



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geoforum

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum)

## Editorial

## Not-quite-neoliberal natures in Latin America: An introduction

Corin de Freitas<sup>a</sup>, Andrea J. Marston<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Karen Bakker<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, 1984 West Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2, Canada<sup>b</sup> Geography Department, University of California at Berkeley, 507 McCone Hall, Berkeley, CA 94709, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 18 October 2014

Received in revised form 26 May 2015

Accepted 28 May 2015

Available online xxxxx

## Keywords:

Neoliberalism

Post-neoliberalism

Environmental governance

Latin America

## ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the concept of ‘not-quite-neoliberal natures’ in relation to contemporary theoretical debates and Latin American political processes. The phrase is meant to signal both our appreciation of and reservations about theoretical elaborations of neoliberalism, post-neoliberalism, and (post-)neoliberal natures in relation to the wide variety of reforms currently transforming resource governance in Latin America. After reviewing theoretical debates about (post-)neoliberalism and situating them within Latin American history, we present the major themes emerging across the papers in this special issue: (1) the prevalence of concomitant and overlapping political processes, (2) the productivity of tensions and contradictions, particularly with respect to the state-society relationship, and (3) dynamism, or an insistence on the depth and liveliness of ‘context’ and ‘contestation’.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Recent Latin American history has introduced a series of complications into prevalent understandings of neoliberalization and post-neoliberalization. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in Bolivia, where widespread mobilization in the early 2000s led to the election of Evo Morales – South America’s first indigenous-identifying president – and an apparent rejection of the neoliberal governance model. In August 2011, however, the contradictions of so-called post-neoliberal policies were brought to light when more than 500 indigenous Bolivians set out on a March of over 350 miles from Trinidad, a city in the eastern lowlands, to the nation’s highland capital of La Paz. The marchers were protesting the construction of a highway that was going to bifurcate TIPNIS (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécura), a protected national park and indigenous territory belonging to the Yuracaré, Moxeño, and Chimán peoples. The Morales administration claimed that the highway would increase national connectivity and economic productivity by facilitating the movement of goods between La Paz, Trinidad, and Brazil. The protestors, however, felt that the highway was more likely to increase deforestation by cocaleros (coca-leaf cultivators), serve as a drug trade route with Brazil, and facilitate exploitation of TIPNIS hydrocarbon deposits by Brazilian companies. Moreover, they were furious that their recently won right to prior consultation regarding activities that would affect their territories – guaranteed in the 2009

Bolivian Constitution – had been (in their view) summarily ignored (Hines, 2011; Webber, 2012). Commentators were divided: was the TIPNIS highway evidence of ongoing accumulation by dispossession, now driven by Brazilian neo-imperialist investors but otherwise identical to neoliberal practices that characterized the 1980s and 1990s, or was it indeed (as government officials sought to portray it) a post-neoliberal strategy focused on uniting national territory and generating wealth for redistributive social programs?

This example underscores the ambiguity of both putatively neoliberal modes of resource governance and their post-neoliberal alternatives. In Latin America, resource governance practices that might be characterized as neoliberal, post-neoliberal, and something-else-entirely coexist simultaneously, and they present us with a conceptual challenge: how can we characterize these “not-quite-neoliberal” natures, and how might they push a more general re-theorization of the processes of (post-)neoliberalization in Latin America – and beyond?

## 1. Introduction

The ‘neoliberalization of nature’ is one of the most controversial topics in contemporary environmental management. The past few decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the involvement of private corporations in resource ownership, biotechnological innovation, and the provision of market trading mechanisms for (proxy) ecosystem services. Simultaneously, markets (and market proxies) have been deployed as mechanisms of environmental governance at multiple scales. Advocates present these developments as a welcome ‘greening’ of capitalism that will resolve critically urgent

\* Corresponding author at: Geography Department, University of California at Berkeley, 507 McCone Hall, Berkeley, CA 94709, USA.

E-mail addresses: [corin.defreitas@geog.ubc.ca](mailto:corin.defreitas@geog.ubc.ca) (C. de Freitas), [ajmarston@berkeley.edu](mailto:ajmarston@berkeley.edu) (A.J. Marston), [karen.bakker@ucb.ca](mailto:karen.bakker@ucb.ca) (K. Bakker).

environmental crises and promise a virtuous fusion of goals of economic growth, efficiency, and environmental conservation. Opponents reject these developments as ‘greenwashing’ of the appropriation of resources and the environmental commons for private profit, which will deepen socio-environmental inequities. The ensuing debate on ‘neoliberal natures’ has elicited sustained interest (for edited collections, see [Heynen et al., 2007](#); [Mansfield, 2009](#)).

Latin America offers particularly fertile terrain in which to explore these issues, due not only to its brutal, decades-long experiences with neoliberalization but also to its enduring record of social mobilization that includes explicitly anti-, counter-, and post-neoliberal movements. The purpose of this special issue is to explore the ways in which the (post-)neoliberalization of nature is being pursued, contested, and adapted with respect to environmental governance and resource management in Latin America. The papers build on discussions that began in 2012, when we organized several sessions on ‘not-quite-neoliberal natures’ in Latin America at the Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting in New York. The papers contained herein are authored by some of those presenters and discussants, in addition to several invited contributors.

Our aim is to contribute to the growing body of literature engaging with neoliberalization as a set of contested and ambiguous political practices and ideological agendas ([Bakker, 2010](#)). Indeed, the term ‘not-quite-neoliberal’ is meant to signal both our appreciation of and reservations about theoretical elaborations of neoliberalism, post-neoliberalism, and (post-)neoliberal natures—particularly in relation to the wide variety of reforms currently transforming resource governance in Latin America. These developments are clearly troubling the generally agreed-upon definition of neoliberalism. The papers in this special issue thus offer opportunities for reframing conceptual debates around neoliberal natures (and, to a lesser extent, post-neoliberalization) in light of such social and political developments. Specifically, we encouraged contributors to link their analyses to a range of broader debates, including: the ‘new Latin American left’; the region’s ‘alter-globalization’ governance innovations (and, in particular, discussions of the degree to which these innovations are constructive responses to neoliberalization); and/or patterns of continuity and divergence with respect to the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s ([Kellogg, 2007](#); [Brand and Sekler, 2009](#); [Peck et al., 2009](#); [Sader, 2008](#); [Yates and Bakker, 2014](#); [Barrett et al., 2008](#); [Gudynas, 2010](#); [Webber, 2008](#)). Bearing in mind the potential polyvalence, in practice, of ostensibly neoliberal models, we also anticipated that contributors would grapple with examples of interrupted, redirected, or repurposed neoliberalization of environmental governance structures and processes ([McAfee and Shapiro, 2010](#); [Ferguson, 2010](#)). Here, it is important to emphasize the polyvalence of the term ‘neoliberalism’: the papers in the special issue engage with processes of neoliberalization (e.g. the role of marketization, privatization, and commercialization in environmental governance) and equally with the cultural and ideological debates in which neoliberalization is situated and contested (e.g. participatory governance, multiculturalism, autonomy, etc.) The papers thus collectively underscore the importance of polyvalent, flexible definitions of neoliberalization ‘on the ground’.

In the following section, we briefly discuss contemporary geographical research on (post-)neoliberalization and neoliberal natures, emphasizing the ways in which recent scholarship on the socio-environmental politics of neoliberalizing processes in Latin America and Brazil – as well as the protests and social reforms that these processes called forth – have contributed to broader debates. We then introduce the aims of this special issue and explore their relevance to emerging theoretical debates in the discipline before subsequently presenting a synthesis of insights into the grounded

engagement, articulation, and negotiation of (not-quite-)neoliberalizing processes. Lastly, we examine predominant themes across these contributions (which include concomitant processes, tensions and contradictions, and dynamism) before segueing into a concluding discussion of the broader implications for theorizing neoliberal natures and neoliberalization writ large.

## 2. Theorizing neoliberal natures in Latin America

It is helpful to begin by summarizing the framing of neoliberalism that underpinned the initial call for dialog from which this special issue emerged. As a starting point, neoliberalism may be understood as a doctrine with intellectual roots in 19th century liberalism: market exchange should serve as a guide for all human action ([Harvey, 2005](#)). In the 20th century, this doctrine first flourished in (and was actively promoted by) think tanks such as the Mont Pelerin society and specific academic disciplines (notably economics) ([Peck and Tickell, 2007](#)). Subsequent reformulations of the concept have led to a proliferation of interpretations, but for the purposes of this special issue, the following definition is most useful: neoliberalism may be defined as an ideal that expresses a utopian project of reorganizing capitalism at multiple scales – from the local to the global – around the logic and ethos of the market ([Peck, 2010](#)). Of course, this ideal is neither unitary nor uniform; the term neoliberalism is simultaneously a shorthand referent for a “complex assemblage of ideological commitments, discursive representations, and institutional practices, all propagated by highly specific class alliances and organized at multiple geographical scales” ([McCarthy and Prudham, 2004, p. 276](#)).

Whereas neoliberalism is an *ideal*, the cognate term ‘neoliberalization’ is a *process* of reforms and ideological transformations that seeks (at least in theory) to implement the doctrine of neoliberalism; these reforms that were implemented (albeit unevenly, amidst controversy and contestation) in countries around the world from the 1970s onwards ([Peck, 2010](#)). The two terms are therefore related but distinct, and at times even incommensurate. Although these neoliberalizing processes are highly variegated (historically and geographically diverse and context-specific), a few generalizations can be made ([Brenner et al., 2010a](#)). First, at the heart of neoliberalization rests a set of political projects that seek to enhance conditions for capital accumulation and restore the power of economic elites at multiple scales ([Harvey, 2005, p. 19](#); [Peck, 2010](#)). Second, establishing these conditions involves a combination of diverse and dynamic strategies, including (although not necessarily limited to): privatization; marketization; deregulation and re-regulation (‘re-tasking’ the state, flexibilizing labor etc.); the implementation of market proxies in service provision; the strategic re-scaling of governance mechanisms; the exploitation of ecological and/or social fixes; and, the use of ‘flanking mechanisms’ in civil society ([Bakker, 2010](#); [Castree, 2008a, 2008b](#); [Peck et al., 2009](#)). Third, neoliberalization is a process that discursively legitimates neoliberalism even while sometimes coming into conflict with neoliberal ideational norms ([Brenner et al., 2010b](#)).

While the complete constellation of processes and events that led to the resuscitation of liberal doctrine in Latin America cannot be fully summarized here, we highlight a few key moments of a much more complex historical genealogy. For much of the region, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by military dictatorships, growing urban poverty spurred by the uneven development of import substitution industrialization, and massive borrowing to finance the construction of large-scale development projects such as dams and highways. In this context, Chile became somewhat of an outlier when General Augusto Pinochet (who had led a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073687>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073687>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)