
Articles

‘Multiple Battlefields’ of Lithium Extraction-Production at and around the Salar de Uyuni:

Economy vs environment/ecology, colonization vs decolonization,
and global-North vs global-South

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I. Introduction

In Bolivia lithium has taken a more central economic position since 2008 and will continue being central in the anticipated future, Revette explains the current situation of lithium extraction, although hydrocarbons currently serve as the primary source of revenue. Bolivia is a critical node in the ‘triangle of lithium’ and much of the hype surrounding its lithium industry is associated with the global excitement around this unique alkali metal’s role in changing energy technologies. Increased use of battery powered electronics, tools, and vehicles has resulted in a tremendous recent growth in global demand for lithium, and our appetite for all things tech-related only seems to grow. Hybrid and electronic cars along with endless versions of new smartphones and similar devices all demonstrate our expanding dependence on lithium (Revette: 35).

She continues that there are questions regarding the ability of current production to keep up with growing demand. Some foresee a quadrupling of lithium consumption over the next two

decades, and others even argue that lithium shortage will be likely soon. These tangible shifts in the global market place have opened up space for lithium to play a critical role, and Bolivia, home to the world’s largest known reserve of lithium, has identified this an opportunity to step in as a key player in lithium production. The challenge, however, comes in determining exactly how Bolivia will insert itself into this shifting global energy matrix (Revette: 36–37; Perotti and Coviello).

In this context, then she analyzes, Evo Morales, current President of Bolivia, rejected several offers of foreign investment in the lithium industry because he required majority Bolivian ownership in the process, and tremendous emphasis has been placed on the 100% state ownership and management of the initial phases of the industrialization. The lithium industry was placed under the control of a division of the state-run mining corporation Corporación Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL), Gerencia Nacional de Recursos Evaporíticos (GNRE), and Morales has repeatedly emphasized how the lithium industry is critical to the growth, development, and sovereignty of Bolivia. What makes lithium particularly distinctive in such a

mineral rich country is that it represents the unprecedented opportunity for the state to fully control the extraction and industrialization process from its beginning. In conjunction with the larger context of socio-political changes in the country and region, the 2008 inauguration of the state-run lithium industry brought with it great hope and expectations regarding Bolivia's ability to rewrite its long and troubled history with natural resource extraction curse (Revette: 37; Takemura; Mares; Aguilar-Fernandez).

In this article, the current state of the lithium extraction in Bolivia is critically analyzed. Then, the problematique of 'environmental human rights' and 'political ecology' in Latin America is deliberated. At last, future prospects of lithium and natural resources mining and its problems in Bolivia and Latin America are suggested.

II. Extractive Capitalism or Imperialism of the Twenty-First Century

1. Development, difficulties and negative effects of 'progressive extractivism'

In recent years, we can see the development of new form of extractivism in Latin America: 'progressive extractivism'. According to Veltmeyer, this is a heterodox form of extractivism based on resource nationalism and 'inclusionary state activism' in the form of the regulation of operations of extractive capital in the public interest, environmental protection, 'equitable growth' and 'sustainable resource development'. Progressive extractivism, which is exemplified by Bolivia and other post-neoliberal states, is characterized by a development strategy of resource extraction and primary commodity exports, which has been used to deepen the contributions of extractive sector and extend extractivism to other resources such as rare earth or industrial minerals, and lithium in Bolivia. In this scheme, the state plays a much

more active role than in the classical model of extractivism and this state activism has a more 'inclusionary' character (Veltmeyer: 81–82).

A more indirect but no less active role for the state has to do with development financing and infrastructure support, and the provision of subsidies and production incentives. In this scenario, he explains, the transnational mining companies would by no means be done away with. As in the case of Bolivia, they reappear in a new form of association with the state. Even in its new 'progressive' form, a strategy based on natural resource extraction is unsustainable, unable to escape the development trap of reliance and dependency on foreign direct investment and the machinations of global capital and the imperial state (Veltmeyer: 82–83).

As for the extraction and production of lithium, then he mentions, the government anticipates state participation only in the first or easiest phase of the industrialization process, via the formation of a state enterprise (COMIBOL) for the production of carbonate and lithium chloride. For the more complex heavy industrialization process required for the production of metallic lithium, and for the financing of this production, the government has been actively seeking and continues to seek alliance with foreign companies. The policies of governments in Bolivia in the mining sector have created a scenario in which the extraction and exportation of minerals and metals are dominated by the transnationals (Veltmeyer: 91).

2. Labor, conflict and class struggle in the new Bolivia

Most of conflicts in the extractive sector, and the resource wars over water and gas etc. which surround these conflicts, Veltmeyer analyzes, derive from the negative environmental impacts of extractive operations on the economy and on the livelihoods of indigenous communities located near those operations. In this context, class or so-

cial struggles have tended to take the form of a defense of the territorial rights of the indigenous population to the land, water and resources from the predation of extractive capital. Composed mostly of peasant farmers and rural landless or near-landless workers, the indigenous population can be viewed as a new proletariat, one more victim of a protracted capitalist development process of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Veltmeyer: 108–109).

The communities of indigenous peasants that make up rural society, he continues, form the social base of the environmental and social movements of resistance provoked by and brought into existence over the past decade in response to the destructive operations of extractive capital. In this situation, the indigenous peasant farmers have been largely proletarianized, forced to abandon agriculture and their rural communities and to work off-farm, many in the mining sector, or to migrate to the cities where they have joined the ranks of the ubiquitous street workers in the informal sector, which now accounts for up to 60 percent of the economically active population in Bolivia (Veltmeyer: 109).

Bolivia's extreme dependence on the extraction of hydrocarbons and minerals, he mentions, makes the economy vulnerable to the vagaries of commodity prices and leads to conflicts with indigenous and environmental groups over the adverse impacts of extractive projects. The mining sector continues to be disrupted by inter-sectorial conflicts between peasants and indigenous working class fighting over the scraps which the transnational mining industry leaves behind. An abundance of natural resources, together with other endogenous processes of a pathological character, distorts the allocation of economic resources in the region, resulting in a negative redistribution of national income, the concentration of wealth in a few hands, and widespread poverty and recurrent economic crises, while consolidating a 'rent-

ier' mentality, further weakening an already weak institutional framework, encouraging corruption and damaging the environment (Veltmeyer: 113; Veltmeyer *et al.*: 247; McNeishi; Plekkenpol).

3. Costs of extractive capitalism or imperialism

The impacts of extractivism can be put into several categories, both socioeconomic and environmental. Veltmeyer *et al.* insist that the latter relate to the degradation of environments, in which indigenous and farming communities of small-scale producers have to live and work, operate their enterprises and sustain their livelihoods. A large number of detailed scientific studies have corroborated the endless charges, claims and concerns of the populations and communities negatively affected by the operations of extractive capital, particularly open-pit mining (Veltmeyer *et al.*: 237).

The negative social impacts of extractivism, Veltmeyer *et al.* continue, concern jobs and livelihoods, and the health of community members and mineworkers, as well as new forms of social inequality. They also have to do with 'accumulation by dispossession', i.e. enclosure of the commons of land and water, separating the direct producers from their means of production for the purpose of extracting, exploiting and profiting from the human and natural resources. In conditions of the new extractivism, the 'enclosure' and 'depossession' dynamics of the capital accumulation process take and are taking the form of privatizing access to and commodifying both the commons of land and water and extracted subsoil resources, degrading the environment (e.g. polluting air and water), and undermining the livelihoods of the direct producers in their communities (Veltmeyer *et al.*: 237; Gudynas; López and Quiroga).

In short, the extraction and production of lithium have drawn a lot of money, but the result has been very poor and sad: there is no development;

the mass poverty and negative environmental impacts are alarming; what they have is environmental contamination and pollution, massive deforestation, and damage to health and disease.

III. Ethnic Rights and Dilemma of Extractive Development in Plurinational Bolivia

1. Suma Qamaña, ethnic rights and extractive dilemma in the Constitution 2009

Academics, social movement activists and politicians in Bolivia, Ecuador and elsewhere frequently use the Suma Qamaña (*vivir bien*, live well) concept, both as critique of development understood as progress/economic growth and as a principle of harmonious and ecologically sustainable life. According to Lalander, for a better comprehension of the legal setting and the complexities amidst the dilemma of extractive development, the ethnic-indigenous as well as broader social rights, and also the 'extractive developmentalist' rights of the state, it is of great importance to examine some crucial parts of the 2009 Constitution. Broadly speaking, there are references to the central objectives of poverty reduction, welfare provision, economic development and environmental protection throughout the Constitution (e.g. article 312). Moreover, articles 306 and 313 emphasize that the overarching ambition of Bolivian economic policies is to overcome poverty and social/economic exclusion (Lalander: 470–471).

However, he mentions, the same Constitution equally expresses the rights of the state to explore the natural resources of the soil, as pronounced in articles 319 and (below) 355, which also indicates the destination of the incomes derived from these activities:

- I. The industrialization and sale of natural resources shall be a priority of the State.
- II. The profits obtained from the exploitation and

sale of the natural resources shall be distributed and reinvested to promote economic diversification in the different territorial levels of the State. The law shall approve the percentage of profits to be distributed.

- III. The processes of industrialization shall be carried out with preference given to the place of origin of the production, and conditions shall be created which favor competitiveness in the internal and international market (Lalander: 471).

Clearly, then he analyzes, prevailing economic and political interests conflict with indigenous-territorial and environmental rights. Reinforced rights and the maintenance of resource extraction reliance, this enigma is clearly expressed in the Constitution. National authorities justify the persistent extraction with the necessity to achieve distributive justice, that is, a diminution of poverty and the provision of welfare for all, especially the marginalised sectors. This approach, with the partial sacrifice of the specific rights of the environment/nature and indigenous peoples to achieve social welfare, is sometimes labelled progressive neo-extractivism (Lalander: 472).

2. Indigeneity and the dilemma of extractive development

The capitalist logics of accumulation are, Lalander explains, still central traits of the Bolivian political economy, which has been criticized by many activists and scholars who were hoping to witness the progress of an anti-capitalist/post-capitalist project in the country. However, since the beginning, the Morales administration has explicitly communicated that the state should attain control of extractive industries so as to finance welfare reforms and to achieve economic development. Moreover, the Morales government realized radical legal reforms regarding both human rights and environmental principles within the hydrocarbon sector. These improvements, including the ac-

knowledge of rights in the 2009 Constitution, were the outcomes of decades of popular struggle, principally by lowland indigenous peoples (Lalander: 475).

The indigenous and class-defined discourse of Evo Morales and his government is, Lalander continues, pronounced and directed at different levels: the domestic and global spheres respectively. Evo Morales has indeed been portrayed as a climate hero around the world, leaning on discourses based on indigenous values and the worldview of Suma Qamaña (*vivir bien*) as options for responding to both global capitalism and the climate crisis. But, this discourse is applied mostly at a global level, whereas the domestic speeches of Morales deal more with development economics and fair distribution of resources, that is, policies and rights defined by class and social justice. The aim was consequently neither to abandon the matrix of capitalist development, nor to entirely end the pollution of nature through extractivism or to always respect the indigenous territories, but to establish the dilemma and propose the Suma Qamaña as an alternative to the world. The relative superiority of welfare policies vis-à-vis environmental conservation and indirectly indigenous territorial rights is similarly expressed in the quotation. Rounding off, he mentions, the extractive dilemma has been characterized by recent years of contentious politics and resource governance in Bolivia (Lalander: 476–477; Feil und Rüttinger; Schilling-Vacaflor; Mähler and Pierskalla).

3. Political economy of extractive development dilemma

The Bolivian Constitution of 2009 is, according to Lalander, undoubtedly among the most radical in the world regarding the incorporation of international human rights criteria and the recognition of specific indigenous rights. As expressed above in the fragment of the preamble to the Constitution, Bolivia is no longer a republic but

a plurinational state, which is a direct acknowledgment of the indigenous custom to organize according to distinct ethno-cultural identification within the same nation state. Additionally, the indigenous ethical-philosophical conceptualization of Suma Qamaña (*vivir bien*, live well) on the harmonious relationships among human beings and with nature/the environment has been established as the backbone of the Constitution and national development policies. A principal endeavor of the government since 2006 is the ambition to decolonize society, the state and the economy, which is also reflected in the Constitution. Historically, the Bolivian political economy had excluded the indigenous population. Mining and extractive capitalism and imperialism based on exploitation of the indigenous peoples as labor force have characterized the Bolivian political economy since colonial times. The 2009 Constitution strengthened the position and role of the state in the economy, as a response to the discontent with neoliberal global capitalism (Lalander: 464–465).

The Morales government, which has been in the forefront of what has been labeled twenty-first century socialism, Lalander mentions, has repeatedly emphasized that the state should achieve control of extractive industries in order to fund welfare policies and to achieve economic development. Regarding the state control of vital industries, mainly hydrocarbons, agro-business and mining, the Constitution declares the industrialization and commercialization of natural resources to be a key priority of the state, though taking into consideration the rights of indigenous peoples and provided that revenues should be directed at the common good (articles 319 and 355). The dilemma of state authorities is consequently, to be able to deliver welfare for all, which requires economic resources. With the public control of strategic industries, the redistribution of wealth through extraction can be achieved as provision of class-defined rights. The rights of indigenous peoples and of the en-

vironment are affected in situations where natural resources are extracted in indigenous territories (Lalander: 465; Kröger and Lalander; Canessa).

In short, the incorporation of the indigenous philosophy of *Suma Qamaña* in the Constitution and national development policies has reinforced the ethno-ecologist profile of the Morales government, particularly at a global level. Likewise, the government strategically uses the indigeneity and ethno-ecologist discourses. In Bolivian, ethnic rights frequently tend to be downgraded in relation to the broader class-defined rights as an outcome of the extractive dilemma.

IV. State-led Extractivism and Frustration of Indigenous Development

1. Contradictions of plurinational extractivism

The paternalist-clientelist state-society relations in Bolivia, reproducing themselves from resource revenues, according to Poweska, are not contradictory but fully complementary with and functional to the global capitalist system, thus facilitating the subjugation of Bolivia to the interests of global resource markets. Because of the Bolivian state's stronger involvement in socio-political mechanisms produced/conditioned by the resource extraction-dependency, as well as the need to respond to these mechanisms of state-society relations. Bolivia is more prone to capitulate before market pressure for natural resource exploitation. It also contributes to understanding why the Bolivian state, controlled by a supposedly pro-indigenous government, is more sensitive to the interests and expectations of indigenous peoples protesting against state-led extractivism (Poweska: 446).

The configuration of power and dominating social interests and expectations cannot be underestimated. He analyzes that the evolution of the state project towards centralism and the substantial

reduction of 'plurinational' elements of the state's ideology is following traditional and well-established patterns of the Bolivian political culture and character of state-society relations. Corporatism, clientelism, statism and rentierism are interrelated and constitute together the backbone of the Bolivian 'national ideology' and political system, historically rooted but re-articulated with the world commodities boom. This model incites conflicts between different social groups competing to gain influence in state power and capture rents. State-owned resources are used to secure the political loyalty of different social groups and the prolongation of power (Poweska: 457–458).

However, he insists, there is a fundamental contradiction between this model of state control of resources and indigenous peoples' self-determination in development. In its perverse logic of power, the state's paternalism discourages society's own initiatives. Instead of increasing incentives for people's own choices and direct opportunities of development, the state limits people's autonomy in disguise as the protector and saviour of society (Poweska: 458; Ströbele-Gregor; von Braun).

2. Compensatory or predatory? Problem of the state and asymmetries of power

Is the Bolivian state compensatory or predatory? We can say it is both at once. Poweska explains that, in order to be compensatory towards dominating parts of society, it is simultaneously predatory towards indigenous peoples occupying resource rich areas. But how can we explain this ambiguous nature of the Bolivian state's performance, based upon the contradiction of pro-indigenous discourse and pro-extractivist economic policy? (Poweska: 457).

In the interplay of structural and conjunctural factors, he continues, we can find the 'double face' of MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) which is incarnated in the current state project. The rul-

ing party almost since its beginning combined two ideological and pragmatic wings or discursive axis. The one 'wing' deals with extractive economic issues, interested in the return of the economically active central state, the revocation of privatization, nationalization of hydrocarbons and redistribution of rents, industrialization and general modernization, and the generation of employment. The other 'wing' deals with ethnic issues: claims for the end of the persistent exclusion and marginalization of native sectors of society which sought greater access to and presence in the political system, greater sensibility of the state to the interests of indigenous peoples and conferring collective rights (e.g. territorial autonomy, communitarian justice and democracy, recognition of cultural rights, and so on) (Poweska: 457).

There was no one agenda, he mentions, but several different agendas which formed an uncoupled scope of interests and expectations for the state's renovation, agendas of different sectors of society that felt similarly harmed by imperialism and neoliberalism. While these different dimensions combined well before the winning of political power, the apparent union of the indigenous-populist lock started to dissolve thereafter (Poweska: 457).

3. Indigenous rights, extractivism and 'pragmatic retreat'

Bolivia is a state with a long colonial legacy, and with a tradition of discrimination and exclusion of indigenous peoples. Historically, Poweska explains, it was a country where privileged sectors used state power as a mechanism to secure exploitation of subaltern groups. The term 'accumulation by dispossession' is used to address the indigenous peoples' resource dispossession by central state power as transferring property from indigenous groups to state ownership for the benefit of domestic elites and other social groups which are favorably oriented towards central power. All

of these refer to the problem of unequal socio-political relations that render the power structure of the state (Poweska: 455).

Bolivia also demonstrates some attributes of a classic rentier state. He continues that, as the country is historically a natural resource extraction-dependent state, such a state cannot function without revenues coming from resource export sectors, and it has a strong tendency to centralism and vertical relations with society. These patterns are conditioned by the need for control of vital resources and strategic sectors of the economy. Inevitably such a state would maintain a strong central character. This goes hand in hand with the predatory character of such a state (Poweska: 455).

Despite Morales' reputation as a defender of Mother Earth, Poweska insists, the Bolivian state brings into question the authenticity of its pro-indigenous agenda. The extractivist priority policy quickly contradicted the official policy of *vivir bien*. The project of decolonialization became problematic for the policy of nationalization of resources. There is a fundamental conflict between the state and many indigenous groups over this question. The expansion of hydrocarbons exploitation and mining as well as the development of infrastructure and energy projects progress at the expense of the most fundamental indigenous rights. The Bolivian state's 'pragmatic retreat' undermines indigenous rights to territorial and resource control. It seems that the promise of the plurinational state has been converted into empty rhetoric (Poweska: 444).

In short, the fundamental paradox of the rhetoric of human rights have been used and abused by the 'Janus-faced state': one face compensatory and the other predatory. Even if indigenous rights are being strengthened through international activism at the global level, their implementation strictly depends on local circumstances. Even the ratification of well-constructed international law and incorporation of fundamental indigenous rights

into the Constitution cannot ensure their effective realization in practice. The indigenous rights and indigenous agenda are being deformed and manipulated by the state. Together with infrastructural and energetic projects, the expansion of hydrocarbons and the mining industry are at the expense of the most fundamental indigenous rights.

V. Environmental Human Rights and Political Ecology in Latin America

1. New human rights perspective critiques current development

Natural resource exploitation, as the increasing number of large-scale and mega-development projects in the region, according to Raftopoulos, has made Latin America one of the most dangerous places for human rights activists and environmentalists in the world. Human rights have emerged as a weapon in the political battleground over the environment as natural resource extraction has become an increasingly contested and politicized form of development. Latin American governments have relentlessly pursued extraction, regardless of the socio-environmental costs and the abrogation of the most fundamental human rights which this development model entails. Along with the increasing recognition of the linkage between human rights and extractivism, questions are raised within human rights law over approaches to environmental protection and recognition of intercultural perspectives (Raftopoulos: 387–388).

The explosion of social-environmental conflicts that has accompanied the expansion of extractive activities, she explains, has posed a challenge to the political and economic ideology of the current development model. This challenge comes from the new relational ontologies of local and indigenous communities and cultures which have opened up debates about the relationship between the human and non-human world, the

rights of nature and human rights and duties. It has become increasingly apparent that the Commodity Consensus model and the largescale export of primary products in Latin America have advanced in recent years in a context of increasing violence and have impacted enormously on the promotion and protection of human rights. As a consequence of this new cycle of protests in the region, the environment has emerged as a new political battleground for human rights, and along with it, the urgent need to carry out more research on the relationship between human rights, extractivism and the environment (Raftopoulos: 388, 401; Hogenboom; Gianolla; Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment, Sustainable Development Solution Network, UNDP and World Economic Forum; Goyes et. al).

2. Epistemology: Knowing ‘political ecology’

In Latin America, Leff explains the epistemology of knowing political ecology, the ecological destruction generated by the exploitative appropriation of nature during the colonial regime and then on to the present world economic order was accompanied by the exclusion and eradication of traditional practices even as Western knowledge, economic rationality and religious beliefs were imposed on the conquered territories. Unequal international economic exchange is connected to the creation of ‘enclave’ economies as well as the historical and political alliances and dynamics in Latin American countries which facilitated such activity. The political ecology conceive of dependency and underdevelopment as a structural state of world affaires where poor nations provide the natural resources and cheap labor in an unequal interchange for capital and technology from ‘developed’ nations. The cause of Latin American misery is firmly connected to capitalist relations of production which underpin the wealth and power of Euro-America and not to rapid population growth in the Third World. With the contemporary

emergence of severe and intensifying environmental crises, the dialectical relation of capital and ecology is incorporated into the contradictions of the economic world order (Leff: 47).

Decolonizing knowledge, epistemological vigilance and critical thinking about the power strategies which are being deployed in the contemporary geopolitics of sustainable development, he insists, are central to the fight-back against the rampant forces of global capital which combine traditional and new forms of exploitation and oppression in Latin America as well as in the rest of the global South. Decolonizing knowledge is therefore an epistemological condition for deconstructing the exploitative trends of the global economy and reviving the ecological potentials and cultural meanings of local people (Leff: 49; López and Vértiz; Albrecht).

3. Emancipation: Enacting 'political ecology'

Leff suggests the emancipation of enacting political ecology that sustainable production is based on the negentropic conditions of production which is based on the ecological potentials of the earth and the cultural creativity of the peoples. Political ecology faces the challenge of harnessing and reversing this process of entropic degradation by prompting negentropic thermodynamic processes in the construction of a social order founded in the immanence of life, the ecological productivity of the biosphere, and culturally innovative practices which preserve and enhance the sources of life on the planet (Leff:51–52).

Enacting political ecology has also revolves around a clear sense of how past and present hegemonic power structures impinge on people's everyday lives. He insists that, to plot a strategy of emancipation involves an often highly location specific sense of multifaceted ecological distribution conflicts geared by multiple power structures. In effect, socio-environmental conflicts encapsulate the battle between sameness and otherness,

likeliness and difference, and ontological uniformity and diversity. While assessment of these conflicts is by no means confined to Latin America, this region affords an especially rich setting within which to explore and test this concept (Leff:52).

In Latin America, he concludes, the idea which socio-ecological justice and emancipation is based on the 'cultural re-appropriation of nature' is central to political ecology analysis. If the ethical politics of otherness points towards the pacific coexistence of different ways of being-in-the-world, the variety of ways in which human cultures construct nature open political ecology to conflicts of 'equity in difference' arising from different cultural visions and valuations of nature, as well as the confrontation of cultural/economic rights to appropriate nature and territorialize cultural diversity (Leff: 53).

In short, we need the transition towards de-colonial approaches to human rights built upon alternative cosmologies and intercultural perspectives, whereby nature has inalienable rights. There are a number of emerging themes which warrant further attention: how transnational human and environmental rights advocacy networks are shaping the meaning and possibility of human rights discourses, de-colonial approaches to human rights and methodologies in Latin America, the adoption of human rights discourses in different social and cultural contexts and legal systems and also gendered impacts of extractivism and the role of women in social-environmental conflicts could provide valuable new insights into the merits of extractivism as a development strategy. It is hoped that more multidisciplinary research into the topic, broadening the analytical base of debates on extractivism, helps foster a new relationship between humans and nature.

VI. Conclusions

The Bolivian Constitution of 2009 has been classified as one of the most progressive in the world regarding indigenous rights. The indigenous principles of Suma Qamaña (vivir bien, live well) on the harmonious relationship between humans and nature are established in the Constitution. Nonetheless, these rights clash with the constitutionally recognized rights of the nation state to extract and commercialize natural resources and mining under the banner of redistributive justice, welfare reforms and the common good: the dilemma of extractive development. The ethnic identity is multifaceted in Bolivia, and large segments of the indigenous population prefer to identify in class terms. According to changing socio-economic, cultural and political settings, the class-ethnicity tensions have altered throughout history. A central argument is that class based human rights in practice tend to be superior to the ethnically defined rights, as a reflection of the dilemma of extractive development, during Evo Morales' presidency.

In Latin America, human rights have emerged as a weapon in the political battleground over the environment in accordance with natural resource extraction which has become an increasingly contested and politicized form of development. Furthermore, the explosion of socio-environmental conflicts which have accompanied the expansion and politicization of natural resources have highlighted the different conceptualizations of nature, development and human rights. While new human rights perspectives are emerging in the region, mainstream human rights discourses are providing social movements and activists with the legal power to challenge extractivism, and critique the current development agenda. However, while the application of human rights discourses can put pressure on governments, it has yielded limited

concrete results largely because the state as a guardian of human rights remains fragile in Latin America and is willing to override their commitment to human and environmental rights in the pursuit of development.

In order to break this impasse, we need a new epistemology and emancipation, knowing and enacting 'political ecology'.

[Notes]

- 1) This paper is based on the draft titled "Lithium of the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, 'Gold of the 21st century' helps lift a Nation out of poverty or throw it into the abyss of despair?: The next battlefield between economy and environment/ecology" and presented at the 73rd Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, 15–18 November 2017, Philadelphia, U.S.A..
- 2) This paper is a part of research results of "Research on Environmental- and Eco-crimes by Progress of Scientific Technologies and Development of Societies and Measures against Them 2015–2019" (Subject Number: 15K03181) supported by the Grand-in-Aid of Scientific Research by Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
- 3) In order to make a research on current situation of lithium extraction and environmental degradation at and around the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, the author visited the relevant places: the salt plane lake (Uyuni), lagoons (Colorada, Honda, and Charkota), lithium factories (Rio Grande and Lippi), quinoa farms and factory, salt factory (Colchani), etc. in August 2017.
- 4) I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues for their help: Professor María Laura Böhme (University of Buenos Aires) and members of her research group.

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