

‘Extractive Nationalism’?:

Energy Sovereignty in a Petrochemical Era

Erin Fitz-Henry*

University of Melbourne, Melbourne, AUSTRALIA

Growing numbers of ecological economists and green democratic theorists – including Joan Martinez-Alier and Herbert Reid, to name just two – have been calling for some time for the promotion and diffusion of new ‘social values’ to aid the work of creating more sustainable communities. While there is little agreement about the precise content of these values, one small Andean country – Ecuador – is arguably at the global forefront of one such national-level ‘reevaluation of social values.’ In September 2008 Ecuador became the first country in the world to formally extend legal rights to nature, expanding the boundaries of the *polis* to include non-humans in ways that hitherto only the most radical of environmental philosophers have suggested. In five landmark articles in Chapter 7 of the constitution, the multi-party Constituent Assembly convened by Ecuador’s first explicitly anti-neoliberal president, Rafael Correa, acknowledged that, “Nature, or Pachamama, where life becomes real and reproduces itself, has the right to be integrally respected in its existence, and in the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structures, functions, and evolutionary processes.” Although problematically broad (and working from an unspecified conception of just what constitutes ‘nature’), this extension of rights ostensibly means, according to legal scholars, that anyone can bring a case on behalf of nature into an Ecuadorian court (Burdon 2011; Bassi 2009; Fitz-Henry 2012). To be granted legal standing one would not need – as is the case in large parts of the Western world – to be able to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between a given source of environmental damage and one’s personal well-being or private property. One would simply need to be able to demonstrate “sufficient interest.” Upon hearing the news of the approval of this legislation (for which, remarkably, over 60% of the Ecuadorian population voted), environmental lawyers and activists throughout the country were

predictably ecstatic (Martinez and Acosta 2011). Others quickly followed suit, recognizing the momentous shift in politics promised by what Marisol de la Cadena has recently called (though perhaps in somewhat too mystical an idiom for many of us), the legal recognition of “earth beings.” “Can we think about these presences [of the natural world],” she has wondered, “as political actors – or as an issue in politics, at the very least – instead of brushing them away as excessive, residual, or infantile?...The appearance of earth-beings in social protests may evince a moment of rupture of modern politics and an emergent indigeneity.” (De la Cadena 2010: 23).

Despite the poetic promise of these rights, the years since the passage of the 2008 constitution have proven mixed in terms of environmental performance. As of early 2013, three court cases in defence of the rights of nature have been lodged in Ecuadorian courts by Quito-based activists, one of which – albeit a relatively minor one – has already proven successful. In 2011, a provincial court in the southern province of Loja acknowledged the standing of the Vilcabamba river threatened by the expansion of a road by the provincial government (Fitz-Henry 2012). The case was brought by two American expatriates concerned primarily that the debris would affect the river next to which they hoped to build a retreat center. Upon hearing the evidence, the judge determined that the rights of the river were, indeed, being violated, and issued a cease and desist order to the provincial government. A second and more potentially precedent-setting case is currently pending against the Ministry of Renewable Resources for its March 2011 granting of a lease for the country’s first open-pit copper mine to a Chinese mining company (Ecuacorriente). In January 2013 a group of NGO representatives filed the case against the Mirador copper project on the grounds that – in addition to producing over 144 million tons of rock waste over 17 years of projected operations – it would annihilate three species of tree frogs which are existent only in Ecuador. Despite these promising cases, the commitment of the administration to the construction of highly extractive development projects has seemed evidence to many that such rights are little more than rhetorical flourishes on the part of a centralizing and even authoritarian government – one that has even

frequently referred to environmentalists as “infantile terrorists” (Arsel 2011). As the title of one July 2013 article put it, exasperated, “Are the Rights of Nature Already Over in Ecuador?” Referring to the repeated jailings of environmental “terrorists” opposed to the Mirador project, the author concluded that the rights of nature were little more than a “double discourse” deployed by the administration so as to gain legitimacy on the international stage. “There’s one discourse for the international community,” activists in Quito told me, “but it’s an entirely different discourse here at home. Here, it’s all development, development, development...” And indeed, there is reason for some concern. All across the continent the return of progressive center-left governments has been accompanied by highly intensified involvement in extractive projects, including oil, unconventional gas, and copper and gold mining (Bebbington and Bebbington 2012). Whether in Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Peru, or Ecuador, the resource scramble – led primarily by Chinese and Canadian transnationals -- is heating up in ways that make even the neoliberal openings of the 1980s and 1990s appear timid. This is what theorists like the Eduardo Gudnyas have recently termed, “the new extractivism” (Gudnyas 2010).

In this short essay, I am not directly concerned with how best to understand this curious mixture of radical environmental rights and escalating extractivism. Numerous other scholars of and in the region are productively at work doing so (Escobar 2010). Instead, my much more modest aim is to contribute to political theory’s response to the ‘ecological challenge’ by exploring the mobilization of nationalist and regionalist discourses in post-neoliberal states like Ecuador in ways that effectively dampen rights-based environmental resistance. Focusing my discussion on the state’s largest investment and development project in history – a coastal oil refinery and petrochemical complex projected to be one of the largest in South America when it goes fully operational in 2015 – I demonstrate how discourses of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘anti-colonialism’ long honed in opposition to U.S.-led neoliberalism are being used to dilute the potency of rights-based challenges to the petrochemical complex. Drawing on a growing body of research on corporate responses to

environmental harm and qualitative interviews conducted with company representatives, environmental activists, and local residents in 2012, I argue that political philosophers engaged with the ‘ecological challenge’ need to be somewhat more attentive to the ways in which anti-colonialist discourses are currently being re-worked *by corporations in the extractive sector* to facilitate ongoing support for the petrochemical industry. While eco-communitarians have rightly called attention to the importance of local community-building and place-based belonging for developing sustained ecological awareness, these insights need to be augmented by the recognition that such “belonging” can be, and often is, persuasively manipulated by extractive corporations and their developmentalist allies. The cultural mechanics of these processes lie at the center of this paper.

Reclaiming the Nation: A Post-Neoliberal Government

In November 2006, Rafael Correa – a heterodox academic economist inspired by Ha-Joon Chang, a fiercely outspoken critic of the Washington Consensus, and former Minister of Energy – was elected president of Ecuador on an explicitly anti-neoliberal platform. Promising to evict a contentious U.S. military base from the country and to oppose all efforts to sign a free trade agreement with the United States (which would have bankrupted local farmers), he argued vociferously for the need to reclaim national sovereignty from the U.S.-dominated multilateral lending organizations. We are tired of this “long neoliberal night,” he explained. “We will not be a colony of North America any more!” And again, as he reaffirmed in late July 2013: “No longer is this great country the backyard of anyone!” (a reference to the offensive tendency of American politicians to refer to all the countries south of the Rio Grande as “America’s backyard.”) Like many of its regional counterparts, for the better part of twenty years and as a direct result of the macroeconomic prescriptions devised by Washington technocrats, Ecuador had faced spiralling hyperinflation, stagnant public sector salaries, a reduction of subsidies for health and education, and steadily rising food and fuel costs. While the business sector had been increasingly opened to investors and foreign direct investment had soared throughout the 1990s, basic living conditions for

the vast majority – both the middle and working classes – had steadily worsened (Becker 2010; Sawyer 2004; de la Torre 2010). Finally, in 2000, the economy collapsed altogether, leaving former president, Jamil Mahuad, with little choice but to adopt the emergency measure of dollarizing the economy – a move for which he was subsequently removed bloodlessly from office by a coalition of indigenous and non-indigenous activists. By the time Correa arrived at the presidential palace some six years later, three presidents had been peacefully deposed in the space of less than ten years – primarily for violating their campaign promises to end the country’s dependence on the multilateral lending organizations and to stand up to Washington-led meddling in the country’s internal affairs. As my colleagues in Ecuador often reminded me, the promise on the campaign trail had always been to regain the sovereignty of the nation. But always, the post-election result was the same – a further deepening of neo-liberal economic policies and programs and an intensified “selling off” of the national patrimony to Canadian, Australian, and American transnationals.

It was precisely this selling-off and selling-out that the political party Correa founded in 2006, Alianza Pais (the country alliance), vowed to reverse. Alianza Pais is a radical-left (though not ‘revolutionary’ in the Cuban sense) political party that claims to have committed itself to nothing less than a total reclamation of the sovereignty of the country. This sovereignty, they argue, has been steadily compromised by the demands of trans-national corporations – most importantly, oil companies like Occidental Oil, Chevron-Texaco, EnCana, and Alberta Energy who benefited enormously during the neoliberal era from what foreign investors like to call, supremely ‘favourable conditions for the repatriation of profits.’ Indeed, as Suzana Sawyer has recently shown, Chevron-Texaco, which operated in the eastern Amazon for the better part of three decades, took billions of profits out of the country and left behind millions of dollars of damage, for which, it argued, the Ecuadorian state was primarily responsible (Sawyer 2004). In the spirit of combating this ‘humiliating submission’ to foreign (and mostly U.S.) interests, since coming to office Correa has unilaterally cancelled Ecuador’s debt to the IMF, renegotiated oil contracts so that the Ecuadorian

state maintains at least 51% ownership, enraged Occidental Oil by seizing its oil fields after learning of an ‘illegal’ contract negotiation with a Canadian energy company, and initiated enormous infrastructure projects, including roads, electricity lines, and hydro-electric dams – all done in the service of “reclaiming national sovereignty.” While detractors argue that Correa has simply replaced one foreign creditor (the IMF) with another (China), Correa has insisted that what distinguishes the two is that the latter does not insist on the sorts of devastating ‘structural adjustments’ that strangled the economy during the years of high neoliberalism. To maintain the sovereignty of the nation-state against such adjustments is, for Correa, the central challenge of his administration and one that he fiercely (if somewhat flamboyantly) defends. When, in 2009, the UNDP did not grant Ecuador enough representation on the trust board for the country’s novel conservation project in the Amazon – the Yasuni-ITT initiative –, Correa walked from the negotiations, citing an infringement of Ecuadorian sovereignty (Rival 2012). And when, somewhat more recently in late June of 2013, Bolivian president Evo Morales was denied passage through the airspace of a number of Western European countries because of fears that he was transporting Edward Snowden, Correa broke off negotiations for the Andean Trade Preference and Drug Eradication Act with the U.S., again citing violations of the sovereignty of his Bolivian colleague and refusing to make Ecuador vulnerable to U.S. “blackmail.” Upping the ante further, he went on offer the U.S. \$23 million dollars in human rights training – a particularly biting offer given that the United States has for years trained nearly all of the militaries of the region in counter-insurgency tactics that have resulted in some of the most lasting human rights violations on the continent.

These frequent assertions of sovereignty – though aimed primarily at the United States – make use of richly layered historical narratives that are worth exploring in some detail because they undergird the government’s approach to the petrochemical complex and provide the cultural armature and rationale for the project. Like many of the other countries in the Andean region, political discourse in Ecuador is currently energized by the drawing of explicit parallels between the nation-building

projects of the current administration and that of earlier liberal reformers. As Claudio Lomnitz has recently pointed out, all of the leftist regimes in the region have articulated their political projects through what he calls, a “new foundationalism” – that is, a representation of their post-neoliberal projects as a return to some founding moment long neglected by the neoliberal “technocrats” who were in power during the “lost decades” of the 1980s and 1990s (Lomnitz 2007). In the case of Bolivia, that moment stretches back five hundred years to the last of the Aymara kings displaced by the Spaniards; in Venezuela, it is the rise to power at the beginning of the 19th century of the great agitator for Latin American independence, Simon Bolivar. And in Ecuador, it is the reclaiming of the liberal republic from foreign-allied oligarchs at the turn of the last century by General Eloy Alfaro (1842-1912) – a secular reformer, anti-colonial nationalist, and perhaps not unimportantly, the great-grandfather of Correa. It was General Eloy Alfaro – Correa frequently reminds the citizenry – who separated church from state; founded the system of secular education; opened schools to women for the first time; fought for indigenous justice; questioned the external debt; nationalised church properties and cemeteries; and, most importantly, participated in a vigorous anti-colonial politics all throughout the hemisphere. As early as 1883, Alfaro was intimately involved in the Cuban independence struggle, joining the Society of the Friends of Cuba based in New York along with Cuban independence fighter, Jose Marti, and later, in 1895, sending a letter to the Queen of Spain to formally petition for the freedom of the island. “The actions of these radicals [the close friends and colleagues of Eloy Alfaro],” a recent government publication points out, “demonstrate that one of the [principal] elements of their ideology was to fight for the sovereignty of their countries and against all forms of colonialism.” (Hidrovo Quinonez 2012: 70). Despite the occasional tendency on the part of the administration to use this history somewhat selectively, Alfaro’s commitment to independence is evident throughout his life – whether in the frequent trips made to Panama to consult with others involved in the independence struggle or in his passionate speech at the Mexican Congress in 1896 in opposition to the Monroe Doctrine.

Since 2007, Correa has repeatedly invoked Eloy Alfaro to defend his vision of the “citizen’s revolution,” often construing environmentalists opposed to his projects as “terrorists” and “traitors.” “We are going to follow in your footsteps, Comandante,” he promised at the Constituent Assembly in 2008 when the rights of nature were first written into the constitution, “Never again, my General, will this land be the victim of oppressors; never again will it be the estate of the powerful... this is a free and sovereign country that we swear to defend with our lives” (Hidrovo Quinonez 2012). This speech was offered to the members of the Constituent Assembly in the very town in which Eloy Alfaro was born – Montecristi – a small coastal town of some 20,000 residents famous for its world-renowned Panama hats and located some 20 kilometres from where the refinery and petrochemical complex is will be located. Not only has Correa worked aggressively to draw on the General’s symbolic capital as the founder of a long-forgotten anti-colonial liberalism, but he has repeatedly fashioned himself the direct inheritor of Alfaro’s legacy, often drawing one-to-one parallels between the actions of his government and those of his predecessor. As historian Juan Paz y Mino has recently pointed out – reaffirming the government’s line -, just as Eloy Alfaro created the first system of secular education, so, too, Correa has gotten rid of school fees and opened universities to growing numbers of students. And just as Alfaro worked to strengthen the rights of women in the public sector, so, too, Correa has reserved an unprecedented number of seats in his government for women at all levels of administration. Most importantly, however, and this is where I want to dwell for the remainder of this paper, Correa has embarked upon undoubtedly the most ambitious, aggressive, and invasive set of development projects in the country’s history – again drawing primary symbolic currency from Eloy Alfaro to justify the importance of ‘energy sovereignty’ over the rights of nature. While the two are not necessarily opposed, the former has been given sustained prominence. It is the rich cultural and historical associations symbolized by Eloy Alfaro and now embedded in discourses of ‘energy sovereignty’ that are making it exceedingly difficult for environmentalists and other community members opposed to the Refinery of the Pacific to have their voices heard.

The Refinery of the Pacific is our Trans-regional Train!

The Refinery of the Pacific Eloy Alfaro is a joint project of three state-owned oil companies: PetroEcuador (Ecuador), PDVSA (Venezuela), and, as of early July 2013, CNPC (China). The RDP was formed in 2007 when former Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, and Rafael Correa officially signed the memorandum of understanding for what was imagined to be a central cornerstone of their shared project: changing the energy matrices of their respective countries so that they were no longer dependent on the United States or Europe. The facility – originally projected to be in operation in 2013, but now slated to begin operations in 2017 – is located on the arid western coast of Ecuador near the small, economically depressed town of El Aromo – a town that is home to perhaps three hundred people and, now, an understaffed “Environmental Information Center” that rarely appears open. Near the edge of Bosque Pacoche – one of the country’s few dry forest national parks -- it is located in a region that has been perpetually neglected by nearly all of the previous administrations, has never produced, refined, or transported oil (unlike the Amazon), and is home primarily to fishermen and small-scale agriculturalists who have never felt themselves particularly included in the nation-state. While oil accounts for approximately 64% of Ecuador’s total exports and has been the mainstay of the economy for the better part of fifty years (leading to some of the worst contamination in all of South America), the country has never had the industrial capacity to refine a sufficient amount of it to meet internal demand (de la Torre 2010). While it maintains two aging and relatively small (approximately 20,000 – 110,000 barrel-a-day) refineries in the northwestern provinces of Esmeraldas and Sucumbios (both of which are also slated for expansion), neither is currently capable of refining heavy crude.

By contrast, the sheer size and capacity of the RDP is, at least to the non-specialist, staggering: The facility is expected to have a refining capacity of approximately 300,000 barrels of heavy crude a day, producing in addition to refined oil substantial amounts of gasoline, benzene, jet fuel, and

diesel, among other refined products. To be specific, the RDP projects that for the forty years of its operations the facility will produce 83,000 barrels of gasoline a day, 16,000 barrels of diesel, 6,000 barrels of jet fuel, and 4,000 barrels of benzene. The heavy crude will come principally by pipeline from the Amazon region via the recently-constructed pipeline and by boat from Venezuela. Despite the fact that the refinery will occupy a mere 500 hectares of land and be surrounded by some 3,000 hectares of newly planted forest (some 6 million trees, many of which are native species), local residents and Quito-based environmental activists were surprised to learn the mechanics of the refining process itself as described by company representatives during the fifteen days required by Ecuadorian law to “socialize” the project to the affected communities in 2011. The facility, they learned, will operate plants that will be powered continuously (twenty-four hours a day) at temperatures in excess of 800 degrees Celsius. The necessary water – some 3,500 cubic meters per hour – will be drawn from a local reservoir, La Esperanza, some 100 kilometres from the site, around which RDP representatives were just beginning to make their appearances in late 2012 when I began to survey the area. The electricity (in a province long accustomed to frequent blackouts, particularly during the rainy season) will be derived from a major hydro-electric dam, Coco-Codo Sinclair, currently under construction by a Chinese company. According to local university professors in the environmental sciences, the unfortunate result of this massive tapping of both water and energy will most likely be an “immense cauldron of cooking petroleum” that will steam and suffocate the surrounding forest in addition to diverting huge amounts of fresh water from a province already chronically short of such resources. (Indeed, the very name of the province – Manabi – is thought to mean “land without water” – a reference to the fact that Manabi suffers periodic droughts that can last for 6 or 7 years at a time). Understandably worried for the future, residents began to mobilize in the thousands beginning in late 2008 and a group of university intellectuals from across the faculty at LAICA University issued a critical response to the non-specific “terms of reference” with which the communities had been provided by the RDP. In response to the 4-page “terms of reference,” they argued that the company needed to significantly

broaden its conception of direct and indirect impact. Invoking the recent constitution and, in particular, the rights of nature, they argued that, “It is inappropriate and exaggeratedly limited to consider as the population directly affected only those living within the ‘study area’ where the mega-project will be located. Only 5.000 hectares?...They also haven’t considered expanding the concept of indirect impact so that they take account of the interconnectedness of the territory and the environment as part of regional and interregional cycles. As simple a thing as recognizing that taking the water from the Poza Honda [a reservoir some 100 kilometers from the facility] will affect 6 additional cantons.” (Erazo, Camino et. al 2009). Not dissimilarly, summarizing the sense of angry irony felt by many of those most directly affected by the building of the initial encampment some 20 kilometers from the birthplace of Eloy Alfaro, the Quito-based NGO, *Accion Ecologica*, concluded its 2011 report on the refinery by pointing out that, “Montecristi, where the new constitution guaranteeing the rights of communities and the rights of nature was written, will now become home to the toxic waste of the refinery and petrochemical complex.” (Accion Ecologica 2011).

However, this was decidedly a minority opinion. Despite the fact that at least some in the province were well aware of the dangers of the nearby refinery in the province of Esmeraldas (which has led to significantly elevated levels of lead in the blood of refinery workers and suffered one of the worst fires in recent memory), both the government and the management at the RDP in the years since have been able to effectively draw on regionalist and nationalist narratives to render the facility more or less immune to rights-based challenges. In her important contribution to the 2006 *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, Robyn Eckersley argues that the kind of cosmopolitanism espoused by David Held, Michael Waltzer, and Andrew Dobson falters as an approach to responding to ecological challenges because it maintains a commitment to expanded loyalties and extended forms of causality to which the “average citizen” is unlikely to consent. “However far we manage to extend our circle of compassion for others,” she crucially observes, “our most

fundamental allegiances will always be particularistic” (Eckersley 2006: 93) – local, bioregional, and/or national. Thus it is with these allegiances that we must work as we struggle to craft ecological selves, not “citizens of the world.” But these allegiances can also be used to facilitate consent for extraction projects – and sometimes to great effect. While anthropologists, geographers, and political scientists working on what Michael Watts has called, “oil zones,” have paid important attention to the often devastating conflicts that characterise nearly every node in an oil network (Watts 2004; Drost and Stewart 2006); the symbolic role of oil in nation-building projects (Coronil 2004), the marketing efforts of companies like Chevron and Dow Chemical to humanize and environmentalize their images (Sawyer 2004; Fitz-Henry 2011); and the trend toward off-shoring so as to avoid political sensitivities (Appel 2012), less work has been done on the processes by which oil companies work to facilitate and consolidate deep regional identities in ways that often mitigate against robust environmental resistance. While growing numbers of relatively young ethnographers – notably, Elana Shrever, Peter Benson, and Marina Welker – have called for an urgent re-direction of ethnographic attention toward corporate responses to critique (rather than just the study of social movements themselves), students of the oil sector have yet to explore in fine-grained ethnographic detail the ways in which these responses actively nurture and sustain regional identities.

In the case of Ecuador, the Refinery of the Pacific positioned the facility – both explicitly and implicitly – as a continuation, if not the very culmination, of Eloy Alfaro’s anti-colonial dream. In addition to “socializing” the project in four of the communities nearest the facility in late 2011, on December 13, 2012, the RDP ran a widely-advertised seminar-workshop entitled, “Progress for Manabi,” held at the local Howard Johnson in the nearby coastal city of Manta (where I have worked on and off since 2006). The seminar was intended primarily for journalists, students in communication based at the local university, and interested citizens. The large conference room was staffed almost exclusively by women from the company’s Communications Department who passed out shiny white folders emblazoned with images of the refinery that was half refinery, half tree –

half grey, half green. And surrounding the tables were large posters for the refinery, all with the same image: a bottle of oil seductively spilling the golden, amber-colored liquid into a glistening stream which then became a highway. The caption read “Progress for Manabi” – a simple caption that would subsequently appear on nearly every billboard in the province – on the backs of busses, in supermarkets, and even at the airport, often followed by: “Your oil is in the best of hands.” While I have elsewhere written about the feminization of the face of the oil company (as evident in the exclusively-female Communications Department and the growing numbers of women involved in the traditionally male jobs involved in the actual operations) as well as the tree metaphors that have been used as such a fundamental part of the company’s iconography, here I want to focus on the invocations of history – and in particular, the regional history surrounding Eloy Alfaro – that are being used to define and defend the promise of the refinery in the face of considerable environmental opposition.

That December afternoon at the seaside Howard Johnson, speaker after speaker – with the exception of the industrial engineers – peppered their talks with references to both Eloy Alfaro and Simon Bolivar. To provide just one example: A journalist from a Guayaquil-based television channel hired by the refinery argued that – as journalists responsible for the development of the country – Ecuadorian reporters needed to engage in the kind of ‘critical thought’ best exemplified by the great liberator Simon Bolivar. Such ‘critical thought’ principally involved, he believed, generating discussion about the lack of solidarity, political will, and social complacency which had rendered Ecuador unable to free itself from foreign dependence. “We want to migrate,” he explained passionately, “from an extractive economy to a non-extractive economy. But how do we do this? Under what conditions?... Ecuador is like all the other Latin American countries, with resources concentrated in the hands of a few. Since the 1970s, we’ve been reliant on oil, but we didn’t have the industrial infrastructure, so we’ve been exporting crude and importing the petrochemical products. Have we, then, been taking advantage of this oil for the benefit of the

society? No!” Framing the refinery as a rational, cost-benefit response to the increasing gap between the costs of importing the petrochemical products and the proceeds from exporting the raw crude – a financial discrepancy that, if adequately addressed, might allow for the building of the kind of social ‘solidarity’ iconized by Eloy Alfaro – he went on to further bolster the comparison to the 19th century general: “This project is like the tran-regional train of Eloy Alfaro,” he explained, “It is *our train!* It is as important to the building of this nation as the train was in Eloy Alfaro’s time!” One of the foremost achievements of Eloy Alfaro’s regime, he reminded us, was not only the anti-colonial struggle, but the building of a sense of national solidarity as iconized by the first steam train to run from the highlands to the coast – a train disabled in 1912 shortly after the former president was brutally beaten and dragged through the streets of the capital city of Quito by an enraged Catholic establishment. Always, the claim was the same: Sovereignty and solidarity. Both iconized by the struggles of Eloy Alfaro.

And the comparisons didn’t stop there. In fact, the company went to considerable lengths to detail their investment in a series of ‘social investment’ projects that are particularly salient for the region of Manabi and, more importantly for the purposes of this discussion, dependent on symbols and products that maintain direct linkages with the family of Eloy Alfaro. As Douglas Rogers has recently noted of the operations of the Lukoil-Perm company in the Perm Region of Russia, oil and gas companies are playing an increasingly prominent role in the fortifying of regional identities. “Since the early 2000s,” he notes, “Lukoil-Perm had been on a concerted campaign to associate itself with the traditional culture of the Perm Region...[It sponsored a festival] that moved among oil-producing districts of the Perm Region each year, fostering cultural awareness and gathering specialists in the interest of reviving local handicraft production” (Rogers 2012: 285). Similar cultural dynamics were at work in the “socialization” of the project in Ecuador. The city of Eloy Alfaro’s birth – Montecristi – is, as I have already noted, home to the famous weavers of what have come incorrectly to be known as Panama Hats – hats made from fine-grained *paja toquilla* that are

woven by hand, sometimes over the course of an entire year. As any introductory history textbook of the province points out, they are the central part of the identity of the region. Not only was Eloy Alfaro's family actively involved in the export of these much sought-after hats, but they were even responsible for the financing of the liberal revolution, of which Eloy Alfaro is the principal icon. When selling the project to the communities, the company repeatedly re-iterated its claim that its central social project would be the financing of trade schools for the preservation of these weaving techniques. As President Correa himself confirmed in late June 2013, during his weekly radio address held at the construction site on which the refinery will be built, these hats are the lifeblood of the province and are as significant to the "citizen's revolution" as they were to Alfaro's liberal revolution. As folk songs native to the province played proudly over the loudspeakers before Correa began his speech that Saturday, dozens of women wearing blue and green-colored baseball caps with the refinery logo wove the iconic Panama hats – as if to visually consolidate the alliance between the refinery and the regional identity of the weavers. "Never again will this province be forgotten or left behind, my beloved Manabi," he exclaimed, to the cheers of the thousands of onlookers, "It is of central importance to the citizen's revolution and, now, with this refinery, to all of South America!"

Conclusion

I have tried, in this short paper, to demonstrate the cultural work by which a relatively young oil company has managed to secure broad-based consent for one of the largest development projects in South America. In particular, I have tried to show the ways in which an administration guided by "socialism of 21st century" – for whom sovereignty has been a crucial part of the move away from the economic dictates of the IMF and the World Bank – has drawn upon a particularly rich anti-colonial history to bolster an identity that is both regional and national in ways that have made it difficult for activist messages to be heard. Such tactics in the industry are only just beginning to be studied with the nuance they deserve. While this is not to deny the downplay the material substrates

of people's lives – the people in this province desperately need these jobs – it is simply to call the attention of environmental activists and perhaps somewhat too-eager celebrants of the rights of nature to the fact that, as communitarians have long recognized, the tapping and energizing of regional identities is just as important to the mobilization of resistance to such projects as is the proliferation of statistics about the harm they too frequently cause. As Kath Weston and William Mazzarella have recently pointed out, any project that is not as emotionally resonant as it is factually persuasive is unlikely to command sustained consent. The RDP has proven particularly adept at encouraging such emotional resonance by supporting a deeply rooted sense of historical and regional identity. Correa's citizen's revolution and Alfaro's liberal revolution come convincingly together in the figure of the refinery. Just as Alfaro reclaimed the sovereignty of the nation from the incursions of the United States and other interested foreigners, so, too, the energy sovereignty that will be achieved through the refinery will render the nation decisively free of foreign influence.

By even conservative measures, Ecuador has less than 30 years of existing reserves left. While importantly investing in relatively clean hydro-power – the country aims to be a net exporter of energy in the next four years and to produce 93% of its electricity from hydropower – it has continued to grant oil concessions around Yasuni and to open the country to large-scale copper mining. In November 2012, the 11th round of negotiations for contracts for oil blocks opened, and, in late June 2013, after repeatedly stating that the oil fields in Yasuni would *not* be opened to provide additional oil for the refinery, the RDP announced that it had contracted a Chinese state-owned oil company to “engage in further exploration” in the Amazon region. At a time when urban environmental activists – in both Ecuador and abroad – talk anxiously about how to move toward a future that is post-petroleum and, at the same time, ostensibly radical governments invest just as anxiously in precisely those industries, it is increasingly important to appreciate the power of such anti-colonial narratives. Greater attention to the potency of these framings might help – if only in

small ways – to shift the ways in which we engage in environmental activism so that it speaks more clearly to broader swaths of the public at regional, national, and even international levels.

Bibliography

- Appel, Hannah. 2012. 'Offshore work: Oil, modularity, and the how of capitalism in Equatorial Guinea.' *American Ethnologist* 39 (4): 692-709.
- Arsel, M. 2012. 'Between Marx and markets? The state, the left turn, and nature in Ecuador.'" *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*. 103 (2): 150-163.
- Bassi, Michelle. 2009. 'La Naturaleza o Pachamama de Ecuador: What Doctrine Should Grant Trees Standing?' *Oregon Review of International Law*. 461-477.
- Bebbington, Anthony and Denise Bebbington. 2012. *Social Conflict, Economic Development and Extractive Industry*. London: Routledge.
- Becker, Marc. 2012. 'Building a Plurinational Ecuador: Complications and Contradictions.' *Socialism and Democracy* 26 (3): 72-92.
- Behrends, Andrea et. al. 2011. *Crude Domination: An anthropology of oil*. New York: Berghan Books.
- Burdon, Peter. 2011. 'Earth Rights: A theory.'" *IUCN Academy of International Law* 1: 1-12.
- Coronil, Fernando. 1997. *The Magical State*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- De la Cadena, Marisol. 2010. 'Cosmopolitics in the Andes.' *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2): 334-370.
- De la Torre, Carlos and Steve Striffler. 2008. *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Drost, Nadja and Keith Stewart. 2006. 'EnCana in Ecuador: The Canadian Oil Patch Goes to the Amazon.' In *Community Rights and Corporate Responsibility*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Eckersley, Robyn and Andrew Dobson. 2006. *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2010. 'Latin America at a Crossroads: Alternative modernizations, post-liberalism, or post-development.' *Cultural Studies* 24 (1): 1-65.
- Gudnyas, Eduardo. 2010. 'The New Extractivism of the 21st Century: Ten urgent theses about extractivism in relation to current South American progressivism.' *Americas Program Report*. Washington, D.C: Center for International Policy.
- Fitz-Henry, Erin. 2012. 'The Natural Contract: From Levi-Strauss to the Constitutional Court.' *Oceania* 82 (3): 264-277.
- Lomnitz, Claudio. 2007. 'Foundations of the Latin American Left.' *Public Culture* 19 (1): 23-27.
- MacDonald, Laura and Arne Ruckert. 2009. *Post-Neoliberalism in the Americas*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave-MacMillan.

Martinez, Esperanza and Alberto Acosta. 2011. *La Naturaleza con Derechos: De la filosofía a la política*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

North, Liisa, Timothy David Clark, et. al. 2006. *Community Rights and Corporate Responsibility: Canadian Mining and Oil Companies in Latin America*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Rival, Laura. 2012. 'Planning Development Futures in the Ecuadorian Amazon: The expanding oil frontier and the Yasuni-ITT initiative.' In *Social Conflict, Economic Development and Extractive Industry*. London: Routledge.

Rogers, Douglas. 2012. 'The Materiality of the Corporation: Oil, Gas, and Corporate Social Technologies in the Remaking of a Russian Region.' *American Ethnologist* 39(2): 284-296.

Sawyer, Suzana. 2004. *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Strauss, Sarah, Stephanie Rupp, and Thomas Love. 2013. *Cultures of Energy*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Watts, Michael. 2004. 'Resource Curse?' *Geopolitics* 9(1): 50-80.