

Resources, regulation and the state: Struggles over gas extraction and passive revolution in Evo Morales's Bolivia



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ABSTRACT

The indigenous-influenced policies of Evo Morales's Bolivia represent arguably the most important attempt to improve the socioenvironmental implications of resource extraction in recent years, reasserting the role of the state and social movements against 'corporate-led governance'. In this paper, through combining the regulation approach with neo-Gramscian state theory, I carry out a conceptually informed analysis of struggles over hydrocarbon governance in Bolivia, in order to shed light on the reasons why such an ambitious political project has largely failed to realise its transformative potential. I make two interrelated arguments. First, initial, important advances in the governance of resources in Bolivia were later partially reversed, due to shifting power relations between social movements, the hydrocarbon industry, and the state. This points to the need of understanding resource governance and its changes as reflecting or 'condensing' shifting power relationships among social forces. Second, the coming to power of Evo Morales resulted in a 'passive-revolutionary' process whereby an initial radical break with the neoliberal order was followed by a gradual adaptation to pre-existing political economic relations and arrangements. Most notably, plans to reduce the country's dependency on gas exports as well as to challenge the transnational domination of the hydrocarbon sector were abandoned, generating an increasingly explicit incompatibility with indigenous demands. I conclude that neo-Gramscian theory offers important insights that enable us to advance our conceptualisation of the state in resource governance research and in political ecology more generally.

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1. Introduction

Extractive industries are typically associated with negative developmental implications and socio-environmental impacts, particularly at local scales (Bebbington & Bury, 2013). Arguably the most important attempts to improve the socio-environmental outcomes of resource extraction have come, in recent years, from the indigenous-influenced policies of progressive Latin American governments (de Freitas, Marston, & Bakker, 2015).

The government of Evo Morales and the MAS (Movement towards Socialism) party in *Gobierno de Bolivia* (2006-present), particularly, placed indigenous and environmental concerns at the centre of its political agenda, as part of ambitious plans for shifting the country's development model away from primary export-dependency and promoting less harmful society-nature

relationships, informed by indigenous visions and practices. A decade on, however—despite important advances—the Morales administration has not realised its transformative potential in this sense: it has reinforced the extractive character of Bolivian development, without substantially improving its socio-environmental implications (e.g., Perreault, 2013).

Why has such an ambitious political project failed to improve the outcomes of resource extraction? Significant scholarly attention has been paid to processes associated with the 'left turn' in Latin America; yet the debate around the reasons why progressive change has been limited remains open. As regards Bolivia, critics have emphasised, in various degrees, 'structural' constraints to change (Kohl & Farthing, 2012); the legacies of neoliberalism (Kaup, 2013); political limitations inherent to the MAS's political project (Webber, 2011); and the role of conservative social forces in limiting the extent of change (Kaup, 2014). Other contributions, inspired by Gramscian theory, have focused more specifically on the dialectics of progressive change and successive restoration which characterised the trajectory of leftist experiments the region

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(Hesketh & Morton, 2014; Modonesi, 2013; Webber, 2015)—though they have not explicitly related such a dialectics to the governance of extraction.

In order to add to these debates, I carry out a conceptually informed analysis of struggles over hydrocarbon governance in Bolivia, with two objectives: 1) to explore how the governance of extraction changed in relation to broader shifts in the state and society associated with the left turn; and 2) to contribute to explaining why and how progressive changes in the governance of resource extraction have been limited, despite the potentially radical character of the political project that accompanied the election of Evo Morales. This analysis will provide an entry point into broader theoretical discussions regarding the relationship between resource regulation, social struggles and the state.

I make two interrelated arguments. First, initial, important changes in the governance of resources in Bolivia—aimed at improving the socio-environmental outcomes of extraction—were followed by partial reversals, related to shifting power relations between, *inter alia*, social movements, the hydrocarbon industry, and the state. This points to the need of seeing changes in governance—and in the state more generally—as the ‘condensation’ of shifting power relationships among social forces (Poulantzas, 2000) as well as of struggles over alternative socio-natural configurations. Second, the trajectory of the Morales government reflected a ‘passive-revolutionary’ process, whereby an initial radical break with the neoliberal order was followed by a gradual adaptation of its agenda to pre-existing political economic arrangements. This, I argue, resulted in the regularisation of resource-based accumulation, though in ways that significantly differ from neoliberalisation.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I lay out the conceptual framework for the analysis. I extend the regulationist approach to include insights from strategic-relational state theory, in order to account for resource governance processes not directly related to neoliberalism. I also introduce Gramsci’s notion of ‘passive revolution’, as a conceptual framework for explaining the trajectory of transformation and partial restoration characterising political change in contemporary Latin America. In section 3, I analyse the ways in which recent changes in the governance of gas extraction in Bolivia were related to broader shifts in relationships between state and society, resulting in the political empowerment and successive demobilisation of the indigenous movement. In section 4, I contribute to explaining why progressive changes were limited, by exploring the ways that—despite an initial partial rupture with transnational hydrocarbon firms and the national elites—the Morales government resolved conflicts with ‘extractivist’ social forces and shifted its attitude towards popular sectors in ways that marginalised indigenous demands. In section 5, before concluding, I discuss the conceptual implications of these processes for thinking about regulation and the state in political ecology.

The empirical arguments presented in this paper are based on the analysis of both secondary and primary sources. The former include legal and policy documents produced by Bolivian institutions between 2000 and 2015, as well as social organisations’ position statements and media articles from the same period. Primary sources are drawn from a 12-month period of fieldwork conducted by the author in Bolivia between 2013 and 2014.¹ The latter included 33 semi-structured interviews with hydrocarbon

company representatives (6); state authorities at local, regional (*departamento*) and national level (8); experts of hydrocarbon and indigenous issues, including NGO representatives, intellectuals and former government members (17); and members of social and indigenous organisations (2). Interview questions centred on issues related to the governance of oil and gas extraction, the political economy of hydrocarbons in Bolivia, and broader political processes in the country. I also draw on data from participation in indigenous organisations’ meetings (2) and on focus groups (3) exploring indigenous community members’ and leaders’ perceptions of the socio-environmental impacts of oil and gas activities as well as the role of firms, the state and indigenous movements in the governance of extraction.

2. Governance, regulation and neo-Gramscian state theory

Geographers have drawn on neo-Marxist theory, particularly the ‘regulation approach’ (Jessop & Sum, 2006), in order to understand the ways in which institutional configurations for governing resources are remade as a response to threats to accumulation arising from socio-environmental conflicts, crises and contradictions (Bridge & Perreault, 2009). The main research focus of the regulation approach is on how, through institutional re-alignments, accumulation is stabilised or ‘regularised’ (Huber, 2013; Jessop & Sum, 2006).

This approach to governance is closely associated with notion of the ‘mode of regulation’ (Bridge, 2000), defined as “an ensemble of organisational forms, networks, and institutions, rules, norms and patterns of conduct” through which a ‘regime of accumulation’ is reproduced (Peck, 2009, p. 640). The regularisation of resource extraction has been a central analytical focus of geographers (Bridge & Perreault, 2009). They mobilised this framework to study not only how accumulation in extractive sectors is regularised, but also what effect these regularisation efforts have on populations and environments in extraction areas (Himley, 2013; Horowitz, 2015).

Applying this approach to the Bolivian context, however, presents us with a problem. The framework of governance has been mobilised primarily in relation to neoliberalisation processes. These entailed a purported shift ‘from government to governance’; that is, a shift away from national state-centric forms of regulation, typical of Fordism, towards a greater regulatory role of corporate actors, multi-lateral institutions and non-governmental organisations, at supra- and sub-national scales (Bridge, 2000; Himley, 2013). In an effort to capture processes associated with neoliberalism, geographers have explicitly distanced themselves from what they perceived as the excessive national state-centrism of early regulation theory (Bridge & McManus, 2000). Yet, political transformations such as those associated with the Latin American ‘left turn’ signal that resource governance may also change in ways that increase the significance of the state and of social processes taking place at the national scale (Perreault, 2008; de Freitas et al., 2015).²

How are we to capture changes in governance that do not follow a pattern of neoliberalisation, but rather complicate it? How, in other words, can we analyse changes in the mode of regulation related to broader political shifts? I suggest that, in order to address these questions, the regulation approach should be combined with a conceptualisation of the state; and more precisely, following the regulation theorists’ own trajectory, that it should be

¹ Part of the data was gathered through a collective research project coordinated by Adriana Soto and Jannette Giné of the Centre for Applied Studies on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CEADESC), in which I participated as a researcher (Soto et al., 2013). Data analysis and interpretation for this paper are my sole responsibility.

² These processes are sometimes referred to by commentators and state officials as ‘post-neoliberal’. In recent years, there have been important debates in geography and political ecology around the concept of ‘post-neoliberalism’ and its limits (Yates & Bakker, 2014; de Freitas et al., 2015). Contributing to these debates is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper.

complemented with insights from neo-Gramscian state theory (Jessop, 1990, 2008).

2.1. Resource governance beyond neoliberalisation

Neo-Gramscian theory offers a conceptualisation of the state that productively extends the regulationist focus on the institutional embeddedness of the economy (Jessop & Sum, 2006), while at the same time being attuned to political ecology's concern with how nature is mobilised—materially and ideologically—in struggles over 'hegemony' (Ekers, Loftus, & Mann, 2009).

A neo-Gramscian approach to the state—more specifically, Jessop's (1990, 2008) 'strategic-relational approach'—allows us to analyse changes in governance as the product of shifting correlations of forces, crystallised in the institutional ensemble of the mode of regulation and of the state itself. Regulation theorists see the state both as a component of the 'mode of regulation' and as the broader terrain of struggle that determines its form and functioning (Boyer, 1990, p. 41; Jessop & Sum, 2006, p. 90). The state, for regulationists, institutionalises and confines class and other social struggles in ways that guarantee continued accumulation (Jessop, 1990, p. 309).³

This view of the state is influenced by Poulantzas's argument that state is a 'social relation'. The capitalist state, he writes (Poulantzas, 2000, pp. 128–129 original emphasis), should be regarded as "a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions". Similarly, the mode of regulation—and hence governance—crystallises or 'condenses' changing relationships of power among social forces.

In spite of its relational character, however, the state does not passively reflect the social power balance and changes therein, but also shapes and modifies this balance. Poulantzas explains this by arguing that the state apparatus contains an ingrained, 'structural selectivity', which modifies the balance of class forces in ways that stop subaltern groups from threatening the interests of capital (Jessop, 1982, p. 140). As Jessop (1982, pp. 351–352) is right to point out, however, the state's privileging of capitalist interests over those of other classes and fractions cannot be taken for granted: it does not automatically emerge from the form of the state, but depends on contingent conditions open to being challenged (Jessop, 1990, p. 256). He argues therefore that we should talk about 'strategic selectivities' rather than structural ones, because, while the state's form and *modus operandi* make the pursuit of certain social and class projects more difficult than others, these are, at least in principle, open to being modified through social and political struggle (Jessop, 1990, p. 261).

2.2. Passive revolution and transformism

The trajectory of the contemporary Latin American left has been characterised by an initial radical break with neoliberal rule, followed by a partial restoration of pre-existing conditions. For the purposes of this paper, I suggest to adopt the notion of 'passive revolution' in order to capture this dialectics of transformation and restoration. The notion of passive revolution was first introduced by Gramsci in the context of his discussion of the Italian unification process (the '*Risorgimento*'); as he noted, however (2000, pp. 263–264), this thesis has broader scope for the "interpretation of ...

³ This outcome—a guarantee of continued accumulation—cannot, of course, be taken for granted: the form the mode of regulation takes, and its successful 'coupling' with an accumulation regime, is itself the contingent product of political and social struggles.

every epoch characterised by complex historical upheavals". Passive revolution describes historico-political processes in which social relations are profoundly reorganised, yet this is done in ways that reproduce existing forms of political domination while containing popular initiatives from below (Hesketh, 2010, p. 384; Jessop, 1990, p. 213).

The institutionalisation of a 'counter-hegemonic' project is a key defining moment in this sense. As Jessop (Jessop, 1990, p. 213 original emphasis) points out, "for Gramsci the crucial element in 'passive revolutions' is the *statization* of reorganization or restructuring". In the process of institutionalisation of demands for social change, a passive revolution ends up absorbing, diffusing or destroying popular discontent, thereby restoring or expanding existing capitalist relations (Hesketh & Morton, 2014, p. 150). This is why Gramsci also referred to this process as a '*progressive restoration*', as it expresses "the fact that 'progress' would happen as a reaction of the dominant classes to the ... subversivism of popular masses with 'restorations' which adopt to some extent popular demands" (cit. in Voza, 2004, p. 190, my translation).

Passive revolution is typically associated with what Gramsci (2000, p. 250) dubs 'transformism' (*trasformismo*), defined as the "gradual but continuous absorption [into the power bloc] of the active elements produced by allied groups—and even those who came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile". Through transformism, in other words, the ruling class or fraction aims at "weakening or paralysing one's opponent or opponents by taking over their leaders" (Gramsci, 2000, p. 261), overtly or covertly. This relates to the problem of incomplete or 'limited' hegemony (Jessop, 1990, pp. 211–213). While complete, '*expansive*' hegemony ideally mobilises the active consent of all social forces under the moral and intellectual 'leadership' (*direzione*) of a dominant class or fraction, *limited* hegemony can only advance the interests of some subaltern groups (via *ad hoc* compromises and concessions) and needs to co-opt, marginalise or repress others. Particularly targeted by repression are those forces which may threaten the accumulation process—the economic base of hegemony—as well as popular-democratic movements that undermine the ideological bases of the dominant project.

The framework of passive revolution, in sum, helps us to better account for the seemingly paradoxical process whereby an ostensibly progressive project may end up turning against social groups struggling for emancipatory socio-ecological transformation. It also sheds light how and why 'counter-hegemonic' projects can be demobilised through the selective institutionalisation of popular demands in a 'progressive restoration'. This type of trajectory characterised the relationship between the Bolivian state and indigenous popular struggles in recent years; and it is to these struggles that I now turn.

3. Indigenous struggles over gas extraction

In this section, I describe the main changes in the governance of hydrocarbon extraction in Bolivia and argue that they reflected shifts in the balance of power among competing social actors and political forces, mediated by the state. First, the indigenous movement⁴ obtained the recognition of a set of principles for the

⁴ Though currently over 40% of Bolivia's population self-identify as culturally or ethnically 'indigenous' (Schavelzon, 2014), in this paper I use the expression 'indigenous movement' to refer specifically to the groups and organisations that use the labels '*indigena*' and '*originario*' in explicitly political terms, and that prefer it over alternative referents such as '*campesino*' or 'rural worker'. These are, namely, the lowland organisations affiliated with the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB) and the highland groups pertaining to the National Council of *Allyus* and *Markas* of the *Qullasuyu* (CONAMAQ).

protection of indigenous rights and territories in a conjuncture of crisis of neoliberal hegemony and of popular empowerment. Second, conversely, the limited implementation and partial reversal of these measures in the following years corresponded with the demobilisation of the indigenous movement.

3.1. Indigenous rights recognition

Since the 1990s, natural gas has been the most important commodity exported by Bolivia, and it has been at the centre of political disputes over nationalisation and rent distribution (Kaup, 2013; Perreault, 2006). Gas has also been a main focus of struggles by indigenous groups for improving the outcomes of extraction at the local scale (Anthias, 2012; Hindery, 2013). Struggles over gas have been pivotal to placing indigenous and environmental rights in the context of resource extraction at the centre of the Morales government's plans (Radhuber, 2012).

The inclusion in the 2005 Hydrocarbon Law (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2005a) of principles for the protection of indigenous territorial rights was the first meaningful attempt to improve the socio-environmental outcomes of oil and gas extraction in Bolivia. The Hydrocarbon Law was approved in May 2005, a few months before the election of Evo Morales and the 'Movement towards Socialism' (MAS) party in government, at the height of a crisis of political legitimacy and stability precipitated by 'indigenous popular' opposition against the neoliberal policies of the *mestizo* ruling classes then in power (Postero, 2010). Such an indigenous popular 'counter-hegemony' made it possible to overcome some of the 'selectivities' that had traditionally kept a significant portion of Bolivia's indigenous population out of state power.

The recognition of indigenous rights began in Bolivia in the 1980s and 1990s, within a neoliberal multicultural agenda (Anthias & Radcliffe, 2015; Postero, 2006). However, the integration of such rights into the legal framework for hydrocarbon extraction was the result of an important shift in the social balance of power in Bolivia, whereby indigenous popular struggles forced neoliberal elites and transnational capital on the defensive. Hydrocarbon governance was a central focus of political dispute. Natural gas was perceived as a symbol of the dispossession of Bolivia's poor majority (Perreault, 2006), carried out by foreign interests with the help of national elites. Ousting neoliberalism, therefore, came to be identified with recovering gas for the Bolivian people. During the 2003 'gas war', a broad coalition of popular forces united around what came to be known as the 'October Agenda', which summarised the demands of the diverse anti-neoliberal movements with the slogan '*gas, constituyente, renuncia*'—gas nationalisation, Constitutional process, and resignation of then president Sánchez de Lozada (the main architect and executor of Bolivia's neoliberalisation plans).

Such a shift in the power balance was partly the result of increased organisational and mobilisation capacity of the

indigenous bloc. The 2000–2005 cycle of struggle was a period of unprecedented empowerment for the indigenous movement. The process of organisation of the Bolivian indigenous movement began in the late 1970s (García-Linera, Chávez-León, & Costas-Monje, 2010). Indigenous groups in the Bolivian lowlands⁵ initially reacted to the threats posed to their territories and livelihood by agribusiness, timber extraction and, increasingly, oil and gas projects (Anthias, 2012). These groups included the Guaraní as well as other indigenous peoples of the Chaco and Amazon that, in 1982, conformed the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB, originally called *Central Indígena del Oriente Boliviano*) (García-Linera et al., 2010, p. 217). In line with other indigenous movements in Latin America and elsewhere, the demands of the Guaraní and other groups in Bolivia centred on issues of 'territoriality' and 'self-government' (Anthias, 2012; Gustafson, 2009). Over the following decades, while direct confrontation with hydrocarbon and other companies remained one of the key strategies, indigenous struggles in the lowlands also increasingly addressed the state and put forward broader demands (Gustafson, 2009; Hindery, 2013).

The organisational process begun in the lowland constituted the first step towards the transformation of the indigenous movement into a counter-hegemonic political actor (cf. Karriem, 2009), which was key to altering the balance of power in the country *vis-à-vis* neoliberal elites. The most visible manifestation of this movement, since 1990, was the periodical organisation of Indigenous Marches (Paz, 2012). In 2002 march, the main indigenous (*originario*) organisation of the Bolivian highlands, CONAMAQ (National Council of *Allyus* and *Markas* of the *Qullasuyu*) converged with lowland groups in reclaiming indigenous self-determination, demanding a new Constitution capable of fully recognising indigenous identity, territorial autonomy and collective rights. In August 2004, the two national indigenous organisations—CIDOB and CONAMAQ—called a historical meeting with representatives of the campesino movement, and formed the indigenous–campesino 'Unity Pact' (*Pacto de Unidad*). For the first time, indigenous organisations allied with the country's rural workers' unions into a common political front (Garcés, 2010). During parliamentary debates around the Hydrocarbon Law in 2004–05, the Unity Pact successfully pressured for the inclusion of demands around indigenous territorial rights in the new Law's text (Ecoportal, 2005).

3.2. Limited implementation and reversal

The inclusion in the Hydrocarbon Law of principles demanded by the indigenous–campesino alliance demonstrates how changes in resource governance are a 'condensation' of shifts in the social power balance. After the election of Morales, these principles were turned into specific procedures for their implementation. These included, first, the 'Consultation and Participation' bylaw (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2007a), which obliged hydrocarbon firms to obtain 'free, prior and informed consent' (FPIC) by affected indigenous groups for all activities affecting their communities or territories (International Labour Organisation, 1989). Second, the 'Socio-Environmental Monitoring' bylaw (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2007b) established and regulated the functioning of multi-level committees composed by state and indigenous organisation representatives for assessing and overseeing the impacts resulting from hydrocarbon operations. Lastly, a third bylaw instituted an 'Indigenous Development Fund' (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2005b)—financed with a portion of the newly established Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons (IDH) and managed by indigenous–campesino organisations—as a way of redirecting oil and gas rents to the development of communities in extraction areas.

The inclusion of indigenous rights in the Hydrocarbon Law

⁵ The Andean highlands ('*tierras altas*') or high plateau ('*altiplano*') regions, stretching north to south along the western side of the country, are historically inhabited by Quechua- and Aymara-speaking indigenous populations. These, since the 1950s, have come to identify as *campesinos*, while at different times reasserting their 'indian' (*indio*) or 'originary' (*originario*) character. The lowlands (*tierras bajas*) comprise both the Amazon regions to the northeast and east of the Andes, and the drier plains of the Chaco in the southeast. Altogether, these are known as the eastern 'crescent' (*media luna*). The main lowland indigenous group are the Guaraní, spanning the Chaco region of Bolivia but also present in neighbouring countries. As many as 34 ethnic and linguistic groups exist throughout the Amazon and Chaco. All lowland groups self-identify, culturally and politically, as 'indigenous peoples' (*pueblos indígenas*). It is only with the 2009 Constitution that an official attempt was made to bring these diverse groups under a common category: that of 'indigenous originary peasant people' (*pueblo indígena originario campesino*) or nation (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2009).

resulted, in some cases, in greater negotiating power for indigenous organisations *vis-à-vis* oil and gas companies. Overall, however, during the Morales administration, the recognised indigenous rights were implemented only in limited ways and, later, partially reversed (Soto, Giné, & Andreucci, 2013).

The limited application of the Consultation and Participation bylaw is well documented (Pellegri & Ribera-Arismendi, 2012; Schilling-Vacaflor, 2013), and clearly emerged in my research as a main concern of indigenous groups. First, consultation processes were not carried out according to the procedure established by the bylaw, that is, in good faith and respecting the cultural and organisational forms (*usos y costumbres*) of indigenous peoples. Second, particularly in conflictive cases, state authorities as well as firms' representatives influenced the outcome of consultation using gifts and other forms of corruption as well as more or less direct threats.

More generally, rights to FPIC were for the most part detached from a broad understanding of indigenous territorial self-determination to become primarily focused on monetary compensation for socio-environmental impacts (Humphreys Bebbington, 2012). In this context, company personnel perceived the success of their 'socialisation' work by how much they would lower communities' demands for monetary compensation. A representative of a renationalised hydrocarbon firm dedicated to community relations (*relacionamiento comunitario*), for instance, seemed especially proud of one case in the Santa Cruz region⁶:

It was a very successful [consultation], because what [the indigenous organisation] demanded initially was something like 30 million dollars in compensation, and how much did we end up paying? Half a million dollars.

Ostensibly in order to counter the misuse of funds on the part of indigenous leaderships, moreover, companies began to pay out compensations in the form of 'development' projects. This represented a *de facto* reduction of an advanced set of indigenous legal protections into corporate social responsibility (CSR)-style interventions (cf. Himley, 2013).

A less-explored case is that of the 'Socio-Environmental Monitoring' bylaw (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2007b). At the time of writing, this measure has never been adopted. The reasons for this remain unclear. The local and national 'Socio-Environmental Monitoring Committees'—which, according to the bylaw, would have given indigenous representatives the power to carry out inspections without the company's approval—were not put into place. State personnel interviewed spoke of failure on the part of companies to provide funds—however, firms' representatives denied this allegation. Company personnel, on the other hand, blamed the state and indigenous organisations for not having agreed on the exact functioning of the Committees.

Some pointed out the lack of motivation on the part of the state to empower indigenous organisations. As the representative of a transnational firm operating in Bolivia admitted⁷:

It looks like the government [...] is not particularly motivated to include the indigenous in these monitoring processes. Because there is going to be a lot of resistance, a lot of trouble. [...] So maybe the government wants to keep them a little bit on the margin, not get them too involved. Because once the indigenous sector stops being a passive actor, as it is now, and becomes an

active actor [*sic*], it is going to stop a lot of projects or it is going to cause projects to be much more ... let's say, hard to manage.

The result was that environmental controls continued to be carried out by companies themselves, via private consulting firms. Indigenous organisations such as the Guaraní resorted to negotiating voluntary participation in environmental monitoring directly with firms—a practice actively encouraged by the hydrocarbon sector, which, however, deprived indigenous monitoring of any legal value.

The increasingly limited application of the indigenous principles included in the Hydrocarbon Law was followed by the partial reversal of these measures. This was expected to happen through a new law, which was discussed since 2010 but then never adopted (partly due to expected social opposition). Instead, however, in the first months of 2015, right after Evo Morales won his third re-election with ample majority (62%), the government partly reverted these measures through passing two Supreme Decrees that, respectively: a) facilitated hydrocarbon activities in protected areas (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2015a); and b) modified the Consultation and Participation bylaw to limit the duration of consultation processes (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2015b). This marked a clear involution with regard to legal recognition of indigenous territorial rights in the context of oil and gas extraction.

I argue that this limiting and reversal of rights was part of a broader process of marginalisation of the indigenous movement. First, as indigenous demands for territorial self-government appeared increasingly incompatible with the government's developmentalist policies, the MAS strengthened its alliance with the campesino leadership and isolated the indigenous movement. While the greater degree of closeness of campesino unions to the government is understandable—the MAS was originally created as the 'political instrument' of the campesino bloc—this alliance was significantly reinforced through co-optation and clientelism (Tapia, 2014).

A key example of this is the use of the Indigenous Fund to channel hydrocarbon rents to rural workers' unions close to the ruling party. The Indigenous Fund was one of the measures included in the Hydrocarbon Law of 2005 thanks to indigenous-led mobilisations (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2005b). Yet, since it was set to work in 2009, its mechanism for approving resource allocation was controlled by the campesino bloc. Between 2010 and 2013, as a result, 78% of funds went to projects benefiting rural workers' unions; the Guaraní—who had demanded the Fund in the first place as a form of compensation for being disproportionately affected by gas extraction—only received 1% of funds in this period (Soto et al., 2013, p. 72).⁸

Second, the government also co-opted part of the indigenous leadership, leading to the break-up of the indigenous–campesino Unity Pact and its reconstitution as a government-controlled umbrella organisation. The two national indigenous federations—CIDOB and CONAMAQ—were dismantled through government intervention in 2012 and 2013 respectively. The government created parallel organisations by the same name and violently expelled the legitimately recognised leaders from their headquarters. Those who refused to be co-opted suffered repression and marginalisation. While a gradual process of reorganization has since begun, such a repression resulted in a reduced ability of the indigenous front to mobilise and pressure the government.

⁶ Author interview, Santa Cruz, 1 November 2013. All translations from the Spanish are my own.

⁷ Author interview, Santa Cruz, 31 October 2013.

⁸ Allegations of corruption, private appropriation of funds on the part of campesino leaders and the use of the Indigenous Fund to co-opt indigenous leadership become increasingly more frequent; legal investigations are underway at the time of writing.

4. Hydrocarbons and passive revolution

Indigenous marginalisation reflected a counter-shift in the balance of power among social actors with competing interests *vis-à-vis* the governance of hydrocarbon extraction. This caused the state to become less open to progressive demands coming from the indigenous sectors, and to focus on securing resource-based accumulation and control over hydrocarbon rents. What remains to be explained, however, is *why* such a shift took place.

In order to understand the shift in the relationship between the Morales government and the indigenous movement, this section considers the broader process of class conflict and reconciliation that characterised the trajectory of the MAS administration. I argue that this trajectory can be understood as a 'passive revolution'. Despite an initial rupture with neoliberal political economic arrangements for the governance of hydrocarbons, the Morales government was unable to reduce Bolivia's dependency on gas exports and to challenge the dominance of transnational firms in the sector. As a result, it increasingly aligned itself with transnational extractive capital's and other conservative and extractivist interests, at the expense of indigenous socio-environmental agendas.

4.1. Reform and restoration in the hydrocarbon sector

Upon coming to power, reforming resource governance was a priority for the Morales government. This was expressed by two central aims, informed by popular demands. First, in the short term, gas resources should be nationalised in order to increase revenues, consolidate state institutions, and fund social programmes. One of the first measures of Evo Morales's government was to declare the 'nationalisation' of hydrocarbons, with a Supreme Decree (*Gobierno de Bolivia*, 2006) announced in a public ceremony on the 1st of May 2006. Second, in the medium- and long-term, increased revenues from 'recovered' natural resources should be used to commence a transition away from primary-export dependency and towards 'plurinationality' (*García-Linera*, 2006; *Radhuber*, 2012).

This showed a clear rupture with the neoliberal model of Bolivia's development—based on transnationally-controlled export of natural resources—and entailed a potentially radical restructuring of social relations around natural resource exploitation. The way that these goals were turned into concrete policies and plans, however, betrayed a much more moderate approach.

Reform of the hydrocarbon sector in Bolivia succeeded in 'regularising' extraction and expanding resource-based accumulation. It was characterised by *Kaup* (2010) as a 'neoliberal nationalisation'; that is, a 'nationalisation without expropriation' which left control of the hydrocarbon value chain largely to transnational corporations. The renegotiation of exploitation contracts, as required by the 2005 Hydrocarbon Law, greatly increased the ability of the state to collect and redistribute revenues (*Fig. 1*). At the same time, however, the expansion of export markets (primarily towards Argentina), as well as a series of incentives and a cycle of high commodity prices, partly compensated firms for lost profits (*Orellana-Aillón*, 2012). Advances in terms of the reconstitution of the state-owned company YPF, moreover, were limited (*Kaup*, 2013; chap. 7).

This 'incomplete' reform process left unchallenged (and in time reinforced) the position of dominance achieved by transnational firms. The new arrangements favoured strong growth in production and exports. At the same time, plans to use recovered rents from 'nationalised' hydrocarbons to diversify the economy and promote 'plurinationality' were not translated into concrete policies (*Wanderley*, 2013), thereby deepening dependence on gas exports (*Fig. 2*). Partly due to pressure to increase oil and gas reserves, the hydrocarbon frontier greatly expanded in the years following the

election of Morales. The total surface titled to hydrocarbon companies grew seven-fold between 2006 and 2012 (*Jiménez*, 2013, pp. 4–18). As many of these concessions, particularly in the Amazon and Chaco regions, overlapped indigenous territories and protected areas, such an expansion placed increasing pressures on territories, and intensified conflicts and tensions with the indigenous movement.

Another key aspect of passive revolution in Bolivia that must be mentioned here is the Morales administration's changing relationship with the national conservative bloc. During its first term of government, the Morales administration faced aggressive opposition on the part of Bolivia's conservative elites, which brought the country to the brink of civil war in 2007–'08. The conservative bloc, spearheaded by the land-holding elites based in the Department of Santa Cruz and in the eastern lowlands—the country's main agribusiness and cattle-ranching region—opposed plans for land redistribution, but also feared that the hydrocarbon sector reform would limit the flow of oil and gas revenues to Departments (*Kaup*, 2013).⁹ Resolving the conflict was key to consolidating the political position of the MAS (*Webber*, 2015). This class compromise, however, limited the possibility for more radical reform (*Garcés*, 2011) and had important consequences for the governance of hydrocarbons too. The transformist re-orientation of the MAS contributed to shifting its attitude towards popular sectors, as described in the previous section, and contributed to the marginalisation of the indigenous bloc.

4.2. Indigenous organisations as a threat to extraction

Due to the 'progressive restoration' of previously existing power relationships in the hydrocarbon sector and in Bolivian politics more broadly, indigenous demands for greater control of the extraction process were increasingly considered threatening to the viability of resource-based accumulation. First, oil and gas companies operating in Bolivia pressured the government to reduce social and environmental protections in the Hydrocarbon Law, including indigenous territorial rights. They complained that the process for obtaining an environmental licence was overly demanding, particularly in the case of activities affecting indigenous territories, which required a process of prior consultation. As a hydrocarbon company representative maintained, for instance¹⁰:

For a Consultation and Participation process, the timing is not well defined. [...] In the best of cases, it will last six months. But in our last seismic [exploration], it took a year and a half to obtain the [environmental] license. Then there are processes that are truncated, that do not advance, because the indigenous part does not agree [with the project or compensation].

Second, some firms protested that, despite having been assigned concessions, they were not allowed to carry out extractive activities due to socio-environmental restrictions. Such is the case of Petrobras, which signed a contract with YPF to exploit a large area in the northern Amazon, the Rio Hondo bloc, overlapping several protected areas and indigenous territories. The project was stopped by the National Authority for Protected Areas (SERNAP) due to concerns that it would cause a strong reaction from local populations. The company was not at all happy with this decision¹¹:

⁹ More broadly, eastern elites opposed the Morales government on the grounds of its class and ethnic bases, and strategized their reaction as a struggle for regional autonomy justified by a discourse of cultural and racial superiority of lowland mestizos (*Perreault & Green*, 2013).

¹⁰ Author interview, Santa Cruz, 31 October 2013.

¹¹ Author interview, Santa Cruz, 30 October 2013.

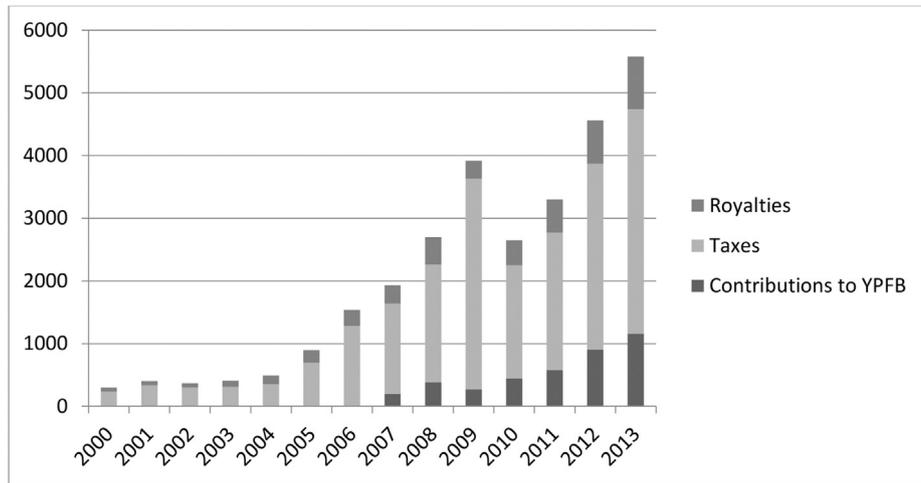


Fig. 1. Hydrocarbon revenues collected by the Bolivian state, 2000–2013, in million US\$.

Source: Own elaboration, adapted from Fundación Jubileo (2014: 13), with data from YPFB statistical bulletins.

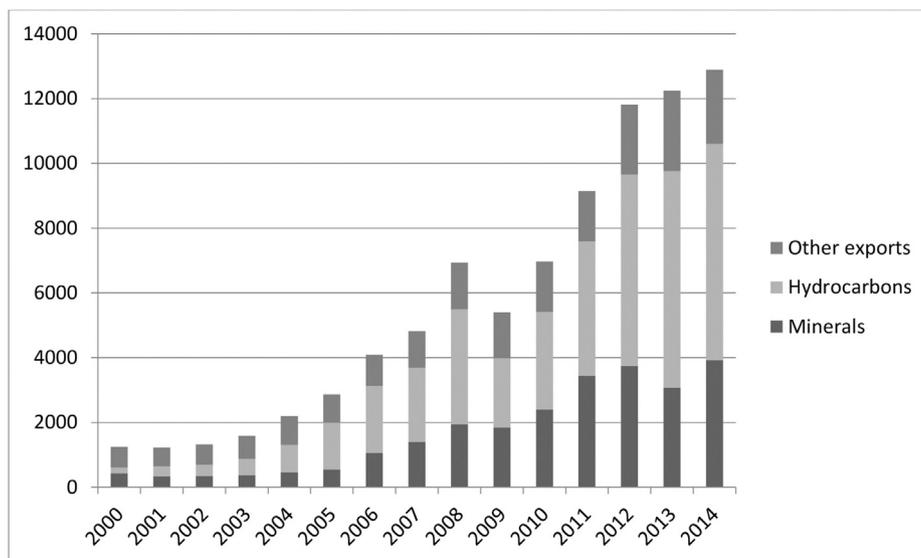


Fig. 2. Total value of exports by sector, in million US\$.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the National Institute of Statistics, Bolivia, 2015.

It's like you rent a house from a married couple, and afterwards it turns out the wife didn't agree to let you use the living room and the dining room. But with the husband you agreed to rent the whole house! The same happened in Río Hondo. We modified the project because we knew it was in a protected area; all the same, the wife, which is to say SERNAP, went mad!

Hydrocarbon firm representatives accused indigenous leaders of having become 'professional blackmailers' aiming—with the help of NGOs—to extort as much money as possible from consultation processes. They therefore pressured the government for a reversal of indigenous rights:

They empowered the indigenous sector so much, that the government really shot itself in the foot, because this is the most

problematic sector, the one that extorts the most, that most hinders the development of the [hydrocarbon] sector.¹²

While these complaints on the part of hydrocarbon companies are not surprising, it is significant that the Bolivian state increasingly aligned itself with these claims. Indigenous rights were seen by state officials too as an obstacle to the smooth functioning of the sector, and representatives of both YPFB and the government came out publicly in favour of less strict socio-environmental regulations¹³ (La Razón, 2014; 2013).

This hostility towards indigenous organisations was reflected in the views of state officials directly responsible for the socio-

¹² Author interview, Santa Cruz, 30 October 2013.

¹³ The government was also under pressure to increase extraction due to the fear that the declining 'traditional' reserves would not allow Bolivia to honour its export contracts—a problem partly related to the fact that, since neoliberal times, companies had not complied with legal obligations to invest in exploration (Kaup, 2013).

environmental management of hydrocarbon extraction. When I asked a representative of the Ministry of the Environment and Water about his take on the issue of compensation for socio-environmental damage, for instance, he corrected me angrily¹⁴:

We should not talk about compensation, but about extortion! People in [indigenous] communities have become corrupted, they have been indoctrinated! Especially their leaders, because people in communities remain poor while their leaders gain millions of dollars [through embezzling compensation money].

Such discursive framings of indigenous organisations as fundamentally an obstacle to resource-based accumulation and development mirrors that of the government more broadly, particularly during Morales's second term (2010–2014).

The conflict over the construction of a highway passing through the Isiboro-Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS), in 2010–2011, was a key turning point in the relationship between the MAS and the indigenous movement (Fabricant & Postero, 2015). During the TIPNIS dispute and other conflicts, indigenous groups opposing extractive projects were depicted in official discourse not only as culturally inferior—as they refused opportunities for 'progress'—but indeed as blocking development for the country's majority.¹⁵ The attack was led by the vice-president García-Linera (2012), who publically accused indigenous organisations and the NGOs which backed them of conspiring with 'imperialist' interests and opposition parties to sabotage the government-led '*proceso de cambio*' (Fabricant & Postero, 2015). These developments show that a passive-revolutionary realignment in the interests of the new power bloc had taken place, which modified the balance of power in favour of 'extractivist' and related interests at the expense of indigenous demands, and ultimately made the repression of indigenous organisations inevitable.

5. Regularising extraction, remaking the state

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate that combining a regulationist framework with a 'strategic-relational approach' to the state provides a useful conceptual lens for analysing changes in resource governance beyond neoliberalisation.

The findings of this paper show that the direction of such changes cannot be taken for granted. The recognition of indigenous territorial rights in Bolivia, for instance, represented a conscious effort to increase the role of state institutions and indigenous organisations in the governance of hydrocarbon extraction—thereby explicitly moving away from neoliberal, 'corporate-led governance' (Himley, 2013). There was an increasing gap, however, between the limiting of corporate-led governance on paper, and the reality on the ground. Despite its increased presence, the nation-state continued to be only one among many actors involved in the governance of extraction. Nevertheless, the ways that changing orientations of state policies and practices affected resource governance in Bolivia show the limits of a framework for the analysis of governance primarily focused on neoliberalisation and the 'hollowing out' of the nation state.

5.1. Governance as a social relation

A central argument of this paper is that the institutional

configurations for the governance of extraction shift in relation to broader changes in the social power balance. Bolivia's hydrocarbon sector is a good case in point. First, the institutionalisation of demands for indigenous territorial rights resulted from indigenous popular empowerment in a conjuncture of political openness favoured by a crisis of neoliberal rule (Postero, 2010). Second, conversely, the limited implementation and successive reversal of measures for the protection of indigenous territorial rights in the Hydrocarbon Law was accompanied by a demobilisation of the indigenous movement. The way that the state did not just passively reflect shifting power balances, but was indeed an active force in shaping these balances, shows its ingrained 'strategic selectivities' (Jessop, 2008). In intervening in ongoing struggles over resource governance, the MAS government sought to contain popular demands perceived as threatening the stability of resource-based accumulation (Tapia, 2014). The limited implementation and successive reversal of newly acquired indigenous territorial rights in the context of hydrocarbon extraction can be understood against this background.

The notion of 'passive revolution' best captures the trajectory of initial rupture and gradual restoration of the Morales government (Hesketh & Morton, 2014; Modonesi, 2013; Webber, 2015) and helps us to shed light on the reasons why progressive changes in the governance of resource extraction were limited. The MAS government succeeded in 'regularising' extraction and expanding resource-based accumulation; yet, in the process of institutionalising demands around the governance of hydrocarbons, it diffused or disarticulated popular discontent, thereby restoring or even expanding pre-existing social and power relations. As a result of limited reform, the hydrocarbon frontier expanded significantly in the years following the election of Morales. In this context, the provisions for the protection of indigenous territorial rights included in the Hydrocarbon Law of 2005 began to appear to the oil and gas industry—and, increasingly, to the Bolivian state itself—as a nuisance, and pressure to limit and reverse them increased.

A similar trajectory characterised the relationship between the MAS and the national conservative bloc. After aggressive opposition to Morales reached its peak in 2008, the government party managed to defeat the conservative bloc, but made important concessions to it in the process. The Bolivian vice-president (and well-known Marxist intellectual) García-Linera (2010) wrote that, with the solution of the political crisis, the MAS succeeded in achieving expansive 'hegemony', thus securing the support of all social classes and fractions. From the viewpoint of passive revolution, however, it is clear that protecting the interests of conservative forces—such as the hydrocarbon industry and landed elites—led to the exclusion of more transformative political projects, such as those put forward by indigenous organisations. The support of popular sectors aligned with the government—such as the campesino bloc (and sections of the indigenous movement)—was secured through clientelism and trasformism. The indigenous groups that continued to threaten the material—that is, extractive—base of the MAS's rule, as well as its ideological foundations, were explicitly repressed.

5.2. The state in political ecology

Mobilising the strategic-relational approach in alliance with a political ecology perspective helps us to expand the former through more explicitly considering socio-environmental relations. As I have shown, struggles over the governance of hydrocarbon extraction in Bolivia were also, in important ways, disputes over alternative society-nature articulations. First, indigenous organisations put forward demands for a more socially and environmentally just extraction, aimed at reducing its negative impacts on

¹⁴ Author interview, La Paz, 25 November 2013.

¹⁵ Similar discourses against indigenous and other groups opposing resource extraction were used by state officials in Peru and Ecuador (Bebbington & Humphreys Bebbington, 2011; Andreucci & Kallis, 2017).

livelihoods while increasing benefits for local populations. In the process, they mobilised indigenous notions of territoriality that challenged the reduction of complex socio-natural entanglements into discrete units such as ‘resources’ and ‘land’. Seeking to ‘scale-up’ indigenous principles of self-government, moreover, the ‘plurinationality’ paradigm imagined a co-existence between the nation-state and spaces of indigenous territorial autonomy (Gustafson, 2009). Second, and opposed to this, visions of developmentalist social forces—such as landed elites or the hydrocarbon industry, but also sectors of the campesino bloc—aligned around an extractivist and in many ways predatory vision of socio-natural interactions, whereby nature was seen as a source of rent and use-values for market-oriented exploitation. Conflicts around gas in Bolivia, therefore, were part of a broader dispute over alternative socio-natural configurations, which became selectively ‘condensed’ in the state.

The conceptual arguments of this paper add to recent debates on regulation and the state in political ecology. In the last years, there have been important steps towards bringing the strategic-relational approach in dialogue with political ecology and resource governance research (Andreucci & Radhuber, 2015; Brand, Görg, & Wissen, 2011; Ioris, 2012; Robertson & Wainwright, 2013). As Jessop noted, “were he alive today, Poulantzas would be a political ecologist” (Wainwright & Mann, 2015, n. 8). Parallel to this, of course, ‘Gramscian political ecology’ has also emerged as an important sub-field (Ekers et al., 2009), though somewhat less preoccupied with theorisations of the state *per se* (D’Alisa & Kallis, 2016). In light of these developments, and due to increasing recognition that capitalism is itself an environmental relation (Parenti, 2015), there is scope for modifying Poulantzas’s definition and argue that the state is indeed a *socio-natural* relation rather than simply a social one (Wainwright & Mann, 2015, n. 8). The relations of which state power is a ‘material condensation’, in other words, are themselves the product of struggles over alternative modes of resource mobilisation and socio-natural configurations.

This approach can also add to recent discussions about how to conceptualise the state in environmental governance research and in political ecology more generally (Robbins, 2007). As Robertson (2015, p. 457, original emphasis) argued:

Political ecologists have had an ambivalent relationship with the state and with what has been formalized as ‘state theory.’ They are generally happy to research and write about state employees, state policies, state economic and development strategies, global economic entanglements and migration between states—but have historically been reluctant to be explicit about what the state itself is.

As I hope to have shown in this paper, the strategic-relational approach offers political ecologists a productive way of thinking about the state. Specifically, I think its main added value lies in considering the state not just as an environmental ‘manager’ (Whitehead, 2008)—an actor in governing society-nature relations—but more broadly as a *terrain of struggles* over alternative socio-natural configurations, which become selectively crystallised in the form and orientation of the state itself. In other words, this approach allows us to continue focussing on how the state sees, governs and even ‘makes’ socio-natures (Parenti, 2015), while at the same time paying greater attention to the myriad ways in which socio-natures themselves—and struggles over them—also ‘make the state’.

6. Conclusions

Commenting on the increasingly authoritarian, anti-indigenous

posture of governments in Bolivia and elsewhere, Maristella Svampa (2015) recently remarked that “the era of Andean promises has come to an end”. In this paper, I have applied and critically extended the analytical framework of ‘resource governance’ to the case of struggles over hydrocarbons in Bolivia, in order to shed light on how and why the Morales government’s indigenous-informed plans for improving the socio-environmental implications of resource extraction have largely failed. I have made two interrelated claims. First, progressive as well as regressive changes in the governance of hydrocarbon extraction in Bolivia have reflected broader shifts in the social power balance, selectively ‘condensed’ into—and strategically modified by—the state. Second, after an initial phase of confrontation and partial rupture with national and transnational capital, resulting from a cycle of indigenous popular struggles, the Morales government resolved these class antagonisms and secured its political reproduction at the expense of more radical reform. Most notably, plans to reduce the country’s dependency on gas exports as well as to challenge the transnational domination of the hydrocarbon sector were abandoned, generating an increasingly explicit incompatibility with indigenous demands over territorial self-government and for a more just extraction. I have concluded that a ‘strategic-relational’ approach to the state is useful in complementing the regulationist approach to governance, by considering ways of stabilising accumulation that go beyond the ‘hollowing out’ of the state. Combining this approach with attention to socio-natural interactions also enables us to advance theorisation of the state in political ecology.

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