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South American Resource Geographies

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At the moment, almost all South American countries are facing deep socio-economic and political crises caused by fundamental changes within the global economic system. The so-called “resource super-cycle”, which had been shaping the global economy for several decades, has come to an end. During this period, South American countries moved towards a resource- and commodity based development path, mostly induced by the growing and apparently never-ending demand of all types of mineral, agrarian and energetic resources from the new economic powers of Asia (especially China). Most observers call this shift in economic priorities and foreign trade a process of “re-primarisation”. From a historic perspective, this economic pattern is already well known. Since colonial times, South America’s role has always been defined as a supplier of raw materials for the world economy. The latest tendencies of “re-primarisation” have had manifold impacts, in the case of some countries leading to a renewed and deepened dependency on a single or on only a few exportable products (especially Venezuela, but also Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, and even Chile).

Parallel to (or rather despite of) this global market induced “re-primarisation”, the majority of South American countries was, in the first years of the new millennium, politically reshaped by a shift towards leftist governments. Coming into power based on their critical position against neoliberalism, especially against the dominance of global market mechanisms and

their social consequences, this new cast of political leaders – Chávez in Venezuela, Kirchner in Argentina, Lula in Brazil, Mujica in Uruguay, Morales in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador – was soon confronted with the realities of everyday policy-making. All of these leaders had to deal with the demands of their supporters from civil society (ecologists, landless people, indigenous groups, labour unions, etc.) on the one hand and to reconcile their ideological positions with the booming resource extraction on the other. The result was the so-called “neo-extractivism”, a socio-economic model and political strategy which tolerates (or even promotes) global market-induced resource extraction, but reinvests the generated revenues (by taxes, royalties etc.) in social development (the Brazilian *bolsa família* programme is a good example). The profits from economic growth caused by this “resource super-cycle” were used, at least more than in earlier times, to increase public welfare, social mobility as well as to alleviate poverty.

The costs of this neo-extractivist development path were relatively high. The proliferation and expansion of new and old “resource frontiers” – e.g. sites of open-pit-mining (iron ore, copper, silver, coal, etc.), the extraction of energy resources (oil and gas), frontiers of agribusiness (soybean, beef, and even tropical fruit, wine, etc.) – came along with increasing ecological problems such as growing deforestation, loss of biodiversity, depletion of water resources, as well as with aggravating social struggles (e.g. struggles over

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land, disrespect regarding indigenous rights, eviction of small-scale farmers, etc.) (cf. *Bebbington and Bury* 2013). In the long run, these and other consequences of the neo-extractivist “commodity consensus” caused fundamental as well as, in many cases, unresolvable contradictions between the proliferation of a growth-oriented and modernisation-based development on the one hand, and sustainability and equity-oriented strategies towards socio-ecological transformation on the other.

Facing these outcomes, a broad debate within civil society and the scientific community emerged discussing alternatives to this neo-extractivist development model. Some scholars referred to an “eco-territorial turn” (*Svampa* 2012), when analysing the actions of social movements against the negative consequences of increased resource extraction. Others proposed the “design” of transitions towards “cautious extractivism” (cf. *Gudynas* 2013), or the adoption of indigenous conceptions, e.g. *buen vivir*, as a South American answer to the hegemonic growth-dependent and resource consuming “western lifestyle” (*Acosta* 2015). All in all, these very vibrant debates on future trends or alternatives to neo-extractivism can be labelled as “post-extractivism” and might be parallelised with the European discussions on “Postwachstum” resp. “degrowth” (cf. *Brand* 2015). Altogether, the South American debate on neo-extractivism and post-extractivism is a noteworthy contribution to the global strive of finding ideas for socio-ecological transformations (cf. *WBGU* 2011).

What are the consequences for resource geographies in South America? Considering the above resumed socio-economic and political processes, South America became, at the latest with the turn of the millennium, a “real world laboratory” where the incorporation of places, regions and whole nations into the logics of global commodity markets is tested. Consequences of this incorporation were changing actor constellations and territorial (re)configurations producing diverse struggles and conflicts with increased complexity. In territorial practice this means competing logics of land use between basic food crops and cash crops, struggles over access to land, conflicts between extraction (e.g. mining) and production (e.g. agriculture) as well as between conservation (protected areas) and resource exploitation.

Altogether, these incorporation processes and their territorial implications caused changes, conflic-

tive overlaps and/or successions of the prevailing “societal relations with nature” (*Gesellschaftliche Naturverhältnisse*) (cf. *Görg* 1999). Against this background, the rules of resource appropriation, as well as the dominant discourses about resources, are deeply interwoven with the prevailing societal relations with nature, causing extensive implications concerning the access to resources (entitlements) and respective relations between the involved actor groups. Increasing multi-scalarities impact changing interests, logics of action and, most of all, changing power relations concerning the actors’ capacity of negotiation and resulting territorial arrangements. Emerging and/or expanding resource frontiers and, in some cases, “enclave economies”, which operate very often in different ways from their surroundings, are the outcomes of resource oriented territorial reconfigurations.

For achieving a better understanding of these complex and changing constellations, resource geographies provide powerful analytical concepts: The value chain approach and/or the global production network approach are a valuable framework for decoding complex economic, institutional and social local-global-interplays. Post-structural approaches (e.g. discourse analyses) allow for the analyses of changing perceptions, symbols and dominating values. Most of all, the holistic approach of Political Ecology offers the possibility for understanding actor constellations and conflicting logics of action, regime configurations, institutional settings, unequal power relations and multi-scalarities.

The contributions to this Special Issue

The initiative for this Special Issue was born during a thematic session of the German Congress of Geography in Berlin in 2015, covering the debate on South American resource geographies from different perspectives. Considering the questions and approaches mentioned above, the authors enrich the interdisciplinary debate in various ways.

In their contribution, *Coy, Ruiz Peyré* and *Obermayr* review the recent re-primarisation process of South American economies as well as conceptual challenges for studying resources. The authors uncover continuities and discontinuities of the recent re-primarisation process and present periods and conditions of resource extraction and the stepwise processes of incorporation into global markets from colonial times until today. In doing so, it becomes evident how the

internal logics of resource extraction have been inscribed in the socio-economic orders and territorial organisation of many parts of South America. Based on this review as well as on an examination of various concepts from critical geography, from Political Ecology and from recent South American debates on extractivism, the authors propose the holistic concept of resource landscapes (i.e. resourcescapes), seen as fundamental for the understanding of the multidimensional and contradictory nature of resources and possible transitions towards a sustainability-oriented transformation.

The recent South American resource boom has reactivated frozen conflicts over resource extraction and has also contributed to the emergence of new disputes, particularly over activities related to mining. Aside from emblematic cases in Argentina, Peru or Ecuador, resource struggles can also be observed for Colombia, the country focused by the contribution of *Dietz and Engels*. The authors are especially interested in conflicts over large-scale mining and respective actor constellations involved in the conflicts. Strategies used by local actors for finding allies, responsibilities and conflict solutions on different scales are presented. The theoretical approaches applied combine concepts from political sciences (contentious politics) with concepts from spatial theory.

Land as a contested resource stands to the fore of debates in policy and civil society, as well as of scientific analysis. Since the last financial crisis, at the latest, the global land rush and different strategies of land grabbing have gained importance. Taking Northwestern Argentina as an example, *Hafner and Rainer* contrast two different land-use models in the province of Salta: soy farming in the lowlands of the Chaco and viticulture in the Andean part of the province. Focussing on diverging practices of land acquisition, valuation and use, the authors uncover quite different strategies, following the respective predominance of short-term logics of capital accumulation in the case of soy farming as well as long-term logics of high-value investments and multi-uses in the case of viticulture. The argument of the authors concerning a more differentiated look at the global land rush is that land grabbing is not to be reduced to mere counting of hectares in order to identify impacts of land use change. Actors and their different motives and forms of action are central, influencing the financialization and structure of land tenure.

In their contribution, *Gerique, López and Pohle* analyse conflicts around protected areas in the Alto Nagaritza valley in southern Ecuador, a biodiversity hotspot of global importance. Based on a political ecological approach, the authors uncover the conflicting interests of the resource extraction strategies of the local Shuar population on the one hand, and conservationists, the state authorities and their priorities on the other. Describing the long history of nature conservation in the study area and contextualising the diverging stakeholder perceptions and interests, the authors show how a lack of involvement of local people and coordination between stakeholders during the creation of conservation areas can provoke open conflicts.

The article of *Ferraro, Bursztyn and Drummond* analyses the ancient land tenure system *fundos de pasto* of the Brazilian Northeast, which is based on commonly held agriculture and animal husbandry. Although small-scale farming and grazing in common fields have been common practices in Northeastern Brazil for a long time, the *fundos de pasto* system came recently under pressure due to extended land privatisation tendencies. In order to protect this traditional practice of commons, the *fundos de pasto* system has been formally acknowledged by the state. Analysing the external pressures and the internal changes of the system, the authors detect a clear relation between social injustice, environmental injustice and degradation, and common pool resources management. Sustainability of communal systems depends more on political capital and public action and less on social capital. In the authors' view, the *fundos de pasto* system is a good example of the importance of public regulation going hand in hand with community action at the local level.

One of the mega-projects for hydro-energy production in the Brazilian Amazon, the Belo Monte Dam, is focused by the contribution of *Fearnside*. Since recent years, conflicts over such mega-projects have gained visibility, not only at national but also at the international level. As one of the most emblematic conflict cases, the struggles around the Belo Monte Dam exemplifies the overriding interests of the state and investors in economic growth and modernisation on the one hand, and clashes with local actors, ecologists and grass roots movements on the other hand. The author meticulously documents the arguments, actions, as well as political support structures characterising the confrontation between the supporters and opponents of the project. Lessons learned are illustrated and can

be taken from the Belo Monte case as inspiration for other resource struggles.

The short contribution of *Muñoz Barriga* is dedicated to tourism initiatives which have been implemented as strategies to promote environmental conservation and socio-economic development in the Sumaco Biosphere Reserve, located in the northern Ecuadorian Amazon region. Such initiatives are perceived as important sustainable alternatives to mining, oil extraction and hydroelectric projects, which have begun to threaten the region in recent times. However, tourism in the study area faces serious problems due to the lack of adequate management and governance strategies, proliferating illegality and informality, as well as triggering uncontrolled competition, lowering of prices, and decrease in the quality of services, risking in the long run an overall decline of the destination.

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