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*Ezafun*



## EL FUTURO DE LA ALIMENTACIÓN Y RETOS DE LA AGRICULTURA PARA EL SIGLO XXI:

*Debates sobre quién, cómo y con qué implicaciones sociales, económicas y ecológicas alimentará el mundo.*

## THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND CHALLENGES FOR AGRICULTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY:

*Debates about who, how and with what social, economic and ecological implications we will feed the world.*

## ELIKADURAREN ETORKIZUNA ETA NEKAZARITZAREN ERRONKAK XXI. MENDERAKO:

*Mundua nork, nola eta zer-nolako inplikazio sozial, ekonomiko eta ekologikorekin elikatuko duen izango da eztabaidagaia*

### ***The Agrarian Question & Food Sovereignty Movements: A Comparative Analysis of Capitalism, the State, and 'Peasant' Class Dynamics in Bolivia & Nepal***

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# The Agrarian Question and Food Sovereignty Movements: A Comparative Analysis of Capitalism, the State, and 'Peasant' Class Dynamics in Bolivia and Nepal

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## Abstract

Beginning in the 1990s, many states in the global South experienced a 'second wave' of popular protests, ostensibly against neoliberal policies deriving from the global Northern imperium, but actually directed in a more profound sense against long-standing social inequities and political marginalization arising from entrenched oligarchical power and failed 'pro-peasant' agrarian reforms at the level of the state (albeit situated within the international context of 'centre-periphery' relations). What was distinctive about these protests was their broadly agrarian character and their 'peasant', and frequently indigenous, complexion. While re-affirming the anti-imperialism and national sovereignty claims of the 'first wave' of anti-neoliberal protests of the 1980s, the 'second wave' was remarkable for its articulation and valorization, in opposition inter alia to both 'orthodox' neoclassical 'developmentalism' and 'progressivist' Marxism, of a pro-peasant positionality, often in combination with a new concern with indigenous and gender rights, and environmental sustainability. These protests suggested that the agrarian question was far from dead, and that rumours to the contrary were premature if the peasant protagonists themselves were to have any say in the matter. These agrarian-based protests often coalesced around the notion of food sovereignty, and the first decade of the new millennium witnessed some remarkable political gains both nationally and internationally, the latter often propelled through the new global network of 'peasant' organizations, *La Via Campesina*. Perhaps the most remarkable political successes, however, particularly given the near universal dominance of neoliberalism until the turn of the millennium, have occurred at national level with the election of a significant number of left-leaning regimes and the adoption in their new or interim national constitutions of formal commitments to food sovereignty. Since about 2010, however, a common trend in these states has been a disappointing lack of progress in the translation of such formal commitments into substantive policies and change 'on the ground'. The states that broadly embody these trends include Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela in Latin America, and Nepal in Asia.

## Introduction

The current paper, taking two of these states – Bolivia and Nepal – as case studies, seeks both to understand the key dynamics of this remarkable phenomenon of ‘peasant’ protest movements against a backdrop of neoliberal globalization, and to delineate salient lessons from it as we enter a period of deepening economic, political, and agricultural/ecological contradictions both of and for global and national capitalisms. Specifically, the paper seeks to understand:

- The political economic (and ecological) basis of these ‘peasant’ protest movements;
- The reasons for their selective political success embodied particularly in the constitutionalization of food sovereignty;
- The reasons for the general failure substantively to build on these successes in the period since 2010 by reference to the interplay of class, state, and capitalist dynamics;
- Whether the original aims and objectives of these protest movements remain relevant and feasible today, and if so, how, politically and agro-ecologically, they might be revived and (re)-enacted.

### *Contextualizing the Agrarian Question: Capitalism, the State, and ‘Peasant’ Resistance*

The conventional wisdom of the last quarter century has been that the agrarian question is a thing of the past and that somehow, within the hubristic milieu of late capitalism, we have been liberated from the constraints of agriculture, land, and nature. Such a position is common to both orthodox, neoclassical developmentalism and ‘progressivist’ Marxism. The premise underlying this paper, however, is that the agrarian question, far from being dead, is arguably *the* most fundamental question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, this is the century, we would suggest, in which the current system of trans-nationalizing capitalism and imperialism, and the neoliberal food regime which forms an intrinsic part of it, are likely to reach their reproductive limits across both ‘political’ and ‘biophysical’ dimensions (Tilzey 2016a). In response to the growing contradictions *of* and *for* capitalism (ibid.), the outcome of the predatory character of monopoly-finance capital and the ‘new imperialism’ that now characterizes North-South relations, there seems to be a renewed imperative to wrest control of global agriculture, land, and other natural resources from these class forces and place them in the hands of the ‘wretched of the Earth’ for the purposes of autonomous, egalitarian, democratic, and ecologically sustainable development.

In order better to understand the current conjuncture, comprising the contradictory nature of globalizing capitalism and its state-level variations and mediations, as providing the generalized, ‘structural’ backdrop to the emergence of peripheral ‘peasant’ protest, it is important to survey, necessarily briefly, the emergence and evolution of the agrarian question from its first explicit intellectual formulation towards the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following this ‘classical’

formulation of the agrarian question in Europe by Kautsky (1899), the 'peripheries' of the global capitalist system received relatively little analytical attention from Marxist theorists. Nonetheless, the process of European and subsequently North American and Japanese imperial expansion would inspire the basis of a new critique emanating from responsive nationalistic and communist movements in the 'periphery', for which the militarized 'enclosure' of the world, through land alienation, forced production for export, the pillaging of mineral resources, and racial domination, became priority concerns. In due course, these movements would condense and transform the 'classical' agrarian question into a project of national liberation, now seen, however, as more than a mere means of industrial development, productivist agriculture, and proletarianization of the bulk of the peasantry as propounded by bourgeois and orthodox socialist theorists alike. The agrarian question in the 'periphery' would thus become intrinsically linked to the realization of national independence. As we shall see, the issue of whether the 'national' question is framed in sub-hegemonic (capitalist) reformist terms, or in counter-hegemonic (anti-capitalist) revolutionary terms, seems to be crucial to the resolution of the agrarian question in favour of the global 'dispossessed'.

The turning point in nationalist struggles was the victory of the Chinese communists, the Maoist vision of which eliminated 'conservative' forces in the countryside and set in motion an autonomous development programme. Here, its historic contribution to the agrarian question was the re-articulation of the home economy free from imperial intervention in a way that would seek to maintain rural-urban political unity and inter-sectoral balance, all within a self-financed and rural-based industrial transformation. As we shall see, this was a vision that would strongly inform the 'peasant' mobilizations in Nepal from the 1990s.

In the remainder of the periphery, however, a variety of transitions was implemented generally without major structural reforms, particularly land reform. With few exceptions, the large majority of peripheral states evaded industrial transition altogether, remaining agrarian, wholly disarticulated and perpetually subordinate to imperial capital and to nationally-based comprador classes (landed oligarchy and comprador bourgeoisie) (de Janvry 1981). The imperium, with the collaboration of these classes, engineered a new international division of labour in agriculture, marked by unprecedented food dependence in the South. The periphery entered a serious agrarian crisis in the 1960s as a consequence of the socially polarizing consequences of the 'green revolution', the exodus to urban centres of marginalized peasantry, and enhanced debt crisis. It was accompanied by a wave of mass mobilizations, culminating either in new revolutionary ruptures by peasant guerilla forces (Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, Mozambique) (Wolf 1969), or military coups under the aegis of the global Northern imperium (Latin America, Congo, Ghana, the Arab world). Imperialism, however, was at this juncture forced temporarily into retreat. Continuing dependency notwithstanding, imperialism acquiesced to the expansion of political sovereignty to the South and to limited experimentation with 'articulated' development as a social bulwark against further revolutionary upheaval.

This interlude of 'benign' imperialism and relative in-dependence for the periphery lasted only until the late 1970s, however. At this point, the neoliberal project was launched by the imperial North, a strategy to recuperate monopolistic profits and stave off an emergent South. In so doing, the project abandoned whatever incipient policy commitment to 'articulated' development had previously existed. Neoliberalism heralded not the 'end' of the agrarian question, but rather the re-launching of the agrarian question of monopoly-finance capital. Through the instrument of debt leverage, the bulk of the global South was gradually re-opened and placed at the disposal of trans-nationalizing capital. 'Disarticulated' development re-asserted itself, with conservative forces, the agro-exporting oligarchies that had been reluctant adherents to ISI and land reform during the 'in-dependence' interlude, now benefitting from the new dependency. Thus, the highly indebted peripheral and semi-peripheral states in which these class forces predominated (counterposed to a burgeoning class of semi-proletarian 'peasantry') were 'forced' (or, from the oligarchies' perspective, were happy) to lift state controls on currencies, prices, capital and trade, roll back industrial policies, privatize public enterprises and retreat to the export of cash crops and minerals as a means of servicing debt (and making profits for the oligarchies). This trend received further reinforcement with the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s, and the 1990s became a decade of almost unbridled neoliberalism.

The result of this resurgence of neoliberal and monopoly-finance capital was to shift once again the coordinates of the agrarian question. The rural exodus and semi-proletarianization of the peasantry continued unabated, but without absorption of the (part)-expelled workforce into industrial employment as was supposed to happen in a 'classic' agrarian transition to capitalism. Agro-export capital continued to marginalize the peasantry, while national industries collapsed. This new 'precarious' workforce has remained to this day insecurely employed, under-employed, or unemployed (manifested most obviously in the 'informal' economy), in constant flux between town and country, and across international borders (growth of the remittance economy). Instead of the classical dichotomy between 'peasants' (or more precisely farmers) and 'workers' seen in 'articulated' development, and in transitions from the former to the latter, the phenomenon that has prevailed is that of permanent semi-proletarianization. Here the expelled, the partially expelled, and super-exploited workforce competes with those in relatively secure employment to drive down wages across the board, delivering super-profits to trans-national capital.

This phenomenon has been interpreted, by both orthodox 'development' theorists and 'progressive' Marxists alike, as the 'disappearance' of the peasantry – for the latter, it is now simply an 'agrarian question of labour' in which the 'peasantry' merely constitute a slightly different form of the proletariat (Bernstein 2010). Nonetheless, members of the semi-proletariat themselves have never abandoned the agrarian question or the land question (de Janvry 1981). The demand for land has expanded in rural areas, and it continues to be seen as fundamental to the reproduction of the household. Indeed, the most politically

significant trend over the last two or three decades has been the upsurge in land occupations in the countryside of the South. This politically reflexive response by the semi-proletariat as agent has placed the agrarian question on the agenda as an agrarian question of land access and of rights for the 'peasantry'. So, access to land for the expelled or partially expelled is now also a question of regaining access to basic citizenship and social rights, or perhaps to claiming 'real citizenship' beyond bourgeois superficialities that has never yet been their (see Mooers 2014, Tilzey 2016b).

We are currently in the midst of a monumental, epochal crisis of neoliberalism, if not yet of capitalism in general. Imperial monopoly-finance capital has escalated its accumulation of land and natural resources in the peripheries, yet it faces three political challenges here (to say nothing of longer term biophysical constraints to which these are, in varying degrees, conjoined). The first two represent sub-hegemonic challenges to the hegemony of neoliberalism: firstly, the national sovereignty regime established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although attenuated, is nonetheless still exercised even by the small states; secondly, the emerging semi-peripheries (the sub-imperium), the unintended consequence of globalization, which, although not radical in themselves, have created new spaces and opportunities for manoeuvre by peripheral states. This sub-hegemonic trend is itself not without its own internal contradictions, these being intrinsic to capitalism and its necessarily state-based form (Tilzey 2016a). Monopolistic firms are springing up in the sub-imperium (China, India, Brazil, South Africa, etc.) and scrambling themselves for natural resources, land, and food supplies. Their home states may not be militarizing imperialism in the manner of the global North, and they do often maintain a higher commitment to the sovereignty regime and to national development. Moreover, the economic flows ushered in across the South have permitted some to circumvent the Western debt trap, as with the 'pink tide' states of Latin America. But all are, nonetheless, subject to the socially and ecologically contradictory dynamics of capitalism.

The agrarian question now certainly remains a question of national sovereignty under conditions of imperialism and sub-imperialism, therefore. But there is also now a tension between national sovereignty as the 'old', reformist vision of articulated capitalist development (even as a means to socialism), on the one hand, and national sovereignty as a 'new', revolutionary, vision of pro-peasant, pro-environmental, and possibly post-developmental *anti-capitalism*, on the other. It is the latter that represents the third, or counter-hegemonic, challenge to neoliberalism. Questions of gender equity, indigenism, and ecological sustainability are, in addition to class, now central to this latter vision. The political question now appears to be: what type of political organization can attend to the semi-proletariat, not to transform it into a proletariat or a class of commercial farmers in a full transition to capitalism, but rather to re-valorize its identity as a peasantry through access to land and the fulfilment of its vocation as small-scale and ecologically-based providers of secure food supplies for themselves, the local community, and the nation – in short, food sovereignty.

In response to deepened neoliberal imperialism and a resurgent landed oligarchy, the ‘peasantry’ have, against all expectations and predictions of their demise, risen up. From the 1990s, rural protest movements have proliferated in Latin America (Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia), Africa (most notably Zimbabwe), and Asia (particularly Nepal, but also India, Philippines) to pursue none other than the recuperation of land by means of mass occupations, among other tactics. The environmental cause has become one of their priorities, particularly in Latin America, given that the destruction wrought by extractive capital occurs most immediately at the expense of marginalized communities. This explains, at least in part, why these rural mobilizations have often incorporated indigenous rights, feminist, and environmental movements.

It is only in a handful of cases, however, these ‘peasant’ protest movements have succeeded in gaining some political power at the level of the state (Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Nepal) and have been able, *inter alia*, to secure commitments in their respective national constitutions to the principle of food sovereignty. In most cases, even here, however, such access to the state has been possible only through fragile alliances with an emergent, sub-hegemonic, national and anti-imperialist bourgeoisie. This means that such alliances have, from the outset, tended to compromise and subvert the original ambitions of the protest movement. While these national bourgeoisies, together crucially with a petty bourgeoisie of upper peasantry, still nurture visions of ‘articulated’ capitalist development, (with the peasantry transformed into capitalist farmers and/or a fully proletarianized workforce), the (middle and lower) peasantry itself seems to have other ideas. They appear to be proposing an alternative society which takes seriously ‘re-peasantization’ or re-agrarianization as a modern project (although calling strongly on traditions drawn from the past) , along with cooperative forms of production and labour absorption. What appears perhaps most distinctive about this new vision, at least in its Latin American variant, is the de-legitimation of capitalism, for political, cultural, and ecological reasons, both as an end in itself and as a putative transitional pathway to socialism.

### *Key Principles Underlying Capital-State-Class Dynamics of the Agrarian Question*

Implicit in this characterization of the agrarian question is a number of theoretical principles which enable us to understand its dynamics *in general*, and, in particular, to understand why ‘counter-hegemonic’ peasant protest movements are a phenomenon of the global South. The first general principle to understand is that capital-state dynamics are characterized not merely by inter-class contestation, for example between capital and the ‘classes of labour’, but also by intra-class contestation, for example, between the different class fractions of capital. These inter- and intra-class relations may also be characterized, in different conjunctures, by alliances and co-optation as much as by contestation. We need, therefore, to pay particular attention to the ‘political’ dynamics of accommodation and resistance between neoliberalism (in the present

conjuncture, usually the hegemonic class fraction) and other capitalist class fractions, notably sub-hegemonic movements (other, particularly nationally-focused, forms of capitalism), and between these fractions and counter-hegemonic movements (advocates of anti-capitalism). Rather than the simple binary of 'corporate capital' or 'empire' versus the 'multitude' that appears to be a common assumption amongst food movement activists and scholars, therefore, the picture presented here is one of a spectrum of resistances to neoliberalism of both a 'systemic' (varieties of capitalism) and an 'anti-systemic' (anti-capitalist) kind.

This picture is further complicated by the enduring, dialectical relation between capitalism and the state, which, through processes of class co-optation and compromise, blurs boundaries between capitalism and its 'other'. Thus, through hegemony, and within the necessary context of the state-capital nexus as I term it (Tilzey 2016a), capitalism has been remarkably successful in neutralizing and co-opting resistance to its exploitative dynamic. This success, however, has been located differentially in the global North. An essential part of this ability to neutralize and co-opt resistance derives from the capitalist world system's broadly bi-polar structure: the socially 'articulated' states of the global North, and the 'disarticulated' states of the global South.<sup>1</sup> Tendentially, oppositional relations between capitalist and non-capitalist classes in 'articulated' states have been defused by 'flanking' measures based on (re)-distributional, nation-building, environmental and other policies, together with the bestowal of (bourgeois) citizenship rights (Chibber 2013, Mooers 2014, Moyo and Yeros 2011).

In the face of increased neoliberal class exploitation, attempts to sustain this compact in the global North have been undertaken increasingly by means of imperial relations, both 'informal' (economic) and 'formal' (politico-military), with the global South. Surplus value from the classes of labor now flows from South to North, 'subsidized' by the massive and destructive hemorrhage of 'ecological surplus' that lies behind this relationship (Exner *et al.* 2013, Moore 2015, Smith 2016). Burgeoning levels of social and ecological dislocation in the South have been the consequence of this extractive relationship. Neoliberalism has similarly subverted the incipient processes of nation-building in the South that had characterized the Keynesian 'developmentalist' era. Resurgent neoliberal primitive accumulation, with the state acting as an organ of the expropriators and agro-exporting fractions of capital, have served to undermine the legitimacy functions of the capital-state nexus throughout much of the global South. The outcome of this 'new imperial'<sup>2</sup> relationship between North and South (Smith

<sup>1</sup> Social disarticulation occurs when the state-capital nexus is interested in its labor force principally from the perspective of production (its ability to generate surplus value) and not primarily from the perspective of consumption (the realization of surplus value through the sale of commodities). Social articulation implies a complementarity between the role of the labor force as producers and consumers, or a situation in which their role as consumers outweighs their significance as producers.

<sup>2</sup> Although circuits of transnational capital are perforce no longer nation-based, the whole logic of imperialism arises from the transfer of value from the South to the imperium in order to sustain the political-economic power and integrity of the latter, a relation sustained only by the imperial state's capacity to act as guarantor of its transnational capitalist interests.



2016) is that citizens of the former are accorded privileges denied to those in the capitalist periphery (see, for example, Mooers 2014).

This legitimacy deficit in the global South, together with the ‘formal’ rather than ‘real’ subsumption within capital of the semi-proletarian majority, carries with it, however, the increased likelihood of challenge to the state-capital nexus by counter-hegemonic forces. Attempted re-appropriations of the state by counter-hegemonic social forces are implied, comprising re-assertions of national, and possibly post-national and post-capitalistic, forms of sovereignty<sup>3</sup>. Such ‘radical’ counter-hegemonic social forces potentially challenge the essential foundations of capitalism, potentially propounding a more Marxian (changed social relations of production, reversal of primitive accumulation), rather than Polanyian (‘embedding’ of capitalism), imaginary of social relational transformation (Tilzey 2016b). Nonetheless, these global Southern re-assertions of sovereignty in its national form, are characterized by strong ambiguity. They comprise a complex *mélange* of sub-hegemonic (national capital fractions, petty bourgeois upper peasantry) and counter-hegemonic (lower/middle peasantry, landless, proletarians, and indigenous) social forces. The assertion of national sovereignty here, as a counter-narrative to neoliberalism, represents a tension between populist, sub-hegemonic, ‘neo-developmentalism’, on the one hand, and (potentially) counter-hegemonic ‘post-developmentalism’ (combining environmentalism, indigenism, re-peasantization, agroecology and food sovereignty), on the other (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014).

This may be described as a Gramscian and Poulantzian view of the state-capital nexus, combined with a concern to understand their differing, but dialectically related, forms between the North and the South. Thus, Poulantzas, much like Gramsci, defined the function of the state not simply in terms of the interests of capitalist class fractions, but also in terms of the need to secure the cohesion of society as a whole. For the state properly to function as a capitalist state, it must be able to go against the individual and particular fractional interests of capitalists in order to act in their general interest as a class. The state must also be ‘relatively autonomous’ from the interests and demands of capitalists. Although this gives the state an appearance of neutrality, however, its class character is implicit in its function in relation to capitalist society. For Poulantzas, then, the state provides the institutional space for various fractions of the capitalist class, in addition possibly to other classes, to come together and form longer-term strategies and alliances, while at the same time, the state disorganizes non-capitalist classes through various means of co-optation and division.

This Poulantzian, rather than Polanyian, view, suggests that global capitalism and its state form are rather less monolithic, and more fractured, than a binary view of ‘corporate empire’ versus ‘society’ would suggest. There is, firstly, an evident tension between the desire of transnational capitalist fractions to transcend the state and implant a global system of

<sup>3</sup> The other side of this picture is, of course, the increased use of coercion and violence by the peripheral state-capital nexus in the exercise of primitive accumulation, frequently supported financially and militarily by the imperial powers whose corporations benefit directly from the expropriation of land and resources from peasant and indigenous populations for the purposes of agro-export or mineral/fossil fuel extraction.

'frictionless' capital flows<sup>4</sup>, on the one hand, and the need by imperial states, particularly, to continue to respond to more nationally-based class fractions and to secure legitimacy amongst the non-capitalist citizenry, on the other. Secondly, given the necessarily state-secured nature of capitalism, the emergence of semi-peripheral states as the outcome of 'globalization' (notably the BRICS) contending to become members of the imperium and responding to nationally-based class fractions, represents resistance to neoliberalism by sub-hegemonic social forces. Thirdly, the burgeoning social and ecological contradictions of imperial relations concentrated largely in the South, and perpetuated by policies of neo-developmentalism and neo-extractivism, and by 'peripheral' forms of surplus appropriation more generally, are generating resistances to the state-capital nexus by 'radical' counter-hegemonic social movements. There are multiple incoherencies in the current conjuncture. These are potentially most disruptive the global South because, as a periphery for the core, it is here that the contradictions of accumulation are greatest and the legitimacy of the state is lowest. Consequently, it is in the South that the potential for transformations towards 'radical', counter-hegemonic futures appears greatest.

In order to illustrate these theoretical arguments, this paper examines the dynamics of agrarian class struggle, capitalism, and the state in Bolivia and Nepal. The Bolivian case, for example, demonstrates clearly the inadequacy of any simple binary assumption relating to a fully trans-nationalized capital/state, on the one hand, and an oppositional, united 'multitude', on the other. The picture is considerably more nuanced than this. This case study suggests, firstly, that the state, as a 'social relation condensing the balance of class forces' (Poulantzas 1975, Jessop 2016), continues to be the key nexus through which capital accumulation is both secured and its contradictions ameliorated or legitimated. Secondly, that there is no one, undifferentiated capitalist class, but rather fluctuating intra-capitalist contestation and alliance between three main fractions: trans-national capital, national landed oligarchy (hegemonic fractions), and small commercial farmers ('upper peasantry') and entrepreneurs (sub-hegemonic fractions). Thirdly, that there is no unified 'peasant way' in putative opposition to 'Empire'. Rather, we witness clear class differentiation between a commercial 'upper peasantry', espousing an increasingly capitalist rationality, and a class of semi-proletarians and landless who constitute the middle and lower peasantry, and cleave to a non- or anti-capitalist ethos (counter-hegemonic class). In Bolivia, the sub-hegemonic class fractions have exploited widespread anti-neoliberal sentiment to install in power the populist *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) party. MAS, despite its pro-peasant and indigenous rhetoric, does not support the smaller peasantry and landless in their agrarian struggles, however. Rather, it engages in an alliance with transnational, extractive capital selectively to

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<sup>4</sup> Transnational capital may want a global state, but trans-nationalization and the simultaneous transcendence of the nation-state is a difficult act to pull off, precisely because of the necessarily uneven development of capitalism, and neoliberalism especially, and the resulting legitimacy crises that ensue. Were transnational capital permitted simply to operate on the basis of the global free movement of capital and labour without the current labour arbitrage and beneficial transfers of value to the imperium that currently obtain, legitimacy crises would sooner or later be inevitable. The collapse of the Doha Round was precisely the result of the imperium's reluctance to abandon asymmetries in protection that permit it 'to have its cake and eat it'. But even these asymmetrical protections vis-à-vis the South have proven inadequate to insulate the North from the limits of legitimacy that are manifest in Brexit and Trumpism. So, the nation-state does seem to be profoundly necessary for the survival of capitalism if *both* accumulation and legitimacy functions are to be fulfilled.

‘compensate’, via state welfare schemes, for the socio-ecological dysfunctionality of capitalism, whilst advancing the interests of its own core support amongst the ‘upper peasantry’ (*cocaleros*). In this way, the potential counter-hegemony of the semi-proletariat, landless, and indigenous peoples, is both dulled by means of the MAS ‘compensatory state’ and thwarted by the opposed class interests of the ‘upper peasantry’, the landed oligarchy, and trans-national extractive capital. This process of class co-optation and division has also been facilitated by the deployment of post-classist and populist indigenist identity politics, characteristic of the ‘new social movements’. While, as we shall, deployment of ethnic and indigenous identity has been an important factor in fomenting popular discontent and anti-neoliberal mobilization, and hence in supporting the rise of left-leaning regimes such as Bolivia and Ecuador, it has, by the same token, helped to obfuscate real class divisions and, thereby, subvert resolution of the agrarian question in favour of the semi-proletariat and landless.

### *Differentiation of ‘Peasant’ Mobilization between States*

The previous section identified a number of *general* conceptual tools which help us to explain why ‘counter-hegemonic’ ‘peasant’ mobilizations, as food sovereignty movements, have a tendency to arise in the global South, and how there is then the potential for their co-optation in populist regimes (or outright repression where the regime remains oligarchical). This does not explain, however, the clear differentiation between states in the global South in the degree to which such mobilizations have succeeded in unifying at the national level, in subsequently overthrowing neoliberal regimes, and in instituting constitutional and policy change, including provisions for food sovereignty. The key to successful anti-neoliberal protest in states such as Bolivia and Ecuador appears to be founded on the ability to deploy ethnic and indigenous, in addition to ‘peasant’ positionalities, as an ‘anti-systemic’ ‘master frame’ (Rice 2012). But, in order to follow through on ‘counter-hegemonic’ transformation, and to avoid co-optation into reformism, there seems to be a need to retain, or to identify, a class basis for struggle *as a complement*, not as a negation, of the wider indigenous, ethnic ‘master frame’. Similarly, the indigenous, ethnic and ‘new social movement’ ‘master frame’ should not be deployed to deny the profound importance of class.

The key, in turn, to explaining why this should have been the case in Bolivia and Ecuador, and not in neighbouring Andean states of Chile and Peru, for example, seems to lie in the way in which the peasantry, and to a certain extent workers, were historically incorporated into the state. In the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, ethnic identities and forms of mobilization came to dominate class-based organization. By contrast, in neighbouring states such as Chile and Peru, the distinct modes of popular political incorporation produced a dynamic whereby class-based identities and organizational forms came to dominate ethnic identification. Strong and cohesive indigenous movements tend to emerge in states, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, where the peasantry has been politically

incorporated by multi-class, populist parties, as opposed to those states, such as Chile and Peru, with a historical pattern of peasant mobilization by parties with self-proclaimed Marxist affinities. The grassroots mobilizations of these Marxist parties tended to create horizontal forms of organization, such as cooperatives and peasant unions, which competed with, and in part served to undermine, more traditional, indigenous associational forms, such as *ayllus* and *comunas*. In contrast, the vertical lines of dependence established between indigenous peoples and populist or clientelist parties did not replace the horizontal organizational bonds of indigenous communities, and the creation of competing class-based bonds was less extensive than under explicitly leftist forms of incorporation. Consequently, with the advent of neoliberalism in the global South and the severing of corporatist ties of the peasantry to the state, it was only in certain states that conditions existed for the re-emergence of indigenous and ethnic identities as a platform for widespread, and agrarian-based, anti-neoliberal protest.

In this way, it would seem that the mode of peasant incorporation into the modern, capitalist (peripheral) state sheds considerable light on the conditions that facilitate or inhibit the articulation of, in the Andean case, ethnic identities as a 'master frame' of anti-neoliberal protest. Following Yashar (1999) and Rice (2012), it is possible to define the period of incorporation of the peasantry as the first and sustained attempt at agrarian reform in a state, that is the transformation of pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations principally by means of the 'Junker road', or the 'farmer road' (de Janvry 1981). Thus, it was through agrarian reform, specifically the destruction of pre-capitalist and semi-servile labour relations, that the rural masses in Latin America were first incorporated into the modern, peripheral capitalist state. Prior to these agrarian reforms, the indigenous peasantry was largely under the *political* control of the rural oligarchy, and thus unavailable as a potential base of support for contestation by classes and class fractions in and around the state. Henceforth, there would be an institutional separation, characteristic of the modern capitalist state, between the 'economy' and the 'polity', whereby 'struggle' would be confined to the realm of the 'political', while demands for more profound 'social relational' transformation in the 'economy' would be absorbed, within the limits of the capitalist state, by reformism.

In this way, two patterns of peasant incorporation may be distinguished: agrarian radicalism, associated with the 'farmer road' to agrarian capitalism, whereby class contestation around the state sought to organize and mobilize the support of the peasantry, and, in the process, offered it up for incorporation into the political system by the Marxist left. This type of incorporation is evident in the cases of Chile and Peru (the latter in the 1969-1975 reform period) (de Janvry 1981). Agrarian conservatism, associated with the 'Junker road', is the process whereby the peasantry was de-politicized and controlled by the state/political parties and eventually incorporated into the polity by means of patron-client linkages to multi-class populist parties. This second type of incorporation, demonstrated by the cases of Bolivia (1953-1964) and Ecuador (1964-1976), was more conducive to

the eventual politicization of ethnic cleavages, since it allowed local indigenous communal structures and associational forms to remain more or less intact. Ethnic identities took on greater political salience in these two states following the erosion of corporatist and clientelist linkages to parties under the pressures of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s (Rice 2012).

In Bolivia, organized workers in the mining sector were historically the central protagonists of popular struggle. Since the 1952 ‘revolution’ that brought the populist MNR to power, Bolivia’s strong, Marxist-oriented labour movement has had a tenuous relationship to the governing party. The peasantry, however, was depoliticized after the revolution and tied to the party through an elaborate system of state corporatism and clientilism. While labour in Bolivia has been organized around class-based entities, the incorporation of the peasantry into the political system followed a populist, clientilist pattern. The contemporary indigenous movement, and agrarian protest of which it forms an integral part, reflect these contradictory legacies. Thus, while strong at the national level, enabling Evo Morales to sweep to power, it continues to be divided by competing class and, potentially obfuscating, ethnicity-based demands, which render it susceptible to co-optation into reformism. This goes some way towards explaining the initial success, and subsequent disappointment, of counter-hegemonic mobilizations in both Bolivia and Ecuador.

In consequence, the Bolivian and Ecuadorian experiences of agrarian and indigenous-based mobilizations from the 1990s are very similar. Thus, anti-neoliberal agrarian protests were undertaken largely by the semi-proletarian peasantry, located mainly in the Andes, and by tribal/communitarian, indigenous groups in the eastern lowlands (*Oriente*). The latter, in particular, have been adversely affected by the mineral/oil extractive and agri-food industries. The peasantry’s protests hark back to the incomplete land reforms and unresolved agrarian question of previous developmentalist episodes, characterized by the ‘Junker road’ to capitalism, whereby the landed oligarchy was the principal beneficiary of reform. Their primary demand is for adequate land for self-subsistence as a matter of priority, and relief from the precarity of semi-proletarian existence. Some may aspire to become members of the commercial (petty bourgeois) upper peasantry, but these are a minority. These protests, making them distinct from previous mobilizations, also have an overlay of ‘post-developmental’ discourse, comprising concern for issues of indigeneity, gender, and ecology. In some respects, therefore, these protests have become ‘post-classist’, but the class problematic nonetheless remains strong, while exhibiting a strong indigenous inflection. These groups, in essence, are looking beyond capitalism and the capitalist state, in other words, beyond reformism. Their advocacy, then, appears to be directed, via profound social relational change away from capitalism, towards what might be termed livelihood sovereignty – the ability to lead fulfilling lives in socially and ecological sustainable ways, free of exploitation and the compulsion to sell labour power to others.

But these ‘radical’, counter-hegemonic groups have run up against, and sometimes been co-opted by, reformist, sub-hegemonic, nationally defined, discourses of sovereignty, including food sovereignty as productivist, national

agriculture. This discourse is articulated also by the small class of commercial family farmers (that is, the former ‘upper peasantry’, not the capitalist estates of the oligarchy), for example, the *cocaleros* of Bolivia. These sub-hegemonic constituencies take their reformist cue, in part, from former developmentalist episodes, such as the MNR in the case of Bolivia, a populist movement that sought to build national ‘articulated’ development. The populist regimes of Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador articulate these sub-hegemonic discourses, and have utilized widespread anti-neoliberal sentiment to forge alliances with counter-hegemonic groups, united by a rhetoric of anti-colonialism/imperialism and of indigenous revival and livelihood principles such as *buen vivir*. But this rhetorical ‘master frame’ hides the class divisions and real motivations that underlie the populist projects – those of favouring small scale and national capitalists through reformism, whilst largely neglecting the counter-hegemonic aims, and current reproductive crisis, of the peasantry and lowland indigenous groups.

### ***Bolivia: The Agrarian Question and the Subversion of Counter-Hegemony through Reformism***

We now examine the case of Bolivia, an exemplar of the trends identified in the previous section

Bolivia, like many other countries in the global South and in Latin America, underwent a neoliberal ‘structural adjustment policy’ (SAP) during the 1980s. Thus, Bolivia’s ‘New Economic Policy’ of 1985 dismantled public services and exposed the peasantry and indigenous groups to enhanced capital accumulation by the agri-food oligarchy and transnational corporations. Neoliberal policies reached a peak of unpopularity with the privatization of the state-owned water company SEMAPA (*Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado*), sparking the resulting ‘Cochabamba Water War’. This mobilization combined with massive protests by Bolivia’s largest union of peasants (the rural workers’ union, CSUTCB, (*Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinas de Bolivia*)) and a general strike called by the non-rural workers’ union, the COB (*Central Obrera Boliviana*). Three years of clashes between protesters and the oligarchic state led ultimately to the toppling of two Bolivian presidents. The 2005 election witnessed a clear victory for Evo Morales, the leader of the coca growers’ union. His party, MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*), was closely linked to the emergent indigenous, anti-colonial, and populist social movements that had coalesced in opposition to the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s and beyond. This broad coalition of peasant, indigenous, and worker organizations formed the *Pacto de Unidad* (Unity Pact) which was essential in Morales’ rise to power and became integrated, to varying degrees, within the new regime (Fabricant 2012, Webber 2015, McKay et al. 2014).

An important source of rural anti-neoliberal protest derived from the parlous condition of the peasantry in Bolivia, particularly the middle and lower peasantry. Thus, rural class structure in Bolivia is characterized by a concentration of land in the hands of a few, and large numbers of often landless peasants. Haciendas

occupy ninety per cent of Bolivia's productive land, leaving only ten per cent divided between mostly indigenous peasant communities and smallholding peasants. Four hundred individuals own seventy per cent of productive land, while there are two and a half million landless peasants in a country of nine million people (seventy-seven per cent of peasants are indigenous) (Enzinna 2007, Webber 2015).

Of the 446,000 peasant production units remaining in the country today, 225,000 are located in the *altiplano*, 164,000 in the valley departments (*yungas*), and only 57,000 in the eastern lowlands. Capitalist relations of production now predominate in the eastern lowlands and are increasingly displacing small-scale peasant production in the valleys and *altiplano*, although the latter continues to be the most important form of production in the *altiplano* (Ormachea Saavedra 2007). (The *altiplano* accounts for only nineteen per cent of total cultivated land.) The rural population is diminishing throughout the country as processes of semi-proletarianization and proletarianization accelerate with the gradual expansion of capitalist relations of production to all parts of the country (Ormachea Saavedra 2007). From the early 1970s, migrant semi-proletarians provided the workforce for sugarcane and cotton harvests in the lowlands, while, for the rest of the year, they maintained small plots of land in the highland departments from which they primarily travelled (that is, Cochabamba, Potosí, and Chuquisaca). Between 1976 and 1996, rural population as a percentage of total population fell from fifty-nine to thirty-nine percent (Pacheco Balanza and Ormachea Saavedra 2000). This decline was caused by two main factors: declining production in the *altiplano* due to soil exhaustion and increasing division of land into *minifundios* over time due to population expansion; and increased capitalization of agriculture in the lowlands, leading to decreased employment opportunities (Pacheco Balanza and Ormachea Saavedra 2000). This squeeze has accentuated the differentiation of the peasantry into rich, medium, and poor strata. 1988 survey data suggest that seventy-six percent of peasantry were poor peasants (lacking means to reproduce their family labour-power on their own land and obliged to sell labour elsewhere on a temporary basis). Medium peasants constituted eleven percent of the peasantry (defined as family units able to reproduce labour without selling labour-power elsewhere). Rich peasants (making a profit after reproducing their family and means of production, and purchasing the labour of poorer peasants and using modern technology) comprised thirteen percent (Ormachea Saavedra 2007). This process of peasant differentiation has only accelerated since then (the middle being squeezed), with richer peasants becoming commercial farmers (Ormachea Saavedra 2007).

To what extent has the Morales regime addressed these contradictions of the peasantry? Following on the demands for a constituent assembly made by indigenous and peasant organizations, Morales initiated a process through which a new constitution would be written in which provision was to be made for 'food sovereignty'. When the constitution was finally approved in 2009, it included food sovereignty as a central element of several sections of the document. First, it refers (Article 255) to food sovereignty in the context of international relations and treaties, suggesting that they must function to meet the interests and sovereignty, including food sovereignty, of the people (Bolivian Constitution 2009). Second, the chapter on Sustainable Integrated Rural Development emphasizes food sovereignty as integral to rural development, laying out the

objective to ‘ensure food security and sovereignty, prioritizing domestic production and consumption...and establishing mechanisms to protect Bolivian agriculture (Bolivian Constitution 2009, Article 405) (Fabricant 2012, McKay et al. 2014). It is important to note that these statements could be taken to mean either productivism and developmentalism, or a more pro-peasant and agroecological programme, or indeed both. As we shall see, the emphasis has tended to be on the first of these options rather than the second.

The position of the Morales regime with respect to food sovereignty is further clarified in the first National Development Plan defined in 2006. Here food sovereignty was identified as a key element in the ‘new vision for development’, the vision in fact being very reformist in character and drawing inspiration from the MAS’ populist predecessor, the MNR, which came to power in the 1950s. In 2008, the ‘new vision’ was elaborated into the Rural Development and Food Sovereignty and Food Security Policy (PSSA), and this was to be implemented through four main programmes:

1. SEMBRAR, promoting private-public partnerships and largely dependent on overseas development assistance for short-term investment projects designed to increase food production (Ministerio de Desarrollo Rural y Tierras (MDRyT) 2010, 63);
2. CRIAR, financing community-led initiatives to support small-scale agriculture (MDRyT 2010);
3. EMPODERAR, funding agro-entrepreneurial development projects (MDRyT 2010);
4. Promotion of Agroecological Production (*Fomento a la Produccion Ecologica/Organica*), supporting agroecological producers with production and marketing (MDRyT 2010, 66).

These programmes relied upon external funding and did not significantly restructure agriculture and governance (McKay et al. 2014) and, by definition, therefore, did not change the relations of production, or social-property relations, upon which any transition to a more ‘radical’ vision of food sovereignty would have depended.

A potentially more direct means of engendering food sovereignty took the form of Bolivia’s ‘Agrarian Revolution’ under the 2006 *Ley de Reconduccion* no. 3545 (Extension Law). This redefined natural resources as state property, and placed greater emphasis on state control and oversight of land consolidation and labour relations. The programme has four main policy aims:

1. The distribution of state-owned land and redistribution by expropriation of land not serving a ‘socio-economic function’ (FES) in respect of indigenous peoples and peasant communities;
2. The mechanization of agriculture;
3. Subsidized credits for small-scale producers;
4. Markets for the products of peasant origin.

The redistribution of land, unfortunately, has largely failed to happen, so that the main beneficiaries of this reform have been the small commercial farms of the upper peasantry (the crucial petty bourgeois constituency for the populist



reformists). Moreover, the agrarian oligarchy of the eastern lowlands has been left essentially intact (Fabricant 2012, Webber 2015). Thus, superficially, the agrarian reform appeared to be relatively successful, with more than thirty-one million hectares being titled and over 100,000 of these titles being distributed to 174,249 beneficiaries (McKay et al. 2014, INRA 2010, Redo *et al.* 2011). However, crucially, ninety per cent of titled land has 'been endowed by the state and is composed entirely of forest reserves' (Redo et al. 2011, 237). Thus, less than ten per cent of the reform sector has actually been redistributed to those who need it most. So, while the 'Agrarian Revolution' was 'intended' to challenge the prevailing and unequal agrarian structure, it has failed to do so. For example, the land ceiling of 5000 hectares in the reform has been rendered effectively obsolete by Article 315 (II) which states that if a corporation has several 'owners' or 'partners', each can have a maximum of 5000 hectares, making land size limits virtually non-existent (McKay et al. 2014). Furthermore, the land ceiling applies only to land acquired after 2009, exacerbating its ineffectiveness. The provision of credit for agricultural mechanization is also clearly designed to benefit the new class of small commercial farms, not the middle and lower peasantries, while of course being, at the same time, environmentally unsustainable.

The process of middle and lower peasant attrition has therefore continued under the government of Evo Morales, despite his pro-peasant and indigenous rhetoric. Capitalist social relations in agriculture have continued to expand under this regime, from seventy-nine percent of farm production to eighty-two percent. In 2005-6 small peasant production accounted for twenty-five percent of total agricultural production in the *altiplano*. By 2008-9, however, this figure had fallen to under twenty-two percent. State subsidies and support are directed to capitalist, agro-industrial production in the lowlands and to the small commercial farm sector, while small-scale peasant producers in the highlands are effectively abandoned (Ormachea Saavedra 2011).

The populist, reformist, Polanyian position of Morales has its own policies and its own analytics, deriving from its essentially petty bourgeois ('progressive') class base. According to this class positionality, the peasantry is a homogeneous group, defined by Chayanovian principles, by indigeneity, and by opposition to corporate, monopoly capital and to the landed oligarchy. By contrast, a 'radical', counter-hegemonic, or class relational positionality, would suggest that certain groups of the peasantry, that is, the upper peasant stratum, are actually benefitting from these processes of differentiation at the expense of other groups e that is, the great majority in the form of semi-proletarians and the rapidly diminishing cohort of middle peasants. The reality is that a significant, and growing, stratum of the peasantry is coming to be defined as 'rich' as per the tripartite classification above. It is accruing profits as a direct result of surplus appropriation through the work of salaried labourers, that is, of semi-proletarians from the growing stratum of poor peasants in most instances. They also have growing motivations for expanding accumulation through expropriation of further land, either from the middle or lower strata of peasantry, or from indigenous tribal groups in the lowlands through a process of primitive accumulation (Ormachea Saavedra 2011, Webber 2015).

The result is that it is very difficult to speak of a 'peasant way' in general as one encompassing the class interests of all three strata of peasantry. Rather, the upper

peasantry is likely to espouse a type of Polanyian 'alterity' more akin to that of small capitalists and petty commodity producers of the global North (the 'progressives' according to Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011), their primary opponents being the agro-industrial landed oligarchy with whom they are in competition for land and labour, and the transnational corporations. Absent threats from this quarter, the rich peasantry is relatively happy with the status quo under MAS, from whom the latter draws its core support (and the class from which Morales himself comes), and which is one of the main beneficiaries from the 'Agrarian Revolution'. By contrast, it is the middle and semi-proletarian peasantry who, for the reasons identified above, are most likely to advocate 'radical' change away from the status quo and towards land and food sovereignty - a change involving, at its heart, fundamental land reform in favour of these lower peasant strata. This is a counter-hegemonic road to alterity through social relational change to 'real citizenship' through human emancipation by means of the re-unification of producers with their means of production. The land involved in such reform will need to be taken not only from the landed oligarchy but also from the upper stratum of peasantry. The objective of such land reform is likely to be the creation of a stable stratum of middle peasantry, able to support its own reproduction and to produce modest surpluses from which to supply the non-farming population.

A transformation in this direction will be important, indeed vital, for both social and ecological reasons. The current conjuncture is highly unstable and unsustainable for both reasons - for the social reasons identified above, and for the ecological reasons deriving from the nature-destroying and fossil-fuel based character of the agro-industrial agriculture being practiced in the eastern lowlands. The classes benefitting from this process, the landed oligarchy, extractive industries, and the upper peasantry, are placing in jeopardy the livelihoods of the majority of Bolivians - the middle and lower peasantry (semi-proletarians), the urban proletariat, and lowland indigenous groups. To date, the urban proletariat has been placated by the 'compensatory state' (Gudynas 2012) through the proceeds of ecologically and socially destructive extractivism e but this cannot continue and is, indeed, faltering, as the commodity boom decelerates and austerity again begins to bite. The class interests of the middle and lower peasantries coincide in this conjuncture with those of proletarians e indeed many 'proletarians' are semi-proletarians. If the sustainable utilization and stewardship of Bolivia's rich ecosystems, including agro- ecosystems, are to be assured through food and land sovereignty for the long-term benefit of all as 'real citizens', then an alliance of these subaltern social forces - the middle/lower peasantry, the urban proletariat, and lowland indigenous groups - would seem to be an imperative development.

In the present, but increasingly unstable, conjuncture, *buen vivir* has been deployed as the foundational 'myth' for the MAS populist programme, taken as a projection of the collective, cooperative Andean and indigenous way. The reality described above, one of extractive capital and the peripheral, compensatory state, is very different from this assumed cooperative ideal. Using this cooperative ideal to legitimate its standing amongst the subaltern classes, MAS has attempted, via the compensatory state and reformism, to embed capitalism in Polanyian fashion by mitigating, in some measure, the impacts of extractivism on the subaltern classes.

Are there any indications that the agrarian question in Bolivia may be resolved in favour of a 'radical', counter-hegemonic interpretation of food sovereignty? Under conditions of neo-extractivism and the 'compensatory state', the class struggle in Bolivia appears to have assumed two principle dimensions (Veltmeyer 2014). The first dimension relates to labour in the public sector and to the mass of proletarianized and semi-proletarianized rural and urban workers comprising, firstly, the huge urban proletariat of self-employed workers in the informal sector and, secondly, a rural proletariat of landless or near-landless workers. Labour in this sector makes up well over half the 'economically active population' and the mass of the urban poor. This dimension of struggle refers in the main to rural urban dynamics in the *altiplano* and *yungas* regions of Bolivia, largely outside the new extractive zones located primarily in the eastern lowlands of the country.

The second dimension of class struggle, located largely in the eastern lowlands, relates, firstly, to the conditions generated by the operations of extractive capital, conditions that have given rise to conflict between the mining companies and the government, on the one hand, and the indigenous peoples and communities negatively affected by extractivism, on the other. It relates, secondly, to the mega-infrastructure projects proposed or undertaken by the MAS government and capital in support of extractivism (Veltmeyer 2014). The class struggle here is one waged essentially by indigenous groups in defence of their territorial rights to the land, water and subsoil resources on which their social existence and well-being depend, and in protest against the destructive effects of mining operations on the environment and their livelihoods. The movements formed to this end have been increasingly active in recent years, as the foreign mining companies have intensified their operations with government support (Webber 2015).

There are indications that these two dimensions of the class struggle are beginning to coalesce, with the confrontation between the government and social movements becoming increasingly dynamic and fractious. The proposal by the MAS government to construct a trans-continental highway through the *Territorio Indígena y Parque Isiboro Secure* (TIPNIS) in support of extractivism and against its own constitutional commitment to protect indigenous lands and nature has acted as a catalyst for the coalescence of these two dimensions of class struggle (Ormachea Saavedra 2011, Veltmeyer 2014).

The approach to development taken by the Morales government, the 'compensatory state' through 'progressive' extractivism, and the policy measures taken to redress the 'inequality predicament', raise serious questions about the likelihood, or even the possibility, of this regime consolidating and sustaining the few, although strategically directed, gains made towards fulfilling its stated aim of creating a cooperative and communitarian society in which all Bolivians 'live well' in social solidarity and in harmony with mother nature (Veltmeyer 2014). The government, like others in Latin America, has chosen to build the compensatory state on the proceeds of a particularly regressive and destructive form of capital accumulation, in which the heavy social and environmental costs are borne disproportionately by the communities most directly affected by the operations of extractive capital (Veltmeyer and Petras 2014).

This extractivist offensive has given rise to a destabilizing process of class struggle characterized by a veritable wave of protest and social resistance (Webber 2015).

In the last few years, a large number of movements and struggles have been calling into question the extractivist-export model and its attendant violence and environmental devastation wrought primarily by transnational capital via the medium of the Morales regime. By means of the compensatory state, the Morales government has constructed a structure of legitimacy, or in other words ‘flanking’ measures, to support renewed capital accumulation through extractivism (Orellana 2011). This represents an attempt to embed capitalism through income and infrastructure measures for low-income groups founded on a narrative of communalism and cooperation as *vivir bien*. In this way, the MAS government had, until recently, temporarily stabilized the contradiction between the accumulation and legitimation functions of the capitalist state. But because this development model, as reformism, has failed to address the class and environmental contradictions of capitalism, it now appears to be unravelling, as elsewhere in Latin America. With the de-legitimation of extractivism, the proletariat, lower and middle peasants, and indigenous groups are increasingly advocating a model of the cooperative society beyond capitalism. The capacity of the ‘compensatory state’ to subvert counter-hegemony by means of strategic material and rhetorical devices (including anti-imperialism and indigenism) remains strong, however, and it remains to be seen whether reflexive responses by the subaltern classes to Bolivia’s socio-ecological crisis can transform reformism into revolution.

### Nepal

As noted, the precise reason for selecting Bolivia and Nepal as case studies is that both states have food sovereignty written into their respective constitutions, facts that reflect the force of rural social movements, particularly during the first decade of the new millennium, in pushing for agrarian reform against entrenched landed oligarchies, political marginalization, and the neoliberalization of policy. In this there are broad structural similarities between the two states: largely agrarian social base (albeit with a largely and increasingly semi-proletarian ‘peasantry’), unequal land distribution (majority of rural population with insufficient access to land to meet subsistence requirements), progressive semi-proletarianization of ‘peasantry’, large ‘informal’ economy, and growth of remittance economy. The significance of these structural similarities, and the continuing relevance of the agrarian question and ‘peasant’ protest, is captured by a broadly Gramscian/Poulantzian/peripheral state version of Marxian theory in which class dynamics, the state, imperialism, and dependent development are central analytical categories (although the analytics here, in line with ‘post-developmental’ thinking, now question profoundly both the desirability or feasibility of capitalist development in its own right, and more particularly as a putatively necessary prelude to a socialist future).

There are, nonetheless, significant differences between the case studies: Bolivia has a large primary export economy – agriculture, oil, minerals, together with a significant nationally-focused bourgeoisie; Nepal has none of these (or if some, then only in small measure); Bolivian rural protest was broad-based, non-vanguardist, heavily influenced by indigenous groups and environmentalism, and therefore quite ‘post-developmental’ in tone; Nepal’s was explicitly Maoist,

vanguardist, and classist (led by educated Marxists schooled in the 'orthodox', technologically determinist variant of Marxism – see Bhattarai (2003), for example), with little reference to a 'post-developmental' or an agroecological ethos (although indigenous rights issues have comprised a significant element in the Maoist uprising). In this, the Maoist movement was heavily and explicitly influenced by the Maoist *Sendero Luminoso* movement in Peru (Nickson 1992). Additionally, capitalist relations of production have been dominant in Bolivia since the modernizing 'revolution' of 1952, while Nepal has never had a comprehensive programme of modernising, capitalist reform. Indeed, significant pre-capitalist and feudal social relations remain in Nepal (Sugden 2013), and, far from being a mere residue of the past, appear actually to be reinforced in the current conjuncture as a form of 'functional dualism', delivering 'super-profits' to those who control labour power. These feudal social relations, together with the survival of an absolutist monarchy, are amongst the important predisposing factors behind the Maoist mobilization of the 1990s, a mobilization that was to lead to the installation of full (representative) democratization in the following decade and the inclusion of the term 'food sovereignty' in Nepal's new interim constitution.

The Maoist mobilization was, then, an explicitly class-based and vanguardist movement, led typically by newly educated local elites frustrated by lack of opportunities for advancement in a system ossified by an absolute monarchy, by caste discrimination, and by an absence of democracy. The Maoists deployed a discourse essentially of democratic modernism, not of 'post-developmentalism', with an absence of concern for issues of agroecology and ecological sustainability. 'Food sovereignty', a term not really understood and adopted uncritically at the time of the 2009 Interim Constitution (Adhikari pers. comm), essentially meant national food security, supported by the rather vague notion of 'scientific agriculture', implicitly comprising modern, intensive, productivist farming practices. So, Maoism is a discourse generated by the survival of semi-feudal relations of production, an absolutist monarchy, and consequently inadequate channels through which a growing stratum of educated local elites could realize its political ambitions. In a sense, this stratum utilized the well-founded grievances of the 'peasantry' and landless to achieve its own ends – that of political representation and power. Once (representative) democracy was secured in 2007 and the interests of the cadre of Maoists relatively satisfied politically, the aims of Maoism could be easily subverted by the capitalist reformism of the Nepali Congress Party. However, while these short-term ambitions of the Maoist vanguardists have been satisfied, the structural contradictions of rural Nepal that they purported to articulate, most particularly poverty, exploitation, and highly unequal access to land, have only deepened since 2007. Indeed, these contradictions have been compounded by declining yields, soil erosion, chronic lack of investment in farming, lack of national food security (let alone sovereignty), and by an almost complete absence of land reform. Thus, the transformation envisaged around a new agrarian future that was central to the Maoist movement in Nepal, has now been all but forgotten (Sugden pers comm). In short, there has been a signal failure to make any progress at all towards that nebulous (as far as the vast majority of Nepalis are concerned) notion of food sovereignty. The agrarian question of the peasantry and food sovereignty in Nepal remains, therefore, completely unresolved.

Indeed, since the end of the Maoist war, a number of reactionary trends have been evident. The rise of rightwing populism had been important in Nepal (as in many other countries), as a reactionary backlash by the comprador elite, who mobilize peasants around issues of ethnic majoritarianism and nativism to divert attention away from the national level failings in a dependent, import based economy such as Nepal. At the same time the ethnic counter politics often linked to indigeneity has largely avoided issues of peasant politics focusing on representation within the political sphere – although when these issues do surface it is linked to historical animosities surrounding much older relations of production – namely the abolition of communal land by the feudal state in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. This raises a larger issue relating again to pre-capitalist formations. In Nepal, feudal land ownership, particularly in the lowlands, and in some parts of the hills, represents a competing set of class interests to those in the capitalist sector. This has both affected peasant movements for food sovereignty as the primary contradiction is between peasants and landlords and not between peasants and global agri-business. In the case of Nepal, farm exports are actually limited, although farmers are bonded to global agri-business through dependence on inputs. Nevertheless, the left movement in Nepal has underplayed internal pre-capitalist divisions and overplayed external role of imperialism, and this has perhaps made it more difficult to develop a broad-based peasant movement in the post (Maoist) war context (Sugden pers comm).

While the fundamental questions surrounding the agrarian question remain unresolved, the peasantry and landless, meanwhile, are obliged to devise livelihood survival strategies as best they can. In many instances, this has taken the form of the remittance economy, seasonal migration abroad to Malaysia, the Gulf States, South Korea, and India to work on construction sites, industry, or in agriculture. Some twenty-five per cent of Nepali GDP now derives from remittances from overseas work. This trend has been encouraged by successive Nepali governments as a means of relieving pressure for internal reform, whilst enabling semi-proletarians to eke out livings from their tiny plots of land by means of the remittance supplement. The remittance economy, together with the country's heavy dependency on international aid, has enabled the Nepali state to do little or nothing to address the underlying causes of crisis, social and ecological, that derive from the unresolved agrarian question. These twin crises will surely engulf the country as the remittance economy falters, however, and the contradictions are again 'internalized' within the bounds of the state. Thrown back on its own resources, it is at this point that Nepali state (as the social relational condensation of class interests) will again need to confront the agrarian question, either of its own volition, or through compulsion as the outcome of renewed social upheaval.

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## **Nazioarteko Hizketaldia**

**ELIKADURAREN ETORKIZUNA ETA NEKAZARITZAREN ERRONKAK XXI. MENDERAKO:**



**Mundua nork, nola eta zer-nolako inplikazio sozial, ekonomiko eta ekologikorekin elikatuko duen izango da eztabaidagaia**

2017ko apirilaren 24 / 26. Europa Biltzar Jauregia. Vitoria-Gasteiz. Araba. Euskal Herria. Europa.

## International Colloquium

**THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND CHALLENGES FOR AGRICULTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY:**

**Debates about who, how and with what social, economic and ecological implications we will feed the world.**

April 24th - 26th. Europa Congress Palace. Vitoria Gasteiz. Álava. Basque Country/Europe

## Coloquio Internacional

**EL FUTURO DE LA ALIMENTACIÓN Y RETOS DE LA AGRICULTURA PARA EL SIGLO XXI:**

**Debates sobre quién, cómo y con qué implicaciones sociales, económicas y ecológicas alimentará el mundo.**

24 / 26 de Abril, 2017. Palacio de Congresos Europa. Vitoria-Gasteiz. Álava. País Vasco. Europa.

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