as a nation “between neo-developmentalism and post-development” (2010, p. 20). In a more detailed description of Ecuador, though, Escobar points out that Correa’s policy strategy consists of using mining,

among other sectors, to “amplify the economic the economic growth that can sustain human development,” indicating adherence to neoliberal free-market logic (2010, p. 73). Going further, Escobar characterizes Correa’s strategic sectors, including mining, as “problematic” due to the fact that “they seem exempt from the cultural and environmental criteria” of the leftist ideals that were supposed to frame the new constitution (2010,, p. 22). Thus, Escobar touches upon the paradox of Correa’s leftist regime, stating how indigenous communities “see Correa’s government as upholding an alternative modernization based on academic knowledge, with insufficient participation of indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and workers despite its anti-neoliberal stances” (2010, p. 24).

In analyzing Bolivia’s experiences with mining and neo-extractivism, Escobar argues that there is stronger reason to believe that there is potential for post-neoliberal development under Morales’ government (2010, p. 26). Yet, the reason cited for this hypothesis is actually due to the prevalence of popular protests and civil disobedience by indigenous communities fighting the political economic system of “representative democracy and private property” (Escobar, 2010, p. 30). Ironically, the resurgence of these popular uprisings has been attributed to the increase of indigenous migrants to urban areas who were “displaced from mining and agricultural livelihoods by neo-liberal reforms” (Escobar, 2010, p. 30). Hence, neoliberal mining activity has also been antagonistic to indigenous communities in Bolivia. Still, academic scholarship lacks much in depth analysis isolating the neo-extractivist mining in Ecuador and Bolivia.

### *Competing Theories*

Various theoretical explanations exist in previous scholarship concerning both the shortcomings of post-neoliberal movements, as well as the relationship between politics and economics in general. These theories include both supporters and detractors at neoliberalism.

Scholars provide different explanation as to why post-neoliberalism may have as of yet failed to materialize in Latin America. Those scholars more supportive of neoliberalism, such as Kurt Weyland, theorize that the radicalism of many strains of post-neoliberalism lacks prudence, and instead praises the more moderate left which compromises within the neoliberal structure to be superior, in that its accomplishments “stand on a more solid foundation and...accumulate over time” (2010, p. 13). Following a different strain of thought, less supportive of neoliberalism, Cristobal Kay posits that capitalist concepts such as socioeconomic stratification, social and political consciousness, capital accumulation, surplus value, and processes of exploitation and domination “bring into sharper focus the key contradictions and problems facing the rural economy and society...relevant for understanding contemporary processes of globalization and their problems” (2015, pp. 79-80). Though Kay stops short of producing a specific model for how such economic processes are relevant for politics, he proposes that “the agrarian question today has to be framed beyond the nation state so as to be able to contest the current neoliberal global corporate...regime, although the nation state remains the most immediately viable space of contestation (2015, p. 81).” Thus, Kay advances the concept of the problem and limits of the left political regime. Going even further, other scholars have discussed the “erosion of [Latin American governments’] sovereignty due to globalization” as well (Pierre and Peters, 2010; Puig, 2014, p. 76).

Further discussing the relationships between Latin American political regimes and economic institutions, scholars Hale and Vogt have discussed how neoliberal multiculturalism, which combines free-market economics with policies supporting civil rights, allows for diversity and identity politics to flourish in Central America, without the need for altering the economic system (Hale, 2005; Vogt, 2015). Specifically, Hale identifies policies of decentralization,

reduction of the role of the state, and minimal democratization, with a new focus on human rights, as neoliberal multiculturalism (Hale, 2005, p. 12). While some analysts had begun to argue in the early 1990s and 2000s stages of the “Pink tide” that indigenous rights and sustainable progress were advancing, make such claims that “indigenous peoples have been empowered by alliances with actors...an international regime on the rights of indigenous peoples, the adoption of a new jurisprudence with regard to indigenous peoples, and the creation of autonomous territories (Puig, 2014, p. 74). Yet, analyses of more recent developments continue to provide support for Hale’s theory of neoliberal multiculturalism, which contends that “indigenous organizations win important battles of cultural rights only to find themselves mired in the painstaking, technical, administrative and highly inequitable negotiations for resources and political power that follow” (Hale, 2005, p. 13). Even Puig admitted the limits of these developments, stating that “while progress is tangible, the events of the past two decades indicate the limits of the permeability of Latin American polyarchies” (2012, p. 74). As Eaton discusses, early 21st century leftist presidents actually reversed the politics of decentralization which afforded early gains in indigenous political autonomy, recentralizing power in the executive branch of the nation-state (Eaton, 2013). Therefore, neoliberal multiculturalism provides a specific theory for the mechanism through which leftist political regimes can sustain economic regimes in Latin American countries.

More broadly, scholars such as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and journalist Robert Borden put forward systemic political theories that may also illuminate the forces at work in Latin American politics. Some scholars and activists outright decry the viability of the current political economic world order, such as cynical activist campaigns which maintained that “if voting changed anything, they would make it illegal” (Borden, 1976, p. 7). Offering more detailed

criticisms of modern political institutions, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor posits that the personal decisions of actors in positions of power within the “political establishment” sustain the status quo, due to the fact that these actors’ political conclusions are shaped by experiences of socio-economic privilege (2016, p. 7). Scathingly, Taylor writes that “Elected officials obscure their actions under a cloak of imaginary...solidarity, while ignoring their role as arbiters of political power who willingly operate in a political terrain designed to exploit and oppress...other working class people” (2016, p. 79). Applying such a theory to Latin American politics would look to the ways in which the backgrounds of leaders such as Correa and Morales inhibited the willingness of such leaders to challenge the neoliberal status quo.

As the previous section has shown, scholars have discussed the history and viability of neoliberalism and neo-extractivism in Latin America. Much scholarship has also demonstrated the dialectical relationship of neoliberalism to the rise of leftist regimes in Latin America, which were grown and achieved success out of popular discontent with neoliberal economics. While there is widespread agreement that the leftist, post-neoliberal project has failed to materialize in Latin America, less scholarship has attempted to synthesize and analyze the instances in which the left-wing has directly sustained the neoliberal economic order. The following case studies and analysis attempts to intervene in these discussions of Latin American politics and neoliberal economics by establishing a direct relationship between the left-leaning Presidents Correa and Morales, and the success of neoliberal economic development projects in Ecuador and Bolivia.

#### **V. Case Study: Ecuador**

From his election in 2006 to 2017, with the support of the Alianza Pais party, Ecuador was governed by democratic socialist President Rafael Correa, a left wing leader who rode to power on the promise of reversing the neo-liberal policies of deregulation and privatization of

the Washington Consensus (Eaton 2013). By creating a new constitution, nationalizing important industries, and implementing social welfare programs, Ecuador's government closely adhered to the typical tenets of leftist socialist governance.

### *Constitutional Law*

In regards to the environment, Ecuador's 2008 constitution contains several post-neoliberal inspired articles pertaining to indigenous rights and sustainable development. Towards sustainability, Title VII of the constitution guarantees sustainable development that "is environmentally balanced and respectful of cultural diversity, conserves biodiversity and the natural regeneration capacity of ecosystems, and ensures meeting the needs of present and future generations." Article 57 specifically states that indigenous communities lands are "immune from seizure and indivisible," and requires "free prior informed consultation on the plans and programs for prospecting, producing and marketing nonrenewable resources located on their lands and which could have an environmental or cultural impact on them; to participate in the profits earned from these projects and to receive compensation for social, cultural and environmental damages caused to them."<sup>3</sup> These legal conventions force prospectors to conduct environmental impact studies before they can exploit indigenous land.

However, the constitution goes on to say that "if consent of the consulted community is not obtained, steps provided for by the Constitution and the law shall be taken." The UN convention similarly reinforces this concept, by conferring to the state the responsibility to "provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress" for any action which deprives the indigenous of their lands or resources. However, conflict ensues when communities do not

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<sup>3</sup> Parallely, the 2008 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states in Article 10 that indigenous lands cannot be taken "without the free, prior and informed consent" of the affected peoples. Both Ecuador and Bolivia have ratified this international convention.

provide their consent; thereafter the government exercises its discretion as provided for by the constitution, by granting the use of the land irrespective of the results of the impact studies and desires of the community.

### *Mining Law*

As a result, since coming to power, the leftist government in Ecuador has been the subject of intense criticism, due to conflicts with indigenous and local communities over rights to land use. One of the most heated conflicts that has plagued Correa's administration is the dispute between local communities and extractive mining corporations, often transnational or foreign owned and export-oriented. Though in 2010 Ecuador's mineral sector was nationalized in the name of sovereignty and socialism, and entrusted to the direction of the state mining company ENAMI, discontent with the actions of ENAMI and the continued large-scale extraction in its entirety has culminated in tense disputes, pitting organized responses by community members against the government and corporations. In 2013, in an attempt to attract foreign investment, Congress amended the Mining Law, creating a pro-foreign investment law that fast tracks permit granting, caps the amount of royalties companies must pay, and suspends tax requirements until companies have recovered their investment (Wacaster, 2013, p. 1). Since then, grants of mining concessions have abounded.

Some indigenous rights coalitions have pursued judicial redress for mining concessions. In 2008, Ecuador's Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities, or CONAIE, filed a suit in constitutional court to ask for a law to enforce pre-legislative consultation for mining projects (Alvaro, 2013). Later, ECUARUNARI, Ecuador's Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality, filed a lawsuit in Ecuador to challenge the constitutionality of the 2013 mining law, on the grounds of insufficient consultation with indigenous people living in areas with mining

projects, and additionally aimed to prevent mining in the Andes by appealing to international courts, such as the Human Rights Commission and Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Alvaro, 2013). During Correa's regime, these suits did not alleviate the mining concessions.

#### *Conflict in Intag Region Junin Community*

Intag, a river-valley region of northern Ecuador containing a cloud-forest reserve which is one of the world's richest zones of biodiversity, has been the locus of a heated and typical conflict over mining concessions (Pothier, 2015). In 2013, ENAMI partnered with CODELCO, the Chilean national mining company, with financial backing from China, to explore the Intag region and construct a large-scale, open-pit copper mine (Kuecker, 2013). Open-pit mining in particular is widely linked to environmental degradation in the form of erosion, sinkhole formation, loss of biodiversity and groundwater contamination (Monjezi, 2008), as such the community has opposed it since the 1990s. In the past, the community fought foreign firms during the rise of neoliberalism; now, it faces its own purportedly anti-neoliberal, leftist government.

In opposition to ENAMA and CODELCO in Intag, the communities used a variety of direct actions, which received nationwide popular support. In 2013 they successfully kept ENAMI out of the community with a road blockade, which Kuecker, co-founder of the Intag Solidarity Network, calls "an age-old peasant community tactic" (2013). The people have formed a proactive grassroots organization, Coordinadora Zonal de Intag, to protect the cloud forest, promote alternative economic development, and eradicate large-scale mining entirely (Kuecker, 2013). They have opposed construction from the inception of the exploration, unequivocally withholding their consent.

In response to the Intag conflict, the Correa government pushed back against the communities with a variety of legislative methods to neutralize and criminalize the opposition. In a report by *Defensoría del Pueblo de Ecuador*, human rights investigators found that these personal attacks are two-pronged, comprised of attacks on individuals as well as institutionalized criminalization. For instance, Correa personally led a public attack on *Sabatina* television against leaders of the Intag movement, calling them “anti-democratic” and manipulative intellectuals (Kuecker). In other interviews, labeled environmentalists as “infantile,” “romantics,” and “terrorists” (Billo, 2015).

In addition, the state has resorted to far more violent methods, using the police and military on the grounds of national security. For example, the police monitor people’s daily movements and asked for identification (Billo, 2015). In April 2014, 300 national police accompanied the ENAMI into Intag to stop protesters (Billo, 2015). Also in Intag, Javier Ramírez, the former president of the community, was accused of injuring mining employees during anti-mining protests, detained by police, and jailed for 10 months before being charged (Billo, 2015). He was only charged after-the-fact for inciting violence (Billo, 2015). In response to these government aggressions, according to Ramirez’s wife, “People are afraid of protesting now. [They] don’t know what is going to happen,” and the general perception is that “it’s all political” (Pothier, 2015).

#### *Conflict in the Amazon Shuar Community*

In 2016, in Ecuador’s Southern Amazonian region, the indigenous leaders came together to oppose yet another large-scale Chinese-backed mining project, an open-pit mine by Chinese company EXSA, located in the lands of the Shuar community (Brown, 2017). The community has, as in Intag, led huge protests to physically obstruct the project. The leaders of this

opposition also attempt to make appeals to legal principles. Carlos Mazabanda, field coordinator of the NGO Amazon Watch, declared in an interview with Mongabay that even “if you need those natural resources, you still need to strictly comply with the constitutional mandates. You can’t choose which rights to comply with and which ones not too,” and Tuntiak Katan, Shuar leader and member of COICA, the Coordinator of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, similarly maintained in an interview with Mongabay that, “the truth is we have the best constitution in the world, but the worst constitution in its application in daily life,” (Brown, 2017).

In 2016, police raided the headquarters of the Shuar Federation detained the president, Agustin Wachapá, reportedly beating him in front of his wife before destroying the office and jailing him, also without formal charges (Ling, 2017). As with Ramirez, Wachapa was only later charged for inciting violence (Ling, 2017). Former president of CONAIE and leader of the Andean Kichwa Peoples portended in an interview with Intercontinental Cry that, "The government of Rafael Correa is pushing the Armed Forces to play a role that we have never seen before, not even in times of dictatorship" (Ling, 2017).

#### *Additional Forms of Government Response*

More broadly, in 2013, the government has passed a law defining road blockades as acts of terrorism (Kuecker, 2013). In 2009, the state temporarily shut down the environmental organization, Acción Ecológica, opposing mining projects (Billo, 2015). In 2013, Correa’s government shut down also closed Fundación Pachamama, human rights and environmental organization for “endangering public peace and state security” (Billo, 2015). Correa has consistently justified these acts by declaring a state of emergency, thereby allowing for the suspension of rights such as freedom of assembly, movement, and due process (Ling 2017), but

this state of emergency is based on the economic reality that the state remains dependent on foreign investment. Discussing Correa, the Financial Times commented that his mining policy appears to be “aimed at inking new contracts with foreign investors, not at erasing them” (Schipani, August 3, 2012). Correa’s consistent courtship of foreign mining is heavily indicative of his short-term economic motivation.

In 2006, Correa promoted long discussions with Canadian miners, using his national press to promote alliance, holding that “Canada has always been a good friend of Ecuador.” (Moore, 2009). In 2015, in an interview with Forbes, Correa declared quite unabashedly “that Ecuador is a wonderful place to invest, with a lot of opportunities for investors” (Noer, 2015). Correa even went on to state that while Ecuador’s use of the dollar was a “huge disadvantage,” posing macroeconomic difficulties for the state by precluding currency devaluation, the dollar was nevertheless “a good thing, a huge advantage at the same time for investors, especially American investors” (Noer, 2015). As a result, while some observers heralded Correa’s leftist government for its alternative development (Escobar, 2010), and “‘post-neoliberal’ populism” (Billo, 2015), others have accused his regime of full-blown “militarized neoliberalism,” (Ling, 2017). Disillusioned, leaders commented that “Correa has changed and now all he wants is to exploit all our natural resources. It is a terrible let-down. We voted for him, we believed in him, and now we want him to go,” (Pothier, 2015).

As the above case study has shown, the Ecuadorian government under Correa developed several legal institutions for the support of environmental and cultural rights, yet at the same time managed to circumvent these state priorities when faced with conflicts over land use. In each of the above examples, the Correa government conceded land to foreign industrial extraction corporations. In the coming analysis, this paper engages further with the concessions of the

Correa regime and the implications of these economic outcomes for scholarly understandings of leftist governments in Latin America.

## **VI. Case Study: Bolivia**

In 2006, indigenous leader Evo Morales was democratically elected to the Presidency of Bolivia, turning heads around the world, largely due to his affiliation with MAS, or the Movement Towards Socialism. In a nation where around 70% of the population is of indigenous descent (Escobar, 2010, p. 27), Morales' Presidency was seen as a true testament to democracy, and his critique of neoliberalism more broadly provided much hope to the populace in general. Even more so than in Ecuador, Morales' democratic socialist government provided hope to both the grassroots and scholars around the world that a post-liberal state, breaking the seemingly inescapable neo-extractive and neo-developmental bonds of neo-liberalism inherited from the 20th Century. Like Ecuador, Morales moved to reverse the market reforms of the Washington Consensus, through nationalization and expropriation, and social transfer programs. Molina unequivocally labeled Bolivia as "an experiment in postneoliberal politics," charting a "third way" with respect other governments in Latin America such as Chile and Venezuela (Weyland, 2010, p. 57). Indeed, Bolivia has been analyzed as a way "to go beyond the Right-Left political spectrum" to envision a truly decolonial, post-liberal, post-modern political space (Escobar, 2010, p. 26).

### *Constitutional Law*

In 2009, Bolivia rewrote its constitution to reflect the new goals of the socialist government. In addressing the issue of land rights in relation to environmentalism and development, Bolivia appears to follow conventions of indigenous land recognition; Article 342 holds that the State and populace must "conserve, protect and use natural resources and the

biodiversity in a sustainable manner,” and Article 343 gives the population “the right to participate in environmental management, and to be consulted and informed prior to decisions that could affect the quality of the environment.” The constitution also explicitly requires “applications of systems of evaluation of environmental impact.” However, Article 345 holds that the State will regulate the production of all matters affecting health and the environment, Article 346 holds that the conservation and use of natural assets “shall be the responsibility and exclusive authority of the State,” and Article 355 goes so far as to declare the industrialization and sale of natural resources are priorities of the State. Furthermore, in contrast to Ecuador, Article 352 maintains that the exploitation of natural resources will be subject to a process of free, prior, and informed “consultation with the affected population,” rather than the consent of the population, as in Ecuador. To this non-committal end, the Bolivian government states generally that “Citizen participation is guaranteed...and the conservation of ecosystems shall be promoted, in accordance with the Constitution and the law.” The constitution of Bolivia thus solidifies the supremacy of central State discretion, and the law has similarly increased the role of the state to pursue anti-neoliberal measures.

### *Mining Law*

In the name of anti-neoliberalism and protecting the sovereignty of Bolivia, the Morales government nationalized several industries, wresting them from overtly private, foreign control. Over time, Morales nationalized industries including natural gas, oil, pension funds, telecommunications, and hydroelectricity (Achtenberg, 2012), but mining, which is 15% of Bolivia’s GDP (Stratfor, 2012), for the most part remained largely in the private sector under Morales, though he raised mining taxes in 2006 (Jamasmie, 2014). Over time, through the use of the State’s constitutionally derived power, the State nationalized specific mines, and passed laws

such as the 2014 Mining Law, which attempted to ban the ability of small cooperative miners, comprising 35% of Bolivia's mining sector (Jamasmie, 2014), from partnering with large firms, and requiring that all future mining ventures seek approval from COMIBOL, the state's mining agency (Achtenberg, 2014). Conflicts over mining law have persisted from 2006 to 2016, when striking miners ended up kidnapping and killing the Deputy of Internal Affairs Minister at a roadblock near Panduro, during protests against a law that would tighten regulation of miners' activities (Alto, 2018).

### *Conflict with Cooperative Miners*

In Bolivia, a large conflict over mining nationalization took the form of a domestic desire to increase transnational mining operations, rather than decrease as in Ecuador, and wrought intense activism and opposition from the cooperatives. Bolivia's mining sector is split between the state, private sector, and cooperative sector. Though originally of a socialist and collectivist nature, the cooperative sector of late is viewed as a hierarchical private enterprise, controlled by elite groups of stockholders who subcontract to an exploited workforce (Achtenberg, 2014). They are organized within a national federation, FENCONIM, which is part of MAS (Alto, 2018), and fought against the mining law of 2014 to protect their pre-existing arrangements with private firms (Achtenberg, 2014).

The methods employed by FENCOMIN included diverse legal and direct actions. They argued on constitutional grounds that the law recognizes plural mining, which can only be protected if small miners are allowed to make mixed contracts with large businesses (Achtenberg, 2014). In addition, thousands of cooperative miners participated in road blockades which resulted in large economic damages, injuries, and even four casualties (Achtenberg, 2014).

As a result, Morales amended the law to recognize pre-existing contracts, while maintaining that future contracts would still be subject to the law (Achtenberg, 2014).

In response to the FENCOMIN demonstration, though partially successful, Morales took swift legal measures to retaliate and circumscribe the mining cooperatives. For instance, Morales closed COMIBOL operations, ordered the audits of several cooperative-private contracts, declared that he would prosecute insufficient approvals of such contracts as treason, and fired the Mining Minister (Achtenberg, 2014). He also stipulated that pre-existing contracts must be negotiated to conform to the new law within 18 months (Achtenberg, 2014).

### *Conflict with Indigenous Communities*

More environmentally concerned and indigenous land rights-based conflicts over mining concerning land rights have also plagued Bolivia as in Ecuador, in the dispute over Mallku Khota. In 2006, COMIBOL approved the transfer of mining concessions in Mallku Khota, a silver deposit in Northern Bolivia which is home to 46 indigenous communities with territory rights to the land, to South American Silver Corporation (SASC) a Canadian mining company (Garces, July 2012). The company attempted to divide the communities by signing individual community agreements for the surface rights, but were unable to purchase the consensus of the broad community (Garces, July 2012). Additionally, the corporation has refused complete an environmental impact study, argue that there are no perceived environmental risks with the project, (Garces, June 2012). This is despite the fact that the region, which supplied water to the Amazonian region, is going through a process of desertification, and mining projects require large amounts of water (Garces, June 2012).

By 2012, the community organized several direct actions against the SASC concessions. On May 28th, CONAMAQ, the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu, organized

a *March in Defense of the sacred lake of Mallku Khota*, which departed from Mallku Khota en route to La Paz (Garces, June 2012). More militantly, they have taken police and employee hostages, organized protests, and used dynamite and trenches to physically impede SASC (AIN, 2012).

In response, the government at first resorted to police paramilitary resistance. The police gassed indigenous communities (Garces, July 2012), protected SASC employees, and shot at crowds, leading to the death of a community member (AIN, 2012). In the end, Morales personally decided to open up a dialogue with the community (Toro Lanza, 2012), whose leaders eventually signed an agreement which reversed the SASC's mining concession, gave compensation to injured community members, and protected protestors from legal action, even those involved in taking hostages (AIN, 2012). COMIBOL thereafter took over the SASC's mining concessions (Schipani, August 3, 2012). Commenting on the belated decision to appease the local community, the secretary of Bolivia's national miners' union said, "We have nationalized what belongs to us. This was badly privatized back in the nineties, and badly managed...Nothing but rubbish was being left behind for the Bolivian people," (Schipani, August 3, 2012).

#### *Conflict Between Cooperatives Miners and Traditional Miners*

It is important to note that in the Mallku Khota conflict, the groups opposed to SASC included both community members opposed to mining broadly, and cooperative members interested in retaining domestic control over mining. Tension between these two groups have characterized many of Bolivia's mining conflicts, such as the 2006 conflict between mine-company employees and cooperative members at Huanuni in October 2006, in which 16 died (Alto, 2018), and the 2012 conflict over nationalizing the tin and zinc mine of Colquiri. In

Colquiri, mining workers in the traditional mining sector, represented by the Federated Union of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB), fought for the rights to mine a portion of Colquiri previously dominated by cooperative miners in FENCOMIN (Stratfor, June 2012). The FSTMB workers went on strike, and thousands of protestors set up blockades alongside the miners. Regarding Morales' hesitance to comply, Elizabeth Peredo, director of Fundacion Solon, Bolivian human rights organization, argued that "governments [do not] have the ability to set more sustainable policies to care for Mother Earth, despite the rhetoric that adorns the constitutions and legal frameworks" (Harris, 2012). In response, the government moved to nationalize the mine, despite FENCOMIN's objections, in order to resolve the conflict and preserve productivity, without having to make a broad policy statement (Stratfor, June 2012). In Bolivia, the pressure to nationalize therefore comes from domestic groups in FSTMB who favor mining, and groups who oppose mining on environmental and communal grounds, while the pressure to privatize also comes from mining in FENCOMIN, as well as externally from foreign investors, and the government has proven to be responsive to these social and political pressures.

#### *Additional Forms of Government Response*

In justifying the government's deployment of law enforcement and nationalization tactics of stepping in only when local conflicts over the land turn violent, Morales' government is able to rely on the new Constitution which specifically empowers the representative government to do so in the public interest. Also relying on electoral popularity, Bolivia's Minister of Finance held that they "have a mandate as a government to recover everything that was ours and then privatised during the neoliberal model of the late nineties" (Schipani, August 29, 2012). Still, Morales provides further justification, using the rhetoric that the protests of the FENCOMIN mining opposition to nationalization is "a political conspiracy, not a social demand" (Press TV,

2016), which is a sort of anti-democratic accusation. Indeed, he used personal language to describe the protesting miners as “cowardly,” while maintaining that he himself has “always been open” to democratic institutions such as negotiation (Schipani, August 29, 2012). Still, Morales also openly acknowledges that “certain foreign interests” (Press TV, 2016) have a role in shaping the outcomes of mining conflicts.

The decisions of the Morales government to nationalize certain mines can be viewed as leftist leaning decisions, and certainly more so than Correa’s actions. The Financial Times commented in 2012 that Morales’ government appears to be “aimed at giving the state a bigger slice of the sector’s profits” and that “natural resources investors have become increasingly worried when looking at Bolivia” (Schipani, August 3, 2012). Still, overall it can be said that foreign investors and capitalists have not been particularly intimidated, and have been found to remain engaged with Bolivia’s post-nationalization energy sector (Achtenberg, May 2012). Analysts attribute this to Morales’ “non-confrontational,” “investor-friendly policies” and his “willingness to boost private incentives to meet domestic energy needs” (Achtenberg, May 2012), insinuating that these are the true priorities of the government. For example, his expropriation of Spain’s Red Electrica was followed by joint appraiser to fairly compensate the firm on the value of its investment (Achtenberg, May 2012). And indeed, COMIBOL’s chief declared that although they were reviewing contracts “to make them beneficial for the Bolivian state,” there “will still be private mining with no involvement of the state” (Schipani, August 29, 2012). As in Ecuador, economic analysts attribute these assuaging policies to dependency on foreign investment, maintaining that “the country cannot afford the comprehensive nationalization Morales is advocating” because Bolivia’s mining output could not be sustained without foreign capital and technology (Stratfor, June 12, 2012), and its “only major source of

revenue is its natural resource deposits” (Stratfor, June 8, 2012). Hence, despite its constitutional sanctioning of nationalization, analysts have posited that “many of the country’s nationalizations have been in name only” (Stratfor, June 8, 2012). Thus, reliance on foreign investment precludes consistent nationalization policies, leading scholars to posit that Bolivia’s policy agenda has proved insufficiently postneoliberal in terms of “transforming Bolivia’s role in the global economy,” among other problems (Weyland, 2010, p. 57). Hence, while evidently responsive to social movements Bolivia remains constricted by the demands of the global trade order.

As this case study has shown, the Bolivian government under Morales put in place several legal institutions, similar to those of Ecuador, in order to indicate the leftist leader’s commitment to environmental and cultural rights. Yet, despite these political conventions, the Bolivian government often responded in ways antagonistic to the environmentalist and cultural demands of those opposed to mining concessions. Although Morales conceded to domestic protests against foreign industrial mining corporations, the government still demonstrated a prioritization of economic goals over purported goals of social justice and sustainability. In the following analysis, this paper engages further with the decisions of the Morales regime and their implications for academic analyses of leftist regimes and neoliberalism in Latin America.

## **VII. Analysis**

In the earlier portion of this thesis, previous scholarship established the history of the political left in Latin America and the durability of economic neoliberalism in the face of popular discontent. The paradoxical tension between post-neoliberal grassroots movements and leftist political campaigns in Latin America can be better understood by examining the direct relationship between left political leaders and neoliberal economic outcomes in the mining industry of Latin America. In the case studies of this paper, this study provided an in depth

analysis of the actions of the leftist Correa and Morales regimes, in regards to mining conflicts in Ecuador and Bolivia. In both of these cases, the leftist political leaders of Latin American nations, who were democratically elected by people discontent with neoliberalism, directly supported industrial mining interests and neo-extractive development strategies. Thus, both leftist regimes actively worked to reinforce and sustain the global neoliberal economic order of privatization and extraction. The hierarchical supremacy and assumed legitimacy of these largely discursive and bureaucratic national institutions inhibited the power of leftist grassroots and leftist government officials to challenge the existing global economic order, diluting their voices, allowing leftist national governments to welcome global industrial extraction interests. In the above case studies, both Correa and Morales indeed chose to prioritize the capitalization rather than the preservation of natural resources, thereby undermining the concerns of grassroots communities and leftist political leaders, suppressing civil liberties, and allowing for the neo-extractivist developmental state and preventing communal, sustainable development alternatives. Although the Morales industry eventually conceded to popular demands, it was made evident that only under circumstances in which economic interests are threatened, rather than instances in which environmental or indigenous rights are involved, was the government willing to rescind domestically contested mining concessions.

### *Neoliberal Economic Extractivism*

In the previous case studies of Ecuador and Bolivia, the mining conflicts over the right to use land differed slightly, in that the Ecuadorian conflict arose between locals opposed to extractivism and foreign corporations, whereas in Bolivia, conflict arose between locals opposed to extractivism, local miners opposed to foreign industrial extractivism, and foreign corporations. Both case studies are nevertheless comparable in two ways. Firstly, both domestic and foreign

focused anti-extraction and anti-industrial extraction movements can be viewed as movements in favor of post-neoliberal alternative development, according to Escobar's standard that post-neoliberalism ought to "develop infrastructures" that "re-design of social life along non-liberal and post-capitalist criteria, while retaining their autonomy" (2010, p. 4). Secondly, in both cases, the organization and response of each government to the grassroots mobilization in each country was decisive for resolving the competing demands of extractivist development and sustainable development.

In Ecuador, local indigenous communities refused to consent to private foreign mining concessions, demanding that the government take into account the environmental impact and indigenous rights to the land in order to expel the corporate exploration. This resistance took the form of nationwide protests, physical direct actions such as blockades, and legal appeals, including court appeals to constitutional law. The central state government responded to these protests by using its media platforms to discredit protestors as irrational, anti-democratic terrorists; using its legislative power to criminalize popular forms of protest; and administrative power to shut down the organizations of the opposition, using the legal grounds of public peace and state security to justify its actions. Also in the name of national security, the government has used the military and law enforcement to support private foreign investors, and arresting opposition leaders, and retroactively charging them with crimes. As a result of the silencing of protests, the money offered by foreign mining corporations, and the decision of the government to approve the environmental impact assessment of the mining corporations, the corporations were supported by the Ecuadorian government and law enforcement, and allowed to begin an on-going six to eight year-long project to explore the land.

In Bolivia, local indigenous communities, local miners comprised of mining cooperatives and traditional miners, and foreign mining corporations vie for the rights to land use, pitting one group against extraction altogether, while local miners and corporations fight for the right to extract. This triangle of tension differs from the polar conflict in Ecuador, in that the local miners comprised of traditional miners and cooperatives are both part of the voting population as well as part of the economic sector. In Bolivia, similar to their counterparts in Ecuador, the local indigenous communities opposed mining corporations attempts to purchase their consent, using direct actions and physical acts such as marches, taking hostages, protests, dynamite and trench blockades, but relying on the more lenient constitutional requirement of consultation rather than consent in Bolivia, the government still approved the transfer of communal lands to mining corporations, sending police forces to gas the indigenous groups and protect the corporation employees. However, in the face of public pressure, Morales himself later personally decided to open a dialogue with the community, reverse the concessions, and pardon the protestors, leading to a victory for the local indigenous communities.

The cooperatives in Bolivia organized the bulk of the local mining opposition to laws favoring state-sanctioned corporate mining, by organizing strikes, kidnappings, and road blockages, causing great economic damage. Also, as occurred in Ecuador, the cooperative used legal arguments based on the constitutional recognition of plural mining rights, or the right to a diverse mining sector. The government of Bolivia, unlike in Ecuador, actually responded to quell the organized economic disruptions by amending the law to allow for a more gradual implementation, but ignored the legal arguments as they continued to put the law in place, and later retaliated against administrators who had supported previous cooperative efforts to circumvent the mining laws. Another aspect of the state's involvement in mining disputes in

Bolivia concerns the fact that the government has not fully nationalized the mining industry, thus supporting private sector extraction. Yet, the government responds to economically threatening conflicts between the traditional and cooperative local miners by nationalizing particular mines, demonstrating how the state is motivated by preserving state economic interests rather than promoting the constitutionally protected plural mining.

### *The Political Left*

The leftist political establishments of Ecuador and Bolivia under Correa and Morales effectively exemplify the left-wing political regimes which came to power throughout 21st century Latin America, consisting of legal and constitutional frameworks reformed to prioritize social justice and environmental rights, under the direction of the central state government, with the power to nationalize industries and enforce policy through military and law enforcement. The decisions of the leftist political leadership in Bolivia and Ecuador, from the specific construction of human rights language in the constitution and statutes of the legislature, the related rulings of the courts, the level of interaction allowed between the executive and the people, and the summoning of the military, as well as the media, by the government, while not necessarily dispositive, have been decisive in determining the outcomes of mining conflicts in Ecuador and Bolivia.

While both Ecuador and Bolivia ratified international conventions regarding indigenous communal land rights and crafted new constitutions in the twenty-first century providing for indigenous communal land rights and environmental protections, the rhetoric used in the Ecuadorian constitution is stronger than the language used in Bolivia. Still, in both countries, the basic provisions for democratic socialism and pluralism are extant. However, in both countries the populations have complained that the constitution, while providing nominal

acknowledgement of values important to the populace, lacks strength in application and implementation. The tendency of both the Correa and Morales governments, while nominally leftist, to prioritize foreign investment opportunities over the demands of local communities and local economic sectors shows both a vagueness and flexibility in the constitution which diminishes its effectiveness as a means for increasing participation in the political process, and also the willingness of the supposedly left political establishment to compromise the values of its electorate.

As mentioned in the earlier review of past scholarship, in discussing the shift to neoliberalism in the 1990s in Latin America, Charles Hale refers to the economic and political process of decentralization, minimization of the state, and minimal democratization, with a new focus on human rights, as neoliberal multiculturalism (2005, p. 12). It has also been stated that following the subsequent shift to the left in Latin America in the 2000s, many scholars hoped that the new leftist governments would reverse the market reforms of the 1990s and initiate a period of post-neoliberalism. Indeed, as aforementioned, Kent Eaton notes that in this period the governments of Correa and Morales initiated a series of re-nationalizations of private industries, and recentralization of power in the central state government, as well as a continued stated commitment towards human rights and social justice (2013, p. 445).

At the very beginning of the twenty-first century, analysts such as Puig argued that countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador especially exemplified the multicultural state model, especially concerning the strength of the Bolivian constitution (Puig, 2010), and scholars such as Vogt concurred that such tolerance in political space had led “most notably [in] Bolivia and Ecuador,” to “two of the most powerful indigenous movements” in Latin America (Vogt, 2015, p. 30). However, the case studies of Bolivia and Ecuador in this thesis point to a different

development in this trend, in which the process of recentralization and enlargement of the power and centrality of the central state government, while leftist, culminated in the support of the neoliberal extractivist economic order, continuing to allow for private mining concessions for foreign ventures to the detriment of local and indigenous communities.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

In this study, the relationship between neoliberal economics and leftist political regimes in Latin America was analyzed within the arena of mining conflicts in Bolivia and Ecuador. By analyzing the ways in which the Ecuadorian government suppressed local grassroots resistance to industrial extraction projects, compared with the ways in which the Bolivian government has dealt with competing claims over natural resource extraction and use, this study isolated and compared the variations between the political institutions of two different leftist Latin American governments and analyzed the outcomes of these similar yet varied political regimes. Specifically, this thesis looks at how left-wing political actions impeded anti-mining activists in Ecuador and Bolivia from achieving a post-neoliberal economic order with sustainable development, in spite of grassroots efforts resisting neo-extractivism and global neoliberalism in general.

The Correa and Morales governments demonstrate the ability and willingness of left-leaning nation-states, even those run by governments purportedly committed to radical left-wing, post-neoliberalism, to deepen rhetorical acknowledgement of diverse cultures and increase participation in the political process, while maintaining the economic and material systems of neoliberalism in place. In Ecuador, the government was unmoved by the opposition of local indigenous communities to mining corporations based on legal petitions for communal land rights. In Bolivia, the government similarly denied such petitions, while later on responding to

local demands for mining reform only when key economic interests were threatened by the opposition, or when Morales himself felt personally compelled to open dialogue with the community.

In other words, the constitutional and legal changes initiated by the leftist governments of two of the most radically-oriented states in Latin America failed to accomplish the political left's goals to promote social, cultural, and environmental rights. Centralizing power in the offices of the nation-state central government, in spite of electing left-wing and/or indigenous representatives to those offices and recrafting the constitutional frameworks of those nations to recognize social rights, is not sufficient to confer autonomy, decision-making power, nor sovereignty in the hands of the indigenous local communities and local economic actors. Both state governments in Bolivia and Ecuador, although running on anti-neoliberal platforms, remained committed to the free-market logic of neo-extractivism. Under both Correa and Morales, left-leaning regimes in Latin America prioritize international economic regimes over both domestic and international political conventions designed to promote environmental and indigenous rights, demonstrating their commitment to the neoliberal economic order.

Discussing the hegemony of Western political institutions throughout the world, Dipesh Chakrabarty criticizes the "universalization of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community," specifically inculcating "'economics' and 'history' [as] the knowledge forms that correspond to the two major institutions that the rise (and later universalization) of the bourgeoisie order has given to the world- the capitalist mode of production and the nation-state" (2008). Conversely, the decision of both the left-leaning Bolivian and Ecuadorian nation-state governments to reinforce the neoliberal order in the mining industry suggest that not only has

neoliberal economic doctrine had a hand in shaping political projects, but the leftist political leaders in turn have also tended to sustain the neoliberal economic order.

The cases of Correa and Morales are indicative of two characteristics of leftist political regimes in Latin America, that they are largely oriented towards economic organization, and that they are very amenable to the tides of international trends. For leftist Latin American governments to be truly oriented towards post-neoliberal alternatives of governance, they may therefore have to look towards first restructuring their political organization by decentralizing the decision making authority to more local leaders; as Puig suggested, post-neoliberal projects may look to “rethinking the notions of citizenship and democracy, given that the forms of tenure and management of land are central not only for the survival of indigenous peoples, but also for the reproduction of their cultures” (Puig p. 84). Likewise, if Latin American peoples are to survive the hegemony of globalization and sustain a post-neoliberal society based on social justice and sustainable development, they may need to rethink their membership in a community of nation-states dependent on international trade relations and neoliberal capitalism, as these countries continue to espouse free-market logic despite persisting levels of inequality. Further research ought to examine further conflicts over land use to determine the extent to which leftist state governments support local community concerns or industrial business concerns. By delving into the ways in which governments are able to circumvent grassroots interests, as well as documenting and publicizing such interests, political actors may be better able to hold state leaders accountable to their campaign promises and leftist party goals.

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