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## Review of Bret Gustafson's *Bolivia in the Age of Gas* and Thea Riofrancos's *Resource Radicals*

In the mid-2000s, Bolivia and Ecuador captured the attention of the international Left. Evo Morales came to power in 2006 out of a series of popular mobilizations, from the Cochabamba Water War to the Gas War in El Alto. Movement cries for the nationalization of gas, land redistribution, and a new constitution shaped his first year in office. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa came to office in 2007 seeking to reduce the influence of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He declared the national debt illegitimate and announced that the country would default on over \$3 billion worth of bonds.

Morales and Correa, both self-described socialists, were part of the initial cohort of Pink Tide governments that increased social spending, nationalized key industries, and renegotiated trade deals. They presided over the writing of new constitutions that codified the rights of mother nature and redefined social economies with a more significant role for solidarity economies and the cooperative sector.

The conundrum in both countries, however, seemed to center on the failure to concretize the radical demands of social movements into meaningful state policy. Both Morales and Correa started with structural changes to the national economy. But they each scaled back amid right-wing resistance. They began to fragment social movements, unions, and, in the case of Ecuador, demonized environmentalists as “ecoterrorists.” Despite their radical goals of nationalization and redistribution, Morales and Correa’s extractive policies upheld unequal flows of capital between the Global North and South, continued to wreak havoc on the environment, and exacerbated everyday racialized, gendered, and class-based inequities.

The fundamental question of how to negotiate the social, environmental, and gendered contradictions of social-democratic regimes dependent on resource extraction is at the center of anthropologist Bret Gustafson’s *Bolivia in the Age of Gas* and political scientist Thea Riofrancos’s *Resource Radicals: From Petro Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador*. Through archival analysis, political economy, and ethnography in Bolivia and Ecuador, respectively, Gustafson and Riofrancos tell intimate stories of struggle against extractive industries within larger historical tales of state-making. By pushing beyond mere economics, their analyses offer nuance to unpack fossil fuels’ geographic development and embodied violences, questions of territoriality and sovereignty, and the use of creative resistance. Their books are important additions to the growing interdisciplinary literature on extractive frontiers in Latin America.

Both Gustafson’s and Riofrancos’s intellectual questions surfaced out of their long-term commitments to researching and accompanying Indigenous and activist communities in Latin America. Gustafson began his work in Bolivia with movements centered on questions of land and language rights in the 1990s, while Riofrancos went to Ecuador in the early 2000s as a solidarity activist. This grounding clearly shapes their sophisticated and sharp analyses of history, political economy, and on-the-ground movement building. Gustafson’s fine-tuned ethnographic details of violence and bodies, and Riofrancos’s distinctions between resource radicalisms and anti-extractive movements, for instance, demonstrate their deep commitments to getting the story right. Their masterful texts testify to life-long

relationships with Latin American movement activists whose work has evidently shaped the narrative and texture of each of these books.

Gustafson's *Bolivia in the Age of Gas* examines the historical and contemporary cultural politics of Bolivia's complex and often troubled relationship with natural gas. This work came out of witnessing how gas extraction has transformed Guaraní lands, political systems, and communal spaces. Fossil fuel resources—and the quest to extract and export them from this land-locked country—have entangled Bolivia in complicated international relationships, most notably with the United States. These conflicts date back more than a century to when Standard Oil bullied Bolivia amid nationalist fever in the early 1920s. In the neoliberal era, as transnational corporations expropriated natural resources, Bolivians increasingly called for sovereignty in the form of national and territorial control over resource wealth. The popular challenge to neoliberal privatization peaked with the Gas War in the early 2000s, but fossil fuel resources have continued to be at the heart of Bolivia's unfinished and conflictive project of nation state formation.

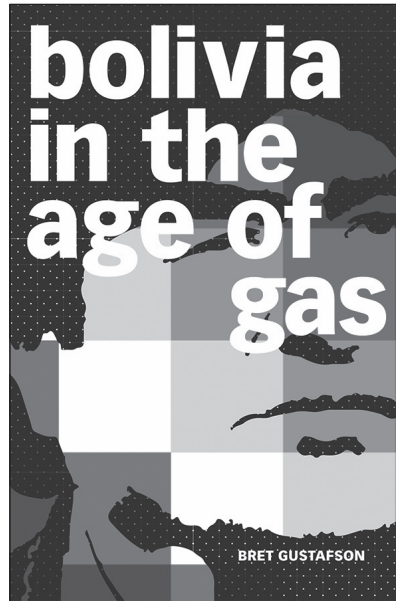
Gustafson's book is organized into three parts: time, space, and excess. The first section presents the *longue durée* of oil and gas extraction; the second homes in on questions tied to national, regional, and Indigenous territorialities; and the third addresses “the gaseous state as a series of interlocking struggles over different forms of excess—excess violence, excess work, and excess money.” In the tradition of the great Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta Mercado, Gustafson draws distinctions and makes connections between the past and present, juxtaposing

historical events in order to deploy them in new ways. He brings a humanistic lens to the study of fossil fuel economies by unpacking the everyday toxicities tied to this industry, from the misogynistic and patriarchal relationships in the gas-rich

Chaco region to the incessant *machista* humor and gossip that fills the oil camps. Beyond confronting climactic crisis, he aims to reveal how fossil fuel economies reproduce the patriarchal, heteronormative, racialized regimes that leave layers of “toxicities that are arrayed against our own bodies as well as ecological systems.” Gustafson's poignant analysis also seeks to “help North American readers understand the problem of ‘fossil capital’ and fossil fuel dependency in the United States as well as in Bolivia.” Writing before President Luis Arce's victory in Bolivia's 2020 election,

Gustafson ends with reflections on what remains of the Left in power after the 2019 right-wing coup that ousted Morales.

While Gustafson looks at these “intimate” inequities inherent in what he calls a gaseous state, Riofrancos zooms in on Ecuador's anti-extractivist and anti-mining movements that surfaced in response to oil extraction under Correa. Through archival and ethnographic research, she explores the conditions and consequences of the radical politicization of resource extraction in what she calls two leftisms: the Correa administration's resource nationalism focused on economic development tied to oil extraction and grassroots activists' anti-extractivism that condemned the government's disregard for nature and Indigenous communities. Riofrancos expands the study of resource politics by decentering state policy and instead locating oil and mining politics inside movement spaces, where visions of

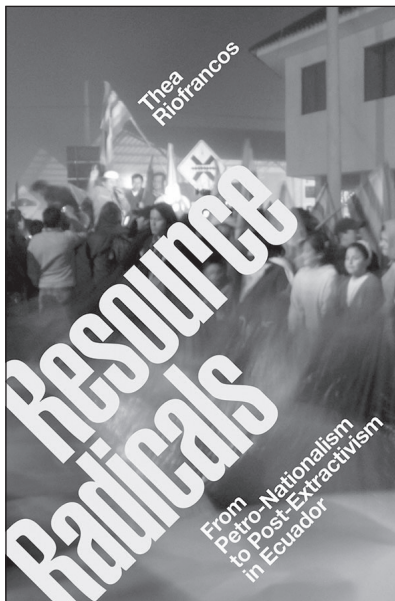


Duke University Press, 2020

resource extraction often conflict with the state. She highlights the militant grassroots mobilizations that shaped what she calls resource radicalism. Wielding ideas such as constitutional authority and democratic sovereignty, these activists crafted their own critiques of extractivism. She sees multiple forms of resource radicalisms with foci on different issues, such as Indigenous rights, environmental contamination, labor exploitation, foreign ownership, and more. Riofrancos underlines the power that activists had in halting the means of production by identifying and resisting disparate nodes of extraction. This strategic power to stall extractive projects at key chokepoints can bring an end to an anticipated pipeline project or seriously delay projects in a specific oil or gas field itself. Resistance envisions and enacts alternatives.

Riofrancos's book charts a linear narrative from neoliberalism to extractivism. Against the backdrop of a "longer-term trajectory of peasant-cum indigenous mobilizations against economic exploitation and political exclusion" from 1930 to 1990, she presents the history of popular struggles under neoliberal administrations from 1990 to 2006—the year Correa was elected. In response to privatization and deregulation, social movements articulated a demand for radical resource nationalism: democratic and national control over extraction. But zooming in on the 2007-2010 period, she argues that the Correa government pivoted from resource nationalism to *extractivismo*. She then takes a deep dive into a rich ethnography of the strategies and tactics of distinct grassroots activists opposing extraction. She concludes with crucial reflections about the dilemmas of resource dependency for both the Left in power and the Left in resistance. "For all the limitations and contradictions of the Pink Tide,"

she writes, "without the Left in power, political, social and economic inequalities mutually reinforce one another, denying a dignified life to the vast majority of the population and protecting the privileges of the few against the democratic will of the many."



Duke University Press, 2020

Fundamental questions surface at the end of both Gustafson and Riofrancos's books that chart new directions for political analyses of Latin American social movements: How can activists create a robust Left in Latin America that has the power to reach its tentacles into the state but also the compassion and willingness to work with grassroots movements? How can the new Left regimes learn from the past to avoid the tendency to coopt, usurp, or demobilize the most radical anti-extractivist movements? How can Left regimes confront the newly resurgent right? And what is the

possibility of Latin American leftists reconstructing a viable political project that can weave together egalitarian and ecological demands? The Pink Tide may be over, but a new iteration of Left regimes is taking shape in Latin America that will require activists to revise their critiques, reinvent imaginative strategies, and assemble new forms of resistance. ■

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**Nicole Fabricant** is an associate professor of anthropology at Towson University in Maryland. She is author of *Mobilizing Bolivia's Displaced: Indigenous Politics and the Struggle Over Land* (UNC, 2012). She is writing a manuscript entitled *Fighting to Breathe in Baltimore's Toxic Periphery* (University of California Press, forthcoming). She is a member of NACLA's editorial committee.