



ERPI 2018 International Conference
Authoritarian Populism and the Rural World

Conference Paper No.34

Authoritarian Populism and Neo-Extractivism in Bolivia and Ecuador: The Unresolved Agrarian Question and the Prospects for Food Sovereignty as Counter-Hegemony

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17-18 March 2018

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, Netherlands

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March, 2018

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Authoritarian Populism and Neo-Extractivism in Bolivia and Ecuador: The Unresolved Agrarian Question and the Prospects for Food Sovereignty as Counter-Hegemony

Mark Tilzey

Abstract

*The new economic flows ushered in across the South by the rise of China have permitted some to circumvent the imperial debt trap, notably the 'pink tide' states of Latin America. These states, exploiting this window of opportunity, have sought to revisit developmentalism by means of 'neo-extractivism'. The populist, and increasingly authoritarian, regimes in Bolivia and Ecuador are exemplars of this trend and have swept to power on the back of anti-neoliberal sentiment. These populist regimes in Bolivia and Ecuador articulate a sub-hegemonic discourse of national developmentalism, whilst forging alliances with counter-hegemonic groups, united by a rhetoric of anti-imperialism, indigenous revival, and livelihood principles such as **buena vida**. But this rhetorical 'master frame' hides the class divisions and real motivations underlying populism: that of favouring neo-extractivism, via sub-imperial capital, to fund the 'compensatory state', supporting small scale commercial farmers through reformism while largely neglecting the counter-hegemonic aims, and reproductive crisis, of the middle/lower peasantry, and lowland indigenous groups, and their calls for food sovereignty as radical social relational change. Thus far, this counter-hegemonic impulse has been contained by such compensatory welfarism. It is questionable, however, whether this populist compact can endure. The fiscal capacity of the reformist state is dependent upon the inherently unsustainable, and time-limited, revenue windfall that derives from neo-extractivism. Whether through progressive exhaustion of the resource base, or through a collapse in the commodity boom as a result of accumulation crisis in China, or a combination of both, Bolivia and Ecuador's model of neo-developmentalism is built on shifting sands. When revenues from extractivism begin to dry up, the short-term consumer boom, the welfare payments, and the class alliances that go with them, will start to unravel. At this point, the populist regime and reformist state will encounter the limits of its legitimacy. Will this facilitate a resurgence of counter-hegemonic mobilisation? The paper speculates that a 'dual powers' strategy may be appropriate, whereby counter-hegemony, as food/livelihood sovereignty, may be implanted at 'local' level as a form of autonomy, whilst, simultaneously, recognizing the need to engage and transform the state to secure a more generalized autonomy from capitalism.*

Introduction: Neo-Extractivism, Authoritarian Populism, and the Unresolved Agrarian Question – China and the Latin American ‘Pink Tide’

China’s emergence as a key site of capital accumulation has opened up a space for other states in the global South to re-assert more nationally-based capitalist development or, at least, for national (what I term ‘sub-hegemonic’) fractions of capital to selectively displace global Northern dominance, embodied in hegemonic transnational neoliberalism. This has coincided with widespread disenchantment with neoliberalism in the global South, and in Latin America particularly. The boom in primary commodity prices stimulated by China’s growth has enabled sub-hegemonic fractions of national capital to ally with non-capitalist (what I term ‘counter-hegemonic’) class forces to install a wave of centre-left, and characteristically populist, regimes in Latin America particularly (known popularly as the ‘pink tide’) (Spronk and Webber 2015). Bolivia and Ecuador are exemplars of such populist regimes, both states pursuing neo-developmental policies on the basis of neo-extractivism stimulated and enabled largely by Chinese capital accumulation.

The backdrop to this conjuncture has been the widespread resistance in Latin America, from the 1990s, to the socially polarizing consequences of neoliberalism and to the progressive loss of national sovereignty (including sovereignty over food) that accompanied the deepening of ‘extroverted’ dependent development. Bolivia and Ecuador are representative of states where popular forces, comprising peasants, semi-proletarians, proletarians and landless, indigenous groups, and more endogenously oriented class fractions of the bourgeoisies, have succeeded, with varying degrees of success, in resisting and displacing the dominance of the ‘disarticulated alliance’ of the national landed oligarchy and trans-nationalized capital. What both states have in common is a new commitment to greater state guidance and interventionism in the economy, a greater formal or substantive commitment to national food sovereignty, and the introduction of social programmes to alleviate the severe income disparities characteristic of the neoliberal era. Funds for the latter, however, are predicated on the proceeds of the ‘new’ extractivism, not only of mineral and fossil-fuel resources, but also of agri-fuels, offered by the emergence of sub-imperial states, notably China in the case of Ecuador, and Brazil in the case of Bolivia (with China increasingly influential in Brazilian agri-food dynamics, however, particularly in respect of soya production).

Since the assumption of power by, respectively, MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) and AP (*Allianza Pais*), both Bolivia and Ecuador have been pursuing neo-developmental policies (that is, redistributive policies and, at least ostensibly, growth based on accumulation by *nationally* oriented fractions of capital) predicated on neo-extractivism. This neo-developmentalism, as neo-extractivism, is contradictory both ‘politically’ and ‘ecologically’, however. Politically, it comprises a populist *reformism* that attempts to address selected symptoms of capitalist contradiction, notably poverty and inequality, through redistributive policies, whilst failing to address their structural causes, based as these are on highly unequal access to the means of production. Politically, such populist reformism may be understood by means of the Gramscian concept of *passive revolution*, entailing reform from above, led by nationally-oriented fractions of capital, but, crucially, in alliance with proletarians, peasants and indigenous people. Ecologically, these regimes are contradictory since they pursue unsustainable policies of both energy and mineral extraction (often in ‘protected areas’ and/or on lands of indigenous peoples), and of productivist, export agriculture, not only for purposes of capital accumulation, but also, crucially, in order to fund redistributive social programmes and infrastructure development. In both Bolivia and Ecuador, largely due to continuing opposition from an entrenched landed oligarchy and their governments’ increasing collusion with transnational capital in the search for export earnings, relatively little progress, consequently, has been made with respect to addressing the structural bases of poverty and inequality – that is, the question of land redistribution in favour of the semi-proletariat and landless, and the confirmation of land rights with respect to indigenous groups (Giunta 2014, Spronk and Webber 2015). In this way, a percentage of revenues from primary resource extraction, via ground rent, has been diverted to social programmes to placate the semi-proletariat and urban proletariat, leading to an uneasy compromise, embodied in these populist regimes as ‘compensatory states’ (Gudynas 2012), between (counter-hegemonic) subaltern classes, the nationally-focused (sub-hegemonic) bourgeoisie, and the continuing (hegemonic) power of the landed oligarchy,

often in alliance with transnational capital. The key to the coherence of these populist regimes lies, materially, in the distribution of wealth (via state welfarism) beyond their core political constituencies (the upper peasantry, small farmers, nationally oriented bourgeoisie) to the semi-proletariat and proletariat, even as the means of production of these latter continues to attenuate before the pressures of capital accumulation. It lies, discursively, on the basis of the deployment of legitimating measures such as the construction of a ‘national consensus or alliance for progress’ and an attendant demonization of all those resisting or opposing such ‘progress’, often vilified as ‘imperialist stooges’ (Webber 2017b).

Over the last decade, the coherence of such populism has come under increasing strain as these neo-developmental and extractivist regimes have failed to meet the key objectives of their erstwhile constituencies of support amongst indigenous groups and semi-proletarian and landless peasantry, particularly. For these constituencies, tensions focus around access to land and the means of production (including land rights for indigenous communities), and around the neo-developmental focus on economic growth as a means of bypassing the need to address the structural causes of land poverty, landlessness, and insecurity of land tenure. In this way food (and land) sovereignty has become a highly contested discourse, deriving initially from re-assertions of national sovereignty as a counter-narrative to neoliberalism, but now often appropriated by neo-developmentalism to mean food provisioning for the national market by productivist means. This discursive tension and ambiguity is expressed in the constitutionalization of food sovereignty in Bolivia and Ecuador (Tilzey 2018). The appropriation of food sovereignty discourse by the governments of these states, in the service of neo-developmental ends, is increasingly contested by peasant and indigenous movements seeking something akin to a ‘post-developmental’ (Tilzey 2018) or ‘alternative developmental’ (Vergara-Camus 2014) model of cooperative social relations founded on the principle of *buen vivir* (good living) (Giunta 2014, Tilzey 2016b). The irony here is that the populist governments of Bolivia and Ecuador have both invoked the cooperative principle of *buen vivir* or *vivir bien* to legitimate further capital accumulation by means of a Polanyian process of ‘embedding’ extractivism through the ‘compensatory state’. As the dependency of welfare on extractivism becomes ever more entrenched, however, and the latter ever more corrosive of the original alternative developmental aims of counter-hegemonic movements, so have the populist regimes of Bolivia and Ecuador become more authoritarian, deploying a variety of ‘legal’ and extra-legal mechanisms to close down opposition to mineral and agri-food extractivism.

In this way, Bolivia and Ecuador have been able to support social welfare programmes and infrastructure development only through resource extraction fed, to a significant degree, by the Chinese commodity boom. Welfarism mitigates and dulls pressure from counter-hegemonic movements to implement policies to redistribute land and affirm the right of access to land. Consequently, the regimes of Morales and Correa (now Moreno) have been reluctant to put in place sustainable food production and livelihood systems based on land redistribution and security of land rights, precisely because the growth model is premised on the perpetuation of mineral extractivism, agro-export productivism, and the stimulation of nationally-oriented productivist agriculture by the small commercial farm sector. So, while the regimes of Correa/Moreno and Morales relied heavily upon peasant and indigenous support to secure their initial electoral success, and have included provisions for food sovereignty in their new constitutions, moves towards substantive implementation of these provisions, through key measures such as land redistribution, have fallen far short of expectation (Henderson 2017, Webber 2017a, b), particularly in the case of Ecuador. Consequently, these agrarian and indigenous constituencies of support are becoming increasingly alienated from the governments of Morales and Moreno. Moreover, the current decline in primary commodity prices is likely to see a reduction in government budgets for social programmes and a renewed focus on austerity, with consequent threats to welfare policies and, derivatively, to the coherence of the populist compact between sub-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic constituencies.

In order to explain the dynamics of populism, this paper adopts a Gramscian and Poulantzian view of the state-capital nexus as I term it (Tilzey 2018) (that is, the dialectical, or *internal* relation between the state and capital), combined with a concern to understand how these state level dynamics are

inserted within, and conditioned by, the wider imperial core-periphery structure of the capitalist world system (the dialectic of the ‘universal’ and the ‘particular’). Thus, Poulantzas (1975), much like Gramsci (1971), defined the function of the state not simply in terms of the interests of capitalist class fractions, but also in terms of the need to secure the cohesion of society as a whole. For the state properly to function as a capitalist state, it must be able to go against the individual and particular fractional interests of capitalists in order to act in their general interest as a class, not merely for the purposes of continued capital accumulation, but particularly for purposes of legitimation (the conceptual links to Regulation Theory (see Boyer and Saillard 2002) should be evident here). The state, also for reasons of legitimation, must, additionally, be ‘relatively autonomous’ from the interests and demands of capitalists. Although this gives the state an appearance of neutrality, however, its class character is implicit in its function in relation to capitalist society. And the legitimacy deficit of the state in the South, and particularly in Latin America, under neoliberalism, is closely related to the continuing power of dominant capitalist oligarchies, and the new power of transnational capital in the ‘new imperialism’, in and around the peripheral state (see Tilzey 2018 for further detail). For Poulantzas, then, the state provides the institutional space for various fractions of the capitalist class, in addition possibly to other classes, to come together and form longer-term strategies and alliances, while at the same time, the state disorganizes non-capitalist classes through various means of co-optation and division. This theoretical approach enables us to capture the key dynamic of populism as the means of re-establishing legitimacy of the state-capital nexus, following its de-legitimation during the neoliberal period, by means of reformism as neo-developmentalism. As populism encounters the contradictions of its neo-extractivist foundations – growing opposition from those constituencies expropriated or neglected, and increased difficulty of funding welfare policies due to the commodity price slump – so does populism become increasingly authoritarian.

The key contextual backdrop to populism and reformism is thus the *legitimacy* crisis of neoliberalism that emerged, and increased to the point of fracture, as the 1990s progressed. This legitimacy deficit of the state and neoliberalism in Latin America, together with the ‘formal’ rather than ‘real’ subsumption within capital of the semi-proletarian majority, and the precarity that accompanied this condition, carried with it the increased likelihood of challenge to the state-capital nexus by counter-hegemonic forces. Attempted re-appropriations of, or resistances to, the state by counter-hegemonic social forces were thus entailed, comprising re-assertions of national, and possibly post-national (autonomist) and post-capitalistic, forms of sovereignty¹. Such ‘radical’ counter-hegemonic social forces did indeed emerge in Bolivia and Ecuador, and potentially challenged the essential foundations of capitalism, implicitly or explicitly propounding a more Marxian (changed social relations of production, reversal of primitive accumulation, and ‘alternative developmental’), rather than Polanyian (‘embedding’ of capitalism, populist), imaginary of social relational transformation (Tilzey 2016b). Nonetheless, these Latin American re-assertions of sovereignty in its national form, were, and to continue to be, characterized by strong ambiguity. They comprise a complex *mélange* of sub-hegemonic (national capital fractions, petty bourgeois upper peasantry) and counter-hegemonic (lower/middle peasantry, landless, proletarians, and indigenous) social forces. The assertion of national sovereignty here, as a counter-narrative to neoliberalism, represents, as noted, a tension between populist, sub-hegemonic, ‘neo-developmentalism’, on the one hand, and (potentially) counter-hegemonic ‘post-developmentalism’ (combining environmentalism, indigenism, re-peasantization, agroecology and food sovereignty), on the other (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014).

It is the legitimation dimension of reformism that is inextricably associated with populism, therefore, in which *trasformismo* (Gramsci 1971) is a key concept and dynamic (see Webber 2017a, b). *Trasformismo* is a process that works to co-opt potential leaders of subaltern social groups. By extension, *trasformismo* can serve as a strategy to assimilate and domesticate potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition and can, thereby, obstruct the

¹ The other side of this picture is, of course, the increased use of coercion and violence by the peripheral state-capital nexus in the exercise of primitive accumulation, frequently supported financially and militarily by the imperial powers whose corporations benefit directly from the expropriation of land and resources from peasant and indigenous populations for the purposes of agro-export or mineral/fossil fuel extraction.

formation of class-based organized opposition to established political power (Cox 1993). In this way, capacities for social mobilization from below in early stages, that is the mobilizations against neoliberalism during the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, are progressively contained or co-opted (or selectively repressed), while the political initiative of sections of the dominant classes is gradually restored, as has occurred in the last decade. Passive revolutions, as *transformismo*, involve the establishment of a form of domination capable of enacting conservative reforms (sustaining capitalism) disguised in the language of earlier (counter-hegemonic) impulses emerging from below, securing in this way a passive consensus of the dominated classes. Rather than a restoration of the *status quo ante*, there is rather a molecular change in the balance of forces under passive revolution, progressively emasculating the capacities for self-organization and self-activity of counter-hegemonic forces through co-optation, guaranteeing passivity in relation to the new order and encouraging demobilization, or at least controlling such popular mobilization as still occurs (Webber 2017b). Passive revolutions, in the case of Bolivia and Ecuador, thus involve neither total restoration of the old order as desired by the hegemonic landed oligarchy (in this case, peripheral neoliberalism or ‘disarticulated’ accumulation), nor radical revolution as proposed by counter-hegemonic forces. Rather, they involve a dialectic of revolution/restoration, transformation/preservation, in which a sub-hegemonic, populist bloc placates the oligarchy, on the one hand, while co-opting the popular masses on the other. In Bolivia and Ecuador this has been secured by the Correa/Morales regimes restoring the *legitimacy* of capitalism by a Polanyian, or reformist/populist, process of distributing some of the proceeds of extractive accumulation to those otherwise most disadvantaged by that very same process of accumulation.

Thus, reform may be defined as a state intervention, as passive revolution, that is stimulated by a developmental crisis, in this case peripheral neoliberalism, and is: first, evidently short of revolution (in which case the dominant mode of production, capitalism, would be overthrown, as would also be the case with the capitalist state, together with their attendant understandings of ‘sovereignty’); and, second, is not dependent on sheer repression. Reformism, in effect therefore, attempts, in parlance of Regulation Theory, to construct a ‘flanking’ mode of regulation to ‘embed’ a somewhat modified regime of accumulation but, crucially, without subverting capitalist social-property relations themselves. In this, then, reformism has much in common with Keynesian and Polanyian (in essence populist) ‘solutions’ to capitalist crises (see Tilzey 2016b for discussion).

There are three types of reforms that are of fundamental relevance to securing and reproducing capitalism in the face of its contradictions with respect to the peripheral state-capital nexus.

- Reforms associated with the transition to capitalism and the immediate post-transition period;
- Reforms associated with crises of accumulation. In the periphery, this is not a problem in itself for trans-nationalized capital since the under-consumption crisis is located primarily in the core countries (Tilzey 2018). Similarly, under-production crisis in the conditions of production does not appear imminent. Rather, the problem lies with the exclusion of other fractions of capital, notably national bourgeoisie and small commercial farmers, from the accumulation nexus of the ‘disarticulated alliance’;
- Reforms associated with crises of legitimacy. Here the elements that create legitimacy are: first, the existence of a petty bourgeoisie, this providing the material basis for the ideology of liberal capitalism, and of the meritocratic, enterprising, and ‘sovereign’ individual; the ability of certain fractions of the working class to enter into social democratic arrangements for the improvement of wages and working conditions under the ideology of state planning and the welfare state (or the ‘compensatory state’ in its latest iteration). Legitimacy reforms, in response principally to the poverty generating policies of neoliberalism, are arguably the most important motivation behind reformism in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian cases, and take the Polanyian form of ‘embedding’ capitalism and the creation of a petty bourgeoisie (the upper peasantry, for example) and the co-optation of some parts of the working class and semi-proletariat through populism.

In embarking on reform programmes, the state operates under three further constraints, all of which are relevant to dynamics of reformism in our case studies. These are:

- A constraint determined by the degree of legitimacy of the state. To implement its reformist policies, the state needs to secure, via populism, the support of different social classes and fractions of classes that comprise its constituency;
- A constraint imposed by the fiscal capacity of the state. The reformist capacity of the state is limited by its capacity to generate a public budget on the basis of tax revenues. As we shall see in the case of Bolivia and Ecuador, the legitimacy of the current regimes has been founded on redistributive policies involving social security, health, and welfare payments to those sectors of society most marginalized by neoliberalism. The monies employed to this end depend upon revenues originating in the sphere of production, most especially through extractivism, via ground rent. It is thus clear that political protests against resource extraction potentially have an impact of the state's fiscal capacity and upon those groups benefitting from it. As such protests grow, so is the state's response likely to become increasingly authoritarian;
- A constraint that derives from the administrative capacity of the state. The state needs to have an adequate administrative capacity to understand the nature of the specific forms of crisis and to define and operationalize the corresponding reforms. This frequently runs up against the clientelistic nature of agencies and ministries, as we shall see in the case of Ecuador, for example, where the Ministry of Agriculture (MAGAP) has hitherto been largely at the service of the landed oligarchy.

Reformism in the current conjuncture also has referents in previous rounds of reform, in Bolivia from the 1950s until the neoliberal era (1952-1985), and in Ecuador during much shorter episodes of developmentalism, especially during the 1970s. In both countries, agrarian reformism was, firstly, an attempt to generate a more 'articulated' model of development (de Janvry 1981), and secondly, with legitimacy concerns uppermost, a means of containing peasant political pressures both through direct control of peasant organizations, and through the legislation of mild land reform projects intended to eradicate semi-feudal estates from the agrarian structure and to redistribute some land, inadequately, to the peasantry (Conaghan 1988, Webber 2017a). This effectively induced the transformation of semi-feudal estates into capitalist enterprises of the oligarchy, while limited redistribution of land created an incipient sector of capitalized family farms, thus bridging, through the establishment of a politically stable petty bourgeoisie, the historical gap between *minifundio* and *latifundio*. The remaining peasantry became, in the main, semi-proletarians, selling their labour on the new capitalist estates or on the urban market. The agrarian question thus remained unresolved from the perspective of the peasantry, and it was this unresolved question that underpinned the renewed agrarian protest that erupted from the 1990s in response to neoliberalism, this time reinforced by wider concerns relating to indigenous self-determination and environmental degradation.

Below we present detailed case studies of agrarian class dynamics, the state-capital nexus, and populism in Bolivia and Ecuador. The final section of the paper addresses whether alternatives to populism and reformist capitalism are available and what these might comprise if they are to secure social and ecological sustainability as simultaneous and synergistic phenomena.

Bolivia

Please see longer version of this paper for details

Ecuador

Please see longer version of this paper for details

The Prospects for Food Sovereignty as Counter-Hegemony

Counter-hegemony is here taken to mean opposition to, and autonomy from, the state-capital nexus – that is, from capitalism and its material and discursive supporting structures within the modern state, as ‘modern sovereignty’. Emancipatory politics equates here, then, to counter-hegemony. Crucial here, then also, is how we choose to define capitalism and its relation to the modern state because this definition will determine how we envisage counter-hegemony as emancipatory politics.

The definition preferred here derives from the school of so-called ‘Political Marxism’, exemplified in the work of Brenner (1977, 1985), Wood (1995, 2009), and Mooers (1991), particularly. This approach has much in common with Gramscian and Poulantzian theory, with an emphasis on class dynamics and social-property relations within the state as key explanatory factors, whilst seeking to situate these dynamics within the wider enabling and constraining political economy of the world capitalist core periphery structure (see Tilzey 2018 for full delineation of this approach). Following ‘Political Marxism’ (see Vergara-Camus 2014, Tilzey 2018), we can understand capitalism as the contradictory combination of a set of social relations characterized by:

- The separation, wholly or partially, of workers from their means of production;
- Market dependence of producers (the compulsion to depend on a competitive market for the reproduction either of the worker (and family) or of the capitalist enterprise);
- The dominance of absolute private property (the extirpation of common rights in land, and the determination of the right to land only through the capitalist market and, therefore, the alienability of land through its commodification);
- The compulsive imperative of competition among producers (both workers and capitalists);
- The separation of the ‘economic’ from the ‘political’ in the form of the modern, capitalist state;
- Commodity fetishism;
- The predominance of exchange value over use-value since surplus value extracted from workers is contained in commodities sold on the market.

The loss of the labourer’s control over his/her labour power that is entailed in the expropriation of labourers from their means of production (that is, the process of ‘primitive accumulation’) is the absolutely key element in the emergence of the above characteristics. The crucial step in the emergence of fully capitalist relations of production is the expropriation, or dispossession, of peasants from their access to land (usually entailing the extirpation of customary rights to land) and the assertion of absolute property rights by capitalist landowners over that land. It is the obstruction or reversal of this process of primitive accumulation that comprises the absolutely key demand and desire of counter-hegemonic peasant forces in the global South – this demand and desire persists because the majority of subalterns in the global South are semi-proletarians, still retaining some access to land, however inadequate this may be (they are *formally*, rather than *really*, subsumed within capitalist relations of production, the latter condition applying to proletarians. The reasons for the dominance and persistence of the semi-proletarian condition in the global South is detailed in Tilzey 2018.). Such direct access to non-commodified land exemplifies a form of production in which the labourer (semi-proletarian) still controls his/her labour power and, to some extent, the degree and form of integration into the market. Thus, semi-proletarian peasants, even those who depend on the market for the fulfilment of a significant element of their subsistence needs, have more room for manoeuvre (more ‘autonomy’), through the adjustment of production and consumption, than their fully proletarianized counterparts (Vergara-Camus 2014). Under the prevailing conditions of precarity and ‘jobless growth’, such autonomy, even if partial, is greatly valued. Unsurprisingly, the aspiration of many under such circumstances is to secure greater autonomy from the capitalist market, in other words, to secure greater access to land in order to achieve self-sufficiency in the production of basic use values such as food. The aspiration, in other words, is to secure a relation to the market that is one of

opportunity, not of *compulsion*. Such a condition might be described as one of radical food sovereignty, or what I have elsewhere termed livelihood sovereignty (Tilzey 2018).

Given our understanding of capitalism defined above, the achievement of this condition requires the thoroughgoing transformation and abrogation of capitalist social-property relations towards democratic and devolved common ownership – or better, stewardship – of the means of livelihood. Again, given our previous discussion, a class-relational or Political Marxian understanding of capitalism appears necessary as a basis for this transformation (see Tilzey 2016b for discussion). Essential prerequisites here are the sundering of the capital-labour relation and the abrogation of the alienability of property that underlie the competitive impulse of capitalism and the atomization of non-capitalist collectivities. Since the alienation of land and labour thus constitute the quintessence of capitalism, it is the re-appropriation of land by the dispossessed or partially dispossessed, and the retention of land by those fortunate enough to sustain customary access to it, for the co-operative production of use values for society as a whole, that mark the key elements in capital's transcendence and as the basis for future sustainability. Here the transformation of class-relational power through political action within and around the state (that is, seizing opportunities for autonomy at the local level whilst addressing wider social-property relations by confronting the state) – a 'dual powers' strategy – will be key in expunging exploitative relations and laying the jurisdictional and material foundations for social equity, cooperative organization, and ecological sustainability.²

If the social relational and institutional transformation of the state-capital nexus is the essential prerequisite for livelihood sovereignty, which social forces might bring this about and what is the substantive nature of the policies and measures, most particularly for fundamental need satisfaction, poverty alleviation, and ecological sustainability, that might put it into effect? We suggest that it is the middle and lower peasantries, and indigenous peoples, possibly in alliance with the proletarian precariat, which comprise the main counter-hegemonic agent for emancipatory politics as livelihood sovereignty. This is so because they view access to non-commodified land, the escape from market dependence, and the equitable and ecologically sustainable production of use values to meet fundamental need satisfaction, as the key objectives of social relational transformation. So, although the middle and lower peasantries have indeed become progressively more (semi)-proletarianized under neoliberalism, contra Bernstein (2014), they have resisted the adoption of a proletarian class positionality. This is so because, for them, poverty equates to a gradual loss of peasant status, which they consequently seek to reverse. The desire for such a reversal has indeed become ever more insistent as the contradictions of neoliberalism have mounted and the proletariat has increasingly acquired the status of a precariat. Access to land, however limited, often provides, under these conditions, the only real element of livelihood security. Thus, struggles in the countryside and in the city often have an essentially peasant character due to the incapacity of disarticulated development to provide salaried employment (real subsumption) as a viable alternative to secure the means of livelihood. Both peasants and workers seek refuge in the peasant situation, therefore, that is, in the auto-production of use values, to the greatest degree possible, to meet fundamental needs. The rise of

² While having certain similarities with the 'alternative development' approach (e.g. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 2000), the Political Marxian approach presented here differs from it in key respects: first, alternative development lacks a historical perspective that is capable of identifying the long-term effects of the insertion of local processes into those operating at regional, national, and global levels; second, by relying on the use of the undifferentiated category of the 'poor', proponents of alternative development have abandoned the attempt to capture the specificity of peasant communities and smallholder production within different national capitalist formations; third, alternative development proponents tend to avoid confronting the issue of power relations among, and within, classes, ethnic groups and genders, and resort to moral criticism rather than recognizing that all forms of oppression rest on power relations and can only be addressed through conflict and struggle; fourth, their criticism of the state-led model of development, which is subsidiary to their criticism of state-imposed neoliberal restructuring, has also led them to avoid reflecting on the role that the state could play within a broader project of social transformation; finally, alternative development approaches tend to over-emphasize processes of social change at the local level, a focus that reflects a theoretical and political weakness with regard to how alternative development proponents address the insertion of local processes of social change into global processes and struggles (see Vergara-Camus 2014 for discussion).

indigenous and ecological consciousness since the 1990s, and the simultaneous delegitimation of capitalist modernism, have served only to reinforce the hunger for land and aversion to full proletarianization. Thus, the resolution of the unresolved agrarian question of the peasantry in Latin America, particularly in the current ecologically constrained and increasingly volatile conjuncture, seems, contra Bernstein, more than ever to be, of necessity, agrarian and peasant in nature. In this, the potential for mass mobilization on the part of the middle/lower peasantries, the precariat, and indigenous groups, for an agrarian solution to the contradictions, ‘political’ and ‘ecological’, of capitalism (expressed in ongoing primitive accumulation) does not seem unrealistic, as our case studies have suggested. It seems evident, however, that the populist, neo-developmental regimes in Bolivia and Ecuador have the capacity to delay or subvert such mobilizations by co-opting elements of the precariat through welfarism, and by fomenting a petty bourgeois consciousness amongst the peasantry through favouring the development of the small commercial farm sector by means of the conferral of absolute property rights and the thoroughgoing commodification (market dependence) of its activities. It is essential, consequently, to distinguish carefully between the different class fractions of the peasantry in terms of their positionalities and their political aspirations – whether they wish to secure autonomy from market dependence through secure access to the means of production, most particularly land, or whether they wish to become more market dependent by entering the ranks of the capitalist class.

The MST and Emancipatory Rural Politics as Counter-Hegemony in Bolivia

The importance of differentiating between reformism (sub-hegemony) and anti-capitalism (counter-hegemony) is well illustrated by the dynamics of the *Movimiento de los Trabajadores sin Tierra* (MST) in Bolivia (a sister organization of the better known Brazilian MST). These dynamics help us to identify a strategy of emancipatory rural politics whereby counter-hegemony, as food and livelihood sovereignty, may be implanted at ‘local’ level as a form of autonomy, in the manner of the Zapatistas in Mexico, whilst, simultaneously, recognizing the need to engage the state to secure a more generalized autonomy from capitalism. The MST strategy seems to represent a ‘dual powers’ approach, exploiting current opportunities for autonomy where possible, whilst amplifying the struggle for deeper and wider transformation through appropriation and subversion of the modern state itself. Here, I draw on Fabricant’s (2012) ethnography of the MST in the Bolivian *Oriente*, a study that demonstrates the movement’s embrace of radical, participatory democracy, and its advocacy of collective ownership of land, drawing on, while ‘reinventing’, communal traditions inspired by the pre-Columbian *ayllu*.

The formation of the MST in Bolivia was inspired by its sister organization in Brazil. Like the latter, the Bolivian MST has exploited the constitutional requirement for agricultural land to be in productive use. Accordingly, the organization has targeted idle land, owned by members of the agrarian oligarchy, but held largely for purposes of speculation. The state constitution permits the occupation of such land for the purpose of turning it to productive use, through the submission of a petition for legal title. The MST is painfully aware, however, that such autonomy as exists in these small number of successful cases is founded on a fragile legal loophole within a more generalized system of absolute property rights which the capitalist state, including the reformist state of Evo Morales, is committed to uphold. It recognizes, therefore, that a far greater, and more thoroughgoing, transformation of social-property relations is required if its model of *ayllu*-inspired autonomy for the landless and land-poor peasantry is to be more widely implanted.

In these few cases of successful, legalized, land occupations, the MST has built an organizational structure that is democratic and participatory, capable of creating order and holding leaders and rank and file to account through collective governance. This can be thought of as a form of grassroots citizenship, inspired by, but also reconfiguring, Andean principles of autonomy, self-governance, and participatory democracy. This stands in contrast to liberal citizenship as individualism, ‘given’ to members as a right by the state. The Andean ideal of the *ayllu*, imagined as community-held land and

collective forms of governance and control, has become the principal framework for governing MST settlements. These modern *ayllus* are characterized by nucleated settlements, communal landholdings, rotational political and administrative offices, land redistribution, and rural tax collection.

The MST takes parts of the *ayllu* model and adapts them to structure their political organization at the community, regional, and national levels. The state has fractionalized land and territory through a model of citizenship ('modern sovereignty') that has assigned absolute property rights to individuals, but the MST begins, by contrast, with the idea that land is much more than a piece of individual property – indeed, complete dominion over land by an individual or group is itself considered illegitimate. Rather, land is a collective right and should entail stewardship rather than absolute dominion. The occupation of land, or what the MST call a 're-conquest' of sorts, has to do with reclaiming and re-territorializing indigenous control and autonomy over land and other critical resources. The dynamic relationship between territorial autonomy and the ability to provide a political infrastructure that sustains humanity is designated by indigenous conceptualizations such as *sumak kawsay* (in Kichwa) or *buen vivir* (*vivir bien*). This 'return to the past' logic provides a sense of territorial and communal security through a form of 'collective' control.

The overarching purpose of this new *ayllu* structure is to reshape corporatist and highly vertical union-style structures into a horizontal, participatory, and democratic organization. This has much in common with the Zapatistas' local forms of community governance (*juntas de buen gobierno*), these resembling the MST *nucleos* and decentralized committees. The *ayllu* model can be seen as the historical sediment and outcome of the past that determines current distributions, or redistributions, of power and control. This model of democracy, with its embedded 'indigenous' laws and customs, is a reinvention, rather than necessarily a direct continuation, of the pre-Columbian forms of governance, forms that were widely eliminated or subverted by the Spanish conquest. Whether in direct communication with the past or not, the *ayllu* as a communal imaginary nonetheless inspires a 'radical' model of collective organization and production that appears to vitiate capitalism.

The MST's idea of food sovereignty and agroecology is deeply embedded in collaborative and collective forms of production. In order to build small-scale agricultural communes, members rely upon the Andean concept of *ayni*, referring to reciprocity, whereby workers take care of one another, with the understanding that one favour will be returned by another at some future time. The *minka*, or economic exchange among persons of differing socio-economic or ritual statuses at the time of the Incan Empire, now assumes the form with MST of a work service by members to construct communal infrastructure such as schools and health clinics, in return for a meal or daily wage. Not only does the *minka* connect people to one another through a collective project, it also ensures the longer-term survival and resilience of such communities. The MST has revived and politicized essentialized notions of Andean rural culture by establishing *ayni* and *minka* as forms of resistance to the capitalist, large-scale, agro-industrial production of the oligarchy. In their re-appropriation of this cultural model as antithetical to capitalism, the MST affirms the social, collective, and reciprocal forms of production, in which all members of the community benefit from family farming.

Nonetheless, there exist tensions within the MST between those, the majority, who wish to pursue a collectivist ideal, and those, a minority, who wish to acquire title to land on an individual basis, the latter a highly individualistic and capitalist-driven response to the problem of land inequality. Land petitions, in the latter case, are filed as individual rather than communal requests. This has the potential to undermine the ability of the MST collectively to negotiate for communal land ownership, and places such power in the hands of a few individuals who want simply to buy and sell property. This tension is unsurprising. Peasant and indigenous movements cannot simply 'transition' to a pure collective model given the huge constraints of actually existing capitalism and marginalization with which they have to contend on a daily basis. While the better-off peasantry, who are unlikely in any case to be members of MST, may wish to pursue the capitalist 'farmer road' ('accumulation from below'), it remains the case that many members tend to adopt, as best they can, 'pieces' of the alternative collective model whilst attempting to optimize survival strategies within actually existing capitalism (Fabricant 2012, 129). The result is a hybridization between pragmatic survival strategies

and the striving towards something better, the latter articulated by MST as the *ayllu*. This serves perhaps to highlight the limitations of autonomism as a doctrine that assumes that real change can occur ‘without taking power’ or, in other words, without addressing the causal basis of poverty, marginalization and ecological despoliation. This is recognized by the MST. While seizing all the opportunities available at the local level to secure access to land and institute collective ways of life as food sovereignty, the MST recognizes that the limits to this strategy are defined precisely by the forces of unsustainability that need to be confronted. This confrontation can occur only if the struggle is taken to the state by means of a dual powers strategy. This is why the MST has taken part in successive Marches for Land and Territory to the state capitals, demanding fundamental change in social-property relations throughout the country, and concomitant change in the nature of the state itself.

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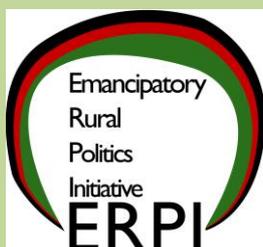
ERPI 2018 International Conference
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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