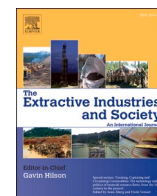




The Extractive Industries and Society

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/exis

Book Review

Riofrancos, Thea. 2020. *Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador*. Duke University Press: Durham and London. ISBN 9781478008484 (Paperback) \$26.95 USD.

There has been much interest in Latin American resource nationalisms during the commodity boom of the early 21st century that several left-leaning countries harnessed for income redistribution and more equitable social policy. Focusing on Ecuador, Riofrancos examines the political economy of resource extraction during the Presidency of former President Rafael Correa (2007–2017).

Riofrancos argues that a dialectic of governance (“left-in-power”) and resistance (“left-in-resistance”) exists on the Ecuadorian left that, while sharing common ground in historically-bound struggles against capitalism, also fundamentally diverge based on competing “resource radicalisms” (p.167). On one side, a radical resource nationalism seeks redistributive ends from sovereign natural mineral endowments. On the other, anti-extractivism seeks to re-constitute the human-nature relationship and advance the interests of long-repressed voices through rights enshrined in the newly codified pluricultural state constitution. The book particularly focuses on the latter, being the discourses and strategies of anti-extractive social movements – *campesino* groups, indigenous political organizations, and radical environmentalists – and the ways in which disputes over resource extraction became the primary arena for contestation with the state.

The book is divided into five chapters and is based on fifteen months of multi-site fieldwork stretching over seven years that involved ethnography, archival research, and over 100 interviews. The book shows an extensive engagement with government bureaucrats, state political actors, social movement leadership, and extractive industry representatives. A key contribution of Riofrancos to the wider research on resource politics is the primary focus on natural resource governance policy as an arena for larger instances of political contestation, which departs from more familiar focuses on the social-environmental effects of extraction or the developmental outcomes of specific natural resource governance models.

Riofrancos uses discourse analysis to examine the strategies of anti-extractive social movements and the counter-response from state bureaucrats and politicians that also harnessed leftist narratives to advance an extractivist development model. Interview transcripts showed that bureaucrats struggled with the policy paradoxes in the new constitution of 2008, such as allusions to the rights of nature and aspirations of a post-extractive economy existing alongside the policy aims of the Correa government to aggressively expand oil & gas extraction and to develop the nascent mining sector. While the discourse analysis weaves throughout all chapters, there are also institutional and legal empirical

details that provide important context.

Following a historical genealogy underpinning the relationship between radical politics and resource nationalism in chapter 1, chapter 2 distills many of the familiar rhetorical strategies used by the government to promote extractivism. For anti-extractive social movements, harnessing the broader narrative of resistance during the ascendancy of a left-wing politics was achieved by framing extractivism as antithetical to the goal of breaking resource dependency and as a “developmentalist pathology that was the essence of Western civilization” (p. 61).

Chapter 3 highlights the role of popular movements in the success of Rafael Correa’s Presidential election and in the government’s initial ability to form a coalition with diverse sectors of the left. Riofrancos then identifies conflicting components of the 2008 constitution. Specifically, that the achievement of a pluricultural citizenship-regime in Ecuador conflicts with provisions related specifically to the extractivist ambitions of the nation-state. Drawing from case studies between 2011 and 2014, Riofrancos explains that social mobilization of anti-extraction groups was carried out via strategic interpretation of the constitution against the very government that drafted it. In response, pro-extractive government officials mobilized familiar anti-imperialist discourses against the anti-extractive groups and reframed them as traitors of the national interest, puppets to the interests of private capital seeking to dismantle redistributive politics, and as spreaders of misinformation on behalf of foreign environmental NGOs.

Chapters 4–5 examine case studies of prior consultation for mining projects, which serve as an arena for discursive mobilization of the competing resource radicalisms. Anti-extractive groups exercised their rights at the local level through new participatory institutions, which demonstrated in one case how extractivism was overwhelmingly unpopular. In contrast, the discursive analysis of President Correa displayed a reactionary undercurrent that repeatedly returned to a historically-constituted privileging of majoritarian democracy. Central in the state’s narrative was a condemnation of opposition to extraction projects of national interest as minority-rule, which made the post-neoliberal vision for Ecuador “impossible to govern” (p. 134).

The book comprehensively examines the political arena through the lens of extractivism for envisioning a post-neoliberal Ecuador. Opposition actors to the wider left-turn of Ecuador during this time, namely right-wing factions of the domestic elite, are not focused on in great detail, despite their influence in national finance and industry. This is largely justified by the book’s focus on assessment of the mosaic of groups on the left and the reality that Quito is the political and bureaucratic locus of power during the years of the “left-in-power.”

Several years of primary research, observation, and social movement accompaniment culminates in a meaningful reflection on the dilemmas of the “left-in-resistance” to extraction. Riofrancos offers ideas on how to

move forward with visions of sustainable and progressive resource governance, while also recognizing three key hurdles. First, the ideational endurance of resource dependency in even the most anti-capitalist notions of social development. Second, that describing a hypothetical post-extractivist society is ambiguous. Finally, the issue of “territorial scale” (p. 179) and the ways in which anti-extractive resistance is tied to local conditions, which inhibits broad-coalition building.

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