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Capitalism, imperialism, nationalism: agrarian dynamics and resistance as radical food sovereignty

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Abstract

This paper explores the dynamics of capitalism, imperialism, and nationalism to contextualize and explain “radical” food sovereignty. It defines the opportunities and constraints surrounding the dynamics of “radical” food sovereignty as an anti-capitalist, counter-hegemonic movement. The difficulties in subverting the state-capital nexus are explored with reference to the pink tide states in Latin America, particularly Bolivia and Ecuador. Such “left” populism, through neo-extractivist funded welfarism, has subverted “radical” food sovereignty movements. Growing contradictions of neo-extractivism presage the delegitimation of the peripheral state-capital nexus, a resurgence of right authoritarian populism, and a further round of counter-hegemonic protest.

Keywords: Nationalism; capitalism; imperialism; agrarian resistance; food sovereignty

Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between “radical” food sovereignty and the dynamics of capitalism, imperialism, and nationalism. “Radical” food sovereignty invokes a Marxian, or social relational, understanding of capitalism and agrarian transitions (Tilzey 2018), with capitalism on this view arising from the commodification of labour power through expropriation of agricultural producers from their means of production – or primitive accumulation (Marx 1972). Such expropriation leads to the imposition of market dependency on the classes of labour (Kautsky 1988; Wood 2002; Bernstein 2009) as a condition of survival. Radical food sovereignty, as one of the most important contemporary agrarian resistance movements (Edelman and Borras 2016), envisages an abrogation of this condition as a prerequisite for social and ecological sustainability. The purpose of this paper is to provide a spatio-temporal contextualization of radical food sovereignty movements by placing them within the wider political and ecological dynamics of the state-capital nexus (McKay 2018; Tilzey 2018), and of the imperial, sub-imperial, and peripheral form of the world capitalist system which structures these. The rationale behind this is, firstly, to understand the causal basis of “radical” food sovereignty as opposed to its “progressive” form; and, secondly, to afford a strategic view on the opportunities and constraints surrounding the resurgence of

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radical food sovereignty as an anti-capitalist, counter-hegemonic movement. The latter is undertaken by reference to case studies of Bolivia and Ecuador.

To do this, we articulate a theorization which integrates Political Marxism (Brenner 1985; Mooers 1991; Wood 2002), neo-Gramscian international political economy (Cox 1993, Bieler and Morton 2004), regulation theory (Boyer and Saillard 2002), and Poulantzian state theory (Poulantzas 1978). In this paper, then, class struggle, capital, and the state remain central and dialectically related analytical categories. This generates a Marxian analytical frame when delineating the theory and praxis of radical food sovereignty.

To understand the causal basis of radical food sovereignty and to afford a strategic view on the opportunities and constraints surrounding its resurgence requires, we argue, a better understanding of capital-state dynamics as nationalism, imperialism, and now sub-imperialism if the nature of market dependency and primitive accumulation are to be understood as a prerequisite for their subversion through counter-hegemony (Tilzey 2019a, 2019b). We argue that counter-hegemony as radical food sovereignty – for reasons intimately related to the imperialistic and sub-imperialistic character of capitalism as the “imperial mode of living” (Brand and Wissen 2018) – is differentially located in the global South, the global locus of the majority of peasantry peasants, semi-proletarians, and indigenous people whose continuing links to non-commodified land offer escape routes from the precarity of “disarticulated” capitalism (de Janvry 1981).

We argue that this differential location occurs because the capitalist “agrarian transition” in the global South has *not* generally taken the form of the full proletarianization (complete separation of workers from the means of production) that has usually characterized the global North and parts of the sub-imperium (notably China). Rather, the “transition” is often partial, with peasants, as semi-proletarians, commonly retaining some access to land, a tendency compounded by lack of secure employment opportunities in capitalist agriculture and in the non-agrarian sector (de Janvry 1981; Vergara-Camus 2014; Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017; McKay 2018). This is due, in significant degree, to peripheral and dependent forms of capital accumulation (Petras and Veltmeyer 2016). This means that, although the great bulk of Latin America, for example, has gone through a capitalist transition, the socially and sectorally disarticulated character of that transition (de Janvry 1981; McKay 2018) implies that a significant percentage of the “classes of labour” who retain access to land undertake *non-capitalist* forms of production. This percentage (middle and lower peasantry) retains a peasant rather than a proletarian class positionality, a vitally important consideration in understanding the causal basis of radical food sovereignty. Due to semi-proletarianization and precarity, we

argue that a “radical” imaginary of food sovereignty *tends* to emerge (although no inevitability is implied), a counter-hegemonic position which advocates the redistribution of land from capitalists to the peasantry and precariat for the production of fundamental use values, perhaps most importantly food. Such a “reverse” agrarian transition constitutes an abrogation of primitive accumulation.

We suggest that the capitalist “agrarian transition” in the global North (and increasingly in the sub-imperium) has, by contrast, entailed proletarianization, leading to the extirpation of the peasantry and the almost exclusive appropriation of the countryside by capitalist farmers. The potentially revolutionary character of the proletariat here has typically been dulled by the co-optation of this class into capitalism as “labour aristocracy” and as “consumers”. Such “material rewards” and the prevalently urban character of these societies have been facilitated by “unequal ecological exchange” with the global South, something which we may term “resource imperialism”, sustaining the “imperial mode of living” (Brand and Wissen 2018). The implication of these dynamics is that, due to the general extirpation of the peasantry, rural resistance to capitalism in the global North is miniscule by comparison to the South, and commonly assumes the form, not of “radical”, but rather of “progressive”, food sovereignty as advocated by “alternative”, commercial, smaller scale producers (the “new peasantries” of van der Ploeg [2008]).

How might counter-hegemonic change then, as radical food sovereignty, come about? It is here, we suggest, that the role of the Southern precariat becomes pivotal. The differential location of radical counter-hegemonic classes in the periphery implies the re-emergence of breaches in the state-capital nexus, as the history of “peasant wars” has demonstrated (for example, Wolf 1999; Vergara-Camus 2014). No inevitability is implied here, of course, since any such scenario is contingent upon “political” dynamics (the relative strength and strategic dexterity of social forces, or “*class struggle*”), albeit against an “ecological” backdrop of ineluctably increasing resource and energy scarcity. Indeed, the difficulties entailed in subverting the state-capital nexus, even in the global South (let alone the global North), are demonstrated in the second part of this paper by reference to the experience of counter-hegemonic movements in the “pink tide” states of Latin America, notably in Bolivia and Ecuador. These states represent a microcosm (albeit a pale reflection) of the operation of the “imperial mode of living”, whereby the counter-hegemonic forces which overthrew neoliberalism in the first decade of the new millennium have been progressively subverted by national-popular programmes of reformist capitalism. The term “national-popular” entails a class alliance between “sub-hegemonic” (nationally-oriented) bourgeoisie and petty

bourgeoisie) and counter-hegemonic (anti-capitalist) groups to form political parties such as the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) in Bolivia and AP (*Alianza País*) in Ecuador. “Reformist” capitalism entails a more socially inclusive form of the state-capital nexus whereby a significant percentage of surplus value or rents from capital is appropriated by the state and redistributed to the “classes of labour”.

These “populist” regimes, in alliance with imperial and sub-imperial capital, have deployed the proceeds of “neo-extractivism” to dull radicalism through welfarism and employment, all the while generating primitive accumulation and the destruction of ecological ways of living by that very process of extractivism (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014; Tilzey 2019a). Resistance to primitive accumulation and precarity is again on the rise, however, and in response these states are becoming increasingly authoritarian. We suggest, in conclusion, that, as a consequence, delegitimation of the peripheral state-capital nexus again beckons. While right-wing populism is an ever-present danger, as current events in both Bolivia and Ecuador demonstrate, such delegitimation likely presages a further round of counter-hegemonic protest.

Capitalism, imperialism, nationalism, and radical food sovereignty

The emergence of radical food sovereignty is premised largely on the perpetuation in much of the global South of a *semi-proletariat*, with partial and inadequate access to land. This semi-proletariat also frequently has a functional dualistic relation to capital (de Janvry 1981; McKay 2018), the state-capital nexus in the South seeking to sustain relations of socially disarticulated capital accumulation. This is key to the “new imperial” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2016; Tilzey 2019b) subordination of the South to the North under neoliberalism, with the imperium seeking to perpetuate relations of social articulation amongst its citizenry at the expense of the periphery. For the latter, the reality of precarity, involving poor pay, intermittent employment, or self-exploitation in the informal sector, erodes the narrative, associated with social articulation, of the inevitability and the superiority of capitalist/urban/industrial modes of existence vis-à-vis non-capitalist modes. The result, tendentially, is a “radical” imaginary of food sovereignty, indeed of land sovereignty or livelihood sovereignty (Tilzey 2018), as counter-hegemony and as a *reverse* agrarian transition, in which access to land for production of essential use values is the foremost demand of the precariat.

The (imperial/sub-imperial) state plays a major role in constituting and stabilizing the “imperial mode of living” by not only securing access externally to strategic resources (accumulation), but also guaranteeing internally a certain standard of living of the masses

through social insurance systems and labour market regulations (legitimation). The state acts to implement a mode of regulation (legitimation) as the hegemonic normalization of consumer affluence as the key denominator of the “good life”, while the ability to promise and secure growth and “progress” (the regime of accumulation) is particularly important since it constitutes the material basis of the imperial mode of living (Boyer and Saillard 2002; Jessop 2016; Brand and Wissen 2018; Tilzey 2019b). We can see, therefore, that capitalism, the state, and imperialism, together with “core” and “periphery”, are “internally” related, or co-constituting, phenomena.

More generally, capitalism cannot survive without the state, since the latter secures fundamental accumulation and legitimation functions for the former – thus, capital and the modern state are co-dependent as the *state-capital nexus* (van Apeldoorn et al. 2012; McKay 2018; Tilzey 2018). Otero (2013, 2018) develops a similar argument for the continuing regulatory importance of the state in contrast to the arguments of McMichael (2013) for the assumed plenipotential powers of transnational capital. Firstly, this involves the complementary accumulation and legitimation functions of the state in relation to capital as defined by, variously, O’Connor (1973) and Regulation Theory (Boyer and Saillard 2002). Further, following Poulantzas (1978), we can see the state, given the lack of “extra-economic” influence that individual capitals can exert, as providing the *essential* institutional space for various fractions of the capitalist class, in addition possibly to other classes, to come together to form longer-term strategies and alliances whilst, simultaneously, the state disorganizes non-capitalist classes through various means of co-optation and division.

Nationalism may be a key component of this, elevating national identity above class, this in turn facilitated by material rewards secured by means of imperialism. Poulantzas (1978) also indicated that the state, for reasons of legitimation, must, additionally, be “relatively autonomous” from the interests and demands of particular fractions of capital, and even from capital “in general”. So, as he suggested, the state represents the condensation of the balance of class forces in society. We suggest, therefore, that the modern state is usefully conceptualized as a social relation. In other words, it is an arena or container (the state-capital nexus) (Taylor 1994; van Apeldoorn et al. 2012), within which class contestation and compromise are played out, principally to secure the material and ideological reproduction of the hegemonic fractions of capital, even where these may be transnational in orientation. This is also to assert the enduring importance of divergent fractions of capital in current dynamics and the pervasive significance of the territorial form, and potentially imperialist character, of the state.

Nationalism/populism embodies the initiative of particular classes/class fractions in exploiting accumulation, and especially legitimation, crises with a view to enhancing the politico-economic interests of its core constituency. The result is the formation of an “historic bloc” (Gramsci 1971) (a class alliance beyond the core constituency which may be termed “national-popular”), whose objective is the “capture” of the state as a prelude to the stabilization, through re-legitimization, of the state-capital nexus. This it secures through reformist measures to the benefit of classes which suffered in the crisis causally preceding nationalism/populism. Characteristically, populism deploys nationalism as a rhetorical counterpoint to “internationalism” (neoliberal and trans-nationalized capital fractions), and subordinates class to national/ethnic/racial identity (Brass 2000, 2014).

Resistances to neoliberalism and imperialism, as in the pink tide states, may take the form of national-popular attempts to foment social articulation, which have the effect of subverting counter-hegemonic, anti-capitalist forces such as radical food sovereignty. However, these attempts to foment articulated capitalism are themselves constrained by imperial/sub-imperial dependency and the inability to supply the secure non-agricultural employment which might transform the peasantry into a proletariat as in the global North (agrarian question 1: “political” limits). They are also circumscribed by ecological constraints (sources and sinks) which prohibit the generalization to the global South of Northern levels of consumption/affluence (agrarian question 2: “ecological” limits). The resulting disarticulated development and pervasive precarity generate demands by land poor and landless for a model of radical food sovereignty beyond capitalism, reinforced by a resurgence of calls for indigenous self-determination and decolonialization (agrarian question 3: the “peasant way” out of the politico-ecological impasse of capitalism).

National-popular regimes, neo-extractivism, and the subversion of counter-hegemony

The differential impacts in the South of capital’s exploitative “political” and “ecological” dynamic, deficits in the peripheral state’s performance of its welfare, employment, and legitimacy functions, together with the “formal” rather than “real” subsumption within capital of the semi-proletarian majority, carry with them, then, the increased likelihood of challenge to the state-capital nexus by counter-hegemonic social forces. Nonetheless, the capacity of the state-capital nexus to subvert counter-hegemony is amply demonstrated even in the global South, where we may point to the experiences of radical food sovereignty movements over the “progressive” cycle of the Latin American pink tide states. Bolivia and Ecuador are exemplary

pink tide states where “radical” forces, comprising middle/lower peasantry, semi-proletarians, proletarians and landless, and indigenous people, engaged in what proved to be a fateful alliance with “progressive” national bourgeoisie and upper peasantry to displace neoliberalism, only to install national-popular regimes of reformist capitalism (Hylton and Thomson 2007). Some scholars (for example, Postero 2010; Harten 2011; Ellner 2012) have seen the rise of the pink tide states as constituting a radical departure from previous neoliberal regimes, a re-founding of economy, society and state that “is intended to make the entire political and economic system more just, inclusive, participatory, and aligned with indigenous cultures” (Ellner 2012, 97) and “promising a radical inclusion of all those disenfranchised in the past” (Harten 2011, 202-3). Postero (2010, 29) suggests that the new regimes represent a ceding of “permanent control over the state to indigenous and popular sectors”. The analysis presented in this paper is deeply sceptical of such claims and aligns, rather, with thinking articulated by scholars such as Brabazon and Webber (2014), McKay (2018), Vergara-Camus and Kay (2017), and Veltmeyer and Petras (2014). This thinking asserts, with varying emphases, that while pink tide states did/have assume(d) greater regulatory and redistributive roles than their neoliberal predecessors, these roles were/have been guided more by “neo-developmentalism” and “agro-extractivism” (or neo-extractivism) than by any real attempt to address the structural bases of land inequality, poverty, and precarity. As Vergara-Camus and Kay (2017, 433) indicate, the two most important missing elements in the rural policies of these states “were the lack of redistributive agrarian reform and the lack of a programme of reforms to place peasants and family farming at the centre of a sustainable and egalitarian model of agricultural development” – or, in our terms, radical food sovereignty. They continue: “no plan was drawn up to begin to reorganize the peasant sector so that it could acquire some kind of collective dynamism, through the creation of cooperatives, networks or agro-industries, instead of isolated policies oriented towards the individual producer. Similarly, most anti-poverty measures simply temporarily alleviated the levels of poverty through a variety of subsidies and income support measures, which are dependent on the ability and willingness of governments to provide.”

Reformist capitalism here entails a new commitment to greater state guidance and interventionism in the economy, to national food sovereignty (albeit largely rhetorical), and to the introduction of social programmes to alleviate the severe income disparities of the neoliberal era (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014). Funds for the latter, however, are predicated on the proceeds of the “new” extractivism, of minerals, fossil-fuels, and agri-fuels, offered by the emergence of sub-imperial states, notably China (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014). These funds

have been deployed by the “compensatory state” (Gudynas 2012) to subsidize welfarism and infrastructure projects, placating counter-hegemonic constituencies, whose demands for radical land redistribution and land rights remain largely unmet. Thus, we have a situation in which state-level dynamics as a “double movement” (Polanyi 1957) against neoliberalism are enabled by the rise of a would-be hegemon, China, forging symbiotic (albeit asymmetrical) links with peripheral national-popular regimes to support Chinese accumulation and its desire to secure geopolitical parity with the USA.

Bolivia and Ecuador have, over the last decade or so, pursued national-popular strategies with the following principal accumulation and legitimation objectives: a form of redistributive capitalism, focusing on the accumulation needs of its core sub-hegemonic class constituency, while using the proceeds of neo-extractivism (generated largely by the agrarian oligarchy and transnational capital) to placate counter-hegemonic classes through welfarism as a legitimation measure (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014). This enables the structural bases of inequality and poverty to be temporarily by-passed or mitigated, but only at the cost of deepening the political and ecological contradictions of extractive capitalism (Tilzey 2019a). As these contradictions deepen, exacerbated by “jobless” growth and high dependency on external markets, so does social unrest grow commensurately. The response of the ruling bloc in the pink tide states is a turn to increasing authoritarianism to push through its programme of accelerated commodification (Webber 2017b) and destruction of the biophysical foundations for sustainable living (*buen vivir*) in the name of short-lived growth and consumerism.

A national-popular regime pivots around the balance of legitimacy of the state-capital nexus – who benefits from extractive accumulation, welfarism and infrastructure creation under “neo-developmentalism”, and who loses through primitive accumulation and proletarianization? The regime works through *transformismo*, a strategy to assimilate and neutralize counter-hegemonic interests by co-opting them into the policies of the (sub-hegemonic) historic bloc (Cox 1993). Thus, counter-hegemonic protest, such as the anti-neoliberal mobilizations in Bolivia and Ecuador in the 1990s and 2000s, is progressively assimilated into the national-popular bloc, whilst the hegemonic oligarchy, initially marginalized, sees its influence gradually restored. Rather than a restoration of the status quo ante, *transformismo* involves a “molecular” transformation (Gramsci 1971; Webber 2017b) in the balance of class influence, progressively eviscerating the capacity of counter-hegemonic movements, whilst domesticating right-wing extremism of the oligarchy. *Transformismo*, as a national-popular programme of reformist capitalism, thus involves a dialectic of revolution/restoration, transformation/preservation (Webber 2017a, 2017b), in which a sub-

hegemonic, populist bloc appeases the oligarchy whilst, simultaneously, seeking to neutralize counter-hegemonic forces. The fiscal glue that binds the populist bloc stems from neo-extractivism – as this exacts an ever-greater toll on subaltern populations and the biophysical fabric of the land, so does resistance by these populations grow. Increased state authoritarianism is the predictable outcome.

The Correa/Moreno and Morales regimes in Ecuador and Bolivia exemplify well this process. Both have sought to re-legitimize capitalism through “left” populist reformism by widening the cohort of extractivism’s beneficiaries. Symptomatically, the core of the sub-hegemonic, populist bloc comprises the middle-classes which, particularly in Ecuador, have benefitted differentially from increased employment and salaries in infrastructure development, and through fuel subsidies (Davalos and Albuja 2014). Below we present case studies of agrarian class dynamics, the state-capital nexus, and the subversion of radical food sovereignty in Bolivia and Ecuador.

Bolivia

The 2005 election witnessed a clear victory for Evo Morales, the leader of the coca growers’ union. His party, MAS, was closely linked to the emergent indigenous, anti-colonial, and populist social movements that had coalesced in opposition to the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s and beyond. This broad coalition of peasant, indigenous, and worker organizations formed the *Pacto de Unidad* (Unity Pact) which was essential in Morales’ rise to power and became integrated, to varying degrees, within the new regime (Fabricant 2012, Webber 2015, 2017a, McKay *et al.* 2014).

The highly unequal distribution of land was an important cause of anti-neoliberal mobilization. The small class of landed oligarchy owns over seventy per cent of the most productive land, concentrated in the eastern lowlands. Meanwhile, over three million peasants, in a national population of some ten million people, own no land (Enzinna 2007; Webber 2015). A small class of rich or upper peasants (small commercial farms) is sandwiched between the lower peasantry and the oligarchy, lending vital and core political support for Morales. Unsurprisingly, this class received rewards from, and increased its membership during, the Morales regime (Webber 2017b).

It was the aspiration of the Unity Pact to institute an “Agrarian Revolution” in response to the parlous condition of the lower and indigenous peasantry. This was to be achieved primarily through the expropriation and redistribution of land from the oligarchy to this class (McKay *et al.* 2014) a crucial element of radical food sovereignty, but also through the re-

allocation of state-owned land, the latter a much less contentious way of pursuing agrarian reform. In this way, the first policy priority of the 2006 “Agrarian Revolution” was to be the distribution of state-owned land “not serving a socio-economic function” in favour of these subaltern groups (Fabricant 2012). Sadly, this intended programme of land redistribution has not, in the main, materialized. Predictably, the upper peasantry, Morales’ key pillar of support, has been the prime beneficiary of reform (Colque et al. 2016), while the agrarian oligarchy has remained largely untouched (Fabricant 2012; Webber 2015). Since less than ten per cent of land in the reform sector has, in reality, been transferred to intended subaltern beneficiaries, Bolivia’s markedly skewed structure of land ownership remains effectively intact.

If the period between 2006-2010 was most auspicious with respect to radical land reform, this window of opportunity has since closed progressively. After 2010, the Morales regime chose to prioritize land registration and titling in preference to expropriation and redistribution (Colque et al. 2016; Webber 2017b). Meanwhile, peasant bifurcation into an enlarged class of commercial upper peasantry juxtaposed to a ballooning landless or semi-proletarian lower peasantry became characteristic (Webber 2015; Colque et al. 2016). Consolidation of the former was facilitated by land registration, involving conferral on individuals of absolute property rights. This small-farm commercial sector, with consolidation of its juridico-economic status, continues to exploit the deteriorating fortunes of the lower peasantry through the latter’s compulsion to sell its labour power.

Where previously a dualism was prevalent between the peasant semi-proletariat and the agrarian oligarchy, land registration saw the emergence, with the expansion of the upper peasantry, of a tripartite structure of agrarian social-property relations. In its control of the most productive land, surplus value production, and land rent, the oligarchy has retained status as the hegemonic class. The commercial upper peasantry constitutes the agrarian sub-hegemonic class which, rather than being “autonomous”, is in reality profoundly subordinated to larger value chains of agro-industrial development (Colque et al. 2016; Webber 2017b; McKay 2018). Additionally, the Morales regime’s assertions concerning the strategic role of this class in national food security were largely rhetorical, given that the period of MAS incumbency witnessed a steady expansion in the import of food staples, compromising national production of wage foods and the survival of the middle and lower peasantry (Colque et al. 2015; Ormachea Saavedra 2015). The fate of the counter-hegemonic class of semi-proletariat and landless in this tripartite structure is twofold: to become a labour force or reserve army of labour, the latter driving down wages and costs of production through functional dualism; or to become “surplus” population, condemned to join the ranks of the rural/urban precariat

(Colque et al. 2016; McKay 2017). The Bolivian MST (*Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales sin Tierra*), for example, represents a radical food sovereignty response to this ‘fate’. Its tactics of land invasion reflect an understanding by members that land inequality is embedded in the peripheral context of global capitalism, which must be transformed if land equality is to be attained. The MST strives to ensure the collective rights to land of all Bolivian peasants within the context of a wider campaign for generalized agrarian reform, involving changed social relations towards independent, small-scale, and ecologically sustainable production (Fabricant 2012; Brabazon and Webber 2014).

The agrarian oligarchy attained state hegemony from 1996-2006, a neoliberal “disarticulated alliance” which, however, was temporarily displaced by the sub-hegemony of MAS rule between 2006-2009, a period of the “Agrarian Revolution” (McKay 2018). The open antagonism between the oligarchy and the MAS “historic bloc” of sub- and counter-hegemonic movements during this period was then succeeded by a rapprochement between the former and sub-hegemonic fractions. This coincided with Morales’ new commitment to deepen neo-extractivism in alliance with the oligarchy in a “Productive Revolution” (McKay 2018), and simultaneously to “de-radicalize” through co-optation, or to repress through authoritarian means, the counter-hegemonic elements of the bloc. The core of the sub-hegemonic populist alliance comprises, as noted, the commercial upper peasantry, and this fraction has held sway over many public institutions such as INRA (*Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria*), CAN (*Comunidad Andina de Naciones*), and MDRyT (*Ministerio de Desarrollo Rural y Tierra*), together with the largest unions such as CSUTCB (*Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinas de Bolivia*) (Colque et al. 2016; Webber 2017b). This insinuation of the upper peasant fraction, Morales’ core constituency, into the state and para-state apparatus, has entailed the decapitation and attempted de-mobilization of counter-hegemonic forces. Thus, the “Agrarian Revolution”, which was to have transformed rural social-property relations to the benefit of the lower peasant majority, remains in abeyance (Almaraz 2015).

In the absence of a resolution to the agrarian question of the lower peasant majority through redistributive land reform, the big issue concerns the durability of the national popular alliance. The irony is that Morales sought to dampen opposition through the “compensatory state”, premised on extractivism that continues to drive **the** primitive accumulation, the causal basis of that opposition. The MAS regime attempted to mitigate the resulting precarity through welfarism, whilst failing to address its causes. As Morales sought to force through expanded extractivism in the face of declining commodity prices (since 2014), deepening ecological contradiction, greater social precarity, and rising opposition, so did the regime’s populism

become increasingly authoritarian. Indeed, Morales' leadership style increasingly resembled that of a *caudillo* (Thwaites Rey and Ouviaña 2012; Zibechi 2016; Webber 2017b), while policy-making became a technocratized and de-politicized, with extractive activities undertaken through resort to force. This, in turn, incited only further opposition to the extractivist export model and its concomitant ecological destruction and violence. The political repercussions of this turn to authoritarianism included the fragmentation of the *Pacto de Unidad*, with CIDOB and CONAMAQ splitting in 2011 (Webber 2017b). Morales, in turn, attempted to incapacitate these organizations with respect to their independent representation of indigenous and *campesino* groups. The dangers for MAS of this turn to authoritarianism were manifested perhaps most clearly in the decision by the formerly loyal CSUTCB to withhold support for the MAS' attempt to change the constitution in order to stay in power for another term. This unprecedented schism is symptomatic of CSUTCB's increased relative autonomy and deteriorating relations with the MAS in the latter's quest for state power (McKay 2018). This alienation of CSUTCB was to prove prescient in relation to current events, with its leader Nelson Condori, following the departure of Morales for Mexico after the "coup" in November 2019, literally embracing the figurehead of the new "right populists", Luis Camacho.

The MAS regime, through its national-popular policies and rhetoric, sought to legitimize a programme of extractivist capital accumulation (Orellana 2011). MAS sought to "embed" capitalism by widening its cohort of beneficiaries to lower income groups through welfarism, rhetorically founded on a narrative of communalism and cooperation as *faux vivir bien*. This represented a temporary equilibration between the contradictory accumulation and legitimation dimensions of the state-capital nexus. By placating counter-hegemonic forces between 2006-2009, Morales restored legitimacy of the state-capital nexus. Subsequently, he shifted emphasis to capital accumulation, differentially benefitting the landed oligarchy, transnational capital, and the upper peasantry at the expense of the subaltern majority (Webber 2017b). With MAS' forfeiture of its legitimacy, this subaltern majority has again been seeking a "political" and "ecological" solution to extractivism beyond capitalism. The limits of MAS legitimacy have been defined by its increasing resort to authoritarianism in pursuit of neo-extractivism. Now, emboldened by the rightward drift of regimes in Brazil and the USA, the *cruceño* oligarchy and nouveau riche have exploited adeptly these divisions within the left historic bloc and Morales' authoritarianism to engineer a "coup" in the name of "democracy" and the "people". If successfully institutionalized, this coup will usher in a round of intensified extractivism and

erosion of the social gains achieved by MAS, threatening to undermine, perhaps irretrievably, the longer-term construction of “livelihood sovereignty” as authentic *vivir bien*.

Ecuador

Despite more than ten years of rule by the “left” populist regimes of Rafael Correa and now Lenin Moreno, land tenure structure in Ecuador remains highly skewed in favour of an agrarian oligarchy, with the majority of the peasantry being semi-proletarian or landless (Brassel, Herrera, and Laforge 2008). Just as lack of access to land by these subalterns led to anti-neoliberal agrarian protest in the 1990s, so does this unresolved agrarian question continue to represent a principal contradiction for the national popular project of Correa/Moreno (Carrión and Herrera 2012; Martínez 2017). As in Bolivia, these counter-hegemonic subaltern forces afforded opportunities for sub-hegemonic interests, comprising urban middle-classes (*forajidos*) and the upper peasantry, to constitute an “historic bloc” to overturn neoliberalism in 2006 (Clark 2017). This bloc was facilitated externally by China’s quest for fossil fuels, minerals, and agro-exports, on which basis that state was happy to extend credit to the new regime (Bonilla 2015). The urban, middle-class core of this sub-hegemonic bloc was able to co-opt the “progressive” or upper peasant fraction through new state subvention for competitive improvements to small-scale commercial agriculture (Henderson 2017). Simultaneously, it sought to neutralize the lower peasant “radical” fraction through “welfarism”, funded by an emergent “compensatory state” on the basis of neo-extractivism and Chinese loans (Davalos and Albuja 2014).

Correa’s political dependence on the *Mesa Agraria* (Agrarian Platform), a grouping of counter-hegemonic forces, obliged him, upon election, to fulfil one of his key commitments to it – the convocation in April 2007 of a national constituent assembly (McKay et al. 2014). This assembly was able to secure the “constitutionalization” of many of the Agrarian Platform’s key demands, notably the redistribution of land to the peasant sector, together with state subvention and extension services for smaller-scale farms (Clark 2017). With legitimacy concerns uppermost, the Correa regime was constrained to absorb these food sovereignty demands, at least rhetorically, into its national popular project. Nonetheless, it subsequently became clear that Correa was willing to countenance implementation only of the reformist (“progressive”) elements of food sovereignty, that is, proposals from sub-hegemonic upper peasantry, consistent with his national populism. “Radical”, or counter-hegemonic, demands for land redistribution have remained unfulfilled, however (Giunta 2014; Henderson 2017; Tilzey

2019a). Correa, and subsequently Moreno, have implemented, therefore, only those agrarian reform measures consistent with their vision of productivist food sovereignty as national food security, entailing, inter alia, support for productivity improvements within the upper peasant sector.

As in Bolivia, then, the Correa/Moreno vision of food sovereignty is inconsistent with the counter-hegemonic demands of the lower peasantry for land redistribution, sustainability, and agroecological production (Carrión and Herrera 2012; Martinez 2017). The latter have been assuaged through the “welfarism” of the “compensatory state”, the fiscal means of so doing flowing, albeit indirectly, from neo-extractivist income (Davalos and Albuja 2014). As with Morales in Bolivia, Correa and Moreno have strongly encouraged the “new extraction” of minerals, fossil fuels, and agri-food, for example, oil palm principally from the *Oriente*, undertaken increasingly by Chinese capital (Carrión 2016). Additionally, new infrastructure, such as roads and airports, has been funded through Chinese loans, their repayment reinforcing the regime’s commitment to neo-extractivism. Whilst neo-extractivism is causing ecological devastation and social dislocation in the *Oriente* (Carrión 2016), the principal beneficiaries of the “compensatory state” – the upper peasantry through credit and the lower peasantry through wage supplements – are largely removed spatially from these impacts. Meanwhile, opposition to extractivism is increasingly suppressed on grounds of “terrorism” or de-stabilizing the “citizens’ revolution”, indicative of a marked trend towards authoritarian populism (de la Torre 2013). De la Torre (2013) notes that the state is co-opting social movements and taming civil society whereby citizens are being turned into passive and grateful recipients of the leader’s benevolent and technocratically engineered policies. This is part of a clear trend towards *caudillismo* and authoritarianism. In contrast to Bolivia, however, it is not so much the case of social movement leadership being co-opted into the state apparatus but rather of the membership being politically beguiled by strategically targeted policies and welfare disbursements. The result has been to progressively divorce social movement leaders from their mass base in the case of organizations such as FENOCIN (*Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras*), CONAIE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*), and Ecuarrunari (Confederation of the Peoples of *Kichwa* Nationality of Ecuador).

The Correa/Moreno programme of enhancing commercial upper peasant productivity and competitiveness, and of re-centring the state (“re-statization”) (Tilzey and Potter 2007) as development’s propellant (Herrera 2017), responds to the traditionally neglected needs of this commercial small-farm fraction. Predictably, the Correa/Moreno regimes continue to be

popular with this sub-hegemonic class fraction (Henderson 2017, 2018), serving to legitimate national populism and its national market-focused rhetoric. At the same time, the regime's policies have debilitated the leadership of counter-hegemonic groups, principally Andean-based, which persists in its call for land redistribution and condemnation of market-oriented policies, whether national-popular or neoliberal (Carrión and Herrera 2012; Henderson 2018). Counter-hegemonic organizations were, in 2006, instrumental in propelling the state towards anti-neoliberal policies. Since then, they have been constrained increasingly to assume reactive responses to a populist regime which has partly constitutionalized their demands, selectively co-opted their leadership, and steadily appropriated their discourses and mass bases of organizational support (Becker 2012; Henderson 2017; Tilzey 2019a). Many peasant and indigenous organizations have suffered incapacitation as their discourse, and central planks of their policy (at least concerning the upper peasantry), have been appropriated by the Correa/Moreno regimes (Herrera 2017). Correa and Moreno have thus responded positively to the upper peasantry's demand for protection against competition from more transnational agri-food competition (together with social programmes as wage subsidies for the lower peasantry), whilst refusing to implement counter-hegemonic demands for mass expropriation and redistribution of land, such as is still advocated by FENOCIN's Andean membership (Henderson 2018). "Radicalism" has been dulled in favour of reformism, whilst the oligarchy has, for the moment, been persuaded of the merits of the "compensatory state". National populism has entailed, then, the convergence towards the centre of peasant counter-hegemony, on the one hand, and oligarchic hegemony, on the other. As in Bolivia, the Gramscian concept of *transformismo* helps us to understand this process.

Should the revenue stream from neo-extractivism dwindle, however, whether for "ecological" or "political" reasons, or both, the consumer boom, infrastructure development, and welfare disbursements will falter, with predictable adverse implications for the populist compact. The national popular programme will then confront a legitimation crisis, marked by a distinct turn to authoritarianism. We are, indeed, currently witnessing an acceleration of authoritarianism and violence by the state, reacting to deepening opposition to its programme of extractivism. Indeed, the Moreno regime has recently been seeking to introduce an austerity package in order to qualify for a loan from the IMF in response to fiscal crisis, and to reintroduce neoliberal policies more widely. In this, he has received united support from the right-wing oligarchy and the USA (Resmini 2019). It is possible that legitimation crisis will also be marked, however, by a resurgence of the counter-hegemonic mobilization, and its vision of "authentic" *buen vivir*, which overthrew neoliberalism a decade and a half ago. Today,

we are currently witnessing widespread protests in Ecuador in response to Moreno's attempt to force through an IMF austerity package, supported by extreme violence on the part of the armed forces (Resmini 2019).

Conclusion

By developing a deeper understanding of the relations between capitalism, the state, and class by means of the concept of the “state-capital nexus”, and of the relation between peripheral states and the imperium/sub-imperium, this paper has sought to explain how radical food sovereignty is located differentially in the global South, with reference especially to Latin America. It has also, by these same means, sought to show how the political advances of radical food sovereignty in the 1990s and 2000s have been subverted by nationalism and populism founded on neo-extractivism as a “consensus of commodities” (Svampa 2013). Neoliberalism essentially delimited the beneficiaries of extractivism to the global North and to a small class of Southern ‘extroverted’ elites. The resulting extreme poverty and precarity in the South during the course of the 1990s and into the new millennium generated a legitimization crisis for neoliberalism in Latin America particularly, setting off a “double movement” which saw the rise of the radical food sovereignty movements that were instrumental in the subsequent emergence of the pink tide states, particularly in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador. These states have pursued, in essence, a diluted version of the “imperial mode of living” within their own national territories (although Brazil, as a sub-imperium, extracts resources from its own “periphery” within Latin America). Thus, as national-popular programmes of development, the pink tide states have pursued a form of redistributive capitalism, focusing on the accumulation needs of their core sub-hegemonic constituencies, the middle classes and upper peasantry, while using the proceeds of neo-extractivism (generated largely by the oligarchy and transnational capital) to placate and subvert counter-hegemonic agrarian classes through welfarism. This has enabled the structural bases of inequality and poverty to be temporarily by-passed or mitigated, but only at the cost of deepening the political and ecological contradictions of extractive capitalism.

The durability of the “consensus of commodities” is thus highly uncertain. Neo-extractivism affords only a short-term and inherently unsustainable basis for the reformist state's fiscal capacity. This capacity, and the neo-developmental and national popular alliance which it sustains, is subject to contradictions of both an ecological (exhaustion and destructive impacts of resource extraction) and political (decline in commodity prices, collapse

of external markets, etc.) nature. Should the revenue stream from neo-extractivism dwindle, whether for ecological or political reasons, or both, the consumer boom, infrastructure development, and welfare disbursements will falter, with predictable adverse implications for the populist compact. The national popular programme will then confront a renewed legitimisation crisis. In Ecuador, the fiscal capacity of the state has indeed been under increasing strain, with Moreno attempting to force through an austerity package in order to secure a loan from the IMF. Elements of this austerity package, notably the threat to end fuel subsidy, have been withdrawn by the government under pressure from those most vulnerable to the cost implications of a fuel price hike, aided significantly by a resurgence of protest by indigenous groups including CONAIE. The fuel protests have acted as a lightning rod for demonstrations of wider discontent with the policies of the Moreno regime on the part of those, the semi-proletarian and landless indigenous peasantry and precariat, whose aspirations for the national-popular regime remain largely unfulfilled. Such protests have been met with extreme violence by the armed forces, supported by the right-wing oligarchy and the USA, with the outcome of such mobilizations highly uncertain at the time of writing.

Alternatively, a de-legitimation of “left” populism threatens to play into the hands of a resurgent right, which, “flying the flag of nationalism” (Malamud 2017) is poised to take over the baton of authoritarian populism (Herrera 2017), a scenario that has already come to pass in Brazil and now appears an increasing possibility in Bolivia. As “left” populism moves to the right and the right itself invokes national populism, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the two variants of authoritarian populism, both premised on a programme of neo-extractivism, albeit with beneficiaries more delimited in the latter case. Thus, in Bolivia, recent and ongoing events indicate that Morales’ assumption of the role of *caudillo*, and manipulation of the legal limits to presidential term of office, alienated elements of his support and made him vulnerable to accusations of electoral fraud when these arose after the recently disputed general election in October 2019. The “new indigenous” middle class, which has emerged during the period of MAS rule and benefitted from neo-extractivism, has either withdrawn its support from Morales or remained quiescent during the recent turmoil. This has enabled the right to exploit these divisions, gathering its traditional constituency of *cruceño* oligarchs and *camba* nouveau riche (amongst whom is numbered the rightist/populist “civic leader” Luis Camacho), embracing the new middle class, and seeking to divide subaltern support by currying favour with groups which have already distanced themselves from Morales (for example, the entente between Luis Camacho and Nelson Condori of CSUTCB). The key element behind the recent and apparent right-wing “coup” has been, however, the capitulation

of the military and police force to rightist “inducements” and their failure to support Morales’ commitment to hold a fresh general election. This speaks to the failure of MAS to “depoliticize” these forces, and of the latter’s continuing underlying adherence to rule by a non-indigenous elite and commitment to a “uni-national”, rather than pluri-national, vision for Bolivia (witness members of these forces removing the *wiphala* insignia, symbol of pluri-nationalism, from their uniforms). Right-wing forces have also undoubtedly been emboldened by the shift to rightist authoritarian populism in the imperium (the USA) and the sub-imperium (Brazil), the latter in particular poised to reinforce its traditionally exploitative relationship with Bolivia in class alliance with the lowland oligarchy (see Marini 1973).

We may well witness in these states, then, a retrenchment towards rightist authoritarianism, which is likely to be accompanied by the tragedy of reinforced ecological despoliation as extractivism accelerates, and of increasing income disparities, poverty and precarity as welfare measures are whittled away, employment stagnates, and land ownership becomes even more concentrated. Right populism may require the development of clientelistic relations with some elements of the subaltern classes, but these will do little to mitigate the overall downward trend in measures of social equity and ecological sustainability. There is little doubt, however, that these contradictions will, in turn, generate a “double movement” at some indeterminable point in the future. “Left” populism has attempted to foster elements of neo-developmentalism on the basis of neo-extractivism, generating consumerism and welfarism, and has thus represented a diluted microcosm the “imperial mode of living”. “Right” populism represents an almost unmitigated assault on the environment and indigenous people particularly, constituting an unprecedented acceleration of extractivism without compensation, in which this process is portrayed as a “God-given” right to exploit resources in the service of national potency and in the face of imperial ecological “meddling”. With radical food sovereignty demands for an “agrarian revolution” unmet, however, the counter-hegemonic constituency cannot be appeased or suppressed indefinitely. The exhaustion of resources and soils through extractivism (McKay 2017) will likely presage dwindling funds for the “compensatory” capitalist state of “left” populism, and attenuated surplus value for the agro-exporting elite of rightist authoritarianism, the consequent unravelling of fragile populist alliances, and a resurgence of radical resistance. This time around, the scarcity of “ecological surplus” from extractivism may well severely curtail the ability of the state-capital nexus to deflect counter-hegemonic forces from seeking an agroecological and peasant-based resolution of the agrarian question – a cessation and reversal of “primitive accumulation” to address both rural and urban precarity through radical food sovereignty, a key element of anti-capitalist

autonomy as “livelihood sovereignty” (Tilzey 2018).

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