



Resources, regulation and the state: Struggles over gas extraction and passive revolution in Evo Morales's Bolivia



Diego Andreucci*

Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambientals (ICTA), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 January 2016

Received in revised form

4 September 2017

Accepted 5 September 2017

Keywords:

Political ecology

Strategic-relational approach

Gramsci

Hydrocarbons

Bolivia

Indigenous movements

ABSTRACT

The indigenous-influenced policies of Evo Morales's Bolivia represent arguably the most important attempt to improve the socioenvironmental implications of resource extraction in recent years, reasserting the role of the state and social movements against 'corporate-led governance'. In this paper, through combining the regulation approach with neo-Gramscian state theory, I carry out a conceptually informed analysis of struggles over hydrocarbon governance in Bolivia, in order to shed light on the reasons why such an ambitious political project has largely failed to realise its transformative potential. I make two interrelated arguments. First, initial, important advances in the governance of resources in Bolivia were later partially reversed, due to shifting power relations between social movements, the hydrocarbon industry, and the state. This points to the need of understanding resource governance and its changes as reflecting or 'condensing' shifting power relationships among social forces. Second, the coming to power of Evo Morales resulted in a 'passive-revolutionary' process whereby an initial radical break with the neoliberal order was followed by a gradual adaptation to pre-existing political economic relations and arrangements. Most notably, plans to reduce the country's dependency on gas exports as well as to challenge the transnational domination of the hydrocarbon sector were abandoned, generating an increasingly explicit incompatibility with indigenous demands. I conclude that neo-Gramscian theory offers important insights that enable us to advance our conceptualisation of the state in resource governance research and in political ecology more generally.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Extractive industries are typically associated with negative developmental implications and socio-environmental impacts, particularly at local scales (Bebbington & Bury, 2013). Arguably the most important attempts to improve the socio-environmental outcomes of resource extraction have come, in recent years, from the indigenous-influenced policies of progressive Latin American governments (de Freitas, Marston, & Bakker, 2015).

The government of Evo Morales and the MAS (Movement towards Socialism) party in *Gobierno de Bolivia* (2006-present), particularly, placed indigenous and environmental concerns at the centre of its political agenda, as part of ambitious plans for shifting the country's development model away from primary export-dependency and promoting less harmful society-nature

relationships, informed by indigenous visions and practices. A decade on, however—despite important advances—the Morales administration has not realised its transformative potential in this sense: it has reinforced the extractive character of Bolivian development, without substantially improving its socio-environmental implications (e.g., Perreault, 2013).

Why has such an ambitious political project failed to improve the outcomes of resource extraction? Significant scholarly attention has been paid to processes associated with the 'left turn' in Latin America; yet the debate around the reasons why progressive change has been limited remains open. As regards Bolivia, critics have emphasised, in various degrees, 'structural' constraints to change (Kohl & Farthing, 2012); the legacies of neoliberalism (Kaup, 2013); political limitations inherent to the MAS's political project (Webber, 2011); and the role of conservative social forces in limiting the extent of change (Kaup, 2014). Other contributions, inspired by Gramscian theory, have focused more specifically on the dialectics of progressive change and successive restoration which characterised the trajectory of leftist experiments the region

* Office Z150, Edifici ICTA-ICP, Campus de la UAB, 08193 Bellaterra, Cerdanyola del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain.

E-mail address: diego.andreucci@gmail.com.

(Hesketh & Morton, 2014; Modonesi, 2013; Webber, 2015)—though they have not explicitly related such a dialectics to the governance of extraction.

In order to add to these debates, I carry out a conceptually informed analysis of struggles over hydrocarbon governance in Bolivia, with two objectives: 1) to explore how the governance of extraction changed in relation to broader shifts in the state and society associated with the left turn; and 2) to contribute to explaining why and how progressive changes in the governance of resource extraction have been limited, despite the potentially radical character of the political project that accompanied the election of Evo Morales. This analysis will provide an entry point into broader theoretical discussions regarding the relationship between resource regulation, social struggles and the state.

I make two interrelated arguments. First, initial, important changes in the governance of resources in Bolivia—aimed at improving the socio-environmental outcomes of extraction—were followed by partial reversals, related to shifting power relations between, *inter alia*, social movements, the hydrocarbon industry, and the state. This points to the need of seeing changes in governance—and in the state more generally—as the ‘condensation’ of shifting power relationships among social forces (Poulantzas, 2000) as well as of struggles over alternative socio-natural configurations. Second, the trajectory of the Morales government reflected a ‘passive-revolutionary’ process, whereby an initial radical break with the neoliberal order was followed by a gradual adaptation of its agenda to pre-existing political economic arrangements. This, I argue, resulted in the regularisation of resource-based accumulation, though in ways that significantly differ from neoliberalisation.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I lay out the conceptual framework for the analysis. I extend the regulationist approach to include insights from strategic-relational state theory, in order to account for resource governance processes not directly related to neoliberalism. I also introduce Gramsci’s notion of ‘passive revolution’, as a conceptual framework for explaining the trajectory of transformation and partial restoration characterising political change in contemporary Latin America. In section 3, I analyse the ways in which recent changes in the governance of gas extraction in Bolivia were related to broader shifts in relationships between state and society, resulting in the political empowerment and successive demobilisation of the indigenous movement. In section 4, I contribute to explaining why progressive changes were limited, by exploring the ways that—despite an initial partial rupture with transnational hydrocarbon firms and the national elites—the Morales government resolved conflicts with ‘extractivist’ social forces and shifted its attitude towards popular sectors in ways that marginalised indigenous demands. In section 5, before concluding, I discuss the conceptual implications of these processes for thinking about regulation and the state in political ecology.

The empirical arguments presented in this paper are based on the analysis of both secondary and primary sources. The former include legal and policy documents produced by Bolivian institutions between 2000 and 2015, as well as social organisations’ position statements and media articles from the same period. Primary sources are drawn from a 12-month period of fieldwork conducted by the author in Bolivia between 2013 and 2014.¹ The latter included 33 semi-structured interviews with hydrocarbon

company representatives (6); state authorities at local, regional (*departamento*) and national level (8); experts of hydrocarbon and indigenous issues, including NGO representatives, intellectuals and former government members (17); and members of social and indigenous organisations (2). Interview questions centred on issues related to the governance of oil and gas extraction, the political economy of hydrocarbons in Bolivia, and broader political processes in the country. I also draw on data from participation in indigenous organisations’ meetings (2) and on focus groups (3) exploring indigenous community members’ and leaders’ perceptions of the socio-environmental impacts of oil and gas activities as well as the role of firms, the state and indigenous movements in the governance of extraction.

2. Governance, regulation and neo-Gramscian state theory

Geographers have drawn on neo-Marxist theory, particularly the ‘regulation approach’ (Jessop & Sum, 2006), in order to understand the ways in which institutional configurations for governing resources are remade as a response to threats to accumulation arising from socio-environmental conflicts, crises and contradictions (Bridge & Perreault, 2009). The main research focus of the regulation approach is on how, through institutional re-alignments, accumulation is stabilised or ‘regularised’ (Huber, 2013; Jessop & Sum, 2006).

This approach to governance is closely associated with notion of the ‘mode of regulation’ (Bridge, 2000), defined as “an ensemble of organisational forms, networks, and institutions, rules, norms and patterns of conduct” through which a ‘regime of accumulation’ is reproduced (Peck, 2009, p. 640). The regularisation of resource extraction has been a central analytical focus of geographers (Bridge & Perreault, 2009). They mobilised this framework to study not only how accumulation in extractive sectors is regularised, but also what effect these regularisation efforts have on populations and environments in extraction areas (Himley, 2013; Horowitz, 2015).

Applying this approach to the Bolivian context, however, presents us with a problem. The framework of governance has been mobilised primarily in relation to neoliberalisation processes. These entailed a purported shift ‘from government to governance’; that is, a shift away from national state-centric forms of regulation, typical of Fordism, towards a greater regulatory role of corporate actors, multi-lateral institutions and non-governmental organisations, at supra- and sub-national scales (Bridge, 2000; Himley, 2013). In an effort to capture processes associated with neoliberalism, geographers have explicitly distanced themselves from what they perceived as the excessive national state-centrism of early regulation theory (Bridge & McManus, 2000). Yet, political transformations such as those associated with the Latin American ‘left turn’ signal that resource governance may also change in ways that increase the significance of the state and of social processes taking place at the national scale (Perreault, 2008; de Freitas et al., 2015).²

How are we to capture changes in governance that do not follow a pattern of neoliberalisation, but rather complicate it? How, in other words, can we analyse changes in the mode of regulation related to broader political shifts? I suggest that, in order to address these questions, the regulation approach should be combined with a conceptualisation of the state; and more precisely, following the regulation theorists’ own trajectory, that it should be

¹ Part of the data was gathered through a collective research project coordinated by Adriana Soto and Jannette Giné of the Centre for Applied Studies on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CEADESC), in which I participated as a researcher (Soto et al., 2013). Data analysis and interpretation for this paper are my sole responsibility.

² These processes are sometimes referred to by commentators and state officials as ‘post-neoliberal’. In recent years, there have been important debates in geography and political ecology around the concept of ‘post-neoliberalism’ and its limits (Yates & Bakker, 2014; de Freitas et al., 2015). Contributing to these debates is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5118438>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5118438>

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