

The New Global Politics

**Global Social Movements in the
Twenty-First Century**

**Edited by Harry E. Vanden,
Peter N. Funke and Gary Prevost**

5 Resource extraction, *sumak kawsay*, and social movement resistance in Ecuador under Rafael Correa

Marc Becker

At 7:39 pm on August 15, 2013, Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa (2013a) tweeted “in a few minutes I will speak to the country about the Yasuní-ITT initiative. It has been a long time since I was so nervous!” Correa had good reason to be anxious because he was about to cancel a signature program of his Citizens’ Revolution, one that enjoyed support of 90 percent of the Ecuadorian population. “The world has failed us,” Correa stated in a nationally televised news conference in which he announced that he had signed an executive decree to permit exploitation of oil in the biologically sensitive and diverse Yasuní National Park. “With deep sadness but also with absolute responsibility to our people and history, I have had to take one of the hardest decisions of my government.” He blamed the world’s hypocrisy for failing to support the innovative proposal with financial donations. “We weren’t asking for charity,” Correa said, “we were asking for co-responsibility in the fight against climate change” (Wyss 2013).

The Yasuní is home to the Waorani who had gained little from the petroleum economy. In response to grassroots pressure from social movements, Correa had attempted to negotiate an end to oil exploration in the park in exchange for international debt relief and development aid (Koenig 2007; Pastor and Donati 2008). Despite a strong global reaction against Correa’s decision to bow out of the Yasuní proposal, the pronouncement was consistent with previous political calculations that his government had made. Since taking office in 2007, Correa had pursued economic policies designed to grow Ecuador’s economy and lower poverty rates, and he succeeded admirably in these goals even as the methods he employed to achieve them consistently ran him afoul of environmentalists, social movement activists, and others to his left (Weisbrot, Johnston, and Lefebvre 2013). Although canceling the Yasuní initiative was the most unpopular decision in his more than six years in power, it would be an exaggeration to call this a watershed moment. Instead, it reflected the inherent contradictions and tensions between social movement strategies and electoral paths to power.

A key issue that has long faced the left is what might simplistically be reduced to a communist versus anarchist debate over the role of the state. This chapter, however, picks up on another tension within the left that is currently being played out in social movement conflicts with progressive governments in Latin America, and that is between modernization and ecology or sustainability, what some call the red–green

split. This division is, of course, related to the communist-anarchist one, and it acquires unique characteristics when focused through a Marxist-indigenous lens. While anarchist strategies influenced indigenous movements in Chiapas, Mexico, and Zulia, Venezuela, their counterparts in Ecuador emerged out of Marxist organizing efforts dating back to the 1920s, which seemingly should have made them supportive of state-centered development projects. In 1990, Ecuadorian indigenous movements emerged as a visible force in a powerful protest against economic exploitation and racial discrimination that shut down the country for a week. Over the next decade, they came to be seen as model social movements for their repeated challenges to neoliberal economic policies that successfully removed a series of conservative governments from office. Nevertheless, those same leftist social movements that opened up political space that paved the way to Correa's election in 2006 now ran into conflicts with that progressive government.

Capitalism and socialism share a common goal of modernization. The environmental consequences of development are the same whether it is carried out by capitalist or socialist regimes. As David Harvey (2005) notes, a modern capitalist strategy is to privatize wealth while socializing the negative consequences of development. Socialists, however, have a commitment to defending the interests of the most marginalized sectors of society that traditional development strategies can affect most negatively, as well as pursuing egalitarian and sustainable policies. Given the realities of climate change, environmentalists have disputed the notion that a petroleum-based and agro-industrial economy is compatible with a sustainable society. A challenge is how to bring the benefits of modernization to society while avoiding the pitfalls of the accompanying negative environmental consequences. If that balance is not achievable, the question then becomes whether socialists should favor economic development or environmental sustainability. An environmental and indigenous critique, however, contends that this is a false dilemma. Nonsustainable development strategies trade long-term survival for short-term benefits. Furthermore, the short-term benefits often feed into a mentality of a desire for superficial commodities and material gain rather than emphasizing more important societal values that prioritize human relations.

Correa's developmental policies could be characterized by what might be called *neoliberal environmentalism*; they reveal how easy it is to employ a discourse that articulates ideas of respect for the rights of nature as long as they are not operationalized.¹ A result is a reinforcement of a capitalist mode of production rather than advancing policies that prioritize sustainability. Many social movement activists find this tradeoff unacceptable. The threat that climate change presented to the survival of the planet necessitated an immediate turn away from capitalist development policies. Therein lies the rub between Correa and his opponents on the indigenous and environmental social movement left.

Yasuní-ITT initiative

Experts estimate that the Ishpingo Tiputini Tambococha (ITT) oilfields in the Yasuní National Park hold nearly a trillion barrels of oil, about a fifth of Ecuador's

total reserves, and that its extraction could generate more than \$7 billion in revenue over a 10-year period. UNESCO designated the park as a world biosphere reserve in 1989 because it contained 1,300 species of animals and 100,000 species of insects, many of which were not found anywhere else in the world. Each hectare of the forest reportedly had as many as 655 tree species, more than in all of North America. Not drilling in the pristine rainforest would protect its rich mix of wildlife and plant life and help halt climate change by preventing the release of more than 400 million tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. According to the plan, in exchange for foregoing drilling in the park, international donors would contribute \$3.6 billion, half of the estimated value of the petroleum, to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for health care, education, and other social programs. Despite broad local and international support for the plan, donors were not forthcoming with contributions. After six years, the fund had collected only \$13 million in donations with \$116 million more in pledges, well short of the stated goal.

The proposal not to drill in the ecologically sensitive area of eastern Ecuador predated the Correa administration. Franco Viteri Gualinga (2013), the president of the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana* (CONFENIAE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon), which groups 21 organizations and federations from 11 indigenous nationalities in the Amazon, noted “that the initiative to leave oil underground in exchange for raising funds as part of an ecological debt of industrialized countries was an initiative of Indigenous movements and environmentalists.” When Correa incorporated those ideas into his Yasuní–ITT proposal in 2007, not only did he use an indigenous proposal to advance the popularity of his administration, but he also used his government to give a social movement demand a global visibility that it would otherwise not have had. Seemingly social movement and government policy objectives and strategies should have reinforced each other.

From the beginning of his government, Correa forwarded a nationalistic economic platform and criticized foreign oil corporations for extracting the majority of petroleum rents out of the country. As he consolidated control over power, he pushed through congressional reforms that raised taxes on windfall oil profits and used these funds to provide subsidies to poor people to lower their utility costs, expand access to credit, and improve social services (Conaghan 2008, 55). “Now the oil is everyone’s,” Correa declared (Saavedra 2007, 1). He stopped short, though, of nationalizing natural resources. Furthermore, more important than the nationalization of natural resources is the nationalization of the industry that extracts the wealth from those resources. Commonly neoliberal governments had privatized industries that governments had built to exploit valuable resources, thereby limiting public ownership of the means of production. Social movement activists criticized the Correa administration for not doing more to build alternative economic models that would shift resources to the most dispossessed and impoverished sectors of society.

In contrast to Correa’s extractivist development model, social movement advocates instead promoted the *sumak kawsay* (the “good life,” or *buen vivir* in

Spanish), a Quechua concept that privileged human needs over those of capital or non-ecological development. After Evo Morales's ascendancy to the Bolivian presidency in 2006, Bolivian foreign minister David Choquehuanca emphasized the necessity of pursuing the Andean principle of living well (*vivir bien*) rather than the capitalist, modernist concept of living better (*vivir mejor*). Instead of focusing on material accumulation, this approach sought to build a sustainable economy. This perspective included an explicit critique of traditional development strategies that increased the use of resources rather than seeking to live in harmony with others and with nature. Uruguayan environmental analyst Eduardo Gudynas (2013a, 23) aptly notes that the *sumak kawsay* "is a complex conceptual field that includes different perspectives that simultaneously present a radical critique of current development approaches and endorse alternatives based on the rights of nature, expanded conceptions of the community, rejection of the linearity of history, and so on." It draws on gender, the rights of nature, plurinationality, and indigenous cosmologies.

Economist and social movement ally Alberto Acosta (2013a) points out that the *sumak kawsay* is different than development in that it does not apply a set of policies, instruments, and indicators to leave an "underdeveloped" state to achieve a "developed" condition. Acosta notes that despite the attempts of many countries to follow that path, few have achieved the goal, thereby pointing to the weakness of that approach. Rather, these attempts have resulted in a *mal desarrollo*, a "bad" or distorted development, which has contributed to climate change on a global scale. He urges instead to move beyond traditional concepts of progress that emphasize production and mechanical notions of economic growth. Acosta joined social movement activists in calling for new visions based on indigenous knowledge and ancestral concepts that were consistent with ecological, popular, Marxist, feminist, and other alternative ideas for how to structure society that emerged out of marginalized sectors. He points to the need to overcome the divorce between nature and human beings. Instead of sustaining civilization, capitalism puts life itself at risk. The *sumak kawsay* charted one path for moving beyond Western notions of progress, with a special attention to the rights of nature. Acosta became one of the most vocal advocates for social movement demands for alternative concepts of development.

As a neo-Keynesian economist trained at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Correa attempted to use petroleum resources to develop the Ecuadorian economy. Correa maintained that anything could be used for good or evil, and that he was determined to use Ecuador's natural resources to construct a positive development model. Creating alternatives to an extractive economy was a long-term proposition, he said, and short-term dependence on mining for revenue and employment was unavoidable. Correa claimed that "the real dilemma" of drilling in a sensitive ecological area was "do we protect 100 percent of the Yasuní and have no resources to meet the urgent needs of our people, or do we save 99 percent of it and have \$18 billion to fight poverty?" (Kestenbaum 2013). Indigenous and environmentalist opponents, however, claimed that in framing the issue this

way, Correa had set up a false dilemma and that it revealed his failure to break from a capitalist logic of resource extraction.

Underlining a reality that has been an important motivating factor for many social movements, Acosta referred to petroleum as a “resource curse.” Professor Carlos Larrea (2013) who worked on the Yasuní–ITT initiative notes that although Ecuador had exported petroleum for more than four decades, “poverty still affects one in three Ecuadorians, and almost half of our workers are underemployed.” No oil-exporting country, he maintained, had managed to achieve an equitable and sustainable form of development. Economic studies illustrate resource extraction provides a fundamentally flawed strategy for economic development.

As dependency theorists had long observed, the value added to the processing of raw commodities inevitably accrued to advanced industrial economies, not to peripheral countries such as Ecuador. Furthermore, as Ecuador raised taxes on oil companies, they stopped investing in new explorations and production stagnated at about 500,000 barrels per day. Serious questions remained as to whether a reliance on export commodities could grow Ecuador’s economy. As Gudynas (2013b) observed:

There are many intermediate steps between extracting a natural resource and reducing poverty, and it is in these stages that a great many problems arise. These go from the very doubtful economic benefits of these kinds of extractive industry (since on the one hand the State profits from exporting oil, but loses on the other due to the need to attend to social and environmental impacts), to the role of intermediary (where the enterprises, whether state or private, from the North or from southern friends, can only succeed when they maximize profits, and this is almost always at the cost of the environment and local communities).

These fundamental problems led to a common saying in Ecuador that the country became a dollar poorer for every barrel of oil that it exported. Social movements aspired to a fundamentally different model of development, which led many activists and intellectuals to look for alternatives to drilling for oil in the Yasuní.

Correa’s social movement opponents repeatedly charged that the president had failed to make a fundamental break from a capitalist logic of resource extraction. Sociologist Jorge León Trujillo (2013), who had long studied Ecuador’s social movements, states that he never understood how the commodification of the environment, as would happen with the Yasuní initiative, could be considered a revolutionary proposal. As economist William Black (2013) concludes, “Correa’s budget priorities are precisely those recommended in the Washington Consensus – education, health, and infrastructure.” The economic proposals that Correa pursued were not unlike those that the conservative economist Hernando de Soto in neighboring Peru had long advocated. At best, for leftists and social movement activists, Correa’s approach appeared to be one of green capitalism that was quickly discarded when it no longer provided the expected economic returns.

Social movement protests

In November 2007, just as a constituent assembly began work on a new constitution, a simmering dispute at Yasuní boiled to the surface. In the town of Dayuma, local inhabitants protesting oil exploitation seized control of several oil wells. They demanded support for economic development and environmental protections for indigenous communities. Correa responded with a heavy hand, deploying the military to stop the dissidents and accusing the protesters of being unpatriotic saboteurs. He complained about “infantile environmentalists” creating obstacles to economic development and dismissed groups that opposed him as part of an “infantile left” comprised of “fundamentalists” who should not be allowed to derail his programs (Zibechi 2009). The government arrested 45 people and charged them with terrorism for attempting to disrupt petroleum extraction. After protests from human rights activists, Correa lifted a state of emergency that he had imposed, though the government kept 23 activists in detention. In March 2008, the assembly granted amnesty to 357 social movement leaders facing criminal charges for their actions in defense of the environment from mining and petroleum actions (Aguirre 2008; INREDH 2008). The logic of social movement activism and the government’s economic policies had come into direct conflict with each other.

For some, this repressive response showed Correa’s true colors. Correa pursued an aggressive and combative policy against his adversaries. His attitude was not limited to those on the conservative right, as he also relentlessly attacked progressive forces who were opposed to his developmentalist policies. Correa’s social movement opponents threatened to raise challenges to his actions, leading to further friction between indigenous and environmentalist activists and Correa’s urban supporters. Correa’s efforts to restrict the actions of social movements led to charges that he was attempting to criminalize political protest. The indigenous think-tank *Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas* (ICCI, Institute for Indigenous Sciences and Cultures) criticized Correa for betraying “signs of subscribing to the most radical proposals of colonial territoriality in recent years.” This included his desire to open spaces to mining, privatizing biodiversity, and increasing petroleum extraction (ICCI 2008, 8). In response, Correa called on his opponents to respect the law. “No more strikes, no more violence,” he said. “Everything through dialogue, nothing by force” (Saavedra 2008, 4). He indicated that he would not be swayed by social movement pressure, the same mobilized force that had challenged previous neoliberal governments and opened a path to his election on a leftist platform.

In January 2010, Correa backpedaled on the proposal to leave petroleum reserves in the ground in the Yasuní National Park in exchange for international funding for development programs. Correa complained that the proposal would come at a cost to Ecuador’s sovereignty and announced plans to commence drilling operations in the park. In response, Falconi, one of Correa’s closest allies, resigned his position as foreign minister. Falconi’s move led other officials to leave his government as well. “He didn’t only lose a foreign minister,” Acosta

said. "Correa lost one of the best advocates for the movement's ideology" (Saavedra 2010). Both Acosta and Falconi had been key players in the political project that brought Correa to power, and now both were firmly allied with a social movement opposition.

For the next several years, Correa retained at best tenuous support for the Yasuní proposal, repeatedly threatening to move to a "plan B" to commence drilling in the preserve. Reports indicated that quietly and behind the scenes the Ecuadorian government was proceeding at full speed to develop the oil fields because of their significant economic potential (Monahan 2013; Wallace 2013). During the 2013 presidential campaign, Acosta, who was running for the top office with social movement support as the candidate for the *Coordinadora Purinacional por la Unidad de las Izquierdas* (Plurinational Coordinating Body for the Unity of the Left), contended that "if Correa wins the ITT initiative will be dropped. The infrastructure is already in place to exploit the oil." Acosta noted, "Correa takes credit for the ITT initiative outside of Ecuador. But in reality he doesn't feel comfortable with it. He's preparing to blame rich nations for not giving enough to make it work" (Varas, Ribadeneira, and Watts 2013). Indicative of Correa's ultimate commitment was placing Ivonne Baki, a conservative politician who had participated in previous neoliberal governments, in charge of the project. In August 2013, Acosta's prediction became reality with Correa's decision to commence drilling operations in the park.

On August 20, 2013, CONFENIAE president Franco Viteri Gualinga (2013) released a statement that denounced the government's plans to terminate the Yasuní-ITT initiative. "The deepening of the extractive policies of the current regime, which exceeds that of former neoliberal governments," the statement read, "has led to systematic violations of our fundamental rights and has generated a number of socio-environmental conflicts in Indigenous communities throughout the Amazon region." CONFENIAE pointed to a historical pattern of the extermination of indigenous groups due to petroleum exploration, including the Tetete in northeastern Ecuador 40 years earlier. "History repeats itself," the federation proclaimed. "We are on the verge of a new ethnocide."

The current abuses were occurring, CONFENIAE complained, even as the country projected an image as "possessing one of the world's most advanced constitutions, which recognizes the collective rights of Indigenous peoples, especially their right to free, prior and informed consent, the rights of nature, the Sumak Kawsay, among others" (Viteri Gualinga, 2013). Nevertheless, "when the interests of large capital become involved, the rulers through their control of the judicial system, demonstrate that they have no qualms with reforming laws to legalize theft, looting, and human rights violations" (Viteri Gualinga, 2013). Correa's announcement to suspend the Yasuní initiative was a betrayal of social movement support for the policy. Reflecting the broadening divide between a popular leftist president and indigenous activists who should have provided his strongest base of support, Viteri denounced the decision as "only one more example of the neoliberal, pro-imperialist, and traitorous character of the current regime" (Viteri Gualinga, 2013). From CONFENIAE's perspective, Correa's actions confirmed

what they had long understood: “the government was never really committed to the conservation of nature, beyond an advertising and media campaign to project an opposite image to the world” (Viteri Gualinga, 2013). The government always had a double standard, and the plan to drill in the Yasuní was always the ace that they held up their sleeve. That realization was very disillusioning for many social movement activists.

Correa’s conservative opponents also opportunistically used the failure of the Yasuní plan to attack the Ecuadorian government. An orchestrated chorus of domestic and international media voices that already had condemned the Correa administration for his alleged repression of freedom of the press now appeared to be challenging Correa from the left. Writing in the opposition Quiteño newspaper *Hoy*, columnist José Hernández (2013) criticized Correa for putting the project in the hands of Baki, a person “whose ecological past is as irrefutable as her enormous political convictions.” Correa, according to Hernández, sent the wrong message by putting such an important political project in the hands of a person whose political positions shifted so easily with the prevailing winds. The *New York Times* (2013) editorial board questioned whether Correa’s original plan was “a good-faith effort to preserve an extraordinarily rich and diverse ecosystem.” The newspaper argued that “the consequences are dismal” and that “a valuable model for protecting regional biodiversity hot spots through a kind of global stewardship has been jettisoned.” Given their previously antagonistic editorial stances, the hypocrisy and opportunism of these editorial statements on this issue was immediately obvious. This led Correa (2013b) to tweet “Now the biggest environmentalists are the mercantilist newspapers” as he sarcastically suggested a referendum to require that newspapers be published digitally in order “to save paper and avoid indiscriminate logging.” The oligarchy’s exploitation of social movement concerns to advance their own political agenda highlighted the danger of an opportunistic alliance between conservative politicians and social movement activists against a popular leftist president who failed to incorporate indigenous and environmental demands into his policy proposals.

The most significant opposition to Correa’s decision to drill in the ecologically sensitive park, however, came not from the conservative oligarchy but from what should have formed his social movement base on the left. On August 22, 2013, in the name of indigenous, student, and environmental organizations, the noted jurist and social movement ally Dr. Julio César Trujillo formally delivered a request to the constitutional court in Quito for a popular referendum on the president’s plans. Correa initially appeared to welcome the challenge of opponents calling for a referendum on the government’s decision to drill in the Yasuní. “How am I going to oppose a referendum if it is a constitutional right to request one?” Correa stated. “It is also my right to request congressional permission” to extract petroleum from the park. Correa’s petition declared that it was in the “national interest” to extract petroleum from the Yasuní. Correa’s party Alianza PAIS had a super majority in the congress, and the delegates would be compliant to his leadership; there was little question that they would approve his drilling proposal. “We are sure,” Correa declared, “that with sufficient information we will have the full support of the

Ecuadorian people” to accelerate the pace of resource extraction (Prensa Libre 2013).

Correa’s opponents needed to collect 584,000 signatures, or 5 percent of the voters in this country of 15 million people, to put the Yasuní proposal to a public vote. The proposed referendum asked: “Do you agree that the Ecuadorean government should keep the crude in the ITT, known as block 43, underground indefinitely?” (Meléndez 2013). Although the group Yasunidos collected 850,000 signatures, on May 6, 2014, the National Electoral Council invalidated two-thirds of them because of alleged irregularities which led to charges and countercharges of fraud and bias.

Social movement activists followed multiple strategies to realize their objectives. At the same time that they organized a petition drive to achieve policy change through institutional means, they also engaged in street protests. On August 27, 2013, less than two weeks after Correa announced his decision to commence drilling in the Yasuní, a police cordon prevented demonstrators from reaching the presidential palace on Quito’s central Plaza de la Independencia to protest the government’s policies. Police fired rubber bullets at the protesters, injuring twelve people (nearly blinding a young woman) and detaining seven. Among those arrested was Marco Guatemal, vice-president of Ecuarrunari, the powerful federation of Kichwa peoples in the Ecuadorian highlands that had long fought against neoliberal economic policies. In response to the repression, the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), the country’s primary indigenous organization, released a statement that demanded “that the president stop the repression and prosecution of Indigenous leaders and convoke a referendum on oil exploration in the ITT.” CONAIE also demanded amnesty for all those who faced prosecution for charges of terrorism (Cholango 2013).

Environmentalism

Following his overwhelming 2013 electoral victory, Correa approached foreign investors to increase investment in the nascent mining sector. Correa’s goal was to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil exports with a goal of improving the country’s infrastructure and achieving sustainable economic and social development. While Correa defended a country’s right to nationalize companies with just compensation for the common good, he made no moves to do so. Instead, he was content to allow production to remain in the hands of foreign companies while living off the royalties from the extraction of the raw commodities. Even while Correa was able to negotiate very beneficial terms with the companies, he did not break from the underlying logic of a rentier economy that extracted raw commodities and in exchange imported finished goods with an accompanying failure to develop the country’s internal economy.

Environmentalists had warmly embraced Ecuador’s 2008 constitution for protecting the rights of nature, a recognition that built on a growing environmental consciousness in the 1980s and 1990s throughout the Americas (Galeano 2008).

Constitutional reforms in Colombia in 1991 and in Brazil in 1998 established the right of people to enjoy a clean and sustainable environment, even though the extension of human rights to the realm of nature was controversial at first (Martínez 2009). Ecuador's new constitution took this one step further to recognize the rights of nature itself, the first country in the world to do so. These rights included that of the very existence and restoration of nature. Article 71 declared that "nature or *Pachamama* [the Quechua term for mother earth], from which life springs, has the right to have its existence integrally respected" (República del Ecuador 2008). The inclusion of the rights of nature was largely due to the actions of Alberto Acosta (2009a, 15, 17–18), the president of the constituent assembly, who pressed for the need to go beyond an anthropocentric vision of Ecuador's future. Acosta argued that while giving rights to nature might seem as strange to some as the need to give rights to slaves or women appeared at one point in history, "great changes require bold action and open minds." Similar to how it was necessary to stop the buying and selling of slaves, it was now important to halt the commodification of nature. "If social justice was the central axis for social struggles in the twentieth century," Acosta maintained, "environmental justice will increasingly play that role in the twenty-first century." Constitutional assembly member Leonardo Viteri commented that while at first it might appear unusual to grant nature rights, it should not be so "if even corporations have rights" (Acosta 2008a, 260). Environmental issues gained broad support in the assembly.

In addition to the constitutional mandates to protect the rights of nature, the constitution also required the government to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, and in particular the Tagaeri and the Taromenane who were living in voluntary isolation in the Yasuní National Park. Article 57 of the 2008 constitution specifically states:

The territories of the peoples living in voluntary isolation are an irreducible and intangible ancestral possession and all forms of extractive activities shall be forbidden there. The State shall adopt measures to guarantee their lives, enforce respect for self-determination and the will to remain in isolation and to ensure observance of their rights. The violation of these rights shall constitute a crime of ethnocide, which shall be classified as such by law.

(República del Ecuador 2008)

Quite simply, Correa's decision to drill in Yasuní was a violation of stipulations in the constitution to protect the survival of marginalized peoples.

Indigenous and environmental activists did not necessarily call for an end to mineral extraction, but they were opposed to new large-scale mining plans that continued preexisting extractivist paradigms. While at first a strong ally of Correa, Acosta subsequently became harshly critical of the president's economic development strategies. "We are obligated to optimize the extraction of petroleum without causing environmental and social damage," Acosta (2009b, 27–28) argued. Ecuador needed to realize the highest possible social benefit from each barrel of oil extracted instead of only focusing on maximizing production. "We have to learn,"

he continued, "exporting natural resources had not led to development." Rather, "the principal factor in production and development is the human being." Acosta (2008b, 45–46) insisted that Ecuador had to change "that vision that condemns our countries to be producers and exporters of raw materials" that historically has underdeveloped economies in the developing world.

In response to these criticisms, Correa denounced "indigenous fundamentalists" and leftist environmentalists, and argued that "the biggest mistake is to subordinate human rights to ostensible natural rights" (Latin American Weekly Report 2013, 1–2). In contrast to Acosta's position, Correa identified poverty as Ecuador's primary problem and justified extractive development strategies that resulted in a negative ecological impact on a few people in order to reduce poverty for many more people. Acosta (2012) denounced this strategy as a misleading farce, not unlike the unfulfilled promises of neoliberalism. An embrace of the *sumak kawsay*, Acosta contends, needed to move beyond rhetoric and vague platitudes to a pursuit of alternative development models. Underlying these conflicts between Acosta and Correa were different concepts of the state, and in particular the role of social movement participation in decisions over public policy. Despite Acosta's criticisms of an anthropocentric view of the world that informed Correa's political strategies, social movements favored policies that ultimately prioritized human development over concerns for environmental sustainability. Social movement leaders sought to chart paths forward out of this impasse.

Development at all costs

In a speech at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2005 where Hugo Chávez first articulated the socialist nature of the Bolivarian Revolution, the Venezuelan president argued that the world faced two options, socialism or death, because capitalism was destroying the planet. New left governments in South America, however, generally pursued a path of state-centered capitalism focused on development at all costs that ultimately resulted in as negative of consequences for the life of the planet as corporate-led capitalism.

Socialists commonly critique capitalism's unsustainable nature. The logic of capitalism requires the exhaustion of natural resources in order to maximize short-term profits at all costs, often resulting in unnecessary waste and consumption. A profit motive hinders an efficient and sustainable exploitation of resources. In particular, green economists question what the limits are to growth. A standard refrain is that a commodity-based policy of pursuing continual and endless economic growth is suicidal and will lead to the destruction of the planet (Williams 2010). In *Kicking Away the Ladder*, South Korean development economist Ha-Joon Chang (2002) contends that wealthy countries employ protectionist measures to develop their industries even as they force poor countries to open their markets to external commerce. As countries industrialize, they tend to implement interventionist economic policies to prevent poorer countries from following a similar path to development. Industrial countries view the planet as a zero-sum

game in which material gains in poor countries would come at a cost to those in wealthier ones.²

Some environmentalists view Marxism as embodying the same productivist drive as capitalism, and this has resulted in the disastrous ecological records of some socialist countries. Capitalism won out over feudalism because it was more productive, some Marxists would argue, and socialism will also triumph because it forwards an alternative economic model that leads to higher levels of development than is possible under capitalism. A socialist economy should be more efficient and sustainable because of a focus on human needs rather than consumption. At the 2009 World Social Forum, Correa contended that even though capitalism is commonly associated with efficiency and socialism with justice, socialism was both more just and more efficient than capitalism.

Despite capitalist promises of increased wealth that would benefit all of society, lived realities were quite different. Instead, capitalism delivered increased joblessness, rising debt, and stagnant incomes. These realities appeared to underscore Karl Marx's contention that capitalism was inherently unjust and self-destructive and that it would concentrate wealth in the hands of a greedy few and heighten class conflicts. Given this reality, it remains ironic that China turned to capitalism to grow its economy with a resulting rise in inequality and ecological destruction. Rather than emphasizing guaranteed incomes and increasing worker rights, China sacrificed those achievements for improvements in macroeconomic indicators. The Bolshevik bureaucratization of the Russian Revolution in the 1920s similarly emphasized economic growth at the cost both to workers' control as well as environmental destruction.

Given rapidly growing rates of inequality and ecological devastation that accompanied China's drive to industrialize, it should be surprising that China became a model for Cuba and subsequently other American countries like Ecuador. These economic development policies led to increased exploitation and class conflict. In Ecuador, social movement ally Alberto Acosta (2012) cautions against simplistically assuming that economic growth would diminish poverty. As the history of Latin America demonstrates, economic growth does not automatically translate into human development. The problem facing Ecuador, Acosta argues, was to solve problems of poverty without falling into the traps of growing inequality or destruction of the environment. It would be impossible to eliminate poverty, he contends, without addressing persistent problems of the excessive concentration of wealth. Social movement critics questioned the wisdom of the economic development policies that China and Cuba pursued.

A growing body of literature attempts to bridge the divide between Marxism and ecological economics. Economist Paul Burkett (2006, 6), for example, traces the contours of these debates in order to facilitate improved communication to enhance understandings between those who hold different points of view. Burkett notes that Marxists tend to be suspicious of attempts to limit development because of their desire to privilege attempts "to improve the human by fundamentally transforming class and other power relationships, or even by redistributing wealth

and income.” Ecological economists, in contrast, tend to disregard the role of class in creating environmental problems.

In an interview with the Chilean newspaper *Punto Final*, Correa defended his extractive policies against social movement opposition. “Where in the Communist Manifesto does it say no to mining?” he declared. “Traditionally socialist countries have been based on mining. What socialist theory is opposed to mining?” The president contended that it would be a serious mistake to break from an extractivist model. Rather, Ecuador must maximize use of these resources to develop other sectors of the economy. Where else, he asked, would the country acquire the necessary resources to fund schools, universities, and research centers to develop a knowledge economy? The alternative, he maintained, was to return to a primitive hunting and gathering economy (Cabieses Martínez 2012, 16–18). Correa shared similar goals with social movement activists, but they diverged over how to achieve those goals and what compromises would be acceptable to achieve a greater good.

In *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, John Bellamy Foster (2000) asks whether progress requires the conquest of nature. Despite a common assumption that Marx was only concerned with industrial growth and the development of economic forces, Foster argues that he was also concerned with human relations to nature. In direct contradiction to Correa, Foster contends that Marx did have ecological concerns and that his materialist concept of history must be understood in relation to his materialist concept of nature. In fact, Foster contends that it was not until the 1930s and under Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union that Marx's followers replaced his ecological critiques and concerns for sustainable development with an emphasis on production. Not only was this a reversal from Lenin's policies in the 1920s, but Foster argues that the resulting ecocide also halted an earlier intellectual dynamism and contributed to a subsequent economic decline. Economist Joan Martínez Alier (2013) similarly questions Correa's understanding of Marx's attitudes toward environmental issues. While Marx would not have commented on climate change because that concept was not understood during his lifetime, Martínez Alier contends that had he known of the climatic consequences of a petroleum-based economy he would have protested such developments. Burkett (2006, 10) argues that now that Foster and others have debunked common assumptions that Marx and Engels ignored natural limits to growth and advocated for human domination of nature, real advances can be made in the field.

One danger of environmentalism is to demand that people in developing countries accept lower standards of living in order to prevent environmental collapse, while those in the developed world enjoy the benefits of development and material progress. Ecosocialist Nicholas Davenport (2012, 9) points out that this attitude “is unlikely to win workers to environmentalism when capitalist austerity is already slashing living standards.” The ideological thrust of such an environmental strategy is not unlike the paternalism of *indigenista* policies that sought to keep indigenous peoples in a primitive state because of a fear that modernization would disrupt their “traditional” societies, even while these intellectuals embraced for themselves similar changes that these developments brought to the

western world. Despite the rhetoric of some neo-*indigenista* indigenous intellectuals, most community members reject primitivist mentalities that forego the benefits of modernity.

Davenport (2012, 9) imagines an alternative world in which ecologically sound practices would be achieved in a society where workers democratically and rationally control the economy in order to maximize public benefit while also taking into account ecological sustainability. He forwards a challenge of realizing human development while at the same time limiting the negative ecological impacts of the human presence on the planet. Because of much larger ecological and productive forces at play, a solution cannot lie solely in a liberal individualism based on personal lifestyle choices to save the environment. Industrial processes are far more damaging, and class relationships and economic modes of production determine these. On a theoretical level, Marxists argue that lifestyle changes would occur "as part of a social process of liberation, not as a forced sacrifice or moralistic principle" (Davenport 2012, 10). In practice, however, humans want to enjoy the material benefits of modernization and only the most altruistic or politically aware are willingly forgo the commodification of society in favor of a greater good. A challenge is how to reduce consumption to a sustainable level without lowering living standards, even while recognizing that levels of resource use are determined on a societal rather than an individual level. Nevertheless, this issue in large part remains a concern of the privileged in industrialized societies while the most impoverished sectors of the global south are in need of better and more secure access to food, water, medical services, housing, education, transportation, and communications infrastructure.

A longstanding Marxist goal has been to harness technological advances to enhance human potential. The goal, from this perspective, should be more free time to engage in fulfilling activities rather than leading to higher production levels. In practice, however, economic development appears to lead to growing desires for commodities rather than a more humane society. While technological innovations may provide short-term solutions to poverty and environmental derogation, Marxist ecologists contend that over the long haul such approaches only increase resource depletion and waste (Foster, Clark, and York 2010). Even as ecosocialists contend that environmental concerns are inherently wrapped up with the demands and program of revolutionary Marxism, historical events point to deep tensions and complications in realizing these objectives. Social movement needs and demands sat at the juncture of these debates. It was in the context of these broader debates that social movement activists turned against Correa's development policies.

Critics of capitalism point out that in developing countries, poverty contributes directly to ecological destruction, and transferring wealth to impoverished countries would foster more sustainable practices (Williams 2010, 224–225). Correa's economic policies, as journalist Raúl Zibechi (2012, 186) observes, most benefited a growing middle class that could take advantage of mall-based consumption, but it did most damage to poor rural and urban dwellers. Sooner or later, Zibechi argues, Correa would have to choose between the winners and losers of

his neo-extractive policies. His decision to discount social movement concerns over drilling for oil in the Yasuní indicates that he had made his choice.

These conflicts placed a popular president on a collision course with social movements that had once provided a leading voice against the implementation of neoliberal economic policies and opened up political space for the election of a leftist government. Alberto Acosta (2013b), who as minister of mines in Correa's first government was one of the strongest advocates for the Yasuní initiative, acknowledges the importance of the government in advancing the proposal. Even though the government has now officially disavowed the initiative, Acosta still hoped that social movements might be able to make this idea a reality. "Yasuní-ITT can still be achieved by civil society in Ecuador and around the world," Acosta concluded. "We need other Yasunís too." As social movements and leftist governments continued a dance around each other, it became increasingly apparent that we may need the cooperation of both to realize the shared objectives of saving the world from poverty, inequality, and environmental catastrophe.

Notes

- 1 The allusion with "neoliberal environmentalism" is, of course, to the ideas of neoliberal multiculturalism as most famously expressed by Hale (2002).
- 2 Correa (2009, 142–144) cites Chang as one of the key influences on his critique of the Washington Consensus and its negative consequences for developing economies.

References

- Acosta, Alberto. 2008a. *Bitácora Constituyente*. Quito: Abya Yala.
- . 2008b. "El buen vivir, una oportunidad por construir." *Ecuador Debate* 75 (December): 33–47.
- . 2009a. "Los grandes cambios requieren de esfuerzos audaces: A manera de prólogo." *Derechos de la naturaleza: el futuro es ahora*. Eds. Acosta, Alberto and Esperanza Martínez. Quito: Abya Yala, 15–24.
- . 2009b. "siempre más democracia, nunca menos: A manera de prólogo." *El buen vivir: una vía para el desarrollo*. Eds. Acosta, Alberto and Esperanza Martínez. Quito: Abya Yala, 19–30.
- . 2012. "Correa y su obsesión extractivista por el crecimiento económico." <http://lalineadefuego.info/2012/12/27/correa-y-su-obsesion-extractivista-por-el-crecimiento-economico-alberto-acosta/>, December 26, 2012.
- . 2013a. "Construir el buen vivir: sumak kawsay." <http://lalineadefuego.info/2013/01/08/construir-el-buen-vivir-sumak-kawsay-por-alberto-acosta/>, January 8, 2013.
- . 2013b. "Why Ecuador's President Has Failed the Country over Yasuní-ITT." <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/sep/04/ecuador-president-failed-country-yasuni-itt>, September 4, 2013.
- Aguirre, Milagros. 2008. *Dayuma: ¡Nunca más!* Quito: CICAME.
- Black, William K. 2013. "The Mystery of Cannibal Capitalists and Ecuadorian Entrepreneurs." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-k-black/the-mystery-of-cannibal-c_b_3823118.html, August 27, 2013.

- Burkett, Paul. 2006. *Marxism and Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Cabieses Martínez, Francisca. 2012. "Rafael Correa, de 'indignado' a presidente de la República: Revolución Ciudadana, el camino del Ecuador." *Punto Final* 758 (May 25): 16–18.
- Chang, Ha-Joon. 2002. *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective*. London: Anthem.
- Cholango, Humberto. 2013. "La Confederación Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador CONAIE, frente a la entrega de Mandato de la Sierra Central." *Quito*, August 29, 2013.
- Conaghan, Catherine M. 2008. "Ecuador: Correa's Plebiscitary Presidency." *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 2 (April): 46–60.
- Correa, Rafael. 2009. *Ecuador: de Banana Republic a la No República*. Bogotá: Debate.
- . 2013a. <https://twitter.com/MashiRafael/status/368170045182324736>, August 15, 2013.
- . 2013b. <https://twitter.com/MashiRafael/status/369463508364042240>, August 19, 2013.
- Davenport, Nicholas. 2012. "Toward a Sustainable Society: A Marxist Ecological Vision." *Against the Current* 27.5, no. 161 (November/December): 9–11.
- Foster, John Bellamy. 2000. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. New York: Monthly Review.
- Foster, John Bellamy, Brett Clark, and Richard York. 2010. *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth*. New York: Monthly Review.
- Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (INREDH). 2008. "Asamblea concede amnistía para los defensores de los derechos humanos." <http://www.inredh.org/noticias/noticias.php?modulo=noticiasleermas&idioma=es&id=178>, March 14, 2008.
- Galeano, Eduardo. 2008. "Nature Is Not Mute." *The Progressive* 72, no. 8 (August): 19.
- Gudynas, Eduardo. 2013a. "Development Alternatives in Bolivia: The Impulse, the Resistance, and the Restoration." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 46.1 (Spring): 22–26.
- . 2013b. "The Rights of Nature Following the End of the Petroleum Moratorium in Amazonia." *ALAI, América Latina en Movimiento*. <http://alainet.org/active/66614>, August 21, 2013.
- Hale, Charles R. 2002. "Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 3 (August): 485–524.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hernández, José. 2013. "Yasuní o cómo Correa piensa la política." *Hoy (Quito)*, August 18, 2013.
- Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (ICCI). 2008. "Plurinacionalidad, territorios y democracia: los límites del debate." *Yachaykuna* 8 (April): 5–9.
- Kestenbaum, David. 2013. "Ecuador to World: Pay up to Save the Rainforest: World to Ecuador: Meh." <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2013/09/02/216878935/ecuador-to-world-pay-up-to-save-the-rainforest-world-to-ecuador-meh>, September 2, 2013.
- Koenig, Kevin. 2007. "Ecuador's Oil Change: An Exporter's Historic Proposal." *Multinational Monitor* 28, no. 4: 10–14.
- Larrea, Carlos. 2013. "El Parque Nacional Yasuní." <http://lalineadefuego.info/2013/08/29/el-parque-nacional-yasuni-por-carlos-larrea/>, August 29, 2013.
- Latin American Weekly Report. 2013. "Correa Takes Big Risk by Bailing on Yasuní." *Latin American Weekly Report* WR-13–33 (August 22): 1–2.

- León Trujillo, Jorge G. 2013. "Yasunizar sin proyecto Yasuní." <http://lalineadefuego.info/2013/08/27/yasunizar-sin-proyecto-yasuni-por-jorge-g-leon-trujillo/>, August 20, 2013.
- Martínez, Esperanza. 2009. "Los derechos de la naturaleza en los países amazónicos." *Derechos de la naturaleza: el futuro es ahora*. Eds. Acosta, Alberto and Esperanza Martínez. Quito: Abya Yala, 85–98.
- Martínez Alier, Joan. 2013. "Marx y el extractivismo del presidente Correa." <http://www.censat.org/articulos/10024-analisis/10665-marx-y-el-extractivismo-del-presidente-correa>, February 23, 2013.
- Meléndez, Ángela. 2013. "Civil Society Calls for Vote on Drilling in Ecuador's Yasuní Park." <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/08/civil-society-calls-for-vote-on-drilling-in-ecuadors-yasuni-park/>, August 24, 2013.
- Monahan, Jane. 2013. "Showdown in the Amazon." *New Internationalist* 459 (January/February): 58–59.
- New York Times*. 2013. "A Good Deal Gone Bad." August 24, 2013, A20.
- Pastor, Ginés Haro, and Georgina Donati. 2008. *Yasuní Green Gold: The Amazon Fight to Keep Oil Underground*. Oxford: New Internationalist.
- Prensa Libre. 2013. "Reportan choques en marcha contra la extracción petrolera en Yasuní." *Prensa Libre*. http://www.prensalibre.com/internacional/Ecuador-medio-ambiente-petroleo_0_982701811.html, August 28, 2013.
- República del Ecuador. 2008. "Constitución de 2008." <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.
- Saavedra, Luis Ángel. 2007. "'We've Balanced out the Power.'" *Latinamerica Press* 39, no. 19 (October 17): 1.
- . 2008. "The Good with the Bad." *Latinamerica Press* 40, no. 1 (January 23): 4.
- . 2010. "Pioneering Alternative Development Program at Risk." *Latinamerica Press* (January 27).<http://lapress.org/articles.asp?art=6045>.
- Varas, Eduardo, Marcela Ribadeneira, and Jonathan Watts. 2013. "Ecuador Election: Rafael Correa Set to Win Despite Fossil Fuel Fears." *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/14/ecuador-election-president-rafael-correa>, February 14, 2013.
- Viteri Gualinga, Franco. 2013. "La CONFENIAE ante el anuncio de explotación del Yasuní ITT." *Puyo*, August 20, 2013.
- Wallace, Scott. 2013. "Rain Forest for Sale." *National Geographic* 223, no. 1 (January): 82–119.
- Weisbrot, Mark, Jake Johnston, and Stephan Lefebvre. 2013. *Ecuador's New Deal: Reforming and Regulating the Financial Sector*. Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR).
- Williams, Chris. 2010. *Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Wyss, Jim. 2013. "Ecuador Pulls the Plug on Innovative Cash-for-Conservation Program in the Amazon." *Miami Herald*, August 15, 2013.
- Zibechi, Raúl. 2009. "Ecuador: The Logic of Development Clashes with Movements." *IRC Americas Program*. Silver City, NM: International Relations Center, March 17, 2009. <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/5965>.
- . 2012. *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*. Oakland, CA: AK.