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## Book Review

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Thea Riofrancos, *Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador*. (Durham: Duke University Press 2020) xi + 252 pp., \$26.95 (pbk), ISBN: 9781478008484.

In this fascinating book Thea Riofrancos explores the overlap between two strains of the progressive left in Ecuador which would at first seem to be opposites but turn out to be more like twins who disagree on strategy. On the one hand is the anti-extractive environmentalist movement, and on the other, the *Revolución Ciudadana* (Bolivarian socialism for the twenty-first century). Before the political victory of the latter, both strains viewed the environmental crisis through the lens of dependency theory. The picture was clear: the global North, by means of American oil companies, was looting the Amazon, seen as both the lung of the earth and the home of its indigenous defenders. The situation changed significantly however with the electoral triumph of the leftist coalition in 2006, the subsequent nationalization of petroleum resources, and the resulting constitutional assembly. These developments gave rise to a new situation which increasingly pitted these two strains of the coalition against each other over the issue of extraction. The anti-extraction environmentalist wing soon left the coalition, creating a conflict between what Riofrancos calls the 'Left-in power' and the 'Left-in resistance'. The strength of the book is its close historical focus on Ecuador as well as its far-reaching implications for the dilemmas faced by the left elsewhere in the developing world with the ascent of China as the increasingly dominant resource extractor.

As Riofrancos sees it, the Ecuadorian constitutional assembly of 2007-2008 laid the groundwork for both strains of progressive thinking, in part because their ideologies are closely related and historically difficult to extricate from each other. As she puts it, 'The resulting 2008 constitution is a fundamentally contradictory text. It empowers both local communities and the state to make decisions regarding resource extraction. It grants rights to nature, and it asserts the state's exclusive control over subsoil resources and biodiversity itself' (p. 77).

The first chapter chronicles Ecuador's move from neo-liberalism to what she calls 'extractivismo' centered around the rise of Rafael Correa and the socialism of the twenty-first century. The second explores extractivism as a grand narrative, almost a philosophy of history. The Correa government understood the neo-liberalism of past governments as the absence of the state. The past environmental destruction caused by the oil fields was due to this absence of the state. In the absence of the state, multinational corporations looted the nation's petroleum resources. So far the two strains are on the same page, but the Bolivarian movement went farther. In doing so, they argued, the multinationals harmed the environment, not because doing so was an inherent part of mining, but because it

was easier and cheaper to destroy the environment and the multinationals did not care. Once the post neo-liberal state took control to regulate the process for the common good, the potential harm to the environment became a purely technical problem. In the view of the Correa government, there was no environmental problem that proper technology and state planning could not overcome. Furthermore, as far as they were concerned, the problem of dependency on the global north was solved by the substitution of China, a sister socialist country, for the US and Europe as primary lender and investor. Furthermore, in Ecuador and Bolivia the Bolivarian governments that sought Chinese assistance in petroleum extraction won with a substantial portion, or even a majority, of indigenous votes. This creates a very different situation from the older dependency image of upper-class white Ecuadorians extracting oil from indigenous territories in cooperation with the US. Because the green left shared a large part of this 'grand narrative', the extractionist shift to China and nationalized resources was harder to combat. The difference lies in a greater skepticism of the greens as to the ability of the state to extract petroleum safely. There is however a second major disagreement within the progressive movement, which is the tension between the local communities where the extraction occurs and the good of Ecuadorians as a whole.

The third chapter exemplifies the dilemma by exploring the ambivalences of the 'consulta previa'. With its great optimism, the Ecuadorian constitution grants communities the right to be consulted before mining or petroleum begins in their territory. Yet the ample rights to free healthcare, education, housing and many other things also guaranteed to Ecuadorians in the constitution (including the rights of nature defended by salaried park wardens) depend on the assumption that those who are consulted will say 'yes'. If they should say 'no' all of the other rights guaranteed in the constitution fall like a house of cards because they depend on resources from the extraction of state-owned oil to fund them. The constitution, and certainly the Correa government, seem to envision an ideal and patriotic citizen, educated and committed to the common good, who could only say 'yes'. In reality, however, there are oil spills and many other downsides that come from the presence of oil workers. As a result the indigenous communities closest to the mines and oil fields are divided, but on the whole opposed. The two sides tend to write off these divisions, each portraying the other as the result of external meddling and thus not truly indigenous.

The fourth chapter is a case study of Quimsacocha, a gold mine in Azuay opposed by 90 percent of the population, most of whom are indigenous or campesinos. Because so many local residents opposed this mine, Quimsacocha is a limit case for the Bolivarian left's belief that ideal citizens will say 'yes' when consulted. In this case they said 'no', but the government pushed ahead anyway, publicly exposing both their unwillingness to follow the constitution as well the ambiguities within the constitution itself.

Chapter 5, 'Governing the Future' views the problem of consent to extraction from the perspective of the Bolivarian state who perceive it as a purely technical problem of managing information. They were convinced that communities protested because they were misinformed. These protests in turn misinformed the Chinese and other extraction company partners who might mistake indigenous 'confusion' for serious resistance. Riofrancos argues that in what was supposedly the ideal post-neoliberal state 'the legacy of neoliberalism endured not by inertia', but through the collusion of the state and corporate actors who conspired to control the technical information provided to local communities in a way that would insure their quiescence (p. 161).

In the concluding chapter Riofrancos articulates the dilemmas faced respectively by the Left-in-power and the Left-in-resistance. In doing so she seeks to be generous to both. She argues that for the Left-in-power, natural resource extraction provides one of the few obvious sources of revenue for reducing inequality and dependency, and in so doing to achieve support for their political project. Thus, for them, nationalizing resource extraction is a natural move with broad support. At the same time dependence on the export of raw materials increases dependency on the colonial powers that refine the materials and fund development (in this case China). Thus it may inherently work to increase dependency and decrease sovereignty. The Left-in resistance faced a different dilemma. Their success is due to a 'strategy centered on mobilizing those directly affected against extractive development' (p. 174). However, the author argues, they were never successful in gaining broader support from the majority (even of working class and indigenous origin people on the left) who benefit from extraction-related jobs and public projects. *Resource Radicals* is a well-researched and well-written book that will help readers understand how a country with a large and progressive indigenous population could include the rights of Pachamama (Mother Earth) into its progressive constitution and still be so torn over petroleum extraction and mining.

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