PROJECT MUSE®

Resource Radicals: From Metro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador by Thea Riofrancos (review)

Jeffery Paige

The Americas, Volume 78, Number 4, October 2021, pp. 691-692 (Article)

Published by Cambridge University Press

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/836864

[Access provided at 18 Nov 2021 16:05 GMT from Duke University Libraries]

Blanc is primarily concerned, though, with developments in Brazil. He sheds new light on the origins in Brazil of a rural landless activist movement of now global reach, but hesitates at pursuing a more complete borderlands history. His source base is impressive regardless, drawing from oral history interviews, state archives in Brazil and Paraguay, and—most innovatively—the records of the Itaipú Binational itself. This quasi-state entity's documentation of its surveillance of rural activists permitted Blanc to track the dam's repercussive waves across a flooded landscape and beyond. The result is a fine piece of scholarship with demonstrated value for classroom use.

Grand Valley State University
Allendale, Michigan
hunerm@gvsu.edu

MICHAEL HUNER

EXTRACTIVISM IN ECUADOR

Resource Radicals: From Metro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador. By Thea Riofrancos. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. Pp. 252. $99.95 cloth; $26.95 paper.
doi:10.1017/tam.2021.95

Ecuador is an excellent choice for a study of the dilemmas of poor, natural-resource-dependent economies. From independence, its economy has been entirely based on the export of primary materials, first cacao, then bananas, petroleum after 1972, and now large-scale mining. Ecuador has also seen some of the most powerful resistance against the natural resource model.

According to the author, the discourse of resistance falls into two categories: "radical resource nationalism" and "anti-extractivism." Radical resource nationalism was the position of the left not only in Ecuador but throughout Latin America in the twentieth century. It called for the nationalization of natural resources and the redistribution of their revenues into development projects and increased social welfare expenditure. In Ecuador, this position was included in the "twentieth-century socialism" of President Rafael Correa and his successor. But under Correa's administration, a split in the left emerged between his position and a new form of resource radicalism that Riofrancos calls "anti-extractivism." It refers to opposition to an excessive reliance on natural resource exports without regard for their human or ecological costs.

In this work, the author concentrates on the discourse of these two forms of resource radicalism. She dismisses the extensive literature on the natural resource curse and, in the case of oil on petro-states, as "deterministic" and" pessimistic." Instead, she argues that natural resource policy is a consequence of political conflict between different discourses of resource radicalism. The strength of her work is its careful, empirically based study of the discourses of the two forms of resource radicalism. She uses three

kinds of sources: 100 interviews with government officials, indigenous leaders, environmental leaders, and labor and other left leaders; archival analysis of the assembly debates that created the 2008 constitution; and a participant observation study of the development of a mining project in southeastern Ecuador. The discourse analysis shows that there was no love lost between the two forms of the left's resource radicalism. Correa, in the *New Left Review,* called the anti-extractivists "absurd" and "dangerous." He often referred to the opposition as "infantile environmentalists." The language of the anti-extractivists was no less negative. Correa was denounced as a neoliberal and a phony socialist.

In her archival analysis of constituent assembly debates, Riofrancos shows that the lines of conflict were drawn over the issue of "consent" versus "consultation." The assembly was willing to grant the right to free prior consultation to communities that would be affected by resource development, but not the right of consent. Consent would grant veto power over natural resource extraction to the communities affected. The two leaders of the consent position were Alberto Acosta and Mónica Chuji. Both later broke with Correa and became major spokespersons for the anti-extractivist position.

In her participant observation case study, Riofrancos demonstrates the limits of consultation. Government officials and corporate leaders spoke in terms of "information," while anti-extractivists spoke in terms of political conflict. In the end, the corporations and the government officials prevailed. The government conducted educational and informational efforts as if the problem of conflicting interests could be solved by showing the communities the wisdom of the government's position. In the end, "consultation" amounted to little more than misinforming the communities about the consequences of mining developments, something they knew perfectly well from their own experience.

In the concluding chapter, Riofrancos uses her ideal-type analysis of resource radicalism to argue that the conflict between the two perspectives has been a major factor in the reversal of the pink tide in Ecuador and throughout the region. In her final pages, however, she sounds a hopeful note, indicating that in Ecuador in 2019 massive nationwide protests forced the government to reverse its position on ending fuel subsidies. Certainly, this book is a theoretically original and empirically solid contribution. But I was left to wonder what a poor, natural resource-based economy is to do without its primary source of wealth.

University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
jpaige@umich.edu

JEFFERY PAIGE