

# Food sovereignty and neo-extractivism: limits and possibilities of an alternative development model<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract.* Food sovereignty and neo-extractivism are two highly contentious concepts that have emerged in the development studies literature and as development alternatives pursued predominantly by governments in Latin America. This paper engages with both Critical Development Studies (CDS) and Critical Globalization Studies (CGS) to analyze the dynamics of this post-neoliberal model in Bolivia, providing insights into the convergences and contradictions of neo-extractivism and food sovereignty. Rather than challenging or transforming the neoliberal model of development, it is argued that the post-neoliberal model has been used strategically by states to gain and maintain legitimacy while facilitating and even exacerbating exploitative forms of extractivism for the accumulation of wealth and power. This has been possible, in part, due to the contradictory class positions that have materialized as the rural poor are increasingly dependent upon, and adversely incorporated into, new «modes of extraction».

*Keywords:* food sovereignty; neo-extractivism; critical development studies; critical globalization studies; Bolivia

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## Introduction

In the field of CDS, the «post-neoliberal» model of development based on export-oriented natural resource extraction combined with social welfare programmes has sparked debates as to whether or not it represents an alternative model for economic and social development, or if it should be viewed as a new political ideology, replacing the neoliberal model that dominated over the previous two decades (Veltmeyer y Petras, 2014). On the one hand, the neo-extractivist model has been criticized for reinforcing a dependency on raw material exports, volatile international commodities markets, and what is known as the «natural resource curse» and the «Dutch disease» (Acosta, 2013; Burchardt y Dietz, 2014; Gudynas, 2015; North y Grinspun, 2016; Svampa, 2013b; Veltmeyer, 2013). On the other hand, social welfare programmes such as conditional cash transfers and food sovereignty policies designed to eradicate hunger, decrease inequalities and alleviate poverty and socio-economic injustices have been praised<sup>2</sup> by intergovernmental organizations (FAO, 2015), academics, activists and social movements (Altieri y Toledo, 2011; Desmarais, 2007; Rosset, 2011). Such alternatives often rely on finances derived from the extraction of natural resources which directly threatens the viability of the alternatives they claim to be supporting. The basic tenets of food sovereignty and the fundamentals of neo-extractivism represent profoundly contradictory models of development. Yet, together they epitomize the post-neoliberal model of a new developmentalism, representing both a

<sup>2</sup> While praised for their ideals, the authors cited provide critical analyses of the challenges between such ideals and how they play out in practice.

rejection to, and continuation of, the neoliberal policies which preceded them. How do we make sense of this alternative model of development? What are its limits and possibilities for building a socially-just and sustainable future? Most scholars have analyzed «neo-extractivism» with only cursory reference to food sovereignty; while food sovereignty scholars have given little attention to neo-extractivism. While contradictions may seem apparent, how and the extent to which these dynamics unfold on the ground —with real implications for peoples' livelihoods— remain important questions for both theory and practice.

The post-neoliberal period emerged in Latin America at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when a wave of progressive left governments swept across the region (including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela) with unprecedented popular support from the historically marginalized masses (see Ruckert, Macdonald y Proulx, 2017; Veltmeyer y Petras, 2014). Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela were arguably the most radical regimes in terms of both policy and discourse against neoliberal prescriptions, particularly with their charismatic leaders in Evo Morales, Rafael Correa and Hugo Chavez, respectively. While many of the other countries of the so-called «pink tide» have reverted back to moderate centrist and conservative regimes, the political parties of Morales, Correa and Chávez remain in power. These three regimes have constitutionalized the right to food sovereignty and have made impressive gains in alleviating poverty and decreasing inequality through the redistribution of extractivist rents (McKay, Nehring y Walsh-Dilley, 2014) Ecuador, and Bolivia. As a constitutional right, food sovereignty presents a significant opening to promote a citizen's revolution of the food system, but is such a proposal possible or desirable as a top-down initiative?

The concept itself is inherently people-led as it implies constructing (or deconstructing). At the same time, they have increased their dependence on natural resource extraction, with primary products representing over 90% of total exports in all three countries —more than double the regional average of 46% (CEPAL, 2018) toxic chemical products formed as secondary metabolites by a few fungal species that readily colonise crops and contaminate them with toxins in the field or after harvest. Ochratoxins and Aflatoxins are mycotoxins of major significance and hence there has been significant research on broad range of analytical and detection techniques that could be useful and practical. Due to the variety of structures of these toxins, it is impossible to use one standard technique for analysis and/or detection. Practical requirements for high-sensitivity analysis and the need for a specialist laboratory setting create challenges for routine analysis. Several existing analytical techniques, which offer flexible and broad-based methods of analysis and in some cases detection, have been discussed in this manuscript. There are a number of methods used, of which many are lab-based, but to our knowledge there seems to be no single technique that stands out above the rest, although analytical liquid chromatography, commonly linked with mass spectroscopy is likely to be popular. This review manuscript discusses (a. The increased reliance on raw material exports for state revenue has intensified forms of extraction and required the expansion into new frontiers, particularly since the fall of commodities prices on international markets. As new frontiers open up, access and control over land-based natural resources become increasingly contentious. More often than not, indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers depend on these same resources to sustain their livelihoods. And here lies the irony: the rents derived from natural resource extraction are

used to support the livelihoods of the rural poor whom are threatened by these very same extractive activities.

Food sovereignty alternatives and social welfare programmes such as conditional cash transfers are designed to facilitate a transition out of poverty to a sustainable rural livelihood. Yet, the rural poor are increasingly faced with conflict over access to land and water, contaminated soils and irrigation systems, displacement and outright dispossession as a result of state-facilitated extractivist expansion. Indeed, this forms part of the post-neoliberal model of development and represents the seemingly contradictory yet persistent duality of food sovereignty and neo-extractivism. This post-neoliberal model was borne out of a critique to the dominant development paradigm, while it necessarily depends on the integration into global markets and circuits of production and consumption. Understanding these dynamics requires engaging with, and fusing, the strengths of both CDS and CGS which, as McMichael argues «are two sides of the same coin» (2005:111). This paper interrogates these contradictions, in theory and practice, providing empirical insights to illuminate our understanding of how the dynamics of food sovereignty and neo-extractivism play out on the ground with important implications for peoples' livelihoods.

## Food Sovereignty and neo-extractivism

### *The food sovereignty alternative to a failing food system*

World hunger is on the rise with nearly one billion people suffering from undernourishment, while another two billion are overweight and obese

(FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, 2018). The dominant food system, which produces enough to feed nearly 9.5 billion people (Faostat, 2016) is failing humanity. The contemporary food sovereignty campaign aims to dismantle and transform this highly unequal food system and has been put forth as an alternative, not only by influential social movements but also by progressive-left states around the world. Food sovereignty emerged as the antithesis of the corporate-controlled agro-industrial food system and particularly against the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) (McMichael, 2014) but also to recognize its relation to the politics of capital in a crisis conjuncture. This paper traces the evolution of the food sovereignty vision from the initial stages of the food sovereignty countermovement to the present, arguing that food sovereignty politics have not only traveled from countryside to city as consumers/citizens anticipate ecological constraints and compensate for unequal food distributions, but also they have been confronted with transitions in the food regime following the recent food crisis. New enclosures, in the forms of land grabs and value-chains, administered by public-private ?governance? partnerships, have contradictory effects: threatening the peasant base of the food sovereignty countermovement, but also threatening to exacerbate the food crisis, as evidenced in recent food riot politics animated by the food sovereignty vision. As the food regime restructures, it reconditions the possibilities of food sovereignty politics. Arguably, the ultimate historicization of food sovereignty possibility is immanent in cumulative energy and climate feedbacks.

To historicize food sovereignty is not simply to recognize its multiple forms and circumstances across time and space, but also to recognize its relation to the politics of capital in a crisis conjuncture. This paper traces the evolution of the food sovereignty

vision from the initial stages of the food sovereignty counter-movement to the present, arguing that food sovereignty politics have not only traveled from countryside to city as consumers/citizens anticipate ecological constraints and compensate for unequal food distributions, but also they have been confronted with transitions in the food regime following the recent food crisis. New enclosures, in the forms of land grabs and value-chains, administered by public-private ?governance? partnerships, have contradictory effects: threatening the peasant base of the food sovereignty counter-movement, but also threatening to exacerbate the food crisis, as evidenced in recent food riot politics animated by the food sovereignty vision. As the food regime restructures, it reconditions the possibilities of food sovereignty politics. Arguably, the ultimate historicization of food sovereignty possibility is immanent in cumulative energy and climate feedbacks». It represents a mobilizing frame for (largely agrarian) social movements, led by La Via Campesina (LVC), but increasingly broadening to encompass the converging interests of agrarian, food and immigrant labour justice transcending the rural-urban divide (Brent, Schiavoni, and Alonso-Fradejas, 2015); and it offers a socially-just and inclusive alternative to our broken food system (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe, 2010). As a critique, movement and alternative, food sovereignty is understandably defined and interpreted differently by different people at different times. As Schiavoni puts it, «what food sovereignty means and what it might look like, conceptually and in practice, are subject to ongoing processes of contestation and negotiation» (Schiavoni, 2017:3). This is not only due to contested interpretations of the concept itself, but that fundamentally food sovereignty construction is ongoing and a function of community-based control over food systems which requires local, regional and national analyses and

strategies-meaning, «no single food sovereignty model can be designed and imposed from elsewhere» (Wiebe and Wipf, 2011:5).

The most commonly accepted definition of food sovereignty today is that put forth at the Nyéléni World Forum for Food Sovereignty held in 2007: «the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems», (Nyéléni, 2007). Ultimately, food sovereignty is about democratizing and de-commodifying our food systems through the dismantling of the corporate-controlled market oligopoly that currently controls it and by building viable alternatives through participatory decision-making beginning at the local level. A common point of contention regarding the food sovereignty movement (FSM) is its position on international trade (Burnett and Murphy, 2014). This relates directly with two other critical issues in food sovereignty politics and scholarship: the role of the state and the localization dimension. While delving into these issues goes beyond the scope of this paper (but see McKay *et al.*, 2014; Robbins, 2015, respectively on these topics) Ecuador, and Bolivia. As a constitutional right, food sovereignty presents a significant opening to promote a citizen's revolution of the food system, but is such a proposal possible or desirable as a top-down initiative? The concept itself is inherently people-led as it implies constructing (or deconstructing, it is necessary to briefly elaborate on the FSM's position vis-à-vis the dominant, corporate controlled food system.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For more comprehensive, in-depth and critical perspectives on food sovereignty see the special issues in *Globalizations*, guest edited by Shattuck *et al.*, (2015) as a movement and a set of ideas, is coming of age. Rooted in resistance to free trade and the globalizing force of neoliberalism, the concept has inspired collective action across the world. We examine what has changed since food sovereignty first emerged on the international scene and reflect on insight from new

Rather than an outright rejection of international trade, the FSM seeks to dismantle and transform the dominant trade structures which facilitate corporate control and concentration over our food systems. This means providing more protections for small-scale farmers (i.e. from «dumping»<sup>4</sup>), support (i.e. extension services, market access, just prices), democratizing land control<sup>5</sup> (i.e. through redistributive reforms, protecting rights and restitution), and eliminating predatory intermediaries and a concentration of control by market oligopolies across the value chain (i.e. locally-produced and controlled food provisioning).<sup>6</sup>

One of the principal forms of control has been through market concentration and consolidation of seed and chemical companies which has led to a market oligopoly largely controlled globally by the «Big Six»: Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, Dow Chemical, BASF and Dupont. Together, these companies

terrain where the movement has expanded. We argue that to advance the theory and practice of food sovereignty, new frameworks and analytical methods are needed to move beyond binaries—between urban and rural, gender equality and the family farm, trade and localism, and autonomy and engagement with the state. A research agenda in food sovereignty must not shy away from the rising contradictions in and challenges to the movement. The places of seeming contradiction may in fact be where the greatest insights are to be found. We suggest that by taking a relational perspective, scholars can begin to draw insight into the challenges and sticking points of food sovereignty by» (*The Journal of Peasant Studies*, guest edited by Edelman *et al.*, 2014); and *Third World Quarterly*, guest edited by Alonso-Fradejas *et al.*, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Dumping is an international trade strategy whereby countries export food surpluses and sell them at below market prices with the help of government subsidies which often have devastating effects for local producers in the receiving country.

<sup>5</sup> See Franco *et al.*, (2015) we argue that democratic land control is inseparable from human rights. It is important to understand demands for democratic land control in the context of broadly distinct political conditions that in turn each requires distinct political intervention, namely, respect/protect, promote, and/or restore democratic land control. In addition, we also argue that broader institutional instruments carried out simultaneously at different levels, ranging from conventional land reforms to the recently passed UN Committee on Food Security (CFS and McKay (2018b)

<sup>6</sup> See McKay (2018a) for an example of control grabbing through value chain concentration.

control 75% of the global agro-chemical market, 63% of the commercial seed market, and over 75% of private sector research in seeds and pesticides (ETC Group, 2015:4). The well-known ABCD (ADM, Bunge, Cargill, Louis Dreyfus) agribusiness firms control an estimated 75 to 90% of the global grain trade (Wesz Jr, 2016:294). This type of oligopolistic market power obstructs competition and can lead to price fixing —as was the case in the 1990s when ADM was fined over US\$ 100 million for colluding with other companies to raise prices for lysine and citric acid (Murphy, Burch, and Clapp, 2012). More than the material commodification and control of agro-inputs, the «Big Six» also control access to information and innovations. Combined, their budgets for agriculture research and development (RANDD) is some 20 times larger than that of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) and 15 times that of the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) budget for crop science research, giving them significant control over the agricultural RANDD industry (ETC Group, 2015). As Kloppenburg argues, agricultural research has been «an important means of eliminating the barriers to the penetration of agriculture by capital» by commodifying agro-inputs and displacing productive activities off the farm and into an industrial setting (Kloppenburg, 2004:10). But while agricultural innovations are certainly important, it becomes problematic when a small, self-interested group dictates the research agenda and the interlinked technologies and products which are available in the market (see Miller and Conko, 2001). With significant influence and control over the agricultural research agenda, the «Big Six» can therefore invest in shaping agriculture's technical form through continued «innovations» which require their «technological packages» complete with patented seeds, agro-chemical inputs and access to advanced mechanization.

This control over information and knowledge production represents the power agro-industry has over ideas, technological innovation, and ultimately authority over the terms of modern agricultural production. So, while the FSM position regarding alternatives to international trade may be ambiguous (see Burnett and Murphy, 2014) —what is clear is that it seeks to dismantle these unequal structures of concentration and control over people, food and knowledge and build a more democratic, participatory and socially just food system. Ironically, states in Latin America that have voiced their support and even created legislation to foster food sovereignty are doing so by expanding extractivist frontiers via a neo-extractivist model of development. Before delving further into how these dynamics co-exist and contradict in Bolivia, the next section provides a brief overview of neo-extractivism.

### *From extractivism to neo-extractivism*

The extraction of natural resources has been integral for the accumulation of wealth and capital on a global scale. It was a defining feature of the coercive and exploitative socio-economic relations during colonialism and has continued to shape an international division of labour during capitalism. This division represents stark power asymmetries both within and between countries around the world. In the field of CDS, such asymmetries were central to the emergence of the structural theory or school of development with its origins in a study published by the Economic Commission of Latin America (ECLA), headed by Raúl Prebisch in 1950. Contrary to the dominant neoclassical orthodoxy of the time based on comparative advantage, Prebisch argued that the terms of trade between

the periphery (raw material exporters) and the centre (industrialized countries) tended to decline over time, meaning peripheral countries would have to increasingly extract more natural resources in order to import the same value of manufactured or industrialized value-added goods. Influenced by Prebisch, structuralists argued for an increased role of the state to foster industrialization through various forms of protection and support—a policy known as «import substitution industrialization» (ISI). Structuralist such as Prebisch and Celso Furtado were pioneers of ISI policies and were highly influential in the emergence of state-led developmentalism in Latin America in the two decades after World War II. This prompted a critique from dependency theorists such as André Gunder Frank and Paul Baran who argued that peripheral countries must delink from the global capitalist system to avoid the development of underdevelopment which would only persist as states pursued ISI policies within global capitalism.

The crisis of neoliberalism in the late 1990s revived elements of these theories as the «pink tide» of progressive-left regimes swept across Latin America with discourses against «neoliberal globalization» and US-imperialism. While neither ISI policies nor a de-linking from the global capitalist system transpired<sup>7</sup>, these governments have pursued a new model referred to as post-neoliberal development (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014) or the «new developmentalism» (Bresser-Pereira, 2016). This more «inclusive» model promised to regain control over their natural resources and redistribute the resource wealth to alleviate poverty, inequality and facilitate industrialization. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve

<sup>7</sup> Though the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) was an attempt to facilitate more regional integration and partially de-link from the dependence on the US dollar and trade.

into the nuances of these «Latin American theories of development and underdevelopment» (see Kay, 1989; Kay and Gwynne, 2000), it is necessary to acknowledge and understand the importance of the structuralist school and ECLA in challenging dominant development models rooted in modernization theory and ultimately initiating what has come to be known as Critical Development Studies (see Veltmeyer and Bowles, 2018).

More than just removing, or extracting, natural resources, extractivism refers to the broader social relations of production and reproduction in extractive economies and enclaves. For Acosta (2013) extractivism is a mode of accumulation which entails «the deep structural logic of production, distribution, exchange, and accumulation» (Chase-Dunn and Hall, 2000:86). For Gudynas (2015) extractivism is a «mode of appropriation» which refers to the different forms of organizing the appropriation of distinct natural resources (physical materials, energy and ecological processes) for human purposes in specific social and environmental contexts. Gudynas rejects the notion of «mode of production» when referring to extractivism, since we do not «produce» natural resources, but rather appropriate or extract them from nature (2015:188). From this perspective, extractivism is not analogous to an industry since the industrial, value-added processes usually occur in faraway places from the extraction. This builds from Bunker's argument that the «internal dynamics of extractive economies differ significantly from those of productive economies in their effects on the natural environment, on the distribution of human populations, on the construction of economic infrastructure, and therefore on the subsequent development potential of the affected regions» (1984:1019) ecological, and infrastructural effects of extractive economies differ significantly from those of productive economies.

Analysis of underdevelopment in extractive export economies requires time-lagged models of the cumulative effects of the sequence of local modes of extraction organized in response to world-system demands. Such a model, organized around the predominance of specific commodities at different times, is derived from a critical synthesis of various theories of development and underdevelopment. The propositions in this model are examined through a case study of the sequence of extractive export economies in the Amazon Basin from the time of colonial conquest to the present. \\\\\\\\\ This article discusses the differences between extraction and production economies and their relative effects on their region and each other. It is a convincing piece of work on one hand as it is well researched and considered. However, it is steeped in economic theory and can often make overarching statements without backing them up completely with statistical evidence. Bunker goes on to say that «when natural resources are extracted from one regional ecosystem to be consumed or transformed in another, the socioeconomic and ecological linkages to the extracted commodity tend to a loss of value in the region of origin and to accretion of value in the region of consumption or transformation» (1984:1019)ecological, and infrastructural effects of extractive economies differ significantly from those of productive economies. Analysis of underdevelopment in extractive export economies requires time-lagged models of the cumulative effects of the sequence of local modes of extraction organized in response to world-system demands. Such a model, organized around the predominance of specific commodities at different times, is derived from a critical synthesis of various theories of development and underdevelopment. The propositions in this model are examined through a case study of the sequence of extractive export economies

in the Amazon Basin from the time of colonial conquest to the present. This article discusses the differences between extraction and production economies and their relative effects on their region and each other. It is a convincing piece of work on one hand as it is well researched and considered. However, it is steeped in economic theory and can often make overarching statements without backing them up completely with statistical evidence. Extractivism not only leads to uneven economic and ecological exchange, but can also have devastating social consequences. Incomes often rise and fall rapidly, populations are displaced, ecosystems destroyed and political elites become susceptible to forms of corruption. For Bunker, these processes represent «modes of extraction» which he introduced to characterize the systemic connections between changes in «the class structures; the organization of labor; systems of property and exchange; the activities of the state; the distribution of populations; the development of physical infrastructure; and the kinds of information, beliefs, and ideologies which shape social organization and behaviour» (1984:1020) ecological, and infrastructural effects of extractive economies differ significantly from those of productive economies. Analysis of underdevelopment in extractive export economies requires time-lagged models of the cumulative effects of the sequence of local modes of extraction organized in response to world-system demands. Such a model, organized around the predominance of specific commodities at different times, is derived from a critical synthesis of various theories of development and underdevelopment. The propositions in this model are examined through a case study of the sequence of extractive export economies in the Amazon Basin from the time of colonial conquest to the present. This article discusses the differences between extraction and production economies

and their relative effects on their region and each other. It is a convincing piece of work on one hand as it is well researched and considered. However, it is steeped in economic theory and can often make overarching statements without backing them up completely with statistical (1984:1020). In other words, extractivism is not simply «to pull out», but encompasses particular exploitative social relations combined with unequal ecological and economic exchange. As Ye, van der Ploeg, Schneider and Shanin put it, «extractivism...is mining (or farming, etc.) that is *patterned in a particular way*» (emphasis in original, 2019:2), which «implies (if not requires) monopoly control over specific natural resources (minerals, oil, gas, fertile lands, aquifers, woodlands, etc.) and it results in their ruthless exploitation» (2019:1). It is therefore important to consider the relations of production (or extraction), of property, of divisions of labour, of income distribution, and of consumption, reproduction and accumulation in extractive economies.

If extractivism characterizes the exploitative colonial relations and the unequal economic and ecological exchange which has continued under the «development project», then what is the «new extractivism»? Neoliberal policies reached a crisis of legitimacy in the 1990s, as asymmetric relations among countries were intensified by trade liberalization, financial deregulation the rollback of the state. Indebtedness among countries of the South resulted in a loss of sovereignty to countries and institutions of the North and policy prescriptions imposed on the former led to drastic inequalities and increased impoverishment. Social discontent among the marginalized majority resulted in a proliferation of social movement mobilization and protest. This was most evident in Latin America, where progressive left-wing parties rose to power with strong

support among the historically marginalized, represented by indigenous, peasants, women and other classes of labour, both rural and urban —establishing new relations among social movements and the state (see Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005; Vergara-Camus and Kay, 2017a). Political discourse was aimed directly at the rejection of neoliberalism and imperialism as political leaders vowed to take back sovereignty and control over their natural resources and development trajectories. From this emerged what Gudynas (2009) calls «progressive neo-extractivism» (*neo-extractivismo progresista*) whereby the state plays a more active role and achieves greater legitimacy through the redistribution of some of the surpluses generated by extractivism, albeit with similar negative social and environmental impacts. This raises an important question as to whether or not the increased role of the state in the extractive sector combined with a more equitable distribution of extractivist rents is altering the exploitative relations of production (or extraction) and reproduction in extractive economies and enclaves.

Critical development scholars have been interrogating these dynamics over the past decade or so, with a consensus that progressive neo-extractivism has not only perpetuated similar «modes of extraction», but continues to depend on expanding extractivist frontiers (see Acosta, 2013; Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington, 2011; Bebbington, 2009; Gudynas, 2009, 2015; Svampa, 2013a; Veltmeyer, 2013; Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014). Veltmeyer and Petras argue that the post-neoliberal state (with particularly emphasis on Bolivia and Ecuador) is merely the latest twist and turn in the politics of what they call «extractive imperialism» whereby agents of the state «will rally to the defense of extractive capital as the result of congruent economic interests (profits for the corporation, royalties

and taxes for the governments)» (2014:22). In Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington's essay on the strategies for governing extraction and socio-environmental conflicts among neoliberal and post-neoliberal regimes, they find that «the logics and consequences of extraction seem very similar regardless of the political project or ideological model» (2011, pp. 141-142). In this regard, the authors assert that «Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia also share a growing intolerance of resistance to this policy and each have greeted this intolerance with increasingly harsh rhetoric, criminalization of protest (or at least threats to this effect), and a tendency on the part of their executive branches to emit proposals for legislative reform that reduce the scope for the exercise of citizen voice during the project cycle of extractive investment» (Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington, 2011:140). Drawing on the findings of a Special Issue published in the *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vergara-Camus and Kay (2017a, 2017b) argue that, with variation and in their context-specific political economies, left-wing governments in Latin America have failed to transform the unequal agrarian structures in the countryside due to their dependence on, and alliances with, classes of capital. While conditional cash transfers and other social welfare programmes have indeed been important for poverty alleviation and a reduction in inequality, such a residual approach to the poverty problematic remains dependent on extractivist rents and fails to tackle structural inequalities of class and intra-class dynamics. Evidently, such findings in the CDS and Critical Agrarian Studies (CAS) literature contradict the claim that the post-neoliberal states facilitate social inclusion, social justice or attempt to change the political economy of extractivism. As Gudynas writes, «(progressive) governments move to take state control over these resources, although they end up reproducing the

same productive processes, similar relations of power, and the same social and environmental impacts» (2010:12). In other words, the «modes of appropriation» and «modes of extraction» remain the same —prompting us to ask, how these states are able maintain legitimacy when their main constituents mobilized against similar forms of (neoliberal) extractivism just over a decade ago?

The next section provides a preliminary discussion on the dynamics between mining cooperatives and small-scale peasant farmers in the municipality of Palca, outside of La Paz, where new «modes of extraction» are leading to contradictory class positions among the peasantry as they become adversely incorporated into the new extractivist model.

*Convergence and contradictions of a development model:  
preliminary notes from Palca, La Paz*

In 2006, the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) launched an «Agrarian Revolution» promising agrarian reform and later including food sovereignty and the indigenous concept of *«buen vivir»* (living well/*sumak kawsay*) in its Constitution, yet the country remains dependent on (agro)extractivist rents which reinforce exploitative and exclusionary relations of production and environmental degradation. Rather than building food sovereignty policy from the ground up by working with communities, Bolivia's food sovereignty programmes are top-down and productivity-oriented, focusing on specific crops rather than democratizing the food system as a whole. There are nine distinct «national programmes» which focus on fruit, vegetables, potatoes, tomatoes, farm animals, cattle, cacao, the Amazon region, and technological innovation (IPDSA, 2016).

However, the cash-crop, export-oriented agro-industrial model remains the priority —specifically soybean production— which has nearly doubled since 2005/06 while food imports have quadrupled in value over the same period (ANAPO, 2015; Flores, 2017). This model, better characterized as agrarian extractivism or *extractivismo agrario*, forms part of the state's three-pronged neo-extractivist model (Alonso-Fradejas, 2015; B. M. McKay, 2017, 2018c) hydrocarbons, and soybeans. While Bolivia has a long history of mineral and natural gas extraction, the agricultural sector's highly mechanized and capital-intensive character are relatively new developments. Referred to here as «agrarian extractivism» this paper reveals the very extractive nature of soybean production in Bolivia based on four interlinked dimensions: (1.

Despite the strong state-society relations which were instrumental in the MAS' rise to state power, these relations have become conflict-ridden as extractive frontiers expand and resource-based conflicts abound. In some cases, influential social movements have been incorporated into — or even co-opted by— the state, but others have maintained their autonomy and continue to struggle for social justice in the face of extractivist development (McKay, 2017b). However, in many cases people find themselves caught in contradictory positions —between classes, lucrative livelihood alternatives and long-term interests of their families, communities and environments. One particular region where these dynamics play out is in Palca.

Palca is a municipality located in the highland valley region in close proximity to the country's administrative capital city, La Paz. It sits at the foot of Illimani, one of the highest glacier mountains in Bolivia with important cultural significance and an indispensable water resource for the

surrounding region, including the nation's capital. Its unique geographic location spans three different ecological zones: mountainous highlands, valleys, and fertile tropics. Close to 4,000 small scale farming households produce a variety of traditional crops along the base of the mountain in Palca, yet they have become increasingly in conflict with both large-scale private miners and small-scale mining cooperatives for access over land and other natural resources. The recent discovery of gold has attracted Chinese mining companies, adding new ethno-nationalistic dynamics to the relations of resource access and control. The proliferation of mining cooperatives have exacerbated these conflicts as the number of mining cooperatives has nearly doubled in Bolivia since Evo Morales came to power -- from 911 cooperatives in 2006 to 1,816 in 2017, employing nearly 137,000 people directly (Mamani, 2018; Pagina Siete, 2018). While the horizontal structure of cooperatives can provide benefits for its members and is, in principal, democratically-controlled, forms of exploitation persist.

The growth in cooperatives coincided with two favourable conditions. First, was the commodity price boom which lasted from 2003-2013. Second, was the election of Evo Morales and the MAS. Mining cooperatives were a powerful social force leading up to, and in support of, the election of Evo Morales and the MAS. Many members of the National Federation of Mining Cooperatives (*Federación Nacional de Cooperativas Mineras, Fencomin*) were absorbed by the state, such as the first Minister of Mining appointed by the MAS, Walter Villarroel, who was previously the president of Fencomin (Francescone and Díaz, 2013). As a result, support for cooperatives has expanded, in terms of both mining contracts and tax policy. Between 2008 and 2012, more than half of all mining contracts were distributed to cooperatives, representing nearly half the total acreage denoted

for such concessions, though the private sector still controls roughly 70% of total mineral extraction (Francescone and Díaz, 2013; Fundación Unir Bolivia, 2014). These cooperatives primarily extract gold, which represents around 70% of their total mining revenue. Cooperatives are exempt from taxes and pay just 2.5% in royalties for the gold they extract (and claim formally)<sup>8</sup> (Fundación Jubileo, 2018a). These favourable conditions combined with lenient social and environmental regulations (i.e. lack of enforcement of labour standards, environmental impact assessments) have resulted in a nearly uncontrollable explosion of mining cooperatives across the country.

Despite the increase in numbers, cooperative membership remains exclusive. According to cooperative miners in Palca, formal membership as an «associate» (*socio*) requires an initial investment of anywhere between USD \$8000 to USD \$20,000. In many cases, associates will contract young men and rural youth to work as «representatives» (*representante*). Representatives often undertake the worst, most laborious, and dangerous tasks —and do not receive employment benefits or security. They are the precarious, informal workers who sacrifice their time, health and safety in order try to become an associate (personal communication, August 2018). The ratio of associates to representatives (or precarious labourers) can vary, and often does, according to the size of the cooperative. In Cerro Rico, it has been reported that roughly 80% of the labour force —representing 18,000 people— are precarious, informal and without benefits, working under and directly for associates who appropriate the vast majority of the extractivist rents in a similar, exploitative manner to that of a private enterprise (Francescone and Díaz, 2013). These hierarchical

<sup>8</sup> Discussion with key informants revealed that it is common practice to not claim all minerals extracted.

relations of production (or extraction) run counter to the cooperative logic which is based on eliminating such forms of exploitation.

While there are many mining cooperatives that consist of hundreds or even thousands of associates and are highly mechanized; many small-scale, artisanal mining cooperatives have emerged consisting of 20 or 30 associates. An artisanal mining cooperative near Palca, for example, consists of 28 associates and use only basic tools and explosives to mine gold (personal communication, August 2018). These miners consider themselves as *agro-mineros* (agro-miners), alternating every 30 days between the mine and the farm. Many are also engaged in various forms of pluriactivity —working a variety of seasonal and on-demand jobs from a brick-layer to a truck and taxi driver (personal communication, August 2018). Pluriactivity has become the new normal in many areas —both rural and urban— as many cannot survive with only one job, forming part of an emerging precarious class moving between the rural and urban and across sectors, often weakening class consciousness (see Urioste, 2017). For *agro-mineros* in Palca, work conditions are risky and harsh, but mining remains the most lucrative opportunity to support their families. Many have developed chronic illnesses such as rheumatism, pneumonia, tuberculosis, among others; while one associate lost his brother to an accident in the mine —a tragic incident which unfortunately is not uncommon (personal communication, August 2018). Mercury is used in the extraction process of gold mining, putting at risk not only the miners' health but also the natural environment as it is common practice to use and dispose of the mercury in rivers flowing from Mount Illimani. Recognized as one of the most toxic metals for both human health and the environment, a recent study by the Ministry of Environment and Water reveals that

mercury discharge in Bolivia amounts to an average of 133.1 tons per year with gold mining responsible for nearly 50% of total contamination. This total represents, just under 7% of total mercury contamination on the planet (MRE and MMAyA, 2015).

Less than two decades ago, gold mining in the region was nearly non-existent. According to one local peasant and political leader, «only the Mayor (of Palca) was mining. Now many people, including foreigners, have come to the region to mine gold, both informally and formally. Agriculture has been abandoned and the state does not enter the area—there is no control» (personal communication, 28 August 2018). Despite promises of an «agrarian revolution» and policies and programmes designed under the framework of food sovereignty, small farmers struggle to subsist. Average farm size is 1.11 hectares and most farmers produce a variety of crops including maize, potato, lettuce, green beans, peaches, tomato, and onion (INE, 2013). Many families self-identify as peasants, yet the rural youth are increasingly seeking employment in the cities and/or the mines, becoming *agro-mineros*. While contamination has become an important issue in some villages, most farmers struggle with the lack of irrigation and market access. Water streams down from Illimani's glaciers, yet infrastructure is lacking to make use of the resource. Many fear that the rivers are becoming contaminated, pointing to the need for studies to properly measure levels of mercury and other contaminants in the water and crops.

Despite government programmes such as «Mi Agua» (My Water) which is designed to provide farmers with irrigation, many farmers in Palca have been neglected. Under the government's food sovereignty programmes, improved seeds have been distributed to some villages, yet

many farmers expressed their discontent with the lack of capacity building and continuity with such programmes (personal communication, November 2017; August 2018). Improved, or hybrid seeds, are not native to the region and often require new agro-chemical inputs. The absence of technical assistance, training and other extension services have resulted in many beneficiaries using the improved seeds for one harvest only and then going back to sowing their own native seeds (personal communication, 2018). Further, the lack of participatory methods in the design and implementation of the programmes in order to facilitate peoples' right to define and control their own food systems - including appropriate technologies in accordance with their productive systems —has resulted in programme failure and a lack of continuity. The top-down, technocratic approach to food sovereignty in Bolivia is more so aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and working towards a system of capital-intensive agricultural modernization, rather than towards a process of food system democratization.

Complicating the situation even more for small farmers is their means of market access. Most farmers in Palca sell their produce at the Mercado Rodriguez in La Paz. However, they do not have formal permission to sell at this market or space to sell their products in the city due to legal restrictions and forms of monopoly control over city markets. This forces farmers to arrive and sell at the market between 3am-7am during the week. Some send their harvest with intermediaries, while others travel by bus in the middle of the night. Buyers and prices are never guaranteed and farmers are usually forced to accept an unfair low price, especially as it approaches 7am and they are forced to leave the market space before authorities or permit holder arrive (personal communication, November

2017). They feel subordinated and under-appreciated despite providing the city with an important supply of locally-produced food. Evidently, the rural youth do not aspire to this type precarious rural livelihood.

It is precisely in places like Palca where the dynamics of food sovereignty and neo-extractivism converge and contradict. The proliferation of cooperative gold mining (not to mention illegal artisanal mining) is both facilitated and supported by the state as a means to harness political support and legitimacy among a growing and socially mobilized sector. Since mining cooperatives pay a mere 2.5% in royalty fees, their contribution to state revenues is negligible. Yet, as extractivist frontiers expand and more of the rural youth are absorbed into this «mode of extraction», their economic interests become aligned with the extractivist agenda, while the social and ecological base of the countryside is increasingly eroded. For the rural youth, becoming an associate in a mining cooperative represents a prosperous future, while the drudgery of farming is often perceived as backward and static in the current context. This is not due to their relationship to the land or their identities, but rather the current conditions of farming and the lack of support and services for small-scale farmers. The «mode of extraction» in Palca is altering the class structure and the organization of labour in ways which place *agro-mineros* in contradictory positions between extractivism and food sovereignty ideals. In many ways, these dynamics parallel the agro-extractivist dynamics in the soybean sector in Santa Cruz where «the semiproletarian workforce has interests as both landowners and wage labourers and is thus less likely to organize as a class for itself» (B. M. McKay, 2018d:417). *Agro-mineros* often maintain control over a small parcel of land, while their livelihoods depend on pluriactivity, including mineral extraction. But these *agro-mineros* do

not abandon their peasant identities and may occupy what Peluso refers to as new «smallholder slots», «produced or reproduced when new forms of property or land use emerge in the wake of new social formations on the land or as competing capitalisms confront one another in the same spaces» (2017:840). Yet, as resource frontiers produce new smallholder frontiers and potentially attract and transform smallholders—in this case smallholder miners—politics can become blurred, contradictory or conflicting. With one foot in the mine and the other on the farm, contradictions abound in terms of one's economic and political interests. Furthermore, the internal hierarchies within mining cooperatives which are supposedly democratic and horizontally managed further exacerbate such contradictions. *Agro-mineros* are caught between struggling to improve their situation within the cooperative structure, struggling to gain access to more mining contracts and concessions, to struggling for access to land, irrigation, markets and assistance for farmers.

While these dynamics in Palca may be local, they are directly connected to Bolivia's continued dependence on a neo-extractivist development model linked and contingent on international commodity prices. The lack of support for farming livelihoods combined with the favourable conditions for natural resource extraction have both «pushed» and «pulled» people into new modes of extraction. The next section sheds some light on how these dynamics are related to processes of globalization and Bolivia's integration into global circuits of production and consumption.

## Globalization and its discontents

In the context of an increasingly globalized world whereby «multiple transnational corporations, organizations and networks now act beyond the established territorial boundaries, often with little dependence on or accountability to any single nation state» (Hosseini and Gills, 2018:139), challenges abound for food sovereignty construction. These challenges have only been intensified by the convergence of several factors in the global political economy: a commodity prices boom from 2003-2013; the rapid pace of urbanization and industrialization of emerging economies, in particular China and India, but also Brazil and Argentina, as new global sources of production and consumption for commodities (Cousins, Borras, Sauer, and Ye, 2018; B. M. McKay, Hall, and Liu, 2016); the growing financialization of food and agriculture which has increased food price volatility, uncertainty and has created new kinds of «distancing» between production, distribution and consumption which comes in direct conflict with food sovereignty ideals (Clapp, 2014; Clapp and Isakson, 2018); and finally the explosion of flex crop monocultures which can be used in multiple and flexible ways as food, feed, fuel or industrial material. Together, these dynamics have contributed to the global rush for resources characterized by an unprecedented rate of land deals around the world (Borras, Hall, Scoones, White, and Wolford, 2011) the convergence of global crises in food, energy, finance, and the environment has driven a dramatic revaluation of land ownership. Powerful transnational and national economic actors from corporations to national governments and private equity funds have searched for empty land often in distant countries that can serve as sites for fuel and food production in the event of future price spikes». The-

se global changes present both significant challenges to food sovereignty construction and opportunities for neo-extractivist expansion. The growth and concentration of multinationals such as the Big Six and the ABCD's and their ability to shape and influence discourses and knowledge production around industrial capitalist agriculture as the only way to feed the world remain key challenges for food system democratization.

most nation-states have experienced a triple «squeeze» by means of globalization, decentralization, and the privatization of their functions since the neoliberal era, the multiple crises of the contemporary period are «likely to re-emphasize, not devalue, the role played by nation-states and state authorities in the politics of agrarian transformation» (Borras, 2009:10). This has indeed been the case with the new and diverse forms of «populism» emerging around the world—from Trump to Sanders, Maduro to Morales, Modi to Erdogan—spanning the political spectrum from left to right, authoritarian to progressive or socialist (Scoones *et al.*, 2018). The highly controversial decision by the MAS to run for fourth consecutive presidential term and ignore the results of a national referendum held in 2016 points to signs of an emerging kind of authoritarian populism in Bolivia (McKay and Colque, forthcoming). These new forms of nationalist-populism emerging around the world today must be understood in relation to processes of neoliberal globalization.

As Gills (2000:3) put it nearly 20 years ago, «the key political tension in the coming era will be between the forces of neoliberal economic globalization, seeking to expand the freedom of capital, and the forces of social resistance, seeking to preserve and to redefine community and solidarity». In many ways, the dynamics of food sovereignty and neo-extractivism represent this tension. The food sovereignty movement was borne out of

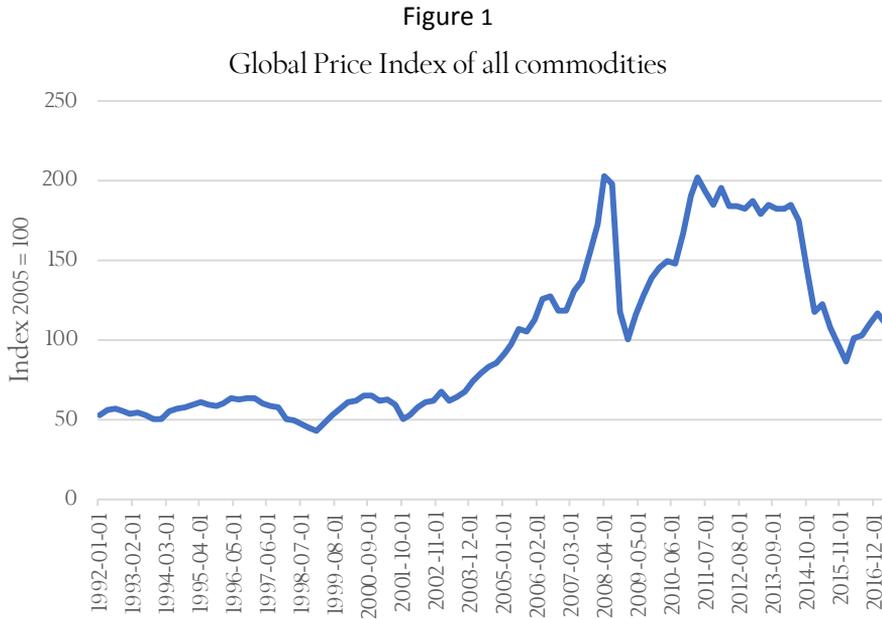
response to the corporate assault on agriculture legitimated and institutionalized under the guise of trade agreements such as the WTO's AoA. From the infamous «Battle in Seattle» to today, the food sovereignty movement, led by La Via Campesina, has been central in protesting against these agreements and ultimately helping to halt the WTO's Doha Round of trade negotiations which have been at a standstill since 2001 (see Bello, 2009:132). Despite such struggles, the corporate-controlled food system continues to «squeeze» the peasantry and small-scale capitalist farmers, eroding opportunities for food sovereignty. As Cristóbal Kay puts it «peasants get squeezed by neoliberal policies as, on the one hand, they cannot compete with the cheap food imports (especially if free trade agreements are implemented) and, on the other hand, do not benefit from the new export opportunities due to lack of capital, technical know-how, marketing skills, lack of economies of scale, and so on» (Kay, 2006:464) to learn from their strengths as well as their weaknesses. For this purpose the concepts of marginality, social exclusion, new rurality and rural livelihoods, as well as the ethnic and gender dimensions of poverty, are examined. The debate on the peasantization (capitalization. The «squeeze» on smallholders and the peasantry has not only led to processes of social differentiation in countryside, but also widespread rural-urban migration throughout many parts of the world. In Bolivia, this squeeze is brought on by (agro)extractivist expansion and is pushing the rural youth to migrate to urban centers or engage in gold mining —both of which undermine farming futures and food sovereignty construction.

From Santa Cruz to La Paz, small-scale family farmers are increasingly threatened by the expansion of (agro)extractive frontiers. In the case of the lowlands in Santa Cruz, it is agrarian extractivism which both

excludes and adversely incorporates smallholders; while in La Paz it is the mining cooperative's «mode of extraction». In both cases, the convergences and contradictions of a model are exposed. Smallholders are promised an «agrarian revolution» with redistributive reforms and food sovereignty alternatives yet these programmes have been nearly absent, inadequate, and at best represent a vision completely different from that put forward by La Via Campesina. Yet for the Bolivian state, extractivism remains the only means to achieve these socially-inclusive and sustainable objectives. As Bolivia's Vice President Garcia Linera puts it, «(extractivism is) the only technical means (we have) to distribute the material wealth...and to allow us to have the material, technical and cognitive conditions to transform its technical and productive base...[it] is not a goal in itself, but can be the starting point for overcoming extractivism itself» (Garcia Linera, 2012:34). In a more recent event hosted by the United Nations Development Programme, Garcia Linera announced that Bolivia will continue the model of «extractivismo» for decades to come (Corz, 2016). Where, on the state's agenda, does this put concepts such as food sovereignty, buen vivir, and the rights of mother nature? Is it realistic pursue a model of extractivism to overcome extractivism itself?

A continued reliance on extractivism requires integrating into global circuits of production, distribution and consumption that are concentrated around (agro)extractive commodities, exacerbating a dependence on raw material exports. As a result, state revenues and expenditures become increasingly contingent on volatile commodity markets. As commodity prices fall, state revenues follow suit, threatening the state's ability to provide cash transfer programmes for the poor and marginalized. The following figure shows the commodities boom starting in 2003, the crash

during the financial crisis in 2007/08, and the collapse in 2014 which, according to the José Antonio Ocampo, «may be the beginning of a long period of weak commodity prices» (Ocampo, 2017:51).



Source: (IMF, 2018)

International commodity prices have had a direct impact on Bolivia's budget and expenditures. The fiscal capacity of the state is highly dependent on extractivist rents, with the hydrocarbon sector representing 80%, the mining sector 3% and the rest of the economy 17% of total fiscal revenues in 2017 (Fundación Jubileo, 2018b:5).<sup>9</sup> From 2014 to 2016, as commodity

<sup>9</sup> Note Bolivia's fiscal revenues have long been dependent on the hydrocarbon sector, preceding the Morales administration. In 2000, hydrocarbons represented 83% of fiscal revenues; in 2006, 55% and in 2016/17 back to 80% (Fundación Jubileo, 2018b).

prices collapsed, extractivist rents appropriated by the state from the hydrocarbon sector fell from USD \$3.5 billion to USD \$1.7 billion, representing a nearly 50% decrease in just two years (Fundación Jubileo, 2016). Social programmes such as «Renta Dignidad», which transfers between USD \$36-43/month to low-income residents aged 60 and over, are funded directly from hydrocarbon rents, putting into question the programme's continuity if prices continue to fall. However, it appears as though the state's strategy to deal with falling commodity prices is to expand (agro)extractivist frontiers. In 2014, in a meeting with Julio Roda, President of the Agricultural Chamber of the East (*Cámara Agropecuaria del Oriente*, CAO) and Reuben Costas, leader of the opposition, the MAS announced plans to expand the agricultural frontier by 1 million hectares per year for the next 10 years in order to «guarantee food sovereignty» (Ministerio de Comunicación, 2014; Vicepresidente, 2012). This was followed by the passing of Decree 2366 in 2015, which opened up 24 million hectares of land for hydrocarbon extraction, encroaching into, and opening up, 11 formerly protected areas (Campanini, 2015). As modes of extraction expand into new frontiers, existing social and environmental dynamics are disrupted, often altering relations of production, property and power which can lead to resource-based conflicts. The infamous TIPNIS case is but one example, but these conflicts remain widespread across the country (EJ Atlas, 2018; Fundación Tierra, 2018).

What the Bolivian case demonstrates is that as extractive economies are integrated into global circuits of production, distribution, and consumption, the fiscal capacity of the state is increasingly dependent on volatile commodity markets which are beyond its control. In order to maintain fiscal revenues in times of stagnant commodity prices, new frontiers are opened up, disrupting local economies and ecologies. A continued

reliance on extractivism, without substantial advances towards industrialization or economic diversification, puts into question how and whether extractivism can be used as a means to overcome extractivism itself, as per the argument put forth by Vice President Garcia Linera.

## Conclusion

Food sovereignty and neo-extractivism represent more than an alternative development model; they are two sides of the state's strategy to facilitate capital accumulation while maintaining political legitimacy. Rather than constructing food sovereignty alternatives through democratization, participatory decision-making, and building robust and diversified local systems of food production, distribution and consumption, the Bolivian model is focused on cash crops for export —characterized as agrarian extractivism. As the economy becomes more and more integrated into, and dependent on, global markets and volatile commodity prices, it is increasingly vulnerable to external shocks. The over-reliance of fiscal revenues on extractivist rents combined with a lack of economic diversification and industrialization to capture value-added surpluses contributes to this fragility. The commodities boom and the rise of China both in the global political economy and with regards to its growing relationship with Latin America has only exacerbated this (re)-primarization of Latin American economies (Ocampo, 2017).

This paper has attempted to engage with both CDS and CGS to analyze and interrogate this post-neoliberal model of development in Bolivia. More than engaging with the debates around food sovereignty and

neo-extractivism in theory, this paper provides empirical insights into how these dynamics are playing out on the ground, in the municipality of Palca. Extractivism is having both a push and a pull effect on rural livelihoods and food sovereignty construction. On the one hand, peasants and smallholders are being pushed, by means of both (agro)extractivist expansion and natural resource contamination. On the other hand, the rural youth are being pulled into mining as a more lucrative form of livelihood, despite exploitative and dangerous working conditions. The emergence of agro-mineros in the highlands and semi-proletarian rentiers in the lowlands have placed the rural poor in contradictory class positions where they are adversely incorporated into new modes of extraction which are both divorcing them from working the land and eroding their identity as peasants. Such contradictory class positions may explain why there has been a lack of overt, organized forms of resistance in these areas.

While food sovereignty and neo-extractivism have thus far been able to co-exist in policy and discourse, limits and contradictions are emerging in practice. Smallholders and ecosystems are increasingly threatened by (agro)extractivist expansion. Farming futures are disappearing. Neo-extractivism, coupled with social and eco-justice discourses, cannot overcome «extractivism» if it reproduces and intensifies similar «modes of extraction» which have plagued Latin America's development for decades and even centuries. Engaging with, and fusing, CDS and CGS can help us understand these dynamics in their historical and global contexts and reveal the limits and possibilities of alternatives such as the post-neoliberal development model.

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