

Chapter 2: Bringing Nature Into the “Sow the Oil” Discourse

“[Marx’s] account of the productive engagement of Monsieur le Capital with Madame la Terre unwittingly serves to confirm dominant representations of a world polarized into a masculine and creative order which is the home of capital in the metropolitan centers and a feminized and subjected domain where nature passively awaits capital’s fertile embrace in the periphery”
(Coronil 1997, 57).

A Prelude: The Pathway to the Farewell of the State

Throughout the 1980s, Latin American countries faced payback time for the “sow the oil” attempts of the previous decades. External debt triggered a severe economic and social crisis known as the Latin American lost decade (*década perdida*). Hettne (1987, 14) argued that the “time bomb” of debt grew out of unprecedented international lending by private banks in the latter part of the 1970s. Subsequently, several countries reached a point where they lost capacity to repay their external debt obligations²⁷ (mainly Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina). In 1982, Mexico defaulted on its external debt. Like Mexico, other Latin American countries had increased their external debt for purposes of industrialization and infrastructure during the previous decades. Table No. 1 depicts 1) the multiplication of Latin American external debt between 1970 and 1982, 2) the growth of the private banks’ share of external debt, and 3) the increase of the ratio of service payments to exports, i.e. the proportion of export earnings required to pay interest and amortization on the debt. Latin American external debt nearly quadrupled between 1970 and 1975 as the banks’ share of debt doubled during the same period. Debt quadrupled again between 1975 and 1982 as the banks’ share of debt continued increasing. Whilst, the ratio of debt service to exports jumped from a “feasible” 26.6 percent in 1975 to an “impossible” 59 percent in 1982 (Bulmer-Thomas 2003, 351).

²⁷ Herrero (2019, 85) argued that main ingredients of the “bomb” were 1) the rise of the real interest rate, and 2) the appreciation of the U.S. dollar, which reduced the value of the region’s exports.

Remarkably, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina (countries that defaulted on their debt) had relied on an industrialization strategy, in which “firms were encouraged to exploit opportunities provided both by the protected domestic market and by the growth of world trade” from the 1960s onward. Colombia, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic also prioritized the protected industrialization strategy (Bulmer-Thomas 2003, 316). Though, in the 1970s, Argentina switched to a market-oriented strategy, which aimed at reducing protection in order to move domestic prices more closely in line with international prices. Such strategy was pursued by Chile and Uruguay; a main consequence of the enforcement of a market-oriented and less-protected environment was “the replacement of high-cost local industrial production by less expensive imports”, i.e. negative industrialization (Bulmer-Thomas 2003, 323).

Table No. 1: Latin American external debt indicators 1970-82

	Total public, private, and short-term external debt, in billions of US\$	Banks' share of public external debt (percent)	Ratio of service payments (interest and amortization) to exports (percent)
1970 ²⁸	20.8	19.5	17.6
1975	75.4	42.9	26.6
1979	184.2	56.0	43.4
1980	229.1	56.6	38.3
1981	279.7	57.6	43.8
1982	314.4	57.6	59.0

Source: Bulmer-Thomas (2003, 352)

The Latin American *década perdida* was the prelude to the enforcement of neoliberal policies across the region. During the last decades of the twentieth century, the leading role of the Latin American *desarrollista* state in the national development process was challenged by the Washington Consensus (WC) and its intention to force the prevalence of market rules within national borders and international free trade. The enforcement of market-led policies across the region reached a peak during the 1990s, while the neoliberal agenda demanded state's withdrawal from key arenas of the economy on the basis of the blatant consequences of the lost decade, and

28 External public debt only.

on the pretext of state’s incapacity and corruption²⁹. As an overall framework for the enforcement of the neoliberal agenda, the Washington Consensus anticipated structural adjustment programs (SAP), which pursued cutoffs of social benefits and the reduction of the state apparatus thus in different degrees imprinted the economies of the Latin American countries. Though, far beyond a range of economic measures, the WC “deserved to be endorsed across the political spectrum” (Williamson 1993, 1329), since it implied a set of governance devices in which the state’s role in the development process was meant to change drastically, not only vis-à-vis domestic circumstances, but also on a global scale.

The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 inaugurated a new global governance scheme³⁰ that sought the elimination of barriers to trade based on a renewed bet on the Ricardian classical doctrine of comparative advantages. Under such a regime, state’s enforcement of policies to protect or support non-competitive domestic industry looked at least provoking, if not bluntly blasphemous, against neoliberal globalization and free market gospels. State’s intervention was considered as the main source of free market distortion, and even as the principal cause of corruption (Nederveen Pieterse 2010, 7; Todaro and Smith 2012, 482). Under such a regime, Latin American states devoted to keep globalization’s gates open by sharing natural resources rents with (foreign) private interests³¹. The enforcement of market-led policies in Latin America resulted in an overall increase of the volume of exports of goods. By 1998, half of the Latin American countries exported at least about a third of their GDP; only four countries exported less than a fourth: Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia, while the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Costa Rica (the most open to external markets) showed export coefficients larger than fifty percent (Benavente 2001, 19).

29 In this line, Kaufmann (2019) asserted that “corruption is not the disease that erodes the system in the Global South, it is the symptom of a weak sociopolitical and economic system”.

30 In 1994, during the economic hegemony of neoliberalism, 123 states signed the Marrakesh Agreement on international trade, thus founding the World Trade Organization (WTO).

31 Daly (2019, 13) argued that among the perils of globalization are 1) tolerance of corporate power in domestic markets in order to be big enough to compete internationally, and 2) intensified specialization with the consequence of reducing the range of choice of ways to earn a livelihood, and increasing dependence on other countries.

Most economic diversification attempts supported by Latin American states during the last decades of the twentieth century resulted in an ampler portfolio of raw material exports. Whilst, some increase of exports of manufactured goods was correlated to *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) located in Central America, mainly in Mexico (Bulmer-Thomas 2003, 316). Table No. 2 depicts the volume of exports of goods and the net barter terms of trade for the period 1980-2000. Whereas the volume of exports of goods nearly quadrupled between 1985 and 2000, the net barter terms of trade followed a steadily decreasing trend that began in 1980 and ended in the last years of the twentieth century. The latter speaks for an increase of exports of raw material in a context of low international commodity prices.

Table No. 2: Volume of exports and net barter terms of trade, Latin America 1980-2000

	Volume of exports of goods (1995 = 100)	Net barter terms of trade (1995 = 100)
1980	n.a.	161.6
1985	44.7	125.5
1990	65.3	94.4
1995	100.0	100.0
2000	159.8	103.6

Source: Bulmer-Thomas (2003, 364-369)

The upsurge in the overall volume of exports mirrored in an improvement in the economy after the *década perdida*. Though, the growth of GDP per capita, in turn, did not correlate with a reduction of poverty measured in the percentage of households below poverty line. Table No. 3 shows the growth of GDP and the percentage of households below poverty line for the period 1980-2001. Whereas the growth of GDP per capita from -0.9 in the 1980s decade to 1.2 in the following decade speaks for a recovery of the economy, the fluctuation of the percentage of households below poverty line between 35 and 41 percent during the last decades of the twentieth century speaks for the prevalence of household poverty in Latin America. Hence, the enforcement of the WC neoliberal agenda revealed insufficient

to deal with the Latin American debt crisis of the last decades of the twentieth century³².

Table No. 3: Growth of GDP per capita and percentage of households below poverty line, Latin America 1980-2001

	Growth of GDP per capita (US\$ at 1995 prices)	Households below poverty line (percentage)
Circa 1980	n.a.	35
1981-1990	-0.9	n.a.
Circa 1990	n.a.	41
1991-2001	1.2	n.a.
Circa 2000	n.a.	35

Source: Bulmer-Thomas (2003, 383-387)

The other side of the coin was the increase in the volume of imports. Even during the period of apparent prevalence of international free trade and market liberalization, within the reign of the WTO, “a formidable arsenal of weapons” was required to control the demand for imports and to ration available foreign exchange (Bulmer-Thomas 2003, 365). On the one hand, in order to support domestic production, countries in the Global North imposed “intense protectionist pressures” that affected both traditional and nontraditional exports from Latin America. On the other hand, Latin American countries relied on quotas, licenses, high tariffs, and other mechanisms to decelerate nonessential imports, which conspired against the achievements in the balance of payments done by the outstanding increase in the volume of exports (Bulmer-Thomas 2003, 365).

Revisiting Development Thinking: From the Environment to Nature

With the retraction of national states, the agency of multilateral organizations gained momentum. The height of neoliberalism “interfaced with the international environmental discourse of sustainable development” (Lewis

32 Besides the crises “in the real world” and the “institutional crisis of the nation state”, Hettne (1987, 5) drew attention to a crisis in development theory. The author based his contention on the “incapacity” of the social sciences, in general, and development studies, in particular, to correctly understand the phenomenon of crisis in the context of the development process (Hettne 1987, 7).

2016, 77), which was originally outlined in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) of the United Nations. The Commission's Report, *Our Common Future* (United Nations 1987), called for the inclusion of an environmental component into development planning. Hence, the United Nations' sustainable development discourse advocated a permanent position for the environment within further debates on the development process of national states (Alarcón 2020). However, before the emergence of the sustainable development discourse, discussions on development included *natural resources* rather than the *environment*. In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm; member states agreed upon a give-and-take relationship between natural resources and development: Development was considered in the conference's declaration as a requisite to preserve the environment (United Nations 1972). That same year, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (Meadows et al. 1972) was published. This milestone of environmental thinking warned of the consequences of the finiteness of the resources that had been sustaining global economic growth. Meadows et al. (1972, 15) approached five global concerns, which illustrated the relationship between natural resources and development at that time: 1) accelerating industrialization, 2) rapid population growth, 3) widespread malnutrition, 4) depletion of non-renewable resources, and 5) deteriorating environment.

Twenty years after Stockholm and five years after *Our Common Future*, Rio de Janeiro hosted the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the so-called Earth Summit) in 1992. Representatives from 172 nations signed their adhesion to the environmental imperative outlined in the discourse of sustainable development and thus the rise of the concept of the environment. The Agenda 21 action plan (United Nations 1992), a main outcome of the summit, placed the imperative of environmental policymaking at national and subnational levels. As national states assimilated the mainstream environmental discourse of sustainable development³³ into domestic political institutions, the Latin American re-

33 Outcomes of the 1992 Earth Summit were 1) the Agenda 21 action plan, 2) the Forests Principles, and 3) the Rio Declaration with 4) the Convention on Biological Diversity, 5) the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and 6) the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Together, this arrangement encompasses the master narrative of the discourse of sustainable development.

gion experienced a wave of creation of environmental national authorities, such as ministries, and promulgation of new environmental legislation during the 1990s. The states’ official environmental discourse backed the natural resources-based development model and evoked the faith that environmental problems might be solved by technology, capital, and international cooperation, the “vital forces” of capitalism (Alarcón 2020, 217; Es-cobar 1995a, 36). Hence, the states’ official environmental discourse explicitly alluded to progress and modernization.

With the embracement of the official discourse of sustainable development and the adoption of the concept of the environment, national states accepted the necessity of investing in 1) environmental protection and 2) natural resources management. For natural resources-dependent economies, this imposed a constraint on the free availability of natural resources rent, when it implied reinvestments in the state-owned natural resources sector. However, capitalism promptly outlined the narratives of the green economy and the circular economy³⁴ in order to match environmental management with economic growth, and to convey that investing in the environment is certainly a good investment (in monetary or chrematistic terms).

While Latin American national states configured an official environmental discourse that rested on progress, environmental consciousness of the negative socioecological consequences of extractivism mushroomed among society. Environmental movements embodied society’s increased awareness, and claimed a permanent place in national politics. Since the environmental discourse appealed by social movements was rooted in the cultural critique of modern society (Hajer and Fischer 1999, 3), it was antipodal to the official discourse held by national states. Criticism was directed mainly at 1) the instrumental perspective, which considered nature as mere natural resources required for modernization, and 2) the dialectic subject-object that deemed nature to be subjugated by a detached subject: man³⁵. The evidence of socioecological degradation and depletion of natu-

34 Green economy and circular economy are strongly criticized in ecological economics. Herman Daly (2019, 9), the champion of ecological economics worldwide, argued that both, green economy and circular economy, are based on “growthism”, i.e. the belief that economic growth is the costless solution or at least the necessary precondition for any solution to socio-environmental problems such as poverty, environmental destruction, climate change, etc. Ecological economics rather advocates the subordination of the economic system to the size of the ecosphere (Daly 2019, 10; Martínez-Alier and Roca 2001, 15).

35 Critical stances entail a gender perspective that also denounces patriarchy.

ral resources as a consequence of extractivism added arguments against the possibility of catching up with the consumption standards of the Global North.

Whereas the concept of nature appeared in the state's official discourse as mere natural resources available for commodification, social movements defended alternative meanings of nature related to natural heritage and to ancient peoples' habitat and means of existence. These stances on the relationship between society and nature became central to the construction of the concept of development in the twenty-first century. When environmental movements denounced the disastrous socioecological consequences of the natural resources-based development model, they pointed at the rentier state as the political regime that legitimized it. Antagonist meanings of development, that derived from these alternative visions of the society-nature relationship promptly acquired the capacity to shape the relationship between state and society in the twenty-first century (Alarcón, Rocha, and Di Pietro 2018, 66). Leff (1999, 94) recapped that the reasons for socio-environmental movements³⁶ to mobilize not only stemmed from cultural and symbolic values, but also from material and social interests. Nonetheless, the agency of socio-environmental movements became central to the understanding that socioecological problems are eminently political and hence any techno-economic treatment of the relationship nature-society is doomed to be insufficient (Leff 1986, 145 in Martínez-Alier and Schlüpmann 1991, 318). Central to the construction of the environmental discourse of the social movements that highlights nature (as opposed to natural resources and the environment) is the defense of land and peoples' cultural rights (as opposed to capital investments in environmental protection and natural resources management). According to Leff (1999, 94), these "values" are capable of "driving new social actors and conducting political actions towards the construction of a new social order". The exposition of natural values in the discourse of the social movements indeed contributed to the critique of the state's developmental project during the twenty-first century commodities boom (2003-2014).

36 The movements that Leff (1999) refers to as "socio-environmental movements" are sometimes called in this book plainly "social movements" in order to emphasize the antagonism toward the official environmental discourse held by the state. However, the designation aims to stress on the social movements that embraced environmental awareness of the negative socioecological consequences of extractivism.

The Legacy of the Youngest Boom: The Triad Nature-State-Development

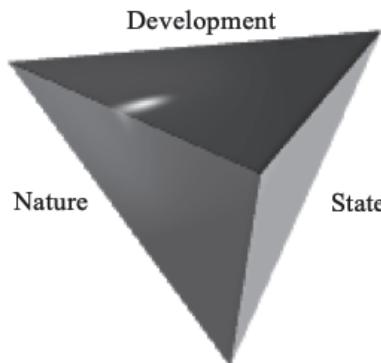
The end of the “idyllic decade” (Ocampo 2015a, 8) of the twenty-first century commodities boom marked a watershed in the development process of natural resources-rich countries. With the benefit of hindsight, it might be argued that efforts done by Latin American states to diversify the productive structure during bonanza periods, i.e. efforts to “sow the oil”, contrast with the enduring dilemma of an insufficiently diversified export portfolio accompanied with a heavy external debt burden at the end of natural resources boom periods. Transient development achievements accomplished during bonanza periods, as improved socioeconomic indicators, correlate with the ongoing re-primarization of the economy and the intensification of natural resources’ extraction. This paradox might lead to the conclusion that state’s commitment with economic diversification was reaped outside the economic arena, elsewhere in the social formation. Hence, the study of the legacy of the oil booms and its outreach is a contemporary task of development thinking.

During the twenty-first century commodities boom, contemporary scholars and authors approached the process of development in natural resources-rich countries, mainly in Latin America, through the lens of neo-extractivism. According to Svampa (2013, 30), the reigning “economic and political-ideological” order in Latin America during the youngest boom, was the “*consenso de los commodities*”. Under such a regime, Latin American neo-extractivism was the favored development strategy of states across the region. The dissection of Latin American neo-extractivism shows, on the one hand, a socioeconomic ingredient that stresses on the leading role played by the state in 1) the appropriation of swollen natural resources rent, and 2) its distribution among society. Hence, the economic parameters of Latin American neo-extractivism do not differ from the arguments of the rentier state theory. On the other hand, the assessment of the neo-extractivist development strategy reveals a political-ideological component, which emphasizes on the states’ struggles to impose the natural resources-based development model on society despite the apparent consensus on the centrality of natural resources rent to the achievement of development goals. These struggles manifest in socio-environmental conflicts on natural resources in territories affected by extractivist activity. Hence, two characteristics of the youngest natural resources boom become central to open the gates to a deeper understanding of the development process in Latin American natural resources-rich countries: 1) the incorporation of the state’s agency, i.e. its capacity to intervene in the national development

process, not only by appropriating and allocating natural resources rent during a specific international juncture, but also by shaping a domestic environmental discourse, and 2) the emergence of society's environmental awareness of the negative socioecological consequences of the prevalence of the natural resources-based development model.

In order to assess the role of the state in the development process and its outcomes on society in Latin America since the end of the Second World War, this book proposes an interdisciplinary approach named the triad nature-state-development. The triad might be visualized as a triangular pyramid (Figure No. 1). As any tetrahedron, it is composed by three side faces and a triangular base. Figure No. 1 depicts an analogy between the triad nature-state-development and a triangular pyramid, where the side faces of the pyramid correspond to the components of the triad, namely, nature, state, and development. The base of the pyramid points at society, as in a prism through which society might be examined.

Figure No. 1: The triad nature-state-development: A pyramid with three side faces



Source: Own diagram

As the discourse of “sow the oil” evolves into the study of the triad nature-state-development, it becomes a matter of contemporary development theories and thus entangled in a web of old and new disciplines such as (international) political economy, political science, sociology of development, development economics, and political ecology. These disciplines back the assessment of the role of the state in the development process in Latin America and its outcomes on society, and are highlighted through the ob-

servation of society through the three “side faces” of the triad nature-state-development.

First, the approach to the state’s leading role in the development process opened the gates for a wider understanding of the social formation and social classes. Since local bourgeoisies were not considered able to overthrow the crumbling oligarchical state³⁷ of the first half of the twentieth century in Latin American social thought, the task was assumed by the classic *desarrollista* state. The leitmotiv of taking control of the economy was driven by the intention of transfer rents from oligarchical sectors linked to natural resources exports to the industrial sector (Cueva 2013, 162). State’s support of industrialization was anchored in the creation of an internal market; therefore, the project of the Latin American classic *desarrollista* state is regarded as an endeavor to consolidate the capitalist mode of production. The assessment of the Latin American *desarrollista* state at the head of a coalition of social classes, mainly represented by “industrialists³⁸, [urban] middle classes, urban working classes” (Kay 1989, 19), in transit to a new capitalist economic and sociopolitical structure has been traditionally backed by political science and sociology of development.

Second, the study of the historical relationship between Latin America and the rest of the world opened the gates to approach the “external constraints” (Amin 1990, 5) imposed on the developmental endeavors of national states by the capitalist world-system. Baran (1968, 101) argued that capitalism steered natural resources-dependent economies to concentrate on their most competitive raw product for the external market. As a consequence of capitalist-led specialization, the fate of natural resources-rich countries was chained to the gambles of the world market and its international price policy (Baran 1968, 101). Such a neo-Marxist view of the North-South relations nourished the “resource curse” thesis and highlighted the shortcomings of the traditional outward-oriented natural resources-based development model in Latin America. Despite the different theoretical background, Baran’s (1968) argument coincides with the mainstream of rentier theory in the economic diversification cul-de-sac in natural resources-rich countries. The critique of the “resource curse” thesis stems, as

³⁷ Cueva (2013, 133) argued that hegemonic crisis within the oligarchical state set off when local bourgeoisies struggled with monopolistic capital to predominate within the oligarchical coalition.

³⁸ Segments of the bourgeoisie that began to differentiate from the *latifundista* oligarchy due to its “modern entrepreneurial capacity, i.e. the ability to set in force a rational-capitalist mode of production” (Cardoso 1971, 76) were supported by Latin American governments in order to become the new industrialist class.

well, from diverse theoretical backgrounds; though it has been carried out with support of the (international) political economy. A widespread theoretical position advocates the prevalence of the study of domestic circumstances and points out the necessity of examining country's "social institutions, class structures and government policies" (Saad-Filho and Weeks 2013, 8) instead of considering natural resources' abundance as a curse *per se*. Whilst, a more empirical branch presents the evidence that international high commodity prices actually benefited the social and economic spheres in natural resources-dependent states.

Third, the theoretical approach to the relationship between nature and the state presented novel categories (such as Latin American neo-extractivism) that invite to revisit the state's ways of intervention in the national development process and the concept of development itself. As national states espoused an environmental discourse that backs the natural resources-based development model, widespread environmental awareness increasingly steers the discussions on the role of natural resources in development. During boom periods, when high international commodities' prices translated into transient socioeconomic improvements, Latin American states accumulated arguments in favor of a further reliance on the prevalent development model. Though, antagonist environmental discourses arose from different social factions and exposed the fissures in the apparent consensus on the pros of natural resources-dependence. Alternative meanings of nature, related to natural heritage and to ancient peoples' habitat and means of existence, are in the center of an alternative environmental discourse that dissents from the view of nature as mere natural resources available for commodification. These positions on nature are currently defended by different social actors and became a fundamental argument in the critique of development (Alarcón, Rocha, and Di Pietro 2018, 66). The approach of the evolution of the meanings of nature and development has been supported by political ecology, as it analyzes the context and the social actors that generated and were generated by the antagonist environmental discourses.

The Challenges of Latin American Social Thought

Latin American social thought has developed theoretical inputs powerful enough not only to dismantle pre-established notions about the triad nature-state-development but also to reassess the concepts themselves. Key contributions of Latin American (under)development thinking have to do

with the inclusion of the state as ubiquitous actor of the development process, and the role of natural resources within a generously gifted region. Hence, classic debates have orbited around 1) the role of the state in national modernization and 2) national states’ agency to face cycles within the capitalist world-economy. A more recent focus of research, which stems from Coronil’s (1997) pathbreaking *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela*, refers to the role of the state in the configuration of the relationship between society and nature. Coronil’s work posits the centrality of oil to the Venezuelan state formation during the twentieth century, and attributes “magical properties” to the state in order to give rise to development and other illusions of modernity.

The triad nature-state-development aims to integrate these contemporary theoretical debates of Latin American social thought in one corpus. Latin American (under)development thinking has been approaching the triad in a separate way, with an emphasis on the relationships between pairs of “side faces” of the triad: 1) state-development, 2) development-nature, and 3) nature-state. *First*, the study of the relationship between state and development has been traditionally shaped by the state as the actor *who* is in charge of “sow the oil”. Local bourgeoisies, which have been assigned central tasks in the development process in other theoretical perspectives, have been approached in Latin American social thought mainly from two standpoints: 1) their proximity to the traditional oligarchy, i.e. the Latin American economic and sociopolitical order which is dominated by domestic agro-exporters and landowners (*latifundistas*) linked to transnational capital³⁹, and 2) their rentier behavior, which releases them from the pressure of reinvesting their revenues (rent) on productive activities in order to remain competitive (Wilcock et al. 2016, 12). Thus, Latin American bourgeoisies have been wide and large blamed for their lack of Schumpeterian “will and action” (Schumpeter 1911, 284), and for mimicking the old oligarchy⁴⁰. In Latin American development thinking, hence,

39 Latin American bourgeoisies were sometimes called “lumpenbourgeoisies” because of its dependence on (rather than its connection with) transnational capital (Frank 1972).

40 Elsenhans (1977, 38) characterized the bourgeoisie through its members, who compete in markets as owners of the means of production; in order to remain members of the class, they have to remain competitive by innovating the way in which they appropriate their corresponding part of the surplus. Hence, the bourgeoisie is chained to the profitability of its investments. In this book, the term bourgeoisie refers to a privileged class that allegedly detached from the Latin American traditional oligarchy.

local bourgeoisies are pictured as oedipal, not because of killing the agro-exporter father, but because of marrying the landowner mother.

Second, while the approach to the relationship between the state and development focuses on domestic circumstances within national states, the study of the relationship between development and nature concentrates in the regions' relations with the rest of the world, i.e. in the "external constraints" (Amin 1990, 5). Latin American development thinking traditionally exposed the region's developmental endeavors as attempts to depart from the natural resources-based development model, hence, to climb up the international division of labor. Indeed, Galeano (2014), in his 1971 groundbreaking *Open Veins of Latin America*, traced the path of natural resources extractivism since the *Conquista*; the way *how* Latin America was absorbed into the capitalist world-system prevails as the region's landmark and has decisively contributed to the creation of a social imaginary of the development-nature relationship. Pessimistic visions linked to natural resources abundance and backwardness converged in the resource curse thesis. A lesser explored field is the construction of the social imaginary that links natural resources abundance with a blessing; it is argued that this might be observed during boom periods.

Third, the relationship between nature and the state is the youngest field of research within the triad nature-state-development. A prevalent topic in this regard is the approach to the political economy of the environment; Johnston (1996), for instance, explains the state's possibilities to enforce measures to protect the environment within a framework provided by the capitalist world economy. Latin American contributions have mainly dealt with the role of natural resources 1) in the state's formation, and 2) in the relationship between state and society. On the one hand, the approach to the state's formation has been dominated by the rentier theory since the last decades of the twentieth century⁴¹. In her classic *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Karl (1997, 16) argued that the political (not economically prioritized) allocation of rent among society is a central characteristic of the rentier state. In a further contribution to the rentier state paradigm, Ross (2001, 357) connected oil extraction with authoritarian

41 Peters (2019) assessed the (positive and negative) effects of natural resources rent dependence on Global South societies through the innovative concept of "Rentengesellschaften" (rentier societies).

regimes⁴². On the other hand, the approach to the relationship between state and society, which gained momentum with the rise of socio-environmental thinking, has focused on the study of local conflicts on natural resources involving mainly native communities and social movements⁴³. Thereby, the role played by the state is rather dualistic, supporting the commercial extraction of natural resources undertaken by public or private enterprises while bidding different kinds of compensations for compromised peoples and territories. Hence, the study of socio-environmental conflicts in territories concentrates on the antagonist relationship between the state and local factions or coalitions. Despite overall environmental awareness, such approaches rarely exceed the local level. In order to transcend the local level and to deal with the problem of the relationship between state and society from a wider perspective, this book proposes the approach to the antagonist environmental discourses of the state and social movements.

42 Peters (2015, 159) argued that the connection between authoritarian regimes (dictatorships) and rentier states has not been sufficiently approached in Latin America, hence, he advocated for “democratic rentierism” as an option to study the phenomenon within the region.

43 In *Ciudades del Milenio: ¿Inclusión o exclusión en una nueva Amazonía?* (Millennial Cities: Inclusion or exclusion in a new Amazonia), Vallejo et al. (2016) provide an example of the centrality of oil in the relationship between the state and society in a local context in Ecuador. During the twenty-first century commodities boom, the Ecuadorian government used oil rents to build so-called “Millennial Cities” and bring the illusion of modernity to native communities of the oil fields in the Amazonia. Though, local inhabitants mostly refused government’s offer of moving into new houses and abandoning their ancestral way of life.